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Voice, Hybridity, and Representation: Reading Literature through Said, Spivak, and Bhabha

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Abstract:

This research paper employs the critical frameworks of Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and Edward Said to analyse the intricacies of voice, hybridity, and representation in postcolonial literature. The study examines the impact of colonial power structures on identity, voice, and self-representation in postcolonial societies through the analysis of significant texts, including *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys, *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy. Said's concept of Orientalism underscores how the West often denies the colonized the right to self-representation by depicting the conquered world as an exotic and inferior Other. Spivak's concept of the subaltern underscores the silencing of marginalized voices, particularly those of women and individuals from lower castes.

Keywords: Voice, Hybridity, Representation, Subaltern, Orientalism.

1. Introduction

Postcolonial literary studies have been shaped by the work of three pioneers: Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi K. Bhabha. Their theories still shape how literature talks about colonial history and politics of identity. Their research provides a robust framework for understanding how

literature simultaneously mirrors and contests colonial power dynamics. *Voice, hybridity, and representation* are important to their work because they help them look at how literature shows colonial and postcolonial people and whether these shows support or go against imperial ideology. *Voice* is an important topic in postcolonial literature that is often linked to power and agency. Gayatri Spivak asserts that understanding the mechanisms of representation in postcolonial texts necessitates an awareness of the subaltern's ability to articulate. Spivak asserts that the colonized, especially women and other marginalized groups, are often denied the opportunity to articulate their experiences inside dominant cultural narratives. Homi Bhabha's concept of *hybridity*, conversely, contests conventional notions of culture, race, and national identity by analyzing how colonial interactions generate mixed identities. Bhabha's *Third Space* thesis posits that hybrid identities serve as both sites of resistance and transformation, as well as products of colonialism. The power dynamics of colonization are intricately connected to representation in postcolonial literature. Western literature and study have long shown the East as an exotic, primitive "Other," in contrast to the logical, civilized West. Edward Said's *Orientalism* is a good example of this. Said's Orientalism theory elucidates how cultural depictions of non-Western nations as inferior and requiring Western intervention perpetuate colonial dominance. Nevertheless, postcolonial literature frequently interrogates and undermines these representations, offering alternative narratives of culture, history, and identity. This research will analyse the interplay of the theories of Said, Spivak, and Bhabha within the realm of postcolonial literature to enhance the understanding of *voice, hybridity, and representation*. This article will analyse the influence of colonial power structures on identity and the manner in which postcolonial authors navigate these dynamics in their works, utilizing theories applied to specific literary texts, including *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys, and *The God of Small Things* by

Arundhati Roy. This research posits that these writings illustrate how postcolonial subjects resist these representations through hybrid identities and alternative narrative approaches, while simultaneously revealing the mechanisms by which colonialism suppresses and distorts voice.

2. Literature Review

The three theoretical ideas that are essential to the study of postcolonial literature—*Orientalism* (Said), *Subalternity* (Spivak), and *Hybridity* (Bhabha)—will be covered in further detail in this section. Additionally, we will examine the connections between these theories and how they offer a framework for deciphering the intricacies of identity, representation, and voice in postcolonial writings.

2.1 Edward Said: Orientalism and Representation

Orientalism, written by Edward Said in 1978, transformed the discipline of postcolonial studies by analyzing how academic research and Western literature portrayed the East as an inferior and exotic "Other." Said's argument says that Orientalism is the way that the West shows the East as a strange, old, and exotic country. This depiction is entrenched in a power structure that upholds colonial supremacy and beyond mere cultural misinterpretation. Said said that Western speech made the East look like the reverse of the West. The East is known for being irrational, corrupt, and stuck in the past, whereas the West is known for being logical, making progress, and being civilized. This two-sided view not only justified imperialism, but it also had an effect on Western policy in the East. Said's theory of Orientalism shows how literature, research, and the arts made people think of the East as a weak and submissive place, which made the argument for colonial intervention stronger. Orientalism is a big part of postcolonial literature because it looks at how

colonial power shows itself in the way people see themselves. Said's theory allows for the examination of how imperialist ideologies were reinforced by the depictions of Eastern countries by colonial authors like Rudyard Kipling and Joseph Conrad. Said's writings offer postcolonial authors a foundation to challenge these representations by constructing counter-narratives that subvert Orientalist stereotypes and present a more authentic portrayal of the colonized individuals. Said's concept of Orientalism can be employed to analyse colonial literature and to understand the impact of literary representations on the broader cultural and political dynamics of empire. In reaction to this Orientalist discourse, authors in postcolonial literature often offer alternate perspectives that challenge the colonial gaze and depict the East (or the colonized) based on their own standards.

