CHAPTER-5

CONCLUSION
In order to examine the traits of the novels of 1990s it is necessary to return to the novels of 1980s as both of them possess many structural and thematic similarities. The major novels of the 1990s refuse to be pinned down or tamed into time divisions. Of course, there are continuities, shifts and disruptions.

Like the novels of 1980s, the novels of 1990s possess the same formal and linguistic experiments such as dexterous, de-doxified use of language, the irreverent tone, the defiant and vigorous challenge to the power of history and received traditions. One of the continuities is the engagement with the history, both national and personal, history of lives and institutions, family sagas, the freedom struggle, gender discriminations, the history of socialization, past accounts in different perspectives and the need to review happenings and roles and to deconstruct knowledge structures legitimised by the imperial discourse. Engagement with reviewing and replaying of past events lacks romanticism. It is not a search for identity in the existential sense of the term but a search for the hidden layers of meaning for the little narratives which if placed together may yield a new meaning. The family sagas-Rushdie’s The Ground Beneath Her Feet, David Davidar’s The House of Blue Mangoes and Amitav Ghosh’s The Glass Palace show a concern with genealogy and heredity. Genealogical histories are in direct contrast to the kind of individualistic existential novels of Sahgal and Anita Desai which came up in 60s and 70s.

Amitav Ghosh in his Shadow Lines and The Glass Palace place the individuals in the generational kinship patterns—grandmother and Raj Kumar respectively and social history is filtered through their perspectives
and the marginalised categories get surfaced on the scene. Family sagas and histories such as Rushdie’s *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace* and David Davidar’s *The House of Blue Mangoes* facilitate an analysis of family and marriage and gender and ground realities. Experimentation with narrative forms is also located within these relationships to time --- the historical and real time---for these facilitate both temporal and spatial dislocations allowing the narrative voice to shift, the narrative persona to impersonate and be fractured as it is handled by many a writer. The characters are so numerous and their lives are so intertwined that the novel of both 80s and 90s becomes a crowded place. Even as regards the technique of story-telling in narrative they share the same characteristics.

The novels of the 1980s exploded the Hindu male world view of Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand, whereas the novels of 1990s foreground and represent the notion of a Non-Hindu female/minority world view.

Like the 1980s novels, the 1990s novels draw upon characters from different world countries. They are also metrocentric and experiment with reading against the grain with the intention of turning received truths and traditions on their head and making double readings possible. They, like the 1980s novels, present multiple perspectives and fragmented identities. They are Rushdie’s *The Moor’s Last Sigh* and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, Amitav Ghosh’s *The Calcutta Chromosome* and *The Glass Palace* and Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*.

When looked for thematic preoccupations, there is some difference between the novels of 1980s and those of 1990s. The individual has to play an important role in history and the novels of the 1980s reflect
an urgency to rewrite Indian history and expose the untruths of political versions. This obsessive theme mirrors the felt pain that the Partition of 1947 and the Emergency between 1975 and 1977 had given. For the novelist of the 1980s who challenged and rewrote received truths, the postmodern technique of readings and writings against the grain gets a free play. The novels of 1990s however are concerned to exhibit not only a shift from the national to the international but also a movement from the national to the regional. Novelists like Rushdie, Vikram Seth and Bharathi Mukherjee exhibit a movement towards internationalism by consciously avoiding looking backwards. Rushdie privileges international writers as they alone possess the dual ability to look at their own culture and at other cultures with equal objectivity. They claim that they belong at once 'nowhere' and 'everywhere' and that their works are complex in range. By being NRIs they have questioned the notion of Indianness and rather celebrated homelessness as a state of mind. They, like other postmoderns, see the notion of Indianness as a composite of many identities and debunk the idea of an exclusively Indian identity. In *The Moor's Last Sigh* it is difficult to conclude if Moraes Zogoiby is Spanish, Indian, Christian or a mix. The blood of many races runs through his veins. The 1990s novels open up one's thinking about one's real identity. One is many-selved representing molded international identity. Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*, Vikram Seth's *An Equal Music*, Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* and *The Ground Beneath Feet* are examples of this notion. This movement away from the original centre of location is called centrifugal tendency.

