CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Indian English Literature today, is an independent discipline. It is the outcome of many factors like British rule, English as official language, English education in India, study of Western thoughts and impact of Western culture. All these influences and many more, brought about a revolutionary trend in Indian English literature. The factors that helped, shaped and moulded the growth of the Indian literature in English arose as much from the political and social problems of a colonized country, as from indigenous narrative traditions of ancient culture. This is exquisitely exemplified in the works of Romesh Chandra Dutt, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Rabindranath Tagore, Henry Derozio, Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu. The works of these writers reflect the socio-political situations existing in the country which is “faithfully mirrored right from the early phase of reformist exuberance to the growth of a revolutionary consciousness among the common masses of India.”¹ In comparison to the literatures of Indian languages like Bengali, Kannada, Tamil, Hindi and Urdu, the Indian English Literature is young. Nevertheless, it has its own history.

Fiction, an expression of the most intimate consciousness of life and society, forms an impressive core of literature. As a creative process, fiction is an
expression of the most powerful and intimate consciousness of life and society: the society in which it grows and develops, and it has some purposes to fulfill, like, some thoughts to be contemplated on, and some plans to be acted upon for the welfare of humanity. When it broods upon such different things, it witnesses changes taking place in life and society, and, therefore, these changes are reflected in the fictional world. Indian English fiction is also doing the same thing. Indian English fiction expresses thoughts, feelings and emotions in a rationale and fascinating manner, and directly or indirectly throws light upon different changes in its own way. Hence, the reflection of change in different fields of Indian society manifests the significance and utility of the Indian creative writing in English.

In India novel is a recent form of literature. The Indian English fiction from its very beginning has witnessed socio-cultural, economic and political changes in the destiny of this nation. The development of English novel in India was slower when compared to poetry and drama. Before the 19th century, the Indian literatures had the romance, the tale and the fable, but the novel as we understand it now is “the gift of the West.”2 The earliest English novels appeared in Bengal. The generally accepted view is that the beginning of Indian English fiction is marked by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s Rajmohan’s Wife (1864). B.C.Chatterjee imbibes patriotic feelings of Bengal and exposes the shams and hypocrisies of contemporary life and society, teaching the lessons of social and cultural values in
his writings. The Bengali writers mainly dominated the period from 1864 to 1900. Widely known novelists of this period are - Raj Lakshmi Debi, Toru Dutt, Lal Behari Dey, K.Charkavarti, Kamala Satthianandhan, Behramji Malabari, N.V.Pai, R.K.Pant, T.C.Mookerjee, A.P.Dutta and others. They made use of their knowledge of Western thoughts, as well as of the ancient learning in their novels.

