INTRODUCTION

The ‘Novel’ as a literary form, is one of the most notable gifts of Britishers to India. Epics, lyrics, dramas, short stories and fables have their respectable ancestries, going back by several centuries. In one sense India had a rich potential for the novel form than the West. Indian gift of story-telling dates back to the Rigveda and Upanishads. There were cycles of stories in prose and poetry, ‘Thirty two Stories of the Throne’ relating to King Vikramaditya, Somdeva’s ‘Katha Saritasagar’ are perhaps the most reputed and popular in regional languages and Sanskrit. Then there are the Jataka Tales narrating the successive birth of Buddha written in prose. The interesting part is so much of contemporary social realities get into these stories. Dandin’s Dasa Kumar Charita, a 6th century work narrates, the adventures of ten princes in which the day to day life of the people figure prominently and show merit of what we now call the psychological novels and novels of realism. These are virtual handbooks to success in life. Sanskrit literature of course, did have a tradition of prose fiction of which Dandin’s Dasa Kumar Charita (6th century) and Bana Bhatta’s Kadambari (first half of the 7th century) are notable examples. Sanskrit criticism even makes a distinction between two types of novels; ‘The Akadakayika’ built among people and incidents
and 'The Katha' with plots of pure invention which roughly corresponds to the distinction between novel and romance in Western criticism. But as Chaitanya notes that there are not enough examples to substantiate the validity of the form of the distinction. They appear to be isolated marvels. For the novel, proper to be called so, one had to wait till the later half of the nineteenth century, when the Western impact of India's cultural front had resulted among other things, in the development of formal written prose, first as a functional and later as an artistic medium. The translation of Western classics followed. Gradually translations took the form of adaptation, abridgment, and finally creation of original works in distant imitation or under the inspiration of Western models began.

Indian English Fiction, since its birth, has passed through three main phases. The first phase was one of the historical novel. It was, however, a short lived and passing phase. The second is the long-lived phase of the socially and politically conscious novel. It was the phase of social realism. And the third is the phase of the psychological novel with a marked concern for the private and the inner. These phases have, no doubt, overlapped one another but each of them is distinctly noticeable in the respective period of its dominance. A striking feature of Indian English fiction, in the first two phases is the script of nationalism. What the Indian Mutiny of 1857 was to the Anglo-Indian Novelists, the
national movement is to Indo–Anglican novelists. The British impact on the national movement is to last till the quarter of nineteenth century which was almost traumatic; the struggle for freedom was not merely a political alone. It was deeply rooted in emotional and ideological schisms within the psyche of each and every sensitive Indian. Literature became available to the nationalists and revolutionaries as a convenient way of dramatizing and popularizing their cause. The novel, the genre of imaginative literature, which gives artistic form to the relationship of man and society, thus became instrumental in making public the contemporary social reality and national fervor. Indian life was then dominated by politics and it was in no way surprising that a novelist should react to it.

Thus, the emergence of Indian English fiction can be clearly linked to the growth of nationalism, especially among the urban educated elite. This is reflected in the themes and motifs mobilized by writers which show a strong preponderance of patriotic fervor in the early twentieth century, right up to Indian Independence in 1947. With the achievement of Independence, it naturally lost a little of its sheen and the ambivalences and complexities of being a post–independence state began to occupy the creative imagination of the writers. In fact, a simplistic understanding of
Indian English Fiction literature would identify another three phases in the growth of this genre, in addition to the three phases.

The earliest specimen of Indian English Fiction were tales rather than novels, and their use of fantasy on a limited scale, shows their links with the ancient Indian tradition, though the subject matter is contemporary. Kylash Chunder Dutt's 'A Journey of 48 hours' of the year of 1945 appeared in The Calcutta Literary Gazette on 6th June 1835. In this literary fantasy the author narrates the story of an imaginary unsuccessful revolt against the British rule. A hundred years later, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's 'Rajmohan's Wife' is not only an Indian English novel of this period which faithfully follows this pattern, K.S Ramamurti also maintains that the early Indian English novelists were by no means imitators but conscious experimenters who adopted an alien form and medium to social-cultural situation and sensibility which were specifically Indian.

The real beginning in the field of fiction was made by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-94) with 'Rajmohan's Wife' (1864) written in English. This was soon followed by 'Durgeshnandini', 'Kapalkundala', 'Vishavriksha', 'Krishnakant Uyil', 'Anandmath', and 'Devi Choudhurani', which were written in Bengali, later translated into English. 'Anandmath' is his best known novel, which won him national
recognition nearly a decade after his death. He was hailed as the inspired author of the song ‘Bandemataram’, embedded in ‘Anandmath’. After one or two pieces written under the shadow of Bankim, Tagore achieved his first success with ‘Choker Bali’ (1902), later translated into English as ‘Bindoni’. Sarat Caahndra Chatterjee (1876-1938) also went through a Bankim stage and a Tagore stage before outgrowing them in his best works ‘Srikanta Gribhada haunt Dabi SesPrashna’, which were later translated into English. Sarat Chandra identified himself with the downtrodden Indian novel in English, this period seemed to have passed through three stages, writes Annanda Shankar Ray, a prominent Bengali Novelist, “When Bankim wrote the chief question was how to restore the national self respect. In Rabindranath’s it was how to bridge the East and the West. in Sarat Chandra, it was how to identify us with the common people” (1)

