

## Introduction

This dissertation aims at focusing critical attention on one of the significant themes in Indian Fiction in English — the theme of childhood. Quite a number of Indian novelists, both in stories and novels, have dealt with childhood either in a major way or casually. But here in this dissertation I am going to focus my attention on those writers, who have dealt with childhood with a serious concern. Two of the major novelists in English, Mulk Raj Anand and R. K. Narayan, have written a good deal of fiction with childhood as the central theme. I thought, therefore, that it would be profitable to study these two writers' treatment of childhood and arrive at certain conclusions about the Indian attitude to childhood, on the one hand, and, on the other, the nature and extent of the Indian contribution to childhood fiction in general. Since the scope of this dissertation is extremely limited, I have not undertaken a comprehensive study of all the fiction related to childhood that has appeared in Indian Writing in English. I have also avoided

making a comparative study of the Indian treatment of childhood with that of other Commonwealth writers, although that would have yielded an extremely interesting discussion on various cultural attitudes towards childhood.

The design of the dissertation is as follows: In Chapter One, I have attempted to give a proper, though rather inadequate, perspective for the study of childhood in Indian fiction by briefly looking at (a) the treatment of the childhood theme in English literature, and (b) the treatment of the same theme in Indian literature ancient and modern. Since the attempt here is to work out a broad perspective, this chapter is rather tentative in nature and not the result of an exhaustive and scholarly study.

Chapter Two and Three examine Mulk Raj Anand's stories and novels, each chapter dealing with a particular attitude of his towards childhood. Chapter Two deals with fiction in which the child is used as an instrument for the exposure of social evils and Chapter Three with childhood as a self-contained theme, interesting in itself.

Similarly, there ~~will be~~<sup>are</sup> two chapters on R. K. Narayan, Chapter Four and Five, each dealing with one genre, Chapter Four dealing with his novels, and Chapter Five with his stories. The Final Chapter, "Chapter Six: Conclusion", contains a discussion, in the light of our study of Anand and Narayan, of the Indian attitude to childhood, and a tentative attempt to evaluate the contribution of Indian writers ~~towards~~<sup>to</sup> childhood fiction in English.