



Research Paper

## I, You and the In-between; a Move towards the Third Space

Sugandha Malhotra

**ABSTRACT:** *As a study of Homi K Bhabha's theories on the dialogue between the colonizer and the colonized, the paper puts forth an understanding along with a critique of his theory. The master-slave dialectic is problematized and overturned with the concept of assimilation blurring the boundaries which were established as precursors to imperialism.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Hybridity, Assimilation, Post-Colonial, Global, Differences, Culture*

*Received 28Feb., 2020; Accepted 07 Mar., 2020 © The author(s) 2020.*

*Published with open access at [www.questjournals.org](http://www.questjournals.org)*

Homi K Bhabha, the bearer of deconstructive post-colonialism, employs a scholarship of Language and history which is done to put forth his argument about the inability of binaries to provide a cohesive structure for ruler and the ruled. His focus, through two essays which have been taken into consideration ('Signs Taken for Wonders' and 'Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences'), enumerate and elucidate the inability of binary oppositions to represent a discourse which encompasses many voids, and unrecognised spaces in it.

In his first essay 'Signs taken for Wonders', Bhabha presents three arguments; one with the missionary and the natives, one with Conrad, and the final one with V.S. Naipaul, giving us three views of colonialism and the position of post-coloniality. In the first argument with Anund, the missionary, and the native, what can be inferred is a paternalistic attitude towards the native, where the native has to be educated with knowledge considered to be much more profound than his own, attempting to shift his worldview in order to inhabit another. Colonialism then, provides a habitat not just to survive in, but a belief that there comes with it an imagined sense of security, where the master is bound to protect the slave by virtue of his dominance over the other; "To be a colonial was to know a kind of security; it was to inhabit a fixed world". This semblance of security is a requisite for the survival of the concept of superiority to survive and thrive in as it formulates and assimilates, in the mind of the subject, the façade of an ever present entity to fall back on. This particular entity ascertains its own position as above and beyond the entity of the subject. Due to the position of the former, the space of the dialogue renders itself as a space of exchange which allows and disallows. The definition of this exchange comes undone as exchange in its very essence signifies a give and take of ideas in a setting where both involved parties interrogate and enrich their vocabulary. The colonist, in their ignorance of understanding this very idea of exchanges, and by deluding themselves into believing the unparalleled force of reason, believed that knowledge trickles down through them to a reticent receiver who accepts without projecting. However, for Bhabha and the reader who understands the leitmotif, the exchange charts out another trajectory where the missionary in his pursuit of elevating the native through his knowledge, becomes part of a structure where knowledge is exchanged if not equally, but exchanged regardless. The projection is realised as a necessary factor to any existing form of exchange and the binary of the master and the student is thwarted by Bhabha as he mentions the impossibility of a one sided exchange and the inevitability of intervention from both sides to contribute to the knowledge creation.

What was most fascinating in this process of dialogic contradiction was that the way the peasants dealt with this colonial antagonism was continually to produce supplementary discourses as sites of resistance and negotiation. They would say, for instance: We would be happy to convert so long as you convinced us that these words of the Christian god do not come from the mouths of meat eaters. These words are very beautiful, but your priests are a nonvegetarian class. We cannot believe that anybody who eats meat can transmit the word of God. (Mitchell n.p.)

The very idea of a vegetarian Bible is created to fit the demographic of the native as his ideals cannot exist without the inclusion of this concept. This need for a Vegetarian Bible is a process where the student is creating an alternative to accepting the master's knowledge which seems to stand on its own without this intervention. However, the question posed by the native becomes a crucial point of interrogating 'The Book' as

an absolute entity. The worldview presented, provides, if not a middle ground, but a space of negotiation, for the purpose of conversion; Bhabha elaborates on this positionality of ambivalence which is ever-present in an exchange “Now there is nothing in the logic of the Hindu/Christian theological dialectic or in the master/peasant dialogue that requires the construction of this incommensurable site and sign of negotiation: the vegetarian Bible. Give us the vegetarian Bible and we will convert” (Mitchell n.p.). The Bible also loses its absolute, iron clad dominance, as the impossible is asked by a section of a community which is otherwise assumed to be inferior, in both form and intellect. “Hybridity intervenes in the exercise of authority not merely to indicate the impossibility of its identity but to represent the unpredictability of its presence. The book retains its presence, but it is no longer a representation of an essence; it is now a partial presence, a (strategic) device in a specific colonial engagement, an apurtenance of authority” (Cain, Harrison 85). The principles of conversion are moulded to fit the need of the native and not the other way round, making this cultural and religious transfer, a form of exchange, with inputs from the native and resistance from the master.

Further in the essay, Conrad posits himself in the midst of a difficulty as his protagonist, Marlowe, cannot completely ignore ‘The Book’ but cannot fully appropriate it as his own “I assure you to leave off reading was like tearing myself away from the shelter of an old and solid friendship” (Bhabha 40). His contempt and acceptance are not separated but are intermingled together in a state of dilemma which makes him the representative of the situation of the colonized. ‘The Book’ is an object of wonder which holds a promise of enlightenment, but it is also a variant of subjugation which will further reduce the power they are entitled to or even allowed to. There are no longer any absolutes in acceptance and rejection as it seems like an idea which only serves on a very primal level of understanding colonialism.

