CHAPTER ONE

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The English language came to India at a time when Indians were prepared to try anything that helped them explore new realms of thought and adopt new ways of expression. The new vistas which English education opened to the Indian made him restless. There was a wave of enthusiasm all around. The Renaissance that followed had a profound impact on the Indians. The study of English language and literature, to a considerable extent revolutionised the thought processes of the educated Indians and subsequently changed not only their outlook on life but also their basic approach to life.

Two significant developments took place in the wake of the Indian Renaissance. First, the emergence of a middle class and secondly the introduction of new literary forms like the Novel, the Short Story and the One-Act Play to the Indians. Bengal with its political eminence showed the way for the rest of India. Great enthusiasm was shown there to master the newly introduced language. Even those who denounced English were steadily learning English.

The greatest service the literatures of the West rendered to the Indians was that they created a consciousness of the individuality of man. Indians were shaken out of their traditional fatalism and conservatism. The belief that whatever a man may do, he is destined to be what he is changed considerably. This awakening enabled the Indian to see himself in relation to the world around and acted as a catalyst in his search for identity. The vibrant native tradition neglected over the centuries following political subservience and social confusion got a fresh boost with the breath of fresh air from the West. The Indian writers were overwhelmed by a spirit of adventure and exercised their skill in the
new modes thrown open to them. They found the novel as a literary form literally novel to them and they started experimenting though hesitantly, with this new form.

The thematic study of Indo-Anglian fiction shows that while the form is alien the content is essentially Indian. It would be nothing short of perversity to stigmatise any of the novels of serious practitioners of fiction like R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Arun Joshi, Nagarajan and Chaman Nahal as an imitation of the western novel. A writer worth his salt has necessarily to reflect the tradition into which he is born. At a more obvious level every novelist tries to present something – the political or social situations, a movement or the human situation involving the mind and the heart. At a higher level the novel of one region is compared with that of another region to portray the human predicament.

Indo-Anglian fiction is totally Indian in theme and in treatment its message being essentially Indian. English is being used with greater dexterity and has undoubtedly become a powerful instrument for the delineation and probing of complex psychological problems and states of mind. Many writers of fiction have broken fresh grounds and have come out with solid and outstanding works compelling close critical examination. Many writers show a rare vitality and freshness and an all-round competence.

Some of the writers have taken the craft of fiction seriously and have shown a good grasp of Indian literary conventions and great concern for the transmission of genuine Indian thought and feeling. The Indian epics and Upanishads have exerted considerable influence on the Indian writers of English.

With the advent of Gandhi on the Indian political scene the Indo-Anglian fiction marked the beginning of a thematically significant era. His inspiring leadership, social
reforms like getting rid of untouchability and crusade against the evils of drinking and the promotion of cottage industries gave the writers distinct themes.

The novels with extensive references to the nationalist movement are still coming out. But since many of these novelists do not have first-hand information of the movement they do not project the real issues that were at stake. Apart from a few satisfying novels on the theme, a novel that could proudly be described as an authentic artistic recreation of the epic struggle may reveal itself in future.

The ghastly development that followed the vivisection of the sub-continent attracted the attention of many writers and in fact the partition of India has become the second predominant theme of the Indo-Anglian novel.

The number of writers who are sensitive to the suffering of the poor is not large. Of the three hundred odd novels published so far hardly a dozen depict it. And most of these novels appeared in the pre-independence period. Nobody knows why the revolutionary fervour and left-wing sympathies found in many gifted writers are lacking in their post-independence writing.

Foreign rule over nearly two hundred years gave rise to some distinct themes like rootlessness and identity crisis following a close association of the East and the West and the difficulties the Indian immigrants face in the country of their domicile and the difficulties of Indians in their home land on their return after having spent some years in foreign countries.

Spiritual, mental and psychological alienation has become a powerful theme for many writers. The vast canvas of the theme helped many Indo-Anglian novelists to explore the many aspects of the inner life of man. The concept of alienation and the
search for identity entered the Indo-Anglian fiction as a strong motif in the fifties. It soon became a recurring theme especially with younger writers. In a number of novels a deep anguish and despair form the chief thematic preoccupations. Many of them depict an isolated man pitted against his fellowmen. He is quite often engaged in a helpless quest for his identity.

The most significant development in the history of Indo-Anglian literature of the post-independence period is the emergence of a powerful group of women writers. Writing about the recent fiction K.R.S.Iyengar says: “The future of insane fiction has given ample evidence of vitality, variety, humanity and artistic integrity” (The Indian Contribution to English literature, 157). The first experiments were made in Bengal and all the major literary figures of the day were Bengalis. Bankim Chandra considered to be the Father of the Indian Novel inaugurated them in 1864 significantly enough with Raj Mohan’s Wife not in Bengali but in English. But it was with his second novel Durgasandini in Bengali that he made his impact on the Indian literary scene. Raj Mohan’s Wife was followed by more than a dozen novels all in Bengali. All these novels have been translated into English and the major languages of India. They undoubtedly played a vital role in quickening the literary renaissance all over the country. Bankim Chandra filled the foreign mould with Indian content and legitimately earned the name of the Father of the Novel in India. Krishna Kripalani has summed up Bankim’s contribution thus:

It was Bankim Chandra who established the novel as a major literary form in India. He had his limitations. He was romantic, effusive and ...he indulged a little too free in literary flashes and bombast and was no peer of
his great contemporaries Zola and Dickens as much of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky (Indo-Anglian Novel, 31).

