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## SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDYING POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE AND ITS RELEVANCE

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### ABSTRACT

A brief introduction to Postcolonial literature is to be given at the outset. Then the indication of the word 'Postcolonialism' along with the origin and development of this Postcolonial studies have to be examined. Various representative authors like Rushdie, Achebe, Ondaatje, Fanon, Derek Walcott and J. M. Coetzee in addition to some female writers like Jamaica Kincaid, Isabelle Illende, and Eavan Boland are to be presented critically. Moreover, some representative works of most renowned authors under the literary movement Postcolonialism are presented critically. The prominent literary works like *Things Fall Apart*, *Midnight's Children*, *Disgrace*, *The English Patient*, *Ceremony* along with *A Small Place*, *Decolonizing the Mind* are to be examined in terms of their Postcolonial elements. This paper also presents common motifs and themes like 'Identity', 'Language', 'Racism' along with their unique settings, point of view, narration styles. As this movement has some political, contextual reflections and they are to be examined carefully. Finally the conclusions are drawn by means of the review of literature indicated.

**Key Words:** Postcolonialism, Identity, Racism, Negritude, Ethnicity, Culture, Literary Theory.

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### INTRODUCTION

The term 'Postcolonialism' is widely refers to the representation of race, ethnicity, culture and human identity in the modern era, mostly after many colonised countries got their independence. It is connected with imperialism from the moment of colonization until 21<sup>st</sup> century; "The word imperialism derives from the Latin *imperium*, which has numerous meanings including *power, authority, command, dominion, realm, and empire*" (Habib 737). It describes many interactions between 'coloniser' and 'colonised.' Majority of the world was under the control of European countries. Especially the British Empire consisted of "more than a quarter of all the territory on the surface of the earth: one in four people was a subject of Queen

Victoria." It is the literature and the art produced in the countries such as India, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, Senegal and Australia after their independence, called as Postcolonial literature. Edward Said's prominent book *Orientalism* is an assessment of Western representation of the Eastern culture under the label 'Postcolonial Studies'. Canada and Australia are often treated as 'settler' countries as they are part of British Commonwealth of Nations. Most famous postcolonial writers like Rushdie, Achebe, Ondaatje, Fanon, Derek Walcott, J. M. Coetzee, Jamaica Kincaid, Isabelle Illende, and Eavan Boland etc. Most of their literary works were representing interrelations between the coloniser and the colonised, such as *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *Midnight Children* (1981), *The Waiting for the Barbarians*

(1990), *Disgrace* (1990) and *English Patient* (1992) etc.

### Spread of Postcolonialism

There is a single largest defining factor in outlining world politics in the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century i.e. Britain's loss of empire at the outset of World War II. After that Britain lost most of its formal colonies in Africa, the Caribbean, the Mediterranean, the Pacific, South-East Asia and the far East including Persian Gulf etc., In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Britain had gained control over many parts of North America, Canada and Caribbean Islands along with slaves from Africa and market development in India. Nevertheless, Britain viewed its imperialistic expansion as a moral responsibility and exerting greater control over the countries like India, Africa and China. A famous British writer Kipling referred this responsibility, 'the white man's burden' of civilizing the people who were obviously incapable of self-governing. Many colonised countries such as India, Pakistan, Ireland, Kenya, Nigeria and so on started writing a type of literature reflecting and representing their own experiences while and after colonization. Frantz Fanon laid essential theoretical foundation for the future colonial theories in his famous book *The Wretched of the Earth* (1992). He argues that a new world can come into being only with a violent revolution by African farmers. In another instant, he used his personal experiences in his book *Black Skin, White Mask* (1952) to show relationship between colonized and colonizer in terms of psychology in observing emotional damage to both colonized and colonizer. His work anticipated Said's *Orientalism*.

Said's *Orientalism* critiques Western representation of the East as irrational, anti-western, primitive and dishonest. According to Said, Orientalism is an ideology born of the colonizers' desire to know their subjects to control them in a better manner. Said argues, "To write about the Arab Oriental world...is to write with the authority of a nation...with the unquestioning certainty of absolute truth backed by absolute force." Another postcolonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak whose writings focused on the intersections of gender, ethnicity of postcolonial subjects viewed her job as a postcolonial critic. Bhabha illustrates his

"conception of 'cultural difference' in terms of what he describes as 'the language metaphor', which represents cultures in semiotic terms as functioning and assigning value in the same way that systems of language provide meaning" (Gilbert, 124). Homi Bhabha's theory and criticism investigates ideas of 'Hybridity' and 'Ambivalence' to construct national and cultural identities. "Hybridity, perhaps the key concept throughout Bhabha's career in this respect, obviously depends upon a presumption of the existence of its opposite for its force" (Gilbert, 128). In his famous books *Nation and Narration* (1990) and *The Location of Culture* (1994) used psychoanalysis and semiotics to explore the 'spaces' created by dominant social formations in the works of Morrison, Gordimer etc.

