The women novelists have played an important part in the development of the Indian English literature, right from the very beginning. In fact, the pioneer among them, Miss. Torula Lutt has been called a prodigy in the realm of Indian English literature in view of her contribution. A Bengali by birth, she wrote two novels one in French and the other, an unpublished one, in English, with the titles, *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers* and *Bianca or The Young Spanish Maiden* respectively. The French novel was translated into Bengali as *The Diary of Miss D'Arvers* and enjoyed wide popularity in her home state. Its English translation by Prithvindra Mukherjee came out serially in *The Illustrated Weekly of India* in 1963. Her English novel which could not be completed owing to her premature death, has eight chapters and the beginning of the ninth one. It was published serially in the *Bengal Magazine* from January to April in the year 1878 by her father who added a note to the last instalment, stating:

"The gentle hand that traced the story thus far— the hand of Miss Lorr Lutt left-off here. Was it illness that made the pen drop from the weary fingers? I do not know. I think not. The sketch was
first attempt probably and abandoned. I am inclined to think so because the novel left in the French language is very much superior indeed to this fragment and is complete. Other fragments there are both in prose and verse but mostly rough-hewn and unpolished?

Bianca is a love tragedy (going by the fragment in hand), modelled after the French Romances of the nineteenth century. It is the story of a Spanish immigrant family in England, which initiates the theme of culture-shock, in this case experienced by the Spanish people in English environments. This theme was later explored by Indian English women novelists like Santhe Rama Rao, Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai in their novels. The heroine Bianca, a Spanish girl, falls in love with Lord Henry Montague Moore, an aristocratic Englishman. They decide to marry but the proposal is viewed with concern by Bianca's father Mr. Alonzo Garcia, who is not sure of the outcome of such a marriage. He is also afraid of being lonely in an alien country after Bianca's marriage. Thus the difference between the cultural approaches of the Spanish and the English is clearly indicated through Mr. Garcia's unwillingness to marry his daughter into a family that is different in tradition and status from his own.

This cultural difference builds up a vicious prejudice
in the mind of Lady Moore, Loro Henry's mother. Deliberately setting out to foil the marriage, she takes course to intrigues with the help of Mr. Owen, a suave and scheming character, distantly related to Bianca. What the nature of this intrigue is, has not clearly been revealed by the novelist. But tragedy strikes the love-lorn couple, Henry leaves for the Crimean war and Bianca is left desolate and disillusioned.

To give the plot a double-edged emphasis of sorrow, the novel begins with the death of Inez, the elder sister of Bianca. If Inez is identified with Aru, Loro's sister, then by the same margin it may be hinted that Bianca is possibly an autobiographical fragment, with the names and places changed. Since the French novel is also a passionate love story between a young girl and a fabulously rich and handsome man, ending in a tragedy, it can be assumed that Loro, a teenaged, dreamy-eyed maiden, must have experienced the exquisite pleasure and pain of unfulfilled love, penning it with romantic fervour, in her novels. Also, the world of love and devotion depicted in the lives of three characters, the father and the two daughters, in Bianca is similar to one found in Loro Dutt's own family. Loro Dutt's own love for French and English poetry is reflected in the character of Bianca.

Since the unfinished product hampers any definite
conclusion about structure or characterization, Toru ltt's contribution needs to be judged in relation to the historical perspective more than anything else. But the little that is there, undoubtedly reveals her talent in placing the sequences with precision, clarity and coherence. There is much romanticizing after the fashion of the French romances, but it is not unjustifiable if one keeps the novelist's age and education in mind.

The characterization shows imagination, balance and creative instinct. If some typical romans are exhibited, they become enjoyable because of their realistic portrayals. Mr. García is a typical, affectionate father, whose sorrow in losing one daughter is accentuated by the fear of separation from the other. But he is also a practical man, who considers dispassionately the pros and cons of an inter-racial marriage between two persons belonging to two different strata of society. The crafty, scheming and vainglorious Lady Moore is a study in the category of villains. Her snobbery and smugness on one hand, and stooping down to every mean trick to remove Bianca from Henry's mind, on the other, make her a feminine version of Iago with a definite motive. Mr. Owen is her male counterpart, being devoid of decency of heart and integrity of nature, having concern for none, but his own self.
In Bianca and Henry, are found the traditional heroine, and a hero with some unusual qualities, for a romantic fantasy like this. Both of them possess raw, unadorned fundamental qualities that signify a staunch defiance of the evil and the evil-minded. Bianca has more brains and character than beauty. Henry is a manly hero, vigorous in body and mind, able to take decisive steps and abort any attempt to blacken his character and interfere in his affairs. Both have superior tastes in literature, and signify through their love a union of spirit and body.

Toru Dutt strikes an original note in the characterization of the four year old Willie, Henry's brother, for she is the first woman novelist to paint a child in the Indian English literary scene. Later on, Cornelia Sorabji takes up this trend of child characterization in her short stories. Willie is completely realistic as a child as he goes ramping through his naughtiness and innocence and captivates readers. His is a tender portrait drawn with infinite care and a fine humour that shows his childish tenacity and goodness of nature. Thus Toru Dutt's creative talent would certainly have reached a superior height had fate not dealt the fatal blow that it did so cunningly in taking away precocious talents like Marlowe and Keats.

Toru Dutt's Bianca was published in 1878 though it
might have been written around 1874 after Aru Dutt's death. In that case, Raj Lakshmi Devi whose *The Hindu Wife or The Enchanted Fruit* was published in 1876 should be informally considered as the first Indian English woman novelist. This novel is the life story of a Hindu wife and her ideals. It is rather like a moral sermon in the guise of a novel and describes the duties and responsibilities of a Hindu wife in detail.

Sevantibai Nikambe published her novel *Katanbaji: A Sketch of Bombay High Caste Hindu Wife* in 1885 in London. The title explains the theme quite distinctly. It is the life story of a Maharashtrian woman of aristocratic family in India. It has a feminine approach in the description of the Maharashtrian Brahmins, their customs, values of life, family life and social relations. It is more of a social chronicle of a particular community than a well-knit novel cast in an organic form. Ramabai Saraswati's novel published in 1886 in Philadelphia treats of similar theme in an idealistic manner. Pursuing nearly the same vein of chronicle writing, Ramabai also depicts the life of the Maharashtrian community, through the experiences of women characters belonging to the rich stratum of society.

