Chapter 2: Brief Survey of Indian Novels in English

It will be audacious on a part of a foreigner like me to write the entire history of Indo-Anglian fiction in an introductory chapter of a Ph. D. dissertation. Hence I would take a stock of the different phases in the development of Indian novel in English.

At first I would like to explain the term critical study that I have used in the title of the thesis. It refers to open eyed pursuit of an undertaken work from different angles. It is a questioning of one’s own understanding of the texts. It amounts to view and review one’s comprehension of the undertaken study. It also means going deep into the matters related to chosen area. Every work of literature has characters, setting, plot, story, theme, narrative technique style etc. Writer weaves these elements together into a unified whole in such a way that it looks like a motley colored yet integrated whole.

Scholars and scientists have been working tirelessly in the field of psychology, sociology, history, language etc. Outcome of these research activities has its impact on literary creativity. Sigmund Freud observed human mind closely and explained mechanism behind human behavior. He provided reasonably acceptable explanation of human dreams. He also wrote on the sexual behavior of human beings of different age groups. All these discoveries equipped readers and writers with new tools and theories to look at a work of art.
Another significant influence in the twentieth century was the economic theories propagated by Marx. He wrote extensively on the causes of class war between rich and poor, employer and employee, bourgeois and proletariat, privileged and unprivileged sections of the society. Theories put forward by Marx and Freud churned up all creative minds of the world, irrespective of language barriers. Term critical study today takes in to account not only what is written but also psycho-linguistic implications of work.

Life in Indian subcontinent hundred years ago was simple and straightforward. It was not much exposed to the external voices. Though regional writers had been writing in their respective languages of their regions, they and their readership had not come out of medieval bhakti traditions. It had its self imposed discipline.

Times changed. Non-violent freedom movement before 1947, aftermath of partition, liberalization of societies and globalization of land stirred all kinds of arts. Critical study has to take into consideration all these changes. Naturally, modern Indo-Anglian literature lends to more than one interpretation. Indian writers have adopted various narrative techniques through their interaction with world writers. Their language has changed. Characterization has acquired deep and wide ranges.

1. Thumbnail sketch of Indo-Anglian fiction

Literature in general has a grand eloquent tradition in India. Two epics namely Ramayana and Mahabharata have been a perennial source of inspiration for art and artists in India. Thousands of writers from different Indian languages have written novels, plays, autobiographies, travelogues, poems etc for the years. This proves that literature is not new to the land.
Indians began to write novels in English towards the end of the nineteenth century. The first book written by an Indian in English is by Sake Dean Mahomet, titled *Travels of Dean Mahomet* which was published in England in 1793. It was influenced by the western art form of the novel. It sketches the life of Indian people, their history and geography in the eighteenth century. According to R. K. Singh (1987):

“It is theoretically unsound to expect from non-native English writers to write like the native English speakers. Because each culture has its own way of speaking and patterns of discourse, and for effective cross cultural, interregional, international communication these ways and patterns must be developed”(3)

People, who write on the Indo-Anglian fiction, generally start with the famous trio of Narayan, Anand and Raja Rao. I would like to tread their path. Narayan published ten novels from 1935 to 1992 on imaginatively construed milieu of Malgudi in the southern part of India. Narayan excels in two areas. His art of characterization is commendable. His Raju, Rosie, Jagan, Mali, Margayya, Krishanan, Vasu accompany readers days after the reading of the novels is over. Their life style, public conduct, tone of their conversation exhibit typically Indian patterns. Second characteristic feature of Narayan’s writing is his skill to animate the atmosphere in which action takes place. His writing in light satirical vein pinches but does not hurt readers. He skillfully mixes laughter with serious intentions which makes readers ponder over his own position in the society.

Narayan’s *The Guide* which won him prestigious Sahitya Akadami award in 1960 is one of the most readable novels in Indo-Anglian fiction. The novel is based on the traditional
Indian theme of transformation of a sinner into a Swami and capital punishment for his worldly misdeeds. Narayan always made use of Indian mythology in his novels. Legendary Valya who became Valmiki is obvious in Raju the guide. Reference to Mahatma Gandhi is unmistakably clear in Waiting for Mahatma. Committed as he is to Hindu ideology, Narayan builds his themes around Hindu myths and legends. Valya’s transformation into Valmiki in The Guide, Savitri in The Dark Room, and Sita Sati Savitri in Waiting for Mahatma are some of the examples.

Raju the guide takes advantage of the hapless Rosie’s madness for dance and severs her from her husband, Marco. He had to go to jail because he forged Rosie’s cheque unscrupulously. After his release from prison he assumed a role of a saint accidentally. He continued to disguise his identity till a fast unto death was thrust upon him. The absorbing descriptions of railway platform and train passengers, alluring references to Marco-Rosie relationship, final fair scene all make this novel enchanting.

Mulk Raj Anand deals with class and caste struggle in India. His two novels namely Untouchable and Coolie are based on the theme of discrimination in Indian society. Young Bakha suffers hunger, humiliation and deprivation simply because of his birth in the family of outcaste. He had to carry human shit on his head, eat stale food and live in the most unhygienic area of the town. His sister was molested in the sanctum sanctorum of the temple by the very person who was supposed to guard the sanctity and piety of the place.

Anand’s Coolie attracted the attention of the readers due to its panoramic character. Street urchin Munoo suffers heavily in a country that boasts of its preference to
humanitarian values. His native village and parents fail to provide for his basic needs.
The story of his sufferings continues even when he goes to town, cities and metropolis
that treat him inhumanly. The close relatives, rich employers and high positioned
bureaucrats look at him as a mechanical instrument to help them. The pathetic picture of
the child breaks the hearts of the sympathetic readers. According to Dr. Sinha Sunita
(2007):

“The novel Coolie is verily a cross section of the horrible and the
holy, the inhuman and the humane, the sordid and the beautiful.
The general effect is panoramic, as good and evil are thrown
together, as in real life.” (97)

Anand and Narayan belong to the first generation of fiction writers in India. The themes
that they dealt with, their narrative techniques and their art of characterization had close
affinity with respective characteristic features in Indian literatures in regional languages.
They did not deviate much from the noble Indian tradition of writing. They told things
but did not reveal much. English that featured in their writings was grammatical but not
communicative enough. This is not an attempt to deprive them of their precious role in
the development of Indo-Anglian fiction.

