

## DECOLONISATION AS CULMINATION IN INDIGENOUS POSTCOLONIAL CRITICISM

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### **Abstract:**

*This paper re-examines the postcolonial theory from an indigenous perspective and arrives at a vital culminating point of decolonisation. It gains importance as it has the capability to grant credibility to the existence of indigenous people. It also proves to be a highly empowering factor that has the power to lift the lives of indigenous people. This particular aspect can further trigger celebration of differences, and at the same time welcome a new dawn of peaceful co-existence.*

**Keywords:** Decolonisation, postcolonialism, hybridity, colonialism, indigenous, identity crisis.

Attempting a study of colonialism and postcolonialism involves several dimensions, as they are multi-dimensional approaches that branch out in various directions. The main motive of colonisation is to send settlers to a particular place and establish political control over it. Once they settle, they establish their control over the indigenous people of an area. The result is that indigenous people are locked into a social system that denies access to the same rights, opportunities, and facilities as granted to mainstreamers. Colonisation in multi ethnic regions is an extremely problematic one, because it is something that constitutes several ethnic groups. In the process of colonisation many ethnic groups are wiped away and some end up as assimilated versions and in the postcolonial era, cultural genocide is seen to have carried out its purpose in many ethnic groups. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon claims that the past of the colonised is disfigured by the settlers. Elaborating on the legacy of colonisation, Fanon says, "Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the Native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it" (169).

Colonialism has served as a brutal assault on indigenous people across the globe. Human rights violation and exploitation of natural resources are the hallmarks of colonialism. By saying this one cannot also deny the fact that colonialism is responsible for launching modernity in ways of living. The language, culture and life style of the indigenous people were simply dismissed as primitive and animalistic. Everything related to them was seen in a negative manner. This resulted in establishing dominance and at the same time marginalising the indigenous people. Materialistic concerns filled dominance with atrocities and inhuman attitudes. In order to hide it from humanistic world view, colonisers distorted history and wrote it the way it suited them. However when indigenous people stepped into arts and literature, they represented a counter and new Indigenous perspectives have come to the limelight.

Colonial history has determined the postcolonial power structures, which remained the same even as post colonisation period dawned anew. The position of the Native or Aborigines still occupied the margin and thus relegated to the background. The relationship between the coloniser and the colonised was clearly defined respectively as the 'centre' and the 'margin' in colonialism. Postcolonialism however takes a new form and results in a situation where the 'margin' comes into conflict with the 'centre'. This conflict increases as more and more subaltern voices gain recognition. In the beginning, postcolonial theory was viewed by the west as anti-slavery and anti-colonialism. Slowly the west intruded and brought about

humanitarian, political, economic, and religious justifications about rules of conquests.

Indigenous people were projected as “weak-willed, inferior, secondary, effeminate, and unable to rule themselves” (Boehmer 351). Because of this, indigenous literatures started challenging western colonial discourses and were soon on a trajectory of highlighting the truth. This was purely started off by Native writers and very soon supported by a considerable number of mainstream writers. Suddenly postcolonialism becomes a Third world approach with every other 'isms' contributing to it, be it feminism, anti-colonialism, liberalism, psychoanalytical criticism etc. By the 1970s, postcolonialism found its way into literary criticism and it came to be employed to analyse various effects of colonisation. Thus postcolonialism is an occurrence or existence after the establishment of postcolonial governance.

Postcolonial critics locate it as a period after colonisation or after independence. In other words, it is a consequence of colonialism. In Homi K. Bhabha's words the term 'Postcolonial' implies “the historical experience of the once-colonized Third world comes to be formed in the west” (qtd. in Mongia 1). Bhabha sees postcolonial criticism as emerging from colonial experiences. He says “Postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of Third countries and the discourses of “minorities” within the geopolitical divisions of East and West, North and South” (*Location* 171). However, the term covers, every culture affected by the imperial process from colonisation to the present day. This is because there is continuity in the historical process started by European invasion. Critics like Elleke Boehmer says that “the postcolonial is that which questions, overturns, and/or critically refracts colonial authority its epistemologies and forms of violence, its claims to superiority” (351). According to Couze Venn, postcolonialism is a door way “towards a future that will not repeat existing forms of sociality and oppressive power relations” (190).

Postcolonialism did not emerge without strong opposition from the Native/Indigenous people. Indigenous writers like King in Canada and Mudrooroo in Australia see “the wave of postcolonial studies as threatening to deny the fact that Australian Aborigines are still colonized, always invaded and never free from the history of white occupation” (qtd. in Edwards 47). Mudrooroo strongly says that “the effects of colonisation cannot be relegated to the past, as the prefix 'post' in postcolonial seems to suggest” (qtd. in Edwards 47).

