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CONTRAPUNTAL READING OF POST-COLONIAL AND GLOBALECTICAL ELEMENTS IN THE WORKS OF ELEVEN EMINENT AUTHORS

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ABSTRACT

Post-colonialism as a branch of epistemology, politics and ethics addresses the problem of submergence and loss of identity, individuality and distinctiveness of the colonized 'other' and his gradual acquiescence of the values of the colonizers by treating them as superior to his own and it also tries to provide some space and voice to the marginalized other or the subaltern. Globalectics is essentially concerned with the relation, tension, connection and perception that exist among different cultures and how they interact with each other and how they are related to the centre and how the apparent attire of the entire world affairs and international politics is shaped by the invisible, internal dynamics of the dialectical. Now a contrapuntal reading is a particular way of reading the texts by which the reader or interpreter is advised not to grant any privilege to any particular voice and that he should not treat different voices as unrelated to one another but rather see them as indispensable and complimentary to each other and thus treat them as part of something much larger than what each of these diverse elements unique and enriched in their own individual way can encompass. In this paper by analyzing the texts and writings of these eleven outstanding and eminent authors, namely Achebe, Gordimer, Soyinka, Thiongo, Coetzee, Ondaatze, Salman Rushdie, Patrick White, Margaret Atwood, V.S.Naipaul, and Amitv Ghosh we will be dealing with the issue of transition from and overlapping of post-colonialism and globalectics as two separate but mutually reinforcing spheres of study whose full power can be harnessed only by adopting a contrapuntal reading. The chief aim of this study is to bring forth and assemble different voices, identities, and entities and to place them before the reader so as to help him interpret these voices and themes from his own personal standpoint or centre.

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INTRODUCTION

Man's quest for the one and absolute truth which will serve as the centre for all his questions, answers, visions, revisions, doubts, discourse, thesis and hypothesis has led him to formulate new ways, discover new methods, and innovate new process in hope of using them as rungs for the one great ladder

which will take him to that elusive centre of impeccable knowledge. That centre or fountainhead of all knowledge should be an all encompassing and all-transcending and completely independent entity which can serve as the basis of all meanings and but while one is on his way of reaching that he is still not free of the imperfect egoistic assumptions and

perceptions of superiority about one's own culture, knowledge, philosophy, race etc. These assumptions often make the quest for that ultimate truth an impossible journey and it is for making this journey smooth and free of unwanted distractions that one should adopt different viewpoints of analyzing works belonging to different authors, cultures, countries and continents to make certain hitherto unexplored voices, implications, subtexts and imageries more prominent before the present generation. Post-colonialism is one such peculiar viewpoint or lens which helps one to explore and elucidate countless numbers of suppressed or submerged voices hidden beneath or woven within the fabric of works of some of the most revered writers and artists belonging to different ages. There are still some whose works have prominent or explicit elements of post-coloniality and whose works are intended to inspire the reader to actually uncover the truths of the works by using the post-colonial viewpoint as the basis of all his perceptions. Thus the dominant western-oriented or all-white discourse can be overthrown and the suppressed subaltern and the marginalized can assume control over the defining power of almost the entire narrative.

Chinua Achebe, V. S. Naipaul and J. M. Coetzee these Post-colonial writers have all dealt with Africa in their own individual and unique ways. Achebe does not treat the African culture and ways of life as something hybrid, complex, dependant for its significance on the Western style of perceiving things or neither has he shown Africa to be existing only in relation to its difference from or consonance with the Western form of religion, culture, identity, and discourse. The major theme of the novel 'Things Fall Apart' centers around the destruction of Africa's intricate, almost incomprehensible but unique way of life and culture in the wake of British colonization and forced or maneuvered conversion to Christianity. The administrative as well as religious changes that the British tries to impose upon the native Africans has the disastrous effects of uprooting the indigenous people from their original root and tradition and can be seen as some instruments of subjugation, subordination and subservience which starts with creating distrust,

