Culture studies have been gaining momentum in the contemporary literary arena. Culture is a vast area which encompasses all that human beings inherit and acquire in the course of life. Literature, being a product of culture, should be analysed and relished from the cultural viewpoint. Knowledge of the culture around which a novel is woven, enables a reader to understand it better and its environment. It aids to the better understanding of the themes and serves as an instrument in sustaining one’s culture.

India being a culturally rich country, has generated wonderful pieces of literature which proclaim to the world the unique cultural practices. Many Indian writers have created ripples in the annals of literature and made the world turn and cast a look at them. Especially, Indian fiction has won for itself an enviable place in the domain of world literature. It has been given a fresh lease of life by a new crop of novelists. Among the novelists, special mention should be made of Arundhati Roy, Githa Hariharan and Kiran Desai who have made an ineffaceable mark in the field of literature. In order to reach the global audience, they have chosen English as the language for the exhibition of their creative ability. The present study has therefore been done on the select fictional writings of
these eminent authors whose writings project the diverse culture, ethnicity and tradition of their country in their own perspective, highlighting both virtues and vices. Being writers representing different generations, they perceive and conceive the society and its culture in the light of their individual experiences and register the major issues of their time in a highly stirring and sagacious way.

The scrutiny of the authors selected for study unflinchingly discloses their different cultural milieu and justifies the portrayal of their ethnicity, culture and tradition in their literary creations. The first chapter of the study titled “Introduction” examines the biography of the chosen authors which divulges the creative excellence of these writers and their social concern. It also lays bear the scope of the thesis. A genuine attempt to analyse works done on the chosen authors and the relevance of the present study has been done in the chapter. The aim of the study, structure of the thesis and the methodology adopted have also been recorded in this chapter.

Different cultural patterns of life prevalent in India as they emerge in these writers’ fictional narratives are registered in the second chapter “Mores and Modes”. India has always remained a pluralistic country with diverse cultures, faiths, practices, food and dress habits, yet, stands united. Its unity in diversity has been a constant source of admiration around the globe. The culture of India has influenced the global culture and also got
influenced by them. Yet, it has successfully preserved some of its ethnic
cultural practices without any change and these writers have artistically
expressed them in their writings.

Arundhati Roy, who has chosen her own native place as the major
locale of her prime novel, lavishly extols the geographical beauty of her
country and describes some of the distinct cultural patterns of her people.
Her realistic descriptions of Ayemenam in the month of May, Kotayam
Police station and its Police Inspector with big moustache are common
scenes in Kerala. Her text is replete with images that are rooted in Indian
culture. It gets strengthened with folk songs and film songs. Roy
establishes the strong belief of the Indians through a song of the film
Chemmeen that forewarns that those who transgress the moral codes of the
society will be doomed beyond redemption. Roy’s story of Ammu, Velutha
and the twins’ lives also bear testimony to this belief. The superstitious
beliefs of the people play a prominent role in checking and preventing such
moral transgressions. Roy provides ample instances for this.

Such illustrations that advocate severe restrictions on women’s
morality prove Roy’s Indian mooring and its depth which no Western
education or feminist thought could disintegrate and it affirms that such
beliefs will stand the test of time and no modernization or globalization can
alter them. Such is the attitude of Indians towards divorce. However
educated or westernized, the Indians are dread of divorce. In spite of
disharmony in their lives, they hold on to marriage for the sake of their children. They have learned from their society that divorce is a fatal familial evil that destroys the happiness of not only the couples but their progenies too. Roy also affirms this idea. She shows that the humiliation Ammu and her children experience is due to broken marriage. She also highlights the Indian patriarchal social set-up where women are more humiliated and tormented by contrasting the divorced life of Chacko with that of Ammu.

The *Kathakali*, the traditional art form of Kerala and its richness are proclaimed by Roy to her global readers. She goes effusive in describing the beauty of this art which illuminates India’s diverse art forms which are based on the two great epics *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*, the treasure house of Indian culture. How this art form has influenced her writing style is also explicated by the novelist herself. She has averred that it is the beauty of performing the known story through *Kathakali* that inspires and influences her to reveal the crux of her story in the first chapter itself, unlike other writers who keep up the suspense to the last page.

