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How has post colonialism affected our perception in the novels “No Longer at Ease” by Chinua Achebe and “Samskara” by U.R Ananthamurthy ?

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Research Question- How has post colonialism affected our perception in the novels “No Longer at Ease” by Chinua Achebe and “Samskara”?

A study in post-colonialism is a highly enticing endeavor. In the modern society, postcolonial literature is largely underappreciated in contrast to the more opulent reception of the Victorian or Elizabethan era of literature. The truth is, even today, modern perceptions of many colonial nations are largely constructed by their colonial masters. There is certainly a bias due to the influence of Western Hegemony and its monopoly on global media. The Western world still possesses a tendency to discredit anything which does not conform to its democratic liberalist ideals without glancing at other local factors. In the modern world, while the last remnants of these wild stereotypes still exist, there have been successive waves of postcolonial writers who seek to rectify the stereotypes created by the Western World through its media. In the world of post-colonialism, African, Indian, and Caribbean authors have been the frontrunners in showcasing the adverse effects of the colonization with several threads running similar in authors such as Chinua Achebe, Raja Rao, and V. S Naipaul. Alongside these came a series of literary essays which critiques the colonial era books for its one sided Eurocentric bias. These essays have contested colonial themes like institutionalization, valorization of the English literary study and marginality. Particular secondary source authors I have referred to understand the gravity of post colonialism include Homi K Bhabha, V. S Naipaul, Edward Said, and Bill Ashcroft. For my preliminary research, I've chosen two divergent novels. The first novel "No Longer at Ease is

an emphatic widely appreciated work of Chinua Achebe in the field of post-colonial study. The second novel “Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man” is a translated work of a celebrated author- U. R Ananthamurthy. The portrayal of social degeneracy is thoroughly expounded upon in this translated Kannada novel. Its intent is its ire at Brahmins- “the bourgeoisie of colonial India”, a supposedly elite aristocratic austere community, exercising its hypocrisy by being extremely indulgent towards materialistic objects at a particularly inopportune time- the death of a man, and his final rites.

Ambivalence

A key concept of post-colonialism; ambivalence engages readers to the double feelings the Colonial masters have for their subjects. As Homi K Bhabha, a pioneer in the literary circle for his attention and discussion on the post-colonial attitude claims “The ... (colonial) moment relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence ”¹ in “The Location of Culture”. This can be seen evidently in “Samskara”, where the relation between the Brahmins, and the Non- Brahmins are viewed in a similar context. The Brahmins openly distance themselves from anything which resembles acting like a non Brahmin, yet there is a perpetual feeling of appreciation for their lifestyle, and

¹ Page 25, The Location of Culture, Homi K Bhabha, Routledge Publications

the freedom it brings them. It might have been due to the understanding that even while condescending on the lower social class, they are heavily dependent on the lower class to provide them with the social value they are recognized with.

Regarding austerity, ironically Pranesacharya, the only embodiment of honest moral scruples seemed to be the lone character unperturbed by interactions with the lower caste- Putta. Indeed, his mild irritation arises in the first place upon interacting with Putta, not due his disdain for social class but for the disturbing his solitude. This can be seen when it is quoted “Here is Putta, willing to involve himself in another's life for no reason at all. Who knows, what debts from what past life are being cleared this way? There seems to be no escaping this man's company. A creeper winding around one's feet. Who dare say one's life is one's own² ? ” This sense of double feeling, or ambivalence goes a long way in forming the character development of Pranesacharya and his own understanding of who he really is.

This ambivalence can be viewed in *No Longer at Ease* as well. As Homi K Bhabha, a critical theorist and a frontrunner in the post colonialist field claims in his essay “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse `”, “The menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of

