Chapter Two

The Rise of Regionalism in Indian English Fiction: A Survey

The recent concepts and ideas related to postcolonial theories which paved the way for the ideological base for regionalism have been briefly summed up in the previous chapter. To comprehend the problematics of regionalism in contemporary Indian English fiction, it becomes essential that its distinct ethnicity be explored. This chapter intends to make a survey of the shifting paradigms of Indian writing in English vis-à-vis the concept of regionalism.

The growth of the novel in India can be traced to the influence of the nineteenth century English novel, especially to the works of Walter Scott, Wilkie Collins and Disraeli. It could also be traced to the indigenous story-telling traditions (Katha tradition) of the Mahabharata, Ramayana and the Puranas. Similarly this tradition could have been adopted from The Panchatantra and the rich tales of the Arabian Nights. Such story-telling traditions use the creative encompassing of realities with subtle connotations to timeless truths. The narrative forms that existed in India in the form of puranas, epics, mahakavyas, romances and ballads were very different from the mono-directional prose narrative models of Europe. In his foreword to The Growth of the Novel in India 1950-1980, Ayyappa Paniker observes:

The single religion, single language, single-race concept of nationhood which came into vogue in post-
Renaissance Europe at about the same time as the rise of the novel as an important form of literary narrative, fostered a linear, chronologically streamlined, single-voice narrative—which was very different from the multi-voice, nonlinear, cyclical, chronologically diversified narrative that had developed in ancient India. (vii)

The oral narrative tradition which was very popular in medieval India, catered to the cultural needs of the people and also formed the basis for their written stories. The richness and density of the traditional Indian narrative dwindled and dwarfed with the colonial influence. The coloniser could easily convince the English educated Indians that their oral tradition and folk culture were inferior. Thus the narrative mould of the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Kadambari and Raghuvamsa were given up in favour of stories that would appeal to the readers, now accustomed to novels written on Western models. However, it must be admitted that the folk traditions of the oral narrative gained importance during the struggle for freedom especially among the illiterate masses. Folk narrative had also existed in the West, but with the urbanization and industrialization which established itself as the "dominant tradition", folk tradition became the "little tradition." But in India, in spite of the growing urbanization and migration from villages to cities, the village tradition remained the "dominant tradition" (Paniker viii). The influence of the Western novel was evident in the narratology and action of the plot as well as in the understanding of Indian characters. As the influence grew
prominent, the novels attempted in English found easy models in the English literary classics.

The origin of the Indian novel in English has been entangled in controversy. Though the 1930s are generally considered as the take off decade for the Indian novel in English, its genealogy can be traced far back to the 1850s or much earlier. Literary critics like Qurratulain Hyder claim that the novel arose from the Persian and Urdu tradition of love poetry and troubadour philosophy. Some others believe that the Indian novel in English arose after 1857 to express the changed socio-political reality in India. The year 1857 which laid the foundation of British power in India and the establishment of the universities in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay aided in providing colonial English education to the Indians and also paved the way for the origin of the novel in India. Another perspective shows that the works of the Indologists which were used to generate interest in the Empire not only introduced the theme of the Other but also gave rise to the genre of the novel in India (Williams and Winchoo 96-98). Apart from these, there are Telugu, Marathi and Bengali chauvinists who argue that the origin of the Indian novel in English is deeply rooted in their respective vernaculars. Literary historians like Srinivasa Iyengar consider the Indian novel in English to be a Western import:

The ‘novel’ as a literary phenomenon is new to India. Epics, lyrics, dramas, short stories and fables have their respectable ancestries going back by several centuries, but it is only during a period of little more
than a century that the novel – the long sustained piece of prose fiction – has taken root in India. (314)

Agreeing with Iyengar, M.K.Naik remarks that “though India was probably the fountain-head of story-telling, the novel as we know today was an importation of the West” (Dimensions 99). From the above mentioned views, it is to be presumed that the novel has evolved out of a profound cultural amalgamation between the existing oral narrative forms and the imposed British form.

Many scholars consider Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s Rajmohan’s Wife (1864) which was serialized in the Calcutta weekly, The Indian Field to be the first Indian novel in English. It was in Bengal that a literary renaissance first manifested itself. Rajmohan’s Wife was Bankim’s initial attempt to write fiction based on a Victorian model to which the colonial education had exposed a new generation of urban Indians. Bankim’s role as a pioneer of the Indian novel was that he used the novel as a means to portray the social reality of the times in the English language as well as in the vernacular (his Bengali novels are Durgesh Nandini and Kopal Kandla). While the novel of realism had to reject all sorts of universalisation, Bankim who was unexposed to the cruelties of feudalism depicted a romantic feudalism in Rajmohan’s Wife akin to Walter Scott. K. S. Ramamurti comments that though the novel remains a faithful study of Bengal in the nineteenth century, it lacks “the democratic spirit”, the same defect shared by the social novelists like Scott and Jane Austen (47). It paved the way for Anand Math (1884), Indian’s first political novel which contains the “Bande Mataram” (later taken as an anthem by protesting young
nationalists) that gave inspiration to the Swadeshi resistance movement against the partition of Bengal in 1905. This claim of Rajmohan’s Wife being the first novel has been challenged by Asha Kaushik in her book, Politics, Aesthetics and Culture (1988) where she states that the first novel written in English in India was by Kylash Chunder Dutt in 1835 and it was a political novel “anticipating the movement for independence, one hundred and ten years in advance of the actual occurrence” (49). On the other hand, we have critics like K.S. Ramamurti who consider Lal Behari Day’s Govinda Samanta or The History of a Bengali Raiyat (1874) to be the first significant Indian novel in English in that it marks the beginnings of a new type of narrative prose. The novel can be considered as a forerunner to Raja Rao’s Kanthapura in not only being a social chronicle of Bengal but also in making the fate of Govinda Samanta to be that of every Indian. In terms of style, the novelist identifies the predicament the Indian English writer would face for the next few decades. In his novel, Day is apologetic in making his Bengali peasants speak an English closer to home grounds: “If I had translated their talk into the Somershire or the Yorkshire dialect, I should have turned them into English and not Bengali peasants” (qtd in Ramamurti 63). The literary renaissance was part of a larger struggle to find out a space for nationalism. The novel, as a genre which dominated contemporary Indian English literature under British influence during the nineteenth century was used by writers to address contemporary social issues. The novels published from the 1860s to the end of the nineteenth century were written by writers who belonged to the English-
educated and white-collared class of Indians and were influenced by the progressive ideals of the Bengal Renaissance. The emergence of the novel in the second half of the nineteenth century exemplifies a complex compromise instead of a mere derivation. In fact, in no other period was the influence of a foreign literature and an alien culture so strong on Indian English literature and society. A passionate attraction for the West and a deep love for India were the two regulating factors of this period. The Indian fictional writers in English displayed their acquaintance with the classics by using epigraphs from Byron, Shakespeare or Coleridge with quotations and references generously woven irrespective of the demands of the narrative (Mukherjee, *Perishable* 18).

