

Colonialist Criticism by Chinua Achebe

Critical Appreciation

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The essay 'Colonialist Criticism' is an attack on a lingering colonialism in the criticism of African literature by non-Africans. The African writer writes the text or 'they produce literature, their literature goes to Europeans for analysis. Every African literature has to get thought the grids of European writers.

They have to meet the criteria said by the European writer, African writer wrote the text for the African people but European people analyzed it. It means they are the jury's bench, or they judge the text. [One question raised that How do they judge] while judging, they always keep on the concept that is big brother consciousness. They always make the binaries. These binaries are like white and black or the European or African. They think that Europeans are superior and big brothers, whereas Africans are inferior and small brothers. Europeans are teacher and Africans are learners. Therefore, Europeans are at the center and Africans are at the margin. Therefore Africans have to learn many more things from the Europeans. They tend to feel that burden of teaching to the Africans. Therefore, Europeans feel that they know more about African literature, art

and culture than African themselves. Achebe sees the faults of colonialist criticism in the assumption that the African writer is "Somewhat unfinished European and that somehow outsiders can know Africa better than the native writers. Achebe opposes, the European colonial prejudice, habit of ruling and discriminating other and comparing African people their literature, art and culture etc. He argues that African literature should not be judged with the canonical literature since it has its own particularity and peculiarity. The mask of European civilization does not know the history of African people. So Achebe's claim is that blacks (colonized) should write their own history neglecting what has been already universalized. He argues that "If the text is judged from European perspective a text doesn't get right evaluation and the essence of the text is killed."

Attacks on Universalism

The term 'Universalism' is exclusive, it includes the whole world. The term Universalism refers to European parochialism, European writers always emphasized universality in the writing. They believe that the writer has to cover all the issues in general or the writer has to speak for all. They judge African text from this angle; they argued that the African text is not universal because it does not speak about universal issue. It speaks only

African voice, therefore their text is invalid. They are not able to write about the whole universe. The two problems with Universalism, according to Achebe are, first that the presumed universality that critics find, is merely a synonym for the "narrow self-serving parochialism of Europe" and second, that every literature must "speak of a particular place; evolve out of the necessities of its history, past and current and the aspirations and destiny of its people." It means that every text comes out of specific time space and the people. Therefore, every text is related to space-specific and people-specific. African people have experience about racism. Therefore, they can write about racism deliberately. African might have made many mistakes, but they didn't bring racism in the world. Therefore, they would, write about it, which is African-specific situation which is pervaded in African. Achebe sustained the idea that "the term universalism must be vanished."

Attacks on Language

African writers writing in English don't mean that they are following European model. Language is not the property or possession of any group country or continent. Language is common property as well as de-ethicized. English language is not the property of British or American. It doesn't belong to anyone. African writers are writing in English to make

themselves heard. If they write in African language nobody will come to know about them. They have the problem of communication. African writers writing in English wanted to win the attention of the world. Language is the common heritage for all the people.

Towards the end of the essay he criticizes the native writers. All the time European writers cannot be slammed deplorable. He says the even native writers have not done anything to uplift the condition of African literature. They are not responsible for their own people. He embodies the idea and says that only through the earnestness or "Eager-enough" is most important to uplift the condition of African literature. Only then African literature will get the prestigious status otherwise they will be dominated. For the domination of Europeans Achebe calls 'seduction'. The native poets and critics are equally responsible for this seduction because they never attempt to break this barricade of this European canon rather they enjoy to be in appendage of it.