Chapter One

Introduction

Women are natural story-tellers even when they don’t write or publish... Love, war, politics, economic and social tensions, legendary history, the ‘groves of Academe’, even spirituality – all are popular with contemporary novelists.

– K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar

Indian women novelists in English constitute a significant group in Indian Writing in English. Fiction by women writers constitutes a major segment of contemporary Indian writing in English. Women writers writing in English present with insight and understanding the dilemma which modern women are facing in a traditional society where dual morality is the accepted norm: self-willed and individualistic women have to face suffering caused by broken relationships. Women who are conscious of their emotional needs are striving for self-fulfillment, rejecting the existing traditions and social set-up and longing for more liberal and unconventional ways of life. Indian women novelists have given a new dimension to Indian literature. In fact, it took many years and several distinguished personalities to bring the present status and distinction to Indian English literature. Writers like Cornelia Sorabji, Kamala Markandeya, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Anita Desai, Shashi
Deshpande are largely responsible for establishing a noteworthy position for women writers in India also because they have been enthusiastically received in the West. The earlier writers paved the way but later writers like Arundathi Roy and Kiran Desai with the Booker Prize for their works namely, *The God of Small Things* and *The Inheritance of Loss*, brought global recognition to women writers in India. Till then, Indian women writers have been undervalued traditionally due to patriarchal assumptions about the superior worth of male experience. But recent contributions have established women writers not only for their self-expression but also for rewriting the cultural/social history of India. Their contributions have also helped in bringing about the much-needed social change in the country. Thus, it can be said that the women of this country owe a lot to Indian women writers for providing a mode of self-expression and a platform to be heard and noticed.

The beginnings of contributions from Indian women writers writing in English can be traced to the pre-independence era. The first known writer who made her mark in fiction writing was Toru Dutt (1856-1877). She died at the age of 21 even before her work got published. As a bilingual writer, she wrote both French and an English novel. With her limited experience of life her fiction was inevitably an autobiographical projection of her life. She did not live to see her work published and all her works were published posthumously. The tragic death of her brother and sister made her works reflective of the inner tragedy of her life through her fiction. Moreover, her understanding of romantic love was deeply drawn from literature. Her novels possessed a fusion of romantic love and terrible bereavement.
After Toru Dutt, it is the post-independence period that has witnessed sizeable and significant contributions of women fiction writers. The two outstanding writers after the Second World War were Ruth Prawer Jhabwala and Kamala Markandaya; both have unique features. Jhabwala was born of Polish parents and married to an Indian possessed a tag of outsider-insider, whereas Markandaya is tagged as an insider-outsider (an expatriate) who has been living in England for a number of years.

Ruth Prawer Jhabwala (b.1927) winner of Booker-Prize for her novel, *Heat and Dust* (1975) wrote eight novels and they fall into distinct and evenly matched groups – viz. comedies of urban middle class Indian life, especially in undivided Hindu families and ironic studies of the East-West encounter. Her comedies drew comparisons with Jane Austen, in their anatomy of power within westernized, extended families, or the slow growth of love in arranged marriages. She found affinities with Jewish culture with an emphasis on family and honour. Her views of India are different than that of Naipaul or E.M. Forster. Unlike Naipaul, she wasn’t drawn to India by ancestry or, as in Forster’s case, by a desire to move beyond a complacent western liberalism. And again, in the words of a well-known critic, “The most distinctive feature of Jhabwala’s novels is the subtlety and adroitness with which she unravels the gossamer threads of intricate human relationships - especially the women in the Hindu joint family” (Naik 235)

Jhabwala’s works focus on the social background rather than the characters. Her short stories and 12 novels fall into two distinct classes, though their themes are not mutually exclusive. Her first four novels are comedies of urban middle-class life
in India. The varying reactions of the westernized protagonists and their conventional Indian families form an important theme in her work apart from the subject of arranged marriage and romantic love. Her next four novels are ironic studies of the interaction between India and Britain. “Her satire extends to cynicism and is increasingly stereotypical in their picture of India. Her earlier novels described the complicated power relationship in an Indian joint family”. (Mehrotra 229)

Kamala Markandaya’s (1924-2004) fiction evinces a much broader range and offers a greater variety of setting, character and effect though her quintessential themes are equally few – viz, the East-West encounter takes two forms – first, a direct relationship between Indian and British characters; and secondly, the impact of modern urban culture brought in by the British rule on traditional Indian life.

