Chapter- I

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Introduction:

While Indian authors have been making significant contributions to world literature since Independence, the past years have seen an enormous flourishing of Indian fiction in the International development. As Indian authors develop into more popular internationally, many conservative Indians criticize the attention their work invites to social problems in India, with many politicians with less than thrilled about the current explosion in Indian fiction. Not only are the works of Indian authors soaring on the best-seller list, they are also receiving a great compact of critical acclamation. Now Indian writing in English is considered as a major contemporary current in English language-literature. Writing in English has come to get a respectable position and the credit for it goes to a good number of women authors. Indian writing is a distinguishing literature. Indian writing is a relatively new experience, as far as literature concerns. Though one can trace such authors in India to a century back, Indian writing in English has come into force only in the last couple of decades or so. Some of these authors have achieved wide-reaching celebrity; some national and other perhaps have to be content with a more constricted circle.

Women authors in India are moving forward with their well-built and certain strides, matching the quickness of the world. We see them bursting out in full bloom spreading their own individual fragrances. They are recognized for their originality, versatility and the indigenous flavor of the soil that they bring to their work. Yes, they
are our women writers. Indian Women writing in English is being recognized as major contemporary current in English language and literature. The likes of Salman Rushdie, Amitav Gosh and Anita Desai have won worldwide praise for the quality of their writing and their imaginative use of English. These contain the role of English as comprehensive lingua franca: the position of English in India. The Indian authors in English are writing, not in their native language but in a second language, and the resultant transcultural character of their texts.

Traditionally, the work of Indian Women Authors has been undervalued due to patriarchal assumptions about the superior worth of male experience. The factors contributing to this prejudice is the fact that most of these women writers have observed no domestic space. The India women's perceptions of their aspirations and expectations are within the framework of Indian social and moral commitments. Indian Women Authors in English are victims of a second prejudice vis-a-vis their regional counterpart’s. Proficiency in English is available only to authors of the intelligent, affluent and educated classes. Therefore, author’s works are often belongs to high social strata and cut off from the reality of Indian life.

The majority of novels written by Indian women novelists represent the psychological sufferings of the frustrated homemakers. Indian writing in English is now gaining ground rapidly. In the realm of fiction, it has heralded a new era and has earned many glories both at home and abroad. Indian women authors have started questioning the important old patriarchal domination. They are no longer puppets in the hands of man. They have shown their worth in the field of literature both qualitatively and quantitatively and are showing it even today without any problem.
We see Indian women writers like Gita Mehta, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Shobha De, Githa Hariharan, Shashi Deshpande, Kiran Desai, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Jhumpa Lahiri and Manju Kapur and many more have left an indelible imprint on the readers of Indian fiction in English.

A major development in modern Indian fiction is the growth of a feminist or women-centred approach, that seeks to project and interpret experience, from the point of a feminine consciousness and sensibility. The image of women in fiction has undergone a change during the last four decades. Women writers have moved away from traditional portrayals of enduring self-sacrificing women, towards conflicts, female characters searching for identity; no longer characterized and defined simply in terms of their victim status.

A most important preoccupation in recent Indian women’s writing has been a delineation of inner life and subtle interpersonal relationships. In a culture where individualism and protest have often remained alien ideas and marital bliss and the woman’s role at home is a central focus. It is interesting to note the emergence of not just an essential, Indian sensibility but an expression of cultural displacement. Women’s presentation is more assertive, more liberated in their view and more articulate in their expression than the woman of the past is. As Chaman Nahal writes about feminism in India: “Both the awareness of woman’s position in society as one of disadvantage or in generality compared with that of man and also a desire to remove those is advantages.”

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I will focus on the contribution of some well-known women writers of Indian English Literature.

**Contribution of Prominent Women Novelists in Indian English Literature:**

**Shashi Deshpande:**

Shashi Deshpande is the second daughter of the famous Kannada dramatist in Karnataka and Sanskrit Scholar Shriranga. She did a graduation in Journalism at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan, Mumbai and worked for a couple of months as a journalist for the magazine *On Looker*. Her first novel *The Dark Holds No Terror* was published in June 1999. She is a winner of the Sahitya Akadami award, for her novel *That long Silence*. Her third famous novel is *Roots and Shadows*. She has projected objectively a new female face with subjective experiences with a geocentric vision. She reflects on the problems and concerns of the middle class Indian women. Her writings are rooted in the culture in which she lives. Her remarks are sensitive to the common everyday events and experiences and give an artistic expression to something that is simple and mundane. Her feminism is particularly Indian in the sense that it is borne out of the predicament of Indian women placed between contradictory identities. The women characters are with traditional approaches trying to tie family and profession to maintain the virtues of Indian culture.

Shashi Deshpande has been a very serious Indian English women novelist who has depicted different aspects of woman's life - particularly the middle class woman's life- in her novels and short stories. She is strongly against labelling her a feminist writer. Instead of taking an extreme stand as a feminist against the patriarchal
society and male domination, she takes a balanced view of life from a woman's standpoint by bringing in all the perceptiveness of a sensitive writer that she is. Her serious philosophy of life is expressed in many of her writings.

Shashi Deshpande’s novel *A Matter of Time* is a continuation of her exploration into the many facts of the feminine experience in writing. In this novel, she has displayed the themes of silence, gender differences, passive sufferings and familiar relationships into much deeper realms. It is a story encompassing three generations of women coming to terms with their life in and all female worlds. The relation women characters share with their men is homered with silence, absence or indifference. The pain of disintegration of the family troubles Aru, who consider herself for her father’s action and sets out to undo it. It is in this stifling atmosphere the characters evolve and come to a newer understanding of their lives.

The role of fury and destiny are playing as main themes around which Deshpande weaves her tale. Deshpande’s simple yet powerful prose reads like a grandmother’s tale that pierces the deep into heart and settles. At one point, the use of omniscient narration teases the reader as the speaker forces events but is not to share until time and plot unfolds it. Deshpande’s *A Matter of Time* and Salman Rushdie’s *Fury* both novels spun around theme of existential fury. Deshpande brings Rushdie’s novel out from howling New York City to a calm and mediating Karnataka and his hills in the gaps a reader might have had left craves for. The underlying theme in Shashi Deshpande's novels is human relationships especially the ones that exist between father and daughter, husband and wife, between mother and daughter. In all relationships, the women occupy the central stage and significantly, the narration
shifts through her feminine consciousness.

In her novels, three types of suffering women characters reoccur with subtle changes. The first type belongs to the protagonist’s mother or the mother figure, the traditional woman, who believes that her place is with her husband and family. The second type of woman is bolder more self-reliant and rebellious. She cannot confirm to mythological, submissive and surrender vision of womanhood. As radical feminist, ideology expressed, for example, Sarah's friend Nathan in *The Dark Holds No Terror*.

The third, type of women characters, are the women in between neither traditional nor radical in their ideas and practice. For Example, Indu in *Roots and Shadows* leaves her husband to seek refuge in her ancestral home. Being a woman herself, she sympathises with women. As Shashi Deshpande clarifies in one of the interviews about feminist approach in her writing, “If others see something feminist in my writings, I must say that it is not consciously done. It is because the world for women is like that and I am mirroring the world.”

**Manju Kapur:**

The other noted novelist is Manju Kapur. She is a Professor of English at Miranda House in Delhi. Her first novel *Difficult Daughters* received the Common Wealth Award for the Eurasian region. Her novel *A Married Woman* is a seductive story of a love at a time of political and religious upheaval, and is told with sympathy and intelligence. *A Married Woman* is the story of an artist whose canvas challenges the constraints of middle class existence. Manju Kapur describes through her
protagonist (Astha),

A woman should be aware of self-controlled, strong willed, self-reliant and rational, having faith in the inner strength of womanhood. A meaningful change can be brought only from within by being free in the deeper psychic sense.³

Asthा like to have a break from dependence on others and proceeds on the path of full human status that poses a threat to Hemant and his male superiority. However, she finds herself trapped between the pressures of the modern developing society and shackles of the ancient biases. She sets out on her quest for a more meaningful life in her lesbian relationship. She canonizes and commemorates her insulted feminine sensibility raising the male tantrum to social transformation in the society.

