CHAPTER-II

JOURNEY OF WOMEN NOVELISTS IN INDIA

2.1 Preliminaries

This chapter deals with the study of ‘novel’ as a popular literary genre. It traces the advent of the novel in India which is a product of colonial encounter. Essentially dominated by male writers, women’s writings in the past were looked down upon as inconsequential. Literary contributions by Indian women writers were undervalued on account of patriarchal assumptions which prioritized the works of male experiences. For many women writers, who are products of strong patriarchal cultures, ability to write and communicate in the language of the colonizers represents power. Since English is the language of British-ruled colonies, literature written in English has often been used to marginalize and thwart female point of view. But in the post-colonial era, however, the ability to use language, read, write, speak and publish has become an enabling tool to question the absence of female authorial representation from the literary canon. Post-colonial studies sparks off questions related to identity, race, gender and ethnicity. Since one of the objectives of the post-colonial discourse is aimed at reinstating the marginalized in the face of the dominant some of the aspects it seeks to address through its fictions are those related to women’s status in society, gender bias, quest for identity among others. As Rosalind Miles remarks,

*The task of interpretation of women’s experience cannot be left to male writers alone, however sympathetic they might 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.*

Taking this argument into consideration, the present chapter will very briefly study the works of women novelists in India. While trying to understand the themes in
the writings of some of the prominent post-colonial women writers, the study will also focus on the portrayal of their women protagonists.

2.2 The Novel in India: A Historical Perspective

Forever at the fountain-head of story-telling, the ‘novel’ as a literary phenomenon is fairly new when compared to other literary genres such as epics, lyrics, short stories and fables. These genres boast of an ancestry of several centuries. The ‘novel’ as a genre is an importation from the west. In other words, this sustained piece of prose fiction - the novel is one of the most notable gifts of English education to India having a legacy of a period little more than a century.

Of course, there are many who would argue and maintain that Sanskrit literature ushered the tradition of prose fiction in India with works like Bana’s *Kadambari* written in the first half of the seventh century, and Subhendu’s *Vasavadatta* written in late sixth century or early seventh century or Dandin’s *Dasa Kumara Charita* written in the sixth century. But the fact remains that for an exact description of a novel, and properly called so, one had to wait till the latter half of the nineteenth century. Lord Macaulay introduced English in India in 1935 with an intention to produce cheap clerks for East India Company. Indian in looks and habits, and yet very English in their attitude and manners, the contribution of the so called Indian English clerks in the enrichment of English literature and language surpassed the total contribution of all commonwealth nations of the world put together. Thus, the Western impact on Indian cultural front resulted in the development of formal written prose in the regional languages.

The advent of Indian English novel is an offshoot of the prolonged and momentous rule by the British in India. The Indian English novel in reality is a ‘metamorphosed’ form of the numerous stories of the land that already existed hidden in the myths, folklore and the umpteen languages and cultures that chaffered, cried, laughed and conversed all over the continent.
A comprehensive study of the literary history of modern India shows that it was in Bengal that the ‘literary renaissance’ first manifested itself; but almost immediately afterwards, signs of ‘new life’ were seen in the erstwhile Madras, Bombay and other parts of India as well. (Iyengar, 315) Although the first novel written in Bengali was *Alaler Ghorer Dulal* (‘Spoilt Son of a Rich Family’) which was published in the year 1858, the real beginnings were made with the work of the great Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s *Rajmohan’s Wife* published in 1864. This novel was a blend of romanticism and nationalism. A series of novels by the writer viz. *Kapalkundala*, *Vishavriksha*, *Krishnakanter Uyil*, *Anandamath*, *Devi Chaudhurani* and others appeared between 1866 and 1886 and many of them came out in English versions too. *Rajmohan’s Wife*, the melodramatic story of the trials and tribulations of a long suffering middle class Hindu wife at the hands of her callous husband is designed to convey a moral. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, who reigned as the literary monarch of renascent Bengal was soon followed by Rabindranath Tagore and Sarat Chandra Chatterjee. While Tagore achieved his first success with *Chokher Bali* (1902), translated in English as *Binodini* by Krishna Kriplani, narrating the tale of a young widow who has no right to love, no right to happiness in life, Sarat Chandra Chatterjee identified himself with the down-and-outs, and boldly portrayed the tears and sweat of the lower middle class and have-not classes. Trailing behind the Bankim – Tagore - Sarat ‘triune glory’, there were several other novelists who artistically presented the ups and downs of the everyday life in Bengal. Rajalakshmi Devi’s *The Hindu Wife* (1876), Toru Dutt’s *Bianca* (1878), Kali Krishna Lahiri’s *Roshinara* (1881), H. Dutt’s *Bijoy Chand* (1888) and Khatrapal Chakravarthi’s *Sarata* and *Hingana* (1895) were some of the other novels published during this period.

Thus, as K.R.S Iyengar observes, “the vicissitudes of the Bengali novel happened to foreshadow more or less the vicissitudes of the Novel in India”² (319)
In the pre-independence period, Indian English novels were more factual depicting contemporary India’s social setting under the impact of Gandhian principles. Bhagabat Nayak in his article “Trends in Indian English Fiction: Past, Perfect and Present Continuous” states,

*The resurgence of English education, rise of Indian Bloomsbury intellectuals, political unity between Hindus and Muslims, vision of imagined India and sway of Gandhian ideology of the nation favored a few elite Indians to write fiction in English*¹ (The Atlantic Literary Review, 114).

The urge for social reform was, of course, a significant aspect of the Indian renaissance of the nineteenth century and it found its prominence as a theme in some of the early Indian fiction. The issues that engaged the minds of the novelists of this period were the position of women, the plight of the peasants and the degeneration of the old aristocracy. The spirit of the age is more pervasively and effectively reflected in the fiction of the period than in other genres. The novel is a means of expression for the writer, and it is ultimately born of understanding and love. And, as Anuradha Roy observes:

*Novels, however great they are, cannot change or destroy repressive social structures: but by posing questions, by suggesting re-assessments and re-definition, they can help in formulating a consciousness which can, perhaps, ultimately bring about a constructive change*² (145)

The novel is a living and evolving literary genre and has in the hands of its practitioners displayed a perfect blend of form, substance and expression that is strikingly Indian and at the same time shows qualities of universality. A society stirred with the spirit of nationalistic fervor was a fertile ground for writing fiction and it was during the 1930’s that three major Indian English novelists - Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao began their career. While the social disparity
of India was aptly described by Anand in his *Coolie*, a glimpse of the imaginary village life with its entire unedited realities are seen in R. K. Narayan’s *Malgudi Days* and the last but not the least, the aura of Gandhism is depicted by Raja Rao in his remarkable novel *Kanthapura* which portrays a whole new India.

Anand’s notable contribution to fiction include *Untouchable* (1935) and *Coolie* (1936), *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937), *The Village* (1939) and *Across the Black Waters* (1940). In writing about the pariahs and the under-dogs rather than the sophisticated and the elect, Anand ventured into a territory that had been largely ignored till then by Indian writers. Writing during the 1930’s, which was the seed-time of modern independent India, Anand said, he would prefer the ‘familiar to the fancied’ and that he would avoid the highways of romance and sophistication but explore the by-lanes of the outcastes and the peasants, the *sepoys* and the working people.

A new dimension was added to the novel of social portraiture when R. K. Narayan began his series of Malgudi novels with *Swami and Friends* (1935). However, as M. K. Naik in his book *Indian English Fiction* observes,

\[
\text{Narayan produced his best work after Independence, when the little small town ironies of his microcosm developed into an awareness of the larger existential irony of human nature and life itself}^5 \text{ (16-17).}
\]

Narayan’s good humored irony as a firm ally of serious moral concern is evident in *The Financial Expert* (1952); *The Guide* (1958) and *The Man-eater of Malgudi* (1962). All these novels treat the theme of nemesis impressively.

Raja Rao’s *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) is one of the greatest of Indian English novels dealing with the enactment of East-West confrontation and stands unchallenged as a philosophical novel in the history of Indian English Fiction. *Kanthapura* (1938) narrates the tremors of Gandhian impact in a South-Indian
village recorded in the chatty language of an elderly widow and the reader sees everything through the film of her memory, sensibility and temperament.

Social life in a massive country like India is so full of vagaries and varieties that a novelist with a keen eye for observation and an empathizing heart would find such a wide spread of subject before him which would be literally inexhaustible. And women being natural storytellers couldn’t fail to make significant contribution to the genre themselves.

### 2.3 Post-Colonial Women Novelists: A Chronological Study

The world of fiction in India was for long marked by the overwhelming presence of male writers. Writing is a great means of self-expression, self-actualization and self-assertion. Throughout history, it is observed that women have been mute. Their silence was the main reason for them to be kept outside the historical process. But when they took to writing, they could express their woes and agonies and hold a mirror to their prevailing condition of being the ‘subaltern’ with gusto. Though it is observed that Indian women writers were greatly influenced by the ideologies of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Jean-Francois Lyotard that emphasized on the role of language and discussion in the construction of sexuality and the structure of gender relations, they did not imitate the western writers. Not having discarded the union of man and woman, they strove for a society with equal status for men and women rather than that of the dominating and the dominant. These novelists moved away from the stereotyped portrait of woman as the epitome of love and sacrifice and presented them as modern and educated individuals with a sense of awareness about their rights and position in society. The Independence Movement brought her out of the sheltered existence and propelled her into action in the social and political spheres. This emboldened her to revolt against patriarchy which had thrust upon her a subservient status. It is this
change in Indian woman that is voiced by the post-colonial woman novelists in India.

