
UNIT 1 ORIENTALISM AND AFTER

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Defining Orientalism
- 1.3 The Functioning of Orientalism
 - 1.3.1 Abstract Knowledge and Realistic Comprehension
- 1.4 Said's Methodology
 - 1.4.1 Said's Audiences
 - 1.4.2 Said's Palestinian Background
- 1.5 Critique of Orientalism
- 1.6 Said's Afterword to Orientalism
- 1.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.8 Questions
- 1.9 Glossary

1.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to examine the concept of Orientalism as propounded by **Edward Said**. In the process of examining the theory we shall define Orientalism, look at the way it operates and analyse the motivation behind this cultural- theoretical phenomenon. We will also trace **Said's** line of argument in order to follow the links between how he shapes the disparate sectors that have contributed to Orientalism as a discourse. We will look at the methodology **Said** adopted, the audiences he wrote for and his own personal location that motivated him to evolve this theory. In conclusion we will attempt a critique of his theory, discuss the loopholes in his argument pointed out by critics in the last twenty years and also look at the *Afterword to Orientalism* that **Edward Said** added later to this book.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Edward Said's *Orientalism* has been credited with opening out the field of Postcolonial Studies / Colonial Discourse Analysis because of its persistent linking together of the colonial experience with the Empire, and of politics with culture. It has served as an agency to the formerly marginalised peoples and has allowed the Empire to write back. *Orientalism* was published in 1978. This work offered a critique of oriental studies or what is also, known as the construction of knowledge of the Orient by the West. **Said's** book generated a lot of hostility among scholars of the Orient who accused **Said** of crossing the line between arts and politics. But many who found its iconoclastic violation of boundaries and conventions in unsettling received ideas of Orient and Occident liberating and enabling greeted it with immense enthusiasm.

1.2 DEFINING ORIENTALISM

What do we understand by Orientalism? **Said** gives us three definitions in the *Introduction* to his book. It would be appropriate that we examine each definition before we attempt an overall characterisation of Orientalism. **Said** states the initial meaning to be the following:

Anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient – and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist – either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism. (p.2)

What is notable in this definition is the number of disciplines that **Said** includes in the study of Orientalism, pointing to the fact that they are all interlinked rather than separate entities. Thus, the study of humankind, the study of the origin, development and structure of societies, the study of the past and the study of languages, obviously share a great deal of common ground, but construct different kinds of knowledge structures. **Said's** attempt to define Orientalism begins by transgressing academically sanctified disciplinary boundaries by claiming that academic classifications should be disregarded when their subject matter is the Orient. This takes us into the next definition.

The second definition that **Said** gives is a more general one, though it still pertains to the academy; **Said** says:

Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident". (p.2)

With the second definition **Said** moves to a much broader area of the academy – the study of the very nature of knowledge, and the study of existence itself. The parameters of the study of Orientalism then become almost limitless, and open the floodgates for writers from a variety of disciplines:

Poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists and imperial administrators". (p.2)

We are now moving from the theoretical space of academics out into the political realm of administration. The scope of writers who can be brought into the purview of Orientalist writing extends to include creative artists and administrators as well. The internal academic boundaries that were transgressed in the first definition now take a step further to violate the boundary between academics and politics, opening up a number of possibilities for studying Orientalism. **Said** now moves out of the academy and its related disciplines into the world of power, authority and control in his third meaning. This definition is located in a historical, material context and articulates his thesis more clearly:

Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. (p.3)

A corporate institution, by definition, refers to a large group of people that perform multiple functions in different fields but act as a single entity. The academy that has thus, disseminated knowledge of the Orient is now replaced with a corporate institution whose function and powers are far more than the academy could ever have. Orientalism's main feature is that it is constituted of the West and it deals with domination of the Orient through every socio-political institution available to it.

To structure the field of Orientalism, **Said** uses **Foucault's** notion of a discourse, that is, of constituting a discursive field that is able to unite disparate materials as an area of study. **Said** argues that it is only by examining Orientalism as a systematic discipline that it is possible to understand that European culture has not just managed but also produced the Orient "politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically,

scientifically, and imaginatively". *Orientalism* tries to show how the West achieved this, but more important than that, it also asserts that the reason this immense project was undertaken was because Europe "gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self." (p.3) That is, the Occident needed to produce the Orient as a means of defining itself as a superior power.

Said makes one more attempt to define the enormous scope of Orientalism later in the *Introduction*. He does not consider the institutions or the areas of study/practice that can be seen as orientalist; he looks at the methods by which it is produced and established, or the modes through which it is expressed. He defines it as "a *distribution* of geopolitical awareness...an *elaboration* not only of a basic geographical distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident) but also of a whole series of 'interest'...a certain *will* or *intention* to understand...." (p.12 original emphasis) He concludes by clarifying his argument thus:

Indeed, my real argument is that Orientalism is – and does not simply represent – a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with "our" world.
(p.12)

Here, Orientalism is defined as a dimension of the modern culture of the West as manifest in its politics and academic disciplines, with the express aim to gain authority over the Orient. Having defined the scope of Orientalism in different ways, let us now examine how Orientalism works as a discursive field of study.

1.3 THE FUNCTIONING OF ORIENTALISM

We have to see how a large number of disciplines, interests, practices, and power groups function together in concert under Orientalism without a written contract. **Said** uses **Gramsci** and his idea of cultural hegemony to explain how Orientalism functions effectively. **Antonio Gramsci's** analysis of society distinguished between civil and political society. **Gramsci** argued that civil society is made up of voluntary affiliation, in which he listed schools, families and unions. Membership to these units is voluntary and affiliation to the "influence of ideas, of institutions, and of other persons" is by consent, not domination or coercion. Culture operates within civil society and the cultural leadership that emerges through the process of some cultures dominating over others is what **Gramsci** calls 'hegemony'. **Said** points to the Gramscian notion of the cultural hegemony of the industrial West to show how Orientalism is produced and maintained in a historical, socio-political context.

The move from the last definition of Orientalism to **Gramsci's** formulation of cultural hegemony is a smooth one. **Said** locates the central idea that defines the culture of Europe as "the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures." (p.7) Orientalism arises out of Europe's need to identify the *Other* over whom it can assert its superiority in a neat binary of "us" against "them". The binary of *Self/Other* is not a static one; Orientalism's power and longevity is founded on what **Said** terms its strategy of "flexible *positional* superiority". (p.7 original emphasis) As a result of this strategy it is possible to have series of relationships and circumstances between the West and the Orient in which the West always emerges superior. **Said** points to the historical circumstances that facilitated this assertion of superiority of culture – that of Europe's extraordinary ascendancy from the late Renaissance to the present. The economic and political situation of Europe and the Orient allowed diverse people to be present in the Orient and to speak about it – that is, to construct knowledge about it – with very little resistance from the Orient itself.

The linguistic appeal of *Orientalism* lies in the range of occupations, disciplines and institutions it is able to catalogue in its examination of the complex, multi-layered formation of this field: "the scientist, the scholar, the missionary, the trader, [or] the soldier" (p.7), a list of people that includes scientific and intellectual pursuits, religion, business and the military, occupations that are not usually seen in relation with each other as sharing common grounds. While it is well known that the trader and the missionary were often followed by the soldier in the process of colonisation (as with the **East India Company**), or that religion and business were given safe entry by the army in colonised areas, the idea that they all worked towards the common goal of orientalising it is novel.

The emerging theories of mankind and the universe in anthropology, sociology, linguistics, race and history are catalogued and documented further by **Said**. Postcolonial theory has examined in detail how each of these disciplines and the theories that emerged from their 'academic research' functioned to support and justify colonisation while maintaining their sanctity as pure, apolitical scholarship. It is important to remember that all these theories of the Orient emerged from what **Gramsci** calls the civil society and thus illustrate "Western hegemony over the Orient during the period from the end of the eighteenth century". (p.7) **Said** is not concerned with the state institutions of the army, the police and the central bureaucracy, which form the political society and function through domination.

1.3.1 Abstract Knowledge and Realistic Comprehension

We discern a few gaps in **Said's** theoretical mapping of divisions in the contemporary world. **Said** is able to bring in such an impressive array of socio-political institutions in his study of *Orientalism* because he shows scant respect for the self-preserving boundaries they have drawn around them in academic study and research. We noted in the second definition of *Orientalism* that **Said** has advanced from transgressing boundaries of academic disciplines to violating those drawn between academics and politics. While a quarter of a century later we are well aware that the nexus between politics and culture is one that is used to gain authority and establish hegemonic control over society, **Said** needed to labour the point to convince the academy that saw anything influenced by politics as tainted.

In **Said**, the distinction between pure and political knowledge is an extremely tenuous one. **Said** spends the time and effort on establishing this fact because he is defining *Orientalism* as a study of politics and culture, or imperialism and culture, of which culture belongs to the realm of pure, academic knowledge and politics to the world of power and administration, and the two were rarely seen as having anything in common. To argue that the Orient is a wilful, man made construct **Said** first needs to discuss how knowledge is constructed first.

Said outlines the distinction made in the academy between the humanities, and the ideological sciences such as economics, politics and sociology. In the case of the former / the humanities, this area of study is supposed to be completely divorced from politics, irrespective of the academician's political loyalties, whereas, in the case of the latter (i.e., the ideological sciences such as economics, politics and sociology), the ideology of the scholar/researcher is said to be woven into his/ her material. However, both these streams are supposed to produce "true" scholarship that is untouched by his/her political beliefs or social, class position. **Said** explains it by saying that just as texts always exist in context with other texts – like the idea of inter-textuality – so too:

Political, institutional, and ideological constraints act in the same manner on the individual author." (p.13)

This definition would imply that it is impossible for a European or even an American who is studying the Orient to be aware of the fact that he/she belongs to a power that

has vested interests in the Orient, and that however subconsciously, this will be the first reaction to the Orient. Thus, the individual response will be secondary. If this argument is, extended to the study of Orientalism itself, it would as **Said** says include the entire field of study, imagination and scholarly institutions as being governed by political imperialism to such an extent that it is impossible to bracket it off.

For **Said**, investigating the political ideology that shapes academic or creative writing is not demeaning but highly enabling. It helps us to understand "the persistence and the durability of saturating hegemonic systems like culture" and to see how they enabled the production of writers and thinkers rather than inhibiting them. And by investigating the construction of Orientalism as a dynamic exchange between those writing about the Orient and the political concerns of the empire we are able to address a large number of questions that appear in the space opened up by yoking culture to imperialism:

What other sorts of intellectual, aesthetic, scholarly, and cultural energies went into the making of an imperialist tradition like the Orientalist one? How did philology, lexicography, history, biology, political and economic theory, novel writing, and lyric poetry come into the service of Orientalism's broadly imperialist view of the world? (p.15)

The question now is not of finding which disciplines were complicit with empire. Once it is accepted that no pure knowledge is possible, the question can be reframed as one of investigating *how* individual authors and disciplines have worked towards constructing Orientalism. Being a theorist **Said** moves within well-defined parameters. Here, we can see what can be learnt from the critical tools and methods used by **Edward Said**.

1.4 SAID'S METHODOLOGY

A structure of knowledge or discourse, must first lay bare the tools it uses in gathering, formulating, and disseminating this knowledge. Up to this point **Said** has shown us how he has put together his material. He now turns his methodology, or how he formulates his material into a coherent theory. In the next section he will address the question of audiences.

Said limits his scope and material by temporal and spatial parameters; that is, according to a period of time and geographical spaces. Focussing on the Anglo-French-American experience of the Arabs and Islam, **Said** says that he is interrogating the intellectual authority of the West over the Orient, and that as the study of authority is intrinsic to any description of the Orient it forms part of his methodology. Much of this study of Orientalism is describing the "historical authority in and personal authority of Orientalism" (p.20) because, according to **Said**, authority must be analysed. **Said** argues forcefully for the need to interrogate authority, for, as he says, there is nothing mysterious or natural about it. Authority is consciously formed, it is irradiated, that is, it is made intelligible, and then it is disseminated or distributed, spread. Furthermore, authority has status, and it is well known that the dominant power or authority also establishes canons of taste and value for society at large. The dominant power that holds authority also defines the dominant ideology so that it becomes difficult to distinguish it from what it dignifies as true: Thus it becomes essential to analyse this authority and to interrogate how it is formed and how it functions.

Said's methodological devices to study authority are what he calls *strategic location* and *strategic formation*. Strategic location is "a way of describing the author's position in a text with regard to the Oriental material he writes about". (p.20) Any writer of the Orient must locate himself in relation to the Orient in order to represent it or speak on its behalf. This location is done in terms of the narrative voice,

structure, images, themes and motifs, all of which function in concert to represent the Orient to the reader. It is important to note that each of these features is consciously chosen from numerous options. In addition to this, each text aligns itself strategically to a formation of texts: "it *affiliates* itself with other works, with audiences, with the Orient itself." (p.20) Over time, these formations gain strength and authority through institutions and discourses. These formations can be analysed in terms of relationships between works, audiences, and particular aspects of the Orient. Some examples of these formations – sub-genres – are philological studies, travel books and oriental fantasies.

Said is not interested in analysing what lies hidden within the Oriental text but rather focuses on the exteriority of the text. **Said** is not concerned with a close reading of the text itself; he is interested in studying how the poet or scholar represents the Orient, how he describes it, how he makes it speak, for there are no "natural" descriptions of the Orient, no great original that needs to be studied to see how closely it has been depicted. As he had argued earlier, the emphasis is on the fact that all representations of the Orient need to be seen as representations, and evidence of this can be found in style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices and historical and social circumstances. The methodology of *Orientalism* is to study location and formation of the writer and the text, and to interrogate the evidence of how the Orient is constructed or represented in a particular text in order to align it to the larger body of Oriental writings. This brings us to the next section. Who was **Edward Said** actually aiming the text at? Who was he writing for? Let us try and analyse who, his readers were/ are.

1.4.1 Said's Audiences

Said has several audiences in mind while writing this book. The first is the literary community, students of literature and criticism, like himself. This study is relevant to this particular audience because it shows the interrelations between society, history, and textuality. It also exposes the connections between culture and politics throwing open questions of politics, ideology and the logic of power. The second audience is the contemporary student of the Orient, from the university scholar to the policy maker. This study will present to them their own genealogy and perhaps the critique will make the question the assumptions on which their work depends. Third comes the general reader who may be interested with the western conceptions and treatments of *Others*, and with the role played by western culture in global politics. And the last category is the Third World reader who needs to be aware of the strength of western cultural discourse.

In *Orientalism*, **Said** has felt the need to devote some space to the kinds of readers he is addressing and also to comment on how this work may be useful to them. Since he is setting out to interrogate Orientalism through its own texts and authors, he wants to ascertain that his readings of these texts will be received in a manner that serves to unsettle the received discourse of Orientalism, and not simply be added to the discourse itself. As a Professor of Literature and Criticism he is keen to guide the reader as to how his book should be read. All works of literature are affected both by the writer as well as his/ her personal experiences. Let us now grasp **Said's** own background, the personal-intellectual biographical point from where he wrote *Orientalism* and whether this could affect his perception.

1.4.2 Said's Palestinian Background

The argument ends with **Said** turning his investigative gaze on himself to look at his own historical, socio-political, geographical, and national location, and to see how it effects his construction of knowledge of the Orient. He acknowledges that he has a personal investment in this study that arises from his awareness of being an "Oriental" as he grew up in Palestine and Egypt, both British colonies. The domination of the culture of the Orientals by the West has been a powerful factor in

their lives. **Said** gestures towards his Western education in the British colonies as well as in the United States to point to his persistent awareness of being an Oriental, but he only parenthetically locates the construction of this discourse of Orientalism as one that is enabled by this Western education, and more particularly through his own specialisation as a literary critic. His many invocations to literary critics such as **Foucault, Gramsci, Raymond Williams** which attest to his awareness of literary theory, and his immense knowledge of the High Canon of European literature have given him the tools with which to interrogate the cultural hegemony of the West in orientalisng the Orient. The immediate experience that have in part given rise to the writing of this book come from the fact that he is an Arab Palestinian living in America, a life which is particularly disheartening:

The web of racism, cultural stereotypes, political imperialism, dehumanizing ideology holding in the Arab or the Muslim is very strong indeed, and it is this web which every Palestinian has come to feel as his uniquely punishing destiny." (p.27)

Critics have noted that Edward **Said** is no ordinary Arab Palestinian. Instead, he is a distinguished academician and thinker. His relevance is also unmistakeable, it is worth remembering that the hate crimes which appeared in the aftermath of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in the United States of America (US of A) immediately targeted all people who looked oriental. Let us now get back to our discussion and attempt a critique of Orientalism in the next section.

1.5 CRITIQUE OF ORIENTALISM

Iconoclastic violation of the boundaries between academic disciplines and between politics and culture is what we associate Orientalism with. Only Orientalism could dare to disturb the might of Postcolonial Studies that appeared in its wake. It opened a huge number of questions, innumerable spaces for interrogation that the academy had not ventured into before. However, in the last twenty odd years since the publication of *Orientalism* some relevant criticisms have been levelled against it.

Critics have said that **Said** is re-enforcing the strength and authority of the discourse of Orientalism by reifying the binary of the Occident and the Orient. He is treating the West as a unitary, homogenised space that functions as one cohesive body. Germany, Britain, France, Spain, Portugal and the United States of America all act of one will. This homogenisation is not only spatial, it is also temporal, going all the way back to **Aeschylus** and extending to the present. By representing only the apparatus of the all-powerful West and ignoring the resistance to this discourse of authority by the Orient, he is actually perpetuating this practice. He is depriving the Orient of all agencies representing it as completely submissive and passive. Finally, by making no attempt to study the ways in which this discourse was received by either the West or the Orient the study of Orientalism is deeply flawed.

It is perhaps important to remember that *Orientalism* was written in the late 1970s and while it is true that much of what it labours to prove – the intrinsic link between culture and politics, for instance – is self-evident to us today, indeed is one of the tools we use to read all literary and non-literary texts, it provoked hostile reactions from a large number of academicians and orientalists when it was first published because it was so radical. *Orientalism* is still an important beginning in studying the process of decolonisation.

1.6 SAID'S AFTERWORD TO ORIENTALISM

In the *Afterword to Orientalism*, (1995), **Said** tries to correct misreadings and "wilful misunderstandings", but he also rehearses his arguments from *Orientalism* and traces the intellectual developments that followed the publication of *Orientalism* and

acknowledged its influence. The first part of the *Afterword* deals in detail with misreadings, and the politics of those who have "willfully" misread and misconstrued **Said's** argument. That section is not of much interest to us. But in the second section of the *Afterword* **Said** traces the political developments that have taken place globally and then looks at the scholarship and criticism that has followed in the wake of these changes. This section of the *Afterword* is of immense importance to our subject of postcolonial studies and decolonising the mind.

In the *Afterword*, **Said** focuses on the serious rift that he perceives in the public consciousness between the old ideas of Western hegemony and the newer ideas that have taken hold among subaltern and disadvantaged communities. **Said** points out that the disadvantaged communities, among whom he counts the formerly colonised, the enslaved and the suppressed, are no longer silent or unaccounted for by anyone except "senior European and American males". **Said** gestures towards the revolution in the consciousness of women, minorities and the marginalised that has been taking place worldwide, and says that this movement is so powerful that it has affected mainstream thinking worldwide.

After a brief discussion of postcolonialism and post modernism **Said** articulates the crucial difference that he perceives between them. Postcolonialism is motivated by urgent historical and political imperatives, while postmodernism is relatively detached. Consequently, their approaches and results are completely different even though there are some overlaps. Reviewing the enormous amount of postcolonial work that has been done since the early 1980s **Said** says that although this work does emphasise the local, regional and contingent, the connection comes from the concentration on a universal set of concerns, "all of them relating to emancipation, revisionist attitudes towards history and culture, a widespread use of recurring theoretical models and styles". Most of this work critiques Eurocentrism and patriarchy. **Said** singles out India's Subaltern Studies as the most remarkable in this field:

Perhaps the most brilliant revisionist work was done not in Middle East, but in the field of Indology with the advent of Subaltern Studies, a group of remarkable scholars and researchers led by Ranajit Guha. Their aim was nothing less than a revolution in historiography, the immediate goal being to rescue the writing of Indian history from the domination of the nationalist elite and restore to it the important role of the urban poor and the rural masses. (p. 352)

Here, **Said** points out that one of the most interesting developments of postcolonial studies was re-reading of "canonical cultural works" in order to re-investigate their assumptions and to go beyond the master-slave binary that had stifled them up till then. **Said** sees this critical work of the postcolonial field as influential as the writing of radical literature by authors such as **Rushdie** and **Walcott**. *Orientalism* was based on a rethinking of what was perceived for centuries to be an unbridgeable chasm between the East and the West. **Said's** most notable contribution was to "challenge the notion that difference implies hostility, a frozen reified set of opposed essences, and a whole adversarial knowledge built out of those things".

