CHAPTER - XII

CONCLUSION

- Desai's Predicament Examined
According to D.H. Lawrence "the author never escapes from himself, he pads along within the vicious circle of himself or a painter either". As the statement underlines the fact, the novel draws its nourishment from the life of the author and imagination is always deeply rooted in experience. It is difficult to deny that the novelist Anita Desai is deeply involved in her novels.

Anita Desai is essentially a subjective novelist. She reveals the inner emotional world of women most intimately and sincerely. Though reticent about her autobiographical details, in her interview with Yasodhara Dalmia she affirms: "In countless small ways the scenes and settings certainly belong to my life. But the major characters and the major events are either entirely imaginary or an amalgamation of several characters and happenings ... It is common among writers to pick out something from real life and develop their situations around that". In another interview with Atma Ram, Desai admits: "of all my novels, it is most rooted in experience". This confession which was made regarding her self-expression in Bye, Bye, Blackbird confirms the truth that her fiction reflects her experience. In another interview with her Desai most explicitly remarks. "One’s preoccupation can only be a perpetual search ... for meanings, for values, for ... dare I say it ... truth. I think of the world as an ice-berg... the one-tenth visible above the surface of the water is what we call reality, but nine-tenths that are submerged make up the truth, and that is what one is trying to explore. Writing is an effort to discover and then to underline, and finally to convey the true significance of things." Literature remains the best reflector of reality. Her keen sense of observation and feminine sensibility together with her compassionate vision have enabled her to
comprehend the universal problems and depict them in her fictional world. Desai excels in her forte-deeper exploration of "the emotional ecology of the turbulent inner world of individuals tormented by existentialist problems and predicaments."4

The theme of alienation projected by Desai which has been investigated in this literary project is, no doubt, closely related to her experience and perspective. As Wordsworth finds poetry to be 'the spontaneous overflow of emotions recollected in tranquility', the novelist has given vivid expression to what she has felt, experienced, perceived and understood. With her unique feminine sensibility she has transmitted her experience and knowledge accumulated by her keen powers of observation in her work of art.

Mrs. Desai's philosophy of life, her attitude to the modern society and her critical trends can be discovered and assessed in her works. From her early life Anita Desai evinced a profound interest in English Literature especially in fiction. Later D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, Henry James, Proust, E.M. Forester and recently other existential exponents like Sartre, Kierkegaard and Heidegger have swayed their mighty influence on her.

In the novels of Desai the focus is on the inner climate of sensibility. She makes an attempt to explore the submerged truth through the exploration of the psyche of her characters against her own vision of life which is basically dark. Her main concern is to depict the psychic states of her protagonists. She tries to introduce a modern psychological view and projects a sensibility generally not encountered in other Indo-Anglian writers of fiction. As a novelist her distinguishing qualities are many. The chief
among them is the subordination of the background to the characters and the deft handling of the language, imagery and syntax, in order to convey an intimate expression of the inner world of her characters. She is not only interested in the psychology of the solitary individual but she is equally interested in the language suitable to them. In an interview with Florence Libret she says, "I suppose there are other interests certainly. It is not only an individual psychology that I am pursuing when I write. I am interested in language. In prose style in aligning words to experiences and images. I suppose that is really at the heart of any writer's world, trying to find a vocabulary, that is in harmony, with one's experiences with the images one has in one's mind."5

The use of imagery is a very significant aspect of a writer's individuality of style and it is noticed in the writings of Desai. In the words of Harish Raizada: "Anita Desai's novels abound in rich and symbolic images of light and colour of the Sun and Moon, the stars, storm, river, sea, birds, insects and animals. These images are employed to reveal the inner nature of her characters and illuminate their obsessions, changing moods and psychic aberrations besides highlighting the dark and weird atmosphere of her stories ..."6 The use of symbolism is also an important aspect of a writer's style. To quote her (Desai's) own words, "it is movement of the wing one tries to capture, not the bird. That is, it is the image that matters, the symbol, the myth ... of associating them, of relating them, of constructing with them."7 Symbols are an integral part of her novels. She has artistically and functionally interwoven them into the texture of her novels. She insists on analysing her characters and the story is important only in so far as it reflects the obsessions of her characters. She makes each of her novel a haunting exploration of psychic self. Her characters are generally neurotic, highly sensitive, sequestered in a
world of dreams and imagination. They are alienated from their surroundings as a consequence of their failure or unwillingness to adjust with the reality. They often differ in their opinion from others and embark on a long voyage of contemplation in order to find the meaning of their existence.