Among the early women storytellers in India, it is the marvelous Toru Dutt who wrote both French and an English novel before she died at the age of 21 in 1877. Her novels Bianca, or The Young Spanish Maiden and Le Journal de Mademoiselle d’Avers are autobiographical projections. Some of the other early women writers that deserve mention here are Raj Lakshmi Debi, Mrs. KrupabaiSatthianadhan, Swarakumari Debi and Iqbal Unmisa Hussain. It is however, only after the Second World War that women novelists of quality began enriching Indian English fiction. Among them Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Prawer Jhabwala are undoubtedly the most outstanding.

Kamala Markandaya’s first novel, Nectar in a Sieve (1954) is compared to Pearl S Buck’s The Good Earth, and takes the reader to the heart of a South Indian village where life has not changed for a thousand years. The novel states that fear, hunger and despair are the constant companions of a peasant. Her other novels include Some Inner Fury (1957), A Silence of Desire (1963), A Handful of Rice (1966), The Coffer Dams (1969), The Nowhere Man (1972), Two Virgins (1973), The Golden Honeycomb (1977) and Pleasure City (1982).

Ruth Parwer Jhabwala, a German-born British and American Booker Prize-winning novelist moved to India after marrying an Indian architect in 1951. Having lived in Delhi, she elaborated upon her experiences in India and wrote novels on Indian subjects. She published several novels of which To Whom She Will (1955), The Nature of Passion (1956), Esmond in India (1958), The Householder (1960), Get Ready for Battle (1962) and A Backward Place (1965) are noteworthy.

Depiction of social scene has always been a favorite occupation of women novelists. There have been authentic renderings of the social life in Hindu, Parsi
households by lesser known women novelists, who mostly wrote little more than a novel each. Venu Chitale’s *In Transit* (1950) - a story of three generations of a Poona Brahmin joint family between the two World Wars, Rama Mehta’s *Inside the Haveli* (1977) – an absorbing account of Rajasthan Purdah life; Zeenat Futehally’s *Zohra* (1951) –with the princely state of Hyderabad in the Gandhian age as its sultans and Attia Hosain’s *Sun Light on a Broken Column* (1961) – a nostalgic account of aristocratic life in pre-partition Lucknow and Perin Bharucha’s vivid presentation of Parsi life in *Fire Worshippers* (1968), Shakuntala Shrinagesh’s *The Little Black Box* (1955) is somewhat different book in which the story is presented in the form of a diary by the narrator-heroine, Sarla. Santha Rama Rau has several books to her credit. Her only novel *Remember the House* (1956) depicts things well within the range of her experience. Vimala Raina’s *Ambapali* (1962) is an ambitious historical novel set in Buddha’s time in ancient India.

Mrinalini Sarabhai’s *This Alone is True* (1977) describes the difficulties that have to be faced by a girl from a respectable family who desires to make a career in dancing. It is observed that the ‘new’ woman novelists share most of the preoccupation of their male counterparts in terms of pressing concerns and their attitude towards them. Suniti Namjoshi imitated Rushdie in ushering in Magical Realism through her fictional work, *The Conversation of Cow* (1985) and the more substantial one – *The Mothers of Maya Dwip* (1989) and *St. Suniti and the Dragon* (1994). Nina Sibal’s *Yatra* (1987) is supposed to have taken its cue from Rushdie’s Midnight Children and deals with the theme of partition. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), Rani Dharkar’s *The Village Syndrome* (1997) all belong to the genre of Magic Realism. Jai Nimbkar published her first novel *Temporary Answers* in 1974. Her second novel *Come Rain* (1993) presents a new version of the ‘East-West Encounter’, a stock theme in Indian English Fiction. While Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Prawer

Associated with the phenomenon of “late bloomers” (Naik.76) is the name Shashi Deshpande (b.1937) who published her first novel in the eighties. Regarded as the most outstanding woman novelist of the period, Shashi Deshpande’s novels deal with the theme of woman’s quest for fulfillment and the way she is thwarted at every stage by the forces of custom and tradition. Her notable works include *The Dark Holds No Terror* (1980), *Roots and Shadows* (1983), *That Long Silence* (1988), *The Binding Vine* (1993), *A Matter of Time* (1996), *Small Remedies* (2000)

Kiran Desai who followed the footsteps of a novelist mother displays her talent in a totally different direction. Her *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998) is a comic extravaganza built around a fake sadhu who lives perched on a guava tree.

In the post colonial Indian society, Indian women novelists were branded ‘Subaltern’ by their male counterparts who dominated the literary scene thus maintaining their indisputable roles. But the brave band of woman writers unveiled the status and content of modern women in all their facets - “the fall, the rise, the fall-rise and the rise-fall”^6 (Ramesh13)
Daughter of a Keralite mother and married to a Bengali, Arundhati Roy is the best known woman novelist from Kerala. Her only novel *The God of Small Things* (1997) which won her the Man Booker Prize for fiction is about an untouchable who commits the sin of falling in love with a high caste Christian woman and pays the inevitable penalty. A glimpse of metropolitan society and life is seen in Namita Gokhale’s *Paro: Dreams of Passion* (1984) and Sagarika Ghose’s *The Gin Drinkers* (2000) both of which portray the cocktail party circles in Delhi. A favourite theme of the women novelists who have lived in the west for brief or long periods is the East-West nexus. Senior most among them is Bharati Mukherjee whose *Jasmine* (1989) is a melodramatic tale of a Punjabi girl’s sexual escapades as an illegal immigrant in USA. Sunetra Gupta’s *Memories of Rain* (1992) and *The Glassblower’s Breath* (1993), Meena Alexander’s *Manhattan Music* (1997), Atima Shrivastava’s *Transmission* (1992) and *Looking for Maya* (1999) and Meera Syal’s *Anita and Me* (1996) are other novelists whose novels deal with immigrants’ issues. Speaking about women’s struggle for emancipation from economic, political and social bondages is Manju Kapur whose debut novel *Difficult Daughters* (1998) won the Commonwealth writer’s prize in 1999. Other novels of Kapur are *A Married Woman* (2002), *Home* (2006), *The Immigrant* (2008) and *The Custody* (2011). Shobha De’s is perhaps, one name that stands out among all Indian women novelists. A controversial writer, her style of writing created a sensation and invited extreme reactions. Beginning with *Starry Nights* (1989), she has written almost eighteen novels. Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake* (2003) is a coming of age novel built around the theme of the uneasy status of the immigrants, rediscovering one’s roots and finding an identity in a country that will treat you as an alien even if you were born there. A veteran in the short story form, Lahiri in *The Namesake* attempts the genre of novel for the first time, and confesses to have felt liberated and overwhelmed. She is of the opinion that novels are “roomier, messier and more tolerant than a short story.” Among more recent novels by women writers are Anita Nair’s *The Better Man* (2000) and *Ladies
Coupe (2001). *The Better Man* is unique and striking because it is her debut novel where a woman writer explores unusual territory - the man’s world. *Ladies Coupe* deals with women where the writer with an eagle’s eye observes the ordinary lives of maid servants, masseurs, vendors and other women who course through daily life.

### 2.4 Portrayal of ‘Women’ in Post-Colonial Indian Novelists

The novel is a replication of reality as seen in man’s relation to society. Indian English fiction is a vast treasure trove of fictional narratives. Practitioners of this genre have over the years used deft strokes to paint innumerable shades of the cultural ethos of the land in their artistic creations. The *‘twice born fiction’* (Mukherjee) as it is called, since it derives from two parent traditions, the Indian and the British, is of such varied nature that it simply cannot be described in single set of terms. It is in the area of fiction that Indian writers in English have made the most significant contribution and Mulk Raj Anand has rightly pointed out its universal appeal. Inspired by the exigencies of socio-political history of the country, the post-colonial Indian novelists took to studying the problems of contemporary society and gave articulate expression to the burning issues viz. poverty, illiteracy, superstition, caste and gender which seems to prevail in every sphere of man’s existence.

Post-colonial studies are predominantly concerned with the oppression of people by the colonizers. It is a legitimate and accomplished discipline that deals with changed expression as its subject matter and most of the work has been dedicated to the oppressed and exposes the injustice perpetrated by the oppressors. Post-colonial studies has also expanded its horizon and taken into its fold ramifications of liberation, diaspora, immigration and assimilation.

Indian novel in English began as a colonial encounter, and constituted traditions and experiences related to Indian society. Early work in this genre saw writers
talking on romantic, historical, and sentimental themes having emulated the eighteenth and nineteenth century British fiction writers like Daniel Defoe, Fielding and Walter Scott. While it was in Bengal that the ‘literary renaissance’ manifested itself, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s *Rajmohan’s Wife* (1864) heralded the real beginnings of the Indian English novel. The first novel written by an Indian in English, *Rajmohan’s Wife* narrated the melodramatic story of the trials of the long suffering middle class Hindu wife at the hands of her callous husband. The urge for social reform being a significant aspect of the Indian renaissance of the nineteenth century, questions related to the position of women in society naturally became an important theme in some early Indian English Fiction. Shevantibai M. Nikambe’s *Ratnabai: A Sketch of a Bombay High Caste Hindu Young Wife* (1895) – a novel based on the author’s own experience is an overt plea for education for women. It depicts the successful struggle of a Hindu girl married at the age of nine to secure education in spite of strong opposition from her in-laws. Yet another novel addressing the issue of need for social reform written during this time was R.C. Dutt’s *The Lake of Palms: A Story of Indian Domestic Life* (1902) which strongly advocates widow-remarriage. M.K. Naik observes that though novels were being written during this period, “fiction still remained in swaddling clothes.” (107)

In this context, Bhagwat Goyal notes that,

*Literature which is essentially a social and cultural seismograph records the throbbing pulse of time and transmutes it into the heartbeat of eternity*” (43).

