CHAPTER I

NOVEL IN INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE

This research study attempts an evaluation of social and cultural perspectives in the novels of Shashi Deshpande and M.K. Indira. So it begins with a brief survey of the history of fiction in Indian English and Kannada Literature.

Of all the literary forms, novel perhaps is the most faithful, convincing and effective vehicle of depicting a nation's ethos. Novel is the most potent, pliable and popular means of communicating a creative experience, evoking and touching the profound thoughts in and about human life. It is however, a novelist's judgment of human life and relationship, which invests his writing with consistency, direction and shape. Novel is thus a sum total of writers' experiences, feelings, imagination and moral vision.

As novel has been rightly described as 'Pocket theatre', it can be brought to anyone's doorstep, the poverty-infected middle class or the wealth ridden higher class, through the unfolding of subtle and intricate events. A novelist in touch with his society can portray the life of a nation more authentically, convincingly and artistically than a poet or a dramatist. Novels in Indian languages, therefore, do greater justice to the
depiction of Indian life and society than the Western novels dealing with Indian life and society. Indian writers in English have made the most significant contribution to the field of novel. Ever since the publication of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Rajmohan's Wife* in (1864), Indian novel has grown considerably in bulk, variety and maturity. The development of Indian novel follows certain definite patterns, and it is not difficult to trace its gradual progression from the imitative stage to the realistic, from the psychological to the experimental.

Despite all its problems and challenges, Indian English novel has stood the test of time and proved its worth and relevance. “For its verve and resilience, it has been found to be a meritorious outlet”\(^2\). The prose fiction in English written by the Indians is undoubtedly “the most popular vehicle for the transmission of Indian ideas to the wider speaking world”.\(^3\)

A careful study of the works by the Indian writers will give a clear idea of the variegated Indian socio-cultural complex. It is for this reason that Indian English fiction has been regarded as a major source for “a systematic study of cultural contact and cultural change, with Indian world view at the focus which will increase one’s knowledge of acculturation process”.\(^4\) On purely artistic considerations also Indian English novels merit a serious in-depth study.
The early novels in English by Indians were almost invariably imitative and immature. Quite a few of them turned out to be only imitations of the novels written by the Victorians. Novels like B. Rajan Iyer's 'Vasudev Sastri' (1905), Amadha Vaiah's 'Nasreen' (1915) and Balkrishna's 'The love of Kusum' (1910) are all very feeble as works of literature. As K.R. Srinivas Iyengar aptly points out, "The early novels have for us today no more than an antiquarian or historical interest". After pointing out the 'real' problems and 'difficulties facing the Indian novelist', he adds that "The novels written in the vernaculars are more enterprising, richer in context, wider in range' than those written in English". The early novelists' grasp over the language was uncertain and their choice of themes was stereotypical. These early novels, according to Bhupal Singh, "Do not compare favourably with the works produced by the English writers either, on the same or similar themes". He comments: "That they write in a foreign tongue is a serious handicap in itself. Then few of them possess any knowledge of the art of fiction, they do not seem to realise that prose fiction, inspite of its freedom, is subject to definite laws. In plot construction they are weak; and in characterisation weaker still. Their leaning towards didacticism and allegory is further obstacle to their success as novelists". The literary scene in the beginning of the 20th century was thus bleak. But the fact remains that really pioneering efforts
were made by some Indian novelists to exploit the resources and potential of a ‘fluid’ form for self-impression.

