Chapter-1

The Place of Gita Mehta in Indian Writing in English

The proliferation of novel in Indian English manifests itself multifariously encompassing almost every aspect of Indian social life. In the last one hundred years or so, this staggering branch of literature has blossomed like a fragrant flower and has become golden gate for the world to see India through. This literary explosion or renaissance has not been quite evolutionary but, in recent years, it has caused a boom in the realm of Indian fiction writing.

The social upheavals and the terrible delusions of modern times have been presented in nearly all novels that are being written today. These novels have universal appeal cutting across barriers of culture and time. We are all socialized differently because we grow up in different communities. But at the core of every culture remains the upholding of basic human values. India has one of the greatest cultures, Vedic culture, which has been the guiding phenomenon for the humanity. It has now evolved and it must combat with the world of heterogeneous societies who do not wish to leave aside their historical particulars which give them uniqueness.

Literature is a kind of knowledge about human existence with reference to the cosmos, nature, society and the inner mental process of human beings, fiction, especially, is not only an aesthetic enjoyment for readers but also acquires power in the hands of competent writers. It generates a scope for change and development. It becomes powerful as well as pleasure giving.

Indian writing in English has been much-admired in the literary world for its innovation, far-
reaching new approaches to the art of storytelling and reworking of language. While the older generation continues to produce literary masterworks, a newer generation of writing talent has emerged, ensuring that the fount of imagination in the country has not run dry.

These Indian writers have fashioned a place of their own in English with their inspiring works of literary fineness. Indian writing has navigated an extended haggard path of uplifting evolution. The renaissance in Indian writing was kicked off in the 1980's and the precursor of this group, the hallmark of Indian writing of this era was Salman Rushdie.

Through globalization English has acquired enlarged importance as a common "lingua franca" for the global community. Speaking of literature, Indian writing in English is nearly hot off the fire. The Indian writing in English boosted off only in the last couple of decades and since then, a number of writers bagged global fame, some achieved national and others had to find gratification through contracted loop.

Looking far back at the fictions produced in the Indian continent since the beginning of twentieth century, one is impressed by the quality and quantity of Indian English fiction. These fictions provide a wide range of variety. It presents not merely a mirror image of life but also turns this life inside out.

With the publication of Ram Mohan Roy's tract on ‘Satī’ in 1818 to the present day would be a stretch of 190 years. However the real beginnings were with the work of the great Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-94). His first published work – *Rajmohan’s Wife* (1864) was in English. Since then Indian novel in English has grown by leaps and bounds in respect of bulk,
variety, experimentation and maturity.

An idea of the nature and extent of the growth and development and potential of this literary form in India can be had by placing the early novels written by Indians beside some recent work. Most early novels in English by Indians were almost invariably imitative and immature. Quite a few of them turned out to be only poor relations of the novels written by the Victorians. Novels like B. Rajan Iyer’s *Vasudev Sashtri* (1905), Balkrishna’s *The Love of Kusum* (1910), and Sir Jogendra Singh’s *Nasreen* (1915) are all very feeble as works of literature. As Srinivasa Iyengar points out, these early novels ‘have for us today no more than an antiquarian or historical interest.’ While pointing out the “real” problems and “difficulties face the Indian novelist”, he also points out that as compared to these works Indian novels written in vernaculars are “more enterprising, richer in content and wider in range.”

In initial stage, Indian’s creative writing in English was not taken seriously; it was rather ridiculed and debunked variously. Gordon Bottomly, for example, described it as ‘Mathew Arnold in a Saree’ some others dubbed it as ‘Shakuntala in Skirts’ or ‘Shelley in Salwar.’ Indians attempt at creative writing in English was even compared to a dog's walking on the hind legs. Some Indians themselves were not very optimistic about the achievements of this literature.

The early novelists’ choice of themes was stereotypical and their grasp over the language uncertain. These early novels, Bhupal Singh feels, “do not compare favorably” with the English novelists’ works also. He remarks:
‘That they write in a foreign tongue is serious handicap in itself. Then few of them possess any knowledge of the art of fiction; they do not seem to realize that prose fiction, in spite of its freedom, is subject to definite laws. In plot construction they are weak, and in characterization weaker still. Their leaning towards didacticism and allegory is further obstacle to their success as novelists.’

It is undeniably fact that the literary scene in the beginning of the twentieth century was thus dismal. But the fact remains that really pioneering efforts were made by some Indian novelists to exploit the resources and potential of a ‘fluid’ form for self-expression.

After World War-I Indian English novel became determinedly more realistic and less idealized. The novelists made deliberate efforts to depict the distress of the downtrodden classes, portraying India as she really was, wart and all. The novels written between the two world wars were primarily concerned with the contemporary social milieu and were greatly influenced by the Gandhian ethos. It is in this phase that we come across excellent novels for the first time, as is evident from Mulk Raj Anand’s Untouchable (1935), R.K. Narayan’s Swami and Friends (1935) and Raja Rao’s Kanthapura (1938). The novel proved to be highly valuable to the nationalists and revolutionaries as a convenient and effective means of popularizing and disseminating their cause.

