INTRODUCTION

He assembled the aged priests and put questions to them concerning the kings who had once possessed the world. 'How did they,' he inquired, 'hold the world in the beginning, and why is it that it has been left to us in such a sorry state? And how was it that they were able to live free of care during the days of their heroic labours?'

(Firdausi, *Shah-Nama*, in Mistry, Epigraph, *Such a Long Journey*)

The aim of this dissertation is to examine the effects of ideology in caste and class constructions in Indian society through a study of selected novels. It is shown that while caste and class denominations and a structure of hegemonic control or actual dominance have prevailed in Indian society from pre-colonial times, during colonial rule the caste system was used as an administrative apparatus as well as a means of social stratification and control. To the extent that India's colonial rulers found a readymade social structure to facilitate governance—this did not require any further investment and consolidation—caste and class continue to dominate the Indian socio-political scene and remain as the ideological pivot of postcolonial Indian fiction in English.

In a peculiar way, postcolonialism in Indian fiction is informed by the temporal-sequential as well as the epistemic sense of the term 'post-colonial.' For example, it imbibes unique and undeniable traits of resistance to traditional structures and modes of living and thinking—especially those guaranteed or propounded by scriptural and social sanctions—that are increasingly visible in the first quarter of the twentieth century. On the other hand, postcolonial fiction appropriates new methods of resistance from India's anti-colonial struggle, giving it a more potent resonance, directed both against colonial rule and indigenous orthodoxies. This produces an ideological convergence between caste and class. What looks like an epistemic or epistemological overlapping is symptomatic of a rise of new economic and aspirational languages.

The result is a kind of class-caste continuum that simultaneously challenges and re-configures the role of caste and class in social stratification. First, social categories can no longer be seen as independent of economic and political empowerment of the traditionally marginalized communities and their access to privileges and opportunities

in an electoral democracy. In the wake of India's independence, several factors contributed to major changes in the caste-class dynamics. The Indian English novel becomes what Terry Eagleton calls the productive matrix of a new order of representation ("Ideology" 64), of opportunities and burdens. The main areas of concern are the gradual decline of the predominantly rural agrarian economy, rise in core and peripheral industrial employment, internal displacement and migration, erosion of rural employment, urbanization, availability of jobs in the service sector that had no use for caste-compliance or expertise, the erosion of traditional and hegemonic power base of the erstwhile feudal elites, the rise of subaltern resistance etc.

This study shows how class-caste relationships get increasingly layered, spawning new and mutant identities that use the older formations but in new contexts and hugely different from what they were in the early colonial period. The consequences of such use also vary from those generated by their traditional use. To carry out the study a number of great postcolonial novels, old and new, written by prominent Indian authors based in India or abroad have been chosen: Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935) and *Coolie* (1936), Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) and *A Handful of Rice* (1966), Nayantara Sahgal's *Rich Like Us* (1985), Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English, August* (1988), Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* (1991), *A Fine Balance* (1995) and *Family Matters* (2002), Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* (2000), *The Hungry Tide* (2004), and *Sea of Poppies* (2008*),* Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008).

Since the settings of the novels cover a period of about one hundred and sixty years, the study would reveal the variations in the social and economic conditions of the people over the period, and given differences in contexts of operation of caste and class it would make the discourses more varied broad-based. On the other hand, the settings cover geographical locations spread widely across India, the Indian subcontinent (Burma and Bangladesh) and even beyond (the Malaya peninsula and Mauritius). The texts cast a wider net, presenting a much broader view of culture, social behaviour and economic conditions across South and South East Asia, bringing in a large diversity of language, religion and culture of the Indian people.

Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004) is famous as an Indian writer in English, notable for his depiction of the lives of the poor, and the socially deprived sections of the populace in pre-independence India. Anand is considered one of the founding fathers of the Indian novel in English. *Untouchable* revolves around the social stigma suffered by an untouchable in a caste-ridden society while *Coolie* depicts the miseries and agonies of the high-caste downtrodden.

