

World Literature through the
Lens of Postcolonial Perspectives
A Critical Study

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Dedicated
to
My Parents

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Ecofeminism-Its Liason with Postcolonial Theory

- N. Vasanthi

Events in history are mirrored through literature .Literature reflects the happenings of incidents and remarkable events recorded in History. These upholding of various events by literature, made many literarians and critical thinkers to evolve different systems of critical theories. Some of the critical theories and thoughts are New historicism, Formalism, Feminism, Aestheticism so on & so forth. Incidentally, there are certain theories, though emerging at different settings and scenarios, share certain rudimentary concepts in common, in deeper interpretations. This paper tries to analyse the same, taking two such theories and analyse about their basic tenets and traits and explore how some of their notions have some resemblances in common. This paper takes post colonialism and Ecofeminism and tries to discuss their basic concepts and attempts to identify some mappings between the two theories. Further, this paper also summarizes the genesis, Emergence and development of both the theories and discusses on the concepts of subaltern, subordination and other dominating patriarchal concepts exemplified in both postcolonialism and Ecofeminism and finally draw a line of commonality between the two theories.

Literature is the mirror of the age. It upholds the culture, settings, behaviours, folks of that age. Through literature, one can be able to know about the socio economic and political scenarios, besides history. Many critical theories and criticisms involve themselves in the evaluation and interpretations of literature. According to the web sources, A Critical Theory is a social theory that aims to critique and change society as a whole. Critical theories attempt to find the underlying assumptions in social life that keep people from fully and truly understanding how the world works. (web). A critical literary theory analyses the works of literature in their respective periods in history. Right from Aristotle, Plato to recent -isms like New Historicism, Formalism, Aestheticism, feminism, etc, many works of literature has been explored and projected in its myriad manners. The study of various literary theories enabled to understand the actual literary work and the setting of the periods in a unique and informative way, paving a platform to the literary fraternity to clearly ensemble the milieu of its origin. To cite an example, the feminist literary theory voices for the emancipation and liberation of women, when applied to a literary work, say a novel, tries to evaluate the potentiality of the female characters in the work and tries to juxtapose its basic tenets in the text. It also attempts to justify its traits by dissecting the novel. Incidentally, there are certain theories, though emerged at different settings and scenarios, share certain rudimentary concepts in common. Moreover these theories, though evolved at different periods, settings, approaches & isms of thought, share some common notions between them when viewed and interpreted from different & deeper

perspectives. Post colonialism and Ecofeminism stand to illustrate the above said point.

According to Wikipedia, Postcolonialism (also post-colonial theory) is the critical academic study of the cultural, political and economic legacy of colonialism and Imperialism, focusing on the impact of human control and exploitation of colonized people and their lands. The field started to emerge in the 1960s, as scholars from previously colonized countries began publishing on the lingering effects of colonialism, developing a critical analysis of the history, culture, literature, and discourse of (usually European) imperial power.(web). From the above definition we can understand that postcolonial theory postulates the cultural, social, historic background of the colonizing and colonized people. The imperial countries and their attempt to subjugate the colonized people and the treatment and atrocities meted out to them is extolled in colonialism.

The so called colonized/colonizing, Imperial/colonial, altern/subaltern the binary power relationship forms the basic notions of Postcolonialism. In *An Introduction to Post-Colonialism, Post-colonial Theory and Post-colonial Literature*, Post colonial theory is defined as 'Postcolonial theory is a literary theory or critical approach that deals with literature produced in countries that were once, or are now, colonies of other countries. It may also deal with literature written in or by citizens of colonizing countries that takes colonies or their peoples as its subject matter. The theory is based around concepts of 'otherness' and resistance. Further, it is said that It focuses particularly on the way in which literature by the colonizing culture distorts the experience and

realities, and inscribes the inferiority, of the colonized people on literature by colonized peoples which attempts to articulate their identity and reclaim their past in the face of that past's inevitable otherness. It can also deal with the way in which literature in colonizing countries appropriates the language, images, scenes, traditions and so forth of colonized countries.

Some of the pioneers of Post colonialism are Edward Said and Orientalism, Frantz Fanon and subjugation, Gayatri Spivak and Subaltern, Homi K. Bhabha and hybridity, R. Siva Kumar and alternative modernity etc. The term, Postcolonialism is viewed with different perspectives and given corresponding explanations as hyphenated and unhyphenated word like post-colonialism & Postcolonialism. According to web sources,

The consensus in the field is that "post-colonial" (with a hyphen) signifies a period that comes chronologically "after" colonialism. "Postcolonial," on the other hand, signals the persisting impact of colonization across time periods and geographical regions.

In his article, Post colonialism & Biblical theory, Dr. Philip Irvin Mitchell, Dallas of Baptist university, says that it is important to know the definitions to understand the concept of post colonial theory 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-initial awareness of the social, psychological, and cultural inferiority enforced by being in a colonized state; the struggle for ethnic, cultural, and political autonomy; and a growing awareness of cultural overlap and hybridity.

In *Orientalism*, Edward Said's describes that theory

describes the binary 'us and them' (web) relationship dividing the entire world into two major binary social constructs as 'Occident' and the 'Orient'

. Apart from this, a most popular term in postcolonial history is the term 'sub-altern'. The Definition of this term is, 'A *Subaltern* is someone with a low ranking in a social, political, or other hierarchy. It can also mean someone who has been marginalized or oppressed.' From the Latin roots *sub-* ("below"), and *alternus* ("all others"), *subaltern* is used to describe someone of a low rank (as in the military) or class (as in a caste system). (...) the term is also used to describe someone who has no political or economic power, such as a poor person living under a dictatorship. (Vocabulary.com).

