

INTRODUCTION

The present dissertation seeks to provide a comprehensive critical statement on A Suitable Boy of Vikram Seth (b. 1952). A major novelist, a poet, Seth began his writing career in the 1980s and he still writes. After the brilliant collection of poems, All You Who Sleep Tonight (1990) and a collection of stories Beastly Tales (1992), Seth has produced his Magnum Opus, his latest novel, A Suitable Boy, a 1349 – page tome, which has earned him a staggering Rs. 2.6 crore in advance, something unprecedented in the world of Indian publication. Vikram Seth was in Calcutta on 4 and 5 March to launch his new book. During that session Ashoke Sen interviewed Seth whom Sen asked the following question about the narrative technique:

AS: could you tell me about your narrative technique? Do you take the role of an omniscient observer while telling the story?

The answer to this question given by Seth inspired this dissertation.

VS: There are two aspects of omniscience: the tone of omniscience, i.e., the permission the writer gives himself or herself to any thoughts of the character, he or she may be interested in. Secondly, when you determine what the characters will do. As far as the first is concerned, I am sometimes omniscient, sometimes semi-omniscient, sometimes ignorant.

I allow myself whatever works. I allow myself a flexibility or degree of knowledge. But I have a very ad-hoc attitude towards literature – if it works, it works. If it ^{is} convincing, it is convincing, otherwise it is a failure. So I am not particularly concerned whether Henry Jamesian – like I have to decide if I can see the world through these characters, or whether Tolstoy – like I am omniscient. I do not care. The other question is whether I am omniscient in the determination of my characters. That I am certainly not. In fact many of the characters which I thought would be minor characters, became very important in the scheme of the novel. So it was not that I with some kind of super vision was able to see till the end of their lives. Sometimes I could, sometimes I could not.

The present dissertation is an attempt to provide a detailed analysis and evaluation of A Suitable boy with reference to its thematic patterns and narrative techniques.

Chapter I provides a brief survey of Indian English Fiction. The main ground covered in this section is the important male as well as female fiction writers from 1864 to the present period. This survey is based mainly on M. K.

Naik's book A History of Indian English Literature and Iyengar's Indian Writing in English. However, the recent development in writing in Indian English Fiction has been gathered from very many sources like Indian English Fiction 1980-90: An Assessment by Bharucha and Sarang and The New Indian Novel in English: A Study of the 1980s by Viney Kirpal and Fiction of the Nineties by Dass and Dhawan and many journals and newspapers. The survey is updated including Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things (1997).

Vikram Seth, chronologically speaking, appears in the history of the fiction writers of the 80s. However, A Suitable Boy (1993) and his other works needed a separate treatment outside the normal brief survey. Therefore, Chapter II is devoted to place Vikram Seth into the tradition of fiction writers of Indian English. This part of the dissertation is meant for a brief biographical account of Seth and discussion regarding his other works. This chapter also provides a review of the criticism of Seth and A Suitable Boy with the view to look into the opinions of the critics and to decide about assessing the novel for the thematic patterns and the narrative technique.

Chapter III undertakes to discuss the criteria for the critical analysis and to provide a detailed textual analysis of A Suitable Boy dealing with the socio-political experience presented in it. This chapter also seeks to provide the theoretical statement on the scope of the thematic and narrative technique with the aspects of the novel: plot, character, dialogue, setting and the point of view.

Seth uses his acute sense of the Indian social class and caste and religious structures and shows how its emotional fabric is torn apart by the collective

trauma of Indian independence and the aftermath of the struggle for political power.

Chapter IV sums up the entire argument of the thesis by accentuating its findings.

Chapter - I

A Brief Survey of Indian English Fiction

Indian creative writing in English flowered almost immediately after Macaulay's introducing English education in 1835. Whatever may be the motive behind the introduction of English in Indian Education, it was proved a boon in disguise. It opened a world of ideas and new vistas of imagination for the first generation of English learners. The outcome was what is now known as Indo- Anglian Literature. The Sahitya Akademy accepted 'Indian English Literature' as the most suitable appellation for this body of writing because the term emphasizes two significant ideas: first that this literature constitutes one of the many streams that join the great ocean called Indian literature, which, though written in different languages, has an unmistakable unity; and secondly, that is an inevitable product of the nativization of the English language to express the Indian sensibility. Nevertheless, by whatever name Indian English literature is called, 'it remains a literary phenomenon worthy of serious scrutiny.'¹

Indo- Anglian writers were handicapped by the necessity of expressing themselves in a foreign language, which many of them had learnt only through books. With all the shortcomings, gradually the functional prose gave place to poetry, making the novel to be the last in the field of Indo - Anglian literature. Vinayak Krishna Gokhale observes, " Indo -Anglian literature is a curious phenomenon with a fairly long history. The forces that co-operated towards developing English into a world language have also been responsible for the growth of Indo - Anglian literature

which has a history going back to nearly a hundred and fifty years. Considerable work has been produced during this period in poetry, fiction, drama and philosophic and argumentative prose. A few writers in each one of these departments of Indo - Anglian literature have attained international fame. This would not have happened but for the fact that the Indo-Anglian literary tradition has had an unquestioned vitality.”²

Serious Indian writing in English has a history of some 200 years. While much of this writing has been political, scholarly, polemical, autobiographical or in journalism, a tradition of creative writing has also gradually developed since the days Derozio in the 1830s - initially somewhat unsteadily and with gaps, but after the 1930s in a continuous stream, which, by 1990s, has become a ‘bubbling brook.’³

Fiction , being the most characteristic and powerful form of literary expression today, has acquired a prestigious position in the Indian – English literature. As a distinct literary form, the novel is undoubtedly of recent birth. It is, in fact, the latest of literary forms to be evolved and the most dominant in the twentieth century. Iyengar observes, “ The novel as a literary phenomenon is new to India. Epics, lyrics, dramas, short-stories and fables have their respectable ancestries, going back to several centuries, but it is only during a period of little more than a century that the novel – the long sustained piece of prose fiction – has occurred and taken root in India.”⁴ However, the novel did not get perfection until 1920. Meenakshi Mukherjee rightly says, “The novel, the genre of imaginative literature which gave artistic form to the relationship of man and society was conspicuously absent until the 1920s.”⁵

It is commonly agreed that the novel is the readiest and most acceptable way of embodying experiences and ideas in the context of our time. It corresponds in our

civilization to the epic in the primitive stages of some races, to the drama in the Athens of Pericles , to the essay in the Age of Queen Anne. Indian creative writers in English have been attracted to and adopted this form generously and skillfully.

The Indian English fiction passed through three phases (i) Historical (ii) Social and Political and (iii) Psychological; and these phases many a times overlap; but they are distinctly visible. Hence we can divide the history of Indian English fiction into four successive periods:

(i) From 1875 to 1920,

(ii) From 1920 to 1947,

(iii) From 1947 to 1970,

(iv) From 1970 onwards: Modern fiction .

