

Conclusion

Jose Varunny M. “Contours of Psychological (Dis)orientation: A Postcolonial Reading of Caryl Phillips’s Fiction” . Research Centre, Department of English, St. Thomas’ College, Thrissur – 680 001
March 2014 .

Chapter VII

Conclusion

Caryl Phillips, like many postcolonial writers, contemplates on the enormous measures of colonial impacts on humanity. His novels turn out to be a prism through which he views the history of multiple sites of colonialism and specifically, those complex psychological experiences generated by the Western colonial activities. He conducts meticulous investigations into the intricate aspects of colonial involvement in the histories of African slavery, Jewish Holocaust and other various (post)colonial conditions. While exploring the psychological consequences of these colonial histories in the lives of its immediate victims, he also pays remarkable interest in examining how such historical past exercises enormous psychological distress on the descendents of those victims in the contemporary times. However, Phillips, in his fiction, engages not only with the traumatic experiences, but also the formative psychological dynamics in various colonial relationships and conditions. Accordingly, his novels explore diverse psychological aspects in the postcolonial experiences such as ‘hegemonic relationships,’ ‘displacement,’ ‘migration,’ questions of ‘belonging,’ ‘formation of identity,’ ‘racism’ and ‘colonial resistance.’

The present study through a postcolonial reading of Caryl Phillips’s fiction sought to bring to light some of the significant aspects of psychic dynamics, conflicts and disturbances in the lives of those involved in and affected by colonialism. Not only did the study explore such destabilising psychic experiences, but it also attempted to recognise and identify how these experiences

in the lives of the protagonists in the novels make them (dis)oriented in response to their (post)colonial contexts. In order to make this investigation authentic and productive, the thesis attempted to dwell upon various domains of postcolonial experiences of Phillips's characters. As such the thesis is divided into seven chapters including introduction and conclusion.

The first chapter, "Introduction: (Post)coloniality and Psychology," sought to address the topic of the present research, justifying the undertaking of such a project in Caryl Phillips's novels. Caryl Phillips was introduced as a black British writer as well as a postcolonial writer whose central focus mainly dwells on the psychic aspects of African, Caribbean, Asian and Jewish diaspora. The chapter then proceeded to discuss some of the current and relevant theories in postcolonial psychology that include some of the significant psychological concepts relevant to (post)colonial trauma and stress disorder under which novels for the study have been examined. The chapter ended with a summary of the subsequent chapters of the thesis.

The second chapter, "Dialectics of Postcolonial Relationships: Mapping the Psychodynamics of the Colonial Binaries in Caryl Phillips's Fiction," attempted to show the complex dialectics that evolve in the relationships between the colonial binaries – blacks and whites, colonised and coloniser or slave and slaver in their (post)colonial encounters and contact zones. An exploration into their psychological territories was undertaken exposing the colonial ideologies and discourses that exercise deep impact in legitimising the centrality of the 'whiteness' and the marginality of the 'blackness.' Subsequently, on a closer

reading, the present study also discovered that it is not only the colonised who suffer psychologically, but rather the colonisers too pass through stunning psychological anxieties and displacements. For such an exploration of psychic dynamics, Caryl Phillips's novels *Higher Ground*, *Cambridge*, *Crossing the River*, *Nature of Blood* and *Dancing in the Dark* were critically analysed, because in these novels the blacks and the whites confront each other forcing mutual psychological pressures. The analysis in this chapter revealed that behind every colonial/postcolonial relationship, there are some psychological imperatives, interests, motivations and dynamics of both the coloniser and the colonised that structure and sustain colonialism.