Raja Rao markedly holds a distinct place on account of his use of myth, choices of themes, and his peculiar Vedantic stance. Due to his Vedantic vision, distinction between the creator and the creation does not exist for Raja Rao. As such he moves with fluency from the mundane to

After 1950's, however, Indian novelists’ interest moved from the public to the private sphere. They began to delineate in their works the individual’s quest for the self in all its varied and complex forms along with his problems and crises. Most of them, in their eagerness to find new themes, “renounced the larger world in favor of the inner man” and engaged themselves in “a search for the essence of human living.”

Dr. Bhabani Bhattacharya's five novels - *So many Hungers* (1947), *Music for Mohini* (1954), *He who Rides a Tiger* (1954), *A Goddess Named Gold* (1960) and *Shadow from Ladakh* (1966) - form rather an impressive achievement. He has been a freelance writer, and some of his vivid historical sketches were published as *Indian Cavalcade: Some Memorable Yesterday in 1942*. He has travelled widely, and he is a much translated novelist. The Sahitya Academy award to him in 1967 was a fitting recognition of his outstanding achievement in the field of Indian fiction in English. In quick succession, and without repeating himself, Mr. Manohar Malgonkar has published four novels in the course of five years. The first, *Distant Drum*, appeared in 1960, *Combat of Shadows* (1962), *The Princess* (1963) and the fourth one, *A Bend in the Ganges*, in 1964. Taken together, these novels constitute no mean achievement. There is a certain maturity about them, and in plotting as well as in telling his stories he displays an ability that compels recognition.

From time immemorial, Indian women have been showing their worth in each and every walk
of their life. Gargi, Maitreyi, and Sulabha in scriptures, Sita, Noorjahan and Laxmibai in history and Kamla Markanday, R.P. Jhabwala, Arundhati Roy, Manju Kapoor and Mahasweta Devi and many more in fictions have left their indelible imprint on the pages of history-an imprint which is suffused with such a powerful and beautiful color which can’t be erased and darkened by Time. They are, to quote Ben Jonson ‘not for an age but for all times.’ Remove women from the history is tantamount to remove all zest for life and adventure and to bury deep all literature. Anees Jung in her book, Unveiling India rightly holds the view:

‘In this complex, pantheon of diversities the Indian woman remains the point of unity, unveiling through each single experience a collective consciousness prized by a society that is locked in mortal combat with the power and weakness of age and time. She remains the still centre, like the centre in a potter’s wheel, circling to create new forms, unfolding the continuity of a racial life, which in turn has encircled and helped her acquire a quality of concentration.’

Indian woman novelists in English and in other vernaculars try their best to deal with, apart from many other things, the pathetic plight of forsaken women who are fated to suffer from birth to death. Starting with Toru Dutt who died at the early age of 21 years lesser than John Keats up to the recent feminist writers. Her novels, Bianca and Le Journal de Mademoiselle d’Arvers deal with the autobiographical projections, her sweet and sour experiences, she gathered in her very short life.
Cornelia Sorabji, a Parsi Christian, is the other great figure in the realm of novels and short stories. She is mainly famous for her three important works - *Love and Life Behind the Purdah* (1901), *Sun Babies in the Child Life of India* (1904), and *Between the Twilight* (1908). She reveals in her novels the various moods and vestures going in under the 'purdah' - the ecstasy, tragedy, comedy and many more things which are unnoticed even by a feminist philosopher.

G.V. Desani's *All About H. Hatterr* is easily one of the most daringly experimental novels in Indian English literature. Govindas Vishnoodas Desani ran away from home at the age of eighteen and spent the next twenty-five years in England, working as a newspaper correspondent, popular lecturer and broadcaster. Returning to India in 1952, he spent several years in seclusion, practicing yoga and studying Buddhism. Since 1968, he has been teaching philosophy in an American University. *All About H. Hatterr* is a novel extremely complex both in theme and technique. It is at once diverting autobiography of a Eurasian, who is as avid for experience as he is incapable of learning from it; the story of the hero’s spiritual quest for understanding the meaning of life; a social chronicle revealing aspects of White, Eurasian and Indian character; an uproariously funny comedy— a ‘human horseplay’, brimful of various kinds of humor ranging from sheer farce to subtle wit; a triumphant experiment in blending Western and Indian narrative forms, and an astonishing exhibition of a seemingly unlimited stylistic virtuosity.