(i) From 1875 to 1920:

There are two views, one favouring the theory that many of the novels in this earlier period were ‘ sorry imitations of the early Victorian novels and another reiterating that Indian English fiction has not been imitative though Indian English poetry has been. An observation made by Prof. Alphonso Karkala is very significant:

Most of the verse writers, piously imitating the English poets, wrote mediocre poetry; but the prose narrators less imitative in their attempt to write fiction in English, looked homewards to Indian life and Indian scenes with which they were familiar. None of them followed the more popular Victorian novelists. ⁶

Though the period upto 1920 suffered from technical flaws and overdose of romanticizing and monotony, there were some good efforts. This period gives us a variety of the romantic, the social, the historical and the detective novels. Though we find a few good novels, we can say that this period laid a foundation for an impressive construction of the edifice of the novel in India. It was Bunkim Chandra Chatterji who first explored the possibilities of the novel. His first novel Rajmohan's Wife (1864) itself was in English.

Social novels, in this period, are: Raj Laxmi Devi's The Hindu Wife (1876), B. Dutta's Bijoy Chand (1888), Kshetrapal Chakrabarti's Sarita and Hinjama (1895), and A. Madhaviah's Thillai Govindan (1912) etc.

Historical novels of this period include S.K. Ghosh's Verdict Of The Gods (1906) The Prince Of Destiny (1909), Sardar Jogendra Singh's Nur – Jehan (1906) etc. Historical romance of this period includes Toru Dutt's Bianca or The Young Spanish Maiden, Kali Krishna's Roshanara (1881), T.Ramakrishna's Padmini (1903) etc.

(ii) From 1920 to 1947:

The First World War ended in 1918 and its impact began gradually to be mirrored in literature from 1921 onwards. The war with its grim carnage had stirred the conscience of the world. Indian writers were doubly affected by the war because, the national consciousness was awakened and liberty and independence were prizes worth fighting and dying for. This idea became more and more marked as the freedom movement led by Mahatma Gandhi gradually spread over the length and breadth of India. Therefore, the novels of the struggle of independence gained popularity.

The novelties in this period were serious about their art and there was a conscious awareness of form and experiment. They dealt with the contemporary problems and society rather than history and romance. Political and social themes formed typical trends of this period.

The remarkable social novels of this period are Sardar Jogindra Singh's Kamala (1925), D.F. Karaka's There Lay The City (1932) and Just Flesh (1941) Ahmad Ali's Twilight in Delhi(1940), K. A. Abbas' Tomorrow Is Ours (1943) which show a large variety of subject matter and a deeper understanding of social problem and characterization. This period also saw the novels of social reform like Untouchable (1935), Coolie (1936), Two Leaves And A Bud (1937), The Big Heart (1945) by Mulk Raj Anand. The social novels, which are portrayal of the changing social conditions of this period are: Dhan Gopal Mukherji's My Brother's Face(1926), K. Nagarajan's Athavar House (1937). However, a new dimension was added to the novel of social portraiture when R. K. Narayan began his series of Malgudi novels with Swami and Friends in 1935.

Historical novels of this period are Baladiya, A Historical Romance Of Ancient India (1930) and Three Men of Destiny by Ayyar.

Indian struggle for Independence was an epic struggle covering half a century. With the intensification of the freedom struggle during the Gandhian movement where politics was virtually the daily bread of the age. Therefore, we find that the political theme looming large in the fiction of this period. The remarkable political novels of this period are Frieda H. Das' Into the Sun (1933), K. S. Venkatramani's Kandan, the Patriot (1934), Raja Rao's Kanthapura (1938), C. N. Zutshi's Mother

Land (1944), R. K. Narayan's Waiting for the Mahatma (1955), K. A. Abba's Inqilab (1955) etc. Thus national awakening and political uprising gave a great impetus to the Indian novel of this period.

The nineteen thirties and forties constitute the most flourishing decades in the history of Indian English fiction. The eminent Indian novelists in English like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan who have world –wide recognition as great writers and their works have been translated in different languages of the world. They identified themselves with the aspirations of their compatriots and they portrayed various phases of Indian struggle for freedom.

(iii) From 1947 to 1970:

The first remarkable feature of post Independence Indo – English fiction in consolidation of their writer's reputations by the leading trio of Anand, Narayan and Rao. Besides these giants a different set of novelists in English in Indian who emerged after Independence who looked inward for materials as well as method. Not the outside world but the ancient heritage of the land becomes the source of material and not the conventional techniques of narration but the traditional puranic, discursive mode of narration, becomes the source of experimentation in the novelistic technique for them.

After Independence the contemporary Indian English novels depicted the joy of Independence, the sorrow of partition and the bloodshed and human cruelty at the time of partition. In addition to these there were also rural novels, romances, political novels a few humourous novels.

The trauma of a partition has stirred the creative genius of some Indian novelists such as Khushwant Singh, Manohar Malgonkar, Balachandra Rajan, Chaman Nahal, and Raj Gill. Khushwant Singh was the first novelist to capitalize on partition as pivotal theme in his first novel Train To Pakistan (1956) which is by far the best known and the most powerful novel on Partition. This novel depicts the holocaust through a simple plot building upto spine-chilling climax. Other novels on Partition are B. Rajan's The Dark Dancer (1959), Manohar Malgonkar's A Bend In The Ganges (1964), Raj Gill's The Rape (1974), Chaman Nahal's Azadi (1975), H.S. Gill's Ashes and Petals (1978) etc.

Major political events of this period were pictured in Bhabani Bhattacharya's Shadow from Ladakh (1966), Rohit Handa's Comrade Sahib (1977) etc.

The poverty of the farmers was depicted in So Many Hungers (1947) and He Who Rides a Tiger (1954).

We see social life of Delhi in powerful and entertaining novels of Ruth Praver Jhabhavalala. We find humorous and ironic touch in G. V. Desani's All About Mr. Hatter (1948). The trend of social realism faded gradually in post – Independence period. Social life of that period was recorded in S. Menon Marth's Wound of Spring (1960) and The Sale of an Island (1968).

The East – West encounter was the prominent theme of this period. This theme is still being written on variously. The classic examples of East – West encounter are Raj Rao's The Serpent And The Rope (1960) G. V. Desani's All About Mr. Hatter (1948), B. Rajan's The Dark Dancer (1959) And Too Long in the West (1961). While most of the earlier novels depict the reactions of an Indian on returning

home from abroad, some recent post-Independence novels explore the life of the Indian who goes abroad and how he succeeds or fails to adjust to the alien culture, for instance, M. V. Rama Sharma's The Stream (1956) and Look Homeward (1976), Victor Anant's The Revolving Man (1959), Roman Basu's A Gift Of Love (1974), Chaman Nahal's Into Another Dawn (1977) etc.

(iv) From 1970 onwards : modern fiction

In this period some new novelists appear on the scene. It saw the trend of introspective or the psychological novel. The novelists were self conscious, inward looking and analytical. The 'Big Three' Mulk Raj Anand, R. H. Narayan, and Raja Rao also continued writing fiction in this period. However, one notices that Indian English novel suffers from a paucity of psychological fiction before independence. But in the post – Independence period a few novelists made efforts in this direction i.e. attracted by this neglected area. K. M. Trishanku made an experiment in psychological fiction called Onion Peel (1973).

