CHAPTER - 1

Introduction

(A) The Indian English Novel: A Brief Survey

Novel is a popular medium to express the characteristics of society. It works as a mediator between the novelist and the society. This plant did not generate in India but this exotic plant has been brought by the Britisher on the Indian English literary ground. It originated in Europe and with the establishment of European colonies it stepped into the non-European countries. It appeared on the Indian English literary scene following the British colonization in India. Now it is flourishing because of the great efforts of Indian writers. But it took a long time to start as in the beginning it had to face a number of problems—medium of expression, culture and prejudice against English. Although in the Indian English novel the medium of expression is English, there is a common thing which is running through its varieties—“a standard the body of which is correct English usage, but whose soul is Indian in colour, thought and imagery.”¹ The
Indian fiction writers used this genre as a carrier for their indigenous experiences and culture. Thus, the Indian English novel is an example of literary hybridization of Indian content and Western form.

The credit of starting the tradition of novel in India especially goes to Bengali novelists: Michael Madhusudan Dutt with *Captive Ladie* (1849), the only novel in English. Thereafter he started his career in Bengali poems. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-94) with his first effort wrote *Rajmohan’s Wife* (1864). He took the life of an ordinary middle class Bengali family as a subject of his novel.

Novels kept on appearing during the period from the sixties up to the end of the nineteenth century, but they were greatly affected by the eighteenth and nineteenth century British Fiction. It was the most significant challenge for the Indo-Anglian novelists to have come out of the grip of British Fiction and use the English language in Indian style. Most of these writers disclosed the social issues and a few dealt with historical theme in their novels. These novelists include Ram Krishna Pant’s *The Boy of Bengal* (1866), Tarachand Mookerjee’s *The Scorpions or Eastern Thoughts* (1868), Lal Behari’s *The History*
of Bengal Raiyat (1874), Anand Prosad Dutt’s The Indolence (1878), Shoshee Chunder Dutt’s The Young Zamidar (1883), Trailokya Nath Das’s Hirimba’s Wedding (1884), Mirza Moorad Alee Beg’s Lalum, The Beragun, or The Battle of Panipat (1884), Sanjihi Mull’s The Interesting story of Prince Pooran (1886), Michael Madhusudan Dutt’s Bijoy Chand: An Indian Tale (1888), Yogendranath Chattopadhyaya’s The Girl and Her Tutor (1891) and Lt. Suresh Biswas: His Life and Adventures (1900) and B.R. Rajam Iyer’s Fragment of a Religious Novel, True Greatness or Vasudev Sastri (Serialized in Prabuddha Bharata, 1896-98). There were some translated works in English also—Manoj Basu’s Jalajangal and The Forest Goddess by Barindra Nath Bose. The twentieth century novel came in light with a great change from the earlier ones. The west wind left a great impact on the novelists and English education had spread out rapidly in the next twenty years. Novelists wrote novels on every subject—historical, east-west relationship and social affairs. T. Ramakrishna with Padmini (1903) tried to write a historical novel in English, The Dive for Death (1912) is a fully superstitious novel but the superstitions dealt therein make the characters weak. Romesh Chunder Dutt’s two Bengali novels
were translated into English— The Lake of Palms: A story of Indian Domestic Life (1902), a realistic novel with the setting of Bengali life in the 19th century, written on the theme of widow re-marriage with an intention of social reform and his next novel The Slave Girl of Agra, an Indian Historical Romance (1909), discloses the Mughal Period and gives a glimpse of the seventeenth century life of Agra. Sarath Kumar Ghosh another Bengali novelist tried to make a fantasy by Verdict of the Gods (1905). In 1906 it was published under the title 1001 Indian Nights: The Trails of Narayan Lal. The next novel of Sarath Kumar Ghosh was entitled The Prince of Destiny: The New Krishna (1909), the first fictional example on East-West relationship— “a union of the highest ideals of The East and West.”² A. Madhoviah, the contemporary of these Bengali writers came into light with his first effort Satyananda (1909) and other novel Thillai Govindan (1916). There is a portrait of a young protagonist who raises his voice against the formalism of religion. His other novels are Clarinda (1915), Nanda, the Pariah Who Overcame Caste (1923) and Lt. Panju— A Modern Indian (1924).
Again stray novels appeared on the scene belonging to the Bengal and Madras presidencies but they were not sufficient to satisfy the readers. These include S.T. Ram’s Cosmopolitan Hindustani (1902), L.B. Pal’s A Glimpse of Zanana Life in Bengal (1904), M. Venkatesiya Naidu’s The Princess Kamala or The Model Wife (1904), S.M. Mitra’s Hindupore, A Peep Behind the Indian Unrest—An Anglo Indian Romance (1909) S.B. Banerjee’s The Adventures of Mrs. Russell (1909), Bal Krishna’s The Love of Kusuma: An Eastern Love Story (1910), B.K. Sarkar’s Man of Letters (1911), M.M. Munshi’s Beauty and Joy (1914), T.K. Gopal Pannikar’s Storm and Sunshine (1916), Srinivasa Rau’s Varanasi: The Portugese Ambassador (1917), and C. Parthasarthy’s Sangili Karuppan: The Wheel of Destiny (1920).

