First Chapter

Postcolonial Theory
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The discernable beginnings of colonial moments are much harder to trace, and characterising them is much more challenging than Edward Said would have us believe. Said’s approach postulates many intellectually irresolvable points of theorisation that are empirically unsustainable. The moments he arbitrarily chooses to theorise his arguments about the Orient are often found to be either irrelevant to or incongruous with the fundamental issues defining the process of colonialism. The structuring flaw of Said’s more reductive line of argument lies in his attribution of unsound motives to the alleged production of the Orient.

The origins of the desire to embark on the colonial expansion cannot tenably be theorised as having been rooted in the unflinching faith of the European self in its own intrinsic superiority to the native other. Colonial expansionism is a much more intricate and complex phenomenon that requires to be explicated with the help of more subtly nuanced discourses of political economy rather than merely in terms of psychic inadequacies and of steadily crumbling European self. Colonialism, we are in possession of irrefutable evidence to conclude, has always fundamentally been an economic and materialist project that can be argued to have been marginally informed by the desperate need to fortify the fragile self. Focus of some of the
postcolonialists on the process of colonisation as an expression of the West’s psychic fragmentation is a calculatedly misled approach to imperialism.

One’s views on the structuring coordinates of postcolonial theorisation are subject to periodical changes, and the most momentous of the events that has forced a radical rethinking about the way we have been fairly content to understand postcolonial discourses is the destruction of the World Trade Centre in America and, more significantly, the West’s reaction to it. The turbulence that brew up in the wake of the ‘event’ that is aggressively represented as 9/11 has emphatically underlined the often-raised politico-theoretical point that there exists an unbridgeable temporal chasm between the world that is practically colonisable yet and the one which is readily willing to appropriate this colonisable space. The ineffaceable persistence of the non-collapsible binary opposites at the plane of larger reality should make us aware of the need to reorient ourselves in relation to postcolonial discourses. Rumina Sethi argues how US-based capitalism drives our world:

*The new initiatives taken by the US – including the jettisoning of fixed exchange rates based on the gold standard and the disposal of almost all regulatory controls following the fiscal policies of US presidents, particularly those advanced by Richard Nixon who practically traduced the doctrine of Keynesianism – more or less discounted government intervention in the maintenance of a sound economy. Henceforth, the ‘free*
market’ became the ‘new religion’ by means of which virtually all
government attempts to safeguard the economy, except for regulating
inflation through the supply of money and credit, were removed. The rise
of conservative governments under Ronald Reagan in the United States
and Margaret Thatcher in Britain saw the revival of international trade,
foreign investment and privatization and an enthusiasm for the
development of the ‘global village’, signifying ‘neoliberalism’, which
presaged the beginning of the decline of nation-states. This was also
known as the ‘Washington consensus’ in politics, ‘neoclassical economics’
among academics, and ‘globalism’ or ‘globalization’ in the world at large.
Thatcher and Reagan together manoeuvred what David Harvey calls a
process of ‘accumulation by dispossession’. (34)

It is natural that our understanding of the world that has come to be
known as ‘postcolonial’ is determined by our perceptions of our colonial
pasts, although it is possible to contend that these ‘pasts’ have always been
shaped by the West which tailored them in accordance with its requirements.
There could be a number of contestations about this point of contrived pasts
and fabricated histories of the colonised lands, cultures and minds, though it
would seem preposterous to assume the presence of benign intentions on the
part of the imperial ruling order in doing so. The investment of the
constructed difference in the other was a direct and logical result of the
West’s exclusivist ideology premised on the superiority of self over the other. The construction of the invented difference has been the singular time-tested strategy continually employed in disempowering the colonised other. The carefully-designed process aimed at consolidating the notions of alterity went on steadily for a long time. What the narratives of European economic and psychological histories have been blind to are a range of monstrous crises that necessitated a colonial phase. It is interesting to note that the kind of internal crises that were immanent to Europe had their origins in the political economy it had chosen for itself. This makes it imperative to have a clear idea of what was going on in Europe in order to better understand the dynamics of colonialism. There are a good number of ways in which the western economic and social histories are intertwined with that of colonialism in the sense that imperialism may be conclusively argued to have sprung from a set of developments in the white man’s world.

The definitive location of the genesis of colonialism in the continental crises has much to do with the need to counter the theories that trace the origins of the imperialism in the psychic inadequacies and moral deprivations of the native. Some of these arguments are insidiously subtler variations on “white man’s burden theory” that claim to share common grounds with postmodernism and deconstruction. This brand of postcolonialism admittedly informed by postmodernism blissfully traces the
roots of the spirit of emancipatory politics to the ideologies of the coloniser. Robert Young very often, in his ardent attempts to run down the materialist interpretation of colonial history, heavily draws on Derrida’s strategies of deconstruction with a firm conviction of their radical potentiality. Quite confoundingly, Young suggests that the innate radicalism of Derrida’s theory stems from the anti-French liberation movement in Algeria which Derrida the Master Deconstructer and the rest of poststructuralist enshrine in their theoretical discourses--an argument which sounds too good to be true. In his *Postcolonialism* Young says:

> Many of those who developed the theoretical positions subsequently characterized as poststructuralism came from Algeria or had been involved in the war of independence. Fanon, Memmi, Bourdieu, Althusser, Lyotard, Derrida, Cixous — they were all in or from Algeria. None of them, it is true, were Algerian proper, in the sense of coming from the indigenous Arab, Berber, Kabyle, Chaouia, or Mzabite peoples that make up the population of modern independent Algeria. They were, so to speak, Algerian improper, those who did not belong easily to either side—a condition that the subsequent history of Algeria has shown is in its own way characteristically Algerian, for the many different Algerian ‘proper’ do not belong easily to the Algerian state either.
A few lines later he goes on to add:

*The poststructuralism associated with these names could better be characterised therefore as Franco –Magherebian theory for its theoretical interventions have been actively concerned with the task of undoing the ideological heritage of French colonialism and with rethinking the premises, assumptions and protocols of its centrist, imperial culture.* (413-414)

It takes a good deal of ingenuity on one’s part to understand the seemingly inscrutable implications of this line of argument which may be seen as arising from an intense anxiety to gain acceptance. It is very hard to ferret out the presence of an iota of apprehension in the metropolitan postcolonialist to seek approval from his/her native community for his views. Young’s argument grossly mischaracterises the conditions under which colonialism began and flourished, and, more disturbingly, his line of theorisation misplaces the origins of anti-colonial resistance and liberation movements. One needs a colossal amount of ability of self-deception to ignore the political ramifications of the conflation of poststructuralism with postcolonialism. The primacy accorded to the indeterminacy of subjectivity is a singular hallmark of postmodernist conceptualisation of the world around us, and this effectively undermines the seminal radical view that resistance to colonialism was history-and culture-specific. The idealisation of the
indeterminate subject, by overemphasising the radical potential of metropolitanism, effaces the specificity of conditions of subject formation, and, in effect, this dangerously collapses the duality between the colonising subject and the colonised subject. The same line of theorisation often propels itself on the fulcrum of the arbitrarily constructed binary of nationalism and metropolitanism. The following lines amply demonstrate the point that for most of the postcolonial theorists the aperture of entry into the epistemological realm is through the conduit of poststructuralism and postmodernism:

Colonialism and the operation of the colonial apparatus, Derrida recognised, typically produced politically and conceptually ungoverned effects. These could then be redeployed against it. So Derrida, neither French nor Algerian, always anti-nationalist and cosmopolitan, critical of western ethnocentrism from Of Grammatology’s very first page, preoccupied with justice and injustice, developed deconstruction as a procedure for intellectual and cultural decolonisation within the metropolis to which he had sailed.....(416)

This considered view very magnanimously leaves the colonised reader with two choices: to seriously consider the task of thanking the coloniser’s theoretical discourses for liberating the colonised subject’s mind from the sinister effects of colonialism; second, to view Young, like most of the
postcolonialists, as writing from within geographically non-colonised metropolis. One keeps wondering whether the kind of knowledge produced in the metropolitan academic and intellectual environs about the operations of colonialism has got anything to do with ex-colonies we are condemned to live in. The decisive turn of the postcolonial theorisation is marked by the conferring of primacy to the subtle acts of cultural signifying. This is exemplified by what a critic like Sara Suleri, with reference to Kipling’s, works has to say about colonial representation of experiences:

> More than an appreciation of the griefs of cultural anthropology, however, Kipling supplies a narrative means to read the implications of imperial time. Here, “imperial time” demands to be interpreted less as a recognisable chronology of historic events than as a contiguous chain of surprise effects: even as empire seeks to occupy a monolithic historic space, its temporality is more accurately characterised as a disruptive sequence of present tense perpetually surprised, allowing for neither the precedent of the past nor the anticipation of a future. Instead, its grim montage of autonomous moments implies a certain threadbare dynamism in which surface is the only face that legitimises signification. (113)

Postcolonial theoretical practices, as they are situated in metropolitan academia, draw their strength and legitimacy from the dominant notions of modernity. And, this tenacious adherence to the habits of thoughts and
structuring of perceptions that are predicated on the myths of modernity and postmodernity has eroded the base of faith in the radical credentials of postcolonial theories. The postcolonial theory, despite all its feigned diversity, is replete with unifying directional markings that are unmistakeably informed by postmodern thinking. The political insinuations of postmodernism are not very commendably subtle when we come to realise that most of the metropolitan postcolonial theorists -Young could be viewed as one of them- argue that the emergence of postcolonialism as a direct offshoot of the potentially eclectic West’s benign acts of assimilating the essentially disruptive colonised other into its fold. The postmodern moment, as it is deftly argued, contains in it all anti-colonial resistance and liberation movements including postcolonialism. The affiliative engagements of postcolonialism with linguistics-based theories have blunted the theory’s political edge.

The constitutional flaws of postcolonialism are embedded in the pioneer work Orientalism which wilfully decentres the focus of the whole issue of colonialism. Said’s problem is that he wonderfully manages to effect a conclusive divorce between colonialism and capitalism and, consequently, fails to offer a plausible explanation for the occurrence of colonialism at a certain juncture of history. Despite the fact that this appears to be an unreasonable accusation to be made against Said whose focus in Orientalism
may, in crudity, be said to be on the ways of theorising the West’s understanding of its colonies, it is not awfully irrational to expect him to go into the causes of colonial expansionism. It deflects the attention of the reader, of course by an intellectual sleight of hand, from the tangibly real experiences of being the colonised other to the problematics of the textual strategies employed to consolidate the colonial power. In his afterword to 1979 edition of *Orientalism* Said has the following to say about the role of the critical scholar:

*The central point in all this is, as Vico taught us, that human history is made by human beings. Since the struggle for control over territory is part of that history, so too is the struggle over historical and social meaning. The task for the critical scholar is not to separate one struggle from another, but to connect them, despite the contrast between the overpowering materiality of the former and the apparently otherworldly refinements of the latter. My way of doing this has been to show that the development and maintenance of every culture require the existence of another, different and competing alter ego. The construction of identity—for identity, whether of Orient or Occident, France or Britain, while obviously a repository of distinct collective experiences, is finally a construction of opposites and “others” whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from “us”. (331-332)*
There is nothing new about the process of identity formation of the self that draws on the differences of the constructed or ‘contrived’ other, and no culture is self-forming in terms of its ‘existential’ reality. This apart, there is very little for which a given culture trusts itself with the ‘ontological’ support from its psychologically contiguous culture for material survival. Culture does not evolve only in relation to the differences of its projected other, for there is hardly anything cogent and solid that can be characteristically termed as culture. The problem one finds with Said’s argument is his disturbingly conspicuous silence over the existence of material conditions that shape the culture of a given society at given moment in history. The reaction of the colonised societies to imperial onslaught was by no means concerted or homogeneous and greatly varied in proportion to each group or class’s material progress or its absence. Even though it is unwarrantedly impolite to underplay the pivotal role of Orientalism in giving a recognisably definitive point of inauguration to postcolonialism it is often said to have given the whole theoretical movement a misplaced set of priorities and preferences. The result of this willed disorientation is the institutionalised perception of the task of postcolonialism as the elucidation of a set of ‘relationships’. This tenor of postcolonial theorisation has overshadowed the reality of the existence of the irreconcilable categories of the coloniser and the colonised.
The standard criticism against Said’s argument is that it was thrown up by the West at a point when its own world was in a turbulent state, a view that has been cumulatively corroborated by the direction in which postcolonial theory has been furtively propelled. The politics of collusion between poststructuralism and postcolonialism, as this convergence as has often been accused, managed to infiltrate its agenda into academia through *Orientalism*. The most unsettling aspect of this much overvalued work is its attitude to history which it appropriates so selectively that it often resembles the self-consciously calculated devaluation of history perpetrated by poststructuralist schools. Despite the fact that he keeps his attitude to poststructuralism ambiguously critical, shorn of all its discursive subterfuge *Orientalism* remains trapped in the theoretical and ideological framework of poststructuralist thinking.

The central line of theorisation the present dissertation intends to tread is self-consciously far removed from the non-materialist discourses rooted in Said’s arguments and that of many of his postcolonial successors. In the following few pages an attempt is made to delineate the theoretical ground the thesis is purportedly based on and to unequivocally define its points of departure from the established course of postcolonial theory predominantly informed by Said’s works. And this, the thesis hopes to strive at accomplishing by mapping the locus of the undesirable shifts in the
contemporary political, and cultural discourses and theories. The need for positing the recent changes in the nature of postcolonial theory produced by the metropolitan academic institutions within the larger political and economic structural reconfiguration is a prerequisite for the ‘construction’ of materialist postcolonial theory

As it is evident, the transition in postcolonial theory of late is a causal expression of the groundbreaking shift in social and cultural theories that have chosen to abandon a materialist understanding of ‘social processes and symbolic order’ in favour of a textualisation of reality defined by the scuttled concept of history. The textualist approach to history and reality is the symptom of a profound faith in the internal dynamics of self-originated signification of cultural texts intriguingly declared to be divorced from the material conditions that have produced them. The subordination of the real to the semiotic is an encroaching theoretical phenomenon that has practically neutralised the time-honoured modes of grappling with reality. This totalising and totalised idealisation of the textual and semiotic—chillingly identical to the supremacy of the virtual space—has come to destabilise the postcolonial studies which, it now appears hard to believe, were once known as colonial discourse analysis driven and intimated by the narratives of the struggles constructed by the colonised. Regarding the malady that ails the postcolonial theory of our day this is what Benita Parry has to say:
With the arrival of modes where the analysis of the internal structures to texts, enunciations and sign systems had become detached from a concurrent examination social and experiential circumstances, the stage was set for the reign of theoretical tendencies which Edward Said has deplored for permitting intellectuals ‘an astonishing sense of weightlessness with regard to the gravity of history’. As postcolonial studies became saturated by premises predicated on the priority of signifying processes, the field emerged as an exemplary instance of such levitation. It is then no accident that despite the active participation of materialists, the discussion has come to be seen as inextricably associated with ‘post’ theories and has appeared concerned to rearticulate colonialism and its aftermath from a theoretical position freed from the categories of political theory, state formation and socio-economic relations. (Parry-p-4)

It is surprising to note that Said should know the price of this ‘weightlessness’ better than any other theorist of any consequence. One is heartened to realise that his clinically precise ripping apart of postcolonial discourses from the traumatised experiences of the colonised has not completely blinded him to the problem of getting high on the self-procreated heady theories. This pronounced disconnect between the reality and the theorisation of reality characterises postcolonialism today which has viciously severed its umbilical cord with a world that was once brutalised and
dehumanised by real people with no so benign intentions. The disastrous consequence of the entire process is the strategic abandonment of oppositional and confrontational terms of engagement and theorisation in favour of reconciliatory discourses. There is no doubting the fact that postcolonial theory has traversed a long way since the days of colonial discourse in terms of its variety and expansion, though it can be argued that the centres of its production have moved away from the colonised spaces. A good number of these postcolonial theoretical positions are strikingly marked by an overwhelmingly profound amount of political naiveté. The self-defeating intricacies proliferated by varied persuasions of postcolonial theory apparently spring from the lack of political commitment that characterised the original anti-colonial resistance and liberation movements. A few theorists – prominent among them being Robert Young- vehemently argue to the effect that it is the anti-colonial liberatory ideology that begot poststructuralism. This putatively radical moment European history is grandiloquently said to have stemmed from nationalist resistant movements against the totalising imperial power structures. Like most of the claims and expositions made by the levitating theorists this tenuous argument can be neither proved conclusively nor be peremptorily dismissed.

