



# How Ethical is the Colonisation of Current Decolonisation Debates in the Academia?

Pradeep Narayanan\*

## Abstract

This is the fourth year of my exploration of studies and readings on the process known as decolonisation. When I reflect on this journey, several instances have reminded that there is a semblance of a journey (movement) in the discourse of decolonisation, although things are largely static. From the perspective of the Global South, I observe that all major grant makers and investors are located in the Global North. The Global North also houses important knowledge-certifying institutions and significant universities that receive research grants to study the Global South. Furthermore, Institutional Review Boards in the Global North define and mainstream ethics derived from their own cultural sensibilities. These factors contribute to the dominant influence of colonisation, which can be seen as clouds roaring from the top and affecting the Global South.

**Keywords:** Decolonisation, Global South, Global North, Institutional Review Boards

## Introduction

It has been the fourth year of my exploration of studies and readings on the process known as decolonisation. When I reflect on this journey, several instances remind me that there is a semblance within the journey (movement) of the discourse of decolonisation, although things are largely static.

From the perspective of the Global South, I observe that all significant grantmakers and investors are located in the Global North. The Global North also houses important knowledge-

---

\* Praxis India; Email: [pradeepn@praxisindia.org](mailto:pradeepn@praxisindia.org)

certifying institutions and influential universities that receive research grants to study the Global South. Furthermore, Institutional Review Boards in the Global North define and mainstream ethics derived from their cultural sensibilities. These factors contribute to the dominant influence of colonisation, which can be seen as clouds roaring from the top and affecting the Global South.

If I am allowed to imagine how the Global North perceives its role in the global knowledge system today, it would be depicted as a feeding tube that the Global North has inserted into the body of the Global South. The Global North feeds the Global South with knowledge often "created" in the Global North, sometimes even processed from contributions by individuals in the Global South. The Global North supplies funds, knowledge, ideology, values, and ethics through this feeding tube.

Now, what does the decolonisation 'movement' in the Global North aim to do? It often focuses on changing the content of the food that goes through the feeding tube. Some proponents argue that if knowledge produced in the Global South is fed through this feeding tube, it constitutes decolonisation. Others attempt to include a Global South member on research teams or incorporate cultural aspects of the Global South in the curriculum as an attempt at decolonisation. However, some are concerned about potential infection issues arising from the use of the feeding tube. They engage in discussions on decolonisation but strive for a more comfortable feeding tube, seeking to alter the curriculum and pedagogy by incorporating perspectives from the Global South.

Does this fundamentally alter power relationships? No. The perspective of the Global North can only go so far. It still perceives itself as a doctor treating the Global South or a caregiver nurturing it. Who is genuinely ill? Who needs to be treated? These questions trouble me when engaging with Global North institutions on decolonisation.

On the contrary, the perspective of the Global South reveals the diseases that manifest within the Global South. It recognises that the causes of these diseases are not solely located in the Global South but also the Global North. The Global South aspires to eliminate the need for the feeding tube that characterises our highly hierarchical

knowledge system. Ironically, the Global South is likely feeding the Global North, providing wealth and knowledge.

In this discussion, I address four crucial aspects of colonisation that need to be challenged, eight characteristics of Global North-led decolonisation discourse that we need to be cautious of, and three recommendations for moving forward.

### **Four Crucial Aspects of Colonisation**

We must clearly define what 'colonisation' means in the present scenario, where every country has achieved political independence.

First, the privileges enjoyed by the Global North are embedded in the hierarchies of global trade and politics. These privileges stem from the Global North's access to various networks of donors, investors, universities, and publishers. With the Global North as funders and investors in development aid and business and the Global South as recipients and a manufacturing supply chain, an inherent hierarchy is already well-established within their relationship.

Second, these access-related privileges are often intergenerational. They need not be acquired by successive generations through individual efforts; instead, citizens of the Global North are often born with these privileges.

Third, global trade, investments, and patent rules are continuously formulated to protect these privileges. In this sense, colonisation is not a matter of the past but an ongoing process.

Fourth, these privileges have become normalised in the Global North. They are perceived as the 'rights' of the Global North. Any attempt to deprive the Global North of these rights is considered illegitimate and unethical. Their counterargument would be: How can individuals be blamed for their privileged birth?

### **Eight Characteristics of Global North-led Decolonisation Discourse**

The problem today is that the Global North has significant control over the discourse on decolonisation. Some examples of this control include:

First, the term 'decolonisation' is used within the larger framework of the colonised existence of the Global South. The debates often avoid discussions about the hegemony of the Global North.

Second, the Global North has introduced several neutral and secular terms to counter-narratives against the hegemony. It has devised a definition of merit and competency often determined by an individual's access to a knowledge network. When entities from the Global South point out the privileges the Global North enjoys, the Global North argues that both the Global North and Global South have similar opportunities to display their competencies, citing examples of successful individuals from the Global South. They ask, "If they can do it, why not others?" When confronted with unequal access to a competency-building environment, the Global North often blames the incompetence of the governance systems in the Global South.

