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Diaspora, Colonialism and the main postcolonial theories

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Abstract

Diaspora is as old as human history. It was here in pre-history times and we get a few glimpses of it in religious scriptures- *the Bible* as well as the *Ouran*. It was when the Jews were scattered out of Palestine and Egypt. Asserians threw them out of Palestine and Pharo drew them from Egypt. As such the word '*diaspora*' or '*diasporic*' got stuck with the Jews. Still it meant for Jews alone. The word comes from the Greek verb which means '*to scather*' which clearly shows in the Greek world, too, there were forcible movements of people from comparatively stronger city-states to other places. With the rise of modern civilization there grew the European Imperialism which subjugated almost all the Eastern Countries and changed them into Colonies. It was an era of exploitation- political, culture as well as educational. Post colonialism followed colonialism and the colonized countries got freedom. The native overcame political and cultural imperialism. There appeared dozen of writers from the third world who contributed their intellectual might to postcolonial Theory. Their contribution much misunderstanding between the West and the Orient. They asked the writers from the West to shed their misgivings about the East and to make true estimate of its culture.

Keywords: Colonialism, Post-Colonialism, diaspora, orient, imperialism

1. Introduction

The word 'Disaspora' has become a multi-dimensional in its meaning with the passage of time. The term has its origin in the Greek verb 'diaspeiro' which means 'I scatter' and is hence, used to refer to the movement of a population from its original locality, whether under some force or of its own sweet will. The term has great historical significance and it is generally accepted that the word 'diaspora' was originally used to signify the movement of the Jewish people away from ancient Palestine to settle in other countries. These were the times of Moses (PBUH) and Pharoas, more precisely in the region of Remises II Where these tribes went is covered by the dim layers of history. Still a renounced historian, Aziz Kashmiri, asserts that one of these tribes reached as far as Kashmir and calls the Kashmiris as original Jews. Even in ancient Greece, this term was used to refer to the citizens of a powerful city-state who migrated to a conquered land with the colonization in mind and to assimilate the dominated area. We have this word in Hebrew Bible as well as in its Greek translation. Even the Psalms bear this word. The term 'Diaspora' seems to be as old as history itself and much of its old usage concerns the Jews. The process of diaspora went on even after pre-history times and even continues to this day. Before Christian era started, the Jews had been the chief diasporic victims whether they were haunted out of their homeland by Asserians or by Romans and in English the word 'diasporic' used without a modifier simply referred to Jewish diaspora. We agree with Hornby that traditionally 'Diaspora refers to the movement of the Jewish People away from their own country to live and work in other countries. Then as great a historian as Will Durant gives a painful account of the Jewish Diaspora and praising the courage and fortitude of these people saying "The story of the Jews since the Dispersion is one of the epics of the European history".

The times have changed and the old war-lords have been replaced by the elected representatives but it never means that diasporian movements have stopped under new rulers, rather the term has grown in volume and become multi-dimensional. The term is used now to include all kinds of exiles, expatriates, immigrants and writers who live in other countries away from home. With the beginning of industrialization and scientific development in Europe came the necessary evils of imperialism and colonization. In the 19th century, Europeans, particularly the British and the French almost spread all over the world as colonizers- cum-rulers and they sent many of their colonized subjects of Asia and Africa to many places as indentured labourers. In one such event, V.S. Naipaul's grandfather went to Trinidad from Bombay. Originally diasporas had more to do with 'migration as colonialism'