1.7 LET US SUM UP

Using **Foucault's** notion of a discourse to structure the field of Orientalism, **Said** has argued that it is only by examining Orientalism as a systematic discipline that it is possible to understand that European culture has not just managed but also produced the Orient "politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively". *Orientalism* tries to show how the West achieved this, but more important than that, it also asserts that the reason this immense project was

undertaken was that because Europe “gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self.” The methodological devices that **Said** has used for studying the authority of Orientalism are what he calls *strategic location* and *strategic formation*. **Said** is not interested in analysing what lies hidden within the Oriental text but rather focuses on the exteriority of the text. Although there are several flaws in **Said**’s argument, it is important to remember that he was a pioneer in this field and is seen as the person who opened out the area of Postcolonial Studies.

1.8 QUESTIONS

1. How does Said define Orientalism? Why does he offer more than one definition?
2. How does Said distinguish between pure and political knowledge? What are the implications of blurring the line between the two?
3. What does Said mean by demystifying authority?
4. What are the salient features of Said’s methodology?
5. Point out the flaws, or loopholes, in Said’s argument. Do they seriously undermine his argument?

1.9 GLOSSARY

Discourse:	To seriously speak or write on a topic, to speak or write about a subject in a formal context and at length
Disseminate:	To distribute or spread something, especially information
Genealogy:	Study of the history of families, and the line of descent from their ancestors
Homogenise:	To make homogenous; of same kind, having the same kind of constituent elements
Iconoclastic:	Challenging or overturning traditional beliefs, customs, and values
Ideology:	system of social beliefs, a closely organised system of beliefs, values, and ideas forming the basis of a social philosophy or programme
Methodology:	Organising system, the methods or organising principles underlying a particular area of study
Received ideas:	Accepted notions

UNIT 2 LITERATURE AND NATIONALISM

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Literature and Nationalism
- 2.3 About Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory'
- 2.4 Three World Theory or Unitary World
 - 2.4.1 Third World Literature Defined by Time, Period or Geographic Location
- 2.5 Canonisation of Third World Literature
- 2.6 Location of Jameson's Text
- 2.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.8 Questions
- 2.9 Glossary

2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we will take up **Aijaz Ahmad**'s essay *Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory'*, which he wrote in response to **Frederic Jameson**'s *Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capital* in an attempt to analyse the concept of literature and nationalism.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

We will read through **Ahmad**'s argument and try to understand **Jameson**'s category of the *Third World* and the major flaws that **Ahmad** finds in **Jameson**'s reasoning. For this we need to first comprehend **Jameson**'s theory, then **Ahmad**'s disagreements with it, and finally to look at **Ahmad**'s premise of inhabiting a unitary world as an alternative to **Jameson**'s theory. We will then apply this theory to the category of *Third World Literature* as defined by **Jameson** and redefined by **Ahmad**. It is important to fully comprehend one section before moving on to the next in order to avoid being confused; it is also essential to distinguish between **Ahmad**'s discussion of **Jameson**'s theory and the counter-construction of his own, if we are to understand what we mean by literature and nationalism. Let us first grasp what we mean by literature and nationalism.

2.2 LITERATURE AND NATIONALISM

Before we begin discussing **Ahmed**'s essay let us examine the two terms: literature and nationalism. We should also see as to how these two entities are interlinked and how they fit into the concept of decolonising the mind. Colonial literature as we are aware by now proclaimed both the superiority and rightness in every aspect of colonial life. During the early years of the twentieth century colonialism and England's imperial authority over her colonies was on the decline. The English had lately been defeated in the Boer War. Moreover, across the empire various movements and groups that were resisting the empire began emerging in the form of cultural revivals or by raising hitherto, unheard voices against imperialism. At the same time even "white colonial nationalism" was as **Elleke Boehmer** calls it

“growing more assertive”. What was happening was a complicated affair – an emerging nexus between various causes and circumstances. While writers like **D H Lawrence** were proclaiming London to be the heart of the world (*Kangaroo*, 1923), (Boehmer, p 99), other writers were busy expressing a pride in their own cultures in an effort to revive the feelings of nationalism however, nascent.

Politically, there was a lot of development in the colonies. Australia became a Federation in 1901, the Swadeshi Movement gathered momentum in Bengal in 1905-08, and there was a gradual upsurge in the influence of the Indian National Congress in the freedom struggle, and the call for the First Civil Disobedience Movement was made in 1921-22. Other colonies in Africa like Kenya, Nigeria and Southern Africa were experiencing civil unrest. The South African Native National Congress (to be later renamed the African National Congress) was formed in 1912. Moreover, the 1920s saw the rise of the black African Mass Movement under the inspirational guidance of **Marcus Garvey**, a Jamaican emigrant. The phenomenon was to be reflected in works of other Black Nationalists. Writers across the empire were validating their own experience by:

Producing anthropological studies, social history and journalism as well as poetry and fiction to promote their cause. (p. 100, Elleke Boehmer).

It was in the form of a cultural revolution – a form where colonial history was being re-interpreted, where religion was being revived, and where elegiac and nostalgic poetry was being written. It was through such a cultural revolution that the feelings of strong nationalism, a pride in all that that was native was being mobilised. Literary traditions that were in fact inherited from the colonisers now came to be, not only, appropriated, and translated, but also indigenised to represent anti-colonial self-expression. Colonised writers were taking up a stance against colonial rule and doing so by utilising the very tools that were handed to them by the colonisers. They were taking western genres of the novel as well as short fiction as a means of expressing their own perceptions of culture, space and colonised experience.

Such writers included **Rabindranath Tagore** and **Raja Rao** from India, **Claude McKay** from Jamaica and **Solomon Plaatje** from South Africa. From what has been said so far, it may be discerned that the feelings of cultural pride, the going back to one's roots, looking for inspiration within one's own cultural sphere along with the various political movements were part and parcel of anti-colonialism and the growth of a sense of nationalism. Let us now move on to analysing **Ahmed's** essay in the following section.

2.3 ABOUT JAMESON'S RHETORIC OF OTHERNESS AND THE NATIONAL ALLEGORY

In this essay, **Ahmad's** analysis of the *Three World Theory* and of *Third World Literature* is done from a Marxist perspective. It is important to note, that within the field of Postcolonial Studies there are different kinds of theories, and very often theorists disagree vehemently with each other. In this essay we see **Ahmad** disagreeing with **Jameson** even though they both belong to the same ideological persuasion. There is one further point that we need to pay special attention to: the fact that **Ahmad** has a radical materialist position and does not either detract from or add to the relevance or credibility of his argument. As **Said** has shown us in Unit one, it is impossible for any individual to produce 'pure' knowledge; the foregrounding of one's politics instead of taking away from the argument opens out many other possibilities for discussion. While reading through this Unit you should be thinking of your own position in relation to **Ahmad's**, and then analyse your own politics in relation to Marxism. As postcolonial subjects, all our readings of texts will be influenced by our postcoloniality, whether we are aware of it or not.

Aijaz Ahmad's *Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory'* first appeared in 1987 in the Fall issue of *Social Text*, and was later reprinted in 1992 as a chapter in his book, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*. Here, Ahmad interrogates Jameson's conception of the world as divided in three neat categories of the First World, Second World and the Third World, and then his construction of the binary opposition of the First World and the Third World. Ahmad argues that there is no such thing as a theoretical category of *Third World Literature*, that it is not possible to construct such a category without being reductive.

One of the examples that Ahmad gives for the impossibility of constructing a theoretical category of *Third World Literature* is that the vast majority of literature produced in Asia and Africa is not written in the languages of the metropolitan countries and is therefore unavailable to the literary theorist as s/he goes on to construct this category. Since it is only the rare literary theorist in the United States of America or Europe who has fluency in any Asian or African language there are major literary traditions from both these places that are completely unknown to the literary theorist.

However, the major difficulty, according to Ahmad, in creating a category of *Third World Literature* is the Three World theory itself, and Ahmad addresses this question at length before turning to the issue of literature. For Ahmad, Jameson defines the First World as 'the capitalist first world', the Second World as 'the socialist bloc' and the Third World comprises 'countries that have suffered colonialism and imperialism'. Jameson asserts that he is using these terms in 'as essentially descriptive way'. Ahmad's rejoinder to this is worth quoting in some detail:

...when it comes to knowledge of the world, there is no such thing as a category of the 'essentially descriptive'; that 'description' is never ideologically or cognitively neutral; that to 'describe' is to specify a locus of meaning, to construct an object of knowledge, and to produce a knowledge that will be bound by that act of descriptive construction.
(p.99)

The point that Ahmad is making is that no description can be neutral, or innocent, and that any process of describing involves a construction of knowledge by the person who is describing, a construction of knowledge that is influenced by his/her own ideology. From the knowledge thus created by description, judgment of classification, generalisation and value can be made, thus the object of knowledge is bound by that act of descriptive construction. The central issue, however, is the manner in which these terms are defined. The first and second worlds are defined according to their production systems, that is, capitalism and socialism. But the third world is defined according to its experience of suffering under colonialism or imperialism.

This classification divides the world into those who make history and those others that are simply its objects. Ahmad asks, if the First World is capitalist and the Second World is socialist then what is the Third World? Is it pre-capitalist or is it in transition? And can all Third World countries be located in a homogenous category?

Ahmad points out that India has all the characteristics of a capitalist country:

...Generalized commodity production, vigorous and escalating exchanges not only between agriculture and industry but also between Departments I and II of industry itself and (a large number of) technical personnel." (p.100)

It also has a bourgeois democracy and regional democratically elected communist parties in power. Does that put India in the First World or the Third? Countries on the Pacific rim from South Korea to Singapore constitute the fastest growing region within global capitalism, but these countries have also suffered colonialism and

imperialism. Does that make them First World countries or Third World? **Ahmad** contends that there are no real facts to support the theory of a binary opposition between a capitalist First World and a non- or pre-capitalist Third World.

Ahmad says that having created the Third World in terms of 'the experience of colonialism and imperialism' **Jameson** has gone on to assert that "all third-world texts are necessarily...*national allegories*" (original emphasis). **Ahmad** argues that if the Third World is to be defined only in terms of its experience of colonialism and imperialism, then of course the main ideological formation will be that of nationalism. He points to the opening paragraph of **Jameson's** essay in which **Jameson** argues that the only choice available to the Third World is between its 'nationalisms' and a 'global American postmodernist culture'. **Ahmad** asks: Why is it that the socialist and/or communist culture are not a choice, a culture that is neither nationalist nor postmodernist? **Ahmad** also critiques **Jameson's** homogenising of nationalism, arguing that there are a multiplicity of nationalisms in Asia and Africa today, and not all of them progressive, so that it is not necessary that they will all produce a progressive cultural practice in terms of the national allegory narrative that **Jameson** predicts.

It is also very difficult to predict with any certainty that the bourgeois Third World will not opt for postmodernism over nationalism; indeed, most of them want the American postmodern culture and have opted for it. Thus, to yoke together the Three Worlds Theory, the progressive nationalist ideology, and the assertion that the national allegory is the only form of narrativity that the Third World is capable of is theoretically unviable. This theory neither takes into consideration the relations of production in the case of the so-called Third World, nor the possibility of class formation or class struggle. By insisting on national oppression it suppresses the "multiplicities of intersecting conflicts based upon class, gender, nation, race, region, and so on...." (p.102) The Third World as defined by the Three World Theory is then left with no option but to narrate the same nationalist allegory for all time. In the next section, we shall examine the binary opposition between the Three Worlds and the Unitary World Theory.

2.4 THREE WORLD THEORY OR UNITARY WORLD

In place of the *Three Worlds Theory* **Ahmad** makes the radical proposition that we live not in three worlds but in one. This is the world in which both sides of **Jameson's** binary opposition experience colonialism and imperialism, for **Ahmad** points out that imperialism is experienced within the United States of America as well. Today we live in a world in which societies are constituted by the division of class in the countries of backward capitalism as well as advanced capitalism. Also the most important aspect is that this is the world that is saturated by capitalism. **Jameson's** definition is contained only within the First World, and the resistance to capitalism that is in his view restricted only to the socialism of the Second World. According to **Ahmed**, the different parts of capitalist system that pervade the world are not to be seen as binary opposites but as a contradictory unity when we break down the Three World Theory and think of ourselves all as inhabiting one world.

What would be the implications for literary theory of replacing the Three World Theory with one world? First, there would be no need to search for 'a cognitive aesthetics for third-world literature'; second, the idea of a meta-narrative, a master narrative, that encompasses the rich multiplicity of real narratives in the Third World would have to be abandoned; and third, it may turn out that many of the questions asked about the Urdu or Bengali literary traditions of literature are the same as those asked about Anglo-American literature and that a real knowledge of these traditions may force literary theorists in the United States to ask questions of their tradition that they had not asked before. **Ahmed** points out that **Jameson**, has already dismissed the idea of proceeding from the premise of a unitary world because according to him

beginning from that premise would necessitate 'falling back into some general liberal humanistic universalism'. That is, **Jameson** is afraid that the danger of considering a real unity of the world would be that this could only be done through the process of homogenisation of all cultures and peoples, and would thus negate the specificity of cultural differences. **Ahmad** counters this objection with two arguments.

First, that rather than viewing the world as being united by a liberalist ideology of humanism, a Marxist critic such as **Jameson** should be able to see that the world is united "by the global operation of a single mode of production, namely the capitalist one, and the global resistance to this mode, a resistance which is itself unevenly developed in different parts of the globe". (p.103) The world is thus perceived as a unity because of the capitalist mode of production that controls/determines it and the resistance to capitalism through socialism. **Ahmad** points out that socialism is spread out over Asia, Africa, and Latin America and also exists within the US in groups and individuals. The world is united, then, through the "ferocious struggle between capital and labour" which is now global in character.

Second, **Ahmad** argues, it is **Jameson's** theory of the world neatly divided into a binarised opposition that erases the specificity of cultural differences and thus ends up homogenising the world. The cultural heterogeneity within the Third World is suppressed because it is defined only in terms of its 'experience'. **Ahmad** illustrates through several examples that Asia, Africa and Latin America do not have a common history, and do not even have a singular experience of colonialism and imperialism, which varied vastly from one culture to another, from one continent to another.

The circuits of exchange that exist among the advanced capitalist countries do not exist between the Third World countries so that cultural complexes that bind the advanced capitalist countries are not present here. Capitalism in the Third World countries only has the power to homogenise the urban bourgeoisie through the culture that it is able to create, but does not affect the majority of the population. However, the countries of Western Europe and North America have been tied together for about two hundred years. Capitalism here is much older and the cultural logic of capitalism operates much more powerfully in these metropolitan formations. The circuits of exchange among these countries are very well established so that the products of culture circulate immediately and briskly among them, thus creating a certain amount of cultural homogeneity. **Ahmad's** point here is not to reverse **Jameson's** classification, but to:

...define the material basis for a fair degree of cultural homogenisation among the advanced capitalist countries and the lack of that kind of homogenisation in the rest of the capitalist world." (p.105)

Jameson then, according to **Ahmad** not only homogenises the spaces within the First and the Third World, he also insists on the absolute difference between the two and the relation of Otherness between them. His theory freezes the global space where struggles between the motivating forces of capitalism and socialism, capital and labour, take place. By forcing the heterogeneities and productivities of the world into a single oppositional binary, the Third World is reduced to narrate itself through the only form available in the position that it occupies by virtue of its experience of colonialism and imperialism. Thus, if all Third World texts are necessarily national allegories, then any text that is not a national allegory is not a true Third World text.

Ahmad thus demolishes **Jameson's** Three World Theory and its attendant corollaries by concluding that the category of the Third World which is constituted by the experience of colonialism and imperialism and whose difference from the First World is in its choice of nationalism over postmodernism, which is therefore capable of narrating itself only through the metatext of the national allegory is "epistemologically an impossible category". (p.105) This brings us to the next

question. How is third world literature defined? Let us take a look at the question of time and space as used in the definition of First and Third World literatures.

2.4.1 Third World Literatures Defined By Time, Period or Geographic Location?

Ahmad turns his attention to the question of time and space in defining First and Third World texts next. The use of the terms of the First and Third World as defined by **Jameson**, poses a problem because there is a great deal of slippage in the way that he deploys the terms in constructing these analytic categories. **Ahmed** shows that in different places in his essay **Jameson** has located the specificity of the First World in (i) the postmodernist moment, (ii) capitalist mode of production, and (iii) as co-terminus with 'Western civilisation', 'Graeco-Judaic'.

While the first location is of recent origin, the second is older, and the third would date back to antiquity. **Ahmad** asks:

When did this First World become First -in the pre-Christian centuries, or after World War II?" (p.106)

Similarly, at what point in time do texts produced in countries that have 'experienced colonialism and imperialism' become Third World texts? According to **Jameson**'s definition, should it not be from the historical point in those countries *after* colonisation? But **Jameson** sets up binaries between the First and Third World that are not restricted to the advent or experience of colonisation. He selects **Lu Xun**, an Asian writer, and **Sambene**, an African writer as 'the West's Other' on the basis of the tribal/tributary and the Asiatic modes. Likewise, **Jameson** sets in opposition **Freud**'s theory as Western against ten centuries of Chinese distributions of libidinal energies in reading **Lu Xun**. **Jameson** thus suggests that the difference between the First and Third Worlds is a basic and essential one, a primordial one, one whose roots are far older than capitalism itself.

Apart from the question of time, or historical period, there is also the question of space, of location, that categorises texts as Third World. **Ahmad** asks:

Do all texts produced in countries with 'experience of colonialism and imperialism' become, by virtue of geographical origin, 'third-world texts'?" (p.106)

Ahmad points out that he is aware of so many texts from his part of the world that do not fit the description of 'national allegory'. Why, then, does **Jameson** insist on 'all' texts belonging to the third-world as being national allegories? **Ahmad** locates his answer to this query in **Jameson**'s need to produce a single, unitary theory of Third World literature, and a unitary theory needs a unified category in which to force *all* Third World literature. **Ahmad** wonders if this means that only those texts that have national allegories are to be admitted as authentic Third World texts while the host of other texts that do not deal with national allegory are automatically excluded? **Ahmad** goes back to his disagreement with **Jameson**'s categorisation of the Third World outside the modern systems of production, as pre- or non-capitalist, to focus on one of the confusions that occur in his attempt to construct a category of Third World literature as the *Other*, or binary opposite, of First World literature.

For **Jameson**, one of the determinants of the capitalist culture that produces the western realist and modernist novel is that there "is a radical split between the private and the public". He classifies the private and poetic, the domain of sexuality, the unconscious. The public is the political, the economic, and the world of classes. **Jameson** has argued that the relations between the private and the public are wholly different in first and third world cultures. Again **Ahmad** underlines the fact that in the First World the radical split between the private and the public is located in the

capitalist system, but the absence of this split in the Third World is not located in any mode of production.

To develop this point **Ahmad** goes back to another essay by **Jameson** on **Lukacs** in *Marxism and Form*, where **Jameson** distinguishes between the literature of pre-industrial societies and the literature of the industrial era. **Jameson** argued in that essay that the agricultural or tribal culture knows no history and therefore each generation repeats the same experiences as though for the first time. **Ahmad** points to the correspondence between this idea and that of the necessity of the Third World to narrate its experiences only, always, through the national allegory. **Jameson** also theorises the difference between the pre-industrialised and industrialised societies using the same terms that he now deploys for the First and Third World – the unity of the public and the private in the pre-industrialised/Third World, and the separation of the two in the industrial/First World. The major flaw of this theoretical category, **Ahmad** emphasises again, is that of suspending the Third World outside the modes of production – capitalism and socialism – and imposing on it a unity based on its experience of colonialism and imperialism.

Just as there is a slippage in **Jameson**'s definition of the First World and the Third World, his usage of the term 'nation', too, keeps slipping into wider, less precise vocabulary. He uses the terms 'culture', 'society', 'collectivity' etc as interchangeable with 'nation'. To illustrate, **Ahmad** quotes two sentences from the essay: "All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories*..." and "...the telling of the individual story and the individual experience cannot but ultimately involve the whole labourious telling of the experience of the collectivity itself." **Ahmad** asks if these two sentences mean the same thing? There are two important points that **Ahmad** makes in this context. First, it is entirely possible to connect one's personal experience to a 'collectivity'. This could be done in terms of class, gender, caste, religious community, trade union, political party, village or prison – any group or formation of people within society. This combining of the private and the public need not involve the category of the nation or refer back to the experience of colonialism and imperialism even if it allegorises the individual experience. If we use the term collectivity rather than nation then **Jameson**'s theory would apply to a larger body of texts with greater accuracy.

