Chapter Two

Indian Fiction in English: A Brief Review

The particular historical and political background of colonial rule led to the gaining of proficiency in English among Indian people. The command of the language is reflected in the Indian creative writing in English. Most notably, it is Indian fiction that reflects the postcolonial stance of the Indian mind. The novel, which was non-existent in India till late nineteenth century, first emerged in Indian regional languages and developed considerably in the succeeding years. Indian novels in English emerged in 1875 with the publication of the Bengali work, Rajmohan’s Wife by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya. The first Indian woman writer, Rajlakshmi Debi, wrote the novel The Hindu Wife in 1876. The early fiction published in English was dominated by historical themes and the representation of Indian life. The steady growth of Indian fiction in English continued till 1930. The publication of Raja Rao’s Kanthapura (1938) proved to be a turning point in the history of Indian novel in English. The major influence on the Indian novel in English in India is that of the British novel. The novel of social realism and the historical novel of the nineteenth century have especially influenced the Indian novel in English. The growth and development of Indian fiction in the regional languages and English indicates the evolution of Indian society; both fiction and society reflect the impact of various economic, sociological, political and cultural phases of development. The novel has not only represented the Indian social milieu, but also has depicted the age-old cultural and philosophical tradition of the country.

A brief review of the recurrent themes in Indian English fiction bears out these concerns quite clearly. Freedom movement, history, partition, regional and cultural differences, etc. are some of the common themes of Indian fiction. The theme of cultural confrontation between the East and West also has been a very dominant theme of Indian Fiction.
The phases of development of Indian fiction have been distinctly defined as periods of historical romances, sociopolitical realism and psychological fiction probing the individual psyche. Unlike the regional novel, the Indian English novel aims at readers who have diverse cultural, linguistic, and regional backgrounds. However, Indian English fiction also has expressed a situation of common experience, the urban experience.

According to M.K. Naik Indian fiction received it’s identity in English from the contributions of the major trio in the arena, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and R.K. Narayan. The phase of social realism began with these writers. Their fiction is reformative in nature. Influenced by a socialist faith and an egalitarian view, Anand’s fiction deals with the plight of the downtrodden in the Indian society. That he has humanitarian concerns, compassion and anger at the evils of tradition is evident in his reformative spirit. Anand deals with the theme of exploitation. *The Untouchable* (1936) for example deals with caste, cultural conflict and colonization; *The Village Across The Black Waters* (1941) and *The Sword and The Sickle* (1942) discuss socio-political problems; *The Big Heart* (1945) has the theme of royal life in India while *The Private Life of an Indian Prince* (1953) presents the theme of peasant life; *The Old Man and The Cow* (1960) is about the autobiographical experiences which are further explored in *Seven Summers* (1951), *Morning Face* (1970), *Confession of Love* (1976). Anand’s fiction is ruthlessly realistic. He has been one of the earliest writers to nativize English by appropriating it to express an Indian sensibility. His contribution to the Indian novel is everlasting.

Raja Rao’s contribution to Indian fiction is just four novels, yet his influence is immense. His *Kanthapura* (1938) became a trendsetting text in Indian English fiction. *Kanthapura* is acknowledged as an ideal postcolonial text, dealing with the theme of freedom movement, evocating the Gandhian age as well as appropriating the language and literary form for decolonization and resistance. It rediscovers the soul of India on
material and literary/metaphysical levels. Rao’s *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960), a Sahitya Academi award winning novel, is highly complex and has multiple layers of meanings. It deals with the East-West interaction and their mutual effects. It has autobiographical references. It presents an Indian intellectual’s sensible search for his tradition from an analytical point of view. The theme of quest for self knowledge and the theme of love are treated symbolically in this novel. *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965) is a philosophical novel and a delightful comedy probing into the philosophical tradition of India. *Comrade Krillove* (1970) is the fourth novel dealing with the theme of Indian freedom struggle, the political ideology of communism and East-West confrontation.