Tagore who came to the Indian literary scene like a Colossus has acknowledged his indebtedness to Bankim Chandra on several occasions. He fed the Indian novel which was still in its infancy with the milk and honey of the age-old Indian culture and tradition and to him goes the credit of nurturing the infant at its most important stage of growth. The spell he cast brought the entire Indian literature under a new force which embodied the essence of the Vedic outlook of life. Gora, The Home and the World, Binodini and Farewell My Friend had a salutary effect on the novel in India. The lead given by Bankim, Tagore, Sarat and Prem Chand produced a good harvest of fiction both in English and the regional languages. Whoever had a good command of English started writing what could be described as books of fiction. Toru Dutt, Tagore’s sister Swarnakumari Ghoshal, Raj Laxmi Devi, Rajam Iyer, Kshetra Pal Chakaravarthy, Madhaviah, S.M.Mitra, Sorabji Cornelis, Balakrishna, H.Dutt, Krupabai Sathianathan and Michael Madhusudhan Dutt were some of the writers of this category. None of them wrote anything that could be dignified with the title of a novel. The dominant themes of these early writers were either social problems presented with an avowed didactic purpose or moral codes presented through tales for the edification of the young. The themes selected varied from writer to writer depending on the province he hailed from. Studying about the novel in regional literatures of this period T.W.Clark says: “These early writers were concerned with the conflict between a tradition -ridden culture and modernity” (The Novel, 764985).
This could be well said of the early Indo-Anglian novelists. Their efforts were poor imitations of the western novels with Indian content, some of them eulogising the admirable qualities of the Indian women, an obvious result of Ram Mohan's crusade to improve the status of women.

The political awakening started a new era in creative writing also in the country. Gandhi's thoughts and principles and his influence on people formed a rich storehouse of themes for Indian writers to draw from. Even a cursory glance through Indian literature produced after 1920 reveals how Gandhi influenced every writer of note. In fact, for the Indian writer there was nothing more exciting or challenging to write about. The charismatic personality of Gandhi and the resurgence he created among the rural folk, many of whom were hitherto considered 'untouchables' even from a literary point of view gave the Indian writer a mine of themes. The fact that theme, character and milieu changed from the city to the village, from the intrigues of palaces to the huts of the common man, from the educated to the illiterate and silent, from the butterfly world of young lovers to the brave fighters of the nationalist movement was evident in every branch of writing in India.

Krishna Kripalani has observed this situation thus:

It was both moral and intellectual and at once inhibitive and liberating. In so far as it sharpened the writer's loyalties by narrowing them and encouraged Puritanism and a horror of sex it was inhibitive and unhealthy and resulted without meaning to, in an irritating sanctimoniousness. Gandhi stripped urban life elegance of their pretensions and emphasised that religion without compassion and cultures without conscience were
worthless. He transfigured the image of India and turned national idealism from its futile adulation of the past to face the reality of India as she was poor, starving and helpless but with an untapped potential of unlimited possibilities (Panoramic Glimpse, 79).

Another significant development marked this period. Creative writing has been the monopoly of the upper class. It was largely by the upper class and for the upper class. But with the advent of Gandhi on the political scene this situation changed. More and more middle class also strayed into the field of creative writing. There was a change in the attitude of the lower class. They found that their own lives could also be made the themes of literature. Hitherto they have been observing literature from a safe romantic distance. M.K.Naik writes:

It is no more coincidence that there came a sudden flowering of Indian fiction in English in the 1930s a period during which the star of Gandhi attained its meridian on the Indian horizon. Under the leadership of Gandhi the Indian freedom struggle already more than a generation old became so thoroughly democratised that the freedom consciousness percolated for the first time to the very grass roots of Indian society and revitalised it to the core (Indian Literature, 57).

The Post-Indeped period in India has been a period of tremendous and significant output of Indian English writing. It offers a fertile field interpretation of the social, economic and political issues, the dominant social values and the transformation taking place in the social values of the middle and lower classes in India. The novel reflects far more realistic picture of the period, events and people of contemporary India. The novel
as the major literary genre of society has come to a faithful attempt to recreate the social world of man’s relationship with his family and other institutions, the conflicts and tension between the groups and social classes.

The novelists who made a mark during this period included Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K.Narayan. Anand’s *Untouchables* (1935), *Coolie* (1936) and *Two Leaves and a Bud* brought him to the forefront as a socially committed novelist highlighting not merely the colonial exploitation of Indians but also the caste and class-oriented exploitation of the untouchables and the poor within Indian society.

Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* (1938) remains a milestone in its projection of Gandhian phenomenon and the manner wherein the vast chunk of humanity was aroused socially and politically by it. His *The Serpent and the Rope* presents the theme of interracial and intercultural relationships in an altogether different way.

R.K.Narayan’s *Swami and Friends* (1935) struck a totally different note catching bemusedly the slow pace of life in Malgudi, a fictional microcosm of India. *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937) and *The Dark Room* (1938) followed closely. *The Bachelor of Arts* is an early novel which explores the darker areas of human experience.

Kamala Markandaya and Manohar Malgonkar approach the subject of interracial and intercultural relationships in two different ways. They do come to more or less the same conclusion that there is much disappointment and suffering for those who try to break social, racial and cultural barriers. Kamala Markandaya’s Some Inner Fury and Manohar Malgonkar’s Combat of Shadows depict the Indo-English encounters involving specifically sex, love and marriage. They represent the problems and prospects of establishing intimate and meaningful relationships between two cultural and racial groups.

G.V. Desani presents in the allegorical play Hali (1950) everyman’s quest for fulfilment with the protagonist Hali standing for both male and female aspects. Jabwala’s Heat and Dust deals with the sordid aspects of sex and pregnancy in India. Her India is presented as making demands on Europeans which are difficult to reconcile. The heat and dust of India affects people not merely physically but also in other less direct ways.

Nirad Chaudhry finds Indian Hindu social life gregarious, noisy, lacking in privacy and leisure and destructive of civilised mental communication. The segregation of men and women is a further limitation. Life in the joint family is a bed of thorns and a source of irritation. The qualities of a good unitary family - energy and animation, acquisition of interests and a positive dominant tone - are seldom in evidence.

