Chapter One

Introduction

India, an ancient country with its grand civilization which pursues diverse cultural patterns, has been invariably a source of curiosity to the entire world. Its unity in diversity has ensnared the minds of the West that is almost homogeneous in its culture. India stands unique in its multiculturalism – a great variety in culture, tradition, religion, language, and ethnicity. These kaleidoscopic splendour and variety get reflected in the Indian literature which naturally holds a mirror to life. Literature and culture are closely associated and in fact it is “an organic part of the total culture-complex in which it takes its origin” (Bhatnagar 1).

The credit of enforcing English education on Indians goes to Lord Macaulay. He with his brother-in-law Sir Charles Trevelyan very convincingly advocated to the East India Company that educating the Indians would really fetch them more respect and adulation. Macaulay also believed that English education would make the native, “Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and intellect” (Bakshi 163). Though part of this prophesy had been proven true, it produced quite a contrary impact on the Indians. They tried indeed to copy the English culture, but in its course, it also intensified the patriotic feeling of the natives. The English History and Literature which were taught to the
Indians to proclaim the superiority of the colonizer really stirred the patriotic feeling of the natives and enlightened them about the significance of unity, reverence for one’s culture and tradition.

The learning of English language facilitated the intercommunication among people of India who spoke different languages and thus accelerated the process of integration and undoubtedly paved way for Indian independence. The patriotic feelings were aroused through literature which progressively resulted in the emergence of Indian English Literature.

Today, Indian English Literature refers to the literary works by writers in India who write in English language and their native language could be any one of the numerous languages of India. Despite six decades of independence and departure of the British from India, Indians are unable to get themselves out of the ensnaring clutches of their rulers. This is predominantly due to the fact that being a multilingual country and each language aspiring to get priority over the other fails to achieve a consensus. As a result, no language not even Hindi which is claimed to be the national language achieves the status of the lingua franca of India. Thus, India being a multilingual country, the writers in general preferred English which became the common tongue after the colonization if one wanted to reach wider audience. This resulted in the emergence of Indian English Literature which was originally known as Indo-Anglian Literature or Indian Writing in English. This confusion in nomenclature was eradicated by the Sahitya...
academy which called any literary creation in English produced by an Indian author as Indian English Literature.

Fiction was the much sought after genre in the Indian English Literature, as it was chosen widely by the Indian readers. Though Indian writers initiated their writings based on the West, the fictional world of India stands unique in its originality. Fiction has been “seen as the main stay of Indian English Literature” (Smitha 1). This may be due to the fact that Indians basically have an inclination towards fiction. Stories have always occupied a special place in the Indian life as they are part of its rich culture. Stories embedded in the epics, legends and scriptures instruct as well as enlighten in the art of handling the dilemmas or problems that one confronts at home and society, thereby making lives quite stirring and enticing. It should not be neglected that it is the level of English literacy that gives spurt to writing and reading which ultimately resulted in the flourishing of Indian English fiction. The creative fecundity of the Indian writers in English especially in the genre fiction is enunciated by the readers and scholars all over the globe. The various covetous awards and accolades they have won bear testimony to this.

The translation of the Bible by the English missionaries brought revival in the prose writing and this encouraged the English to translate the Western classics. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee wrote the first Indian novel Rajmohan’s Wife which was published in 1864. This was followed by Raj
Lakshmi Devi’s *The Hindu Wife* and Toru Dutt’s *Binaca*. But these writings lacked literary values and are “no more than an antiquarian or historical interest” (Iyengar 315). Though there were couple of other fictional narratives appeared in this decade including the novels written in vernacular languages, which were later translated into English, the genre became enriched in the hands of the eminent authors who were very popularly addressed as the ‘trio’ namely, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao. Since then there has been a steady output of Indian English fiction. As Robert Pinto says, “Indian writers have made a dent in the world literary scenario by their genius and awakened an interest in the riches of Indian culture and civilization as well as in the changes taking place in Indian ethos” (102). The Indian novelists, of course take pride in the cultural richness and variety, but they do not blindly adore it. Whenever they come across any social vice, they condemn it outright through their art. They conceptualize and problematise culture and show concern for the plight of the dispossessed.

The dominant theme in Indian English fiction before independence was inescapably political. Other concerns of these novelists are the caste system, social and religious taboos, superstitions, hegemony and the like. As a true artist, Mulk Raj Anand, the eldest of the trio tried to give his voice against the age old practices of the discrimination of class and community. R.K.Narayan’s novels on the other hand, offer a striking
contrast to that of Mulk Raj Anand. He can be claimed as a pure Indian novelist who had a clear vision of India as his life was spent only in India, that too in South India. Though different in perspectives, style and themes, these Indian writers are all unique in presenting the anatomy of India and their chief concern was national independence.

The Indian writers of the post-independent era espoused English as a tool and employed it in sundry ways to express widely differing cultural experiences. Indian writers begin to employ language as a dynamic medium to explore and expose the complex Indian reality. After independence, India has undergone a sea change in the social, political, religious and cultural fields. These changes are faithfully captured and highlighted by the literary luminaries. It took roots from the peripheries and geographical decentering and the writing began to include themes like exile, immigration, expatriation and the formation of huge diaspora. The novels of this period crossed all the racial, cultural and regional barriers and earned immense popularity. The great Indian novelists have vied with great writers of the world and even excelled them in several aspects. They proclaimed to the world the colourful and glorious culture and tradition of India. These writers have not only challenged the hegemony of the imperial centre but also questioned the Eurocentric ideology. The fictional writings of the period explicitly depicted the cultural and social problems of independent India and its changing scenario.
A sweeping survey of Indian literature shows a list of numerous promising writers like Bhabani Bhattacharia, Manohar Malgoankar, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Chaman Nahal and third generation novelists like Arun Joshi, Nirad C. Chaudri, Amitav Ghosh, V.S.Naipaul, Rohinton Mistry, Vikram Seth, Shashi Tharoor and Vikram Chandra. Their works parade most often passionately and sympathetically the multifaceted life in India, the social awakening and protest, utter poverty of peasants, freedom struggle and the social and political transition. They also exhibit to the West, India’s choice in cultural and linguistic arena, the aftereffect of colonization and its cultural appendages.