R.K. Narayan has contributed fourteen novels, many short stories, an autobiography, translations and several volumes of miscellaneous writings. Narayan explores the lives of ordinary men and women in a fictional south Indian town called Malgudi. Narayan’s ironic tone, controlled narrative and simple style make his writing very interesting. Narayan is one of the three major writers, who shaped the course of Indian fiction in English. His fiction reveals middle class life in almost all its aspects. His realistic fiction represents South Indian culture with authenticity, sympathy and irony too. East-West encounter, cultural conflict, philosophical concerns, freedom movement, ancient Indian moral system are some of the other major themes that Narayan has dealt with his fiction. The centrality of tradition in Indian life is a notable feature of his writing. *Swami and Friends* (1935), *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937) *The Dark Room* (1938) *The Guide* (1958). The *Financial Expert* (1952) and most other novels of Narayan are authentic representations of the Indian ethos.

The second generation of Indian novelists in English, Manohar Malgoankar, Bhabani Bhattacharya and Bhalchandra Rajan carried forward the trend of social realism initiated by the trio and the same set of themes. Significantly, the Muslim Novelists such as Ahmed Ali,
Iqubalunissa Hussain, Amir Ali, K.A. Abbas, Humayun Kabir, etc evocatively brought out the Muslim ethos and culture, and the Muslim household life along with the theme of East-West encounter, freedom struggle and social reforms.

The fiction of the nineteen sixties and seventies marked a thematic shift towards individualism and the representation of inner reality. The post-independence novel expressed colonial experience rather objectively. However, it contained the marginal/subaltern experiences as well as the abrogation and appropriation of language and authority. The impact of East–West encounter has been a theme even during this period. That is, this theme has found its place in almost all major novelists’ fiction.

The fiction of the last two decades of the twentieth century seems to have accepted the challenges of changing time. The maturing of Indian English fiction may witnessed in this period. We noticed Indian fiction exploring a broad range of themes and becoming more experimental. Salman Rushdi’s Midnight’s Children (1981) inaugurated an era of postmodernism, fantasy, and magic realism in Indian English fiction. His image dominates the fiction of this period. Surrealism, fantasy and linguistic decolonization of his works were instrumental in determining the course of the forthcoming fiction in Indian English. The postcolonial spirit of the young generation of novelists indicates the new course and the maturity of Indian fiction in terms of ‘appropriation and abrogation’ of the English language and the form of fiction.

The fiction of the last two decades also shows the postcolonial trait of subversion. The women writers began to pose challenges and subvert the brut rigidity of patriarchal order. The issues and viewpoints of dalit, tribal and the other socially marginalized people are being discussed in the recent fiction. The class/caste based social hierarchy of Indian society and the ideology supporting this hierarchy have been questioned by these writers. The protest against established authorities finds a very
authentic expression in this fiction. The texts of this period are deconstructive on the one hand, and on the other they assert the identities of the marginalized and the experience of dislocation and displacement. Identity crisis is visible in these texts. The process of cultural hybridity and “reclaiming the lost territory through the literary text” has also been an essential element in the fiction of this period.

Their temporal distance from the colonial period makes the post independence writers view the past differently. Not only the political, but the social and cultural authorities of Indian societies also are being examined and reassessed by these novelists. The young generation of novelists is interested in interpreting the past / history etc., with a renewed vision; their view is pluralistic. The experiences of the marginalized sections in the society, gender issues, immigrants’ experiences, internal cultural differences and social discriminations are issues reflected in their fiction. They give voice to the point of view of the ‘other’. They explore the multicultural aspects of Indian society as well. There is no didacticism in the fiction of the last two decades of the 20th century. However they mirror reality in a striking manner. The probing into the inner reality of the individual mind has gained priority over the depiction of external experiences. The new novelists are more interested in the exploration of the human psyche. The individual is at the centre of their fiction. The phase of ‘assertion of identity’ and ‘reclaiming of the cultural ground’ in post colonial terms could be traced easily in the fiction of the nineteen eighties and nineties.