Postcolonialism is a theoretical frame over which a study of political and cultural change is carried out. Among the number of key aspects over which postcolonial existence is studied, the first and foremost is exoticism. Sheer adventure, trade and curiosity landed the European nations on the shores of indigenous lands. The indigenous people were seen as an exotic group especially because of their primitive look and cultural practices. This is a stimulating and exciting difference that made the Europeans treat them as exotic and see themselves, as normal or typical. The struggle began only when the Europeans tried to change the exotic into normal.

Cultural aspects make the Europeans raise themselves above the indigenous cultures across the globe. Cultural semiotics is a system of signs through which a particular group defines itself. The colonising group also use the same in controlling and assimilating another group. The relationship established by the coloniser and the colonised is ambivalent. When an issue is regarded as ambiguous, it means that it is open to more than one level of interpretation. The relationship between the coloniser and the colonised is ambivalent and there are mixed feelings or contradictory ideas about something and someone. The coloniser regards the colonised as both inferior as well as an exotic other. The colonised views the coloniser as destructive and corrupt, yet enviable. This ambivalent relationship also shows why postcolonialism has dawned with a mixed sense of blessing and curse.

The next aspect that successfully creates colonies is hegemonic control over indigenous population and land. Hegemony is leadership or dominance by one social group over the other. Hegemonic rule is a dominant one in all political and social contexts. The hegemonic class in the colonial and postcolonial narratives of indigenous people are the mainstream Whites. In order to establish hegemonic

rule, the colonisers adopt ideologies which forms the basis of economic or political theory and policy to entrap indigenous people. By imposing ideologies, the colonisers relegate the colonised to the background and consequently root themselves.

Once rooting themselves, the colonisers create boundaries and call it their own occupied place. They even create boundaries for indigenous people to occupy. This is called mapping in postcolonial studies. Long usage of land and passage of time during colonisation made colonisers to legally establish their rights over indigenous lands. This also includes all kinds of rights, titles and institutions. So this attitude of mapping is as much prescriptive as it is descriptive. The descriptive maps were later used to assist in the process of aggression and to establish claims. Thus the boundaries of a nation came to be established during post colonisation.

Creating boundaries, results in marginalisation which is treating a person, group or concept as insignificant or peripheral. By removing them from public space, the indigenous people are marginalised while the coloniser takes the centre. This naturally gives rise to racism. It is a belief that all members of each race possess characteristic abilities or qualities specific to that race, especially so as to distinguish it as inferior or superior to another race or races. It is a kind of a prejudice, discrimination or antagonism directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is superior. In every form of abuse initiated by colonial attitude, the grounds are connected with difference in race. With racism begins clash of cultures, and it gives rise to a phenomenon called hybridity, which is simply a combination of two aspects. It is multiculturalist in nature and relates to having several cultural or ethnic groups within a society.

In postcolonialism, hybridity is a transcultural form that hails from cross-cultural exchange. It does not limit itself to the cultural zone alone but it can be social, political, linguistic, religious, etc. In many cases hybridity is argumentative, controversial, and disruptive in its experience. Hybridity is often related to two other reactions. One is catalysis and the other is creolisation. Catalysis is a new world experience where several ethnic groups interact and mix with each other in a contentious environment. This gives way to new forms of identity and experience. The next reaction is creolisation. Creole is a language developed from the first contact of a European language with a local language. It stands for a mixture that has developed a new experience of language. This condition arises from a mixture of ethnic and racial mixing. Mimicry is another aspect of postcolonial studies. In postcolonialism, the means by which the colonised adapt the culture of the coloniser is called mimicry. This imitation occurs in language, education, clothing, etc., and results in changes in important ways. This is an approach that always contains in it the ambivalence of hybridity.

Another key aspect is magical realism or surrealism. It is a literary or artistic genre in which realistic narrative and naturalistic techniques are combined with surreal elements of dream or fantasy. In the western literary adaptations, the imaginary life of indigenous cultures that experience the mythical, magical, and supernatural are depicted in a decidedly different fashion than in Indigenous texts. Indigenous descriptions are not altogether realistic. Their horror, pain, and agony are realistically conveyed, but their mythical and supernatural religious, cultural, and traditional aspects are represented with a tinge of magic or surrealism. A mingling of European realism and indigenous fantasy is done in such a manner that the two worlds almost merge with each other. Every ethnic group is intrinsically different in characteristic natures or dispositions. Otherness is the quality or fact of being different. It is a way in which an individual or a group defines itself. This is what is known as identity. Identity is important for one's own self-concept, in social establishments and in national understanding. Alterity is another type of otherness, as it is the state of being different. Differences occur due to different political, cultural, linguistic or religious practices changing from one state to another. This may be a forced change or a voluntary one.

