

Critical Discourse Analysis of the Character of Caliban by Post-colonial Critics: A Post-colonial Scrutiny

Prof Piar Chand
Department of HSS
NIT, Hamirpur, India
piaru@nitham.ac.in

Shivani Chaudhary
Lecturer (Communication Skills)
Department of HSS
NIT, Hamirpur, India
shivanisoni27@gmail.com

Abstract: *Owing to the vague description of Caliban's characterization in Shakespeare's play The Tempest, there have been many different interpretations of the character in the history of the production of the play, with a range that pictures Caliban from a half human and half bestial figure Third World inhabitant. Despite Caliban's minor role in the play, the character has gained critics' interest due to his subsequent re-contextualization within postcolonial contexts. The aim of the paper is to give a post postcolonial response to the characterization of Caliban. It is argued that we, the critics are killing literature by viewing it just through one lens – post-colonialism. Critical Discourse Analysis would be used as methodological tool not only for studying power politics but also to expose how post colonial theory makes use of a selective approach by choosing certain details and ignoring the others. This in turn brings to surface what is not being presented by the post colonial critics and the hidden intentions and strategies behind it. The objective of the paper is also to present a critical study of discursive practices of 'othering'. The different portrayals of Caliban have been made possible not only because of Shakespeare's vague description of his character but because the figure of Caliban has been interpreted differently in different codes and contexts.*

Keywords: Post postcolonial, Caliban, *The Tempest*, Power Politics.

1. INTRODUCTION

After studying post-colonialism as a theory and also its implication to various texts, we had become blind to what the author had to say. Jacques Derrida's "Deconstruction", Barthes's "The Death of the Author" make us spell bound us to such an extent that we tried to push every centre to a periphery. T.S. Eliot's "things fall apart, "the centre does not hold" persuaded us well enough to believe that it was time to deconstruct every piece of literature, to lend it several interpretations instead of the existing one(s). On these grounds we argued so much with our professor that all communication became one way. Neither could she convince us nor could we convince her. The next day she began afresh and said, "Leave this post-colonialism aside for a while and then see the text!" It was then that we realized that we were killing literature by viewing it just through one lens – post-colonialism.

Owing to the vague description of Caliban's characterization in Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*, there have been many different portrayals of the character in the play's production history, a range that pictures Caliban from a half-animal figure to a Third World inhabitant. Initially, the figure of Caliban was read as the symbol of primitive humanity, a degenerated character exhibiting greed, lawlessness and lust. In his development up to the mid 20th century, Caliban symbolized the Third World as imagined by Europe to justify colonialism. Conversely, in Third World countries, this character has developed into a positive symbol of the Third World, a view that highlights the implacable spirit of Caliban against Prospero's subjugation. The reiterations of Caliban as a symbol of the Third World can be found not only in a dramatic work, such as in Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest*, but also in psychological and political treatises, such as those written by Octavio Mannoni and Fernando Retamar. This development shows that, although originally a dramatic persona, Caliban has gained recognition beyond theatrical performance and literary criticism and has inhabited other realms of discourse such as that of politics, psychology and ethnography.

2. METHODOLOGY

In order to explore the discourse, we use Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a methodological tool. Some of the terms from the framework of CDA such as omission, context, code, angle and framing have been utilized to put our point across. Critical Discourse Analysis would be used as methodological tool not only for studying power politics but also to expose how post colonial theory makes use of a selective approach by choosing certain details and ignoring the others. We would critically analyze Caliban as a character and not as a colonized since he is representative of a class – a class of slaves. We shall discuss the power exerted by Prospero on him with the help of CDA, irrespective of the discourse of colonization with special reference to Shakespeare's characterization as belonging to all the ages.

2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis of the character of Caliban

The different portrayals of Caliban have been made possible not only because of Shakespeare's vague description of his character but because the figure of Caliban, as a preformative type, involves various codes and contexts. As a figure that draws together cultural stories, traditions, and political contests, Caliban has been transformed into a cultural and political vehicle by which writers keep reinterpreting his character to serve their own goals. A performance, both textual and non-textual, always reproduces and recreates itself because a performance embodies cultural and political contests in which certain cultural or political views are more privileged than others.

We, therefore, argue that all who feel marginalized interpret it keeping in view their own plight. The feminist critics, for instance, view the play from Miranda's perspective and the post colonial critics through the character of Caliban. But the loophole is that just to quote Miranda and her speeches or a faulty perception of Caliban's character in order to acclimatize with the feminist theory or post colonial theory kills the beauty of totality of the play. Grabbing one of its aspect and commenting upon it without properly contextualizing it certainly provides a lop-sided view which mars the very essence of the play. Our view is in tandem with Alan Sinfield who had complained that 'a reductive version of cultural materialism is manufactured' by some of its critics, supported by selective quotation, and then censured as insufficiently complex.'

