Chapter I

Introduction

"Because today I want to tell you of cruelty (Mine alone?)
Sisters, I want to tell you of cruelty; the one I use, day after day,
even to myself, even in punishment, even in comfort,
Serene cruelty, daily, in which I undress myself, with which I
undress myself, dress and move on; in indifference, in accuracy."

From Novas Cartas Portuguesas, 1974:97

Since recent times, women’s writings have acquired a great deal of significance all over the world. The silent spells of women have been cast away and the new voices are being heard in the world of letters. To state in brief, literature is no more exclusively a man’s domain but is shared by women armed with new voice of resistance and gifted with new sensitivity and experiences. The marginality of women has been acutely felt and passionately resisted. With the increasing roles in the fields of education and employment, women have acquired new liberties. With the result, women’s writings have arrived with the renewed strength and energy. During the last few decades, the debate on the style and substance on women’s writings has reached new heights. The global economy has shaped new roles for women, granted them new experiences. In developing nations, women who had been bonded to the male oriented culture, have now gained new strengths and new voices. In nations like India, which had been subjected to painfully long innings of colonial domination, women writers have emerged on the scene, thanks to the social and political changes that have happened around them. The education provided by the colonizers has opened the doors to the influx of new ideas on emancipation, freedom, individuality and the meaning of identity.
The present researcher has attempted to study the postcolonial scenario in the world of women’s writings in India, with emphasis on negotiations with culture and tradition. 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. Juliet Mitchell in her article “Feminity, Narrative and Psychoanalysis” suggests that the novel form itself arose out of woman’s search for identity within new social structure; the earliest novelists, she believes are not men, but women examining the nature of feminity under patriarchy (426-30). Prasannasree Sathupati states:

Human experience, for centuries has been synonymous with the masculine experience. With the result that the collective image of humanity has been defined as a subject in her own right, but merely as an entity that concerns man either in real life or in his fantasy life. There has existed all the same a distinctively female literacy tradition grown out of the anxieties of a woman’s life. Women writers have been drawn more to fiction writing than to the genres of poetry and drama. The very reality of woman’s life situation is ‘interrupted’; nature perhaps is the reason for a close affinity between women and fiction writing. (13)

Literature is necessarily a reflection of the changing pulse of a nation and it’s transmuting socio-cultural realities. 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 Harihanar’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.

Indian writing in English can no longer be discarded as an exotic chapter in English Literature. It is the sum total of the cultural patterns emerging in the Indian literary panorama in the post-modern times. It reflects the tradition-ridden Indian society that magnifies the Indian woman and binds her to the age-old Indian culture of being subservient to the dominant male ego. It also makes a reading of the heartbeats of the Indian woman, which defies and demolishes the barriers that obstruct the growth of independent female psyche.

This introductory chapter provides a brief note on Postcolonial literature and women in general, and a short survey of Indian fiction in English produced by Indian women writers of the recent past. This is followed by a terse note on the lives and works of the authors chosen for this study. An explanation of the critical terms employed, are stated towards the end of the chapter.

(2)

In the following paragraphs major stand points with reference to the central concerns of this research are briefly narrated. Women’s role and emancipation, which have been related to the consciousness of equality, identity and the forces that bind the women against liberation, are expressed by the researchers of women’s studies. As far as Indian scene is concerned, tradition and culture of the nation play a key role in marginalizing the women,
while the colonial rule has opened the gates of education towards finding their own tools of empowerment. The empowerment of women in reality is the urgent need of the hour, as it seems to be the best way to stop the degeneration of the society and to bring about harmony, happiness, progress, prosperity and peace in the world. Dr. Kiran Devendra, a noted scholar of women's studies remarks about the empowerment of woman thus:

Empowerment of women would mean equipping women to be economically independent, self-reliant, have a positive self-esteem, to enable them to face any difficult situation and they should be able to participate in developmental activities. The empowered women should be able to participate in the process of decision-making.

It is a very complex phenomenon, and as such needs multi-dimensional, multi-pronged and multi-disciplined handling. These are being done at the levels of awareness generation, advocacy and gender – sensitization and value-education. Empowered women lead more satisfying lives and need to support other women in their efforts toward empowerment. Nobel Laureate Dr. Amartya Sen rightly remarks, “Indeed, the empowerment of women is one of the central issues in the process of development for many countries in the world today”.

However, in this age of contradictions, women witness growing opportunities in all spheres of life on the one hand and physical elimination of women who dare question male domination even incipiently on the other. On one side, the human spirit soars high to treat men and women as equal human beings with reason and creativity; at another side, men treading roughshod over the lives and liberties of women can be witnessed. Thus, the social situation of women is the result of two pulls of opposite directions. In the cultural field woman is still considered as a human being of the second grade, in spite of the fact that
Indian Constitution proclaims her equal of man. The paradoxical and puzzling element is, women too figure as poets, writers, actresses, musicians, singers, dancers, painters, public speakers and political activists. However, their representative figures are very insignificant when compared to their male counterparts. Mythreyi Krishnaraj analyses this situation thus:

The role of culture and ideology in determining the outcome for women in specific instances deserves much attention. What is interesting is that not only do culture and ideology shape the contours of subordination but they also mould the conceptualization of liberation. Overcoming material obstacles is indeed of prime importance but neglect of transformation of values and attributes can subvert the liberatory potential in these endeavours. (2)

Kishori Nayak’s remarks about the women in the third world and their identity crisis, clarifies further the subjugation factors in the lives of women thus:

It is now almost truism that women of the third world are subject to multiple hierarchies that their identities are hardly allowed any expression and are, for most part, suppressed. These problems of identity are further accentuated, when they are uprooted from their native lands/cultures, and transplanted into another land/culture. (37)

Real progress for women is not merely opposition to patriarchal values of power and authority, although confrontation is sometimes a successful strategy for change. (Suma Chitnis in ‘Feminism: Indian Ethos and Indian Convictions’ remarks,

...the greatest obstacle to change in the directions of equality for women in India is the value system by which women abide. Women are conditioned to
revere the father, and serve the husband as devotee serves God. The ideal of ‘Pativrata’ is romanticized through legend, folklore and folksong and reaffirmed through ceremonies of different kinds....Both Savitri and Sita exhibit sharp wit, intelligence, resourcefulness, tenacity and affection. These qualities have never been held up for emulation. Tradition has only emphasized women’s self-immolation. (91)

In patriarchal societies, like Indian society, women are restricted to subordinate positions in all areas of life. Women have to move individually and cooperatively to their new territory of equality since men are reluctant to give ground with respect to their own super-ordinate position. In this context, Gayatri Spivak’s emphasis on ‘gendered subaltern’ - that, women are doubly oppressed by colonialism and patriarchy in the Third World countries, is quite significant. In her essay, ‘Can the subaltern speak?’ she writes thus:

Colonialism and patriarchy - both oppressed women and it is difficult for the subaltern to articulate her point of view and ‘there is no space from where the subaltern (sexed) subject can speak’....Between patriarchy and Imperialism, subject – constitution and object – formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into pristine nothingness, but a violent shuttling which is a displaced figuration of the ‘third – world woman’, caught between tradition and modernisation. (306)

By moving towards fulfillment, women transcend empirical difficulties and survive. They survive as long as they aim for fulfillment. Dr. Promila Kapur rightly observes, “Empowerment, therefore, is the ability to maintain one’s own inner dignity, to serve others and inspire them to experience their own dignity too” (404). Nevertheless, many women still are victims, and real shifts in their status can only be accomplished through cooperation
with each other. They need other women to see themselves more clearly and they develop strength and courage through their mutual support. Women who strengthen their position cannot afford to ignore more dependent entrapped women. In order to guarantee their hard-won new advantages, they need to support and guide women who are not yet sufficiently free to act in their own interests.