The same is true of Indian English Novel which recorded the themes of Indian struggle for freedom. Indo-Anglian fiction, particularly that of the thirties, are intensely influenced by the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi, who fought for the under privileged classes, the have-nots and the downtrodden, the marginalized and the
weak. Fiction in India witnessed a dramatic change with the arrival of the Big Three on the scene in the 1930s viz. Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao. Although the first Indian novel in English by Bamkin Chandra Chatterjee dates back to 1864, it is argued that “the Indian English novel achieved the semblance of a literary movement only during the 1930s” \textsuperscript{11} (Goyal 44)

A prolific writer and a champion of the underdogs and suppressed class, Mulk Raj Anand’s first novel \textit{Untouchable} (1935) describes an eventful day in the life of Bakha, a sweeper from the outcast colony in the cantonment town of Bulashah. \textit{Coolie} (1936), narrates the pathetic odyssey of Munoo, an orphaned boy from the hills exploited by the forces of industrialism, capitalism, communalism, colonialism and sexism. More than an indictment of individuals, Anand’s \textit{Coolie} is an indictment against society as a whole - a society that breeds such prejudice and cupidity and cruelty. And \textit{Two Leaves and a Bud} (1937) tells the story of the protagonist Gangu, who is lured by false promises and is, forced to work in unhygienic conditions and suffer from starvation.

R.K. Narayan stands out among the Indian English novelists. Born in 1906, and brought up in a conservative, orthodox Hindu society, Narayan comes across the stifling plight of women within the confines of an orthodox society which has nothing to offer a woman except for material refuge. She is a product of a society where she has claims over nothing else other than her body.

\textit{What possession can a woman call her own except her body? Everything that she has is her father’s, her husband’s or her son’s} \textsuperscript{12} (Narayan 88).

The above lines from his novel firmly establish the real position of women in the society depicted by Narayan. A critical analysis of Narayan’s novels ranging from \textit{The Dark Room} (1938) to \textit{Grandmother’s Tale} (1992) has him voicing his views on emancipation of women from servitude in the orthodox Hindu society. His imaginary town of Malgudi which is at the heart of all the action in his novels is a
striking resemblance to Hardy’s Wessex. Interestingly, in this fictional town of Malgudi, one can find two categories of women-the mothers, aunts or grandmothers who cling to the long established traditions of orthodox Hindu society and another set of women who belong to the modern generation and express a strong desire to break the taboos and traditions that thwart their freedom. Juxtaposing the character of Savitri in *The Dark Room* who acts as a mirror to the status of women in pre-independent India with his protagonist Rosie of *The Guide* (1958) written post-independence, Narayan attempts to show the transition in women from a very docile and subservient being to one who is more liberated, educated and strong-willed—a woman who dares to leave her husband for his apathy and indifferent attitude towards her. Again, one notices a striking contrast in the names of his heroines. While Savitri is reminiscent of the mythical character by the same name, Rosie is more westernized and unconventional. Finally, his *The Painter of Signs*, echoes the voices of all the women in his novels who struggle for emancipation by breaking down the walls of the ‘doll’s houses.’ Strikingly modern in her spirit of independence, and displaying a strong sense of individuality, she revolts against the typical system of the institution of marriage in a patriarchal society.

All said and done, the trio did not pay much attention to women emancipation in their novels. Although they had great material on freedom movement and the role women played, at their disposal, they failed to justify the opportunity. Except for *The Old Woman and the Cow* (1960), Anand is deeply involved in championing the cause of the underdogs and have-nots in the society. Gauri, stands out as a fine example of women’s emancipation. Narayan’s portrayal of women characters ranges from the meek and submissive wife of Margayya in the *Financial Expert* and Savitri in *The Dark Room*, to the vibrant and radical women characters like Daisy and Rosie in *The Painter of Signs* and *The Guide* respectively. But Daisy
and Rosie are not examples to be emulated and Anand too obliquely warns us of the destructive repercussions ‘feminism’ will have on society.

Women in the novels of Raja Rao are victims of domestic injustice. Indian culture being deeply rooted into his consciousness, he fails to offer concrete solutions to various women’s issues. Portrayal of women in the works of Bhabani Bhattacharya, are though full of optimism yet a far cry from realism. Kajoli in *So Many Hungers!* suffers immense torture and misery but her spirit remains invincible. Mohini in *Music for Mohini* initiates social reform in Behula village steeped in superstitions and obsolete customs. Bhattacharya’s women are tender and charming and though they try to affect social change, they end up being victimized.

It is therefore observed that male novelists somehow failed to understand a woman’s psyche and make an honest portrayal of the women characters in their novels. The male novelists have either projected their weaknesses and shortcomings or placed her on a high pedestal and deified her. In doing so, the delineation of the real woman somehow evaded them.

A perfunctory look at the significant volume of the creative work produced in the post-colonial novels in English bring out the evolutionary formula clearly discernible in the Indian society. One gets to see a classic shift of women characters from “feminine” to “female”. K.R. Srinivas Iyangar’s axiomatic expression is quite curt and justifiably authenticated: “*women are natural storytellers even when they don’t write or publish*”13 (435). Like the British women novelists, Indian women writers surpass the male novelists both quantitatively and qualitatively in their exploration of inner mind of women in order to assert their identity. Through their writings, they have lived to challenge the assumption that gender oppression is the primary force of patriarchy. In a patriarchal set up women have had no real power in the outside world, no place in
decision making. In other words, they were passive creatures confined to their households in a male dominated society. It was this docile and secondary status of women that has been justifiably questioned by an intellectually rich breed of women writers in India.

Having traced the beginnings of the English novel in India and also taken a cursory look at the delineation of women characters in the works of the Triad - Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao, what follows in this section of the chapter is a perfunctory analysis of some of the major post-colonial women novelists and the portrayal of ‘women’ in their works.

Kamala Markandaya (b.1924) is one of those women novelists whose work depicts the prelude to a fresh awakening in Indian women. She is not a radical feminist and her novels in no way are outright condemnation of the repressive and dominating patriarchal set up. Though she does not take up the role of a propagandist, her novels reflect the ambivalence of change in women. In her first novel, *Nectar in the Sieve* (1954) which is compared to Pearl S Buck’s *The Good Earth* (1954) she takes us to the heart of a South Indian village where life has not changed for a thousand years. Rukmini, the narrator- heroine in the novel is a Mother of Sorrows who receives shock after shock. Her character in the novel is intended to show a gradual emergence from the plane of innocence to experience. She had the maturity to say:

> A woman they say, always remembers her wedding night...but for me there are other nights...when I went to my husband matured in mind as well as in the body  

(Markandaya, Nectar in the Sieve 66).

Rukmini is a sensible and prudent housewife, well versed in all chores related to a peasant’s wife.

R. A. Singh writes:
Rukmani’s spiritual stamina, heroic impulse, love-like simplicity, love for her children tolerance and respect for traditional values make her an outstanding character\(^\text{(6)}\).

Thus, Rukmani is an admirable picture of stoicism and resilience and as observed by A.V. Krishna Rao, “The real truth of Nectar in the Sieve is the spiritual stamina of Rukmani.”\(^\text{(6)}\)

Kamala Markandaya’s second novel Some Inner Fury (1957) like her earlier novel is cast in the autobiographical form and exploits the freedom of service. But there appears a world of difference between Rukmani and Mira, the heroine of Some Inner Fury. “Mira is a creature of imagination and memory and in her, naturalness and sophistication are in uneasy partnership”\(^\text{17}\) (Iyengar439).

Mira grows up to be a relatively independent girl but when restrictions are imposed upon her she smashes them down. But she soon grasps the perils of rampant freedom-

\[\text{It was out; the uncertainty, one’s helplessness, the fear, the despair, never allowed into the consciousness but always existing there}^{18}\] (Markanadaya, Some Inner Fury 165).

The deep-rooted forces of convention stop her from trespassing. Markandaya makes her objective very clear - no roots, no survival. Roshan in the novel is a rich lady who angles in the troubled waters of emancipation and revolutionary politics.

\[\text{She is all in one - forthright, erudite, endowed and progressive. Her conception of freedom is universal – national and global – and thus a role model for other women}^{19}\] (Ramesh 76).

Of all the characters in Some Inner Fury, Premala is the sweetest, even the most heroic whose-
Mother sadness is as potent as her mother love or mother might, whose silence is stronger than all rhetoric, and whose seeming capacity for resignation is the true measure of her measureless strength\(^{20}\) (Iyengar 440).

Sarojini of *A Silence of Desire* (1961), Markandaya’s third novel is a mainstream middle class orthodox Hindu housewife, having her own conventions of life. She has all the requisites of a responsible home-maker.

*She is good with her children, an excellent cook, an efficient manager of the household, a woman who still gave him pleasure after fifteen years of marriage...*\(^{21}\) (Silence of Desire 6).

Markandaya portrays her as the emissary of the ‘new and revolutionary’ Indian woman in the making.

Ruth Prawer Jhabwala in the course of a little over a decade published six novels. Her novels deal with the psyche of Indian women who undergo inexpressible sufferings in their marital life. She points out the undesirable facets of social life in India and attributes them as a source of suffering among Indian women. In her portrayal of ‘women’, she brings out the pain and agony experienced by them as a result of their frustration in love, infidelity, betrayal, divorce and disintegration of their marital life. Jhabwala’s protagonist Sarala in *Get Ready for Battle* (1962) is a weak and indolent woman always eating and sleeping; yet it is her innate strength of character that splendidly scores in the end.

Anita Desai has, as all her critics unanimously agree, successfully portrayed the intimate world of the female self in most of her novels. Anita Desai’s novels are-

*Concerned with the emotional world of women, revealing a rare, imaginative awareness of various deeper forces at work and a profound understanding of feminine sensibility*\(^{22}\) (Hariprasanna).
Anita Desai’s fiction stands as a collective metaphor for celebration of womanhood in the midst of conflicting ideologies, human bondages and phallocentric notions of womanhood.