Literary historians like K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar (*Indian Writing in English* [1962]), P.P. Mehta (*Indo Anglian Fiction: An Assessment* [1968]) and M.K. Naik (*A History of Indian English Literature* [1982]) have classified the Indian English novels on the basis of their chronology. Of these, Iyengar still remains as one of the most authoritative voices and his seminal book *Indian Writing in English* elaborately discusses the development of the Indian English novel up to the 1970s. Novels published between 1864 and 1900 include Ram Krishna Punt’s *The Boy of Bengal* (1866), Anand Prosad Dutt’s *The Indolence* (1878), Shoshee Chunder Dutt’s *The Young Zamindar* (1883), Trailokya Nath Das’s *Hirimba’s Wedding* (1884), Yogendra Nath Chattopadhyaya’s *The Girl and Her Tutor* (1891), Krupabai Satthianandam’s *Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life* (1894) and *Saguna: A Story of Native Christian Life* (1895), Shevantibai M. Nikambe’s *Ratnabai: A Sketch of a Bombay High Caste Hindu Wife*
(1895) and Michael Madhusudan Dutt’s *Bijoy Chand: An Indian Tale* (1888) and *Lt. Suresh Biswas: His Life and Adventures* (1900).

Though the twentieth century began with novelists of more substantial output, instances of a display of obsequiousness could be seen in their works too. Romesh Chandra Dutt translated two of his own Bengali novels into English: *The Lake of Palms: A Story of Indian Domestic Life* (1902) and *The Slave Girl of Agra, an Indian Historical Romance* (1909). The first, a realistic novel, seems to have been written with the aim of social reform wherein the author makes a spirited plea for widow remarriage, while the latter is a historical romance set in the Mughal period. Sarath Kumar Ghosh, another Bengali novelist, wrote *Verdict of Gods* (1905) and *The Prince of Destiny: The New Krishna* (1909). A. Madhaviah and T. Ramakrishna Pillai, belonging to Madras presidency were two important contemporaries of these Bengali novelists. Madhaviah wrote *Satyananda* (1909), *Thillai Govindan* (1916), *Clarinda* (1915), *Nanda, the Pariah Who Overcame Caste* (1923) and *Lt. Panju-A Modern Indian* (1924). T. Ramakrishna Pillai wrote *Padmini* (1903) and *A Dive for Death* (1911). Another Indian English novelist of prominence was the Punjabi writer Jogendra Singh whose fictional works include *Nur Jahan, The Romance of an Indian Queen* (1909), a historical novel; and *Nasrin, An Indian Medley* (1911), a realistic novel depicting the fall of aristocratic life in North India. Then appeared on the scene novels such as S. T. Ram’s *The Cosmopolitan Hindusthani* (1902), L. B. Pal’s *A Glimpse of Zanana Life in Bengal* (1904), S. B. Banerjee’s *The Adventures of Mrs. Russell* (1909), Balkrishna’s *The Love of Kusuma: An Eastern Love
Story (1910), B. K. Sarkar’s Man of Letters (1911), M. M. Munshi’s Beauty and Joy (1914) and T. K. Gopal Pannikar’s Storm and Sunshine (1916). As stated above, these writers who wrote in the wake of nationalism modeled their works on their English masters, as there was the need to be heard by them. Meenakshi Mukherjee, in her classical study of the emergence of the novel in Indian writing, Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society of India (1985) asserts that these early novelists either derived their works from their European masters or brought about a “synthesis of a borrowed literary form and indigenous aesthetic – as well as cultural expectations . . .” (18). Most of the novels lacked a direct involvement with Indian values and experiences and responded to the Indian society just as any Westerner would have. The recipe for many successful Indian English novels of the times, as remarked by M.K. Naik, was to take an assortment of sadhus, maharajahs, Westernized Indian men and traditional women along with a couple of tiger-hunts, rope-tricks, snakes and elephants and make them perform against a background of communal riots and national uprisings (A History 287). Though the influence of English on the early novels is unmistakable, the novel as a literary form arose not merely due to this external stimulus, “it was rooted in the intellectual needs and aesthetic sensibility of the burgeoning middle class” (Panikkar 156).

The market economy entering rural India, the emergence of the middle class and the superfluous forces of modernisation contributed to the rise of the Indian novel in English. One of the prominent forces of modernisation from the 1920s to the 1940s
was the birth of the scientific temper in the middle-class. The educated middle class eagerly read Western literatures represented by Byron, Shakespeare and Dickens and then constructed the colonial western tradition bilingually. Even at the beginning of the twentieth century when nationalism had become a prominent theme in most of the *bhasha* (term used extensively by G.N. Devy [After Amnesia] to refer to Indian languages) writers, the novelist in English continued to show his unqualified surrender to the foreign ruler. One of the reasons for this servility could be the problem faced by the novelist regarding the uncertainty of his readership. That his target is the Western audience is clearly evident from the detailed documentation and explanatory asides found in his works. As Meenakshi Mukherjee remarks: “The language, English, ruled out any possibility of a regional identity, and any assertion of a broadly *Indian* identity was undertaken generally to emphasize otherness and exoticity rather than to make a political statement” (*Perishable* 15-16).

A similar strain of a discursive argument can be discerned in Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* wherein he points out three distinctive phases which native intellectuals go through in relation to the colonial culture. In the first phase, the native intellectual attempts an “unqualified assimilation” (76). He is inspired by European culture and in doing so he ignores the cultural traditions of the indigenous masses. His writings “correspond point by point with those of his opposite numbers in the mother country” (178-79). In the second phase, the native intellectual who is dissatisfied with copying the colonizer rakes up
childhood memories of the bygone days, as he has never been a part of the indigenous people. The literature thus produced is to use Fanon’s terms “just before-the -battle” (179). He wishes to become a part of the people:

He sets a high value on the customs, traditions and appearances of his people; but his inevitable, painful experience only seems to be a banal search for exoticism. The sari becomes sacred, and shoes that come from Paris and Italy are left off in favour of pampooties, while suddenly the language of the ruling power is felt to burn your lips. Finding your fellow countrymen sometimes means in this phase to will to be a nigger, not a nigger like all other niggers but a real nigger, a Negro cur, just the sort of nigger that the white man wants you to be. Going back to your own people means to become a dirty wog, to go native as much as you can, to become unrecognizable, and to cut off those wings that before you had allowed to grow. (Wretched 178)

The native intellectual realizes that he “can never make colonialism blush for shame by spreading out little-known cultural treasures under its eyes” (180). As he realizes this he throws himself completely into the freedom struggle and “turns himself into an awakener” (179). In the third “fighting phase” a new kind of writing is thus produced. Fanon analyses this phase:
While at the beginning the native intellectual used to produce his work to be read exclusively by the oppressor, whether with the intention of charming him or denouncing him through ethnical or subjectivist means, now the native writer progressively takes on the habit of addressing his own people. (*Wretched* 193)

Nationalism, in the name of a common culture, language and history became the platform for mobilising against the occupying power. By mixing, upturning and dismantling negative representations, the colonised turned identities ascribed to them into positive self-images. In Africa, the Negritude writers glamorized that which was downtrodden and gave spiritual vitality to degrading stereotypes. Elleke Boehmer points out that this kind of anti-imperial cultural nationalism performs a double process of “cleaving” – a cleaving from and a cleaving to. By cleaving from, she means moving away from colonial definitions and a cleaving to which means borrowing and appropriating linguistic and textual forms of colonial power (105-06). In order to combat with the disregard shown by imperial powers, nationalist movements focused in the building of a “true” national character in literature as well as in other forms of cultural life. Though such inventions helped, as discussed in the previous chapter, in the early phases anti-colonial nationalist movements were orchestrated by elites and it excluded the self-expression of the less empowered. The elites who had access to both Western and local cultures were alienated from both: “To be true to oneself in
borrowed robes” says Boehmer, was the core dilemma of the colonial nationalist (115). Though the elites challenged imperial rule, they found that it could prove advantageous to them if they made a few compromises with it. No matter how hard they tried, they were considered different and were ridiculed for imitating the Europeans. This made the nationalist writers attempt at a self-reconstruction by retrieving their lost identity and traditional past.