Kushwant Singh’s Train to Pakistan is a passionate human comment on the recent Indian history. The scene of the novel spasmodically comes to life with the coming of violence in the wake of the Partition. Singh spares none for the mass tragedy - corrupt officials, the communist theoretician and the religious fanatics with all hues. Some novels of Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal and all the novels of Arun Joshi’s are found to
reveal existential attitudes. Existential attitudes are detectable in Arun Joshi's novels whose central concerns are recognisably Indian. The novels of Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal are suffused with existential atmosphere. In their fiction the predicament of the protagonist arises out of marital discord, the tension between husband and wife caused by their temperamental incompatibility.

Indian fiction is a concatenation of states of women in Indian scriptures versus the actual social reality. It is a depiction of socio-cultural changes and a pursuit of identity of women - the old order giving way to the new. Victory over superstition, social customs and male prejudices, gender-related discrimination and exploitation, a new thirst for economic independence by women used as a key to social upliftment are some of the pictures dealt in Indian fiction. The position of women is precarious. Economic backing has very faint glimmers of hope. Violence, indifference and male-chauvinism plague women.

Anita Desai is in many ways a representative Indian women novelist in English. Her contribution to fiction in independent India is more significant than the other women novelists such as Ruth Prawer Jhabwala, Nayantara Sahgal or Kamala Markandaya. Jhabwala in many ways is far away from the mainstream of Indian writing in English, so has no logical inheritance of the Anglo-Indian tradition. Though it is true that being a foreigner she lived and worked in India over a long period of time and this gave her a greater insight into the Indian background in portraying her characters than perhaps many of the British and American writers on India. Since she regards herself as an observer of Indian life she makes herself at one with India and her culture. As a consequence her characters are devout of Indian sensibility.
Kamala Markandaya on the other hand is representative of an elder generation whereas Anita Desai is counted among the significant writers of the younger generation. Kamala Markandaya is in a true sense an Indian and her novels depict Indian life and culture in a more acute and subtle way and exhibit at the same time East-West encounter. Her characters are not torn apart in their own inner self. In that sense her characters can be termed as flat or unchanging.

Anita Desai is solely conscious of her role as a woman writer and has tried her best to maintain the tradition for women writers. In her opinion there should be a conspicuous difference between a man and a woman writer in the sense of value. She as a woman writer has a belief and concern more with thought, emotion and sensation than with the action, experience and achievement depicted in the novels of male novelists.

Anita Desai is among the foremost Indian novelists of the post-independence era. She is one of the most distinguished contemporary women novelists writing in English language and comparable with Iris Murdoch, Doris Lessing, Margaret Lawrence and Floria Nwapa.

Anita Desai was born on June 24, 1937 in India to a German mother and an Indian father. Desai writes in English, saying that she first learned English when she went to school. It was the first language that she learned to read and write so it became her literary language. Languages tend to proliferate around one in India and one tends to pick up and use whatever is at hand. It makes one realise each language has its own distinct genius. Her family spoke German at home and Hindi to their friends.

Her published works include short stories, children's books and a dozen novels. Two of the novels Clear Light of Day (1980) and In Custody (1984) were short-listed for
the Booker Prize. She received the Guardian Award for Children's Fiction for the novel \textit{The Village by the Sea} (1982). She has been a member of the Advisory Board for English of the National Academy of Letters in Delhi. Anita Desai is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in London and a Member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. She has been Visiting Fellow at Girton College, Cambridge, in England and has taught writing at Smith College and has been the Purington Professor of English at Mount Holyoke College in the United States. She has been awarded the prestigious Sahitya Academy (Academy of letters) for her \textit{Fire on the Mountain} and Authors' Guild Award for excellence in writing for her \textit{Where Shall We Go This Summer}?

Desai's work is part of a new style of writing to come out of India which is not nearly as conservative as Indian writing had been in the past. Desai grew up during World War II and could see the anxiety her German mother was experiencing about the situation and her family in Germany. After the war when she realised the Germany she had known was devastated her mother never returned there, nor had any desire to return. Anita herself did not visit Germany until she was an adult. Anita Desai is one of the world's best-known authors and a writer who has influenced generations of writers. Since 1993 she has been teaching in MIT's Program in writing hers being the first professorial appointment by the university in fiction writing in 20 years.

Indian writing in English like any other writing must provide its own justification over and above the lingual content. The situation is by no means unique or confined to India. The Indian writers writing in English, though not necessarily as expatriates, belong to the stream of bilingual writers or the extra-territorial. Anita Desai's rejection of any linguistic boundary is fully justified but the question becomes slightly complicated when
she refers to tradition. Though this expresses a genuine problem namely to which literary or cultural tradition does one belong to when writing in a language other than the mother-tongue, it raises the problem of inter-relation between language and culture.

Desai refers briefly to the question of approach and attitude. Her projected answer to the problem of socio-cultural transference is to write the novel of the inner-world. She admits to having side-stepped the problems of writing in English that she supposed to have encountered during her writing. Jasbir Jain observes:

Anita Desai discusses several aspects of her work, amongst others, language, subject and tradition. By rejecting the idea of apology or defence she at once sets aside the theory that one can express oneself best in the mother-tongue and puts her work in the right perspective. Perhaps twenty years ago there was some need to discuss the issues of language with reference to Indian writing in English. P.Lal devoted considerable energy to it as did Professor C.D.Narasimhaiah (The Novels of Anita Desai, 3)

Anita Desai's reference to the inner world, to the language of the interior, is a reference to both form and subject. She recognises this division between inner and outer worlds and acknowledges its validity not only with reference to her own work but also with reference to the work of other writers.

The cohesiveness of art is made up of innumerable miniscule fragments coming together from various directions, fantasy, philosophical and psychological concepts, external details, abstractions, actual facts and finally falling into place to sustain a larger whole, to evolve into images which merge together to make a complete, total scene. This
is realised through the examples she draws from the views and experiences of other writers such as Proust, Virginia Woolf, Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath.

Among the Indian women writers Anita Desai is exclusively an inner novelist, a meditating shaman, monitoring the numbness, pain and anguish of the psyche. The inscrutable feminine world portrayed in her novels tempts mysteriously to plumb deeper. Every female protagonist in her novels is a high priest of a secret altar.

