CHAPTER - II
LITERARY AND SOCIAL BACK GROUND
OF R.K. NARAYAN

2.1 GENERAL

India was a legend in England before the two countries came into contact with each other. For about three and a half centuries the countries have dealt with each other in trade, military and political affairs. India gave wealth and empire to England and of many things she received in return, the most significant are the English language and the concept of the Constitutional Government. The use of English in India began as a conscious choice. In the nineteenth century, English filled a need for scientific and modern education and for the exchange of intellectual ideas. Indians themselves felt that the classical languages were no longer able to do this and the regional languages were not yet ready. English language flourished in India and today, India not only remains a member of the English speaking but also contributes a distinct genre of English literature called ‘Indo - Anglian Literature’.

2.2. INDO - ANGLIAN LITERATURE

Indo - Anglian literature is defined as literature produced in the English language by Indian authors. The term Indo - Anglian was coined to distinguish
from another kind of Indian writing called 'Anglo-Indian' which refers to the literary works dealing with Indian theme, setting and purpose written by English men. There is a third term 'Indo-English' which is also very often used to connote the Indian writing in English or Indo-Anglian literature. According to Professor V.K. Gokak, Indo-English literature in its simplest definition refers to translation into English from literature in Indian languages. He places works like R.C. Dutt's 'Ramayan' and 'Mahabharat' under this category.

Contact with English brought a tremendous change in the attitude of Indians. Westernization left a great impact on the social, political and religious life of India. For the first time Indians began to question the orthodox prejudices, dogmas and superstitions which had gripped them for centuries. The revival of Indian classical learning and the introduction and study of European arts and sciences gave rise to an unprecedented awakening in India, similar to the renaissance that occurred in the fourteenth century Italy.

In India the renaissance did not appear in the sense of revival alone. The main aspect of the Indian renaissance was the effort to recreate the cultural life that existed in the West. Indo-Anglian literature was born out of this instinct of imitation. Indian writing in English beginning with the uncertain experiments of the 'renaissance' has now acquired the status of 'Indo-Anglian literature'. The
Indo-Anglian writers have aroused considerable interest both at home and abroad. As stated by C.D. Narasimhaiah in 'The Swan and the Eagle',

Indian writing in English is a definite contribution to the composite culture of India. It is primarily a part of the literature of India like other literature written in various regional languages. It can present the life of a village like Bulashah or kanthapura a small town like Malgudi or kedaram or sweep Continents and eternity itself and so long as the operative sensibility of the writer is essentially Indian, it will be Indian literature. (Narasimhaiah 9)

Indo-Anglian literature has become a full fledged literature. Considerable work has been done over the past in poetry, drama, fiction and criticism. Indian writing in English caught public attention towards the end of the nineteenth century. But it came of its own only after the independence. Independence brought new confidence to Indian writers and Indian writing in English flourished leaps and bounds in India. Till the end of nineteenth century fiction was written mainly in vernaculars. Soon after the great War when India began to develop closer cultural contact with the West, when the tides of Russian and French literatures began to pour down into the rich and fertile genius of India
, turning down old scales of values, it was then the Indian writers began most seriously to write novels and short stories in English. Compared to drama and poetry, the art of fiction is quite new. Before the nineteenth century the Indian literature had the romance, the tale and the fable but novel which we are familiar with today was the gift of the West. Today novel has become the dominant literary form. It is evident that the novel is adopted to any culture which shares some of the rational, scientific, inquisitive tendencies of the West and also the modern curiosity about society.

In addition to tales, legends and autobiographical accounts efforts were also made in the second half of the nineteenth century to write novels in English. In the beginning they were written with a view to bring about some social or economical reform. The early Indo-Anglian novels were written under the influence of the popular English novelists like Sir. Walter Scott, Dickens etc. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, who was the founder of modern school of Indian fiction was also the first Indian to write a novel in English. He was greatly influenced by Scott. He started his literary career with ‘Raj Mohan’s Wife’. This was his first and last novel in English. Here he gave an indication to other writers that it was possible to write an Indian novel in English. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Rabindranath Tagore and R.C. Dutt exercised a tremendous influence on the early Indo-Anglian novelists. Translations of Bankim’s novels provided a
model of historical novel to Indo-Anglian fiction. Tagore revealed the inmost current of man’s mind in his novels. Very few Indo-Anglian novelists could escape the influence of Tagore. The renaissance of Indo-Anglian literature reached its culmination in the work of Tagore. The novels of these writers paved way to Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao and others. Anand brought humanism to Indo-Anglian fiction shifting the accent from the idyllic to the realistic. His novels Coolie, Untouchable and Two leaves and a Bud deals with problems of hunger and poverty, economic exploitation and class distinction. He has also brought the so called stream of consciousness technique which had not been employed before. Raja Rao has written philosophical fiction. He has developed the metaphysical novel so as to put in touch with the immortal tradition of India and recover the past with a view to make the present meaningful to India and the world at a time when in the West existence itself is thought absurd. His ‘Serpent and the Rope’ has been hailed as East’s interpretation of West. R.K. Narayan the important contemporary of Anand and Raja Rao may be classified as a novelist of the middle class with a comic view of life.

2.3 R.K. NARAYAN’S PLACE IN INDO - ANGLIAN LITERATURE

It is only after independence that Indo - Anglian novel came to its own. To day it is the most flourishing form of Indo - Anglian literature. If Indo-
Anglian novel has secured a place of prestige, it is mainly the result of the contribution of the leading writers like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao. Each of them has contributed in his own way to the rich thought and technique of the form. They base their novels on Indian themes. They voice the joys and sorrows and problems of India. Borrowing the technique from the West they depict the life of the middle class people in Indian homes. The popular themes of these novelists are the deep issues of human significance, criss-cross of emotion, crisis, the frustrations, urges and ideas which move Indian men and women, the maladjustments, character crisis and hunger. They recognise man in his social context.

