

*Review*

## Postcolonial feminism: Looking into within-beyond-to difference

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**Postcolonial feminism is a relatively novel wing of postcolonial feminine scholarship. Postcolonial feminism or 'third world feminism' emerged in response to Western mainstream feminism. Western feminism has never been heedful to the differences pertaining to class, race, feelings, and settings of women of once colonized territories. Postcolonial feminism rejects Western feminism on the ground of its utter 'eurocentricism'. Hence it is fallacious to hope postcolonial females to be valued, appreciated and justified by the Western hands. Of course, the long Western tendency to homogenize and universalize women and their experiences led to the emergence of 'postcolonial feminism'. Postcolonial feminism is a hopeful discourse it seeks peaceful solutions for all world marginalized women. Postcolonial feminists imagine a world in which differences are celebrated and enjoyed. Postcolonial feminists work for social, cultural, economic, and religious freedoms for women.**

**Key words:** Colonialism, postcolonialism, postcolonial feminism, and postcolonial ecriture.

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### INTRODUCTION

Postcolonial feminism is a critique of the homogenizing tendencies of Western feminism. Contrary to Western feminism, 'postcolonial feminism' as a new feather wishes to bring into light the typicality of problems of women of the Third world nations. This is mainly the initiative of those activists, and academics who belong partially or fully to once colonized countries. They are working for the all-round amelioration in the lives of women of post-colonial origin.

#### Development of thought

Feminism is a fabulous field of study across the world. It is simplistic to believe that Western feminists can represent and justify the stand of women living in once-colonized countries. Since lives, experiences and

circumstances of postcolonial women differ utterly from that of Western women, so feminists of postcolonial origin should come forward and make differences visible and acceptable across cultures; otherwise get ready to take on colonized garbs of identity. If lives, experiences, and circumstances of women of postcolonial settings are divergent, they should be judged, evaluated, and treated as such hence 'postcolonial feminism' consolidated. Postcolonial feminist brought the view of universal sisterhood under threat. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan and You-me Park "Postcolonial feminism cannot be regarded simply as a subset of postcolonial studies, or, alternatively, as another variety of feminism. Rather it is an intervention that is changing the configurations of both postcolonial and feminist studies. Postcolonial feminism is an exploration of and at the intersections of colonialism and neocolonialism with gender, nation, class, race, and

sexualities in the different contexts of women's lives, their subjectivities, work, sexuality, and rights" (Schwarz and Ray, 2005).

Young enumerates key issues of 'postcolonial feminist' endeavour:

Postcolonial feminism has never operated as a separate entity from postcolonialism; rather it has directly inspired the forms and the force of postcolonial politics. Where its feminist focus is foregrounded, it comprises non-western feminisms which negotiate the political demands of nationalism, socialist feminism, liberalism, and eco-feminism, alongside the social challenge of everyday patriarchy, typically supported by its institutional and legal discrimination: of domestic violence, sexual abuse, rape, honour killings, dowry deaths, female foeticide, child abuse. Feminism in a postcolonial frame begins with the situation of the ordinary woman in a particular place, while also thinking her situation through in relation to broader issues to give her the more powerful basis of collectivity. It will highlight the degree to which women are still working against a colonial legacy that was itself powerfully patriarchal - institutional, economic, political, and ideological (Young, 2003).

Long history of prejudices and inhuman remarks against females prevailed over countless social and cultural texts ultimately led to the emergence of feminism in late 60s and early 70s of twentieth century in the West. Since then feminists went all out to reexamine issues of sex, gender, and even language (as by-products of patriarchy) in literary and cultural discourses. Feminism like Marxism and Post colonialism invalidates unjust power relationships. Feminists having an oppositional stance started questioning their inferior status and asked for amelioration in their social position (Freedman, 2002). As such it calls for equal justice and equal opportunities for females. In short feminism as a concerted attempt aims to get the nature of gender inequality, gender politics, gender roles and relations, power relations and sexuality. In other words, feminism as a reactive discipline seeks to answer the question why women are treated as a second class citizen, oppressed and enjoyed lesser opportunities than males. Feminism is consisted in variegated; colorful approaches hence better to call such approach 'feminisms'. It is culture based line. In multicultural countries, feminist approach looks highly fragmented and multi-valent. The forms and colors of feminism in Indian context are unique and surprising. Since India is the seat of cultures, feminine complexes are too much. As the belief, unity in diversity sustains in India so there is some feminine virtues exist here which are common to all Indian women having all the same differences. In India, all four kinds of feminisms broadly speaking- First world, Second world, Third world, and Forth world (Dalit feminism), exist. Mostly women in India honour their

tradition and culture with all traditional feminine colour.