By 1930 Indian English Literature was more than century old and had yet not produced a single novelist with substantial output. And then came a sudden flowering when the Gandhian Age (1920-47) had reached its peak during the Civil Disobedience Movement of the thirties. It provided a fertile soil for fiction and it is not surprising that the three major Indian English novelists viz. Mulk Raj Anand, R.K Narayan and Raja Rao began their career during this phase. In fact, it was during this period that
Indian English fiction discovered some of its most significant themes such as the ordeal of freedom struggle, East-West relationship, the communal problems, plight of the untouchables, the landless poor, the economically exploited etc. With the intensification of the freedom struggle political themes bloomed large in the fiction of this period. The earliest example is K.S Venkraman’s ‘Karkan the Patriot’, ‘A Novel of New Indian in the Making’, (1932) a picture of civil Disobedience Movement seen through rose colored spectacles. Anand deals with both communism and Gandhism with irony in ‘The Sword and the Sickle’ (1942), Raja Rao’s Kanthapura (1938) is easily the finest evocation of the Gandhian age in Indian English Fiction.

An interesting literary phenomenon during this period was the use of the ethnic novel represented by a group of Muslim novelists, most of whom wrote about life in Muslim households. The most characteristic note is a nostalgic presentation of the decay of Muslim culture. Ahmed Ali’s ‘Twilight in Delhi’ (1940) presents the decay of a whole culture, a particular mode of thought and living. Iqbalunnia’s Hussairi’s ‘Purdah and Polygamy: Life in Indian Muslim Household’ (1940) describes an intimate picture of a traditional Muslim mercantile household seen through a sensitive feminine eye. Humayun Kabir’s ‘Men and Rivers’
(1945) describes the East Bengal river side scene affected by the changing moods of the river Padma and its impact on the fisher folk.

The post Independence period saw the consolidation of Indian English fiction by leading trio of Anand, Narayan and Raja Rao. With Anand's 'Untouchable' the Indian English novel became truly experimental in technique, both in making the entire narrative a presentation of a single day's happening and in his attempt to probe the thought process of his protagonist. Anand made significant experiment in his other novels, he found roomy form of Dickenson and Russian novel, more convenient for the expression of his humanist and humanitarian convictions, while he gave an Indian coloring to his style. After his episodic first novel 'Swami and his Friends', Narayan made significant experiment with technique in 'The Financial Expert', 'The Guide' and 'The Man eater of Malgudi'. Narayan was able to enlist his good humored irony as a firm and serious moral concern, thus creating serious comedy which has its centre in Malgudi, but has a circumference embracing the entire human condition. He became a single minded (Malgudi) town ironies of his microcosm, developed into an awareness of the larger existential irony of human nature and itself. Raj Rao adopted the form of Hindu 'Sthalpurana' and the 'Harikatha' with their mixture of narration description, religious discourse folk lore while telling a story of freedom struggle in a small
South Indian village Kanthapura and adopted English to Indian
conditions, his native Kannada into English. His 'Serpent and the Rope',
(1960) as an enactment of East-West encounter and as a philosophical
novel, stands out as a magnificent achievement.

The post Independence period marks the beginning of a really
contemporary Indo-Anglican fiction. A whole lot of new novelists like
Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya, Manohar Malgaokar,
Khushwant Singh, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Nayantara Sehgal, Anita
Desai, Santha Rama Rao appeared on the literary scene and lent a hand to
the rapid development of the novel by the importation of new
themes, technical complexity, fictional brilliance and surer sense of grip
on the medium. All these novelists have written about a distinct Indian
scene, its terrible poverty, its agricultural tradition, its ancient and
ritualistic religion, caste system, its post-Independence social milieu. The
post Independence novel, clearly marks out a new phase of emotional
and intellectual growth in Indian Literature. The dislocation, the temper
and disenchantment of the post war and post Independence have had their
impact on the Indo-Anglican novel too.

