

Introduction to Literary Theory
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Lecture -33
Postcolonial Theory I: Edward Said

Welcome back to yet another lecture on Literary Theory and today, the topic of our discussion will be post colonialism. As we discussed in our previous lecture, the postmodern condition is marked by the d legitimization of a single grand narrative and the foregrounding in it is place of little narratives or (Refer Time: 00:44). One of the most powerful manifestations of this post modernist turn is the rise of post colonial studies with the various departments of English literature, the world over from around the 1980s and 1990s, 1980s onwards.

As we will see in this lecture as well as the following one. In fact, the main thrusts of post colonial studies has been to undermine and d legitimize, the grand narrative of European colonialism, which gained ascendancy especially, during the 19th and early 20th century. This is complemented by a sustained attempt by post colonial scholars, to foreground the little narratives of the people who were and indeed, in some cases still are subjugated by colonialism, either politically or culturally or economically.

Today's lecture would try and track the genesis of post colonialism as a coherent theoretical field by especially, focusing on the works of Edwards side, but before we start discussing side, let us take a look at the various meanings of the term post colonialism. And I would; however, like to mention here that this lecture as well as the next one will build upon the 10, our course on post colonial literature that I had earlier offered on the NPTEL platform.

So, those of you who have already done that course, should use my lectures on post colonialism in this series, as a way to refresh your memories of that course and to go over some of the concepts, a new that you have already done. And those of you who have not done that, then our course on post colonial literature, my suggestion would be that you will perhaps find some of the topics that I will discuss in these lectures on post colonialism here, in this series on literary theory to be slightly cryptic.

So, my suggestion would be that if you want a detailed elaboration of any of these topics, you should go to that 10 hour lecture series, which is available online and you should go to the relevant lectures there in that series, where I have discussed everything that I will be talking about here in this lecture and in the next one in a great deal of details. So, first let me come to the term post colonialism.

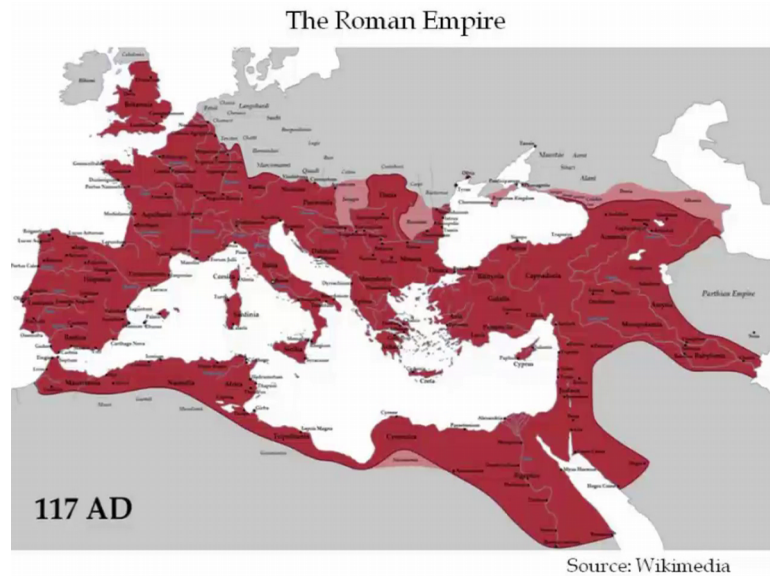
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The term postcolonialism has at its root the word colonialism which is derived from the Latin word *colōnia*.

This term is constituted of two parts at its root it has the word colonialism, which is derived from the Latin word *Colonia* and the term post colonialism also has another very important component which is the prefix *post*, but we will discuss the significance of this prefix later. First, let us focus on the word colonialism.

Now, as I just mentioned, the word colonialism derives from the Latin root word *Colonia*, which at the most fundamental level means something like a farm land or a landed estate, but to understand the full significance of this term *Colonia*, we will have to know something about the original context in which this term was used.

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Now, as you will know from your school level history lessons, the Roman empire had, for a very long time indeed, an aggressive expansionist policy. And during the first 100 years of the common era the Roman empire that stretched from the modern day Iraq and the Persian Gulf in the East to the modern day Portugal in the West and from Egypt and the northern fringes of Africa in the South to England in the North was in fact, constantly expanding.