Marriage is an honest recognition of the native equality between man and woman. It is an equal necessity for both partners and does not set up one above the other. It is an agreement to share between themselves, the joys and sorrows, and all the responsibilities of a joint venture called family. The institution of marriage and family mark a unique development in the evolutionary history of humanity. It acts as a wonderful bridge between nature and civilization, biology and culture, sex and moral righteousness, personal enmity and public order, - above all between individual and society.

However, in the institution called family in the patriarchal set up, the productive and reproductive labour of women is actually under the control of the male. Though patriarchal attitudes are responsible for this approach towards women, the ultimate ground of domination is the material goods, which is the actual basis of the patriarchal system. “Normally, the situation of the wife in a patriarchal marriage does not change across age or nationality” (Basham: 167). Patriarchy and capitalism operate effectively together to use women as a profitable source of production and reproduction, while keeping control over women’s labour and perpetuating their inferior status. Capitalism and Patriarchy are neither autonomous nor identical systems; they are mutually dependent.

Though women may not be encouraged to develop careers by their families, the media and educational institutions communicate clearer messages of support than ever before. By selecting values that are in their own interests, women strengthen their
motivation and effectiveness. Values are central to life. As women discover their most meaningful values and create real identities, they convert from ascribed religions of traditional patriarchal values about gender to achieved religions of egalitarian values. "There is a man within every woman, and a woman in every man. We contain within, an antipode of ourselves" (Namita Gokhale: 64). Therefore, both are equal participants in the human condition and it is in everyone's interests, to move towards autonomy and more general, less polarized gender definitions.

The crux of the problem is that man-woman relationships has on the whole, evolved through centuries on a set pattern, namely, man to rule and woman to obey; man, the master, and woman, the slave; man, the god, and woman, the devout; man for the field and woman for the hearth and so on. Alka Saxena remarks in "Feminism: Time to Stop Suffering in Silence", that, "the uppish and superior attitude of men is the root cause of female dissatisfaction" (21). These traditional and old beliefs mutely followed are now challenged. Right from the earliest times to the present, women have been struggling to find a respectable place for themselves. A survey on the scenario of Women's Movement and Association – Regional perspective (1860 – 1993) makes the following observation:

Hitherto Women have fought battles for others, may be men, children or society at large. Time is at hand when they have to fight battles on their own for themselves. Many of their problems remain unsolved. Their claim to individuality, equality, justice and freedom has still to be recognized and acted upon. Their rights over their bodies have to be accepted and their work, evaluated adequately. Their contribution to perpetuation of human race through motherhood has to be appreciated and treated as national service. Evaluation of their work at lower level than that of men has to cease. (214)
The status of woman all over the world is more or less the same. Only the degree of their suppression varies from place to place and time to time. Women have been exploited by men in all ages. From the earliest times to the present, desirable woman portrayed is the one who is passive and subservient. Toni Morrison’s views on Feminism in “The Art of Fiction: 134”, Paris Review (1993) are relevant here:

I only know that I will never again trust my life, my future, to the whims of men, in companies or out. Never again will their judgment have anything to do with what I think I can do... He (my husband) knew better about his life but not about mine. I had to stop and say, let me start again and see what it is like to be a grown up. I decided to leave home... I wanted to see what it was like to be a grown up. That was the wonderful liberation of being divorced and having children. (21)

In the past, suppression by men has prompted many women to rebel against it. Mary Wollstonecraft, one of the earliest feminists who articulated the case for women through her revolutionary book A Vindication for the Rights of Women, took cudgels against the indiscrimination shown against women. Sara Grant, another noted Feminist, attacked the “bawling brotherhood” for their preference to ‘cow-women’. Rebecca West and Virginia Woolf reviewed the cultural and economic disadvantages of women in patriarchal society (Anita Myles 1). Thus, feminism as an extension of existentialism gets echoed in world literature. Shoba Venkatesh in “Reading Resistance” states, “If silence is powerlessness, then the very act of writing can be designated as resistance” (71). Many black women writers admit that they are writing on behalf of those women who do not know how to express their views, or whose voices are not allowed to be heard. Gloria Naylor boldly admits this point in her interview to American Review: “I wanted to become
a writer because I felt that my presence as a black woman and my perspectives as a woman in general, had been under-represented in American Literature” (1980:1:42).

Therefore, postcolonial feminist literature has always carried the heavy burden of dealing with, not to say unravelling, layers of misinterpretation of traditions and religions. The role of woman along with the economic and social independence is the centre of this dilemma. Robert Fraser remarks in this context,

... the painful transition from belonging to alienation, the imposition of foreign tongues, the successive traumas of oppression, and liberation followed by the patient endeavour to reconstitute the self. These are the dimensions that define the postcolonial fiction as a distinctive area of imaginative exploration. (1)

Postcolonial women writers participate actively in the ongoing process of decolonizing culture. Peter Barry in Beginning Theory is quite clear and emphatic about the two-fold objectives of postcolonial studies. “If the first step towards a postcolonial perspective is to reclaim one's own past, then the second is to begin to erode the colonialist ideology by which that past had been devalued”(192). Deconstruction and subversion of the ill effects of colonialism and imperialism are the express agenda of postcolonial studies. The existential struggle of women to establish their identity, to assert their individuality and their desperate fight to exist as a separate entity appear in all intensity in the novels of the post-colonial women writers. They try to question and reconstruct many of the concepts involved in the Post-Colonial Theory.

Sara Suleri, comments on the mixing of ‘post colonial’ with ‘woman’ in her article “Woman Skin Deep: Feminism and Post colonial Condition”, thus:
The concept of the postcolonial itself is too frequently robbed of historical specificity in order to function as a pre-approved allegory for any mode of discursive contestation. The coupling of ‘postcolonial’ with ‘woman’, however, almost inevitably leads to the simplicities that underline unthinking celebrations of oppression, elevating the racially female voice into a metaphor for ‘the good’. (4)

The stances of Indian women writers, particularly with regard to glorifying or denigrating traditions, vary as demanded by their own class backgrounds, levels of education, identity awareness, social commitment, economic independence, political freedom and their search for alternatives to existing levels of subjugation and oppression often inscribed with their most respected traditions. The ‘double colonizational oppressive practices of patriarchy that preceded and continues after colonialism and that inscribes the concept of womanhood, motherhood, and tradition such as dowry, bride-price, sati, polygamy and the burdens of female roles in urban environments, which are instituted by colonialism, and all kinds of marginalisation of women by negation, alienation and subjugation are re-dealt with, in the texts of these women writers.

But, eminent critics like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who is hailed as a spokesperson for the Asian and Third World woman “expresses her disapproval of the west’s monolithic construction of a “Third World” that conveniently wipes out all the differences of culture, history, race and ethnicity, that matter so much to these people themselves” (Postcolonial Critic 114).

