CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

Art is not created in a vacuum; it is the work not simply of a person, but of an author fixed in time and space, answering to a community of which he is an important articulate part. Wilber Scott believes that art's relations to society are vitally important and the investigation of these relationships may organize and deepen one's aesthetic response to a work of art. Therefore, critics are legitimately interested in understanding the social milieu and the extent to which and the manner in which the artist responds to it. Hence the relevance of Frenchman Taine in his *Critical Approaches to Literature* has said that literature is the consequence of the moment, the race and the milieu. The relations between literature and society are reciprocal. Literature is not only the effect of social causes, it is also the cause of the social effects. It is clear that till literature continues to keep its bonds with society, social depiction will be the main source of the novelist. The tendency to associate art and social values is natural, perhaps intrinsic to realism in fiction.

Scholars and critics, of course, have long been interested in the ties between art, the writer, and the social milieu and very often their studies contain implicit judgments based on those associations. Harry Levin has...
stated that the relations between literature and society are reciprocal. Literature is not only the effect of social causes; it is also the cause of social effects.

Literature is the reflection of society because it mirrors the multifarious activities and events. It can not be imagined that literature is a separate entity having no direct or indirect relations with society because a writer is a man speaking to man about men and their affairs. His life is influenced by the conditions of the age in which he is born and brought up and in which he works and creates. A writer's genius is sharpened by his intellectual and cultural milieu and the socio-economic forces. These forces interact with him. Thus literature is a direct off-shoot of the society and comes into existence through the medium of the creator's imagination. It offers social content that will serve as information as well as comment about the society.

The novel which gives an artistic form to the man and society relationship came India only in the nineteen twenties. The novel as an art form came to India with the British and the Indo-Anglian novel came into existence after a long time the novel had become an established genre in the Indian languages. The novel which developed in the Western world is only
concerned with the time and space and their effects on man. The novelist
has been less concerned about the moral values.

But the modern novelist considers time not only a dimension of the
physical world but considers that it as a shaping force of man's individual
and collective history. 'Place' plays an important role in the life of every
human being. The modern novel is the product of our environment in the
given time.

In America Howells, Jack London, Hamlin Garland and Frank
Norris have all been concerned with the relation between literature and
society. Critics are interested in evaluating the social environment in which
a novelist responds to it. Edmund Wilson also traces sociological criticism
to Vico's 18th century study of Homer's epics which revealed social
conditions in which the Greek poets lived. Harder also continued this
approach in the 19th century.

With the economic depression, the writers began to add a powerful
tool of judgment to their examination of literature as a mirror of society.
To know about the social conditions of earlier times, it is reasonable to
place the work of art in the social atmosphere and define that relationship,
the best sociological critic will get a clear picture of the social status of that
particular period.
The imaginative literature was totally absent until the nineteen-twenties in the Indian English novels. It gives an artistic form to the relationship of man and society. The novel as an art form came to India with the British. The Indian novel in English came into existence long after the novel had become an established genre in other Indian native languages. There was lack of historical sense in the Indians. The novelist has been less concerned with the un-changing moral varieties and their presentation in a timeless setting. But on the contrary, the modern novelist considers 'time' as a dimension of the world and shaping force of man's individual and the history at large. The 'place' has also played a vital role because an individual's experience is rooted to its particular point and space. The modern English novel is the product of a particular environment in a particular society and in a fixed time-space. Without time and space, it is impossible to write a good novel. It should have a definite location and the time-space as well and the reality of a particular place. The novelist's main idea of writing a novel is man-in-society. His subject matter should also be the manners and conventions of a man and his identity in the social set-up.

After the perusal of the Indian Novels, we come to the conclusion that the earliest Indian novels were written in Bengali. It was due to the fact that Bengal was the first region where the British came first. Some of the
earlier sketches were having the Bengali society background and their conventions. But the later novels consist of the historical sense as well. The pre-occupation of historical sense emerged at different times and in different parts of India.

**Indian English Novel** blossomed in the 1930s, under the direct impact of Mahatma Gandhi and writers like Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Raja Rao and R.K.Narayan used the English novel as conscious keepers of the community. They reflected in their novels a refined but realistic conscious of the social concerns and aspirations with which society was imbued.