Contemporary human history is passing through very critical phases. Man under the pressure of scientific and technological advancement is threatened with severe disintegration within and without. It is obvious that modern Indian-English fiction whose true voice at present lies in Anita Desai, should seek new dimensions and highlight the novel experiences of contemporary man. She magnifies with the ease and flow of her mighty pen and her culture its predicaments and paradoxes. She has created a picture of life in her novels soaked in alienation. The dissatisfaction prevailing everywhere can be noticed in her novels. The solitary being is of the predominant interest to her. Her novels are living monuments of agony and predicament of individuals in existence where they wage a crucial battle to attain freedom from meanness and worthlessness.

A close study of Desai's fiction reveals that "she portrays with amazing accuracy the inward odyssey and psychic upheavals of hyper-sensitive people struggling to survive in difficult human situations. Her characters are exceptional beings who are victims of anguish, anxiety and terrible self-consciousness and are unable to accept life as it comes. Consequently they suffer from terrible inner conflicts. Her concern with the psychic lives of her characters endows her work with universality." It is generally believed that Desai’s protagonists suffer from nagging sense of alienation, ruthlessness, ungratifying interpersonal relationships, anxiety and despair, frustrations, tensions, loss of identity, alienation, dissonance and despair which are integral to human condition.
Anita Desai deals with the psychological problems of Indian women after marriage. Her interest in the psychic life of her characters is not that of a psychiatrist. Her main purpose is to study the intriguing complexity of human personality. The psychic conflicts of her protagonists, their struggle to find a meaning in life, symbolise the concern of modern man with the eternal human situation. She is more interested in her characters and story; it is sometimes of secondary importance. B. Rama Chandra Rao rightly observes that "Psychological sophistication which was lacking earlier makes her work something very unusual in Indo-Anglian fiction." Their actions are less important because she portrays their emotions, feelings and thoughts to reveal their psychic odyssey. Thus she moves away from traditional realism to psychological realism. Like the novels of Henry James, in her fiction the action is important in relation to the reactions of the mind.

Probing into the misery of human predicament, Desai deals with the problems of ruthlessness and alienation in different degrees and from diverse angles. The novelist is mostly preoccupied with the psyche of her characters. She delves deep down the complex mysteries of the mind which at times drive the protagonists to destruction. Her later fiction illustrates her mature treatment of the theme through her protagonists who shed their sense of frustration and defeatism and learn to connect "the inward with the outward ... the individual with the society."

Desai explores the cause of suffering and problems especially of women in various predicaments and portrays different types of women. Seema Jena aptly observes that Anita Desai's novels are "certainly reflections of social realities and she delves deep into the forces that condition the growth of a female in the patriarchal ... male
dominated Indian family. Some of her women are assertive types who rise in revolt against tradition. She portrays their keen struggle to maintain their individuality while finding some means of relating to the society also. Consequently their main concern is a quest for meaning in life, persistent search for identity and ideal love relationships. But it is not an easy goal to achieve because like the characters of Virginia Woolf they find it difficult to communicate. It is true for almost everyone in Desai's fictional world. They are terribly lonely because to quote Virginia Woolf "Each had his own business to think of. Each had his past shut in him like the leaves of a book known to him by heart and his friends could only read the title." It is true that almost all her protagonists are solitary individuals. They fail to communicate themselves with the people around and hence their loneliness and alienation. They feel themselves to be closed, sequestered and alienated beings in a cage. They conceive themselves to be condemned prisoners living in isolated death cells. They are restless to the extent of being irrational and mad. They are chronically obsessed and abnormally anxious to come out of the confines of cruel, lifeless, deadly prisons.

With regard to her themes, Desai seems to have opted for portraying various themes at a time in her novels and in each individual novel these themes seem to be occurring again and again. She admits very frankly that there are no clear-cut themes in her novels. She makes no bones about the selection of her themes when she says, "My novels don't have themes - at least not till they are finished, published, or read, do I see any theme. While writing, I follow my instinct, I follow flashes of insight. I veer away from or even fight anything that threatens to distort or destroy this insight, and somehow come to the end look back to see the pattern of foot prints on the sand." She usually starts by presenting a person who is cut out in a 'different grain' from others. They
resist the demands of society and turn out to be rebels. Not finding a proper channel of communication they become alienated and start brooding over their lives. Thus her themes are original and entirely different from those of other Indo-Anglian novels. The themes of her novels mostly related to women. She writes about the sensitive women in an insensitive world. She is concerned with the depths of the inner-self and the psyche of her characters.

Desai with her psychological view, projects a vision of womanhood that absorbs the traditional woman who has come to possess a new self-energy and a new personality. Meena Shirwadkar comes to the conclusion on the ‘image of the women’: "Tradition, transition and modernity are the stages through which the Indo-Anglian novel is passing woman in life and literature herself voluntarily surrendered to the ideal of self-sacrifice. The sublimation or suppression of her natural desires and aspirations must have created a deep struggle inside, at least in sub-consciousness." This deep struggle in her sub-consciousness makes her rebel against tradition. Almost all her female protagonists are assertive types, yet they rise in revolt against tradition. As Lakshmi Parasuram observes: "Modern life has considerably altered, and added to the content of woman’s experiences.... the equality and level of woman’s perception of the world have drastically changed and so also her own awareness of herself and her relationships to the world."  

