



Reconstruction of Identity: A Critical Discourse Analysis of *Sea of Poppies*, *The Heirs of Columbus* and *Nervous Conditions*

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Abstract- This paper aims to investigate the reconstruction of subaltern identity in the backdrop of colonial era. It draws a cross cultural analysis of fictional work of three different postcolonial texts (*Sea of Poppies*, *The Heirs of Columbus* and *Nervous Conditions*) to examine the identity construction and deconstruction through the power of discourse. The fictional works are also political documents which are used as the tools of resistance and decolonization. This research thus aims to highlight the literary works as a voice of the subaltern marginalized subjects whose voice is censored and suppressed in traditional official documents of history.

Keywords: Re-construction of Identity, Discourse of Power, Marginalized. Post-colonialism

I. INTRODUCTION

This study explores the reconstruction of colonized subject as a counter-discourse to power. The identity of native is stereotyped and constructed as an uncivilized subject in the colonial grand narrative which is resisted in the work of post-colonial fiction. The post-colonial writers reconstruct the native identities hence defy and write back to the empire. It investigates the selected works in the light of research question that "How do different cultures respond to colonial suppression in the selected works?". This paper draws a cross cultural comparative analysis of three different colonized territories represented in the selected novels from different colonized regions such as Zimbabwe (Africa), South Asia (Bangali India) and American Indians and traces the process, effects and reactions of the colonization on cross cultural national and individual identities. Comparative literature focuses the study of cross cultural texts which makes it interdisciplinary as it mainly emphasizes the connections reflected in literary works across both space and time. The beginning of this chapter exhibits a brief introduction of the process of colonialism, its effects and reactions in the colonized regions. This is followed by a detailed critical discourse analysis of the selected novels through Norman Fairclough's three dimensional approach. The critical discourse analysis in this chapter deals with discourse as a social practice which explores the operation of ideologies embedded and manifested in the narrative discourse and specifically the dialectical relationship between discourse and society (174). This is the last stage in Fairclough's multidimensional approach of critical discourse analysis. This "Explanation" stage of analysis involves ideologies, their effects and social determinants. **Social Determinants** focus the investigation of power relations at different levels such as societal, situational and institutional. It also focuses the ways through which these practices shape discourses. **Ideologies** focus the ideologies which are "determined by particular power relations in the society or institution, and in terms of their contribution to struggles to sustain or change these power relations - they are seen ideologically" (*Language and Power* 166). **Effects** focus the effects of the practices that "how is this discourse positioned in relation to struggles at the situational, institutional and societal levels?. It examines that how does these practices contribute to sustain, maintain and transfer power relations.

This paper draws a cross cultural analysis of fictional work of three different postcolonial texts to examine the identity construction and deconstruction through the power of discourse. The study of comparative literature in postcolonial backdrop is a political process according Bassnet as it is an attempt for reasserting national and cultural identity in the postcolonial era (39). The fictional works are also political documents which are used as the tools of resistance and decolonization. This research thus aims to highlight the literary works as a voice of the subaltern marginalized subjects whose voice is censored and suppressed in traditional official documents of history.

An Overview of the Process of Colonialism in the Selected Works

Colonialism is the concept of expansion and establishment of colony in a region by a political power of another region on the basis of unequal relationship between the colony and the colonial power. The

European colonialism started from 16th century to the mid of twentieth century and established colonies in different regions of world. The process of colonialism was based on the concept of binary oppositions us and them which constructed suppressed identities of the colonized. The present study reflects the process of colonialism in the regions presented in the selected novels that is South Asia (Bangali India), Zimbabwe (Africa) and American Indians (United States). These regions were colonized in different time periods but reflect the same scenario of suppression by the colonial powers.