After the Second World War, the history of Indian women novelist got a new track, a new vision. In this period Kamla Markandaya and R.P. Jhabvala are unquestionably the most outstanding personalities in the field of social and artistic novels. Kamla Markandaya's first

Like the women poets of the post-Independence period, the women novelists too form a sizable and significant school. Jhabvala, the contemporary of Kamla Markandaya has also left an indelible imprint in the history of women novelist in English. It is, indeed, a complex task to decide whether R.P. Jhabvala belongs to India or Germany, insider or outsider. The work of the earliest of these writers of fiction, Jhabvala raises, a knotty problem for the historian of Indian English literature—viz., whether she can legitimately be called an Indian English writer. Born of Polish parents in Germany and educated in England, Ruth Prawer married an Indian and has lived in India for more than twenty-four years. She herself has declared that she should not be considered an ‘Indian writer’ but ‘as one of those European writers who have written about India.’ But an important point of difference between Jhabvala and prominent Western writers such as Kipling and Forster is that she has lived in India much longer than they did and with far greater involvement; and more importantly, her marriage to an Indian gave her access to Indian society on terms radically different from those in the ease of these writers. Consequently, her best ‘work reveals such inwardness in her picture of certain segments of Indian social life, that it is difficult not to consider her as an ‘insider’, who at the same time enjoys the privilege of being an ‘outsider’ in an obvious sense. Most of her writings deal with the various shades of Indianness, apart from many other things. In the course of little over a decade, Mrs. R.P. Jhabwala has published six novels - *To whom She Will* (1955), *The Nature of Passion* (1956),
Esmond in India (1958), The House Holder (1960), Get Ready for Battle (1962) and A Backward Place (1965).

Nayantara Sahgal, the niece of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and the daughter of Vijyalaxmi Pandit, is a novelist of politics. She is also known as a successful political columnist for different newspapers. Nayantara Sahgal is usually regarded as an exponent of the political novel. She herself has declared that each of her novels ‘more or less reflects the political era we are passing through’. Nayantara naturally had an upbringing in which politics was inevitably a strong ambience; but along with the obvious political theme, her fiction is also preoccupied with the modern Indian woman's search for sexual freedom and self-realization. Neither of the themes is, however, handled with sufficient complexity and the failure to establish a clear ideational relationship between the political turmoil outside and the private torment of broken marriages robs most of her novels of a unified effect. Her writing is generally characterized by simplicity and boldness. Her writing is also famous for keeping in touch with the latest political ups and downs with a tinge of western liberalism. Her first novel, A Time to be Happy (1957) was followed by This Time of Morning (1965), Storm in Chandigarh (1969), The Day in Shadow (1971) and A Situation in New Delhi (1977).

Vimla Raina is today known for her bestselling novel, Ambapali, a historical novel which presents the history of Vaishali. Ambapali in history was the first woman to be admitted in the fold of Lord Buddha. Rama Mehta's first novel Inside the Haveli (1977) has the credit of winning the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award in 1979. It deals with the confrontation between culture and civilization between city and village.
The fictional world of Anita Desai is just like an iceberg mostly hidden and partly visible; it is overcast by mist and fog, half revealed and half concealed. Anita Desai unravels the tortuous involutions of sensibility with subtlety and finesse and her ability to evoke the changing aspects of Nature matched with human moods is another of her assets, though her easy mastery of the language and her penchant for image and symbol occasionally result in preciosity and over-writing. If her fiction is able to advance from the vision of ‘aloneness’ as a psychological state of mind to that of alienation as a metaphysical enigma-as one hopes, it will Anita Desai may one day achieve an amplified pattern of significant exploration of consciousness comparable to Virginia Woolf at her best. In her two novels -Cry, the Peacock (1963) and Voices in the City (1965) - Anita Desai has added a new dimension to the achievement of Indian women writers in English fiction.

Shobha De, a modern novelist, is famous for portraying the sexual mania of the commercial world. In 1988, she shot into literary limelight by writing her first novel, Socialite Evening. Her other works are Starry Nights, Sisters, Sultry Days, Strange Obsession, Snapshots, Second Thoughts, Shorting from the Hips, Small Betrayals, Surviving Men and Speed Post. Mahasweta Devi, the winner of prestigious Jnanpith and Magasasay Award for her novel, Mother of 1084 contends that women should not be submissive and passive and should realize the inner strength of which they are known.

Winner of the Booker prize for 1997, Arundhati Roy's first novel The God of Small Things pushed her onto the centre stage of literary adulation. The book has been translated into more than 40 languages in the world. V.S. Naipaul bagged this prize in 1972 for In a Free State;
R.P. Jhabvala did it in 1975 for *Heat and Dust*; Salman Rushdie in 1981 for *Midnight’s Children*. However, all above authors are only of Indian origin. But Roy has got the credit of being the first entirely home grown Indian to have this prestigious prize. Unlike other Indian novelists, Roy is born, educated and brought up in India.

In the growth of development of Indian novel in English, 1980s occupy the most significant and fruitful position. During the last two decades some very promising novelists have published their first works, illuminating the milky way of Indian fiction in English. It was an epoch-making and trend-setting era for Indian novel in English opening new vistas and showing possibilities of new avenues for fiction-writing. It is during the eighties that Indian English novelists and novels earned unheard of honors and distinctions in the western academic world.

Probably the most sensational literary event of the 1980s was the publication of Salman Rushdie's voluminous novel *Midnight’s Children* in 1980. Later he brought out *Shame* (1983), *The Satanic Verses* (1988), *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1991) and *The Moor’s Last Sigh* (1996) which became an international literary success, created a real generation of its own in the form of a crop of young Indian novelists eagerly following in Rushdie's footsteps. Among these novelists the most talented ones are: Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Allan Sealy, Upmanyu Chatterjee, Shashi Tharoor, Farrukh Dhondy, Rohinton Mistry and Firdaus Kanga.

