CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTORY
In the past, people used to carry coal from New Castle to different parts of the world. But now-a-days, coal is being carried from most parts of the world to New Castle. The main point is that earlier British literature was prescribed in the curriculum and other literatures were not comprehensively studied and encouraged. The creative artist from the erstwhile colonies of Britian produced a considerable body of literature called, Commonwealth literature. Of late, this literature has also gained ground. Critics have not got any unanimity about this literature. Some have given the term, Commonwealth literature; some others have not hesitated to name it New Literatures in English. A few critics have also given it the name, Post-colonial Literature.

Though the erstwhile colonies of Britain produced an important body of literature called Commonwealth literature, for the sake of convenience, the term, Post-colonial Literature seems to have gained currency. Margret Drabble observed rightly

the term post-colonial literature is to date, the most convenient way of embracing the powerful and diverse body of literary responses to the challenges presented by de-colonization and the transitions, independence and post-independence in a wide variety of political and cultural context.
Post-colonial literature consists of a body of writing that emanates from Europe's former colonies. Though it addresses the questions of history, identity, ethnicity, gender and language in general, the term is replete with contradictions and conundrums. The forms of colonial rule and the processes of de-colonization are very much varied to admit of a single definition. One may also raise the doubt whether the once favoured term, Commonwealth literature, is still appropriate at all. The term Commonwealth literature contains too many implied assumptions of a multi-cultural community in which each country is working towards a sense of shared enterprise and common experience. But now-a-days, the term Post-colonial Literature has gained currency.

In this context, it is pertinent to recall the observation made by Prof. C.D. Narasimhaiah. According to him,

Commonwealth found themselves for the first time at the giving end. And while the mother country began to be at the receiving end ... and what it received was not gold, silver, diamond, jute, cotton, silk or spices, but as they say, the things of the mind and the spirit. This one act alone gave a tremendous boost to the creative talent in Commonwealth countries.
These lines of Narasimhaiah show that the creative artists from Commonwealth countries have produced a good body of literature that is being read with utmost reverence by the teachers of English as well as by highly educated persons. Even prestigious publishing houses like Oxford University Press, Heinemann and Chatto and Windus came forward to publish books by writers in English from Commonwealth countries. In Commonwealth literature, African writing has won its own prominence. In fact, there are some features that bind African literature together.

For many years, the African continent had been under the control of Europeans. In fact, the Europeans regarded Africa as a dark continent. In the 18th century, the Africans were considered to be in a state of Nature, in perfect harmony with their environment. Prior to the inception of the European colonial rule in Africa, many of the societies on the continent had their modes of communication through the oral tradition. According to Alamin Mazrui and Lupenga Mphande,

*Such societies have sometimes been described as belonging to the oral tradition in the wider sense of the term that includes not only expression in speech form, but also in its complimentsaries like the drum, the dance, the*
From this passage, it is learnt that there has often been a tendency to regard orality as a peculiarly African pre-disposition.

Joseph Conrad talking about his journey into Africa, says:

- going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginning of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest..... you lost your way on that river as you would in a desert

The observation made by Conrad throws light on the impenetrable forests and trackless wilderness in Africa.

Africa remained in the same state even after the discovery of extensive trade routes. While the geographical area remained as a dark continent, the state of human beings was the same as that of the geographical area. The terms, *noble savages, the depraved cannibals, children of nature* etc., described the Africans aptly. The Europeans placed the Africans below the white race in the ladder of great chain of beings.
While the great Sahara desert separated Africa from Europe, the remaining three sides of the continent were separated from other lands by vast oceans. The vast coastal line of Africa was controlled for over 400 years in trade by Arabs, Europeans and Asians. Till the 18th century, Arabs and Europeans established their castles on the coastline and traded from there. The traders used to gather gold, ivory and slaves from Africa though the interior Africa continued to remain as a dark continent. In this context, Ronald Oliver makes an interesting observation on the state of affairs in Africa upto the 13th century:

What happened economically in the 13th century .... seems to have mainly the intensification of the already established lines of commercial exploitation.

When the slave trade was in progress, the Africans were, in European economical terms, noble savages. During the 19th century, the British were building up a paramountcy of influence on Africa. Palm oil and slaves from West Africa, cloves and ivory from East Africa were exported to Europe. Naturally, the British went to the interiors of Eastern Africa in search of ivory that brought them huge resources. The slave trade had horrible effects on the African society. The middle-men from Africa helped Europeans and Americans to increase their lucrative
market. In turn, the Europeans supplied arms and ammunition to the tribal chief, creating mistrust and war-fear among the African tribes. This also affected the economic conditions in Africa.