Sea of Poppies represents the colonial period in Bengali India during British era. Amitav Ghosh narrates a history of suppression and subjugation of the native population by the colonizers and their resistance through different characters. The story is primarily centered in the mid-19th century and records economic political and social lives of various classes of society in Indian subcontinent. The colonizers entered the region as a trading company in 1708 and through different discursive strategies subjugated the native population and deprived them of their land culture and identity. Postcolonial writers resist against the colonial suppression and raise the voice of subjugated class of the society thus reconstruct the native identity as center in their novels. *Nervous Conditions* narrates the subjugation of the native population of Africans in the same vein. The process of colonialism destroyed the sense of self of the native population in Africa. Dangarembga narrates the identity crisis of native and the confusion of native mind caused by the foreign colonizer's culture. In a semi-autobiographical way of narration Dangarembga retells the history of colonialism and its destruction on native mind. The novel is set in the backdrop of 1960's Rhodesia and focuses the history of colonialism in the region through a Rhodesian family. Dangarembga traces the history of subjugation and resistance by placing the suppressed in center. Similarly, Vizenor traces the resistance of American Indians in *The Heirs of Columbus* and writes back to the center by placing margin in the center. *The Heirs of Columbus* deconstructs the official history and reconstructs the American Indian tribal identity by narrating a different version of history from margin. All these writers deconstruct history by narrating mini narratives instead of one single truth (meta narrative).

Representation of Other Culture and Resistance

The process of colonialism constructed the native identity as inferior and represented it as other to the world thus native culture was also considered inferior as compared to the colonizer's culture. Culture according to Stuart Hall is "the ' way of life' of people, community, nation or a social group" (Hall 2). It can also be defined as the "shared values" of a group or society. Stuart Hall states that culture is mainly concerned with production and exchange of meaning (2). In this regard culture is the practices and process lived by a group in their social setup. Representation in this context is "the process by which members of a culture use language to produce meaning" (Hall 61). It is the power which determines the exclusion and inclusion of a culture and determines the representation. The native in postcolonial terms is always stereotyped and presented as other object that needs to get civilized by the colonizers. Representation can be viewed in terms of discourse which involves ideology and power. The power structures in colonial reign infused ideologies of western cultural superiority and suppressed the colonized subjects. *Sea of Poppies* represents the native culture and resists to the colonial representation of cultural other by raising the voices of suppressed class. Native culture is shown superior in *Sea of Poppies* as it celebrates the cultural harmony of the Indians in subcontinent which was disturbed by the invasion of foreign language. Paulette, a French in origin loves the Bangali native language and culture because she is raised in India and wants to practice the native way of life but can't because of the dominant English circle around her as Ghosh states:

The candle in Paulette's window was the first to pierce the pre-dawn darkness that surrounded Bethel: of all the residents of the house, master and servant alike, she was always up the earliest and her day usually began with the hiding of the *sari* she had slept in at night. It was only in the seclusion of her bedroom, sheltered from the praying gaze of the staff, that she dared wear a *sari* at all: Paulette had discovered that Bethel, the servants, no less than the masters, held strong views on what was appropriate for Europeans, especially memsahibs. The bearers and *khidmutgars* sneered when her clothing was not quite pukka, and they would often ignore her if she spoke to them in Bengali-or anything other than the kitchen-Hindustani that was the language of command in the house (129).

Social Determinants Ideologies and Effects

The above quoted text highlights the cultural suppression of the native class on one hand and native's response to foreign culture on other hand. It shows how power functions at different levels that is societal, situational and institutional. Paulette craves for native cultural dress and language but cannot

practice the native way of life because of the situational and institutional power structures. The words **she was always up the earliest** highlight the situational social determinants as Paulette wants to be dressed traditionally but because of the power structures she is compelled to be dressed in English ways. Her situation is determined by the dominant class of the colonizers that is Mr. Burnham and his family. Paulette is up early because **her day usually began with the hiding of the sari she had slept in at night**. The words **hiding of the sari** exhibit the ideology of institutional power structures (colonizers). *Sari* is a traditional dress but Paulette is afraid to wear it in front of the English Burnham family so she hides it and wears it only at night when she is alone. The text **it was only in the seclusion of her bedroom** highlights the institutional ideology of us and them of the colonizers and determines the societal and institutional ideologies accordingly. The seclusion of bedroom shows that the native cultural dress is something inferior and shouldn't be used by a white lady. The reaction of the servants at house shows the effects of colonial discourse and ideology which determines a specific behavior and reaction of the native. The native is trained to expect everything superior from the colonizers so they don't accept the native language spoken by Paulette. They don't want to see her in the traditional Indian dress *sari* because it belongs to the low class of society according to the colonial ideology of us and them. The words **that she dared wear a sari** highlight the effects of the colonial discourse. **Dared** is a very strong word used by Ghosh to show the effect of colonial ideology on native mind. Paulette can't even dare to wear a traditional dress in front of the servants and natives because it is abandoned by the power structures. It was not only the dress she hides the servants ignore her Bengali language too. Their mind is trained by the colonial ideology to take their native language Bengali inferior to English so Paulette shouldn't speak to them in Bengali but in the superior language of the colonizer. The text **they would often ignore her if she spoke to them in Bengali** shows the institutional supremacy of the colonizers who determine the societal and situational power relations. The societal reaction by the *Khidmatguars* and bearers in effect determine the situation of Paulette as an individual of colonized society.