Her first novel, *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) illustrates all these preoccupations. But in her later novel *The Coffer Dams* (1969) she attempts to evolve a new style, with its primacy of oblique and convoluted expression, tortured syntax and jerky sentence structure that does not make an easy reading but appears to be heavily influenced by Faulkner and Henry James (Naik 237).

Unlike Jhabvala, Markandaya gives equal importance to the principal characters and also the economic, political, cultural and social issues.
Nayantara Sehgal (b.1927) is regarded as an exponent of the political novel. Being the daughter of Vijayalakshmi Pandit, she has had an upbringing in which politics was inevitably a strong presence. Hence, it is natural that politics is her major concern/forte. Apart from political themes, her fiction is also preoccupied with the modern Indian woman's search for sexual freedom and self-realization. Her novels present the life of the richest sections of Indian society and their political, shallow values. The writer's concern for the Indian heritage and its value for the educated Indian are voiced in her works. Her works deal with issues such as the freedom-struggle, arrival of independence, Naxalite movement, division of Punjab, student unrest etc. The characters in her novels remain limited to a few easily recognizable portraits of well-known politicians. The women of the elite class are portrayed as nymphomaniacs and as women chafing against the marriage code of the country.

Among the major women fiction writers, Anita Desai brought about a new dimension to Indian English fiction. The earlier writers were interested in political and social realities. But Desai’s interest lay in the interior landscape of the mind. She excels in writing psychological novels. She has enriched the tradition of Indian novel in English. Her real concern is nothing less than the exploration of human psyche. Desai’s protagonists are persons for whom aloneness alone is ‘the sole natural condition, aloneness alone the treasure worth treasuring’. They are mostly women, who, though they have reached different stages in life (from schoolgirl to grandmother), are all fragile introverts ‘trapped in their own skins’. Their emotional traumas lead to violent death for some in the end. The distinction of Desai’s writing does not lie so much in her exposition, as in her attempts at going deep into the dark
recesses of her character, minds and discovering truths about them. Her themes are psychological and philosophical. Almost all her characters are Indian, set in an Indian background and surrounded by the Indian socio-economic environment. Her novels revolve around the working of the mind of her women protagonists. She does not show any predilection for political or social issues that prevail around these characters. To be alienated from ‘Self’ and ‘Society’ is one of the greatest tragedies of modern man or woman. Desai presents this problem of alienation faced by most of her protagonists. They find that they are unable to fulfill social expectations or play their ordained roles. Hence, they face a sense of rootlessness, isolation and alienation. Self-alienation is the more basic form of rootlessness and can thwart the individual’s mental and psychic development in an alarming manner. Desai’s women protagonists are capable of dissent but incapable of finding a resolution to their problems. They lack the strength to change their lives and are too weak to accept their incapacity to change their world. Among Desai’s protagonists, Bim in Clear Light of the Day is most representative of the emancipated, independent woman that much of modern fiction seeks to portray. She is neither a defeatist nor an escapist but a practical-minded individual who seeks solutions within her limited sphere of life. She heralds the arrival of Deshpande’s protagonists. Thus, Desai’s protagonists exemplify the growing change in the Indian women of this century. If examined chronologically the visible development of her female protagonist is indicative of the changing scenario in India.

The dominant concern of the literature of this period is perhaps character development and psychological depth, often combined with a sense of the alienated
individual, dissatisfied with modern life. In the 1950s and 60s, it is this sense of alienation that reflected the situation of the women writers in Indian writing. The numerous novels published by women writers during this period focused on the theme of alienation as an attempt to affiliate Indian writing to the dominant forms of western fiction. This period witnessed comparatively few novels by women. To name a few Lotika Ghose, Mrinalini Sarabhai, Bani Ray, Padmini Sengupta, Meenakshi Puri and Veena Paintal were all unsuccessful in creating a notable contribution to the world of fiction. Among novels by women published during the 1970s some notable names include Raji Narasimhan, Bharati Mukherjee, Veena Nagpal, Shanta Rameshwar Rao, Jai Nimbkar, Kamala Das, Rama Mehta, Uma Vasudeva and Anita Kumar to name a few.

The 1980s witnessed a second coming of the Indian Novel in English. The commercial developments in English language publishing within India have played their part in enabling a new crop of novelists to come forward. The setting up of Penguin India in 1985 and the emergence of Rupa Paperbacks and India Ink have provided a marketing network to be able to deliver more affordable English language fiction to the expanding urban middle class. This period is mainly dominated by male writers especially a group of writers identified with Delhi’s Elite St.Stephens College. The big names include Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Tharoor, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Mukul Keshavan etc.

