Chapter V: CONCLUSION
The elaborate study of gender and textuality as these are constructed by the imperialist/colonial modes of perception helps to reconstruct the feminist and post-colonial debates on representation and identity. “Masks of Conquest” by Gauri Viswanathan follows modern English studies to their colonial origins. The book shows that English literary study was in place before its institutionalization in England and had its beginnings as a strategy for managing the colony. The author shows that English literature is tied up in the politics of the British Empire while also challenging modern assumptions about canon creation and the modern study of literature. The question of subjectivity lies at the heart of any exploration of political and cultural resistance, and the rejection of enlightenment notion of selfhood is a particularly significant issue for colonial subjects. The development of influential theories of subject construction by ideology discourse and language in work of Althusser, Foucault and Lacan seems to provide very effective models for the construction of colonial subject by a dominant imperial culture.

It is no wonder that a number of postcolonial feminists have questioned the relationship between the woman and the postcolonial, one subaltern subject with another. In her essay "A Feminist Approach to African Literature," Kristen Holt Petersen asks, "which is the more important, which comes first, the fight for female equality or the fight against Western cultural imperialism?" This question is further problematized when education and language are mixed into the complexity of identities and their constructed hierarchies as channelled
and/or policed by colonial discourse, which transforms into the norm and thus generates stereotypes, alliances and biases within the native community. In this sense, women's positioning in the colonial and postcolonial worlds and subsequently produced texts are riddled with the polemics of subaltern identity, and are doubly difficult to break away from. When women in the East are reluctantly allowed a voice in the patriarchal dialogism of the West, notes Chandra Talpade Mohanty, they are marked by the modifier "third world," which carries with it an implicit stigma of "less than" subsequently, as noted by British scholar Terry Eagleton the plight of women in such societies, forced as they are to assume many of its most wretched burdens, has resulted in a peculiarly fruitful alliance between feminism and post colonialism. It is no wonder then that many prominent postcolonial theorists are women, and most discussions of the subaltern subject inextricably involve a discussion of the (dis)placement of women in colonial/postcolonial/neocolonial contexts.

McClintock, Anne argues in her book *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* that, race, gender and class are not distinct realms of experience, existing in splendid isolation from each other but come into existence in and through relation to each other in contradictory and conflictual ways. According McClintock men and women did not experience imperialism in the same way" and that intra-gender relations were important, as well. Anne McClintock explores the sexualizing of the terra incognita, the imperial myth of the empty lands, the dirt fetish and the "civilizing mission", sexuality and
labour, advertising and commodity racism, the Victorian invention of the idle woman, feminism and racial difference, and anti-apartheid culture in the current transformation of national power.

Using feminist, post-colonial, psychoanalytic and socialist theories, *Imperial Leather* argues that the categories of gender, race and class do not exist in isolation, but emerge in intimate relation to one another. Drawing on diverse cultural forms—novels, advertising, diaries, poetry, oral history, and mass commodity spectacle—the book examines imperialism not only as a poetics of ambivalence, but as a politics of violence. Rejecting traditional binaries of self/other, man/woman, colonizer/colonized, Anne McClintock calls instead for a more informed and complex understanding of categories of social power and identity.

The appearance of woman in the field of literature is a significant fact and the advent of female literature promises woman's view of life, woman's experience; in other words a new element. Within the present cultural-theoretical discussion, the postcolonial discourse has gained much visibility and influence. Ever since the collapse of colonialism, cultures that were formerly European colonies can be seen working to define themselves outside the boundaries of colonialism. Focusing on critical discourses like postmodernism, feminism and multiculturalism which rise from the specifically Western socio-political content, the post-colonial theory enables us to pose questions related to identity, race, gender and ethnicity.

As the post-colonial discourse seeks to “reinstate the marginalised in the face of the dominant,” the acknowledgement of women's
experience, the focus on the indifference towards gender issues and the quest for identity become significant aspects of post-colonial thought and fiction. Feminism and post colonialism share a common concern for voicing the position of the subaltern in society and engendering feminist consciousness in reaction to male paradigms of female experience. As Rosalind Miles remarks that the task of interpretation of women's experience cannot be left to male writers alone, however sympathetic they may be the female perspective, expressed through women's writings of all kinds is more than a valuable corrective to an all male view of the universe.

