

Betwixt Colonialism and Humanism: Feminising Humanity's Clothes

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Abstract

An existential odyssey that binds together the lived conditions and experiences takes us towards perspectives that grow outside the periphery of the structure. There lies a reality beyond what is available to us as seen and heard. The article argues for all the unthought perspectives and unheard voices from colonialism to pandemic. It also provides a feminist spectacle to stand outside the circle and reconsider the real. Philosophy always seems to be concerned about the notion of truth. The idea is so inherent that, even the subject of identity and identification can be seen revolving around it. The article tries to throw some light on the different constructs and notions of identity and how they come together to reflect different social realities. To think, a picture of reality that contains in itself, an image of various realities and truths must be a subject to a philosophical speculation. The paper takes its references from the post-colonial literature to talk about the effect and consequences of decolonisation over the changing clothes of humanity. The phrase 'changing clothes of humanity' here is actually a parallel to speak of how changing sociocultural frame has always recognised the change in perspectives. Conclusively, the paper tries to present us a lens of interpretation by bringing us the lived reality of the colonial world, their situatedness and perspectives through the analysis of different cases. There has been a surface contrast with how the lived experience of colonialism can be seen in parallel with the current pandemic situation.

Key words: Orient, Nationalism, Pandemic, Othering, Patriarchy

Preluding the quoted

There are adequate approaches central to the discourses on humanity. The critical question of this debate reads, how imperialism did and colonialism bring different seasons for

the various social and cultural unit and at the same time, how they recognised it. Conclusively The article draws towards the current situation of pandemics and provides a feminist analysis of the situations comparatively. An unsolved paradox that runs parallel is the question of identity, i.e., how do the different social groups recognise themselves when subjected to oriental or imperial subjugation. To shed a bright light on the shortcomings of the current epistemological approach taken towards the time of crisis and consider it from a gender-neutral lens and for a specific purpose, let us look back to the experiences and the lived conditions of various social groups.

We see that the sufficient conditions for humanism do not maintain the same sufficiency for different social realities. The traditional analytic approaches against colonialism and imperialism try to see humanity from an egalitarian perspective. According to this model, the notion of Orient created by the dominant political ideology of first world European dominants imposes control and subjugation over the colonies. In the same context If we examine the groundbreaking work 'Orientalism' of the tremendous cultural critique, Edward Said. The western Scholarship about the eastern nations seems to be in a strong tie with the notion of a homogeneous society, where the influences and effects are believed to be equally similar throughout the social whole.

To what extent these images are coherent to the different social realities is a question that needs an investigation. We need to look at these approaches from the spectacle of feminist literature. The attempt to show the third world reality as one homogeneous reality fails to recognise masculine and feminine as two separate realities affected differently by the different approaches.

Let us think, why we cannot have a reality instead realities by examining how the lived conditions of the different social group differ from each other and affects them differently, which not only includes a literary and socio-political system but a psychological subsystem as well. An attempt to develop a more suitable and realistic approach to colonialism can be, questioning the lucidity of previously taken approaches and look into the specifications with a more dynamic perception rather than what has been prescribed.

Bringing the Perspectives Together

When we trace the post-colonial literature in order to understand and demonstrate the effects and consequences of decolonisation over the countries that were colonised. We can see, no recognition has been given to identifying the marginal identities and unheard voices which always remained at the periphery and could never reach the centre. However, Edward Said's critique of western superiority of culture and identities over the orientals in order to

bring in focus how the effects of orientalism and colonialism were not similar for different social units, and the homogenisation of social reality in the post-colonial literature is not the right reflection of the socio-political conditions of the Orient.

We can also look at the feminist perspective forwarded by CT Mohanty and Kumkum Sangari, who talks about how the lived conditions of Women differ from men. Mohanti talks about how first-world literature has ignored the complexities and differences prevalent in third-world societies, While Sangari has shed light on how the social conditions are different for the different units of the society. If we take both these perspectives together, in order to understand these differences more clearly and rightly frame how colonialism and imperialism left their impact over the third world countries. These differences are not merely of cultures and arts but more specifically about the social, political, and economic conditions lived by the different groups of the society.