Though her earlier contributions date back to the 70s, it is in the 1980s that her works established her as the leading writer who deals in a direct way with the situation of women in urban, middle-class life. This phase in the fiction by women writers projected a realistic picture of the middle-class educated women who are financially independent. These characters represent a larger part of Indian society by the 70s. Her novels deal with the problems of adjustments and conflicts in the minds of female protagonists, their rejection of rituals that are vestiges of the past. Deshpande’s novel, *The Binding Vine* (1992) is filtered through the fears, hopes and uncertainties of an urban middle-class consciousness. The novelists of the 90s are known for the contemporary approach in their novels. The novels of Namita Gokhale or Shobha De’ are really outspoken. Most of these female novelists are known for their bold views. Basically, these are the novels of protest and an outburst of reservations and contaminations. Unlike the past, when the works of women novelists were given less priority and were actually undervalued, classification of feministic or male writings hardly makes any sense today.

The earlier women writers like Kamala Markandya, Nayantara Sehgal and Anita Desai entered the phase of an inimitable representation of the ‘New Indian Woman’ who is dissatisfied with the inhibiting cultural, natural or sexual roles assigned to her from the unconscious dawn of patriarchal India. Ellen E.Jordon observes that, ‘The English feminists endowed the ‘New Woman’ with her hostility to men, her questioning of marriage, her determination to escape from the restrictions of home life and her belief that education could make a woman capable of leading a
financially self-fulfilling life” (19). Indian women writers wrote novels that deal with Women’s problems. But the treatment is often peripheral and the novels project the female protagonists with the stereo-typical virtues of the Indian women like devotion, patience and abject acceptance of whatever is meted out to her.

Shobha De (b.1947) is an Indian columnist and novelist often called India’s Jackie Collins. A freelance writer and columnist for several newspapers and magazines, she has written several novels, which are striking examples of explicit depiction of sex, failed marriages and relationships, lust and passion. Her _Socialite Evenings_ (1989) is a story of a failed marriage and failed relationships and a schizophrenic sister in the party life of Bombay. _Strange Obsession_, another of her novels is a story about sexual obsession set in Bombay’s fashion world. _Spouse: The Truth about Marriage_ is a best-selling book about how marriages work and why they fail. Her writings explored female subjectivity and that paved the way to establish an identity that is not imposed by a patriarchal society. The image of New Woman and her struggle for an identity of her own also emerges in the Indian English Novel. Novels such as Nayantara Sahgal’s _Rich Like Us_ (1986) and Rama Mehta’s _Inside the Haveli_ (1977) look more towards issues of traditional Indian culture, particularly the debate on female education. Indian women writers wrote novels that deal with women’s problems.

A number of Indian women novelists who made their debut in the 1990s are producing novels which reveal the true state of Indian society and its treatment of women. These writers were born after Indian Independence and therefore the English
Language does not have colonial associations for them. Their work is marked by an impressive feel for the language and an authentic presentation of contemporary India, with all its regional variations. Their focus is on the urban middle class, the stratum of society they know best.

Many of these authors like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (b.1956) in *The Mistress of Spices* (1997) use magic realism in their novels. Divakaruni’s themes include women, immigration, the South Asian Experience, history, myth, magical realism and diversity. She writes for children and adults and her books have been translated into 29 languages. Suniti Namjoshi (b.1941) stands out for her use of fantasy and surrealism in her novels and Anuradha Marwah-Roy’s *Idol Love* (1999) presents a chilling picture of an Indian dystopia in the 21st century. Other novels deal with various aspects of college life, such as Meena Alexander’s *Nampally House* (1991) and Rani Dharker’s *The Virgin Syndrome* (1997). Another theme that emerges is that of the lives of women during India’s struggle for independence, as seen for example in Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters* (1998).

