INTRODUCTION

The reading and enjoyment of literature has been guided by a humanism based on an empiricist, idealist interpretation of the world. As Catherine Belsey says, commonsense assumes that literary texts that are worth reading speak the truth and that “they express the particular perception, the individual insights of their authors” (Belsey 2). Post-Saussurean or post structuralist thought has called in question the assumption of the authority of commonsense and challenged the whole concept of realism. Expressive realism postulates a theory that literature reflects the reality of experience as it is perceived by one individual. The expression of this perception in a text, it was believed, enabled other individuals to recognize its truth. The post structuralist assault on the belief that mimetic accuracy is the foundation of all art began as early as the 1940s. W.K.Wimsatt and Monroe C.Beardsley in “The Intentional Fallacy” (1946) make a serious attempt to come to terms with the problem of the author’s authority over the text. New critics like Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren rejected the expressive theory that the text would been seen to posses a single , deterministic meaning and that the authority for the meaning was the author . They held the view that meaning existed within the text and demanded a close and detailed attention
to the formal properties of the text. What is inherent in the text is a range of possibilities of meaning. Texts are plural, open to a number of interpretations and it therefore follows that language gains importance with its infinite possibilities of meaning. Meaning is the result, not of individual intention, but of inter-individual intelligibility. That is to say, meaning is socially constructed and so, related closely to social formation itself. Hence, ideology, it may be seen, is deeply inscribed in language, in discourses, myths and representations. It follows from this that the subject is also linguistically and discursively constructed. In *A Theory of Literary Production* (1966) Pierre Macherey suggests that a text is ‘progressively’ discovered. The text becomes the raw material to be interpreted by the critic. It is liberated from authorial control and made available for production through the process of reading. One of the central hypotheses of contemporary critical theory is that gender is a crucial determinant in the production, circulation and consumption of literary discourses. Gender, it has also been argued, is a textual effect produced by certain texts when they are placed in certain reading or ideological contexts.

This thesis tries to explore the problems relating to the plurality of identity/gender. The argument is that the presence of the pre-textual or fixed gender identity is untenable when considered against a position that asserts the non-fixity or fluidity of gender positions. Subject/gender identity, thus it may be argued, is a result of textual construction. This study attempts to
make gendered readings of four Indian English novels – Shashi Deshpande’s *Small Remedies* (2000), Upamanyu Chatterjee’s *English, August : An Indian Story* (1988), Arundhati Roy’s *God of Small Things* (1997) and Amitav Ghosh’s *Shadow Lines* (1988). It focuses on the construction of masculinity and femininity within specific textual spaces. The objective is to explore how the category of identity, predicated on sexual difference, is inscribed discursively. What such gendered readings hope to expose is the interplay of gender, power and social control. Gendered readings are subversive in that they historicize the gender relations informing the cultural construction of collective identities and thus unmask and challenge the resulting power relations. The thesis attempts to show through a close reading of the texts under consideration, how authorial biases operate unconsciously to produce gendered texts. It also attempts to verify/test this position by placing male and female writers of Indian English Fiction in conjunction and then ‘reading’ the texts for the effects they produce.

'Gender' is a concept which is much contested today. It is also an intensely problematic word in the contemporary lexicon. In the sixth edition of Dr. Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1785) 'gender’ is defined as the grammatical practice of classifying nouns as masculine, feminine or neuter. It could also mean 'a sex'. The verb 'to gender' is also used as a synonym for the sexual act: to beget, to breed or to copulate. In the nineteenth century, sexuality emerged as an object of scientific and
popular knowledge. By the early 1900s to possess a sexuality was to lay claim to a distinct form of subjectivity. Contemporary perceptions of gender have been greatly influenced by researches in biology and psychology. Sigmund Freud’s *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) revealed the working of the sexual instinct to be far more complicated than was generally understood. These essays proved that psychoanalysis could be a useful tool to explore the hitherto unexplored terrain of sexuality. In contemporary times, a discursive explosion may be said to have taken place around the question of gender.

Simone de Beauvoir’s ground-breaking work on gender, *The Second Sex* (1949) is a wide ranging and sophisticated study that draws on existential phenomenology, anthropology, psychoanalysis and a Marxist analysis of history to achieve an understanding of what it is to be a woman. *The Second Sex* with its celebrated manifesto, 'One is not born, but rather becomes a woman' is perhaps the first to take a social constructivist view of gender. De Beauvoir maintains that 'male' and 'female' are not fixed ontological essences but are functions of historically specific forms of mediation. They function in a sense as cultural narratives through which we structure the world. The two key concepts de Beauvoir propounds are (1) that woman is the absolute ‘Other’ (2) that femininity is constructed. De Beauvoir focuses on how femininity has been conceptualized and woman reduced to the position of a relative being in a patriarchal society. The book mainly argues that
throughout history, 'woman' has been constructed as man's Other and denied access to an autonomous existence. Man, according to de Beauvoir, assumes the position of universal subject and woman is positioned as a relative 'Other' or the object of male consciousness. Rejecting as unreliable the historical evidence that explains women's oppression, she follows Hegel's hypothesis on the master-slave dialectic. One can interpret woman's position as absolute 'Other' as the result of a process of 'becoming'. De Beauvoir argues that 'to be' a woman should be interpreted in the dynamic Hegelian sense of 'to have become' (de Beauvoir, 24). There is according to de Beauvoir no 'natural' femininity or maternal 'instinct'. Woman 'becomes' her gender by learning to conform to patriarchal society's requirement that she exist inauthentically - as a passive body for consumption by the male gaze. The Second Sex preceded by about twenty years the resurgence of feminism in the late 1960s and 1970s.