Manju Kapur in *Difficult Daughters* presents the image of suffering women. In post-colonial era, partition has ever been the most prolific and prominent area for creative writers. During this phase, number of novels was written on the theme of the destruction. It brings the plight and provides a sad telling commentary on the breakdown on human values. In her writings, Manju Kapur has emphasised on the issues in the context of patriarchy; inter-religious marriage; family bond, male-female bond, co-existence of past and present. She has narrated her women protagonists as a victim of biology, gender, domestic violence, and circumstances. Kapur thinks that, *There is a man within every woman and a woman in every man. When, manhood is questioned womanhood is fragmented.*⁴
A major pre-occupation in recent Indian women's writings has been a description of Inner life and subtle relationships. In a culture where, individualism and protest have often remained unfamiliar ideas and marital bliss and the women's responsibility at home is the central focus. It is interesting to see the emergence of not just an essential Indian sensibility but an expression of cultural diversion.

Arundhati Roy:

The other famous and renowned novelist is Arundhati Roy. She was born in 1961 in Bengal. Arundhati grew up in Kerala. She trained herself as an architect at the Delhi school of Architecture but abandoned it in between. She believes that “A feminist is a woman who negotiates herself into a position where she has choices.” The International community knows Arundhati Roy as an artist with her debut novel The God of Small Things. The God of Small Things won Britain's premier Booker Prize, the Booker McConnell in 1997. Roy is the first non-expatriate Indian author and the first Indian woman to have won this prize. Roy’s major essays The End of Imagination and The Greater Common Good are available online. She is between the two Indian authors writing in English who has won the Booker Prize (the other one being Salman Rushdie for his Midnight Children.) She has never admitted that she is a feminist but The God of Small Things reveals at many places her feminist stance and her protagonist represent feminine sensibility. Arundhati Roy’s mother says:

Arundhati is a born talker and a born writer. While, she was studying in school, it was a problem to find a teacher, who could cope with her voracious appetite for reading and writing. Most of
the time, she educated herself on her own. I can remember our vice-principle Sneha Zaharias resorting to Shakespeare’s The Tempest as a text for the little fourth grade.6

Roy seems to be iconoclast in, The God of Small Things. The stylistic innovations make the novel unique and bring vitality and exuberance to the novel. The novel is unique in every aspect and it is a linguistic experiment with the English language. The stylistic writings include the use of words, phrases and even sentences from vernacular language, use of italics, subject less sentences, faulty spellings, topicalisation, deviation from normal word order, single word ‘sentences,’ change of word classes, clustering of word classes and a variety of other techniques. She has given prominence to ecology and subalternity as the major themes in the novel.

Arundhati Roy’s close observations and the minute aspects in the creation of her literary skills are observed in her other works. Her two important articles on the net are The End of Imagination and The Greater Common Good. In The End of Imagination, Roy criticises nuclear policies of the Government of India. She foretells the harmful consequences of nuclear weapons on human beings and ecology in The End of Imagination:

Our cities and forests, our fields and villages will burn for days. Rivers will turn to poison. The air will become fire. The wind will spread the flames when everything there is to burn has burned and the fires die, smoke will rise and shut out the sun. There will be on day and only interminable
night. Temperatures will drop to far below freezing and nuclear winter will set in. Water will turn into toxic ice. Radioactive fallout will seep through the earth and contaminated groundwater. Most living things, animals and vegetables, fish and fowl, will die. Only rats and cockroaches will breed, multiply, and complete with forging, relic humane for what little food there is.\(^7\)

Anita Desai:

Anita Desai, the other great novelist of the Indian English fiction was born in 1937. Anita Desai is unquestionably one of the celebrated Indian - English fiction writers. She holds a unique place among the contemporary women novelists of India. She has to her credit a large number of creative works and a coherently growing readership throughout the world. She has published ten novels and other literary works of immense value. Anita Desai’s women characters in her novels rebel against patriarchal community in order to explore their own potential or to live on their own terms, regardless of the consequences that such a rebellion may have on their lives. They take the position of outsiders to fight and criticize those cultural ideologies that come in their way of becoming free individuals, self-chosen withdrawal, for these women, takes on the form a weapon for survival in a patriarchal community.

Anita Desai is an Indian writer whose works portrayed the experience of the people of India. She spends her life in writing and teaching fiction. She is an English-language Indian novelist and author of children’s book. She differs in many ways
from the post colonial women novelists in English. She is the great artist in the realm of English novel. One of India’s best known authors, Anita Desai has been among the voices that defined the post-independence literary scene in India—not just as writer, but also a chronicler of events that shaped the nascent republic though more often at a micro level than her contemporaries. On the literary map of Indian women’s writing, she appears to be a leading luminary. As a novelist, Anita Desai is more interested in the individual, than the general.

Anita Desai is widely recognized as one of India’s leading English language fiction authors. As one critic writes that distinguishes the voice of Anita Desai is the physical intensity of her pose, the range of her capacious intelligence, her unsentimental compassion. Her work is an illumination and a blessing. The treatment of the migrant condition in literature is the most engrossing topic exciting intellectual debate. The post modernist world has seen the emergence of interdisciplinary and cultural studies as the major thrust areas of academic exploration. Anita Desai has been considered as a novelist of modes, of persistent states of mind and psyche.

Anita Desai is feminist writer is not to deny her artistic achievement. Socio, psycho, philosophical dimensions in her novel are quite impressive. In Indian writing, Anita Desai has established herself for her remarkable contribution to the development of art and ethos of novel writing technique. As a successful writer, writing for an international publishing market, she is invested with a certain power to imaginatively represent an “authentic” India. While she is not a writer who bombards us with an epic style narration, purporting to offer “the great Indian novel,” her exploration of individual identities and self formations work in a subtle and
problematic way, creating instead miniatures, and guiding the reader’s responses through a combination of omniscience, internal focalization, indirect speech and symbolic tropes.

**Bharti Mukherjee:**

Bharti Mukherjee, the other post-colonial writer was born on July 27, 1940 at Calcutta she has done her M.A. in English and Ancient Indian culture from the Baroda University and her Doctor of Philosophy, in English and cognitive literature in 1969, from Iowa, university, United States. Her works focusses on the phenomenon of migration, the status of new immigrants and the feeling of alienation often experienced by expectation as well as an Indian women and their struggle. Her own struggle with identity first as an immigrant from India then an Indian expatriate in Canada and finally as an immigrant in the United States has led to her current contentment of being an immigrant in a country of immigrants. Her important works are *The Tiger’s Daughter* and *Days and Nights*. *The Tiger’s Daughter* is a story about a young girl named ‘Tara’ who ventures back to India after many years of being away to return to poverty and turmoil.

The second phase of her writing encompasses works such as *Wife*, *An invisible Woman* (Essay), *The Sorrow and the Terror*. In *Wife*, (1975) Mukherjee writes about a woman named Simple who has been suppressed by such man and attempts to be the ideal Bengali wife. Out of fear and personal inability, she murders her husband and eventually commits suicide. In her third phase, she wrote *Leave it to me* (1997) where she tells the story of a young woman named Debby Di Martino who
seeks revenge on parents who abandoned her. The story reveals her ungrateful interaction with kind adoptive parents and a vengeful search for her real parents. The novel also looks at the conflict between eastern and western worlds and at mother-daughter relationships through the political and emotional topics by the main figure in her quote for the revenge.

