CHAPTER – VII

SUMMATION

Its (this age’s) point is that this age, with its passion for categories and its indifference to the uniqueness of the individual is reducing all of us to a condition of invisibility.¹

The fictionist Anita Desai is acutely aware of the societal conditions that the women confront, in the modern era. Understandably, she uses the medium of literature as the poignant outlet to voice her feelings, thoughts and experiences concerning men and women. In fact, not many writers could be so very representative of the community as Anita Desai is.

Anita Desai makes the perceptive and the critically oriented readers become immediately conscious of her powerful assertion, which projects her female wrath against the dominant attitudes and denials and deprivations meted out to the victims by the victimizers. Anita Desai urges the women to realize their twin strengths, which is that women alone can carry the universe within themselves and approximate the creative work in bringing into being new births, and secondly it is the women alone who can initiate man into right action.

The fiction of Anita Desai has become self-analytical and introspective and the individual’s quest for a personal meaning in life has become a theme of unavoidable interest for her. Her primary emphasis is
thus on sights and sounds on movements and patterns both physical and mental as they impinge on the consciousness of her protagonists. She has got her own style of taking the readers to the core of protagonist’s feelings.

In Cry, the Peacock, she has shown the extreme disturbance, extreme irritation of the protagonist whose subconscious thought has been pulled to the surface of consciousness by the rope of loneliness. She says;

The rolling cotton-balls, the flying yellow leaves, the surging clouds of dust, all seemed to flee, flee, flee, and yet could not, for they were bound to the season, and returned to continue their struggle for escape. Something similar heaved inside me – a longing, a dread, a search for solution, despair, and my head throbbed and spun as I lay flat on my back through the long afternoons.

Moreover, Anita Desai opens the eyes of the women to know who they are, where they are, what they are and what they are not capable of. In other words, she educates women to discover themselves their inner strengths, and their limitations and think and act accordingly.

The novelist Desai advocates to the women to take pride in the female sex, and shed their inferiority complexes, castration complex, and fear psychosis. Moreover, she educates the women to shed their
submissive attitudes and approaches to life and emerge as women who have gained real empowerment to face any kind of challenge in life.

Anita Desai is helpful in guiding the perceptive women readers to discover their inherent strengths through self-definition and self-discovery. Above all, she champions the cause of the women in their struggle for intellectual, moral, spiritual, economic, social and political survival, and for their empowerment and emergence as women capable of doing all that the male sex is capable of, if not better.

In fact, the novelist awakens in the hearts of all perceptive readers a stronger sense of justice and a more Christian-like humanity. In all these respects she has proved herself to be educative, instructive and trend setting. Therefore, Anita Desai does not want the women to turn into psychic and neurotic case studies. It is because the women who suffer cause the men to suffer. The women who indulge in self-pity create stress and strains – *Strum-und-Drang* – for their men.

It ought to be stressed at this point that the contributions made by Anita Desai, the Indian writer writing in English, to the growth, development and phenomenal strength of Women Literature and by extension to World Literature is significant, relevant and consequential. Incidentally, Anita Desai cannot be dismissed as a second class writer when compared with male writers.
Desai occupies an unassailable place in the galaxy of Indian English Women novelists. She is one of the strongest voices of women writing in India today. Desai possesses sure and unerring satiric instincts. The several illuminating flashes of satire with Anita Desai is only incidental. Her sense of irony embraces the whole emotional range of her characters.

Unlike the satirists who distance themselves from their creatures and describe them from outside only, Desai probes into the inner psyche and inner recesses of her characters. That is why her whole style is ironical. Her delicate irony is the very essence of her style. Irony of style has been created by Desai deliberately.

This is a wrong assumption and deserves to be deconstructed and thoroughly exploded. In actual fact, Anita Desai has greatly and immeasurably enriched and revitalized Women Literature through her signal contributions to Indian writing in English.

