CHAPTER – I

INTRODUCTION

We must rather adapt a view for which the term *Perspectivism*,
seems sensible. We must be able to refer a work of art to the
values of its own time and of all the periods subsequent to its
own...¹

This above quoted assertion of Austin Warren serves as a convenient
parameter to gauge the range, scope, artistic creativity and purpose sense in
the fictions of Anita Desai. In fact, it admirably and adequately qualifies her
mind and art. Anita Desai has richly contributed by her fictions to the
strength, significance, growth, development, transcendence, relevance, wide
reach and consequence of Indian writing in English by an Indian woman, and
by extension world literature.

She demonstrates her artistic capability for enclosing the old and the
new. The flawless triumph of Anita Desai’s art lies in her creative ability to
give expression to adequately and admirably to her feelings, thoughts, and
experiences in her literary products and invest them with the balanced
proportions, symmetry, perfection, cohesion, order and unity.

Anita Desai’s themes such as love, hatred, sex alienation, the absurd
conditions of life, psychic stresses and strains, and the secondary status of
women and her crusade to redeem the women from their suspended state
and show them the means to empower themselves through education and economic independence, are always creative and have vistas.

Despite the varying themes, her novels are unified by the persistent strain of existentialism. She herself makes her intentions clear:

My novels are no reflections of Indian society, politics or characters. They are a part of my private effort to seize upon the raw materials of life – its shapelessness its meaninglessness².

As such, Anita Desai is affected by the society and the Establishment and she intends and wants her fictions to have social relevance and consequence. Moreover, she wishes that her literary works provide the necessary and needed correctives and the healthy and definitive prescriptions so that the society and the Establishment would mend and alter for the better.

In this context, it is apt to quote the assertion of Harry Levin:

Literature is not only the effect of social casues; it is also the cause of social effects….³

Yet again, Austin Warren’s another assertion deserves to be quoted and studied in conjunction with the pithy and pointed statement of Harry Levin:

The writer is not only influenced by society; he influences it. Art not merely reproduces life but also shapes it….⁴
So much so, the fictions of Anita Desai qualified by moral earnestness, intellectual intensities and social expectations, prove to be a genuine and objective study of the society and the Establishment. The observation of William O’Connor is a pointer in this regard:

Society becomes the work of art....

Moreover, two more assertions of Austin Warren deserve to be examined in conjunction with the assertions already quoted in this regard. Austin Warren’s first argument is that:

Literature can be used as a social document and literature can be made to yield the outlines of social history... Literature is simply a mirror of life, and thus, obviously a social document.

Austin Warren’s other contention is:

The most immediate setting of a work of literature, we shall then recognize, is its linguistic and literary tradition, and this tradition in turn is encompassed by a general cultural “climate”. Only far less directly can literature be connected with concrete economic, political, and social conditions. Of course, there are interrelationships between all spheres of human activities...

It ought to be stressed that Austin Warren fails not to realize the validity of the argument that literature and society lie intertwined. Thus, based on the assertions of Harry Levin, Austin Warren and William O’Connor, the
literary products of Anita Desai cannot be branded and dismissed as mere propaganda literature. On the other hand, they are real purposive art, and they succeed in achieving a reach that transcends time and space.

In this context, the pointed observation of Terry Eagleton becomes relevant here:

To write well is more than a matter of “style”; it also means having at one’s disposal an ideological perspective, which can penetrate to the realities of man’s experience in a certain situation...\(^8\)

Incidentally, the literature of Anita Desai speaks directly to the mind and heart of the readers. It is precisely because ideas or mental pictures are the rough materials of this writer. In representing reality she is absolutely limited by the very conditions of the art of writing and by the elements of fiction, to project the mental aspects of the external existence, which she portrays.

In fact, Anita Desai, the Indian Woman genius artist, through her fictions promotes a high level of mentation in the sensitive and perspective readers, and persuades them to shed their individual ego and embrace the corporate ego, and thereby accept intersubjectivity as the way of meaningful life.
In fine, Anita Desai’s fictions reproduce external reality in its mental aspect. She employs the representation of the objective aspects of reality to assist the presentation of this mental aspect. But then literature is not altogether objective, for there is also a blend of the subjective element. In other words the fiction of Anita Desai is mainly objective in character but there is controlled infusion of subjectivism in her objective representation of life that she witnesses around herself in her period of life.

Anita Desai firmly believes that her mind transference is of real value and is of equal importance to objective reportage. As such one detects her mind transference in her fictions. Yet again, the accent that this creative genius places is on high seriousness of absolute sincerity, and as such to present the greatest number of greater ideas.

It is with such a perspective on the art of writing that one assess the merits of Anita Desai as a creative artist. In fact, she projects herself as the representative and perfect spokesperson of the women and men of her time.

Furthermore, in delineating the male and female characters she bestows the same attention and care with which she projects the female protagonists. She talks of the male characters, who too suffer alienation, as some of her women characters do. For instance both Maya and Gautama in Cry, the Peacock experience alienation as an inevitable condition in their lives. She accurately identifies and classifies characters as the Debased Selves, the Alienates, and some as the Fatalists.
As such, Anita Desai draws the attention of women to be on guard against the such domination of male characters in real life. Hence, Anita Desai’s literature is helpful in guiding women readers to discover their inner 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 males are capable of doing, if not better. In fact, Anita Desai opens in the hearts and minds of the perceptive readers a stronger sense of social justice, and a more Christ-like humanity. And it is precisely because she believes in the justice track for both men and women.

