CHAPTER 2

CONTEMPORARY INDIAN ENGLISH FICTION:

A Brief Survey

The novel, basically a western genre, has influenced the literatures of all the written languages in the world. This may be due to its facility and accessibility to the average literate and the interest it holds for the common man due to its parallels to life. Many a writer has used this form to represent the real life which is mostly contemporary to him. If in the past a writer was moved by the issues around and expressed himself in poetry, from the nineteenth century the writers have been mostly using the novel form to express their concerns about human life. In the twentieth century when the stage has been replaced by the movie, and later by the television the form of drama had been limited to express the social concerns, and mostly problems. On the other hand the novel has grown enormously comprising all the aspects of human life; and, in addition, fiction dealing with suspense like the detective novels and dealing with the fantastic and imaginary worlds like the Harry Potter Series have also become popular.

In recent years we are told that Imagination had to bow down to reality to explore the world that one didn't know fully. While these are some of the incisive and compelling discussions working through the issue of novel, the writer Amitav Ghosh insists that the novel is a significant genre because it incorporates all aspects of life. The response of the novelist is best described in a novel. It is this response of the novelist that is important to make the experience of the novel real and universal.

The Indian novel during the postcolonial period fell back to tradition to overthrow anything that was anti-native or imperialistic. Liberation was a dream inherent strongly in the religio-socio-economic tradition of India. The prevailing spirit of nationalism was a morass of subordination and ideological unity. Alongside with this epilogue was the history of English education which led to the advent of Indian Writing in English. It is a definitive history that integrated cultural, political activism and philosophy for a free and united India. The ideology of Gandhi, his code of morality, tolerance and self-sacrifice became pseudo moralistic. The subversion of these forms marked the rise of postcolonial scene in India. Nevertheless, colonization left indelible marks within the Indian psyche. The British were driven out; but English remained. Due to the multi-linguistic setting of India, English language was continued and it became the major language of
expression for the educated Indian writer. The freedom achieved almost after a thousand years, opened new doors to hitherto unseen arenas and both men and women started expressing eloquently the basic problems that wrought them.

It was the rhetoric of Independence that was to manifest the Indian Writing in English. The Indo-English creative writers found English not pliable to Indian themes. They had to adopt alternative patterns of writing i.e., a pattern of writing in less degree than the native writers.

It was then widely realized and accepted that in the ideology of the human experience, the female experience must be given a fairly equal importance of expression. It is somewhere that this complex and chilling line of history that has failed a claim. The fate of this failure importantly dates to the postcolonial or postmodern period. The postmodern writers crafted a common platform for the spirit of a free literary experience. Such freedom arises from the physical setting initially. Thus the freedom movement of the country played a role not only in the development of political consciousness, but also in the literary sensibility.

On the Indian scene, the novel in the native languages started in early 1700s. But Indian Fiction in English could come into existence only after the Indians got educated in the schools established in India by the British. The early writers and thinkers considered English as a language of progress and wrote mostly to effect reforms in the conservative Indians. The imparting of English education started as early as 1717 in Madras, 1718 in Bombay and 1720 in Calcutta and in 1817 with the creation of the Hindu College by Raja Ram Mohan Roy. India wanted English Education of the best type. Anglo Indian literature had no racial significance and was a product of Indo English literary relations.

Ram Mohan Roy and Ranade, Dadabhai and Phiroz Shah Surendranath and Bipin Lal, Sankaran Nair and S. Srinivas Iyengar, Tilak and Gokhale, Malaviya and Motilal, C.R. Das and Aurobindo and a hundred other nationalists and patriots reasoned in English, creating a new kind of Indian Literature. In the words of Surendranath Banerjee,

“our fathers, the first fruits of English education were violently pro-British. They could see no flaw in the civilization or culture of the West. They were charmed by its novelty and its strangeness.”

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The translations of the regional language into English became the signposts of modern India. The preoccupation with patriotism or the creation of Pakistan became some of the characteristic fiction produced in India. A colloquial knowledge of English was felt already in Tamil Nadu and later in Bengal. Raja Ram Mohan Roy’s plea was for more English and for more of Englishmen in India, that -

“... on mature consideration, therefore I think I may safely recommend that educated persons of characters and capital should now be permitted and encouraged to settle in India, without any restriction of locality or any liability to banishment at the discretion of government...”

Macaulay's celebrated minute clinched the issue at last,

“to make natives of this country good English scholars and that to this end our efforts ought to be directed.”

(p.27)

According to Lord William Bentick, the great objective of the British government was to promote European literature and science, and divert all the funds for the purpose of English education to the natives.