In the case of Anita Desai there is no de-emphasizing the role of woman as mother but there is a deeper probe into its complexity. The mother is an embittered woman caught between her own personality and desires, and life imposed on her as the economically dependent mother by the male dominated world.

At times the women live under the illusion that they suffer because of their men. But in actual fact it is this psychic and delusory feeling that they reel under the unsympathetic attitudes and approaches of their men
that cause tensions and anxieties to the women and push them to a state of alienation.

In Maya’s case, first thing is that, she is a pampered child (Electra complex) of Rai Saheb, second, her marriage with an ill-matched person Gautama, third, she is childless and fourthly, her thin relationship with her in-laws. All these things get into vein which turn her into a neurotic and abnormal person and which lead to the killing of her husband.

There is a possibility of Maya to be same if she meets her father. It is left to the readers to interpret or assume that her father whose love cannot be sustained can erase the void in her life and adapt to her life.

In the case of Sita, first thing is her city atmosphere (the violence), second is her being pregnant at the age of forty; third is her admiration for her father and the Island; fourth her marriage with a person, who is very practical and fifth her surface level relationship with her in-law and her own children, make things worse.

But then, Anita Desai, the creative women artist, has refused to be the obedient mouthpiece of male authors and be governed by the male literary conventions. Instead she has delved deep into what Adrienne Rich has called the catered night of the female memory to touch the true matrix; the wisdom of mankind.

This novelist traces the sociological, historical and psychological approaches to highlight sharply the history of the plights and predicaments
of women from the past to the present, to underscore their claims on several issues and societal fronts. She projects her viewpoints quite convincingly, persuasively, authentically, with a great sense of modern aesthetic.

Anita Desai has been artistically capable in arguing her view points with conviction, faith, and purpose. She has been differently affected by the great strides made in the fields of social theories and practices. And these have transformed her female psyche and female autonomy as a writer. She has successfully introduced feminist modernism. She has in large measure succeeded in resolving the contradiction, tensions and anxieties – *Angst* – experienced by women in the post satellite era.

The novelist deals with the plights and predicaments, the stresses and starings – *Strum-und-Drang* – the anxieties and tensions – *Angst* – and the handicaps confronted by women. Here Desai’s fictions are marked by their richness and thorough originality. She provides an excellent variety of characters quite credible and at the same quite familiar to people.

Anita Desai’s characters, both moral and spiritual, are set against the essential mysteries of death and sex, friendship and poverty, and the desperation and vulnerability of man that one encounters in many stories, but rarely so economically expressed.

Her narrative, containing symbolical and fabulous elements, is laid in small set pieces, snapshots arranged in a pattern that cannot be
anticipated until the author is done with her surprises. There is a great deal of humour, and a sense of cerebration, in spite of pains and miseries and self-pitying traumas, and all of it is beautifully wrought.

Her fictions are thought-provoking stories. They speak volumes for Anita Desai’s talent, and ingenuity. Her descriptive passages prove her great literary and artistic worth. She lambastes in her fictions the moral prudery that dampens spontaneity, and twists natural appetites. She also directs her attack on the middle class hypocrisy.

Yet again, she illuminates the complexity of the attitudes of men and women towards life. She presents them as martyrs of some terrible desperation. She argues that women could endure life’s calamities. She does not want the readers to become indifferent to these women.

In fact, the characters that Anita Desai portrays, come alive from the pages vital and strong because she has made the readers care about the pain in their lives. And ultimately her fictions are about pain and estrangement. All the characters are moulded by the quality and duration of their pain.

