Introduction

Tradition is an extremely comprehensive term, it indicates a specific mode of behavioural pattern even a particular trend of approaching a topic, and its broad and flexible matter could be related to both life and literature. The quality of permanence referring to certain rituals, habits and customs contributing to a certain philosophy of life forms the essence of tradition. In life today, people have to live with rival pulls of tradition and modernity in search of their identity or independence. However tradition and modernity are not dichotomous. Tradition as has increasingly been discovered has the greatest capacity for initiating change and accommodation to the modern.

In a tradition bound society like India, change and tradition are not antithetical. Tradition does not decay or disappear, it only carries within it a capacity for growth and adjustment concerning itself with a new set of ideas, rites, habits appropriate for the new times. This is evident from the multifarious growth of Indian tradition. A study of society in India reveals that certain cherished Indian values sanctioned by tradition are seen to be changing in the modern times, leading to a total transformation in attitudes, perceptives, values and ultimately lives. The complex question of tradition – modernity – change in context of the heterogeneous Indian society can be studied on the basis of an interpretation in terms of the contemporary social, cultural and historical processes. In modern India the conflict between Dharma – duty, responsibility, religion and personal goals has become very intense. Dharma is living and acting the role determined for one by tradition versus the quest for ones aims and desires which is determined by individual needs. Again, the idea of sexual purity largely associated in India with woman was a means of control and gender bias in a patriarchal society. Mythical prototypes were created based on the concepts of chastity and purity to be eulogized and emulated by generations of women. In contrast sexual
emancipation as integral to the freedom has become the beacon light for the individual as well as communities of women in both life and literature. In this case, we can say that tradition carries within it a capacity for growth and adjustment. Change has continued to occur in the midst of tradition and is a continuous process. In the process of change, we note aspects like actual continuity and desired continuity as for example widow immolation of the past is repeated in the present day dowry deaths, as an instance of actual continuity in bestial form. The use of T.V for life like representations of ancient tradition like the serialization of the epics-Mahabharata and Ramayana is a renewal of the traditional roots. So confronted with challenges of new situations both individuals and communities go back to the past to sift through the maze of early traditions, select and renew if necessary.

T.S.Eliot's observation on the continuity of the past into the present and the future becomes relevant for life as well as for literature and the arts. The creation of something new has to be based on certain aspects of the old. The preservation of tradition then becomes very crucial in the creative process in contributing to changes. As he says in his famous essay Tradition and the Individual Talent:

No poet, no artist of any art has his complete meaning alone
his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists.... The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves which is modified by the introduction of the new. (Tradition, 294.)

Thus, the existing order "monuments" form a strong base on which to build the new. The "modification" and creation of the new order then depends on selection (the human factor) and also the natural process. To observe life and society in the context of tradition and change, it is inevitable that we closely scrutinize the effect of tradition on changing trends in literature. Tradition is both a bulwark and an anchor
to the creation as well as well as the preservation of literature and life. Tradition is therefore dependent on “the historical sense” (Tradition 294) which is a perception “not only of the pastness of the past but of its presence.” (Tradition 294). The essence is that the past and the present are not two disparate aspects of time but analogous “ceaselessly conditioning and reshaping each other.” (Kumar-4).

So most great names from the world of letters have talked of tradition as the backdrop, the foundation and the cornerstone of literature .F.R Leavis has based one of his most important pieces of fiction criticism on the creation of a strong base (tradition) which would be a beacon light to the future. Indian English literature interwoven with a mixture of the old and the new- the ancient and modern, can surely be approached from this viewpoint. It would be interesting to see how Leavis’ approach can be related to the study of literature and tradition in Indian English Fiction. In his famous book The Great Tradition, Leavis talks about a centrality of tradition of nineteenth century English fiction, laying emphasis on a group of selected writers who he says are the greats of English fiction. Leavis believed that human sensibility nourished by a literary culture like the one he was talking about, has a relationship with society as a whole. In the early stages of Indian English literature there was a central tradition round which most works revolved, but of late, Indian English fiction writers have started looking at a “plurality of tradition” by “dissolving the great tradition of F.R Leavis.”(Mukherjee 176). It encouraged readers to look at recent history, society and events that could open to a variety of meanings to unearth the real truth of Indian literary and cultural tradition, reveal the truth of the multiplicity of India with its multi- ethnic, multi- religious and multifarious histories- a kind of layered plurality.
Leavis' observation about Jane Austen holds good for fiction in general and Indian English fiction in particular. Austen he says "exemplifies beautifully the relations of 'the individual talent' to tradition" (Leavis 13). Here he talks about the marriage of the best of tradition and creative talent to produce a fresh and enlivening tradition. Jane Austen's relation to tradition is a "creative one". (Leavis 13). She is both created by the Great Tradition of English literature and she herself creates a tradition to be emulated. So in the context of Indian English fiction, though we may disagree with Leavis regarding a centrality of tradition and insist instead in a "plurality of tradition" (Mukherjee 176) to cover the multiplicity of the Indian reality, we do agree with his views on Jane Austen as extremely relevant to the Indian English fiction. Many writers of the past from Mulk Raj Anand to R.K. Narayan have created a tradition of sorts. Emulating these pioneers Nayantara Sahgal has created the tradition of the political novel in Indian English fiction. Anita Desai in her preoccupation with the inner mind and the study of the individual psyche has created novel trends in Indian English fiction for later writers to emulate.

