CONCLUSION

The emergence of women novelists in India has considerably influenced the change in the attitude of the patriarchal society. These, women writers have, very effectively, portrayed the female psyche — her problems, her suffering and finally her emancipation. Women writers like Rama Mehta, Jai Nimbkar, Githa Hariharan, Arundhati Roy and Manju Kapur are remarkable for their portrayal of an evolving woman. They project the urges, dreams, desires and limitations of a woman. She is, in their works, an individual with freedom of choices. She is on her journey to transformation from the dumb and dependent person to self-respecting and self-confident individual. Thus these writers have attempted to create a new image of woman.

Until 1960s, the dominant image of the woman portrayed is that of a suffering and submissive woman. During 1970s and 80s, the passive and male appendage transforms, however gradually, into an assertive and self-willed woman in search of her identity. Fiction of the 1990s emphasizes a woman’s growth and fulfilment. The five novels taken for study were published during the last three decades of the twentieth century: Rama Mehta’s *Inside the Haveli* in 1977, Jai Nimbkar’s *A Joint Venture* in 1988, Githa Hariharan’s *The Thousand Faces of Night* in 1992, Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small things* in 1997 and Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters* in 1998. A study of these
novels reveal that the central theme is more or less the same. The difference lies in the treatment of the subject.

In *Inside the Haveli* the protagonist, Geeta, the only child of educated parents, and a product of a co-ed Bombay college, used to mixing with boys, is hardly prepared, by her background, for the purdah which she would have to wear for the rest of her life, after her marriage with Ajay. Though she is at once perceived as an alien, as one who is not conversant with the customs of Udaipur, she has been taught by her mother to be an adaptive person.

The conflict between Bhagawat Singhji’s wife, the mistress of the haveli and her young daughter-in-law, Geeta, the educated non-haveli girl from Bombay is essentially the conflict between the old and the new order. It prophesies the most interesting dramatic possibilities, especially in the context of the Indian milieu.

The conflict arises in Geeta’s mind the moment she enters Udaipur. She is filled with a sense of rebellion against the rigid customs of her society which do not permit the females the right to be their natural selves, who must live uneducated and un-enlightened like dumb-driven cattle. The haveli seems to suffocate to her. She feels trapped in it with its traditional values and unchanging patterns. The custom of purdah and the practice of segregation are reprehensible to her.
She also notices lack of spontaneity in the behavior of her family members. It takes several years to Geeta to get adjusted in the haveli. The event of Geeta’s decision to send Sita, motherless servant-child, to school is the most important source of conflict between the old and the new order.

While Geeta brings a visible transformation in the members of the haveli, she herself undergoes a metamorphosis. She begins to appreciate the strength of the system which she had earlier found stifling. She realizes that any tradition is a whole system which cannot be judged by norms borrowed from a different system. Individual aspirations are important, no doubt, but more important in Indian society is the duty of children towards their parents. She appreciates her husband’s wisdom in staying on in Udaipur. The novelist, through the protagonist, apprehends that individualism in the Indian context is not self-indulgence, and the possibility of freedom for the individual exists even within the laws of the haveli. A total break of tradition is not necessary.

The protagonist is able to strike the right synthesis between the modern and the traditional ways. In the place of frustration and alienation, Geeta begins to experience pride and affection for the haveli. She goes on with her efforts to change the life in the haveli. So she starts classes and her husband appreciates her efforts, thinking that it is time for new ideas to enter the haveli.
In spite of her urge for freedom and modernity, Geeta finds that the age-honoured customs and traditions of her family, and the overwhelming love and affection which her in-laws as well as maids give her have a sanctity of their own and to disregard them would be an act of sin against human values. She is even convinced that some traditions have a dignity of their own. Her sense of non-adjustment is gradually changed into a sense of adjustment during the course of her life in the haveli. She penetrates the facade of rituals and customs and finds underneath it a deep reserve of warm love, care and affection.

Geeta knows that identity and self-assertion make her life more meaningful but she, now, realizes that this should not be at the cost of one’s values and the best of one’s traditions. She takes over the charge of the haveli to continue its age long tradition but not before bringing into it new concepts. She carves out her own identity as a New Woman living within the ambit of tradition. She neither shatters the ancestral dignity nor gives up essentials of modernity through education.

