Canadian Literature - Introduction

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Canada is the largest country in the world now with a population of around 28 million. It is a vast country beaded with diverse people and places stretching from the pacific to the Atlantic and the northern Atlantic Ice Fields to the American frontiers. There has been a clamour for culling out separate nations for the English, French and the First Nations. But still Canada remains as a single nation, though its very size is baffling.

The making of Canada itself is worth studying just as its streams of literature. It is in every sense a country of immigrants. The earliest immigrants of Canada were the Aboriginal people from Siberia. Gradually people belonging to different races from all over the world -- the French, the English, The Norwegians, Ukrainians, Germans, Italians, Greeks, the Africans and the Asians moved into Canada as immigrants. Now it is hailed as a multicultural and ethno cultural “mosaic”. The people of Canada refuse to accept it as “a melting pot”. To a great extent multiculturalism, facilitating people of different physical features, religious beliefs, customs and manners, and multilingual potential, has become a passable system and way of life. However, the Royal Commission Report published in 1970 highlighted only Biculturalism and Bilingualism, laying stress on the ‘Anglophones’ and ‘Francophones’. Of course the commission report accommodates some subordinate languages and cultures that various immigrant groups have brought into Canada. But the report does not make any mention of the native people.

The government attitude reflected in the recommendations pertaining to the immigrant communities gives some hope. At the outset, it
recognizes the value of the contributions of the immigrants to the enrichment of Canadian culture. Then it prohibits the assimilation of individuals to one or other of the ‘main stream cultures’ at the cost of their cultural and linguistic moorings. The goal is to facilitate a sort of integration of the immigrants with the Canadian society at large without burying their cultural identity. Besides, the Canadian Multiculturalism Act of 1988 upholds multiculturalism as “a fundamental characteristic of the Canadian heritage and identity”. Still equal rights and opportunities are a far cry. Various minority and marginal groups are striving to assert their rights and preserve their roots. A sense of unjust exclusion haunts such peoples. There is an unbridgeable gap between the perception of the government on Multiculturalism and that of the dominant white groups in everyday life.

The literary scenario -- creative, critical and historical -- too affirms it. Canadian history and literature have been written by and for the ‘Anglophone’ and ‘Francophone’ societies. The immigrant minorities, marginal people and the native Indians could not make them heard due to the language barrier. Since they are visible minorities, the native Indians and other immigrant communities have reconciled to the use of English/French as their medium. Histories are being rewritten. Literatures of different hues and colour are springing. Still a peep into the past will be beneficial. To begin with it should be accepted that Canadian literature in English is a progeny of British seed planted in American soil. To a great extent it is a confluence of two major streams in the language -- British and American. It could claim a history of a century or at the most a little more. But by late 19th century French Canadian literature too came into prominence, though to begin with it was Quebec bound. For Indian students and scholars it will be interesting to note that Canadian literature or literatures are written in more than
one major language. Further, with an emphasis on regional and multicultural themes, the problems and prospects reflected in recent Canadian literatures offer plenty of issues to be probed. An encounter with Canadian literatures will be exciting as well as educative from the Indian point of view. Canada like India is a mosaic rather than a melting pot. Usually Canada is considered a “peaceable kingdom”. But now things are fast changing. The flow of war resisters from America, exiled African Asians, Indo-Chinese refugees, and immigrants from across the world have changed the complexion of Canada and with that its literatures during the last three or four decades. Now Canadian literature comprises English Canadian Literature, French Canadian Literature, Afro-Canadian Literature, Caribbean-Canadian Literature, South Asian Canadian Literature, Native Canadian Literature and the like.

Early writings of the Anglophones and the Francophones tried to portray their settler experiences, etched with memories/pangs of their home countries. Naturally the early works were descriptive, often a sort of historical recounting of their bitter sweet experiences in taming a wild country. Male protagonists dominate such works. “Early Canadian literature records the exploration of the male protagonists through the wilderness, dark forests and undulating prairie lands, the Rocky Mountains and trackless wastes of snow. The male pioneer myth became the conquest of the wilderness in terms of physicality. A female literary tradition in Canada begins only in 1950s with Susanna Moodie and Catherine Parr Traill. The female response to the wilderness was an internalisation of the unconquered terrains of the psyche” (Begum and Ajaykumar 10).