doubts and insecurity in the minds of people for their Igbo tradition, and its cultural and religious practices and ends with making them internalize the Christian way of life and British administrative apparatuses. Another theme that is explored in this novel is the inherent fault of the central character Okonkwo, who is ambitious, industrious, honest, masculine but is rash, and unthinking and his sense of self and identity is wholly dependent on the approval of others in his community and he thinks of anything that intrudes into it as a threat and he tries hard to be a man though in a flawed manner. His sense of attaining masculinity is fuelled by an indomitable desire to rise above his father's spendthrift, lazy, ineffectual and effeminate character and he associates violence, haughtiness, and aggression as the only set of emotions to be displayed for expressing true masculinity. He beats his wives and threatens to kill women. Okonkwo behaves impetuously and rashly and kills his surrogate son with a machete only to appear strong and masculine. In the end by refusing to desert the traditional ideals, and values and by resisting against the dominant force of western intrusion he embraces his own death in a glorious and remarkable manner. The entire society and people belonging to Igbo tradition have been brought up based on an unquestioned acceptance of traditional values and customs and its stereotyped gender role and once that very basis of society gets attacked by colonialism the entire structure becomes susceptible to a great collapse as all its constituent members start getting transformed into divisive elements.

Naipaul on the other hand stands like an outsider with an Orientalist approach and self-consciously reinforces some sort of Bourgeoisie mode of discourse. V.S. Naipaul in his works has depicted the problems of alienation, identity crisis, exile, fragmentation that have emerged as a result of transition from Colonialism to independent nation. Though colonialism has become history and previously colonized nations have become independent but still the lack of rootedness, a sense of oneness of self with the society and one's surroundings, the feeling of connectedness and the pleasure of pursuing a purposeful balanced life have

often eluded the grasp of many people whose past has been subject to intense colonial pressure of fragmentation and destabilization. Cultural colonization has also affected the psyche and soul of the colonized people very badly. V.S. Naipaul as an observer of the problem of ex-colonies has from time to time pointed out the inadequacies that the societal set up of these newly found colonies generally entail. In his novels, *The Mimic Men*, *Guerrillas*, *A Bend in the River*, *In a Free State* etc., as a master artist in post-coloniality he has endowed the themes of alienation, separation, anxiety and exile with an universal human interest. His novels mainly focus upon the problems of post-colonial and post-imperial societies in the Third World countries.

Wole Soyinka through different genres namely drama, essay, poems, novels and autobiographies has explored the struggles, conflicts and predicaments of the entire African continent. Soyinka's own life is full of several remarkable incidents and intrigues and they often overlap with his own works and memoirs and reflect a simultaneous evolution of both his personal and authorial self. Soyinka in his writings has adopted the viewpoint of a native African and though he has strongly reacted against the movement of 'Negritude' which aims to establish African culture and racial identity of the black people as something much different from that of West in much of his writings he has in fact taken recourse to African myths and Yoruba culture. In 'The Pantheon' and 'Myth, Literature and The African World' Soyinka exudes his pride in African culture as he tries to explain the creation of universe by Yoruban gods and Orgun, the King of Yoruban gods. In his play *Death and the King's Horseman*, Soyinka has presented the interaction among three worlds – the world of the living, the world of the dead, and the world of the unborn and this has its roots in Yoruba worldview or Yoruba cosmology. The play does not merely depict a clash of cultures; neither is it a case study of white colonialists interfering with the Yoruba culture. Rather the actions of Elesin has cosmic significance and when he has allowed himself to get distracted by the beautiful virgin woman and thus fails to perform his duty after the

death of King it is made clear that the entire world order will suffer as a result of his actions. Even the suicide of Elesin after seeing his son's death cannot compensate for loss that his earlier actions have brought upon the community as the bond has irreparably been severed. It is shown that though the whites often intrude upon and invade in the workings the overall cosmic order can never be made impure with the tentacles of imperialism or colonialism. This is the type of globalectics that Ngugi wa Thiong'o has elaborated in his writings - a quest for regaining an ultimate centre for formulating one's personal worldview.