Now, within this expanding Roman empire, one of the prevalent practices was to reward Veteran soldiers of the Roman army, with vast stretches of landed estates or Colonia's and these landed estates were situated in the newly occupied territory and this was one of the major form of rewards granted to Veteran army soldiers.

Now, the soldiers who would go and settle in these landed estates would retain their Roman citizenship and in return, they were expected to protect the Roman interests in the newly occupied territories and keep the native inhabitants of those lands under subjugation. So, colony which is the modern derivative of the term Colonia and from which we ultimately derived the term colonialism, retains two very important aspect of the ancient Roman practice that I have just discussed with you.

The first aspect is that modern colony, like the ancient Colonia is established through a process of violent subjugation and the second aspect, which modern colonialism shares with the Roman practice of establishing Colonias is that, it involves a relationship

between two different territories between, what is called the Metropolis and the Periphery and these are important terms within the field of post colonial studies.

So, what is a Metropolis? Well a Metropolis literally translates into a mother city or a mother country and in the context of Roman Colonia. For instance the Metropolis was Rome, which was at the centre of the Roman Empire and to which all Roman citizens were affiliated, the occupied territory on the other hand in which they read those Colonias were Periphery to the mother country or the Metropolis.

So, if we are talking about the Roman empire, Rome is a Metropolis and a place like Britain for instance which was a Roman colony at one point in history was the Periphery within this scheme of things. And if we apply this model to understand more recent forms of colonialism like for instance; the British colonialism of the 19th century then Britain would be the Metropolis, the country which is at the centre of this colonial empire and a place like India for instance; or a place like Nigeria, they would be Peripheries of this Metropolis, this mother country.

Now, though I have traced back the etymological roots of the word colonialism to the ancient Roman empire, the modern use of the word colonialism especially, as it is understood within the field of post colonial studies is restricted to the forceful subjugation of various countries in the global South by certain European powers roughly from around the 15th century C E.

These European powers included a number of nations, like Portugal for instance Spain, there was Netherlands, but post colonial studies has actually remained mostly focused on British and French colonialism which started slightly after the beginning of Spanish colonialism, for instance or Portuguese colonialism and which reached its peak around the 19th and early 20th century. And during this period of time the Metropolis of Britain and France was connected to vast stretches of Africa and Asia, which served as their colonial periphery.

Now, one of the basic characteristic features of this modern colonialism with which post colonial theory concerns itself is capitalism and to understand this crucial link between capitalism and colonialism, let us begin by briefly looking at how capitalism functions. Capitalism is perhaps most simply defined as a process of investing money or capital to make more money, in the form of profit and the West had been moving from the feudal

mode of economy to this new capitalist mode of economy from around the 14th and 15th century onwards when mercantilism, long distance trade started flourishing.

However, the phase of capitalism that is most integrally associated with the kind of colonialism that we are focusing on is the industrial phase of capitalism really and this phase started to gain momentum from say the late 18 and early 19th century, when the effects of the industrial revolution gradually started setting in.

And this industrial revolution which had its origin in England, allowed the western countries to produce far in excess of their consumption. Which means that the mechanization of the production process led to a huge accumulation of surplus products, which during the 19th and early 20th century became a source of great wealth for Western European countries like **Britain** for instance or France, but though I have talked about increase in wealth and profit through the excess production, if you look at the phenomenon of increasing production within the capitalist system carefully.

You will see that on the surface, it is actually associated not with an increase in profit, but with a decrease in profit on the surface apparently. Let me explain this by putting forward an example. Let us take the instance of shirt production for instance. Now, let us say that to begin with, I only have enough resources to produce clothes for my own self, which I do along with my family entirely for our own personal consumption, for our personal use.

Now, let us say that industrial revolution happens and with the advent of mechanized power looms I suddenly become able to produce shirts in far greater numbers than I require for my own self and my own family. So, what do I do? I use this excess production to sell in the market and earn myself profit right, this is how capitalism starts working. Now, let us say that I sell in the market each shirt that I have made, for a certain amount of money and I make a profit of rupees 100 from each shirt.