Kamala Markandaya (1924-2004) was an expatriate Indian novelist and journalist, known for her writings about culture clash between rural and urban Indian societies. *Nectar in a Sieve* is on the problems and sufferings of the peasants of rural India during the last phase of the colonial rule. It depicts how the changes generated by gradual industrialization destabilize the lives of the peace-loving peasants and uproot them from their lands making them homeless and supportless. *A Handful of Rice* narrates the complicacy of city life and shows how those who migrate from the village to the city in search of a better life get frustrated.

Nayantara Sahgal (1927-)   is an Indian journalist and novelist who highlights in her fiction personal crises of India's elite and suppression of the rights of the common masses during periods of political upheaval. Born and brought up in the Indian aristocratic society Sahgal belongs to the family of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India. Sahgal is a daughter of Nehru's sister Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit who herself was a well-known diplomat during the early decades of independent India. *Rich Like Us* reflects the political and economic corruption as well as social exploitation of the downtrodden during the time of Emergency in India.

Upamanyu Chatterjee (1959-) whose major literary creations begin in 1988 with his novel, *English, August,* has been in the Indian Civil Service since 1983. *English, August* portraying the life of an Indian civil servant posted in an interior rural area brings out the contrast between urban realities and rural realities in India.

Rohinton Mistry (1952-) an Indian (Mumbai) born Parsi writer (in English) now based in Canada, began his literary activities with the novel *Such a Long Journey* which tells an intricate story of problems and anxieties of the family and friends of a kindhearted

honest Parsi Bank clerk during a turbulent period when war broke out between India and Pakistan during 1971-1972. *A Fine Balance* is a study of various problems of the Parsis living in Mumbai during difficult times – India's 1975 state of Emergency proclaimed by the government. *Family Matters* is the story of a middle class Parsi family living through domestic crises under exigent circumstances.

Amitav Ghosh (1956-) began his career with *The Circle of Reason* (1986), and wrote a series of novels on partition and migration including *Shadow Lines* (1988), leading to his recent *Ibis trilogy*. Ghosh's novels mostly deal with historical settings in and around the Indian Ocean. *The Glass Palace* is set in a wide geographical region comprising India, East Bengal (now Bangladesh) and Malaya, and spans a century beginning in the 1830s. *The Glass Palace* is the story of Indians migrating to different places of this region for different purposes. *The Hungry Tide* is the story of the annihilation of displaced settlers in the Sundarbans, a cluster of tiny islands off the easternmost corner of India in the Bay of Bengal. *Sea of Poppies*, first of the *Ibis trilogy*, is set in colonial days and describes the circumstances that prompt Indian labourers indentured by colonial rulers to leave their homeland and take a tumultuous voyage across the Indian Ocean in the Ibis to work in the plantations in the British colony of Mauritius and elsewhere.

Arundhati Roy (1961-) is best known as the author of *The God of Small Things* which is her debut novel. The story of *The God of Small Things* revolves around caste and class exploitation in the Syrian Christian community in the Communist-dominated southern state of Kerala.

Kiran Desai (1971-) in her novel *The Inheritance of Loss* gives space to the subaltern consciousness. The story of the novel, set in the Himalayas, revolves around a young girl Sai living with her grandfather, a retired judge and their cook. The latter two represent the employer-servant relationship with the servant taking it upon himself to construct a past for his master.

Aravind Adiga (1974-) in his novel *The White Tiger* dwells on a man's quest for freedom – freedom of all types, especially low social status. While narrating the story the author unravels corruption in the society in various forms.

All the fifteen novels chosen for study fit into the domain of postcolonial literature as they address issues related to the caste-class structure controlled by different ideologies which gained significance during the colonial period and afterwards.

The defining criteria for the class system have an *economic base* whereas the criteria for the caste system are *birth* and *hereditary profession.* Each of the systems divides the Indian society into different classes. The entirety of the classes formed by these two distinct systems is referred to as *the social classes* of India.