Prof. M.M. Bhattacharya’s earnest desire was that the repeated representations of Indians were responsible for the introduction of English and Western culture into India. Henry Derozio, a celebrated teacher of the Hindu College, became a household name; Kesub Chunder Sen, a humanist, linked India with England. Kashinath Telang and Ranade (called the father of Indian Economics) were intellectuals of modern civilization who shared their aim of life of fulness. With a wide outlook on life and humane sentiment, they seized the moment through remarkable and spirited writing. Conjuring up the image of India, Sir Narayan Chandavarkar, an orator and politician along with many impressive personalities, tried to modernize the vernacular speech into social instruments of change. It was Ramakrishna Paramahamsa who defined the best of the West to India. Vivekananda's writings and speeches were a dominant spirit of essentially educative value. Further, the translation of Western classics became the new literary phenomenon. The Indian novelists after Independence were drawn to American, European and even Russian models. Some stock representatives were found everywhere. If the tragedy of
partition neutralized the creative challenge of serious novelists on the one hand, the popular novels on crime and sex prevailed. A complete confrontation of the contemporary human experience needed to be shaped by the available material about human life.

The pre-independent Indian novelists in English reflected mostly on the then existing society. Displaying enormous social consciousness, they considered it as a duty to portray the existing scene rather than talking about reforms. At the most we have had writers and poets like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu, Rabindranath Tagore, Henry Derozio and a few others writing poems and novels to help grow patriotic feelings.

Indian literature is the study of India and Indian Writing in English, a discipline which grew out of Indo-English literary alliance. According to Srinivas Iyengar, Sri Aurobindo has maintained the view that -

“future poetry will acquire a mantric or incantatory quality - will come to us like a dance of creative life and that such poetry will be first manifested in English and perhaps in Indian Writing in English.” ³

It was a particular experience when Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ranade, Dadabhai and Phirozhshah, Surendranath and Bipin Pal, Sankaran Nair and S. Srinivasa Iyengar, Tilak and Gokhale, Malaviya and Motilal, C.R. Das and Aurobindo created new dimensions to the spectrum of Indian literature which were different from those of Englishmen or American. After the withdrawal of the British on 15 August, 1947, English language remained in an influential position. Both before and after Independence, the Indian writers, spiritual and political leaders used English to put forward their views to the world, whether it is about Indian politics or religion. Eminent thinkers like Vivekanand, Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Gandhi and Radhakrishnan were being heard in the West. It was in Raja Ram Mohan Roy's “Brahmo Samaj” that Tagore saw him as a man who not only introduced India to a modern age but also sought emancipation of women.

Toru Dutt, the first woman writer with a great scholarship in English, wrote fascinating poetry with native genius. On the other hand, the Indian literary scene was enlarged by Michael Madhusudhan, Bankim Chandra and Ramesh Chander Dutt whose selected translations of the greatest Indian epics - Rig Veda, the Upanishads, Buddhist literature and Kalidasa's
Kumarasambhava - are worth reading. Ramesh Chander Dutt's experience of the reading of Mahabharata and Ramayana was as follows:

“The characters of the Mahabharata are characters of flesh and blood, with the virtues and crimes of great actors in the historic world; the characters of the Ramayana are more often the ideals of many devoted to truth, and of womanly faithfulness and love in domestic life.”

Later came, Manmohan Ghose whose poems had the quintessential romantic Indian flavour. It was with Rabindranath Tagore that music, painting, poetry and drama burst into a new spring of life and joy, and placed India on the postmodern literary scene. Srinivas Iyengar's reading of Tagore is as follows:

“We must recognize, [Tagore once declared] that it is providential that the west has come to India, and yet someone must show the East to the West, and convince the West that the East has her contribution to make to the history of civilization.”

After Tagore and Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu expressed, in her fullest artistic, limits the sufferings and joy of human life and in a rhythm that was peculiarly English. Sri Aurobindo was epiphanic about the future of Indian fiction.

Gandhian ideologies on home rule, self-mastery, fearlessness, truth, satyagraha conveyed a personal and moral responsibility in day-to-day life; yet to Gandhi, India's independence was the “pathway of life.” On the contrary, to Nehru India's audience made Nehru “a successful speaker.” Though the novel was in a nascent form, the characteristic figures in Indian fiction were the benevolent Guru, Guide, Swamy, Fakir, Yogi, Mahatma or malevolent as a picaro.

