

On Doing Postcolonialism Or, How Shall We Negotiate Post-Colonial Colonialism?

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It is not the official departure of the colonial machine that has engineered, by default, the architecture of a new world-order, rather, while the *colonies* do not exist anymore (here of course we take *colony* as implying a country under direct administrative set-up or structure of governance of another, more powerful, country), *colonialism* – which indicates both an idea and a condition – happens to continue, albeit without its more obvious signs. The present write-up¹ showcases musings on issues directly entangled with colonial memory as well as relatively autonomous of that “defining interlude” called colonialism, and explores the various facets – textual, socio-cultural, historical, political and so on – of the colonial encounter and the ways in which this encounter has shaped the colonised, that is, how the people’s concerns are determined and perspectives influenced as inhabitants of former colonies. In its own way the following discussion thus attempts to offer some insights into the colonies’ distinctive history and modern identity.

Now, as this article concerns the discourse that has been functioning in the name of postcolonialism for several decades by now, one would perhaps not find it redundant if the writer begins the discussion with a brief mapping of this already huge literary-academic industry. I wish to offer a short hand, if not underhand, narrative of how this field has developed in the last few decades or so, and I shall also talk about our expectation of the birth of a different kind of discourse and material reality in the former colonies. In other words, my attempt will be to show the kind of postcolonialism we are doing now as well as the kind of postcolonialism we want to do.²

Colonialism, obviously, is an extremely resilient, powerful and varied system, having diverse manifestations in different parts of the world; naturally the responses it has engendered are also diverse and complex. Moreover, the colonised societies have their own set of internal agendas and forces that continue to interact with and modify the direct response to the colonial incursion. The retreat of the British after the Second World War occasioned the start of political independence for its colonies, but colonialism was not to end with the end of colonial occupation. The obvious signs began to disappear, but the population did not really gain freedom as colonial encounters impacted powerfully on the culture, literature, and politics of the non-West. Postcolonialism, in its literary/theoretical/critical engagement with this intricate postcolonial reality, turns out to be a layered trope containing and subsuming various strands, some of which are hugely

paradoxical and deeply ironic. It has become the site of numerous investigations from many disciplines, as well as a theoretical perspective from which to view a variety of concerns including the interface between the postcolonial writing and the economic forces of production of the modern global era which increasingly commodify cultures, the reality of the deterritorialised nationalisms, the new ethnic-architectures that intersect with and cut across national boundaries and so on. Now, what are those writings that can be categorised as postcolonial literature? Do they include literatures written only after the formal colonial rule? Again, what are the concerns that inform the writings of the postcolonials? Is it all about writing back? To put up resistance? In fact, there is a wide range of writings and concerns to which the label can be applied.

It would not be wise to reduce everything in the interface between the colonisers and the colonised simply as a matter of dominance and subordination. This is, of course, the broad parameter of this encounter, but a closer observation reveals that there are many different nuances to this broader equation; there are numerous complications, many pockets of resistance, and various contrary impulses. The native leaders and scholars, who eventually produced some kind of counter-discourse, were also products of that very system of colonialism. As Professor Aali Areefur Rehman reminds us, ³ “English education” in the mid-nineteenth century led to the infusion of all sorts of new ideas that reinvigorated the “moribund Indian cultures” of the time: Raja Ram Mohan Roy’s writings, the Bengal Renaissance, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan’s Aligarh movement, among other developments, all were said to have derived from the “new learning” of English education which resulted eventually in the awakening of nationalism, democracy, and ultimately the demand for and attainment of political independence. The postcolonial perspective in cultural studies, developed in the second half of the twentieth century, however, showed how English education was not without its darker side in intention and had eclipsed much that was good in the native system.

The issues and elements, that comprised postcolonialism later, were being discussed for quite a long period, but the term as such became popular around the time the book *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin came out. The earlier landmark in this regard was Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) in which the key word, of course, was “Orientalism,” the discursive corpus and academic discipline whereby the West studied its Others. During the years between these two books, postcolonialism, the term and field of study, attained prominence, and Orientalism itself came to be subsumed by postcolonialism. The actual term “postcolonial” was not employed in the early studies of Edward Said, Gayatri Chakrovorty Spivak or Homi K. Bhabha. Spivak perhaps first used the term in 1990 in *The Post-Colonial Critic*. In 1991 Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge published an essay by this title, “What is Post(-) colonialism?” where they distinguished between a continuation of colonialism, and a resistance to it, and the distinction is predicated upon the presence or absence of the hyphen between “post” and “colonialism.” While the distinction in spelling still exists, the term is now used in wide and diverse ways to include study and analysis of European territorial conquests and differing responses to such incursions; various institutions and discursive operations of European colonialism; political, linguistic and cultural experience of societies that were

former colonies; politics of identity formation, and resistance to colonial legacies in post-independence nations and so on.

The colonies attempted to rebuild their cultural and political structures after collisions with the imperialist West; they began to map out new identities of their own, and slowly began to raise their own voices. The end of formal, direct colonial mechanism thus gave them an opportunity to articulate resistance to the dominant; the question, however, still remains whether they are better off with or without the discourse called postcolonialism when it comes to studying and foregrounding themselves: after all, how can one rely on the capacity of the subject in a postcolonial society to resist imperialism, and thus to intervene in the condition which appears to construct subjectivity itself? We need, therefore, to probe into the ways a Britain without its colonies still maintains cultural authority in postcolonial societies and how Eurocentric assumptions about race, nationality and literature time and again haunt the production of postcolonial writing. Indeed, no one in a former colony can ever fully avoid the effects of colonial and neocolonial cultural powers; neocolonialism is even more difficult to detect and resist as it reinforces a deeper and wider hegemony.

