INTRODUCTION

In the last few years post-colonial discourse has assumed increasing significance in literary studies. There have been a few important studies of the impact of colonialism in Asia, Africa, South America and the Caribbeans. Colonialism, it is now increasingly felt, is a much more complex phenomenon than what the writers on colonialism before 1950 present it to be. The need to re-examine this phenomenon has been felt acutely in recent years because of the developments in the ex-colonies in the past few years. It was felt at one time that as soon as the white coloniser left the colonies and the native leadership assumed political leadership, the oppressed natives would find fresh avenues of liberation and fulfilment. The wretched of the earth would be restored to the dignity which had been denied to them under the colonial rule and the stigma of subjugation having been removed, healing of the wounded psyche would soon take place.

Unfortunately, these hopes have to a great extent been belied by the developments in these erstwhile colonies. The promised dawn did not bring the light of liberation and freedom from oppression and violence. Almost in all cases it is noticed that colonial mindsets have made deep inroads. The colonial rulers left behind the institutions and values they had brought with them to the colonies and the new elite - the new ruling class in the colonies - by accepting and perpetuating them gave birth to neo-colonialism. The
only explanation of this strange reversal of values can be that there was something in the very process of colonisation, that is responsible for the schism. This process includes the colonization of the native mind with the coloniser's institutions and propaganda. In this context, it can be seen that the counter-rhetoric which the natives resorted to and other strategies which they adopted to fight the alien rule also contained the seeds of the same 'colonial' attitude.

Soon after the arrival of the white colonizers there were numerous ways in which the natives expressed their reactions to the presence of the alien culture among them. As the natives became acquainted with the administrative and cultural institutions brought into their midst by the colonisers, they began to make use of them to voice their reactions. The process was considerably accelerated when a sizeable number of natives gained a reasonable mastery of the colonisers' language and were able to articulate their responses in English or French or Spanish and so on.

One mode of such articulation was literature. Most of the colonised countries had their literary traditions. Most of them were oral literary traditions (belonging to what Ngugi calls 'orature') but some (as in India) had very old and rich tradition of oral as well as written literature. In most countries the impact of the coloniser's presence was to produce literature which either expresses awe for the newly arrived masters or critically re-examines native institutions and native cultural forms including
religion. But as time went on, this mood gave way to a more serious introspection, and the native literary expression whether in the form of the novel or poetry or drama began to show a marked concern with the effects of the colonial presence.

A recurring theme in the literature produced in these colonial countries is the theme of exile. Sometimes it manifests itself as the theme of the 'loss of self' or the 'loss of a sense of integrated identity'. It is to be noted that such a feeling is experienced by an individual who either willingly leaves his native home or by one who is forcibly uprooted from the native soil and taken away to an alien land either literally or metaphorically. But to understand the feeling of loss we must have a well-defined notion of what 'identity' means. In this connection I find Erik Erikson's well known analysis of the formation of identity illuminating. He states:

In psychological terms, identity formation employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observation, a process taking place on all levels of mental functioning, by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to a typology significant to them; while he judges their way of judging him in the light of how he perceives himself in comparison to them and to types that have become relevant to him. This process is, luckily, and necessarily, for the most part unconscious except where inner conditions and outer circumstances combine to aggravate a painful, or elated, "identity consciousness".(1)

Through the actions and interactions of the fictional characters under the pressure of circumstances the themes of
identity consciousness' and 'fragmented identity' emerge. A schism of this kind is very often the result of an intense inner strife, with two very strong pulls tearing the person's sense of self in two different directions. The split in the psyche of the characters in the colonial literature is caused by the strife resulting from the presence of the alien western culture in the midst of the native culture. A sensitive mind is, under such a situation, 'no longer at ease'. To live with a divided self is never conducive to psychological health. The malaise of the split identity produces strong feelings of restlessness, disgust with one's own self and with surroundings and dislike bordering on hatred either of one's own past and traditions or hatred of the alien masters. No matter what form such sense of the loss of identity takes, the result is always a destructive attitude. The struggle to escape from the prison of a stigmatized personality is always painful. The colonial writers who began to produce their significant work in late 1950's and 1960's form a spectrum. There are some writers like V.S. Naipaul in whose works the theme of exile emerges very clearly. Naipaul's forefathers migrated from India to the Caribbeans in the last century. He was educated in the West Indies and later went to England where he studied at Oxford University. Naipaul's most celebrated novel A House for Mr.Biswas may be taken as the most eloquent expression of the colonised mind's struggle to secure psychological anchorage and to have firm roots in the soil so that a new identity can be achieved. The same theme
of 'exile' is to be found in most of his other works. In some of the other prominent West Indian writers like George Lamming, Samuel Selvon, Wilson Harris, Roger Mais and Derek Walcott we see the emergence of the same theme.