Anita Desai portrays her characters with an amazing delicacy and lightness of touch. Nothing glares out. Instead the perspective and critically oriented reader reaches inside their beings and begins to understand what motivates their hostilities.
The language is always simple and potent. It is tight and quiet, not over-luscious with flowery phrases. This spare quality of writing blends softly with the languid and familiar tone of the dialogue. Anita Desai's expression of her style of writing is worth quoting here:

I (Anita Desai) think the purpose of my writing is to discover — for myself — and then describe and convey the truth — the Dutch Old masters who could paint a loaf of bread so incomparably were not merely painting the meaning of that loaf, its significance to man, its quality, even its flavor ... My writing is an effort to discover, underline and convey the significance of things...\(^3\)

A beautiful and haunting atmosphere emerges out of the wreck of these folks' lives, a quality that is absolutely convincing and absolutely precise. The reader shares the tears and hurts of the characters as if it were through empathy, and as if they have watched it happened too often around him to deny them their tragedy. The novelist takes that simple locality and populates that landscape with familiar folks.

They are not limited to their time and space, but reach out to the readers and take in their pain also. The readers happen to be with them through lives, fraught like our own with all sorts of tragedies and jokes. It is this capacity, which distinguishes Anita Desai's *Oeuvres*. She can write so that it rings true to the readers. She draws a vision of pain that lives in the eyes of the readers.
It is not only in the use of subject matter, characterization and in presenting the atmosphere of minds but also in the use of narrative technique, symbols, images, flashback, the method of objective correlative and stream of consciousness, etc., that Anita Desai has achieved high recognition. In regard to the use of the stream of consciousness and interior monologue in her novels, she does it with a view to capturing the prismatic quality of life in her fiction.

Every novel of Desai is unique in itself. In *Cry, the Peacock* the emotional disparity between Maya and her husband Gautama is the basic cause of her sufferings. The lack of marital harmony in their lives leads to contingent situation of Maya’s life. Arjuna’s conflict with his father’ bourgeois values of life creates a crisis of situation for him. In *Voices in the City*, Nirode suspects his mother of adultery and his cherished image of his mother is shattered. Monisha experiences a sense of imprisonment in her in-law’s house.

Thus, through her fictions, Anita Desai projects herself as an outstanding woman genius. There are many compelling elements in her fiction, including the delineation of the psychological and emotional effects of being owned – of having no sense of self, of fearing to trust or to love when anything can be taken away at any time.

The portrayal of the very limited consciousness of the characters, and of their painful slow growth toward damaged self-awareness, is also
effective, although sometimes the halt and hesitant nature of their thoughts makes her novels almost catatonic.

Anita Desai writes powerful, expressive fiction in which she delineates the struggles of the characters for wholeness and political autonomy. In her fictions she has introduced several of the particular themes. But the major themes are the domination of powerful men over powerless women, and the sufferings of the women at the hands of women. They feel psychically that men torment them.

Thus, Anita Desai’s fictions have earned for her the universal acclaim that she is an astounding woman genius. Her works have established her literary preeminence as one of the remarkable and accomplished and great women writers who have richly contributed to the growth and development, of Women Literature.

The logic of everyday world is replaced by forms of contradiction and discontinuity, radical shifts of context which suggest that “reality as well as “fiction” is merely one more game with words...⁴

The novelist gains maturation as an artist of excellence, and relevance. This Indian woman artist-genius has struck maturation only through hard labour, commitment to writing well, and cerebreation. It is through hard labour and sweat that they Anita Desai has attained higher
level of sophistication in writing. Understandably only elitist readers could delve deep into her mature art products.

The reader’s first impression of reading Anita Desai is one brave originality and uniqueness. Her novels are certainly reflective of social realities from psychological perspective. She closely examiners the emotional world of womankind. In dealing with the interior landscape and the psychic odyssey of her characters, Desai has extended and enlarged the thematic horizon of the Indian English novels.

Her characters are creatures of habit, stubborn and unyielding. These characters are inevitably confronted with an unfriendly and hostile reality. They feel emotionally estranged from the family and environment. They turn inward and speak to themselves in long soliloquies and monologues.

According to her, most marriages prove to be unions of incompatibility. Her women long for love and communion of the spirit which they perceive as the panacea of the ills of the world. In her novels one can come across a symbolic link between images, which form an interface, a common bond. Imagery is primarily used to capture and crystallize a wide range of experiences.

