Towards Conclusion

This dissertation attempts a systematic investigation of the genesis and growth of the Indian English novel and relating it to the emergence of the novel as a genre on the Indian literary scene under changing social, economic, political, cultural conditions since colonial period. The most significant of these changes is the resulting of the emergence of individualistic social order, the spread of education, the growth industrialization, urbanization, the rise of the middle class, the spread of print media and of journalism, the birth of the reason, the questioning of old customs and tradition, the emancipation of Indian women and above all the socio-economic reforms which sought to usher in a new era of freedom and justice. Interestingly socio-economic re-orientations helped the emergence of the novel in India in the second part of the nineteenth century. The novel of the period reflects the spirit of the age which has moulded the artist’s sensibility and prompts the novelist’s vision. If one takes a look at the initial years of the twentieth century in India, Bengal in particular one finds that the surfacing of a Bengali novel *Alaler Gharer Dulal* (1854) written by Pyare Chand Mitra. However, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee established the novel as a major literary form in India. He showed that the ordinary life of a middle class Bengali could be the subject matter for a novel. His *Rajmohan’s Wife* (1864) was the first and the only English novel he wrote and then he switched over to his mother tongue Bengali, as he was a staunch nationalist.

The growth of the novel reflects a move towards a new interest in the complexities of everyday life experience. Most of the novels in general, are concerned with ordinary people and their problems in the society in which they identify themselves, quite often focusing on the tension between individuals and society to which they belong.
One can easily trace the emergence of the Indian English novel due to the changing socio-economic and political conditions and shifts in the modes of writing. Lionel Trilling observes, the novel is “the most effective agent of the moral imagination” (Trilling 215) The early novels of K.S. Venkataramani, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, and K. Nagarajan stand as fine examples, discussing invariably the socio-economic condition of India, the downtrodden, socially and economically oppressed, suppressed, hierarchy of caste system, religious, philosophical, metaphysical issues, freedom movement, East-West cultural clash and so on. The post independence Indian English novelists began to probe the contours of human consciousness. A new corpus of partition novels came into existence soon after the independence. Novelists like Kushwant Singh, Chaman Nahal, Kamala Markandeya and others documented the nightmarish, turbulent and fateful experience of millions of victims of the partition and dimension of the country. This period also witnessed the emergence of women writers like Kamala Markandeya, Nayantara Shagal and Anita Desai who dealt with women related issues like their aspirations and disappointments as central to understand women oriented experiences and patriarchy. Along with this, more and more Indian novelists began to explore new avenues and techniques in the novel form.

Interestingly, the dawn of the twentieth century the Indian novels in English has liberated itself from the hegemony of the West, taking its place in the Indian Ethos and literary scene. As a genre, the Indian novel in English has a uniqueness of its own, “excluding now a sense of belonging to a cultural and political context that is once marked by very specific histories and constantly evolving” (Priyamvada Gopal 187). Stories and events related to historical, political, cultural, religious, traditional, and
economic issues continue to influence the novelist’s imagination. Hence the ‘the idea of India’ has become an integral part of the Indian novel in English today.

The post independence Indian English novel was under the process of revival. In Meenakshi Mukherjee’s words, the novel of the period “has turned introspective and the individual’s quest for a personal meaning in life has become a theme of urgent interest for the Indo-Anglican writer” (198). The three phases of Indian English novels are Historical romance, social or political realism, and Psychological novels showing an introspective concern with the individual. The novels of the period shifted their interest from the public sphere to the private domain. The reformist zeal of the early novels gave way in course of time to intensive probe of the “self”. The post independence novelists were self-conscious, inward looking and analytical.

The novelists were very well aware that the conflicts were no longer content to document the reality; they used novel as a medium of exploration of a new reality and subtle projection of values. Without using of any overt propaganda, the works of the writers’ examine the ideas of freedom and justice vis-a-vis the individual self, the family, society, culture, politics and other related issues. Deviating away from established conventions, traditions, customs, the novelists of the period found alternatives to the traditional realistic pattern in narratives, employing new narrative techniques, irony, fantasy, parody and satire. The varied technical and experimentation, exhibited by the writers after Rushdie, explore the possibilities of the hitherto unheard of terrain undermining established notions in an attempt to question and evaluate the reality embedded in a deep rooted culture.
Far-reaching changes that took place in the social, familial, cultural and political spheres after the 1980s have significantly expanded and altered the nature of Indian reality. The novels began to challenge/contest traditional assumptions and attitudes. The turmoil and distress in the new circumstances have become the subject matter of these novels which formulate new consciousness as well as awakening.

The novels of twenty-first century reflect the cultural translations, cultural dislocations, cultural crisis and cultural degeneration. Hybridity, heterogeneity and pluralism are discussed frequently. The novelists of this period employ the technique of intertextuality. They believe that texts are free to use intertextuality in which previously accepted distinctions between (text and con-text) hardly matters. The meaning of a work is perceived better, when it is read in relation to other texts.

