BHARATI VIDYAPEETH

(Deemed to be University), Pune

Accredited with 'A+' Grade (2017) by NAAC
Category - I University Status by UGC
'A' Grade University Status by MHRD, Govt. of India

SCHOOL OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE – I

SELF LEARNING MATERIAL
SLM

MA - I (PGENG 14)

Bharati Vidyapeeth
(Deemed to be University), Pune
School of Distance Education

Dr. Patangrao Kadam
Founder : Bharati Vidyapeeth
Founder - Chancellor : Bharati Vidyapeeth
(Deemed to be University), Pune

Prof. Dr. Shivajirao Kadam
Chancellor,
Bharati Vidyapeeth
(Deemed to be University), Pune

Prof. Dr. Manikrao Salunkhe
Vice Chancellor,
Bharati Vidyapeeth
(Deemed to be University), Pune

Dr. Vishwajeet Kadam
Pro-Vice Chancellor,
Bharati Vidyapeeth
(Deemed to be University), Pune

Prescribed for MA
Edition : First

Copies : 800

Published by :
Registrar
Bharati Vidyapeeth
(Deemed to be University), Pune

Printed by :
Bharati Vidyapeeth's
Bharati Printing Press
Pune.

Cover Design by :
Bharati Vidyapeeth's
Bharati Printing Press
Pune.

ISBN : 978-93-88283-47-2

* Further information about the School of Distance Education may be obtained from the university office at Bharati Vidyapeeth Bhavan, Lal Bahaddur Shastri Marg, Pune - 411 030.

Centre for School of Distance Education
Bharati Vidyapeeth
(Deemed to be University), Pune, India

Writers Team		
Author	**Unit**	
Dr. Rajashri Barvekar	**Basic Concepts**	**i) Introduction : Situating Postcolonial** **ii) Postcolonial issues in performance**
Dr. Sunil Sawant	**Basic Concepts & History**	**i) Postcolonial autobiographical writing** **ii) Approaching the world : Language & voice**
Professor Dr. S. D. Sargar	**Form & Genre**	**Form & Genre**
Prin. Dr. Santosh Koti	**Ngugi Wa Thiango's**	***Decolonising the Mind***
Dr. Annie John	**Dorris Lessing's**	***The Grass is Singing***

REVIEWER		
COURSE	**SUBJECT**	**FACULTY**
MA (English)	**Postcolonial Literature-I**	**Dr. Rajashri Barvekar**

EDITOR		
COURSE	**SUBJECT**	**FACULTY**
MA (English)	**Postcolonial Literature-I**	**Dr. Vivekanand A. Rankhambe**

ISBN No : 978-93-88283-47-2

CONTENTS

Unit - 2 Basic Concepts - II

Contents

2.0 OBJECTIVES

After completing the study of this unit, you will

- know about the basic concepts
- know about the trends in postcolonial writing
- learn postcolonial autobiographical writing
- learn appropriating the word: language and voice
- be able to answer the questions on the unit

2.1 INTRODUCTION

All of us know that Postcolonial Studies is an important development in the field of literary studies. This unit deals with two important basic concepts in Postcolonial Studies: 1) Postcolonial Autobiographical Writing and 2) Appropriating the Word: Language and Voice.

2.2 POSTCOLONIAL AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITING

For a long time, histories and narratives written by the colonizers dominated the cultures of the colonized. Different postcolonial texts try to challenge and revise the form and content of these colonialist histories and narratives. They do so to assert the dignity and validity of the cultures of the colonized. Often, some of these texts got caught within the terms defined by the colonizer. Such authors as Chinua Achebe, Margaret Atwood, Jean Rhys and Salman Rushdie realized this danger. They, therefore, used the strategy of questioning the very process of a single perspective and linear narration. They avoided the use of simple categories of good and evil or civilized and barbaric, or such absolute distinctions as `them' and 'us'.

Another strategy frequently found in postcolonial writing is the process of grounding the text in autobiography. This strategy starts from the self as the central point of reference. Thus, many postcolonial writers have drawn on their childhood experience. They sometimes convey precolonial culture, a relatively innocent world before the impact of foreign educational systems. They also convey the vulnerability of a child to the dictates of colonial power. In these ways postcolonial autobiographies are different from autobiographies produced in a metropolitan context. Whereas metropoli¬tan autobiographies seek to explore and assert the writer's individualism, postcolonial autobiographies often portray the author as a representative of his cultural group. For example, the autobiographies of Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Jawaharlal Nehru and Kwane Nkrumah record a new nation's struggle to come into being and its establishment of a cultural and ideological identity.

In both Nehru's An Autobiography and Kwane Nkrumah's Ghana: The Autobiography o/ Kwane Nkruinah (1957), the personal and national narratives merge. Nehru writes of India, its people and culture, as a female entity. The state, on the other hand, is perceived as masculine, and as Nehru portrays it, the role of the state is to discipline and modernize the sometimes recalcitrant and traditionalist nation. Similarly, Nkrumah's text inscribes Ghana as feminine, and parallels the nation with his mother, to whom the autobiography is dedicated. Both auto¬biographies become iconic texts which are alluded to and questioned in later fictions such as Rushdie's Midnight's Children (1981) and The Moor's Last Sigh (1995) in the case of Nehru, and, in the case of Nkrumah, The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born (1968) by Ayi Kwei Armah and Anowa (1970) and Our Sister Killjoy (1977) by Amu Ata Aidoo. Bapsi Sidwha's autobiographical novel, Ice-Candy-Man (1988) brilliantly uses a child narrator. The novel is based on Sidwha's own situation at the time of partition with her Parsi family in Lahore. It depicts the tensions and sufferings experienced by various groups during the partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan. The narrator's Ayah, courted

NOTES

by both Muslim and Hindu, becomes a symbol of the continent itself as she is ultimately kidnapped and ravaged.

