

Contemporary Theory from the First World to Third World: A Critical Study

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Abstract

This paper deals with origin of theory i.e., how and when human beings started theorizing or concretizing the natural world as well as the human world around them. With the passage of time when language started appearing as a controlling agency, production of linguistic artifacts— literary discourses as well as general discourses came under the control of ruling elites who established this control with the help of intellectuals. Then scientific inventions like printing press that converted literary production into commercial adventure if not fully then at least partially, seemed to liberate the masses from the hegemonic control of ruling class. This development slowly and steadily culminated in the form of contemporary theory where a critic very much like a scientist analyses literary works at both micro as well as macro level. But this development is also appropriated by the new world order controlled by post-industrial capitalism, which doesn't have one centre of power rather a centre of power scattered in the psyches of all human beings. In this era on neo-colonialism this upsurge of abstract theories has emerged a potent weapon to re-colonize the Third world and Diaspora writers, postcolonial thinkers, humanists, advocates of globalization, and advocates of scientific and economic progress all are forwarding this agenda of capitalism.

Key Words: linguistic links, faculty of language, clinical phase, deconstructing ideological mystifications, intellectual wage labourer, white future, Integrated World Capitalism (IWC), depoliticization of citizenry.

There exists a very complex relationship between life, literature and theory. Literature is actually a mode of constructing the image of the real world in the psychological space, which is more important than the real world because it becomes the only available medium of understanding the outer world. In this way literature becomes a 'life substitute', a means of putting people in a state of equilibrium with the surrounding world, which is partially constituted by the production itself. Therefore, different societies in different ages produce different literatures, to maintain equilibrium with the ever-changing world. Hence, works of art, literature and even theory construct some possible self in the individual as well as the collective audience, by changing emotional as well as intellectual content of consciousness and by enabling them to react more subtly and deeply to the world. It implies that works of art, literature and theory do not merely reflect the world, rather they construct it, and therefore they fall under the category of literature of power. All theorists of literature since the ancient times have recognized this function of literature, which is evident from the fact that they theorized how to write poetry, drama, novel and even theory also.

A glimpse into the earliest of literature and other arts belonging to almost all societies of this world will prove that the ability to utter different sounds and ability to draw various figures played a very important role in organizing those societies since then this tendency is growing. Slowly all human beings of that time started getting organized in the form of social groups with the help of common linguistic structures which were constituted of sounds that have meaning only for the members of that group. Most of the languages of that time were lyrical in nature because their success was based on the simple fact observed by the founding fathers i.e. melodious sounds mesmerize human beings. Once it was established that language is a far better weapon than physical power then the people who ruled over others with the help of physical power could not let the power slip from their hands so they employed comparatively intelligent people to control the linguistic production. Perhaps it was the point in the history of mankind when they theorized the use of language for the first time. In this way in the form of language they found a new instrument for controlling the society. In the beginning as mentioned earlier people were free to use language in their own way but acceptability of that use became a social activity for the first time which is continuing since then. Therefore language functions in many ways first it theorizes the world, secondly it theorizes how to theorize and thirdly it theorizes how to decipher the already theorized material.

In the first stage only one use of language was known i.e. theorization of world through language. In the second stage people in power felt the need to control this theorization so they promoted theories that helped in the concentration of power in their hands. In this stage the creative writers who helped the centralization of power

were rewarded on the other hand those who were against it or tried to build their independent narratives were punished and nothing about most of them is available now. With the invention of writing and later on printing press mass production of literary works started that required a market i.e. educated people. When so many works started pouring into the market it became necessary to write according to the likes and dislikes of people. But ruling authorities started imposing censor on literary works that went against them. Though alternative ways of understanding life have always been there, the advent of Nineteenth century saw some major changes in the field of understanding of literature and life, and these changes were the resultant of changes in the field of philosophy. Charles Darwin, Marx, Freud, Saussure, Foucault, Derrida, Chomsky, Said, Simone de Beauvoir are some of the major names who initiated these changes. Along with these philosophers creative writers also challenged the theory of life and the theory of art propounded by the earlier theorists like Aristotle and Arnold. P B Shelley voiced the poor in the romantic era, Charles Dickens and Galsworthy made heroes out of poor. The changes which were in process during the previous ages took new forms in the Twentieth century. After this theory of literary creation came the theory of analysis which is popularly known as contemporary theory, which deals with not how to write a literary work but with how a work of literature is produced, how it gains its meaning or meanings and so many other aspects which were never discussed earlier. In this way contemporary theory came into being; when the approach to literary texts is no longer based on non-linguistic, that is to say historical and aesthetic considerations or, to put it somewhat less crudely, when the object of discussion is no longer the meaning or the value but “the modalities of production and of reception of meaning and of value prior to their establishment” (Paul de Man: 354).

