

Differences of Commonwealth and Postcolonial literature : A review

Sanjay Kumar

Assistant Professor of English,

Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar Government College, Jagdishpura (Kaithal)

sanjay35197811@rediffmail.com

Abstract

As a term in literary regional studies, Literature by the Commonwealth generally reference the literary products of the African , Asian, Caribbean and North American independent countries that had once been colonized by the United Kingdom. The works of writers from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, India, Malaysia and Singapore are therefore regarded as Commonwealth literature the development of literatures from these Commonwealth nations. Some of the issues that will be discussed include the general characteristics of Commonwealth literature, the ways in which these common features have been affected by the different cultures and historical development of the individual nations in focus, and the ways in which the development of national literatures has affected the notion of a Commonwealth literature. the major themes and trends that distinguish Commonwealth Literature as displayed in a selection of countries.

Key words: Commonwealth, countries, historical, development etc

Introduction

The term “Commonwealth literature” poses significant problems of definition. It has historical, geographic, political and linguistic connotations that simultaneously affirm and revise its status as a distinct body of literary work. The historical fact of colonization by the United Kingdom and the linguistic reality of English as mother tongue or official language do not automatically imply membership of either the Commonwealth as a political organisation or of the body of literary works known as Commonwealth literature. The United States is perhaps the most prominent example in this regard. The Republic of Ireland is another. There is also the ironic fact that the literature of the United Kingdom is not regarded as Commonwealth literature, even though its imperial past and language form the basis of the concept of Commonwealth literature.

However, despite all this, the term 'commonwealth literature' has become a convenient reference over time to the literary work of the most of the countries that have been and thus are primarily linked to former colonies of the UK.

modern British colonial experience,

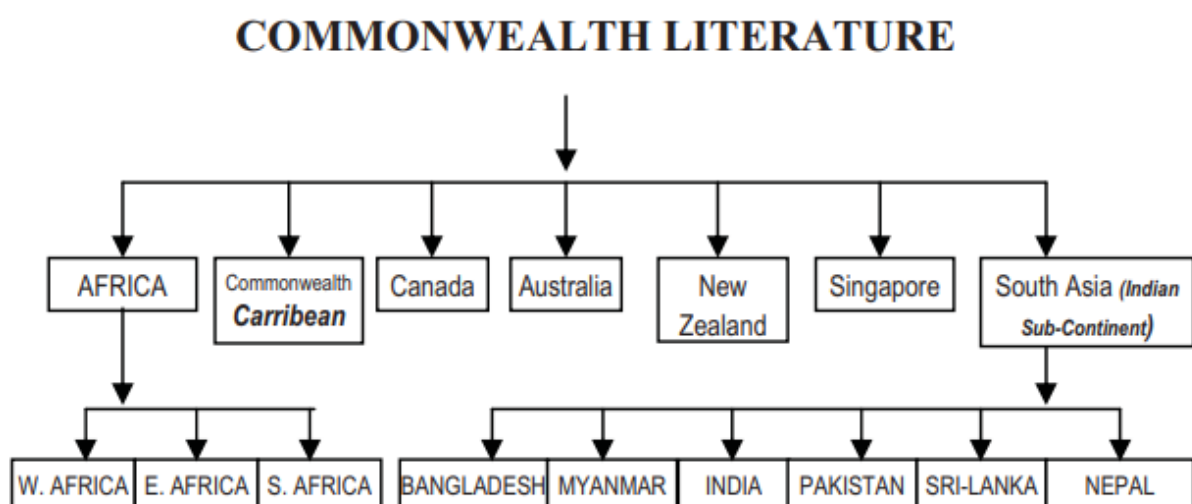
(ii) the current use of English, and

(iii) the British literary tradition 's influence

Unlike other literary categories, it is not completely defined by political ideology (such as Marxist literature), historical period(Elizabethan literature), geographical region (African literature) or prevailing literary trends(Symbolist literature). Commonwealth literature is, in many ways, a complex combination of all of these other categories, and this enables it to bridge the inevitable distinctions between writers from very different socio-cultural backgrounds. As William Walsh claims, “it is at least, a useful category of denotation grounded in history and making a point of substance about those it is applied to,”

yet, one which does not ignore the fact that “*an African or an Indian or a Nigerian writer writes against a particular historical tradition and in a particular national context.*”

Its essence, literature from the Commonwealth demonstrates in particular resonantly the inherent ties between geography and history and between topic and subject.



Australian Literature

Of all the counties examined here, it is probably Australia which underwent a historical experience least conducive to literary development. Australia is unlike other Commonwealth nations in that the British specifically designated it a penal colony when it was first colonized in 1788. This means that it was the place where convicted criminals in Britain were sent as punishment for a variety of petty and serious crimes. As a result of this process of transportation, as it was known, many people came to Australia unwillingly and in conditions of great deprivation and misery. In addition to this, often-harsh climatic conditions, the relatively small population and the huge size of the country combined to make literary activity difficult undertaking.

