

The Holy Trinity of Postcolonial Studies: Background and Scope

الثالوث المقدس لدراسات ما بعد الاستعمار: الخلفية والنطاق

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Abstract:

In the last two decades, postcolonial theory gained more prominence and has become one of the most influential approaches to literary analysis. The extensiveness of postcolonial studies, in terms of philosophical and thematic concerns, somehow disturbs the reader. In literature and literary criticism, scholars argue that being acquainted with the founding fathers of any literary movement gives the reader more chance to meet the author's expectations and the understand his/her message. Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak are the pillars of postcolonial studies that any postcolonialist-reader is compelled to read about before approaching postcolonial literary texts. They are considered by Robert Young as the Holy Trinity of Postcolonialism. The present study sheds light on postcolonialism as a theory of subversion and reclamation and examines the contributions of the Holy Trinity to the rise of postcolonial studies.

Keywords: Ambivalence, Deconstruction, Hybridity, Mimicry Orientalism, Postcolonialism, Subalternity.

ملخص:

تعتبر نظرية ما بعد الاستعمار واحدة من أبرز نظريات تحليل النصوص الأدبية والأكثر تأثيراً لما اكتسبته من شهرة خلال العقدتين الأخيرين، إلا أنها قد أصبحت مصدر إزعاج لبعض القراء السطحيين غير الملمين بمصطلحاتها وفلسفتها نتيجة امتزاجها بمدارس أدبية أخرى على شاكلة النسوية والماركسية والتفكيكية التي تعتبر جوهر مدرسة ما بعد الحداثة. لقد اجمع رواد الأدب والنقد على أن الإمام بفلسفة الآباء الروحيين للمدارس الأدبية هو مفتاح فهم النصوص واستنباط رسالة الكاتب. وعلى ضوء هذا القول، فإن هذه الورقة البحثية تؤكد أنه يتعين على قارئ نصوص ودراسات ما بعد الاستعمار الإمام بفلسفات ورؤى كل من إدوارد سعيد، هومي بhabha، و جياتري سبيفاك الذين يشكلون الثالوث المقدس لخطاب و دراسات ما بعد الاستعمار. الكلمات المتاحة: الاستشراق، التناقض، التشابه، التهجين، الثانوية.

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1. Introduction:

In reading or analyzing a literary work, the reader takes into account the author's biography and the surrounding events or circumstances that made the author write and publish his work. Besides, one should also pay attention to the literary school that the writer belongs to. Applying literary theory gives the text its value and meaning and shows the reader's literary qualities. Etymologically, the term "theory" comes from Greek word "theoria" which means a view or a perspective. It formulates the relationship between the author and his work, and explains the extent to which the text is more the product of a culture and shows how the given text contributes to the author's culture. In *Feminist Frameworks*, Alison Jaggar and Paula Rothenberg claim that:

A theory offers a general account of how a range of phenomena are systematically connected; by placing individual items in a larger context, it increases our understanding both of the whole and of the parts constituting the whole. Theory is a systematic, analytic approach to everyday experience. (54)

Literary theory offers varying approaches for understanding the importance of historical context in interpreting the text and analyzing it thematically and stylistically. In dealing with Third World literature, the reader usually places the text in its historical context before offering it any interpretation. In formerly colonized countries, postcolonial theory finds its legitimacy and has become the vehicle by which the reader embarks on a journey behind the lines of the short story, the novella, the novel, the poem, or the play.

In the last two decades, postcolonial theory gained more reputation and importance. Due to its critics' debates and contributions, this literary school has taken its well-established place with other schools like feminism, Marxism, and psychoanalysis and became a major critical discourse in the humanities. Some attempts have been recorded by readers to define the school in terms of its origins and relation to colonialism. Being a compound word, the term 'Postcolonialism' means after colonialism. The concept was first used by historians as a reference to the post-World War II period. In literature, the concept was used as a name of a new postmodernist school around the 1970's which concerned itself with the literature that was written in countries which experienced the curse and turmoil of colonialism.