The first two decades of the twentieth century are noteworthy as they made significant contribution to the growth and development of Indian English fiction in its seminal stage. It was the era of socio-cultural and national consciousness in which Indian English novelists also gave their limited contribution through their writings. Romesh Chandra Dutta, a renowned Bengali novelist, translated two of his six novels - Sansar and Madhvi Kankan into English under the titles The Lake of Palms (1902) and The Slave Girl of Agra (1909) respectively. These novels aimed at the elimination of social evils and superstitions, desiring social reforms. They show an awareness of the local colour, regional life and some right values through their thoughts and actions. Socio-cultural and political changes, social evils like casteism, purdah pratha, child marriage, poverty, exploitation, disparity, cultural-conflict, historical happenings, realism and romantic tales are common place in the novels of this period of national awakening. Parallel to the struggle for political freedom was a social struggle - a fight against superstition, casteism, poverty, illiteracy and many other social evils that were eating into the vitals of
Indian society. The socio-political movement that had caught the imagination of the entire nation also inspired the Indian novelists in English, who rightly realized that novel too had a vital role to play in it. Small wonder, therefore, if the Indian English novelists, right from the end of the second decade of the twentieth century, started focusing their attention largely on contemporary problems. Motivated by socio-cultural and political awareness and changed historical situation, they started to conceive of the state of values around them while presenting life and society realistically in their fictional world. Naturally in the pre-Independence era, novels like Rabindranath Tagore’s *The Wreck* (1921) and *Gora* (1923), M.M.Banarji’s *Nanda, the Pariah Who Overcame Caste* (1923), D.G.Mukherjee’s *Hari, the Jungle Lad* (1924) and *My Brother’s Face* (1925), K.S.Venktramani’s *Murugan, The Tiller* (1927) and other works gave firm footing to the Indian fiction in English and still have sparks of alternative patterns of values, focusing on social concerns, stark realism, humanism, regional colour, orthodox, liberal, progressive and Gandhian thoughts and rapidly changing historical and political situations. The novels that emerged at different times, in different regions of India showed a preoccupation with historical romance; and the full development of the Indian novel as a whole may be found with historical romances, social or political reform fiction and psychological novel. Historical romances, full of sentimental and exotic elements, were predominant until 1930. The growth of Indian novel is seen very
clearly with social or political reform fiction of R.K.Narayan and others. Though historical romances and reform fictions can be traced quite distinctly, the psychological novel is not clearly seen. Novelists like K.S.Venkatramani with novels on rural life, Mulk Raj Anand with realistic novels and passionate progressivism, Raja Rao with philosophic fiction and the emotional zeal for Gandhian ideals and R.K.Narayan with novels on middle class people, have contributed much for the growth of Indian English novel. During 1930s and 1940s novelists of India used the medium to spread Gandhi’s message, the problem of casteism and untouchability, facts related to freedom struggle which found a “strong and genuine expression among the novelists who wrote for the English speaking public in the country.”

From Raja Rao to Nayantara Sahgal, we find various shades of intensity with which the Indian fiction adopted itself its new role after independence. The socio-cultural consciousness and the growth of the feelings of nationalism and achievement of national independence gave a fantastic impetus to the growth and development of Indian English fiction.

The Indian fiction in English attains maturity, full flowering and wide acclaim in the post-independence era. The post-independence writers did not much concern themselves with old fashioned ideas. They imbibed a new freedom. With the attainment of independence, the novelists experience a change in their themes. They treated novel as a “sort of a container for a special kind of reality which may
or may not resemble that ‘real reality’ which we experience outside books.” In brief, they were interested in creating novels having desirable reality. Novelists other than R.K.Narayan are interested in being realistic. The focus is shifted from the public to the private sphere. The inner dilemma, anxiety, alienation, frustration, detachment, involvement, self-condemnation, self approval, restlessness, sense of guilt, loneliness, nausea, etc. became the pinpoints for the themes of the novels of this age. With them the themes of current happenings, cross-cultural conflict, realism and fantasy, rural events, the traumatic experiences in the form of partition of India and Pakistan, Indo-China, and Indo-Pak wars, communal carnages, loss of faith and values, curse of industrialization and materialism, growing hostility among men, the growth of Indian ethos and sensibility, etc., are seen in the novels of the post-independence fictionists like G.V.Desani, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan, Nirad C.Chaudhari, Khushwant Singh, Manohar Malgonkar, S.N.Ghose, B.Rajan, Kamala Markandeya and others. By the end of the sixties and in the early seventies the same themes were seen in the novels of Arun Joshi, Chaman Nahal, Jatin Mohan Ganguli, P.M.Nityananda, B.K.Karanjia, Timeri Murari, R.P.Jhabvala, Attia Hussain, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sehgal, Nargis Dalal, Vimala Raina, Veena Paintal, Bharti Mukherjee and Anita Kumar.

It is the task of a novelist to present in his work faithfully and realistically the sum total of a society’s thought processes, vision of life, needs, aspirations,
traditions and national commitments. Before analyzing how truthfully the selected authors have presented society in its many faces in their novels, it will be pertinent to have a look at the social scene.