Canadian Literature

Like its counterpart in Australia, Canadian literature has been deeply affected by perceptions of its ambivalent status. Despite its size, potential and actual wealth, Canada has long been regarded as “an inescapable question mark, a shape without form, a nagging puzzle.” Such a seeming lack of solidity is encapsulated in the paradoxes which structure it: “a people divided among themselves by race and language; a British colony which has thrown off colonialism; an American nation which stands stubbornly apart from the United States of America

New Zealand Literature

One of the most important defining characteristics of the literature of New Zealand is its remoteness. New Zealand is a small island country of about 1600 kilometres from its nearest neighbour, Australia, and far away from the regular shipping lanes and air routes of most nations. This isolation has given its literary development some of the characteristics of atypical frontier society, even more so than those of other countries of the New World. Another element that has shaped the development of New Zealand’s literature is the noticeable lack of general support for literary activity during the early part of its history. This has been traced largely to the Nonconformist religious background of a significant portion of citizens, as well as the relatively small population of the country.

Indian Literature

India is the Commonwealth’s largest nation by far, and several significant characteristics are implicated in its huge size and population. The first is the number of languages that are spoken. There are over 840 languages spoken by almost one billion people. These languages are, in turn, a reflection of the hugely diverse religions that comprise the country, ranging

from the predominant Hindu through the Buddhist, the Jains, to the significant Muslim minority. These religions have a very long continuous history and have spawned literatures of great antiquity and extraordinary beauty, such as those found in Sanskrit, Tamil, Gujarati, Arabic and Kashmiri. India has also had longer contact with Christianity than most countries in Asia, with the founding of a Roman Catholic Mission in Goa in the fourteenth century. In relative terms, therefore, colonial rule over this “jewel of the British empire” was relatively brief.

Malaysia and Singapore

The modern literatures of Malaysia and the city-state of Singapore may be taken together because they share many cultural traditions due to their communities’ geographical proximity to each other at the southernmost tip of Southeast Asia. Formerly known as Malaya, the area was once the centre of a lucrative trade because of its strategic position between India and China. With the rise of European trading powers, it came under the control of first the Portuguese in the sixteenth century, then the Dutch in the seventeenth, and finally the British in 1795

Differences of Commonwealth and Postcolonial literature

The Commonwealth Literature and Postcolonial Literature are often used synonymously by students. A broader term is postcolonial literature. The term Post-colonial has been adopted by numbers of critics such as Chatterjee (1979), Darby (1997) and Castellino (2000) to describe issues ranging from political, social, anthropological and economic theory. Anne McClintock proposed that: the word Post-Colonial metaphorically describes history as a sequence of stages along an epochal path, from the "pre-colonial," to the "colonial," to the "post-colonial" – a non-contradictory, if not a disavowed involvement in linear time and the concept of growth. The term postcolonial is used to encompass all facets of the colonial method, from the start to the end of colonial interaction in the large introduction to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin's post colonial studies reader. We hold a common opinion regarding the term post-colonial as they both refer to it from the point of view of times of colonization prior to, during and after.

Conclusion

Commonwealth Literature as a heterogeneous product of diverse cultures provides its readers larger perspectives of humanity. It has tremendous vitality and variety and a distinct voice to

become a significant discipline of English studies. African Literature written in English, French, and other European languages by Africans has added a new dimension to the commonwealth literature. The use of oral literature has given African flavour and authenticity to modern African literature. The contemporary African writing is greatly concerned with interpreting the more recent implications of a history over four centuries. Knowledge of African history, culture, and religion is essential to understand and appreciate the growth of African literature in English.

Reference

- [1] William Walsh, (1973) Preface, Commonwealth Literature (London: Oxford University Press) .
- [2] William Walsh, (1973) Introduction, Readings in Commonwealth Literature , ed., William Walsh (London: Oxford University Press,) xvi.
- [3] Gerald Moore, (1969) Introduction, The Chosen Tongue: English Writing in the TropicalWorld (London: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd.) ix .
- [4] G.A. Wilkes, (1974) Introduction, The Colonial Poets, ed., G. A. Wilkes (North Ridge, NSW: Angus and Robertson, 1984) n. p.
- [5] H.J. Oliver, (1961) “The Literature of Australia ” The Commonwealth Pen : An Introduction to the Literature of the British Commonwealth , ed., A. L. McLeod (New York: Cornell University Press) 39.
- [6] Martin Seymour-Smith, (1973) “Canadian Literature,” Guide in Modern World Literature (London: Wolfe Publishing Limited,) 332.
- [7] See J. C. Reid, “The Literature of New Zealand,” Pen 65-67, and Seymour-Smith, “New Zealand Literature,”Guide891. Seymour-Smith, New Zealand,” 892.