Edward Said's ideas on the issue of tradition, in literature are both illuminating and path breaking. According to Said, writers, thinkers and texts are very important as creators of a tradition. The idea in either case is that a book can always describe people, places and experiences, so much so that the book or text acquires a greater authority than the "actuality it describes". (Said 273). In time such knowledge and reality produces a tradition which Michel Foucault calls "discourse". (What is an author? 185). The great responsibility of the writer in the creation of a tradition of Indian English writing is that of a thought process, which they hand over to the new generation of writers and readers. During the first decade of the emergence of the Indian English novel, Anand, Raja Rao and R.K.
Narayan and others had felt an urgency to foreground the idea of a composite nation and a certain tradition had to be created. The themes these writers handled were pan-Indian, for example: the freedom, movement, the partition, the clash between tradition and modernity, faith and rationality, the east-west confrontation, exploitation, the disintegration of the traditional institutions. They were on their way to creating the discourse of the nation. These writers varied in their ideology and narrative mode but they shared a faith in the Indian reality rendered through particularized situations. Raja Rao constructed an idealized Indian based on the Gandhian philosophy. Anand criticised the claims of Indian high culture by exposing its inherent faults Narayan created a miniature India in his Malgudi world. Earlier in the writings of these writers were seen pitting of the Indian tradition against a unified imaginary west. In the seventies, eighties and nineties of this century, things changed and Indian English writers wrote, drawing inspiration both from the west and their native cultural roots. Though 'India' still loomed large in their work it is difficult to establish an exclusively Indian identity because of their mixed heritage and their becoming a part of the "Global league". (Mukherjee 175).

Since its inception Indian English writing mainly fiction has shown interest in gender realities as part of its sociological concerns. The location of women in the cultural, historical and literary tradition is significant for women became the site on which tradition was debated in India. With this the image of woman, as the harbinger of both tradition and change in society became a palpable truth.

The significant male writers like Bankim Chandra, Tagore, Ram Mohan Roy etc during the colonial rule have represented and shown deep concern
for these social realities. Writers like Nayantara Sahgal and other female authors of her generation have continued this tradition of gender and social reality. As Jasbir Jain says in this regard, “She (Sahgal) provides a continued tradition of gender and social reality and foregrounds the work of male writers who have upheld feminist causes”. (Jain xx)

The social content of the Indian English novel thus marks it out as a distinct genre particularly in its concern with issues of women, the conflict between individual and the family/community and so on.

The tradition of representing the exploitation of Indian women and trying to reconstruct her life in an effort to end subjectivity and oppression can be related to the surge of protest and reformation associated with the freedom movement. This was when women for the first time took tentative but definite steps towards protest, emancipation and reformation.

Susie Tharu and K.Lalitha in Women writing In India 600 B.C. to the present Vol I and II have sought to create “a separate tradition of Indian women’s writing and to rewrite literary history from their position of post colonial feminists.” (Palkar, 23)

A distinct identity is sought to be carved by Tharu and Lalitha through representation of Indian women’s writing from the earliest times in an effort to isolate their problems, frustrations and desires as distinct from their white sisters. The experience of colonialism further sets them apart from western feminism. In selecting women’s writing from different Indian languages might from the 6th century B.C. to the present they have tried to place Indian women’s writing in the proper historical perspective. They have thus pointed to a distinct tradition of women’s writing in India. A tradition, which probe issues of class,
caste, gender, nation, empire apart from feminism. Other Post-colonial feminist critics in India and elsewhere have tried to demythicize the entrenched idea of stereotyped womanhood in literary and cultural representatives e.g. in popular media (mainstream cinema, T.V. Serials) as well as in serious literature. Critics like Leela Gandhi in her book *Post Colonial Theory*, Meenakshi Mukherjee in *The Perishable Empire* and Kumkum Sangari and Suresh Vaid with their *Recasting Women* have all raised and tried to answer questions concerning the nature of the patriarchal system, women and their concerns against the backdrop of a transitional and post-colonial society. These insightful writings offer fresh perspectives in Indian English writing relating them to broader issues of life against the backdrop of tradition and change.

In the discussion of the pertinent point of the location of women in the historical, social and literary tradition of India one has to go back to its early and recent history. The strength and permanence of the Indian tradition harks back to its long and ancient history. Indian civilization, which goes several hundred centuries, provided India with a strong tradition. Rooted in socio-cultural ethos it sanctified/codified a body of thought, attitude and social practices which grew and developed age after age and more or less became fixed. The great change in Indian tradition came about with the advent of the British. The impact of western ideas and modern thought process was so great that it created a kind of cultural upheaval and forced the Indians to critically examine their tradition. While small groups upheld the strength of tradition, the progressive radical groups advocated wholesale rejection of a tradition, and the pragmatic ones chose to retrieve whatever of value they could from tradition, so that the transition to modernity could be less traumatic. The British connection created a fascinated attraction for
all that was new and associated with the wide world outside, which beckoned irresistibly. As it was the men who were in contact with the outside world and women who were restricted to the inner space in a traditional, patriarchal Indian society, they (women) came to be associated with tradition and the inner world. Thus removed as they were from the influences of modernity and the outside world women came to be regarded as the chief representation and preservers of tradition.

