CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Indian literature in English has passed the century mark with significant contributions from writers of three generations. Of all the genres the novel has turned out to be the hot favorite throughout a major chunk of the hundred years since English works by Indian writers have garnered national and international attention. It is time now to take stock of the situation Tagore’s genius and phenomenal contributions both in literature and music (Rabindro Sangeet) have become stuff for folklore and undoubtedly he is one who should rank with classics like Tolstoy and Dickens. Then there is the remarkable work of the maker of Malgudi and the wizard who bestowed the bowl of the common man with the magical boon of laughter. Among the first generation writers there are classics like Prem Chand, and Sarat Chandra whose works present many sterling woman characters who add to the true dignity of Indian womanhood. The Bengali literature is replete with equally profound male characters like Srikanto and Gora. The first generation writers thus made a great and richly deserved impact on the world literary scene. A corollary of the popularity of the novels as well as the equally impressive movie adaptations of dozens of these works makes for the tremendous growth of this genre. While the short story or the play is preferred for movie adaptations in the west, the novel is largely preferred by Indian cinema. Hence, the western films are plot and action-driven, and the Indian movies depend more on character and mood. This close collaboration between these two genres proves to be most productive in the east as well as the west. Around 6 of Prem Chand’s works and 10 of Sarat Chandra’s novels have been made into unforgettable
classics on the celluloid. Thus the success and reputation of a novelist does not necessarily end in print but takes him to greater heights in career. The novel undoubtedly became the most popular genre and as a result more and more literary enthusiasts turned to it for literary success. It is thus essential to briefly recapitulate the major trends and achievements of this period to assess the specific contributions of the two writers in question.

Literature is the most concrete record of the human spirit and reveals certain truths about social systems and habits. One of such major concerns of Indian English fiction over the last three decades is the evolution of feminism psyche and its earnest attempts to come to terms with the changing realities of the new world as opposed to the old. While some of them have unshaken faith in the old system there are a few who invite the vibrant changes in the society.

Tagore is the first modern Indian writer who brought women out of kitchen and the bed room into the parlor - a social arena where they play a significant role, arguing and exchanging ideas with their male counter parts. Women have strong personalities and are no more mere objects of desire. Tagore’s famous heroines like Nandini in *Red Oleander* and Anandamayee in *Gora* show great fervor in establishing women’s rights. These tendencies have already appeared in the works of Bengali writers like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee.

Next, the emergence of the great trinity with their multiple social concerns gave a new direction to Indian fiction. Of them R.K. Narayan’s women may be grouped as conventional and unconventional. While a majority of them may be classified as common and ordinary middle class women - a few like Rosie *The Guide* and Daisy *The Painter of Signs* are the ones who raise a voice of protest against male dominance and gender bias. Raja Rao’s heroines on the other hand, come from the
upper middle class society who, by and large follow the traditions. Mulk Raj Anand presents the traditional Indian women of the lower strata of society – who are often exploited by Indian social and economic conditions – like poverty and caste. In his fiction women struggle through social crises and uphold the image of those who are victims of social circumstances. They put up with a lot of social and gender-based exploitation and emerge as individuals with immense patience deserving sympathy. (Azam, 34-3)

The Indian English fiction thus presented characters drawn from different milieu – and the recurrent themes are exploitation, gender bias and the resultant frustration and alienation. Majority of the works can be classified under this head. However a few writers have moved away from this and produced works that display a new trend and direction – notable among them being Bharati Mukharjee, Jhumpa Lahiri and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. (Kumar 1-17)

In addition to the earlier mentioned novelists and their works, it would be apt to recall the attempts of the other novelists including the writers of Indian Diaspora who had and are still using novel as a platform to address the problems related to women and their identity. Kiran Desai the daughter of Anita Desai is an Indian author who is a citizen of India and a permanent resident of the United States. Her first novel *Hullabaloo In the Guava Orchard Group* deals with the themes of hunger and satisfaction where hunger is common and satisfaction is hard to come. Her second novel *The Inheritance of Loss* deals with the themes of migration and living between two worlds i.e., between past and present. (Sampath Nelson 85)