However the emergence of three literary luminaries, major trio Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayana, on the literary firmament brought new hopes about the creative activity in the form of fiction. William Walsh maintains that “It was in 1930s that the Indians began what has now turned out to be their very substantial contribution to the novel in English and one peculiarly suited to their talents”\textsuperscript{8}. The development of Indian English novel hereafter seems to follow certain set patterns. After World War I Indian English novel became determinedly more realistic and less idealized. The novelists made deliberate attempts to depict the distress of the downtrodden classes, portraying India as she really was, and all the novels written between the two World Wars were primarily concerned with the contemporary social milieu and were greatly influenced by the Gandhian ethos, and the Gandhian Movement. It is in the phase we come across excellent novels for the first time as is evident from Mulk Raj Anand’s ‘\textit{Untouchable}’ (1935), ‘which describes an eventful day in the life of Bakha, a young sweeper from the outcastes’ colony of a North Indian cantonment town. This particular day brings him his daily torments and more but in the end it also suggests three alternative solutions to his problem: A missionary tries to persuade him
to embrace Christianity; he listens to Gandhiji, who advocates social reform; and he also hears of mechanized sanitation as the only answer possible. R.K. Narayan’s ‘Swami and Friends’ (1935), is a delightful account of a school boy, Swaminathan, whose name, abridged as ‘Swami’ gives characteristically Narasyanesque, ironic flavor to the title, raising expectations which the actual narrative neatly demolishes. And Raja Rao’s ‘Kanthapura’ (1938), which is perhaps the finest evocation of the Gandhian age in Indian English fiction, is the story of a small south Indian Village caught in the maelstrom of the freedom struggle of the nineteen thirties and transformed so completely in the end that ‘there’s neither man not mosquito’ left in it. The novel proved to be highly valuable to the nationalists and revolutionaries as a convenient and effective means of popularizing and disseminating their cause. “On account of the surging nationalistic feelings the content of the novel underwent profound change and it had to cater to demands of the ‘zeitgeist’ when the scene shifted to the contemporary battles and agitations”9.

After the 1950’s however, novelists moved from the public to the private sphere. They began to portray in their works the individual’s search for the self in all its varied and complex forms along with his problems and crises. C. Paul Verghese pointed out “Most of them in their
eagerness to find novel themes, renounced the larger world in favour of the inner man and engaged themselves in a search for the essence of human living"\textsuperscript{10}.

The Novels of Anita Desai, Arun Joshi contain seeds of future development. Bhabani Bhattacharya and Manohar Malagonkar were already recognised in and outside India. The contribution of Nayantara Sahgal is usually regarded as an exponent of the political novel, but politics is one of her two major concerns. She herself has declared that each of her novels "More or less reflects the political era we are passing through"\textsuperscript{11}. Daughter of Vijayalaxmi Pandit and niece of Jawaharlal Nehru, Nayanatara naturally had an upbringing in which politics was inevitably a strong ambience; but along with the obvious political theme, her fiction is also preoccupied with the modern Indian woman's search for sexual freedom and self realization, neither of these themes is, however, handled with sufficient complexity. The failure to establish a clear ideational relationship between the political turmoil outside and the private torment of broken marriages robs most of her novels of the unified effect. Sahgal's first novel, 'A Time to be happy' (1958), is a loose chronicle dealing with two north Indian families during the last stages of the freedom struggle and the arrival of independence. 'This time of Morning' (1968), contains one of Sahgal's best-realized political portraits.
of Kalyan Sinha, a man with acid on his tongue, a gimlet in his eye, a chip on his shoulder a figure whose resemblance to U.K. Krishna Menon is quite plain. Rashmi, only daughter of Kailas, married to a Foreign Serviceman, is now back home, who feels 'how like prolonged starvation wrong marriage could be' and Uma wife of Arjun Mitra, takes to drinking because it gives her a solace, a sleep walker's gait an appearance; that's why Uma, the nymphomaniac, again represents women chafing against the marriage code. In 'Storm in Chandigarh' (1969), the political background is that of the division of the Punjab into the two states of Punjab and Haryana. 'The Day in Shadow' (1971), was obviously inspired by the personal experience of the novelist.

