

New Literatures in English and the World Literature

About the chapter:

This module talks about new literature in English and its relation to World Literature or its position within the system of world literature. This module also understands that the new literature in English as a category itself is a sphere of world literature. While we try to understand new literature in the very context of world literature, we actually understand that new literature is to be globally circulated and it is not only a new literary area but also a new voice and new history to the global audience. Therefore, it has its own right to claim the world. The age old dominated idea of world literature with the very literary components of the European and American literature or to be more specific, the literature of the white is broken and the canon is reshaped with the intervention of the new literature written in English or translated into English. New literature in English reshapes our whole idea of world literature and it forms new canons in the map of world literature. It is actually a new cartography of world literature. Through this very brief study with reference to different scholastic works on world literature, this modules try to conceptualise above mentioned arguments.

Introduction:

Eminent philosophe, psychiatrist, revolutionary and a writer, Frantz Fanon wrote the given powerful lines in his book *Black skin White masks* about his experience of racism when he was pointed out by a small child.

“Look, a Negro!” The circle was drawing a bit tighter. I made no secret of my amusement.

“Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened!” Frightened! Frightened! Now they were beginning to be afraid of me. I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but laughter had become impossible. [. . .] Then, assailed at various points, the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema. In the train it was no longer a question of being aware of my body in the third person but in a triple person. In the train I was given not one but two, three places [. . .] On that day, completely dislocated, unable to be abroad with the other, the white man, who unmercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object”.

The need of new literature in English originated from the bigotry which the people of the colonized countries had experienced by various European tyrant colonizers. The study of new literature in English is concerned with the postcolonial literature which is emerged from the former colonies of the British. Therefore literature from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, Africa, Caribbean etc. are considered as postcolonial literature. Though America also was a British colony but it was independent long before the other colonies of the British and it holds major power in world politics, economy, international affairs, so it is kept aside from the land of postcolonial literature. The Afro-American literature is considered as postcolonial literature as it speaks of the oppressed voice and this literature is not mere literature but the tool of movement of emancipation of the Black against the white oppression of the centuries. Thorsten Schreiber in his M.A. thesis on *English Literatures on the Internet* elaborately discussed about the postcolonial or new literature in English in internet (Schreiber, Thorsten ;).

Postcolonial literature which is majorly understand as new literature mainly talks about the marginal sections. The concept of marginality has multiple meaning here. Here we assume colony as marginal, voice of the different oppressed class as the marginal, migrated people or the refugees as marginal, non-white literature as marginal, movement for freedom or emancipation as the marginal. Therefore the new literature English is actually the collective narrative of the people has been fighting for different causes since last two centuries in different parts of the world. New literature in English is gradually expanded.

The idea of postcolonial literature and new literature is not entirely similar but new literature includes larger contexts and varieties of literature than the postcolonial literature. Unrest in Middle East or West Asian countries attracts the attention of the people across the globe. The refugee problem, killing of innumerable innocent people, regular warfare, homelessness of innocent people are written in different literatures from this region. Such literature has wider audience who extends their solidarity towards these people through literary reception. Hence, there are multiple reasons like political complexities, international trade, imperialism, weapon trade, etc. which bring new literature in the map of world literature.

What is New Literature in English?

New English Literature or New Literature in English is no longer integral part of English department or English studies. New Literature in English can be claimed as a discipline by its own. Augsburg University defines New Literature in English as, "The term New English Literatures (NEL) refers to the anglophone literatures of Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, Oceania, and Canada. The field has direct overlaps with English Studies, for instance by including Black and Asian British literatures as well as travel writing; via Canadian literatures, it is also closely linked to the field of North American studies, a special focus in the Augsburg NEL".

Warwick University, department of English and Comparative Literary Studies defines New Literature in English in this way,

“Through the medium of English, writers from Africa and Asia today confront a (prospectively) global audience. This module aims to introduce students to the emergent body of literature being produced by writers (and film-makers) from South Africa, sub-Saharan Africa generally, and South Asia, and to situate it in terms of the historical circumstances that have engendered it and to which it constitutes a response”. (EN251 New Literatures in English)

This concept of New Literature in English or New English Literature has its overlap with the concepts of postcolonial Literature and Commonwealth Literature or the Third World Literature. But it is not only the postcolonial, or commonwealth or the third world literature but it is aggregate of all these and more. The above mentioned definitions shows with the study of this new literature actually Comparative Literature and English literature disciplines are reshaped and thus literary study responses towards more contemporary problems and issues of the time.