Since the time women started questioning their subordinate status, got continuously fractured, divided and developed; it at present does not imply to a single and coherent trajectory of thought (Tolan, 2006). In the course of development especially, with the fall of European colonies in Africa, South-East Asia, and Latin America, and the Caribbean islands, it was felt by feminists belonging to once-colonized territories in the eighties that much amount of time passed and it is nonsensical to continue to be represented by aliens; we should represent ourselves in our own terms instead, hence postcolonial feminism. Before we discuss postcolonial feminism, it is better to know first what post colonialism is. Post colonialism or 'postcolonial critical theory' without doubt is an after-colonial development. It emerged around the closing years of the 80s. But it gained currency as a critical spade only in the t90s. It struggles to push back economic, social, cultural, psychological, and linguistic colonial left-overs. The term is generally applied 'to describe any kind of resistance, particularly against class, race, and gender oppression' (Theime, 2003). It does not approve of unjust power structures and relationships. This thought movement argues for 'social justice, emancipation, and democracy in order to oppose oppressive structures of racism, discrimination, and exploitation' (Nayar, 2008) by hiding off colonial dynamism. Colonial masters at colonial sites applied intricate strategies to others at every footstep.

Postcolonialism is concerned with social, cultural, political, economic, moral, religious sites, literature, language etc. to fight back 'euro-centrism'. Boehmer succinctly gives an account of postcolonial writing:

Rather than simply being the writing which 'came after' empire, postcolonial literature is that which critically scrutinizes the colonial relationship. It is writing that sets out in one way or another to resist colonialist perspectives. As well as a change in power, decolonization demanded symbolic overhaul, a reshaping of dominant meanings. Post-colonial literature formed part of that process of overhaul. To give expression to colonized experience, post-colonial writers sought to undercut thematically and formally the discourses which supported colonization - the myths of power, the race classifications, the imagery of subordination. Post-colonial literature, therefore, is deeply marked by experience of cultural exclusion and division under empire. Especially in its early stages it can also be nationalist writing. Building on this, postcoloniality is defined as that condition in which colonized peoples seek to take their place, forcibly or otherwise, as historical subjects. (Boehmer 2006)

In numberless colonialist texts, papers, articles, and documents, it is sought hard to project and picture negative pictures or images of orients which Westerners never use for themselves and as such, to inculcate inferiority and

meanness in oriental minds. This is what Western scholars call 'civilizing mission'. Moreover indigenous culture, language, tradition never found scant attention and respect in the eyes of the West. Of course it was aimed to prepare defective robots. However, it was over-vaulting dream of the West. In colonial hands, language throughout played very crucial roles, and purposefully wreaked havoc on orientals. In this way, orientals during colonial rule were victims of cruelty, brutality, and so-called 'civilizing mission' of the West. Post colonialism throughout seeks to counter all kinds of oppression, injustice and traces left by the West.