We find that a similar situation prevails in Africa which also has experienced a similar disastrous cultural impact of colonisation. The theme of exile dominates the works of writers like Wole Soyinka (Nigeria), Chinua Achebe (Nigeria), Ayi Kwei Arman (Ghana), Okot p Bitek (Uganda), Peter Abrahams (South Africa), Ama Ata Aidoo (Ghana), Ezekiel Mphalele (South Africa) and Ngugi wa Thiong'o (Kenya).

It is not surprising that the theme of 'exile' should figure so prominently in the works of these writers. In all the colonised countries there was a dramatic collapse of the native cultures. This was partly due to the superior technology that the conquering alien races from the Western world brought with them. It was partly due to the internal strife that existed among the various tribes inhabiting the countries of Africa. The collapse always produced a trauma, for the colonised native's psyche. He was totally at a loss to understand the causes of his defeat, subjugation and utter humiliation at the hands of the white man. It produced in him a sense of the loss of 'self' or a sense of being an exile in his own homeland.

Literature which is always sensitive to the changes that are taking place in the culture of which it is an
integral part cannot but fail to record in its own unique way this phenomenon and hence of the theme of exile which is treated at some length in Chapter 1 of the present study. However, after the collapse and the initial shock produced by colonisation many creative minds have been striving for visions of alternatives that can help overcome the sense of 'exile' and achieve for themselves and for their people a sense of being at home in their circumambient universe. There have been similar attempts in the fields of politics and religion. However, I am more interested in the 'literary' efforts of the writers who strive to achieve and give us a glimpse of an integrated self, and the means whereby they achieve it. In their work is found an image of man who is no longer locked in his own separate cell but has learned to live in co-operation with his community. I have called this vision a 'homecoming' vision. I consider the work of Edward Brathwaite, a Caribbean poet, the fiction—particularly later fiction—of a Kenyan novelist Ngugi wa Thiong'o and the two latest novels of the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe very significant from this point of view. In these works, as I try to show in the subsequent chapters, we find an alternative vision. It overcomes the stigma and humiliation which was the handiwork of colonialism and its more vicious manifestation under 'neo-colonial' dispensation after independence in many of the ex-colonial countries. What is even more significant from a literary point of view is that in forging this homecoming vision these writers have retained what is valuable in the poetic and narrative
traditions they have borrowed and appropriated from the West and at the same time they have found new resources in their immediate surroundings (‘Jazz’ as an art form in Brathwaite) and in the traditional narrative modes in their native cultures. They have made creative use of the ex-master’s tongue but when a writer like Ngugi wa Thiong’o finds it too irrelevant for his purposes, he courageously goes back to his native tongue.

The works discussed in the following chapters are significant also for the content of the vision. What I have called the ‘homecoming’ vision is a vision of the kind of life that is ‘possible’ not only for the newly liberated, decolonised man but for humanity at large. As I shall show in Chapter 2 of the present study and also in the subsequent chapters on Brathwaite, Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Chinua Achebe, the ‘homecoming’ vision is an assimilative vision. It brings together the positive elements from man’s experience in the last three centuries which are still helpful to the material and spiritual well-being of mankind and those elements in the native traditions which help in forging the new alternative vision. These elements include the legendary mythical conception of man’s past experience as opposed to the linear experience that is called ‘history’ in the western tradition. Also significant is the profound conception of the role of the woman – the largest oppressed class in the world – in the alternative vision. The ‘homecoming’ vision, by replacing the present power-
structures which have made the human condition miserable, promises an alternative where opposition and the strife syndrome are replaced by co-operation and creation in consonance with one’s community and nature. I believe that it is in this vision that the significance of the writers discussed here lies.

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