Robert J Stoller in Sex and Gender: On the Development of Masculinity and Femininity (1968) another landmark publication, speaks of 'gender' as a tremendous area of "behaviour, feelings, thoughts and fantasies that are related to the sexes and yet do not have primarily biological connotations" (ix). He draws attention to the possibility of an inner discord, a kind of non-identity with one's sexual being. Kate Millet's theory of patriarchy expounded in Sexual Politics (1977), one of the major texts of
second wave feminism, was inspired by Stoller's work. Millet emphasised the argument that ‘male’ and ‘female’ are really two cultures.

Michel Foucault can be considered as one of the early constructionists claiming that sexuality and sexual conduct are not natural categories having foundation in reality. They are, instead, predicated upon social construction. Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (1979) shows the radical revision that ideas and beliefs about sexuality have undergone. The three-volume series written between 1976 and 1984 shows sex to be an effect rather than the product of discourses which attempt to analyze, describe and regulate the activities of human beings. A novel perspective was thus initiated to study the origins and the hitherto held view of sexuality.

While 'sex' denotes the language through which we come to know our desires, 'gender' denotes the cultural practices through which these desires are played out. In modern parlance, the term 'gender' can be defined in a relatively straightforward way as the social construction of our concepts of masculinity and femininity. It makes meaningless, the 'natural' link between one's identity as 'a man' or 'a woman' and one’s social behaviour. Behaviour can therefore be categorized as 'masculine' or 'feminine', this again varying with cultures and social groups. Behaviour, it would then imply, need not necessarily be related to the biological categories of 'male' or 'female'. In *Gender Trouble, Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), Judith
Butler, an advocate of the theory of 'peformativity', asks very pertinent questions about the construction of gender:

When feminist theorists claim that gender is the cultural interpretation of sex or that gender is culturally constructed, what is the manner or mechanisms of this construction? If gender is constructed, could it be constructed differently, or does its constructedness imply some form of social determinism, foreclosing the possibility of agency and transformation? Does 'construction' suggest that certain laws generate gender difference along universal axes of gender difference? How and when does the construction of gender take place? What sense can we make of a construction that cannot assume a human constructor prior to the construction? (7 - 8)

To Butler's question of how and when the construction of gender takes place, one of the many answers would be 'in writing'. Writing is a rich site for the exploration of political meanings and the imaginative potential of gender, and for testing its boundaries. The restrictive nature of gender definitions becomes apparent once one is made aware of the 'fluid' nature of gender.
David Glover and Cora Kaplan in *Genders* (2000) state that "both (sex and gender) are inescapably cultural categories that refer to ways of describing and understanding human bodies and human relationships, our relationship to ourselves and to others" (Glover and Kaplan xxvi).

Jacques Lacan’s theories regarding language, literature and the nature of the human subject and his post-structuralist reading of Freud had far-reaching impact on later theorists. He theorized that the acquisition of language and the entry into its symbolic order occur at the Oedipal phase in which the child accepts his/her gender identity. Lacan's celebrated dictum that "the unconscious is structured like a language" is central to his ideas of subject formation. For Lacan, the unconscious is the 'kernel' of being. According to him, language is detached from external reality and is an independent realm. In Lacanian terms one needs to understand the constructedness and instability of the subject, or the subject as a linguistic construct, or language as a self-contained universal discourse. One can then speak of contradictory undercurrents of meaning, which lie like a subconscious beneath the 'conscious' of the text.

Julia Kristeva, the critical theorist and psychoanalyst, who has worked extensively on the concept of subject, uses the phrase "subject in process" to elaborate this fluidity. In "A Question of Subjectivity" she states:
Anyone who reads Artaud's texts will realize that all identities are unstable: the identity of linguistic signs, the identity of meaning, as a result, the identity of the speaker. And in order to take account of this destabilization of meaning and of the subject, I thought the term "subject in process" would be appropriate. 'Process' in the sense of process but also in the sense of a legal proceeding where the subject is committed to trial, because our identities in life are constantly called into question, brought to trial, over-ruled.

(Rice and Waugh 128)

Thus the subject is in flux, 'destabilized' and borders between the unconscious and the social. Taking into account the shifting, fluid nature of gender and subjectivity, one needs to re-contextualize narratives.

A variety of critical positions have developed in feminism since 1970. It is now appropriate to speak of feminist theories rather than of a feminist theory. The variety with feminist literary studies can be accounted for, partly by the facility with which feminism has interacted with other critical discourses, both influencing and being influenced by them. Mary Eagleton has tried to illustrate the effect of Marx on Cora Kaplan, of Michel Foucault on Peggy Kamuf, of Julia Kristeva on Toril Moi, of Jacques Derrida on
Gayatri Spivak and of Sigmund Freud on seemingly everybody - Millet, Kaplan, Mary Jacobus, and the French feminists to mention a few. A suspicion of theory, however is widespread throughout feminism. Many feminists see theory as male-dominated. Hélène Cixous for instance, considers theory to be impersonal, public, objective and male; and experience personal, private, subjective and female.