Similarly expressions of the views and problems of women as themes of literary works, found its entry in Indian English Literature too. In India, the focus of the Postcolonial New English Literature naturally falls on women as the voice of the
marginalised, who represent the case of the underdog in this still largely tradition-bound society.

Hence, the task of challenging and changing the status of women in the post-independent India has been taken up by the Indian Writers in English especially the recent women writers of the younger generations. They have come to recognise that fiction is not only a beautiful genre but also a powerful one- it can disturb assault, wrench and disrupt like a pinprick. Lakshmishree Banerjee aptly remarks about them thus:

These women writers are deeply aware of the various facets of domestic and public life, of the different aspects of human and social relationships which bring them, both happiness and anxiety, physical and spiritual concerns and upheavals, which are adequately expressed in the text. There is a definite search for an alternative vision or an artistic transcendence which make these compositions significant and purposeful. (130)

The present thesis is in an exploration of the creative output of Indian women writers of recent times and their attempts to identify and assert the subjectivity and identity of women in the context of family and familial relationships that includes mother-daughter conflict. A large number of Indian women, who benefited from English education granted by the colonisers, have attempted to express their dreams and despairs in English language, especially in the field of fiction. Consequently, many women novelists made their debut in the post-independence literary scene. Indian English Fiction is dominated by this second generation of postcolonial writers, who began a tremendous flurry of publication activity in the 1980s. Most of their works deal with the resistance and repression of the marginalised in the Third World and the charting and mapping of the cultural territories in the decolonised
societies along with the cobbling together of a composite, indigenous identity for the “Other” and “Subaltern” in the globalised community. Their first novels are quite effective in revealing the true state of Indian society when it comes to the treatment of women. All these writers were born after Indian Independence, and English does not have any colonial associations for them. Their work is marked by an impressive feel for the language, and a completely authentic presentation of contemporary India, with all its regional variations. They generally write about the urban middle class, the stratum of society which they know best and analyse the women characters in the Indian social setup in their evolutionary paradigm of feminine to female. Thus, the 1980s for Indian writing have marked what Edward Said has called, “second stage of post-colonialism” (252).

Even during the colonial days women writers of India who were exposed to English education and impelled by creative energies started writing stories and poems. The newspapers and the magazines of the times were thrilled to accommodate the writings by women. Some Indian men writers even chose to write using women’s names. In many regional languages, women’s magazines exclusively devoted to the world of women arrive. The new bunch of women writers presented the life and the experiences of women in a new language and identified them differently from the ones presented by men writers. The women writers did not approve of idealising women and the conventional role tailored for them; instead they radicalised and revealed the life of women as victims, thus challenging the male literary tradition. The common message was resistance to subjugation of women and a need for emancipation. They asserted that it is possible only when the women go into a larger world of life, free from the suffocating homes.

The Post-Independent India saw novelists like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal compete with great literary giants like R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj
Anand and Raja Rao, as significant contributors of Indian writing in English. While Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Prawar Jhabwala attempt to deal with the problems of society and woman’s oppression, Anita Desai and Shashi Despande deal with the woman’s inner world and their sojourn into the interior realms of woman’s consciousness. In the works of these women novelists, woman emerges as an individual, challenging her existential survival. They aim at catching the whole woman alive in terms of feelings, intellect and emotions. Many of them rebel against the strict traditional code of the society. They have successfully projected the urges, dreams, and desires of Indian woman, in particular, the middle-class housewife, who refuses to be suffocated by her environment. They depict woman in the context of the contemporary world, as an individual with freedom of choices. However, their canvas is not limited to women only; they depict a wider cultural scene, and the problems and difficulties, joys and sorrows of human beings which have universal significance.

Woman as an individual with throbbing pulse, feelings and aspirations, involved in a stream of life that is complicated, demanding and exhausting, makes her appearance in the novels by women writers. The appearance of the fully awakened woman, prepared to accept the challenges in order to live a meaningful life is a recent phenomenon in Indian English Literature. The attempt of the women novelists to portray the predicament of woman succeeded most effectively. It has given a distinct dimension to the image of woman in the family and society. The reason could be their instinctive perception of and insight into the woman’s reactions and responses, problems and perplexities, dreams and despairs, and the complex working of their inner selves, and their emotional involvements and their retrospective disturbances.
The publication of *Nectar in a Sieve* (1980) by Kamala Markandaya ushers in a welcome deviation from the established practice of hero-oriented novels. Her *Pleasure City* (1982) marks a new direction in her work. The cultural confrontation here is not the usual East versus West, but it is tradition and modernity. While the East-West confrontation and the resultant conflicts are reflected in the writings of Kamala Das, the problems confronted by the middle-class and lower middle class people are dealt with in the novels of Ruth Prawer. She writes about the furious social scuffing in present day India. As Shyam M. Asnani remarks, “all her novels are full of local colour and deals with the young who are inert, romantic, rigid and scheming” (*Critical response* 80). Jhabwala describes the collision between the tradition and modernity, the east and the west and the resulting confusions in her novels. Rajeshwar Mittapalli observes, “The unravelling of the mysteries of the Indian psyche, although with an air of amused detachment, is certainly a strong point of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala’s fiction” (74).

Madhusudan Prasad remarks that Anita Desai “mainly explores the emotional world of women, revealing a rare imaginative awareness of various deeper forces at work and a profound understanding of feminine sensibility as well as psychology”(138). Anita Desai has published six of her eleven novels in the last two decades. *Clear Light of Day* (1980), perhaps her best novel, deals with two sisters from a loveless home. Desai switches from a woman-centred to a male-centred narrative in *Custody* (1984), which presents the world of Deven Sharma, a poorly paid lecturer in a provincial town. All of Anita Desai’s earlier novels had Indians as central characters. Anita Desai moved to America early in the nineties. Her work since then revealed all the characteristics of diasporic fiction: a concern with the fate of immigrants, and a growing distance from the Indian reality, which is viewed from the outside. Desai’s ninth novel *Journey to Ithaca* (1995) has a charismatic old woman as a Guru. The irreconcilability between the inner and outer worlds, the improbable
gulf between expectation and reality, resulting in the deep anguish of the sensitive soul in eternal search of peace is the underlying theme in almost all the novels of Anita Desai. Her fictional world is just like an ice-berg mostly hidden, partly visible. She has heralded a new era in the realm of psychological portrayal of the character. Self-identification is a socio-psychic realization of psycho-emotional and psycho-moral values, in the novels of Anita Desai.

There are a few women novelists who use public events as a backdrop, but their work is not comparable to Nayantara Sahgal as political novelist. Women in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal question the validity of the accepted set of values and rebel against the existing moral codes and social norms, which deny woman the oxygen of freedom that nourishes the individual self. Jasbir Jain observes: “In almost every novel, Nayantara has a central woman character who gradually moves towards an awareness of her emotional needs” (63). Her women refuse to be an acquiescent, suffering and sacrificing lot. They strive to establish a new order with changed standards where women can be their true selves and where there is no need of hypocrisy. Unlike the women in Anita Desai who, when confronted by uncongenial atmosphere withdraw into themselves, Nayantara Sahgal’s women continue their fight against the hostile environment. They are positive in their attitude and refuse to accept defeat.