When surveying the field, it is imperative to recognise the inherent contradictions or ambivalences/ambiguities of the term “postcolonialism.” Not only is it a heterogeneous terrain encompassing a vast body of people and their cultures, thus essentially varied and diverse in its contents, but also hides two contrary impulses, and therefore, maintains an internal contradiction: in one sense, one may substitute “neo” for post, as the word “postcolonial,” in several cases and contexts, means “neocolonial”; simultaneously, the other impulse in the word “postcolonial” is “anticolonial.” “Post” intends to project itself to be celebratory, taking attention away from the continuity of neocolonial operations. In reality however, “post” fails to signal the end, as colonialism is always present, in one part or another in the world, in divergent forms. Domination of colonial powers still continues through international monetary bodies, multinational corporations and a variety of educational and cultural institutions. In fact, an easy dismantling of its own oppressive system is almost impossible for the West even if it wants to do so; try as it might, the taint of imperialism is hard to wash off. Despite its impressive fund of emancipating theories and philosophies, the West still remains so deeply imperialistic, because it is grounded in a peculiarly complex and self-sustaining system which has the resilience, the capacity to absorb, co-opt and contain its Other. As we know only too well, counter-cultures in the West are hooked to the dominant culture and are totally dependent on it, because the dominant culture provides, as it were, an outlet to all those forces of discontent it engenders. Counter-cultures use the same technologies of dissemination that the dominant culture does. The marketing of postcolonialism differs little from the way some other trendy academic products, say, poststructuralism or postmodernism, are also being marketed. Capitalistic imperialism is, thus, built into the western academy, and there is no easy way out of it even for those among them who wish to change things. On the other side, the new elites – the Macaulayan class, indigenous in blood and colour but western in education, training and taste – are dominant in the former colonies, although they are unrepresentative of the native people and act as unconscious, even willing agents for their revered ex-masters. If these compradors are still there in the administration and other

spheres of the former colonies to continue with the colonial set-up, then does anticolonial nationalism differ significantly from the western one?

Some critics, as we know, invoke the hyphenated form (post-colonialism) as implying a chronological separation between the two “ages”: colonial and postcolonial, a decisive temporal marker of the decolonising process; but others argue for the unbroken term (postcolonialism) on the ground that the postcolonial condition is inaugurated with the onset rather than the end of colonial occupation, and accordingly, the unbroken term is more sensitive to the long history of colonial consequences, and the reality of its continuation. There are other problems in definition. Does the term refer to texts or to practices or to psychological condition or to concrete historical processes? Perhaps it refers to interaction of all these; it has diverse and interdisciplinary usage, and seems to lack a coherent methodology. In literary contexts, postcolonialism means reading texts from former colonies and diaspora as well as re-reading western canonical texts, that is, a “contrapuntal” reading that unmasks, through its subversive critical engagement, how deeply the ideology and practices of imperialism are embedded in western society and culture. Indeed, postcolonialism is a very convenient blanket word, which allows for a lot of different types of things, and perhaps it is this inconsistency/imprecision/ ambiguity that has contributed, ironically, to its prevalence.

Thus postcolonialism, as we shall define it, does not mean after colonialism, for this would be to falsely ascribe an end to the colonial process. There is nothing *post* about colonialism, and so, postcolonialism must aspire for a sustained examination of the continuing imperial processes and strategies in “neocolonial” societies. But then the thing is, it uses the tools – modes of thought and argument, forms of literature, film and theatre – of western origin in resisting the (neo-)imperialist control. The dominant language and its discursive forms are used to express widely differing cultural experiences, to reach the widest possible audience, to intervene more readily/effectively which the texts in indigenous languages are deemed incapable of doing. This means using tools of dominant discourse to resist the same: instead of unlearning English, one learns how to curse in the master’s tongue. Appropriating this Caliban paradigm, however, creates a host of creative anxieties among anticolonial literary practitioners. These writers “appropriate” English so that it might become a medium of authentic native expression, but there are still debates as to how it can adequately voice the concerns of the postcolonials. Now, would it not be too simplistic, on the other hand, to use indigenous cultural traditions as *the* means of asserting identity in opposition to the colonial culture or to define postcolonial writings *only* in terms of a rejection of the culture of the coloniser in favour of indigenous? Would it not mean, among other things, bracketing our history and identity between colonialism and its aftermath? Would we accept that our history begins and ends with colonialism? Colonialism, of course, is an important, even “defining interlude” in our history, but then we cannot let it become the sole determinant of our destiny for all times to come. Our understanding of *history* should not be centred entirely on/around colonialism.

Colonialism is about economic exploitation; it is also about epistemological and cultural violence; colonisers have created a particular way of seeing the world for the colonised, establishing *forever* the white superiority in the mind of the latter and making them indulge

in self-pity. This becomes evident in the fact that we still need western recognition to be assured of ourselves. Colonialism colonises the mind; therefore, it does not end with the end of colonial occupation. Does postcolonialism inspire dismantling of this worldview and applying autonomous ideas to reading literature in the perspective of our specific geo-historical and cultural location? Does the discourse challenge universalism, Eurocentricism, West's essentialist, narcissistic desire to always see the world in its own self-image, and unmask ideological disguises of imperialism? Indeed, postcolonialism claims to have inspired a reading away from texts' universal and timeless value towards a more politicised approach where local concerns are important, but at the same time we are aware of the processes whereby postcolonial studies ironically coopt and rehearse neocolonial imperatives of political domination, economic exploitations and cultural hegemony. One may even argue that postcolonialism, in a way, appears to be a privileged academic/institutionalised discourse that classifies and surveys the East almost in the same manner as the actual modes of colonial dominance it professes to dismantle. Again, the fact that postcolonial literature has its audience largely outside the ex-colonies makes one wonder: for whom do these postcolonial writers write?