### Postcolonial Authors

Some of the most prominent authors of Postcolonial literatures are Chinua Achebe, J. M. Coetzee, Franz Fanon, Michael Ondaatje, Salman Rushdie, Li-Young Li, Derek Walcott and Jamaica Kincaid, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak etc. "The four names appear again and again as thinkers who have shaped postcolonial theory: Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak" (Innes, 5). Though all these writers had different lands, nationalities and social backgrounds, they could all create their own distinction in producing wonderful works of literature of which many would certainly come under the label 'Postcolonial literature. Chinua Achebe of Nigeria with his first novel, *The Things Fall Apart* (1958) writes about the tensions between the people and the values of the native Igbo community and the Christian colonizers. He worked in many universities in Nigeria and America for more than three decades. In addition to his fictional writings, he wrote some non-fiction collection of essays *Home and Exile* (2000). Achebe got the Man Booker International Prize in 2007 for his literary merit so as J. M. Coetzee who was apartheid writer. J. M. Coetzee developed vigorous anti-imperialist attitudes as a white writer living in South Africa for the apartheid. In most of his novels, he represented his own alienation from his fellow Africans. *The Life and Times of Michael K* is an award winning novel set in Cape Town with a protagonist Michael K who is a gardener. His novels

are allegorical and accentuating the everlasting nature of human vindictiveness. Coetzee received his second Booker Prize for his *Disgrace* (1999). Though he got numerous awards, the highest one is Nobel Prize in literature in 2003. Another notable writer in Postcolonial literature, Frantz Fanon who was interested in the emotional effects of colonization and racism on blacks, his most known work *The Wretched of the Earth* in 1961 and become a leading critic of colonial power and influenced aggressive revolution. Moreover he had significant influence on many thinkers such as Homi Bhabha, Jean Paul Sartre, and Edward Said. Edward "Said is concerned with the ways in which knowledge is governed and owned by Europeans to reinforce power, and to exclude or dismiss the knowledge which natives might claim to have" (Innes, 9). Michael Ondaatje is a novelist, critic, poet born in Sri Lanka and moved to London with his mother. He is best known for his Booker Prize winning novel *the English Patient* which features the interactions of characters of various nationalities during the last days of WWII. Salman Rushdie is an Indian postcolonial writer who wanted to become a writer from his childhood. His most successful and Booker Prize winning novel is *Midnight's Children* which got him international reputation. By sketching Indian history from 1910 to 1976 he weaved personal experiences with history. His *The Satanic Verses* got banned and caused a Muslims protest throughout the world termed the book blasphemous. He had to face troubles in the name of 'fatwa' for the novel *The Satanic Verses*. In most of his writings, Rushdie explores the intersections of history, religion, culture and identity.

On par with male writers in postcolonial literature, there are notable female writers such as Jamaica Kincaid, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak have contributed in a greater extent. Kincaid's novel *A Small Place* describes about Antigua. Mostly she wrote about women's experiences with other women in addition to the effects of patriarchy and colonialism women's own image. Another female writer and one of the prominent theorists of postcolonial literary theory is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who translated Derrida's *Of Grammatology* in to English along with its preface. She gave

numerous interviews on her critical opinions about postcolonial literature.

#### Postcolonialism literature in English

One of the most influential novels of Postcolonialism is *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, explores the interaction between traditional African society and British colonizers. In this novel the character Okonkwo struggles to understand and cope up with the changes got from Christianity and British control. His novel examines various situations occurred after the post-independence fictional West African village. Achebe conveyed through his novels how the British legacies continue to weaken possibility of uniting the country. South African novelist and Booker Prize winner J. M. Coetzee explores the themes of crime, revenge, land rights and racial justice post-apartheid South Africa. The plot of the novel strongly connected with the character David Lurie was expelled from for sexual harassment. Salman Rushdie's most popular novel *Midnight's Children* intertwines personal events into the history of India. The narrator in the novel is Saleem Sinai. Author used many devices like Magic Realism, Hindu story telling etc. In addition Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* surveys lots of postcolonial themes such as intersections between national and individual identity which caused in consciousness. It is set in a country house in Florence and describes the lives of a young woman and three men from various countries including a badly burnt English patient dying in a room. Some significant writers in postcolonial literature are like Ngugu wa Thiongo, Edwidge Danticat Leslie Marmon Silko, Jamaica Kincaid including Li-Young Lee contributed considerably. Ngugi's *Decolonizing the Mind* is a kind of multiple type genre and it describes various traditions of his people. It also presents how British education system tried to destroy the local culture and its language Gikuyu. Silko in his novel *Ceremony* celebrates various traditions and myths of the Laguna Pueblo and influence of white relation on local culture. It also shows how Native Americans hold a special position in postcolonial discourse.