Indian society does not allow much freedom to woman. So now they are rigorously struggling to overcome the age long chauvinism. They are engrossed in such of their identity and want to enjoy privacy and individuality. Whenever their feelings are deeply hurt, they feel extremely dissatisfied and alienated. Desai mainly deals with the psychological problems of married Indian women. Marriage, which results in an identity crisis in an Indian woman’s life, becomes the motif of her earlier novels.
Desai writes about certain aspects of life. They are - interpersonal relations, marital discord, domestic disharmony, maladjustment, temperamental incompatibility, incommunication, quest for identity and meaninglessness of life and predicament of modern man. She also writes about the conflict between the reality and illusion in life, incapability of facing the hard realities of life, nurturing of individuality, withdrawal from and involvement in life, the indifference of the children and husband, broken homes, parents' fixation, condition of lonely man in alien country, mundane and divine love and quest for spirituality and mysticism, etc. All these aspects of life certainly develop a sense of alienation in the life of man.

Most of Desai's characters suffer from spiritual dryness --- 'a lack of faith' as David says in Voices in the City. This originates from traumatic interaction and pernicious home environment. Their peculiar childhood, dissatisfying adolescence, unfulfilling middle years do not give them the opportunity to attain maturity of thought and outlook. In the words of Carroll Davis they have been denied 'the room to grow' because they suffer from disturbed childhood, broken homes, parents fixation and lack of parental love. Maya and Sita suffer from father - fixation whereas Nirode and Hugo suffer from mother - fixation. Raka faces the problem of broken home and disturbed childhood. Bim, Tara, Raja, and Baba suffer from parental love and Hugo Batungartner suffers from the clash between his father’s pride and his mother’s gracefulness. So generally, they yearn for the parental love throughout their lives. As a result they cannot attain maturity in life and fail to face the hard realities of life. Hence they fall out of the main stream of life and get alienated from everyone and everything around. Thus interpersonal relationships, at one stage or the other, have been of an inhibitory nature.
Maya was not allowed to step into the world of reality. She not only suffers from father-fixation, but also from lack of marital bliss. The faithlessness of Nirod’s mother shocks him. Throughout life she fails to face the hard realities of life and develops a sort of negative attitude towards life. He loses faith in life and it is only after his detachment from his mother, he realises the true meaning of life. Nirode, Monisha, Raka, Bim, Raja, Sophie, Laila experience emotional deprivation. Nand Kaul suffers from the agony of a rejected wife and mother. Sita, Maya, Monisha and Sophie are also deprived of marital joys and satisfaction. Hari’s father is indifferent to the needs of his growing children. Hugo Baumgartner’s father ignores his emotional needs. No wonder these characters find it difficult to cope with their existence, and face the situation which pose a grave threat to their emotional survival.

Desai’s characters however can not be dubbed as escapists, for they discharge their duties allotted to them quite effectively, but resent the circumstances in which they have to operate. Nanda, Sita, Sarah and Sophie are dutiful wives and daughters. They discharge their duties quite effectively but most of the time, they feel crushed under the load of responsibilities and long for release and when they find themselves free from the enmeshing net of duties, they try to get what they had been robbed off in the past. They try to find peace by forcing themselves into a state of alienation. Some of her women protagonists like Sita, Sarah, Tara, Bim and Sophie learn to compromise while Maya, Monisha, Nanda Kaul and Jla Das perish inspite of their withdrawal from or involvement in life. They are not militant feminists demanding freedom and equality with men but gentle women whose only desire is for a right to exist and lead a meaningful life. They are dignified, strange, unpredictable and beautiful individuals. They never expect any
pity, sympathy and compassion from anybody. They don’t like to be at the mercy of anyone. They are gentle ladies of self-respect. Sita, Sarah, Bim, Nanda Kaul, Amla, Sophie and Laila—all experience the bitterness of alienation, but ultimately they recognize the reality of life and make a compromise with it. Maya, Monisha, Sita, Nanda Kaul frustrate themselves from the unrequited love and their deep desire to love and be loved remains unfulfilled. They fail in their quest for fulfilment but the magnitude of their effort cannot be ignored.

The urge to be related and the need to avoid loneliness is basic human nature. When the characters can not relate to the reality of their circumstances, they employ indirect methods, compensatory behaviour to achieve a sense of fulfilment, identity and individuality. To resolve their conflicts, they attempt to escape into time and space. Some of them turn their back on the present and take the route back to childhood. Sita fails to adjust both with her husband and children consequently, she feels alienated and goes back to her childhood home, at Manori along with her children Karan and Menaka. When Maya fails to have marital bliss she begins to think about her father and childhood days with her father. Others snap their relationship with people and ideas. However, withdrawal and escape do not help in achieving a sense of authenticity. Their fears and anxieties are not overcome. They are still haunted by nothingness and worthlessness.