Now, in the market I am not the only seller, there are other sellers of shirts as well and some of these sellers in order to cut me out of the business and to win all the customers for themselves reduce their profit per shirt to rupees 50, let us say. Now, in order to stay afloat in the business and to win back the customers, I will then have to reduce my profit margin even further right. I will probably let us say I will have to reduce it down to rupees 25, which will in turn elicit a similar response from my rivals.

So, in a free market, as you can see here, we are confronted with a race to the bottom as far as profit is concerned and this is one of the key features of capitalist economy. Now, if I am confronted with such a situation, I can remedy this phenomenon of constantly falling profits in two different ways; the first way is to decrease the cost of production.

So, if I can somehow reduce the cost of the raw materials and of the labour, that are required to make the finished product then I will be again able to increase my profit margin. This is because profit margin is basically, the difference between the market price of a commodity and its cost of production. So, if my ultimate price of the shirt, the price in which I am able to sell the shirt in the market reduces, I can still hold on to the profit margin by reducing the cost of labouring input and the cost of raw materials.

This is one way in which I can hold on to the profit, but there is also another way and that deals with increase of my market share. So, let us say that, because of intense competition with my rivals I have had to cut down the profit margin on my shirt from rupees 100 to rupee 1. Now, I can still make 100 rupees profit, if in place of selling 1 shirt, I sell 100 shirts. So, for each shirt that I was selling earlier, if I managed to increase it to 100 shirts in the change scenario then I will still be able to earn a profit of 100 rupees right, by increasing the market share.

So, in other words even if my profit margins go down a 100 times, I can still go on earning the same amount of profit, if I am able to increase my market share 100 times. Indeed I can even increase my profit in spite of falling profit margin, if I manage to expand the market share of my product at a rate that is faster than the rate in which my profit margin is falling and here is precisely where colonialism comes into the equation.

The industrialized European countries, colonized vast areas of the global South to use their territorial resources to produce cheap raw materials like cotton for instance, like rubber and these were used in the industrial production of Europe and the subjugated population of the colonies were also used as cheap labour power, which helped the European colonial Metropolis to reduce their cost of production even further. But apart from reducing the cost of production, the colonies also helped European profit making in another very different way, which was by providing a captive market.

Think of the Indian colonial context for instance, not only did we provide cheap raw materials in the form of cotton in the form of indigo, in the form of opium even and we

also provided cheap workforce in the form of indentured labourers, but we also acted as a captive market for goods produced by the industries in the colonial metropolis right.

For instance; we were the market for the textile industry, for instance which was flourishing in places like Manchester. This connection between industrial capitalism and European colonialism explains, why with the progress of the former that is industrial capitalism during the 19th and early 20th century, the latter that is European colonialism also reached its peak. Indeed the whole continent of Africa was neatly puzzled out as colonies between all the major European powers, precisely to provide them with the needs for their growth in profit.

It was in fact, meant to prevent a full scale war between the Western industrialized nations who were all scouting at that point in time for cheap raw materials and cheap labour for their factories and they were also looking of course, for captive markets for their industrial products. He needs a risk to colonize and to exploit the resources of Africa, which for the 19th century west had remained the only major unmapped territory in the face of this earth, was already underway by the early 1880s.

Belgium in fact, was one of the first European powers to move in and to occupy large parts of the Congo basin to procure the important raw materials of rubber and ivory was also very important. This had set in motion, what is known as (Refer Time: 21:08) the scramble for Africa, in which all the major European industrialized nations participated.

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Otto von Bismarck
(1815 - 1898)



Source: en.wikipedia.org

In the winter of 1884-1885, the German chancellor Otto von Bismarck, he sought to settle the matter of colonizing Africa amicably between the European powers by holding a conference in Berlin and as a direct consequence of this notorious conference, the whole of Africa except Ithopeiya, Liberia and some parts of modern day, Somalia was passing off as colonies and was shared between the major European powers and what is especially ironic here is that in that infamous Berlin conference, which was to decide the fate of an entire continent, for decades there was not a single African present.

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African Perspectives on Colonialism (1987)

To understand more about this connection between capitalism and European colonial expansion especially, from within the African context, I would recommend that you read the book titled, African perspectives on colonialism, which is written by the Ghanaian Historian Albert A. Dubois. And it is a thin book, a manageable book and it is wonderfully thought provoking as well as informative. So, this is a good book to read.