² Page 120, *Samskara- A Rite for a Dead man*, Oxford University Press

colonial discourse also disrupts its authority. And it is a double-vision that is a result of what I've described as the partial representation/recognition of the colonial object.”³ Achebe showcases this double vision in *No Longer at Ease*. The Colonial masters still control much of the ministerial hierarchy, and their patronizing attitude stands in sharp contrast to the idea of governance. This patronizing can be seen when it is quoted “I cannot comprehend how a young man of your education and brilliant promise could have done this”⁴. The very claim sounds both ludicrous and assuming in its attitude of trying to understand Obi’s circumstances, without actually doing so. Even though Obi’s life seems luxurious in its outset, with a high paying job, and other amenities, Achebe shows us through the lens of Obi how he is financially faring, with particular emphasis on his moral scruples against corruption. Thus, the assuming line by Mr. Justice William Galloway strikes home in showing how patronizing the colonial attitude can be. In contrast, the racial bigotry that arrives with ambivalence can be seen in seen when Mr. Green, a highly educated government bureaucrat remarks “The fact that over countless centuries the African has been the victim of the worst climate in the world and of every imaginable disease. Hardly his fault. But he has been sapped mentally and physically. We have brought him Western education. But what at use is it to him?”

³ Page 129, *Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse*, Homi K Bhabha, MIT University Press Publication

⁴ Page 4, *No Longer at Ease*, Chinua Achebe

⁵ suggesting scorn and disdain. Here, Chinua Achebe shows the ambivalence shown by the Europeans in critiquing the natives in an unforgiving, biased, on sided manner. As Edward Said writes his critically acclaimed essay “On Orientalism”, on the biases of the Caucasian man “His travel notes and letters reveal a man scrupulously reporting events, persons, and settings, delighting in their bizarreries, never attempting to reduce the incongruities before him. In what he writes (or perhaps because he writes), the premium is on the eye-catching, translated into self-consciously worked-out phrases: for example, "Inscriptions and bird droppings are the only two things in Egypt that give any indication of life.” ” ⁶ He portrays the white man as a judgmental soul, looking to condemn in an ambivalent manner, anything which is not represented or representative of the European way of being. A fine example which Bhabha demonstrates in his essay is the example he draws of Macaulay on his opinions at native representation in the colonial government. He writes “ At the intersection of European learning and colonial power, Macaulay can conceive of nothing other than " a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern-a class of persons Indian in blood and color, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect”.” ⁷

⁵ Page 5, No Longer at Ease, Chinua Achebe, 1961

⁶ Page 184, On Orientalism, Edward Said.

⁷ Page 119, Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse, Homi K Bhabha, MIT University Press Publication

Obi's employment in the bureaucracy is exact example of the phenomena by Bhabha. Obi is employed in the government of an African country to govern its African people in a manner which would satisfy the colonialist. He is looked as the sole educated representative of the black in a black man's country and government.

Socio-Centric Bias

Another aspect of post-colonialism which is deeply embedded in the crux of both novels is socio-centric bias. With casteism in the very roots of Samskara, it is a fairly direct case. This can be seen in the bias against Muslims "corrupting" the agrahara. This is, in fact the very reason Naranappa could not be excommunicated from the agrahara. As mentioned "He threatened to become a Muslim ...If he had really become a Muslim no law could have thrown him out of the brahmin agrahara. We would have had to leave. Even Praneshacharya kept quiet then, his hands were tied too." Here it can be seen that there is a deep bias against Muslims and other low castes in the novel. Through Naranappa, UR Ananthamurthy breaks down the hypocrisy of the agrahara. With Naranappa acting as a foil to Praneshacharya, Naranappa breaks down the fundamentalist ideas (which only exist in principle) projected to be the rules of brahminism. UR. Ananthamurthy shows us to what extent the social degeneracy has sunk in within the depths of the agrahara through the lens of Naranappa.

T. Elliot writes this phenomena of the “aristocrats” trying to replace their colonial masters beautifully in the foreword of “No Longer at Ease” – “We returned to our places, these Kingdoms, But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation, With an alien people clutching our gods. I should be glad of another death.”⁸ In a comparable light, there are clear class strata present in “No Longer At Ease”. This can be seen in the reference that no decent restaurant would serve Nigerian food in Nigeria. “Do they serve Nigerian food here?’ Joseph was surprised at the question. No decent restaurant served Nigerian food”⁹. In a society with the post-colonial term, the “new rich”, trying to imitate their colonial masters, in an attempt ascertain the same social conditions, which their masters did, there was a communal shift in clothing, food and living style to match the colonials. This shows the extent to which social strata influences lifestyle. In a more detailed analysis, Obi despite being educated in the West, (maybe even perhaps because of it) does not feel the need to westernize to the same extent that an educated person in Nigeria would. In fact a particular example is the extent to which the rich change their behavior to suit the Western Hegemony, such as changing gastronomical tastes, and clothing, while essentially portraying the same thinking towards society as a hole.

