



Literary Approaches to Peace Promotion: A Close Reading of Selected Literary Theories

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Abstract:

This paper aims to highlight the role the literary theory has played for the global peace promotion. Three literary approaches will be discussed here to bring to the light as to how different approaches have remained successful to unfold the sources of crises in the recent era. This paper elucidates that economic inequality and the class struggle between the haves and have not, the global identity conflicts, such as ethnic, religious and political divides, ensuing the upsurge of violence, bloodshed and mass murder and issues related to the gender disparity have been highlighted in the literary theory by Karl Marx, Edward Said, and Gayatri Spivak as Marxist, Postcolonial and Feminist critics, respectively. By highlighting the injustice around the globe, these critics, with the help of their literary theories sought to understand today's chaotic world. The critics also suggest the strategies to cope with this chaos and to bring harmony and peace in the world. The data on literary theory have been collected by closely studying the primary texts of the authors. Close Reading method has been employed to analyse the texts further. By analyzing the texts, it has been concluded that these theories converge on one point; they all reflect on peace promotion.

Keywords: Marxism, feminism, post-colonialism, literary approaches, injustice, peace promotion

INTRODUCTION

The upsurge of violence in the wake recent global identity crisis, global poverty, and the discrimination of people on the basis of class, caste and gender has completely transformed the picture of the contemporary world. From the issues of identity conflicts, stretching from the Middle East, such as the conflict between Israel and Palestine, to all the Third World's nations, the rise in the global poverty, the increase in the gap between the rich and the poor and the gender, class and caste discrimination have urged the global scholars to rethink the issues and build a successful plan to cope with this uncertainty and chaos. This paper aims to highlight the role the literary theory has

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played in bringing peace and harmony among individuals, people and nations. While providing different perspective and different approaches, literary critics, through their works have brought meaning and certainty in the otherwise chaotic world. Three critics are being discussed here who have highlighted the reasons behind the current state of unrest and confusion and have tried to resolve the mentioned issues and helped us to understand today's world. Chronologically dividing the evolution of literary theory, this paper will discuss, firstly, the contribution of classical economist, Karl Marx with reference to poverty alleviation, Edward Said with reference to global identity crisis and Gayatri Spivak with reference to the uplift of the subaltern groups, especially prompting the status of women in a society.

The primary aim of this study is to highlight the contributions made by different literary theorists for improving the overall well-being of the global society. The study seeks to describe as to what possible contributions, different theorists, by propounding literary theories, have made by raising their voice for peace and well-being of the world; therefore, the question arises; What are the possible contributions which have been contributed by the mentioned literary theorists for the global peace promotion?

METHODOLOGY

Research design of the present study is descriptive and qualitative in nature. The study uses qualitative analysis in order to describe the contribution of the selected literary theorists. Methodologically, the primary texts have been read and examined closely by employing conventional Close reading method. For conducting the research, the data has been accessed to, by selecting the primary texts such as Karl Marx's *Das Capital*, suggesting to Capitalism as the root cause of poverty, Said's *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* referring to imperialism as the cause of global identity crisis, and Spivak's "Can the Subaltern speak?" highlighting the causes of the marginalization of the subaltern groups including women in a society, and have been analyzed in the light of global peace promotion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

While highlighting the causes of poverty as proposed by Karl Marx, Peet (2010) noted Marxist theorists' observations that poverty and inequality are the functional components of capitalism's mode of production. They complement and supplement the growth of capitalist mode of production. Capitalism's survival and growth depends upon the unequal structures of a society. Poverty and inequality are reducible only with the change of mode of production.

Basu (2021) views the current era as marked by economic crisis. The current economic unrest, unequal distribution of wealth, harmful effects of capitalism, disparities in housing and health care facilities have urged the scholars to rethink the phenomenon to settle the problems of oppression, discrimination, unequal trade and investment treaties. Marxism refers to the theory of economic materialism. The world history is the history of economic, historical materialism. Spanning on a decade the three volumes of Capital encompass the dynamics of capitalism. Hence the source becomes a tool to analyse capitalism and its effects on a society.