Some of the protagonists rise above despair and gloom and make a heroic attempt to come back and accept life as it is. They are Sita, Bim, Deven, Hari and Sophie. Their escapades into time and space venting out emotion in violent outbursts of anger and flights of fantasy provide them the essential wisdom and inner strength to face the reality of human situation. Sita’s journey to Manori provides her time for
introspection. She ultimately realises that meaningful survival is possible only in cooperation and coexistence. Near the horizon, even the earth and the sky meet each other. Birn’s anger and disappointment melt away and emotional equilibrium descends on her when she tears Raja’s letter and makes a move towards developing social relations by going to the musical concert at Misra’s house. Amla suffers from existential crisis, but soon decides that she will not allow herself to be lost like her sister Monisha. A close interaction with Nur and his world disillusions Deven Sharma. He realises that he can survive only by accepting life as it is. In the end he is to distinguish lived reality and art. Hari’s trip to Bombay makes him face the challenges in life. In her later novels, there is a positive attitude towards life. In Clear Light of Day, it is love that she sees the meaning and perfection of life. In The Village by the Sea, she seems to be in favour of acceptance, adaptation and adjustability to the circumstances. In her In Custody she advocates a welcome even to the calamities of life. Sophie’s desertion of her husband makes her realise the sanctity of the marriage and harsh realities of life. The message Desai gives through all her novels is that one must learn ‘to connect’ and ‘to accept’ in order to make one’s life meaningful. She also advocates fatalistic attitude towards life. The fate of man is governed by some external forces which is not under his control. He desires one thing, but his fate forces him to do something. Nirode, Adit, Dev, Deven, Baumgartner and Mattoo - all face the bitterness of fate and feel helpless. They seem to demonstrate the view that man proposes and God disposes.

Desai establishes that only those survive who have the capacity to compromise and conform and are willing to remain. "within the pattern of familiar everyday living and doing that becomes those whom God means to live on earth." In an interview
Desai says," Of course, if one is alive in this world, one cannot survive without compromise. Drawing the lines means certain death."

It sounds courageous to say 'a great No'; but real value lies in saying 'the great Yes'. She seems to say that swimming against the current can be an attention catching device, but to swim with the current with other competitors is the test of one's stamina and ability to co-operate and tolerate healthy competition.

Some of Desai's characters - Maya, Monisha, Nirode, Raka, Nanda Kaul and Baumgartner live in solitary confinements and show their reluctance to face reality. There is a different set of characters who compromise with life -- Sita, Sarah, Dev, Bir, Amla, Deven, Sarla, Hari and Sophie. These characters have psychic conflicts; but they solve their personal problems through self-discovery. The growing urge for self-discovery exhibits the growth potential of her protagonists. Self-alienation of her characters is an obsessive compulsive disorder. Its movement towards harmony and order crystallises in self-discovery. In studying the psychic travails of the alienated self, Desai traces the link between reality and illusion. The individual-self struggles for the attainment of an authentic existence and hence it moves from a mistaken and confused awareness of identity to a quiet self-assertion of individuality. In Desai's fiction self-identification springs from the inner urge to strike a balance between the constructive and destructive aspects of self-alienation. Majority of her protagonists are women.

Desai understands the problem of an educated woman in depth. Family, marriage, parenthood and other forms of human relationship do not provide, most of these women, any mode of emotional fulfilment or satisfaction. They yearn for parental love throughout their life. Due to this, they do not attain maturity in life and fail to face the
hard realities of life. Thus they fall out of the main stream of life and get alienated from everyone and their surroundings. Maya fails to adjust with her husband and finds him prosaic; Monisha, Sarah, Sita, Sarla, Nanda Kaul and Sophie are in need of love. But their husbands do not bother about their deep passions. It makes them feel alienated from their lives and feel lonely in this world. When the love of the women remains unfulfilled, and no one tries to understand their deep passions, they feel utterly lonely, alienated and they try to search for their identity and existence. Even when women like Maya, Monisha, Nanda Kaul fail to show their inner strength, it is mainly because of their men who fail to understand them properly and do not help them to overcome their frustrations and weaknesses. Although the men portrayed by Desai are not ruthless and dominating, they do not exert themselves to extend the need, strength and understanding. As Gautama and Jiban are always absorbed in official work, they fail to forestall the domestic tragedy. The novelist argues that women are denied the essential freedom, the right for responsible self-hood for authenticity through individual choice.