Experimentation with form, technique and language is a prominent feature of the new fiction. The writers seem to have shaken off the colonial burden about the English language. Rather, it has become a resourceful tool of subversion in their hands. English is a natural choice of these writers, as it is an official language of communication of the educated class, whom they address. One doesn’t find any glossary at the end of the new novel, explaining the meaning of the Indian words. The
language manifests a strong Indianness appropriate for a powerful representation of local colours. The regional language words with their cultural significances have been employed successfully. Salman Rushdi’s ‘chutnification of English’ has emboldened his fellow writers to break the smugness of Queen’s English and remould it into the average Indian English usage. The language has been given a peculiar Indian cultural depth. According to M.K. Naik, “their affinities are with G.V.Dessani’s *All about H Hatter* rather than the Big three.”

The new novel is more globalized in depicting the backgrounds of the various continents, apart from India. The new Indian novel in English has employed with skill experimental techniques of stream of consciousness, innovative use of flashbacks, and postmodern style of narration. The novelists confidently handle experimentation with time, surrealism, magic realism and fantasy. Simultaneously, the fiction of this period skilfully and employs the traditional Indian methods of narration. The circular narration of story telling, and the use of oral traditions, legends and myths and folk stories have given a truly Indian flavour to the fiction of the nineteen eighties and nineties.

Though a considerable number of women writers were present at the time of the emergence of Indian fiction in English, their contribution was noticed only in the sixties and seventies. Listing their contribution, M.K. Naik comments:

A notable development is the emergence of entire school of women novelists among whom the leading figures are Ruth Pravar Jhabwala, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sehgal and Anita Desai.

It is not that women’s issues first found an expression in the works of these women writers. The earlier writers also were sympathetic to women’s situation. Tagor’s *Ghare Bhaire*(1919), R.K. Narayan’s *The
Dark Room (1938) and Anand’s fiction indicated concern for the oppressed situation of women. However sympathetic they might be to the plight of women, the male authors could only place women in their traditional roles. They projected woman as a silent, tolerant being, suffering mutely and playing the role of the preserver of the family respect at the cost of their individuality. The issue of women’s oppression was an integral part of the reform movement in India. Many a regional novelist expressed the oppression of women in their fiction Rabindranath Tagore, Sharatchandra Chattopadhyaya (Bengali), H. N. Apte (Marathi) are some such writers. But the emergence of women writers gave an authentic voice to the experiences of women in independent India. Women writers of this generation focused their attention on themes such as, personal relationships, urban and rural strife, historical nostalgia, life in a joint family, East-West encounter and other individual experiences. These women writers brought woman’s experience to the center of their works. For them, human suffering by could be comprehensive only when it subsumes the plight of women. This thematic and emotional development in the fiction is direct impact of the educational reforms started by the colonial masters.

Gradually, Indian society began to move towards modernity. Women’s education took roots and working women became a fact of life. The awareness of individuality and women’s rights were on the rise, because of social reforms and government policies. Yet, this rise in status of women could not completely change her place and position in society. The typical patriarchal attitude of subordinating women still persisted in the Indian society. The literary texts by women writers of the latter and present times have been essentially interrogating this attitude. Social changes, education and self-earning capacity have brought about a certain awareness in them about their ‘suppressed status’, individuality and rights. The fiction of women novelists of the sixties and seventies began the depiction of the new woman of India. The quest for identity, complex
human relationships, institutions of, marriage and family, functioning of female psyche and interpretation of life experiences from a woman’s point of view became favourite subjects for these novelists. Their fiction challenges the patriarchal and cultural authority that has degraded women into their dark oppressive status. Susie Tharu and K. Lalita define the nature of women writing in India in the following very apt words:

> Over the half century that followed women’s texts have fed into and elaborated the course of dominance and the investment of gender in it but they have also deflected and refigured that course.¹⁵

