

## RECENT CRITICAL THEORIES AND TRENDS IN LITERATURE

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### Abstract

Post-colonial literature is much more actively produced in the English-speaking nations, though similar processes could be seen in the cultures of other language-speaking countries albeit in a weak form. Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Nadine Gordimer, J.M. Coetzec, Derek Walcott, V.S. Naipaul, Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje, Les Murray, Salman Rushdie, Janet Frame are some front line writers who highlight growing urban global culture, produced by international politics, communications and an economy going world-wide. In India, writers of the 80s and after that have shown enhanced awareness of their engagement with history and particular historical contexts. One notes this in Salman Rushdie, Shashi Tharoor, Amitav Ghosh, Nayantara Sehgal, Attia Hosain (though she wrote in the 1960s), Rama Mehta, Manju Kapoor, and several others. Besides, the earlier works of such writers as Prechand, Phanishwarnath Renu, Mukul Kesawan, Krishna Sobti, Qurratulain Hyder, Bhisham Sahni, Kamleshwar, Rahi Masoom Raza, etc. are subjected to re-assessment in the light of post-colonial theories. One interesting development is the meeting of post-colonialist traits with those of post-modernism where exploration of ancient myths and magic realism are used to understand the significance of the present and locate one's identity. Shashi Tharoor has used myth in *The Great Indian Novel*, and Girish Karnad in *The Hayavadana* and *The Nag Manala*. Influences work on a larger transnational scale where one observes African writers teaching in the Pacific island writing. The short stories of Frank Sargeson, a New Zealander, showed Australian poets ways of reproducing common lower a middle-class speech. Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* showed Australian, Indian and African novelists how post-modernist fabulation a self-reflexivity could be given national political dimensions and used allegorically. The line of transmission was from Gunter Grass and Gabriel Garcia Ma'rquez through Rushdie to such commonwealth novelists as Syl Cheney-Coker, Alex Miller and Amitav Ghosh.

Key Words: Recent Critical Theories, Trends in Literature, Post - Colonialism, Orientalism and Mimicry

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Modernism in literature represented an attempt to understand the creative process in the purest form, which it was felt, could be reached only by isolating it from the 'baser' tastes and values. The drift took the great thinkers of the movement away from the surface realities of life; the events and happenings that affect the minds and life tended to be ignored and the quest for pure philosophical and artistic systems that would be self-explanatory and self-contained, and not beholden to any extrinsic factors dominated modernist approaches.

The growth of what is to-day called post-modernism owes a great deal to the avid supporters and critics of modernist tenets. What is remarkable about the emergence of a body of critical-aesthetic theories in the last half-a-century is that there has been extensive study aiming to understand both the context of a text as well as the structural dimensions. It has been felt in recent years that there is an urgent need to give serious thought to the 'extraneous' forces that make it possible for a work of art to come into being; an understanding of the conditions in which a particular work is produced is of immense value in formulating our assessment of it. So the scholars feel that ignoring the 'context' would be disastrous, and numerous works are being produced that attempt to discover those invisible links that bind text to its context. These researches have revolutionized the whole aesthetic-critical perspective as there is greater interaction between various disciplines, immensely illuminating and profitable in seeking to understand the commonality of issues. Literature today is far closer to social problems than it has been in the past, and there is seen a deep involvement with public culture as never before. The rise of diasporic writing, feminism, gynocriticism, multiculturalism, reader-response theory, postcolonial perspective, the neo-Marxist point of view, new historicism and a most of other theories have changed our understanding of literature, that of the past as well as of the present.

There has also been a steady growth of the formalist school; different schools of criticism have emerged seeking to understand structure and organization of different units in society through a close study of other disciplines like sociology, anthropology, linguistics, and psychology and use their insights to better understand literature and art. It is necessary to get ourselves acquainted with these developments. Following are presented in brief some of the recent critical theories and trends so as to enable young students to feel inspired to study them in further detail.

#### Post-Colonialism

One of those modern topics of intellectual debate that are prefixed with Post-, post-colonialism is an inclusive term embracing a wide range and variety of concerns. The term post-colonial is used to cover all the 'cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present-day'. It does not refer to the situation obtaining in a newly independent country that has wrested its freedom from the colonizer, but to the time 'it started conceiving and constructing its various sets of discursive practices to resist colonization, its ways, its ideologies, and legacies'. Thus although India obtained freedom on

August 15, 1947, the Indian post-colonialism may be said to have begun with works of writers and thinkers of the nineteenth century. Identifying this condition as Post-colonialism one scholar points out,

“Its formation is not rooted so much in intellectual debate as in the process of history, human psychology and the positioning within a power relationship. The relationship of this post-coloniality with literature is born out of and reflects upon political conditions.”