Postcolonial theory emerged from the colonial testimony of third world countries and the discourse of minorities. It is widely acknowledged that it emerged as a retort and reaction to the cultural legacy of colonialism. Ashcroft et al maintain that postcolonial theory appeared "from the inability of European theory to deal effectively with the challenges and varied

cultural provenance of postcolonial writing” (11-13). If its background is the colonial aftermath and the reaction to the cultural legacy of colonialism, its scope is the interpretation and critical reading of the canonical literary texts. By so doing, postcolonialism focuses on the question of race and shows how the optic of race enables Western colonial powers to represent, reflect and make visible native culture in inferior ways. Within a binary oppositional context, postcolonialists believe that orientalist (colonial) writings, art, and Western legal systems are always radicalized and unequal to the point that the colonizer does the representation and the native (Orient) is represented. In *The Location of Culture* Homi Bhabha argues that postcolonial criticism bears witness to the unequal and universal forces of cultural representation that are involved in a constant competition for political and economic control in the contemporary world. In *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, Robert Young argues that postcolonial theory concerns itself with the colonial history, only to the extent that history determined the configuration and power structure of the present (67). It also takes into account the anti-colonial movement as a source of political inspiration. Postcolonialism has been introduced as a school that marks the historical facts of decolonization to allow people of inferior rank reclaim their sovereignty. In words of Young, “it gives them a negotiating space for equity.” (67)

Postcolonialism is a meeting point and a battleground of a variety of disciplines. The school is indebted to postmodernism and post-structuralism. Commenting on this relationship between the two ‘isms’, Arif Dirlik considers postcolonialism as “a child of postmodernism” (qtd. in Arab 40). Anne McClintock conflates the post-isms. In her view, the relation between postcolonialism and postmodernism is more of a marketing strategy, whereby postcolonialism appears to be riding on the postmodern bandwagon. They both share the principle of opposing logocentrism. Ashcroft et al note that postmodernism is the deconstruction of the logocentric meta-narratives of European culture. Accordingly, they maintain that this aspect of postmodernism is similar to the postcolonial project of breaking down the binary opposition like West and east. Therefore, postcolonial theory remains beleaguered by charges that it is the product of postmodernism. Linda Hutcheon argues that there is ‘a great deal of overlap in their concerns: formal, thematic, strategic’ (Hutcheon 151). In terms of similarities, Hutcheon writes:

The post-colonial is therefore as implicated in that which it challenges as is the postmodern the post-colonial has at its disposal various ways of subverting from within the dominant culture – such as irony, allegory, and self-reflexivity– that it shares with the complicitous critique of postmodernism. (170–1)

Postcolonial theory feeds on the literature written in formerly colonized countries. It is considered as a political discourse that revisits, remembers, and interrogates the colonial and pre-colonial past. It is a theoretical retort to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath. Therefore, postcolonialists seek to investigate aspects of imperialism that are still enforced through political, economic and social exploitation in post-independent nations. Postcolonialism does not herald a brave new world where all the mistakes and ills of the colonial past have been cured. Rather, it recognizes the historical continuity and change. Modes of binary representations, advocates of this school maintain, are still available. In other words, today 's representation is very much like the one that spread during the colonial period. It also asserts the premise, the possibility, and the continuing necessity of change. According to Ngugi wa Thiong'o the purpose of postcolonial studies "is to assist the total and absolute decolonization of societies in psychological as well as political terms, involving massive and powerful recuperations of the precolonial cultures." (qtd. in *The Empire Writes Back* 194). Post-colonialism, as both a body of theory and a study of political and cultural change, has gone and continues to go through three broad stages:

- 1- An initial awareness of the social, psychological, and cultural inferiority enforced by being in a colonized state
- 2- The struggle for ethnic, cultural, and political autonomy
- 3- A growing awareness of cultural overlap and hybridity

Like deconstruction and other various postmodern approaches to textual analysis, postcolonialism is known as a heterogeneous field of study where even its spelling provides several alternatives. A debate has been raised on whether the term should be used with or without the hyphen. Critics are not in agreement whether the term should be used with or without hyphen: i. e. 'post-colonial' and 'postcolonial' have different meanings. The hyphenated term 'post-colonialism' marks a historical period as is suggested by phrases like 'after colonialism', 'after independence', 'after the end of empire' while the term 'postcolonialism' refers to all the characteristics of a society or culture from the time of the colonization to the present. The term postcolonial" designates liberatory and oppositional responses to colonialism more broadly than the hyphenated term post-colonial". The term postcolonial refers to the unrepresentable in the colonial: racial difference, legal inequality, subalternity and all of the submerged or suppressed contradictions within the colonial social order itself. According to Bill Ashcroft, Griffith & Tiffin, 'The semantic basis of the term 'post-colonialism' might seem to suggest a concern only with the national culture after the

departure of the imperial power' (1) and they refer 'postcolonial' to cover all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day.' (2)