R.K. Narayan, the writer of great eminence is an acute observer of life and an excellent story teller but not a social commentator like Anand. He has depicted in novel after novel the small world of Malgudi - its mediocrity, its pathos and its comedy with a rare mixture of humour, compassion and irony “If Anand is the novelist as reformer, Raja Rao the novelist as metaphysical poet, Narayan is simply the novelist as novelist” (6) says William Walsh. He writes with complete objectivity and successfully projects the true image of India in his novels by his meticulous re-creation of Indian landscape and by his realistic portrayal of Indian life and characters.
Graham Greene saw good reasons to compare Narayan to Anton Chekov and Jane Austen. He saw Narayan as similar to Austen in that both wrote novels using light irony dealing with social matters and characters of one type of society adjusting to customs and circumstance. Similarly Greene saw Narayan as similar to Chekov in that they both narrated stories well, stories which has little plot and action and ended with anticlimaxes or lack of dramatic resolution.

2.4 NARAYAN’S MALGUDI

Malgudi, an imaginary south Indian town, is the fictional setting of R.K. Narayan’s novels. He himself expresses how he conceived that idea and how he invented the imaginary town.

I remember waking up with the name Malgudi on vijayadashami, the day on which the invocation of learning is celebrated. Malgudi was an earth-shaking discovery for me because, I had no mind for facts or things like that, which would be necessary in writing about Malgudi or any real place. I first pictured not my town but just the railway station, which was a small platform with a banyan tree, a station master, and two trains a day, one coming and one going. On
vijayadashami, I sat down and wrote the first sentence about my town. "The train had just arrived at Malgudi station" (Mehta 156)

The Principal landmarks of Malgudi: Malgudi station, Anand Bhavan, Kabir street, lawley extention, the Royal Haircutting saloon, the statue of Sir Frederick Lawley, the office of 'The Banner' the sarayu river, Nallappa's grove, hills, hotels, cinemas, colleges-constitute a strong social frame work. In the first novel 'Swami and Friends' Malgudi is neither a village nor a city, but a town of modest size. But in each successive novel it grows both in time and place. It has grown from a small sized agricultural town to semi-industrialized city.

Malgudi the fictional settings of Narayan's novel and short stories claims as remarkable a place in literature as 'The Wessex' of Thomas Hardy. It is of absorbing interest to the readers of R.K.Narayan. It is not a mere geographical expression, it has distinct personality of its own. Dr.Srinivasa Iyengar has rightly remarked in 'The Indian Writing in English' that Malgudi is the real hero of his novels and short stories.

It is Narayan's triumph as an artist that he makes us have complete faith in the reality of Malgudi. It is so
strongly implanted in our imagination that we wonder
whom we are going to meet in this town .... The street
and lanes appear to be as familiar as one’s home town
( Iyengar 282)

Narayan’s characters are typically Malgudians rooted in the age old local
traditions. His characters belong to Malgudi. As stated in an article in Banasthali
Patrika. “His Sampaths and Chandrans do not play their part but live, move in
and out, talk and laugh and then disappear only to appear again and again in the
familiar sights”. (Mukerji 80)

Narayan’s greatest charm lies in making Malgudi and its people, and their
values real for us. Keen observation, sympathy, unfailing good humour and
gentle satire are some of his most serviceable tools in establishing the intimate
sense of reality. In Graham Greene’s in his introduction to ‘The B.A.’ wishes that

We can go out into those loved and shabby streets and
see with excitement and certainty of pleasure, a
stranger approaching past the bank, the cinema, the
hair-cutting saloon, a stranger who will greet us we
know with some unexpected and revealing phrase that
will open a door on yet another human existence (VI)
2.5 NARAYAN’S LANGUAGE AND STYLE

Narayan has an English style that is perfectly suited to his matter. He commands an easy and graceful style sharpened by a quite and unobtrusive ironical sense of humour. Narayan’s style is direct and straightforward and is characterized by an economy of expression and vocabulary adequate to deal with the range of subject matter and Indian sensibilities. He avoids unique and obscure phrasing and his syntax comes closer to the pattern of the normal conversation of an educated Indian. It is these, things as also the lucidity, extreme purity, simplicity, colour, verse and exactitude of his writing that amount for the leisurely decorum of his novels. As William Walsh observes in ‘The Times of India’, “Narayan’s language is beautifully adopted to communicate a different, an Indian sensibility.” (7)

It is this style of writing that makes the simple things of life have a special charm and quality. Men and events stand out clearly, and the narrative, as well as the conversation gives the impression of a master confident of his powers, telling the story.
2.6 STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA DOWN THE AGES

It has been said that the best way to judge, the position of a nation is to find out the status of women in it. Her status is a yardstick to measure the standard of culture of any age or country.

Through the centuries the Hindu woman in literature has been based on the Mythic Models from Ramayana and the Puranas. Sita, the silent sufferer, the archetype of Indian womanhood; the earth mother, forbearance personified, the playmate and beloved Radha; the devotee Meera. Patterned on these Hindu Models the woman is often passive, accepting the dynamic role of the men in her life. One wonders why she is not based on the Vedic or Pre-vedic models.

In the vedic and pre-vedic times a woman enjoyed equality with man at least to some degree. The worship of the great mother as the Grand multiplier is one of the oldest in the world. The history of this worship appears to have originated with the most ancient figure of the mighty mother of nature representing clearly enough by her feminine nature the life-bearing, life nourishing, maternal principle. That in the beginning the Goddess was predominant over the God can be safely asserted when we discover that

... in all countries from the Euphrates to the Adriatic, the chief divinity was at first in woman
form. Looking to the East of the Euphrates we see the dusk divinity of India, the Adya-shakti and Maha-shakti or supreme power of many names (Woodroffe 410).

But what singles India out in this matter in the continued history of the cult, from the hoary past down to modern times and the way in which the religious consciousness, developing and deepening around this mother concept, has influenced the thought of the whole nation through the ages.

