
UNIT 1 NAMING THE DISCIPLINE

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this Unit is to define 'New Literatures in English'. You may have heard of Courses in Commonwealth Literature, Postcolonial Literature and New Literatures in English. What do these different categories mean? How are they different and how far do they overlap? What bearing do social, economic and political forces have on the construction of these categories? These are some of the questions that we will address in the course of our discussion in this Unit.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

A language that is not renewed, that does not develop, can easily die. English at the moment is being enriched by the new usages of overseas writers. But this is not why one reads Narayan or Khushwant Singh of India, Soyinka or Achebe of Nigeria, Patrick White or A.D. Hope of Australia, Janet Frame or Dan Davin of New Zealand, A.M. Klein or Earle Birney of Canada, Iqbal Husain or Zulfikar Ghose of Pakistan, Edgar Mittelholzer or Sam Selvon of the Caribbean, or any other of the excellent writers now writing throughout the Commonwealth. True, one reads them because they tell us about the way their countries are evolving; true, one reads them because they enrich our pleasure in the English language, but in the cold light of judgement one reads them for the supranational qualities in their work. One reads them because they bring new ideas, new interpretations of life to us. One reads them, in short, because they are good writers. The standards of judgement are not national standards. Standards of the critic must be cosmopolitan; only the best should be praised. Norman Jeffares Lecture delivered to members of the Commonwealth Literature from 9-12 September 1964 at the University of Leeds.)

That the study of literatures in English produced by non-British authors was valued, ever since it originated out of the cross-cultural contact between the colonisers and the colonised has not always been true: For example, Edmund Gosse's valuation of a

volume of Toru Dutt's poetry from its unattractive appearance: "A hopeless volume it seemed, with its queer type, published at Bhowanipore, printed at the Saphthikasambad Press!" (qtd. In Narasimhaiah, 1978:xv). Gosse, the nineteenth century novelist, poet, biographer and critic reinforces the attitudes of English men of letters who judged works originating out of peripheral colonial territories like India in this negative manner. Once he opens the "hopeless" looking volume he is amazed at the quality of Dutt's poetry, open to British influence but reflective of the local setting. From the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century, certain factors contributed towards an interest in the study of literature from the erstwhile colonies, many of whom had gained or were shortly to gain independence around this time. These together with the UK comprised the British Commonwealth Association of nations differing greatly amongst themselves and yet linked by strong political, social, economic, cultural and linguistic ties arising out of a shared, albeit varying, colonial experience. One of these was the creation of an English-educated intelligentsia who, by the very nature of their training, were steeped in European traditions of dissemination and assimilation of knowledge. This does not mean that they accepted it uncritically but it does imply that, at least in some cases, the choice of a language for conveying their ideas carried a cultural baggage which was difficult to get rid of.

The writers mentioned by Jeffares all belong to the class just described. The works they produce not only reflect or "tell us about the way their countries are evolving" but also critique and question it. So not only do they provide vivid accounts of local colour in a language inflected with those localisms which "enrich" English, but rather they create a "linguistic code, english, which has been transformed and subverted into several distinctive varieties throughout the world" and is different from a "standard code, English" (Ashcroft *et al*, 1988:8) (Please note the use of english with a small 'e'—an english spoken by non-natives and part of what has been called 'World Englishes', This is different from English with a capital 'E' and spoken by native-speakers of the language). The distinctiveness of these works contributes to the thematic, linguistic and formal diversity of what came to be called New Literatures in English. The authors listed by Jeffares (notice all of them are male, except Janet Frame) constitute a 'canon' of sorts. There is a debate on what makes works worthy enough to be included in the 'canon,' what are the parameters adopted for judging their work, can any implications be drawn from what is excluded from the canon, is the latter to do with literary or extra-literary reasons. It is in taking cognizance of these and related concerns that the term Postcolonial is useful, particularly since most recent theorisations about literatures from the Commonwealth countries prefer to use this term.

1.2 FRAMING COMMONWEALTH LITERATURE

1.2.1 Origins

When tracing a chronology of events leading up to the establishment of Commonwealth Literature as a discipline it is common to ascribe the beginnings to universities in the United Kingdom. In the 1950s some courses in American, Commonwealth, Irish, and African literatures were offered in "a few provincial UK universities." The value judgement implied in the word "provincial" is unmistakable and it is no wonder that Dennis Walder, from whose account of the Commonwealth project this phrase is taken, should also denigrate other formerly colonial countries for including "little clusters of 'local' texts . . . into the syllabuses of English Departments . . . often with patronizing disclaimers" (1998:61). Walder's survey gives a new turn to the disjuncture between the metropolis and the periphery, the former usually taken to refer to the origin/centre of colonial power and the latter the regions over whom that power was exercised and continues to be exercised in neo-colonial forms. Thus if London was the metropolitan centre then countries in Asia or Africa colonised by the British were the outposts or the periphery of the British empire. The former is typified as cosmopolitan and the latter as provincial is colonial

discourse. You might wonder how this applies to academia and the beginnings of Commonwealth Literature. I am suggesting that such typifications are also read into Western academia which one might suppose would be characterised as uniformly metropolitan from a certain perspective. As Walder's use of the word "provincial" and his view of local texts included in syllabi at the University of Cape Town in South Africa indicates, the centre of Commonwealth literary studies lay elsewhere. Indeed he glorifies the first school of Commonwealth Literature founded at Leeds University in 1964 where "some of the best [works] found their way onto the Leeds syllabus" (Walder, 1998:62). Peripheral origins in other universities in the U.K. are not listed by Walder. Hence it is useful to have another view of the origins as given by Anna Rutherford in the Foreword to a collection of essays on the field arising out of a conference held at Aarhus University in Denmark. Rutherford perceptively pre-empted the question which might be asked "What business have the Danes with the Commonwealth?" The answer lies in the founding of possibly the first Institute of Commonwealth Literature at Aarhus in 1958 by Professor Greta Hort (Rutherford, 1972:7).

I have given these two instances of the institutional-temporal origins of Commonwealth Literature to point out how institutions are instrumental in determining new areas of study. But that academic curricula are influenced by political, social and economic factors is also borne out in the case of Commonwealth Literature becoming an object of study in the 1950s and 1960s. Many erstwhile colonised countries gained their independence at this time. India and Pakistan emerged as nations in 1947, Nigeria and Kenya in 1960 and 1963 respectively, the West Indian federation was formed in 1960. In Walder's view the literary and cultural expression of "nationalist strivings" during the process of decolonization produced writings in English which had a major impact internationally (1998:59-60). This can be one reason for their inclusion in university curricula in the U.K. But it is also useful to remember that post-war Britain, especially the 1950s and 1960s, experienced a large scale arrival of migrants belonging to its former colonies in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. While this produced hysterical political responses like the Immigration Act of 1968 as a strategy for excluding non-white settlers from any sense of national belonging, it also served as an opportune moment for appropriating 'black' cultural production under the term Commonwealth Literature.

1.2.2 Critiques

It is an accepted form of critical scholarship that concepts and terms which become dated are held up to interrogation. This is what has happened in the case of 'Commonwealth Literature.' At the time when the term gained currency the U.K. had a powerful international presence, not the least because it had been the single largest colonial power till about a decade or so before the 1960s, and its former colonies had recently come together under the umbrella Commonwealth. Even within this contradictions abound. In an essay entitled "'Commonwealth Literature' Does Not Exist" Salman Rushdie observes, "South Africa and Pakistan, for instance, are not members of the Commonwealth, but their authors apparently belong to its literature. On the other hand, England, which, as far as I'm aware, has not been expelled from the Commonwealth quite yet, has been excluded from its literary manifestation" (1991:62). Rushdie's characteristic flippancy should not obscure the seriousness of his purpose in commenting on the naively political origins of literary labels with limited efficacy.

As early as 1970 William Walsh, appointed as professor to the first Chair of Commonwealth Literature at the University of Leeds, commented on his usage of the term in a book length study of selected Indian, African, Caribbean, Australian, New Zealand and Canadian authors. Walsh professes an awareness that it "may be objected to by those who take a more exact political view of the Commonwealth than I take here." Writers, he feels, may wish to see themselves as arising out of a particular "historical tradition" and "national context" and not as contributors to the literature of an "amorphous Commonwealth" (1970:10). Almost twenty years later

the conception of this amorphousness is contemptuously phrased thus, "this bunch of upstarts, huddling together under this new and badly made umbrella" (Rushdie, 1991:63). I am suggesting that the amorphousness of the concept, leading to confusion as to what can or cannot be included under this label, is the least serious objection which can be raised against it. Remember that most of the Commonwealth countries derive many aspects of their political, legal and educational systems from the British model. The similarities between the British and Indian legal systems are a case in point. So when the term is adopted for the literatures of these countries it implies as if even the forms of cultural expression derive from and are assessed by conceptual and critical models originating in a country formerly exercising control over, but now supposedly on an equal footing with independent nations. The easy appropriation of the 'common' literary 'wealth' of these nations by the British academia can be critiqued on these grounds.

A celebratory view of 'Commonwealth Literature' and wholesale approbation of the two words in conjunction is taken by that veteran of Commonwealth literary studies in India, C.D. Narasimhaiah. This is evinced in statements like the following: "The Commonwealth offers possibilities for an intelligent meeting of the East and the West . . ." (Narasimhaiah, 1978:xxix). The hierarchization implicit in this meeting which was the direct consequence of colonisation leading to imposition of the English language in countries now part of the Commonwealth as well as the irony inherent in the nomenclature of this political body are issues not taken into account. In a more recent work Narasimhaiah uses a phrase of Chinua Achebe's to label Commonwealth Literature "the heirloom of . . . [a] multiple heritage" (1995:25). It can be argued that the "heritage" spoken of here was imposed rather than inherited in most cases. There is a hierarchization implicit in this imposition which means that Commonwealth Literature is "positioned *below* English literature 'proper' . . . or . . . places English Literature at the centre and the rest of the world at the periphery" (Rushdie, 1991:66). Recall the concept of the centre and the periphery which I explained in the section titled 'Origins' and try and understand Rushdie's statement in the context of the academia. Valourisation of Commonwealth Literature does not obscure the fact that literature falling within this rubric is still considered a category within English Literature with most British universities offering a token selection of texts comprising a study of this area.

1.2.3 Continued Usage

From the sustained critical assaults on the term I have outlined in the previous section it would be natural for you to assume that the term has now passed out of usage. However, this is hardly the case as the title of C.D. Narasimhaiah's book *Essays in Commonwealth Literature: Heirloom of a Multiple Heritage* published in 1995 indicates. Even with an awareness of the political and cultural problematics it continues to be used although with a greater degree of self-reflexivity. I shall cite a few instances of this. When the first conference on the field was held in 1964 one of the recommendations made was that a journal of Commonwealth literature including critical articles and annual biographies should be established (Press, 1965:214). This led to *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* edited by Arthur Ravenscroft of South African origin. The journal is well into its third decade of publication and is a useful source of information about recent literary and critical publication from the various Commonwealth countries.

My other example is the international body Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (ACLALS). The success of the Leeds Conference, which has already been discussed in some detail, led to the formation of the ACLALS which organised its first conference in Brisbane, Australia in 1968 on the theme of national identity. Its second conference focussed on literature of the West Indies and was held in 1971. The body organises a triennial conference and has regional branches affiliated to it such as India-ACLALS, South Pacific-ACLALS and European-ACLALS. Significantly the theme for the 12th triennial conference to be held in July 2001 in Canberra, Australia is 'Resistance and Reconciliation: Writing in the

Commonwealth.' One of the questions to be debated in this conference is how have "recent theoretical perspectives confirmed or challenged notions of a Commonwealth, and Commonwealth writing." What is this symptomatic of? I would say that it is in the spirit of combative engagement that a body like the ACLALS question its very founding principle while also adhering to it.

1.3 APPARENT NEWNESS, UNDERLYING CONTINUITY

1.3.1 Defining Newness

Commonwealth literary studies, as explained in the previous section, took as their object of study literatures of the newly independent nations. Colonisation in one form or the other was responsible for the use of English in these regions which already had an established tradition of orature/literature in languages other than English. Thus the English language literature produced was a "new" addition to the body of literature already existing in various languages in countries like India, Kenya, Nigeria, Australia, New Zealand and Canada. However, this is not how the newness of such literature is perceived. As in the term 'Commonwealth Literature' the assimilationist model is at work in the term 'New Literatures in English.' Indeed when discussing the former Rushdie voiced the suspicion that quite possibly it "is no more than an ungainly term for the younger English literatures" (1987:65-66). When assimilated into the existing body of English literature, seen as the repository of universal human values, the new or younger literatures in English are perceived as "enriching" or invigorating it. Let us see what forms such a critical stance has taken in explicatory studies using this phrase or variants of it.

Bruce King in his introduction to *Literatures of the World in English* acknowledges that there are "different national literary traditions with values and histories of their own" but that "each literature is a part of world English literature, and shares in the heritage of British writing" (1974:20-21). King's liberal humanist critical stance fails to mask the contradictions inherent in the above formulation. If each literary tradition reflects its own "values" then clearly the heritage of British writing will have values markedly different from other national literary traditions, not the least because a different set of material and political conditions are constitutive of it. Thus the "nostalgia" for a "long-established English tradition" which King sees expressed in the various national literatures is not simply an "ideal of a more ordered, settled, complex society" as he assumes (1974:20). The inculcation of this ideal and appreciation of the literature reflective of it was part of the colonial agenda, to form "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect," as Macaulay put it in his *Minute on Indian Education*. Having outlined the problems in King's critical formulations on the newly emerged literatures in English it must be said that his definition of it is nothing if not inclusive. I am citing it in detail so that you can contrast it with other, more selective, definitions:

A new English literature may express a culture which has grown up with the settler communities, it may be a continuation of indigenous cultural traditions, or it may be some mixture of the effects of colonization, including the bringing together of various races into one nation.

(King, 1974:2)

In a later work entitled *The New English Literatures: Cultural Nationalism in a Changing World* published in 1980 King focussed on literatures from six countries—Nigeria, India, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the West Indies and on authors from each of these.

Recent European publications using the concept of newness proffer other, less inclusive, definitions. Terminological inconsistency too abounds as in a work edited by M.T. Bindella and G.V. Davis entitled *Imagination and the Creative Impulse in*

in Post/colonial Literatures in English' series. While the collection includes readings of African, Indian, Canadian and Australian texts and literatures, the editors are firm about what constitutes New Literatures:

From the European perspective at least, the new literatures in English deal with "new" countries where new immigrant populations have settled and new national identities have come into existence. The new literatures thus reflect *par excellence* the historical processes by which such societies have been created and the development of consciousness through which new lands have been inscribed in the collective imagination of emerging countries.

(Bindella, 1993:5)

Thus the literatures of Nigeria, India and Zimbabwe are discussed because they are "new" nations and those of Australia, Canada, New Zealand because they have been populated by "new" immigrants. The West Indies fits both categories since not only does its population comprise those who are immigrants but also because it has recently become a nation, or rather, a federation of nationalities. The focus on new lands "inscribing" themselves on the imagination of emerging countries makes the emphasis on Canadian, Australian and New Zealand literature inevitable which is why, in my opinion, this is a less inclusive definition than King's.

1.3.2 Variants of Newness

European critics have tried to pull Commonwealth Literature and New Literatures in English away from being a mere "supplement to British Literature. One of the reports read out at a symposium on 'Imagination and the Creative Impulse in New Literatures in English' called for "a new integral model of organisation which would take account of the comparative, contextual and multicultural aspects of the subject, thus accommodating the New Literatures in a reformed structural pattern of International English Literature" (Bindella, 1993:11). This structural pattern is free of the associations of assimilation and hierarchization implied by the already critiqued nomenclature. Not only is it flexible enough to include English-language literature from countries not falling within the Commonwealth umbrella but also chosen to highlight the possible interconnections between the literatures of various nations (inter-national).

This is the purpose of another recent collection of essays initially read out at a conference of the European Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (EACLALS) on the theme 'Nationalism vs. Internationalism. Subtitled '(Inter) National Dimensions of Literatures in English' it sees these literatures as a form of globalisation (Zach, 1996:xiv). In the same collection Bruce King's essay uses the globalised American cultural model mentioned in the Introduction to make the facile generalisation that "Commonwealth literature is itself multicultural: an overseas colony is by nature multicultural. . . . Multiculturalism is as much Nigerian, West Indian, Malaysian or Indian as North American, European or Australian" (1996:15). Taken in a loose sense this is true but it obscures the power relations operating between different cultural groups in the countries listed, in some of which race is a determining factor. Neither in society nor in literature does the parity which is assumed to underlie multiculturalism operate as it is ideally meant to. King is aware of this and to theorise the contestatory relations in a multicultural Commonwealth he uses the American model of the "cultural wars in the United States" (1996:16). What is disturbing is the unifying force he attributes to the English language as a medium of communication which can resolve the intra- and inter-national problems in both multicultural nations like Nigeria and India and a multicultural body like the Commonwealth (King, 1996:15).

In discussing these variants of "newness" my purpose has been to prepare the ground for a political versus non-political stance in the area variously described as Commonwealth Literature or New Literatures in English. Some aspects of this stance are scrutinised briefly in the next section.

1.3.3 Contentious Concerns

Naming the Discipline

I have dwelt at length on the variation of the term discussed so far. This section is about the overlapping set of concerns addressed by commentators preferring to align themselves with either of the two: Commonwealth literary studies or the study of New Literatures in English. Let me begin by pointing out their convergences as well as divergences on the role and function of literature. The newly emergent literatures should aspire to develop “supranational qualities” since good writing possesses “human and universal qualities” (Jeffares, 1965:xviii); they are the best means of “pooling the resources of many cultures . . . and of breaking the national barriers so as to make them available to all of us in the hope of supplementing each others deficiencies and correcting the warps” (Narasimhaiah, 1978:xxx). Literature as the bearer of universal values and serving as a means of the betterment of the human condition is a liberal humanist view which became outmoded once it was accepted that literature is not a pure entity uncontaminated by the political, the social and material modes of production. Jeffares and Narasimhaiah’s statements would lead one to believe that the best kind of Commonwealth literature is that which is ideologically neutral. More recent commentators, even while pointing out the dangers of “universalism,” fall into the same trap while discussing the works of “Third-World” writers. The study of these, according to Zach and Goodwin, “counteracts feelings of superiority, dispels stereotyped notions about other nations, broadens too narrow aesthetic views, and inspires respect for people of a different creed and colour and for their cultural achievements” (1996:xiv). This, as is apparent, accords criticism a transparency and idealism which is as fallacious as the idea of a lack of a political stance in literature.

However even this political stance has not been without its attendant problems. Literatures falling under the rubrics discussed so far have been valued, or in the opinion of some, like Rushdie, overvalued, because of the nationalist politics they convey. As expressions of anti-colonial nationalist consciousness they have been “ghettoised” under either Commonwealth Literatures or New Literatures in English. One of the rules for life inside the ‘ghetto’, is that “literature is an expression of nationality” (Rushdie, 1987:66). A recognition of this is apparent in recent criticism such as King’s writings on the Commonwealth novels where he states explicitly that those novels which use “representative characters for a national or racial allegory” have won international acclaim (1991:6). Not only does this lead to an ignorance of the other influences, besides anti-colonial resistance, which go into the making of these literatures, but also this focus on national allegories written in English serves to obfuscate the validity of literature written in the local languages, whose concerns may converge and/or diverge from the former. As you can see both the valuation of literatures for their supranational, universal characteristics as well as for their representation of nationalistic concerns are contentious concerns. This leads either to the adoption of New Critical methodologies for analysis or to overtly political, but covertly essentialist, form of categorising and critiquing literary production in the countries under discussion.

What kind of literature from these countries gets read internationally, by whom and in what ways depends on the expression of nationality. Gordon Collier questions the assumptions which make both critics and readers choose certain texts above others which are “more internationalist in their origins and less obviously rooted in the more conspicuous determinants of place” (Bindella, 1993:8). These works then come to constitute a canon of Commonwealth Literature or New Literatures in English which in itself is a paradox of sorts since the inclusion of these literatures within English Literature was, at least in some senses, intended to broaden the horizons of what was seen as limited and insular. The selective principle involved in choosing the best that has been known and thought in the Commonwealth is perceived as a “problem” by Norman Jeffares since it is difficult to decide “what novels one would wish more people to read, as ‘touchstones’ perhaps, as the equivalent of anthology poems” (1972:10). You may be aware that when Matthew Arnold spoke of “touchstones” he referred to the best literary works ever produced. A new work could be compared

with these classics to determine its value. The reference to Matthew Arnold's touchstone method of criticism underlines the need to contain the study of these relatively new literatures within the critical and institutional framework of the study of English literature, an enterprise in which Arnold played a pivotal role. To historicise the introduction of Western forms of knowledge, a specific discipline of which was the study of English language and literature, to study its impact on the minds of the colonised, the kinds of resistance it engendered and its continuing effect on these societies after their emergence as independent nation-states, are some areas of study. Let us deal with some of these and related objectives under another term in the next section.

1.4 ENABLING POSTCOLONIAL ENGAGEMENT

1.4.1 Political Theory/Theoretical Politics

The semantic basis of the term 'post-colonial' might seem to suggest a concern only with the national culture after the departure of the imperial power. It has occasionally been employed in some earlier work in the area to distinguish between the periods before and after independence ('colonial period' and 'post-colonial period'), for example, in constructing national literary histories, or in suggesting comparative studies between stages in those histories. . . . We use the term 'post-colonial,' however, to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression. We also suggest that it is most appropriate as the term for the new cross-cultural criticism which has emerged in recent years and for the discourse through which this is constituted.

(Ashcroft *et al.* 1989:2)

The quotation given above is from *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* which made post-colonial the catchphrase in academic circles. I have quoted from it at length to indicate that the authors of this book, although aware that the term has been used previously ("occasionally been employed") in other kinds of discourse, appropriate it for a cross cultural discussion of literary texts to which they give the grand name "cross-cultural criticism." It is this literary-cultural postcoloniality which Aijaz Ahmad takes issue with when he points out that the first major debate on the idea of postcolonialism was initiated in 1972 by Hamza Alvi's article "The State in Postcolonial Societies: Pakistan and Bangladesh" which appeared in *New Left Review*. When the term came to be used in the 1980s, Ahmad observes, it was with no memory that it has originated "not in cultural theory but in political theory, with the object of inquiry at that time being not 'post-colonial literature' or the 'postcolonial intellectual' but the 'postcolonial state'" (1995:280-81). The depoliticizing of the term and its use to label periods, authors, texts and intellectuals, has resulted in the containment of literature and its criticism from the social, political and material processes which influence it. Only one of these processes, colonialism and only one of its effects, discursivity is the object of attention in a de-politicized literary and cultural usage of postcolonial theory. This is why reservations have been expressed against what Ashcroft *et al.* call, "a continuity of preoccupations" in the "culture" (notice the singular) "affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day." Among others Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge have called for an "adequate materialist theory of postcolonialism" which can take into account how colonialism variously affected different cultures (1994:285). The account given by the authors of *The Empire Writes Back* from the moment of colonization to the present day was ruptured decisively at various points when the former colonies became independent and hence it has also been suggested that the terms "neo-colonial" and "post-independence" are probably more suitable.

A sustained engagement with the term has led to a doing away with its hyphenated form (post-colonial) and adoption of the unhyphenated term (postcolonialism) as more reflective of the continued operation of the material, social and linguistic forms of colonialism in politically independent countries. Please do not think that the critiques take away the efficacy of the term postcolonial. On the contrary it is only when a discipline is critiqued that it can remedy the lacunae which creep in due to inadequate or selective theorisations like the discursive approach to postcolonialism taken by the authors of *The Empire Writes Back*. Judged by any standards this is an important book for readers of postcolonial literatures, but it needs to be supplemented by other readings, some of which have already been suggested.

1.4.2 Textual/Revolutionary Oppositionality

One of the foundational texts of postcolonial theory is Edward Said's brilliant account of the construction of the Orient by Western discourse. In Said's words, European culture "was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period . . ." (1995:3). Said's work is part of what has now come to be called colonial discourse analysis. In directing attention to the discursive production of meanings, Orientalism is seen as representing "the first phase of postcolonial theory" (Gandhi, 1999:64). This textual oppositionalism can be compared and contrasted with that of Frantz Fanon. Fanon gives a description of the phases which native cultural producers go through in their relation with the colonial culture: a period of "unqualified assimilation," followed by a stage in which the native is disturbed and "decides to remember what he is," and finally "the fighting phase" in which he will "shake" the people. In the fifties and sixties Fanon wrote about native absorption of and opposition to the colonial culture as the Other with reference to Algeria and Haiti. This is a kind of oppositionality different from the one generated by Said's enterprise of diagnosing how the West absorbed and represented the Orient as the Other in the nineteen seventies.

In the work of the Kenyan activist and writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o there is an awareness about the materialist basis of textuality as well as a commitment to its revolutionary potential. To this end he has repeatedly pointed out the stereotypical depictions of Africa, its environs and its people by imperialist writers like Rudyard Kipling, Rider Haggard, Elspeth Huxley and others. In addition, he counters such representations in his novels and criticism which focus on the struggles of the proletariat against their colonial or neo-colonial masters. He has also called for an abolition of the English language and its literature and an adoption of African languages and literatures in the interest of forging a positive self-image of the African in a seminal work entitled *Decolonizing the Mind*. The promulgation of such ideas has not been without a price, Ngugi was held as a political detainee for a year in post-colonial Kenya and has now been living in exile for a good many years in New York. It is to this aspect of exile, also referred to as diasporic, that I will now turn.