The third chapter, "Geographic, Cultural, Social and Mnemonic Spaces: Displacement and the Vexing Question of Belonging in Caryl Phillips's Fiction," attempted to analyse the postcolonial experiences of displacement and subsequent search for 'home.' Postcolonial 'displacement' is viewed as a sense of 'uprootedness' and 'dislocation' of various aspects of life engendered by various colonial processes. The chapter while analysing the novels *The Final Passage*, *A State of Independence*, "West" in *Crossing the River*, "Higher Ground" in *Higher Ground*, *The Nature of Blood* and *A Distant Shore* discovered that colonial operations such as those of slavery, wars, political and economic colonisation and Holocaust have all been some of the significant causes in producing forced displacements and dislocations on humanity. Apart from such forced displacements caused by colonial processes, there have been also migrations, another form of displacement, to England made in view of better economic opportunities in a world of colonial capitalism and economic imbalances. The

study exposed that along with the pain and suffering of the displacement, a search for belonging implants one of the fundamental sources of psychological disorientation in the characters of Phillips's fiction. Specifically, this search for belonging or 'home' of the displaced takes place in unstable, fluid and pluralistic cultural experiences of migrations and diasporic movements. As a result of these movements, exiles and diasporic journeys, there occurs disruption of one's notions of geography, culture, history and identity dragging the individuals into psychological pain, suffering and disorientation.

The fourth chapter, "Cross-Cultural Encounters, Movements and Liminal Spaces: Formation of Postcolonial Identity in Caryl Phillips's Fiction," discussed the psychological vexations related to the formation of identity of the individuals brought within the harrowing patterns of colonial/postcolonial contexts, transnational migrations and exiles. Phillips's novels *The Final Passage*, *A State of Independence*, *Cambridge*, "The Pagan coast" in *Crossing the River*, *A Distant Shore* and *The Nature of Blood* were analysed to examine how constant migrations and cross-border movements become significant in constituting the cultural identities of postcolonial subject. Caryl Phillips in his novels explores how identities are negotiated and articulated on the 'border-lines,' 'in-between spaces' or 'hybridised spaces.' The postcolonial reading of his fiction revealed that on fluid conditions of migrations, the identities are formed with many kinds of mixed potentials, possibilities, tensions, and ambivalences of not belonging to any definite spaces. The study exposed also that for Phillips, formation of the diasporic and marginalised identities are challenged and confronted against the earlier notions of 'fixed,' 'homogenous,' and 'essential' identity formats. Therefore, the

problems that are encountered by the postcolonial subjects in their attempts to negotiate and articulate their identity at the 'in-between spaces' of various conflicting cultures provide enormous psychological conflicts and disorientation owing to a profound sense of being 'not here, not there'.

The fifth chapter, "Racism, Xenophobia and Tribalism: Constructing the Postcolonial Other in Caryl Phillips's Fiction," examined the psychological vexations and distress of Phillips's characters, who struggle to survive in a world that differentiates and excludes people on the basis of their racial and cultural backgrounds. "The Cargo Rap," in *Higher Ground*, *The Nature of Blood*, *A Distant Shore*, *Foreigners* and *In the Falling Snow* were studied to analyse the experiences of the blacks, the Jews and the Asians in America and Britain, where the characters encounter racism, xenophobia and 'tribalism.' The study revealed disturbing cases of deep psychological discomfort and disorientation in Phillips's characters at being excluded and marginalised. While striving to make their survival possible in these parts of the world, the migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are often confronted with hostilities that allow them to be seen as 'outsiders,' 'strangers' and 'aliens,' and consequently, they are permanently kept at bay as the 'other.' It is exposed in the study that such racialised perspectives inevitably generate profound psychological pain and suffering in the victims.

The sixth chapter, "The Decolonising Consciousness of the Oppressed under Slavery in Caryl Phillips's Fiction," brought to its compass of analysis one of the exceptional psychological dynamics evinced by the colonised in the moments of suffering under the structure of slavery. In its analysis, the chapter