Women novelists in English have also made their contribution to the novel of social realism. Often, the theme of east/west encounter reappears in their works. A quick overview of the major women writers’ contribution may also elaborate their postcolonial stance. Kamala Markandaya is a major expatriate writer, who portrays women in various roles. The theme of East-West cultural confrontation is revealed in her novels. Markandaya throws light on the relationship between Indian and British characters as well as the impact of the British culture over the traditional India. Ina sense her works combine tradition and modernity. In her Nectar in the Sieve (1954), Rukmani is the central figure. The harsh realities of peasant life are revealed through this rustic woman’s life story. As has already been mentioned Markandaya prominently deals with the theme of tradition and modernity. But her fiction also bears the postcolonial features quite impressively. The themes of protest and reform, questioning of identities, etc. find their place in her fiction. Adopting a woman’s point of view she depicts the world in all its stark reality. Rukmani, is truly a subaltern giving voice to the existential plight of the Indian farmer. Some Inner Fury (1955) sets the female protagonist, Mirabai, against the backdrop of the freedom movement. The East-West encounter and strife in social life and personal emotional encounters are issues that Markandaya discusses to bring out women’s contribution to the
freedom movement. Postcolonially speaking, Markandaya depicts women’s resistance to male hegemony and the effects of colonial subjugation in this novel. Her *Silence of Desire* (1963), again, shows the problems of gender difference between genders. Though not from a strictly feminist point of view, Yet Markandaya reflects upon the impact of male hegemony and patriarchal dominance. Her *Possession* (1963) evokes the conflict of Eastern and Western values. The novels also expresses with the theme of anti-patriarchal rage, and quest for identity.

Ruth Pravar Jhabwala, though living abroad, deals with India and has presented stereotypes pertaining to the theme of joint family. Jhabwala’s novels *To Whom She Wills* (1955), *Nature of Passion* (1955), *The Householder* (1960) and *Get Ready for the Battle* (1962) comically deal with the theme of Indian middle class urban life. She juxtaposes romantic love and arranged marriage together and takes her readers through intricate human relationships. Her manner of expression is subtle. She writes about life of women in joint Hindu families. The power play and verbal battles are made entertaining by Jhabwala. Nayantara Sehgal is yet another major writer who has a strong feminist bias. Sehgal exposes the gendered social/moral structures of Indian society. Her works also attack the patriarchal domination and they have political overtones. Sehgal’s concerns clearly show the impact of colonial educational reforms. The factors that make her a postcolonial writer are awareness about gender discrimination, feminist movements, influence of the Gandhian thought and her predilection for plurality. Most of her novels are women-centred. In M.K. Naik’s words, “Sehgal’s fiction is preoccupied, with the modern Indian woman’s search for sexual freedom and self realisation.”

(MK. Naik, P.239) *A Time to be Happy* (1958), *This Time of Morning* (1968), *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969) and *A Situation in New Delhi* (1977) depict trapped women trapped in difficult situations seeking escape in extramarital relationships. The anguish of the modern, educated urban woman in a conventional marriage relationship is a major theme in
her fiction. Sehgal presents the issues of adultery and divorce as a subversive protest against the patriarchal value system. She also expresses her concern with the political, religious and communal discord and with oppressive social structures. Sehgal seems to suggest a redefinition and reorganization of these social structures in Indian society. She has also objectively looked back to history and the partition trauma from a current perspective.

Anita Desai’s fiction shows thematic changes. She is interested in probing into the reality and socio-political conditions of women’s life. Desai’s protagonists are mostly women. While depicting their loneliness and emotional trauma, Desai questions man-woman relationship and the institution of marriage. She is concerned with immigrant experiences as well. Anita Desai marks a new phase in Indian fiction. Her *Cry, The Peacock* (1963) *Voices in the City* (1965) and *Where Shall We Go this Summer* (1975) reveal feminine sensibility in a callous and male-centred social systems. Her later novels like *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), *In Custody* (1984) *Baumgartner’s Bombay* (1989) and *Clear Light of the Day* (1980) bring out the existential trauma of a modern man alienated from within.