So, now that we have a more or less a working idea of what colonialism means especially, within the context of post colonial studies, let us turn to the prefix post and its significance. Now, usually when the prefix post is added to any word, it is added before any word, it signifies something that happens after the event or the time period that is suggested by the main word, to which it has been attached as a prefix.

So, for instance if I asked you to meet me post lunch on a certain date, you will understand that our meeting will happen on that date, after lunch. Similarly, if I say that I

have attended a post midnight, church service for instance it will mean that I have attended a church service, which was held after the midnight hour.

So, according to this logic, when we attach the prefix post to the word colonialism, it should refer to things political cultural economic social and so on, that take place after colonialism right, but here we need to be slightly careful, because within the field of post colonial studies, after colonialism does not mean after the end of colonialism. Rather it means after the beginning of colonialism, let us try and understand this statement in some more detail. Colonialism as a process works on the colonized as well as on the colonizing countries in a number of different ways and I think this is pretty obvious to all of us

This is why it is difficult, if not impossible to mention a specific ending when all of these impacts, all of these connections that are generated through colonialism comes to an end simultaneously think about the Indian context. For example, what happened on the 15th of August 1947 was only one aspect of British colonialism coming to an end in the subcontinent, in other words on that date 15th August 1947 India ceased to be politically governed by the British monarch and the British parliament. But India's engagement with several other colonial legacies continued, even after that and in fact, is still continuing to this day be it.

For instance, in the field of cultural engagement speed, in the field of economic engagements and so on and so forth. Even the political decoupling between India and British colonialism was only partially achieved on 15th August 1947 and this we can understand very easily, if we notice that we still use the parliamentary form of democracy, which is very much a part of our colonial legacy. So, as you can see we really cannot have a definitive date on which European colonialism ends and this definitive date is neither possible in the Indian context, nor is it possible in the context of the global South.

This is why post colonialism at least within the field of study that bears its name is understood, as the sum total of all the various social political economic and cultural changes that are brought about following the first impact of colonialism. So, post colonialism starts not with the end of colonialism, but rather with the beginning of colonialism and if we are focused on the context of British colonialism in India for

instance, then this post colonialism does not begin in 1947. But rather it can be traced back, at least as far back as early 18 century when (Refer Time: 28:02) Mughal emperor Farrukhsiyar granted through his farmaan or official order in 1770 duty free trading rights in the Province of Bengal to the British East India company.

Well now, that we have explored the term post colonialism in depth, let us try and see what constitutes post colonial theory per say and we will discuss this topic with reference to the works of three iconic figures, in the field of post colonial theory and in fact, they are often regarded as the holy trinity of post colonialism. And here, the three figures that I am talking about are Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayathri Chakraborty Spivak.

So, today we will start with side and his seminal texts orientalism whose publication in a way inaugurated the field of post colonial theory, but here I must mention that there is a figure who predates Edward side and his pioneering text and who is today considered to be one of the key figures within post colonial theory.

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Frantz Fanon
(1925 - 1961)

- *Black Skin, White Masks*
(1952)
- *The Wretched of the Earth*
(1961)



Source: Wikipedia

He is the psychiatrist, philosopher and cultural theorist from the Caribbean Island of Martinique Frantz Fanon, whose dates are 1925 and 1961 and whose texts *Black Skin White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth* did today enjoy canonical status within the field of post colonial studies. And indeed his theory that colonialism, even when it seems to end formally, like for instance as it did in India in 15th August 1947, actually

continues surreptitiously in the global South, through the imposition of a neo colonial order, by the indigenous middle class leaders.

And this theory play's a significant role in how post colonial studies approach the question of colonialism, they approach the question of independence, nationalism, freedom movement, etcetera etcetera, but phonon was only appropriated by the post colonial scholars once the field was established following the 1978 publication of Edward Side's orientalism. So, it is to side and to orientalism that we will have to turn in order to understand the genesis of the field of post colonial theory.