Jai Nimbkar’s protagonist, Jyoti of A Joint Venture is, in many ways, a replica of Geeta of Inside the Haveli. The conflict in her is between the role she has been playing to please her husband and the self she desires to be-fitting the traditional role as a good wife and of being oneself. She realizes after a married life of thirty years that what she has
lived has not been her life at all and that it has been her husband’s. She understands the selfish, self-seeking, self-centered, business-like even hypocritical attitude of her husband. It is this that prompts her decision to leave him and try to live on her own. Her shocked husband Ram asks her to go to Mahabaleshwar and reconsider her decision. So she leaves Ram not for good as she would have liked to but to spend a week, as a sort of compromise, at Mahabaleshwar to think things over.

At Mahabaleshwar, Jyoti realizes how she allowed herself to be dictated by her husband’s opinions and decisions denying herself in the process the precious little things she wanted to do and cherish in her life. Jyoti is an intelligent, average looking middle-class woman while Ram is a typical Indian husband, who fails to see that his wife and children need something more than a comfortable life. At Mahabaleswar a change has occurred to her. She becomes aware of the fact that if she has not exercised her choice in any matter, it is she who has to be blamed as she allowed Ram to dictate to her and take lead in all matters. She realizes that she also contributed to her victimization. It also occurs to her that she is in no way inferior to him but only distinct from him.

On returning from Mahabaleshwar, she perceives a difference in her husband. Her decision not to leave Ram is not a surrender or reconciliation or compromise. It is only being realistic in her approach
to life that maturity lies not in resolving the marriage but to find solution to problem with in the family itself. She is now ready to confront her husband whom she had earlier refused to meet. This reveals her capacity to assert her own rights and individuality. Thus she evolves into a New Woman who becomes fully aware of her potential as a human being. She decides to play the role of his protector, which so far he had played for her.

Githa Hariharan, no longer satisfied with woman’s passive role as a woman and a wife, expresses her angry protest through Devi, the protagonist of The Thousand Faces of Night who emerges as a New Woman who is true to her self. It is a story of Devi’s quest for self-image. Having failed to define her identity as a wife in an arranged marriage, or even as a rebellious lover, Devi finally returns to her mother to start life from the beginning.

This novel is structured around the sexual and marital experiences of Devi, Sita and Mayamma. The novelist highlights Devi’s experience by interspersing with events related to Sita’s and Mayamma’s personal lives. Devi’s failure to become a mother becomes a crucial factor in her development as an individual. But unlike Mayamma, the old care-taker, she liberates herself from the pressures of feminine role-play. Her self-fulfilment does not lie in bearing and rearing of children, but in
recognizing her own inherent potential to live with herself on more positive terms.

Devi passes through a lacerating process of identity crisis. Refusing an offer of marriage from her black American friend Dan because of her ambivalence to American culture, she returns to India for the sake of her widowed mother. In India, married to Mahesh, a Regional Manager of a multinational firm whose job demands long tours, Devi tries to fit herself in the role of a wife and daughter-in-law just as her mother did years ago. But her marital life is far from satisfactory.

Mahesh is so insensitive that it never occurs to him that Devi has an individuality that needs to express itself not merely as a wife. Her first rebellion against her husband takes the form of a vengeful negation of motherhood. Devi’s life in a new place, the vast emptiness of the house, her husband’s long spells of absence, his cold and indifferent attitude when present, lack of proper companion and her inability to conceive perhaps lured her to Gopal, a classical singer. Assuming him to be an ideal companion, she goes away with him. But life with him does not afford her the space she craves for. With this disenchantment, realization dawns on Devi that all through her life, she has been running away — from America, from Mahesh and from Gopal.
By stepping out of marriage, Devi dismisses the voice of reason represented by both Mahesh and Sita. With Gopal, she realizes that her position as mistress is not very different from that of a wife to Mahesh. Neither Mahesh nor Gopal offer enough space for her. Her secondary status is stressed through the image of her being a mere reflection on the mirror-studded buttons of Gopal’s Kurta. Devi dismisses illusions and the ‘Maya’ of Gopal’s music from her life. Gopal is a mere prop to be dispended with. Devi becomes alert to the inner call of self-realization. She finally turns to her mother, and seeks the real music that Sita could probably provide.

Unlike Devi, her mother, has succeeded in reaching her goal of wifehood with a dogged determination and relentless self-discipline. She chose the feminine role of a good daughter-in-law and wife. In order to achieve that to perfection, she trampled on her music and destroyed the artist in her. She shaped her husband and daughter exactly as she wanted. She has achieved what she wanted, and worked for that.

Devi’s old care-taker, Mayamma, inspite of her own difficult and painful life, inspite of knowing no happiness with her husband and son, is able to be a bed-rock to Mahesh’s family. She is the greatest sufferer of the three. She is a traditional woman who has resigned to her lot. Devi’s final assertion of her autonomy celebrates the power of the entire
community of women. Here, the novelist has a new voice which cannot remain stifled or silent any more. It is a prophetic voice announcing the emergence of a new woman who is true to her own self.

