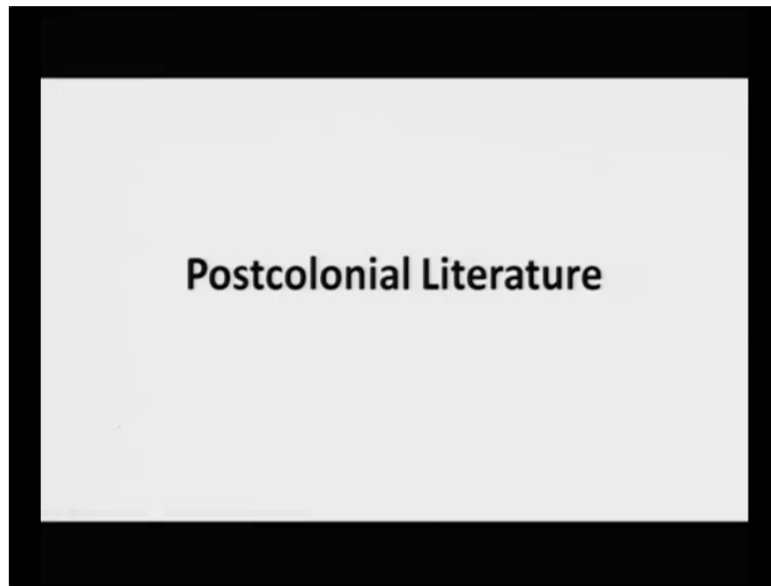


Postcolonial Literature
Prof. Sayan Chattopadhyay
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur

Lecture No. #01
Introduction – What is Postcolonialism?

Hello, and Welcome to this course, on Postcolonial Literature.

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Conventionally, the study of English Literature, in Indian universities and colleges, has meant primarily a study of British Literature. Or, at most, we include the study of American literature. In this new category, Postcolonial Literature, we encounter a fascinatingly wide array of literary texts, that come from parts of the world, as varied as India, West Indies, Africa, Canada, Australia, South America. And therefore, I think that, though this course, is primarily aimed at graduate students of English Literature.

Anyone, who is interested in literature in general, should benefit from this course. And, since this particular course, is going to read the wide variety of literary texts, that I just mentioned, against the backdrop of Colonialism, and resistance to Colonialism. It should also appeal to students, who are interested to know more about the cultural legacies of Colonialism, as well as those, who want to actively engage with the process of decolonisation, or think through the process of decolonisation.

Postcolonial Literature, as some of us will know, is a fast expanding field of literary studies. And, just the numbers of academic journals, of books, of monograph series, of conference proceedings, that are regularly brought out, with the word Postcolonial or Postcolonialism, in their title, that very number, is now mind-boggling. This course will try to map, some of the exciting possibilities, as well as challenges, that this new area of literary studies has thrown up.

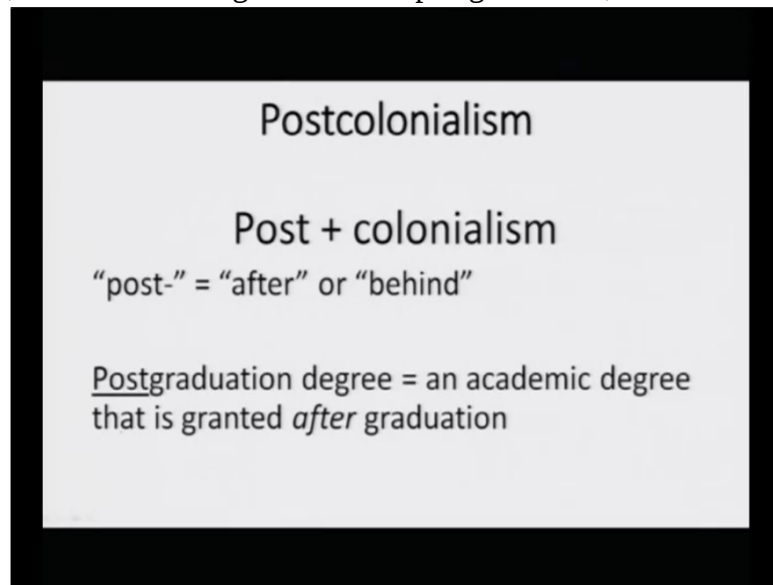
And, it will do so, by discussing literary texts, as well as critical texts, which have come to form the canons of Postcolonial Literature. But, even before we try and do that, we will try and discover the kind of literature, that this category contains, we should try and understand in depth, the meaning of the word Postcolonial or Postcolonialism. Because, at the end of the day, this is the term, which holds the literary category together, and gives meaning to it.