The 1990s novelists dealt with the local, the regional, the religious and linguistic minorities as against the theme of international personality and the world as one's home. Arundhati Roy in *The God of Small Things*, Mistry in *Such a Long Journey*, Rushdie in *The Moor's Last Sigh* and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, David Davidar in *The House of
Blue Mangoes present Non-Hindu communities and their world of values, beliefs and practices. They also centerstage the marginalised including women, children, low-castes, slum dwellers and servants. While the Hindus and the Muslims were affected by the events of Freedom and Partition in Rushdie's Midnight's Children and The Satanic Verses (1988) it was the Roman Catholics of Cochin who were affected by the assertive culture of the Hindus in The Moor's Last Sigh. Vikram Seth's A Suitable Boy focusses on the local / regional and the subaltern and exhibits centripetal tendency. The novels of the 1990s, therefore, show a double movement of the centrifugal and the centripetal tendencies. Assertiveness is common to the novels showing both centripetal and centrifugal tendencies. It is quite the opposite of both passivity and aggressiveness. It means standing up for one's rights while respecting the rights of others. The protagonists in the international novels, though they experience the pressure of racist superiority around them, still find the voice to tell the white world that it is dependent on them and that they have changed the white world with their inputs. This assertiveness lends an appealing quality. The idea of hybridity is forcefully presented.

In certain novels, the themes of internationalism and subalterism criss-cross in the same novel, which also shares the voice of assertion. The religious and linguistic minority protagonists, not contending to live in the shadow of the Hindu majority, demand to be respected and so is the case with the women who are no longer contented to be contained in a universal or patriarchal world-view. The feminist fiction of Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De, Jaishree Misra and Anita Desai stand the best example. With the growth of womanist / feminist protagonists, there is the fall of male characters. The voice of assertion and self-dignity is the biggest contribution of the novels of 1990s. No doubt, the texts of the 1990s are writing the stuff that the West wanted to read. Both the texts reveal the deeper inner anxieties
through different formal experiments, they have tried to cope with the complex psychological issues and realities.

The Ghosts of Vasu Master by Gita Hariharan is very much in the style of R.K. Narayan’s Swami and Friends as it is a series of short stories. Yet it is a novel and the narrative is a link of episodes, each of which is self-enclosed, complete and adequate, but when cohered provide a different meaning. The two narratives — the relearning of old age and the theory of education run side by side.

Unlike the manner of Allan Sealy’s experiment with narrative form in The Trotternama (1988) which distinguishes from plain old-fashioned history and which records the historical events and the changing power relations along with the transformation of the Trotters, Amitav Ghosh’s The Glass Palace presents the same theme of the transformation of the Royal family into the common folk.

There has been the recurrence of the coming up of twins in the novels of both 80s and 90s. Twins appear in Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children, The Ground Beneath Her Feet and Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things. In Midnight’s Children the twins emphasize both the division of the country and the commonalty existing between the two. In The God of Small Things, the twins symbolise the strong bond of love in family relations through their incest. In The Ground Beneath Her Feet the twins are unlike with opposite personalities and contribute to both the survival and the ruin of family.

In Upamanyu Chatterjee’s English, August and The Mammaries of Welfare State, there is a realization that the past was our creation, a collective creation like the present. Agastya Sen feels guilty because of his passivity as he cannot be absolved or declared innocent. But there is also an absence of guilt in the affairs of the heart, which in earlier writing was steeped in guilt. The concerted effort of Inder is to make Saroj
feel guilty for a pre-marital relationship in Sahgal’s *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969). But in Shashi Deshpande’s *Roots and Shadows* (1983), *Small Remedies*, and Jaishree Misra’s *Ancient Promises*, an adulterous relationship does not lead to sense of guilt but liberates the psyche from false restrictions. Guilt is experienced in the parent-child relationship in Upamanyu Chatterjee’s *The Last Burden* along with actualization of unbecoming emotions and erosion of idealised codes of behaviour even if the adopted narrative is one of fantasy, dream structure and myth-making. Through the characters of Lady Spenta Cama in Rushdie’s *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and Leela in Shashi Deshpande’s *Small Remedies* adultery is confronted mildly in marital relationships and their second marriages are examined from different angles of anchorage for survival and companionship.

