

Postcolonial Perspectives in the Booker Winning Indian Novels

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ABSTRACT

The emphasis of the present article has been to explore the four Booker prize Indian English novels through a postcolonial perspective. The work was undertaken to understand the evolution of Indian literature in general and Indian English fiction in particular over the years. The exploration of the four major works by celebrated novelists has enlightened me on many aspects of India, Indian people and Indian literature. The study has provided me a fascinating and rewarding experience. The novels that are taken up for the study are: Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Arundhati Roy *The God of Small Things*, Kiran Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss* and Arvind Adiga, *The White Tiger* etc. The critical study of these four novels in connection with each other yields more powerful insight into the understanding of the postcolonial scenario of Indian society. Hence, this study seeks to examine the postcolonial perspective dripped through the four select novels. The thesis contains a detailed study of Indian English fiction as a genre, postcolonial theory, earlier as well as current history of the Booker prize, the depiction of life and literary career of the select novelists through their biographies and exploration of postcolonial aspects in the select novels. The four novels under study represent a mirror of Indian Society. The novelists deal with various themes. They depict Indian society and dilemmas of developing national identity after colonial rule. The issues such as caste and class, multiculturalism, feminism, violence, cultural dislocation and crisis of identity are dominant in their writing. The novelists explore postcolonial chaos and despair, misuse of power and exploitation, centre and marginality, voices of subaltern, history, immigration, oppression and political unrest through their writing in an effective manner. The appealing subjects of these novelists are margin between cultures, tradition and modernity, religion and politics, globalization, hybridity and otherness, orientalism, diaspora, etc.

KEYWORDS: *post-colonial, perspectives, novels, booker, society, themes, prize, Indian, English, literature*

INTRODUCTION

The Indian novel has been a vibrant and energetic expressive space in the 21st century. While the grand postcolonial gestures characteristic of the late-20th-century Indian novel have been in evidence in new novels by established authors such as Vikram Chandra, Amitav Ghosh, and Salman Rushdie, a slate of new authors has emerged in this period as well, charting a range of new novelistic modes. Some of these authors are Kiran Desai, Aravind Adiga, Githa Hariharan, Samina Ali, Karan Mahajan, and Amitava Kumar. In general, there has been a move away from

ambitious literary fiction in the form of the "huge, baggy monster" that led to the publication of several monumental post-colonial novels in the 1980s and 1990s; increasingly the most dynamic and influential Indian writing uses new novelistic forms and literary styles tied to the changing landscape of India's current contemporary social and political problems. The newer generation of authors has also eschewed the aspiration to represent the entirety of life in modern India, and instead aimed to explore much more limited regional and cultural narrative