2.2 Gayatri Spivak: The Subaltern and the Question of Voice

In her seminal article "*Can the Subaltern Speak?*" (1988), Gayatri Spivak talks about the idea of the subaltern. This is a word she uses to describe the colonized people who are pushed to the edges and silenced by colonial and postcolonial power structures. Subalterns are socioeconomic groups whose opinions are ignored or muted in the dominant discourse, especially during colonial rule. Spivak's famous statement that the subaltern is silent means that the systems of power—colonial, patriarchal, or capitalist—stop the subaltern from speaking for themselves and sharing their own experiences. The colonial power imposes its own representation of the subaltern's identity, while the subaltern's inability to articulate within the prevailing power structures that dictate their existence effectively silences them. In this manner, the prevailing story conceals or supplants the voice of the subaltern. Spivak's notion of the subaltern is essential for postcolonial literary analysis as it underscores the absence of voice in colonial and postcolonial texts. Literature often depicts

the colonized as subjects of colonial discourse, portraying them as victims, stereotypes, or passive beneficiaries of Western culture, rather than as autonomous persons. Spivak's theory assists in our examination of how these representations are intentionally constructed within contexts of unequal power dynamics rather than being innocent misinterpretations. Spivak complicates this viewpoint by asserting that while the subaltern cannot articulate their thoughts directly, there are instances in which they can resist or create alternative modes of communication. Postcolonial writers often give voice to these marginalized people through subversive narrative forms that challenge colonial representations. To understand how postcolonial literature both reflects and contests dominant colonial notions, it is essential to enquire whether the subaltern can articulate their voice.

2.3 Homi Bhabha: Hybridity, Mimicry, and the Third Space

Homi Bhabha's work on mimicry and hybridity provides a framework for examining identity development in postcolonial contexts. In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha asserts that colonialism creates a place for cultural negotiation, wherein both the colonizer and the colonized are influenced by their interactions, rather than merely enforcing a unilateral system of rule. This interaction creates hybrid identities, which are identities that come from mixing cultural influences instead than being completely indigenous or colonial. Bhabha's theory of hybridity posits that colonial subjects modify and reproduce the colonizer's culture in ways that contest its original meanings, rather than merely imitating it. So, hybridity is a kind of resistance because it shows how fake colonial power institutions are and how they undermine established cultural identities. Hybridity serves as a paradigm for agency in postcolonial literature, wherein the colonized subject actively negotiates and transforms their colonial identities instead of passively acquiescing to them.

Bhabha's theory is based on the idea of the Third Space, which is the space where hybrid identities are formed. In the Third Space, which is a space of resistance and change, new cultural meanings might emerge that are neither solely colonial or indigenous. This concept is crucial for understanding how postcolonial authors depict identity as a dynamic and fluid process rather than a fixed notion. Bhabha's ideas about hybridity and the Third Space give us a good way to look at how postcolonial literature deals with the problems of identity. Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* are two examples of novels that highlight how characters have trouble figuring out where they fit in a society that has been affected by colonial history and how hybrid identities form after colonial encounters.

3. Close Reading and Analysis of Literary Texts

3.1.1 Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*: Voice and Representation in the Colonial Encounter

Things Fall Apart (1958) is about Okonkwo, a renowned leader in the Igbo town of Umuofia in Nigeria during the colonial era. The book tells the story of Okonkwo's life, which goes up and down, just like the Igbo society that was falling apart because of British colonization and Christian missionary work.