Indo-Anglian fiction is firmly located in a double tradition—the linguistic tradition and the cultural tradition. Boundaries between class and class, between the personal and the political have collapsed as seen in Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace*.

Intertextuality is yet another trend in which a great deal of Indo-Anglian fiction refers to a particular kind of British literature—the literature that deals with Raj or the category of Children’s Literature—Kipling, Forster, Lewis Carroll, Tennyson and the others. Intertextual references to Indian literature, in contrast to this, are to structures, epics, myths and legends—to the Mahabharata and the Ramayana.

In the 50s and 60s the use of English for writing in India was debated and doubts were expressed regarding its ability to reflect Indian cultural reality. Today, that debate is viewed as an agency of change, not only from the imperial point of view but from the national point of view. This debate is found in one form or the other in Rushdie’s *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, Upamanyu Chatterjee’s *English, August* and *The Mammaries of the*

In the novels such as *The Romantics, The God of Small Things, The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and *The House of Blue Mangoes,* the lure of the colonizers' world still remains powerful. It appears that some popular Indo-Anglian novelists are working out their identity and fortune through the pathways of the Raj. Love angle is always with some one from France or the U.S. or the U.K. and not with some one from the Asian countries. The Third-world characters generally get married to distant persons of distant lands in the First World only to get deserted by way of divorce. They all come back, dejected and disillusioned as the colonised without the colony which seems an anachronism. But they are equally so in a post-colonial society. In a way to say, the West's colonialness is replaced by that of the East. This theme is reflected both in family sagas and feminist fictions of both 80s and 90s.

Replacing English with Indian languages and their equivalents appears just a part of the Indo-Anglian novelist's struggle against imperialism.

As regards the profession of Indian writing in English the fact of Pico Iyer's words cannot be forgotten. The Indo-Anglian fiction writers are "a new breed of people, an intercontinental tribe of wanderers whose sensibilities and experiences are cosmopolitan, their mindsets comfortably close to those living in the west, even while they write of India." They are situated on a bridge between the two worlds of East and West dealing with both the themes. A new trend of blending as well as co-existence of East and West motifs and values has set in, which at times, seems to disprove the words of Rudyard Kipling: "East is East and West is west/And never the twain shall meet." Pankaj Mishra's *The Romantics,* Ghosh's *The Glass Palace,* Gita Hariharan's *The Ghosts of Vasu Master,*
Rushdie’s *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and Ghosh’s another novel *The Calcutta Chromosome* reflect the East-West theme. The East-West collision, sometimes, projects symbolically through an ideological conflict between tradition and modernity, faith and reason, scientific knowledge and intuitive knowledge.

Rushdie’s says that literature is a means of holding a conversation with the world. Better we reach out to the world with global literature in this age of globalisation. The study of English literature is slowly losing its status as a colonial relic, reverting ever so grudgingly to its Indian roots. It has found its lost constituency among all those who love the power of a distilled imagination.

Hybridity is inherent in the middle-class Indians as exemplified in *A Suitable Boy, The God of Small things, The Glass Palace* and some such novels.

In the novels of 1990s such as *An Equal Music* and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* metrocentricity is exhibited due to the shifting of locations to Paris, London and some American cities.

Identity within the Indian diaspora is predicated upon a variety of historical processes and participating writers encompass a multiplicity of religions, languages and cultures.