For generations, Indian novels were the man’s domain. Male novelists festooned the fiction world of India for decades. They presented issues concerning them and even if they depicted women’s issues, they were expressed from a man’s perspective that lacked sincerity and genuineness. A close look at the Indian culture studies discloses the bitter truth that India practises the twin straddle system of culture where what is freely given to man is denied outright to woman. She is treated as second sex, slightly better than animals. As Anita Miley avers, “woman is considered more as a product of cultural norms and restraints rather than as a creation of nature” (1). The male writers, of course, presented women’s problems, but they lacked sincerity and originality as they are born out of the secondhand knowledge of the women’s issues. Their writings showed
woman passive or aggressive, traditional or modern. She is always portrayed in the light of submission. This necessitated a welcoming change in the writing province. The revival of Indian culture, which gave room for higher education for woman, brought a sea change in the literary field which is swept away by the flood of highly talented women writers. Quite grippingly, they are at the core of the present century literary ventures and it is not at all an exaggeration to remark that they surpassed their male counterparts with respect to their themes and styles.

As Iyengar rightly remarks “Women are natural story-tellers even when they don’t write or publish” (435). The novels of Jane Austen, George Eliot, Emily and Charlotte Bronte motivated the Indian women too and they took the challenge of revealing the bitter realities of the domestic and social life through their women characters. They brought to the fore the pathetic plight of the Indian womenfolk even decades after attaining independence. The history of Indian Women Writing in English commences with Toru Dutt’s autobiographical novel Binaca. Her novel is “full of love and affection, sincerity and purity which characterize the core of an ideal Indian woman” (Prasad 315). The second generation of Indian English women writers like Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Mirnalini Sarabhai, Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande came to the front to give new treats to their readers. They responded positively to the changing social scenario and were sensitive to the shifting mental set-up of Indian
life after independence. At the same time, to create a new space for them is altogether a difficult task. They had to pass through many hardships, because women could not write and remain feminine without transgressing the norms set-up by patriarchal authority. Articulating the inconvenience an author has to accost in the Indian society, Anita Desai discloses in one of her interviews in “A Fortnightly Express Review” in *The New Indian Express*, “It was difficult to carve a place in which I could write. But it was also absolutely essential. I knew I had to do it” (Hiremath n.pag). She also promulgates the reason behind it: “I think I felt limited as a woman. As a woman I had to live a certain kind of life. I was somebody’s wife, somebody’s mother. But I felt I was never myself. Not myself -- writer”. (Hiremath n.pag) These afflicted words of the eminent writer throw enough light on the marginalized state of Indian women.

The women writers’ sense of peripheral position within a patriarchal society leads them to attempt experimentation in themes, style and techniques. They divulge a new shift in cultural expression, an invariably bold initiative in presenting taboo breaking themes like challenging tradition and encouraging transgression of traditional rules. Kamala Markandaya is one such competent writer who gave a definite tone and clear texture to the Indian Writing in English. She is an expatriate writer whose fiction envisages a greater variety in setting and characterization. Her themes are mostly East West encounter and the different roles of
women and how they are subjected to “binary pulls torn between tradition and modernity” (Miles 10) and the problems they encounter in the contemporary India in performing various roles like wife, mother, daughter, sister and their attempt to attain autonomy.

Anita Desai on the other hand, strikes a new trend in the arena of fiction writing. Instead of probing into the social and political issues, her novels take a challenging step into the female psyche utilizing a highly poetic and evocative language. Follow suit, Shashi Deshpande has also written moving stories of the marginalized women and her stories attest her as a literary miracle. Her novels unveil the jagged insight into human psyche. Special mention should be made of the veteran writer Shobha De who bursts into the literary world with the publication of her novel *Socialite Evenings* in 1998. Her portrayal of elemental passions and experimentation with the language has won for her a special place in the hearts of her readers. She can be claimed as the first to explore the world of modern women in India. The cardinal issue raised by Shobha De in her novel relates to power.

The richness and diversity of the present day Indian Writing get reflected in the works of the women writers like Amrita Pritam, Anita Nair and Mahasweta Devi. These writers with their high educational and intellectual standards have given a sharp edge to their observation. Their natural feminine sensibility has imparted to their observation a human
touch and psychological depth. These writers have adopted English as a tool to unravel in diverse ways, to express widely differing cultural experiences highlighting the real plight of the women in India. They have proved themselves as powerful chroniclers of contemporary India’s social and political life.

This list of adroit Indian women writers will prove incomplete if one fails to include the names of Arundhati Roy, Githa Hariharan and Kiran Desai. Indian Writing in English reached ascendancy with their valuable contribution, presented in a distinct style which has won the admiration and adulation of the West. The presage of James Joyce, that “the East shall shake the West awake” (qtd. in Chaturvedi 179) has come true with the literary contribution of these writers. Their creativity and novelty of presentation have enabled them to carve a unique and significant place in the realm of Indian English fiction. Among the chosen authors Arundhati Roy could demand the immediate global attention with her singular literary creation *The God of Small Things* which won for her the most covetous Booker Prize for the year 2007. Hariharan too attracted the attention of the literati by winning the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize for the best first book in 1993 for her *The Thousand Faces of Night* and many such accolades came on her way to assert her talent as a writer. Desai, the youngest of the three has appealed to the interest of the readers all over world with her
novel *The Inheritance of Loss*, which secured a permanent place for her in the arena of literature by bagging the Man Booker Prize for the year 2006.