For many a critic, colonialism becomes determining marker of history (which hinders the possibility of alternative organisations of historical epochs), and their assumption is that all writing from postcolonial countries will be primarily concerned with colonial history or decolonising the mind. This essentialist assumption and hegemonic discourse regarding representation of the postcolonial subject needs to be challenged. As Ipsita Sengupta has pointed out in her essay on Amitav Ghosh and Nationalism,⁴ instead of becoming entangled in antagonism and oppositional historiography, we need to rethink the encounter along independent lines, and look for spaces of autonomy and resistance. Taking debates on "nation" in Ghosh as a case in point, she says, when critics respond to Ghosh in terms of postcolonialism, colonialism remains the "water-shed event" in their gaze at history and nations; but Ghosh's version of the same is neither pre nor post colonial: it refuses to play to binaries, to western classifications of history. Instead of growing hysteric whenever we encounter a western concept/model, especially of colonial origin, we need to cultivate a mature response to these ideas, neither disowning them nor writing back to them in the victim mode. As Sengupta suggests, we can instead fashion our own model under the same brandname, and thus "dispersed India," with its loci as diverse as memory, vast cross-cultural geographies, folklores and forgotten manuscripts, is the "Amitavian shade" to the debate on nations and history (Ghosh wants a world where differences are not hierarchised, but rather cohabit in an accommodating, horizontal space).

To take up another major area of concern in postcolonial literature, theory as well as cultural studies: the issue of diaspora. The classical diaspora, as we know, refers to the Jews who, after being banished from their homeland, were dispersed into different "unaccustomed earths." In the postcolonial "new" diaspora – as if the colonised people are in a reverse move to the metropolitan centres – there is no forced exile like the old one of the Jews or of indentured labourers in early colonial plantations; instead, it is composed of educated professionals, whose relocation in different western metropolises is motivated largely by the "lure of the lucre." In his personal note on diaspora Abdullah Al Mamun brands this much-hyped category as just an opportunistic ghetto of some

writers and critics of third-world origin, now comfortably settled in the first-world academics.⁵ For furthering their own career and material gains, they have turned Diaspora, Mamun says, into an exotic commodity for the consumption of the West as well as for the countries of their origin. As such these so-called diasporics can only pretend to write resistant narratives, because, their opposition itself is a form of compromise. He opines that this state of diaspora loses even a tangential relation with the meaning of “diaspeirein” and disrupts all the necessary properties of diaspora as a functioning metaphor, and has created “epistemological and ontological aporia” by insisting on accepting it for something it is not. This diaspora thus seems to have practically monopolised and almost hijacked the entire discourse of diaspora by ousting others, perhaps the more legitimate members, who have failed to take part in the subversion.

The postcolonial diaspora writings, however, talk about the “diasporic anxieties”; they strive to portray diasporans as Janus-faced or as Trishanku, their identity being wrapped around transnational hyphenation, living in-between. They deal with migrant guilt, issues of loyalty and betrayal, negotiations with multiple homes that involve acculturation, assimilation as well as generational conflict and cultural clash. Sometimes diaspora writings are nothing but a creative elaboration of pre-existing white stereotypes; and as these writings not only describe *home* but also justify why it has to be left behind, they often present a degenerate, depressing East. Again, living at a distance from the objective, everyday reality of home, the diaspora writers often come up with distorted images and “chutneyfied” narratives of “imaginary homelands.” They tend to encash the charm of the unfamiliar and commodify their homeland and culture as they can see a wide market out there for fictional representation of exotic ethnicity, for an East that is “safely different” – an exciting site for fantasy offering no threat of resistance. The promotion of these diaspora writers, picked up as local experts for their respective ethnicities, is integral to the intriguing market politics in which the hegemonic publishing industry in the West along with the grinding US-UK review machine (of *The New York Times*, *The Guardian* and so on) has a decisive role to play. While it is believed by many that rather than leading to a senseless pastiche, diasporic spaces actually provide such writers with a “double perspective” – that is, a unique point of view as outsider-insiders – from which certain significant critical perceptions about homeland become possible, there are others who argue that the diaspora authors do not have the right to write home as too much distance incapacitates them altogether from capturing realities they claim to represent. The diaspora writer thus attracts attention of two conflicting sets of audience: while the West looks for familiar stereotypes, the reader at home seeks his own validity; and the writer is trapped between the two. In my monograph on Adib Khan,⁶ I have shown how Khan’s “home narratives” participate in the contemporary hegemonic politics of the publishing industry in the West that thrives, as mentioned above, on exoticisation and commodification of culture. There are reasons to suppose that Khan, in his depiction of contemporary realities of Bangladeshi life and culture, operates largely within the (western) paradigm of negative stereotyping and clichéd generalisations, and a distinct outsidersness can be discerned from his writings.

Now, postcolonialism, as I have already indicated, aims at supplying the academic world with the ethical paradigm for “systematic critique of institutional suffering,” but the discourse itself stands on a slippery foundation, and is full of problems and paradoxes, ironies and self-contradictions. It was only in the 1990s that the discussion of postcolonialism, as a sort of a more respectable replacement to Commonwealth or World Literature in English, started seriously in our part of the world. We were a late entry into this discourse as we continued to speak of commonwealth literature and so on, and then we happened to discover that the new name for who we are is “postcolonial.” There remain, however, fundamental confusions regarding the ability of this new discourse in conceiving “proper” resistant narratives, as the monopoly of the English language and western epistemology inform this discourse. Moreover, on closer observation, we detect a discrepancy between postcolonial discourse and postcolonial condition. It is a paradox that our entrance into the (privileged) discourse of postcolonialism, in one sense, means an automatic exit from the condition of postcoloniality; thus, as an Indian critic has pointed out, there are no “untainted” postcolonials in the discourse of postcolonialism. Postcolonialism, in a way, is about privileged people in metropolises discussing under-privileged people elsewhere; but what makes this less obvious is that these privileged people are often non-white, and originally from locations which are former-colonies.