The Gandhian movement left its inevitable impact on the people of India as was reflected in the Indian English writings of the period. This corresponds to Fanon’s description of “just before-the-battle” phase where the native intellectual tries to break himself free from the coloniser’s culture. The sudden flowering of realistic novels during the 1930s could be attributed to this influence. The nation-wide movement of Gandhi, not only inspired Indian English novelists but also provided them with some of their prominent themes such as the struggle for freedom, the East-West encounter, the communal problem and the miserable condition of the untouchables, the landless poor, the downtrodden, the economically exploited and the oppressed (Naik, A History 118). In this period, Gandhism and Marxism co-existed, both being driven by the same anti-imperialistic impulses. The Progressive Writers’ Movement brought socialists of different hues on a common platform, reinforcing the shared contemporary concerns, especially the mobilisation of the underprivileged. Social realism enabled Indian writers to explore the social contradictions which were not articulated earlier in their writings. Indian English novelists, akin to the bhasha writers were quick to seize upon the marginalised as
protagonists for their works. A case in point is Bakha (in Anand’s *Untouchable*) who became the first ever low caste underdog in Indian English fiction to hold the spotlight as protagonist.

The impact of the far-reaching change on the Indian social and political scene caused by the Gandhian movement can be perceived in K. S. Venkatramani’s *Murugan, the Tiller* (1927) and *Kandan, the Patriot: A Novel of New India in the Making* (1932). The former reflects Gandhian economics while the latter reflects his politics. A. S. P. Ayyar’s novels like *Baladitya* (1930) and *Three Men of Destiny* (1939), although untouched by the twentieth-century models and set in ancient Indian history, are Gandhian in spirit. They were followed by K. Nagarajan’s *Athavar House* (1937) and *Chronicles of Kedaram* (1961), a novel which picturises life in a town on the Coromandel Coast affected by the Gandhian whirlwind in the thirties. From the 1920s to the 1950s, the Big Three, to use William Walsh’s term—Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao personify popular discourses in colonialism, nationalism, and tradition and modernity in fiction in their own distinctive manner. Mulk Raj Anand, a founding member of Progressive Writers Association, brings the dehumanising conditions that were present in Indian society into sharp focus in his novels such as *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936), *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937). His famous trilogy, *The Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1940), and *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942) depicts a strong protest against social injustices. The novel series span a very turbulent period of
Indian history from the beginning of the First World War to the nationalism and socialism of the 1920s. This period of creative turbulence that fired Mulk Raj Anand's imagination was the same that had produced Premchand's *Godaan*, Thakazhi's *Chemmeen*, Gopinath Mohanty's *Paraja*, K.A. Abbas' *Inquilab*, Phaneswarnath Renu's *Maila Anchal* and Sivarama Karanth's *Chomana Dudi*. Anand’s protagonists “pushed by coercive institutions of rural power supported by economic and colonial authority, were at once representative of the modern working class India, and the traditional caste system”(Williams and Winchoo 100). He attempts to subvert both the high Brahmin and colonial cultures by giving the untouchables a voice through the English novel. Meenakshi Mukherjee comments on Anand’s protagonists: “The heroes of Mulk Raj Anand are rugged individualists who suffer because they refuse to conform. Munoo the coolie, Bakha the untouchable, Bhiku the chamar, Lal Singh of the trilogy - all are persecuted by society for their non-conformity but all of them are indomitable in spirit”(*Twice Born* 77). While Anand treats the problem of untouchability in his *Untouchable*, it is the inhumanity of the white tea-planters of Assam that he voices in *Two Leaves and a Bud*. Iyengar notes that “in writing of the pariahs and the bottom dogs rather than of the select and the sophisticated”, Anand has ventured into a new territory which had been till then largely ignored by Indian English writers (333). Gandhi’s influence helped shape his social conscience and prompted him to use a simplified language in his fictional works.
If Anand dealt with social reality, R.K. Narayan wrote about the effects of social institutions in the life of an individual. The fictional south Indian town of Malgudi serves as the locale for virtually all his works—Swami and Friends (1935), The English Teacher (1945), The Financial Expert (1952), Waiting for the Mahatma (1955), The Guide (1958), The Vendor of Sweets (1967), The Painter of Signs (1976) A Story Teller’s World (1989) and The World of Nagaraj (2001). The Guide, which won the Sahitya Akademy award in 1960 and remains the author's most critically acclaimed novel, describes the transformation of the protagonist, Raju from a tour guide to a spiritual guide. Waiting for the Mahatma, a love story set against the backdrop of the Gandhian freedom struggle brings in episodes of Gandhi’s visit to Malgudi and the chaos prevalent after Gandhi’s arrest. Iyengar commends the masterful ease with which he handles an alien language “that conveys the subtlest shades of feeling and thought” (384). Narayan’s art, the critic opines, is one of “resolved limitation and conscientious exploration” (Iyengar 360). The main preoccupation of Narayan’s novels is the middle class with their tension and anxieties. The gentle irony and humour that he extracts from the ordinary life of south India through Malgudi has been Narayan’s strength as a writer. Despite being proficient writers of Indian English literature, it was only with the support rendered by E.M. Forster to Mulk Raj Anand and Graham Greene to R.K. Narayan that enabled the initial publication and acknowledgement of their works in the international arena.
Raja Rao, along with Anand and Narayan form the remarkable triad of Indian fiction of the thirties. His first novel, *Kanthapura* set in a small south Indian village (1938) is perhaps “the finest evocation of the Gandhian age in Indian English fiction” (Naik, *A History* 166). *Kanthapura* shows how the nationalist urge fused with their traditional religious beliefs completely transforms the lives of the villagers. There is a marked intellectual shift from Raja Rao’s first novel, *Kanthapura* to his later works like *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) and *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965) after he adopts Vedantic philosophy. In the novel *The Chess Master and His Moves* (1988), Rao uses the metaphor of a chess game to animate philosophical and psychological ideas.