There is a tradition of thinking according to which God is regarded as half-man, half-woman Ardhanarishwara which suggests that woman has equal status with man. That she has even a better status is made plain by the fact that the Goddess of learning is Saraswathi, a female. Again the Goddess of wealth is Lakshmi, the Goddess of power and strength is also Shakti or Kali-all females like the muses of Greek Mythology. The Hindu sees most things in the form of woman. The earth, the rivers, his country, speech, cleaning, prosperity and calamity all take on feminine forms. It is even said that there are more words in the feminine gender in Indian languages than in any others tongue.

The Goddess who occupies, the pride of place in the Indian tradition is Shakti without whom we are taught to believe nothing in this world can either
move or work. The word Shakti is grammatically feminine, meaning "power" coming from the root 'sak,' 'to be able,' 'to have force to do' 'to act' 'to have power'. Symbolically too it is female because it is the productive principle, God in mother form as the supreme power, the primal energy which creates, sustains and withdraws the Universe. Even Brahma, Vishnu and Siva are supposed to be subject to her authority and it is according to her wishes that they carry on their respective function of creation, sustenance and destruction. If Brahma creates the world, Vishnu preserves it and Siva destroys. It is only as machines they do all those; the one who motivates them is Devi, who is the Shakti. Hence the worship of the Goddess in India goes back to Pre-Aryan and even Pre-Dravidan times, gradually becoming a part of the Hindu tradition, which is to a considerable extent reflected in the essential Hindu attitude towards woman in life.

The motherhood ideal is the highest fulfillment of Indian womanhood. In ancient Indian society, a mother occupied a position higher than the father because while a father could be abandoned under circumstances, mother had to be maintained at all times. She was considered as the ornament of the household, the queen, the mistress of her home and the friend and adviser of her husband in need. The Rig Veda too endorses the view by saying that the woman is the only prop of the house; but the family and society are also supported by her. The
family becomes dry and barren and the society becomes paralyzed without the existence of a wife.

The pages of Indian history scintillate with the achievements of women who have made valuable continuations to the intellectual growth of the country. Even in the Vedic age, it is said, women enjoyed equal opportunities for education and work. They were eligible for Upanayana or initiation and Bramacharya or study of Brahman-knowledge. In the epic age, instances are not rare of women performing sacrifices and uttering mantras even in their own right. In the ‘Ramayana’ also we find some instances of ascetic women engaged in the study, teaching and preaching of the highest Truth.

A few more examples can be cited to remove all scepticism, to impress the uniqueness of feminine achievement in areas where even man fear to tread. The name ‘Gargi’ stands out pre-eminently in Brihadaranyaka upanished as she looms large in the field of female scholarship in the Vedic age. The anecdote goes that when all the sages were defeated by the erudite scholar and Saint Yajnavalkya in the theological disputations held in the court of king Janaka, they made Gargi, their spokesman to debate with Yajnavalkya and champion their cause. The great sage perturbed by the questions, is reported to have said: “Ask not too much, Gargi, so that thy head may not fall off thy body.”
The case of Bharati, Mandanamishra's wife who entered into a philosophical argument with the great philosopher Sankara of the eighteenth century and emerged victorious is familiar to all Indians. The name of Maitreyi is even better known for her spirit of renunciation and thirst for immortality. Her spiritual discourse with her husband Yajnavalkya does great credit to Indian womanhood. Mention must also be made of Akhamahadevi a saintly social reformer of the twelfth century whose sayings have become practically aphorisms, comparable in quality to those of Confucius. These are of poetical merit, characterized by simplicity of expression. It cannot be denied that millions of Hindus even today sing and live by the bhajans of Mira, Saint-poet of the North whose musical compositions known for their soul-stirring quality are certain to keep the spark of devotion in many breasts alive. Woman who have performed astonishing miracles are not lacking either. The story of Nalayini who could prevent even the sun from rising and achieving the impossible in arresting nature's normal process is enough to make the heart of any Western woman burst with envy.

It is shocking to note that these aspects of women are totally eclipsed by her relatively new subservient role. As stated earlier through the centuries, the Hindu woman in literature has been based on the Mythic Models from Ramayana and the Puranas. The one work overwhelmingly assumed to be responsible for
relegating the Hindu woman to an inferior status is the Manu Smrithi, a compendium of codes on living in society. But the codes of Manu are replete with contradiction. While one section states that a woman must be honoured and happy if a home or a family is to be blessed by God. (III, 56) another orders a woman to perform all household duties, irrespective of her husband’s treatment of her (V, 154) while there is a code that emphasizes the importance of intellectual companionship in marriage (IX, 102) and would not let a woman leave her husband if he is not sane (IX, 79) there is another that compels her to serve an unfaithful or a lecherous husband (V, 154). Mutual fidelity is encouraged (IX, 101) but yet another section expects a wife to put up with an unfaithful husband (V, 154), even though a husband may leave an unfaithful wife, with impunity (IX, 80).” (2) Society has overlooked these contradiction’s and the precepts that have taken hold in the social fabric are those that are responsible for the Indian woman’s peculiarly low position.

One section that has made a great impact is that which disallows any freedom for a woman. The father protects the woman during childhood, the husband during her youth and the son during her old age. Therefore a woman does not deserve freedom. She is therefore inculcated with the ideas of martyrdom, of pride in patience, of the need to accept a lower status through the mythical models of Sita, Savitri, Gandhari etc. Following these models she is
taught to be shy, gentle and dignified as a person, pure and faithful as a wife and selfless, loving and thoughtful as a mother. Building on this image, Acharya quotes

Karyeshu mantri, Karaneshu Daasi
Repecha Lakshmi, Kshamayaa dharitrii,
Bhoj yeshu mata Shayanetu Rambha
Shat karma Yukta, kula Dharma patni (351)

The above lines mean

Like a slave while working/serving,
A minister when counseling/advising,
Goddess Lakshmi in her looks/personality,
The Earth in Forbearance/endurance,
A mother while feeding,
Rambha the celestial Prostitute, in bed,

These six are the true characteristics of an ideal wife. Thus the patriarchal joint family system consolidated the position of the man by forever damning that of the woman.
2.7. WOMEN IN THE WEST

Literature is like a kaleidoscope which offers us fascinating glimpses of how the female part of the species has been fictionally patterned and characterized by the creative writer. The distinction between what women are and what they are made to look like, they are imaged, is a crucial one and should never be blamed. The images of women are built around their social and public roles. Women in private may be found to do certain things but since our civilization, has stereotyped them in a certain fashion, we are not inclined to accept them.