Third, proponents of Global North-led decolonisation sidestep the need to define colonisation through the lens of privileges enjoyed by the Global North. The studies mainly referenced the deprivation experienced by the Global South, evoking sympathy for the Global South rather than anger against the Global North.

Fourth, decolonisation would mean challenging not only the privileges of the Global North but also actively removing the Global North's sole access to those privileges. This would result in fear, panic, and deprivation among the Global North. In essence, true decolonisation would entail real deprivation for the Global North. However, the Global North always seeks a win-win scenario and resists having its power and that of its peers challenged.

Fifth, the Global North gaze aims to build a case for cooperative struggle and seeks solidarity between like-minded individuals from the Global North and Global South. However, the terms of this Global South-Global North solidarity remain ambiguous. When it comes to funding platforms in the Global South advocating for decolonisation against the mainstream Global North, like-minded individuals from the Global North often refrain from taking leadership positions on such projects, suggesting that these initiatives should be led by the Global South, as if leadership is

determined solely by funding. This covertly assumes the power to teach morality to the Global South, implying that the latter must fight its battles as if the Global North has faced hardships in its journey to the top!

The Global North sees it as its Brahmanical duty when it comes to funding knowledge creation on decolonisation. The Global North's capitalist colonisation journey has created vulnerabilities among some stakeholders in the Global North. Publicly funded universities, especially those focused on non-STEM disciplines, have demanded funds to support their salaries and pensions. However, these funds are often denied cruelly, and these institutions are asked to compete for funds from the market. But where is the market for them? It is the Global North's aid program to the Global South. These grants are reasonable funding for Global North universities to fulfil their Brahmanical duty. The publicly funded universities compete with each other to secure what is rightfully their entitlement from the government. Still, in doing so, they divert resources that were meant as reparation grants for the Global South. While the Global North universities receive their tokenistic government funds, they also fulfil the colonisation duty of documenting the history of development aid to the Global South, again from the perspective of the Global North.

Seventh, Global North politics constantly reshapes colonialism in the now sovereign Global South. The capitalist ecosystem thrives on reducing the Global South to a sweatshop supply chain. So the Kshatriyas of the world guard the politics, the Vaishyas guard the businesses, and the Brahmins secure control over the knowledge system that serves both politics and businesses. In other words, decolonisation debates often operate within the four walls of the caste system. Ambedkar's concept of the Infection of Imitation can explain how this system leads to complicity between the Global North and the elites of the Global South. It is this complicity that should be most feared.

Eighth, on the other hand, the challenge is that power elites in the Global South are now using the term 'colonisation' to protect their privileges within the Global South. The message they continuously propagate is that "the Global South is under constant assault" to keep internal protests in check. It is essential to be aware

of how the term 'colonisation' can be misused by the elites in the Global South. The decolonisation debates become top-down due to this misuse. Further, the dominant castes are the Global North within South Asia. All the characteristics of colonisation are embedded within the power of caste politics in the Global South.

Understanding these eight contexts is crucial to comprehending the current vibrant decolonisation agenda within various debates in the Global North.

The concern is that the only approach to decolonisation that the Global North's decolonisation gaze would ever suggest is to respectfully ask Global North stakeholders to voluntarily relinquish their rights for the benefit of the Global South!

### **Suggested Way Forward**

So, what can be done to initiate the decolonisation of decolonisation?

First, let us learn from the struggles against the Brahmanical caste system and racism. The demand for equality from anti-caste movements is not just about deprivation or discrimination; it is a battle for dignity. We should define dignity from the perspective of the Global South and use that notion to establish principles for decolonisation debates.

Second, the Global South's perspective should shape the decolonisation debates. While the Global North focuses on the feeding tube, the Global South focuses on the disease. The disease is not exclusive to the Global South; it is often caused by patriarchy, racism, casteism, or capitalism, which have a dominant presence in the Global North. Therefore, decolonisation must be a struggle against these "isms." Furthermore, decolonisation debates emerging from the Global South should also be anti-capitalist, anti-caste, and anti-patriarchy because colonisation, when viewed from below, encompasses systems and structures that perpetuate colonisation.

Third, the Global North searches for sanitised terms to describe its peers and their conscious and unconscious perpetuating practices, avoiding calling a spade a spade. Meanwhile, the Global South is provided with sugar-coated terms to evoke sympathy. What is needed is to produce anger against the system and structures. Suppressing anger does not necessarily create peace; it perpetuates

a silent violence characterised by the indignity faced by the vast population of the Global South. Anger is essential and should be acknowledged, explored, and engaged with.

Let us strive to decolonise the debates surrounding decolonisation.