To Aurobindo, the novelist was a kind of seer who could tell the future events in the form of a story. But the chief question was how to restore a national respect for the novel form. It was the Triad, Bankim, Tagore, Sarat Chandra who made novel the most engaging art form. The perceptive difficulties of the novelist were: what was his address and to whom was his particular ‘crocus’ addressed to. In the hands of the practitioners the novel became a living and an evolving literary genre.
On the whole, the Indian novelists chose English as the only medium of fiction and depicted the Indian life and culture. Novel became a living and literary genre that fused different narrative forms, the content and the expression. Nirad C. Chaudhari's novels portrayed the Indians’ attachment to the river; Narayan's novels centred on Malgudi on Sarayu; Mulk Raj Anand’s narratives captured the solitary individual and the collective states of minds which, like Charles Dickens, had unsavoury aspects of life and its variegated richness. It was Narayan’s novels that were open-ended and creative with the motif of renewal and restoration. Bhabani Bhattacharya’s novels mediated on the last years of the British regime to the first years of the Congress rule. The ramifications and intricacies of human action remained an unresolved paradox to the writers and the readers. Manohar Malgoankar’s novels exhibited an authentic quality of the clash of the army and the civilian code of life. The narrative touches are filled with strange and antique nuances on the shame and glory of partition.

Though it is an attempt to unfold the national tragedy under the guise of fiction, it is a tribute to Manohar Malgoankar’s virtuosity. Nevertheless, Bhabani Bhattacharya’s So Many Hungers (1947), R.K. Narayan's Waiting for the Mahatma (1955) and Kamala Markandaya's Some Inner Fury (1957) are compelling accounts of the writer's personal experiences of partition. The horrors of partition critique the reality of sensation which challenges the national obsession with borders. The drama of shame and degradation of the Indians and Pakistanis who resented to the two-nation theory is best described in Kushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan. Kamala Markandaya’s personal perspectives on the events of history are explorations on the continuity of History.

The Indian Writing in English moves from national to personal; from freedom struggle to gender discriminations to present the different perspectives and happenings. The imposed perspectives deconstruct the knowledge structures which were legitimized by the imperial discourse. The post-colonial discourse is a search for the hidden layers of meaning, through succinct narratives. The horrors about the partition and the racy details about Emergency by writers like Nayantara Sehgal, Salman Rushdie and Rohinton Mistry are critical landmarks in the political history of India.

The political freedom achieved in 1947 had also brought in changes in the social and personal lives, and consequently, in the Indian Writing in English. As women education was recognized
as an important aspect of the free India, the government had introduced certain schemes and measures encouraging girl education. The consciousness that was born and developed in women during the final phase of the independence struggle and the participation of the Indian women in the freedom struggle had also helped the position of women. The inspiration given by the participation of the freedom struggle, and their education later, resulted in producing a group of women writers in India. From then on, both men and women writers concentrated on the themes concerning both the sexes.

Rohinton Mistry’s *A Fine Balance*, dwells with great detail upon the imposition of Emergency and its repercussions. Allan Sealy's experiment of the ‘nama’ records the events of history along with the changing power structures of the Trotter family in the book titled *The Trotter Nama*. Amitav Ghosh gives a firsthand personal familiarity to the Indian reality. The Indian reality had different meanings of displacement, exiles and migration or diaspora. Indeed, many diaspora writers have been pushed to the margins. Though the writers like Amit Choudhari, Sunetra Gupta, Leela Dhingra and Meera Syal are outside India, they did respond to the cultural situations and created the great critical interest. On the other hand, Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight Children* represents the fragmented identities of ‘displacement’ and ‘rootlessness.’ Significantly, the novel *Midnight’s Children* becomes a truly post-colonial account against the backdrop of the Indian government. Many women writers such as Githa Hariharan in *The Thousand Faces of Night* and *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* and Nina Sibal in *Yatra* use English without any colonial associations.

The novels of 1980s present the family histories and provide a family tree like Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* and Vikram Seth’s *A Suitable Boy* which are crowded with lives and places. Shashi Tharoor’s *The Great Indian novel*, Upamanyu Chatterjee’s *Madna English, August* and Anurag Mathur’s *Jajan* have a touch of rural or small town Indian life. The agony and ecstasy of the urban Indian transcends the historical Indian legacy to bring out the post-colonial experience. With the thematic preoccupation of the individual, Rushdie, Tharoor, Amitav Ghosh, Githa Hariharan and Vikram Chandra moved away from the novels of the preceding decade.

Nayantara Sehgal’s novels have a childlike truth which pace into the past and the present. It is Arundhati Roy, who makes a fine use of the “stream of consciousness” technique that the novel
acquires a chiselled piece of perfection. But, unlike the NRI writers such as Raja Rao whose only theme was the India of their memory, novelists like Rushdie and Bharathi Mukherjee show a tendency for a movement towards internationalism. Bharathi Mukherjee’s fiction reveals the emotional psychic consequences of the Indian women immigrants.

