

## Lecture - 10

### Postcolonial Literary Criticism

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So, in this class, we are going to discuss postcolonial literary criticism. In other words, how do postcolonial theorists, how do postcolonial critics look at a work of art, look at a literary piece and analyze it? So, before we go into the details, in a manner recalling random association test that psychiatrists use, let me give you a particular concept or I am going to invoke a word and whatever the image that comes to your mind you will jot it down in your papers. And this is a kind of a regular activity we do in the class. Say for instance when I say

in the very first of the classes, I announce the word if I ask you to think of Africa or the moment I utter the word Africa, what does the word evoke in you, what kind of concepts the word evokes in you? Or if you like using the imagery of colour, what colour comes to your mind, and why does that happen? Second, if I say darkness, just I utter the word darkness what is the quality associated with the word darkness? Well, in most of these cases without a blink of an eye, many of the students would respond to these colours in a very negative way. They have a kind of a pejorative meaning associated with the concept of Africa.

The moment I say Africa either they say the 'dark continent', impoverished, not developed. And if I say the word darkness, automatically in most of the cases they say it's evil. So, why am I invoking this particular concept here, it's going to be evident in a very short while.

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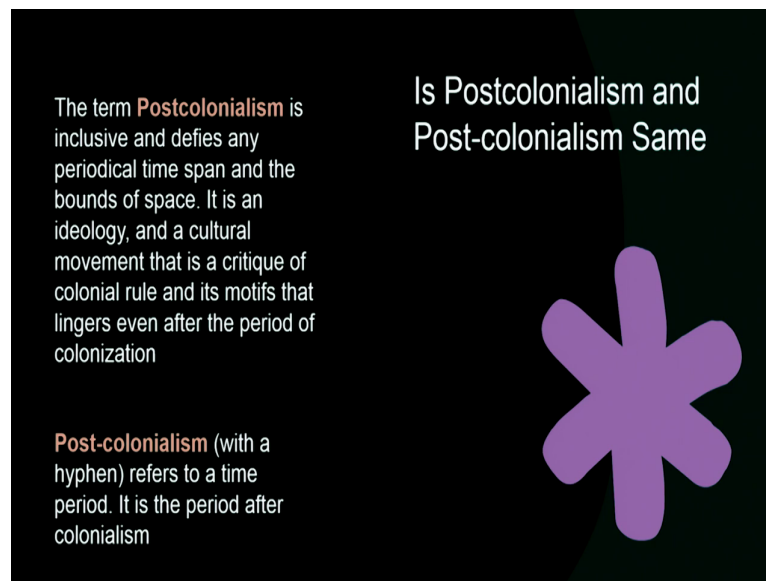


Before that of course, we need to understand what is postcolonial criticism, and what is postcoloniality. Let us take a quick look at the concept. Postcolonialism as a literary theory evokes a particular approach towards the study of former colonies, the colonies which were subjugated to the imperial rule, or the colonial rule and the cultural hegemony, their mindset and their works of literature. So, it's a kind of a critical, theoretical, philosophical approach towards understanding the colonized nations.

The second understanding of postcolonialism is it deals with the study of South Asian nations, African nations, Caribbean nations that were once a part of the British imperial rule. So, the entire concept of nation, the concept of culture, the concept of subjectivity, concept of

identity, so how do these factors get affected by the fact that these countries were once a part of the British imperial rule, and what are the consequences of that, we are going to study all that in this particular lens, through this particular lens. Postcolonialism as a philosophical tool also analyzes the ethical, socio-political concerns about the cultural identity with cultural identity, subjectivity, the concepts of race, nationality, ethnicity, gender, language, power equations, and all that, vis a vis the British imperial state.