In addition to many male postcolonial writers whose works have been examined just

before, there are some renowned female novelists also contributed, especially Jamaica Kincaid with her famous novel *Small Place* is one of the postcolonial discourse with which she draws on her personal experience of living in British colony of Antigua. Kincaid expresses her contempt for the British ways for colonized. In this novel she focuses on the English Educational system which attempted to turn natives into English. Further she points out that the native people like to adopt the worst of foreign culture and pay no attention to the best. Another novelist Edwidge Danticat from Haiti is the writer of the novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. Her novel presents many themes like migration, sexuality, gender and history as they are the most common postcolonial themes. In this novel the protagonist Sophie struggles to get an identity out of desperate cultures and languages such as French, English to adapt to American ways after she reaches Brooklyn, New York. Danticat become a leading female voice of postcolonial literature.

#### **The Central ideas in Postcolonial literature**

Postcolonial has many common motifs and themes like 'cultural dominance' and Racism', 'quest for identity', 'racial discrimination', 'inequality', 'hybridity' along with some peculiar presentation styles. Most of the postcolonial writers reflected and demonstrated many thematic concepts which are quite connected with both 'colonizer' and 'colonized'. White Europeans continually accentuated on racial discrimination for their superiority over colonized. It was most evident in South Africa that the apartheid was incorporated in national laws. Among the most notable acts of this kind were 'The Groups Areas Act', 'Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act', 'Immorality Act', 'The Population Registration Act', 'Bantu Authorities Act', and 'The Abolition of Passes and Coordination of Documents Act'. Each of these acts were limiting, restricting and discriminating colonized from the ruling White. Both the writers Nadine Gordimer and Coetzee in their fiction showed how apartheid destroyed South Africa in many ways as emotionally, morally and economically. In postcolonial context, language played crucial role in control and subjugation of colonized people. Colonizers often imposed their language upon their subjects in order

to control them. So most postcolonial writers address the issues in many ways by mixing the local language with imposed language, the result is a hybrid one that underscores the broken nature of the colonized mind.

#### **Postcolonialism and its reflections**

There are various reflections of Postcolonial literature in terms of theories and conceptions. The Postcolonial theorists examine both the colonial texts and literature written after colonialism. Some of the notable theorists who popularised colonialism such as Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha and others. These theorists connected postcolonial literature with many fields like history, politics, philosophy and literary traditions and its significance in present day society. Most of the times, these postcolonial theorists are from postcolonial countries for instance Edward Said from Palestine, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak from India and Fanon from a French colony, Martinique. The colonial countries started writing and depicting the experiences of colonization and many changes brought by independence upon individuals and their respective nations. Some filmmakers also attempted to depict colonial and postcolonial predicaments in their films. Satyajit Ray, Deepa Mehta, Mira Nair, Shyam Benegal are few among the filmmakers who contributed to Postcolonialism. Music in postcolonial countries also exhibiting cultural identity and values as aboriginal pop music, best example of this kind of music such as Ravi Shankar's unification of classical Indian music with Western sounds. Negritude movement also based on the concept of shared cultural affinity among black Africans. Most prominently negritude literature included the poetry of Leopold Senghor and Aime Cesaire especially in *Return to My Native Land*.

#### **Conclusion**

In fact, as the Postcolonial literature deals with framing identities, the politics of rewriting, translations, relation between nation and nationalism. It is a most dominant form of literature and it has a great appeal. In most of the postcolonial novels which have been mentioned connected with many colonies such as Africa, Australasia, the Caribbean, Ireland, Latin American and South Africa.

Postcolonialism mostly deals with many concepts like cultural, political, geographical, psychological and post-structural etc. The major colonial empires are the British, the French, the Spanish and Portuguese. It is also major literature which helps in understanding both 'colonizer' and 'colonized' in many concerns like education, politics, geography, culture and customs.

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