Mrs. K. Satthianadan was the first Indian woman to enter Madras Medical College after passing her B.A. Her parents were the first Brahmin converts to Christianity in Bombay Presidency.
Her rich and variegated experiences of social life and keen insight into human nature equipped her fully to be a successful novelist. Her two novels, *Saguna: A Story Of Native Christian Life* published in 1895 and *Kamala: A Story Of Hindu Life* published in 1894, may be bracketed as the two parts of an autobiographical novel depicting the trials and tribulations faced by a woman in changing circumstances, before and after marriage. *Saguna* describes the Christian community in Bombay and Maharashtra in the later half of the nineteenth century. It also reveals the ways of an orthodox Brahmin family and its conversion to Christianity. *Kamala*, the other novel, unfolds the life of an unfortunate married woman of the Maharashtrian family in Nasik of the nineteenth century. These two novels thus present the themes of the culture-shock, experienced by a Brahmin family through conversion to Christianity, and the existential predicament of a married woman.

Apart from these two novels Mrs. Satthianadan had also published in 1893 a volume of short stories entitled *Stories of Christian Life*, in collaboration with her husband. It is also a collection of twelve stories, six of which, "The Native Pastor and His Flock", "The Story of John Gabriel", "All Is Well That Ends Well", "Sita's Emancipation", "From Darkness into Light" and "The Story of A Temptation" are
Mrs. Satthianadan's contribution to the anthology. These stories deal with the lives of the early Indian converts and depict the transitional phase of the Christian community in India. The disturbing circumstances created by the people, drawn from different communities and castes, impede the unification process of the Christian converts. The preface highlights the earlier phase of the East-West encounter with the ideal of compromise between the best of the two worlds:

"In an over-enthusiasm to assimilate the thought and culture of the west, there is a danger of overlooking all that is good in the Eastern ideal of life; but those who are watching the progress of the community, feel sanguine that in spite of excesses, which are incidental to times of abrupt change, the community is working its way slowly but surely, towards an ideal, which is neither pure Eastern nor Western, but which combines the best elements of both."

The stories in this collection should better be studied as character portraits taken from real life and thinly disguised with the change of names and places. The plot is thin and is used as a mere thread to link different experiences of characters portrayed. In characterization Mrs. Satthianadan reveals a keen insight into human nature and delineates successfully the characters of European missionaries like Rev. John Grumbhan and Mr. Gilbert who
pursue their vocation with selfless zeal and devotion. The
native converts are presented with realism and a discerning
insight into the peculiarity of their situation, as they are
left suspended between their adopted religion and the
religion of birth. The writer thus gives a new dimension to
the theme of the East-West encounter by depicting the lives
of Indian converts to Christianity. She does not overlook
the fact that the Indian Christians remain a separate
community, being looked down upon by the natives and treated
with a mixed feeling of apprehension and pity by the
Europeans. But she also believes that Christianity opens the
doors to a wider horizon leading out of narrow casteism and
disharmonious traditions which cripple human personality.

The advent of twentieth century brings forth a talented
women short-story writer, Cornelia Sorabji. She was born in
a rich Parsi family and had the advantage of both wealth and
a foreign education. She was the first Indian woman
barrister. She lived in London after completing her education
and contributed short stories to the magazine - The Nineteenth
Century and After and Macmillan's Magazine. These short
stories were collected into three volumes, Love and Life
Behind the Purdah (1901), Sun and Shadows : Studies in Indian Life in India (1904) and Between The Twilight (1908)
respectively.
Taking thematically, stories of the first and the third volumes depict the world of the suffering women from different aspects while those of the second volume present the portraits of child life in India. Since the writer belongs to the class of educated, emancipated women, she is deeply concerned with the miserable plights of the Indian women, who are ruled by the iron hands of their lords and masters sanctioned by superstition and double standards. It is not only the women from the backward classes, but all, regardless of class, strata and educational standards are victims of abuse in the man-made society. She exposes the evils of the caste system, child marriages, child widowhoods and the exploitation of the simple and credulous women by crafty priests. Indian women are doubly exploited in the first place by social customs that keep them in the twilight world of ignorance and blind faith; and secondly by their male relations like father, brothers or husbands.

The writer does blame men alone for the miseries of women. She is also bitter against women who being uneducated, superstitious and jealous of their own kind, are themselves the architects of their misfortune. A mother-in-law instigates her son to maltreat his wife to satisfy her own ego; a first wife poisons the second; the superstitious women members refuse to send for medical aid for a dying female relative - these and many other similar
examples are treated by Miss. Sorabji to reveal the heartlessness of women against their own kind. The writer pleads for all women and to every one who feels a responsibility to social obligations, to give a fair deal to the Indian women.

Out of the eleven stories included in the first volume, Love and Life behind the Purdah, nine portray miseries and sufferings undergone by women in their lives. Whether it is Sita, a middle class, educated, young woman deserted by her husband Het Ram who goes abroad for studies in "The Pestilence At Noonday" or the devoted young queen Piari, whose husband marries another woman in Love and Life, their plights are the same. Commenting on their miserable condition, the senior queen Sandal Kaur remarks bitterly:

"We are all toys, toys of time and space: some battered rather more than others, but all toys, and soon to give place to newer ones."

"Love and Death", "Urmi" and "The Fire is Quenched" prove the saying that women are the greatest enemies of their own tribe. The story "Love and Death" shows how in a plague-stricken village, the superstitions women folk refuse to be treated by male doctors and chant mantras instead. "Urmi" depicts how a beautiful young queen and her baby-son fall victims of jealousy of other women of the household,
who poison them. In "Behind The Purdah", the miserable
condition of the old, widowed queen, falsely accused of
poisoning one of the grand daughters-in-law, is described
movingly. Ms. Sorabji makes it clear that even these rich
women feel contented with their abject condition and while
away their time in frivolities:

"What do the ladies do all day
you ask? Quarrel? No, they
are too lethargic for any such
activity. Most of them turn over
and fondle their lovely jewels
and silk garments" (P.158).