⁸ Page 5, Foreword, No Longer at Ease, Chinua Achebe, 1961

⁹ Page 28, No Longer at Ease, Chinua Achebe, 1961

Even through Praneshacharya's death, we see the underlying traits of the other Brahmins in the agrahara. We see Dasacharya's gluttony, Garuda's jealousy, and the ladies' insatiable greed. This can be seen in the willingness with which the rites were heatedly contested after the gold was offered by Chandri. This can be seen in the manner, all the characters try to dissuade others from performing the rites, while not willing to do so themselves either. From the following lines, this can be seen- "The women calculated swiftly: that heap of gold was worth at least two thousand rupees. One after another, the wives scanned their husbands' faces. The brahmins bowed their heads: they were afraid, fearful that the lust for gold might destroy brahmin purity. But in the heart of every one of them flashed the question: if some other brahmin should perform the final rite for Naranappa, he might keep his brahminhood and yet put all that gold on his wife's neck."¹⁰ The condemning of brahminism is certainly deftly handled as the central theme in Samskara. Thus, as a whole, U. R. Ananthamurthy shows the deep stigma, and class stratification both an internalized implicit phenomena, and deeply sown, explicit social rules.

This could be viewed as the importance in carrying yourself as a colonial in developing postcolonial country. Obi often faces this problem due to his tendency of distancing himself from the norm. This can be seen when it is quoted

"Everybody was properly dressed in agbada or European suit except the guest of

¹⁰ Page 10, Samskara- A Rite for a Dead man, Oxford University Press

honour, who appeared in his shirtsleeves because of the heat. That was Obi's mistake Number One. Everybody expected a young man from England to be impressively turned out...(The Secretary's speech reception) Needless to say, this address was repeatedly interrupted by cheers and the clapping of hands. What a sharp young man their secretary was, all said. He deserved to go to England himself. He wrote the kind of English they admired if not understood: the kind that filled the mouth, like the proverbial dry meat.(Obi's speech) Obi's English, on the other hand, was most unimpressive. He spoke 'is' and 'was'. He told them about the value of education. 'Education for service, not for white-collar jobs and comfortable salaries. With our great country on the threshold of independence, we need men who are prepared to serve her well and truly.' When he sat down the audience clapped from politeness. Mistake Number Two.”¹¹

So, in accordance to Bill Ashcroft, this alienation, or “othering” is embedded as a cultural discourse, which is to say that this level of alienation is not solely an independent phenomena. It is a system actively encouraged by the colonizers to act as a bridge between the African masses, and the figure of respect. This can be seen explicitly when Obi is asked to stay at a hotel, and travel in a car, in an attempt by

¹¹ Page 26, No Longer at Ease, Chinua Achebe, 1961

the colonial government to distance himself from the people he is serving. More explicitly, this can be seen in the manner Naranappa threatens to downright destroy the social strata, such as dining with Muslims, and fishing from the holy pond; a threat which genuinely frightened most Brahmins because the alienation they promote would be torn ceaselessly. As Bill Ashcroft, author of the essay “The Empire Strikes Back quotes “The absurdity of this divided loyalty ... the uncertainty of spiritual location imposed by the distinction of centre and margin, is the characteristic of colonial alienation.”¹² Through Ashcroft’s definition, Praneshacharya looks as a character with mixed sense of conflicting loyalties for both his moral uprightness and the lifestyle around him, alienating him to a scholar well disconnected from society. In a personal conversation which I had with Bill Ashcroft, the author of “The Empire Writes Back”, he observes the following “No Longer at Ease is one of those Africa novels that registers the dashed hopes of colonised people who had thought independence would be their utopia. But independent nations simply occupied the colonial state borders and maintained the colonial hierarchies. This novel directs its ire at the post independence elites who continued corrupt policies of exploitation and inequality.