The principal concern of modern writers is to focus upon the tensions involved in contemporary living and the inevitable loneliness of the individual resulting from the lack of real connection and communication. Their main aim is to portray the tragedy of human souls trapped in adverse circumstance, the predicament of man in a world surrounded by inimical forces in both nature and human institutions. As a result it has often been a portrayal of the conflicts arising from one’s affiliation with the two worlds- inner and outer worlds, two different ways of life (Rise of the Indian Novel in English, 273).

The twentieth century novelists show a preoccupation with the inner life, with the inner world of feeling and sensibility. This is particularly true of woman novelists of the present day who while portraying the reality of the outer world probe deeper into the workings of the human mind in general and the psyche of the female in particular.

The Indo-Anglian literature amazingly attained new heights both inside and outside India. Anita Desai is one of those few Indian novelists in English who have tried to understand closely the predicament of their female characters. She represents the welcome creative release of the feminine sensibility on the literary horizon after the
Second World War. Anita Desai is explicitly not pleased with the voices and achievements of Indian women novelists for they have been content to record and document and their intent in the psychological aspect of their characters have been commonly marginal.

Anita Desai displays her disfavour for the novelists who take interest in the outer rather than the inner world preferably the social to the psychological novel. She herself contributes psychic novels which she narrates as purely subjective. She rightly analyses her psychological feelings and she says:

> It has been my personal luck that my temperament and circumstances have combined to give me the shelter, privacy and solitude required for the writing of such novels, thereby avoiding problems a more objective writer has to deal with since he depends upon observation rather than a private vision (Anita Desai: The Indian Writers' Problems, 255).

In order to place Anita Desai in proper perspective it is essential to compare her with the other women novelists who have more or less the same thematic and theoretical exposure and who in their own way deal with the commonly shared theme of human relationship. Anita Desai presents a new dimension to English fiction through exploration of this troubled sensibility, a typical neo-Indian phenomenon. Anita Desai stands obviously ahead of others and throws light on the inner climate, the climate of feminine sensibility in her novels. Anita Desai's novels are rightly concerned with the emotional world of women revealing a rare imaginative awareness of various deeper forces at work and a profound understanding of feminine sensibility.
Anita Desai has been very much influenced by the writings of D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf especially in the use of stream of consciousness technique. She is an original writer in her own right who has created a novel form, which is unique and distinct.

Being a psychological novelist and concerned largely with the psyche of her characters Anita Desai deviates from the main tradition of characterisation. She believes the world as something ‘ethereal’ much in the same way as Virginia Woolf considers life: “A luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelop surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end” (Modern Fiction, 189).

Henry James believes that man has a yearning to live as the great truth above life or as Somerset Maugham holds that man is engaged in a constant search to free himself from bondage.

Anita Desai seeks to discover and convey through her characters the significance of things by delving deep down the mysteries of the mind. She asserts that her writing is an effort to discover, underline and convey the significance of things. She seizes upon that incomplete and seemingly meaningless mass of reality around her and discovers its significance by plunging below the surface and plumbing the depths till they become more lucid, brilliant and explicable reflection of the visible world.

The novels of Anita Desai make an interesting study from this point of view going deeper into the complexities of human existence. She endeavours to evaluate the various formidable factors that render it uncomfortable and unendurable.
Desai skillfully explores the emotional ecology of her protagonists who while combating the ubiquitous forces of absurd realities feel terribly oppressed with the burden of living helplessly in a contemporary chaotic milieu.

The main problems of almost all the heroines of Anita Desai are their problem of identity and individuality. What is so innovative in the treatment of this theme by Anita Desai is that she explores the problem not merely at the social or familial level but at a much deeper psychological level. Withdrawal, alienation and loneliness are common traits in almost all the novels of Desai.

In her fiction the predicament of the protagonist is caused by the tension between the husband and the wife and their temperamental incompatibility leading to marital discord.

In Cry, the Peacock, Voices in the City, Where Shall We Go This Summer? and Clear Light of Day Anita Desai unravels the tortuous involutions of sensibility with subtlety and finesse and her ability to evoke the changing aspects of Nature matched with human moods is another of her assets. In all these novels her female protagonists are alienated from society, from family, from parents, from partners and even from their own selves because they are not average people but liberal individuals made to stand against the general current to fight and struggle against it.

Desai portrays the external facade as fallacious through the characters in her works. In her novel Clear Light of Day she is able to show the outer sides of her characters through Bim the main character and Bim’s family and neighbours. Externally, Bim is mostly portrayed as strong and stable but occasionally as a traditional Indian woman who is a bit bitter at others especially her family members. She is the one who is
forced to take care of her mentally handicapped brother Baba. Even after she becomes accustomed to her brother Bim is forced to care for her alcoholic Mira-masi. Bim’s sturdy exteriors contrast with that of her shy sister Tara. Tara is seemingly content with her husband Bakul who had gradually trained her and made her into an active, organised woman who looked up at her engagement book every morning, made plans and programs for the day ahead and then walked her way through them to retire to her room at night tired with the triumphant tiredness of the virtuous and the dutiful world in America. Moreover, Baba, their mentally handicapped brother, always seems to be oblivious to everything going on and, therefore, is assumed by everyone to understand nothing. His constant amusement with pebbles, aimless wanderings in the streets and obsession with musical instruments only validate his oblivion and deficiency to others.

Contrary to the inferior Baba there is the bold brother Raja. He is the proud, confident, brave and independent son who escapes to his Muslim neighbours’ parties during riotous times and leaves Bim with no compunction. Another seemingly self assured male character in the novel is Tara’s husband Bakul. Bakul is seen especially in Tara’s eyes as a smart, successful and sophisticated man who has prevailed in the much adorned America. Anita Desai uses the characters in her novel Clear Light of Day to manifest the outer facades of people.