The Women novelists also made significant contribution to the English novel. They are natural writers because they play various roles in their life. Woman education was not broad enough in earlier nineteenth century but at the start of that century woman novelists came into light—Raj Laxshmi Debi’s The Hindu Wife, or The Enchanted Fruit (1876). Toru Dutt (1856-77) with her limitation started writing on her own
experiences. She passed her life isolated from the current world. She attempted an unfinished novel Bianca, or The Young Spanish Maiden (1878), and Le Journal de Mademoiselle d’Arvers in the form of English translation. It is a romantic love story set in Bengal. Mrs. Krupabai Satthianadhan’s Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life (1895) and Saguna: A Story of Native Christian Life (1895) — “both thinly veiled exercises in autobiography.”³ Shevantibai M. Nikambe, who produced Ratanbai: A sketch of a Bombay High Caste Hindu Young Wife (1895). Then came Svarna Kumari Debi with her two translated novels into English— An Unfinished Song (1913) and The Fatal Garland (1915), a historical novel.

A Punjabi novelist, Sardar Jogendar Singh also appeared with his fictional work— Nur Jahan, The Romance of an Indian Queen (1909), a historical novel ; Nasrin: An Indian Medley (1911), a realistic novel depicting the fall of aristocratic life in North India ; Kamala (1925) and Kamni (1931), dealing with social affairs. Out of these four novels the first three were published in London and the last one in Lahore.

The Gandhian whirlwind blew all over the country. Mahatma Gandhi was a great humanist and a man of religion. It is true that
he gave his support to the liberation of India but he had no hatred for the British. With his movement during 1920-1947 a revolution started all over the country. He opened the way of India’s freedom and made his countrymen realize for their liberty. By and by in every segment of our national life came a radical and pervasive change with Gandhian whirlwind, “a new confidence was generated and the writers attempted to encompass the contemporary social reality in their writings.”

India’s struggle for freedom made a tremendous impact on every creation whether writing or painting. Like the writers, artists also “chose the freedom struggle as a subject for their paintings.”

According to Nehru, “Gandhi .... was like a powerful current of fresh air that made us stretch ourselves and take deep breaths.”

The inevitable impact of the Gandhian movement on Indian English literature was the sudden flowering of the realistic novel during the thirties of the last century. The novelists turned their attention away from the past and started to concentrate on contemporary issues. Social and political problems were prevailing in their novels which Indians found in their life. The Indian English fiction about the Gandhian era justifies E.M. Forster’s observation about the modern novel as playing the
special role of portraying life by time. The nation-wide movement of Gandhi not only inspired but also provided the Indian English novelists with some of the prominent themes as—the struggle for freedom, East-West encounter, the communal problem and the miserable conditions of the untouchables, the landless poor, the down-trodden, the economically exploited and the oppressed.

The impact of the far-reaching changes of the Indian social and political scene caused by the Gandhian movement can be perceived in K.S. Venkatramani’s (1891-1951), Murugan, The Tiller (1927) and Kandan, The Patriot: A Novel of New India in the Making (1932). The first one is about the Gandhian economics, surrounded by the rural life and the second one discloses Gandhian politics. Then after came A.S.P. Ayyer (1899-1963) with his novels but his creation was quite different from the contemporary fiction. Although they were Gandhian in spirit, the setting was not of the twentieth century. His novel Baladitya (1930) came with the setting of fifth century India and the background of his Three Men of Destiny (1939) with Alexander’s invasion of India in fourth century B.C. After that the Tamil novelist, Krishnaswamy Nagarajan (b.1893) writes his
two novels— Athavar House (1937) which is a family chronicle; a Galsworthy depicting financial vicissitudes in the Maharastrian Brahmin joint family and in addition, the ferment of the Gandhian age, while his later novel, Chronicles of Kedaram (1961) shows the combined effect of realism and a sharp sense of irony.

