CONCLUSION

Modern critical theories have initiated a move from gender obsession towards a text – centredness, focusing on the work itself. The work is viewed as a combined product of various historical influences and of its producer’s location in terms of gender, class, race, region and sexual orientation. The recent shift of interest from authorial intention to reader-reception, favours the active critical reader more than the passive one. With the ‘death of the author’, the text undergoes a radical reconceptualisation. This is specially enabling in the sense that now the reader can enter a text in whichever way she/he chooses. The author becomes an impersonal agency sans preconception or intention. The text, thus, gets to be internally contexted. This affects the interpretative process leading to an impersonal sense of ‘reading’.

French feminists like Hélène Cixous, speak of “a writing said to be feminine” (or masculine) or, more recently, of a “decipherable libidinal femininity which can be read in writing produced by a male or female” (Conley 129). It is not apparently the empirical sex of the author that matters, but the writing itself. Cixous warns against the dangers of confusing the sex
of the author with the sex of the writing he/she produces. She says in “Castration”:

Most women are like this: they do someone else’s – man’s – writing and in their innocence sustain it and give it voice, and end up producing writing that is in effect masculine … to be signed with a woman’s name doesn’t necessarily make a piece of writing feminine. It could quite well be masculine writing, and conversely the fact that a piece of writing is signed with a man’s name does not in itself exclude femininity. It’s rare, but you can sometimes find femininity in writings signed by men: it does happen. (52)

By enabling feminist criticism to escape from a disabling author-centred empiricism, this linking of sexuality and textuality opens up a whole new field of feminist investigation of the articulation of desire in language, not only in texts written by women but also in those written by men.

This thesis makes an attempt to close-read four Indian English novels: Shashi Deshpande’s *Small Remedies*, Arundhati Roy’s *God of Small Things*, Upamanyu Chatterjee’s *English, August: An Indian Story* and Amitav Ghosh’s *Shadow Lines*. 
One cannot fail to see similarities in the themes of the four novels: Identity crisis, displacement and alienation. These themes are dealt with in uniquely different ways by the authors. The central motive of "return" is all too obvious. In Small Remedies, Madhu's frequent trips down memory lane take her into the pasts of several individuals in the story. As far as Bai's life-story is concerned there can be no progress without a detour into her elusive past. In The Shadow Lines, Tha'mma's dramatic return to Dhaka becomes a turning point in her life, and also problematizes notions of patriotism, freedom and boundaries. The child-narrator's return to the England of his imagination deepens the complexity of the text. The 'Re-return' of Estha and the return of Rahel to Ayemenem in The God of Small Things become a poignant moment of reunion - an antidote, as it were, for the preceding saga of intense suffering. Agastya in English, August, An Indian Story finally looks forward to some respite from a life of degradation, purposelessness and sheer boredom. All these 'return' journeys are quests for meaning in life, efforts to piece together the myriad complexities that the protagonists encounter.

The texts also probe the deep silence that linger in the selves of some of the protagonists. Estha's impervious, stony silence that takes possession of him as a child, looms over the entire narrative of The God of Small Things. Madhu's search for the real Bai hinges around Bai's silent rejection of her daughter in Small Remedies. Ghosh's boy-narrator in The Shadow Lines
speaks of a silence lying "outside the reach of [his] intelligence, beyond words" (TSL 218). The silent search of the narrator which forms the core of the novel throws the notions of secularism, nationalism and freedom into disarray. There is absolute silence "of an absolute, impenetrable banality" (TSL 218) in the life and mission of the narrator. In English, August: An Indian Story, Agastya's non-communication with himself is a non-verbal patch that breeds mere degeneration. The novel speaks of his efforts to come to grips with himself and seek meaning in life.