Anita Desai essentially gives voice to the sense of dislocation that causes a strong feeling of cultural and geographical alienation. According to D. Maya:

Dislocation or uncentredness – geographic, emotional or cultural – can be seen to be the root malady underlying the sense of alienation and rootlessness setting in on Anita Desai’s characters. With woman characters it often results from an incompatible partnership with an insensitive, practical and successful male... The sensitive individual male or female is poised against hostile or indifferent forces of the family or society leading to suffering and unmitigated loneliness.
The quest for self and its effect of alienation and cultural conflict recur in Desai’s fiction. Her prime concern is with woman’s search for individual space. *Fasting Feasting* (1999) exposes the marketing trend in the Indian marriage system and certain other issues. Though critical about traditional systems of family life, Desai’s feminism is different from its western counterpart. She does not seem to imply breaking of family bonds. The woman in her novels either return to the family or prefer death.

Shashi Deshpande’s fiction explores the Indian middle class experience without the exotic touch. The female protagonists of Deshpande rebel against the authoritative tradition. There is always a conflict between modernity and tradition. She also deals with cultural issues such as life in joint families, marriages crossing caste class barriers and with sex and sexuality. Her works probe into the urban middle class life as well as into the condition of the lower classes which barely survive on respectability. Deshpande projects the feminine consciousness in *The Dark Holds No fear* (1980), *Roots and Shadows* (1983) and *The Binding Vine* (1993). According to Jasbir Jain, Deshpande’s women narrators transcend their gender in order to explore the male psyche and avoid stereotypical projections of patriarchal structures. Shashi Deshpande does not uphold the reconciliatory attitude in relationships. Self and recovery of self, analytical approach to patriarchy and family relationship are some of her major concerns. Her novels bear within the undercurrents of her feminist leanings.

into her works symbols, myths and images from Indian culture. The images of goddesses recur in her novels with special significance. The patriarchal tradition is prominently presented in *The Desirable Daughters*, along with the history of freedom struggle. Mukharjee uses the quotations from Keats’s poem and uses parallel structures as to *The Grecian Urn* by Keats. This is a peculiar post colonial response that looks at the colonial literature with renewed meanings from the other’s point of view. She treats the feelings of otherness with a positive spirit of cultural assimilation rather than with a sad feeling of nostalgia.

Rajeshwari Sundar Rajan argues that a judgement of women’s literature depends upon the understanding of its historic location. She points out:

> Writing as a testimony, remains a particularly privileged mode of self representation for women in India. Women novelists writing in India, therefore, necessarily inhabit a rarefied realm, but not only are they, paradoxically, highly visible ---we might say, visible for that very reason. They are also treated as representative voices.\(^1\)

The novel of the nineties is more daring in its engagement with the themes. Significantly, the number of women writers in the decade was considerably high. They dealt with a bewildering range of themes and have blended mythology, history, raj, sex, psychological probing and many more complexities of life. While projecting the world of the individual, these novelists consider the subtle aspects of change in woman’s aspirations and in their surrounding. According to a critic: “The confident voices of nineties have moved beyond problems of gender to the negations of other larger themes like postcoloniality, nationality and history.”\(^2\) They exhibit the Indian sensibility evolved with new pressures and other complex aspects of life. A distinct Indian identity is visible in their fiction.
The literary texts by women writers of the last two decades are deconstructive in approach. They not only reflect upon women’s experience, but also question the established authority in almost every field. The women writers of the eighties and nineties probe deeply into women’s psyche and assert an independent image of a free woman claiming her life. Rebellions against the oppressive authority is stronger than the depiction of victimised gender in the fiction of these decades. The quest for self, its discovery and fulfilment are visible in their protagonists. Yet, the feminism reflected in these texts is essentially shaped by the Indian experience. The feminism as reflected in this fiction is shaped from Indian womanhood and is different from the western form of feminism. Indian women writers explore the inner strife of female existence and discover the forces and factors that form their identity in the particular Indian setup. According to V.T. Giridhari:

The concepts of sexual politics, patriarchy, personal /political are glorified phrases and seem oversimplified in Indian context, the Indian family structure and patriarchies in India have a benevolent side without any sexual overtones. Apart from women, men also are victimised in social role-hence the western concept may not be totally applicable to interpret Indian text.

