The novel, as a form of literary writing, has diversified and proliferated so extensively over time that today it is rarely discussed without referring to its sub-genres and species like the epistolary novel, the sentimental novel, the Gothic novel, the propaganda, regional, psychological or thesis novel, the documentary or historical novel, the detective, crime, thriller, spy or adventure novel, the satirical or allegorical novel, the campus novel, the science-fiction or fantasy novel, the anti-novel, the national allegory novel, the postcolonial or national novel, the realist, modern or postmodern novel etc. Knowing more about these sub-types usually seems to make us none the wiser about the overall nature of the novel. The death knell of the novel has been sounded several times, for instance, with the growth of cinema, with futurism and surrealism, with the avant-gardes, with the rise of the anti-novel or the nouveau roman, with the incredible spread of mass-media, and now with debates about hypertext on the Internet. The novel, however, has survived most of these predictions and its durability and profusion as a genre is intriguing. It is this aspect of the novel that draws us to embark upon a more detailed study of the novel in order to understand its generic fundamentals.
It is useful, at the very outset, to note that critics have rarely worked on the novel without simultaneously acknowledging the difficulty of theorizing the novel. Georg Lukács in *The Theory of the Novel* (1920) observes that “the novel is the most hazardous genre”, while M.M. Bakhtin in ‘Epic and Novel,’ (1941) opines, “The utter inadequacy of literary theory is exposed when it is forced to deal with the novel”. Lennard J. Davis in *Resisting Novels* (1987) argues that the “novel must always be thought of as ambivalent”. Christopher Gillie in *Longman Companion to English Literature* (1972) writes, “The novel, of course is a form that has always resisted definition”. Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) argues that the “novel is an incorporative, quasi-encyclopedic cultural form”. Raymond Williams in *The Long Revolution* (1961) calls it “not so much a literary form as a whole literature in itself”. Marthe Robert in *Origins of the Novel* (1980) observes that the “novel knows neither rule nor restraint. Open to every possibility, its boundaries fluctuate in all directions”. Fredric Jameson in *The Political Unconscious* (1981) calls it an eclectic “process” rather than a “form”. J.A. Cuddon in *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (1976) states that the “subject matter of the novel eludes classification, for it is the hold-all Gladstone bag of literature. No other literary form has proved so pliable and adaptable to a seemingly endless variety of topics and themes.”

Many critics have emphasized this elusive and complex nature of the genre. As a result, two divergent tendencies have developed in theoretical studies about the novel, especially over the last few decades. One tendency is to argue that the novel as a genre is so exhaustive that it cannot be studied in its entirety, and therefore, it must be examined primarily through its sub-species or sub-genres. The other, more extreme, tendency is to

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ignore the novel altogether in favour of employing more incorporative and inclusive conceptual categories like 'fiction', 'text' or 'narrative' in order to study novels. As a sub-text to the present study, we critically examine the theoretical premises behind such views and argue on the contrary that the 'novel' continues to remain a relevant and pertinent literary concept, irrespective and inspite of its diversifications.

Our primary emphasis, however, is on identifying and delineating the key generic characteristics of the novel better. Towards this end, we examine both the rise as well as the development of the novel. We try to identify the characteristics that are symptomatic of the novel's emergence and origin. Later, we also try to understand the novel by locating the attributes that have prevailed or sustained the genre across its multifarious development and spread. We test the veracity of our conclusions by comparing the similarities in the inferences in these two instances.

We also study another important yet neglected aspect of the genre of the novel. In recent times some critics have started arguing that the novel by nature is a flexible, incorporative and inclusive genre. They characterize the novel by its ability to incorporate the formal and thematic features from other literary as well as non-literary genres within its generic fold. The roots of such opinions can be traced to two important critics of the novel, namely, Georg Lukács and Mikhail Bakhtin. Georg Lukács argues in his landmark work, *The Theory of the Novel*, that the novel is a genre which is in a state of "eternally existent becoming." Mikhail Bakhtin argues in his short but extremely significant essay, 'Epic and Novel,' that the basic tendency of the novel is "plasticity" or "hybridity" and that the novel parodies all other genres by critically incorporating them. However, this view about the novel is not restricted to critics alone. Even novelists express similar views. For instance, writing about the novel in the nineteenth century Emile Zola says:

The novel is no longer confined to one special sphere; it has invaded and taken possession of all spheres. Like science, it is the master of the world. It touches on all subjects: writes history; treats of physiology and psychology; rises to the highest flights of poetry; studies the most diverse subjects — politics, social economy, religion, and manners. Entire nature is its domain.
It adopts the form which pleases it, taking the tone which seems best, feeling no longer bound by any limit.\(^\text{10}\)

Virginia Woolf similarly describes the novel as a “cannibalistic” form that has the tendency to devour all other genres.\(^\text{11}\) However, to our knowledge, no novelist or critic has tried to explain the reasons behind the same. In our thesis, therefore, we devote our attention to establishing the links between the emergence of this characteristic in the novel and the conditions generated by the emergence of a flexible, incorporative and inclusive system of capitalism. The proposition that we advance is that all literary genres that follow strict codes of literary decorum face problems in capitalist times. In their place, the novel emerges as the first major literary genre to deliberately do away with rigid literary hierarchies and rules. This argument is substantiated using the work of the critics of the novel as well as historical accounts about the modern age.

Before proceeding any further, however, let us briefly state that approaches to studying the novel can broadly be divided into three distinct categories. Some critics theorize the novel by identifying certain key novels and deriving the characteristics of the genre or its development through a detailed analysis of those works. There are those who first assume a working definition of the novel and then develop theories about the novel by identifying texts according to the requirements of their working hypothesis. While some work on the novel by premising their studies on existing theoretical works and debates. In our case, we primarily rely upon works by critics who have offered comprehensive and influential theories on the novel.

The first chapter of our thesis broadly surveys the key theoretical debates about the novel. We examine not merely the important aspects of the novel, but also the diverse opinions that exist about each of these different aspects. Our attention is devoted to examining different views on the origin and rise of the novel. The links drawn by different critics between the novel and the epic, the novel and the romances, as well as the novel and realism are examined. We look at the novel with respect to theoretical debates about modernism and postmodernism. Moreover, we investigate the novel vis-à-vis aspects of colonialism, nationalism, gender, print and other media. In short, while


touching upon important aspects of different theories of the novel, our aim is to demonstrate that the novel is a paradox-ridden genre. This provides the background for our subsequent attempts to sift out the nature of the genre from among these paradoxical views.

In the second chapter we study the rise of the genre. As we know, opinions about the novel’s origin are divided between those who trace the novel to the early eighteenth century England and those who trace it to significantly earlier times and places ranging from medieval Europe, Japan and China, to ancient Greece, Rome and Egypt. Obviously, all these opinions about the novel cannot simultaneously be true. What is surprising in this context, however, is the complete absence of theoretical works that try to deal with this entire spectrum of irreconcilable opinions in order to resolve this dispute. In this chapter, therefore, we try to engage with these incompatible differences in order to find out when, where, why and how the novel came up in history. Here we also interrogate whether the genre of the novel emerged in continuation with the literary conventions of earlier genres like the epic and the romances, or whether it was a significantly new literary genre.