Division of the population into classes signifying social inequality has long existed in almost every human society. Initially, in many parts of the world including India, such division was a dichotomy comprising only two classes, the *rich* and the *poor*. In the works of two great Germans, Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Max Weber (1864-1920) in the form of *Das Capital (Vol I, 1867*) and *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (1905)* respectively one can find discourses on social classes. According to Marx the society has a two-tier class system, the two tiers being the *bourgeoisie* and the *proletariat.* Weber's work discusses a three-tier class system indicating an expansion of Marx's class system. A propertied class is placed at the top because it owns economic power, social status and political influence. A propertyless intelligentsia which forms a professional class is placed next. The members of this class not only have relatively high social status and some political influence, but also have higher position in the labour market and ownership of lesser forms of property than the propertied class. The petty bourgeoisie was placed third, because its members had less property ownership, less social status and less political influence.

In the course of time social classification becomes more complex, being determined, in some countries, by different criteria – criteria of race, ethnicity, colour, etc. Gradually, standard of living and life-style, possession of wealth and property, education and power begin to play determinant roles in the evolution of social classes in the world, each class having its own distinctive identity in the society, making the process of classification more complicated. Moreover, the rigour and criteria of formation of the classes and their demarcation widely vary from time to time and from society to society.

Before the advent of the British in the mid-eighteenth century, India also had a two-tier class system (not a caste system) consisting of the poor and the rich, comparable with Marx's bourgeoisie-proletariat system, and such a system continued for about a century. During the British rule, in the mid-nineteenth century, it expanded to a three-tier system with three classes emerging – the *lower class*, the *middle class* and the *upper class* in ascending order of economic power, social status and dignity. However, each of these classes soon became a cluster of classes, not easily distinguishable, enjoying varying social standing and dignity.

In 1844, during colonial rule, English was made the official language with a declaration that people having knowledge of English would be preferred for government employment. This hastened the spread of English education in India more extensively. In the 1850s, a properly articulated education system from the primary school to the university was implemented in India. The main aim of such a plan was to meet the need for low-ranking, English speaking Indian clerks and the necessity for employing educated Indians to man an expanding bureaucracy. Above all, the idea was to create a class of Indians who would be "Indians by blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals, in intellect" as proposed by T. B. Macaulay in his *Minute on Education* (1835). It was also expected that English education would make the Indians reconcile to the British rule.

In general, the aim of the colonial education policy was to assimilate the Indian population, in particular the Indian elite, to the British way of thinking and seeing the world. This education system introduced by the British in India did create a new class of people as envisaged – a class of people, educated, moderately affluent having their voice heard in the society. Initially, the main defining criteria of this class were education and affluence, and this class came to be known as the *middle class* of the society. However, the set of defining criteria for this class was ever expanding with time and the class itself swelled enormously to include many other categories of people. The word *middle* suggests that the middle class is bracketed on either side by the lower and upper echelons – the lower class and the upper class. Thus, a three tier lower-middle-upper class system, resembling that of Weber's came into existence in India. Although there is no sharp

demarcation of the different units in the class system, this system presents a social spectrum of the Indian people.

In India, the other social classification, the caste system based on the criteria of birth and hereditary profession, is mainly confined to the Hindu society. Caste (derived from Portuguese *casta,* meaning breed, race, or kind)[Hobson, *The Indian Caste System and The British*] is a label attached to a Hindu on the basis of his/her birth origin; a Hindu *inherits* the caste of the family to which he/she is born. Caste is unalterable, it is hereditary, and it rolls on from generation to generation. Castes have social rankings from lower to higher, and the rank of the caste of a person determines his/her status in the society. Each caste creates a social class, occupying a distinctive place in the caste hierarchy. In this sense the caste system may be regarded as another class system based on caste.