Let us look briefly at the creation of the category itself as a supposed improvement upon commonwealth literature. The Commonwealth – British imperialism’s “redundant offspring” – manifests colonial nostalgia, as it claims to be an association of equal and mutually cooperating nations constituted by countries with a shared colonial legacy. The situation is paradoxical: there is a professed philanthropic impulse on the part of the colonials to the postcolonials, when the relationship is practically built on inequity and exploitation, however translated these may be into the idiom of freedom and progress. Commonwealth was an attempt at tending to the sores, relieving the pain the Empire inflicted, but it was also about continuing a kind of its moral authority. Postcolonialism, in its attempts at revisiting and interrogating colonial past, in its proclaimed resistance and exposition of exploitations, reveals its anxiety to avoid ideological deception and moral ambivalence of the Commonwealth project, but ultimately its similarity with the latter gets exposed in its West-centredness, in its operating within western epistemology and critical paradigm. This underlines the unlikelihood of “postcolonial” being a real improvement over “commonwealth,” rather than merely a change in nomenclature. Postcolonialism thus does not herald a radically new era, a new world where ills of colonialism are over; in fact, “post” implies both historical continuity and change.

Postcolonialism tends to claim itself to be a disciplinary project devoted to the task of examining the processes and effects of, and responses, resistant or otherwise, to European colonialism from the sixteenth century upto the neo or covert colonialism of the present day. If we look at the academic and intellectual background of postcolonialism, we notice that the discipline is not very unique methodologically or conceptually; it is, in fact, indebted to a variety of both earlier and more recent western theories. Over the years it has come to represent a certain holdall, if you like, of different theoretical perspectives, attitudes and styles, besides signifying a huge academic industry the centre of which is to be found primarily in the West. The term “postcolonialism,” as we know, migrated from social

sciences, particularly History and Political Studies, to the discourse of literary criticism in the late 1970s, and flourished in the 1980s and 90s in the hands of Spivak, Bhabha, Aijaz Ahmad, Fanon and others. Orientalism is commonly regarded as the principal catalyst and reference point for postcolonial theory. The “literary and theoretical repackaging” of this discourse has something to do with the retreat of the organised Left and the rise of postmodernity. It is left to postcolonialism and its likes to put up whatever resistance they could to the ongoing triumph of capitalism. But as Marxist interrogation of Empire is limited, one may find theoretical and political incompatibility between Marxist and postcolonial positions. The Marxist approach is that we should not speak so much of colonialism or postcolonialism as of capitalist modernity which takes colonial form in particular places at particular times. Marxism has failed to direct a comprehensive critique against colonial history and ideology: for reasons of its own very specific reading of the developments of capitalism in the late nineteenth century Marxism has been unable to theorise colonialism as an exploitative relationship between the West and its others, and to accommodate the specific political needs and experience of the colonised world. The fact of cultural inadequacy of Marxist theory can be understood by the inattention of Marx himself to the world outside Europe. Again, postcolonialism has inherited a very specific understanding of western domination as the symptom of an unwholesome alliance between power and knowledge. Derrida and Foucault have identified European knowledge and rationality with economic domination and political hegemony, and though they do not directly address the problems of colonialism, they theorise that there is a reciprocal relationship between colonial knowledge and colonial power, and that the very structure of western rationality is racist and imperialist. They challenge the universal validity of western culture and epistemology, and it is in this challenge that postcolonial thought could find its “desired moorings.” Postmodernism and postcolonialism share similar theoretical trajectory: the de-centering of the subject; incredulity towards metanarratives; and replacement of unitary power axes by a plurality of power/ discourse formations, by demonstrating multiple possible readings of any given text. Both postcolonialism and postmodernism are sceptical of explanations which claim to be viable/valid for all groups, cultures, traditions or races, instead, they focus on the relative truths of each, and they parallel poststructuralism in that all forms of cultural discourse are manifestations of the relations and constructions of power in contemporary society.

One objection to postcolonial discourse is that while this is what the metropolitan academic institutions has invented to understand and categorise the literatures and subjectivities of the “postcolonial subalterns,” the latter are more or less excluded from it. Most postcolonial people are still so colonised/marginalised that they are voiceless within their own societies, let alone in the international world-system. It was the recognition of this problem, among other things, which led some postcolonialist historians to engage themselves with the subaltern studies. Subaltern Studies attempts at seeing colonial history from the perspective of the subaltern; it challenges the claims of elite historiography that indigenous nationalism was primarily an idealist venture where the native elite led the people from subjugation to freedom, and instead recognises that the subaltern is denied access to power and system of representation, and has always been mediated.

Colonialism has wrought an epistemic violence upon the postcolonial subalterns, making them incapacitated to control their own representation; in order to be heard they must adopt western thought and reasoning. No act of dissent or resistance that occurs on behalf of an essential subaltern subject is entirely separate from the dominant discourse that provides the language and the conceptual categories with which the subaltern voice speaks. Indeed, the existence of postcolonial discourse itself can be explained as one example of such speaking, an important aspect of its being conveying experience in a language foreign to a writer's own culture. As indigenous "postcolonial" intellectuals, our moral burden thus is really huge: instead of merely playing cynical, self-seeking professionals, interested primarily in furthering our own careers, and thus edging closer and closer to centres of power, we should aim to live up to representing the interests and welfare of the people of former-colonies, most of whom cannot even read and write. But how would we represent? There are critics who believe that if we aim to engage truly with the task of representing the subaltern we would need first to *decentre* ourselves as experts; this is to mean that our mind will not be decolonised as long as we continue to use the coloniser's language and "critical toolbox": the books, the methods and structure of argument, the rhetorical style and so on. This line of argumentation indicates too that a "true" Postcolonialism should be proclaimed in different languages, and originated from within the colonised peoples in order to foreground their full autonomy. But if that happens, others may argue, will it not be transformed into an "enfeebled and fragmented" discourse? And is there any common language/methodology that may speak *equally* to all formerly colonised people?