Contemporary feminisms have placed language on the political agenda of feminist literary studies. Feminist theories of language are diverse and reflect the political differences within feminism and also the great proliferation of 'discourses' - traditions, theoretical frameworks and academic disciplines. The 'exclusion' of woman from naming and representation, that is, from language itself, has opened up the inevitability of a kind of writing that addresses female sexuality and experience. Writers like Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf in their use of language deviated from a linear conception of time and space. The realization of the potential that such a 'different' kind of language has within it for the re-working of power equations has led women writers to challenge the notion of 'rational discourse'. Through their experiments with language women writers try to foreground its less rational aspects. However, this subversive use of language is not the exclusive prerogative of women writers. Deborah Cameron says:
It should be noted that this 'feminine' sort of writing need not be confined to women writers, and that those women who advocate it often hold up men as models of what they are trying to achieve: Julia Kristeva discusses Mallarme and Lautremont, while Dorothy Richardson admired Proust and Joyce. What most feminists of this type would insist on, however, is that 'feminine' writing done by either sex is progressive because it challenges certain myths (rationality, unity) that are essentially patriarchal. (10)

Feminist theorists in France have advocated ways of writing that embody women's difference - 'difference' pertaining not just to what is written about, but also the language in which it is written. These feminists speak of a kind of writing that addresses female sexuality and experience. This requires a new form of language, a radical remaking of literary style in the image of woman rather than of man. These feminists are convinced that the existing style and grammar are male in form. Inspired by the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan, they believe that the order of language is a masculine order dominated metaphorically by the phallic principle. 'Feminine' writing, therefore, obviously lies outside this order. Luce Irigaray speaks of a language in which the masculine structure has broken down.
Julia Kristeva speaks about pre-symbolic features 'disrupting' discourse, producing the strangeness and fragmentation one sees in symbolist poetry.

The notion of 'feminine writing' or *écriture féminine* put forward by the French feminists has, more often than not, evaded definition. Hélène Cixous, who first introduced the term *écriture féminine* finds it "impossible to define a feminine practice of writing". She is however sure that "it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallocentric system", which can be conceived of only by subjects who are “breakers of automatism, by peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate” (Warhol and Herndl 340). Cixous considers feminine writing to be a spontaneous outpouring. In “Laugh of the Medusa” she outlines the features of this writing:

A feminine text cannot fail to be more than subversive.

It is volcanic; as it is written it brings about an upheaval of the old property crust, carrier of masculine investments; there is no other way.

(Warhol and Herndl 344)

In *The Newly Born Woman* Cixous exhorts women:

Write yourself: your body must make itself heard. Then the huge resources of the unconscious will burst out. Finally the inexhaustible feminine Imaginary is going to be deployed. (Simons 126)
Cixous goes on to say that the status of *écriture féminine* is consciously non-prescriptive and in permanent flux. *Écriture féminine* does not entail a reductive gender specificity but could be written by men or women who are capable of demonstrating an openness to the other in writing. Surprisingly, some practitioners of this kind of writing that Cixous points out are male: Shakespeare, Heinrich von Kleist and Jean Genet. According to Kristeva 'woman' cannot be represented. In her essay “La Femme,” she says, "Woman" is –

. . . something above and beyond nomenclatures and ideologies. There are certain 'men' who are familiar with this phenomenon; it is what some modern texts never stop signifying: testing the limits of language and sociality - the law and its transgression, mastery and (sexual) pleasure without reserving one for males and the other for females, on the condition that it is never mentioned. (Moi 162)

Kristeva's “Women's Time” identifies two ways of thinking about time: linear and cyclic. Linear time is associated with the first generation of feminists and their attempt to secure women's rights within existing society, within the symbolic order. Cyclic time is associated with second-generation feminism that stresses the difference between men and women. Kristeva
resists both these approaches to time since they share the tendency to fix female identity. In the essay she proposes a third time-phase or a new space, where the play of difference and deferral is celebrated as the condition of all sexual identity, so that the cultural characteristics of both femininity and masculinity become the basis of subjectivity. In this way sexual identity is released and exposed as unfixed, not timeless, always in process and always incomplete. Thus a space is created where the sexual opposition is undone. (Warhol and Herndl 445-446).

Elaine Showalter in 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness' (1981) gives a lengthy presentation of what she takes to be the four main directions of present-day feminist criticism: biological, linguistic, psychoanalytic and cultural criticism. She emphasises on the need for gynocritics "to concentrate on women's access to language" since "women have been denied the full resources of language and have been forced into silence, euphemism and circumlocution" (Lodge 193). Gynocriticism, that deals with woman as writer, opens up new entry points into woman - authored texts.

Alice Jardine sets her theory of gynesis which has been influenced by the philosophies of Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida against Elaine Showalter’s gynocriticism. 'Gynesis' according to her is

... a reincorporation and reconceptualization of that which has been the master narratives’ own non
knowledge, what has eluded them, what has engulfed
them. This other-than-themselves is almost always a
'space' of some kind (over which the narrative has lost
control), and this space has been coded as feminine, as
woman . . . (15)

Gynesis is “the putting into discourse of 'woman.'” This amounts to a
valourization of the feminine which is "intrinsic to new and necessary modes
of thinking, writing, speaking" (15). Jardine points out that the French
interest converges on 'woman' who is not a person but a writing effect. This is
distinctly different from the Anglo-American view that centres on 'women'-
as real biological entities who are forging a politics based on shared
experience and needs. When the French talk of écriture féminine they do not
mean the tradition of women's writing that Woolf and Showalter are
concerned with, but a certain mode of writing that unsettles fixed meanings.

Whereas gynocriticism foregrounds the sex of the author - her unique
voice, gynesis challenges authorial identity. Gynesis points to a textual
freeplay of meaning which cannot be bound by authorial intention or critical
analysis. In gynesis, belief in the individual as possessing a fully conscious,
rational, secure identity gives way to a 'subject' which is unstable and is being
constantly re-formed. As mentioned earlier Kristeva's phrase, 'subject in
process', expresses how identities in life are in constant flux. That is to say,
gender does not rest solely in the author, it is just as likely to be subverted in the language of the text.

