

Unit - III

This Unit comprises three items:

- 1. From ‘Commonwealth to postcolonial’ – Detailed Study**
- 2. Emergence of Commonwealth Literature – Detailed Study**
- 3. Crisis –from Orientalism – Non –Detailed Study.**

1. From ‘Commonwealth to postcolonial’ – Detailed Study

The following is the extract of ‘**From Commonwealth to Postcolonial**’ taken from *Beginning Post Colonialism* by John McLeod

From ‘Commonwealth to postcolonial’

Introduction:

The Purpose of this chapter

-- To get a flexible but solid definition of the word ‘postcolonialism’ --placing it in two contexts

--1. Historical experiences of decolonisation – occurred in 20th Century

--2. Intellectual developments in latter part of 20th Century

--especially – the shift from Commonwealth Literature to Postcolonial Literature

Colonialism & decolonisation

---By 20th Century, -- British Empire covered a vast area of earth

[Africa, Asia, Australasia, Canada, Caribbean & Ireland.]

---By 21st Century – there remains a small number of British colonies

---Today – the phrase – *The British Empire* – used in past sense –

---Signifying/marking – a historical period & set of relationships – no longer current.

--- In short, the 20th Century has been :

1. The century of colonial demise
2. The century of decolonisation

For millions of people were once under the authority of British Empire/Crown.

--- With the advent of 21st Century – Britain remains a colonial power

--- with possessions in the Caribbean & South Atlantic

--- Further, the material & imaginative legacies --- of colonialism & decolonisation ---- remain important constitutive elements – in the cotemporary domains of : anthropology, economics, art, global politics, international capitalism, mass-media and literature

---To define the meaning of Colonialism – two other terms need to be considered

1. Capitalism
2. Imperialism

Colonialism & Captitalism

---Denis Judd – argues

---colonialism – first & foremost part of – commercial venture of Western nations --- from late 17th & early 18th Century

---the seizing of foreign lands for government & settlement --- partly motivated by

- 1. desire to create & control market abroad for Western goods
- 2. securing the natural resources & labour power and
- 3. the resources of people at the lowest possible cost

Colonialism – was – lucrative commercial operation – that brought wealth and riches to Western nations --- through economic exploitation of others --- for economic profit, reward and riches

--- hence, colonialism & capitalism maintained mutually supportive relationship.

Colonialism & Imperialism

---these two mean two different things ---though used interchangeable sometimes.

---Peter Childs & Patrick Williams argue

--- imperialism – an ideology --- upholds legitimacy of

--- 1. economic and military control of one nation by another

---Colonilism is only *one form of practice* resulting from – the ideology of imperialism

--- 2. specifically concerns the settlement of one group of people -- in a new location.

--- Childs and Williams define imperialism as:

“the extension and expansion of trade and commerce under the protection of political, legal, and military controls”

---while colonialism is virtually over today

---Imperialism continues to stay

[like America still engaged in imperial acts – securing wealth and power --- through economic exploitation of other nations.

Benita Parry puts it:

“colonialism is a specific and the most spectacular mode of imperialism’s many and mutable state, one which preceded the rule of international finance capitalism and whose formal ending imperialism has survived”

The recap:

---colonialism is a particular historical manifestation of imperialism

---specific to certain places and time.

---the British Empire as one form of an imperial economic and political structure.

---Elleke Boehmer's judicious definition of colonialism

“ the settlement of territory, the exploitation or development of resources, and the attempt of govern the indigenous inhabitants of occupied lands”

[a] the emphasis on the *settlement* of land

[b] the *economic* relationship at the heart of colonialism , and

[c] *the unequal relations of power* which colonialism constructs.

There are 3 distinct periods of decolonisation with regard to the imperial venture of British Empire:

1. Loss of American colonies and declaration of American independence in the late 18th Century

2. Creation of the 'dominions' – during the end of 19th Century and upto to the first decade of 20th Century. [describing the nations of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa]

3.The post-war period – the decades immediately after the end of the Second World War.

---many reasons of decolonisation.

