Abstract

Postcolonial studies, refer more broadly to the study of cultural groups, practices, and discourses—including but not limited to literary discourses—in the colonized world and specifically to the analysis of texts and other cultural discourses that emerged after the end of the colonial period. Resistance against traditional practices in the established society, and anything which baffles human efforts is a typical note of this modern writing. In the recent times, woman and interests of her welfare, have drawn undeniable attention worldwide. A distinguishing feature of contemporary women writings is, that it purports to speak about 'real' women. It claims to record the direct experiences of women', to understand 'the reality of being a woman in Indian, context', and to examine how 'women in India really feel about being women'. The more traditional a postcolonial society is – namely, Hindu Society in India - the more problematic the question of women's emancipation, and therefore, the more passionate, intense and emphatic its women writers are. The postcolonial perspective has inspired many women writers to make an attempt to recover the rich and meaningful cultures of women heretofore ignored or marginalized.

Bill Ashcroft relates the term Post-colonialism to the study of resistance. Spivak asserts the significance of the mute voices, the silence of the subalterns. While emphasis on the one hand is laid on the text and its ramifications, the history of the text and the experience conditioned by the history, at another level, there is a concern to look at the race, gender and culture of the author who produces the text. Edward Said spoke of the resistance rhetoric that emerges from rejection and separation syndrome and found fault with the western cultural institutions that were responsible for the creation of those 'others', the Orientals. With the result, the dialectical nature of subjectivity was found to be dominant in postcolonial writings
Following the changes in the Post Independence Indian society, fiction in Indian English has progressed from depicting women characters solely as epitomes of suffering womanly virtue to portraying more complex and realistic characters. From women who endure namelessly, fulfilling the ideal of the devoted wife-goddess, the Post-Independence Indian fiction by women has to a conflicted yet liberating naming of one's own experience and that of other women. The recent Indian women writers depict both the diversity of women and the diversity within each woman. Rather than limiting the lives of women to one ideal, they push the ideal towards the full expression of each woman's potential.

The present researcher has attempted to figure out the culture subject in the texts of some recent Indian women fiction writers, with emphasis on negotiations with culture and tradition, so as to read in their lives the ambivalent positions of resistance and subjectivity in the light of Indian culture. Hence, the central concern of this researcher is to locate the three chosen women writers in the discussion on subjectivity, with culture as the essential parameter. The question is this: how could women writers, who attempt to break the barriers of culture, could also locate the subjectivity of Indian women in India's culture. The discussions have been oriented towards subjectivity, which is granted to the principal women characters, through a process of experience.

Chapter I: Introduction begins with a short account of postcolonial literature and women in general. It is followed by a terse note on Indian fiction in English produced by Indian women writers during the second half of the last century and the lives and works of the authors chosen for this study. In the final pages of this Introduction, an explanation of the critical terms employed, are also stated.

Like their Western counterparts, the Indian women novelists also are minutely examining the institution of marriage. The concern is higher with women writers, since
The increasing education has made her aware of her rights as an individual. Education has enlarged her psychological terrains thereby making her highly sensitive to even the slightest psychological ruptures that life offers. Ironically, she is therefore more fragile than her predecessors. The recent Indian women writers namely, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Namita Gakale, Bharati Mukherji, Indira Ganesan, Anita Nair, Githa Hariharan, Manju Kapoor, Shobha De, Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai have produced an interesting array of female protagonists who emerge from their sufferings within the framework of marriage and societal cultural practices to a new social order.

Though the study is referred to as postcolonial approach, the principal aim is not to project the changes and the reactive measures posited by the colonisation; instead, it is rather an attempt to locate the perception of Indian women gifted with creativity and individuality, in the specific context of India’s long tradition and binding culture. With this idea in mind, the present research scholar has chosen to study some select narratives authored by three women writers - Githa Hariharan, Indira Ganesan and Anita Nair, who have received critical attention during the recent past. The aim is to gauge the attitudinal changes in the minds of new women of the present generation. The texts chosen for study are Githa Hariharan’s *The Thousand Faces of Night*, and *When Dreams Travel*, Indira Ganesan’s *The Journey* and *Inheritance* and Anita Nair’s *Ladies Coupe*. The common element in this choice is that, these writers belong to the recent past and their books have been produced during the last two decades. And it is hoped that the study would reveal the matrix of new responses and new changes that happened during the recent times.

Chapter II entitled *Writing Female Identity: Subversion and Re–Interpretation of Narratives*, is a critical note on the original text of *1001 Nights* and deals with the major
changes brought in the text by Githa Hariharan. It is an analysis in detail of Githa Hariharan’s subversion of the Arabian Tales so as to clarify the abilities of women in general and of the East in particular. The next two sections take up an analysis of woman as the illuminated subject in Githa Hariharan’s narratives, *When Dreams Travel* and *The Thousand Faces of Night*. The last section of this chapter attempts a conclusion on the meaning of the tales for the common folks.

