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Analysing the Politics of South Asian Post Colonial English Literature

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Postcolonial studies or post colonialism is the academic study of the cultural colonialism or imposition on a certain community or race by a more powerful group and the subsequent consequences. The term post colonialism was first coined by French demographer Alfred Sauvy. Edward Said's book *Orientalism* is considered to be a seminal work in postcolonial studies. Said came to be known as the Father of post colonialism.

South East Asia was a part of the British Empire for over two hundred years. Not only did the colonizers rule the colonies in the literal sense, they also enforced their own language on the natives, obliterating the indigenous languages of the land, enabling a sort of cultural colonialism over them.

Sherri Mitchell Weh'na Ha'mu Kwasset said, "In many historical texts, colonization is referred to as a settling, but it is nothing of the sort. Colonization is deeply unsettling. It disrupts the cultural identity and sense of belonging of those being colonized. It then attempts to separate them from their core values and beliefs, to break them to the will of the colonizer. The it forcible imposes its own values and ideologies onto those being colonized. When those subjected to colonization begin to assimilate to the ways of the oppressor they begin to oppress others, both within and outside of their group. This expands the influence of the oppressor and further erodes the will of the people to fight for their own freedom."

Language as a result, became a tool of cultural colonialism and the colonizers imposed his identity on the native colonised people. In some cases, colonizers systematically prohibited native languages. Many writers educated under colonization recount how students were demoted, reprimanded or even beaten for speaking their native language in colonial schools.

Antonio Gramsci considered 'Language Domination' as sovereignty because of content. Homi Bhabha (1990: 112) believes that "there is no language in vacuum situation but it is used in humane society for connection so it is meaningful and to be meaningful is what makes a language a useful thing and it is the only reason for its being."

Phillipson defines English linguistic imperialism as "the dominance of English... asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages." English is often referred to as a global "lingua franca", but Phillipson argues that when its dominance leads to a *linguicide*, it can be more aptly titled a "lingua frankensteinia".

Phillipson's theory supports the historic spread of English as an international language and that language's continued dominance, particularly in postcolonial settings such as India, Pakistan, Uganda, Zimbabwe, etc., but also increasingly in "neo-colonial" settings such as continental Europe. His theory draws mainly on Johan Galtung's imperialism theory, Antonio Gramsci's social theory, and in particular on his notion of cultural hegemony.

A central theme of Phillipson's theory is the complex hegemonic processes which, he asserts, continue to sustain the pre-eminence of English in the world today. His book analyzes the British Council's use of rhetoric to promote English, and discusses key tenets of English applied linguistics and English-language-teaching methodology. These tenets hold that:

- English is best taught monolingually ("the monolingual fallacy").
- The ideal teacher is a native speaker ("the native-speaker fallacy").
- The earlier English is taught, the better the results ("the early-start fallacy").

- The more English is taught, the better the results ("the maximum-exposure fallacy").
- If other languages are used much, standards of English will drop ("the subtractive fallacy").

Therefore, language, here, English, becomes the central question in the postcolonial argument. Post colonial writers are in the eye of a constant conflict- whether to write in the colonizers tongue and gain a greater audience, or to use their native language as a sign of rebellion. Most radical among those writers who have chosen to turn away from English, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, a Gikuyu writer from Kenya, began a successful career writing in English before turning to work entirely in his native language. In *Decolonising the Mind*, his 1986 "farewell to English," Ngũgĩ posits that through language people have not only described the world, but also understand themselves by it. For him, English in Africa is a "cultural bomb" that continues a process of erasing memories of pre-colonial cultures and history and installs the dominance of new, more insidious forms of colonialism. Writing in Gikuyu, then, is Ngũgĩ's way not only of harkening back to Gikuyu traditions, but also of acknowledging and communicating their continuing presence. Ngũgĩ is concerned primarily not with universality, though models of struggle can always move out and be translated for other cultures, but with preserving the specificity of individual groups. In a general statement, Ngũgĩ points out that language and culture are inseparable, and that therefore the loss of the former results in the loss of the latter: Specific culture is not transmitted through language in its universality, but in its particularity as the language of a specific community with a specific history. Written literature and orature are the main means by which a particular language transmits the images of the world contained in the culture it carries. Language as communication and as culture are then products of each other ... Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we perceive ourselves and our place in the world.

Language is thus inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world. On the other side of the language debate is Salman Rushdie. Although Rushdie's novels often tackle the history of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Great Britain, his comments have wider relevance, particularly considering his status in world literature. He comments on how working in new Englishes can be a therapeutic act of resistance, remaking a colonial language to reflect the postcolonial experience (See Postcolonial Novel). In the essay "Imaginary Homelands" (from the eponymous collection published by Granta in 1992), he explains that, far from being something that can simply be ignored or disposed of, the English language is the place where writers can and must work out the problems that confront emerging/recently independent colonies: One of the changes [in the location of anglophone writers of Indian descent] has to do with attitudes towards the use of English. Many have referred to the argument about the appropriateness of this language to Indian themes. And I hope all of us share the opinion that we can't simply use the language the way the British did; that it needs remaking for our own purposes. Those of us who do use English do so in spite of our ambiguity towards it, or perhaps because of that, perhaps because we can find in that linguistic struggle a reflection of other struggles taking place in the real world, struggles between the cultures within ourselves and the influences at work upon our societies. To conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free. The theoretical and scholarly debate about language is addressed in detail in *The Empire Writes Back* (1989). Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin explore the ways in which writers encounter a dominant, colonial language. They describe a two-part process through which writers in the post-colonial world displace a standard language (denoted with the capital "e" in "English") and replace it with a local variant that does not have the perceived stain of being somehow sub-standard, but rather reflects a distinct cultural outlook through local

usage. The terms they give these two processes are “abrogation” and “accommodation”:

Abrogation is a refusal of the categories of the imperial culture, its aesthetic, its illusory standard of normative or “correct” usage, and its assumption of a traditional and fixed meaning “inscribed” in the words. Appropriation is the process by which the language is made to “bear the burden” of one’s own cultural experience ... Language is adopted as a tool and utilized to express widely differing cultural experiences.

