CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The novel, a long sustained piece of prose fiction and a genre of imaginative literature, came to India as an art form with the British. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar observes “The ‘novel’ as a literary phenomenon is new to India.”\(^1\) Indo-Anglian novel came into existence long after the novel had become an established genre in other Indian languages. It was only in the later half of the nineteenth century the proper novel resulted because of the western impact. Even before this, the Indo-Anglian novel diffidently appeared in the 1920s and established itself in the next two decades. And even before the 1920s, there were hardly half a dozen novels. The composition of some original works on the western model succeeded after the phase of translation of western classics.

Meenakshi Mukherji observes “the full development of the Indian novel as a whole...may be divided into three large stages: 1. Historical romance, 2. Social or political realism, 3. Psychological novels showing an introspective concern with the individuals.”\(^2\)

The first phase of fiction of historical romances starts with Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s *Rajmohan’s Wife* (1864), Toru Dutt’s
Bianca or The Young Spanish Maiden (1878), R.C. Dutt’s The Slave Girl of Agra (1909) and S.K. Ghose’s The Prince of Destiny (1909). They are no more than an antiquarian or historical interest.

The rise of the novel in English in India was not only a literary phenomenon but also a social phenomenon as it was associated with social, political and economic conditions. Right from 1920s to 1940s, the historical romance was associated with the awakening of Indian nationalism and the novelist of the social reform novels shifted his subject to contemporary situation of battles and agitations. They, being inflamed by politics, aimed at improving the lot of desperate hungry millions. The novelist’s understanding and love for Mother India made his writing transcend the local and controversial and attain vitality and dignity. The novel proper attained a definite art form around thirties. This second phase in the development of the novel is seen from K.S. Venkata Ramani’s Murugan the Tiller (1927) and Kandan the Patriot (1932) to Mulk Raj Anand’s passionate progressivism and emotional zeal for Gandhi and ideals in Raja Rao’s works.

K.S. Venkata Ramani’s Murugan the Tiller and Rajarao’s Kanthapura (1938) describe the tremors of Gandhi’s impact along with Civil Disobedience of thirties. Mulk Raj Anand’s Untouchable (1935),
Coolie (1936) and Two Leaves and a Bud (1937) were like packets of dynamite and they enraged the die hard and ruffled the bureaucracy, probing the hidden nucleus of exploitation. His Village (1939), Across the Blackwaters (1940) and The Sword and the Sickle (1942) were the typical ingredients of the village life—landlord and superstition, mass conformity and mass hysteria, the cupidity and cruelty of some and the apathy and helplessness of the many. The Second World War period in India, the growing chasm between the Hindu and the Muslim and between India and Britain, the Bengal hangers, the Quit India Movement and the mounting frustration are covered in Bhabani Bhattacharya's So Many Hungers (1947), R.K. Narayan's Waiting for Mahatma (1955) and Kamala Markandeya's Some Inner Fury (1957).

Of course there has been some overlapping of one phase over the other. But from the 1950s onwards, the Indian novel in English has become enriched with variety and vitality in respect of its multi-faceted themes. The shift of emphasis was from the public issues of society to the private agonies of the individuals. K.B. Vaid, commenting on the themes of the Indian novelist, says that his preoccupations are: "portrayal of widespread social evils and tensions; examination of the survivals of the past; exploration of the hybrid culture of the dislocations
and conflicts in a tradition-ridden society under the impact of an incipient, half-hearted industrialization. Yet some novels in the post-Independence era concerned themselves with the country and its vagaries. Khuswant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) and Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* (1975) are an imaginative record of partition of 1947. B. Rajan's *The Dark Dancer* (1959), Manohar Malgonkar's *Distant Drum* (1960) and *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964) explore the origin of the two-nation theory. Bhabani Bhattacharya's *Shadow from Ladakh* (1966) indicates the inadequacy of Gandhism to meet the altered challenges of the time, which is the shift from self-denial to self-recognition. There is a blending of the oriental insights with the western technology in Kamala Markandeya's *A silence of Desire* (1960) and R.K. Narayan's *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967) and Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960). Materialism may be a quality loud enough to attract attention in the western approach to life but it would wrong to say that Indians have been only spiritualists devoid of any material interests. R.K. Narayan's *The Financial Expert* (1952), Nayantara Sehgal's *The Day in Shadow* (1971) and Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* (1980) testify to this observation.
With Indian Independence, the themes of nationalism and partition recede into the background, the younger novelists started displaying an increasing inwardness in their themes. The themes of loneliness, of rootlessness, of restlessness, of the exploration of the psyche and the inner man have been dealt with by Anita Desai’s *Cry, the Peacock* (1963) and *Voices in the City* (1965) and Arun Joshi’s *The Foreigner* (1968).