3.1.2 Application of Said's *Orientalism* and Voice

Said's thesis of Orientalism examines how the West depicts the East (or the "Other") as strange, primitive, and requiring Western intervention. Achebe's writing takes place in Africa, but Said's concepts about representation may be used to talk about how colonial discourse changes how people see indigenous societies in general. *Things Fall Apart* shows the Igbo civilization as

complicated, advanced, and able to support itself, which is very different from how prior Western works showed them. The presence of missionaries and colonial forces upsets this balance. This shows how colonial powers push a false and harmful story of "civilization." Achebe's story goes against colonial views by giving a deep, multi-faceted picture of Igbo culture and its many layers. Okonkwo, as the main character, shows how strong and weak traditional Igbo values may be. Achebe uses the story of Okonkwo to fight against colonial assumptions that say African societies are naturally primitive or uncivilized. Achebe's story about the advent of colonial missionaries shows this very well. He doesn't see them as a civilizing force, but as an imposition that destroys a thriving culture.

3.1.3 Application of Spivak's Subaltern

Spivak's theory of the subaltern is also important here, especially when it comes to the voices of groups that are not heard. The missionaries in *Things Fall Apart* are a voice that purposefully silences the voices of the people who live there. Achebe uses Nwoye, Okonkwo's son, to highlight how colonialism takes advantage of existing social and cultural divides in Igbo society to promote conversion to Christianity as a way to keep people in line. The book also shows how the subaltern, in this example, the indigenous Igbo people, react to colonization. As a character, Nwoye is a mix of old and new ideas. He is lured to Christianity because it offers a way out of his father's harsh reality. His conversion, however, is not an act of total submission; rather, it is a complex type of resistance, indicating that there are opportunities for agency even in the context of colonial domination.

3.1.4 Application of Bhabha's Hybridity and the Third Space

Bhabha's theory of hybridity and the Third Space provides a valuable framework for analyzing the cultural negotiations present in *Things Fall Apart*. When the missionaries come, they establish a mixed cultural area where Igbo beliefs and Western Christianity are put next to each other. The connection between these two cultures offers a space where new, mixed identities might grow. For example, Nwoye's struggle to balance his father's traditional values with his new faith. This conflict is a cultural clash that both accepts and fights against colonial influence. In the last chapters of the book, Okonkwo's sad end shows how traditional ways of doing things failed in the face of colonialism. Achebe's use of a tragic hero, on the other hand, shows how strong indigenous traditions are and how colonial rule doesn't completely take away the voice and power of the people who were colonized.

3.2.1. Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*: Subaltern Voices and the Colonial Legacy

Jean Rhys wrote *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) as a precursor to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. It depicts the narrative of Antoinette Cosway, a young Creole woman who grew up in Jamaica after slavery ended. Antoinette is stuck between her European roots and the Caribbean's cultural elements. As her marriage to Mr. Rochester (the future "madwoman in the attic") falls apart, she feels more and more alone. This shows how race, gender, and colonialism all work together to silence her.

3.2.2 Application of Spivak's Subaltern

Spivak's notion of the subaltern offers a robust framework for examining Antoinette's suppression in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Antoinette's internal conflict regarding her identity as a Creole woman epitomizes the voice of the subaltern, which is marginalized within colonial and patriarchal power

structures. Antoinette is seen as too European and not authentically Caribbean by both the colonizers and her own people throughout the book. Her feeling of being out of place and alone grows stronger because she can't fully fit into either culture. Spivak's concept of the subaltern woman is especially pertinent to Antoinette's experience. She is stuck between places of power that are based on race and gender, which stops her from saying what she wants and what she wants to do. Her ultimate insanity serves as a metaphor for the brutality inherent in colonialism and patriarchy, as the female, subaltern body is silenced both literally and figuratively.

3.2.3 Application of Said's *Orientalism* and Representation

Rhys' novel also deals with Said's idea of representation. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette's Creole identity serves as the lens through which colonial and patriarchal power delineates otherness, paralleling the construction of the colonized as the Other in Orientalism. Her insanity is depicted as the final collapse of identity, propelled by the conflict between colonial pressure and her yearning for independence. Rhys challenges the way colonial power tries to define and limit the identity of the people who are colonized in this way.