In "The Fire is Quenched", Avemani, a Parsi woman,
subjects her daughter-in-law Makhi, to the penance of
receiving ten thousand strikes on her body because she is
contaminated by touching the dead body of her child.

Two stories, "Greater Love" and "A Living Sacrifice"
depict the women subjected to terrible tortures due to
superstitions. In the first story, Matha Sri, removes herself
from her husband's house forever so that he can marry a
second time and have children. In the second story, a twin
sister Dwarki takes the place of her young widowed sister
Tani, on the funeral pyre of the latter's husband, to save
her from the fiery death. Thus the curse of infertility
and the Satti rites hang over the Hindu women's heads like
the sword of Lamocles.
In the stories "Alappa - A Study in Ashes" and "Pancit Je - A Portrait", the crafty practices of the men of God are revealed in mild satirical vein. These stories reveal how even in the forties, men are misdirected by these brokers of religion, who hoodwink the credulous in innumerable ways.

In the third collection of fourteen stories Ms. Borabji pursues the same theme with an essayist's approach. There are two types of stories in this collection, the first kind points out the inferior roles of women in the social ceremonies and rites, the second kind points out the abuse women face in general. Even the omnipotent goddesses like Durga, Sati, Kali and Saraswati have to cater to the whims of their husbands. The "Legend of Tulsi" exposes the surprising treachery of a lover to his love of the previous birth, to win a battle. The women and goddesses themselves acknowledge their husbands as personification of the supreme ideal and images of God. Even the mistreatment of their husbands is taken by them with stoic faith and without any opposition. In these stories, the writer points out that "woman is of no account except as hand maid to her lord, man".4

The wretched conditions of bonded slavery, borne by Indian women is described in "Devi-Goddess", "The Seller Far of Ignorance", "The Lie That Binds", "The Queen Who Stood Erect" and "Portraits of Some Indian Women". The
The highest qualification of feminism is the child-bearing capacity of a woman. Even in this respect she is rated higher if she gives birth to a son, for a daughter is supposed to bring untold sorrow and ill luck to the family. "A Child or Two" depicts how a widow is compelled to kill her daughter who becomes a widow at the age of five. Child marriages and widowhoods are blots for which any civilized nation would hang its head in shame. But in India among the Hindus, child marriage is given the religious sanctity of "Gauridan" i.e. giving away a daughter who has not reached puberty and thus retained her purity. Child widows are supposed to be the victims of the punishment of evil actions of their previous births. Thus there is given a valid excuse for every kind of exploitation of women.

Ms. Sorabji has pointed out that superstition and illiteracy breed injustice to women, the education of women should, therefore, be the primary concern of people in India. The greater responsibility, however, lies on the shoulders of women who must revolt and jerk back the man-made society into the realm of conscience and social consciousness. Self confidence can be derived through economic independence, which in turn can be achieved only through proper education. Indian women should realize that "the time when the nation could be served by a grovelling
women-kind, if ever such time there was, is past" (P.148).

In the second volume entitled **Sun Babies** the stories depict the child life in India. The children, who distinguish themselves by their heroism, integrity and innocence are portrayed with tender touches and warm sympathy in the eight stories of this anthology: "My Master's Slave", "The Chota Chowkidar", "Fleet Foot", "The Loll Festival," "Ceremonies and Green Rooms", "mera" and "The Festival of Lights". In the first story, Pagal, the seven year old child says:

"Carry no anxiety on my account, Miss Sahib. Shall I, who have been these many years mine own provider, shall I be beholden to any?"

In "The Chota Chowkidar", the guard's six year old son tells his mistress "I am a man-child. Is there any limit to what I can do?" (P.44). Both the children are young in body but wise in spirit and mature in courage. "Fleet Foot" presents the extraordinary character of a child mother of an orphan house,

"Eight year old house mother rose betimes and sprinkled the ground with the water of oblation and worshipped the God of the Maratha country and drew her menfolk draught of water and went with them to the market square" (P.70).
In other stories, Miss. Sorabji depicts children who bear the brunt of their misfortune heroically with their heads held high. In "The Doll Festival", Piari does not hesitate to sacrifice her best loved doll when the situation demands it. In "The Ceremonies and Green Rooms", Uma takes it stoically when her poetic and dramatic career is suddenly cut short by the untimely death of her father. The protagonist in the story "Mera", a small Parsi girl endures heroically the agony of her failure to learn to play on piano. "The Festival of Lights" shows how a beggar boy and girl pass their time happily inspite of their uncertain and insecure life.

This volume clearly indicates Ms. Sorabji's ability to portray the dramatic element in character delineation. Having a wide range of vision and the skill to sort out the reality from the trivial or the ornamental, Ms. Sorabji presents her stories with sincerity and verve. Incidents and situations are unfolded through dialogues that are properly fitted to the characters. The serious and the humorous blend with each other to give a unified effect of delicacy and dignity. She has used the normal forms of story telling along with the epistolary manner with commendable skill.
Mrs. Linbai A. R. Chinoy wrote in collaboration with her husband a novel *Pootli: A Story of Life in Bombay*, depicting the fashionable life of the Parsi community. The locale is Bombay and the plot is based on the experience of Pootli, a rich Parsi girl, pampered by an over indulgent father. She loves Jal, a handsome two-timer, carrying on with many girls at a time. His affair with Lizzie Brown, Pootli's own teacher, shocks the latter and transforms her character completely. Her sudden metamorphosis from a headstrong, shallow-natured, and unintellectual person into a sensible and grave woman, unites her with Mr. Cursetji, her father's friend, who is mature in age and wisdom and sweet and lovable in temperament.

There are two other love affairs in the novel, one of which ends tragically. Pootli's Hindu girl friend Lilawati loves Narottam, the son of Sir Madhavadas. The lovers overcome the opposition of Lilawati's father and are united happily. Pootli's Parsi girl friend, Mithu Vastur, who loves a poor artist Borabji, is however, not so fortunate. She dies of heart-break when her father compels her to marry another person.