The authors are careful to point out, however, that abrogation alone, though a vital step in “decolonizing” a dominant language (see Ngũgĩ) is not sufficient, in that it offers the danger that roles will be reversed and a new set of normative practices will move into place.

Another issue Ashcroft et al. describe is the three types of linguistic communities they identify: the monoglossic, the diglossic, and the polyglossic. Monoglossic communities, corresponding roughly to old settler colonies, are places where “english” (the lower-case “e” in “english” denotes local, non-standard/British usage) are the native tongue. Diglossic communities, by far the most common of the three, occur where “... bilingualism has become an enduring societal arrangement, for example in India, Africa, the South Pacific, for the indigenous populations of settled colonies, and in Canada, where Québécois culture has created an artificially bilingual society”. Finally, polyglossic societies “... [o]ccur principally in the Caribbean, where a multitude of dialects interweave to form a generally comprehensible continuum” Kamala Das, in her poem ‘An Introduction’ said, ‘The language I speak/ Becomes mine/ its distortions, its queerness/ All mine, mine alone/ It is half English, half Indian, funny, perhaps, but it is honest.’

Through this poem, she addresses the politics of language. She speaks in an adapted and appropriated version of English which is very different from the ‘pure’ Queen’s English, as it were. In this way, she is able to write in English and yet rebel against the colonial master.

Postcolonial writers use certain literary tools and devices which make this genre of literature unique.

Different postcolonial writing strategies include such issues as menace, sly mimicry, subversion, appropriation, abrogation and accommodation. English language in its varieties assumes a cosmopolitan character, and is used at times metonymically, that is, including writers' own language without them necessarily undoing their cultural heritage. The essay concludes that, English is a power-generating metaphor; it is mutually constitutive, engendering both the coloniser and colonised as repositories or sites of power. In this matrix, English is used in the post colony for cultural transmission and for the alteration of colonial and imperial dominance. Postcolonial writers are not bondsmen, but committed agents in the polyvocality of cultures and other diverse discourses in postcolonial spaces and the ever changing global context.

The global spread of English has resulted in the emergence of a diverse range of postcolonial varieties around the world. Postcolonial English provides a clear and original account of the evolution of these varieties, exploring the historical, social and ecological factors that have shaped all levels of their structure. It argues that while these Englishes have developed new and unique properties which differ greatly from one location to another, their spread and diversification can in fact be explained by a single underlying process, which builds upon the constant relationships and communication needs of the colonizers, the colonized and other parties.

Postcolonial writers use several literary tools such as translation and transliteration. Translation is the changing of a text from one language to the other, keeping the intrinsic content the same, yet

tweaking with the language making it more palatable for a foreign readership. Transliteration is the literal translation of native phrases and idioms into another language, on the other hand. What distinguishes postcolonial approaches to translation is that they examine inter-

Cultural encounters in contexts marked by unequal power relations. Herein lie their strengths as well as their weaknesses. Their major contribution has been to illuminate the role of power in the production and reception of translation. But it is not certain that the postcolonial framework can be applied to other interlingual exchanges with minimal inequality of power relations. Moreover, there is a general tendency to underrate the differences among (post)colonial contexts themselves. It is suggested that insufficient attention to the socio-political background of translation has been reflected in postcolonial formulations of resistance, which are typically purely textual.

South East Asia has its own version of English and therefore is a hub of postcolonial studies.

The English language as used in BANGLADESH, Bhutan, India, the MALDIVES, NEPAL, Pakistan, and SRI LANKA. The combined populations of these countries, projected as 1,400m in the year 2000, constitute almost a quarter of the human race. English is their main link language, largely as a result of British commercial, colonial, and educational influence since the 17c. Only Nepal, Bhutan, and the Maldives remained outside the British Raj. All South Asian countries are linguistically and culturally diverse, with two major language families, Dravidian and Indo-Aryan, a shared cultural and political history, common literary and folk traditions, and pervasive strata of SANSKRIT, Persian, and English in language and literature. Three factors operated in favour of the spread of English: the work of Christian missionaries: demand from local leaders for education in English, to benefit from Western knowledge; and a decision by the government of

India to make English the official medium of education. There is a general educated South Asian variety of English used for pan-regional and international purposes. Its use is influenced by three factors: level of education and proficiency; the user's first or dominant language (and the characteristics of the language family to which it belongs); and ethnic, religious, or other background. There is a continuum from this educated usage as an ACROLECT through various MESOLECTS to such BASILECTS as the BROKEN ENGLISH of servants, street vendors and beggars.

This distinctive style of language, makes South Asian postcolonial studies a rich field of study.

In conclusion, it can be said that the cultural imperialism through language, which was imposed on the natives by the British, was transformed into a lucrative field of study by appropriating and adapting the English language and imbibing it as one's own.

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