CHAPTER-III
POSTCOLONIALISM AND AMITAV GHOSH
Introduction

Postcolonialism is one of the significant, widely employed and deliberated critical theories of late. Though, it has borrowed its ideas from Marxism, poststructuralism and postmodernism, it has drawn the attention of more and more readers and scholars throughout the world. It is a reaction to, resistance against colonialism, exploration of its effects on the colonized; it is a re-examination of colonial discourses, decolonization, re-instating of the native and an unlearning of the established truths. The issues of racial, class, caste and regional domination, cultural, literary and linguistic hegemony, diaspora, feminism and globalization also come under the purview of postcolonialism. More than any other concept, the postcolonial has facilitated the gradual disturbance of the Eurocentric dominance and has empowered postcolonial intellectuals to redirect discussion towards issues of direct political relevance to the non-Western world. Moreover, it addresses many issues, encompasses several subjects and countries. Writers from postcolonial countries have been prominent and major literary awards like the Booker, the Man Booker and the Nobel Prize have been awarded to them. The works of the major writers, including Amitav Ghosh, now appear on numerous college and university syllabi. Consequently, their writing has provided the nourishment for postcolonial theory. A study of “Postcolonialism”, in the form of an overview, is undertaken below.

Postcolonialism is concerned with colonial encounter, reaction to colonialism and exploration of its effects on the lives of the colonized. The word ‘colonialism’ comes from the Roman ‘colonia’ which meant ‘farm’ or ‘settlement’ and referred to Romans settled in other lands but still retained their citizenship. The process of forming a community in the new land necessarily meant unforming or re-forming the communities that existed
there already and involved a wide range of practices like trade, plunder, negotiation, warfare, genocide, enslavement and rebellions. This process of colonization has exploited the colonized societies. As Tabish Khair opines, it has “historically served as a smokescreen for the changed (industrial/izing) nature of the exploitation” (Babu Fictions, 16). So, colonialism can be defined as “the conquest and control of other people’s land and goods” (Loomba, 8). As colonialism had exercised its sway over 84.6 percent of the land surface of the globe, it was not an identical process in different parts of the world but everywhere it locked the original inhabitants and the newcomers into the most complex and traumatic relationship in human history.

Colonialism is not altogether a new phenomenon. In a sense it has been there and “it has been a recurrent and widespread feature of human history” (Loomba 8). But the colonialism we are concerned is much different from the earlier colonialism. Earlier colonialisms were pre-capitalist but modern colonialism was established alongside capitalism. It did more than extracting tribute, goods and wealth from countries it conquered— it restructured the economies of the colonized and drew them into a complex relationship, so that there was a flow of human and natural resources between colonized and colonial countries. The distinction between pre-capitalism and modern capitalism is often made by referring to the latter as imperialism. Imperialism is the highest stage of colonialism. In a way colonialism has led to the emergence of capitalism, so, Ania Loomba regards colonialism as “the midwife that assisted at the birth of European capitalism” (Loomba 10). Supporting Ania Loomb’s opinion, Sim Stuart considers “colonialism as a phase in the history of imperialism which in turn is the globalization of the capitalist mode of production from the sixteenth
In toto, what happens as a consequence of imperial domination is known as colonialism or neo-colonialism. It exists even today. Thus, colonialism was born in order to establish its power and hegemony, to achieve its interests, to leave its legacies, and to perpetuate its control constructed the binaries, constituted the self and Other, evolved racism, enslavement, dominance and complete control over the colonized along with exporting the Western technologies and ideas. Leela Gandhi says, “Colonialism marks the historical process whereby the West attempts systematically to conceal or negate the cultural difference and value of the non-west” (16). Consequently the process of colonialism or neo-colonialism or imperialism has given birth to postcoloniality, postcolonial studies, postcolonial theory and postcolonialism.

**Definitions of Postcolonialism**

Since postcolonialism encompasses many aspects, addressing several issues and embraces many disciplines; it is very difficult to define it in an all inclusive definition. Yet, some of the definitions which throw light on the nature, objectives and scope of postcolonialism are discussed below.

Defining postcolonialism Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms says, “It considers vexed cultural-political questions of national and ethnic identity, otherness, race, imperialism and language during and after the colonial period” (265). It is considered as an intellectual discourse that consists of reaction to and analysis of the cultural legacies of colonialism and imperialism. M.S Nagarajan’s remark exemplifies this, “postcolonialism tries to unearth the operations and ideologies, political, economic etc at work during the period of colonialism” (185). This definition covers the impact of colonialism on other systems of colonized societies. M.H Abrams defines postcolonialism as “the critical analysis of the history, culture, literature and
modes of discourses that are specific to the former colonies of England, Spain, France and other European imperial powers”(236). This definition stresses on the re-reading, re-visiting and unlearning of all the colonial discourses. More recently postcolonialism “has come to mean something other than post independent and includes writing that resists colonialism in all forms” (Sim 286). This definition covers the aspect of resistance to all the avatars of colonialism. Bill Ashcroft et al are of the opinion, “postcolonialism is used to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day” (2). Further they say it is concerned with the “world as it exists during and after the period of European imperial domination and the effects of this on contemporary literatures” (2). This definition makes it clear that postcolonialism is not concerned with the time after colonialism has ceased, but it is an engagement with and contestation of colonial discourses, power structures and social hierarchies it created and their impact on the Orient cultures. Another postcolonial theorist Ania Loomba’s definition also highlights more or less the same ideas. She says “it is more helpful to think of postcolonialism not just as coming literally after colonialism and signifying its demise but more flexibly as the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism” (16). She also views “Non-Western literatures need to be recovered, celebrated, re-circulated, and re-interpreted not just in order to revise our view of European culture but as part of the process of decolonization” (82).

**Journey of Postcolonialism**

The journey of postcolonialism from the beginning to the present is not of the same vigor and speed. It has passed through periods of change. Helen Tiffin and others say that postcolonial literature has followed a
periodization of three phases which can be termed as ‘adopt’ ‘adapt’ and ‘adept’. The phase of ‘adopt’ is that in which the European models are imitated, as these are supposed to be the best models. The second stage of ‘adapt’ begins when the European form is modified to suit indigenous requirements. The third is ‘adept’ phase in which the new literature breaks away from all the previous norms and conventions and strikes a path creating a literature that is one’s own. It is to this end, and towards such an attainment, contemporary literature of the third world moves.

**Post-Colonialism v/s Postcolonialism**

The use of the terms ‘post-colonial’ and ‘postcolonial’ is the subject of considerable debate. The hyphenated word refers specifically to the period after a country; people or state ceases to be governed by colonial power such as Britain or France and takes administrative power into their own hands. Thus, India gained its political independence in 1947 and became historically ‘post-colonial’ after 15 August 1947. For some critics the hyphenated form is a decisive temporal marker of the decolonizing process. Where as, others fiercely query the implied chronological separation between colonialism and its aftermath on the ground that “the postcolonial condition is inaugurated with the onset rather than the end of colonial occupation” (Gandhi 3). The prefix ‘post’ implies an ‘aftermath’ in two senses- temporal as in coming after, and ideological as in supplanting. A country may be both postcolonial (in the sense of being formally independent) and neo-colonial (in the sense of remaining economically and culturally dependent) at the same time. However, it is argued that the unbroken term ‘postcolonialism’ is more sensitive to refer to the long history of colonial consequences and as ‘Postcolonial Studies’ tends to embrace literary, cultural and sometimes anthropological-studies. As the postcolonial
theorists are more concerned with the consequences of colonialism, it is obvious that postcolonialism is not just concerned with time after colonialism has ceased but it is an engagement with and contestation of colonialism’s discourses, power structures and social hierarchies.