Three classic texts on the rise of the novel, namely: The Theory of the Novel (1920) by Georg Lukács, The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays written between 1934-41 by Mikhail Bakhtin, and The Rise of the Novel (1957) by Ian Watt, are taken up for this purpose. We also study the opinions of recent novel critics like Marthe Robert, Lennard J. Davis, Nancy Armstrong, Michael McKeon, and Firdaus Azim. All these critics are rooted in different theoretical and historical assumptions and, therefore, arrive at significantly different explanations for the emergence of the novel. Lukács argues that the novel came up as a new literary genre in the modern age because of the collapse of the earlier world of the epic. According to him the novel represents and embodies the lost totality and fragmentation of the new world, both in its form as well as in its content. Bakhtin traces the origin of the novel to ancient Greece and Rome. However, he argues that the modern triumph of the form of the novel can be attributed to the analogous development of dialogism and hybridity in the verbal-discursive universe. He argues that the multilingual and polyglot form of the novel embodies this hybrid and dialogic essence. Ian Watt attributes the rise of the novel to individualism and realism. He also associates the rise of the novel to the emergence of the English middle classes. The novel, according to him, is committed to expressing an aggregate view of the world comprising of particular experiences of particular individuals at particular places in
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particular times, as opposed to the unified worldview of the middle ages. Marthe Roberts uses psychoanalysis to link the novel to the family romances. Lennard J. Davis associates the novel to the emergence of print culture and capitalism, Nancy Armstrong to gender and female individualism, Michael McKeon to the progressive and conservative ideological concerns involved in the transformation from feudalism to capitalism, and Firdaus Azim to questions of subjectivity and colonialism. This chapter critically examines all these views. We contextualize the debate about the novel in the historical transformation from feudalism to capitalism. We also examine some early novels.

In the third chapter, we examine the novel vis-à-vis the concept of realism. Realism has been used as an important concept to define, re-define, classify as well as periodise the novel. Many critics claim that the single most important characteristic of the novel is realism. They argue that although realism in the novel has undergone many significant changes, the intention of novelists remains wholly realist. They also argue that in contemporary times the novel has reinvented itself through radically different realisms like ‘magic realism’ and ‘hyper-realism’. However, many critics also claim that realism is a dated concept which has run its course more than a hundred years ago. They argue that modernist and postmodern novels are basically characterized by their anti-realist assertions, and therefore, calling the novel a realist genre would be a complete travesty. In the last fifty years or so, several important theoretical works have been written on the novel. Critics have begun to argue that all realist texts are necessarily fictive, while all fictive texts inevitably represent a degree of reality. This chapter examines in detail important works both by theorists of the novel as well as theorists of realism. Our argument is that the emergence and development of realism in the novel cannot be understood without linking the novel integrally to the changing consciousness and ideological concerns of the middle classes.

Towards this end, we first examine in detail three important views, namely: ‘critical realism’ as propounded by Lukács, ‘mimesis’ as discussed by Auerbach, and ‘formal realism’ as evolved by Ian Watt. Lukács develops the concept of critical realism in his book, Studies in European Realism (1930). He advocates critical realism as a desirable realist ethic for the novel. The central concept of critical realism for Lukács is the “type” which organically binds together both the general as well as the particular in creating characters as well as situations. Eric Auerbach develops his exhaustive thesis on the development of realism in the Western world in his study, Mimesis: The Representations of Reality in Western Literature (1946). In this book, he studies the
development of the concept of mimesis in works ranging from *Odyssey* and *The Bible* (Old Testament) to modern novels by Virginia Woolf. Auerbach examines the development of realism vis-à-vis two ancient styles of representing reality: the "separation of styles" and the "mixture of styles". The "separation of styles", he argues, is characterised by the belief that everyday reality can find description in literature only in comic, low or intermediary genres. Whereas, the "mixture of styles" does not necessarily restrict realistic descriptions to low genres but seeks to altogether do away with rigid hierarchies between high and low forms. Ian Watt develops the concept of formal realism in his study *The Rise of the Novel* (1957). He argues that the key thrust of formal realism is to embody the circumstantial view of life through the techniques of authentic reporting of human experience, detailing of the story, individuality of actors, particularity of time and space, and referentiality of language. He argues that formal realism is the lowest common denominator of the form of the novel and its temper is critical, anti-traditional and innovating.

We also examine the major debates about realism and the novel over the last hundred years or so. Our study is divided into two parts: the period raging from 1880s to 1940s, and the period ranging from 1950s to contemporary times. Thus, way we take into account all major modern and postmodern debates about realism, including significant contributions made by Roland Barthes, Fredric Jameson, Linda Hutcheon and Jean Baudrillard.