Anita Desai has perfectly handled the intricacies, minutiae and workings of human relationships in the modern scenario. Her novels truly present the decaying face of human relationships as evident in this modern world. The glue that bound the relations earlier has now gone dry. In the modern scenario no relation has been left with its ingenuity and authenticity. The relation of daughter and father, mother and son, sister and brother and even of husband and wife has come under the dark shadows of suspicion, distrust, miscommunication and above all silence.

The thread of relations has lost its tenacity. Just like Anita Desai’s characters, Maya, Adit and Sarah, modern men and women are leading a dead life. Desai has very beautifully explored this strange place in her novels and kept open a whole new world in front of us.
And the knowledge of Anita Desai of the sufferings and struggles of men and women is comprehensive and perceptive in character. She is aware of the purpose sense behind the argument of Simon de Beauvoir, which runs thus:

Thus humanity is male made and man defines women not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being... she is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is incidental. The inessential is opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the Absolute – she is the other... ⁹

The assumption that persists is that women are fundamentally different from men and this has been the cause of the subordination of women. It is argued, then, that women’s differences from men is the chief reason of women being oppressed, denied, exploited and dehumanize. This is the fate of the female protagonists of Anita Desai.

It ought to be stressed that the fundamental fact of male domination over women is discernible in all societies. Patriarchy is justified by the biological differences between men and women and is the causative factor of the universal oppression of women by men.

With such a clear knowledge of what patriarchy has devised and designed for women and the persistent female psyche operating at the level of submissiveness, servility, and inferiority, Anita Desai portrays the male and
female characters in her fictions. With a thorough knowledge of the male mind and the female psyche she delinates the male and female characters in her eleven fictions quite convincingly and persuasively.

It must also be said to her credit that because of her Indian origin she is able to suffuse her eleven fictions with Indianness. The characters are Indian, the milieu described in her fictions are mostly from India, and the prevailing atmosphere is Indian and the language is chaste English that captures the varying flavours of Indianness.

This deep-seated awareness of everything Indian can be traced to her Bengali father and Gujarathi husband. Incidentally, Anita Desai was born in Mussoorie, India, in 1937 to a Bengali father and a German mother. She had her rich school education at Queen Mary’s Higher Secondary School, Miranda House, New Delhi and later on her collegiate education at the University of Delhi. She has put her power of observation of even the minutiae of men and matters, gathered knowledge, languages mastery, language skills, verbal brilliance, writing capacities and a style of expression uniquely and originally her own to create great and crafted works of art.

Being a mother of four children she has had the optimum taste of motherhood. And her own personal knowledge of what is to be a woman, and the awareness of the plights and predicaments of other women surface time and again in her eleven fictions. Moreover, her awareness of the mind workings and actions of men around her get reflected in the male charaters delineated by her.
Anita Desai has earned for herself a healthy niche in the annals of Indian writing in English. She has firmly established her reputation as one of the outstanding creative fictionists. As a remarkable Indian writer in English she has won several prestigious literary awards. Mention may be made of her being the recipient of the Guardian Award for Children’s Fiction for her work, *The Village by the Sea* and the National Academy Award for *Fire on the Mountain*.

Anita Desai has emerged as a significant Academe. She is a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in London. She is a Member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. She enjoys teaching assignments at British and American Universities.

It must be noted that the pioneers of Indo-Anglican novels like Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya, R.K. Narayan dealt with social upheavals. And Mulk Raj Anand is identified as the Father of Left Oriented literature in India. And Raja Rao, Kamala Markandaya and Kushwant Singh tried their hands on topics such as East-West encounter and spiritualism.

But Anita Desai shifts the literary interest from the external world to the innards of the individual. The focus is on the states of mind, and not in mirroring the Indian society. In fact, Anita Desai’s best literary efforts are to capture the atmosphere of the mind, and directly involve the reader in the flow of a particular consciousness.
In this context, the pointed observation of S.P. Swain is worth recording here:

....they (the fictions of Anita Desai) are deeply moving in their existential and socio-psychic import. Microsom of man’s endless struggle for survival, they voice the anguished ennui of the caged bird that symbolizes the modern man. Emblem of remonstrance and psychic protest, they strive for the protection and preservation of their dignity and self esteem in a patriarchal society. Indigantly promiscuous and inordinately self-conscious, they long for mutual understanding and reciprocation of love and respect... This inner world of sensibility rendered through splendid poetic prose gives a peculiar poetic quality to Desai’s novels...10

At this juncture a brief critical survey of her novels becomes necessary to underscore her literary preeminence as one of the distinguished Indian writers in English.

Anita Desai’s **Voice in the City** (1965) is a fascinating novel. It describes the corrosive effects of city life upon an Indian family. Brought up in luxury by an over-indulgent mother, Nirode settles down in Calcutta and becomes absorbed into its bohemian life, while his elder sister Monish, lives out a servile existence within the rigid confines of a traditional Hindu family. Their younger sister arrives from the country and becomes involved with an
artist. The outcome of this affair and the dreadful decision Monish eventually takes, make this fiction a doubly haunting and a consummate work of art.

In **Voices in the City**, Anita Desai, the fictonist, captures a vivid picture of India’s social transition. The style of expression in this fiction is lucid, highly controlled and tight, and un-dramatic. Her imagistic power acquires an ambiguous and terrible power and the words hold down the events forcibly.

Anita Desai’s next fiction **Fire on the Mountain** (1977) brings into confrontation the young Raka and the old, Nanda Kaul. It is a gripping and moving story told in a cool and clear prose. It is perfectly accomplished fiction. The main character Nanda Kaul has chosen to spend her last years high up in the mountains. There, free from the demands of a busy life, she arranges her thouhts in a tranquil setting.