The independence movement in India was much different from other Revolutions as— French Revolution, Russian or American Revolution. Neither it was bloody nor an armed struggle for power. It was a new approach to life for all Indians which remained for a long period of time in world history. This movement was a pensive emotional experience also for all people in the thirties, forties, nineties and twenties. No writer could avoid it from his creative work.

In the thirties of the last century the most remarkable event in the realm of Indian English fiction was the emergence of the three brightest stars— Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004), R.K. Narayan (1906-2001), and Raja Rao (1908-2006). Like others, they also tried to evince the social diseases which were sapping the vitality of Indian society. In fact, they brought the Indian English novel into a new flavour and “established the assumptions,
sketched the main themes, drew the first models of the characters, and elaborated the peculiar logic of the Indian novel in English.”

Mulk Raj Anand, a prolific writer hailed from the North-West Frontier Province of the undivided India. He addressed himself in a most open way, and the problems which were faced by the people of those days, were the subject of his novels. His father Lal Chand Anand served in the Indian Army and Mulk Raj Anand’s childhood passed among different types of people. His autobiographical experiences and his vision of a modern egalitarian society found expression in his novels. His early friends and playmates became, with the hue of imagination, the heroes of his novels. He himself says: “All these heroes as the other men and women, who had emerged in my novels and short stories, were dear to me, because they were the reflections of the real people I had known during my childhood and youth.” (qtd. in Iyengar 334)

His literary career started with Untouchable (1935), a chilling expose of the day-to-day life of a member of India’s untouchable caste. It is a story of single day in the life of Bakha, who is slapped for the only reason that he belonged to a low caste. In
Coolie (1936) he discloses the plight of a poor 15 year old Indian boy, Munnoo, who is trapped in servitude as a child labourer and Two Leaves and a Bud (1937) shows a peasant, Gangu who becomes a victim of exploitation while trying to protect his daughter from being raped by a British Colonial officer. Then came his trilogy— The Village (1939), Across the Black Waters (1941), The Sword and the Sickle (1942), ‘called Lalu trilogy’ and their themes are on boyhood, youth and early manhood.

Mulk Raj Anand’s other three novels— The Big Heart (1945), The Road (1963), and The Death of a Hero (1964) deal with the young protagonists— Anant, Bhikhoo and Maqbool who symbolize the spirit of joy but had to face the identity crisis. His other novel Private Life of an Indian Prince (1953) discloses once again echoes of identity crisis but in a different way and the hero Vicky because of his own infirmities, is responsible for the crisis in his life. Like male characters his women characters also face the same identity crisis. Readers find Gauri in The Old Woman and the Cow (1960) as Naikar says, “struggling against all odds to secure her identity.”8 From 1950 Mulk Raj Anand embarked to write autobiographical novels— Seven Summers (1951), Morning Face (1968), Confessions of a Lover (1976),
The Bubble (1984), Little Plays of Mahatma Gandhi (1991) and Nine Moods of Bharata: Novel of a Pilgrimage (1998). His novel Morning Face won him The National Academy Award. It contains elements of his spiritual journey as he struggles to attain a higher sense of self-awareness. He puts in his novels, joys and sorrows of his heart. He himself expresses frankly: “The connection between my life and writing is more intimate than in other novelists. I write as I live. My life is my message.” (qtd. in Naikar 21)

His style is redolent of the Indian soil for he imports words, phrases, turns of expression and proverbs from his native Punjabi and Hindi into English which won him the reputation of being India’s Charles Dickens.