A change came about during the long years of the struggle for Indian independence, when Indian women were encouraged to join the freedom movement. For the first time they broke the shackles of society and came out in numbers to voice the cry for freedom. A kind of myth was built round the women and they became the symbols of power, sacrifice and endurance synonymous with the mother Goddess-Shakti (Durga). This association with the divine helped combat the feeling of helplessness and degradation brought about by colonial domination. The position of an enslaved, powerless nation was sought to be upgraded by building round it the image of Mother India- the Goddess-like ‘avatar’ symbol of power, which destroyed evil. This image creation of women in the colonial times was a harking back to the, glory of the Vedic times. Raja Ram Mohan Roy and reformers termed it the golden Age of Indian Womanhood by focusing on the stories of early learned heroic women like ‘Maitreyee’ and Gargi to emancipate women bring about social reform. In this context, the traditions of the past were used to substantiate the desired conditions of the present.

This relocating of the position of women that went into the construction of a new feminine identity, as for example the creation of a prototype was required by the nation in crisis. For example Shanti in Bankim Chandra’s
Anandamath had transcended both her sexuality and domesticity and became an inspiration to her husband working towards liberating the nation from shackles of slavery. Women were designed into symbols of national awakening by the nationalists as also many women themselves assumed a heroic role and thus created a political space for themselves. The great philosopher Vivekananda held the opinion that: "A race that produced Sita even if it only dreamt of her, has a reverence for women that is unmatched on earth." (Vivekananda V, 231) He thus reverses the generally held opinion of the western colonists that women were degraded by Hinduism and in India. Bankim Chandra in Bande Mataram had invoked the mother (the epitome of courage, strength and sacrifice) to save the Motherland by bowing to her in all humility.

The image that prevailed thereafter was of the archetypal heroines of yore the spiritual Maitreyee and the learned Gargi, the suffering Sita, the faithful Savitri and the heroic Laxmibai. During the freedom movement women for the first time broke the shackles of society and came out to voice the cry of freedom on Gandhi’s pronouncement that: “I shall work for an India where women will enjoy the same rights as men… This is the India of my dreams”. (Gandhi 474)

Especially during the Civil Disobedience Movement Women’s participation led to the immense success of the movement. As Bipin Chandra and other historians claimed that

...the civil disobedience movement had contributed greatly to the mass social emancipation of Indian women. It accomplished in weeks what three quarters of a century of a social reform movements had failed to do for the emancipation of Indian women. (Chandra, Tripathi, De 161)
In this context one can say that in talking about a tradition regarding women, the point of analysis is not the position or status of a women as ‘existing’ or ‘developing’ but as ‘created’. Women then became the site on which tradition was debated and viewed, to some extent the view is relevant even today. Nationalism during the nineteenth century came to occupy the pre-eminent position the religion had held in the lives of the people in the preceding ages. When this became a permitted site for women, one can say a small but significant step occurred in the expression of their rights. However, whether the concept of power delegated on women was real or a myth is a debatable point. Women burdened with the heavy responsibility of a heroic, virtuous image to which she became perpetually chained. A burden she is still carrying.

The difference today is of changed perceptions. Women of those times were elated with their images of the archetypal femininity but today they have become burdened with the weight and responsibility of this image, which they have to sustain hiding their real selves, suppressing their dreams, desires and individuality. However to all intents and purposes, the twentieth and the twenty-first century “has continued to reproduce in all essentials, the same kind of womanhood that the nineteenth century has so carefully and so successfully constructed as an enduring legacy for us.” (Sangari & Vaid 79). The legacy continues, the image of high spirituality, domestic and moral virtue-societal responsibility—a burden which is still the lot of Indian women.

In order to examine the repercussions of this burden during this particular juncture in the lives of women who had inherited this legacy of history, it was necessary to study Indian English fiction to understand how the writers of this genre treated women and tradition. I have therefore devoted the first chapter
of my thesis to a general survey of the social and historical background of Indian English fiction, naming it—“A Historical Perspective: the Social and Political Contexts of Indian English Fiction”. This survey makes specific reference to the woman question as treated by a wide selection of writers focusing on the specific themes they have treated, their topical, contemporaneous and universal relevance. Most Indian English writers like the regional language counterparts are preoccupied by the tradition/modernity paradigm. As Makarand Paranjpe says, “The tradition-modernity paradigm therefore defines our culture.” (Paranjpe 160) The conflict between what we have inherited and what we wish to become recurs in our own lives from generation to generation. However, it is important to see whether these writings and the writers have been able to bridge the chasm between the intellectually motivated women (writers, artists and poets) and the masses. As Viswapriya Iyengar notes: “It requires infinite reservoirs of humanity not to be divided on the battlefront from those who suffer, not to let the poignant and violent moments of history be immobilized through the distinction of a the chronicler from the victim.” (Iyengar XI). A very significant observation, which is discerned by many noted writers, for then only will literature be a part of life with truth and honesty. The interaction of tradition and modernity and the resultant changes is an interesting field of study particularly in the context of the diversity of Indian culture and society. As the critic, Naresh Jain puts it: “what may be modern in a rural setting may be traditional in a city.” (Jain 11). The strong defining marks between a city and a village and distinctions both in the rural and urban set ups makes the issue of tradition, change, modernity very complicated. This and the entrenched idea of Indian womanhood in the archetypal images throw up challenges in the path of defining the Indian woman. In a traditional society like
India, the relevance of early ideas, beliefs and customs led to the issue of continuity of tradition. To understand such issues related to the legacy of an ancient civilization that is still alive one has to enter the world of myth and folklore.