Arundhati Roy (b.1961) is the winner of the Booker Prize in 1997 for her novel *The God of Small Things* (1991) Her contribution to Indian fictional world, though being only one, won her the Booker Prize for Literature. Narratives of colonialism and westernization play their own parts in shaping the choices facing these women. The mirror of history is cracked and distorting.
Coorg, one of the most picturesque regions of Karnataka comes to life in Kavery Nambisan’s *The Scent of Pepper* (1996); Meena Alexander’s *Nampally House*, set in Hyderabad. Women writers from several regions of India have thus written evocatively about their society and the way it treats its women. The south in general makes the most impressive contribution. Apart from Arundhati Roy there are other writers who have made few but notable contributions. Suma Jasson’s *Circumferances* (1994), Elizabeth’s *A Video, a Fridge and a Bride* (1995), Indira Ganesan’s *The Journey* (1990) and Lakshmi Kannan’s *Going Home* (1999). With the exception of Sohaila Abdulla’s *The Madwoman of Jogare* (1998) and Esther David’s *The Walled City* (1997) there is no noteworthy fiction by women in Maharashtra and Gujarat. It has been observed that most of the contributions to Indian English Fiction have been made by women writers from the north, south and eastern parts of the country. The Punjab has prominent representatives: Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters* (1998) and *Waiting for Winter* Shauna Singh Baldwin’s *What the Body remembers* (1999). All the novels emphasize the plight of young Punjabi girls chafing under the tight control exercised by tyrannical fathers and traditional society. Metropolitan societies have received attention in Namita Gokhale’s *Paro and Dreams of Passion* (1984); Sagarika Ghose’s *The Gin Drinkers* (2000), both of which portray cocktail party circles in Delhi.

The ethnic variety of the Indian Sub-continent is once again stressed in the fiction of women writers. In Shama Fatehally’s *Tara Lane* (1993), a cosy aristocratic Muslim home is depicted. A Parsi girl’s life in Bombay is well portrayed in Dina
Mehta’s *And Some Take a Lover* (1992), Manorama Mathai’s *Mulligatawny Soup*; Eshther David’s *The Walled City* reveals the Jewish family life in Ahmedabad.

In the field of regional fiction in English, women writers such as Arundhati Roy, Anita Nair, Meena Alexaander, and Susan Vishwanathan have put the southern state of Kerala on the fictional map; while the culture of other regions has been represented by other women writers.

Some of the acclaimed expatriate writers, such as Meera Syal, Anita Rau Badami, Shauna Singh Baldwin. Uma Parameshwarsan, Chitra Banerjee Diwakurni, Anjana Appachana and Kiran Desai wrote about the East-West confrontation or the clash between tradition and modernity. The theme of migration that leads to self-discovery, with a negation of the traditions of the country of origin, is a recurrent one among migrant authors. Bharati Kirchner’s *Shiva Dancing* (1998), Ammena Meer’s *Bombay Talkies* (1994) and Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine* (1989) are some good examples.

When we look at the last five decades, the image of women’s fiction has definitely undergone a change. Women writers have moved away from traditional portrayals of enduring, self-sacrificing women toward divergent female characters searching for identity, no longer characterized and defined simply in terms of their victim status. In contrast to earlier novels, female characters from the 1980s onwards assert themselves and defy marriage and motherhood.
Namita Gokhale has written a total of five novels and is a renowned writer. Her first novel *Paro: Dreams of Passion* (1984) received critical acclaim and created uproar with its playful sexual humour. Next was an ironic fable titled *Gods Graves and Grandmother* (1994), which was about the street life of Delhi. Her write-ups deal with unrequited love, passions, jealousies, ignorance and other common psychological aspects. Suzanne Arundhati Roy (b.1961) won the Booker Prize in 1997 for her first novel, *The God of Small Things*. The book is semi-autobiographical and a major part captures her childhood experiences in Ayemenem. A struggle to fashion female autonomy in the context of received narratives faces Ammu, the heroine of the novel. Ammu shares Roy’s regional and religious background. She is a divorcee struggling against the fate laid out for her by convention. Roy shows how traditional narratives like Mahabharata close off possibilities for women. Ammu and her foreign-returned daughter (the novel’s narrator) have to fight against Indian tradition to define their position in society. Both are presented with alternative identities which they find equally alienating. The book was also listed as one of the New York Times Notable Books of the Year for 1997. Arundhati Roy fashioned a new language for fiction. She can be credited with creating a new idiom and phrases like ‘biological father,’ ‘diable age’, ‘Sea-Secrets,’ ‘re-Returned,’ ‘non-elect,’ ‘death coiled like an angry spring,’ ‘touchables,’ ‘Rice-Christians,’ ‘Clean children, like a packet of peppermints’ ‘as lonely as a wolf,’ etc. Besides, taking up cudgels for women’s right to property and to choose their lovers, the novel also makes references to the Communist movement in Kerala and allusions to the *Mahabharata*. This can be considered as a representative post-colonial novel for it seeks to restructure the power centre by giving right to women to live their lives in their own way, and fashions a new language for fiction by creating a new Indian English idiom.
Manju Kapoor (b. 1948), a famous Indian English novelist touches upon various themes like man-woman relationship, human desire, longing, gender discrimination, marginalization, rebellion and protest in her novels. Till date she has written five novels i.e. *Difficult Daughters* (1998), *A Married Woman* (2002), *Home* (2006). *The Immigrant* (2008) and *The Custody* (2011). Her first novel *Difficult Daughters* won the Commonwealth Prize for first novels (Eurasia section). The Immigrant has been short listed for South-Asian literature. Kapur highlights those issues of feminism that are endemic to the situation in India in order to help us understand how difficult it is for women here to arrive at an evolved state of mind being trapped within the matrix of religion and tradition. Her novels manifest woman’s struggle for emancipation from economic, political and social bondages. She has tried to evolve her own stream of emergence of new woman grounded in reality. Modern women writers like her have articulated woman’s aspirations, her professional endeavours, and her newly formed relationship with man and the changed perceptions of sexuality in their novels. Kiran Desai (b.1971) has written two novels: *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998) and *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006). For her first book she received accolades from such notable figures as Salman Rushdie and her second work won her the 2006 Man Booker Prize and the 2006 National Book Critics Circle Fiction Award.

