

Post-colonialism and Indian Literature

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Abstract: The purpose of this research paper is to highlight the importance of Indian tradition and culture in response to the Macaulay's Minutes on Indian Education in 1835 (period of colonization) by taking the examples from Bhatrhari's *Vakyapadiya*, Bharat's *Natyasastra*, Bhamaha's *Kavyalankara* etc. It would not be exaggeration if we say that a single shelf of Indian classics is worth the whole European literature. It is debated that post-colonialism provides a means of defiance by which any exploitative and discriminative practices, regardless of time and space, can be challenged. The paper discusses various experiences of anti-slavery and anti-colonial movements in India comprising the development of post-colonialism. The paper consists of a section where in a discussion of the elements that functioned as justification of humanitarianism, democracy and culture in colonial and post-colonial India in context of linguistic colonialism through several eminent texts of Indian writers, followed by a reflection on the concept of "hybrid identities".

Keywords: Post-Colonialism, Indian literature, Macaulay's minutes on Indian Education.

In order to define Post-Colonialism it is necessary to understand Colonialism first. Colonialism is the establishment, upholding, possession and extension of colonies in one terrain by people from another terrain. It is a process whereby the metropole claims sovereignty over the colony, and the social structure, government, and economics of the colony are altered by colonizers from the metropole. Colonialism is a set of lopsided relationships between the metropolis and the colony; and between the colonists and the indigenous population. Most of the indigenous people were oppressed and enslaved by the ruling power. At the same time, they were forced to give up their cultural heritage and to assimilate the colonizers' culture. This strategy, which is also known as culture colonization, was supposed to manipulate the colonized people's minds. Most of the colonial powers tried to integrate their language, the major aspect of their civilised culture, in foreign societies. Language and literature have always been used as a powerful tool by colonisers in the process of colonisation. For example, in India the Aryans and Moghuls came to the sub-continent; established their rule and settled down over the area for a long time. Both the Aryans and the Moghuls produced their literature in their own languages like the Vedas, the Upanishads, etc in Sanskrit. In fact, the Moghuls created a new language, Urdu, in this sub-continent. Though they colonized at the beginning and settled down in India. Did their literature sustain its impact? Similarly the British and the other Europeans like French and Portugese came to India as colonizers

but after leaving India they left all pervasive impact of colonialism. Now the challenge for the colonised India was to find an individual way of living. It could not get rid of the Western life style. On the other hand, former colonial powers had to change their self-assessment. The colonial powers believed that a colonised nation which adopted and admired Western culture and language would no longer resist the colonisers' occupation. However, certain opportunities, struggles and various experiences of anti-slavery and anti-colonial movements in India led to the development of post-colonisation.

If a man with eyes is led by someone else, it means that he | does not see
with his own eyes. - abara on Mimamsa-Stra, 1.2.31

In a literal sense, "Post-Colonial" refers to the time after Colonization. The second college edition of The American Heritage Dictionary defines it as "of, relating to, or being the time following the establishment of independence in a colony". From an optimistic point of view, post-colonialism is a means of defiance by which any exploitative and discriminative practices, regardless of time and space, can be challenged. Post-colonialism deals with the democracy and humanistic concerns of colonised societies, and the dilemmas of developing a self-governing nation after colonial rule. Post-colonialism also deals with conflicts of identity and cultural belonging. Colonial powers came to foreign states and destroyed main parts of native tradition and culture; furthermore, they continuously replaced them with their own ones. This often leads to conflicts when countries became independent and suddenly faced the challenge of developing a new nation with identity and self-confidence. What is evident here is that, despite the past of colonialism in the exchange for "flag independence" (Slemon 1995:102) that brought neither economic independence, nor compensation for that past, imperialism as a concept and colonialism as a practice are still active in a new form. Since 1950, Post-Colonialism has increasingly become an object of scientific examination as Western intellectuals began to get interested in the "Third World Countries". The research paper consists of three sections. The first section highlights the importance of Indian tradition and culture in response to the Macaulay's Minutes on Indian Education in 1835 (period of colonization) by taking the examples from Bhathari's *Vakyapadiya*, Bharat's *Natyasastra*, Bhamaha's *Kavyalankara* etc. The second section discusses the impact of rudiments of colonialisation on Indian Education System in post-colonial period. The concluding part of the paper reflects the concept of "hybrid identities" which is the state of people in the post-colonial period.