Kamala Markandya:


Kamala gives vivid pictures of hills of south India in its full bloom producing rice thrice a year and the place is dearer to her than misty landscapes of wales or light blue assure of the mediterranean sea. Her entire creative work reflects her love and reverence to the native country India. Although she is a city dweller, yet she is known to the lives and problems of villages. The titles such as 'Rice and Monsoon', 'Handful of Rice' etc., Shows her knowledge about the price of rice for Indian peasants. The novel *Nectar in of Sieve* (1954) highlights the eminent peasant’s problem of colonial
India. Indian farmers cultivate the rice field standing in knee-deep water and sweating in the scotching says of sun.

The creative works of Kamala Markandaya show a definite tendency of adopting the themes. In the first novel, her protagonists are the Indian farmers (Rukmani, Thambi and others) and in succeeding novels, the Indians, who have accepted the European culture, but at last renounce Mirabai and Roshan in Some Inner Fury and Anasuya in Possession. But in the best novel The Coffer Dam, Kamala switches over to the westernization of protagonist and opt Helen, an English woman, as her central character. Kamala Markandaya is an outstanding creative writer of Indian English literature. Her novels have been translated into many languages because her each novel earned wide response in the world's literary circles. Her fiction portrays the true Indian world-perception written in realistic style.

**Kiran Desai:**

An Indian author, Kiran Desai was born in 1971. She is citizen of India. She has a permanent resident of the USA. Her novel The Inheritance of Loss won the 2006 Booker prize and the National Book Critics Circle fiction award. Her first novel Hullabaloo published in 1998, won Betty Trask Award, a prize given by the society of Authors for the new novels by citizens of the Common Wealth of nations under the age of 35. The Inheritance of Loss opens with a teenage Indian girl, an orphan called Sai, living with her Cambridge educated Anglophile grandfather, a retired judge, in the town of Kalimpong on the Indian side of the Himalayas. Sai is romantically involved with her maths tutor, Gyan, the Descendant of a Nepali Ghurkha mercenary,
but he eventually recalls from her obvious privilege and falls in with a group of Ethnic Nepalese insurgents.

Kiran Desai has handled several major issues of modern civilization in her second novel. The concept of globalization is multisided. It has economic, political, social, cultural and educational aspects. It may create an opportunity or a danger, because of Globalization, situations have changed, new concepts have emerged and people have stepped out their areas of confinement to find company and competency among their counter parts. Dr. Shubha Mukherjee remarks:

Kiran Desai’s The Inheritance of Loss presents the picture of globalised India. The characters like Jamubhai Patel, Mrs and Mr Mistry, Sai, Biju Nonita and Lolita are affected by Globalisation. As intelligent writer and careful observer of human behaviour, Kiran Desai fulfils the responsibility of writing about current sensational issues.8

At Such moments, Desai seems far from writers like Zadie Smith and Hari Kudzu whose fiction takes a generally optimistic view of what Salman Rushdie has called that "Hybridity, impurity, inter mingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, and songs."9
Nayantara Sahagal:

Nayantara Sahgal, born on May 10, 1927 in Allahabad, is one of the Indian English fiction writers today. She is the second daughter of the renowned freedom fighter Vijaya Laxmi Pandit. Politics is teeming in her blood as her parents and near relatives were all activity participating in freedom struggle and post-independence nation’s politics. She completed her schooling at Mussorie in a co-educational institution managed by an American Missionery. In view of political turmoil in Indian and ban on the political activities of students, her parents took decision to send her to America for further education. She was married to a British employee, Gautarn Sahgal but the marriage soon fizzled out. Later she was married to Nirmal Mangat Rai. She took divorce again and started writing fiction and features for Newspapers and Magazines. Now she is an established creative writer and a columnist of Indian journalism. Her fiction concerns with India's elite responding to the crises engendered by political change. Her main works are: *Prison and Chocolate Cake (memoir)* (1954); *A Time to be Happy* (1963); *This time of morning* (1965); *Plan for Departure* (1986); *Storm in Chandigarh* (1988); *The Day in Shadow* (1973); *Rich like us* (1985); *Lesser breeds* (2003).

Sahgal's all novels are somehow political and even his dealings with social and human values are also a political concern. In *A Time to be Happy*, the rural upliftment programme is as much a matter of political importance as the change of government in Delhi. The Britishers are suspicious about the sense of self-reliance and self-respect which the programme desires to teach people. But with the advent of freedom in India the government changes and the attitude of the people also change.
The British Industrialists of British are now not in position to predict the policies of the government.

Nayantara Sahgal’s major concerns, therefore, in her freedom of Indian, traditional socio-cultural values and people’s attitude towards the politics and personal relationships. Her fictional concern can broadly be divided into themes like tradition versus modernity. She is aware that food is not less important than freedom in a poor and under country like India. It is under this context that she chooses to earmark the role of the leaders of country and the democracy is far more a faith than a convenience people in a democratic country like India. Traditional values are an important preservation for Indian is not confined to the temples and other religious places of worship but in fact it is a way of life. Hindu philosophy provides a definite shape and clarity to the moral values.

**Shobha De:**

Shobha De was born in 1948 in Maharashtra. She got her education in Delhi and Bombay. After graduating with a degree in Psychology from St. Xavier’s, she began her career as a journalist in 1970s. Serious critics thrash her novels, racy and raunchy in style and content, but the numbers they sell make her one of the most widely read English novelists in India. Shobha De has had divers career as a model, a copy writer, a socialite, a scriptwriter, a novelist. She founded and edited three popular magazines-Stardust and Society and Celebrity. She has published eight novels, which have been extremely successful. At present, she lives with her second husband, Dilip De and their six children in South Mumbai’s posh area the Cuffed
Shobha De, an eminent modern novelist and journalist has presented the status of women in Indian society which underwent perceptible changes due to the spread of literacy, legislation and the experiences of the freedom movements. She may rightly be described as a very realistic, down to earth writer portraying the world of glamour in the Indian upper middle class milieu without any inhibition. She is bold enough to illumine the real human condition- the way girl think, fantasize and converse with each other about tabooed subjects. She discusses blatantly the problems, desires and aspirations of career women highlighting in general gender awareness, self-definition, existence and destiny. Most of the women characters depicted by Shobha De are economically independent and socially uninhibited. They are competent professionals working shoulder to shoulder with their male counterparts. The women in her world are enterprising, bold, innovative and ever ready to accept challenges. She shatters the myth that high-flying urban women have a life full of happiness and contentment. On the contrary she probes the psyche of her women characters to reveal the trauma, insecurity and agony that lies beneath the gloss and glitter.

Shobha De stands as a pioneer to explore the world of the urban women in India. In almost all of her novels, a woman is the protagonist. De has concentrated not only on the presentation of a strange and startling world marking the emergence of recent trends in society but has also shown her concern for the problems, especially emotional and social, faced by contemporary high society women. De’s fictional world marks the overwhelming presence of women. The life spectacle and the world-
view presented in her novels are directly or indirectly related to women. The modern urban women's concern their behaviour, their life style, their thoughts and their responses in different situations forms the main concern of De's fictional works. However, in her novels she has explored a variety of women from one extreme of highly conservative who accept the traditional Indian cultural ethos to the radically modern, assertive and liberated women who challenge the well-entrenched moral orthodoxy of the patriarchal social system and attempt to establish their own supremacy. But her main concentration is on modern women's life and their immediate problems. The women characters in De's fictional have been presented as autonomous beings free from all restrictions imposed by society, culture and her own their own sense of guilt. As a result her women characters are modern, strong and they take bold decisions to survive in society. For example, Karuna in *Socialite Evenings*, Mikki and Alisha in *Sisters* and Aasha Rani in *Starry Nights* appear to be rebellious modern women who challenge the orthodoxy of sexual and social taboos.