It is true that much of what postcolonialism deals with happen to be in the English language; its canvas currently does not cover the linguistic, creative and cultural plurality and vitality of the former colonies. In its present form, postcolonialism appears incapable of accommodating anything more than the "*English fraction*" of the postcolonial reality, and is, therefore, not useful enough for our larger purposes. It seems to have equated works of a few, mainly diasporic writers, with the entirety of postcolonial literature, as if literatures in other languages and "peripheries" are not worth considering. Besides, one of postcolonialism's other disadvantages is that its focus, by definition, is on contemporary literatures though some of the finest literatures from such societies were produced during and before colonialism, and often in languages other than English. Again, the present academic structures and disciplinary formations which are being perpetuated by our universities are grossly insufficient to reflect and foreground our ownness. That is why it is necessary to continue our efforts towards evolving such a system of studying our literatures/cultures which will not be just multilingual, but translingual; which will not represent merely the "English fraction," but the heterogeneity of postcolonial reality.

Having said so, I would still argue that there is nothing wrong if a postcolonialism, which aspires to be more inclusive and more representative of peoples and cultures of former-colonies than the present one, can build itself upon the foundations of the English language. Only we must ensure that the *use* of this language will depend on us. In fact, we can use English in whatever way we think fit. There is no point in making a case for any such radical discourse that would involve forsaking even the language of English, because, a "true postcolonialist" writer/critic can "appropriate" the oppressor's language

and turn it against the oppressor, or use it for a purpose ulterior to that of the colonial enterprise. In fact, one viable solution to the violence of western unilateral production of knowledge is to use it to subversively reread and reinform, instead of going for wholesale rejection in an equally violent manner. However, at the same time, we need to encourage translations between the languages used in the various former colonies that would include translation of indigenous language into English as well as into other indigenous languages; and it is equally important to insist on the need for metropolitan institutions and cultural practices to open themselves up to indigenous texts by encouraging the learning and use of these languages by metropolitan scholars.

The English departments in the former colonies have increasingly been challenging the centrality of the classical English canon, and have introduced courses on new literatures in English, perhaps in an anxiety to achieve a modern native methodology and a relatively more independent mode of critical engagement with what is predominantly a Eurocentric discipline and academy. This mood of introspection is reflected in repeated revisions of curricula, accommodating “homegrown” resources – either originally in English or in English translation – for study. Aali Areefur Rehman, a respected Bangladeshi professor of English, who has closely witnessed the growth and development of the field of “English Studies” in his country for almost four decades, however, seems to hold a rather “classical” position in this regard⁷: if an English Studies department of a university wishes to be a real English Studies department, it will not challenge the centrality of the British canon; rather, the core classics of British literature, by which he means the better known works produced by English writers from the Renaissance down to the end of the nineteenth century, should be mandatory for its undergraduate students. At the same time, literature in Other Englishes – which is actually not that much “other” in his opinion, as it is profoundly affected by the literature and publication mores of English-speaking countries – should be there in the curriculum as an option for students. While commenting on the English Language Teaching (ELT) programme which entered into local English departments in the mid-1970s, he says that it becomes not a means to an end, but an end in itself: our students seem to be studying ELT in order to teach ELT in their turn. He suggests that in the courses in ELT there should be a good deal of just plain English language teaching. Professor Rehman becomes apprehensive as to whether English as a (Literary) discipline is destined for an embarrassed marginal existence in the local academia. English departments in the immediate future, he anticipates, will continue to be filled as there is a paucity of places in our universities, but the level of students’ enjoyment of classic English literature will continue to fall. Students will be more interested in “a marketable English degree, and not in English itself.” The fact that most foreign books get translated immediately is one clear indication for him of a steep decline in the English readership. He explains that Literature in other Englishes, though looked upon sometimes with “a jaundiced and sometimes merely an amused eye” by the home-readership, comes next to translation because this is still by and about “ourselves.” The sun is at last beginning to set on English literature as a prestigious, popular subject, quips Professor Rehman, and predicts that the English Department and what is taught in it may increasingly become less relevant in Bangladesh and may ultimately find itself merged with something like the Department of Modern Languages, and its professionals may simply teach the language. He tells the young English professionals, who may initially

react with horror at this prospect, to try a broadening and popularising of the discipline: one of the ways, he suggests, which can broaden it to suit our own interests is to bring within the frontiers of English Studies everything that has been written in the language with “serious intentions” in our country, or in South Asia generally.

To get back to the issue of heterogeneous impacts of colonial legacy, the colonies themselves are similar as well as dissimilar spaces in the sense that forms and dynamics of socio-cultural realities are not same in all the colonies. The experience of colonialism varies in terms of gender, class and ethnicity, and even within the same class and gender. As such, any attempt to grant any group a collective speech invariably will encounter the problem of assuming cultural solidarity among a heterogeneous people. If we look at Bengalis for instance, we shall understand that there are internal similarities as well as differences which testify to the heterogeneity within the category of Bengali itself. It nullifies the idea that national and cultural identities can easily be defined and that individuals fit neatly into such categories, rather it points to hybridisation of culture: no one is “purely one thing.” Indeed, it is no longer possible to return to an absolute “precolonial cultural purity” – which is again illusory – or to regain precolonial subjectivity.

Postcolonialism aspires to be a more comprehensive critique on colonialism, by uncovering its all pervasive, long-lasting, multiple violence; yet for many it remains predominantly a “patriarchal” discourse in its present avatar. The recognition of the fact that colonialism affected men and women in different ways will facilitate a more “authentic” examination of the issue. Indeed, it can be argued that the colonial intervention contributed, to a significant extent, to our women’s liberation, education and empowerment, and still those among them who locate themselves presently in different western metropolises do not want to return from their “diasporic home” that seems to provide the space denied them in their motherland. Again, the anticolonial nationalist trepidation about the “westernisation” of indigenous women reflects the extent to which postcolonial nations authenticate their distinct cultural identity through their (subjugation of) women.