An examination of Caliban and his stage history thus invites several approaches and tactics. Despite Caliban's minor role in the play, the character has gained critics' interest due to his subsequent re-contextualization within postcolonial contexts. The present paper is meant to probe into the theoretical ideological premises of the postcolonial practices in relation to Shakespeare, and examine how far they are based on facts and what they intentionally choose to ignore or distort.

There is not a word in *The Tempest* about America, nothing but the Bermudas, once barely mentioned as faraway places' and that the characters who are shipwrecked are returning from Tunis after a wedding, not in the least intending to set foot upon, let alone settle or conquer, uncivilized lands. So to equate Prospero and Caliban with a colonizer and a colonized respectively is not justified. We are not living in a utopia. All individuals are not equal. Examples abound around us when we see a boss exerting power on his employee, or a father talking with an authority with his son, a country moving ahead of others in terms of economic, technological or some other type of growth. In all such instances the powerful certainly assumes air of superiority. It might be due to their sense of achievement, pride or even authority. It would be insane to believe that all those who dominate by virtue of their power are colonizers. Shakespeare, the great delineator of character is bringing in front of us one such aspect of human behaviour. The one who is powerful tends to use, misuse or abuse it. Had the power been vested with Gonzalo and Stephano in the play, they would have also used, abused or misused it but equating all those who possess certain things and exercise power by virtue of it are not colonizers.

2.2 A Critical Study of the Discursive Practice of 'Othering'

Another objective of the paper is also to present a critical study of discursive practices of 'othering'. The post colonial critics have referred to Caliban as the 'other' and this makes ground for us to delve into the politics of unsaid, or things that have been omitted or left out by them. Our question is: Why has Ariel been left out? Caliban is Prospero's slave and so is Ariel. Only the

discourse related to Caliban has been taken into consideration by the post-colonial critics since it caters to their theory. Ariel is completely missing from the scene. This in turn brings to surface what is not being presented by the post colonial critics and the hidden intentions and strategies behind it. We could also say that Post colonial critics are silent about Ariel since he is a good servant which implies enslavement is not always resented by the post colonial critics. In some houses people employ others as servants; this happens in third world countries too. Why then people in general and post-colonial critics in particular do not oppose the prevalent practice of enslavement?

Hence, the chief focus of a post-colonial investigation of *The Tempest* is through the character of Caliban, seen not as the 'deformed slave' of the dramatis personae but as a native of the island over whom Prospero has imposed a form of colonial domination. The following speech by Caliban is most quoted by the post-colonial critics:

I must eat my dinner.
This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother,
Which thou tak'st from me. When thou cam'st first
Thou strok'st me, and made much of me; would'st give me
Water with berries in't; and teach me how
To name the bigger light, and how the less,
That burn by day and night: and then I lov'd thee
And show'd thee all the qualities o' th'isle,
The fresh springs, brine pits, barren place and feretile:
Curs'd be I that that did so! All the charms
Of Sycorax, toads, beetles, bats, light on you!
For I am all the subjects that you have,
Which first was mine own King: and here you sty me
In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me
The rest o'th' island

Act I Scene II

In the above speech there is a crucial incident which seems to have turned the relationship between Prospero and Caliban sour, and this is what Caliban does not mention. It is Prospero's perception of Caliban's attempt to rape his daughter Miranda. Shakespeare pictures another aspect of human nature here. At first Prospero is good to Caliban and once something goes wrong in the relationship, and wrong to an extent which is perceived as a threat for reattempting rape on his daughter, certainly Prospero would not treat Caliban in the way he did previously.

2.3 Critical Discourse Analysis of Caliban's Critics

An examination of Caliban and his stage history thus invites several approaches and tactics. Despite Caliban's minor role in the play, the character has gained critics' interest due to his subsequent re-contextualization within postcolonial contexts. The present paper is meant to probe into the theoretical ideological premises of the postcolonial practices in relation to Shakespeare, and examine how far they are based on facts and what they intentionally choose to ignore or distort.

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The reason that the post colonial critics quote for Caliban's attempt to rape Miranda is his being a black male. Miranda is the only woman around Caliban and it is but natural for Caliban to get attracted towards her.

I do not know
One of my sex; no woman's face remember,
Save, from my glass, mine own. Act III Scene I

What is the proof that had Caliban not been a black male he would not have tried to rape Miranda? It is again a perspective- a fallacious perspective of the post-colonial critics who themselves seem to have become obsessed with the binary opposition of black and white.