The second trio R.K. Narayan (1906-2001) is among the well-known and most widely read Indian novelist writing in English. He kept himself aloof from the prevailing social-political issues of the contemporary period. His well drawn portrayals of Indian life were set mostly in the fictional South Indian town, Malgudi. Malgudi, of course, does not exist. It is for R.K. Narayan, just as Wessex is for Thomas Hardy, an imaginary landscape inhabited by the unique characters of his stories and novels. Before Independence, R.K. Narayan produced Swami and Friends
(1935), The Bachelor of Arts (1937), The Dark Room (1938) and The English Teacher (1946). R.K. Narayan’s fictional art seems to reach maturity in his novels, which appeared after Independence— The Financial Expert (1952), The Guide (1958) and The Man-Eater of Malgudi (1962). His other novels include Waiting for the Mahatma (1955), dealing with the Gandhian freedom struggle; The Vendor of Sweets (1967), and The Painter of Signs (1976). In his nineties R.K. Narayan added four more novels to his corpus with A Tiger for Malgudi (1983), followed by Talkative Man (1983), The World of Nagaraj (1990) and Grandmother’s Tale (1992). In contrast to Mulk Raj Anand’s militant humanism and his robust earthiness, R.K. Narayan presents delicate blend of gentle irony and sympathy, quiet realism and fantasy in all his works. R.K. Narayan explores, “the staying power of the society.... whose hundred ills have not destroyed the moral and spiritual base of the individual.”

The youngest of the trio, Raja Rao has not been a prolific novelist like Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan. Raja Rao (1908-2006) was born in the state of Mysore in South India, in a well-known Brahmin family. He got his early education at Muslim School. After taking degree from Madras University, he left India
for Europe where he remained for a decade. His native language was Kanarese but he got his post-graduate education in France and all his publications in book form were in English. His first novel *Kanthapura* (1938) has the theme of the impact of Gandhi’s teaching on non-violent resistance against the British of an obscure Mysore village in South India. He borrows the style and structure from Indian vernacular tales and folk-epic.

His next novel *Serpent and the Rope* (1960), winner of the Sahitya Academy Award, 1963, shows the relationship between Indian and Western culture. Its protagonist, Ramaswamy, a young Brahmin, goes to France for the sake of studies and marries a French college teacher who sees her husband above all as a Guru. She leaves her husband and becomes a Buddhist and renounces worldly desires. The *Cat and Shakespeare* (1965), a metaphysical comedy that answered philosophical questions posed in the earlier novels. Its protagonist gets divine grace and discovers that there is no dichotomy between himself and God. It is not mere fantasy, for it Iyengar states, “is admittedly based on actual events.”(409) His other novel *Comrade Kirillov* (1976) was first published in French. It satirizes Communism as an ideological misunderstanding of man’s ultimate aims and argues
that all foreign creeds gradually become Indianized. The Chessmaster and His Moves (1988) is crowded by various characters from different cultures seeking their identities. Raja Rao used the metaphor of the chess game to animate philosophical and psychological ideas. Here ‘The Chessmaster’ is God Himself and ‘His Moves’ are what He makes man do. His place in the realm of Indian English fiction is safe. Like most Indian novelists in English, he is a stylist, symbolist, myth-maker, the finest painter of East-West encounter and a philosophical novelist.

After getting independence India had so many challenges to face and several changes came over Indian life. Although complicacies took place in social, political, economic and cultural spheres but India handled them thoughtfully and adequately and kept on progressing step by step. The fact of being independent and having its own identity spurred the Indian English writing. It provided the writer with self-confidence and broadened his vision and sharpened his self-examining faculty. “As a total result of these developments, important gains were registered especially in fiction, poetry and
criticism. Fiction, already well-established, grew in both variety and stature." (Naik 192)

(B) *The Making of R.K. Narayan: The Novelist*

R.K. Narayan (1906-2001) was born in a South Indian conservative Brahmin family in Madras on 10th October. He was the third of eight surviving children. His full name was Rasipuram Krishnaswami Ayyar Narayanswami. In South India, the given name is usually written at last. His first name stands for the village Rasipuram to which his family belonged; middle name stands for the name of his father, Krishnaswami and the full form of Narayan is Narayanswami. The novelist never used the full form of his name; he called himself simply R.K. Narayan. Soon after his birth, when he was only two years old, his father got a job as a school teacher in Mysore and his family shifted there, but R.K. Narayan was left behind under the care of his maternal grandmother, Parvathi, who was called ‘Ammanī’. She was a commanding figure in the family whom no one could dare, not even R.K. Narayan, to ask questions. He lived with her and
one of his uncles, until he was a teenager. He spent a few weeks, in summer holidays, visiting his parents and siblings.