Anita Desai views the struggle of her protagonists in the context of human struggle. The characters like Nirode, Raja, Adit, Dev, Hari, Baumgartner and Matteo justify that the novelist incorporates the modern sensibility of male protagonists also. Her successive portrayal of the anguish, despair, alienation and self-discovery of these men substantiates her claim that she writes about the "human-condition-not the male or female condition." After analysing four of her early novels, B. Ramachandra Rao says; "Their problems are psychological or spiritual not social or economical ... the ordinary problems of everyday life are never really touched upon ... Hunger, starvation and poverty, the mute misery of the millions of Indians are never touched upon by Mrs.
Desai. Her later novels show a marked change in her vision of life. In her later novels she shows greater awareness of social reality. Village by the Sea presents the pathetic plight of a poverty ridden family. In In Custody and Baumgartner’s Bombay there are references to protagonists’ crisis arising out of social and economic aspects of life. The violence of the II World War, poverty, alienation and displacement of generations of German Jews find an authentic portrayal in Baumgartners’ Bombay. Hugo, a victim of this holocaust leads a life of poverty and loneliness during his old age. He is looked down upon as an eccentric. ‘Billiwallah Pagal’ as he is unable to feed his pets properly. Deven hails from a poor family. Poverty makes him grow into an uncertain and meek person. His job does not give him satisfaction. He is dissatisfied with life. His life becomes an aimless one and hence he alienates himself from his job and family. Some characters in her fiction indulge in immoral relations. Nirode’s mother, Sita’s father. Nanda Kaul’s husband are entrapped in illegal relations. Nanda Kaul’s alienation is due to the selfishness of her husband and children. Her husband betrayed her by Sharing her love with Miss. David. Both her husband and children never bother about her feelings. Although Maya holds Gautama responsible for her unfulfilled instinctuality in marital relationship, she does not cross the bounds of marital morality inspite of her sexual frustration. Both Maya and Nanda Kaul proved themselves to be very faithful to their husbands. Maya’s murder of Gautama is not an accident but the result of prolonged psychic condition. Alienation and loneliness make Sita, Mira Mashi and Lorte smoke and drink. Maya, Monisha and Mira Mashi commit suicide because they fail to face the hard realities of life and to adjust and accommodate with their wards. So all these novels clearly depict through characterisation how the time and destiny along with the social, psychological and political problems enhance the already unsurmountable misery and
despair in human life. R.S. Sharma aptly sums up: "Anita Desai sees the world in terms of experience as it emerges from the encounter of the experiencing self with the world outside."²⁰

One of the most significant aspects of Desai's characterisation is her successful attempt to establish a relationship between external objects of nature and psychic states of her personages. Her characters are not case studies of 'neurosis' nor are they evolutionary histories of 'psychological phenomenon'. They are living individuals interested in life. Nevertheless the trouble with some of them is that they at times take a wrong path and perpetuate their neurosis. The neurosis of Maya, or Raka, or Mira Masi is not a private one. The enormity of the problem is reflected not merely in Maya and Mira Masi's inability to cope with their immediate environment or people around, but also their own increasing reflection, which is a new phenomenon in Indian women. Such cases are seen everywhere very often in Indian society. From this point of view a majority of her characters - Maya, Monisha, Nirade, Raka, Nanda Kaul, Laila, Matteo live either in illusions by retreating into fabrication and fantasy, or show their reluctance to face reality. They live in self-imposed solitary confinements. Reality is unbearable to them. So they find involvement destructive and want to withdraw from it.

With nothing to live for, almost all her characters revolt against the existing patterns of life. As they do not have anything to fight for, their fight remains half-hearted and ends in failure. Sometimes instead of fighting, they tend only to withdraw. But to their surprise, they realise, that their attempts are futile because withdrawal is unattainable. If they try to seek relief in another world, the world of fantasy, after entering it, they come to realise that it is no better than the world of reality. Thus man
is entangled in a marge from which there is no way out. He writhes in pain all the time and waits for death which too is incapable of giving any meaning to his waiting. It is exactly true in the case of Baumgartner, Nanda Kaul, Manisha and Mira Masi. Desai basically seems to say the longer one lives, the deeper he suffers the bitter assaults of existence.

A scrutiny of Desai’s art shows that the novelist is growth-oriented. The development from her first heroine, Maya to her latest creation, Sophie, is a story of steady ascent towards self-realisation. Keeping in view the seriousness of their self-alienation and the possibility of actualisation, Desai’s characters may be studied in four groups. In the first category we place Maya, Monisha, who are sensitive and fitted against insensitive spouses. Then there are cases of neurosis - Sita, Nirode, Nanda, Raka, Laila and Matteo. None of them commits suicide though each is on the brink of it. The destructive effects of self-alienation is much less discernible in Sita, Sarah, Sarla and Sophie. We find greater clarity of perception in Bim, Amla, Deven, and Hari. Bim’s rage in the early part of the novel is almost neurotic. But her vision soon acquires authenticity. She finds her ‘lost self’ and achieves self-realisation. Amla also has an affirming faith in life. Deven is trapped in his self-realisation. Amla also has an affirming faith in life. Deven is trapped in his self-created mesh. Socially he is in a precarious position and suffers from humiliation. But indications of an acceptance of life on mental level are there.