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rather than with uprooting and deterritorialisation. Presently diaspora means movement from a homeland, as well as, grounding in the host society. According to Clifford both displacement and dwelling constitute and characterise diaspora communities. Clifford assures us that there runs a thread of compulsion all along the processes of diasporas. He says “Their members, with varying degrees of urgency, negotiate and resist the social realities of poverty, violence, policing, racism and political and economic inequality (Clifford reference). We cannot deny the links formed between the two as Glick Schiller and his co-authors say,” It is important to acknowledge the links or ‘social relations formed between the immigrants’ adopted countries (Glick reference). Almost all the forms of dislocation are associated with colonialisms and its aftermath and so they have necessarily become the central topics of postcolonial thought and literature. Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan admits in his paper “*Concepts in Postcolonial Theory: Diaspora, Exile, Migration*” that diaspora has undeniably brought about profound changes in the demographics, cultures, epistemologies and politics of the post-colonial world. He does not regard diaspora as a singular phenomenon but varied and heterogeneous in its aspects. Now that diaspora has become a multidisciplinary field covering history of slavery, colonization and indentured labour, the financial aspects and sources of livelihood of displaced persons, their experiences of homelessness, their ideologies of home and nation, their culture and multiculturalism. The theory of Diaspora, being open ended, has been analysed by various theoreticians from various angles and still the issue, remains unresolved to this day. Vijay Mishra, referring to Derrida, tries to underline the basic problem inherent in Diaspora. “A critical diaspora addresses the following questions raised by Derrida: “Where then are we? Where do we find ourselves? With whom can we identify in order to affirm our identity and to till ourselves our own history? First of all, to whom to we recount it?” Paranjape gives a short summary of these problems inherent in Diaspora, when he says, “All these words truth, alienation, appropriation, habitation, one’s home, place of the subject, law and so on remain, in my eyes, problematic”. Vijay Mishra draws our attention to the Indian diaspora as given by V.S. Naipaul. “It was astonishing what they (the indentured labourers) did bring, but they were going to the end of the world and they come prepared or wilderness. They brought holy books and astrological almanacs, images, musical instruments, stringbeds, plates and jars, even querns, even grinding stones..... as it was, they carried India with them. Colonialism was the imperialist expansion of western countries, especially Britain and France, into the rest of the world to dominate other countries as their colonies and influence the local people educationally as were as, culturally. The colonizers had to consolidate their power over those colonial settlements and according to Boehmer ‘Colonialism involves the consolidation of imperial power, and is manifested in the settlement of territory, the exploitation or development of resources, and attempt to govern the indigenous inhabitants of occupied lands’. Post-colonialism, as the term indicates, refers to the period after colonialism in which the colonized took their proper place by gaining freedom, thus, overcoming the political and cultural imperialism. Broadly speaking Post-Colonialism seems to follow colonialism in a linear way but the whole process is not so simple because even in

post-colonial era, we see colonialism in the form of neo-colonialism taking place as in Palestine and Afghanistan which gives rise to new diasporic movements. Post colonial criticism is wide in its perspective and many schools of thought like post-structuralism, post-modernism and orientalism contribute to it. Many new terms like marginality, subaltern, hybridity, expatriate, multiculturalism, mimicry and ‘the other’ are used to describe the colonizer-colonized relationships. Postcolonial criticism has gathered mass and momentum during the last two decades and scholars like Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak are taken as fore-runners of postcolonial criticism and in this field, Edward Said is regarded as the greatest fighter among them all. He got stimulus from the ideas of Italian Philosopher Vico, as well as, from Gramsci, the Marxist Philosopher of Italy but it is Edward Said himself who gave a solid base to post-colonial criticism by writing such books as, ‘*Beginnings, Orientalism*’ and ‘*the Question of Palestine*’. Said’s contribution to postcolonial theory needs to be understood in proper perspective against the backdrop of his concept of ‘orientalism. Palestinian Edward Said was himself of this origin but had left Palestine in 1947, just before the creation of Israel out of the territory of Palestine in 1948 and settled in America to teach at Columbia University. He was not a Muslim by faith but simply a Palestinian Arab and it is in America that he felt the bitterness of being a Palestinian there. His own experiences over there made him to write his most productive and influential book ‘*Orientalism*’. He makes it clear in the introduction, “The life of Arab Palestinian in the West, particularly America, is disheartening—The Web of racism, cultural stereotypes political imperialism, dehumanizing ideology holding in the Arab or the Muslim is very strong indeed, and it is this web white every Palestinian has come to feel as his uniquely punishing destiny. As is evident from the above quoted lines of Edward Said, he himself felt this ‘uniquely punishing destiny’. He understood that the domination of the rulers over the ruled was brought to work at two levels——— at the administrative level through military power and at social level, through schools and institutions like churches and other organisations. The colonized were exploited politically, as well as, culturally to claim the superiority of the West over the East. ‘*Orientalism*’ is considered as source book which upholds the cause of the marginal and gives the colonized a sense of identity and status. Said’s contention is that ‘without examining orientalism as a discourse, one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage- and even produce- the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, another stalwart with postcolonial criticism, pointed out that, “The study of colonial discourse, released by work such as Said’s has blossomed into a garden where the marginal can speak and be spoken, even spoken for”. Talking about the contribution of Said’s *Orientalism* Leela Ghandii says, “Orientalism is the first book in a trilogy devoted to an exploration of the historically imbalanced relationship between the world of Islam, the Middle East, and the ‘Orient’ on the one hand, and that of the European and American imperialism on the other”. Said is sure that the Western attitude towards Orientals is based on ignorance of