Second, when we use the term 'collectivity' and widen its application to texts, then the difference between First and Third World texts becomes much less radical. **Ahmad** points out that the history of realism in the European novel has been associated with ideas of 'the social'. Even today, a majority of the texts produced in the First World make a fundamental connection between the individual story and some larger experience. Once the idea of the 'nation' is replaced with that of 'collectivity' and we can think of the process of allegorisation as not simply between individual and nation but as a relation between the private and the public, between person and community then a whole host of texts written within the postmodernist United States of America are automatically included within this category. American writers, along with Asian and African writers must connect their private imaginations with experiences of collectivity. From here on, **Ahmad** shifts his focus to the idea of constructing canons in literature. The next section will examine this in detail.

2.5 CANONISATION OF THIRD WORLD LITERATURE

Jameson's plea for syllabus reform argues for the need to include 'non-canonical' 'third-world literature'. **Ahmad** now turns his attention to the idea of canon construction. What are the mechanisms of construction? Some of the considerations would be (i) being considered major literary figures by the American academy, (ii) receiving prestigious awards, (iii) being taught routinely in Literature courses, just as

other European writers are, (iv) being reviewed favourably by major literary journals and newspapers in the United States and Britain. **Ahmad** gives us an exhaustive list of Asian, African and Latin-American writers who fulfill all these criteria of canonisation: **Neruda, Vallejo, Octavio Paz, Borges, Fuentes, Marquez, Achebe, Soyinka, Said, Naipaul, Rushdie**. **Ahmad** comments:

...the representation of this body of work in Jameson's discourse as simply 'non-canonical' – that is, as something that has been altogether excluded from the contemporary practices of high textuality in the US academy – does appear to overstate the case considerably. (p.112)

In his discussion of 'non-canonical' third-world literature **Jameson** further distinguishes between the form used by the First and Third World literatures, arguing that the latter still uses the kind of realism that the First World writers have now outgrown, the kind used by writers like **Dreiser** and **Sherwood**. **Ahmad** points to other highly regarded contemporary North American (US), fictionists such as **Bellow, Malamud, Grace Paley** and **Rober Stone** who still use the realist mode. At the same time there are several very well known 'third-world' fictionists who have been so well received in the United States/British literary circles precisely because they do not write like **Dreiser** and **Sherwood**: **Rushdie, Marquez, Neruda, Borges**, and **Cesaire**. **Ahmad** now changes the direction of the issue that **Jameson** raises of syllabus reform to include 'non-canonical' 'third-world' texts. **Ahmad's** analysis conclusively proves that it is incorrect to say that the canon does not admit Third World writers. He argues that bourgeois culture works through selective admission and selective canonisation, so that certain 'Third World' writers are now a part of the literary discourse in the United States of America. The more useful question to be asked now is: How does this principle of selective incorporation work in relation to texts produced outside the metropolitan countries? What are the determining factors that select some writers, some texts, into the canon while rejecting others? Not only does **Ahmad** explain **Jameson's** argument and counter it, but he also tries and locates it in time and place. We shall see how he does this in the next section.

2.6 LOCATION OF JAMESON'S TEXT

At the beginning of this essay **Ahmad** foregrounds his own political ideology as well as **Jameson's**:

And because I am a Marxist, I had always thought of us, Jameson and myself, as birds of the same feather..." (p.96)

At the end of the essay **Ahmad** takes **Jameson** to task for having taken recourse to pre-Marxist ideas. The essay focuses on the unviability of constructing the *Third World* as a singular category, of placing the *Third World* outside the modes of production, of denying it the agency or dynamism to be part of the struggle between the First World and the Second, between capitalism and socialism. **Ahmad** gives us his understanding of the Marxist dialectic, which he says comprises a tension. The tension lies between "the problematic of a final determination and the utter historicity of multiple, interpenetrating determinations." (120) The outcome of this struggle is never easily predictable, because it hardly ever corresponds to the will of any of the parties/historical agents who are struggling over that outcome. The essence of the Marxist dialectic is precisely the tension that is created by the struggle of different wills and intentions, of a multiplicity of historic forces, the tension that forms the site for the possibility of dynamic struggle.

Ahmad illustrates this theory of the Marxist dialectic by taking his own theory of the one world united by the global capitalist mode of production and the socialist resistance to that mode. He shows how this theory, or constitutive fact operates

differently in different countries of Asia and Africa. The outcome in every country is vastly different according to the specific conditions – historic, social, political, economic – of each country, even though the problematic of a ‘final determination’ is the same. It follows then, that in each case literary production will be varied and multiple as well.

The issue of a unitary, single literary production whether of First or Third World is even more complicated. Literary texts are produced in the context of competing ideological and cultural clusters, and in analysing the guiding force behind the production of the text it will first have to be placed in the context of the cluster that gives it energy and form. If one has sufficient knowledge of the constitution of the field from which the text emerges it would be possible to specify its principle ideological formations and narrative forms. But this does not mean that one can take the few texts that become available to the metropolitan literary critic because of issues pertaining to language and canonicity, and then “to posit a complete singularisation and transparency in the process of determinacy, so that all ideological complexity is reduced to a single ideological formation and all narratives are read as local expressions of a metatext”. (p.121) That is, to take a few texts and through them impose a single factor that determines what the major concerns of all such texts should be, and of how they should be narrated, is to reduce all the ideological complexity that goes into the production of a literary text.

To demonstrate what he means by “multiple determinations at work in any text of considerable complexity” **Ahmad** now turns his analytic gaze on **Jameson**’s own text to interrogate its cultural location. As is to be expected, **Ahmad** finds that **Jameson** inhabits multiple, complex spaces:

- Jameson’s text is a First World text because he identifies himself as a US intellectual. But he is not the typical US intellectual because he is able to juxtapose non-European texts with literary criticism so well. Also he debunks ‘the global American culture of postmodernism’ which he defines as *the* culture of his country.
- His text belongs to the Second World because the theoretical framework is Marxist and his political identification is socialist.
- His text goes deep into the Third World in terms of its thematics and in relation with the other texts which give it its meaning. He valorises the Third World, and affiliates himself with it.

Ahmad’s solution to the problem of where to locate this text is one that emerges from his own theory of our inhabiting one world: he places the text primarily in **Jameson**’s Second World, **Ahmad**’s own name for a global resistance. But **Ahmad** emphasises that he places him in the Second World not by suppressing his other affiliations, but:

...by identifying that which has been central to all his theoretical undertakings for many years. (p.122)

2.7 LET US SUM UP

In this essay, **Aijaz Ahmad** joins issue with **Frederic Jameson**’s construction of the *Third World* in terms of ‘the experience of colonialism and imperialism’ and then applies this definition to the category of *Third World Literature*, asserting that “all third-world texts are necessarily...*national allegories*” (original emphasis). **Ahmad** foregrounds the flaws in **Jameson**’s *Three Worlds Theory* and offers an alternative beginning with the premise that we all inhabit one world. From there **Ahmad** attacks **Jameson**’s homogenisation of *Third World Literature*, showing the impossibility of making such a theoretical category. He then questions **Jameson**’s assertion that all

Third World literatures are national allegories, pointing to the fact that the boundaries drawn by colonial powers that define postcolonial nations cannot be unquestioningly accepted as unitary identities for all its peoples. **Ahmad** offers innumerable Third World writers who write texts that are not straightforwardly realist, and are not national allegories, while at the same time pointing out texts from the First World that are national allegories.

2.8 QUESTIONS

1. Why does Ahmad consider it impossible to construct Third World Literature as a theoretical category?
2. What are Ahmad's arguments against the Three Worlds Theory?
3. What alternative does Ahmad offer to the Three Worlds Theory?
4. What are the arguments that Ahmad makes against Jameson's assertion that "all third-world texts are necessarily...*national allegories*"?
5. Do you agree with Ahmad's contention that 'Third World' literature is now very much a part of the canon?

2.9 GLOSSARY

Aesthetics:	How something looks; especially when considered in terms of how pleasing it is.
Allegory:	Symbolic work; a work in which the characters and events are to be understood as representing other things and symbolically expressing a deeper, often spiritual, moral, or political meaning.
Bourgeois:	Capitalist; relating to the social class that owns most of the wealth and is regarded as exploiting the working class
Cognitive:	Concerned with acquisition of knowledge; relating to the process of acquiring knowledge by the use of reasoning, intuition, or perception.
Conventional:	Typical of affluent middleclass people; who are often characterised as conventional or conservative in outlook.
Postmodern:	After modernism; relating to art, architecture, literature, or thinking developed after and usually in reaction to modernism.

UNIT 3 DECOLONISING THE MIND

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Colonising the Mind
- 3.3 Literature As A Site Of Cultural Domination: Said's Orientalism
- 3.4 Decolonising the Mind: The Question of Language
 - 3.4.1 The Writing of History
- 3.5 'Decolonising the Indian Mind': Resisting Neo-Colonialism
- 3.6 Saying An "Impossible 'No'"
- 3.7 Decolonising the Western Mind
- 3.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.9 Questions

3.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit attempts to introduce the concept of 'decolonisation' of the mind and how it relates to the context of the cultural domain of colonialism. It will discuss how cultural domination is realised in the three sites of literature, language and history and how critical perspectives of postcolonial theory equip us with the tools to examine the manner in which cultural domination is organised and to evolve strategies of resistance to it. (A more detailed analysis of postcolonial theory appears in other units of this Block). It will indicate how decolonising the mind is a continuous process and how resistance may be organised against the forces of neo-colonialism. Finally, it will consider the many ways in which the practice of decolonisation of the European mind can be affected.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Let us first understand the term 'decolonisation'. Naturally, there has to be first colonisation, in order to talk of decolonisation. We all know that colonisation is the process of converting a country (other than your own), into a producer of raw material for your industry and a market for your finished goods. So colonisation involves the twin processes of destroying or marginalising local economies and other administrative and political structures, and the erection of new ones that facilitate the coloniser's goals. Decolonisation then becomes the opposite process: that of dismantling the colonial structures, once the imperial powers leave.

We must stop here to sound a note of caution. We have cited above the imperialist motive of colonisation. There can be others motives. For instance in the Americas and Australia, the colonisers went as settlers while in India they came as traders. Africa was brutalised and plundered in a different way. All these places experienced decolonisation differently. Thus, we need to be very careful in our analysis of the different kinds of colonisations in different countries, since different experiences of colonisation gave rise to very different kinds of resistance movements ranging from **Gandhi's** non-violence to **Fanon's** blueprint for violent struggle. So there are three very crucial elements to keep in mind while discussing decolonisation: the manner of colonisation, the nature of the resistance movement, and the grounds on which decolonisation is granted. This must be kept in mind in order to avoid easy generalities.

We must also understand that the erection of new structures by imperial powers is not always and in all places a one-way violent imposition of the conqueror's will. It functions in many ways, often entering into a dialogue with local populations and institutions and is facilitated almost always with the help of a collaborating elite. In the process of colonisation, if trade is to carry on successfully and profits are to be made, it is crucial for the imperial power to have an efficient political structure in which to function and it is necessary to have the co-operation, either voluntary or forced, of local peoples. As mentioned earlier, before we begin to talk about decolonising the mind, we need to see how the mind was colonised in the first place. This we shall do so in the next section.

3.2 COLONISING THE MIND

It is erroneous to assume that people receive foreign domination passively. Since the use of force has the unpleasant fall-out of political turmoil, it is important to establish to the local population that the changes they see around them, and which they sometimes try to resist are actually in their favour, and profitable to them, and that they are active players in the arrangement. As a strategy to co-opt the colonised people and rule over them with their consent therefore, the process of colonisation of the mind becomes an important project of the imperial power. This strategy takes overt and covert forms, sometimes functioning as state policy and at other times insidiously, creeping up on the colonised subject to suggest that s/he is inferior, that his/her language, culture, religion, history, his/her looks and colour are all inferior to that of the representation of the imperial power. There emerges a master-slave relationship internalised by the colonised subject. This wears down resistance to the imperial power or at least, is expected to do so. This process is referred to as cultural domination or colonisation of the mind.

Colonisation of the mind is a process slower than the economic and political takeover of power because of the traditions and history of particular populations that make them resist actively or passively this mental takeover. Thus there are sites identified through which cultural hegemony is organised. Most commonly, these are rewritten histories, language and education policies and cultural texts that may be literary, cinematic and so on. The superiority of the 'master' is however, internalised, especially, with the systematic erosion of the agency of the subject in the economic, political and social domains, more effective in contexts where colonisation is over a long period of time.

The trappings of power magnify the oppressor into one better than the oppressed. When the imperial power exits and a politically free nation takes down the structures created by the colonial power, it is a rapid and victorious wave of decolonisation. But the decolonisation of the mind remains a continuous and slow process because of the internalisation of cultural domination of the imperial power.

To this may be added the fact that the centres of power relocate and function in new forms reincarnated as trans-national capital and global mass media with all the links between the two. These are termed the forces of neo-colonialism and their new centres are called 'metropolitan centres'. They are located in the financial and cultural capitals of the United Kingdom and the United States of America, including in universities, academies and other institutions of higher learning. The debates and opinions that emanate from these centres are hegemonic and dominate the discourse of colonisation. In this context, one of the prime strategies of decolonisation for formerly colonised peoples would be to resist the categories offered by these very debates even as one engages with them.

There is a cultural flip side to this that cannot be ignored, as it would leave the discussion of decolonisation incomplete. Just as the colonial subject internalises his cultural subjugation, the imperial subject too does so. In the domain of culture,

therefore, it constructs allegories of masterhood and interprets the colonial experience through constructions of false histories, exotic and esoteric locales and cultures populated by simplistically drawn peoples. In the sections that follow we will look at all these in greater detail.

3.3 LITERATURE AS A SITE OF CULTURAL DOMINATION: SAID'S *ORIENTALISM*

If we were to consider much of the literature about India and other colonies of Britain that was produced during the period of British colonisation we would find that these writings abound in the creation of cultural stereotypes which propagate racial superiority of the white to the 'blacks' or 'natives' and religious superiority of Christianity to all other religions and religious practices. Even as this literature encapsulates the colonial experience of a different and remote land or peoples or culture, ostensibly in innocent acts of description or creation of characters, a hierarchy of power is established. The west rules over the east, the white over the black and the latter with its easy collapse of symbolic boundaries translates into the triumph of Good over Evil. One common example of cultural stereotyping is the image of India as the land of snake-charmers, fire-walking naked fakirs, maharajas and elephants. The complexity of an entire region is reduced to simplistic categories. These literary and cultural constructs are not only circulated in the west but come back to the colonies to constantly batter at the self-esteem of the colonised people and make them seem ridiculous to themselves. It is not difficult to understand that, people with low levels of confidence will lend themselves to being ruled over with greater ease than if that did not take place.

Postcolonial scholars have examined the literatures of colonisation to expose how cultural domination takes place at the site of literary production. Who is writing? What is the target readership? Who is publishing and where? What are the political beliefs of the writer? When is the text produced? It becomes important to ask these questions. The answers lead us to see how literary production maintains the status quo of existing power structures. In other words, literature is ideological.

Edward Said in 1978 in *Orientalism* lays bare both the strategies of cultural domination of the Occident over the Orient and provided the methodology for recognising and resisting these strategies in our readings of texts. The salient features of **Said's** argument are that the world is divided into two unequal halves, the 'superior' Occident and the inferior and subordinated Orient and that thus there occurs an invisible suppressive dimension to it. In the realm of knowledge, given the historical fact of European colonisation with its imperative to maintain its power structures, all knowledge of the Orient becomes a construct. In other words, the Orient is an ideological creation, glorified or demonised as the case may be, with an end to prove the superiority of the European and thus continue and justify the logic of European domination. This project of the 'producers' of the Orient in the realm of culture **Said** calls Orientalism and its motive is to label the Orient as Europe's *Other* - all that it is not. He shows how this is a false construct, limited at the best of times, driven by the urge of cultural hegemony which is so important in order to rule by consent of the oppressed. He advocates the urgency of the need to expose the power structures that form the context of cultural production. No narration or description is 'obvious' or 'innocent' any more. The possibility of 'pure' knowledge does not exist. All knowledge is ideologically produced and therefore, ideologically inscribed. Using **Said's** methodology **Chinua Achebe** reads **Conrad's** *Heart of Darkness* to show how in the novel, Africa is constructed as the racial, cultural and political *Other* of Europe and its perceived superiority. It is an iconic model for future analysis of canonical western texts. Despite the flaws in **Said's** argument as recorded by critics, his remains a pioneering study, empowering the process of decolonisation of the mind.

3.4 DECOLONISING THE MIND: THE QUESTION OF LANGUAGE

Language is one of the prime sites of cultural domination. The postcolonial critic **Aijaz Ahmad** talks about how any attempt to form a category of third world literature is defied by the fact that these writers write in their own language and their works are simply not available to a metropolitan canon constructed without access to those languages. Thus only writers writing in the languages of the metropolitan centres or translated into them would be considered for inclusion in the canon. We can already understand how such languages are privileged even in a postcolonial world. We must however, remember that though all colonies do not experience the same pattern of language imposition, the language issue is a crucial one in colonised nations. In India particularly, the English language continues to define power structures and class positions. English as a language was formally introduced in India in accordance with **Thomas Macaulay's** *Minute on Education* in 1834. The stated purpose was to:

...form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions that we govern; a class of persons Indian in blood and color but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect.

This was based on two premises: one was the perceived superiority of English over other languages (for example, Sanskrit or Arabic); the other was the use of language as a political instrument in the hands of the colonisers - language was to be put into use not only as a means of communication, but was to come as a social and cultural package with the intention of creating a class of Indians who would identify and align themselves with the British. This was how cultural imperialism was to function. However, this policy was directed at a numerically small number of Indians and the diffusion of the English language did not percolate through Indian society. What did happen was that **Macaulay's** class of Indians empowered with the English language and aligned with a western world view became the natural inheritors of power after the British left India, and the role and function of the English language assumed different dimensions creating a huge divide between English speaking and non-English speaking Indians with the social and educational opportunities available to either.

Interestingly, the gap between policy and practice also yielded results quite different from what the British intended. It was utilised by Indian writers to turn the tables on the English-speaking world by using the English language as a medium for their own cultural, social, political and philosophical articulations. Indian English writing has evolved through many stages of imitation, revolt and quest for identity to become an autonomous entity, with its own set of distinct forms, styles and idiomatic expression. With the advent of postcolonial writing, there have been several debates over the use of English by Indian authors - debates regarding the status of English as a pan-Indian phenomenon and its co-existence with the official language, Hindi. Using the English language has often been seen as elitist, un-Indian and therefore anti-national. But there have been counter-arguments stressing the linguistic plurality of India, on the cultural relativity and the diversity of linguistic patterning. The truth is that English has been incorporated and is now firmly entrenched in the Indian cultural milieu. A peculiar brand of Indian English has emerged as a result of several years of "experimentation" by postcolonial Indian English writers, many of them located in the metropolitan centres.

The experience of English in India has been different from the experience of the coloniser's language in other colonies, primarily because of the existence of strong local cultures and because the education policy of the British touched the lives of very few Indians. Caste-defined India with its many religions had a number of structural fortifications to insulate itself against any alien intrusion. This was not the case with other colonies where proselytising activity worked in tandem with the imperialist agenda.

Ngugi Wa Thiong' O's *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, published in 1986, examines almost a hundred years of colonialism and neo-colonialism to explore the internalisation and institutionalisation of cultural imperialism through language. In the book, the Kenyan **Ngugi** formally declares his farewell to English and embraces thenceforth only *Kiswahili* and *Gikuyu* as the languages in which he will write. **Ngugi** establishes the intrinsic link between language, culture and ideology. To take on the coloniser's language is not just a choice of medium: it involves the internalising of the culture, logic and ideology of colonisation itself. **Ngugi** asks whether writing in English really qualifies as African literature, with its corollaries of the domination of African cultures and languages by Europe, and language/literature and audiences at the level of class and nation. He points out how it was taken for granted that English (or French or Portuguese) was the natural language for literary production, for political mediation between Africans at the national, continental and international levels. Literary debates even among African writers "accepted the fatalistic logic" of communicating in the language of the colonisers. The question was how to make these European languages carry the weight of the African experiences of the writers? **Ngugi** asks, "Why...should an African writer, or any writer, become so obsessed by taking from his mother-tongue to enrich other tongues? ... We never asked ourselves: how can we enrich our languages?" (p.8) **Ngugi** finds his answer in the policy of the colonial powers of following "the sword and the bullet" with "the chalk and the blackboard". That is, of buttressing the physical violence with psychological violence. In this phase, language became the means to subjugate the spirit.

Control was imposed through military conquest and political dictatorship. But colonisation's most important area of domination was mental control through culture to affect how the colonised perceived themselves in relation to others. **Ngugi** says:

To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others." (p.16)

The main tool used for this domination was the domination of language – the systematic undervaluing of the colonised's culture and language and the elevation of the language and culture of the coloniser.