This novel is an allegory in the guise of a novel. It depicts the fight between the good and the evil, ending with poetic justice. Jal is deceived by Lizzie Brown and
Tom her cousin and partner, loses all his money and dies of plague. Adarji is led astray by his greed for money and is ultimately ruined. Lizzie herself is deserted by Tom, after she ceases to be useful to him. The novel also portrays the evil influence of 'Aamon' on its votaries and the shallowness of romantic love at the adolescent age. It also satirises the hypocrisy of pseudo-reformers of Hindu religion like Purshottamdas, who give fiery speeches in favour of widow remarriage but shirk from arranging the marriage of their own widowed daughters. Though Purshottamdas is himself not ashamed to marry a second time yet he denies the same opportunity to his daughter, a child widow.

The author lacks the skill of weaving a coherent plot and breathing life into her characters. The two sub-plots have not been perfectly integrated into the main plot to make the story appear an organic whole. Characters are not individualized. They are mere personifications of virtues and vices. They are mostly static and it is very seldom that they grow. In certain cases when a character changes, it does so abruptly, unnaturally and unconvincingly. Its transformation is not properly accounted for. One is surprised how a head-strong girl like Pootli suddenly turns into a model daughter and wife.

U.T. Ramabai, another woman writer of this period,
contributed stories and poems to several periodicals and published a collection of her stories and poems when she was only twenty one. Her anthology, *Victory of Faith and Other Stories* contains eight stories and four poems, bearing upon both tragic and humorous themes. Kamabai has staunch faith in the omnipotence of *God*, and signifies this in the title story, the "Victory of Faith", in which Sudanath, who leaves his ailing wife Swarna in the hands of *God*, is able to vindicate his faith. In "Saguna", an orphan girl refuses the help of her neighbours and puts her trust in *God*. She believes that her future and her happiness lies in the hands of *God*, "let Him do as He wishes".

The stories, "The Little Book Binder" and "Disillusion" depict poignant moving themes. In the first story, a little girl *Prama* spoils her father's favourite book and is as a punishment scolded by him. But when she begins to cry, her father unable to bear her grief, breaks down himself. Thus father and daughter make it up with tears. In "Disillusion", Shushila, a poor widow, experiences a brief illusive period of happiness when her husband appears to her in her dreams. But when the spell is over, she finds despair and harsh realities of life staring her in the face.

"Love Wins" and "Hatna" depict the conflict between the traditional and the modern or the old and the young.
generations in the persons of conservative mothers-in-law and educated and modern daughters-in-law. In the first story, Pushkar marries Nirmala for love and shocks his mother Tarabai and grandmother Bhavani, who refuse to accept her as one of the family. But Nirmala, a wise and considerate girl, wins their affection by her selfless devotion. In "Ratna", the heroine Ratna is a modern and fearless girl who calls a spade, a spade and is rejected by Mrs. Srinivas, a prospective mother-in-law because of her unwomanly boldness. But chance brings Navin, Mrs. Srinivas's son and Ratna together and they are soon attracted to each other while engaged in social service work. Ultimately they decide to marry and soon Ratna wins every one to her side by love and self sacrifice. Thus in both the stories, the younger generation fares better than the older one, by showing flexibility, wisdom and consideration to win the hearts of their opponents. "The Little One Speaks" and "Aunts and Cats" are humorous stories about little children and their incorrigible aunts.

Ramabai's stories are family entertainers, imparting clean and wholesome fun. She points her child world with as much ease as she does the world of the grown-ups. Though in most of her stories she is mainly preoccupied with the portrayal of good and noble in man, yet since human life
is a synthesis of good and evil, the dark aspects of life also do not escape her notice. She, however, ousts the devil in man with her staunch faith in the supreme power of God.


The stories of the first section deal with the then topical theme of the dacoit menace in the interior of Bengal, while those of the second one contain tales of near-escapes from the clutches of tigers together with the hunting excursions of high officials and kings. Most of these stories are based on real life experiences and cover wide range of incidents. Sunity Levee is a gifted storytiller; she is adept in creating suspense through her
narrative and keeping the curiosity of readers on tip-toe. She is also the first Indian English woman writer to use the vernacular words in English to give the effect of Indian atmosphere to her stories. Words like 'Jhee' for maid servant, Kali-maa for mother Kali and 'Palki' for the palanquin have been frequently used by her. Her style is easy and smooth; the language used is direct, lucid and without much ornamentation, unlike the Indian English of her days.

The Jagirdar of Palna or An Indian Girl's Tale, written by Nalini Turkhud was published in 1936. It is another moral fable depicting the defeat of the evil and the victory of good with poetic justice at the end. The theme is clearly indicated in words of Chandrakant Gaekwad, a prominent character in the novel:

"I have rebelled against the laws of God and man, and am now reaping its punishment. This agonising mental torment is greater than poverty or any bodily pain."

It is the story of two families, contrasting as the representatives of goodness of nature and viciousness of character. On the death of Mr. Butt his two children, Sauri and Minanath, become the victims of adverse circumstances. Minanath reels under the shock and being unable to find a job after completing his college education, takes the easy way
out of his difficulty by befriending Chandrakant, the notorious feudal lord of the Satyapur Estate. Gauri, however, manages to stay calm in the face of all kinds of misfortune and having been forewarned by Shushila, her friend, keeps herself at a distance from the lecherous Jagirdar, even though she realizes that her brother is ready to side with his benefactor.

Finding no way to escape from the evil designs of her powerful adversary, Gauri throws herself in the river but is luckily rescued by Dr. Dhirendranath Sinha, a medico who has decided to spend his life in the service of the poor. He is later on revealed to be the real heir of the estate of Satyapur, his mother, the Princess having been ousted by the scheming concubine of the late Jagirdar whose bastard son, Chandrakant now rules the estate with the help of his mother, Mai Saheb. Fate smiles on Dhirendranath and Gauri; they are happily united and the estate is restored to the rightful owner. While Dhirendranath, his mother and Gauri are rewarded by destiny for their virtues, Minanath dies a broken-hearted man, Chandrakant is stricken with plague and Mai Saheb contacts leprosy and goes through a living hell. Thus nemesis overtakes the evil doers and they are punished.

