Held to Ransom? The South Asian Diaspora and Postcolonial Discourse

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Abstract

The present paper explores the critical approaches to postcoloniality and subalternity in the theoretical writings of the South Asian diaspora as it seeks to define the nature of postcolonial theory – is it a methodology, an approach, or a theory? Its close association with diasporic studies with its emphasis on exile, homeland and identity and its constant addressivity to the West identifies it with diasporic approaches. If so, where does its use lie for home cultures? Working with Arun Prabha Mukherjee's two books, Bhabha's essays on the "Postcolonial and the Postmodern" and "Unsatisfied: Notes on Vernacular Cosmopolitanism," Gayatri Spivak's translations of Mahasweta Devi's stories alongside her Prefaces, Introductions and translator's notes and her long essay "A Literary Representation of the Subaltern," the discussion foregrounds the gap between political freedom and cultural independence.

Even though there has been a visible shift in translation theories and in the use and intermittent inclusion of native languages, it has still not succeeded in reclaiming cultural territories of intellectual thought. The world of the diasporic critic, no matter where located, is still locked up in a one-sided approach (refer to Vijay Mishra and Satendra Nandan). There is an urgent need to return to a closer examination of the critical views of native writers in order to relocate our objectives and define our spheres and to complete the incomplete process of liberation and reclaim lost territories. This argument requires a better understanding of colonial histories and pushes us towards an in-depth exploration of power relations. The discursiveness which appears to inhabit this discourse must be sharpened towards making a coherent pattern.

Keywords

Culture, homeland, diaspora, postcolonial, aesthetics, subaltern

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Between the years 1945-1950, a large number of colonies gained their independence from foreign rule. But, more than six decades later, we are still embroiled in postcolonial discourse, constantly debating and pursuing its diverse positions. From this point of view it emerges as a parasitical theory, constantly feeding on other theoretical positions and caught up in a colonial situation. At times, it appears that the literary text acts only as an illustration. Postcolonialism is a complex term, diverse, and differently located in each case with affiliation to a different homeland and a different nationality, yet it cloaks itself as one. Critics and theorists themselves are conscious of its indefinability and constantly shifting approaches.[2] What is postcolonialism: a methodology, a theory, a study of encounters and resistance movements, recovery of past (and subaltern) histories or a break from the past? Critics have also commented on its affiliation and close imbrication with diaspora theory. Arif Dirlik, commenting on its affiliations with postmodernism, observed that it marked the arrival of the third world intellectuals in First World Academe (329).[3] In this paper I propose to discuss the postcolonial positions that have emerged from theoretical writings of some of the South Asian diaspora writers and attempt an overview of the definition, purpose and continued need or otherwise of its continued application.

Both Satendra Nandan and Vijay Mishra[4] have commented on the significance of the diasporic consciousness to the understanding of the postcolonial perspective. Several other critics consider postcolonialism to be a theory of the exiled, the displaced, slaves, immigrants and indentured labour. But this overdependence on exile and its other attributes is extremely confining as it rules out or should rule out the populations who have stayed on in their homelands as well as those who have migrated voluntarily. The displacement resulting from voluntary migrations is very different in nature as is the resistance which arises out of it. These continued concerns with different locations, both geographically and historically, and different political circumstances raise in their turn a whole lot of other questions, some of which are voiced by Arun Mukherjee in most of her work, but for the moment her own summing up in the essay "Post-colonialism: Some Uneasy Conjunctures," an essay in which she is critical of the act of homogenising indulged in by many critics, including the authors of *The Empire Writes Back*, should suffice to introduce them. She goes on to list four points, briefly: generalisations, an

[2] Arun Mukherjee, Satendra Nandan, Vijay Mishra and others have all pointed this out at different times. Locations, settler colonies, periods of exile and various other factors such as employment and tenure positions have marked its growth.

[3] See Arif Dirlik, "'The Postcolonial Aura': Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism."

