CHAPTER IV
THE LITERARY CLIMATE
As already noted, the Indian English Novels are immensely influenced by the Gandhian impact which covered a span of more than three decades. It is inconceivable how anyone could write in the thirties without reflecting the sense of the age and the spirit of the time. The novelists of this period have thus ably described the social, political and economic themes in their works. Surprisingly, a writer of the Independent India, evinced an increased creative vigour and developed an urge for experimentation of a novel form of writing either in English or any other regional language for that matter. Undoubtedly, Gandhiji is accredited for having stirred the entire Indian society and also bring the stalwarts like, Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao, to the literary scene.

The Post - Independence period is a witness to an equally important school of women novelists who have contributed largely to the Indians writing in English. The prominent leading figures are Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal and Anita Desai. For a thematic study only the first two women novelists are taken under study for they are unquestionably the most outstanding.

Speaking about the sweeping changes of the Gandhian Age the attention was not specifically on the contemporary political and economic spheres only but
on the virtual transformation in the social scene was noticeable. Certainly, these drastic changes in practically all areas had their repercussions on the writings of the contemporary writers. Some of the novels of this period thematically cover the immediate impact of the Freedom Struggle. Under the social themes the novelist chose to write on the communal problems, the plight of the untouchables and the down-trodden, the landless poor, the economically exploited and oppressed and also a special fascination for East-West encounters find a prominent place in Indian writing.

Categorically the novelists under study are grouped thus: Mulk Raj Anand as a progressive and a committed writer, R. K. Narayan a realistic writer and a comic genius, Raja Rao as a philosophical writer, Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala are socialists making an indepth study of human relationships.

Coming to the compelling themes that find a place in the works of each of the author can be classified thus: Anand, the most committed writer whose social themes include the oppression and degrading social practices on the humans kept below the sub-human level and the treatment meted out to the underdogs of the society. R. K. Narayan, a man with a difference, did not confine himself to the stereotyped themes of social, political and
economic but a writer of multifarious issues, making the most ordinary prominent by his comic vigour. He also attempts to write on lesser serious social problems in some of his novels. Coming to Raja Rao his major themes are social, political, religious, metaphysical and philosophical. Ruth Prawer Jhabvala explores areas like love, marriage, family relationships as well as East-West encounters. Kamala Markandaya discusses themes like political, social, economic and spiritual. On a wider canvas Markandaya writes about the women and the role they play in society including the East-West encounters.

Amongst the writers mentioned above Mulk Raj Anand can be singled out to have written most emphatically on the social issues of India. He makes an attempt to reveal the pathos and agony of the underdogs of society, the down-trodden who live below the sub-human level. His novels like Untouchable (1935), Coolie (1936) and Two Leaves and a Bud (1937) conform his deep felt sympathy for the class of the underprivileged. Indeed, these novels hit the sorest spot of the traditional Hindu society and win the reader's deep felt sympathies for this poor race. His work cannot be adjudged as being totally politically motivated for it is only in a few that hypocritical self-complacency of the British is picturised. The Road (1963) spells the same tragedy as that of Untouchable but certain mature after thoughts are included in this story. Anand's
very first novel Untouchable is vivid, compact and a masterpiece of art. As a humanist, he was greatly troubled by the complete degradation of the human spirit symbolised in the lives of the untouchables, in Untouchable and The Road. Bakha and Bhikhu represent the misery and suffering of all untouchables. While Coolie and Two Leaves and a Bud show the unspeakable misery of another class of the exploited - the coolies. Both the novels show the British masters as pure exploiters and the harassment of the under - privileged, by the capitalistic forces. The Big Heart (1945) deals with the social themes where the clash between tradition and modernity is shown in which the hero Ananta falls a victim. The interaction is between the traditional copper - smiths and the factory - owner capitalists. A single day's events are chronicled in a fine and well knit structure.