**Genesis of Postcolonialism**

Various such as historical, political, literary and cultural contexts are instrumental in giving place to postcoloniality, postcolonial studies, postcolonial theory and postcolonilism. Critics have foregrounded any one of the above mentioned aspects depending upon their view. But mainly the origin of postcolonilism may be situated in historical context that is colonialism itself and resistance to it, in the absence of theories to deal with cultural difference of the Other, and in intellectual revolution that is the origin of theories like poststructuralism and postmodernism.

The discussion of the contexts that have led to the origin of postcolonilism is done below. The historical context includes time from onset of colonialism to present efforts to decolonize. Leela Gandhi, a postcolonial critic, opines that “postcolonial condition is inaugurated with the onset rather than the end of colonial occupation” (3). The main attribute of postcolonialism is resistance to colonial occupation and its domination. In the same book Gandhi opines that “the psychological resistance to colonialism begins with the onset of colonialism” (17). So the efforts to decolonize are not initiated after the dismantling of colonial rule but started with the onset of colonial control. In this regard Ghyan Prakash insists “we might start to ascertain the first elaboration of a postcolonial theory itself in historical figures like Gandhiji and Frantz Fanon” (quoted in Gandhi 18). These writers undertook the task of decolonizing the minds of the colonized by creating the national identity. Though there are some differences between
these two, both are “united in their proposal of a radical style of total resistance to the totalizing political and cultural offensive of the colonial civilizing mission” (Gandhi 19). In a way the exploitative nature of colonialism led to the origin of postcoloniality. Thus colonialism itself had sown the seeds of anti-colonial movement.

There are some writers who trace the origin of postcolonialism in the literature of the then ‘Commonwealth literature’ or the ‘Third world Literature’. Before the term ‘postcolonialism’ gained currency the resistance literature of the colonized countries was named Commonwealth Literature. In 1950s and 1960s the creative writings of the colonized countries’ writers drew attention of the readers and critics. Though there was some resistance, the Commonwealth Literature became significant part of the curriculum of English departments at various universities in Britain. In 1950s and 1960s the major writers and academics like V.S. Naipaul and Wole Soyinka and the children of thousands of people who were appointed to work in health and transport systems and to work in steel and textile factories came to study there. Consequently, immigrant teachers and students alike demanded the study of African, Caribbean and Indian writing in English. In the beginning Commonwealth literary studies had striven to remain apolitical focusing on aspects such as form and style, some times comparison was made with the works of main stream British writers. Texts by non-western authors were often read within the framework of area studies programs. But gradually there was a considerable pressure to read and understand these works within a political context. In Britain the racist attitudes kept black and Asian people out of all but the most poorly paid jobs and resented their presence in British cities and suburbs. This context led to an increasing emphasis on political, psychological and cultural resistance to discrimination on grounds of race.
and color. The writing and reading of texts by African, Caribbean and Asian authors were seen as a means of restoring dignity and self respect to people who had suffered from hundreds of years of contemptuous dismissal, exploitation and enslavement by Europeans. Writers from the former colonies wish to speak for themselves, to tell their own stories including the story of the colonial encounter and its consequences. Thus it is the amalgamation of Commonwealth literary studies, Black Studies and Third World Studies that has led to the origin of postcolonial studies and postcolonial theory.

The other context that led to the origin of postcolonialism is the absence of adequate theories to deal with cultural difference of the Other. European literary theories have emerged from particular cultural traditions. So, the same theories are not suitable to judge cultural creations of all the societies. The postcolonial critics Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin opine that “the idea of ‘post-colonial literary theory’ emerges from the inability of European theory to deal adequately with the complexities and varied cultural province of post-colonial writing” (10). The literature of the Other was valued and judged with the yardsticks put forth by the West. So, the postcolonial writers questioned the theories of style and genre, assumptions about universal features of language, epistemologies and value systems. So also the followers of native traditions and beliefs contributed to the origin of postcoloniality by struggling to preserve culture and by resisting to colonial imposition. In this regard Parry warns against “the tendency to disown the work done within radical traditions other than the most recently enunciate heterodoxies, as necessarily less subversive of the established order” (Quoted in Gandhi 18). The postcolonial theory emerged in order to dismantle the hegemony of the West, to accommodate the
cultural difference, to address and celebrate the plurality of colonized societies.

The other context that assisted the origin of postcolonial theory is the revolution within ‘Western’ intellectual traditions in thinking about some of the issues—language and how it articulates experience, how ideologies work, how human subjectivities are formed, what we might mean by culture etc. This development has led to the emergence of political movements. These ideas traveled to the colonized countries through colonialism. It served as the vehicle for the export of Western technologies and ideas. Hence, Marx regarded colonialism as a brutal precondition for the liberation of these societies. Language and ideologies play a vital role in exercising and continuing control and othering societies. The West constructed the categories based on race, colour, gender, location, and economy to perpetuate its control over the Other. But the theories like Marxism, poststructuralism and postmodernism questioned these constructed categories. The Marxists believed that the ideologies are always the product of economic and social life and ideology has the function of obscuring the reality. Gramsci opines ideology in general works to maintain social cohesion and to expresses dominant interests. His main argument is that there are particular ideologies that express the protest of those who are exploited. Gramsci formulated his concept of ‘hegemony’, as it is power achieved through a combination of ‘coercion’ and ‘consent’. He argued that the ruling classes achieve domination not by ‘force or coercion’ alone but also by creating subjects who willingly submit to being ruled. Ideology is crucial in creating ‘consent’. Thus, Gramsci considers ideologies as more than just reflections of material reality. Gramsci views that hegemony does
not operate through simple imposition from the above it incorporates and transforms ideas and practices of those who are dominated.

Supporting and adding to Gramsci’s ideas Althusser argues in modern capitalist societies the ‘force’ is achieved by using Repressive State Apparatuses like army and police. The ‘consent’ is enforced through Ideological State Apparatuses such as schools, the church, the family, media, and political systems. These ideological apparatuses assist in the reproduction of the dominant system by creating subjects who are ideologically conditioned to accept the values of the system. The main argument is that ideologies and ideological instruments are instrumental in dominating and furthering it. This thinking has helped postcolonial studies and has opened up innovative ways of analyzing institutions, literature as well as ideas.

The Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure’s ideas have also contributed to the origin of postcolonial thinking. He argued that the relation between the ‘signifier’ and the ‘signified’ is arbitrary, which is to say that words achieve their meaning from an association in the mind, not from any natural or necessary reference to entities in the real world. Thus, for him language is not a way of naming things which already exist, but a system of signs, whose meaning is relational. On this basis, we can think of language as ideological rather than objective. Objecting to Saussure’s views the French Marxist Pierre Machery suggested that “texts can only be understood in the context of their utterance. The literary text is not created by an intention (objective or subjective) it is produced under determinate conditions” (quoted in Loomba 36).