2. Post/colonialist Discourse: Origins, Meaning and Significance

The term discourse is usually associated with the massive works of the French philosopher Michel Foucault. The concept found its legitimacy around the sixteenth century and was used to describe a formal speech, narration, treatise, dissertation, conversation or sermon. Foucauldian sense of the term has little to do with the act of speaking in its traditional sense. Foucault adopted the term to denote a historically contingent social system that produces knowledge and meaning. For him, a discourse is a strongly bounded area of social knowledge, a system of statements within which the world can be known. Therefore, discourse can be defined as a way of organizing knowledge which structures the constitution of social relations through the collective understanding of the discursive logic and more importantly the acceptance of the discourse as social fact. Discourse is produced by effects of power within a social order; a power which prescribes given rules, and particular categories that are regarded as *a priori*, and which in turn define and decide on the criteria for legitimating knowledge and truth.

Colonial discourse is a term brought into currency by Edward Said who perceived Foucault's notion of a discourse as valuable for describing that system within which that range of practices termed 'colonial' come into being. It refers to a system of statements about colonies and colonizing powers. It is a system of knowledge about the world within which acts of colonization take place. It also permits the colonized to see themselves. Known as the colonialist discourse theory, postcolonialism revolves around rules of inclusion and exclusion which operate on the belief of the colonizer's superiority, in terms of culture, history, language, politics and art, and the colonized inferiority. It shows that the essence of imperialism is the distinction between the primitive colonized and civilized colonizer.

Theories of colonial discourses have been very influential in the evolution of postcolonialism. Essentially, postcolonial discourse is the result of the works of authors like Aimé Césaire, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, Aijaz Ahmad and others., their works explore the modes of representations and perceptions that were fundamentally used as tools by the colonizer to keep the colonized subservient to the colonial rule. Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak are the most influential critics whose contribution to the rise of postcolonial studies made Robert Young argue that they represent the "Holy

Trinity” of Postcolonialism. The following section is dedicated to the task of summarizing and detailing the historical foundation of postcolonialism and the contributions of the Holy Trinity.

3. Edward Said’s *Orientalism*: Exploring the Dark Side of the Imperialistic Discourse

Postcolonialism is an amalgam of different postmodern trends and comprises methods of intellectual discourses that draw from the post-structuralist school of thought. It entered the agenda of metropolitan intellectuals and academics as a reflex of a new consciousness around 1960 in the wake of political independence sought by Third-World counties in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean which shared a common history of colonial domination, the imposition of English language and British ways, loss of indigenous cultures, psychological dependency and slavish survivalism. It designates a broad, postmodern intellectual discourse that has renewed the perception and understanding of modern history, cultural studies, political theories and literary criticism. Although its features existed in literary texts that were written during the colonial epoch, some critics would date its rise to the publication of Edward Said ‘s *Orientalism* in 1978. Bijay Kumar Das asserts that if the origin of postcolonial aesthetic lies in Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), and its theory in Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978), the critical assessment of it dates back to Aschroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin’s epoch-making book, *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) (*Twentieth Century Literary Criticism* 136)

As a matter of fact, no critic has been as influential as Edward Said in developing postcolonial theory. He played a crucial role in establishing the basis of the school. His book *Orientalism* (1978) is the starting point of journey toward the past that seeks to evaluate, assess, read, and reflect the imperialistic project and the duality of the Occident and the Orient. In his magnum opus, Said considers ‘orientalism’ as the essence of imperialism. It is a repertoire of images and attitudes and ways of seeing consisting of recurrent stereotypes within Orientalist writing in the West. Said defines orientalism as “a Western style for dominating, restructuring having authority over orient” (3). Orientalism as discourse then helps create the conditions or participates in the domination of the Orient by the West. The Orientalist discourse is overloaded with false images and myths about the Eastern. It found its legitimacy in literature and the works philologists like Silvestre de Sacy and Ernest Renan. It is based on the belief that the Westerner is superior to the Easterner. By means of stereotypes, the Orient/East became the object of knowledge, silent and passive, and the West became the

realm of the subject, of the knower/representer. Said began his research on the ‘Orientalist project’, of the West by maintaining that “as much as the west itself, the Orient (referring to the middle east) is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West” (3). According to Ania Loomba, Said argues that “the representation of the orient in European literary texts, travelogues and other writings contributed to the creation of a dichotomy between Europe and its other” (Colonialism/Postcolonialism 44)

