

Mapping Postcolonialism – Selected Analysis from Page to Screen

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Abstract

In recent years, a postcolonial study is an extensive genre of its own in the field of literature. Post colonialism refers to a discourse which seeks to address the dilemmas of identity due to colonialism. And literature is a form through which the colonized express their sentiments and thoughts. In doing so, these writers prefer using the language of the colonizer as a way of ‘writing back to the empire’. The researcher in her paper seeks to showcase South Asian post-colonial literature and the effects that follow colonialism. The paper will further compare the selected literary texts with its visual portrayal in cinema. The birth of cinema aims in educating people by reaching out to them in a subtle way. It not only entertains but also informs its audience world-wide.

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Introduction

South Asian Literature represents literature penned by writers from the Indian Subcontinent. The South Asian countries include writers from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka and Nepal. Works from Bhutan, Myanmar, Tibet, and the Maldives are sometimes also included. These writings are penned in the vernacular regional languages and also in English, which is the language of the 'other'. English as a language can be said as the language of the colonizer.

India was under colonial rule for over a century. The colonized was bound by the colonizer in different ways. They were forced to abide by the language, culture, ethics and etiquettes, beliefs and so on of the 'other'. This can be seen in countries colonized by the British. India is one of them. The British impacted India and its people in different ways. They encouraged education but with English as the supreme medium. With the mirage of 'civilization', the 'white' affected the 'other' in numerous ways. This colonial contact of the imperial culture with the indigenous culture can be called Post colonialism.

Post colonialism refers to the period after colonialism. It is a discourse which consists of reactions to and analysis of the cultural legacy of colonialism. Post-colonial theory examines various reactions of the colonizers like suppression, resistance, representation, difference, identity crisis, and other responses towards the colonial impact. The British colonised several countries to extend their empire and India is one among them. Post-colonial literature as a discourse can be drawn in literature, film, feminism, sociology, science and in other Humanities. Postcolonial literature refers to the literature produced by countries colonised by the British. This literature consists of the interaction between the imperial power and the indigenous people and serves as an expression of native colonial atrocities. Post-colonial English literature is a deliberate attempt of "writing back", "re-writing" and "re-reading". The literatures from these colonised countries can be placed under the umbrella of 'Postcolonialism'.

Postcolonialism

'Post- colonial' means post or after colonial period, thus indicating the happenings after the colonial contact. Postcolonial Studies refer to the aftermath effects of colonial contact and its

effects of the various cultural experiences. In spite of gaining its independence, there seems to have been no solution to the impact of the imperial power. The term postcolonial studies are mainly based on the historical facts of European colonialism. Postcolonial theory involves discussions and experiences of the natives. This theory is produced by societies in which the imperial force of Europe has been given an expression. The theory focuses on the marginalized on the basis of historical process. This theory is documented by postcolonial theorists like Edward Said, Franz Fanon, Homi K Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Raja Rao and others. The other theorists restrict the use of the word 'post-colonialism' to 'after-independence' or 'after-colonialism'. Every colonized society is subject to the colonial impact in some way or the other, either overtly or covertly.

Postcolonial theorists and writers underline the need to rewrite history, and bring out the hidden truths of the empire and restore its facts of the past. These theorists address the colonized and the issues of ethnicity, racism, identity, which are a result of colonialism. According to social scientists, the motive of colonialism was to explore, conquer and build trade relations, which will again benefit their empire. The moral theory justifies the British colonization as a mission to civilize the 'barbaric coloured colonies' and to rescue them from their darkness.

In *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* by Bill Ashcrott, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, the word Postcolonialism in comprehensive sense "to cover all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day". It has writings taken from the first world from settler colonies of the seventeenth century who marked the process of writing back to the empire. Theorist Edward Said is prominent literary and cultural critic. His work *Orientalism* in 1978, has contributed to the field of postcolonial studies as well the other fields. His work encompasses the views on the Orient by West (Occident). According to Said, Orientalism refers to concepts of the 'West' as the 'civilised' and their forced subjugation of the 'East'. The concept of the East (Orient) as per the West means that they are from the inferior world, backward, irrational and barbaric, therefore the West identifies themselves opposite to East. They subjugated the colonizer not just physically by also mentally. The natives were made to feel inferior and demonstrated the urgent need to civilise them. In Chinua Achebe's words the British felt that Africa had,

"no cultural traditions of its own, no religious, economic or political background worthy of serious attention and certainly no history of glory in the creative arts".

Beside Said we have another theorist Gayatri Spivak with her seminal essay "*Can the Subaltern Speak?*" This essay raises the question whether these subjugated people can raise a voice against the colonizer. The subaltern refers to the marginalized (the colonized). Homi K Bhabha also speaks about 'Hybridity' which talks about the point where the two cultures meet and this point of contact forms a 'new culture'. The two different cultures begin to transform its borders and thus form a new culture, for instance the Indo-Anglican Indian culture, the Goan- Portuguese culture, etc.