*Untouchable* (1935) by Mulk Raj Anand is a notable example of such social chronicling. It reflects conscious of the lower most sections of Indian society, its needs, its frustrations, its dreams, its aspirations, its problems and the diverse solutions confronting it. Through the protagonist of this novel Mulk Raj Anand presents a veritable social history of India of the first few decades of the 20th century of the Indian society.

The development of Indian novel was in three stages; historical sense, social or political realism and psychological. We find that this development was found in the Indian languages like Bengali, Hindi, Marathi, Kannada and Malayalam.
The Indo-English novel has many branches of fiction. We find historical sense in the novel of S.K. Ghosh, *The Prince of Destiny* and S.K. Mitra's *Hindupur*, which were published in 1909. The history in these novels is only romantic and not having the actual facts. We find that the historical sense sometimes co-existed with the recent social and political awareness. The development of the Indian English novel has taken place into the span of about forty years.

We notice social realism in the works of Munshi Prem Chand in Hindi and Sarat Chandra Chatterjee in Bengali in the twenties. In these works, we also find that they depict every day problems of rural community which give the next phase of development of Indian novel in English. The public issues whether these may be social or political attracted the writers and the Indian national freedom movement gave a rich material to these contemporary writers. Rabindranath and Sarat Chandra dealt with different aspects of the socio-political upheaval. Sarat Chandra's novel *Pather Dabi* (1926) was banned by the Britishers only on political grounds. While in his other novels, like *Palli Samaj* (1916) and *Arakshaniya* (1916), Sarat Chandra dealt with the superstitions and orthodoxy in village life. Munshi Prem Chand dealt with the issue of prostitution in *Sevasadan* (1916) but later on in 1932, Munshi Prem Chand dealt with Gandhian ideology in
Karambhumi. Social problems and politics have always been part and parcel of these writers. In Bhagavati Charan Verma’s Hindi novel Bhule Bisre Chitra (1959) the society of thirties has been projected having conflict of political beliefs and the social ideals. The literary terms in thirties was romanticized by the previous generation of writers. The nationalist feeling came into existence in the life of the Indian society in the twenties and thirties. Even the social reform novels were full of politics and were dedicated to the political independence of the country. In the novels in ‘twenties’ and ‘thirties’ they had a great liking of the motherland and most of their works were dedicated for the improvement of the lot of the people and for the attainment of the freedom. Hence, patriotism and nationalism form the nucleus of the themes of the early Indo-English fiction too.

But the second phase of the development of Indian English novel, can be seen in Venkatramani’s Murugan the Tiller (1927) and Kandan the Patriot (1932) to Mulk Raj Anand’s passionate progressivism and the emotional zeal for Gandhian ideals in Raja Rao’s early novels. The Indo-English novelist was no longer interested in depicting the improvement of the lot of the people but they tried to project the individual’s self realization. We feel that if the Indian novel in English is firmly rooted in the social and cultural
ethos of India, then it should be considered independently of the great tradition of the English novel.

The Indian novelist in English is confronted by a number of artistic problems. Most important of all is the problem of “medium” of writing. But a Marathi or a Tamil or Bengali novelist takes it granted of some assumptions due to the fact that the novelist and the reader both share similar background and the common experience. But on the contrary, the Indian English novelist and the reader do not share the same assumptions. In English language, it cuts across diverse ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds and thus makes the novelist uncertain of his basic assumptions. In India, there is a varied background of the audience and thus the novelist has to explain constantly his way of thinking and writing as well, which increases the work-load of the Indian English novelist.

