Chapter 1:

Introduction

Many research scholars have explored different aspects of Anita Desai’s multifaceted writing. They include areas such as feminist approach, the philosophical approach and psychological one. They have analysed her fictional works in great detail highlighting both the strength and weaknesses of her writing. However, there has been a dearth of critical analysis with reference to the lyrical form and the stylistic approach. I, as a researcher, have made an attempt to examine critically her major works from both the literary perspective and the stylistic one. In the former one I would focus on the lyrical form wherein the imagery and symbols play an important part in projecting the things. In addition to this the focus on stylistics will help in analyzing Anita Desai’s language and style in particular. The combination of the two, I think, will give an adequate and reliable assessment of her work.

This would confine itself to literary analysis. Over and above this, her novels have been analyzed in the light of the discipline of stylistic.
A study of Anita Desai’s style, a detailed textural analysis of the major novels is followed by a study of form, structure and rhetoric from her novels, direction is being taken from the work of Geoffrey N. Leech and Michael H. Short.

Biographical Sketch:

Anita Desai is one of the world famous and of India’s best modern novelists in English. She is an Indian novelist, short story writer, screenwriter, and story writer. She is a writer who has influenced generations of writers. She has enriched Indian fictional world with her significant literary outputs. Anita Desai, originally an Indian citizen, migrated to America. She has been living in America. She can be considered to be an expatriate writer of the Indian origin. Anita Desai was born on 24th June, 1937, in Mussoorie, a hill station situated in the foothills of the Himalayan ranges, near Dehradun, in the North Indian State of Uttarakhand, India. It is conveniently connected by road to Delhi and major cities. It is called “Gateway to Yamunotri and Gangotri, Shrines of Northern India.” She was formerly known as Anita Mazumdar, a daughter of Dhiren N. Mazumdar, a Bengali business executive, and the former Toni Nime, a German expatriate, a teacher, while an engineering student in pre-war Berlin, of German origin.

Anita Desai’s mother was a German Christian and her father was a Bengali Indian. She was dark and did not have the Teutonic fair looks. She also had an un-German Name: Nime. She used to claim that the ancestors had come from France, from Nime. Her first name was also very
French: Antoinette, later shortened to Toni. Her mother, Antoinette Nime, could trace her origin to France, and her father, Dhiren Mazumdar’s native place was Dhaka (now in Bangladesh) but he had settled in New Delhi. He spoke German very well. This mixed parentage of complex origin gives Anita Desai the advantage of having double perspective when writing about India and Indians as well as about migrants in India and Indian migrants to the West. If seen from her mother’s side she is an outsider and if seen from her father’s side she is a native. She was educated in Delhi. She married on 13-12-1958 to Ashwin Desai – a Gujarati businessman and gave four children. About her husband she comments “My writing career was entirely subservient to being a wife and a mother. I lived the life of the typical Indian housewives: wrote in the gaps and hid it away, kept it secret”. Later the family moved to Mumbai where she raised two sons, Arjun and Rahul, and two daughters, Tani and Kiran.

Anita Desai was multilingual. Since 1950s she has lived in many cities like Culcatta, Mumbai, Chandigarh, New Delhi and Pune. Some of the cities are well described in her novels. When she was just a child she spoke German at home and Urdu or Hindi with friends as well as Bengali and English at the school. Though Anita Desai had inherited both Bengali and German languages from her parents, strangely enough, she never wrote a book in either of the languages. In her interview with Jasbir Jain, she comments “I think and all Indians are aware – since all of us are bilingual if not trilingual – one tends to employ more than one language and select whichever word seems more apt and most
descriptive at the moment. There are a few German words and phrases which come easily to me, seem to me to be more descriptive than their Hindi or their English or Bengali counterparts but, actually, I have had to quite consciously erase these from my writing as well as from my present life too. It would be too complicating to bring in the German strand apart from all other strands which make up my life”.

Having grown up in a houseful of books led her to the early decision that writing would be her life. While studying English at the University of New Delhi, Anita Desai dedicated herself to writing. At a tender age of nine, she had studied *Wuthering Heights*. Her career started with short stories which got printed in leading Indian magazines. Her first story was *Circus Cat*. Then she wrote one after another stories followed by him first novel *Cry the Peacock* in 1963 and many more.
Awards and Prizes awarded to Anita Desai:

1983 – Guardian Children’s Fiction (for the novel *Village by the Sea*)
1984 – Booker Prize for Fiction (short listed) for the book *Fasting and Feasting*

Aberto Moravia Prize for Literature (Italy)

Anita Desai is a member of the Advisory Board of English of the National Academy of Letters in New Delhi. She is a member of American academy of arts and letters. Anita Desai is a fellow of the Royal society of literature in London. She got the Sahitya academy award in 1978 for *Fire on the Mountain*. Her novel *In Custody* was filmed by Ivory Merchant. And last but not the least, Anita Desai is a proud mother of Kiran Desai – the Bookers Prize winner for her novel *Guava Orchards*. Anita Desai has taught at Mount Holyke College, Baruch College and Smith College. At present she divides her times between teaching at the IT – USA and Cambridge and also writes for the New York review of books.
Anita Desai uses different fictional techniques according to the demands of the story. Except for her use of poetry in her novels they may not call her a technical innovator. and who can be an innovator when the novel is being written in English for last two hundred years. From the point of view of technique what is important is not innovation or novelty but how effective the technique is in conveying the meaning and narrating the story effectively. Anita Desai is able to narrate the story to portray the characters, to convey the mood to evoke the atmosphere to probe the psyche of her characters successfully and for this she uses flashback technique, stream of consciousness technique, use of contrasting characters, use of symbolism and effective use of language either to evoke an atmosphere or to transcribe the pronunciations or the characters or to use rhetorical skill for harangue. And to create realistic effort she also uses Hindi words but in moderation. The only thing that irks us in her use of German songs and poetry in her novels without giving paraphrases, as though readers whether in India or abroad is supposed to know German language.