In the context of colonialism and postcolonialism, language has often become a site for both colonisation and resistance. When the colonising forces suppressed original indigenous language, some

postcolonial Native authors insisted on a return to the original indigenous language. This has become a much debated issue among postcolonial indigenous authors. One set of authors are very keen to abrogate or refuse to use the language of the coloniser in a correct or standard way. Another set of authors find it to be an appropriate or suitable process where the language is made to shoulder the misfortunes of one's own cultural experience.

Postcolonialism begins with a concern on how European nations conquered and controlled 'Third World' cultures. Then it moves on to the effect this has had on those people. Finally it winds up with how the colonised people have responded to this and how far they have tried to resist those encroachments. After such systems of analysis, contemporary indigenous writers have moved postcolonialism further with the concept of decolonisation. They find it to be an important factor to erase all agony and move towards a positive attitude filled with hope on all fronts. Four hundred years of imperialist expansion comes along with the most heinous crimes ever done, so decolonisation is not an easy task. Still indigenous writers are giving it a full vent, so that changes happen.

Postcolonial rewritings offer "new perspectives" and expose "a variety of individual and community assumptions" (Edwards 54). At the same time, postcolonial writings have "debates that are not easily resolved and which will undoubtedly continue into the future" (Edwards 61). For most indigenous authors, postcolonial theory is a problematical one as it does not answer a vital question, when the Native become truly postcolonial. Postcolonialism on a positive note challenges all that is exploitative and discriminative. Yet, according to indigenous authors postcolonialism lacks something. This is because of the fact that there is no culmination in decolonisation. If it had empowered minds with a decolonised feel, such queries would not have risen about postcolonialism. This theory struggles because of constant changes in the social, political, academic, military and economic sphere. Given the rapidly changing world, postcolonialism is not intact, but lacking in so many ways. Classical colonialism is over and what is seen as taking place in postcolonialism is actually neo-colonialism. Young refers to neo-colonialism as the last stage of imperialism. Young also calls for a new society where "the antithetical values of racism and anti-racism [would] produce a society without racism and a new humanism" (266).

In this theoretical realm, the indigenous writers create awareness regarding the truth behind colonisation and the wrongs carried out during colonisation and its effects on them after colonisation. The second thing they do is to represent the significance of their land, culture, language, traditions and all other sociological, cultural and political notions. They also voice forth their struggle for ethnic, cultural and political autonomy. The final hint they give in their narratives is their understanding of the need to cope with the contemporary world of cultural overlap and hybridity. This final hint is found only in a limited set of writers and not in all. So it is still in the process of being born, but this hint is a positive step towards decolonisation.

The indigenous way of life adorns a sense of integrity. Indigenous people show concern for their fellow human beings, as their domestic life is a well-knit one. Acknowledging the uniqueness of their communities, their culture and their togetherness, brings a lot of happiness among the indigenous people. Their efforts towards re-learning their languages and spiritual practices should be respected. Self-less motive and care strengthen the harmony and sovereignty of the indigenous people. Analysing rich indigenous texts actually reveals their commendable qualities. Sharing belongings and basic amenities, love and concern for the old, equal distribution, respect for elders and women, and service without expecting anything in return, nurturing and moulding children with love, knowledge and comfort, playful and jovial attitude while doing physical work, simple healthy living and hard work are all important aspects of indigenous life that are worthy of praise.

In the process of rediscovering or re-practicing Native languages and culture, the Aborigines regain their uniqueness and have more positive inclination towards establishing their Native identity. In the postcolonial discourse, when their individuality is at stake, their attempts to revive their languages,



tradition and culture are a very positive move towards delivering themselves. Postcolonial writing interrogates “European discourses and discursive strategies from a privileged position with (and between) two worlds” (Tiffin 95). Armed with their pen, the postcolonial writers address “the dominance of imperial language as it relates to educational systems, to economic structures and perhaps more importantly to the medium through which anti-imperial ideas are cast” (Edwards 30).

A false representation of history always troubles a nation's indigenous people. It alters their very existence and imprisons them within mainstream narratives or texts that demean them. When indigenous voices start blooming, imprisoned images of falsified history are set free. This is the major aspect of indigenous literature, which is actually an active pursuit of decolonisation. By projecting the reality of the past, cultural and psychological decolonisation occurs. Indigenous perspectives unmask painful truths and make mainstream governments recognise, accept or apologise for it. Such trajectory of incidents frees the Indigenous minds and makes them look beyond depression and seek justice. They sometimes use violent uprisings as a process of demanding justice as part of decolonisation. As the indigenous people protest and shout their anger and purpose, the colonised mind gets cured and their existence becomes important. This is a huge positive outcome of decolonisation. By exposing indigenous perspectives and the need for indigenous struggle, the authors strongly maintain the importance of decolonisation as succession of postcolonialism. The decolonisation process should dismantle all hidden colonial aspects.