Even if Raja Rao is always clubbed with Narayan and Anand, I would like to assign a
separate space for him. Because I feel that even though their contemporary, he has
independent artistic skills, techniques of narration and manner of characterization. His
Kanthapura, The Serpent and the Rope and The Cat and Shakespeare each has its own
separate identity due to the theme, its treatment and language experimentation.
I strongly feel that Narayan and Anand are the novelists that exhibit their close affinity with the Indian tradition of literary creation. Raja Rao expands the scope of Indo-Anglian fiction. He was the first person to write on eastern philosophy vis-à-vis western one. Suggestivity which is a significant yardstick of creative writing is seen in Indo-Anglian fiction for the first time in Rao’s *The Serpent and the Rope* and *The Cat and Shakespeare*.

No foreign reader can ignore the important role that *Kanthapura* played in fusing Indian tradition of storytelling with a foreign language. It is the impressive account of the non-violent struggle of civilians under the leadership of Gandhi for their liberation and emancipation. The transformation of a small village into a group of peaceful revolutionary activists impresses the readers all over the world, otherwise inconsequential villagers group together to overthrow the foreign regime under the leadership of a village youth, Moorthy. Rao creates a story teller in Achhakka to give it an Indian flavor. His comment that he is using the language that is not Indian to express the spirit that is purely Indian is the first elucidating statement on the changing nature of Indo-Anglian fiction.

Many writers followed the trio. K. Nagarajan, Manohar Malgonkar, Babhani Bhattacharya and Khushawant Singh are some of the often quoted novelists in the international circles. Each one of them has independent identity. Malgonkar’s novels are set against the sociopolitical background of India whereas Bhattacharya focuses on the social ills like illiteracy, hunger, superstitions, discrimination in human beings etc. in the sarcastic fashion. Khushwant Singh is entertaining and instructive in approach.

K. Nagarajan’s *The Chronicles of Kedaram* comments on the socio-political atmosphere in India during the freedom struggle. Author demonstrates a confrontation between the
age old practices like untouchability and the emerging scientific spirit in India. Nationalist leaders were working hard to lessen the gap between upper caste and lower caste people, poor and rich, rural and urban. But there were forces actively working to sabotage the plan.

Narrator of the novel Gokarnam Shastri represented the orthodox discriminatory fanatical beliefs of the bygone days. Vasu a westernized sophisticated youth challenges Shastri’s views by employing an untouchable servant in his house. Contrast between narrator’s ideas and the ideas of other characters works as a creative tension of the novel. So called puritanical behavior of Gokarnam is condemned and criticized by the writer throughout. Renowned critic Manamohan Bhatnagar says:

“Indian writer has to choose his own blend of tradition—both Indian and English—and individual talent the capability to synthesize them and forge his experience into a unique artistic amalgam meeting the dual requirements.”

Babhani Bhattacharya and Manohar Malgonkar belong to the next generation of Indo-Anglian writers. Bhattacharya’s So Many Hungers, He Who Rides a Tiger and Music for Mohini are set against the background of Bengal. So Many Hungers portrays the pathetic picture of the destructive effects of natural disaster like famine and manmade disaster like scarcity on underdeveloped people. Thousands of people from North Eastern part of India died of starvation during the famine in the region. People lost their heads in a desperate attempt to survive. They hated, cheated, looted and assassinated each other. The
overpowering feeling of avarice and greed suppressed the good in people and murderous instinct took over their philanthropic sense. Novel depicts all this.

Bhattacharya deals with the theme of domestic discord in *Music for Mohini*. Educated city bred girl Mohini marries an educated village boy Jayadeo. Her encounter with a superstitious mother in law forms the action of the novel. Mohini fails to conceive many years after her marriage with Jayadeo. Her mother in law tortures her because she thinks that her son would not reach the heaven if Mohini failed to bear a child. She took Mohini to the temple of Virgin Goddess to sacrifice her blood at the altar. Tragedy is averted after the successful intervention of Jayadeo and benevolent God who blesses Mohini with a child.

Malgonkar’s novels deal mostly with the military life with which he was closely acquainted. The man of military discipline, Malgonkar mourns the lack of it during the post independence era. His *Princes* exposes the miserable conditions of the erstwhile rulers in India after the accession of princely states. They could not adjust with the emerging liberal atmosphere in which common people began to interrogate the legitimacy of their existence.

Malgonkar’s *A Bend in the Ganges* unfolds the national tragedy in which natives do not fight with the foreign power but with their own compatriots under the name of religion. Hindus and Muslims living on the same land butchered each other without any convincing reason. Novel delineates the changing world order after the Second World War in which divine values like humanism, cooperation and non-violence had meekly yielded to pernicious weapons. The title of the novel refers to an incident from Ramayana.
in which Rama and his followers took a final look of the land they were leaving for fourteen long years. Because Lord Rama knew that social, cultural and economic conditions of the people of Ayodhya will deteriorate by the time he returns from fourteen years of exile. This expression carries symbolic significance in the history of India which experienced marked difference between the two eras before and after 1947. Malgonkar probably suggests that India before and after British Raj resembled ancient Ayodhya during Rama’s presence and Bharata’s rule.

One of the most episodic novels in the Indo-Anglian fictional world is Chaman Nahal’s *Azadi*. Though the novel is set against the political background of partition of the land in 1947, it needs to be read for its delineation of mean tendencies reigning in human minds. Partition of the land subverted the very principles of close brotherhood, peaceful co-existence and humanitarian considerations. After the announcement of division of land, minds were divided. Friends became enemies; members of the same family ran helter-skelter, feeling of avarice rode over the feeling of sacrifice, sexual exploitation of women became common, killing of each other seemed child’s play, human face lost in the morbid mentality of mob. The novelist exposes meanness, cruelty and vanity of the people in the face of political maneuvering.