Her great grandchild, Raka, comes to join her. She is a thin, fragile, secretive girl. And Nanda Kaul deeply resents her intrusion in her otherwise peaceful life in the mountains. With the help of Raka, who has the capacity to change things, Nanda Kaul discovers new needs deep within herself. When the violence explodes, she faces the truth.

And Anita Desai’s next fiction **Cry, the Peacock** (1980) is a very significant work. With a sense of place Anita Desai creates a well-crafted fiction, which has the likeness of a stained landscape with details of images, colors and odors. It is poetic prose that is employed as the medium in this
fiction. **Cry, the Peacock** is an outstanding and compulsive fiction authored by a sensitive artist with vivid imagination and excellent powers of description and remarkable narrative skill.

Anita Desai traces the story of a young girl, Maya, who is obsessed by a childhood prophecy of disaster, which cannot be averted. The author builds of an atmosphere of tension as torrid, and oppressive as a stifiling Indian summer, both in the colourful crowded cities and strangely beautiful countryside. This is also of marital discord imbued with a strong streak of neurotic fantasy. The domineering attitude of the male charater, Gautama, is exactly delineated. He invites alienation on himself by his thoughts and actions.

Anita Desai’s **Clear Light of Day** (1980) is a wonderful fiction about silence and music, and about the partition of a family, as well as a nation. Against the wide canvas of momentous political and social changes in India, the writer depicts in fine detail the lives of one middle class Hindu family. Bim, a plain and competent woman lives in Old Delhi caring for Baba, her retarded younger brother. She assumes the role of the keeper of the family. Tara, the beautiful young sister, comes home on a visit. On her return from India, she leaves as the wife of a diplomat. Her older brother, Raja, who longed to be a poet and a hero, marries a Muslim and becomes a successful businessman.

The story revolves around these three. And the sisters, Bim and Tara, explore their lives from the Partition Riots of 1947 to the present. And in this fiction reality and illusion are perceived through the subtle filter of time and
memory. This fiction is an exquisitely written story of an Indian family confronting the problematic world and the break up of the illusions of the sisters and their brother.

The fiction *The Village by the Sea*, (1982) by Anita Desai, is an exquisite novel marked by details and piercing feeling. It is about Hari and Lila of a small fishing village called Thul. It has remained in all its pristine purity unaffected by the sophisticated strains of urban life of the twentieth century. Thul was still ruled by the age-old seasonal rhythms. The family of Hari and Lila is down on its luck, and passes through financial doldrums, mainly because of their drunkard father and seriously ill mother. It is a state of gloomy poverty that is captured in this fiction and the sufferings of the child-hero, Hari.

Anita Desai’s *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1982) deals with the identity crisis of Sita, the protagonist of the novel. Her husband is insensitive, which brings her to a state of psychic depression. But her sufferings, to a certain extent, are those that she invites on herself and in the procedss inovles her husband Gautama also to suffer the same plights and predicaments.

This fiction, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* is an intense story of a sensitive wife torn between the desire to abandon the boredom and hypocrisy of her middle class and ostensibly comfortable existence, and the realization that the bonds that bind her to it cannot be broken. It is a skilful dramatization of an unusual life situation of an anguished woman, and a
suffering man. The fictionist presents the story with insight, with clarity of vision, and in flawless style.

**In Custody** (1984) by Anita Desai is a memorable novel, beautifully accomplished, and well crafted. The fiction is resonant and realistic. **In Custody** projects Deven, the protagonist, who at the suggestion of his friend Murad, decides to leave his shapeless town of Miro pore and go to Delhi to meet the greatest living Urdu poet. He goes with dreams of becoming famous and great after meeting Nur but he turns only disillusioned. But the argumentation of **In Custody** is to turn frustration into a triumphing state.

Anita Desai’s **Bye Bye Blackbird** (1985) deals with Dev and Adit, the expatriates whose relationships with their parent country is one of hate and love. These immigrants have a hard time in England, their adopted country. Many blackbirds – Indian immigrants in England – are either partially rejected or totally turned away, for East is East and West is west and the twin can never meet. But this does not affect the flow of immigration.

In **Bye Bye Blackbird** Adit is faced with the dilemma of whether to stay in London or return to India. Finally he conquers his indecisiveness and decides to return to India. This decision brought him emancipation from all the mental conflicts, pains and predicaments he was passing through as an expatiraite in London.

Hugo Baumgartner, the central character of Anita Desai’s **Baumgartner’s Bombay** (1988) is a wandering Jew all his life. Diaspora,
displacement, disorientation, resettlement and reorientation, nostalgia, cultural divide, and the sufferings and struggles are very much part and parcel of the life of a Jew and Baumgartner is no exception.

From the agonizing scenes of his childhood in Berlin, through his spell in business in Calcutta, and then Bombay, Baumgartner does not belong. He is too dark for Hitler's society, and he is too fair for India. And Baumgartner remains a foreigner – a firanghi – wherever he goes.

Anita Desai’s next novel *Journey to Ithaca* (1995) is quite entrancing in character. It explores the ambiguous nature of divine and profane love. Matteo, the hero, leaves his home on the Italian lakes to search for a spiritual enlightenment in the ashrams of India. Practical, down to earth Sophie accompanies him but does not find the mysterious Mother as inspiring a guru as he does. As Matteo worships at the Mother’s feet and Sophie struggles for his love, the fiction unfolds the Mother’s own story. The Mother traces her story from the Egyptian childhood in the early part of the twentieth century, her joining an Indian dance troupe in Paris, Venice and New York and to her arrival and search for divine love in India.