The 1980s witnessed efflorescent emergence of new Indian fiction in English heralding a new era of change in its tenor, tone and content. The new crop of writers produced their maiden works and brought new conviction and maturity which was all its own. They are an honest endeavour trying to clean a quintessential pan-humanism though distinct contexts. Their literature gave way to new inclusiveness. The novel especially became rather flexible and accommodated new compulsions and realities and sensibilities. These novelists “unfettered Indian fiction in English from Pre-Independence complexes, abolished explanatory footnotes and citation marks and strove successfully to forge a new idiom relying on the vocabulary of irreverence by handling English language more freely, creatively, unselﬁconsciously ‘without being
It was Salman Rushdie who changed the concept of Indian writing in English and made indelible imprints on the world literary horizon with his *Midnight's Children* (1981) and later *Shame* (1988) by depicting Indian reality with a fantastical tinge and transfusing history, myth and autobiography exquisitely. But what set the Thames ablaze was *Satanic Verses* (1988), a novel more burnt than read. In the wake of Rushdie's literary glasnost, there emerged an impressive array of the second generation of post-colonial writers of the 80s from the corridors of St. Stephen's College, New Delhi. This assembly of literary artists include Amitav Ghosh, Allan Sealy, Shashi Tharoor, Vikram Seth, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Vijay Singh and others. These new writers have realized that the wounds on the Indian psyche by its countrymen have become ulcerous and rotten. "With an extensive use of fantasy and a fresh language, they have striven to exteriorize the scars of inwardness. They have portrayed modern man who finds himself trapped in multiple pressures and perils and yet chases something ineluctable, inscrutable and inevitable which does not concede him definite victory over itself and at the same time does not allow him to rest with ease. This has led..."
allow him to rest with ease. This has led to a significant change in his quest. The quest may appear personal or topical, yet it has universal connotations, for it stands out as his quest for existence in a universe sans meaning. The new protagonist inevitably lacks in heroic status and to an extent his unheroic actions are consequences of the realistic and democratic temper of the readers whose receptivity cannot be risked by the novelist. The new novelists have reacted against old set of values, facile idealism, stereotyped attitudes and hypocritical morality. In a way no protagonist remains a hero.

Some notable works of the eighties are briefed here. Amitav Ghosh's *Circle of Reason* (1986), an imaginative fiction stretching from rural Bengal to modern Mediterranean ports, had been received well for his formal innovation, subtle use of imagery and idiom. His mastery of narration was reaffirmed by *The Shadow Lines* (1988). Vikram Seth’s *The Golden Gate* (1986), a novel written in mellifluous sonnets, was an unprecedented achievement which helped Indian novel in English cross another frontier of form which overcame all hindrances pertaining to content.

Allan Sealy’s *Trotternama* (1988) is a work about the inventive portrayal of Anglo-Indian life and its worth lies in its quirky and
exuberant humour and its intense and eclectic prose. *Jaya Ganga* (1989) of Vijay Singh defies all levels e.g. an autobiography, a diary, a travelogue, a reportage, for it is criss-crossing of diverse characteristics of India—communal harmony, religious fanaticism, hypocrisy, casteism, superstitions and all that India breathes; but on the surface level it describes the pilgrimage of Nishant, the novelist’s persona on Ganga. Set in the post Mrs. Indira Gandhi assassination era and the 1984 General Elections, the days of terrific turmoil and feverish anxiety, the novel refers to the events of the last half of the decade. The other works of 80s include Geetha Mehta’s *Karma Cola* (1980), and *Raj* (1989), S. Deshpande’s *Roots and Shadows* (1983), Nina Sibal’s *Yatra* (1987), Leena Dhingra’s *Amritvala* (1988) Gopal Gandhi’s *Refuge* (1989), and Shobha De’s *Socialite Evenings* (1989).

Upamanyu Chatterjee’s *English, August: An Indian Story* (1988), the first of the two novels, is a work of 1980s. Evocative, candid and in parts inspired, it presents the portrait of a district administrator's life in rural Madna district. In the eyes of Shashi Tharoor “*English, August* has the single most memorable simile of all Indo-anglian writing—a character who ‘smelled like a scented eraser from a geometry box’.”
Even during the 1990s the flood gates have had to be opened for the sheer volume of fiction. Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* (1990) was to retell the political history of 20th century's India through a fictional recasting of events, episodes and characters from the Mahabharata. Farruk Dhondy's *Bombay Duck* (1990) deals with the relevant contemporary issue of communal fundamentalism. Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* (1991) became a significant departure in the literary tradition of Indian fiction in English. It presents a fact pertaining to the conspiracy case of the Nagarwala, the Chief Cashier of the Parliament Street Branch of the SBI, New Delhi, complying with the instructions of the highest echelons of the power of the country found himself behind the bars to be later sentenced to four years imprisonment which led to his death. R.K. Narayan's *The World of Nag Raj* (1990) reinterprets the popular legend of the sage Narada. V.S. Naipal's *India: A Million Mutinies* (1990) portrays India as a country destroyed by survile poverty, senseless conformism, narrow identities and human decay at a larger scale. *Trying to Grow* (1990) by Firdaus Kanga presents the picture of middle class parsis with all their interesting eccentricities in a joint family living in Bombay's Colaba causeway. Chaman Nahal's *The Salt of Life* (1991) was unique as it
"seized on an event which was one of the turning points in India's yearnings for liberation, the drama of deprivation of people through a tax imposed by the alien rulers on the only luxury which made the meal of poor palates."7

Upamanyu Chatterjee's second novel *The Last Burden* (1993), which is going to be appraised in the foregoing thesis, belongs to the 90s. In the Indian context more often than not, the concern of the typical Indian does not go beyond the family. The affairs of the family constitute, for the average ordinary Indian the highest concern of life. By and large, his socio-economic concerns would be a traditional character. Even intimate personal experiences and psychological habits tend to be dominated by conventional moves and traditional perspectives. And yet with all these psychological constraints, he leads an independent human life all of his own with a number of subterranean impulses, urges and tensions controlling his inner life and not adequately understood and tackled by him, some of them could have socio-cultural factors for their source and some others primarily psychological. Chatterjee's *The Last Burden*, being unlike the family sagas initiated by Rushdie in *Midnight's Children*, Nina Sibal's *Yatra*, Allan Sealy's *Trolter-Nama* and Boman Desai's *The Memory of*
Elephants (1988), remotely concerned itself with Indian middle class life. "It is a powerful and mature exploitation of the changing face of the Indian family and notions of filial responsibilities."