It lends clarity and vividness to the situation she describes, events she documents, and characters she delineates. Most of the images used
by Desai in her novels are so sharply condensed and chiselled that they resemble a piece of painting. She is a symbolic as well as an imagist.

And the readers cannot afford to be casual browsers to grasp at her studied level of argumentation. Only critically oriented readers could better appreciate the mature literary works of Anita Desai. Anita Desai could turn into a mature artist because she has been able to employ her powers of imagination, inborn talents, inspiration, and apt modes of expression in a combined manner for creating aesthetic artifacts.

Desai does not justify the actions of these women – only grants them the right to act – even make mistakes. This is a significant claim. One should not be denied the privilege of making a decision merely because it might be wrong. The two women Maya and Sita gently but firmly press their claim.

Understandably then, a high level of technical achievements mark the art products of Anita Desai. In fact, she has employed her art tools with functional valuations and functional variations. In fine, through verbal mastery, language manipulations, linguistic experimentation, innovative forms, and technical devices she has gained recognition as a creative self.

Anita Desai, the remarkable Indian writer in English, through innovative ways and contextual excellence has enriched Indian writing in English, and by extension Commonwealth literature. In this context, one takes into account the pertinent statement of Richard Chase,
which is worth quoting here:

... the health culture depends upon its recurring impulse to experimentation, its search for radical values, its historical awareness, its flexibility and its receptivity to experience....

Thus. Through her fictions, Anita Desai displays her technical virtuosity.

All of this suggest that in spite of several ambivalences and a tendency of wordiness, which make Anita Desai’s achievement uneven, her fictional talent, has added a new dimension to the Indo-English novel. In her fiction we find thematic possibilities which stem not from the insular Indian situation but from the generic human condition.

Thus, Anita Desai has been a new icon on the Indian scene writing in English. She tried her best in exploring the psyche of human being. In spite of her achievement, Anita Desai has her own limitation. Like Ruth P. Jhabvala and Manohar Malgaonkar, she writes only about the upper class urban people.

The range of her themes is also restricted to domestic problems – women’s city life and men’s psychological crisis. She does not depict the pain and poverty or suffering. However, she is excellent in depicting the inner furies of women and their rising tone for emancipation and empowerment. She also pays much attention to form and technique in writing.
Anita Desai, like Jhabvala and others, does not go beyond the line of her sphere. Her range of themes, as in Jane Austine’s, is limited to the domestic affairs, kitchens, gardens, beaches and the like. As K.R.S. Srinivasa Iyengar says,

the explosions in Mrs. Desai’s novels occur only within narrow domestic walls. Always, is the intolerable grapple with thoughts, feelings and emotions⁶.

Desai’s novels are a poetic display of harmonious presentation of form and substances. Her artistic, lively portaitures and beautiful family environs are surely the signs of her genuine talent. Mr. B. Ramachandra Rao states,

The sense of form which is late to develop is the sign of the maturity of a literature, and the novels of Anita Desai are a happy example of the fusion of form with content, of structure with texture⁷.

Like all other Indian English Novelists, Desai is a novelist as well as a short story writer. Her novels offer satirical view of social change in post-independence India with a strong sense of waste, limitation, failure and frustration. There is no doubt that with all her works, Desai has made significant contributions to Indian Fiction.
Thus, Desai seems involved in the problems of marital discord and the hypocrisy, the faithlessness and the soul – destroying grinding process of compromise which accompanies it. In each of her novels, traumatic experiences of married lives can be encountered. She fearlessly puts forward the fact that in society, marriages generally follow the jungle law of ‘the survival of the fittest’. Being physically stronger, man survives.

To conclude, Anita Desai indirectly suggests that women should either remain unmarried, unfettered and unaccepted by the society or marry, and be damned to everlasting private hell. She humbly admits that she is allergic to writing social novels. However, this would be a topic for further research in the area of study.
REFERENCES


2. Anita Desai, Cry, the Peacock, New Delhi, Orient Paperback, 1990, p.35.