The novel is narrated from the first person point of view, Gauri Dutt being the viewpoint character. The incidents
out of his difficulty by befriending Chandrakant, the notorious feudal lord of the Satyapur Estate. Sauri, however, manages to stay calm in face of all kinds of misfortune and having been forewarned by Shushila, her friend, keeps herself at a distance from the lecherous Jagirdar, even though she realizes that her brother is ready to side with his benefactor.

Finding no way to escape from the evil designs of her powerful adversary, Sauri throws herself in the river but is luckily rescued by Dr. Chirenranath Sinha, a medico who has decided to spend his life in the service of the poor. He is later on revealed to be the real heir of the estate of Satyapur, his mother, the Princess having been ousted by the scheming concubine of the late Jagirdar whose bastard son, Chandrakant now rules the estate with the help of his mother, Mai Saheb. Fate smiles on Chirenranath and Sauri; they are happily united and the estate is restored to the rightful owner. While Chirenranath, his mother and Sauri are rewarded by destiny for their virtues, Minanath dies a broken-hearted man, Chandrakant is stricken with plague and Mai Saheb contacts leprosy and goes through a living hell. Thus nemesis overtakes the evil doers and they are punished.

The novel is narrated from the first person point of view, Sauri Lutt being the viewpoint character. The incidents
are either arranged around her or the characters confide in her their experiences. Characters are divided into two groups according to their nature, thus allowing no personality development. The good are so noble and the bad are so vicious that they fail to be convincing portraits. Miss Turkhud believes in repentance being the best remedy that purges the evil heart and gives it a chance to turn a new leaf. Chandrakant confesses his crime to Gauri and dies a penitent man. But Minanath and Mai Saheb have no such opportunity and are thus tortured both physically and spiritually.

Elia Sen is one of the foremost women writers of this period to portray the agony of the suffering woman-kind, and raise a social issue through her writings. She is also the first authoress to leave the field of romantic and domestic fiction and treat wide-ranging issues like the famine and the world war that threatened human existence in the forties.

Elia Sen's stories have impressive atmosphere and a strong backbone of an interesting plot-line, sustained by the comprehensive and mature strains of characterization. The title story of the first volume of six stories, *A Child Is Born and Other Stories*, shows the sure grasp of realism in character delineation and situation description. The birth of a child is a social event, fulfilling the aspirations of a family, be it poor or rich. The latter
broadcasts it with a show of pomp and splendour, the poor can, however, afford only to celebrate this happiness with frugality. The event itself, all the same, remains an important one for both. The social consciousness reflected through the study reveals the author's sympathy for the sentiments of the poor. "The Next Train" maintains the strain of seriousness and portrays an ever-waiting mother, who sits on the platform to receive her son, coming back from Burma. Her waiting is endless, for death claims him in the Japanese bombardment in Rangoon. Apart from the tragic theme of separation of a mother and son, the story also presents the moving stage of the refugees fleeing the Burma border, enduring innumerable hardships to outmanoeuvre their fates.

"The Anniversary" is a psychological study of the conflicting emotions of a married woman Uma, who feels empty and broken after twenty years of monotonous marriage. The four walls of her home, signifying her humdrum existence, suffocate her. She desires to live like her friend Sulekha, who is a living flame on account of political ideology and spirit of freedom. Uma's inferiority complex is heightened when she reminiscences about Sulekha who faces the challenges of life on her own and is full of zest for living. Ela Sen recreates the modern woman's dilemma of existence that has been explored, later on, so successfully by the Indian
English women novelists like Markandaya and Desai. The characters of Uma and Sulekha with their contrasting situations in life have been drawn with keen insight. Uma's thoughts are revealed through the expressionistic technique and clearly indicate the raging turmoil in her head and heart.

"The Shadow" highlights the gruesome situation of the Bengal famine in which Radha kills her baby daughter by throwing it into the river, and sends away her young son to earn his own bread. Ela Sen paints the ruthless clutch of hunger in grimly realistic touches. Radha is the representative of the human kind, fighting against her destiny before it crushes her down completely.

The second collection of seven stories entitled *Midnight on the Lake* and other stories treats the theme of woman's misfortune brought through hunger, poverty and faithless love. Trust and love land Geeta, a widow into pregnancy in the title story "Midnight on the Lake". Her lover, a married man, refuses to own the parenthood, and scorns at her: "A widow and pregnant at that. What community would accept you and give you honourable position?" There is no other way out for the widow mother but to kill herself and her unborn child before the society dominated by the man-made standard points its accusing finger at the victim, though not the
wrong doers. Similarly "The Dog Woman" is another story of faithlessness and broken heart that leave the simple girl Jethi with no other alternative but to turn to dogs for company. "The Wasteland" symbolically represents the worthlessness of Madhuri's life, who like Uma reminisces over her past.

In "The Doll Makers" and "The Villagers", the conflicting values of urban and rural life are presented through the characters taken from village life, who refuse to sell themselves for the glamour and glitter of money. In the first story, the craftsman breaks away from the lure of money without any regret and with complete assurance. In the second story, Suren, the villager-turned-factory-worker, cannot escape the evil ways of the city and degenerates into an animal.

Darkening Days, Being a Narrative of Famine-Stricken Bengal was published in 1944. All the stories of this collection are woven round the common theme depicting the terrible impact of the famine on the people of Bengal. In the 'preface' the authoress emphasises the fact that man becomes his worst enemy when he surrenders to greed. The famine which resulted in the agony and deaths of the countless innocent people was a consequence of the misdeeds of the callous authorities and the greedy and inhuman
hoarders and black marketeers. This volume is a crusade of the socially conscious author against such deliberate acts of cruelty that go unpunished. The authoress adds an essay, 'Facts and Figures' and a fourteen-point rejoinder, 'Are You Aware', to the book in which is given the statistical detail of the people who suffered and died in the famine.
In the 'Foreword', she writes:

"The short stories which make up the major portion of the book, have all been called from real life. Names have been altered, but the facts remain. These are not imaginary characters, nor fantasies born of association with relief work. They are live people, not phantoms strutting about on a literary stage."3

Three factors emerge important in these stories, first, that they are about mothers, rising in grandeur of sacrifice in the tenacity of their fight against the famine to save their children; secondly, that the stories are pieces of bleak truth covered thinly with anonymity and are capable of shattering the social complacency through their realism and bitterness, thirdly, Ela Sen is a committed writer, who writes with a mission to awaken social sense and conscience of the reading public. She delivers her message distinctly and vigorously without caring for literary embellishments.

