

A POST-COLONIAL PERSPECTIVE OF KHUSHWANT SINGH TRAIN TO PAKISTAN

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Abstract

Colonialism exerted a great influence on the lives and literature of the ex-colonies; and that postcolonial literature of these former colonies and their descended addresses the issues pertaining to colonialism. “Train to Pakistan” is a historical novel by Khushwant Singh; it was published in 1956, with the backdrop of Indian partition holocaust of 1947 that displaced around twenty million people and killed over a million. Instead of chronicling the partition of British India in terms of only the political events surrounding it, Khushwant Singh digs into a deep locale providing a human dimension which brings to the event a sense of reality, horror and believability. The present study offers a discourse analysis of Khushwant Singh’s novel “Train to Pakistan” to ascertain the colonialism and its impact on postcolonial writings, particularly writings of postcolonial India. The novel is analyzed in the backdrop of colonialism and highlighting some of the major issues and debates of postcolonial discourse with particular focus on issues of representation and resistance, and appropriation of language.

Keywords: colonialism, postcolonial discourse, representation, resistance, appropriation.

Introduction

Colonialism is a practice by which strong nations exert their power and dominance over the weaker ones. Colonialism has ever been like a nightmare for the colonized and a privilege for the colonizers. Its impact on the lives of the people of former colonies and their descendents has been universally acknowledged. There have been so many views regarding the effects of colonialism. These views depend on the political and ideological situatedness of those who propagate them. Some of views claim that in spite of the ugly face of colonialism, it did a lot of good to the colonies. It brought to the colonized a kind of new inspiration of life, mainly western and advanced. It did strengthen a strong sense of national unity and national culture. It also brought industrial revolution and modern economy to the colonies; and above all it highly developed cultural and social life where it occurred. In these claims, mentioned above, is the colonizer's high moral grounds and good attributes are implicit. On the other hand, there is the view that colonialism is pure physical and psychological oppression, exploitation, immoral, evil, and nothing more than a form of slavery. As a result, it could not bring any good to the colonized, as no possible good could come out of such a disguised evil, and that it should be combated with sheer force and continuous repulsion. This fundamental view not only denies any positive effect of colonialism, but also accuses those so-called apologists for colonialism. The impact of colonialism is so intrinsic that almost all the ex-colonies are still in the firm clutches of colonialism in the form of neo-colonialism; that they can not shake off the imprint of colonialism. The imperial image of colonizer has become a myth that it can not be shaken. Commenting on the idea of imperial colonizer, George Lamming (2004) says;

[t]his colonialism has become a kind of systematic knowledge and over the time it has become a solidified myth. Laws can be changed over night, but this myth of imperial colonizer is impossible to displace. (p. 15)

Post colonialism is usually referred to time period after the World War 2nd marking the end of colonialism. With the wake of postcolonial discourse, the pioneers of Post-colonialism like Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak among others concerned themselves with the social, cultural, moral and psychological effect of colonization on the former colonies around the world. They regarded the way in which the occident paved its means of access to the orient and the rest of the world as based on unconfounded truths. They asserted in their discourses that no culture or nation is better or worse than other culture and consequently they nullified the logic of the colonialists. In their readings of colonial and post-

colonial literature and other forms of art, post-colonial critics relied heavily on other available literary theories. They manipulated various social, cultural and political theories like Marxism, New Historicism, Psychoanalysis, Post-structuralism and Deconstruction to serve their purposes.

Edward Said, in his book *Orientalism* (1978), challenges the western construction of the Orient, and the difference between occident and orient, between east and west, between civilized and uncivilized; and he offers his influential ideas about the Orientalism. According to him, Orientalism is the western style for, “Restructuring the image of orient, dominating it, and having Authority over it” (Said 1978, p. 3). While discussing the issue of representation and resistance, Said argues that the representation of the orient by the occident is artificial and prejudiced one and therefore needs to be restructured and reformed.

