

**Literary Theory and Literary Criticism**  
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**Lecture - 17**

**Part A**

**Post Colonial and Criticism**

Hello and welcome back to the course on Literary Theory and Literary Criticism. In today's lecture in the 2 modules we will be covering a brief look at post-colonial theory and criticism. So, what do we understand by post-colonialism or post-colonial studies. Put very simply, it means, it implies, the critical analysis of the history, the cultural, the literatures. And the modes of this course that are very specific to what used to be former European colonies and imperial powers. And by former European colonies and imperial power, we are thinking about countries like England, Spain, France, etcetera all of which had colonies outside their own territories.

Now, these studies focus especially on the third world countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean Islands and South America. However, some scholars also extend the scope of such analysis to the discourse and cultural production of such sources countries as Australia, Canada and New Zealand too. Even though, they achieved independence much, much earlier than the rest of the third world countries. Post-colonial studies are also concerned with aspects of British literature in the 18th and 19th centuries. These are viewed through a perspective that reveals the extent to which the social and economic life represented in the literature of the period, tells us about the phenomenon of colonial exploitation.

The premise here is that, literature cannot be judged by a very simple and single universalized, universal standard. The claim that often made that great literature is something that is of timeless value. And there is universal, undermines, if seen as something is serious in an attitude that undermines and disregards, cultural, social and national differences in experiences and world outlooks.

Let us take an example, for instance to claim that Thomas Hardy's Wessex novels are basically an exploration of the fundamental and universal aspects of the human condition

would be to completely overlook the factor that his novels are very, very original, historically specific and are mostly really, white masculine working class narratives.

Post-colonialism aims to reject this kind of a universalism instead it seeks to expose white Eurocentric norms and practices, which try to pass off as natural and thereby assume an elevated status. Postcolonial criticism perhaps gained impetus from the publication of Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* is published in 1961 originally in French. *The Wretched of the Earth* voiced, what could be described as a cultural resistance to Francis African Empire.

Fanon himself was a psychiatrist in Martinique and Martinique is a Caribbean Island and it still continues to exist as French colony. So, he was a psychiatrist in Martinique and he argued that the first task for the colonized people was to reclaim their identity, to claim their identity and a voice that can be used to reclaim their own past. The European colonization power had simply devalued the nation's past, saying it is pre-colonial era as an era of pre civilization.

Almost like a limbo kind of state of affairs and it was even pre-colonial history of these places, where even read as something that represented as historical void. Fanon argued that both white and black children, were taught to see history, culture and progress as something that began with the arrival of the Europeans. Post-colonial perspectives are thus informed by a need to reclaim one's pre-colonial past and the need to wash out the colonialist ideologies by which this past has been eroded away and thereby devalued.

Along with Frantz Fanon Homi K. Bhabha is also one of the most important figures in contemporary postcolonial studies. And Bhabha's contribution, Bhabha's significant contribution is that, he has coined number of the fields, neologisms or you know, key terms that we originally coined for the purpose of theorizing certain aspects. So, he coined a lot of terms himself and also gave us a lot of key concepts, concepts such as hybridity, mimicry, difference and ambivalence.

According to Bhabha's theory such terms describe the ways in which colonies people have resisted the power of the colonizer. You might be surprised to know that Homi Bhabha is an Indian and in 2012, he was awarded the Padma Bhushan award in the field of literature on education by the Indian government. Much of Bhabha's work, including *The Location of Culture* which came out in 1994, focuses on the politics, the emotions and

the values that exist in the space between the colonizer and the colonized, which is to say that, Homi Bhabha makes the argument that culture is something that needs to be seen more than, something that is more than nearly a distinction between us and the other.

So, that cannot be a case of us versus them kind of a logic operating there, they need to be seen as the some of their histories. Bhabha likes to use the word hybrid, meaning something that is composed of mixed elements to describe postcolonial people and experiences. In doing so, Bhabha focused on the collective effects of colonization on people and cultures.

Another key post-colonial thinker is perhaps Edward Said, Edward Said was a Palestinian American literary theorist and intellectual, who helped found the critical theory of this field known as post-colonialism. Said's most seminal work is perhaps in orientalism which was established in 1978 and is considered the foundational work on which most of postcolonial theory developed.

Bhabha's own work develops many of the ideas that we are originally offered to us by Edward Said. Seen thus, say good perhaps, we considered as the father of postcolonial thought, his work focus on exploring and questioning the artificial boundaries or the stereotypical boundaries that have been drawn between the east and the west, specifically as they relate to them Middle east.

In doing so, Said focused specifically on the stereotypes of Middle east, however, these very same ideas can also be extended to include, how we view all kinds of otherings. This is the, us versus other mentality that many colonizers take with them into a new country, such simple generation lead to misconceptions and miscommunications, which are very often the basis of postcolonial analysis.

Orientalism applied what can be described as a revised form of Michel Foucault's historicist critique of discourse. To analyze what Said called cultural imperialism, this mode of imperialism impose it is power not by force, but by disseminating a Eurocentric discourse that assumed the normality of everything occidental. Occidental is a term that we used to denote everything that is western and this can be correlated with the term oriental, which is largely a term; that is used to denote something; that is Asian.

The oriental is often seen in such discourses as an exotic one and also often the inferior other. Such an analysis is supplemented by other theoretical principles including Althusser own redefinition of the Marxist theory of ideology and the deconstructive theory of the (Refer time: 09:33). Orientalism also studies the phenomenon of Eurocentric universalism as we mentioned earlier.

