A comparative study of the two contemporary novelists has revealed many aspects of the two writers – Githa Hariharan and Anita Nair, who started contributing towards Indian English fiction in the early and late 1990s respectively. G.V. Desani’s *All about H. Hatterr* (1948), one of the most experimental novels in Indian English literature has inspired both Hariharan and Nair as they themselves have admitted in one of their interviews. The extremely complex novel both in theme and technique is a triumphant experiment in blending Western and Indian narrative forms and a perfect example of unlimited stylistic virtuosity. The novel also incorporates *The Panchtantra, Hitopdesha, the Upanishads* and *the Puranas* into its narrative. The emboxed technique of story telling and the emphasis on a viable philosophy of living in the world recall *The Panchatantra* has definitely influenced Hariharan’s fiction. G.V Desani’s most difficult novel, which has received admiration and praise for its attempt to blend western and oriental modes of narration in telling tales with a modern setting can be considered one of the earliest postmodernist Indian fiction that has paved way and guided the present novelists. The striking features perceptible in Nair and Hariharan’s fiction are significant contributions to the postmodern era of Indian English fiction. Their fiction reflects the contemporary social condition prevalent in the country with wide range of characters populating their work. The experiences of these characters are based on a particular cultural, political, religious and social
milieu. Indian women and men with all their longings, aspirations and frustrations are portrayed very effectively in their novels and short stories as well. Both the writers have attempted to focus on the plights and problems of men/women mostly with an urban base. All their works of fiction does not necessarily speak of ‘female narrative strategies.’ Hariharan and Nair are conditioned by Indian upbringing but have risen above traditional constraints. Therefore, the women characters in both the writers' fiction reflect the conflicts and tensions arising out of the attempts to negotiate between tradition and the desire to lead a new life. Their fiction reflects the shift in moral values, the social transition, changing attitudes and also problems arising out of the generation gap. Writers like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, and Bharati Mukherjee have denied any sort of feminist bias but an indepth analysis of Hariharan and Nair's fiction proves a strong feminist intent and women's issue pertains to be the chief concern of their plot. The two writers are as prolific as their predecessors as far as women-centric themes are concerned but their position as feminist writing is difficult to assess because of their rejection of the existing models of feminist writing either Western or Indian. The broadening of the thematic range, a shift from village centricism to city centricism with exception to a couple of novels and a few short stories are some of the discernible aspects of their fiction. The setting has shifted from the village to the metropolis and also abroad (in Nair’s short stories).

While dealing with the story of ordinary and unexceptional lives, the absence of a hero-like figure in their fiction becomes a common factor in the works of both the writers. Hariharan and Nair have strategically dealt with problems of men and women. They have attempted experimentation involving a total or modified return to
ancient literary methods. Their fiction seems to be trying to give expression to the Indian experience of the modern predicament. Strongly influenced by Indian middle class mores, their fiction unlike earlier women writers are unconventional, and are much freer in their handling of the sex-theme. Born and brought up in the post-colonial world, they are not self-conscious in handling the English language and therefore, the highly significant feature of their fiction is the way they handle the English language.

Magic realism, the most dominant genre popularized by Salman Rushdie has influenced Hariharan whereas Nair's fiction born of social reality can be defined as fiction of social realism. Moreover, regional fiction, popularized by R.K.Narayan has enthralled and inspired Nair and her fiction. Both the writers are concerned about the real life in India and human issues that become the focus of their writings. Among the novelists experimenting consciously with Indian Writing in English, Hariharan and Nair have established a unique identity as Indian writers with their chosen themes, characterization etc. Hariharan through her fiction voices her concern with social issues as she aligns with feminist and ethnic groups. Her hallmark being narratives, metafiction and magic realism has all the essential of a postmodern Indian English writer. Hariharan's magical realist novels When Dreams Travel and The Ghosts of Vasu Master include dreams taking place during normal life, the return of previously deceased characters, extremely complicated plots, wild shifts in time, and myths, fairy tales and fables. This style of introducing fantastic or impossible elements into a narrative that is otherwise normal is the most important postmodern technique employed by Hariharan. She has consciously used various techniques of postmodern
literature such as irony, pastiche, intertextuality, metafiction, historiographic metafiction etc. She is considered a ‘cerebral writer’ as reading and comprehending her fiction becomes extremely challenging to her readers. Having begun her literary journey in the later part of the 1990s, Nair’s fiction concerns ordinary lives and their connection with each other. Her stories are emotion-provoking and are inspired from her minute observations of the life around her. A writer, who has travelled extensively, does not show any penchant for exploring any other place in her fiction except South India. She did attempt to bring in the exotic foreign locales in her only collection of short stories Satyr of the Subway but never repeated in her later fiction.