As this study research is about colonial impact on the literature and it requires interpretation. We have based the research in hermeneutical and postmodern epistemology. Hermeneutics is concerned with the interpretation of text, speech or a piece of art in order to make meaning, “Hermeneutics is the theory that is concerned with the philosophy of the interpretation of meaning of an object (a text, a work of art, human action, the utterances of another speaker and so on” (Schwandt 2000, p. 62).

We will conduct a Discourse Analysis of the text under study with the backdrop of postcolonial literary theory in order to gain a better understanding of the hidden structures of language that are involved in the debate of representation and resistance. Through discourse analysis, various aspects of language, such as how much space is given to a character, what sort of words the author employs, what is the social, cultural and historical situatedness of the characters etc, will be looked into. It will also be helpful for investigating the author’s ideological dispositions evident in text. Owing to the constraint of time and space, we just focused on the two issues pertaining to post-colonial debate namely the issue of representation and resistance, and appropriation of language.

Statement of the study

The present study is undertaken to investigate the issue of representation and resistance in Khushwant Singh’s novel “Train to Pakistan”. In developing the parameters of this inquiry, the following objectives are established.

To understand the impact of colonialism in the novel.

To analyze the form of resistance offered by the writer against colonial rule.
To examine how writer shows the interaction between the colonizers' culture and the indigenous culture in terms of the appropriation of language.

Theoretical perspective

Post-colonialism or postcolonial theory is an intellectual discourse that came to existence after Second World War. This academic discussion got developed as the former colonies became independent around the middle of twentieth century. Even though the colonial era ends after the Second World War as the colonies all around the world got independence, but still the influence of colonialism is very much rampant in the former colonies. Intellectuals and scholars from these colonies contest against the evils of colonization and try to set free the minds of people from the firm clutches of colonialism. Post-colonial discourse involves academic discussion that investigates the diverse issues related to the colonialism, colonial rule and its impact on the colonized people and their descendants. It also deals with conflicts of national identity and cultural belonging, the issues of representations and resistance against monolithic (Eurocentric) ideas of the superiority of colonizers and inferiority of colonized. When colonialism began and colonial power was exercised in the colonies by the foreign states; it brought a great influence on the subjugated colonies and annihilated main parts of indigenous tradition and culture. This often led to conflicts when these countries got independence and suddenly faced the challenge of developing a new nationwide identity and self-confidence. The challenges for all these countries to find out an individual way of proceeding on their own, were of two sorts; first they could not shake off of the Western dominated imperial culture and manage to create a completely new and solidified culture for themselves. Second, the former colonial power had to change their self-assessment.

Representation and resistance are the important areas on which the enormous edifice of postcolonial discourse exists. Resistance against colonialism is one of the most important and intrinsic issue in postcolonial discourse, as it is commonly said that every oppression has a resistance. Writers from the ex-colonies around the world discuss this issue through their texts; it has become central to postcolonial debates. Representation of occident and occident within the textual archive were situated as normative, and these representations were re-projected to the colonized – through formal education or general colonialist cultural relations – as authoritative

pictures of themselves. Representation from the outside other is not authentic because of the ulterior motifs on the part of representer, “such representations of occident of orient were based on the ulterior motives of the Europe’s domination of Asia, they represented orient as uncivilized and put before them the task of civilizing them, by ruling them” (Ashcroft et al 1998, p. 35).

Edward Said, in his most important and influential post-colonial text *Orientalism* (1978) examines the process by which this discursive formation emerged and continues to develop over the time; and he challenges the western constructed concept of orientalism and difference between powerful occident and weaker orient, civilized occident and uncivilized orient; and offers his influential ideas about western prejudiced representation of the others (orient).