¹² Page 129, The Empire Writes back, Bill Ashcroft

Alienation is primarily seen in characters as a theme, rather than a particular section of the novel. Bluntly put, in Samskara, U. R Ananthamurthy looks at Praneshacharya and asks a very critical question. Who is Praneshacharya, if you remove his wisdom, moral dignity, and authority as the head of the agrahara? The themes of alienation forms the crux of the book in the latter half, with Praneshacharya trying to find the answer to the question through a series of interactions, met cognition and journeys. Through this journey, he realizes the invalidity of the temple precincts, especially considering the state of the priests. Perhaps due to his extended interaction with Putta, a Malera, (a half-cast) he comes to odd with the realization that austerity is not dependant on social class. He repeatedly alludes this to the reader, calling the Malera an innocent, inquisitive, pesky, busybody through multiple instances of the novel. After he loses in the austerity of the priests, he loses faith with the institution itself, going as far as to implore Putta to accompany him inside the temple.

Hegemony

In a similar manner, Praneshacharya showcases this hegemonical alienation as a transition phase. He enforces a certain authority in the Agrahara, since he considers it home. He enforces his authority in ensuring that every other character

in the Agrahara embodies his piousness and austerity. Likewise he enforces these ideals on both Mahaballa and Naranappa- his only real acquaintances. He tries with great force and conviction as can be seen on the quote.

“Then my heart hardened to stone...”Did you change your course on your own? What experience, what need, what craving moved you this way? What would you advise me now? Did woman and pleasure bring you every satisfaction? Could that aristocratic spirit of your be satisfied by a mere woman ?”

“Aha, now I know.’ Praneshacharya rose to his feet and started walking

Yes, that's the root of it. My disappointment with Mahabala remained with me. Unawares, I have seen Mahabala in Naranappa.”¹³

He explains this phenomena with great critical understanding. “To make up for my defeat there, I tried to win a victory here over Naranappa. But I was defeated, defeated-fell flat on my face. Whatever it was I fought all along, I turned into it myself. Why? Where, how, did I?” ¹⁴

Yet, the alienation felt by Pranescharya arises from his infatuation with Chandri and the inability of his to come to a decision regarding Naranappa’s last rites. He feels alienated from the fact that despite his knowledge, he is unable to solve the

¹³Page 84, Samskara- A Rite for a Dead man, Oxford University Press

¹⁴ Page 84, Samskara- A Rite for a Dead man, Oxford University Press

problem of the last rites. He becomes more disillusioned with every passing day, in his ability to reason. This alienation leads in him finding another path for himself. This central idea of Praneshacharya trying to find a path for himself acts as a key pillar stone of alienation in the novel.

As quoted by Bill Ashcroft during my personal interview “In Gramsci's definition hegemony is dominance by consent and such hegemonic practices were also continued by ruling elites in independent African states... Postcolonial studies investigates the engagement of colonized people with imperial power and this engagement begins from the moment of imperial invasion”¹⁵, cultural hegemony is a powerful phenomena where the ruling exerts its influence within society to make itself the norm. This can be seen in the manner the masses are in awe of the English language and the knowing of the “book”. This can be seen in *No Longer at Ease* where it is quoted “Of course those of you who know book will not have any difficulty,' said the Vice-President on Obi's left. Otherwise I would have suggested seeing some of the men beforehand”¹⁶

¹⁵ Received as an email- Can be found in the Appendix

¹⁶ Page 27, *No Longer at Ease*, Chinua Achebe, 1961

Likewise, in Samskara this effect is observed in quite some depth. Despite having been in a degenerate state, the Brahmins still controls the activities of the village through hegemony. Here we can see omnipresence in societal function as a means of exercising hegemonic dominance. Throughout the novel, we realize that a Brahmin needs to be in presence for a birthing ceremony, marriages and the like. Feeding the Brahmin is considered an auspicious common part of any event, and complete hospitality is leveled on the sheer idea that they are supposed to be pious men. In Samskara this can be seen in the following lines.

