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Title of Ph.D Thesis: “Writing Gender, Writing Nation: A Critical Study of Select Women’s Fiction in Post-independence India”

Key Words: Gender, Nation, Women’s Fiction, Indian Women’s Movement, Feminist Solidarity

The present thesis examines select women’s narratives in post-independence India as they interrogate the category of nation, exposing various patriarchal alliances underlying its framework. I propose that women writers, in the process of writing about gender relations, comment and reflect on the larger socio-political, economic concerns of society and thus inscribe the nation. By so doing, one could highlight the spatial congruence between the terms gender and nation, deconstructing the binary opposition between the private and the public, material and the spiritual/cultural. It would also lead to a reconstitution of the gendered habitus both at the level of micropolitics and macropolitics.

The thesis is divided into five chapters, accompanied by a Preface, an Introduction and a Conclusion. The Preface introduces the topic, briefly charting out the trajectory of the thesis. The Introduction critically approaches the title of the thesis from various facets. Chapter One, titled “Women as ‘Citizens’: Gendered Violence in Partition Narratives by Women” engages with Amrita Pritam’s *Pinjar* (1950) and Jyotirmoyee Devi’s *The River Churning* (1967). The chapter especially problematises the Central Recovery Operation, which was launched in 1949 to exchange abducted women between India and Pakistan on the basis of their religious identity, to bring home the above argument. Chapter Two is called “Feminist Negotiation of Autarchy: Going Beyond Victimhood.” It takes up Mahasweta Devi’s *Mother of 1084* (1974) and

Nayantara Sahgal's *Rich Like Us* (1985), which record how the distortions in the system and their consequences like the Naxalism, which ravaged the state of West Bengal in 1967 or the National Emergency in 1975, marked real challenges to caste, class and gender empowerment in post-independence India.

Chapter Three is called "Negotiating Structural Inequalities – Marriage, Domesticity, Divorce and Widowhood in Post-independence India." It takes up a detailed study of Mridula Garg's *Chittacobra* (1979), Mannu Bhandari's *Aapka Bunt* (1971), and Indira Goswami's *Shadow of Dark God* (1986) to highlight their interrogations of the patriarchal, virilocal, patrilineal family structure in the light of legislative and adjudicatory framework and how it approaches marriage, widowhood, divorce, and varied property laws. Chapter Four of the thesis, "Economic Liberalisation, Cultural Ghettoisation and their Impact on the Gendered Contexts," focuses on Alka Saraogi's *Kali-katha: Via Bypass* (1998) and Usha K. R.'s *Monkey-Man* (2010), exploring how women writers in the post-1991 era negotiate the category of nation and its concomitant identity politics when it is impinged on by the looming spectre of liberalisation and globalisation. Chapter Five is titled "Writings from the Margins- Dalit and Muslim Women's Narratives." It takes up a detailed analysis of Bama's *Sangati* (1994) and Salma's *The Hour Past Midnight* (1995), foregrounding the authors' assertion from the margins of the nation and how the architectonics of the nation-state is contingent upon the pillars of subaltern voices, impinging on the centre in pertinent ways.

In reading together these women writers coming from different linguistic, cultural and communal contexts, the thesis underlines that these women writers may be writing about their respective contexts, but each one of them displaces the dominant representations of the nation, providing us with an alternative perspective on the nation.