Declining moral standards, corruption in public as well as private lives appeal to both the writers. These are the contemporary issues ailing India in the present times and therefore the writers’ moral responsibility finds expression in the themes they present. They also employ national myths and make allusions to national epics like Mahabharata. Hariharan and Nair with their open-ended narratives attempt to involve the readers as much as possible.

Their use of Tamil and Malayalam words evidently presents the customs and traditions of the people belonging to Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Nair, in particular, with exception to her short stories has not explored beyond these two states. Nair shows a direction towards contextuality and rootedness in her works, like Arundhati Roy and David Davidar (b.1958) Roy has written only one novel that features Kerala extensively. David Davidar has three published novels and like Nair grew up in Kerala and Tamil Nadu and both states feature prominently in his fiction as well. There is also a striking similarity between Davidar’s The House of Blue Mangoes
(2002) and Nair's *The Better Man*. Both the novels focus on inescapable conflicts between father and son. The protagonists are shown getting drawn to their ancestral land. Nair says that she has a natural need to write about Kerala. Her works reflect the topography and traditions of Kerala which has enriched Indian writing in English to a great extent. Her first and third novel is enacted against backdrop of the Malabar region. Kerala, especially the rural landscape is well represented in her works. Both the writers' works being translated in more than thirty languages indicate towards their growing demand and popularity among the foreign readers as well as the rest of the country. It is precisely the reason for providing their readers with glossary of the Indian words. Both Hariharan and Nair are consciously aware of the changes taking place in India in the past 50 years, which is reflected in their works. Nair believes that talking has universal appeal, and therefore dialogues used in her fiction tend to portray the human emotions and conditions as these things unlike situations, do not change from place to place. She firmly believes that a writer has to live reality and also write with assurance and authority. Therefore, she feels the writers who write about India from abroad are unable to portray the true picture. They tend to focus on the issues based on their memory of the place and fail to bring forth the reality. Both Hariharan and Nair have problems with the women writers being perceived as women-centric. They feel that writers should not be segregated on the basis of their gender. With their works both writers have proved that women are also capable of serious and intense writings. Having written female-oriented novels like *The Thousand Faces of Night* and *Ladies Coupe* Hariharan and Nair do not want to be categorized as feminist writers and restrict themselves with limited options. Therefore, not all their novels or short stories are female-oriented. Moreover, both the
writers are fascinated by the world of myth and have immensely derived sources from our mythology.

Hariharan’s concern for our shrinking space as citizens, writers, teachers, students, and rational people is reflected in her last two novels *In Times of Siege* and *Fugitive Histories*. She feels a tremendous compulsion to write about the insidious ways in which people’s minds are being shrunk. She deliberately chose to set the novel, *In Times Of Siege* in a University, as ‘the process of learning is supposed to break down walls and enlarge the student’s world.’ She is alarmed by the disparity in our society based on caste, gender, language and life-choices. To construct a novel, she likes to take up an issue that interested her and has lived through. Through her fiction she wants people to understand the difference, make space for them to thrive and celebrate them. The Gujarat riots shook her and that only confirmed her necessity to write her latest novel *Fugitive Histories*. At certain times, certain themes obsess her and as a result her short stories celebrate life despite the pervasive presence of death. About her writing, the humour in her work mostly tends to irony, wordplay and dark humour. There is a combination of the sensuous and the cerebral when she brings all things alive – whether it is animals or buildings or moon. She strongly believes that stories have meanings only when they are retold for the present times. Her language intertwined with ideas, images and designs is the most important writing tool she uses. She wants the language, to be as clear as a mirror. Her focus on rewriting of history is due to the possibility of its access to explore and debate. She believes, ‘history is a tool of analysis for us to know our past.’ She further adds, ‘Fiction has a thousand ways of giving us a new take on the dynamics of power relations.’ As a writer she feels she has a special responsibility to discharge, especially being in a multicultural society like India. Therefore, her interests lie in examining the relevant
themes like the tussles between tradition and modernity or making of modernity, equal rights for women and the strengthening of secular ideas and movements to combat growing fundamentalism. Her fiction aims at revealing truths that are fundamentally political.

