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Depiction of Key-features of Post-Colonialism through Selected Stories of Rudyard Kipling and R. K. Narayan

Nishtha Mishra
Research Scholar,
Department of English and M.E.L.,
University of Allahabad.

The term “postcolonial” is a name given to those regions of the world that have been the colonies of some other countries in the history and those that have been a party to the confluence of different cultures due to this. It has been defined as follows:

“Postcolonialism’ is thus a name for a critical theoretical approach in literary and cultural studies, but it also, as importantly, designates a politics of transformational resistance to unjust and unequal forms of political and cultural authority which extends back across the twentieth century and beyond.” (Waugh 340)

Post colonialism as a critical approach shows parallels with feminist activism in 1961. Many concepts of liberation have thus been adapted and inter-transferred due to which these movements have parallel phases of transformation of outlook too. However, some of its central and critical concepts developed earlier out of national struggles for independence in the first half of the twentieth century. The political and cultural reforms planned by anti-colonial movements in countries like India, Algeria, Ghana, Kenya and Caribbean etc formed the origin of what we call post colonialism. With increased drive after the end of World War II, anti colonial nationalist movements took a more confrontational, no compromise approach to decolonization than had their founders and predecessors.

Theorizing the processes of cultural as well as political resistance there were anti-colonial nationalists-like the Bengali radical Aurobindo Ghosh in *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance* and Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of The World* . For many researchers and critics, ancestry of postcolonial criticism traced back to 1961 when Frantz Fanon published in French his *The Wretched of the World* that voiced ‘cultural resistance’ to France’s African empire. *Orientalism* by Edward Said is another revealing book on postcolonial criticism that exposes “Eurocentric Universalism” which establishes without analysis “the superiority of what is European or Western and the inferiority of what is not.”

The first step towards a postcolonial viewpoint is to reclaim one’s own past, then the second is to begin to erode the colonialist ideology by which that past had been devalued. Characteristically, postcolonial writers evoke or create a precolonial version of their own nation, rejecting the modern and the contemporary, which is tainted with the colonial status of their

countries. Here, then, is the first characteristic of postcolonial criticism –an awareness of representations of the non-European as exotic or immoral ‘Other’.

Language also is an area of concern in postcolonial criticism. The ‘linguistic deference’ adds a feeling that the language that is being used belongs to somebody else, and therefore shouldn’t be meddled with, without permission. Some post colonial writers have concluded that the coloniser’s language carries a permanent stigma of being other’s and that to write in it involves a vital compliance in colonial structures. This feeling is illustrated in Stephan Dedalus’s thoughts about the English Language in James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* where he is patronised by an English priest because of his use of a local dialect word. He tells himself “The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine... My soul frets in the shadow of his language.”

The notion of double, divided, hybrid or fluid identity because of the shared coloniser and the colonised ideology is another characteristic of this criticism. In *Culture and Imperialism* Said points out that the desire frequently expressed in Yeats’s work , to regain contact with an earlier, mythical, nationalistic Ireland is typical of writers whose own position is postcolonial. The earlier critics attacked Chinua Achebe’s *Things fall Apart* criticising him for “affecting to identify with African Villagers” when actually his university education and his broadcasting job should make him identify with the values of ‘civilisation’. Homi Bhabha in his essay ‘Of Mimicry and Man’ points out the colonisers’ attempt to make the colonised adapt their values and standards so that they do not remain “other” to the colonisers. However, since the colonised have a culture of their own preserved through the history and mythology of their respective native lands that do not leave their psyche and thus they offer resistance to those values forced by the colonisers. As a result of this, there occurred a hybridisation of values instead of total transformation in which both the minds of the colonisers as well as colonised adapted some values of the other which with passage of time became indispensable for both.

Thus, postcolonial literature had passed through three transition phases. In the first, they had an unquestioning agreement with the European models and the aim was to continue writing in the same fashion. This can be called the ‘Adopt’ phase of the colonial literature. Then is the ‘Adapt’ phase, so called because it aims to adapt the coloniser’s form to colonised subject matter so as to deviate slightly from the genre. And the final is the ‘Adept’ phase which involves remaking the form to the specifications of the colonised or post colonised writers. The independence is thus derived in this stage through various cross cultural interactions. This stress on ‘cross-cultural’ interactions is the fourth characteristic of postcolonial criticism.

Thus, the analysis of a text through the eye-glass of post colonialism may involve the following:

- Rejection of the claims to universalism made by Western literature and showing its limitations of outlook and inability to empathise across cultural and ethnic boundaries.

- An examination of the representation of other cultures in literature to achieve its purpose.
- Showing how such literature has ignored and shown preference of silence over speech on issues relating to colonisation and imperialism.
- Foregrounding questions arising out of cultural differences and diversity and also examining their treatment in relevant works.
- Celebrating hybridity and cultural ‘polyvalency’ occurring on account of factors like a colonial school system and colonised cultural and oral traditions.
- Developing a perspective that marginality, plurality and the perceived ‘otherness’ can be seen as sources of energy and potential change.