Hariharan also takes delight in her Indian birth and she raves about the virtue of her culture and its typical cultural practices which can be universal and applicable even in the high-tech world. She revives readers’ interest in the Indian epics and the *Panchatantra*. She advocates the
traditional practices of Yoga and meditation. Hariharan promulgates the virtue of the traditional medical practice called Ayurveda in her novel *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*. The founders of this Ayurveda namely Charaka and Sushruda are eulogized by her. She compares it with the English medical practice and says that Ayurveda excels other medical sciences in providing relief not only to the symptoms but cures the disease from its roots, thus giving permanent solace.

Being an offspring of a Brahmin Hindu family, Hariharan voices out some of the cultural practices prevalent in such families and her preferences for them. She makes a mention of the habit of planting trees like neem and peepal on the day of wedding by the Hindu bride and bridegroom. It is based on the ethnic belief that as the tree grows high and flourish, the life of the couple will also thrive. Whatever be the belief, such faiths cultivate a healthy practice that facilitates humanity in general.

The first two novels of Hariharan underscore several extracts from the Hindu Mythology and *Panchatantra*, the quintessence of Hinduism which induce people to choose the right path, the path of virtue. The Hindus believe in one’s *Karma* which decides their life for several births. As a result, people dare not go astray, fearing the punishment that they may trigger. This results in the smooth running of the social machinery. Hariharan also observes that it is this aspect of religion which facilitates the successful maintenance of patriarchy even in the modern era.
Like Roy, Hariharan too endorses superstitious beliefs as the personal treasury of Indian culture. Horoscopes decide the happiness of many Indians as they display unrelenting faith in them. Hariharan highlights both the positive and negative impact of such traditional beliefs. It positively enables the people to endure the misfortunes as the will of God and gives them the patience to overcome the bitter period of their life. She also shows that these beliefs demote people like Mayamma, a meek, yielding to all kinds of oppression and humiliation, never gaining courage to defy many of the social vices. Observing the devastating nature of these superstitious beliefs, Hariharan ridicules them by unveiling how meaningless they are through several instances.

Though Hariharan spurns at some of the traditional beliefs and practices, she also hails to the sky some of the very distinct cultural practices of the Indians. One such practice is the veneration, the Indian society displays towards the teachers. She highly eulogizes the Gurukula system of the Indians in the past. Teachers, in those times were considered the most respectable and honourable and treated on par with Gods. However, Hariharan does not show the least hesitation in giving an unswerving cross-section of the present day India where the author herself is a teacher. She bewails how the Western influence has resulted in the degradation of the Indian educational system where both the teacher and the students have failed in their errand. It has become a business where a
A probing study on the novels of Haraiharan also shows that though the Indians get attracted and influenced by the Western culture, they remain obdurate in some of their inherent practices. Marriage is one such practice. The Western education or even the attraction for the Westerners does not convince them to marry a foreigner very easily. Hariharan illustrates this through Devi who rejects the proposal of her American friend Dan though she likes him and comes forward to marry a person of her mother’s choice. Many parents who come to see Devi also uncloak this view. They want their sons to be educated in the West and want them to talk and dress like the English but prefer them to marry only Indian girls.

Hariharan asserts that superstitious beliefs are not the monopoly of Indian culture alone. She exposes the Westerners who ridicule the East for their irrational beliefs, too foster such practices. She narrates the apartment in which Dan lives does not have a thirteenth floor as they believe that it is an unlucky number. She analyses and asserts that the superstitious beliefs that the Indians have cultivated have a cultural lineage. Most of them are buttressed by religious faiths like breaking coconuts to lord Ganesha to ward off obstacles on their way.

In spite of her Western brought up, Kiran Desai also, introduces some of the beliefs of her homeland which are largely superstitious.
Marriage between frogs to invite rain and the undaunted belief in one’s birth star which she narrates in her debut novel *The Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, proclaim that she too has strong Indian lineage, like her mother. The Indian belief that when a human being meets with an accidental or unnatural death, the spirit haunts the place of death and terrifies the people as ghost is invariably narrated by all the three writers chosen for study.

Food and apparel are some of the factors that proclaim the cultural uniqueness of the inhabitants of a particular country. India, being a pluralistic country has diverse food habits and dress codes. This assortment has been reliably recorded in the novels of Roy, Hariharan and Desai. Apart from these merits and distinctness of their culture, these writers do present the social vices of their own country. They unanimously reprimand the unhealthy dowry system, patriarchy, marginalization of the weak, the social vices which harm the growth of the country and thus sow the seeds of awareness and realization in the minds of their readers.