[4] Refer to Satendra Nandan's essay, "The Diasporic Consciousness" and Vijay Mishra, "New Lamps for Old: Diasporas Migrancy Borders." Both are included in *Interrogating Postcolonialism*.

assumed singular representation, downplaying of differences between settler colonies and those colonised in their own territories, and observes that the theory "suppresses internal hierarchies."[5] In *Oppositional Aesthetics* (1994) she has expressed similar views. Her first section is subtitled "The Colour of Theory," in which she emphasises the origins of this theoretical position which provides a comfortable niche to the Third World academe but is confining and subjugating in various degrees. Does one necessarily read in opposition, against the grain? Resistance is one of the main positions of postcoloniality. Arun Mukherjee writes in her introduction, "My work continues to be oppositional to the dominant ideologies of literary and cultural analysis in Euro-America" (*Aesthetics* vii); it attempts to arrive at a necessary method of change in the consciousness of the reader. The meaning will unfold itself only to the reading which looks for it without pre-existing prejudices or foregone conclusions. Mere reading, she points out, is not adequate in itself, just as "simply teaching postcolonial literary texts does not change consciousness" (xii). The context is important, one which includes all kinds of differences – history, economic background, cultural roots and relations with others – else violence is done to non-European writing. Mukherjee's emphasis in both her major works, *Oppositional Aesthetics* (1994) and the later *Postcolonialism, My Living* (1998), is focused on the way one reads, works on contexts and is attentive to its native aesthetics. In her interrogation of postcolonial theory, her continued objection is to general categorisation of Third World cultures ("Introduction," *My Living* xiv-xv). Her work brings out the ironical aspect of postcolonial theory, which is conscious of the search for identity (in the work of the diaspora and of the aboriginals), recovery of histories (subaltern studies) but is primarily coded in general categorisations overlooking differences. In the essay "First World Readers, Third World Texts," her argument is that "Acknowledgement of differences would force us to admit that the impact of colonialism is only one element in the history of societies which go back thousands of years" (*My Living* 6). It is on this very ground that Mukherjee questions the term "universal" in an essay spanning centuries of writing.[6] "Universal" is also a legacy of the Enlightenment and of the West's civilising discourse instrumental in setting up a single normative pattern which has led to discriminatory practices. Freedom

[5] I happened to be at the conference where Arun Mukherjee presented the paper "Some Uneasy Conjunctures." Gareth Griffiths was visibly upset by her criticism of their stand and defended the point of view they had adopted for the *Empire Writes Back.* This defense has taken the shape of the essay included in the same anthology, "Representation and Production: Issues of Control in Postcolonial Cultures," *Interrogating Postcolonialism* 21-36.

[6] Refer to "Universals," *Postcolonialism, My Living* 197-214. The "Universal" is looked upon as an aesthetic quality (201), but anti-universalists call the "universal" approach as a totalisation (203). There are other problematic areas in both the positions and one needs to find a place for equality outside the universalising tendency. The term has always dismissed difference as inferior, uncivilised and unaesthetic.

from it necessarily involves recognition of the multifold difference – of history, culture, language and tradition. Repeatedly Mukherjee turns to translated texts, unwilling to timidly accept the idea of translated cultures. Language is the carrier of cultural traditions and the smoothening out of differences in the act of translation amounts to erasure, ignoring the need to step beyond the surface.

In an essay on Mahasweta Devi, she takes up Gayatri Spivak's translation of Devi's story "Stanadayini" which Spivak has titled "Breast-Mother" and which is Spivak's primary illustration for her essay "A Literary Representation of the Subaltern." Mukherjee is critical of the "cultural specificities that Spivak has erased, perhaps deliberately, in order to make the text more accessible to the western reader." This erasure of cultural specificities, unfortunately "makes the text lose much of its resonance for the Indian reader" ("Of Goddesses and 'Mothers': Goddess Feminism and Mahasweta Devi's 'The Wet-nurse,'" *My Living* 169). Spivak's introductions to her translations of Mahasweta Devi's stories have been criticised by several others, including Sujit Mukherjee,[7] but she defends herself by arguing that "colloquialisms take away the project of an intellectual…. Since the general tendency in reading and teaching so called 'Third World' literature is towards an uninstructed cultural relativism, I have always written companion essays with each of my translations, attempting to intervene and transform this tendency" ("Appendix," *Imaginary Maps* 199). Again, in her "Foreword" to Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi," she specifies her reading methodology which is deconstructive and meant to make the Third World text accessible to the First World. She is conscious of the two different readerships the translations seek to address, but the conviction that an interpretative role has to be played stays with her. Does this precondition the reader's approach and raise the question of the manner this affects the aesthetic response to the text and the understanding of its cultural rootedness? Do we, in the Third World, require these interpretative strategies for our reading from the First World? Does this approach comment on the cultural density of Third World cultures or the lack of effort on the part of the First World reader? The issues are very complicated. Spivak's Introductions are at one level apologies and at another dismissive of the writer's voice in her search for the closest "approximation to the First World scholar in search of the Third World" ("Translator's Foreword to Draupadi" 179). The task she assigns herself is of building an interpretative bridge, constantly moving between the First World scholar and the Third World writer. Spivak's interpretative stance is heavily influenced by Derrida, whose *Of Grammatology* she very ably translated into English, and also absorbed its methodology. In her "Translator's Preface to Derrida's *Of Grammatology,*" she writes, "we think of the Preface, however, not