During the eighties, the novelist with the most sustained achievement is Shashi Deshpande. Her writings emerge from her incompatible responses to the middle class Indian sensibilities. Shashi Deshpande moves a little further and catches on the sable psychological complexities of the individual (woman) mind. She strikes a note of realism and optimism in her portrayal of the Indian middle class educated women. Her women characters seek their self hood within the orbit of family and relationships. In an interview
given to Lakshmi Holmstorm, she stated, “My background is very firmly here. I was never educated abroad; my novels don’t have any westerners, for example. They are about Indian people and the complexities of our lives ... My English is as we use it” (Wasafri: 1993:26).

In the novel, That Long Silence (1988) which marks her emergence as a major novelist she makes an aesthetic plea to free the female psyche from the conventional male control. Deshpande shows up the hollowness of modern Indian life and deals with the ills of arranged marriages and the resultant desperation and frustration, misunderstanding and incompatibility, sense of guilt and loss, loneliness or alienation of a sensitive woman pitted against ill – fated marriage and hostile circumstances around her. The repetitiveness and boredom of a woman’s life comes through forcefully. In the Binding Wine, she narrates how the silence imposed on women is partly of their own making, though society and tradition do play a role. Almost all her novels deal with a crisis in the heroine’s life. Indira Nityanandam in her ‘Introduction’ to Indo-English Fiction: The Last Decade rightly remarks, “All her (Shashi Deshpande) novels have women protagonists who embark on a process of self- discovery within the established patriarchal set up” (20). Her work is woman – oriented, but it would not be correct to term her a feminist, because there is nothing doctrinaire about her fiction. She simply portrays in depth, the meaning of being a woman in modern India.

In the recent times, a new crop of women novelists, namely, Gita Mehta, Namita Gokhale, Bharati Mukherjee, Nina Sibal, Indira Ganesan, Shobha De, Arundhati Roy, Githa Hariharan, Manju Kapoor, Anita Nair and Kiran Desai – to mention a few, have made their mark as new writers of fiction, dealing with the problems faced by Indian women. They show their deep insight into human nature, and their understanding of day-to-day problems. They deal with the feminine themes such as clash between tradition and modernity, the identity crisis of their protagonists, and the Indian woman’s quest for
liberation and independence. The new generation of women writers have their own different styles. They write in effortless and delightful English, and some of them are provocatively modern. These women writers conceive the relationship of woman to her surroundings in new and realistic terms, and face the challenges posed by the influx of western ideas.

Though writing in the particular milieu of the middle class society of India, they transcend the narrow confines and their books present, the individual's experience of her uniqueness in her power to transcend the given. They do so with the unusual perception of reality.

Another remarkable feature is their understanding of human life and its predicament. R.K. Dhawan in his "Introduction: Indian women novelists" remarks thus:

Fiction by women writers constitutes a major segment of the contemporary Indian writing in English. It provides insights, a wealth of understanding, a reservoir of meanings and a basis of discussion. Through women writers' eyes we can see a different world, with their assistance we can seek to realise the potential of human achievement. In any appraisal of Indian English literature, an appreciation of the writing of its women is essential. (10)

With the tide of Feminism, there emerged the concept of 'new woman', radically different from her traditional counterpart. (Ellen E. Jordan observes that “the English feminists endowed the ‘New Woman’ with her hostility with men, her questioning of marriage, her determination to escape from the restriction of homelife and her belief that education could make a woman capable of leading a financially self-sufficient single yet fulfilling life”. (19))

She is conscious, resourceful, confident, dynamic, at times necessarily aggressive, busy re-defining herself, acquiring a new identity, and dealing with the world around on her own terms. She occupies the centre stage and has shed her position of the 'Other'. Namita
Gokale has succeeded in projecting such an image of the new woman in her novel. Namita Gokale is a novelist who has grown and developed in the course of four novels written within the last fifteen years. Her first novel, Paro: Dreams of Passion (1984) deals with the upper crust of contemporary Indian society in metropolitan town. The characters change their partners quicker than their clothes. Her second novel, Gods, Graves and Grandmother (1994) is notable for its social realism. The beginning of the book provides a fine satirical touch of the way religious leaders proliferate in India. A Himalayan Love Story (1996), her third novel, traces the lives of the two star-crossed lovers who grew up in Nainital. It bears testimony to the novelist’s love for her native region. Gokale’s fourth novel, the Book of Shadows (1999) marks her coming of age as a notable writer. She effects a paradigm shift in the position of her woman characters, who are autonomous and do not depend on their fathers, husbands or sons for their survival, as Manu postulates. (Anees Jung 68). They are cast in the mould of the ‘New Woman’ who solves her problems herself, and is assertive, practical and resilient. This image of the ‘New Woman’ constitutes a forceful and effective rebuttal to the definition of woman as a “sweetheart, a paramour, a mistress”, in most of the dictionaries. She successfully creates a female space which her women occupy with dignity, confidence and feeling of self-respect.

Anjana Appachana, Shashi Deshpande, Githa Hariharan and Bulbul Sharma present authentic pictures of life in India without mentioning events like the partition or the Emergency because their focus is inward. Some common themes like the discrimination against the daughter, the oppressive silence of women and the lack of communication between the sexes are treated descriptively in Anjana Appachana’s narratives - Incantations and other stories (1991) and, Listening Now (1998). The latter is a novel, which is credible re-creation of Indian life. The reader feels that he/she is personally acquainted with the women, and readily identifies with them. Indian culture transcends regional variation in
discriminating against the daughters: whether it is Delhi, Lucknow or Bangalore, the son invariably gets first preference in all things, whether it is food, pocket money or education. Appachana gives a realistic account of the lives of middle class women in an Indian city and their painful negotiations between personal aspirations and societal expectations. She novelist presents a searing picture of the exploitation of the daughter-in-law who suffers in traditional Indian family. Very few women novelists have written about the partition of 1947. It is mentioned in Nina Sibal’s Yatra, Sharma Singh Baldwin’s What the Body Remembers (1991) and Manju Kapur’s Difficult Daughters (1998). Meena Arora Nayak’s second novel, About Daddy (2000) presents the topic in an original way.

Arundhati Roy is credited for catapulting Indian writing in English to a new height in the literary world. She has paved ways for the younger generation of writers who are knocking at the doors of literary stardom. This 37-year-old New Delhi architect won the prestigious Booker Prize in 1996 for her debut novel, The God of Small Things. It is a bit autobiographical in nature. The whole story revolves around the village, Aymenem, near Kottayam. In theme, it peeps into the life of the Keralite society, their rites, rituals, cultural practices and patriarchal dominations. Her new style of writing that twists the language to conform to feeling – a style that has paradoxical coinages, ungrammatical constructions, bizarre phrases etc. reminds one of what T.S.Eliot has meant by his famous phrase ‘Objective Correlative’ or ‘Emotional equivalent’.