Recent writers depict both the diversity of women and the diversity within each woman, rather than limiting the lives of women to one ideal. The novels emerging in the 21st century furnish examples of a whole range of attitudes towards the imposition of tradition, some offering an analysis of the family structure and the
caste system as the key elements of patriarchal social organization. They also re-interpret mythology by using new symbols and subverting the canonic versions. One can draw conclusion from the contribution of Indian women's writing in the fictional world as significant in making society aware of women's demands and in providing a medium for self-expression and thus, re-writing the History of India.

An overview of Contemporary Indian English fiction by women writers reveals an incredible array of talents. Many of the novelists seem to regard India's wealth of literary and mythical tradition as freely available to be rewritten in the present. These writers from varied cultural background have globalised the idea of India that has been subject to re-assessment across the whole range of Indian culture in the past two decades. Indian writing in English by women writers has definitely contributed to the globalization of Indian culture. These novels cannot be dismissed as 'the treason of intellectual elite.'

Indian Writing in English is uniquely placed to re-imagine the nation: globalizing Indian culture and re-thematising India as an endless narrative possibility; an infinitely open market, then equally it has been used to situate modernity in relation to India. It has been deployed to call the globalization of culture to local account to foreground the difficulties of translation and the possibilities of dialogue (Mehrotra 336).
The output of fiction by women writers has been so extensive during the last two decades that it easily surpasses the total output for any corresponding period. It is an accepted norm that sheer quantity does not automatically guarantee quality; hence attention must also be drawn to the increasing global recognition and respect the 'new' novelists are getting today. Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Bharati Mukherjee and many others have been awarded prestigious literary prizes like The Man Booker and Pulitzer prizes respectively. These awards establish them as serious writers and the world takes notice of their literary contributions decisively. Some Women Writers have shown exceptional interest in literary experimentation in a less epic mode than many of their male counterparts. All those novelists who have toyed with the epic tradition have laid some kind of claim to the cultural authority of the *Mahabharata*. Githa Hariharan’s *The Thousand Faces of Nights* (1992) and *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* (1994) are concerned with rewriting folktales and Children’s stories. Hariharan’s novels stand as a repudiation of the orientalist view of India as defined by the glorious high culture of antiquity.

Of the many established women writers, the two names that have made a notable contribution to Indian English Writing are Githa Hariharan (b. 1954) and Anita Nair (b. 1966). Both the writers hail from South India and have to their credit a corpus of creative fiction of sufficient bulk and quality to merit serious study. Having spent most of her life in Delhi apart from Bombay and Manila, Hariharan’s treatment of her plots, art of narration and characters differ from Nair’s. In her fiction, Nair is more concerned with the nuances of the characters she creates. Both the writers make an attempt to represent the place and people they are familiar with. Their works are
influenced by the mythical characters that they have read and heard of. Their works remind us of Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan who have influenced Hariharan and Nair respectively. Before a comprehensive study of their volume of works is undertaken it becomes imperative to have an overview of their life and contribution to the world of fiction.