[7] "Translator's Preface," *Imaginary Maps*. Spivak also mentions Sara Suleri who brought against her the charge of exoticisation.

as a literary but as an expository exercise. It 'involves a norm of truth' although it might well be the insertion of an obvious fiction into an ostensibly 'true' discourse" ("Translator's Preface" to *Of Grammatology* xi). It is this assumption that Mukherjee objects to, when she questions the cultural erasure. In direct contrast to Mukherjee's emphasis on discovering the meaning of the Third World text with reference to its composite origins, Spivak's readings are guided by her placement in the First World as she observes in her "Translator's Preface" in *Imaginary Maps*, "it is the expatriate critic who has to make the effort" to make the US reader see some of the differences (xii).[8] In this Preface, Spivak comes up with two very interesting terms: "ethical singularity" and "organic intellectual," terms that need to be deconstructed in their fullness as they lay a heavy burden on the ethical values of the writer. The first of these is a serious engagement which wants to reach across to the unrevealed meaning, a "secret encounter," and I should think applicable to the reader in her engagement with the text as well as to the writer in her engagement with the subject. But can this secret encounter take place across expository introductions or does it require a free agency of the reader? The second term "organic intellectual" applies to the writer when she gets "into the structure of responsible (responding and being responded to) resistance" (xix-xxiii).

In Spivak's long essay "A Literary Representation of the Subaltern," the interpretation of "Breast-Mother" is framed dominantly in economic terms of production, reproduction and consumption, the decline in demand and the exploitation of a human body – sexually, socially and through a false sense of modernity by the younger women who are reluctant to breastfeed their own children. "Breast-Mother" is about a woman placed in a lower economic (subaltern) position (though from an upper caste), whose fate hangs on the pleasure of the patriarchs and the capitalists. (Am I reading the story in these terms because of Spivak's essay? Would I have looked at it differently if my access had been first to the story?) Spivak lists the following tasks for the interpreter: historian and a teacher of literature to "critically" interrupt each other; the teacher to "re-constellate" the text, in the process perhaps "wrench it out of its proper context"; and likely place it in an alien interpretative context, in this case Spivak mentions western Marxist Feminism. The Third World text, in its turn, may reveal some of its limitations of theoretical frameworks. She goes on to observe, "This might have implications for the current and continued subalternisation of so-called 'third-world' literatures" ("Literary Representation" 91-92). One may not quarrel with some of her assumptions but is it fair to "wrench" it out of its cultural context? Is it not possible to interpret from

[8] Gayatri Spivak frequently uses the terms "western trained informant" and "native informant" with reference to the same culture critic ("Translator's Foreword to 'Draupadi'" 179 and "Translator's Preface" to *Imaginary Maps* 18).

several theoretical positions without doing so? One would also like to ask whether this is a strategy to free the text/literature/society from subalternisation or to relocate it with reference to western critical discourse, without taking into consideration the violence to the text.

The subaltern studies project, despite its apparent uses especially in the recovery of lesser known histories, has not sufficiently debated power structures operating within a society. It has also not sufficiently worked with the caste debates and the working of peasant movements and bourgeois loyalties to the British almost in opposition to each other throughout the nineteenth century. It has popularised the word "subaltern," as it has inherited it from Gramsci, as the proletariat/peasants/oppressed/exploited, *almost* dismissing the colonial subalternity of the upper, wealthy classes, the *bhadralok,* who went so far as to refer to England as "mother country."[9] True, there are a couple of essays on Gandhi by Shahid Amin and Partha Chatterjee recognising his role in endowing the subaltern with dignity and agency. Gandhi was the one who built a bridge of understanding between the politicised sections of society.[10] The Foucauldian analysis of power is extremely relevant to Gandhi's political role as well as to the study of subalternity presented in "Breast-Mother," a narrative which explores the various shifts of power which take place – physicality, disability, religion, capitalism, collapse of the joint family, superficial value of status and several others. In her reading of the story, Spivak wishes to construct it in accordance with her theoretical position and is engaged in reconstructing the text. The essay, she says, will touch upon the "always tendentious question of elite methodologies and subaltern material" ("A Literary Representation" 92). Separating the two – history in the making of literature from its language and reception – she accepts that Mahasweta Devi has always been "gripped by the individual in history," but it was only with the collection of stories in *Agnigarbha* (1978*)* that Devi moved toward writing historical fiction. In an "unpublished intervention at a conference, Devi referred to it [the story] as 'a parable of India after decolonization'" ("A Literary Representation" 96). Proceeding on this assumption, Spivak, dissatisfied by reading the story in accordance with Devi's view, observes, "In order that Mahasweta's parable be disclosed, what *must be excluded* from the story is precisely the attempt to represent the subaltern as such" ("A Literary Representation" 97; emphasis added). A little later in the essay, she again observes, "it is the role of the indigenous subaltern that *must be* excluded" ("A Literary Representation" 97; emphasis added). These exclusions