The emphasis in the postcolonial reading is on the idea of texuality for it argues that the colonial text contradicts its underlying assumptions such as civilization, justice, aesthetics, sensibility, gender etc. post colonial critics offer a re-reading of the authoritative colonial text and interrogate their underlying assumptions about culture and identity in the terms of texuality. Gender constructions of female subjectivity is a very central issue in contemporary theorist of postcoloniality, the most controversial and provocative arguments in this respect are offered by Gayatri C. Spivak, in her famous essay, “Three Women’s Text and a Critique of Imperialism” she argues that the need to recover the lost voices of subaltern is immensely urgent from a post colonial point of view. But a very lucid account of the women as colonised subject is at the centre of Ania Loomba’s work, *Colonialism/Post Colonialism* in 1998.
Though women have been official storytellers to generations, much of world literature had been dominated by a canon that dismissed women's writings as inconsequential a few centuries ago. Women writers whether post-colonial or not have always been marginalised and excluded from the literary canon, they are treated as “colonies” in a male-dominated value system. Their work has been undervalued due to patriarchal assumptions about the superior worth of male experience because they were presumed to write within the enclosed domestic space and women's perceptions of their experience within it and therefore, rank below the works of male writers who deal with weightier themes. However, with the collapse of colonialism and focus on feminist discourse we can see the emergence of several counter canons, resulting as a reaction against this exclusion, which has helped to establish women's writing in mainstream literature. Women writers today, reveal the disconnection between what the women said and what they wrote, between their spoken words and their silences, between women as the subject matter of writing and women subjects and writers, between language, literature and social movements and the emergence of women's voices. Thus, their fiction aims at developing new definitions of power and stresses those women’s values, centred on life giving, must be revalued.

Contemporary women writers through their fiction have chosen to talk back, moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited and those who stand and struggle side by side, a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth
possible. It is that act of speech, of 'talking back,' that is no mere gesture of empty words that is the expression of a movement from object to subject—the liberated voice.

In almost all the literatures of the world, the women writers are transcending the boundaries and making their presence felt on the international stage. The brilliant constellation of women writers includes Doris Lessing the Nobel Laureate for Literature 2007 and Nadine Gordimer, the Nobel Prize winner in 1991, both from Africa; Toni Morrison, the Nobel Prize winner in 1993 from America; Jane Austen from Britain, whose Pride and Prejudice topped a survey of the greatest women writers; Margaret Atwood, the Booker Prize winner for the year 2003 and many more in the earlier years; Margaret Laurence, Alice Munro, the distinctive women writers dominating the literature of Canada; and Inez Baranay from Australia. It also includes Indian women writers, namely Kiran Desai, the Man Booker Prize winner in 2006; Manju Kapur, the winner of Commonwealth Prize; Jhumpa Lahiri, the winner of year 2000 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction; Anita Desai, thrice shortlisted for the Booker Prize; Shashi Deshpande, the Sahitya Akademi winner in 1990 and Anita Nair who has been tipped as the most promising young writer of the time. Taslima Nasrin controversial Bangladeshi novelist who has also received many awards; Monica Ali, also from Bangladesh, who has been judged the winner of Grant’s Best of Young British Novelists; Bapsi Sidhwa, "Pakistan's finest English language novelist" and the recipient of Sitara-i-Imtiaz and Tehmina Durrani, another Pakistani writer who won the Italian Marrissa
Post-colonial Feminist Literature has unravelled the layers of misinterpretations of traditions and religions. The more traditional post-colonial society is, the more problematic the question of women's emancipation is and therefore, more passionate its women writers are and their works can be characterised as feminist treatises. In the recent years Austen has been valued particularly by the feminist critics who have appreciated the high intelligence of her heroines. Her emphasis on the reality of women's lives reveals the subservient position of women and explores the issues of gender that explore the male and female power.