Myths and rituals also play a unique role in deciding the life style of the people of India. *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* are the guiding factors of the majority of Hindus in India. Roy and Hariharan seek the help of the myths from the great epics to illuminate their novels. Besides myths, Roy exploits film and folk songs to drive home her ideas, whereas Hariharan uses the *Panchatantra* to bedeck her revolutionary ideas. The
most contemporary writer Desai on the other hand, seeks history for her help to present her story and the prevalent problems of her age and her country.

However rich and ancient a country may be, it cannot prosper unless it adopts itself to the changing times. No culture can remain static; it has to be influenced by the changing times in order to be enriched and emulated by others. Globalization is one such phenomenon which brings people of diverse cultures and nations together. It has successfully been portrayed by the writers who present both the pros and cons of this global phenomenon which enable people to reach the nook and corner of the world within hours, thereby literarily changing the vast globe into a mere village.

Hybridity is a state that globalization automatically brings on its course. No culture can be claimed to be pure and India being already plural in its culture is very open towards other cultures. Colonization has been a major trendsetter in India. The colonizers have influenced the natives so much that some of them renounced their native culture and have become anglophiles. It ultimately results in the denial of one’s individuality and identity and thus ends in the loss of roots. This idea has been commendably put forth by Roy, Hariharan and Desai, who emphasize that absorbing the goodness of one country is not a vice, but it should not be at the cost of loosing one’s roots; it should not be a blind admiration and imitation of some culture which one considers as superior.
Globalization has created diasporas across the world which brought not only foreign economy and development but also intensified the patriotic feeling in people. Though some go astray from their own culture and yield to the forces of foreign culture, many like Rahel, Tara, and Biju display a great longing towards the native land and its cultural and behavioural patterns. The basic Indian quality love, despite the various shortcomings, has been presented by the three writers as a remedy to save people from all kinds of despair and to hope for their better life.

Globalization which has brought a random and rapid change in the Indian culture and society resulted in the emergence of a multicultural mosaic which favours power-play among the different sections of society. People are divided according to class, creed and religion. In the power-play, affluent people try to drive the weaker section to the periphery and it results in the sprouting of two cultures namely main and sub-cultures. As a consequence of this power-play, the sub-cultures are relegated to a subservient position and neglected. The chosen writers felt that it is their duty to highlight and catapult the subculture and various issues that masticate them through their writings and they are registered in the third chapter “Subdued Voices”.

Roy, Hariharan and Desai scrutinize the reasons for a particular culture gaining dominance over the native culture in India and it has been found that colonization is one such factor. It created adulation for the West
and naturally native culture is given only a secondary status. The futility of such a blind adulation and emulation has been tenaciously communicated by the chosen authors. They break many of the convoluted myths which have given them a hegemonic status. They also highlight how the imitation of alien culture deprives the natives of their identity and renounces them as mere shadows.

Race is another discriminating factor as observed by the chosen writers. Hegemony is inflicted by the first world country over the third world country, like India. They despise Indians and abuse them, whereas the Indians display total submission and admiration for the first world countries and their culture. This irony of situation has been commendably conveyed by these writers. Muscle power also adds to the suppression of the weak and this too, finds expression in the novels of these writers.

It is unfortunate, that in India people get delight in their high birth and they also think it is their right to exercise authority over the low caste people. Many atrocities are imposed upon people of lower caste and among the three writers chosen for study, Roy has observed and presented the problems of this social evil in *The God of Small Things*. The lower caste people are denied the right to speak, enter temples and proper education is also considered voracity on their part. The writers also highlight how political and social institutions including the educational system in India promote hegemony and marginalize the weak.
Religion too contributes its share in subjugating the minority. India being a multireligious country, different religions vie with one another to gain supremacy and in its course, minority gets crushed. Though all the writers chosen for scrutiny here express religion inflicting discrimination among the people of India, it is Hariharan who makes it a major issue in her narrative *In Times of Siege*.

Above all the discriminating forces, economic imbalance which is predominantly seen in the Indian society plays a major role in subjugating the impoverished section of the society. Though Roy, Hariharan and Desai collectively present the problems of the poor and how the affluent people have an upper hand over the poor, Desai’s text looms large over this issue.