[9] Refer to the speeches and articles in *Nineteenth Century Documents 1821-1918*, especially Prosonno Coomar Tagore's in 1838 (50).

[10] Refer to Anthony Parel's Introduction to *Hind Swaraj*. Gandhi, in every sense, especially in terms of power was located in a subaltern position. He rose above it to bring about a shift in power. Gandhi, in a way, brought about the reversal in power which Foucault in his "Two Lectures on Power" has talked about as the circulation of power.

would make it possible to say that in the early phases of colonialism, no resistance movements were forthcoming. If nationalism is to be addressed as a discourse, "credited with emancipatory possibilities… then one most ignore the innumerable subaltern examples of resistance…" (97). Her stand is constantly accompanied by explanations and the need to set a direction for the "reading" – explanations geared towards tracing a history of colonial resistance and "disclosing" the parabolic nature of the text. In fact, in her view, nationalism may not have much relevance for the subaltern (98).[11] The application of feminist ideologies of different hues permits a more continued interpretation for the placement of the gendered subaltern and creates space for an ironical subversion of India's worship of mother-goddesses, though the victim still remains passive and powerless. At no time, even through her successive pregnancies, does she experience power. All she experiences is endless progeny sucking at her breast, a repetitive exercise and perhaps economic power as a breadearner, which many women are used to, especially in the lower economic range, and accept as natural. There is a dependency in her reproductive powers as they are tied to another.

Each different interpretative tool works towards a different meaning of the narrative, and is an expository exercise as to what the act of reading can do with a text, a demonstration of deconstructive strategies which simultaneously questions the applicability of elite methodologies. It results in "an unacknowledged analogy, just as the subaltern *is* not elite (ontology), so must the historian not *know* through elite method (epistemology)" ("A Literary Representation" 111). By now one has travelled full circle to the very beginnings. If in the process, though indirectly, we have come to the significance of the location of the narrative in culture, history and politics, but perhaps not orthodox religious beliefs, it is accidental. While Arun Mukherjee places the story against the lion-seated image of the goddess and observes that Mahasweta Devi through her narrative demolishes the myth of the mother-goddess and at the same time exposes patriarchal hypocrisy, Spivak opens out different theoretical approaches. It is to be appreciated that she is conscious of the complicity between "hegemonic [here US] and orthodox [here Indian] readings… [and] the continuing subalternization of Third World material" ("A

[11] One would accept Spivak's position but there are finer aspects which need attention. The history of Bengal in itself is not enough to generalise about the whole of India which had more than 500 states at the advent of the British, several languages, many religions and different economic concerns. There were several regional disparities and a constant shift in political positions with the states signing different treaties with the British, at times, to fight their battles with rival states. there were small, local movements, and the Indigo Rebellion, though confined to a region, lasted for nearly half-a-century from its early simmerings to a later collective action. But the class division was the greater hindrance to any kind of collective unity. Do we not look at the differences in social structures?