The determination to explore the ugliness of reality, negative emotions and the fragility of relationships has resulted in the writings of displacement where writers like Ruth Prawar Jabhvala, Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai disclaimed or distanced themselves from India. Their writings set the tone to the diasporic genre of writing. Anita Desai congratulates Arundhati Roy for giving legitimacy to the Indian English. Married at 20, and with two daughters, Anita Desai was utterly subservient to that of being a wife. As a writer, her writings reflect the times.

The Independence has also influenced the thematic concerns of women novelists. Participation in the Indian freedom struggle leaving the cozy and restricted setting of their homes, gave them a taste of freedom in the open air. Women started thinking about the long forgotten Indian ideals of equality and fraternity. While the Vedic India considered men and women as equals and the entire world as one single family, the foreign invasions which began on India, 1200 years ago, resulted in the total loss of freedom for women, and confined them to their small homes. This confinement might have been a safety measure against the foreign invaders who forced Indian women to join their harems. But centuries of this confinement of Indian women affected the mind of the Indian male too. The balance in the Indian society vanished and created superiority complex in men, and consequent inferiority complex in women. Both the sexes were happy till the Independence, as each group lived in its illusion, accepting man as the Guard and woman as the Guarded. But this unnatural setting received a jolt with the change that had wrought in the postcolonial Indian scene. Any changes in the society would reflect themselves in fiction; hence, the scene in Indian English fiction had to change after the Independence. Before Independence, the Indian Writers in English belonged to either of the two groups: one, using English to intensify patriotic feelings in Indians to achieve freedom for the country, two, representing the existing social settings without any reference to the independence struggle.

The post-colonial writers of India freed themselves of political and economic issues which they left to the leaders of the county to deal with. The social, and more so the psychological, issues became their chief concerns. While most of the men writers were concerned about the inevitable
changes in the Indian society in free India, some of them also dealt with the desirable changes in the Indian society in order to compete with the intellectuality of the West.

The convent schools and more English medium schools came into existence. These schools adopted and propagated a peculiar culture which is neither totally Indian nor totally Western. An ideal culture combining the values of the East and the intellectuality of the West would have been the best form, as propagated by the Indian Monk Swami Vivekananda. Vivekananda’s lectures, given worldwide, triggered the production of much spiritual writing brought out by Ramakrishna Mutt and other religious organizations. While these writings struggled to bring back the original Indian culture, the products of the so called convents and English medium schools remained largely uninfluenced by them. So a modern culture which is neither strong as the ancient Indian culture, nor logical like the western culture has come into existence in India. The writers of 1970s and 1980s are the byproducts of such a culture which is wrought with confusion about the status and roles of men and women.

The genre which represented the Indian life after the Indian independence has taken the name as Post-colonial literature in English. The writers from early 1950s to the date have been portraying various problems that Indian men and women have been facing after Independence. These problems ranged from casual relationships with acquaintances, to the deepest relationships of the family. A glance at some of these works throws light on the variety and intensity that the Indian English Fiction has gained over decades.

Writers like Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan were amusingly satirical, ironic, tragic, pathetic or farcical presenting the idiosyncrasies of mankind with a consummate skill. To fill the reality of experience, R.K. Narayan created fiction on the surviving forms of colonization. Narayan’s popularity sprang from *My Dateless Diary* and the whole corpus of Malgudi stories where he handles English with great ease. The novel completes full circle with Raja Rao adopting a different style of English idiom, rhythm, and tone with a distinct speech of vernacular Kannada.

Another articulate writer of the Triad was Raja Rao. Raja Rao’s novels are reader-inclusive. The reader has to infer a great deal in between the lines and take part in the action/event. Cheerfully humane, Raja Rao’s novels are a search for love, faith and harmony in mankind.

A much translated regional novelist of the time was Dr. Bhabani Bhattacharya whose *So Many Hungers* (1947), *Music for Mohini* (1952), *He who Rides a Tiger* (1954), *A Goddess named
Gold (1960) and Shadow from Ladakh (1966) give a slice of Indian life. Manohar Malgoankar brings in some intrigue, suspense and sex with sound historical perspective of fictionalized historical representations in The Princess and Spy in Amber.

A historic study of the early novels of Kamala Markandaya’s Possession, Manohar Malgoankar’s A Bend in the Ganges and Khushwant Singh’s I shall not Hear the Nightingale exhibited a variety of attitudes. Two women novelists Shakuntala Srinagesh in The Little Black Box (1955) and Anita Desai in Cry, The Peacock (1963) and Voices in the City (1965) made a daring exploit of James Joyce’s stream of consciousness technique.