Along with social realism, and magic realism, surrealism is also employed by the women novelists of the last decades of the 20th century. They employ fantastic situations, futuristic society, ironies and magical qualities in their fiction. Suniti Namjoshi’s *The Conversion of the Cow* (1985), *The Mothers of Maya Deep* (1989), Anuradha Marwah-Roy’s *The Dragon* (1999), Nina Sibal’s *Yatra*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s *The Mistress of the Spices* (1992) is some notable examples. M.K. Naik points out that “regional novel seems to be popular with women writers.” Thus Kerala landscape has appeared in the fictional world of Arundhati Roy, Anita Nair and Susan Vishwnathan. Regions of Punjab, Bengal, Mumbai,
and community culture have found representation by many women writers’ fiction.

The literary endeavours of diasporic women writers form is another feature of the Indian fiction in English today. There have been NRI writers like Anita Desai and Jhabwalla since the beginning. But their number increased in the last two decades. Suniti Namjoshi, Bharti Mukharjee, Kiran Desai, Chitra Banerjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, Meena Alexander are just a few of them. They write about India nostalgically. Their distance from the actualities of contemporary Indian society and life find a clear expression in their writing. However, one can always notice in their works an earnest attempt to create the homeland. Their fiction explores the life experiences of the immigrants. They search for their roots in their past memories, myths and in exotic India. They also graphically and hauntingly depict the alienation of an immigrant experience in an alien land. The immigrant experience, of being away from homeland and facing the problems of adjustment in another land are authentically narrated in diasporic fiction. Mostly, the narration is from the point of view of the female protagonist.

It is pertinent here to take a look at the contribution of the authors selected for discussion in this dissertation. They are Jai Nimbkar, Arundhati Roy, Gita Mehta, Chitra Banerjee-Divakaruni, and Jhumpa Lahiri. Jai Nimbkar’s career began as a short story writer and has spanned three decades of the last century. Her first collection of short stories was published in 1971 by the Writer’s Workshop. The first novel, Temporary Answers followed in 1974. Joint Venture (1988) and Come Rain (1993) are her other contributions.

Nimbkar deals with a variety of themes and issues concerning Indian women of the post independence period. Her fiction probes the place of woman in family and society. She also throws light on the gender discrimination that exists in the patriarchal system, family and the
institutions of marriage. The identity crisis of postcolonial Indian woman is another issue. Almost all her works have woman protagonists. Nimbkar’s novel *Temporary Answers* revisits the theme of widowhood and remarriage in the twentieth century, from the point of view of an educated girl, Vinita. It is more of a search for identity. This novel redefines the role of family in a woman’s life and offers insights into the complex working of the psyche of an educated woman in modern society. The novel offers a sociological and cultural representation of a particular community in Maharashtra.

Her novel *Joint Venture* (1988) evidences her maturity as a writer in treating the theme of man-woman relationship. The work throws light on the superficial existence of woman in the society and the quest of a modern educated woman for a meaningful space. Jyoti, the protagonist, questions the relevance of marriage system. In *Come Rain* (1993) Jai Nimbkar presents the cultural conflict in an international / religious / racial marriage. This novel focuses on the theme of marriage and the inherent insecurities / displacement in it. Here the Indian family system is reviewed by a western woman.