In the autobiographies mentioned above, the public figures recount their personal journey as a paradigm. This paradigm encourages the readers to identify themselves with the nation in formation. In the majority of postcolonial autobiographies, however, the connection between public and private expression may be less explicit. Such autobiographies, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak points out, may also occur as 'testimonies, in which 'the subaltern [gives] testimony to the less oppressed other'. Many slave narratives belong to this genre. Here one might also consider Frantz Fanon's Black Skin, White Masks (1952) as an often autobiographical testimonial, which at the same time contests the author's designation as sub¬altern. Fanon's work explicitly addresses the issue of the conflict between the identity ascribed by others to him as a representative and stereotyped black body, and the self which asserts an individual subjectivity and identity. Fanon's work is alluded to in semi-autobiographical works such as Aidoo's Our Sister Killjoy and Tsitsi Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions (1988).

Fanon comments that the colonial denial of the humanity of the colo¬nized drives them 'to ask the question constantly "Who am I?" Hence it is not surprising that autobiography and autobiographical fiction and poetry become pervasive modes in postcolonial writing. In Ireland W. B. Yeats fore¬grounds the construction of self, the struggle to achieve identity, not only in his Autobiographies (1926) but also in his poetry and drama.

James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916) and Ulysses (1922) both draw attention to their status as autobiographical fiction, while at the same time problematizing the issue of physical and mental colonization. Like Yeats, Joyce reveals in A Portrait the developing consciousness of his protagonist, Stephen Dedalus, as a divided self, who must steer his way past the institutional dogmas of religion, family and nation in order to become a writer who can 'forge in the smithy of [his] soul the uncreated conscience of [his] race'.

Although A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man is based closely on Joyce's own experience of his family, the school and university he attended, the culture of Dublin in the last twenty years of the nineteenth century— we should be care¬ful not to merge the author completely with Stephen. The critic James Olney maintains that 'any autobiography constitutes a psychological-philosophical imitation of the autobiographer's personality' In autobiographical fiction the act of imitation of the author's personality in certain periods and in spe¬cific contexts is made more evident by the adoption of a pseudonym for the central protagonist, and perhaps the use of indirect free speech, or the sense of an interior monologue, rather than first person narrative to convey the con¬sciousness of its subject. Joyce's subsequent novel, Ulysses, portrays a slightly older Stephen, who is much more self-conscious and sceptical about the iden¬tification of Ireland with Cathleen ni Houlihan or with other female figures. He also parodies and criticizes forms of Irish nationalism which hark back to a nostalgic precolonial or rural utopia, and which promulgate a singular racial identity. Hence the other major protagonists in Ulysses are Leopold and Molly Bloom, who are respectively of Hungarian Jewish and English-Spanish descent. Nevertheless, it is obvious that Joyce opposes both Britain's colonial rule and the hegemony of the Roman Catholic Church. In both novels, the issue of nationalism and the writer's responsibility to his nation is debated explicitly and implicitly.

NOTES

Colonial texts 'invariably describe the colonised human as "other", and just as invari¬ably in the third person plural. In postcolonial novels, the first person singular is explicitly construed as identical, and coterminous, with the nation itself'. Of course some colonial texts are narrated in the first person — for example, Robinson Crusoe (1719), Jane Eyre (1847) and Heart of Darkness (1902). Each of these novels, like many colonial travel books and anthropo¬logical texts, constructs the white European male or female observer/narrator as normative. Postcolonial autobiographies resituate the central perspective, the seeing 'eye' or 'I, and at the same time dramatize the process of the indigenous speaker's reconstruction or reassertion of his or her identity.

European autobiographies concentrate on the individual and his experience. In African writing, however, commu¬nity is more important than the individual. Autobiography from Africa is less an individual phe¬nomenon than a social one. Indeed postcolonial writers are mainly concerned with the social con¬text, the political and cultural forces which impinge on their community, rather than with the individuality of the protagonist. Much early postcolonial writing is an attempt to give both the community and the individual expression. It writes 'from the inside' in opposition to the colonial outsider's dismissal of either cultural value or individual subjectivity within that community.

In the West Indies C. L. R James's Beyond a Boundary (1963) and Minty Alley (1936) depict the protagonist's grow¬ing awareness of the ways in which colour and class may circumscribe the expansion of the self. George Lamming's influential autobiographical novel In the Castle of My Skin (1953) portrays a childhood and adolescence in Barbados. Challenging the concept of autobiogra¬phy as centering on one individual, Sistren, the Jamaican women's collective, has produced a collective autobiography, Lionheart Gal (1986), which transfers the oral narratives of working-class women to a single written-text.

Lamming's In the Castle of My Skin explores a history of mental colonization which the protagonist seeks to escape through exile. Because of the impact of British colonialism on the psychology of Barbadians during the 1930s and 1940s, a community on the one hand took pride in its relationship to the 'Mother Country, identifying itself as 'Little England, and on the other hand was aware of the need for an independent economic and cultural existence. This mental colonization, linked to a rigid class structure, created in Lamming's view 'a fractured consciousness, a deep split in its sensibility which now raised difficult problems of language and values; the whole issue of cultural allegiance between imposed norms of White Power, represented by a small numerical minority, and the fragmented memory of the African masses: between white instruction and

NOTES

Black imagination'. Lamming, like Joyce, depicts the consciousness of an entire community to which the protagonist is attached, but from which he also seeks detachment. In both novels an ambiva¬lent parting is achieved at the end, as the protagonist rejects a particular call to nationalism based on racial identification, and looks towards departure from the island home.