Adding to Saussure’s notion of sign and signified, Derrida suggests that no sign is identical with the signified and there is always a gap between
the two. The slippage between words or signs and their meaning is evident in every representation, every utterance. Accordingly, no utterance or text is capable of conveying its own meaning. But all texts, if analyzed closely or deconstructed, reveal their own instability and their contradictions (Loomba 36). In other words, meaning is not self-present in the sign or in text, but is the result of this gap, slippage or what Derrida calls ‘difference’. Thus, from a variety of different intersecting perspectives, language is seen to construct the subject and no human utterance is innocent. If words are deconstructed they would reveal individual and historical consciousness at work. These thinkers together suggested that ideological and social practices are interconnected. They also viewed language as a tool of domination and as means of constructing identity. These various radical ways of thinking about language and ideology challenge any rigid demarcation of event and representation, or history and text.

Althusser’s student Michel Foucault’s work stands at the intersection of innovations in theories of ideology, subjectivity and language and has created an important influence on the shaping of post-modernist and post-structuralist ideas and via Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, on postcolonial studies. Foucault opines “All human ideas and all fields of knowledge are structured and determined by the laws of certain code of knowledge” (Loomba 35). In his view knowledge is not innocent but profoundly connected with the operations of power. In the discourse language is used in particular ways. Ideologies justified exploitation of colonized. So both feminist and anti-colonial movements need to challenge dominant ideas of history, culture and representation. Poststructuralists suspected the established truths and challenged the ‘meta-narratives’. They considered culture as a site of conflict between the oppressors and the oppressed.
also paid attention to language as a tool of domination and as means of constructing identity. The postmodern writers consider human being as decentred, society as totally fragmented and utterance as unstable. Another idea contributed is that history does not just provide a background to the study of texts, but forms an essential part of textual meaning; conversely, texts or representations have to be seen as fundamental to the creation of history and culture. Thus all these ideas and developments inspired and helped the colonized countries’ thinkers and writers to revisit the colonial discourses and to form postcolonial theory.

The four names, among many, appear again and again as thinkers who have shaped postcolonial theory are Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayathri Spivak. The ideas these writers contributed form the bases of postcolonial theory. The main contributions of these thinkers to postcolonial theory are discussed below.

**Frantz Fanon**

Frantz Fanon is one of the earliest writers associated with Postcolonialism. One of the critics Albert Memmi considers him as “A prophet of the Third World, a romantic hero of decolonization” (quoted in Loomba 123). He was born in 1925 at Martinique, a French former slave colony. He was taught by the great poet and Marxist politician Aime Cesaire. He studied medicine and psychiatry in France where Lacan was one of his teachers.

Fanon’s first work *Black Skin, White Masks* was published in 1952. This is a remarkable personal account and analysis of the effect of the ‘colonial gaze’- of being seen, defined and stereotyped by the Europeans whose culture is deemed to be superior and to have greater authority than the cultures of Africa and the Caribbean. European appearance and culture is
assumed to be the norm by which the others judged, making all others ‘abnormal’ and either exotic or inferior or both. It is a psychoanalytical study, an attempt to understand the causes of racism and more importantly, the effects of racism and colonialism on black people and how to overcome or deal with those effects. Fanon believed that to a greater or lesser extent black people had internalized the racism and accepted the inferior status. Fanon says that White men consider themselves superior to black men and Black men have to prove to white men the richness of their thought, culture and the equal value of their intellect. Fanon points out “it was not modernization as such but colonialism that dislocated and distorted the psyche of the oppressed”. Further, he says the impact of colonialism has nullified the colonized. “The black man is not a man. The colonial experience annihilates the colonized’s sense of self, seals him into a crushing objecthood, which is he is not a man” (quoted in Loomba 122). Fanon writes back to European psychological construction of Africans in these words “Algerian’s criminality, his impulsivity and violence of his murders are not the consequences of organization of his nervous system or of the characterial originality but the direct product of the colonial situation” (quoted in Loomba 122-123). Fanon also emphasized the dehumanizing aspect of colonialism.

Fanon does not approve with the idea of negritude, coined by Aime Cesaire and strongly propounded by Leopold Sedar Senghor. Negritude movement considers sense of shared culture, subjectivity and spiritual essence stretches across the divisions of nations as political entities. It condemned white supremacy and imperial domination and positively celebrated the blackness as a distinct racial-cultural way of being. Senghor considers it as a sum of the cultural value of the black world. Fanon does not
support this ideology on the ground that *negritude* as an ideology trapped within the terms of a European dialectic and unable to break away from the essentialism inherent in colonialist and racialist thinking. Fanon points out that “its literature as violent, resounding, florid writing which on the whole serves to reassure the occupying power, written as it is in the language of, and for the benefit of, that power by an assimilated, albeit protesting, native intelligentsia” (Loomba 178). Fanon opines it can be a passage and not objective, means and not the ultimate goal. Many Anglophone African writers shared Fanon’s skepticism regarding Senghor’s promotion of negritude. The Nigerian playwright Soyinka expressed his view that it was superfluous for Africans to broadcast their African identity, pointing out that a tiger does not need to proclaim his negritude. Against this Fanon proposes a national literature, a literature of combat directed towards the people, engaged in the formation of ‘national consciousness’ and committed to the struggle for national liberation.

Fanon’s experience of working with Algerians fighting to liberate their country from French colonialism led to the publication of other essays and books, of which *The Wretched of the Earth* (1965) has become the most widely read. In this work he continues his psychological study of the colonized. It describes the psychology of the colonizers. He asserted that in order to justify their rule and occupation of the natives’ territory, settlers and administrators create a Manichean Society; that is they classify the world of the ‘native’ as the opposite of everything the European supposedly represents: civilization, morality, cleanliness, law and order, wholesome masculinity. The native is by definition uncivilized or barbaric, childlike, feminine, unable to rule himself and superstitious. He is supposed to have no historical monuments, no literature and hence no history. In other words, the
‘Others’ are denied of all attributes of humanity. Fanon pointed out that; attitudes such as of Hegel were used by the colonizers to justify colonization. It was argued that Europeans brought civilization, progress and history to Africa or India or Ireland for the first time. At the same time, Africans and other colonized peoples were seen as mentally and physically adapted only for menial labour or routine clerical positions. Settlers and governments continued to maintain that the colonized peoples were incapable of self-government or of putting their land and its resources to good use. Fanon believed that colonial governments could be uprooted only by violence. Moreover, he argued, such violence was a means of destroying the mental colonization and sense of racial inferiority. The violence he had advocated has a cathartic value aimed at ‘cleansing’ the male colonized psyche from the effects of the epistemic violence of colonialism. Fanon shared the move of educated Africans of seeking and validating their own culture and civilization by rediscovering a buried history and celebrating early achievements. He believed that such restoration of the past was an important factor in giving colonized people the confidence to envision a future without European rule and a nation capable of future achievements. He contested and negated the European insistence that Africans were incapable of creating a civilization or anything worthwhile.