Ngugi shows us how important the language question is to Postcolonial Studies. Today the elite in the postcolonial countries still use the colonial language as the medium of instruction in their education. Fluency in European languages, especially in English, confers great advantages in finding higher paying jobs. Through the continued use of the colonial language neo-imperialism strengthens its hold on post-colonial countries. The very important point that **Ngugi** makes in this essay is that the use of the coloniser's language implies the internalisation of the coloniser's culture, and a setting up of a hierarchy between the culture of the coloniser and the colonised. In the next section we shall look at how history and historical narratives are prime sites of cultural colonisation and the perpetuation of hegemony.

3.4.1 The Writing of History

This is a discussion that properly belongs to the realm of historical theory but with the collapse of boundaries that make literature and the social sciences discrete domains of study, it is important to examine this, especially in relation to the project of decolonisation of the mind. History and historical narratives are prime sites of cultural colonisation and perpetuation of hegemony. The writing or re-writing of the history of a colonised people is one of the cultural projects of imperialism. One of the things that the colonial power can hegemonically impose is for instance, the reading of pre-colonial culture, as one of blank darkness and barbarity. It can cause the all-important erasure of memory, identity and roots, a state that becomes fundamental to the business of empire as it creates willing subjects who consent in their own oppression and are co-opted into the imperialist agenda. Contemporary

historiographers have contested the periodisation of history of colonised peoples as pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial. By defining the history of a people in this way the point of historical reference remains the experience of colonialism. By insisting on national oppression it suppresses in **Ahmed's** words, the "multiplicities of intersecting conflicts based upon class, gender, nation, race, region, and so on....". In other words, history is made at various levels in the life of a people and it is made simultaneously, out of a number of disparate and similar events, linked or disjunct. So historiography must be approached in a way that colonialism becomes one fact, one event among many that has shaped the consciousness of a people, their history, their harmonies and their conflicts.

What is the implication for the process of decolonisation of the mind? The reference point of all that a people is, is no longer the event of colonisation. The national histories constructed as a movement against colonisation, as in India, then stop to look at all the residual areas of conflict in Indian society. This is an important activity because it serves to recuperate not only the disrupted memories, myths, traditions and narratives from the interstices of colonisation, but also starts looking at the writing of history from a non-hegemonical position. This will promote a more profound understanding of social and historical complexities than what is permitted by the easy generalisations that narratives of national oppression permit. We must remember that in a certain sense, the categories of postcoloniality apply to all the peoples of the world in turn. The danger is that this homogeneous category mitigates the particular experiences of a people and the ruptures that colonisation may have caused in particular histories, for instance of social groups or religious formations. So there must be a reorientation in the approach to history. The subaltern school of historiography in India is the prime mover in this direction.

3.5 'DECOLONISING THE INDIAN MIND': RESISTING NEO-COLONIALISM

The forces of neo-colonialism are those powerful western nations that seek to subordinate, and exploit and hegemonise without engaging in military conquest. The agenda is furthered by the activity of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation to facilitate the movement of trans-national capital. The open market policy of the new world order fails to ensure a level playing field for all the players in a global economy. The economically weaker nations often have to submit to the demands of the powerful European-American combines. This facilitates a global interface that has tremendous cultural consequences for the developing and underdeveloped economies of the world. The spectacular growth of mass media and communication technology as well as information technology has posed new threats of cultural domination whose consequences are already apparent, not only in impact studies but also in the resistance methods that may be adopted. **Namvar Singh** in his essay *Decolonising the Indian Mind*, identifies decolonisation as the single most significant event of the 20th century. Importantly, he goes on to express his anxiety about the "new onslaught" of colonisation and explores the ways in which neo-colonialism can be resisted. He rejects the easy solutions of turning to tradition, to nationalism or to an anti-West sentiment. Singh suggests setting up of a global network of resistance along with the many anti-imperialist individuals and groups who have actively expressed their disagreement with colonialism and imperialism. The West is seen as a complex, multi-dimensional entity with which we need to negotiate with care, and not to dismiss out of hand.

Singh maintains that there is no one simple given tradition in India. Any tradition that is used to oppose the onslaught of colonisation will have to be reconstructed as "the rediscovery of the past by the present as desired". This means that the tradition that will be constructed as the past of the country will be according to the needs of the present. This will thus be a biased version of tradition. Whose tradition is it to be? The two examples **Singh** gives are those of the imperial powers of today who still

have a vested interest in their previous colonies, and who need to see India and the Third World as a backward and primitive place. The imperial forces pick out of India's past only those things that help consolidate the image of primitiveness and backwardness. The second example is that of the one-dimensional and narrow tradition presented by Hindu fundamentalists as India's 'real' past. Both these groups create a tradition with a motive that is either political or commercial or both.

Singh also rejects the option of resisting neo-colonialism through the 'nationalist allegory'. "Whose nation?", he asks. The poor, the backward, the *Dalit* do not according to him, identify with the nation as it currently obtains. He points out that the nationalism that existed at the beginning of the twentieth century has done its job and spent its energies; there is no point in trying to revive it, or invoke it once again. Instead, **Singh** argues that resistance can be organised by taking into account the realities of the present. In the realm of culture, **Singh** argues, though a small percentage of society has been culturally colonised, and that too superficially, it is important to realise that this colonisation is hegemonic. That is, the colonisation of the small percentage of Indians is one that constitutes cultural control and exerts power. It is important, also to remember that this small percentage of culturally colonised people belong to the class that claims to have changed and developed literature in the post-Independence period. **Singh's** cynicism against this class is evident, and he ironically points out that this is the class that claims to have effected decolonisation, even though it was a "pseudo-decolonisation."

Namvar Singh recommends that we should not dissociate ourselves from the progressive elements in the west in search of a distinctive identity for Third World literature. The model for "Third World Literature" could be the literature of the socialist bloc of the Second World. Although the Second World is beginning to disintegrate, its literature is not. **Singh** asserts that the literature of the Second World is more liberated and exciting than that of the Third World. **Namvar Singh's** resistance to neo-colonialism leads him to find alternative models for a 'Third World Literature'. Clearly, he accepts the division of the world into three, a position **Aijaz Ahmed** so strongly refuted from the postcolonial standpoint.

3.6 SAYING AN "IMPOSSIBLE 'NO' "

Namvar Singh's acceptance of the three-world theory (Appearing elsewhere in this Block), even as he devises strategies to resist neo-colonialism is a typical condition of the postcolonial intellectual. **Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak** articulates both the frustration of the efforts to decolonise as well as the compelling urgency to do so when she writes that postcolonial resistance consists in saying an "impossible 'no' to a structure, which one critiques, yet inhabits intimately". Any engagement with decolonisation implies involvement with the colonial project: with its policies, institutions and vocabulary. It is in a sense impossible to decolonise fully. **Spivak** advances the idea of 'catechesis' as a strategy to critique colonial assumptions. This consists in "reversing, displacing and seizing the apparatus of value-coding".

In modern and democratic India, the Constitution, the Parliament, the Judiciary, the Civil service, the missionary schools, and indeed the very idea of resisting oppression in an organised manner, are all products of colonialism and lessons of the English language. Decolonisation would mean dismantling every institution, without anything to be put up in its stead. In the Indian context therefore, the evaluation of colonisation is very important and it is necessary to explain what decolonisation would specifically imply. It is crucial to repeat that the pattern of colonisation determines the process of decolonisation, and it differs from place to place. Scholars and activists engaged in the discourses of postcolonialism have thus highlighted different issues. These are important to know if only to assess the strategies of colonisation and decolonisation. The various academic bodies that facilitate research and enquiry in

the area through scholarships and grants are products of a vicious imperialism. The Rhodes scholarship comes immediately to mind. **Namvar Singh** touches upon this aspect of neo-colonialism when he talks about the activities of the Ford Foundation in India and other Asian countries and the kind of studies it is known to fund. He also warns against a breed of local neo-colonialists who facilitate this effort. However, it is difficult to find people who have refused these grants and scholarships on the basis of convictions.

3.7 DECOLONISING THE WESTERN MIND

The process of decolonisation of the mind would be incomplete without the decolonisation of the western mind. We have mentioned above that colonisers too internalise the colonial hierarchies of power to construct allegories of masterhood for themselves. However, it is important to remember that even as those allegories are constructed, even as histories are rewritten, languages imposed, cultural domination sought, and battles of resistance fought, there have been liberals and humanitarian groups in Europe who were not just sympathising but also actively fighting colonial power structures at home. There were groups of scholars and intellectuals from Europe who were exploring, documenting and exposing the rich, sophisticated and complex histories and cultures of the 'barbarian' 'undeveloped' societies. Even with the reservations that **Said's** *Orientalism* has taught us to harbour, these studies have contributed enormously to the European understanding of the colonies.

The decolonising of literary studies in the metropolitan academies offered the possibility of the development of postcolonial theory. The works of postcolonial critics were first published in journals coming out of the Anglo-American academy. These facts do not in any way undermine the radical, path-breaking scholarship of the authors or their essays; rather, it shows that they have created the space for anti-colonial, anti-imperialist, and anti-capitalist scholarship and politics in the bastion of power. The fact that their essays are seminal also to Postcolonial Studies in the metropolitan academy reveals a great deal about the complex balance of power between the American/European scholar and the one from the postcolonial countries, for Postcolonial Studies cannot ignore the inputs of the latter. The process of decolonisation of the European mind was also carried forward by the migrant populations of previously colonised people who surged into European countries for better prospects after the colonies were liberated and continue to do so. Thus, today the presence of immigrants in Europe and United States is bringing changes in culture, arts and literature. A vital and exciting literature is coming out of the previously colonised countries as the 'Empire Writes Back'. One of the consequences of the decolonising of mind in literary studies in India is the canon reform we have been witnessing in the last few years so that literature other than the one projected by the British canon that we inherited from the British Raj is also studied.

3.8 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have focused on the idea of decolonisation of the mind. We have examined some of the sites of cultural colonisation and seen how the perspectives of postcolonial criticism can help us formulate strategies of reading and resisting cultural texts. It is important to remember that patterns of colonialism have varied from place to place and people to people and these determine the nature and process of decolonisation. We have also seen how the forces of neo-colonialism pose new threats in an unequal world order. We have then gone on to suggest as critics have done that though it is impossible to decolonise minds completely, resistance in every new form must continue.

3.9 QUESTIONS

1. What do you understand by decolonisation of the mind?
2. How is the literary theory of decolonising the mind put into practice?
Mention the arguments used in this theory?
3. How does language play a role in cultural colonisation?
4. What are the sites across which cultural domination is organised?
5. What are the forces of neo-colonialism and how can they be resisted?

UNIT 4 CIVILISATIONAL CONFLICTS IN LITERATURE

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Civilisational Conflicts in Literature
- 4.3 Conrad's Othering of Africa
- 4.4 Racist Representation of Africa
- 4.5 Veracity of Representations
- 4.6 Colonialist Representation in *A Passage to India*
- 4.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.8 Questions
- 4.9 Glossary

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In Units 1,2 and 3 we have read theories of how colonisation functioned through cultural colonialism as well as political and administrative domination, and how neo-imperialism continues this project by constructing the previously colonised, the *Third World*, as the *Other*. In this Unit we will take up readings of two canonical texts: one by one of the foremost writer of postcolonial literature, **Chinua Achebe**, and the other by a prominent postcolonial critic, **Abdul R JanMohamed**. They re-read **Conrad's** *Heart of Darkness* and **Forster's** *A Passage to India* respectively. From a close textual analysis of the *Heart of Darkness*, **Achebe** moves to formulating a theory about the methods used by the West in systematically representing *Other* cultures in a racist manner as does **JanMohamed** in his reading of **E M Forster's** *A Passage to India*. In this Unit we will put the theory we have been reading in the last three units to practical use. It is useful to think of how you can use Postcolonial theory to read other texts.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Achebe, born in 1930, is a Nigerian acclaimed as a novelist, poet and essayist. He is credited with articulating a pre-colonial past for Africa, a continent that was pronounced by the colonial powers as having no history. **Achebe** begins his essay, *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness*, (1977) with two personal anecdotes. Both these accounts foreground the stereotypes of Africa that exist in the imagination of the West. The first stereotype is that Africa has no history; the second is the association of tribal rituals and superstitions with the African culture. The reason these Western stereotypes of Africa are important to interrogate is that they point to a systematic construction of Africa through the shorthand they provide, and that even in an age of information technology these stereotypes remain unshaken. **Achebe** diagnoses the problem at the very outset:

If there is something in these utterances more than youthful inexperience, more than a lack of factual knowledge, what is it? Quite simply it is the desire – one might indeed say the need – in Western psychology to set Africa up as a foil to Europe, as a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar, in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace will be manifest. (138)

Unlike **Said**, **Achebe**'s intention is not to interrogate the need of the West to prove its superiority through the negation of other cultures. In this essay **Achebe** endeavours to use his own expertise as a novelist to scrutinise the ideological framework of *Heart of Darkness*. **Achebe** gives several reasons for picking this particular text. According to him, this text more than any other that he knows displays the Western desire to set up Africa as a foil to Europe. Although there are vast numbers of other books that do the same thing, **Conrad** is worth examining because he is considered one of the great stylists of modern fiction. His fiction thus falls into the category of 'permanent' fiction. The most important reason for analysing *Heart of Darkness* is that it is constantly read and taught by serious academics and is then able to seamlessly reinforce all the stereotypes of Africa through the academy itself. **Abdul R JanMohamed**'s concern on the other hand lies in the knowledge that most of the critical material on colonialist literature does not take into account the political context of culture and history. He posits that in order to understand colonialist discourse we have to map the ideological function of this discourse with the actual imperial practice. To elucidate his concern, **JanMohamed** has re-read several canonised texts like the *Heart of Darkness* and *Kim*. We shall however, examine his reading of *A Passage to India*. We shall begin with what has been often perceived by critics as Civilisational Conflicts in Literature by examining **Achebe**'s reading of **Conrad**'s *Heart of Darkness*.

4.2 CIVILISATIONAL CONFLICTS IN LITERATURE

In Unit 1 we studied **Edward Said**'s theory of Orientalism that locates the need of the West, or Europe, to assert its superiority through the *Othering* of a different culture as the primary motive behind orientalising a segment of the world. This Unit will look at readings of two texts that use this theory. **Chinua Achebe**, the eminent African author, whose novel, *Things Fall Apart*, is an essential part of the canon of postcolonial fiction. His re-reading of **Joseph Conrad**'s *Heart of Darkness* as a text that is invested in constructing Africa and Africans as the *Other* in order to assert the ascendancy of Europe, and **Abdul R Jan Mohamed**, the well-known postcolonial critic's, reading of **E M Forster**'s *A Passage to India* as a text that attempts to forge a synthesis between the *Self* and the *Other* but ultimately falls back on the colonialist discourse to show the inevitable failure of this exercise. In the present phase of neo-colonialism, particularly that crystallised in the nineteen-eighties and nineties, the division between the colonised world and the colonising power has assumed the dimensions of what can be called civilisational antagonism. A deeply prejudiced paradigm between 'civilisations' divides humanity between two irreconcilable parts and bears the stamp of racism. A number of important critical voices have drawn our attention to this fact. It is important to take note of the rigorous discipline with which both critics use tools of critical analysis in unearthing the latent racism in these novels.

4.3 CONRAD'S *OTHERING* OF AFRICA

Before we turn to **Achebe**'s reading of *Heart of Darkness* it would be useful to refer back to Unit 1 to remind ourselves, of the methodology put in place by **Said** in *Orientalism*:

...all representations of the Orient need to be seen as representations, and evidence of this can be found in style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices and historical and social circumstances. The methodology of *Orientalism* is to study location and formation of the writer and the text, and to interrogate the evidence of how the Orient is constructed or represented in a particular text in order to align it to the larger body of Oriental writings. (Unit 1)

It is important to note, however, that while *Orientalism* was first published in 1978, **Achebe's** *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness* first appeared in *The Massachusetts Review* in 1977, and was actually presented as a paper at the University of Massachusetts on February 18th, 1975. **Achebe** is then not indebted to **Said** for his methodology of reading *Heart of Darkness*. It is significant that both these literary critics arrived independently at very similar strategies of reading 'great' literature, and used their findings from these readings to articulate a larger theory about the ways in which the West systematically constructs Africa or the East to serve its own needs. **Achebe** uses all the tools available to him as a novelist and a literary critic to interrogate the text through its style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices and historical and social circumstances. **Achebe's** premise is that *Heart of Darkness* projects Africa as "the other world", as the antithesis of Europe, and constructs a binary of civilisation versus bestiality. You have already studied the *Heart of Darkness* in your **British Novel Course**. However, for our analysis we will need to go into some detail on the novel at this juncture. It would also be of help if you could re-read the block on the *Heart of Darkness*. The novel opens on the banks of the River Thames, but it uses this setting only to more effectively *Other* the River Congo, which is the actual setting of the story. While the River Thames is tranquil and peaceful, enjoying an old age pension for the service it has rendered to the people inhabiting its banks, the River Congo has rendered no service and does not merit an old age pension. It is a pathway to "the earliest beginning of the world" (p.139), that is, a pre-civilisational period, a pre-human world.

While it is true that **Conrad** differentiates between the two rivers and portrays one as good and the other as bad, **Achebe** asserts that that is not the real point. As in any Self/Other binary, what disturbs **Conrad** is not the difference but the "lurking hint of kinship", the fear of acknowledging the similarities between this civilised world and the primordial one. This fear arises out of the risk posed by re-visiting the darkness that the West has conquered and forgotten; the risk of "falling victim to an avenging recrudescence of the mindless frenzy of the first beginnings." (p.139) The peace and tranquility of the civilised world then has its foundations in the "triumphant bestiality" that it now defines itself against, the darkness that belongs to the *Other*. **Conrad** is worried about the temptations of submitting to the darkness that the West believes it has successfully suppressed.

Achebe analyses **Conrad's** style of writing in the creation of an Africa whose main characteristics are an inscrutable silence and mindless frenzy. He draws attention to **Conrad's** repetition of words such as 'implacable', 'inscrutable', 'incomprehensible' and 'mysterious'. He quotes **F R Leavis** who had discovered this use of repetition long ago: **Leavis** comments on **Conrad's** "adjectival insistence upon inexpressible and incomprehensible mystery." (p.140) Most critics of **Conrad** see this repetition as a stylistic flaw, but **Achebe's** theoretical framework allows him to make conclusions that have much more serious implications than the weakness of writing style. **Achebe** accuses **Conrad** of artistic bad faith in trying to induce a hypnotic stupor in his readers by bombarding them with emotive words. But how is the intelligent reader deceived by **Conrad's** trickery? **Achebe** is aware that the normal reader is usually able to detect such "underhand trickery" and resist it. However, **Achebe** asserts, **Conrad's** choice of subject is such that he need not fear a conflict with the psychological predisposition of his readers. **Conrad** chooses the "role of the purveyor of comforting myths." (p.140) Thus, the Western readership that is responsible for canonising this text is only too eager to accept Africa as the land of the myths of their distant past, a past on account of which they can comfort themselves that they do not need to worry about any more.

After the setting and style of the novel, **Achebe** turns to a critical analysis of the characterisation in it. He quotes a lengthy passage that is self-evident and needs no commentary to prove his point. The passage describes the inhabitants of the banks of River Congo in terms that are dehumanising, dissecting the people into different body parts rather than recognisable humans, and coalescing them with the jungle from which they emerge:

A burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage. (p.140)

He describes them as monstrous and ugly. However, as with the River Thames and the River Congo, the primary point is not that the inhabitants of Africa are the opposite of the civilised Westerner; the reason for the interest of the European in the African is the “dim suspicion” that there could be some remote, distant, common ground that could render the monstrous African comprehensible to his civilised *Other*. When **Conrad** actually looks at an individual African who has a recognisable human form his racism does not fare much better. **Achebe** picks out two descriptions of individual Africans: Marlow’s helmsman and the African mistress of Kurtz. The African helmsman is described as “a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat walking on his hind legs”. (p.141) **Conrad**’s discomfort seems to stem from seeing an African performing a task that requires Western knowledge and education and puts him on parity with the other Europeans on the boat, albeit in a hierarchical structure. **Achebe** underlines the fact that **Conrad** places a great deal of importance on things being in their right place; a cannibal needs no excuse to be swaying and clapping in the jungle, but when he steps out of the place that **Conrad** has designated as appropriate for him then **Conrad** is uncomfortable. To construct a binary of the West as Africa’s civilisational *Other* it is important that both the entities have stable, unchanging identities. There can be no space for an individual to cross over – no matter how marginally – from one side of the boundary to the other because that unsettles the logic of the binary.