But, an attempt to understand the meaning of the term, to answer the question, what is Postcolonialism, is fraught with difficulties. It is in fact, a challenge. And, I refer to it as a challenge primarily because, for the past four decades now, this term Postcolonialism, has been used to mean various, different things. In fact, there is also no general consensus, as to how, the term Postcolonial or Postcolonialism, should be written. Should it be written, with a hyphen, separating post and Colonialism, or should it be written as a single word.

So, our first task therefore, would be to know, how to navigate through this rather confusing warren of meanings, as well as spellings, of this term Postcolonialism. Now, if you look at the word Postcolonialism carefully, you will notice that, it is composed of two different elements. The major element, or the major component, is of course the word Colonialism. But, there is also a very important prefix, that is attached to the word, which is post.

And, that prefix, adds an important dimension, to our understanding of the term. Now, if we go to the dictionary, and look up the prefix post, we will see that, generally it means, after or behind. So, if we attach the prefix post, before a noun, which denotes a particular event, then post indicates, something that happens or comes after the event, that is indicated by the noun. (Refer Slide Time: 06:28)

So, for instance, if we are looking at the word postgraduation, for instance, which also uses



the same prefix post. Then, we will see that, by adding the prefix post, the word postgraduation signifies something, which comes after, or happens after the graduation. So, if we are talking about postgraduation degree, for instance, if I am doing a postgraduation degree in English, that will mean that, I have already completed my graduation.

And, I am now studying for a degree, which can be obtained, only after graduation. If we try to decode the term, Postcolonialism, using this same logic, then the term should mean, the period that comes after Colonialism. If you try and understand, this particular meaning, from within the Indian context, then we are almost inevitably directed towards a certain date. And, that date, is of course 15th August 1947. As we all know, India till 1947, was a British colony.

And, on 15th August 1947, we ceased to be a colony, and we became a sovereign nation state. Now, this should mean therefore, that the period in the history of India, that comes after the date of our political independence, is the history of Postcolonial India. Now, there are certain problems, if you understand the term Postcolonialism, in this sense. And, I am going to come to these problems, soon enough. But, let me state here that, this is not an altogether wrong understanding of the term, Postcolonialism.

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Indeed, the word Postcolonial, used with a hyphen, separating post and Colonial, has often



been used, to refer to the post-independence history of states, which were once politically part of large European empires. Which means that, this equation, Postcolonial means, post-independence, is not an altogether wrong equation. But, nevertheless, this is not the mainstream, understanding of the term Postcolonialism, within the field of Postcolonial studies

And, to mark this difference, the word Postcolonialism is used, without the hyphen, by most scholars of Postcolonial studies. But, what is the problem, if you use Postcolonialism, to mean post-independence. Well, even without a very well-rounded definition of Colonialism at our hand, we are going to discuss that later. But, right now, even without definition of Colonialism, I think, we all agree that, Colonialism has a number of different facets, different aspects.

And, the political aspect, though an important one, is not the only aspect of Colonialism. To try and understand this further, let us look at the date 15th August 1947, more closely. What exactly happened, on that date. Well, on that date, we ceased to be politically governed by the British parliament, or British Monarch. They ceased having any direct political control over our affairs. But, this political power, which Britain exercised over India, till 14th August 1947, till the date before independence, was only part of, what we understand as British Colonialism.

Indeed, apart from the political domain, British Colonialism also exerted a large amount of influence on the social, cultural, and economic spheres of India. And, those influences, did not come to an abrupt stop, when we achieved our independence, on 15th August 1947. So, even today, if we look around, we find ourselves surrounded by legacies of British Colonialism, which range from the miles and miles of railway tracks, that criss-cross this country, to the English language in which, I am now communicating with you.

Perhaps, at the most profound impact of British Colonialism in India, was economic. Because, it was with the advent of Colonialism, that India became, thoroughly integrated within a global network of capitalism. And, even seven decades after gaining political independence, we are still very much integrated within that global network of capitalism. So, clearly, not everything, that constituted British Colonialism in India, has come to an end.