Central to the general discussion is the idea that the colonized countries were not only subjected to political power but to a range of ideological, cultural and intellectual structure that the colonizing power deliberately built as part of the imperial strategy. The knowledge ‘is never innocent’, but part of the power exerted by the colonizer. Ngugi wa Thiong’O has observed in his *Decolonising the Mind*,

In this manner arose the particular discipline known as Orientalism or Oriental studies. In this context, Edward Said gave a new interpretation of the scholarly endeavors of the west aimed at probing the Orient's intellectual-cultural wealth. According to him, Orientalism is a discourse created by the European culture in order to manage and produce Orient politically, sociologically, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the post-enlightenment period. To quote said,

So, the Orient created out of the power or out of a sense of the ‘white man's burden’ perpetuates in various concepts, notions, images and cultural categories, the primary one being the binary construct of We and the Other. Thus the symbolization of the Orient as weak, submissive, effeminate, lethargic, savage, foolish in need of the civilizing influence of the superior, gentle, powerful and intelligent west lives on in countless works. Even the category of the ‘Third World’ is a western creation, and scholars have begun to question it. These categories and concepts continue to be used to mould and determine the attitudes of those countries that attained independence decades ago. This is the essence of post-colonialism. In Edward Said's opinion, one of the major aspects of western domination is the creation of a perception of Orient as essentially monolithic, "with an unchanging history, Edward Said says that the western orientalist misrepresents the Orient in these major respects:

- West is always viewed as rational, humane, developed and superior, the Orient as underdeveloped and inferior.
- Western views are based on classical texts rather than modern Oriental realities.
- The Orient is always viewed as uniform homespun and unchanging.
- The Orient does not have the ability to define itself, so it is the burden of the Orientalist to make an objective assessment of the East.

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Said's major works are *Orientalism* (1978); *The World, The Text and the Critic* (1983); and *Culture and Imperialism*. He is one of three major thinkers in the field. The other two are Gayatri Spivak-Chakravorty and Homik Bhabha.

While Said provided formulations about Orientalism, Gayatri Spivak put forward the notion of Subalternity. A leading feminist deconstructionist, Spivak is mainly concerned with the mute and silent women in post-colonial societies, and in her seminal essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak', and several other writings such as 'Marginality on the Teaching Machine', 'Freud Feminism in an International Frame', 'Explanation and Culture', she investigates diverse causes and features of suppression, exploitation, and objectification of the ex-colonized. She found the experience of marginality to be a common factor, and linked race, gender and class politics with an international market economy and emphasizes the plurality and diversity in feminist thought.

Marginality is the location from which she examines and deconstructs the hegemonic systems of the west. She finds that the 'construction of knowledge in the metropolitan centers and the western universities produces a specified type of culture which defines and describes the dominant idea'. In her opinion, there is a need for a rethinking in these matters. The 'Other' continues to be viewed as subordinate once this framework is adopted, and 'official explanations' that are aligned with the power continue to be floated around. She insists on questioning and examining these terms and concepts through a deconstructionist process in order to have a clear assumption. Spivak's formulation led to a new vision that has gone beyond Orient-Occident framework and includes in its scope what has come to be called 'internal colonization' situation where the subaltern, including the 'mute women, are subjected to a different kind of suppression.

#### Homi Bhabha

Homi Bhabha has put forward the idea of 'mimicry' that denotes 'the gap between the norm of civility as presented by European Enlightenment and its distorted colonial imitation. In his opinion, colonizer provides to the colonized the tools whereby the latter erodes the imperial power by building up the native resistance. This is done through 'mimicry' of the dominant power-creation of an 'in-between space' and/or hybridity. Mimicry is the outward or external imitation of the authority leading to the setting up of new structures of authority and generating new political initiatives.

Bhabha also questions the idea of the 'nation', its application to the 'heterogeneous collection of people's to bring out their 'national' character. This seems to have generated a great deal of interest in the subject, the notion of nation and nationalism coming under sharp focus. Ashish Nandy's analysis of Tagore's *Gora* lays bare the subversive role of the western concept of nationalism and its effect on the growth of the protagonist's personality. This

victory of nationalism, Tagore implies, is ultimately a victory of the west over Indian civilization”.

It is not possible to go into detailed discussion of how the basic western assumption about the nation, national and nationalism in the colonized countries are being questioned and analyzed, suffice it to say that in the wake of post-colonialist studies this age-old idea of nationalism is put to close scrutiny. Eminent scholars in the field are Gyanendra Pandey, Ranjit Guha, Sudepta Kaviraj, Partha Chatterji and Ashish Nandy. They are unanimous in pointing out that although the myth of the nation might function as a "valuable resource in unifying a people opposing colonization, it does so by downplaying other forms of resistance, such as those based on identities defined by gender or class that cannot be contained within the assumption of homogeneity".

However, at least one leading critic Aijaz Ahmed is of the opinion that one should not forget that the current anti-orientalism debate is itself an 'orientalism' produced by the western counter-culture which romanticized the Third World while ignoring the actual social, economic and political realities of the former colonies. In his opinion, the homogenization of the Third World into an idealized resistance movement against forces of imperialism and neo-colonialism is another example of the West's tendency to ignore multi-cultural and social diversities.

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