



CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

(A) COMMONWEALTH LITERATURE

The very term 'COMMONWEALTH' is political, a different form of British empire. So far as the British colonisation is concerned there are two movements; one, the colonisation of land and the other, the colonisation of people. English people went to Australia and Canada to Colonise the land, so the Australians and Canadians are Europeans at second hand and their relationship with England was father-son relationship. In the case of India and West Africa, British people colonised the people, so their relationship was of master servant or of victor-victimised.

Since, the middle of the 19th century, the commonwealth countries started to achieve their separate identity from British domination. Canada (1867), Australia (1901) and South Africa (1910) became the dominion states. According to S.P. Aiyar -

They are autonomous communities within the British empire, equal status in no way, subordinate one to another into any respect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the crown and freely associated as members of the British commonwealth of the Nations.¹

After the second world war, the Asian countries also attained freedom, but their relationship with England within the Commonwealth remains infact.

The commonwealth countries are different from one another in racial, cultural and linguistic attitudes, But they are bound together because they bear the common influence of English language and English culture, which is the result of their long association with British life.

It is clear that the term 'Commonwealth' bears a political measures, So the literature produced in these Commonwealth Countries bears the same political connotation. The nature of Commonwealth Literature is evolving, so it is difficult to make clear and final definition of it. Generally speaking, the literature produced in English, in the countries other than England and U.S.A., can be called 'Commonwealth Literature'. In this literature, we may find the strong influence of English literature and language; English education and culture.

At the closing meeting of the conference on Commonwealth Literature, held at University of Leeds (May 1972), Prof. A.N. Jaffares speaks about Commonwealth Literature -

The term Commonwealth Literature is a convenient short hand term, largely a political in tone, to describe the writings of the English Speaking World outside Britain and United States of America. It encompasses late members such as South Africa, Pakistan, as easily as it includes the old dominions of Australia, New Zealand and Canada or the newly independent island states like Mauritius or Fiji.²

Iyengar, in his definition of Commonwealth Literature describes the nature of it. He says -

The Literature in Commonwealth countries is always the means of giving form and utterance to the despairs and hopes, the enthusiasm and apathy, the thrill of joy and the stab of pain - all the vicissitudes in fact - of a nations history as it moves from freedom to slavery, from slavery to revolution, from revolution to independence and again from independence to the tasks of reconstruction which involve further experience of futility and failure.³

We may see now, that are the common features shared by all Commonwealth Literature which are the result of the

development of colonial consciousness. In the early stage these writers in the colonial countries are imitative . The slave nations are strictly dominated by their masters. They are hopeful about the English cultural and values. So their work reflects the impact of west. But the change comes to them gradually. In the next stage they try to search their roots and their identity; then they try to assert their separate identity. With the help of this we can classify the literature into three parts.

- (a) The literature produced in the countries which have no native past . The literature of dominion states such as Australia, Canada etc, belongs to this category.
- (b) The African literature which has the tribal past . In their literature we see the confrontation of the tribal life and whiteman's new beliefs and ideas.
- (c) The literature produced in the countries like India which has past with long heritage.

B) AUSTRALIA AND AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE -

Australia, is an island continent and also a land of contrasts. Nearly seventy percent of the land is arid and unsuitable for the settlement. That is why its population is very small. It is the richest country in natural resources and an industrial nation having high living standards. Keneally, in his novel, 'The Chart of Jimmie Blacksmith' describes proudly that -

Australia is

The smallest continent,
The largest island
And dearest land of all.⁴

As far as the history of Australia is concerned. Australia is recognised as a country of immigrants, Manning Clark describes the four migrations of people to Australia.

The first three brought the aborigines, probably 25,000 years before the birth of Christ. The fourth, which brought the Europeans, began in 1788 and is still continuing in the present day. The first of the abosigines were Negritos, who were forced to move south from their hunting grounds in South-East Asia by people with the superior material culture. They were followed by the Murrayians, a people related to the Ainu in Japan. They in turn were pushed further south in Austra-

o

-lia by the Carpentarians who were related to the Vedda in Ceylon.⁵

The early visitors to Australia were Dutch. In 1606, Captain Jansz visit the West Coast of Cape York Peninsula whose report about the land was not so good.

