CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

1. In Retrospect:

An attempt has been made in the foregoing chapters to examine the Social Realism depicted in the eight Indian English novels selected for this study published in the last two decades of the twentieth century. The study confirms that there are many aspects of social realism treated in the novels.

In this chapter a summary of the study, which has been undertaken in the preceding chapters, as a sort of retrospective summing up is given; an attempt has been made to prove the presence of social realism and the novelists’ true ability to depict thoroughly social realism through many aspects in their novels.

The first chapter gives the introduction. Here, a brief note on the development of Indian English novel is given.

The second chapter has dealt with the major Features of the Period 1980 – 2000 and the development of Indian English novel in different genres is analyzed. A brief note on the different genres helped to clarify the novels’ socio-realistic vision, which was analyzed in the pertaining chapters.

The third chapter dealt with the theory on Social Realism. In this chapter the key term of the thesis ‘Social Realism’ was discussed elaborately. Central to the
study of these novels is an understanding of the term ‘Social Realism’. The term suggests the true picture of society in its multifarious aspects. It is an all embracing term indicating a sound knowledge of social dynamics, politics, social history and social problems.

In comparison with terms like ‘social consciousness’, ‘social sense’ or ‘social experience’, the term ‘social realism’ suggests a deeper and more systematic understanding of the nature and functioning of a social organization. Hence the term suggests an insight into the social reality.

Social Realism has been chiefly concerned with the commonplaces of everyday life among the middle and lower classes, where character is a product of social factors and environment is the integral element in the dramatic complications in literature, an approach that proceeds from an analysis of reality in terms of natural forces. Realism, a style of writing that gives the impression of recording or ‘reflecting’ faithfully an actual way of life.

The fourth chapter presented the Identity Crisis as an aspect of social realism in Partap Sharma’s *Day’s of the Turban* and Upamanyu Chatterjee’s *English, August: An Indian Story* and analyzes the novels in detail in view of identity crisis along with other aspects of social realism like encounter of old and new ideas, family life, position of women, tradition, crime and contemporary political
situation, modern Indian society and moral awareness, depiction of social panorama, contemporary social life and vision of life.

In Sharma’s *Day’s of the Turban*, Balbir’s grandfather, Lok Raj, is a traditional man, who thinks in terms of family only. For him family is everything, whereas for Balbir, who is suffering from identity crises, it is a bond which tied him from going out of its clutches and he always confronts with the family structure and wants to flee away from family bonds. Sharma’s treatment of the institution of the family in India is more thoughtful. According to him the unshakable strength of Punjab and perhaps its regenerative power too, rests upon clan kinship that goes beyond religion. There is always a kind of tug of war between him and his father, who belongs to and believes in the old traditional way of life. Dev Singh is another character who looks after his entire family, even though he is ready to take revenge on Uday Singh.

Sharma’s view is that the caste system in Punjab does not carry with it the bigotry and vehemence that it does in some other states. But the fiction underlines that caste prejudices in Punjab as elsewhere run deep and fierce. A harijan settlement is swiftly obliterated; Uday’s low caste makes him an easy victim of both Sikhs and Hindus, whereas Balbir’s Muhiyal status guarantees a measure of safety even in the enemy camp.
The political system of India is clearly depicted in the situations like commonwealth games and bluestar operation. The novel, which grew out of the research on the events of June 1984, attempts to situate the then current upheavals of Punjab in the context of a long and turbulent history – invasions from the north, British rule which ended with partition and the division of Punjab between Pakistan and India, the Indian government’s hostility towards regional self-assertion and the issue of Khalistan. The provenance of the work helps to explain its appeal as well as limitations. The story of Balbir, the discontented grandson of a powerful landowner, who becomes entangled in the operations of a small-time gun-runner, and a terrorist action group led by the charismatic Amar Sing, is realistically integrated with Sharma’s political and social commentary.