Hence, it has been the women whose contribution to the English novel that established the great art of novel writing. Toru Dutt drew heavily from European literature. Her characters Bianca or The Young Spanish Maiden, though of foreign origin, owe a lot to the tradition of Indian women. Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Prawar Jhabvala unquestionably enriched Indian fiction. Against the pervasiveness of evil in an urban atmosphere, their depiction of woman as “embodiment of patience”, “love”, and “tenderness” is simply enduring. If it is ‘social climate’ in Jhabvala’s novels, the ‘accent’ is on the principal characters in Kamala Markandaya’s novels. But the writer who caught the impulse of postcolonial India was Anita Desai.

In A History of Indian English Literature, M.K. Naik has pointed out that Indian novel always had the tradition of social realism. 6 “This tradition started by novelists like Mulk Raj Anand was continued after Independence. Among the Indian novelists writing in English, women novelists form a sizable and significant group.”7 Women writers like Toru Dutt, Mrs. Sathianathan, Miss Cornelia Sorabji, ShevantibaiNikambe were the pioneers of this group, who wrote in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Their theme is usually the Indian woman, as she was seen emerging in the new social conditions. They are very subjective in outlook and lay stress on private experience.

Though Kamala Markandaya was born in India, she has lived in England for a number of years. Her novels have a greater variety of setting and characters. But essentially she dwells on a few main themes like the East Vest encounter, and the woman in different roles. Her first novel Nectar in a Sieve (1954) brings her the distinction of being, the only one of this group to have turned to rural India. However, the urban and foreign influences on the writes are obvious. And
the picture of rural India painted by her is quite contrived. Her stories of east-west encounters
after *The Coffer Dams* (1969) are much more comprehensive and authentic

Nayantara Sehgal’s background is very significant. The daughter of Vijayalaxmi Pandit and
niece of Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, politics seem to be a natural selection in themes for her, for
instance, *A Time to be Happy* (1958); *This Time of Morning* (1968) *The Storm in Chandigarh*
(1969) and *A Situation in New Delhi* (1977) all have political themes. Though she has not
handled the themes with sufficient complexity and limited her concept of the political novel to a
few easily recognizable portraits of famous leaders (Kalyan Sinha in *This Time of Morning*,
based on V.K.Krishna Menon), her political acumen has sometimes proved disconcertingly
prophetic. In *The Storm in Chandigarh* (1969) Indu says “What would the next stop be an army
and a flag for the Punjab.”

Anita Desai is more interested in unraveling the mystery of the mind than in social and political
realities. Her themes are the agony of existence, the metaphysical problems and they are
expressed through neurotic, lonely, fragile introverts like Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* (1963). The
effect of existentialist literature is seen in the nausea of existence felt by her characters. Nirode in
*Voices in the City* (1965) has been called a Kafkaesque figure. In *Where Shall we go this Summer*
(1975), Seeta realises that there are no values outside life. A middle-aged woman in her fifth
(and unwanted) pregnancy, she is stilled by the cruelty and callousness of urban life. Anita Desai
unravels the mystery of the sensitive mind very subtly. “Anita Desai’s primary occupation in all
her works is not how one gets along with others, but with oneself.” M.E.Derrett claims that
though most of the Indo-Anglian novelists were born in India, they have either lived or have
been educated in the west. And so there is a certain de-Indianisation of their attitudes. Though
this may be true to some extent about the four major Indian women novelists we have considered
so far, it does not apply to Shashi Deshpande whose upbringing and education are totally Indian.
The only alien aspect of her writing - if it can be called so - is the language. But English,
according to her, “is used by her like any other Indian language. Therefore, the Indianness of her
writing is extremely natural and authentic, not contrived or aggressive. In fact, she does not want
it to be recognised a separate aspect.” Philip Stevick in his *Theory of the Novel* states that the
novel records the passage from a state of innocence to a state of experience. The Protagonist of
the novel “follows a pattern of disillusionment from potential fulfillment to actual
accomplishment from a hopeful naivete to a resigned wisdom.” Thus, it is distinguished from
romance which is essentially escapist literature. The novel leads us back to reality. If we consider the themes of Shashi Deshpande's novels, we realise that a similar progress in the protagonist's life is portrayed in them. All her protagonists - Indu, Sam, Jaya, Khshama, and Manju are shown to be in a state of confusion at the beginning. Slowly as the novel unfolds, they go through a process of introspection, self-analysis and self-realisation. At the end, they emerge as more confident, more in control of themselves and significantly, more hopeful. As Jaya, in That Long Silence concludes “there is always hope.”