The first Englishman who visited the continent was William Dampier, in 1688, who described that the people were the miserablest people of the world. These views were changed when James cook arrived at Botany Bay and found the native people happier than the civilized Europeans. He recommanded the land for the settlement of the convicts.

Geoffrey Balton Says :

It was the unique experiment, Australia must be the only nation in the World to have been founded as a prison.⁶

Before this, the convicts were send to America, but the revolt of the Colonies in 1776 ended this transportation. So Britishers were looking for a place for settlement. Since 1788, convicts were brought to Australia and it became a penal colony. This becomes a turning point in the old way life of the native aborigines. It is also notable, that it is the beginning of European civilization in Australia.

The early missionaries persuaded people to give up traditions such as head hunting or cannibalism and tried to induce them to adopt European way of life. The clashes between these two civilizations started, because the aborigines were the hunters who never thought about the private property. The white settlers cannot understand this aboriginal way of life. They moved in with their flocks and herds and pushed the aborigines off their land, dispossessed and destitute. They were badly treated by the white majority. The result was that the aborigines were decreasing in numbers due to the clashes and the diseases from the white people.

The number of full blooded aborigines is quite low and many of the aborigines have some European or Asian blood. As a result the aborigines are detribalised and they have lost their own culture.

The transportation of convicts from Britain. Came to an end in 1853 , but there free settlers from the other parts of the World were attracted by the prosperity of the land and , Australia is no longer the 'New Britannia'. Australia has become a land of multicultural people.

Starting with the aboriginals the Australian people have become a mixture of British, Irish, European and Asian origins living in an environment different from

any other. Within the last 200 years, and especially in the last fifty years they have begun to create a new culture with enormous potential for combining European background with awareness of Asian neighbours.⁷

So in Australia there is a cultural problem; as Allan Healy describes -

Perhaps the supreme irony is, that Australia, of all Western countries the one most devoted to uniformity, is running one of the most culturally divided colonies in crea-tion.⁸

In 1901, the colonies joined in a Federation of states and became a member of the Institution of Commonwealth. And Australia became a sovereign and independent nation and is no longer a parasite country of England. They are related to Britain economically, politically and culturally. Britain is Australia's major trading partner and she depends on her mother country for her defence needs. About the reliance of Australia On Britain, Horbe says -

Yet the lack of strong intellectual life in Australia has meant that Australian intellectualls who like to keep up with things often perhaps usually fell back on 'quality' newspapers and weeklies from London. They looked at the World from London

and this could mean not only that they were inclined to accept London views of what the solutions to the problems were... but they also accepted a London definition of what the problems themselves were.....⁹

Australians are provincial by nature, in them we see the ideals of equality, mateship and pursuit of happiness. Australia is free from class distinction, and communal domination. Thus she gives importance to fraternity.

Bertrand Russell said that -

Australia pointed the way to a happier destiny for man throughout the centuries to come.¹⁰

So she differs from England who believes in privilege and wealth.

After the World War II, Australia developed her own nationhood, and is always in quest for national identity. From the result of the World War II, they realised that they could no longer live on British protection. So she turns towards Asia, especially, the south-east Asia, Japan, India, China. Though Australia is at the edge of Asia, they were unknown to each other. Since the World War II, Australia has changed her attitude towards Asian countries. Japan has become the major trading partner of Australia. Though she is a European oriented

Society, she has never been associated with White man's imperialistic nature in her dealings with Asians.

There is a gradual increase in contact and mutual exchange between the people of Australia and Southeast Asia. The young Australians are encouraged to study Asia firstly, China, Japan, then Indonesia, Malayasia and more recently India and Pakistan.

After discussing the development of Australian national history, we may turn towards the literary development — specifically, the fictional development of Australia.

The earliest prose work of Australia is in the form of memories and official reports and personal records which provides an account of events and discoveries in the new colony.