I

Vedas, *Upanishads* and *Puranas*, and all the great epics of India were written in Sanskrit, for instance, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, etc. and these books are considered to be the basis of culture, customs and traditions. But the impact of colonisation in India turned everything upside down. For instance, Thomas Babington Macaulay's Minute on Indian

Education (1835): [...] All parties seem to agree on one point, that the dialects commonly spoken among the natives of India contain neither literary nor scientific information. Moreover, they are so poor and rude that, until they are enriched from some other quarter, it will not be easy to translate any valuable work into them. In *krik* 33rd, Bharthari says, "The known power of an object to produce different effects is inoperative when it comes into contact with particular objects or factors." To borrow a scientific precedence, the function of Oxygen is to aggravate fire but when it combines with the atoms of Hydrogen, it extinguishes fire.



Similarly the power of a word is changed with the change in place, time and context. Hence it shows the association of both literary and scientific information in the Indian texts. Macaulay said: What then shall that language be? One half of the Committee maintains that it should be the English. The other half strongly recommends the Arabic and Sanskrit. The whole question seems to me to be, which language is the best worth knowing? I have no knowledge of either Sanskrit or Arabic. But I have done what I could to form a correct estimate of their value. I have read translations of the most celebrated Arabic and Sanskrit works. I have conversed both here and at home with men who are distinguished by their proficiency in the Eastern tongues. [...] I have never found one Orientalist who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. But I second his thought in saying that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. And that English would make Indians cultured! What they thought of 'White Man's Burden' was not actually to make us civilized and cultured but to be their slaves.

"You taught me language; and my profit on't is, I know how to curse; the red plague rid you, for learning me your language!"

- Shakespeare's *The Tempest*

Macaulay said: ...It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say, that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanskrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the paltriest abridgements used at preparatory schools in England. In every branch of physical or moral philosophy, the relative position of the two nations is nearly the same. But when we look at the intrinsic value of our own literature, or at the particular situation of this country, we shall see the strongest reason to think that, of all foreign languages, the Sanskrit language is that which would be the most useful to our native subjects. For example, the widely read and famous epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata have valuable historical traces of India. The common masses can learn moral values from these texts which is not obtainable from any of the European texts. Bharthari categorises the knowledge into two types: *Lokik* (ordinary) and *Alokik* (extraordinary). To acquire the second kind of knowledge, the knower has to go through the process of

sodhana, i.e. preparation. Seeing with “mind's eye” is the ideal epistemology of Indian thought. In *krik* 35th, he says that only the jewelers know the value of *lokik mani* and *gini* (precious stones). They cannot define it to anybody else because the knowledge of quality of any object can be attained through practice. Macaulay again said: [...] In one point I fully agree with the gentlemen to whose general views I am opposed. I feel with them, that it is impossible for us to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country. These minutes show that they wanted to make Indians their servants rather than civilised. Can they civilise us whose civilization is 5000 years old? In Indian tradition, knowledge has been composed, stored and preserved in the framework of oral culture. As it is composed in the mind, it is also preserved in the mind, not outside the mind. Indian civilization has always been attached to the values of knowledge. Sri Aurobindo says in his letters,

“We Indians, born and bred in a country where *jñān* has been stored and accumulated since the race began, bear about in us the inherited gains of many thousands of years...” – India's Rebirth, (1905), p. 14.

We can show the intellectual thoughts, morality and the depth of knowledge in Indian texts by comparing them with the Western texts. In Indian tradition, there are 18 major vidyās, theoretical disciplines, and 64 kalās (crafts). The 18 vidyās are: the four Vedas, four subsidiary Vedas (Āyurveda, Dhanurveda, Gandharvaveda, architecture), Purāṇa, Nyāya, Mīmāṃsā, Dharmasāstra and Vedāṅga (phonetics, grammar, metre, astronomy, ritual and philology). For instance, The Indian mind addressed the issues regarding drama, dance and music quite early in its civilization. *Nāṭyaśāstra* is one of the earliest treatises on the performing arts but its relevance is contemporary and universal. It is a source text for literary theory and its influence has been all pervasive. It delineates a detailed theory of dramaturgy. Referred to as *Nāṭyaveda* or as fifth Veda, it incorporates all the arts and sciences, and enlightens at the same time. *Nāṭyaśāstra* literally means a discipline of dramaturgy. It not only encompasses all arts like music and dance but also analyses human life and conditions. Thus it emerges as an authoritative text widely referred to for its knowledge. *Nāṭyaśāstra* and *Poetics* are the seminal texts in their respective traditions. *Nāṭyaśāstra* is comparable to *Poetics* in parts only as discussion about drama started in India much earlier than the West. “In the West, Aristotle's poetics is the only book available on the subject in the past. It contains 26 small chapters. Aristotle being a genius, there are instances in the treatise when his mind touches the fringes of profound thought. However his statements are not satisfactory to the mind trained in the Indian Poetics.”² says Seshendra Sharma in *Poetics, East and West*. The quotation briefly summarises the depth of profundity