*Her women characters herald a new morality which is not confined to physical chastity. It demands accommodation of individual longing for ‘self-fulfilment’*\(^23\) (Kakatiya Journal 3.1)

In her novel *Cry the Peacock* (1963), Desai explores the turbulent emotional world of the neurotic protagonist, Maya, who reels under an acute alienation, that stems from marital discord and lands on the verge of curious insanity. Maya’s neurosis in the novel is based on ‘marital discord’ arising out of ‘morbid pre-occupation with death’ and it shatters the very identity of women in our contemporary male-dominated society where a woman longing for love is driven into madness or compelled to commit suicide. Maya’s husband Gautama is a man in whom “understanding was scant, love was meager.” Desai’s Maya is extremely sensitive and represents a woman who has failed to come to terms with the dominion of patriarchy. Sita, the heroine of *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975) stands for the irreconcilable inner and outer worlds. The imponderable gulf between expectation and reality leads to anguish of the sensitive soul. Independent and non-conformist that she is, she feels asphyxiated due to the ‘vegetarian complacence’, the ‘solidity’, the ‘insularity’ and unimaginative way of life of her husband, children and other people around her. Though she suffers from loneliness, unlike Maya, she doesn’t commit suicide but simply compromises with her destiny and finds the courage to face life with all its ups and down. Monisha’s predicament in *Voices in the City* (1965) is again pretty similar to that of Maya. While Maya is obsessed with fear, Monisha is obsessed by a sense of suffocation. Though Monisha lives with her husband Jiban and shares his bed yet Jiban never shares her mind. Anita Desai’s *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) presents a study of the agonized pride of Nanda Kaul who longs for a calm retired life. She is found to
desire a life of seclusion as a result of her husband’s perpetual faithlessness. Their wedding is veritably based on physical lust and circumstantial convenience bereft of love. Thus, the poignant race of women in Anita Desai’s novel pictures the innumerable unspoken miseries of millions of married women tortured and tormented by existential problems and dilemmas faced by them in a conservative taboo - ridden society.

Attia Hussain’s *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) is an autobiographical account presented through the fictional character Laila, the fifteen year old orphaned daughter of an influential Muslim Taluqdar family. Laila is portrayed as a girl with a strong spirit struggling for independence in a world which believes in traditional rules of obedience where honor and dishonor are more important than personal happiness, a world where feudalism prevails.

A notable contributor to feminist fiction, Nayantara Sehgal has presented in her novels modern Indian women’s search for definition of self and society. Sehgal, believes Lakshmi Sinha, has taken up the two images - “abla and shakti” of conventional Indian women and recreated the image of sabla in the character of Jaipal and Sonali. As a writer of feminist concerns she condemns the idea of looking at women as “property” and not “persons” (Kakatiya Journal 3.1)

In a letter to Jasbir Jain, Sehgal says:

*I try to create the virtuous women – the modern Sita, if you like my women are strivers and aspirers, towards freedom, towards goodness, towards a compassionate world. This virtue is a quality of heart and mind and spirit a kind of untouched innocence and integrity, I think there is this quality in the Indian women.* (145)

There is something very distinct in Sehgal’s portrayal of her women. Her women characters are concerned with the fundamental question- the lot of women. In fact,
all her novels from *A Time to be Happy* (1957) to *Mistaken Identity* (1985) express her deep concern for the dominant status of women in the patriarchal society. They also emphasize upon the value of freedom which is so essential for the inner and outer development of individuals cocooned within domesticity. Sehgal’s heroines move out in search of wider spaces and become a part of the competition and battle against the struggle for survival. Her first two women Maya in *A Time to be Happy* and Rashmi in *This Time of Morning* are still women in stasis but her other three protagonists - Saroj, Simrit, and Devi display strong self determination. Sehgal’s Maya and Rashmi are products of a parochial society and their struggle for emancipation is burdened with feelings of guilt. Sehgal’s female protagonists from novels that form a part of her second phase of writing are different. These women are self-assured and have the courage to break free from the shackles of oppression, with no sense of guilt or even remorse. Saroj is married in *Storm of Chandigarh* (1969) to Inder but he fails to treat his wife as a friend with whom he can “be naked in spirit”27 (61) Inder uses her premarital lapse as a weapon to humble her. Her act, he feels has no place in an ‘order that clearly demarcated the roles of men and women’.

Saroj, on her part is wholly involved in her marriage to Inder and desires to build a healthy relationship with him but since Inder continues to treat her “merely as a wife - a possession, not a person.”28 (Jain 52) Saroj walks out of the home that had ceased to be a ‘home’. Simrit in *The Day in Shadow* (1971) represents the well-bred Hindu women inspired by sense of goodness and ideal values of life who yearn for a compassionate understanding, sympathy and friendship to blossom in her marital relationship, but the cruel, materialistic and selfish husband finds it only too melodramatic. In fact, Simrit for Sehgal, is an average acquiescent woman who allows herself to be exploited for the simple reason that she “is not part of the creating active world”29 (Sehgal, The Hindustan Times). She is
symbolic of the Hindu race; she is not an individual, she is, “a culture, a tradition, a patient, enduring passivity” (Sehgal 18)

Sehgal’s *Rich Like Us* (1985), which won the Sinclair Prize and Sahitya Akademi Award marks the third and most mature phase of her career. It vividly describes how “Women are exploited and victimized on all occasions in marriage, in sexual relationships, in childbirth and even in adultery” (Asnani, Chaddha 67). In a patriarchal society, man wields every opportunity to use woman to his utmost advantage and self-gratification. Sehgal’s *Rich Like Us* touches upon the predicament of women in a tradition-bound society and narrates her sufferings. The novel is the story of Rose, though there is another character Sonali. In fact, Sonali is the symbol of the new woman of Modern India.

Sehgal’s women that belong to the last phase of her career are strong willed, courageous and emotionally independent. It is noticed that in their struggle for self-realization, both Saroj in *Storm in Chandigarh* and Simritin in *The Day in Shadow* seek the support of, and are motivated by Vishal and Raj respectively. However, Sonali Ranade in *Rich like Us* dares to challenge male superiority successfully without assistance from any man. This only proves how strong her survival instinct is! Anna Hansen of *Plans for Departure* (1985) is a Danish woman who wants to break away and be herself. She not only knows what she wants but also knows how to achieve it. Her travels were “part of her quest for freedom and meaning” (Jain 146)

In *Mistaken Identity*, culminates Sehgal’s quest for emancipation of woman. Here is the story of Rani of Vijaygarh, a nameless character that is also not educated like Sehgal’s other heroines. Betrothed at five and married at thirteen, she was confined to the four walls of her house. Nobody cared to know whether she wanted to marry or not, because like other women of her time she was “all tongue and no script” (Mistaken Identity 156). Leading a neglected and humiliated life
of the unwanted wife of the king, and “raving for more life to live” (158), she displays immense vitality and courage to move away from the stereotyped role of the royal wife to marry her ardent lover Yusuf, a communist.

Thus, from the prototype Maya to Rani of Vijaygarh, Sehgal portrays her women as individuals who wish to combine marriage and their individuality in such a way that neither is harmed. They are seen longing for their independence away from the hypocritical world of double standards in a male dominated society.

Kamala Das who holds the repute of a poetess more than a novelist, produced two novels. *The Alphabet of Lust* (1976) and *A Doll for the Child Prostitute* (1977). The protagonists in these novels let themselves to be exploited sexually in their assertion for emancipation and search for identity. Even her autobiography, *My Story* reveals her struggle for emancipation and search for identity. Manasi of *The Alphabet of Lust* is the frustrated unhappy wife of Amol Mitra, a man old enough to be her father. His preoccupation with his work denies Manasi love and companionship of her husband. Feeling ignored and despondent she craves for freedom so much so that she breaks all barriers-social or moral. Both Mira and Rukmini are child prostitutes as the name of Kamala Das’ second novel *A Doll for Child Prostitute* suggests. While Mira the child prostitute, in her desire for emancipation secretly marries her student client, a marriage that doesn’t last a week and Mira is forced to return to prostitution, Rukmini’s quest for identity and desire to lead a respectable life is fulfilled through her marriage with the brothel-keeper’s son. Paro in Namita Gokhales *Paro: Dream of Passions* (1984) is portrayed as a woman who gives expression to her need for freedom through her sexual exploits. She puts an end to all the inhibitions and moral values when she turns a nymphomaniac in search of sexual escapades and emerges a prototype of emancipation and individuality.
Assessing Shashi Deshpande’s worth as a novelist, G.S. Amur writes “Women’s writing can be seen at its best”\textsuperscript{35} (84) in her fiction. This is true because the source of her main motivation is not from borrowed ideology but from first hand authentic experience and understanding of what it means to be a woman in typical Indian context.

Sarita, the protagonist of Despande’s first novel \textit{The Dark Holds No Terror} (1980) is a well-educated modern Indian woman, a doctor by profession who demands equality with men, a rebel who protests against man. Through Saru, the novelist highlights how emancipation and success for women can cause subversion of roles in the family and destroy happiness. Though education elevates her status in the community, it does in no way alter her status in the family. Saru undergoes humiliation both as a child and post-marriage, as a wife. She has to bear the brunt of gender-discrimination shown by her parents and carry the bruise of blame, totally undeserved, when her mother holds her, the daughter, responsible for the son’s death. The mother’s cruel attitude towards Saru is evident in her words “Why didn’t you die? Why are you alive and he dead?”\textsuperscript{36} (The Dark Holds No Terror 14) When Sarita gains importance as a lady doctor, her husband Manohar’s ego is hurt. She now becomes a victim of Manu’s sadism which is revealed in his sexual tortures.

