CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

One of the difficult tasks of a novelist is to represent scenes of familiar life in an elegant and interesting manner. No novel is 'true to life'. No story is either. It is, in fact, impossible for the novelist to confine himself only to 'scientific realism'. He is interested not in giving a banal photographic representation of life, but a vision of it that is fuller and truthful than even reality itself. In order to make his work more interesting and meaningful he mixes fantasy with fact; rather, he uses fictional realism.

'Fictional Realism' appears to be a contradiction in terms for it contains the apparently antithetical terms fiction and realism. Fiction comes from the Latin word fictum meaning 'fabricated'. Realism, in a broader sense, is 'a representation of objects and conditions in the way they appear to the senses as opposed to the ideal and the fanciful.'

Though these two terms seem like opposites, it is not easy to separate them, in a novel. Novelists mix fiction

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with realism to provide delight and an insight into facts at the same time; they tend to be fictionally realistic.

Fictional Realism is not just realism represented in novels. It is, on the other hand, the novelist's way of dealing with realism or sometimes even distorting it for his fiction's sake. In his hands it remains as a technique by which truth is represented in an artistic way. Everyone knows that too much of indulgence in the 'facts' of life only wears the mind; similarly too much of 'fiction' displeases the reader. Justifiably, he craves for novels with fictional realism. The novelist on his part knows that though he could meddle with reality he could ill-afford to lose sight of probability. So he makes his 'fictive reality' related to facts of life.

Broadly speaking, novels can be divided into two categories, romantic and realistic. Pointing out the distinction between the two, Kenneth Graham quotes Clara Reeve who distinguishes the two thus:

The Romance is an heroic fable, which treats of fabulous persons and things. - The Novel is a picture of real life and manners, and the times in which it is written. The Romance in lofty and elevated language, describes what never happened nor is likely to happen. - The novel gives a familiar relation of such things, as pass everyday before our eyes, such as may happen to our friend, or to ourselves.  

Even though there exists this difference between the two, novelists have been mixing the two to realize the wonderful and the strange in terms of the familiar and the realistic. Sensing the need for such a mixture, Henry Fielding agrees with the fact that "the great art of Poetry is to mix truth with fiction in order to join the credible with the surprising." We can trace it back to Aristotle who says, "A convincing impossibility is preferable to what is unconvincing even though it is possible."

However, the major tradition of European fiction in the 19th century is a tradition of realism. Even now, the overwhelming majority of novels are realistic. Yet, there is a growing dissatisfaction among the novelists, to stick to realism only; they recognize the obsolescence of realism. Therefore, they have been exploring new fictional modes. David Lodge sums up the situation thus:

The situation of the novelist today may be compared to a man standing at a crossroads. The road on which he stands is the realistic novel, the compromise between the fictional and the empirical modes. In the fifties there was a strong feeling that this was the main road... That wave of enthusiasm for the realistic novel in the fifties has however considerably abated. Realistic novels continue to be written but the pressure of scepticism on the aesthetic and epistemological premises of literary realism is so

extensive that many novelists instead of marching confidently straight ahead, or at least considering the two routes that branch off in the opposite directions. One of these leads to the non-fictional novel and the other to what Mr. Scholes calls fabulation. 5

The situation is slightly different in Indian English literature. Before the nineteenth century the Indian Literatures had the romance, the tale and the fable but the 'novel' as we understand it now is 'the gift of the West.' 6 It was only during the first world war Indian English novel flourished. K.S. Venkataramani with his novels on rural life, Mulk Raj Anand with his realistic novels, Raja Rao with the philosophic fiction and R.K. Narayan with novels on the middle class South Indian society have contributed very much for the growth of Indian English novel.

During the 1930's and 1940's novelists of India used the medium to spread Gandhi's message to the masses of India. The problem of casteism and untouchability that Gandhi preached found a 'strong and genuine expression among the novelists who wrote for the English-speaking public in the country.' 7 The post independence writers did not too much concern themselves with 'Quit India' themes. They imbibed a new freedom.

They treated the novel as a "sort of a container for a special kind of reality which may or may not resemble that 'real reality' which we experience outside books." In brief, they were interested in creating novels having 'desirable reality.' This precisely is the case with R.K. Narayan.

Among the Indian writers of fiction in English, Narayan has greatly realized the fact that the novelist, apart from being a realist, must be a realist of a fictional world. All his novels blend fiction with realism to achieve this goal. All great masters appear to be masters of their technique and Narayan is a master of the technique of fictional realism. By combining factual descriptions of the external actions of the people with imaginary incidents, by placing all his characters and their actions in a semi-real world, i.e., the world of Malgudi, and by making use of myths appropriately to throw more light on contemporary facts, Narayan has proved the fact that novels, after all, represent imaginative truth. He remains different from the others precisely in his use of fictional realism; it is, in fact, his forte. Other novelists are interested in being realistic or in presenting their point of view effectively. Narayan's concern is chiefly with the delight that he offers his readers. Therefore, he incorporates, in his novels and short stories, a kind of fantasy, not to provide an escape but to quicken and enlarge the mind. He

knows fully well that a kind of fantasy is an invaluable ingredient in a novel. This blending of realism and fantasy is so natural with him that it has become a unique quality in him. This unique quality - fictional realism - in Narayan therefore deserves a full-length treatment and so the present study has been undertaken.

