

A Post-Colonial Interpretation to Reach Hybrid Culture – The English Teacher a Study

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Abstract

This article focuses on the post-colonial treatment and social spirit of the novel *The English Teacher*. Post colonialism seeks to understand how oppression, resistance and adaptation have occurred during colonial rule. This means that post-colonialism analyses specific strategies of power, domination, hegemony and oppression utilized by the colonizer in the colony. This includes a vast spectrum of issues as art, architecture, economics, political philosophy and their legal manifestation e.g. courts, laws, psychological states, medical and scientific apparatus, the education system and civil codes, all of which embody , in some form or other, colonial ideology. Post-colonialism also seeks to understand how the colonized reacted to, adapted or

resisted to this structure of domination. Colonial rule plays a main role in *The English Teacher* as well. The name of the novel itself signifies the influence of the unwelcome British rule.

Keywords

Post-colonialism, legal manifestation, political philosophy, colonial ideology, scientific apparatus.

Introduction

The first part of the novel is light-hearted and humorous the recounting Krishnan's early married life with Susila and daughter Leela. After the death of Susila, the story becomes somber and serious. Krishnan is a teacher of English in Albert Mission College. Unable to derive a job satisfaction from teaching, he is constantly tormented by a feeling that he is "doing the wrong work" (*English Teacher*, p.1). Krishnan is deeply rooted in indigenous culture. He finds English as a language of colonial domination. But he is caught into an old situation that he has to teach the same language that he hates. Krishnan's tragic story is the story of the spiritual agony and anguish of a learned, sensitive and imaginative modern Indian, who is an unhappy blend of a revolutionary and uncompromising idealist having his roots firmly embedded in native tradition.

His musing on the purposelessness and aimlessness of his fixed routine reveals the agony of a mind newly awakened to the tragedy of its life:

“The feeling again and again came upon me that as I was nearing thirty I should cease to live like a cow(perhaps, a cow, with justice, might feel hurt at the comparison), eating, working, talking, etc. all done to perfection. I am sure, but always leaving behind a sense of something missing.”(English Teacher,p.1)

This latent unconventionality of Krishnan is due to the fact that he is not able to surrender to colonized culture imposed by the British rule. He resists against the colonized culture. Krishnan is very unhappy to think that this education system has been completely out of tune with the needs of Indian students. His broodings over the teacher- taught relationship reveal striking unconventionality of his views. He is at once against the unquestioning obedience and obeisance of students to their teachers.

Krishnan very truly realizes that the discordance between the teacher and taught is often due to teacher’s tendency to terrorize students into submission and to cow them down by their superior force. These feelings of Krishnan reveal his dedication to duty and commitment to the cause of education. Krishnan seems to be influenced by his primitive native education system. He thinks that a teacher should have a loving and sympathetic attitude

towards grievance of the students rather than the lion-tamer's touch to strengthen his ties with the students:

"In a somber moment perhaps I would reflect on the question of obedience. Born in different households, perhaps petted, pampered, and bullied, by parents, uncles, brother-all persons known to them and are responsible for their growth and welfare. Who was I that they should obey my command? What tie was there in between me and them? Do I absorb their personalities as did the old master and merge them in mine." (Narayan, English Teacher, p. 9)

Postcolonial Discourse

Krishnan is against English-oriented curriculum of college. Language is the fundamental site for postcolonial discourse because the colonial process itself begins in language. The control over language by colonizer, whether achieved by displacing native languages, by installing itself as a standard against other variants which are constituted as impurities, or by planting the language of empire in a new place, remains the most potent instrument of cultural control. Language is the significant signifier of culture. Language provides the terms by which reality may be constituted, it provides the names by which world may be known. Through Krishnan, Narayan shows his own sensitivity for native language and culture.

One of the most powerful demonstrations of the power of language is the means by which it provides, through the

function of naming, a technique for knowing a colonized place or people. To name the world is to understand it, to know it and to have control over it. To name reality is to exert power over it, simply because the dominant language becomes the way in which it is known. In colonial experience, this power is by no means vague or abstract. A systematic education and indoctrination installed in the language and thus the reality on which it was predicted as preeminent.

There are several responses to this dominance of imperial language, but two main responses are present immediately in the decolonizing process- rejection or subversion. The Study of the English Language and Literature in Postcolonial context seems to be “a densely political phenomenon” (Theory and practice in post – Colonial Literature,p.23)and consequently comes under the purview of the postcolonial writers. Walder states that one of the fundamental assertions of post- colonialism is that the English language and literature have played a very significant role in propounding colonial ideology aimed at the survival and consolidation of the colonial rule. In other words, the construction of English literary education is part of the colonial cultural design.