1.4.3 Diasporic Intellectuals and High Theory

The career graphs of diasporic intellectuals like Homi Bhabha, Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak attest to the institutionalisation of postcolonial theory in Western, particularly the U.S. academia. Their origins in the third world as well as their theorisations about their own positionality enable them to occupy a location which is comfortably marginal to the centre. In their own very different ways the members of this holy postcolonial trinity have drawn attention to figures ignored by high theory: the migrant at the interstices of cultures (Bhabha); the gendered subaltern (Spivak); the stereotyped oriental (Said). One of the frequent objections against this theoretical practice is its over-reliance on post-structuralist terminology and ideology with its focus on the decentering of meaning due to an inherent indeterminacy in discourse. For instance, in her most widely discussed essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' Spivak is self-reflexive about her role as the investigating academic whose object of inquiry is the female subaltern subject. It is no wonder then that given this hierarchization

the conclusion drawn is that the subaltern cannot speak, but one might add, that she is spoken for in the West by academic mediators like Spivak. This need not take away from the value of such theorisations, for they do deal with issues of race, gender, class and caste.

For many of their anti-imperialist critiques these theorists draw upon canonical texts by Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Rudyard Kipling, Joseph Conrad, to name a few. In reading these works oppositionally to recover the suppressed voices in them, whether of migrants, natives or women, Spivak and Said add a new dimension to literary and critical representation. In this respect Bhabha's readings of works by Frantz Fanon, Toni Morrison, Derek Walcott and others can be seen as an attempt towards establishing an alternative postcolonial canon even though the aim is to dismantle canons.

1.5 LET US SUM UP

One of the issues touched upon in the three major divisions in this unit has been that of canonisation of authors and texts. Since we are dealing with literature, this focus was inevitable. However, I hope I have also been able to indicate that literature is not divorced from the social, political and economic context in which it originates. The terms 'Commonwealth' and 'Postcolonial' indicate these intersections. I have also tried to indicate that no longer can literature, criticism and theory be separated since literature is an ideological critique of society and much recent theory is creative. Although the section divisions may seem to indicate a progression from 'Commonwealth Literature' to 'New Literatures in English' to Postcolonial Literature' do remember that all three are currently in use. Finally, some of the predominant concerns only briefly touched upon in this unit such as history, nationalism, language, migrancy, ethnicity, feminism will be taken up in the subsequent units.

1.6 QUESTIONS

1. On what grounds can the term 'Commonwealth Literature' be critiqued?
2. Analyse the term 'New Literatures in English' as a possible advance on 'Commonwealth Literature.'
3. What role have migrant intellectuals played in the institutionalisation of postcolonial theory?

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UNIT 2 AFRICAN LITERATURE: CULTURE AND POST-NATIONALIST POLITICS IN KENYA AND NIGERIA

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 The Politics of Language
 - 2.2.1 Choosing Between English and Native Languages
 - 2.2.2 Swahili
 - 2.2.3 Kikuyu
- 2.3 Literature and Social Commitment
 - 2.3.1 Prose Writing in Kenya
 - 2.3.2 Theatre in Nigeria
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 - 2.4.1 Cultural and Political Assertion
 - 2.4.2 Censorship
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- 2.6 Questions
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2.0 OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this unit is to outline how cultural production in Africa has been directly affected by the choice of a particular language (English, Swahili, Kikuyu, Igbo etc) as a means of education and how writers, particularly from Kenya and Nigeria, have responded to this choice. In the socially committed literature emerging from these nations the freedom of the writer has often sought to be curtailed. A brief survey of Yoruba theatre and Kenya prose writing is included in this unit with the aim of indicating how this literature both reflects and questions the structures established after independence, sometimes leading to the political persecution of the writers who dared to question. Please note that we will speak mostly of Kenya and Nigeria and not the rest of Africa as the texts prescribed in your course are Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests* and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat*.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In any given time and place cultural production can take many forms all of which—music, dance, painting, sculpture, oral traditions, literature—are reflective of the social and historical processes in a society. In this unit I shall focus on the role literature, and the language it is written in, plays in African countries like Kenya and Nigeria when political independence has already been achieved. Let me begin by giving a brief account of the political situation in these countries in the years when they were under colonial control and immediately after they won their freedom from colonial rule. You will read in detail about the historical and political background in Blocks 2 and 3. Although British control over Kenya was established by the Berlin Conference in 1885, European settlers poured in only from 1895 onwards. Kenya became a British colony in 1920. The war of independence known as the Mau Mau war lasted from 1952 to 1960 leading to negotiations, which resulted in independence in 1963. Immediately after independence English was the official language in Kenya.

In 1974 Swahili replaced English as the official language in the wake of a process which had begun in 1969, when a constitutional amendment had instituted the use of Swahili in the National Assembly.

Let us now turn to Nigeria. Parts of the country which form Nigeria today were Protectorates under the British towards the end of the 19th century. Nigeria gained independence in 1960 and became a federal republic in 1963. Post-independence Nigeria has had a succession of military governments. Between 1967 and 1970 the eastern regions seceded from the republic in what came to be called the Nigerian Civil War. There are almost 400 indigenous languages in Nigeria. English and the main language of each state are the official languages. I think it should be obvious to you that once nationalist struggles in these countries achieved their political objective—*independence*—one of the most important post-nationalist concerns to emerge was the question of which language to adopt. I am suggesting that before this concern was taken up by writers like Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Wole Soyinka they had to conceptualise the role of the writer in postcolonial Kenya and Nigeria respectively. Both have dealt with this in talks which have been published and are now recognised as seminal theorisations. Soyinka's 'The Writer in a Modern African State' was an address delivered at the Afro-Scandinavian Writers' Conference, Stockholm, in 1960, shortly before the Nigerian Civil War. Ngugi's 'The Writer and His Past' and 'The Writer in a Changing Society' were in the form of a paper given to the Kenya Historical Association in 1968 and a speech delivered to Makerere extra-mural students at Jinja, Uganda, in 1969. Both Soyinka and Ngugi visualise the role of the writer in historical terms. The following quotations will help clarify the point I am making:

The African writer needs an urgent release from the fascination of the past. Of course, the past exists, the real African consciousness establishes this—the past exists now, this moment, it is co-existent in present awareness. It clarifies the present and explains the future, but it is not a fleshpot for escapist indulgence, and it is vitally dependent on the sensibility that recalls it.

(Soyinka, 1993: 18-19)

I believe the African novelist, the African writer. . . . must be committed on the side of the majority (as indeed he was during the anti-colonial struggle) whose silent and violent clamour for change is rocking the continent. By diving into himself, deep into the collective unconscious of his people, he can seek the root, the trend in the revolutionary struggle. He has already done something in restoring the African character to his history, to his past. But in a capitalist society, the past has a romantic glamour: gazing at it . . . is often a means of escaping the present. It is only in a socialist context that a look at yesterday can be meaningful in illuminating today and tomorrow. Whatever his ideological persuasion, this is the African writer's task.

(Ngugi, 1972: 46)

Do you notice any similarities in the statements by Soyinka and Ngugi? **Firstly**, both agree that for the African writer to remain embedded in the past, whether it be a glorious vision of pre-colonial existence or the excesses of the colonial regime, is detrimental because it is "escapist." If the writer takes recourse to the past it should be in terms meaningful and relevant to the present. **Secondly**, what Soyinka calls "the sensibility" of the author and Ngugi labels "the ideological persuasion" is responsible for how meaningful a role writers can play in the historical processes of which they are a part. And **finally**, if such a role involves serving as a "conscience" of society (Soyinka) by examining it in a "socialist" manner (Ngugi), how pertinent is it to the social, political and economic problems faced by many countries in Africa? This is not to imply that Soyinka and Ngugi have similar political orientations. Indeed one can label these positions as the right and the left respectively. However, this does not take away from my main point that both have tried to assign a socially

and culturally committed role to the African writer. As the next section will indicate, they have in very different ways, also addressed the question of language.

2.2 THE POLITICS OF LANGUAGE

2.2.1 Choosing Between English and Native Languages

It might surprise you to learn that unlike the situation in South Africa or Francophone Africa where languages like Afrikaans and French were, and in some cases continue to be, imposed on the native populations, the official policy in British Africa was to encourage instruction and education in indigenous languages. James Booth has pointed out that in the British colonies indigenous languages were employed in primary education, English becoming the exclusive language of instruction only at the secondary level. We shall look at this in the context of the promotion of literacy, modern education and creative writing in East and West Africa. The missionary societies taught reading and writing to those they wished to convert and procured vernacular translations of scriptural texts in the nineteenth century (Gerard, 1981: 173). In 1922 one such missionary society obtained financial support from the Phelps-Stokes fund for an enquiry into the educational systems in Africa. The enquiry commission proclaimed an "emphatic belief in the value of the Native languages" thus distancing themselves from the linguistic policies followed by the French and the Portuguese in their African territories. Given this report's declaration that "The processes of education must begin with the characteristics of the people as they are and help them to evolve to the higher levels" and the British governmental memorandum in 1925 specifying that "the study of the educational use of the vernaculars is of primary importance" (Gerard, 1981: 183) it seems as if the British government was involved in the noble mission of encouraging native languages.

Let us first take the case of Kenya. It is an indication of the confused aims of the British colonists that although the colonial government declared in 1929 that English should be the official language of Kenya, Swahili continued to be the language of instruction in schools, possibly because English was considered too powerful a "political tool" to be given to Africans. Only the Kikuyu Independent Schools proved an exception to these rules since in 1935 they decided to introduce English as the medium of instruction at all levels. In a surprising change in policy the 1950s saw the introduction of English at the primary level by the government. Shortly after independence, the Ominde report commissioned by the Kenyatta government saw in English the possibility of promoting "national unity" (Sicherman, 1990: 28) leading to widespread protests against its imposition.

What is the situation like in Nigeria? As in the other British colonies here too the official policy was one of promotion of vernacular languages and literatures. Whereas this policy was successful in the case of Yoruba language and literature leading to the appearance of original writing, both prose and poetry, during the first half of the twentieth century, it did not work as well among the Ibos, the other major linguistic groups in Nigeria. One of the most moving accounts of the linguistic dilemma Ibo writers find themselves in is provided by Chinua Achebe:

I have always been fond of stories and intrigued by language—first Igbo and later English which I began to learn at about the age of eight. I don't know for certain but I probably have spoken more words in Igbo than English but I have definitely written more words in English than Igbo. Which I think makes me perfectly bilingual.

(Achebe, 1973: 190)

An educational code had been promulgated in Nigeria in 1903, the first government secondary school was founded in 1911 and these combined with the influence of Henry Carr (1863-1965), the first Nigerian high official in educational matters, led to

the emergence of a literate class (Gerard, 1981: 247). That this class was fluently bilingual, as Achebe indicates with reference to himself, has been attributed to sociological and linguistic factors. Gerard suggests that the variety of Ibo dialects led to controversies over orthographies (spellings) and hence to the neglect of Ibo language and literature. Moreover, Ibo children, initially taught to read through the vernacular primary readers, were encouraged to read in English by their parents. English was seen as a means of acquiring positions of power in the governmental machinery (1981: 260). What Gerard fails to point out is something to which Achebe has obliquely drawn attention to in the essay 'Named for Victoria, Queen of England': if the missionaries used the vernacular languages for the spread of Christianity, they also introduced the native converts (like Achebe's family) to English literature through translations of the Bible, Christian hymns and works like *The Pilgrim's Progress*. This was also a factor in the Africans' desire to acquire the English language. This was despite efforts like the Nigerian 'National Policy in Education' (1977) which outlined the government's policy to encourage indigenous languages by advocating that each child should learn one of the three "major" languages apart from the mother tongue, the major languages recognised are: Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba.

Asserting the efficacy of one's own languages against an imposed one as a marker of cultural identity is a common anti-colonial strategy in nationalist politics. The British African colonial policy by and large supported the use of indigenous languages. This does not mean that no power and prestige came to be attached to English, rather a premium was attached to acquiring an English education. It is this mindset which writers like Ngugi and Soyinka are reacting against in the period following the nationalist struggle (postcolonial Kenya and Africa) when the hegemony of the colonial language still reigns supreme.

2.2.2 Swahili

To counter this hegemony the adoption of a common pan-African language has been proposed. As early as 1959 the Second Conference of Negro Writers and Artists which took place at Rome called for the choice of one African language which "would not necessarily belong to a relative majority of peoples" and that "All Africans would learn this national language besides their own regional language and the European language of secondary education," the latter would be optional. In addition "a team of linguists would be instructed to enrich this language . . . with the terminology necessary for the expression of modern philosophy, science and technology" (qtd. In Booth, 1981: 64). Recognising the importance of language as a constituent in "social programming" Soyinka has called for the adoption of a common African language which would do away with colonially imposed divisions. Read the following statement carefully and attempt to understand the relationship between culture and language:

... attention must be called again to the fact that our present national boundaries are colonial, that the cultural orientation is therefore still predominantly colonial, that the linguistic boundary is even more critical than the geographical because it is culturally divisive, but also that to replace such boundaries with several nation-linguistic boundaries is to enshrine for all time the principle of colonial fragmentation.

(Soyinka, 1993: 91)

To do away with these "nation-linguistic" boundaries Swahili is envisaged as an ideal choice because most of East and Central Africa already speaks and writes in this language. This will help in combating the cultural fragmentation which arose out of various African nations making a choice between European languages and the languages spoken within its boundaries. Having no common African languages to communicate in is perceived a serious handicap to African cultural (one might also add political and economic) solidarity.

Please do not assume that the project is not fraught with contradictions and difficulties in implementation. One of the most obvious of these is the enormous scholarship which would be involved in translating works from other African languages into Swahili for educational purposes. It is quite possible that the governments of many countries where Swahili is not used, such as Nigeria, would prove resistant to the idea for economic or cultural chauvinistic reasons. Countries like Kenya and Tanzania where Swahili is already an established language would be at an advantage and probably stand to gain more out of this proposal in cultural and linguistic terms. These are inequities which even the ideal of a pan-African cultural synthesis cannot wish away. Backed though it is by bodies like the Congress of Negro Writers and Artists, Union of Writers of the African Peoples, the All-Africa Teachers Union and authorities like Cheik Anta Diop and Wole Soyinka, the problems already outlined make its implementation difficult, if not impossible. No wonder then the adoption of Swahili as an African *lingua franca* has not materialised.

2.2.3 Kikuyu

The most ardent advocate of Kikuyu language and literature, Ngugi wa Thiong'o has often been criticized for his neglect of Swahili which is the national language of Kenya. Ngugi's championing of oral literature in Kikuyu is seen as a deliberate indifference to Swahili literature. Sicherman observes that objectively speaking Swahili literature both written and oral, in Kenya as well as in Tanzania, is by far the most dynamic branch of East African literature alive today. Hence Ngugi's neglect of the teaching of Swahili literature in the Department of Literature at Nairobi has been criticised (1990: 35). We will see whether this charge has any validity. In 1968 Ngugi and two of his colleagues called for the abolition of the English Department at the University of Nairobi. The new organising principle they proposed involved a study of Kenyan and East African literature, African literature, third world literature and literature from the rest of the world at what was named the Literature Department at the University of Nairobi (Ngugi, 1986: 94-5). In continuation with the same "Nairobi Literature Debate" the Dept. of Literature co-organised a conference on 'The Teaching of African Literature Kenyan Schools' at which one of the strongest recommendations made was: "A clear programme of Swahili literature be introduced and be made compulsory in schools . . . Swahili has a major and an increasing role to play in Kenya and needs to be given greater emphasis that it has hitherto been accorded" (Ngugi, 1986: 99). Ngugi's endorsement of this report indicates that the focus on his tribal language Kikuyu in his fictional and theoretical works does not necessarily imply a bias against Swahili which is the official language of Kenya.

I will now focus on Ngugi's views on literature as a means of cultural expression with reference to his native language, Kikuyu. In 1963, Obi Wali published a controversial article entitled 'The Dead End of African Literature' which Ngugi read prior to its publication in *Transition*. Wali's argument "that any true African literature must be written in African languages" and that "it is better for an African writer to think and feel in his own language" had a profound influence on Ngugi's own formulations on the issue (Sicherman, 1990: 28). Literature written in colonial languages is not African literature since it involves a "dissociation, divorce, or alienation from the immediate environment," an idea which becomes clearer when the colonial language is seen as "a carrier of culture" (Ngugi, 1986: 17). This is how he correlates the two:

Language as communication and culture are . . . products of each other. Communication creates culture: culture is a means of communication. Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world. How people perceive themselves affects how they look at their culture, at their politics and at the social production of wealth, at their entire relationship to nature and to other beings. Language is

thus inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world.

(Ngugi, 1986: 15-16)

Given this basic relationship between language and culture it is no wonder that Ngugi's choice of writing in his mother tongue Kikuyu is intended as a means of giving expression to the daily rhythms, social structures and struggles of the Kenyan people. He publicly rejected the English language in favour of Kikuyu in 1977 but had written and produced plays in Kikuyu since 1976. His plays were seen as subversive by the Kenyan government. Not only were they banned, they also led to Ngugi being put in prison for the year 1978. Despite political repercussions the use of Kikuyu for creative purposes has had a significant impact in Kenya. As Ngugi explains, his novel *The Devil on the Cross* written in Kikuyu was "received into the age old tradition of storytelling around the fireside" when groups of workers, families would gather together for readings from it (1986: 83). This marked the success of his agenda of reaching out to people in a language and idiom familiar to them, making literature not the elitist pursuit it was when it was written in the colonial language but socially relevant to the masses.

Writing in Kikuyu has not been an easy task for Ngugi. The language did not possess a significant tradition of novel or fiction writing. The existing Kikuyu orthography proved unsatisfactory for conveying certain sounds and tonal variations (Ngugi, 1986: 74-5). Despite these linguistic constraints and political persecution Ngugi's efforts at creating a significant body of literature in his native language are commendable. Hence it is all the more ironical that living in exile for over a decade now Ngugi has reverted back to using English, the colonial language he once rejected so vehemently.

2.3 LITERATURE AND SOCIAL COMMITMENT

2.3.1 Prose Writing in Kenya

Ngugi's writings are a case in point for the oft-made claim that among the various ethnic groups in Kenya, the Kikuyu who experienced the severest forms of racial, political and economic tensions, were "the most advanced tribe, with more educated members and a higher degree of political consciousness" (Hatch qtd. in Gerard, 1981: 309). Among those who sought to create a tradition of novel or fiction writing in the Kikuyu language, Ngugi has singled out Gakaara wa Wanjau who established a journal in the language. Having been imprisoned for writing in the language of the masses he kept a diary as a record for the years he spent in prison (1952-1962) which was later published as a book (Ngugi, 1986: 24, 74). That this writer's career has had a profound influence on Ngugi's should be apparent: like him Ngugi writes, or at least wrote, in Kikuyu besides having maintained a record of the one year he spent in a maximum security prison published as *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*. However, Ngugi's educational training and early career also illustrate the fact that the Kikuyu were the first to recognize the advantage to be gained by adopting English. As early as 1938 Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya* was the first book written by a Kikuyu to attract worldwide attention (Gerard, 1981: 309).

The most significant body of Kenyan prose writing in English has come from writers whose native language is Kikuyu. Many of the works written in the nineteen sixties and seventies deal with the Mau Mau movement and its aftermath. I will discuss a few of these novels of 'freedom' briefly. Some of these are Ngugi's *Weep not, Child* (1964), *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), Charity Waciuma's *Daughter of Mumbi* (1969), John Karoki's *The Land is Ours* (1970), Godwin Wachira's *Ordeal in the Forest* (1968) and Meja Mwangi's *Carcase for Hounds* (1974) and *Taste of Death* (1975). Critical opinion is divided on the depiction of this important event in Kenya's history.

On the one hand some of the fictional reconstructions, whose names have been listed, depict rural families caught in the crossfire between the Mau Mau guerilla forest fighters and the home guards or security forces who sought to control the 'violence' perpetrated by the former. On the other they find it hard to reconcile themselves to the brutal excesses of the Mau Mau guerillas. David Maughan-Brown in a discussion of four novels dealing with this event forwards the opinion that Mwangi, Mangwa and Wachira represent it "in just as negatively equivocal a manner as the politicians and businessmen whose political and commercial interests were most obviously served by the tactic of retrospective criminalisation of the movement" (1985: 206).

Prose writing in Kenya has also explored other themes. Charles Mangua and David Maillu have depicted the alienation of the educated elite, their growing disillusionment, the generation gap between parents and their children in works which have been discredited as non-serious and lacking in value because of the supposedly obscene language used. Women novelists and short story writers like Charity Waciūma and Grace Ogot voice their concern for the place of women in African society. Waciūma's autobiographical work *Daughter of Mumbi* presents events in Kenya immediately after independence through the consciousness of a young village girl who grows up to be a teacher. In her stories Ogot, who has played an active part in Kenyan politics, also presents simple village characters who, once they become politically informed, try to remedy the ills plaguing post-independence Kenya. Much of the recent Kenyan writing has moved beyond nationalist concerns to other social, political and economic issues which need to be voiced and redressed. This brief account of prose writing in Kenya has attempted to indicate this shift.

2.3.2 Theatre in Nigeria

Theatre in Nigeria developed out of a combination of traditional rituals involving masquerades, chants, music, dancing and themes and ideas derived from the Bible under the influence of the missionaries. As Ulli Beier has detailed in an exhaustive essay on Yoruba theatre which "began to perform Biblical stories in and outside the church" with music based on Yoruba hymns. These plays, first performed in the nineteen thirties, were meant for the instruction of members belonging to that particular faction of the Church as well as fund-raising devices (1967: 245). Since both traditional and alien influences helped in initiating theatrical activity in Nigeria, in this section I shall talk about theatre in Nigerian languages as well as in English.

A coming together of both influences is seen in the plays of Hubert Ogunde who is credited with the initiation of professional theatre in Yoruba (Beier) and the secularisation of Yoruba drama (Gerard, 1981). Yoruba language theatre has the advantage of attracting large audiences and is therefore a commercially profitable proposition. Moreover Ogunde's plays with their improvised dialogues, music based on hymn tunes but using traditional instruments and political satire were very popular in Nigeria and outside it. He first started performing in the 1940s. Very early on in his career his commitment to social causes was revealed in a vernacular play entitled *Strike and Hunger* (1945), dramatizing the country-side strike which broke out in 1945. The titles of some of his other plays *Let the Yoruba Think* and *Truth is Bitter* hint at their being vehicles for social and political commentary. Ogunde's theatrical development has been discussed in four neat phases by Michael Etherton: the phase of cultural nationalism from 1944-1950; consolidation of the company through independence 1954-64; post-independence party politics 1964-66; the company since the civil war 1972 to the present day. Etherton is of the opinion that Ogunde does not seem to have responded to the political organisation in various regions of Nigeria which was taking place in the 1950s (1982: 46). Despite this and other kinds of criticism levelled against the sensationalism and spectacle of Ogunde's plays there is no denying that his travelling theatre was instrumental in creating a tradition of Yoruba drama which others built on. One of these was Ogunde's colleague E.K. Ogunmola who removed the music hall element from Ogunde's plays and substituted it by serious acting to develop Yoruba 'Opera' as a "serious theatre form" (Beier,

1967: 245). Ogunmola is famous for his dramatic rendition of Amos Tutuola's folkloric quest-narrative *The Palm Wine Drinkard*. Some of his plays like *Conscience* and *Love of Money* are social satires aimed at exposing the materialism and hypocrisy rampant in Nigerian society. Another important Yoruba playwright is Duro Ladipo who draws on Yoruba myths, poetry, music for his plays. He has used Samuel Johnson *History of the Yorubas* (1921) as source material for the legends he dramatises in *The King Did Not Hang* and *The King is Dead*. The former gained international acclaim when it was performed at the Berlin Theatre and Music Festival in 1964 and at the Commonwealth Festival in Britain in 1965. One of Ladipo's favourite themes is the clash of cultures, sometimes explored through myths, legends and at other times through folklore.

Yoruba language theatre in Nigeria is complemented by English-language theatre. Soyinka's plays for instance also explore the contact and clash between tradition and modernity through myths, legends and folklore. In fact Soyinka's dramatic theory derives from this aspect of Yoruba culture. The traditional content of Soyinka's plays has often been a subject of discussion. It has been suggested that as far as the songs in his plays are concerned, they are "pseudo-traditional," many are taken from "popular disc records of modern commercial musicians who work in the traditional mode" (Ogumba, 1972: 5). Perhaps the strength of Soyinka's dramaturgy lies in using tradition or pseudo-tradition to comment on the contemporary Nigerian situation. A case in point is *A Dance of the Forests*, performed in October 1960, the month in which Nigeria achieved Independence, which uses Yoruba myths to indicate the destiny to be attained by post-Independence Nigeria. Soyinka has explored a variety of dramatic styles in his oeuvre: farce, tragedy and romantic mythology being a few of these (Esslin, 1967: 260). Nigeria's other major English-language playwright is J.P. Clark. He too has transmuted legends into plays, the most famous of these being *Ozidi* (1966). This play derives from the traditional Ijo saga or epic, centred on Orua in the Delta region of Nigeria (Etherton, 1982: 68). His other plays *The Raft*, *The Masquerade* and *The Song of the Goat* published together in 1964 are all realistic tragedies. Both Soyinka and Clark use a highly stylized poetic idiom but to different purposes. Clark's characters are generalized in part due to what Esslin has labelled "the stark, timeless and almost placeless simplicity of the language" whereas Soyinka's use of verse reinforces his plays' setting in the present, "a very recognizable independent Nigeria with its corrupting town life set against superstition and backwardness in the countryside" (Esslin, 1967: 260). Reading through this synoptic survey I hope it is apparent to you how English and local language (specifically Yoruba) theatre in Nigeria draws upon local traditions to reflect, discuss and critique the social and political ills plaguing contemporary Nigeria to emerge as a theatre of commitment.