Vikram Seth stirred the Indian mind with the publication of his voluminous novel *A suitable Boy*, it left the literary world stunned. Also the careful analysis of Seth's *The Golden Gate*, Rushdie's *Shame* and *The Satanic Verses*, Upmanyu Chatterjee's *The English August*, Amitav

The decade of the Nineties was the harbinger of more profitable business to the western publishers. The western readers’ suffering from the angst of depression and melancholia need some kind of diversion have turned to Indian novel in English for getting spiritual solace. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, Sashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel*, Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*, *A Fine Balance*, Gita Mehta's *Karma Cola* and *A River Sutra* highlighted their divine propensities. Winner of the Commonwealth Award, Githa Hariharan too hit the buzzer with her novel *The Thousand Faces of Night*.

Feminism has grown from Kamla Markandaya, Anita Desai, R.P. Jhabvala and Nayantra Sahgal to pave way for Sashi Deshpande, Nina Sibal, Anees Jung, Manju Kapoor, Bharti Mukherjee, Kiran Desai, Namita Gokhale and Jaishree Misra. These newer female voices have highlighted the interior landscape of the emancipated woman's sensibility and her psychological pragmatism. Indian women settled abroad have depicted their diasporic experience in their novels. Women writers of Indian origin like Chitra Banerjee; Shauna Singh, Kiran Desai, Bharti Mukherjee, Geeta Mehta and Meera Syal have published new fiction. Meera Syal’s famous novel *Anita and Me* has been made into a successful film.

Many Indian novelists have based their fiction on the raw material of history. This is true in the case of novels like Sashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel*, Chaman Nahal’s *Azadi,*
Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* and *Delhi*, Rushdie’s newly released *Shalimar the Clown* and Gita Mehta’s *Raj*.

The divergent trend in Indian fiction is best illustrated in the recently published novel by Vikas Swarup whose novel *Q and A* has introduced a fresh theme to the wide ranging terrain of Indian literature. There are a host of young novelist like Anurag Mathur, Samit Basu, Siddharth Sanghavi, Arvind Adiga and Chetan Bhagat, who have introduced absolutely new themes in Indian fiction. Chetan Bhagat arrived on the literary scene with his *Five Point someone* and then duly followed it with yet another best seller, the novel *One Night @ Call Centre* and *Two States*. Both of them have been made into successful film. Samit Basu’s *The Manticore Secret* is a fantasy based work, a genre many Indian English authors like to dabble in.

Of the novelists of the late sixties and the seventies, the most prominent are Arun Joshi and Chaman Nahal. Arun Joshi's recurrent theme is alienation in its different aspects, and his heroes are intensely self-centered persons prone to self-pity and escapism. In spite of their weaknesses, they are, however, genuine seekers who strive to grope towards a purpose in life and self-fulfillment. In his three novels, Joshi attempts to deal with three facets or the theme of alienation, in relation to self, the society around and humanity at large, respectively. Sindi Oberoi in *The Foreigner* (1968) is a born ‘foreigner’—a man alienated from all humanity. The only son of an Indian father and an English mother, and born in Kenya, he is orphaned at an early age and grows into a youth without family ties and without a country. The ending of the novel appears to be botched up —a weakness not confined to this first novel alone, though Joshi's presentation of his hero’s alienation is evocative enough.
The Strange Case of Billy Biswas (1971) presents a protagonist alienated from the higher middle-class society in which he is born and brought up and in which he is compelled to live, though he finds in himself an over-powering urge to march to a different drum altogether. Right from his adolescence Billy has been conscious of an *urkraft*—a 'a great force—a primitive force' within himself, which continues to register its presence time and again. His higher training in anthropology in the U.S.A. accentuates this consciousness further. After his return to India, marriage and a secure teaching job in a major University fail to stifle the nagging, strident primitive voice within, and Billy runs away during an anthropological survey expedition to join a primitive tribe, where he is soon accepted as an incarnation of a legendary ancient king. The 'short happy life' of Billy Biswas ends when, during an attempt by his near relations to reclaim him, he is shot dead accidentally by a policeman. Billy's transformation, unlike Sindi's, is well-motivated throughout and the absorbing narrative quickens its pace, leading to the final, tragic man-hunt. In spite of this, the novel fails to be a major fictional achievement because it is not, in the final analysis, informed with sufficient imaginative power to make so unusual a narrative absolutely convincing, especially in its picture of the tribal society in which Billy finds himself king, its beliefs and practices, and its apotheosis of the professor.

The most acute kind of alienation is that from self and the victim in The Apprentice (1974) is Rathor, a minor Government official. The son of a middle class freedom-fighter, he had been a poet and an athlete in youth and his ambition had been 'to be good! Respected! To be of use! The imperatives or making a living however, compel him to be a clerk and the prevailing atmosphere of corruption and Mammonism in the post-Independence period soon corrodes his
soul. Rathor's penance in his quest to regain his pre-lapsarian innocence however, takes a form more symbolic than practical: he takes to polishing the shoes of the devotees who visit a temple, on his way to his office. One wonders whether Joshi has not botched up his ending once again, the upshot being a sudden slackening of artistic control.