Although the origin of the caste system is not precisely known, the system is believed to have existed in the Hindu society since the Vedic age. The original caste system divided the Hindus into four main categories, the *Varnas*: Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors and nobility), Vaishyas (agriculturists, traders and artisans), and Shudras (tenant farmers and servants). It appears that this categorization was based on the people's occupations. Again, each Varna was subdivided into a large number of castes (*jatis)*, and in turn, each caste was subdivided into many sub-castes (*upajatis*). The network formed by the castes and the sub-castes stemming from the four Varnas together constituted what came to be known as the caste system. Although originally caste was dependent upon a person's work or occupation, it soon became hereditary, that is, determinable by the person's birth. Thus a person could not change his caste by changing his occupation. Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras were put in descending order in respect of their social dignity and status. And thus developed the ideology of casteism.

However, the caste system did not cover the entire Hindu population – a section of the population was left out, and the members of this section were called *ashprishas (untouchables/outcastes)*. These people were assigned to do all the odd jobs the people belonging to the four Varnas did not do. Although the untouchables were outside the

periphery of the caste system, they were considered to constitute a separate caste at the lowest stratum of the society.

It may be mentioned here that caste and gender cannot be seen as exclusive categories as some of their concerns intersect. Gupta, in *The Gender of Caste*, observes that "while caste is seen as a uniquely Indian form of hierarchical stratification to be treated empirically, gender has been viewed as a universal conceptual category central to the production of patriarchies" (5). However, she points out that "In the past two decades the intersectedness of anti-caste thought that gender has emerged as central in the work of some feminists….They have shown how caste radicals—be it Jyotirao Phule, B.R. Ambedkar, or E.V.Ramaswamy Periyar—distinctly drew and challenged connections between sexual regulation and caste reproduction" (6). Gupta mentions this in the context of Dalit women's histories wherein she tries to collate them with "the heterogeneity of caste experiences, events, practices, and discourses" (9). This is expected to lend resonance to the studies at hand. Similarly, some of the novels like Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* or Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* draw attention to the undercurrents tied to women within the caste system.

Each caste is bound by conventions and in-group prescriptions. Although caste practices have had local variations across the country, they still have some common features relating to marriage, dining, and religious worship. Inter-caste marriages have had a troubled legacy in spite of social reforms.

In most cases only the Brahmins could conduct religious rituals and services. Kshatriyas and Vaishyas were allowed to worship in temples, but in some places, Shudras were denied entry into temples. All untouchables were debarred from entering temples, even the temple grounds. Some more stringent regulations were there for the untouchables. An untouchable was not allowed to draw water from a public well, for it was believed, it would pollute the water making it unusable by members of other castes. At the other extreme, even the shadow of an untouchable falling on an upper caste person was believed to pollute that person or make him impure. Therefore, an untouchable had to take utmost care so that his shadow could never touch an upper caste Hindu. Such was the rigour of some of the practices and regulations stipulated in the caste system. This ideology of purity-impurity later came to be known as Brahminical ideology. A large

number of Hindus accepted this ideology in the past as a social norm, but gradually there has been opposition to this ideology. Two great Indians, M.K. Gandhi (1869-1948) and B.R. Ambedkar (1891-1956) developed their respective ideologies in opposition to Brahminical ideology. The essence of Gandhian ideology is to bring a social change making the job of the untouchables honourable without disturbing the caste system. Gandhi coined the word *Harijans* (children of God) to mean the untouchables. On the other hand Ambedkarite ideology is based on the philosophy of protest against all forms of caste-based discriminations. A more detailed discussion on these two ideologies is given in the next chapter. However, the effect of these two ideologies on social behaviour has only been partial, even after long years of independence.

The emergence of the class system has a significant effect on the caste system in India. As mentioned earlier, the basic difference between the two systems is that the caste system is hereditary whereas the class system is not. An interesting feature of the two systems is that they are not mutually exclusive; they are not independent of each other. They have intersections or overlappings, which generate a relationship between the two systems. There is a possibility that a high caste person may belong to a lower class, and on the other hand a low caste person may belong to a higher class. This is because the set of criteria defining classes is independent of the set of criteria for designating castes. Such a possibility indicates a caste-class relationship which affects social relationships among the people.It is seen that caste is closely related to gender as some of its prescriptions are meant for particular gender.It is not only women who are governed by caste regulations on what to do inside and outside the house, but also men who find themselves conforming or at least trying to conform to caste determined paradigms of masculinity.