\textit{The hurting hands; the savage teeth, the monstrous assault of a horrible familiar body. And above me a face I could not recognize}\textsuperscript{37} (112).

The protagonist of \textit{Roots and Shadows} (1983) is a young woman who has rebelled against her authoritarian and traditional joint family. Indu, the heroine feels suffocated and disintegrated in a marriage that fails to bring her physical or emotional gratification. She must undergo immense trauma when she refuses to play the straight-jacketed role of a wife. Indu is forced to conceal her real feeling as the male ego refuses to accept passion in a woman. The perpetual pain, anger
disappointment because of the growing absurdities in life brings in “Silence” in her life. Indu ruefully remarks, “That was one thing I had learnt now. One thing my marriage taught me. The gift of silence.”\(^{38}\) (Roots and Shadows 30).

Indu’s realization of the need to conform and her awareness of the great destruction that conformity would impose upon herself make her cry out “I can never become myself”\(^{39}\) (30). Indu’s tender soul is seen being stifled as a child due to child marriage and later being withered under sexual advances of her husband.

Jaya the narrator-writer-protagonist in Shashi Despande’s *The Long Silence* (1988) essays the role of a wife and mother to perfection and yet she finds herself lonely and estranged. Demonstrating two sides of her personality, she is seen vacillating between the two selves - ‘Suhasini’ steeped in tradition and ‘Jaya’ trying to break the shackles of tradition. Basically, a modern woman rooted in tradition, Jaya ends up succumbing silently to the male ego and finally she is left with no identity of her own but “just emptiness and silence”\(^{40}\) (That Long Silence 144). Urmila is different from her predecessors on account of her endeavours to help other women.

Urmila the central character in *The Binding Vine* (1993) is educated, a career woman and assumes, a new role in response to the needs of the hour. She is also a grieving mother who has lost her one year old daughter Anu and as a result becomes highly sensitive to the suffering and despair of others. Shashi Despande’s Urmila is the ‘New Woman’ who is independent, assertive and economically and socially secure.

Rectifying the male presumption about female subjugation she says:

\[\text{No human being wants to be dominated. The most important need is to love. From the moment of our birth, we struggle to find something with which we can anchor ourselves to this strange world we find ourselves in. Only when do we love we find this anchor}\]^{41}\) (The Binding Vine 137).
The novelist through the consciousness of her female protagonist Urmi describes her quest for love, meaning and happiness in life. The novelist also delineates the character of two other women in the novel - Shakuntala, a rape victim’s mother and Urmi’s mother-in-law, and Mira, a victim of marital rape. Through these characters, Deshpande argues how the invasion of female body “even though sanctified by marriage can be traumatic as rape.”42 (Reddy 97)

In *A Matter of Time* (1996) Sumi retreats into a shocked silence being unexpectedly deserted by her husband Gopal. Deshpande portrays her as a woman with a rare sense of courage and self-confidence. She shows fortitude in the face of this tragedy and desires to be independent, asserts her identity and revives her creativity. She copes admirably with her status as an estranged wife and her role as a single parent hidden behind her stoic silence. Sumi evolves out of the invisible fetters of patriarchy and reaches a stage of self-sufficiency and self-fulfillment. Sumi’s patience, tolerance, sense of equanimity and stoicism makes her an ‘enigma’. As Shashi Despande observes:

*Sumi’s acceptance is not passive. She blocks out the unpleasantness. She has a good opinion of herself; she is more concerned with getting on life. She does not want pity; she would do anything for pride...*43 (Rama Rao 13).

*A Matter of Time* is also about Kalyani, Sumi’s grandmother who is not so educated, Sumi’s sister Premi, a successful doctor and the young girls Aru, Charu and Seema. All these young girls aspire for a career and independence. The old and the new seem to exist in a family which is modern but laced with certain traditional values.

The protagonist of Despande’s novel *Small Remedies* (2000) is Madhu Saptarishi. She is an urban middle aged, educated woman who is trying to accept the death of her eighteen-year-old son in a tragic accident when a bus is burnt down in Bombay
in the riots following the demolition of Babri Masjid. Madhu is assigned the task of writing the biography of a famous musician, Savitribai, who has sacrificed her family in pursuit of music. Savitribai represents the time in history when girls from respectable families were not allowed to learn music. It was only courtesans who rendered music. Her elopement with a Muslim tabla player helps her in realizing her dream. Twelve-year-old Munni, her daughter, has no place in her life as a musician. Munni too rejects her mother and the tabla player to “forge a new identity for herself as a conventional Hindu woman” (Naik, Narayan 88) Madhu recreates an honest story of Savitribai’s life and also her own aunt Leela who broke herself from the chains of orthodoxy and caste by marrying a Christian. This, in a way empowers Madhu to overcome her sense of loss following her son’s death.

Despande’s novels generally deal with a crisis in the heroine’s life and most of the time she employs a stream-of-conscious technique where the story is narrated by the heroine. Though she vehemently refuses being referred to as a feminist, her vast corpus of work happens to be woman-oriented.

*The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992), debut novel by Githa Hariharan, a prolific woman writer and social activist, won the Commonwealth Writer’s Prize for best first novel in the Eurasian region. Hariharan, in this novel portrays different facets of women, their sufferings and their status in society. Her vivid portrayal of three women - Devi, Sita and Mayanamma gives the readers a peek into the different aspects of women belonging to three different generations. Devi, the protagonist is an educated and modern girl who returns to her family home in Madras leaving behind her Black American friend Dan. Back home from America she is pressurized to marry Mahesh, the match her widowed mother Sita arranges for her. Beginning to live with an insensitive husband, the marriage loses all meaning when Devi fails to have a child. Unhappy, lonely and disillusioned with her relationship with Mahesh, she confesses that she was “unprepared for the vast
yawning middle chapters” (Harihan 44) of her life and decides to walk out of her marriage. Devi is not the only unhappy woman in the story, for, her mother Sita, and the old maid servant Mayanamma shares her misery too. Harihan depicts the inner life of these women traversing across these generations, each one having their own saga to narrate.

Absence of healthy communication and care and concern for each other in marital relationships results in estrangement of partners that leads to bad marriage. Devi’s grandmother who is a feminist in her own right is seen asserting her individuality. She narrates myths of Amba, Gandhari, Ganga and others to build up a traditional image of woman handed down through generations. Devi’s mother Sita, who is an expert veena player stifles her creativity by giving up her veena and turns into an efficient household machine to serve her husband. Mayanamma is ill-treated because she is barren and her tale of woe is no different from other women. Conditioned in her feminine role by the principles of a traditional society, she cannot offer resistance to the tortures meted out to her by her tyrant husband and mother-in-law. She is seen submitting herself to rigidities of the patriarchal society that believes that a woman is an “embodiment of sacrifice, silent suffering, humility, faith and knowledge” (Everett 76)

Githa Harihan employs exceptional fictional skills to show very subtly how women are bludgeoned to play subordinate roles. Harihan’s women characters are epitomes of the changing image of Indian women who drift away from their lot and become embodiments of self-sacrifice and endurance while they don the garb of self-assured, ambitious, bold and assertive women in society.

Daughter of the famous novelist Anita Desai, Kiran Desai was exposed to a literary environment ever since she was a child and very easily inherited her mother’s literary skill. She entered the world of literature in 1998 with the publication of her first novel Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard but it was her
second novel *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) that saw her becoming famous as a postmodern literary artist. Writing with wit and perception Kiran Desai creates elegant and thoughtful study of families and deals with all levels of society and different cultures. *The Inheritance of Loss* opens with a teenage Indian girl Sai, who is orphaned and lives with her Cambridge educated Anglophile grandfather, a retired judge in the town of Kalimpong on the Indian side of the Himalayas. She loses her parents Mr. and Mrs. Mistry in an accident in Russia and is accepted easily into the life of the judge who was otherwise a difficult person to adjust with. Sai is not docile like her grandmother Nimmi or inconspicuous as her mother. She is portrayed as the modern woman who is at the same time innocent, sensitive naïve and bold. Nimmi, her grandmother is a true depiction of an innocent village girl. Her marriage to the judge Jemubhai Patel is in reality a marriage of two cultures – the East and the West. Failing to adjust with her arrogant husband, she breaks her silence:

> With fear that grew as she spoke the words, summoning up the same spirit of the powder-puff night, she defied him. To his amazed ears and her own shocked ears, as if waking up to a moment of clarity before death, she said:
> “You are the one who is stupid” (Desai 304).

Her outburst after the usual silence is strong and humiliating for the judge because it questions his supremacy over her. Through Nimmi’s bold act of breaking her silence and retaliating, Kiran Desai symbolizes the ‘ruled’ speaking against the ‘ruler’. It is also perhaps the ‘oppressed’ (women) in the patriarchal set-up standing up against their oppressors (men folk).

The first Indian writer based in India to be on the Picador USA select list for Spring 2000, Anita Nair has come a long way from aspiring to be a psychiatrist to almost becoming a journalist, finding a hold in the world of advertising to actually becoming a writer. Anita Nair confesses:
Being a writer is a necessity for me, an addiction. The best thing about being a writer is to be anonymous in one’s writing, being genderless, ageless, classless, writing about people completely different from myself⁴⁸ (Menon, caffeddilli.com).

Her famous novel *Ladies Coupe* (2001) which was written soon after her first novel *The Better Man* (2000) answers questions that every woman must have faced in her life with regards to her status in society. The novel is a saga of a woman’s search for strength, independence and dignity as a woman. In the novel Nair’s women can be visualized clearly - “their faces, their bones their desires”⁴⁹ (Singh, Tribune).