According to indigenous writers, decolonisation of the mind has the power to reduce high suicide rates, school drop-out rates, drugs and alcohol abuse, sexual abuse and domestic violence. These are activities conditioned by colonial politics of racism and materialism. So, it is a fact that decolonisation of the mindscape will lead to stopping or at least bringing down the rate of such issues or happenings. Emancipation from mental colonisation happens only when the individual actively participates in the process of decolonisation. Based on the analysis of the texts, it is also noted that various positive steps are necessary to enter into the process of decolonisation and establish decolonisation. Revival of indigenous languages, culture, art forms and dance forms proves to be crucial in the decolonisation process. Ownership of lands, mind and imagination also decolonises Indigenous people. Re-establishment of the spiritual attitude towards land and nature can also influence decolonisation. Most writers want indigenous and non-indigenous people to be mutually enriched intellectually, politically, culturally and spiritually. Rebuilding indigenous communities by meeting their needs and aspirations is an urgent need towards decolonisation.

Negotiation of indigenous and non-indigenous value systems, developing closely knit traditional family and community systems, and understanding traditional healing methods of indigenous medical knowledge can also help in the establishment of decolonisation. Indigenous people should also be given proper space and opportunities to establish their self-esteem and identity. The emotional intensity attributed by the Indigenous people towards memories of their nostalgic past should be respected, as they are all a part of a traumatic history. The lessons of the past have to be acknowledged to avoid future abuses and trauma. Recognising indigenous history and protecting indigenous lands from corporate interests assure indigenous people that they are not being exploited.

Commendable qualities of indigenous life like, concern for fellow human beings, a closely-knit domestic life, respect for elders and women, and nurturing nature should be appreciated and adopted into the very existence of human race. Indigenous culture treats the earth and all in it with respect. It remains close to what is called as great spiritual spirits or ancestors. It shows respect for fellow beings and works for the benefit of humanity. It gives assistance and kindness wherever needed and instructs people to do what is right and look after the well-being of mind and body. It teaches people to dedicate a share of their efforts to a greater common good. It gives importance to truthful and honest behaviour and asks the people to take full responsibility for their actions. In the present world scenario it is very difficult to maintain an authentic and traditional indigenous life or government. The indigenous writers have also understood this fact of a

multicultural world where hybridity proves to be inevitable. So, indigenous people struggle for an existence without a centre and margin and fight for a space that is evenly distributed. What is favoured for the mainstream should also reach out to the people in the margins, so that the differences get erased and conflicts end.

In the concluding chapter of his book, "Is the Ethnic, 'Authentic' in the Diaspora?" Radhakrishnan asks a very vital question related to hybrid existence. He asks, "If a minority group were left in peace with itself and not dominated or forced into a relationship with the dominant world or national order, would the group still find the term 'authentic' meaningful or necessary?" (211). At the same time, when talking against hybrid forms, indigenous writers do not aim at replacing white with black, but seek for a solidarity that gives equal importance to both. Hybridity is seen as solidarity "to establish, non-hierarchical connections" that encourages "lateral relations: instead of living within the bounds created by a linear view of history and society, we become free to interact on an equal footing with all the traditions that determine our present predicament" (Lionnet 7).

Change along with time has put humanity on the trajectory of development. When there is acceptance of essential changes, life moves on smoothly. But when such vital changes remain unacceptable, conflict keeps prevailing in a constant mode. Co-existence with equal opportunities is an urgent need for indigenous nations across the globe. The beauty of the world lies in the diversity of its people. Differences do not divide humanity. What really divides humanity is the inability to recognise, accept and celebrate those differences. A nation's culture, tradition and language are foundations where a unique identity is built. Trying to scrape off that unique identity and forcing to imitate another is not an acceptable pattern of life. Rather, negotiations of cultural and traditional values are acceptable to the contemporary world that aims at hybrid representations. A Cherokee proverb states that there is a battle of two wolves inside a human being. One is evil and is filled with anger, jealousy, greed, resentment, lies, inferiority and ego. The other is good and it is filled with joy, peace, love, hope, humility, kindness, empathy and truth. After saying this, the proverb comments that the wolf that always wins is the one the human being has fed. Humanistic values of equality, peaceful co-existence, love, friendship and freedom have the power to decolonise all indigenous communities across the world and create a better world experience for their future generation.

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