In the same vein Vizenor rewrites the native history in *The Heirs of Columbus* by representing the admiral of Ocean Sea into a cross blood Jewish trickster. He resists to the dominant culture through his writings thus transforms the tragedy of native cultural genocide into an ironical comedy of trickstering. His bold fiction strikes the chords of resistance and plays a melody of native cultural harmony in comparison to the western cultural supremacy. He highlights the cultural genocide of native through his different characters as he narrates:

Teets was disheartened by the suspicion of sexual abuse by the scientists; she understood from personal experiences the horrors of survival in some tribal families, but who could be so cruel to abuse wounded children, those burned by the poisons and chemical pleasures of civilization; abused even more by the men who were trusted to heal them. She cried over the memories of the cruelties the children had endured (156).

Social Determinants Ideologies and Effects

Vizenor highlights the power relations at different levels in the quoted text which shaped the colonial discourse of western superiority. The **chemical pleasure of civilization** shows the power of the colonizer which subjugated the native as other with the slogan of civilization (19). Vizenor deconstructs the notion of civilization on both situational and societal level as according to him this **chemical civilization** resulted in abuse and injury to the children. The western ideology of civilization was constructed by the western institutions to tame the native subjects. The ideology is resisted in *The Heirs of Columbus* because it brought destruction and death to the native population. This ideology worked on different levels to construct native identity as other of civilized identity. **The horrors of survival** highlight the effects of the operation of western ideology. The infusion of western ideology made survival difficult for the native population and to survive was horrible for them. Teet's crying **over the memories of the cruelties the children had endured** r -narrate the historical genocide of native (39). The healing therapy at point Assinika is in fact resistance of Vizenor as a native subject who shows the glory of tribal style of life over the poisons **and chemical pleasure of civilization**. He ends colonialism through his imagined nation which he dedicates to healing. Vizenor conveys a message to his readers that natives are no more victim of western suppression and the survivors turn the discourse of domination upside down, imagine and retell it in their own way (96). He reshapes Indian identity and resists to the western ideologies by writing back to them in trickster discourse.

Dangarembga uses *Nervousconditions* as a metaphor by showing many characters suffer from the nervous conditions of being hybrid. According to Dangarembga the white cultural ideals virtually killed the

colonized subjects. She shows the superiority of native cultural life in comparison to the white cultural ideals (169). The colonial mode of education and culture produced sense of alienation from the native culture into native subject which further resulted in a severe form of nervous conditions. The characters are shown losing harmony with their native life, culture and families. Dangarembga resists against these nervous conditions and highlights the darker side of picture in comparison to colonial discourse of civilization. She highlights the identity conflict through many characters as Tambu says:

I was very pleased to see the sadza when it came, although nobody else seemed to care for it. This was embarrassing. There were many things that were embarrassing about that meal: my place looked as though a small and angry child had been fed there; here I was with a spoon in my hand instead of a fork and now Maiguru was dishing sadza on to my plate, sadza that nobody else would eat. She was being very kind. When we went to England . . . it was terrible. It took me months to get used to the food. It has no taste, you know, and there was so little of it. I used to be hungry day and night. Sometimes it was so bad I couldn't sleep (82).