The European colonizers had their own interest in Africa as they wanted raw material to manufacture goods as well as a market for their expanding economies. To control the African territories forever, there grew competition among the European countries. In 1885, the Berlin-African Conference decided that a country should have occupied the territories before it claimed it. As a result, the European colonizers — Spain, France, Portugal, Italy and England — created artificial boundaries and changed the map of Africa according to their convenience. They also brought the Metropolitan principles and systems from their lands and imposed them on the Africans with a few changes. In 1992, Lord Lugard in his The Dual Mandate expounded the system of indirect rule. In those days, the colonizers felt that the hierarchical African societies could be fixed more neatly into the colonial system. Later, they found that the assimilation of feudal chiefdoms could not be incorporated easily into a modern state. As a result of the meeting of two different power structures, a variety of problems and misunderstandings had crept in.

European missionaries also played a vital role in bringing about a few changes in African societies. They took it as their mission to help
and reform *uncivilized people*. They made sincere attempts to reform the African rituals and bring in better values. They established missionary schools to educate the *primitive African tribes*. They never appreciated the religion of the natives. They vehemently put on white mask to cover the black face. Like the administrators, the missionaries also had occupational needs to consolidate the image of savage Africa. In fact, as James Ogude rightly observes,

*The Africans, for example, saw themselves as the legitimate defenders of progress and development which were best expressed in Christianity.*

These lines overtly tell about the role of Christianity in African societies.

Colonization markedly modernized the African countries. It introduced new modes of production, a system of labour and education that had helped the natives to question traditional modes of thoughts. It also introduced a liberal religion in Africa. On the native side, the colonizers consciously worked to break the spirit of rebellion against the British rule by educating the natives suitably and also by engendering an inferiority complex. As a result, though he belongs to the countries that are independent today, the native tends to look up to his former rulers for general guidance, monetary assistance, technical advice and
intellectual guidance, so that ironically enough the economic and political equation between the former and the latter remains what it was during the days of British subjugation. It is pertinent to mention the piercing observation made by James Ogude:

*The crisis in Africa is the stark reality that colonialism left backward economies that could hardly nurture an advanced proletariat .... Born out of the ruins of colonial history, the post-colonial state was a society whose agents' change lacked a coherent vision*.

As free countries, the African countries did not make strides on economic and social fronts. They have failed miserably to solve the problems of poverty and unemployment. The native rulers have only replaced the foreign ruler. Even after independence, the distance between the leaders and the masses has increased. In the absence of good creative leadership, the common man continues to be exploited as in the days of the European rulers. Most of the natives of the former colonial societies, now look up to the white man's superior culture as a model and they, at the same time, feel ashamed of their own backward culture.
The African writers produced their creative writing keeping in view the society around them. Sometimes, the British novelistic tradition influenced the African writers. Though they did not adhere to some innovations and adaptations from the traditional literary forms, they never hesitated to use English as a non-colonial language. They enriched the English language with their literary output. They borrowed liberally from the local idiom and tried to assimilate this into the syntactical structure of English. They did not wish to write like the English and so they tried out various experiments to give English a local touch.

Another important factor that one sees in African writing is a natural reference to what is British and sometimes what it is in the West. But this snobbery is not always evident in some of the African writers like Achebe and Ngugi who ask their leaders to develop a taste for their own African literature. They are so open-minded that they ask the natives not to ignore their African identity.

The creative writers from Africa have made an extensive use of myths and legends of their countries in their writings. They, however, freed themselves from the blind imitation of white man's values. They never hesitated to preserve their self-respect and dignity. They held the view that their hopes of recovery after independence were being foiled by the neo-colonial forces. So they yearned for complete freedom from
all impositions and bondages in social, political and cultural realms. Thus, creative literature in English written in Africa recorded

*the native writers' increasing awareness of the peculiar present day problems ... and his growing concern with the need to confront them*.²

The African writers have drawn the attention of the world to the predicament faced by their people while presenting the different facets of African heritage in their writings. African literature has depicted the crisis faced by the African people. It has a clear vision of an ideal society. The writers have realised the need to combine the best in the old cultural traditions with the enlightened ideas of the modern world. They have not hesitated to express their resentment against the corruption in independent African societies. They have even protested against the authoritarian forces which tried to misuse the freedom gained from the colonial powers. They have expressed solidarity with the people who are still under the domination of racist regimes. The African writers lay emphasis on tradition, family structure and they have even acknowledged their moorings in the heritage of their motherland. In their writings, they have maintained the African ethos and also the predicament of African society. They have even discussed the change
in the African society that is effected by the new political evil. They have expressed their protest against totalitarian tendencies and the political groups which held them in a constant state of peril.

The drama in the third world countries has certain common features in it. Usually, the playwrights from these countries are well aware of the contemporary problems and so they feel that there is a desperate need to confront them. Colonialism stretching over many years in the third world countries has affected the native sensibility. So, the playwright does not hesitate to depict to the reading public, the historical fact of colonization and its far-reaching consequences on the present conditions and status of his country. This venture has led to the need to decolonize and also to the need for preserving the cultural values of the African society.