Thousands of people from India and Pakistan flee their ancestral homes in search of safe havens in an unseen territory. Millions of people in the convoy undergo harrowing experiences like hunger, massacre and undignifying attacks. People attack opposite camps most unscrupulously. Women are paraded naked. Some women are abducted and raped in the journey. Though this novel seems to be based on the aftermath of partition, it is about larger wicked human tendencies.
One of the most noticeable yet largely ignored novels in Indo-Anglian fiction perhaps is Arun Joshi’s *The Foreigner*. Joshi deals with the theme of horrifying consequences of patriarchal domination of Indian in America. Novel opens with Oberoi Sindi’s cold response to Bapu Khemaka’s death in accident. One is often reminded of Albert Camus’s *The Outsider* during the reading of this novel. Generally heterosexual attractions generate involvement and attachment in the concerned persons. But Oberoi is unaffected even by his love affair with June and other girls.

Unlike Albert Camus’s *The Outsider*, this novel takes opposite turn in the end. Sindi visits a poverty stricken family of Muthu dwelling in slum. He was shocked to see the human life of co-existence there. Half a dozen children in half naked and underfed condition, couple of invalid grownups and four legged animals were living together in a small place without grumbling. He was forced to give up detachment and live like a normal human being after that.

Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* is one of the most talked about novels in Indian subcontinent due to its immediate socio-political appeal. It handles the theme of love, hate, sacrifice and violence after the partition of land in 1947. Peace loving multitude of a small border village Mano Majara suddenly plunged into violent madness after the partition. Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs who believed in the integrity of mind and soul for centuries before turned against each other in murderous spree after partition.

Train travelling from India towards Pakistan with panic stricken ordinary people, mostly Muslims was attacked by hooligans causing the death of hundreds of innocent civilians. Train that was supposed to take people to safe haven unfortunately caused fatal carrier of
death. Khushwant Singh shows the horribly inhuman face of men and women in the border area of India and Pakistan during the period that followed independence. It also shows the spirit of sacrifice of Jagga who had to die in an attempt to save his beloved Nur who was travelling by the train.

Amitav Ghosh’s *Culcutta Chromosome* handles a totally new theme. The novel demonstrates how western people high jacked eastern ideas and gained universal recognition. Everybody in the world is made to believe that Ronald Ross discovered bacteria that caused fatal malaria. But this novel propounds different theory, according to which credit for this discovery should go to Indians.

L. Murugan comes to India from U. S. A. on a special visit to find out the person who in reality discovered chromosome. His visits to different people and places in India reveal that neither Cunninghum nor Ronald Ross discovered the germ. Half literate “dhooley bearer” Lakhan and rustic Mangala were instrumental in the discovery. Gosh tries to obliterate westerners’ long prevailing belief that easterners are superstitious and blind believers. According to him, though Indians were uneducated but curiosity and interrogative spirit never lacked in them.

Brief survey of Indo-Anglian literature cannot be completed without a comment on Salaman Rushdie. Rushdie is one of the post modern writers of fiction today. His *Midnight Children* and *Moors Last Sigh* created stormy reactions in the world of letters all over the world.

Kiran Nagarkar’s *Ravan and Eddie* delineates the life of Central Works Department’s chawl in cosmopolitan Bombay. Ravan, the Marathi Hindu stands for the changing
identity of Hindu in the face of grueling problems of everyday living. The sarcastic, humorous and ironic tone of the novel makes this novel an illustration of Mumbai English. Novel ends with two sons of two warring mothers engaged in marital dance in perfect harmony.

The universe of CWD chawl is populated with a variety of people and personalities. It offers us the picture of lower middle class Bombay who confront their destinies every minute. Though it seems to be a clash between two cultures on the surface, Nagarkar saves it from getting pedantic. Indian culture for a long time had been invincible and impregnable for centuries. But modern cosmopolitan life filled with conflicting challenges in metropolitan cities like Mumbai create a subculture in which living becomes an issue of primary significance and fanatic religious ideas are relegated to secondary concerns. Essential items like food, clothes and shelter acquire primacy over religious fanaticism.

Journey of Indo-Anglian fiction started with the trio and has continued without interruptions till this date. Various changes have occurred in the art of novel writing over the years. Simple straightforward narrative technique of Narayan and Anand has paved way for more complicated narrative technique of Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy etc. Novels of the first phase were based on socio-cultural themes like poverty and marriages. Indo-Anglian novels of today deal with psychological issues like alienation and disturbed minds. Indo-Anglian novel has acquired in depth and dimensions.

This section cannot end without a reasonable reference to Chetan Bhagat’s *Five Point Someone* and *One Night at the Call Centre*. The first one deals with the hypocrisy in the
high centers of learning like IIT. The second novel deals with the wretched life of people working in the call centers. Both these novels created history in matter related to readership. One hundred and ninety impressions of *Five Point Someone* came out in the bazaar within seven years of its publication. *One Night at the Call Centre* was published eleven times within one year. Bhagat has been able to attract young readers by treating a new theme in totally different manner.

2. **Woman Novelists**

In spite of voluminous publications of novels, women felt that they did not get judicious representation in male writings. According to Dr Vikas Raval:

“In the dominant discourses of patriarchy, women’s experiences are relegated to the margins. So in women’s writing centrality is given to women’s experiences. Most feminist discourses focus on girlhood experiences, the world of domesticity, man woman relationship and purely feminine experiences like giving birth, nurturing children, and certain biological functions like menstruation and menopause etc.” (298)

Hence many women writers came forward to voice their concerns through writing. I would like to comment on the women novelists now. I would start with Kamala Markandaya and end with Shobha De.