2.4 THE WRITER IN AFRICA

2.4.1 Cultural and Political Assertion

Assertions of cultural and political nationalism are usually viewed as a part of the anti-colonial struggles of the colonized. Only two examples of such assertions will be given in this section: that of Negritude which posits an African world union based on shared racial, cultural and spiritual essences and that of the 'African Personality' which is pan-Africanist in its orientation.

The Negritude movement started by intellectuals from the French colonies is seen as a reaction against the French colonial policy of assimilation. According to Frantz Fanon the assimilationist phase constitutes the first stage of cultural evolution. The second stage is the "cultural nationalist" phase in which the native intellectual remembers an "authentic identity" and "kicks against" attempts at assimilation (Amuta, 1989: 158-59). So Negritude (the word was coined by Aimé Césaire) represents the second phase in Fanon's schema. Its key ideas are a repudiation of

“certain intrinsic values of European civilization” such as its machine technology, materialism, contractual manner of social relationships, adherence to scientific planning in every detail. In contrast it “extols the African’s close attachment to the soil and to nature, the warmth of his humanity expressed in relationships which are purely personal and zest for a life which is not circumscribed by much planning” (Obiechina, 1967: 27). This view of an unsullied African cultural and social essence has, on the one hand, been deemed essential to a recovery of African dignity (Achebe) and on the other, been repudiated as replicating the stereotypes of the instinctual African versus the rational Westerner established by the colonisers (Soyinka). Soyinka’s is the most trenchant critique which has been launched against the Negritudists. Responding to statements like “Emotion is completely Negro as reason is Greek” Soyinka says that Negritude “accepted one of the most common blasphemies of racism, that the black man has nothing between his ears, and proceeded to subvert the power of poetry to glorify this fabricated justification of European cultural domination” (qtd. In Booth, 1981: 9). This denial of reason to Africans is, in Soyinka’s view, playing into the hands of Europeans who used this logic to justify colonisation. Valid though Soyinka’s argument is, it is probably necessary to see Negritude as an ‘essential’ step in the reconstitution of a racial and cultural identity.

Kwame Nkrumah’s philosophy of ‘the African Personality’ is often dismissed on the same grounds as the Negritude movement. What I now want to emphasise is that both Nkrumah’s nationalist and pan-African vision represent what Fanon has called the “nationalist” or “fighting” phase in which the native man of culture “after having tried to lose himself in the people, will on the contrary shake the people” (Fanon qtd. In Armata, 1989: 159). Kwame Appiah has observed that Nkrumah’s nationalist enthusiasms were largely pan-Africanist and hence it needn’t come as a surprise that he was central to the foundation of the Organisation of African Unity, represented Africa in the Non-Aligned Movement and at the UN and was consistent in his preoccupation with the complete liberation of Africa from colonial rule (1992: 262-63). Look at this extract from Nkrumah’s work *I Speak of Freedom* (1961) and mark the use of cultural stereotypes and political prophecy:

I believe strongly and sincerely that with the deep-rooted wisdom and dignity, the innate respect for human lives, the intense humanity that is our heritage, the African race, united under one federal government, will emerge not as just another world bloc to flaunt its wealth and strength, but as a Great Power whose greatness is indestructible because it is built not on fear, envy and suspicion, nor won at the expense of others, but founded on hope, trust, friendship and directed to the good of all mankind.

(qtd. In Booth, 1981: 14-15)

Notice the use of adjectives like “deep-rooted wisdom and dignity,” “innate respect,” “intense humanity” which are said to characterise “the African race.” There is an easy slippage from racial characteristics to political rhetoric when it is said that this race will be united under “one federal government,” a form of pan-African unity, which Nkrumah envisaged. In an attempt to define both the ‘African Personality’ and pan-Africanism, some indication of which is provided in the passage quoted above, Obiechina has forwarded the view that whereas the latter “is an essentially political movement aimed at continental co-operation between independent African states,” the former “is a psycho-ethnological concept resembling Negritude but differing from it because it applies to the African continent alone” (1968: 29).

These instances of cultural and political self-definition need to be viewed as arising out of the exigencies of colonial rule and neocolonial domination over African countries. Both the Negritudists from French colonial Africa and the Caribbean and Nkrumah from Ghana voice versions of cultural and political autonomy. If these inadvertently echo racist vocabulary it is probably because, in Achebe’s ringing words, “it is in the nature of things that we may need to counter racism with . . . an

anti-racist racism, to announce not just that we are as good as the next man but that we are much better" (qtd. in Booth, 191: 11).

2.4.2 Censorship

The important role fulfilled by writers in their engagement with social, cultural and political concerns has not gone unchallenged in Africa. Many have had to pay a heavy personal price for their activist creativity in the form of bans on their work, imprisonment and exile. One of the earliest instances is the ban imposed by the colonial authorities on Ogunde's play *Strike and Hunger* in 1945. In the 1960s Ogunde produced plays commenting on political events in Western Nigeria. As a result his company was banned for performing in the region for about three years. Ladipo, another Yoruba playwright, was caught in the midst of a controversy about the use of drums in the church, leading him to perform his religious compositions outside the church (Gerard, 1981: 256). Soyinka continues the tradition of Nigerian playwrights getting into trouble with the authorities. This is largely due to his deliberately provocative activities such as supposedly forcing his way into the Ibadan Radio Station in 1965 to substitute a tape announcing an Action Group election victory in place of the official tape announcing a rigged victory or covering his car with placards accusing the police of brutality (Booth, 1981: 119-20). An account of his imprisonment is grandiosely titled *The Man Died: Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka* (1972). Whether through activism in literature or through direct involvement in political events, Nigerian authors have aroused the ire of authorities leading to consequences like the ones detailed.

The crackdown on artistic freedom has taken more severe forms in the East African countries Kenya and Uganda. The Ugandan poet Okot p' Bitek's best known work *Song of Lawino* was at first rejected by publishers because of its explicitness in sexual matters. Okot was later dismissed from his post as Director of the Uganda Cultural Centre because of his outspokenness in political matters. Living in exile in Nigeria he found employment at the University of Nairobi (Gerard, 1981: 305). No writer illustrates the case for political persecution better than Ngugi wa Thiong'o who got into trouble with the authorities over the performance of his play *I Will Marry When I Want* (1977) in Kikuyu. Deemed as politically subversive its license was revoked after a few performances and Ngugi was put under detention on 31st December 1977. The official explanation was that he was "being held under the Public Security Act for possessing 18 banned books" (Sicherman, 1990: 11). He wrote *Devil on the Cross* while in prison and later published an account of his imprisonment in *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*. In 1982 while Ngugi was in London he received news of his impending arrest in Nairobi and decided to remain in exile. Over the years he has been accused of leading a clandestine opposition political group in Kenya, his books have been suppressed by the government and people arrested for reading them out aloud (Sicherman, 1990: 16-17).

The careers of these African writers illustrate the conjunction between literature and society which they have been attempting in their work. That this conjunction often takes the form of state sponsored repression of the right to free expression only serves to indicate that many African writers get too close to reality for comfort.

2.5 LET US SUM UP

I began this unit by discussing the close relationship between culture and language. There are diverse cultures and many languages reflective and constitutive of those cultures in Africa: Yoruba and Kikuyu being only two of them. That these have received considerable attention in the recent past is, in no small measure, owing to their cause being championed by Soyinka and Ngugi. Both are a part of the tradition of socially committed writing which, despite attempts to curb it, has exerted a

profound influence in the nationalist and post-nationalist phases of various African countries. A sign of the vitality of such a tradition is the exchange of ideas among African writers in the form of endorsement or critique. Thus Soyinka critiques the Negritudists, Achebe defends them and their influence on Nkrumah is more than obvious. The role of the writer in Africa is not, or rather cannot be, restricted to that of a social commentator. As Ngugi has shown through his grassroots theatrical activities it is necessary to involve the masses if literature and culture are to serve as effective tools of resistance. If this resistance involves taking the risk of persecution, African literary history illustrates that writers consider this a small price to pay.

2.6 QUESTIONS

1. How is language reflective of culture? Cite the views of two African writers on this issue.
2. List the advantages and disadvantages attendant in the use of Swahili as a pan-African language.
3. Discuss the intersection of literature and politics with reference to prose writing in Kenya and theatre in Nigeria.

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UNIT 3 CARIBBEAN LITERATURE – THE AESTHETIC OF DIASPORA

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 The 1930's - Towards Culture Decolonisation
- 3.3 The 'Boom' and the Writer in Exile
- 3.4 The Decades of the Critics
- 3.5 Towards New Voices
- 3.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.7 Questions
- 3.8 Suggested Readings

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we shall firstly map the emergence of Anglophone Caribbean aesthetics – we shall locate the moments when Caribbean writers and critics debated and discussed issues pertaining to Caribbean writing and criticism. This brief survey would focus approximately on a 50 year period from 1930 to 1980 when Caribbean writers and critics undertook the project of cultural decolonisation and resistance against colonial power to forge national consciousness. We all know that literary productions are entangled in historical moments, they are also a result of specific social and material conditions. In this survey, I shall also try to contextualize the Caribbean aesthetic within its specific historical and material conditions. Any study of writing in and from the Caribbean has to acknowledge and contend with the basic sense of its diasporic nature – (What do we mean by diaspora? Literally it means dispersion and comes from the Bible which describes the scattering of the Jews in various countries outside Palestine. Today diaspora refers to those people who have gone out of their original homelands and live in other countries. eg. People of Indian origin living in the Caribbean are called the Indian diaspora. In the introduction, I will outline the historical context of the emergence of the diaspora.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

“Mr. Biswas found it easy to imagine the other race of Indians moving about this road before the world grew dark for them”
(*A House for Mr. Biswas*, Naipaul, 397)

Writing in *An Area of Darkness*, Naipaul remembers reading about the disappearance of the indigenous population –

“... the aboriginal inhabitants of the West Indies ‘sickened and died’ when the spaniards came ...”
(*An Area of Darkness*, Naipaul, 209)

These two quotations from V.S. Naipaul foreground the troubled history of colonialism in the Caribbean. The colonial encounter between the immigrants and the original inhabitants had a great impact on the culture, society and history of the region. Any engagement with Caribbean literary production would be incomplete without an engagement with the colonial encounter and its impact. I shall briefly describe this process.

The 'discovery' of the Caribbean islands by Christopher Columbus in 1492 led to a brutal period of colonial domination that continued till the 1960's when most of the Caribbean nations gained independence. The Spaniards established the first European settlement in eastern Hispaniola in 1502, and by the middle of sixteenth century they had fanned out into other islands. The Dutch, Portuguese, English and French colonisers followed the Spanish and by the eighteenth century the entire Caribbean region was under colonial rule which by now was predominantly English. The territorial and economic ambitions of the colonial enterprise led to the extermination and often brutal decimation of the indigenous Amerindian population. The aboriginal inhabitants were victims of expansionist colonial policy, social dislocation and new epidemic diseases like measles and small pox. Those who survived had their social, political and cultural lives reorganized in the name of Christianity and its 'civilizing missions'. Their lives were regimented by slavery and demands of a profit oriented commercial policy in mining and pearl fishing followed by the European powers. The Europeans who invaded and conquered the Caribbean destroyed the world of the native people and realigned their world with larger Eurocentric events where their histories collided with other histories in Africa, Asia and Europe to produce a mongrel and hybrid Caribbean experience.

Introduced by the Dutch in 1640, the sugar plantation system provided the necessary attraction to potential colonisers. The island economies based on small farms producing cash crops of cotton and tobacco were changed into large plantations requiring vast expanse of land and large labour force. The Amerindian population had all but disappeared and this shortage resulted in the forced migration of African slaves. Between 1518 and 1870, the transatlantic slave trade supplied the greatest proportion of the Caribbean population. This trade was so lucrative that even the English royal family invested in the company of Royal Adventurers Chartered in 1663! Commenting on the African diaspora, Cuban born Jamaican writer Sylvia Wynter says –

“Our conditions is one of uprootedness. Our uprootedness is the original model of total twentieth century disruption of man ... We anticipated by centuries that exile which is our own century Is now common to all ...” (307)

The abolition of slavery by the British Parliament in 1834 and the end of apprenticeship system in 1838 marked the next watershed in Caribbean history. The abolition of slavery and ban on slave trade necessitated the import of indentured labourers to work on plantations. (Who are indentured labourers? They were labourers who had entered into written agreement with their masters.) They arrived mainly from India and China. Between 1838 and 1917 when the indentured system was abolished, nearly 500,000 East Indians from U.P. and Bihar immigrated to the Caribbean. Apart from the fact that these indentured people had a legally defined term of service and were guaranteed a set wage, these Asian indentured labourers were treated like African slaves whom they had partially replaced in the fields and factories. These new immigrants added to the different nationalities that made up the ruralistic Caribbean Society.

An important fallout of the abolition of slavery and subsequently indentured system was the emergence of an educated middle class and working class population. Supported by various British trade union groups, these were the precursors of the rise of nationalism in the Caribbean. Post – Independence Caribbean society witnessed the emergence of nationalist sentiments. Between 1880 and 1920, Anglophone Caribbean nations saw nation wide agitations for better wages and working conditions. The social unrest within the Caribbean was an obvious fall out of a long history of colonial rule and neglect which had resulted in poor social conditions and low wages. Demands for self government and political representation gained popular support. The Caribbean people adopted the mode of general strikes and riot as a potent weapon of protest against the colonial authorities. The canefield riots in

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Trinidad, the sugar worker strike in Trinidad in 1934, and oil workers' strike in 1937 led to a general strike and the dock workers went on strike in 1938 in Jamaica. Disturbances rapidly spread with a wave of riots and strikes across Barbados, British Guayana and Jamaica & Trinidad & Tobago. Another important event that had far reaching implication was the establishment of the Rastafarian movement in Jamaica in 1930 by Marcus Garvey. Rastafarianism soon became a political and cultural movement that helped to consolidate the black power movement in the Caribbean. As a political and cultural ideology it had an immense contribution in forging a sense of national consciousness and identity for the blacks, and helped it to emerge as the dominant social, group in the Caribbean. One of the 'solutions' to tackle the growing social discontent and contain the nationalist sentiments was the granting of the universal adult suffrage by the British to the islands.

The British government also pushed for a modified self government and created the West Indian Federation in 1958. Complete independence was achieved in the following decades, with Trinidad and Tobago achieving independence in 1962, Barbados in 1966, Bahamas in 1973, Grenada in 1974, Dominica in 1978, St. Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines in 1979, Antigua and Barbados in 1981 and St. Kitts and Nevis in 1983.

This brief and selective historical mapping foregrounds the most significant aspects of Caribbean society – the impact of European colonization almost wiped out the Amerindian population (they survive in few reserves in Guayana & Dominica) and the Africans, East Indians and other ethnic minorities were forced into their diaspora. Consequently the Caribbean experience has become synonymous with diaspora and exile, it has become a land of ethnically diverse people with diverse histories, who were forced into living together. The result has been a curious mongrel and hybrid Caribbean identity where pre conquest Amerindian, post conquest European and African and post emancipation Indian and Chinese identities and histories jostle for space and accommodation.

The emergence of a Caribbean literary aesthetic has to be viewed within this historical condition of uprootedness. As Naipaul says "Living in a borrowed culture, the West-Indian, more than most needs writers to tell him who he is, where he stands" (The Middle Passage, pp. 73). Commenting on this condition of dislocation and displacement, Braithwaite says. "The most significant feature of West Indian life and imagination since Emancipation has been its sense of rootlessness, of not belonging to the landscape The problem of and for West Indian artists and intellectuals is that having been born and educated within this fragmented culture, they start out in the world without a sense of wholeness" (Timeheri, 344) In this 'borrowed culture', the writer is not only trying to reclaim his / her own history, he also needs to do so for other lost histories. The emergence of a Caribbean literary tradition is thus an attempt at decolonising the culture and people from the literal and literary colonization of the Britishers. It is also an enterprise to reclaim and forge alter / native cultural traditions for a people who were forced into their diasporas.

3.2 THE 1930'S

The emergence of a re-visionist agenda for Caribbean literature can be located in the turbulent decades of the 1930's and 1940's. We have already seen that the Anglophone Caribbean was moving towards a new national consciousness, at least in its collective opposition to colonial rule. In this period of flux generated by the popular social unrest, the cultural identities were extremely mobile and hybrid. Concurrent with the rise of political nationalism, Caribbean writers and intellectuals were also trying to forge their cultural identities. Hence cultural decolonisation became an important aspect of this agenda. Certain writers were articulating and

writing about their separate national identities and moving away from an anglocentric aesthetic tradition and a Leavisite 'moral vision'. (This refers to F.R. Leavis's book *The Great Tradition* in which he identifies the "great" writers on the basis of their "moral vision"). The Caribbean little magazines particularly *The Beacon* in Trinidad and *Public Opinion* in Jamaica made significant contribution in realigning public opinion against the colonial literary models and ideologies. Writers associated with these magazines functioned as cultural agitators. Albert Gomes calls them "angry youngmen of the thirties", who highlighted the importance of the local and specific regional identities. They advocated a breaking away from the bonds of cultural allegiances to colonialism. The central issue for most of these writers was to have cultural reorientation that would avoid pseudo-Britishness. A quote from Albert Gomes' article '*A West Indian Literature*' published in *The Beacon* in 1933 will substantiate the point. - Gomes' article sets out a manifesto for indigenous literature -

"It is important more over, that we break away as far as possible from the English tradition : and the fact that some of us are still slaves to Scott & Dickens is merely because we lack the necessary artistic individuality and sensibility in order to see how incongruous that tradition is with the West Indian scene and spirit the sooner we throw off the veneer of culture that our colonization has brought us the better for our artistic aims One has only to glance through the various periodicals published in this and other islands to see what slaves we still are to English culture and tradition. There are some who lay great store by this conscious aping of another man's culture but to us it merely seems a sign of the immaturity of our spirit " - (113)

The nationalist writers advocated socially realist writings and a literary naming of the landscape as a tool of resistance against the colonial hangover. The publication of regional works such as Norman Cameron's *Guianese Poetry 1831-1931* & Albert Gomes' *A selection from the fiction and verse of the Island of Trinidad* (1937), journals such as *Bim* in Barbados (founded 1942) & *Kyk-over-al* in Jamaica (founded in 1945) and BBC Caribbean voices radio programme helped to create a sense of national pride as well as facilitated localized cultural exchanges. A key text that helped in this project of cultural decolonization was Vic Reid's *New Day* (1949). Reid traced the emergence of Jamaican society from the Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865 through the character of Johnny Campbell and used creole (a native language formed by the combination of a European language with indigenous languages) as the language of narration. The emphasis on resistance, protest and rootedness in this historical novel was to have important resonances for Caribbean literature in the later decades.

This project of cultural decolonization also undertook to expose and oppose the colonial education. Many writers critiqued the colonial educational system as a means of ideological domination that thwarted the rise of indigenous consciousness. Commenting on the overarching influence of colonial education, George Lamming wrote in '*The Occasion for speaking*'.

"... The West Indians' education was imported in much the same way that flour and butter was imported from Canada. Since the cultural negotiation was strictly between England and the natives and England had acquired, somehow the divine right to organize the natives' reading, it is to be expected that England's export of literature would be English. Deliberately and exclusively English. And the further back in time England went for these treasures, the safer was the English commodity. So the examinations, which would determine the Trinidadians future in the civil service, imposed Shakespeare and Wordsworth, and Jane Austen and George Eliot and the whole tabernacle of dead names How in the name of Heavens could a colonial native taught by an English native within a strict curriculum how could he ever get out from under this ancient mausoleum of historic achievement? ... " (254-5).

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Note the voice of indignant protest and strident criticism of the hegemonic control exercised by colonial education! A different register of protest can be seen in a short calypso (A type of song based on a subject of interest in the news and sung in a West Indian manner) '*Dan is the Man*' by the Mighty Sparrow (Slinger Francisco). As a folk-form, the calypso originated in West Africa and incorporates elements of digging songs chanted by people at work. The Calypso has remained a cultural form which speaks and to an often illiterate working class audience.

Dan is the Man

I

According to the education you get when you small
You 'II grow up with true ambition and respect from one an all
But in days in school they teach me like a fool
The things they teach me I should be a block-headed mule.

Pussy had finished his work long ago
And now he resting and thing
Solomon Agundy was born on a Monday
The Ass in the Lion Skin
Winkin Blinkin and Nod
Sail off in a wooden shoe
How the Agouti lose he tail and Alligator trying to get
Monkey liver soup.

II

The poems and the lessons they write and send from England
Impress me they were trying to cultivate comedians
Comic books made more sense
You know it was fictitious without pretence
But like Cutteridge wanted to keep us in ignorance
Humpty Dumpty sat on a wll
Humpty Dumpty did fal
Goosey Goosey Gander
Where shall I wander
Ding dong dell.... Pussy in the well
RIKKI ... TIKKI TAVI
Rikki Tikki Taxi

III

Well Cutteridge he was plenty times more advanced than
them scientists
I aint believe that no one man could write so much foolishness
Aeroplane and rockets didn't come too soon
Scientist used to make the grade in balloon
This time Cutteridge done make a cow jump over the moon.

Tom Tom the piper son
Stole the pig and away he ran
Once there was a woman who lived in a shoe
She had so many children she didn't know what to do
Dickery Dickery Dock
The mouse run up the Clock
The lion and the mouse
A woman pushing a cow up a ladder to eat grass on top a house.

IV

Caribbean Literature

How I happen to get some education my friends I don't
know
All they teach me is about Brer Rabbit and Rumpelstiltskin
..... O
They wanted to keep me down indeed
They tried their best but didn't succeed
You see I was dunce and up to now I can't read.

Peter Peter was a pumpkin eater
And the Lilliput people tie Gulliver
When I was sick and lay abed
I had two pillows at my head
I see the Goose that lay the golden egg
The Spider and the Fly
Morocoy with wings flying in the sky
They beat me like a dog to learn that in school
If me head was bright I would a be a damn fool

I have quoted entire calypso because it offers a significant insight into an alternative oral literary form that subverts and debunks the tool of colonial education – Capt. J.O. Cutteridge's *West Indian Readers* (1926-1929), a text book widely used in the Caribbean school curriculum for three decades. It questions the worth of a standardizing education for a Caribbean citizen. The narrator deftly articulates his escape from this debilitating system to save himself from becoming a block headed mule. In its use of irony and cultural mimicry, this calypso can be seen as a sign of protest and resistance that helps shape the emerging Caribbean literature. In fact Braithwaite has firmly argued for according a privileged status to the calypso for not only using it as an available literary model for Caribbean discourse but as a literary form itself.

However it would be naive to presume that this revisionist agenda for a literature of social engagement went unchallenged by a more orthodox position. There were still many writers who accorded an apolitical status to art and subscribed to a more universal, standard and anglocentric view of literature. Two quotations will help us to understand this position. The first is by J.E.C. Mac Farlane from his 1935 address 'The Challenges of Our Time' –

“ ... As representatives of a great tradition. We offer you poetry upon which we feel certain the true foundation of this Europe rests and by which it will be preserved throughout the storm that hangs above the horizon of the civilization...” – (110)

Mr. Farlane also speaks about the function of poetry as being of greatest service to humanity in “restoring the lost outline, in raising it from the maze of sensuous things into the clear atmosphere of the spirit”. E. A. Carr's opinion concurs with Mac Farlanes' position –

“...Many good artists today are deliberately denying The essential part that tradition plays in art. The flouting of this fact has something evers of the fanaticism of a crusade It seems the political unrest of the age has seeped into and infected the serenity of the sphere of art ...”(III) .

Notice that both McFarlane and Carr unequivocally divorce art and literature from the social and political context and advocate a Leavsite version of tradition and moral values. They privilege the imperial motherland and speak of themselves as part of the imperial culture. Carr infact derides socially committed art as a fanatic crusade with the obvious implication that this crusade needs to be tempered down. According a

privileged and enabling position to the Western tradition is also evident in C.L.R. James' essay '*Discovering Literature in Trinidad*' (1930). He claims an undisguised pride in his intellectual heritage and emphasizes his apprenticeship to western literature. However it is significant to remember that C.L.R. James was a central figure in Trinidad's anti-colonial movements and he drew upon his 'mastery' of classical education to make Trinidadians aware of their society and literature. He is also responsible for upholding cricket as a West Indian sport. His ambivalent subject position reflects the paradoxical situation of a colonized intellectual. He both incorporates the view of the colonizer and the colonized. At least James denies ideologically fixed positions to the heritage of Western Tradition. In this, his position is markedly different to that of McFarlane and Carr who subscribe totally to the ideology of colonial traditions.