The major narrative techniques these contemporary novelists use are non-linear plots, multiple narrations, flash back and flash forward techniques, anti-heroes, more about common people, story within story, mixed genres and so on. These novelists have widely travelled, are very well acquainted with many Western theories and have got exposed to the consequences of modernism with more emphasis on reason. In order to achieve their task, they resort to literary devises like parody, irony, magic realism, flash back, myths, legends, folklore, traditions and beliefs and so on. Thus, they reject the concepts of unity of time, place and action. With these techniques, the contemporary novelists dismantle the binaries, and hierarchy of disciplines. They mainly concentrate on the metropolis, their problems, and culture and their ways of life. The reason for this, “the nation itself has moved from the village centrisim of the Gandhian era to the city centrisim of the post-Nehru period” (John Mee 320). Majority of the writers from post colonial
societies have been using these trends to retreat into metropolitan or cosmopolitan elitism which produces literature intended only for the English reading privileged classes in India as well as across the world.

Indian English novels underwent a sea change in theme and in narrative strategies after Salman Rushdie. In other words, the contemporary novelists were skeptical about recorded historical materials. The British recorded ‘imperial historiography’ has constructed to defend the British rule in India and to prove their ‘cultural, racial and intellectual superiority’. The events depicted in it are complex, paradoxical, riddled, biased and prejudiced. The early novelists, like historians, romanticized the greatness and glory of India’s ancient civilization and culture. But the contemporary Indian novelists write history from different dimensions. Due to the impact of literary renaissance, the social and political changes, the power politics behind writing history, the contemporary novelists began to look at things from the relativistic perspective. The novels become an alternative rendering for countering the versions of official and professional historians groups, through historiographic metafiction. Issues such as social identity and cultural roots in the context of migration are taken up as a site of conflict. In a way, the writers attempted to shed light on the untold or hidden stories of history, especially the suppressed class- the subalterns instead of depicting kings, queens, princes and so on. The postmodern novelists resorted to history with the purpose of finding its relevance to contemporaneity, to demythize the present personalities, to satirize, to allegorize, to give voice to the voiceless in the past, to record the unrecorded, to interrogate the concept of nation, nationalism and finally to present their point of view.
The professional historians agree that history needs to be rewritten constantly thinking that the historical perspectives change from generation to generation. There was a strong parallelism between the depiction of India by the British and by the Indians. This parallelism appears quite obvious in the fashion in which the Indian and the British writer view the same events. Especially, the important historical events that were closely connected with the British Imperial period. Thus, the Indian national leaders and the people who fought in the freedom struggle remained without proper recognition. Historical fiction, viewed in this light, has greater capacity in finding the truth. Both the historian and a novelist probe into the past to unearth this truth. Both, the historian and the novelist supplement to the incompleteness of official histories. Both use historical events and documented evidences for their framework, operating on the margins of preferentiality introducing other concocted, even private stories- which put the official historical records by offering many different stories. But they refuse to claim to absolute truth in the official versions. Most of the historians are not aware of the fact that the local princes and subalterns suffered under the imperial rule. The novelists are no longer content merely documenting the reality; they use their novels as a medium for the exploration of the new reality and a subtle projection of values. They do not stick to ideology but it is embedded within it and emerges from it. Without using any overt propaganda, the novels confirm the novelists’ commitment to the ideas of freedom and justice in the context of the individual self, society, family, politics and culture. Thus, Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace*, Vikram Seth’s *Two Lives*, Jaishree Misra’s *Rani* and Navtez Sarna’s *The Exile* stand as a fine instance for history-fiction interface. For instance, Jaishree Misra’s *Rani* explores Lakshmibai’s personal life, along with her
political struggle against the British. Most of the historians have overlooked the famous Bibigarh incident which changed the fate of Rani Lakshmibai. Thus, Misra fills this gap which is left by the historians. Likewise, Navtez Sarna probes into the depth of the plight of the last king of Punjab Duleep Singh and how he was made victim of the colonial politics in *The Exile*. Vikram Seth’s *Two Lives* also discusses about the common people are affected by the inhuman holocaust and Hitler’s greed for power. The subalterns like Shanti and Henny who were the part of Germany got their due recognition because of Seth who writes their biography. By posing questions and revealing the underlying conflicts, by suggesting re-assessment and re-definition, the works of Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Jaishree Misra and Navtez Sarna help in formulating a consciousness which can perhaps bring about a constructive change. These novels deal with the history from the view of imagination and fiction, fictionalize history, and offer new alternative meanings to the real incidents. However, their approach may differ in tone and technique, as the former would follow the chronology of the events while the latter would rethink and re/interpret the past from different perspectives, depending on the changes in the received data of history. For this, the postcolonial/contemporary novelists often provide a revisiting to history and contest its existing interpretations, often fuse fact and fiction to re-member the earlier happenings, incidents, views and assumptions. Because their major concern was the nature of reality that existed during colonial period. In a way, the novelist communicates his ideas through already established facts. The litterateur has to construct a living picture out of a few bygone events to communicate to the reader. As David Daiches observes, “the novelist tends to become an artist as well as historian” (92).
Cultural symbols, religious intolerance, communal violence prove that the social identity of every Indian is grounded in traditional religious identifications and communalism. All these bring about psychological anxieties and animosities towards other. Since the changing pressures of modernization and secularism in a multicultural, multi-religious, multilingual country like India, aggravate religious intolerance, communalism and each group vies for power and tries to establish its religious and cultural identity over other group. The communal riots break out as “all follow a similar pattern, suspicion, distrust and rumour activating conditioned minds, all sources of terrifying communal violence” (Kapadia 87-88). Most of the contemporary novelists who deal with political themes in their novels observe things in a detached and objective way. They use literary devises like, allegory, epic mode, magic realism, fairy tale, alternative events or parallel episodes, parody, irony, self-reflexivity and playfulness are some of the forms given national experience. The contemporary writers “mediate a sense of multiplicity, fragmentation, and instability of meaning, dissensus and the breakdown grand theories” (Waugh 49). Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Tharoor, and Githa Hariharan show the concept of politics in variegated ways. The protagonists who are marginalized challenge the hegemony of power and its official version of public events. These alternative voices express alternative histories or facilitate the intermixing of fragments of old stories to give new and unexpected possibilities.