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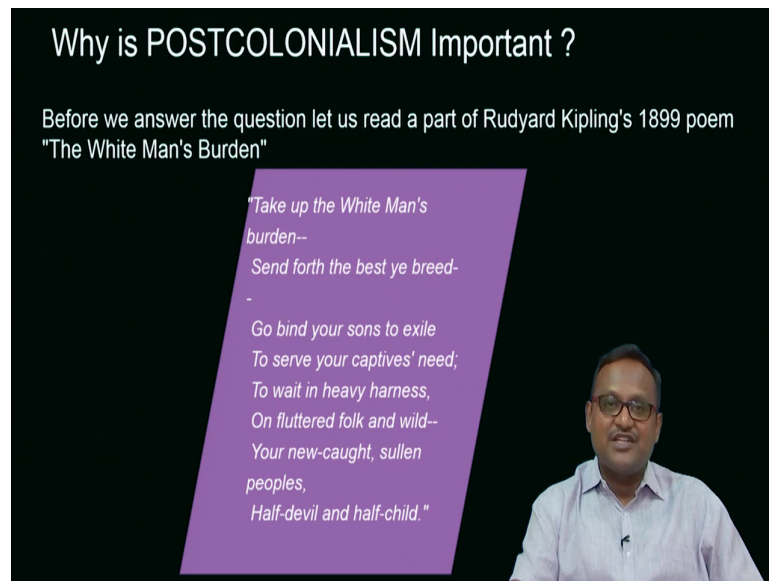


Extending our understanding of the concept of imperialism, you may have seen postcolonialism written in two different ways. One is with a hyphen between post and colonialism, the other is postcolonialism. So, you may be wondering or you may have wondered if there is any difference between the two concepts or if you could use them interchangeably?

Well, the term postcolonialism without any hyphen between them refers to the concept of subjugation without any time period attached to that. It's an ideology a socio-political movement or even a cultural movement that critiques the colonial rule its motives even after the period of colonization or much before even the period of colonization. Well, here the concept of colony matters albeit in a tangential way, but all other forms of domination, all other forms of subjugation, all other forms of control also are studied here. In that sense, it is a slightly more comprehensive term. If we use post-colonialism, the hyphenated post-colonialism, it refers to all these things during the period of colonization and

immediately afterwards. It's the period after colonialism. As the term states, post-colonialism, after the withdrawal of the empire, then the cultural consequences, political consequences and the social consequences of the withdrawal of the colony and the kind of mental state it entails on the one subjected colonized people, so it is going to study all this. This is a kind of a minor difference that we need to keep in mind while using the term post-colonialism.

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Why is POSTCOLONIALISM Important ?

Before we answer the question let us read a part of Rudyard Kipling's 1899 poem "The White Man's Burden"

*"Take up the White Man's  
burden--  
Send forth the best ye breed--  
-  
Go bind your sons to exile  
To serve your captives' need;  
To wait in heavy harness,  
On fluttered folk and wild--  
Your new-caught, sullen  
peoples,  
Half-devil and half-child."*

Moving ahead, why is the study of postcolonialism important? Before we answer that question, let us take a quick look at a short poem that almost acts as a cultural manifesto for people who advocate colonialism. It is by Rudyard Kipling, an extraordinary writer and unfortunately who exhibited clear and indisputable signs of coloniality and colonialism in his writings.

"Take up the White Man's burden-

Send forth the best ye breed.

Go bind your sons to exile.

To serve your captives' need;