In autobiographical writings by women in Africa, India, and the West Indies, the search for identity and self-fulfilment is even more problematical. The oppression of 'native' women by both the colonial and the patriarchal local cultures confines women to domestic and childbearing duties, and discriminate in terms of both gender and ethnicity or colour. Jean Rhys has portrayed the traumatic effects of such double colonization in Wide Sar¬gasso Sea (1966). She has also revealed the sense of disorientation and loss of identity experienced by her protagonist in her more autobiographical novel, Voyage in the Dark (1934). Indeed, many autobiographical works by postcolonial women narrate a descent into disorientation and madness in the face of the impossi¬ble demands and denial of worth that they face. These works include Bessie Head's A Question of Power (1973), Keri Hulme's The Bone People (1984), Janet Frame's An Angel at My Table (1984) and Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions. In the novels by Head, Hulme and Dangarembga, the women protagonists are assaulted physically and psychologically by men who feel their own fragile sta¬tus in emerging or newly independent nations threatened, and by conflicting expectations regarding their role and sexual attractiveness, an attractiveness based on Western norms of appearance and behaviour.

Other women writers have avoided the issue of sexuality by focusing on childhood and early adolescence. This emphasis on childhood experience 'has nevertheless lim¬ited the critical response to Caribbean literature in one important way: it has arrested the discussion of sexuality'. Thus Merle Hodge's Crick-Crack Monkey (1970), Zee Edgell's Beka Lamb (1982) and Jamaica Kincaid's Annie John (1986) all portray their protagonists' growing awareness of discrimination in terms of gender, class and colour, but end their narratives before the discovery of sexual identity. One can see a similar pattern in Australian autobiography and auto¬biographical fiction. Miles Franklin's My Beautiful Career (1901) focuses mainly on the narrator's early, almost Edenic childhood on a remote bush farm, contrasted with her teenage years in a harsher and poorer environment on a dairy farm, where she feels culturally deprived and oppressed by the expectation that she should forget her ambition to be a writer and marry. Franklin's novel both endorses the ardent nationalism that led up to federation and cri¬tiques the masculine ethos of that nationalism.

In Patrick White's The Twyborn Affair (1979), the struggle for national independence and self-validation is paralleled by the quest for acceptance as a homosexual. White's autobiography Flaws in the Glass (1981) is explicit about his life as a writer, and his complex identity as an Australian and a homosexual in what was then a homophobic culture.

NOTES

Postcolonial autobiographical writing often plays a significant role in establishing the subject's sense of location and belonging. However, the desire to establish location and belonging may perform differently for settler authors, for indigenous authors, and for writers of mixed race and cultures. Examples of these different functions in autobiographies can be seen in Karen Blixen's Out of Africa (1937), Sally Morgan's My Place (1987), Liernardine Evaristo's Lara (1997), and Michael Ondaatje's Returning in the Family (1982).

'I had a farm in Africa, at the fool of Ile Ngong hills': thus Karen Blinn estab-lishes her ownership, stating that the land once belonged to lien and asserting her presence and being in that 'colonial singular first person.' Moreover, we are told a few lines on that this was not just a random piece of land; it was Africa distilled up through six thousand feet, like the strong and refined essence of a continent:28 Nevertheless, the title of this autobiographical work, Out of Africa, forewarns the reader that the author no longer belongs. One might read this text as a contest between Blixen and Africa in terms of asserting then rejecting her right to belong, and this perhaps is the narrative entrenched in much set - tier writing during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In addition to My Brilliant Career, one could include here such works as Susanna Moodie's Roughing it in The Bush (1852), and more recently, Judith Drake-Brockman's Wongi Wongi (2001), written in response to Morgan's My Place.

All these works share a lack of interest in the prehistory of the location and the author's family; it is the author who gives the place meaning, and who takes meaning from her presence in that place. Moreover, its significance is contained within the period of the writer's residence.

In contrast, Morgan's autobiography begins with a scene in which the author is conspicuously out of place and disempowered, while the affirmative title, My Place, suggests a future belonging. The alien unnaturalness of the hospital is juxtaposed with Sally's memories of her grandmother's closeness to nature, another bedside scene where she is woken to hear the sound of a bullfrog and the call of a special bird. The opening contrast, between a self distorted and threatened in a sterile white male world, and a self remembered and sustained in connection with her grandmother and nature, sets up the scheme of the autobiography. Like the hospi¬tal, school, with its rigid and 'unnatural' regulations, presents another public realm in which Sally feels completely alien, whereas her grandmother provides a sympathetic retreat from that world. The autobiography reiterates a contrast between the new, white imposed and unnatural world, and the older 'natural' world associated with her grandmother, a world which draws its sustenance from close attention to birds, animals and the natural environment, a world rooted both in the land and the past.

While Blixen begins her memoir with the affirmation of her 'self in connection to the land and ends with the dissolution of that fantasy of belonging, Morgan is concerned with the quest for selfhood, and for an identity which locates her biologically, culturally and geographically. And while Kenya allows Blixen to establish herself as an exceptional European woman (and indeed also

NOTES

nourishes exceptional European men such as Denys Finch-Hatton), Morgan seeks to construct a communal identity, dissolved into a common strand of aboriginality and connected to a particular place of origin through the voices of 'ordinary' Aborigines. And whereas Blixen's narrative begins with a clearly focused autobiographical 'I' and then disintegrates at the end into a series of fragments as Finch-Hatton dies and she and her community of servants move away into an unknown future, Morgan's work builds to a climax through a series of connected narratives moving back into the past. For Blixen, her presence in Africa must be self-contained, in terms of both time and place, cut off from past or future; for Morgan, her presence and self-realization in Australia, her future, can be achieved only through a series of historical and geographical journeys, which allow a suppressed past and sense of belonging to come to the surface.

While for Blixen a European identity is taken for granted, and there is plenty of reference to all those artefacts which signal her European culture — the fine china, the silverware, the piano, the books, the furniture, the wine — Morgan's text involves the gradual discovery and recognition of aboriginality. In so doing, she constructs a generalized aboriginal identity for the reader. This moves from racial identity, the recognition of the significance of her darker skin, and her grandmother's non-European features, towards cultural identity, through the narration of the experiences of her great-uncle, her mother and finally her grandmother. Through these stories Morgan also moves away from the confines of an urban location in the suburbs of Perth to the former freedom and sense of belonging in Corunna Downs.