*Gynesis* contains a potential for antifeminism in that it questions the credibility of the woman's experience. Gayatri Spivak objects to French feminism because of its tendency to disengage from the particularities of the historical and political world. However, modern textual theory fed by semiotics, psychoanalysis and deconstruction has taught us not to confuse the sex of the author with the sexuality inscribed in the text.

As mentioned earlier Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990) and its sequel, *Bodies That Matter* (1993), raises questions about the formation of gender identity and subjectivity. Butler's 'subject' is not an individual but a linguistic structure in formation. It is involved in an endless process of becoming. Michel Foucault in his historical analyses of the variable constructions of sex and sexuality in different contexts and societies provide Butler with a theoretical framework for her own formulations of gender, sex and sexuality as unfixed and constructed entities. The linguistic theories of Jacques Derrida complement these formulations of the subject. If Butler and Foucault describe subject formation as a process which must be placed within specific historical and discursive contexts in order to be understood, then Derrida similarly describes meaning as an 'event' that takes place on a citational chain with no origin or end, a theory that effectively deprives
individual speakers of control over their utterances (Salih 14). Butler is more concerned with the processes by which the individual comes to assume her/his position as a subject, than with individual experiences. If Foucault's genealogical investigations assume that sex and gender are 'effects', Butler believes that gendered and sexed identities are performative. Butler is extending de Beauvior's famous insight that 'one is not born, but rather becomes a woman', to suggest that “‘woman' is something we 'do' rather than something we 'are'” (de Beauvior 281). Language and discourse 'do' gender. Gender identities are constituted and constructed by language, which means that there is no gender identity that precedes language.

The feminist programme to research the lives and works of individual authors and to uncover the 'secrets' of female experience which lie beneath the surface of the text, was unsettled by Barthes's pronouncement of the death of the author. Barthes's theory challenged the author’s gender. Poststructuralist theory provides a new kind of analysis. It sees the text not as an authentic expression of experience but as “a site for the discursive construction of the meaning of gender” (Weedon 138). Poststructuralism argues that meaning is neither fixed nor controlled by individual readers or writers: it is culturally defined, learnt and plural. As against the idea proposed by the liberal humanist ideology that the subject is a unified and free whole, poststructuralism posits that human subjectivity is shifting and fragmented. For feminists perhaps the most important point is that subjectivity is seen as
changing and contradictory: gendered identity is not static and natural, but formed within language and open to change. Poststructuralist feminist analyses reject the idea of an authentic female voice or experience, but see the study of women's writing as a means of understanding patriarchy. They map the possible subject position open to women (Frith 108). While Anglo-American feminist criticism lays emphasis on the cohesive nature of female experience, social feminist critics examine how, in complex ways, gender intersects with class, race and the literary text. They focus on the gaps, ambiguities, incoherences and evasions within the text - on the 'not-said'. The Marxist feminists use Lacanian psychoanalytic theory because it provides a way of theorizing gendered subjectivity as socially constructed, precarious, contradictory and capable of change.

What then, one is inclined to ask, is the place/role of an author. The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'author' as 'the person who originates or gives existence to anything' and 'one who begets; a father, an ancestor'. Against such a definition Barthes's and Foucault's positions may be seen to have liberatory potential in their rejection of 'authorial power'. Roland Barthes in "The Death of the Author" lays emphasis on the short-lived role of the author. He observes,
Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body of writing.

(Rice and Waugh 114)

According to him, it is language that speaks and performs, not the author. Language, he says, knows 'subject' not a 'person'. In his essay “From Work to Text”, Barthes defines the text as "a methodological field", "a process of demonstration", "held in language" (Rice and Waugh 167). He goes on to say that while ‘work’ closes on the signified, the text "practices the infinite deferment of the signified" (Rice and Waugh 168). Since the 'scripтор' of the text is just an instance of writing, it naturally follows that the text has a life of its own and yields itself to an objective analysis. The text, divorced as it is from its author, shows up certain strategies that are transgressive. Texts can no longer be treated as self-contained verbal structures with definite meanings. The texts themselves are fraught with unconscious movement and their meanings are dependent on the reader's active engagement with textual structures. Pierre Macherey, in *A Theory of Literary Production*, observes how a text is not self-sufficient, but contains within it a silence / absence that must be explored to locate its meaning.

The speech of the book comes from a certain silence, a matter which it endows with form, a ground on which it
traces a figure. Thus the book is not self-sufficient; it is necessarily accompanied by a certain absence, without which it could not exist. A knowledge of the book must include a consideration of this absence. (463)

These gaps and ellipses which give the work its meaning need to be brought to light. The work often contributes to an exposure of ideology since it is established against an ideology as much as it is from an ideology (Macherey 466).