3.2.4 Application of Bhabha's Hybridity

Bhabha's concept of hybridity is essential for comprehending the conflict within Antoinette's identity. She represents a mixed identity, being neither entirely as European nor as Caribbean, but rather traversing the interstitial realms of these identities. The book shows how postcolonial people are stuck between two cultures and can't truly belong to either one. This double identity makes Antoinette feel like an outsider all the time, both in the colonial system and in her own mind. Her estrangement serves as a sort of resistance against the colonial imposition of rigid identities, compelling her to assert her voice in a reality that fails to recognize her subjectivity.

3.3.1. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*: Voice, Hybridity, and Historical Memory

The God of Small Things (1997) is a complicated story that takes place in India after colonialism. The book is about Ammu and her twin kids, Estha and Rahel, and how they deal with caste, colonialism, and love that is not allowed. The book looks at memory, family, and social structure in a postcolonial setting.

3.3.2 Application of Said's *Orientalism* and Representation

In *The God of Small Things*, the characters' identities and experiences are greatly affected by how colonialism is portrayed and what happened after British rule. The legacy of colonialism is seen in the caste structure, the religious division, and the cultural assimilation that characterize Indian culture. Roy criticizes how these colonial legacies still shape how marginalized groups are represented. For example, she points out how Ammu's forbidden love affair with Velutha, a lower-caste man, is the focus of society judgement. Through this story, Roy shows how colonial power still affects social hierarchies and the silencing of subaltern voices.

3.3.3 Application of Spivak's Subaltern

In *The God of Small Things*, Velutha and Ammu are examples of the subaltern, who are not allowed to speak. Because Velutha is from a lesser caste, he can't speak for himself or be part of the story of power. The caste structure and the cultural rules of colonialism keep him from loving Ammu.

4. Colonial and Postcolonial identities

The close readings of *Things Fall Apart*, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and *The God of Small Things* emphasize the convergence of voice, hybridity, and representation in postcolonial literature. Each

book, through its distinct narrative and background, addresses the intricacies of colonial and postcolonial identities, illustrating the resilience of the subaltern and the innovative resistance presented by hybridized, liminal figures.

5. Voice and Subalternity in Postcolonial Literature

A significant result in this analysis is the substantial role of voice in postcolonial literature, especially regarding colonial silencing. Spivak's idea of the subaltern elucidates the frequent denial of voice to colonized subjects inside the prevailing discourse. In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo's fight against colonialism is both an external and an internal one. He is fighting against the fall of a society that used to provide him power and authority. Colonial power not only silences Okonkwo but also the whole Igbo community. When the missionaries come, they erase the voices of the Igbo people by replacing their spiritual and cultural practices with Western ideas of Christianity and civilization. Achebe's work shows how colonialism systematically silences the voices of the colonized and makes them adopt a foreign language and way of seeing the world in order to express their identities. Antoinette's isolation in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, both in the colonial system and in her own family, highlights the subaltern's quiet. Her difficulties as a Creole woman exemplify Spivak's assertion that the subaltern is rendered voiceless, or when they do articulate, their expressions are frequently misconstrued or disregarded. Rhys offers a strong criticism of the psychological effects of colonialism and patriarchy on the subaltern woman through Antoinette's journey into madness. Her incapacity to establish herself against colonial and gendered power structures illustrates the complexity of identity in postcolonial situations. In *The God of Small Things*, Ammu and Velutha are examples of Spivak's idea of the subaltern because they both suffer from the effects of caste and colonialism. The tragic death of Velutha and the eventual exile of Ammu illustrate the ongoing

suppression of marginalized voices by colonial and societal systems. Roy's story, on the other hand, demonstrates how these people who have been silenced fight back by taking back space through the story's broken structure. The work illustrates the contradiction between the personal and the political in postcolonial identities, showing that the voices of the oppressed are not completely silenced but continue to exist in subversive ways.