The conflict between the traditional and the modern world is presented from a slightly different angle in The Old Woman and the Cow (1960), since the protagonist here is a woman. This is the only novel of Anand which solely deals with the issues and rights of the Indian women. This novel is a powerful tale of Gandhi's heroism and resilience, devotion and tenderness, self respect and sensitiveness. The woman's quest and struggle for self - realisation, and the transformation which she undergoes
through the impact of modernity retaining some of the finer elements of rustic Indian womanhood, constitute the chief theme of the novel. Anand’s Village trilogy constitutes, The Village (1939), Across the Black Waters (1941) and The Sword and the Sickle (1942), though the story begins with a social theme, it later changes to a political one as the hero Lal Singh becomes an active member of a revolutionary group. In this group of novels, too, Anand deals with the socio-political themes like the conflict between tradition and modernity and the struggle for man’s self-realisation. The local and national politics is shown particularly in the last of the trilogy. Political themes also become prominent in such novels as Private Life of an Indian Prince (1953) and Death of a Hero (1964). The two themes that run side by side are that, the former novel is the neurotic life of a prince and the political life of the country immediately after Independence. The latter novel again deals with the tension that followed India’s partition after Independence. The background is the invasion of Kashmir by the Pakistan raiders, which led to the signing of the Instrument of Accession to India by the Maharaja of Kashmir. The story is simple and covers a very short period of the protagonist, Maqbool Sherwani’s life. All these novels whether social, economic or political, show Anand’s strong consistency of purpose and reveal his humanistic philosophy.
On the other hand, R.K. Narayan with his humour hits upon the social themes like in *Swami and Friends* (1935) he gives an account of a school boy in the Malgudi village. Narayan narrates the story in such a good humoured way that the reader can perceive the writer's thoughts of his boyhood days in the village of Malgudi. A very unlikely story written by Narayan is *The Dark Room* (1938) which is a serious tale of a woman who silently suffers, leaves her home but returns only to surrender, showing her dependence on her husband. In contrast to this novel is *The English Teacher* (1946) where Krishnan belonging to a middle class and a college teacher confronts the petty and trivial daily business problems of living. Narayan has lined these petty problems with his comic irony and humour. In the second half of the novel Narayan shows Krishnan establishing connection with his dead wife where the treatment of supernatural could not be skilfully handled by this comic genius.

In the Post - Independence period Narayan wrote three serious novels; *The Financial Expert* (1952), *The Guide* (1958) and *The Man Eater of Malgudi* (1962). The first novel deals with Margayya who wishes to accumulate wealth. On being ridiculed by the Bank Secretary he fasts and worships Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth, for forty days, and luck turns in his favour. He prints a pornographic book by Dr. Pal and with its profit he starts
a money-lending career. Towards the end the situation reverses and Margayya decides to resume his first occupation thus learning a lesson that Prosperity and peace cannot go together. *The Guide* is the best of Narayan's writings which won him the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1960. The tourist guide Raju has an affair with Rosie, wife of an excavator, who does not care for the subtle feelings of his wife. Rosie's shattered life is restored to some extent by Raju who encourages her to give her best dance performances in public. Raju forges Rosie's signature and is sentenced to jail. Sporting a beard and a yellow robe Raju is mistaken for a sadhu. The entire village comes to have a glimpse of this Mahatma who on refusal to eat food is mistaken to have taken a fast unto death, in that drought-stricken area unless rain arrives. Narayan shows the die-hard belief and superstition practised in India. For as long as people cling on to these illogical beliefs there cannot be a complete transformation of their understanding of this space age.

The social scene depicted in the novel *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) by Kamala Markandaya illustrates rural village life with all its antimony and happiness as compared to modernised urban life. The villagers live on an elemental level with bare necessities like food, clothing and shelter. With the setting in of the westernised culture the rural sensibility has drastically changed. Their
innocence and simplicity and magnanimity has given place to uncouth behaviour and egoism. This is the problem faced by Rukmani, a rustic woman, who due to modernisation in industry is forced to migrate to a city, along with her husband, Nathan. They are fleeced as they both do not know the city—ways of survival. It is Kennington, a British doctor and a social worker who comes to their rescue.

In spite of Markandaya’s effort to draw typical village life—like pictures, she falls short in capturing the true spirit of the rural rustics to the fullest. Her picturisation of an Indian village with all its relevant details still lack the turn and twist in the speech of a rustic, their traditions and conventions, culture and religion which do not dimensionally satisfy the reader when compared to Kanthapura of Raja Rao. Though writers like Anand, Narayan and Kamala Markandaya have managed to depict a few snatches of Indian rural sensibility, it is only Raja Rao by far the best who has given authentic details of an Indian village.