Myth and folklore, which as is well-known plays a strong part in the shaping of tradition related to the concept of cultural and social change. I have therefore included a chapter called ‘Myth and Folklore’ as my second chapter. The influence of folklore and myth, particularly folk tradition in day-to-day life in relation to modern urban life, their influence on customs, beliefs and rituals is relevant to my scope of study. In this chapter I will try to explore how myth has undergone transition and change and how it has come to be applied in a reincarnated form in modern life. Similarly folk beliefs which pertain to our roots in the hoary past, have undergone vast transformation and have appeared in novel forms in modern set ups.

To understand the position of women with reference to tradition and change both in the individual and social context one has to go in quest of certain major literary texts written during the post-independence era. I chose for my study a trio of major Indian women novelists generally regarded as the big three. The regional language novelists are outside the range of my study. The three: Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal and Anita Desai are contemporary writers and have been working for a great length of time, covering almost the entire five decades after independence. The considerable number of novels each wrote, which in their variety, and contemporarity have become a reflection of the upheavals, transition, tragedies and triumphs of the age we are passing through. These three writers have ably monitored the desired and undesired, the subtle and
slow changes that have come over our lifestyles, attitudes and outlook over the
decades. The variety in the writings of the three becomes even more significant
because of their efforts at the delineation of the multifarious roles a woman plays
in society the given and the expected. The object of selecting three different
writers is to have a varied perspective and to make a comparative analysis between
the three with their differences in outlook and temperament.

Nayantara Sahgal to whom Chapter- 3 of the thesis is devoted
occupies a unique position in Indian English fiction, with her special brand of
socio-political novels. Her family background as a scion of India’s foremost
political family—the Nehru’s, bestows a special perspective upon her with which
to view the world from the point of the politician or bureaucrat. Nayantara Sahgal
through the use of the political genre, and the vivid narration of important political
and historical events brings in to focus, the lives of both ordinary and important
people coming within its range. The tragedies and triumphs of private lives
become an allegory of the political ills and events of the age. A writer so
intimately involved with a great age of India’s history, incisively records the
phases of change and transition of a largely traditional society. This fact was
substantiated on reading her Sahitya Academy winning novel Rich Like Us which
indicate her special talent of juxtaposing the two worlds—the personal world of
human emotion and relationships and the impersonal world of politics. Politics
and power play of the administrative set up, which plays a strong part in the Indian
milieu and affects common life, would become one of the angles on my study of
women and society and Sahgal is most suited to show the way.

The primary source materials on Nayantara Sahgal including her
autobiographies and her account of her response to life, literature and politics
gives us simple evidence of Sahgal's personal, literary political, social views and
attitudes. *Prison and Chocolate Cake*, the author's first book is the story of her
childhood and growing up years at Anand Bhawan—the ancestral home of the
Nehrus at Allahabad. In this work the stalwarts of the freedom movement like:
Nehru, Gandhi, Patel, Ranjit Pandit, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit etc, the various stages
of the greatest freedom movement and the epoch making events in the history of
India at that time are brought to vivid life by the young Sahgal. *Point of View-A
personal Response to Life, Literature and Politics:* is a collection of her public
addresses at literary conferences and a varied selection of her comments on the
contemporary Indian scene. We get an insight into her response to life, literature
and politics from this book'. This is one of the best books to understand about
Sahgal, the writer and the person. She talks on her uniting which helped her find
herself and discover her true identity. *Point of View* also records her vivid
responses to her personal life and the world around her in essays like 'of Myself'
and 'Family' where she talks on her writing, her recent creations, her experiences
in the genre of Indian English besides her views.

Literary historians like K.R. Srinivas Iyengar, M.K. Naik and
William Walsh have provided some early views on Nayantara Sahgal. K.R.
Srinivas Iyengar, the Grand Old Man of Indian English literature, talking generally
about the Indian English women novelists declared way back in 1962 that as
women were national story tellers they can hold their own with the male writers.
Though he praises Sahgal's writing skill and her command over the English
language and her use of satire to air her views, he finds her art of fiction rather
contrived.
M.K. Naik in his book *A History of Indian English Literature* published 1982 declares that Nayantara Sahgal’s fiction the political ambience is very strong but at the same time her preoccupation with the modern Indian woman’s search for sexual freedom and self realization is evident. However, he finds certain limitations in her failure to bring out the unity between the political turmoil outside and the trauma of private conflicts like broken relationships.

William Walsh in the book *Indian Literature in English* 1990 makes some valuable comments on the essence and objective of Sahgal’s writing “...the sliding and side stepping of politicians and the effect of their arrogance and remoteness on ordinary lives that engages her attention.” (Walsh 104). He also states that the “shape and spirit” of her novels are given “by her conviction that politics should be a form of moral activity”. (Walsh 104)

Among the critical works devoted entirely to Nayantara Sahgal’s works we can list the books authored by the noted critics: Jasbir Jain, Dr. M. Narendra and Manmohan Bhatnagar all written around the same time in the nineties by which time Sahgal had written most of her fiction and reached the pinnacle of her writing career. Jasbir Jain’s book titled *Nayantara Sahgal* (1994) is an invaluable book, which minutely analyses most of the novels of Sahgal. Her dominant concerns like the emergence of the new woman, the east west conflict in attitude and philosophy and the tradition modernity/change question are treated extensively by Jain. Jain says that Sahgal rather concerns herself with the reality of the contemporary situation and through the political aura; she projects a vision of the values and quality of life she upholds. Her political novels concern themselves with humanistic issues for in her work both are interrelated.
Dr. M. Narendra in his book *Microcosms of Modern India* (1998) declares her “the boldest’ among the new generation of Indo Anglian writers as she has been uniting a new type of political novel where she analyses the set up and changes that took place in post independent India.