The present study “Exploring Indian Culture: A Reading of Select Fictional Narratives of Arundhati Roy, Githa Hariharan and Kiran Desai” attempts to excavate the cultural aspects, one of the key issues of postcolonialism in the select fictional narratives of the chosen authors. Cultural studies is a recent area of research which favours the need to examine and relish a work of art in the backdrop of its culture. Culture is a complex term that includes all the activities of life both original and inherited in the course of one’s life. To define in the words of Tylor “Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (qtd. in Vatsyayan 174). Viewed under the light of this definition, one can presume the undeniable truth that man and culture are inseparable and it enables one to live in harmony with his surroundings. As such, it is true and logical to infer that literature is indeed an expression of the culture of a society and as the cultural critics claim a literary work should be examined “in the light of its political, social and historic background, or to put in brief in the light of one’s culture” (Davis 149). Cultural studies took its origin from human being’s interest and curiosity in understanding the background and environment which elevated his/her growth for ages.
It is the historical and social patterns of a country that determines the cultural richness of that country. India, being one of the traditionally richest countries has been exposed to various changing phenomenon, including its encounter with alien cultural patterns before and after independence. This exposure also brought forth both positive and negative impact on the country. This changing cultural phenomenon has registered a sea change in the social, political and historic scenario. Some cultural patterns of ancient India withstand the test of time and continue as they are the crux of a country’s tradition and ethnicity, whereas there are some others that are highly vulnerable to the changing social set-up, always open to adapt and change.

Arundhati Roy, Githa Hariharan and Kiran Desai are chosen for study because they have commendably and artistically painted on their literary canvas, India in three different decades, its cultural plurality, ethnicity and behavioral patterns. Being born in three different parts of the country, in different religious, linguistic, ethnic and social set-up, they could highlight the salient features of this multicultural and multilingual customs and traditions, both good and bad. They have been vulnerable to the changing social norms of their country in the postcolonial period and to some extent faithful in representing the various issues of their age.

Arundhati Roy has chiselled a niche in the treasure trough of Indian fiction in English. She occupies the second phase of the postcolonial fiction
writers and could join the list of eminent and world renowned writers with her single novel *The God of Small Things*. It is a major breakthrough in Indian fiction in English. She imparts an aura of freshness to Indian novel in English, with her unique style. Her initial endeavour has turned out to be a masterpiece and has succeeded in attracting the literary world in spite of its extreme local colour. It introduced Roy as a charming, humorous, strong-willed, independent, energetic, creative and fun loving lady. The much coveted Booker Prize that she won for her maiden literary attempt speaks volumes regarding her faculty as a creative writer par excellence and the credit of the first entirely home grown Indian to bag the prize goes to her too. Moreover *The God of Small Things* shattered all the past records in the sale of copies. The fastest selling Booker prize winner till then was Roddy Doyle’s *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* which won the award in 1993. Roy’s novel also enjoyed the privilege of being translated into nearly forty languages. This divulges the unexpected popularity this young novelist has won for her most unexpected work and as R.K.Dhawan has rightly commented that this novel “has put Ayemenam or rather India on the map of English-speaking world” (11).

The biography of Arundhati Roy helps one scrutinize and get a fair idea about her creation. Suzanna Arundhati Roy was born on 24th November 1961 in Shillong, Meghalaya. Similar to her protagonist Rahel, Roy herself is a product of cross-cultural marriage. Her mother Mary Roy
is a native of Kerala, a Christian, whereas her father is a Hindu from Bengal. Their marriage was an unsuccessful one. As a result, Roy had to spend her childhood in Aymanam with her mother. The early childhood influenced her writing and seep into her novel thematically and structurally.

The role her mother played in moulding Roy as an independent human being is not something that can be overlooked. She imbibed her concern for the society from her mother, who was a prominent social activist of her time. Mary Roy was also the founder of an independent school Corpus Christy which still is the much sought after school in Kerala. Roy also had her primary education there. Mary Roy displayed effrontery in challenging the patriarchal Syrian Christian society which denied equal rights to women in their fathers’ property. She created much uproar in the traditional Indian social set up by filing a public interest litigation against the Syrian Christian inheritance law that commented that a woman can inherit only one-fourth of her father’s property or five thousand rupees, whichever is less. The Supreme Court gave the verdict in favour of Mary Roy by pronouncing that a woman has equal share in her father’s property. This incident evidently proclaims that Roy has inherited the rebellious nature and a rare verve for affronting the traditional social norms from her intrepid mother.
Roy has been nurtured by her mother quite differently that she displayed unusual courage and has her say in anything and everything. She left home at the age of sixteen to Delhi and embarked on a homeless lifestyle, living in a small hut with tin roofs within the walls of Feroz Shah Kolta. There she lived by selling empty bottles. Later, she managed to enroll herself as a student of Architecture at the Delhi School of Architecture. It was there she met her first husband Gerald Da Cunha, an architect. The training that she received there pruned her creative ability and accelerated her planning and writing skill. Roy has confessed this in most of her interviews, whereby she likens the preparation for creating a plot for her novel to that of drawing plans for the building.

*The God of Small Things* is not the first piece of Roy’s creation. She started her literary career by writing screenplays. She wrote the script for the film *Electric Moon* and later she narrated her experience in the making of *Electric Moon* in the magazine *Sunday* and it was her first published work. This was followed by *In Which Annie Gives It Those Ones*, a film through which she also proved her faculty as an actress. It was her second husband Pradeep Krishen who made her appear in two of his films. Though this brought her fame, she soon realised that it was not her forte. Moreover, her criticism on Shekar Kapoor’s *Bandit Queen* invited controversy and Roy lost further opportunities in film field. It was this time that Roy began to write her worldly acclaimed novel to quench her soul which was
hankering for creativity and opportunely it lifted her to the status of a celebrity. She never dreamt of that her creation would bag such a wonderful success. She confessed that she was not at all confident about the creative excellence of her maiden fictional shot. But it was destined the other way. She forwarded her book to Pankaj Mishra, the author of the travel book *Butter Chicken in Ludhiana* whom she recently met. He was greatly impressed by the novel and so he propelled it to the British publisher with these words of extol: “I think I have found the new Rushdie. This is the biggest book since *Midnight’s Children*” (Rediff 3) – perhaps the greatest accolade that any novice could get.

Though *The God of Small Things* is the only novel penned by this talented writer, she has written various articles of social interest that proclaim Roy’s commitment to the society she lives in and her love and concern for humanity in general. One such article is “The End of Imagination” which was published in the magazine *Front Line* (14 Aug 1998). In the same year, she wrote another article on the similar theme which saw expression through the Malayalam daily *Mathruboomi*.