In his autobiographical book My Days (1974) R.K. Narayan gives a delightful account of his days in Madras, where he had his school and college education. He grew up speaking Tamil and learning English at the Lutheran Mission School close to his grandmother’s house and studied for a short time at the C.R.C. High School. When his father was appointed headmaster of the Maharaja College in Mysore, R.K. Narayan moved back there with his parents. He was not an enthusiastic student and failed repeatedly in Arithmetic and did his graduation in 1930 when he was twenty four, at Maharaja College Mysore. As his father had to support a large family, R.K. Narayan had to seek a job. At first he worked as a clerk in the Mysore Secretariat for some time, but found his work tedious. Then he became a teacher, but the vocation did not suit him. He also worked for sometime as a correspondent of Madras Justice, and also as a sub-editor. At last he took to writing. In those days it was quite unthinkable that an Indian could write in English and become successful. But Narayan went ahead with great confidence, even though in the beginning many of his writings were rejected outright:
I offered samples of my writing to every kind of editor and publisher in the city of Madras. The general criticism was that my stories lacked “plot”. There was no appreciation of my literary values, and I had nothing else to offer. Malgudi was inescapable as the sky overhead.

Even though his earnings were meager, he resolved to live on writing alone. In his first year of writing, he earned nine rupees and twelve annas, in the second year a story was sold for eighteen rupees, and in the third year a children’s tale fetched him thirty rupees. His first novel Swami and Friends (1935) was declared satisfactory and was accepted for publication in England, sponsored by Graham Greene who wrote introduction for his later novels like The Bachelor of Arts (1937) and The Financial Expert (1952).

In 1933 R.K. Narayan married Rajam and a daughter was born to them. During this period he wrote The Bachelor of Arts and The Dark Room (1938). His beloved wife died of typhoid in 1939, just five years after their marriage. She has always been a source of inspiration to him and a number of R.K. Narayan’s female characters bear close resemblance to his wife’s character and personality. The loss and suffering made him a fuller and wiser man. He did not write any novel for the next six years.
was a period of deep anguish and introspection. During this period he published three volumes of short stories—Malgudi Days (1914), Dodu and Other Stories (1943) and Cyclone and Other Stories (1944). Dodu is none other than R.K. Narayan’s brother R.K. Laxman, the famous cartoonist. These collections are now out of print, but most of the stories are republished in later collections of short stories like—An Astrologer’s Day and Other Stories (1947), and Lawley Road and Other Stories (1956).

Even as a boy, R.K. Narayan was a voracious reader. Since his father was a headmaster, R.K. Narayan had access to almost all literary magazines from London and New York, which acquainted him with such English writers—Arthur Conan Doyle, P.G. Wodehouse, W.W. Jacobs, Arnold Bennet and a host of others. John O’London’s stories appealed to him and provided him with themes centering round a moment or mood with a crisis. R.K. Narayan began to read all the books in the library and acquired a critical sense through book reviews which tempered his enthusiasm for some writers like Marie Corellie. He admired Scott and read a whole row of Dickens and loved his London and queer personalities therein. He also enjoyed reading Moliere,
Pope, Marlowe, Tolstoy, Hardy and Marie Corellie who wrote popular romances. The romantic poets induced him into the secrets of Nature’s glory. In My Days, R.K. Narayan says: “Tagore’s poetry swept him off his feet.” Shakespeare interested him and he knew The Tempest long before he knew anything else. Educated in a Lutheran Mission School, R.K. Narayan had also read the Bible and was fascinated by it.

R.K. Narayan started writing under the influence of events occurring around him. Moreover his wife, his uncle and Mr. Sampath, a friend, had served him as models. His wife had been portrayed in his novel The English Teacher (1945), published in The United States with the title Grateful to Life and Death (1953). Throughout the novel one can have glimpse of Rajam and Narayan in the guise of Susila and Krishna. The novel, as R.K. Narayan himself admits, is autobiographical in content, very little part of it being fiction.