Anita Desai is one of the best-known contemporary Indian English Novelists of our country and has endeavored to accommodate the native Indian tradition in English language. We find in her major novels, different techniques, she has made use of Indian words, German poetry and a few nursery rhymes. Mainly she portrays dilemmas and doubts of woman who are “misfits” in their own way, who do not
want to be heroic but all the time we find them struggling for what they do not have for example love, affection, attention, acceptance, recognition, or appreciation. Her novel focuses on the inner climate, the climate of sensibility. The interplay of thoughts, feelings and emotions is reflected in language, syntax and imagery aspects of existentialism are in evidence in the total framework of her stories. A modest attempt has been made to make a comprehensive study of the novels of Anita Desai.

In order to understand and explain her style and her use of the language, a comparison between her earlier novels to the later ones is necessary.

we can arrange her novels chronologically, thus:

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<th>No.</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<td>1.</td>
<td><em>Cry the Peacock</em></td>
<td>1963</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td><em>Voices in the City</em></td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td><em>Bye-Bye Black Bird</em></td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td><em>Where Shall we go this Summer</em></td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td><em>Fire on the Mountain</em></td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td><em>Clear Light of the day</em></td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td><em>Village by the Sea</em></td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td><em>In Custody</em></td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td><em>Journey to Ithaca</em></td>
<td>1995</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td><em>Fasting and Feasting</em></td>
<td>1999</td>
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Anita Desai uses her skill in transcribing Indian pronunciation of English for example in *Baumgartners Bombay* “Ex-pawt of course, ex-pawt”, Germany, Europe, Shipping timber- I know I know. They rolled their words in their mouths like potatoes. Use of original Hindi words like “Chelas, Garam Chai, Pani, Mantra, Billi wala pagal, Paan, lungi, saris etc” has being used often.

We can group her novels in accordance to her stylistic techniques. In *Where Shall we go this summer?*, *Bye Bye Black Bird*, *Cry, the peacock* and *Journey to Ithaca*, we come across the central women characters trying to break open their cocooned life. Where as in other works, say *Baumgartners Bombay*, *The village by the sea*, *Fire on the mountains*, *Voices in the city* and *In Custody*, with a powerful use of gushing emotions she has ruffled the feather to such an extent that hardly anything remains to be said further. Anita Desai's style changes from her previous novels to the latter ones. Anita Desai writes in the symbolic modes which not only subordinates plot to the other characters but also pushes it to the background. The repetition of the article “the”, often use of verb phrases, the use of free indirect speech, verbal structures, highlight her language more. The third person narration is a striking note in her works. In her novels *In Custody* we find her shifting from her female characters to the
male characters- a poet- Nur. The problem of an individual, who feels emotionally and spiritually alone, forms the backbone of her themes. Her female characters do not lack company but lag companionship. In her novels, life is depicted as it really is. She does not draw upon second hand information for the groundwork of her plots. She gives her work an authenticity that arises from her deep understanding and observation of life. She narrates her stories using many symbolisms. She shifts freely from comparison with animals, to use of English language as spoken by Indians; to a repetition of words to lend emphasis. She has obtained this knowledge of life through direct observation and insight. We find her novels, very true to life, reflecting nature. Her style is the lifeblood of her ideas, well released through language. *Bye Bye Black Bird* is the only novel where we come across Anita Desai’s own experience as an Indian abroad. So it can be said that it is a biographical novel of a kind. There is no concept of hero or a heroine in her novels. She leaves it to the readers to sympathize or reject her characters. Her recent novel *Fasting and Feasting*, which is short listed for the Bookers Prize, based on religious background; does not meet the expectations of the readers.

Theory of lyrical novel as propounded by Freedman in his article on “The Novels of Herman Hess. The articles dwell on the major features of the lyrical novel and also underline the difference between the lyrical
novels and the other one. The following are the dominant features of lyrical novels highlighted by Freedman. I have tried to analyze the major novels of Anita Desai. In the light of these features.

Taking into consideration Ralph Freedman’s article “Nature and Forms of the Lyrical Novels” (E.d. by Robert Murray Davis Uni. of Oklahoma p-53). “Combining features of both, the lyrical novel shifts the reader’s attention from men and events who a formal design. The usual scenery of fiction becomes a texture of imagery, and characters appear as personae for the self”. A lyrical novel assumes a unique form which transcends the casuals and temporal movement of narrative within the frame work of fiction.

What distinguishes lyrical from non-lyrical writing is a different concept of objectivity. It is a truism that the novel is not always realistic in the sense of being a “truthful” reproduction of external life but its main tradition separates the experiencing self from the world the experiences are about. The lyrical novel seeks to combine men and world in a strangely inward, yet aesthetically objective, form. It absorbs action all together refashions it as a pattern of imagery. Its tradition is neither didactic nor dramatic, although features of both may be used, but poetic in the narrow sense of “lyrical”.

Most works of fiction, as Northrop Frye has shown, are composed of various elements, drawing on what we usually designate as novel, romance, confession and satire ("Anatomy of Criticism Princeton Uni. Press, 1957, p-315 to 325"). Similarly, lyrical fiction crosses boundaries between types and methods of narrative, now showing itself in the romance, now in the confession, and often even in the conventional novel. Conventionally, the lyric, as distinct from epic and drama, is seen either as an instantaneous expression of a feeling or as a spatial form. Lyrical novel exploit the expectation of narrative by turning it into its opposite; a lyrical process.