J. M. Coetzee on the other hand denounces any authorial point of view and he wants to provide the text and words of a writing a completely autonomous identity. He wants the reader to assume the control over the acts interpreting and reinventing meanings of a text and does not want the author to be the ultimate, one and the absolute authority in fixing and determining the value of a particular work. In *Foe* Susan Barton starts questioning the role of narrator, the role of Robinson Crusoe, the predicament of Friday in the grander scheme of things when her plight, she believes will be written by Mr. Daniel Foe. Here Susan Barton tries to emphasize on truth which she wants to be preserved in the writings of Mr. Foe and she does not want herself to be subjected to exaggeration or embellishment or elimination. Susan's attempts to give voice to herself and her history and also to the silenced Friday underlines the postcolonial struggle of finding voice for the marginalized, the oppressed and the "otherised" people. Coetzee in his writings have explored the timeless struggles of the binaries like the dominant and the dominated and he also expresses his belief that language can given be an autonomous identity if the author renounces his position of determining and controlling everything that comes from his pen.

Another writer Margaret Atwood is also preoccupied with exploring certain types of binary opposition or conflict in her poetry. She sees the conflict between civilization and savagery as an endless, eternal and everlasting struggle. The civilization is like the colonizer, the master always trying to restrain every natural powerful impulse to

bring it under the control of certain codified rules, laws and regulations which symbolize the ordered civilization. The force of wilderness on the other hand always tries to break free to express itself in a manner which is always incomprehensible to the civilized authority. She also expresses the man-woman struggle and conflict as the female body in her poetry from time to time has been depicted as some sort of theatre where all acts of violence and atrocity are committed by men. The female body has her own distinctive aura of sensuality, creativity, continuity and fluency which the men often tries to entrap and capture and then try to make her an subservient, weak and passive being. In *The Edible Woman* make the protagonist and the first person narrator during Part One and Part Three of the novel Marian MacAlpin's refusal to eat coincides with her refusal to get drawn into the patriarchal society's attempts to draw, delimit and define a woman by robbing her of her essential feminine virtues and independent self. She equates the act of eating meat to that of society's process of ingestion, digestion and assimilation of essential feminine parts.

Patrick White has dealt with Australian landscape and life by bestowing them with a subtle metaphysical, mythical and grand aura thus transforming the course of the nation's usual literary practices which was till then based upon egoistic elaboration of nationalism, realism and materialism. In his work *Voss* Patrick White has rendered the desert or the continent to a mythical being and a journey through this terrain becomes a symbolic and spiritual voyage enabling the characters to gain a deeper, more profound and accurate insights into their own souls. Johann Ulrich Voss and Laura Trevelyan through suffering and humility achieve a mystical union of their souls thus reinforcing the Christian ideals of achieving redemption from worldly sins by means of selfless, penance and suffering. In his novel *The Tree of Man* Patrick White celebrates the resilience and endurance of Stan Parker and his wife Amy when they struggle hard to establish and maintain a home and family for themselves in a remote scrubby patch of terrain in Australia. Thus he is postcolonial in his attempts to portray Australia as something different from what

most other European masters have made it appeared to be.

Salman Rushdie's novels often reveal the tension and pain resulting from loss of identity in a tragic-comic manner which has resulted from faults and ineptitudes of political, social and religious system of post-colonial world. Cultures, races, religions have become mixed, impure and diluted as a result of many political, and social upheavals and religious intolerance or bigotry. His novel *Midnight's Children* depicts the dilemma that the midnight-born children namely Saleem, Shiva, and Parvati have to face. This hour marks the beginning of post-colonial era when India and Pakistan were reborn after shaking away some 200 years old shackles of repression, oppression and humiliating servitude. Their lives get intertwined with some very momentous political events which influence the world in general and as a result their lives are often filled with echoes of modern history and the children often feel overwhelmed with burden of their births. Each of these children embody not only the unifying forces that hold a diverse country like India together but also the undercurrents of differences and discord that can tear it apart. He is also the author against whom a 'fatwa' (death warrant) was issued for his novel *The Satanic Verses* where he allegedly has portrayed Prophet Muhammad irreverently.