"In studying the psychic travails of alienated self, Desai traces the link between reality and illusion. The individual self struggles for the attainment of an authentic existence and hence it moves from mistaken and confused awareness of identity to a
quiet self-assertion of individuality ... In her novels self-identification springs from the inner urge to strike a balance between the constructive and destructive aspects of self-alienation as Swain and Nayak rightly point out.

Desai's characters may not be fully healthy and self-actualised individuals; but all of them are not outright sickly, insane or morbid. Some of them have vitality and aliveness. In the process of the development of individuality, they reveal self-strength and tendency to emerge out of their isolation, insecurity and anxiety and gain a kind of closeness and solidarity. Thus Desai has delineated in her novels the problems and plights of alienated individuals caught in the crisis of a changing society. She excels particularly in highlighting the miserable position of highly sensitive and emotional women tortured by the humiliating sense of neglect of loneliness and desperation. The existential problem of the alienated-self finally emerges to be the central theme of her novels. She represents therefore a set of new attitudes and themes associated with modern Indian novel in English.

Desai strives for a harmonious and individualistic existence within the family matrix. She is mostly preoccupied with the frustration of married women yearning for genuine love. Projecting wretched plight of the couples trapped in marriages, Desai focuses on various factors such as intellectual disparity, lack of communication and mutual understanding, maladjustment, clashes of tastes and values and childlessness that usher in frustration, disillusionment and husband-wife alienation which ultimately lead to marital discord. Domestic friction often leads to tragic death and family disintegration. Both Maya and Manisha proved the same. As Desai progresses in her fictional art, the principles of acceptance, adaptation and adjustment, operate and work out compromise
and reconciliation in the families. She is quite conservative and moralistic in respecting the rich social value accorded to the institution of marriage.

Alienation has been a dominant theme in the fiction writers of Europe and America. It is a modern trend in fiction writing. There are traces of alienation in the first group of fiction writers of Indian writing in English. But, it became an almost predominant theme in the writings of both Arun Joshi and Anita Desai who belong to the third group of Indian fiction writers in Indian English. These writers are very much influenced and fascinated by both American and European fiction. Alienation is prevalent in America today. American youth is almost swayed by alienation. It has become almost a disease that is spreading from one continent to the other. It is a global phenomenon. It is a very strange human situation. Today every man is a stranger not only to his neighbour but also to himself. It is a pitiable condition of every society. The alienated man is every man and no man drifting in a world that has little meaning for him and over which he exercises no power. He is a stranger to himself and to others. As Erich Fromm writes, "Alienation as we find it in modern society is almost total, it pervades the relationship of man to his work, to the things he consumes, to his fellowmen and to himself." The reasons for alienation in the modern society are many. The modern man is too individualistic, self-centred and does not bother about his neighbour. His lonely routine makes his life mechanical.

Inspite of the population explosion all over the world, the gulf between man and man is becoming wider and wider. Separation creates anxiety. When man is overpowered by anxiety he feels alienated. Speaking of London in 1844 Angeles described the alienation of the city dweller most graphically. "... Hundreds and thousands
of men and women drawn from all classes and ranks of society pack the streets of London ... No one ever thinks of sparing a glance for his neighbours in the streets. The more the Londoners are packed into a tiny space, the more repulsive and disgraceful becomes the brutal indifference with which they ignore their neighbours and selfishly concentrate upon their private affairs ... this isolation of the individual - this narrowminded egotism - is everywhere the fundamental principle of modern society.\textsuperscript{23} Majority of men in modern society seem to worship isolation.

The reason for this isolation, loneliness and unconcern for the fellow beings of individual is. industrial, scientific and technological advancement and splitting up of joint family system. In a joint family children used to have warmth of love and affection from elder members of the family. They had a good opportunity to learn moral values of life from their grand parents. Especially with the emergence of ‘nuclear’ or ‘atomic’ families. love, affection, respect and moral values are gradually disappearing. Busy parents don’t find enough time to devote to the proper bringing up of their children. Thus man is lost in the modern society.

"In pre-modern peasant society ... man lived in the harmonious mutual respect of authority ... felt themselves integral parts of a community ... No one was alienated from himself or isolated from his territorial community and his kin. Beliefs were firm and were universally shared."\textsuperscript{24} Today the society is changed. There is ‘social disintegration’ in every society. Peter Haslett calls this ‘the World we have lost’. He further says, "What happened ... was change in human personality or character and it is this characterological revolution which must be understood if we are to determine
whether alienation today differs in form and degree, miseries of which earlier men complained.\textsuperscript{25}

The alienating influences of industrialisation extend far beyond the individual worker. They touch with equal force upon the family and the community. Of the many effects of industrialisation on the family, the most important is the breakdown of the extended kenship group. The close bonds between the young and the old and especially the respect the youth had previously given to age had gone.