As a novelist and a trend setter, Rao is very different from Anand. William Walsh considers Anand as “a man of the future committed to science and Marxist humanism” and Rao as one with “a profound sense of richness and creativity of the past, metaphysical, poetic, traditional” (67-68). In Anand’s works, locutions, idioms and images in the Indian vernacular are rendered directly into English. As Anand himself mentions in one of his interviews, none of his characters would ever use the expression, “Get the hell out of here” but it would be something like “Jao Jao hawa khao” which is a literal translation of ‘Go and eat the air’. He comments on his own style: “You’ll find that two-thirds of my narrative is symptomatic of or echoed from the native consciousness. Dialogue is almost completely translated, up to 90 percent, from Punjabi or Hindustani into English” (“Interview” 110). Anand’s claim that he has been able to enrich the English language
by introducing Indian metaphors, is debatable. Over usage of Indian terms leaves them bereft of any meaning. Critics like B.R. Agrawal and M.P. Sinha comment on the “idiosyncrasies and purposeless verbiage” (257) of his style. Dieter Riemenschneider comments on Anand’s experimentation:

Though Anand’s experimentation with style must be regarded interesting, objections raised by a number of critics have not failed to point out certain weaknesses but, at the same time no other Indian English writer has yet achieved to establish for the novel a distinct style in the way the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe succeeded with regard to the African novel in English. (“The Indo-English Novel” 59)

Rao’s method, on the other hand, of realising an Indian sensibility in the English language is subtler than that of Mulk Raj Anand. Walsh remarks: “His writing is closer to speech, and he is able to use the rhythms of speech— and particularly the intimate, sharing rhythm of folk speech— to indicate character, feeling and a vast tissue of assumptions and beliefs” (68). It is precisely this method of Rao that works through his story of Kanthapura. Rao’s strategy is to Indianise while Narayan uses the English language in a bare etymological fashion. “In attempting to keep his language free of cultural nuances by employing a correct international register, Narayan’s English might appear trite or unoriginal”, opines Anjali Roy in her essay “Making New Words/Worlds: Options for the Indian Novelist in English” (76). While Rao recommends and practises cultural difference, Narayan strives to free the language
of all cultural associations and to bridge the coloniser/colonised gap by bringing the language under the canopy of one great tradition of English literature. Perhaps this quality of Narayan’s writings gives it a universality rather than an Indian sensibility. Shashi Deshpande remarks that his characters lacked any complexity or subtlety which led to a style of writing that was naïve and pedestrian (“Paved the Ways”). Shashi Tharoor criticises him for “the narrowness of his vision, the predictability of his prose, and the shallowness of the pool of experience and vocabulary from which he drew.” He compares him to Jane Austen “whose fiction was restricted to the concerns of a small society portrayed with precision and empathy” (“The Comedies”). But this is exactly why M.K. Naik considers Narayan to be one of the earliest and “greatest exponent” of the genre of regional fiction in Indian English literature (Twentieth 206). Iyengar opines that Narayan’s Malgudi caters to a small area as against the vastness of Hardy’s Wessex and Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha County (384). However, recent regional fiction in Indian English reveals that though Narayan’s novels convey an intimate sense of place through his Malgudi, they can never be termed regional. Iyengar further points out that in the background of Malgudi “too much perhaps is sought to be made out of hackneyed Indian motifs like cobras, Bharatanatyam and bogus sadhus” (384). On examining the novel from a regional perspective, it is evident that Malgudi was the focal point into which Narayan concentrated his entire vision of the Indian experience. Stressing on the universality of the characteristics of Malgudi, Narayan himself says in his introduction to Malgudi
Days: “If I explain that Malgudi is a small town in South India I shall only be expressing a half-truth, for the characteristics of Malgudi seem to me to be universal”(8).

A similar view can be taken regarding Rao’s Kanthapura. Though one agrees that the Kannada speaking inhabitants of Kanthapura are more realistic, it has to be admitted that Rao has not been totally free in creating a locale with an identity of its own. What happens there is what happened in every part of India during the nationalist struggle for freedom. In the same way, Anand’s novels seem to emphasise the universal as against the particular - “as if Bakha is all ‘untouchables’, Munoo is all ‘coolies’ (Iyengar 356). Likewise, the African writers Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa-Thiong’o and Wole Soyinka locate their fiction and affirm the cultures of their specific communities- the Igbo, Gikuyu or Yoruba. Unlike the earlier writers like Kwame Nkrumah and Leopold Senghor, these new writers have been successful in portraying the culture of a particular society. But here too, the community presented goes on to become a metonym for the entire African nation. This bears parallels with Rao’s Kanthapura and Narayan’s Malgudi where these villages become metonymic of India. The critic, P.P. Raveendran observes that a close reading of any of these works would reveal that what nationalism meant to the writers of the period was “a shift of emphasis from the city to the village, and from the “virtues” of “English” English to specifically Indian varieties of the English language (“Nationalism” 154). He argues that though the novel affects a break from the tradition at the level of thematic material, it fails to produce any major change
at the level of sensibility. The narrative of *Kanthapura* could be viewed, as appropriating the discourse of orientalism to represent what it thought was the Indian reality (“Nationalism”157). Nevertheless, it would be fatuous to discredit these authors who were inspired by nationalism and patriotism as lacking in authenticity. In fact, their writings are renderings of what they took to be objective reality. It must be acknowledged that the “Big Three” have taken a great step in deconstructing the pan-Indian reality and setting the possibility of regional identities in Indian fiction in English.

The appearance of many women novelists during this period added a new dimension to the Indian English novel. Revisiting writings by Indian women writers of the nineteenth century and assessing the literary examinations of the Indian woman’s personality, her environment and challenges, one can easily see how they had to combat problems with language and marginalisation. Condemned to a crushing loss of presence in literature, women writers of the nineteenth century falteringly started to engage feminist discussions in an attempt to challenge the subordination and multiple manipulation of women. It was however, only post-independent India that galvanized the emergence of women writers, reinforcing their specific roles. Writers such as Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal and Anita Desai join the male trio as India’s best known writers in English until the emergence of the Rushdie generation. Jane Austen, Emily Bronte, and Virginia Woolf had been inspiration for women writers all over the world and in India too, to
come out of the woods and to use fiction as an effective tool against subversion. They had helped women writers to redirect attention to women’s experience and their roles in society, to enable them to create opportunities for themselves, to define their own needs and values and strategies and goals, and also to respond to the social, economic and political needs of the time. The post-independence women writers realized how women had been appropriated and metaphorised out of existence in movements of resistance and regeneration and took upon themselves the mission of showing how women could contribute positively to social regeneration like men.

Kamala Markandaya can be placed next only in position to the trio. Her first work, *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) explores the impact of industrialization on a small south Indian town and the travails faced by Rukmani, the peasant heroine of the novel. This novel will be taken up for a detailed discussion from the perspective of regionalism in the third chapter of this dissertation. Another novelist of the period is Ruth Prawer Jhabvala whose first novel, *To Whom She Will*, appeared in 1955. Her novels depict ironically the life and manners of Indian middle class families, Europeans trying to understand India and the clash between Eastern and Western cultures. Other novels like Attia Hossain’s *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) and Santha Rama Rao’s *Remember the House* (1956) deal with the story of a woman’s struggle for independence and a young woman’s development from immaturity to a sense of reality. A new subject matter was brought into Indian fiction by Nayantara Sahgal as she expresses
her indignation at the infringement of the people’s rights by the arrogant politicians in her novels like *This Time of the Morning* (1968), *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969) and *Rich Like Us* (1985). Anita Desai’s earliest work *Cry the Peacock* (1963) and *Voices in the City* (1965) deal competently with traditional beliefs and customs enfeebled by modernity. Both Kamala Markandaya and Anitha Desai initiated the beginnings of the diasporic novel by locating themselves in the West and writing about the middle and subaltern classes in their fiction. But of the two, Markandaya has been criticized on the grounds that she lacked a total understanding of the life of the poor and her novels were written to project India to the Western readers.