Orientalism is the first book in which Said relentlessly unmask the ideological disguises of imperialism. As an ideology, orientalism is based on the binary opposition between the Westerner (Self) and the Orient (Other). The Orient is frequently described in a series of negative terms. R. K. Kaul summarizes what Said calls the dogmas of Orientalism in the following words:

It was assumed that the West is rational, developed, humane, superior, the Orient is aberrant, underdeveloped and inferior, (ii) The Orientalist was guided by the classical texts in his attitude to the orient rather than modern oriental realities; (iii) The orient was considered to be unchanging and uniform, (iv) Finally since orient is incapable of defining itself, an objective assessment of the East must be made by the Western Orientalist. (“Edward Said’s *Orientalism* and Abbe Dubois” 62)

Said shows how knowledge about the Orient was part of the colonial domination. He made his readers believe that the Westerner misrepresented the East as a mystic place of exoticism, moral laxity, and sexual degeneracy. In Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, Africa becomes the land of wilderness, savagery, decadence, and cannibalism. Such images often result from the West’s dreams and fantasies.

Readers of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) should take into consideration that Michel Foucault’s *The Archeology of Knowledge* is its framework and context. Foucault terms the disconnect between the excavator and excavated¹ “exteriority. Foucault’s ‘exteriority’ serves Said’s research on the Orientalist project. Said noticed that the Orientalist discourse was created by some Eurocentric philologists who interpreted culture and language of the East. Accordingly, he maintains that this discourse developed out of a large body of “imaginative and travel literature” (99). Drawing upon Michel Foucault’s work on discursive formation, Said argues that texts can create not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe. In time, such knowledge and reality produce a tradition, or what Michel

¹ By the excavated Foucault meant humans or concepts that are subjects of the excavation

Foucault calls a discoursell (Orientalism 94). The Orient, Said claims, exists as a discursive formation, one which is subject to the whims and fancies of those exterior to it.

Commenting on his book and postcolonialist project, Shrikant Sawant argues that Said's major task is to "do away the binary opposition between the west and the east so that one cannot claim the superiority over the other" (123). *Orientalism* offers an opportunity for the Orient to emancipate himself from the imposition of his imposed definition. D.P Digole argues that through this book, "Said enlarged the scope of postcolonialism by exposing the Eurocentric universalism that establishes Western superiority over the East" (131). In *World Yearbook of Education 2010*, Mazawi argues that through *Orientalism*, Said attempts to show that "the colonial project was not reducible to a simple military-economic system, but was also underpinned by a discursive infrastructure and whole apparatus of knowledge whose violence was as much epistemic as it was physical." (322)

4. Homi K. Bhabha: On Cultural Contact and Clash of Civilizations

Homi K. Bhabha is one of the leading figures of cultural theory and contemporary postcolonial criticism. Born in Mumbai on May 6th, 1949, Bhabha studied at the University of Bombay before having his chance at Oxford University. He is a professor at Harvard University and serves as an advisor to art institutions such as the Institute of Contemporary Arts London, and the Whitney Museum of American Arts, New York. Bhabha is an influential figure in postcolonial studies and his magnum opus *The Location of Culture* (1994) is the critical book which catapulted him and made him famous. He developed neologisms like ambivalence, mimicry, third space, and hybridity which are not only central to postcolonial studies, but have become influential for broader debates on contemporary issues like modernity, race, gender, globalization, human rights, and other political matters. The extensive usage of his concepts and his interference in different domains irradiate and illuminate the relevance of postcolonialism and prove that the past does not bar and cannot be discussed far from colonialism.

Bhabha shows how histories of cultures continuously intrude on the present, encouraging an investigation of where the crossings lie. He examines history as points of contacts – interactions between cultures. As a matter of fact, Homi Bhabha avoids polarizations such as "East" and "West" because he believes that such a perspective is reductive. For him, the binary opposition does not succeed to explain the world. The division between cultures, he asserts, is less antagonistic.

Bhabha argues that the colonial discourse produces the colonized as a fixed reality which is at once and “other” and yet entirely knowable and visible. In *The Location of Culture*, he claims that the objective of ‘colonial discourse’ is “to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction” (70). By means of stereotypes, the colonized is made to accept his inferiority and believe that the colonizer’s culture is universal. Bhabha asserts that stereotyping is the *scenario* of colonial fantasy which, in staging the ambivalence of desire, articulates the demand of the Negro which the Negro disrupts.