The post colonial critics themselves accuse Caliban's instinct of being wild and uncontrollable. It is natural for Prospero, the father to call him savage. Shakespeare nowhere intended to equate Caliban's instinct with his being a "black male" as the post colonial critics call it. We come across a similar scenario in Forster's *A Passage to India* too where the notion of wild and uncontrollable sexuality is attached with a black male. Later it is discovered as nothing but an illusion. In this case too it could have been an illusion. So when Caliban says "you prevented the attempt," he is being ironical to strengthen the illusion due to his frustration as a result of accusation imposed upon him.

As far as the discourse of language as elaborated by the post-colonial critics is concerned, language is viewed as being passed from the colonizer to the colonized. But language is in fact a medium to communicate. Miranda obviously believes it to be a great honour and reminds Caliban how she "took pains to make thee speak" and describes Caliban's previous way of speaking as "gabble". In case of Prospero and Caliban, when both did not know each others code, one could have learnt the other's language, it could be the either of the two. Since Miranda calls Caliban's language "gabble", it was probably tough to learn. It could be interpreted that Caliban was made to learn Prospero's language in order to make communication possible.

Finally, Prospero renounces his magical power:

Sir I am vexed
Bear with my weakness; my old brain is troubled. Act IV Scene I

His renunciation is at will. It is not a result of Caliban's protest as is the case in colonialism. So analyzing the play from a post colonial point of view is not holistically justified.

Caliban is, in psychologically terms, a submissive character and he needs somebody to direct him:

I'll show thee every fertile inch o'th' island; and
I will kiss thy foot: I prithee, be my god. Act II Scene II

No colonized ever overtly request the colonizer to be their lord, their master. Here we can see Prospero and Caliban through a trait approach theory where one that is submissive banks upon the other who is dominant.

"I must be here confined by you,
Or sent to Naples. Let me not,
Since I have my dukedom got
And pardon'd the deceiver, dwell
In this bare island by your spell;
But release me from my bands
With the help of your good hands:
Gentle breath of yours my sails
Must fill, or else my project fails,
Which was to please. Now I want
Spirits to enforce, art to enchant,
And my ending is despair,
Unless I be relieved by prayer,
Which pierces so that it assaults
Mercy itself and frees all faults.

As you from crimes would pardon'd be,
Let your indulgence set me free.”

The above epilogue spoken by Prospero shows that Prospero himself is not the ultimate force behind whatever has happened; he too is under somebody's "spell" or power. The above speech also reveals that unlike a utopia one person exerting power over the other is a commonplace phenomenon. It is not a story of a usurper and a usurped but it is surely a story of power which one has more than the other and takes advantage of. The powerful, as per the tenets of CDA, exercise power by hegemonising and legitimizing. The case is similar with colonialism since power politics could be considered as an umbrella term which embraces colonialism in it and hence the similarities between the two. But we cannot jump to a conclusion that wherever power is being exercised, it is a case of colonialism. For instance, India is a democracy. The common man feels he has all rights by virtue of being a citizen of India. But what Critical Discourse Analysis of "India as a Democracy" contextualizing it in the present scenario exposes is that the word "democracy" is used to mislead the minds of people, thereby exerting power not by coercion but through their consent. Government and all the related ministers and officials make use of their power which the common man feels is their right but the extent of misuse and abuse of power is neither questioned nor helped by him.

2.4 Removing the Dust off Shakespeare's Shoulders

Shakespeare who belongs to all the ages is certainly presenting a similar situation of power politics in *The Tempest*, but he is by no means supporting the civilized, white race of Prospero as being supreme which is the ground for most of the post-colonial critics to consider the play as a text favoring colonialism. As discussed earlier this is further strengthened by the epilogue where Prospero himself feels he is under somebody else's power.

3. CONCLUSION

Post colonial critics, therefore, posit a reductive relationship between text and context. Post-colonial criticism depends upon the selective quotation, misreading, and flattening of arguments, positions and words. Postcolonialists suggest that Shakespeare's plays endorse the inequities of the social order around them which is however a lopsided view. According to Vickers, postcolonial readings of *The Tempest* are guilty of reducing the play to "an allegory about colonialism" with Prospero seen as "an exploitative protocapitalist" and Caliban "an innocent savage, deprived of his legitimate heritage". Our view is in line with his. We would conclude with Schneider's words

By choosing colonialism as a frame, and then "reifying" that frame as if it were coterminous with the limits of discourse in general, I find that they do indeed marginalize not only a large field of pertinent contemporary discourse, but also *The Tempest* itself.”

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