Further as Velaskar observes, "the caste-based division of labour is gendered". She adds that " women's reproductive and productive labour is appropriated by sexual division of labour and secured by marriage and kinship ties, thus revealing the importance of patriarchal control over women for social reproduction. In the context of caste –feudal mode, control over the labour of all producing/toiling classes- peasants, artisans and agricultural labourers and menial servants - was appropriated by the ruling classes as part of the development of caste-defined villages"(Caste and Gender" 402).

Describing the complexity of the caste-class relationship K. L. Sharma, in *Caste and Class in India*, remarks:

> Caste and class are... not only highly differentiated internally, complexities of their expression and articulation signify the vast ramifications of structural social inequality. Debate on caste and class has covered wide-ranging issues related to indicators of status, levels of equality and inequality, cultural and structural interaction, occupational mobility, etc. Conceptual schemes to analyse these issues highlight structural versus cultural, closed versus open, organic versus segmentary, interactional versus attributional and corporate versus individual dimensions regarding the nature of caste and class in India. (1)

Initially the position in the caste scale was reflected in the class scale – an upper caste person being placed in a higher class and a lower caste person in a lower class. This happened mainly because of the socio-economic disparities that existed among the people of different castes. When a lower caste person climbed to a higher class, he/she could summon courage to challenge or defy the caste restrictions or regulations imposed on him/her. This effectively contributed to lessening the rigour in the prescriptions regarding caste practices and regulations. The democratic process in independent India also helps the low-caste people to raise their voice, by establishing group identity, against caste discriminations. This has caused suppression, if not elimination, of caste hatred of the high caste against the low caste. Whereas caste discrimination is based on the purity-impurity ideology, class discrimination is based on superiority-inferiority ideology. Both these ideologies bring social disparity and disharmony.

The caste system is sometimes used as a framework for social discrimination amongst Hindus in Indian society. It was used by the British colonial rulers to divide and control the Indians. However similar discrimination based on different criteria is not uncommon in the Indian subcontinent among followers of other religions, including some sections of Muslims and Christians. Especially when a low caste Hindu is converted to another religion he/she is often not able to free him/her from caste stigma even in the new religion. Whatever be the case, caste and class divisions, discriminations or conflict, are seen to have been triggered off by differences of ideology. This is addressed in the dissertation.

The discourses presented in this thesis are related to the social classes of India as depicted in postcolonial Indian fiction. They revolve around the social and economic status of these classes in relation to the prevailing ideologies. Any social stratification is effected by ideologies, and as such, casteism is an ideology. Ideologies can generate hatred, feelings of inferiority and superiority among different sections or classes of the population in a society. In the formation of the other classes, apart from those created by casteism, education, economy and power play dominant roles, i.e. an ideology based on education, economy and power determines these classes.

The Scheme of the Thesis:

Objectives:

This dissertation examines critically the representation of caste, class and forms of ideology in postcolonial Indian English fiction:

1) to examine the role of shifting ideologies in the formation of social structures in India, bringing in caste and class discriminations leading to oppression and exploitation as addressed in some of the postcolonial Indian novels;

2) to show how categories which are seen as fixed at birth like caste, increasingly become protean, especially in the case of strategically inclusive dalit subaltern groups;

3) to show how the novels try to give agency to the dominated subaltern through appropriation and radicalization;

4) to examine the numerous constructions of group or collective identity in the novels enabled and empowered by democracy;

5) to examine how the ideologies create affective spaces in the novels chosen for the study.