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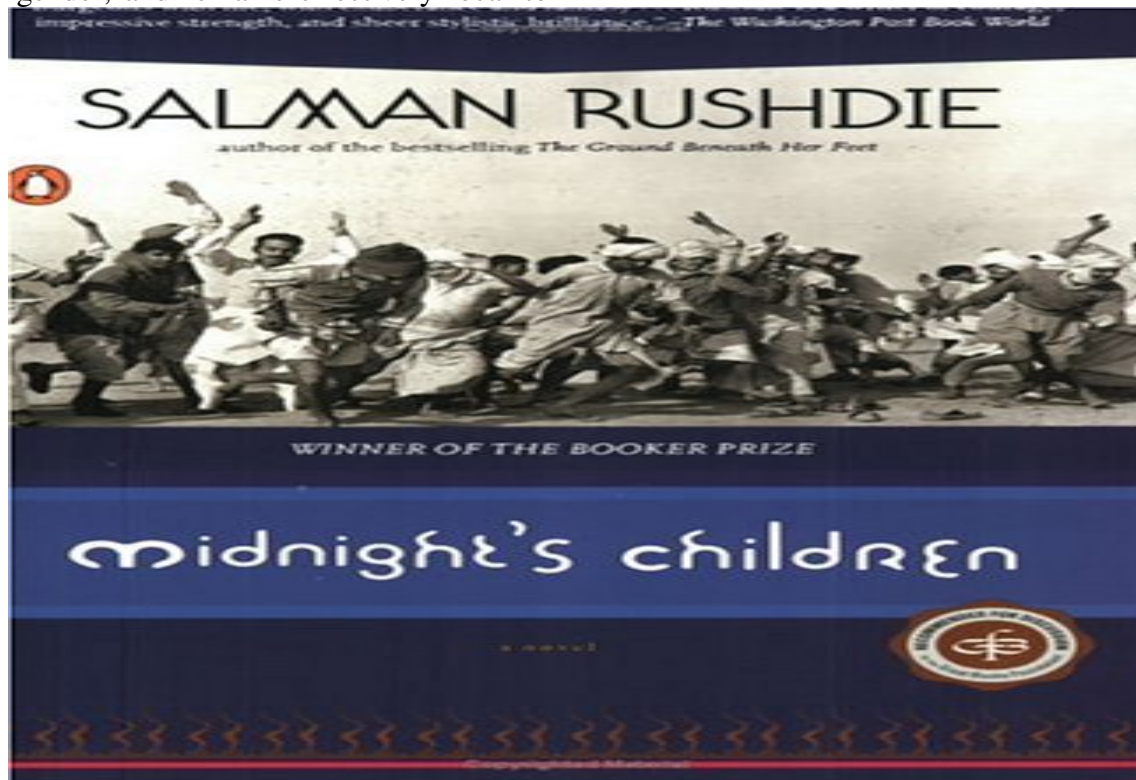
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frameworks. If a novel like Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) took its protagonist all over the Indian subcontinent and indexed a large number of important historical controversies in the interest of broad representation, Padma Viswanathan's *The Toss of a Lemon* (2008) limits itself to a focus on a single Tamil Brahmin family's orientation to issues of caste and gender, and remains effectively local to

Tamil Nadu. There is no central agenda or defining idiom of this emerging literary culture, but three major groupings can be identified that encapsulate the major themes and preoccupations of 21st-century Indian fiction: "New Urban Realism," "Gender and Secular History," and "Globalizing India, Rein scribing the Past." [1,2]