This fiction, *Journey to Ithaca* is tightly structured. It is evocative and is rich with the sounds, sights, and smells of Italy and India. It draws the reader into the heart of the most untranslatable of human experience.

Anita Desai’s recent fiction *Fasting, Feasing* (1999), is full of wit and sensuality, farce and deep pathos. It cuts right to the heart of family life in two
different cultures. The story revolves around Uma, the plain daughter. She fails to outgrow her home and family. She stays within the confines of her family surrounded and smothered by her godlike, overbearing parents, and by her younger sister Aruna, who is ambitious and who enters into a successful marriage.

Arun is the male heir of the family, who experiences the rigors of fatalism. Across the world in Massachusetts, where Arun goes as a student he finds a different cultural pattern. It is bewildering and full of terror for the young Indian adolescent far from home. Two different ways of assuaging human hungers, desires and appetites are revealed in this subtle, sharp and poignant story, *Fasting, Feasting*.

Fasting distils India and feating captures America. This fiction, *Fasting, Feasting* ranges from the hub of a close knit Indian household, with its traditional obligation and impositions, its overpowering warmth and sensual responses, to the cool centre of an American family, with its freedom, freezers and paradoxically self-denying, self-indulgence. In both there are victims and survivors.

Thus, this brief critical survey amply testifies to the fact that Anita Desai is an outstanding fictionist. Like Vladimir Nabokov, who denied any knowledge of Kafka or Freud, Anita Desai denies the importance of theories in the shaping of artistic imagination. Anita Desai argues that a work of art should grow from within, form the writer’s inner beckoning and compulsion.
Anita Desai’s statement is worth quoting here:

I (Anita Desai) think theories of the novel are held by those of an academic or critical turn of mind, not the creative. A writer does not create a novel by observing a given set of theories – he follows flashes of individual vision, and relies on a kind of instinct that tells him what to follow, and what to avoid, how to veer away from what would be destructive to his vision. It is these flashes of vision, and a kind of trained instinct that leads him ….not any theories¹¹

And nature has determined woman’s destiny through beauty, charm, and sweetness. And it is an acknowledged fact that woman submitted willingly to the social and sexual subjection of pairing.

The women constantly longed for relief by the right of chastity. The notion of sexual resistance, the defence of integrity with frigidity, or the preservation of independence through chastity are common themes in a male dominated society.

And chastity, or even negative attitudes towards coitus, which accompany frigidity, opened as patriarchal, social and psychological stratagems to limit or prohibit a woman’s pleasures in sexuality. But then they could also be transformed into protective feminine stratagems in a refusal to capitulate to patriarchal force – physical, economic or social.
The effect of patriarchal social condition upon women with regard to their sexual lives has had enormous and even anomalous results. One marvels at the proof of the power of socialization to culturally restrain women in all respects.

Patriarchy tends to convert a woman into a sexual object. This is precisely the manner in which the male characters look upon the women. But the woman does not enjoy sexuality, which is agreed to be her fate. Instead, she is made to suffer for and be ashamed of her sexuality. And women have been confined to the cultural level of animal life providing the male with sexual outlet and exercising the animal functions of reproduction and care of the young.

Thus, the female has had sexuality visited upon her as a punishment in a way of life, which, with few exceptions, and part from maternity, did not encourage her to derive pleasure in sexuality and limited her to an existence otherwise comprised mainly of menial labour and domestic service.

By and large, pregnancy and childbirth were continually referred to, in the patriarchal set up, as biological infirmities. Yet again, the entire burden of child care and housework was thrust upon women, frequently alone, as paternal responsibility was so often neglected.

A woman, who resists femininity, feminine temperament, status, and role is thought to court neurosis, for femininity is her fate as anatomy is destiny. In so evading the only identity nature has granted her, she courts
nothingness. This is precisely the state of mind of Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* and it is because of her neurotic condition that she suffers and she perforce enovles Gautama also to suffer likewise. In a marginally different way the same can be said of Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* She suffers from neurosis and she makes Raman also suffer loneness and misery.

And in fact, Anita Desai is acknowledged by renowned critics to have gained artistic maturation as a fictionist of excellence, significance, relevance, and consequence. Anita Desai, the artistic genius has struck artistic maturation by virtue of her hard labour and her writing skill, sincere commitment to write well and perfectly and fittingly and to her cerebration.

In this context the statement of Patricia Waugh is worth quoting here:

> 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….¹²

Anita Desai’s female protagonists perceive the psychic truth which is distinctly different from the reality they confront. They develop fears, obsessions, neuroses, paranoia or schizophrenia and gradually withdraw from the society including their families and husbands. They develop incomunicaiton and tend to ponder over existential problems and end up in alienation.
Anita Desai has an innate ability to peep into the inner recesses of the psyche of her characters rather than the outer spectacle of action. She has enormously contributed to the growth of Indian fiction in English by incorporating psychic aspect of her female characters who have suffered privation and humiliations, neglect and silence, aloofness and alienation. Alienation has been the thematic motif that organically connects Anita Desai’s fiction. This makes her an exceptionally unique novelist.

Tendulkar has created these unique women characters in ‘Shanta court Chalue Aahe’ and ‘Sakhamam Binder’ who leave an indelible impression on our mind. These are not just fictional characters but clearly prove Tendulkar’s competence in probing and portraying the intricacies of the female mind.