Kamala Markandaya is one of the prolific women writers in the Indo-Anglian literary world. Her two novel *Nectar in a Sieve* and *A Handful of Rice* attracted the attention of readers in India and abroad for the novelty in their themes. They depict the sorrowful
existence and fruitless efforts of the poor people in villages and cities. Her Rukmini has acquired a mythological status of Sita in Ramayana. *A Handful of Rice* is about all the trouble that unprivileged section of the society in India has to take in order to meet the daily bread. One group of critics considered her a novelist that writes only about futility of human efforts. V. Ramesh (2011) comments that:

> “Kamala Markandaya’s novels are in search of affirmative resolution for unenthusiastic state of affairs. It is true that she pictures the negative or gloomy facets in Indian women’s lives, but there are positive signals that togetherness and mutual understanding could work wonders in making a meaningful existence” (266)

Rama Mehata’s *Inside the Haveli* calls for special attention for more than one reason. Indian women whether from rural background or the urban one are always subjected to subordination. Geeta, the protagonist was born and brought up in Bombay. She got married with Vijay not because he came from feudal family but because he had acquired university education. Yet she did not have any special place in the haveli as well as in her husband’s life.

The novel also deals with the theme of women’s helplessness. Though she thought of revolting against feudal mentality in the society, she was compelled to compromise. She accepted the customs and traditions of the family in the end.

Jai Nimbkar is a bilingual novelist simultaneously writing in Marathi and English. Her two novels *Come Rain* and *Temporary Answers* portray the picture of inner world of
women. Nimbkar in *Temporary Answers* prophesizes the solutions that a widow finds in order to overcome her loneliness have transitory appeal. After the untimely death of her husband in road accident in Bombay, Dr Vineeta Sohoni comes to her parents in Pune. But she meets only disappointment there in her parent’s house. Protagonist Vineeta chooses a lover in Abhijeet but is soon disillusioned with him. She takes up a social work for unprivileged children in slum areas. But corruption and malpractices there tire her soon. She starts medical practice. But she had to shut her dispensary within short time. Jai Nimbkar probably underlies the importance of husband in woman’s life in India.

Ruth Pravar Jhabwala’s *Heat and Dust* published in 1975 delineates the India of the twentieth century from a westerner’s eye. Although Jhabwala is included in the group of Indo-Anglian writers she declines to associate with Indo-Anglian group of novelists. In her essay *Living in India* (London Magazine, September 1970) she writes:

“I have lived in India for most of my adult life. My husband is Indian and so are my children. I am not and less so every year.”

Jhabwala presents only the dark picture of India by writing about riots, sutee, gay parties and hijaras.

The title of the novel ironically suggests that India is all heat and dust. Its people take interest in beastly pleasures. They believe in superstitious ideas of the past. She paints the lecherous picture of the Nabab’s court, intrigues there in order to expose Indian people.

Nayantara Sahgal is one of the famous female writers that deal with the problems of women in India. Her close relations with Nehru family acquainted her with different facets of women in India and abroad which directed and influenced her creative talent.
Sahgal is deeply concerned with the failure of marital relationships, loneliness, private terror and marginalized position of women in society. Most of her women remarry not because they are antifeminists but because they visualize a world there. Her novels *A Time to Be Happy*, *This Time of Morning* and *Storm in Chandigarh* present the silent sufferings of women and their reactions to the dominating customs and traditions.

Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Jai Nimbkar, Gauri Deshpande, Shashi Deshpande are some of the notable names in the women section. These writers wrote about the various problems like child marriage, sexual exploitation, subordinate place accorded to them etc. Traditional patriarchal Indian society believed that the protection of women was their responsibility. Hence women did not need to come before the men members of the family and society. Times changed. Principles of equality and liberty brought about a welcome change in the thinking patterns of women all over the world. It had its corresponding impact on the condition of women in India. Indian woman today is visible in almost all walks of life. They have begun to write and they are being written about.

Major Indian women novelists in English handle the theme revolving around the relationship between husband and wife. According to these writers, such encounter generally results into tension between the spouses, because it is based on the doctrine of hierarchy rather than the one of equality. Hence women novelists chose to write on educated and bold women protagonists who are ready to take on the unacceptable orthodox social and cultural practices. These women protagonists claim separate place and identity for themselves.
Anita Desai’s *Cry the Peacock* delineates the tense relationship between Maya and Gautam. It is ironic that in spite of coexistence as husband and wife feelings of disappointment, defeat and disaster occupy the couple most of the times. Maya tries her best to lessen the intensity of differences by patiently waiting for peacock in her life to sing and dance. But all her efforts to gain physical and psychological security end in negating her existence as separate person.

Maya feels the burden of exclusion from her husband. Her inability to have a child gives birth to doubt and suspicion in the minds of introvert Maya more than in the mind of Gautam. She had found an alternative in her dog Toto, whose unfortunate death increased feeling of loneliness in her life, which did not provide happiness to Maya. She thought that self destruction would redeem her of torturous existence.

In spite of the fact that score of women novelists have taken up the issue of women’s liberation and emancipation, there is a large chunk of Indian women who have not found place in creative writing as yet. Illiterate village laborers, fourth class employees of the Government and semi-government sectors, sweepers, scavengers, vegetable vendors etc are still outside the periphery of Indo-Anglian fiction. They have not yet acquired judicious representation even in the writing of women. Girls and women we come across in these novels belong to upper and upper middle class of the Indian society. Doctors, engineers, professors, bureaucrats fill the pages of these novels. Uneducated rural woman does not find due space in these novels. Women belonging to scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and adivasi areas are rarely found in this fiction.
Shashi Deshpande’s autobiographical novel *That Long Silence* is about the meek sufferings of a sensitive woman in upper class Indian family. Women whether educated or uneducated are taken for granted in domestic and public life. Their job according to many is to cook, bear and rear children and accept the role assigned to them by the men of the family.