Gita Mehta is the daughter of a well known leader and freedom fighter, Biju Patnaik. Though she lives abroad, her roots creatively pull her back to India. Mehta’s writing encompasses issues such as history, identity, politics, and philosophy. Her stance to these issues a postcolonial and it expresses itself in her works in a very entertaining manner. She also considers these issues in a rational, analytical way. While exploring the manifest aspects of Indian culture and reality she sprinkles the narratives with irony and pleasant humour. The simple fluent narrations of Gita Mehta revive the ancient narrative techniques and styles of ancient India. Her *Karma Kola* (1979) is a thoroughly postcolonial text that brings out in a very stark comic style the exotic attraction of India as land of Mystic spirituality and reality. Similarly the postcolonial stance of the author is strikingly apparent in the novel. *Raj* (1989) and *River Sutra* (1993), both
deal with postcolonial issues. *Raj* is a recreation of history and covers the preceding years of independence from a royal woman’s point of view. The novel unmasks the rigid patriarchal domestic order as well as the larger social/political turbulence during the freedom movement. *A River Sutra* (1993) is a mystical/philosophical representation of India. It too has an exotic quality. This novel shows her experimentation with the form and revival of the ancient Indian narrative style. Mehta’s recent book *Snakes and Ladders* (1997), is a series of essays charts India’s journey towards modernity. These essays note down the changes that have taken place in the socio-political life and record the record major events in independent India.

This study of the Indian fiction in English of the last decades cannot be complete without briefly discussing Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (1997). The novel immediately attracted a lot of critical acclaim and won the Booker award in 1997. The novel narrates the history of a family and simultaneously comments on the national history of colonised situation. *The God of Small Things* concerns itself with many postcolonial issues of identity and hybridity. It questions the power structures and voices the marginalized outcries keeping a woman and a dalit at its centre. Roy’s linguistic subversion of Roy displays the confident command of India’s new generation of writers. The text has set a new canon for Indian fiction.

Apart from *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy has published non-fictional works like *The Algebra of Infinite justice* (2002) which is a collection of essays. Most of them are essentially ataunch criticism of political, social and environmental exploitation. She is concerned with the issues such as global peace and nuclear war, the effects of corporate globalization, displacement caused by big dams and terrorism, neocolonialism of America, etc. Roy’s works are truly postcolonial in challenging the oppressive orders. Her protest is equally sincere in the fictional and non-fictional works.
Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an expatriate writer. She was born in India and grew up in her till 1976. She left for the United States at the age of nineteen. At present she is a teacher of creative writing at Foothill College in California. She has started MAITRI, a helpline in the locality for South Asian immigrant women. Chitra Banarjee Divakaruni’s works centre around the experiences of immigrant women and difficulties in their relationships. Her first collection of short stories, *Arranged Marriage* (1995) is based on her observations while working for MAITRI.

Her novel, *The Mistress of the Spices* (1997) is a unique blend of magic realism and the trauma of migration. The mystic quality of the fantasy recreates immigrant life with all its anxiety. The novel offers other dimensions of cultural/racial conflict as well as synthesis. The postcolonial concerns with identity and hybridity of immigrant Indians is effectively brought out in this work Divakaruni’s *Sister of My Hearts* (1999) and *The Vine of Desire* (2002) depict the life of two Bengali women and they focus on various women’s issues. The representation of the Indian traditional patriarchal society is an attempt to expose the suffocation of the modern educated woman in such a society. These novels also assert the potentials of the modern woman to overcome the subordinate status with courage. *The Unknown Errors of Our Lives* (2001) is a short story collection. Most of the stories in it are about family, culture and nostalgic memories of their women protagonists. Divakaruni is also a poet who deals with a variety of themes. Her major works are about South Asian women and immigrant experience and her focus is on the marginalization and identity of woman in the traditional Bengali society.

Jhumpa Lahiri is the first Asian writer to win the Pulitzer Prize in 2000 for her début short story collection, *Interpreter of Maladies* (2000). This expatriate Bengali writer is a teacher of creative writing in Boston University and Rhode Island School of Design. Her first novel *Namesake* (2003) was a major best seller and became New York Magazine Book of the Year. Lahiri explores the lives of Indian Americans, specifically the
Bengali community. Her *Interpreter of Maladies* deals with the dilemma of Indian Immigrants. Women are centre of focus in her fiction. The nine stories in *Interpreter of Maladies* exhibit women’s attempts at resisting marginality. It is essentially a postcolonial text evoking nostalgic memories of the homeland. Her novel *Namesake* explores the situations of cultural confrontation and its consequence on immigrant identities. The dislocation and displacement themes dominate the novel. Here again the world view of a woman protagonist offers inside story of the trauma of immigration. Lahiri has claimed a number of awards for her novel too.