"The Co-wife" is the story of two wives of one man,
whose relationship smacks of vitriolic jealousy. The onslaught of the famine, however, gives it a sudden and noble change, when Lakshmi saves Soudamini's son, when the latter dies of hunger. "The Unknown" depicts a similar theme of a motherless child being saved by Radha at a great cost to her own self. "The Queue" presents the serpentine row of hungry men and women, miserably waiting for food from the charity canteens. "The Road" reminds one of Markandaya's Nectar in a Sieve that speaks of the deeply spiritual relation between the farmer and his paddy fields. As the villagers return to their village after the famine, their lives are beset with many difficulties. Even their houses are reduced in pitiable conditions. But the ripe paddy, dancing in the breeze, brings back optimism and confidence into their hearts.

Though a committed writer Basen is adept in her treatment of plot and character. She is realistic to the very core and gives her stories that breath of beauty found in simplicity. She never manipulates the character, nor does she manœuvre the situations. A Chekhovian trait in her stories, finds the unusual in the usual and reveals the unsuspected depths in characters and situations with ease and directions, as is shown through Radha, a village woman, who murmurs when she throws her baby in the river: "Such a small, thin baby and she made such a big splash".
In the description of the psychological turmoil of her characters, Ela Sen uses the expressionistic technique. She looks at life as a series of impressions and records them in vivid flashes of situations in relation to the characters. The innermost working of the mind is revealed by the outward action of the individual character. There is little room for moralising or flowery description in her stories. Her stories are characterized by a warm sympathy for the underdog. The vein of irony running through them reveals her keen discernment of the pervasive rot in the Indian society. Her language is lucid and marked with grace and dignity. She uses effective similes and describes nature with poetic eyes.

Iqbalunissa Hussain and Ishvari, the Muslim women writers in English, have depicted realistically the pitiable lot of women in Muslim society. In his "foreword" to Iqbalunissa's novel *Murder and Polygamy: Life in an Indian Muslim Household* published in 1944, Sir Ramalinga Reddy, the then Vice Chancellor of Andhra University observed:

"without exaggeration, I can hail her as the Jane Austen of India. She deals with the ordinary, the familiar, not with the romantic and the heroic. It is by deft touches, each minute in itself but together constituting life and reality that she wins first the attention and finally the heart of the reader."

The novel has the Austenian trend of an expository title that clearly indicates the theme and the plot of this domestic tragedy, providing a serious criticism of life in the Muslim community. The novelist highlights the two evils, first, the trend of keeping Muslim women imprisoned within the four walls to safeguard their purity from the outside world, and secondly, the custom of keeping four co-wives by a single man. The men-folk also have the advantage of seeking divorce merely by pronouncing the word, 'divorce' thrice, whenever they like. Ms. Hussain has taken the limited canvas of the family of Kabeer, a Muslim gentleman, who maries four wives for one reason or another, and discovers his blunder costing him money, mental peace and lastly his life when it is too late. Instigated by his mother Zuhra, who dislikes Kabeer's first wife Nazmi, he marries Munnira, only to find to his horror that she is hideously pockmarked. He then turns his face to Makhbool, a young, beautiful and accomplished girl. Not satisfied with her, Kabeer marries a fourth time and Nurjehan comes to claim her rights when he is on his death bed. To give 'Mehar' or dowry-money to the brides, Kabeer has to sell off his property. Thus he dies a man broken in body and soul through his own inadvertency.

The novelist paints a Muslim household with all its
petty squabbles, jealousies, intrigues, heart rending emotional situations and acts of friendship. The Kabir's home can be a picture of any Muslim home in which women are treated as disposable commodities. Thus, through a limited canvas, the novelist has brought in a strain of universality in the realistic approach to the theme. The Muslim society firmly believes that "A woman as a wife should be subservient in everything to man's comfort and exist for him and him alone. She should have no particular liking for anything. Her work should, as a matter of course begin and end with him" (p.49). This cry of the anguished soul of a woman, for individual liberty has been taken up by the post-independence writers like Nayantara Sahgal and Anita Desai and echoes in the lines:

"I wanted to show how even in a free country like ours, where women are equal citizens, a woman can be criminally exploited without creating a ripple".

It would not be wrong to say that in this respect, Ms. Hussain shows greater social consciousness and a deeper impact upon her readers than Jane Austen. She declares a 'Jehad' or a holy war against the hypocrisy of the man-made society that denies a Muslim woman her fundamental rights. Commenting on the suffocating conditions of marriage in the Muslim society, she remarks:
"Marriage among Muslims is a lottery. Only those on whom luck smiles get a square deal as far as temperament, interest and beauty are concerned. Love does not begin before marriage. It arises only from observation and use of the object. It is nourished not by intellect but by the service the woman renders the man" (p.120).

It must have required a great deal of courage and integrity for a Muslim woman in the forties "to present the currents and cross-currents in a typical Muslim family with such a scathing sarcasm. She shows commendable skill in characterization in this limited sphere. Among her convincingly and realistically drawn characters are Zuhra, the dissatisfied and critical mother-in-law, who takes sadistic pleasure in having confrontations with her daughter-in-law; the four wives of Kabeer who are victims of social injustice, and who aggravate their sorrow by taking revenge on one another; Kabeer, an egoistic and inconsiderable young man who leads a reckless life. His sister Jameela and her husband Meher Hassen are opposite to Kabeer and Zuhra in their nature and behaviour. They represent the voice of sanity and reason in the novel.