This period also saw the emergence of mythical fiction. In some of the novels of Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan and in almost all the novels of Raja Rao and Sudhin Ghose we find the use of Indian mythical motifs both in technique and as theme. Other examples of mythical fiction are A. Anantnarayan's The Silvar Pilgrimage (1961), Vasant A. Shahane's first novel Prajapati (1984), which stands out as an admirable paradigm of mythical fiction.

A remarkable literary phenomenon in post – independence fiction is the development of the existentialist novels displaying a shift of emphasis from the external to internal, the outer to the inner, etching the contours of the interior

landscape of the individual's mind. Anita Desai and Arun Joshi are only two novelists, in the last two decades, seemed to be committed to existentialist themes. Arun Joshi in his four novels: The Foreigner (1968), The Strange Case Of Billy Biswas (1971), The Apprentice (1971), The Last Labyrinth (1981), treats different facets of alienation. The existentialist theme is also used by Sasthi Brata in his Confessions of an Indian Woman – Eater (1971) and She And He (1973) and Y. P. Dhawan in his Beyond the Guru (1977).

Liberated writing also grew in Indian English fiction of this period. Sasthi Brata is the leader in this respect. His She And He (1973), K. M. Trishanku's Onion Peel (1973) Vikram Kapur's Traumatic Bite (1978) are the examples of liberated writing. On the whole, the 1970s heralded a new era of change in the tone and content of Indian English fiction. The novelists of this period have distinguished themselves mainly due to their variety of thematic concerns and technical virtuosity in handling their matter and particularly language.

The 1980s may aptly be described as the decade of fiction. Certainly there are more novelists publishing now than ever before. The sudden realization of the reality of history in which the individual has an important role to play is reflected in the Indian novel of 1980s. "The experience of having been so close to losing one's freedom, democracy, idealism had been an intense and poignant one. The feeling of having been given a new release of life with which to make a second beginning, with renewed pledges was quite pervasive."⁷ This statement by Viney Kirpal has a crucial significance so far as the Indian English novel of the 1980s is concerned. In comparison to the early period, the quantity and variety of fiction published during the

1980s are impressive. About seventy-five novels that appeared during this decade have attracted comment whether in review –criticism or more serious. Several writers published their first novels during the span, which makes it possible to speak of a new generation of Indian English novel. Among those who came into prominence during this span are: Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Upamanyu Chatterji, Allan Sealy And Shashi Tharoor.

The most important literary contribution in 1980's is by Salman Rushdie with the publication of his first novel Midnight's Children (1981). It has received a wide acclaim. It dramatizes the beginnings of independent India in the life of beak – nosed widely extravagant Muslim, Saleem Sinai, who was born on the stroke of the midnight bringing in India's Independence. It encapsulates the experiences of three generations of the Sinai family. Set on an epical scale, this panoramic work, spans a period of seventy years in India's modern history. Pattern on the narrative technique of Tristram Shandy, it is an enormously ambitious novel. Midnight's Children has won the coveted Booker's award for the year 1981 and also James Tait Black Prize. M. Sivaramkrishna opines, 'Rushdie's work impels a revaluation of the genre of the novel itself.'⁸ It is a novel that changes the way we understand our rapidly changing world and so helps us to feel at home with it.

Rushdie's other novel Shame is published in 1983. " This fable – parable – tale is set at the time of the beginning of Pakistan and goes on to include the division of the country although, as Rushdie says, it could well be set in the fourteenth century or in quite another country."⁹ It is about the life of men and women and the quasi religious- political life of Pakistan.

It is the story of Sufia Zinobia, elder daughter of General Raza Hyder (Rushdie's fictional General Zia) and his wife Bilquis, about what happened between her father and Chairman Iskander Harappa (or Zulfikar Ali Bhutto), formerly Prime Minister, and about her marriage to a certain Omar Khayyam Shakil, Physician, and for a time, the intimate crony of Isky Harrappa, whose neck had the miraculous power of remaining unfurnished, even by a hangman's rope.

His The Satanic Verses (1988) is a colossal structure erected around one authorial intention, which is the producing of maximum of religious satire by fantasizing people, situations and historical events. Its fantasy techniques are the familiar ones: transformation, reincarnation, unfamiliarization of the familiar and vice versa, the traditional magic lamp and occasionally, fantastic animals. Rushdie received Germany's Author of the Year Award in 1989 for The Satanic Verses.

Haroun and the Sea of Stories (1991) is an outcome of Rushdie's despair and suffering that he had to undergo after the publication of The Satanic Verses. It is the story of a young boy who lives in a city ruinously sad that it has forgotten its name. His father Rashid is the greatest story - teller of all times. The source of Rashid's stories was his subscription to the story -water from the Great Story Sea located on the earth's other moon called Kahani. Haroun seeks the help of the water genie, Iff, who has come to disconnect his father's water supply. Water genie, Iff, takes him to the earth's moon Kahani. Finally, Haroun succeeds in having his father's supply of story- water restored. Haroun And the Sea of Stories received a writer's Guild Award.

The Moor's Last Sigh (1995) is a grand family chronicle of the passionate love and business affairs of four generations of a grotesque and rich Indian family.

The narrator of this richly textured, densely allusive tale is Moraes Zogoiby, but the true protagonist is his mother, Aurora De Gama. Salman Rushdie himself says, "Mine is the story of the fall from grace of a high-born crossbreed -me, Moraes Zogoiby, called 'Moor', for most of my life the only heir to the spice -trade -'n'-big -business millions of the De Gama- Zogoiby dynasty of cochin—and of my banishment by mother Aurora, nee de Gama, most illustrious of our modern artists,"¹⁰ The Moor's Last Sigh is spectacularly ambitious, funny, satirical and compassionate. It is a love song to a vanishing world, but also its last hurrah.

For Rushdie, novel is a political discourse, and to this end he adopts the narrative mode of fable and the stance of a fantasist. His novels are rooted firmly in political social context, and about the element of fantasy Rushdie says, " I build imaginary countries and try to impose them on the ones that exist."¹¹

Midnight's Children created a generation of its own in the form of a crop of young Indian novelists eagerly following in Rushdie's footsteps. Among these novelists, the most talented one are Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Upamanyu Chatterji, Shashi Tharoor, Farrukh Dhondy, Rohinton Mistry and Firdaus Kanga. The New York Times (December 16,1991) has called these new Indian writers 'Rushdie's Children.'¹²

Amitav Ghosh made waves with his very first novel, the Circle of Reason (1986) and with his second, The Shadow Lines (1988) established himself in the forefront of the fleet of Indian English novelists. Flying the Indian Flag, but plying international waters with ease and zest, he belongs to the brash (young) urban generation that regards all the cities of the world as its own.

The Circle Of Reason is a skillfully structured web of fantasy and fable, politics and philosophy that is both entertaining and challenging. briskly-pace narrative chronicles the tragi- comic coming of age of Alu, a young Bengali orphan. The story unfolds in small village in Bengal, moves via Kerala to a fictitious state in the Middle East and reaches its document in Sahara desert. It presents history as a collective memory, a link between past and present .The past, a reference point for understanding what is happening, is equally dependent on the present, to determine the perspective.