Similarly, Desai uses her work Fasting, Feasting to convey the same message. This novel is also based around a main character Uma and her family in particular her brother Arun and his experiences in the United States. As the eldest daughter of two strict and unappreciative parents Uma is portrayed as subservient, plain and clumsy. She is one step up from a servant but seems to never verbally voice her complaints especially when
19

having to leave school to take care of her brother. Contrary to Uma there is her younger
sister Aruna. Aruna is portrayed as a beautiful and intelligent young woman.

No one was surprised but everyone was gratified when Aruna brought off the
marriage that Uma had dismally failed to make. As was to be expected she took her time,
showed a reluctance to decide, played choosy but soon enough made the wisest, the most
expedient choice and Aruna was whisked away to a life that she had said would be
‘fantastic’. But such words, such use of them did seem to raise Aruna to another level-
distant and airy as Uma imagined must be her flat overlooking the sea. Juxtaposed with
Aruna the subservient wife and mother Mama is outwardly pleased and content and
almost always referred to along with Papa. It seems Mama always tries to please Papa.
She constantly fusses over his afternoon tea time snack and accompanies him to all
parties. On the other hand, Desai portrays Papa as a stable, cold, unemotional, strict and
above all a strong man. The fact that Papa is ordering around a man who drives for a
living shows his need to be in control at all times. Also, Papa is often times referred to
either on his way to or from the office showing his workaholic state of mind. Another
male in the household Arun is the only son and is portrayed as the most lucky and perfect
in his parents’ eyes. Arun is so cherished that he is sent to the United States for his
studies. It is in his host family’s home where he encounters Melanie and Rod, his host
sister and brother. Desai chooses to convey Melanie as a pretty, modern, stuck up and
over-confident young girl. Her brother Rod is the typical, handsome, athletic, all-
American boy who is constantly exercising and playing football. Desai characterises all
the personalities and portrays them as they appear to be. By presenting the reader with
these outer facades Desai is later able to juxtapose them with the true inner feelings of her characters.

In order to reveal the beauty and ugliness of life Anita Desai deploys characters having acute sensitivity to its grandeur as well as its sordidness. She is not a visionary or mystic but an artist who shows the sorrows underlying the grandest things and the grandeur underlying the sorriest things.

Anita Desai’s primary concern in all her novels is to show how one gets along with oneself. The basic problem is how to exist in society and yet maintain one’s individuality. A majority of Desai’s characters live either in illusion by retreating into fabrication and fantasy or show their reluctance to face reality. They live in self-imposed solitary confinement. Then, there are characters that compromise with life. Although they have their conflicts they manage to transcend their personal problems. The growing urge for self-discovery in Desai’s characters thus exhibits the potential of her protagonists as also the ever-developing vision of their creator. A novel is not simply mimesis. It is a story told from a certain moral and intellectual point of view and from a certain emotional distance.

Hence, in Anita Desai’s novels her characters are not case studies of neurosis, nor are they evolutionary histories of psychological phenomenon. They are living individuals interested in life with its hopes, dejections and chaotic flow. They are moved by the aesthetics of existence; whatever is beautiful and good, whatever has glory and power is only a portion of the divine.

Many readers appreciate Anita Desai’s achievement in creating characters independent of social or political issues but they concentrate mainly on the thematic
aspects of her works. The psychological intricacies of the behaviour of her protagonists, their struggle to find a meaning in life symbolise the concern of modern man with the eternal human situation which speaks of the changed perception of writers in depicting characters. Anita Desai’s way of unraveling a story is not traditional.

Desai’s personages are engaged in contemplations, not action. Notwithstanding this limitation she has been successful in capturing and holding the attention of her readers by her narrative skill. Her freshness and spontaneity indicate her rich, creative faculty. She creates a character in order to tell a tale and embody her vision of life.

Anita Desai is a great analyst of the human mind, a creator of brilliant characters and an astute interpreter of life. She presents a gallery of vivid and realistic portraits. The motivational system of her personages works in the peculiar manner situated to their environment and their basic needs. When one grasps her character’s psychology one begins to see them as human with their weaknesses and potentialities. They are indeed caught in the web of their own compulsions but cannot be regarded as haunted protagonists who do not come to grips with life. When understood psychologically, one can visualise their ambitions, disappointments and loneliness as real. They react to their troubles with tragic intensity. By her fictional rendering of neurotic behaviour, interaction and solution the novelist not only plumbs human nature but also helps to grasp their inner reality intuitively. What psychologists and social scientists treat objectively, by abstract analysis, Anita Desai provides subjectively by her aesthetic portrayal.

A close reading of Anita Desai’s novels reveals that her real concern is with the exploration of human psyche. Drawing the concepts of neurotic processes from Karen Horney and its understanding of health from the tenets of Abraham Maslow, Anita Desai
probes the 'real self' of various characters and tries to ascertain their intrinsic nature. Desai’s characters are drawn in the light of Third Force Psychology.

Anita Desai has undoubtedly brought her maverick muse under discipline or called the muses home, so to speak. As a novelist she deals with the sequestered individual living in an abandoned limbo of personal privation. Her fictional world postulates an engaging tussle between the alienated individual and the chaotic milieu. The alienated individual in her novels is delineated to be struggling for socio-psychic emancipation from a physico-moral world. The solitary being and the lone individual is one of her major concerns. She deftly explores the emotional ecology of her protagonists who are delineated as individuals facing the ferocious assaults of existence. In her novels she endeavours to appraise the various obsessive stimuli that breed alienation in the life of her protagonists.

