

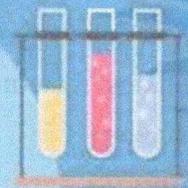
Blend: A Tapestry of Multi-Disciplinary Narratives

ENGLISH PART - I

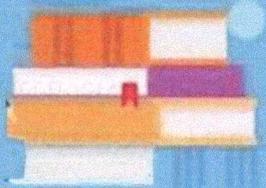


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Jaisingpura, Aurangabad. (M.S.)

Title

Blend: A Tapestry of Multi-Disciplinary Narratives

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Publisher

Ajanta Prakashan

ISO 9001 : 2015 QMS

ISBN/ISSN

Jaisingpura, Near University Gate, Aurangabad. (M.S.)

Mobile No. : 9579260877, 9822620877

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www.ajantaprakashan.in

Cover Design

Gaurav Kachru Kumawat
Ajanta Computers & Printers
Jaisingpura, Aurangabad. (M.S.)

Printer

Om Offset, Aurangabad. (M.S.)

First Edition

December 2022

ISBN : 978-93-83587-53-7

Rs.- 550/- Rs.

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23. Planner Homi K. Bhabha's Essay of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse

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Introduction

Homi K. Bhabha's "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" is one of the most significant essays in the postcolonial theory. In this essay, Bhabha makes use of use of several technical terms and intertextual references to explain the concept of mimicry and to expose the ambivalent, ironic relationship between the colonizers and the colonized. It also sheds light on the intentions of the colonizers towards the colonized. The title of the essay is itself suggestive and includes three important terms- mimicry, ambivalence, and colonial discourse. A short introduction to these terms will expose the focus of Bhabha's discussion in this essay. Mimicry, in a general sense and fundamentally, is an imitation or copying to someone. But Homi K. Bhabha's use of the term "Mimicry" in this essay goes beyond to its general sense and reveals a broad idea in the colonial text. According to Homi K. Bhabha, mimicry is not only the act of imitating or mimicking the language and culture of colonizers by colonized people. Mimicry is a tool, a method, or a strategy used by both the colonizer and the colonized. The colonizers as a part of a so-called civilizing mission wanted their colonial subjects to imitate or to mimic their language, manners, and culture. The colonized people also wanted to imitate or to mimic their colonial masters for the purpose of providing service and gaining empowerment. In short, according to Bhabha, mimicry shows the colonial halfness, a technique of camouflage (resemblance) and a sort of threat for both the colonizer and the colonized. The second term "ambivalence" which is used by Bhabha in the title shows a sense of "double talk" or "the coexistence of two opposite ideas" in the colonial discourse and the third term "colonial discourse" is nothing but a system or the set of narrative statements that shows the

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colonizer's policies towards the colonized people. Bhabha remarks that these colonial practices or policies towards the colonized people. Bhabha remarks that these colonial practices or policies have the purpose of civilization or improvement of the colonized people at the apparent level and at the same time they have some hidden motives in its background. Resembling the colonizer). For this duality or doublings, Bhabha uses the term ambivalence. In short, the focus of this essay is to explain the nature of mimicry, the menace i.e. threats or dangers of mimicry, and the ambivalent structure (the double talk or the coexistence of two opposite ideas and motives) of colonial discourse. Homi K Bhabha elaborates on the notion of mimicry and the ambivalence of colonial discourse by referring to about nine texts associated with colonial practices.

The essay "Of Mimicry and Man" opens with two quotations that clearly show the nature of mimicry and the double talk (ambivalence) of colonial discourse. By using Lacanian vision of mimicry Bhabha reveals the three-dimensional nature of colonial mimicry that begins with colonized people's act of mere copying to the colonizer, then camouflaging (resembling the colonizer), and finally showing the resistance to the colonial power. Homi K Bhabha argues that mimicry is a disciplined imitation of a white man's language, manners, and culture to achieve the purpose of the so-called "civilizing mission." But, according to Bhabha, this is not only the reason. The colonizers wanted their colonized people to engage themselves in mimicking the white man because they also wanted to be exalted and empowered. Thus, the process of mimicry has two-fold purposes that make the term itself ambivalent. All the colonial discourses have an ambivalent structure in it.