Speaking about *Ladies Coupe* in an Article in The Times of India, Christina Koning remarks,

*Nair conveys her protagonist’s dilemma with a freshness and charm that makes her story more than just the predictable feminist homily it might appear.*⁵⁰

Travelling on a women’s compartment of a train from Bangalore to Kanyakumari are six women who have only one thing common between them- “gender.” Nair is of the view that-

*There was a certain strength deep inside that every individual has”⁴⁶ and that women must be courageous and claim their own lives and possibilities*⁵¹ (Mathai, The Hindu).

So though the women travelling together do not discuss their life stories openly with each other, Nair’s protagonist Akhila has them sharing their experiences with her and presents them all on the “threshold of self-discovery filled with the incantatory power to see a new destination and to burn up the tracks”⁵² (Sinha 151)
Forty-five-year-old Akhila is a frustrated spinster who has spent all her years of youth looking after parents, siblings and their offspring’s. Assuming the role of the family head after the death of her father, she sacrifices her own desires, uncared by her own family members who are self-centered and shamelessly keep living off her. The railway journey she undertakes is in a way an escape from her family duties carried out by her so selflessly. Setting off on a journey with her fellow travelers – Janaki Prabhakar, Prabha Devi, Margaret Paulraj, Sheela Vasudevan and Marikolanthu, she is initially resistant to mingle freely but later knew that-

*She could tell these women whatever she chose to. Her secrets, desires and fears. In turn she could ask them whatever she wanted. They would never see each other again*⁵³ (Ladies Coupe 20).

Janaki Prabhakar, the oldest among all has been a pampered wife and always looked after by her father, brothers and her husband. Nair portrays her as a woman who ends up being fragile, and clings on to the men in her life for support. To Janaki, a woman’s ultimate duty was to get married - “I believed in that tired old cliché that a home was a woman’s kingdom”⁵⁴ (23)

Nair’s next portrait is of Sheela Vasudevan, a fourteen year old girl who had the ability to perceive what others could not. Her grandmother, whom she called Ammumma, was a perfectionist all her life. So even after her grandmother’s death Sheela dresses her up because she says “I’m not going to let the world see you like this”⁵⁵ (73). When her parents disapproved of this as if the act was sacrilegious, she (Sheela) didn’t care. “She knew Ammumma would have been pleased”⁵⁶ (74).

Perhaps, this paves way for Sheela’s future liberation. Nair’s next woman character is a Margaret Paulraj, a chemistry teacher who believes that everything in life is a combination of acids, alkaline and gases. She does not subscribe to the idea that a woman is incomplete without a man. She employs a unique weapon to
snub his conceited behavior and male ego. She begins feeding him to a state of benign fatness.

Ebe slowly became a fat man. A quiet man. An easy man. Man who no longer needed the coterie or defaced books. He needed me like he had never before. And he became a man I could live with once again\(^{57}\) (134).

Prabha Devi, another passenger, is a woman who doesn’t believe in the norms set by men. She has a mind of her own, and is sure of what she wants. The desire to learn swimming is born at the sight of a swimming pool. Once at it, her entire life is transformed.

She felt the years slip away from her... from the tips of her fingers a straight line, a slow triumph... My body no longer matters. I have this I have conquered fear\(^{58}\) (195).

With all her co-passengers alighting the train, Akhila has for her companion only one passenger Marikolanthu, a woman “from whom anger poured forth like a stream of lava”\(^{59}\) (209)

Nair voices the true strength every woman possesses through the words of Marikolanthu. Annoyed with the views of the other co-passengers, she says they couldn’t fathom how cruel the world could be to women. But with her strong conviction she blurts out:

Women are strong. Women can do everything as well as men. Women can do much more. But a woman has to seek that vein of strength in herself. It does not show itself naturally\(^{60}\) (210).

Nair’s delineation of her women in the novel sends a strong message of hope for women in India who have been perpetually repressed, humiliated and debased in a patriarchal society.
Jhumpa Lahiri is one of the new generation writers of Indian origin in America. Her works take a peek into the numerous cultural conflicts and issues of identities in the first and second generation’s emigrants in the west. Her characters are those people who are perpetually experiencing the anguish of being away from ‘home’ amidst their humdrum existence. Lahiri’s fiction does not present female characters as the “subject of male chauvinism or victims of masculine oppressions” observes Chandrashekhar Sharma. Rather, they have to fight against the issues that emerge from themselves.

Lahiri’s female characters can be looked at as belonging to two categories. One set of women who are brought up with values inherited from their parents and the parent culture find it difficult to adjust to an alien culture. The second category of immigrant disregards their ethnic identity and creates a personal identity of their choice. The Namesake is the story of Ashima Bhaduri who becomes Ashima Ganguli after her marriage to Ashok Ganguli from Alipore in Calcutta. Lahiri vividly portrays Ashima’s immigrant experience, identity problems, emotional alienation from her ancestral home and the pangs of missing out on the cares and concern of her family. Unlike her husband Ashok, she is reluctant to accept the American culture and resists all things that are American. Her longing nostalgia for her family in her country of birth is felt even more during her pregnancy.

> Nothing feels normal to Ashima, it’s not so much the pain which she knows somehow she will survive. It’s the consequence: motherhood in a foreign land. Unmonitored by those she loved she is terrified to raise a child in a country where she knows so little, where life seems so tentative and spare.

(The Namesake 6).

Ashima is a traditional Indian wife who is unaffected by the American culture and sticks to her ideologies and simple lifestyle. Family relationships matter most to her and untouched by American multi culture she tries her best to uphold the
traditional values against the materialistic values of America. Lahiri, vividly portrays the character of a typical Indian woman who is constantly tormented by the fear of being alienated from her culture and the growing neglect of her children towards the culture to which they originally belong. Moushumi, in Lahiri’s *The Namesake* is a new generation Bengali born girl who is raised in the multicultural society in America. She is a unique combination of Indian, American and French identities. She is thoroughly westernized as a result of her education in New York University and frequent travels to France and England. A conspicuous change is witnessed in her perspective of cultural consciousness. The second generation immigrant has little or no appreciation for the Indian culture and is a striking contrast to Ashima in her attitude and outlook towards relationships. While one notices a perfect harmony in the husband-wife relationship between Ashima and Ashok and Ashima is “shattered into pieces and she feels lonely suddenly, horribly permanently alone” after her husband’s death, Moushumi has “privately vowed that she had never grown fully dependent on her husband”63 (247). Divorce comes easily to their marriage that developed in America’s multicultural milieu. Lahiri’s youngest protagonist, Ashima’s daughter Sonia, like her brother Gogoi, the second generation immigrant resents the childhood trips to India which supposedly denies them the material comforts in the US. Bengali culture which has been a major part of their parents past seems alien to these children.

Thus, Lahiri’s portrayal of Ashima focuses upon the pangs experienced by a culturally bred Indian woman in a foreign land, caused by a sense of isolation. Lahiri is seriously concerned about the question of identity which is always a difficult one, but more so for the immigrants who are culturally displaced like or those who grow up simultaneously.

This is vividly delineated in the characters of Ashima, Moushumi and Sonia. As a diasporic woman Ashima succeeds in creating a new discourse for herself within an alien country that could be a host and never a home. She is seen re-identifying
her lost ‘self’ by mingling in social groups that comprised of Bengali diaspora where the homesick and bewildered wives turned to Ashima for recipes and advice.

Assuming the position of a pointer for the younger groups of Bengalis, She convincingly doles out advice to the young migrant women who according to Amit Shah face “duality of the immigrant reality, the slow dwindling of rootedness, the new avenues and the roadblocks of assimilation and belonging.”64 (Cineaste 15.3)

In sharp contrast to Ashima is Moushumi. Moushumi is the ‘twice displaced’ migrant child whose exile is never resolved. However like Ashima she too rejects USA as a ‘host’ country. A rebellious cultural outsider, she rejects her Bengali British and American identities to embrace a fourth European one. If Ashima as her name suggest is Lahiri’s ‘borderless’ protagonist, then Sonia, Lahiri’s youngest protagonist is neither confused nor at any stage worried about her position in the American society. Her life transitions smoothly from a typical South Asian American teenager in small town USA to a young attorney in Boston. Unlike Ashima and Moushumi, Sonia as a young girl or adult woman does not struggle with ideas of displacement. With passage of time Sonia and Ashima begin to bond and develop a “surprising companionship”65 (279) to negotiate newer identities.

Arundhati Roy is an acclaimed post-colonial Indian novelist. She became the first non-expatriate Indian author and the first Indian woman to win the Booker Prize for her seminal work. *The God of Small Things* (1997). The novel is a realistic portrayal of the plight of women in society and their perpetual struggle to be recognized as individuals in a male-dominated conservative world. The novelist analyses the issue of gender oppression and advocates greater social reforms in the rigid status of women both in marital as well as inter-gender relation of Ammu,
Mammachi, Baby Kochamma and Rahel. Ammu finishes her school education in the same year her father retires from his job in Delhi and settles in Ayemenem. In Ammu’s father Pappachi’s opinion, education for girls is an “unnecessary expense.”

Ammu stands up to challenge against the hypocritical practices when she is not allowed to pursue her studies. As a result, she is left with no other occupation but to wait for marriage and help her mother. At Ayemenem, Ammu feels like a prisoner, tied down to a monotonous routine of housework. Also lack of enough money at Pappachi’s disposal fails to bring any proposal for Ammu. She was frustrated at not being able to pursue her studies and suffocated in the uncongenial environment of her home.

All day she dreamed of escaping from Ayemenem and the clutches of her ill-tempered father and bitter, long suffering mother. She hatched several wretched little plans (38-39).

In a bid to escape from this life Ammu makes an impulsive decision by accepting marriage to a man who she had barely known for five days. In a fit of desperation, “she thought that anything, anyone at all would be better than returning to Ayemenem” (39) but to her dismay later discovers that her husband is a “full blown alcoholic with all of an alcoholic deviousness and tragic charm.”