Hypotheses and Contentions:

This dissertation examines the following hypotheses:

a) that while caste hierarchies continue, the traditionally marginalized caste groups offer counters of resistance;

b) that this resistance leads to the formation of new classes;

c) that caste and class continue to be connected despite attempts to separate the two in the present;

d) that in some cases migration is a means of breaking free of the caste structure.

e) that class structures are fluid allowing people to look for mobility creating new forms of subalternity;

f) that ideologies play significant roles in the caste-class continuum; and

g) that public sphere politics simultaneously carries and challenges operative ideologies of caste and class in colonial as well as independent India.

Review of literature

Broadly speaking, the literature under review can be divided into three main categories:

a) The first category includes studies on Caste, Class and Ideology: Nicholas B. Dirks in *Castes of Mind* (2001) puts forward his view that the caste system in pre-colonial Indian society was quite flexible and caste boundaries were not well demarcated. But the British in colonial period made the caste boundaries well demarcated for their need to categorise and catalogue the Indian population for administrative purpose. Andre Beteille's *Caste, Class and Power* (1965) examines critically the changing patterns of caste, class and power in an Indian village of Tanjore district in erstwhile state of Madras. The investigations are carried out from sociological viewpoint. Sudha Pai's *Dalit Assertion* (2002) studies how the dalits build up movements to assert their rights under democracy in modern India. The book analyses the links between dalit assertion and development in democratic India and focuses on how regional differences affect dalit unity and make them unable to assert themselves as a unified group. Amartya Sen's *Argumentative Indian* (2005) shows how the long argumentative tradition of Indians is the key to understand contemporary India. Sen argues that secularism, elimination of caste, class, gender and community based disparities and inequalities and maintenance of peace in the entire subcontinent are essential for building a strong and successful democracy in India. V.S. Naipaul in *India: A Million Mutinies* (1990) posits his thesis of India as a raging multiplicity

where multiple religious sects, ethnic communities coexist within a packed space increasingly asserting their own identities under the influence of democracy. Debjani Ganguli's *Caste, Colonialism and Counter Modernity* (2005) discusses the enigmatic continuance of caste practices even in the twenty first century.

b) The second category includes studies on Subalternity, Modernity and Postcolonial studies: Sanjay Joshi's *Fractured Modernity* (2001) is a critical study of Indian middle class. Joshi contends that even with limited economic, social and political power the middle class advocates modernity and manages to become hegemonic by its ability to be cultural entrepreneurs. Sunil Khilnani's book *The Idea of India* (1997) is critical of the paradoxes and ironies that creep into independent India that embraced democracy. Khilnani maintains that democracy has not been able to overcome some serious problems like acute poverty and religious divisiveness in India. The project of *Subaltern Studies* (1982-2005) published several volumes (six of them edited by Ranajit Guha) which include a wide range of studies concerning modes of power and peasantry, communalism, working class conditions authenticated by field studies, viewing critically colonial claim of enlightening the colonised , insurgency and counter-insurgency, tendency to justify insurgency and so on. On the other hand , the book *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial* (2000) edited by Vinayak Chaturvedi offers a critique of the interpretations made by subaltern studies group on Indian History and freedom movement. Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Habitations of Modernity* (2002) is a bunch of closely linked essays focusing on the intricacies of modernism in India. The book views critically some of the cultural practices followed in India, creating a kind of civic consciousness. Partha Chatterjee's *Nation and its Fragments* (1993) presents an analysis of nationalism in Asia and Africa and brings out the basic differences between this nationalism and that of the west.

c) The third category includes studies on Indian English Fiction: Geetha Ganapathy Dore's *The Postcolonial Indian Novel in English (2011)* critically discusses the works of some eminent postcolonial writers and shows how their works have taken the Indian novel form to new heights. Makarand Paranjape's *Another Canon: Indian Texts and Traditions in English* (2009), discusses how in the period spanning more than seventy years in independent India, English literary and textual practice

develops focusing on some classic texts. Tabish Khair in *Babu Fictions* (2001) presents a critical analysis of contemporary Indian fiction in English. Employing the concept of 'discourse' and formulating class divisions in emblematic 'Babu Coolie' terms, the book presents critical readings of authors like Raja Rao, Anita Desai, R.K Narayan, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh and others. Priyamvada Gopal's *The Indian English Novel* (2009) is an introduction to Indian English fiction which has now occupied prominent place in the international literary field. Krishna Sen and Rituparna Roy edited book, *Writing India Anew* (2013) is another volume of critical essays that addresses some contemporary and relevant issues of Indian English Fiction.