However even before the formation of the Confederation of Canada in 1867, the need for a national literature was felt. Edward Hartley Dewart, an
upper Canadian clergyman published an anthology, *Selections from the Canadian Poets* in 1864. In his introduction he said, “A national literature is an essential element in the formation of national character. It is not merely the record of a country’s mental progress: it is the expression of its intellectual life, the bond of national unity and the guide of national energy” (Qtd. in Woodcock 1).

History shows that a literature cannot be created by a collective act. For a long time, the pioneer mentality prevailed. Works devoted to the recreation of the cultural patterns and institutions of their lost homeland in the Canadian wilderness occupied centre stage. Besides, Canadian poetry and fiction till late 19th century remained derivative in their imagery and form. Drama and criticism were still in the formative stage.

To have a feel of the Canadian frontier it will be profitable to undertake a journey through Susanna Moodie’s two major works, *Roughing it in the Bush* (1852) and *Life in the Clearings Versus the Bush* (1853). Even a glance at the early works like these in Canadian literature will make it clear that like Canadian history, Canadian literature reflects the struggle of a young country to assert itself against the pressures of a mother country and a neighbouring giant to the south. Nineteenth and early twentieth century Canadian literature to a considerable extent treat the Canadian scene in a way palpably reminiscent of other countries. For instance, early Canadian Poetry in English is overweighed with English Romantic and Victorian poetry. Definitely it lends ample scope to study the extent and nature of influence vis-à-vis the kind of imagination at work. One will easily notice the effort on the part of the early poets to describe the landscape of the New World. The landscape loomed large in their imagination; much later they brought in the inhabitants of the land to their creative terrain. The need for home-
spun imagination was set in by Lampman, Charles G.D. Roberts, Bliss Carman and Duncan Campbell Scott.

In the 1920s and 1930s Canadian literature slowly began to acquire a distinctive Canadian identity. The rise of a host of prairie realists like Robert J. Stead, Maria Ostenso, and Philip Grove gave a new direction to Canadian Literature. Morely Callaghan’s telling moralist parables, ironed out novels with an urban background and ‘with a difference’ that caught the attention of the readers.

Canadian Poetry flowered in Montreal between the wars. It still had a vibrant Anglophone culture. The first signs of modernism were found in the poems published in *McGill University Review* by F.R. Scott and A.J.M. Smith. Their verse was “cosmopolitan in form, since it took cognizance of experimental trends in both Britain and the United states, but sought to locate itself firmly in a Canadian setting, and to find the rhythms of speech appropriate to the place” (Woodcock 3). *New Provinces*, an anthology published by them in 1936 paved the way for Canadian modernism and also a distinctive Canadian literary tradition. “With A. M. Klein and Leon Kennedy, Scott and Smith belong to a common school, which shows the distinguishing features or new bearings such as the Imagist techniques, symbolism, revival of forms of Classicism, Pastoralism and Metaphysical poetic techniques” (Rao XII). Smith’s anthologies, *A Book of Canadian Poetry* (1943), *The Oxford Book of Canadian Verse* (1960) and *Modern Canadian Verse* (1967) serve as very good introductions to Canadian poetry till 1960. These collections define a tradition, a fresh form of adaptation to befit the ethos of an emerging national culture.

The 1940s witnessed remarkable poetic activities both at Montreal and Toronto. At Montreal F. R. Scott was joined by upcoming poets like Irving
Layton, Louis Dudek, P. K. Page and many more. At the same time in poets like Toronto Earle Birney, Dorothy Livesay and Raymond Souster were blossoming. Two important Montreal journals *Preview* and *First Statement* published the challenging experimental poems of all these writers. In 1945 these two journals were merged into one as *Northern Review*. In Victoria, almost at the same time, Alan Crawley published the historic *Contemporary Verse*. It paved the way for a poetic movement in the West.

The field of theatre was not rich at the early period. But a native theatre did exist in Canada even before the arrival of the Europeans. But from the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century itself Canadian drama was developing in the Atlantic Provinces, especially in Ontario. By the middle of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century Quebec also became active in drama. Small theatres gave way to grand opera houses. What had changed very much, however, was the practice established by the early garrison theatres of presenting well-tried plays from abroad as the stand and repertoire, usually under the auspicious of visiting professional companies from Great Britain or the United States” (Benson and Connolly 11). By the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century commercial theatres came up in the west too, especially in Winnipeg. C. P. Walker did it in Winnipeg while Ambrose Small did the same in Ontario. But as a whole they looked for everything to New York.