Franz Fanon is another notable theorist who contributed to postcolonial studies with his works '*Black Skin, White Masks*' (1961) and '*Wretched of the Earth*' (1961). Fanon being a psychologist (in Africa) treated many of his patients with psychological disorders. His works talk about how the imperial texts talks about the natives in zoological terms, plainly reducing the natives to animals. '*Black Skin, White Masks*' throws light on the racial discrimination between the 'whites' and the 'blacks'. This racism had a large impact on the psychological aspect of the natives as the 'whites' forced the 'black men' to accept their norms and alienated their consciousness. The 'whites' proved their culture, language, ethics beliefs and traditions as superior and universal, to the indigenous culture. This created a sense of inferiority in the mind of the natives and thus accepted the ways of the 'west'.

The post-colonial theories have when applied to the selected works bring forth themes of post colonialism, which have been discussed.

These concerns are

- Representation and resistance
- Language
- Cultural history
- Colonial consciousness
- Nationalism
- Hybridity

Postcolonial Literature

Postcolonial Literature refers to writings which emerged after the colonial contact. These writings are important as they talk about the 'large-scale historical phenomena and the shifting power relations'. This literature was a way of writing back to the empire. The writers wrote about the impact of the colonizers and how they affected their wellbeing. These writings focus upon matters like identity, history, language, cultural exchange, exploitation and migration.

Rukmini Bhaya Nair remarks

"Postcoloniality is a condition requiring a cure, and the passage to that cure involves a return to buried memories of colonial trauma"

These memories of colonial trauma depict the exploitation of the colonized. The writers prefer to pen these traumatised experiences, so that it they can record history. Like other colonized Nations, we see that India is one of them. South-Asian Literature deals with various themes which are mentioned above. It deals with the colonial impact.

There are many South-Asian literatures which deal with the theme of Postcolonialism. These literatures are written by writers living in India or the other South-Asian Nations or living elsewhere. These writers write in English, the language of the 'whites', or in their own

vernacular language. Some of the South-Asian writers are Arundhati Roy, R K Narayan, Amitav Ghosh, Bharati Mukherjee, Anita Desai, Rangel Rebeiro and many others.

The researcher in this paper selects to discuss the works of two writers, namely Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children* and Bhisam Sahni's novel *Tamas*. Both these novels have been adapted into movies.

***Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie (1981)**

Which won the Booker Prize and the Booker of Bookers, weaved its narrative based on the children born with magical abilities on midnight of 14 August 1947

Salman Rushdie's "*Midnight's Children*" in the title is the moment at which India gained its independence from the British. This novel was later adapted into a film in November 2012 by the same name by Deepa Mehta.

The novel is a paradigmatic postcolonial text, which subverts the notions of the historical and native culture and language. Rushdie uses the postmodern narrative techniques, to subvert the two. It amalgamates history, magic, reality, myths and parody as one whole. Being a postcolonial writer, Rushdie makes use of magic realism (a postmodern narrative technique of reality and fantasy as a whole). The novel revolves around Saleem Sinai who is born on August 14th "on the stroke of midnight, when the clock-hands joined its palms in respectful greeting as I came" (pg. 9). Thence he is "handcuffed by history". It further describes the history of Saleem Sinai, wherein Saleem's family roots are in Kashmir, a highly Muslim populated area. Rushdie skilfully intertwines Indian history and fiction like the myths and reality in India.

***Tamas* by Bhisam Sahni (1987)**

This most acclaimed Hindi novel highlights the issue of the partition of India in association with the 'bloody' riots and the story of independence simultaneously. This novel inspired many creative minds in India and Pakistan to create literary/cinematic depictions of its plot. It was adapted into a film by Govind Nihalani. The film remains true to the novel and gives a very descriptive, explicit, verbal, brutal and shocking portrayal of those tough times.

The novel is set in a colonized Indian village where there is harmony among the Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. The emergence of the Congress party and Muslim League is thrown light upon. The Hindus and Muslims support the Indian National Congress party. The Muslim League spouts up and when one day, a carcass of a pig is found at the entrance of a Mosque. The Muslims blame the Hindus for this filthy act, while the Hindus say that it is not their work. The atmosphere heats up and riots break in the village. There is mass killing of people of various faiths. During this time, the British ignore the scene and advocate the policy of 'divide and rule'. The novel ends with the approval of the British to self-rule India, provided the Congress party and the Muslim League compromise. Lord Mountbatten, the last Viceroy, transfers his powers to India in 1947.