Protagonist Jaya keeps quiet for the most part of her married life. Her husband changes jobs without consulting her. He shifts from Delhi to Bombay taking his wife’s consent for granted. When it becomes unbearable for her she challenges her husband’s authority. Marriage in traditional Indian societies is considered to be a reliable instrument of exploitation of women for men. This novel raises woman’s voice against such injustice with a message that long silence of women could be explosive and annihilating.

Shobha De, the high priestess of gossip and innuendo is one of the most controversial woman writers of the present day. Revolutionary by nature, she has written about private lives and secret affairs of celebrities without any restrain. She rebels against the orthodox social ideas, male dominance and institutional suppression of women. Her active participation in creative endeavors as model, magazine editor, columnist, social commentator, television script writer and creative writer accorded to her multidimensional personality which is always reflected in her novels.

In spite of her name and fame in media, many readers hesitate to accept her as a novelist. She is occupied with the glamorous world of aristocrat India to such an extent that she has become blind to the lower class realities. Her novels *Socialite Evenings, Starry Nights*
and *Strange Obsession* are readable for their gossiping feature. Shashi Kant Gupta (2010) remarks:

“*She is a non-canonical writer with no fixed or particular ideas
for she started with feminist concerns and subsequently switched
over to feminist cum humanitarian approach to life.*”(4)

Hence many women writers came forward to voice their concerns through writing. Though there is a considerable variety in these writings, I found that these women novelists exhibit upcoming Indian woman rather than post modern western woman. Their characters are Indian at heart, ready to compromise rather than break away forever. That is why Indo-Anglian novel does not have hard core revolutionary woman protagonist who is prepared to destroy the voluntarily accepted framework of womanhood.

3. Appreciation of Indo-Anglian Fiction

Narayan, Anand and Raja Rao started a stream that is widely known as Indo-Anglian fiction today. The trio published their novels in the thirties and forties of the last century. The output till then naturally was not sufficient for writing a history of Indo-Anglian fiction. Prof. K. R. Shrinivasa Iyengar’s seminal work *Indian Writing in English* published in 1962 was the first attempt towards documentation of existing Indian writings in English. The book contained information on poets, essayists, autobiographers and prose writers besides the novelists. I believe that writing of an independent history of Indo-Anglian literature is desirable today.

I have noticed following characteristic features of Indo-Anglian fiction. Term twice born fiction used by Meenakshi Mukherjee summarizes the basic nature of Indo-Anglian
fiction of the first few years. India had one of the longest and admirable literary traditions in the world. Two epics, Vedas, Upanishdas, Shruti, Smruti, Puranas had been an inseparable portion of Indians’ lives. Folk tales, folk songs and folk dances based on the themes that were picked from the epics satiated the literary needs of illiterate populace of India for centuries. When Indians began to write in English stage was set for them; background was already available to them. Ample raw material was at their disposal. Task before them was to present it in an alien language, i.e. English.

English was not the first language of the creative writers and readers of India of the initial phase. Narayan, Anand and Raja Rao knew Tamil, Punjabi and Kannad respectively. Naturally the novel for them was born in the first language initially. It had one more birth when the writers processed their material to compose their novels in English. Various incidents and dialogues incorporated in these works demonstrate the validity of this statement.

Average Indian reader of Indo-Anglian fiction of the first phase knew two official languages well enough. I have observed during my stay in Pune that people here know Marathi, Hindi and English languages reasonably well. Presence of multilingual readers certainly plays its part in the creative process of the writer knowingly or unknowingly. Indo-Anglian fiction is twice born in this sense as well.

Indian fiction of the first generation is deeply rooted in Indian soil. There are frequent references to Indian epics and mythology in this fiction. Narayan, Anand and Raja Rao made extensive use of characters and incidents from India’s past to explain present. Readers come across Sadhus, Sanyasis, and Swamis in this literature repeatedly. Valya,
the road robber was transformed into a poet Valmiki. Narayan recreates the transformation technique in *The Guide*. Nonviolent leadership of Gandhi finds its voice in *Kanthapura*. There are many references to fasts, pilgrimages, village fairs, local deities and legendary figures in this fiction. That is why this literature bears the proud substantive of Indian.

This of course is the strength of Indian English literature. It may have borrowed the language from ruler. Yet it has not gone away from its socio-cultural roots. If material that is communicated is as important as the language in which it is communicated, Indian fiction stands its ground perfectly well.

Some critics said that Indian English fiction was kept in the section reserved for sociology in American libraries. Even though some people consider it derogatory, it is a creditable tag for Indian fiction. I appreciate Indian writers in English for sticking to their national identity.

Indian English fiction has some inborn limitations. For example it handles stock themes like starvation, illiteracy, famine, gender discrimination, ill health, sectarian violence, superstitious way of life etc. Most of these novels carried moral tags.

Variety of languages, people and cultures in India mesmerized me during my stay in India for five years. My teachers, friends and acquaintances told me that Indian literatures in regional languages find its reflections in abundance. I feel that Indo-Anglian literature is equally rich in bringing out India of variety. Writers from North, South, East and West of India have presented India in all its color, fragrance and vigor during the last hundred years quite competently.
Appropriation of English language by Indians to suit various communicative needs of the society could be considered a great linguistic achievement. Simultaneous presence of many languages with a long literary tradition could work positively as well as negatively. Patriotic feelings could lead the people to hate the language of their erstwhile ruler. But better sense prevailed in India and English writing continued without serious hurdles. Credit for this flexible approach goes to democratic ways of life. India’s future status as world super power has its seed in this adaptability.

When one comments on the style of work of art, one primarily takes into consideration the language that is used in it, because it is the only weapon at the hands of literary artist to communicate moods, feelings, emotions and attitudes of characters and himself. Even silence that many writers use as technique is transcendental manifestation of language. Indian writers of thirties and forties of the last century used grammatically correct, pure English for various reasons.

English that characters used in conversations was an attempt on the part of a writer to characterize a person through language. Uneducated characters used broken English; educated people used English of Grammar schools. Writers used the language that suited the taste of readers.