Homi K Bhabha exposes this ambivalence of colonial discourse in the very beginning of his essay when he quotes Sir Edward Cust who in his speech remarks that the colony must be thankful to their colonial master because they allowed the natives to mimic the white (the British) that resulted into achieving that so exalted position for them. Thus, Cust highlights the original policy of the colonizer was to allow the colonized people to mime them for civilization or improvement. However, he also warned the colonizer not to forget the principle of their colonial policy- that is the colonial dependence while conferring the privileges to the colony. By this, he means there should not be the entire civilization of the colonized people so that they will remain as colonial dependent requiring British rule. By referring to the speech Edward Cust, Bhabha succeeds in highlighting ambivalence (i.e. the double talk or the coexistence of two opposite ideas) of colonial discourse. This colonial policy shows the purpose of civilization but it carries a hidden motive of controlling the colonized people.

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To define the term mimicry, to explain its nature and effects (menace) and to show the ambivalent structure of colonial discourse. Homi K Bhabha refers to Lord Rosebery's narrative-writ by the finger of the divine, Edward Said's description of conflict-laden colonial discourse and theme of war, Samuel Weber's definition of slave, Charles Grant's concept of partial imitator, Lord Macaulay's concept of interpreters and translators, the concept of mimic man, Benedict Anderson's idea of anglicised identity, Sigmund Freud's idea of fantasy, and Jacques Lacan's notion of camouflage, etc. In Bhabha's view, the term mimicry as "an effective strategy of colonial power," "as an artistic compromise in colonial discourse," "constructed around the ambivalence of the sameness with difference, "having the features of indeterminacy, double articulation, and inappropriateness," "having the ability of resemblance and menace," and as "the metonymy of presence," etc. Let's discuss each in detail:

According to Homi Bhabha mimicry is the most elusive and effective strategy of colonial power and knowledge. The colonizer (the West) believed that only their culture was civilized and the native people (the East) whom they colonized were savages and uncivilized. There was a narrative developed by Lord Roseberry in which he opined that the colonization of the East by the West was God's writ (order). God sent the West (the British) to the East (for example India) to make the colonized subjects civilized individuals. For civilization, according to Bhabha there was no alternative to mimicry in the era of colonialism. The colonizers asked the colonized to mimic their language and culture as they were superior and they wanted the partial civilization only and not the entire civilization. They wanted to make them human beings but not wholly human beings. In his way, mimicry becomes the strategy of civilization and holding control also. Further, the colonial discourse of civilizing missions has an ambivalent structure. There seems a grand, lofty theme of civilization but at a hidden level there is selfish motive of spreading colonial power. Thus there is a double talk in this civilizing policy.

Mimicry, as Bhabha views is an ironic compromise between the two imperatives of colonial discourse and it is constructed around the ambivalence of almost the same but not quite. The colonial discourse, in Edward Said's description, is marked by the conflict between the two imperatives- the one is demanding an unchanged solid identity and the second is demanding the change, difference, or reconstitution of colonial discourse. As the colonial relationship progresses, the colonial authority expresses their desire for domination, and at the same time, the colonial subject expresses their desire for the natural progress of history. They wanted to become like their colonial masters. It is in this conflict between the synchronic panoptical vision of domination and the progressive nature of history, mimicry functions as an ironic compromise.