This study is important because every novel is studied in detail situating them in the tradition they have been produced. Each of Sahgal’s novels uses the political background to tell a human story. Narendra also makes an in depth study of all important women characters of Sahgal subverting the concept of traditional virtue and talking about real virtue in the context of the modern age.

*The Fiction of Nayantara Sahgal* (1996) by Manmohan Bhatnagar is a work, which focuses on the thematic patterns in Nayantara Sahgal with emphases on the political motif within. The critic pinpoints the human factor in the political and social sphere where the individual is exploited and entangled in a series of conflicts which Sahgal outlines carefully in her novels. Nayantara’s deep concern for the rot that has crept into the political and social sphere is analysed in the book.

Two valuable essays on Sahgal’s writing against the backdrop of a tradition and change, are — ‘The Crisis of Contemporary India’ and ‘Cultural and Political Allegory in Rich Like Us’ by Makarand Paranjpe in the book *Women In Indo-Anglian Fiction-Tradition and Modernity* Ed. By Naresh K. Jain (1998). In the first essay Paranjpe places Sahgal’s characters in the transitional social set up of modern India and tries to see how her women characters respond to the opposing pulls of tradition and modernity. Paranjpe’s essay treats the public and personal implications of Sahgal’s work against the backdrop of a changing nation. As he says, “We are all simply a part of one big story or proto-narrative our own
'little' stories adding to its totality'. (Paranjpe 159) Paranjpe concludes that Sahgal works out a synthesis between tradition and modernity accepting some aspects rejecting others of each. Ultimately it is a judicious mixture of tradition and modernity, which constitutes the value system of Sahgal’s novels. Makarand Paranjpe’s other essay in the same book is an incisive criticism of Sahgal’s novel *Rich Like Us*—the essay is ‘Cultural and Political Allegory in *Rich Like Us*’. Sahgal, according to Paranjpe explores the whole range of women’s perceptions in a changing India from past to the present.

Two essays in the book *Modern Indian English Fiction* by O.P Mathur on Nayantara Sahgal’s novel are namely—“A Perspective on Nayantara’s *A Situation in New Delhi*’ and ‘The Nausea of Totalitarianism’: A Note on Nayantara Sahgal’s *Rich Like Us*”. In the first article, the writer opines that Sahgal through the novel (*Situation in New Delhi*) demonstrates the contrast between the lingering idealism of Nehruvian era and the degenerative political trends of era following a threatening the core of Indian socio-political life.

In the second essay —“The Nausea of Totalitarianism” Mathur considers the novel *Rich Like Us* an extremely effective study on the Emergency as it exposes the dangerous nexus between politics, business and crime. Mathur also stresses on Sahgal’s emphasis on her strong women characters like Sonali who represent the spirit of India arising “phoenix like to discover the richness and enlarge the domains of free India” (*Mathur*, 183)

The book *Women’s Writing—Text and Context* Ed-by Jasbir Jain is an invaluable addition’s to Women’s studies. The essay on Nayantara Sahgal in the above book—“Mythologising History—The Indo-British Experience” is important because it negotiates the world of history and myth in the form of a
novel. Jain shows how the novel *Rich Like Us* deals with the Indo-British experience/encounter and what each has learnt from the other. Myth is used in the novel to point to the victimization of women, and to depict power play in society. Jain shows us how effectively Sahgal depicts the victims and victimizers in a universal situation through the depiction of an Indian reality.

The later essays on Sahgal starting with Jasbir Jain focuses on the treatment of feminist issues and human relationships apart from the much debated political angle.

Viney Kirpal’s essay in the same book titled ‘*Rich Like Us- Text, Context and Subtext*’ has treated the novel from a feminist angle. She points out that Sahgal has contributed to the thorough analysis of feminine emotions by describing the private experiences of women. Kirpal like Jain uses the mythical approach to talk about corrupting power in the novel.

Mini Nanda’s article ‘Power structure in Nayantara Sahgal’s *Rich Like Us*’ is also about the depiction of the lust of power. But she sees the novel also as an affirmation of positive relationships and regeneration of society.

The article ‘Portrayal of Man-Women relationship in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal’ by Shyam M.Asnani from the book *Indian Fiction In English* Ed. P. Mallikarjuna Rao and M. Rajeshwar deals with Sahgal’s treatment of changes in the Indian psyche (outlook, attitudes) in relation to external changes affecting man/woman relations. The critic particularly admires Sahgal’s strong portraiture of her women characters. Asnani also appreciates Sahgal’s clarity of vision, which does not hesitate to castigate even religion and conventionality.

The genuine and continuing interest in the socio-cultural problems besetting Indian society in Sahgal’s writing find expression in her older
contemporary Kamala Markandaya. The fourth chapter of this study is on Markandaya the senior most among the trio. Markandaya's themes are not uncommon in Indian English fiction but what is of special interest is her sensitive depiction of change-fast enveloping Indian society. The modernity, tradition conflict, the tide of materialism power etc threatening to sweep away revered values, form basic issues in her novels. Markandaya was selected from among many writers of her generation because in her concern and treatment of the above topics, she was a pioneer. Her concerns, were taken up as core issues by later writers Markandaya is one of the few Indian English writers to write about different levels of life o a class-ridden society. From Nectar In a Sieve dealing with rural poverty to the depiction of urban unemployment and poverty, in A Handful of Rice, variety in the depiction of women is a speciality of Markandaya. From the whimsicalities of an overpowering, modern woman in Caroline (Possession), the travails of a traditional woman Sarojini in A Silence of Desire to the portrayal of the strong peasant woman Rukmani, adapting to change in Nectar In A Sieve, she has covered a vast range. Like the regional language novelists, she has touched upon different spheres of Indian life painstakingly exposing the different layers of existence.