Towards the end of the story **Conrad** sets up another opposing set of characters; the African Amazonian woman and the refined European Intended. **Achebe** comments that the difference in the novelist’s attitude to these two women is conveyed in many ways, but the most important one for him is the power of speech – human expression – that is given to the one and withheld from the other. The African woman is equated with the wilderness and her purpose is “inscrutable”. The European woman is in mourning, **Conrad** tells us, and her character is definable in human terms:

She had a mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering (p.143),

- all attributes of a civilised people. But more than that, she is allowed to speak.

Achebe emphasises the role of speech in this novel. Africans are not allowed any comprehensible speech. They make “a violent babble of uncouth sounds”, and the problem does not seem to be that the Europeans are incapable of understanding their language, because even among themselves they “exchange short grunting phrases”. There are, however, two exceptions to this norm and **Achebe** discusses both at some length to underline the implications. The first is the cannibal’s monosyllabic “Catch ‘im” and “Eat ‘im”, and the second is the now famous pronouncement, “Mistah Kurtz – he dead”. **Achebe** sees the conferring of speech on the Africans in these two cases as his best assault on them. If **Conrad** wants to communicate the unspeakable craving in their heart to eat each other he has to give them some modicum of speech because grunts will not suffice. The grunts convey a vague and ambiguous impression of bestiality and monstrosity, but only the clarity of speech issuing out of their own mouths, voicing their cannibalistic desire can confirm the impression. The “insolent black head” that announces the death of Kurtz is seen by **Achebe** as the perfect stylistic device to write an appropriate ending to the horror story of Kurtz’s succumbing to the powers of darkness. What better way of ending his story than by “the proclamation of his physical death by the forces he had joined?” asks **Achebe** (p.144) In the following section we shall look at **Achebe**’s critical analysis of **Conrad**’s *Heart of Darkness* which makes him conclude that “Joseph Conrad was a thoroughgoing racist.”

The reason that most critics make no mention of this fact is that white racism against Africa is the norm and invites no comment or criticism when evidence of this is found. The excuses made for not focusing on the patent racism in the text are mostly that the text is about the deterioration of one European mind and that **Conrad's** critique and ridicule of Europe is far greater than that of Africa, or that Africa is only a setting, a backdrop, for the story of Kurtz. **Achebe's** objection to the representation of Africa in the text is exactly this: Africa is used as a "metaphysical battlefield" and Africans are of no importance in this setting. The metaphysical dimension needs to clear the battlefield of all people recognisable as humans, and what better place than Africa where human beings do not count in the white racist worldview? **Achebe** indignantly asks:

Can nobody see the preposterous and perverse arrogance in thus reducing Africa to the role of props for the break-up of one petty European mind?"
(p.146)

Achebe then questions the inclusion of *Heart of Darkness* in the canon of great literature when it so obviously celebrates the dehumanisation of Africa, the dehumanisation that has been fostered in the world by the white racism that uncritically accepts it and successfully perpetuates it. Can a racist novel be called a great work of art? **Achebe** emphatically answers in the negative. He does not argue with **Conrad's** great talents, or his insight in the exploration of European minds, but he points out that these things have already been discussed for the last fifty years, whereas his racism has not been addressed until now. To explore the reasons for **Conrad's** overt racism **Achebe** turns to form tools of textual analysis that interrogate the style, figure of speech, setting and narrative devices an examination of the exteriority of the text, that is the social and historical location of the text and its author. So **Achebe** links the year of **Conrad's** birth, 1857, to the very year when Anglican missionaries started arriving in Nigeria. Historically, **Conrad** grew up in a period when the reputation of the African people was very low, and this perhaps accounts, to some extent, for his own racism. But socio-historical factors cannot explain **Conrad's** obsession with the blackness of what he repeatedly calls "niggers". **Achebe** relates this antipathy to the black people to **Conrad's** own psychology. In support of his psychological analysis of **Conrad**, **Achebe** quotes two passages from **Conrad's** own life. **Conrad's** first encounter with a "buck nigger" created a permanent, unshakeable impression of black people as representing "blind, furious, unreasoning rage". (p.147) The impact of this encounter on him cannot be underestimated as he tells us that "of that nigger I used to dream for years afterwards." (p.147)

The fixation with blackness, we know by now, must have an opposite obsession with whiteness. And sure enough, **Conrad** has a companion piece to that of the "buck nigger" of the first Englishman that he encountered, whom he calls "my unforgettable Englishman". As with the "buck nigger" a great deal of the description focuses on the physical whiteness of the Englishman – his exposed calves, marble like condition, tone of young ivory, etc. But just as the blackness of the "buck nigger" was accompanied by "unreasoning rage", so the whiteness of the Englishman is personified by "a glance of kindly curiosity and a friendly gleam of big, sound, shiny teeth". (p.147) **Achebe** comments, "Irrational love and irrational hate jostling together in the heart of that talented, tormented man." (p.148) **Achebe's** methodology of examining **Conrad's** racism in *Heart of Darkness* has been two-pronged: one is to scrutinise the form and theme of the actual text itself and to place it in a socio-historical context, and the other is to interrogate the psyche of the author himself. While the first method uses cultural materialism, that is, it investigates the material facts that surround the text and the author to deconstruct its ideology, the second method of psychoanalysis perceives the author as an individual whose psychology cannot entirely be rationalised in terms of his location – socially and historically.

Conrad's obsession with blackness is influenced to some degree by the period in which he is living, but ultimately **Achebe** diagnoses it as "irrational", arising from his "tormented" mind. However, **Conrad's** case is not that of a prejudiced mind out to downgrade the *other*. We, therefore, need to probe deeper into his fictional representation. This is what we will attempt in the following discussion.

4.5 VERACITY OF REPRESENTATIONS

Why is it important to speak out against the racism of a work of fiction that is not meant to please the people about whom it is written? Does the author of a fictional story have to be responsible in his/her representations of peoples and places? **Achebe** firmly believes that the writer does bear the burden of responsibility because Africans have undergone untold sufferings precisely due to the kinds of prejudices and insults that this novel portrays. More important than the agonies suffered in the past is the fact that these atrocities continue into the present in many ways and many places even today. Thus, for this representation of Africa to go unchallenged means to abet the injustices to the black people that history has witnessed and that now continue to be present due to the stereotypes of the Africans that are perpetuated through 'great' fiction. The other issue that **Achebe** raises is: how does one question the veracity of the representation of one who has actually, physically, experienced the places and peoples he is representing, specially when one has no first hand experience of those places and peoples oneself? **Achebe** has two responses to this. The first is that a traveller's representations need not be trusted simply because he saw those things with his own eyes. It is well known that perspectivism, the point of view from which one views anything, fundamentally influences the manner in which it is perceived. And as **Aijaz Ahmad** emphasises:

...when it comes to knowledge of the world, there is no such thing as a category of the 'essentially descriptive'; that 'description' is never ideologically or cognitively neutral; that to 'describe' is to specify a locus of meaning, to construct an object of knowledge, and to produce a knowledge that will be bound by that act of descriptive construction.

Conrad's 'description' of Africa is an excellent illustration of **Ahmad's** argument. **Conrad's** 'description' emerges out of his own ideological beliefs and can never be the product of a 'neutral' standpoint. The danger of this description lies precisely in the fact that once **Conrad** has constructed Africa as an object of knowledge through its 'cannibalistic', 'monstrous' people and its primordial, bestial state, the Africa that is thus created is bound by this description and becomes the site for judgments, values, perceptions in the future. **Conrad's** Africa then blends seamlessly into the already existing stereotype of Africa and strengthens the negative values attributed to it through its prejudiced descriptions.

Achebe's second response to the viability of questioning a first-hand traveller's representation of a people and a place is that of exploring other sources for information and then doing a comparative study. He thus turns to the account of a British art historian, **Frank Willett**, to see how his view of Africa compares with **Conrad's** and finds that the differences between the two are irreconcilable. **Willett's** account is about the impact of African art on the great European painters. He even identifies a mask that stunned **Derain** when he saw it and who was affected enough by it to show it to **Matisse** and **Picasso**. African art in the early part of the nineteenth hundreds was responsible for ushering in a revolution in the tradition of the painting of Europe. It seems inconceivable that **Conrad's** savages who fade in and out of the wilderness could be deemed capable of producing great art, or any art, for that matter. **Achebe** identifies the people who made the mask that **Willett** refers to as the *Fang* people, and tells us that they are "without doubt among the world's greatest masters

of sculptured form.” (p.149) The discovery of their work by European artists was responsible for the beginning of *cubism* and for infusing life into European art.

At the end of the essay **Achebe** reiterates the hypothesis with which he began: namely that **Conrad**’s racism is just a reflection of the dominant image of Africa in the Western imagination. The reason for the entirely negative construction of Africa, **Achebe** says is that “the West seems to suffer deep anxieties about the precariousness of its civilisation and to have a need for constant reassurance by comparison with Africa”. (p.150) This was echoed a year later by **Edward Said**. Thus the construction of the polarised binaries of the River Thames/River Congo, the African mistress/the Intended, European civilisation/masses of swaying bodies in the jungles. But as **Achebe** has been at pains to underline, the main point is not that the binary puts in permanent opposition good/bad; the main point is the need to avoid the *Other* because of the risk that it may invade the *Self* and claim it in the name of shared ancestry, just as the darkness claimed Kurtz. **Achebe** finds that there is no easy way out of this dehumanising of Africa by the West that can come about by simply telling them about the ‘real’ Africa which is not the opposite of that which is portrayed by the West but is simply a human Africa with all the attributes of human beings anywhere in the world. But this demystification is not possible because the counter knowledge of the prevalent stereotype of Africa is disseminated through every institution of the West – its media, its schools and its churches. The work of undoing these systematically taught stereotypes is daunting, but must be done nevertheless. Of crucial importance in the work of redressing this issue is to be aware of the integral link between stereotyping and politics. Thus, while **Conrad** was aware of the evil of imperial exploitation and he condemned it in his writing, he did not make the connection between imperialism and the racist ideology, grounded in the assumed superiority of the West and the inherent inferiority of the non-West, which gave it legitimacy. On the other hand, there has never been a time when the victims of racism have not been aware of the connection between the two, even if they are not part of the educated elite who have the language and tools to read and critique **Conrad**, to internalise and raise his/her voice against this racism.

4.6 COLONIALIST REPRESENTATIONS IN *A PASSAGE TO INDIA*

Abdul R JanMohamed’s essay, *The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature* was published in the well-known scholarly journal *Critical Inquiry* in the Autumn of 1985 in a special volume entitled “‘Race,’ Writing and Difference”. **JanMohamed** starts his essay by voicing his concern with the fact that most of the critical material on colonialist literature does not take into account the political context of culture and history. Due to this, there is a systematic avoidance of any analysis of domination, manipulation, exploitation and disenfranchisement that forms part of any relationship. However, it certainly is part of all colonial relations. He posits that to understand colonialist discourse we have to map the ideological function of this discourse with the actual imperialist practices. When we study colonialist fiction, we will find that the ideological functions can be understood, indeed *must* be analysed, in terms of the politics and culture of the European and the colonialist, not in terms of the colonised and their land in which this fiction is set.

In order to enable the postcolonial critic to analyse colonialist literature by examining the politics of culture and history **JanMohamed** gives us his model of the Manichean allegory:

Just as imperialists “administer” the resources of the conquered country, so colonialist discourse “commodifies” the native subject into a stereotyped object and uses him as a “resource” for colonialist fiction. The European writer commodifies the native by negating his individuality, his subjectivity,

so that he is now perceived as a generic being that can be exchanged for any other native (they all look alike, act alike, and so on). Once reduced to his exchange-value in the colonialist signifying system, he is fed into the Manichean allegory, which functions as the currency, the medium of exchange, for the entire colonialist discursive system. The exchange function of the allegory remains constant, while the generic attributes themselves can be substituted infinitely (and even contradictorily) for one another. As Said points out in his study of *Orientalism*, such strategies depend on a "flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand." Within such a representational economy, the writer's task is to "administer" the relatively scarce resources of the Manichean opposition in order to reproduce the native in a potentially infinite variety of images, the apparent diversity of which is determined by the simple machinery of Manichean allegory. (p.64)

In colonial societies, **JanMohamed** argues, the dominant model of power is the Manichean opposition between the supposed superiority of the European and the alleged inferiority of the native. In colonialist literary representation this gives rise to diverse yet interchangeable oppositions between "black and white, good and evil, superiority and inferiority, civilisation and savagery, intelligence and emotion, rationality and sensuality, *Self* and *Other*, subject and object." The power of this Manichean opposition is so great that even those writers who are reluctant to acknowledge it, and are critical of imperialist exploitation, are sucked into it.

To illustrate his point **JanMohamed** re-reads some canonical novels, including *Heart of Darkness* and **Rudyard Kipling's** *Kim*. For our work we shall focus on his reading of **E M Forster's** *A Passage to India*. **JanMohamed** begins his analysis of **Forster** by observing that in *A Passage to India* **Forster** very consciously and deliberately brackets the values and basis of his own culture so that he can look beyond them, so that he can perceive other cultures without being biased by his own. He does this in order to appreciate the common ground between *Self* and *Other*, or the term that **JanMohamed** uses, an alterity. Thus, **Forster** is harsh in his satirisation of the stereotypes of colonialist racism and is able to present accurately and concretely differences between Muslim and Hindu beliefs, or the differences between Anglo-Indian and English values.

Forster makes a sincere attempt to examine the possibilities of cultural and racial rapprochement – a coming together, or union – of the two races, of the East and the West, the coloniser and the colonised. However, the very devices he uses for this eventually guarantee their failure. **JanMohamed's** analysis of **Forster's** use of the landscape of India – the Marabar caves – the spirituality and religion that symbolises Indians, and the ambiguity of the metaphysical and mystical experiences of the British in India expose the inevitability of failure in forging a union between the two cultures at even the minutest level. He points out that India is characterised as a land of pathos, of an ontological homesickness that is embodied in the Marabar Hills and caves. He further shows that **Forster** stresses on the ambiguity of the caves, the Jain religion that has for its goal the absolute Nothing, and more important, on the Indian mind which is so steeped in ambiguity that it confuses a branch with a snake. Thus, metaphysical difference is embodied in the very landscape, religion and mentality of India. The implication of **Forster's** use of the metaphysical difference can be seen in the end when Fielding asks Aziz why they cannot be friends. **Forster** portrays the friendship of Fielding and Aziz as the only one that bears the potential of transcending racial barriers.

Fielding is rational, lacks racial prejudice and is humane. Aziz has matured through his experiences with the British Raj. Both want to be friends, but the negative reply does not come from either of them, or from any of the political, social, historical and cultural structures that have so painstakingly been examined and analysed in the

novel; rather, they come from the many inanimate objects that form India, the objects both “ridiculous and august”, the objects that had said “Come” with their many mouths earlier in the novel. **JanMohamed** comments:

In the final analysis, racial difference is once again supported and justified by metaphysical difference. ...The narrative decision to turn India into a metaphysical protagonist inherently antithetical to Western liberal humanism probably stems from a sense of larger cultural differences, the machinery of which is similar to that of the Manichean allegory.

JanMohamed’s conclusion, then, like **Achebe**’s, is that it is impossible for **Forster** to completely put aside his own cultural values and perspectives, and that is why he finds it difficult to end his novel with a union, a rapprochement, between his own supposedly superior European protagonist and his *Other*, the allegedly inferior colonised native. What makes **JanMohamed**’s reading of *A Passage to India* so much more complex than **Achebe**’s reading of *Heart of Darkness* is his ability to use the tools of the postcolonial critic to expose the colonialist discourse of a novel that is valorised as being different from other colonialist fiction, a novel that is seen as representing India from within and not with the usual racist bias that is inherent in other colonial works. **JanMohamed** shows that even when a writer belonging to the colonial power deliberately and consciously sets out to expose the stereotypes that his countrymen have indulged in, and to move towards a breaking down of the barrier between *Self* and *Other*, he cannot move out of his own cultural background completely.

4.7 LET US SUM UP

Achebe selects **Joseph Conrad**’s *Heart of Darkness* in his plan to question racist constructions of Africa because he feels that this text more than any other displays the Western desire to set up Africa as a foil to Europe. **Conrad** is particularly worth examining because he is accepted as one of the great stylists of modern fiction. His fiction thus belongs to the category of ‘permanent’ fiction. The reason for analysing *Heart of Darkness* is that it is read constantly by serious academics. **Achebe** uses all the tools available to him as a novelist and a literary critic to examine the text through its style, figures of speech, setting, etc. **Achebe**’s critical analysis of **Conrad**’s *Heart of Darkness* makes him remark, that, “**Joseph Conrad** was a thoroughgoing racist.” (p.145) The reason that most critics make no mention of this fact is that white racism against Africa is the norm and invites no comment or criticism when evidence of it is found. At the end of the essay **Achebe** reiterates the hypothesis with which he began: namely that **Conrad**’s racism is just a reflection of the dominant image of Africa in the Western imagination. **Abdul R JanMohamed** started his essay by voicing his concern with the fact that most of the critical material available on colonialist literature does not acknowledge the influence of the political context of culture and history. He suggests that in order to understand the colonialist discourse one would need to trace the ideological function of this discourse with what was the actual imperialist practice of that time. He then goes on to re-read **E M Forster**’s *A Passage to India*. Through his re-reading of *A Passage to India*, he manages to show that even though **Forster** tried very hard to expose the stereotypes that his countrymen have indulged in, and to move towards a breaking down of the barrier between the *Self* and the *other*, he cannot move out of his own cultural background completely as is evident from his ending of *A Passage to India*.

4.8 QUESTIONS

1. Why does Chinua Achebe select Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* to analyse Western representations of Africa in racist terms?
2. What tools does Achebe use in his analysis of *Heart of Darkness*?

3. Do you agree with Achebe's conclusion that "Joseph Conrad was a thoroughgoing racist"?
4. What theory does Achebe formulate from his reading of *Heart of Darkness*? Why do Western critics not discuss the racist representation of Africa in this novel?
5. What according to JanMohamed is necessary for a study of colonialist literature/ fiction?
6. What strategy should be adopted to analyse colonialist literature in postcolonial terms?
7. Do you agree with JanMohamed's conclusion that it is impossible for Forster to completely put aside his own cultural values and perspectives in *A Passage to India*?

4.9 GLOSSARY

Ascendancy:	Powerful position, a position of power or domination over others
Primordial:	Existing first, existing at the beginning of time
Inscrutable:	Mysterious, hard to interpret because not expressing anything obviously
Demystification:	Make less mysterious, to remove the mystery surrounding something, for example, by explaining it in simple language
Rapprochement:	Renewal of friendly relations, the establishment or renewal of friendly relations between people or nations that were previously hostile or unsympathetic toward each other (<i>formal</i>)

UNIT 5 RESISTING COLONISATION AND RE-COLONISATION

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Resisting Colonisation and Re-colonisation
- 5.3 Decolonising the Indian Mind
- 5.4 Nationalism in *Gora* and *Samskar*
- 5.5 Singh's Critique of Post Independence Indian Literature
- 5.6 Third World Versus First World
- 5.7 Struggle against Neo Colonialism
- 5.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.9 Questions
- 5.10 Glossary

5.0 OBJECTIVES

In Units 1, 2, and 3 we have studied theories of Postcoloniality, and in Unit 4 we have studied the practical application of these theories to the reading of two texts – *Heart of Darkness* and *A Passage to India*. The reference point in Unit 4 was the 'civilisational' clash supposed to have emerged in the closing decades of the twentieth century. In this Unit we will look at the concept of resisting colonisation and re-colonisation by examining an essay by an eminent Hindi critic **Namvar Singh**. This essay is at once somewhat problematic and explanatory as it also does a number of things: it responds to Postcolonial theories, uses them in formulating ideas, and also does a comparative reading of two texts.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Before we begin a discussion of this essay a word of caution is necessary. We need to be alert to two things while reading this essay: the first is **Namvar Singh's** main theme in this piece – that neo-colonialism must be detected and resisted, and the second is the form, that is, the construction and methodology of the argument itself. By now we have already read four essays and analysed the different methods and approaches used in Postcolonial theory. We should therefore, be ready to critique essays using the theories that we have studied to find the flaws or merits of the argument presented. In this unit, we shall also try to show how an argument can be subjected to critical examination.

5.2 RESISTING COLONISATION AND RE-COLONISATION

The block to which the present unit belongs is about the various types of writing about what used to be the British Empire till World War II. In the previous four units we have tried to examine the nature of colonial literature and how postcolonial critics have tried to understand it or even deconstruct it. Before we proceed, any further, it would be pertinent to look at the various literary terms that we have been using through this block. When we talk of imperialism/ imperial, what is meant is the

political authority with which a state assumed control and power over another state/ nation/ country. Imperialism would therefore, mean the British Empire assuming complete control over India or her other colonies. Imperialism is normally reflected through the use of symbols and symbolism and pageantry, which once again is indicative of another dominant culture. For example, England was an imperial power in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Colonialism is a result of imperialism. A consolidated imperial power involves capturing of territories, settlement, very often the exploitation of resources of the conquered territory and an attempt to rule the native inhabitants of a newly colonised land (e.g., India and Australia were both colonised by the British).