Kiran Desai is born in India in 1971 and has completed her schooling in Massachusetts before attending Bennington College, Hollins University and Columbia University, where she studied creative writing, taking two years off to write Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard(1998). Eight years later, The Inheritance of Loss was published in early 2006, and won the 2006 Booker Prize. The characters of her story are entirely fictional, but
these journeys (of her grandparents) as well as her own, provided insight into what it means to travel between East and West and it is this she wanted to capture. The fact that she lives this particular life is no accident. It was her inheritance. The Inheritance of Loss is a book that tries to capture what it means to live between East and West and what it means to be an immigrant, and what happens when a Western element is introduced into a country that is not of the West. The novel is about an embittered old judge who lives in a crumbling house at the foot of Mount Kanchenjunga in the Himalayas. He craves nothing more than to retire in peace. The old judge’s reverie is disturbed by the arrival of his orphaned granddaughter and the son of his garrulous cook. As she herself says, "These are old themes that continue to be relevant in today's world, the past informing the present, the present revealing the past." Pankaj Misra in ‘Wounded by the West’, a review in The Newyork Times Book Review, sums up the novel thus:

Although it focuses on the fate of a few powerless individuals, Kiran Desai’s extraordinary new novel manages to explore, with intimacy and insight, just about every contemporary international issue: globalisation, multiculturalism, economic inequality, fundamentalism and terrorist violence. Despite being set in the mid-1980s, it seems the best kind of post-9/11 novel. (1)

Thus, the women writers of the postcolonial India portray life in all its depth and complexity in their novels. They have poignantly conveyed the predicament of people who are engaged in the struggle, not only with their circumstances, with their limitations and failure, but also with their own self. The novelists show a deep insight into human nature, and at the same time they catch the epiphanies of life in their work. They view life with an acute sense of observation, a fine sensitivity, a keen perception and sharp sensibility. Thus, the new generation of women writers have moved from both subjugation and
aggressiveness to a state of total equanimity and equality with a clear perception of their future goals.

So, the hegemonic initiatives have given way to more egalitarian currents in the Indian English women’s literature with ‘feminism’ and ‘Indianness’ easily blending into the ‘natural’ and the ‘universally human.’ The backlash, of extreme conservation on the one hand, and of ‘feminism’ on the other, has contributed positively to an emergent woman’s order most definitely assured of its dignified place in the new world order. As a result, Indian women’s literature in English stands in its own right now, as internationally, and humanistically more tenable.

Thus, a cursory glance of the major women narratives of the Post-Independence Era of Indian writing in English shows the increasing levels of understanding, resistance and re-orientation of women’s issues. The present investigation attempts to study this situation through the texts of three recent women writers, Githa Hariharan, Indira Ganesan and Anita Nair. It would be appropriate to introduce the three authors and the primary sources chosen for analysis. The following paragraphs provide the background to the discussion that ensues from the texts. Together with Anita Desai, Shashi Despande and Meena Alexander, Githa Hariharan has been hailed as one who is committed to feminine and social issues.

Githa Hariharan was born in Coimbatore (1954) and educated in Mumbai, Manila and the United States. She has written four novels, The Thousand Faces of Night (1992), which won the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best First Book, The Ghosts of Vasu Master (1994) , When Dreams Travel (1999) and In Times of Siege (2003). She has also written a collection of stories entitled The Art of Dying (1993). She has also edited A
Southern Harvest, an anthology of Indian short stories translated from four major South Indian languages. She lives in New Delhi where she works as a freelance editor. Githa Hariharan is a known name in the world of English writing, but what is a lesser-known fact is that, in her own quiet way she has changed the perception of a mother’s role and place. She and her doctor-husband fought the system to have the mother declared as the legal and financial guardian of her children. Thanks to Githa Hariharan and her husband, the legal rights of mothers were promoted by the outcome of this case. She made history by winning this right for mothers on February 18, 1999. (Antonio Navarro – Tejero 27) Her narratives are unique in style and substance. In fact she is postcolonial in her usage of language and in her usage of subversion technique particularly with reference to her readings of male narratives in general and Asia’s culture in particular.

In her first novel The Thousand Faces of Night, (1992) Githa Hariharan deals with the Indian realities, its pressing problems, its self defining mechanisms, its working through of colonial memories, its cultural conflicts, challenges and tensions with regard to Indian women of the Patriarchal society. She also probes deep into the issue of mother–daughter, grandmother–granddaughter relationships and its influences on their views of men and society. The Thousand Faces of Night presents three women belonging to different generations, with nothing to relieve the drabness of their lives as they are caught up ‘between tradition and modernity’. Devi, the protagonist, cannot cope with life in India. Modern education, including a degree from an American University, only exacerbates the problem. When Devi returns to her widowed mother in Madras, leaving behind her black American friend Dan, her extended family pressurises her to get married. Mahesh, the husband her mother arranges for her, is somewhat insensitive, and the marriage loses all meaning when Devi fails to have a child. Devi is not the only unhappy woman in the book: her mother and the old maidservant Mayamma share her misery. Mayamma is ill – treated
because she is barren, but Devi's mother Sita is largely responsible for her own fate. She is the most powerful character in the novel. An expert veena player she broke her veena after marriage and moulded herself into a super - efficient household machine and worked for her husband's advancement. However, by killing her talent, she also develops into a person who stifles all creativity, whether in her husband or her only child Devi. The novel is interspersed with the legends and folktales Devi heard in her childhood and there are many points of view in the narrative: Devi's and Mayamma's in the first person, and the third - person author's narration about Devi or Sita.

Githa Hariharan's next novel is very different from her earlier works, which are primarily in the social realist mode, though story telling is an important trope. When Dreams Travel (1999) is a kind of feminist retelling of the Arabian Nights. Kamila Shamsie remarks in Times Literary Supplement. "This is a novel as much about story-telling as about story-tellers and one of the threads that Githa Hariharan skilfully weaves into her narrative is the mutability of the tales, their tendency to shift as they pass from one person to another, revealing the story-teller's background and views" (21).

When the activity of writing, together with storytelling serves to promote dominant patriarchal ideologies, they become the target of Githa Hariharan's critical perspective. As a means to confront the patriarchal ideology of these texts, Githa Hariharan re-tells the famous 1001 Nights in such a way that the recreated text argues that self-preservation has to be more important than social mobility. When Dreams Travel is a different kind of text, in the 'myth making business' projecting exemplary heroines, while deconstructing both misogynous and colonial stereotypes. That is to say, Githa Hariharan is creating new figures that embody alternative concepts and images, translating to a short hand version, the horizon of liberated feminist identities.
By re-writing Shahrzad's story from a feminist angle, Githa Hariharan imposes on the readers a whole re-thinking of the hatred of women so obvious in the famous translations of medieval Arab anthologies. In this way, Githa Hariharan not only answering back to a misogynous literary tradition but she is also deconstructing and eroding the sexist impact of the original. Thus, in *When Dreams Travel*, Githa Hariharan also establishes story telling as a woman’s tradition, passed on from generation to generation. The male characters can listen and repeat the tales they have heard, but it is women who invent them.

Marriage, family, man-woman relationships, commercialisation, destitution, alienation, marginalisation, individuality, womanhood, identity crisis, dilution of traditional and cultural values are some of the remarkable issues that are dealt with by the modern Indian novelists like Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Nayantara Sahgal, and Arundhati Roy. Following this line, Githa Hariharan focuses on modern Indian woman, who finds herself in a peculiar situation, wherein her freedom to interact with men is hampered by certain traditional practices and strange conventions. The observation of Sudhir Kakar in *Feminine Identity and Intimate Relations* that ‘a woman’s status in Indian Society is determined by her faithful adherence to the prescribed code of behaviour’ is relevant in this context (27).