Theatrical independence and the emergence of a Canadian theatrical identity was the result of alternative forms of entertainment in Canada -- film and radio. The Little Theatre Movement and the Dominion Drama Festival hastened it. John Coulter and Robertson Davies deserve special attention in this connection, though they were confined by the WASP social and political ethic. The 1930s ushered in a trend: the will to use the theatre as an educational and political
force. The Workers’ Experimental Theatre and the Theatre of Action offered something new to the theatre goers. The establishment of the Canadian Broadcasting Commission in 1932, which became in 1936 the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, induced a national character and identity for Canadian drama. By the 1950s some sort of government aid was begun to support theatre. English Canadian theatre had a remarkable growth in the 1960s. Historical, National and Regional issues were taken up in a daring way for dramatic rendering. The works of John Herbert, James Reaney and George Ryga redefined the contours of Canadian drama. International acclaim as well as national approval and appreciation helped the movement.

The Alternate Theatre also came up in the 1960s. It was an offshoot of various aesthetic, political and cultural influences. “Deliberately opposing established values and conventions, alternative theatre was an international phenomenon that manifested itself in diverse ways -- from rudimentary street theatre to iconoclastic New York repertory ensembles like Julian Beck’s Living Theatre, to the 1967 Broadway Rock Musical Hair” (Benson and Connolly 85). A distinctively Canadian alternate theatre emerged as the result of a changing political environment at home and a spontaneous interest in Canadian culture, history and institutions. David Freeman, George Walker and David French are the most prominent among alternate playwrights. Indian scholars, students and even the public can learn a lot from a close study of the works of these dramatists. The augmented role played by Regionalism in the 1970s is also worth studying, for, it brings up striking similarities between the theatre activities in India and Canada in various regions and languages. The sheer variety and diverse concerns and appropriate techniques should encourage anyone to make a serious
study of Regionalism at play in the theatre. For research purposes as well as enjoyment the plays of Michael Cook, David Fennario, Ken Mitchel, John Murrell and Sharon Pollock would be really profitable. It should be borne in mind that “Productions of plays by regional playwrights are not, of course, limited to particular kinds of theatres. A play like John Murrell’s *Waiting for the Parade* might be seen anywhere in the country (or abroad), in small alternate theatres, in large civic theatres, or amateur community theatres” (Benson and Connolly, 103).

Another area which deserves notice is the growth of the Canadian theatre for the young in recent years. Canadian children’s plays have considerably increased. Dinner theatres like *Stage West*, founded in Edmonton in 1975 shows the growth of the Canadian theatre in another direction. Usually the plays staged are light fare: often British sex comedies and simple musicals.

Canadian drama like Canadian poetry and fiction, definitely contributed its share to the building up of a national consciousness without bartering regional and individual interests:

‘In order to achieve any semblance of nationhood on a consolidated basis,’ George Ryga argues, ‘we have to redefine some mythological reason -- for why we do the things the way we do them.’ In this century Canadian dramatists have attempted to redefine the past (in order to say something about the present), reaching back to key historical figures -- Riel, Sitting Bull, the Donnelly’s, Billy Bishop, Bethune. But they have also created a gallery of memorable characters whose collective portrait is a portrait of Canada: mad Hester in *Still Stands the House*, the doomed Rita Joe, the Mercer family. (Benson and Connolly 113)
With all its ups and downs Canadian drama in English should prove a good hunting ground for the students and scholars of Canadian literature alike.