The shadow lines won him the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award. It has theme and character interacting to form a taut whole. The primary theme of the novel is the impact of historical events of ordinary lives. We are shown how the tangle of events impinges on and finally controls the destiny of human individuals.

Speaking of the novelists who constitute the great tradition of the English novel, F.R.Leavis remarks, “they not only change the possibilities of the art for practitioners and readers, but that they are significant in terms of the human awareness they promote; awareness of the possibilities of life”¹³ And one can, without hesitation ,say this of Ghosh’s novel, In An Antique Land (1992). It demonstrates most powerfully how an excursion into the past is no escape from the present, but a coming to grips with the present realities of living. By juxtaposing the medieval and modern worlds of the twelveth and twentieth centuries in two different civilizations of India and Egypt with diverse cultures of Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Hinduism, Ghosh magnificently illustrates through his fictional discourse, the need for human understanding and religious tolerance. In Amitav Ghosh, we have

truly a novelist as a scholar and his In An Antique Land is a brilliant metaphor of our times.

His forth book The Calcutta Chromosome (1996)-a kind of mystery thriller – seems at first to be a radial departure from what he has written so far, but slowly the links begin to visible. The ability to let research and fiction breathe life into each other, the jumbling up of time and space until the discontinuity itself becomes meaningful, the specificity of the story opening out to a broader inquiry about life traces of these features were evident in both The Shadow Lines and In An Antique Land if not in The Circle Of Reason.

In The Calcutta Chromosome at least, three different searches get enmeshed in a frenzied design, each set at separate point of history, geography and the level of realism. The first is that of an Egyptian clerk, Antar, who is trying to trace the adventures of one L. Murugan, who inexplicably disappeared in Calcutta in August 1995. The second pertains to this Murugans desire to discover the missing links in the history of malaria research, centring on Ronald Ross. The third is that of Urmila Roy, a young journalist in Calcutta in 1995 who ‘wants to do a piece on Phulboni, a Bengali writer.’¹⁴

Vikram Seth, chronologically speaking, belongs hear. But his works are discussed briefly here because there is a separate section on his works in a next chapter. Vikram Seth began his literary career with Mappings, a book of poems in 1981. But his first novel is The Golden Gate (1986), in verse. It is also the first Indian novel in verse. For a first novel, the acclaim it has received is indeed very impressive. John Hollander calls it “a brilliantly fashioned” tale of life among a number of Bay

area “Yuppies” and that it is “never anything less than quaintly and most unqualifiedly marvelous”.¹⁵ It is a little too singular, something in the nature of a tour de force. It is devoid of oriental characters and colours. Set in San Francisco, it is written in mellifluous sonnets about the west. D. Y. Enright says “The Golden Gate is a technical triumph, unparalleled (I would hazard) in English. We may not have scorned the sonnet, but we shall hardly have thought it capable of this sustained sequenentiality, speed, elegance, width and depth of insight”¹⁶

Recently he wrote a novel A Suitable Boy (1993) which is only his second novel and the first one in prose. Dr. N. Gilroy-Scott in the Editorial of Literature Alive says, “Vikram Seth has been the subject of more press coverage in recent months than virtually any other Indian writer in living memory. Having already acquired an enviable reputation as a daringly innovative poet and travel writer, he has stunned the literary world with a first and immensely long novel, A Suitable Boy.”¹⁷ It is mainly the story of Mrs. Rupa Mehra who attempts to find out a suitable boy for one of her daughters Lata. It provides a panorama of the years immediately after Independence of the Gandhi-Nehru India. It tells the story about India as newly independent and struggling through a time of great crisis. The Sunday Telegraph reviewer says, “This is a novel invested with the truly gigantic quality, fiction on the grand scale.”¹⁸ This novel won for him the 1994 Commonwealth Writers Prize for the best novel.

Upamanyu Chatterji came on the literary scene with his novel English August: An Indian story (1998), which is a great success. The story of the novel has for its hero one Agasthya Sen whose nick-name at an Anglophile school was August. His

passion for everything British earns him another obvious one, English. In this novel, Chatterji depicted one aspect of India, i.e. Indian bureaucracy in which Agasthya Sen was a misfit because of his urban, elite and anglicized background. It faithfully records the protagonist's sense of isolation, rootlessness and cultural dislocation

His second novel is The Last Burden. (1993) In the novel Shyamanand and Urmila are displaced from Calcutta, their cultural home and have no friends or family in the city where they have worked and now live while waiting for deaths amid a destructive atmosphere of squabbling, bickering and accusations. Naturally, their sons, Burfi and Jamun, have grown up into westernized, rootless individuals, each in his own way unable to form lasting relationships. The whole family unit seems to have an air of distracted displacement, like the huge cactus they take with them when they leave the small rented flat for a sterile, anonymous house of their own. Like that cactus this family is equally pathetic and uprooted.

Allan Sealy's first novel Trotter – nama (1988) narrates the story of an Anglo - Indian clan from its inception in the eighteenth century founded by a French mercenary officer Julein Aleysium Trotter, it has its hey-day in the nineteenth century and then came to a sad decline. Sealy has enunciated that Anglo- Indians have been a part and parcel of India and that their contribution to the growth of Indian society have not been meagre.

Allan sealy gives us one of the great comic novels to come out of India- Hero (1990). Hero: South Indian film star – turned-politician. He makes the leap half-blind- from movies to politics, from Bombay to Delhi, and tastes power. Then he gets himself new dark glasses, Nero: number 1 Villain of North India. Then he buys

himself a real gun. Zero: Hero's sidekick and biographer, scriptwriter-turned-speechwriter, he gives us his career, his ambitions, even his mistress – the fragrant U.D. Cologne – for Hero. Then he becomes Minister of Screens.

Shashi Tharoor produced the great novel The Great Indian Novel (1989). It is one of the greatest achievements of the Indo – Anglian fiction. It is, of course, an attempt to retell the political history of twentieth century India through a frictional recasting of events, episodes and the characters from the Mahabharata. According to Shashi Tharoor, ‘ The narrative technique of this novel is as varied in tone, form and a scansion as the epic itself, with its numerous interpolations and digressions.’¹⁹

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the fiction of the nineties, from the Indian point of view, is the emergence of new talent. A number of novelists have made a mark with their ‘first’ novels – Firdaus Kanga, Farrukh Dhondy, Rohinton Mistry, Amit Chaudhuri, Arvindan Basu etc.

Firdaus Kanga came on the literery scene with his first novel Trying To Grow (1990) evaluating it critically, Subhash Chandra points out “ the novel is concerned with the theme of initiation and has the unraveling of the contradictory, hypocritical and seamy side of life and the young hero's adjusting to the shock of this discovery.”²⁰ In a telling statement, the author asserts that what stands out in the novel, ‘is extensive eroticism, which seems to permeate almost every relationship – man - woman, man - man.’²¹ The novel is essentially autobiographical. The main thrust of the novel is to depict the hero, Daryus Kotwal's attempts to find and identify for himself.