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The colonizers allowed the colonized people to mimic their language, culture, and patterns to civilize or improve the colonial subject. However, they were worried about their colonial domination at the same time. To keep their domination over the colonized subject and to hold the colonial power, the colonizers developed the ambivalent structure of mimicry. In this sense, Homi K Bhabha describes colonial mimicry as the desire for a reformed, recognizable other as a subject of difference that is almost the same but not quite. This description shows that the colonial masters (the British) wanted to reform their colonial subject (the Indians), they wanted to make the colonized people like the colonizers. But there was ambivalence and that was the colonizers did not want to make the colonial subjects exactly like themselves. They wanted to reform, to civilize the colonized people in such a way that still maintained a difference and their identity should remain as the other. By mimicking the colonizers, the colonized people will be reformed and will look similar to their colonial masters. However, they will not fit the hegemonic culture and political system of the colonizer. This ambivalent policy of colonial mimicry highlights the indeterminate, double-articulated, and inappropriate nature of mimicry. Homi K. Bhabha argues that colonial mimicry has an ambivalent and ambiguous nature. It serves the function of strategy and instrument for both the colonizers and the colonized. Mimicry is an imitation as well as the process of disavowal. It is also a strategy for reforming and disciplining the colonial subject and at the same, it is an instrument used by the colonial masters to gain power and to control the colonized. It is also a sign of inappropriate for both the colonizers and the colonized as it has a subversive quality.

To show the ambivalent structure of colonial discourse, Homi Bhabha refers to several texts and links his concept of mimicry with a number of definitions or terminologies. According to Bhabha, the effect of mimicry is profound and disturbing on the authority of colonial discourse. The British or the West came to the East with their grand post-enlightenment purpose of civilizing the Eastern countries. As soon as they colonized the people belonging to the Eastern countries, their language of liberty alienated them from the dream of post-enlightenment civility. This ambivalence of colonial discourse, Bhabha proven through the definition of slav made by John Locke. John Locke was the 17th-century British philosopher who made a double use of slaves in his 'The second Treatise' considering the state of California and the state of Nature, he has offered ambivalent notion of 'slave'. For Locke, in the state of California the word slave is the legitimate from of ownership. Is is a lawful possession. But in the state of nature, he expresses that the slave is an illegitimate exercise of power. He argues that in the state of nature, man must be free from any supervisor power on the earth and only follow the law of nature

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whereas in the state of California, he argues that every man of California shall have absolute power and authority over their slaves. Thus, the double talk or two opposite opinions of the same concept of slave shows the ambivalent structure of colonial discourse. Each and every colonial policy or discourse is marked with such ambivalence says Bhabha. This ambivalence of mimicry fixes the colonial subject as a “partial” presence. By partial Bhabha means both ‘incomplete’ and ‘virtual’. Such partiality of colonial discourse is shown by Bhabha through Charles Grant’s text.

This ambivalent purpose of civilizing and controlling the colonized people is explained by Homi K. Bhabha through several colonial texts and policies. Bhabha refers to Charles Grant’s tract “Observations of the States...” and Lord Macaulay’s “Infamous Minutes” which clearly shows the ambivalent structure (dual motives or purposes) of colonial discourse. Charles Grant, the social reformer and educationalist, by observing the uncivilized and half-savage Indian scenario wants to bring improvement or civilization in India. He wrote a tract and proposed strongly to introduce an evangelical system of mission education. He also wanted to bring political reformation through the introduction of the doctrines of Christianity. So, at the prima facie, the colonial discourse (policy) of spreading evangelical education exposes the civilizing purpose. However, Bhabha points out that there was ambivalence (duality) in this discourse and further, he remarks that “caught between the desire for religious reform and the fear that the Indians should become turbulent for liberty” Grant advocated the partial diffusion Christianity and the partial influence of moral improvement which will construct appropriate colonial subject. The Colonizers were afraid of that if the colonized people got all education, they would not remain under our control and hence, according to Bhabha, Charles Grant’s advocated the principle of the partial diffusion of Christianity that taught the natives (i.e. the colonized People) to imitate the new mannerism of British Empire and at the same taught them to remain under the colonial protection and power. Thus, Charles Grant’s project created the colonial subject as the partial imitator.