Among the many possible features of diaspora, the feature of the dynastic conception of the family is found in Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children, The Moor’s Last Sigh, David Davidhar’s The House of Blue Mangoes and Amitav Ghosh’s The Glass Palace*. In all these fictions, the narrative of the family reaches backwards into a past of power and privilege and arrives in a present, marked by decline, decay and death, if not sexual depravity and mental degeneracy.
The diasporic writers present their protagonists with a typical American reverence for the freedom of the individual. Vina Apsara in Rushdie’s *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* is the best example. The diasporic writers not only engage our attention towards the immigrant, feminist and existential sensibility but also unravels their characters’ struggle for freedom, survival and self-realisation in a multiracial society. The characters such as Ormus, Vina and Rai considered America their dream world and merged into its culture. Though the diasporic writers tend to show their bias towards metropolitan and cosmopolitan fiction there has been a genuine attempt to encompass the rural and urban Indian realities. Despite the presentation of India’s radical secularism, its religious self is everywhere found in the fiction. The Indians of all diasporas have sought to record the manner in which they have adopted to their new environment and how they have experienced both identification with and alienation from their old and new homelands. The bonding of culture, religion, literature and language is especially strong in a Diasporic situation but where it provides ethnic identity and a sense of self, it can also alienate from the host culture. It is this displacement which gives the Diasporic writing its peculiar qualities of loss and nostalgia. The diasporic writers have provided a fragmented worldview whether they write of their new homelands or their old. As Rushdie has said in *Imaginary Homelands*, they are obliged to “deal in broken mirrors some of whose fragments have been lost.”

A significant aspect of the diasporic discourse is the leitmotif of “journeying”---which is also central to most Diasporic writing. Most of the characters in Rushdie’s *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace* do journeying for survival, happiness, fortune-making and continuity of existence.
The two most important motifs of suffering and death that are found in the diasporic discourse find expression in Rushdie’s *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace*.

Cosmopolitanism/Internationalism is found in the recent novelists. Rushdie says “Literature has little or nothing to do with a writer’s home address” — “loss of home, happens all the time. We are all unhoused in the world. The native house (country) is always in one’s heart.”\(^2\) He abandons national specificity. For him the distinction between inside-outside has obliterated. He reflects “I am conscious of shifts in my writing. There was always a tug of war in me between ‘there’ and ‘here’, the pull of roots and the dream of leaving.”\(^3\) He further reflects, “Now I have come down firmly on the side of those who by preference, nature or circumstances simply do not belong. This unbelonging—disorientation, loss of the East—is my artistic country now.”\(^4\) Rushdie’s *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* is one such example in a globalised world.

It is humanity that is centerstaged in most of the novels. They reflect Rushdie’s words: “My material is not Indian/English or family/loss/migration/cosmopolitan. It is simply to try to respond as fully to the human movement that I find myself in.”\(^5\)

Bikhu Parekh says that the characteristic typical of the average Indian migrant operating within a largely non-assimilationist diaspora is: “Far from being homeless, he has several homes and that is the only way he has increasingly come to feel at home in the world.”\(^6\) He suggests that the Indian diasporic subject can share and co-exist in several homes simultaneously and that distances need not necessarily lead to a sense of fragmentation and loss.
Both the novels of 80s and 90s seek to repossess history and unravel the tangled threads of race, ethnicity, religion and gender which bind and separate peoples from one another. The multitudinous voices in the discourse such as Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace* and *The Calcutta Chromosome* and Gita Hariharan’s *The Ghosts of Varu Master* signal challenge to the hegemonic Western world view and demand a place for alternative visions through the themes of resistance and subversion and by the crafting of older pre-colonial narratives.

Of late some focus is given to the ordinary experiences of life—the preoccupation with the small and the trivial, the movement away from the grand and the heroic has been a characteristic practice. Unlike Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh, writers like Amit Chowdhuri and Upamanyu Chatterjee focussed on trivial subjects such as boredom, the routine and the mundane experiences of ordinary lives.

As regards the plot some observations are made. The real-story, with its beginning, middle and conclusion, does not exist. Such conventional narrative is not to be found as the narrative is unfolded from the eyes of children in novels like *The God of Small Things* and *The Blue Bedspread*.