It implies that the field of literature requires an autonomous discipline of investigation to consider its possibility and status, and this investigative project also includes its own methods and approaches i.e. theory. After these changes in the field of understanding there has been a striking proliferation of literary theory. The very meaning of Literature, reading and criticism has undergone deep alteration. This new phase in the field of interpreting and understanding literature is known as clinical phase. In this phase analysis ranges from macro i.e. the study of the whole text to micro i.e. the study of parts that can be as small as a single word or even smaller. The critic of this new phase is more like a scientist analyzing the text under his microscope. If earlier theorists constructed the concept of literature like the religious people who constructed the concept of life then contemporary theorists can be compared to medical professionals who study the various aspects of human beings such as anatomical, physiological, genetic etc. by borrowing terms and concepts from physics chemistry genetics etc. similarly contemporary theory studies various aspects of literature such as socio-cultural, economic, aesthetic, linguistic etc. by borrowing

“its terms and concepts very largely from other disciplines — linguistics, psychoanalysis, philosophy, Marxism,” and “In the process, literary criticism has been drawn into the vortex of a powerful new field of study in which all these disciplines are merged and interfused, and which goes under the general name of ‘theory’”(David Lodge:11-12). In the earlier phase of literary theory, the job of critics was to construct a philosophy of life and literature through construction but in the contemporary phase of literary criticism their job as Fredric Jameson says, “is to deconstruct the ideological mystifications that obscure the text’s place in the world—in short to demystify the text’s pretensions to an idealist autonomy. Following that, however, the critic must restore to the text the “repressed and buried reality” of the “collective struggle to wrest a realm of freedom from a realm of Necessity” (Fredric Jameson qtd. in Michael Clark: 242). It seems that this type of studies will deconstruct the high culture and in this way benefit the subaltern groups such as women, formerly colonized people, Dalits etc. but as John Brenkman says,

...cultural studies—whatever aspects of culture it studies—itself belongs to high culture. To do cultural studies requires an extraordinary level of educational attainment, the mastery of rarefied styles of discourse and argument, and, most importantly, a methodically alienated attitude toward ordinary cultural objects, practices, and experiences. It bears all the marks of the elite and specialized training on which it depends. (John Brenkman:115)

Therefore this practice of deconstructing ideological mystifications is an attempt to subsume practice into and as theory, thereby not just cutting itself off from society but disguising that isolation as engagement. Even when the theory does assume the postures and categories of political practice, that assumption is purely rhetorical and conceives of politics strictly in the terms of literary theory, rewriting the world as text. Spread of capitalistic mode of production and consumption to almost all parts of the world and the advent of neo-colonial phase which started even before the former colonies became free changed the object of production and the object of power that is why the mechanisms by which power and production are disseminated and perpetuated also changed. The science like objectivity that seems to deconstruct the hegemonic structure of world order has now become an instrument of the same because, “the political arena of social domination and hierarchical order — is defined primarily in terms of artifice or representation, not the categories of historical materialism. Its goal is not the production of commodities but the reproduction of code, and the object of its power is not the slave or the worker but a new kind of being: “the saturated consumer [who] appears as the spellbound avatar of the wage labourer” (Baudrillard qtd. in Michael Clark: 247-48). The time of this new being is now “free,” but its desire is carefully organised to produce “a new kind of serf,” “the individual as consumption power” (Baudrillard qtd. in Michael Clark: 247-48). All the

major theories belonging to contemporary era have origins in the West. The science like neutrality and objectivity, which is their feature, is also a political project; because spread of neo-colonialism is perpetuated through these seemingly apolitical things such as—science, technology, democracy, theory, humanism etc. These neutral things are projected as universal requirements, which shadow the real-life interests of people, their struggles etc. and whole of the formerly colonised world looks towards either the white world or the whitened people who are considered an embodiment of these qualities, and who can help emancipate the whole world of its ills. But this whole process helps in colonising not only the present but also the future as Gayatri Spivak questions in her paper “Post-Modernism, Post-Structuralism, Post-Marxism, Post-Analytic Philosophy, Post(e) Pedagogy: Where is Post Coming From?” She warns that all discussions of, ... “future” may be thinly disguised attempts to colonize that future as white, First World males have colonized past and present. I could continue to enumerate other constraints that militate against talking about any “future” for “the” “institution” of “literature” and “the” “cultural” “community” because theory has thrown all those terms into citation. Or I could attack theory for my own dilemma. (Gayatri Spivak qtd. in Susan R. Horton: 273).