A woman’s futile struggle for fulfilment in a patriarchal society is portrayed by Arundhati Roy in her, *The God of Small Things*. It focuses on a young Syrian-Christian girl from Kerala who is by nature neither meek nor docile, neither submissive nor obedient. She grows up in a family where her mother’s physical vulnerability and father’s supremacy are established. Driven by sheer desperation for having been denied higher education, and with a desire to escape her father’s violence, Ammu chooses to marry a Bengali young man against the wishes of her parents. Later she realizes that it has been a wrong choice. In marrying a man of her choice, she asserts her right of taking decisions but unfortunately it is a bad decision. She has put up with the ways of her husband who is a drunkard and a wife-beater. But eventually the marriage fails as he proposes to offer her to his white boss for getting reinstated in his job. She decides to quit such a husband and returns to her parents’ home at Ayemenem with her twins. Perpetual suffering waits for her there.

She is not received well. According to her people, she has no status as a divorcee anywhere and hence no place in the parental home. She and her children are neglected and tortured. They are considered a
burden. It is a matter of surprise that, her own mother, Mammachi is insensitive to her daughter’s misery. Having internalized patriarchal norms, she turns cruel when it comes to Ammu’s desires. Baby Kochamma, her aunt, hates Ammu and her children. Her unfulfilled love resulting in frustration is vented on Ammu. Her resentment of Ammu is an offshoot of her jealousy, as Ammu, unlike her, refuses to submit to her fate and tries to assert her existence.

Ammu has no claims, whatsoever, to the family property nor is privileged enough to enjoy the same attention and affection reserved for Chacko, her brother. She is denied the space which she deserves in her own right. Ammu swallows the humiliation she is subjected to for the sake of her children. However, she fails to realize that the inequality shown to her and her subordination will only strengthen the rigid and unfair hierarchial structure.

Ammu realizes slowly and unconsciously that reckless rage of passion has been battling inside her. This eventually leads her to love Velutha, a low caste man. She is bold enough to meet him at the haunted house on the banks of the river, Meenachal where Velutha, the untouchable, seeks strength from her. Velutha’s father, who is a witness to Ammu’s clandestine meeting with his son, betrays her own son and apologizes to Mammachi on her son’s behalf for his misconduct and
even offers to kill him. Mammachi and Baby Kochamma conspire to kill Velutha as they cannot accept Ammu’s affair with a low caste man. A false charge of rape on Ammu is filed against Velutha. The Police Inspector colludes with them. Velutha is arrested, tortured in the most inhuman way possible and beaten to death in the police custody.

Ammu’s attempts to reclaim her body are mercilessly crushed down. Patriarchy punishes both — Ammu for having defiled generation of breeding and Velutha for having defiled the tradition. Both are destroyed because they are not bound by the laws of the society.

Ammu is bold enough to rush to the Kottayam police station with her kids to set records straight and save Velutha. The rude police inspector insults and humiliates her by calling her veshya and her children, illegitimate. He even dares to tap her breasts with his baton. The helpless Ammu doesn’t even protest at this humiliation. Looking at Velutha’s badly bruised and shattered body in a state of unconsciousness, she holds herself responsible for his death and mutters to herself that he is dead and she has killed him.

The news of Ammu’s visit to the police station makes Baby Kochamma to sense some unsafe edge in Ammu. So, she plans to remove Ammu from the house she executes this through Chacko by telling him that Ammu has been responsible for his daughter’s death.
Enraged Chako drives Ammu out of the house by asking her to pack her bags and leave the house immediately. As a consequence she gets separated from her children and dies a lonely miserable death in a cheap lodge. Having been branded as a fallen woman, she is denied even a decent church burial. Thus Ammu and Velutha are destroyed for their violation of the patriarchal norms.

Ammu’s guilt about her first rebellion of marrying a drunkard, her divorce and the ill treatment she is subjected to at home seem to have made her very weak-willed. That makes her swallow all the humiliation both at home and at the police station without any protest. She remains dependent upon her parents submitting herself to negligence and hatred. She doesn’t even think of a dignified independent living.

Ammu’s broken marriage, her unwantedness in her parent’s home and her womanly desires lead her to her untimely death at the age of 31. It could be her lack of restraint in getting herself entangled in an affair with a low-caste man that has destroyed not only Ammu and Velutha but the prospects of her children also.