Everything in the narrative unfolds with quiet deliberation so much so that the end of the novel seems more like a pause than a culmination. The grand epic narratives such as Vikram Seth’s *A Suitable Boy*, Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace* and Rushdie’s *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* are rather unconventional in their plots. The structure of the modern Indo-Anglian novel reflects the metaphor of the banyan tree as presumed by Amit Chowdhuri: “It sprouts and grows and spreads and drops down branches that become trunks or intertwine with other branches.... the structure is held by the supporting trunks.” The examples are Vikram Seth’s *A Suitable Boy*,...

In the contemporary novels, a great change has occurred in the attitude towards time and space. Ghosh uses the concept of time in a very innovative manner. The constant shifts between the present and the past events as ‘time lived’ and ‘time remembered’ in The Shadow Lines are further developed in The Calcutta Chromosome. There is blurring of images which further helps in dissolving the distance between past and present and future. Hence, there is a space-time continuum where myriads of impressions from different periods of one’s life and experience coalesce.

Shifting of scene of action to different parts of the world has become a common feature of the novels of both 80s and 90s. This technique of continuous time and place shift goes beyond the accepted stream of consciousness techniques and take within its scope more than the space of one life, one generation, one experience and one event. It is no doubt that blurring of past, present, and future is an innovative, experimental touch to the novels of the day.

Contemporary novelists bring different languages into comic collision celebrating linguistic diversity meeting the requirement of the Indian context which is explicitly stated in the very beginning page of Upamanyu Chatterjee’s English, August: “Amazing mix-----Hazaar fucked. Urdu and American. . . . nowhere else could language be mixed and spoken with such ease.” Jon Mee quotes Anita Desai’s words on the advent of the use of Spoken English beginning with Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children: “. . . . it was only after Salman Rushdie came along that Indian writers felt capable of using spoken language, Spoken English, the way it’s spoken on Indian streets by ordinary people.”
The novelists of 1980s and 1990s demonstrate that the Indian ‘taang’ is not a pure essence, but a masala mix of a culture that has always been to appropriate influences from outside of the subcontinent. From this point of view English is implicated in the polyphony of Indian languages, its colonial authority relativized by entering into the complexity which it describes.

Playfulness of the language used in recent novels is spoken in nature and appears an abrogation of Standard English, a sign of certain cultural weightlessness, the deracinated insouciance of elite college boys or the alienation of those who have lost touch with the national community.

The consolidated idea of nation and a pull towards a homogenisation of reality have been felt in the latest novels. In the genre of the novel, Meenakshi Mukherjee says, “there has been a greater pull towards a homogenisation of reality, an essentialising of India, a flattening out of the complicated and conflicting contours, the ambiguous and shifting relations that exists between individuals and groups in a plural community.”10 This Indian reality is mediated in the English language in Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children and The Moor’s Last Sigh, Seth’s A Suitable Boy, Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things, David Davidar’s The House of Blue Mangoes leading to evolve a national imagined community. Such pan-Indian themes as nationalist movement and disintegration of joint families that were dealt with by R.K.Narayan have again been dealt with in the novels of both 80s and 90s. Though nationalism is a major concern, the fractured consciousness of the characters does not entitle them to conform themselves to a particular national identity. As Meenakshi Mukherjee puts it: “Human lives spill over national boundaries refusing to stay contained in neat
compartments." So, there has emerged the sense of universality and humanity in the novels of the day.

As we moved towards the close of the century, the gap between writing in Indian languages and the kind being done in English is narrowing down and the concerns of one are reflected in the other. The Indo-Anglian novels of both 80s and 90s exhibit a blend of multiple themes and techniques.
NOTES

1. Pico Iyer qtd. in The Literary Review of The Hindu, June 4, 2000 p.IX.


3. Ibid., 21

4. Ibid., 21

5. Ibid., 22

6. Ibid., 22

7. Ibid., 111