The texts and debates within this period were clearly shaped by and instrumental in major cultural transitions that emerged in the Caribbean in later decades. They sought to remake their national identities and Caribbean homelands from their colonial selves. Yet the powerful dominance of the colonial ideology continued to spawn orthodox positions and aesthetic models. The project of cultural decolonisation was far from complete, as our next section will testify. We shall turn to the '*booming*' of the West Indian novel in the 1950s and examine the critical practice of this decade.

3.3 THE 'BOOM' AND THE WRITER IN EXILE

The decade of the 1950's is very often referred to as the decade of the West Indian novel. George Lamming believes that the West Indian novel was one of the important tools that facilitated the rise of national consciousness and challenged the anglocentric ideologies of colonial educational and cultural practices. According to Lamming, the West Indian novelist articulated the voice of the West Indian society and its community. In fact many of the novelists who constitute the dominant voices in the Caribbean canon, emerged during this decade. Some 'classics' associated with the Caribbean canon like Lamming's *In the Castle of my Skin* (1957) Naipaul's, *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961) and Wilson Harris' *Palace of the Peacock* (1960) belong to this period of the booming of the West Indian novel. Significantly all these writers, Samul Selvon, Naipaul, Lamming, Andrew Salkey, Wilson Harris, Edgar Mittelholzer, Kamau Braithwaite, John Hearne, Jan Carew, V. S. Reid, Derek Walcott were male, middle class, educated and with very few exception, based in England. So the formation of a Caribbean canon, inspite of its nationalistic revisionist agenda was formed in and was a function of exile in the metropolitan center (mostly London) and excluded women writers. The marginalized Caribbean operated within its own system of further margins and peripheries. However, the influence of these writers in the creation of an aesthetic of Caribbean canon cannot be underestimated. Two seminal critical texts – Kenneth Ramchand's *The West Indian Novel and its Background* (1970) and Wilson Harris' *Tradition - The Writer and Society* (1967) firmly established the critical practice to study these writers. The practice included the notions of a separate and specific tradition (different from the English tradition), relationship between writer and society, questions of audience and the responsibility of the artist, themes of alienation and isolated individual, highlighting the importance of the autobiographical novel or the novel of childhood as formative to an emerging of Caribbean literature, the centrality of themes of displacement and dislocation, and the symbols of unhoused and unaccommodated characters (notably in Naipaul's *Mr. Biswas* which explores the symbol of the building process). The criticism also included analysis of stylistic and linguistic experimentation (for example the use of Creole by Selvon and Naipaul), the dual pulls of African, Asian or European heritage, preoccupation with naming the landscape, validating the local, the notion of exile, nostalgia and rewriting histories within a largely realist tradition.

However this boom in literary production was largely a function of exile of a number of Caribbean writers for whom London became the literary capital. The phenomenon of exile is not peculiar to Caribbean writers or to this period, but it did have significant impact on Caribbean writing. These writers were a part of a large scale migration of Caribbean people to the 'motherland'. These 'British subjects' were recruited for the service industries after the second world war and they found it hard to resist the allure of the metropolitan center. London was after all part of their cultural myth. David Dabydeen remarked in *Slave Song* (1984) that a mutual representation of otherness has been going on – perhaps for a very long time.

“... England is our Utopia, an ironic reversal, for Raleigh was looking away from the ‘squalor’ of his homeland to the imagined purity of our whereas we are now reacting against our ‘sordid’ environment and looking to ‘England’ as Heaven...”. (121)

The writers who migrated to Britain cited various reasons for their departure. Most like Braithwaite felt stifled in the limiting circumstances of the islands. He remarked – “... the West Indies could be written about and explored. But only from the vantage point outside the West Indies. It was no point going back. No writer could live in that stifling atmosphere of middle class materialism and philistinism...” (346). George Lamming, writing about the reasons for large scale migration of writers said, “... The West Indian of average opportunity and intelligence has not yet been converted to reading as a civilized activity Reading seriously at any age is still largely associated with reading for examination The Writers are afraid of returning Because they feel that sooner or later they will be ignored in and by a society about which they have been at once articulate and authentic...” (259). The historical exigencies, massive illiteracy, lack of responsive audiences, few publishing houses and lack of opportunities to make a career out of writing forced these writers to leave. The situation was worse for black writers as is evident in C.L.R. James’ articulation of the social and material reality faced by them – “... We (the blackmen) went one way, these white boy all went the other way. We were black and the only way we could do anything along the lines we were interested in was by going abroad you (the white) stayed not only because your parents had money but because your skin was white; there was a chance for you, but for us there was not – except to be a civil servant and hand papers, take them from the men downstairs and hand them to the man upstairs...” (164).

The metropolitan center (London) did provide a measure of literary and commercial success, but the experience of exile did not prove as liberating and enabling as these writers had expected it to be. Disillusioned by his experiences as a Cambridge undergraduate and the metropolitan attitude to his work, Braithwaite commented on the reasons for his return in *Timehri*, “... I felt that I had arrived, I was possessing the landscape. But I turned to find that my ‘fellow Englishmen’ were not particularly prepossessed with me.... the Cambridge magazines didn’t take my poems.... or rather they only took those which had West Indian, to me ‘exotic’ flavour. I felt neglected and misunderstood...” (346). Naipaul’s case offers a good example of the ambiguous position of the third world post colonial writer. He chose to stay, he attained fame and popularity, he acknowledges his debt to the wider English tradition, yet he feels ‘peripheral’ to the English Society. He says “... London is my metropolitan center; it is my commercial center; and yet I know that it is a kind of limbo and I am a refugee in the sense that I am always peripheral...” (41).

This articulation of a sense of marginalisation and Braithwaite’s discomfort at being labeled as ‘exotic’ points to a larger post colonial paradox. The benchmark for the post colonial writer still remains the acceptance and success in the center, yet the center refuses to offer unconditional accommodation. Thus these writers in exile both gained and lost something, they remained both inside and outside their metropolitan centers.

In the Caribbean, these writers in exile came in for severe criticism. Questions were raised about the efficacy of writing produced for the consumption of a largely metropolitan literati at the expense of the local audience. One of the fiercest critic of the writer-in-exile was Margaret Blundell. Writing in her 1966 article '*Caribbean Readers & Writers*' she commented :

"... Can a people achieve a real literature if it only produces for export? A society produces writers and artists of ability and imagination. The society can provide its authors with the raw material for their arts, but can the finished work continue to be valid when it is continually played to an alien audience After ten years in exile, writing about the Caribbean of ten years ago. The writer is in danger of creating the equivalent of the stage Irishman, a sort of never-never calypso man of Caribbean fiction designed to amuse the fog-bound silent Englishman..." (212).

Blundell states her objection forcefully. She also drew attention to the problems of audience created in this situation especially in relation to the use of language –

"... Not enough of our poets speak to us through our own vernacular. Inevitably when they are moulded, consciously and unconsciously by far wider reading than most literate West Indians, there is a gap in communication Sometimes the acclaim of an absentee and largely urban audience makes the situation worse as the intellectual qualities of poetry are over-emphasized at the expense of more imaginative and intuitive qualities. There is scarcely any local West Indian audience to speak to in this literary idiom..." (212)

However this phenomenon of the writer-in-exile was balanced by other committed writers who chose to stay. Derek Walcott was one of these, he established himself with three poetry collections in 1948, 1962 and 1965. In 1959, he founded the Trinidad Theatre Workshop which provided a significant creative outlet for him and other Caribbean dramatists. Commenting on the contrary pull to remain in the Caribbean, Walcott termed it "the power of the provincial". The Guyanese writer, and editor of *Kyk-over-al*, A. J. Seymour also 'stayed' and provided crucial guidance to *Kyk-over-al*. Another very important writer who 'remained' was Martin Carter, who published an important volume, ***Poems of Resistance from British Guiana*** in 1954. S. O. Asien traced the protest tradition in West Indian poetry in a seminal article in the *Jamaica Journal* in 1972 and said that Carter's poetry is basically situational, intensely personal in the exclusiveness of private experiences and responses but representative and contemporary in their "... stunning reflection of the bleak slice of Guyanese history..." (40-5).

The Caribbean literary practice in this decade of 'boom' of the novel remained caught within the dichotomy of the expatriate writer and the 'provincial' writer. The aesthetics of socially committed writing continued within the region, where the Caribbean little magazines like *Bim*, *Kyk-over-al*, *Kaie* etc. provided the necessary valuable cultural space for these writers. The threat of Caribbean writing being subsumed within the English canon forced the 'provincials' to commit themselves to establishing regional literature and criticism and to rephrase Blundell to not only, produce for export – for consumption of the '*fog-bound Englishman*' but for the locals, in a language and idiom that was their own. This call for a literature and criticism of their own was to have resonances in the next decades – the late 1960's and 1970's to which I shall now turn.

3.4 THE DECADES OF THE CRITICS

The decades of 1960's and 1970's were years of transition for the various nations in the region. Some had achieved independence, some were aiming for independence. This period saw the transition to post coloniality for these newly independent nations

but the breakup of the West Indian Federation in 1962 disillusioned many. Commenting on this period of transition, Braithwaite wrote in 1977 'The Love – Axe : Developing a Caribbean Aesthetic 1962 – 1974 I.

“... In 1962, the Federation of the West Indies broke up,.... True, we been left with had universal adult suffrage, and this had taken us into our various independencies and certainly, especially in Jamaica, there was a certain spirit and expression of nationalism. But our 'actions' had been mainly 'international' gesture : anti-establishment, anti-colonial : not popular people-based, certainly not native The Federation turned out to be a dream of London. Somewhere along the line we had forgotten Garvey, our grass root selves, the insurrection of the 1930's...” (282)

Braithwaite's formulation reechoes Albert Gomes' 1930 manifesto for West Indian literature and Margaret Bludnell's prescription for localizing literary activity. This recentering of literary and critical activity within the Caribbean, rather than from the expatriate base of London, was a seminal feature of this period. This recentering can be located in a series of significant journal essays which I shall look at. These essays made important contributions to debates concerning linguistic and formal experimentation in Caribbean literature. The writers who contributed to these debates included Braithwaite, Walcott and Sylvia Wynter. Other new poets who emerged in this decade and contributed to this revisionist agenda included Mervyn Morris, Dennis Scott, Anthony McNeill, Victor Questal, and the dub or performance poets like Bongo Jerry, Mutabaruka, Oku Onuora, Michael Smith and in Britain Linton Kwesi Johnson.

It is possible to locate a shift within the Caribbean literary practice from the earlier West Indian to a proper Caribbean matrix in this period. I shall try to locate this shift through 4 journal essays – ‘... *We must learn to sit down together and discuss a little culture – Reflections on West Indian writing and Criticism...*’ by Cuban born Jamaican writer and critic Sylvia Wynter, ‘*Timehri*’ and ‘*Jazz and the West Indian Novel, I, II, III,*’ by Braithwaite and ‘*The Muse of History*’ by Derek Walcott. These essays offered introspective theorizations about Caribbean literary and critical discourse, and about the individual subject positions and version of personal revisionist histories of the authors. Their championing of Creole had significant resonances for the use of nation language in the subsequent years of the last century.

Sylvia Wynters' essay. *We must learn to sit down together and discuss a little culture – Reflection on West Indian writing and criticism, (1968 – 1969)* discusses the historical and material impact colonialism and migration had on West Indian society where Literature and critical practices were merely reduced to the status of being 'branch-plants' to the metropolitan centre. She criticised writers, notably Walcott who she said were 'trapped at times with the cultural myth rather than the cultural reality of Europe'. This cultural myth underproped the economic and political power of Europe in its exploitation of the non-Europeans. The writers and critics had to come to terms with the cultural reality of Europe and free themselves from the dominance of Europe as a super culture. She also attacked the 'acquiescent critic' who is 'mediated to his bones by the colonial myth in which he is involved'. For Wynter the 'swing of the pendulum will redress the balance towards the myth of Africa'. Reflecting on her subject position Wynter said 'I returned because I had no choice. I could not write, my talent did not suffice, except I could return to the lived experience of my own corner of reality. I accepted that writing would have to be done in the interstices of my time' (308) Wynters' essay was one of the seminal essays that reiterated the need to recentre critical activity within the Caribbean and shake off the appendage of the branch plant syndrome and to articulate the lived reality of the Afro-Caribbean experience.

Jazz and the West Indian Novel I, II, III is an attempt at theorizing the critical practice of the West Indian novel where Braithwaite was trying to show a form of literature

similar to the Jazz. This essay is a little confusing as Braithwaite is unable to offer correspondences between a musical form and literature. However what he implies is a linguistic aesthetic that would incorporate the folk experiences and privilege the indigenous form of calypso, reggae, ska, which would position itself against the 'head centered Romantic / Victorian tradition'. This alternative aesthetic would be 'belly centered'. He offers a somewhat ambiguous definition of the Jazz novel – "The Jazz novel deals with specific, clearly defined, folk type community....(and) will try to express the essence of this community through its form" but his agenda for Caribbean writers is unambiguous – "a Creole culture. And a Creole way of seeing first" (342 – 43), thereby reiterating his position that the site of protest, resistance and social engagement had to be located within the physical and figurative space of the Caribbean.

In *Timehri* (1970) Braithwaite examined a range of issues pertinent to his own critical practices and Caribbean criticism in general. Braithwaite's position about Creole was still in a formulative state, he saw it as a national – language only in 1984. He advocated the reclamation of the Amerindian and African past of the Caribbean experience and a positive reinscription of Caribbean culture. This essay was significant as Braithwaite articulated the seminal contribution made by the Amerindian culture to contemporary Caribbean art forms. In framing the development of a Caribbean aesthetic, he projected it as a "...journeying into the past and hinter land which is at the same time a movement of possession into present and future. Through this movement of possession we become truly ourselves, truly our own creators, discovering word for object, image for the word..." (350)

Braithwaite articulated the need to transcend the cultural problem of rootlessness and plurality foregrounded by the writers of 1950's. The repossession that he advocates would become possible if the writers could rediscover their sense of community as he had done in discovering his historical diviners' in a Ghanaian village.

"...I was coming to an awareness and understanding of community, of cultural wholeness of the place of the individual within the tribe, in society. ... I came to a sense of identification of myself with these people, my living diviners. I came to connect my history with theirs, the bridge of my mind now linking Atlantic and ancestor, homeland and heartland.... And I came home to find that I had not really left. That it was still Africa; Africa in the Caribbean.... The connection between my lived, but un-heeded non-middle class boyhood, and its Great Tradition on the eastern mainland had been made..." (347)

There is a complete rejection of the Eurocentric Leavisite "Great Tradition." Instead Braithwaite reaffirms his African ancestry that went on to provide him with valuable critical insights for his later work. In this extremely personalized history, Braithwaite offers a commonality with Wynters' position of coming back to her '*lived corner of reality*', to her sense of personal time. Both Wynter and Braithwaite firmly relocated themselves in their margins rather than at the metropolitan centre.

The other essay that helped to reformulate Caribbean aesthetic was Derek Walcott's '*Muse of History*' (1974), where he discussed the relationship between a writer, his ancestry and history. Walcott rejected the linearity of time and based his revisionist agenda on the cyclical and fluidity of historical moments. He categorized history as a narrative discourse without morality and argued that writers had to emerge out of the trap of linear history, out of their engagement with bitterness and recriminatory involvement with the past. Instead they had to grasp the fictionality of history, so that they could have a more interpenetrative engagement with the past and the present. In Walcott's formulation, this is the only alternative that Caribbean people and artists have of liberating themselves from the tyrannies of their colonial memories and histories. This liberation would be enabling as it would offer a more productive and honest engagement with their individual subject position. Walcott carried forward his

reformulation of his revisionist history in his 1992 Nobel Prize lecture. *'The Antilles : Fragments of Epic Memory'* where he privileged the present and the unconsciousness rather than the recovery of the past. He rejects a notion of Caribbean history that only engages with its sense of loss and oppression. He anticipates a culture of change and newness and affirms the Caribbean as a place of emotional possibility with enormous creative resources that can be enabling, inspirational and liberating for its people and writers.

This introspective critical practice opened new possibilities for Caribbean literary production in the following years. Whether it was Wynters' and Braithwaite's formulation of recuperating the African self and connecting with a sense of community or Walcott's vision of cyclical historicity with possibilities of liberation, these essays provided significant insights to our understanding of the rise of performative or dub poetry that dominated the decade of 1980's. The 1970 and 1979 Savacou anthologies also provided the impetus to this new aesthetic and in opening up the canon to new trends and new voices. These two anthologies foregrounded a shift in concerns from anti-colonial oppositional modes to more introspective and non-colonial oppositional modes to reclaim a Caribbean subjectivity. In the next section, we shall turn to the aesthetic of dub poetry and the use of nation language that has been an enabling and liberating experience for the Caribbean writers.

3.5 TOWARDS NEW VOICES

I have already pointed out that the preoccupation with linguistic idiom was a dominant trend in the attempts to forge an indigenous Caribbean aesthetic. Linguistic experimentation with Creole as a narrative trend was an important constituent of the many 'classics' produced in the boom period, specially in the works of Selvon and Naipaul. In the 1930's and 1940's, Louise Bennett experimented with Jamaican Creole in her poetry. However it needs to be pointed out that these earlier experiments were not well articulated theoretical positions and very often were criticized for merely reproducing an exotic flavour, specially as noted in the criticism by the metropolitan critics, who failed to understand the subversive implications of Creole language. Even within the Caribbean, Creole was regarded as a "*Dialect.... a 'broken tongue'*" with which it is impossible to build an edifice of verse possessing the perfect symmetry of finished art (McFarlane, 1956 12). Samuel Selvon was asked by metropolitan critics to modify his linguistic range so that he could be 'understood' by a wider audience and the pioneering poetry of Louise Bennett was seen as 'dialect' rather than literature. Mervyn Morris commented, rather sadly in 1967 that 'The language which maids and yard boys (use) is not yet accepted simply as one of our Jamaican ways of speech' (Morris, 1967, 12). In his introduction to Bennett's *Jamaican Labrish* (1966), Rex Nettleford referred to Creole as an 'unruly substance' and 'an idiom whose limitations as a bastard tongue are all too evident' (Nettleford, 1966, 12). All these observations point to the uneasy status that Creole occupied in the Caribbean. It was either not literary enough, and of course that benchmark for literariness was British Standard English, or if it was used, it was relegated to the lowly status of a dialect, broken tongue, bad English, exotic use or as comic intrusion!

The reception of Creole started changing with ground breaking linguistic studies on Creole from 1960's onwards. I have already pointed out that the Caribbean writers and critics were championing the cause of Creole and a vernacular idiom during the 1960's. Closely read, Margaret Blundell's prescription for West Indian writers (1966) she exhorts them to speak to their people in the vernacular and not tailor their literature to suit the preferences and expectations of a literate / urban / international audience. She criticizes the writer in exile for packaging the language to suit a literature written for export. The central issue at stake was to privilege the use of Creole as a literary linguistic idiom that would help define the indigenous Caribbean

aesthetic. The emphasis on indigenous, grass roots and folk resources in the critical practice of the 1970's championed the cause of Creole. The strongest statement in favour of Creole have been made by Braithwaite and Merle Hodge. Braithwaite traces the historical origins of the low status of Creole to the language spoken by African slaves on the sugar plantation. These languages were severely undermined in favour of the European 'standard'. This led to the formation of a submerged language with rich potential for cultural resistance (refer to the calypso *Dan is the man* where you see the subversive use of Creole vs standard English) where it becomes simultaneously powerless and empowering. (1984). Braithwaite articulated his theorization about Creole in his 1979 Harvard lecture – '*History of the voice : The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry*' which was later published in 1984. He elevated Creole to the status of a 'nation language' as a more culture specific term, which is less neutral than Creole and affirmed, a positive status for Caribbean non-'standard' language. Merle Hodge in her 1990 essay '*Challenges of the Struggle for Sovereignty*' makes an impassioned plea for the recognition of Creole –

“...We speak Creole, we need Creole, we cannot function without Creole. for our deepest thought processes are bound up in the structure of Creole, but we hold Creole in contempt...”(Hodge, 1990 – 13)

The fact that Hodge makes this emotional and passionate appeal for acceptance of Creole testifies to the problematic status still accorded to Braithwaites' nation-language. In spite of making inroads in to the literary practice, Creole has not been widely accepted within and outside the Caribbean as a viable alternative to standard English, for usage in academic or journalistic discourse. However linguistic experiments with nation language continue and some journalists like Carolyn Cooper are using Creole journalism (1989) when she reviewed *Lion heart Gal* in Creole. This testifies to the powerful hegemonic domination of the colonial discourse that still exists in the Caribbean.

Yet one significant contribution of nation language and indigenization has been the emergence of performance or dub poetry. I have already mentioned that performance poets like Bongo Jerry, Mutabaruka, Oku Onuora, Michael Smith and Linton Kwesi Johnson in Britain were among the new poetic voices that emerged in the 1970's. Dub poetry relies heavily on the performative and musical element where occasion and delivery are as important as what it written down. Hence it has been categorized as an oral literary form. Louise Bennett's *Jamaica Labrish* (1944) and her later poetry and Braithwaite's 1973 *The Arrivants : A New World Trilogy* are considered important forerunners of performance poetry. Braithwaite's experiments in *The Arrivants* in making use of black musical rhythms and forms, like work songs, spirituals, mento, ska, reggae, steel pan, calypso, jazz the blues etc. and Bennett's use of Jamaican Creole heavily influenced the later performance poets. It is difficult to grasp the potency and vibrancy of dub poetry unless you witness this poetry being performed. I will quote a few lines from Linton Kwesi Johnson's '*Five Nights of Bleeding*'

“...night number one was in BRIX / TON :
was a-beatin out a riddim/wid a fyah,
commin down his reggae – reggae wyah;
it was a sounn shakin down you spiral col/umn,
a bad music tearin up you flesh...”

Notice the powerful mesmerizing rhythms which have a jabbing, stabbing physicality which delivers the aggressive tone which would be quite impossible to achieve in the use of standard English.

I shall also quote some prase in nation language from Harry Narain's A letter to the Prime Minister.

This letter I writ (t)ing you is not really to ask fo’ anything. Is just to tell you what’s going on, an I left it to the kindness of you heart to mek we small man something lil mo’better than dey-bad. I don’t want it sound like a complaint either, but I got few things on me mind because I see the situation going bad to wo’ss in the rice industry.

You always say when we see things go bad complain. Mek report. Down here who I gon complain to, the police? They gon sey they not concern with the rice industry; go talk to Mr. Burnett, the big boss man at the local rice board. Mr. Burnett office lock up whole day, you don’t know whether he in or he out. And with the crowd that brace that office you might give Mr. Burnett all right to protect heself. Any time he pull the bolt it might be like if hydro dam you tell we’ bout break. Complain to the radio? Cde. P.M., how you go about that? My radio does only talk, it don’t listen. The Chronicle? The only person I know connected with the newspaper down here is the lil boy who does bring it round. And the way he behaving he already got one foot in Berbice, if you know what I mean...”. (Narain, 407).

You could compare this to Braithwaite’s use of nation language in the poetry you read.

Johnson’s ground breaking collection **Dread Beat and Blood** (published 1975) in London and Oku Onuora’s **Echo** (published in 1977) in Jamaica paved the way for a new generation of dub poets. These two anthologies were characterized by the use of nation language, a strong performance aesthetic, formal and thematic influence of reggae-music, use of biblical allusion and highly politicized contents. Other poets who have contributed to the growing popularity of dub poetry include Jean Binta Breeze, Benjamin Zephaniah, James Berry, Jamaica Kincaid etc. David Dabydenes’ ground breaking collection **Slave Song** also uses Creole to record the often marginalized Indo-Caribbean experience and seeks to redress the Afro-centric biases of Caribbean literature. Poets like Grace Nicholas, Lorna, Goodison testify to the enabling and empowering place of oral literary model and indigenization of language within the Caribbean discourse.

It is evident from the brief and selective mapping that the emergence of Caribbean aesthetic has been a project fraught with problematics of identity, history, cultural decolonisation and attempts at indigenization. In this Unit we hope that the key debates will enable you to engage with the writings of Naipaul, Braithwaite and Walcott within their historical, social and material contexts.

3.6 LET US SUM UP

I began this unit by giving you the historical background of the diasporic nature of Caribbean identity where I discussed the impact of colonization, emancipation and the indentured system. In the next section, I briefly outlined the emergence of cultural decolonisation as it took shape during the 1930’s and the debates relating to the colonial educational systems and literary models. Gomes and Mc Farlanes’ position show us the two extreme positions – Gomes’ call for complete decolonisation, while McFarlane subscribes completely to the ideological assumptions of the colonizer.

In the next section, I referred to the ‘booming’ of West Indian prose fiction that led to the construction of a ‘canon’ of ‘classic’ West Indian novels. However, this consolidation was the product of the large scale migration of West Indian writers. The next important point in the development of Caribbean literature was a recentering of literary and critical practice within the region. I have used the four journal essays to point out the major preoccupations and formulations of this period.