Literary Representation" 112). In some measure, Spivak is also guilty as she admits that Devi's work, in order to be accessible to the West, needs to be introduced; this is the moving impulse behind her, often dictatorial, Introductions, Prefaces and the West-directed translations themselves. The end result is a very clinical reading of the narrative. She makes a subtle difference between parable and representation – the first works, at least, at two levels of meaning, while the second links the meaning to the outside world. But if the word "parable" is to be opened out, it is a signifying medium of a familiar story, which has accumulated other meanings in the process of the act of living and the act of telling, while representation is a conscious effort to extract a particular meaning by contextualising it against a background. One always represents a point-of-view, or a case to another. But the "parabolic sign reminds us that the crucial struggle must be situated within a much larger network…" ("A Literary Representation"117). Devi, very consciously, represented but the larger critiquing moves towards a parable. At one level the story is also critiquing the over dominance of religion, which leads both to exploitation – the rise to power on the shoulders of caste and religion by Jashoda's husband, reminding one of Bhabani Bhattacharya's *A Goddess Named Gold* – and to passivity induced by the faith in karma (the inevitability of what is destined). There is, towards the end of the essay, a reference to realism and the "predictable generalization" that other literatures have moved towards language games ("A Literary Representation" 132). For language games, read postmodernism.[12] She, however, has no comments to offer on Devi's literary approach or her efforts to get to know her characters. The authorial interventions are mentioned, but the gap between the writer's awareness and Jashoda's inability to problematise her own condition is of great significance. The two consciousnesses – the writer's and the character's – are different in degree and context. Mahasweta Devi brings to it not only her knowledge of religious legends but also her awareness of western feminism, thus creating space for multiple interpretations, leaving an open question whether the act of reading is more important or the act of framing, and in the process she creates an entry point for the western reader for approaching the text prior to reading or searching for its implications.

Postmodernism has similarly engaged the attention of several postcolonial theoreticians in association with postcolonialism. Both theoretical approaches have their early origin in the post Second World War scenario and are engaged with the fall-out of the war: postcolonialism with identities, issues and aesthetics

[12] Spivak refers to David Hardiman's comment, "[Mahasweta's] down-to-earth style made for excellent theatre, with Gayatri being upstaged" (133). In the concluding paragraph of the essay, she justifies her stand of employing multiple entry points and writes, "If the teacher clandestinely carves out a piece of action by using the text as a tool, it is only in celebration of the text's apartness…. Paradoxically, this apartness makes the text susceptible to a history larger than that of the writer, reader and teacher" ("A Literary Representation" 134).

of the newly politically independent societies and postmodernism with the new cultures from the erstwhile colonies which demanded a new relationship – one of being recognised as equal, a position very different from the ruler-ruled relationship which had an element of subordination. Postmodernism, chronologically and logically, is *post*-modernism and thus conscious of the collapse of Enlightenment norms, structures and values. The line of dissent which had inhabited early modernist writing, especially of Gogol, Dostoyevsky and Conrad – the metaphor of madness, the experience of trauma, the surfacing of the underground man – took the West by surprise. Several decades after Matthew Arnold's essay of the same title, we have Lionel Trilling's essay "On the Modern Element in Literature," a modest recognition of the challenges of opening up modernist writings, which were difficult to pin down to any singular meanings.[13] Aristotelian aesthetics were now redundant – metafiction, metanarratives and new dramaturgical experiments had surfaced, dismissing integrated characters and adapting heavily from third world legends, narratives and approaches.[14] Postcolonialism, on the other hand, made a reluctant beginning with the effort to accommodate Third World protest in literary aesthetics. I propose to focus on four writers: Homi Bhabha, Arun Mukherjee, Kwame Anthony Appiah and Simon During, and their discussions of the relationship between the two movements.[15] Their views bring out the differences of location, situation, race and origin but the issues they raise are at some level shared.

Mukherjee asks the question, "Whose Postcolonialism and Whose Postmodernism?" Their relationship is a contested terrain, and postmodernism is an assimilationist mode. (She cites Helen Tiffin in her support, *My Living* 215). Can cultures and texts outside Europe be termed postmodern? As they originate and represent two different aspects of political histories, power positions and relationships, is it possible to look for some similarities (*My Living*

[13] The opening essay in Lionel Trilling's *Beyond Culture*, "On the Modern Element in Literature," first appeared in *Partisan Review*, 1965. The essay needs to be read alongside Matthew Arnold's essay delivered more than a century earlier, in 1857, "On the Modern Element in Literature." Arnold moves towards recognition, while Trilling recognises the dismantling taking place in art.

[14] The sixties witnessed a burgeoning of experimental theatre in many countries. In the States, Off Broadway and Off-Off Broadway theatre groups and coffee house performances came up. Also refer to La Mama Experimental Theatre Group, Jean Van Itallie's plays, Joseph Chaikin's Poor Theatre and several other groups. Richard Schechner worked with structure and form and turned to Kathakali, an Indian narrative dance drama.