Next, postcolonial feminism sometimes also referred to as 'third world feminism' born out of the critique aimed towards Western feminism which is mainly a white discourse. Truly the history of Western feminism is predominantly covered by West European and North American women experiences. The author abhors using the nomenclature third world feminism because in Western discourses the term is used pejoratively and connotes at once social, cultural, and economic backwardness. If backwardness is taken for granted, no nation is immune to this phenomenon. The term 'third world' is no better than 'commonwealth'. It must allow meeting the destiny which commonwealth in the 90s met. Postcolonial feminism emerged out of the gendered history of colonialism. The history of colonialism is largely the history of exploitation of non-white, non-Western others. Colonized countries have been deeply affected by the exploitative racist nature of colonialism. Postcolonial feminists argue that colonial oppression particularly racial, class, and ethnic has in large part overlooked women in postcolonial societies. Postcolonial feminists are critical of Western forms of feminism, especially radical (in the sense it seeks to make differences visible in non-oppressive ways) and liberal forms (for, they have no sense of differences) of feminism and their habit to homogenize and universalize women experiences of the whole world. Primly, postcolonial feminism explores in different contexts, women's lives, work, identity, sexuality, and rights in the light of colonialism and neocolonialism with gender, nation, class, race, and sexualities. This field of study is mainly identified with the works of feminists of once-colonized nations. Chandra Talapade Mohanty, Gayatri Spivak, Uma Narayan, Sara Suleri, Lata Mani, Kumkum Sangari, are some of the few postcolonial feminists. Postcolonial feminists are closely associated with Black feminists (Alice Walker, Angela Davis, Kimberla Crenshaw to name a few) because both strive for recognition not only by men in their own culture, but also by Western feminists. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan and You-me Park identify two key issues for 'postcolonial feminism'- representation, and the questions of setting or locale. They argue:

In their engagement with the issue of representation, postcolonial feminist critics, in common with other US

women of color, have attacked both the idea of universal "woman," as well as the reification of the Third World "difference" that produces the "monolithic" Third World woman. They have insisted instead upon the specificities of race, class, nationality, religion, and sexualities that intersect with gender, and the hierarchies, epistemic as well as political, social, and economic that exists among women. First World feminists are called upon to recognize differences, acknowledge the historical specificity of women in other places and times, and abandon their unexamined ethnocentrism and the reproduction of orientalist categories of thought; nor can these earlier positions be replaced simply by an attitude of easy benevolence towards Third World women as-victims, "information retrieval" as a way of knowing them, or the celebration of pluralism. Instead First World feminists must enter the hard work of uncovering and contesting global power relations, economic, political, military, and cultural-hegemonic (Schwarz and Ray, 2005).

They further argue:

Questions of location (their own, and those of their subjects) are historicized and politicized as postcolonial feminists enter the terrain of the reflexive that we call theory. The investigators' identities and places of speaking are marked by hybridity, in-betweenness, and hyphenation; pure and authentic "origins" are rendered dubious; their intellectual trajectories are crossed with histories of arrival (in the First World); the autobiographical turn, in anthropology for instance, is seen as specifically feminist. When "Third World Women" speak in the voices of these feminists, it is to repudiate otherness, tokenism, stereotyping, exceptionalism, and the role of "native informant." They seek to resignify the attributes of Third World women – silence, the veil, absence and negativity, for instance (Schwarz and Ray, 2005).

It provides of course correctives to mainstream Western feminism, and involves women of both developing and developed countries. It envisions global feminism. To downplay racial, class, and age differences have been part of mainstream feminism. Postcolonial feminists inveigh against Eurocentric complacency and colour blindness. Western feminists tend usually towards a complete and totalizing identity. They examine their own culture and customs to evaluate the rest of the world. Such universalist aspirations have been very common among western feminists. The postcolonial feminists abhor universalist aspirations and warn against the reproduction of colonial/colonized hierarchy. Krishnaraj writes:

We no longer think in terms of a universal female subordination for which there is some unitary causation but realize the historical processes occurred in different

places at different times and in different ways; subordination was never uniform even within the same period across all groups nor even within the same group. Women enjoyed spheres of influence and power as well as been victims of subjugation (Krishnaraj, 2000).

Mohanty (1991) in her influential article *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses*, criticizes Western feminism on the grounds that it is ethnocentric and does not pay attention to the unique experiences of women residing in postcolonial nations. In the other words, she disapproves of Western feminism regarding all women as a homogeneous group without having any sense of difference pertaining to race, class, and circumstance. She vehemently opposes and brings into light various colonial tricks applied in the production of the third world women as a singular monolithic subject; in some recent feminist text (Gandhi, 2005). As such they colonize the material and historical differences of the lives of women. Mohanty deconstructs the politics of image-giving to postcolonial women of Western feminism.