As a whole in Canadian literature a national concern came into vogue by the late 1940s. Actually World War II increased “the Canadian sense of existing as a separate nation” (Woodcock 4). It is a fact that “any national literature depends for its survival on the development of the kind of infrastructure which we often call a ‘literary world’, meaning the kind of ambience in which the writers are in touch with each other, in which responsible criticism develops, and in which there is a reasonable certainty of publications through a network of publishers, periodicals and media writing to use literary material. That a fair number of writers should earn enough to work without having to depend on academic appointments or journalistic chores, is also one of the signs of a literary world” (Woodcock 5). Only by the 1960s such a scenario emerged in Canada. But in the 1940s the very direction of Canadian fiction was changed by Hugh MacLennan’s Barometer Rising and Sinclair Ross’s As for Me and My House. Just as the quasi-epics of E. J. Pratt and the early poems of Earle Birney, these novels gave the message that the people of Canada were coming to terms with their own land and no more on their various “Old Countries”. Numerous writers have come into prominence in the 1960s including women which is certainly a welcome change. In 1976 the outstanding Canadian critic Northrop Frye commented on the “colossal verbal explosion that has taken place in Canada since 1960”. Really there was a phenomenal increase in the number of books published, the magazines in circulation, the number of publishing houses and bookshops in operation or the number of Canadian books read by Canadians. Actually by then, “the magazines and the publishing houses became part of that essential infrastructure of a literary
world. Linked in a symbolic way to the expansion of the literary world was the emergence of the Canada Council, the organization for the administration of public patronage without political strings” (Woodcock 6). It gave a real fillip to literature, arts and sciences. Consequently the number of writers and works increased considerably.

Many powerful writers emerged in all genres especially in fiction and poetry. Writers perceived landscape no more as a mere background posing challenges, problems, or in some cases evoking a sense of awe and wonder, but gave it symbolic hues as unmapped territory. They linked with it not only the earlier ‘garrison mentality’, but the more vital and persistent issue of survival. In other words, they bestowed on the landscape psychological ramifications. Undoubtedly one cannot overlook the strong claims of eminent women writers like Margaret Laurence and Margaret Atwood. A ‘revision’, re-definition and relocation of woman seem to be their prime concern. Laurence’s prairie/Manawaka tetrology -- *The Stone Angel* (1961), *A Jest of God* (1966), *The Fire-Dwellers* (1969) and *The Diviners* (1974) are hinged on ‘a powerfully realized woman’. These works also underscore an emerging new trend to break away from the past. Margaret Atwood is another towering woman writer of various genres:

In all her writing Atwood has demonstrated remarkable intellectual control of her material. Each book has a thematic unity and explores the central preoccupation of her work; the role of mythology, both personal and cultural, in the individual life. Like Northrop Frye, whose influence on Atwood has been significant, she perceives the conventions that lie behind every reality -- the mythological
substructure of modern culture - with great acuity. (The Oxford Companion 31).

Atwood led the way to deal with the crucial theme of survival at a psychic plane. In more than one way it turned out to be an extension of the persistent issue of physical survival, more complex, dense and challenging. It brought about radical changes in the craft of writing, style and imagery. Writing as such became more subjective; the writer no more remained a mere observer/recorder. This shift in the writers' attitude was evident in the late 1950s and 1960s itself. Margaret Atwood, Marian Engel, Alice Munro, Hugh Mac Lennan and many more endeavoured to deal with the theme of solitude in relation to the white race burdened with a sense of loss of their homeland and forced to reconcile with a d. A robust sense of Canadianness gave Canadian literature a bonding status. It lent a lot to generate a national feeling, emanating from a national unity and national identity. A good number of novels like The Stone Angel, Surfacing, Bodily Harm, Lives of Girls and Women, Who Do You Think You Are?, and Bear embark on exploration and survival. They try to trace unknown territories and challenge the confounding boundaries in fiction and reality. Such works have the distinction of opening up a new vista where works of art steeped in originality reflect the intricacies of Canadian society in great detail with disarming candour:

Taken together they constitute a psychological, geographical and sociological portrait of Canada as it was for the Anglophone, Francophone writers. Writers like Sinclair Ross, Philip Grove, J. C. Stead, Earnest Buckler, Rudy Weibe, Nicole Brossard and others were instrumental in channeling Canadian literature into a distinct body of writing that was expressive of new dimensions. From very regional
and realistic writing Canadian literature moved towards post-structuralist postmodern canons. Rudy Wiebe’s novel *Temptations of Big Bear* is a pointer to the growing concern of the sympathetic white to the native Indians whose history had remained unwritten. It is also an acceptance of a group of people who had been rendered voiceless within a European discourse. (Begum and Ajaykumar 11)

Along with these rooting and bonding in ‘the new homeland’ many of the Anglophone writers enlarged and enriched their ‘cultural reach’ from their experience of leaving Canada and returning. It happened alike to younger and older writers. The works of Margaret Laurence, Earle Birney, Dorothy Livesay, Irving Layton, P. K. Page, Dave Godfrey, Audrey Thomas, Marian Angel, Al Purdy and many others prove this point. In relation to these writers, an examination of the relationship between their exile experience and national/regional consciousness will be of great value. For instance, one can analyse Al Purdy’s collection of poems, *Being Alive* (1978) from this angle.