Roy has startled her readers through yet another article “The Greater Common Good” which was based on the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), a leading mass movement against the project in the valley for many years. These two essays “The End of Imagination” and “The Greater Common Good” are published as *The Cost of Living* in 1999. Another

The plethora of accolades and criticism that a writer invites, divulges the success of any writer. Viewed in this angle, Arundhati Roy can be claimed as the most successful writer as thousands of articles have emerged praising as well as reproving her literary skills. She also has to her
credit a number of awards. As mentioned before, she won the Booker Prize in the year 1997 for her debut novel *The God of Small Things*. Prior to this prestigious award, she also won the National Film Award for Best Screenplay in the year 1989 for the semiautobiographical screenplay *In Which Annie Gives It Those Ones*. Lannan Foundation’s Cultural Freedom Award was given to her in 2002 for writing about various political and social issues and her ongoing work in the struggle for freedom, justice and cultural diversity. In May 2004, she was awarded the Sydney Peace Prize for her work on social campaigns and her advocacy of non-violence. The Sahitya Akademi Award, a national award which is given to eminent literary personalities was given to her in January 2006 for her collection of essays on contemporary issues titled *The Algebra of Infinite Justice*. She declined to accept it as a protest against the Indian policies which fell in line with the U.S.

It is essential to know the story of the novel and the thought process of the artist in order to have a clear idea of the iconoclastic thematic and technical nuances that Roy has experimented in her novel. Set in a small village in Kerala, *The God of Small Things* (GST) is about one particular Syrian Christian family. The entire story is undraped briefly in the very first chapter. The story commences with the return of Rahel, the protagonist to her ancestral home and her reunion with her twin brother Estha after twenty three years. All the events in the narratives, centers
around the presence of Rahel in the village. The arrival of Sophie Mol, the twins’ cousin, her death by accident and the ill-fated love between the Ammu and Velutha form the nucleus of the novel. The novel is set in a typical rural landscape of Kerala. A cursory reading of the text gives the impression that the novel is quite simple, but a detailed study reveals the artistic ability of the author and it has a very complex plot. In brief, *The God of Small Things* portrays the broken home of Rahel. She fails to get the love and affection from her elders that a child so badly needs. Her emotional needs remain unfulfilled. Velutha, Ammu’s childhood friend is the only person to love these twins besides their mother. Quite ironically, they are deceived into giving false evidence when Velutha is arrested and he is brutally tortured to death. This incident destroys the family of Ammu beyond redemption, crushing the lives of the twins at bud itself. All who have read this novel will admit that though Roy has written only one novel, it is enough to give a real picture of India and it has succeeded in addressing the important issues of her country and its people.

The year 1954 became memorable in the field of literature due to the birth of the renowned writer Githa Hariharan. She is the predecessor of Arundhati Roy. She was born in a Brahmin household in Coimbatore, a town in Tamil Nadu. Her father was a journalist and her mother was devoted in bringing up her three children, including that of Hariharan. Her early days were spent in Bombay and Manila where she had her education.
and books were her only buddies during that period. She also got the privilege to pursue her higher education at Fairfield University, Connecticut, where she also worked as a staff writer in WNET- channel 13. However, in 1979, she returned to her motherland, where she continued to work as an editor in various cosmopolitan cities both in South and North India. She also got noticed as a freelance writer. Hariharan was fluky enough to identify at the early stage itself that she fits well in the realm of literature. She has strengthened her creative skills by reading voraciously. She started with Victorian classics and moved on to taste the Japanese novels. Her thirst for ravenous reading does not set her aloof from common man. She is very much vulnerable to human suffering especially that of her own sex which frequently finds place in her writings.

Hariharan also had training in Carnatic music which instilled in her an unending passion for music. This love for music finds outlets through several of her characters like Devi and Sita in her maiden novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* which also displays her reverence for Carnatic musicians like Muthu Swamy Dikshider and Thyagarajar. Though born in a traditional Brahmin family, where lots of restrictions are imposed upon women, Hariharan was fortunate enough to enjoy freedom. Her parents encouraged not only her reading habits, but also welcomed her indulging in discussions and arguments.
Hariharan started to fragrant the literary world of India with her debut novel *The Thousand Faces of Night*, which came out in 1992 where she talks for the redemption of womanhood by exposing the sufferings of women in three different generations. Here, one can evince the birth of a social activist, though she abhors to be branded as one. In the history of Indian Literature, one can come across several writers who have confronted with legal cases filed against them. For the first time in India, Hariharan hits a record by challenging the law which prevented women from being the guardians of their children. She filed a law suit in 1995 against the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act which was discriminatory and against women. She fought against this bigotry for years and could get victory after four years. In 1999, the Supreme Court gave verdict in favour of the author. This is an evidence for her consternation for the marginalized womenfolk. Hariharan divulges her concern not for womanhood alone, but humanity in general. She is a member of MIND (the Movement In India for Nuclear Disarmament) and this discloses her social commitment. When questioned about her role as a social activist she averred, “our work has to reflect the troubled times we are living in. the battering rams are at the door and we have to think of protecting the cushioned writer’s space” (Hindustantimes web).

Hariharan’s initial literary attempt *The Thousand Faces of Night* coloured her career as a writer and she was considered as an advocate of
women’s rights. However, being a versatile novelist she expressed her regrets over this kind of labelling in one of her interviews. She has articulated very clearly that she does not want herself to be “labeled, pigeonholed as a writer. Of course my concern with women’s issues continued, but I was uncomfortable about being patted on the back for being a woman who writes well about women” (Navarro and Tejrero 2). She further clarifies her concept of a writer thus: “I resent any attempts to ghettoize writers as women or Indians and so on…. But to me the whole point of being a writer, or a reader for that matter is to be able to travel to different sorts of issues, questions, landscapes, power struggles” (3). She discloses that she usually wrote novels about issues that provoked her and does not bother whether her protagonists are male or female.