Upamanyu Chatterjee’s *English, August* clearly depicts the way of life of bureaucrats, IAS officers, in the characters like Agastya, his seniors, Srivastav and Bajaj and the district police officer Kumar, who exhibit the old accouterments of importance like the flashing orange light on the roof of the car and pomposity in the name of maintaining the dignity of office. There is a realistic approach in the various pictures of life of people in Madna and Jompanna. Sen’s sense of alienation deepens not finding a reasonable answer to the question as to who he is. He lacks a definite sense of identity which comes from being rooted in one’s culture. Here the notion of dislocation and identity are interconnected. He has no
doubts that he is an Indian, a Bengali. But he is distanced from his native culture and tradition, from ties that bind family, friends, history and myths of the land. An identity involves a continual interface and exchange of cultural performances. Sen tries to feel settled and assumes some kind of role to fit into the image of a bureaucrat. Consciously he tries to sound pompous. He starts lying, he learns to scowl like Srivastav, and he plays personality tricks. But finally he is unable to cope with the multiple roles that he is expected to play.

The novel focuses on the urgent need for decolonization not only of the bureaucratic structure in India but also of the colonial mind. Development cannot take place when masses are distanced from the administrators and in the absence of authentic selves who are engaged and concerned with the administration of the country. Chatterjee tells the entire story keeping in mind the projection of contemporary India and it is worth to have a subtitle, “An Indian Story”.

In the fifth chapter an attempt has been made to show the Cultural Ethos depicted in Rohinton Mistry’s Such A Long Journey, Shashi Tharoor’s Show Business and Vikram Seth’s A Suitable Boy with the analyses of other aspects of social realism like family life, man-woman relationship, crime, moral awareness, marriage as an institution, depiction of social panorama, contemporary social life and political scene, caste, education, tradition, religion and position of women.
Rohinton Mistry’s *Such A Long Journey* has effectively used the backdrop of the post-independent Indian political context particularly of the crucial period of the sixties and the seventies. The novelist offers commentary on the socio-political situation and corruption and crime in high places. Some characters in the novel make really illuminating comments. Gustad thinks about the position of the Parsis in Bombay and comments that there was no future for minorities with all the fascist Shiva Sena politics and Marathi language nonsense. On the whole, the novel depicts life-style of Parsis in the city. The life-style of Parsis living in Khodadad building is the microcosm of the Parsis in India.

In this novel Mistry comes out as a critical realist so far as the treatment of social reality is concerned. Through this his ideology comes out to project the kind of society he wants to be a part of. In his consciousness of the social and political aspects of a particular historical period he emerges as a progressive writer, but in his vision of a larger rhythm of life, in which all forms of human happiness and misery are seen woven inseparably in the development of the central character towards a climax, he shows his allegiance to literature’s timeless values, independent of narrow commitments, whether political or regional.

Shashi Tharoor’s *Show Business* presents Bombay film industry with as much reality as possible. He takes the tale of a prominent politician’s son who rises from bit parts to Indian superstardom, then moves on to meet his downfall in the
similar if more dangerous game of politics. Ashok’s amoral adventures sound familiar to the readers of filmy news. He lives as if life were a movie starring him, along with a supporting cast of beautiful women and servile men. He meets an accident to his disgrace, but throngs of loyal fans keep vigil outside while he lies dying. His father, brother and another fellow actor offer more serious commentary. For them, politics and film are same. Both of them are involved in pretense. Corruption and crime are normal in politics as they are shown in films. Tharoor is one of those rare writers who felicitously combine gentle satire with an urgent concern for society’s ills.

Maya, Ashok’s wife, is largely the prototypic good wife of films who gives up a career for the sake of the family and maintains her silence on her husband’s antics so as not to impugn the family’s honour. Whereas, Mehnaz Elahi, the mistress, never moves beyond the role scripted for her. Throughout she remains confined within the role of “the other woman”, who is thoroughly infatuated with the hero and who feels no need to legitimize the relationship with her man. This man-woman relationship is depicted realistically which is directly correlated to some actors from Hindi film land.

This novel is the best example of commentary on contemporary Indian life and politics. Here the author used filmy glitz and glamour as a metaphor for Indian society.
In this chapter, Vikram Seth’s *A Suitable Boy* has been interrogated and it is shown that the social realism is perfectly depicted through all most all the aspects of social realism. The praises to Seth’s novel must take into account his ability to give shape to a fictional technique, which contaminates various elements in terms of periods, genres and characters. Nehruvian period freely mixes with Elizabethan age, fictional narration with dramatic and poetic discourse and male with female identity. Starting with the story of Lata, the narrative relating to the psychological point of view gradually flows into her relatives and friends and lovers, and soon the readers lost in a wide and intricate maze of socio-political history. Of course, Seth was not creating a psychological study, and it is to the credit of Seth that he fits Lata so neatly into the vast and complex structural pattern of the novel. Thus Lata’s choice and rejection, seen in its social aspects, embody the mature response of an intelligent adult in the postcolonial situation.