The crossing of frontiers by Canadians has helped to take up some hitherto neglected areas of writing. Serious literary criticism was for a prolonged period conspicuous by its absence. Perhaps the lone critic even in late 1950s was Northrop Frye (*The Anatomy of Criticism*, 1957). But by the 1960s many significant younger critics emerged; Margaret Atwood (*Survival*, 1972), D. G. Jones (*Butterfly on the Rock*, 1970) and W. H. New (*Articulating West*, 1972). Now there is no dearth of Canadian critics.

Canadian literature is fast growing. As in the rest of the world, in Canada too there is a lot of experimentation with writing. Novelists like Robert Kroetsch, Matt Cohen, Jack Hodgins, Timothy Findley and many others demand
serious study. There is a host of poets like Phyllis Web, Leonard Cohen, Margaret Avison, Alden Nowlan, Gwendolyn Mac Ewen, Michael Ondaatje and George Bowering who have emerged in recent decades. They have to be studied from Canadian as well as experimental perspectives. It may be also of interest to note that many young poets like Patrick Lane, Sid Marty, Dale Zieroth, Susan Musgrave and Tom Wayman in the Prairie Provinces and British Columbia are advocating a return to the landscape with a difference. “Northrop Frye once remarked that, whatever its political shape, Canada is culturally decentralist, and Canadian writers have recently been proving it by their variety of approach, which is as much regional as it is personal” (Woodcock 11).

Canadian literature in French is as important as Canadian literature in English. In this introduction I just wish to state that the French Canadian literature spread out extensively only in recent decades. Till then, though it was rich in all genres it was mainly confined to Quebec/the French territory and the highly homogeneous population of French Canada. “Nationalism, first in the form of ultra-conservatism, then with the goal of total transformation, inspired a great deal of writing. Since the election of nationalist government, however, Quebec literature has become widely diversified. And as the population of Francophone Quebec continues to move towards ethnic pluralism, even greater diversification can be expected, accompanied by the enrichment of variety and the dynamics of cultural interaction” (Sutherland 22).

By and large Canadian literature denotes Anglophone writing and Francophone writing. That is the way in which labeling has been done by the mainstream; it is more exclusive than inclusive. The most glaring exclusion is that of Aboriginal/First Nation peoples’ writing. Politically and historically too the
mainstream people systematically decimated the aboriginal people by pursuing the Canadian Government policy of “Aggressive Civilization”. Even by the end of nineteenth century, it appeared that native cultures would completely disappear to be supplanted by Christianity, schoolbooks and a metal technology. The progressive disappearance of various aboriginal peoples has been due to a total non-recognition of their very existence, their language, art and cultures. Their identity has been in peril since the European immigration; they have been treated as savages with no language, no voice. Silence has been imposed on them. The mainstream people virtually uprooted the first nation people from the land. “The encounter to begin with was an essentially unequal encounter between ‘unequals’. The feeling of ‘the other’ tagged with the sad label ‘inferior’ burdened the First Nation’s people with the sense of ‘shame’ and ‘fear’ and this imposed a sort of disquieting silence on them” (Nair 173). The white settlers could easily keep off the aboriginals from their world. This artificial division was based on power hierarchy:

The native got reduced to a conventional figure. He lost his voice. If native characters spoke, they spoke in archaisms or without articles, in the sham eloquence of florid romance or the muted syllables of deprivation. If native characters moved, they moved according to European schedules of arrangement, as faithful friends or savage foes, or as marginal figures the mighty could afford to ignore. Over the course of time even historical figures turned from person to signs”.

The prolonged struggle -- cultural, political, social, economic, racial and even sexual -- has yielded an unwholesome version of
Canadian history. As W. H. New rightly says, “The preponderant influence of this version of history depended on the construction of margins: the tendency it established was to deny Native Communities respect for their own position in history contingent upon European perspectives, to displace one language of perception with a self-justifying substitute. Power declares; it doesn’t readily listen” (5). The white immigrants viewed all aboriginal people as one, thereby denying their cultures and languages. They totally disapproved of the aboriginal peoples’ oral tradition and art forms. Of course till the 1970s ad 1980s the first nation’s people could not make them heard due to their language barrier and of course illiteracy.