**Edward Said**

While Fanon had focused mainly on the relationship between colonizer and colonized in Africa and the Caribbean, the literary and cultural critic Edward Said concentrated more on portrayals of Asia, including India and the Middle East. If Fanon said the West had created the ‘Manichean society’, Said went a step ahead to prove how that ‘Manichean Society’ has been created through European discourses. *Orientalism*(1978) is Said’s most
influential and much debated work. Its publication is considered as canonical event. It had revolutionary impact on intellectual formations, structures, lives, both in the West and in the postcolonial non-West. Gayatri Spivak considers it “as a funding text or source book through which marginality has acquired the status of a discipline in the Anglo-American academy” (quoted in Gandhi 65). In this book, Said is concerned with the ways in which knowledge is governed and owned by Europeans to reinforce power, and to exclude or dismiss the knowledge which natives might claim to have. Drawing on Foucault’s work, and his notion of systems of discourses are controlled by those in power which define the ‘truths’ by which we live and judge others. Said is of opinion that if knowledge is institutionalized it starts to collaborate with the interests of a dominant or ruling elite. He refers to anthropology, history, linguistics and literary criticism as well as European literary works as a network of ‘discourses’ which establish a particular view of ‘Orientals’ as a people to be governed rather than as equals who are capable of self government. Said contests the Orientlists’ belief that the contemporary oriental societies were in need of being civilized by imposing European civilization. He stresses that Orientalism refers not to a place but to an idea, and can be seen as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, having authority over the Orient. Said views Orientalism as an enormous system or inter-textual network of rules and procedures which regulate anything that may be thought, written or imagined about the Orient. The discourse of Orientalism was systematically utilized by the Europeans to construct the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, economically and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period. European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and underground self. Said challenged what
Euro-Americans traditionally referred to as “Orientalism”. It is a pattern of making certain generalizations about the part of the world known as the ‘East’. Orientalism was a political vision whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, West, Us) and the strange (the Orient, the East, them). Orientalism is the first book in which Said relentlessly unmask the ideological disguises of imperialism. Orientalism is not free from criticism. It is considered a limited text primarily because it has not accommodated the possibility of difference within Oriental discourse.

More ambitious in terms of scope and ideas is Culture and Imperialism (1993). This book explores the empire and the expansion of European culture throughout the world. Said provides an account of the ways in which Western culture is implicated in the European imperial project, a process which amounts to a general effort to rule distant lands and peoples. Western culture exports Western ideas and languages to other countries and represents these countries back home. Said has pointed out that “language and literature together implicated in constructing the binary of a European self and non-European Other, which is a part of the creation of colonial authority” (Quoted in Looma 66). He also offers a number of insights into Europe’s special ways of representing the non-west lands.

**Gayatri Spivak**

Gayatri Spivak is another influential postcolonial theorist. She was born in Calcutta and received her B.A. from the Calcutta University. She went to the United States and completed her M.A. and Ph.D in English literature at Cornell University, where Paul De Man was one of her mentors. She taught at various American universities, including the University of Texas, the university of Pittsburgh, and Columbia University. Her earliest
important work was her introduction to and translation of Jacques Derrida’s *Of Grammatology* (1977).

Breaking the rules of the academy and trespassing disciplinary boundaries have been central to the intellectual projects of Spivak. She is one of the leading critics of our times. She is the scholar of deconstructive approaches to verbal, visual, and social texts. Her most important contribution to the field of literary studies is helping to define, elaborate on, and then complicate the field of postcolonial studies.

Whether she is writing as a feminist, Marxist, or postcolonialist Spivak’s work is characterized by deconstruction theory. It is evident in her method of questioning the basic assumptions of dominant systems of language and thought in order to unsettle and decentre meaning. She points out that, “illogical but naturalized values are coded within the legacy of imperialism: nationhood, constitutionality, citizenship, democracy and culturalism” (Sim 309). Spivak joined feminism’s interest in the silenced women to Marxist global concern with the political, economic and cultural oppression of nonwhite people. The result was a series of highly influential essays that helped set the agenda for feminism and for postcolonial theory in the 1980s and 1990s.

Spivak describes herself as a “practical deconstructionist feminist Marxist” (Quoted in Leitch 2193). She uses deconstruction to examine how truth is constructed. In her work she combines passionate denunciation of the harm done to women, non-Europeans and poor by the privileged West. “Can the Subaltern Speak?” is certainly her best known and most controversial essay. The major concern of this essay is the possibility of constituting the Other, by the postcolonial intellectuals, as the self’s shadow. Spivak highlights that the intellectuals may exercise mastery over the very
subject they want to produce. Intellectuals have tried to create counter discourses that contest the dominant discourses and which are an attempt to liberate the Other and to enable that Other to experience and articulate its constituted subject hood. Spivak asks, Can- with or without the intervention of well intentioned intellectuals- the subaltern speak? Her blunt answer is no. She characterizes the subaltern in this way “the subaltern always stands in an ambiguous relation to power-subordinate to it but never fully consenting to its rule, never adopting the dominant point of view or vocabulary as expressive of its own identity” (Quoted in Leitch 2194). She also underscores that the colonized subaltern subject is irretrievably heterogeneous. Spivak observes that the Other is romanticized because the theorists and advocates of political transformation consider subaltern as a potential source of change and expect them to lead the fight against multinational global capitalism. She asks how can the least powerful Other lead and halt it when most of the power resides in the West. Moreover, Spivak points out that the suggestion all the third world peoples stand the same relation to global capitalism and should respond to it in the same way is ‘essentialist”. Essentialism is the belief that certain people or entities share some essential unchanging “nature” that secures their membership in a category. Essentialism is criticized for its generalization about categories like women, class, community etc.

Spivak’s another landmark contribution to postcolonialism is the concept of Strategic essentialism”. She does not agree with the idea of essentialism but she proposes for “strategic use of positive essentialism”. She argues that though ‘Essentialism’ makes some crude generalizations, strategically it is important to make essentialist claims. The idea can be better illustrated through an example. Feminists must publicize the
feminization of poverty. Of course many women are not poor, but to battle effectively against the poverty some women require the strategic essentialism to highlight the gendered nature of economic inequality. Hence, she calls for “strategic use of positive essentialism” in order to reinstate the marginalized in place of the dominant.

Spivak argues leftist intellectuals who romanticize the oppressed essentialize the subaltern and thus replicate the colonialist discourses they purport to critique. She points out that a group’s or person’s identity is relational. There is no true or pure Other; instead the Other always already exists in relation to the discourse that would name it as Other. She observes the whole world is now organized economically, politically and culturally along the lines of Western discourses. The multiplicity of discourses reinforces the marginalization of non-white and the dual marginalization of non-white women.

She points out that colonialists thought of themselves as well-intentioned but their intention was to assert difference between British “civilization” and Indian “barbarism” and intervene in the cultural life of the non-West. Spivak’s often quoted sentence can be quoted to illustrate this nature of the West, “White men are saving brown women from brown men” (2195). Here white men are projected as saviors and brown men are scapegoated as oppressors. Spivak wants intellectuals to reveal the ‘political interests’ in such claims. Further, Spivak says in a deconstructive fashion that any system and discourse, inevitably excludes something. So, the ‘traces’ of those exclusions should haunt us. And she urges us to hear the faint whisper of what could not be said.

