

# Identity Issue in Postcolonial Literature

A Presentation by

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# Postcolonial

Since the second half of the 20th century a new era came to being when many countries gained independence, transitioning from colony to country. According to many literary critics and theorists the term postcolonial is defined as "all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, 194 and Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Key Concepts*, 186).

# The Importance of Postcolonial Studies

Colonialism has had a great influence on history of the world, societies and individuals. It concerns the larger issues of human beings such as culture, race, gender and identity.

# Postcolonial Literature and Theory

Postcolonial literature and criticism appeared during and after many countries gained or struggling for independency. The most themes that both deal with are race, gender, ethnicity, identity and culture.

# Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial criticism as Habib in *Modern literary criticism and theory a history* argues, has taken a number of aims: most fundamentally, to re-examine the history of colonialism from the perspective of the colonized; to determine the economic, political, and cultural impact of colonialism on both the colonized peoples and the colonizing powers; to analyze the process of decolonization; and above all; to participate in the goals of political liberation, which includes equal access to material resources, the contestation of forms of domination, and the articulation of political and cultural identities (Habib, 739).

# Postcolonial Theory

Terry Eagleton states that Post-colonial theory is not the only product of multiculturalism and decolonization, it also reflects an historic shift from revolutionary nationalism in the third world (Eagleton, 205). It is interesting to mention that from the 1950s onwards, many of well-known writers and theorists were not came from Britain or America, but they were from former British colonies such as Sam Selvon, Salman Rushdie, V. S. Naipaul, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatry Spivak, Derek Walcott, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and etc.

# Identity

One of the controversial issues of postcolonialism is the question of identity and culture. In the modern world with the increase of immigrant numbers, hybrid nations, and constitution of countries with different cultural diversities the question of identity came to the surface.

# Identity

The rise of the question of identity became a major theme not only in literature but in the whole area of life, also it was because of the colonial impact as Pieterse argues After World War II, at the time of decolonization when imperial identities were decentered, "the question of the Other" became critical and prominent theme"( Pieterse,22). In the relation of self and the other "Identity emerges as a kind of unsettled space or an unresolved question in that space, between a number of intersecting discourses" (Hall 1989, 10).

# Franz Fanon

Franz Fanon in his theoretical argument about the consequences of colonialism and the change formed by the experience of immigration, "examines the experience of having to wear 'white masks' to get by Europe, of having to bend one's own identity so as to appear to the colonizer to be free of all taint of primitive native traits."( Ryan,117-118)

# Edward Said

Edward Said's central point of identity construction, which is under the influence of Foucaultian idea of power, is the ability to resist, to recreate oneself as a postcolonial, anti-imperialist subject and this recreation of the self needs to be contextualized because it is the construction of identity that constitutes freedom and human beings are what they make themselves, even if they are subjects of repressive discourse. (Ashcroft & Ahluwalia, 112)

# Homi Bhabha

Another postcolonial theorist is Homi Bhabha in his *The Location of Culture* who developed his theory by shifting from the binary opposition of Edward Said, which based on the power and knowledge of Foucault, and presented the concept of hybridity, and hybrid identity for Bhabha comes from the "interweaving of elements of both colonizer and colonized challenging the validity and authenticity of any essentialist cultural identity" (Meridith, 2).

# Bhabha

Homi Bhabha also discusses that there is a third space which is "in between the designation of identity" and that "this interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains the difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy"(Bhabha, 4).

# Postcolonial Novel

Postcolonial Novelists especially writers in former British colonies has attracted attention of readers and literary prize organizers. And as Christopher O'Reilly in *Post-Colonial Literature* states "The label 'post-colonial' demands a shift in focus, away from British literature (literature produced by British writers) to world literatures in English." (O'Reilly 7).

# Postcolonial Novel

As postcolonial theorists considered the issue of identity as one of its essential discussion, and as Sheoran states " the major themes in the works written in the postcolonial period have been the fragmentation and identity crisis experienced by the once colonized peoples and the important impacts of colonialism on the indigenous (Sheoran1).

# Postcolonial Novel

Novelists exposed and expressed the conditions of identity crises that emerged in postcolonial period. Their novels rarely avoided or escaped from the presence of diasporas and exile and matters that connected to identity. Novelists such as V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdi and Sam Selvon and others depicted the dilemma of immigrants pictured the search of those immigrants of meaning and identity. V.S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* and Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* clearly present how immigrants struggle for the creation and resistance of their threatened identity.

# Postcolonial Novel

In another perspective and in connection to British imperial power in many postcolonial novels London became an important setting beside the above mentioned novels Tayeb Salih' Season of Migration to the North and other novels the events take place in London as a symbol of imperial power, expectations, fears, and multicultural image of the new world.( Halloran,121)

# Postcolonial Novel

Selvon in *The Lonely Londoners* by imaging actual London sites and placing migrant characters within them, Selvon stakes his and other colonial migrants' claim to the geographical location most symbolic of British imperialism and culture. (Dyer, 108). Selvon's novel *The Lonely Londoners* depicts the experience of Trinidadian migrants in London, and they face the feeling of displacement and loosing identity

# Postcolonial Novel

The impact of colonialism on individual's ambivalence and the loss of identity lead to an imitation of colonizers identity in this way *The Mimic Men* as Reeta Harode suggests The title of the novel signifies the condition of colonized men who imitates and reflects colonizers lifestyle and views.

# Postcolonial Novel

In Tayeb Salih's novel *Season of Migration to the North* the crises of identity related to the imperial power legacy by revealing the idea of otherness, "the characters of *Seasons of Migration* show how colonial power dismantled and transformed modes of identification as such, leaving deeper chasms in how people experienced life and community."(Hughes, 12)

# Conclusion

The reaction and reconstruction of postcolonial identity can be in crisis in the clash of procolonized people with the new conditions of multicultural and hybrid communities in one hand and to find way to get rid of being mimcrized by colonial imposition and the difficulty of recognition reflects one's uniqueness, it keeps their traditions and behaviors. One of the findings is that the strategy of colonial power has an effective influence on colonized people to lose sense of identification, being mimicries and feeling unhomely.

Thank You