

Chapter 11

STORY OF THE NOVEL IN ENGLISH

We are fond of telling others about the things we know and imagine. Of all the senses, our sight is the most perfect and delightful. It fills the mind with variety of ideas, converses with objects at greatest distance and (continues without being satiated with proper enjoyments.) The work of art is to entertain the imagination. Novel is a vital record of what we see, feel, think and learn from life. Thus novel is an expression of life through the medium of language. Novel is not newness but genuineness. A novel grows directly out of life. It is the nearest thing to life and a mode of amplifying experiences and extending our contact with our fellowmen beyond our personal contact.

Do you remember the story told by your grandmother? What were your feelings then? Did you feel the thrill? In many ways, we are still like the primitive man today. First we are attracted by the narrative; later we appreciate the style and the significance. But this is not always so. When you grow up and read novels, you will get what you want and what you need. In fact novels will give you the kind of satisfaction you yourself may not have imagined. Novels are a combination of imagination and intellect that express life in the form of a story. They show motives and influences which govern human life.

Would you not like to know the story of the development of the novels? To come to the present stage, the novel had to pass through several centuries. The earliest forms of the novel are the Greek Romances. Now let me tell you here the word novel includes all prose fiction. It may be divided into stories and romances.

The rise of the novel was the result of the democratic movement of eighteenth century. The greatest achievement of this age was the actual beginning of the novel. But before that there were some writers who had given elementary form to the novel. For example, writers like Bunyan (1628-88) and Defoe (1660- 1731) who took advantage of the public interest in fiction. Let me tell you here that Bunyan is considered to be a great prose writer. **The Pilgrim's Progress** began as an allegory but in course of time Bunyan began to be considered the pioneer of the modern novel.

You must have heard of the **Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe**. Do you know the name of the writer? Yes he is Daniel Defoe (1660 - 1731). In this novel he describes the experiences of Alexander Selkirk who spent five years in solitude island.

The novel in its genuine form came with Richardson (1689 - 1761) and Fielding (1707-1754). Richardson is called the father of the modern novel. His novel **Pamela** tells the story of the trial and tribulation and the final happy marriage of a young girl. The writer, in a realistic manner paints the inner life of the middle class society.

Have you heard of **Tom Jones**? The novelist is **Henry Fielding**. He firmly established the novel as an independent form. He gave genuine pictures of men and women without moralizing over their vices and virtues. Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774) emphasized on the high principles and purity of domestic life. The **Vicar of Wakefield** deals with a character who undergoes pain and misfortune but ends up triumphant with his faith in God. A few novelist of the romantic age came under the spell of medievalism and wrote novels of terror or the Gothic novels. In the **Mysteries of Utopia** Ann Radcliff (1764- 1823) relates the story of an innocent and sensitive girl who falls in the hands of a heartless villain named Montoni. He keeps her in an isolated castle full of mystery and terror. Jane Austen(1774-1817) infused good sense and balance into the English novel which had earlier become too emotional. She refines and simplified it, making it a true reflection of English life. She had in her inner mind, the idea of presenting the English society exactly as it was. **Pride and Prejudice** is the best and most widely read of her novels. Among the contemporaries of Austen was Sir Walter Scott (1771- 1832). But he was vastly different from her. He depicted pageantry of history on broader canvases. Scott deals with the chivalric and exciting adventures of life. He is the first English writer of the historical novel such as **Ivanhoe** (1819) followed by **Kenilworth** (1821). Scott was the first novelist who made the scene an essential element in fiction. We breathe the very atmosphere of the place and feel the presence of the moors and mountains in his novels. The Victorian age in English literature began in the second quarter of the nineteenth century and ended by 1900. In this age the novel made rapid progress.

Novel reading became the chief occupation of the educated class. A number of brilliant novelists showed that it was possible to adapt the novel to many purposes. The



Daniel Defoe



Sir Walter Scott

early Victorian period saw the heyday of the English novel. The two most outstanding novelists of the period were Dickens and Thackeray. The other novelists were the Bronte Sisters, Mrs. Gaskell, George Eliot – all female novelists and Charles Read Meredith and Thomas Hardy among the male writers. All these novelists had a number of points of similarity. They identified themselves with their age and were its spokesmen. They voiced the doubts and fears of the public, but they also shared their general assumptions. They were conscious of the havoc of the industrial revolution, the presence of mass poverty and accumulation of riches in a few hands. Yet they believed that these evils were temporary and that England was growing prosperous. They produced novels that were truly national. You must be acquainted with



Rudyard Kipling



Joseph Conrad

Pick Wick Papers and David Copperfield. Dickens had the knack of combining humour with pathos and the best examples of it you can find in these novels. There were many great novelists in the Victorian age. Thomas Hardy made the novel as serious a medium as poetry which could deal with the fundamental problems of life. He had a deep compassion for mankind, especially for the poor and downtrodden. R.L. Stevenson (1850- 1894) introduced romantic adventures in the novels.