As the essay proceeds with Naipaul’s state of awe which soon turns to dismay, Bhabha makes yet another attempt to show that even though the native accepts the colonial culture as his own, there will always be a certain kind of handicap attached to that knowledge; A culture obtained through an exchange will never be printed on ‘Tabula Rasa’ but will be re-printed on a surface which carries with it the trace of an identity developed before and during that exchange. So, Bhabha turns away from the Hegelian Master-Slave dialectic where the slave loses his self through the order of the master.

But the reader might question the validity of the argument of Bhabha as to what exactly happens when binaries are removed and are pushed into a space of unknowability? Does it form another possibility of actions and reactions or does it merely stabilize the ground on which the master directs his order. This question requires a study of another essay mentioned earlier in the paper, ‘Cultural Diversity and Differences’. Through this essay, Bhabha concretizes his argument about the ambivalent space by calling it the ‘Third Space’ which exists in order for the native to become more than a mere subject of colonialism into a ‘hybrid’, who manages to assimilate his position as not of constants but as a being with an identity always in flux.

Through Fanon, Bhabha explains how “Cultures are never unitary in themselves, nor simply dualistic in relation of self to other” (Bhabhan.p.). This nature of culture is what forms the essence of his argument about the Third Space as Fanon explains how when one culture changed due to some intervention, there will never exist a simple going back to its traditions. To believe in this philosophy of going back to the past and erasing the affect and effect of colonialism then becomes a reductive argument which dwells more on the level of nostalgia rather on the concept of moving forward. The state of flux will allow the native to encounter and embrace the culture of the West, appropriate it, and formulate it in a way that becomes the markers of a cultural identity beyond what was past. The idea of Cultural Difference then becomes problematic as difference is always quantified in negation to one aspect. This kind of negation, on the basis of colour, race, religion, grounds cultural difference more into the concept of opposing binaries than into a cohesive unit of various facets. Interpreting a culture should not be a design to create binaries but to create that ambivalent Third Space, creating a hybrid culture which allows for change and appropriation not simply from the dominant culture but the sub-culture as well; “Interpretation is never a simple act of communication between the I and the You, but rather: ‘The production of meaning requires that these two places be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space’” (Peet 378).

The final quotation by Harris adds to Bhabhas argument of the Third Space as the answer to the position of post-colonialism, as something which “can only occur with an acceptance of a concurrent void and with a willingness to descend into that void” (Bhabhan.p.). This void can be the void of venturing into an alien territory, accepting or refuting their culture, altering it or duplicating it. It always is a position of uncertainty with which one enters a discourse. However, this entering always allows for exchange to happen on both levels. So, Bhabha, like Harris is ascertaining that this alien space will create not a difference, but diversity or something which he calls ‘International Culture’, which caters to the Hybrid beings of colonialism. An example of this can be seen in contemporary Hollywood cinema where Indian actors no longer play certain kinds of roles, portraying Indian culture as primitive or uneducated, but as a cite where knowledge creation and modernity are happening at a similar pace with the west. Also, the word Third World is also being

problematized as an approach of difference and is now used with careful consideration. The idea of the Global is more prevalent which can be seen as a way of creating diversity rather than difference.

However, the critique of Bhabha disallows for his theory to remain unquestioned. This theory of Hybridity and the Third Space remains restricted to a certain class of individuals; particularly the intellectuals, who can understand the politics of language and culture Bhabha delves into. It excludes sub-cultures by generalizing the effect of colonial exchange throughout countries. The third Space or the space of ambivalence is only present for the select few who understand this discourse. So, much like all critical theory, it remains a theory which loses its face in terms of practical application as the elitist in Bhabha doesn't let him counter present models of hegemony through signifiers which are available or comprehended by the margins. This is where the use of Derrida in his theory has been done selectively by Bhabha as Derrida already provides the loopholes attached to power which says that the position of centrality is bound to create a margin or a sub-culture which will further create another sub-culture when it assumes power. For example, patriarchy subsumes the female culture, feminism subsumes the tribal culture, so on and so forth. So, this ambivalence will only be the prerogative of selected individuals who will exclude those who do not validate their hypothesis. Yet, this claim does not dismiss Bhabha's theory as it does provide a different lens to look at colonialism. The reader then should be careful about what should be applied in which context as subjectivity always caters to some power politics.

### REFERENCES

- [1]. Primary Texts
- [2]. Bhabha, Homi K. "Cultural Diversity And Cultural Differences." N.p. Print.
- [3]. Bhabha, Homi K. "Signs Taken For Wonders." Ed. Homi K Bhabha. N.p. 38-43. Print.
- [4]. Secondary Texts
- [5]. Cain, P. J., and Mark Harrison. *Imperialism: Critical Concepts in Historical Studies*. Vol. 3, Routledge, 2001.
- [6]. Mitchell, W.J.T. "Translator Translated." *Stanford University. Artforum International Magazine Inc.*, Mar. 1995. Web. 27 Sept. 2015.
- [7]. Peet, Richard. "Review." *The Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers)* 29.4 (1997): 378-379. JSTOR. Web. 27 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20003836>>.

Sugandha Malhotra." *I, You and the In-between; a Move towards the Third Space* " *Quest Journals Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science* , vol. 08(01), 2020, pp. 53-55.