The post-independence period explored the consequences of partition on Indian culture. The founding fathers of fiction – Anand, Narayan and Rao continued writing during this period and were succeeded by writers like Bhabhani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgonakar and Khushwant Singh. Bhabhani Bhattacharya’s novels – *So Many Hungers* (1947) and *He Who Rides the Tiger* (1954) deal with the subjects of famine and caste in a pan-Indian setting. Apart from these his other novels include *Music for Mohini* (1952), *A Goddess named Gold* (1960) and *Shadow from Ladakh* (1966). Manohar Malgonkar’s *A Bend in the Ganges* explores the sheer frenzy that possessed the people in Punjab in the August of 1947. A similar glimpse of the partition horror is depicted in his novel *Distant Drums*. Balachandra Rajan’s *The Dark Dancer* (1959) is an illustration of the emphatically formal English still used by Indian English writers. Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* (1956) deals
with the communal massacres that followed the partition of India and the events are narrated as seen through the eyes of the Sikh and Muslim inhabitants of the Punjabi village of Mano Mijra. Menon Marath’s novel *Wounds of Spring* (1961) is firmly rooted in the soil of Kerala and describes the disintegration of the traditional matriarchal Nair family during the second decade of the twentieth century. The events in the novel are also shaped by the Moplah rebellion of 1921. For the few decades during the freedom struggle, the Indian English novelist testified his intense concern with the national movement for political independence. Nationalism being a pan-Indian experience, it was best expressed in the pan-Indian language of modern India. To discuss the social change that set in after independence, the Indian English novelist chose certain basic models which were familiar to all Indians. Whether it was Mulk Raj Anand writing about a village in Punjab, or Attia Hosain writing about the Muslim family in Lucknow, or Marath about the joint family in Kerala, “the underlying situation is real to all Indians, and lies very close to their immediate experience” (Mukherjee, *Twice Born* 35). The formidable task of confronting the great deal of regional variations—historical, social, cultural and geographical—in a country like India was solved by resorting to such “Indian” themes which would appeal to both the pan-Indian reader and the Western reader alike.

After the 1960s, Indian English fiction like its Western counterpart shifted its focus from the public to the private sphere. The nuclear holocaust of the Second World War brought about unrest and anxiety all over the world and the situation gave rise to
psychological disorders and loss of moral values. Responding to the new era, world literature started to deal with the gloom of modern society. Indian novelists could not remain aloof from these currents. They were not exclusively concerned with the exploration and interpretation of a social milieu, but dealt with new subjects of human existence and man’s quest for self. The central thematic concern of the Indian English novel of the 1950s and 60s shifted to new avenues charting a new literary path: “i) search for identity in a metaphysical or ethnic sense as in the novels of Raja Rao, B.Rajan and Kamala Markandaya, and ii) the introvert’s probings into the inner mind, as in Anitha Desai’s novels” (Kirpal 23). This shift of focus in Indian English fiction becomes clearer particularly with Anita Desai and Arun Joshi who explore the agonized existence of modern man in their writings. Anita Desai made her debut as a novelist in 1963 with *The Peacock*. In many of her works, Anita Desai has highlighted the tensions among the family members and estrangement of middle class women. It was followed by *Voices of the City* (1965), a story about three siblings and their different ways of life in Calcutta. Her other novels include *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), *Clear Light of Day* (1980), *In Custody* (1984) and *Fasting, Feasting* (1999). Her novel, *The Zig Zag Way* (2004) is set in twentieth-century Mexico. The other new voices of the late sixties and seventies belong to Arun Joshi and Chaman Nahal. This sense of alienation also reflects the situation of the Indian writers in English in the fifties and sixties where by possessing an education and elite status, they remain separated from the masses.
The 1970s witnessed many events like the collapse of Nehru’s mixed economy, urban unemployment, food riots in Bihar and Bengal, anti-price rise and railway strikes. But nothing affected the middle class Indian English writer as much as the declaration of the Emergency by Indira Gandhi (1975-77). With her authoritarianism, she replaced the British ruler as the protagonist of the novels written during the earlier period. Resistance to the emergency made writers take up themes of social engagement, woman’s empowerment, democratic freedom and minority representation. The first to capture this theme was Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1980). Viney Kirpal points out that when Raja Rao speaks of the injustice done to India in *Kanthapura*, his aim is to create an awareness among his fellowmen on the exploitative aspects of colonization but when Rushdie evokes history, his objective is “not to raise public consciousness or to inspire empathy” but “to direct a frontal attack at the state for its ideology of power and authoritarianism against its own people” (26). Shashi Tharoor’s *The Great Indian Novel*, Nayantara Sahgal’s *Rich Like Us* and Rohinton Mistry’s *Such a Long Journey* are other fictional works which deal with the Emergency Period. Makarand Paranjape, in his essay “Post-Independence Indian English Literature: Towards a New Literary History” makes a very illuminating comment on the new position occupied by the fictional writings of Indian English:

> Indian English Literature is a contest over the nature, identity and ultimately the destiny of modern India. Of late, the realistic, modernistic, pessimistic mode of the
The concept of unity that was pivotal to the years of nationalist struggle and the building of the new nation-state has been displaced by an urgent need to question the nature of that unity. The homogeneity depicted in the earlier Indian English novels was not a realistic representation of Indian society. As the success of the nation-state depended on its projection of cultural oneness, it was achieved by means of a strategy whereby the inconvenient complexities would be left out in order to simplify the narratives and present it as a single, unified whole (Mukherjee, *Realism* 93). This clearly explains why the Indian English novel of the eighties is different from its precursors both in technique and sensibility. Though the portrayals of the regions, the downtrodden, the women and the quest for self-identity have continued to be fictionalised in the novels of the 1920s and the 1980s, the difference lies in the technique and the outlook of the new Indian English novelist. The novels which have been written up to the 1970s, question tradition but at the same time strike a compromise with it. Viney Kirpal identifies the methods employed by the writers of the 1980s: “Official versions of history, patriarchal ...
versions of womanhood, class /caste versions of the subaltern are the discourses that are being contested and undermined by the post 1980s Indian English novelists” (27). In the novels of the eighties, there is an aggressive attempt to install the subaltern higher than his inherited position. In exchanging the two new-born babies in *Midnight’s Children*, Rushdie installs the subaltern where the member of the higher class would have liked to be. Similarly, in rewriting the Ekalavya episode in *The Great Indian Novel*, Tharoor reveals the machinations of the privileged in not allowing the subaltern to be installed higher than his station. Making a frontal attack on the stereo types about women has been a prominent feature in the feminist novels of the 1980s. Novels by Shashi Deshpande and Nayantara Sahgal dismantle prevalent notions about women and foreground certain “woman’s experience.”

Though there was a mass mobilisation of the people during and after the period of nationalism, the elitist power continued to dominate. It was however the socio-political events in the 1990s that brought the backward classes of northern India to the forefront of politics. It is to be noted that the electoral participation of the backward classes and their representation in assemblies was much higher than in the bygone years. This was something that did not happen during the nationalist movement and the feeling of empowerment amongst the OBCs and the Dalits has been stronger since the 1990s. In his introduction to *Indian Fiction of the Nineties* (1997), R.S. Pathak points out that novelists are resorting to complex techniques of narration as they have become aware that “the issues pertaining to the Indian subcontinent cannot be
easily and simplistically rendered”(x). The disjointed narrative structure of the new novels in Indian English have led to a reconsideration of the national form and in fact to “a veritable redefinition of the nation itself as plural and multiple with a variety of voices, many contradictory, but each with a validity and ground of its own” (Padma 21).