In the postcolonial context, the term Subaltern refers to the people who are inferior in rank, cadre /culture, specifically the people of the colonies. The term was first adopted by Antonio Gramsci to refer to the working classes of the Soviet Union. But the intensity of the term reached its heights with Gayatri Spivak through her seminal work, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (1985). She insists that the subalterns are the colonized people who remain voiceless and silent against the oppression and repression of the Imperial powers. She takes linguistic phenomena to project her view on the term, Subaltern.

On the other hand, Ecofeminism is a branch of feminism that deals with feminism and ecology (web). This system of thought, places women & Nature on one side and the men on the other. Just as women undergo oppression and exploitation in the hands of male patriarchy, Nature also suffers the same in the male dominated industrialized world.

According to web sources, Ecofeminist analysis explores the connections between women and nature in culture, economy, religion, politics, literature and iconography, and addresses the parallels between the oppression of nature and the oppression of women. These parallels include, but are not limited to, seeing women and nature as property, seeing men as the curators of culture and women as the curators of nature, and how men dominate women and humans dominate nature. Ecofeminism emphasizes that both women and nature must be respected.

Ecofeminism voices for the emancipation of women and respect for Nature as the primal force of the universe without which nothing can be achieved. It strives to safeguard Nature and Women from the male dominated patriarchic society. Man is blind to the fact that there is no productivity without women & Nature and the well-being of the planet. It equates the exploitation of the weaker gender to the exploitation of Nature. The term was first coined by French writer Françoise d'Eaubonne in her book *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* (1974), where she speaks about the suppression and oppression of women and Nature. Movements in history such as Chipko Movement by Sundarlal Bahuguna, Gaura Devi, Sudesha Devi, Bachni Devi, Chandi Prasad Bhatt, Govind Singh Rawat, Dhoom Singh Negi, Shamsheer Singh Bisht and Ghanasyam Raturi., Appiko movement, Narmada Bachao Andolan by Medha Patkar, Bishnoi Movement by Amrita Devi Bishnoi, Greenbelt Movement by Vangari Matai in Kenya stands as remarkable illustrations of the tenets of Ecofeminism. This nascent theory has been branched into Radical EcoFeminism, Social Ecofeminism etc. Some of the

pioneers of this literary theory are Greta Gaard, Karren.J.Warren, Ynestra king ,Val Plumwood and the most renowned Indian Ecofeminist, VandanaShiva. These Ecofeminists project their notions and nuances on the oppression and exploitation of women and nature in the hands of male patriarchy and work for their emancipation and liberation.

The very notion of subjugation and subordination forms the basic common tenet for both Postcolonialism & Ecofeminism. Though the agents of subordination and subordinating are different in both the theories, the very concept of one dominating over the other can be sensed from both the theories. In the case of Postcolonialism the people of the colonies are subordinated and deprived of their freedom and liberty by the colonial regime and imperial powers of the west. The exploitation and loot of the natural and other resources of the colonies and the suppression of the colonial people by the imperial powers can be observed when viewed through the lens of Ecofeminism as well but in a different way. In Ecofeminism too the suppression and exploitation of both nature and women takes place by the male patriarchy. Ecofeminist philosophy asserts that the male patriarchal world is responsible for the subjugation of women and destruction of Nature. In the context of Postcolonialism, the colonies and its people can be perceived as possessing feminine qualities undergoing submissiveness and silent experience of the oppression. On the other hand the imperialist powers can be perceived as possessing 'Masculine' qualities exercising their colonial rule over the colonial people. The term, 'Sub-Altern', the one being subordinate to the other, put

forth by Gayatri Spivak, can be applied and interpreted not only for the colonial people but also to women and Nature in the Ecofeminist context. Infact, her proposal of Sub-altern can be understood with more deeper meaning with Vandana Shiva's term, 'Reductionist', (Shiva, Staying Alive,pg.no.20)wherein the Nature & Women are reduced by the male Patriarchy. The colonies despite their rich culture, Nature were forced to disimplement and made to follow the imperial rules with the explanation that they need 'guidance and Enlightenment', by the Occident

Notably, "the West" created the cultural concept of "the East," which according to Said allowed the Europeans to suppress the peoples of the Middle East, the Indian Subcontinent, and of Asia in general, from expressing and representing themselves as discrete peoples and cultures. Orientalism thus conflated and reduced the non-Western world into the homogeneous cultural entity known as "the East." Therefore, in service to the colonial type of imperialism, the us-and-them orientalist paradigm allowed European scholars to represent the Oriental World as inferior and backward, irrational and wild, as opposed to a Western Europe that was superior and progressive, rational and civil—the opposite of the Oriental Other.(web)

Thus, this paper tries to place both Postcolonialist theory and Ecofeminist theory at the same standpoint taking some parameters and criteria into consideration. Though emerged from different milieu and have different labels and terminologies, both the theories have the underlying concept of, 'the one dominating the other'. The binary conception of male/female, strong/weak, imperial/sub-altern are the

characteristics to be applied to both Postcolonialism and Ecofeminism. Thus, the complementarity of both the theories makes any literary work being elevated and explored in to more deeper level thereby making any text more interesting and inquisitive.

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