

Module: PCL

Level: M2 (Civ and Lit)

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I- Postcolonial Literature and Postcolonial Criticism:

- 1- **“Postcolonial” literature** refers to literary works produced in response to the legacy of colonialism and imperialism. It explores the effects of colonization on cultures, identities, and societies, often addressing themes such as displacement, cultural conflict, identity, power dynamics, and resistance. These literary works is about the experiences of characters from previously colonized nations. They challenge dominant colonial histories and narratives, often reclaiming and redefining cultural identities. Notable authors in postcolonial literature include Chinua Achebe, Salman Rushdie, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and Jamaica Kincaid. Their works often reveal the complexities of postcolonial identities and the enduring impacts of colonial rule. All postcolonial literatures begin with an unquestioning acceptance of the authority of European models (especially in the novel) and with the ambition of writing works that will be masterpieces entirely in this tradition. This can be called the **‘Adopt’** phase of colonial literature, since the writer’s ambition is to adopt the form as it stands, the assumption being that it has universal validity. The second stage can be called the **‘Adapt’** phase of colonial literature, since it aims to adapt the European form to African subject matter, thus assuming partial rights of intervention in the genre. In the final phase there is, so to speak, a declaration of cultural independence whereby African writers remake the form to their own specification, without reference to European norms. This might be called the **‘Adept’** phase, since its characteristic is the assumption that the

colonial writer is an independent 'adept' in the form, not a humble apprentice, as in the first phase, or a mere licensee, as in the second.

- 2- **“Postcolonial” criticism** emerged as a specific category in the 1990s because books of literary theory and criticism do not mention the label of “postcolonial criticism” until influential books like *In Other Worlds* by Gayatri Spivak, *The Empire Writes Back* by Bill Ashcroft, *Nation and Narration* by Homi Bhabha, and *Culture and Imperialism* by Edward Said have been published to give to the term finally its distinct currency.

The ancestry of postcolonial criticism can be traced to **Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth***, published in French in 1961 voicing what might be called “cultural resistance” to France’s African empire. Fanon argued that the first step for the ‘colonialised’ people in finding a voice and identity is **to reclaim their own past**. The next step is **to begin to erode the colonialist ideology by which that past had been devalued**.

Another major book which can be said to inaugurate postcolonial criticism is **Edward Said’s *Orientalism*** (1978), which is a specific exposé of **the Eurocentric universalism** which takes for granted both the superiority of what is European or western, and the inferiority of what is not. Said identifies a European cultural tradition of ‘Orientalism’, which is a particular and long-standing way of identifying the East as **‘Other’** and inferior to the West. Hence, postcolonial criticism as an analysis of the cultural dimension of colonialism/imperialism is as old as the struggle against it; such work has been a staple of anti-colonial movements everywhere.

While Fanon’s and Said’s theoretical orientation has always been more materialist, postcolonial critics like Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak draw on the more implications of poststructuralism and particularly deconstruction. That is to say, these

postcolonial critics derive from the methods of Jaque Derriada's deconstruction, Bakhtin's dialogics, the theories of ideologies, Lacanian psychoanalysis, Michel Foucault's writings on power and knowledge, and Lyotard's 'postmodern' critique of the universalizing historical narratives and strategies of western rationality. In order to differentiate between the aims and the political agendas of postmodernism and poststructuralism on the one hand and postcolonialism on the other hand, Linda Hutcheon finds out that postmodernism and poststructuralism direct their critique at the unified humanist subject, while postcolonialism seeks to undermine the imperialist subject.

If the three stages mentioned earlier (Adopt, Adapt, and Adept) provide a way of seeing postcolonial literature, then a way of seeing the stages of postcolonial criticism would be to suggest, as we have just been doing, that they closely parallel the developmental stages of feminist criticism. **In its earliest phase**, which is to say before it was known as such, postcolonial criticism took as its main subject matter **white representations of colonial countries and criticized these for their limitations and their bias**: thus, critics would discuss the representation of Africa in Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness* or of India in E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, or of Algeria in Albert Camus's *The Outsider*. This corresponds to the early 1970s phase of feminist criticism when the subject matter was the representation of women by male novelists like D.H. Lawrence or Henry Miller- the classic instance is Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics*. **The second phase** of postcolonial criticism involved a turn towards explorations of themselves and their society by postcolonial writers. At this stage the celebration and exploration of **diversity, hybridity, and difference** become central. This is the stage when, in the title of the well-known pioneering work in this field, **'the empire writes back'**. This corresponds to the 'gynotext' phase of

feminist criticism, when there is a turn towards the exploration of female experience and identities in books by women.

3- **What Postcolonial critics do:**

- They **reject the claims to universalism** made on behalf of canonical Western literature and seek to show its limitations of outlook, especially its general inability to empathise across boundaries of cultural and ethnic difference.
- They examine the representation of other cultures in literature as a way of achieving this end.
- They show how such literature is often evasively and crucially silent on matters concerned with colonization and imperialism (see, for instance, the discussion of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* by Edward Said).
- They foreground questions of **cultural difference and diversity** and examine their treatment in relevant literary works.
- They celebrate **hybridity and 'cultural polyvalency'**, that is, the situation whereby individuals and groups belong simultaneously to more than one culture (for instance, that of the colonizer, through a colonial school system, and that of the colonized, through local and oral traditions).
- They develop a perspective, not just applicable to postcolonial literatures, whereby states of marginality, plurality and perceived **'Otherness'** are seen as sources of energy and potential change.