

Post-Colonialism: Definition, Development and Examples from India (Handout)

Definition: What is post-colonialism?

- Intellectual direction (sometimes also called an “era” or the “post-colonial theory”)
- Developed from the time after colonialism, as colonial countries became independent
- Plays a role in history, literature, politics, culture and identity
- Can be found in both the countries that were colonised and in former colonial powers
- Deals with colonial and mainly post-colonial times

Development

- “Mental Decolonisation”: Former colonial countries try to deconstruct old attitudes and perceptions that refer to the vanquished time of colonialism
- The Western world got interested in post-colonialism in the 1970s
- Characteristics of the post-colonial theory:
 - o Violent-like, unbuffered contact between two different cultures and attitudes (the suppressors and the formerly suppressed)
 - o Relationship between these two cultures as rather contradictory and ambiguous
 - o Description of problems resulting from the step to independence:
 - ⇒ Natives have to learn how to deal with the power of independence
 - ⇒ Colonial powers have to accept the loss of power over foreign countries
 - ⇒ Both have to deal with their past as suppressors and suppressed
 - o Conflicts of identity and cultural belonging within the former colonial countries:
 - ⇒ Western destruction and replacement of deep-rooted cultures and traditions
 - ⇒ Challenge of creating a new nationwide identity and self-confidence
 - ⇒ Western culture had become part of people’s identity
- Difficult, paradox identification process
- o Post-colonialism: Identification process takes places on a linguistic level
- o Exchange of thoughts from the perspective of both parties
- o Post-colonialism deals with the consequences and legacies of colonialism for society and culture in contexts of suppression, resistance, gender, migration etc.

History of Indian colonialism

- 1756: Foundation of the “British East India Company”
- 1857: First Indian rebellion against the British colonialists; rebellion fails
- 1885: Foundation of the “National Indian Congress”: Demand for participation in the Indian government; first attempts to create a movement for independence
- 1947: Mahatma Ghandi’s non-violent movement succeeds and India becomes independent
- Indian Partition: The country is divided into the Indian Union and Pakistan (“Great Divide”)

Post-colonial development in India

- Religious and ethnic conflicts between Hindus and Muslims causes displacement of ~17 million people and genocide (about 700.000 – one million killed)
- Wars between Pakistan and India
- Economic progress, but persistent problems in India: Poverty, overpopulation, environmental pollution, ethnic and religious conflicts
- Examples for post-colonial literature and themes:
 - o Edward Said: “Orientalism” (1978; analysis of European colonial intentions and attitudes)
 - o Indian Partition in literature (“Indian trauma”):
 - ⇒ Saddat Hasan Manto: “Mottled Dawn” (collection of sketches and stories)

- Post-colonial intercultural exchange (India and Britain):
 - ⇒ Salman Rushdie: Multi-perspective approach to the post-colonial complex; Funny, brave, metaphoric, ironical way of writing (e.g. novel "Midnight's Children", 1980)
 - ⇒ Ruth Praver Jhabvala: "Heat and Dust" (novel, 1975): Colonial and post-colonial intercultural contacts
- "Bollywood" movies deal with post-colonial issues and tensions
- "The English language as an omnipresent legacy of the former colonial times
- British-Indian relationship today:
 - Indian independence has been managed (mainly democratic and politically stable)
 - Tensions between both countries still cannot be completely removed; relationship is not always unproblematic with regard to the colonial past
 - Process of decolonisation is in progress, but has not been finished yet