Michael Ondaatje is another writer who struggles between the trends of postmodernism and post-colonialism and attempts to 'recast history as a redefinable present rather than an irrevocably interpreted past'. He in *In The Skin of A Lion* tries to reconstruct history as something which can be recast to fit in the present. He uses Toronto to enact his reconstructed history. He re-evaluates history, analyzes the power struggle between the centre and the marginalized and explores the power of language and its use or abuse as a tool of dominance and control. To him there is no one fully true grand narrative in history, it can be and should be interpreted from different angles to form a parallel reality or alternative unofficial history which can serve as a backdrop against which a novel can be written. In *The English Patient* he tries to depict the struggle which an individual faces when he tries to

cope with the extremely unforgiving realities by creating for himself any alternate identity. But in moments of urgency like in wartime the nation will force the individual to value his national identity as the most valuable thing above everything else. In this novel the intense love between Almásy and Katharine hold the power to transcend everything and it often appears that time and place have no particular relevance to intensely felt passions and strongly bound human connections. But there will always be attempts from colonial powers to uproot and exterminate all human attempts to form true connections as is symbolized in United States' dropping bombs upon Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Italian Villa symbolizes both birth and death as the war destroys it but nature tries her best to rebuild it by refilling its holes. Also Ondaatje in his novel *In The Skin of A Lion* structurally follows a conspicuous post-modernist trend as he rejects the traditional Aristotelian linear narrative form in favor of a more non-linear back and forth mode. He uses many images, juxtaposes many voices, re-organizes time for storytelling. Thematically as he tries to focus on the problems of the immigrants and their native culture, ideals and value system he is clearly following a post-colonial trend.

Amitav Ghosh's novels are interlaced with themes of post-colonialism and Indo-nostalgia. His *The Glass Palace* recounts the stories of struggles that have made India, Burma and Malay as they are today and it centres around the protagonist Raj Kumar who during 1885 British invasion of Burma is forced to embrace exile. But his quest for Dolly even years after he has become rich and established is his quest for centre which has shaped his life. In *The Sea of Poppies* Amitav Ghosh narrates the adventures of a motley crew on a huge ship across Indian Ocean as they are going to join in the Opium Wars in China. In the time of intense upheaval the fates of the passengers on the ship are woven together and from this intertwining of fates a new history and a new generation will be born which will span across continents and oceans. The novel has as its characters Deeti, a simple, pious village woman fleeing from the threats of her brother-in-law along with Kalua who rescued her from 'sati' but was sent to the ship *Ibis* along with Deeti as a result of a

punishment for fleeing with her, an American sailor with an ancestry of mixed race named Zachary Reid, an Indian rajah / zamindar called Neel Rattan Halder who is also forced to serve as indentured laborer on the ship as a result of his refusal to sell off his ancestral properties and zamindari to Mr. Burnham, Paulette, a French orphan who is fleeing from Mr. Burnham to Mauritius in search of a better future and Benjamin Burnham, an evangelist opium trader.

The works of Nadine Gordimer deals with "moral and psychological tensions of her racially divided home country." She explores and questions existing power relations and their truth, the meaning of truth, the effect of politics on the lives of common people, their moral dilemmas, ambiguities and choices etc. She deals with the racial and cultural tension and tussle between love and politics as prevalent in South Africa very masterfully. As is evident in *July's People* she explores in a breathtaking manner the predicament of the people when terrible choices are forced upon them by violence. Here it is shown how the traditional system of apartheid has been overturned and the hunted becomes the hunter as the blacks have risen against the whites. Maureen and Bamford Smales, an educated white couple are shown to be trying to survive in the wake of the fictional civil war with help of their long-time maidservant July.

THEMES OF POST-COLONIALITY, GLOBALETICS AND CONTRAPUNTAL READING

According to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, "Reading globally is a way of approaching any text from whatever times and places to allow its content and themes form a free conversation with other texts of one's time and place, the better to make it yield its maximum to the human. It is to allow it to speak to our own cultural present even as we speak to it from our own cultural present. It is to read the text with the eyes of the world; it is to see the world with the eyes of the text." What he wanted is to study literature in way in a way which will make sense to a reader and this can be done only by starting the storytelling based on the works of one's own culture instead of following blindly the white European masters of classics whom we take to be the cornerstone of greatness. Postcolonial world and its horizons according to him are to be broadened.