Joshi is a novelist seriously interested in existential dilemmas and equally acutely aware of both the problems of post-Independence Indian society and the implications of the East-West encounter. He is a skilled narrator and can even make an entire novel a long monologue without losing his hold over the reader's attention. He has the vision and the technique; all he needs is greater maturity.

Chaman Nahal is a novelist of painful odysseys presented in different contexts. In his first novel, *My True Faces* (1973), Kamal Kant, whose wife Malati has left him, goes in search of her throughout Delhi and its outskirts, but having found her in the end, realizes that their marriage is broken beyond repair. The quest motif enables Nahal to hold the narrative line taut and the realism of scenes like the brothel episode is evocative; but Delhi fails to become a presence in the novel as Dublin is in Joyce. No foundation has been laid for the temple episode at the end, which is a glaring example of writing done with one eye on the Western audience's stock response to such a motif. The sudden change-over to the mock-heroic in an entire chapter (No. XIII) also mars the unity of tone.

*Azadi* (1975), which won the Sahitya Akademi award for the year 1977, is a much more ambitious undertaking. This account of the migration of Kanshi Ram, a Sialkot grain merchant and his family to India at the time of the dismemberment of colonial India into two nations in
1947, is easily one of the most comprehensive fictional accounts of the Partition holocaust in Indian English literature. Episodes like the procession of jubilant Muslims in Sialkot when Partition is announced, the queer parade of naked Hindu women in Narowal and the immolation of Niranjan Singh stand out by their realism. On the other hand, the love affair between Arun and a Muslim girl is a hackneyed romantic touch. As a novel of migration Azadi is by no means in the same class as The Grapes of Wrath, though it has its felicities.

Nahal turns to the Indian English novelist's favorite theme of East-West encounter in Into Another Dawn (1977) but does not appear to bring either a new perspective or a freshness of treatment to this subject. His hero, Ravi Sharma hails from an orthodox Brahmin family from holy Hardwar; goes to the United States for higher studies and duly falls in love with an American woman, the unhappy wife of a business executive. They elope, but Ravi discovers that he has terminal cancer and returns to Hardwar to die. His death-bed musings, east in the form of a retrospective narration can hardly be said to constitute a commentary on two cultures which is in any way original or marked by subtlety of perception. Both the central theme and the hero as a Brahmin intellectual invite comparison with The Serpent and the Rope—a comparison which does little credit to Into Another Dawn.

In his recent novel, The English Queens (1979), Nahal appears to be trying to do too many things. In narrating this tale of the love of Rekha, an army officer's daughter living in a select colony, for a poor musician from an adjoining slum, Nahal does not seem to be quite clear in his mind whether to present the tale as a realistic social satire on the anglicized elite or a sheer comic extravaganza or a supernatural fantasy. Both the satire and the extravaganza have their
moments of success, but the supernatural motif has been very crudely handled, and in any case, the three ingredients in the novel ultimately fail to form a 'seamless whole'.

Despite all forebodings, misgivings, problems and challenges, Indian novel in English has already proved its worth and possibilities. In 1993, *Midnight’s Children* was adjudged the ‘Booker of Bookers’ and again in 2007 it was adjudged the ‘King of Bookers’- the best novel to have won the Booker prize in its first 25 and 40 years respectively. There are also brilliant novels by Amitav Ghosa, Kiran Desai, the winner of Booker prize for literature in 2006 and Amit Chaudhari. Arundhati Roy’s much hyped novel *The God of Small Things* has been awarded the Booker prize for 1997. All these novels along with the earlier master pieces like *A suitable Boy, The Great Indian Novel, Inheritance of Loss, A River Sutra* and others have brought the new Indian novel into sharp focus. The rich harvest of talents in Indian fiction in English has already enkindled the hope of still better productions M.K. Naik has so pertinently remarked:

‘……..perhaps the best argument in support of the view that Indian writing in English is a body of works worth serious critical consideration is the fact the best in it has been taken seriously and subjected to minute appraisal by critical in both India and abroad. The steady interest it has roused, in recent years, in English speaking countries shows that it has merits other than those of sheer novelty and exoticism.’
The daughter of renowned Indian novelist Anita Desai, Kiran Desai is at the front line of a new generation of Indian writers in English exploring themes of globalization and exploitation in 21st century India. In 2006 Kiran Desai became only the second Indian woman to win the Man Booker prize for her second novel, The Inheritance of Loss. She also won National Book Critics Circle Fiction Award.

Nirad C. Chaudhuri was a Bengali–English writer and cultural commentator. He was born in 1897 in Kishoreganj, which today is part of Bangladesh but at that time was part of Bengal, a region of British India. He was honored the Sahitya Akademi Award, in 1975 for his biography on Max Muller called Scholar Extraordinary, by the Sahitya Akademi, India’s national academy of letters. In 1992, he was awarded by Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom with the title of Commander of Order of the British Empire (CBE). His 1965 work The Continent of Circe earned him the Duff Cooper Memorial Award, becoming the first and only Indian to be selected for the prize.