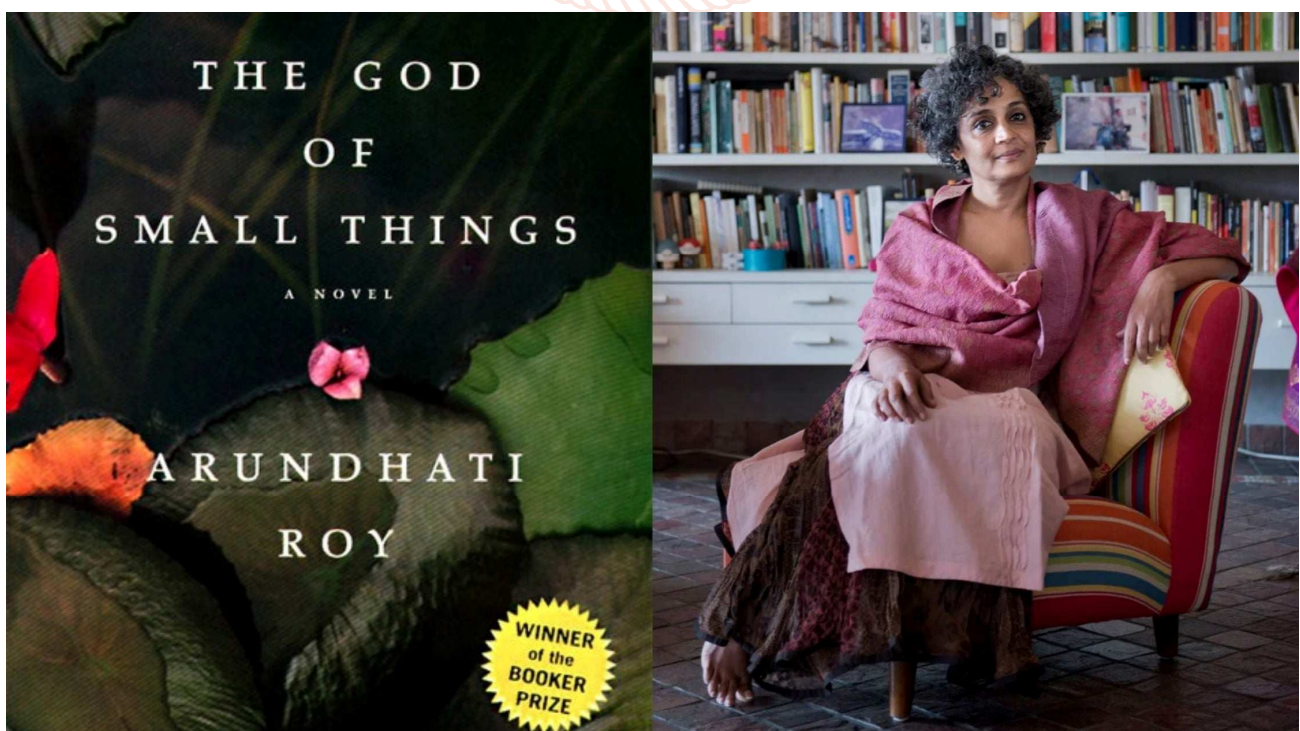


The Indian novel has been a vibrant and energetic expressive space in the 21st century. While the grand "postcolonial" gestures characteristic of some of the most influential 20th-century Indian novels have been in evidence in new novels by established authors like Vikram Chandra, Amitav Ghosh, and Salman Rushdie, a slate of new authors has emerged in this period as well, charting out a range of new novelistic modes. In general, there has been a move away from ambitious literary fiction in the form of the "huge, baggy monster" that led to the publication of several monumental postcolonial novels in the 1980s and 1990s (Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* [1981], Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* [1993], and Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* [1995] being three cases in point). Such novels are still being published—two noteworthy examples might be Chandra's *Sacred Games* (2006), and Ghosh's *Ibis Trilogy* (2008–2015)—but increasingly the most dynamic and influential Indian writing is exploring new novelistic forms and literary styles. Amit Chaudhuri once described the "large, postmodernist Indian English novel" as pursuing a "mimesis of form, where the largeness of the book allegorizes the largeness of the country it represents." Another version of this idea might be Fredric Jameson's much debated "national allegory" concept. Admittedly, not all Indian novelists writing in English even in the 1980s and 1990s aspired toward the baggy nationalist allegory; Chaudhuri himself is a case in point. Still, in the most exciting new Indian fiction published since 2000, [3, 4] the newer generation of authors has eschewed the aspiration to present the entirety of life in modern India, and instead aimed to explore much more limited regional and cultural narrative frameworks. There is no central agenda or defining idiom of this emerging literary culture—and that is in some ways the point—though three major groupings take up some of the major themes of Indian literature of the early 21st century: "New Urban Realism," "Gender and Religion," and "Globalizing India, Rein scribing the Past." To be clear, these are loose groupings introduced that help describe some important new trends in Indian fiction. In actuality, most texts have elements of more than one of these thematic areas, with some (for instance, Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*) straddling all three. The focus here will largely be on novels written in English, for reasons that will be explored in greater detail in the note on language below. [5, 6] Also, it seems important to state that the emphasis here is on Indian novels, rather than Indian diaspora fiction. Thus, diaspora-oriented fiction by writers such as Jhumpa Lahiri or Chitra Divakaruni is not our concern in the present essay; the primary interest is in contemporary novels that are

set in India, and that can be seen as contributing to the conversation about Indian literature occurring within India in some way. That said, it seems salient to note that here no analytical distinction is made between writers who are based primarily in India and those who are based abroad. Thus, because they are set entirely in India, books like Padma Viswanathan's *The Toss of a Lemon* (2008) or Chandra's *Sacred Games* should be considered "Indian" novels even if their authors live in the United States. First, a brief section on language (which seems essential in the highly linguistically complicated universe of Indian literature), and the growth of domestic Indian markets for fiction, which has led to the realignment of the Indian publishing industry. [7, 8]