Spivak interrogates the politics of culture from a marginal perspective ("outside") while maintaining the prerogatives of a professional position
within the hegemony. Through deconstruction she turns hegemonic narratives inside out, and as a third world woman in a position of privilege in the American academy, she brings the outside in. These contradictory positions have led her to develop the notion that the center is also a margin, more like the center line on a road than the center of town. "This is the classic deconstructive position, in the middle, but not on either side" (de Kock interview). This reconfiguring of the "center" (or re-centering, perhaps) also changes the position and status of the margins: no longer outside looking in, but an integral, if minor, language.

Spivak examines the validity of the western representation of the other. She points out that the discursive institutions which regulate writing about the Other are shut off to postcolonial or feminist scrutiny. Researches and knowledge have served as prime justification for the conquest of Other culture and their enslavement, the west is talking about the Other in its own language. Is it possible for the West to speak about the non-west without the political interests? So, Spivak is not impressed with Western efforts to speak for the Other. She criticizes West’s desire for subjectivity through the creation of binaries, construction of identity and legitimizing the discourses. She examines number of persistent Western practices crucial to colonization and imperialism associated with what she calls ‘Othering’. She observes that the self, patriarchy and British colonization, constitutes the subaltern in its (self’s) shadow. Her contention that there is no place, from which the subaltern subject can speak, signifies that the systems of colonization and patriarchy are oppressive and silencing.

Spivak links postcolonialism and feminism by highlighting the fact that both women and colonized peoples have been forced to articulate their experiences in the language of the oppressors. She has critiqued Marxist,
feminist and postcolonial schools of thought through the lens of deconstructivism and has highlighted the pitfalls of marginality while resolutely refusing to remain in the margin.

**Homi Bhabha**

Homi Bhabha was born in 1949. He was raised in the Parsi community of Bombay, India, where his father was an important constitutional lawyer. After receiving a B.A. from Bombay University, he traveled to England to earn his M.A. and D.Phil from Oxford University. He taught at Sussex University for sixteen years; he also held visiting appointments in the United States at Princeton University and the University of Pennsylvania during the late 1980s and early 1990s. In 1994 he became Chester D. Tripp Professor in the Humanities at the University of Chicago, moving in 2001 to Harvard University.

Being a prominent figure in postcolonial studies, Bhabha has infused thinking about nationality, ethnicity and politics with poststructuralist theories of identity and indeterminacy. Extending the work of Said and Spivak, Bhabha also deconstructs the dichotomies of the West and the Orient, the centre and the periphery, the colonizer and the colonized, the oppressor and the oppressed, and the self and the Other. He borrows Derrida’s analysis of how binary oppositions structure Western thoughts. Bhabha’s contribution to postcolonial theory is that the dichotomies created by the West are too “reductive because they imply that any national culture is unitary, homogeneous and defined by fixity or an essential core. Instead, he proposes that nationalities, ethnicities and identities are dialogic, indeterminate and characterized by hybridity” (Quoted in Leitch 2377). He revises the conventional notions of nationality and colonial subject and shows how both are shifting and hybrid constructions. In order to reinforce
the fluid sense of nationality and identity, Bhabha employs a vocabulary of process oriented terms, namely dialogic, translation, in-between, cross-reference and ambivalence. He borrows the concept of dialogue from Bakhtin to stress that colonialism is not a one way process but entails an interaction between colonizer and colonized. However, besides several related ideas the important contributions of Bhabha to postcolonial theory are ambivalence, mimicry and hybridity, these are related one another. Bhabha shows how these postcolonial conditions and concepts disrupt the hegemonic nature of imperialism. The discussion of them is done below.

The term ‘ambivalence’ was first developed in psychoanalysis to describe a continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and wanting its opposite. It also refers to a simultaneous attraction towards and repulsion from an object, person or action. Homi Bhabha has adapted it into colonial discourse theory to describe the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between colonizer and colonized. The relationship is ambivalent because the ‘Other’ is never completely opposed to the ‘Self’. Ambivalence also characterizes the way in which colonial discourse relates to the colonized subject. It may be both exploitative and nurturing. In Bhabha’s theory ambivalence disrupts the clear-cut authority of colonial domination because it disturbs the simple relationship between colonizer and colonized. Ambivalence is an unwelcome aspect for the colonizers because they want to produce compliant subjects who reproduce its assumptions, habits and values- that is ‘mimic’ the colonizer. But they produce ambivalent subjects whose mimicry is never very far from mockery. In a way it is not disempowering for the colonial subject; but rather can be seen to be ambi-valent or two-powered. The effect of this ambivalence is disturbance of the authority of colonial discourse. In Bhabha’s opinion the
colonial relationship is always ambivalent and it generates the seeds of its own destruction. It also implies that the colonial relationship is going to be disrupted without any resistance or rebellion on the part of the colonized. His argument is that colonial discourse is compelled to be ambivalent because it never really wants colonial subjects to be exact replicas of the colonizers. This would be too threatening. Finally, this ambivalent situation will cause downfall of the imperialism and disrupt its assumption of monolithic power. Moreover, Bhabha shows that both colonizing and colonized subjects are implicated in the ambivalence of colonial discourse. The concept is connected to hybridity because as ambivalence ‘decentres’ authority from its position of power, the authority may also become hybridized when placed in a colonial context. The hybridity can be seen as a feature of its ambivalence. Bhabha argues that:

colonial discourse is antagonistic, split and contradictory, so that it never fully manages to assert a fixed and stereotypical knowledge of the colonial Other as it sets out to do. Even in the most confident colonial text there are moments of ambivalence: moments when it is possible to discern that the argument is contradictory (Malpas 154).

Bhabha borrows the concept of identity from Fanon’s psychological model of colonialism and Lacan’s concept of ‘mimicry’. Bhabha adapts it by drawing upon recent theories of language, enunciation and subjectivity which point out that communication is a process that is never perfectly achieved and there is always a slippage, a gap between what is said and what is heard. So, the process of replication is never complete or perfect, because of the context in which it is reproduced, the original can never be exactly replicated. Bhabha suggests that colonial authority is necessarily rendered ‘hybrid’ and ambivalent when it is imitated or reproduced. This situation
leads to the opening up of space for the colonized to subvert the master-discourse. Bhabha suggests “it is possible to think of ‘mimicry’ as a way of eluding control” (quoted in Lomba 78). He argues that the colonial subject does not imitate exactly, instead he/she is forced to produce an ‘excess’ cultural imitation. This mimicry revises colonial discourse and creates a new hybrid identity for the colonial subject. Fanon highlighted that the colonial authority works by inviting black to mimic white culture and his black mimics are dislocated subjects. But for Bhabha such an invitation itself undercuts colonial hegemony. Mimicry has the effect of undermining authority.