Amit Chaudhuri is perhaps the only Indian writer to be as prominent for his literary works as his musical career. He is a proficient classical singer who has performed in India, the UK and the US and has also released an album titled This is Not Fusion. Chaudhuri’s books have won his plentiful awards around the world, including the Los Angeles Times book prize in 2003 for Freedom Song. His latest novel, The Immortals (2009) combines his love for music and literature and has won critical fame for its portrayal of the delights of music.

Amit Chaudhuri is doubtlessly the only Indian writer to be as well-known for his literary works as his musical career. A proficient classical singer, he has performed in India, the U.K. and the
U.S. and has also released an album titled *This is Not Fusion*. Chaudhuri's books have won him abundant awards around the globe, including the Los Angeles Times book prize in 2003 for *Freedom Song*. His latest novel, *The Immortals* (2009) merges his love for music and literature and has won significant applause for its portrayal of the pleasures of music. He was included in the panel for the Man Booker International Prize 2009, alongside writer Jane Smiley and essayist Andrey Kurkov. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. His other work includes *A strange and Sublime Address*, *Afternoon Raag*, and *A New World*.

Amitav Gosh is another name that can never be missed out from the list of top contemporary writers. One of the most acclaimed Indian writers in English, Amitav Ghosh’s novels have won recognition across the globe for the power of their story telling and historical settings. Amitav Ghosh was born in Calcutta and grew up in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. He studied in Delhi, Oxford and Alexandria and is the author of *The Circle of Reason*, *The Shadow Lines*, *In An Antique Land*, *Dancing in Cambodia*, *The Calcutta Chromosome*, *The Glass Palace*, *The Hungry Tide*, and the first two volumes of *The Ibis Trilogy*: *Sea of Poppies*, and *River of Smoke*.

*The Circle of Reason* was awarded France’s Prix Médicis in 1990, and *The Shadow Lines* won two prestigious Indian prizes the same year, the Sahitya Akademi Award and the Ananda Puraskar. *The Calcutta Chromosome* won the Arthur C. Clarke award for 1997 and *The Glass Palace* won the International e-Book Award at the Frankfurt book fair in 2001. In January 2005 *The Hungry Tide* was awarded the Crossword Book Prize, a major Indian award. His
novel, *Sea of Poppies* (2008) was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, 2008 and was awarded the Crossword Book Prize and the India Plaza Golden Quill Award.

The Mumbai-born Rohinton Mistry, shifted to Canada and there penned his first novel *One Sunday* which bagged the annual contributors’ award from the Canadian fiction magazine. He also received the commonwealth writer prize for *Such a Long Journey* whereas *A Fine Balance* was shortlisted for Bookers Prize. His novels throw light on concerns distressing the Parsi community in India. The beauty of his books lies in their lyrical prose though his novels are long and depressing at times. Mistry's works are a pool of human emotions that mount above situation or provision. His characters are philosophical porch of unsophisticated love and he dwells in the ordinary only to transform into the extra-ordinary.

The latest novice in the world of Indian writers is Jhumpa Lahiri. She embarks upon the much debated topic of cultural identity of Indians in far off lands. Her debut book *The Interpreter of Maladies* stormed the literary world as it won the esteemed Pulitzer Prize in 2000. Her first novel *The Namesake* a striving endeavor to graph the lives of a family of immigrants through the eyes of a young boy. Both her books have acknowledged criticism as well as great compliments but she merits a site for undertaking a subject long disregarded by other Indian writers. Lahiri is a member of the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities, appointed by U.S. President Barack Obama.

Upamanyu Chatterjee deserves a mention as he was one of the first Indian authors who found success outside of India with his 1988 debut novel, *English, August*. His wry sense of humor and realistic portrayal of India has given us the witty and amusing, *The Mammaries of the
Welfare State. However, he hasn’t been able to replicate the success of his debut novel with his later works, especially in the West.

Aravind Adiga is the newest Indian writer to become a worldwide publishing phenomenon. A former journalist with Time magazine, Adiga’s first novel, The White Tiger (2008) won the Man Booker prize, making him the fourth Indian novelist do so. The White Tiger explored the dark underbelly of the new, modern India and was a fixture on best seller lists across the country.

Chetan Bhagat may not be the critics’ darling, but this IIM graduate and former investment banker has touched a chord with a youthful readership ranging from college students to IT employees. His first novel, Five Point Someone (2004), is one of the biggest selling English novels in the history of Indian publishing. His latest, 2 States – The Story of My Marriage, was the best selling book by an Indian author in 2009. Bhagat’s success has spawned a whole army of clones who churn out books that have mimic his colloquial language, college and corporate settings, linear narratives and lightweight plots. Bhagat and his loyal fans have learned to ignore the army of naysayers bemoaning the lack of intellectual heft in his books. He has in many ways, earned the right to crow from the rooftops – in the age of Facebook and Twitter, he’s managed to turn a large proportion of Indian youth into avid readers.