De does not believe in describing her women character as love-slaves or bitches or more helpmates at home. They seek equal treatment from men. Being educated they are conscious of their marginalization. Their main concern is to make their presence felt. De has distorted the image of women who cry for freedom and equality which still goes unheard in the patriarchal world. From this perspective, the women in her works are more powerful than men.

Shobha De's women are far in comparison to their male counterparts. They are not weak and submissive but they are bold and frank enough to cope in a world that is cruel to them. They show exemplary courage and strength in the times of crisis.
They never think of defeat. They are not guilty of their affirms and attitudes. In *Sultry Days*, Sujata is quite gross and repulsive. She is comfortable with whatever she does. She does not lead a life which is defined by her husband. She follows her natural instincts and makes her own rules. Similarly, in *Sisters* Mikki is not emotional, subdued or weak like traditional Indian women. On the contrary she is assertive, pragmatic and song. She challenges a usual orthodoxy vision of society. She is a woman who easily and without any sense of guilt breaks off her engagement with Naveen, when he fails to respond her wish. In a sense Shobha De is a forerunner of the emerging Indian woman with her liberated womanhood.

**Githa Hariharan:**

Githa Hariharan was, born in Coimbatore, India, to a Tamil Brahmin family from Pallghat, South India. Her father was a journalist with a leading Indian newspaper - the times of India -and her mother devoted all her energies and attention to bring up her three children.

Githa had a happy childhood, being allowed to grow up in the intoxicating company books, feeding on the early diet of Victorian classics and moving, on to discover the delights of the Japanese novels. This ravenous intake of the written word proved to be a period of unconsciousness preparation for the vocation she was to choose ultimately. Her training in Indian Carnatic music engendered a deep love for it, a love that later diversified to include jazz within its ambit and spilled over into symphonic organization of her fiction.
Compellingly articulate, she insists that though her upbringing was quite traditional it was not necessarily oppressive and, moreover, that it was fairly liberal. As a child, in addition to being allowed to read what she liked, she could freely engage in discussions and arguments. She received a liberal education in leading public institutions in Bombay, Manila, and United States. She took her master's in communication from Fairfield University, Connecticut, and, subsequently, worked briefly as a television scriptwriter in New York. Therefore, from 1979, she worked as an editor of social sciences for Orient Longman, a large publishing house, for ten years in Mumbai, Chennai, and New Delhi, and then followed it up with a stint as a freelancer. Finally realizing her vocation, she took the major decision of abandoning this profession to become a full-time writer.

Githa Hariharan seems to have come a long way since her first novel; *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992) had sent waves in the literary world and won the commonwealth Writers' Prize. Her latest work, *When Dreams Travel* (1999) is about a woman’s search for “her” story. But what seems to have undergone a sea change is the author's treatment of the subject. Here the author attempts to write a metafiction through an elaborate inter text that is made to foreground the feminist issue from a fresh perspective. In keeping with her continued interest in legend and myth, the novel draws on the Arabian Nights, audaciously picking up Shahrzad (Hariharan's favored spelling) and her younger sister, Dunyazad, as the protagonists of an ingeniously crafted novel about euphonic dreams. Immediately recalling the likes of Angela Carter, Gabriel, Garcia Marquez, and Salman Rushdie and the magic realist mode, the memories of Dunyazad, brimming with stories, become the take-off point for an original reinterpretation of the archetypal myth. The chaste, intelligent, ambitious,
quick-tongued Shahrzad's tales of love and adventure, designed to delay death, in conjunction with the heady cocktail of the cerebral and the erotic, ultimately allow for a serious reexploration of gender locations, the constant elbowing of the sexes for power and love.

Githa Harihnan used the old story of the Arabian Nights as theme and Intertext. Her story reverberates with echoes from the text of past and at the same time curves out daring lines of departure. The 1001 Nights had used the familiar device of stories within stories. We have examples throughout literary history of such internalizing of the relationship between authors and readers, art and life. Hariharan finds this useful for her met arid metafictional schemata. Seen from the angle of modern fiction theory this double fiction appears to be a story about storytelling, with the purpose to suggest the ulterior triumph of art over life, of imagination over mundane and cruel reality, or the ennobling effect of art even on an insensitive mind.

**Ruth Prawer Jhabvala:**

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, born and bred in a foreign country is hailed as one of the greatest writers of Indian English Literature. She has chosen to leave India after living here about twenty five years and now lives in New York. While she is lauded for being objective, unsentimental, detached, ironic and often satirical, one is aware of the limitations imposed upon her work by a fixed European eye. She writes about India with a view-point of an European and for the readers, majority of whom are from western countries. She seems aware of her western values and this has affects her technique and the contents of her novels. Her major novels are: *To Whom She Will*

Jhabvala usually writes about the rising business bourgeosia of North India living in and around Delhi. Her characters, chosen mostly from an Indian middle class or upper class family, are by no means sophisticated. She peeps into the affairs of an Indian middle class family as if it is a comedy of the unrestricted human consciousness. Her vision maintains a limitation and avoids falling into sentimentality or superficial involvement. She wants to express ironically in her novels that living in India does not mean sharing the Indian vision of life. The East-West encounter seen in the Indo-English literature are in fact a legacy of colonial past. But Jhabvala's approach is a bit different as compared with other novelists. The Indian coming back from England and making efforts to settle down in India is commonly seen in the modern Indian Fiction. She writes her novels within their narrow compass. She has an excellent ear for the rhythms of Indian speech and an ardent eye for the modes of cultural behaviours of Indian society. About her limitations, the noted critic Balachandra Rajan says,

*But the cast is limited, the tonal range is restricted and joint effect of her many book is unavoidably one of the accumulation rather than growth. Even if we confine ourselves to the foreigners and their dealings with India, there are opportunities to move deeper which Mrs. Jhabvala avoids.*

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Her early novel *To Whom She Will* (1955) is a gentle comedy dealing with the life of Amrita who loves Hari and wants to settle down in matrimony with him. Hari is weak willed, tall-talking, passive and pseudo-romantic and Amrita is also not so strong women. She is rather immature with adolescent swings of sentiment. When Hari announces her love with Amrita, his brother-in-law (sister's husband) brushes aside their love being an adolescent's passion. Jhahvala’s another novel; *The nature of Passion* has been appreciated as a comedy of manners and also as a fine family novel. The female protagonist, Nimmi, is good looking, intelligent and rich. She lives in a joint family of her father Lalaji who lives with his wife, sister, three sons, three daughter, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, all jostling against each other’s, knowing each other's weaknesses. Lalaji is enterprising and cheerful who loves his youngest daughter, Nimmi utmost. He treats all women as mere possessions and even his wife has a soft corner for his youngest daughter who for them is treasure and finest achievement.

**Jhumpa Lahiri:**

Jhumpa Lahiri was born in 1967 in London. She grew up in Rhode Island and lives in New York City. She is a graduate of Barnard College. Eventually, Lahiri did enter Boston University, where she received an MA. in English, an M.A. in Creative Writing, and an M.A. in Comparative Literature and in the Arts, and a Ph.D. in Renaissance Studies. She has taught creative writing in Boston University and the Rhode Island School of Design. She currently lives in New York City, where she is working on a novel. Her debut book, *Interpreter of Maladies*, is a collection of short stories, three of which *The New Yorker* has published on April 10, 2000.
Jhumpa Lahiri was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, the first person of South Asian origin to win an individual prize. In May 2000, *The Third and Final Continent*, a story by Lahiri that ran in a summer 1999 fiction issue of The New Yorker was one of three stories that won the magazine a National Magazine Award for Fiction. In 1999, she was named by *The New Yorker* as one of the 20 best writers under the age of 40. Her title story has been selected for the O. Henry Award and The Best American Short Stories. She was a recipient of Transatlantic Review Award from Henfield Foundation and Fiction Prize from the Louisville Review. She was fellow at the Fine Arts Work Centre in Provincetown.