The last section points to the new confidence with which contemporary poets and writers are articulating their local existential realities generated by the use of oral literary forms. This trajectory towards a Caribbean aesthetic does in no way imply one homogenous notion of 'Caribbeanness'. The Caribbean identity is still being constructed out of overlapping domains of 'oneness' and 'differences', relating to different language origins and diverse hobbies.

3.7 QUESTIONS

1. What are the three major historical moments that have helped create a hybrid Caribbean culture?
2. Colonial educational system was inadequate for creation of national consciousness. Comment with regard to the Caribbean situation.
3. Language is a marker of identity. Comment on the use of nation-language as constitutive of the process of indigenous Caribbean identity.

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UNIT 4 SOUTH ASIAN LITERATURE

Structure

- 4.0. Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Survey of South- Asian Literatures in English
 - 4.2.1 Pakistani Literature in English
 - 4.2.2 Sri Lankan Literature in English
 - 4.2.3 Bangladeshi Writing in English
 - 4.2.4 Indian Literature in English
 - 4.2.5 Twentieth Century Developments in Indian English Fiction
- 4.3 Postcolonialism
 - 4.3.1 Unravelling Postcolonialism
 - 4.3.2 Postcolonial Literary Analysis and Pedagogy
 - 4.3.3 Problems with the Postcolonial Paradigm
- 4.4 Literature at the Margins – Some Critical Aspects
 - 4.4.1 The Question of the Margin
 - 4.4.2 Women and Literature
 - 4.4.3 Conceptual Challenges
- 4.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.6 Questions
- 4.7 Suggested Reading

4.0 OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of the unit is to show that the newly emerging literatures in English in South Asia (and the Indian novel, specifically) are the products of complex determinants. The colonial encounter is the foremost determinant for emerging literatures in English in India and the subcontinent. Additionally, the process through which the new nation comes into being, the trauma of partition, the formation of national identities in a situation of political instability all contribute to the vast body of literature, not just in English, but in the regional languages as well.

My attempt in this introduction to a representative body of South Asian literature would be to show how literature refracts realities outside its domain and cannot, therefore, be studied in isolation from them. In this course, you will study Bapsi Sidhwa's partition novel *Ice Candy Man*, which pulls together some of the issues mentioned above.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

India, Pakistan, Bangladesh (erstwhile East Pakistan), Sri Lanka and Nepal are the countries covered under the rubric of South Asia. Most of these are newly emerging nations, having gained freedom from British colonial power around the late 1940s or so.

The term 'New Literatures in English' has been deemed appropriate to describe the recent literary developments in South Asian countries emerging from the experience of colonialism. The term 'new' in this context would also seek to distinguish between the 'old' British literature produced by representatives of the imperial power and the recent 'new' literature produced by indigenous inhabitants in the English language. 'New Literatures in English' is now found preferable to the earlier categorization of 'Commonwealth' or 'Third World Literature', as you might have read. Further,

though 'colonial' and 'postcolonial' are used as well, the idea of "new" literatures also seems to de-emphasise the colonial past and might therefore be preferable to other descriptions.

What each of these literatures from the South Asian region has in common beyond their "special" or distinctive characteristics is that they emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and "asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial center." (Ashcroft et al., 1989, p.1)

The new literatures in English can be seen to develop through various stages which can be broadly classified as imitation, in the first phase, followed by a phase of protest or resistance and finally to a phase where the 'new' literature develops a distinct identity of its own. In the first phase writers tend to imitate the great works of the imperial power, which become the models for emulation. Shakespeare and the Romantic poets were some of the models for the Indo-English writers in the nineteenth century, which led them to "daffodilize" the tropics or to see their own landscapes through English eyes. This kind of literature can be seen to be produced under "imperial license" and often resulted in a sense of alienation from the lived and experiential reality around them. The careers of the Bengali poet, Michael Madhusudan Dutt and the Sri Lankan James Alwis can be shown as illustrations of this pattern.

In the second stage, there is a denial of the privilege of 'English' and a "refusal of the categories of the imperial culture, its aesthetic, its illusory standard of normative or 'correct' usage" (Ashcroft et al, 1989, p.38). In this first phase of nationalist self-assertion, there is a realization of the power and mastery inscribed in language which leads to a rejection of the colonial culture. The final phase is the development of an indigenous idiom, when the colonized writer is able to appropriate the language – English, in this case – to communicate his/her own cultural experience. This process would lead to a sense of "disalienation", the ability to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own (Ashcroft et al, 1989, p.39)

The importance of language in colonialism and subsequent processes of decolonisation was realized by one of the most well-known critics of colonialism, Frantz Fanon (1927-1963), a psychiatrist from Martinique. While recognizing the potency and power of racial characteristics of 'Blackness' at the heart of the oppression of colonialism, he felt that the power exercised by white over black, colonized over colonizer could be dismantled by a realization of the mystificatory potential of language. In this influential book *Black Skin, White Masks*, he attempts to analyse colonialism and to "help the black man to free himself of the arsenal of complexes that has been developed by the colonial environment" (Fanon, 2001, 160). The black/colonized man, according to Fanon, should be freed from the disabling position of colonialism to the construction of new liberating narratives of decolonisation.

The process of imitation, resistance or protest and then appropriation or forging one's own literary idiom are often foregrounded in the literary works of South Asian writers like Raja Rao (in his preface to *Kanthapura*) and earlier nineteenth century writers like M.M. Dutt and James Alwis of Sri Lanka as well. The fiction, poetry and drama of many writers bear the imprint of the tensions of the colonial relationship while expressing an incipient nationalism and proclaiming development of a distinct identity. However, inherent in this implicit agenda is a danger that Balachandra Rajan cautions against in his address at a Leeds Conference:

In newer literatures, the pressures of literary nationality can be compulsive and the writer writes according to specifications which can be subtly tempting when the writer himself is committed to them as a citizen ... [There is] the patriotic [view] in which the writer

becomes the voice of nationhood and the achievement of an Indian writer for example, is judged by the intensity of his Indianness [Quoted in *Considerations* ed Mukherjee, 1964; 1)

Different writers respond to these pulls and pressures in different ways, according to diverse cultural locations and ideological positions, but certain common themes emerge in most of South Asian literature in English: the colonial and East-West encounter, the development of a sense of pride in one's own culture, a preoccupation and experimentation with language and a continuing concern with issues of identity and nationhood. Some of the best South Asian fiction in English by Rushdie (See *Midnight's Children*, 1981), Amitava Ghosh (*The Shadow Lines*, 1988) and Michael Ondaatje (*The English Patient*, 1992) reflect and refract these urgencies and preoccupations.

4.2 SURVEY OF SOUTH ASIAN LITERATURES IN ENGLISH

In this section, I will briefly survey Pakistani and Sri Lankan literature in English before going on to deal with Indian-English writing. The South Asian region is where English has been more prominent than elsewhere; moreover, the use of English has not been confined to the practical spheres alone, but has been the literary vehicle for some of the best writings from this region.

4.2.1 Pakistani Literature in English

In his address to the International Conference on English in South Asia (January, 1989), Alamgir Hashmi pointed out that English in Pakistan had come to South Asia as the colonizer's language, and had subsequently acquired local "traits, a local habitation and a name" (Hashmi, 1996, 107). In fact, the first published book in English by a South Asian was *Travels* (1794) by an Indian Muslim Sake Deen Mohammed. During the early twentieth century, there were notable writers like Shahid Suhrawady, Mohammad Iqbal and Ahmed Ali.

In the field of poetry, there was an attempt to weld South Asian epic traditions with those of Romanticism. In the 1930s, Shahid Suhrawady's poetic compositions like *Essays in Verse* (1937), drawing on the precision of Muslim art and often on English neo-classicism, could be seen as evolving a character of its own.

In the field of prose writing around the same time, Ahmed Ali had introduced concepts of European realism into his Urdu stories and revolutionized Urdu literature. He then wrote *Twilight in Delhi*, the first major Muslim novel to emerge from the subcontinent. Developments in Pakistani writing after 1947 illustrate the fact that Pakistani literature has outstripped its colonial origins and developed a new personal identity of its own. This is amply evident in the poems of Taufiq Rafat, Daud Kamal, Kaleem Omar and Maki Qureshi who laid the groundwork for Pakistani poetry in the 1970s and 1980s.

In the field of novel writing, the writings of Ahmed Ali, Zulfikar Ghose, Salman Rushdie and Bapsi Sidhwa "has swayed postcolonial fictional modes from realism to fantasy and metafictional language myths" (Hashmi, 1996, p.114). Sidhwa's novels are *The Bride* (1983), *The Crow Eaters* (1978) and *Ice Candy Man* (1988), the last of which won several awards including the German Literature Prize (1991) and the 1993 Lila Wallace Grant. Notable recent novels from Pakistan include *The Thirteenth House* (1987) by Adam Zameenzad where desire is mixed with horror, astrology and mysticism with history. Also worthy of mention are Tariq Ali's novel *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (1992) and Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days* (1990), which is part memoir, part fiction and which won the Pushcart Prize, Nadeem

Aslam's *Season of the Rainbirds* which won the Betly Trask Award and was nominated for several others and Mohsin Hamid's *Mothsmoke* (2000). Zulfikar Ghose's novels include *Figures of Enchantment* (1986), a superb postcolonial novel, *Holme's Investigations into the Bogart Script* (1981) and *The Triple Mirror of the Self* (1992), among others. His works assert "language as the only tangible reality, and fiction as an ironic history of self and society" (Hashmi, 1996, 114). Short fiction and nonfiction have also been prolific genres in the hands of new writers like Aamer Hussein, Muneeza Shamsie and Rukhsana Ahmed.

In Pakistan, English drama has had a limited tradition as an art form. It is significant that the few well-known Pakistani English dramatists have all established themselves in Britain. Notable among them are Hanif Kureishi whose screenplay *My Beautiful Laundrette* deals with unemployment and racism in Britain and was followed soon after by *The Buddha of Suburbia* which was a novel about an Asian boy growing up in Britain. The work of Rukhsana Ahmad and Tariq Ali also thematise the East-West encounter. The former's writing also carries a strong feminist theme, which was in part a response to the imposition of a new martial law regime in the 1970s.

Otherwise original plays in Pakistan have been few and far between. Among the most noteworthy is Taufiq Rafat's 'The Foothold' which was entirely in verse. Muneeza Shamsie relates that after the 1970s some playwrights like Imran Aslam made a conscious decision to write plays in Urdu partly to reach a wider audience and partly because they were a little embarrassed at the 'elitist' connotations of English.

Though the tyrannical nature of some of Pakistan's governments has not been conducive to freedom of expression in any language, the quality of writing on the whole has definitely "improved in the passage from colonial subservience to an era of national self-definition" (Hashmi, 1996, 111).

4.2.2 Sri Lankan Literature in English

Sri Lanka had been under the domination of the Portuguese (1505-1640), the Dutch (1640-1796) and the British from 1796 until 1948, when it gained freedom on 4 February, 1948. Sri Lanka is linked to the South Asian region by strong ties of history, culture, religion, language and literature. Like in other colonized areas, the early literature from Sri Lanka in English shows the limitations of emulation and blind imitation. This is mirrored in the poetic career of James Alwis who gained proficiency in Sinhalese when he realized that mastery over English would hardly redeem him from slavery.

In the field of Sri Lankan literature, there seems to be an abiding preoccupation with the language of poetry, especially so when that language has been acquired in a colonial situation. "However", as Gooneratne points out, it "is also part of a wider concern, a search for identity within the national and cultural environment." (Gooneratne, 1980, p.168)

The writer in Sri Lanka faces the problem of a limited readership/audience and has thus to write with an eye on an international / overseas reader / audience. The prickly problem of the English-language writer's relationship with his chosen language informs a lot of Sri Lankan poetry. However, instead of the initial pale imitations of Wordsworth and Moore, Sri Lankan poetry has evolved a vigorous local idiom of its own. Thus, from Louis Nell and Ashley Halpe to Patrick Fernando, we move to Lakdasa Wikkramasinghe, Anne Ranasinghe, the hallmark of whose poetry is a "perceptible freedom to experiment with language in terms of individual experience", and to "look with fresh eyes at a local society and environment." (Gooneratne, 1980, p.165). The experience of relocation and expatriation among many Sri Lankan writers in the 1950s and 1960s served to foreground questions of personal identity and themes of nostalgia and exile. In the poems of recent expatriates, there is a sense in which the act of departure has sealed their identity and made that identity a

heightened reality. Also, the violence and strife that has marked Sinhalese society in the last thirty years has found its way into its poetry as well.

Sri Lankan theatre in English took several years before it was able to develop an English language drama which could successfully exploit the resources of the local idiom. Attempts were made to adopt European plays by the University Dramatic Society under Professor E.F.C. Ludowyk in the 1940s, but these attempts could not establish a successful dramatic tradition subsequently. It was only with Ernest McIntyre's production of Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and later Shakespeare's *Othello* that a connection was established between the worlds of Sinhalese and European drama (Gooneratne, 1980, p156). At the same time, there is a tradition of domestic comedy in English which comprises plays like Ludowyk's 'He Comes from Jaffna' (1950), Lanerolle's 'Well, Mudaliyar' and McIntyre's 'The Education of Miss Asia' (1971) and 'The President of the O.B.A.

Any mapping of the terrain of the Sri Lankan novel starts paradoxically with the work of an Englishman Leonard Woolf, whose work *A Village in the Jungle* (1913) demonstrated its closeness to the local idiom and to the habitual rhythms of Sinhalese expression. It has since been translated into Sinhalese as *Baddeganna*.

In the last two decades or so, the novels of writers like Romesh Gunashekhara (*Reef. Sandglass*) and Michael Ondaatje have enriched Sri Lankan English fiction. Originally from Sri Lanka, Ondaatje's roots are of mixed Dutch, Tamil and Sinhalese elements. After his education in England, he settled in Canada. A sense of the transcultural informs most of his work, communicated through these of migration, international displacement or the personal search for his family's past. (*The English Patient* (1992), *Running in the Family* (1983), *Handwriting* and *Anil's Ghost*.) The theme of the mapping countries and experience across cultural boundaries is a key aspect in Ondaatje's work, a feature that can be called a characteristic of transcultural writing.

4.2.3 Bangladeshi Writing in English

Bangladesh became a separate entity after 1971, when it declared its independent status vis-à-vis Pakistan. Bangladesh has had a rich tradition of Bengali literature, which is its common heritage with West Bengal; in addition there has been a tradition of Bangla Muslim writing best represented by Kazi Nazrul Islam. In recent years the writings of Taslima Nasreen have been accorded international recognition, but her works like *Lajja*, her autobiography and newspaper columns are noteworthy not so much for their artistic merit as for their hardhitting polemic against repressive ideologies.

4.2.4 Indian Literature in English

In order to contextualise modern Indian poetry in English, it is illuminating to look at Bruce King's comment on the same.

Modern Indian English-language poetry is one of the many 'new literatures' which began to emerge at the end of the Second World War after the end of colonialism. Unlike the creative writing of Africa and the Caribbean, modern Indian poetry in English has been neglected by most critics, foreign readers and intellectuals for it has no obvious direct relationship to the cultural movements which led to national independence; by 1947 the situation had changed and with it the concern of the new poets became their relationship to end alienation from the realities of their society. (King, 1987, p.1)

By the 1960s, the pioneering efforts of Ezekiel and some others, published first in magazines like *'Illustrated Weekly'* and *'Quest'* and then by Writers Workshop had borne fruit. Poets like Ezekiel, Ramanujan, Kamala Das, Gieve Patel and Adil Jussawala had made a mark with their poetry. Most of these poets have continued to write well into the 1980s and 1990s. Ramanujan's (d.1993) last work *'The Black Hen'* published as Book IV of the *'Collected Poems'* (1995) concerns itself with poetic themes of roots, heredity and ancestry. Ezekiel's *'Latter Day Psalms'* (1982) and *'Poems'* (1983-88) show an increasing use of the dramatic mode in place of his earlier theme of failure, which led to a sense of self-doubt and self-laceration in some of his early poetry. Dom Moraes's poems span more than the quarter of a century; *'John Nobody'* was published in 1965, *'Serendip'* (1990) and *'Craxton'* in the 1990s. Gieve Patel, similarly published his poems in 1966 and his latest collection *'Mirrored Mirroring'* in 1991. International recognition came by way of the Commonwealth Poetry Prize to Arun Kolatkar for *'Jejuri'* (1976). The writings of Parthasarathy, Arvind K. Mehrotra, Dilip Chitre and later Keki Daruwalla (*'Winter Poems'*, 1980, *'Landscape'*, 1987; *'A Summer of Tigers'*, 1995, *'Night River'*, 2000) Shiv K. Kumar (*'Trapfalls in the Sky'*, 1986, *'Woolgathering'*, 1998) and Jayanta Mahapatra (8 volumes of poetry from 1980 to 1997) convey a maturity of vision and deftness of execution that have helped establish India-English poetry as a distinct genre. In the last few decades and especially in the 1990s, some women have also emerged as poets of considerable distinction. Kamala Das, Eunice de Souza, Sujata Bhatt and Meena Alexander are some of the better known names. Indian-English poetry, to the extent one can homogenise the category in spite of the diverse voices that constitute it, has made a distinct place for itself in modern Indian culture. As Bruce King comments in his introduction to Indian English Poetry.

Indian English poetry is part of the process of modernization which includes urbanization, industrialization, mobility, independence, social change, increased communication (in the form of films, television, radio, journals and newspapers), national and international transportation networks, mass education and the resulting paradox that as an independent culture emerges it also participate in the international, modern, usually westernized world. (King, 1987, p3).

If, initially, Modern Indian English verse appeared to be indebted to British and a few European models, it now reveals an awareness of most of world literature, including contemporary American, recent South American and older Indian devotional verse in the regional languages (ibid, p.5).

Further, English has become one of the most significant languages of modern India in which "words and expression" have recognized national rather than imported significances and references, alluding to local realities, traditions and ways of feeling (ibid, p.3).

Thus, in 'An Introduction', Kamala Das sums up the Indo-English writers' dilemma : "..... I am Indian, very brown, born / in Malabar, I speak three languages, write in / Two, Dream in one. Don't write in English, they said, / English is not your mother-tongue..... Why not let me speak in / any language I like ? The language I speak / becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses, / All mine, mine alone....."

The story of the growth of Indo-English drama highlights several significant aspects about culture, language and the nature of dramatic and theatrical activity. Nineteenth century attempts to stage and adapt English plays gradually lost out to regional language drama in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. (See Naik, 1984, p.153). While Shakespearean and western drama have often been successfully welded with local folk traditions (e.g., 'Jatra', 'Nautanki') and performed in the regional languages, drama in English in India has been restricted to a limited urban audience. The names

of Asif Currimbhoy and now Mahesh Dattani are the few well-known names in the field, in contrast to regional language drama which boasts of a whole lot of names like Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, Habib Tanvir and Badal Sircar. In order for India-English drama to be effective, it has to derive its impetus and strength from traditional Indian forms. The Indo-English dramatists' continuing attempt must be to locate and successfully use such indigenous traditions.

4.2.5 Twentieth Century Developments in Indian English Fiction

Questions and problems of address, language and 'Indianness' persist and percolate through to the twentieth century novel as well, and are articulated in Raja Rao's preface to *Kanthapura* (1938), a novel dealing with the impact of Gandhian thought upon a community. Since the narrator is an old unlettered woman, Rao uses English with the cadences and rhythms of Indian speech. In the Preface, which foregrounds the postcolonial problematic, Rao confesses:

The telling has not been easy. One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought movement that looks maltreated in an alien language (pp i-ii) (*Kanthapura*, 1938)

Unlike an earlier generation of writers like Bankim and Govardhanram Tripathi, (who wrote his novel *Saraswatichandra* (1887-1900) in Gujarati and his personal notebooks in English) and Ngugi later who took a decision in the light of his political commitment to write in his native Gikuyu, as a way out of the impasse between expressing African realities in the English language, Rao continued to write in English. In his refusal to relinquish English as the medium of his stories, since 'it is not really an alien language' he exemplifies a turn of phrase that is distinctive and unique. His dictum that "We cannot write like the English... We should not. We cannot write only as Indians" shows a way out from the problem of alienation of the earlier writers. Arguably, it also carves a space for him, which is relatively independent of the burden of cultural representation.

In the hands of Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan, Indo-English fiction made significant generic leaps forging an idiom of its own, gaining momentum with the socio-political urgencies of the freedom movement and the impact of Gandhian thought. Mulk Raj Anand's novels are infused by a progressive humanitarianism. His considerable oeuvre includes *Coolie* (1933), *Untouchable* (1935), *The Village* (1939) and *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942) and is informed by an ardour for social reform and a conviction of salvation through socialistic doctrine. While it should not be assumed that a novel or a novelist operates in an ideologically neutral space, Anand's fervent ideological beliefs, and overt socialism sometimes result in technical and artistic flaws, like in *Untouchable* and *The Sword and the Sickle* (where the protagonist Lallu meets the Mahatma). Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938), mentioned earlier, also shows the author's ideological affinity with Gandhian beliefs. Rao's later book *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960), depicts the classic encounter between East and West in the marriage of Rama, the Indian student and Madeline, a Frenchwoman. The novel – if it can be so called with its massive overlay of philosophy – is infused with a belief in non-dualistic vedantic doctrine and shows the contrast between two contrary world-views.

The third major writer of this period, also well received in the West, is R.K. Narayan. Unlike Rao, the East-West theme is lacking in his work; unlike the earlier two authors, his 'Gandhian' novel *Waiting for the Mahatma* is considered his weakest. His manifold talents lie elsewhere in crafting a picture / version of Indian life in English unsurpassed in its authenticity and social realism. From *Swami and Friends* (1935) to *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937) to *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967) he offers a minutely observed account of the fictional 'Malgudi', a glimpse which is representative more than panoramic.

In the fifties and sixties, novelists like Kamala Markandaya, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Nayantara Sahgal and later, Arun Joshi and particularly Anita Desai are significant figures; G.V. Desani's *All About H. Hatter* (1948) and Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) are significant landmarks in the literary landscape. In reading these authors, we must be sensitive to questions of language and address, identity and nationality.

I am aware that a summing up of this kind excludes more writers and issues than it addresses. However, in order to convey some of the salient issues of the newly-emerging literatures of South Asia, I have chosen the Indian English novel as a representative genre within this larger group.

It is in the eighties and nineties – the last twenty years – that the Indian novel has made a phenomenal impact globally, with the publication of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1980), considered the model postcolonial novel, a national allegory that has influenced a whole generation of writers and created a horizon of expectations for readers and critics alike. In the novel, Rushdie seems to celebrate the plenitude of India in what can be labeled as the postmodernist mode, challenging several assumptions about language, nation, history and narrative.

As Meenakshi Mukherjee comments on the impact of *Midnight's Children*:

In retrospect, we see that *Midnight's Children* had a very important role to play in the reversal of the 'centre-periphery' paradigm in English literary culture, in dissolving the great tradition of F.R. Leavis into a plurality of traditions coming from many races, many regions, many cultures ... Although in an entirely different way from the earlier novels, *Midnight's Children* is also constructing the idea of the nation – an India that is inclusive and tolerant but threatened by the bleak forces of binary opposition. (Mukherjee, 2000 pp 76-77).

This novel expresses deep anxiety about the fragility of the nation and the fluidity of identity. The preoccupation with nation, identity, memory and violence has continued to be a seminal one in South Asian subcontinental writing. The making of the nation ruptured by Partition and communal riots, events which bring home to individuals and collectivities the significance of religious and cultural identity are further thematized in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, Mukul Kesavan's *Looking Through Glass* and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*.

In Ghosh's novel, the unnamed narrator, through the experiences of his mentor, Tridib, realizes the illusory and insecure nature of borders and boundaries as invented corollaries of the idea of nationhood. Thus, instead of securing borders through acts of military violence, there is a desire to transcend nationalism to go beyond to an understanding of internationalism and global humanitarianism.

At the same time, we need to look at the category of globalism closely. To what extent is globalism the prerogative of a few privileged individuals or the privilege of an internationally recognized category of writers and intellectuals? It is here that the Indian writer in English employing pan-Indian themes and addressing an international audience has an advantage over the writings of his/her regional counterparts, whose work may not be globally accessible in English. Such a writer, especially if he / she is a migrant – witness the case of Rushdie, Michael Ondaatje or even a Bharati Mukherjee – belongs to what Timothy Brennan calls the 'Third world Cosmopolitans' who are hailed by prominent critics as interpreters and authentic voices of the 'Third World'. Underlying this phenomenon is obviously the operation of a canon. Literary texts get canonized in different ways – by being discussed and praised by influential critics, by being mentioned in histories of literature, by being taught in classrooms and through an accretion of commentary around them

(Mukherjee, 2000 p 3) In stark contrast to the proliferation of Indian English fiction in the late twentieth century, Indian English novels of the nineteenth century have not been subjected to any of these canonizing processes and have, as a result, been denied literary history, or even archival value.