Postcolonial Literature

Elleke Boehmer proposes a narrow definition of postcolonial literature and focuses on “literature written in English” in the countries which formerly belonged to the British Empire (Schreiber, Thorsten ;). But this definition cannot address the historical trajectory of English writing in former colonies. Colonial forms of literature is not only found in English writings of the colony but also writings in other languages too. And colonies continue to write in English after being independent. As for example postcolonial literature is written in India not only in English but also in different Indian languages also. And Indian English literature is not only a postcolonial phenomenon but it has its historical root in colonial period because colony introduces English.

According to Ania Loomba “postcolonialism is a relatively vague concept”, and Christine MacLeod opines, “there is no definitive consensus on what technically constitutes postcoloniality” (Schreiber, Thorsten ;). According to Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, “a lack of critical practice concerning the New Literatures is responsible for “the inability of European theory to deal adequately with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of post-colonial writing” (Schreiber, Thorsten ;). Though they think that “the term postcolonial is the best solution at the moment because “it points the way towards a possible study of the effects of colonialism (...). Even so, better terms may still emerge” (Schreiber, Thorsten ;).

Decolonisation and New Literature

In the age of decolonisation, New literature in English is considered as critical reflection of colonial experience. English is the platform through which a writer could convey his/her feelings, experiences and nostalgia to the entire world. Authors look for “a self-constituted identity” and independence. In this respect, the use of language is a predominant issue in New English literature. The usage of English in penning down New literature implies “the fusion of cultures” because “the meeting of two cultures, and in particular the way in which an indigenous order has been usurped by alien and intrusive values” (Schreiber, Thorsten) is one of the dominant themes in postcolonial literature.

Authors regard “language as a medium of power” but instead of using Standard English, they employ a national variety in order to reconstruct and deconstruct the English language.

Therefore, “post-colonial writing abrogates the privileged centrality of ‘English’ by using language to signify difference while employing a sameness which allows it to be understood” (Schreiber, Thorsten ;). Such deconstruction happens because the imperial power wants to keep hold or “control over the means of communication rather than the control over life and property”. Authors across such nations or countries try to establish their voice against this imperial control and that voice is circulated through literature across the globe. This is how the colonial experiences or imprints in history is important in the whole understanding of new literature. New literature defines the world literature with the voice of the oppressed.

World Literature and Literary Study

The term world literature or the concept of world literature is proposed by Goethe for the first time. His idea of **Weltliteratur**, which was recorded by his personal secretary Johann Peter Eckermann, translated as world literature. In dinner table it was said by Goethe, *National literature is now rather an unmeaning term; the epoch of World-literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach.*

Goethe

Goethe later explains how this term is different from the concept of national literature and why we should have such a category. Later on so many other scholars across the globe worked on the concept of world literature and huge paradigm shift has been observed in the concept and study of world literature across the globe in last two centuries.

There are lots of arguments on the definition and scope of world literature. Sometimes it is assumed the best literature from different languages can be considered as world literature. Sometimes it is thought that the representative writings from different nations can be considered as world literature. But these thoughts are quite impossible in practical sense. Because best always is complicated to be defined. Tagore’s idea of Viswasahitya or world literature allows the time as a judge to define the best literature. That means the text what exists beyond its time is actually the literature of the time or classic or true literature.

But in last few decades, different scholars of world literature came into a decision that we cannot conceive world literature only an object of study but it is a way of study, it is a method of studying different literatures produced in different languages.

There are two broad methods of conceptualizing or imagining world literature. One is through English and other is through translation in any language other than English. Large amount of literature mainly the new literature is circulated across the globe through English translation outside and the other the texts from new literary areas are written in English and published by the globally renowned publishing houses. So English imagines its own world literature in its own way. But there are multiple single ways in different linguistic system through which those system receive their world literature. And it happens mainly with the translation into that particular language mostly from English or from very few other major European or Eastern languages.

Self-respect of the communities and claim of self-identity in literary practices makes readers or communities' position very significant in defining world literature. For example Cave Verde literature is claimed as world literature by the practitioners of this literature. Cave Verde people spread over the Europe and they are African origin. This literature carries experiences of the people from different continents and this is the voice of emancipation of the community. As Cave Verde people are scattered across the Europe, naturally this literature has cosmopolitan experiences. Similarly Afro-American literature also carries the voice of the oppressed and voice of emancipation. It is well received as a literature of self-respect and struggle by different oppressed communities like by the Dalits of India.