The 34-year old Deutsche Bank executive turned out to be one of India’s best-selling authors by writing about modern India in a colloquial challenging approach that hits a chord with young readers. He authored five bestselling novels, Five Point Someone (2004), One Night @ the Call Center (2005), The 3 Mistakes of My Life (2008), 2 States (2009) & Revolution 2020:
Love, Corruption, and Ambition. All five books have stayed bestsellers since their release and two have inspired Bollywood films (including the hit film 3 Idiots). In 2008, The New York Times called Bhagat "the biggest selling English language novelist in India's history". Bhagat is always surrounded by controversies for his blatant remarks.

Gita Mehta was born in Delhi in 1943. She got her education from Cambridge University. She started her career as a writer. She has written journalistic pieces and directing documentaries about India for BBC and ITV before she embarked on her career as a novelist. Writing fiction, she says, is not easy, particularly if you are dealing with facts and composing factual pieces. Non-fiction writing provides a kind of ‘safety net’ beyond which one does not go; not so in fiction where the imagination is at play. However, the experience in making documentaries gave her freedom to move about, to collect data and to amass information. As a war correspondent with NBC (USA), she got an opportunity to tour Bangladesh and cover the Indo-Pak War 1971. She saw the birth of the nation. She also made documentary on elections in the erstwhile princely states. This first-hand knowledge widened her horizon further and her own experiences plus her family background molded her vision of India and gave her keen insight to understand India’s problems, her strength and weaknesses. She divides her time among India, England and the United States. Despite their busy schedule, the Mehtas spend at least three months in India. In fact, every winter is a homecoming for them. This time is reserved for family visits and get-togethers. Gita says she does not write during these visits as it is a period reserved for accumulation of experience and assimilation of ideas.

Young Gita was growing up in the thick of political activities that always created fluid
situations. Her father was often in jail and her mother followed him ‘from jail to jail … smuggling letters into the jail’ (Snakes and Ladders 1997:6), and running around offices to get him released. In order to ensure stability for their education, the parents decided to send them – Gita and her brother – to a boarding school. Gita received her early education in India; she graduated from Bombay University, and thereafter was sent to Cambridge for a Masters in English Literature. She met her future husband Ajai Mehta while at Cambridge where Ajai, also know as “Sonny”, was also a student. After their marriage they settled in London and in 1987 shifted to New York where sonny joined as the Editor-in-chief of the world renowned publishing house Alfred A. Knopf. Because of Mr. Mehta’s position in the publishing industry, the family holds a prominent place in New York’s literary and publishing circles. In her piece “Making India Accessible” published in publisher’s Weekly in 1997, Wendy Smith describes the Mehtas’ home thus: ‘Gita and Sonny Mehta’s apartment is an oasis of tranquility in midtown Manhatan. Outside on a chilly March day, Park Avenue traffic is at its mid-afternoon worst, and the chatter of kids from a school next door nearly drowns out the honking horns and screeching brakes. Inside, all distracting sounds seem to be absorbed by the crammed floor-to-ceiling bookshelves, custom-built when the couple moved to New York from London in 1987 when Sonny replaced Robert Gottlieb as Knopf editor-in-chief’ (Wendy, 1997: 53).

When she started writing books, fiction and non-fiction both, she did it with the self-confidence of an insider’s familiarity. ‘Because of this journalistic background, all of her books feature keen political insight founded in thorough investigation. Because of the intelligence and family history that follows Mehta into her writing, her books are smart investigations into the
ideas, people, history and personalities that have determined what has shaped modern India and ultimately, who she is as a woman of Indian descent’ (“Voices from the Gaps”).

Gita Mehta seems to be in search for a space for herself as a writer, covertly because of her immigrant status but overtly because of her husband’s position as the top official in the internationally acclaimed publishing house like Alfred A. Knopf. In her interview with Wendy Smith, Mehta confines that being the wife of a big publisher breeds insecurities, ‘imagine: you’re working on a book, and Gabriel Garcia Marquez comes for a drink – you think, ‘Does the world really need me?’ And these nightmare sales for other writers; I hear Sonny say, ‘Well, we’ve sold 1.2 million copies of something and I think, ‘Oh my God!’ That’s why, when I’m really into a book, I go to London; I can’t be an appendage to Sonny’s work when I’m writing’ (Wendy, 1997: 3). She works independently no doubt, but her books are infused as much by the thought of India as by the Indian Thought, and are interpreted as exemplifying Indian diaspora. A point to note, however, is that neither during her interviews nor in her works does she express the diasporic apprehension of rootlessness, or longing for stability and continuity. All she does is to present India playfully and this has been often criticized as ambivalence and ‘imaginatively created India’ (Maria, 2001: 2).

Among the works of her peers of India, her writing differentiates itself by freshness as much as by a cosmopolitan outlook. She writes of India with love and affection, yet how dissimilar her picture is from the portraiture of those who also write about India but never manage to break out of metropolitan limits. Gita Mehta, stoutly refusing to mistake the city ways for the ways of the masses, casts her net wide, collecting the life of the women in tea plantations, of the tribal
people in the Vindhya ranges, or of the common man in the heart of the Thar Desert. In the panoramic vistas of her fiction and non-fiction, one can as easily come upon a princess as a tea picker, upon fakes as well as fakirs, upon seekers of salvation and of wealth. There is nothing that her eyes do not light upon, and certainly nothing that they do not illumine. To encounter her writing is virtually to make a fresh discovery of India.