[15] I must confess that for Appiah and During (African and New Zealander respectively) I have used only the extracts in *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*. Eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. Further to this, Mukherjee's essay came out in 1994, Appiah's in 1992, During's in 1987 and Bhabha's in 1992, covering a period of nearly eight years (though in my discussion, I have not followed the chronological order). Perhaps this may explain some of the differences, bearing testimony to the fact that aesthetic judgements reflect temporal shifts and are affected by political situations.

216)? Mukherjee, keeping in view the diversity in migratory patterns, objects to the homogenising tendency. A significant point that Mukherjee makes (and which I too endorse), is "The anti-realist representation, parody, auto-referentiality, problematizing of history, etc. are deemed to be postmodern tendencies, regardless of their purpose or origin in non-European traditions of storytelling" (218). In the same essay, she refers to *tilism, aiyyari, Betal Pachisi* and *Panchtantra.* I would go further and include *tantric* as well as orality. Bankim Chandra's novels belong to the late nineteenth century as does the well-known "classic" of magic and mystery, *Chandrakanta.*[16] Further to this, orality is more than a way of storytelling, it is also a dislocationary practice. Adoption of strategies and modes from Third World countries is woven into postmodernist methods, though she admits that in contrast to the fragmentation of postmodernism, postcolonial criticism reveals "a tendency towards creating a unitary subject" (*My Living* 221).

Kwame Anthony Appiah connects the two with the conjunction "and" in order to bring out the manner in which they run into each other – "The Postcolonial and the Postmodern" – and goes on to refute the generalisation that whatever is influenced by colonisation is postcolonial, "For the *post* in postmodern is a space clearing gesture… and many areas of contemporary African cultural life… are not in that way concerned with transcending – with going beyond – coloniality" (*The Postcolonial Studies Reader* 119). Appiah works towards a freedom from the colonial influence. While the writing of the first stage returned to tradition and engaged in the construction of a "nation," the writing of the second stage itself presented a "challenge to the first stage and moves towards postrealism." It is here that he identifies the shared liberating mode of the two movements (120-21). In contrast to Appiah, a Third World voice, Simon During (a New Zealander) sees postcolonialism and postmodernism as two different discourses presenting a choice, "Postmodernism or Postcolonialism Today." His definition of postmodern is one which "refuses to turn the Other into the Same" (*The Postcolonial Studies Reader* 125). Further it deprives the Other of a voice (and seeks to speak for it?). During considers the postcolonial effort as one which turns towards mimicry and ambivalence. This is in direct opposition to Mukherjee's position, which opposes appropriation and assimilation, as well as to Appiah's, which sees a libratory gesture as the two movements conjunct in breaking away from the colonial shadow. Postcolonialism, for During, is a

[16] The "tantric" tradition is closely associated with rituals of religion and powers of meditation. Bankim Chandra employs it in his novel *Kapal Kundala* (1866). It was a living tradition (even today it is practiced in some pockets of India, as is shamanism). Some of these practices are common in other Third World countries as well as are the other categories which Arun Mukherjee lists as *aiyyari* and *tilism,* which approximates alchemy, magic and impersonations. *Chandrakanta Santiti* is an ongoing narrative in several volumes by Devki Nandan Khatri based on *tilismic* practices written in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

movement directed towards nationalism and national identities, thus its emphasis is different. The suppression of local languages and of minority cultures hinders this. The imposition of English over local languages and cultures erases difference. In During's view Rushdie responds to the postcolonial challenge through using an English which is not transatlantic, interwoven as it is with words from Indian languages, he responds "in terms of the *differend*" (During 128). Referring to Rushdie's novel *Shame*, he points out the double space that the writer occupies: "it certainly does not reflect postmodernity – *Shame*'s purpose is to reconnect shame – that epic, indeed pre-capitalist emotion… to the recent history of Pakistan" (During128). Postcolonialism for During is the delving into histories of the past and reconstructing cultures.