The Indo-Anglican novel, witnessed a new phase of development in
relation to its imaginative expansion, thematic widening and technical
maturity. Naturally they turned their attention to the internal problems of
the Indian. They came to interpret fictionally the real problems of the
teeming millions, the terrible poverty staring in their face find adequate
treatment in the novels of Kushwant Singh 'I Shall not hear the
Nightangle'(1959), Kamala Markandaya’s ‘Some Inner Furry’ (1955),
Manohar Malgaokar’s ‘A Bend in the Ganges’ (1964), K.S Abba’s
Inqilab (1955), Nayantara Sehgal’s ‘A Time to be Happy’ (1958). ‘The
Chinese Aggression’ forms the setting of BhabaniBhattacharya’s ‘Shadow
from Laddakh’ (1966), Nayantara Sehgal’s ‘Storm in Chandigarh’ a
situation in New Delhi contain some striking and easily recognizable
portraits of leading political personalities. Kushwant Singh’s ‘A Train to
Pakistan’ (1956), B.Rajan’s ‘The Dark Dancer’ (1950), ChamanNahal’s ‘Azai’
(1975), Manohar Malgaokar’s ‘A Bend in the Ganges’ are prominent
novels of partition. The larger theme of East-West encounter of which
Raja Rao’s ‘The Serpent and the Rope’ is a fine evocation, fascinated
many novelists of the period like B.Rajan, Manohar Malgaokar and G.V
Desani. However, it is the women novelists who have offered a very
sensitive treatment of this theme. Jhabvala in her ‘Esmond in
India’ (1958), ‘Heat and Dust’ (1975), Anita Desai’s ‘Bye Bye Blackbird
(1971), Kamala Markandaya’s ‘A Silence of Desire’ (1960), and ‘The
Nowhere Man’ are memorable record of the East-West encounter.
Indian Fiction in English is a living and evolving literary genre. During the period of nationalist movement the subject-matter was inescapably political, after independence a new trend is visible. The travails of freedom struggle, the communal divide and the miseries of the downtrodden have given a place to issues like meaningless existence, alienation and psychological issues and individual groping towards self realization is portrayed, in the novels like ‘She and He’ (1973) by Sasthi Batra, Kamala Das’s ‘Alphabet of Lust’ (1976), Bharti Mukherjee’s ‘Study of the Abnormal Mind of the frustrated Bengali wife in New York’ (1976).

Technique wise the novels up to and in the 1970’s are humanistic. They question tradition but they also strike a compromise with it. In 1981 the publication of Salman Rushdie’s ‘Midnight’s Children’ was considered a sensational literary event. The work seemed to destroy both the sanctity of content and the stable form of Indian English novel. ‘Midnight’s Children’ is a postmodernist deconstructionist account of recent Indian history.

With the possible exception of Salman Rushdie no Indian novelist has earned so much popularity or notoriety as Shobha De. She burst upon the literary scene with her novel in less than a decade. Like the Eighteenth century novelists, Shobha De portrays the myriad facts of contemporary
social reality. She is among the earliest to explore the world of urban woman in India. 'The God of Small Things' (1997) became a literary phenomenon in the literary world, winning for its author, Arundhati Roy, the Booker Prize. She has often been bracketed with Salman Rushdie who put Indian writing on the international literary map. The dawn of the 21st century witnessed VS. Naipul being honored with the Nobel Prize for literature and Jhumpa Lahiri being awarded the Pulitzer prize for literature and for her debut work 'Interpreter of Maladies'.

On the whole Post Independence fiction, especially of the 1980 displays confidence in both experimentation in style and form. The old sociological, historical and political modes of writing have been transformed.

The Indian writing in English has shown richness and diversity and a capacity to accommodate a wide range of concerns. In Mulk Raj Anand a humane concern for the undergone, not just a preconception with economic determinism, in R.K Narayan the comic mode as equivalent to the tragic in his evocation of mediocrity, K. Nagarajan surprises by his sensitive handling of the human significance in the religious and theological labyrinth, so characteristic of Hindu society. While Raja Rao captures the magnificent mythical imagination of Indian antiquity, he has also altered expression to accommodate a distinctly profound Indian
sensibility. One sees this in different degrees in the writers, especially Kamla Markandaya, Santha Rama Rau and Anita Desai who have a fine eye for urban sensibility. Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kushwant Singh, in very different ways, give us valuable insight onto pathos and human degradation caused by political upheavals. In addition to these Nehru, Gandhi, Anand S. Coomarswamy, Aurobindo, Tagore, Nirad Chaudhari and V.S. Naipaul are consciously controversial writers as well as the new voices Arun Joshi, Vikram Seth, Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Shobha De, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri have all helped in recovering and enriching the creative and critical heritage of India.

In the first phase, Indian English Literature reveals itself to be heavily influenced by the colonial masters in its thematic and formalistic choices. The Second phase marks a rejection of this influence and valorization of all that is Indian in contrast to the West. Thus we find many novels extolling the Indian villages in the contrast to westernizing modernizing ethos that posits the modern cosmopolitan city as fit subject for literature.

In the third and final phase, Indian English Literature grew beyond the need for responding to or reacting, and yet, Literature in a deeply political country cannot fail to be political.

The reason why Narayan’s ‘Guide’ is more engaging than Naipaul’s ‘Mystic Masseur’, Kipling’s ‘Kim’ and Raja Rao’s ‘The Serpent and the
Rope’, more significant than E.M. Forster’s ‘A Passage to India’ is ‘The Serpent and the Rope’ begins where ‘A Passage to India’ ends, the spiritual concern begins where the material ends.

Thus now the following chapters would deal with Ruth Prawer Jhabvala’s work. The Chapters would be dealing mainly with the East-West encounter in her novels which affect the man- Woman relationship.

References:-