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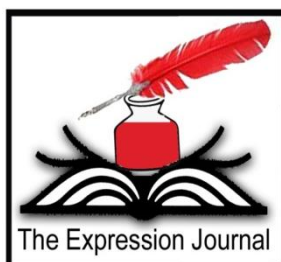
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## NEW ENGLISH LITERATURES: AN OVERVIEW

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### Abstract

This paper highlights the multiplicity and amalgam prevalent in most of the so-called side lined societies and it also throws light on the colonial and postcolonial writings that are delegated as imperative to understand the specifications of these two mind bogging terms. It also focuses on the common matrices of post colonial writings, socio – political aspects that determine people’s lives, identity crisis, diasporic predicaments, suppression of native life and their indigenous culture by activating the field of cultural studies and enthusiastically promoting feminist studies. Postcolonial writings have similarities with Feminism, post-structuralism and Hypertext theory. Female body is metaphorically used to denote colonies and the discovery of the conquered land. This paper is an attempt to provide a brief overview of the New Literature in English.

### Key-Words

Deshpande, Women, Gender Discrimination, Prejudices, Struggle, Patriarchy.

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The nomenclature 'New English Literatures' indicates the colonial and postcolonial writings that are the products of the former British colonies, namely, parts of Africa, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Caribbean countries, India, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, islands in the South Pacific, and Sri Lanka. Though many scholars view that American Literature too must be treated as New English Literature, it is not considered post-colonial because of its state of independence and power position. However, the Afro-American Literature is taken to be post-colonial due to its African / European cultural origins and also because of its minor standing.

Since these 'New English Literatures' are delegated as colonial / postcolonial writings, it becomes imperative to understand the specifications of these two mind-boggling terms. In fact, there is an ongoing debate concerning the terminology, especially that of 'post-colonialism'. Elleke Boehmer in her book *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (1995) views that in general, most modern and contemporary literatures can be termed colonial or postcolonial owing to the conquest of Britain by the Roman Empire. She proposes a narrower definition "literature written in English" and the scholars could as well focus their attention on literatures of the countries formerly belonged to the British Empire. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in their scholarly work *The Empire Writes Back. Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (1989), state that a lack of critical practice regarding the New Literatures is responsible for "the inability of European theory to deal adequately with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of post-colonial writing", and affirm that the term postcolonial is the best solution at the moment as it directs the way for the study of the effects of colonialism, a term "associated with the expansion of the European nation-state in the nineteenth century", says Boehmer. There is no clear definition for the term 'colonial literature' because of its heterogeneous character.

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Postcolonial Literature is taken to be a severe critical reflection of colonial experience during the period of decolonization. Andrew Gurr in his work "The Politics of Postcolonial Criticism" (1997) forwards a historically-based value judgment that colonialism is "a 'bad' manifestation of power politics". The scholars believe that the 'postcolonial' generally describes the second half of the twentieth century, a period after the flourishing days of colonialism and look for independence in writings with a "self-constituted identity". The most significant feature in this regard, that is in the postcolonial theory, is the use of language, which is twin-pronged: (i) the writers abandoning the coloniser's language to rediscover their roots (ii) their conviction that the use of English implies "fusion of culture" which has to be necessarily corrected. The meeting of two cultures, and the usurping of an indigenous order by alien and intrusive values is one of the dominant themes in the study of postcolonial literature. The writers know well that the language is the medium of power. They prefer to employ a national variety to reconstruct and deconstruct the English language, instead of using Standard English. A reason for this deconstruction process is the imperial power's "control over the means of communication rather than the control over life and property", observe Ashcroft et al and they continue to argue that "in many postcolonial societies, it was not the English language which had the greatest effect, but writing itself" and that the "seizing of the means of communication and the liberation of post-colonial writing by the appropriation of the written word become crucial features of the process of self-assertion and of the ability to reconstruct the world as an unfolding historical process."