Postcolonial Themes in Literature - Adapted into Films

These two novels form an essential part of postcolonial literature. These two selected novels are given mirror resemblances in the film. They help to bring out the postcolonial theories to its surface in a very subtle manner. The films give a clear picture of the novels cinematography. In this paper I would like to delineate the themes of Postcolonialism portrayed in the selected literature and films.

The postcolonial theories and themes highlighted in the selected novels and films shall be analysed. The themes seen in these novels are

Cultural History -

The novel *Midnight's Children*, opens with the image of the perforated sheet with "three drops old, faded redness", which Saleem says that the linen serves as his "Talisman". The protagonist Saleem Sinai's personal history has a magical connection with the history of India. The sheet is a metaphor which stands for the history written in blood; the blood which was shed through history for India's freedom. Indian history and politics is very well portrayed in the novel. Rushdie beautifully portrays the historical events in a realistic way and binds it with his grandfather Dr. Adam Aziz in the novel. He refers to his maternal grandfather as of the European descent which refers to the colonizer.

"he learned that India - like radium - had been 'discovered' by the Europeans; even Oskar was filled with admiration for Vasco de Gama, and this was what finally separated Aadam Aziz from his friends, this belief of theirs that he was somehow the invention of their ancestors"

(MC - 11)

Rushdie's Saleem further describes his grandfather as "that German Aziz" and also refers to him being a witness of the Jallianwalla Baag massacre at Amritsar, where General Dyer commands his troops to open fire at a crowd of unarmed Indians who had gathered to peacefully demonstrate the British presence in India. The Novelist has also referred to the birth of Saleem coinciding with the Independence of India on 14th midnight 1947. The novel also refers to the migration of Indian Muslims and the China war in the year 1962. Saleem's family too shifts to Bombay. The Indo-Pak war in 1965, results in death of many Sinai family members in Karachi (MC pg. 342). He also refers to the Prime Minister of India Indira Gandhi (1966) and the Emergency period in India was from 1975-77, which was introduced by her. Saleem is one of the victims of this emergence period who is sterilised.

The subverting of history "the death of Mahatma Gandhi occurs on a wrong date". He portrays the real as unreal and the unreal as real. Besides this, Rushdie has described India as 'a land of snakes and magic'.

In *Tamas* by Sahni, reflects the partition of India as its central theme. It demonstrates the Indian National Congress in 1885 and the Muslim League in 1906. There is reference to Gandhi and his philosophies. The 'divide and rule policy' is seen through Richard, the British Deputy Commissioner of the District carrying out the policies of England in India. He represents the colonizer. Richard's collection of Indian artefacts, interest in Indian history and 'exploration' depicts the reason of British colonizing places like India, Kenya, Africa, India and others. Richard tells Liza the Indian Cultural history

"The first wave of migrants who came from central Asia three or four thousand years ago and the bands of invaders who came two thousand or so late, both belonged to the same racial stock. The former were known as Aryans." (*Tamas* pg. 41)

Richard's attitude is that of the colonizer. He says that

"The Indians have no idea of their history".

His reaction towards the riots is that,

"If the subjects fight among themselves, the ruler is safe". (pg. 54)

The novelist shows patriotism and search for freedom, from the hand of the British, through the character of Jarnail. The story told by Kharim Khan and its moral elevate the colonization of India by the British. He says

"What I mean to say is that what the ruler can see, the common man, I mean you and I, may fail to see. The Britishers have all seeing eyes. Nothing escapes their notice. Otherwise, how can a handful of feringshis coming from across the seven seas, rule over such a vast country? The Englishmen are very shrewd and far-sighted."

(*Tamas* - Ch. 8)

Here one can see that the colonized believed the colonizer to be the 'all knower' and 'their saviour'.

The second is **Representation and Resistance**.

The theme of culture as rich and traditional is portrayed very well in the selected works. The indigenous at the same time reject the culture and ways of the 'white'. Here the colonized seeks to represent his identity and rejects the colonial mask. The writers through their work exemplify the rich indigenous culture and portray the colonizer describing the colonized wrongly. They show how the Indian people were rich and civilized in their own way.

For instance in Rushdie's novel, we see how he has portrayed the Indian culture of myths, folk, beliefs, customs and practices. Thus, representing the Indian culture as it is. For instance the influence of the different cultures on India is like the biryani which is a rice garnished dish with variety of spices, vegetables and meat.

The Indian superstitions and the belief in fortune tellers like the prophecy of Saleem Sinai when he was in his mother's womb.

“A son - such a son who will never be older than his motherland – neither older nor younger ... there will be two heads - but you shall see one – there will be knees and a nose, a nose and knees, - newspaper will praise him – two mothers raise him! Bicyclists love him – but, crowds will shove Sisters will weep – cobra will creep...Spittoons will brain him - doctors will drain him - jungle will claim him - wizards reclaim Soldiers will try him – tyrants will fry him! He will have sons without having sons! He will be old before he is old! And he will die, before he is dead’.”