traced out an indomitable spirit in the slaves that challenges or resists the colonial slavery though often expressed in a subtle manner. For Phillips, the whole issue of slavery is awfully intricate as it is mixed up with concrete as well as abstract power relationships. However, various forms of resistance to colonial power–relations in slavery are manifested in “Heartland” in *Higher Ground*, in *Cambridge*, and in “Pagan Coast” and “West” sections in *Crossing the River*. The study discovered that in these fictional works, the colonial authority and power are exercised mainly through cultural hegemony over the colonised. Very often, the coloniser’s cultural apparatuses become the means of wielding control over the cultural, intellectual and even existential aspects of the slaves. The liberation of the individual is made possible through forms of resistance and various oppositional strategies seeking to sever such power relations. Thus, decolonising consciousness of the colonised evolves in two ways to realise such resistance; first, the protagonists employ subversive strategies in which the colonial discourses and ideologies, the foundations upon which colonialism rests, are subverted. Second, it undermines the representations of colonial authority and power, thereby formulating concrete and conscious opposition to colonialism. Phillips’s novels do not talk about anti–colonial resistance formed at the political, social and economic level; his concern, as analysed in the thesis, is mainly about the resistance at the psychological sphere. What emerges in his fiction is that his characters who exhibit such anti–hegemonic resistance to colonial slavery do make their struggle possible and remain ‘almost’ liberated from their colonial situation. Though their resistance does not fully liberate them socially and

politically, such process of resistance is sustained through their decolonising consciousness as a continuing process.

Colonial projects, postcolonial circumstances, geographical shifts, alienation of self, colonial mimicry etc., though psychologically treated in this thesis, nevertheless stand in relation to the material context, which is the larger stage on which the human drama of (dis)orientation is unravelled. The most frequented tool to analyse such material contexts of colonialism in cultural studies remains to be Marxist theories even today. However, the researcher acknowledges that a Marxist approach is not directly applied in relation to the research undertaken in the thesis, while he is aware of the fact that most of the critics and thinkers who have come to help clarify the particular focus of this thesis – namely, psychological (dis)orientation of postcolonial subjects – are in fact people whose original inspiration is, consciously or unconsciously, Marxism. The researcher on his part, however, chose to concentrate on the particular focus of this thesis, namely, the contextual examination of psychological disorientation/orientation of postcolonial subjects, though he does not disclaim Marxism's significant role in analysing the consequences of colonialism.

While conducting investigations into various postcolonial experiences, the research simultaneously discovers the gaps and silences in the present study. Dwelling upon such unexplored themes and subject matters, the study proposes to open up further research fields and areas in Caryl Phillips's fiction. One general inference to be drawn from Caryl Phillips's works is that despite belonging to the black British writers and postcolonial writers, he escapes an easy fixation to the

above categories. Although Western colonialism and its repercussions on human psyche receive main thrust in his writing, his aesthetic explorations transcend such fields of study. Accordingly, an investigation into the treatment of women, both the black and the white, and their subaltern and dominant positions in Phillips's fiction could be of a rewarding area for a further research. While dealing with postcolonialism, Phillips's fiction also exhibit remarkable affinities with other contemporary critical fields. Thus, studies on postmodernism, globalisation, historical imagination, formation of self (*Bildungsroman*) etc., as depicted in his novels are also rewarding areas of investigation and research. As Phillips fundamentally focuses, in fiction, on the displacement, migration and transformation of identity, he incorporates befitting stylistic methods to suit such displacements. Therefore, a rewarding area for a prospective study could be the correlations between Phillips's themes of displacements and corresponding techniques employed by him.

As one of the most talented writers among the contemporary postcolonial writers like Kazuo Ishiguro (1954–), Salman Rushdie (1947–), Hanif Kureishi (1954–), Anita Desai (1937–), David Dabydeen (1955–), Timothy Mo (1950–), Vikram Seth (1952–) and Sadie Smith (1975–), Caryl Phillips deserves particular attention due to his wide variety of concerns regarding humanity. What provides originality to the often meditated and imagined postcolonial themes of 'belonging,' 'home,' 'migrations,' 'identity' 'racism' etc., is his carefully crafted but involved investigations into the psychological experiences of the people painfully uprooted from their selves and their past. His fiction today remains a testimony to the European colonialism and the psychological havoc it plays

irrevocably on its victims. Thus the present study, through its investigation into the psychological experiences of postcolonial conditions, is expected to shed some light on some of the fundamental aspects of postcolonial relationships and experiences.