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COMMUNICATION IN POST COLONIAL DRAMA

Priyanka Sharma

Student of M.A.(2012-14)
Centre for English Language and Literature
Central University of Orissa
Koraput, Odisha-764020, India
Email: cpriyanka.21@gmail.com
Website: www.cuo.ac.in

Postcolonial Drama; Edited by Nasser Dasht Peyma, New Delhi; 2009; ISBN-81-316-0282-6; Hardcover: 258 pages; Price: Rs.675

The concept of postcolonialism deals with the effect of colonization on cultures and societies. The term as originally used after the Second World War was hyphenated (post-colonialism), had clearly a chronological meaning as suggested by phrases like “after colonialism” or “after independence”, thus designating the post independence period. However, the unbroken term (postcolonialism), is more sensitive to the long history of colonial consequences representing all the characteristics of society or culture from the time of the colonialization to the present. The study of controlling power of representation in the colonized societies had begun in the late 1970s with the texts such as Said’s *Orientalism* (1978), and led to the development of what came to be called “Colonialist Discourse Theory” in the work of critics such as Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha. The use and approval of the term was consolidated by the appearance of *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), which was written by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin.

On the line of the above view, the book ‘*Postcolonial Drama*’ and its first chapter “*Drama and the Postcolonial Experience*” explores the intersection of postcolonial theories and postcolonial drama and the various ways in which it acts as a significant site for resistance strategies used by colonized subjects. Postcolonial Drama includes the plays of the dramatists as Wole Soyinka

from Nigeria, Girish Karnad from India, Athol Fugard from South Africa, Jack Davis from Australia, Vincent O'Sullivan from New Zealand, Kee Thuan Chye from Malaysia, and Derek Walcott from St. Lucia, West Indies. Although these dramatists reflect different cultures and histories, they share the common condition of cultural subjugation, which has informed their dramas. The author opines that, "among the many challenges facing the postcolonial writers is the attempts to both revitalize their traditions and also to contest the preoccupations about their culture. Postcolonial writers want to produce a literature, which helps to reconstitute the hybrid identity of the colonized people. The term 'hybrid' refers to the concept of hybridity, an important concept in postcolonial theory, referring to the integration of cultural signs and practices from the colonizing and the colonized cultures."

The second chapter "*Wole Soyinka's Plays*" analyses Wole Soyinka's three well known plays, '*A Dance of the Forest*' (1963), '*The Road*' (1965), and '*The Bacchae of Euripides*' (1973). Through these plays he brings forth the postcolonial culture, postcolonial identity as well as hopes and frustrations of his nation. Nigerian literature expresses the struggles of a country that has survived the exploitation of colonialism and the devastation of civil war and authoritarianism. This turmoil of Nigerian history which is present in Soyinka's plays has been depicted through this chapter. It further depicts how Soyinka's writings display the influences of both modern European writings and traditional Yoruba mythology.

The first play analysed is "*A Dance of the Forests: A Struggle for the Life and Soul of a Nation*", which Soyinka was commissioned to write for Nigeria's independence celebrations in 1960. Here the author describes how the postcolonial writers often represent the maternal body with an unborn, stillborn, or incomplete child when slowed down or uncertain progress towards decolonization is figured by some kind of failure because in this play the "half-child" or "abiku" goes back and forth between this life and that of unborn which represents the contemporary Nigerian world of spiritual transition, matching the political and social transition of the country. Here an analogy is drawn between the movement of the play across the past, present and future, with the three stages of Yoruban existence – the world of ancestors, the world of the living, and the world of the unborn. Since the play has been set in the period of transatlantic slave trade, the author is of the opinion that Soyinka globalizes the context of corrupt power in Mata Kharibu's

kingdom. Colonialism had bred constant dishonesty and misuse of power in generations of native politicians which we are being reminded of in the play.

“The Road: A Microcosm of the Nigerian Society” was written for and staged at Commonwealth Art Festival in 1965. This section of the chapter presents the profound dislocating impact of the forces of technology and social and cultural change on the daily lives of the newly urbanized working poor of West African cities, who try to make a living out of professions associated with the roads and highways as well as it is concerned metaphysically with sacrifice, but in the context of malicious death on Nigeria’s roads and the rubbishing by community of a lumpen working class.

In the 19th century, the classics were used to promote the cause of colonialism. In the 20th century, however, the African playwrights rewrote the classics to voice their political view and create new work of art. The Greeks, and particularly the figures of Dionysus and Antigone, could represent the individual, civil rights and freedom. The author expresses that, “Postcolonial cultures face the destruction of the past communal self. They feel that their cultures have been caught between international capitalism, the modernist inscription of national identities, and the premodern heritage of tribal communities. Wole Soyinka has explored this postcolonial “inbetweenness” – to employ Homi Bhabha’s term – or hybridity, through his rewritings of violence in ancient Greek drama. In *“The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite”*, Soyinka returns to the roots of both European and African Yoruba theatre, linking Dionysian and Ogunian rites of communal passage, to involve the audience in the ancient sacrificial offering.” This section of the chapter brings forth racism and distinction between “civilized” and “barbarian”.

The third chapter *“Derek Walcott’s Plays”* undertakes the discussion of three well-known plays of Derek Walcott. They are *‘The Sea at Dauphin’* (1954), *‘Ti-Jean and His Brothers’* (1958), and *‘Dream on Monkey Mountain’* (1970). Here the blend of European and African heritages that have influenced the development of identity in the Caribbean is acknowledged. Walcott has experienced the conflicts between the positions of European and African, Anglophone and Francophone, Standard English and Creole. The intersection between Caribbean, British and American culture forms the voice in his dramas. He grew up with three languages – French Creole, English Creole and English – but mostly preferred Patois for the plays. Search for

identity, difference between black and white, subject and ruler, are generally seen as the major themes in his dramas which have been discussed elaborately in this chapter.