Edward W. Said, the most important critic in the field of postcolonial criticism also highlights the colonising nature of postcolonial theory which is considered as liberating. He points out this fact in his *The world, the Text and the Critic*:

As it is now practised and as I treat it, criticism is an academic thing, located for the most part far away from the question that troubles the reader of a daily newspaper. Up to a certain point this is as it should be. But we have reached the stage at which specialization and professionalization, allied with cultural dogma, barely sublimated ethnocentrism and nationalism, as well as surprisingly insistent quasi-religious quietism, have transported the professional and academic critic of literature — the most focussed and intensely trained interpreter of texts produced by the culture — into another world altogether. In that relatively untroubled and secluded world there seems to be no contact with the world of events and societies, which modern history, intellectuals, and critics have in fact built. Instead contemporary criticism is an institution for publically affirming the values of our, that is, European, dominant elite culture, and for privately setting loose the unrestrained interpretation of universal defined in advance as the endless misreading of a misinterpretation. The result has been regulated, not to say calculated, irrelevance of criticism, except as an adornment to what the powers of modern industrial society transact: the hegemony of militarism and a new cold war the depoliticization of citizenry, the overall compliance of the intellectual class to which critics belong. (25)

Felix Guattari in his *The Three Ecologies* throws some light on this problem when he talks about three ecologies i.e. mental ecology, social ecology and environmental

ecology. According to him the world of today is controlled by “post-Industrial-capitalism-which Guattari calls Integrated World Capitalism (IWC)- is delocalized and deterritorialized to such an extent that it is impossible to locate the source of its power” (Gray Genosko: 24-30). IWC’s most potent weapon for achieving social control without violence is the mass media which links the whole world and in this way is involved in the creation of demand so there will always be a market for capital investment.

This new world order kills its dissidents through appropriation i.e. by producing its own critics who enjoy all of its benefits i.e. they are published, popularized, circulated, interpreted and canonized only through it so their arguments and modes of working help it, that is why despite all opposition from many sides it is growing at full pace.

Post-industrial capitalism has created a vast market for the literature and the theory that talks about colonized, marginalized, women and other subaltern sections but at the same time it ensures that no significant change should take place in the situation of these people for example despite the fact that every second or third of educated women and men proclaim themselves to be feminist thinkers the condition of women is degrading continuously. Despite the presence of largest number of postcolonial thinkers America is the biggest neo-colonizer. These are only two of the numerous examples. What can be the reason behind the failure of these dissident thinkers except that they are dissidents only because capitalism wants them to be so, and the day capitalism do not need them they will vanish as dewdrops vanish at sunrise. Now the question is why it is so. This post- industrial capitalism has emerged as a kind of huge machine with its brain and desire to rule over the world. It injects emerging intellectuals with readymade theories which are not directly related to their surrounding world and in this way occupies their creative and critical faculties. Sometimes we see the markets thronged with so many texts on theory that converts many scholars into theorists at other times the same markets are full of texts declaring the end of theory and all so called theorists are converted into anti- theorists. Similarly a seminar sponsored by some big name, some foreign university etc. on any of the topics lures so many scholars to become experts on the topic of the seminar. Undoubtedly anyone can be a scholar in as many branches as one wants but what is wrong with this type of blind race is that they are not scholars in these fields on their own but because capitalism wants them to be, and in this way this post- industrial capitalism devoid them of their autonomy and their control over their own mind.

As mentioned above the huge post- industrial capitalism powered machine has its brain, if not whole then at least larger part, situated in Euro- American part of the world and they are controlling almost the whole of the world and this upsurge of various theories and anti- theories is part of that agenda. It works in such a subtle

manner that not only the intellectuals from Third World but also the intellectuals from First World become its victims and the most horrible thing is that they never realize and even if they realize like Gayatri Spivak and Edward W. Said mentioned earlier they are unwilling or unable to come out of the victimhood and their victimhood is presented in such a manner that many more are willing to become its victims.