After independence no one can rightly say that India broke the chains of evil customs and out-dated ideas of the past. Even though great efforts were made by social reformists in eradicating the evil customs that were present in the past strongly observed by society, they could not be uprooted. These evil practices and customs still persisted in free India. Another problem ignored was the position of women which drew the attention of all the right thinking people in free India. The present younger generation raised a strong voice against this discrimination shown to women.

Many revolutionary steps have been taken, and drastic reforms are made by the Indian government for the eradication of social problems. Hence great changes have taken place in the condition of the poor, the women and the weaker sections of society. Such changes have been portrayed realistically in Indian English novels. These novels reflect the varied features of contemporary society. After independence, the novel has had more scope for diversification. Most of the novelists have touched almost all the strata of Indian society, and varied aspects are reproduced artistically and truthfully in their thought-provoking novels. The novelists have tried to draw a lively picture of the modern Indian society,
projecting here and there its salient features like, caste system, joint families and their disintegration, man-woman relationship, East-West encounter, traditional concept, position of women in society and the problem of urbanization.

The eight novels selected for the study were not clearly mentioned anywhere as the novels of Social Realism. They were considered in a different way and it was unjust too. Dr.M.K.Naik has included these novels among many others as novels of Social Realism. These eight novels have been selected for the present study. Dr.M.K.Naik considered these novels as of Social Realism genre, which is a trend in Indian English novel during the last two decades of the twentieth century.

The school of Social Realism led by Vikram Seth and others and their novels published during the last two decades (1980-2000), have not been clearly explored to the field of Indian English literature and criticism. Hence, the present study aims to examine eight selected novels of different authors. The study aims to reveal the change in the goals, motivations and achievements. It will become an addition to the critical field of Indian literature.

The purpose of the present study is to enquire in-depth the selected Indian English novels of Social Realism, with a view to determine their place in the great tradition of Indian fiction and their contribution to this tradition.
The present study aims to examine the following novels.

1. Partap Sharma’s *Days of the Turban* (1986)
2. Upamanyu Chatterjee’s *English, August* (1988)
5. Vikram Seth’s *A Suitable Boy* (1993)
6. Anurag Mathur’s *Making the Minister Smile* (1996)

The novels of Social Realism portray life in its various aspects like identity crisis, cultural ethos and diaspora, observe social scenes acutely, deal with political scenes, life and culture, interpret new aspirations and disillusionment, ideas and realities, and stress on social milieu of the changing times.

*The Times of India* writes in its book review on Partap Sharma’s *Days of the Turban* that it presents a picture of Punjab’s rural society. *Deccan Herald* writes that it tells a tale, does not shy away from the ambiguities of a contemporary situation. *Days of the Turban*, as a novel of social realism, presents a picture of Indian society from the inside. It shows a country in transition, where the old values are under attack from new ideas but where in the end, the traditions and
ways of life of the past still have their place. *Hindustan Times* book review says that it offers an insight into the goings on in the Punjab from a human point of view. Partap Sharma is at his best on home ground picturing rural life realistically and truthfully with an added flavour of fictionality.

*Punch* observes that *English, August* by Upamanyu Chatterjee is a marvelously intelligent and entertaining socially realist novel, and especially fascinating for any one curious about modern India. This novel has been screened long back and was a great success. *Observer* marks that by the highest serio-comic standards, this novel marks the debut of an extraordinarily promising new talent.

*Such A Long Journey* by Rohinton Mistry is set in Bombay against the backdrop of war in the Indian subcontinent and the birth of Bangladesh, telling the story of the peculiar way in which the conflict impinges on the lives of Gustad Noble the hero, an ordinary man and his family. *New York Times* book review says that Mistry manages to convey a vivid picture of India through sharp, affectionate sketches of Indian family life and a gift for erotic satire. Mistry’s position as a socialist novelist is the result of a genuine inner compulsion rather than an external role enacted by him. He is a powerful chronicler of contemporary social and political life. The remarkable feature of Mistry’s fiction is that it captures the crowded throbbing life of India.
Show Business by Shashi Tharoor is, as critics observed, many books rolled into one - it is the story about the telling of stories, a wonderfully funny tale about the romance and folly of cinema, a novel on an epic scale of ambition, greed, love, deception and death. And perhaps most important, it is a fable for our time which teaches us that we live in a world where illusion is the only reality and nothing is what it seems.