The growing visibility and presence of the Indian English novel now is tied up, to a large extent, with the increasing influence of postcolonial theory and 'third world' intellectuals on the American academy. The increasing numbers of the 'Third World' cosmopolitan intellectuals in the U.S. universities has helped in the dissemination and circulation of theories based on newly emerging literatures in English from former colonies. What makes intellectuals like Gayatri Chakravarti Spivak and Homi Bhabha successful is their "mastery over the current idiom of the metropolitan metalanguage of narrative". This ensures their "favourable reception in the global centers of publication and criticism." However, not all writers from other cultures, obviously, receive this attention. While this new receptivity in London or New York may have "made it easier for some writers from outside the Western world to get a hearing, they may do so only within a field of reception already defined by metropolitan parameters and agendas". (Mukherjee, 2000, 179) In other words, the criteria of evaluating the standards of literary production are constructed and determined by the needs and demands of the receiving culture, that is, western universities.

One implicit expectation from Third World 'Commonwealth' (the earlier term) and postcolonial writers is that their work would inevitably highlight the experience of colonialism as theme or metaphor – as Rushdie did in the Methwold section of the *Midnight's Children* or Naipaul in 'The Shorthills Adventure in *A House for Mr. Biswas*. For all their undeniable literary value, the terms of their critical reception in the West embody the operation of a certain politics of representation that is heightened by the diasporic location of author and critic. In spite of their use of English with a small 'e' and forging of an indigenous literary idiom, the Empire need not always write back. The writer's address might not, necessarily, be to the metropolitan centre and colonialism might no longer be the central issue in the newly emergent literatures, which may be conditioned by other local, diverse and complex pressures like the disintegration of older social orders and challenges posed to patriarchy, particularly by the newly emergent articulate woman. As an example, it is only in the late nineteen-nineties that the rich literature of partition, both written and oral, is being looked at. The right critical and aesthetic distance from the event fifty years later seems to have helped evolve the right perspective, resulting in the production and translation of literary classics on partition.

One of the issues raised by the questions of classics, especially at the level of reception, is the question of the "timeless universals" of the "great tradition" of literature, the canon. Academic discussions about interrogating and replacing the canon result in the establishment of a counter canon where certain known names are repeatedly anthologized and showcased under the titles of South Asian, African or Caribbean literatures, with the editors of these collections doing a token updating every few years.

Not only that, it is these anthologies in circulation, which often introduce virtually monolingual or monocultural (having access to one literature) students in South Asian and non-western universities to their own literature. What we have to do here is to interrogate the pedagogic hegemony of postcolonialism currently in circulation in English departments in the U.S. universities which, then, becomes a model here.

4.3 : POSTCOLONIALISM

4.3.1 Unraveling Postcolonialism

Like the earlier term 'Commonwealth' to describe emerging literatures in English, the term 'postcolonial' etymologically indicates its emphasis as a continuing

Postcolonial analysis is concerned with the material, cultural and intellectual impact of British rule, introduction of Western forms of knowledge and its immediate and continuing effect on the colonised societies. In addition, the impact of the colonizing process on the coloniser has also been looked at by writers like Frantz Fanon and Ashis Nandy.

Edward Said's influential book *Orientalism* (1978), in many senses the basic text and reference point for postcolonialism, was a 'canonical event' in terms of its revolutionary impact on "intellectual formation, structures and lives both in the west and in the postcolonial non-west." (Gandhi, 1998, 66) It changed the drift of many disciplines, expanding and re-visioning their scope and intent (Brannon, 1992, 98). *Orientalism* is a systematic painstaking exposition of the reciprocal relationship between colonial knowledge and colonial power. What is new in *Orientalism's* method of exposition is its unrelenting focus on literature, and it is this aspect that I am stressing on as particularly relevant to our field of study. As Leela Gandhi points out in her introduction to postcolonial theory:

Despite its interdisciplinary concerns, the field of postcolonial studies is marked by a preponderant focus upon 'postcolonial literature' - a contentious category which refers somewhat arbitrarily to 'literatures in English', namely, to those literatures which have accompanied the projection and decline of British imperialism. (Gandhi, 1998, 141)

The focus on literature in postcolonialism as a mode of cultural production is a corollary to the cultural hegemony of British imperialism/colonialism which can be described as a "textual takeover" (Boehmer, 1995, 94). Macaulay's *Minute* emphasises the value of English literature as an instrument of cultural domination, which was made "central to the cultural enterprise of Empire". (Ashcroft et al. 1989, 3)

Gauri Vishwanathan's *Masks of Conquest* (1989) views the literary text as a "mask for economic exploitation" which "successfully camouflages the material activities of the coloniser" (Vishwanathan, 1989, 20). In memorizing passages from literary and poetical texts, the colonial subject was indoctrinated into complete subordination. However, in different ways, Said, Vishwanathan and Ashcroft et al may be seen as subscribing to the idea of a total conquest. There is a subtle shift of focus to forms of response and resistance in later postcolonial theorizing.

Much of postcolonial theory ignores the "theoretical self-sufficiency of African or Asian knowledge systems"; it also shows a failure to "foreground those cultural and historical conversations which circumvent the Western World". (Gandhi, 1998, Preface) Some of the problems of postcolonial theory and concomitantly, postcolonial literary analysis are outlined in the following sections.

4.3.2 Postcolonial Literary Analysis and Pedagogy

A critique of postcolonialism from our point of view would involve a brief look at the implications for reading and teaching initiated by postcolonialism. Postcolonial literary analysis has effected radically revisionist readings of canonical classics like Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Bronte's *Jane Eyre*. Instead of naturalizing the eternal beauties of the colonial canon, postcolonial pedagogical practice "addresses questions arising from the apparent discrepancy between the antagonistic worlds of the colonial text and the postcolonial classroom." (Gandhi, 1998, 146) This takes the form of consciousness - raising whereby the student is encouraged to read against the grain of earlier critical ideas like authorial intention and universal meanings. Further, an attempt is made to historicize the received curriculum, with a view to revealing "imperialism's shaping hand in the formation of English studies". (Vishwanathan, 1989, 167)

Much of postcolonial literary theory's oppositional and specifically anticolonial thrust were anticipated by the contentious concerns of Ngugi wa Thiong'o as early as 1968, when he and his colleagues challenged the dubious cultural and pedagogical pre-eminence of English within a decolonised African context. In a paper entitled 'On the Abolition of the English Department' (Ngugi, 1972) a move discussed ever since in varying climes and places, he proposed that the 'unauthentic discourse of Englishness be replaced by a radical centralization of African literature and language (Gandhi, 1998, 151). In the context of colonial India, Mahatma Gandhi's total rejection of English education and belief in the legitimate cultural primacy of Indian literatures and language, is comparable. He realised that English has created a gulf between the educated classes and the masses, and called for a rejection of "their civilization", since it is this that "makes their presence in India possible." (M.K. Gandhi, 1938, 66)

Gandhi's assertion may be seen as an example of a refusal or rejection of the categories of the imperial culture. This refusal is more than a gesture of nationalist assertion; it constitutes a radical interrogation of the bases and philosophical assumptions of European and British metaphysics. (Ashcroft, 1989, 33) At the same time, at another level, problems with English as the medium of instruction persist. In a recent issue of *Economic and Political Weekly (EPW)* (July 28-August 3, 2001 - Vol. xxxvi No.30), an article on the 'Politics of Development in Postcolonial India' discusses the social fracturing caused by English medium education. As a marker of class privilege, English education becomes a terrain of struggle and results in increasing polarization, fracturing and violence along class, caste, religious and gender lines (David Faust, Richa Nagar, *EPW*).

More productive from the point of view of postcolonial analysis are the textual strategies of subversion and appropriation. One example of this is exemplified in Raja Rao's 'Preface' to *Kanthapura* (1938) mentioned earlier. In R.K. Narayan's *The English Teacher* (1946), the eponymous hero Krishna rebels against the methods of English teaching calling it a "whole century of false education", but venerates English literature: "What fool could be insensible to Shakespeare's sonnets or 'The Ode to the West Wind?'" (Narayan, 1946, 220-1)

The task of the postcolonial critic and teacher, in the face of the "veneration" mentioned above, would be to prise open the complicit relations between imperialism, language and literature. The first step in demonstrating the politics of representation implicated in such a project would be to problematise the retention and continuance of the study of British literature in post-Independence India. *The Lie of the Land* (edited R. Sunder Rajan), and *Rethinking English* (edited Svati Joshi) are valuable critical interventions in such a process. At the same time, some of the newly emerging literatures/ works in English can be seen as produced, by in some sense, and having a dialogic relationship with the agenda outlined above. The nuanced, gender / class / caste inflected depiction of the Syrian Christian community in Arundhati Ray's *The God of Small Things* (1997) is a case in point. Similarly, the complex representation of the colonial Indian army in South Asia (Burma and Malaysia) is interwoven with a history of teak and the closing years of Burma's last king to form the warp and weft of Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* (2000), one of the most well-researched works to emerge from the Indian subcontinent in recent years.

Ideally speaking, the task of a postcolonial pedagogy would be to retrieve, legitimize and provide a basis for knowledge systems which have been suppressed because they were not in alliance with the dominant political interest. In addition, such a pedagogy should be able to unravel and unmask the nexus of power and knowledge which supported the imperial project. It would be appropriate, in this context, to quote Stuart Hall's description of what the cultural studies project had set out to do:

.....When cultural studies began its work ... it had ... to undertake the task of unmasking what it considered to be the unstated presuppositions of the humanist tradition itself. It had to bring to light the ideological assumptions underpinning the practice, to expose the educational program ... and to try and conduct an ideological critique of the way the humanities and the arts presented themselves as parts of disinterested knowledge. (Hall, 1990, 15)

However, while postcolonial theory highlights the duplicities and inconsistencies between western humanist traditions and our colonial histories, it has its blind spots as well. Some of these concerns are briefly indicated in the next section.

4.3.3 Problems with the Postcolonial Paradigm

The problems or limitations of the postcolonial paradigm are partly due to the empowered context of the postcolonial intellectual, a fact mentioned earlier. The circulation of high theories by diasporic intellectuals often occupying certain institutional privileges results in a gap between postcolonial theory and actual ground realities of the developing countries of South Asia or Africa. Critics like Arif Dirlik and Aizaz Ahmad are unrelenting in their exclusion of all theoretical / intellectual activity which lacks adequate referents to 'everyday' sociality (Gandhi, 1998, 56). Ahmad also targets the postcolonial preoccupation with questions regarding the formation of subjectivities as a solipsistic preoccupation with a "play of identities" which obscure the 'real' politics of the collectivity (Ahmad, 1995, 13). Similarly, in an article titled 'The Postcolonial aura: third world criticism in the age of global capitalism', Dirlik argues that the predominantly "epistemological and psychic orientations of postcolonial intellectual" are ethically incompatible with and irrelevant to the "problems of social, political and cultural domination" (Dirlik, 1994, 331, quoted in Gandhi, 1998, 57)

What are the implications of postcolonialism's occasional shortsightedness for newly emerging literatures in English? Depending on the positions from where the oppositional critiques emanate—Marxists and socialist feminists lay more stress on class while psychoanalytic feminists primary focus is on gender and sexuality—the focus of postcolonial theorizing become obvious.

It is with some of these excluded marginal areas that I would be dealing with in the last section.

4.4 LITERATURE AT THE MARGINS - SOME CRITICAL ASPECTS

4.4.1 The Question of the Margin

The notion of the excluded margin involves a certain political relationship between the centre and periphery highlighted by the French critic Foucault's observation that:

One must not suppose that there exists a certain sphere of 'marginality' that would be the legitimate concern of a free and disinterested scientific inquiry were it not the object of mechanisms of exclusion brought to bear by the economic or ideological requirements of power. If 'marginality' is being constituted as an area of investigation, this is only because relations on power have established it as a possible object... (quoted in Gandhi, 98, 55)

The postcolonial academic is co-opted into accepting the very process of marginalisation he/she should be resisting. One area where the discourse of

marginality is constantly pushing against its limits is in the terrain of women and literature. In fact, feminist criticism has radically interrogated the notion of marginality, viewing it as a patriarchal ploy to invisibilise and suppress women's writings and to render them invisible.

4.4.2 Women and Literature

The location of women in literature and the relation of women and literature is a complex one in our culture. Women become the site in literature of the colonial period, on which the symbolic dramatization of an incipient nationalism, the questions and anxieties of Indianness and of colonial modernity, are enacted. Bimala in Tagore's *The Home and the World* (1915, translated, 1919), Savithri in Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) and even Ila in *The Shadow Lines* (1988) embody collective cultural anxieties. The relationship women bear to newly emerging national literatures is both metaphoric (analogical) and metonymic (representative). In addition, as symbolic repositories of tradition and maternal nature and nurture, women are often identified with a traditional, and backward-looking nationalism (McClintock, 1993, 66). Thus, Bimala in Tagore's novel becomes the battleground for conflicting notions of liberal humanism or civic nationalism, on the one hand, and ethnic nationalism or fundamentalism, on the other. Even the clash of cultures in Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* is conveyed through the contrasting figures of Madeleine and Savithri; on another plane, the collapse of community and identity is powerfully depicted through the changing fortunes of Ayah in Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*.

Sangari and Vaid in *Recasting Women* (1989) have elaborated the implications of deep - rooted and widespread changes in the cultural (social-economic-domestic-conjugal) formations of colonial India in reformulating patriarchies and effecting structural shifts in social arrangements. It is in this moment of challenge to prevailing socio-cultural arrangements that much of the 'new' literatures had their origin, as I have mentioned in the first section.

Since men were in the public domain and subject to colonial control, (see Partha Chatterjee, 1986, 1992) women were often the conduit to express their anxieties over their discrepant dislocations. How women bore the brunt of masculine anxieties and yet managed to clear and create a space of their own through writing is related by Tharu and Lalitha in *Women Writing in India* (2 vols., 1991)

Although women had no direct access to English education till early twentieth century, they were often encouraged to learn English privately or read English literature in translation. Thus, English literature was not an entirely unknown entity among upper class educated women in late nineteenth and early twentieth century India. Tharu and Lalitha's archival work also unearthed considerable evidence to prove the existence of indigenous traditions of women's writing that "emerge at the contested margins of patriarchy, empire and nation". (Tharu and Lalitha, 1991, Pref xvii) There are complexities in the cultural fabric that must be considered, for example, the politics of canon building or the tension between public and private realities, to fully appreciate cultural context in which women write. If we look at the contexts and politics of women's writing and its reception in India and elsewhere, certain processes of censorship, and suppression become evident. In the context of a national colloquium on censorship, held in Hyderabad in July, 2001, Ammu Joseph distinguishes between censorship by mob or street censorship and official or state censorship, on the one hand, and the more subtle forms of censorship, often rooted in gender, that stifle creativity, on the other. (The Hindu, July 15) Often this censorship is self-imposed, in order to negotiate the patriarchal restraints of everyday life.

Novelists like Shashi Deshpande (b. 1938) and Anita Desai (b. 1937) have thematised the middle class woman's predicament by foregrounding the tensions between inherited traditions and a newly articulated selfhood. The realities of gender

violence, rigid norms of female behaviour and constant suppression of female desire underpin novels like *That Long Silence*, *The Darkness Holds no Terrors* (Deshpande) and Roy's *The God of Small Things*. Roy's novel, in fact, breaks the silence on race, class and gender in a manner reminiscent of Greek tragedy. Further, these gaps and silences, in a sense, should underwrite our recognition of the fact that it is not only women, but other subaltern groups - like dalits in India or aboriginal natives in Australia - who have been relegated to the margins of national cultures or literatures.

With the emergence of fundamentalism and fascism, almost all over the world in the 1990s, it is crucial to go beyond nationalisms to perceive the constructedness of the categories of literature and genre. Received notions of literature or genre often act as limiting frames or fixes, which are inadequate to represent the varieties of newly emerging literatures all over the world.

One function of the newly emerging literatures is to constantly interrogate, challenge and extend the categories of literature. Women's writing, however, has contested its marginal position to emerge as central to literature. Some feminist criticisms, have highlighted the constructedness (by patriarchy) of the category of literature and literary meaning and have expanded our understanding of these categories.

4.4.3 Conceptual Challenges

"The interaction of 'English' (Ashcroft et al., 1989, 181) writing with the older traditions of orature or literature in postcolonial societies, and the emergence of a writing which has as a major aim the assertion of social and cultural difference, have radically questioned easy assumptions about the characteristics of the genres we usually employ as structuring and categorizing literature as novel, lyric, epic, play, etc. Our sense, not only of that which ought to enter the canon, but also of what could be included under the rubric of 'literature', has been altered by writers writing in an inherited English language. (Ashcroft, 181). Contemporary Asian and African literatures, as a result of the vitality of their oral and performance traditions, have offered a number of alter/native ways of conceiving narrative structure. Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1980) is again a good example of the use of oral narrative traditions where chronology, linearity and continuity are dispensed with and replaced with a digressive, looping narrative. Similarly, standard English is replaced with a kitschy, chutnified mix of colloquialness. In a three part essay titled 'Poles of Recovery'; From Dutt to (Nirad) Choudhary (Hindu, July 29, 2001) the noted writer Amit Chaudhuri makes a subtle point:

English prose style, in the hands of writers like Chaudhuri (who learnt English as a second language) and Naipaul, has been an instrument of ambivalence; neither of these two writers, among the greatest post-colonial stylists of English prose, come from the upper reaches of their respective societies. In Chaudhuri's hands, English prose style, becomes the measure of one who feels he does not quite belong On the other hand, Rushdie's "kichee" prose, with its "Bombay mix" of Hindi, English and Indian English, is a hegemonic language of an upper middle class generation in post-independence, post-liberalisation India ... this "kichee" language is far from an African creole or pidgin, or being a language of the dispossessed.

It is thus from a privileged location that a Rushdie can put the claims of Indian writing in English, as superior to regional language writing. Many years ago in a Writers Workshop symposium, P. Lal, its founder, claimed:

Without trying to be facetious I should like to suggest that only in English can the real Indian poetry be written; any other poetry is likely to be Bengali-slanted or Gujarati-based, and so on ...”

Possibly, one way of countering the hegemonic claims of Indian writers writing in English, is not to resist but to join them. It is in this that proliferating translations can be seen as a positive and enabling way to bridge the gap between a regional writer and a (inter) national audience. The choice between confining oneself to a limited audience / readership, and submitting to the publisher, market and readership is a difficult one for the writer, but one which has to be negotiated.

4.5 LET US SUM UP

In this overview of the Indo-Anglian novel as a representative body of South Asian writing, I have attempted to deal with some of the crucial critical issues of postcoloniality, canonicity and pedagogy, as central to the construction of literature. I have also suggested the significance of gender and class locations in determining the author's fictional aspirations and literary styles. Taken in conjunction with our knowledge of other literatures, this should furnish us with a clear picture of the issues at stake while approaching new literatures in English in South Asia and the developing world.

4.6 QUESTIONS

1. To what extent does the canon determine our idea of what constitutes literature? Discuss with examples.
2. Discuss the central issues in the emergence of South Asian literatures in English, using Indo-Anglian fiction as a point of entry.
3. What is the role of women's writing in newly emerging literatures?

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UNIT 5 AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE : INTERROGATING NATIONAL MYTHS

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 History and Identity
 - 5.2.1 Tracking the Course of Australian Studies
 - 5.2.2 Issues of a National Identity
- 5.3 National Myths and Contestations
 - 5.3.1 Constructing the National Image
 - 5.3.2 Contestations
- 5.4 Outside and Inside the Canon
- 5.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.6 Questions
- 5.7 Suggested Readings

5.0 OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this unit is to introduce you to Australian Literature that some of you may be reading for the first time. We will, therefore, familiarize you with the geographical, socio-political and other contexts that shape the literature of this island-continent and the various kinds of writing that fall under its rubric. Your textual study within the scope of the course is confined to the study of a white canonical writer, Australia's Nobel Prize laureate, Patrick White, but it is important to learn that there is a wide body of literary creation in Australia today that includes Aboriginal, women's and immigrant writing. Besides, it is important to understand the history of the country and how its changing dimensions have left an impact on the way national myths have been created and contested in the creative realm.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Australia, the smallest of continents, the largest of islands, fifth among the world's nations in area, had indigenous peoples living there for thousands of years before the British claimed the land as *terra nullius* - empty land - following Captain James Cook's invasion in 1788. It established a penal colony and named it New South Wales. Other colonies of the British empire were gradually added such as Tasmania (1825), Western Australia (1829), South Australia (1836), Victoria (1851) and Queensland (1859). They had their separate constitutions till January 26, 1901, when the several states decided to come together and form a federation under the Commonwealth of Australia.

For a long time the narration of the history of Australia began with Cook's invasion and the Aboriginal people were considered mere wards of the state rather than as full citizens in their own right. It was only in 1967, after a national referendum, where ninety percent of the white population voted in their favour, that the Aboriginal people got citizenship rights. Initially Australia followed a white-only immigration policy but the years from 1947 to 1964 witnessed a policy of assimilation of Chinese war refugees, for instance, and later of integration from 1964 to 1973. In 1973 the Whitlam government declared Australia as a multicultural society and ever since the country has tried to maintain that character in letter and spirit.

These changes in the national policies have had a decided impact on the way the history of Australia is being told and the literary voices that are gaining precedence in recent times. The starting points in the narration of the history of Australia no longer necessarily erase the Aboriginal narratives that existed before the arrival of the colonizers. What was originally presented in many mainstream white historical narratives as a peaceful settlement stands revealed as a traumatic invasion that led to the intentional and unintentional decimation of large numbers of Aborigines through conflict, disease and so-called welfare policies. The impact of later immigration policies on the socio-cultural atmosphere as well as the change in attitudes to women in Australian society too is being reflected in the literary canons of Australia. The changing demographic make-up Australia has introduced many counter-narratives that are challenging traditional national myths in some ways and endorsing new ones of a multicultural social milieu. These diverse voices especially of Aborigines, women and immigrants in Australia are rewriting the way Australia's national identity has been constructed.

5.2 HISTORY AND IDENTITY

5.2.1 Tracking the Course of Australian Literary Studies

Oral traditions within the Aboriginal as well as white settler communities of Australia formed the bedrock of early Australian writing. Oral forms such as Aboriginal song cycles, colonial ballads and bush songs were dominant influences that came to be part of the early written forms of the Australian nation and its cultural consciousness. At this formative stage of the Australian nation as we know it today, categories of writing that would not necessarily be considered 'literature' in the traditional sense—such as letters, journals and travelogues—formed a significant corpus of work that represented or gave insight into the construction of the sense of an Australian identity.

One issue central to this process of the construction of a national identity has been whether to adopt a stance of affiliation or difference vis-à-vis the British and European colonial models of literature and culture. The initial trend was to constantly either use the European models as a point of reference or comparison. However, convict and bush traditions, especially in short stories and ballads, culled out a more distinctive paradigm as they focused on the specific responses of the new denizens of the land to the natural and social environment of the Australian penal system and the outback. The thematic drift of writing falling within the convict traditions often focused on a sense of resistance to authority and the system, while that belonging to the tradition of the outback dwelt on the pioneering spirit of survival. To this period belongs the *Bulletin* school of writing which peaked in the 1880s. Writers like Banjo Paterson and Henry Lawson, who belonged to this school, drew on these Australian nativist traditions in their verse and prose. They elevated the Australian Bush and the concept of mateship to cultural symbols and stood in distinction to colonial cultural values of the metropolitan centres in Europe. The wild environment of the Australian continent and the need this generated for the pioneers and bushmen to stick together in a strange sense of interdependence and egalitarianism became hallmarks of what it meant to be Australian to many.

In time the very Australian canon that had been used to forge a new identity of Australia distinct from its colonial legacy by white Australian writers came to be challenged for its conceptualization and presentation of a monolithic Australian identity. The fact that it favoured male white writers and excluded the voices of other sections of Australian society was seen as evidence of how it was replicating in many ways the same trends of the British canon that it had been trying to disassociate itself from. As a reaction to this, at one level the focus started to shift to representations of Australia by women writers such as Judith Wright, Barbara Bayton and Elizabeth Jolley. They revealed through their work that the conceptualisation of the Bush and mateship as symbols of Australianness had hitherto in either very prominent or subtle

ways excluded the role women played in the pioneering phase and in the later establishment of the nation. They also showed how from their perspective these symbols had romanticized the settling of the Australian nation.

A new dimension to Australian studies was added in due course of time with indigenous writing being included in the purview of the Australian writing. Thus a growing body of Aboriginal writing came to be included and studied and this includes early versions and English translations of Aboriginal song sequences and folk tales. In some instances an indigenous word 'Koorie' is used to designate this literature. The publication and popularity since the 1960s of Kath Walker's poetry, the plays of Kevin Gilbert and Jack Davis, the novels of Colin Johnson, the autobiographical work of Ruby Langford, Sally Morgan and Glenyse Ward have proved the strong literary presence of Aboriginal voices in Australia. Their work revealed how what had been presented as the peaceful settling of the island-continent, had in fact been a very destructive and traumatic invasion and forced occupation of the Aboriginal spaces. This writing is directed at throwing light on these historical realities and situating the present position of Aborigines within that framework so that redressal can be made. The political and personal element in this kind of writing thus is very strong.

Another kind of writing that finds a place today in Australia is immigrant/diasporic writing and writers such as Judah Waten, David Martin, Dimitris Tsaloumas, Yasmine Gonneratne, Adib Khan, Satendra Nandan, Beth Yahp are just some of the representative figures in this field. Once again their writing is part of the steady flow of revisions to a simplistic conceptualization of the Australian identity. As the multicultural nature of Australia's population becomes politically and socioculturally accepted, these voices and what they have to say are gaining precedence.

