Preface

The precise way by which this thesis came into being is not traceable to any single, or singular, incident or happening. I would rather like to think that it is constructed out of a medley of literary experiences woven and bound by certain ideological perspectives, which have not, however, blinded me to the presence or validity of other perspectives. The way contemporary fiction problematises the existing discourses has always been a matter of abiding interest to me and I hope that something of this interest communicates itself to my readers. To keep my search to manageable proportions, I have limited it to a discussion of Truth, State, Gender and Laughter, especially the way they are problematised, in selections of writings sprinkled on a fairly global scale.

All the four concepts, if concepts they are, have become rigidified, stratified in fact, so as to acquire the force of foundationalist concepts, beyond the pale of scrutiny and interrogation. They also occupy slots which conventional wisdom designates as private and public and since I wished
to problematise these neat, all too neat, boundaries, I foregrounded power and its politics which animate all the four areas of traditional divisions. It is also my wish to point out the constructedness of these boundaries and what they neatly enclosed so that they are disrobed of the false sanctities they are made to wear. The Nietzschean and Foucauldian conceptualisations are germane to this kind of theorising not only because they are rooted in historicisations but also because of their commitment to power which desanctifies and demystifies the foundationalist traditions. Though I am not a scholar of philosophy or cultural history, I believe I have not done violence to the keen spirit of enquiry animating the texts of Nietzsche and Foucault or to the perspectives through which they reach their specific conclusions.

The writers, however, are not convenient pegs to hang my theoretical coats. I have read and reread Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance and with each reading my love and respect for the book have gone up a notch. Umberto Eco’s The Name of the Rose gets a similar esteem and Milan
Kundera's novels have always struck me, with all their subtle philosophical subtexts, as much more than mere protest novels. Discovering Margaret Atwood was a pleasure and so was the unalloyed joy I derived while reading J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*, whose lean and spare prose not only points to the desolation of hopes but also to a grim determination to come to terms. Nearer home, Salman Rushdie has managed to attain an iconical status and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* continues to provoke controversy. As for the inclusion of Albert Camus's classic, *The Fall*, I owe it to a speech given by Venugopalan Nair, my esteemed professor, in one of the rare literary functions the English department of Tagore Arts College managed to hold.

I wish to thank Dr N. Natarajan, my supervisor and guide, for not only providing an organization, unity and coherence to my thesis but also for introducing me to a body of postmodernist thought in a number of fruitful discussions we had. This thesis evolved as an outcome of these discussions and its final shape owes its existence to the
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M. Nazir Ali