Born in 1937, during the British occupation of India, Anita Desai is the first post colonial Indian woman writer to explore the Indian sensibility through a postmodern culture. Like a meteorologist, she conveys the fever and fret the chill and storm of the inner consciousness in a language of poetic brilliance. Anita Desai’s contemporary, Santha Rama Rav has a novel, Children of 40, where she attempts to bridge the Gulf between East and West through a cultural continuity of travel and romance. Nayantara Sehgal’s stories center round the love exploits of the Zamindari families and the events of 1942. A Time to be Happy exposes what happens in the drawing rooms of politically important people. The novel is a photographic discourse on the chance that comes about on Nehru's prime-ministership. This Time of morning, another of Sehgal’s story is steeped with politics and journalistic overtones. Her latest novel Storm in Chandigarh is a satire on the officialdom of Delhi of yesteryears. Vimala Rama, another Indo-English writer, recreates historical representations of Chandrasena, Ambapali, Ajat Shatru with occasional poetic brilliance.

Amidst the impressive array of the works of women writers, R.K. Narayan deals with a powerful theme concerning women in his The Painter of Signs which could make a family planning campaign click. Raja Rao’s attempts to portray an Indian seeker’s life of fulfillment outside his motherland record the syndrome of the movement from East to West. Manohar Malgoankar’s motif of the American dream; Kamala Markandaya’s experiments of Indians in U.K.; V.S. Naipaul’s clowning of mimic men and Mrs. Jhabvala’s failure to reach a captive audience are somewhat integrated in style and content but individual experiments close to the art and practice of postmodern writing was not experimented upon.

The invasion of the Portuguese, the French, the English and the Dutch lowered the spirit and unity of India. The influence of English education reflected an interest in the aesthetics of the
West. The import of western literary aesthetes, like Henry James, James Joyce, Proust, D.H. Lawrence and Eliot brought a major shift on the sensibility of Indian thinking and Indian writing.

The influence on the Indians started reflecting through literature. Rabindranath Tagore’s translation of Eliot’s modernist art poem, *Journey of the Magi*, into Bengali and Nehru’s speeches and letters/epistles produced a kind of Indian Literature that was more akin to the West than the East. As Nehru writes:

“I have become a queer mixture of the East and West, out of place everywhere, at home nowhere. Perhaps my thoughts and approach to life are more akin to what is called western than eastern...”

Dr. Narasimaiah describes the literary position roughly before and after Independence as the time was staged for the criticism of I.A. Richards and F.R. Leavis which was as much as the rage of the enthusiasm of Independence struggle. Younger writers wished to be different from their fathers and read T.S. Eliot, Henry James, James Joyce and D.H. Lawrence to write like them if they could. Their word seemed to be “the last word” for the budding Indian “poet, playwright or novelist.” (p.70). For the novel to be fully grown Iyengar observes that,

“we have to wait till the latter half of the nineteenth century when the western impact on India's cultural front had resulted, among other things, in the development of formal written prose in the regional languages, in India first as a functional, and presently, as an artistic medium.”

While the conditions for the novel form were being created, the post-independent literary scene was crowded with thematic concerns for evil; estrangement of the individual from the self; growing pessimism - all of which were fast transforming the Indian society. The breaking of the joint family in an imitation of the nuclear families of the west gravely influenced the culture of Indian families. Changing from the personal occupations and agriculture into jobs immensely influenced the psyche of the Indians. However on adopting the Western situations to the joint family system like the popular commercials on “small happy homes” lead to the breakdown of coherent family system of India. Further the introduction of women's education and women’s franchise brought home a new dimension in the Indian Renaissance, especially in the outlook of
the socio-cultural and literary spheres of Indian woman. A concern for the various aspects of a woman's life became the chief theme of the Indian women writers of English.

Fiction by Indian women novelists occupies a prominent place in Indian Writing in English. They have made a substantial contribution to the growth and the enrichment of Indian novels in English. Their novels are essentially concerned with the gender discrimination, alienation and other problems related to women who are exposed to both physical and psychological abuse and ill-treatment in the male-dominated Indian society.

Man-woman relationship is the unit of individual and social life and hence it has been the central theme of the novelists all over the world. They have exposed the part sex which is playing in man's life today. The characters of Nayantara Sahgal reflect the changing facets of man-woman relationship in India. The women characters of Mrs. Sahgal are no longer the subdued sex “a figure of humility, neck bent eyes downcast.” (Thestorm in Chandigarh) In their conjugal relationship and their relationship outside marriage the heroines of Mrs. Sahgal are solitary individuals striving for self-assertion. Nayantara Sahgal is a powerful artist and her Rich like us, the winner of Sahitya Akademi award and also of the prestigious British honour the Sinclair prize for fiction focuses on the position of woman as victims of patriarchy. It examines the constraints that operate throughout their lives and render them emotionally and even otherwise crippled.