From colonialism comes the word colonial literature. Since we are students of English literature, colonial literature could be used to mean / include writings that are concerned with the colonial experience and colonial preoccupations written during colonial times. Postcolonial literature, on the other hand is, apart from being simply the writing that came after the empire also that which examines the colonial relationship between coloniser and the colonised critically. It is also a literature that resists the colonial perspective. Also referred to as decolonisation. Such writing demands a re- look, and a re-structuring of established meanings and power equations. Postcolonialism / postcolonial writers and critics are largely engaged in the act of undercutting those discourses that supported colonisation, those images of power and race. This in turn gives rise to another term – postcoloniality, a state of being in which the formerly colonised, seek their own place in the global scenario.

Sometimes, neo-colonialism is also used in place of postcolonialism. It must be remembered that though both these terms refer to the post independence period they mean different things. Neo-colonialism is a term borrowed from economic theory which signifies/ means the economic control still being exercised by the west on their former colonies, in spite of the fact that the former colonies are now independent nations. Whereas former colonies have gained political independence and the proverbial sun has set on the British Empire, we are still trapped in colonialism of another kind. Despite the fact that there has been a development in anti- imperialism and in critiquing established orders of the empire, colonialism still exists in a new form under newer imperial powers. The essay that we will be discussing in this unit will show us how we should resist both colonisation, as well as re-colonisation.

5.3 DECOLONISING THE INDIAN MIND

In this section we shall look at **Namvar Singh's** essay, *Decolonising the Indian Mind* that was written in 1991. **Namvar Singh**, an eminent Hindi critic, starts the essay *Decolonising the Indian Mind* by stating that the greatest event of world history in the twentieth century is decolonisation. He links the end of colonisation to the end of the cultural control of European and American literature in the academy. According to **Singh**, the most “creatively exciting and stimulating” (p.75) literature is now emerging from Latin America, Africa and Asia. These literatures are mounting a challenge to the literatures of Europe and America and are thus hastening the process of decolonisation. **Singh** argues that since the literary creativity of Latin America, Africa and Asia are now occupying center-stage, the literary theorists of Europe and America, have tried to fit them into easily categorised formulations such as *Commonwealth Literature*, *New Literatures in English* and *Postcolonial Literature*. The newest such formulation, he says, is *Third World Literature*.

Singh observes that the term *Third World Literature* is a form of “neo-‘orientalism’ of the post-colonial age” (p.76). Loosely using **Edward Said's** theory of *Orientalism* **Singh** comments that Europe and America still need to define themselves in opposition to an entity *other* than themselves. The West thinks that the Third World, too, needs to use some *other* to define itself, and they can think of no other entity than

themselves to form that *Other*. **Singh** asserts that this is the true perspective from which the Indian Literature of the twentieth century should be evaluated. Let us briefly examine a few aspects of his argument in this regard and see if they indicate any difficulties.

Some of the loopholes in the perspective used by **Singh** to evaluate Indian Literature appear as follows:

1. Using **Said's** *Orientalism*, **Singh** homogenises the West – Europe and America – as a single, undifferentiated entity that acts cohesively, with complete internal unity. The construction of the West as a unitary body is one of the problems with **Said's** *Orientalism* that many critics have pointed out in the last twenty years since its first publication. **Singh** shows no awareness of this problem.
2. **Said's** *Orientalism* describes specific socio-historical, geo-political conditions that gave rise to the Orientalism of the 18th century. As far as **Namvar Singh** is concerned, he does not address in any disciplined, academic manner the reasons for the West's needing an *Other* in a postcolonial world. There is no attempt in **Namvar Singh's** essay to locate postcolonial *Othering* in the field of literature in a materialist context.
3. The last part of **Singh's** formulation that according to the approach of the West the *Third World* needs an *Other* and that, that *Other* can only be the West is not substantiated in any way by references to either critics or creative writing. How **Singh** arrives at this conclusion is not demonstrated in the essay. These have to be kept in mind in order to assess the worth of **Namvar Singh's** argument.

Singh proceeds to link his opening statement of decolonisation being the greatest world event of the twentieth century to the issue of Indian Literature. He states that it is not possible to find a resolution to issues such as those of tradition and modernity, regional and national identity, etc., through any perspective except that of decolonisation. The awareness of Indian writers to the issues emerging from decolonisation relates, according to **Singh**, directly to the release of their creative energies. He attributes the “feeble and slack” attitude towards decolonisation in the post-Independence writers to the fact that India has not produced literary phenomena such as **Marquez**, **Achebe** or **Ngugi Wa Thiong'O** in this period.

What we may conclude at this stage is the consequences of having a feeble attitude to decolonisation. What normally happens is that nationalist sentiments grow weaker with the passage of time. On the other hand **Singh** has argued that nationalism is essential in fighting imperialism which is still prevalent in the postcolonial world. One of the reasons that **Singh** locates for the “silent compromise with imperialism” (p.77) is the fact that rather than gaining Independence India was granted Independence. He asks: “Were it a matter of gaining independence, would we have gained the independence of a partitioned country?” (p.77) India's acceptance of partition resulted in the shattering of the Indian identity. The idea of considering the event of colonisation and the process of decolonisation as the central governing phenomenon from which to perceive a multiplicity of issues is somewhat problematic. We have already read in earlier units, **Aijaz Ahmad's** critique of **Frederic Jameson** in which he points out that there were many crucial negotiations made in determining identities between different groups within India that were not influenced by colonialism. **Ahmad** has argued that to accept colonisation as the central experience influencing Indian literature is to unquestioningly accept the binarised power structure created by the West as the only available one. Before we go any further we should take a look at the meaning of nationalism as represented in earlier works of fiction. In the next section we shall examine the meaning of nationalism as reflected in two important twentieth century Indian novels- namely, *Gora* and *Samskar*. We can understand **Namvar Singh's** simplistic notions only if

5.4 NATIONALISM IN *GORA* AND *SAMSKAR*

To analyse the consequences of the fragmentation of identity caused by the Partition, **Singh** does a reading of two Indian novels: **Rabindranath Tagore's** *Gora* which was published in 1910 and **U R Anantha Murthy's** *Samskar*, published in 1965. In **Singh's** opinion, these two novels are comparable because they share a central theme, that of a search for identity and a crisis of identity. The central characters of the two novels, Gaur Mohan and Praneshacharya, emerge at the end as human beings rather than singular, unidimensional persons. **Singh's** critique of the two novels is made from the perspective of nationalism, which according to him was missing in the Indian writers of the post-Independence generation. **Tagore's** character Gaur Mohan celebrates his identity as one that belongs to India as a whole with no conflict between religions, castes, or communities. On the other hand, in *Samskar*, Praneshacharya's new identity does not relate back to India at all – it is based on unlearning all that the world of caste, religion and community has taught, and on allowing the heart to flow freely like a child's. **Singh's** argument is that *Gora's* identity instils pride in him while Praneshacharya becomes meek in his newfound freedom.

As we can see **Singh's** character analysis of *Gora* and Praneshacharya does not use any specific tools of literary criticism; rather, it is based on assertion, buttressed by phrases such as “unless I am, of course, imagining it”. (p.79) The quotations that **Singh** gives from both texts illustrate a similar ‘feeling’ of freedom in the two characters. The freedom, or liberation, is from the taboos that enclose the daily life of an upper caste Hindu. **Singh** locates *Gora's* new identity, or loss of the old identity, in terms of the nation that is losing the specificity of one unified identity to one that encompasses all of India because it has broken free of the boundaries of religion and caste. Praneshacharya, while going through exactly the same kind of crisis of identity, and coming to the same conclusion, the realisation that he is not a Brahmin but a human being, expresses this new identity not in terms of the nation but in terms of the heart. **Singh** finds undertones of existentialism as opposed to nationalism in Praneshacharya's speech. However, the lines that he quotes to support his argument show that Praneshacharya has discovered a profound new meaning in life after unlearning his old identity unlike the existential hero for whom loss of the old identity results in finding out that life has no meaning at all.

From here, **Singh** goes on to compare the ‘Indianness’ (a term that he has used rather uncritically) of each novel. He finds that *Samskar* constructs life in the Indian village through stereotypes that the West enjoys seeing, whereas **Tagore** in *Gora* does not feel the need to contrive such Indianness. **Singh** says that this is the reason why western scholars consider *Samskar* a more ‘Indian’ novel while *Gora* goes unregarded. According to **Singh**, **Anantha Murthy** is writing *Samskar* with an eye on what the West wants to see of India as *Other*, while **Tagore** is unconcerned with the West. Strangely however, in the next paragraph, **Singh** quotes a lengthy passage from *Gora* in which **Tagore** is clearly concerned about the West and asserts an Indianness that should exist without influence from the West: “... We shall not compare ourselves point by point with some Western ideal... We shall not feel embarrassed in the least before others or ourselves for the customs, faith, scriptures or society of the country we have been born in...” (P.80) **Singh** praises the *swadeshi* tone of this passage and holds it up as a model to those writers who need to offer proofs of their Indianness to western critics. Interestingly, what **Singh** does not consider in his analysis is that **Tagore** shows his awareness of the gaze of the West and actually addresses it straightforwardly in his novel. If **Anantha Murthy** is being accused of pandering to the stereotypes of India that the West cherishes, then this

passage shows **Tagore** asserting an Indianness that is constructed against the West as the superior Other, even if it does so in the process of rejecting the West. On the basis of the passages quoted by **Singh** it is difficult to prove that the position of the imperial West was more important in the creative process for **Anantha Murthy** than it was for **Tagore**. From an analysis of two Indian novels, **Singh** turns his attention to the defining characteristics of post-Independence Indian literature. Let us now take a look at post-independence Indian literature in the next section.

5.5 SINGH'S CRITIQUE OF POST-INDEPENDENCE INDIAN LITERATURE

We notice that, **Namvar Singh** limits his area of enquiry severely by stating that only Indian writers in English can be seen as representative of India: "If truth be told, it is these Indian writers in English alone who are the representative writers of 'Indian literature', while the literature of any other Indian language such as Hindi, Bengali, or Tamil must remain 'regional literature'". (p.80) At the obvious level, **Singh** has used irony here. However, this formulation should alert us to the fact that **Singh** has indirectly asserted that the representative Indian writer can only be the one who has had a colonial education giving him/her the requisite proficiency in English to use that language as the medium of the creative process. It is with this basic assumption in mind that **Singh** seems to have critiqued Indian literature.

Singh implies that the construction of the category of the Indian novel, or the Third World novel, has become something of an academic-commercial enterprise because it gives Indian writers in English and Indian professors of English an excuse to hold/attend seminars and create work for themselves. He carries this implication a step forward to charge these writers and professors with endeavouring to impose one definition of Indian literature in English rather than trying to explore the rich and complex area of Indian creativity. According to **Singh**, the attempt in these seminars is to prove that the realistic European novel no longer influences Indian literature; rather, it is turning to indigenous Indian themes and forms to construct a new Indian novel. **Singh** levels his accusation against these writers and professors quite strongly:

There is an attempt to incorporate within the process such myths, customs and beliefs of Indian life as are exotic for the West and therefore the objects of its special curiosity." (p.80)

He makes the charge that because these writers and professors would have difficulty in backing their argument with actual texts, the English language novelists are "putting their heart and soul" into writing such novels. The charge is that all English language novelists are shaping their creative work to meet the requirements of the West.

It is important to note that **Singh** claims that those who endeavour to show that the Indian novel uses indigenous Indian material in its construction have no proof to back their argument. On his side, however, **Singh** himself is not able to name any novel that backs his assertion that such novels are being produced on a large scale. Who, specifically, are the writers that he is referring to? Which are the novels? What is their marketing history that proves their success in the West? A few references would have strengthened his argument. Because of the lack of these references, the assertion that **Singh** makes is very tenuous and, therefore, unconvincing.

Singh ends his expose of these suspect Indian writers in English by asking:

If we were to go by the results, the Indian novel in English today would seem to be rather more 'Indian' than the so called 'regional language' novels." (p.81)

One is not sure what to make of this statement, for **Singh** starts this section by clearly demarcating English language novels as 'Indian' and the others as 'regional'. How are these 'Indian' and 'regional' identities to be reconciled? Is a cockfight among tribals an 'Indian' characteristic or a 'regional' one? Are only those features that apply uniformly to all of India 'Indian' while those that are confined to certain communities, religions or geographical areas 'regional'? Or are there some dominant characteristics that are 'Indian' while there may be others that are more widespread but less visible 'regional'? These are crucial issues that need to be dealt with before one uses the neat categories of 'Indian' and 'regional' in reference to either literature or identity.

Namvar Singh does refute the argument that for the English speaking/writing Indian writer or scholar, the journey back to the East has to be through the West. **Singh** shows awareness of the fact that Indian writers in English are against colonisation in literature and that the helplessness of those writers who lived in the colonial phase as well as those who travel to the West in the postcolonial phase is understandable. But he asks a question similar to the one he asked a few lines above:

But how can one accept this as the destiny of the whole of Indian literature?"
(p.81)

The problems in the rhetorical answer to this question again arise from the terms of inquiry that **Singh** has put into place: namely, that 'Indian' literature is literature written in English. To answer his question with some academic rigour and to include in this inquiry literatures other than those written in English, **Singh** must change his terms of reference or at least use the existing ones explicitly and consistently. He cannot move arbitrarily between different definitions of 'Indian' literature. After his analysis of Indian literature **Singh** returns to the construction of the category of *Third World Literature* and links the creation of this category to the conception of the *Third World* itself in the period after World War II. We shall take up this part of the argument in the next section of our unit.

5.6 THIRD WORLD VERSUS FIRST WORLD

Singh had stated earlier in the essay that the creation of the category of *Third World Literature* was motivated by the West's need to define itself through an *Other*. He comes back to this argument now from a slightly different perspective: that of the post-modernist idea of "difference". As we have seen earlier in this block, the categories of *First World* and *Third World* are problematic and need to be deconstructed with close attention to all the implications that they carry. **Singh**, however, dismisses the conception of *Third World Literature* as "a figment of the fertile imagination of the 'First World'". (p.83) **Singh** argues that while in the period of colonisation the West aimed at the Europeanisation and Americanisation of the colonised, in the postcolonial era the ultimate value of the East for the West is in its preservation of its 'difference', presumably so that it can continue to function as the West's *Other*.

One of the reasons that **Singh** identifies for our not being alert to this "deviousness of colonisation" (p.84) is that Indians in general and Indian writers in particular have internalised cultural colonisation. We now use the coloniser's language and concepts in defining our own identity. This lack of awareness of the dangers of cultural colonisation is the reason that **Singh** gives for post-Independence writers' ambivalent attitude towards colonialism. **Singh** alleges that this ambivalence towards colonialism is accepted as a characteristic of modernism. Ambivalence towards colonialism is considered "a desirable value of modern poetic and aesthetics." (p.84) The consequences of this ambivalence are again far-reaching and can be seen in the way our native prose is now changing from the direct robust indigenous prose of the

nineteenth century. **Singh** relates the attitude of ambivalence towards colonialism to the question of language that every Indian writer faces.

Singh's framework of analysing Indian literature through the perspective of decolonisation – and therefore colonisation – raises some problems here. Earlier **Singh** had referred to the imperialism that is still prevalent in the postcolonial world. Although **Singh** does not give details, the concept of neo-imperialism/ neo-colonialism through global capitalism is one we are all familiar with. But in this section **Singh** refers only to colonialism, which is associated with political and administrative control along with economic domination. Why does colonialism have to be the central event on which every Indian writer should focus? In response to this, **Singh** says that we use the language and concepts of the colonisers to define ourselves because we have internalised cultural colonisation. But by insisting on the centrality of colonisation and decolonisation in the experience of the Indian nation, **Singh** is not allowing space and agency for the multiplicity of other voices and identities that make up the socio-historic experiences of India. **Singh** is forcing the Indian identity into the binary of coloniser/colonised while at the same time urging us to forge an Indianness that is not influenced by the desires of the West. **Namvar Singh** makes a forceful case in his movement towards this conclusion. We shall examine this in the following section.

5.7 STRUGGLE AGAINST NEO-COLONIALISM

Singh asks in the essay: "How should we oppose the new onslaught of colonisation?" (p.84) Here **Singh** specifies that he is referring to the "new onslaught" of colonisation and therefore distinguishes between this and the earlier process of colonisation and decolonisation. One answer to this question is to go to the past, to our traditions. But **Singh** very pertinently argues that there is no simple given tradition that already exists. Any tradition that is used to oppose the onslaught of colonisation will be the one that is reconstructed. This reconstruction will be "the rediscovery of the past by the present as desired". (p.84) That is, the tradition that will be created as the past of the country will be according to the needs of the present, and will thus be a biased version of tradition. The question remains as to which tradition should we use? The two examples **Singh** gives are those of the imperial powers of today who still have a vested interest in their previous colonies, and who need to see India and the Third World as a backward and primitive place, and so pick out of India's past only those things that help consolidate the image of primitiveness and backwardness. The second relates to the unidimensional and narrow tradition presented by the Hindu fundamentalists as India's 'real' past. Both these groups create a tradition with a motive that is either political or commercial or both.

The second answer to the question of how to oppose the new onslaught of colonialism is through 'nationalist allegory', but **Singh** rightly rejects this option too. Just as he had asked earlier whose tradition, so he asks again, whose nation? Is it the nation of those in power? What kind of nationalism would the poverty-stricken identify with? What kind of nationalism would the dalits identify with? **Singh** pertinently points out that the nationalism that existed at the beginning of the twentieth century has done its job and spent its energies; there is no point in trying to revive it, or invoking it once again.

If we are to find a solution to the problem of how to oppose the new onslaught of colonialism, **Singh** argues, it would have to be done by taking into account the realities of the present. We must realise that even though a small percentage of society has been culturally colonised, and that too superficially, it is important to realise that this colonisation is hegemonic. That is, the colonisation of the small percentage of Indians is one that constitutes cultural control and exerts power. It is important, also, to remember that this small percentage of culturally colonised people belong to the class that claims to having changed and developed literature in the post-

Independence period. **Singh**'s cynicism against this class is evident, and he ironically points out that this is the class that claims to have effected decolonisation, even though it was a "pseudo-decolonisation." (p.85)

The solution to opposing the new onslaught of colonialism is not a complete rejection of the West either, states **Singh**. For the first time in this essay, **Singh** does not refer to the West as a single, homogenised, unitary entity. He acknowledges that even within the imperial West there are many anti-imperialist individuals and groups who have actively expressed their disagreement with colonialism and imperialism. He asserts that we should not dissociate ourselves from them in search of a distinctive identity for *Third World literature*. The West, in this very short paragraph, is seen as a complex, multi-dimensional entity with which we need to negotiate with care, and not to dismiss out of hand. The model that '*Third World Literature*' can look up to is that of the '*Second World Literature*' of socialist countries. Although the *Second World* is beginning to disintegrate, its literature is not. **Singh** asserts that the literature of the *Second World* is more liberated and exciting than that of the *Third World*. Since **Singh** had earlier rejected the category of '*Third World Literature*' as a figment of the fertile imagination of the *First World*, one is not sure how to define these three worlds and what characteristics to assign to them before moving on to the important task of defining their literatures.

Singh concludes by looking at the future of the postcolonial world that is still under the domination of neo-imperialism as the US-Iraq war proves. By the 1990s socialism could no longer be seen as the future towards which the world was moving. **Singh** then concludes on a positive note by referring to the concept of progress that will inexorably propel us into the future even while our face is turned towards the past. We do not have the time to right past wrongs since progress is propelling us into the future. One of the reasons that this essay is so loosely argued is that it was originally a speech that was later transcribed and translated. It is difficult for a speech to be as rigorous in its argument as a written essay. A speaker has to rely on the memory and attention of its audience when making an argument because the time for absorption and comprehension is brief. There is no possibility to go back and clarify a point or to read it once again to understand the links in the argument. Further, translations inevitably change the meaning of the original, even if very slightly. Thus the use of closely related, often interchangeable words such as 'colonialism' and 'imperialism' could be an insertion of the translator rather than the speaker.

However, while all these factors are true, this speech comes to us, students of Postcolonial Studies, as a printed essay, one that has been canonised to the degree that it forms part of the syllabus. As literary critics we must engage with this essay as we would with any other piece of writing. As we have been pointing out through this unit, part of the problems with this essay arises from vague and sweeping generalisations that are not substantiated by any references. Statements are asserted rather than argued. But the more fundamental problem arises from loose and arbitrary definitions of the crucial categories of the *First World* and the *Third World*, and of Indian literature. Since these are the very categories that the essay has adopted, it was essential to have coherent, defined ideas about them.