---the fundamental reason – the growth of various nationalist movements in both the 'settler' and 'settled' colonies – that gave resistance to – British colonial authority.

---during this period --- Britain's status as World economic power rapidly declined.

- America and Soviet Unions became the military superpowers.
- Moreover, The British Empire was increasingly expensive to administer
- handed over the administration of colonial affairs to its people.
- without considering the economical readiness of the colonised peoples for the shift of power.

2. Emergence of Commonwealth Literature – Detailed Study

The following is the brief extract of “**The Emergence of Commonwealth Literature**” taken from *Beginning Post Colonialism* by John McLeod :

---Two areas of intellectual study account for the emergence ---Commonwealth literature and theories of colonial discourses.

---Literary critics started using the term - Commonwealth Literature – from 1950’s to describe

---literatures in English emerging from a selection of countries with a history of colonisation.

---as a special area of study, it was an attempt to identify and to locate this vigorous literary activity ---to consider the common concerns and attributes that the manifold literary voices had.

---Commonwealth Literature was exclusively associated with countries with history of colonisation.

---Earlier, the term was used to the special status of the dominions within the Empire and their continuing allegiance to Britain---but gradually the term ‘dominions’ got dropped---during the first few decades of the beginning of the 20th Century

----The identification and study of Commonwealth Literature echoed a benign usage of 'Commonwealth'.

---The term suggested a shared, valuable literary inheritance between desperate and variable nations---distinctly promoting unity in diversity.

---Commonwealth literature certainly dealt with national and cultural issues. It was at its best comparable with the English literary canon that functions as the means of measuring its value.

---It was able to transcend its regional affiliations and to produce work of permanent and universal relevance.

---Critics like Walsh observed --- Commonwealth literature dealt fundamentally with the same preoccupations with the human condition as did Jane Austen or George Eliot. National differences were certainly important adding the novelty of 'personality', 'light' and 'colour', but ultimately this national specifics were secondary to the fundamental universal meaning of the work.

---Critics of commonwealth literature conformed texts to a critical status quo. The experimental concerns of these texts, their novelty and local focus made them exciting to read and helped them depict the nation with which they were concerned.

---Critics like Jeffares and Walsh were instrumental in securing Commonwealth literature as an important category of artistic endeavour and a viable area of academic study.

---The postcolonial critics of later time made an attempt to discard the liberal humanist bias perceived in the critics of commonwealth literature and gave way read literature in other new ways.

3. Crisis –from Orientalism – Non –detailed Study.

Crisis is the fourth topic in the introductory chapter of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, under the title *The Scope of Orientalism*. Here, Said talks about the textual attitude. The writers assume a fallacy,

“the swarming, unpredictable and problematic mess in which human beings live can be understood on the basis of what books –texts—say; to apply what one learns out of a book literally to reality to risk folly or ruin.”

Hence, one can understand that there has been a dissimilarity between reality and what the texts say about reality.

Said asserts that two situations favours a textual attitude. In an unknown and relatively threatening situation, men do resort to previously available knowledge, i.e. texts stored in the form of books. Travel books or guides are of this type. The second situation that favours the textual attitude is termed as ‘the appearance of success’

“ Orient came from books written in the tradition of Orientalism”.

“Orientalism had much to do with a preposterous transition” –the transition from a mere textual apprehension, formulation, or definition of the Orient to the putting of all this into practice.

Edward Said in order to reiterate his arguments on this textual attitude, uses a term ‘the Orientalized orient’.

“ Orientalism carried forward two traits: 1. A newly found scientific self consciousness based on the linguistic importance of the Orient to Europe and 2. a proclivity to divide, subdivide redivide its subject matter without changing its mind about the Orient as being always the same, unchanging , uniform and radically peculiar object.”

This way, Said relates orientalism to colonisation. This textual attitude amounts for the psychological colonisation. This is how, Said exposes the ‘Crisis’ in his *Orientalism*.

The short notes given above have been compiled from the topic *Crisis - from Orientalism*, Edward Said, *Vintage Books 1979*