Although postcolonialism and feminism are apparently disciplinary siblings in the sense that both struggle against repressive structures of domination and try to endow margins with the adequate system of representation, yet the fact remains that postcolonial feminists themselves are rooted in Eurocentric prejudices; they assume all women to be a homogenous group, and they are also patronising in approach, a fact which problematises the relationship between third world women and their representation through first world scholarship. The “gendered subaltern” thus exists as unrepresentable in discourse, a shadowy figure on margins. It is not that she cannot speak as such, rather, even when she utters words she is still interpreted through such conceptual and methodological procedures which are unable to understand her intervention with accuracy, the way it truly is. She is assigned no position of enunciation, and is written continuously as the object of patriarchy and imperialism as well as of western liberal feminism and the anticolonial nationalist narratives. Whenever she speaks, she speaks through such dominant discourses, so, her point is almost always lost.

“True” postcolonialism, I would argue, needs to focus on divergent forms of social inequality – or discriminations against peripheral population, that is, minorities in terms of religion, region, race, class, caste, gender and so on – within former-colonies themselves. In this connection, I would like to claim my readers’ attention for a moment to the *location* where this paper was produced. The academic community and people in general who inhabit such a peripheral location as Rajshahi might claim an agency to authentically speak about the issue of internal colonisation/marginalisation which is often ignored in the commonplace understanding of the centre/periphery binary. Let us not operate blindly within the politics of reductive homogeneity and the usual metabinaries such as East the Colonised versus West the Coloniser, precisely because the system which colonialism works through is very subtle and intricate. I am of course not talking about distancing the conceptualisation of colonialism from its historical specificity, i.e., from the burden of a history of oppressive western intervention in the East, rather what I’m talking about is bringing into its fold along with this “historical” colonialism other kinds of instruments and enterprises which are also colonising in nature. As is already noted, the experience of colonialism as well as of “decolonisation” is not similar at all places, and there are marginal and peripheral groups within the ex-colonies themselves. There are margins within the margin. In India, various language groups prefer English – which of course deviates, especially in its oral form, from the standard British English – as a lingua franca to combat internal colonialist presence of Hindi. Such “internal colonial” issues are significant part of the contemporary postcolonial scene. Besides, we do have internal issues independent of colonialism. Postcolonialism should aspire to bring into its fold this multiplicity of experiences and realities in the former colonies. Here in Bangladesh, the academic/intellectual community of Dhaka dominates those of other places in the country largely because of the privilege of being located appropriately – in the capital city-centred country like Bangladesh – and thus having all the access to the means of power and representation. So, if we agree that the story of colonial encounter and articulating resistance to it is a linear agenda, this would be far too simplistic an understanding of a highly complex phenomenon.

In studying and representing ourselves, the current postcolonialism, therefore, is inadequate. It cannot serve us beyond a point; it has its own limitations and inherent ambiguities; the question thus is how to articulate a more useful postcolonialism, how to shape it to suit our own specific purposes, how to forge adequate technologies of a meaningful dissent. Our desired kind of postcolonialism will address facets of internal colonialism equally seriously, more so because there is danger that we may overlook the issue. One may argue that these are instances of merely social injustice rather than problems informed by postcoloniality, that locals/natives exercising power over non-natives/outside in a given postcolonial locality, for example, is not really a colonial paradigm. The argument is valid, no doubt; but then, considering the fact that oppression, domination, and discrimination are the core characteristics of colonialism, perhaps we need now to understand colonialism as having diverse faces along with the classic Prospero-Caliban tableau; perhaps we need to identify different forms of social marginalisation within the ex-colonies as forms of “internal” colonialist operation. For a more inclusive and informed postcolonial discourse, perhaps it is necessary to look at

internal colonialist forces like the hegemony perpetrated by the comprador class or the violence of “linguicism”; perhaps it is necessary to look at how the cities dominate rural areas, big metropolitans the lesser cities, the towns mofussils, the capital city of the country other city centres; perhaps it is necessary to look at how even within a district, the “locals” abuse peoples from other regions of the same country. It is important to probe into the politics of these diverse forms of colonisation operating within the former-colonies themselves, and formulate effective resistance against it to derive a meaningful discourse out of postcolonialism.

However, when we take the question of postcolonialism as part of a broader civilisational interaction between us and the West, we find that the relationship is unequal, and in an unequal world, academic exchanges too are bound to be unequal. Examining this inequality, becoming aware of its various consequences and intricacies is the beginning of any effective, meaningful response on the part of the postcolonial. We need to understand the nature and extent of our subordination, the all-pervasive impact of imperialism on our lives. The very disciplinary structures within which we function, and the content of much of what exists as our academic discourse – various poststructuralist and postmodernist theories such as feminism, deconstruction, new historicism, and so on – are almost totally derived from the West. So, we must confront the question as to the scope and efficacy of any possible dissent. When most of the available means and methods of dissent, when both the notion of postcolonial literature and much of the theoretical discourse developed to interpret it apparently come to us from the West, one may even consider postcolonialism to be the product of an imperialistic cultural system as commonwealth studies before it was. Hence we need to debate the entire workings of the present discourse, instead of passively accepting its validity.

However, it is not that no dissent is possible, that we are so compromised that whatever we do is already tainted by our collusion with imperialism, rather, even in its present form, postcolonialism does have its utility or “serviceability.” Therefore, while we must have the knowledge of its hegemonic capacities, while we must have introspections about our own self-contradictions, we should not be bitter, contentious, or be engulfed with negative emotion; rather, we should use its available advantages for working towards a kind of greater self-autonomy. It is imperative for us to redefine the practical scope of dissent, and also, to identify peoples who might undertake the task of formulating such dissent. There are those among us to whom the unequal relationship with the West is just “natural,” so they choose not to question it but merely seek whatever benefit is possible from within it, and they are even eager to cooperate with “the authority.” These obvious “assenters” are often regarded as simpletons, as misguided old models, because it is fashionable to pretend that anyone who is innocent of Foucault and Said, Derrida and Kristeva is irrelevant. “Dissenters,” riding high on poststructuralism and postmodernism, have all but conquered the establishment (but is there any *real* distinction between that “obsolete” organised assent and this “trendier” organised dissent, considering that just as the technologies of assent were imported, the technologies of dissent are also largely imported?). Now, somewhere in between these two camps there are those who, regardless of where they might have lived or studied, are reasonably committed to trying to improve the “indigenous” system, however flawed it might presently be. It is they who