Many modern fiction writers in Indian vernacular languages use the stories of Rama and Sita, Krishna and Arjuna, significant characters from the ancient legends, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* or the stories of the local heroines like Kannagi from the famous Tamil epic *Chilalppathikaram*, to illustrate the value of the priceless Indian culture and tradition. Githa Hariharan renders a similar job in *When Dreams Travel* in which she reinterprets the tale about the Arab kings, the well-known story about the Arabian Nights.

*When Dreams Travel*, is a lively blend of past and present, and the narrative concerns the life of two ambitious brides, Shahrzad and Dunyazad who aspire to be heroines/martyrs. The novel is set in the background of the popular tale, *The 1001 Arabian Nights* which pictures a Sultan who wants a virgin every night whom he executes at dawn. Shahrzad, being witty and endowed with a felicitous tongue enchants the king with a tale every night, but leaves the story unfinished, thus gaining the King’s interest, thereby ensuing her survival for another day. Githa Hariharan deftly uses the tale to bring out the terror, the terrible oppression and injustice against women. Myth and reality, fable and fantasy, dreaming and wakefulness thread their way through this sinuous labyrinth of stories, encompassing the past and the present. It raises issues that are at the core of all feministic concerns.

In the original text, the narratives of Scheherazade are continuous (N1 N2 N3 etc). But Hariharan’s novel is structured into two main parts. Part I is the main narrative and it
contains Hariharan’s version of Shahrayar and Scheherazade’s myth, ‘taking back to different aspects of original narrative’ presented in the introductory section. In Part II, she writes new tales, which are very different and are actually allegories of modern issues. Dilshad and Dunyazad are the actual story tellers of this version. This part has many references to postcolonial issues. So, When Dreams Travel (1999), is a kind of feminist re-telling of the 1001 Nights.

The Thousand faces of Night is the story of Devi’s quest for her identity as a woman. Having failed to define her real self within the framework of the male oriented social structures, namely as a wife in an arranged marriage, or even as a rebellious lover, Devi finally returns to her mother, “to stay and fight and to make sense of it all, she would have to start from the very beginning”(TFN 139). It is in relationship to her mother that Devi hopes to find an identity for herself.

Githa Hariharan’s study is a study of women in India. In this context, Hindu mythological characters help her to state her argument of emancipation and sublimation into a symbol of power, a ‘Sakthi.’ The discussion in this chapter asserts and confirms the argument of this researcher, that Githa Hariharan reveals her new message of deliverance, in the process of rewriting the myth of Arabian Nights, since she also subverts the Hindu Mythological tales. Both the texts considered here, proclaim a message from the writer, that passivity is not the life of woman.

Chapter III entitled Mother – Daughter Relationship and the Temporal Pulls of Culture, attempts to explore the life situations of modern Indian women through a reading of mother-daughter relationship particularly their attributes to marriage and man-woman relationships. The study reads in detail Indira Ganesan’s two narratives, The Journey and Inheritance, and also Githa Hariharan’s The Thousand Faces of Night.
Indira Ganesan stands unique in her treatment of the theme of mother-daughter relationship in the ‘Free India’. Though she seems to be guided by the rising awareness of identity and freedom among the teenage girls, Renu and Rukmani of The Journey juxtaposed with Sonil and Lakshmi of Inheritance upholds the critical plight of women, who are caught up between the traditional, patriarchal, culture-bound society and their inner, natural longings to live as emancipated, fulfilled and composite women. It is interesting to note the difference of attitude to life between the two generations of women of Post-Independence era. The awareness of their real ‘self’ and womanhood is felt by the first generation women. Hence they try to seize the opportunities for educational and economic development. But their inner psyche is still not completely liberated from the clutches of certain cultural, social, and even political constraints. This is all the more evident in the life of Lakshmi, mother of Sonil, the Protagonist of the Inheritance. Caught between her deeper desires and emotional expectations of a consummate and healthy married life and the marriage of convenience and customary patriarchal middle class Hindu society, the three attempts of Lakshmi culminate in sheer disappointment and despair. By going against the traditional marriage and family life, Lakshmi alienates herself from the society and converts this as a license to pursue an independent life. Though the ‘New Woman’ in Lakshmi appears to be free and frolicking, the ‘real mother’ in her is frightened of ‘Sonil’, her third daughter who appears to be a replica of her. There is a queer love-hate relationship between Lakshmi and Sonil, mother and daughter.