“The villager stood leaning against his buffalo and said ... 'There's a well here. I'll give you a pitcher. You can draw some water and take a bath. I'll give you rice and lentils, you can cook It on three bricks, and eat You must be tired, poor man.’”¹⁷

CONCLUSION

Post-colonialism has played a crucial role in the shaping out modern literature. Post-colonial literature represents an era where authors tried to clear out myths and wild stereotypical misinterpretations. Authors such as Edward Said have been extremely important in new field. Post-colonial writing has not been limited to

¹⁷ Page 94, Samskara- A Rite for a Dead man, Oxford University Press

novels and critical essays either. Poetry plays an equally important role in the shaping of the post-colonial world. Rita Joe- A first Nation Canadian's "I lost my talk" is particularly an example of this. The key theme revolves around how the British- in an attempt to reduce pride to their native tribe forcefully took them to Shubenacadie, where they grew up. Despite this, Rita Joe highlights how she has come to terms with not being a native any longer with the quote "You snatched it away: I speak like you, I think like you, I create like you." Finally she gives her hand of friendship in a very powerful manner where she implores the British to listen to the consequences, in their own language (" So gently I offer my hand and ask, :Let me find my talk, :So I can teach you about me.)¹⁸ I have found this to be the finest epitaph of post-colonialism. An interesting aspect is the manner in which, despite similar roots in post colonialism, the way African authors have diverged away from Indian ones. African authors have a far more distinct poetic oral history. In the field of post-colonialism, this has been reflected to a very large extent. Authors such as Nadine Gordimer and Aminatta Forma have created a niche for themselves in the field. With the language being highly symbolic, and terse, there is a contextual image of desolation felt in African authors. They have evolved their own distinct language, which stands quite apart from British English; an effort which Indian authors could not do to the same extent. Authors such as

¹⁸ I lost my Talk, Rita Joe

Raja Rao, and Mulk Raj Anand have largely tried to speak like to an Englishman, to an Englishman rather than creating their own genre. Post-colonialism in the recent era has come a long way as well. With much of the Indian authors not calling themselves post-colonial, their attitudes and works are still defined largely by post-colonial attitudes. In a personal conversation I shared with Bill Ashcroft, he explains “Salman Rushdie once disputed the term 'Commonwealth Literature' and no doubt would dispute post colonialism as well. But postcolonial does not refer to chronology or to a particular way of being, it is a way of reading and Rushdie's texts are eminently readable in postcolonial terms. Postcolonial studies investigates the engagement of colonized people with imperial power and this engagement begins from the moment of imperial invasion.”¹⁹. The purpose of this essay is to view the post colonial aspect of “Samskara” by U. R Ananthamurthy and “No Longer at Ease” by Chinua Achebe, and view its impact in literature.

(3753 words)

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¹⁹ Received as an email- Can be found in the Appendix

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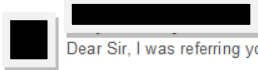
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Appendix

Image of the online conversation with Bill Ashcroft

Clarification on your work- "The Empire Writes Back" Inbox x



Sep 23, 2018, 3:37 PM ☆

Dear Sir, I was referring your work titled "The Empire Writes Back" as part of my Extended Essay, in IB. I was primarily comparing post colonialism and more spe



Bill Ashcroft <b.ashcroft@unsw.edu.au>

Sep 25, 2018, 5:13 PM ☆ ↩ ⋮

to me ▾

Dea

No Longer at Ease is one of those Africa novels that registers the dashed hopes of colonised people who had thought independence would be their utopia. But independent nations simply occupied the colonial state borders and maintained the colonial hierarchies. This novel directs its ire at the post independence elites who continued corrupt policies of exploitation and inequality.

In Gramsci's definition hegemony is dominance by consent and such hegemonic practices were also continued by ruling elites in independent African states.

Salman Rushdie once disputed the term 'Commonwealth Literature' and no doubt would dispute post colonialism as well. But postcolonial does not refer to chronology or to a particular way of being, it is a way of reading and Rushdie's texts are eminently readable in postcolonial terms. Postcolonial studies investigates the engagement of colonised people with imperial power and this engagement begins from the moment of imperial invasion.

I hope this helps

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