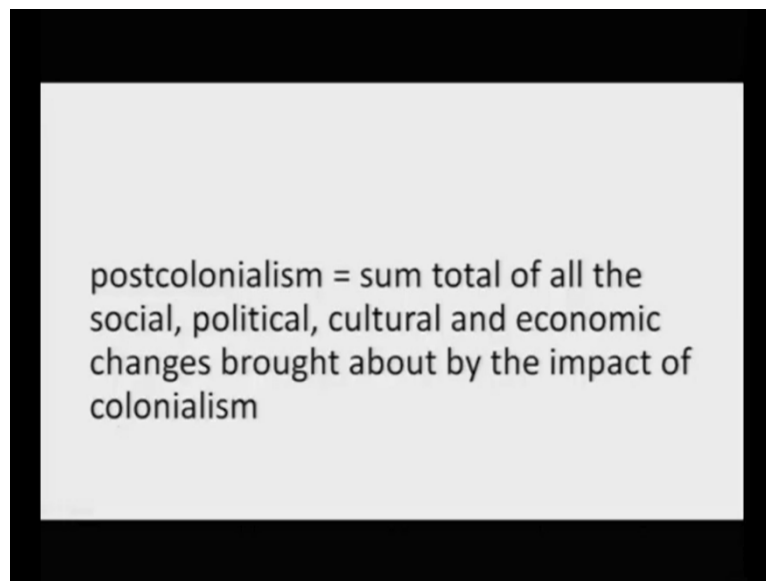
Therefore, as far as understanding Postcolonialism, within the Indian context is concerned, a date like 15th August 1947, does not prove to be very useful. Is there then, any other way of understanding, the term Postcolonialism. Well, there is. And, if you think about the discussion that we have had so far, you will realise that, we have been trying to understand Postcolonialism, as signifying things, which come after the end of Colonialism.

And, that end is apparently signified by the date, 15th August 1947, as far as India is concerned. But, as we have seen many aspects, which constituted the process of Colonialism, at least in the context of British Raj in India, has survived well beyond our deed of political independence. And therefore, it is not practicable, to talk about the end of Colonialism. But, we get a new insight into things, if we think of Postcolonialism as a word, that signifies, not something that comes after the end of Colonialism, but as signifying things, that come after the beginning of Colonialism.

Now, I can understand that, this sounds slightly confusing. But, to help us understand this better, and this is crucial. Let us again, use the familiar context of Indian history. Now, if rather than the end of British Colonialism in India, we have to look for its beginning, then we will see that, we are pushed as far back as the 18th century. When the Mughal Emperor Farrukhsiyar issued a Farman, allowing the East India company, the British East India company.

There were in fact, a number of East India companies, the British East India company, Duty-Free trading rights in Bengal. And, since the first quarter of the 18th century, when the Farman came into effect, the British Colonial power started expanding their economic and political influence in India, which was soon coupled by a strong socio-cultural influence as well. Now, the impact of this Colonial influence was such that, the India that emerged after the first impact of Colonialism, was felt, was markedly different from the India, that was there before the impact of Colonialism.

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Postcolonialism, in this Indian context, would therefore mean, the sum total of all the various social, political, economic and cultural changes, that started being perceived, after the first impact of Colonialism was felt. And, if you notice here in the slide, I have spelt Postcolonialism, without the hyphen. So, chronologically, Postcolonial India, is not the India after 1947, as far as, the field of Postcolonial studies is concerned.

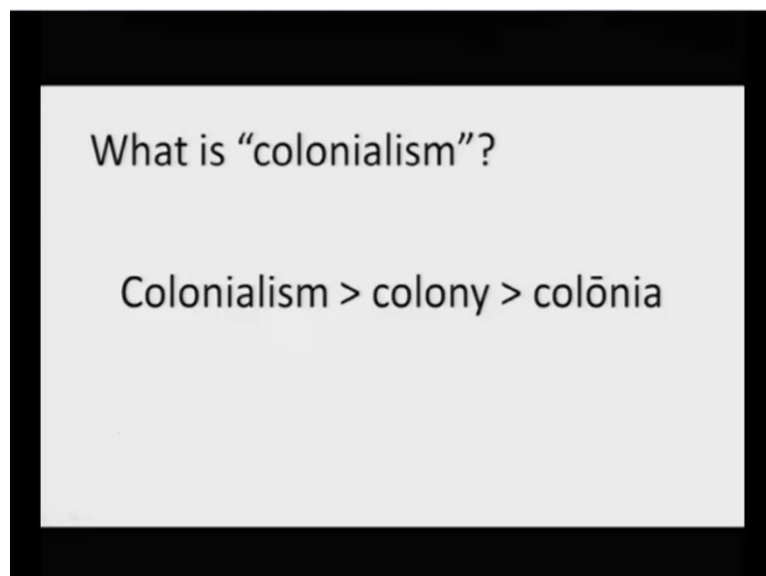
Rather, it is the India, which started emerging from the 18th century onwards, as the Colonial power, British Colonial power, started spreading its influence, across the land. Now, at this point, let us stop for a while, and think about this new definition of Postcolonialism, that we have arrived at. If, Postcolonialism is the sum total of the social, economic, political, cultural changes, that are brought about, because of Colonialism, then all these changes, relevant only for the Colonised society, and not for the Colonising society.