In "modern urban society ... no man is bound by ties of sentimental affection or moral obligation or loyalty to any other man. each man is concerned with his own interest ... The family is dissolved, friendship dead, religious beliefs evaporated."\textsuperscript{26} Modern man is in the process of cutting himself off from others around him. Billu, the coconut seller, a character in the novel, Village by the Sea represents this attitude when he says, "I don't need them ... I am a man and depend on myself. That is the best way to be, boy-free and independent. Don't say 'please' and don't say 'thank you' - take what you want. Be a man be independent."\textsuperscript{27} This self-made separation in course of time makes man anxious for communication. The German Sociologist, George Simmel observed that "the deepest problems of modern life is to derive from the claim of the individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces."\textsuperscript{28}

This is a self-conscious age. Man has become so much a problem to himself. Inspite of scientific and technological advancement, he is fast losing touch with his own world. The world is growing each day closer, yet it becomes more impersonal. Although
it is more densely populated, in face to face relations, it is more dehumanised. The modern man is divorced from nature, bereft of his religion, isolated in his community and chained to his monotonous work. Man is crushed by mass society. The individual emerged in the mass. When he stands alone with his individuality, he is something other than what he is. On the other hand in the mass, the individual becomes an isolated atom. The atomisation of individuals is alienating the mass society. The individuals are not directly related to one another in a variety of independent groups. Mass society destroys traditional human groups.

With the growth of individuality in man, a sort of new detachment with others began. Alienation is an accompaniment of individualism. It crops up when love is lacking in interpersonal relationship. Love is the answer to the problem of human existence. Separation creeps in the absence of love. Separateness is the source of intense anxiety. The deepest need of man is to overcome his separateness and to leave the prison of his ‘aloneness’. The "desire for interpersonal fusion is the most powerful striving in man. The failure to achieve it means insanity, or destruction-self-destruction or the destruction of others." 39 Without love humanity could not exist even for a day.

This is an 'age of anxiety' to adopt W.H. Auden's phrase and consequently human-relationship, especially man-woman relationship, has changed considerably. All human relationships have become so complex in the increasing complexity of this age. Desai's portrayal of man-woman relationship has been influenced and conditioned by the existing intricate social situation. It must be said to her credit that in her ten novels,
she has covered a wide gamut of man-woman relationship. In her novels we hardly get at least a glimpse of delights and exultations of mutual reciprocated love. Instead we meet with the agonies, the heart aches and the shocks of embittered man-woman relations. Her treatment of man-woman relationship is both artistically moving and psychologically sound. Each one of the frustrated characters adopts his or her own manner of facing the problem of alienation, suffering and boredom. It is the predicament of the modern human situation that has affected the most tender and sweet aspect of the human relationship. In Desai’s fictional world most of the human relationships are seen to suffer from acute breakdown of communication. His female protagonists strive for harmony and fulfilment in human relationship. Her aim is to bring home to us the most unpalatable facts about contemporary relations.

Modern human relations are weak or rather farce. Interpersonal relationship in the world of Desai is weaker. There is temperamental incompatibility between wife and husband in her novels. The relationship between wife and husband, parents and children among brothers and sisters and between the individual and society is hopelessly bad. Among these, the husband-wife relationship figures most prominently. It is seldom harmonious or satisfying. All her female protagonists have heightened physical and emotional sensitivity while their male partners are practical and matter of fact persons. They are hardly able to share or even to appreciate the world of their wives. This temperamental incompatibility naturally leads to alienation. The women protagonists of Desai seem to value their individuality, privacy and freedom. They wish to love and be loved. This is hardly possible because love in this world is invariably associated with
duty, obligation and loss of freedom and individuality. Human relations are absurd in the fictional world of Desai. She feels that all human relationships are inadequate; basically everyone is solitary and involvement in human relationships in this world, invariably leads to disaster. They are hardly able to give any emotional or spiritual sustenance. Confirmative social routine means drudgery to her characters. An individual feels lonely and alienated in such a morbidly dark world. He is hopeless and full of despair, acutely conscious of the worthlessness and absurdity of all objects and pattern around him.