Michel Foucault in his essay "What is an Author?", examines how the author came to be individualized and valorized. He deals at length with the relationship between text and author. He observes that "writing unfolds like a game (jeu) that invariably goes beyond its own rules and transgresses its limits" (Rabinow 102). The work, instead of immortalizing the author, becomes his/her murderer. An effacement of the writing subject's individual characteristics takes place. Foucault goes on to examine the author-function and its implications on the literary content. Discourses endowed with the author-function possess a plurality of selves because the narrator (first person) refers not to the writer but "to an alter ego whose distance from the author varies, often changing the course of the work" (Rabinow 112). Therefore, the author-function can give rise simultaneously to several selves and subject positions. Foucault points out that,
the author is not an indefinite source of significations
which fill a work, the author does not precede the works;
he is a certain functional principle by which . . . one
limits, excludes and, chooses; in short, by which one
impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the
free composition, decomposition and recomposition of
fiction. In fact, if we are accustomed to presenting the
author as a genius as a perpetual surging of invention, it
is because, in reality, we make him function in exactly
the opposite fashion. One can say that the author is an
ideological product, since we represent him as the
opposite of his historically real function. When a
historically given function is represented in a figure that
inverts it, one has an ideological production. The author
is therefore the ideological figure by which one marks
the manner in which we fear the proliferation of
meaning . . .

. . .Although, since the eighteenth century, the author has
played the role of the regulator of the fictive, a role quite
characteristic of our era of industrial and bourgeois
society, of individualism and private property, still, given
the historical modifications that are taking place, it does
not seem necessary that the author function remain constant in form, complexity and even in existence …. as our society changes, at the very moment when it is in the process of changing, the author function will disappear, and in such a manner that fiction and its polysemous texts will once again function according to another mode, but still with a system of constraint – one which will no longer be the author, but which will have to be determined or, perhaps, experienced. …We would no longer hear the questions that have been rehashed for so long: who really spoke? Is it really he and not someone else? With what authenticity or originality? And what part of his deepest self did he express in his discourse? Instead, there would be other questions, like these: what are the modes of existence of this discourse? Where has it been used? How can it circulate? And who can appropriate it for himself? What are the places in it where there is room for possible subjects? Who can assume these various subject functions? And behind all these questions, we would hear hardly anything but the stirring of an indifference: What difference does it make who is speaking? (Rabinow 119-120)
In “From Work to Text” Roland Barthes differentiates between the terms *work* and *text*. A literary *work* refers to a concept of creativity whereby the author guarantees the meaning or truth of a written piece apprehended by the critic as a lasting stable object. Such a tradition of authority valorizes the concept of authorship. The literary *text*, on the other hand, is the result of an interaction: "it exists only as discourse. In other words, the text is experienced only in an activity, a production" (Rice and Waugh 167)). The *text* is a "methodological field", "a productivity". It is the result of a dialogical process of exchange between reader and writer. Thus one recognises the plural character of textual criticism. Whereas the literary *work* has an author whose viewpoint and intention need be respected, the literary *text* is authorless since it does not privilege the generator or encoder of the message.

Both Barthes and Foucault are strikingly similar in their playing down of the all pervasive presence of the author in a text. An author, according to them would imply a hero with status and privilege, a unique, intuitive individual displaying special insights, sporting a refined sensibility; a source of meaning engaged in regulating and controlling the text, in giving unity to a body of writing and defining its limits. This would imply linking authoring to ownership and appropriation. The erasure of the author would thus become especially enabling in the sense that only then could the reader enter a text in which ever way he/she chooses.
Feminism has worked in tandem with poststructuralist and postmodernist thought. All the three critical perspectives have questioned the authority of the author - they all have had a subversive and undermining impact on canonical views of literary history. Mary Eagleton alludes to "The Death of the Woman Author", which might problematize the feminist agenda of empowering the woman author. But as Nelly Furman in "The Politics of Language: Beyond the Gender Principle?" says:

Since, for the textual reader, literature is not a representation of experience but something that is experienced, from a feminist viewpoint the question is not whether a literary work has been written by a woman and reflects her experience of life, or how it compares to other works by women, but rather how it lends itself to be read from a feminist position.

(Greene and Kahn 69)

The 1970s saw feminists making a reassessment of ‘motherhood’ and ‘mothering’ in a woman's life. Radical and social feminists considered bearing and rearing of children to be oppressive forms of drudgery that kept women away from the public sphere, and sought for means to liberate women from the practice and ideology of motherhood. Most early writings caricatured the mother as monster and neurotic smotherer. The mother had to
bear the guilt of gender grooming and of her complicity in strengthening patriarchy. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* provides a thorough survey of the origin and perpetuation of the patriarchal oppression of women. She observes that marriage and motherhood have been artificially promoted as the most important roles for women in society and this has been inscribed in the laws, customs, beliefs and cultures of society. This has confined women to the private sphere of domesticity. According to de Beauvoir there is no 'natural' femininity or masculinity or any natural 'instinct'. Woman 'becomes' her gender by learning to conform to the requirements of patriarchal society that she exists inauthentically as a passive body for consumption by the male gaze, and by abandoning her freedom and devoting herself to the roles of wife and mother. De Beauvoir observes, “From infancy woman is repeatedly told that she is made for child bearing, and the splendours of maternity are forever sung to her” (de Beauvoir 508). Motherhood thus gets institutionalized, validated by society, laws and customs. Ultimately, ”the mother is the very incarnation of the Good ” (de Beauvoir 204). De Beauvoir rejects the mystification of motherhood, since she sees within it a hidden agenda of trapping women in embodied immanence. Adrienne Rich in *Of Woman Born* (1986) denies the existence of a nurturing instinct. She weaves together her individual experience as a mother and the broader societal ideas underpinning the institution of motherhood in Western culture. Rich places motherhood firmly in the context of sexual politics, presenting it as an arena of feminist
struggle. By distinguishing the institution of motherhood as an invention of patriarchal societies, she highlights the control which patriarchy exerts on women's reproductive capacities. Rich observes, “. . . motherhood is not only a core human relationship but a political institution, a key stone to the domination in every sphere of women by men (Palmer 99).