In the mother daughter relationship between Sita and Devi, in The Thousand Faces of the Night, there is an element of awe and despair, which is keenly felt by the daughter. Sometimes the mother is perplexingly wonderful, while at other times she is devilish and overpowering. In her attempt to escape the controlling powers of her mother, Devi scripts her moments of freedom. This is the complex and paradox, in Devi.
Chapter IV is entitled Indian Female Subjectivity: An Experience of Collectivity. It is a discussion of Anita Nair’s perception of human experience and identity not always conditioned by education or institutions or other factors. Anita Nair tries to give a new definition for human life, stating that one becomes aware of the woman in her, only when she is able to delink from the institutions or even from the gender. In other words, discovery of the self is possible only by a collective immersion in the grand version of human life. India is a country of communities—where community bath, community lunch, and community living are common and are accepted as a life-style. From that point, human experience is not always a felt experience. It is also a learnt experience.

This chapter deals with the protagonist’s discovery of her identity as a woman during a session of free and uncensored exchange that is possible only in Indian rural life. Actually the narrative poses the question about the free woman and structured device between man and woman. It also raises question on the relationship between active reality of liberation and a willed choice made by an individual in the crucible of life. Women have been caught up by the manacles of institutions and their visions of their ‘self’ had been blurred by the imposed values. Their behaviour had been conditioned by social codes and the escape from these boundaries is possible only during the mobility process, only when a woman meets another woman and shares her experience. These rendezvous moments provide an experience that is composite and reveals a life wherein the experience and not the institution matters. Culture is an institution and History is a record of the select observances of culture. The possibility of escape, the transcendence comes only to those who are ready to leave their roots. Journey, travel, and mobility all involve an uprooted moment in life. In such negligible weightage sessions of culture women can speak, share, communicate, educate and influence others. This is what happens in Ladies Coupe. Women are awakened to sessions of illumination during
these sessions. Both Anita Nair and Githa Hariharan reveal the significance of mobility / travel which facilitates such moments of illumination.

Chapter V is a Synoptic Discussion on Summation. Resistance is one of the important characteristics of Postcolonial narratives. It manifests itself as a refusal to be aborted, taking the array of influences exerted by the dominating power, and alerting them into tools for expressing a deeply held sense of identity and cultural being. Above all, transformation has been the most powerful and active form of resistance, a very integral part of the imagination of these societies. The drive to emancipate and re-empower is a distinct postcolonial identity. Githa Hariharan does this job in all her early literary writings – The Thousand Faces of Night and When Dreams Travel. Devi, the protagonist of The Thousand Faces of Night, has been fed by stories and tales from Hindu (ancient) myths and legends by her grandmother. Her father-in-law too explains her, the values of an ideal woman, in her role as wife and mother, citing, examples from The Ramayana and The Mahabharata. But Devi chooses her own ideal idol – ‘Sakti’, and decides to begin ‘life a new’. A totally different picture of the heroines of 1001 Nights emerges at the end of When Dreams Travel. The Wazir’s daughters, Shahrazad and Dunyazad, successfully complete the ‘circle with no beginning or end’, leaving the question to the universal woman. “I fought for myself, for you as well. What will you do when your turn comes?” (WDT 276).

In her re-interpretation of 1001 NIGHTS, Githa Hariharan re-frames woman’s roles - Listener becomes the Speaker, Slave becomes the Master, Dreamer becomes the Diplomat, the Word overpowers the Sword, Magic becomes Reality, Sub-Altern turns out to be King-Maker; above all the ‘Other’ becomes the Centre in her novel When Dreams Travel. For the emergence of new social order, it is essential that the old cultural agents and the transmission belts of the past are replaced or modified.
While cultural identity is highlighted in 'The Journey' – the return 'home' as illuminated subject, the woman's identity—including the hybrid subjectivity of Alphonsa, is dealt with in 'Inheritance' by Indira Ganesan. The narratives when closely studied reveal a pattern—the changing times - that fashion the roles of mothers and daughters. What seems to be the activating force is the element of culture. In the daughters' quest the changing times and culture shocks are seen, but there is a final moment of resolution which happens as daughters return to their cultural roots.

In both texts inferiority syndrome and inhibitive attitude of women are overcome, thanks to the interface of mother and daughter. For the mother, life is a state of pain: and for the daughter, life begins in a state of illumination. In home-ward experience this is made possible. When one reads the rejection of the West in the novels, naturally the suggestion is for returning to one's culture not as a stereotype of tradition, but as illuminated individual with the subjectivation process activated.