Mohanty writes out in her another work:

Western feminists appropriate and "colonise" the fundamental complexities and conflicts which characterise the lives of women of different classes, religions, cultures, races and castes in these countries. It is in the process of homogenization and systemisation of the oppression of women in the third world that power is exercised in much of recent Western feminist discourse and this power needs to be defined and named (Third World).

Next, she is against portrayals of postcolonial women primarily as ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domesticated, family-oriented, and victimized. Mohanty feels that in such negative characterizations scant attention is paid to history and difference. Postcolonial feminists disapprove postcolonial tendencies to construct a single category of the colonized ignoring differences. They argue that colonial oppression undoubtedly hurt sentiments of both men and women but nature was quite different. Women suffered what Mohanty calls double colonization first as a colonized subject and second as simply being a woman by patriarchy. She argued that, just as men reduced women to the other, so the white women had constructed the Third World women as the other to herself (Tolan, 2006).

Mary Daly an American radical essentialist feminist in her 1978 book, *Gyn/Ecology: The Mathematics of Radical Feminism*, like Simone de Beauvoir argues that religion, law, and science all are just to benefit patriarchy and to define and delimit women. In this book she compares sati practice with European witch burning. Uma Narayan of postcolonial origin is critical of Daly's account on sati. Uma Narayan feels that Daly is not immune to the ways

postcolonial women experiences are universalized and generalized. She thinks that Daly fails to give due attention to social and cultural contexts on sati. Hence she stresses on the need of adequate knowledge of history to deprogramme and devalidate Eurocentrism. Uma Narayan argues:

Colonial history is the terrain where the project of 'Western' culture's self-definition became a project heavily dependent upon its 'difference' from its 'Others' both internal and external. The contemporary self-definition of many Third-World cultures and communities are also in profound ways political responses to this history. Working together to develop a rich feminist account of this history that divides and connects us might well provide Western and Third-World feminists [with] some difficult but interesting common ground, and be a project that is crucial and central to any truly 'international' feminist politics (Narayan, 2010).

Narayan on the another instance writes justly, "Third World feminism is not a mindless mimicking of 'western agendas' in one clear and simple sense- Indian feminism is clearly a response to the issues specifically confronting many Indian women" (Weedon, 1997).

The question of voice that is who speaks for whom and whose voices are being heard in discussions on postcolonial women's issues is another moot point in postcolonial feminism. Spivak raises the question of voice in her most popular essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (1988). In it, she explores possibilities to recover the long silenced voices of the subaltern women. And it is duty of postcolonial feminists to represent them. But when Western women speak for the others, they only displace them, replacing their voices with their own (Boehmer, 2006). She in her another work *In Other Worlds* (1987) writes, "The pioneering books that bring First World feminists news from the Third World are written by privileged informants and can only be deciphered by a trained readership.... This is the tired nationalist claim that only a native can know the scene. The point that I am trying to make is that, in order to learn enough about Third World women and to develop a different readership, the immense heterogeneity of the field must be appreciated, and the First World woman must learn to stop feeling privileged *as a woman* (Young, 2003). The matter of fact is that postcolonial women to remain passive and continue to bear male-oppressive environments. These women seek to emancipate themselves through education, struggle, and hard work. The postcolonial men re-colonized the bodies and minds of their women in the name of preserving their cultural values. Women since long have been supposed to carry the burden of cultural values. But the same has brought a new life and freshness to the consciousness of women. Postcolonial women today feel and enjoy mental freedom though the bodies appear still colonized by men.

Postcolonial feminism is primarily concerned with deplorable plight of women in postcolonial environment”.

The question of language accordingly is another necessity in the strengthening of ‘postcolonial feminism’. By formulating a new ‘postcolonial feminine ecriture’ postcolonial feminists can provide new energy and authenticity to their project of transformation of society. Raja Rao long ago in his “Foreword” to *Kanthapura* (1938) wrote:

The telling has not been easy. One has to convey in a language that is not one’s own and the spirit that is one’s own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought- movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use the word ‘alien’, yet English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up- like Sanskrit or Persian was before-but not our emotional makeup. We are all ‘instinctively’ bilingual. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have to look at the large world as part of us.... The tempo of Indian life must be infused into our English expression. We, in India, think quickly, we talk quickly, and when we move we move quickly. There must be something in the sun of India. And our paths are paths interminable (Rao, 2011).