Commenting on the relationship between the colonizer and colonized, Bhabha believes that it is marked by ambivalence. Etymologically, the term ‘ambivalence’ was first used by psychoanalysts to describe a continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and wanting its opposite. It also refers to a simultaneous attraction toward and repulsion from an object, person or action. Adapted into colonial discourse theory by Homi K Bhabha, ambivalence describes the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between colonizer and colonized. He proposed this concept, purporting that there was a fluidity involved in the process of colonization, where the practice of adopting the colonizer’s cultural practices was a natural result of human intermingling and cultural shifting, and that the stereotyping of the colonized nation spoke more to the insecurities and fears of the colonizer than it did representing the practices of the colonized. The way they regard one another is ambivalent as the colonized is both inferior yet exotic in the eyes of the colonizer, and the colonizer both enviable yet corrupt in the eyes of the colonized subject. In a broader sense, ambivalence can, and this is crucial to Bhabha, nevertheless, be seen as a productive concept. Ambivalence opens up the system of signs and introduces a slippage between two opposing cultural identities. In other words, it nurtures a more nuanced understanding of life, one that favors negotiation between two perceived opponents.

The term ‘mimicry’ is also associated with the works of Homi Bhabha. It is the belief that the colonized inevitably take on some of the practices of the colonizer. Mimicry in colonial and postcolonial literature is most commonly seen when members of a colonized society imitate the language, dress, politics, or cultural attitude of their colonizers. Bhabha describes ‘Mimicry as one of the most effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge. Mimicry is perceived as an opportunistic pattern of behavior: one is supposed to copy the person in power, because one hopes to have access to that same power. In “Of Mimicry and Men” Bhabha claims that within the tension between the synchronic panoptical vision of

domination-the demand for identity, stasis-and the counter-pressure of the diachrony of history-change, difference - mimicry represents an ironic compromise” (126). It describes the ambivalent relationship between the colonizer and colonized. Bhabha gives the example of the British who wanted to create a class of Indians who should adopt English habits, opinions, and morals. They became mimic men who, like Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*, learnt to imitate like English, but were not accepted as such. Hence, mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.*” For Bhabha, “to be Anglicized is emphatically not to be English.” (87)

The effect of mimicry on the authority of colonial discourse is profound and disturbing. Bhabha traces the origins of mimicry back to the efforts by the colonial authorities to 'civilize' the indigenous communities, mainly through Western education. The excess or slippage produced by the ambivalence of mimicry (almost the same, but not quite) does not merely "rupture" the discourse, but becomes transformed into “an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a "partial" presence” (Bhabha 127). In this regard, mimic men are not slavish as they have power to menace the colonizers. The use of English language on the part of the colonized is a menace to orientalist structure of knowledge in which oppositional distinction is made. 'Mimicry' gives rise to postcolonial analysis by subverting the colonial master's authority and hegemony. It is a weapon of anti-colonial civility, an ambivalent mixture of deference and disobedience. Leela Gandhi rightly says, ‘mimicry inaugurates the process of anti-colonial self-differentiation through the logic of inappropriate appropriation.’ (150)

Hybridity is another concept that found its legitimacy in postcolonial debates. It has always been associated with Bhabha whose analysis of colonizer/colonized dichotomy shows the interdependence and a sort of mutual construction of their subjectivities. The scientific term 'hybrid' refers to an organism produced by a cross between different organisms or species. hybridization in Bhabha's theory refers to the emergence of new mixed identities as a result of the intermingling of different cultures. The process of hybridization can occur when two or more cultures operate in close proximity. Although the concept of hybridity was proposed primarily within the colonial framework, it has since been adopted by cultural theorists and sociologists to discuss several issues, such as migration, globalization, imperialism, and neocolonialism.