6. Hybridity and the Third Space: Negotiating Identity

Bhabha's theories of hybridity and the Third Space provide a valuable framework for analyzing the intricacies of identity construction in postcolonial writings. In each of the novels examined, the protagonists grapple with their position in a postcolonial context characterized by cultural conflict and tension. Hybridity is not solely the amalgamation of cultures; it pertains to the formation of new identities that emerge in the interstitial areas between colonial and indigenous norms.

In *Things Fall Apart*, colonial control creates a third space where persons like Nwoye are pulled between the traditional Igbo values and the appeal of Christianity. Nwoye's final conversion signifies a forfeiture of cultural identity and an endeavor to forge a new identity within a colonial context. Nevertheless, this act of hybridity is not solely an act of submission; it signifies agency within a colonial framework and underscores the intricacy of identity during colonial oppression. Antoinette's conflict with her Creole identity in *Wide Sargasso Sea* exemplifies the Third Space. She has an identity that is not completely European or Caribbean, therefore she feels like she doesn't belong to either world. Antoinette's persistent struggle with her identity, which changes between the two cultures she can't fully belong to, shows Bhabha's Third Space. Her mixed identity is a place where she has power and is also silenced, which makes it hard for her to fully assert her

independence. Her tragic destiny—her ultimate insanity—serves as a symbol for the psychological fragmentation induced by colonialism's detrimental effects on mixed identities. *The God of Small Things* shows how the characters' relationships are affected by the conflict between their native identity and the influence of Western culture. Ammu's love for Velutha, a man from a lower caste, shows how relationships in postcolonial times are mixed, with social and ethnic lines crossing in a forbidden love. The book says that the hybrid person in postcolonial India is stuck between the old colonial system (the caste system in this example) and the new social realities of postcolonial India. Roy uses the sad story of Ammu and Velutha to criticize the way colonial systems still exist in Indian culture and to show how postcolonial identities are always changing.

7. Representation and the Persistence of Colonial Power

The research also shows that all three texts are mostly about representation. Said's idea of Orientalism is a useful method to explain how the colonizer sees the colonized and how these images are questioned or turned on their heads in postcolonial literature. Achebe employs the Western literary canon in *Things Fall Apart* to recover African identity and counter Orientalist stereotypes. Achebe subverts the colonial perspective by depicting the depth and complexity of Igbo society, thereby resisting the simplification of the Igbo people as the savage Other. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, on the other hand, Rhys breaks down Brontë's imperialist view of the "madwoman" in *Jane Eyre* and reimagines her as a complicated, tragic character whose fate is a direct result of colonialism and patriarchy. In *The God of Small Things*, Roy criticizes how colonialism still affects India after it has become independent, especially in how caste and religion still affect people's identities. The caste system, a legacy of colonialism, exemplifies enduring power structures that

silence specific voices. Roy uses the sad story of Ammu and Velutha to show how colonialism's effects are still very much a part of the social fabric of postcolonial cultures.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research has examined how the theories of Said, Spivak, and Bhabha yield significant insights into the dynamics of voice, hybridity, and representation in postcolonial literature. By examining Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, we have elucidated the influence of colonial power structures on identity, voice, and representation, while also emphasizing the methods by which postcolonial authors contest and undermine these frameworks. Said's Orientalism elucidates the portrayal of the colonized as the exotic, regressive Other within colonial discourses, while postcolonial literature subverts these depictions by reclaiming voice and expressing the agency of marginalized individuals. Spivak's subaltern theory emphasizes the marginalization of the colonized, particularly women, and stresses the necessity of amplifying the voices of the subaltern in literature. Bhabha's concept of hybridity provides a framework for comprehending how postcolonial individuals traverse the liminal areas between colonial and indigenous cultures, thereby forging new, hybrid identities that challenge rigid definitions of belonging. In the end, the postcolonial writings spoken about in this study show that colonial legacies still affect the identities of the colonized, but these identities are not fixed. The protagonists in these works resist, adapt, and evolve in ways that show how cultural, social, and political power is still being fought over in the postcolonial globe. Examining these texts through the framework of postcolonial theory enhances our comprehension of the intricacies of identity, voice, and representation in the postcolonial context.

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