To sum up, the fiction of the Post1980s displays postmodern and postcolonial features. It is analytical and deconstructive. It is essentially pluralistic and democratic in the choice of themes. Experimentation with form and language are essentially a postcolonial aspect of the Indian fiction in English. The major contributors are women writers in the post1980s, who are concerned with ‘gender discriminations’ and the ‘othering’ of women. Most of them evoke the middle class woman’s experience, and they effectively bring to light the boredom of repetitive life. In spite of regional, cultural and linguistic variations, most of the issues projected in their writing are similar. Invariably they challenge the traditional patriarchal view that denies identity to a woman. The rise in the number of début novelists in the nineties effectively reveals the status of women in India. Their writing itself is an assertion of identity, and an attempt at creating a space of their own.
Notes and references


This study examines the emergence of novel as literary genre in India. The novel form emerged on Indian literary scene first in Bengal which came in close contact with the British. Budevchandra Mukharjee’s *Anguria Binimoy* (1857) was a best seller by the standard of the time. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s *Raj Singha* (1881) are Romesh Chandra Dutt’s *Maharashtra Jeevan Prabhat* (1878) are some of the early novels. In Marathi, Mukharjee points out, the first novel is *Mysorecha Wagh* (1890) by H. N. Apte . In Gujarati Kishorilal Goswami produced a series of historical novels, starting with *Labang Lata* (1891). C V Raman Pillai in Malayalam wrote *Martanda Varma* (1891) and in Kannada *Kumudini* (1913) was also written


Meenakshi Sharma’s book analyses the process of colonization, through English language and education and the resistance to it through creative writing in English. She states, ‘Writing in English has thus to be seen alongside the rise of nationalism and the development of Indian languages and literature. This is not to deny that by writing in English, and by appropriating and abrogating the language and literary models of imperial centre, late nineteenth –and early twentieth century writers could make a statement of intellectual (if not political) equality; Redress ‘misrepresentation ‘while fulfilling personal literary ambitions in what was established as the literature of culture and power.’

Narsimhaiah discusses the makers of Indian English from Toru Dutt to the present.


5 Mukharje, *Twice Born Fiction*, p. 19


7 M.K. Naik elaborates that, Anand is a writer with strong social conviction. His fiction has become almost the cultural consciousness of independent India. Anand’s range of themes includes projection of social evils, attacks on capitalism and communalism; concern with the downtrodden and women’s plight are essentially reformative. His fiction has a strong note of propaganda. R.K. Narayan, on the other hand, is concerned with social and moral issues. The spiritual aspects of Indian life appear in his fiction with a note of irony. In spite of the subtle humour and irony, Narayan’s fiction is concerned with social and moral issues. Raja Rao’s Concern with the Gandhian freedom struggle and philosophy are essentially reformative in spirit.


8 The second generation writers like Bhabhani Bhattacharya and Manohar Malgoankar portrayed the external life on a large scale. But as in the Nineteen seventies the focus shifted to the individual. The novelists ended to depict the individual’s inner life. The fiction of Arun Joshi strongly brought out the portrayal of human psyche on literary scene.

Amitav Ghosh, Upmanu Chatterjee, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai and
show more interest in depicting inner strife.

9 Muslim novelists have contributed in the second phase of Indian Fiction:


14 M.K. Naik *A History of Indian Literature in English*, p. 239.
18 Meenakshi Bharat, ed. *Desert in Bloom Contemporary Fiction in English*
19 Sunder Rajan, “The Feminist Plot and The Nationalistic Allegory Home World in Two Indian Women Writer’s Novels in English”