

POSTCOLONIALISM NOTES

P K NAYAR WRITES,

- *Postcolonialism* is the academic, intellectual, ideological and ideational scaffolding of the condition of decolonization (the period following political independence for nations and cultures in Africa, Asia and South America). Postcolonialism as a theory and a critique emerged from within anti-colonial activism and political movements in Asia, Africa and South America. Intellectuals and political leaders among 'natives' – a term used, throughout this book, to reference non-European cultures and peoples of Asia, Africa and South America – interrogating colonial practices in these movements generated ideas that eventually coalesced into a body of thought within academic practices.
- Race is the key prism through which all postcolonial analysis is refracted.
- *Colonialism* is the process of settlement by Europeans in Asian, African, South American, Canadian and Australian spaces. Colonization was a violent appropriation and sustained exploitation of native races and spaces by European cultures.
- The European nation established itself primarily as a military-administrative power in the 'colony'. Military-political conquest and domination were accompanied, in all cases, by a close *study* of native cultures: anthropological- ethnographic studies, codification of native laws and detailed documentation of native histories and arts, to produce a colonial archive of knowledge about the natives.
- Finally, having acquired in-depth knowledge of native cultures, the colonial power proceeded to modify and control the social and cultural practices and beliefs of the natives in the guise of 'reform' and 'welfare'. New systems of schooling, architecture and even agriculture forced the colonized natives to acquire new skills and methods.
- Colonialism was never just as an exploitative political or economic process, it was also a *cultural conquest* of the native whereby the native's forms of knowledge, art, cultural practices and religious beliefs were studied, classified, policed, judged and altered by the European.
- *Colonial discourse* is the construction of the native, usually in stereotypical ways, in European narratives, images and representations in a variety of modes and genres such as the arts, literature, the law, science writing and administrative reports.
- The native is *constructed* as primitive, depraved, pagan, criminal, immoral, vulnerable and effeminate in colonial discourse. Such a discourse then constructs a reality where future European administrators would not only see the native *through*

the lens of this discourse, but also enact policies or initiate political-administrative measures because they believe in the truth-claims of the discourse. Discourse becomes, in other words, the mode of perceiving, judging and acting upon the non-European.

- *Imperialism* refers to the practice of governance of Asian or African nations through ‘remote control’, *without* actual settlement in the non-European spaces when European or American powers control financial, military, political, cultural activities in Asian, African or South American nations. It generally refers to a system of economic domination and exploitation, though political and military domination often accompanies the economic one.
- Imperialism is the *ideology* that recommends, furthers and justifies colonial rule. Imperialism situates the Asian or African region on the periphery, with the control resting with the European centre. Imperialism is the theory and colonialism is the practice, where both are based on racial difference.
- *Neocolonialism* is the continuing economic exploitation of Asian and African nation-states by the former colonials – Europeans – and American powers. In most cases, neocolonialism is achieved not merely through state control by Euro-American powers but by a nexus between the economic (embodied in the banking and financial systems of the Euro-American ‘First World’), the nation-state (embodied in the politician and governments) and the business house (embodied in multinational corporations), often accompanied by insidious threats of trade sanctions and military action. Neocolonialism, therefore, may be the more insidious and dangerous form of colonialism.
- *Postcoloniality* refers to the historical and material conditions of formerly colonized Asian, African and South American nations. It refers to the economic and political conditions in countries such as India after the European ruler handed over political power to the native population. Since the last decades of the twentieth century, ‘postcoloniality’ increasingly emphasizes the impact of global geopolitics, globalization and economic shifts upon material conditions in Asian and African nation-states.
- *Decolonization* is the process whereby non-white nations and ethnic groups in Asia, Africa and South America strive to secure freedom (economic, political, intellectual) from their European masters. ‘Postcoloniality’ and ‘decolonization’ are used, especially in postcolonial theory to describe resistance, particularly against class, race and gender oppression. Decolonization seeks freedom from colonial forms of *thinking*, to revive native, local and vernacular forms of knowledge by questioning and overturning European categories and epistemologies. Thus decolonization has resulted in the revival of mysticism and spiritualism – which had been rejected by colonialism’s scientism as primitive – as forms of knowledge in post-colonial societies. Decolonization is thus a critical methodology.

- *Postcolonialism*, the theoretical and intellectual arm of the postcolonial condition, refers to a mode of reading, political analysis and cultural resistance that negotiates with the native's *colonial history* and *neocolonial present*. Leela Gandhi defines postcolonialism as a "theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath. It is a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past."
- Postcolonialism invokes ideas of social justice, emancipation and democracy in order to oppose oppressive structures of racism, discrimination and exploitation. But it also emphasizes the formerly colonized subject's 'agency' – defined as the ability to affect her/his present conditions and future prospects – in the face of *continuing* oppression. It is a set of critical approaches, ideas and critical methodologies that enable us to 'read' colonial/colonizing practices and structures.
- *Postcolonial theory* is a complex analytical strategy that foregrounds *racial difference* in the relationship – political, social, economic and cultural – between First/Western and Third/Eastern worlds. It is a reading practice that is determinedly political when it examines
 - how the First/Western world represented the non-European native/world,
 - how colonial histories, anthropology, area studies, cartography were rooted in a racial discourse,
 - how the native was feminized, dehumanized and marginalized in both, representations and real life in the period of colonialism,
 - the psychological effects of colonialism on colonizer and colonized,
 - the 'instruments' of colonial domination: English literature, historiography, art and architecture,
 - the rise of nationalist discourse that resisted colonialism.