The images of women has been so much influenced or rather vitiated by male bias that one cannot escape being struck by the discrepancy between the way women behave and the way they are made to behave in literature. Certain courses of action are simply ruled out for them. All the great achievements belong to the heroes – our literary myths are organized around this premise. From Socrates down the wars have been the sole concern of man. It is Prometheus who had brought fire from heaven. It is Odysseus and his comrades who are described to be travelling on the dark and turbulent seas, encountering great adventures. It is God’s son who can bring about the redemption of the fallen race. As for success in more mundane matter, it is always man who is destined to make it. The woman indeed is under such a heavy embargo in this
respect that if she harbors any design of competing with a man, she is accused of loosing her femininity. A ‘female intellect’ is treated either as a misnomer or as an object fit for a sally of wit and sarcasm. This distortion of woman’s nature by male writers has rightly enough called forth this bitter comment from Charlotte Bronte.

If man could see us as we really are, they would be little amazed; but the cleverest, the acutest men are often under an illusion about women... their good woman is a queer thing, half doll, half angel; their bad woman almost always a friend. Then to hear them fall into ecstasies with each others creations, worshipping the heroine of such a poem- novel- drama, thinking it fine-divine! Fine and divine it may be, but often artificial (Bronte 350-351; ch XXVII)

The dichotomy of saint and devil has been used in stereotyping women finds a forceful illustration in the image of Virgin Mary and that of Eve – Where as the former is freed from tainted sexuality, so as to bring man to God, the latter is so sexualized as to appear as the source of all the woe of the human race consequent upon Adam’s exile from the garden of Eden. The typical Victorian heroine, so obedient chaste and pious, so docilely agreeing in marriage to see her
parents authority exchanged for that of her husband, is somewhat like a secular
variation of the former. Conversely in Salome, Cleropatra, Lucretia Borgia,
Clytemnestera and in Lady Macbeth chastising her wavering husband with the
valour of her tongue into committing a heinous and cold-blooded murder, we
can see the transformation of the latter –Eve, In the interest of dramatization
woman has generally been turned into travesty of one kind or another.

The traditional view of women suffered a drastic change after the World
War I when women were granted franchise. The new currents of thought
culminating in the feminist movement have supplied a whole host of new
images. One of the most significant gain of the recent times is the serious
struggle of the women to define her own identity which has for long ages been
entrusted with false and misleading stereotyping of the male writers. A woman
has ceased to be looked upon as a mere appendage to a man. She is person with
her intrinsic worth. She has every right to make most of her life by turning to
account whatever potential and intelligence she possesses. She is to be seen in
the larger perspective of human becoming and not in the constricted relationship
she has with a man or with the family.

Images embodying such new ways of thinking are proliferating in
literature. If the earlier images can be called fragmentary as they tended to
reduce the total personality of a woman to a few selected phases acceptable to
men because so flattering to his ego, the new images can be called integrated because they represent woman as human beings – in their total complexity.

According to Virginia Woolf, men or women are not mentally exclusive categories. It is therefore patently absurd to make women look either as entirely different from or as exactly like men. An integrated woman is neither male nor female but androgynous. For a complete fertilization of one’s personality there should take place a fusion between the masculine and feminine. In the place of submission on the one hand and defiance on the other Mrs. Wroof shows an integration. To quote her own words, “It is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman manly or man-womanly.” (Woolf 144) It is in virtue of these diverse qualities that she can weave an odd assortment of people into a harmonious party and can win her freedom from self long before her philosopher-husband. If human character is not static and if consciousness is forever expanding and evolving, literature will continue to be energized by fresh images of women – such images as are free from cliche and stereotype

2.8. FEMINISM IN INDIA

Feminism has come to mean a movement in support of the principle that women should have the same rights and opportunities in aspects such as legal, political, social, economic etc as men. As stated in ‘Half the Sky’.
“By feminism we mean both the awareness of women’s position in society as one of disadvantage or in equality compared with that of men and also a desire to remove those disadvantages.” (3)

Feminists try to identify the deep-rooted causes leading to oppression of women and endeavor to remove, as far as possible, such causes. They try to bring about a change in the social milieu where in women are accepted as equals, in all respects to men in the equitable sharing of rights, opportunities and also responsibilities in the proven of evolution of human society. Some restrict their demands to equality in matters relating to education and work with an eye on economic self-reliance. There are other among the feminists who call for a drastic change of the entire panorama of social fabric with a view to do away lock, stock and barrel with the tradition-bound entrenched belief in the moral superiority of man over woman. Their cry is to eradicate the persisting gender-discrimination in all its manifestations.

Down the ages, the place of women in the tradition-bound, male-dominated Indian society had been very unenviable. Women were treated as no more than mere chattel. They were confined to the four walls of the house. Freedom enjoyed by men in different fields of activity was considered a male prerogative and, therefore denied to women. The seeds of emancipation of
women were sown by the British rulers, Thanks to their sagacity and foresight, by their patronage and encouragement of women’s education.

Leaders and reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Bal Gangadhar Tilak Mahatma Gandhi and a host of other luminaries rendered yeoman service for the upliftment of women. After the advent of the constitutions guaranteeing equal rights to women, there dawned a fresh awareness of the status of women in the society. But in spite of such epoch-making developments, the position of women - economic, social and cultural in almost every stratum of Indian society remains far from reassuring. A vast majority of women outside the civilized society are reconciled to a life of humiliation in the form of gender bias while performing the roles of wives and mother in the rigidly custom-bound milieu they live in.