The critical writings on Kamala Markandaya refer to her as a pioneer in projecting the changing image of the traditional Indian society and her skill in portraying the essence of Indian tradition juxtaposed with the temporal and secular changes in the society. Most of the critics focus on her rural sensibility, her philosophic vision of life, and her portrayal of the social tensions.

A.V. Krishna Rao and Madhabi Menon's book Kamala Markandaya—A Critical Study of her Novels: 1954-1982 is a diligent study by two
serious critics who have done full justice to Kamala Markandaya’s creative art, for it as exhaustive, study of the writers’ novels in an analytical manner. The writers discuss the problem of Markandaya’s cross cultural background vis-à-vis the question of identity. However, they claim that the problem is overcome by the writer’s duality of vision which gives her a wider perspective. An important aspect of Markandaya’s writing (the novels) is fully reflective of the “awakened feminine sensibility in Modern India”. (Rao & Menon 2). Markandaya’s characters grapple between freedom and responsibility as they relate to social changes and pattern of freedom.

*Kamala Markandaya—A Critical Spectrum* Edited by M.K. Bhatnagar carrying a host of essays by eminent critics form an important addition to studies on the writer. Bhatnagar in his critical introduction emphasizes the fact that Markandaya is an “insider-outsider”. This aspect of her life gives a greater range and wide variety to her settings and characters. The essays in this book covers the many dimensional aspects of Markandaya’s writings—i.e. her social chronicling, her gaze into intercultural encounters, her rural sensibility and the east/west conflict of which she is a living example (an Indian married to an Englishman) and the cultural encounters thereafter, finds mention in the essays.

The book *Human Bonds and Bondages—The Fiction of Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya* by Usha Pathania is very interesting and useful as a comparative study of the two writers and their respective attitudes to the questions of human bonds (ties) and their implication for both the individual and social issues. The primary relations projected in the two writers are studied:- how they are formed/sustained or changed and sometimes dissolved. The similarities and differences between the two writers are highlighted. Markandaya’s protagonists
value their bonds above everything. Outside forces sometimes throw a spanner on such relations, but ultimately the ties become stronger and relationships move towards a rhythm and harmony.

Desai on the other hand portrays hypersensitive, neurotic individuals and kin ties between these people leads to a kind of dissonance and despair. Relationships in a Desai novel are usually disturbed. However studied in the greater context of cultural and social significance human bonds are like a protective haven essential for self-realisation and human happiness. This is a very interesting and valuable study because it throws light on aspects of relationships in individuals, which highlights social trends.

This book is especially interesting because it offers a comparative study of Markandaya and Desai which very few critics have done. Usha Pathania says that Anita Desai’s prime concern has always been the exploration of the inner selves of her women and she explores and portrays kin bonds from the psychological viewpoint. Markandaya’s portrayal of her women is sensitive and incisive, but her depiction of male characters is equally sensitive.

*Modern Indian Novel in English* (1999) by R.S. Pathak carries some important essays. In the essay ‘Kamala Markandaya’s sociological Concerns, Pathak points to the sociological aspects in the work of Markandaya as he says—“It may be said that Markandaya fictionalises the sociology of India.” (Pathak 69)

He further states that we find in Markandaya’s novels an authentic portrayal of contemporary India and its challenges. Particularly her classic novel *Nectar In A Sieve* which presents the saga of Indian life at its grassroots—The essay is valuable because it sums up Markandaya’s works in a brief and precise manner with focus on the sociological implications.
The Indo-Anglian Novel and the Changing Tradition (1972) by Angara V. Krishna Rao emphasizes on Markandaya's special place in Indo Anglian fiction because her novels reflects the national consciousness and the awakened feminine sensibility against a backdrop of a changing traditional society. The critic makes an important point, when he says that her first four novels represent contemporary 'Zeitgeist' (55)—the characteristic spirit of a particular period of history. Markandaya's triumph according to the critic lies in her traditionalist stance, all the while transmitting the different phases of national experience into significant forms of art.

Shiv K. Kumar's essay 'Tradition and Change in the novels of Kamala Markandaya' included in the highly rated anthology Indian Fiction in English (1999)-ed. by P. Mallikarjuna Rao and M. Rajeshwar is extremely relevant for this study. Shiv K. Kumar marks the distinguishing features of Markandaya as being her acute awareness of gradual change and shift in values of Indian society. Kumar feels that Markandaya's novels carry a certain contemporary relevance because the world of her novels is peopled with characters caught between certain choices and commitments, change is the focal theme of Markandaya's novels, "the pivot round which her fictional world revolves" (204)

The book Women in Indo-Anglian Fiction—Tradition and Modernity(1998) ed. Naresh K. Jain offers new insights into Indian women seen moving with the times, though living their lives in patriarchal set ups, bearing the might of tradition at the same time reacting to pressures of change and modernity.

