

PREFACE

Prominent among Indian women novelists are Nayantara Sahgal, Kamala Markandaya, Attia Hosain, Anita Desai, Shobha De, Shashi Deshpande, Jai Nimbkar, Tara Ali Baig, Namita Gokhale, Gita Mehta, and Gita Hariharan. These women writers have in the recent past attracted wide-spread interest both in India and abroad. Some of them have in their own way inimitably represented the new Indian woman dissatisfied with the inhibiting roles assigned to her in a patriarchal society. Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, and Nayantara Sahgal, among others, have documented this female resistance against patriarchy. Shashi Deshpande has tried to project a realistic picture of the middle class educated women who are financially independent. Her novels deal with the problems of adjustments and conflicts in the minds of female protagonists in a transitional society. They begin at a critical point in the lives of these protagonists and unfold a quest for the self. Jai Nimbkar in novels like *A Joint Venture* and *Temporary—Answers* deals with the middle class woman's identity crisis in the contemporary patriarchal Indian society. Tara Ali Baig's *The Moon in Rahu* is not an ostentatiously feminist work in the manner of Kamala Markandaya's *Two Virgins* and Kamala Das' *The Alphabet of Lust*. It is a novel remarkable for the adaptation of the English idiom to the Indian experience and expression.

Gita Mehta's novels have a special force of their own in the field of Indian writing in English. Her three novels *Karma Cola*, *Raj*, and *A*

River Sutra are a poignant study of the cultural history of India and they contain a powerful critique of modern India. *Karma Cola* deals with travesties of various kinds while it extravagantly presents a montage of modern India unmatched for its brilliance in detail and scope. It gives a vivid glimpse into the east-west encounter, the hippie culture, the rise of a new nomadic tribe in spiritual quest, and the culture shock that the travesties of the spiritual gurus cause. *Raj* is a work in which history and fiction have been interwoven. It gives a fascinating glimpse into a woman's moment in history. Spanning nearly half-a-century, the novel takes in its sweep the drama of India's struggle for independence, even as it traces Jaya's coming of age as a ruler of her state. *A River Sutra* is a series of mythopoeic experiences as told to a retired bureaucrat on the banks of the river Narmada by a motley crowd of pilgrims and teachers. The central paradox of the novel begins with the dominant myth of Shiva. The quest for personal and social meanings is what is contained in the cohesive structure of the various interlaced tales in *A River Sutra*. In the whole novel, the river Narmada presents itself as a witness to the awful reality of the world. The novel is conceived in terms of an organising principle which has temporal as well as spatial dimensions. The protagonist at the end of the novel is no longer detached and complacent about his choice of Vanaprasthi. The river sutras unsettle his subconsciousness and that is his epiphanic moment. *A River Sutra* is a series of lyrical, interlocking stories that transport the reader into a contemporary

India through a living myth. *Snakes and Ladders* offers a key to modern India. It illuminatingly presents in rich detail, drawn from myths and antiquity, the kaleidoscopic mosaic that India is. And at the same time it offers a uniquely personal and informative assessment of India. The thesis proposes to study Gita Mehta's works in terms of the mosaic of Indian life and culture that they reveal.

I have drawn on the critical accounts of these works and I have pleasure in acknowledging my debt of gratitude to all the pioneering critics in this field. I have great pleasure in thanking Prof.C.R.Visweswara Rao, Professor of English & Dean, Faculty of Languages and Literature, and my research supervisor, for his scholarly guidance and warm and timely help at various stages in the preparation of this dissertation. I deem it a pleasure to thank all the members of the staff of the Department of English for their advice and help. I wish to express my special debt of gratitude to my uncle Dr.K.Raghavendra Rao of the Department of Physics, S.K.University, Anantapur, for encouraging me to launch on research. My parents have always been a source of love and inspiration that prompted me to pursue higher studies. No words of thanks will redeem me of my deep and loving debt to them. I have great pleasure in acknowledging my brother Harish's affectionate concern for me all through.

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