Another writer of significance is Indira Ganesan, author of the novels, *The Journey*(1990) and *Inheritance*(1998). Indira Ganesan was born in Srirangam, India, and moved to the United States when she was in grammar school. She graduated from Vassar College and received an M.F.A. from the Iowa Writers’ Workshop. Her first novel was *The Journey*, and she was a Granta Best Young American Novelist Award finalist. She attempts to read Indian women’s experience, particularly the diasporic element. In this process, she is found to shuttle between India’s culture and tradition on one hand and the challenges and new experiences received by the compulsive exposure to the western culture, on the other.
Indira Ganesan’s *The Journey* is a novel about its female protagonist Renu Krishnan’s struggle to come to terms with the sudden loss of her twin cousin, with whom she had assumed a rare closeness. What had so long been pushed deep down within her, surfaces and Renu is made to acknowledge her own repressed sexuality and apparently, the incestuous love she had for her twin cousin Rajesh. In a nation of immigrants, the story of arrival and adjustment is a perennial fictional favourite. Fewer writers address going home again, but Ganesan’s delicately constructed first novel does. *The Journey* is the story that revolves around the two sisters, born on the fictional Indian island of Pi. Renu is nineteen, Manx is fifteen and both move to Long Island, New York along with their parents while they are still young. Jasbir Jain remarks about the journey motif in Indian Literature: “The journey is not merely an encounter with the unfamiliar, but may be, more often than not, an encounter with the self.... The journey undertaken is a journey of self discovery... a journey into unknown territories...” (26).

Journey has a significant place in this novel. The development of the main theme, namely the awareness of one’s real and inner identity is narrated through the symbol of journey. In Indira Ganesan’s *The Journey* it is Manx, as Alphonsa and Marya have done earlier, who seems to be on her journey to awareness. The novel begins with the return journey of the Krishnan family, from Long Island to their native place, Pi Island. They are returning to Pi because Renu’s cousin Rajesh is met with an accident and is dead by drowning. Conceived on the same day as and born on the same day, Renu and Rajesh are considered to as twins According to village lore, if one of the twins dies, the other will follow soon. So Renu believes that since her twin Rajesh is dead by water, she will die by fire. In Ganesan’s scheme, Rajesh also seems to be Renu’s doppelganger. He remained at home while she and her family settled in the United States and his death marks the death of her childhood and perhaps even the death of the Hindi in her provokes a crisis in Renu’s
life. Renu slides easily back into the traditional ways of India, but Manx her younger sister, has been thoroughly Americanized, right down to her punk haircut. Once back on Pi, Manx proposes another journey for her sister and other relatives of their generation – a trip of discovery and exploration around the island itself.

Indira Ganesan continues her literary journey in the imaginary Island of Pi, with her new novel *Inheritance*. In this novel, "Ganesan Fashions a witty portrait of a suffocating family set against a lush background that is a veritable naturalistic hymn to India" (Publishers' Weekly 55). The heroine of *Inheritance* is fifteen-year-old Sonil, who has "hardly two days apart when she is not sick". Sonil has come to the Island of Pi on a four-month leave from her pre-university to recover at her grandmother's house on the island away from the infected cities. Since the island air is so good, she'll recover well, assures her grandmother to her aunts who have carefully watched over her for the last nine years.

Sonil's mother, Lakshmi, appears to be mysterious, beautiful, fashionable, strange, and out of reach for Sonil. Lakshmi, who avoids Sonil, has had several affairs and has been widowed once. Two of her three children were illegitimate: one born of a liaison with a filmmaker's son, and Sonil born out of a relationship with an American photographer. Lakshmi is presented paradoxically throughout the book, almost as a voyeur. Sonil herself is a voyeur. She secretly invades the privacy of her mother’s room so as to find out something about my mother by reading her friend's verse. Sonil too soon becomes engulfed in sexual escapades with Richard, an American. Very early in the novel, the author sets up a revealing moral dilemma between the mother and daughter that speaks of conflict. When Richard inevitably leaves Sonil because he is too old, Sonil, like her cousin Jani thinks of religion. The novel concludes with promises of happiness after Sonil meets with her father and has somewhat reconciled with her mother. The novel deals with the nuances and
conflicting struggles that are prevalent in the relationship between a modern daughter and tradition-bound mother in a patriarchal society.

Anita Nair, born in Shoranur, Kerala, was brought up in Madras; and after her graduation went to the U.S. to study Journalism at the age of 27. She is the author of Satyr of the Subway and Other Stories (1997) and three other novels, The Better Man, (1998), Ladies Coupe – A novel in Parts, (2002), and Mistress (2006). Malabar Mind, her first book of poems appeared in July, 2002. She has also edited an anthology of writings about Kerala entitled Where the Rain is Born (2003). She has written books for children too, which includes Puffin Book on World Myths and Legends (2004). Anna Sujatha Mathai remarks, “Anita Nair is a fine writer, with a great sense of character, a vivid knowledge of South Indian culture, and has an eye for telling detail. She can move from tender compassion to sensuality, to raging hatred and is a complete teller of stories” (The Hindu, 17 June, 2006: L.S.I). Comparing the Ladies Coupe with Susan Viswanathan’s Something Barely Remembered Geetha Ganapathy-Dore states that Anita Nair uses a more strident and celebrity form of feminism. She states that Nair deals “with the liberties that women have learnt to take with the institution of marriage.” She highlights the point that her “narratives end with a return-home, that demonstrates women’s ability to negotiate a still centre, despite their fragmentation of their subjectivity, under the pressure of conflicting social and symbolic forces” (141).

Anita Nair understands the tradition and culture and attempts to find the answer to the challenges of human life as the woman takes to mobility and acquires knowledge. Her novel Ladies Coupe is a fine narrative that solves the riddles of human life as the protagonist travels in a train compartment. While the traditional novels dwell upon the quest, the interior journey that cultivates illuminations, Anita Nair attempts to find new experiences as one traverses into the exterior. Her second novel, Ladies Coupe, upholds the
promise of her first. Being the story of a woman's search for strength and independence, Ladies Coupe focuses on the inner strength every human being possesses. Ladies coupe is a compartment in a train that is reserved exclusively for women. This compartment is safe, quiet and preferred by women who are either traveling alone (or traveling without a man). However, Akhila, the protagonist chooses to travel in a ladies’ coupe to discover her real identity.

Akhila is a forty-five-year-old single woman who belongs to a conservative Brahmin family. She enjoys eating eggs, doesn’t perform her prayer rituals, makes love to a man who is much younger than her and gets upset when she sees the signboard at the ticket counter which is meant for ‘Ladies, handicapped and senior citizens’. The title in itself is very interesting to begin with. It is in this compartment that six women of different ages and family background come together and weave their own world. As the story develops, the coupe turns into a place where six women share some of their life’s most private moments—about their childhood, their husbands, their sons and their lovers. In each of the stories, it is clearly seen that all the six women have been victimized by the male-dominated society and each of these women have struggled, at some point, in their life to establish their own identity. Some fail, some succeed and some manage to stay ‘afloat’. The narrator, the sixth woman challenges herself to break the monotony of her life and asserts her identity again. She succeeds and stays afloat.