Nancy Chodorow, feminist sociologist and psychoanalyst, sees gender differences as a compromise formation to the Oedipal complex. Male children typically experience love as a dyadic relationship; daughters are caught in a libidinal triangle where the ego is pulled between love for the father, love of the mother and concern and worry over the relationship of the father to the mother. For Chodorow, the contrast between the dyadic and triadic first love experience explains the social construction of gender roles. Child care arrangements under patriarchy, however, relegate women to the private domain of home. Motherhood thus is reduced to sheer penal servitude.

French theorists also link motherhood to language. Cixous and Kristeva have made connections between writing, femininity and the pre-Oedipal. Cixous describes écriture féminine as a form of writing which originates from the mother's voice and gets its inspiration from the body. Though available to both sexes, in a phallocentric culture it most frequently occurs in texts written by women. Kristeva associates motherhood with the
attributes of maternal *jouissance* and the potential for disruption which it possesses. This *jouissance*, she points out, is both feared and devalued by a phallocentric culture which recognizes the threat it constitutes to the status quo (Moi 113-119). 'Femininity' is identified with an experimentally fluid form of writing which subverts the reader’s expectations of linear rational discourse, merging identities and ego boundaries in a manner similar to that which occurs in the pre-Oedipal mother-infant bond.

Laurie A Finke, who belongs to the constructivist group of feminists, believes that progressive feminist politics depend on perceiving gender and even reality as social constructs that can be dismantled and reconstructed in new and more egalitarian ways. In *Feminist Theory, Women's Writing* (1992) Finke explores the possibilities of the subversive, demystifying potential of feminist theory and advocates feminism’s need for a politics of *complexity*. She uses the term in a technical as well as evaluative sense drawing specifically on the works of cultural critics like Donna Haraway, N.Katherine Hayles, Bruno Latour and Michel Serres – who work in hybrid fields at the intersection of science and culture. According to Finke,

*Complexity* describes a cultural politics of indeterminacy, informed by contemporary theoretical debates in a variety of fields but without the political paralysis often attributed to poststructuralism. (4)
She turns to the cultural critiques of science to decentre notions of objectivity and totalizing theory which underwrite a host of disciplinary and critical practices that inform feminist theory. Her project is to seek ways of appropriating aspects of dominant discourses to feminist theory - a way out of the maze of dualisms – nature/culture, mind/body, fact/fiction and so on. Finke draws on Donna Haraway's ideas of 'complexity.'

According to Haraway, contemporary scientific thinking like nonlinear dynamics, information theory and fluid mechanics – may help feminists to move towards a feminist theory of complexity, away from the universal and totalizing theory. A time has come when disorder is a productive theoretical principle in the sciences. In her book, *Chaos Bound* (1990) Katherine Hayles writes:

… disorder has become a focal point for contemporary theory because it offers the possibility of escaping from what are increasingly perceived as coercive structures of order. (265)

Order is achieved through the exclusion, neutralization or marginalization of anything that lies outside socially constructed ‘norms’. Order thus becomes coercive. To understand the implication of ‘complexity’ in relation to women’s writing, one needs to see its difference from what physicists call a theory of everything (or TOE). Such a theory (TOE) would be a totalizing,
universalizing theory. Most literary critics, including feminist literary critics, according to Finke,

consciously or unconsciously, have derived their beliefs about what a theory is from precisely this kind of scientific idealism, itself a remnant of totalizing misinterpretation of eighteenth-century Newtonianism.

(7)

Totalizing beliefs about theory are being challenged by scientists in many fields. As Hayles notes, in both the postmodern sciences and in literary theory, the 1970s and the 1980s brought “a break away from universalizing, totalizing perspectives and a move towards local, fractured systems and modes of analysis” (2), in other words, towards theories of complexity. In contrast to a theory of everything, a theory of complexity reveals the messiness behind the illusion of unified narratives about the world by restoring information, or ‘noise’ that is previously marginalized and excluded by those narratives. It attempts, in short, to expose the fictivity or the constructed nature of facts.

The irregular and unpredictable evolution of time of non-linear systems has been dubbed as 'Chaos'. Chaos theory ushered in a major paradigm shift. One of the insights of Chaos theory is that disorder can be perhaps more productively conceived of as the presence of information.
Feminism can account for more information from those sources that have most often been marginalized by dominant systems of ‘order’. Complexity, as Hayles notes, insists on local application rather than on global laws or principles. To quote Finke:

An individual assumes a gendered identity, in this regard, only within a set of social practices specific to a historical time, place and culture. There are no universal roles or meanings attached to male or female, no “eternal feminine” or masculine principle, only network of differential relations that construct men and women, masculine and feminine, in culturally and historically specific ways. (9)

Finke believes that a feminist theory of complexity must be dialogic, double-voiced. Since the field of utterance is the space in which feminist theories must be contested, a feminist theory of complexity might usefully begin with a dialogic notion of the utterance to counter the totalizing structuralist concept of sign which dominates contemporary literary theory. Mikhail Bakhtin argues that all discourse is inherently dialogic and double-voiced, that it involves "intense interaction and struggle between one's own and another's word . . . in which [these words] oppose or . . . interanimate one another" (1981 354). The term 'double-voiced' applies to language which
calls into question the fiction of authoritative or monologic discourse. Every utterance is always inhabited by the voice of the ‘other’ or many ‘others’, because the interests of race, class, gender, ethnicity, age and any number of other related ‘accents’ intersect in any utterance. The term *heteroglossia* represents this complex system. Bakhtin’s theory of the dialogized word is useful to feminist critics precisely because it refuses to see the oppressed or marginalized as passive victims of their oppression; it returns to them a culturally specific agency and the power to participate in defining their struggles, in turning the oppressor's words against him/her. Feminists can thus appropriate the notion of *heteroglossia*, highlighting the dialogical nature of all discourse, insisting that those contested voices be heard. A theory of complexity therefore will foreground unheard, muted voices, or chaotic disordered voices and gravitate towards a non-linear and non deterministic model of cultural analysis.