Vikram Seth is such an author that he writes with the omniscience and authority on everything including urban and rural social customs, dress, cuisine, funerary rites, cricket and even the technicalities of shoe manufacture. Hindustan Times observes that A Suitable Boy is an immensely enjoyable novel which describes with unhurried pace the panorama of India and illuminates segment of Indian life quite brilliantly. The Times writes on this novel that it is the most fecund as well as the most prodigious work of the latter half of this century.

Making the Minister Smile by Anurag Mathur is about the adventures of an average American among the inscrutable Indians. Here, an American foot ball player comes to Delhi as a result of his family’s Corporation’s collaboration with an Indian company. Here in India he becomes enmeshed with industrial disputes. Jayachandran, an eminent critic observes that the solution to the entire Gordian knot of problems in the novel is in making the minister smile. The novel presents an accurate Indian political scene as it appears to a common man in India.
David Robson comments on *The Romantics* by Pankj Mishra that Mishra is one of those magical writers who can capture the sights and smells of everyday life. Aamer Hussen says that *The Romantics* is peppered with discreet social comment on caste, class and sectarian strife. Here in this novel Mishra offers surprisingly assured, provocatively balanced meditation on the familiar culture clash, focusing on a generation of Indian youth bewildered about the value of an ancient heritage others find indispensable. *Sunday Times* marks that contemporary life is pictured in the pages of *The Romantics*.

Eileen Battersby points out that *A New World* by Amit Choudhuri is the story of an ordinary man’s wry acceptance of a sense of failure. *Financial Times* observes that it is through Amit’s disassociating gaze that we see the intimate details of the household of India.

Notwithstanding these strictures, the critics do point to the significant features of these novels. Most of the critics hint at the novels’ and novelists’ insight into social mobility. Apart from these casual and tangential references by critics, these novels’ socially realistic insights have not been clearly identified and systematically explored. Hence, a systematic attempt has been made in the present thesis to study these novels in detail and to explore their social relevance. Central to the study of these works as novels of social realism is a thorough examination of
the term ‘Social Realism’. Along with the in-depth study of themes of each novel, the qualities of the novel of social realism are to be understood clearly.

The present thesis is structured in seven chapters.

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

The second chapter deals with the major Features of the Period 1980 – 2000 and the development of Indian English novel in different genres is analyzed. It will help to clarify the novels’ socio-realistic vision, which will be analyzed in the following chapters.

The third chapter deals with the theory on Social Realism. Here an attempt has been made to analyze the term Social Realism. It is a broad, all embracing term that goes beyond the implications of ‘social consciousness’, ‘social sense’ or ‘social experience’. ‘Social’ is an omnibus word covering all aspects of human activity that display an awareness of others. Simply speaking “Social Realism” is an extraordinary reach of understanding of social life. Still better, it is an intellectual power of probing into the nature and function of society, its various institutions and traditions, and their functioning. It is an intellectual penetration of social process.
The term ‘Social Realism’ describes both a specific stylistic approach and an overall attitude towards subject matter. Its primary goal is not to amuse but to convince the observer of the evils. It aims at the unadorned depiction of the contemporary social life in its various aspects. Society is a fluid entity. Its truthful, historically concrete representation with revolutionary development becomes the real depiction of social panorama. The detailed analysis of the term ‘Social Realism’ and a brief note on growth of Indian English novel will help to clarify the novels’ socio-realistic vision.

The fourth chapter deals with 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*.