The Indian novelists in English have chosen themes and situations that are having relevance all over the country. These themes are having relevance all over the country. These themes are not many, since there is variety of social structure, values, conventions and customs in different parts of India. But these novelists have chosen subjects from the basic patterns, which are similar to all Indians. These themes include theme of social change, the disintegration of the old hierarchical and agrarian society.
or the disintegration in the joint family. For example, Mulk Raj Anand writes about the peasant family in Punjab in *The Sword and the Sickle* which underlines the situation of the Indian people and his own experience. These Indian themes have basis in the works of the Indian novelists in English. These themes are still inherent in the society as were many years ago. But the novelists took the themes of national movement for political independence in their works in the nineteen thirties and forties as well. This is due to the fact that after long years of struggle and sacrifice have shaped and coloured the experiences of the modern Indian novelists. The struggle for independence has enriched the knowledge of the Indian novelists in English that they could not avoid choosing such themes. Particularly in English language, the novelist assumes greater significance because this is one of the few pan-Indian experiences of our time and English is the only shared language of modern India. The concern of the Indo-English novelist is ultra-historical because of the life of the modern man and his individuality and personal life are developed by the factors of history. We find that a large number of the Indo-English novelists concentrate their viewpoint on the confrontation between East and West at the level of people and at the level of idea as well. Even the Indo-English novelists have explored
the idea of joining metaphysical, spiritual and romantic aspects in their works of art.

There are many aspects of Indian life where the West has had no abiding impact and the Indo-English novelists successfully project the aspects of the life of non-urban, indigenous and in-ward looking situations of the characters. R.K. Narayan in his article "English in India" which appeared in *The Times of India*, December 2, 1964 pointed out that Western society is totally based on different conceptions of man-woman relationship from ours and the marital bliss is a more frequent subject in Indian novels than romantic love. R.K. Narayan further adds in this article that the theme of the eternal triangle, that perennial peg of Western storytellers to hang their novels upon, is useless for an Indian writer because our social condition does not provide adequate facilities for such triangles. But after a close perusal of the works of Indo-English novelists, it presents to us that even in the Indian context, a triangle is very much present and the third side of a triangle is provided by the joint family. Thus this aspect gives an opportunity for the study of the human group behaviour alongwith projection of the pre-industrial way of life and entrenched force of orthodoxy in which the individual finds himself helpless. This conflict is resolved as duty to family and personal fulfilment. The fulfilment of the
goal of individual is based on the Western society especially when it is achieved at the cost of the family. The Indo-English novelist is caught into a conflict because he is using the language and form of Indian tradition but the reference is different. Sexual love and personal happiness do not have central importance in the Indian tradition but these enjoy the central importance in the Western novel. The Western novelist focuses on the selfhood and the individual personality. In many works of Indo-English novelists, there is the theme of socio-cultural life of India, adherence to rituals, faith in Guru etc. etc. This theme has even attracted Raja Rao, Bhabani Bhattacharya and R.K.Narayan. The most important aspect of the works of Indo-English novelists has been that of the first person narrative, autobiographical in method. The Indian novelists have chosen the conscious use of myth for enhancing the effect of a contemporary situation which has been borrowed from the West but it has been naturalized in the Indian atmosphere.

In our country, literature exists in many languages but the literary works in English have a special significance. The English language has crossed all barriers at the level of society. Thus the Indian Critics stand on a common ground. Thus, we can analyze the experiences that have gone into the making of Indian literature and the writer can transform his own
experience which is universal in its artistic appeal. But the achievement of the Indo-English novelist may fall short of the achievement of a regional novelist in some other Indian language because of the late development and the quantitative disadvantage of Indo-English writers.

(Against this background of socially-committed art, R.K.Narayan just could not have written novels set in an ivory tower. Especially when he formed part of the group of novelists who started writing in 1930s, a period steeped in nationalism and concern for the people at large. Narayan has been a favourite subject of study in critical circles with critics exploring his quaint humour, his subtle irony, his conservatism, his creation of three dimensional, life-like characters, his painstaking portrayal in minute details of a fictional township, Malgudi. But somehow Narayan’s rendering of social consciousness in essential details has somehow not been explored or given the probing treatment that the study deserves. This gap is critical scholarship is sought to be bridged here.

All the novels of R.K.Narayan present charmingly convincing vignettes of Indian social life. This is not only in the novels but also in short stories too that various forms of social consciousness have been projected by Narayan. The contextuality of his novels is social, economic
and sometimes political also—much though the Critics want to appreciate his works as pure art.