Apart from several other things, Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things deals with feminism and gender discrimination in a conservative patriarchal domination where women have a very little share in the total happiness of the family; where they are seldom allowed to take education and where men always dominate over women, the possessed over the non-possessed, the powerful over the weak and the touchable over the untouchable. The God of Small Things portrays a truthful picture of the plight of the Indian women, their great sufferings, cares & anxieties, their humble submission persecution and undeserved humiliation in a male dominating society. It also shows the women marathon struggle for seeking the sense of 'identity' in a totally averse and envious society. The social structure of an Indian woman is full of many ups and downs, ifs and buts.
Thus, a critical exploration of the book, *The God of Small Things* clearly shows the untold miseries and undeserved sufferings of women who have to bear the brunt of male domination silently and meekly.

It is suggested that unlike the radical feminists, who are seriously concerned with the tortures inflicted on the female in the patriarchal society, Dattani projects a world in which both the male and the female are loser as they are forced to stay under the illusion that being biologically different, the male and the female are also compelled to accept cultural polarities. To reveal the cultural polarities imposed on the male and the female in the society Dattani creates a real world—Indian society, infamous for bringing atrocities against its female members—and also introduces a dream world at the end of the play when Tara and Dan are seen hugging each other in some other place. A perfect combination of the real world and the dream world in *Tara* helps the dramatist pave out a new way for projecting his views on gender discrimination.

R.K. Dhawan observes, Desai’s depiction of Time is - what she quotes on the last page of the novel, *Clear Light of Day* a very significant line from Eliot’s *Four Quartets*, Time is both a ‘destroyer’ and ‘preserver.’ Deeply influenced by Camus, Kafka, Baudelaire, Anita Desai’s protagonists sometimes appear to have “walked out of the pages of one of Camus's novels,” says Usha Bande, an Indian critic.

Anita Desai’s characters speak through Baudelaire’s verbal texts of “right to contradict” and “right to leave.” Most of the debates and issues on women are essentially tainted with fate-fatality, obsession with death on alienation which Anita Desai powerfully exploited for the Indian audience. The changing customs and cultures of Indian society invariably focused the feminine sensibility.

Desai's impressions, moods and emotions are ingrained in words: “it is like chain smoking,” she says -

“I chain smoke with words, with books. There is a difference of course, what begins as self-indulgence eventually becomes a self discipline.”
Anita Desai's literary themes of conflicting relationships, alienation, obsession with death and search for identity and meaning in life almost unconsciously weave into her plots and characters. Her works usher in the necessity of encountering the effects of colonized cultures long after the imperial phase had ceased. Anita Desai made a place for herself in writing about the long term effects on the psyche of women in the family and the society and their attitude, compromising or otherwise.

To Anita Desai, literature is significant and an overwhelming experience than the real world that draws her to solitary individuals. As a writer, she was stuck to literature from an early age. She acknowledges the writers who influenced her deeply.

“In my twenties when I first began to work seriously and consciously on my novels, it was D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, Henry James and Proust that influenced me more strongly.” 16

Desai's discourse is essentially on,

“women, few men but mostly women. Like Melville, Anita Desai finds human dignity in little dark corners of life; not among the powerful and successful, but among the oppressed the defeated; among the victims of God or of nature or of man or, simply of ‘things.’”17

Dash's perceptive comment on Anita Desai's concern for the introspective characters is as follows:

“Anita Desai is acutely sensitive to the lives of the people who live on the brink. In an interview she remarks : ‘Well, I think, solitary and introspective people are always very aware of living on the brink ... but perhaps my introspective characters are more aware than others of what lies on the other side.’”18

Gently shaking off the paternalistic and liberal ideas of contemporary writers, Anita Desai interprets the reality of women, in a postcolonial/postmodern situation, as defeated and betrayed; exploited by fortune hunters; and those with the courage when they must say the great ‘Yes’ or the great ‘No’ to confront like creatively and unconventionally. Anita Desai unmistakably
imprints a ‘female sentence,’ the ‘female time’ and quintessentially seeks self-realization and self-fulfillment as a female writer. She confesses:

“Writing is to me a process to discover the truth -the truth that is, nine-tenth of the iceberg that lies submerged beneath the one-tenth visible portion we call Reality. Writing is my way of ploughing to the depths and exploring this underlying truth. All my writing is an effort to discover, to underline and convey the true significance of things.”