Methodologies/approach(es) applied:

This project combines the tools of postcolonial criticism and close textual analysis.

The chapter plan of this dissertation is prepared keeping in mind the possible effects of caste-class relationship on different sections of the population at different times in changed conditions and circumstances in respect of their individual, collective and social behaviour and actions. Besides the **Introduction** and the **Conclusion** at the end the main body of the work has been divided into five chapters:

Chapter One: "**Examining Ideology and Caste-Class Dynamics in Postcolonial Indian Fiction**"

This chapter studies the role played by ideology in class and caste profiling in Indian fiction written in English. It is seen that class and caste parameters are determined not by resources or by birth alone but influenced by political ideologies. The resurgence of once oppressed classes (because of caste restrictions or poverty) as they claim political space is an important issue in such fiction. While early writers addressed narrow caste discriminations in Indian society, writers are now increasingly focusing on the class (caste) mobility through the intervention of modernity and democracy in India.

Chapter Two: "**Spatial and Social Mobility**"

This chapter examines the relationship between spatial mobility and social hierarchy as projected in the postcolonial novels. The oppressed class tends to escape (even get the better of/challenge/negotiate/avoid) the dominance of the powerful group by changing their occupation and moving out of their native place, even migrating to distant lands. It

also looks at the fluidity of class determinants in Indian society as projected in novels like Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*, *The Hungry Tide* and *Sea of Poppies*.

Chapter Three: "**Middle Class Uncertainties**"

This chapter examines the fluidity and openness of the category marked as the middle class in Indian society as shown by Sanjay Joshi in *Fractured Modernity*. It is seen that the middle class is not just identified by its material possessions only but by its ability to participate in public debates and issues common to society. As some of the novels show characters belonging to the middle class find themselves in economic hardship while others do not have financial worries. The term uncertainties refers not to the anxieties of this class but to the shifting markers of this class. As pointed out by Joshi the middle class may be seen as an evolving category rather than a fixed entity. The novels taken for study in this chapter are Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* and *Family Matters*.

Chapter Four: "**Critiquing Caste**"

This chapter examines the caste hierarchies resulting in the hegemonic control, even exploitation of one caste by a higher more powerful caste, and the contemporary transformation of this structure through a study of novels like *Untouchable*, *A Fine Balance*, *The God of Small Things, The Hungry Tide* and *Sea of Poppies*. The chapter shows how caste which has been the traditional tool of oppression, was used by the British to divide and rule the people and has emerged as a counter of resistance in contemporary India where so-called lower castes choose to combine under the umbrella term *dalit* to question their oppression. It is shown that while caste and class denominations within a structure of hegemonic control or actual dominance have prevailed in Indian society from pre-colonial times, it is only under British rule that the caste system gained prominence as a means of social stratification and control.

Chapter Five: "**Mapping Postcolonial Subalternities**"

The chapter examines the presentation of subaltern consciousness in the novels from different perspectives – differences in insiders' viewpoints as well as those between insider and outsider. It also shows how the agency of the subaltern is often denied by narratives based on colonialist, nationalist or mutant discourses in the selected novels. The novels taken for study in this chapter are *Nectar in a Sieve*, *A Handful of Rice,*

Coolie, Rich Like Us, English, August,The Hungry Tide, The Inheritance of Loss and The White Tiger .

The **Conclusion** sums up the findings of individual chapters as well as those of the dissertation as a whole.