Variety of languages, people, cultures, languages and religious faiths in India collectively contributed to the making of Indian literature. My friends, acquaintances and teachers told me about the richness of literatures in regional languages in India. I dare say world may have British literature, Norwegian literature etc. But literature in plural would always be Indian literatures. Regional literatures in India naturally find ample space for
respective people, culture and religious faiths. For example, Bengali literature is replete with references to Durga Puja and Marathi literature has frequent references to local fairs and folk arts of the region. Writers from all over India presented India in all its vigor and colors during the last so many centuries effortlessly.

Case of Indian English writers was slightly different from that of American literature. English was not the language of writers or their Indian readers. They knew English language but it was not the language in which they dreamt. Indian English writers had acquired English. They had not inherited it. Yet the ease with which Indian writers in English have appropriated English to suit the various communicative needs is certainly a great linguistic achievement.

Writers and their characters used the English that sometimes looked awkward. Sometimes it looked academic. Sometimes it seemed a deliberate attempt on the part of a novelist to sound English and Indian simultaneously. Sometimes it looked like Indian woman in European skirt. Narayan and Anand used literal translations of some of the Indian expressions to give their writing local touch. They explained Indian concepts in the texts in an attempt to bring out an incident, episode or character. However it must be stated that Indian writers soon overcame this weakness.

Writers faced real challenge when it came to the representation of conversation in which characters belonged to diverse social, cultural and economic backgrounds. Characters were Indians who did not know English language properly. Though they did not use English in everyday life, novelists had to resort to it in the novel. Consequently, they looked like lifeless dolls with their strings in the hands of their creators.
This was of course a transitory phenomenon. Indo-Anglian novelists picked global English and international conventions of writing fiction within a short span of time. Today’s writers are using English of international level and acceptability. Writings of Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Arvind Adiga, Shashi Tharur, Chetan Bhagat etc. can be quoted as evidence to this remark.

Narrative techniques that the Indo-Anglian writers used could be classified in three categories. First category comprises of the writers who narrated the entire novel. In the second category the writer created independent narrator to unfold the novel. Third category is of the autobiographical nature having narrator with a mouthpiece of a writer.

Though the Indo-Anglian writers of the initial times had close contacts with their European counterparts then, they were fully acquainted with considerably long Indian literary tradition. This proximity helped them maintain their integrity as writers in English language. Narrative techniques that these writers used were closer to the narrative techniques of their Indian predecessors than the European contemporaries.

Narayan and Anand followed simple linear method of narrating the story. Once the novelists introduced characters, topic and setting in the starting pages, readers were in a position to guess the middle and end of the novel. Whatever the readers guessed got confirmed in the course of action of the novel many times. Even though Narayan used flash back technique in his *The Guide*, it still possessed the simplicity of story. Narayan’s *Swami and the Friends, The Bachelor of Arts* and Anand’s *Untouchable, Coolie and The Swordand the Sickle* possess the simplicity and straightforwardness of narration.
There are quite a few novels in Indo-Anglian section in which writers have created narrators; for example Raju in *The Guide*, Vineeta in *Temporary Answers*, Rukhmini in *Nectar in a Sieve*.

Comparison of Anand’s Munoo in *Coolie* with Adiga’s Balaram in *The White Tiger* would help throw light on the changes that have taken place in the art of characterization in Indo-Anglian fiction over the years. Both these characters belonged to the unprivileged strata of the Indian society. Munoo is a coolie, rickshaw puller, a house boy; Balaram is a private auto-mobile driver, a modern version of a rickshaw puller. Similarity between the two ends here. Their responses to their situations reflect on the theme of the respective novels. Characters in the novels of the past were characterized by the novelists; today they characterize themselves. They do not want to be puppets and parrots to follow the language of their creators.

Sometimes novelists create a mouthpiece in order to put forward his/her own life or ideology. Autobiographical novels belong to this category.

Principles of Indian philosophy, Gandhian way of looking at life directed the characterization of the first generation novelists. Writers were committed to some cause. Basic purpose of writing for them was to shape the character of readers and build the nation in the right direction. Tolerance, submissiveness, obedience, sacrifice, conformity etc. were considered virtuous aspects of personality in characterization. Non violent protest, meek sacrifice, and willingness to subjugation suited the characters. Retaliatory and rebellious attitudes did not find its place in these works. But times changed and figure of Balaram with all boldness emerged in Indo-Anglian novel.
Indo-Anglian novel for a long time had a predictably simple framework of informative beginning, illustrative middle and satisfying end without much deviation from the central theme and pivotal character. Point of view, philosophy and mind set of a writer surfaced within the first few pages of the work. Novels like Narayan’s *Bachelor of Art*, Anand’s *Untouchable*, Malgonkar’s *Princes*, Markanday’s *Nectar in a Sieve* etc. could be quoted in this regard. Writers created a central character around which other characters and events moved. Raju in *The Guide*, Bakha in *Untouchable*, Munoo in *Coolie*, Abhay in *Princes* etc. are examples in evidence. This technique helped writers to focus their attention on their own design rather than be an inactive spectator of the movement of the plot.

This has changed over the years. It is difficult to point out one single theme, one central personality or a single episode as guiding the course of entire writing. Questions like who is a hero of *Calcutta Chromosome*? What is the theme of *The Foreigner*? What message does *The Inheritance of Loss* pass on? What is the narrative technique of *The God of Small Things*? cannot be answered in unilateral way. It is not the writer’s duty anymore to answer the doubts raised by the work and its readers. It is the response of the readers that counts most today. Indo-Anglian novelists of today have adopted international technique of novel writing. That is what brought Booker Prizes to them.

India opened its economy to international markets in the nineties of the last century. Naturally, common people, farmers, peasants, workers, singers, musicians, writers and entrepreneurs got opportunity to interact with their international counterparts. Such exposure and interaction widened the creative span of artists, resulting into the enrichment of skills of writers.
Indo-Anglian writers could not be expected to remain aloof from these happenings. English language that had been used since the beginning of the 20th century adopted and got adapted to these external forces. As a result, Indian English novels today have international English in place of Indian English. Dialogues incorporated in novels like *The God of Small Things* and *The White Tiger* are close to real life English rather than pandit English.