The important contribution of Bhabha to postcolonial studies is the concept of ‘hybridity’. A ‘hybrid’ is technically a cross between two different species and therefore the term hybridization evokes a botanical notion of inter-species grafting. However, we can trace the use of the term ‘hybridity’ in postcolonial theory in ‘transculturation’. The Cuban anthropologist, Fernando Ortiz used it to describe the mixing of different groups in Cuba and the way in which marginal groups selectively appropriate materials transmitted to them by a dominant culture, the result of such transculturation a mixing, a ‘hybridity’. Pratt has employed the idea of ‘transculturation’ to indicate inter-cultural negotiation that is constant feature of ‘the contact zone’ or the special spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination. There are different opinions regarding the resultant hybridity. Some consider it as an inevitable result because all that takes place in the ‘contact zones’ can not be monitored and controlled. Some consider it as a result of deliberate colonial policy. For instance, Pedro Fermin de Vagras actually “advocated a policy of interbreeding between
whites and Indians in order to ‘hispanicise’ and finally extinguish Indians” (quoted in Loomba 145). Thus, colonial hybridity was a strategy aimed at maintaining the cultural purity and stabilizing the status quo. But in practice it did not happen like that anti-colonial movements and individuals drew upon Western ideas and vocabulary to challenge colonial rule and hybridized what they borrowed by juxtaposing it with indigenous ideas. Hybridity has been used in post-colonial discourse to mean simply cross cultural exchange and the mutuality of cultures. But the critics have criticized this idea on the ground that it would increase continuing post-colonial dependence and neglect specific local difference.

But Bhabha celebrates hybridity on the ground that it would deconstruct the binaries and disrupts the conventionally assumed borders between colonizers and colonized, East and West, self and Other. It negates the hierarchical nature of the imperial process. Bhabha argues that hybridity has the potential to reverse the structures of domination in the colonial situation. He has transformed the Bhaktin’s intentional hybrid into an active moment of challenge and resistance against a dominant colonial power …depriving the imposed imperialist culture, not only of the authority that it has so for so long imposed politically, often through violence, but even of its own claims to authenticity. Bhabha is of the opinion that we need not go to back to pre-colonial traditions to assert national culture for decolonization, because the hybrid nature of postcolonial culture itself is anti-colonial model for resistance and decolonization. For him “resistance is a condition produced by the dominant discourse itself. Neither colonized nor colonizer is independent of the other” (quoted in Loomba 149). He considers hybridity a necessary attribute of colonial condition. Moreover Bhabha argues the conditions of in-betweenness and hybridity cannot be understood
without reference to the ideological and institutional structures in which they are housed. Thus being an anti-essentialist he questions the notion of a ‘unitary identity’ with his concept of hybridity. This concept of Bhabha is shared by some critics, for example, James Kelman has made an important point that “neither the colonizers nor the colonized are homogeneous categories” (quoted in Loomba 77).

Bhabha’s goal of theorizing hybridity is not simply to modify the terms of debate in postcolonial studies but to make a political intervention. He points out that the concept of hybridity fights against the restrictive notion of cultural identity and fosters the larger goal of ‘socialist community’ while acknowledging cultural differences. Bhabha argues that “borders presuppose a no-man’s land, an in-between space that simultaneously divides and connects two areas. This space, he suggests is productive and enabling” (Malpas 155).

Bhabha remarks that a theory should have political relevance. Some have criticized the theories that they lack utility, social relevance and moral good. But Bhabha declares the political efficacy of literary theory and contends that theory is not separate from or opposed to political activism but works hand in hand.

Bhabha’s thoughts are not accepted by all, for instance Aijaz Ahmad criticizes him for ignoring the class and caste. Further, Aijaz says “Bhabha’s concept of hybridity applies more aptly to privileged postcolonial intellectuals who have gained success in the Western world, like Bhabha himself, than to those in colonial situations” (Quoted in Leitch 2378). Other commentators have noted that the notion of a hybrid identity is too broad and amorphous, applying ultimately to all identities. But within the context
of debates in postcolonial studies, the concept of hybridity has decisively altered static thinking about nations and identities.

**Other Major Concerns of Postcolonialism**

Besides the ideas contributed by the postcolonial thinkers discussed above some other concepts and concerns of postcolonialism are elaborated below. According to Leela Gandhi, “Post colonialism is a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering and crucially interrogating the colonial past”(4). Postcolonialism is concerned with the colonial encounter, reaction to it, for and against and its impact on the colonized and colonizers. “The colonial encounter itself accelerated the contact between previously discrete and autonomous cultures” (Gandhi 126). The major goal is accounting for and combating the residual effects of colonialism on Others’ cultures. Analyzing the cultural legacy of colonialism and how a colonized people’s knowledge was used against them in service of the colonizers interests. It deals with exploring how the colonizers constructed non-white to perpetuate and legitimate their dominance over the subaltern through the creation of binaries and concepts like universalism, enlightenment, humanism and rationality. It also deals with how language, literature, history, science and traditions were utilized to export the colonial ideologies to serve their interests. That is why the rise of English literary studies as a discipline and the institutionalization of English in India were linked to the perceived needs of colonial administrators. Gauri Vishwanathan points out, “the introduction of English literature marks the effacement of sordid history of colonialist expropriation, material exploitation, and class and race oppression behind European world dominance” (20). It masks all sorts of colonial exploitations. Her view is also supported by Leela Gandhi, who says, “imperial relations may have
been established initially by guns, guile and disguise, but they were maintained in their interpolative phase largely by textuality”(142). English education was defended on the ground that a single self of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia and as part of their disinterested humanist commitment to the pedagogic enlightenment of their subjects. Gradually, English studies was transformed into an instrument for ensuring industriousness, efficiency, trustworthiness and compliance in native subjects. Thus, English studies was the powerful weapon in the colonial arsenal. Eurocentric critical practices insist on certain western texts as the markers of superior culture and value. There are connections between language and culture, as Ngugi argues, colonialism made inroads into the latter through the control of the former. However, there are postcolonial critics like Boehmer who observes that postcolonial texts “need not always signify texts rigidly associated with the colonial power. Some Orientlists labored to counter the ethnographic assumptions of metropolitan culture” (quoted in Gandhi 154). Some colonial writers considered the East as a utopian alternative to the ethical and political violence of empire.

Postcolonial studies intends to clear space for multiple voices, especially subaltern. “Non-Western literatures need to be recovered, celebrated, re-circulated, reinterpreted not just in order to revise our view of European culture but as part of the process of decolonization”(Loomba 82). According to Bill Ashcroft “postcolonialism is concerned with writing by those people formerly colonized by Britain” (1).Thus the empire is writing back to the centre by writing its own histories, literatures, re-territorializing the de-territorialized or dislocated native myths, legends, stories, traditions, cultures and legacies appropriating the colonizer’s language. Thereby it tries
to decolonize politically, socially, economically, culturally and literarily. It deals with how the colonized were othered, constructed, presented, how ideas of cultural, physiological and racial differences were created and how the colonizers legitimized epistemic violence and systematized oppression. It provides a framework for destabilizing dominant discourses, challenging inherent assumptions and critiquing the legacies of colonialism. For instance, Ngugi and his followers challenged the dubious cultural and pedagogical pre-eminence of English literature.

