



## VI - CONCLUSIONS

Indian fiction in English, which is the highest achievement of Indian English writing, presents a wide spectrum of creative motivations, concerns and techniques. Even a casual glance at the variegated field of Indian fiction in English gives us an idea of the diversity of the Indian writer's novelistic concerns and achieved creations. Yet, it is possible to identify some major impulses and concerns keeping in view the major trends in the socio-cultural process of this century. In the context of rapidly changing society under the dynamic forces of nationalism, urbanization and modernization the novel inevitably takes on a social character, trying to grapple with problems of social reforms and social transformations. Mulk Raj Anand eminently represents their concern. But historically India

also has stood for certain abiding values and perennial patterns of human life, which have helped the Indian civilization survive through the centuries. One of the novelistic preoccupations in India has been with these permanent structures of what we call Indian wisdom. R. K. Narayan represents this attitude of quizzical, and sometimes ironic, acceptance of life with all its contradictions and so-called progressive evolution. The third novelistic preoccupation can be characterised by a philosophic quest. Raja Rao's novels carry on this old Upanishadic impulse. The fourth concern is that of the reconstruction of history as we find in the novels of, say, Manohar Malgaonkar and Kushwant Singh.

These major preoccupations may be set to produce four different kinds of novels : (i) the novel as a mirror and an instrument of socio-cultural process; (ii) the novel as witness; (iii) the novel as a philosophic quest; (iv) the novel as history.

Now from the point of view of the theme

of childhood it is necessary to place it in the context of the kind of novel that a writer is writing. In novel as history, for example, childhood would never be shown as an autonomous entity but something related to its later development. In the novel as witness childhood would be considered autonomous as a self-contained avastha with its own parameters. In the novel of social purpose, on the other hand, the concept of the child as victim would be most fruitfully used. In this dissertation, we have focused our attention on two novelistic categories; (i) the novel of social purpose and (ii) the novel as witness.

Mulk Raj Anand who began writing fiction under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi is our finest representative of the novel of social purpose. He inevitably chose the Dickensian device of using the concept of child-as-victim, in exposing the evils of Indian traditional social structures. He was not merely interested in exposing the social evils, say, like untouchability, but was also interested in arousing the social consciousness of

the readers in respect of the social reform that he was proposing — that of the total abolition of untouchability. Along with the Dickensian device Anand used the modern stream-of-consciousness technique in order to demonstrate that the untouchable is a human being like you and me, with the same human impulses, emotions and aspirations. Anand's early novels are a great success in intensifying our awareness in regard to the predicament of the lower sections of society which are ruthlessly suppressed and exploited by the upper castes and richer classes of society. In his later novels Anand seems to have fallen a victim to the other novelistic impulse — that of novel as history. The novel as history later takes the form of the autobiographical novel in novels like Seven Summers and Morning Face and Confession of a Lover. Since the history that he wants to recreate is his own history the element of nostalgia is bound to enter his narrative mode. Our study shows that fortunately Anand's nostalgia does not degenerate into sentimentality, which, of course, is a measure of Anand's maturity.

Seven Summers succeeds in overcoming the dangers of sentimentality because the author adopts

another level of objective reflection and commentary as part of his narrative style. What is most interesting in Seven Summers is the tension between the Romantic concept of childhood and the modern, the former often dominating the latter. In the Morning Face, however, it is the other way round, the concept of the child as a complex being, a raw soul, interacting with the outside world, dominating over the Romantic concept of the child-as-victim. These two novels are a great contribution to childhood fiction in English, because they present the authentic picture of Indian childhood in the context of the rapidly changing Indian society and also the inevitable growth of modernism in India. Anand's Krishan is, in a sense, every Indian, moving from tradition to modernity.

If Anand is a social prophet, R. K. Narayan is a modern rishi watching the various phases of life and the various phases of social transformations with a gentle, quizzical, smile on his face. His attitude to childhood is characteristic of his comprehensive vision of life which accepts the various awasthās of life as autonomous and interesting in themselves (to him who believes in life after death — cf.

The English Teacher - even this life itself is an awasthā in the pattern of an eternal life), Swami and his Friends presents childhood as autonomous : it does not, for instance, make us ask the question - what happened to Swami and his friends in later life? Similarly, we do not want to know of the children in The Dark Room when they grow up. What is of significance in Narayan's concept of the child is that he rarely romanticises it. In fact, he conceives of the child as a complex being, clever, crafty, good, evil etc., trying to come to terms with the environment in his own complex ways. His is curiously enough a modern view, even though he himself is not influenced by the twentieth century psychological studies of the child. His is a classical view according to which each awastha is self-contained and exists according to its own laws.

My dissertation is only a beginning, exploring tentatively the possibility of doing significant research on the whole spectrum of childhood fiction in Indo-English literature, and I shall feel rewarded if this limited study has contributed to our critical awareness of one of the major recurrent themes in Indian fiction in English.