Eastern culture and literature, and because of this ignorance, the West burdened the East with its own culture and literature. He successfully brought out the values of Oriental culture and put the marginalised 'other' to the centre stage. Edward Said's *Orientalism* shows us the binary opposition between the West and the East- the Occident and the Orient. Ania Loomba explains this view point of Said by saying, "Said argues that the representations of the 'Orient' in European literary texts, travelogues and other writings contributed to the creation of a dichotomy between Europe and the its 'others. In Loomba's opinion this dichotomy was the basic to the creation of European culture which helped the extension of European hegemony over other lands. Said asserts that the West has misrepresented the 'Orient' in certain aspects. R.K. Kaul explains these aspects saying, "It was assumed that the west is rational, developed, humane, superior, the Orient is aberrant, under-developed and inferior..... The Orientalist was guided by the classical texts in his attitude to the orient rather than modern oriental realities..... The Orient was unchanging and uniform, incapable of defining itself and so its objective assessment must be made by the Western Orientalist. With the help of his postcolonial theory Said checked greatly the trends of formalism in Anglo- American criticism. He was not West- bashing at all but simply wanted the West and the East to come closer for a better understanding. He thought all cultures were hybrid and so, it was well thought that it is impossible to separate the West from the East. In his own words "West's most paradoxical gift was to allow people belief that they were only, mainly exclusively white or black, or Western or Oriental". At the end it is enough to say that Said did his job well and there is no stopping to it. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is another pioneer of Postcolonial criticism. Spivak belongs to the category of Indian expatriate writers who live in U.S.A. Post structuralism, Marginality, postcoloniality and 'value' are pet tools she uses in her dealings with Post colonialism and, in her discourses She often uses the word '*subaltern*' while referring to the colonized, the working class, blacks and the women. She is all praise for Edward Said and thinks that the study of colonial discourse has been released by his work and it has bloomed into a garden where marginal can speak and be spoken— even spoken for. Gayatri Spivak takes deconstruction as strategy for estimation of Postcolonial condition. She takes post coloniality as a wide term of reference and thinks that,

"The deconstruction of Postcoloniality bears not only on the status of migrants in the Western metropolis but also on conditions in the decolonized world, especially among the rural poor".