Thus postcoloniality and globalectics are two themes interconnected with and interdependent upon each other. Globalectics tries to record the complex interpenetration of diverse cultural, social, political, socio-economic segments of world culture where each of these elements should be provided with an opportunity to discover their own relation to centre of a narrative and this centre too varies according to the viewpoint of the interpreter. Following the lines of thought of Edward Said a contrapuntal reading is necessary to fully harness the power of globalectic approach as a contrapuntal reading renounces any dominant or singularly complete mode of narration rather it accepts multifariousness of voices and the importance of providing platform to many intertwined, overlapping and embedded segments of history for reorganizing and reviving the suppressed history of the marginalized and the subaltern along with those of the metropolitans and the elites.

Okonkwo in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Elesin in Soyinka's *Death and The King's Horseman*, Susan Barton in Coetzee's *Foe*, Marian McAlpin in Atwood's *The Edible Woman*, Saleem Sinai in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Mohun Biswas in V.S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr Biswas*, Johann Ulrich Voss in Patrick White's *Voss*, Almásy in Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, Raj Kumar in Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* and Deeti, Zachary Reid and Neel Rattan Halder in Ghosh's *The Sea of Poppies* are such characters who encapsulate essentially the entire spirit of globalectics in effectively performing their role as nodes or points of intersection and interpenetration in the complex web of nations, cultures and people in the text, in their spirited search for stability, meaning and purpose in life and in embodying the crux of many parallel, intermeshed and embedded sets of history. They stand as upholders of certain long-cherished value system based on the traditional ideals and champions of human dignity bravely posing resistance against even the most relentless onslaughts from forces of modernization, dehumanization and massive westernization. Their struggles in some way or other are often related to that of entire human history and in this way their individual turmoil, turbulence and traumas are often

connected to a larger scheme of things from whose fabric a new vision, a new future and a new world order can emerge. Characters like Amusa, Joseph, Simon, Jane in Soyinka's *Death and The King's Horseman*; Reverend James Smith, The District Commissioner and Enoch in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*; Peter Wollander in Atwood's *The Edible Woman*; Mr. Burnham in Amitav Ghosh's *The Sea of Poppies*; Mr. Daniel Foe in Coetzee's *Foe*; Shama and her overbearing family in Naipaul's *A House for Mr Biswas*; Geoffrey Clifton in Ondaatje's *The English Patient* are the counterpoint characters who play their part in resisting the attempts of the protagonists' search for integrity and their quest for the absolute meaning in the world around them. These characters in a contrapuntal reading are necessary to be studied in order for their voices to be placed side by side to those who stand for the marginalized and others. In Soyinka's *Death and The King's Horseman* he has purposefully portrayed the vanity and hollowness in the efforts of the British imperialist power to conquer and consume Yoruba culture, for the former can hardly understand the depths and dimension of the latter and as such no clash is possible. Similarly Achebe in his *Things Fall Apart* has made it clear that Africa is not the silent, incomprehensible and barbaric continent that the western mode of discourse and narratives made it out to be, rather it has a complexity, diversity, profundity of its own as is evident in the Igbo language which is too subtle for the colonialist linguistic system to capture.

CONCLUSION

These eleven authors and many others have successfully depicted the violent, unrestrained, collision or clash of cultures that inevitably results from the sudden breaking away of nations from the control of colonial powers and in their attempt to make a meaning of their own culture from a standpoint and perspective which is their peculiarly their own. In contrast to their newly discovered culture, mode of narration, ethical, social values the value system belonging to that of Western powers often seem to be contradictory, ambiguous and alienating.

Decolonization is the process which comes into play when the situation calls for removing the

relicts that the domineering colonial powers have left upon the minds of colonized people long after they have gained independence. The authors time and again have shown the tensions, frustrations, collisions that are inevitable when the colonized would be breaking itself free of the Eurocentric discourse.

Post-colonialism also deals with the problem of the independent nations' quest of forming identity and self-dependence especially when the (formerly) colonized powers discover that some vital parts of their main tradition were destroyed and denigrated by the colonial imperial forces. Post-colonialism here assumes the role of providing the newly independent nations with an intellectual guidance following which the nation and its culture can regain the broken pieces of their cultures and possibly put them back together to form a distorted yet somewhat a reminiscent of the original images.

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