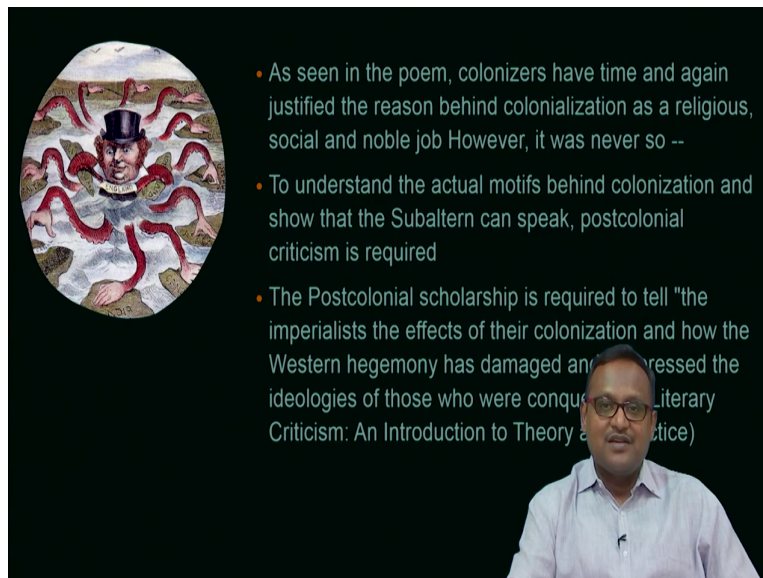
to wait in heavy harness, on fluttered folk and wild-

your new-caught, sullen peoples,

half-devil and half-child."

The entire poem is filled with a kind of advocacy for imperialism or colonialism. So, look at the very first line - 'White Man's burden'. Is there any logical reason behind colonialism because all of us right now say know that subjugating anybody, forget a race even another individual, is inhuman and immoral that is now a common understanding right. And it should have been a common understanding even earlier. So, what could be the logic behind the philosophical and political manifestation of colonialism? Annexing someone else's land and creating a kind of domination over them, finding out the logic behind that is crucial to understanding the White man's burden. According to this the white races felt that it was their duty to educate people of other races because other people, the people of other races were incapable of civilization, were incapable of leading a dignified life, were incapable of leading an organized cultured civilized life. Therefore, these guys arrogated upon themselves a kind of a socio-political responsibility and called it White Man's burden. And look at their attitude towards the people they are about to subjugate, they consider them half-devil and half-child. Therefore, it is their divine duty to educate these illiterates, so that is the kind of logic they used in order to further the imperialist agenda.

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- As seen in the poem, colonizers have time and again justified the reason behind colonialization as a religious, social and noble job However, it was never so --
- To understand the actual motifs behind colonization and show that the Subaltern can speak, postcolonial criticism is required
- The Postcolonial scholarship is required to tell "the imperialists the effects of their colonization and how the Western hegemony has damaged and oppressed the ideologies of those who were conquered" (Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice)

So, in a sense, this particular poem illustrates the logic behind colonialism and also displays their mindset. And the image that we have used here is quite an evocative look at the kind of how they use all their might using all their strength how they are subjugating other lands, other people, other races. So, this poem also helps you in understanding the actual motives behind colonization, and how in order for us to understand these so-called hypocritical

notions of White Man's burden and how in order to reclaim our identity, how in order to reclaim our subjectivity we need the help of postcolonialism. And when applied to literature, of course, postcolonial critics tend to analyze these things and much more.

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Before we proceed further, we need to slightly understand the difference between colonialism and imperialism. Colonialism is a kind of an umbrella term and an overall term that is also used to define annexation of the cultural landscapes, not just the political or the geographical landscapes, and the psychological landscapes; the cultural landscapes of race and how you subject them to a kind of how you enslave them in order to further the agenda of imperialism.

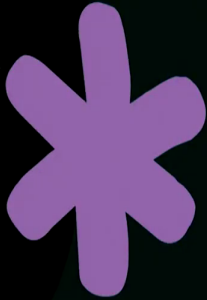
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The term **imperialism** is derived from the Latin word *imperium*, meaning to command.

"imperialism is an ideological project which upholds the legitimacy of the economic and military control of one nation by another. They define imperialism as 'the extension and expansion of trade and commerce under the protection of political, legal, and military controls' "

(Berry 18)

The dominion of a nation over one or more neighboring nations refers to as imperialism



On the other hand, imperialism is a highly political tool wherein here you try to annex somebody's land as well, it is a total control taking total control of it. While the concept of colonialism helps us in understanding the concept of establishing colonies culturally and metaphorically. Imperialism is direct aggression it is a direct annexing of the lands and thereby taking total control of a race, society, and nation.