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Edward Said
(1935 – 2003)

• *Orientalism* (1978)



Source: www.edwardsaid.org

Edwards Said was born in British occupied Palestine in 1935 and he died in America in 2003 besides, did his doctorate on of Conrad from the university of Harvard and he subsequently became a professor at the Columbia university, where he taught till the last year of his life. During his career, Said war a number of hats including that of a scholar of comparative literature.

He used to teach comparative literature in Columbia university, but he was also a music critic, he was a public intellectual, he was known for his advocacy of the Palestinian cause, but his most lasting academic contribution is perhaps his book *Orientalism*, where he explored how the European colonialism of the orient or the east was not simply a matter of military subjugation, military occupation.

It also involved the creation and the plural proliferation of a peculiar kind of discourse that legitimized the colonial subjugation of the East by the West. It is this discourse and the ways in which it gets generated and circulated that Edward Said refers to as orientalism. So, according to Said orientalism has three different aspects, the first aspect is that of orientalism as a way of thinking, about the orient as a way of talking, about the orient and by Orient I mean East, by whom well by the occident or the West.

So, in its first aspect; orientalism is a peculiar kind of way in which the West or the occident has traditionally thought about and spoken about the orient, the East. The second aspect of orientalism is that, it is an academic discipline and the third aspect is that of orientalism as a corporate institution for dealing with the orient.

So, let us discuss these three aspects one by one. According to Said, the Western tradition of thinking about the orient as a single entity with a homogenous characteristic, feature can be traced as far back as the Greek tragedies of the 5th century BCE and in this tradition which starts from those Greek literature, we find orient being depicted not just as a landmass, but as an other to the European self.

In this imaginative geography represented by orientalism as a peculiar way of thinking about the orient. The orient is presented as the exact opposite of all the qualities, which the West consciously cultivates as part of its cultural self fashioning. Thus, if the west considers itself to be characterized by a culture of masculinity then the orient by contrast assumes a feminine entity in this imaginative geography.

If the occident likes to think of itself in terms of mature adulthood, then the orient becomes for them a representative of childish immaturity, if the occident considers itself to be at the pinnacle of civilization then of course, the orient comes to represent the depths of Barbarism and moral and cultural depravity. Now, Said argues that this peculiar way of thinking and talking about the orient as simultaneously, foreign loads some and yet excitingly the exotic gained a special significance during the heyday of European colonialism and provided a template for forming leading a discourse about the subjugation of the East by the West.

In this leader fees orientalism emerged as an academic discipline, which built upon the millennia old Western prejudices about the orient, under the garb of objective scientific knowledge gathering. So, now let us come to this idea of orientalism as an academic

discipline, which according to Said began from around the late 18 century and which represents the second major aspect of what constitutes orientalism. So, in 1798 something happened, something very important, what was that?

Napoleon Bonaparte of France led an armed invasion to Egypt and according to Said this was a major turning point in the history of the relationship between orient and occident and the history of the colonial subjugation of the East by the West and this is, because Napoleon in his invasion was not only accompanied by soldiers, but also by an army of scholars and scientists who would transform the occupied territory in a field of academic inquiry and systematic knowledge gathering.

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Description de l'Égypte

This would in fact, lead to the production of a multi volume Encyclopaedia of Egypt called Description of de l Egypte, which would meticulously describe the geography, the history, flora the fauna, the people of Egypt and though the perspective would be western and would indeed be underlined by those millennia old prejudices that I have just talked about. The Encyclopaedia was presented as an exercise in scientific knowledge gathering, written from an apparently Archimedean vantage point of objectivity.

Such quote unquote scientific knowledge gathering about the subjugated territory and it's people can in fact, be observed as a major characteristic feature, in almost all of European colonialism of the East and we can also for instance see it, in the context of British colonialism in India. Thus, we have figures like Warren Hastings, who was the

first governor general of British India or colonial officers like William Jones, for instance Ht Colebrook, Nathaniel Hal Head all of them and they during the late 18 and early 19 century researched, compiled and published voluminously on various aspects related India.

So, just like the scholars and servants who accompanied Napoleon Bonaparte to Egypt were transforming Egypt from a land mass to a site of academic inquiry, a site of western academic inquiry to be precise, these people were also doing the same with India and the most famous examples of their scholarship was of course, in the field of Sanskrit studies and the study of ancient Indian scriptures. But they also published academic monographs and peoples on subjects as diverse as Indian law, Indian literature, astrology, Indian flora and fauna, Indian history etcetera.