Another important issue pertaining to postcolonial discourse is the issue of language. As Ashcroft et al (2003) puts it, “Language is a basic tool of struggle used for postcolonial discourse because the colonial process it self begins in language” (p.85) Language is the intellectual means by which postcolonial communication and reflection takes place. This is essentially important as the most colonial powers tried to integrate the major aspect of their civilized culture, in the foreign colonial societies. Language is not a simple phenomenon; rather it is a complex phenomenon. It mediates power structure; the language of powerful people dominates in the country. For example, when William the Conqueror defeated the English king Herald in the battle of Hasting in 1066, the French language gained the place of English. It gained the status of a dominant language in the country. Earlier, English was the language spoken in the country but by the invasion of French, English lost its status and thrown to the secondary position. Similarly, in the sub-continent, due the British imperialism, English language dominated for considerably long time, even now it is regarded as superior language than the native languages. People speaking English language enjoyed superior position in the society because of its association to the colonizers therefore, “the English language was part of the pose and power” (Kachru 1986, p. 5)

There are numerous responses to the concept of the dominance of imperial language of colonizers, but among these two most influential reactions present themselves immediately in the process of decolonization – namely abrogation and appropriation. Abrogation is simply defined as the

rejection to use imperial culture including its language; it involves the complete denial of imperial English language and use of indigenous language. The African writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (1994), took the stance of abrogation of English language. He was of the view that language is the embodiment of culture and civilization, and it transforms the culture from one generation to another. By using language of colonizer to represent the indigenous culture we are just moving ourselves away from our roots, therefore he preferred to write in African language than in English language. As he says, "Thus language and literature (of colonizers) were taking us further and further from ourselves to other selves, from our world to other worlds" (Thiong'o 1994, p. 288).

Appropriation is another rebellious strategy of appropriating English into local needs. In the process of appropriation of language different techniques are used such as the use of untranslated words, fusion of English and native languages, code-switching etc. Chinua Achebe, another African writer, who chooses for English language to reach out and express to the world about the sufferings of Africans under colonial rule in Africa. He shows flexibility in his attitude towards using colonizer's language and takes the stance of appropriating English language. As Chinua Achebe (1964) wrote,

I believe that the English language, above all languages, will be the most suitable choice to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be new English, still in full relationship with its ancestral home but changed to suit the new African surroundings and experiences. (p. 62)

The use abrogation and appropriation of language by the post-colonial writers gives these texts cultural and indigenous touches. When this postcolonial literature came to the forefront, the presumption that literature produced in the former colonies was incapable of its universal application and inferior to the colonizer's text, was seriously questioned and even destabilized the position taken by the colonizer in the field of literature and the worth of these texts was realized all around the world.

Colonialism in India

British colonialism began in India when Britain founded "British East India Company" in 1756 by the British colonialists to control most of the important parts of India like Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. In 1857, the first big rebellion against British rule took place in the north of India, known

as “First War of Indian Independence”. It was the first time Indians rebelled against the presence of Britain and its imperial rule in India, in massive numbers. In 1885, the “National Indian Congress” was founded, which demanded for the Indians legitimate representation and appropriate share in the government. Besides, a Muslim anti-colonial organization called “Muslim League” was established in 1906. While most of the Indian population remained loyal to the British colonial power.

The resistance against British colonial rule mainly instigated and organized by Gandhi, Quid e Azam, and Nehru, finally led to independence in 1947; and huge British colony was split into two nations, Pakistan and India. This partition led to the huge movements and ethnic conflicts across the Indian – Pakistan borders. Around 10 millions Muslims were expelled from India and in the same number Hindus and Sikhs crossed the border from India to Pakistan. Numerous people died in these conflicts and these conflicts gave rise to tension between Pakistan and India, which culminated to different wars particularly over the Kashmir issue. Concerning the postcolonial India literature, most of the Pakistani and India writers took the stance to write about the evils of British colonial rule in India.