A major charge levelled against Indian English fiction, especially those written till the last quarter of the last century, was that it lacked a regional base. Even so it should be admitted that the enchantment with the regional culture with its rich aura of folk legends has its beginnings in a work like Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura*. Though the novel was hailed as a trend setter, its mode of narration and style were severely criticised by critics reared in the British traditions. The later revolution of Indian English fiction has in a sense validated Raja Rao’s bold experiment. Today the Indian English novel has built up a remarkable tradition of ethnic and regional variety. During the last thirty years, i.e., from the eighties a new generation of Indians writing fiction in English has come to the forefront. Very strong efforts have been made to liberate English from the yoke of colonialism. The gradual expanse of the reading public among the middle classes and the transformations in the publishing industry have had sweeping implications for fictional writings in English. The situation was very different nearly forty years ago, when P. Lal’s Writers Workshop was the only publisher. New writers have found outlets through many recently opened publishing houses like Dronequill (Bangalore), Hachette India (Delhi), Westland Publications, Peacock Books (New Delhi).
and Frog Books (Mumbai). Indian branches of established publishing houses like Penguin, Picador, HarperCollins and Random House have also continued to encourage new writers. Indian English has firmly staked its claim into being considered as one of India’s literatures.

New writers draw upon their cultural resources to express their alterity and not to exhibit it as exotic. While the earlier writers of twentieth century emphasized their experience of alienation and distrusted the language, it is imperative for the new writers in Indian English to create a meaningful identity in a new way. As noted, writers of the eighties provided a new dimension of realism to Indian English fiction which it lacked in the past. They no longer hesitate in pouring out an entire novel in verse or continuing metaphors through their narrative as Shashi Tharoor does in The Great Indian Novel or in using the method of the ‘nama’ or chronicle to unseat European historiography as does Allan Sealy in The Trotter Nama (1988). G.N. Devy remarks that in the eighties “nationalism was a dead theme” and the emphasis now was on “regionalism and sectarianism” (“The Indian English Novel”14). Writers like Balraj Khanna(A Nation of Fools1984) and Pratap Sharma(The Days of the Turban 1986) deal with the region of Punjab in their novels. Boman Desai’s The Memory of Elephants(1988) asserts and defines the ethnic identity of the Parsi community in India. Kerala is the setting of The Death of a Harijan (1984) by P. Thomas. Kunjaram Hills (1984) by S. Gopalan is set in the region between Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The Vultures (1984) by Vasudeva Reddy is a study of the rural life in Andhra Pradesh and
the rustic life of Orissa has been considered in Manoj Das’ *Cyclones* (1987). The writers of this period show a greater self confidence in exploring the specific identities of varied regions and ethnic communities of India. In one of his works, Devy comments on the new techniques employed in Indian English fiction:

> Moreover, the Indian writers in English have started enjoying telling stories in the rambling manner of the *Kathasaritsagar*, and telling them in some or the other Indian register of English. No longer do they name their heroes Rama and their heroines Rosy; now they name them Chamcha or Bhagmati. No longer do their characters wander to Paris or London in self-search; these days the self can be found at the end of a journey from Bombay to Delhi, and oftener in one’s own city. (*In Another Tongue* 111-12)

John Mee in his essay “After Midnight: The Novel in the 1980s and 1990s” considers Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1980) to have set forth a new trend in fictional writing in the Indian literary scene. His postmodern style challenged the grand national narratives by celebrating hybridity and fragmentation. This paved the way for a new group of expatriate Indian writers including Farukh Dhoondy and Rohinton Mistry who started writing about versions of “home”. Both these writers express the pathos in the marginalised Parsi way of living in their novels- *Poona Company* and *Such a Long Journey* (1991) respectively. In India, a new crop of fiction writers like Gurucharandas, Amitav Ghosh, Upamanyu Chaterjee, Shashi Tharoor and Vikram Seth attracted a much larger
readership than ever before. The novels of the eighties simultaneously challenged and reinforced the national framework without totally renouncing it. By challenging the official versions of the nationalist historiography, post-Rushdie novels like Mukul Kesavan’s *Looking through the Glass* (1995) replace nationalist politics with region based loyalties. Magic realism has been used by writers like Suniti Namjoshi in her *The Mothers of Maya Diip* (1989), *Yatra*, Nina Sibal’s debut novel and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s *The Mistress of Spices* (1997). During the 1990s a number of women authors made their debut in the field of fiction. The list of Indian women novelists comprises popular names such as Arundhati Roy, Jaisree Misra, Kavery Nambisan, Anita Nair and Kiran Desai. During this period, Indian English fiction included science fiction and mystery novels into its repertoire. The pioneer of science fiction, Jayant Narlikar’s *The Return of Vaman* (1989) and *The Message from Aristarchus* (1992), and Amitav Ghosh’s *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996) are a few novels that belong to this category. Mystery novels include Manohar Malgonkar’s *Bandicoot Run* (1982) and *The Garland Keepers* (1987); N.C. Menon’s *Mystery on the Mountain* (1986), Shashi Warrier’s *The Orphan* (1998) and *Sniper* (1999) and Vikram Chandra’s *The Srinagar Conspiracy* (2000). Children’s fiction, especially by women writers which also became prominent after the eighties include Suniti Namjoshi’s *Aditi and the One-eyed Monkey* (1986); Kavery Bhatt’s (now Kavery Nambisan) *Once Upon a Forest* (1986), *The Cuckoo Clock* (1986), *The School Upon a Hill* (1992); Geeta
At this juncture it would be pertinent to briefly outline the need to distinguish the English of the erstwhile imperial centre and the “english” which as a linguistic code has been transformed into several distinctive varieties throughout the world, as suitably substantiated by Ashcroft et al. in *The Empire Writes Back* (1989). Postcolonial writing has been written out of the tension between the two processes of appropriation and abrogation (38). Abrogation is the rejection of standard English and appropriation is the process wherein the English language is brought under the influence of the vernacular tongue. The new “english” thus created is entirely different from the language of the centre and has been utilized in various ways to express widely differing cultural experiences (39). The writers felt the need to express their distinct subjectivity as they became concerned to legitimate from their particular geographic and cultural perspective. It was necessary that their literature had to “represent the struggles, passions and landscapes that lay close to the colonized hearts” (Boehmer 189). They attempted to hammer out on the anvil of their experience a language more closely moulded to their environment. The language has been broken up into a number of “splinter forms” which is no longer English but a multiplicity of “englishe”s” (Boehmer 210). Writers from India and Africa like Rao and Achebe whose possession of English is “native” find it inappropriate to describe the fauna, geographical conditions and cultural practices
of their lands. In the foreword to *Kanthapura*, Rao discusses the problems of cultural identity and specificity in an alien language:

> The telling has not been easy. One has to convey in a language that is not one’s own the spirit that is one’s own. One had to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use the word alien, yet English is not an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up-like Sanskrit or Persian was before- but not of our emotional make-up. (vii)

He further adds that the very tempo of Indian life should be infused into our English expression. Rao admits that it is difficult for the Indian writer trained in the Queen’s English to play on the associations of words to make use of the kind of rich cultural heritage being available for the writers in other Indian languages, to convey that “spirit of one’s own.” Chinua Achebe’s use of the language closely resembles that of Rao. On the practice of indigenizing English, he observes: “I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be new English, still in communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit the new African surroundings” (*Morning* 103).