Another recurring and predominant theme in the novels of Anita Desai is the complexity of human relationship, particularly the man -woman relationship. Her women are not ordinary women but sensitive beings. They possess refined sensibilities with the complexion of aesthetics. Her male characters on the other hand are rational, pragmatic and logical. This temperamental incompatibility triggers a sense of frustration and alienation among her women characters. Emotionally starved and unfulfilled women revolt against the male dominance and demand the rightful place. They revolt against their dreary, monotonous and insipid existence. This confrontation with reality and circumstances lead them in a quagmire of crisis. And it is in this context that this study attempts to appreciate the reach and range of her vision in as much as it would concern itself to apply psychological parameters to understand the complexity and complexion of
her heroines. A woman universally unfolds herself primarily into three roles; of a mother, wife and daughter. Indian mythology is replete with stories where female psyche is imbued with qualities like dedication, servitude and devotion. Archetypes of Sita, Draupadi, Savitri and many other women in the Indian legends are perched as ego idols of womanhood par excellence. The western mythology on the other hand offers no such archetypes. Moreover, an Indian family in spirit, functioning and mystic is by and large an extended community and therefore many factors contribute in the shaping and constellation of the anima. Both male and female experience the maternal side for a longer period than their western counterpart. Comparing the impact of Indian and the western ethos on the psyche of a child Sudhir Kakkar states that in India,

> The child's differentiation of himself from his mother and consequently of the ego from the id is structurally weaker and comes chronologically later than in the west. With this outcome the symbiosis of infancy pay a relatively greater role in the personality of the adult Indian (The Inner World, 104).

It is natural, therefore, that the mother becomes the primary component of the Indian anima and is easily accessible to a man while the anima in the case of a western man is recessed and he has to exert a lot to experience its nuances. It has been perceptively observed that: "The Indian anima is much more developed in terms of scope and abundance than that of the western man whose relationship with mother is essentially singular, much less in terms of time and intensity" (Indian Psyche, 67).

A study of Anita Desai's novels is always a soul-searching process for her readers to be completely honest and sincere as she herself is. She fearlessly puts forward the
point that the basic concept of marriage is a social contract theory based on human convenience and biological needs. All her heroines and heroes disassociate the factors of love from the concept of marriage. Destruction of the self or the concept of living for others forms the basic aspect of every marriage.

A fiercely individualistic novelist like Anita Desai is always an enigma to the traditional reading public and the self-styled critics of Indian English novels. Both are generally put through a tough time in being compelled to set apace with her robustly outspoken manner of propagating the typically unconventional but painfully realistic thesis that the ritualistic hypocrisy of the institution of marriage is increasingly taking the shape of the dead albatross around the worlds of the modern, emancipated, self-respecting women. The difference between make-believe supernatural horror and the modern horror world of the conjugal lives is that the former can be wished away but the latter demands the heaviest price from the married woman to preserve the semblance of social prestige.

As marriage is concerned with a union of two different minds some forced adjustment is bound to be there. This adjustment naturally comes from both individuals—the husband and the wife. In Indian social situation if a marriage is successful then credit is rarely given to a woman for her contribution to make it successful. The fact that the successful married life is made of the wife’s grace, love, wisdom and a sense of understanding, tolerance and sacrifice is hardly recognised. If a marriage becomes unsuccessful then the women is invariably held responsible for the failure. But a self-conscious, self-respecting woman will never accept this. In the present situation, she
being fully aware of her capabilities and weaknesses she is also aware of her own career and the individual needs of her body and soul.

Mrs. Desai's novels project moral values with great realism. Her novels reflect the hard realities of day-to-day life. Literature, society and creative writers are closely associated with each other. Society and their environment have their import on the creative writers as the sensitive creative writer makes his or her impact on the society. Social and literary conventions, political, economical, educational and religious environments of the society influence the writers a great deal. Anita Desai being no exception her novels make an interesting study from this point of view. She has emerged as a serious, skilled and promising novelist of India today. Among Indian writers in English perhaps Anita Desai may be one of the most self-conscious artists forging a unique world out of the mundane things of day-to-day existence of the Indian female.

Anita Desai is interested in characters who are not average but have retreated or who have been driven to despair. Such characters turn against the general current or they are forced to do so. It is easy to flow with the current, it makes no demands and it costs no efforts. But those who cannot follow it, whose heart cries out 'the great no' who fight the current and struggle against it, they know what these demands are and what it costs to meet them.

Anita Desai's fiction mirrors her aspirations and dreams, her frustrations and disillusionments. She thinks that a writer has to assume the role of a critic and a satirist whose business is to reveal truths. According to her a writer is interested in revealing truths and telling truths in no uncertain terms. She says a writer has to assume that role although that is not given to him. He has to seize it and cling to it and hold it even when
others would rather relieve him of it. It is considered a particularly unseemly role for a woman to play.

Anita Desai is one of the most serious yet appealing novelists on the Indian English firmament. Her novels unravel the mystery of the inner life of her characters. For her it is the depth which is interesting, delving deeper and deeper in a character or a scene rather than going to the peripherals but never recalling the core or the centre.

Since the publication of her first novel Anita Desai has received substantial critical acclaim. Her marked edge derives from the richness of her narrative technique and the vast extension of the inner world that imports a problematic and elusive nature to her writing. According to Meena Belliappa Desai has an “...evidence of departure from current modes of fictional writing and of an earnest effort to break new grounds” (Anita Desai: A Study of Her Fiction, 1).

According to Anita Desai writing is a process of discovering the truth- the truth that is nine-tenths of the iceberg that lies submerged beneath the one-tenth visible portion that is called reality. Writing is her way of plunging to the depths and exploring this underlying truth. All her writing is an effort to discover, to underline and convey the true significance of things. So she is more concerned with thought, emotion and sensation than with action, experience and achievement.

Anita Desai concentrates exclusively on the interior landscape of the mind. She seems to write almost instinctively as she has often claimed, writing for her being an almost compulsive need to realise and express herself through language. Her characters reveal her vision of life, they share perceptions and they set out in quest of meaning. They love solitude and privacy.
Desai’s world is not an artistic utopia. The great power of illuminative fiction lies in its mimetic presentation of experience.