Hariharan has tried her hand in writing almost all genres namely novels, short stories, essays, newspaper articles and columns and it lays bare the versatility of Hariharan as an artist. However, she has been known to the world as a novelist as some of the novels written by her have taken even the Indian English Writing to the global market. Her oeuvre includes *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992), *The Ghost of Vasu Master* (1994), *When Dreams Travel* (1999), *In Times of Siege* (2003) and the latest to add to this list is *Fugitive Histories* (2009). Hariharan has also committed to paper number of short stories with innumerable themes and they emerged out as a collection titled *The Art of Dying* in the year 1993. The collection
contains twenty carefully written stories with diverse themes, both serious and humorous, displaying the kaleidoscopic variety of human emotions.

Hariharan has also written enticing stories for children which appeared under the title *The Winning Team* in 2004. It contains ten stories that deal with different kinds of people and they are sure to move the children who laugh, cry and get puzzled with its characters. She has edited a volume of stories in English which are translations from the major South Indian languages and it appeared under the title *The Southern Harvest* (1993). It contains sixteen brilliant and evocative stories that address the ground-level realities of poverty and powerlessness. She has co-edited a collection of stories for children *Sorry, Best Friend* (1997).


Hariharan’s essays and short stories have appeared in various journals and anthologies. To mention some of them are: In Other Words, New Writing by Indian Women, Into the Nineties, Post-Colonial Women’s Writing, Conjunctions, The New Internationalist, The Arnold Anthology of Post-Colonial Literatures in English, Feast! Women Write About Food, Enigmas and Arrivals, An Anthology of Commonwealth Writing, The Vintage Book of Indian Writing 1947-1997, The Writer’s Path, An Introduction to Short Fiction, Imaging the Other, Best Loved Indian Stories, Options, Women and Media Collective, The Fiction Collection 1: 20 Years of Penguin India, “Diablo Baby” in the Kenyon Review, and so on. Her short story “A Night with Scheherazade,” was also aired on The Sound of Writing, National Public Radio, Washington D.C., 1996. She writes nowadays a regular column for the major Indian newspaper The Telegraph and has been a visiting professor and Writer-in-Residence in several universities, including Dartmouth College and George Washington University in the US, the University of Canterbury at Kent in the UK and Jamia Milia Islamia in India.

The lists of fictional and non-fictional narratives assert Hariharan’s dexterity as a writer and her experience as a resourceful writer have equipped her to accept praise and disparagement with the same poise. She
is not swayed either by praise or by criticism. She confesses that recognition “is good, but it was not going to change my agenda as a writer, nor was criticism going to stop me from writing” (Navarro and Tejero 6). Her debut novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* has proclaimed her creativity as a writer by bagging the Commonwealth Writers’ prize for the best first book in 1993. The book was also nominated for the IMPAC award in 1996. The story “The Warden” from *The Art of Dying* was nominated for the Pushcart Prize in 1995. *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* was nominated for the Commonwealth Writers Prize in 1995 whereas *When Dreams Travel* was nominated for the Booker Prize in 1999. *In Times of Siege* was shortlisted for the Eurasian section of the Commonwealth Writers Prize 2004 and it was also nominated for the Kiriyama Prize in 2004. The prowess of a writer can also be evinced in the number of translations his/her work invites. Hariharan’s works have been translated into a number of languages including French, Italian, Spanish, German, Dutch, Greek, Urdu and Vietnamese.

As the study aims at probing the culture of India in the select fictional narratives, the first four novels of Hariharan namely *The Thousand Faces of Night, The Ghost of Vasu Master, When Dreams Travel* and *In Times of Siege* are chosen. For the clear understanding, it is *de rigueur* to analyse the story of these novels. The debut novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* itself has turned out to be a trend setter for Hariharan. Quite
interestingly, the novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* (TFN) commences with the *Vachana* of Devara Dasimayya which was translated by A.K.Ramanujan. It is set in a South Indian Brahmin household and it is from here that Hariharan tries to unravel the problems confronted by three generations of women namely Sita, Mayamma and Devi. The novel commences with the protagonist Devi’s return to her mother in Chennai from the USA. She returns to her motherland by renouncing her offer of marriage from her black friend Dan because of her ardent love for her mother Sita who enjoys complete power over her daughter. On her return, Sita arranges marriage for Devi with Mahesh, a typical male-chauvinist. He cares very little for the feeling of Devi. Failing to give birth to a child, Devi considers her life futile. The servant Mayamma and her father-in-law are the only comforts, but when her loneliness becomes unbearable, she elopes with Gopal, a singer, but he too lets her down. Ultimately, she takes refuge once again on the lap of her mother or in other words, back to her culture and ethnicity. In weaving the story of Devi, Hariharan also narrates the struggle put forth by Mayamma and Sita who belong to the previous generations and explicates how the way of responding to the patriarchy by each of these women differs much from that of the other.

Hariharan’s second literary creation *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* (GVM) is evaluated by her critics as a difficult novel. It narrates quite a different tale. It is an extraordinary moving tale of a school teacher who is
very often baffled with the philosophy of life. The novel commences with Vasu Master’s retirement and his physical ailments. The novel takes a new turn when the “papaya headed” Mani, a mentally retarded boy comes to him seeking knowledge. He proves to be the biggest challenge for Vasu Master as he neither talks nor behaves like a human being. His beastly behaviour forces even his parents to forsake him. As a last source of refuge he has been brought to Vasu Master who accepts him both as a challenge and a way out to his lonely superannuated life. It helps him to seek self realization. Hariharan has sought the aid of the Panchatantra, a fountainhead of wisdom to bring together her characters and these stories in addition to embellish the fiction, act as a thought provoker to her readers. The novelist also employs the innovative technique of leaving her novel open ended, not divulging whether the protagonist succeeded in healing the boy which gives room for further interpretations on the part of her readers.

Hariharan takes her author’s feet from her familiar traditional Brahmin locality and plants them in an altogether alien country in her third novel When Dreams Travel (WT) which was published in 1999. However, like her maiden novel The Thousand Faces of Night, When Dreams Travel also attempts to unravel the power struggle women are entrapped into. But it is not delivered as lightly as her first novel. The author herself has commented about the difficulty of reading this novel. She remarks that it is
“like Chinese boxes – you keep making smaller and smaller boxes and even that does not lead you to the heart of things” (Kagal 42). It is indeed true that the readers feel like walking through a maze.