Discussion

Literary prizes have existed in one form or another for many centuries. In former times, literary prizes were frequently bestowed by rulers, monarchs and other powerful individual patrons who cannily deployed them for the double purpose of proving their munificence while reconfirming the loyalty of their subjects. Such reciprocal ties of patronage, while by no means unknown today, have become increasingly uncommon. Literary prizes as we know them now are best seen as a phenomenon of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries: as reflections of shifting patterns of patronage, with an increasing emphasis on public sponsorship, and, above all, as signs of the dominant role played by international industry as a legitimising agent for literature and the other arts. In a global cultural economy controlled by huge multinational companies, the corporate sponsorship of the arts has become an indisputable fact. [9, 10] The corporate prize, like the endowed Chair, is a 'gift' that brings publicity to the company while functioning as a symbolic marker of its authorising power. As state subsidies of the arts have dwindled, alarmingly in many countries, corporate sponsors have emerged to dominate the literary/artistic scene. Corporate sponsorship has largely overtaken the earlier, predominantly hierarchical systems of private and public patronage through which ideas of literature and literary value were upheld. The evaluative criteria for corporate sponsorship vary widely; it would clearly be misguided to see it as a uniform 'regime'. A structural analysis of types of sponsorship patterns—types of award, funding requirements, social and ideological factors, and so on—risks underestimating the historical trajectory that each particular sponsoring agency takes. This is no less the case with agencies operating across geopolitical boundaries: for example, international literary awards bestowed by globally active companies. Such awards, it could be argued, have emerged, many of them in the later twentieth century, as a response to the globalisation of—especially English-language—literature. This view overlooks, however, the continuing asymmetries of power that are attendant on the production and consumption of world literature in English. Hence Bernth Lindfors' provocative suggestion that the most famous of all international literary awards, the Nobel, established in 1901, has had a distinctly Eurocentric bias since its inception. ¹ The same might be said for more recent, and more obviously corporate, awards like the Booker. As Hugh Eakin has suggested, the Booker, despite its 'multicultural consciousness', has arguably done less to further the development of 'non-Western' and/or postcolonial literatures than it has to 'encourage the commerce of an "exotic" commodity catered to the Western literary market'. In this chapter, I shall examine Eakin's proposition further by inquiring into the history of, and histories behind, the Booker Prize. [11, 12]



Wuk, nuttin bu wuk Maan

noon an night nuttin bu wuk Booker own me

patacake Booker own me pickni.

Pain, nuttin bu pain Waan million tous'ne acre cane (David Dabydeen, 'Song of the Creole Gang Women') In David Dabydeen's poem 'Song of the Creole Gang Women' (1994), Booker features as a cruel plantation-owner, ruthlessly preying upon his disempowered female workforce. A footnote to the poem reads, simply enough: 'Booker: British sugar company that owned Guyana'. Booker, it would appear, has a history in contradiction with its current reputation as a postcolonial literary patron. Not surprisingly, Booker plc, formerly the Booker McConnell company—a leading multinational agribusiness conglomerate employing over 20, 000 people and generating annual revenue in excess of \$5 billion -has been eager to downplay its nineteenth-century colonial past. But as Hugh Eakin notes with requisite irony, the Booker judges' 'recognition of postcolonial authors carries the dubious tincture of the company's history'. The company, initially formed in 1834 to provide distributional services on the sugar-estates of Demerara (now Guyana), achieved rapid prosperity under a harsh colonial regime. At the onset of independence the company was relocated to London, which remains its headquarters today. It was in London in the early 1960s that it established its book division, primarily designed to buy up copyrights of famous popular-fiction writers (Agatha Christie, Ian Fleming, etc.). This proved a lucrative enterprise, prompting the company a few years later to found the Booker Prize for literature in English. Sponsored by Booker plc but administered since 1971 by the charitable concern the Book Trust (formerly the National Book League), the Prize, first awarded to P. H. Newby (Something to Answer For) in 1969, soon grew into one of Britain's most recognisable cultural institutions. The history of the Prize itself is no less conflicted than its donor's past. [13, 14] As Tom Maschler has suggested, the Prize took its inspiration from the then better-known French Prix Goncourt—a hierarchy since arguably reversed, with Le Figaro describing the Goncourt as the 'French Booker'. Originally established as a £5, 000 award to the best fulllength English-language novel of the year, the Prize grew both monetarily and, exponentially, in prestige. Widely regarded today as one of the world's top literary prizes, the Booker has acquired and cultivated a mythology of its own. Much of this has to do, of course, with careful media management. Newspaper coverage was solicited, and granted, from the beginning; but probably the crucial step was taken in 1981, when the Prize's final award-

