INTRODUCTION

The Indian English novel has established a tradition of its own which goes back to a little over a hundred years. It has witnessed a significant growth particularly over the last two decades. There is a certain multiplicity of themes and variety of styles seen in this genre today. Apart from the political and social themes, there are gender-based themes, ethnic-minority themes, themes dealing with the expatriate experience. There is also a considerable experimentation in styles.

This body of literature has achieved a world-wide recognition in recent times, which is hardly surprising considering the attention that has been devoted to it by Indian and Western critics and scholars over the last thirty years or so. This critical attention can be related to the institutionalization of Indian English literature in colleges and universities. The fact that Indian English literature has become part of the prescribed syllabus for under-graduate and post-graduate study could account for the amount of critical evaluation and research directed towards it.

However, an objective analysis of the critical and historical accounts of this area reveals that there is a considerable gap between the extant works of Indian English fiction and the critical, historical studies of it, made so far. Most of these critical and historical studies chart the growth of the entire area in terms of period and canon. This has served to fulfill a pedagogic requirement necessitated by the institutionalization of Indian English literature. But from a purely historiographical perspective, this strategy leaves many questions unanswered. My attempt in this

dissertation is to examine the relationship between the existing works of Indian English fiction and its historical progression.

Does the brief span of the existence of this area of literature allow scope for writing a history ? Is it realistic to chart this history in terms of periods or canon ? Or wouldn't it be more fruitful to admit of the difficulties involved in such a venture and write a more realistic account of the historical progression of the Indian English novel ? These are some of the questions that I have attempted to raise and answer in this dissertation.

In the first chapter of my dissertation, I have examined at some length the critical studies of Indian English fiction made by Srinivas-Iyengar, C.D. Narasihnmaiah, M. K. Naik, Meenakshi Mukherjee and William Walsh. The early studies made by K. R. Srinivas-Iyengar and C. D. Narasinhmaiah tend to be defensive and at times apologetic. This is understandable, for these critics spoke of the Indian English novel when the area was in its initial stages of development. But it was really Meenakshi Mukherjee who placed the Indian English novel in a historical perspective. She identified one of the central issues by maintaining that it is *The Twice-Born Fiction* : fiction born out of a blending of the native sensibility and a foreign language. She further paved the way for critics and students of this area by unravelling the three main strands of this fiction and making a detailed analysis of the main themes and styles. M. K. Naik classified the Indian English novel in terms of periods which he related to the external political reality, in his short survey, *A History of Indian English Literature.* G. N. Devy has emphasized the need for a just and proper assessment of the achievements of Indian English fiction in

the context of the cultural and social factors responsible for the sudden spurt in its growth in recent times. The efforts of these critics in examining critical and historical aspects of Indian English fiction cannot be under-estimated. And it is not my aim in this thesis to criticize their efforts. My chief emphasis in this dissertation is on the need to go beyond bio-bibliographical surveys of Indian-English novelists and thematic and stylistic analyses of their works and to view the tradition of the Indian English novel from a historiographical perspective. My contention is that the existing historiography of this area needs to be re-considered. The very concept of literary history has generated critical debates in recent times and these debates have created for us a possibility of re-interpreting literary traditions. The need to break away from tried methods of writing literary history has become increasingly mainfest. A literary history which rests on the method of periodization and canonization seems inadequate for our purposes. I have demonstrated how an application of these methods is both pre-mature and unrealistic while charting the history of the Indian English novel as of now.

In the second chapter, I have analysed in brief some of the contemporary theories of literary history and shown how literary history is indispensable. The need to study the past, the particularity of the context in which a literary work takes shape, the literary modes and conventions influencing a literary work cannot be too much emphasized. I have then examined some of the recent theories of literary history outlined by Rene Wellek, R. S. Crane, David Perkins, Hans Robert Jauss, Wolfgang Iser, Hayden White and the New Historicists. I am not suggesting a blind incorporation of these western theories in the absence of historiographical principles in the Indian context. The limitations of

these theories in this regard have been discussed. I have further demonstrated how post-colonial discourse in the west fails to account for the culture-specificity of postcolonial literatures, for factors such as differences of race, class, caste, gender and ethnicity. In this connection, I have briefly dwelt on the views of postcolonial critics such as Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Arun Mukhrjee, Helen Tiffin, Bill Ashcroft and Gareth Griffin. No western theory, however explanatory it may be in the western context, could adequately account for the evolution of this area of literature. In other words, conventional notions of historiography, mainly derived from western historiographical principles would have to be dismissed in favour of more realistic, more historically appropriate methods of writing the history of this area of fiction.

I have offered some suggestions for writing such a history in the third chapter of my dissertation. I have argued against an indiscriminate appropriation of Western methods of historiography, particularly the methods of canonization and periodization. I have demonstrated the inadequacy of these methods for attempting the history of the Indian English novel. As an alternative to these methods, which are inappropriate in the present context, I have suggested that it is more realistic to view the history of the Indian English novel in terms of clusters. The clusters identified in this dissertation have been distinguished on the basis of themes and styles.