As rightly observed Asoka Rani

But what is shockingly true is that even women with liberal modern education, with an irrepressible yearning to break loose from the time-honoured crippling and inequitous social laws condemning women to a role far subordinated to that of men, do often lose their moorings and find themselves in perilously embarrassing situations due to a variety of reasons. There are instances galore when working
women with sound economic potential are also not able to steer clear of besetting pitfalls created by the customs and beliefs sedulously preserved in the tradition bound Indian society. (17)

Slowly becoming aware of the injustice heaped on them, women began to raise their voice in protest and this led to the birth of women liberation movement in the early seventies. Elite women confined to major cities were initially drawn into the vortex of these feminist movements and their primary role was to bring home to the women in the diverse sections of society how they were subjected to inequitous and humiliating treatment in this custom-bound male-domination environment.

Gradually with the passage of time, more and more votaries of feminism joined the ranks of the movement. The position of women in the society is slowly but steadily changing for the better following their unremitting assertion of their individuality by turning their wrath against the humiliating conventions assiduously nurtured by man down the ages. Women are beginning to take part in the affairs of the world, which is after all still a world that belongs to man. They have yet to traverse a long way towards their goal of taking up their position alongside men on terms of perfect equality. As long as gender discrimination in whatever measure continues the clash of male-female identity is also bound to be
here. And as long as this clash persists, deleterious consequences such as the breakdown of marriage and worse still women taking recourse to horrendous forms of suicide continue to plague our society. This problem when is defying a solution despite several decades of reformist efforts affects the self respect of women constituting half of the human race.

It is said that the literature of any country is the store-house of information on the cultural and sociological aspects of its people. "The role of the writers is to feel the pulse of the society, know its sickness and suggest such cures as are in consommé with its culture." (Jaiswal; 14) Feminists argue that literature all along has been turned to the point of view of the male element. Woman is often "marginalised" "repressed" or "silenced" in literary works. Inspired by the feminist movement in the West, some Indian women, in their eagerness for freedom, made a total switch over to the other side seeking freedom from everything including their culture.

Feminism in its early stages visualized an exclusively all female world where men owned only peripheral functions. However the present day feminist thought while seeking to destroy masculinist hierarchy is not against sennal dualtion feminism is necessarily pro-woman but it need not be anti-man. Affirming such a view P. Ramamoorthi aptly remarks
The attempts to gate female enclaves are extremist reactions but the recent trends in feminist literature are an indication that it is possible for a woman to live in the world where men also live (38).

Such optimistic thought shows that the day is not far off when men and women are valued equally and they be complementary to one another in a world where life sans sex-discrimination ensures unsullied duties, individuality and self respect to women.

2.9. NOVELS UNDER STUDY

If Indo-Anglian novels has secured a place of prestige, it is mainly the result of the contribution of the leading writers like Anand, Narayan and Raja Rao. Each of them has contributed in his own way to the rich thought and technique of the form. The perennial appeal of Narayan as a novelist is done to his genius for humour. The sympathetic humour and broad humanity of Narayan has no parallel in Indo-Anglian fiction. In his novels and short stories Narayan creates a world of sun-shine and laughter, a happy, warm and compassionate humanity under whose shade eccentric individuals polish their absurdities. Narayan has the gift of healthy, refreshing, invigorating humour, compassionate, sympathetic and even profound.
Narayan has only few equals among modern novelists and is the best novelist that India has produced. He is probably among the most entertaining, distinguished writers of India. He is a writer pure and simple with no ambitions or pretensions to be known as a crusader, idealist or missionary or scholar. Narayan who shuns becoming a public figure in an interview titled ‘Speaking as a Writer’ openly reveals his hatred towards popularity.

This kind of image building may help an actor or a film personality but it seems to me totally irrelevant in the career of an author. An author performs best in obscurity and in a state of unselfconsciousness. A personality cult is unnecessary for him. It may prove even harmful. I visualize an ideal condition when a book could be published without the author’s name on it; a secret to be shared only between the author and his publisher, anonymity could be a blessing.

The one touchstone of good writing that Narayan has kept constantly in mind is readability and he has invariably lived upon it.
Narayan has written fifteen novels. The novels which are analysed in this study are Swami and Friends, The Bachelor of Arts, The Dark Room, The English Teacher, Mr. Sampath, The Guide, The Vendor Sweets, The World of Nagaraj and Talkative Man. A brief summary of each novel is given below in order to introduce the various types of women dealt by Narayan in his novels. It also helps the reader to get a glimpse of each novel before the detailed analysis.

2.9.1. Swami And Friends

Narayan’s first novel Swami And Friends(1935) introduces the world of Malgudi to the readers. This world grows in size and maturity with his successive novels. Swami and friends, the novel of innocence, “Offers us a pure escape into irresponsible World” (Morning Post). The novel is quite an achievement. With unusual skill, Narayan succeeds in capturing the spirit of childhood. Swami and his friends are a delightful bunch of juvenile characters, each of them distinctly sketched and recognizable. While the focus in on the world of Swami and his friends, the novel has interesting adult characters too. Father, Granny, Head master of Albert Mission School and Board High School and Masters of Various subjects represent Swami’s adult world. These character tend to become overtoned and exaggerated as they are viewed through the eyes of child. Swami’s world is a comic world with a sad overtone. It is a world of reckless revelries, gnawing anxieties on the eve of examinations, fears and
terrors of elders and teachers, a consuming passion for a thing like an iron hoop and of tear jerking moments like parting from a friend. Few writers had the heightened intensity of imagination like Dickens to enter into a child’s mind and heart. As rightly said by Shiv. Girla . K.