As Ngugi wa Thiongo's novels dispute Blixen's claim to ownership through their recount¬ing of historical, legendary ties to the land and the experience of dispossession and imprisonment, so Morgan disputes the claims of the Drake-Brockmans and other white settlers. Moreover, Morgan establishes this aboriginal close¬ness to nature and communal responsibility as a biological inheritance, figured through the recurring reference to a special bird call, heard by her grandmother, her great-uncle, her sister Jill and herself. Morgan's quest, with her mother and sister, leads her to that place of origin, Corunna, and to being claimed as part of the community by the people who live there. In Morgan's words, 'What had begun as a tentative search for knowledge had grown into a spiritual and emo¬tional pilgrimage. We had an Aboriginal consciousness now, and were proud of it.' She also declares, 'How deprived we would have been if we had been willing to let things stay as they were. We would have survived, but not as whole people. We would never have known our place.'

Bernardine Evaristo, in her autobiographical verse novel Lara, begins with an awareness of her racial mixture (Irish and Nigerian), but like Morgan her narrator must experience a geographical and historical journey of discovery before she can fully acknowl¬edge her Nigerian heritage, and so locate herself back in England. Despite significant differences in the contexts and contents of these two works, there are also interesting similarities. In each case their colour is connected with their sense of unbelonging, of being out of place. Both urban Australia and urban England are seen as the worlds of white people, where black people are perceived as belonging elsewhere. Paradoxically, it is only by going elsewhere, by leaving the city, that the authors can claim their place in the city. Thus Lara travels first to Lagos and encounters the world of her father and his relatives, and then to Brazil, where her great-grandfather had been taken as a slave, in order to locate herself in history through its associations with specific places, and then returns to London.

Both these autobiographies by Morgan and Evaristo share certain scenes or tropes with Ondaatje's autobiographical Running in the Family. The emphasis on hybridity and multicul¬turalism in this text functions as a counter to the discourse of ethnic nationalism which was becoming so virulent in Sri Lanka in the 1970s and early 1980s. Thus the marriage of Ondaatje's partly Tamil father and Burgher mother, the friction between them and their subsequent divorce, has a particular resonance in the context of the ethnic and class tensions in Sri Lanka. As a returnee of mixed race who seeks to retrieve his identity in a Sri Lankan context, Ondaatje must restage those tensions and conflicts, and seek some reconciliation between the attachments to mother and father. There are interesting similarities between the scenes in My Place and Running in the Family where the child must act as intermediary between a violent alcoholic father and the mother who is the victim of his outbursts. As in the Ondaatje scenes, the demand for an allegiance to one side rather than another, the staging of the child as negotiator on behalf of the 'wronged' party, is imbued with racial significance (the mother must leave behind her aboriginal parent) and reverberates in the context of the racial politics of the country as a whole. In Evaristo's work also, Lara acts as an intermediary between her white grandmother and her Nigerian father, and also learns to act the penitent in face of her father's harsh beatings; in all three works the father's presence and the tensions between the parents bring fear, pain and guilt for the children.

All three are also hybrid texts in their use of a mixture of genres. In con¬trast to Blixen's univocal text, told entirely from her perspective and in her authoritative voice, Morgan, Evaristo and Ondaatje deploy a mixture of voices, perspectives and genres. Ondaatje foregrounds the problem of recapturing the past through his fragmentary structure, in which he mingles anecdotes (sometimes conflicting), poems, quotations from past travel writers, mem¬oirs, dialogue and photographs. The borderlines between the factual and the imagined often become blurred. Indeed, the text ends with the poignant admission that the past cannot be truly known, and that he will never 'find' his father, so is unable to see himself in terms of a patriarchal origin and descent. Even the photographs add to this sense of unknowability; rather than confirming the 'reality' of those photographed, and allowing us to 'see' them as they were, the groups in fancy dress, the parents making ape faces, the streets awash with water, all suggest transient or performed identities, moments of instability. Like Franklin and White, and like Naipaul's characters in The Mimic Men (1967), Ondaatje's use of a mixture of genres denies the notion of a fixed or stable identity, and suggests rather the performance of identities.

NOTES

Often travel, the move away from a starting place, becomes in postcolonial autobi¬ography a means of locating oneself back in that land. Naipaul's The Enigma of Arrival begins with his persistent mapping of the Wiltshire countryside, before then describing his journey from the Caribbean, his disorientation in London, and then his sense of belonging in Wiltshire again. Like Naipaul, Ondaatje min¬gles autobiography and travel writing in his Running in the Family. For both Naipaul and Ondaatje, England and Sri Lanka are made familiar and at the same time strange by a tradition of writing about them. They come to these countries with a kind of double vision, recognizing the scenes portrayed in books or advertisements yet finding the written or picture book images slightly out of kilter. Thus Naipaul's image of England is both confirmed and amended by the sight of the black-and-white cows on the Wiltshire hillside, a reminder of the images on the tins of condensed milk he remembered from his childhood. Naipaul revisions the English landscape in terms of his Trinidadian world: the patterns of snowdrifts remind him of the whorls of sand on the beaches he walked on as a child.' In Ondaatje's case, however, the recognition of scenes in Sri Lanka is influenced both by his childhood memories and by the reaction of his Canadian-born children to a world which is for them completely new.

The title of Naipaul's autobiographical novel, The Enigma of Arrival, encapsulates one aspect of many postcolonial autobiographies. Whereas European autobiographies traditionally map a journey through life to a point of comple¬tion or arrival, many postcolonial autobiographies, accept a concept of identity which embraces 'contingency, indeterminacy, and conflict.' For Naipaul, the 'arrival' is always uncertain, enigmatic, possibly yet another departure. However, autobiographies by diasporic writers such as .Evaristo, Naipual or Ondaatje differ from those of writers like Morgan, who assert their recovery of self and place in their 'home' country, or Wole Soyinka, whose trilogy beginning with Ake (1981) affirms his origins and belonging in Yoruba culture.