The features that led to the need of postcolonial literature and critics are clearly present in the works of Rudyard Kipling. He being a British resident in the colonised India having had his education in London portrayed a fair deal of coloniser’s idea of Indians in his *Plain Tales from Hills*. In ‘Lispeth’, Kipling mentions that a native girl becomes beautiful if she looks like the ladies of the west:

When a Hill-girl grows lovely, she is worth travelling fifty miles over bad ground to look upon. Lispeth had a Greek face- one of those faces people paint so often and see so seldom. She was of a pale, ivory colour, and for her race, extremely tall. Also she possessed eyes that were wonderful; and had she not been dressed in the abominable print-cloths affected by Missions, you would, meeting her on the hillside unexpectedly have thought her the original Diana of Romans going out to slay.

The same apostle of beauty turned into an urchin on facing rejection by an English man and going back to her native people:

She went out down the valley, and returned in the dress of a Hill-girl- infamously dirty, but without the nose-stud and earrings. She had her hair braided into the long pigtail, helped out with black thread that Hill-women wear.

‘I am going back to my own people,’ said she. ‘You have Killed Lispeth. There is only left old Jadeh’s Daughter- the daughter of a pahari and the servant of Tarka devi. You are all liars, you English.’

She took to her own unclean people savagely, as if to make up the arrears of the life she had stepped out of; and, in a little time, she married a woodcutter who beat her after the manner of Paharis , and her beauty faded soon.

In these two descriptions of the central character a clear preference for English as a race can be seen. Kipling’s attempt seems to establish the superiority of the West colonisers when compared to the colonised East. However, Lispeth’s giving up of Coloniser’s way of life in itself represents the key feature of Post colonialism, i.e., reclaiming one’s own past.

A similar inferior representation of Indian Women can be found in another story ‘Yoked with an Unbeliever’ in *Plain Tales from the Hills*. In this story, an Englishman Phil after being heartbroken by his beloved marries the daughter of a Rajput ex-Subedar who had been the Major in the Army. This is how this hill-woman has been projected by Kipling:

The girl had a strain of Hill blood in her and like the Hill-women, was not a purdah-nashin or woman who lives behind the veil. Where Phil met her, or how he heard of her does not matter. She was a good girl and handsome, and in her way, very clever and shrewd; though, of course a little hard.....Dunmaya was a thoroughly honest girl, and in spite of her reverence for an Englishman, had a reasonable estimate of her husband’s weakness. She managed him tenderly, and became, in less than a year, a very passable imitation of an English Lady in the dress and carriage. It is curious to think that a Hill-Man after a lifetime’s education is a Hill-man still; but a Hill-woman can in six months master most of the ways of her English sisters.

The idea that a woman is presentable if she has English ways again tries to establish the superiority of English and the west over the natives. The mere mention of the word ‘imitation’ of the English ladies suggests their superior position. They thus automatically find themselves at a pedestal while the Hill-girl, Dunmaya remains below them as after so many efforts she was able to adopt most ways of English women but not all. In the story of a heartbroken and betrayed Phil, the woman who actually applies balm to his wailing and injured heart is treated as the inferior “Other” whose story is of less importance when compared to Phil’s former beloved Agnes. The ways that would have forced Phil to marry her out of so many others were made to be seen by Kipling as shrewd rather than genuine. And towards the end also Agnes who came to rekindle the flames of love between Phil and herself soon after her husband’s death has been projected as the wronged party:

Now the particular sin and shame of the whole business is that Phil, who really is not worth thinking of twice, was and is loved by Dunmaya, and more than loved by Agnes, the whole of whose life he seems to have spoiled.

Thus, the bias towards the West and against the East can be clearly seen in these stories. In the opening lines of the same story, India has been told of as an exotic and mysterious place about which the West has many negative apprehensions:

When the Gravesend tender left the P. & O. Steamer for Bombay and went back to catch the train to Town, there were many people init crying. But the one who wept most, and most openly, was Miss Agnes Laiter. She had reason to cry, because the only man she ever loved- or ever could love, so she said- was going out to India; and India as everyone knows, is divided equally between jungle, tigers, cobras, cholera, and sepoy.

The most common description of India found in the texts from the coloniser’s point of view represents it as a land of snakes and snake charmers. There are ample of descriptions mystifying the land that worships and patronises the snakes. India thus had been depicted as an

exotic land beyond the inclusion of Universal standards the West had set not only in Kipling's works but also in the works other authors of that period. Everything about it has been portrayed in a mysterious light that is to be feared.

Against such misrepresentations, R.K. Narayan drew his Indian characters found and accepted universally from the southern region of Malgudi. Narayan in his introduction to the book *Malgudi Days* says:

“I have named this volume MALGUDI DAYS in order to give to it a plausibly geographical status. I am often asked. ‘Where is Malgudi?’ All I can say is that it is imaginary and not to be found on any map... if I explain that Malgudi is a small town in South India I shall only be expressing a half-truth, for the characteristics of Malgudi seem to me universal.”