As a result of the unbearable and innumerable types of sufferings the poor have to encounter in their life, they take strenuous effort to escape from humiliation. Hence, they migrate to the first world countries or to the industrialized or economically affluent places in their country. However, such a jump often proves futile for they undergo worst type of humiliation which mars their self-respect and reduce them to the status of shadows, deprived of identity and dignity and this has been proved beyond doubt by the chosen authors. They eke out an existence worst than that of animals. The writers have perpetually observed that all kinds of displacement, whether it occurs within or outside one’s own country, bring in ignominy and dissonance. They too assert the basic truth that money or wealth can
never be a substitute for harmony of existence and the idea has been
laudably disseminated through the happy reunion of the father and the US
returned son, Biju in Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*.

Apart from other discriminating factors, old age and physical or
mental deformity can nullify a person’s identity beyond imagination and
the authors put the accent on it through numerous examples. Even a slight
deviation from normalcy can depreciate people denying them their right to
normal life which in course of time aggravates their deformity, supplying
them an existence worse than that of beasts. The misfortune is that divine
institutions like education or politics, instead of advocating and pursuing
fraternity and equality, train the progeny hegemony and discrimination
thereby, paving way for disharmony within the pluralistic nation like India.

Roy, Hariharan and Desai have thus perceived in the Indian society
so many factors that bring about marginalization and thereby create a sub-
code of behaviour and culture that is widely termed as the ‘other’. Through
their writing, they cast a warning to all those who try to over-rule others.
They avow that history teaches the lesson that no one can be subdued for
ever and all the suppressed will regain their strength and will revolt against
the suppressing agents and no one however powerful they may be, can
encounter such agitation. They provide enough evidences to substantiate
their view and thus cry for equality or at least harmony within the
multicultural or mosaic culture of India.
Patriarchy in the Indian society drives women to the margins inflicting various forms of repression over them and these have been depicted in the fourth chapter “Suffering Sex”. The root to female subjugation is analysed here and Manu is traced to be the first patriarch who had denied giving women independent social status. Women, at first willingly submitted themselves to male hegemony. However, education and exposure to the global culture unveiled to them their marginal status and this resulted in the revival of women’s status in India. Roy, Hariharan and Desai belong to this group of women who have began to realize the strength of womanhood and hence they show the audacity to unveil the sufferings of the women and try to promulgate the need to defy the age-old patriarchal social set-up through their fictional narratives.

Marriage is found to be an institution that keeps alive patriarchy in the Indian society. The chosen writers and their works typify that marriage is an inexorable factor in women’s lives which very often seems to bring devastation in their life and they are doomed beyond redemption. Roy brings to her readers three generations of women which bear witness to the futility of married life. Some women like Kalyani could live happily just because they surrender totally to the hegemony of men and embrace self-disgrace. Hariharan’s *The Thousand Faces of Night* also highlights and reinforces the view of Roy. Hariharan’s women characters respond to this crushing cultural mechanism by renouncing it or by yielding to its officious
wheels. Other novels of Hariharan selected for study here also is imbibed with the same idea about this social institution which is very much controlled by the cultural norms of the locale.

Desai’s view is also not quite different from that of her contemporary writers. Both the novels of Desai mark the lack of understanding and harmony within married life. She implicitly points out marriage as a milestone around a woman’s neck that throttles her little by little. The married life of Kulfi and Chawla in *The Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* and Nimi and Jemubhai in *The Inheritance of Loss* reveal this bitter truth. The chosen writers also disclose invariably that if one agrees that women are marginalized, one has to admit that they are doubly marginalized if they are born in a poor or low caste family.

These writers also accentuate, why in spite of being troublesome, the Indian women patiently suffer within the conjugal relationships. They unanimously bring to focus how husbandless women suffer in the Indian male chauvinistic society. It ruins the happiness of women by depriving them of even the right to live, considered a burden and social responsibility. It does not stop with the dilapidation of the wife’s life, but crushes the offspring’s life at the bud itself. Fearing this, most Indian women sacrifice their happiness for the betterment of their children. Thus, the writers show marriage as a “sacrificial knife” which demands complete subjugation, failing which, it can pierce the women into splinters anytime.
Roy, Hariharan and Desai expose that marriage is not the only factor that is instrumental in bringing disgrace to women and marginalize them. Men play various roles in women’s lives, but whatever relation they have with women, they try to exercise hegemony and drive them to margin by violently occupying the centre. The repression for a woman starts at home. She is humiliated by the father, brother and after marriage not only husband but the sons too, aggravate the suffering. The writers provide sufficient instances to substantiate this truth which is prevalently seen in the Indian society, irrespective of the locale north or south. She is the most easily vulnerable one on whom number of atrocities are inflicted.