There are many worlds and therefore many world literatures. Each language, culture, community has their own concept of world literature. Hence, world literature as an object of study is also multiple. Except this polyphony in the single literary system is also makes a literary system world literature. As for example, we can say about Thomas Olive Beebee's work *German Literature as World Literature*¹, Mads Rosendahl Thomsen and Dan Ringgaard's *Danish Literature as World Literature*² etc. focuses on the cosmopolitanism and polyphony of literary system. This concept of world literature also talks about the reception of German and Danish literature in the world and also other world literature into German and Danish literature.

Contemporary discussion on world literature is dominated by the USA based scholars, like David Damrosch, Franco Moretti, Djelal Kadir, etc. Damrosch, Moretti proposes that literary study is now to be moved from Comparative Literature to World Literature. And their suggestion is, "moving literary studies away from period, genre, nation, or author towards a cultural perspective. This includes, for example, gender, race, and ideology on a transnational level" (Nilsson, Petra;). Scholars like Spivak, Wai Chee Dimock, proposed for a 'planetary literature' which means the literature of 'non-globalised' area and "it is also meant to target notions of world, area, nation, and culture".

David Damrosch, leading comparatist of the world and most celebrated in the field of World Literature, comments, "I take world literature to encompass all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language" (What is World Literature?). So, to Damrosch it is about those texts what crosses the boundary of its origin. If one particular text is very famous and has historical significance for the source culture cannot be qualified as a text of World Literature until and unless it is translated or received in target culture. But translation and circulation again is a political issue. Politics and power of the publication houses, geographical location of the publication house, economic condition of the source culture, number of good translators exist in that particular language, all these issues are related with the translation of a particular text. Harish Trivedi on the contrary says, "passive responsive capacity and readiness to whatever is washed up to our doorstep by the tides of global market forces or the quirks of literary transmission and translation"

Pascale Casanova's work *The World Republic of Letters*, is worth to mention here in the context of New Literature in English. A short review of the book says, "Rejecting facile talk of globalization, with its suggestion of a happy literary "melting pot," Casanova exposes an emerging regime of inequality in the world of letters, where minor languages and literatures are subject to the invisible but implacable violence of their dominant counterparts".

World Literature and New Literature in English

English is moving discipline. It is no more English only. Discipline of English is no more about English literature only. It responds so quickly against the contemporary global issues.

Like the social sciences it also deals with the burning issue of the century like racism, gender violence, refugee, war etc. The new literature which is actually emerged from the former British colonies, or from the conflict zones of the world or from the weaker and oppressed sections of different spaces is makes English department moves to response towards contemporary problems and crisis. If we observe, we can find that the map of the World Literature also has been changing with the new literature in English in its practice into the disciplines.

New literature in English is another step ahead towards an inclusive study of world literature and it is interesting area of comparative literature too. As Spivak talks about planetarity literature as the non-globalised literature or the literature of the global south, new literature is that space which is comparatist's present interest. It is a composite space for the literature of South Asia, South East Asia, Africa, Latin America; it is the literature talks about racism, migration, refugee problems, conflicts, crisis in humanity, gender violence, Dalits, Tribal literature etc. Hence, it is a new canon formed in World Literature and Comparative Literature. Each component of New Literature is comparative in its very nature, as for example tribal literature of any one country is not single at all, it is plural always. So the study of tribal literature itself is comparative and it can be read best through the lens of world literature. Dalit literature and Afro-American literature are related in the emotion of solidarity and inspiration-influence.

Conclusion

New Literature in English itself is a World Literature and it is Comparative Literature too. New Literature in English is an object of study for World Literature. It is comparative by its very nature because it is written from different parts of the world and addresses different issues. We can observe same problems have been addressed by the new literature from different places, and therefore it helps us to understand the grand narrative of history and also it appears as one of the true sources of the human history across the globe.

New Literature is new as a discourse but it is not new genealogically. Because it emerges from the womb of the long history of the past of the old civilization. It is new because it was once dominated, it is new because it was an alternative narrative of human history and culture. In this regard, world literature has also been changing in the decades and if anything is assumed as the object of study of contemporary world literature, it is new literature in English or English translation, no doubt.