Once we start recognising the presence of realities rather than a reality, it will answer the question of why we cannot idealise a homogenous reality from a socio-political perspective.

Recasting Gender Roles: A Feminist Perspective

The nature of socio-political processes in a civil society plays a significant role in determining how the patriarchal framework would affect the daily lives of women. The patriarchy cannot be seen as uniformly distributed and playing an even role to all the Social classes within the Social structure. Instead, it is reproduced and reconstituted in different classes and sections of society. Our political understanding of the experiences, observation, and social constitutions brings us to the understanding of them as historical processes. The patriarchal practices, codes, conducts, etc. are not extrinsic to the social structures; they are somewhat intrinsically involved and bring a change in social categories. We cannot reach a stage where we can either generalise or simplify a system either politically or socially.

To provide a flexible ground within which we can define the idea of pluralism is still a distant goal, yet to be achieved. The nationalist models which emphasised on developments and reforms have shattered the post-colonial smugness and improving the status of women. In enjoying the legitimacy of development, a significant section of the society was pushed to the margins. These people were mostly invisible, and so were their problems.

Along with the visible process of production, economic growth, and social paradigm there runs parallel stories concerned with the people subjected under them. The only visible outcome is the conflicts of ideologies and politicisation of identities, be it social or religious. However, in the background, there runs a process concerning how such processes grow.

The Emergence of Realities within Reality

The relationship between the classes and the conditions lived by them is more variable than being complex. The idea of reconsideration of the lived conditions of the different social spheres is not about reconstituting or reliving them, instead of developing a perspective understanding of how imperialism and colonialism had a variable effect on different social and cultural realities. We can hold that, the relationship between changing modes of production and how different classes have responded to it is both systematically aligned together and politically growing independent of each other. To say, we can always systematise and generalise a process but not how it affects a class or social structure.

To consider, men and women in the same class approach the same issue in different ways. The means of production, social privileges, etc. are not necessarily approached in the same way the classes or subclasses see them. The growing hierarchies and the mode of subjugation also come in a different relationship with different social spheres such that they overlap or reformulate themselves in a way that the effects are invisible. The colonial rule left a compulsory obligation to extract the surplus which created the invisible class groups within.

To an extent, we can say, all these differences have contributed to the development of subclasses. The formation of the middle class in both rural and urban society is one such event. The urban professionals, the rural artisans, small landlords, all of them belonged to this class, but at the same time, all of them held different considerations and responses towards their surroundings.

If we take womanhood to our understanding, the creation of different identities like Hindu woman, Indian woman, Aryan woman, etc. All of them have a different identity but are somehow interlinked to a frame called womanhood and can be understood in opposition to a different frame called western woman.

Covering the Cases: Highlighting the Hidden

Several cases can be observed from colonial India. In the princely state of Hyderabad, India, during a peasant struggle, the way agrarian relations were seen played a significant role in determining how the different class of women is experiencing patriarchies. To the women of the ruling class, it was a different determinant than how it affected the women who were being ruled. Many women who were pushed into the domestic sphere could see minimal opportunities in the public domain. The emergence of the public domain was more clearly evident in a post-colonial society.

By the 19th century, the idea of emancipation, liberation, and freedom was taken more rightfully than a mere ideology. All of these concepts can be tied to a homogeneous

idea of national emancipation covering the implicitness of class and caste terms. Sumanta Banerjee, in her essay, talks about how womanhood maintaining heterogeneities have been tied under the umbrella of cultural homogenisation. The seclusion of women into public and private spheres was more focused on the formation of identities than class structures. For women, an organised social system, to say activities were not open till the second half of the 19th century, of course, the waiving of restrictions came with certain obligations.