Anita Nair's Ladies Coupe provides a detailed note on the experience available for women outside home. This is something one gets as knowledge from the other. A modern woman becomes woman enough, when she understands better the womenfolk of other stages, status and stations. This happens to Akhila, the protagonist, in her painful middle chapters of life, single and lonely, as she meets five other Indian women. As every one tells the tale of lived experiences, the ideal suffering woman of India emerges from their sharing. These most harmed suffering individuals provide the composite experience that leads them to understand the world better. They become strong enough to reject the man's moulded world and choose to live according to the dictates of their inner voices which had been muffled by patriarchy, tradition and culture. Interestingly, Anita Nair reworks the typical woman's tale which has in fact, a single - sentence story line – “A woman in India suffers at all hands".
Hence the only choice available to them is to live according to the dictates of their inner voices. Like Githa Hariharan’s *When dreams travel*, Anita Nair’s *Ladies Coupe* works up the genre of tale exclusively as a woman’s form. A tale is an uncorrupted version, accommodative to common folk’s creative imagination and for a woman, imagination is a lived experience. In other words their story is their life and their life becomes a tale to be consumed by fellow women.

Both Anita Nair and Githa Hariharan make a special mention of the ‘*MahaDevis*’ as representative voices of the subaltern. There is a desire within the heart of the women of India to take revenge upon the society that has subjugated them in the name of inferior human subjects. Hindu lawgivers like Manu, being male authors of living codes, have been partisan to the women of India. They desired a social system that favoured men, and consolidated it in the name of culture. The origin and consolidation of these myths subvert the Hindu patriarchal reading of the woman’s status. It was based on a concept that treated women as weak and inferior by body and intellect when compared to man. The weaker sex with the polluted body could remain as subservient and silent. Many of the ‘*Mahadevis*’ are manifestations of protest, anger, violence and hatred. They hate the game of the male and have devised these goddess endowed with not only beauty, wisdom and intelligence, but also courage, anger and violence. Women folks of India have learnt about these myths as tales and legends passed on from grand mothers to grand daughters. If at all they return to India’s culture after their mobility ventures and the rendezvous attempts with the west, it is only to anchor themselves in this protest. So, what we find in recent Indian woman fiction is in one sense, a restatement of hidden protests in ‘Devi’ myths.

Thus, the foregoing discussion reveals, that, Indian women writers are concerned with subjectivity and identity. When one writes about woman’s identity and subjectivity, it is
always conditioned by a general understanding about the two terms - subjectivity and identity. In this respect, Indian women writers are not different from their counterparts in other languages. But a significant aspect of the identity and subjectivity emerges from the local space which this researcher would like to name as ‘Indian Theme’. These women writers are exclusively Indian in the sense that their arguments are meaningful in the feminist space which is also a family space. India does not adore single parent or family-less subjectivity. The major characters in the narratives of these writers function in a family space or they end their journey returning to a family. In their evolution from the ‘feminine’ to the ‘female’, the Indian women are progressive and conscious of their rights, and at the same time aware of the fact that a woman’s position lies within the family-unit, which she must sustain and nurture.

Western subjectivity is anchored in individual space, while Indian subjectivity is community-oriented. Hence, the ‘well-meetings’ or ‘women gossip’ provide the women an opportunity to understand the self and identify. Also, one finds the Indian women writers are very much concerned with the evil hands of patriarchy and how it extends into the making of stereo-type women, through a process of culture.

The thesis addresses three types of experiences: a subjectivity identified through a process of collective composite experience of life, wherein the personal and the private domains are erased; secondly, the experience is acquired from mother-daughter relationship with changing emotional levels of attachment and detachment; and thirdly, the principal characters’ experience of life in a process of quest, namely, the world-to-home mobility syndrome. The detailed analysis of the select novels of Githa Hariharan, Anita Nair and Indira Ganesan, highlight the truth that, decolonization attempts exist, concurrent to the culture immersion exercise.
Naturally, these women writers attempt to defy and resist the enslaving hands of culture. For this very purpose their protagonists choose to walk out of their homes, plan to go out of the orbit of family and seek new experience in new cultures. But the journeys have to end and inheritance should be chosen with modifications. Hence they return to culture with better understanding of its good and evil aspects. They come back with the illuminated wisdom and new knowledge obtained through new experiences. The new Indian woman lives in a better frame of mind choosing the good in Indian culture and rejecting the evil and the stereo-type. They emerge as ‘women of liquidity’ rather than the ‘solid women’ of the past. Hence, it is argued that the Indian women writers, in spite of all their transcendent desires, find something significant in their own immanent culture with hope and a sense of rejuvenation the present becomes an experience to build a future.

This study is an interesting addition to the growing interest of researchers in Indian writing in English and offers scope for extending the areas of investigation on lines of comparative study.