First World theory has its own implications in the Third World it restricts the natural growth of intellectuals in this part of the World. Every individual, hence society and culture are endowed with a natural tendency of theorizing the world and life and they concretize it in the written forms, then comes the theory of writing that changes with the arising needs of that individual, society or culture, after this theory of writing comes the theory of reading or interpretation, which also changes with the arising needs of individual, society or culture. But unfortunately it is not happening in the Third World. One can find deconstructionists, poststructuralists, postmodernists, feminists, post-colonialists, eco-critics and many more varieties of intellectuals but except a few all of them are carrying this burden of intellectualism just only because it provides them a status of Third World Euro- Americans which is a privileged one because of colonial history of their countries. In this way the post- industrial capitalism has overloaded the Third world Intellectuals with imported theories that hardly any space is left there for carrying their own things and even if they find any space left they fill it with their own dead past which, poses no rift with imported theories because it also belong to the imported category i.e. imported from past. This whole enterprise has converted a large number of Third World intellectuals into rag-pickers who do this task of rag-picking sometimes from the backyard of First World and sometimes from their own backyard and fill up their present with the things that are made to belong to their present.

Post-industrial capitalism detaches Third World intellectuals and masses from their own present and their own reality because its hegemony can be established only in this situation. During the struggle for freedom a significant number of people from the Third World started appropriating knowledge that came to them from West for their own benefit. The reformative movements like communism liberated common masses in the West and therefore was treated as a kind of danger even there. They controlled this movement in two ways by fulfilling the demands of newly liberated common masses by exploiting the Third World and by shifting the focus from real life to texts through movements like new criticism, deconstruction, postmodernism etc. These movements helped Euro- American center not only in controlling their own people but also the Third World. All these theories though seem to be liberating in nature became instruments of re-colonizing the Third world, which was getting political freedom slowly and steadily. In this way only the former colonizers became postcolonial, as far as former colonies are considered they only entered into the phase

of neo-colonialism, which aims at conquering the mental landscapes more than the geographical landscapes. This impact of neo-colonialism is evident in the transnational location of Third World Intellectuals. It works in two ways first it projects as if the writers who write in English are the only intellectuals from the Third World secondly it popularizes only the writers who forward its agenda. A look into the works of all major writers from First World and Third World will reveal this fact. All major Writers from Euro-America write about their own society from their own locations in this way they theorize new ways of looking at their socio-economic, political, ethical, and many more problems. On the other hand what these Diaspora writers are theorizing– they theorize trans-nationalism, need for porous national boundaries, globalization which are instruments of neo-colonization. Their characters like them belong to nowhere, with no commitment towards any society in particular, moving across the borders as if borders in the West are so porous, theorizing this type of creative writing, this type of life and this ideology as the best one in the world. Undoubtedly these Diaspora writers write from their situation of exclusion i.e. willing exclusion from native country and natural exclusion from adopted country.

Undoubtedly a large part of criticism of colonialism comes from the postcolonial thinkers situated in Euro-America but as they enjoy all the benefits of this colonialism such as heavy salaries, comfortable life and international reputation etc. that come through exploitation of Third world resources by the hegemonic First World how their criticism can be true criticism. This situation is like getting job to manufacture weapons for liberating colonized country in the factory of a colonizer country that will surely be used against the colonized country. In this despite, the fact that very strong criticism of colonialism is produced these days situation is not changing because these critics become shareholders in the project of neo-colonialism that is why their project of representing the Third World always strengthens the neo-colonizers. For instance Gayatri Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha the main figures along with some comparatively smaller figures such as Leela Gandhi, Ania Loomba etc. have been projected as the postcolonial thinkers by Euro-American publishing houses. The main reason behind this projection is that they are carrying out the First World project of diverting the attention of the Third world intellectual away from his/her real world towards abstract theories. They are using the voices of these Third World Intellectuals because of two reasons first their voices can be projected as the voices of the Third World and secondly it lures so many other Third World intellectuals to join this group. It is evident from the fact that the intellectuals, writers, social activists and critics who do not help First World projects and whom they cannot appropriate are not published and popularized by First World publishing industry. Therefore, though contemporary theory seems to be liberating it has become an instrument of re-colonizing the Third World because every aspect of this theory is under the control of capitalism which is the main cause behind colonialism.

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