While highlighting the effects of postcolonialism on the contemporary geopolitics and the recent global identity crisis, Edward Said has played a phenomenal role as a literary critic and contributed

for the peace promotion, by highlighting the source of current crisis. Edde (2019) views Said's, *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* as the works which have brought forth an entirely new approach of Western perspective of the East. West's self-proclaimed cultural superiority over the others and the domination and the abuse of power has been marked by Said approach, finally, falls like a hammer blow on the Western thought of domination and superiority. *Orientalism*, being the obligatory reference to Said, becomes the signature term associated to him, in and outside the academia. While applying his method and approach towards day to day events such as Palestinian occupation by the Jews, Said expresses his anger towards injustice of Israeli- American policy leashed on Palestine.

Commenting on Said's seminal work *Orientalism*, Tucker (2010) has noted its contributions in spotlighting the prejudices of the Western scholars in representing the East. The work later on spawned the postcolonial theory in literary, political and historical domains. He argued that the European interest in the East was motivated towards political and military establishment in the Eastern region, as to justify the forces of colonialism and imperialism. Through his work he has pointed out the flawed representation of Western scholars of presenting the East as strange, romantic, other and therefore an enemy to it. Said as a literary and cultural critic has broken new grounds of analyzing the problem of Middle East, and the Third World countries and helped to understand the world with a new approach.

Riach (2017) notes Spivak's contribution towards the peace and health of a society by highlighting the marginalization and oppression of elite class, academics, religious and political. The article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" is a voice for the poor people of the class who cannot speak for themselves. Rather as noted by Riach, what Spivak meant is that the poor cannot be heard. Instead the most privilege people of a class speak for them. According to Spivak if the subaltern are given the chance to speak for themselves and be heard, they would definitely have their political voice. Spivak combines Marxism, feminism and deconstructionism. These approaches help her to reach the problem of oppression caused by differences in power, gender and access to knowledge. The contribution of the essay has been profound. It sparked agitation and fury in the academy as the way Spivak has spotlighted the general silencing of the poor especially of women in a colony where she is doubly marginalized. Spivak's essay is a call to arms and an urgency to work for the subaltern against the subalternity and the time to dismantle the structures of colonialism, academia and patriarchy.

Morris (2010) has observed the writing of Spivak's essay, "Can the subaltern speak?" as containing the revolutionary spirit. While commenting on the use of s/Subject both as a grammatical category and critiquing the word in reference to the West's subjectivity, Morris elaborates Spivak's concerns over Western scholarship on the construction of its other. While Spivak criticizes Foucault's and Deleuze's scholarships as reductive approaches to view the Eastern women which is widely celebrated in the Western academia, she views their scholarship being incapable of recognizing the constitutive subjectivity of the Eastern women. According to her Western scholarship has remained inattentive to the issues related to the Third World, especially the poorest of them and the women whom she calls the subalterns.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

As a German philosopher and economist, Karl Marx 's influence extends to the fields of economy, sociology, philosophy, politics and literary studies. However, his contribution towards understanding the capitalist's world and its implications on the social structure of a society is immense. The following discussion includes his contribution in understanding the structure of a society, the establishment of capitalism and its far reaching effects on the proletariat class. Therefore, the discussion includes Marx as an economic theorist as well as his theoretical applications on literary studies. Starting with Marx's (1867) contribution for poverty alleviation, the suggestions which first appeared in his work, *Communist Manifesto* in 1848 and lately in *Das Kapital* in 1867, this section focusses on the theory of surplus value and accumulation of wealth in a few hands. By proposing the theory of surplus value and propounding political and economic theory, Marx pictures a social class of the workers or proletariat which is capable of producing wealth, though the worker is denied to enjoy the same by the bourgeois class which keeps the surplus to it and accumulates it by producing capital on it. By proposing the theory of surplus value, he suggests the reasons as to why the poor or the working class always remains poor and the bourgeois gets richer and richer. Marx (1867) observed as such:

Let us now return to our would-be capitalist. We left him just after he purchased, in the open market, all the necessary factors of the labour process; its objective factors, the means of production, as well as its subjective factor, labour power. With the keen eye of an expert, he has selected the means of production, and the kind of labour power, best adapted to his particular trade, be it spinning, boot-making or any other kind...Secondly the product is the property of the capitalist and not of the labourer...from the instant he steps into workshop, the use value of its labour power, and therefore also its use, which is its labour, belongs to the capitalist (pp.130-131).