The irrational finds a place in Anita Desai’s works where it is probed and it surfaces in human relationships. The unknown region beyond reason, however, is not always to be identified with the unconscious and it is also by no means the only or the major dimension of Desai’s work. There are others equally significant and important. More prominent than the psychological aspect is the nature of existential doubt and the philosophical questioning. There is also the question of cultural convergence, the oblique and the direct concern with the creative process and the feminist concerns.

It is apparent that here is a writer who is concerned with reality and the nature of reality, a writer who refrains from telling the reader what to look for. This in itself is enough justification to start looking for the invisible, start looking for the unsaid and to move across the territories defined and undefined.

The growing up with India’s freedom, the impact of the partition, the family of four children, the changing equations between brothers and sisters, coming closer and drawing apart, the books read during childhood, the reaction to urban violence, the family relationship observed so closely and drawn in such fine details approximate the actual experience in their understanding of human life and relationships.

In Desai’s work there is a Joycean fascination with external detail as if she were looking for an anchorage in the terra firma to enable imagination to take flight. Most writers place their fictional narration within a realistic framework but with Desai it is almost an obsession. Places acquire as much of an identity as people.
The books her characters read or have read supply another clue about the influence on her as well as about the kind of background she has had. They also indicate her intellectual and philosophical concerns. Professor Bose in *Voices in the City* is fond of substantiating his views with *Stories from the Panchatantra*, *The Mahabaratha* and *The Bhagwad Gita* constitute another strong fascination and form a contrast to Kafka, Camus and Baudelaire. The Das children in *Clear Light of Day* are exposed to books which most children attending missionary or English schools read in the forties, *Loorna Dorna*, *Gone With The Wind*, *Beau Geste* and *Robin Hood* while the unimaginative characters like Jiban in *Voices in the City* and Bakul in *Clear Light of Day* are safely bracketed with Burke and Johnson.

In *Clear Light of Day* the worlds of individual fantasies are juxtaposed until in the end their boundary lines are questioned and shifted and they merge in some measure with the world of normative reality. The family house is an enclosed world over which looms the influence of the dead parents who had led a club-going and bridge-playing life cut off from everyday relationships. While the mother had gradually sunk into ill-health the father had reduced all business activities to a mere signing of papers. The inheritors of this decadent way of life are four children of the family each nursing his own world of dreams and aspirations.

The novels of Desai portray extreme situations caused by conflicts in the inner configurations of the individual – the conflict between reason and instinct, the will and the reality, involvement and detachment. These conflicts resolve round the interplay of the ‘self’ with others. In her novels the concentration of the individual on exterior devices of the ego rather than internal spiritual development creates a situation in which the
spiritual self is alienated to a degree and to an extent from where it becomes impossible for the individual to grapple with reality. Amid the flux of empirical reality the individual relentlessly struggles to attain authentic selfhood – the core of being from where human action springs – which would not only enable the individual to grasp reality but also endow a meaning to his existence. This struggle of the individual for a possible apprehension of self-identity forms a recurrent theme in the novels of Desai.

Anita Desai incorporates themes such as the agony of existence, the metaphysical void, the fears and the tremblings of her protagonists whose values, beliefs, and structures jeopardised which in turn stand in the way of the individual’s self-realisation. Her forte is: “The exploration of sensibility- the particular kind of Indian sensibility that is ill at ease among barbarians and the philistines, the anarchists and the amoralists” (Indian Writing in English, 464).

Anita Desai also admits her preoccupation with the ‘essential’ human condition. Indeed, almost all the thematic studies of her novels have concentrated on loneliness and withdrawal of her character- be it self-imposed like that of Nanda Kaul or Sita or circumstantial as that of Bim or Monisha.

Jasbir Jain views Desai’s works thematically bringing out in the process her psychological concerns. According to her the ‘warp and woof’ of Anita Desai’s works attracts attention when: “The themes are analysed, the social and political elements are subtly camouflaged and subdued by dwelling on emotions and responses which are far more engrossing the hard facts of reality” (The Novels of Anita Desai, 1).

Anita Desai achieves the sense of reality by probing the innermost depths of human psyche. This provides her a theme which runs like a thread all through her works,
the wholeness to which all other concepts of loneliness, escape, detachment, time, death and conflicts are sub-ordinated.

True to this assertion life itself becomes a quest as Suno, one of the characters says: “Life has taken a different path for me, in the form of a search, not a race” (Games at Twilight, 32).

Anita Desai is solely concerned with the projection of the psycho-emotional and socio-psycho status of the protagonists living in an alien and cloistered world of existential problems and passions. Alienation in her novels is represented in the form of tension between the poetry of life and prose of form, between self and society. It is socio- psychic in nature. Repressive tolerance on the part of isolated self in her novels leads to self- abnegation or self-immolation.

In so far as the themes of richness and reverence for life is concerned Anita Desai is on a familiar ground for these themes have figured in all their complexity in the novels of such modern masters as Lawrence, Hemingway and Faulkner. Whereas these writers have successfully projected this pervasive sense of violence in themes of social and moral forces affecting individual relationships Anita Desai views it through the eyes of a woman who is incapable of seeing anything beyond her family and the limited area of her domestic relationships. Consequently, the novel is restricted to a very narrow canvas in which the complexities of Sita’s actual alienation and anguish fail to find adequate expression. Had Anita Desai attempted a deeper probe into the sources of Sita’s alienation some of her existential leanings would have found fictional representation. Unfortunately, they remain on the level of the statement. Her method of logical demonstration ‘one incident’ ... ‘another incident’... ‘more small incidents’ hardly helps
her obviate that difficulty. In fact Anita Desai employs a variety of narrative resources which do not cohere into an aesthetic whole. Assuming that she intends to suggest the inadequacy of narrative resources to express the living reality one would have expected her to lend depth and density to her intended goal. The shift in narrative strategies is too abrupt to fall into a pattern. As a result even the phenomenon of violence that she depicts remains unrealised in terms of feelings and emotions. It is always external on the periphery narrated and described but never felt. This seems to be the primary weakness of the novel for though Mrs. Desai strives hard to communicate Sita’s awareness of a pervasive violence through irony and a tortured syntax. She fails to convince the readers that Sita really had adequate reasons to leave her husband at a time when she was expecting a baby.