In the colonial period, the identity of a woman from higher strata was defined more precisely in opposition to a woman from the lower class. When we see the formation of these classes or the subclasses within them as a social construct, we can take it for granted that the construct is not natural but created. Sumanta Banerjee describes the urban Bengali social structure as *Bhadralok*. The women who worked in the public sphere were invisibly categorised as middle and lower middle class, at times, women from lower classes also stepped out from their houses to look for work opportunities. More sophisticated and elite women kept themselves under the boundaries of obligatory structures.

To say, the formation of the class was more about the formation of an identity. The framed reality that concerned the Socio-political landscape during the colonial period was a string of many such invisible realities which were short of both attention and consideration. The reforms and developments tied with the name of humanity are the redefinition of the identities within then involved in the formulation of class structure.

Through the Lens of Othering

In the name of nationalism, the supremacy of culture is placed over others. Such a placing creates a base of inferiority for the framed other. The paramountcy of one and othering of the 'other' has not only ignored the conditions with human experience but also the lived condition as human experience. The catastrophes that have stemmed from othering are by default, given an inferior status. What we see as the emerging reality hides several realities, the subjected inferiority of the cultures as others plays a role in demeaning and dehumanising the social structures in the framework of identities.

We have often focussed on the relationship between each other, preferably on the relationship of others with the mainstream. Other in the name of gender, class, sex has often given secondary status. The emerging reality has always focused on what has been given the primary role. The reason why we need to look through the lens of others is that the hidden reality is as real as the emerging reality.

Covid-19 Pandemic: A Colonial Mould

During the time of crisis, the government, privileged class, and science, all of them have returned to similar and familiar kind of precautions and preservations. The first model to control a pandemic situation was provided during colonialism. The vital part of South Asia brings us to the question, how the social and political powers operated within colonial mould?

To consider, the plague pandemic of Bombay in 1869 changed the complete socio-political landscape, for the first time in history special legal and judicial powers were acquired in the name of the humanitarian subject. The relationship between the colonial state and what has been subjected to it has never been constant. The mainstay of the colonial regime in the early 20th century in the name of their anti-plague movement was to restrict the powers of landless and poor. The large-scale vaccine trials that took place in the 1890s by the colonial government were on colonies. The jails, hospitals, and slums gave an experimental ground to the state for future trials. These trends also continued worldwide during the post-colonial period.

The authoritarian trend continued even in the 21st century. In the time of crisis, leadership has always been questionable. If we move towards the current situation of the pandemic, the question of what constitutes outstanding leadership has presented women leaders in a better position. The anecdotal perception does not stand independent of the facts. The emerging patterns of the situation show that the female-led countries have handled the crisis situation well.

Such countries, when matched with the male-led countries with similar socio-demographic situations, throw us the differences, how these countries have performed better. Data shows the female-led countries have been more sensitive towards the deaths happening around and have been more risk-averse. They have been ready to take more economic risks in order to save their social and human resources by locking down early.

The reason why we can see a better situation in such countries lies where we started from. We always reflect on our experiences, familiarities and similarities. When we say a female-led state has been more sensitive towards their human resources might come from how they have grown and been resourced. Even accounting for the institutional control, the females have been better at execution. The controlled population can better execute the control; similarly, our experiences shape our outcomes.

Bringing up Rear

History has prescribed structure within structures, and the reality hid in structures within the structure. The questions that demanded interpretations have been answered with obligations.

A much-needed investigation into the lived conditions of humanity brings to us several possibilities, how the social realities varied within a landscape marks the footsteps of a journey set in the backdrop of similarities and familiarities. How we live does not come independent of how we have lived. Our sensitivities reflect on how our experiences have been. The situations we face comes in acquaintance with the conditions we are subjected to. We must look for perspectives rather than a perspective to reality.

'The subject is always subjective to its subjugation and the subjectivity that lies within a subject is one reality within realities. Every subjectivity is a subject within-subjects and every reality is a reality within realities.

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