By contrast to mimicry, which is a relatively fixed and limited idea, postcolonial hybridity can be quite slippery and broad. At a basic level, hybridity refers to any mixing of

eastern and western cultures. This intermixing of cultures has occurred as a result of colonialism. Homi K Bhabha conceives hybridity as a “third space” in which cultural identity is negotiated in a way that subverts the power relations between coloniser and colonised. He argues that cultures have no distinct, permanent being, but rather sees them as shifting and defined by the people who carry them, interweaving and changing with where the people live and where they have lived – creating a hybrid or mix of cultures within a person. Bhabha sees hybridity as an empowering condition where both cultural purity and cultural diversity are rejected. Hybridity becomes a means of resisting a unitary identity by emphasizing the multiplicity and plural identities that exist between cultures where Bhabha calls “Third Space”. At this point, hybridity appears as a transcultural form in the contact zone produced by the colonialism. Commenting on the power of hybridity, As Robert Young (1995) writes:

Hybridity thus makes difference into sameness, and sameness into difference, but in a way that makes the same no longer the same, the different no longer simply different. In that sense, it operates according to the form of logic that Derrida isolates in the term „brisure, a breaking and a joining at the same time, in the same place: difference and sameness in an apparently impossible simultaneity. Hybridity thus consists of a bizarre binate operation, in which each impulse is qualified against the other, forcing momentary forms of dislocation and displacement into complex economies of agonistic reticulation” (25)

5. Gayatri Spivak: Toward Making the Gagged Heard

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is an international Indian critic who was born on February 24th, 1942 in Calcutta. She studied at the university of Calcutta (1959) and received her MA in English from Cornell. She conducted her Ma thesis on William Butler Yeats and was supervised by Paul de Man. She opened the gate of translation earlier and successfully translated Jacques Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*. Her valuable translation of the work made Derrida’s work more enjoyable. Her work falls within post-structuralist criticism, deconstructivist reading of Marxism, feminism, and postcolonialism. Commenting on her literary position, Spivak once stated that:

My position is generally a reactive one. I am viewed by Marxists as too codic, by feminists as too male-identified, by indigenous theorists as too committed to Western Theory. I am uneasily pleased about this. (*Post-Colonial Critic* 67)

In dealing with Spivak’s critical thought, Edward Said’s “contrapuntal” reading strategy is recommended since her ideas are continually evolving and resist, in true deconstructive fashion, a straight textual analysis. She has said that she prefers the teaching environment where ideas are continually in motion and development.

Spivak is always cited by readers who are concerned with the issue of subalternity. Indeed, she is an icon of subaltern studies and postcolonial feminism. The term subaltern was first coined and used by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci when he described cultural hegemony to identify groups that were marginalized, displaced, excluded, and their voices were denied. By definition, subaltern means people belonging to lower class or of inferior rank. It describes people in the lower social classes and other social groups that are marginalized in an imperial colony. David Ludden (2005) argues that subaltern studies is about examining “histories from below”. He claims that “**SUBALTERN STUDIES** from its beginnings was felt by many, with some justice, to be somewhat too dismissive about predecessors and contemporaries working on not entirely dissimilar lines, and the claims of setting up a new ‘paradigm’ were certainly overflamboyant” (Ludden, 403). It analyzes and studies the plight of those in the social groups that have virtually no way to climb up the hierarchy of power within the institution that they dwell in.

Subalternity gained more prominence with Gayatri Spivak’s most notorious essay “Can the Subaltern Speak? The essay is read as a commentary on the work of the Subaltern Studies Group in which she questions their patronizing attitudes. Spivak is known for her Derridean deconstructive method by which she interacts with Subaltern critics like Ranajit Guha and Dipesh Chakrabarty. She adopts Derridean deconstructive techniques to point out the different forms of subject formations and “othering.” Much of Spivak’s ideas are informed by her interactions with ‘the Subaltern Studies Group, including Ranajit Guha and Dipesh Chakrabarty. Spivak believes that it is impossible to recover the voice of the subaltern, insinuating the unimaginable extent of colonial repression and its historical intersection with patriarchy — which she illustrates with a reference to colonial debates on widow immolation in India. Spivak shares with Lata Mani the view that the colonial discussion on the practice of Sati excludes and marginalizes the Indian widow.