The above study shows that women writers have gone up from difficult to tribal and rural areas too, but all of them have expressed their concern for women and their problems. The variety of subjects, they have touched upon is a great contribution in creating awareness for the modern women all over the globe. The variety of subjects handled by them considering Indian environment needs an appreciation. Some of the writers have not claimed that they belong to feminist’s movement yet their writings suggest that their inner spirit and feelings are for the welfare of the women.

**Gita Mehta:**

**Life:**

An Indian writer, Gita Mehta, was born in 1943 to an extremely active in the struggle for Indian liberation from Britain and in a renowned Oriya family. The Oriya, known classically by various names (Odia, Odri, Utkaliya,
Kalingi, Latin: Uri), are an ethnic group of eastern India and of eastern Indo-Aryan stock. She is the daughter of Biju Patnaik, an Indian independence activist and a Chief Minister of post-independence Odisha, then known as Orissa. Her younger brother Naveen Patnaik is presently the Chief Minister of Orissa. At her birth, Mehta's grandmother demanded that she be named Joan of Arc, as a child born into a community of freedom fighters who were often forced to go underground as a result of their political actions. But instead, she was named Gita (translated "song"), as in song of freedom. It could also be, let us conjecture, that she was named Gita because her parents were fighting for a just cause and Lord Krishna’s *Gita* is a thesis on *Karma*/action. Whatever be the case, Gita probably had something of Joan of Arc intrinsically in her whom she gives to her protagonist Jaya in *Raj*-self assurance and frankness. Only several weeks after Mehta's birth, her father was imprisoned for his political activity. Growing up, she was surrounded by her parent's active struggle for Indian liberation. At the age of three, she and her brother were sent to a boarding school while her mother followed her father from one jail to the next.

When Gita Mehta was five years old, she saw her first dead body. It was Gandhi's. She'd been playing with her brother on a cold January afternoon when the news came over that the Mahatma had been shot dead by one of his own Hindu guards. Even now she remembers the shock of seeing her mother and the family's servants weeping beside the wireless that brought the news. More significantly, she remembers sitting on someone's shoulders among the weirdly silent crowds standing four-deep alongside the funeral route, watching as a lorry, surmounted by garlands of marigolds, carried the symbol of Indian freedom to his funeral pyre. She remembered it particularly well when she went to see Gandhi, the Richard Attenborough film, in
which the funeral had become a full military job, all slow-marching, uniformed
troops and rumbling gun carriages. Later she found out that - wholly against the
expressed desire of the master of non-violent protest - a state funeral had been
mounted, by Nehru and Mountbatten "for the record".

It's this kind of double-vision that Mehta loves to concern within her books:
the India seen from the inside by a passionate returned emigrate and the India as sold
to the West in images of mysticism, poverty and chaos. She made her name in 1980
with *Karma Cola: The Marketing of the Mystic East*, a blisteringly funny piss-take of
consumerism trying to sell Nirvana, of the Beatles calling on the Maharishi, Ravi
Shankar at Woodstock... Later she took to fiction, and published *Raj* (a bit of a
commercial blockbuster about rich princeling families looking for love in the run-up
to Partition) and *A River Sutra*, a poetic little rhapsody about a retired bureaucrat
rediscovering his soul in retirement beside a sacred river. Now, half a century after
her country's independence, she's back in Tom Wolfe mode with *Snakes and Ladders*,
a 35-chapter guide to modern India, taking in politics, economics, autobiography,
jokes, history, polemic, anecdote, interviews, race, the arts, literature, caste, and the
sex industry, dished up with the airiest of manners. She uses words and phrases from
the *Raj* lexicon - "the imperial jig was up"; Mrs Gandhi being "quite loopy";
something "sticking in the craw". Amid passionate denunciations of the poverty trap
(that keeps, say, illiterate peasants paying off the interest on tiny loans for 20 years)
she finds room for vast and alternation pronouncements. "The most interesting
evolution of independent India," she writes, "is the change from individual
fearlessness in the face of social and political injustice, to the craven courting of those
who possess social and political power."
Education:

Young Gita was growing up in the thick of political activities that always created fluid situations. Her father was often in jail and her mother followed him ‘from jail to jail… smuggling letters into the jail’ and running around offices to get him released. In order to ensure stability for their two children, particularly in their education, the parents decided to send them Gita and her brother to a boarding school. Gita received her early education in India. She graduated from Bombay University. Thereafter, she was sent to Cambridge for a Masters in English Literature. She met her future husband Ajai Sonny. After their marriage they settled in London.

In 1987 she shifted to New York where Sonny joined as the Editor-in-chief of the world renowned publishing house Alfred A. Knopf. because of Mr. Mehta’s position in the publishing industry, the family holds a prominent place in New York’s literary and publishing circle. They married and have one son. Mehta and her husband "Sonny," the president of Alfred A. Knopf publishing house, currently maintain residences in New York, London and Delhi, spending at least three months of every year in India. As a result of Sonny Mehta's prominent position in New York's publishing industry, the couple is a central figure in New York's literary publishing world.

Career:

In addition to writing, Mehta has also spent time as a journalist and directed several documentaries about India for BBC and NBC. She has made four films on the
Bangladesh war, and for NBC she covered the Indo-Pakistan war that led to the creation of Bangladesh. She has also made films on elections in the former Indian princely states. Because of this journalistic background, all of her books feature keen political insight founded in thorough investigation. Because of the intelligence and family history that follows Mehta into her writing, her books are smart investigations into the ideas, people, history and personalities that have determined what has shaped modern India and ultimately, who she is as a woman of Indian descent. She has the unique opportunity to collect the richness of living on three continents, and it is this rarity of perspective that gives her a uniquely witty and frank ability to define her vision of India through her work. As Mehta states,

*India is a place where worlds and times are colliding with huge velocity: we're putting satellites into space, and we have bullock carts; there, that constant tension and contradiction of immense sophistication and an almost pre-medieval way of life.*

Her film compilation of the Bangladesh revolution, Dateline Bangladesh, was shown in cinema theatres both in India and abroad. In earlier interview, in 1991, responding to the question about her documentaries, she had said:

*I made four films on the Bangladesh war — I was with the guerillas, the Mukti Bahini, inside Bangladesh. Later, for NBC, I covered the Indo-Pakistan war that led to the creation of Bangladesh. I also made films on the elections in the former Indian princely states... I would charge into the offices of BBC and NBC*
and ask them, 'Why don't you let Indians make films about India?'

They were astonished and let me do the films.14

Gita Mehta's works reflect the insight gained through her journalistic and political background. But besides that she has even written numerous articles for various Indian, American and European magazines. She made documentaries for European and American televisions. Gita Mehta, eminent journalist turned writer nicely combined India's glorious history, culture and spirituality through her novels. Her works have been translated into 21 languages and published in twenty-seven countries. She has been on the bestseller lists in Europe, the US and India. Gita Mehta comments: "I am a camera, and the reader can see through my eyes."15

Mehta is a witty, opinionated person who is always open to new ideas and experiences. At the age of forty, she did a parachute jump with a British military squadron. But she did not challenge herself with physically taxing adventures in pursuit of eternal youth, she assured Christa Worthington of Harper's Bazaar in 1989: "I am an Asian woman....Possibly because one is Indian; it's not terrifying to grow up. As we grow older, we're given more authority and respect."16 In her piece "Making India Accessible" published in Publisher's Weekly in 1997, Wendy Smith describes the Mehtas' home thus:

Gita and Sonny Mehta's apartment is an oasis of tranquility
in midtown Manhattan. Outside on a chilly March day,
Park Avenue traffic is at its mid-afternoon worst, and the
chatter of kids from a school next door nearly drowns out
the honking horns and screeching brakes. Inside, all distracting sounds seem to be absorbed by the crammed floor-to-ceiling bookshelves, custom-built when the couple moved to New York from London in 1987 when Sonny replaced Robert Gottlieb as Knopf editor-in-chief.

Gita and Ajay Mehta have a son who lives in London and the family maintains residences in Delhi, New York and London. Despite their otherwise busy schedule, the Mehtas spend at least three months in India. In fact, every winter is a homecoming for them. This time is reserved for family visits and get-togethers. Gita says she does not write during these visits as it is a period reserved for accumulation of experience and assimilation of ideas.

Writing fiction, she says, is not easy, particularly if you are dealing with facts and composing factual pieces. Non-fiction writing provides a kind of 'safety net' beyond which one does not go; not so in fiction where the imagination is at play. However, the experience in making documentaries gave her freedom to move about, to collect data and to amass information. As a war correspondent with NBC (USA), she got an opportunity to tour Bangladesh and cover the Indo-Pak War 1971. She saw the birth of the nation. She also made a documentary on elections in the erstwhile princely states. This first-hand knowledge widened her horizon further and her own experiences plus her family background moulded her vision of India and gave her keen insight to understand India's problems, her strength and weaknesses.
When she started writing books, fiction and non-fiction both, she did it with the self-confidence of an insider's familiarity.

*Because of this journalistic background, all of her books feature keen political insight founded in thorough investigation. Because of writing, her books are smart investigations into the ideas, people, history and personalities that have determined what have shaped modern India and ultimately, who she is a woman of Indian descent.*

**Works of Gita Mehta:**

(1) *Karma Cola: Marketing the Mystic East* (1979),

(2) *Raj* (1989),

(3) *River Sutra* (1993),

(4) *Snakes and Ladders: Glimpses of Modern India* (1997), and


**1) Karma Cola: Marketing the Mystic East (1979)**

Gita Mehta’s first book, *Karma Cola: Marketing the Mystic East* (1979), took a mocking look at the Western belief that spiritual enlightenment could be acquired instantly by hopping on to a jet and finding the easiest available guru. *Karma cola* was the starting point of Gita Mehta’s literary career. It was by chance that she came upon the idea which she later developed as a theme for her book. The incident behind the decision to write something on ‘Karma’ is interesting. It was
sparkled by Mehta’s annoyance at being seen as an automatic India expert. She wrote Karma Cola within three weeks and when the book came out it got a warm response. The work is satire on both the Indian fake mystics and the western naïve seekers. The story begins in the late '60s, when hundreds of thousands of Westerners descended upon India, disciples of a cultural revolution that proclaimed that the magic and mystery missing from their lives was to be found in the East. An Indian writer who has also lived in England and the United States, Gita Mehta was ideally placed to observe the spectacle of European and American "pilgrims" interacting with their hosts. When she finally recorded her razor sharp observations in Karma Cola, the book became an instant classic for describing, in merciless detail, what happens when the traditions of an ancient and long-lived society are turned into commodities and sold to those who don't understand them.

This book is an exploration of and commentary on the decades-long history of the West's search for spiritual enlightenment in the teachings of Eastern religions and philosophies. As she comments on the relationship between faith and commerce in this particular set of circumstances, the author considers the tendency towards, and growth of, exploitation on both sides, particularly as manifest in the expanding practice of using spirituality as a commodity. The author introduces her analysis of the East/West spiritual relationship with commentary on a pair of myths that, she contends, explain the circumstances from which the mutual exploitation in that relationship emerged. She then, throughout the book, explores various facets, motivations, manifestations and repercussions of that exploitation.
Prominent among the specific aspects of eastern spirituality that the author considers is the idea of karma - specifically, the belief that many aspects of an individual's current life carry with them echoes of past lives and/or the foundations of aspects of future lives. The subject of karma is discussed with particular focus in Sections One and Two. In Section Three, the author introduces another of her central contentions, one related to her initial commentary on karma. This is the idea that the true nature and implications of eastern philosophy and teachings are often too profoundly different from their "home" philosophies for western seekers to handle. This thesis is reiterated and supported, on several occasions throughout the book, by anecdotal reportage of individuals who, as the result of contemplating eastern spirituality too closely or too intently, have either lost their grip on reality or gone into forms of denial.

*Brilliantly irreverent, Karma Cola displays Gita Mehta's gift for weaving old and new, common and bizarre, history and current events, into a seamless and colourful narrative that is at once witty, shocking and poignant.*

Sections Four through Seven discuss ways in which individuals on both sides of the spiritual equation under consideration, both seekers and teachers, see what they want to see and act in response to those perceptions. Here the author begins her consideration of the exploitation that takes place on both sides of the equation, illustrating how both seekers and teachers are willing to exploit, and be exploited, in order to get what they believe they want. Many teachers, she contends, want money. Many seekers, she further contends, want any kind of spiritual enlightenment they can
get. The brief Section Eight, meanwhile, takes a mostly anecdotal look at ways in which the spiritual gap between west and east can be bridged through other, non-exploitative means. Section Nine, however, contrasts the hope implied in Section Eight with a vivid, multi-leveled portrayal on how India's long history of exploitation by a number of different western natures has created what amounts to a culture of exploitation, grounded across the decades in the illegal drug trade.

Section Ten examines the role and function of sexuality in both eastern spirituality and in triggering desire for explorations of connection with that spirituality in the west. Section Eleven deepens that consideration with an examination of the sexual/sensual appeal of those on the darker, more corrupt, and ultimately more destructive side of the equation. In Section Twelve, the author reiterates her contention that the true nature of eastern philosophy and practice is ultimately too harsh for western seekers not only to understand and accept, but to want to understand and accept. Finally, in the brief Section Thirteen, the author holds out hope for future evolution of the east/west spiritual relationship, tempering it with the implication that both cultures have responsibility for creating the damage to that relationship, and both sides have a considerable way to go before a genuine, un-exploitative communion within that relationship can, and will, be realized.

In the dazzling prose that has become her trademark, Mehta skewers the entire Spectrum of seekers: The Beatles, homeless students, Hollywood rich kids in detox, British guilt-trippers, and more. In doing so, she also reveals the devastating byproducts that the Westerners brought to the villages of rural India high anxiety and drug addiction among them. Brilliantly irreverent, Karma Cola displays Gita Mehta's
Sometimes a book is published that is virtually unreviewable. Not because it is a mess, but rather because one cannot do it justice. Published in 1979 and still being reprinted, Karma Cola is one such work. Recommended to me by someone who had just left India, the subject of the book, I was handed a passage to read. It detailed the story of an English aristocrat who had heard about a guru in the mountains who was reported to be able to turn urine into scented rose water. And so this Englishman went out to find the guru and sampled his wares, which, it turned out, smelt and tasted remarkably like urine.

Although the book is widely known for its collection of stories of western disciples seeking out mystical gurus and their tailor-made truths, it is its study of how India discovered that they were quite hip after all (in the eyes of some westerners) while they were turning to western culture, makes it a must read. Although the times have changed since it first came out, it’s biting and well-observed satire mixed with Gita Mehta’s electric writing style (on occasions reminding me of Tom Wolfe) stand out. But I’ve said too much.