The modern age in English literature started from the beginning of the twentieth century (1900-1960). The impact of scientific thought was mainly responsible for the attitude of interrogation and disintegration of old values. In an age of

mass education, the novelists began to appeal to the masses. They began to look upon nature as a system planned by the Divine architect. A number of writers began to voice these ideas in their writings. One great disadvantage under which the modern writer labours is that there is no common ground on which the writers and their readers meet. The novel is full of adventure and experiments peculiar to the modern age which is an age of transition and discovery. It is the most important and popular medium of this age which could compete with both film and radio. The modern novel is psychological. It deals with relation between loneliness and love.



D. H. Lawrence

The immediate ancestors of the modern English novels who dominated the early part of the twentieth century were Wells, Bennet, Conrad, Kipling and Forster. These writers write for a small group of people. D.H. Lawrence is concerned with how individuals could fully realise themselves as individuals so as to make true contact with others. There are such fine description and narrative in modern novels as remind us of the works of great English poets. Thus we see novels embrace every aspect of interest. It is like telling a story. Every form of life grows in the novels. It is the greatest educational force in the modern world. Now English, as we all know, is no more a monopoly of the British. It has become an international language. Today, besides the British novels, we have the Indian, African, Canadian and many other novels in English. We shall talk in brief about all of them.



E. M. Forster

Indian Novel in English

Indian English novels have won worldwide recognition. The Indian novelists have established a great tradition.

The Indian novel in English is part of the Indian literature. It reflects the social, political and cultural ambience of the time. Bankim Chandra's **Raj Mohan's Wife** written in 1864 was the first Indian novel in English. He wrote profusely in Bengali and awakened national consciousness through his novels. The 30s saw the Indian movement for freedom under Mahatma Gandhi. The three great novelists of the time represented the three aspects of Indian life. Mulk Raj Anand wrote social novels and tried to break the barriers of caste and creed. His **untouchable** is an attempt to abolish the evil of untouchability. Economic slavery and colonial exploitation are the subject matter of **Coolie** and **Two Leaves and a Bud**. R.K. Narayan through his social comedies has mirrored the little ironies of domestic life and crumbling old values in the developing society. Raja Rao has championed the case of Indian Philosophy on the one hand and the essence of Gandhism on the other. **The Guide** of R. K. Narayan and the **Serpent and the Rope** and **Kanthapura** of Raja Rao are immortal works. As the novel consolidated some more novelists joined the band wagon and wrote



Mulk Raj Anand

extensively on all aspects of Indian life. Nayantara Sahgal wrote political novels like **Storm in Chandgarh** and **Rich Like Us**, Kamala Markandaya wrote novels of social concern like **Nectar in a Sieve** and **Some Inner Fury**. The partition of India figures in scores of novels like Khushwant Singh's **Train to Pakistan**, K.S. Duggal's **Twice Born Twice Dead**, Chamanwahab's **Azadi**, Manohar Malagaonkar's **A Bend in the Ganges** etc. Anita Desai's focus is on the inner consciousness of her characters as in **Cry**, **The Peacock**, **Bye, Bye Blackbird** and **Voices in the City**. Arun Joshi wrote existential novels like **The Foreigner** and **Strange Case of Billy Biswas**. Some Indian English novelists have also experimented



R. K. Narayan

with the form of the novel. Mulk Raj Anand wrote **Untouchable** in the stream of consciousness technique while Vikram Seth wrote **The Golden Gate** a novel entirely in sonnets. Among the recent ones the most remarkable are Amitav Ghosh for his **The Shadow Lines**, Vikram Seth for his **A Suitable Boy**, Shashi Tharoor for his **The Great Indian Novel**, Arundhati



Anita Desai

Roy for her **The God of Small Things**, Raj Kamal Jha for his **The Blue Bedspread** and Kiran Desai for **The Inheritance of Loss**.