Thus Ammu is a victim all through her life — victimized by her father before her marriage, by her husband after her marriage, neglected by her mother and humiliated by her aunt after divorce and finally rendered destitute by her brother. Ammu’s daughter, Rahel is a contrast
to her mother. She has no qualms in ending her unhappy marriage. She represents the non-conservative attitude of a liberated woman. She declines to accept man–made laws. Even incest with her brother create no trouble to her. She is self-reliant and is the image of a modern liberated woman.

Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters*, set in 1940s, centres around a young traditional Punjabi girl, the eldest of eleven children. She has been conditioned, since her childhood, that the duty of a girl is to get married. She is even engaged to a suitable boy, an engineer by profession. However, influenced by her cousin, Shakuntala, a lady with progressive outlook, Virmati desires higher education. She also nurtures a desire to be independent and lead a life of her own. She sees that her marriage is postponed and thus gets an opportunity to study. As chance would have it, she comes into contact with an Oxford-returned English Professor, a married man and a tenant of her aunt, Harish.

Dissatisfied in an incompatible marriage with an illiterate wife, Harish is attracted towards Virmati who resists initially but subsequently gives in. Her misplaced passion for an already married man forces her to cancel her engagement through an attempt at suicide. She realizes, for the first time, her hopelessness of illicit love when she learns about the pregnancy of Harish’s first wife. For a while, she realizes that she is
being used and hence resolves to forget him and burns all his letters. She goes to Lahore to do her B.T. But Harish follows her there and makes her a target of his sexual desires. She surrenders before him. Her position is reduced to that of a concubine. Even after an abortion, Harish pays no heed to her request to marry her. However, Virmati finally succeeds in getting married to him after some forceful threats and with the help of a mutual friend. Sadly after her marriage she does not get any space in his family. As a second wife, her quest for identity is replaced by the struggle for existence. Eventually she acquires the much awaited status — wife and mother. Still she feels depressed and alienated may be due to her subdued and suppressed position in her own house as Harish’s highhanded behaviour does not permit her any assertion of power or freedom.

Virmati, as her name implies, is an embodiment of courage. She displays courage to fight for her right to education, to cancel her engagement with a boy chosen by her parents, to respond to the love and passion of a married man, to have an illicit affair with him, to terminate her unwed pregnancy and so on. She hardly bothers about moral codes. She is only conscious of her emotional needs. Her courage in challenging parental authority disappears when it comes to asserting herself before Harish. Unfortunately her resistance fades when it should
be strong to refute his sexual oppression. She becomes submissive and passive. She allows herself to be exploited willingly and happily. Defying patriarchal norms and unmindful of her reputation, she is hell-bent on achieving what she craves for. She tries to find fulfilment in her own way.

Virmati hates being Harish’s mistress. At the same time she is unable to conceive a life without him. The only desire in her is to be worthy of Harish. Competing with his first wife, Ganga to wash his clothes demonstrates her desire to play the role of a traditional housewife. Thus despite her earlier rebellion, defiance and self-assertion at various stages of her life, she is neither totally traditional nor truly emancipated. She fails to carve an identity of her own as she willingly loses hers in his identity.

In the pre independence India, when women were very traditional, Virmati tried to assert herself. Even if she fails, she has to be appreciated as it is a significant achievement for a woman of those days.

Virmati is a new woman as she is educated, economically independent, assertive and rebellious. However her emotional dependence on Harish makes her a puppet in his hands. When she has to protest his sexual oppression, her rebellion wanes away and she indulges
in pre-marital sex. Thus her lack of self-control interferes with her desire to be autonomous and still she is a dumb and mute follower of her husband.

Ida, her daughter, rejects her as a woman, not as a mother. Ida is strong and clear-headed. She is bold enough to terminate her marriage when she is denied maternity by her husband. There is a positive strength and determination in her which is lacking in Virmati. Thus, by being truly emancipated, she offers hope for the future.

Thus all the five novels chosen for the study register a steady progress from the male supremacy and female dependence to gender equality in varying degrees. These novels also attempt to renegotiate sexual relations between men and women and gendered behavior. Geeta (Inside the Haveli), Jyoti (A Joint Venture), Devi (The Thousand Faces of Night), Ammu (The God of Small Things) and Virmati (Difficult Daughters) are rebellious and self-assertive women who rebel against convention and the patriarchal restrictions which marginalize their positions. They are willing to face the challenges of life.