can make up the catalytic intellectual constituency that will try to work out alternatives to the hegemonic dominance of the West in our academic lives. They will, of course, forge alliances with international/metropolitan academics, but instead of always looking for a place in a ready-made community over *there*, it is *here* that a sense of academic community needs to be strongly nurtured. Let us redefine our priorities, and focus on our own, immediate concerns, and believe that the dignity of “the black/brown(-skinned) scholarship” depends more than ever before on how we view ourselves, rather than how others view us. There are no easy solutions or alternatives; no impassioned outbursts of radicalism will instantly empower us. Rather, the path to greater academic sovereignty requires great perseverance, years of planning, concerted action, investments in institutions and systems, constant upgradation of the technologies of knowledge, wider publishing opportunities, greater scope for utilisation of existing reserves of talent, and of course, a renewed emphasis on recognising and rewarding excellence.

Now, what we can easily see is that “real” postcoloniality is not fully contained in the present discourse of postcolonialism; a large part of our lives, experiences, and subjectivities has always remained outside its purview. Postcolonialism, then, in its current shape, can neither be rejected nor accepted fully. We have to work out our own adjustment and compromise with it, while endeavouring to safeguard ourselves from its distorting, hegemonic tendencies. While I underline the incapacity of postcolonial discourse to deal with the lived reality of the people it theorises about, I want to note too the hollowness and futility of any simplistic revolt against the West (which is of course all too easy; everyday we see people practising this), as we have our numerous and even unknown ties with it. And although indigenous culture does offer an alternative to the West, it is important to realise that it is also not “pure” and self-sufficient. We need, therefore, to develop a *modus vivendi*, an ability to be familiar with more than one culture, and to be functional in more than one “cultural market,” instead of seeking conversion from one to the other: coexistence, extension, accumulation are crucial rather than substitution, rejection, or suppression. We shall, then, no longer be torn between two cultures and the attendant crises of identity, which has been a frequent condition of mind of English-educated postcolonials – Aali Areefur Rehman refers to them as “*deshi* nationalists and English gentlemen at one and the same time”⁸ – for more than two hundred years.

Now to wind up our discussion so far, the discourse of postcolonialism itself, the one which happens to remain a part of standard academic currency for more than thirty years now, is heavily influenced by the very imperial culture which it seeks to resist and replace, and the ongoing process of cooptation, collusion, or compromise poses a serious challenge to postcolonial academics in general and to criticism in particular. To achieve clarity about these confusions and hegemonic operations, being aware of these intricacies, having a clear sense of our own self-interest, locating ourselves in our own narratives is the beginning of our emergence as “true” postcolonials. That is, the first step towards meaningful dissent for us lies in recognising the extent to which we are already compromised. As is noted above, colonialism, being a complex phenomenon, did not develop in a uniform or unilinear fashion; it did not merely dominate everywhere; it also engendered pockets of resistance. Similarly, its retreat will also be multiform and

diverse; while some of us will be more staunchly anticolonial, a number of us will persist in our neocolonial ways of thinking and being. That is why it is important for us to fracture the imagined wholeness or availability of any universal discourse of postcolonialism. We need to be aware that what emanates from the metropolis and goes by the name of postcolonialism is not the *only* kind of stance. Also, we need to distinguish between the “ism” that is postcolonial and our condition or reality as postcolonial people. If we remain oblivious of this distinction, the theoretical postulation of our own condition will remain permanently the exclusive preserve of those located in the (western) metropolitan centres.

As mentioned earlier, notwithstanding the active collaboration of scholars from the colonised world, postcolonial theory, as it has come to be canonised, was generated and developed in the metropolitan academy, and then exported to us. As such, postcolonialism, as an academic discipline, contains within it the (neo) imperialist potentials. If we aspire to be “real” postcolonials we have to come to terms with this fact, and finally to construct our own postcolonialism. It is true that any such venture cannot exist in a realm that is autonomous or untouched by the larger forces of global capital, but it is crucial to develop our own indigenous market rather than exist only as raw data in the processing units of the metropolitan mills of theory. This will entail some vital changes in the way we currently conduct ourselves: we must come out of our attitude of subservience with the western academy, and perhaps one way to show it is our (“indigenous” scholars’) reading and citing each other rather than being locked into a one-way academic traffic with the West.

Postcolonialism begins, as a critic has put it intelligently, when third world intellectuals arrive in first world academies, which implies that postcolonialism as a discourse is a form of “contained opposition,” and even, at its worst, little more than a career move. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a lot of the left-leaning academics sought refuge under the umbrella of postcolonialism, and got absorbed into the western academy; the purpose of the opposition was actually assimilation. It is as if you oppose something only to join it. The flip side is that, barring a few exceptions, postcolonials are also victims of what we may call an academic apartheid. While mainstream areas of western culture continue under the control of the “white folk,” peripheral subjects are handed over to the “brown folk” to cultivate. Postcolonialism is thus a mixed bag: while it allows for a kind of academic upward mobility or possibilitises a presence for people and things of the third world in the first world academy, it also reinforces western hegemony, entailing a different kind of stereotyping or intellectual ghettoisation whereby coloured peoples are expected to confine themselves to a specific set of issues: Monica Ali can only be a writer of *Brick Lane*, and she should not aspire to author *Alentejo Blue*. Besides, as Professor Rehman points out in his interview, writers in our South Asian countries still do not “arrive” until they are published in some authentically English country; and even, it is partly the place, the publisher and the reception by the literary establishment of the West that determines what is studied seriously in our universities.⁹