However, colonization has given the aboriginal peoples the English language. Though late, they have begun to use English as their political and literary language. This has helped the natives to unite and to initiate a struggle to fight against the ‘silencing’ and ‘misrepresentation’ in the white dominant mainstream writing and art forms. Native writing is an earnest attempt to retrieve the lost ground. Themes invariably centre round the bitter experiences of colonization, deprivation, objectification and marginalization. Cultural survival is also a major concern. Centuries of suffering and denigration have forced the native writers to be protesters, for, that is perhaps the only option. Through vigorous protests, they want to be at least heard if not listened. But their ultimate aim is to redress their genuine grievances and to regain self respect and basic human rights. Even when they register their protest, their writings strike a balance with nature and diverse moods of man. The worst affected of the aboriginal peoples are women. Somehow or other among the native writers women are in the vanguard.
“The 1970s heralded a phenomenal explosion of creative writing by Indians. Its enormous range -- poetry, song, autobiography, retold traditional narratives, history, essays and children’s literature -- makes the period a turning point in the development of literature in English by Canadian first peoples” (Petrone 112). Apart from individual works by powerful writers like Maria Campbell, Beatrice Culleton, Joan Crate, Jeannette Armstrong and many more, very interesting as well as revealing anthologies too came out. *A Gathering of Spirit* (1984) edited by Beth Brant and *Writing the Circle* (1993) edited by Jeanne Perreault and Sylvia Vanee are two such important anthologies. The sole aim is to get voices recorded, even without the names of the speakers/writers. For, the native voice in spite of a rich oral tradition has been systematically and mercilessly suppressed. The native anguish has been expressed by many. For instance see Emma La Rocque’s spontaneous utterance in her powerful essay, “Here Are Our Voices - Who Will Hear”:

Aboriginal people were people of words, cultivated words. They were neither wordless nor illiterate in the context of their linguistic and cultural roots. The issue is not that native people were ever wordless but that, in Canada, their words were literally and politically negated... . To discuss native literature is to tangle with a myriad of issues: Voiceless, accessibility, stereotypes, appropriation, ghettoization, linguistic, cultural, sexual and colonial roots of experience, and therefore, of self expression -- all issues that bang at the door of conventional notions about Canada and about literature. (XV)
The complexity of the challenge faced by the aboriginal peoples is evident here. The very act of writing/telling is a healing process. It enables them to unburden, to share. The community/collective feeling is very strong. Listen to the words of Maria Campbell in her introduction to *Half-Breed* (1979), “I write this for all of you, to tell you what it is like to be a half-breed woman in our country. I want to tell you about the joys and sorrows, oppressing poverty, the frustration and the dreams”.

Maria Campbell’s *Half-Breed*, Beatrice Culleton’s *April Raintree*, Jeannette Armstrong’s *Slash* and Lee Maracle’s *I Am Woman* are works dealing with contemporary society and issues. Even though, each writer has a personal/special purpose, anger and loss and some sort of ‘protest’ pervade all these works. They simply want to communicate. All of them use many autobiographical details to give their writing a human touch and to make their utterances authentic. They use a first person narrative strategy, rather liberally, for a double purpose, to win a subjective position and to strike a note of intimacy. Though not hyperconscious they unknowingly evolve a counter discourse: Terry Goldie in *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigence in Canadian, Australian and New Zealand Literature* (1989) demonstrates that almost all accounts of indigenous people have only re-inscribed the baffling dichotomy these novels are trying to displace.

It is heartening to note that more native writers are trying to be heard. They are intent on giving a voice for themselves. All in one voice assert they have something to offer for the Canadian society. But at the same time they cannot be absolutely free of the harrowing experiences of the past. So for the native writers writing is an act of revisiting the past, living in the active present with a ray of hope for the future. This is applicable to new writers like Thomas

They have all one aim; to regain their lost identity and cultural mooring in all respect. In spite of the systematic decimation of the aboriginal by the Europeans/white immigrants, they want to assert that they have not lost everything. As Maria Campbell in 1990 remarked, though they have lost everything after Columbus’s discovery of America 500 years ago, they have one thing left, which is their voice. And as long as their voice is heard there is hope. Probably, they are rejuvenating as prophesied by the shamans and Louis Riel through their writings.