The first play discussed here is *“The Sea at Dauphin: Celebrating Man’s Sorrow and Endurance”* which rewrites John Millington Synge’s *‘Riders to the Sea’* (1904). This section of the chapter delves into the poverty prevalent in the Caribbean which runs throughout the play. Naturally the characters here are very poor, their surroundings are depressing and in a very bad condition. It presents the fate of the characters at the hands of unknown force, here the sea. The editor takes the liberty of discussing the character Afa whose ethical views are different from the accepted or traditional ones. Further according to Augustine, Afa lacks love, compassion, mercy, and that he has malice, but Afa thinks that he is not responsible for the misery and the poverty in the world, so he has no obligation to be considerate. Postcolonial drama employs indigenous song and music or hybridized forms, which is further discussed here. Song and music are powerful linguistic signifiers. Songs here represent death as a welcome escape rather than the ultimate disaster for humans, thus, showing futility of life.

An analysis of *“Ti-Jean and His Brothers: The Quest toward Defining the Caribbean Identity”*, is presented in this section whose central theme of exploration of Caribbean identity, lack of interest and self-hatred that affects Ti-Jean’s community which dominates the discussion. This part delves into the journey of Ti-Jean which offers lessons about his personal and collective identity and gets him ready for his heroic task. It further depicts how he battles against the devil and his victory which allows him to free his people from self-imposed slavery and to bring back hope to his community. His opponent is considered to be a symbol of oppression. As discussed, the play presents an example of the potential of Creole folktale to inspire, and to act as a symbol for independence and liberation. For Ashaolu, the play is “an allegory of any revolt against any authoritarian or tyrannical government”.

“Dream on Monkey Mountain: Search for Cultural Identity in the face of Colonialism”, is a political allegory of the state of the blacks in the postcolonial world in general and in the Caribbean in particular. This section discusses how they are cut off from their roots. The main character of the play, Makak is determined to go back to Africa as a part of vision where vision is the one where he dreams of the white Goddess. Thus, it explores a peasant dream of rejecting

the white world and regaining an African heritage. It aptly describes how colonialism has been important in damaging the human soul and humiliating the inhabitants of this part of the world.

The fourth chapter, “*Girish Karnad’s Plays*” deals with three well known plays by the Indian dramatist Girish Karnad. They are: ‘*Tughlaq*’ (1964), ‘*Hayavadana*’ (1971), and ‘*Naga-Mandala*’ (1988). It discusses how Karnad being a postcolonial dramatist hybridizes his interest in Indian’s cultural traditions with Western dramatic literature, theory and criticism. As a result of which Karnad can not only resist the nativist pull to revive the authentic Indian culture but also the temptation of Western hegemonic cultural standards.

“*Tughlaq: Questioning Indian History*”, is the first play being discussed. It focuses on *Tughlaq* being a contemporary play because one can see flashes of Tughlaqian attitude – heartless yet well meaning – in contemporary political structures too. On one hand, Tughlaq makes foolish decisions – he shifts the capital of India from Delhi to Daulatabad to centralize administration, makes copper coins equal in value of silver dinars and shamelessly designs a conspiracy to kill his own brother and father at prayer hour – on the other hand, he is determined to work for his people, to ensure their happiness and to take initiative in the direction of communal equality. This section delves into the fact that how the king tries to impose secular mindset on his people because in doing so, he hopes to secure an immortal place for himself in the history, and he fails. This “colonial” ruler realizes that he is isolated and that there is a vast cultural difference between himself and the people he rules.

The parallel with British colonialism in India becomes relevant with a postcolonial reading of “*Hayavadana : A Synthesis of Folk Theatre, Tradition, Indian Mythology and Contemporaneity*”, since the colour of skin is the visible marker of difference, which is to be signaled by the masks Karnad intends the male actors to put on, depicted through the two men, Devadatta and Kapila fighting over one woman, Padmini. The discussion revolves around the fact that masks are powerful signifiers concerned with mimesis, mimicry, obscurity and identity throughout colonial and postcolonial period. The black and the white masks, which indicate the characters changing identity, echo Fanon’s ‘*Black Skin, White Masks*’.

With the help of Karnad’s next play, “*Naga-Mandala: A Story Theatre and a Postcolonial Feminist Play*”, the author gives a commentary on the oppression of women, and the injustice

done to women by patriarchal culture. It analyses the fact that a woman can be either a whore or a goddess, nothing in between. In addition the test is only for her not for man. Man is never criticized or punished for his brutish behavior as is the case of Appanna in the play who commits adultery without facing any objection. Silence is the curse for repressed and marginalized women. The discussion here is also based on the skill with which Karnad intertwines two stories thereby creating a piece of theatre that uses storytelling form to explore the importance of stories in all our lives.

Wole Soyinka, Derek Walcott and Girish Karnad write from and of a common cultural subjection and oppression, and share the desire to use theatre to explore and verify their cultural substance. They have done so in remarkably similar and different ways. This is as a result of their individual personal mental orientations and the cultural forces as well as realities that have nurtured them.

Hence, on the whole, '*Postcolonial Drama*' by Nasser Dasht Peyma, will undoubtedly be considered as one of the most remarkable and comprehensive book encompassing within itself three popular dramas each by three major dramatists sharing common cultural and historical background, thereby the book being an asset to the inspiring practitioners, scholars and students of postcolonial drama and other related topics.