Preface

Indian novel in English originated and developed as a consequence of English education and the impact of Western culture. Novel being the most powerful and popular form of English literature has been chosen as the most suitable medium for the exploration of experiences and ideas by writers since time immemorial. Ever since the novel emerged as a literary form, it has changed constantly according to the changing social, political and cultural situations. Hence, novel reflects complexities of everyday experience. “For me, the value of the novel as a form is that it is able to incorporate elements of every aspects of life” (Amitav Ghosh 5). In its early phase, the Indian novel in English established its roots by imitating the Western novels. As a recognizable literary phenomenon, the Indian novel in English has only a brief history of one and a half century and signaled its arrival in 1864, with the publication of Rajmohan’s Wife by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. This was followed by the works of Kylas Chunder Dutt, Suchee Chunder Dutt, Jogendar Singh, A.S.P. Ayyer and others whose attempts were considered as amateur and sporadic in nature. It only in the 1930s that the Indian novel in English got recognition by the appearance of “The Big Three” (Walsh 26), Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao on the Indian literary scene, who brought international recognition to the Indian novels in English. The themes handled by this generation of novelists were predictably pan-Indian- the national movement, the socially, economically, politically oppressed and suppressed class, caste system of Indian society, partition of the country, and clash between tradition and modernity and East and the West, disintegration of the joint family, emancipation of women, man-woman relationship. The other representative novelists of post-Independence period are, Kamala
Markandeya, G.V. Desani, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgoankar, Nayantara Shagal, K.A. Abbas, Amir Ali, Anita Desai, Arun Joshi, Kushwant Singh, Shashi Deshpande and others. These writers have explored the radical issues and innumerable conflicts faced by the Indian society in the period of transition from tradition to modernity. But this scenario changed after the publication of Salman Rushdie’s seminal novel “Midnight’s Children” in 1981 which created a stir in the Indian English literary circle and gave birth to new generation of novelists- ‘Rushdie’s Children. “It would be no exaggeration to say that the best English fiction in the world is being is written by Indian or those of Indian origin” (Paranjape 21).

The post-Midnight’s Children phase thus ushered a new era and has witnessed a preoccupation with new forms and themes and those issues which were ignored by the earlier Indian novelists in English. Binaries such as literary language versus colloquial language, literature versus literature-in-society are addressed with originality. Postcolonial issues like the institutionalized versions of societal control, the clash with the ‘other’ and within oneself and so on got voiced in their creative writings.

In the first decade of the new millennium, Indian society got exposed to the effects of Globalization, multiculturalism, hybridity, the fast changing values in the field of social, cultural and political sphere changing the value system rapidly led to the clash between inner world and outside pressures. The novels selected for the study attempt to capture such shifts- the shift from Gandhian ideal to Nehruvian secularism followed by the impact of rapid industrialization.
The present study highlights how History, Politics and Culture are interlinked, how their interfacing with fiction sheds light on the Socio-cultural milieu and political and economic aspect of India as a nation. The novels chosen for study would add a new dimension to the already proliferating Indian Novel in English.

The thesis titled *Millennial Awakening: Historical, Political and Cultural Registers in Indian Novels in English (2000-2009)* attempts to discuss how the contemporary Indian English novelists represent and examine History, Politics and Culture in the aftermath of Globalization. The thesis is divided *ut infra*:

Preface.

I. Indian English Novels: Then and Now.

II. Re-membering History.

III. Contextualizing Polititics.

IV. Indian Culture - Texts and Contexts.

V. Conclusion.

The first chapter titled *Indian English Novel: Then and Now* offers a brief survey of the origin and development, major preoccupations, themes and techniques of Indian English novels from 1864 to 2009 from Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s *Rajmohans’s Wife* (1864) to the present. Incidentally, the Indian novelists in English of the first generation made an attempt to examine the prevailing issues such as related to cultural re-orientations. They experimented with the newly acquired ‘alien’ language English.
In the beginning, the novelists wrote historical romances, as the form of novel was new to them. As they were the first generation of writers influenced by the western novels and English, they wrote novels based on history depending on the imperial historiography. Therefore, the contemporary novelists re-read the histories and found that they were ‘constructed’, ‘contrived’, and fabricated/written to defend the British rule in India. Hence, the contemporary novelists worked to subvert the Western notion of ‘History’ as well as imperialistic records of Indian history. To decolonize the history form the imperial historiography, recent writers explore new techniques and strategies such as magic realism, myths, folklore, flash back techniques and alternative or parallel and subaltern histories. These writers have no faith in the conventional notions of linear, sequential or chronological history. The novels selected for the study in this chapter, *Remembering History* are Amitav Ghosh’s *Sea of Poppies*, Vikram Seth’s *Two Lives*, Jaishree Misra’s *Rani* and Navtez Sarna’s *The Exile*. All these novels, excepting Vikram Seth’s *Two Lives* look into the damage- physical as well as psychological and economic breakdown, social disorientation, and the exploitation of the colonized under the Imperial Rule.

These novels fictionalize history, and offer new alternative meanings to the real incidents. However, their approach may differ in tone and technique, as the historian would follow the chronology of the events while the novelist would rethink and re/interpret the past from different perspectives, depending on the changes in the received data of history. Contemporary Indian writers examine the past with an ironic eye. The discussed writers explore and revisit the forms of life that existed during the British rule in India. They also examine and expose the subtle strategies employed by the British to
make the colonized people take their subjugated position as something natural and transcendental. The select novels of the Dissertation also bring out the fashion in which the British paradigm of power politics still play a crucial role in defining the power relations operating in the changing Indian Society.