What sets Gita Mehta apart even from the contemporary women writers of India is that she is not wedded to any “isms.” She scrupulously keeps to the role of the artist, casting prejudice and anger aside, the emotions that might well interfere with her observations or distort her perceptions. She seldom writes to judge of Indian customs, or to condemn the social practices, and never to sell them abroad as some tropical exotica. She writes because she takes delight in the variety and the vitality of the people. Of course, she has little patience with cowardice, corruption, or hypocrisy. However, her prose exposes, rather than sermonizes, leaving the reader amused and feeling superior.

Her latest book, *Snakes and Ladders: Glimpses of Modern India* (1997), a retrospective of the first fifty years of India’s independence, strikes one, says Bhavana Pankaj, as “a maestro’s rendition of a classical Indian Raga. The artist selects a Raga depending on the time of the day or night, tells the story behind it before proceeding to sing.” So does Mehta select a topic, slowly exploring it with the caution of an apprentice. Then she expands on it, peeling layer after layer to render the nature of the subject with the touch of a maestro. Whether her melody is fluid, languid, or urgent, she stays in perfect sync with her theme. Invariably, Mehta’s performance, touched by passion, vibrates with energy.
Similarly centering on India, her first work, *Karma Cola: Marketing the Mystic East* (1997), offers a witty expose of the cult of the mystic East propagated by humbugs and moneymakers. Nor are the Westerners pouring into India really interested in spiritualism; they are, if truth be told, drawn by the promise of the psychedelic heavens of Goa and Kathmandu. Evenly critical of India and the West, the vignettes that make up the book are in the nature of a highly confident and sensitive woman’s diary kept on her travels through India. The sketches reveal an intellect well honed and a mind bemused by human credulity and contradictions.

The clear, crisp prose, the unsentimental approach to the subject, and the graphic accounts of places- all the outstanding features of her first work *Karma Cola*- give a clear indication of what to expect from this writer. She brings the reporter’s keen observation, the journalist’s scrupulous accuracy, and the ad writer’s passion for colorful phrasing to her task as writer. The gift makes her work eminently readable, even memorable.

Her first work of fiction, *Raj: A Novel* (1989), reveals another aspect of Mehta as writer. With its facts well researched, the novel blends historical figures with fictitious characters, to recount faithfully the various stages of India’s struggle for freedom. Here Mohanda Gandhi and Winston Churchill, Viththalbhai Patel and Mohammed Ali Jinnah, mix and mingle with maharajahs and viceroys whose lives are equally racked by the nonviolent nationalist and militant rebels. The novel, in which the dashing princes chase European women while their chaste Indian spouses pine inside palaces, makes for an easy read. The weakness of the novel is that Mehta, unlike Salman Rushdie or Ben Okri, does not forge any formal structures or invent any aggressive narrative strategies. The novel, therefore, comes across, in the words of Vijay
Lakshmi, “more as a ‘referential’ than an ‘imaginative’ recreation of history.” However, the story, moving fast, easily tugs the reader through its 469 vivid pages.

Gita Mehta began her fiction writing with *Karma Cola* in 1979. Beginning with a study of the social classes during colonial rule and royal India, *Raj*, reflects, crucial period of Indian history. *A River Sutra* moves into more serious question like life and death. She has received acclaimed as being an international cross-cultural critic who has, according to Chandmal, “recorded India for Indians”.

Gita Mehta is a writer known, perhaps, more for her essay than her novels. She is also a documentary filmmaker and journalist. These activities all share a focus on India, the country of her birth-its history, politics and cultures. The same concerns inform her novels: *Raj*, a historical novel set during the early stages of Indian’s struggle for independence from Britain, and *A River Sutra*, a modern revisitation of prevalent traditions of Indian aesthetic and philosophical thought.

Mehta has documented India into films, covering Bangladesh war, the Indo-Pakistan war, and the elections in the former Indian princely states. Her essays, as represented by two collections, *Karma Cola: Marketing the Mystic East* (1979) and *Snakes and Ladders: Glimpses of Modern India* (1997) muse on things Indian, from politics and social unrest, the endless clash of religions and cultures, spirituality, and the Indian textile industry to Indian literature and film, and so on. The style of the essays is personal and lucid, often bitingly clear and always honest. This same lucid immediacy and intimacy marks *A River Sutra*. 
Raj, lacking this intimate voice, is a more distanced work, valuable rather for its meticulous and even handed grasp of a complex and important period in history. Her *Eternal Ganesha* gives the glimpse of myths and beliefs about Lord Ganesha in Hindu religion.

Mehta occupies a unique position as a writer who elucidates uniquely Indian experience in a clear and intelligent voice. She relates a rich and ongoing history – its nuance, complexity and contradiction – opening doors and windows into Indian life in ways few other writers do. While her first novel may be seen as thinly characterized and lacking in depth, the balance of her work, including her second novel, constitutes a unique and valuable contribution to the literatures of the world.
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