Though all the three big Indian English novelists - Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan - have been writing in the same period, they differ in their techniques. Raja Rao in his _Kanthapura_ and _The Serpent and the Rope_ has done more than merely presenting realities. In _Kanthapura_ he dramatizes Indians' struggle for freedom and makes the novel a 'Gandhi-Purana'. This novel explores 'the meaning of cultural identity on a eliocentric plane, moving along the panoramic surfaces of history and touching the grand peaks of the Gandhian myth and legend.' In _The Serpent and the Rope_ Raja Rao takes up metaphysical issues. Hemenway feels: 'Truth, not goodness; metaphysics not mortality - these are the key-notes of Indian philosophy and they are affirmed eloquently in _The Serpent and the Rope._' It can be said that in Raja Rao's novels 'the reality is transformed into a myth and in his search for truth, Raja Rao gets out of touch with reality in its concrete modes.'

Mulk Raj Anand remains the mouthpiece of the downtrodden and the havenots. He pictures the miseries and plights of the poor. His commitment, as a novelist, to the cause of Indian nationalism and socialism is an accepted factor. He uses the medium of novel to lodge his protest, "though he is careful to point out that in its quest of humanist ideal fiction must not lose its artistic integrity." 13

Actually it is his contemporary R.K. Narayan who maintains this 'artistic integrity' in his works. He is aware of the fact "that the novelist needs his realism, but that he must be the realist of a fictional world." 14 Therefore he represents truth in an artistic way; he makes use of fictional realism. Undoubtedly he is aware of the problems of the Indians, but as a comic genius he presents those problems in a delightful way. Instead of highlighting the problems of people he gives a fictional touch to make his stories delightful. He is not interested in presenting, in a deep manner as Raja Rao does, the metaphysical puzzles of life and death: neither is he solely concerned with depicting the socially realistic problems of India as Mulk Raj Anand does. Of course, the varied scenes that Narayan presents in his novels are interesting for their presentation of Indian life, but they "fail to give a comprehensive idea of Indian social life." 15

Paradoxically, it is this 'failure' that accounts for his other merit namely the gift of story-telling. For Narayan, the novel remains a story, a delightful but recognizably truthful story. His world is 'a comedian's delight, with a fantastic range of human absurdities; and its afflictions and pangs being touched only lightly, a world enjoyable in the extreme, with just show of tears, sooner wiped than appeared.' 16 By introducing fantasy at the appropriate moment to remove the 'afflictions and pangs' of human beings, Narayan removes the tears from the eyes of his characters and readers. Therefore, his novels besides being 'recognizably truthful' remain 'delightful'.

Narayan's novels are realistic as far as the themes go. He does not draw his material from fables and fairy-tales. His men and women are as real as we are. They encounter such things that happen to us or to our friends. Even Malgudi, his locale, is as realistic as any other town. We are familiar with it as we are 'with our own birthplace.' 17 With all that Narayan is not satisfied in the just representation of reality. He is aware of the fact that reality is not what happens to be most real to us at the moment, but it is what we perceive in our moments of great intensity. The peculiar power of imagination enables us to cling on to

16. Ibid., p.81.
this vision even after the disappearance of the tension. His novels create such a kind of vision that stays with us permanently even after the disappearance of the 'really real'. He effects this kind of the actual into an imagined reality by using the technique of fictional realism.

Among the Indian English novelists, Narayan probably is the only writer who mixes fact and fantasy in a consistent way. It can be said that he is unique in that respect. There is a systematic development of this technique, in him and so it calls for a detailed study. The other aspects in him such as irony, comic mode and even realism have been studied at length by various critics. But hitherto no systematic and in-depth study of fictional realism in his works has been done. The present study aims at it.

A typical Narayan novel is a mixture of fiction and realism; in fact, it is a triumphant adjustment of these two different kinds of order. However, this mixture is not uniform, throughout. There is less of fiction and more of fact in the early novels of the writer. But fiction gains importance in his mature novels. And in a novel like A Tiger for Malgudi Narayan even slides into fantasy. The degree of fictional reality present in his novels can be understood better if his novels are grouped, though such a grouping is very difficult and can only be arbitrary. However, an attempt to group his novels, from the point of view of fictional realism, can be made in the following way.
(i) More realistic novels in which fantasy is interspersed only here and there. These are the early novels such as:

- Swami and Friends
- The Bachelor of Arts
- The English Teacher
- The Dark Room.

(ii) Novels in which realism and fantasy are mixed harmoniously. The novels such as:

- Mr. Sampath
- The Financial Expert
- The Guide.

These novels make use of fantasy and realism by giving equal importance to both of them. As far as the technique of fictional realism is concerned, these mature novels are the representative pieces.

(iii) Novels that are built on fabulor themes:

- The Man Eater of Malgudi
- The Vendor of Sweets.

It appears as though the novelist is on the side of fantasy in these novels. In a way, they herald his recent novel A Tiger for Malgudi.

(iv) Novels in which fictional realism is not happily adjusted:

- Waiting for the Mahatma
- The Painter of Signs.
(v) *A Tiger for Malgudi*, which is more of a fantasy.

Though not all the Short Stories of Narayan make use of fictional realism, a good many of them successfully use this technique. Narayan mixes fact and fantasy even in his setting, Malgudi.

The success of a Narayan novel depends as much on its fictional realism as on its irony, humour, satire and even realism. Narayan differs from the other major Indian English writers of fiction in his combination of the real and the unreal, to interpret India. In fact, this combination provides, "the interplay so important to the success of his novels abroad."\(^{18}\) This, in turn, emphasizes the need for studying Narayan's novels in the light of fictional realism. The subsequent chapters are an attempt in that direction.

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