Train to Pakistan is a historical novel by Khushwant Singh, it was published in 1956, with the backdrop of Pakistan-Indian partition of 1947 that caused the displacement of twenty million people and killed over a million. Instead of just narrating the partition of British India in terms of only the historical or political events surrounding it, Khushwant Singh tries to give this event multiple facets, and bring forth horrors and terrors underlying it. Situated in the postcolonial India *Train to Pakistan* addresses a number of issues related to post colonialism such as representation and resistance, abrogation and appropriation of language, racial issues and hybridism etc. in this study I just focused on the two issues; of representation and the appropriation of language. Now I analyze the novel as a postcolonial text with particularly focus on these two issues.

Representation and Resistance

Train to Pakistan (1956) is a novel, set in the time period of immediate post-partition of sub-continent. It is the story of a peaceful and harmonious village name Mano Majra, located along the Pakistan-Indian border; where Muslims and Sikhs live together with peace and harmony without being conscious of racial discrimination, till the hatred was infused in

them. The story begins with a dramatic incident of dacoity that took place one peaceful night, when the village money lender Ram Lal was murdered by a neighboring village dacoit. But as suspected murderer, two young men were taken to prisoner; Iqbal, newly arrived social worker and Jugga, a notorious young man of the village.

In this novel Khushwant Singh offers resistance against British colonial rule in India. Partition (Great Division of 1947) was an act of getting rid of colonialism, but even after the withdrawal of Britain from India, still the imprint of imperialism evident. Some people, who were benefited from British Imperialism, were contended to remain under the colonialism. But most of the population resisted against and wanted to get rid of colonialism. As Iqbal angrily asks two people; “Why people of our country do not want to be free from the evils of slavery? I am wondered why do they want to remain slaves all their lives?” (p. 44).

There were also some common people, whose lives were so monotonous that they could not find out any traces of prosperity; Khushwant Singh presents the voice of these people; “Freedom, truly, is a good thing. But what will we get out of it because it is not meant for we common people. Educated people, will be awarded the jobs the English had?” (p. 45).

In away both the people resisted against British rule, they wanted to have freedom of any sort. Colonization disrupted the identify and self image of the peoples that now they are devoid of what is called national identity. They wanted to have their own identity, ideology and representation. The image of imperial colonizer has become so much deep in the life of India that even in the police station and other government official offices, the whole system is run according to British rule. As Khushwant Singh presents it in the description of police station, where Iqbal and Jugga were taken; this shows the imperial image of colonizer that has generated a strong impact on the minds of colonized; “In the police office, there was an old framed picture of King George VI, hanging on the wall behind the table and with a placard stating in Urdu, BRIBERY IS A CRIME” (p. 62).

Another fruit of colonization was the class consciousness. During colonization, British colonialists exercised the power through investing power and prestige to the native elite class. The native upper class gentry, who were favored by the Britishers, looked down upon the middle or lower class. Consequently, there existed different classes among the people in the society. This hierarchy of classes was there during the colonial rule and it

was also prevalent even after the end of colonial rule in India. The bourgeois and lower class gentry agitated against this class discrimination through different ways. Several postcolonial writers challenge against this class distinction and offer their resistance against this hierarchy. Khushwant Singh also resisted against this hierarchy through the contrast of two characters; Iqbal and Jugga. Iqbal is an educated social worker and Jugga is a village notorious young man. When both are arrested and brought to the police station, they got different treatment. Jugga was treated as lowly criminal given hard cement floor as bed; while Iqbal was given protocol and a chair, table and charpoy were put in his cell. Khushwant Singh resisted against this class discrimination in the following lines;

A country which had accepted caste distinctions for many years under the colonial rule, discrimination or inequality between human being had become their inborn mental disposition. If this caste disparity was to be eradicated by legislation, it came up in other forms of class distinction. In thoroughly Westernized circles like that if the civil servants in the government secretariat in Delhi, places for parking cars were marked according to seniority, and certain entrances to offices were reserved for higher officials...with such a mental make-up which was so much thoroughly influenced by the imperial sectionalized and grading according to their social status, even people who were charged or convicted of the same offence were treated differently due to their status in the society. Iqbal was A-class. Jugga was at the rock-bottom C.” (p. 64)

Such was the class distinction given by the imperial colonizers, which was prevalent in the country at the time of the physical presence of colonizer and it can be witnessed even now after a long time of their departure from the country. The impact of the colonizer on the colonized was so much strong that later was unable to shake off and get rid of that. Khushwanth Singh resisted against this class discrimination bestowed on the Indians by the Britishers and wanted to get rid of this evil.