Fharrukh Dhondy published his first and maiden novel Bombay Duck in 1990. It is a novel illustrating life realistically and interpreting it intellectually. The novel tries to throw some significant light on some contemporary issues including communal fundamentalism and predicament of immigrants in England. The foul smell of Bombay duck drying on the sand is symbolic of deeper corruption. The story is labyrinthine but it's remarkable variety and a astute narrative technique imparts it an abiding interest. A. K. Awasthi states, "The novel concentrates on culture alongside all its interrelated aspects. The novelists feeds an irony and presents intellectual solutions." ²²

Rohinton Mistry, who earlier published a collection of short stories A Long Journey (1991) has come out with the novel Such A Long Journey (1991). The writer's this maiden attempt in the genre, has made a mark on the literary scene. Set against the background of the Indo-Pak War of 1971, it delves into the human predicament of an individual. Gustad Noble, the protagonist in the novel, is like a typical classical tragic hero who passes from 'happiness to misery'. He is out to expose social and political evils of India. At times, there is a ruthless criticism of the corrupt government at the centre. It makes the reader sit up and take note of its usual tone and texture. This novel won for Mistry the Governer General's Prize for the best fiction written in Canada.

His second novel A Fine Balance (1996) is a significant landmark in recent Indian fiction in English. It was shortlisted for the 1996 Booker Prize and went on to win for Mistry the 1996 Commonwealth Writers Prize. It not only spans a period of about fourty years of free India (from the time just before India's attaining freedom to

the year 1984, when Mrs. Ghandi was assassinated), but is also a work that gives a richly comprehensive account of the goings on in the country. A Fine Balance is a fictional presentation with three major strands in it – the stories of Dina Dalal, a Parsi widow who bravely strives for a free and independent existence; young Maneck Kohlah who grapples with problem of existence; and the chamar – turned – tailors Ishvar and Om Praksh's struggle for survival in a world that is a hostile but occasionally allows them to find refuge in feelings of kinship and togetherness.

Mistry is a social and critical realist. His primary concern is not with propaganda of criticism, but with the predicament of modern life. K.C. Belliappa observes, 'the narrative voice in Mistry's fictional discourse achieves "a fine balance" between involvement and detachment, thus providing a reliable witness to an eventful era in a nation's history.'²³

Amit Chaudhuri's maiden novel A Strange And Sublime Address (1992) won the author the Society of Authors' prestigious Betty Trask Award and also Guardian Fiction Prize. His achievement is all the more creditable for this is his first published work. The novel has a very thin plot; it is a journey down memory lane. The protagonist, Sandip, a ten – year – old boy lives with his parents in Bombay. Every year during the summer vacation he goes to Calcutta to maternal uncle's house. A vivid picture of Calcutta life is faithfully depicted. It gives a clear idea about a typical middle – class household in Calcutta. With dexterous skill, Chaudhuri recreates in the novel simple pleasures of childhood bathing, eating and also sleeping. And he successfully transforms the world of children into a universal vision. The narration

does not merely present a story, it makes us live and share an actual experience with minute details of time and place.

Afternoon Raga (1994) is autobiographical. The scenes alternate between Oxford and Bombay. The narrator's description of Oxford for example is such that a visitor will find it as accurate as a guide book. He records the changing architecture of Bombay. The narrator still feels no guilt about the dependence of his class on domestic servants - to that extent he is still typically Indian. It is not the external events he is interested in. The external details are only the setting for the inner drama. The novel has no plot. It ends inconclusively.

Arvindan Basu is important in the world of Indian fiction. In his novel Thy Will be Done -(Rupa), the Calcutta born Basu has powerfully and passionately depicted the lives of clergymen down south. He has based his story on a true incident. On August 21, 1988, he came across an article in the Indian Express on how a priest in the interiors of Kerala has been acquitted of the murder of his child lover. That served as the nucleus of the story.

The fact that all these modern writers have written in English should not make us suspect the quality of their writing. The Indianness of Indian writing is as genuine as the Americanness of U.S. writing. Critics and readers all over the world agree the fiction writers of the nineties, especially from that India, are adding significantly to the mainstream of world literature.

Indian English novel has flourished beyond expectations. "It is now", as Iyengar observes, "aligning and evolving a literary genre, and is trying, in the hands

of the practitioners, a fusion of form, substance and expression that is recognizably Indian , yet also bearing the marks of universality.”²⁴

According to Mēena Shirwadkar, the Indian English women novelists may be placed into three groups on the basis of the distinct features of their themes, techniques and style of expression:

The early women novelists tried to give their characters justice by posing the social problems; but owing to the lack of experience of writing, they soon turned to didacticism, sentimentalism and romanticism, which weakened their novels. However, considering the sincerity behind their motivations and at the same time, the lack of any guiding tradition, their efforts appear admirable. The second group of women writers offers convincing creations of a world in which characters live and indicate that the novel written by women novelists had reached maturity. They forge a style and project a vision of their own. They reveal a power of artistic selection by which their novels achieve a harmonious effect. Out of this group of novelists, three names have risen to eminence – Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabavala and Anita Desai. The later women novelists forming a third group give expression to the most recent problems and show remarkable awareness of the challenges of the present. Feminism, free sex, isolation, alienation, identity, crisis or an individual struggling to be oneself are some of the thematic concerns of the women novelists today .²⁵

The Indian English women novelists can be divided in the following three successive phases:

- i) From 1876 to 1920,
- ii) From 1920 to 1970,
- iii) From 1970 onwards.

i) From 1876 to 1920:

The very emergence of women writing in English during this period was very significant in itself, marking as it did, the birth of a new era which held out for the Indian opportunities for a dynamic participation in the social life of the country. So Ramamurti K.S. says "The very emergence of the women writers in English during this period was of great significance; for, their works, scanty in output as they were, were qualitatively superior to those of many others who wrote before and after them. This claim should be accepted as perfectly justified at least in respect of a few writers like Toru Dutt, Mrs. Ghosal, Sorabji Cornelia and Krupabai Sathianandhan."²⁶

Among these, Toru Datta was certainly the foremost as a writer in English and as an artist, for she was a born poet and highly gifted writer. She has a place in the history of the Indian novel in English the significance of which can never be overemphasized though she has her place of pre-eminence in the world of Indo – English poetry. She wrote Bianca or The Young Spanish Maiden (1878). The other novels written in this period are: Rajlaxmi Debis, The Hindu Wife or The Enchanted Fruit (1976), Krupabai Sathianadhan's Kamala, A Story of Hindu Wife (1879) and Saguna : A Story of Native Christian Life (1895), Sheventabai M.

Nikambe's, Ratanabai : A Sketch of Bombay Cast Hindu Young Wife (1895), Cornelia Sorabji's Love and Life Behind the Purdah(1901), Sun Babies (1904) and Between the Twilights (1908), Mrs. Ghosal's The Fatal Garland (1915) and An Unfinished Song (1916) etc.

