Chapter I

Introduction

आहुः सत्यं हि परमं धमं धर्मविदो जना:

[ Those who have knowledge of dharma say that Truth is the highest Dharma ]

-The Message of Valmiki Ramayana
Chapter I

Introduction

1.1 The Theme of the Research

It is a novel experiment of the Indian English Writers that they, being Indian in their thought and experiences, have chosen to express themselves in English, thereby making themselves heard in the west, gaining wider audience across the globe. English language has served them as an apt media for the intellectual intercourse between the east and the west. Indian English literature, in due course of time, has emerged as a happy blend of new thoughts coming from the west and the wisdom of the glorious traditional past of India. The new intellectual awareness has given the Indian writers in English, a critical impulse to respond and to explore the traditional past and also to evaluate the ancient literature.

The Ramayana has enriched the literary creations of Indian English writers. Myths have added to the meaning and significance to Indian English literature. The writers are aware of the mythic reality of Indian society. Indians relate a great deal of their personal lives as they find parallels of themselves in myths. Myths have thus become a part of language that one knows and understands in literature, rather than a conscious literary device.
The Ramayana has been a store house of archetypes and images. The first poetical utterance of Valmiki, मा निषाद [ O Nishad, don't do it] has become archetypal, Kusha and Lava, the sons of Ram have become archetypal bards and many other characters have been shaped as archetypes, as they embody certain impulses in the collective unconscious of the Indian mind. To present the reality as comprehensible, many Indian English writers have taken recourse to mythological allusions. They have used the themes and characters of The Ramayana and presented them in modern perspectives with certain positively convincing digressions. They have reconstructed the theme and re-shaped the characters according to their creative demands and the demands of the new age, with a realization that myths have to be reinterpreted in new human contexts. Every age has its canons and set of codes as life keeps evolving, and accordingly the sensibilities of writers are shaped. The epic has a very rich content and enormous space, wherein there is unlimited scope for modification, rethinking and reconstruction. This is the real structure of an epic.

The fiction writers like Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R K Narayan have revealed through their works that Indian literature has a mythical frame. The characters are archetypal extensions and mythical parallels in their novels. Raja Rao for example, mythicises the freedom struggle of India in his novel Kanthapura. Raja Rao elevates the freedom struggle of India to the battle of gods and demons, the battle between
good and evil and the ultimate triumph of good over the evil which is
the basic theme in Indian ancient literature that upholds the virtues of
truth and goodness.

Mulk Raj Anand and R K Narayan appeal to us as social
interpreters of the Indian society showing how the old myths can be
oppressive through the ages in case of women. Women writers,
including the Indian diasporic writers like Anita Desai, Bharati
Mukherjee and others reveal in their writings, how the myths turn to be
psycho-emotional realities for women. Even the names of the
protagonists – Sita, Maya, Tara, Ram, Ramani are all reflective of the
mythical reality of Indian society. The female protagonists combat with
the oppressive mythic shadows that haunt them in their lives. In
Indian English poetry, there has been a significant variation in the
continuity of the archetype of Sita. The poets reconceptualize Sita in
different contexts. There have been significant shifts in the focuses.
For example, in the epic poem *Sitayana* by K R S Iyengar, we find a
significant shift from Ram to Sita. Sita is the manifestation of the
divine power and the central figure of the poem instead of Ram.
Ancient Indian tradition worships goddesses and Iyengar’s *Sitayana* is a
conscious return to the ancient verities.

There are reverberations of the protesting voice of Sita in the
modern writings, where we find a new version of the old archetype of
Sita. An example of the protagonist in Anita Desai’s novel *Where Shall*
We Go This Summer can be given here. In this novel, the protagonist Sita is a neurotic character in revolt against the male tyranny, though she finally accepts the domestic bond. We hear more of the unheard voice of the women in modern Indian English literature. The Sita archetype has acquired various connotations in the works of Indian English poets. There are also poems on Kaikeyi, such as Amrita Syam’s Kaikeyi, and short stories and plays where the stigmatized characters like Ahalya, Shurpanakha and Shambuka surface. The modern south Indian writings focus more on such characters which are treated empathetically.

Sri Aurobindo views Indian literatures as expressions of a common literature. There are essential threads of unity in our multilingual and multi-religious literature. Indian writers cannot escape myths. In many literary works, mythic frame comes naturally and not as a conscious literary device. Myths are present symbolically, metaphorically, allegorically or in the forms of archetypal extensions. The study of all the literary works of Indian English literature is not manageable in the frame of one dissertation. Hence, the researcher had to select prominent works of Indian English writers and limit the study to the reflections of The Ramayana in fiction, poetry and drama.

