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.

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 postcolonial 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
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 relation-
ships. Feminists having an oppositional stance started
questioning their inferior status and asked for amelio-
ration in their social position (Freedman, 2002). As such it
calls for equal justice and equal opportunities for females.

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 perspec-
tives. 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 on
otherwise, as historical subjects. (Boehmer 2006)

In numberless colonialist texts, papers, articles, and do-
cuments, 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

sexualities in the different contexts of women’s lives, their
subjectivities, work, sexuality, and rights” (Schwarz and
Ray, 2005).
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 indians. In this way, orientals during colonial rule were victims of cruelty, brutality, and so-called 'civilizing mission' of the West. Post colonialism throughout dehumanizes 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-betweeness, 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 seem 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; sub-
ordination 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
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 funda-
mental 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 systematisation 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
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 'inter-
national' 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 appreci-
ated, 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 coloured coloniz. He guided numberless thinkers engaged in the liberating project of colonial imprints. Western scholars unfailingly 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 homemaker 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 constricative. 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 entertained and enjoyed, and moreover make space to get space for social, cultural, or economic structures across the world. The prime objective of postcolonial feminists 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 constricative. 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.

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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’.

**REFERENCE**