A striking feature of the novels of all these women writers is that they are, by and large, like personal memories and autobiographical sketches with characteristic emphasis on subjectivity and private experience. It should be admitted, as K.S. Ramamurti says, " the theme of almost all the novels of the early women writers was the Indian woman, the new woman as the writers saw her emerge in the fast changing social milieu."²⁷

i) From 1920 to 1970 :

In this period women novelists of quality started to enrich Indian fiction in English. Two novelists, Venu Chitle and Shanta Rama Rao presented through their novels In Transmit (1950) and Remember The House (1956) high cast Hindu families of their times with a sensitive narration of women growing up from girlhood to maturity, the vicissitudes the members of the family have to face the social, economic and political pressures they have to undergo. Shakuntala Shrinagesh's The Little Black Box (1955) is a psychological study depicting the life in Indian family.

A notable development is the emergence of an entire school of women novelists among whom the leading figures are Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabavala , Nayantara Sahgal and Anita Desai.

Kamala Markandaya offers us a tragic vision of life in her novels : Nectar in a Sieve (1954), Some Inner Fury (1957), A Silence of Desire (1961), Possession (1963), A Handful of Rice (1966), The Cofferd Dam (1969).

Ruth Praver Jhabavala enjoys a double perspective being an outsider living in India. Meenakshi Mukharjee observes, “ Jhabavala brings an European sensibility to work on the material which is non-European.”²⁸ She Wrote To Whom She Will (1955), The Nature of Passion (1956) Esmond in India (1958), Get Ready for Battle (1962), Backward Place (1965).

Nayantara Sahgal’s novels A Time To Be Happy (1957), This Time of Morning (1965), Storm in Chandigarh (1969), Day in Shadow (1971) show the women who are fraught with suffering and anguish.

The Sita – Parvati -Pativrata tradition tells the Indian women to suffer in silence; her modern educated mind asks , what if her husband is not like Rama?. Is she still to remain a faithful wife? They also realize that braking way is also painful. There can be no clean break and no easy solution.

Anita Desai shows a tragic vision of women’s life in marriage. She is one of the most serious yet appealing novelists on the Indian English firmament. Her reputation has been steadily rising since the publication of her first novel, Cry the Peacock (1963). Her other novels are Voices in the City (1965), Bye – Bye Blackbird (1971).

iii) From 1970 onwards :

In this period, the dominant themes in the novels of women novelists are loneliness, boredom, the clash between old and new and the individual versus society

and also a marked pre-occupation with sex. Such themes are presented in Nargis Dalal's Minari(1967), The Sisters (1973), The Inner Door (1975), The Girls From Overseas(1979).

An outsider's view of the east – west problem is presented in Bharathi Mukherjee's novels such as The Tiger's Daughter (1973), Wife(1976).

In Jai Nimbkar's novels we find a variety of themes and problems concerning the Indian women, particularly in the socio – economic context of the post-independence India. Jai Nimbkar tried to show inequality of the sexes, place of the woman in her family and society, her search for personal identity, the effect of marriage on the Indian woman through her novels Temporary Answer (1974), and A Joint Venture(1988).

Other important novels published in this period are Roshini or Serenity in Storm (1967), Like in the Broken Chain (1967), An Autumn Leaf (1976), Spring Returns (1977), Midnight Woman (1979) by Veena Paintal . The Song of Anasuya (1978) by Uma Vasudev. The Heart of Standing Is You Cannot Fly (1973), Forever Free (1979) By Raji Narasimhan.

The eighties have been a remarkable decade in terms of literary output. While on the one hand we have seen a formidable volume of new publications and new names, we have also seen and equally formidable vulgarization of the printed world. Selecting feminine writing out of this muddle has been a most interesting experience and has forced one to read and ponder over a whole new range of fiction. There is a truth about contemporary Indian English fiction that lies beyond generic and economic factors. In deconstructing the world of these women writers we become

aware that these are embryos in the process of becoming. Ira Pande says “ Upon reading the text of some recent women writers, I must confess I am tempted to call theirs the literature of the baby – log, which would include generically those convent-educated, genteel young ladies whose tussorees and diamonds proclaim their twin worship of Gandhi and Mammon.”²⁹

Behind the novelists of the eighties lies the teenager of the sixties and seventies and the child of the forties and fifties. Behind their growth is also the growth of Indian democracy, and behind the debased, sordid and common world of their text, is a larger matrix of squalor. The roots of this fictional world lie in a sub – culture spawned by the Bombay film and the pulp of fiction popular in the late sixties. The idealism and self denial of an earlier India faded before the glitz of high living and simple thinking. This simplification of life problems and replacement of quality by quantity was slowly to overwhelm a whole generation, shape their minds and consequently their language.

Jai Nimbkar, Nina Sibal, Namita Gokhale, Dina Mehta , Shashi Deshpande, Nayantara Sahgal, Shobha De, Bharati Mukherjee and Uma Vasudev have made it possible to speak of women Indian English fiction.

Dina Mehta is a Parsee novelist. She is both a playwright and a short story writer. She writes from a woman’s point of view and deals with women’s question. Her novel And some Take a Lover (1992) is an absorbing work about the conflicting loyalties of a Parsee family enmeshed in the political turmoil of the Quit India Movement. Novy Kapadia observes, “The conflict, both political and personal and the racy narrative style of this novel is reminiscent of some of Graham Greene’s thrillers

essentially an exploration of the mind and soul, a type of metaphysical thriller. Graham Greene with characteristic self-deprecating modesty had labelled a whole range of his novels as “entertainments.” Such fiction was also termed as spy thrillers.”³⁰ Dina Mehta’s this novel belongs to this genre. In her portrayal of characters and movement of the plot she deals with many of Greene’s recurring themes, of doubt and guilt, motivated revolutionaries and young idealists.

Kamala Markandaya is a distinguished Indian English novelist. Though married to a Britisher and settled down in London, she continues to write on themes concerning India and its culture. She is sensitive novelist and her depiction of the clash of two attitudes is balanced and authentic, presumably because her own personality combines in itself the contrary qualities and values of the two cultures. As an artist, she carefully refuses to side with any culture and lays bare the strengths and weaknesses of each one of them .

She wrote Pleasure City in 1982. The title of it is significant as it suggests an attempt to blend imagination with reality. It is an artistic creation like that of Hardy’s wessex or Narayanas’ Malgudi. The project of building a holiday resort “Shalimar” in the unnamed fictional city by the side of a remote fishing village is symbolic of the technological co-operation transcending the narrow cultural barriers. The project is undertaken by the company, which consist of foreigners as well as Indians.

Anita Desai is best known of contemporary women writers and comparable with Iris Murdoch, Daris Lessing, Margaret Laurence and Flora Nwapa. Dr. J.P. Tripathi states: “... Anita Desai possesses one of the healthiest and psychologically most balanced minds in the realm of Indian English fiction and the society, of her test

and attitudes, is almost exemplary, a point worth emulating by her fellow- religionists in the field of writing....”³¹ A close reading of Anita Dasai’s novels reveals that her real concern is with the exploration of human psyche. In her novel Village By the Sea (1982), we see the political influences shaping the lives of the villagers. We find her protagonist moving away from self – absorption to involve themselves in greater struggles. It is no longer ‘consciousness’ which is the characteristic feature of the novel but action, which becomes equally if not more important.