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala’s social themes concentrate mostly on love, marriage with Indian as well as Western partners and the Hindu joint family system in India. Though she is an outsider and lived for a quarter of a century in India she able to describe superficially the real life style of the Indians. She in fact enjoys the advantage of viewing the East and the West with an
while other writers like Anand, Narayan, Ruth Jhabvala and Markandaya’s concentration was more on the contemporary issues like social, political or economic. Raja Rao deviated to search and reflect on highly complex issues like the Indian philosophy of Advaita, the philosophy of total surrender or mother cat theory as well as western thoughts and religions like Albigensian heresy, Christianity, Buddhism and Islam. It is Raja Rao’s novel The Serpent and the Rope which is a feast for those hungry souls who wish to delve deep into the realm of Truth and recognise the illusory from the reality.

Raja Rao has taken much care to give authentic details of the religious activities that take place in Kanthapura. The festivals of Rama, Krishna, Ganesh, Gauri and even Kartik, the festival of lights are shown with all their festivity and activity. The Gandhian victory in Kanthapura is recorded as not an easy one for the forces of orthodoxy, conservatism and superstitions acted as the fort-walls. Fortunately, a weakness of the villagers to hear mythical tales in the form of a Harikatha is the only way wherein politics is introduced in small doses.

A common theme that runs through all the novels of the novelists under discussion is the theme of love and marriage. Marriages discussed by the authors are not solely Indian but Indian with Western counterparts too
have been dealt with. Narayan's novel, The Bachelor of Arts deals vaguely with a sensitive youth, Chandran who is caught in a conflict between western ideas of love and marriage. The ideas are injected through his education and the traditional social set up in which he lives. In frustration he becomes a sanyasi but on his return home he finds that an arranged marriage is not an imposition at all. The author deals with these issues most superficially but what can one expect from a writer who drives you at your wits end with his humour and irony. The Vendor of Sweets where Jagan is a Gandhian, his son Mali goes to the west and returns with a western lady whom he has not married yet. This modernity holds Jagan in an awe-stricken state and he decides to renounce the world. Narayan's implications seem rather obscure. The novel is neither wholly devoted to the East-West encounter or orthodoxy and modernity in the way of life or even a clash between the older and the younger generation or the Gandhian motif. Here the writer is unable to give fit expression to his thoughts and ideas explicitly, which he wishes to convey. The Guide covers some of the social aspects as well as the love and marriage theme. A futile marriage, is envisaged between Marco and Rosie as well as a love affair between Rosie and Raju ends without any fruition. In fact such an act between a married lady and a young man is looked down upon by society. Marriage is a
sacred bond between a young lady and a man for ever. The Guide is in fact one of the best novels produced by Narayan.

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala focuses her attention primarily to the traditional Indian Hindu families as well as East-West encounters. She being an outsider before marriage and an insider after marriage is familiar and not a stranger to the problems of society in India. In The Householder the life of a middle class Indian family is depicted and the East-West encounter appears in a minor way. Jhabvala reacts strongly with her western characters and to a large extent shows signs of transformation in them. Skillfully, Jhabvala describes the experiences of the Westerners in India and their interaction with the Indians. Her foreignness in fact, enables her to deal with mixed marriages of Indians with Westerners in a critical but good-humoured manner. The differences in custom as well as the life style of both the East and the West have been vividly described. She stands at the junction where East and West meet and is in a better position to see the interactions of the two most diverse cultures through her own life experience.

In To Whom She Will a love affair between a young man and a woman is shown which ends in each one accepting a separate arranged marriage. Nature of Passion (1956) shows the passion of a rich business man for his
youngest daughter to be married in a rich family. The main intention of the father to find a good match is in his own interest to further his business. The Householder is the story of a newly wedded couple who enter the grahasti (household) and learn all the pleasures and pains of becoming a householder. It is a typical social situation where the couple Prem and Indu lead an economically cramped life. The mind's tension in Prem's mind is two fold, one, the pressing circumstances at home and second the anxiety whether he will be able to run his household discreetly after their baby is born. Get Ready for Battle shows a businessman who derives a scheme to acquire the land occupied by the poor. His own wife is a social worker and from whom he is separated and himself lives with a widow. They also have a worthless son, Vishnu.