In other words, when we are talking about the British Colonialism in India, can we only talk about the emergence of a Postcolonial India, and not about Postcolonial Britain. Well, that is a wrong assumption. Why? Because, even a cursory acquaintance with the British history of 18th-century, and 19th-century, and even 20th-century, would tell us that, the British society was as deeply impacted, as deeply influenced, by the process of Colonialism, as the Indian society.

And, in fact, this is not very difficult to comprehend, if we keep in mind that, Colonialism is ultimately a two-way traffic, a two-way traffic of ideas, goods and people, between the Colonised, and the Colonising country. Therefore, it is implausible to think that, Colonialism only affects the Colonised people, and not the Colonisers. Thus, if we can talk about a Postcolonial India, we can also with equal justice, talk about the emergence of a Postcolonial Britain.

Now, so far, we have been talking about Colonialism, without really trying to explore its definition, its meanings. But, now, let us look at it more closely. And, if we want to understand, what is Colonialism, then the historical origin of the word provides us, with a very interesting clue.

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The word Colonialism, has at its root, the word colony, which in turn, is derived from the Latin word, Colonia. The oxford English dictionary defines Colonia, as farms or landed estates, which were located in newly conquered territories of the Roman empire, and were

originally given as gifts to Roman citizens, who are mostly veteran soldiers. And, establishing such Roman Colonies, in an otherwise hostile territory, ensured that, the occupied land remained under control.

And, among the various Colonies, that Roman had, London was a very prominent one. Of this understanding of colony and Colonialism, via the root word Colonia, throws up a number of interesting points. The first point is that, Colonialism, or the process of establishing Colonies, is essentially a violent process. Because, it involves forcibly occupying the land, and using the territorial resources, that originally belonged to someone else. Colonies are therefore, sites of hostility and violence.

As we will see, in this course, the Colonial violence, that I just mentioned, makes itself felt at several different levels, social, economic, cultural. But, these more abstract kinds of violence, are almost always coupled with the brutalities of physical violence. And, we see this for instance, in Peru, via during the early decades of the 16th century, Spanish conquistadors reduced the native population, from about half a Crore, to around 3 Lakhs.

We again see this, more recently in the 1893 war, against the Matabele kingdom, which is in present-day Zimbabwe, where the British forces, almost moved down their African opponents like grass, using the newly invented maxim gun, which is a special kind of a machine gun. So, though in this course, we will talk a lot about the cultural violence, perpetrated by Colonialism, as well as resistance to this culture of violence, we should not become blind to the physical violence, to the gruesome physical violence, which almost always underlines the process of Colonialism.

The second point to note, in the dictionary definition of the Latin word Colonia, which informs the present-day use of the word Colonialism is that, though Roman Colonia, where settlements away from the heart of Italy, which was the centre of the Roman empire, they were nevertheless inhabited by people, who still retained their rights as Roman citizens, and who represented the political and economic interests of their mother country, in the distant territory of the Colonies.

Therefore, when we are talking about Colonialism, which derives from this Roman model, we are always talking about this relationship, between a mother country, which is otherwise

called Metropolis, and from where the Colonising people come, and the conquered country, which is transformed into a colony, so that, its resources can be siphoned off.

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If we look at this world map of 1921, here the shaded areas, represent the British Colonial empire. And here, you can see, that the comparatively small island of Britain, is acting as the Colonial mother country, or Metropolis, over a huge territory, that includes South Asia, which of course contains, present-day Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Srilanka. There is also Burma. It contains, vast stretches of Africa. It contains, Canada. It contains, Australia. It contains, New Zealand.

Now, it can be argued that, such territorial conquests and expansion, as this map shows, was always a part of human history. As we have seen, even the British capital of London, which acted as a centre of the metropolis, of this entire huge Colonial empire, was itself, once a colony of the Roman empire. So, does not, this make the history of Colonialism, really the entire history of humanity.

Well, it may be so. But, as far as Postcolonial studies is concerned, the focus is on the kinds of Colonialism, that emerged, since the sixteenth century. And, that were driven primarily by the profit-making motives of capitalism. We will be discussing, this relationship between Colonialism and Capitalism, later on. But, before that, we will have to try and understand, Postcolonialism, and its relation to literature. This will be our topic, for the next lecture. Thank you.