CONCLUSION
Conclusion

It is an established fact that the famous trio—Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao—shaped the destiny of Indian English fiction. No doubt Anand’s commitment to the cause of exploited in our society is genuine and total as is Raja Rao’s preoccupation with Indian metaphysical tradition but Narayan has distinctiveness of highlighting the dilemma of average men and women of India. The triumph of his fiction is the invention of Malgudi—a microcosm of Indian macrocosm—in which one comes across such characters as Margayya, Jagan, Natraj, Raju, Chandran and Sriram with whom the reader easily identifies himself.

In a Seminar, held in 1996, G. S. Balarama Gupta had remarked that one way of strengthening Indian English literary studies would be to encourage our research scholars to explore new areas for their dissertations instead of repeating work on Anand, Narayan, Raja Rao, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya and similar other authors on whom so much work has already been done, unless of course they have something stunningly original to say about them.¹

Getting a fresh and innovative impetus from the seminar proceedings, it was resolved by the present scholar to attempt something *stunningly original* in Indian writing in English, as Mr Balarama had envisaged. Among the writers mentioned by Mr Balarama, it was found that R. K. Narayan is distinctive as well as 'extraordinary' and has been placed

in the same category of creative achievement as Hemingway or Faulkner,... while John Updike refers to him as 'the foremost Indian writer of fiction in English.'

Graham Greene goes further:

Since the death of Evelyn Waugh, Narayan is the novelist I most admire in English language.

However, the Narayan paradox in the critical analysis and evaluation of Indian writing in English has been quite enigmatic and confusing because far from considering his work modern and post-modern or relating it to the post-colonial critical perspective Narayan has been presented as a conventional Indian writer who represents in an ironical way a sanity, a wholesomeness, a psychological fullness which is

---

as stable as humanity. These things have been discussed in detailed manner in the chapter I of the thesis where an attempt has been made to give a brief yet encompassing resume of the conventional approach to Narayan’s novels which revolves round the argument expressed by Meenakshi Mukherjee’s words, ‘Order — Dislocation of order — Re-integration of order’. It has been established that most of the critics on Narayan and his writings — while discussing his themes, concepts, characterization, imagery and style — believe that his novels return to the inevitable Indian values, reinforcing the strength of tradition: ‘Whatever happens India will go on’. In the chapter, however, it has been pointed out that Narayan’s novels contain the potential and the qualities of being deciphered and scrutinized from a postmodernist reading, particularly so far as his description of men and manners is concerned. In other words, Narayan’s achievement can be perceived in the manner in which he carries forward traditional and spiritual values into the lives of twentieth-century characters in order to see their viability within a new context which might hold the potential of dismantling ‘eternal’ traditions. While Narayan is sympathetic to indigenous culture and its manifestation through myths, there are ironic tonalities at work which make it possible
to relate him to the post-structuralist and post-modernist critical interpretation, particularly the one given by Jacques Lacan. Such an analysis and interpretation has been referred to as 'Lacanian perspective on Narayan's novels'.

Among the structural and post-structuralist critics and theoreticians Jacques Lacan was chosen for two reasons: first, because Lacan is one of the three leading figures in what has been described as 'the most significant intellectual movement of our time'—Derrida and Foucault being the other two — and second, in view of Fredric Jameson's essay 'Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan: Marxism, Psychoanalytic Criticism, and the Problem of the Subject' in which an attempt has been made to 'coordinate a Marxist and a Freudian criticism' in order to establish a link 'between social phenomena and what must be called private, rather than even merely individual facts'. In the essay, Jameson argues that in 'pure' psychoanalytic criticism, the social phenomenon with which the private materials of case history, of individual fantasy or childhood experience, must initially be confronted is simply language itself. Even prior to the establishment of those official social phenomena which are the literary forms and the literary institution as such, language — the very medium of
universality and of intersubjectivity — constitutes that primary social instance into which the pre-verbal, pre-social facts of archaic or unconscious experience find themselves somehow inserted.

In the light of this perspective, Jacques Lacan’s contribution as a psychoanalytic critic and theoretician has been analysed in Chapter II of the thesis. Lacan, while reformulating the Freudian concepts, is not merely aligning himself with the structuralist and the post-structuralist movement (both being same because in the majority of cases the post-structuralists are those structuralists who ultimately realised the limitations of structuralism and as such shifted their stance) but is rather illustrating the way in which the analyst should proceed when listening to and interpreting the discourse of the analysand. The analyst must, in other words, treat the analysand’s discourse as a text: this method of reading is similar to those methods employed by Derrida and his followers. Lacan’s discussions of literary texts also aim at extracting certain elements which serve as metaphors to illustrate some of his most important ideas, concepts, themes and perceptions. For example, in his reading of Poe’s *The Purloined Letter*, Lacan points to the circulating letter as a metaphor for the determinative power of the signifier.
Instead of delineating the psychoanalytic theories of Lacan, which is beyond the scope of the present thesis, the attention has been focussed on three realms of Lacanian analysis — the imaginary, the symbolic and the real — which, according to Lois Tyson\(^3\), comprise along with the concept of ‘the Mirror Phase’ the most reliable way to interpret a literary work through a Lacanian lens. Jacques Lacan (it has been already established in the thesis) as a leading post-Freudian psychoanalytic theorist focused on language and language-related issues while discussing the unconscious and while revising Freud’s concept of the Oedipus Complex. He argued that the pre-oedipal stage is also a preverbal or ‘mirror stage,’ a stage, he associated with the imaginary order. He associated the subsequent Oedipal stage—which roughly coincides with the child’s entry into language—with what he calls the symbolic order, in which words are not the things they stand for but substitutes for those things. The imaginary order and the symbolic order are two of Lacan’s three orders of subjectivity, the third being the real, which involves

intractable and substantial things or states that cannot be imagined, symbolized, or known directly (such as death).

Following Tyson, Narayan’s novels have been analysed in the three chapters in terms of the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real in order to establish that these novels contain everything in terms of theme, language and characterisation that can yield them to a valid and valuable analysis from Lacanian perspective. It has been established that R. K. Narayan like Mulk Raj Anand vividly represent the Indian society and ethos in all its facets, though both are essentially different: while Anand advocates political sentiment which arises out of experience and is settled through action, Narayan insists on retelling myths against a contemporary background, so that even in accepting the timeless relevance of the past, he can test the validity of that past in the present. While telling or retelling ‘myths against a contemporary background’ Narayan affirms what Terry Eagleton has pointed out, that Psychoanalytic Criticism views literature as a kind of ‘escape’ or fantasy, at its best it can bring us as close to the basic concerns of human existence as literature ever gets. No doubt, Narayan places his characters of Malgudi in the Indian tradition and deals exquisitely with Indian mystic tradition, yet the way he delineates
characters, themes, situations, language and imagery bring him close to Jacques Lacan. Hence, the attempt made here, it is envisaged, will gradually infuse the readers and scholars with the spirit to reinterpret the works of major Indian English writers in the light of recent critical and literary theories in order to realise that instead of leading us away from literature and literary texts, as has been argued by those who one way or other are against theory, in Jacques Lacan and other structuralist and post-structuralist theoreticians we have perhaps simply got the messiahs for a proper analysis, appreciation and evaluation of literary artifacts.