ceremony was first televised on BBC. Currently broadcast on Britain's culturally oriented Channel Four, the ceremony and the lavish gala dinner that accompanies it have become the subject of endless anecdotes; television, as Hermione Lee wearily suggests, has 'ensured that Booker [will] forever be identified by the word "razzmattaz", playing up to its vulgar Miss World aspect and fixing in the British eye a peculiar view of writers as dinner-jacketed gormandisers'. Sir Michael Caine, former Chairman of Booker plc as well as of the Prize Management Committee, is equally wry in noting the costs involved in attracting such high-level publicity. [15, 16]

Results

Since independence, Indian English writings, especially, novels have become a major part of the world literature canon. They are widely read across the globe and have garnered international accolades for the vivid presentation of the multilayered, multicultural and multilingual Indian society. Mulk Raj Anand says about the novels that "the novel at its most interesting is a process of inhale-exhale, a life-giving inspiration, a prose poem which releases the body and soul, even a new visionary glimpse of the miracle of life itself." He felt that novel was the most appropriate tool to depict the society and hence was the soul of literature. On the other hand, according to D. H Lawrence, novels are perfect medium as they reveal the changing rainbow of living relationship. Indian novels are unique blend of the glorious the pre-colonialism India, mindset of people during British rule, its long period of freedom struggle and a quest for identity. Indian English novelists such as Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Salman Rushdie, Jhumpa Lahiri, Arundhati Roy etc have made irreplaceable place for themselves among the elite international writers. They have also won many prestigious literary awards both nationally and internationally. These writers have successfully nativised the foreign language and beautified it with Indian motifs and colours. Their works portray the various phases of the rapidly changing Indian society from the pre independence era to the modern times. While doing so, they have faced many challenges in conveying the intricate depths and complex realities of the changing dynamics of the Indian society. When we talk about Indian English writing, we do not merely implicate the works of prose and poetry written in English in India, what we mean to imply is the entire culture of India and its deep rooted tradition. Indian culture is quite rich and diverse with people belonging to different states, following varied customs, rituals and most importantly India has people speaking almost 22 different languages and innumerable dialects. The