The three critics – Mukherjee, Appiah and During – adopt three very different positions in regard to the relationship between postcolonialism and postmodernism and because of this difference their definitions of postcolonialism also become different. There are three very different standpoints despite the fact that Mukherjee and Appiah move toward similar directions, while During recognises the overriding of local cultures in Australia through the imposition of the ruler's language. During, however, recognises the imposition of English on native languages because of which the cultural surfacing possible in New Zealand (because of the Maori presence), is not possible in Australia despite the presence of the Aborigines (125, 128-29). Bhabha's exploratory journey is, however, differently directed. Conscious of the uneven placement of former imperial and colonial cultures, his attempt is to locate agency. He attributes postcoloniality to the discourses of "minorities," which through their intervention "in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic 'normality' to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nation, races, communities, peoples" express their resistance (*Location of Culture* 171). One needs to look closely at such statements to fully grasp their implications. Is it a concern for, or an acknowledgement of, the presence of the past? Bhabha's thrust in this essay is towards erasing binaries and replacing them by a pluralistic discourse. He inclines towards non-colonial cultural forms. This is in line with his earlier reference to minorities. Moving through frames such as contra modernity and alterity, his emphasis is on "nunciation" (the spoken aspect of language, the definitive expression of a point of view, an articulation, a voice), and strategy, zeroing in on "social text" and agency (*Location of Culture* 183). This follows an extensive discussion of Barthes's *The Pleasure of the Text,* a text where Barthes comments on the different sites which produce meaning. Barthes proceeds in a leisurely, sensuous manner over the texture of the text with its language, resonance, sound and evocation. There is a consciousness of the interplay between the signifier and the signified and their relationship to the reader. He goes on to relate the pleasure of reading to the writer's pleasure of writing, thus

building up a connection between processes, consciousnesses and reception. Bhabha, through this reference, opens out the many layers of linguistic discourse though not stopping to dwell on them. And like some other postcolonialists, he too realises the force of language which moves not only the act of reading but also the act of listening towards interpretative stances. The multiple forces which produce meaning compel the reader to find a multi-pronged interpretative strategy. Postmodernity, like postcoloniality, is located in a "post" situation, where the "individual's narrative" surpasses him and moves outside it (*Location of Culture* 174). It questions modernity. Suppose, for one moment, we drop Spivak's interpretation of Devi's story and replace her strategies of exclusion by Bhabha's strategies of inclusion, we are likely to read it differently. Ambivalence, which for Bhabha inhabits individual and cultural constructs, deconstructs the idea of "representation" of Spivak's title. Bhabha does not disapprove of the "real" or realism. In fact, he turns frequently to psychology and draws attention to Lacan for the formulation of several of his concepts and his writing reflects a deep interest in psychoanalysis. But this very stand towards pluralistic cultures and erasures of binaries is somewhat contradicted in a later essay on cosmopolitanism (1996), when once again an adjective is employed to create a category, "vernacular cosmopolitanism" ("Unsatisfied: Notes on Vernacular Cosmopolitanism" 38-52). Working with his now familiar dialogicity he enters into a cross-cultural discourse with philosophical, psychoanalytic and political positions, in his attempt to formulate a conceptual understanding. The use of the word "unsatisfied" is both an enigma in itself and a key to the essay, which is engaged with the contradictory psychological pulls being experienced by the individual human being. The essential problem remains of connecting the postcolonial need for identity with the need for location and recognition in the larger global world, which incidentally also contains within it the risk of erasure. Later in the essay, Bhabha writes:

> What is the sign of 'humanness' in the category of the transnational 'cosmopolitanism'? Where does the subject of global inquiry or injury stand or speak from? To what does it bear relation; from where does it claim responsibility? It is to a brief *unsatisfied* consideration of these issues that I want to turn to today. ("Unsatisfied: Notes" 40)

Beginning with Fanon and his aspirations to belong to a larger, global world while at the same time retaining (and strengthening) the affiliations of origin, he refers to Fanon's credo: "National consciousness, *which is not nationalism*, is the only thing that can give us an international dimension" (qtd. in "Unsatisfied Notes" 40). This again is one of the many paradoxes that difference of location in history creates. How do we retain the integrity of being and yet give ourselves to a global world? Where can connections be made and where do the

beginnings lie? And most important of all, there is the question of power: who takes the decisions? The problematics of situating the erstwhile colonial world in a future of global oneness are many and perhaps have no easy solutions. In hard political (and cultural) terms, the question which Bhabha poses is of immense significance: "What does it mean, for us, to occupy the space of the 'unsatisfied' – which Adrienne Rich has poetically performed, rather than propositionally prescribed?" ("Unsatisfied: Notes" 47).