Discursive Resistance

According to Indian linguist, Braj Kachru, English has been accepted as a lingua franca in India because of its

relatively neutral nature, since its effects in everyday use are far less inflammatory than those stemming from the contention between one and another minority languages. Indian novelist Raja Rao in *Forward to Kanthapura* states that English is the language of intellect, not of emotion; in India, English should, therefore, be appropriated to the level of a dialect which will someday prove to be as distinctive and colorful as the Irish or the American.

The question which provokes argument over the most effective form of discursive resistance is whether one can use the language of imperialism without being inescapably contaminated by an imperial world view.

This is the question which troubles Krishnan. He longs for his native language and indigenous culture. Narayan, through the protagonist, Krishnan, exposes the miserable condition of the colonized India youths who are products of an alien culture embodied in convents, Mission Schools, Board Schools and Colleges which represent a whole century of false education. Krishnan considers education to be a big fraud leading the Indian youths away from their cultural heritage and thus making them foreigners in their native country. Narayan feels that this education has reduced our nation to a nation of morons; we have become strangers to our own culture and camp followers of another culture. It seems that we are feeding on leavings and garbage.

Krishnan, completely disillusioned with the incompatibility and uselessness of traditional colonized education, wants to tell boys at the grave risk of losing his job that: "They are being fed on literary garbage and that we are all the paid servants of the garbage department" (English Teacher, p. 171).

Narayan's perception of English education could not be clearer than this. Like most of his countrymen, he too detested the promotion of the British culture which will effectively help to keep the country in subjugation and servility. This English education has bred a class of youngsters revering the British culture, disregarding their own heritage and in some cases, even showing contempt to their own.

The Postcolonial Context

In postcolonial context, the language is a tool which has meaning according to the way in which it is used. But it is very important to understand Narayan's attitude towards English language. The colonial education which Narayan received might have influenced his views on the English language, since in the classroom; Narayan had to see English as the first language, his native language being the second language. In the Indian subcontinent, one of the first writers to talk about the business of writing in English is R.K. Narayan. Indeed, R.K. Narayan is the first Indian novelist in English to secure international

recognition. He began his career in the 1930's during the period of Indian political mobilization and the campaign of civil disobedience against the British imperialism.

The English Teacher (1945) was published two years before formal Indian independence that was a time when the Indians had to position themselves vis-à-vis British colonialism and Indian nationalism. And yet, neither colonialism nor nationalism occupies a central position in his novels. What is more interesting is that Narayan gives no sense of having a problem about writing in English. Indeed he thinks that we cannot write like the English. Raja Rao states that we should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as a part of us. English both is and isn't an alien language. English has become the language of Indians' intellectual make-up but not of their emotional makeup. Language is an important cultural capital. Time and again we have seen postcolonial politicians and intellectuals take on the colonizing language as a means of empowerment, a bank of cultural capital to be used for the purpose of self-presentation. But for person like Krishnan, the ambivalence of this process lies in intractable philosophical problem whether having a language amounts to having a particular kind of world, a world that is simply not communicable in any other language. This problem rests on the question of meaning itself, of how meaning is communicated in the text.

Written text is a social situation. Meaning is a social fact which comes to being within the discourse of a culture, the social facts as well as social structures are the social accomplishments.

Language in post-colonial societies is characterized by complexity, hybridity and constant change. It rejects the assumption of a linguistic structure or code that can be described by the colonial distinction of standard and variant. All language is marginal; all languages emerge out of conflict and struggle.

Conclusion

Language functions are not simply as a device for reporting experience, but also, as a way of defining experience for its speakers. So, to possess a language is to possess a technique, not necessarily a quantum of knowledge about the world. It is the situation of discourse, then, rather than the linguistic system in speaker's mind, in which the obligatory terms of language are structured. The meaning and nature of perceived reality are not determined within the minds of the users, not even within the language itself, but within the use, within the multiplicity of relationships which operate in the system. The semantic component of the sentence is contained in the syntax. The meaning of a word or phrase is its use in the language, a use which has nothing to do with the kind of world a user has in his or her head.

The speaker has in mind, are the linguistic system or culture, or intentions or meanings, are only, accessible in the retrospective performance of speaking. Language is coextensive with social reality, not because it causes a certain perception of the world, but because it is inextricable from that perception. Language exists, therefore, neither before the fact nor after fact but in the fact.

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