Social Determinants Ideologies and Effects

The quoted text explains the colonial ideology on institutional, societal and situational levels. The power is shown working on different levels with different strategies. Tambu's feelings about the English mode of life creates alienation in her character from her own culture. She loses the sense of belongingness in the company of her own native colonized family. ***I was pleased to see sadza*** is her original self which speaks in a tone of delight to see a cultural thing but ***nobody else seemed to care for it*** kill her feelings as she starts considering it something inferior. The word ***pleased*** comes in comparison to ***embarrassing*** as she feels embarrassed to be pleased about Sadza. ***Pleased*** highlights native's positive feeling both on societal and situational level about their culture which get crushed as ***nobody else seemed to care for it***. The behavior of Tambu's aunt and cousin is the effect of white ideology of superiority infused in native mind. The ideology created a chaos in native character as everything which belongs to native appeared embarrassing such as Tambu says; ***There were many things that were embarrassing***. The colonizers infused their ideologies strategically and imposed their culture on native by showing it superior culture. Tambu as a native subject is shown embarrassed of her natural way of eating because she did not eat in colonial manner as she comments ***I was with a spoon in my hand instead of a fork***. Everything that belonged to the colonizer was considered superior and graceful by the native. Tambu's aunt uses the word ***terrible*** to describe her feelings in mimicking the white ways. The effect of colonialism was the death of native cultural heritage which resulted in inferiority complex, sleepless nights and empty stomach of native. The colonial discourse created the ideology of white superiority on societal and institutional level which affected native identity negatively. Dangarembga resists against this condition of native thus reconstructs native identity hence highlights another side of colonial history.

Authors and intellectuals resisted the empire in their writing and write back to the empire in a rebellious tone. Amitav Ghosh recreates native identity and sheds light on the power structures and their discourse which hegemonically influenced the native as an individual and as a social group. Each character in the Ibis strives hard to redefine and recreate his identity. Adaptation of English ways was the only way to get respected in the society so native tried hard to imitate the English cultural standards. Ghosh shows this practice through Babo Nob Kissin's character as he comments about him that:

He decided that his best hope for advancement lay in finding a place with one of the city's English firms. To this end, he began to attend tutorial meetings in the house of a Tamil dubash- a translator who worked for Gillanders & Company, a big trading agency. He quickly established himself as one of the best students in the group, stringing together sentences with a fluency that astounded his master as well as his fellow pupils . . . it was not just his acumen and his fluency in English that Baboo Nob Kissin's employers valued his services: they appreciated also his eagerness to please and his apparently limitless tolerance for abuse (171).

Social Determinants Ideologies and Effects

The above quoted text highlights the ideology of power structures which work on societal and situational level. The identity of native is recreated by showing the operation of ideologies. Babo Nob Kissin's tutorial meetings show the effect of the discourse of power which infused an ideology of white superiority. Babo Nob Kissin's decision as quoted ***To this end, he began to attend tutorial meetings*** highlight the power on institutional and societal level. Advancement and respect for a native was only in adaptation of white

ways of life .AmitavGhosh deconstruct the documented history by showing the story of common masses and the social determinants which resulted in subjugation of native identity. Babo Nob Kissin's stance is well reflected in the text when he thinks that **his best hope for advancement lay in finding a place with one of the city's English firms** .Babo Nob Kissin's reflection is shown as an individual's thought as well as he represents the whole native society. This mentioned line in fact highlights the effect of white ideologies which worked both on individual, situational and societal level. Ghosh's tone is ironical as he unveils the discourses which constructed identities on different levels and created a power hierarchy. Babo Nob Kissin's **fluency in English** was appreciated by English because he as an individual negates himself in this process and adopts the language of a foreigner thus indirectly considers him and his language superior than himself. Most ironically it was not only the language which pleased the white colonizer but what pleased him most was Babo Nob Kissin's **eagerness to please and his apparently limitless tolerance for abuse**. Native treated English superior thus eventually considered them their masters as is shown in the above quoted text. Babo Nob Kissin not only shows **eagerness to please** his English masters but he has a **limitless tolerance for abuse** .Ghosh's choice of these strong words shed light on the negation of self to an extent where nothing appears bad. AmitavGhosh narrates the history of native from below to reconstruct native's identity which was subjugated by white colonizers.