The, products of such systematic knowledge gathering about the subjugated population, about their society and their land in the form of various academic publications were given pride of place in the libraries of the West and soon the study of orient generated, such fully fledged academic disciplines like Egyptology, for instance or ideology.

Indeed this growing accumulation of academic publications about the East in the libraries and learning institutions of the west, soon came to represent the most if not the only authentic way of knowing the orient. In fact, this conviction became so, deep rooted by the first few decades of the 19th century that someone like James Mill the British philosopher, but also someone who was associated with the East India company, British East India company could write these lines in the preface to his multi volume history of British India and I quote.

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This writer [...] has never been in India; and [...] has a very slight, and elementary acquaintance, with any of the languages of the East. [...] [Yet] it appeared to me, that a sufficient stock of information was now collected in the languages of Europe, to enable the inquirer to ascertain every important point, in the history of India.

(Preface, Volume I, *The History of British India*)

This writer has never been in India; and has a very slight and elementary acquaintance, with any of the languages of the East. Yet, it appeared to me, that a sufficient stock of information was now, collected in the languages of Europe, to enable the enquirer to a certain every important point, in the history of India. The sheer audacity here is mind boggling.

He is saying that foreign enquirer like him it is possible to a certain every important point about India, without even visiting India or its people for a single day, according to him everything is already available in the form of academic publications. Such knowledge gathering about the orient deeply influenced, how orient was governed by the colonial authority and this brings us to the third aspect of orientalism, which is orientalism as corporate institution. Now, as you will know from our earlier lectures on Foucault A Loser and Graham Sheep that subjugation is exercised, not merely through brute force, but also through several institutions, through which power is wielded indirectly.

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The cluster of institutions through which the Orient was controlled systematically “by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it” is what is referred to by Said as the corporate institution of Orientalism.

This cluster of institutions through which the orient was controlled systematically and I am quoting from orientalism here by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over, it is what is referred to by side as the corporate institution of orientalism. And as I have just stated the way, this corporate institution functioned and wielded its administrative power was heavily determined by the biased view of the East, which by the late 18 and early 19th century had come to be translated into respectable form of academic knowledge.

Now, as students of literary studies, we need to keep in mind that this discourse about the orient, underlined by the age old prejudices of the occident and ratified by their colonial institutions also deeply influenced the way orient was being conceptualized and written about by western literature, including celebrated authors like Lord Byron for instance, Sheridan or Val Gustave Flaubert, Rudyard Kipling and of course, Joseph Conrad on whom Side wrote his doctoral thesis.

Said through his writings offered an insight into how the discourse that framed the works of these canonical authors within the field of literature was characterized not only by a deep association with the process of colonial subjugation, but also with the old occidental bias about the orient, but Said’s intervention into literary studies went very much beyond this insight.

In fact, Said's main purpose was not simply to reveal this connection between literature and colonial discourse, but also to undermine it, by revealing its internal fault lines and to do this Said developed a technique, which is called the technique of contrapuntal reading and what is contrapuntal reading? Well, it is a reading strategy, which tries to read a text underscored by such colonial discourse like orientalism, by questioning some of its inherent assumptions, which its author and its intended readers would have shared as axiomatic.

So, for instance a contrapuntal reading of a 19th century British novel set in the orient would proceed by undermining the basic assumptions that the West, for instance is civilizational is superior to the East or that the former is somehow more masculine than the latter or that the occident is more mature than the orient.

So, in other words contrapuntal reading, reads a text, approaches a text against the grain, and inside this reading strategy has actually come to occupy the centre of post colonial literary criticism, but I do not have a sufficient amount of time here to actually show you, illustrate to you, how contrapuntal reading is done with reference to a particular text, but if you are interested to know more about it, I would suggest that you listen to my lectures on Joseph Conrad's novel, Heart of Darkness in my other NPTEL course, on post colonial literature. So, with this, we end our first lecture on post colonialism. We will continue with our discussion on this topic, in our next lecture, where we will especially focus on the works of Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

Thank you.