2.2.1 Check Your Progress

A) Choose the correct alternative.

1. Some postcolonial writers have questioned the very process of a single perspective and ----------.
   a) first person narration
   b) third person narration
   c) linear narration
   d) omniscient narration

2. Metropolitan autobiographies try to explore and assert the writer's --.
   a) childhood b) individualism
   c) marriage d) freedom

3. Frantz Fanon's Black Skin, White Masks can be considered as---------.
   a) a linear narrative
   b) an autobiographical testimonial
   c) an interior monologue
   d) a counter narrative

4. Colonial texts invariably describe the colonized human as ----------.
   a) "self" b) "slave"
   c) "other" d) "subaltern"

5. European autobiographies map a journey through life to a point of --.
   a) departure b) failure
   c) success d) arrival

B) Answer in one word/phrase/sentence.

1. Who becomes a symbol of the continent in Bapsi Sidwha's novel Ice-Candy-Man?
2. What is the title of Sally Morgan's autobiography?
3. Which texts make use of a mixture of genres?
4. What is more important in African writing than the individual?
5. What is the term used to refer to Wole Soyinka's culture?

2.2.2 Terms to Remember

- **precolonial :** occurring or existing before the beginning of colonial rule
- **recalcitrant :** unmanageable, unruly
- **subaltern :** the populations which are socially, politically and geographically outside of the hegemonic power structure of the cology and of the colonial homeland
- **Edenic :** unspoilt and idyllic
- **homophobic :** having or showing a dislike of or prejudice against homosexual people
- **aboriginality :** inhabiting or existing in a land form the earliest times or from before the arrival of colonists
- **hybridity :** the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization
- **multiculturalism :** equal respect to the various cultures in a society; promotion of cultural diversity

NOTES

2.3 APPROPRIATING THE WORD: LANGUAGE AND VOICE

Postcolonial writers, critics and readers are extremely sensitive about the issue of language. They hotly debate whether to use an imposed colonial language such as English, French, etc. or whether writers should use their native language or mother tongue. The problem is if they choose the language of their colonizer they are working with words and syntax which express the perception and characteristic modes of thinking of a culture which scorned their own. Languages not only carry sets of associations related to particular words, such as 'tribe', 'fetish', 'black' and 'white', but also particular ways of thinking and perceiving. Structuralists and poststructuralists such as Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault have argued that we are enclosed in the language we inherit; we cannot think outside of it, and therefore it cannot express a different way of thinking and perceiving. Thus some writers from Africa, the Indian subcontinent and Ireland have argued that literatures in European languages can hardly be defined as African or Indian or Irish literature.

There is also an argument that only the mother tongue should be used for creative expression because it carries the emotional weight and connotations that are important to poetry and prose. It is claimed that the use of a European language limits the writer's audience and introduces the idiom and traditions of a foreign culture. The Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o decided after writing five novels and two plays in English to use only his mother tongue, Gikuyu. Ngugi's later novels The Devil on the Cross (1980; English translation 1982) and Matigari (1986; English translation 1989) are written in Gikuyu, and also draw on oral forms such as ballads and folktales. He cat¬egorizes works by African writers using the English language as 'Afro-Saxon literature'.

For Ngugi, the choice of language is also related to the choice of audience. He also believes that it is the African writer's duty to his culture to nourish the languages and cultures that exist there. As writers create in indigenous languages, they will keep them alive and growing. Without this there is the likelihood that English will take over completely and the local languages with their idiom and traditions will die out.

The issue of language was central to the nationalist movement in Ireland for at least a century. It was urged that the Gaelic language should be revived as the national tongue to oppose the domination of English language and culture. Forty years later, Daniel Corkery argued that Irish literature must be defined first of all as literature written in the Irish language. However, W. B. Yeats argued that it was possible to 'build up a national tradition, a national literature which [would] be none the less Irish in spirit for being English in language'? He cited the examples of Bret Harte, Henry Thoreau, and Walt Whitman and their formation of a specifically American literature.

NOTES

Yeats chose English because he could not speak or read Irish. He also believed that it was necessary to reach both a national and an international audience. Such writers as Chinua Achebe and Salman Rushdie have argued that English allows them to reach a national audience and break down the barriers between differ¬ent ethnic groups within the nation. English can be used as a common language to bring together Bengali, Hindi, Gujarati, Oriya, Parsi, Tamil and Urdu speakers. Likewise in Nigeria, English is the official national language which enables Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba peoples to communicate with each other and with the central government. Achebe finds that English-language works by the African writers are not sterile. The African writers question the English lan¬guage and its assumptions even as they make use of it. Indeed, all of Achebe's novels question the English language and its assumptions. Things Fall Apart (1958) calls to the reader's attention the existence of the Igbo language and its inclusion of non-European concepts, such as agbala, chi and ndichie, which English can never quite encompass. In the novel, the English language is seen not only to be inadequate, but at times to deny Igbo (and African) perceptions and dignity.

Achebe makes a distinction between ethnic and national literatures. According to him, Nigeria is a nation created by the British, who imposed their language as the national language. Achebe declared that as a national writer he had no choice but to write in English. He argued that English could be used to create an African song. It will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings. In later years, however, Achebe's view on English as the only national lan¬guage for Nigerians has changed, and he has written poetry in Igbo. More recently, he has written of Nigerian literature in English as only one of the branches of a growing tree and does not see writings in other languages such as Hausa or Yoruba as any less national. In this attitude he differs from Rushdie. Rushdie insisted on English as the appropriate national lit¬erary language for India. He further declared that there was no worthwhile Indian writing that was not originally in English. However, it is quite obvious that Indian Writing in English takes much of its energy and distinctiveness from its contact with other languages in India and the speech rhythms, idioms and cultural contexts that they bring to English.