The creative writers in Africa earnestly feel that they have a mission and an avocation to arouse consciousness among the natives. They preserve and assert the beauty and dignity of their own culture. Secondly, they feel that under the guidance of the educated masses, the country must become a mature independent nation. In other words, they are writers with social purpose. They feel that they should show concern for the people around them and also arouse some consciousness in their minds. The African drama has emerged not simply as a pure literary exercise but as an artistic response with socio-
political situation existing in the country. The factors that shaped and moulded the growth of the African drama since the gaining of independence, arose as much from the political and social problems of colonizer countries as from indigenous narrative tradition of ancient culture. This is exquisitely exemplified in the plays of Wole Soyinka, Achebe and Ngugi.

Motivated by the political and social questions arising from the changed historical situation, the African playwright began to conceive of the relationship of man and his surroundings in a new and realistic manner. It is pertinent here to mention the observation made by Chinua Achebe.

*African narratives have always been seen as writing against colonial discursive practices in an attempt to validate Africa's historiography denied by colonialism ... They aim at the reconstituting of a shattered community against all the pressures of the colonial system.*

Some of the African writers do not hesitate to grapple with the notion of nationalism and other related issues such as ethnicity and individualism. They also made a sincere attempt to define the new nation-state theory and more importantly, to give an alternative African
African writers focussed on the development of print language as a primary terrain in which the idea of the nation is constituted. Most of them, through their works made it a point to exhibit the ethos of their nation. The idea of the nation, as Anderson says,

emerged when print capitalism provided a medium to establish a bounded identity.¹⁰

They emphasized the role of literature in validating and reinforcing the spirit of nationalism. As there was a literary barrenness in East-Africa, quite a few writers argued vehemently that a nation without writers is a dying nation. A few writers like Ngugi earnestly felt that there was a lack of appropriate literature that would give some substance to the idea of East African nations. Similarly, artists like Achebe, saw the writer as having a socially prominent role in the formation of the nation. They almost felt that the writers were the heralds of a new awareness of the emergent Africa. They were also alive to the fact that ethnicity was a major stumbling block to the creation of a nation.
Most of the African writers do not hesitate to project the correct picture of Africa. They feel that the peasants, the workers and other common people of Africa who were marginalised in the past, continue to receive the same treatment even now. They are of the opinion that peasants, workers and women continue to suffer even now at the hands of a few African capitalists. Even at the hands of the post-colonial rulers, they continue to remain as marginalised groups. So, the writers prompt the Africans by forcing them

to argue for the complexity of engagement of
Africans with imported institutions and constructs.  

African writing attempts to show that Africans have had their own previous history and that it was implicated in establishing or contesting power. It records their struggles their resistance to colonial and neo-colonial domination in the post-colonial state. In the East African context, the struggle crystallized itself in the Mau Mau anti-colonial war, a struggle which could continue to inspire new resolves for freedom and dignity. They are easily influenced by the works of Marx and those of Fanon. It was Fanon who never hesitated to use violence for liberation. His criticism of national bourgeoisie and his prediction of their neo-colonial mentality find an expression in the African writing. His notion of
the native poet as the custodian of national culture and as educator is also echoed in the African writing.

The African writers were markedly influenced by the changes that were taking place in the African body politic following independence. The political scenario after independence was fraught with fears, frustrations and disillusionment. Most of them expressed their bitterness against the new governments. They sympathized with the peasants and workers, who fought against the West, as they were neglected thoroughly. In other words, they were increasingly frustrated by the new African governments that could not deliver the goods to the peasants and the workers. They raise profound questions in their writings about the corruption within the post-colonial governments, even as they gave vent to their growing disillusionment with the capitalist world system. They never hesitated to spell out the broad outlines of the underdevelopment and dependency perspective in their countries. They also noted how colonialism paralysed their country’s absorption into the world capitalist system which fostered economic measures that resulted in an unbalanced development.

The African writers felt that the neo-colonialism in their countries was rooted in the transition from colonialism to independence, a transition which resulted in the transfer of political power to a regime based on the support of social classes closely linked to foreign
capitalists. They were disillusioned with the pitfalls of national consciousness as also with the underdevelopment and dependence that obtained in their countries.

The African writer, though very much a product of the colonial experience, by virtue of a keener sensibility understands the subversive impact that colonization has had on the colonial consciousness. Therefore, his attempt has been justifiable to keep his readers informed of the far-reaching consequences of colonization on the present system and status of his country. But, this attempt has not exhausted itself with a mere sentimental journey into a lost idyllic past but has developed into an urgent expression of the need to de-colonize. Frantz Fanon in his *The Wretched of the Earth* says,

> Decolonization is the veritable creation of new men ... the thing which has been colonized becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself.  