By proposing the means as to how a capitalist owns his resources, including the material ones such as the factors of the material labour, the necessary tools, machines, the investment in the form of money and the human labour power, Marx suggests the ways and means of the capitalist's exploitation. The labourers, as human resource become the part of objective material as machineries and therefore become the tools in the capitalist's exploitative machinery. In such a situation while the labour and labourer belong to the capitalist, he after selling out the product and distributing the wages of ten hour labour among the labourers, he gets the surplus value on which he builds his capital. The text on surplus value reads as such: "The rate of surplus value is therefore an exact expression for the degree of exploitation of labour power by capital, or of the labourer by the capitalist" (p. 153).

Marx further explains as to how this capital in the form of surplus value becomes the source of a production of a class by the capitalist which is called proletariat and which, in spite of huge contribution in the production of the material gets the same wages of ten hour labour and becomes poorer and poorer in the process. The text elaborating this phenomenon follows: "Now that we have considered the forcible creation of a class of outlawed proletarians, the bloody discipline that turned them into wage labourers, the disgraceful action of the State which employed the police to accelerate the accumulation of capital by increasing the degree of exploitation of labour, the question remains: whence came the capitalist originally" (p. 528)?

The above mentioned points for discussion lead to the analysis of Karl Marx as an economic theorist and make the reader analyze the causes of poverty among people. However, the question remains as to how as a political and economic theorist, Marx remains relevant to literary studies. As to the theories of poverty and class structure, Marx is applicable to literary studies as well. Any literary text which brings forth the issues of poverty and social structure and class struggle, is a Marxist text. And, therefore, any author who writes through such perspective is a Marxist writer and critic. In the literary studies, Marxist perspective are numerous. One such example is the study of *The God of Small Things*. As a literary text it highlights the discrimination of class and caste issue. Oppression of Velutha as a member of a lower caste, is significant of the economic oppression studying through Marxist perspective. The classification of jam, jellies and pickles of Mammachi's pickle factory, extends to all the fabrics of the Indian society. The discrimination against the women, children and the untouchable, all reflects Marxist perspective on the mentioned society. If literature reflects the propagation of ideology as proposed by Eagleton (1983), the literary theory has served its purposes. The function of literature and literary theory is to promote the belief system of a writer, the critic and the theorist.

As to the question of identity conflicts, let's see as how Edward Said has highlighted the sources of such conflicts happening in the contemporary world. While proposing the anti-thesis of Huntington's (1996) 'clash of civilization,' Said (1998) noted that the clash is simply not because of the clash of religions, cultures, ethnicity, or the conflicts between the in groups and the out groups in the late twentieth century and early decades of the twenty first century. It is more than simply the clash of identities, be it in the name of culture or civilization. Each identity group wants to promote its vested interest by dominating and maintaining its hegemony over the others. It is the West as Imperial power and the US as Atlantic power has constructed the identity conflicts. The clash of the ideologies of Communism and Western Liberalism between two great blocs of Cold War era, the US and the Soviet Union was replaced by the clash of civilizations. Rather, in order to dominate and hegemonize the space vacated by the clash of ideologies, the New World Order would govern the world with the new idea of the clash of civilizations. It is still the West, according to Said (1998) which is at the center of the world to govern the other worlds and dominate them. It is at this point that Said (1978) is relevant to our study.

Said argued that Orientalism is the Western idea of establishing their others. Orientalism as a discourse is important to understand because as a systematic discipline it has been able to produce and maintain the Orient politically, culturally, militarily and ideologically. The upsurge of religious violence in the twentieth century and the recent wave of terrorism in the twenty first century between the Western and the Atlantic powers the rest of the world according to Said (1993) lies in the hegemony of European Atlantic power. Any culture or civilization other than the West is *other* or Orient. By *Orientalism* Said meant different and interdependent meanings. The one meaning is associated with the teaching, writing or researching about the Orient. Another meaning of Orientalism is the style of thought which distinguishes on the basis of ontology and epistemology, between the two. Therefore, this difference becomes the starting point for theories, novels, and epics, social descriptions and political accounts. It is the third meaning which makes Orientalism important and relevant to this study. It works as the corporate institution which deals with the orient by making statements about it, giving authorizing views about it, describing it or teaching it. Hence constructing a dominating and authoritative relation between the Orient and the Occident.