In the fourth and last chapter of our thesis, we study the development of the novel in history. This development is studied by examining both the 'external' as well as the 'internal' developments in the genre of the novel. We begin by examining the development of the novel vis-à-vis the literary canon. It is a well-known fact that the novel did not always enjoy the favour of the literary establishments. Infact, during its early years the novel existed in considerable disrepute. From there, the novel came to occupy a central place in the literary establishment by the mid-twentieth century. In contemporary times many literary critics have started calling the novel a minor cultural form compared to other forms like film or video. We seek to understand the reasons behind this interesting trajectory of the novel. We believe that this phenomenon is linked to the changing preoccupations of bourgeois culture in history. We also argue that while the novel manages to find a respectable place in the literary canon by the early twentieth century, these were also the times when the novel started getting divided into 'high' and
‘low’ novels. Thus, the canonization of the novel was not universal and only a few novels found a place in the corridors of culture.

We also study two interesting yet contradictory aspects of the development of the novel. The novel has been continually plagued by predictions about its demise or death. Several novelists and critics have announced the death of the novel at different points of time during the twentieth century. However, the novel periodically emerged unscathed from many of these predictions and announcements. Simultaneously, the novel has also been associated with a sense of constant newness. If we look at the developing nomenclature of the novel, we find that the novel was first called ‘Novel’, literally meaning new; then ‘New Novel’ by Henry James at the turn of the twentieth century; then ‘Nouveau Roman’ or new novel by Robbe-Grillet in the mid-twentieth century; and subsequently ‘New New Novel’ by Philip Sollers during the late twentieth century. All these represent different stages of the development of the novel. In this section of the chapter, we argue that the vacillation of the novel between these two kinds of extremes — of ever dying and ever rejuvenating — is linked to print culture and the literary market. Additionally, we examine specific aspects and reasons behind the prevalence of contemporary notions about the exhaustion of the genre. We demonstrate how this current state of affairs is linked to post-structuralist theories, especially the theory of ‘intertextuality’ propounded by Julia Kristeva, and the increasing monopolization of the publishing industry.

Next we examine the novel through its dominant typology of early, realist, modern and postmodern novels. We primarily study the development of the techniques and themes of the novel. We also enter the contentious areas of debate between modernism and postmodernism. While some critics like Jean-François Lyotard and Alex Callinicos argue that these stages represent the deepening of the same continuing essence, some others like Brian McHale and David Harvey also argue that they are fundamentally and integrally opposed to each other. We draw attention to the complex and ideologically contested nature of modernism as opposed to the ideologically more homogenous character of postmodernism. We try to argue that what we know of modernism today is only a selective picture, and a more holistic view of modernist trends in art and literature is required in order to make more accurate assessments about both modernism and postmodernism.

In the last section of this last chapter, we try to develop our most complex argument about the nature of the novel. We argue that the novel is indeed characterised
by an inclusive and incorporative tendency since the days of its inception and across its multifarious development and spread. However, just to argue that the novel is open-ended and all-inclusive by nature, hardly suffices as a definition for the novel. After all, the novel, if it were free to the point of arbitrariness and complete lack of restrictions, would cease to remain a genre and would become all literature in itself. Therefore, this section of the chapter attempts to discern the pattern in the generic incorporations done by the novel. We try to delineate those literary genres which the Western novel excludes, as well as those types which it includes.

We trace the development of the novel vis-à-vis its two-fold tendency of centralization and fragmentation. While the novel has proliferated and disseminated in the course of its developments, it has also tended to become all the more same in its themes and techniques. We attribute this aspect of the novel to developments in the print industry and the centralized nature of the world under capitalism. At the same time the development of the techniques of the novel can be traced back to the increased fragmentation of the individual subject under capitalism. As capitalism becomes more centralized, the consciousness of people living under capitalism becomes more fragmented. We use this dichotomy to examine the novel, as well as the lack of randomness in its generic inclusions.

The main limitation of our work is that we primarily develop our arguments on the basis of critical and theoretical works on the novel. We also restrict our arguments in the main to the study of only the Western novel. However, we recognize that the development of the novel, particularly over the last few decades, as well as the concept of realism in the novel, can be understood better if the contribution of the non-Western novel is also taken into account. We have, therefore, used occasional references to non-Western novels in order to substantiate some points about the Western novel.