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### Postcolonial Nations

- ❖ Africa
- ❖ Australia
- ❖ South Asia
- ❖ Singapore
- ❖ New Zealand
- ❖ Canada
- ❖ Caribbean Island
- ❖ United Kingdom
- ❖ Ireland



The British Empire 1900's



 The Commonwealth consists of 54-member state, most of which were under the British Colonial rule



So, going ahead in this particular map, you get a picture of the nations that were once a part of the colony. Well, on the last count you have more than 50 countries that were part of the

British Empire which are now of course postcolonial nations though they are no longer under the Rulership of the British monarchy still, for the sake of some kind of political connections, they are still called commonwealth countries though now the concept of commonwealth countries is slightly getting dated. It gives us a picture of the kind of societies, nations that were once a part of the British colony.

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### Some terms related to Postcolonialism



Mimicry: The act of colonial subjects trying to copy the culture and habits of their colonial masters result as mimicry, which can be threatening since it most often becomes a parody

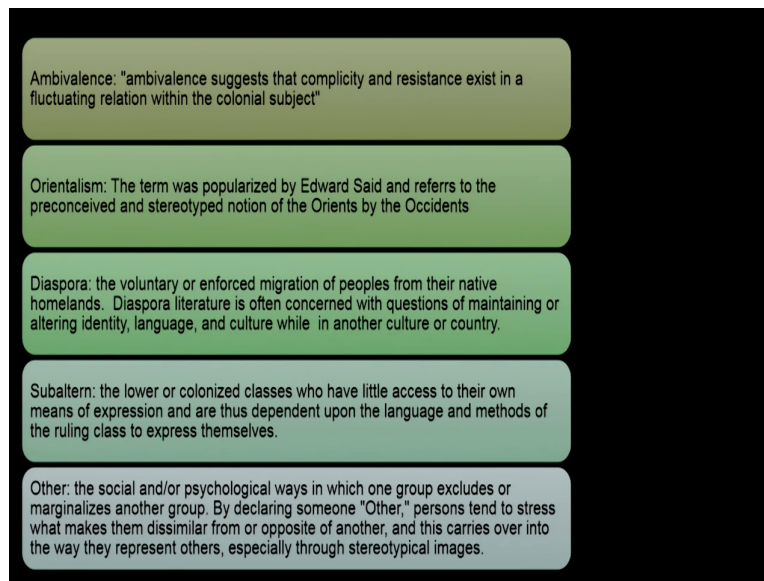
Hybridity: It refers to the creation of an in-between space that results out of cross-cultural exchange

Neocolonialism: the continuing economic dominance and exploitation of the "politically-free" Third World countries by the European imperial powers.

Now, before proceeding further in this discussion of postcolonialism or postcolonial literary criticism, we need to have a fair understanding of some common terms that are used in postcolonial discourse. Before that of course there is an interesting meme that I want you to look at. So, Africa then and Africa now, how is it connected to the concept we are reading? That we will get to know shortly. The first one is the concept of mimicry. So, it's the concept that was promulgated and also popularized by very well known postcolonial critic Homi K Bhaba in the *Location of Culture* and other books. So, it is the act of colonial subjects trying to copy the culture and habits of their colonial masters. If a particular race has been subjected to a kind of hegemony over a long period of time, it results in a kind of psychological suppression of the identity of the colonized people. As a result of which the colonized people lose their sense of identity, lose their sense of subjectivity and start imitating their masters, without them actually knowing it. That creates a state of 'mimicry', it is a very pathetic state that happens when there is total self-abnegation of a culture. When a race negates its own identity, the value of its own culture, the value of its own sense of worth, that is when it starts copying its masters and engages in a state of mimicry, which leads to it becoming a kind of