Ruth Jhabvala's mixed marriages are seen in Esmond in India (1958) and A Backward Place (1965). In both the novels she presents the experiences of an Indian woman married to a European and a European woman married to an Indian. The Westerners are attracted towards India mainly due to her rich ancient culture and heritage which continues in spite of modern trends. This is the case with Esmond and Judy in Esmond in India and A Backward Place respectively, where they marry Indian woman and man respectively and wish to settle here. But, so far all the marriages between the East and the West are not harmonious, differences in life style
often lead to misunderstanding, strained relations and consequently, separation. Esmond and Gulab face a similar situation in Esmond in India. Gulab marries an Englishman named Esmond Stillwood, but their relationship is not harmonious. The differences in life style, custom and behaviour lead to misunderstanding and discord. Consequently their relations are strained and they drift apart. In A Backward Place the situation is superficially the reverse. Here Judy, an English girl, marries Bal an Indian. He is a handsome man with many plans which fail to take a materialistic shape as they are so far-fetched. Judy at all levels tries to sustain Bal, their children and even their marriage as well. In her fury she sulks and fumes comparing Bal to the Englishmen in their behaviour. Very unlikely of a foreigner, Judy submits to her fate, like a generous and serene cow.

Ruth Jhabvala's main focus is on mixed marriages. Her foreign protagonists feel rootless in India. Their attraction for each other is illusory and short lived due to diverse characteristics and they ultimately find themselves trapped in an unhappy relationship. The discord and confusion in relation is solely due to differences in custom, caste, manner, attitudes and mode of living. To bring out the behavioural pattern of her characters, Ruth Jhabvala adopts gentle irony and satire and presents them in a very humorous way.
The situation reverses in the case of Kamala Markandaya. She, an Indian, has been living in England for a number of years and can be called an expatriate. Her novels throw light on two major aspects, they are the East-West encounter and the role of women in life. Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* shows the suffering and sacrifice of Rukmani, the narrator-heroine. Women's capacity for endurance is inexhaustible. Hence, Rukmani bears all the sorrows without any grudge like her husband's infidelity, her daughter sacrifices the family in order to save them from starvation, the death of child Kutl and finally leaves her home to go the city. Both Nathan and Rukmani become stone breakers, Nathan dies leaving his wife forlorn to face the wicked world. She never gives up the fight for survival and returns to the village to live with her children and rebuild their fortune. Perseverance and hope is always rewarded even if one is engaged in finding nectar in a sieve.

As for the theme of marriage, Markandaya contrasts the village marriage to the modernised version of this sacred union. Rukmani's marriage in *Nectar in a Sieve* is a sacred covenant which ties the twosome in a holy bond. On the other hand is Murugan, who arranges his own marriage and lives in the city without the sanction of the elderly people of the village. He deserts his wife and takes another woman without any hassle or hesitation.
The Indo-English relationship in *Some Inner Fury* (1955). Mira is attracted to Richard. The fury of the 'Quit India' movement denies the fruition of their love and overtakes them and finally tears the two apart. Richard falls a victim to mob fury while Mira returns home only to shut herself and to cherish old memories. Marriage between Premala and Kitsamy is an unhappy one. Premala in order to escape the stifling home atmosphere becomes a social worker. This novel can also be termed as a tragedy born out of the iron hand of politics.

Kamala Markandaya in her novel *The Coffer Dame* (1969) offers one of her most comprehensive pictures of the Indo-English encounters. A British engineering firm with Clinton and Mackendrick partnering it, set out to build a dam across a South Indian river. Besides the foreign engineers the Indian engineers like Krishnan and Bashiam a tribal, a technician, are also included. Clinton works only on a purely working relationship with the Indians while his wife, Helen, sees the Indians, especially the tribal with curiosity and humanistic feeling. Slowly Helen's closeness with Bashiam develops into an affair. The dynamites planted in this construction area to split the rock and make the river turn, blasts prematurely. Many tribal workers are killed while some are buried under the debris. Bashiam is asked to operate the newly installed crane to lift the boulders and
release the trapped corpses. In this rescue operation, the crane being defective falls on land alongside Bashiam. Bashiam dies under mysterious circumstances but all the same the dam is completed. Markandaya thus like Jhabvala shows that the East-West come close to each other to some extent but a total union between the two is never noticed.