R.K. Narayan has described his uncle quite at length in his autobiography. He describes his uncle’s drunken escapades out in the evenings. R.K. Narayan tells that his drunken uncle used to settle down to a nice chat with the family after dinner, and insist on having everyone around him. Every morning he would
take R.K. Narayan out with him in his demonstration car, which he drove nearly a hundred miles a day, saw dozens of persons, subjected them to his sales talk and booked at least one order in a day and celebrated his success with four gins before lunch. He kept R.K. Narayan in his company throughout, and as he tells, in My Days, “I acquired valuable experience and familiarity with a variety of human types, their style of talk and outlook. Above all, my uncle himself was an inescapable model for me….his approach to other human beings, his aggressive talk wherever he went, his dash and recklessness….especially his abandon to alcohol in every form all through the day.” (96) R.K. Narayan portrayed him as Kailas in The Bachelor of Arts. He provided all the substance wherever R.K. Narayan had to portray a drunken character.

In one of his novels, Mr. Sampath (1949), published in the United States under the title The Printer of Malgudi (1957), R.K. Narayan depicts his friend Mr. Sampath as a printer turned film director. He observes that in real life too, Sampath is a very busy film personality, with a shooting schedule almost everyday at studios in Mysore and Madras. He is also portrayed as Natraj in The Man-Eater of Malgudi (1961). Between these two novels

R.K. Narayan’s job as a newspaper reporter helped him to come into contact with a variety of men and their activities. He confesses that he had started writing under the influence of events occurring around him in the style of any writer who was uppermost in his mind at the time. Once, when his father lost a dear friend who affected him deeply, R.K. Narayan was moved by his sorrow and says in My Days that he “wrote ten pages of an outpouring entitled ‘Friendship’— very nearly echoing the lamentations of ‘Adonais’ but in a flamboyant poetic prose.”(64) During his profession he met different types of people who helped him in creating conflicting personality in his works as a Taxidermist Vasu in The Man-Eater of Malgudi and a shopkeeper Jagan in The Vendor of Sweets (1967). R.K. Narayan wrote My Days (1974) nearly thirty years after writing The English Teacher. He also discussed the social problem of population in The Painter of Signs (1977). His career entered in a productive phase which included A Tiger for Malgudi (1983),

R.K. Narayan was a born story teller. He narrated the story both at the superficial level where the locale is dominating and at the deeper level where general truths are incorporated in artistic terms. He sealed his achievement as a story-teller with his finest collections of stories— A Horse and Two Goats (1970), Malgudi Days (1982) and Under the Bunyan Tree and Other Stories (1985). Once R.K. Narayan’s uncle suggested him to study the old epics because he would get profit out of it and “his writing would gain in seriousness and weight.” He contended that old epics are the source of creating an incident or a character in imaginative writing, and he also took his characters dipped in Puranic tradition. He re-told the legends— Gods, Demons and Others (1965), The Ramayana (1972) and The Mahabharata (1978) and written a number of essays— Next Sunday (1960) Reluctant Guru (1965), A Writer’s Nightmare (1988), The World of The Story Teller and a travelogue The Emerald Route (1980) in collaboration with his renowned younger brother, the great cartoonist, R.K. Laxman. R.K. Narayan received a number of literary awards and distinctions. He
received The National Prize of Indian Literary Academy in 1958 and The Sahitya Academy Award in 1960 for his novel The Guide. His two novels The Guide and Mr. Sampath, have been made two immensely popular films. A dramatic version also appeared in New York in 1968. R.K. Narayan was awarded Padma Bhushan in 1964. He was also honoured by the University of Leeds in 1967 and University of Delhi in 1973. He has been included in the “Writers and their Works” series published by the British Council. He visited U.S.A. in 1956 on an invitation from the Rockefeller Foundation. Many of his stories and sketches have been broadcast by the B.B.C. His works are published both in England and the United States where he enjoys wide popularity. In America, he is regarded next only to Faulkner and Graham Greene.

R.K. Narayan’s first novel Swami and Friends (1935) is a juvenile comedy with nineteen chapters. It describes the boy’s life in South India. In fact, this book is one of his best works and he “succeeds in capturing the spirit of childhood.”12 With the activities of Swami, a ten year old boy and his group, he is a spontaneous, impulsive, mischievous and yet a very innocent child. He has all the similarities of R.K. Narayan’s boyhood days.
Being a reflection of R.K. Narayan himself, Swami hates schools and education. Monday, the first day of a week, is called a black day by Swami. He doesn’t want to go with the discipline of the school and teachers after the “delicious freedom of Saturday and Sunday.”