The bulk of the novel is used to portray a realistic picture of India. Vivid descriptions of the Pul Mela, the ordinary life of Rasheed’s village, the horror of communal riots, a cricket match, the whole election procedure of campaigning, polling and counting, all these lend the novel a very wide socio-political framework.

The novel provides the feel of a complete life in all its shades of pain, pleasure, anxiety, frustration, hypocrisy, selfishness, unselfishness, pride and
snobbishness. Like a true social realist, Seth makes *A Suitable Boy* all encompassing.

In the sixth chapter an attempt has been made to show the Diaspora as an aspect of social realism in Anurag Mathur’s *Making the Minister Smile*, Pankaj Mishra’s *The Romantics* and Amit Choudhuri’s *A New World* along with other aspects of social realism like contemporary political situation, industrial indiscipline, crime, contemporary social life, east-west encounter, man-woman relationship, moral awareness, family life, marriage as an institution and socio-economic condition of India.

Anurag Mathur’s *Making the Minister Smile* unfolds with the controversy surrounding a company and its workers’ union. How the workers, the union leader and the management strive and yet fail to come to an amicable solution to resolve the factory problem makes up the crux of the story. The author has maintained a realistic approach and has consciously avoided myths while depicting his characters and the circumstances that encircle them. He also succeeds in maintaining his wry sense of humour. For instance, the way Chris is shocked when he meets Kalpana who shatters the image of the perfect Indian girl he had in mind, one who symbolizes chastity and innocence is hilarious.
Chris Stark, a handsome young American, comes to India on business that is facing a terrible fate due to local worker troubles in India. What follows is Chris’s experience of the Indian industrialization scenario - handling the labor union troubles; learning the language; learning the Indian way of dealing with people around; adapting to the political conditions and situations around. The solution to the entire Gordian knot of problems lies in making the Minister smile.

Had there been more character development and plot depth, the story would’ve been more appreciated. There are certain aspects in the novel that show the author’s keen observation of life in India - the nuances people face and how they deal with it; the lifestyles; the eccentricities; the fads - it all feels like an honest portrayal.

Striking contrast in the behavior of Indians and Americans has made this novel something like reading. At the opening of the novel Chris grumbled that this country just was not built for football players.

An anxious look around showed that there were no starving millions waving pitiful stumps and begging for alms and American visas - Observes Chris Stark, the protagonist of the novel after landing in India when his apprehension about the country being a poverty-stricken land of beggars is negated. The simple incident about bags disappearing in India but staying put in America not just amuses us, but
brings us face-to-face with hard truths that we have come to accept as normal in India.

Pankaj Mishra’s *The Romantics* focuses on India in Western eyes. The narrator, a young Brahmin named Samar, is Indian, and the book is set in India, but many of the other characters are Westerners and it is mainly against them that Samar measures himself. Mishra tries to strike a balance between East and West, contrasting the fates of the foreigners that come to India in search of enlightenment, adventure and even love.

The setting of the novel is largely in places that foreigners congregate to, places of exile, retreat and death: Benares, Pondicherry and the Tibetan center in exile of Dharmashala. The descriptions of Benares are beautifully written. But there is an unreality to each of these places in the novel. The outsiders who populate these places in the novel emphasize the feeling further.

The difficulty comes with the fact that the cast of the novel does not really do much. They enter relationships, break out of them, travel, meet people, and that is pretty much of it. By the end of the novel, the reader feels that Samar had lived a while and learned little, and there was minimal emotional growth on the part of any of the characters. The reason may be that the autobiographical nature of the novel forced Mishra to shy away from further developing the characters – perhaps he knew too well who they were.
Amit Chaudhuri’s *A New World* takes great pains in demystifying the very sensuous and sophisticated subcultures of Calcutta and the surrounding region of India because in Western media, Calcutta and its surrounding regions have been continually underrepresented.