An overview of contemporary Indian fiction in English reveals an incredible array of talent. It is rich and vigorous as new writers experiment with different forms. Indian English fiction today reflects the confident, new-found individual voice of the Indian English writer. The voice is no more apologetic about writing in an ‘alien’ language. English has emerged as a vibrant language capable of internalizing the Indian sensibility. It is used imaginatively and confidently by its practitioners. Indian literature in English
may be considered a kind of literature-in-progress, a protean literature which keeps on finding new voices and new styles.

Makarand Paranjape traces the evolution of the Indian English novel in *Towards a Poetics of the Indian English Novel*. He starts with the ‘Colonial Beginnings’ (1835-1900) when Bankim Chandra Chatopadhyay wrote *Rajmohan’s Wife* and Toru Dutt her incomplete *Bianca or The Young Spanish Maiden* (1878). The ‘Nationalist Era’ (1900-1950) saw the publication of A.Madhavaiah’s *Thillai Govindan* (1908). Some of the other major writers during this period were Raja Rao, Romesh Chandra Dutt, Babhani Bhattacharya and G.V. Desani. Desani’s *All about H.Hatter* is a landmark in experimental writing. Paranjape’s ‘Modernist Interlude’ (1950-80) featured the Big three- Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan, as also the Big three women writers, Kamala Markandeya, Nayantara Sahgal and Anita Desai. Others who enriched the scene were Sudhir N Ghose, Manohar Malgonkar, Arun Joshi, Ruskin Bond, Chaman Nahal, Ruth P.Jhabvala, Santha Rama Rao, Jai Nimbkar, Bharati Mukherjee and Shashi Despande besides several more. The two dominant trends that may be seen in the works of these writers could be broadly termed as ‘social realism’ and ‘psychological realism’. Indian English fiction impacted on an international readership in a big way with Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981). *Midnight’s Children* changed the way English fiction was written. It heralded a new technique of writing. It contained a certain postmodern playfulness,
magical realism, a new exuberance of language, the reinvention of allegory, layers of interconnected stories and a disarming frankness. Writers like Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Tharoor, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Rukun Advani, Mukul Kesavan, Anurag Mathur, Vikram Seth, Vikram Chandra, Amit Chaudhari, Rohinton Mistry and Firdaus Kanga have redefined the contours of Indian English fiction. An equally impressive array of women writers form part of the postmodernist scene: Namita Gokhale, Gita Hariharan, Shama Futehally, Meena Alexander, Gita Mehta, Anita Nair, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Kavery Nambissan and others.

This thesis attempts to discover how gender operates in selected works of four Indian English novelists. The novels chosen for study are Shashi Deshpande's *Small Remedies* (2000), Arundhati Roy's *God of Small Things* (1997), Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English, August: An Indian Story* (1988) and Amitav Ghosh's *Shadow Lines* (1988). These authors have been internationally acclaimed and have played a pivotal role in projecting Indian English fiction on to the international arena. The chosen novels are contemporary and in many aspects postmodern. When analysed in the light of modern theories of text and gender these novels throw up interesting insights into how textual process becomes gendered.

Shashi Deshpande holds a prominent place among the contemporary Indian English writers since she has a corpus of work reflective of the Indian
middle class. Her stories locate the individual firmly within a familial and a social context. Deshpande’s words are concerned with the women’s perspective, but, she is not confined to a feminist position. Her work is located in the question of personhood, of right to body, space for independence, realization of a self and decentring male centrality in society and in a woman’s life. She has an amazing literary output of more than twenty books. Her first publication, a collection of short stories, *The Legacy* appeared in 1978. Her first novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* was published two years later. An earlier novel *Roots and Shadows* was published in 1983 five years after its writing. The mid-eighties saw the publication of three collection of short stories: *It was the Nightingale* (1986), *It Was Dark* (1986) and *The Miracle* (1986). After the crime novella *If I Die Today* (1982), Deshpande went on to write novels that found her a prominent place in the forefront of Indian English writing: *Roots and Shadows, That Long Silence* (1989), *The Binding Vine* (1993), *Come Up and Be Dead* (1985), *A Matter of Time* (1996), and *Small Remedies* (2000). Other short story collections include *The Stone Women and Other Stories* and *Intrusion and Other Stories*. Deshpande’s latest novel *In the Country of Deceit* was published in August 2008. Her novels wade through generations in families. Families work through relationship and interdependence and become powerful agencies of socialization and transmission of values. The concept of ‘space’ within families also get problematized in her fiction. Some of
Deshpande’s novels also highlight the concerns of the creative woman writer. So her fiction moves from the personal to the social, veers back again to the realization of the self.