Postcolonialism is the rejection of the master narratives of Western imperialism in which the colonial Other is not only subordinated and marginalized but also in effect deleted as a cultural agency. So it advocates for its replacement by counter-narratives. Postcolonialists argue that history is the discourse through which the West has asserted its hegemony over the rest of the world and consider the ‘history’ as the grand narrative through which the Eurocentrism is ‘totalized’ as the proper account of all humanity. Hence, postcolonial historiography declares its intention to fragment this account with the voices of those unaccounted Others who have been silenced and domesticated.

Postcolonialism is foregrounding traditions and culture of the colonized countries. It is also known as nativism. It may be equated with the negritude movement. How do we reclaim the pre-colonial past and how do we overcome the colonial ideology? There are proponents arguing for each side, and the debate goes on endlessly. Some authors resort to writing in their own native language, for instance, Ngugi. The writers, who plead for decolonization, maintain that we must assert the tradition of our native culture, recover and rejuvenate our past in order not to be wholly consumed by foreign cultures. On the other side there are writers like Derek Walcott
and Rushdie, who believe in hybridity. They believe culture always changes. Change is the condition of art remaining as art. In the context of globalization post colonial identity is hybrid and that is the condition.

There is another view that colonialism cannot be treated as a matter of past. Indeed some form of control emerges in what may be termed neocolonialism, where the big powers hold the purse strings and control the fate of the developing nations. Cultural imperialism of the USA slowly destroys native cultures by cutting at the roots of indigenous cultures. Economically powerful nations dominate the weaker and less powerful. Ironically, postcolonial criticism is itself a form of cultural imperialism. Imperial domination shapes our way of thinking.

Major concerns of postcolonial studies are the issues of transculturation, transnationality, mimicry, ambivalence, hybridity, creolization, the in-betweeness, diasporas, unhomed, mobility, cross over of ideas and identities generated by colonialism. With the advent of colonial rule, the colonized countries underwent unprecedented changes in almost all the walks of their lives. Seemingly for the civilizing, humanizing and amelioration of colonized countries, internally for administrative control, the transport and communication systems were introduced in the colonies. This led to the transport and free movement of peoples in and outside the colonies. It also created ‘the contact zone’ or the social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, grapple with each other often in asymmetrical relations of dominations and subordinations. Fernando Ortiz has coined the term ‘transculturation’ to describe the situation of mixing of different groups. In the resulted context, peoples borrow and lend, mimic and assimilate cultures. It is a two way process which affects both. This leads to the hybridity. For some postcolonial critics, it is an inevitable condition and
a welcomeable aspect because it dismantles the binaries of various sort constructed by the West to perpetuate the hegemony over the Orient and results in the heterogeneity. So, hybridity has been invoked as an anti-colonial strategy by the colonized. This hybridity is criticized by some nativists on the ground that it erases the distinctness of native cultures and it fixes them (colonized) into perpetual ‘Otherness’. The celebration of hybridity generally refers to the destabilizing of colonized cultures. The cultural diversity created by hybridity conveniently disguises rather more serious economic and political disparities.

Thus the colonial encounter leads to fluidity of identities. The in-betweenness, ambivalence, unhomed or houselessness, mobility and identity crises are further elaborated through the accompanying concept of ‘diaspora’. Diaspora evokes the specific traumas of human displacement. Edward Said says “Diaspora is ambivalent, transitory, culturally contaminated, borderline figure of exile” (quoted in Gandhi 132). Further, diaspora figure is picturesquely constructed and presented in the following words by some postcolonial writers. “He/she is the political figure between domains, between forms, between homes, between languages” (quoted in Gandhi 132). So also, diasporic condition has led to the alienation, double consciousness, multiplicity of identity and homelessness. Like hybridity, Diaspora is also a postcolonial attribute. For some it is a welcomeable aspect because it de-centers the centre, brings peripheries to centre, and interrogates the ethnic identity and cultural nationalism. This leads to the state where oppressors themselves become the victims of their own modes of oppression. Homi Bhabha and Pratt argue “the figure of the colonized native is instrumental in the contamination and hybridization of colonial meanings” (quoted in Gandhi 134-35). These writers celebrate hybridity and diaspora
because the native is no longer available as the pure or unadulterated object of Orientalist inquiry. He or she is contaminated by the West which is dangerously unotherable. The diasporic is the decolonized subject par excellence, whose disrupted, non-essentialist, inbetweenness supplies the energy and power in the hybrid colonized and he/she is the liberated subject. Moreover, it disrupts the fixity of colonizer-colonized binaries.

**Limitations of Postcolonialism**

As any other canonical and popular theories, Post colonialism is also facing several challenges. There are many critics and thinkers who are not happy with the term postcolonialism. Aijaz Ahmed considers “postcolonialism is as dangerous as the neo-colonial one in not only creating the bogey of an undifferentiated pre-colonial past but also in neglecting the fact of decolonization” (quoted in Khair 15). Further, Ahmed has pointed out the methodological poverty of postcolonial theory and its tendency to expand the postcolonial period both chronologically and spatially. Moreover, the term implies that the colonial period is over and it remains as a distinctive landmark in the histories of these countries. Another critic Tabish Khair warns against too much emphasis on postcolonialism because “histories of these countries (colonized) before colonization had a separate existence that can not be subsumed within the colonial referent” (16). In fact colonization extends across the period of colonization into the present. Further Tabish Khair says “it is the colonial that is privileged in postcolonial theory and criticism” (16). In this guise postcolonialism may continue to simply deliver old wine in new bottles. Postmodern and poststructuralist commentators argue that postcolonialism is in danger of becoming another totalizing method and theory and they blame it for “too much dependence upon poststructuralist and postmodernist perspective” (Loomba 17).
feminist theory and criticism gender/ woman is taken as an organizing category of experience. Woman as a monolithic category of analysis across the classes, races, nations and cultures has failed. So also, postcolonialism has taken colonialism as a way to organize the experience of more than three fourth of people living in the world today. This homogenizing of colonial experience is not acceptable because all the countries were not colonized, subordinated, silenced and Othered with the same intention, with the same apparatuses, at the same time. The way of life all these countries is different, all these did not decolonize at the same time with the same means and same intensity. Another critic De Alva wants to de-link the term postcoloniality from formal decolonization because he thinks “many people living in both once colonized and colonizing countries are still subject to the oppressions put into place by colonialism” (quoted in Loomba 17). So also, postcolonialism semantically delivers the idea of a world historicized through the single category of colonialism, hence these critics do not completely agree with postcolonialism.

Postcolonial critics point out postcolonialism revolves only round the imperial subordination and anti-colonial resistance. There is no denying that history is marked by Western domination and resistance to it, but, there are many aspects, we need to pay attention to failures, inadequacies and interrogate the construction of history as certain.

According to some critics ‘post’ in postcolonialism connotes a chronological succession, a historical break, a change and emergence of a new and better world order and produces the illusion of an end of colonial trouble. If we examine the present situation do we come across the rosy picture the word ‘post’ signifies? Conversely, we find increasing divisiveness between contemporary societies and continuation of colonial
formation across the world. Simon During points out that postcolonial theory has the tendency to extend European categories beyond colonial meanings, for instance ‘Commonwealth Literature’ or New Literatures in English became studies in ‘Post-colonial Literatures’.