Therefore the need arises for the postcolonial writing to define itself by “seizing the language of the center and replacing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place” (Ashcroft et al., *Empire Writes Back* 38). This refashioning of the language can be
done through strategies like inserting untranslated words into the
texts by discarding glossing, by refusing to follow standard English
syntax and by using structures derived from other languages. The
postcolonial writers have been successful in creating a new identity
by adapting their own linguistic, cultural and sociological contexts
in their writings. In his lecture on “The Future of Englishes”, David
Crystal opines that the language as used by various communities
in unique ways is being increasingly shaped by a “regionally
specific cultural content” (10). The new English(es), he feels, do
not show great variations in pronunciation and grammar but they
increasingly display cultural differences which are reflected
primarily in the lexicon (11). The language which operates in this
way achieves what a simple translation could never have. The
texture, sound, rhythms and syntax of the original language
determines the shape and mode of the English variant (Ashcroft
Post-Colonial 181).

The absence of glossing in Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*
reflects a new self confidence of the Indian English writers in the
use of the language. Like Rushdie, Arundhati Roy too displays a
creative inventiveness in breaking all the rules of standard English
and creating a new register close to the vernacular Indian tongue.
Both in Rushdie and in Roy, the wordplay is sustained through a
supreme command over the language. “The meanings of
unfamiliar Indianisms which emerges from the context”, says Anjali
Roy, “must be negotiated by the western reader in the same
manner other culturally embedded terms are deciphered” (78).
This refusal to make concessions for the Western reader marks a
new phase in the writing of fiction in Indian English. Amitav Ghosh too intersperses his fictional works like *The Circle of Reason* (1986) and *The Shadow Lines* (1988) with nativisms devoid of glossing but they are embedded in the standard English structure. These writers have been successful in using the language to express the depth and range of their experience. John Mee asserts that this rewriting of English into a new one by incorporating the dialogue of the Indian regional languages is achieved by bringing “different languages into comic collision, testing the limits of communication between them celebrating India’s linguistic diversity, and taking over the English language to meet the requirements of an Indian context (320). Hereby, English gets implicated into the polyphony of Indian languages and its colonial authority gets relativised by entering into the complexity which it describes.

The novelists who belong to “The New Indian Novel in English” (a brand patented by Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*) have been identified by their use of “english”, by their unseating of history and their usage of Indian narrative methods in their fictional works. The main contention against these novelists has been that the history they rewrite is elite history and their ‘oral’ narrative methods privilege caste and class thereby excluding ethnic communities and regional histories (Padma 136). It is even doubted if the elite, upper class writer in his representation of India either elides or ignores the unpleasant aspects like poverty, violence and disease. There are critics like R.S. Sharma who go on to criticize the new novelists possessing a good English education and being steeped in Western fiction “have
succumbed to the western version of India and know which ‘facts’ about this country have a tremendous appeal” (13).

It is to be inferred from the above discussion that the writers of the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries have been successful to a very large extent in recreating their experiences in a new language moulded to suit their purposes and in incorporating the regional flavour to their writings. The change in circumstances today has encouraged the creativity and experimentation of Indian writers who have been freed from the constraints of authentic Queen’s English. The new crop of writers since the nineties have come to maturity at a time when self-expression and self-assertion have given a new breath of life to Indian writing in English by the valorization of regional and local identities (Williams and Winchoo 23-24).

In her most widely known book dealing with the themes and techniques of the Indian novel in English, *The Twice Born Fiction: Themes and Techniques of the Indian Novel in English*. (1971), Meenakshi Mukherjee applauds Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai’s *Chemmeen* for its highly localized theme dealing with the fisher folk of Allepey, a district in Kerala. The critic feels that Indian English fiction failed to depict such themes of regional flavor primarily due to the uncertainty of their readers and also due to the self consciousness of using a foreign language. Mukherjee further remarks that “the few novels which have succeeded are usually the ones firmly rooted in time and place; yet most Indo-Anglian novelists are constantly aiming at an Indianness bereft of temporal and spatial values” (195). Accordingly, “the future of
Indo-Anglian fiction seems to lie in the direction of further authenticity through exploiting the particular, local and regional reality . . . rather than straining to find another of the very few available ‘all-India’ themes“(196). This authenticity can be achieved only if the regions are “localised geographically and emotionally”(194) and the novelist grapples with “the particular, the concrete and the immediate” (196). The upsurge of the reading public among the middle classes and the successful efforts by contemporary novelists to appropriate the language to suit a particular milieu, have attributed to an interest in local and regional histories, thus paving the way for regionalism in Indian English fiction. Tracing the changing perception of the nation in Indian English fiction, Shyamala Narayan notes that the contemporary Indian English novelists no longer essentialise India but instead portrays its pluralism (“Changing Perceptions“46). To understand the polyphonic nature of the land, it is imperative that each region be explored through its specificities.

The nineties witnessed a refreshing impetus to the growth of the regional novel in Indian English. The younger generation of novelists “are more concerned with the minute particularities of life and the regional and religious identity of the protagonist” and make no attempts to present India as an abstraction (Narayan, “Changing Perceptions”34). Tamil Nadu is the setting of Kasturi Sreenivasan’s The Light from Heaven (1990) and it narrates the story of a Brahmin youth who renounces his Brahmin identity and becomes a sweeper. P. A. Krishnan also traces the history of four generations of an Iyengar family in The Tiger Claw Tree (1998) and

Along with these writers we have expatriate writers handling the region who, according to Naik and Shyamala Narayan, could deal better with the lives of the Indian immigrant community as they have only a “weak grasp of actual conditions in contemporary India, and tend to recreate it through the lens of nostalgia . . . .”(106). Kiran Desai’s *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998) engages the common theme of the holy man and the gullibility of the public. Though her Booker prize-winning novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) is set in Kalimpong in the north-eastern Himalayas and deals with the Gorkhaland agitation, it constantly shifts between Kalimpong and New York and is basically about the loss of identity in the face of globalization. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s *The Mistress of Spices* (1997) depicts the problems of Indians in America and Vikram Chandra’s *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* (1995) narrates the inability of an Indian character to feel at home in India or America.

This period of Indian English writings also include fictional works which depict Dalit lives and experiences. Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* and Arvind Adiga’s *The White Tiger* (2008)
encapsulate the pain and humiliation inflicted on the down-trodden and the class struggles they encounter. The lives of the slum dwellers find expression in Kavery Nambisan’s *The Story That Must Not Be Told* and Vikas Swarup’s *Q & A* (2005). *Serious Men* by Manu Joseph which won the Hindu Best Fiction award of 2010 also deals with the simmering resentment of the Dalit towards his Brahmin employers and the portrayal of slum life.