It is only thorough hard labour and sweat that Anita Desai has attained higher level of sophistication in writing. Understandably, her fictions are not meant for casual browsers. Only elitist and perceptive readers could delve deep into her mature art products. The simple reason is that this woman writer is a demanding artist.

She expects reader participation on her own terms and not on the terms of the readers. And as stated earlier the readers cannot afford to be casual browsers to grasp at her studied level of argumentation. Only perceptive and critically oriented readers could better appreciate her mature fictions.
Yet again, Anita Desai could blossom into a mature artist mainly 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.

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

In this context, one takes into account the pertinent argument 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...  

In the case of Anita Desai it can be safely argued that all of her knowledge starts with her private sensations, ideas, feelings, and experiences and sense data of her individual mind. It is her egocentric predicament. As such, reality, is reduced to her mind being governed by ideas, feelings and experiences.

But then Anita Desai is conscious of the fact that strong aggressive impulses must be sublimated in group life. The reason is that society would not accept and tolerate the strong impulsive behaviour of an individual. It is
the claim of Anita Desai that individuals must suppress their hostilities, and their private sensations, altogether. If that is not possible, then the individual must express them in a manner that will appear constructive or harmless to the welfare of other persons.

A careful study of the novelist’s language reveals meaningful correlations between the psychic condition of the characters and the language used by them. Her novels contain evidences of her awareness of various problems pertaining to women, which she has tried to tackle from a psychological point of view. The solutions presented by her may be muted or oblique at times, but the significance of her efforts can hardly be denied.

A controlled form of stream of consciousness is employed in most of the novels. The psychological nature of the theme more than justifies the form. Speaking of her mode of narration she remarks,

Writing is not an act of deliberation, reason and choice. It is a matter of instinct, silence and waiting. It is the movement of the wing one tries to capture not the bird. That is, it is the image that matters, the symbol, the myth...\textsuperscript{14}

A succession of images that externalize the internal conflict is the mode adopted in most of the novels. Manipulation of time is another characteristic feature. Time constantly shifts between past and present and the present is always subject to the inevitable influence of the past.
There is a merging of the first person, second person and third person narration in Anita Desai’s novels. Mostly the Jamesian method of the “indirect and oblique view” of narration is employed\(^\text{15}\). Narrative voices shift and alternate, lending themselves to multivalent readings. The text becomes the site of proliferate meanings and multiple readings making writings meaningful.

The goal of Anita Desai, the woman genius-artist, is to turn into a mature writer, and as an astounding creative self. She has achieved a great measure of success in this dual regard. Anita Desai could achieve literary preminence among the Indian writers writing in English, and strike artistic maturation at the thematic level in her range of characterization only by applying her mind to the single-minded purpose of creating great and lasting works of art.

The first exercise of the free woman is to devise her own mode of revolt, a mode, which will reflect her own independence and originality. The more clearly the forms of oppression emerge in her understanding, the more clearly she can see the shape of future action. . . . \(^\text{16}\)

It is an acknowledged fact that the mind set of Anita Desai as a creative artist is of an outstanding calibre, and high artistic maturation. She has the rare capacity to open up a closed world and to make it clearly visible to perceptive and critically oriented readers. Clear thinking and great originality mark the creative art products of Anita Desai. Yet again, Anita
Desai’s literary products are qualified by contextual relevance, structural finesse, and organizational tightness, and verbal brilliance, and artistic control.

Furthermore, Anita Desai’s literary products gain lasting value mainly because she reflects on the problems and issues of life, which are universally experienced by all in all ages in the past and also in the years to come. An art object like all other objects has two factors — form and content. As to the problem of mutual relation between these two factors, there are two contesting groups of aestheticians.

According to one group form is fundamental. This group holds on to the viewpoint that form is art. And therefore in such an art — subject — matter or content — is not very important. Art can be made without looking at content, that is, content has nothing to do with art proper. It is argued that art is independent of the thoughts and ideas of the artist.

Therefore, the work of art is viewed as a detached object. It is a theory of art from which the subject or the artist is excluded. The aestheticians of this group fail to recognize the fact that art is successful to the extent it expresses a particular idea. The other group places the accent on content. What is of primary importance is content. The value of crafted art depends on the gravity of the ideas.

But Anita Desai takes a balanced and a synthetic view. To her form and content are inseparable. Abstraction of form from content or content from
form implies an abstract theory of art, which should be replaced by a concrete one in which form and content make a pattern or synola — artistic whole.

In fact, a work of art, according to Anita Desai, is a form-content complex. For it is the means of expression of a particular idea of the artist. Content by itself can enrich neither the content nor form by itself but brings about that enrichment. The success of a work of art depends on the harmony between the two. When something is called creation it implies both the idea and the expression of the idea, two taken together.

In connection with the relation between form and content one has to bear in mind the fact that content by itself is not something fixed. It is not a solid crystal. In fact, content is always in the process of becoming. It becomes what it is with the development of form. Content is content because of form in which it resides. In fact, content achieves its distinctive feature only when it is cast in a particular form. What Anita Desai emphasizes is that what is called a great form is nothing but a great idea, and a great idea is nothing but the form of the great or lofty life, which is the result of the all round development of the personality of the artist.

Thus, both content and form are not something static. They are dynamically related to each other. In intellectual field, a particular subject matter can be transferred from one place to another as it is. Sometimes the subject appears brighter; when taking form from the original, it is put in different context.
Here thought is thought. It is fixed. But when it becomes content of art it cannot be transferred. Content cannot be separated from the form, which supports it. Content and form are related to each like mind and body.

