Preface

After thirty-three long years, South Africa returned to the Commonwealth in 1994. South Africa was not the racist white minority-ruled state that went out of the Commonwealth when it was readmitted to the organisation; but a fully democratic state. The white minority regime did not voluntarily relinquish the power. It was forced to do so by long and sustained internal and international pressure. The Commonwealth had a distinct and important role in the transformation.

South Africa had been a colony of Britain, a leading member of the Commonwealth. Contrary to its decolonisation policy of granting ‘independence with the majority rule’, Britain had transferred power to the whites in South Africa. The South African whites used apartheid policy to dominate and suppress the blacks. British investment formed the backbone of South African economy, helping it to sustain its apartheid policy. Britain was directly or indirectly involved in many of the issues of South Africa.

The policy of apartheid was against the Commonwealth principle of equality. Moreover, the composition of the Commonwealth was rapidly changing while apartheid was being solidified in South Africa. With the accession of African countries to the Commonwealth African issues gained prominence. The African interests were concentrated on particular issues and areas like Southern Africa, trade, aid and developmental assistance. Politically, two issues—Rhodesia and South Africa—came to the forefront and they ensured that South Africa remained a prominent issue in the Commonwealth.

The sensitivity of the subject and the strength of the feeling that racial discrimination evoked, in the Commonwealth can be understood from the harsh words used against it. The Commonwealth termed racial prejudice as a dangerous sickness and racial discrimination as an unmitigated evil. The African countries wanted that Britain, a major ally of South Africa, should take stronger action against the government of South Africa. The Commonwealth became a useful forum to exert pressure on Britain to change its policies in line with the cause of African countries. With the
independence of Zimbabwe in 1980, facilitated through the Commonwealth, the issue of South Africa got individual attention.

The objective of this study is to deal with the South African issues in the Commonwealth and to examine as to how these issues were dealt within the Commonwealth. Though South Africa withdrew from the Commonwealth in 1961, its issues continued to dominate the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth, like other organisations, used the policy to isolate, boycott and to impose sanctions to deal with South Africa. In this connection, various issues that came up—the issue of arms, sports, sanctions, and the destabilisation of the neighbouring countries—are looked into.

This study analyses how different groups within the Commonwealth, the old Commonwealth, the African countries and the Asian countries like India acted on these issues. It studies the style and intensity of the pressures they tried to apply, the different attitudes these countries had on these issues, and how the Commonwealth acted as an international organisation in the South African issue. The study analyses as how at various times the controversies over the issues of South Africa threatened the very existence of the Commonwealth and how the Commonwealth survived these.

The period for the study is 1961-1993. The decision of South Africa to become a Republic was a convenient opportunity for the Commonwealth to reconsider South Africa’s position in the Commonwealth. Tremendous pressure from many Commonwealth members made South Africa withdraw from the Commonwealth in 1961. It was from this time onwards that the Commonwealth started taking South African issues as priority agenda. This study starts from this year. Though by 1990 it was clear that apartheid was on the run, the whites still tried to cling on to power. In 1993, the Transitional Executive Council, a multiracial body to work towards election in 1994 was formed. It was only then that Mandela declared that the countdown to democracy began. In the same year, the Commonwealth Secretary General Emeka Anyaoku expressed hope that South Africa would one day re-join the organisation.
The nature of this study has partially dictated its methodology. To understand a major African problem, which the Commonwealth tried to solve, the methodology used has been historical analysis based on the Commonwealth primary sources and other research works. The available pieces of evidence are used for analysis. The analysis is also problem and theme oriented not chronological.

The sources used are primary and secondary literatures. Under primary sources, largely official publications of the Commonwealth Secretariat have been used. The Biennial Reports of the Commonwealth Secretary General, the Communiqués of the Commonwealth meetings, the Accords passed in the meetings and the Reports of the Sanctions Committee and the Commonwealth Foreign Ministers Sanctions Committee are used. The report of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group and the Documents and Speeches on the Commonwealth affairs also come under this. For comparative Assessment, the official documents of the United Nations Organisation and the Non-Aligned Movement have also been used as primary documents.

Secondary sources include books, periodicals and newspapers. Other than the numerous journals, periodicals like Kessing’s Contemporary Archives, Asian Recorder, and West Africa have been used. Newspapers were used as valuable sources of information on contemporary events.

The thesis has been organised into seven chapters. The first chapter, introduction, gives a background of the structure and evaluation of the Commonwealth. The role of the British decolonisation process in the making of the Commonwealth has also been looked into. Besides this, the chapter serves as a background to the policy of apartheid, its laws and its impact to understand the issues of South Africa are taken up in the subsequent chapters.

The second chapter discusses and analyses the situation that led to the exit of South Africa from the Commonwealth. Till 1957, the issue of South Africa was not discussed in the Commonwealth. The reason for this change from 1960 onwards and the process of the exit are studied here. The pressure from different countries in the Commonwealth for the exit and the roles of major players have been examined.
The third chapter deals with the African countries and their positions on the issues of South Africa in the Commonwealth. The position of African countries differed among themselves. The Front Line States (FLS) who were economically dependent on South Africa had difficulties in offering support against South Africa. This was further accentuated by the aggressive destabilisation strategies of South Africa. The support, the differences and the contradictions of African members of the Commonwealth are studied in this chapter.

The fourth chapter deals with Britain and the issue of South Africa in the Commonwealth. Britain, its objection to sanctions and with its investment and trade with South Africa was always at loggerheads with the rest of the Commonwealth. The reasons for which it did not apply sufficient pressure and Britain's justifications on these issues are studied here.

The fifth chapter deals with the non-African Commonwealth members who have played an important role on these issues. Australia, New Zealand and Canada had historical ties with South Africa. But at crucial point, they all got together with other countries against South Africa. The positions and the roles of these countries have been discussed in this chapter. The Asian countries supported the struggle against apartheid. India, with its people of Indian origin in South Africa, had special interest in the struggle for majority rule in South Africa. It played a leading role against the struggle both within the Commonwealth and outside. This chapter critically examines their roles.

The sixth chapter deals with the activities and position of the Commonwealth and that of other organisations like United Nations, Non-Aligned Movement, European Economic Community, Organisation of African Unity. This chapter makes a comparative assessment of the Commonwealth vis-à-vis other international organisation, given their respective strengths and weaknesses, in terms of its role and impact on issues against apartheid. The last chapter, Conclusion, makes an overall assessment of the Commonwealth on South African issues.
A notable limitation of the study is the absence of fieldwork neither to the African countries nor to the Commonwealth Secretariat in London. A fieldwork would have given access to some of the important primary materials and interviews with the major players. These would have given a clearer picture of the internal dynamics and political pressures within the Commonwealth during the period of study.

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