(MC – 87-88)

This prophecy foreshadows the future events of the novel.

In *Tamas*, also Sahni portrays the cultural and social richness of India. He talks about the unity and harmony among people of various faiths in India. The medicine man and the Pir Sahib were men with great healing and spiritual power.

The resistance is seen through the characters of Jarnail, who knows the true colour of the British and tries to expose their hypocrisy. He is ready to sacrifice his life for it as well.

Indian ‘Unity in diversity’ is seen in *Midnight's Children* where the narrator says

"Note that, despite my Muslim background, I'm enough of a Bombayite to be well up on Hindu stories."

(MC 149)

Language is another theme which can be seen in these novels and films

English is the language of the colonizer. It is not the language of the Indians. The British ruled over India for over a century. Though India gained its independence, it did not get away by the ways of the British. The colonizers adopted the ways of the British either forcefully or by choice. One of the elements is the English language. The colonized learnt this English language and used the same to write back. English language has acquired various nuances because it is the language of the ‘other’. The postcolonial writers use it to express their ‘colonized self’. The use of indigenous words in spoken English is very common in India. For instance in *Tamas*, words like ‘masterji’, ‘pucca’, ‘babuji’.

Fourthly we have the theme of **Nationalism**, where the indigenous people take pride in this cultural history, nation, and unity among people and then revolt against the ‘other’ or the common cause. In the postcolonial literatures, nationalism refers to a genre of writing which seeks to free from the clutches of the colonial power. These literatures emphasize on cultural and historical aspects of a place. It is the act of ‘coming together for a common cause.

In the novel *Tamas*, the Indian National Congress party includes brothers of our faith and serve for the good cause. While towards the end, the Indian brothers get against the British. They let go all their differences and unite as one.

Orientalism

The West feels that they are superior and look down upon the East. Through the character of Richard one can understand the attitude of the West towards the East. Richard has great sense of pride and superiority about his colour and race. He feels that Indians are an inferior race and backward. Richard says,

“Most people have no knowledge of their history. They only live it.”

He moreover says that

“I have been exploring”

It refers to the colonizer as an explorer.

His feeling of being believed and accepted as inferior is seen in the following lines,

“All Indians are quick tempered. They are all terribly self-centred.

And they adore white women.”

The theme of **Hybridity** is another dominant theme in these novels. Postcolonial critic Homi K Bhabha defines Hybridity “as a creation of a new cultural forms and realities from the colonial encounter.”

It begins from the contact point of two cultures. *Midnight's Children* displays hybridity with the perfect portrayal of Saleem Sinai the protagonist. He is a result of the union of the white man and a woman of Indian indigenous culture. It is the union of Wee Willie Winky's wife Vanita and the Englishman William Methwold. Thus we see a union of two cultures and the birth of a new one.

Literature and Films

Film and literature are linked to one another with its basic elements which include plot, characters, themes, setting and other effects. The novelist creates images by the use of words, while a film maker will create visual images of words.

Some of the reasons for this are firstly, the audience get more attracted to films than novels. They feel that it is better and easier to watch than read. Secondly, the audience can freely see the setting and unify with the characters which they see before them. But here again the audience must remember that the film artist is projecting the picture which is formed in his mind. And no two minds can picture the same image. Thirdly, films help in a better understanding of the writing. Another reason is that films portray a scene in less time with no much explanation while in a novel there will be a long description. Besides this the films which remain true to the novel are called ‘resemblances’ by Bluestone. He remarked that a filmed novel is always different from the source novel. Lastly a film is an easy medium to reach out to people worldwide.

The two novels *Midnight's Children* and *Tamas* which have been adapted into films, have very well remained faithful to the novels plot and distinctly thrown light on the themes of

Postcolonialism. The themes are well 'hybridized' by the writer with his dynamic use of language.

The recent two decades, seem to have elevated the study of theories of post colonialism giving encouragement to various offshoots. Researchers conduct studies revealing new windows and evolving new theories. The wide range of analysis has helped to analyse other forms of art with the same lens. They reveal the elements of postcolonialism in art forms like literature, music, paintings, films and others. Thus increasing the scope of study and extending the laid boundaries of postcolonialism to greater lengths

Conclusion

The South-Asian Literature is a wide canon of literatures dealing with various aspects. One of them is Postcolonialism. The selected novels *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie and *Tamas* by Bhisham Sahni clearly demonstrate the postcolonial themes and can be said to belong to the genre of Postcolonial Literature. The adaptations of these novels also portray the same and therefore one can say that the films resemble its source closely.

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