Anjana Appachana is a novelist of Indian origin who lives in the United States. Her fiction is often discussed in the context of late 20\textsuperscript{th} century literature. Her focus is on the domestic rather than the political landscape of modern Indian life.
Listening and giving voice to women’s stories has been identified as her predominant literary project. Appachana uses women’s sexuality and relationships within families and within friends as her major subjects. Her novel *Listening Now* gives voice to the ordinary by showing all the pains and passions, happiness and sorrow, guilt and anger which is normally assumed to belong only to the extraordinary. (Nubile 44)

Bharti Krichner is the prolific author of eight books, four novels and four cook books. Her first novel *Shiva Dancing* unfolds a vivid canvas of intersecting cultures and passions that are spiced with the richness and grace of Indian tradition. Her second novel *Sharmila’s Book* deals with an American woman who travels to India for an arranged marriage. Her third novel *Darjeeling* is a story of two sisters long separated by their love for an idealistic young revolutionary man. This is a complex novel about family, exile and sisterly relationship. Her fourth novel *Pastries: a Novel of Desserts and Discoveries* is about an American woman who is the owner of the pastries café. (Sampath Nelson 159)

The quote that best depicts Feminism in Indian context in the genre of novels would be the observation made by Simon De Beauvoir who rightly says:

> women today are in a fair way to dethrone the myth of feminity. They are beginning to affirm their independence in correct ways but they do not succeed in living completely the life of a human being. (Parshley 445)

Virginia Woolf calls Shakespeare a masculine mind and regrets the fact that Lady Winchilsea who could be equally great a poetic talent was not allowed to grow because of gender bias of the Elizabethan period. Woolf traces out the history of English literature and says that women are deprived of education, economic independence and domestic space. Women must have money and room to write.
Thus Feminism and its crusade against a male dominated society are of special importance in the Indian context. Feminism in India is not a single theoretical orientation; it has changed over time in relation to historical and cultural realities.

The Indian woman has for years been a silent sufferer. She has played different roles – as a wife, sister and daughter. But she has never been able to claim her own individuality. The words that we associate for ideal women in Indian context are self-denial, sacrifice, patience, devotion and silent suffering. Woman was and is expected to subordinate every wish and desire to someone – a parent, a husband, or a child.

Feminism as an ideology and as a movement has also touched Indian English writing. Better education and employment opportunities have created a new awareness among Indian women. In the words of Veena Noble Das:

The Indian women caught in the flux of tradition and modernity bearing the burden of the past and the aspirations of the future in the crux of feminism in India. A search for identity and a quest for the definition of the self have become prime features of women in literature under the sway of Feminism. (Das 82)

It is but common knowledge that socialisation plays an important role in the construction of gender and bares the link between social values and the paradigms of male domination. Gender is a social and cultural construct. Socialisation is a very powerful instrument and it has enormous influence in conditioning not only girls but also a boy’s psyche since its influence begins early in childhood. In literature, a girl has been suppressed and concealed and is forced to restrict her real self. The overall picture one gathers from literature is subordination, exploitation, violence and
oppression where women are trapped in patriarchal cultural values and paradigms.

The growth of a girl in Indian society is seen mainly in relation to her attitude towards her family and her duty towards it. The successful formation of the self-identity depends upon the delicate balance that the girl maintains between submission and revolt. The burden of the female child is more irksome than that of the male child because of the aspects of her body, the function of her femaleness that intrude upon the growth of her personality. Down the ages, the place of women in the tradition bound, male dominated society has been very unenviable. Despite epoch-making changes, the position of women economically, socially and culturally has not shown much change.

Shashi Deshpande shows great sensitivity and awareness of the ways and means through which a young girl is prepared for her future status in society. Cultural, social and psychological factors such as the family structures, Women’s position in it, female sexuality and the trauma of monthly cycle are the factors that influence women. Her major novels *The Dark Holds No Terror, Roots and Shadows* and *The Long Silence* trace the quest for self-definition of women, who are educated and modern but who cannot shake off their background and manner in which they have been brought up.