While on the one hand the end of the twentieth century witnessed a surge of regional writings, on the other, the twenty-first century Indian English fiction writing is characterized by the rise of genre writing. There has been a slew of Indian writings in English with writers making no pretensions of aspiring to write literary fiction. The norm becomes a metropolitan city featuring metro-educated professionals who are presented as regional stereotypes of Malayalee Mallus or Bengali Bongs. The extraordinary boom in Indian English fictional writing could be attributed to the success of Chetan Bhagat’s fictional works set in call centers, campuses of IITs, IIMs and JNU. The trend of campus novels which began with the phenomenal success of Bhagat’s *Five Point Someone* (2004) is followed by *Mediocre But Arrogant* (2005) by Abhijit Bhaduri, Harshdeep Jolly’s *Everything You Desire* (2007), Soma Das’ *Sumthing of a Mock Tale* (2007), and Amitabha Bagchi’s *Above Average* (2007). Inter-regional marriages have become a predominant feature of these novels. The new genre writing also comprises of the *Da Vinci Code* inspired historical mysteries of Ashwin Sanghi (*The Krishna Key* [2012], *Rozabel Line* [2008] and *Chanakya’s Chant* [2010]), the mythological re-tellings of Ashok
Banker’s Ramayana, Krishna Coriolis and Mahabharatha Series, Indian chik lit (Swati Kaushal’s *Piece of Cake*, Rajashree’s *Trust Me* and Anuja Chauhan’s *The Zoya Factor*) and the Mills and Boon inspired *Times of India* series called “Desi Romances.” Murder mysteries have also begun to appear with Anita Nair’s *Cut Like Wound*, Madhumita Bhattacharya’s *The Masala Murder* (2012) and Swati Kaushal’s *Drop Dead* (2012) which are detective novels with desi sleuths. It is to be construed that the recent fictional writing is gradually reverting towards a pan-Indian approach in continuation of the earlier tradition of Indian writing in English, albeit with its own variations in the new era of globalization.

The popularity of the Indian English writing since the nineties has once more reopened the debate of the superiority/inferiority of Indian Writing in English as opposed to the literary works in the various languages of India. Prior to this period, the major issue of the debate was linguistic (the English language conveying an alien culture) and literary (creativity in using English) as expressed way back in Raja Rao’s classic foreword. Since the nineties, the distrust of English in India is not based on account of it being a foreign language, but being the language of the elite and the privileged groups. It has been based on the anxiety that the wide popularity of the novels in Indian English might lead to the projection of a homogenous entity and mask the issues related to the lives of the ordinary people living in the varied regions of the country. One of the key issues raised in this context is about how far the writer has been successful in effectively representing the cultural, social and political reality experienced by the masses. The views of Rushdie
and Amit Chaudhari expressed through their books *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing 1947-1997* and *The Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature* respectively essentialise this battle. Rushdie's statement in his introduction to the book that India's best writing since independence may have been done in the language of the departed imperialists created a lot of resentment among many writers, including writers in English. He observes that Indian English writers have been criticized for lacking a “true” understanding of the soul of India: “Its practitioners are denigrated for being too upper-middle class; for lacking diversity in their choice of themes and techniques, for being less popular in India than outside India. . . .” (xiii). Rushdie agrees that most of the writers come from the educated classes of India but the novelist vouches for genuine attempts being made by these writers to encompass Indian realities. Questioning Rushdie’s claim, Amit Chaudhuri writes:

Can it be true that Indian writing, that endlessly rich, complex and problematic entity, is to be represented by a handful of writers who write in English, who live in England or America and whom one might have met at a party, most of whom have published no more than two novels, some of them only one?” (“Introduction: Modernity and the Vernacular” xvii)

Chaudhuri feels that after Rushdie, Indian writing in English started employing magical realism, bagginess, non-linear narrative and hybrid language to sustain themes seen as microcosms of India and supposedly reflecting Indian conditions. He contrasts this with
the works of earlier writers such as R.K. Narayan where the use of English is pure, but the deciphering of meaning needs cultural familiarity. “Indianness”, according to Chaudhuri, is a theme constructed only in Indian Writing in English and does not articulate itself in the vernacular literatures:

It is worth remembering that those who write in the languages of India, whether that happens to be English or one of the modern ‘vernaculars’, do not necessarily write about ‘India’ or a national narrative . . . but about cultures and localities that are both situated in, and disperse the idea of, the nation. (“Introduction: The Construction” xxiv)

Earlier Indian English writers claimed superiority on the grounds that they dealt with a pan-Indian sensibility in their novels unlike the bhasha novelist. It is at the level of sensibility that bhasha literatures do not encompass the whole of the nation. To possess a purely Hindi or Malayalam or Marathi sensibility is what they claimed makes regional writing subordinate or inferior. Likewise in the nineties, the bhasha novelists showed a distrust for Indian English novels on account of their over-projection and misrepresentation of India as a homogenous entity. The most vociferous attack has come from the Nativist school of criticism whose main proponent, Bhalchandra Nemade, considers Indian writing in English to lack roots in India. He further asserts that it’s time we realized the fact that our literary endeavours beyond our own language group smacks of mediocrity (“Nativism”253). This debate has been further exemplified through a series of interviews
with *bhasha* writers in an article entitled “Midnight Orphans” by Sheela Reddy in the *Outlook* (25 Feb.2002). The noted Kannada writer, U.R. Ananthamurthy’s grouse is the failure of regional writers to gain international recognition as they do not write in the global language of America (54). However, overlooking the fact of Indian writing in English being “export-oriented”, he concedes that the best works do manage to convey the ambience of the provincial language and ethos. Citing the case of Arundhati Roy, Ananthamurthy applauds her English “whose energy comes from Malayali culture and ambience”(57). Jeyamohan, a Tamil writer feels that “the experiments happening in Tamil and Malayalam fiction are far bolder than anything happening in Indian English” (62). Similarly, the Hindi novelist, Nirmal Verma feels that “Indian writers in English find themselves in a strange place; the emotional content is missing, as is the real core of the Indian experience.” He concludes that the best writers in regional languages come from the middle and lower classes of society and their writing “encompasses the entire epic flow of their life”(62). The underlying criterion of these discussions is the alleged charge levelled at Indian English fictional writing as lacking a sense of rootedness.

M.K. Naik and Shyamala Narayan contend that a writer can be universal only if he is “intensely regional” (250). They affirm: “It is only by writing with your own region in your bones that you can be true to the kindred points of home and the universe” (250-1). This raises the question of authenticity of writers. The Indian English or the *bhasha* writers’ claims to superiority can be evaluated solely on the basis of how true he is to his roots and how
far he is successful in addressing the “earthy, native traditions which are specific to place and time” (Nemade, “Nativism” 239). Such novels raise hopes for gradually overcoming the conspicuous dichotomy of the English and the regional novel in India.

The new novels that appeared in India, especially in the nineties, become worthy of serious studies in this context. These novels strongly depict regionalism which was neglected by the grand narratives of the earlier Indian English fiction. It has therefore become necessary to examine how the regionalism in Indian English novels contributes to the build-up of a literary discourse nearer to the Indian social reality. The ensuing chapters will focus on the selected works of Kamala Markandaya, Anita Nair, Kavery Nambisan and Arundhati Roy from the perspective of regionalism presented hitherto.