Akhila is her family’s sole breadwinner, whom everyone takes for granted but without whom they would all be lost. Akhila is seized suddenly by a nameless desire - to get on to a train and travel to the farthest point on the map of India, Kanyakumari. That is why she lands herself in the midst of women in the coupe. She gets a peep into the lives of other women who also become companions in her journey. It's the journey and not the
destination that matters. For, by making an effort to find her answers, she finds a lot more than what she intends to know.

They are, Janaki, Margaret Shanti, Prabha Devi and Marikolanthu. As it often happens on long train journeys, fellow-travellers are both curious and giving, and shares not only their food articles but also their lives with others. After her initial resistance, Akhila begins to listen, and to tell, and in the process starts to learn about life within and without. At first, she asks for and expects to get help in making her decisions, and is told that she must decide for herself. Initially she is somewhat upset but later she recognises the wisdom of this advice and her respect for her fellow travellers soars high.

Each of the women is finely drawn, as are their men. Each one is caught in a net of relationships, partly of her own making and partly one that is ‘made’ for her. Once Akhila assumes the role of family head, her own wishes and desires are forgotten by everyone and she too puts a firm lid - not always successfully - on them. Margaret boils with rage against her ‘drawer-of-genitalia-in-library-books husband’, Ebenezer, for his many conceits but remains silent, until such time as she decides to resist and finds her own unique weapon, like her companions. The young Sheela, who dresses up her dead grandmother’s dead body because she cannot bear to have her face look so ugly even after her death, could be a young Akhila or a young Prabha Devi in-the-making. The oldest woman Janaki develops a ‘friendly love’ for her husband in the autumn of their lives, where as Prabha Devi finds a solution to stay ‘afloat’ in the art of swimming for mid-life crisis. Marikolunthu whose rape is literally and metaphorically coupled with extreme poverty and class exploitation is the culmination of all other stories.

In the end Akhila, having made it to Kanyakumari, finds herself in a hotel called Sea Breeze. She is acutely aware of everyone’s surprise looks at a woman-on-a-beach-alone,
and decides to make her own private rebellion. Much like Margaret who decides to rebel by feeding her husband into a state of benign fatness, Akhila takes desire by the horns. She releases herself from the hold of convention and family expectations, at least mentally. Now she can go back to her life, but with the knowledge that she is free of some of the shackles at least.

The five novels chosen for study, namely, The Thousand Faces of Night, When Dreams Travel, The Journey, Inheritance and Ladies Coupe by the three writers deal with issues central for women in particular and humanity in general. The protagonists articulate against the center of male authority, takes freedom in their hands, shaking the shackles of culture and tradition. Some attain and achieve power, while for some new situations about motherhood, marriage, sexuality and individual identity are obtained. The present researcher attempts to read the turn of events and the quest of woman in the light of culture and patriarchy, the two conditioning centres of authority.

(5)

Note on critical terms:

Post-colonialism is not merely a chronological term that refers to the exit of empires from their erstwhile colonies; it is now considered as a concept with a specific discourse on the domains and fields concerning the once colonised lands. Among the definitions of Post-colonialism, are those that refer to “a historical change, a cultural stance, and a condition distinguished by the entry into metropolitan cultures of other voices, histories and experiences, and an achieved transition” (Benita Parry 11). For Stephen Slemon, the term refers to an act of describing a remarkably heterogeneous set of subject positions involved in professional fields and critical enterprises. This has resulted in studying the sites of reactive domains in the context of views expressed by Edward Said, Homi Bhaba and
Gayathri Spivak. The Post-colonial discourse has engaged the politics in the English Studies programs in countries like India. It also studies the issues connected with the subaltern women, the Marxian materiality, and subjectivity of individuals of newly liberated nations. Some scholars have attempted to look at the power of patriarchy that is inscribed in the culture of religious societies and the resultant phenomenon of resistance and identity---issues of topical concern for the feminists. Bill Ashcroft relates the term, post-colonialism, to the study of resistance (The Empire Writes Back 2). Edward Said in his book Orientalism, 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 (95). With the result, the dialectical nature of subjectivity was found to be dominant in postcolonial writings and critics like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak express their disapproval of the west's monolithic construction of a "Third World" that conveniently "wipes out all the differences of culture, history, race and ethnicity". From a Feminist perspective, Spivak strongly asserts, "the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" and "... cannot be heard or read" (2203-06).

It is true that much has happened to change the lives of women of India during the colonial and postcolonial days. While the colonisers highlighted the misery of Indian women handed out by patriarchal ideology that issue from India’s culture the colonisers did benefit from such a condition for it provided them an opportunity to justify their rule over the nation. Post-colonial critics have pointed out the hidden political agenda encased in the sympathetic notes on ‘Sati’-the custom of burning a wife with her dead husband. The relationship between power and control is the significant thing, both in politics and in culture process. Hence, many new women writers attempt to figure out a new Indian woman in their writings as they also attempt to generate a composite Indian woman figure. In both these acts, according to this researcher, there is a culture specification.
The preoccupation of the present scholar is to figure out the culture subject in the selected texts of chosen recent Indian women fiction writers to read in their writings the ambivalent positions of resistance and subjectivity in the light of Indian culture. The demands of the culture are overwhelming and the women subjects attain their experience through a process of imagined reality as well as the historical conditions.

Though the title refers to women’s writings in general, genre fiction has been chosen to be the primary source, for it provides ample scope for a discussion on time and space, history and imagined reality. The question however remains how could women writers who attempt to transcend the barriers of culture accept to anchor their subjectivity defined by culture. This actually presents the thesis in juncture, enabling a discussion on Indian Female Subjectivity.

Women’s poetics of fiction has come up with its own defining term to the gamut of theoretical terminology fastened by feminist politics. They begin with empowerment and end with defining terms of subjectivity, identity and female sexuality. In the world of fiction new women writers have arrived at a new language of body poetics, resulting in an exclusive paradigm of women’s narratives. The challenge however remains with respect to identifying the domains of the family (rejected, negated or modified), man-woman relationship (moral and social codes questioned) and finally the concept of emerging new woman. With the result, the paradigm of empowerment and equality has been substituted with individuality and subjectivity: feminine and feminist discoverer have yielded space to female discourse.

The postcolonial debates on margin and centre, history and culture have provided a platform for women writers to embark on their discourse with regard to identity and subjectivity, read through experience. The relationship between individuals is no more
man/woman centred but has been extended to the relationship between women, sexual and psychological. Some women writers have attempted to speak about motherhood and daughterhood experience; jealousy, hatred and violence are also brought into the matrix of woman-woman relationship. Considering these new areas of poetics, the writer has given her emphasis on individuality, subjectivity and female experience. Indian women writers have to take up the entire issue in the context of India’s culture. The space given to women in Indian narratives, have problematised culture. For many centuries, India’s culture is favourable to men. The question that remains to be answered however is this; is there a space for woman in India’s culture, which has not been revealed or denied to women in India? The three authors chosen for study by this investigator provide enough space for discussion on the new woman. This investigator used two terms, the ‘liquid woman’ and ‘solid woman’ and the term, composite womanhood. A brief note on the terms is provided in the following paragraphs.