Gerald Vizenor destabilizes the colonial ideology of victimized native who lives far away from civilization and portrays an Indian in contemporary America thus deconstructs history through the trickster discourse. He also resists against the colonial ideals of pure blood and celebrates the cross mixed blood descendants of tribal and western race. He re-narrates history of Christopher Columbus and postulates that great explorer is also a mixed blood descendant of Jews and Mayan as he argues:

" Stones hold our tribal words and the past in silence,In the same way that we listen to the stories in blood and hold our past in memories " . . . " Columbus was Mayan " said stone . . . " the Maya brought civilization to the savages of old world and the rest is natural " said stone. " Columbus escaped from the culture of death and carried our tribal genes back to the New world, back to the great river, he was an adventurer in our blood and he returned to his homeland" (9).

Social Determinants, Ideologies and Effects

The above quoted text turns the colonial ideology upside down and resist against the power structures which shaped native identity as other of western identity. Vizenor takes away the effect of colonial ideology through his trickster discourse and claims Columbus as a Mayan Indian and the Indians as his heirs. The claim of Stone Columbus when he says **Columbus was Mayan** erases the colonial social determinants on situational and societal level as Vizenor reconstructs an Indian identity and celebrates it as an authentic cross blood identity. The heirs value their cross blood identity and resist against the colonial ideology of Columbian history and western supremacy as to them Columbus **was an adventurer in our blood and he returned to his homeland**. The effect of colonialism on American Indians is obliterated from the native ironically as the native is shown the descendent of Columbus in the quoted text who reinvent his past in stories and reinvent his origin as a hybrid cross blood tribal.

Dangarembga articulates the colonial cultural suppression which effect native identity as an illness. In *Nervous Conditions* this illness is highlighted on metaphoric level as it threatened the lives of native colonized subjects. Dangarembga highlights this illness as a destructive effect of Englishness as she comments:

It's the Englishness, she said. It'll kill them all if they aren't careful, and she snored. Look at them, that boy Chido can't hardly speak a word of his own mother's tongue, and you'll see his children will be worse. Running around with that white one, isn't he, the missionary's daughter? His children will disgrace us . . . And himself, to look at him he may look all right, but there's no telling what price he is paying. She wouldn't say much about Nyasha. About that one we don't even speak. Its speaking for itself. Both of them, It's the Englishness .It's a wonder it hasn't affected the parents too (203).

Social Determinants Ideologies and Effects

In the above quoted text Tambu's mother blames **Englishness** as a destructive element which destroyed many lives .**It's the Englishness** show the resistance of native on both situational and societal level. Tambu's mother resists against this **Englishness** as an individual as well as a representative of native society. The word **Englishness** is used in a derogatory way because to her it is a disease which will **kill**

them all if they aren't careful. A native needs to be **careful** in his adaptation of white ways as it has disastrous effects. The ideologies of power are resisted in the above quoted text and another ideology of native harmony is introduced on situational and societal level. Tambu's mother discusses the disastrous effects of white ideology which governed native lives .She considers it a flaw not to speak mother tongue fluently as she says **that boy Chido can't hardly speak a word of his own mother's tongue, and you'll see ' his children will be worse ' .** She alarms about the worst conditions in consequence of this cultural genocide of the colonizers. Native's identity is presented ironically by Tambu's mother as according to her mimicking the white ways apparently seem okay but have contamination which destroy identities inwardly .Her comments about Chido represent a true condition of native who is sunken deep into nervous conditions and conflict of identity as she says **And himself, to look at him he may look all right, but there's no telling what price he is paying.** Dangarembga resists through her characters against the **Englishness** of the white culture and reconstructs identities that are shown well aware of the disastrous effects of **Englishness**.

II. CONCLUSION

This chapter draws a comparative analysis of reconstruction of identity in three different regions represented in the selected novels. These three novels represent the history of colonialism in different time periods about different race and region who share the same experiences thus resist and write back to the empire. *Sea of Poppies* narrates the colonial history in mid-19th century while *The Heirs of Columbus* talks about the colonial history of American Indians from pre-Columbian period till today that is both past and present. *Nervous Conditions* on the other hand narrates the history of twentieth century Rhodesia .The identity of native is reconstructed by re-telling the past from another perspective in these mentioned novels .By placing the native in center the authors of these selected works resist against the ideology of western superiority.

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