Postcolonial criticism concentrates on non-European cultural traditions, more specifically writings from those countries which had been colonized but are now free and second, it lays emphasis on representation of immigrant Asians and Africans in Western literature. Spivak was known in America not as an Asian but as an Indian. This cultural difference is central preoccupation of Postcolonial critics and Spivak feels more bitterly so. The voices of the Third World countries are known as the voices from the margin, which is synonymous with '*periphery*' and '*othernesses*'. The Postcolonial critics want to remove the stigma of marginality. In her view it is Eurocentric to choose only such writers who write under the

consciousness of marginality. She disagrees with the view that 'magical realism' should be the norm for the identification of '*Third World Writers*'. Her concept of marginality is partly based on the ideas of Foucault and she warns against complete schism between 'centre' and 'margin'. In a lecture at Birkbeck College, the University of London, she herself raises the question as to why the name 'postcolonial' is useful in the movement of Postcolonialism and explains herself by saying, "We, who are from formerly colonized countries, are able to communicate to each other, to exchange, to establish sociality, because we have had access to the culture of imperialism" Spivak's, greatest tool in dealing with postcolonial criticism is postcoloniality which helps one to look back into the colonial era as a historical perspective and link it with the present (i.e, postcolonial era). It is here that the concept of 'hybridity' intrudes in. Like Edward Said, Spivak comes to the conclusion that the colonizers only did not shape and influence the political and cultural institutions of the colonized, they themselves were influenced by the colonial culture. Spivak deals also with the concept of 'value'. She thinks that post colonial deconstruction necessarily involves recording of fields of value. Taking the idea from Marx, she defines it as the possibility of mediation. Homi K. Bhabha was the third important critic of Postcolonial criticism who was greatly influenced by the great French thinker, Jacques Lucan. He has contributed to Postcolonial criticism by the usage of such terms as '*Mimicry*', '*hybridity*' and 'the other. Like Said and Spivak, he too was a diasporic person. What was Bhabha's conception of the term Postcolonial can be guessed well from the words which, according to Mongia, he stated at a conference in New York in May 1991, "The term Postcolonial is increasingly used to describe that form of social criticism that bears witness to those unequal and uneven processes of representation by which the historical experience of the once colonized third World comes to be framed in the West. With this view in mind, he expounded his theory in such books as '*Nation and Narration*' and '*The Location of Culture*' even if the postcolonial theory hinges upon coloniser/ colonized relationship, strongly enough his terms are related to the colonized greatly than the colonizer using the terms 'Mimicry' '*hybirdity*' and 'otherness', he analyses the state of the colonised in the postcolonial era. The term '*mimicry*', expressed in simple words, mean imitation and when the term is used with reference to postcolonial is, it gets its wider significance. In this context the term 'mimicry underlines the gap between the norm of civility as presented by European Engagement and its colonial imitation in distorted form. Bhabha exposes the self-defeating structure of colonial discourse in his essay "of Mimicry and Man" He states that at the end of the 18th century, the English administration wanted to convert their Indian subjects to Christianity but did not want them to be too Christians or too English as they foresaw that they were simply producing a colonized mimic. 'Mimicry' often shows reverse reaction. It is a state of ambivalence that undermines the claims of imperial discourse. Isolation of racialized essence of either the colonized or the colonizer is made impossible by it. It is just like binary opposition between authority and oppression, authorization and de-authorization. All modes of imposition result in mimicry. It eludes the way of control and thus, subverts the colonial master's authority and used by Bhabha in his postcolonial

criticism. It shows a sort of negotiation- both political and cultural- between the colonizer and the colonized. Before Bhabha, Edward Said had underlined the importance of cultural hybridity. Ania Loomba calls Bhabha's hybridity theory most influential but controversial. Bhabha seems to be influenced by Fanon when he suggests that hybridity is necessary attribute of the colonial condition. Fanon's conception is that the colonized subject can never attain the whiteness he has been taught to desire, or shed the blackness he has learnt to devalue. Bhabha seems to stress that both the colonizer and the colonized are interdependent. Not only they are present together but they also act on one another and there are many reversible reactions between the two. *Hyberdity* is an essential ingredient of postcolonial discourse, we are supposed to discriminate between the diverse modalities of hybridity. The term brings to our mind a sense of 'in-bitterness' which is greatly supported by the concept of '*diaspora*'. The term '*diaspora*' losses much of its poignancy with the benign effect of hybridity.

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