The introductory chapter examines theories of ‘gender’ and the connotations that the term has gathered over a period of time. Textual constructions of the subject are also explored. At times the subject is seen to be a product of discourses, at others, the subject becomes another ‘position’ in language, an authorial position constructed by the intersection of the ‘discursive plane’. The chapter also examines feminist theories of motherhood and of writing. It then goes on to introduce a feminist theory of complexity that foregrounds disordered, chaotic voices. After a brief assessment of the evolution of Indian English fiction, the lines of argument in the succeeding chapters are touched upon.

The second chapter of this thesis in an analysis of Small Remedies brings to light some interesting facts. Shashi Deshpande employs the omniscient narrator. The entire narrative is tightly structured and the
omniscient presence is in total control over the unravelling of the plot. The story line brings into focus 'strong' women who have swum against the tide, but Deshpande remains trapped in conservative paradigms of womanhood. The text plays down mothers while valorizing the fathers. Nevertheless, as the narrative progresses one becomes aware of the narrator's anxiety with motherhood. The obsession takes its toll as the narrator - biographer ultimately 'threatens' to use her authorial power and fill up the ellipses in Bai's life story with her own version.

The third chapter is a close reading of Arundathi Roy's *God of Small Things*. The text highlights subaltern consciousness - it throws ample light on the marginalization/oppression of individuals on the basis of caste, class and gender. Children too do not escape the barbs of the malicious adult world. The text becomes a vociferous protest against all kinds of marginalization. Through the child focalizer, a sort of de-centering takes place. This is strikingly different from the all-knowing, answer-seeking, questioning presence of the dominating authorial voice one confronts in *Small Remedies*. Ammu "sets aside morality of divorcehood and motherhood" (*GOST* 44) to exult in her sexuality. The fluidity and suppleness of the language used, coupled with its daring, unconventional innovations show what Cixous terms *écriture feminine* at work.
The fourth chapter on Upamanyu Chatterjee’s *English, August: An Indian Story* takes stock of the overtly androcentric narrative. The narratorial voice speaks of alienation and dissipation, seeking refuge in sex, drinks and drugs. In the novel there are no female characters worth the name and the few who are featured are treated as carnal prey. The controlling power of the male gaze is all apparent. Laura Mulvey suggests that in distancing the image of woman, fetishizing her, regarding her voyeuristically as a spectacle there is evidently a strong power politics at play. In *English, August: An Indian Story*, woman is objectified. She becomes the object of male desire, de Beauvoir's "other" whose existence is validated only through her ability to fulfill male wishes.

The last chapter reads *The Shadow Lines* as a recovery of history through personal memory - a memory which remains buried in the interstices between the domain of public knowledge and private understanding. The focalizer is a boy who internalizes the perspective of Tridib, which is refreshingly different from the conventional. The narrator’s picturesque memory of the Prices' London home validates the existence of a history that is reconstituted through the narrator's memory and retrieved through the text. No single character is presented with the omniscience of complete knowledge. Even the narrator’s discourse is not privileged over the other narratives. The narration becomes at times disparate and fragmented. The multiplicity of voices posits a partial truth or fragmentary information. But all
finally become a part of the larger narrative and the consciousness of the narrator. The narrator, commenting on the ontological nature of reality realizes that "there are moments in time that are not knowable" (TSL 68) as opposed to knowledge created by the "weight of remembered detail" (TSL 67). It is upto the narrative to uncover the silence. Received notions of nationalism and history are subverted and a non-patriarchal sensibility is foregrounded.

This thesis may appropriately conclude with the observations made by K.Satchidanandan in Indian Literature : Positions and Propositions (1999)

Every reading is a postponement of the ultimate meaning of the text since texts are open-ended and can be read in a variety of unforeseeable ways and the reader’s discoveries are inevitably the products of the tools used for reading. It is not the author who speaks, but language itself which is by nature polysemic as no word is eternally bound up with a particular meaning. This gap between the word and the meaning is the site of the reader’s freedom for ‘writing’ the text. (222)

With the focus on the reader’s powers of conjecture and free play of imagination, reading becomes writing. The text becomes a volatile space, simmering with new meanings, and gifting its reader fresh perspectives.