Modern Indo-Anglian fiction is more inclusive. We find people from all walks of life with the characteristic differences in their emotional and mental upbringing in this fiction. Girls and women, boys and men, workers and industrialists, villagers and city dwellers, poor and rich, literate and illiterate, employed and unemployed occupy number of pages of this fiction. Indo-Anglian fiction has travelled a long distance from stereotype topics, dry characterization and lifeless conversational patterns. It is seen that the author has loosened his grip over his material and allowed it to have its own way freely.

Thousands of Indian citizens have migrated to America, England, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand over the years for various reasons. Some of them have obtained citizenship there. Second generation of migrants are playing its role in social, economic, literary and even political fields of the concerned countries. As a result they have become a material for writers.

Concept Indo-Anglian has expanded recently with the inclusion of Indian diasporic writers like Jhumpa Lahiri, Bharati Mukherjee, Amitav Ghosh, Sunetra Gupta, Vikram Set etc. These writers have written about Indian immigrants’ emotional world outside India particularly. Discriminatory treatment meted out to them by aborigines figures
prominently in diasporic writing. Clash of cultures and clash of worldly interests between the two people results into creative arena for the writers of Indian origin. The encounter between the two mostly turns into hostile interaction and unpleasant scenes.

Another aspect of this type of literature is the nostalgic element it contains. Even if they reside in advanced physical conditions most of the times, leisure hours seem vacant to them. Memories of homeland, its people, and its socio-cultural activities erupt and disturb the people there. Emergence of feelings of fear and uncertainty at the background of sense of insecurity in the surrounding world constitute the body of diasporic writing. Jhumpa Lahiri’s *Namesake*, Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine*, Manju Kapoor’s *Difficult Daughters* and Sunetra Gupta’s *Memories of Rain* are some of the often quoted novels in this category.

I have always asked one question to myself. What does diasporic experience really mean to Indian outside India, since India itself is a miniature image of the world? I found people of all nationalities in India. I came across many Indians who frequently travel outside India as they would travel within the country. Big cities in India have malls with international cuisine and clothes. Indians have easy access to Hollywood films and social networking sites. In short when India itself has become global, there is no reason to separate diasporic experience as something totally new.

Indo-Anglian novel has travelled a long distance during the last hundred years or so. E. M. Forster wrote about different aspects of novel and their role in the structure building of the novel in *The Aspects of Novel*. He makes elaborate comments on the contributory
features like characters, plot, narrative technique, language, style and setting to
differentiate novel from other forms of literature. Ages have passed since then!

I would like to say that modern Indo-Anglian fiction has grown in accordance with the
growth elsewhere in the world. It is more open for readers than the novels published
during the first half of the 20th century when the novelists narrated everything. It has
crossed the traditional limits of characterization, selection of themes, variations in
language usages and stereotype nature of themes. Many times modern Indo-Anglian
fiction defies straight forward analysis. It is open for different interpretations to the
readers as the writers of today abstain from intrusion. Novels by Shobha De, Shashi
Tharoor, Bharati Mukherjee, Chetan Bhagat cannot be summarized in an article or two.
Their multidimensional approach which is confusing at times is their strength.

English language that these writers use and the way in which characters from India and
outside India in these novels speak is the language of the modern man. It is not given to
him; times have created it. Such a language does not seem borrowed from outside or
imposed from above. It seems to have emerged from the overall ambience of the novel
itself.

Social and political life of Indians have always impressed a person like me. Treasure in
the form of literature that Indians have inherited from the past is certainly enviable. Indo-
Anglian literature may not have long history like the literature in regional languages in
India has. Yet the two virtues namely flexibility and adaptability that this literature
possesses will make it Indian literature like Marathi, Bengali and Kannad literature and a
part of world literature simultaneously.
Existence of so many languages and rich literatures in these languages in such a vast land of sometimes diametrically opposite diversity poses opportunities and challenges for the writers writing in a foreign language like English. Indians already are endowed with rich literary tradition of oral and written kinds. Naturally they have developed their own critical paradigms and literary theories. Indo-Anglian writers and their readers have to keep all this in mind by choice or by force.

Indian society was not an industrialized society until recently. They had “Zamindari” and “rayatwari” system. They were under the local princely states till the Indian Government annexed them in 1950. Naturally the economic theory of Marx which was based mainly on the relationship between industrialists and industrial workers needs to be revised in relation to its application to Indo-Anglian fiction. Indians have rich and poor, land lord and land labor. Hence it is imminent that representation of farmer, worker, labor, house maid etc. in Indo-Anglian literature needs to be viewed from different perspectives.

Indian woman had been a picture of paradoxical realities. She is worshipped as Goddess on one hand and victimized for a score of reasons on the other hand. Majority of them led the life of underprivileged secondary citizen till the recent times. Naturally the women characters in the western fiction and those in Indian fiction cannot be interpreted by one yardstick. Woman’s liberation movement in the west needs to be differentiated from Indian woman’s agitation for survival. Their representation in literature needs to be analyzed with other parameters.

Indian literary tradition speaks about Rasa theory. Nine types of Rasa are allied with nine types of tones and moods of literary writing. I hear that Rasa theory is applied in the
analysis of literary works in other languages in India. Indo-Anglian literature will find a new way of looking at itself if it also adopts to the Indian method of analysis.

4. Sahitya Akademi Award winning novels

I would like to end this chapter with a very brief note on the Indian English novels that have got prestigious Sahitya Akademi Awards. Indian Sahitya Akademi is established in 1954 to promote literary activities in India. It promotes publications in various Indian languages and holds seminars and workshops for the writers and readers.

RK Narayan’s *The Guide* (1958) was conferred the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1960. Like the author’s other works, it is based in the small town of Malgudi in south India. The story revolves around a character Raju who in transformation and search of peace becomes a spiritual guru and evolves to be a holy man in the eyes of the society.