Content refers to the internal factor in contrast with form, which refers to external fact. Form includes medium, technique, aids, tools, — all that goes for externalization of mental fact. Here too, according to Anita Desai, the inner and the outer are intrinsically connected. In fact, the aesthetic theory, which Anita Desai holds, is a humanistic theory. Any divine involvement or any supra-mundane reference has been completely ruled out by the artist, Anita Desai.

An artist is a man like any other man having a human history behind. Man is the beginning and end of creative process. A work of art is always some perceptible object to be enjoyed and appreciated by some human observer. Moreover, Anita Desai takes all the writing care at her disposal to see to it that the structure is of a balanced and perfect manner and that the organization is tightly well knit, without any lose ends.

Yet again, she places the accent, in a balanced manner, on the elements of fiction and the rhetorical requirements, which overlap one another. There is the proper description of the milieu, Zeitgeist, and the race, class and gender in her works.

Anita Desai places equal accent on accurate storytelling as well. She values the importance of tight plot construction, and effective narration. There
is the right fusion of intellect and intuition. It is not all inspiration, but inspiration channelled through crafted art.

Anita Desai never fails to take recourse to revisions. It is precisely because of Anita Desai’s writing faith that lies in the fact that only repeated and proper revisions can ensure that sophisticated level of perfection and complexity in her fictions.

It ought to be stressed that Anita Desai is a technical virtuoso. She is bestowed with the talent to employ the literary tools and devices with functional valuations and variations. Furthermore, her Weltanschauung is deeply colored but not totally obtruded by the stresses and strains — the Sturm-und-Drang — the tensions and anxieties — Angst — experienced by men and women.

Anita Desai captures as it were the very pulse of the present world, which has witnessed two Global Wars, the Wall Street Crash — the Great depression — the anomie — and the great accent placed on materialism. In fact the merchant in man reigns supreme.

That is precisely why men and women are conscious of spinning more dollars, and with this in mind are acutely conscious of spending even fractions of seconds to earn and hoard more. As such values of life, moral and ethical standards take a descending curve and suffer a downward dip.

The major themes that draw the attention of writers the world over including Anita Desai are not the age old subjects of birth, growth, maturity,
passion, union, new birth, mutability, decay, death, and rebirth. On the other hand on the familial ground it is human relationships, which have suffered a serious jolt because of the accent on material side and animalistic side of life. And it is sex first and love next.

The argument that is currently prevalent among the intellectuals is where there is satisfactory sex there is bound to be love and not otherwise. Consequently where there is no satisfactory sex there is bound to be violence and death. This vein of thinking began in the sixties of the twentieth century when post-modernism made its mark.

Therefore, Anita Desai concentrates on the psychic angle of her characters, who suffer from the mental crises passed through by them. The family relationship has touched an unhealthy low because of sexism, or over-sexed or under-sexed condition, and the beastly animalism in the characters. There is the stress on a life that is rooted in a mechanical and daily dull routine. The tempo of life is one of a fast phase and it is fast living and nothing else.

Therefore, the tragedy of men and women are that they have lost their self-respect, honour, and dignity, and as a consequence they lose their separate and distinct individuality.

In such a context, notwithstanding the phenomenal material gains and high standard of living men and women suffer from mental crises and as a
result of the persistent psychic strains and stresses turn into neurotic case studies.

Incidentally, through her effective way of describing the scene of action and time of action, Anita Desai evokes the right responses and correct emotions. But the descriptions do not root themselves at the level of emotions and physicality. On the other hand, the power of evoked emotions strengthens the promotion of the next level of intellection, and finally the higher level of moral and spiritual thinking.

Anita Desai’s art products enable the perceptive and critically oriented readers to detect the clarity of her vision, range, depth, scope, and dynamism of her writing. In fact, through her literary products she projects herself as the most distinguished fictionist of the post-war period.

Thus, by applying her ingenuity, the zeal for revision, conscious and painstaking craftsmanship, committed art, clarity of vision, extensive reachable nature, significance, relevance, and consequence, and with the richest and varied imagination, Anita Desai enjoys the reputation of an outstanding artist.

Yet again, the language skills, language maximization, verbal brilliance, imagery, choice diction, descriptive excellence, narrative techniques, and dialogue writing merit consideration as far as Anita Desai’s merits are concerned.
It ought to be stressed that Anita Desai takes a humanistic conception of creativity. And creativity is essentially a human process. By human process one means that artistic creation does not take any divine existence either as source or goal of the work. The whole process is to be referred to the artist as a human being. Creative work starts with man and ends with man, and that man is again a total man, a concrete man.

This is the convenient parameter to gauge the range, scope, artistic creativity and purpose sense in the fictions of Anita Desai. In fact, it admirably and adequately qualifies her mind and art. There is a sharp focus on Anita Desai and on her subject matter. With this idea in mind there is the examination of Anita Desai as a rare combination of an artist and an aesthetician. In fact Anita Desai’s viewpoints on aesthetics are of immense importance. They are the outcome of an artist of brilliant imagination.

It ought to be stressed that most of the aesthetic theories of other philosophers who have great intellectual acumen are unlike that of Anita Desai. The theories of other philosophers are based on mere theoretical investigation, and as such there is the possibility of their being away from actualities. On the other hand, the truths, which one expects to glean from Anita Desai are all concrete truths. These are the truths as they are experienced by a great creative genius like Anita Desai.

Yet again, Anita Desai’s writings on literature, like all other writings, are also marked by characteristic originality. She has written what she herself has felt, and realized, and as such her writings are characterized by the absence
of reference to aesthetic thinkers, either of the East or the West. And Anita Desai’s aesthetic theories are rooted in her living experiences, thoughts, and feelings as a great creative artist.