Whereas Africans or Indians or Sri Lankans who write in English are in daily contact with other ethnic lan¬guages which embody alternative world views, African American and African Caribbean writers must have recourse to some form of English. And while those who belong to the African diaspora can draw on a distinctive form of English influenced by African idioms, formations and borrowings, white Australians and Canadians and many Anglo-Irish writers do not even have these distinctive resources with which to construct a national literature.

In J. M. Synge's The Playboy of the Western World (1907), the language is often the centre of attention. Such a focusing on the language disintegrates the standard associations between the native form of the language and certain stock characters.

NOTES

Works by Kamau Brathwaite, Lorna Goodison, Langston Hughes, Johnson, Una Marson and other African American and African Caribbean poets also refer to other artistic modes such as blues, spirituals, reggae and jazz as a means of giving the language validity. Moreover, the choice of that form of language and form signifies a choice of audience. Thus the dual celebration and rejection inherent in the choice of a form of language implies a rejection of the absolute standards of the colonizer and asserts that the people with whom the poem identifies are not only fit subjects for poetic expression but also the source of a poetic language. Synge made use of `Hiberno English'. He influenced Derek Walcott. Walcott's poetry also at times draws on the language and 'folk imagination' of St Lucians and Trinidadians. But the language and form of Walcott's poetry, as distinct from his plays, generally compares more closely with Yeats than with the language of Synge's drama in his choice of a sinuous Standard English syntax and vocabulary modulated by local inflections and idioms. Other West Indian poets and prose writers have more consistently advocated and employed variations of local patois, creating and enriching a characteristic West Indian tradition.

Brathwaite, Barbadian poet and historian, makes use of Creole or Caribbean English rather than Standard English. Brathwaite coined the term 'nation language' which refers to culturally specific ways of speaking in the Caribbean — i.e., those aspects which are distinctively Caribbean in terms of vocabulary, syntax, intonation and pro¬nunciation. In Nigeria, Ken Saro-Wiwa used a mixture of linguistic registers, including pid¬gin, which draws on a variety of indigenous languages in combination with English, and Standard English to create his novel, Sozaboy: A Novel in Rotten English (1985). Sujatta Bhatt's poem, 'Search for My Tongue' and G. V. Desani's novel All About H. Hatterr (1948) make use of Hinglish, a combination of Hindi and English.

However, whereas Nigerian pidgin or Sheng or Hinglish are formed by two or more languages which continue to coexist and interact, Caribbean nation language as defined by Brathwaite is the result of an underground or suppressed language influencing the English that slaves were forced to speak. Brathwaite believes that Caribbean English carries with it a suppressed African identity which surfaces and continues in particular words and forms, for example 'nun' for `to eat'; 'I and i' for 'we'; 'What it mean?' for 'What does it mean?' The underground African language also surfaces in the sound of the language, and particular characteristics of voice. Brathwaite dismisses terms such as 'dialect' because they reiterate the hierarchy between metropolitan Standard English and suggest that the language as it is spoken by Caribbean people is marginal or inferior.

Brathwaite also argues that the rhythm most prevalent in English poetry from Chaucer to the present day, the iambic pentameter, is inappropriate to the cadences of Caribbean speech and the natural environment of the West Indies. Brathwaite declares, the pentameter is linked to metropolitan English speech and musical forms, while Caribbean poetry needs to be connected to 'native musical forms and the native language'. Together, the local music and local speech form a major part of the oral tradition which has sustained and developed a distinctive Caribbean culture. One example is calypso, which employs dactyls rather than the pentameter and is, in Brathwaite's view, more suited to Caribbean speech rhythms and intonations.

NOTES

Brathwaite stresses the importance of orality. For him, and for many other postcolonial writers, orality is linked to authenticity, for it does not rely on technology, or artificial modes of preservation. The performer and his audience together create 'a continuum where meaning truly resides'.

Brath¬waite suggests that performance poets such as Louise Bennett and calypso poets such as Mighty Sparrow provide more use¬ful models for contemporary Caribbean writers. But he also acknowledges the influence of T. S. Eliot on 'mainstream poets' moving from Standard English to nation language, claiming that 'what T. S. Eliot did for Caribbean poetry and Caribbean literature was to introduce the notion of the speaking voice, the conversational tone. That is what really attracted us to Eliot'. Eliot's use of musical forms and speech cadences is also developed by Brath¬waite in new and distinctively Caribbean modes. Whereas the musical genres of the prelude, operatic overture and quartet are explicit structures for Eliot's poetry, Brathwaite draws on blues, calypso, jazz and reggae rhythms.

Poets like Brathwaite use a modified form of local patois, accessible to a wide audience throughout as well as outside the Caribbean, and draw on a variety of West Indian voices, including Barbadian, Jamaican and Trinidadian. Those like Bennett and Mikey (Michael) Smith draw on the patois of one island, in their case Jamaica. While Brathwaite is read and heard internationally, in Europe, North Amer¬ica and the United Kingdom, as well as the West Indian islands including his native Barbados, Bennett is best known in her native Jamaica, where she drew enormous audiences for her dramatic performances of her poems. Bennett began publishing her poems in the Gleaner, Jamaica's national newspaper, in the 1940s, poems which were read by and to local audi¬ences, who delighted in her ironic and humorous debunking of self-important politicians and characters. Her work embodies a celebration of folk humour and language, and foregrounds its capacity for mockery and self-mockery. Draw¬ing on Jamaica's traditional folk stories, proverbs, myths and songs, preserved primarily through oral retellings, Bennett performed and wrote in the native Jamaican English dialect, which is known variously as Creole, 'Jamaica talk, West Indian English, Jamaican dialect or patois'. Through this use of language, and through her playful ironizing of the emergent nation state and its symbols, nationalists and anti-nationalist, the poor and the wealthy, Bennett builds what Ramazani has nicely termed an 'amiable community' of Jamaicans.