(2) Raj (1989)

Raj, Mehta's first novel, begins during the last years of the nineteenth century. The book Raj (1989) covered the 50 years preceding Indian independence through the fictional character of Jaya Singh, daughter and wife of maharajahs who
ruled two of India's nominally independent kingdoms. The novel's protagonist, Jaya Singh, is the daughter of the Maharaja and Maharani of Balmer, one of the kingdoms of Royal India. Mehta paints Jaya's childhood, the traditions and rituals, political pressures and duties that inform her life, with evocative detail. She deals even-handedly with the political and social issues, conveying the immense pain and demoralizing powerlessness with which the Indian people had to deal, while still managing to portray the British with some objectivity. The novel achieves historical sweep, following Jaya from childhood through adolescence to her betrothal and then through her marriage to a Prince of Royal India who has no interest in Indian women, but whom, as a Westernized playboy, prefers European women, airplanes, and polo to the duties of a protector of the people. Mehta uses Jaya as a lens through which to view these turbulent years of India's struggle for independence. She does an admirable job of portraying Jaya's world—a woman with resources and education raised half in and half out of the traditions of purdah and Hindu ritual that reigned unchanging for generations before her. The novel is rich in detail and complexity. But much of the action, like Gandhi's salt march or the violent struggles between Hindus and Muslims, is experienced from a distance, through those to whom Jaya is connected rather than through Jaya herself. The novel has been criticized for a lack of character development and depth. Rather than drawing the reader deeply into the unfolding of history, the evenness and limited scope of Mehta's handling present a somewhat flat aspect, as of great events viewed through the wrong end of a telescope. The novel is most valuable as an account of a lost way of life as it was vanishing within the complex political realities that gave birth, ultimately, to the modern nations of India and Pakistan.
An epic historical novel about a woman in India who was the daughter of one ruling family, wife of another, and mother/regent for another during the last half century of British rule. Gita Mehta has achieved what authors of historical must do; she has written the personal story of Jaya Signh, woman with whom we can empathize, and the account of her time and place as seen from her character’s perspective. Her dual achievement is particularly important because so much of what many of know about early twentieth-century India is from the perspective of the colonizer rather than the colonized. An Englishman, like Paul Scott in The Raj Quartet, for example, writes with great sympathy about the people of India and their mistreatment by the British, but Gita Mehta is able to provide a different and more immediate account of why even the ruling classes of Indians were so angry with their rulers.

*Raj* is set in the small kingdoms of northern India, places which I have never before examined or understood. When the British consolidated their rule in most of India, they allowed the rajs, or monarchs, of these kingdoms to continue to rule as long as they ruled as the British administrators so fit. The raj were stripped of their governing power, but allowed to keep their wealth and personal freedom. Some of them, like Jaya’s father, ruled with an understanding that their people must be their first priority. Others, like Jaya’s husband, responded to their loss of political power by focusing their attention and wealth on the personal pursuit of pleasure. As the nationalist movement grew in the part of India which Britain ruled directly, the raj were divided over where they loyalty should be placed. As regent for her young son, Jaya is in the midst of turmoil around independence. The two men whom Jaya might
have loved were supporters of the two opposing sides; an Englishman and a Nationalist. Both her own story and that of India are told with gripping intensity.

(3) A River Sutra (1993)

Mehta's second novel, A River Sutra, is a more intimate and deeply focused work. The narrative centers on India's holiest river, the Narmada, in the form of a series of tales, or modified sutras of Indian literature. The tales of various pilgrims to the river tap the deep veins of Indian mythology and artistic traditions while also forming a prose meditation on the country's secular-humanist tradition. The character of an unnamed civil servant who has retired from the world to run a government rest house on the river is the thread loosely weaving the stories together along with the Narmada itself. Mehta's subject matter here is as rich as the tradition she taps. Classical Sanskrit drama, Hindu mythology, and Sufi poetry all find reflection and reiteration in the novel. One recurring motif playing through the book is that of the raga of Indian classical music. Another is that of Kama, god of love, and the passions and mysteries of the human heart. For all its substance of ancient Indian tradition and thought, A River Sutra is a modern work that acknowledges the difficulties facing modern India at the same time as it takes the reader on a skillfully realized journey into a resonant culture. A River Sutra (1993), blended Indian mythology with hard hitting depictions of love in its many forms. The book speaks about the life of a disillusioned bureaucrat who learns about life from the stories of six pilgrims heading to the banks of India's holiest river.
In the novel *A River Sutra*, the focus is on India that was and that still is, within the contemporary India. The novel contains many interlinked stories within it are narrated to the narrator by other characters of the novel. Mehta presents unconnected stories in the novel - stories about Hindu and Jain ascetics, courtesans and minstrels, diamond merchants and tea executives, Muslim clerics and music teachers, tribal folks.

The narrator is unnamed and unidentified in the novel, is gaining knowledge which brings on the shores of Narmada where he meets many people and learns from them various ideas of life. Unlike most first-person narrative, the narrator in this novel, reveals very little about himself. He seems to have no life story, no main event that made him choose to live a retired life on the banks of the Narmada River. In contrast to this, the people whom the narrator meets and the stories he hears, reveal the disorderly nature of human life. Without exception, the narrator meets or hears tales of extraordinary people; people who have made enormous sacrifices for love or who have been treated cruelly by life. The novel *A River Sutra* set in the bank of the river shows how the narrator is getting experiences from the people those come/reside on the bank of the river. In the novel the narrator often meets someone who comes to rescue in the banks of the river which gives shelter to everyone who comes after some disturbance in their normal life. The narrator listens to their stories and gains experience/knowledge from their experiences. Thus the shore becomes a guide to develop the narrator’s knowledge by providing him the opportunity of meeting those strangers.
Gita Mehta’s another work *Snakes and Ladders*, is a collection of essays on India. Captured in these essays is a time-period when India, post-independence, was struggling to establish its identity as a self-sufficient, progressive economy. The forward of the book explains the name given to the book and relates it to the Indian context. The book proceeds with essays on Indian politics, films, myths, popular beliefs, superstitions, love, leisure, décor and other very Indian tidbits. These combine beautifully to weave together the tapestry that is India. In some ways, the collection of short stories has become a trend in post-colonial Indian literature. In *Snakes and Ladders*, Gita Mehta gives her variation on the theme, with a multitude of brief insights into real life in India.

India became self-governing in 1947. Living through our first half-century of nationhood has been a roller-coaster ride, the highs so sudden we have become light-headed with exhilaration, the lows too deep to even contemplate solution, as if the game of Snakes and Ladders had been invented to illustrate our attempts to move an ancient land toward modern enlightenment without jettisoning from our past that which is valuable or unique. As the author quotes:

*As its best the culture of India is like a massive sponge, absorbing everything while purists shake their heads in despair. Other cultures have sought to expel all foreign-devil influences from their shores, but India has always shown an appetite for foreign devils matched only by her capacity to make them go native. In India we*
are still wearing our saris and our dhotis not in defiant chauvinism but because quite simply that is how we dress. So when I see painted on the walls of sixteenth-century Rajput villas pictures of the god Krishna playing his flute not next to a herd of cows in a meadow but from the backseat of a Rolls-Royce, I feel reassured that Indian culture is still in business, that Krishna will continue to play his flute whether he is in a field, a rolls, or a rocket.²⁰

The traditional Indian game of Snakes and Ladders is simple enough. Played by rolling dice to determine how many squares a player may move his marker across a board, starting at square one and finishing at square one hundred. Because of its unpredictability it was one of our favourite games when we were children. There was the element of chance determined by the throw of the dice. But more than that, the actual board was suggestive of danger, an austere geometry of squares broken by angled ladders and snakes with vast jaws. Landing at the foot of a ladder meant you could climb it, sometimes moving thirty squares in a single throw. That was the good part. You could also make it all the way to square ninety-nine, only to encounter a snake painted in lurid colors. Then you had to slide down the serpent while your gleeful opponent streaked past. Mehta says,

*Even if you're writing about Superman, you have to invent a planet for him to come from; you can't write in a void. In Snakes and Ladders, even though it's a series of essays, my hope was that they would have an accretive effect, so that by the time you finish the book and I'm telling you what it is that I love about India, it has become familiar to the reader.*²¹
Sometimes, in our glacial progress toward liberation from the injustice that make a mockery of political freedoms, it seems we Indians have vaulted over the painful stages experienced by other countries, lifted by ladders we had no right to expect. At other times we have been swallowed by the snakes of past nightmares, finding ourselves after half a century of independence back at square one.