introduction of English language in India has been a blessing in disguise for its people. Though it was introduced in India with the sole purpose to promote educational reform and produce a group of working class men who, in Lord Macaulay's words, would be Indians in blood and colour but English in taste. Although in a long run, the English language proved to be an asset and provided a common platform for a plethora of Indian writers from all over India to voice their thoughts, feelings, ideas and beliefs to the entire world. Since then there is no looking back. India has immensely contributed towards the world literature and provides an insightful analysis of the subaltern voice. [14] The first ever book written in Indian soil was a travel narrative by Sake Dean Mahomet, titled *Travels of Dean Mahomet* in 1793. It was in epistolary form in which he detailed about military conflicts, food, wildlife and Indian culture. The credit of producing the very first full length English novel in India goes to Bankim Chandra Chatterjee for *Rajmohan's Wife* in 1864. The novel deals with domestic and social themes and speaks widely about colonial modernity. This novel opened the door for the emergence of many other Indian novelists to come in front foot and write about the prevalent social conditions such as dowry system, child marriage, sati-pratha, casteism and widespread illiteracy and superstitions. Raja Ram Mohan Roy had been a pioneer for such writings. He tried to make people of India culturally and socially aware and boycott such inhuman practices. India attained independence after a long struggle for freedom and the countrymen had to pay a heavy cost of partition. This was a period of introspection and working together to build a country which could be self-dependent. The novelists of this period played a pivotal role in arousing the national conscience and raising the social issues which were needed to be addressed. The post-colonial Indian English novel writing was hugely dominated by the trio of Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R. K Narayan. They completely changed the outlook of Indian novels in world scenario. Each of them contributed differently though together they presented a single Indian voice. Critic William Walsh states 'It is these three writers, who defined the area in which the Indian novel was to operate. They established its assumptions; they sketched its main themes, freed the first models of its characters and elaborated its particular logic. Each of them used an easy, natural idiom which was unaffected by the opacity of a British inheritance. Their language has been freed of the foggy taste of Britain and transferred to a wholly new setting of brutal heat and brilliant light.' These three novelists were the flag-bearers of Indian English novels and mirrored the postcolonial Indian society

through their powerful writings. Their works reflected the after affects of the traumas of colonisation faced by the newly independent India, whose people in actual sense were miles away from understanding and truly enjoying the real essence of independence. The protagonists try to explore their own identity and place in the world full of unjust social norms and systems. The great critic K. R Srinivasan Iyengar writes about them in his *Indian Writings in English* that, "Between them they comprise as it were the North and the South, extension and concentration, vigour and urbanity, vitality and artistic reticence." It's a rare coincidence that all these three writers started their literary career at the same time; i. e., the 1930s. Raja Rao, one of the greatest writers of post-colonial India, studied in America and France and was highly influenced by the Vedantic philosophy. He wrote many short stories and four major novels, namely, *Kanthapura* (1938), *The Cow of the Barricades* (1947), *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) and *The Cat and the Shakespeare* (1965). *The Serpent and the Rope* is a spiritual semi-autobiographical novel for which he was awarded the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award in 1964. It is a philosophical and metaphysical novel dealing with the issue of a failed marriage and clash of western and eastern cultures and their values. Raja Rao was a staunch follower of the dictums and principles of Mahatma Gandhi and never failed to glorify Gandhian of non-violent struggle and success in the Indian freedom movement. P. C Bhattacharya writes about the philosophical outlook of Raja Rao that "Raja Rao felt a strong affinity towards Gandhi. The basic principles of Gandhi were derived from the thoughts of the ancient Indian thinkers, especially as contained in Gita and Ramayana. Even his fasts which some thought to be a kind of political blackmail, were of a piece with the Brahminic spirit...." And Raja Rao, being a Brahmin himself, immediately related to them. One of his highly acclaimed novels, *Kanthapura* focuses on themes of nationalism, erosion of rigidly followed caste system, labour exploitation and Gandhian ideology of building a unified India. K. R Rao, in his book *The Fiction of Raja Rao*, writes that *Kanthapura* doesn't only project the Indian spirit but is a living experience moving in time and space. The novel acts in three levels, political, social and religious and signify the concept of unified India. He is also the recipient of India's second and third greatest civilian awards, Padma Vibhusan (2007) and Padma Bhusan (1969). Another prominent novelist, Mulk Raj Anand has written several essays, eight short stories and more than a dozen novels. He is best known for his realistic novels dealing with sympathetic portrayal of the

downtrodden and poor in India. He very clearly shows the class conflicts and strongly followed caste system and heavily condemned them. [15]