The Indian English writing which began with Dean Mohammand's prose work has developed into a full fledged literary genre. The Indian English fiction has won five Booker prize so far. The new novelists have potential enough to clinch recognition as a world literature in English.



Ernest Hemingway

American, Australian and Canadian novels

American novelists have made a remarkable contribution to English literature. They have depicted in their novels various and multifaceted aspects of the social, cultural and political problems of the time. Some of the important

American novelists and their works are Herman Melville (**Typee** and **Mobydick**), Mark Twain (**Tom Sawyer**, **Huckleberry Finn**), Henry James (**The Europeans**, **The**

Ambassadors and The Portrait of A Lady), Ernest Hemingway (**For Whom the Bell Tolls, The Old Man and the Sea and A Farewell to Arms**), John Dos Parros (**The 42nd Parallel and The Big Money**) John Steinbeck (**Of Mice and Men and The Yapes of Wrath**) and Saul Bellow (**Herzog and Humboldt's Gift**).



Henry James

In America, Africans were brought as slaves to work on the plantations. Gradually they became free and used English for creative writing. The novels written by them are protests against oppression and racial discrimination. Richard Wright wrote **Native Son** and **Black Boy**. Ralph Ellison's **Invisible Man** is a moving story of the Afro-Americans. Similarly, Afro-American women also wrote excellent novels depicting the sufferings of the black women in the American society. Tony Morrison's **The Blue Eye, Sula** and Alice Walker's **The Colour Purple** desire racial and sexual equality.

Like the USA in Canada, too, the English novel is growing. Margaret Atwood is critical of male dominated Canadian society. Her **The Edible Woman** wishes gender equality. Similarly in Australia the novel in English has made great progress. Patrick White's **Voss** and **Tree of Man** plead for an Australian identity.

The Canadian novels advocate existence of life in diversity. The idea they represent is that in spite of differences, man has to learn the value of reconciliation, tolerance and love for mankind. Michael Ondaatje, Alice Munro, Joan Barefoot, Beatrice, Ruddy Wiebe, Atwood are representative writers of the Canadian novel of today.

African novel in English

With the spread of British Conquest, English rule in many African countries made English the official language there. The English educated writers wrote challenging British colonialism and highlighting the tribal virtues. In Nigeria, Chinua Achebe's **Things Fall Apart** and **Arrow of God** are portrayal of his country and people.

In Kenya Ngugi Wa Thiong in his novels criticised colonialism, neo-colonialism and put his faith in the Kenyan masses. His novels **Weep Not Child, Petals of Blood** and **Devil on the Cross** are great works in which Ngugi foresees a bright future through struggle against western supremacy. A



Chinua Achebe

similar note is shared by the novelists of South Africa. Alex La Guma in his **A Walk in the Night** attacks apartheid. Nadine Gordimer has written against racial prejudices and oppression both during the apartheid regime and in the new democratic and multiracial South Africa. **The Conservationist**, **A Guest of Honour** and **A Son's Story** are great achievements.

Caribbean Novel in English

Many African slaves and Indian indentured labourers were brought by Western colonisers to Trinidad, Jamaica, Barbados and other nearby countries to work in the plantations. They were subject to most inhuman treatment. The English educated writers from these places wrote about racial discrimination, wide atrocities and the quest for rootedness. George Lemming's novel **In the Castle of My Skin** and Earl Lovelace's **The Dragon cannot Dance** depict the sufferings of the blacks. The novels of V.S. Naipoul like **The House for Mr Vishwas**, **The Mimic Man**, **Half A Life** and Lakshmi Persaud's **Butterfly in the Wing** and **Shastra** are sensitive narratives of the agonies of the Indians.

We hope you must have enjoyed reading the stories of the growth and development of the English language and the stories of the English poetry, drama and novel all over the world. The richness of the English language is also due to the translation of the works of different languages into English. You must try to read as much as possible and some day you may also become able to translate the great works of the Indian languages into English. This would contribute to better understanding among various cultures and strengthen universal brotherhood.

Exercises

1. Complete the statements given below:

- A Novel is a vital record of
- A novel is an expression ofthrough
- A novel grows
- Novels are a combination of
- The Vicar of Wakefield deal with
- Jane Austen infused and into the English novel.
- Dickens had the knack of combining with.....

2. Answer these questions very briefly:

- Write the name of the earliest forms of the novel.
- Which work is considered the pioneer of the modern novel?
- Who wrote the **Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe**?
- Who is called the father of the modern novel?
- Who is the first writer of the historical novel?