Githa Hariharan was born in Coimbatore and grew up in Bombay and Manila. She was educated in these two cities and later in the United States. She worked as Editor in the Mumbai, Chennai and New Delhi offices of Orient Longman. Since 1985, she has undertaken professional editing on a freelance basis. She now lives in New Delhi. She got noticed for her very first novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992) which won her the coveted Commonwealth Writer’s Prize. Her other works include: *The Art of Dying and other stories* (1993), *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* (1994), *When Dreams Travel* (1999), *In Times Of Siege* (2003), *Fugitive Histories* (2009) and a volume of Children's book *The Winning Team* (2004). Hariharan has also edited *A Southern Harvest*, a volume of stories in English translation from four major south Indian languages; and, with co-editor Shama Futehally a collection of stories of children, and *Sorry, Best Friends*. She also writes a regular column in the Kolkata based newspaper 'The Telegraph' Her contribution to the world of fiction dates back to the early 90s. When she became pregnant with her first child she decided not to go back to publishing and started her writing career seriously. In her interview to Arnab Chakladar she confessed about the boredom that she experienced during her early months of motherhood. Moreover, she was bored by confinement, but she also experienced 'an unexpected source of creative stimulation'. As a writer, she has been
influenced by some great writers both Indian and foreign. While growing up, she discovered Russian and Japanese novelists and poets. She was greatly influenced by Desani’s *All about H Hatter* and Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura*. The imaginative language of Rushdie in *Midnight’s Children* was equally instrumental in influencing Hariharan’s language. She says, “I can speak about the conscious influences –Rushdie did something equally imaginative with language in *Midnights Children*, and it also spoke to us at the time in a way older writers or writing in translation didn’t.” (Chakladar).

Rushdie’s vivid descriptions and his idiosyncratic characters set an example to Indian writers in English as to how language could be appropriated, bent in any way one wanted, to achieve sensational effects. Hariharan was also deeply influenced by Rushdie’s *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, for its post-modern playfulness, the turn to history, a new exuberance of language, the reinvention of allegory, the sexual frankness etc. She admits to the influences of Raja Rao and Salman Rushdie in shaping her art of fiction writing. She also admits she was tremendously influenced by Girish Karnad. In an interview with Arnab Chakladar says, “Girish Karnad’s ability to mine old stories for our times is something I learnt a lot from.”

When we look at her volume of works, one is easily convinced by her confession. For instance, in *The Thousand Faces of Night*, she attempts to renew the whole community of women through representation of myths. For surveying the feminine destiny from different angles, she has employed four different narrators. It is
a Mahabharata from the feminine perspective, telling stories of Gandhari and Amba unlike the original where Karna, Arjuna or Bhima's stories were told.

Her second novel, The Ghosts of Vasu Master is a reflection of her extensive reading of Charaka Samhita. The re-working of Children's stories of the Panchtantra in The Ghosts of Vasu Master explores what it means to be a good citizen. The novel truly justifies Shashi Deshpande's essay 'Literature and Morality'; "...Undoubtedly, the core of all great literature is a moral vision. But this moral vision has to be conveyed in the right form and every artist is conscious of this; the truth is that no artist is free of the inner pressure to shape one's art, to put what one is saying in the best possible way." (Deshpande 109/110).

In The Ghosts of Vasu Master, the most autobiographical of Hariharan's novels, wherein the idea that Vasu, the protagonist grapples with, reflects her own eclectic course of reading on alternative methods of teaching, ancient Indian education and Indian healing systems.

Morality in literature comes from the author, basically from the philosophy of the author, which is the foundation of all that s/he creates. But there is more-if the writer does not have faith in what s/he is saying, if the writer is not free, there can be no moral literature (Deshpande 116).
The author’s faith in ancient education and healing system is reinforced; when through the journey of Vasu, Hariharan unravels the mystery behind the defeat of children like Mani, who have no desire to learn. Vasu experiments with his teaching skills and exposes the failure of the monotonous strategies of teaching prevalent in the contemporary educational institutions.

All of Hariharan’s works grow out of her beliefs. *When Dreams Travel* and *In Times of Siege* have grown out of her feminism and political beliefs. All her novels are very varied but the common strand is the medley of voices. Multiplicity and the mutability of stories always hold her in thrall. She loves the idea of the same story being told by ten different people. She too, like Girish Karnad mines old stories from the past and modifies them to adapt to the present times.

Hariharan’s fascination for the past and her interest in becoming a part of the larger debates on our multiple pasts make her experiment with her fiction. She firmly believes that ‘literature is more effective than history as in the former one can imagine the little bits that sometimes seem almost empty. She has employed this with her portrayal of Basava in *In Times of Siege*. This novel holds up a brutal mirror to an India, which has been completely seized by fanaticism, hatred and mistrust. She has intentionally set the novel in a university. The process of learning, which is supposed to encourage debate and disagreement by breaking down walls and expanding the student’s world, on the contrary encourages the irrational, reinforces prejudice and inculcates hatred of anything or anyone that is different from the self.
In her collection of short stories, titled, *The Art of Dying and Other Stories*, Death is the protagonist. She has attempted to use death as a window to view the world and all its mysteries. Through these stories she attempts to look at death and its co-existence with the living. Despite the pervasive presence of death, the stories finally celebrate life.