However, there are exaggeratedly dangerous logical extremes to which this argument can be conveniently stretched to validate and legitimate
the patently Eurocentric poststructuralism and deconstruction’s supposed immanence and universal applicability. It is conceptually impossible to conceive the very presence of a common ground on which ideologically incongruous poststructuralism and postcolonialism can meet on equal terms. The problem lies not so much in the reluctance of postcolonialism to be theoretically ‘eclectic’ (not same as being metropolitan) as it does in the poststructuralism’s dismissive attitude to the materialist explanation of colonialism as a stage in the development of capitalism. It is futile to go on pretending as if the battle lines were invisible and as if theorist did not know where they stood. It may have disappointed Young-as it must have a number of postcolonialists of his brand-that his metropolitanism-informed attempts have come to be dubbed merely as postcolonial reading of deconstruction. The vexing question one is tempted to pose is if both the theoretical movements had a common originary locus that would enjoin them to be ideologically at variance with each other, though there are a few theorists who swear by the intrinsic ideological concurrence of the two. The theories that celebrate their avowed intent of collapsing the graded binaries or merely inverting them, are little likely to serve the cause of anti-colonial politics, for the lingering legacy of colonialism is easier to contest and counter in terms of a dialectical relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. A passage from Parry’s book sheds more light on this point:
At stake is whether the imperial project is historicized within the determining instance of capitalism’s global trajectory, or uprooted from its material ground and resituated as a cultural phenomenon whose intelligibility and functioning can be recuperated from tendentious reading of the texts. For where the ‘the politics of symbolic order’ displaces the more demanding politics operating in real-world situations, and a theoretical commitment to rejecting fixed subject-positions as ontologically faulty and dyadic polarities as epistemologically unsound acts to erase structural conflict, there is no scope for anti-colonialist discourses which inscribe irreconcilable contest, or for anti-colonialist practices that were manifestly confrontational.

Integral to this revisionist endeavour is the re-presentation of colonialism as transactional, a move that displaces the received perception of conflict with ‘in-between’ space of negotiation. (8)

Those who maintain that colonialism has been a mere freak accident that has bred a set of human relationships that continue to persist are wilfully unmindful of the glaring reality that this set of relations were determined by the overriding concern of the empire to keep the wheels of its economy endlessly running. There is no way postcolonialism can circumvent the need for conceptualising the process of colonisation in political and economic terms. It is unsettling to realise that postcolonial theory of the metropolitan
academy lacks the political and moral urgency of the early anti-colonial discourses. The ‘in-between space’ Parry talks has been taken over by culturalism that is so strategically privileged as to retain the theoretical hegemony of postmodernists and poststructuralists. Very often the colonised is desperately let to wish that the colonial experience had been a mutually beneficial cultural encounter as it is often made out. The cultural, which is fervently argued to be the real locus of colonial conflict, relegates the importance of the political and the economic to background to the advantage of the coloniser. The most widely circulated postcolonial theories revolve around the fulcrum of the definition of the term postcolonialism which is definitively and definably cultural in its focus and thrust. It is quite frustrating to find more and more postcolonial theorists vouching for the primacy of the cultural at the expense of a materialist conceptualisation of the issues that have emerged in the wake of the process of colonisation and ‘decolonisation. And, when it comes to the process of decolonisation there is little consensus as to its very occurrence, save the nature of the process. A good number of scholars downplay the significance of the formal political liberation of the colonies, emphasising the continued cultural domination of the West. This skewed view subtly runs down the decisive role played by the anti-colonialists movements and colonial discourses. The thesis will come back to deal with the issues of the need for focusing on the paramount importance of the formal political emancipation and the more precarious and
veiled forms in which imperialism continues to determine the destinies of the former colonies. The following two passages taken from two different sources try to prove the point that the politics of the cultural is central concern of the postcolonial theory. The first is from John McLeod’s *Introduction to The Rutledge Companion to Postcolonial Studies*:

*This sentiment* (Lord Macaulay’s expression of desire to create a class of interpreters to better govern India) demonstrates the extent to which colonial powers paradoxically needed the very people whom they often considered ‘infrahumans’ to succeed in their colonial aims, as well pointing out the extent to which colonialism irrevocably transformed the identities of those involved, and on both sides. The terms ‘colonizer’ and ‘colonized’ are not simply words which substitute precisely for, in this instance, ‘British’ and ‘Indian’; rather, they describe particular new kinds of identities, inseparable from each other that are generated by the establishment of colonialism.(3)

This is the refined hypocrisy at its best: one would, on reading this, be inclined to think that the diametrically opposite roles of the coloniser and the colonised are interchangeable at will and options were widely open, and by sheer masochistic craving Indians chose to be colonised. This is the kind of critique metropolis-centred postcolonial theorists are munificently generating for our consumption and this kind of theorisation is made conceivable
because of the precedence attached to the cultural in contemporary theoretical arena. The other passage is taken from *On Postcolony* by Achille Mbembe in which he states:

> The notion “postcolony” identifies specifically a given historical trajectory—that of societies recently emerging from the experience of colonization and the violence which the colonial relationship involves. To be sure, the postcolony is chaotically pluralistic; it has nonetheless an internal coherence. It is a specific system of signs, a particular way of fabricating simulacra or re-forming stereotypes. It is not, however, just an economy of signs in which power is mirrored and imagined self-reflectively. The postcolony is characterized by a distinctive style of political improvisation, by a tendency to excess and lack of proportion, as well as by distinctive ways identities are multiplied, transformed, and put into circulation. But the postcolony is also made up of a series of corporate institutions and a political machinery that, once in place, constitute a distinctive regime of violence. In this sense, the postcolony is a particularly revealing, and rather dramatic, stage on which are played out the wider problems of subjection and its corollary, discipline. (102-103)

This passage has been quoted at length for the kind of definition it offers of the state of the postcolony which is projected merely as a kind of surreal space that lets things happen on their own accord. Although it is
unwarranted a move to conclude the traumatic experience of psychological colonisation being decisively overcome, the blight of the formal colonies lies elsewhere: the malevolently persisting legacy of the coloniser is much more deep-rooted than a mere bequest of proliferating systems of auto-running signs. This passage, for all its poetic finesse, fails to locate the roots of the malady that afflicts the postcolony in the continuum between the different stages of capitalism. Violence, which the colonial machinery very often took recourse to, does not lend any more specificity to the operations of imperialism than it does to the ways in which many indigenous feudal institutions have chosen to function. In spite of the fact that at certain junctures the colony and postcolony run the risks of appearing like the replicas of each other, it has to be borne in mind that both the forms of exploitation and the resistance to them have changed beyond recognition. One desperately wishes that there had been simpler and more tangible explanations available for understanding colonialism and postcolonialism as we have experienced them and continue to be affected by their having been an integral part of our existence.

At this point of Introduction a reference must be made to the issue of the fluidity of subjectivity that has become central thesis of many postcolonial theories. Ever since Lacanian psychoanalysis dissolved the subject with all its political potentiality, the coherence required to reify the political agent has
effectively dissipated, conclusively eliminating the possibility of political change. Enamoured with the idea of the decentred subject we find good many a postcolonial theorist building the notion of the diffused subjectivity into basic structures of their arguments. It is Homi Bhabha who has managed to bring the ‘findings’ of psychoanalysis to bear upon the postcolonial theory, and his arguments are centred on the ‘indispensable’ concept of the subject in flux. The primacy and autonomy of the agency of the colonised subject in political transformation are the primary issues that concern the arguments Bhabha puts forward. Psychoanalytically informed, as they are, his theoretical positions are grounded in Freudian and Lacanian analyses of the formation of the subject that is eternally in process. The decision to take the colonial conflict to the psychoanalytical plane – which could be construed to result from either strong psychological desire to counter Fanon or to construct a pluralist colonised subject after the decentred subject of the West- can spell disaster for the process of the formation of the politically-informed postcolonial subject. Bhabha is for the one who firmly believes in the inevitable interventions of the operations of the unconscious in the constant unfolding of the relationship between the colonising subject and the colonised subject. As such the relationship between the two is not only essentially unstable, but is fundamentally ambivalent, a notion that makes us suspect the political and ideological credentials of the argument. Here is
passage taken from Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture* which elaborates in equivocal terms his notion of the political:

> It is not difficult to question the civil argument that people are a conjugation of individuals, harmonious under the Law. We can dispute the political argument that the radical, vanguardist party and its masses represent a certain objectification in a historical process, or stage, of social transformation. What remains to be thought is the repetitious desire to recognise ourselves doubly, as, at once, decentred in solidary processes of the political group, and yet, ourselves as a consciously committed, even individuated, agent of change-the bearer of belief. What is this ethical pressure ‘to account for ourselves’-but only partially-within a theatre of political agonism, bureaucratic obfuscation, violence and violation? Is this political desire for partial identification a beautifully human, even pathetic attempt to disavow the realisation that, betwixt and besides the lofty dreams of political thinking, there exists an acknowledgement, somewhere between fact and fantasy, that the techniques and technologies of politics need not be humanising at all, in no way endorsing of what we understand to be human-humanist? - predicament. (92-93)

Cynicism need not be much more refined than this, though one knows for certain that for all its stylised chicanery this rambunctious argument has nothing to do with the issues of political praxis and political agency. Bhabha,
who refuses to conceptualise the roles of the coloniser and the colonised in conflictual and contradictory terms, is quick to be disconcerted by the moral quandary arising from having to choose between the need to be part of the larger political group and to be an individuated political agent. The dichotomy of the social (though he chooses to use much more vulgar term political) and the individual that he constructs in vain does not exist and no one knows it better than Bhabha himself. His devotion to the concept of hybridity, based on the denial of the dichotomy of the coloniser and the colonised, sees him arguing for the existence of an in-between psychic space at the points of contiguity of the master and the marginalised cultures. One can quite frequently encounter his mastery at turning the fundamentally political and economic issues into psychic and psychoanalytical ones. Colonialism, as he vehemently argues, is susceptible to attacks of the colonised which, as he terms, takes on the form of mimicry in that the subordinate groups in their blind imitation of the ruling order subvert and undermine the dominant culture. It is difficult to guess at the ways in which this strategy could be relied on to work in the real world. Indian histories, which are the main source of his theoretical formulations, could produce better arguments about the nature of colonialism and the conflict between the dominant and subordinate classes and in fact have led more non-metropolitan theorists to come out with a better understanding of the dynamics of conflictual colonial relations. The dissertation will find opportunities to deal with Bhabha at a
greater length in the following pages, though it is appropriate to use a citation from Benita Parry which refers to Sara Suleri, a passage from whom has already been cited, and Bhabha:

It is possible that the Indian materials which are the sources for Suleri and Bhabha offer opportunities for discovering a middle ground, given the long histories of communication between the colonizer and regional and national elites, and the consequent commerce between dominant and marginalized knowledges. Yet although these exchanges should not be allowed to obscure the brutality of colonialism’s territorial expropriations in the Indian subcontinent, or the murderous punishments inflicted on opposition, and which persisted until British withdrawal, there is now a vogue for rewriting British rule in India as a hegemony – which I understand as coercion significantly tempered by reciprocity and consent, or consent fortified by coercion. This is a version of the relationship between rulers and subaltern classes disputed by Ranajit Guha, who represents the situation as one of domination and resistance. Furthermore, other contexts such as plantation colonialism and genocidal settler regimes, or the atrocities attendant on violent territorial expropriation in North and sub-Saharan Africa, confront us with narratives of physical force and economic compulsion, from which the elite natives’ peaceable colloquies with the invaders’ cognitive systems are wholly absent, and where the construing of
affection linkages would introduce a grotesque romanticism into annals of physical, institutional and discursive violence. (68)

The question that keeps nagging the colonised subject when it comes to the theory being produced by postcolonialists like Bhabha is whom do the ideological orientations of the abstruse theory stand to profit. It is worth taking a risk of making an observation at this point that most of the metropolitan theorists seem to be generating the theoretical discourses in direct reaction and relation to what is perceived to be happening in metropolitan academy. The inebriating intellectual ambience of the idyllic academia renders the important issues of the real political and economic struggles irrelevant to the institutions of knowledge production.

This line of argument brings us face to face with the inevitably contentious questions of the anti-colonial nationalism, its forms and the class lines on which it took shape; we have already made a reference to the argument that traces the origins of ‘subversive’ critiques of logocentric traditions of the Western epistemology to the Algerian anti-colonial resistance. The theoretically-contrived convergence of the origins of colonial desire and the discourses of resistance to it has proved politically defeating and ideologically stultifying. The kind of overwhelming confusion that pervades the theoretical scenario regarding the nature of anti-colonial
resistance and the state of postcolony has its genesis in the existence of a range of theoretical explanations about the origin and development of colonialism. There are as many theorists who believe the driving force of colonialism to be the export of surplus European capital as there are theorists who trace the source of it to the desire to send overseas surplus energy, especially the sexual energy. However, it would be less than intellectual candour to deny the inhuman forms European sexual practise took in the lands of the colonised which were duly legitimated by the combined force of power and ideology produced by capitalist machinery. Powerfully arguing against the kind of discourses of legitimation devised by Europe to defend its extremities Greg Thomas states in his *The Sexual Demon of Colonial Power*:

The entire history of our African presence in American captivity lays bare a raw sexual terror that defines the cult of white supremacy here and elsewhere. Whether we think of the ceaseless assault on Black family existence, the obscene hysterics of apartheid lynching, the physical violations of direct and indirect colonization, or the sadomasochistic torture of formal enslavement and its transoceanic trade in flesh, we see that the rule of Europe has assumed a notably erotic form. Even so, despite a certain common sense rooted in Africana resistance to the ravages of empire, the carnal dynamics of white domination rarely receive sustained critical attention. (1)
It is an implausible and unsustainable theoretical line that strongly holds that it is the desperate scramble for the avenues of Whiteman’s libidinal gratification that powered the European colonial enterprise. That these approaches to colonialism fall well short in offering a very convincing theory of the inevitability of the phenomenon has always invariably been due to the gritty reluctance on the part of these theorists to relate colonialism to particular stages in the development of capitalism. This inalienable relation between capitalism and different forms of imperialist expansionism is glaringly evident in the continued economic domination of the former colonising nations that could convincingly be argued to have strategically withdrawn from colonies in order to gain more effectively sustained and elaborate economic control of the non-metropolitan world. Allied with the encroaching capitalism colonialism breached the economic and social forms of organisation of the non-capitalist societies and communities, leading to the establishment of the monolithic mode of capitalist production. Evidently and demonstrably there hardly remains a society that has managed to retain a non-capitalist mode of social organisation. Nor has the process of formal decolonisation-undeniably a momentous phenomenon in itself- been a remarkably decisive force in arresting the unchecked growth of the capitalism and its insidious influence. As it ought to have long-perhaps more than a century ago-been anticipated we happen to inhabit a world very intelligently’
and ‘gingerly’ globalised, courtesy the insatiable greed of a monstrous force, yet appallingly divided.

The formal dissolution of empires did not sever the economic relationship which the juggernaut machinery of capitalism had coerced the colonising and the colonised societies into. Contrary to the long-harboured hopes, imperialism took on subtler, more sinister and more incontrovertible forms, practically incapacitating the formerly colonised nations from reverting to their pre- and non-capitalist modes of self-organisation. The much-flaunted notion of global village is an ominous myth that flies in the face of the abrasive reality of a world that is divided on the lines of an unequal distribution of capital and international labour. The world, one realises on a closer inspection, after all has not liberally allowed itself a greater willingness to change radically notwithstanding the formal termination of colonialism. The perseverance of more intricate and pervasive forms of imperialist control of the formerly colonised nations has raised a range of serious doubts about the prematurely celebratory use of the term postcolonialism. The declaration of the accomplished state of the postcolonial world has been called into question. More detrimental to the purpose of a materialist understanding of the process of history, both past and contemporary, is the drawing of an indelible line between the colonial and the postcolonial phases. Anne McClintock makes the following comment
about the practice of defining these two stages of history in mutually exclusionary terms:

   Most importantly, orienting theory around the temporal axis colonial/postcolonial makes it easier not to see, and therefore harder to theorize, the continuities in international imbalances in imperial power. Since the 1940s, the United States’ imperialism-without-colonies has taken a number of distinct forms (military, political, economic and cultural), some concealed, some half-concealed. The power US finance capital and huge multi-nationals direct the flows of capital, commodities, armaments and media information around the world can have an impact as massive as any colonial regime. It is precisely the greater subtlety, innovation and variety of these forms of imperialism that makes the historical rupture implied by the term ‘post-colonial’ especially unwarranted. (295-296)

   Understood against this historical and ideological backdrop of the impossibility of linear conceptualisation of the evolution of the different stages of capitalism, the notion of the putative arrival of the postcolonial world seems to run counter to the imbalanced world we live in. In the light of the unsettling realisation of the futility of the direction in which the contemporary postcolonial theory is headed, it becomes a matter of theoretical urgency and relevance to restore the revolutionary and confrontational spirit of the early anti-colonial resistance discourses to the
postcolonial theories. The struggle for liberation in different formerly colonised nations was neither uniform in its nature nor unilinear in the process of unfolding. It involved many minute phases and a legion of intricate forms. Related closely to the issue of anti-colonial resistance are the questions of the colonised subject and the dynamics of its formation. The primary issues of economic and political colonial domination lead on to the derivative concepts regarding the determinant role played by nationalism and nationalist culture in the political emancipation of the colonies, and, most significantly, in the context of the concern of the present dissertation, the prominence assumed by the literature produced in response to and in confrontation with the colonising cultures. Yet, this is a very tremulously unsteady and soggy ground one runs the danger of unwittingly walking onto given the overpowering ability of the psychologism and psychoanalysis to catapult themselves onto the centre stage of colonial and postcolonial discourses.

The question of the very possibility of the colonising and the colonised subjectivities forming themselves in relation to each other uninformed by the existing economic, social and political conditions has assumed the monstrous proportions in the field of postcolonial theory. However, this quite misleading attempt to focus on the non-economic and non-political dimension of the colonial experience is demonstrably metropolitan and
symptomatically poststructuralist, and, it must be admitted, is unfamiliar to anti-colonial discourses. The problem of the formation of the colonised subject is inextricably bound up with the attendant intricacies related to the discourses of nationalism and national culture. Nationalism-particularly anti-colonialist nationalism- has always been at the centre of the postcolonial theorisation. Even in its narrowest sense of having come into existence in opposition to imperial rule nationalism has been the most contested of all the concepts that dominate postcolonial discussions. The questions as to what legitimates nation and who represent the multitudes that constitute a nation have often been rancorously debated. The cumulative complexity the notion of nationalism has acquired may safely be said to be the direct outcome of the dubious and untenable stances taken by the metropolitan intellectuals with regard to the very desirability of nationalism. It is quite frequently argued, in certain theoretical circles of postcolonialism that the very fact that the world has irreversibly entered the postcolonial phase of history is peremptory refutation of the validity of nationalism. That the issue is more complex and nuanced than this hyped argument is evident from the fact that the issues concerning the colossal physical task of nation-building continue to plague the former colonies.

Nation is, theoretically, an imagined space on which, like on the postmodernist concept of subject, a good number of divergent of forces,
views and interests converge at a given moment; there is very precious little, it must be admitted, one can do politically equipped with this kind of a vague and intangible notion of nation. The idea of nation envisaged by anti-colonial nationalists was much more concrete, politically feasible and emotionally wieldy than the nebulously impalpable apparition conjured up by metropolitan postcolonialists. Those theorists that swear by the predominance of the unadulterated psychological relationship between the coloniser and the colonised subjects—a good many of them happen to be proponents of the idea of conceptually unsustainable hybridity—refute the category of nation in all its concrete solidity. The logical corollary of this line of argument is the categorical denial of the significance of the formal decolonisation and that of the authority and authenticity of the anti-colonial voices. The ideal metropolitan intellectual ambience constantly sustains itself on an exaggerated denial of the gory and violent nature of anti-colonial struggle. Fanon, who is a decisive and irrevocable theoretical point of departure for Bhabha, starts his book *The Wretched of the Earth* with a detailed description of the nature of the process of decolonisation:

*National liberation, national renaissance, the restoration of nationhood to the people, commonwealth: whatever may be the headings used or the new formulas introduced, decolonization is always a violent phenomenon. At whatever level we study it—relationships between*
individuals, new names for sports clubs, the human admixture at cocktail parties, in the police, on the directing boards of national or private banks—decolonization is quite simply the replacing of a certain "species" of men by another "species" of men. Without any period of transition, there is a total, complete, and absolute substitution. It is true that we could equally well stress the rise of a new nation, the setting up of a new state, its diplomatic relations, and its economic and political trends. But we have precisely chosen to speak of that kind of tabula rasa which characterizes at the outset all decolonization. Its unusual importance is that it constitutes, from the very first day, the minimum demands of the colonized. To tell the truth, the proof of success lies in a whole social structure being changed from the bottom up. The extraordinary importance of this change is that it is willed, called for, demanded. (35)