Conclusions

The Indian English Novel had pass through several stages before reaching present position. The postindependence writing throw light on the contemporary problems such as poverty, corruption, caste related issues, lack of exposure for women, economic instability and so on. Indian women novelists constitute a new voyage in novel writing which provide keen insight towards the female psyche. Women novelist actively engaged in exploring the female consciousness and gradual emersion towards an awakening conscience and that leads to enrichment of their inner self in a patriarchal society. It is essential for that period because the large part of the feminine experience is out of the male psyche. There for post-colonial women writers were authentically portrayed conflicts and traumas of women experience and their engrossing study reveal the progression of women from feminine to female. The writers such as Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao attempted to explore the cotemporary Indian society from their specific views without distorting the reality. They were emerged on the literary scene in 1930. It was the real beginning of Indian Novel in English. Thus, the major contribution to the Indian Novel in English in the Pre-Independence era is of men and not of women. The Indian Novelist before Independence were mainly interested in social, political and historical concerns. But later in 1950s a new kind of novel dealing with the contemporary issues appeared on the Indian literary scene. The Psychological Novel depicting the human personality and inner realities of life replaced the realistic Novel. The Novels written in the post-Independence period successfully render the Indian reality. A number of novelist explored the psychological and sociological conflicts in the social and the individual life. There is a kind of shift from Socio-political concerns to the Inner life of human being. In other words, the center of their novel is shifted from the society to an Individual. Another Important development, in this period is "resurgence of women's writing". Jasbir jain's words can be matched with Mukesh Ranjan verma's comment that "perhaps the most striking feature of the contemporary Indian English fiction has been emergence of feminist literature". He also notes that the women writers are giving voice to the sufferings, aspirations and asseverations of women in a traditionally male dominated world". Thus, the rise of women writers creates a significant space in the terrain of post-colonial Indian English writing. In the

world women writers had been confronted many problems and challenges before reaching the present state traditionally; the work of women writers has been undervalued due to patriarchal assumptions about the superior worth of male experience. There is general misconception that men are meant to dominate and rule women to subordinate and to be ruled and this hierarchy is biologically determined, natural and unchanging. Patriarchy curtails the freedom of women in all manners and deprives them all their resources. Their freedom of speech and even the very existence itself is prevented by the patriarchal society. As per the gender roles that are socially determined men are given more freedom. Women are not given access and authority to make decisions within and outside the family. Gender injustice is escalated all over the world. The male centered theories were not ready to view them as a matter of difference. They hold that women are inferior, less intelligent and less creative. Male centered models are inadequate for the analysis of female experience. The experience and behavior of women cannot be accommodated by the patriarchy and it considered as deviant or uncultured. In such a model of culture two groups come in existence. [14, 15] The dominant (men) and the muted (women). It found separate roles for men and women, women were considered inferior and no overlap of roles was allowed. Male critics do not consider what the women thinkers are saying. On the other hand, they even boast of their ignorance of feminist criticism. At the same time feminist writers are anxious for the approval from their "white fathers" Language related debates is one of the most exciting areas of feminist of writing. In Elaine showalter's view plenty of words are there in any language to express very strong emotions but women are not allowed to use them. They are beyond their reach. On the other hand, they are often forced in silence, euphemism or circumlocution. Virginia Woolf clearly writes. "--- Men shocked if a woman says what she feels". Women haven't got deserving space and see it as a result of conspiracies of male historians. international women's movement, the assumptions of literary study have been profoundly altered. In Indian sexism is still a threat to women, who are exposed to murder, rape, torture and variety of other crimes. But our sensitive women writers do not lose their sight towards the plight of sisterhood in our society. With the rise of feminism in India, in the seventies, the feminist literary critics came to believe that women had to create literature of their own, in which the feminine sensibility could consider and confront the peculiarly feminine issues and experience. It was essential to do so, because a large part of the feminine experience is

out of the reach of the male psyche and therefore an authentic and sensitive portrayal of the conflicts and traumas could be achieved only by women writers. Thus, later part of seventies saw a spurt in feminist writing which concentrated in the vivid range of the exploited female. Such works presented women as oppressed, exploited, tortured, cheated, angry, Alienated and rebellious. Thus, protest taking in different forms against the “male domination”. In India, study of female psyche is an effort to liberate women from their marginalized condition. It is also an attempt to reinterpret their status in the world. Feminist consciousness has certainly given a fresh ardor and excitement to literary studies. [16]

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