_When Dreams Travel_ is basically a re-narration of the legendary fiction _The Arabian Nights_ which unfolds the story of Scheherazade, whom Hariharan presents as Shahrzad. She and her sister Dunyazad married the brothers Sultan Shahryar and Shahzaman. Shahryar was once cuckolded by his wife and to avenge his wife and prevent another woman deceiving him, he ravishes a virgin every night and beheads her in the morning. Finally, Shahrzad, his wife manages to put an end to this practice through her wit with which she narrates amusing stories for thousand and one nights. _The Arabian Nights_ ends here with the conversion of Shahryar who is enthralled by these stories, rectifies his deadly deed and begins to live happily with Shahrzad. The story of Hariharan begins here. She raises the valid question, how a woman could live happily with such a man as Shahryar. She uses her creativity to find out what would have happened to Shahrzad after her thousand and one nights. She switches over to the next part where Shahrzad’s sister Dunyazad comes to investigate her sister’s mysterious death. She is helped by a servant named Dilshad. But she lives as if in a trance, in which she undergoes a travel along with Dilshad. They spent seven nights in a dilapidated mansion along with the spirit of
Shahrzad. They narrate stories and in fact these stories give a clue to the readers about what would have happened to Shahrzad.

*In Times of Siege* (TS) is the first book to be published by the major U.S publishing house [Vintage] in 2003. *In Times of Siege* unfolds the story of a middle aged college professor Shiv Murthy. The locale of the story is mostly college campuses, a very familiar one for the author, who herself is a professor. *In Times of Siege* holds an uncompromising mirror to Indian social life where everyone is vulnerable and can experience and encounter a time of siege. Shiv Murthy, a fifty two year old history professor is the protagonist of this novel. In the absence Rekha, his wife, Meena, Shiv’s ward calls on him for help, telling that she has fractured her leg. The arrival of Meena stirs his mind and creates ripples of strange feelings in him. Meanwhile, his lesson on the twelfth century poet and reformer Basava creates much uproar by the so called social movement *Ithikas Suraksha Manch*. They make allegations against Shiv that he has hurt the sentiments of the Hindus. He tackles the situation with the help of Meena and her friends. Shiv’s affection for the girl increases, but by this time she recovers from her illness. Shiv apprehends the toe-curling reality that soon the girl who made him a hero will leave him and his wife Rekha who exercised full command over him will soon resume her position. Still, Meena will be there in a quiet corner of his heart for ever and the novel ends with the protagonist waiting for his wife’s return.
*Fugitive Histories* is the latest creation of Hariharan which came out in the year 2009. Though it is not chosen for study, it is inevitable to know story line of this novel for the better understanding of its author. It unravels the thoughts and experiences of three women namely Mala, Sara and Yasmeen. The story begins in Delhi where Mala lives alone after the death of her husband Azad. His sketches and scrap books help her recollect her past with him. They remind her of the hardships a Brahmin woman has undergone for marrying a Muslim man Azad who has renounced all religions. Their daughter Sara, quite unlike her brother is confronted with the multicultural challenges of her society, and unable to choose between her parents’ culture and religion, struggles for her own identity. Hariharan also portrays the story of another girl named Yasmeen who survives the communal riot and faces so many misfortunes. Yet, she shows rare vigour in overcoming the hurdles with the help of her mother and strives to achieve her dream of coming up in life through education. Though the novel does not have a story per se, the thoughts and emotions of the three women protagonists are wonderfully portrayed by Hariharan which demands appreciation.

Kiran Desai, the youngest of the trio chosen for study, has established herself as a promising Indian writer with her maiden attempt *The Hullaballoo in the Guava Orchard*. It announced to the literary world the arrival of a stunning new voice and as exclaimed by Rushdie a
“welcome proof that India’s encounter with the English language continues to give birth to new children, endowed with lavish gifts”(The Richmond Review.com). Kiran Desai was born in New Delhi on September 3, 1971. She is the youngest of the four children. Her mother Anita Desai, who is a well renowned writer, had a German mother and Indian father. Kiran Desai spent only fourteen years of her childhood in India. She was taken to the United States as her family moved there. The early years of Kiran were spent by listening to her mother talking about literature and the art of writing and it had unfathomable influence on her. As a youngster, Kiran Desai was fascinated by the writings of Trumen Capote, Tennessee Williams, Flannery O’Connor, Ichiguru, Kenzaburo Oe, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Juan Rulfo and R.K.Narayan. She finished her schooling in Massachusetts. This was followed by her college education at Bennington College in Vermont and Hollins University in Virginia. By this time, her flair for creative writing has taken roots. This led her to Columbia University, New York where she studied creative writing. At present she lives in Brooklyn, New York. She also makes frequent visits to India, as she owns the citizenship of both America and India.

While she was doing a course on creative studies that she drafted her first novel The Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard which was published in 1998. Talking about her first writing experience, Kiran Desai confesses “Writing for me means humility. It’s a process that involves fear and doubt
especially if you’re writing honestly” (Biography web). The book very explicitly reveals her apprehension of Indian culture and subtleties and nuances of the Indian life. Though *The Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* is her first novel, she came to limelight as a writer in 1977 itself with her article published in the *New Yorker* and in *Mirror Work*, a conventional anthology of 50 years of Indian writing edited by Salman Rushdie. This article earned appreciation from eminent writers like Salman Rushdie who extolled her creativity to heights. Though she was introduced as the daughter of Anita Desai, Kiran could establish with her first novel a unique style for herself – a style quite distinct from that of her mother. In life also, Kiran has chosen her own style. She does not want to get married and beget children for she claims “If I had a child, I’d have to break out of it and be sweet. But as a writer, I am trying to understand hate and anger” (Kumar 73).