Deshpande’s fiction is an example of the ways in which a girl child’s particular position, social reality and psychological growth determine her personality. It is said that it would be psychologically unrealistic to imagine that awareness within the women emerges suddenly, that she becomes a person with the onset of adolescence. The role of early life experience, the role of education, closeness to parents, siblings and relations are some very crucial elements that go a long way in creation of a woman’s personality. (Naikar 204)
Anita Desai like Joyce and Woolf is widely recognized as the pioneer of the psychological novel in modern Indian English literature. The most conspicuous feature of her art is the portrayal of characters. She penetrates psychologically deep into the inner working of women and externalises their passive reactions. In this respect she approximates Virginia Woolf, James Joyce and Henry James. In the novel *Cry, the Peacock* Anita explores the turbulent emotional world of the neurotic protagonist Maya who is constantly haunted by a presentiment of her husband’s death on account of her belief in astrological prediction. In her other novels *Voice in the City, Where Shall We Go This Summer*, Anita follows the track of the Bronte Sisters, who choose to study the heart and mind of women from women’s point-of-view.

Love, lust, war, politics, economic, social tensions, aspirations, disappointment, prejudices, riches and rags, life’s intricate and inner feelings, sensualities, spiritualities have all been delineated clearly in the novels of women novelists who contributed substantially to the Indian writings in English literature. An analysis of the novels by Indian women novelists reveals that these novelists have written with immense concern and understanding for their female characters.

In the present study the select novels allude to gender ideology that influences cultural identity, which in turn depends on nationality, culture, religion, region, caste and social class. This is more so in the Indian situation. These are the factors that are considered relevant in these novels.

However, it is also evident that this cultural identity keeps shifting its definition and dimensions from generation to generation and period to period. It is also interesting to note that over the period of time the changing dynamics of economic conditions do impact and influence the cultural identity, self or individual identity across the nations, religions, caste and social classes. This is evident and
relevant in the Indian context from the Vedic times. The status and role of woman has been changing to suit the requirement and priorities of time.

It is a known fact that the status of women during the early Vedic period was very high. A woman was considered equal and regarded higher than her male counterpart because of her child bearing ability. The woman is the one who provided the identity to a man or family and helped in elevating the status of her counterpart in the society. Education and religious parity was not denied until much later. Women enjoyed the freedom to choose their career and life partner in the name of Swayamvara. Even widow re-marriages were quiet common.

This was the norm of the Vedic ages. It was further ensured by linking the prosperity of an individual or an individual through the prosperity, honour and happiness enjoyed by the women in the family.

Manu Smriti III preaches:

Women must be honoured and adorned by their fathers, brothers, husbands and brother-in-laws, who desire their own welfare. Where women are honoured, there the Gods are pleased; but where they are not honoured, no sacred rite yields rewards. Where the female relations live in grief, the family soon wholly perishes; but the family where they are not unhappy even prospers. The houses, in which female relations, not being duly honoured, pronounce a curse, perish completely, as if destroyed by magic. Hence men who seek their welfare, should always honour women, bestowing her with gifts of ornaments, cloths and food.
Similar to this are the preaching of Bhishma in the epic Mahabharata, where he says:

O ruler of the earth (Yuddisthira) the lineage in which daughters and daughter-in-laws are saddened by ill treatment, that lineage is destroyed. When these women curse in grief, their households that caused such unbearable grief lose their charm, prosperity and happiness. (Mahabharata, Anushastan parva.12.14).

The statements clearly show how the status of women in India slowly and subtly changed from being a individual who is equal in status to that of someone to be cherished and worshipped. This shift reflects the changing dynamics of the society, through gender power play.

From being an equal, woman is elevated to the divine to be worshipped on the pedestal thereby restricting her to the inner space of the home and simultaneously truncating her independence in society and career and social equality. She is then ascribed the identity of the nurturer and caretaker. This slowly shifted her position from the pedestal in the pooja room to the kitchen thus making her completely silent. This along with the socio-economic and political considerations post invasions provided an opportunity for the patriarchal society to push their counter parts to the dark interiors of the home never to be heard and never to be seen. This status as identity was further consolidated with child marriage and sati, the solution to counter abuse of women by the invaders or colonizers, compelling women to accept the weak ‘abala’ role. The only opportunity to express their courage and strength was in fulfilling and emulating the roles of mythical characters Sati, Savitri etc., whose sole purpose of life was to ensure the health and prosperity of their husband’s life. Thus
was born the pativratha who was the ideal woman who was “Karyeshu Dasi, Karnashu Manthri, Bhojyushu Mata, and Sayaneshu Rambha”. These lines propounded by Manu nailed her role and identity to the bearer of culture and tradition. The writing of the early times reflects the same. No doubt the male authors did explore the problems and exploitation of women in the then contemporary India (the late 18th century and the early 19th century). Yet it was only after women writers entered that the narrative became women centric. Susan Geber and Sandra Gilbert in their book *The Mad Woman in the Attic* says:

A woman writer is engaged at another level with assaulting and revising, deconstructing and reconstructing those images of women inherited from male literature, especially the paradigmatic polarities of angels and monsters (Gilbert and Gubar 6).