Bennett's poems comment ironically on local politics and politicians, on the foibles of mothers, sons and daughters, on issues of unemployment, war and emigration. Often the irony is directed towards the colonizers and the colonized, the persona of the poem as well as her audience. In her poem 'Colonization in

NOTES

Reverse', she observes the phenomenon of the 1950s rush by Jamaicans to emigrate to Britain (the Windrush generation), and wonders how the British who colonized Jamaica in previous centuries will respond to this new reversal which led to a large number of Jamaicans arriving in Britain in the decade after 1948. But the unrealistic dreams of those who emigrate (and then behave as the colonizers did — living off the labour of others) are also mocked.

In many poems, Bennett reveals her affiliation with a specifically Jamaican genre of oral performance, the mento, a forerunner of ska and reggae, and sometimes fused (and confused) with calypso, with whose satiric and self-ironizing humour it has much in common. Mentos were songs performed in dance halls and at rural gatherings in Jamaica, and can be traced back to the mid-nineteenth century. Topics included politics, daily life and personal relationships; in the 1950s the difficulties and troubles encountered by Jamaicans migrating to England were the subject of many mentos. Moreover, the figure of Miss Mattie, as a representative Jamaican audience, invoked in `Colonization in Reverse' and other poems by Bennett, also frequently recurs in mento songs. In some of her performances, Bennett interspersed her dramatic renditions of her verses with mento songs. Bennett's affiliation with the mento tradition allows her to define her audience and her role as performer, and in so doing to speak to specific expectations and conventions which her audience will recognize. It also allows her to affirm Jamaican culture and language. But she expands and renews the tradition, which had generally been confined to male performers. As a female performer, Bennett challenges the conventions, and her male and female personalities and her use of stock characters like Miss Mattie take on an altered dimension when they are recreated and performed by a woman.

Her use of Jamaican patois and popular traditions, indeed her very popu¬larity, for a long time encouraged academics and critics to dismiss Bennett as not a poet to be taken seriously. Since the 1970s, however, Bennett has been recognized as an important influence. The Jamaican poet and prose writer Olive Senior commented in a 1994 interview, 'all of us, I think, have been influenced by Louise Bennett, who was a pioneer in writing Creole and speaking it — because it was some¬thing revolutionary'. Influential West Indian academics such as Rex Nettleford and Mervyn Morris have written Introductions to her collected poems, giving them serious attention. As Denise deCaires Narain puts it, 'Louise Bennett's poetry . . . is often cited as marking the birth of an "authentic" West Indian poetry, the moment when the region finds its voice . . . in her exclusive use of Creole, her work is seen as redefining and indigenizing the contours of the "poetic".'

In 'finding a voice' for the region, Bennett also finds and defines an audience. Whereas West Indian poets such as Brathwaite, Martin Carter, Lorna Goodison and Walcott have more often drawn on forms of language readily accessible to West Indian and other audiences outside of Jamaica, Bennett's poetic per¬formances, in their use of patois and reference to local characters and events, explicitly acknowledge Jamaicans at home and abroad as her chosen primary audience. Her ironic treatment of Jamaican characters and events, and of the personae she performs, her assumption that her audiences will understand and respond to such ironic treatment of their own foibles and failings, allows her to avoid the danger of sounding patronizing; between performer and audience there is a mutual respect.

Bennett's use of patois has been significant not only in performance, but also in writing. As Susanne Maleisen comments, her first poetry collection in print, published in 1942, must be seen as a milestone in the transformation between oral and written Creole form. The very act of inscribing Creole on the page affirmed its status on an equal footing with Standard English publications, and provided a model for successor poets such as Jean Binta Breeze and Senior. Bennett drew on a system of orthography which is more accessible to those already literate in Standard English. However, some critics and writers have argued that such a choice decreases the authenticity and status of Creole as a nation language, whereas a system of transliteration which is more closely phonetic makes the Creole more autonomous and also more consistent in its language formations.

Bennett's approach and her use of patois in performed poetry has been taken up by younger Jamaican poets such as Valerie Bloom and Binta Breeze, both of whom now live in Britain and are sought after as performers there. Male poets have also continued the tradition she has made famous: in Britain James Berry, who emigrated from Jamaica in the 1950s, wrote in a modified Jamaican patois a series called Lucy's Letters (1982). Perhaps the most compelling author to use Jamaican patois in performance poetry was Mikey Smith, whose highly rhetor¬ical denunciations of abuses of power employ a grimmer and more cutting kind of irony than Bennett's. As deCaires Narain points out, Smith's 'Me Cyaan Believe It' alludes to the opening lines of Bennett's poem 'Is Me' (Is who dat a-sey, "who dat"?'). But Smith's characterization of politicians, and the failure of ordinary Jamaicans to reject them, lacks Bennett's humour. That humour, together with the conventional rhythms and rhymes of Bennett's verse, diffuses some of the political bite, and perhaps encourages a resigned response to their failures, and those of other Jamaicans. In contrast, Smith's use of repetition and staccato broken lines, as well as stanzas which produce a call-and-response effect, generates a more disquieting feeling, which emphasizes 'the paranoia, madness, and hardship of life in Jamaica'.

In an interview with Morris, two years before he was assassinated in 1983, Smith acknowledged that his poetry had a political purpose. His poem 'Me Cyaan Believe It' exemplifies Smith's attempt to involve his audience in an understanding and rejection of the politics including gender politics, which leave so many Jamaicans among the depressed and dispossessed.