*The Inheritance of Loss* which came out after eight years in 2006 that widely announced her entry into the realm of literature. It has changed her life beyond expectation. It enabled her to taste the victory that came in her way in the form of the Man Booker Prize, the most prestigious award which deluded her mother twice. This unpredictability of winning awards made Kiran comment on awards as “Awards are such a lottery. … You see behind the scenes and you become conscious of how much awards are down to luck” (Biography web).
Kiran Desai’s *The Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (HGO) has proclaimed herself as a good story teller. The novel is set in a small town called Shahkot. It narrates the story of Sampath Chawla. Sampath’s mother Kulfy is an eccentric woman. In the terrible hot summer season, when everyone is frantically craving for rain Kulfi gives birth to Sampath, who brings with him the long awaited rain. This made the people of this village believe that he is a divine boy with unusual talents. As he grows up, his father is shocked to witness that his life is a continuation of failures – failure at school and at work. In spite of his idiosyncrasies, the family except the father adores him as he is the only boy child of their household. Sampath manages to get a job at the post office, but unable to find satisfaction both from home and office he dodges to a guava orchard. He spends his time over there by snoozing and musing. His life on the guava tree replenishes his mind with an extraordinary peace that lends him a distinct calmness and holiness. Witnessing such a change in Sampath’s character, he is misconstrued as a great saint. People begin to visit him in great numbers and he too proves their notion by revealing the secrets of their life, which come to his knowledge by reading their letters stealthily at the post office. Once when Sampath settles down on the guava tree, he is joined by a horde of followers, including his family who try to commercialize his presence atop the tree. Soon a group of monkeys addicted to alcohol take refuge in the forest which spoils the peace of the
place. Chawla, Sampath’s father takes measures to send these langor away. In the climax the monkeys are chased out and in between this, Sampath undergoes metamorphoses and is turned into a guava of unusual size, with which the monkeys flee form the furore.

Quite innovatively *The Inheritance of Loss* (IL) is set in two different continents namely North East India and The United States of America. It moves very quickly between the beautiful Kalimpong at a time when it was caught in the throes of a separatist movement and the immigrant quarters in New York. The fiction begins in Kalimpong where the retired judge Jemubhai lives along with his granddaughter Sai Mistry and a dog called Mutt, the only living thing loved by the judge and the cook. These three people live at the house called Cho Oyu, in separate shells and share only one thing in common namely loneliness. The protagonist Sai comes to Cho Oyu after the death of her parents. However, her return to her grandfather aggravates her loneliness. She gets affection only from the cook, that too very minimal, as all his love is devoted towards his son who works in the New York city. When Gyan, the Nepali Gorkha, her tutor shows some concern on her, she falls in love with him. This relationship also swerves futile with the Gorkha agitation. Meanwhile, Biju, the cook’s son apprehends his life quite miserable in the United States. When humiliation reaches its culmination, Biju resolves to return to his motherland with his hard earned money, with a dream of leading a
peaceful and happy life with his father. But this simple desire and dream also get shattered as the Gorkha agitators snatch him of all his properties and even his identity. The novel justifies its title by portraying a series of losses. Her characters inherit loss only knowingly or unknowingly. Feeling the urge to give a positive tone and hope to her readers, Desai ends it with a loving reunion of the father and the son at the time of sunrise which implicates that there is still hope for a better life.

Being well renowned authors, the writings of Roy, Hariharan and Desai have been widely discussed and studied in detail in literary circles all over the world. As part of probing into the Indian culture and its diverse cultural patterns, many critics have focused their attention on the unraveling of Indianness in these writers. Among them mention should be made of A.K.Dhawan who brought out an anthology titled Arundhati Roy: The Novelist Extraordinary that delves into detail the various facets of Roy’s creation The God of Small Things, starting from its creation to release and enlisting a series of study on it by eminent critics of the time. Meamy Raphael, another critic has analysed on the problem of survival in a third world country like India in her article “Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things: An Existential Perspective”. As Roy’s novel mainly focused on the social inequality that existed in the name of caste and gender, it invited a plethora of studies on this issue. While Janet Wilson has authored an article titled “Plural Voices of Marginality in Arundhati Roy’s The God
“The Cultural Milieu of Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*”. The impact of colonialism on India has been an interesting area of study in Roy’s novel and among the various articles that emerged out on this topic, mention should be made of Alex Tickell’s “*The God of Small Things: Arundhati Roy’s Post Colonial Cosmopolitanism*”.

Similarly, Githa Hariharan’s novels have also ostensibly invited plethora of critical acclamation. Her maiden attempt *The Thousand Faces of Night* having focused on the contemporary status of Indian women resulted in the emergence of numerous articles highlighting the patriarchal social set up of India as in the case of J.Yellaiah and G.Pratima’s “‘Inside and out There’: Male Constructs and Female Choices in Githa Hariharan’s *The Thousand Faces of Night*” and S.Indira’s “Walking the Tight Rope: A Reading of Githa Hariharan’s *The Thousand Faces of Night*”. Hariharan’s technique of presenting the issues of women through myths welcomed article such as Monika Gupta’s “Myth and Religion in Githa Hariharan’s *The Thousand Faces of Night*”. Hariharan’s other fictional narratives also invited abundant critical appraisals. Among them Carmen Kagal’s “Fantasy Unlimited”, Rama Kundu’s “Githa Hariharan: Intertext, Metafiction and Her Story”, Martina Ghosh’s “Fundoos with Zero Tolerance, Nowtej Sarna’s “Oh! For the Realms of the Spirit”, Veena
Seshadri’s “Overloaded with Messages” are a few that deserve to be mentioned.