The conundrum of the ever evading identity of woman, her space, her role is never ending issue. The role of the ‘Angel of the house’ is questioned by the educated and liberated women. Humans are space bound species. The earmarked space or territory is essential in establishing and creating the identity of humans as individuals and also as part of the family.

The space shared by the family or group or unit or society in common and the private and the public life is where the individual can be true to one self. It is this space or territory that provides the characteristics of an individual or society.

It is generally known fact that these territories are spaces that are claimed or occupied or defended by individuals or the group or society or family. Such spaces or territories, like one’s home, bedroom, workplace, neighbourhood each and every one of them help in forming one’s identity.
The territorial conflicts arise when the boundaries of these spaces are imposed or earmarked by vested interests of society or polity. Problems related to one’s allegiance to a group are attempts made by a group to free from these spaces allocated by the patriarchal society over women, this is more so in India. These spaces or territories provide the identity that is imposed upon women by the society and this in turn leads to the fear to rebel or contest the invisible walls built around them, constraining and fixing their roles. Any attempt to find or move on to another territory is what is popularly known as the quest for identity.

Feminists across the world have been demanding for recognition of woman as an individual with a right to choose her space or territory thereby her identity. The sheltered private space or the inner sanctum of the house allotted to women is viewed by most modern feminists as confinement imposed as a result of gender-specific roles. These forced constrictions lead to fear. Dealing with this fear and emerging from it as victor or valiant is the central theme of the Indian English women novelists.

Shashi Deshpande in her essay, ‘Of Kitchens and Goddesses’ shares her experiences of sudden realization of the female space and says:

Perhaps it was at the moment that I stepped over the threshold into the kitchen. For, as if the focus has shifted and my vision suddenly changed. And instead of safe warm haven of my childhood, I saw another kitchen, where women were claimed to endless, tedious labour crouching for hours before a smoking fire (Deshpande 138).

Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande’s works focus on the female space or what is known as the identity of women. Anita Desai’s novels depict the unusual blend of the Indian and Western philosophy. Desai’s works focus on the individual psyche
when encountered with the existing socio-cultural environment. Her protagonists, especially those chosen for the present study, Maya, Nanda, Bimla and Tara, are portrayed as sensitive, weak, silent sufferers exploited by the patriarchal society leaving them marked both physically and mentally. These highly sensitive women strongly desire freedom to explore wide spaces. They refuse and reject the inner spaces of homes and ensuring roles based on gender like subservient wife, nurturing and self – sacrificing mother. However Shashi Deshpande’s women do not question these imposed spaces. In fact because of the various circumstances and experiences, her protagonists realize that even these domestic realms fail in providing a stable identity.

The constant binary raised by these to writers depicts the conflict that evolves due to the confrontation of tradition versus modernity, especially in the post-independent India. Interestingly, even after crossing the half a century mark since independence, the quest for identity remains status quo. Both writers question the concept of womanhood, wifehood and motherhood using different narrative strategies and shift in perspectives

Maya in Cry the Peacock, Nanda Kaul in Fire on the Mountain, Bimla and Tara in Clear Light of Day question the role of women being limited to domestic realm. Maya wants to be understood and is in need of emotional support to her confused multi-fold struggles. Nanda rejects the same at a very late age and Bim does the same too.

Indu in Roots and Shadows, Saru in The Dark Holds No Terror and Jaya in That Long Silence have different conflicts. Their struggle is multi focused touching upon conflicts of gender, that is, male vs. female, public vs private, which are common among the post independent middle class in India. Both writers resort to the
existential theme and the isolation of the protagonist to introspect their self or identity is noticeable. Moving away to different spaces, abandoning the familiar milieu is common in both. This period of solitude opted by these women ends in different ways. While Anita Desai’s women resort to the black existential reality of death or madness, Shashi Deshpande’s Protagonists emerge stronger and more courageous who decide to face the problems rather than cow down to the pressures of home, world and self.