At the beginning of this essay, I had asked two questions: how do we define postcolonialism, and has it outlived its relevance? In the body of the essay, an attempt has been made to identify some of the positions that major South Asian critics of the diaspora have adopted. They have evolved diversely, and have contributed to the formulation of strategies of reading and interpreting as well as worked out some conceptual frameworks. Yet in certain aspects postcolonialism remains unsatisfactory in its clubbing together of diverse histories and cultures, its addressivity more towards the West than the home cultures, and its exclusion, except for an occasional reference, of writers located in the home countries and those writing in languages other than English. The research it is resulting in, on the average, inclines to concentrate on identity or on resistance without necessarily opening out other concepts or referring to histories and cultures of the text's world. The continuity of cultural traditions, the embedding of texts in earlier texts and in socio-economic situations are not necessarily fully realised either in the writing of the diaspora alone, or in West-located interpretations because the connections with the writings in vernacular languages is excluded. Are there other directions to be explored? Some Caribbean writers are now exploring "Relations" in cultural and cross-cultural relations (Refer to Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*), and Bhabha continues in his pursuit of location of culture in live political situations. But the insights that postcolonialism has provided have not removed the shadow of the colonial or enhanced the visibility of home and native cultures in the building of theoretical positions. Aijaz Ahmad (located in multiple situations) has raised a number of issues in his work *In Theory,* occupies an oppositional position, interrogates western stereotypes, and suggests changes in syllabi and approaches, but what after that? Issues of beginnings, temporalities, social texts are not brought to any definitive or even temporary conclusion. For these, one has to look towards writers such as U.R. Anantha Murthy, Krishna Sobti, Mahasweta Devi, Girish Karnad, Nayantara Sahgal, Manzoor Ehtesham and Giriraj Kishore.[17] It is they who have provided the Indian perspective as they

[17] Creative writers have often expressed their views both in their creative and in their non-fictional essays. The writers referred to write in different languages: Ananthamurthy in Kannada, Mahasweta Devi in Bengali, Krishna Sobti in Hindi, Girish Karnad in Kannada, Nayantara Sahgal in English, Giriraj Kishore in Hindi, Ehtesham in Urdu/Hindi. For some critical essays on identity, time, narrative structures, processes of writing, culture, postcolonialism, nationalism, social

read rebellion, identity, nationalism, culture, aesthetics, language and history. The historical text has been played out on the native soil, and creative writing creates its own theory, generating a perspective for an interpretative strategy.

Postcolonialism needs to be recognised for what it stands for *now*, at this juncture of history. Its legitimacy, through its emphasis on exile, displacement and alienation, locates it in the diasporic narrative. The prioritisation given to exile, additionally fails to distinguish between its multiple shifts. Vijay Mishra's "impossible mourning" has been overwritten by history itself.[18] The territorial connections with both history and culture need to be fore-grounded despite the global movement of cultures, a movement which dislocates migratory cultures while the home cultures continue to evolve, turn nationalist and retrogressive yet generate counter cultures as they constantly dialogue with political realities. Literature often offers a counter discourse to history. For long we and our theorists have been held to ransom by the terms postcoloniality and subalternity, a constant reminder of a colonial past holding us back from working on our own ground. Have we not yet paid the debt to our colonial past? The real emancipation will come only when our journeys are more inwardly directed and the beginnings of our histories, with all their failures and successes are traced through our own narratives – oral, written or simply lived.[19] Post 9/11, the issues have shifted from nationalities to nations ridden with civil or proxy wars, to religious and economic identities, to the challenges of exclusion which the power of the visa helps in keeping others out selectively, increasingly on grounds of religion, feeding the clash of civilisations theory. One cannot negate or pass judgement on all theoretical positions for they vary in nuance and purpose and admittedly postcolonialism has had its uses. Nevertheless, it has become abundantly clear that freedom from academic subalteranisation is possible only if we move out of this discourse which is ridden with hierarchical divisions and confines us to a limited past, if we wish to embark on a serious consideration of culture, aesthetics and the political realities that surround us today. There is a past that existed even before colonialism and which is not necessarily conservative or orthodox, with which we need to connect both in

discrimination, protest and resistance, see Jasbir Jain, ed. *Creating Theory: Writers on Writing* and *The Writer as Critic*.

[18] See Jain, "Overwriting Memory."

[19] Orality constitutes a large part of storytelling in a society where education was confined to the upper castes. It has thrived in oral and folk traditions of song and music, village storytelling, *chaupal* meetings (evening gatherings in the village), and temple gatherings. To give some examples: Krishna Sobti's *Zindagi Nama* (1979) uses several folk forms, parodies and open discussion sessions as do Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938) and R.K. Narayan's *The Guide* (1958). In the present century both G. Kalyana Rao's *Untouchable Spring* (Telugu, 2000; English translation, 2010) and Sarah Joseph's *Gift in Green* (Malayalam, 2011; English translation, 2011) are based on oral traditions from the scriptures, myths and life.

order to know ourselves and to engage with larger issues of cosmopolitanism and globalisation.

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