The change Fanon talks about is much more definitive and more radical than some postcolonialists are willing to attribute to the entire process of liberation of the former colonies. The unprofitable and unwarranted mystification of the formal political liberation and the dialectical relationship between the coloniser and colonised has deflected the true focus of the anti-colonial politics and ideology. Nation is a reality, like class, impossible to wish or do away with, and the most effective method of grappling with it lies not in denying its very existence but in gingerly mastering it. To share the
metropolitan postcolonial view about nation is to aid the designs of the
colonising and imperialist forces that continue to be equally potently eager to
worm their way into the business of ripping nations to penury as they have
always been. Politically both nation and class, when they are defined in
confrontational terms, are potential forms of defeating the oppressive forces
though they, as absolutely inviolable conceptual categories, may prove
detrimental to the wholesome progress of a society that has wrested itself
from the grips of colonial rule. Admitting the inevitability of our definitions
and views about nation and nationalism being influenced by our political
proclivities and ideological preferences, it has to be quickly added that
critique of nationalism produced to date has been immeasurably varied and
divergent. The idea of nation as a totalising force overriding the little
narratives has often been deployed to advance a strong case against the
marginalisation of the subaltern. Without any specific reference to a set of
particularised historic conditions it would seem an impossible task to
characterise nationalism as either exclusively progressive or irredeemably
reactionary, and this is the issue over which we find the intellectual
community vertically divided.

However, the ideas of nation and nationalism are shot through with
certain structuring European ideological baggage very hard to shake off and
as such these two conceptual categories in the final analysis may prove
serving the cause of the metropolitan power centres. There exists an ample amount of evidence that indicates the unfathomable depth to which nationalist narratives are mediated by the colonising master narratives. This cautious stand with reference to the grandnarrative of nation is not informed by crude nativist narcissism that seems to pervade some of the non-metropolitan self-indulgent theoretical writing. Very often nationalism becomes a powerful tool of accession to power in the hands of native bourgeoisie. Brushing aside the comments made by Robert Young in this regard as non-serious we may justify our decision to quote from Wa Thiang’o who pinpoints the dangers of elitism in national representation in the specific context of Africa, though it is fairly valid in all colonial situations:

Right from its conception it was the (African) literature of the petty-bourgeoisie born of the colonial schools and universities. It could not be otherwise, given the linguistic medium of its message. Its rise and development reflected the gradual accession of this class to political and even economic dominance. But the petty-bourgeoisie in Africa was a large class with different strands in it. It ranged from that section which looked forward to a permanent alliance with imperialism in which it played the role of an intermediary between the bourgeoisie of the western metropolis and colonies.......... This literature by Africans in European languages was
specifically that of the nationalist bourgeoisie in its creators, its thematic concerns and its consumption. (445)

The above passage has a resounding relevance to the point the present thesis proposes to prove with regard to the language chosen by the native bourgeoisie to consolidate its cultural domination, which, however, will be dealt with in the following chapter. This is the class which invariably came to inherit the reins of power in all the former colonies. And, in consequence, it is this predominant bourgeoisie that defines the national cultures. What holds good in the African context has striking similarities to the forms in which the so-called Indian national culture surfaced along with anti-colonial resistance movement. The present thesis intends to trace the contours of the cultural matrix characteristically shaped by the Indian bourgeoisie, and this is proposed to be done with exclusive reference to the Indian writing in English. It is this class—economically, socially and culturally (of course in the same order) dominant—that always thrusts itself to the forefront in the process of the emergence of a national culture and, consequently, overrides and obliterates the multiple native cultural identities.

Yet, nationalism, at a given point in history, colonial history, may be argued to have played a decisively progressive role in facilitating the consolidation of a strong anti-colonial resistance movement in the former
colonies. This should not blind one to the subtle and not so subtle differences that characterise a variety of nationalisms that are categorically classifiable in terms of their affiliative or antagonistic relationship with the ideologies that sustained colonial power structures. Certain postcolonial theories embedded in poststructural structures of perception bracket nationalism as imprisoned in native feudal pasts and, consequently, as being innately retrogressive. Aijaz Ahmad expresses this view in strong words in his In Theory:

The newly dominant position of poststructuralist ideology is the fundamental enabling condition for literary theory which debunks nationalism not on the familiar Marxist ground that nationalism in the present century has frequently suppressed questions of gender and class and has itself been frequently complicit with all kinds of obscurantism and revanchist positions, but in the patently postmodernist way of debunking all efforts to speak of origins, collectivities, determinate historical projects. The upshot, of course, is that critics working within the poststructuralist problematic no longer distinguish, in any foregrounded way, between the progressive and retrograde forms of nationalism with reference to particular histories, nor do they examine the even more vexed question of how progressive and retrograde elements may be (and often are) combined within particular nationalist trajectories; what gets debunked, rather, is nationalism as such, in more or less the same apocalyptic manner in which cultural
nationalism was, only a few years earlier, declared the determinate answer to imperialism. (38)

The basic problematic that remains insufficiently attended to is the scope of cultural nationalism in shaping the ideology of the anti-colonial resistance and its ambiguous relationship to political activism. The privileging of cultural nationalism has often led to a situation wherein it has come to be posited against political nationalism. The continental theories, having firmly struck unshakeable roots in the Anglo-American roots, carefully avoided the questions about the relationship between their theory and the world this particular theory claimed to be about. In Indian context, the question of postcolonially theorised reality assumes a politically non-radical dimension as a result of its association with colonial ideologies. The thesis, though proposes to employ the radical strategies and insights of postcolonial theory, chooses to be wholesomely sceptical about some of its positions and arguments. The same scepticism is accentuated by progressively firmer awareness that postcolonial theories have been rendered effectively redundant by the march of the global capitalism. Yet, due to the absence of better techniques, we intend to use postcolonial theoretical views for rereading the works of R.K.Narayan.