As far as considerations of genre go, during the initial phase of literary production in Australia, forms or genres of literature that had strong roots in oral traditions held sway in a significant way. Thus poetry and ballads as well as short stories, which were the literary versions of the songs and fireside yarns formed a prominent segment of the literary output that came out especially during the period when the *Bulletin* had its heyday. 'Banjo' Paterson, A.D. Hope and Judith Wright are perhaps among the best known white proponents of the ballad and poetry genres. Paterson's 'Waltzing Matilda' is a ballad that has even attained the status of an unofficial national anthem. Early Aboriginal writing too had a strong poetic component. Kath Walker (later known as Oodheroo Nunukul) and Colin Johnson (later known as Mudrooroo) are the best known exponents in this area. The Jindyworobak movement founded by Rex Ingamells in the late 1930s deserves mention here as an attempt to bring together these two streams by appropriating or introducing elements of the Aboriginal traditions as understood by white writers, into their poetic practice.

In more recent times it is more difficult to trace trends in the field of poetry because of the proliferation of the variety of voices and themes in this field. The same applies to the other genres as well. While it was comparatively easy at one point in time to pick out a Henry Lawson or Barbara Bayton in the field of short stories, the academic resistance to canonization and the diversity of writers and texts makes that much harder today.

The genres of fiction and personal narratives, however, have grown from strength in Australia as they have in the rest of the world as well. Writers of fiction like Patrick White, Xavier Herbert and Randolph Stow have been followed by renowned writers such as David Malouf, Archie Weller and Thea Astley. Sally Morgan and Ruby Langford are two Aboriginal writers whose contributions to the genre of personal narratives have not only popularized the genre, but also given a broader audience to a perspective on Aboriginal issues in Australia. The main thematic preoccupations remain intricately linked with the conception of the nation space. What has changed

is the diversity of perspectives brought to this and included within the purview of the Australian literature.

5.2.2 Issues of National Identity

We have already stated a few things about Australian literary history. In this section we will see how different sections of the Australian people have looked at these questions. The Bicentenary celebrations of 1988 raised questions about how the beginnings of 'Australia' as a nation have been portrayed in history, literature and popular culture. While for the white settlers of British origin it was a commemoration of the beginning of British colonial settlement two hundred years ago and, therefore, called 'Australia Day', for the Aborigines it meant destruction of their cultures, civilization and relationship with the land, and is, therefore termed 'Invasion Day'. To the former, it is marked by the need to create the myths of national foundation and beginnings that justify their presence on the island-continent. To the latter, it underscores the beginning of a history of loss and the need to question those myths of the Australian nation. The debate is part of a larger debate on the way national identity has been constructed in Australia. The fact that the Aborigines, their history, stories and their political positions have been successfully elided for so long has put a question mark on how and at what cost the Australian identity has been so constructed.

On account of the early history of convict transportation (about 1,50,000 who came in chains) the population comprised of those from the lower strata of British society and civil and military officials to administer the penal colony. The 'pioneers', those from the aristocracy who were free migrants and enjoyed the cultural benefits of education and higher social status focused on what was novel and curious for them, viz., the landscape and the flora and fauna, as well as the indigenous people of the land, that is, the Aboriginal people.

In terms of literary production it meant describing the strange sights and experiences through early journals, letters or other pieces of writing. With the beginning of the gold rush in 1851 resulting from the discovery near Bathurst being made public and subsequent discoveries at Clunes, Ballarat and Bendigo in the state of Victoria (capital Melbourne), intellectual and professional pursuits began to flourish in the cities. This raised a demand for popular literature though the early group of writers, mostly British born, wrote for the larger audience in Britain that enjoyed the exotic flavour of their works. Among this early group of writers who wrote about Australian life and landscape were Catherine Spence, Marcus Clarke and Boldrewood. While Catherine Spence occasionally had the cities as her theme, Marcus Clarke wrote about the penal system and Boldrewood had the Bush as his theme. It is the Bush theme that emerged as one of the important characteristics of Australian writing.

As the ideals of socialism, unionism and nationalism spread by 1890s and Federation took place in 1901, the year that was witness to "White Australia" legislation, the publication scene too changed. Journals and papers, such as *The Bulletin* and *the Worker*, were not tied to the metropolitan centre and catered more to the local reading public. Henry Lawson was a popular writer who published his prose and verse in *The Bulletin*. Angus and Robertson also started publication in 1895, starting with the publication of Banjo Paterson's *The Man from Snowy River*.

The Aboriginal people who had become dispossessed and diasporic in their own country took a long time to get together, after the 1960s only, and start working for a pan-Aboriginality, their people's common identity. This allowed the construction of an effective counter discourse, articulation of their 'Aboriginality' – their common identity. Thus they articulated an oppositional consciousness, a consciousness that defied the dominant white representations of, as Daylight and Johnstone suggest, one, science and anthropology, which saw them as primitive people; two, of law, which saw them as wards of the State rather than as citizens; three, of religion, which saw

them as pagan or heathen. Thus an identity politics became possible. The focal point is the empirical experience and in written literature it takes on the extra dimension of linguistic representation. For example, Cliff Watego (1988), while explicating several socio-cultural questions behind the production of Aboriginal literature, begins by quoting Jack Davis:

We used to speak in those days when we were talking about politics – black-politics – of how we were going to make ourselves heard within the white Australian society. And even in those days when we went back to our little dingy rooms, we said (referring to, among others, Kath Walker, Faith Bandler, and Ken Colbung), ‘well we’ve got to write about this, we’ve got to tell the people’. (Watego 11)

Jack Davis is referring here to the 1960s – the time when leading black activists could strike a note of consensus to enlighten the white public about their grievances and aims through literature. Around the same time Kath Walker’s first two volumes of poetry, *We are Going* (1964) and *The Dawn is at Hand* (1966), sold extremely well making her one of the highest selling poets in Australian history, and thus setting a promising example for other black writers to follow. This budding literary movement (which can also be seen as a supplementary system to the larger Aboriginal movement) gained further momentum in the year 1971 with the publication of Kevin Gilbert’s *End of Dreamtime* which celebrated the very concept of ‘Aboriginality’ and denounced white Australia for its maltreatment of the Aborigines. It is interesting to note here that most of these prominent literary figures were associated with the larger Aboriginal movement. Both Walker and Davis, for example, were associated with the efforts of Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI), which spearheaded the Aboriginal movement throughout the 1960s. These people were also part of the famous Aboriginal tent ‘embassy’ set up in front of Parliament House in Canberra on Australia Day, 1972, to peacefully demonstrate and draw wider attention to the Aboriginal cause. This in turn directed attention at the way national identity was being envisaged. No longer could white Australia afford to ignore that it had a ‘black’ history in more ways than one. Just as the indigenous people of Australia are contesting the white identity of Australia, other groups are taking a look at national myths and pointing out how the constant need for revising them to incorporate the increasingly multicultural faces of Australian society.

5.3 NATIONAL MYTHS AND CONTESTATIONS

5.3.1 Constructing the National Image

Every nation constructs a national image through its histories, national traditions, myths and legacies. These are passed on through the popular consciousness and consistently reinforced by public institutions like and discourses such as literature, the media and academia. This construction of the national image is a long drawn out and subtle process. In Australia, though there were myths linked to the land of Aboriginal origin this was rarely incorporated in the narration of the nation. The predominant impulse in the earlier phase of Australia’s history was to create a national image that set it apart from the colonial legacy of being a penal colony. The myth of settlement was a convenient national narrative that places under erasure both the Aborigines and the historical realities of the founding of the Australian nation. It valorized the spirit of the people, especially the men, who played a significant part in the founding of what was in time to evolve into the Australian nation.

Myths of the new land took formal literary shape by the end of the nineteenth century in the works of the early settlers. These sought to idealise the men and women who confronted the new environment, so different from what they were accustomed to in

popular image of the Bush. He celebrated the spirit of the white bush folk but depicted the outback as bleak and unrelenting. This celebration was at the expense of the city though ironically it was often the city dwellers only who propagated this myth and used it to construct a national cultural identity that was different from the urban ethos celebrated by the imperial centre. The early ballads and stories presented the image of the traveling bushman, the figure of the Outback (the Australian word for remote settlement in the interiors of the land).

Also important in the formation of a national identity, different from that of Britain, was the Australian participation in World War I (1914 – 18) and the tragedy of Gallipoli. Many soldiers from Australia and New Zealand died in the tragedy of Gallipoli. The interwar years, the years of the great world Depression, left about one-thirds of the Australian workforce unemployed by 1931. This war marked a crucial point at which the umbilical cord linking the British imperial center and the Australian antipodes was severed. Following this there was a growing tendency to associate differently on the international front. World war II (1939 – 1945) brought the theatres of war closer to the Antipodes due to the threat from Japan and was another watermark in the nation's history. It accelerated industrialization and opened Australia to alliances with America and a growing awareness that it was part of Asia. The Vietnam War of 1965 brought together these trends and heralded the repercussions they would have for the nation and its construction of a national identity. The influx of immigrants from Southern Europe and South-East Asia that followed in the postwar years set the stage for a change towards a more multicultural paradigm of national consciousness and social policy.

5.3.2 Contestations

Two strong opposing impulses have been seen to pervade much of Australian literature and popular creation on account of this historical course in its attempts to establish a distinct identity. Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra in their Preface to *Dark Side of the Dream: Australian literature and the postcolonial mind* argue that Australia's postcoloniality itself is subject to debate. This is because it is a settler colony where the white settlers continue in some measure the colonial oppression and dispossession of the original inhabitants of the continent. At the same time it wishes at least in the public imagination to break free of the colonial seal and its allegiances.

It is a lapsed colonial power locked in an unresolved and undeclared struggle with the original possessors for legitimacy and land, producing a neocolonial form of literature from a neocolonial mentality that is still obsessed with the exploited Other. Into this complex is embedded a flourishing oppositional postcolonial development in politics, culture and literature. (Hodge and Mishra xiv)

They discuss how this double-bind is part of the construction of the "Australian stereotype, the so-called 'typical Australian', and the 'typical' space that he occupies the Australian Bush, or outback" (xv). According to them the stereotype is a "Caucasian adult male, an itinerant rural worker of no fixed address". Though the values, language and cultural ethos of this stereotype are "widely claimed to represent Australian authenticity" and to be a "touchstone of Australian identity ... a yardstick of Australianness in literature and other arts, as though truly Australian literature should be written by, for and about this character"(xv). The fact that Banjo Patterson's bush song "Waltzing Matilda" – a ballad about a wandering swagman (farm worker) in the Australian outback which celebrates the spirit of survival in the harsh landscape and the bold pioneering spirit – is the unofficial national anthem of Australia is another pointer to this phenomenon.

The paradox they point out is that Australia is in reality a highly urbanized country where this figure is not and was not ever a truly representative figure. Hodge and Mishra estimate that this figure could never have constituted more than fifteen

percent of the population even in the heydays of the pioneering movement. And yet this, the figure that is at the center of the Bush myth, has become so central to much of traditional canonical Australian literature. This is the representative figure of Australia in the popular imagination. Examining this phenomenon they analyse the erasures it makes. Hodge and Mishra argue

At the most superficial level, this figure exists to suppress from the national image recognition of what he isn't. He encodes a class, race and gender identity which classifies women, aborigines and new migrants as un-Australian, a potent fact which is immediately recognized by all those who are subjected to this symbolic annihilation. (xv)

The early myths of the Australian nation whether they were drawn from the experiences of mateship in the Australian outback or the travails of Gallipoli had a tendency to not only elide the perspective of the Aborigines in the narration of the nation but also of the female gender. In more recent times those articulations of the national myth are increasingly being replaced by new myths of a more inclusive multicultural Australia. The biggest impulse for this has come from the sudden upsurge of writing by women and Aborigines. Even within the realm of Aboriginal writing women have taken the forefront with writers like Sally Morgan and Ruby Langford making a big impact on the increased public acceptance of Aboriginal narratives. The increase in autobiographical and biographical texts has also blurred the line between fact and fiction, between genres and disciplines such as history and literature. As a matter of fact, these voices have often made the personal narrative the vehicle of political protest and awareness raising. Immigrant writing too takes a look at the way multiculturalism actually works in Australia. The anomie faced by the immigrants of various backgrounds and the historical legacies and narratives they bring with them challenge versions of multiculturalism that are trying to assimilate differences under a simplistically homogenous 'Australian' umbrella.

5.4 OUTSIDE AND INSIDE THE CANON

Increasingly there is no consensus on national canons as far as literature goes. This applies to Australia as well. The term 'Australian literature' has been used to refer to a body of genres and texts that has always been determined by social and political factors with different orientations to the dominant groups wielding political power at different times in Australia's history. Originally the desire to establish an Australian literary canon was deeply linked with a desire to create an alternate tradition for study and public consumption that saw itself as distinct from the British canon. The construction of the canon involved the designation of the great Australian writers and their works as at once worthy to be set along side canonical figures of the imperial canon and yet in opposition to them. This canon was to make clear the colonists' and settlers' rights to belong to the ranks of the imperial center as well as to the land they had invaded and colonised. The paradox was that at the same time they were trying to earn the seal of approval from the very colonial system whose values they were in supposed opposition to.

There are two ways the Australian canon is being contested. The first involves revealing what the canon does not include. This implies revising the canon to include new texts that remove the imbalance of a literary tradition that gave preference to white male writers depicting a particular image of Australia. The other involves taking another look at so-called canonical authors and texts and revealing how they inscribe challenges to the traditional conceptualization of what is Australian literature. This involves a process of rereading.

Patrick White, one of the best known and most taught of Australian writers, is interesting in the way he is both positioned inside and outside the canon. Today he is

considered very much a canonical figure for Australian literature. In a certain sense he is the equivalent of what Shakespeare is to British literature. Ken Goodwin in *A History of Australian Literature* feels strongly that the eleven novels of Patrick White constitute the most impressive oeuvre in Australian fiction, a judgment verified according to him by White being the only Australian writer awarded the Nobel Prize. The paradox is evident here: it is the external and international recognition that bolsters Patrick White's position in the canon. For much of the time that he did write the reception his work got in Australia was anything but flattering.

Patrick White came from settler stock, so in a sense he was bonafide 'Australian'. However his temperament and his higher education at Cambridge exposed him to the literature, the values and the ethos of the imperial center and Europe in a strong way. He evinced in many ways the taut tension between the cultural values of the Antipodean margins of Australia and the colonial center. He generated as a result quite a lot of hostility and drew critical flak for his vocal aversion to what he saw as Australian philistinism or lack of genuine culture. His most (in)famous words about seeing "in all directions stretched the Great Australian Emptiness, in which the mind is the least of possessions ... and the march of material ugliness does not raise a quiver from the average nerves" (15) struck a raw nerve in the popular psyche.

From one point of view this kind of an opinion was predictable in that it was very much a part of the modernist critique of postwar society in Europe and America. White's use of symbols as a recurring technique in his writing also drew upon European traditions of twentieth century experimental writing in Europe. This however worked against the Australian celebration of the spirit of the average man, the success of settlement and survival in the face of odds. Throughout his career, while White's works were recognized and applauded on both sides of the Atlantic where they fell into predictable moulds, in Australia critics and the reading public did not evince such a positive outlook. What White was creating went against the grain of the national image and myth. It debunked what the Australian's prized and valorized most. The Nobel Prize winner who is today a celebrated canonical figure was at one time designated as 'Australia's Most Unreadable Novelist' and had the likes of A.D. Hope dismiss his work as "illiterate verbal sludge".

The thematic preoccupations and techniques employed by White were out of synch with the more canonically acceptable social realist writing that celebrated the spirit of survival in the Outback and the Bush, the camaraderie of mateship in the face of all odds. Thus when White explored the interior dilemmas of alienated characters seeking totality and internal wholeness, or when he set his narratives in urban milieus and abundantly used symbols and motifs he seemed to be breaking the unwritten laws of Australianness. This was seen in some quarters as evincing a lack of rapport with the life of the average Australian. A novel like *The Solid Mandala*, set in the suburbs of Sydney and focusing on the interior drama of existence in the face of decay and loss, could have been set, it has been argued, in any urban location in the western world – it was not conventionally or typically Australian.

Paradoxically, White consciously set out to work against the Australian literary tradition of naturalism and realism. He says he wanted "to people the Australian emptiness in the only way I am able to" (44). What the outside world and White himself saw as the greatest strengths of his writing were for a long time an affront to the Australian national image. As a result it undermined his popular and critical acceptance until the Nobel Prize made him a very desirable addition to the canon. Rereading even a supposedly canonical writer in this light reveals the many ways in which the horizons of national and literary expectations have been and continue to be redefined in Australian literature today.

5.5 LET US SUM UP

Australian literature, like the national literature of most countries has been a vehicle that has both endorsed and contested the national myth and desire to construct a distinct identity. It is useful to explore the possibilities this has opened in terms of interrogating the premises that went into constructing canons and the ones that are now being used to revise them.

5.6 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss some aspects of the course Australian writing has taken.
2. Discuss aspects of the inclusion and exclusion of Aborigines, and other groups within the framework of the construction of the Australian national identity.
3. Analyse how Patrick White stands both inside and outside the Australian canon for literature.

5.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 6 CANADIAN LITERATURE: SCANNING THE LITERARY LANDSCAPE

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Canada : Country and Character
 - 6.2.1 History
 - 6.2.2 Canada's Cultural and Literary Milieu
 - 6.2.3 Forging a Literary Identity
- 6.3 The Writing on the Wall
 - 6.3.1 Overcoming the Odds
 - 6.3.2 Prose
 - 6.3.3 Poetry
 - 6.3.4 Drama
- 6.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.5 Questions
- 6.6 Suggested Readings

6.0 OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this unit is to familiarize students with tendencies and trends that embody English-Canadian writing. With the emergence of a keen interest in literatures that emanate from beyond the boundaries of Britain and the United States, this unit will focus on the historical, social and literary impacts that have helped Canada evolve its own literary tradition and identity. It will also aim to present a survey of this literature from the early beginnings to its present invigoration and variety.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

With the end of World War II, the sun set on the British empire. Previously colonised national units scrambled to assert and obtain their independence. Reverberations of this emerging scenario of political de/reconstruction found their echoes in the literary arenas of nations across the world. The literary commonwealth of English speaking/writing peoples, with its legacy of an inherited idiom, usage and tone, set about evolving its own indigenous counterparts. This meant that each national-literary entity had to struggle to come to terms with literary traditions determined by the erstwhile centre. This underlines the clash between the forces that represented anxiety (or tradition) with those that stood for value which had to be reconsidered and reframed given the new ground realities. The need for an indigenous literary outpouring was keenly felt. New literatures reflected the contemporary historical, social, and political pressures as they endeavoured to speak in a tongue that equally addressed native and global readership. There also emerged a rapidly changing scenario that revolved round evaluative procedures in literatures. In a fast changing world literature was slowly incorporated into a bigger domain of reference called "cultural studies." These new literatures had to traverse forward with grim determination and carve out their own niche in the pantheon of literatures written in English.

Canada belongs to the literary commonwealth of English speaking/writing nations. It has also had to come to terms with its unique position in the North American

subcontinent. Canadian literary traditions have had their roots in England, France and the United States. It is a young nation as far as its written history goes. Populated by indigenous peoples since the earliest of times, Canada saw the advent of Europeans in the fifteenth century. Skirmishes between English and French settlements in North America continued intermittently till 1759 when Britain gained control of all of Canada. The ensuing American Revolution revealed Canada's anomalous position. It was characterised by a sense of loyalty to Britain, the mother country, on one side, and the desire to establish selfhood, like the United States, on the other. The nation's history, therefore, reflects strains of both continuity and breach, as the country has had to look across its eastern seaboard and its southern boundary. Its early literature in English, too, has shown similar trends, but only for a short while. By the early nineteenth century, however, Canadian writing has endeavoured to evolve its a voice which bore the hallmarks of assertion and strength. In the twentieth century, especially in the second half, creative resilience and variety can be perceived in its literary enterprise. Towards the close of the century, Canadian writing can be seen to have metamorphosed into stances characterised by growth, coherence, and selfhood, as the nation marches ahead in its quest for modernity.

The formation of the Canadian canon was initiated by early literary histories of the country. Most of these emerged from the extra-literary concept of the nation that involved the "Canadian-ness" of literature written in the country. The early literary historians have looked at literature and canon-formation along with the spiritual and political development of the nation. Later Canadian literary output has consciously broken out of these restrictive shackles by aspiring to address readership across the globe.

6.2 CANADA: COUNTRY AND CHARACTER

6.2.1 History

Literature can never written in a vacuum and writers respond to the pressures of society of which they are a part. They are affected by the kinds of people that make up their milieu and their nation. In their writings are rendered reflections of, and responses to, these realities.

National literary canons attempt to bring into existence a definition of a national literature that is tied to the concept of nationhood. Such canons provide the literary vision that shapes newly articulated work and expresses how a culture locates its writings within its larger history. It, thus, becomes essential to undertake a brief exposition of Canada's history. It is the second largest country in the world and enjoys a unique Janus-like position, (Roman god with two heads guarding two doors) in which it looks towards two aggressive and dominating neighbours--the United States of America to the south and Great Britain, across the Atlantic, in the east. It was only in 1867 that Canada emerged as a stable political entity whose present national boundaries were finalised as late as 1949.

Before the advent of white man, its native peoples, the Indians and the Inuits inhabited it. In 1497, when John Cabot of Italy sailed up the Gulf of St. Lawrence, the white men first made his appearance in this rugged, sparsely populated land. Initially the eastern seaboard saw the establishment of white settlements that existed either as trading posts or as military garrisons. Imperialist designs encouraged the French and the British to establish these settlements. Till the seventeenth century it was the French who dominated this imperial race but colonial ambitions brought about the inevitable clashes between the two. The French were defeated in 1759, ensuring that most of settled North America was British. This state of affairs continued for a brief period till the American War of Independence in 1775. It left Canada in a peculiar position as it comprised communities that chose to align themselves with the British rather than the United States. On one hand, these

communities sought to establish a life of modified British social and political traditions; on the other, they hesitated in severing connections with the mother country and adopting the extremes of complete breakaway and independence from it. It was this tendency that laid the social, political and psychological foundations for what eventually cohered as the Canadian nation.

The success of the American War of Independence led to a substantial influx of the Loyalists from the United States to Canada. The War of 1812 united not only the English-speaking Upper Canada and the French-speaking Lower Canada against the expansionist designs of the newly constituted United States; it also promoted a sense of distinctiveness and readjustment within. Napoleonic wars on the Continent resulted in massive European migration to Canada that witnessed new waves of settlers proceeding towards the sparsely populated western regions. Beneath the semblance of peace burned the fires of French-British rivalry. This led to frequent skirmishes between the French and English-speaking populations till 1837 and resulted, ultimately, in Lord Durham's Report of 1839 which paved way for responsible government. A series of conferences led to Confederation in 1867. This meant the creation of the Dominion of Canada that initially comprised the provinces of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario and Quebec. Other provinces joined this Confederation over time; in 1949, New Foundland was the last to join. The national flag was adopted as late as 1975 as the Canada of today emerged with its ten provinces and a central federal government.

6.2.2 Canada's Cultural and Literary Milieu

The Canadian enterprise of nationhood reflects, and is reflected, in its literary history. Four permanent factors emerge as landmarks in its history. They are **a northern character, a historical dependence, a monarchical government, and a committed national destiny** that takes into account special relations with other states. The northern character is ancient in its origins as it harks back to northern European maritime aspirations. What distinguishes the discovery and occupation of Canada from the rest of the Americas is that it was the outcome of the year-round expeditions of Norse seamen-farmers probing the northern seas for new harbours and fisheries, new hay and timber sources. The nation's dependency takes into account the varying degrees of economic, political and strategic reliance that Canada has exhibited down the ages. The northern character itself is a dependent one as it seeks to locate its markets not only for staples and luxuries but also for the needs of the mind and the body. It is the quest for these locations that produced the ancient Norse and Icelandic sagas and gave rise to a new nation in which the political fabric united the technology of an advanced industrial base with the exploitation of the natural resources of its vast area. In the twentieth century, this dependence underwent a transformation in which it was transmuted into the spirit of free association and free alliance with the United States as well as Britain. The country has had to steer cautiously in its dealings with these two juggernauts in political, as well as, economic terms. Canadians have shown little of the republican sentiment and have chosen to remain a British constitutional monarchy. In doing so, they have consciously adopted a national destiny that operates on the twin principles of continuity and change.

One of Canada's starkest realities is the fact that it has two major cultures, the anglophone and the francophone, and many smaller ones. Dual culture, it must be pointed out, is one of history's many harsh gifts to Canada and it has given rise to friction and weakness. As a result, the two predominant cultures have often presented varied perspectives on common experiences. In the one respect that both cultures are united is the shared psychology of endurance and survival, and it is these qualities that engender and sustain modern Canadian writing. It is against the backdrop of these factors in Canadian history that the country's literary history can be better appreciated. The earliest Canadian writing had fulfilled a utilitarian purpose as it was done to help the country's pioneering forefathers keep records. This was followed by another phase that saw the importation of foreign models. This stage was succeeded

by yet another in which imitation and translation of foreign models becomes a norm. The end of this was phase marked by the production of a literature reflecting the Canadian locale and setting. The next phase was characterised by the intensification of this tendency and resulted in the production of independent works. Several literary generations later emerged the early classics of the country's national literature. They mark the penultimate stage of evolution and set the standards of independence and interest that mark a deviation and breaking away from restrictive national moorings. National literary traditions emerged subsequently, defining the parameters of nationalistic standards. In its final stage--that of maturity--the national literature was seen to shed its national concerns, and gain international recognition, thereby opening itself up elsewhere for translation and imitation.