Recent Indian writers depict both the diversity of women and the diversity within each woman, rather than limiting the lives of women to one ideal. The novels emerging in the twenty first century furnish examples of a whole range of attitudes towards the imposition of tradition, some offering an analysis of the family structure and the caste system as the key elements of patriarchal social organization. They also re-interpret mythology by using new symbols and subverting the canonic versions. In short, the work of Indian women writers is significant in making society aware of women's demands, and in providing a medium for self-expression and representation. Similarly in ‘Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses’ Chandra Talpade Mohanty has criticised a tendency in western feminist scholarship to ‘colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the Third World’. The assumption of ‘women as an oppressed group’ is situated in the context of western feminist writing about third
world women. Third world women never rise above the debilitating
generality of their ‘object’ status which are continuously represented by
western feminists in their self-representation in the same context made
them ‘subjects’ of this counter-history. In other words, Western feminist
discourse, by assuming women as a coherent, already constituted group
which is placed in kinship, legal and other structures, defines third world
women as subjects outside of social relations, instead of looking at the
way women are constituted as women through these very structures.
Legal, economic, religious and familial structures are treated as
phenomena to be judged by western standards. When these structures are
defined as ‘underdeveloped’ or ‘developing’ and women are placed
within these structures, an implicit image of the ‘average third world
women’ is produced. This is the transformation of the (implicitly
western) ‘oppressed women’ in to the ‘oppressed third world women’.
While the category of ‘oppressed woman’ is generated through exclusive
focus on gender difference ‘the oppressed third world woman’ category
has an additional attribute – the ‘third-world differences’! The ‘third
world difference’ includes a paternalistic attitude towards women in the
third world. Third world women as a group or category are automatically
and necessarily defined as: religious but not progressive, family oriented
and traditional, legal minors who is still not conscious of their rights,
iliterate and ignorant, domestic and backward and sometimes
revolutionary. This is how the ‘third-world difference’ is produced. The
third world women though have experience and vocabulary of their own
but: they cannot represent themselves; they must be represented. It is
Spivak's who uses” gendered subaltern” for such condition in order to challenge all those special knowledge systems which seek to regulate and articulate the colonized gender. Postcolonial feminists criticize Western feminists because they have a history of universalizing women’s issues, and their discourses are often misunderstood to represent women globally.

The universalization of theories, without the consideration to experience or adequate research but about an identity of women based on their own personal experiences as universal is problematic because there is never a singular identity of women; there are always many identities in place at every single point in time, which may transform over time as well e.g. religious, political, social identities. Total disregard for the ability to generalize will lead to the impossibility of formulating theories which could help to understand the role of women in societies.

To sum up gender is primarily an act of signification or representation. Gender is a matter of choice, of picking up and discarding identities at will. The flow lies in its failure to take into account the contradictory mode in which we inhabit our sense of gender, not as an identity that we freely embrace, but one that we also struggle against, that sustains us at the same time as it constrains us. Like the everyday use of language from which it partly derives, gender underpins our capacity to make decisions and act upon them, while constantly slipping out of our control and ensnaring us in complex web of meaning that no single individual can ever hope to master. But the false image of
the subject who selects her gender for herself is at least correct in suggesting that there are many genders.

*Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India,* this book would have been written to very little purpose if such conclusions were drawn. Conceptions of the British literary curriculum as unmediated assertion of cultural power, which Gauri Viswanathan have argued against throughout, are partly responsible for promoting the illusion of historical continuity in that they systematically ignore the continual modifications of British educational goals and the strategic manoeuvring that produced English studies in India. The relation between past and present Indian education is no more straightforward than the one between educational developments in nineteenth-century England and India or for that matter, between the British Empire and the practice of the humanities today. This is not to say that there is no connection at all of course there is but that connection is no more readily understood through cause-effect explanations than by a global theory that presumes to account for the features of one in terms of the other. There are no simple lessons to be derived from this history, least of all the lesson that imperialism can be swiftly undone merely by hurling away the texts it institutionalized. The English curriculum and their texts were used at one time to supply religious values that could be introduced into the British control of India in no other way. The blurring and questioning of gender role is a persistent feature of postcolonial novels; the distinctions between male and female, white and black, consumers and consumed, moral and immoral, are repeatedly constructed and
deconstructed. The heroine’s selves are multiple, and are cast in different perspectives depending on the context and the audience to which she responds. This sense of a shifting and problematic identity is linked to the awareness of the English language as an inadequate medium which obscures personal and political relationships and interrelationships.

Post-colonial women writers celebrates the excellence, originality and diversity in women's writings which is rapidly flourishing in the global market and creating waves which offers an inclusive analysis of a number of relevant post-colonial and feminist writers whose critiques open up a new set of questions concerning post-colonialism and its related issues like hybridity, otherness, orientalism, multiculturalism, diaspora, globalisation and feminism. They conceptualised around a series of topics like quest for identity and self-definition, the problems of exile and displacement, the agony of alienation and issues of racism and “otherness”. To sum up, the various arguments in defense of the post colonialist debate on the construction of gender and textuality invites the new way to gender study and textual projections of women.