In spite of these limitations post colonialism is a useful critical method of analysis of all the discourses; history, science, social sciences and literatures. It has resulted in a lot of discussion, deliberations, critical and literary output. In a way postcolonial theory has provided the platform and world recognition for the Non-West writers. In an interview the interviewer asked Amitav Ghosh about the reception of ‘Third World Writers’ in the West, Ghosh replies that it has changed dramatically in the last fifteen years and he points out, “it is no longer possible for critics to sneer at our books or to dismiss them out of hand. I think this is due in large part to critics such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak” (Hawley 13). In spite of the fact that it has borrowed ideas from Marxism, poststructuralism and postmodernism, post colonialism is one of the powerful means of questioning the, hegemony, dominance and imposition.

Amitav Ghosh as a Postcolonialist

Amitav Ghosh is the most cosmopolitan of contemporary Indian English writers. In fact he doesn’t want to be categorized as a postcolonial writer, yet his works abound with several postcolonial concerns and attributes.

The major focus of postcolonialists is to dismantle the binaries and hierarchies. These are the constructions of the West to silence the Orient, to establish and perpetuate its hegemony over the ‘Other’. Ghosh also dismantles these divisions. The most pervasive element in Ghosh’s fiction is dismantling of the borders of nation-states and genres. Ghosh’s novels focus
on the arbitrary nature of national borders and shifting characteristics of the boundaries which separate one individual from another. The notion of nation-state has come under increasing strain. In one of the interviews conducted by John Hawley, Ghosh says that the arbitrariness and constructedness of borders has interested him very much and they are ‘naturalized’ by modern political myth making. Further he says “I distrust the lines that people draw between fiction and non-fiction. I think these lines are drawn in order to manipulate our ways of thought: that is why they must be disregarded” (9). He erases and re-draws the cultural and political lines that divide and unite people. Before writing a novel, Ghosh does a lot of research work; consequently he provides knowledge of many subjects. He blends with felicity anthropological, sociological, and historical and several other aspects in his novels. Tabish Khair observes “the fact that Amitav Ghosh has been able to move freely in his writing between anthropology, history and fiction is symptomatic of the extent to which traditional boundaries between those disciplines have broken down themselves” (13).

The major focus is exploring the impact of imperialism on the socio, economic, political, religious and cultural lives of the colonized countries. Ghosh’s novels delineate various dimensions of postcolonialism. For instance, the reviewers of the novel *The Circle of Reason* read it as an allegory about the destruction of traditional village life by the modernizing influx of Western culture and subsequent displacement of non-European people by imperialism. In spite of interweaving of certain historical events, the novel is more concerned with the British colonization of India. Through the character of Balaram Ghosh explores the continuing impact of the Raj’s educational policies on postcolonial India. Balram has made his mind a dumping ground for the West. His obsession with science and reason
destroyed his family. Throughout the novel Ghosh satirizes the so called scientific attitude and rationalism.

Like several postcolonialists Ghosh shares concern with and provides the space for or re-instates the unrecorded, subaltern, silenced, othered, voiceless or those who are overlooked by history and who are swallowed up by the powerful. In the interview with Hawley, Ghosh consents “I have been deeply influenced by the ideas of the subaltern studies group. I think I share some of the concerns of the Subaltern Studies group because I am from the same milieu as many of the group members” (12). Ghosh shows an abiding interest in marginalized and silenced individuals, for instance, Alu and series of characters in *The Circle of Reason*, a mysterious urchin living in an Indian railway station and a lab assistant Mangala in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, an obscure slave in and his master in *In An Antique Land*, an overlooked fisherman Fokir in *The Hungry Tide*, and an orphan Rajkumar in *The Glass Palace*. Ghosh says “my essential interest is in people and their lives, histories and predicaments” (Hawley 7).

Migration, dislocation or de-territorialization of culture and diaspora are also the major issues of post colonialism. Ghosh’s fiction is engaged with these issues. His *The Glass Palace* is considered as an elegy for the diasporic condition. In most of his novels the characters keep moving between more than two countries. Consequently, the resultant issues such as migration, mimicry, hybridity, ambivalence, alienation, sense of loss, unhomed, in-betweenness, plurality of identities and identity crises are significant matters in his fiction.

Irrational, uncivilized, incomprehensible, mystic, and lack of history are common colonial metaphors for colonized people. Ghosh deconstructs these binaries constituted to other the non-West and thereby he interrogates
the supremacy of the West and validity of these binaries. In *The Calcutta Chromosome* the subaltern Mangala and her team had discovered chromosome which causes malaria even before the British scientist Ross discovered it. Murugan says, “He (Ross) thinks he is doing experiment on the malaria parasite. And all the time it’s him who is the experiment on the malaria parasite” (*The Calcutta Chromosome* 78). Here Ghosh subverts the Western binaries and questions the authenticity of Western discourses. Most of his novels uphold magnanimity and humane concern of the ‘non-Western non-players’ and foreground the irrationality, barbarism, inhumanity and incomprehensibility of West.

Like postcolonial writers, Ghosh tries to rebuild Indian history through his novels. He says like many Indians I grew up on stories of other countries. But there are plenty of our own stories to be told. So, he incorporates many untold Indian stories, legends and myths in his novels. History is easily interwoven into the narrative framework Ghosh’s fiction and he attempts a comparative study of Asian and African, Indian and Egyptian, Jewish and Islamic cultures.

Ghosh’s novels are postcolonial thematically as well as in terms of technique. He breaks the traditional time and place unities. There are no barriers of time and space in his fiction. Ghosh uses time to maximum effect because past, present and future coalesce into one. He takes the readers through many parts of the world. The choice of narrator and point of view is an important element of fiction. Should the narrator be omniscient, limited omniscient, objective, first person etc. has to be debated and decided. Ghosh varies his choice of narrator in each of his novels. Today language exerts a pervasive control in Indian fiction in English. Ghosh uses the English language skillfully and artistically. He is free from the British way of using
English. He has restrictions of spelling, grammar, sentence-structure, etc. he twists and turns words and succeeds as Rushdie and Roy have done in making the English their own. The characterization in Ghosh’s fiction is vivid and picturesque. His characters range from orphan to king. His art of characterization and story telling is compared with that of Chaucer and Charles Dickens. John Hawley points out that the first and foremost overriding aspects that inform his works are “the stories and the Dickensian proliferation of characters whose lives engage us and who take us to some richly imagined places and times”(1). Ghosh employs, deliberately, effectively and meaningfully the postcolonial narrative devices such as, magic-realism, meta-fiction, mixed genres, subversion, chutnification, deconstruction, and story within the story as modes of interrogating, rejecting, resisting Western hegemony, rebuilding and reinstating non-West. This places Ghosh as one of the distinct postcolonial novelists in the contemporary context. A detailed study of the thematic concerns and narrative strategies in the select novels of Amitav Ghosh from the postcolonial perspective is undertaken in the following chapters.
Works Cited