which the Indian texts carry. That is why *Nāṭyaśāstra* is considered an encyclopedia of performing arts and is the first most important link in the great chain of literature. Again by comparing Eastern and Western thinkers, Bhamaha, an Indian thinker with Plato and Aristotle, the Greek philosophers, East stands at the highest pedestals. To Plato, we owe the division of poetry into the dithyrambic or the purely lyrical. Aristotle lays emphasis on the two essentials of good writing – clearness and propriety. 'Poetics' and 'Rhetoric' follow more or less the same line, but Rhetoric is further remarkable for its comments on composition in prose and style in general. However, one source of charm is common to both (prose and poetry) – the use of metaphor. But Bhamaha gives five types of figures of speech and sub-divides it into various parts. However, Bhamaha gives more divisions of *kavya* i.e. on a deeper level. He has given description about the *dosa* (faults) generally found in poetry in detail which is not described by any western thinker. Bhamaha is an appreciative, analytical and insightful reader of both poetry and poetics. As a result, he has earned the dignified status of the 'Founder of Indian Poetics'. Almost every literary theory established during the process of evolution of Indian poetics in the post-Bhamaha period, appears either directly stated or indirectly implied in his treatise. Thus, after reviewing a number of examples, it can be said that Indian tradition is considered as the richest tradition as compared to the other ones.

II

Macaulay's minutes on Indian Education have a major impact on Indian Education System. English became a compulsory language in India. The greatest injuries have done to the people of India during the British rule. Education is one of the most remarkable examples; for no more crushing blows have ever been struck at the roots of Indian National evolution. However, the number of Indians who wish to learn and use English has been growing steadily for the last two centuries. We all know that English has come to stay in India. The ruling Indian castes or classes have embraced English with suitable modifications as to the contents of lessons and the lexicon that are used in textbooks and taught in classes. English has become the language of higher castes and the affluent in the Indian subcontinent. The lower castes and poorer classes try to emulate the model set by their peers. The net result is that English will continue, and no central or state government will dare to abolish it from the curriculum in India. Globalization makes English a value added language, the access to which becomes a passport for jobs around the world. It is also recognized that English could not and would not be taught by the native speakers of English in India. This is economically impractical, and politically inconvenient, and sometimes would be viewed as a disastrous step. The former colonies of Britain such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and several African nations have provided for the teaching of English mainly through their nationals. Some countries like Japan and China open their doors to more number of

native speakers of English to teach English. This step has far-reaching consequences for the quality of English language instruction and use in India, but the people of the Indian subcontinent have admirably “resolved” the problem with their own nuances. Better schools and colleges continue to seek a competence for their students similar to that of native English speakers. It is possible that this trend would gain momentum as Indians begin to generate more wealth.

III

The concluding part of the paper reflects the concept of “hybrid identities” which is the state of people in the post-colonial period. This hybrid phenomenon unfortunately does not re-produce the old Native Culture nor does it bring a totally new culture but it produces a dislocated culture, a mixture of worlds – a “fragmented and hybrid theoretical language” within a “conflictual cultural interaction”. For instance, the post-colonial Indian literature, unfortunately, is not having as much depth and morale as that of our classics and is neither a representative of our culture. So we have to develop the Indian intelligence through gaining the knowledge of Indian tradition and culture; to make it possible for India to resume her place amongst the nations, not only as a competitor in material production, but also as a teacher of all the true civilizations, a leader of the-future, as of the past. In the last words of Buddha to his beloved disciple:

“O, Ananda, be ye lamps unto yourselves;
be ye refuges to yourself.
Hold fast to the *dharma* as to a lamp;
hold fast to the *dharma* as a refuge.
Look not for refuge to any one beside yourself.”

End Notes :

1. K. A. Subramaniarma, (2010). a Iyer, (1965). *Vākyapadaya of Bharthari with the Vtti*. Poona: Deccan College
2. Seshender ShPoetics, *East and West*. <sffworld.com.> 14th Dec.

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