To find a literature is to determine the solidity of the nation's existence in time. The European advent represents the stage of occupation that was marked by the raising of garrisons/fortifications. It is characterised by an attitude of a garrison mentality or a closed community whose values, customs, and manners have been transported intact from another environment and refuse to be influenced by the new surroundings. The situation is characterised by a lack of reconciliation or assimilation. This was succeeded by conflict where the experience of a community's imported reality clashes with the amorphous, but immediate, local reality. This attitude symbolises the frontier mentality that is marked by flight, discovery, and the struggle to endure. Once the community familiarises itself with the new territory, the colonial mentality emerges. It is marked by a fragmented transportation to a newly civilised location which still glorifies an idealised past. The fourth stage is reached with the establishment of a self-defining nation opening itself to the immigrant. He is the outsider seeking entry into an area of conflicting and alien orders and conditions. Canada's literary history reflects this pattern of evolution.

6.2.3 Forging a literary identity

The nationalist leanings of the country's literature have, since its earliest manifestations, remained steadfast in prioritising national self-definition and self-promotion. Nationalist values have occupied the centre-stage in the Canadian literary enterprise as it has sought to define and differentiate the "nation" through myriad literary voices. These literary voices embody the tugs and pulls of creative and critical writing of Canada that has, since its earliest days, been involved in an endeavour to make a strong case for distinctiveness.

English Canada showed an inclination towards maintaining links with the parent culture while French Canada favoured the notion of itself as a fragment pursuing its down separate destiny in North America. Recent canonical and literary debates acknowledge a sense of spiritual continuity with British or American models but insist that ethnic diversity is a reality and will hold sway in the times to come. In his "Conclusion" to the *Literary History of Canada*, Northrop Frye had posed a significant historical question about Canadian identity when he asserted that it is not the literary voices answering the "Who am I?" question that truly spoke for and represented Canadian identity. It is, rather, those literary voices that chose to respond to the "What is here?" question that truly addressed themselves to the country's formulation of its literary canon. This assertion underlines the topographical bent of Canadian writing which focused on the physical environment of the land. Canadian national consciousness emphasizes a sense of difference that is steeped in the awareness of the uniqueness of place. Geography complemented history as literary creativity took off.

The seminal event of Confederation in 1867 is a defining moment in the history of Canada and it can be taken as the event that set into motion Canada's historical/cultural clock. In the early days, the favoured form of writing was poetry, and the poetic aesthetic governing it had been inherited from Britain. Poetry was perceived as a treasure that presented the close communion of the material and

spiritual worlds. This communion symbolised the juxtaposition and merger of the spiritual, political, cultural and historical realities, subsuming in itself the nation. Such writing was imbued with heroic and picturesque features, which, in turn were succeeded by the era of political and constitutional struggle that ended in the establishment of responsible government, and ultimately achieved fruition in the establishment of the Confederation. This phase is characterised by that peculiar bent of mind that reveled and participated in the endeavour of nation building. Reflections of this are to be found in Canadian literary history when pre-Confederation literature that does not reflect the collective struggle for national self-determination is relegated to the canonical margins, as informative but imitative or incidental. That writing which described transcontinental travel, exploration or regional detail with the specificity that suggested mastery is privileged as a kind of literary equivalent to physical and political control over the environment. The writers of the Confederation generation then come to occupy canonical centrality because of the coincidence of their literary maturity with that of the political will and character of the people.

Canada's existence as a nation in the face of the rejection of the American Revolution by the Canadian Loyalists and reverses suffered by America in the War of 1812 are two historical realities that gave to impetus the sense of national identity and pride within the Canadian psyche. Canadian writing initially emerged from a colonial derivative culture and then attempted to deviate and evolve into a mature national identity in which maturity is not just a national but a particular geographical, political, and cultural version of a universal ideal. Subsequent writing and canonical studies are an apt example of this propensity as the seeds of this emerge from the preoccupation with national identity. Canadian writers at the end of the nineteenth century were more inclined towards defining the contours of the vast expanses of land that comprised their country and they aspired for an emotional equation with it. The common trend noticeable through the literature of that era was an adherence to the Romantic/Victorian literary models of the mother country (England). This propensity indicated only too clearly the colonial shackles that still bound the land.

The turn of the century was marked by the arrival of waves of immigrants from other nations. Time and conditions conspired together, compelling and generating fresh perspectives in the creative arts. Twentieth century Canadian writing is characterised by this new outlook that seeks to reconsider and transform the earlier impulses and literary responses. A number of Canadian writers lamented the absence of a critical climate and underlined the stringent need for a more critical approach for evaluating its writing. The fundamental criticism against writing was that it ignored the intelligence by not addressing the individual and, as a result, it seemed enervated. By failing to arouse the intellect, such writing could never authenticate that basic component of modernism that is concerned with real experience. Its absence, thereby, precluded it from the domain of modernism. The outstanding reason for this was various forms of narrowness that manifested themselves in Canada as Puritanism, provincialism and colonialism.

In determining critical parameters, the A. J. M. Smith/ John Sutherland debate occupied the literary centrestage. Smith's cosmopolitan ideal attempted a synthesis of national distinctiveness with international merit and represented the fusion of the traditional criterion of universality with the modernist standard of internationalism. Sutherland viewed the literary landscape from a perspective of socialism that had strong Canadian undertones. He suggested that the unreal and ethereal quality of Canadian writing was due to the fact that the middle-class Marxist writer usually came from England into an environment doubly alien because it was passing through a period of special change.

The first two decades of the twentieth century had seen a revolutionary turn of events. These events had inspired writers into repudiating the old ideas and set them off on a new path of creative energy and experimentation. Geographically speaking, localised and concentrated literary activity shifted from the environs of Montreal to Toronto.

The 1930s and 1940s witnessed the polemics of militant writing that was doctrinaire, aggressive and in revolt against society to an extent never seen in Canadian literature. The 1950s saw the emergence of another trend that was antithetical to the aggressively realistic writing of early modernism. This new writing exhibited a combination of simplicity, power, sympathy and intelligence as the guiding spirits, especially in the field of criticism. By emphasising the need for a critical outlook in literary assessment, the writers/critics laid the foundation of the emergence of Canadian schools of criticism. At the close of 1950s, there emerged new perspectives that eclipsed earlier tendencies. They sought to highlight a brand of modernism that displayed a strain that was both urban and realist. They advocated the principles of artistic freedom and integrity, and sound standards of craftsmanship.

This new phase in Canadian writing was characterised by creative ebullience and self-confidence. By shedding the vestiges of Victoriana, the country's literary enterprise sought to formulate new parameters for itself, especially in the sphere of literary evaluation and judgement. This resulted in the acknowledgement of a writer's presence within the sphere of contemporary time and space. The ways of seeing a setting were given far more importance than the setting itself and this became a pervasive influence on the writer's perceptions of reality instead of reality itself.

The pre-1950s phase can be described as one of *gemeinschaft* or a discourse that was characterised by an older type of village commune which had been replaced by the modern *gesellschaft* or a discourse of a conglomeration of isolated individuals in a market system. Given the emergence of new critical and theoretical perspectives on Canadian literature, it becomes quite apparent that the canon of the 1950s onwards had been greatly inclined towards creating a space for itself.

As the centre of Canadian life moved from the fortress to the metropolis, the garrison mentality changed correspondingly. It began as an expression of the moral values that were generally accepted and then, as society got more complicated and more in control of its environment, it became more of a revolutionary garrison within a metropolitan society. One recurrent feature of Canadian life reflected in its literature is the paradoxical superimposition of vast empty spaces and the lack of privacy from prying, avaricious eyes. Due to this, a tone of deep terror linked to the soul of men pervaded writing and manifested itself as anxieties representative of repressive morality. Writing revolved round the inheritance of political and moral disillusionment and predicament. Such themes found great favour with the Canadian writers of the 1960s.

The literary milieu that now emerged placed a premium on critical analysis and debate. Criticism had earlier favoured perspectives that were author-centred, thematic, and concerned with social matters; now it tended to focus on structural and technical commentary. The 1970s were a period that was dominated by a poetics that took into account not only theory but also the idea of nationhood. The two subsequent decades witnessed more changes. Abandoning the garrison of an exclusive culture in favour of experimentation with an imaginative construct of a wilderness, it focussed on creating an identity that had to be realised through commitment, not to a cause or doctrine, but to a sacrificial view of life. This view of life stresses the desirability of a metaphorical dying into life that all great art affirms and celebrates.

Canadian writing was seen to incline towards metafiction or the process of creating order through myth and art. It was involved in investigating the relationship between art (and language) and reality, on the one hand, and between the discourses of art and the structures of social and cultural power, on the other.

The new postmodern theoretical framework of reference brings together separate disciplines like philosophy, linguistics, history, sociology, literary criticism and psychoanalysis. The reader, writer and text have to meet within the context of these. When Canadian postmodern writing takes up issues like ethnicity, feminism, and

immigration, it once again reiterates this point. This writing has transfigured the emphasis on regionalism in literature into a concern for the different, the local, and the particular. Canadian writers re-figure the realist regional into a postmodern different. This is done through challenges to authority in nationalist politics, gender politics and issues related to indigeneity. Canadian writing of the 1990s focussed on communicating diversity and dismembering universality. The most remarkable effort in this direction was made by criticism. Impetus has been provided to Canada's literary enterprise in various forms and through the encouragement given by various extra-literary sources. These include the state's cultural policy, the publishing industry, and the role played by journals and little magazines.

6.3 THE WRITING ON THE WALL

In the myriad manifestations of art--painting, music, architecture, poetry, or prose--can be discerned the essence of an environment or a country. Over the years, Canadian literary enterprise has striven hard to find its moorings and communicate the flavour of the quintessential soul of the land. In the country's literary discourse can be perceived the rapid changes that have overtaken the social, moral and economic fabric of the nation. Individual writers, by resorting to their preferred modes of expression, have contributed to the discourse by foregrounding experience shared with their peers but conveyed through a medium that is particularly personal and individualistic.

6.3.1 Overcoming the odds

Despite its protracted beginnings in the eighteenth century, Canadian literature has traversed a long way in reaching the dimensions of the colossal verbal explosion of the 1970s onwards. This literature has encountered a number of obstacles in its growth. The primary one has been the psychological barrier that has existed in the creative faculties of Canadian writers due to the colonial repercussions of its history. Canadian writing has had to overcome the oppressive psyche of being dominated by the American and British literary traditions. It has also had to juggle with the frontier mentality that earlier formed the basis of its political consolidation and entity. The hold of Puritanism has been another stumbling block in the emergence of a strong Canadian tradition of writing. The Puritan outlook diluted the importance of the arts because it conceived of the artist only as a font of moral ideas, thus endorsing literary standards with a high degree of moral and social orthodoxy. The intensity of this outlook dwindled with the advent of the twentieth century. Another hurdle in the path of Canadian writing, has been regionalism. Strong undercurrents of it can be seen in the anglophone/francophone divide, the vivid western flavour of the Prairie provinces, and the eulogistic tone of pre-Confederation writing of British Columbia. The literary enterprise has had to address and negotiate with these issues. The unsound economic situation of Canadian publishing added to difficulties. Canada has faced stiff competition from its American and British publishers. Canadian writers, who were able to secure a British/American publisher or a British university guarantee, were assured of recognition. This situation compelled many a Canadian writer to migrate. A conscious effort has been made to establish a strong publishing network. Yet, the singular outstanding feature of this literature has been a hankering for a mode of expression that embodies the Canadian consciousness and psyche. This cultural concern has remained dominant, though sometimes dormant, and is evidenced in the numerous shade of writing that have emerged over time. Canadian writing can be viewed as a transition from its early phase of regional awareness and reflection to a marked interest in imagery, myth, symbol, value and psychology. These interests waned and were displaced by new critical strategies that sought to decode available writing and were encouraged in by different modes of institutional support.

In the twentieth century, little magazines embody a peculiar literary phenomena associated with the growth of poetry. In Canada they were the core component of the country's literary world and infrastructure. Little magazines first emerged in Canada in the nineteenth century, but it was only after the World War I that they acquired a recognised literary stature. The emergence of these magazines marks a critical juncture in the history of printing and publication. They reflect the extension of literacy by reaching out to mass audiences. They also mark the stage at which paper and printing became available for private and limited publication. These magazines served as important outlets for writers of poetry and prose.

Through radio and later, television, the writer intruded into Canadian homes, carving a niche of acceptance wherever he/she found an appreciative audience. Readings of poetry and fiction became extremely popular as they purveyed literature in audio-visual form. University depts also started teaching Canadian Literature.

Many associations like the British Association for Canadian Studies were established. All these various forms of encouragement have made a significant contribution towards establishing the credentials of Canadian literature.

6.3.2 Prose

It is in prose that anglophone Canadian writing first manifests itself. Frances Brooke's *The History of Emily Montague* is acclaimed as the first Canadian novel and it typifies the phase of literary importation. Written in the epistolary tradition, the novel is born out of the author's experience of a Canadian garrison town of the 1760s where her husband was chaplain for five years. This literary importation was replaced by the emergence of works that sought to come to terms with the environment in imaginative as well as practical ways. This involved writing which displayed the stirrings of local colour by giving primacy to Canadian settings and Canadian responses to them. Reality was perceived not so much as a set of objects as a construction of the writer in the guise of an observer. The narrative is a miscellaneous collection of impressions, character sketches, anecdotes, short stories, and poems that oscillate between a variety of tones and moods artificially heightened by the author. This tendency symbolises the psychological tensions that prevail in the immigrant's mind and haunt literary consciousness even today.

John Richardson, Thomas Chandler Haliburton, Catherine Parr Traill, and Susanna Moodie are some of the writers of the early phase. Imitation of British models remains the underlying mode in these works; they break free from any other shade of importation by being imbued with a spirit and environment that is markedly Canadian.

Travel literature *per se* surfaced as an important medium of expression in Canada in the latter half of the nineteenth century. It contained a pragmatic response to the scenery of the country in verbal form. It often arose out of exploratory ventures undertaken to determine the locale and volumes of natural resources in the new dominion. Some well-known writers of this genre were Paul Kane, William Francis Butler and G. M. Grant. Other modes adopted were the historical romance, the fantasy, the social satire, the animal stories and the comedy of manners.

In the twentieth century there was a clear break from the influence of importation. Writers consciously moulded a native tradition in which material specific to Canada would forge the imagination and channelise its writing. In representations that range from physical settings to conflicts, this spirit manifests itself. Stephen Leacock, Laura Salverson, Martha Ostenso, Frederick Philip Grove and Hugh MacLennan deserve special mention in this regard.

By the 1960s Canadian literature came into its own. It not only broke free from the shackles of influence and importation, but it also confidently overcame its

preoccupation with cultural/national identity. It was marked by a spirit of self-confidence, energy and sophistication that underlined the change from its earlier trend of realism. The new trend grew out of realism in a direction that drew it towards symbolism under the subtle influence of writers like Lawrence, Kafka and Joyce. Authors like Robert Kroetsch and Rudy Wiebe broke new ground by adopting a postmodernist stance and expression. Jack Hodgins justified the emergence of Canada's own brand of magic realism. This technique has worked its way into the writings of Hodgins himself, apart from Kroetsch, Susan Swan and Michael Ondaatje. Their works throw up myriad possibilities of interpretation arising out of the merger of the fantastic and the serious. A number of accomplished women writers have emerged since the 1950s. Some of the outstanding ones are Mavis Gallant, Margaret Laurence, Alice Munro and Margaret Atwood. Laurence's fiction is born out of her African experience that is strongly grounded in the tribal culture that gives privacy to family, clan, ethnic group or class, within a national existence. The *Manawaka* series places all its five heroines as strangers in a foreign land, the spirit of which seeps into their psyche. Even when they all eventually leave, their emotional ties to it are never severed. Laurence's contribution in the sphere of Canadian fiction lies in articulating a sensibility in which the sense of place holds away and women's perspectives find expression.

The ethnic fabric of Canadian society underwent a significant change in the 1970s with the opening up of borders to Asian immigrants. By the 1980s, the impact of their arrival was clearly manifest in the literature of the times. Prominent among them are Michael Ondaatje, Rohinton Mistry, Joy Kogawa and Austin Clarke. Critical inputs in response to their writings found a congenial soil in *The Toronto South Asian Review*. On both creative and critical fronts, the Canadian literary milieu encouraged immigrants to foreground and discuss issues that had to do with physical, psychological and social alienation and displacement, and their struggle for survival and establishment in unknown territory.

It was as late as the 1960s when the Canadian native peoples were granted citizenship rights and enfranchisement. Yet the native/non-native rift continues in the form of economic, social and cultural inequalities that are a legacy of the country's colonial past. In the 1970s, native authors actually got down to recording their own history and commenting on Canadian society. These efforts were often dismissed as "protest literature." The 1980s saw a proliferation of native literature. This came about due to a conscious effort by the state to inculcate university-trained native writers, to generate an enthusiastic response/readership by staging festivals to introduce native writers, and to hone writing skills by forming aboriginal writing groups and conducting workshops. Native writing has concerned itself primarily with social, political and economic history as it navigates between issues of right and wrong, truth and fiction, men and nature. Well-known authors in this field are George Kenny, Tomson Highway and Evan Adam, Beatrice Colleton, Jeanette Armstrong, Joan Crate, Bruce Chester, Beth Cutland, Wayne Keon, and Daniel David Moses.

Children's literature has for its ancestors the didactic Christian doctrine and catechism purveyed by the Puritan establishment in the seventeenth century. It took almost two hundred years for it to evolve and mature into a creative medium that did more than just eulogise the pioneer struggle for survival in a bleak land. The end of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of a new trend in children's writing. This had to do with the portrayal of youth in a manner that was sentimental and cloying. Narratives revolved round protagonists whose insidious charm solved not only their personal difficulties but also resolved those of the adults around them. The first half of the twentieth century saw a resurgence of native tales retold through a romantic European perspective. Children's literature of the 1950s focused on fantasy and humour. The 1960s saw a radical change in the established patterns of this writing. The upheaval and change in contemporary society resulted in the emergence of themes that lay at the intersection of the adulthood and childhood. These included divorce, drugs, child abuse and other related problems, giving rise to a new realism

that had urban settings. Some well-known writers in this area are Marsha Hewitt, Clair Mackay, Paul Yee, Cora Taylor and Bernice Thurman Hunter.

6.3.3 Poetry

The Loyalists who came to settle in the Maritime provinces after the American Revolution wrote the earliest Canadian poetry. These were people whose political loyalties had been jolted by the success of the Revolution that saw the snipping of the final thread between Britain, the imperial power, and America, her colonial outpost. As disappointed Tories, they moved to Canada and their verse reflects this outlook. Oliver Goldsmith, the grandnephew of his English namesake, was the first poet who also attempted to describe the challenge that settlers faced in the new land. He wrote his long poem, *The Rising Village*, as a sequel to his relative's earlier work entitled *The Deserted Village*. Joseph Howe's *Acadia* reflects the same tradition of descriptive and reflective narrative; Adam Kidd's *The Huron Chief and Other Poems* also belongs to the school of romantic sentimentalism practised by Byron earlier.

The latter half of the century saw the rise of a new perspective in poetry. This was a reflective embodiment of the socio-political scenario in which the country endeavoured to subdue the wilderness, the native peoples, and the rebellions. The War of 1812 and the threat of American annexation hastened the birth of the spirit of national unity. Its literary manifestations took shape in the form of a national ideal that found expression in poetry. In the verse of Charles Sangster, Alexander MacLachlan, and Charles Mair can be identified the reflections of this ideal. Mair's *Tecumseh* is a verse drama that draws upon history in the inappropriate medium of a Shakespearean tragedy.

The golden age of Canadian poetry which dawned with the arrival of the Confederation Poets. They were assigned this nomenclature as they were unwittingly associated with each other through friendship, correspondence and perusal of each other's works. Though named after the country's Confederation in 1867, these poets were mere children at the time. Their significance lies in voicing the representational concerns of their generation despite being influenced by British/American writing. Their achievement can be gauged through the evolution of styles and attitudes that characterised the spirit of the new dominion at home and abroad. Charles G. D. Roberts, his cousin, Bliss Carman, Archibald Lampman and Duncan Campbell Scott comprise the Confederation group of poets. The writing of each of the Confederation poets was highly individualised.

The modern movement in Canadian poetry began in the 1920's. It was marked by the simplification of diction and the divergence of themes. The romanticism of the past was replaced by the metaphysical complexity of realism that had fragmented human psyche the world over. E. J. Pratt, Earle Birney were the outstanding poets of this tradition. The 1920s and 30s also witnessed a poetic tradition that combined the cosmopolitan, the symbolist and the metaphysical strains. The chief exponents of this tradition were F. R. Scott, A. J. M. Smith and A.M. Klein, all of whom were together termed the Montreal Group. The 1940s and 50s saw the emergence of a younger generation of poets. Prominent among whom were Patrick Anderson, Patricia K. Page, Douglas Le Pan, John Glassco, Miriam Waddington, Anne Wilkinson, James Reany, Jay Macpherson and Daryl Hine. This generation honed poetry that individualised versions of metaphysical/romantic poetry which, in its basic expression and sensibility has the undeniable feel of Canada. Their poetry was succeeded by that of Robert Kroetsch and Margaret Atwood. The prose lyric emerged as the dominant tradition in the writings of Al Purdy, Patrick Lane, Milton Acorn, John Newlove, Elizabeth Brewster and Pier Giorgio Di Cicco. In their individual voices they examine and ruminate upon issues of daily life.

6.3.4 Drama

Canadian drama has lagged behind all the other literary genres in its evolution. The reasons for this are many. One of them has been the sparse demographic reality of the country's far-flung communities that did not actively encourage theatre. Another reason was the financial liability of traversing these immense distances as theatre groups sought audiences. The growth of the audio-visual medium also hampered the growth of drama. Added to all these was the deeply entrenched Puritan psyche that viewed dramas as morally undesirable and consciously discouraged its growth.

The earliest manifestations of drama in Canada were the amateur performances of the late nineteenth century. They were primarily undertaken to provide for the entertainment of garrison towns and no written records of these plays survive. At the turn of the century the fortunes of drama looked up. The reasons for this included the decline in the number of foreign touring companies, in the overwhelming popularity of films, in the establishment of drama festivals, and in the important work done by theatre critics and essayists like Fred Jacob, Vincent Massey, Merrill Denison, B. K. Sandwell and Hector Charlesworth. The most popular form of drama at this juncture was the one-act play.

At the close of the 1960s, the impact of feminism was seen in the writings of some Canadian women dramatists like Beverly Simons, Carol Bolt and Sharon Pollock. In more recent times the plays of Erica Ritter and Margaret Hollingsworth have aggressively foregrounded feminist concerns. Outstanding male playwrights of the closing decades of the twentieth century are George Ryga, D. Freeman, T. Walmsley, D. Fennario, and James Reaney.

Canadian drama of the 1980s concentrated on the elements of the comic and the Gothic. The works of Linda Griffiths, Patrick Beamer, John Murrell and David French were outstanding examples of the former trend. Gothic drama focused on the element of psychological horror and its chief exponents were Peter Colley, Tom Grainger, Carol Bolt and Jim Garrard. Regional influences were obviously apparent.

6.4 LET US SUM UP

A nation/culture has to evolve on its way to establishing its credentials of reckoning. Canada's literary enterprise has passed through many stages. It began with the stage of occupation that was marked by raising of garrisons/fortifications and a mentality of a closed community whose values, customs, and manners were transported intact from another environment and refused to be influenced by the new surroundings. This situation was characterised by a lack of reconciliation or assimilation. The second stage was one of conflict where the experience of a community's imported reality clashed with the amorphous, but immediate, local reality. This symbolised the frontier mentality which was marked by flight, discovery, and struggle to endure. Once the community familiarised itself with the new territory, the colonial mentality emerged. It was marked by a fragmented transportation to a newly civilised location which still glorified an idealised past. The fourth stage was reached with the establishment of a self-defining nation opening itself to the immigrant. He is the outsider seeking entry into an area of conflicting and alien orders and conditions.

This literature has come of age despite treading an off-beaten track. Its evolving strength has been its ability to coexist with American cultural dominance and also by producing works that have acquired repute for quality beyond national boundaries. Michael Ondaatje's *Prix Medici* award for *Anil's Ghost* (2000) and Margaret Atwood's Booker for *The Blind Assassin* (2000) are testimony to this. In carving out its place in the annals of world literature, Canadian writing has transcended the

native/cosmopolitan divide by proving that literature has little or nothing to do with a writer's home address.

6.5 QUESTIONS

1. In what ways does Canada's history and geography complement its literature?
2. Discuss the stages that mark Canada's literary enterprise.
3. Comment on the various forms of conscious encouragement given to Canada's literary endeavour by the state and its institutions.

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