Narayan, in his first novel, gives an unmistakable induce of his extraordinary creative power as a comic writer. A complete objectivity of vision, a genial and tolerant attitude towards the absurd and incongruous in life and an underlying current of humanism mark his first attempt in fiction. (15)

In this novel the character of swami’s grandmother is given a special analysis. The honorable position occupied by the oldies in a traditional Indian household and the memorable place they occupied in the sweet hearts of the little ones in the family are revealed in this study. They come under the first type; the traditional women.

2.9.2. The Bachelor Of Arts

Swami and Friends was followed by The Bachelor of Arts first published in 1937, by Eyre & Spottiswoode, with an introduction by Graham Greene – Who had found Swami and Friends “a book in ten thousand.” With this novel
Narayan may be said to have arrived in the contemporary world of fiction. If 'Swami' is a novel of boyhood 'The Bachelor of Arts' may rightly be described as a novel of youth. Narayan in this novel seems to take over from where he stopped in his first novel. He opens with his hero, Chandran, a young man of twenty one, in the last year of his college life, and ends with him a married young man of twenty five, having had a rub with his life and a steady occupation. In between the author successfully packs an 'eventful' career with its shades and sunshine, tears and smile.

Chandran's home provides a realistic and interesting picture of the typical Indian home life. His father, a retired District judge is an affectionate understanding and tolerant father, always keen and eager to make his son happy even at the cost of upsetting his own plans, his mother a proud mother of two sons showers all her affections on her children.

The Bachelor of Arts tells the story of a Hindu household in south India Venkatachela Iyer the retired District judge of Malgudi with his quiet dignity and fondness for gardening, may be any Hindu father. Chandran, his son with good health and a university degree but unemployed may be any modern young man. Chandran's mother is like all Hindu mothers intent on marrying her son to the most desirable young girl with the best dowry and Sushila satisfies all the tests. Chandran is almost sorry to pass his B.A. for then his problems appear plans for
the future, multitude of counsels, lack of opportunities. Malathi fits across his enraptured vision and unbalances his mind to the extend of converting him to a wandering ‘Sanyasi’ for a time. But soon he discovers that an idle mind is the Devil’s workshop; gives up his idea of going to England and settles down to hard steady work as the Local Agent of the ‘Daily Messenger’ and the loving husband of Sushila. The novel gives a true insight into Hindu mind, manners and customs. These developments give a neat rounded ending to the novel. Chandran having passed through the bewildering process of growing up comes to terms with life.

The character of Chandran’s mother and her relationship with other members in the family, especially with her beloved son Chandran is given a close study. Her role as a mother and mother-in-law is analysed in the third chapter of this study. She comes under the traditional women.

2.9.3 The Dark Room

The Dark Room (1938), the third novel of R.K.Narayan stands as a class by itself. It is according to K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar, “an Indian variation of Ibsen’s Doll’s House” (45) It’s hero Ramani, the boss of an upper middle class family and the branch Manager of the Englandia Insurance company, belongs to the old conservative set, which regarded marriage just an institution for implicit
obedience and bearing children. Proud of his self-acquired status in life, his behavior towards his wife and children alternates between some mild enthusiasm and much violent teasing. The period of teasing drives the dutiful wife Savitri to a dark room in the house where she moans and sulks. Raman finds happy relief in the company of his pretty and vivacious girl secretary in the office. Savitri, sensing the infidelity, feels miserable and pained. Unable to bear the pain, she makes bold one day to give him an ultimatum – The girl in the office or the wife – never both. The outcome is the wife is ordered to go out in the midnight. Savitri quits house with a resolve never to return. But the constant thoughts of her children drives her back home to the intense happiness of the sorrowing children and the relief of their erring husband. Reflecting that ‘a part of me is dead’ Savitri sinks to the ‘Common chord’ of life chastened by her recognition of her helplessness and utter dependence on her husband.

Savitri’s character is given a special analysis. Her role as a wife and mother forms the major part of the second chapter of our study. She comes under both traditional and transitional women. As a suffering and sacrificing wife and mother she stands for traditional, but as a rebellious wife, who is defeated in her rebellion she proves a transitional. In the same novel Savitri’s friend Janamma is another example for a traditional.
Few moderns also appear in this novel. They are Gangu, the loud feminist, Ponni, wife of the lock repairer who saved Savitri’s life and Shantabai, the secretary of Ramani. Their characters are analysed in the fifth chapter of this study.

2.9.4. The English Teacher

The English Teacher (1945) published under the title “Grateful to life and Death” in the U.S.A is a logical sequel to The Bachelor of Arts. Written in reminiscent the novel records the growth of the artist in Narayan ‘The English Teacher’ Works out the theme of ‘Life after death’. Its hero Krishnan is a lecturer in English in the Albert mission College of Malgudi. This deeply autobiographical novel has three parts. The first part the briefest of the three gives amusing and realistic pictures of the academic life of a college. This academic world has it comedy in the form of eccentricities, idiosyncrasies and angularities of its inhabitants. The second part of the novel projects a tender and idyllic picture of conjugal life. Krishnan’s world of bliss in shattered by a sudden and cruel blow – the death of his wife. The compelling authenticity of this story, especially the part of narrating Krishnan’s married life and its sad end derives mainly from the author’s own life which forms it’s basis. In an interview with Vedmehta, Narayan gives an account of the sad and pathetic manner of his wife, Rajam’s death.
My father in law who was quite well-to-do wanted to
settle a house on Rajam and one day he came up from
coimbatore and we went round searching for a place.
We looked through a number of remodelled houses
and late that afternoon we happened upon one that
seemed suitable. It had the solidity of an old house
and the bright cleanness of a new-one. While my
father-in-law and I were canvassing the land, Rajam
went into the bathroom, an outhouse to wash. She did
not rejoin us. I got worried and walked back to the
bathroom. Rajam was pounding away at the shut door,
screaming; ‘Some one open it; some one open it;’ I
gave the door one or two hard kicks and Rajam fell out
in my arms. She was convulsed with sobs and her
face was feverish red. She cried out that it was the
dirtiest place she had ever been in. She said a fly had
settled on her lips. I took her home but she wouldn’t
eat anything. She kept washing herself time and time
again. By evening she had temperature and she
remained in bed with typhoid for twenty days. It was
1939 and no one had heard of chloramphenicol, Rajam died. A fly had killed an almost five-year old marriage. (147)

The whole scene is recreated poignantly in chapter III. Susila’s death shakes the very core of Krishnan’s being. He resigns his post of lecture and returns home reflecting poignantly to join his wife. Krishnan loses Susila in the flesh but she comes back to him to be with him for ever. Susila’s promise of psychic communication induces in him a sense of serenity and self-realization.