The third chapter *Contextualizing Politics* focuses on the Indian political scenario after independence. This chapter attempts to discuss different types of politics and examines how and why the politicians exploit the social and religious spheres. It also focuses on forms of violence, such as political violence, communal/sectarian violence, the nexus between politicians and violence, how violence is being a part of Indian politics today, in what way it affects the individual and the society. Along with this, the causes and consequences of violence are discussed.

The novels that are chosen for discussion in this chapter are Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace* (2000), Shashi Tharoor’s *Riot: A Novel* (2005) and Githa Hariharn’s *In Times of Siege* (2003). The largest democratic and secular country like India has been facing innumerable problems and threats in the name of religion and communal violence. The democratic and secular values are further threatened by the rise of an alternative Right-Wing national ideology- *Hindutva*. At the same time, there are several organizations that belong to different religious, political and cultural identities operating and posing threat to the national integrity of the country. The chapter attempts to discuss these vital/crucial issues with reference to the selected novels in which the novelists share their views on political issues. The novels discussed here are ‘historical’ in the sense that they respond to specific moments of India’s historical, political and cultural contexts.
Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace* attempts to present a mirror image of the political and historical schisms, dichotomies and bloody events caused by diverse conflicts that took place in the South-Asian sub-continent during the colonial period. The novel brings out how colonialists use political strategies such as physical usurpation of territories in the name of civilizational imperialism. Shashi Tharoor’s, *Riot: A novel* explores the subtleties of the communal politics in contemporary India in the backdrop of demolition of the sixteenth century Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in 1992, which is a direct result of the growing Hindu militancy and the communal tension in India. It also deals with the East-West cultural clash, and as a multilayered narrative, that sheds light on many contemporary issues like history, politics, society, economy and culture of India. Githa Hariharan’s *In Times of Siege* deftly focuses on the Hindu religious fundamentalism and its effect on places of higher learning, supremacy of Hindu religion and culture. How Hinduism is trying to get entry into the University milieu and establish its identity in the academic circles and how the place of higher learning is getting politicized is frankly dealt by Githa Hariharan.

The political independence of the country transformed and affected as well the social, cultural, political, religious and economic structures of the Indian society. The fourth chapter titled *Indian Culture- Texts and Contexts* discusses political issues and aspects in the novels of Amit Chaudhuri’s *A New World* (2000), Githa Hariharan’s *Fugitive Histories* (2007) and Manju Kapoor’s *Home* (2006). Contemporary Indian novelists in English are living and writing in the most complex phase as Indian society and culture is undergoing a rapid change. As fast and unprecedented changes have been
taking place in the Indian society, the identity of individual in general, essentially that of a woman in particular is changing drastically.

*A New World* provides a peep into India from an immigrant’s perspective. Chaudhuri documents the declining of social, cultural, moral and ethical values in the Indian family structure from the Indian social context. Githa Hariharan’s *Fugitive Histories* is written against the backdrop of Godhra incident in 2002, which took toll of thousands of people who belonged to both the communities- the Hindus and the Muslims. The novelist grapples with the impact of ‘otherness’ and the adverse effects of overt communalism and chauvinism on the fragile human psyche. Manju Kapur’s *Home* deals with the position of middle-class woman in the Indian traditional society. Nisha, the protagonist, is educated, modern, intelligent, bold and assertive, undergoes a series of traumatic events in her life: and finally succeeds to live like a free woman without resorting to any extreme action. Nisha asserts her womanhood boldly because she is iconoclastic and modern in her approach to life.

Amit Chaudhuri, Githa Hariharan and Manju Kapur 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 spiritual and moral perceptions. The novelists emphasize the fact that process of transculturation is an inevitable reality of contemporary Indian society. The complacent notion that the Indian family is a sanctuary of absolute marital fidelity 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.

There is freshness and vitality in the selected contemporary novels of Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Tharoor, Vikram Seth, Githa Hariharan, Amit Chaudhuri Jaishree Misra, Navtez Sarna and Manju Kapur who have explored the hitherto untouched layers of history, politics and culture, life and experience which are not seen in the earlier novels. They venture into new avenues, techniques and approaches to handle themes which are in fact due to the onset of Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization. These writers have a fresh outlook and perspective towards the vital aspects like history, politics and culture living under the sign of Globalization.

The final chapter, “Towards Conclusion” weaves the threads together and offers a summation and comments on the discussion of the previous chapters. The writers who have been taken up for the study are the products of a fast changing society that is undergoing marked transformation under the impact of globalization, media, and cyber culture. Their novels concentrate on the burning issues of contemporary India such as emotional turmoil and attitudes of the youth, the drastic change in the family structures, their lifestyle and attitudes, the paradigm shift in India as a Nation and Culture and so forth. The novels’ narrative patterns and strategies are thoroughly examined in the dissertation. The contribution of the contemporary Indian novelists in English to the enrichment of Indian writing in English and their place in the annals of world literature is also closely examined and commented upon. The discussed novels fictionalize the aspects of life vis-à-vis History, Politics and Culture under the sign of Colonialism, aftermath of Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization and attempt to capture the reality of the changing Indian Society with the dawn of the new millennium.
Works Cited