The significance of the aesthetic in political reconstruction is identified for what is familiar may need to be defamiliarized. Novelists like Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Tharoor and Githa Hariharan use in their novels “contestatory voices and parodic modes to challenge political consensus, expand concepts of history and personal identity” (Waugh 63). These
novoelists reveal in this deconstructing, the mode of re-mapping of the contours of the past, re-formulate the existing questions and re-interrogate the already known facts. What was once considered ‘marginal’ has been brought into the central from the periphery of historical enquiry. These novels offer “the illustration of a historical situation, the description of a society at a given moment, a novelized historiography” (Milan Kundera).

Indian novel in English in the new millennium provides innumerable examples of familial conflicts taking on more serious implications than ever before. One of the major preoccupations of the novelists is the conflict between cultures - the old and the new or the East and the West. This conflict of cultures lies at the heart of the novel. Some writers’ conscious of having partly lost their cultural identity. Amit Chaudhuri, Manju Kapur, and Githa Hariharan portray the encounter of cultures and in conceptualizing the conflict between tradition and modernity, between the materialistic, rational view of life, incompatibility between husband and wife, between families, and the spiritual and moral perceptions, the novelists emphasize the process of transculturation as inevitable reality of contemporary Indian society. Although the characters in these novels like Jayojit in A New World, Nisha in Home and Mala and Sara in Fugitive Histories continue to be governed by societal norms or codes and conducts. Indian society has already started moving towards individualistic notions of living, as evident in these novels. This consciousness is the manifestation of the ideology of the society. The unrelenting nature of the characters who attempt to resolve the incompatibilities is conspicuous in these novels than the passive acceptance of exploitative relationships between various classes of society of the past.
By foregrounding the serious issues of the past, these novels contest/interrogate the traditional order that has been constructed at the cost of individual or group which is not ready to get into the traditional mould. Because of breaking up of institutions like society, marriage, no individual can find his or her identity in the family. It is perhaps under the influence of the feminist ideology of the 70s, patriarchal assumptions got questioned and womanpower got foregrounded. These novelsits subvert the conventional literary discourses and patriarchal power structures in their novels vehemently.

The position of women has become a more central theme in these novels which problematize issues such as marriage and motherhood. The women novelists re-interpret age-old traditions, myths and question the validity of traditional assumptions that circumscribe women in narrow slots. In depicting the female psyche and conflicts, the novelists do not focus as much on the “victim” aspect of the protagonists who are capable of changing their lives. The new women depicted by the novelists refuse to be subservient to thier husband unlike the heroines, which led the novelists re-define the man-woman equation as a core in the new millennium. It is due to the rise of woman’s self-confidence and psychological transformation, women have achieved an awareness and realization of their ‘self’ and identity.

The notion that the Indian family is a sanctuary of absolute marital bliss and security is changed now. The fragile familial bonds, the generation gap, the relationship between parent and children, the disintegration of joint family system, the inner conflicts among the family members, tensions between generations are documented candidly in these novels. The age-old conventions, traditions and customs and modernity feed much of the cause for the familial tensions and conflicts.
The novels of the new millennium break through the stereotyped images of Indian life and evolve a new concept of the Indian self as one that will be able to face the challenges of the modern world successfully. The various manifestations of human conflicts depicted by the novelists are influential in altering the traditional and conventional concepts about Indian novels in English. Thus, the novels of the twenty-first century are successful in liberating the Indian novel from the complexities of the early novelists faced. The emerging world-view, as presented in these novels reflects the dynamics of growth in the postcolonial subject vis-a-vis of the multicultural heterogeneity and plurality of Indian socio-cultural ethos. Such an enquiry no doubt provides uniqueness and vitality to not only Indian novels in English but also adds variety to the already proliferating New Literatures all the world over.
Works Cited


Mee, John. “After Midnight: The Indian Novel in ‘english of the 80s and 90s”.