In this novel Susila the young wife of Krishnan, the English teacher, falls under the category of traditionals. She stands for women with deep rooted traditional values, who refuses to swerve from tradition even when they are given full freedom. Her role as a devoted wife and mother is analysed in the third chapter. Krishnan’s mother also is given a close analysis. Her role as a strict mother-in-law and lovable grandmother is analysed in detail in the third chapter. She too comes under the traditionals.

2.9.5. Mr. Sampath

Mr. Sampath was published in 1949. Srinivas comes to Malgudi to start an idealistic magazine which he calls ‘The Banner’. This venture breaks down temporarily when the printer, Sampath becomes involved in the
production of a mythological film. Srinivas is attached to the new enterprise as its script writer. The story chosen for the film is the temptation of Shiva on Mount Kailas. All Srinivas friends are drawn into the film production in one capacity or other, particularly Ravi an artist of acknowledged talent. Ravi falls in love with Shanti the film star who plays Parvati and whom he identifies with his long lost love of Malgudi. Sampath the printer also falls in love with Shanti and finds an opportunity to play Shiva opposite her. When the great scene of temptation is being shot—that is when shiva opens his third eye and burns up the God of love—Ravi goes mad with jealousy and wrecks the film studio. He is declared mad, exorcised and taken off on pilgrimages. Srinivas returns to his magazine. Sampath is abandoned by Shanti.

In this Novel the housewives and mothers of a traditional Indian household is brought before our eyes through the wife of Mr. Sampath and Srinivas. The pathetic state of traditional women and the inferior place occupied by them in their household are brought out clearly in this novel. They come under the traditionals.

2.9.6. The Financial Expert

The financial Expert, first published in 1952, turned out to be a major literary event of the year. This highly acclaimed novel is notable particularly for
it's central figure Margayya. Born Krishna, he came to be known as Margayya – 
"One who shows the way. He showed the way out to those in financial trouble"
(F.E.1) Margayya, aged forty-two makes a living by advising the peasants who 
come to Malgudi to take loans from the central cooperative land mortgage Bank. 
In order to gain in money and respect, Margayya embarks upon a long course of 
prayers and puja to Lakshmi, Goddess of wealth. This brings him into contact 
with Dr. Pal, author of an erotic manuscript, renamed ‘Domestic Harmony’. 
Margayya buys and publishes this book in partnership with Madanlal of garden 
printers. After some years, Margayya abandons his interest in the book for a 
lump sum payment. He uses this money to set himself up as financial advisor and 
money-lender to the peasants who live near Malgudi, but on a grand scale, with 
his own office in market Road. Margayya’s final enterprise is to receive deposits 
rather than lend, paying high rate of interest. Dr. Pal is engaged as an agent in this 
but because of a personal difference with Margayya, Pal persuades all the people 
who have deposited money to demand their capital immediately. The crash 
comes and Margayya is ruined with only the prospect of returning to the Banyan 
Tree opposite the land Mortgage Bank.

Here again the traditional appears. Margayya’s wife the illiterate 
homebird and Balu’s wife an educated homebird are shown as perfect examples 
for traditional women. They both withstand male dominance silently, unable to
find an alternative. Their character prove that the salvation of traditionals does not lie in education and money alone. Emanicipation of the self is also equally important.

2.9.7. The Guide

Narayan’s eighth Novel ‘the Guide’ (1958) has not only won him country’s highest literary honour (The Sahitya Acadamy Award) but it continued to be his most popular book. More over a majority of the critics tend to regard it as his finest achievement. Even before writing the novel Narayan wondered

Whether to leave my hero alive or dead at the story.

Graham Greene was definite that he should die. So

I have on my hands the life of a man condemned to death before he was born and grown and have to plan my narrative to lead to it—this becomes the major obsession with me. (My days 168 – 169)

The Guide certainly established his distinction as novelist both in India and abroad. It is interesting that the novel attracted Hindi film producers because of its apparent sensational theme.
Raju a tourist guide of Malgudi, meets an archaeologist called Marco. His wife Rosie is a talented and ambitious dancer, but her husband forbids her to dance. Raju becomes Rosi’s lover. Abandoned by Marco, Rosie comes to live with Raju. He leaves all his other works and helps Rosie renamed Nalini to launch her career. Raju and Nalini, now a famous exponent of a Bharathanatyam, live in enormous style in the new lawley extension. At this time, Macro’s lawyer writes, asking for Nalini’s signature to release a box of jewellery which has been in custody in a bank. Raju intercepts this letter and forges Nalini’s signature. He is arrested and jailed. Nalini pays off their debts and the lawyer’s fees, sells the house and leaves Malgudi. She continues to dance. On his release from jail, Raju arrives at the village of Mangala, on the outskirts of Malgudi. Here he acquires a reputation of a wise and holyman. When the rain fails that year, the villagers misunderstand his words and assume that he is going to fast on their behalf. He confesses the truth about his former life, but it makes no difference. Raju is forced into the role of a great sage and dies on the twelfth day of his fast. Two cycles of events form the story of ‘The Guide’ Raju’s rise and fall within the world of normal experience and Raju’s career outside it, beginning as the unknown ex-prisoner and ending as the unknown Swami.
Rosie’s character, in this novel is a perfect example of a transitional woman. She is torn between tradition and modernity and finally leans more on tradition. In this way she proves a perfect transitional woman.