The writers also try to trace the origin of female subjugation and bigotry between genders and find the home being source from where the seeds of partiality take roots. Parents are predominantly the major factors who sow the seeds of bigotry in their children’s minds by being bias in bringing up a male and female child. The children who grow up witnessing this bigotry try to preserve it through successive generations.

The reasons behind the partiality in the brought up of male and female child are traced to be due to the unhealthy cultural practices like dowry system. Indians, who prefer a female child in the animals like cow, feel dejected when a woman gives birth to a girl baby. It is mainly because of the social evil dowry. Parents of the girl have to give huge amount to the boy if she is to be married off respectfully. Apprehension of the enormous
expense that awaits them coerces many parents to heartlessly commit infanticide. It is also considered a disgrace and curse to beget more daughters, whereas it is a boon to give birth to more sons and considered a blessing of God. Such attitudes of the Indians are rebuked by the authors.

Though majority of the women submit themselves to this gender bias, there has arisen a new tendency among women to protest against the age-old practice of marginalization. The writers too, make the readers be aware of the need to rise against this gender bias. However, they faithfully record that it is not an easy endeavour by sketching the trials and tribulations, their rebellious and ambitious female portraits undergo in their respective novels, but they accentuate that it is the need of the hour and women should try to get economical independence, individuality and demand for dignity and equality.

The writers chosen for study do not merely present the sufferings and how and why they are inflicted on women. They also elucidate the need to rise up from the repressing environment and to create their own space to survive. They do not simply preach for women liberation but provide satisfactory examples to show how to attain self-respect and self-realization. Roy’s protagonist Rahel is her concept of modern woman who pays no unwanted adulation that women of her previous generation exhibited. She shows the audacity to defy the patriarchal social set-up and neglect what the male chauvinistic society thinks about her. Though
Hariharan too advocates for the emancipation of women, she does not take the stand of a feminist who advises women to renounce family, when it fails to respect her. Instead, she advises women to create a space of their own within their families and to change adverse situations into a favourable one. This, she does in her novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* in which she brings forth different generation of women and highlights the flaw in each type of women and her choice of woman seems to be not the post-modern protagonist Devi but her mother Sita who changes every adverse situation to be propitious and shows great mental strength in the most crucial situation and is admired and appreciated by all. In *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, the grandmother of the protagonist is the ideal woman of the author and in *In Times of Siege*, Meena and Rekha seem to be the author’s choice, whereas Dunyazad is the right sort of woman in *When Dreams Travel*. Though Kiran Desai’s novels lack powerful women portraits, her women show that they are capable of taking decision of their own. Kulfi and Pinky in *The Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* and Sai Mistry in *The Inheritance of Loss* too have some traits of modern women.

Although the study showcases the secondary status of women in the patriarchal Indian society, the authors also depict a way to escape from the marginalized status. They faithfully record that though men implement this patriarchal system, it is unfortunately women who bolster the successful running of this hegemonic machinery. Unless they change their attitude,
women liberation and equality are something that can only be imagined and can never be attained.

Thus, the present study on the Indian culture, as observed by the three writers Arundhati Roy, Githa Hariharan and Kiran Desai, is not a prosaic academic mission, but a challenging and rewarding critical experience that opened to the pollster, the uniqueness of Indian culture and its diversity. It would be pertinent to mention that their works are not what they have said but rather what they have encountered, experienced and the way they presented their thoughts, feelings and intensely lived experiences which have won laurels for the artists’ creations. They have proclaimed to the world the greatness of India and claim the admiration and appreciation of rest of the world.

The present study has its own inherent limitations and weaknesses. As the main concern of the study is the exploration of Indian culture in the chosen authors, other paradigms and possible themes have to be ignored by the researcher. Further, there is no separate chapter for the stylistic aspects and narrative techniques adopted by the authors. However, the stylistic aspects are discussed while explicating ideas and views.

The chosen authors’ writings are like a treasure mine that can facilitate studies on various other issues of prominence and thus, can promote further research based on different theories like modernism, postmodernism, deconstruction, ecocriticism and so on. The writers’ chief
concern being welfare of the people who are afflicted, their novels can offer comparative studies with the novels of Alice Walker, Nadine Godimer, Toni Morison, Sylvia Plath and the like who give accent for the afflicted.