This principle take for granted both the superiority of the European or the Western and the inferiority of what is not. Said also identifies European cultural tradition of orientalism, which is a particularly longstanding way of identifying the culture and the traditions of the east as nearly the other. This cultural other was always seen as something that was inferior to that of the west.

In a book called literature in the modern world edited by Dennis Walder, Said maintains that the orient is constructed in the western minds has something which can be comparable to which is something comparable to a surrogate or even a kind of underground itself. What this means is that, the east becomes in effect, a repository and projection of those aspects of themselves that the western is do not choose to acknowledge.

This includes such qualities often negative qualities, such as cruelty, sensuality, decadence, laziness, etcetera. So, all these qualities are nearly projected onto the other. However, paradoxically the east is also seen as a fascinating realm of the exotic, it is seen as something that is mystical and seductive, it also seen as a homogeneous entity with the population, with all the people there, just assembling an anonymous mass without any sense of individuality.

Similarly, their action where also seen as something that was determined by instinctive and primitive emotions. Emotions such as lust, fury, terror, etcetera, rather than through a very conscious and plant form of decision, which apparently was the western way of looking at things. Moreover, the emotions and the actions of this other, where always interpreted in the light of racial considerations, attributing for instance, every aspect of their personality to their race.

This would result in argument such as that goes like this, you know arguments that maintained that they are this because they are black or they are this because there Asian, etcetera. Individual circumstances and aspects or and aspects of personality, where by

enlarge ignored. So, let us look at some of the central principles of post-colonialist thought. Post-colonialism is features the rejection of the master narrative of western imperialism in which the colonial other is subordinated, marginalized and even erased as a cultural agency.

This is sought to be replaced by account and narrative in which the colonial figures find their way back into a world history written largely by Europeans. For instance, the collection of essays titled *The Empire Writes Back, Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literature* is published in 1989 and edited by Bill Ashcroft. This volume, stresses, what it terms the hybridization of colonial languages and cultures through which western models are basically superimposed on indigenous traditions.

Another key feature of post-colonialism is the concerned with the formation of the colonial and postcolonial subject. The term subaltern is a way of designating the colonial subject that has been constructed by European discourse and internalized by the colonial people. The term subaltern itself comes on a British word for someone of an inferior rank.

Therefore a topic of interest in the post-colonialist approach is to understand, how and to what extent a subaltern subject, whose speaks a European language can manage to serve as an agent of resistance against the very discourse that created it is subordinate identity. This is also the idea that Gayatri Spivak explores in her seminal work *Can the Subaltern Speak*, it is published in 1988.

In this context, let me draw your attention to Shakespeare's well known play, *The Tempest*, because it is from this play that we have a very critical component of contemporary post-colonialist thought and that is Caribbean paradigm. So, for those of you who are unfamiliar with story and the premise of Shakespeare's *Tempest*, let me quickly run you through.

In *Tempest*, what we have is basically an image of European king, who leaves his homeland, sails the seas and arrives at what can perhaps be seen as a third world Island. There owing to his superior mastery of the world, he quickly subdues the native inhabitants. Caliban is one such inhabitant of this Island, even though Caliban does not really want to be a civilized by this alien king, he his forced to surrender to his whims and fancies, because he possess superior strength.

And one of the aspects that we encounter in the play is the way in which this native inhabitants called Caliban has been taught language by Prospero, the king. He is taught language, so that he can communicate with the native and make him do his bidding. However, Caliban resists this kind of an attitude and from the play, we have Shakespeare famous lines, uttered by Caliban, the line goes like this. You taught me language and my benefit up on it is that, now I know how to curse you.

This is basically what we were talking about, when we are considering the possibility of the subaltern speaking back to the colonizer. Post-colonialism is also concerned with the disestablishing Eurocentric norms of literary and artistic values. And to expand the literary canon itself to include colonial and postcolonial writers, there is a movements to include in the standard academic curriculum, perhaps the world over.

The brilliant and innovative novels poems and plays by such post-colonialist writers in the English language, such as the African writers, Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka, the Caribbean Islanders V. S, Naipaul and Derek Walcott. And the authors from the Indian subcontinent as well, authors like G. V. Desani, Salman Rushdie or Arundhati Roy. Now, although postcolonial criticism is similar to cultural studies, it assumes rather unique perspective on literature and politics.

And precisely because of this, it warrants a very separate kind of discussion, specifically postcolonial critics are concerned with literature produced by colonial powers and works produced by those who were, or our or who continued to be colonized. You may remember the case of the Caribbean Islands which remain to be French colonies up until today.

Postcolonial theory looks at issues of power, economics, politics, religion and culture and how all this elements work in relation to colonial hegemony. Therefore, to sum up, if we where to look at some of the typical concerns of a postcolonial critique, this is what we would find, he would be interested in looking at how the literary text explicitly or even allegorically represents various aspects of colonial operator operation.

The postcolonial critic would also be interested in finding out what the text itself reveals about the problematic of the idea of postcolonial identity. And this would entail studying the relationship between the personal identity and the cultural identity of the colonized

subject and would also deal with such issues as the phenomenon of double consciousness or even having a hybrid identity.

The critic would also look at what persons or group that the works seeks to identify as the other, how are such persons or groups of people described and treated. If you look at the Shakespeare an example that we just discussed, you can quickly understand, how all of these things might correlate. The postcolonial outlook would also be interested in finding out, how a literary text in the western canon reinforces or even undermines, the colonialist ideology through its representation of colonization. And finally, a post-colonist critical approach would also look at whether the text in appropriately silencers, the colonized people it denied them of a voice with which they can speak out. And with that, we conclude our discussion of the first module in postcolonial theory and criticism; see you for the next module.