2.9.8. Waiting for Mahatma

This novel was published in 1955. Sriram, a drifter, lives with his grandmother in kabir street, Malgudi supported by his father’s pension. Gandhi visits Malgudi, while on a tour of South India. Sriram meets Bharathi, an ardent Gandhian follower in a market place and falls in love with her. In order to be with Bharathi and take her hands in marriage, Sriram joins Gandhi’s Camp. Bharathi teaches Gandhian principles to Sriram and becomes his Guru. Slowly they both start loving each other. The lovers are assigned different works and separate. Heeding Gandhi’s instruction, Bharathi get herself imprisoned as instructed by Gandhi but Sriram stays in a hideout and comes under the influence of Jagadish, a terrorist and follower Subhas Chandra Bose. He is finally arrested. Upon his release he joins Bharathi once more. Bharathi has been working in the riot striken area of Noakhali and is now looking after refugee children. The Mahatma blesses them and gives them permission to marry at last: he is shot immediately afterwards, on his way to the prayer meeting.
Bharathi in this novel comes under ‘Modern Women’. Bharathi with her courage, independence, authority, dedication, and sincerity proves a perfect modernist. Another woman character highlighted in this study is Sriram’s grandmother. She is a staunch traditional.

2.9.9. Vendor of Sweets

The Sweet Vendor or The Vendor of Sweets was published in 1967. Jagannath, owner of a prosperous sweet business has an only son, Mali born after several years of marriage and only after a special pilgrimage to Badri hill in order to propitiate the Gods. Jagan’s wife Ambika died of of brain tumour when Mali was still a child. Although he has accumulated wealth Jagan himself leads a simple life based on Gandhian principles. Mali, suddenly decides to leave college and helping himself with his father’s money, leaves for America. He returns three years later with his half-Korean and American wife Grace. He has a scheme to market a ‘novel-writing machine’ for which he assumes Jagan will contribute a vast sum of capital. Jagan begins to avoid his son’s company. He is persuaded to buy a ruined garden and a shrine in which a sculpture hopes to complete and install a figure of the Goddess Gayathri. He decides to live in the forest. Before his departure he hears about his sons arrest under prohibition act and refuses to get involved. But he leaves his business in good order for his son to take over and retreats to forest.
In this novel Ambika, the wife of the sweet vendor is given a close analysis. She comes under the first category, ‘traditional women’. Her relationship with the mother-in-law and her husband derive the most attention.

2.9.10. The Painter of Signs:-

‘The Painter of Signs’ has the most topical and contemporary of the themes and settings in Narayan’s fiction. The Malgudi world in this novel, presents quite an interesting and intriguing blend of modernity and tradition, contemporaneity and convention, reason and superstition. The story centres around Raman, the not so young bachelor, an ‘artist in lettering’ determined to establish the ‘Age of Reason in the world’ and Daisy, an ultra modern heroine, a full time family planning officer. Daisy assigns a job for Raman, takes him with her tour to the most interior part of the villages, succumbs to momentary pleasure, agree to marry Raman on her conditions but finally withdraws her proposal afraid of becoming a household slave. Daisy’s love for freedom, dedication to her work and her fear about marriage bond pushes her to withdraw her decision in the last moment. Her decision shocks Raman, who is too willing to make any compromise with Daisy’s in order to marry her. Finally unable to overcome his grief he decides to remain unmarried.
In this study Daisy's character is analysed in detail. She comes under the category of 'Modern Women'. Daisy with her dare devil attitude to life challenge the entire Indian menfolk, who are dominant and authoritative by nature.

2.9.11. The World of Nagaraj

This novel written in the nineties was published in 1990. The hero of this novel Nagaraj resembles Margayya of The Financial Expert and Jagannath of Vendor of Sweets in many aspects and particularly in their relationship with their son. Nagaraj though he does not have an issue his brother's son Balu prefer his company to his own father who is an uncivilized and ruthless brute. The problem faced by Nagaraj due to presence of Balu in his house form the theme of this novel. Nagaraj and his wife lose this peace and happiness. But still the issueless couple find fulfillment in the company of Balu and his wife. Nagaraj trying unsuccessfully to write an epic on Naradha is another major aspects of this novel. Nagaraj's unsuccessful attempts provide earthier and fun to the readers. In this novel Nagaraj's wife is given a close analysis. Her role as a suffering daughter-in-law and wife is highlighted in this study. A brief analysis of the old lady, the mother of Nagaraj also is done. They both come under the traditional women.
This short novel was published in 1986 and it was serialised in Frontline. The story centres around a man from Timbuctoo. One fine day this stranger lands up in Malgudi and settles in the Railway waiting room. To move him away from the waiting room, the talkative man, who is the centre character of this novel gives him shelter in his house. Settling comfortably here he starts capturing the hearts of vulnerable girls. The librarian’s grand daughter falls an easy victim. The sudden appearance of the lady commandant Sarasa reveals the identity of the Timbuctoo man. He is none but her slippery, womanizing husband. The talkative man saves him by not revealing his place to his wife. Sarasa leaves Malgudi with heavy heart, pleading the talkative man to help her catch her husband. The talkative man feels for his mistake of giving shelter to the cheat and decides to help Sarasa there by to save the innocent grand daughter of the librarian. He bundles the Timbuctoo man up with his devoted wife just before his elopement with the librarian’s grant daughter. Nothing could attach this wavery man with his wife. Once again he elopes with another girl and the novel ends with Sarasa’s search for her runaway husband. Again she appears in Malgudi and pleads the talkative man to help her in her search.
The character of Sarasa in this novel is the best example of a transitional woman. Sarasa is educated and employed still she cannot lead a lone life. Being rooted in tradition she prefers to live with her unwilling husband than to choose a new life like Shantabai or Rosie. Her conflict between tradition and modern is clearly revealed in this novel.