The key chapters of this dissertation address the triadic web of experience of India’s new women that enables them to identify their subjectivity which is characteristic of a kind of collectivity, tending towards reaching the experience of a composite woman. The tilt towards the personal and private is minimal while the identification with the other is dominant. In this respect the experience moves from psychological to social and from social to cultural. In fact a dominant woman culture subject is identified in the writings of the three women writers chosen for the study.

This idea is applied to mother-daughter relationship in novels, the world-to-home mobility syndrome in the lives of some principal characters of these writers, and also in the attempt to reach the collective experience through an initial process of resistance. It is found that the resistance process involves overcoming of the mythic semes embedded in the minds
of women of various stations as a cultural process across an ocean of time. The three core chapters take up a discussion of these issues dealt with in the novels of Githa Hariharan, Indira Ganesan and Anita Nair.

Also, in the context of modern Indian women who happen to be international subjects, the plurality, the hybridity and the home-coming wishes define their sensibility. Negotiation with the Diaspora experience has also to be read in the context of imagined experience one finds in the myths-- the culture doses received from grandma tales. The experience of the home-world diversity is found to be allegorical of mother-daughter relationships.

The cultural inheritance embedded with messages of mythopoeic subjugation might also be studied in the attempts of disinheritance that one finds in the experience of international woman subjects exposed to non-Indian humanity and its culture. In this case, the domesticity and the mobility have to be read as decolonization attempts on the one hand and as a culture-immersion exercise on the other. When one reads the myths of India and the body resistance of modern Indian women, one finds the encounter between the imagined real and the historical real.

Patriarchal tradition and its bonds of wifehood, bride price, polygamy and 'sati' have tested Indian womanhood. The false notions of heroism and ideal versions of womanhood could also be studied figuring out the 'Solid Women' of the past and 'Liquid Women' of the present. The famous Jungian psychoanalyst Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estes in her classic work on the inner lives of woman, "Women Who Run With The Wolves" states thus:

Within every woman lurks the Wild Woman, the powerful force, the hot, at the centre of the psyche, filled with good instinct, passionate creativity and ageless knowing. When women remember through these words (Wild, and
Woman) an old, old memory is stirred and brought back to life. The memory of absolute undeniable and irrevocable kinship with the wild feminine, a relationship which may have become ghostly from neglect, buried by over-domestication, outlawed by the surrounding culture, or no longer understood adequately .... (5)

With this liberal perspective of post-colonial reading as the focus, the present investigator has attempted to figure out the new Indian women found in the recent women writers of our days. In fact, the very stuff of their fiction has much in common with folk tales and lived stories of many Indian women. This is ascertained in the poetics of the fiction particularly when they border on tale and gossip stuff.

Githa Hariharan probes deep into the issue of mother-daughter grandmother-granddaughter relationships and its influences on their views of women and society. The mother-daughter relationship between Devi and Sita is a Love – Hate relationship. It is a result of the clash between Tradition and Modernity. The character portrayal of Devi provides some interesting and paradoxical points. She had a deep and secret longing for the emotional, expressive and purely maternal love from her mother Sita, who appears to be ‘Solid Woman’- humble, conventional, mild, obedient, sacrificial, submissive, docile, and rigid. Slowly and gradually, Sita emerges as the multi-faceted, dynamic, assertive, pragmatic and independent figure- a ‘Liquid Woman’. This transformation can be compared to the changing process of Sita of ‘The Ramayana becoming a ‘Draupadi’ of Mahabharatha. Not succumbing to sorrow or despair, the three protagonists of these three authors prove the strength of their womanhood in their struggle for survival, with a renewed awareness of their identity.
The central concern of the present scholar is to identify the select writings of chosen women writers in the context of the postcolonial scene. The essential parameter for this study is the quotient of culture. India is emerging strong and it is true it had been wading in slavery for centuries. The colonizers had given the nation a name and a territorial identity heavily depending on the culture that runs through the various divisions of this nation. The millions in India do not speak the same language, they do not share the same food habits or life rituals, and yet there is a kind of unity that runs through the life of the people which could be termed as culture. The dominant faith of the nation has provided a thread of unity and it has also put them in slots known as castes and social positions. The universal problem of women’s subjugation by patriarchy has been consolidated by this dominant culture. Women’s narratives focus on the problem and provide a stage for discussion on the imagined and lived realities of Indian women’s lives.

The chapter two of this dissertation discusses on the theme of silence and passivity of Indian women, and the postcolonial era has provided them with enough verbal strength to resist and talk. The author highlights this with her study of Githa Hariharan’s narratives that reveal women as forces endowed with energies for transcension. The novelist finds her protagonists and chief women characters as women of wit and courage who could surmount the problems. A conscious promotion of identity could pave way for liberation. The chapter provides the readers with a detailed study of the two texts, When Dreams Travel.

The third chapter reads the relationships between two generations of women- mothers and daughters. Mothers, in spite of being women are found to serve the tradition, while the daughters are shown as forces of resistance. The two forces are representatives of the past and the present. This chapter reads the narratives of Indira Ganesan and Githa
Hariharan, and attempts to explain the web of relationships in the context of cultural immersion and emotional liberation.

The fourth chapter discusses the element of positive gift of India’s tradition—the benefits of collective and shared experience leading to wisdom. Indian women have been treated to the rare experience of listening to the stories of others’ pains and subjugation, leading to a therapeutic session of relief. This composite experience means a lot to the possibilities of liberation. Life as community experience is something unique to India, and the notion of composite womanhood as a liberating experience is discussed by writers like Anita Nair. The chapter is a study of shared subjectivity.

The last chapter is a synoptic summation of the chosen women’s narratives that are studied with Postcoloniality as a temporal factor. This dissertation facilitates from the textual analysis, an understanding of Indian women caught in the matrix of conscious efforts to freedom and the conditioning factors that slap subjugation. The author of this dissertation highlights this aspect with her classification of women as ‘solid women’ and ‘liquid women’.

To state one of the limitations of the thesis, this researcher has dealt with three authors from a postcolonial perspective, not highlighting the politics of colonialism and the aftermath, but providing weightage to the feminist politics as could be read from the titles of the chapters. Even while asserting the feminist positions, the slant is more towards Indian context and Indian culture. With the result, the interpretations attempt to read the poetics of the texts grounded in India’s culture matrix. Also, though the five novels of the three authors have been discussed in the three key chapters, considering the quantum and significance of the texts, chapter II makes a detailed study of When Dreams Travel and chapter IV makes a detailed analysis of Anita Nair’s Ladies’ Coupe. However, wherever
necessary, Githa Hariharan’s *The Thousand Faces of Night* has been analyzed and used to supplement the arguments. In the case of Indira Ganesan’s fiction, the two novels, *The Journey* and *Inheritance* have been given equal importance. With the result, this research focuses on the themes and strategies of the three authors under consideration.

Thus, the five texts chosen for study reveal a new experience. The protagonists articulate against the centre of male authority and take freedom in their hands, shaking the shackles of culture and tradition. Some attain and achieve power, while for some new revelations about motherhood, marriage, sexuality and individual identity are obtained. The present researcher attempts to read the turn of events and the quest of women in the light of culture and patriarchy, the two conditioning centres of authority.
Chapter I

Notes and References

Books and Nonperiodical Publications


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