Breaking this stereotypical representation given by West, Narayan in his story ‘Naga’ has shown how these so called mysterious snake-charmers are scientific in their approach. How the father and son pair of snake charmers trained the monkey showed direct application of Skinner's operant conditioning through reinforcements, a principle that had been used since time immemorial in India and definitely long before Skinner actually theorized it:

Fifteen days of starvation, bullying, cajoling and dangling of fruit before the monkey's eyes taught him what he was expected to do. First of all, he ceased trying to bite or scratch. And then he realized that his mission in life was to please his master by performing.....Rama constantly tried to push his cap back and rip it off, but whenever he attempted it he was whacked with a switch, and he soon resigned himself to wearing uniform until the end of the day.

The mysterious ways of an astrologer's prediction have also been revealed as effective mind games that the astrologer is fully aware of in the ‘An Astrologer's Day’. These mind games are basic to every therapy in psychology from Freud's psychoanalytical to the recent client centered approach that involves wise probing to extract information:

He had a working analysis of mankind's troubles: marriages, money and the tangles of human ties. Long practise had sharpened his perception. Within five minutes he understood what was wrong. He charged three pies per question and never opened his mouth till the other had spoken for atleast ten minutes, which provided him enough stuff for a dozen answers and advices. When he told the person before him, gazing at his palm, “In many ways you are not getting the fullest results for your efforts,” nine out of ten were disposed to agree with him. Or he questioned: “Is there any woman in your family, maybe even a distant relative, who is not well disposed towards you?” Or he gave an analysis of character: “Most of your troubles are due to your nature. How can you be otherwise with Saturn where he is? You have an impetuous nature and a rough exterior.” This endeared him to their hearts immediately, for even the mildest of us loves to think that h has a forbidding exterior.

The ghost-obsessed West could never imagine how an Indian exorcist can make money out of a cat stuck in a jug. This has been hilariously depicted in the story 'Cat Within'. The exorcist not only made money out of this situation but also forced the landlord to reveal his secrets in public causing him embarrassment.

The 'charms' that the West always feared were nothing but a play of the Indian wits. R.K.Narayan in these stories successfully picked some of the cultural and societal elements of India and demystified it through scientific reasoning. He not only reclaimed Indian practices but showed that they are not 'exotic' ones.

However, in a country where divinity is seen in stones and pillars, it is impossible to escape the miracles or miraculous coincidences. To demonstrate this, the book *Malgudi Days* includes the stories 'The snake-song' and 'Such Perfection'. In 'Such Perfection', the coincidence that the tree just damaging the single toe of the idol making it devoid of perfection and full of divinity. However, in the story 'The Snake-Song', the artist's failure to repeat the same song has definite roots in the psychological repression of the talent due to boredom, guilt and fear of having sung the song at a forbidden time repeatedly:

Next day I narrated my experiences to my master. He said, "Don't you know you ought not to play punnaga varali at night? That apart, now you can never be sure you will not get the snake in again if you play. And when he comes he won't spare you unless you sing his song over again. Are you prepared to do it?"

Further through stories like 'Engine Trouble', 'Forty-five a Month', 'Out of Business', etc showed the struggles of civilization in a post-colonial India further relating the "other" regions to the world population. These stories depicted the cultural 'polyvalency' that caused the confluence of British Civilization and Indian culture and showed how the post-colonial countries are proceeding after the accumulation of two distinctly varied culture. This now indispensable hybridised way of life that the colonised people are leaving has been described quite aptly.

Thus, the textual comparison of the stories of Rudyard Kipling and R.K.Narayan clearly showed the disparity or gap between the perceived India and real India; representation of India by a coloniser and the representation of India by a Native who seeks to reclaim India's past and practices in a positive light; storytelling from the viewpoint of colonisers and that from the viewpoint of colonised; India that is the "exotic other" and India that is just like the rest of the world with its own unique customs and cultures. In his attempt to narrate his experiences in India, Rudyard Kipling remained biased in the representation of the country as the 'inferior other' while the stories of R.K.Narayan celebrated India's so-called exoticism and gave it a demystifying treatment to make it stand in the crowd of the world as one and not as the other. R.K.Narayan's writings do not reject the claims to universalism as many post-colonial writings do. Rather, it celebrated what is different and pointed out what is similar so as to change the notion of perceiving the colonised countries as 'inferior others' and as participants towards a

sustainable future. India being the land of story tellers and R.K.Narayan being one had hardly adapted this form to his use but has actually utilised as a medium of postcolonial expression of experiences. However, the limitations imposed by the English language which is not the first language of R.K.Narayan and which definitely lacks the rich vocabulary of synonyms that Hindi language has, might have restrained the expression of experiences. But this limitation has definitely not obstructed the correction of misrepresentations of India done by colonisers' pens as is evident from the comparison made.

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