Harihan’s fascination for traditional tales and her belief that there can be no final, authoritative version of a story make her the writer she is. There is a lot of re-telling and twisting of tales which she does quite skillfully. This statement can be further substantiated by the confession she made in an interview with Arnab Chakladar, “… One of the strong points of my work or perhaps one of the curses of my vision is that I can never quite see one part of the story or imagine one voice without hearing something in the background.”

Hence, the power of narrative itself and the re-writing of given narratives seem to be the central concern for Harihan. In another interview with Sue Dickman, Harihan admits:

I wrote a lot of book reviews and earlier, journalistic pieces. And fiction of course, there were lots of attempts, little exercises in the closet, short stories for the most part… I used it as sort of a bank. There were certain images that survived, certain paragraphs, even. Perhaps, nothing that you ever read or write really gets wasted ultimately.
Hariharan believes that ‘there are certain things in any written work, any work of art, little things’ which connect to the author’s life. ‘Something that has been heard, misunderstood or for instance even the stories heard, overheard in childhood, surface and the author twists and turns them further, but there is a link there’. It interests her as an author to take out events that occurred in her life, put it onto a story and change names to protect their identity. Moreover, as an author she is more concerned with making sense of the past. She wants to become part of the larger debates on our multiple pasts. She has experimented with the stories of the Arabian Nights and recreated When Dreams Travel. Similarly, she has also used the tales of Panchtantra and twisted them in The Ghosts of Vasu Master. When she attempts to reconstruct the past in a narrative, her chief concern is to make the past relevant and meaningful for the present. In her novel In Times of Siege she uses the historical figure of Basava and tries to use it as a cautionary tale to promote secularism.

In her latest novel, Fugitive Histories (2009) it is the past that continues to haunt Hariharan. This novel is placed on the backdrop of the Gujarat carnage of 2002. The novel begins with Mala’s haunting memories of her childhood and youth when she defied social conventions and married Asad, a Muslim. Sara – Mala and Asad’s daughter is unable to commit to a cause that was dear to her parents. The novel is set in Mumbai and Ahmedabad, the latter being directly connected to the communal riots. Sara meets Yasmin, a survivor of the mayhem, who waits for her lost brother – Akbar’s safe return. The novel depicts innumerable trapped lives, people who continue to be affected by the religious divide in the present-day India. Hariharan says, “Fugitive Histories presents a mosaic of lives that collide in unhappy ways, but
also in ways that produce love, passion and tenderness.” The novel clearly gives the author’s message, “All political commitments have to be questioned, strengthened, renewed and made meaningful for different times.” (The Hindu).

Having attempted both the genres short story and novel, Hariharan has a penchant for the short story as she believes one can experiment and do a lot more with it. As an author the short story became a very useful way of working out certain larger themes for the next novel. She loves the short story because something complete can be done within a small space. In fact, she says in her interview to Arnab Chakladar that her novels. When Dreams Travel and The Ghosts of Vasu Master are, in effect, ‘patchwork quilts’ – made up of different stories.

Anita Nair (b.1966), a popular Indian English writer was born near Shornur in Kerala. Her first book, Satyr of the Subway (1997) is a collection of short stories published when she was working as a creative director of an advertising agency in Bangalore. The book won her a fellowship from the Virginia Centre for Creative Arts. Her second book, a novel titled The Better Man (2000) was published by Penguin India and was the first book by an Indian author to be published by Picador USA. Her other novels include: Ladies Coupe’ (2001), Mistress (2005) and Lessons in Forgetting (2010). Her collections of Children’s books include: Adventures of Nona, The Skating Squirrel, World Myths and Legends, Living Next Door to Alise and Magical Indian Myths. Her Non-fiction works include: Where the Rain is born (Ed.) and Goodnight and God Bless (2008)
Nair's corpus of work illustrates her skill with different genres. She has attempted poetry, short stories, novels, essays and two plays which are adapted from her short stories. Her collection of literary essays, *Goodnight and God Bless*, is bedtime rumination about books, writers, book events, mice, mothers, airports, hotels, the wind and other thought provoking and unexpected subjects. Nair has thus, experimented with various literary forms. Her books have been translated and published in at least 25 languages around the world. In her interview posted by Spark editor she reveals her belief in Indian English Literature:

Most of what is published in India seldom travels the world. However, of what is published worldwide is how the country is perceived. It isn't exactly a positive image of India that is circulated worldwide. For every writer who writes about contemporary India, there are half a dozen writers whose fiction resides in the realm of nostalgia. For every writer who writes about what constitutes India as it is today, there is another writer who will emphasize on the third world imagery.