However, the change should be seriously affected not only in the language and the means of communication but also in the entire system of cultural assumptions that form the base for the English canonical texts. English Studies, by and large, refuse "the value of the 'peripheral', the 'imaginal', the 'uncanonized' " observe Ashcroft et al and suggest a reconsideration of the English canon which still continues to act as a touchstone of taste and value. The English canonical writings must be rearranged to include what is deemed as 'marginal writings', for example, the works of Salman Rushdie and those of the women writers. They must be regarded as postcolonial authors and must find place in the broader definition of 'Postcolonial Literature'. Such a space would obviously allow New English Literatures, which are so far considered as peripheral. The cultural varieties that one sees in these texts offer a rich repertoire for wide research.

Postcolonial studies highlight the multiplicity and amalgam prevalent in most of the so-called side-lined societies, venture to find out meaning and go beyond binaries such as independence and dependence, conflict and complicity, imitation and originality and other dualities. The common matrices of postcolonial writings are the local issues in the context, the socio-political aspects that determine people's lives, making known the silence of the oppressed, the migrants' identity-crisis, their anxiety to find out the roots, diaspora predicaments, suppression of native life and their indigenous culture, and other related issues. The writers who have fore-fronted postcolonial perspectives are, to name a few, Chinua Achebe, Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Homi Bhabha and a few others who have contributed to a variety of postcolonial discourses.

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Postcolonial writings or the New English writings can be seen in two angles. On the one hand, they assure the exit of the sharp mentality and piercing outlook of colonialism and on the other, annoyed at its marginal status, they militantly project the importance of the so far "marginalized Other" that verily asserts identity. For instance, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight Children* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* are exemplary novels written from the point of view of the Other. Mulkraj Anand's *Untouchable* and some of Rabindranath Tagore's works are early examples of postcolonial thinking, where in the indigenous characters are illuminated to make the readers hear their voices. Postcolonial critiques, hence, energetically motivate comparative studies, vigorously activate the field of cultural studies, and notwithstanding these areas, enthusiastically promote Feminist Studies.

Postcolonial writings have similarities with Feminism, post-structuralism and Hypertext theory. Female body is metaphorically used to denote colonies and the discovery of the conquered land. Ania Loomba in his book *Colonialism / Post-colonialism* (1998) quotes Sigmund Freud who says: "The sexual life of adult women is a "dark continent" for psychology", that is, a colony. Any female author has always been marginalized and excluded from canon. The famous example in literature is that of Mary Anne Evans who assumed the name George Eliot to find a place in the literary field as a creative writer. Women are treated as colonies in a male-dominated value system, as men decide which authors (usually male writers) gain access to the canon. Women have to create their own language and have to find a voice to express their desires and wishes. Therefore, in feminist, postcolonialist, post-structuralist and in hypertext theory, decentralisation and deconstruction are common denominators in order to redefine the concept of centre and thus to expand the English canon.

'Hypertext' is text presented on a computer display with references - hyperlinks - to other text so that the reader can have an immediate access. Hypertext is the underlying concept defining the structure of the World Wide Web. It is user friendly with flexible connection and sharing of information over the Internet. The scholars view that the term *hypertext* is difficult-or even controversial-to define. Theorists Landow and Delany (1991), for example, describe it as "the use of the computer to transcend the linear, bounded and fixed qualities of the traditional written text". Going along with this definition, many discussions of hypertext emphasize its nonlinear qualities. Crane and Mylonas (1991) appropriately define that " 'hypertext' refers to the electronic linking of blocks of text". This definition highlights the key property of hypertext, namely its capacity to create conceptual and literal links among disparate sections of a given text. From a literary point of view, electronic formats have called into question previous conceptions of textuality. Theoretical and philosophical understandings of "text" have become intertwined with the technologies that are used to present pieces of writing. Hypertext is highly significant for all disciplines that are concerned with the creation, dissemination, storage, and philosophy of information. At present, in this fast-moving hi-tech world 'Hypertext' seems to be an indispensable mode to carry on researches within and across canonical/non-canonical works.

As for postcolonial literature, not many texts are available on the new medium, mainly because of the copyright situation, since most of the texts were written after 1923. Compared to

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'traditional' English literature, the New Literatures are not appropriately covered on the World Wide Web. A representative canon of postcolonial literature cannot be obtained from the Internet. Many contemporary works are still under copyright protection and are not published in freely accessible text archives. In this tight situation, Hypertext and the Internet in particular may help research by providing resources.

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