Anita Desai’s women reject the confined space of women in the home and prefer wide open natural spaces. Raka in *Fire on the Mountain* is more comfortable going on long walks to the woods and abandoned houses than spending time with people or family. She is comfortable being alone and mad. The other protagonists similarly show an inclination to forests, woods, hill-stations and luscious gardens. Shashi Deshpande’s women run away to escape the problems yet emerge as victors. They take control of the space assigned to them and also relate to it with pride.

The protagonists of both these novelists emerge as individuals who are able to claim their preferred space or identity and overcome their terrors and fears. This fierce struggle can be avoided if and when the rights, privileges, opportunities, responsibilities and roles are distributed without gender bias by individual families and also by their respective societies.

It is believed that Western Feminism is more radical. However, in reality it is the approach of the Indian woman in understanding her role as depicted by these two pioneering writers that is far more radical. The Indian woman’s struggle is tougher when compared to that of her western counterpart. Indian women are forced to confront the various attitudes that are culture-specific, idealized cultural notions of the
obedient daughter, devoted wife, self-sacrificing mother that subjugate women into silent sufferers.

The quest for identity especially that of the women is continuous. With changing times and change in role dynamics, role conflicts, role enactments and family and individual dynamics quest for self identity becomes inevitable. The definition of identity at the turn of the 21st century has been constantly changing. This is true of all nations, cultures, religions and genders. What surfaced as a strong desire in the English women of the Tudor period has gone through three to four transformations. Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte and George Eliot stood for and cherished that society has to pay proper attention to woman’s dignity and give proper recognition to her intelligence. The basic human potential of the female sex has to be accorded the same treatment as that of the male counterpart. That Charlotte Bronte and her sisters had to hide their identity, go abroad and learn German – to continue their education and that George Eliot was paid a very meager sum as a writer speak volumes about the gender discrimination and bias that infested one of the more civilized nations of the universe.

These rumblings took the form of a social movement in 1848. The focal points of the first wave of feminism focused mainly on voting rights and property rights. Then the second phase of feminism started in 1960 and issues like family, work place, sexuality, legal inequalities were highlighted. The movement gathered social, cultural and political momentum but at the same time there were a few weaknesses. The movement was clubbed with other political movements and had to take a back seat. Also the original agenda of the Tudor English age is totally sidelined or forgotten. The third wave introduced the more weird and country-specific or culture-specific
issues like queer theory, abolishing gender role, defending sex work and sex positivity.

The four waves of feminisms do not apply to the Indian writers as they work in a totally different cultural milieu. Further, ‘feminism’ today has become a word which has too many social, political, cultural and personal connotations that it may be safe not to bring it in literary discussions and interpretations.

The community culture which is part of the social fabric and ethos of India is lost due to modernisation. Added to this is the current decade’s rising depression caused by isolation, rampant urbanization, fear and insecurity. The last straw on the camel’s back is the turbulent transition from joint family system to nuclear families breaking the backbone of an agrarian economy causing social distortion. On the one hand the familiar is constantly fading while the new fangled practices are too effervescent to replace the trusted traditions.

All these factors make human life chaotic and it is doubly more in the case of a woman. As rightly presented by Shashi Deshpande, even the familiar and known territories or spaces, assigned to women are intruded and violated by their own male counterparts. Physical abuse by men outside (society) and inside the home (domestic violence) leaves no space for women. They are in a pan new situation where they are neither the Goddesses adorned and worshipped nor the ‘abala’ who is to be constantly protected by the male members of the family and also the society.

So to conclude this long journey of women and their changing identities and shifting spaces and addresses at different levels and situations especially in India, Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande are the pioneers who without hesitation had brought to the fore front the trauma and troubles faced by the Indian Woman. They also tried to give viable solutions to the ever existing problems. Anita Desai’s women
belong to the upper class where loneliness is a part of life. She depicts the hypocritical life style of the neo rich. Shashi Deshpande’s protagonists are the real ones they are the ordinary middle class who suffer under the pressures of life and yet try to bear the burden of culture. The prominent writers of the post colonial, post independent and modern India portray these changing identities of women and their struggle for their space and self identity. The two writers, Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande, are successful in creating an alternative reality and an awareness which though exposes them to oppression, provides them the much refreshing variant from the monotonous outmoded, clichéd models of the ideal Indian womanhood.