In Custody (1984) has Deven, the Hindi lecturer at collage at Mirpore as a hero. He is trying to flog a dead horse in an attempt to interview the famous Urdu poet Nur for his friend Murad’s literary magazine. With the partition of India and the majority of the Muslims having gone to Pakistan, Urdu is no longer considered as important language.

In Baumgartner’s Bombay (1988) political influences play a tremendous role in shaping the life of protagonist, Hugo Baumgartner. As a German Jew, he belongs neither to Hitler’s society, nor to India , where he is treated as a foreigner whenever he goes. There seems to be a certain parallel between Baumgartner’s early life in Germany and his life as an adult in Bombay. He unfortunately suffers as a result of the political reverses in both countries.

In these novels by Anita Desai we see the fusion of the inner and outer world. Although she enters the mind of her characters, we must not forget that this mind is shaped by socio – political factors.

Though like most of the other women novelists Shashi Deshpande has left rural India alone, she has been a pioneer in another field that of a detective fiction.

Her If I Die Today (1982) and Come Up and Be Dead (1983) are both detective novels. The influence of Agatha Christie appears very strong here, though the atmosphere is totally Indian. The protagonist of these novels are Manju and Kshama, who belong to the urban, educative middle – class.

Roots and Shadows (1983) deals with an upper middle class family. This upper class family is on the threshold of social changes, especially changes in the position of the women in particular, in the traditional Hindu society. Indu, the protagonist of this novel is a rebel who returns to her ancestral home at the death of her grandmother to find herself the heiress. Faced with the responsibility of deciding the future of the many members of the family, she is forced into a painful self-analysis. This novel won Thirumati Rangammal Prize in 1984 and was declared the best Indian novel of 1982 –83.

In The Dark Holds No Terrors (1983), the protagonist, Saru is a doctor. She is on a visit to her paternal home in small town. This home has not changed since her childhood. Away from the professional milieu, she becomes an ordinary housewife temporarily. The routine is dull but soothing. Her husband is a mediocre lecturer. As she grows in stature, he becomes a sadist.

Shahi Deshpande is the recipient of the Sahitya Academy Award for the novel That Long Silence (1989). That Long Silence is described as ‘A well-articulated silence’³² by Vimala Rama Rao in the book review. It has for its theme the sudden jolting of a middle – class woman, Jaya’s conformable, boringly predictable life into a disaster that she had often longed for as a variation. But Jaya gives us a new image of the Indian woman who tries to assert her individuality and seeks to break the age

old silence by refusing to dance to the tune of her husband. Vimala Rama Rao observes, “ It deals with a theme hackneyed in women’s fiction, especially the popular kind. But the treatment is refreshingly different, intelligent and welcome.”³³

Shahi Deshpande has emerged as prominent writer in the nineties. Her latest novel The Binding Vine (1993) compels one to discover how the ‘binding vine’ of human emotions links and sustains diverse human being as they go through.

Namita Gokhale’s contribution to Indian English fiction is memorable. Her novel Paro: Dreams of Passion (1985) is an account of the sexual journey and social climbing of Paro- the dynamic Becky- like woman- who marries Priya’s boss, B.R, and then practically snatches every other man she wishes to catch. Paro’s life is a whirl of inane socializing and a saga of the cocktail circuit of Bombay and Delhi. The story is narrated by Priya, who finds Paro with her dreams and passions as her alter ego. It provides a vocabulary of words and events which was quite new when Gokhale first used it in Paro. Namita Gokhale had no literary pretensions, she was neither a Jhabavala nor an Anita Desai, and this alone liberated her from the burden of literary heritage. The popular narrative mode here is the saga, adopted from the Katha which is episodic and autobiographical, with bits of magic realism and the picaresque.

Nayantara Sahgal has distinguished herself as an Indo - Anglian writer of repute. As a novelist, she uses a political set up as background for her characters. She firmly believes that individuals and politics greatly influence each other. She greatly values love, friendship, honesty, freedom and equality and tells us that these must never be sacrificed at any cost. For her freedom means a way of life of doing the

things one believed to be right, even if they were against the accepted social values. Her Rich Like Us (1985) is apparently about the Emergency, about the political event of the mid- seventies, the authoritarian pattern which was followed, and the isolation it imposed. It is also about the causes which led to it.

Plans for Departure (1986) differs in important respects from Sahagal's earlier novels, which are usually classed as "political" or "feminist." According to Neena Arora, Plans for Departure is both a "love story and mystery, set in a continent poised for revolution and a world on the edge of war."³⁴ In this novel the main action, consisting of Anna's stay in Himapur – a small remote hill station in the Himalayas – is worked on a minuscule canvas. For the love – episode and the mystery associated with it, the novel would have become a historical document.

Her another novel Mistaken Identity (1988) which for all practical purpose is Bhushan's story, of his mistaken identity and of his several love affairs, becomes with the liaison of the ranee with a communist worker, a story of some deeper meaning. The ending is in itself a political revolution. It is also a social revolution.

Nina Sibal's Yatra (1987) is described as 'a daring and ambitious first novel.'³⁵ Packed into its pages are all the possible experiences one can have of India upto to the Chipko Movement. The protagonist, Krishna, is the product of a mixed marriage – Greek mother and Indian father. On her birth, her father Parmjit declares, ' Krishna. we'll call her Krishna. A Hindu god whose skin darkened and got blue (sic) When he wallowed prison from a huge overhanging snake (sic). Lord Krishna was a lover and a philosopher; he was in touch with everything.'³⁶ Krishna, therefore, proceeds to

fulfill that prophecy. Her journey – or Yatra – is what the book is all about. Sibal's this book is a good example of what the exile perceives a novel about India should be.

Jai Nimbkar's A Joint Venture (1988) deals essentially with the middle – class, married woman's identity crisis in the contemporary male- dominated Indian society. In it the omniscient narrative merges into the protagonist Jyoti's point of view, gives us a sense of a lived reality. The development of Jyoti's consciousness as an alert and thinking middle-class woman from imitation to protest, and protest to self-realization and containment is what constitutes the central concern of A Joint Venture. T. S. Borat observes, 'Jai Nimbkar has attempted to project in her novel a woman's consciousness which has the pattern of Feminine – Feminist- Female phases of development .'³⁷

Her Come Rain (1993) has the central female character, Ann. She rejects the authority in her family in her own way. She represents the voice raised against such authority. Ann gets her freedom from the fetters of matrimony, the authority of her husband. Jai Nimbkar, who belongs to an Indian particularly, perhaps, could not think of a girl staying unwed and a separation (as freedom) of a married woman is conceivable and therefore, possible only in case of an American (non – Indian) woman like Ann. Although the woman character is the focus of the novel, Nimbkar's heroine fails to impress as a realistic woman in an Indian joint Hindu family.

Shobha De has emerged on the literary scene on Indian fiction dealing with the vital aspects of existence and survival in high class society of India. Closely acquainted with the Bombay cinema and the world of modeling, she has beautifully

mirrored the shattering human values of this glittering society. Her woman characters represent a true picture of the modern Indian women.