Thematically, Raja Rao too like Ruth Jhabvala and Kamala Markandaya shows the East-West encounter as a failure. Multiple themes go into the making of *The Serpent* and the *Rope*, one among them is the East-West encounter theme. It is India and the Brahminism of Rama that attracts, Madeleine, a French teacher to marry this scholar. Though Rama is a Brahmin he has close affinity with Savithri and they are 'spiritually married' to each other. But presently she goes to India to marry Pratap whom she does not love. The third woman in Rama's life is Lakshmi, Sham Sunder's wife, whom he meets in Bombay on his second visit to India. Madeleine on losing her two sons drifts away from Rama towards Buddhism. Accepting this new religion is seen to be natural in the unforeseen circumstances she was undergoing. Drifting into Buddhism can also be the result of her identifying herself with Rama, as Indian wives do. The differences in custom, religion, life — style and thinking pattern ultimately result in a divorce between Rama and Madeleine. Indian marriages like that of Savithri and Pratap, Saroja and
Subramanya Sastri are shown as well as Western marriage of Uncle Charles with Tante Zoubie and Georges with Catherine (Madeleine's cousin), the latter are yet to be married, is also depicted. Comrade Kirillov is the other novel of Raja Rao where a South Indian Brahmin, like Rama, Kirillov marries a Czech lady. She is an intelligent woman with Communistic leanings. Kirillov himself a communist develops a liking for her and marries her. Irene, Kirillov's wife, like Madeleine (Rama's wife) has a special fascination for India and Indians and even desirous to visit this alien land. Towards the end her acceptance in Kirillov's family and Kirillov himself in India haunts her thus, in order to find her own roots alienates herself from Kirillov mentally. She vows never to come to India and it is the cruel hand of death that separates her from Kirillov.

A confrontation between the East and the West is only upto a certain point after which it declines to its original. It is seen from the novels of Jhabvala, Markandaya and Raja Rao that love between the East and West is strong initially but with the passage of time the illusory love changes into bitter feelings for each others custom, tradition, and religion too becomes the bone of contention in some cases. The depth of human feelings and its diversity in every respect has been dealt by Raja Rao more forcefully than Jhabvala or Markandaya. Raja Rao had lived for years abroad yet the Indian culture and tradition
tradition occupies a central place in his character and is
the best representative of the Indian culture and values
abroad.

The theme of marriage is dealt more
elaborately as more and more fictional works are introduced
recently in the Indian English writings. East–West
confrontation forms the central theme of many novels today.
It is not to be inferred that East-West marriages end in
unhappiness only for that matter any marriage does not take
a smooth course.

R.K.Narayan, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala/Kamala
Markandaya have discussed marriages either Indian or Indo-
European in which couples seem to face disappointments or
unfulfilled desires. Lack of understanding and proper
communication is the result of strained relations between
husband and wife. Raja Rao, Jhabvala and Markandaya seem to
draw our special attention towards the couples of mixed
marriages who fail due to diverse life-style, custom and
thought pattern. Sometimes it is noticed in the novels that
the East-West encounters become so intolerable that the
couples are unable to survive together. Traditional
marriages juxtaposed with mixed marriages have been dealt
with elaborately with an inevitable strong understanding
and attitude by Raja Rao. The Serpent and the Rope shows
Rama’s Little Mother, widowed and remains so to tend her
children. On the other hand, Rama’s father is privileged to
marry thrice. Inter-caste marriage of Saroja with Subramanya Sastri is an unhappy one, Savithri's marriage with Pratap is the result of Rama's constant persuasion, Uncle Charles and Zoubie's marriage is just a social contract while Georges and Catherine with a gulf of differences in understanding are to be married shortly. Irene and Kirillov's marriage comes to an end with Irene's death.

The marriages in *The Cat and Shakespeare* by Raja Rao too are not a success. Ramakrishna Pai married to Saroja has an extra-marital affair with Shantha, Govindan Nair though happily married goes to a brothel where suddenly his urge for sex changes into sisterly feeling for Lakshmi. All the marriages recorded so far are unhappy ones with unfulfilled desires or misunderstandings. Rope bridges of understanding and love are always built in mixed marriages but do not prove to be strong enough to stand the test of time.

Philosophy is one of the major themes that Raja Rao makes use of in all his novels. The other novel writers have not, in fact, explored this area at all. Raja Rao deals with the philosophy of Karma in *Kanthapura* the Advaita philosophy of Sri Sankara in *The Serpent and the Rope*, the philosophy of self surrender or the mother-cat theory in *The Cat and Shakespeare* and the quest for truth in *Comrade Kirillov*. Raja Rao's philosophy has a single