Ammu’s life takes a full circle when totally devastated by her husband’s violent behavior and immoral suggestion of pleasing his English Boss Mr. Hollick, she returns to the same place from where she had once tried to run away.

Ammu left her husband and returned unwelcomed to her parents in Ayemenem. To everything that she had fled from only a few years ago. Except that now she had two young children. And no more dreams (42).
Roy very vividly points out the mood of the patriarchal society through the treatment meted out to Ammu. Ammu virtually ends up being an “untouchable” in her home, in her family and in the society. However it is not just the men who contribute to a woman’s tragedy. It is surprising how women too perpetrate another woman’s misfortune. This is evident very clearly in the attitude of Baby Kochamma

*She subscribed wholeheartedly to the commonly held view that a married daughter had no position in her parents’ home. As for a divorced daughter – according to Baby Kochamma, she had no position anywhere at all. And as for a divorced daughter from a love-marriage well, words could not describe Baby Kochamma’s outrage. As for a divorced daughter from an intercommunity love marriage – Baby Kochamma chose to remain quiveringly silent on the subject*\(^7^1\) (45-46).

But all is not well in the life of Ammu’s mother too. Mamachi is a victim of prolonged physical violence at the hands of Pappachi, who though seventeen years older and holds a respectable position in society is constantly jealous of Mammachi. With growing success in her entrepreneurial project Paradise Pickles Preservatives grows the beatings she has to endure from her husband.

*Every night he beat her with a brass flower vase. The beatings weren’t new, what was new was only the frequency with which they took place*\(^7^2\) (47-48).

In Roy’s portrayal of Ammu, one gets a complete picture of a victim of patriarchal ideology. Ammu has no claims anywhere whatsoever, be it as a daughter, wife, sister or citizen.

*She has been humiliated and cornered by her father, ill-treated and betrayed by her husband, insulted by the Police and rendered destitute by her brother*\(^7^3\) (Swami 132).
Though the novelist portrays Ammu as a feminist, Ammu fails to emerge as an aggressive one at that. Her character and mental make-up comes across as essentially weak and submissive.

This section on “Portrayal of ‘Women’ in Post-Colonial Indian Novelists” has dealt with a brief study of the famous novelists of the post-colonial era in chronological order. The study has taken into its fold the major works of these novelists and tried to analyze the delineation of their women protagonists against the backdrop of social, political economic and cultural issues. Shobha De and Manju Kapur also belong to the group of post-colonial women novelists. Although Chapter III and IV will devote itself to an in-depth study of De’s women and their search for ‘self’ in Socialite Evenings and Second Thoughts and Chapter IV will focus on a similar study of Manju Kapur’s novels Difficult Daughters and A Married Woman, an attempt has been made to take a cursory look at the portrayal of women in their other novels which do not fall in the purview of the present study.

Shobha De belongs to category of ‘New Woman’ novelists. Her novels focus on the lives of women from the upper strata of modern Indian society. De’s fictional world is conspicuous because of the overwhelming presence of women characters those are associated with the world of showbiz and glamour. They are attractive and affluent and most of all liberal in their attitude and behavior. Her novels delve into the psyche of educated urban women and primarily deal with issues like sex, quest for identity, and equality of men and women. Her vast corpus of work includes as many as a dozen novels. De describes the mental traumas, emotional distress and the innermost conflicts of her women through her protagonists. She also compels her readers to analyze the causes underlying their peculiar behavior. All her women-Asha Rani, Karuna, Aparna, Meenakshi or Alisha, is modern and rebellious. They are far more assertive, domineering and bold in contrast with their traditional counterparts.
Asha Rani in *Starry Nights* (1991) is a famous Bollywood heroine who quits her career when she is at its peak only to live with a fellow co-star. When her mother dissuades her from giving up her flourishing career she rebukes her mother for being crazy about money and firmly expresses her desire to live for her own self. De’s Asha Rani values her personal interests and refuses to fall in the frame of dutiful, self-sacrificing daughter. Karuna in *Socialite Evenings* (1988) is marginalized at the hands of her husband. Her marriage goes sour leading to divorce. But Karuna is a brave woman who takes control of her life soon without considering it necessary to depend on a man for support. *Sisters* (1992) narrates the tale of the emotional bond between two sisters - Mallika and Alisha. De’s portrayal of Mallika as a bold, confident, ruthlessly ambitious lusty woman has glimpses of westernized character in Indian setting, while Alisha is portrayed as a sexually liberated woman. Maya, in *Second Thoughts* (1996) is a victim of oppression in marriage. Her status is that of an object. The story unfolds the helpless Maya’s search for her rightful place in her marriage and home. Meenakshi in *Strange Obsessions* (1992) stands apart from the women in her other novels that are fiercely independent and gracefully accept the consequences of their emancipated ways of life. She is eccentric and suffers from anxiety and often breaks down under stress. De vividly portrays the abnormal behavior of a woman who has had a neglected childhood, uncaring mother and tyrant father. *Sultry Days* (1994) presents a group of modern women and their changing attitude to life. De’s female characters D’Lima, Lotika, Vimala, Manju, Chandni, Shona, Tanya, Zainab are all shown breaking the established patriarchal norms through their deviant behavior. Thus, De’s fictional canvas is sprayed with colorful portrayal of women who are at once traditional, marginalized, subjugated and extremely modern, self-assured and liberated.

Manju Kapur has carved a niche for herself as a post-colonial novelist writing about the dreams, aspirations and lives of women. The woman is the focal point of
all her novels. Her novels cut across the boundaries of feminism, womanism and all other ideologies of woman emancipation. Kapur’s first novel *Difficult Daughters* depicts the struggle of a woman against traditions in a male-dominated society where moral, ethical and legal discrimination persists in multifarious features. While symbolizing the country’s struggle for independence, Virmati also reveals her rebellious streak in her character when she questions the deep-rooted conventions of morality especially for a girl. In her second novel *A Married Woman*, Kapur portrays Astha as a middle class Indian woman who is highly modern in her opinions on love, sex and marriage. The novel highlights Astha’s need to be acknowledged as an individual in her own right in terms of love, respect, social and economic independence like her male counterpart. ManjuKapur’s novels portray women as constantly striving to establish their identity in the backdrop of family, culture and society. She speaks firstly of women’s pursuit of love followed by man’s attitude to women as objects. Her women are shown as struggling on matters of gender subordination, inequality, and morality. *Home* (2006) spins around the lives of women from business families. Set in post-independent India from 1970 onwards it focuses on the agonizing birth of a new nation as a cause of migration for Lala’s family from Lahore to New Delhi. *Immigrant* (2010) looks beyond the superficial subject of women issues to comment upon the existential aspects that the novelist artistically portrays. *Custody* (2011) is set against the backdrop of globalization and economic liberalization in India in the 1990s and is about the struggle against the spouse and offspring for better freedom.

2.5 Themes in the Novels of Major Women Novelists

Early twentieth century witnessed the flowering of the ‘novel’ as a genre in India. As a literary phenomenon, the novel was new to India. Although the Indian literary scene, specially the novel was pioneered and dominated by the male writers, Toru Dutt, Raj Lakshmi Debi, Swarnakumari Debi, Mrs. Krupabai
Sattianadhan and Cornelia Sorabji are some of the women novelists who contributed to this genre as early as the early nineteenth century. These novelists dealt with the issues of silent suffering of women as victims of evil customs like *Sati*, child marriage, widowhood and subservience to man as some of the current motifs in their fiction. This was the time when the works of the women novelists was grossly undervalued. Women wrote mostly about their own perceptions and experiences within the enclosed domestic arena and the writings by women writers did not take off as much as their male counterparts. It was only after the Second World War that women novelists of quality began enriching Indian fiction. Feminist ideologies began to influence English literature in India with women novelists giving a new dimension to the novel. By the twentieth century, women’s writing became a powerful medium of modernist and feminist statements. K.R.S. Iyengar’s axiomatic expression is quite curt and justifiably authenticated when he says: “*Women are natural storytellers even when they don’t write or publish*”\(^74\) (435).

Most of the novels written by women novelists record the existential dilemmas and predicaments of the lacerated ‘self’ and brings out the traumatizing experiences of the protagonists in a philosophically stifling and stultifying society. Noted literary critic and translator Lakshmi Holmstrom traces some dominant themes which is evident in the works of Indian women novelists since independence. According to her, the themes point towards the social content of “*Colonialism and its aftermath, partition and exile and changing social conditions.*”\(^75\) (ix-x) She argues that “*many of the stories are, feminist in the sense that they present a woman’s perspective and point of view in a particular way.*”\(^76\) (ix-x) The situation in the novels are often touched with sadness, melancholy, sometimes even despair.

Though the novel arrived late on the literary scene, it encompassed all other literary forms as it is free from constraints of style or subject. The Indian English
novel, which began as a colonial encounter initially concentrated on the themes like romantic, sentimental and historical. But the mid twentieth century saw the upsurge of a new awareness about the woman’s marginalized position resulting in the birth of women’s liberation movement. This uprising manifested itself in the writings of women, which extensively and vociferously chose to address the woman’s questions.

Feminists emphasized upon the importance of women being aware of themselves as individuals and shaping their destinies by being assertive and self-confident. They used the term ‘consciousness raising’ or feminist consciousness to describe these phenomena. And as Juliet Mitchell observes consciousness rising is:

\[
\text{The process of transforming the hidden, individual fears of women into a shared awareness of the meaning of them as social problems, the release of anger, anxiety, the struggle of proclaiming the painful and transforming into the political}^{77} \quad (61).
\]

While the traditional women accepted the false conditioning into subordination and dependence without demur, the sensitive women’s growing awareness of their individuality propelled them to revolt against the existing norms of patriarchy.