The essay: History, Change and Modernity: Markandaya's New Woman in Nectar In A Sieve by G.R. Taneja is an interesting article from the socio-cultural point of view, relevant for a study of tradition and change. Taneja shows
that Markandaya’s approach to the potential conflict between tradition and change is an unique one—i.e. through the female self’s assertion of itself—recognition of her individual role and secondly on behalf of her society—the social role.

The anthology—*Indian Writing in English* ed. Mohit K. Ray includes essays on many important Indian English writers from Nirad C. Chowdhury to Arundhati Roy. The essay on Markandaya included in this anthology is ‘Ironic Vision In Kamala Markandaya’s *Nectar In A Sieve*’ by U.S. Rukhaiyar. According to this critic the very title refers to the great irony in the human life “Work without hope, draws nectar in a sieve” (114) It is a fact that works with hope also meets the fate of drawing nectar in a sieve. The critic perceptively deciphers the underlying irony of the story in the tragedy of Rukmani’s family. In the context of tradition and change, Markandaya feels the critic places tradition higher—as the repository of positive values thwarted.

Recent works on Kamala Markandaya and other novelists in Indian English focus on feminist visions of the writer’s works. The book *Feminist Visions—Indian English Women Novelists* by Anita Sinha concentrates on the study of Indian women novelists based on a distinct tradition of their own. Sinha makes a survey of the major novels of Markandaya from the viewpoint of the feminine sensibility.

The book *Contemporary Indian Women Writers in English — A Feminist Perspective* by Surya Nath Pandey concentrates on the feminist approaches to quite a few established Indian English women novelists focusing on a few of the well known texts opening up as the book says “new vistas of critical enquiry to approach a feminist text”. In the book *Studies in Women Writers in English* edited by Mohit K. Ray and Rama Kundu, we get an insight into the work of women
writers across the globe. The essay on Markandaya written by N. Sharada Iyer—
titled 'Orchestration of Themes in Kamala Markandaya's Nectar In A Sieve' talks
about this 'Novel of rural India' as a very ambitious novel. It does so as it is not a
one theme work but a complex fabric of various threads equated with great novels
like Pearl Bucks 'The Good Earth' Bhabani Bhattacharya's So Many Hungers etc.
Another article in the same book "Plaintive Silence and Assertive Resilience in
Kamala Markandaya's A Silence of Desire and Shashi Deshpande's That Long
Silence" by C. Anna Latha Devi talk about feminine concerns in the two writers;
Both these writers through their respective novels delve deep into the crisis of
women. The silence is the expression of the agonies and sufferings of the central
protagonists in the two novels.

The critical work on Markandaya focuses mainly on her deep
sociological concern related to the changing ethos in Indian life in the immediate
post-independence era. The more recent essays emphasize additionally on her
feminist concerns, the crisis and agony facing her characters and the ironic
viewpoint of the writer when talking of the changes and conflict in life.

Like Markandaya and Sahgal, Anita Desai who is one of the most
popular, most read and researched novelists is concerned about the identity of
women. Desai has been included in this study to bring about a sense of continuity
and contemporary relevance. Though a master in the study of inner life and a
delineation of the human psyche, she shows a remarkable skill in portraying the
tragedy and triumph of modern urban existence. It was necessary that Desai should
be included in a socio-cultural study like this because there are very few writers who
have covered such a gamut of emotions and human relationships. Desai also
expresses individual and social vulnerability in the face of the corrupt systems of the
day. The fifth chapter of my study has been devoted to Anita Desai.

Critical works on Desai is now wide ranging, but when Meena Belliappa wrote her book *Anita Desai-A Study of her Fiction* way back in 1971, there were very few critical studies on Desai. Belliappa makes some interesting observations which has since become a part of the established critical opinion on Desai. Belliappa discovered that with Desai the focus of attention has been shifted to the portrayal of the states of mind rather than social documentation. The shift of emphasis from the social to the individual, the critic says marks an important development in Indian English fiction. The inward turning which has a special relevance to modern living where the focus has shifted from community living to the individual identity.

*Stairs to the Attic-The Novels of Anita Desai* by Jasbir Jain is one of the early perceptive work on Desai. A book enriched by a personal viewpoint of the writer in the form of an interview. In this interview, Desai says that she had always been interested in characters that are peculiar rather than everyday average ones. Apart from this invaluable first person source of Desai’s concerns, this book explores in depth each of the novels of Desai. The critic observes that in the novels, the problem of involvement versus detachment, surrender versus freedom is viewed from various perspectives. The critic further observes that in the ambivalent world of Desai, harmony is aspired but not arrived at.

*The Fiction of Anita Desai* (1989) Ed. R.K. Dhawan is a very valuable collection on Desai criticism. Dhawan in his introduction, deals with Desai’s explorations of the human psyche, emphasizing on her use of the language of the interior for psychological analysis of her characters. R.S.Pathak’s essay here
"The Alienated Self in the Novels of Anita Desai" depicts the predicament of modern man which is of dominant interest to the novelist. Desai’s pinpoints this by pointing out the hiatus between what the individual aspires to and the harsh reality of what he/she achieves.

Sandhyarani Dash’s book *Form and Vision in the Novels of Anita Desai* (1996) is a study that aims to examine the themes and messages of Desai’s novels. Desai embodies an ironic vision of life and the form in her novels is governed by an awareness of life’s ambivalence. Similarly the book *The Novels of Anita Desai- A Critical Study* edited by M.K.Bhatnagar and M.Rajeshwar applies sociological and psychoanalytical approaches of formal, textual analysis. The essays in this volume explore the poetic devices and narrative strategies used by Desai. On the same lines is the study: *Style Studies in Anita Desai* by Mohini Chakranarayan which is a pioneering study providing a detailed, textual analysis of eight novels of Desai.

