

Durga Mahavidyalaya, Raipur (C.G.)

Department of English

B.A. Semester III

Course Code: ENSE 01, (DSE)

Course Title: New Literatures in English

Study Material on **WHAT IS COMMONWEALTH LITERATURE?**

(Unit I, Section A)

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HoD

Commonwealth Literature: Definition

- An umbrella term
- Includes the collective Literature of all the postcolonial nations.
- Literary contribution of authors of Africa, Asia, The Caribbeans and North America.
- Salman Rushdie writes:

“a body of writing created in the English language by persons who are not white Britons, or Irish or citizens of the United States of America”.

Commonwealth: The Term

- First used by Oliver Cromwell in 1969.
- The term means “well - being”.
- Rowland Smith (British Author) says –

“Once upon a time there used to be a field called Commonwealth Literature. That Salman Rushdie wrote an essay called “Commonwealth Literature ceased to exist”...it got repackaged as Postcolonial Literature.”

(Post colonizing the commonwealth studies in Literature and Culture, 216)

Interchangeable Terms

- Commonwealth Literature is also referred to as –
 - Postcolonial Literature
 - World Literatures Written in English
 - New Literatures

Categories of Commonwealth Literature

- First, the literature produced by commonwealth countries where English is a 'native' language like Australia, Canada and New Zealand.
- Second, the literature produced by countries where English is a 'foreign' language like India, the West Indies, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and African countries like Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Tanzania.

Functions of Commonwealth Literature

- To nourish emotional lives
- To demonstrate a society that was stable and peaceful before the white colonizers came.
- To assert the richness of one's culture.
- To widen our horizon about the world.
- To satirise the unpopular manifestation in their society in order to educate the populace.
- To create dramatic awareness of language.

Scope of Study

- Commonwealth Literature refers to –
 - Pre-colonial
 - Colonial and
 - Post –colonial works

Notable Characteristics

- The commonwealth is the British Empire in Reverse
- Made up of several literatures
- Multi – dimensional in study
- Includes the whole fate of men in time, space, history and ecology
- Records the process that changed the life and status of the natives and brought slaves under centuries of domination.
- To rebuild societies and communities beyond communalism.

Famous Commonwealth Writers

V. S. Naipaul	Dorris Lessing
Salman Rushdie	Margaret Drabble
Buchi Emecheta	Wole Soyinka
Michael Ondaatje	Edward Braithwaite
Ngugi wa Thiong'o	Derek Walcott
Anita Desai	Nadine Gordimer

Thank You