parody. So, one of the important concepts is well if you have noticed in India, for example, if you have to take up the concept of India, even now though people are not very proficient in speaking, English you may have seen people speaking in English though they do not have a fair command over English. And even when it is not warranted, and not required, they start speaking in English because there is a cultural assumption behind it. What is this assumption? That if you speak English well, that means, it is a sign of being cultured it is a sign of being educated. Whereas, speaking English has nothing it has got nothing to do with being civilized or being educated. We know that, but many people do not seem to know that. So, blind imitation of speaking in English is what is called mimicry. And hybridity is a result of this kind of mimicry. It creates a kind of a hybrid space, a kind of a 'Thrishanku', you are neither here nor there, it is a creation of that kind of an in-between space. Neocolonialism is a very important term. According to this concept, there is no longer a colony today because these nations which were once colonies are no longer politically subjected to the rule of any colonizer. They have achieved their independence and attained freedom. Nevertheless, even to this day, the colony is working in problematic ways which we do not see, especially in the form of economic dominance, cultural dominance and all other ways. We may be politically free, but still, we are economically enslaved to their concept, theoretically, we are enslaved, philosophically we are enslaved, culturally we are enslaved. So, the concept of neocolonialism discusses this; in fact, in the meme that you see here or in the cartoon that you see here - Africa then and Africa now. Africa is a postcolonial state now. Nevertheless, once upon a time, you can see here was a slave who was subjected to the monarchy the British monarchy ruled over them. Now, it's the West in the form of multinational corporations that have captured the African nations, through their loans. Even to this day, the entire continent is indebted to them economically, culturally and in many other ways.

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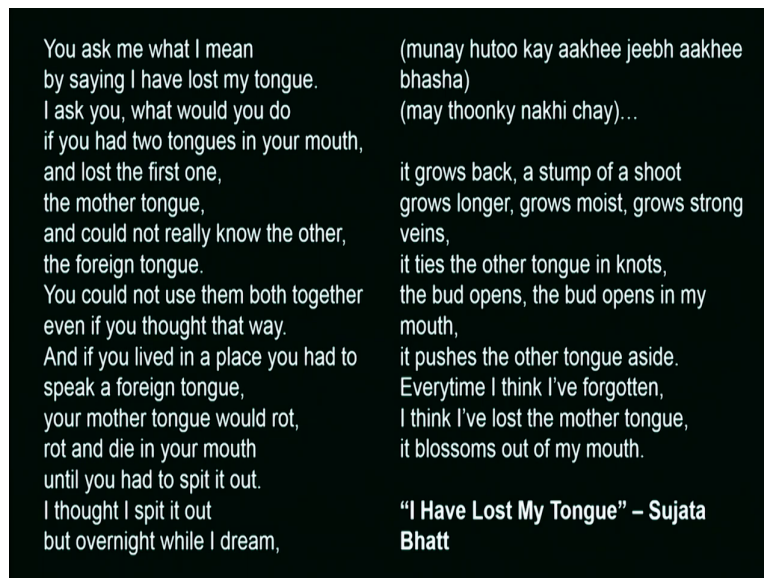


The concept of ambivalence again relates to a kind of an undecided state, an ambivalent position vis a vis the British subjects as a result of it again this is a continuation of the concept of mimicry and hybridity, ensuing in - ambivalence, being unsure of your own worth, your own identity. Orientalism is a very important concept, to be understood vis a vis the occident - orient binary. Orientalism is used in the West in reference to the eastern countries, and eastern cultures. So, this was a term popularized by Edward Said in *Orientalism*. The concept of Diaspora is very important. Diaspora refers to an enforced migration, even a voluntary migration of people from their native homelands. Earlier, during the days of colonization, people were loaded in ships, cargos, and went and sold in slave markets.