The populations of the islands of Barbados and Jamaica are predominantly of African descent, so it is understandable that Brathwaite should emphasize the significance of African languages and cultures in the formation of nation language and West Indian folk traditions. But this emphasis can also exclude

NOTES

other important sections of the population, such as those whose ancestors came from the Indian subcontinent and who form nearly half of the popula¬tions of Guyana and Trinidad. Thus David Dabydeen from Guyana and V. S. Naipaul and Samuel Selvon from Trinidad draw on the idioms, vocabulary and linguistic formations of an English inflected by a variety of Indian languages. Dabydeen's Slave Song (1984) draws on a Guyanese Creole which combines African and Indian formations of English far removed from Standard English. But, in a manner reminiscent of Maria Edgeworth's Irish novel Castle Rack-rent (1800), Dabydeen includes an almost parodic critical apparatus, whose glossary and translations reveal the distinctiveness and untranslatability of the Creole words and phrases. In this manner Dabydeen performs his own duality, as a descendent of the coolie workers and also an Oxford graduate, problema¬tizing the relationship which is at the core of Caribbean writing: that between the articulate writer and the supposedly voiceless workers and peasants. That awareness of this relationship is also articulated in Brathwaite's 'The Wings of the Dove' in which the introductory section is voiced in Standard English, and in which the Rasta man voices his own distrust of 'them clean-face browns, whom he compares to vultures or crows that 'na / feet feel firm / pun de firm stones'.

Discussions of language and diction in postcolonial writing have tended to set up an opposition between 'literary' language, seen as tied to Standard English and the imported book, and 'voice, connected to the speech of 'the folk' and oral traditions. In this paradigm, as Brathwaite's argument makes explicit, voice and orality are seen as more 'authentic' than written language. As Irish cultural nationalists sought to create a literature that was 'racy of the soil' and drew on the culture and language of rural Ireland, and the more rural the more authentic it was held to be, so George Lamming affirmed those Caribbean novelists who had related 'Caribbean experience from the inside, for 'it is the West Indian novel that has restored the West Indian peasant to his true and original status of personality'. But in practice Lamming, like Brathwaite and Walcott, draws on a whole range of registers. His writing acknowledges the value of a flexible approach to and appreciation of the potential to be found in the linguistic diversity of the Caribbean.

2.3.1 Check Your Progress

A) Choose the correct alternative.

1. Postcolonial writers refer to English as ----------.
   a) an imposed colonial language
   b) a link language
   c) an international language
   d) a global language
2. According to Structuralists and Poststructuralists, we are enclosed in the -------- we inherit.
   a) property b) culture
   c) language d) religion
3. Postcolonial writers insist on the use of----------for creative writing.
   a) the European language
   b) the mother tongue
   c) the colonial language
   d) the dialect
4. According to Brathwaite, the iambic pentameter is linked to ---------- ---------- English speech.
   a) colloquial b) elite
   c) provincial d) metropolitan
5. The Caribbean poet Louise Bennet draws on the ---------- of Jamaica.
   a) patois b) calypso
   c) dialect d) creole

B) Answer in one word/phrase/sentence.

1. Mention the mother tongue used by Ngugi wa Thiong'o for writing his later novels.
2. Mention the language which Irish writers decided to revive as the national tongue.
3. Mention the language which Achebe's Things Fall Apart calls to the reader's attention.
4. Mention the variety of English used by J. M. Synge in his plays.
5. Mention the term coined by Brathwaite to refer to Creole or Caribbean English.

2.3.2 Terms to Remember

- indigenous : native
- ethnic : a group of people having the same language, society, culture or nation
- diaspora : the migrated population from its original homeland
- creole : a full, native language developed from a mixture of different languages
- orality : the quality of being oral, not written

NOTES

- pidgin : a mixture of simplified languages
- dialect : a particular form of a language peculiar to a specific region or social group

2.4 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have read about two important basic concepts widely used in Postcolonial Studies. They are: 1) Postcolonial Autobiographical Writing and 2) Appropriating the Word: Language and Voice.

Different postcolonial texts have challenged and revised the form and content of the colonialist histories and narratives in order to assert the dignity and validity of the cultures of the colonized. They have used the strategy of questioning the very process of a single perspective and linear narration. Another strategy frequently used by the postcolonial writers is the use of autobiography.

Postcolonial writers, critics and readers hotly debate whether to use an imposed colonial language such as English, French, etc. or whether writers should use their native language or mother tongue. Some writers have chosen English and other European languages for producing literature, while many prefer the native languages in order to assert their linguistic and cultural identity.

2.5 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

2.2.1 Check Your Progress

A) 1. linear narrative
2. individualism
3. an autobiographical testimonial
4. "other"
5. arrival

B) 1. Ayah
2. My Place
3. Hybrid
4. community
5. Yoruba

2.3.1 Check Your Progress

A) 1. an imposed colonial language
2. language
3. the mother tongue
4. metropolitan
5. patois

B) 1. Gikuyu
2. Gaelic
3. Igbo
4. Hiberno English
5. 'nation language'

NOTES

2.6 EXERCISES

A) Answer the following

1. Critically comment on the postcolonial autobiographical writing.
2. Writing a detailed note on the postcolonial autobiographical writers.
3. What is the difference between European autobiographies and Postcolonial autobiographies?
4. What is the different between ethnic and national literatures?
5. What is the importance of language in producing literature?

B) Write short notes.

1. Autobiographical fiction
2. Sally Morgan's My Place
3. The question of identity in postcolonial autobiographical writing
4. Colonial language vs. Mother tongue
5. Orality

2.7 REFERENCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. The Empire Writes Back. London: Routledge, 1989.
2. Bhabha, Homi. The Location of Culture. London: Routledge, 1994.
3. Brown, Lloyd. Women Writers in Black Africa. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981.
4. Gorra, Michael. After Empire: Scott, Naipaul, Rushdie. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.
5. Ngugi we Thiong'o. Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature. London: James Currey, 1986.

*****