There is also one further problem. This essay was written in 1991, and it refers to several of the literary theorists and to literary theories that form the debate about *Third World Literature* as well as the binary between the *Third* and *First Worlds*. Among these are **Edward Said** and **Frederic Jameson**. But there is no evidence of any awareness of the complexity of the debate around these theorists: We have studied in Unit 2 **Aijaz Ahmad**'s response to **Frederic Jameson**'s argument that all *Third World* texts are necessarily national allegories. **Ahmad** deconstructs **Jameson**'s position with academic rigour, and then offers an alternative position of his own. Similarly, we have studied parts of **Edward Said**'s *Orientalism*, and discussed the problems of homogenising the West that several critics of Said have focused on. **Singh**'s use of these critics and their theories has been done in a

simplistic manner without considering the contentious nature of the positions he is adopting.

Thus, **Singh**'s methodology does not measure up to his intentions. The need to fight neo-imperialism in India as well as Indian literature is an urgent one, especially in view of the developments in Indian writing in English in the thirteen years since this essay was written. Print global capitalism and huge global markets for books, efficient industries of translations and distribution have resulted in enormous money advances being made to writers even before their book is completed. The uneven balance of power and money between Indian writers in English and Indian writers in other languages has pushed Indian writers in English on to the centre-stage as being the representative Indian writers. These problems **Singh** is alert to and cautions us against. However, he relies more on simple statements than on critical analyses to advance his argument.

5.8 LET US SUM UP

Namvar **Singh**'s essay, *Decolonising the Indian Mind*, attempts to do several things: it questions the creation of the category of 'Third World Literature', to define Indian Literature, to critique neo-imperialist forces at work in influencing the creative abilities of Indian writers, and to issue a warning against the deviousness of neo-colonialism and the need to resist its pressure. Most of these issues are those we have already encountered in the earlier four units. In this essay, however, there are a few problems at the level of the argument. Add to this the fact that the arbitrariness of defining categories undermine its main thrust. **Singh**'s main contribution in this essay is his exploration into the ways in which neo-colonialism can be resisted.

5.9 QUESTIONS

1. What, according to Singh, is the main global event of the twentieth century and why? Do you agree with his position?
2. Why does Singh validate Tagore's Gora over Anantha Murthy's Samskar? Do you accept his reading of the two texts?
3. What is Singh's argument against contemporary Indian Literature in English? How does he define Indian Literature?
4. How does Singh think neo-colonialism can be resisted?

5.10 GLOSSARY

Cohesive:	Unified; sticking, holding, or working together to form a unified whole. Sometimes, the word is used in a theoretical sense and gathers an oppressive, threatening dimension.
Indigenous:	Belonging to a place; originating in and typical of a region or country. It is used as the opposite of the general and broad – humanistic, international, etc.,

SUGGESTED READINGS

UNIT 1

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UNIT 2

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UNIT 4

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UNIT 5

1. Singh, Namvar., (1991), *Decolonising the Indian Mind*, Translated by Harish Trivedi,

SUPPLEMENTARY READING MATERIAL

1. *NGUGI WA THING' O*: DECOLONISING THE MIND: THE POLITICS OF LANGUAGE IN AFRICAN LITERATURE
2. PROBLEMS OF RESISTING COLONISATION: CONCLUSION

1. NGUGI WA THIONG'O: *DECOLONISING THE MIND: THE POLITICS OF LANGUAGE IN AFRICAN LITERATURE*

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Objectives

Introduction

Ngugi's Colonial Education; Three Aspects of Language as Communication: Language of Real Life; Language of Speech; Language of Written Signs
Three Aspects of Language as Culture; Culture as a Product and Reflection of History; Language as Culture: Performing the Function of Forming Mental Images; Spoken and Written Language As A Means of Communicating These Images; Language and Colonisation;
Colonisation, Language and African Literature
Summing Up

OBJECTIVES

In this essay we will read one section of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, published in 1986. An attempt will also be made to focus on the use of language by colonial powers for the purpose of cultural colonisation. We need to first comprehend how language originates and develops along with the culture of a community and how it is used for communication and cultural interaction. We then need to analyse the effect of the adoption of the coloniser's language on the culture and self-definition of the colonised people. Finally, we will consider Ngugi's analysis of African literature, its politics and its audiences.

INTRODUCTION

Ngugi wa Thiong'o was born in 1938 in Kenya. He wrote his first play, *The Rebels* in 1961 and has written several plays after that, including *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, (1976), and *Petals of Blood*, (1977). His novels include *Weep Not Child*, (1964), and *A Grain of Wheat*, (1967). Ngugi has also written many volumes of literary criticism and autobiographical works. *Detained: A Prisoner's Diary* came out of his experience in jail for a year. One of his most influential tracts is *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* that was published in 1986. In 1969 the University College at Nairobi, Kenya, where Ngugi was teaching, introduced a new syllabus in the Department of English that sidestepped from the colonial English syllabus they had been following. Ngugi was an active participant in this move. Ngugi's commitment to Marxist and socialist ideology is the basic premise of all his fictional and non-fictional work.

Ngugi begins *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* with a statement in which he declares:

In 1977 I published Petals of Blood and said farewell to the English language as a vehicle of my writing of plays, novels and short stories. All my subsequent creative writing has been written directly in Gikuyu language. ...However, I continued writing explanatory prose in English. ...This book, Decolonising the Mind, is my farewell to English as a vehicle for any of my writings. From now on it is Gikuyu and Kiswahili all the way. However, I hope that through the age old medium of translation I shall be able to continue dialogue with all. (xiv)

It is significant that Ngugi begins the book with this statement as the essays in the book argue forcefully for the need to decolonise the mind by eschewing the

coloniser's language. Ngugi had already begun this process in his own fictional writings, and he now decides to turn completely to the African languages for all his written work. This statement, and decision, is the culmination of many years of thinking and writing on the subject of language. In his Introduction to *Decolonising the Mind* Ngugi says:

This book is a summary of some of the issues in which I have been passionately involved for the last twenty years of my practice in fiction, theatre, criticism and in teaching literature. (1)

The first section of this book is entitled 'The Language of African Literature', and in this section Ngugi establishes the intrinsic link between language, culture and ideology. To take on the coloniser's language is not an innocent act: it involves the internalising of the culture, logic and ideology of colonisation itself.

Ngugi studies the language of African literature – and by extension the use of language in writing and speaking *per se* – in a material socio-political context. He asserts that one cannot study the use of language outside its social context. In the case of the languages used in Africa – the colonisers' European languages and the indigenous African ones – the material context is that of imperialism and neo-imperialism. However, along with the history of the oppression of colonisation and the current reality of the control of the economy, politics and cultures of Africa through neo-imperialism, Ngugi also portrays the ceaseless struggles of the African people against these forces. The picture that emerges, then, is one of an ever-continuing struggle between Euro-American based neo-imperialism and the people of Africa to control not just the wealth but also the means of "communal self-definition in time and space". (p.4) Language plays a central role in this struggle for self-definition in relation to nature and social environment.

Ngugi traces the language issue back in the colonial history of Africa, when in 1884 Africa was carved out by the capitalist powers of Europe into colonies. While the basis of the division into colonies was in economics and politics, Ngugi asserts that it was in culture as well. In 1884 Africa was also divided into the different languages of the European powers, a division it is living under even today when the different countries are identified as English-speaking, French-speaking and Portuguese-speaking. Thus, cultural imperialism went hand-in-hand with economic and political colonisation from its very inception. From 1884 Ngugi moves ahead almost a hundred years to interrogate the internalisation and institutionalisation of this cultural imperialism through language in the era of neo-imperialism. In 1962 Makerere University College in Uganda held a conference entitled 'A Conference of African Writers of English Expression'. This conference automatically excluded those authors who wrote in African languages, with the result that Ngugi, who had at that time only one book to his credit, was invited whereas some of the greatest living African poets and writers were not. The debate at the conference centered round the subject matter of the racial origins and geographical habitation of the writer. The most crucial question was never raised: did writing in English really qualify as African literature, with its corollaries of the domination of African cultures and languages by Europe, and language/literature and audiences at the level of class and nation.

It was taken for granted that English (or French or Portuguese) was the natural language for literary production, for political mediation between Africans at the national, continental and international levels. All the participants at the conference – those who opted for European languages and the generation that came after them – "accepted the fatalistic logic" of communicating in the language of the colonisers. The question that guided the discussion at the conference was: how to make these European languages carry the weight of the African experiences of the writers? Ngugi asks:

Why...should an African writer, or any writer, become so obsessed by taking from his mother-tongue to enrich other tongues? ... We never asked ourselves: how can we enrich our languages?" (p.8)

Ngugi finds his answer in the policy of the colonial powers of following "the sword and the bullet" with "the chalk and the blackboard". That is, of buttressing the physical violence with psychological violence. In this phase, language became the means to subjugate the spirit. To demonstrate how this happens, Ngugi takes us into his own childhood and process of education.

NGUGI'S COLONIAL EDUCATION

Ngugi's process of education is important because it traces the journey from African peasant community to colonial urban centre, a journey emblematic of the process of education that rejects African traditions and culture and embraces the power structures of colonisation. Ngugi's father had four wives and twenty-eight children, a veritable community in itself, but Ngugi emphasises that "as we all did in those days", (p.10) he belonged to a wider extended family and also to the community as a whole. In his pre-school days Ngugi spoke Gikuyu, heard stories in the same language, stories that were imbued with the culture to which the language was intrinsically bound, stories that "reflected real-life struggles in the human world". (p.10) The use of Gikuyu at every level of life – evening teach-ins, community, work in the field – gave a sense of unity and harmony. Ngugi's initial school education was in Gikuyu too, thus ensuring that the harmony between formal education and the Limuru peasant community was maintained.

In 1952 a state of emergency was declared in Kenya and the colonial regime took over the schools. English was imposed as the language of formal education. But Ngugi shows that English became more than just a language: "In Kenya, English became more than a language; it was the language, and all the others had to bow before it in deference." (p.11) The use of Gikuyu was now a punishable offence in school, equated with stupidity. The mastery of English, on the other hand, was rewarded with all sorts of rewards: prizes, prestige, and applause. All exams were to be written in English. If a student failed in English he/she failed the entire exam. Obtaining a credit in English put the student in the topmost bracket. "English was the official vehicle and the magic formula to colonial elitedom", (p.12) writes Ngugi.

The domination of the English language also reinforced the domination of the British culture. It rendered inaccessible the oral tradition of story telling that is part of the culture of storytelling in Gikuyu. Thus, traditional stories and folk tales did not form part of the growing imagination of Ngugi the schoolboy. Instead, he now read the canonised British authors who became the daily companions to his imagination. The canon available to him now, which guided his growing sensibilities, was that of Chaucer to T S Eliot. Ngugi sees this movement away from his traditional language and literature as a movement away from his self, from his world. To understand the full import of this movement from one world to another, it is important to understand how language functions in relation to culture.

THREE ASPECTS OF LANGUAGE AS COMMUNICATION

Ngugi makes the vital connection between language and culture. It is well known that language is a means of communication. Ngugi shows how language is also a carrier of culture. According to him, language as communication has three important aspects.

Language of Real Life

Language of real life as Karl Marx termed it. This aspect goes back to the origins, the development of language itself. A society or culture develops its language through

the relations its people enter into with one another in the interaction of labour while producing wealth or other means of life such as food, clothing and housing. A group of human beings become a community when they start co-operating with each other in production through division of labour. The simplest unit of the community based on division of labour is the family of the man, woman and child within the domestic space of the household. The more complex form of community is when there is co-operation between different branches of production. This form can be seen when people who are only hunters co-operate with those who are only gatherers of fruit with those who only make metal products. And finally there are the most complex divisions such as those in the modern factory's assembly line products where many minds and hands work together in accord with each other to make a single product like a shirt or a shoe. Language originates and develops through the necessity of human beings to communicate with each other in the process of co-operation for production. Ngugi says that this language is an "expression of a relation between human beings and it is specifically human." (p.13)

Language of Speech

This second aspect of language imitates the first, that is, the language of real life. Ngugi defines speech as "verbal signposts". Just as the hand uses tools to mediate between human beings and nature, so spoken words mediate between one human being and another. The mediation of the hand between human beings and nature forms the language of real life, while the spoken word mediates between humans to form the language of speech. Language as speech is then the system of verbal signposts that makes production possible. Speech both reflects and aids communication or the relations that form between human beings in the production of the means of life.

Language of Written Signs

This third aspect of language imitates the second, that is, the language of speech. Historically, the first two aspects of language through the hand and the word evolve more or less together. The written word comes much later in history. Writing uses visual symbols to represent sounds. The simplest visual symbol may have been that known among shepherds to tell the number in a herd. In most societies, the language that its members grow up speaking is the same language they learn to write and there is thus a broad harmony for the child between the three aspects of language as communication. The child's sensibility is formed with the language of his/her experience of life since spoken and written language are not only a reflection of real life but also a product of the interaction with real life. Ngugi had alerted us at the outset to the fact that language has a double role; the one discussed up to now is that of communicating, and the second one is functioning as a carrier of culture. He says, "communication between human beings is also the basis and process of evolving culture." (p.14) A society's culture evolves through the process of performing the same action over and over under similar circumstances (eg, sowing, ploughing, reaping in Indian climatic conditions is bound to be different from African conditions thus giving rise to different cultural practices arising out of cultivation. (This can be seen even within India in the differing cultures of places that are prone to drought Vs flood or have arid land Vs fertile land).

Even the variations in these actions are similar, from which emerge certain patterns, moves, rhythms, habits, attitudes, experiences and knowledge. All this is passed down to the next generation and forms the foundation of their interactions with nature and each other. From these complex interactions that are repeated for generations emerge values that soon acquire the status of self-evident truths. The value system that is established through these 'truths' governs the conception of what is good and bad, beautiful and ugly, etc. Over a period of time a way of life emerges which is different from other ways of life and then becomes the distinctive culture and history of that particular society. These values are the basis on which people form their identities as a society. And these values are carried by language. Ngugi emphasises

this fundamental connection between language and culture: "Language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history. Culture is almost indistinguishable from the language that makes possible its genesis, growth, banking, articulation and indeed its transmission from one generation to the next." (p.15)

THREE ASPECTS OF LANGUAGE AS CULTURE

Ngugi lists the three important aspects of language as culture.

Culture As A Product And Reflection Of History

Culture is a product of history and culture is also a reflection of history. Culture is produced through the very struggle to create wealth and control it, but culture also reflects that process. Culture is not an innocent reflection of history. It reflects history by forming images of the world of nature and nurture. It is important to keep in mind that images influence the perception of what they symbolise.

Language As Culture Performing The Part Of Forming Mental Images

Language as culture performs the function of image-forming in the mind of the child. Ngugi makes two very important points in this connection. The first is that we conceive of ourselves as a people, or we define ourselves as individuals or collectively based on these pictures and images. The second point is that these images may or may not exactly relate to the reality of the struggle that produced them. The important thing is not whether those images correspond exactly or not. The production of those images reflects the way that we confront the world creatively, how we make sense of the struggle between ourselves and nature, and the distortion or clarification of reality that the images produce is what distinguishes one culture from another in its definition of self. Thus, Ngugi says, "Language as culture is thus mediating between me and my own self; between my own self and other selves; between me and nature. Language is mediating in my very being." (p.15) Through the production of images language does more than simply reflect culture; it influences the way culture is constructed.

Spoken And Written Language As A Means Of Communicating These Mental Images

Spoken and written language is used to impart culture through these images to the rest of the world. Here Ngugi distinguishes between the universality of language and the specificity of language. The capacity for speech, for ordering sounds that make for mutual comprehension, is universal, and it reflects the universality of the struggle between human beings and nature. But every culture has a specific language, that is, a particular way of using sounds to form words and of ordering words to make phrases and sentences. When language is used to transmit culture it is used in its specificity. That is, a specific culture is transmitted in a specific language and that language evolves out of its particular history and culture.

"Language as communication and as culture are then products of each other. Communication creates culture: culture is a means of communication", (p.15-16) writes Ngugi. Why is the connection between language and culture of such profound importance? Through the body of values that language and culture carry we come to perceive/define ourselves in terms of our own community/society, and in relation to the world. Language is thus inseparable from the way we think of ourselves as a community of human beings, from the way we view our history and perceive our place in it, and the way that we define our relationship with the rest of the world. Language as a carrier of culture becomes the main tool with which we define and contextualise ourselves.

LANGUAGE AND COLONISATION

Ngugi spends so much time on establishing the role of language as communication and carrier of culture in order to show how colonisation used language to subjugate

the colonised mentally and spiritually. Ngugi points out that colonisation's main aim was to control the wealth of the people. It aimed at controlling what was produced, how it was produced and how the wealth was distributed, what Marx calls the language of real life. This control was imposed through military conquest and political dictatorship. But colonisation's most important area of domination was mental control through culture to affect how the colonised perceived themselves in relation to others. Ngugi says, "To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others." (p.16) The main tool used for this domination was the domination of language – the systematic undervaluing of the colonised's culture and language and the elevation of the language and culture of the coloniser.

Ngugi first demonstrates how language as communication is affected by colonisation. The imposition of a foreign language and suppression of the native language breaks the harmony between the African child and the three aspects of language. Since the foreign language reflects the real language of the life of another community it is divorced from the child's immediately felt experiences. Then the formal education of the child is foreign, the books read are foreign and even the subjects taught in school take bourgeois Europe as the centre of the universe. All this results in colonial alienation, a disassociation of the sensibility of the child from the natural and social environment.

The effects of a colonial education for the African child (or the child of any colonised country) are far-reaching and long lasting. The books and literature the child is made to read are not only the products of a world external to him, they also implant in his mind images of racism, class, sex and politics that portray his culture as always essentially inferior to that of the coloniser. Ngugi comments:

The colonial child was made to see the world and where he stands in it as seen and defined by or reflected in the culture of the language of imposition." (p.17)

The point is not whether this literature is considered great literature or not; what is important in this context is that the location of this literature is necessarily Europe and the implications of this are twofold: one, that the history and culture portrayed are of an external environment from the point of view of the African child, and two, the representation of the rest of the universe is made from the ideological perspective of Europe as the centre. In a socio-political world where the balance of power is so uneven, when the perspective of the imperial powers is imposed through formal education to the colonised, the damage cannot be underestimated.

The damaging effects of the colonial policy to subjugate the spirit through domination of language and culture can be seen in the words of great African writers such as Achebe and Senghor. These writers, along with many other African writers, embrace with gratitude the language of the colonisers as the natural choice for their work. Going back to the conference at Makerere that he had started this section with, Ngugi writes that all the years of colonial education had made them unquestioningly accept 'the fatalistic logic of the unassailable position of English in our literature': The logic was embodied deep in imperialism; and it was:

...imperialism and its effects that we did not examine at Makerere. It is the final triumph of a system of domination when the dominated start singing its virtues. (p.20)

COLONISATION, LANGUAGE, AND AFRICAN LITERATURE

If the major writers of African literature turned to European languages as their medium of expression, what were the implications of this for African literature, its audiences, its politics, and its future? Ngugi now traces the history of postcolonial African literature/authors and its politics. He interrogates the location of the major

authors who formed the tradition of post-colonial African literature. These authors were all part of the petty bourgeoisie who had been educated in the colonial schools and universities, and this was precisely why they were able to write in the language of the colonisers to form the canon of African literature. After the colonial powers left it was this petty bourgeoisie that rose to political power and economic dominance.

Ngugi divides the petty bourgeoisie in two groups: the comprador bourgeoisie that wanted to make a permanent alliance with the imperial powers and played the role of intermediary between the Western metropolis and the people of the colonies, and the nationalistic or patriotic bourgeoisie which saw a future in terms of an independent national economy in African capitalism or some form of socialism. The literature that formed the tradition of postcolonial African writing came from the national bourgeoisie. This literature by the national bourgeoisie played a twofold role: one, it explained Africa to the world as a continent that had a past and a culture of dignity and human complexity; and two, it gave an internal cohesiveness to the tradition of African literature and a common literary frame of reference. The frame of reference was essential to this tradition of literature because the national bourgeoisie neither had its roots in the culture of the African peasantry, nor did it have affiliations with the metropolitan bourgeoisie. Thus it could refer to neither of these literatures. In the initial phase this literature drew its stamina and form from the peasantry and was anti-colonial and anti-imperial.

