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The concept of 'Hybridity' in Homi K. Bhabha's "The location of Culture"

• Ranbir Singh & Sunil Kumar & Dr Sukhbir Singh

Abstract - Homi K. Bhabha is one of the eminent theorists of post-colonial criticism in cultural theory movement. Bhabha explains continuation of impact of cultural contacts and histories. He challenges the simplistic notions of colonizer as oppressor and colonized as oppressed. He finds faults with established ideas like colonizer's domination was one directional. The colonized also resisted this dominance many a times. He gives importance to negotiation elements in cultural interactions. He broadens the post-colonial theory by deriving new concepts and vocabulary. Bhabha is still relevant in 21st century although his prominent works were published during 1980s. He makes us aware of dangers of polarization such as good vs bad. His theoretical insights help us view that historical events have their origin in cultural difference.

Homi K. Bhabha is one of the most important figures in Contemporary post-colonial studies, along with Edward Said and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Any serious discussion of post-colonial studies is incomplete without having reference to Bhabha. In his famous work "The location of culture" (1994), he has introduced many key concepts such as 'mimicry', 'hybridity' and 'ambivalence'. 'Hybridity' is an important concept in post-colonial theory. It refers to the integration or intermingling of cultural signs and practices from the colonizing and the colonized culture. Bhabha states that the assimilation and adaptation of cultural practices, the cross-fertilization of cultures, can be seen as positive, enriching, and dynamic, as well as oppressive. He further states that it is also useful concept for helping to break down the false notions that colonized cultures or colonizing cultures are monolithic and unchanging. Hybridity is central to Bhabha's work and a key factor in challenging notions of identity, culture, and nation. It expresses a state of 'in-betweenness' in a person who stands between two cultures. The term 'hybridity' refers to mixing of two or more breed or species by grafting or cross pollination to form a third hybrid species.

The sense of hybridization has been experienced variously by different people all over the world. Postcolonial studies have been preoccupied with issues of hybridity, creolization, and with the in-betweenness, diasporas, mobility and cross-overs of ideas and identities generated by colonialism. According to Robert Young explains that a hybrid is technically a cross between two different species and that therefore the term hybridization evokes both the botanical notion of inter-species grafting and the vocabulary of Victorian extreme right which regarded different races as different species.

Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, amongst others examine the sites of the 'hybrid' taking shape under colonial domination in India. Bhabha, in his analysis of the nineteenth century, encounters between British rulers and the native Indian masses who tried to form their own resistance practices, finds that hybridization is an outcome of the colonial effect of creating discriminatory and repressive system, in which the colonial, authority, race) nation and culture are fixed by an essentialism (112). He argues that hybridity is also not the discrimination between the 'mother culture' and the 'alien culture' "what become visible is not the self as a reflection but a 'split' within the self." The hybridity is not only coming together of two distinct cultures, it is also not simply a repetition but a double, that represents the trace not of what is depressed but 'something different, a mutation, a hybrid. Here is an autobiographical account of the experience of a sensitive creative writer who now lives in America expresses that he spoke a hybridized Hindi or English at home, cooked in a hybridized way, wore hybridized cloths, and thought hybridized thought. The fact still remains same that hybridization of language, cultural practices and other aspects of life are most of the times extremely painful and humiliating. Bhabha's primary preoccupation has been to re-conceive Eurocentric representations of the 'location of culture' which have tended to uphold binary oppositions between the 'east' and the 'west', 'master' and 'slave', 'self' and 'other'. Bhabha insists that a 'third space' should be recognized and celebrated. In this 'in-between' space in which different identities interact not in relation

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to predominance and subjection but in creative hybrid relations. Bhabha himself is aware of the danger of fixity and fetishism of identities within binary colonial thinking arguing that "all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity."

Bhabha also expresses his view on the relation between the culture and hybridity. According to him, just like colonial culture contemporary culture is also hybrid. When we come in the contact of different cultures, it affects not only our language but also our life style. Linguistic hybridity becomes an apparent marker, reflected in the speech of the British speakers as well as the natives. The Colonial Indian society formed its own mixed pidgin as the diverse nationalities came together on land and sea. The British officers of the East India Company in Calcutta and their business associates did not speak Standard English. Amitav Ghosh in his 'Sea of Poppies' (2008) shows how at dinner the British officers Mr. Burnham, zamindar Raja Neel, Mr. Doughty and others almost unconsciously use local Hindi words within their English. Mr. Burnham says, "But there is no going back just wouldn't hoga" (Ghosh 112). The Hindi word 'hoga' is a verb that completes the meaning 'just wouldn't happen'. Mr. Burnham also uses some of the other local words from Indian language like 'lattee' (stick) and 'bobachees' (cooks). The Hindi words are used making them plural according to rules of English. There are other words which would exemplify the concept of hybridity of language and culture. The word *chawbucked* is derived from Indian word *chabook* (a horse whip). Hybridity can also be seen not only in language but also in art. India continues to bring diverse elements from different cultures in its characteristic way attaining new hybridization in art form, fashions, literary genres, and ideas. One of the recent examples of this hybridity is a newly invented musical instrument called 'mohanveena' designed by Pandit Vishwamohan Bhatt, in which he has combined features of the guitar (a western instrument) with *veena* (a traditional Indian instrument). Reminiscences of many eminent persons of west who came into contact of Indian culture show that the cultural influence on their personalities was inefaceable and permanent. Many new cuisines were invented by doing various modifications during British Era i.e. Chicken Jalfrezi. This name of cuisine is formed by combining the words of English, Urdu and Bengali languages. Hybridity is evident even in the name of books i.e. Prince of Dharma.

Thus it is the 'in-between' space that carries the burden and meaning of culture, and this is what makes the notion of hybridity so important. The concept of hybridity occupies a central place in postcolonial discourse. It is celebrated and privileged as a kind of superior cultural intelligence owing to the advantage of 'in-betweenness', the straddling of two cultures and the consequent ability to negotiate the difference. Hybridity here is substituted by the word fusion, and it plays a creative role, by bringing diverse elements and contributing to the formation of a global culture.

Bhabha brings forwards and broadens the scope of the work done by Spivak and Edward Said. He starts with deconstructing the established polarity of the orient and the occident. He defines hybridity as what "is new, neither the one nor the other," which emerges from a "Third Space." He builds on Spivak's concept of subaltern and deconstructs the periphery and centre to create a third space which provides opportunity for the interaction and influence which subsequently prepares fertile ground for generating 'hybridity'. He takes on binary antithetical structure of Derrida. He argues that these dichotomies are much reductive as these infer that culture of a nation is unitary and homogenous. Bhabha puts forward the idea that identities, nationalities and even ethnicities are indeterminate and dialogic, and 'hybridity' is their characteristic. He says that identities and nationalities remain in flux and no finality can be imposed on them. Bhabha here is subtly applying the theory of social processes and uses the terms of these processes in a new way.

There are various apparent and tacit difficulties in Bhabha's 'hybridity'. Bhabha over simplifies the description of unitariness of identity and ascribes the attribute of oppressiveness to it. He ignores various factors in formation of identity and variations in identities. He far stretches the absoluteness of identity to criticize it and to build his notion of hybridity. Bhabha takes into cognizance only two opposite positions colonizer and colonized and then finds and names a third in-between space for interaction. He forcibly imposes three categories of space and obliquely denies other possibilities. Although most readers find the concept of hybridity as eclectic this provides them a position to avoid the risk of being identified with racism. In spite of all Bhabha's works enable us to rethink colonialism from new perspectives in the era of globalization.

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