Nair, on the contrary, does not concentrate on the cerebral world. In her fiction, it is the characters that provides momentum to the narrative to progress at a fast pace. When she writes, the crux of the story is always there at the back of her mind and the story evolves. She has experimented with various genres like poetry, short story, travelogue, essay, drama and screen-play. She is a versatile writer, who has also translated a famous Malayalam novel ‘Chemmeen’ into English. A good story and character-driven narratives motivates her to write a book. The lucid use of language may not attract the attention of the Western audience but the themes, Indian settings, customs and myth has definitely caught their interest. Though she vehemently refuses to be known as a feminist writer, her female protagonists are manifestations of the perceptible change noticed in society today. Whether it is Radha or Akhila her female characters refuse to be trampled by societal pressure.

Earlier in literature, women’s writing was considered as trivial and insignificant, especially when it deals with women’s lives. Hariharan and Nair have attempted variegated themes like secularism, fundamentalism, social unrest, environmental issues and the idea of belonging or being alien. They have also explored the male psyche with equal ease as they have investigated the changing image and status of women. Thus, they have successfully recreated contemporary
society with insight and justness. It is evident from the assessment of their fictional narratives that both the writers have laid emphasis on history and myths of the land. Their awareness of the political scenario of the country and growing concern about the existing socio-political problems are no less than that of the male writers of the genre. The themes used in their fiction frequently figure in the debates engaged by other contemporary Indian novelists. Both the writers seem to be inclined to fictionally re-live India’s past and re-evaluate Indian culture. Portraying characters and terms of myths embodied in our epics gets them recognition and public acceptance. Love and sex are depicted in their novels with frankness and without any inhibition. The protagonists like Mukundan and Shiv Murthy experience a sense of rootlessness without leaving the shores of their own country. It is this dangerous divisive nature of people that the authors try to draw attention to. Indian English Literature is rich in genres like novel and short story because writers like Hariharan and Nair fulfil their multi-cultural commitments. The richness of a multicultural society like India has a lot of potential and scope. With the exception of few works, Hariharan and Nair do not like to combine in their writings the traits of the West as well as the East. Therefore, their fiction is Indian in sensibility and expression. They like to write as Indians but have grown to look at the large world as a part of them. Through her fiction, Hariharan uses myth and history to seek present reality by making sportive flights from history. Thus, her work displays social concern with a difference. Hariharan and Nair firmly believe that their method of expression has to be colloquial which will someday prove to be as distinctive and colourful as the Irish or the American. Indian English literature is a meeting point for the West and the East; therefore writers like Hariharan and Nair have a great future. Today, with the
contributions made by these two writers they have undoubtedly made their positions clear as committed writers without using the 'prefix' women.

The striking shortfall of their writing is that their literary output fails to find readers at the grass-roots level in India. English being accessible only to the English educated readers, the common people of the country are unable to read and judge their work. Though the two prolific writers have attained a reputable position at a global level their work is not mass literature in India. Despite this shortfall, their familiarity with literatures in English and foreign cultures fulfills multi-cultural commitments and has a luxuriant growth in days to come. Both the writers show promise of enriching Indian English fiction further in the years to come, having broadened the horizon of Indian English literature with their valuable contributions.