With the publication of her first novel, *The Better Man* she was hailed as one of the better and promising writers of the time. The book is the journey of the soul; the story of a retired government officer, Mukundan Nair, who returns to his village in Kerala. The protagonist is shown coming face to face with his dead past. millions of grey shadows and ghosts of his dead mother and ancestors haunting and tormenting him. Set in a village in Kerala, the richness of the local colour and the undercurrents that run beneath the idyllic surroundings of the sleepy village of Kaikurrusi are
explored in picturesque prose. Nair as a novelist has attempted to fathom the deepest recesses of man's psyche.

The critics who have lauded her first novel have opined otherwise about her second novel, *Ladies Coupe*. While defending her work from the mixed reactions of her critics she opines assertively that she writes for herself. Therefore, the criticism in the choice of subject, the period the story is set in as well as the title of the book, is a little unjustified. In *Ladies Coupe*, Akhila the protagonist succeeds in her goal of self-discovery. The novel traces the protagonist's yearning for self as the root cause of human predicament. The ignorance of self leads to anxiety and sorrow but the realization to attain it can provide a new meaning to life. The key to all conflicts lies in reconciling the adversities by resurrecting the self. *Ladies Coupe* is free from male-female dichotomy as it is a story of women who as human beings exercise their choices and decide to live life on their own terms. As it is set in the metro city of Chennai the story appears more realistic to urban readers.

In her third novel *Mistress*, Nair attempts to blend myth and human emotions to create a multicultural and multigenerational saga. She weaves several stories and beautifully infuses to the narrative several sections of Indian epic *Mahabharata*. The novel revolves around the life of Koman, a dedicated *Kathakali* dancer. *Mistress* is a tale of forbidden love and is infused with Hindu mysticism which reflects the radiance and majesty of the traditional dance form, *Kathakali*. As she writes about the complexities of man-woman relationships with equal felicity, she also highlights and incorporates the *Kathakali* aesthetics. With her third novel, one can notice the
maturity of the writer who seems committed to the cause of reviving and sustaining the environment and the culture of Kerala. As an environmentally conscious litterateur, Nair has woven into her fiction major issues such as the dying river, the dying arts and the damage caused to the rural landscape in the process of urbanization.

Her fourth novel, Lessons in Forgetting (2010) is a heartwarming story of redemption, forgiveness and second chances. The novel is well-crafted to echo the stages of cyclone. By a series of coincidences Meera, a corporate wife and writer of cookbooks and Professor J.A. Krishnamurthy find their lives turning and twisting together, with the unpredictability and sheer inevitability of a cyclone.

Nair’s Satyr of the Subway (2006) is the only collection of short stories to date. When universal themes of love, life and death became the preoccupation of many writers, Nair in her collection of urban tales engages with unconventional themes: Lesbianism, business rivalry, loneliness, and encounter with the supernatural and sexual predators. Her stories are known for their evocative prose, visual images and cultural observations. No two stories in this collection are alike. Each one works around dramatically different situations ranging from the mundane to the bizarre. The fascinating stories traverse the entire gamut of human emotion, wherein the male-female relationship is explored and one is constantly reminded of the futility of expectations from life or lovers. This collection is suffused with metaphor, myth and montages of life. Therefore it offers variety and sustains the interest of the readers. In her novels, Nair has rarely attempted to experiment with the settings that are alien to
her. It is in this collection, with an exception to her novel, *Mistress and Satyr of the Subway* where she has experimented with exotic foreign locales. The geographical context of the story help the readers understands the characters' behaviour. The language, customs and myth used in the stories justify the setting and the themes. The foreign locales used in the stories liberate the author from the constraints placed on her by familiar environments. It allows her to experiment with situations and characters, unaffected by readers' expectations or associations with familiar settings.

Through the characters and themes employed in their fictional narratives, both Hariharan and Nair show their commitment to feminist and social issues. Further, they construct 'narrative mappings of alternative Indias' through their novels and short stories. By doing so they contribute to creating a set of representations of India which confront the reader with diverse regional/national problems. A detailed study of the characters and themes of Hariharan's and Nair's selected fictional narratives will further substantiate the points discussed above. For making a balanced opinion about their characterization and thematic techniques the only collection of short stories of both the writers and three novels each will also be discussed in detail.
Works Cited:


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