Bachelor of Arts (1937), the later part of R.K. Narayan’s first novel, Swami and Friends, presents a few phases in the life of Chandran, the protagonist. Chadran is a young man of twenty-one, studying in B.A. last year and ready to enter in the worldly life. He wants to get a remarkable place in the society. It is also concerned that the gap between a young college boys to a matured man is full of various emotional ups and downs. This is clearly portrayed into the four parts of the novel, and each part presents a certain stage of Chandran— the hero in the college, in love, in the world and in domestic life.

The Dark Room (1938) is quite different from the first two novels in theme and technique which is more somber and carefully designed. The dark room, which is an essential part, and a place for safe deposits both a sanctuary and a retreat, in an Indian house but in this novel it is used symbolically where the helpless Savitri retires to sulk and mope. R.K. Narayan took
his story and characters from the day to day life. Here he describes a sad and frustrated married life of Savitri, the tradition-bound, suffering Indian wife, and Ramani, the callous and whimsical husband.

His next novel, The English Teacher (1945) came seven years later his third novel, The Dark Room. It is deeply autobiographical and marks a turning point in R.K. Narayan’s life and career. It is a lyrically told story of the ecstasy and agony of marriage. Krishna, the central character of the novel is a lecturer in English at Albert Mission College. Though he is hardly thirty years old, he is married and has a young beautiful wife and a daughter. They lead a happy marital life for several months but it cuts in short by ill-fate. Their happiness comes to an unexpected end when Susila dies of typhoid. Krishna’s life has changed completely after this calamity. He has no interest in life and he has lost his gaiety of temperament. Events take on an unexpected turn; he met a man who knew how to communicate with spirits. This gave him solace and he found much true information from his dead wife. This contact gave a fresh charm to his life. R.K. Narayan also said that it is a moment for which one feels grateful to life and death.’
Mr. Sampath, or The Printer of Malgudi (1949) depicts R.K. Narayan as a realist and it is a beginning of his mature art. His central characters being matured now involved into sex and earning more money. That is why the circumstances become more intricate. Srinivas, the journalist editor comes to Malgudi from Talapur for printing his weekly journal. He comes into contact with Mr. Sampath, the printer who takes the charge of him and agrees to print his journal. After some time the printing of ‘The Banner’ is stopped because of a sudden strike at the ‘Truth Printing Works’ and Srinivas has to join again Mr. Sampath in his plan of film production but shooting is stopped after an incident and Mr. Sampath goes to Mempi Hill’s rest-house for making holidays with Shanti Devi. After few days, Sampath returns to Srinivas and decides to go to some unknown place. He declines Srinivas’ invitation for taking dinner and says, “I’m going to the railway station. I’ll manage there”, and goes from Malgudi.

The Financial Expert (1952) is one of the masterpieces of R.K. Narayan, and its protagonist, Margayya is “probably Narayan’s greatest single comic creation.” He was born with the name, Krishna, but became famous as Margayya. His name
has symbolic meaning; Margayya, one who shows the way, and of course he shows the right way to those who are in financial trouble. He has the only desire to grow rich at any rate. This novel presents Margayya’s struggle to become rich and ends under the banyan tree from where it started. It is a well-constructed novel and its five parts show the rise and fall of Margayya, the monetary wizard.

His next novel Waiting for the Mahatma (1955) has a distinctive setting and theme among his novels. It is regarded as a political novel related the only movement ‘Quit India’ started by Mahatma Gandhi. In fact, it is the story of Sriram, the hero and his relationship with his grand mother and Bharati, his beloved.

The Guide (1958) is the most highly acclaimed of Narayan’s novels. It has been translated into almost every leading language of Europe and India and has also been made into a highly successful film in English and Hindi. The novel won the Sahitya Academy Award. This celebrated novel tells a complicated story of a typical R.K. Narayan hero, Raju who is unheroic, flawed and blundering. This tragi-comedy is not only highly enjoyable, but also profoundly thoughtful.
The Man-Eater of Malgudi (1961) is one of R.K. Narayan’s master-pieces. This novel is indeed a remarkable work of fiction. It is highly enjoyable and entertaining from the beginning to the end. The focal point in this novel is the ‘man-eater’ of Malgudi, Vasu. It is his diabolical depredations in the peace-loving town of Malgudi that hold the readers attention. The story is full of tension but the natural comic sense of R.K. Narayan turns it into a delightful comic narration with profound moral overtones. More than any other work of R.K. Narayan this novel strikes the readers as a moral fable, allegory or parable.