Ms. Hussain has a knack of using lucid, flowing and simple words that encourage no ambiguity or ornamentation. She often translates Hindustani and Kannada idioms and phrases into easily understood literal English. She is the
first Indian English women novelist to use the word translations of the vernacular to bring Indianess in her language.

Mrs. Krishna Hutheesingh, the talented sister of Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, made her debut in Indian English fiction by publishing an anthology of her stories, Shadows On The Wall, 1946. She had earlier written an autobiography, With No Regrets, and a memoir, Nehrus, besides The Price's Book of Beauty which she brought out in collaboration with Mulk Raj Anand. Like La Sen, Mrs. Hutheesingh also deals with the sufferings of women in her stories. Most of the characters portrayed by her are drawn from real life and represent the women prisoners she had met in the Indian jails. The title clearly explains the theme of the shadows of misfortune and anguish that darken the lives of the women convicts. Describing the genesis of these stories she writes in the 'Preface' that they "are from my recollections of the fellow prisoners, politicals and convicts who were with me in jail many years ago. They are true stories but written with certain embellishment without which no story can adequately convey complex personalities".

The twelve stories of the volume can be informally divided into two sections, those which treat of the lady political prisoners who endure the inhuman jail conditions
for the sake of patriotism and others which describe the
women criminals, who have committed gruesome murders under
compulsion and have no spiritual palliatives. In the first
group fall six stories, "Chitra", "Mataji", "Lakshmi",
"Shyama and Kanti", "Savita Devi" and "Mina" and in the
second one, the other six, entitled "Shaikhan", "Rekha",
"Durgi", "Sherbeti", "Sally" and "Namkali".

Through these stories, Mr. Nathasingh raises a ques­
tion that has developed into a major social problem in the
modern age. The legal system, with its countless loopholes,
provides no reformatory incentive in awarding sentences to
prisoners. Its system of punishment further enhances the
degradation of human mind by forcing ordinary prisoners to
stay for years together in the company of hardened criminals.
Women convicts, in particular, are subjected to terrible
abuse, mental torture and criminal assault by the Jail
authorities. Mary Tayler, a nonelite prisoner in the Bihar
Jails, has commented upon the behaviour of the women jail
wardens, "who subject the women prisoners with unspeakable
cruelty". Whipping and mental torture inflicted on these
convicts deaden all the finer instincts in them and turn them
either into frightened animals or sworn trouble-makers,
branded for life. The law allows no creditable difference
in awarding punishments between crimes committed with cold­
blooded planning and those committed by harassed or
for the sake of patriotism and others which describe the women criminals, who have committed gruesome murders under compulsion and have no spiritual palliatives. In the first group fall six stories, "Chitra", "Mataji", "Lakshmi", "Shyama and Nanti", "Savita Devi" and "Aina" and in the second one other six entitled "Shefikhan", "Rekha", "Durgi", "Sherbeti", "Molly" and "Ramkali".

Through these stories, Ms. Hutheesingh raises a question that has developed into a major social problem in the modern age. The legal system, with its countless loopholes, provides no reformative incentive in awarding sentences to prisoners. Its system of punishment further enhances the degradation of human mind by forcing ordinary prisoners to stay for years together in the company of hardened criminals. Women convicts, in particular, are subjected to terrible abuse, mental torture and criminal assault by the jail authorities. Mary Tayler, a naxalite prisoner in the Bihar Jails, has commented upon the behaviour of the women jail wardens, "who subject the women prisoners with unspeakable cruelty 12. Whipping and mental torture inflicted on these convicts deaden all the finer instincts in them and turn them either into frightened animals or sworn trouble-makers, branded for life. The law allows no creditable difference in awarding punishments for crimes committed with cold-blooded planning and those committed by harassed or
has portrayed women who are pushed in the crime world by their own relations who themselves manage to escape the clutches of law. Shafi Khan kills the mistress of her husband when the latter poisons her only child. Durgi, a young girl, murders her cruel husband because she cannot bear his sadistic behaviour. Molly is raped by her stepfather and is later led to turn a prostitute by an old woman who is supposed to be her granny. Kamkali, a twelve year old girl, kills her stepmother because she intends to sell her to a flesh-trader. Thus these women are ground by the twin pressures of social brutality and legal injustice. Mrs. Hutheesingh's warm sympathy for the underdog transforms these crime stories into a document of human suffering, unforgettable and unforgivable.

Carrying the legacy of writing an elegant, smooth-flowing, vigorous prose, Mrs. Hutheesingh is able to suggest and communicate the maximum by using the minimum. She never permits melodrama to colour the realism in her stories. Direct and precise, her expression is balanced and without any unnecessary ornamentation. She is a writer who writes with an exquisite blending of emotion and craftsmanship.

Ishvani, the only other prominent woman writer besides Iqbalunissa Hussain, wrote her novel *The Brocade* Siri in
1946. It was again published in 1947 in London with the title Girl in Bombay. It is an autobiographical novel, depicting her girlhood, marriage and divorce and later on her departure for England to continue her studies. After completing the education, she lived in Florida, as a refugee with her son during the Second World War. This novel is a product of the nostalgia experienced by the lonely soul of a woman, far away from her own land and relatives.

The title, "The Brocaded Sari", is suggestive of the theme; thick silk saris, heavily worked with gold threads are generally treated as bridal dresses. They ironically mark the end of individual liberty, as the wearer of such saris must carry the heaviness and uncomfortable feelings on the body with a smiling face and stoic mood. Thus the novel, The Brocaded Sari, signifies the life-long bonds of slavery thrown around the body of the woman with the outward slitter of a deceptive appearance of a sanctified and happy union between two beings. A married woman can never remain a free individual and has always to bow down to the customs, traditions and rituals of her husband's family. Superstition and religious fanaticism are other bondages that ruin a woman's happiness.

Akhvani belongs to the Khoja Muslim community and has spent blissful years of childhood in her grandfather's house.
under the tutelage of her liberal and emancipated mother and grandfather, her freedom is curtailed when she comes to live with her stepmother. After her marriage, her husband forces her to join the Agakhani community, that is fanatic and conservative to the core. When Ishvani argues with her husband Raschid, he tells her:

"Now I am going to command you and as a good Muslim wife, you should be too happy to accede to my wishes. You must join the Agakhani community."