So, there is a population of forced migrants from the slave trade, that is how the empire treated its subjects. So, there is a forced migration. And these days it is voluntary migration. Even when we say voluntary, it is not so much voluntary, but almost forced in a different way. Subaltern is another important concept. Subaltern is a term that refers to the colonized classes or the lower classes who have little access to their own means of expression. So, again this concept was popularized during the subaltern movement in postcolonial theory, especially popularized by Gayatri Spivak in her remarkable article 'Can the subaltern speak.' 'Other' is another important concept. In the previous classes, we discussed how in the context of Marxism, how the world was divided into the haves and the have nots, the bourgeois and the proletariat, and the ensuing discrimination. How in the context of feminism, using gender, using the sexes like the male and the female, the man and the woman, how the concept of

subjugation went on. Here the concept of subjugation goes on as ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’. Self refers to the empire; the other refers to the colonized people.

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And how they were denied an agency, a subjectivity of their own. Here is a beautiful poem by Sujata Bhatt that talks of the concept of Diaspora, the concept of mimicry, the concept of ambivalence.

“ You ask me what I mean  
by saying I have lost my tongue  
I ask you what would you do  
if you had two tongues in your mouth,  
and lost the first one,  
the mother tongue,  
and could not really know the other  
the foreign tongue.  
You could not use them both together  
even if you thought that way.”

In this poem, tongue refers to language, and the loss of tongue refers to loss of culture, loss of language because language metaphorically speaking has two roles as we have discussed. One is the role of language as a custodian of culture. So, if you lose a language you lose the key to access the culture. So, this results in mimicry, hybridity and things like the loss of identity. So, the poem beautifully discusses how with the imposition of English. Though English was the language through which we were subjected to their control, even today after independence 75 years after independence we still use English as the language of education, a mode of communication across our own people. We have lost access to our own tongues as a result of which we are being alienated from our own cultures. So, this is created in a kind of alienation in different senses. The poem beautifully discuss discusses all these things in a very interesting manner.

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### What does Postcolonial criticism do?

"The Third World" is seen as world defined entirely by its relations to the empire

Examines the effects of colonial rule on the cultural aspects of the colony and its treatment of Women  
Language Humanity Literature

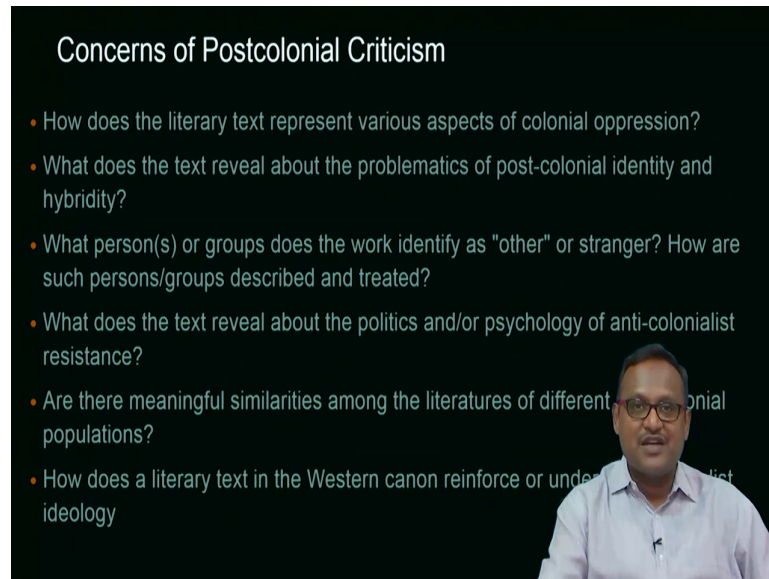
Addressed the politics of knowledge:

- (1) The coloniser's generation of cultural knowledge about the colonised people.
- (2) How that Western cultural knowledge was applied to subjugate a non-European people.