The Orient, simply is not an imaginative entity, rather, it is a constructed reality, orientalized, by the West. Said (1978) refers to Vico's observation that it the man who has constructed his own history extending it to different cultures and geographies. Drawing upon the idea of Vico, therefore, according to Said it is the European-Atlantic power which dominates the Orient, establishing the idea of European identity being superior one as to all non-Europeans identities. As Said (1993) observed:

A substantial amount of scholarship in anthropology, history, and area studies has developed arguments, I put forward in *Orientalism*, which was limited to Middle East. So I, too, have tried here to expand the arguments of the earlier book to describe a more general pattern of relationships between the modern metropolitan West and its overseas territories. What are some of the non-Middle Eastern materials drawn on here. European writings on Africa, India, parts of Far East, Australia, and the Caribbean; these Africanist and Indianist discourses, as some of them have been called, I see as part of general European effort to rule distant lands and peoples and, therefore, as related to Orientalist descriptions of the Islamic world, as well as Europe's special way of representing the Caribbean islands, Ireland, and the Far East. What are striking in these discourses are the rhetorical figures one keeps encountering in their descriptions of the 'mysterious East', as well as the stereotypes about 'the African [or the Indian or Irish or Jamaican or Chines] mind', the notions about bringing civilization to primitive or barbaric peoples, the disturbingly familiar ideas about flogging or death or extended punishment being required when 'they' misbehaved or became rebellious, because 'they' mainly understood force or violence best; were not like 'us' and for that reason deserved to be ruled (pp. xi-xii).

While analyzing the two texts of Edward Said, *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* it becomes obvious that Said's theoretical approach of viewing the issues related to identity has transformed global vision. His approach views the chaotic world of the twentieth and the twenty first century through the lens of power politics. While imposing their hegemony in the territories and colonies of the East and the Third World, European Atlantic power has created chaos and unrest in the world. Said's influence on the political and literary sphere is vast and over-arching. However, as a literary theory if applied on the literary texts such as *The Kite Runner*, *The Wasted Vigil* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, it becomes obvious that his influence is even more pronounced in the current century. The religious violence, the Third Worldly states manifest in the twenty first century also carry the implications of Said's Theory of identity as proposed in *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*.

While presenting the constructivist view, Said (1978) refers to Vico's observation that it the man who has constructed his own history extending it to different cultures and geographies. Employing the idea of Vico, therefore, according to Said (1978) it is the European-Atlantic power which dominates the Orient, establishing the idea of European identity being superior one as to all non-European identities (Said, 1978). The construction of various identities and identity groups, the West has created the internal strives in these societies. It is also to be pointed out that in the literary and political canon the term Orientalism, nowadays, not only applies to the Middle East, as a generic term it is also applied to all Third World states including South Asia. Edward Said (1993) has expanded his idea of identity construction from the Middle East to all Third Worldly states which have remained subjected under the empire, therefore, making Orientalism a more generic

idea. It states that the West has remained successful in constructing and maintaining relations of power among its colonies. While employing Postcolonial Theory in the context of Afghanistan, India and Pakistan, it becomes clear that the religious stratification on the basis of religious divides in these countries started during the Great Game era. During the Great Game era while containing Russian influence in the region, the British deployed its army and manipulated its internal divides in her own favour. The growing influence of Russia in Persian was compensated by instigating sectarian issues between the two states. Hence starts the never ending religious violence in Afghanistan. This religious stratification becomes Afghanistan's Achilles heel which later on culminates in the form of 9/11 in the text. In the context of the Subcontinent it is applicable on the Indian region, wherein the identities of Muslims, Hindus and the Untouchables were constructed, to later on divide the people on these lines, therefore exploiting their religious diversities, it tried to save its own geopolitical interest in the region. Hence, analyzing the data in the light of Postcolonial Theory, it can be calculated that religious based identities in the above mentioned texts were constructed by the imperial forces and they got strengthened in the colonial and postcolonial era. The religious conflicts, which Third Worldly nations face today are, in fact, the legacy handed over to the region by the colonial forces. It were the imperial powers which highlighted the religious divides in the society. These conflicts which arise on the basis of difference of ideology or othering as represented in the mentioned fictions are in fact the product of years of hatred nourished by colonial forces.

The third theorist, selected as a literary, feminist and a postcolonial critic, Spivak has highlighted gender and class disparities by proposing feminist and postcolonial theory. While commenting about the epistemic violence such as the ideology of Imperialism which constructed and constituted the colonial subject as Other, she exemplifies the establishment of Imperial ideology and elaborates as to how a justification and narrative of reality of the other was constructed as normative one. Spivak introduces the underpinnings of British codification of Hindu law. The codification of Hindu law by British imperials, such as the compilation of Hindu law in writing is an example of epistemic violence leashed on a polymorphous, internally incoherent and the Hindu law open at both ends. Earlier, at the end of the eighteenth century the Hindu law was oral in tradition. However, the British codified and stabilized it during their rule on the subcontinent.