Kiran Desai’s two novels have invited surplus of critical acclamations quite unlike before. Her debut literary creation *The Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* called out articles like Simon Carnell’s “Out on a Limb in India”, Shirley Chew’s “The Wiseman Sitting in a Tree”, Rick Hosking’s “Guru in a Beanie in a Guava”, Satendra Kumar’s “Kiran Desai’s *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*: An Expression of Indianness” and so on. Desai’s second novel *The Inheritance of Loss* shattered the world with the eruption of articles that came out mostly to praise the young author. Displacement being one of the main themes, number of articles like Tessa Hadley’s “Exotic to Whom”, Santwana Haldar’s “Exile in Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*” and Tejinder Kaur’s “Problematizing Issues About Home, Homeland, Diaspora and Belongingness in Transnational and National Lands: A Study of Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*” were published on this theme. Some were really interested to dig out the presence of the Indianness in this expatriate writer’s work and this resulted in the publication of articles such as Shyamala A. Narayan’s “India and the USA in Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*”, Helen Stevenson’s “Taste of India Lacks Vital Ingredient”, Kirishna Singh’s “Representation of India in Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*” and so on.
The review of literature thus unveils what a lot of articles and studies these writers have invoked. There are yet more writers who find similarity with more than one novelist, irrespective of the time, which includes both national and transnational authors and have published articles on them. Among them, A.G.Khan feels a similarity between Arundhati Roy and Githa Hariharan which has been recorded in the article “Wrinkled Youth and Pickled Future: Comparing Githa Hariharan and Kiran Desai”. Among these three novelists chosen for study, Arundhati Roy has invited many comparative analyses. Her writing has been compared with Mulk Raj Anand, Amitav Ghosh, Manju Kapoor, Salman Rushdie, Tony Morrison, Margaret Laurence, Shashi Deshpande and even with D.H.Lawrence with respect to the treatment of themes and style. Whereas, Githa Hariharan’s fiction has been compared and studied with that of Aikath Gyaltsen and Bharati Mukerjee. Kiran Desai has scarcely been compared to any contemporary or classic writer and stands unique.

Thus, the creative excellences of Roy, Hariharan and Desai have invited such a lot of studies on divergent themes and style on the individual authors. However, it should be mentioned that no research has been done so far on the works of the three writers together. Hence it is a viable area for research. Moreover, culture studies is a current area of interest that offers new scope and dimension to any literary creation. The principal factor that necessitated such a study on these chosen authors is due to the
fact that different writers living in different parts of India, brought up in diverse cultural backdrop perceive the change in the cultural and social scenario of India in different perspectives and present them to their readers. Such representation facilitates one to have a vivid knowledge of India in all her variety and splendour.

The present study being an expedition on Indian culture, it focuses on the novels of these chosen writers, belonging to different strata of society to explore the richness, diversity, greatness and shortcomings of India, its culture and tradition from a multiple point of view. This study also aims to achieve self-realization, development and amendment of vices, if any, seen in the contemporary Indian society and its culture. The writers chosen for study have done justice to their creative talent in exposing the unique cultural practices, the relevance of Indian myths in governing the life of the Indians, their plural cultural patterns, its diasporas and so on. Instead of blindly praising their country and its culture, they have also included in their novels the social vices of contemporary India including various types of discrimination and unhealthy cultural practices like dowry system. This is due to their belief that reviling their vices will only pave way for eradicating the vices of their country and thus they believe they can contribute their share to take India towards the path of glory. Highlighting India and its historical, social, political and philosophical essence, or to put it in a nutshell to promulgate faithfully the true culture of
India to the world and its global readers are the primary aim of this study. For this purpose different theories of postcolonial criticism and cultural studies have been employed in the study.

The dissertation titled “Exploring Indian Culture: A Reading of Select Fictional Narratives of Arundhati Roy, Githa Hariharan and Kiran Desai” endeavours to explore the diverse cultural and behavioral patterns of India, a rich country, its confrontation with the globalized world, and the impact that colonization has on its already pluralized culture on the backdrop of unraveling their fictional creations. This being the scope of the dissertation, various cultural codes of behaviour, both native and foreign, their impact and influence on the people have been faithfully analysed as presented by these authors under the title “Mores and Modes” in chapter two. It also discusses at length the relevance of Indian myth, the unique religious and ethnic practices of people of India, its virtue and vice, the effects of globalization, and how it has brought forth and encourages migration and thereby tries to evolve a diasporic culture across the globe. A punctilious perusal of Roy, Hariharan and Desai also brings out the essential truth that culture can never remain static and untouched by time, the greatest agent of change. The factors discussed in the chapter accentuate the need to review literature on the basis of its social and cultural milieu.
Culture studies is one of the chief concerns of Postcolonial criticism. “The post colonial criticism witnesses the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for social authority within the modern world order” (Bhabha 245). The contest of race, religion, class, caste over one another and the identity crisis they bring on their way are all central to cultural studies. India being a multicultural country, one can witness people of different class, religion, race living together and in such a society clashes can be a common phenomenon and in the struggle for existence, the weak are impelled to the margin. The centre-margin paradigm is a very common issue in all the postcolonial literature and one can evince the same issue being highlighted by the chosen authors. The third chapter “Subdued Voices” forges to analyse various issues of the marginalized sector of the Indian society, and probes the reason for this marginalization. Roy, Hariharan and Desai have unanimously presented in their writings how hegemony and oppression are the two sides of the same coin that exist irrespectively across India. They also faithfully pronounce their contempt against this unjust hegemony and alert their readers all over the globe saying that anyone who subsists in the centre can be thrown to periphery and everyone is vulnerable here.

In all societies, there is a power play between the genders, one trying to dominate the other. In India, it is the male who exercises hegemony over the female and this cultural practice is called patriarchy.
The problems that the patriarchal culture in India has brought about and the status of women are dealt with in detail under the title “Struggling Sex” in chapter four. Roy, Hariharan and Desai show no reluctance in admitting that marriage is the social institution that nurtures and nourishes patriarchy in the Indian soil. It imprisons woman within the walls of her family, which strangles and hinders her mobility, reduces her identify and self-respect and brings in suffering and loneliness as her only companions. The chosen authors make strenuous effort to awaken women from their passive existence, urge them to recuperate and break the walls of cultural bondage and spring out victories. They also provide their readers with sufficient women protagonists who can be successfully emulated in the real life and thus they sow the seeds of great cultural change.

Findings of the study are registered in the concluding chapter “Summation” which also recounts the findings of the forgoing chapters. The limitations of the research and the areas which can yet be explored in the novels of these chosen authors Roy, Hariharan and Desai are also discussed in this chapter.

The methodology used in the preparation of the thesis is in accordance with *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (Seventh Edition).