So, as discussed earlier, what do postcolonial critiques actually do? Well, postcolonial critiques study these methods, the methods through which the colonizers oppressed the colonized people, robbed them of their own dignity, robbed them of their own identity.

They also discussed the politics of knowledge; how the colonizer's understanding of the colonized helped them because here knowledge is power. They use that knowledge in order to subjugate us, in order to politically control us, culturally control us. So, postcolonial critiques throw light on all these concepts that resulted in our loss of statehood, in our loss of selfhood, in our loss of identity.

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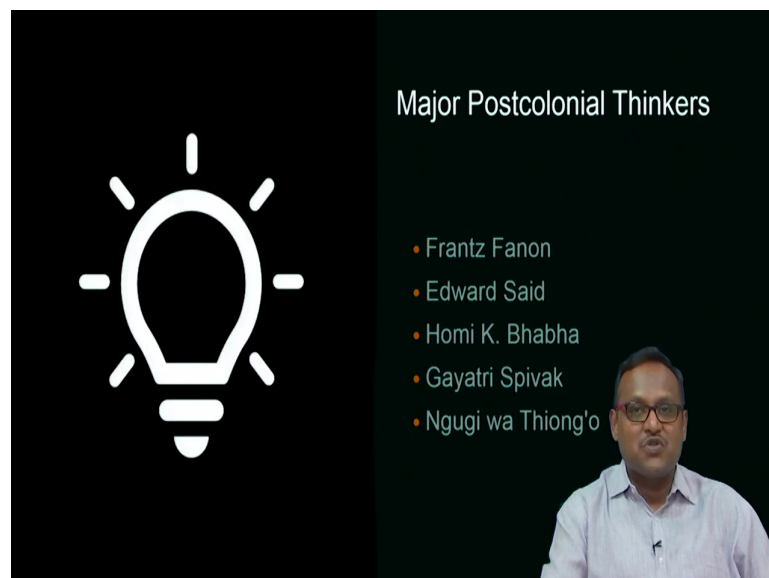


### Concerns of Postcolonial Criticism

- How does the literary text represent various aspects of colonial oppression?
- What does the text reveal about the problematics of post-colonial identity and hybridity?
- What person(s) or groups does the work identify as "other" or stranger? How are such persons/groups described and treated?
- What does the text reveal about the politics and/or psychology of anti-colonialist resistance?
- Are there meaningful similarities among the literatures of different colonial populations?
- How does a literary text in the Western canon reinforce or undermine colonialist ideology?

So, accordingly postcolonial literary criticism deals with how a literary text represents these aspects, by what methods the colonial oppression took place, by what methods the postcolonial subjects begin acquiring their identity back, what is the process of hybridity - these are some of the broad concerns of postcolonial critiques.

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### Major Postcolonial Thinkers

- Frantz Fanon
- Edward Said
- Homi K. Bhabha
- Gayatri Spivak
- Ngugi wa Thiong'o

Well, if we need to chart out the cartography of postcolonialism, then by getting to know about these important thinkers we understand we can understand what postcolonialism is all about - Frantz Fanon, Edwards Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Ngugi wa Thiongo.

Of course, this list is not exhaustive, no list is. So, a fair understanding of their work would reveal to us the methods through which colonizers advance their agenda and the means through which the colonized subject reclaimed or would be reclaiming their identity. So, I am sure with the help of their writings, we would be able to understand the concept of postcolonialism in a little better way. So, these methods that we have learnt during these weeks are of course not exhaustive ways of reading literature, these merely are major ways of reading literature. And each way has its own political agenda, they would like to sensitize, an individual, towards their political goals, their political agendas, that means, to create awareness about the concepts that they hold dear to them. I am sure these are not exhaustive as we have been discussing they are just illustrative. Now that we know different ways of reading literature - like a layperson or reading it with a particular agenda and get ourselves sensitized towards the cultural imperatives - in the next class we would be delving deeply into literature, different forms of literature in a more detailed manner.

Thank you.