As such, Raja Rao brilliantly bids adieu to English language in colonized colour. He guided numberless thinkers engaged in the liberating project of colonial imprints. Western scholars unflinchingly deny and denounce Indian English and do not approve some status to it. Similarly, Chinua Achebe wrote and called upon his compatriot writers:

He (African writer) should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience.... But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings (Said, 1994).

In order to make a novel ‘feminine ecriture’ novelists should draw on French radical thinker Helene Cixous and appreciate her proposal that they should write “which is typically’ characteristically feminine in style, language, tone and feeling, and completely different from (and opposed to) male language and discourse...(Cuddon, 1999). This is very much important, for even critical thinkers puzzle and fumble for due vocabulary to catch the spirit of women’s actual lives and experiences.

## CONCLUSION

To sum up, postcolonial feminists seek to devalidate Western feminists because they easily tend to universalize and homogenize women’s issues, and moreover

believe incorrectly that their texts represent women of the whole world. The prime objective of postcolonial feminists is to make differences (race, class, and setting) regarding women’s lives visible and recognizable in the eyes of Western feminists in non-oppressive ways. They imagine a world where differences are not detested instead, entertained and enjoyed, and moreover make space to thrive being immune to hierarchical structures of class, race, sexual and gender power. Postcolonial feminists argue for women emancipation that is subalternized by social, cultural, or economic structures across the world. Having an insight into differences, they wish for global liberation. Post-colonial feminists entertain and attempt the indigenization of both form and content. Undoubtedly, it is an initiative of postcolonial origin but not restricted to postcolonial vision of postcolonial origin. Heterogeneity is the key theme of postcolonial feminism. Postcolonial feminine writers are not interested in dismantling family order, custom, and tradition. They seek for balance, mutual respect and harmony. On the other side, feminists in Western clothing are home-family-man haters. They do not have sense of keeping households safe and secure. They think all these secondary. Women in postcolonial settings at least in India want to rear family and family relations but not at the behest of their counterparts or co-partners. They prefer balance and harmony maintaining all the feminine differences visible. They do not take motherhood/ womanhood constrictive. The matter of fact is that they want to remove age-old constrictions laid on women’s lives, and live on par with men. They expect emotional support from their partners.

Frankly it can be admitted that any attempt to theorize women experiences of social, cultural, and economic lives and services rendered by them look immediately short and impractical in at least postcolonial sites. Women are most changeable almost like asterisks which change color and shining as acquires direction and light. They lead holographic life. Women’s role and status in the society are widely differing. No woman precisely speaking can be representative of other fellows. In India educational reformation of women’s lives is felt drastically among women activists. They prefer to.

In many cases women do nothing substantively but talk of and dream for luxuries and other amenities. Women belonging to well-off family think and play roles differently altogether. But in the core, women whether they are rich, poor, strong, weak, educated, illiterate, want to live with respect, name and as a partner (not as a wife of olden days). Compromise more or less is found playing active roles in women’s lives. Generally they go for compromise first, and males later on. After all, both are bound to make compromise. Today women are right conscious enough and feel comparatively freer. All females remain docile and submissive till marriage but after it they fight for rights- social, cultural, economic-getting radical if not possible through submission. Women want to live like men performing all biological and

traditional roles. If a woman is earning lady, it is her extra attribute. In many cases less educated women torture family members doing nothing for their betterment because they think that it is the responsibility of men to bear the brunt of the family. In some other cases, women who are educated and conscious crave for self identity and liberation from patriarchal clutches. In such cases true education is drastic need of the time. Mostly, women are perpetrated at women's hands. Postcolonial feminists engage more and more domestic spaces of women's lives. In short, 'postcolonial feminism' provides corrective measures to mainstream 'feminism'.

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