After writing the ambitious novels as The Financial Expert, The Guide and The Man-Eater of Malgudi, R.K. Narayan harked back to the theme with The Vendor of Sweets (1967) used in his earlier novels related to family-relationship. This novel presents the conflict of two generations which plays a dominant role in developing the action and shaping the narrative. Jagan and Mali with their outlook and thoughts take the reader back to Margayya and his son, Balu.

Next novel, The Painter of Signs (1977), appeared after a gap of nearly a decade which produced stories, essays, memories, retold versions of mythological tales and an epic. It is the most
topical and contemporary of R.K. Narayan’s novels. The problem of over-population and the Family Planning Programme of the Government is the central theme of this novel but the focus of interest remains on the love story of Raman and Daisy. Their relationship through its various phases displays a spectrum of emotions— the ardour, humour, frustration, agony, reconciliation, delusion and disillusionment of love. The illusory nature of romantic love with its conspicuous erotic bias comes in again for sardonic treatment.

R.K. Narayan’s novel, A Tiger for Malgudi (1983), is about a tiger possessed of the soul of an enlightened human being who tells his story from his early days to retirement. This novel is not exactly a glory depiction of a tiger, but it has some breath-taking moments. Narayan has a reliable knowledge of animal psychology and their behaviour. That is why he has given a genuine description of jungle life of the tiger.

Talkative Man (1986) by R.K. Narayan does not qualify itself to be taken as a full-fledged novel by any standard. It is like a light table-talk between two friends over a cup of tea. In this novel R.K. Narayan describes one of the most vexing issues in contemporary Indian urban life: the changing roles and
aspirations of women, which obviously come into collision with age-old ways of defining male-female relationship.

The other novel The World of Nagaraj (1990) is the story of travails of its hero Nagaraj who has the inner mission to write on Sage Narada. But he meets frustration because of his attachment for his nephew Krishnaji, affectionately called Tim. The attachment-detachment doctrine plays a decisive role in Nagaraj’s life and affects the fruition of his mission. Here R.K. Narayan attempts to seek an integrated personality with the attributes of a sanyasi and a house-holder.

His last novel Grandmother’s Tale (1992), far from being a proper novel, is a biographical account of R.K. Narayan’s great grandmother, Bala. He heard it from his grandmother and developed it into a readable narrative. His creative output in fiction comprises of fifteen novels building up an unforgettable image of a writer and exhibits that R.K. Narayan’s own experiences and affairs have contributed a lot in making him a novelist.

He is an artist pure and simple and interprets Indian life aesthetically with unprejudiced objectivity. His portrayal of life is realistic in physical detail and, simultaneously, it is suggestive
of the depth beneath. Without being didactic, he presents a profound moral vision in his novels. This vision has its roots in an ageless heritage of culture and tradition. R.K. Narayan is, perhaps, a moral analyst of character and conduct but he does not attempt to impose his views on his readers. His morality is never obtrusive; his readers must gather his message by reading between the lines.

R.K. Narayan’s literary career spans both in pre-independence and post-independence periods of the Indian history. It was a time when India was passing through a crucial phase of National Liberation Movement. Writers, poets and thinkers did their best for the liberation of the country. Under such circumstances R.K. Narayan must have thought it better to amuse his western readers. They were already conversant with a peculiar image of Indian culture which they had observed in ignorant people’s faith in ghosts and apparitions, magical enchantments, and supernatural powers of saints and ascetics. In this way, R.K. Narayan thought it better to become a literary ambassador of Indian culture and expose its hollowness which he observed in its superficialities and which provided sufficient entertainment to his readers.
R.K. Narayan’s novels reveal about the land of his birth, the people, and their faith in religion. His characters, plots and stories give a made-India-stamp to his novels. Although he was educated in India, his works were published in England and America and got honoured there but he had narrated nothing about the foreign matters in his books. His novels always combine realism with elements of fantasy and provide realities of India in general and South India in particular.
Notes and References:


