



# Postcolonialism: An Alternative Discourse Theory

**Dr. Susanta Kumar Bag**

**(Professor)**

**Department of History**

**Sri Aurobindo College (Eve)**

**University of Delhi**

*(Abstract: Postcolonialism as an alternative discourse theory in social science research it appeared in 1970s and 1980s. The foundation of postcolonial theory as practice brought about the culmination of the Enlightenment age, or the Age of Modernism. It generally refers to the hegemonic theory of colonialism in the West. It also looks beyond the liberation movement in third-world countries. The most highlighted points of discussion about postcolonialism are culture, ethnicity, feminism, art, hybridity, discrimination, marginalization, etc. However, many theorists, such as poststructuralists, neo-colonialists, and those who are making global studies, have developed criticism in a lot of ways. However, it has proved a fashionable pedagogy in social science research in contemporary academic discourse.)*

**Keywords:** postcolonialism, enlightenment, modernism, poststructuralists, neocolonialism, subalterns, neo—colonialism, globalisation.

In the late 1970s and 1980s, the much-debated postcolonialism theory as an alternative academic discourse appeared in Europe, which refers to a defined historical time concerning the state of activities designating the aftermath of Western colonialism. It is the term that has been used to denote the contemporaneous venture to retrieve and reconsider the culture, history, and other integral activities of society, which was hegemonized in innumerable ways under Western colonialism and imperialism. Postcolonialism as a theory and practice simultaneously defines further subordination and domination contemporaneously by philosopher-thinkers. The theorists and historians of postcoloniality engaged themselves to study several corresponding aspects of modernity by focusing on philosophy, culture, etc. from historical perspectives, highlighting the contribution and legacy of the Enlightenment Age beyond Europe. The Postcolonials believed that the commencement of postcolonialism was the end of the Enlightenment period, or, in other words, modernism itself. [1] Postcolonialism as a scholarship and academic practice is commonly understood, and it refers to the hegemonic power structure of the Western colonial powers. To address the derivative, 'postcolonialism' certainly, we need to socialize ourselves with several questions as it has many manifestations. [2] J. Daniel Elam in Oxford Bibliographies viewed it as "a body of knowledge primarily concerned with accounting for the political, aesthetic, economic, historical, and social impact of European colonial rule around the world in the 18th through the 20th century." [3] The contribution and legacy of postcolonial theory in academic practice, as enumerated in the Encyclopaedia of Britannica, postcolonialism has a 'rich legacy' but is an ambivalent theory. Having said that, the beginning of postcolonialism is the culmination of the 'Age of Enlightenment' or an 'Age of Empire', and the formulation of these two historical trajectories is more than a coincidence'. [4] Bill Ashcroft, in his familiar article 'Postcolonialism' which was published in 2012, has rightly highlighted that 'Postcolonialism is a discourse' that is associated with the causes and consequences of colonization on the cultures and societies of the colonized.

Historically, the term postcolonialism and its analysis began by historians after World War II, and it refers to the post-decolonization period i.e. 1950s. Since the late 1970s, the term has been vociferously cast off by the critics of cultural studies to discuss the various aspects of cultural dominance by Western nations. In the present

academic practice, it is commonly used to describe post-colonial culture, society, politics, etc. without referring to any particular historical period or a fixed range of societies, but it is best understood as a discourse generating a specific reading practice. [5] The advent of the idea of ‘postcolonialism’ in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a reaction and byproduct of the perceived failures and limitations of modernism, particularly in terms of the understanding of social and cultural intricacies. Hence, the field of post-colonial scholarship has given a useful dimension to the social sciences and humanities as an inclusive area of global study. Postcolonialism, as an alternative and competing theory in social sciences, produces and demonstrates the unrelenting authenticity of local agency, i.e., an intervention that can be applied to Manichaeic approaches to local and global studies. [6]

### **Postcolonialism: An Overview**

Thinker and philosopher Edward W. Said is acknowledged as the originator of postcolonial ideas, and his pioneering work “Orientalism” was published in 1978, in which he argued that ‘Orientalism served as an ideological basis to the Occident to subjugate the Orient’. In the Occident (West), the cultural superior has the responsibility and moral authority to transform the colonized culture. He further stated that ‘Orientalism isn’t just a set of myths; it is an interconnected system of institutions, policies, and ideas.’ [7] Much before Said, Frantz Fanon, a West Indian psychoanalyst, social philosopher, and exponent of liberation theory in third-world countries, was known as a great stalwart in the study of postcolonialism. His two polemical books—“*Black Skin, White Masks*” (1952) and “*The Wretched of the Earth*” (1961). [8] Fanon's “Black Skin, White Masks” is written in the style of autoethnography and shares his own experiences while presenting a historical critique of the effects of racism and dehumanization, inherent in situations of colonial domination, on the human psyche. [9] Holding a similar view, Fanon, in his celebrated work “*The Wretched of the Earth*,” analyses and medically describes the nature of colonialism and imperialism, which have essentially destructive effects on the human psyche as well as on living society. The subjugation of the West not only has its detrimental societal effects, but simultaneously, its imposition has harmful mental effects on the native indigenous people subjugated into colonies. [10] These books put Fanon as a leading intellectual in the international decolonization movement theory. The essential goal of colonialism and imperialism for Fanon was primarily to restructure and reorder the world's native indigenous people. He has eloquently stated that violence is a necessary and common feature of colonialism and imperialism in the West. Fanon considered that colonial oppression necessitates violence, resulting in political engagements. Therefore, Fanon expressed colonialism as an institution and a structure inherited from the postcolonial period. He was simultaneously critical of the postcolonial governments formed after decolonization in the third-world nations. Explaining the postcolonial period Fanon had viewed that rise of corruption, ethnic violence, discrimination, and economic dependency in the former colonies was an offshoot and consequence of the “mediocrity” of Africa’s elite leadership class. Thus, Fanon's subjugation theory’ discussion of colonialism and imperialism has natural consequences that have mental and psychological imprints on the colonized. [11]

Amongst other leading critical thinkers, Gayatri Chakravarty (poststructuralist) is significant to mention. Later as a leading post-structuralists thinker, Spivak at the behest was a leading postcolonial subaltern and feminist thinkers and wrote about issues relating to gender and race. Her use of the term subaltern is influenced by the Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci. Spivak's essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' addressed the way the 'subaltern' woman is constructed, as absent, silent, or not listened to. The 'muteness' of women in postcolonial societies is the main issue that her work addresses. The main argument of her essay is that, between patriarchy and imperialism, subject constitution, and object formation, the figure of woman disappears not into a pristine nothingness but into a marginal position between tradition and modernization. The ferocity perpetrated by Western forms of thought upon the East is of great concern to Spivak. She takes 'the third world' as the conception of the West that locks non-Western cultures into an imperial representation. [12] Homi K. Bhabha (a post-structuralist) is also a distinguished figure in postcolonial theory, criticism, culture theory, and cultural identity in the globalized world. His celebrated work is “*The Location of Culture in 1994*.” As a thinker of postcolonial theory, his analysis had some remarkable components: hybridity, mimicry, third space, and ambivalence. Bhabha's work supplements and develops Fanon’s discussion of colonial identities and cultures, primarily in the background of India’s subjugation under British imperialism in India. [13]

S. Nagarajan, formulating the postcolonial theory, has stated that “Orientalism is a Western style of domination and reappropriation and has moral rights to rule over the East.” He narrates how Western colonial powers during colonialism exemplified the East. Furthermore, how the history and culture of the natives were constructed by the colonial power as barbaric, malicious, primitive, etc., and how this process continued in the later stages of

colonialism, *i.e.*, in the post-colonial period, because after the decolonization process, capitalist ideology has a foothold to employ its influence on the ex-colonies of the world. [14] Ato Quayson, a Ghanaian literary critic and Professor of English at Stanford University, has proposed in his book *'Postcolonialism Theory, Practices, or Process?'* that 'It is a process. A way of thinking through critical thinking or strategies.' It is an intellectual discourse that evolves links between the colonial period and present-day inequalities. Throughout the text, he stresses the importance of seeing postcolonialism as a method of analysis that does not merely refer to another stage after colonialism but to a continuing struggle against colonialism and its effects. [15] Similarly, Jane Hiddleston, in her book *'Understanding Postcolonialism'*, observes in the simplest way and most accurately that 'postcolonialism can generally be understood as the multiple political, economic, cultural, and philosophical responses to colonialism from its inauguration to the present day, and is somewhat broad and sprawling in scope'. [16]

Some other celebrated thinkers in literary history define the theoretical relationships between colonialism and postcolonialism and subtly argue the theory in very unique ways. Most significantly, Leela Gandhi (*Postcolonial Theory: An Introduction*, 1998) and J. C. Robert Young's *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, 2001, Afzal-Khan, Fawzia, and Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks (eds) *The Pre-occupation of Postcolonial Studies* (2000), Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. 2005, Derek Hook, *A Critical Psychology of the Postcolonial: The Mind of Apartheid*, 2012, Patrick William, and Laura Chrisman (eds) *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory* 1994, Young, Robert J. C. *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, 2001. Young, Robert J. J. C. *Postcolonial Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford, 2003, is very prominent to mention. These works have phenomenally contributed to the understanding of postcolonial theory and its academic practice in academia. [17] Thus, it can be agreed that postcolonial names are a set of political, philosophical, or conceptual questions stimulated by colonial projects and their aftermath.

### **Postcolonialism and History**

Much before the postcolonial period, the historical edifice of the past was grounded on the philosophies of liberalism, modernism, and positivism, despite some conceptual flaws. Here, what I have done is make some special reference to the historiography of the national movement during the colonial period and its aftermath. Particularly about the anti-colonial liberation movement of India and the historicity of the Subaltern Studies Project, which is very significant and was developed by Ranjit Guha and his historian colleagues in the 1980s, though it earned much criticism. Much before the progress of subaltern study as dominant historiography, the colonialist/imperialist, nationalists, and Marxists were the dominant practicing theories in academic discourse to study Indian nationalism. Ranjit Guha, an exponent of subaltern historiography in the postcolonial period, in his much-debated theoretical narration *'On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India'* considers all other historiographies of Indian nationalism as elitism-colonialism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism that were products of colonialism and imperialism itself. Sumit Sarkar, who is well known to be one of the exponents of subaltern historiography in the 1980s, emphasized the theory of 'history from below' synonymy to subaltern classes. The postcolonial 'Subaltern Studies Collective' holds the almost the same view as Ranjit Guha and his historian colleagues, who said that other forms, whether imperialist, nationalist, or nationalist, elitist Indian historiography' place a strong emphasis on the experiences and agency of the popular classes. [18] The subaltern study project in India proved influential among younger scholars but also provoked a lot of criticism: nationalists attacked it for downplaying the heroism of the national movement, and Marxists attacked it for neglecting the structures of class and the economy. In Britain, the reaction was initially strongly negative: British studies of Indian history were at this time heavily dominated by a group of scholars popularly identified as the Cambridge School, which focused on interest-group politics and patron-client networks to explain Indian nationalism. [19]

Besides Ranjit Guha and his historian colleagues Dipesh Chakravarty's *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2007), *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Sahid Amin's *Event, Metaphor, and Memory: Chauri Chaura 1922–1992* (2006), Gyanendra Pandey's *Subalternity and Difference: Investigations from the North and the South* (2011), Partha Chatterjee's *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (1994), David Hardiman's *Histories for the Subordinated*, and most prominently Gayatri Chakravarty's *Can Subaltern Speak?* Amongst the above works, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* is a significant contribution to post-colonial and anti-liberation studies in Afro-Asian and Latin American studies. [20]

The subaltern study as academic discourse in social science, more particularly in history, established itself as a captivating, if contentious, discourse in the 1980s. In academic world the thinkers and philosophers have divergent views and opinions pertaining to subaltern study theory. Originally, the subaltern study analysis in 1970 was framed and developed by Oriental theorist Edward Said and impacted contemporary philosophers, including Spivak-poststructuralists. Said wrote most eloquently and in laudatory terms about the Subaltern Study projects. Even more dominant was the response of the post-structuralist and post-colonial theorist Gayatri Spivak's celebrated work, which I have mentioned above and is widely recognized as one of the foundational texts of postcolonial subaltern theory—feminism, caste, and ethnicity. [21] Young, another critical postcolonial thinker, opined that postcolonial as a discourse encompasses the realms of gender, race, ethnicity, and class. Indeed, we should avoid the danger of treating either the “West” or the “tri-continent” (Afro-Asian and Latin America) as homogenous entities. Because, in some way, they are mutually opposed. Colonialism, therefore, is a phenomenon that is internal to imperial nations and external to colonized cultures or nations. Colonialism benefits only a small portion of colonized nations. Consequently, postcolonial discourse theoretically holds and is closely connected with a comprehensive series of discourses within the colonizing powers. The minority studies of African-American, Native American, Latin American, and feminist studies have dealt with various forms of internal colonization of the colonized nations. The postcolonial studies thus mentioned have critically contested mainstream Western philosophy, literature, and ideology. Most importantly, the critical ideas of Henry Louis Gates Jr., an African-female novelist, poet, and commentator on Islam, and Frederic Jameson (theorist) are very significantly and closely connected with various postcolonial studies. [22] In the case of Indian postcolonial studies in history discipline, finding difficulties, great scholars like Sumit Sarkar left the subaltern study project of Ranjit Guha when he published a well-known article, “The Decline of Subaltern in Subaltern Studies,” published in 1997 in the journal ‘Writing Social History. [23]

### **Concluding Remarks**

The postcolonial theory has been under severe criticism from various quarters since it appeared as an alternative discourse in social science research in the 1970s'. Often, historians and thinkers criticize postcolonial theory for their propensity to essentialize what they term coloniality in the form of a uniform, invariant, and continued power, a type of generic, singular colonialism without geographical specificities. Further to mention, historians criticize the postcolonial study and the practically unchanging pattern of historical development from 1492 to 1970. Further, David Scott and Vilashini Coop an have recently opined that the critical force and empirical value of the postcolonial discourse in the present-day context of globalization are practically non-existent. According to them, globalization is not the last variant of neo-imperialism but rather a radically new phase in the history of capitalism, which has nothing in common with the history of colonialism or with the former binary relationship between the center and periphery. At present, the academic theory of postcolonialism has expanded its area of research and it includes- environmental, religious photographic and visual, broadcasting/media, linguistics/literary, ethnicity, marginalization, social justice, migration, and diaspora studies from past to the present in the historical context. Therefore, it would not be wrong to conclude by saying that postcolonial studies are losing their specificity or, on the contrary, that they have already reached their objective. As I have endeavoured to locate the postcolonial study as an alternative discourse theory, has thus grounded itself in the most challenging academic world. As an alternative discourse, despite the development of neocolonial and global studies, it can withstand to the present intricacies in social science research and it does not look like vanishing soon.

### **End Notes**

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