In her essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" she further talks about the oppression of the subaltern. Originally, the word subaltern means a soldier in an army, however, Spivak includes all the marginalized people of a society, including the women, the tribal, illiterate peasantry and the lowest strata of a society etc. The text reads as such:

Let us now move to consider the margins (one can just say the silent, silenced center) of the circuit marked out by this epistemic violence, men and women among the illiterate peasantry, the tribals, the lowest strata of the urban sub-proletariat. According to Foucault and Deleuze (in the First World under the standardization and regimentation of socialized capital, though they do not seem to recognize this), the oppressed if given the chance (the problem of representation cannot be bypassed here), and on the way to solidarity through alliance politics (a Marxist thematic is working here), *can speak and know their conditions*. We must now confront the following question: on the other side of the international division of labor of socialized capital, inside and outside of the

circuit of epistemic violence of imperialist law and education supplementing an earlier economic text, *can the subaltern speak* (p. 282)?

While highlighting the tension between the center and the margins, Spivak specifically focusses her attention to the oppressed women generally and the Indian oppressed women particularly. According to her women in a postcolonial, patriarchal society a woman is doubly marginalized. The marginalizing powers are the centers of Imperialism and Patriarchy.

Can the subaltern speak? What must do the elite do to watch out for the continuing construction of the subaltern. The question of women is more problematic in the context. Clearly if you are poor, black and female you get in three ways. If, however, the formulation is moved from the first world context into the postcolonial context, the description, 'black' or of 'color' loses persuasive significance (p. 294).

The oppression of a poor, black and female becomes multipronged when it is transferred to the postcolonial societies as it not only includes the poor, or the colored woman but a heterogeneous woman who is culturally, religiously diverse. Although Spivak includes oppression of women both of color and of class, oppression of the First World and the Third World respectively, she particularly reports on the women of imperial era.

Reporting on, or better still, participating in, antisexist work among women of color or women in class oppression in the First World or the Third World is undeniably on the agenda. We should also welcome all the information retrieval in the silenced areas that is taking place in anthropology, political science, history and sociology. Yet the assumption or construction of a consciousness or subject sustains such work and will in the long run cohere with the work of imperialist subject – constitution, mingling epistemic violence with the advancement of learning and civilization and the subaltern women will be as mute as ever (p. 295).

The 'constructed counter-narrative of woman's consciousness' (p. 299), as noted by Spivak by the British and the elite Hindu is worthy to be pointed here. In reference to the ritual of sati, the self-immolation of Hindu woman on the pyre of her husband, the ritual is itself the manipulation of the Hindu patriarchy and British imperialism. The scripture only refers to 'sat', the being, which is True, Good, and Right in meaning. Even in the sacred texts, it is the essence or the spirituality. Semantically, the word sat transcends any gender specific notion of masculinity as Spivak noted. However, the word was transformed into 'sati', the feminine of good wife. The epistemic violence by the Hindu elite is obvious here. This invites our attention to see as to how British manipulated the ritual of burning the women in the pyre as a barbarian one and as to how it abolished it as a justification of creating a civil society in the subcontinent. This, Spivak calls the constructed counter-narrative of woman's consciousness. She further elaborates on the interference of British in the following words: "...white men, seeking to save brown women from brown men" (p.297). What is important in the analysis of an Indian woman by Spivak is that the silenced subaltern has no voice of her own. This double construction of women's consciousness in the subcontinent is the best example, she provides to explain her argument.

CONCLUSION

While discussing and analyzing the three primary texts from the selected three theorists, it is concluded that the theorists have highlighted the issues through different perspectives. They have

introduced new ways of viewing the world's problem. This paper aimed to highlight the role the literary theory has played in bringing peace and harmony among individuals, people and nations. While providing different perspective and different approaches, literary critics, through their works have brought meaning and certainty in the otherwise chaotic world. Chronologically dividing literary theory, this paper had discussed, firstly, the contribution of classical economist, Karl Marx with reference to poverty alleviation, Edward Said with reference to global identity crisis and Gayatri Spivak with reference to the uplift of the subaltern groups, especially prompting the status of women in a society. It is concluded that providing diverse perspectives to view the world problems they all have tried to uplift the conditions of human beings by making people aware of the real causes of dissent and chaos in the world and helped promote peace in the world.

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