Whatever be the subject, two types of women are portrayed by Anita Desai -the conformists and the non-conformists. These are very realistic human beings and not mere theories.

Anita Desai is a genuine artist to the core who, like Shakespeare, holds mirror to nature. She does not recognize any theories of fiction but relies solely on her observation and experience. She thinks that the business of the artist is a realistic portrayal of what she sees, and it is for the academicians and the critics to analyze the creative art. She says that:

“... theories of the novel are held by those of an academic or critical turn of mind, not of the creative writer. 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 her vision.”

It is their “flashes” of vision, and a kind of “instinct” that leads the writer and not any theories. Anita Desai masters the art of the novel, without making them into social campaigns. She reflects on the condition of women and children in modern India and portrays them honestly in her novels. Anita Desai has the intensity of matter not contemporaneity. According to her, “the perfect novel achieves the perfect balance with just as much story or as much fantasy with structure can bear, no more.”

Dr. Brij Raj, considers Desai’s novels “an extended piece of music, subtle sensitive sensuous ... complex and richly integrated in its total effect.”
According to Anita Desai, individuals are always running up against tremendous violence or threatened by violence. Desai’s individuals can be put in extremities and “act as agents of self-confrontation.” 23

Finally, the Indo-Anglian novel until the 1970s had a socio politico import with writers like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Kushwant Singh and Kamala Markandaya. The exploration of the Indian psyche through a fictionalized representations of poetry, music, art, life and at the same time the extremely deep, dark, destructive forces of life, conflict sadness, alienation, ugliness that prevail through the individual experiences. This is what is exactly dealt by Anita Desai. She captures the attention of the reader through the novel’s intricate narration to follow a “particular consciousness,” and brings the Indo-Anglian novel “into the mainstream of European and American fiction.” 24

So much for her commitment to the English language is that she creates typical characters with typical dialogue to catalogue a psychological drama of the mind. The study of the individual psyche and its interaction with the social values create a psychic tension which forms the basis of post modern discourse. The post-modern discourse constructs its own language and adopts its own style against the established tradition. Here the novel’s dense description of the characters’ hypersensitivity, alienation, eccentricity enriches the artistic fabric. Also an associative use of landscape, myth, symbols, images of birds and animals reflect the mindscape. It is this meticulous practice, untried before, places Anita Desai in Indian Writing in English in the dimension of postmodern art. Dr. Atma Ram draws the difference between the approaches of male and female writers:

“ Whereas a man is concerned with action, experience and achievement, a woman writer is more concerned with thought, emotion and sensation.” 25

Anita Desai is not worried about the systems of social life; she is more concerned with the basic meaning of life and desires to arrange it into a credible shape. She comments on her own novels:

“My novels are no reflection of Indian society, politics or character. They are a part of my private effort to seize upon the raw material of life - its shapelessness, its meaninglessness.” 26
Born of the social and emotional milieu, Desai's novels are a representation of feminine sensibility that is caught in the crisis of a postmodern society -which is represented by the upper middle class of people -

“who are not average but have retreated or been driven into some extremity of despair and so turned against... the general current.” 27

Whether Anita Desai came under the influence of the theories of existential concerns by Kierkaguard, Bergson, Augustine, Pascal, Heidegger and Proust or even Camus in the treatment of Time and Space, is not certain. But the identity of women (and quintessentially of woman) that has moved away from family to society to social criticism in Literary Studies is given a new identity, a new liberty, a new individuality. Her preoccupation with Indian women who are denied of their value and freedom, asserts that her protagonists are new and different. Her women characters from Maya to Bim and immigrant women characters, Helen and Lotte grow in stature in terms of value and freedom.

Triumphant and independent like her female protagonists, Anita Desai emerges to achieve what she had wanted. Her universe needs no “masculine mediator,” to explore her true potential. Free to employ the language of the inner psyche and creating a realistic fiction, Anita Desai has carved a niche for herself. Whether it is post-modern novel or post-modernist technique, one has to come to terms with Anita Desai in the genre of Indian writing in English.

A reading of Anita Desai’s fiction gives a fair idea of the life in general and women in particular that we find in the contemporary India. The discriminatory practices of people towards women, the consequent complexes of Indian men and women, their confused philosophy of life, the struggle of women to find their own identities - all find a graphic presentation in Anita Desai’s fiction. A thematic analysis of selected novels of Anita Desai will further support the viewpoint that she is a powerful postmodern writer of Indian English.
REFERENCES