In spite of the misconceptions and misrepresentations of the natives willfully manipulated by the white over centuries there are some sympathetic white writers like George Ryga, Rudy Wiebe, Robert Kroetsch, the early novels of Laurence and David William’s first two novels. However, native literature will grow from strength to strength and find its legitimate place in Canadian literature. Its genuine inborn vitality and strength will sustain it. W. H. New rightly remarks:

Native literature reveals the depth and status of the culture, express native wisdom and points of view familiar to other natives, reveals the beauty of the native world, beauty rarely recognized by non-
Native oval narratives, values, beliefs, traditions, humour, and figures of speech. (23)

Along with this inherent depth and beauty a sense of urgency coupled with a political mission will reinvigorate aboriginal peoples’ literature in English.

In the post-1960 or post-1970 context it will be inaccurate to think of Canada without the sizeable immigrant population of diverse origins. South Asians and Black immigrants constitute a major chunk of it. Even the recent white settlers had no difficulty in getting assimilated to the mainstream. Such people are referred to as the “invisible” majority. But the South Asians and the Africans, the ‘visible minority’, still remain outside the mainstream. Owing to the strong hold of their original culture and traditions, they strive hard to hold on to their identity. ‘South Asian’ is an inclusive term. It refers to immigrants who have gone to Canada directly from India, Pakistan or Bangladesh as well as those generations of Caribbeans and Africans who had their origin in India. Most of the Caribbean and African Indians came to Canada after 1960. Perhaps decolonisation prompted the flow, mainly due to economic reasons and the unfriendly environment in the adopted country.

When we think of South Asian Canadian writers many names -- Rohinton Mistry, Neil Bissoondath, Arnold Itwaru, Reinzi Cruz, Michael Ondaatje, M.G. Vassanji, Sam Selvon, Himani Bannerji, Lakshmi Gill, Uma Parameswaran, Rane Bose, Rahul Varma and many more come to our attention.

Rohinton Mistry who had come from Mumbai and settled in Canada, uses his homeland memories to write excellent works like Such a Long Journey.
Neil Bissoondath came to Canada from Trinidad, while Itwaru and Dabydeen moved from Guyana to Canada. Reinzi Cruz and Michael Ondaatje moved to Canada from Sri Lanka. M. G. Vassanji came from Africa to Canada. Most of the others mentioned in the list emigrated from India.

By and large the immigrant writers try to recapture their past-memories, history, and bitter-sweet experience of their former country of residence or origin. M. G. Vassanji’s *The Gunny Sack* and *No New Land* present two facets of immigrant writing. The first novel steeped in memory recaptures the past while the second delineates the immigrants’ hard life in Canada. A love-hate relationship is at work in most of the South Asian writers. Uma Parameswaran portrays the plight of the immigrant very powerfully in “Trisanku”. Himani Bannerji is more overt and forceful in revealing the dichotomy in powerful poems like “Paki Go Home”. Arnold Itwaru in a short but moving poem, “arrival” presents the dilemma of the immigrant:

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this is the place
mark its name
the streets you must learn to remember
there are special songs here
they do not sing of you
in them you do not exist
but to exist you must learn to love them
... ... ... ... ... ... ... ...
... ... ... ... ... ... ... ...
bless yourself
you have arrived
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Rahul Varma and Rana Bose are even co-authoring with Canadian writers to produce plays of an inter-cultural strain.

There are some outstanding South Asian critics too. Arun Mukherjee’s *Towards an Aesthetic of Opposition: Essays on Literature, Criticism and Cultural Imperialism* (1988), and Himani Bannerji’s anti-essay, “The Sound Barrier: Trans Experience” are just two instances. They adopt an uncompromising stance against universalization. Even a glance at the South Asian Canadian writing in English will reveal the variety and richness of it as a whole. The difference in the South Asian immigrants’ roots, origins, beliefs, religions and customs are well reflected in their creations:

Clearly the racial, religious, cultural and linguistic diversity of the people, accented by immigration patterns and the various waves of the Diaspora make for a heady mix. Culturally, educationally, and experimentally, South Asian Canadian writers are a remarkably varied assembly. They do not come tabula rasa nor with begging bowls in hand, ready to be re-fashioned as Anglo or Franco Canadians, but as vibrant talented people schooled in the literary forms of their indigenous and adopted languages, in the vernacular forms of English, and in the traditional forms of English literature. (McGifford XI)
Yet another group of ill-fated immigrants are the Blacks hailing from Trinidad, Jamaica, Barbados, Ghana, Guyana, Nigeria, Haiti, South Africa etc. They have been in North America for more than two millennia. They initially came as slaves. Still these Afrosporic blacks are well outside the mainstream. Colour, illiteracy and economic backwardness are the blocks; certainly the pseudo sense of superiority entertained by the whites as a whole also prevent their entry into the mainstream if even that term is not a misnomer. Afrosporic writers have begun to raise their voice against this sustained human rights violation. Surely in the days to come Afrosporic writing will gain its due place in Canadian literature. Black-Canadian/Asfrosporic writers search for their Canadian identity, which, in a way, is a political quest. They reject the white misrepresentations based on injurious binaries and hierarchies and perverted ideological positions built on Eurocentricism, logocentricism and phallocentricism. They crave for liberation from these clutches. Writers like Claire Harris, Dionne Brand and many more voice these concerns.

Diaspora writing includes many more other solitudes -- Japanese, Jewish, Chinese, Hispanic etc. One may come across an underlying common layer in all these writings. Serious students and researchers can choose an area they prefer. Joy Kogawa’s Obasan should serve as an eye-opener. Pitched against the Second World War Kogawa gives a chilling account of the harrowing experience of the Japanese immigrants in Canada. They have contributed a lot in building up Canada as a nation. But due to sheer prejudice and discrimination, the Japanese were driven from pillar to post in Canada during the Second World War. On the one hand, it is an immigrant saga, on the other hand, it is a family/community/race chronicle.
Jewish Canadian writing is a solid part of the Diaspora writing in English. Nostalgia, holocaust survival, Biblical allusions and Israel are the recurrent themes. Along with that, the Jewish Canadian writers’ works deal with the issue of settlement in their own way, which demands careful study. There is a formidable array of Jewish Canadian poets -- A. M. Klein, Irving Layton, Miriam Waddington, Eli Mandel, Avi Boxer, Leonard Cohen, Stanley Cooperman, Mick Burrs, Seymour Mayne, Nancy Gay-Rotstein, David Sloway and many more. There is ample scope for one to probe how far the characteristics of a living Jewish community are presented in the poems of Mandel, Waddington, Layton or Sloway. It will be also worthwhile to examine how effectively poets like Stanley Cooperman, Avi Boxer, the early Leonard Cohen and Seymour Main inlay their poems with Jewish traditions and experiences.

In fiction, Mordecai Richler’s *Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* where the clever and daring adventures of Duddy to go up in life, of course banking on Jewish heritage and values should persuade one to delve deep into Jewish Canadian fiction. There is no doubt Jewish Canadian writing in English is a vast and rich area which should excite any serious student of Canadian literature.

Chinese Canadian writing in English is also becoming prominent in the Diaspora writing. Chinese immigration to Canada began in the latter half of the 19th century. But the Canadian Government had adopted a rigid stand towards the Chinese immigrants, but now the attitude is changing. The travails of the early Chinese immigrant labourers and the experiences of the later generations are powerfully portrayed in *Disappearing Moon Café* by Sky Lee. She tells the story of Vancouver’s Chinese community whose role in British Columbia’s development has
until recently been denied. It is an epic in scope and intent, spanning four
generations and nearly a century (1892 - 1986). Sky Lee may beckon us to learn
more about Chinese Canadian writing.

Just as the contemporary Canadian society is essentially multicultural
and a veritable mosaic, in spite of the dichotomy between the declared Canadian
Government policy and the practice in day-to-day life, Canadian literature in every
sense is variegated. It is a chequered arena comprising rich and colourful blocks -
English Canadian, French Canadian, Asian Canadian, Chinese Canadian, Japanese
Canadian, Caribbean Canadian, Jewish Canadian, Italian and other European and
even more. An explorative journey into the vast expanse of Canadian literature
should be exciting, educative and profitable for all in a transcultural, context
redefining the concept of home and even the catchy McLuhanesque ‘global
village’.

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For Further Reading

Initially you may skip through the following.