In contrast with Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai (1937), the youngest of the major Indian English women novelists, is more interested in the interior landscape of the mind than in political and social realities. "Writing for her, is an effort to discover, and then to underline, and finally to convey the true significance of things"12. Her novels, according to her, deal with what Ortega Y. Gasset called, "The terror of facing, single-handed, the ferocious assaults of existence. Desai's protagonists are persons for whom aloneness alone is the sole natural condition, aloneness alone the treasure worth treasuring"13. They are mostly women, who though they have reached different stages in life (from
school girl to grand mother) are all fragile introverts 'trapped in their own skins.' In *Voices in The City* (1965) Desai tries successfully to make her setting—in this case, Calcutta, City of Kali, goddess of Death' contributory factor in another tale of alienated individuals. 'Bye Bye Blackbird' (1971), is the only novel of Anita Desai in which social and political realities take precedence over probing of the mind. Anita Desai unravels the tortuous involutions of sensibility with subtlety and finesse and her ability to evoke the changing aspects of Nature matched with human moods is another of her assets, though her easy mastery of the language and her penchant for image and symbol occasionally result in preciosity and over-writing. Talking about modern Indian novel in English, Anita Desai told an interviewer: “There is so little of it... There simply isn’t enough, in the name of variety, value, interest”. There is, however, no dearth of variety and interest in Indian English novel today. In the growth and development of the Indian novel in English the 1980’s occupy the most significant position. During the last two decades some very promising novelists have produced their first works. It is during the eighties that Indian English novelists and novels earned great honors and distinctions in the Western Academic World. It is again; during this period that a team of highly talented novelists produced what Anthony Burgess would call, “some great unexpected masterpiece which will burn
up the world, by its meritorious achievements". To a considerable extent the novel in India came to acquire the same importance that it had acquired in the eighteenth century England, and we can appropriately say about it what Ian Watt said about the eighteenth century English novel: “This (the previous) literary traditionalism was first and most fully challenged by the novel whose primary criterion was truth to individual experience, individual experience which is always unique and therefore always new. The novel is thus the logical literary vehicle of a culture which... has set an unprecedented value on originality on the novel”.

The relation between the small world of a novel and the large world, from which it draws its sustenance, is essentially complicated. Although the novel is a complex and self-contained literary form, Indian English novelists have taken up the challenge with commendable competence and resourcefulness. On 18th January 1982, the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Conferred an honorary membership on R. K. Narayan, who incidentally is the first Indian to receive the rare distinction. Salman Rusdhie’s ‘Midnight’s Children’ received a wide acclaim and won the coveted Booker Award for the year 1981 as well as the James Black memorial prize. As a reviewer of ‘The New York Times’ put it, the novel ‘sounds like a continent finding its price.’ Venkatesh Kulkarni’s ‘Naked in Deccan’ was awarded BCF
American Book Award. For ‘Rich Like Us’ Nayantara Sahagal was selected for the Sinclair Prize for fiction in 1985, while Nina Sibal’s ‘Yatra’ (1987) was chosen for the International Grand Prize for Literature. Bharati Mukherjee’s ‘The Middleman and Other Stories’ was given the National Book Critics Circle Award for 1988 for its ‘humors, raciness and pathos’. Amitou Ghosh’s ‘Fires of Bengal’ has fetched him the Mecidis Prize of France. Amit Chaudhuri’s novel of ‘A Strange and Sublime Address’ was awarded the Betty Track Prize in 1990. The works of these novelists have obtained genuine recognition in India also. For example, no less than five novels were found worthy of the Sahitya Academy Award - The greatest literary honor of the country during the 1980’s itself. These are: Arun Joshi’s ‘The Last Labyrinth’, Nayantara Sahagal’s ‘Rich Like Us’, Vikram Seth’s ‘The Golden Gate’, Amitov Ghosh’s ‘The Shadow Lines,’ and Shashi Deshpande’s ‘That Long Silence’. These facts, which are only illustrative and by no means exhaustive, clearly show that Indian English novel has been given proper response and recognition both inside India and abroad.