Raja Rao’s *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) established his credentials as an Indian stylist and won him the Sahitya Akademy Award in 1964. It is a semi-autobiographical work. It revolves around reality and illusion. The story is based on a person’s search for spiritual truth in India and Europe. 

Mulk Raj Anand’s *Morning Face* (1968) got the Sahitya Academy Award in 1971. The author is known for his representation of the poor castes in general. He is credited as being the first writer to gain an international membership and accreditation. The rigid caste system along with the controversial loopholes of the practices of untouchability is explored in details as part of the analysis.
Chaman Nahal’s *Azadi* (1975) won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1977. It is based on the partition of the Indian subcontinent and the effects and consequences of it. As the author himself was a refugee, the novel gets additional impact. The British generally followed the principle of divide and rule and were to a great extent responsible for the continuous bloodshed in this era.

Anita Desai’s *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) was credited with Winifried Holtby Memorial Prize in 1977, the National Academy of Letters Award in 1978 and the Sahitya Akademy Award in 1978. In addition to this, she was shortlisted for the Booker Prize thrice. This novel focuses on the life of three women and their oppressed life in general. The story is set in Kasauli, a hill station. Sexual exploitation and suppression of women are expressed in this story. The author writes about the role of women in general and the barriers which they encounter to come out of the shackles of the conservative society.

Rama Mehta’s *Inside the Haveli* (1977) won the Sahitya Academy Award in 1979. It revolves around Geetha who hailed from a cosmopolitan society but had to adjust with certain values, beliefs and superstitions in the family after marriage. Though she had to keep purdah, she tried to create a feminine space by educating the servants, children and maid servants. Finally when her magnanimous father in law, Bhagawat Singhji who she loves and respects dies, she is expected by others to carry on the haveli traditions as a new mistress.

Arun Joshi’s *The Last Labyrinth* (1981) won the Sahitya Akademy Award in 1982. It describes the feelings of love, pain and selfishness. The story deals with the human
emotions and the mystery evolving around it. The rational ways, the feeling of inner self
along with his intuitions and philosophies are highlighted in this novel.

Nayantara Sahgal’s Rich Like Us (1985) was credited with the Sinclair Prize of 1985
and the Sahitya Akademi Award of 1986. It focuses on the political and historical set up
of India. It deals with the life of two characters that are fighting for their organization in
the social setup. The novel is set in the middle of the nineteenth century. The atrocities of
the feudal system are the chief focal points in this book. Rich and poor are trapped in a
world of corruption, power and politics.

Vikram Seth’s The Golden Gate (1986) won the Sahitya Academy Award in 1988. It is
set entirely in California and deals with a sense of professionals in San Francisco. As far
as the novel is concerned it has two sects, the verse portion by the author and the music is
by Conrad Cummings. The segregation of the different cultural feelings is all reflected in
the work.

Amitav Ghosh’s The Shadow Lines (1988) won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1989. The
author is an Indian Bengali. The story is set up during the political turmoil of India. It is
about a young boy’s life in Kolkata. The political and cultural system of the time
functions as a background of the action.

Shashi Deshpande’s That Long Silence (1988) was credited with the Sahitya Akademy
Award in the year 1990. It is a story of the couple from the middle class Indian society
where the woman is used as commodity. Jaya strives for identity which she never gets.

Sunetra Gupta’s Memories of Rain (1994) won the Sahitya Academy Award in 1996. It
reveals various aspects of marriage between an Indian lady and an Englishman. The
turmoil associated with the relation and the cultural differences are the focal points of the story. The general cultural differences are the breathing point of this work.

Kiran Nagarkar’s *Cuckold* (1999) won Sahitya Akademy Award in 2000 and is credited with the unique characteristics of familiarity and ease with bilingual media. It revolves around the central character Meerabai and deals with the dowry system of the Rajput era. The complex relationships along with the child marriage and the general feeling of superstitions in the sixteenth century set the action of the novel.

Amit Chaudhuri’s *A New World* (2000) won the Sahitya Akademy Award in 2002. Writer is an internationally acclaimed novelist and a musician. Novel revolves around the precious moments of life. A feeling of sophistication and sensuousness is aroused by the author.

Rupa Bajwa’s *The Sari Shop* (2004) won the Sahitya Academy Award in 2006. The story deals with the gross inequalities due to the caste system in India. The strength of the story is its simplicity. Portrayal of the women characters deserves a special mention. Along with the theme of discriminatory caste, the author also deals with the sexual exploitation of the weak.

Malathi Rao’s *Disorderly Women* (2005) was conferred the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2007. The novel reflects on the life of four Brahmin women who tried to break the barriers of traditions. The novel deals with child marriage and the gender bias.

Esther David’s *The Book of Rachel* (2007) was conferred the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2010. *Book of Rachel* is the story of Rachel, who has been living alone in her house by the sea. Her husband is no more; her children have migrated to Israel as have the Bene
Israel Jews who lived nearby. In her loneliness, the evenness of her routine helps her. It rests on two pillars: the synagogue in her village and the preparation of traditional Bene Israel Jewish food.

While commenting upon the prospects of Indian English fiction, Meenakshi Mukharjee (1971) had said that:

“*The Future of Indo-Anglian fiction lie in the direction of further authenticity through exploiting the particular, local and regional reality--- without of course calculated ‘documentation’ or ‘explanation’ rather than through that straining to find another of the very few available ‘all India’ themes.*” (213)

Nearly forty years have passed since then. Contemporary writers like Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Avind Adiga, Shashi Tharur, Chetan Bhagat have acquired international fame due to innovations in characterization, narrative techniques, themes and style. Renowned literary historian and sympathetic critic M. K. Naik (2006) has said:

“The proof of the success of Indian literature in English is its success. The steady interest it has aroused, in recent years, in English speaking countries shows that it has merits other than those of sheer novelty and exoticism.” (287)