Arundhati Roy first came into the lime light with her screen play for a low budget film *In Which Annie Gives It Those Ones*. Her only novel (to date) *The God of Small Things* (1997) became a huge success with its innovative use of English prose. Roy has deployed a narrative that is meticulously crafted, that shows unparalleled skills in the use of language, that has a complex structure, that conceals at every turn the possibility of discovering some unexpected meaning. It is a book written with immense effort and care, clearly reflecting an architect’s eye for details. Roy has, however, channelized her creative energy to espouse social/political issues. She has authored many works of non-fiction that vehemently critique neo-imperialism and globalization. *The End of Imagination, The Cost of Living, The Greater Common Good, The Algebra of Infinite Justice, An Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire* and *War Talk* are published collections of Roy’s essays and speeches on global justice.

Upamanyu Chatterjee, the writer-civil servant made his appearance on the literary scene with the much publicized *English, August: An Indian Story* in 1988. His wry humour and detached observation of the smug, corrupt Indian administration, caught the imagination of modern Indian reader. The
novel that followed *The Last Burden* (1993) portrays the life of the Indian middle class at the turn of the twentieth century. *The Mammaries of the Welfare State*, a sequel to *English, August*, picks up some seven or eight years after the time of the first novel. The narrative is a collection of loose episodes, more than a structured novel, but the satire is sharp. Chatterjee’s most recent novel is *Weight Loss* (2006), a dark comedy.

Amitav Ghosh is a major writer whose work has over the last two decades brought substance and range to Indian English Fiction. Ghosh’s fiction has pushed at the boundaries of the genre, probing its unlit corners and bringing it into powerful dialogue with other places, peoples and times. Without being grounded on one style, he chooses to set new literary challenges for himself, constantly transforming his work down the years. His career began, like many of his contemporaries, in the experimental wake of *Midnight’s Children* and the techniques it put into innovative play. His fist novel *The Circle of Reason* (1994) opened up a rich seam of stories and themes that Ghosh explored in his later works. It attempts to recover a continuing tradition of cultural exchange for India westwards across the Indian Ocean to the Gulf states and Egypt. *In an Antique Land* (1992) combines travelogue with a historical reflection in returning to this issue. *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996) is also concerned with the relationship between science, history and colonialism in a futuristic detective story. *The Glass
Palace (2000) mediates on large historic and nationalistic issues such as diaspora, migration, refugees, colonial hegemony and the economic and cultural subjugation of populous regions by the west. The Hungry Tide (2004) is set in the mangrove swamps and river islands of the Ganga Delta. The constantly shifting terrain of the Sunderbans provides an extended metaphor for the fluid interaction between different languages, faiths and way of thinking. Ghosh excavates the small worlds that are proliferated in the flow. His most recent novel Sea of Poppies (2008), the first in a trilogy also speaks of new worlds that are forged aboard a ship bound for the Caribbean sugar plantations, among men and women from diverse countries, races and cultures. Ghosh’s second novel The Shadow Lines (1988), the best received among his works, experiments with a narrative form that enables the stories of individuals and families to intersect with the larger stories of nation-states. It addresses histories of belonging and common ground that have been lost in a world which stresses difference.

Shashi Deshpande's fictional world delves deep into the familial matrix. In her novels, it is through interiorized journeys into their own psyche that her women protagonists find the strength to reach out to more stable and sustaining relationships. Small Remedies which centres around the writing of the biography of a high-profile female singer betray patriarchal biases. One of the central concerns of the text is motherhood and mothering. An inclination to valorize motherood is evident in the narrative. This even makes
the narratorial voice judgemental in its treatment of the protagonist. The biographer's mission also gets problematized as it becomes an activity fraught with the politics of power. One becomes aware of an authorial appropriation of the subject which is suggestive of a replay/mimicry of androcentric practices. Kumkum Sangari in the *Politics of the Possible* remarks that patriarchies,

function simultaneously through *coercion* or threat and practice of violence, through making a wide social *consensus* drawn from and dispersed over many areas of social life and through obtaining in various ways, different degrees of *consent* from women. (Sangari 371)

This is played out in Arundhati Roy’s *God of Small Things*. Women seemingly join hands with men and hostile institutions to victimize besides hapless children and outcasts, their own kind. Roy explores the institutions of family, marriage and the law to expose the agenda of violence and oppression. The text becomes a site for 'retaliation', for upsetting the norm through an ingenious use of language. The writings become as transgressive as much as the theme of the novel. Hélène Cixous speaks of two simultaneous movements of *écriture féminine* - flying/stealing - which she calls the gesture of women, flying in language and stealing from language or "making it fly" (Simons 146). The combination of exhilaration (flying) and subversion (theft)
mark feminine writing. Roy's *The God of Small Things* is an example of such a mode of writing.

Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English, August: An Indian Story* is a text steeped in sexist language wherein the woman is transformed from a social being to a carnal prey. She is forced to "remain the inessential" (de Beauvoir 291). There is an all-pervasive 'male gaze' that makes the text guilty of a blatant 'othering'. *The Shadow Lines* by Amitav Ghosh on the other hand is concerned with 'versions' of history. History here is not presented as a linear, chronological progression as in the traditional sense but in a post modernist manner. As Brenda K. Marshall points out, postmodernism is about histories . . . not told, retold, untold. History as it never was. Histories forgotten, hidden, invisible, considered unimportant, changed, irradicated. It's about the refusal to see history as linear, as leading straight up to today in some recognizable pattern all set for us to make sense of. It's about chance. It's about power. It's about information. (4)

The narrative grapples with 'versions' that lie outside the received and acknowledged 'fact', that spill over ordered borders into the blurred regions of chaos or noise.
Two texts by female authors and two others by male authors studied in juxtaposition bring to light gender-effects that emerge consequent to certain narrative strategies, deployment of language and perspectives.