The term “Social Consciousness” is a wide-ranging all-inclusive term that automatically refers to culture, ideology, religion, socio-politico-economic factors operating in society that largely go in the making of consciousness of an individual in life. When this individual happens to be a novelist he tries to create this “consciousness” imaginatively in his fiction through various devices.

Consciousness is the state or faculty of being conscious, as a condition and concomitant of all thought, feeling and volition, the recognition by the thinking subject of its own acts or affections. Consciousness is the perception of what passes in a man’s mind. It is, in the most strict and exact sense of the word signifies the reflex act by which we know that we think and the thoughts and actions are our own and not others. It signifies the totality of impressions, thoughts and feelings, which make up a person’s conscious being. It is often limited by a moral or religious consciousness. It is the activity or experience of increasing sensitivity or awareness. Various social-politico-cultural discourses which are operative in a social set up constitute what we term as “Consciousness”. The concept of social consciousness involves a web of attitudes, tendencies, desires,
ideologies and culture that a writer like R.K.Narayan subtly and imperceptibly weaves into the very warp and woof of the fiction.

By consciousness we also mean that the novelist is always aware about the developments in a social set up and the state of fact of being mentally conscious or aware of anything. As the novelist himself is the product of society and has been brought up in the social milieu, he is well equipped to deal with all such happenings around him. The experiences gained by the novelist mature him so that in his writings, clear picture of society is projected by him.

Thus consciousness implies ideas, thoughts, feelings, wishes, intentions and recollections of an individual, in life as well as in fiction. Where two, or more men know of one and the same fact, they are said to be conscious of it, one to another.

In the novels of R.K.Narayan, it has been observed that Narayan chooses a central character through whose view point he looks at the various aspects of the society as a silent observer. But on the other hand, Mulk Raj Anand is a humanist and his prime concern is to bring out human predicament. Coolie is a study of a village boy's sufferings who because of poverty is compelled to work as a servant. Untouchable deals with the miserable condition of the down-trodden, Two Leaves and a bud deals with
the exploitation of the peasants by the Assam Tea Estate owners. Anand only deals with the economic and class distinctions. Anand looks angrily at the oddities and eccentricities of society but R.K.Narayan looks on the different aspects of the society.

Raja Rao is a metaphysical man. All his novels deal with the metaphysics. Kanthapura depicts the impact of Gandhian philosophy during the days of Non-cooperation Movement as well as the glory of Hindu mythology. The Serpent and the Rope presents symbolical difference between “illusion” and “reality” in the Indian tradition. The Cat and Shakespeare deals with some middle class families of Kerala during the period of second World War. Thus we notice that Raja Rao sees everything in the process of metaphysics, yet his novels deal with the social consciousness. But R.K.Narayan minutely observes the society and presents most realistic pictures with some irony found in it.

R.K.Narayan is the novelist of the individual man and chooses a central character and looks at the various aspects of the society as a silent observer. R.K.Narayan is neither 'angry' like Mulk Raj Anand nor 'philosophical' like Raja Rao. Narayan is not partial at his dealing with the characters in his novels. He only projects the clear image of the society as a silent onlooker. Narayan's art is for art sake. He has no propaganda to
play. It is for the readers to go through his works of art and understand the things. His artistic excellence lies in authentic exploration of facts in absolutely uninvolved manner. Narayan accepts the reality as it presents before him. He notices the society and its developments with an ironic detachment and accepts reality ungrudgingly. He does not criticize the correct things. As observed by him in *Mr. Sampath*, it seems to him 'a futile and presumptuous occupation to analyze, criticize and attempt to set things right anywhere'. The central character of Narayan presents to us everything that occurs in the every walk of the society. He exposes the ills of the society and probes them but never for sadistic pleasure for encouraging disgust among the readers. The early novels of R.K.Narayan deal with the manners and mentality in pre-independence days. The middle novels are Narayan's exploration into the manners and behaviour of people in post-independence. The novels highlight the people's desire for wealth. Narayan is critical of caste system in Indian society. He condemns caste or class division in almost every novel.

Narayan thus comes out to be social reformer who is keenly aware of various absurdities and eccentricities of society and suggests ironically the ways and means for their removal.