In artistic terms, the African writer has articulated the necessity of re-generating the ex-colonial's dead spirit and self-respect of shedding of the oppressive influence of colonization by depicting to the world at large, African's very national identity and achievements.
One finds a few writers who are committed to their native heritage and, at the same time, are aware of the need to change. They first of all, assert the beauty and dignity of their culture. Secondly, they endeavor to educate the masses in the new directions the country must take as a mature independent nation. In other words, they have taken upon themselves the responsibility of awakening through their writings, the ignorant, indifferent and inert masses to the challenges of belonging to a free country after many years of subjugation.

After independence, the African writers yearned for change and social regeneration. They often lamented the absence of positive heroes who would embody the spirit of struggle and resistance against exploitation. Like Fanon, they too would like to take their people to a better society. In the words of Lazarus, the African writers express in their writings

\[ \text{a desire to bring about the kind of radical change, the upward thrust of the people} \]

Some writers turned revolutionaries and some others possessing a passion for change and regeneration, expressed their revolutionary zeal in their writing. Some of them thought that writers must serve as the agents of transformation. They are in a state of predicament, particularly in the impracticability of trying to forge a coherent vision for
change in the face of fragmentation, displacement and basic absence of models to inspire their writings.

In the use of English language, the African writers never hesitated to put forth their colonial experience. For them, writing in English has not been without its serious setbacks. They often find themselves, describing situations and modes of thought which have no direct equivalent in the English way of life. Caught in that situation, they can try and contain what they want to say within the limits of conventional English or they can try to push back some limits to accommodate their idea. The first method produces competent uninspired and rather flat work. The second method will produce something new and valuable to the English language as well as to the material they are trying to put over, but it can also get out of hand. It can lead to simply bad English being accepted or defended as African English.

In the light of the aforesaid, it is pertinent to discuss a few fairly representative African writers. Chinua Achebe is a voice from West Africa who came to limelight with his powerful novel, Things Fall Apart. In the novel, he attempted sincerely to reconstruct in fictional terms a definition of African identity, an identity of which the African ought to have been proud of, instead of feeling ashamed as he had felt ever since the British colonized his country. In the novel, he showed that
African peoples did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry, and above all, they had dignity.\textsuperscript{14}

Achebe felt happy that he wrote his novels keeping in mind the specific African needs of the moment. One of his achievements was that he communicated meaningfully both with his Western readers who were for the most part ignorant of the material he was handling and with those who knew it inside out. He is perhaps the only African writer who has bridged the gap with complete success.\textsuperscript{15}

Thus, Achebe is one writer who represents easily the West African ethos and tradition.

Wole Soyinka, a forceful writer, became the first African to win the Nobel Prize for literature. According to Swedish Academy of Letters, he is a writer who, in a wide cultural perspective and with poetic overtones, fashions the drama of existence. He is a typical Yoruba, an academic, man of theatre, political activist and writer all rolled into one. Yoruba
mythology and history provide the required material for his works as Nature does for Wordsworth's poetry. He has written poems, novels and plays. He is familiar with Black tradition in the United States, South America and the Caribbean as well as with European and African culture. As a political activist, Soyinka uses the stage as an instrument of political satire. He is equally opposed to the post-independence regimes which are tyrannical and corrupt. He strongly believes drama should be made to reflect the way of life and social aspirations of his people. He sees it as the business of writers to expose the evils as a means of bringing about social and political change. As a man of the theatre, he has influenced a number of African playwrights. In the words of James Gibbs,

_He has become more and more preoccupied with the theme of the oppressive boot ….. He disturbs, he disquietens, he delights, he demands attention and now African letters, indeed Africa herself, cannot do without him._

Ngugi is regarded as one of the most influential writers today, not only for his creative work but also for his criticism of wider cultural issues. He sincerely attempted to sensitize his people to realise their own identity and tried to awaken them to the need to free themselves of
complexes by rejecting blind imitation of the white man's values. He emphasized, in literary terms, the need to resurrect their self-respect and dignity as a means of taking their country from darkness into light from backwardness to development and progress. In his six solid novels, the first three were written in a realistic mode and the last three in an allegorical mode. He has been a vocal advocate for writing in African languages and narrative forms, besides putting his commitment into practice. In the words of Oliver Lovesey,

Much of his work conveys a sense of both the transcendent hope of independence and freedom, Uhuru, and also the absolute despair that followed when this hope was compromised.17

Ngugi believes that total liberation in East Africa can be achieved through the united efforts of the peasant, the worker and the student. Like Ngugi, Francis Imbuga is one of the fairly known African writers who emerged in East Africa dealing with the problems of independence, freedom and social equality in post-colonial Kenya. A study is going to be made of the six plays of Imbuga in relation to themes and techniques.
REFERENCES


7. Ibid, pp150-151


9. Quoted in James Ogude in *Ngugi’s Novels and African History*, p.1