Simone de Beauvoir in her book The Second Sex argues that:

\[
\text{She is called ‘the sex’, by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex – no less...She is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the Absolute - She is the Other.}^{78} \quad (16)
\]

Emphasizing on the need for identity, another feminist Betty Friedan in The Feminine Mystique maintains that:
...for woman, as for man, the need for self-fulfillment, autonomy, self-realization, independence, individuality, self-actualization – is as important as the sexual need, with as serious consequences, when it is thwarted\textsuperscript{79}

(314)

The arguments cited above thus forms the matrix for a close examination of different themes observed in the writings of women novelists. A cursory glance at the various themes used by Indian Englishwomen novelists helps us to categorize in general as follows:

The theme of feminism has been addressed by famous novelist Nayantara Sehgal and Rama Mehta, Kamala Das, Anita Nair, Arundhati Roy and Susan Vishwanathan who have popularized the regional fiction. The spirit of Indian culture and its traditional values have been the favourite theme of women writers like Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai. Following the footsteps of Salman Rushdie and his use of magic realism in \textit{Midnight’s Children} are a few women novelists like Suniti Namjoshi whose fiction stands out for its use of fantasy and surrealism. Nina Sibal and Chitra Banerjee Divakurani too employed the theme of magic realism. There are a host of popular women novelists like Bharati Mukherjee, Nargis Dalal Krishna Sobti, Dina Mehta, Indira Goswami, Malati Chendur, Gauri Deshpande, Namita Gokhale, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Shobha De, Jhumpa Lahiri and others are who are famous for expressing their bold views in their writings. Their stories are stories of protest. The theme of Partition of 1947 can be seen in the writings of Nina Sibal, Shauna Singh Baldwin and ManjuKapur. Antonio Navaro-Tejaro points out:
Many Indian women novelists have explored female subjectivity in order to establish an identity that is not imposed by a patriarchal society. Thus, the theme of growing up from childhood to womanhood, that is the bildungsroman, is a recurring strategy. Santha Rama Rau, Ruth Prawer Jhabwala, Kamala Markandaya and Shobha De have dealt with such themes in their novels. The theme of East-West encounter can be seen in the works of Anita Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, Bharati Mukherjee and others.

An attempt is made here to take a peek into the different themes taken up in the major works of a few notable women novelists in India. Since women have been an object of oppression and suppression from times immemorial in a society which bestowed superior status to males, female feminist writers in India, through their women protagonists have tried to voice their angst and advocate their struggle for womanhood in their writings among other issues like freedom movement, post-colonial reminiscence, and Neo-colonial perception among others.

Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Prawer Jhabwala are the most outstanding writers of the 1950’s. Kamala Markandaya’s novels, observes V. Ramesh “are in search of affirmative resolutions for unenthusiastic state of affairs.” Although, one gets a glimpse of gloomy aspects in the lives of Indian women, in her novels, there are also positive indicators for meaningful co-existence through togetherness and mutual understanding. In Nectar in a Sieve, she deals with the fear, hunger and despair which loom large in the life of a peasant. Some Inner Fury is more autobiographical and ‘exploits the freedom of reverie.’ In A Silence of Desire, Markandaya traces the age-old conflict between the head and the heart, emotions and reason. Pleasure City, in fact is one of her best novels where she has shed her undue concerns for describing the politics and economics of India.
Mrs. Jhabwala’s *To Whom She Will* deals with the theme of double event-independence and Partition. Like Jane Austen’s ‘Husband-hunting’ that occupies a prominent place in the action of her novels, ‘wife-hunting’ seems to be a recurrent part of Jhabwala’s novels. She chooses to speak on the traditional method of arranged marriages in her writings. Her fictional world is a delicate depiction of human follies, foibles, and self-deception. Mrs. Jhabwala doesn’t idealize life in her works, but rather tries to empathize with the heartache at the heart of humanity in the portrayal of social life in her writings.

If social background gains prominence over the characters in Jhabwala’s work, and Markandaya’s work gives importance to its principle characters set in diverse socio-economic, political and cultural backdrop, then Anita Desai’s fiction centers around the exploration of modern Indian sensibility, more so the inner world of sensibility, than the outer world of action. Anita Desai’s novels primarily deal with the theme of loneliness and alienation. She portrays her women as the victims of the traditional mode of existence in society without an identity of her own. *Cry the Peacock* deals with the dull human relationship narrated by the protagonist herself. It is the story of Maya’s desire to “justify herself to herself”\(^82\) (Iyengar 465) in order to lead a meaningful and purposeful life. Desai’s novels are psychological explorations that reveal her pre-occupation with thoughts, emotions and feelings more than that of actions and experiences. *Voices in the City* explores the theme of man-woman relationships. Monisha and Jiban’s marriage is a distressing example of conjugal conflict. Though they live together and share their bed, Jiban fails to see through Monisha’s mind. Monisha feels suffocated as a result of this alienation. Thus, Anita Desai gives us a peek into the emotional world of women “revealing a rare imaginative awareness of various deeper forces at work and a profound understanding of feminine sensibility”\(^83\) (Hariprasanna 33)

A leading practitioner of the political novel, Nayantara Sehgal’s novels subtly reveal an autobiographical element in them, at times obvious and at times not. She
continuously juxtaposes the personal world of man-woman relationships with the impersonal world of politics. As a member of a family involved in active politics, she shares her experiences of what happens in the corridors of power, and the homes of political people. Such experiences are recorded in her novel *This Time of Morning*. She discusses the personal trauma of divorce in *The Day in Shadow*. *Rich Like Us* deals with the incidents of 1975-76 when her cousin Indira Gandhi declared a state of national emergency. Her novel *Storm in Chandigarh* like *Rich Like Us* has a political background.

Using public events as the backdrop are a few other women novelists like Divya Mehta and Nina Sibal. The theme of Partition of 1947 finds mention in Nina Sibbal’s *Yatra*, Shauna Singh Baldwin’s *What the Body Remembers* and Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters*. War, politics, economics and social tensions, legendary history and even spirituality are some of the themes popular with the contemporary novelists.

There are another group of women novelists like Anjana Appachana, Shashi Deshpande, Gita Hariharan and Bulbul Sharma who present authentic pictures of life in India. Partition and Emergency don’t find mention in the works of these novelists. Their protagonists are invariably women and the writings revolve around actions in the domestic sphere.

The novels of Shashi Deshpande, an outstanding woman novelist has roots in the middle class Indian society. Without indulging in any kind of verbal pyrotechnics her writings focus on the issues pertaining to the “*rainbow coalition of rights, desires, agendas, struggles, victories*”84 (Sattar, The Hindu) of women. She is not interested in the exotic aspects of India; rather her novels eclectically employ the post-modern technique of deconstructing patriarchal culture and customs and reveal these to be man-made constructs. One does not find extreme rebellious streams of anti-men or anti-marriage in her writings. Instead she sees the need to
harmonize the man-woman relationship by bringing them on equal platform. To quote Beena Agarwal “The fictional world of Shashi Deshpande is not directed towards the annihilation of the existing order but it seeks a re-orientation of society.”\(^{85}\) (217) Her novel That Long Silence points at the “hollowness of modern Indian life- the convenient, arranged marriage with the upwardly mobile husbands and children studying in ‘good’ schools.”\(^{86}\) (Naik 86)

Small Remedies by Deshpande can be read as a study of motherhood and the consequences of a woman centering her life on her child. While A Matter of Time attempts to depict the complex web of relationships in an extended family over three generations. Binding Vine deals with the protagonist’s quest for love meaning and happiness in life. Marriages also feature commonly in her novels. Deshpande’s novels are thus woman-oriented where she almost always makes the narrator the heroine of the novels. Deshpande’s writing is thus women-oriented. The narrator is almost always the heroine of the novel and the story deals with the crisis in the heroine’s life.

Some of the common themes that can be traced in women’s writings are discrimination against the daughter, the silence of women; question of identity and the communication between the sexes. Anjana Appachana’s works give a "realistic account of the lives of the middle class women in an Indian city and their painful negotiations between personal aspirations and societal expectations."\(^{87}\) (Naik 90)

There are other women writers who have written about life in upper class society. Namita Gokhale’s Paro: Dreams of Passion deals with the upper crust of contemporary Indian society in metropolitan towns and the characters change sexual partners faster than clothes. Gods, Graves and Grandmothers deals with social relations and speaks of the proliferation of spiritual leaders in India. Some expatriate novelists like Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahri have a weak grasp of
the real situations in contemporary India and tend to recreate it through the lens of nostalgia.

2.6 Conclusion

It is observed that the novel as a literary genre gained popularity in India as a result of colonial encounter. It was initially marked by an overwhelming presence of the male bastion and the themes they dealt with were more factual and depicted the social setting of contemporary India. The country’s struggle for freedom and the spread of English education saw active participation of women in areas hitherto restricted for them. Women being natural storytellers could express themselves more freely and bring in authenticity in the narration of their experiences. Thus, this chapter while tracing the journey of women novelists of India has commented upon the prominent women novelists whose writings throw light upon the status of women in erstwhile India and their travails and tales of subjugation in a traditional male-dominated society. Growing awareness among women about their rights, and the need for individual space in society emerged as a predominant theme for the post-colonial women novelists who have through their writings raised their voice against the subservient position of women in society. Thus, this chapter while discussing the transition in the portrayal of women from silent sufferers to assertive individuals forms a backdrop for a study of the image of the ‘New Woman’ and their desire for emancipation as seen in the writings of women novelists in post-independent India. The ensuing chapters focus on the need for search for ‘self’ of women as depicted in the selected novels of De and Kapur chosen for this study.
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