The fecundity of modern Indian novel in English can hardly be ignored. In the 1980’s alone quite a few meritorious novels have been published, the most important among them being: R. K. Narayan’s, ‘A Tiger for Malgudi’ (1983), Talkative Man (1986), and ‘World of Nagrai’
(1990), Raja Rao's, 'The Chess Master and his Moves' (1988), Arun Joshi's, 'The Last Labyrinth' (1981), and 'The City and The River' Manohar Malgonkar's, 'Bendicoot Run' (1982), and 'The Garland Keepers' (1986), Anita Desai's, 'The Village by The Sea' (1982), 'In Custody' (1984), and Baumgartner's Bombay (1988), Plans for Departure (1986), and 'Mistaken Identity' (1989), Shashi Deshpande's, 'Come Up and Be Dead' (1983), 'Roots and Shadows' (1983), and 'That Long Silence' (1989), Kamala Markandaya's, 'Pleasure City' (1982), K. D. Khosla's, 'Never the Twain' (1981), Gopalan's, 'Tryst With Destiny' (1981), V. A. Shahane's, 'Praiapati' (1984), and 'Doctor Fauste' (1986), and so on. All these novelists have made significant contributions to enrich Indian English novel in respect of both theme and technique, the sheer originality of their works and the sledge hammer blow of their language have established them as major writers of our times.

Probably the most sensational literary event of the 1980's was the publication of Salman Rushdie's voluminous novel 'Midnight's Children' in (1981). Later he brought out 'Shame' (1983), 'The Satanic Verses' (1988), and 'Haroun and the Sea of Stories' (1991). By his works Rushdie extended the scope of the Indian English novel considerably and left indelible imprint on the future course of its development. Rushdie's novel created a real generation of its own in the form of a crop of young
Indian novelists eagerly following in Rushdie's footsteps. Among these novelists the most talented are; Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Allan Sealy, Upamanyu Chaterjee, Shashi Tharoor, Farrukh Dhondy, Rohinton Mistry and Firdaus Kanga 'The New York Times' 16 December 1991 has called these new Indian writers 'Rushdie's Children'. These novelists, as Anthony Spaeth has pointed out, are making conscious efforts to redefine English prose 'with myths, humor or themes as vast as the subcontinent'.

Rushdie himself once told in an interview, 'I think we are in a position to conquer English Literature' and this is what precisely these novelists are trying to do in their own ways. "It is the privilege and the curse of midnight's children". Rushdie reminds us towards the end of his great novel 'to be both masters and victims of their times'. (Midnight's children, writes Shahi Tharoor label (led) a generation rejuvenate a literature). The novels written by 'Rushdie's Children' also manifest profound changes affecting the social life of modern India.

Amitov Ghosh is one of the brightest stars in the galaxy of the new novelists who appeared in the 1980's. He has addressed himself to those areas of darkness that remained hidden from the very beginning of Indian English Novel. Ghosh's 'The Circle of Reason' (1986), is an imaginative fiction, which stretches from rural Bengal to modern Mediterranean parts. The success of this exuberant 'tour de force' was
repeated in the case of Ghosh’s another novel ‘The Shadow Lines’ (1988). Ghosh’s novels become a metaphor of our times and enshrine every man’s discovery of himself. Though a gifted craftsman, the novelist never ceases to be an Indian even in his superb flights of fantasy, which impart to his novels the folktale charm of the Arabian Nights and make him a Don Quixote of another era.

Vikram Seth began his literary career with ‘Mapping’, a book of poems and attained dizzy heights of success with ‘The Golden Gate’ and ‘A Suitable Boy’ (1993), Vikram Seth has indeed created the novel of our times; Seth’s indebtedness to India is evident in respects of vocabulary and cultural matrix. Seth’s egoless style really matches with India’s confusion and its tendency to ‘connect’ and harmonize.

Upamanyu Chatterjee shot on the literary scene with his novel ‘English August; ‘An Indian Story’ (1988). It faithfully records the protagonist’s sense of isolation, rootlessness and cultural dislocation. Chatterjee has also published ‘The Last Burden’ (1993), which is yet another monument to deracinate urban India. The strongest point about this new novel lies in its exploration of the subterranean emotional conflicts and ties of dependence among ‘modern’ Indian families.

Shashi Tharoor’s ‘The Great Indian Novel’ (1989), is one of the greatest achievements of Indian English fiction. A biting commentary on
the political history of modern India, the novel has been regarded as a masterpiece of post modernism. To Khushwant Singh it is ‘perhaps the best work of fiction by an Indian in recent years’. According to Gunter Grass, ‘Literature must refresh memory’ and Tharoor’s novel ably does it.