All the five women protagonists are victims of gender discrimination directly or indirectly. The worst sufferer is Ammu. The others are able to overcome it, atleast, to some extent. All of them strive for an identity of their own. Still Geeta and Jyoti depend on their
families for emotional support. They feel uneasy in the new identity as their whole existence is seen in relation to men. Though they value freedom and want to be respected as individuals, they cannot think of themselves as different from being a wife or a mother. An identity achieved through relationships can never provide fulfilment for Devi unlike Geeta and Jyoti. Geeta carves out her own identity living within the haveli while Jyoti retains her identity being Ram’s wife. Declining to let gender roles determine her identity, Devi wants to find a new identity in the company of her mother and start a new life. While Ammu seeks an identity in sexual freedom, Virmati loses her identity in the identity of her husband.

The feministic concept of sisterhood emerges, in varying degrees, in all the novels except The God of Small Things which really gives a setback to the much desired feeling of sisterhood among women. It is also sadly lacking in Difficult Daughters as Virmati usurps the rights of Ganga, the first wife of Harish. Women of Inside the Haveli support each other. Sita, the deserted child of the servant, Lakshmi becomes the collective responsibility of all women of the haveli and the little one acquires a special place in their hearts. The bond that exists among Kanwar Sa, Bhabha Sa, Geeta, Pari and Dhapu reveal the friendship among women of different generations and class backgrounds. In A
Joint Venture the friendship between Jyoti and Vinnie is an example of sisterhood. It is presented, at its best, in The Thousand Faces of Night. Sisterhood helps women to rebel against an oppressive system and build on their new empowerment just as Parvatiamma supports Mayamma, who, in her turn supports Devi and finally Devi looks forward to Sita with a hope of erasing the past and to build a bright future.

All the five novels portray women of different generations to explore the theme of exploration and subjugation on the one hand and to trace the growing consciousness among women on the other hand. The women of the first generation are tradition-bound and unconditionally submit to the patriarchal norms. They are aware of the injustice meted out to them but remain silent and become mute sufferers. Pari of Inside the Haveli, Jyoti’s mother in A Join Venture, Mayamma and Sita of The Thousand Faces of Night, Mammachi of The God of Small Things and Virmati’s mother in Difficult Daughters are such women. It is the younger generation — Geeta, Jyoti, Devi, Ammu and Virmati — who protest against male authority.

Whether these young women succeed or not is not important. What is important is that they atleast have succeeded in raising their voice of protest. Geeta protests against child marriages, gender discrimination, and advocates education. She turns as an agent of change
by introducing new concepts into haveli and the meaning of tradition itself undergoes change. Finally she succeeds in establishing her identity within the haveli. Jyoti questions the domination of her husband openly. But the revolt does not take her out of her home. She realizes that she can continue to live with her husband and still retain her identity. It is not surrender or compromise but reconciliation. Initially Ammu’s protest against male authority is very powerful as is evidenced in her marriage and divorce. But subsequently it wanes and she begins to accept her lot unprotestingly. Virmati who resisters a powerful protest against social conventions finally ends up as a puppet in her husband’s hands. She may protest now and then but ultimately she does as he wants her to do. The most powerful protest comes from Devi who rebels against the existing social set-up. She declines herself to be a submissive, suffering and sacrificing wife. She has the determination and will to stand by the cause of her rebellion at any cost. She walks out on Mahesh, her husband and Gopal, her lover and succeeds in transforming her status from that of victimization to empowerment. Thus Devi emerges as the new woman who is true to herself.

The present generation is represented mostly by Rahel and Ida daughter of Ammu and Virmati respectively who are totally independent. They are confident, and individualistic new women who demand equality not on compromising terms but on terms at par with men.
Feminism is seen, in varying degrees, in all five novels. However militant feminism is seen in *The Thousand Faces of Night*. Divorce as a form of revolt against unbearable oppression is seen in the novels published during and after 1980s. Devi and Ammu quit their husbands which cannot be done by Geeta or Jyoti, protagonists of the novels of 1970s. Ammu and Virmati, protagonists of the two novels published during 1990s, *The God of Small Things* and *Difficult Daughters* respectively are classic examples of the concept of the New Woman which also possesses a sexual connotation reflecting changing ideas about female sexuality. Indulging in incest as seen in *The God of Small Things* without being guilty is one such an idea. The new women are sexually liberated and feel no qualms of conscience in establishing pre-marital or extra-marital relations as in the case of Virmati and Ammu. The new women often reject the moral values associated with sex just as both of them have done.

It is felt that a woman can assert her identity and at the same time pursue her interest without threatening the family structure as far as possible. What she should basically aim at is a fine inter-dependent partnership. She can raise her voice if she feels oppressed and suffocated. There can be a total breaking away like Ida. By mere flouting of the social norms one does not become a New Woman. To be a New Woman, a woman should be aware and self controlled, strong willed and self-reliant.