While postcolonialism has contributed in opening up spaces within the West not just for matters non-western, but also for non-western academics, it cannot serve the non-West

beyond a point in the latter's own self-realisation and self-assertion. For that we shall have to cultivate our own creative and critical traditions. Bangladeshi diaspora writers have brought some attention to things Bengali in the West, but then, we have an existence and significance of our own apart from how we are perceived by the West. And interpreting ourselves to ourselves is perhaps more important than interpreting ourselves to the West. It is not that the present postcolonialism is useless, but it is, as we can see, not useful enough for our purposes; it does not take postcolonials far enough on the path to their own self-recovery as autonomous subjects. We may continue to participate in a limited, critical way, using it perhaps as a way to engage with the West, but the major portion of our energies should be invested in studying and celebrating our own narrative and aesthetic traditions. The point is, without going for an outright dismissing of this postcolonialism, we should rather make judicious use of the opportunities it presents, and gradually move along the line of more independent thinking. Postcolonialism in its existing form has things in common with this; indeed, at its best, it may merge with this; but in so far as it hides a neocolonialist agenda it is necessary at times to oppose this postcolonialism, if we are to form a discourse where we shall be able to study our *selves*, our literature, culture, and society on our own. We need to work towards framing a kind of postcolonialism which will be more inclusive and more autonomous in character.

Of course, we shall remain vigilant or protective of things indigenous, but in doing this we need not condemn the globalisation itself or opt out of it and close our doors; this is perhaps not the way forward. What is required, instead, is a certain kind of critical engagement that will help not lose our identity and subjectivity while at the same time save us from being cocooned. We need to keep ourselves in a meaningful and enriching contact with others, with what is going on in different parts of the world. This contact may prove beneficial to the researches we are doing, the departments we are forming, the journals and books we are producing, and so on. However, behind all these there must be a passion for a new way of thinking, a new way of being, a new way of expressing who we are. That is what will lead towards greater self-autonomy in our thought and ideas, in our social, cultural and political arrangements, and of course, in our transaction with others which postcolonialism in its current form has not been able to offer. The aim of a more inclusive and autonomous postcolonialism is not to dominate anybody; it is to safeguard one's selfhood, where one is neither a victim nor a victimiser, neither an oppressed nor an oppressor.

It is not our desire that we shall achieve a triumphal sense of "eastern revenge" against several centuries' imperial slights; but then, while we do not wish to dominate others, we are also unwilling to be subordinate to any one, to be "adjuncts" in somebody else's story. We shall introspect and find out how we can do better than ourselves. The aim of decolonisation for us is to get on with our own stories, to express ourselves in a manner that fulfils us. This can only happen through a more affirmative, future-oriented postcolonialism, which is able to leap beyond notions of cultural inferiority of the postcolonials so as to express truly its inner worth and spirit. It is only by doing so that we, as inhabitants of former colonies, can play a meaningful role, and contribute to the much-needed equilibrium in the world that would possibilitise an equitable survival of the humanity as a whole.

So, instead of harping on the guilt of the West, and scripting elegies for eternity, we have to take confident steps towards a new era, by developing self-assurance and by increasing our efficiency and productivity. If we desire to become truly independent/decolonised, we have to prove ourselves strong, resourceful survivors, capable of interacting with other cultures and knowledge-systems without losing what is distinct about ourselves. Instead of being completely negative in our approach to the history of colonialism and complaining continuously about what the colonisers did, we have to prove what we can do with the degree of autonomy, and the amount of resources that we already have. We have to put our sustained effort towards eradicating our poverty and backwardness, and creating institutional safeguards that will protect the interests of those who are marginalised among us. With the means that we have at our disposal and the will to exact an optimum deployment of our resources, and with our respectful, enriching contact with others, we can very well endeavour to shape our present and future in our own way. Even if it may sound impossible or utopian, still such an ideal may inform our doing postcolonialism, and with this, I think, I should end my musings on how to negotiate the reality of “post-colonial colonialism” for now.

Notes & Acknowledgements

1. An earlier version of the article appeared in a festschrift titled *Literature, History and Culture: Writings in Honour of Professor Aali Areefur Rehman* (eds. Abdullah Al Mamun and Maswood Akhter) which was published by the Department of English, Rajshahi University in 2014.

2. This writing is not “original” in the sense that the works of a host of “postcolonial” writers, theorists and critics have left considerable imprint on my mind, and have conscious or unconscious influence on any reflection of mine regarding “postcolonialism.” I would particularly acknowledge here my debts to the following: Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* ((New York: Vintage, 1993); Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin’s *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989) ; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues* (London: Routledge, 1990) ; Fakrul Alam’s *Imperial Entanglements and Literature in English* (Dhaka: writers.ink, 2007) ; Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge’s essays, “What is Post(-) colonialism?”, *Textual Practice* 5.3 (1991): 399-414 and “What was Postcolonialism”, *New Literary History* 36.3 (Summer 2005):375-402 ; Arif Dirlik’s “The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism”, *Critical Inquiry* (Winter 1994): 328-56 ; Aijaz Ahmad’s “The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality”, *Race and Class* 36.3 (1995): 1-20 ; Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean-edited *The Spivak Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Harish Trivedi and Meenakshi Mukherjee-edited *Interrogating Postcolonialism: Theory, Text and Context* (Shimla:IIAS,1996); Leela Gandhi’s *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (St.

Leonards, N.S.W: Allen & Unwin,1998) ; and *English Studies: Indian Perspectives* (New Delhi: Mantra, 2005) edited by Makarand Paranjape as well as his various other essays and lectures around postcolonial issues.

3-9. From *Musings Post Colonies* (Rajshahi: Chinno, 2012), an edited volume of mine, the following four pieces have been cited in various places of the present paper: “English in Bangladesh: An Interview with Professor Aali Areefur Rehman” (pp.329-50), Ipsita Sengupta’s “Whither the Nation-State?—the Debate on Nationalism and its Alternative in Amitav Ghosh’s Fiction” (pp. 53-82), Abdullah Al Mamun’s “A Personal Note on Diaspora” (pp. 321-25), and Maswood Akhter’s “Bangladsh Revisited: A Monograph on Adib Khan’s Fiction” (pp. 227-318).