Spivak’s use of the term ‘subaltern’ is different from that of Ranajit Guha and Dipesh Chakrabarty. The Spivakian ‘subaltern’ encompasses different subject positions which are not predefined by dominant political discourses. The flexibility of the concept, she believes, is positive as it permits critics to include women to this marginalized social category. She has always been committed to articulating and speaking on the behalf of women who are considered as the most wretched of the earth. Her critical writings provide a powerful counterpoint to the erasure of women, peasants and tribals from the dominant historical and political discourses in India. In “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak says:

The Subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global laundrylists with ‘woman’ as a pious item. Representation has not withered away. The female intellectual as intellectual has a circumscribed task which she must not disown with a flourish. (308)

Spivak argues that the relationship between the critic and her research must be more interactive. The feminist critic must learn from them, speak to them, and learn to suspect that their access to the political and sexual scene is not merely to be corrected by our superior theory and enlightened compassion. She is a very eclectic person who uses what comes to hand. She is a feminist concerned about women in a particular way. She is interested in working out the heterogeneous production of sexed subjects. She is highly concerned with female subject constitution, which she describes as ‘distinguishing between and among women. This discourse, she argues, comes when you speak of the constitution of the urban sub-proletariat or the para-peripheral women, or tribality. She provides a detailed example of the problems involved when First World feminist deals sympathetically with Third-World woman by looking at the French feminist Julia Kristeva’s work on Chinese women. Kristeva’s attempt to offer a feminist account of woman in Chinese culture fails to engage dynamically with specifics of her subject-matter. Kristeva is less interested in Chinese women, rather she is concerned with how the exploration of Third World culture allows her to raise questions about First World women.

In “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak suggests that it is impossible for us to recover the voice of the subaltern or oppressed subject. Even a radical critic like Foucault who thoroughly decenters the human subject, is prone to believing that oppressed subjects can speak for themselves, because he has no conception of the repressive power of colonialism and the way in which it historically intersected with patriarchy. She gives the example of the colonial debates on widow immolation in India to illustrate the combined workings of colonialism and patriarchy which make it difficult for the subaltern (the case of Indian widow burnt on her husband’s pyre) to articulate her point of view. Spivak deliberately challenges the intellectuals’ and the postcolonial historians’ assumption that the voices and perspectives of the oppressed can be recovered. She therefore suggests that such intellectuals adapt the Gramscian maxim — “pessimism, of the intellect, optimism of the will” — by combining the philosophical skepticism about recovering the subaltern agency, with a political commitment of representing the marginalized. She effectively warns the postcolonial critics against homogenizing and romanticizing the subaltern subject.

Spivak's detractors argue that her writing style leads at times to confusion and error, and that this outweighs any strategic gain. It is said among readers that her famous question 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' is ambiguous. Benita Parry (1998) admits that Spivak's use of poststructuralist methodologies to deal with and shed light on women "has further contributed to their silencing" (39). Spivak's claim that women could not speak was denied by Bart Moore-Gilbert (1997) who argued that there are clear historical examples where the resistance of subaltern women to the colonial world is recorded in dominant colonial discourse. (107). It seems that Spivak's subalternity did not reach the political level. In 'Can the Subaltern Vote? Medevoi, Shankar Raman and Benjamin (1990) maintain that she does not contribute to emancipating subaltern women (133). Commenting on the silence of women, Spivak once explained that she did not use the concept literally to claim that women never already talked. Instead, she meant that others did not know how to listen to and interact with them. Thus, the silence of the female as subaltern is a result of a failure of interpretation and not a failure of articulation.

6. Conclusion

Postcolonialism covers the literary and critical works that deal with the colonial period and its aftermath. The term postcolonial literature substitutes the traditional category of 'commonwealth or Third World Literature'. Postcolonialism is highly interested in the social, cultural, and economic changes brought about by the impact of colonialism. Dealing with the literature written in formerly colonized countries, postcolonialism gained its prominence due to the works of Edward Said, Homi K Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak who are said to be its 'Holy Trinity'. Said's 'Orientalism', Bhabha's 'Mimicry and Hybridity', and Spivak's 'Subalternity' form the backbone of postcolonial literature. In terms of affinities, the three critics raised questions and debates within binary oppositions. Yet, their works cannot be clubbed together. Each critic has contributed to the school differently. Said, Bhabha and Spivak all have their primary training and expertise in literary studies, which form the central core of their research agendas. Not surprisingly, their influence has been significant in giving postcolonial studies a distinctive literary bias. However, historians, sociologists and anthropologists have also made significant contributions to the field, often inspired by the seminal work of Said in particular. Postcolonial discourse revolves around binaries like East/West or Colonized/Colonizer, Cultural-clash, and Subalternity to create a forum by which critics aim to deconstruct all aspects of logocentrism and violent hierarchies.

Postcolonialism has become a forum for the oppressed and marginalized which makes their voices heard, and their plight recorded.

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