The same partiality, mockery and ambivalence Bhabha shows through the example of Lord Macaulay’s Infamous Minutes, in which he proposed to introduce English education in India but didn’t want the entire civilization of colonial subject through this policy. He wanted to form only the class of interpreters who would serve between the colonial master and the colonial subject whom they governed. Bhabha quotes one more missionary policy of education that aimed to create only a corps of translators who could work at different offices as laborers. Macaulay’s policy on education makes a mockery of oriental learning and expects only “a class of interpreters between the colonizers and the millions of colonized people.” Macaulay wants a

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class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect". Macaulay's minutes on education show the British introduced English education in India with the lofty intention of civilizing them. But this is not the truth. Their hidden selfish motive is only to create such an educated class that renders their service to their colonial master and helps them to control the colonized. In other words, a mimic man raised "through our English School" according to a missionary educationalist wrote in 1819 "to form a corps of translators and be employed in different departments of labour." However, Bhabha finds a sense of menace in Macaulay's Minutes. According to Bhabha, the Indian class who mimic their colonizers will no longer live the model colonial subject. Having achieved mastery through mimicry the colonized people can become a threat to the colonized. Bhabha traces the Idea of mimicking man through the works of Kipling, Forster, Orwell, Naipaul, and most recently Benedict Anderson's essay on nationalism. Mimicry, according to Anderson's notion problematizes the signs of racial and cultural priority, so that the nation is no longer naturalizable. In this sense, mimicry repeats rather than represents.

According to Bhabha, mimicry is not the familiar exercise of dependent colonial through narcissistic identification. By this, Bhabha means that mimicry of the colonizers by the colonized people does not create a subordinate to the colonial power. It exerts "menace" and a disruptive effect on colonialism creating the possibility of rupturing colonial power. Mimicry conceals no presence or identity behind its mask. It is not what Césaire describes as "colonization thingification." Fanon describes how the colonized educated blacks felt internally white but externally because of their race and physics were treated as black by the colonizers. So he says behind the white mask there stands the essence of the presence Africaine. Thus, the menace of mimicry is its double vision (dual identity) that is the result of partial representation or recognition of the colonial object. Bhabha says that the double vision is generated by the fact that the colonized people imitate the colonizers incompletely or in part. They are split between reality and created reality. For this, Bhabha labels the metonymies of presence. Grant's colonial as a partial imitator, Macaulay's translator, Naipaul's colonial politician as an actor, and Daccaod as sense setter are the appropriate objects of the colonialist chain of command, Authorized Version of otherness. Further, Bhabha suggests that in the process of mimicry, the observer becomes observed, and the partial representation rearticulates the whole notion of identity. This changing identity of the colonized people demands colonial power. Bhabha supports this view by referring to Eric Stoke who remarks that "Certainly India played no central part in fashioning the distinctive quality of English civilization. In many ways, it acted as a disturbing force..."

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Mimicry is a form of difference- almost the same but not quite- and is explained by using a Freudian figure of fantasy.

The visibility of mimicry, according to Homi Bhabha is always produced at the site of interdiction. It is the form of colonial discourse that is uttered inter dicta: a discourse follows the principle that what is known must be kept concealed. The desire for colonial mimicry- an interdictory desire- may not have an object, but it has strategic objectives which Bhabha calls metonymy of presence. The inappropriate signifiers of colonial discourse- the difference between being English and Anglicized, the stereotyped identities, the discriminatory identities, the Simian Black and the Lying Asiatic all these metonymic presence. Mimicry as the metonymy of presence is such an erratic and eccentric strategy of authority through the repetitious slippages of difference and desire. It is the process of the fixation of the colonial as a form of cross-classificatory, discriminatory knowledge and therefore raises the question of authorization of colonial representation.

Conclusion

While discussing the ambivalent structure of colonial discourse, Homi K. Bhabha put forth his views on the menace or threats of mimicry throughout the essay. He enlists the danger of mimicry in terms of split identity, castration, colonial halfness, intimidation, farcical representation of history, and civilization, threat to colonizer through turbulence, etc.

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