Thus the married woman has no choice of her own as a 'good' wife and must be her husband's shadow in every step of her life.

Ishvani's individuality cannot bear such a life and she seeks divorce from her husband. With unhesitating directness, she tells Raschid that marriage has not given her happiness but divorce would at least provide her with peace and self-confidence.

Apart from the autobiographical theme, the novelist highlights the narrow-mindedness of the religious fanatics. This religious fanaticism is treated as a danger to the unity of India's National movement by the protagonist. She has also painted Gandhiji's secularism that draws people from all religions under the same flag to fight the British. The Westernised attitude that liberalises personal outlooks, is
also presented in the novel in an indirect manner, through Uncer Tan and Ishvani herself who opt for Western education and ideas. The novel is written from the point of view of the protagonist and is in the form of reminiscences, the form later adopted so successfully by Markandaya. The events are sketched in a chronological order, giving full details, and having a coherent link throughout the narrative.

Ishvani has delineated her characters with artistic objectivity. She describes the successes and failures, the achievements and shortcomings with an onlooker’s detachment, coloured as little as possible by her emotional approach. She is, however, outspoken in disclosing the bias she has for her husband’s family.

Characters treated are both individuals and types. Her mother and grandfather are ideal persons as contrasted with the shrewish characters like her step-mother and in laws. Haschid, the husband invites more sympathy than scorn because though a well-meaning person, he is torn between fidelity to the religious fanaticism of his parents and consideration for the enlightened view of his modern wife. He has love for her and at the time of divorce asks her "Tell me, do you really want this thing? Will it make you happy?" (P.202). He thus clearly indicates his own unhappiness.
The liberal characters like Ali who disbelieves in conservative of religion and uncle Tan who enjoys food and music without any religious barrier, are painted with sympathy and sincerity. Ali tells Ishvani:

"I am not a fool. That sort of religion is trumped up by the people whose fingers are well buttered. I belong to India. Hindus or Muslims, we are children of the same God" (P. 82).

Ishvani herself is liberal enough to listen to the epics of the Ramayana and Mahabharata and take delight in their stories. An amusing character to bring comic-relief is Aunt Boolbai who keeps her hen-pecked husband on his toes.

Thus Ishvani presents a new theme of religious fanaticism and difference within the Muslim communities that obstruct the path of enlightenment. She talks to her husband Haschid, like an emancipated woman of the new generation:

"But Haschid, you speak about them, what about us? Don't you think that we should have the moral courage to do what we think is right? After all, we represent young India. Our example will be watched and followed by others. Shouldn't we be able to think for ourselves now? Such ideas were all right a hundred years ago, but without modern upbringing, it really makes no sense" (P. 151).
The Indian English women novelists before 1947 belong to the upper strata of society. This was inevitable because during this period only the affluent class was able to go in for higher education and cultivate Western-oriented ideas of liberalism based on education abroad. These novelists are drawn from different communities of India, Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Parsi. They are therefore able to project Indian ethos in its variegated aspects. They portray scenes and characters from every sphere and strata of Indian life — urban and rural, rich and poor, theistic and atheistic, Eastern or Western-oriented, liberal and conservative, simple and honest as well as mean and pretentious. The National Movement and the awakening among women, which followed in its wake also figure prominently in their works.

The changing political and economic conditions in the country led to the advent of a band of the emancipated women writers in the field of Indian English fiction. These writers like Cornelia Sorabji, Iqbalunissa Hussain and Ishwani look at the problems of the suffering women folk from the enlightened point of view. They take up the cross of freeing Indian women from the bonded slavery of married life. This is significant in a special way, because the Western women writers do not have to portray the struggle for sheer existence since they do not experience the stifling conditions of the Indian women’s life and work. The
Indian English women writers on the other hand have not only to shatter the complacency of the conservative men through their writings, but have also to engineer breathing spaces in the minds of the ordinary Indian women, brain-washed by years of religious superstition and traditional beliefs.

The women writers of this age faced criticism from many literary men like Ishwar Gupta, the famous satirist from Bengal who wrote lampoons on educated women and called them "Bibi", the female form of "Babu" i.e. the English educated gentleman. Even the conservative section of women like Mani Sarat Kumari of Bengal who washed her house with the Ganges water after hearing of Raja Ram Mohan Roy's crusade against Sati-rites was highly critical of the approach of the enlightened women writers. The fearlessness and incomitable will to bear any persecution in order to further the cause of the emancipation of their miserable sisters, however, sustained these writers in their brave crusade for a noble cause. Through their powerful writings suffered with the message of better future for women, they paved the way for later writers like Markandeya, Sahgal and Bessai who dealt much harsher blows at the hypocrisy and callousness of man-dominated Indian society.

Indian English women writers of this period also reveal a proper understanding of the laws of their craft. They have
not only tackled a wide variety of characters and themes, but also presented a panoramic vision of Indian society consisting of diverse facets of religions, communities, customs, creed, caste, colour and regional backgrounds. They have presented romantic extravaganza as well as grim realistic tales. They deal with both the tragic and comic aspects in their writings with equal ease and facility. Different forms of narrative techniques such as the editorial omniscience point of view, the first protagonist narrative point of view and the epistolery form have been used by them as also are used the different devices of character delineation - exterior description, psychological analysis, expressionistic and impressionistic methods. Their style and language have the rainbow colours of variety, some have used ornamental and poetic expressions while others have expressed themselves with simplicity and directness. Again some others have used the stilted form of Queen's English while others have freely translated from the vernacular and used Indian English words like Mulk Raj Anand and other contemporary Indian English writers. Taken as a whole, the Indian English women novelists certainly paved the way for the later generation of writers to take over and introduce still newer aspects of fiction. The social, political and economic consciousness reflected with greater vigour in the work of the post-independence Indian English women novelists, have undoubtedly
its roots in the writings of the women writers before 1947, for it is they, who first wrote novels and stories bearing on these themes.
1. The Bengal Magazine, April 1978, p. 381