Appropriation of Language

The most important and interesting feature of the novel “Train to Pakistan”, is the appropriation of language by Khushwant Singh. He denies the concept of Standard English of colonizers and makes it a vehicle to communicate the Indian culture. English is no longer the colonial language; rather it has become a global language. During British rule in the India,

English language came out as a dominant language and spoken all around the country.

Khushwant Singh's use of English language in the novel reveals to us his three strands of using language. First, his use of standard English narration. Second, his native language which is translated into English language. Third, code-switching or the use of phrases and idioms of native language. Khushwant Singh's use of standard English language to narrate the story could be the reflection of his own attitude towards this language. English was introduced in the British colonial rule as a mean of imperial control. Later on it became the medium of continuation of hierarchical power structure and used as a tool of power to cultivate a group of people who will be conscious to identify themselves with the cultural and other standards of the political elite. Along with its influential political role, English was also the language of knowledge and media.

The first strand of appropriation of language is the standard English language, which shows the writer's mastery over the English language. The following line from the text is a good example of writer's use of standard language; "Twilight gave way to the dark of a moonless night. In the swamps by the river, frogs croaked. Cicadas chirped in the reeds. The bearer brought out a hissing paraffin lamp which cast a bright bluish light" (p. 20).

The second strand of Khushwant Singh's use of English language is the occurrence of native language which is interestingly translated. He presents such phrases and words which are frequently used in local dialects and are embodying the local color, and these are translated in English language in order to give the text indigenous flavor. The following lines from the novel are presented as example and are enough to justify the point; "Whatever you say is right to the sixteenth anna of the rupee" (p. 47).

Here in the above mentioned line the word 'sixteenth anna of the rupee' is a native expression, translated into English, which is often used to refer as something hundred percent right. An Indian rupee contains one hundred paises, but these hundred paises are divide into two halves or sixteen annas, the half fifty paises are known as eight anna. These sixteen annas are equivalent to hundred paises and are therefore referred to the hundred percent of something. Similarly another example of native expression being translated into English, is as under; "They are the four-twenties. He said vehemently" (p. 44). Here in this line 'four-twenties' is used to refer to the section 420 of the Indian Penal Code, which defines the offence of cheating.

The third strand used by the writer is code-switching or the use of phrases from the native language. Khushwant Singh uses different words from his native tongue like Babu Sahib, Chacha, Sat Sri Akal Bhaiji, Budmash, Zulum etc. these are the words which give narration a local flavour and enrich the English language with indigenous culture and traditions. Thus, the process of appropriation of language is explicit in the novel. Khushwant Singh uses different strands of English language in order to narrate the story. It has the local color as well as the standard pattern, it might be appear strange to native English speaker.

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion proves the fact that Postcolonial literature, generated in any part of the world, discusses the issues and debated pertaining to colonialism. It involves discussion about experience of various kinds; migration, slavery, identity, suppression, resistance, representation, race, gender and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe such as history, philosophy and linguistics, and the foundational experiences of speaking and writing by which all these come into being. Khushwant Singh's novel *Train to Pakistan* can be read as a postcolonial text. He discusses some of the major issues related to the British colonialism and its impact on literature; mainly the issues of representation and resistance, and appropriation of language. He resists against colonial rule in India and also appropriates English language to present the situations and surroundings of his contemporary culture.

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