The English translations of several regional works have contributed to the enrichment of Indian English literature, becoming integral part of it. The researcher has considered some such important translations for
the study, as they have added more meaning to the theme of research. Also the researcher felt that readers should not be deprived of the pleasure of reading the best pieces of literature in regional languages. For example the Malayali poet Kumaran Asan’s long poem *Chintavishtayaya Sita*, translated into English by Rizio Yohannan Raj as *Sita immersed in Reflection* is a masterpiece appreciated by many intellectuals.

1.2 The Objectives of the Study

The study aims at exploring different reflections of *The Ramayana* in Indian English literature and to find out how the theme and the characters of the epic have been reshaped and reconstructed in different contexts. The study also aims at finding out psychosocial reflections in the works of Indian English writers, and how the writers have transformed the characters of the epic into symbols of various aspects of life and human nature. The objective of the study is to bring out different interpretations of the theme and characters in the light of the writers’ creative insights. The study attempts to show the meaningful recurrence of the theme and characters as the archetypes, in all the genres in Indian English literature.

1.3 The Significance of the Study

Researchers in Indian English Literature so far have taken up studies with different perspectives but the study of reflection of *The
Ramayana in Indian English Literature has not been dealt with. So this study has its own significance. The study shows that The Ramayana has universal theme and appeal and the myth of The Ramayana has survived in the modern literature, though modified according to the modern sensibilities and creative demands of the Indian English writers. The recurrence of the themes of The Ramayana in literature reveals the potential of the epic to respond to the human conditions in all the ages. The uniqueness of the epic is that it has a dynamic relationship with a society in any times and space.

The study will help in understanding the various perspectives on The Ramayana in Indian English writings, as the epic theme has many dimensions and can be interpreted on different planes. The study also shows the ways in which the theme has been received, accepted and modified in different writings prompting the readers to develop new insights about the epic and interpret it in numerous ways.

1.4 The Scope and Limitations of the Study

The power of the epic The Ramayana is seen in the numerous tellings, retellings, versions and renderings which have proliferated over the centuries. Every regional language in India has to its credit a major work on The Ramayana. Indian English writers have made use of the theme of The Ramayana structurally and sometimes digressionally. As the myth of The Ramayana is spread in many Indian English writings, it
is difficult to consider all such works in the purview of the study. Therefore the researcher has limited the study to the prominent reflections of The Ramayana in selected works of Indian English writers. The researcher has followed the Valmiki Ramayana through the faithful translation of it by Arshia Sattar.

1.5 The Underlying Assumptions of the Study

The reflections of the theme and characters of The Ramayana are in the forms of images and archetypes in Indian English literature. The reflections are varied as acceptance, adaptation, variation, and rejection are found in different works.

We find new versions of the ancient archetypes like Sita, Shurpanakha, Ahalya and others. The archetype of Sita has occupied most of the space in Indian English Poetry and Fiction, acquiring various connotations.

A feminist focal point is seen in the English translations of south Indian regional writings. A modern sensibility can be discerned in their writings, in the treatment of marginalized characters of Valmiki Ramayana.

1.6 Methodology

The researcher has selected the works of fiction, poetry and drama in Indian English Literature to explore different reflections of the theme
and characters of *The Ramayana*. The relevant literature, critical essays, journals and articles are referred. As the study requires an extensive use of library resources, the researcher has visited several libraries like Karnatak University Library. The researcher also had discussions with scholars such as Dr. M K Naik, Dr. C V Venugopal and creative writers like Dr. S L Bhyrappa.

### 1.7 The Plan of the Study

The study is divided into six chapters. Chapter One: **Introduction** provides the theme of research, the objectives, significance and the rationale of the study. The chapter provides a justification of the choice of the topic.

Chapter Two: **The Concept and Theory of Reflection in Literature** puts forth the theories of Influence, Reception, and Reflection and justifies the title of the thesis. The chapter also defines Myths and Archetypes in literature.

Chapter Three: **The Ramayana and its Influence on Indian Thought and Culture** provides the gist of The Ramayana and explains the deep impact of The Ramayana on Indian thought and culture and on Indian literature in general. The chapter mentions different Indian versions of The Ramayana.
Chapter Four: The Reflections of The Ramayana in Indian English Poetry focuses on the prominent reflections of The Ramayana in Indian English poetry. The poems of Toru Dutt, K R S Iyengar, Meena Alexander, Kumaran Asan (in English translation) and others are critically analyzed.

Chapter Five: The Reflections of The Ramayana in Indian English Fiction and Drama, critically analyses the works of fiction writers like Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, R K Narayan and the women writers like Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Bharati Mukherjee and others.

Chapter Six: Conclusion summarizes the findings, observations and interpretations.