However, as the comprador bourgeoisie rose to power and strengthened rather than weakened its links with imperialism to usher in a phase of neo-colonialism, the optimism that had marked the earlier phase was now replaced with a tone that was more critical, cynical, disillusioned, bitter and denunciatory. It portrayed the betrayal of hope. But, asks Ngugi, who was the audience that this literature was aimed at with its list of complaints? It could not appeal to the imperial bourgeoisie, or the petty bourgeoisie that was now in power, or to the military that formed part of the ruling class. The audience it sought was mainly what it saw as the people, that is, the peasantry and the working class. This change in audience was reflected in the change in form, which became simpler, with a change in tone that became more direct and also in a direct call for action. It attempted to analyse and evaluate the neo-colonial African society. The problem with the change in tone, audience and direction was that all this was still done in the medium of the languages of Europe. This literature could not reach the people, the peasantry and the working class, because it was hampered by its choice of language. It could only reach the students, teachers, secretaries etc. And it was forced to settle there, trapped within its own colonial inheritance. The damage that the literature of the petty bourgeoisie did to the field of what is recognised as African literature is that the literature it produced was given the identity of African literature, completely suppressing literature in African languages. Ngugi comments on the irony of this situation: "In fact, if it had been left entirely to this class, African languages would have ceased to exist – with independence!" (p.22)

Ngugi shows us how important the language question is to Postcolonial Studies. Today the elite in the postcolonial countries still use the colonial language as the medium of instruction in their education. Fluency in European languages, especially in English, confers great advantages in finding higher paying jobs. Through the continued use of the colonial language neo-imperialism strengthens its hold on post-colonial countries. The very important point that Ngugi makes in this essay is that the use of the coloniser's language implies the internalisation of the coloniser's culture, and a setting up of a hierarchy between the culture of the coloniser and the colonised. While it is true that now English is being moulded to the new needs of postcolonial cultures so that we have American-English, Australian-English, pidgin-English and our own Hinglish, Ngugi rightly points out that all these new variations maintain a close link to a universally comprehensible English and are therefore more conformist than radical.

SUMMING UP

Ngugi wa Thiong'o establishes an intrinsic link between language, culture and ideology. He argues that to take on the coloniser's language is not an innocent act: it involves internalisation of the culture, logic and ideology of colonisation itself. To establish his point that language is also a carrier of culture, Ngugi outlines the three aspects of language as communication: language as real life, language as speech and language as writing. Next, Ngugi discusses how language and culture function, and shows the intrinsic link between language as communication and language as culture. Finally Ngugi moves to analysing the effects of cultural colonisation in the postcolonial era where African literature is only the literature written in the coloniser's language.

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Objectives

Introduction

Contextualising Resistance Through Culture; Questioning and Defining Culture; Mestizage or Racial Intermingling; The Case of Latin American Countries; Decolonisation of the Coloniser

Summing Up

OBJECTIVES

As you know the eighth block of this course is entitled *Decolonising the Mind*, and the essays that we have studied in each unit of Block 8, provides us with theories or readings of the consequences of colonisation in the postcolonial age. Although we have concentrated more on literary studies, the consequences of colonialism, as we have seen, are cultural, economic, social and political. It is important to study the effects of colonisation even in a postcolonial era because, as several of the authors note, neo-imperialism has neatly replaced colonialism in many of the previous colonies. Thus, although this block is meant to deal with decolonisation, we need to take into account the process of colonisation, then the struggle and resistance movements leading to decolonisation, and finally interrogate the prevalence of imperialism in what we call the postcolonial world. Some of the issues that emerge from this exercise are those of the categorisation of countries in the postcolonial world as First, Second and Third World, or undeveloped/underdeveloped and advanced countries.

INTRODUCTION

In any study of colonisation and decolonisation it is essential to avoid easy generalities and a simple homogenisation of the colonial experience. It is crucial to remember that colonialism functioned very differently in different countries, shaping its practices in accordance with the socio-political conditions of the country that it colonised. So, for instance, India never suffered the absolute brutality that Africa did under colonial rule, nor did the colonisers ever attempt to wipe out entire indigenous populations in the Arab countries or in Asia the way they did in Latin America, Australia and the Caribbean Islands. Since the practices of colonisation were so diverse, the natures of resistances to colonisation were equally different. Thus, decolonisation in different countries was widely divergent. It is then obvious that the practices of colonialism and its consequent nature of resistance in decolonisation would result in shaping the economic, political, social and cultural character of different newly independent, postcolonial countries in entirely dissimilar ways. The nature of colonisation and decolonisation also determines the relations between previous coloniser and colonised, as well as the relation between the postcolonial country and the rest of the world. The point is not that no generalities can be made or that there is no commonality of experience; rather, what needs to be emphasised is that any study of postcolonialism must be extremely alert to the specificity of each experience and not attempt to impose one theory on all.

CONTEXTUALISING RESISTANCE THROUGH CULTURE

First, we would like you to study a part of the speech that the Algerian freedom fighter Frantz Fanon made at the Second Congress of Black Artists and Writers, Rome in 1959:

Thus we have followed the break up of the old strata of culture, a shattering which becomes increasingly fundamental; and we have noticed, on the eve of

the decisive conflict for national freedom, the renewing of forms of expression and the rebirth of the imagination. There remains one essential question: what are the relations between the struggle – whether political or military – and culture? Is there a suspension of culture during the conflict? Is the national struggle an expression of a culture? Finally, ought one to say that the battle for freedom however fertile a posteriori with regard to culture is in itself a negation of culture? In short, is the struggle for liberation a cultural phenomenon or not?

We believe that the conscious and organised undertaking by a colonised people to re-establish the sovereignty of that nation constitutes the most complete and obvious cultural manifestation that exists. It is not alone the success of the struggle that afterward gives validity and vigour to culture; culture is not put into cold storage during the conflict. The struggle itself in its development and in its internal progression sends culture along different paths and traces out entirely new ones for it. The struggle for freedom does not give back to the national culture its former value and shapes; this struggle which aims at a fundamentally different set of relations between men cannot leave intact either the form or the content of the people's culture. After the conflict there is not only the disappearance of colonialism but also the disappearance of the colonised man.

This new humanity cannot do otherwise than define a new humanism both for itself and for others. It is prefigured in the objectives and methods of the conflict. A struggle which mobilises all classes of the people and which expresses their aims and their impatience, which is not afraid to count almost exclusively on the people's support, will of necessity triumph. The value of this type of conflict is that it supplies the maximum of conditions necessary for the development and aims of culture. After national freedom has been obtained in these conditions, there is no such painful cultural indecision that is found in certain countries that are newly independent, because the nation by its manner of coming into being and in the terms of its existence exerts a fundamental influence over culture. A nation which is born of the people's concerted action and which embodies the real aspirations of the people while changing the state cannot exist save in the expression of exceptionally rich form of culture.

(Statement made at the Second Congress of Black Artists and Writers, Rome, 1959)

Fanon is arguing here that the nature of the struggle against colonisation must be seen as the ultimate manifestation of the culture of the people. Further, the struggle itself sends this culture on to new paths and causes it to develop internally. And finally, the "struggle which aims at a fundamentally different set of relations between men" results in a radical change in the form and the content of the people's culture. But Fanon warns that the vital connection between decolonisation and culture, the culture of resistance and the postcolonial national culture, can only be harmonious if the resistance movement is a people's movement, emerging from their impatience with oppression and expressing their aims. This passage from Fanon emphasises the point that the specificity of each country's experience of colonialism, the nature of the resistance struggle that results in decolonisation is one that emerges from the culture of the colonised, oppressed people. This culture is created through the interaction of the existing pre-colonial culture and the experience of colonisation. The resulting postcolonial culture is thus determined to a large extent by the politics of the struggle for decolonisation itself. Several postcolonial theorists have emphasised the importance of interrogating the internal politics of the freedom struggle along with the experience of colonisation when analysing postcolonial culture. In India, for example, the communal nature of the political parties fighting for freedom needs to be interrogated when analysing postcolonial communal riots.

QUESTIONING AND DEFINING CULTURE

Of the five essays we have studied in this block two are from Africa, two from India and one from the Middle East. We are aware of the differences in the kinds of colonisation these three cultures were subject to. Africa's population was decimated and displaced through the slave trade and Africans were forced to leave their homeland and move to places as diverse as the Americas, the Caribbean and Europe. In India, colonisation came through trading companies and involved negotiations with a complex system of political rule and administrative structure. In the Middle East, colonisation battled the Arab culture and Islamic religion along with a multiplicity of local socio-historic factors. But the similarity between these three areas is that the colonisers did not come to settle. They came to take the profits of the land back to their home country and to retire there with the riches of their exploits. However, there were other areas that were colonised by Europeans who came to stay, and to intermingle with the people and negotiate with their history and culture in order to carve a permanent space for themselves in their midst. These are the settler colonies, of which North America is a prime example, as are Australia, New Zealand, and Latin America.

In this block we have not read any essays that deal specifically with the colonial experience of a settler colony. The Latin America situation is one that is important to look at since it is a postcolonial society that is still reeling under the effects of colonisation even though it was one of the first places to be decolonised. Its process of decolonisation is complicated hugely due to the fact that a large number of the colonisers intermarried and settled down there. Thus, even after decolonisation, the power structure remained unchanged. To demonstrate how colonisation functioned in widely divergent ways through the world I would like you to read an excerpt from an article by Roberto Fernandez Retamar, a Cuban national, written in 1971. It is titled 'Caliban: Notes Towards a Discussion of Culture in Our America'. Pay special attention in this article to the use of the term *mestizo*, and to the search of identity in a society that is inextricably racially mixed and can find no easy racial 'Other'.

A European journalist, and moreover a leftist, asked me a few days ago, "Does a Latin American culture exist?" We were discussing, naturally enough, the recent polemic regarding Cuba which ended by confronting, on the one hand, certain bourgeois European intellectuals (or aspirants to that state) with a visible colonialist nostalgia; and on the other, the body of Latin American writers and artists who reject open or veiled forms of cultural and political colonialism. The question seemed to me to reveal one of the roots of the polemic, and could also be expressed another way: "Do you exist?" For to question our culture is to question our very existence, our human reality itself, and thus to be willing to take a stand in favor of our irremediable colonial condition, since it suggests that we would be but a distorted echo of what occurs elsewhere. This "elsewhere" is of course the metropolis; the colonising centers, whose "right wings" have exploited us and whose supposed "left wings" pretend to guide us with pious solicitude; in both cases, with the assistance of local intermediaries of varying persuasions.

MESTIZAJE OR RACIAL INTERMINGLING

While this fate is to some extent suffered by all countries emerging from colonialism – those countries of ours which enterprising metropolitan intellectuals have ineptly and successively termed 'barbarians', 'peoples of colour', 'underdeveloped countries', 'third world' – I think the phenomenon achieves a singular crudeness with respect to what Martí called "our *mestizo* America." Although the unquestionable thesis that every man and even every culture is *mestizo* could easily be defended, and although this seems especially valid in the case of colonies, it is nevertheless apparent that in both the ethnic as well as the cultural aspects, capitalist countries long ago achieved a relative homogeneity. Almost before our eyes certain readjustments have been made. The white population of the United States (diverse, but of common European origin) exterminated the aboriginal population and thrust the black population aside, thereby affording itself homogeneity in spite of diversity, and

offering a coherent model which its Nazi disciples attempted to apply even to other European conglomerates – an unforgivable sin that led some members of the bourgeoisie to stigmatise in Hitler what they applauded as a healthy Sunday diversion in Westerns and Tarzan films. Those movies proposed to the world – and even to those of us who rejoiced in the evocation of our own extermination – the monstrous racial criteria which has accompanied the United States from its beginnings to the genocide in Indochina. Less apparent (and in some cases perhaps less cruel) is the process by which other capitalist countries have also achieved relative racial and cultural homogeneity at the expense of internal diversity.

Nor can any necessary relationship be established between mestizaje (racial intermingling; racial mixture and the colonial world. The latter is highly complex despite basic structural affinities. It has included countries with well-defined millennial cultures, some of which (India, Vietnam) have suffered (or are presently suffering) direct occupation, and others, such as China, which have suffered indirect occupation. It also comprehends countries with rich cultures, but less political homogeneity, which have been subjected to extremely diverse forms of colonialism (the Arab world). There are other countries, finally, whose fundamental structures were savagely dislocated by the political-military activity of the European (the peoples of black Africa), despite which they continue to preserve a certain ethnic and cultural homogeneity. (Indeed, the latter occurred despite the colonialists' criminal and unsuccessful attempts to prohibit it.) In these countries, mestizaje naturally exists to a greater or lesser degree, but it is always accidental and always on the fringe of its central line of development.

But within the colonial world, there exists a case unique to the entire planet: a vast zone for which mestizaje is not an accident, but rather the essence, the central line: ourselves, "our mestizo America." Marti, with his excellent knowledge of the language, employed this specific adjective as the distinctive sign of our culture – a culture of descendants, both ethnically and culturally speaking, of aborigines, Africans, and Europeans. In his "Letter from Jamaica" (1815), the Liberator Simon Bolivar had proclaimed: "We are a small human species: we possess a world encircled by vast seas, new in almost all its arts and sciences." In his message to the Congress of Angostura (1819), he added:

Let us bear in mind that our people is neither European nor North American, but a composite of Africa and America, rather than an emanation of Europe; for even Spain fails as a European people because of her African blood, her institutions and her character. It is impossible to assign us with any exactitude to a specific human family. The greater part of the native peoples have been annihilated; the European has mingled with the American and with the African, and the latter has mingled with the Indian and with the European. Born from the womb of a common mother, our fathers, different in origin and blood, are foreigners; all differ visibly in the epidermis, and this dissimilarity leaves marks of the greatest transcendence.

The term mestizo is defined in the dictionary as "somebody who has parents or ancestors of different racial origins, especially somebody in Latin America of both Native American and European ancestry." The quotation by Simon Bolivar shows that this mixing of races is not confined to Europeans and Native Americans: it includes the Africans who were brought into Latin America to provide slave labour. As Retamar points out, every country that has suffered colonisation has a fringe population of mestizo – some of it due to inter-marriage and some due to the rapes of the colonised women by the white men. However, in Latin America the mestizo form the majority of the populations. Retamar's own country, Cuba, has a fifty one percent mixed population.

THE CASE OF LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES

How does the process of decolonising the mind work in a country where the colonisers' blood is inextricably mixed with that of the colonised? What are the

themes and forms of culture that emerge from this highly complex society? Retamar's article shows that the domination of imperialism on the economy and of the metropolitan center on the literature and arts is similar to the situation existing in most postcolonial countries. But amidst this similarity there are very major differences: most of the Latin American countries have no other language but that of the coloniser in which to articulate their anti-imperialism. A quick look at the Latin American countries shows that Spanish is the official language spoken in all of them. They do not have the possibilities of upholding Hindi, Bengali, Tamil as Namvar Singh does, or Gikuyu as Ngugi does, in opposition to the language imposed by the coloniser. Second, most of their original populations and cultures were so systematically decimated or adulterated that there are only very small pockets of pre-colonial culture left intact, and those are by and large marginalised from the mainstream. Thus, there is very little continuity from pre-colonial to postcolonial, unlike India.

We have spent some time on the case of Latin America because it offers so many similarities and differences to that of the other cultures we have studied in this block. In the case of other settler colonies such as North America, Australia and New Zealand, as Retamar points out, the original populations were almost completely wiped out through genocide and the white European culture now exists unchanged by contact with these other cultures, and unchallenged. The Native Americans and aborigines in these countries are confined to reservations. But in Latin America the process of racial intermingling created an entirely different population structure of mestizos in the majority and whites and blacks as minorities. The highly complex composition of this entire continent distinguishes it from other colonised areas and demonstrates how different colonial policies result in enormous differences in postcolonial culture.

DECOLONISATION OF THE COLONISER

There is one aspect that we have not glanced at yet, and that is the decolonisation of Europe, of the coloniser. It would be pertinent to remember that while the resistance movements were being fought in the colonised countries there were simultaneously liberals and humanitarian groups in Europe who were not just sympathising but also actively fighting colonial power structures at home. This is not to shift the arena of action to Europe in the battle for decolonisation; rather, it is simply to interrogate the area of the decolonising of the mind of the coloniser. Second, we must also remember that while the colonial powers were rewriting and obliterating the history and culture of the colonised people in an attempt to make them internalise the colonial culture and to justify their colonial oppression, there were groups of scholars and intellectuals from Europe who were exploring, documenting and exposing the rich, sophisticated and complex histories and cultures of the 'barbarian' 'undeveloped' societies. We must be alert to the incorporation of this scholarship into the project of colonialism as Said has shown us in *Orientalism*, but the Indologists and Orientalists, as well as the scholars who studied the past glory of the Aztecs, for instance, did provide an alternate reading of the pre-colonial culture to that of blank darkness and barbarity which the colonial power tried to hegemonically impose.

In his Preface to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, Jean-Paul Sartre addresses his fellow Europeans and exhorts them to decolonise their mind and accept their complicity in the atrocities of colonisation, for their time is up. Read the extract given below carefully:

This book had not the slightest need of a preface, all the less because it is not addressed to us. Yet I have written one, in order to bring the argument to its conclusion; for we in Europe too are being decolonised: that is to say that the settler which is in every one of us is being savagely rooted out. Let us look at ourselves, if we can bear to, and see what is becoming of us. First, we must face that unexpected revelation, the strip tease of our humanism. There

you can see it, quite naked, and it's not a pretty sight. It was nothing but an ideology of lies, a perfect justification for pillage; its honeyed words, its affectation of sensibility were only alibis for our aggressions. A fine sight they are too, the believers in non-violence, saying that they are neither executioners nor victims. Very well then; if you're not victims when the government which you've voted for, when the army in which your younger brothers are serving without hesitation or remorse have undertaken race murder, you are, without a shadow of doubt, executioners. And if you choose to be victims and to risk being put in prison for a day or two, you are simply choosing to pull your irons out of the fire. But you will not be able to pull them out; they'll have to stay there in the end. Try to understand this at any rate: if violence began this very evening and if exploitation and oppression had never existed on the earth, perhaps the slogans of non-violence might end the quarrel. But if the whole regime, even your non-violent ideas, are conditioned by a thousand-year-old oppression, your passivity serves only to place you in the ranks of the oppressors.

Part of the process of decolonising the mind of the coloniser came about as the colonial powers pulled their administrative and military personnel out of the previously colonised countries and saw them replaced by the native bourgeoisie. Again, one must be aware of the fact that, as all the essays we have read in this block have pointed out, in most colonised countries the process of decolonisation simply transferred the power from the Europeans to the powerful native bourgeoisie with no fundamental change in economic or administrative structure. It is on this basis that neo-imperialism gains in strength constantly. But the regalia of the colonial power had come to an end the sun did set on the British Empire. Secondly, the previously colonised people who surged into European countries in search of better prospects carried the process of decolonisation forward. As a result of colonisation and its economic and cultural policies, there were huge demographic movements of people moving after decolonisation from the 'marginal' 'peripheral' previous colonies to the metropolitan centers; the process of the 'Empire Writes Back' was underway. Thus, today the presence of immigrants in Europe and United States is bringing changes in culture, arts and literature. Algerians in France, Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis in Britain, Hispanics in the United States, have changed the cultural scenario of these metropolitan countries. As Namvar Singh points out, the most vibrant and exciting literature is coming out of the previously colonised countries. While it may be true that the metropolitan academy is trying to slot this literature neatly for its own convenience and use, it is important to remember that this literature has forced them to change their terms of reference and to grapple with a creativity that they have no hand in. In his Preface Sartre says, perhaps too optimistically that "in the past we made history and now it is being made of us" (p.27). The process of decolonisation of the mind has to be undertaken, then, not only in the previous colonies but also in the home country of the coloniser.

SUMMING UP

One of the consequences of the decolonising of mind in literary studies in India is the canon reform we have been witnessing in the last few years so that literature other than the British canon that we inherited from the British Raj is also studied. We still have a long way to go, but the process has begun. On the other hand, the decolonising of literary studies in the metropolitan academies is responsible for the kind of work we are doing in this block: Postcolonial Studies, or Colonial Discourse Analysis. Of the five theorists/authors we have read in this block, four have studied and/or taught in the USA or UK, and at least three have written the essays we study here while doing research and teaching in universities in the United States. Their works were first published in journals coming out of the Anglo-American academy. These facts do not in any way undermine the radical, groundbreaking scholarship of the authors or their essays; rather, it shows that they have created the space for anti-colonial, anti-imperial, and anti-capitalist scholarship and politics in the bastion of power. The fact is that their essays are seminal to Postcolonial Studies in the metropolitan academy

and reveal a great deal about the complex balance of power between the American/European scholar and the one from the postcolonial countries. Postcolonial Studies cannot ignore the inputs of the latter. The importance and relevance of Postcolonial theory is not restricted to theoretical essays of the kind we have studied in this block. Postcolonial theory offers a way of reading texts, (whether books, documents, images, movies, cultural and educational practices, or a multiplicity of other socio-political and cultural productions) by interrogating the structures of power from which they emerge and by analysing their socio-historical cultural material location. It attempts to demystify the authority of power and to allow the reader to grasp agency in order to lay bare the materiality of its production and thus have the tools to critically question its ideology. Since we know well that all power structures maintain their authority through cultural hegemony, Postcolonial Studies gives the reader a chance to choose not to be co-opted in this project.