The catastrophe in the domestic world of Desai is the outcome of the personal indifference of the husband and the wife's inability to cope with it. But Desai's women survive with dignity. They will make adjustments as Sita does at the end of the novel. Monisha and Nanda Kaul are able and capable of adjusting with the environment and people and thus they retain their dignity. Sita's protest is predominant, but her protest does not break the relationship. There is the momentary self-exile in the life of Sita. She returns with a compromise without losing the dignity. Desai aims not for severance or divorce but synthesis. She says, "I don't think anybody's exile from society can solve any problem. I think basically the problem is how to exist in society and yet maintain one's individuality rather than suffering from a lack of society and lack of belonging ..." So almost all main characters in her novels are alienated. It is mainly an interpersonal alienation which includes self, social, psychological, cultural and world alienation. They do not know how to relate to one another.
Modern times are rendered dark as there is little love. French poet Eustache Deschamps cried out a lot about the human relationship of even about a late medieval period:

"Why are the times so dark
Men know each other not at all
I know no more where I belong."\(^3\)

The last line can be taken for granted as the alienated lament of all ages. "Human relations are essentially those of alienated automatons, each basing his security on staying close to the herd, and not being different in thought, feeling or action while everybody tries to be as close as possible to the rest, everybody remains utterly alone, pervaded by the deep sense of insecurity, anxiety and guilt which always result when human separateness can not be overcome."\(^3\)

The modern man escapes into the past or into the future but does not live in the present. Man's happiness depends on the solidarity, he feels with his fellowmen, with past and future generations. Without love, the life we lead on this planet, is only artificial one but not natural. Love is a binding factor of all human relations. The materialistic outlook of modern man draws him closer to selfishness and drives him far away from natural love. Harmonious life is impossible without love. Life becomes a problem without love and communication. "Love is the only sane and satisfactory answer to the problem of human existence, then any anxiety which excludes relatively the development of love must be in the long run perish of its own contradiction with the basic necessities of human nature."\(^3\)
In the present (age) "the processes that characterise life in industrial societies ultimately lead to alienation in all spheres of life. Life has no meaning, there is no joy, no faith, no reality. Everybody is 'happy' except that he does not feel, does not reason, does not love." Referring to the past history, present attitude and future situation of man, Erich Fromm says: "The danger of the past was that men became slaves. The danger of the future is that men may become robots. True enough robots do not rebel. But given man's stature robots can not live and remain sane, they become 'Golms'. They will destroy their world and themselves because they can not stand any longer the boredom of meaningless life."

Alienation acquires a broad significance and range of meaning in Anita Desai's novels. She has delineated the problems and plight of the alienated individuals caught in the crisis of changing society. The existential problem of the alienated self finally emerges to be the central theme in her fiction. She has made a judicious use of psychological insight to record the 'psychic reverberations' of her characters. R.S. Pathak says: "The pervasive sense of alienation has corroded human life from various quarters. The modern man has shrunk in spirit, languishing in confusion, frustration, disintegration, disillusionment and alienation."

Alienation is universal. It can not be uprooted. It will continue in future also. A contemporary religious thinker declared a few years ago that the world is alienating and everybody is alienated. Nobody can escape from it as it is a human condition. The future looks 'bright' for alienation. A futurologist predicts that many will feel like strangers in the superindustrial society of the future. Alienation somehow belongs to our heritage.
The fact worth mentioning is that, an important phase in the growth of the fiction in India as elsewhere, is the gradual shift from the external world to the inner world of the individual. The solitary man is of predominant interest to Anita Desai. Her novels are living monuments of agony and predicaments of individuals in existence. They wage a crucial battle to attain freedom. They take refuge in certain mythical and dreamy world of their own to protect themselves from the universality of nausea, guilt and boredom. In course of their rebellion, they discover the chaos and absurdity of the world and vanity of their attempts. The oneness of Desai’s novels is to portray a world of sensitive characters confined within the bars of a prison house struggling for emancipation. The protagonists of Desai are trying to invent a new world where the individuals or inhabitants, their own fellow beings live a more unified, more harmonious life in peace and solitude. They are prepared for self-immolation, self-annihilation and sacrifice so that justice and harmony could be re-incarnated and restored in a ‘sublime’ and ‘grand’ ‘cosmic order’. All the female characters come alive in their dynamic process, always growing and changing. They are portrayed as engrossed with the present, look backward in time and visualise future as well. They feel alienated from their lives and husbands due to unfulfilled love and feel lonely in their world. Desai advocates the message of adaptation and compromise and recommends a robust coexistence of the conflicting values. In this process, when lucidity dawns upon them, they break their shackles, the prison door opens and the mist of the gloom and despair evaporates and they feel the fine fresh air in the clear light of day. Inspite of his alienation man has to adjust and accommodate himself with the people around and adapt and acclimatise with the circumstances and environment. He has to ‘accept’ life in whatever form it comes,
‘connect’ himself with life and ‘compromise’ with it. He also should develop fatalistic attitude towards life. Life, of course, is a problem to man. It still becomes more problematic if he does not compromise with it. The life in all its forms and colours is seen in the fictional world of Desai. It is fully a world of reality. The modern man fails to realise who he is and where he is. He is almost in delusion. Without love life cannot be harmonious and peaceful. Love involves relationship. It is a concretising factor of human relationships.
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