Preface

The Indian women novelists in English endeavour to establish woman as an individual who breaks from traditional constraints and redefines her identity. They protest against the marginalization, exploitation and cruelty meted out to women in the society. They depict women who are assertive and rebellious strong and independent and in doing so help to make the transition from traditional image of woman as a victim — passive and self-effacing to the modern image of an autonomous and self-willed woman, smooth and meaningful. The emerging New Woman challenges the oppressive patriarchal norms. Education and economic independence make her self-reliant. She shows to the world that she would no longer succumb to oppression but fight the oppressive forces to become an individual free to determine her own life.

The five contemporary Indian women novelists in English chosen for study — Rama Mehta, Jai Nimbkar, Githa Hariharan, Arundhati Roy and Manju Kapur — portray women who are torn between their culturally conditioned image and their feministic aspirations for autonomy and self-hood. They try to project self-confident and self-assertive women. Thus their concerns and priorities are the same. However, each one of the novelists has her own way of dealing with the predicament of the woman protagonist. An attempt is made in this thesis to study the portrayal of women characters in the novels chosen for the study.

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. The Introductory first chapter presents the background to the Indian novel in English by women. An attempt is made here to place all the five novelists, chosen for study, among the major Indian women novelists in English. The second chapter, Rama Mehta’s “Inside the Haveli: Balancing Tradition and Modernity” focuses on the attempts of a woman to blend the two attitudes — modernity and tradition for the benefit of all. She, who initially registers her protest against the patriarchal structure of the haveli, finally succeeds in finding her voice and establishing her identity living within the ambit of tradition.

The third chapter, Jai Nimbkar’s “A Joint Venture: Journey to Self-realization” portrays the rebellion of a victim of male chauvinism. A married woman protests against her
loss of self in an unequal marriage but finally realizes that home is her only refuge where she can still retain her identity and assert herself.

An uncompromising woman in her pursuit of independence and success in creating a space of her own is taken up for discussion in the fourth chapter, Githa Hariharan’s “The Thousand Faces of Night: Towards Emancipation.” Her evolution of the self, her self-assertion and her autonomy establish a new order.

The fifth chapter Arundhati Roy’s “The God of Small Things: An Abortive Rebellion” shows the miserable plight of a woman, a victim of the male chauvinistic society, who registers her vehement protest at every important stage of her life. It also shows how her rebellion is mercilessly crushed and is finally destroyed by the oppressive forces. The novelist seems to question why it is a woman who is always punished for her transgression while a man, for the same violation, is scot free.

The sixth chapter, Manju Kapur’s “Difficult Daughters: In search of Self-fulfilment” examines a woman who defies patriarchal norms and violates social codes to assert her individuality and to achieve self-fulfilment. However, due to her failure to break the “dependence syndrome”, she undergoes a gradual process of self-effacement and fails to create a space for herself for which she has been striving all along.

The last chapter presents a summative conclusion of all the earlier chapters.

Considerable research has taken place so far on these novelists chosen for my study. If Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things has generated exhaustive critical acclaim, Jai Nimbkar’s A Joint Venture has hardly received any critical attention as there are about five articles and no full length publication on it. Compared to this Rama Mehta’s Inside the Haveli enjoys a slightly better critical response. However, all these writers have not yet been dealt with comparatively. An attempt, therefore, is made to make a comparative study of these five third generation Indian English women novelists.
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