Recent critical works concentrate on Desai’s sociological concerns and the strong but subtle feminist preoccupations as against the earlier psychological aspects of the writer. A few works on this line are: *Women and Society in the Novels of Anita Desai* by Bidulata Chowdhury is a sociological study of the novelist. The critic projects the feminine sensibility in Desai against the backdrop of a changing society and a depiction of the Indian woman’s psychology. *The Novels of Anita Desai- A Study in Character and Conflict* by Usha Bande is an invaluable book. The critic makes a wide survey of the important characters of Desai’s novels and analyses their distinct traits. Bande comments that Desai concerned with subjective analysis shifts her attention to inner sensibilities against the backdrop of conditions outside. *The Novels of Anita Desai-A Feminist Perspective* by R.K.Gupta-In this
book, the writer studies the feminine sensibilities in the novels of Anita Desai. The critic says that Desai’s novels expose her awareness of problems of women which she tackles from a psychic point of view. Anita Sinha in her book *Feminist Visions-Indian English Women Novelists* emphasizes on the fact that Desai’s novels are reflective of social realities not immediately perceived. She sees social realities from a psychological perspective.

Critics abroad mention Desai as a representative Indian English novelist. She is included in the famous *Cambridge Guide to Women’s Writing in English* ed. Lorna Sage. In this work, mention is made of her spatial framing narrative, powerful character delineation, tunneling of the past through probing and the stream of consciousness mode.

In *Who’s Who of Women’s Writing* ed. Jane Eldridge Miller, Anita Desai’s work is mentioned as articulating the inner subjectivity of women with, a passionate intensity. *The New Casebook* series’ publication: *Postcolonial literatures* Ed. Michael Parker and Roger Starkey include Anita Desai as a major postcolonial writer. As the introduction says, “Desai’s work acts as a filter and amplifier for a babble of competing voices and discourses.” (14). Desai’s dominance in the world of English writing is acknowledged by including three essays on her novels in this eminent collection.

A survey of the critical opinions on the three writers point out that they have not been treated together as a group on the subject of tradition and change in Indian society. However, these themes do crop up in single studies of the writers. The studies while probing into the dominant concerns of each writer have not in my knowledge brought them together to reveal the face of contemporary society. My endeavour would be to study the central woman protagonists of these three writers
as creatures affected by change in a transitional society. In a comparative study like this, my effort will also be to bring about a comparison between the world projected by these writers and the living world we are inhabiting at present.

A collection of short stories called The Inner Courtyard: Stories By Indian Women Ed. Lakshmi Holmstrom I had read inspired me a lot in this study. The evocative title of the collection talked about the silent, tragic and passionate experience of women from which each story unfolded. These outpourings by women from everyday experience, family histories were revelations to the life of women-past, present and future. Why did women have to restrict themselves to the inner courtyard? Could they make voices heard, how significant was their shadowy presence to the outside world? Is this all that the Indian tradition has to offer to them, what about the winds of change? The three writers, I hoped, would be able to answer some of these questions through their representation of Indian women at the crossroads.

Though thematically diverse, there is a common concern in them on the fate of their protagonists caught in the conflict between inherited tradition and inexorable change. As women, reading women’s minds and voicing their concerns comes easily to them. For them, the lives of everyday reality of women around presented a saga which could be lifted to the level of artistic creation.

Nayantara Sahgal was specially chosen for the novelty she brings to Indian English fiction with her focus on politics as an allegory of life. The power play, victimisation, the addiction and gamble of politics to day are a far cry from that of the humanistic, idealistic aura of the pre-independence days which she depicts. Kamala Markandaya was chosen because her themes have a certain contemporary relevance with her earthy, homegrown appeal. Her novels bring out the writer’s
concern for ordinary lives in rural and urban areas facing the ordeals of everyday existence in a fast-changing world. Anita Desai depicts the inner reality of characters; her sensitive explorations of the interpersonal and the portrayal of various facades of these fragile links of blood, kin or nuptial ties impart a universality to the works of this writer.

My specific preoccupation is that, an in depth study of such relationships, philosophies and concerns of the women protagonists of these writers against the backdrop of a changing society should help me in perceiving and locating the fissures. Which is brought about by the erosion of values and humanistic ideals which society is facing at this juncture. My endeavour is to make a wider survey of the Indian English fictional scene, hence I have taken three writers who studied the various aspects of Indian society, transcended the rural-urban divide, age, economic and social segregation and tried their best to give a composite picture of India. Apart from the psychological and sociological concerns of Desai and Markandaya, Sahgal’s depiction of the political and bureaucratic scene and portrayal of the dramatic events of history will provide, I hope, an added dimension to the understanding of contemporary Indian society.

In this study, an attempt is made to provide a critical analysis of the concept of tradition and change against the backdrop of the historical perspective of Indian English fiction, as such my first chapter is on this area. I have included in my second chapter, “Myth and Folklore,” important aspects of India’s living tradition. It is also important from the point of view of modern reality which will help us to demythicize the myth of the Indian woman as the pativrata and the Sati. Thus, it will release her from the burden of the role model and the superwoman which has for long obliterated her individuality and self worth. The third, fourth and fifth
chapters have been devoted respectively to the three writers already mentioned and a comparative analysis offered in the concluding chapter.
Works Cited


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