The analysis of each novel is divided into four parts: the first part gives an introduction to the novelist and the novel. The second part deals with the plot of the novel. The third part analyzes the novel in detail in view of identity crisis with the other aspects of social realism like encounter of old and new ideas, family life, position of women, tradition, crime and contemporary political situation, social panorama, modern Indian society and moral awareness shown in detail. The last part concludes the chapter.
The Day’s of the Turban presents a picture of Punjab’s rural society that leaves one numb with terror. It provides an insight into the mind of extremists. It shows how extremism builds on fear and then has to reach further into terrorism, not necessarily to further its aim, but for its leadership to keep ahead of its supporters and rivals. Here the reader comes to grips with basic emotions. The drama builds up and it holds the attention of the reader by the margin of his mind. It is so contemporary, so evocative that it will go down in Indian literary history as the most definitive work of fiction on Punjab.

It tells a tale, does not shy away from the ambiguities of a contemporary situation. Days of the Turban, as a novel of social realism, presents a picture of Indian society from the inside. It shows a country in transition, where the old values are under attack from new ideas but where, in the end, the traditions and ways of life of the past still have their place. It offers an insight into the goings on in the Punjab from a human paint of view. Partap Sharma is at his best on home ground picturing rural life realistically and truthfully with an added flavour of fictionality.

The English, August: An Indian Story chronicles one year in the life of a trainee civil servant, Agastya Sen, on his first posting-cum-training session to Madna, a ‘tiny dot’ in the vast Indian hinterland. The book very well depicts the realistic trends in what may be called the grass root administration of a welfare
state, which is India, the comedy of errors, the paradoxes involved therein. The protagonist of the novel is surely out of place, but in due course of time, though reluctantly, fits in the scheme of things, initiating him in the vast community of ‘brown sahibs’ who ruled India. Written by a civil servant, the novel manages to capture the essence of an entire generation of Indians, whose urban realities jar in sharp contrast to that of the villages, the ‘real’ India.

The novel is a marvelously intelligent and entertaining socially realist novel, and especially fascinating for any one curious about modern India. This novel has been screened long back and was a great success.

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*.

The analysis of each novel is divided into four parts: the first part gives an introduction to the novelist and the novel. The second part deals with the plot of the novel. The third part analyzes the novel in detail in the view of the cultural ethos with the 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. The last part concludes the chapter.
The heart of the novel *Such A Long Journey* is Mistry’s recreation of the life and times of Gustad Noble, the protagonist, against the backdrop of Indo-Pak war of 1971 and the emergence of Bangladesh and it is set in Bombay, telling the story of the peculiar way in which the conflict impinges on the lives of Gustad, an ordinary man, and his family. He offers a commentary on the socio-political situations of India. The novel courses through a series of political events touching on various issues such as corruption in high places, minority complexes, majority adventurism, increasing fragmentation of social order and the advent of a personality-oriented political scenario.

The book unfolds a long vista of the varied interests of its characters. This book is the author’s masterpiece. It expresses his feelings about his Parsi community. It not only problematises the Parsi diaspora in the Indian context but also projects his anti-colonial resistance. Almost all the characters are chosen from the middle class Parsi background. Here Mistry manages to convey a vivid picture of India through sharp, affectionate sketches of Indian family life and a gift for erotic satire. His position as a socialist novelist is the result of a genuine inner compulsion rather than an external role enacted by him. He is a powerful chronicler of contemporary social and political life. The remarkable feature of Mistry’s fiction is that it captures the crowded throbbing life of India.
The *Show Business* describes the working of Bollywood, India’s Hindi film industry and the career of a fictional superstar. In this, Tharoor dazzles the readers with a look into the seedy life of Indian movie-making. He deftly captures the sex, intrigue and all about ridiculousness of the world’s largest movie industry. The book begins well but down the road it tends to rush a bit. As the characters and the story are based on real life figures, their stories are more complex than what the writer makes the reader believe. The title refers not only to Bollywood but also to politics, which the protagonist joins, and to religion, as practised by Guru, one of the characters; both of which are forms of ‘show business’, selling illusions to the public. It is the story about the telling of stories, a wonderfully funny tale about the romance and folly of cinema, a novel on an epic scale of ambition, greed, love, deception and death. And, perhaps most important, it is a fable for our time which teaches us that we live in a world where illusion is the only reality and nothing is what it seems.