Shobha De's first novel Socialite Evenings was published, at the turn of the decade, in 1989. In this novel Karuna, the younger protagonist, moves from a dusty clinic in Satara to the mega city of Bombay, from a middle-class family to the big world of fashion designing and advertising. Her heroine is very different from the heroines of other Indo-English women writers such as Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Bharati Mukherjee.

In Starry Nights (1991) Aasha Rani, a ravishingly beautiful film star, 'the dream girl of the millions' is the central character. The novel describes how she chooses the right way of struggling and surviving through it, instead of escaping from life's responsibilities or yielding to the problems. In the end she survives and achieves success in the glittering world of cinema which is in reality so ruthless, so miserable that it can shatter the moral values of innocence of any human being.

Her another two novels Sisters and Obsessions are published recently in 1992. She has very realistically presented the models before us. Her women, rather strong in character, take bold decisions to survive in society.

Gita Mehta has secured her reputation internationally among the modern and contemporary novelists. She has provoked various opinions and is recognized as an incomparable storyteller. Her lack of complexity, and well-organized propelling narration has provided sustenance to her "craft of fiction". Gita Mehta's Karma Cola (1980) is a highly sobering look at what happened when the West invaded India in reckless pursuit of mind expansion and obscure salvation. Just when Indians were

becoming excited about rock and roll – contraceptives in one hand, Coca-Cola in the other - the Americans turned their backs on Elvis and Bill Haley and pointed East, declaring that's where it was at. Mehta's biting wit does not obscure the sensitivity and thoroughness with which she has approached her subject: the close observation and interviews with victims, both Eastern and Western of this commercialism of culture.

Recently Gita Mehta, as Asit Chanamal says, "has lost her amateur statur and has become a writer lionised by the world... She has created a new language of literature and has recreated India for Indians"³⁸ in A River Sutra (1993). Like her earlier books her concern in A River Sutra is to unravel the deep feelings of inner cognizance of man. She offers authentic interpretation to Indian cultural values, music, art forms and heritage. Since Mehta uses the device story-telling, her novel is composed of several threads, which are skillfully interwoven in the story of bureaucrat who retires to Narmada in search of peace and tranquillity, only to discover how little does he actually know of the world.

Bharati Mukherjee's fame has shot up in the recent years, and in terms of popularity, she is vying with Anita Desai. In 1988, she won American National Book Critics Circle Award for her collection, The Middleman and the Other Stories. In her latest novel Jasmin (1990), she gives us a story of an immigrant from the third world to the U.S. pushed from one disaster to another. Jasmine emerges not as a tragic character but as one who is determined to change her destiny and explore infinite possibilities. The novel also orchestrates a quest for identity: how a woman comes to terms with her own self.

Uma Vasudev's Shreya of Sonagarh is a bold portrayal of Shreya, the youngest of the eight children of Thakur Her Pratap Singh. Shreya, who belonged to middle-class family, but was married in a family with feudal traditionalism, ends up as a political figure. The novel brings alive all the pageantry of India's rituals, the crumbling of an old princely order, and the woman as conditioned by the circumstances. It is a story of women's emancipation as well as growth.

Thus as we see above Dina Mehta, Shashi Deshpande, Jai Nimbkar, Shobha De, Gita Mehta and Uma Vasudev dominated the fiction of nineties.

Some recent novelists that deserve mention are Gita Hariharan, Suma Josson , Amrita Pritum, Sunetra Gupta , Shanta Gokhale , Arundhati Roy etc.

The Thousand Faces of Night (1995) is Gita Hariharan's first novel. It mainly the story of Devi, who comes from a comparatively liberal background, which is at the same time steeped in tradition and ritual. She has spent two years in the U.S.A. as a student returns to an arranged marriage and a traditional Indian married life, which she finds familiar as well as alien. Therefore, she has to struggle in order to "adjust".

Suma Josson's first novel Circumference (1994) is an ambitious and sensitively – written novel. Sarala, the protagonist and narrator, is a person in search of herself. She does not know where to start. Having said that, the author does a skillful job of weaving the many strands of the story through different chronological planes and the fabric created is rich with carefully woven designs. Sarala's slow, hesitant steps towards the final goal of finding herself may well be those traced by many an Indian woman today. It is interesting that of the three traditional roles thrust

upon Sarala – that of the daughter, the wife and the mother – the only one she rejects is that of the wife.

Amrita Pritam's Village No.36 is published in 1994. Rohini Mokashi – Punekar observes that the blurb of the novel assures that this is a 'touching tale, set against the backdrop of Kangra Valley, of a man living in a make – believe world, opting for a new woman every time, while the heroine Alka who loves him passionately, is distracted to the point of making herself available as a prostitute.'³⁹ The novel has all the makings of a romantic pot-boiler of the West, a la Barbara Cartland. What the novelist seems to laud is the 'courage' with which Alka 'offers' herself, which indicates a certain unquestioned conventionality.

Sunetra Gupta writes wonderful prose, which translates into easy readability as far as her novel is concerned. Her novel Moonlight into Marzipan (1995) is a delightful turn of phrase- as exquisite in its alliterative sounding effects as is the turning of moonlight into delicious, expensive and subtle – on – the – taste – buds marzipan. In the novel Promothesh's discovery promises to bring him fame and riches, instead it unleashes a chain of events which begins with his arrival in London accompanied by his wife, Esha. Esha's death leaves him marooned and confused, his astonishing discovery slipping from his grasp. Into this morass of ambition and self – pity slips love, in the human form of his biographer, Alexandra Vorobyova, and the devil himself, in the very human form of Yuri Sen. The Statesman points out, 'Through (the)... intricate blending of the whimsically willed and the fatally haphazard, Sunetra Gupta brilliantly captures life's very texture, its warp and woof of fate and decision, law and randomness.'⁴⁰

Shanta Gokhale's novel Rita Welinkar (1995) has generally been read as a feminist text. One of the important thematic concerns of the novel is a confrontation between the two models of female perception. This theme is articulated through the character or the symbol of Victoria the Servant Woman, forever weeping in the memory of her lost lover, Francis. Symbol, because she is not present as a character at any point in the novel. She appears as a figure in memory, intruding upon the stream of consciousness of Rita and Saraswati as a disturbing archetype that belies explanation.

The God of Small Things (1997) is Arundhati Roy's first novel. It could be argued that it actually began thousands of years ago. In a purely practical sense it would probably be correct to say that it all began when Sophie Mol came to Ayemenem. Perhaps it's true that things can change in a day. That a few dozen hours can affect the out come of whole lifetimes. And that when they do, those few dozen hours, like the salvaged remains of a burned house – the charred clock, the signed photograph, the scorched furniture – must be resurrected from the ruins. Little events, ordinary things, smashed and reconstituted, imbued with new meaning, suddenly they become the bleached bones of a story.

As we see above women writers of the nineties probe into human relationships since present problem is closely concerned with mind and heart and the crusade is against age-old established systems. In order to make the process of change smooth and really meaningful, women writers have taken upon themselves this great task.

Thus during the last three decades that the women have been writing works of

fiction, "they have constructed a body of material that manifests a considerable degree of continuity, a uniformity of concern, and wide range in both subject and method." ⁴¹

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