The flawless triumph of Anita Desai’s art lies in her creative ability to give expression to adequately and admirably to her feelings, thoughts, and experiences in her literary products, and invest them with the balanced proportions, symmetry, perfection, cohesion, order and unity. It is significant, relevant, and consequential to record the pointed observation of E. B. Havel in this context, which runs as follows:

Indian art is not concerned with the conscious striving after beauty as a thing worthy to be sought after for its own sake; its main endeavor is always directed towards the realization of an idea, reaching through the finite to the infinite, convinced always that, though the constant effort to express the spiritual origin of earthly beauty, the human mind will take in more and more of the perfect beauty of divinity. . . . 17

Anita Desai, the creative artist, with verve and vitality, absorbs and expresses everything that she witnesses in the society and Establishment of her period. In a way, her art products can be termed as so many revealing social documents, without the least trace of propaganda literature. They sound at times as protest literature, but never get reduced to the level of propaganda.
In fact, thoughts and emotions constitute the contents or matter of art-objects, which are not totally subjective. Artist’s thoughts and ideas are products of the social environment. As such, society and the Establishment affect Anita Desai, and she intends and wants her crafted art products to have social relevance and consequence.

Moreover, Anita Desai wishes that her literary works provide the necessary and needed correctives, and the healthy and definitive prescriptions so that the society and the Establishment would mend and alter for the better.

When an artist is inspired, he cannot but express his thoughts. Every artist, as a creator, has something in him, which demands expression. There is also another necessity. The artist’s business is not over by externalizing his thoughts, but he is also to communicate his thoughts to others. Thus, in order that a work of art can be created, the artist must have in him certain unexpressed emotions and have the urge to express and communicate them.

Furthermore, the artistic creation is rule-bound. An artist has to submit himself in obeying certain rules in carrying out his work. Though artistic creation is a rule-bound process, an element of imprevisibility also works. But the kind of imprevisibility that characterizes the work of art is very different from that which attends chance.

No true artist will leave anything to chance. Even when everything has been foreseen, prepared, and calculated, the creative artist still does not
know what his work is going to be. Just as previsibillity attends determination, imprevisibillity attends liberty. The true meaning of artistic creation is virtually the same as that of the word, liberty. In this context, the pithy but pointed argument of Eric Gill is worth mentioning here:

The artist does not create *de nihilo* but he does create *de novo*... 18

Furthermore, creativity not only springs from human nature but also deals with the human nature. The ultimate subject matter of true artistic creation is the story of man. In her humanistic interpretation of creativity, Anita Desai argues that creation is an essential aspect of life and is one of the means of intercourse between men and men. In fact, the derivative meaning of the word, *Sahitya*, means that literature carries the sense of being united together, the idea to live together.

To Anita Desai art is not art unless it is taken as one of the conditions of human life. Art is not as the metaphysicians say the manifestation of some mysterious idea of beauty of God; it is not, as the aesthetic physiologists say, a game in which man lets off his excess of stored up energy; it is not the expression of man’s emotion by external signs, it is not the production of pleasing objects and above all, it is not pleasure, but it is a means of union among men joining together in the same feeling and indispensable for the life and progress towards well being of humanity.
Anita Desai’s true nature is expressed in her creativity. In man, there are two levels of existence: one relates to animal existence where man is controlled by the sense of utility. The animal existence claims from one a vast amount of training and education about the necessities of livelihood.

But the level of existence, Anita Desai considers, is true existence where man goes beyond; where man transcends the needs of animal existence. The level provides freedom for his dreams and creations. Anita Desai argues the point that is in this realm of freedom that she [the artist] realizes her divine dignity, her great human truth.

Anita Desai maintains that the religion of man is really the religion of an artist and that her religion is the religion of the fictionist. She argues that creativity is in the human nature and man becomes a true man through his creation. Man as the creator is his best identity.

In her literary products Anita Desai acknowledges the truth that there are three fundamental drives in man. They are: love for knowledge; love for power or strength; and the love for artistic creation; These three tendencies work in their own way and development of human personality depends on the harmonious working of the three.

When man comes in the world, he is a stranger here. The world is yet an unknown and unrelated one. But gradually through cognition, volition, and affection, he gets himself acquainted with the world around him. There is
reason in him and that is why he is not satisfied with what he gets. The world around him stands as a great interrogation.

Man’s history is the record of the different attempts to answer these questions. When knowledge is attained, when acquaintance with the world increases, man wants to apply it for some practical achievement. The love of power or strength is also constantly pressing on man. As such he activates himself to exert his influence over nature.

Man applies the knowledge acquired by reason for his practical interest. Man thus builds a house to live in, or constructs a bridge to cross a river. Out of the same urge man also proceeds to conquer nature. With the help of scientific and technological knowledge man controls nature.

But these two impulses, knowledge and action, aim at purpose. Man’s knowledge, and man’s action, are guided by some utilitarian consideration. They are termed as purpose-oriented activities.

But the third basic drive, the drive for creativity, is of a quite different nature. It proceeds without calculation. It is not a purposeful activity in the ordinary sense of the term. The spring of creativity is not to acquire knowledge or to acquire any material prosperity or comfort.

Anita Desai refuses to attach any material prosperity or any other material purpose, or material comfort to creativity in the ordinary sense of the term. The function of creativity, according to Anita Desai, is to give joy. Creativity establishes a relation of joy with the world.
As man needs food and shelter, he needs joy. Our aesthetic sense turned the world, which is otherwise cold and dry, into a world of joy and beauty. The goal towards which Anita Desai's aesthetic sense moves is joy.