Certain novels published in the 1980’s enable us to have an intimate peep into the life and experiences of minority communities. Allan Sealy’s ‘Trotter Nama’ (1988), narrates the story of an Anglo-Indian clan from its inception in the eighteenth century. Founded by a French mercenary officer Julian Aleysius Trotter, it had it’s hey day in the nineteenth century and then came to a sad decline. There have been many books about the AngloIndians who have been a part and parcel of India and their contributions to the growth of the Indian society have not been meager. ‘Trotter – Nama’ is a literary extravaganza’ and seems to have been conceived as a massive epic with a prologue and an Epilogue.

The 1980’s also saw the emergence of three powerful Parsi novelists - Robinton Mistry, Farrukh Dhandy and Firdaus Kanga. Dhonday’s maiden novel, ‘Bombay Duck’ (1990), tries to throw some significant light on some contemporary issues including communal fundamentalism and predicament of immigrants in England. Bombay as presented by the novelist becomes a microcosm of India - or even of the
whole world. The foul smell of Bombay duck drying on the sand is symbolic of deeper corruption.

Firdaus Kanga's 'Trying to Grow' (1990), presents the vicissitudes and experiences of a young Parsi who tries to grow into a gigantic talent from his handicapped nature. The main trust of the novel is to depict the hero's attempts to find an identity for himself:

There is also a group of Indian English novelists who, though not directly influenced by Rushdie, are known for their meritorious achievements in fiction writing and deserve consideration. This group comprises novelists like Shashi Despande, Bharati Mukharjee, Namita Gokhale, Nina Sibal, Vasant A. Shahane, Manoj Das, K.A. Abbas and others who have made significant experiments in fictional form and narrative techniques and are known for their interesting thematic preoccupations. Amongst 'Rushdie's Children' themselves emerge two clear-cut groups of novelists; first group is of those who treat literature as a thought about effort, and the second is of those who treat literature as a mature self-expression. Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Amitov Ghosh, Allan Sealy, Robinton Mistry, Firdaus Kanga and Farrukh Dhondy belong to the first group, while Upamanyu Chatterjee represents the other. Despite their individual differences, however, these novelists display what Shelley calls in a different context a family resemblance. Most of the
novelists have tried to reinterpret the history of modern India and feel as if they are like ‘Rushdie, ‘handcuffed with history’. They have tried to tackle the besetting problem of reality visa-a-versa fantasy. Moreover, they have made unprecedented innovation in the realm of fictional techniques. They are better able to experiment with the idiom to coerce it to suit their purpose. “These novelists have also shown a better awareness of the predicament of the modern man as is clear from their treatment of issues like alienation and immigrant sensibility. Not withstanding all unhappy forebodings and predictions”.17 Indian English novel has flourished beyond expectations. “It is now a living and evolving literary genre and is trying, in the hands of its practitioners, a fusion of form, substance and expression that is recognizably Indian, yet also bearing the marks of university”.18

In the last 100 years or so Indian English fiction has flourished and has come to be recognised as an important source of information on Indian people and their culture. Quite a few women novelists also have made significant contribution in this direction. One of them is Shashi Deshpande. A modest attempt is made in this study to highlight the distinguishing features of Shashi Despande’s Novels in general and to trace the social and cultural perspectives therein particular, and also to
compare her with M.K. Indira, a woman novelist of Kannada in particular.
NOTE

2 Ibid.
109.
4 Spencer Dorothy, Indian Fiction in English, (Philadelphia University).
8 The Indian sensibility in English in C.D. Narasimhaihs (ed) Awakened conscience
   (New Delhi, Sterling, 1978), p. 66.
9 Meenakshi Mukarjee, The Twice Born Fiction, (New Delhi, Heinemann Education
   Books) p. 22.
10 C. Paul Vergese, Problems of the Indian Creative Writer in English, (Bombay:
12 Anitha Desai, Interview with Yashodara Palmia, The Times of India, 29th April
   1979.
13 Ibid
14 Athma Ram, Interviews with Indo-English Writers, (Calcutta, Writers Workshop,
   1983).
18 Quoted in Derrett. p. 94