The first creative writers in Australia were the convicts, who were transported from England to the penal colony. Their work is an embodiment of their experiences, i.e. the human and practical problems they have faced. They are in the form of autobiography or they may be a historical documents or romances. In the words of William Walsh -

The earliest novels, although disfigured by anemic eighteenth century abstraction, are altogether brisker and firmer because of their

reliance upon personal and autobiographical material. ¹¹

Henry Savery's 'Quintus Servinton' (1830-1) Charles Rowcroft's 'Tale of the Colonies' (1843) and 'The Bushranger of Van Diemen's Land' (1846) deal with their convicts' life in Australia. In Quintus Servinton, Savery expresses his own experiences by giving the every details of his life; i.e. his early life, his conviction and his life in New South Wales to the granting of his pardon. Tales of the Colonies, is Rowcrofts personal experience in Hobart and it also describes the process of the settlement in the new country. The Bushranger of Van Diemen's Land is about the aborigines in the land, which belongs to the adventure story.

The earlier novelists are called colonial novelists because -

----- they wrote during the colonial period for colonial period for colonial audiences or for English audiences with conventional attitudes towards Australia as a colony. ¹²

Their writing is strongly influenced by romantic and melodramatic adventure stories of English novelists such as Scott, Dickens and Defoe. Their novels are about the convictism, bushranging and pastoral life. Leonie Kramer states that -

The novelists wrote about the landscape, the people, the convict system and the hardship of life in the land of hopeful dream and actual nightmare. ¹³

The dominant writers of this period are James Tucker, Henry Kingsley, Rolf Bolderwood and Marcus Clark. They use the Australian background to their novels with English sensibility in style and technique. Their characters are, by birth; English who have no deep affinity with Australian land. In His Natural Life, Clark belongs to the tradition of Dickens when he deals with the primary impulse of the novel i.e. social injustice, in a sense; convict transportation.

The period between the 1890s and early 1920s is the most significant in the development; because the novelists became aware of their social condition and their own national identity and they expressed it objectively and realistically. In Such Is Life Joseph Furphy, interprets the relationship of the rich farmer and the bullock driver. He is strongly influenced by the European political situation. He objectively describes the impact of an industrial class-war upon the agricultural situation. This is the first novel addressed to Australian people by an Australian author about the Australian character.

Another novelist, H.H. Richardson, who is influenced by 19th century English literature. Her 'The Fortunes of Richard Mahony' which is Australian in its setting and theme. Having the influence of the 19th century English classical novel of character, she sketches Richard's character with modern consciousness. Like Henry James, she sought her character from the experience of herself.

Since the World War II, there came the new type of literature; i.e. the novels of international outlook. Patrick White, Christena Stead, Randolph Stow, who reject the traditional views that put the white people at the centre. The novelists started mythologising the aspects of Australian development. In the hands of White, Australian novel reaches its culmination. He won the Nobel Prize; the highest literary award in 1973.

His Voss (1957), established the mythic potentialities of Australian history. Voss is an explorer, makes the whole process of ~~slow~~ understanding seem natural in the man and inevitable in setting. White has used christian symbols in his exploration of the nature of man. His journey of exploration is described as spiritual metaphor.

In the recent twenty years, novelists have turned their attention to India and have set their stories in India. For instance John Johnston, Christopher Koch etc.

*In all
their
novels ?*

Christopher Koch (1932), is one of the leading novelists of the younger generation in Australia. He has published some uncollected poetry, four novels and very recently a collection of essays. He is also a regular reviewer and commentator. He has had many occupations working in Europe, Asia and Australia. He was a radio producer in the Australian Broadcasting Commission as a producer for ten years, but he resigned it in 1973 to write full-time.

Out of his four novels, two novels i.e. Across the SeaWall (1965) has India as the setting and The Year of Living Dangerously (1978) has Indonesia as its setting. This is very significant. The novelist seems to explore like E.M. Forster, the exciting and exotic world of Asia. This is important because Koch deals with the contemporary political as well as cultural upheaval in these two countries which have long heritage of the common past.

Across the SeaWall, deals with the contemporary vibrant India teeming with population and poverty as well as its cultural complexes. There is an also an exposition of the mystique of India. The novel ends in the hero's self-realization as an Australian. Thus the course of his life runs a full circle bringing the hero back from where he started.

The Year of Living Dangerously deals with the last and turbulent year of president Sukarno. Koch reveals in a vivid and exciting manner, the party comes of the tyrant and

his fall. This is more ambitious novel dealing with multiple themes. The hero is again a journalist who as a witness to the great drama of political upheaval manipulates the cultural background to diagnose the contemporary malison which affects the developing countries of Asia.

This dissertation is an attempt to characterize the Asian connection of an Australian author.

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