Anita Desai's aesthetic sense is gradually making this world a joyful one. By knowledge her mind spreads over the whole world, by action her power spreads over the whole world, and by her aesthetic sense her joy spreads over the whole world. This is the goal of Anita Desai. In other words, to be an artist means to have the world as knowledge, as power, and as joy.

In fine, Anita Desai has explained all the problems of creativity from this humanistic point of view. It is true, of course, that sometimes contradictory statements are found in her writings. But, they are apparent and not real. For the creative process is a living process, and to grasp the ultimate meaning contradictory views, like thesis and antithesis, do appear.

Incidentally, the literature of Anita Desai speaks directly to the mind and heart of the reader. It is precisely because ideas or mental pictures are the rough material of this outstanding fictionist. In representing reality Anita Desai is absolutely limited by the very conditions of the art of writing and by the elements of fiction, to project the mental aspects of the external existence, which he portrays.

It is an accepted fact that Anita Desai is an outstanding creative genius. As a fictionist, marked by brilliant and extraordinary creativity, she
has never failed to realize the importance of characterization in her literary products.

At this point there is the need to define the term, *character*. The term, *character*, refers to a personage in fiction, short fiction poem or drama. The term, *character*, also denotes the essential qualities and personality traits of a fictional or real individual. The ability to create compelling and believable characters is one of the hallmarks of the literary artist, such as Anita Desai.

It ought to be noted that a character in a work of fiction is realized in a number of ways. If the character is a flat character – a two dimensional character – then there is no artistic maturity seen in creating such a flat character. A flat character is known as a type character and is usually lightly sketched without much detail.

But the character in fiction should be a round character, a three dimensional character. A round character is generally a complex personality, given to poly urges. And a round character is a fully realized individual. The chief character or a protagonist of a fiction is usually three-dimensional. His adversary, if any, is known as the antagonist. It must be stressed that the characters of Anita Desai measure themselves up to be graded as round characters. But then, she introduces some flat characters to off set her round characters.

And characterization in literature is the presentation of attitudes and behaviour of imaginary persons in order to make them credible to the critically
oriented and perceptive reading public. Characterization is a unique feature of fiction. Criticism regards good characterization as an important criterion of excellence in fiction.

A fictionist may choose one of the three methods to present a character. The author may directly describe a character’s personality, as do omniscient fictionists, such as Henry Fielding in Tom Jones, or the writer may have the perceptive reader deduce the personality of a character from his actions, thus enabling the character to remain enigmatic. Or else, a novelist may present the inner workings of a character’s mind, showing the character’ psychological reactions to the situations in which he becomes involved.

Examples of the later method of characterization are found in stream-of-consciousness fictions such as William Faulkner’s As I Lay Dying and The Sound and the Fury. A character may be drawn with a few marked personality traits or with a complex collection of them. The male and female characters of Anita Desai belong to both variety mentioned above. A character may also be either static, showing little change, or remain dynamic, that is, significantly affected by the events of the narrative. And Anita Desai’s male and female characters are quite dynamic in nature.

From this point onwards a brief analysis of Bildungsroman and Kunstelroman becomes necessary to better appreciate the fact that Anita Desai is a mature fictionist, marked by immense creativity. The essential generic characteristic of the Bildungsroman fiction is a concern with the
portrayal of an individual's bildung, where bildung denotes a harmonious self-maturation. Bildungsroman fictions are about the growth of the characters.

In fine, the development of the male and female protagonists is the immediate and ultimate concern of an artist of creativity such as Anita Desai. Michael Beddow offers a satisfactory definition, which is worth quoting here:

. . . it [the Bildungsroman fiction] is an essential part of the heroes’ growth and self-discovery that they are separated from the familiar surroundings in which they were brought up and enter into an alien environment. Cut off from their original environment and not wholly at home in their new one, the various heroes are thrown back upon their own inner resources and have to place a good deal of reliance on their private values and aspirations. . . . The . . . Bildungsroman heroes have their development furthered by entering surroundings, which are profoundly different from those they have previously known, their awareness of the scope and import of the differences increasing as their experiences progress. . . .\textsuperscript{19}

Judged against these parameters of the Bildungsroman fiction it can be safely argued that Anita Desai’s works are Bildungsroman art products. Furthermore, Bildungsroman fiction deals with the growth in understanding by way of assimilating experience. The protagonist passes through successive stages of apprenticeship, which leads to his mastery in the art of living.
In a *Kunstelroman* fiction the protagonist grows through learning experiences and matures, and along with the protagonist the artist also grows through learning experiences in the art of writing, and ultimately matures as a splendid and superb artist. Anita Desai through the male and female characters in her works grows through the learning experiences and matures into a great and accomplished artist of creativity.

And Anita Desai, the creative artist, projects herself as an Omniscient narrator. But at times there is the blend of the authentic I and the imagined I as effectively achieved by Herman Melville in the very first classic and immortal sentence, *Call Me Ishmael* in *Moby Dick*. Anita Desai projects herself as an excellent narrator of events involving male and female characters. Anita Desai is a born storyteller.

Anita Desai’s literary products can be analyzed, interpreted, and evaluated against the parameters defined by the modern rhetorician Kenneth Burke in his *Dramatic Pentad* [Drama of Thinking] and against Freytag’s *Pyramid*. Moreover, there is a studied fusion of the surface structure and deep structure in Anita Desai’s works from the point of view of narratology.

Thus Anita Desai establishes her creative talents.
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