The story is voiced by Jayojit, an assimilated Indian-American mildly tainted by the pleasures of fast food and capitalism. He travels to India for a month long visit to see his parents, with his young son, Bonny. The trip is multi-fold. Outwardly, it appears as a means to bridge the gap of time and distance between son and parents and, particularly, grandson and grandparents. Chaudhuri captures this so poignantly in an argument upon their arrival between Jayojit and his mother about applying Bonny with the proper amount of sunscreen to counteract Calcutta’s scorching temperatures. But the trip is not only that of a pious son aiding to his ageing and lonely parents. Jayojit is retreating after a benign but painful divorce. In each waft of summer breeze, stirring of storm, trip around the city, or increase in temperature, he is redirected to memories of Amala, his ex-wife, and their rise and demise. He has come home to recoup, heal and remember. The novel centers on the subtleties of family life and their relevance. Meals, as in most households, are where the family members meet, converse, argue and share their views and ideas.
The use of nicknames also demonstrates an exchange of subtle affection. Grandmother affectionately calls grandson Shona. Jayojit watches his less expressive father the Admiral liken to his grandson by calling him Baba, normally an exchange shared between father and son. It is in these intimacies, so delicately described by the author, that his intricate literary writing becomes tangential and emotional. The novel is not groundbreaking in its themes, but the author’s eloquent and lyrical account of a reunion with India and family is paced and engrossing.

All the novels deal with the above said aspects of social realism. These aspects are not definitely or accurately depicted in each novel as given above but they are found when closely observed in one or the other way. Hence the study of these novels shows that they are the best examples of novels of social realism.

2. Social Realism in Brief:

The study has exposed various aspects of Social Realism which are suggestive of the fact that the social realism dealt in these novels is true to the Indian cultural background. The broader aspects of social realism are identity crisis, cultural ethos and diaspora. Along with these three, the study has also exposed that there many other aspects of social realism. They are: depiction of social panorama, contemporary social life, vision of life, position of women, marriage as an institution, caste, creed, class and sectarian life, man-woman relationship, East-West encounter, tradition, contemporary political situation,
socio-economic condition, encounter of old and new ideas, modern Indian society, moral awareness, family life, religion, unemployment, youth unrest, industrial indiscipline, and crime.

The present study clearly shows that the novelists present the inner wheel of social reality through fictional medium. By choosing an appropriate story, plot, characters and fictional technique, they elucidate the different aspects and complex functioning of social organizations. Along with the presentation of the social mechanism, they perform the role of social historians of a particular period by documenting and interpreting social and cultural conditions and elucidating the intricacies of social phenomena in a systematic fashion. They also combine the sensibility and imaginative power of the artist with the intellectual penetration and analytical power of sociologists.

Their social realism is free from scientific method because they have to operate within the limitations imposed by their fictional art. They never let themselves to involve in the happenings of the novels’ events without allowing their predilections, private views and vision of society to disrupt the social picture. So their talent for social realism and their artistic integrity are the two important features of these novelists. It is the novelists’ involvement with society that determines the nature of the social picture presented and the depth of social realism revealed.
A thorough study of these novels reveals clearly their socio-realistic outlook. These novelists uphold the great tradition of realism in English fiction. They stick to the concrete world of facts and reflect social life objectively without any prejudice. As committed realists, they stand far away from the use of highly artistic devices like aesthetic form, individual sensibility and use of imagination. Instead, they laid stress on reflection and moral awareness. They achieve this with the great ability of constructing well-knit plots, through which means they are able to achieve social end. Class, caste, colour, creed, family, marriage, education, women’s position and moral got greater emphasis in these novels to uphold the Social Realism device. They also tend to note the socio-economic and political situations in the last two decades of the twentieth century.

Their account of the process of social power in small, closed organizations is of immense help to all those who wish to understand how modern societies function or are run. They are, no doubt, indispensable writers of our times emphasizing the significant truth that the place of man is in society and that his primary duty is to understand its complex processes and functioning for a positive and dynamic relation with it. By this criterion, these eight novels should be adjudged as first rate novels with extra-ordinary insights into contemporary society. Thus the study confirms that the novels selected are in one or the other way the novels of social realism.