Seth through his magnum opus *A Suitable Boy* has proved that novel is an imitation of reality, which readers are always willing to read and explore its relevance in life. It is a marvel that Seth is able to treat the most serious subject of marriage as a problem, widowhood along with religious fanaticism, academic corruption and the Congress’ search for a political base with his masterstroke of wit and irony. The book exemplifies negation of passion whether in inter-
relationships, in sex or in politics or in religion, and for those indulging in passion there is no redemption on the part of Seth who as omniscient or semi-omniscient narrator takes his victims to task. With his penetrating insight into the period, Seth is able to impart the contemporary spirit a wider range in varied locales exquisitely strengthened by denser texture. Seth’s methods of character delineation must be considered in the context of his fictional credo of social realism, because Seth invests his characters with great realism of detail with the intention of using them to identify and develop a wide array of social-related themes. His thematic preoccupation is not restricted to that of finding a suitable bridegroom for Lata, but rather to define what is ‘suitable’, and ‘balanced’ in the context of a new, truncated independent India.

Vikram Seth is such an author that he writes with the omniscience and authority on everything including urban and rural social customs, dress, cuisine, funerary rites, cricket and even the technicalities of shoe manufacture. The novel describes with unhurried pace the panorama of India and illuminates segment of Indian life quite brilliantly. It is the most fecund as well as the most prodigious work of the latter half of this century.

In the **sixth chapter** an attempt has been made to show the Diaspora in Anurag Mathur’s *Making the Minister Smile*, Pankaj Mishra’s *The Romantics* and Amit Choudhuri’s *A New World*. 
The analysis of each novel is divided into four parts: the first part gives an introduction to the novelist and the novel. The second part deals with the plot of the novel. The third part analyzes the novel in detail with the diasporic elements and 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. The last part concludes the chapter.

*Making the Minister Smile* tells the story of an American football player in India. Following the opportunities created by liberalization, his family’s corporation has entered into business collaboration with an Indian company, and this has brought the sportive young man to Delhi. While in India he becomes enmeshed in industrial disputes, political machinations, weird intelligence webs and an unfortunate love affair, besides various other oddities. The book is the result of his finding solution to all his problems by making the minister smile. It gives the real picture of the happenings of Indian politics.

*The Romantics* is a sensitive and introspective novel. It is a good reflection on the relationship between the East and the West and also an interesting journey through different parts of India. It is an intriguing combination of casual grace and emotional intensity, peppered with discreet social comment on caste, class, sectarian strife and the state of the nation.
It, as a socially realistic novel, captures the sights and smells of everyday life. It is peppered with discreet social comment on caste, class and sectarian strife. Here in this novel Mishra offers surprisingly assured, provocatively balanced meditation on the familiar culture clash, focusing on a generation of Indian youth bewildered about the value of an ancient heritage others find indispensable. The contemporary life is pictured in the pages of *The Romantics*.

*A New World* tells the story of Jayojit Chatterjee, an economist, writer and university lecturer. He travels back from USA to his native India with his son to take the advantage of the custody settlement following his divorce. In their re-establishment in the city, it is given a sense of the returning migrants’ disorientation within a landscape that is both familiar yet strange. The book gives a detailed sketch of different places in India and throws light on the social structure of Indian society. It is the story of an ordinary man’s wry acceptance of a sense of failure. It is through Amit’s disassociating gaze that we see the intimate details of the household of India.

The **seventh chapter** deals with the conclusion. Here the summing up of each chapter is made and it includes the findings and comments.
Notes