Perhaps historians will make sense of India's early years of freedom. I find myself able to see only fragments of a country in which worlds and times are colliding with a velocity that defies comprehension. These essays are an attempt to explain something of modern India to myself. I hope others may also see in them facets of an extraordinary world pinning through an extraordinary time.

This is not to say, however, that *Snakes and Ladders* is just another collection of writings about India. While Rushdie may simply use India as a setting to demonstrate his literary prowess, or Mystery may create a scene so vivid you may think that you’re actually visiting India, Mehta takes tact. Her latest work is not so much a collection of short stories as a collection of essays, some only a couple of pages in length, which simply tells you what Gita Mehta thinks about India. She does this in such a way that you’re no longer a visitor – you feel as you’ve been born in, raised in, left, and returned to India. Indeed, such is the strength of the work that, by the time you have finished the book, you will feel homesick for India – wherever your true home may be. India is a land of contrasts. It is the world's most populous democracy, but it still upholds the caste system. It is a burgeoning economic superpower, but one of the poorest nations on earth. It is the home of the world's
biggest movie industry after Hollywood, as well as to the world's oldest religions. It is an ancient civilization celebrating fifty years as a modern nation. Now, as never before, the world wants to know what contemporary India is all about.

There is much, much to be said in favor of *Snakes and Ladders*. First, of all each essay is so short and engrossing that time is quickly forgotten. There should be no excuse not to immediately enter Mehta’s world; all that is required is the slightest knowledge of Indian history. With that precondition satisfied, you can read the book anywhere, anytime: before bed, in the Wendy’s by King’s Cross station, in the Underground going to Russell Square (minding the gap, of course), or even on the train back from Southall. The beauty of smallness is that it doesn’t take a lot of time to get into the story, and if you can’t read for long, you don’t feel as if you must start all over again the next time.

The name of the book is taken from the board game of Snakes and Ladders which apparently originated in India. You won’t completely understand exactly how appropriate this title is until you’ve either studied Indian politics, examined Indian economic policies, or you’ve read this book. In the game, a player can land on a ladder and quickly advance in the game, or land on a snake and immediately be set back. Such is India itself.

Mehta is fascinated by India in all its rich detail of its folkways and history, its culture and politics, its ancient traditions and current concerns. In *Snakes and Ladders* she gives a loving, but unflinching, assessment of India today, in an account that is entertaining, informative, and wholly personal.

This is the story that Mehta recounts in her book, “Eternal Ganesha’ which is a virtual celebration of this wonderful, delightful God who is universally loved as a harbinger of good luck and the remover of obstacles, and for his benign interaction with the affairs of humans. This sumptuous oversized book is laden with 125 color images of the elephant headed deity who appears just about everywhere from the walls of ancient temples to contemporary art work to posters plastered in the bazaars. He is the most popular god of the Hindu pantheon and everyone feels intimately connected to Him.

When the writer Gita Mehta was growing up in Orissa, a small ancient image of Ganesha was unearthed in a mound of dirt as the foundations of their family home were being laid. As nothing else was excavated, as no other idols appeared to suggest that a long forgotten temple lay crumbling under the ground, the little stone figure was deemed to be a sign of divine blessing, she recalls. Everyone agreed the house would be lucky since the Lord of Beginnings had chosen to hide in the earth until the house was ready to be built.

In India, the Hindu deity Ganesha is ubiquitous. His image appears everywhere in village walls in cyber cafes, on handbags and commercial packaging on the sides of trucks and rickshaws, in textiles and neon' and in the most sacred precints of ancient temples. Ganesha’s delightful physical form – he is elephant-headed, he has large bellied body of a man and multiple arms, he is girdled by a serpent and, he rides a mouse enchants the faithful and transcends cultural boundaries, Aside from his charming figure, Ganesha's many names are another indication of the beloved regard in which he is held: he is the Pitcher of Prosperity, the Remover of Obstacles, the
Grantor of Boons, the Guarantor of Success and the Lord of Beginnings. Indeed, Ganesha represents hope, optimism, good will, and some healthy self-indulgence, His magnanimity reminds us that spiritual awareness is not at odds with the good life. Perhaps the most popular god in the Hindu pantheon, Ganesha is also the most accessible he may be invoked by anyone to intercede on their behalf, without a priest or other intermediary. This most democratic of deities is a symbol of tolerance in a fractious World.

Perhaps the most popular god in the Hindu pantheon, the elephant-headed Ganesha is known by many names: the Pitcher of Prosperity, the Remover of Obstacles, the Grantor of Boons, the Guarantor of Success, and the Lord of Beginnings. It is hard not to recognize Ganesha, with his head of an elephant, protuberant belly, and many arms girdled by a serpent and riding a mouse!

In *Eternal Ganesha*, the author, Gita Mehta, provides chapters for each of Ganesha's characteristics -- examining the origins of the god as well as the symbolism behind, for example, the serpent or the mouse. Of the juxtaposition of contradictory animals such as elephant and mouse, Mehta writes:

> They also point to a moral imperative -- that opposites can and must live in peaceful co-existance. Non-violence and humanism derive from that imperative. The elephant does not kill living creatures to survive; it is a symbol of ahimsa or non-violence. A human body encircled by a snake connects the elephant to a mouse, the union of the small with the great; the microcosm with the macrocosm…Ganesha incarnates Hindu philosophy's fundamental
law, the unity in diversity that it is humanity's primary duty to maintain.\textsuperscript{22}

Mehta writes that his trunk is symbolic of the plough, his belly of a bursting granary and farmers have worshipped him as the Lord of Farming and as the Lord of Water; his festival is celebrated in the season of rains in the hope of bountiful harvests. He is the one who safeguards homes, and rare is a Hindu home without an image of Ganesha.

_Eternal Ganesha_ completely enchants the reader in the chapter entitled ‘Ganesha’s Miracle.’ Discussed here is the phenomenon that occurred on September 21, 1995,

*It all began at dawn in a temple on the outskirts of Delhi, India, when milk offered to a statue of Ganesh just disappeared in thin air. Word spread so quickly throughout India that soon that thousands were offering milk to the gods and watching in amazement as it disappeared. Life in India was brought to a virtual standstill as people rushed to temples....*\textsuperscript{23}

More and more reports came flooding in, describing scenes where the idols -- all over India -- were drinking milk! Within seventy-two hours the international press began reporting an even more astounding development. The miracle had jumped national boundaries. Now Hindu idols around the world were consuming milk by the gallon. Many apparently felt a new god been born to save the world from evil.

As she points out, Ganesha is also the special god of India’s vast student population. Many students believe if they slice a closed text book with a Ganesha
medallion the book will fall open at the very topic on which they will be examined, and before entering an examination hall cautious students might recite the Ganesha prayer. In the most humble hut a Ganesha idol might consist of a simple triangle made of mud with a streak of vermilion on its apex. Ganeshas have been fashioned out ofust about anything from green bananas, peanuts, marigolds, and in some cases matchsticks or discarded rubber tires. This jovial god is very much a people’s god.

In this, the first popular book on the subject, bestselling author Gita Mehta offers a probing and entertaining text that explores the rich religious and cultural meanings of this beloved figure. Lavishly illustrated, the book will appeal not only to Hindus, but to all who are touched by the talismanic power of Ganesha’s image and the generous spirit of his attributes.

_Eternal Ganesha_ is an illustrated coffee table book. The book provides an updated and comprehensive story of Ganesha, along with the cultural and political underpinnings of the _Remover of Obstacle’s_ role in Indian society. In the book Gita Mehta notes: Mathematicians acknowledge him (Ganesha) as the power of numbers. He is the first cause. Philosophers acknowledge him as the power of thought.²⁴

Gita Mehta is the author of the bestselling books Raj, A River Sutra, Karma Cola, and Snakes and Ladders. Gita Mehta's books are smart investigations into the ideas, people, history and personalities that have determined what has shaped modern India.
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