As one goes through Desai’s novels one can see the definite sequence and pattern. In this pattern can be traced the growth and development of her attitude to a specific theme, the very titles of her novels are symbolical and suggest the specific pattern.

As an artist Anita Desai handles the raw material of life and conveys it through a pattern and design. Writing itself is a quest for meaning, for value and for truth. She is as much interested in life with its hopes, frustrations, negations, rejections and the chaotic flow of events as she is concerned with art to give shape, purpose and wholeness to life.

Fiedler believes:

A creative work starts with the interaction of man and life. Artistic activity begins when man finds himself face to face with the visible world as with something immensely enigmatical. In the creation of a work of art,
man, suggested in a struggle with nature not for his physical but for his mental existence (On Judging Works of Visual Art, 48)

Anita Desai’s treatment of the themes of alienation, maladjustment, isolation, the absurdity of human existence, the quest for the ultimate meaning and the time as the fourth dimension have an existential leaning.

Desai’s works are a quest for order and meaning in life. Her protagonists undergo a struggle to find their real self and because of the cramping pressures of anxieties they lose it. They experience the disparity between the higher needs of the individual’s inner nature and the unalterable comic conditions of existence. Their personal and historical problems play a significant role in exaggerating these existential troubles and in perpetuating their neurosis. Those who are able to comprehend and surmount their personal difficulties gain a healthy vision of life.

Where Shall We Go This Summer? depicts the tension between a sensitive wife Sita and the rational, practical and worldly husband Raman. Husband-wife discord, inadequacy of their mutual love and disaffection is the major theme in the novel. The novel deeply deals with the theme of marital dissonance. The natural flow of affection between Sita and Raman is very intact but more often it is blocked due to misunderstanding, lack of adequate forbearance and patience.

In some of her novels Anita Desai has introduced marital disharmony as the central theme. She has an independent approach to woman’s problems in Indian social life as well life in general. She does not accept the social tradition emphasised through religious mottos and economic needs that a woman’s body and soul are similar to those of a man. According to her marriage is not a farce as some relationships are.
Mrs. Desai has a definite idea of a happy conjugal life. Some of her young, immature, romantic heroines seem to have this idea of a blissful, happy conjugal life but the idea seems to remain only a dream. The concept of marriage which is related to a delicate union of two different minds has not been properly realised in most of the Indian male-dominated families. Woman's individual identity has not been positively realised with an open mind in Indian social life.

Woman has never been accepted as a full human being. She is invariably taken for granted or totally ignored. This casual attitude causes her consistent suffering and leads to her miserable life.

All the marriages point out that virtues and vices, abilities and disabilities, positive and negative aspects of men and women have not been carefully and intentionally balanced. Similarities between the attitudes of husband and wife to life and things in general play important roles in making their conjugal life successful. Marriage is a union of two souls and conjugal love plays a significant role for achieving this. It is to be woven carefully and thoughtfully.

General situations in society are such that no proper time or thought is given to these affairs. Its results are the clashes, desperations, separation and loneliness. Women who are treated casually become victims of these clashes. Their dependence and traditional approach to their problems cause alienation in their lives. They struggle against strong, negative, soul-killing circumstances but in vain. They become helpless, desperate and nervous. They find solutions by committing suicide or running away or living separately. The fact that Maya in Cry the Peacock ultimately kills her husband may contain an indirect comment on their different values of life.
All the marriages in her novels are more or less business transactions and the profits naturally handed over to the male partner. But not infrequently this order is violently convulsed that the caged bird batters its head against the iron bars and manages to leave a few blood stains; a wife revolts, runs away, commits suicide, becomes a homicidal maniac, finds tremendous freedom in blessed widowhood and a great ‘No’ is said at last to ensure freedom of body and mind. By implication Desai makes it clear that either one should remain unmarried, unfettered and unaccepted by the society as such or marry and be prepared to struggle with an everlasting private hell. In consequence, therefore, she is taken with definite discomfort by the complacent reading public. Her novels are indeed chilling encounters of the traumatic experiences of married life.

Seven of Desai’s novels deal with the same theme, the existential problem of alienation of the emancipated modern woman through maladjustment in marriage. Adjustment for a woman means deleting her individuality, her inner self, her conscience in her married life so that the ideal couple represents the self-satisfied, vainglorious husband and his legally bounded woman-slave.

The theme of man-woman relationship is of particular interest to Anita Desai for in most of her early novels she writes on this theme. She concentrates on the predicament of modern woman in this male-dominated society and her destruction at the altar of marriage. According to her most marriages prove to be unions of incompatibility. Men are apt to be rational and matter-of-fact. Women are sentimental and emotional. Their attitudes and their interests are different. Naturally they look at things in different ways and react differently. Not only is the man himself different as often happens in the society of changing values, his family, his surroundings to which the wife is expected to adjust
herself are entirely different. The result is that there is a gradual erosion of marital relationship and for a woman marriage comes to symbolise nullification of everything she has come to cherish. She feels tied down. This affects her entire psyche and behaviour which soon destroys her sensibility and her very self.

Anita Desai is by far the most serious Indo-English novelist actively engaged in her work. Her complete dedication to her art is a part of her concern for and involvement in the life that she depicts in her novels. She appears to find abundant material in the rather limited field of urban, middle-class life around her to draw upon for her fiction. Anita Desai adheres strictly to the contemporary, realistic urban Indian background from which she herself draws sustenance for her life as an individual and as a writer. She is much too close to the society that she describes to sentimentalise about it. The social and emotional complications in which an educated Indian finds himself caught in a post-independent India are enough material for her imagination.

Anita Desai’s prose is very lucid. She has analysed the inner turbulence of her characters superbly. Her novels are essential in tone for they deal with the contradictions and predicaments faced by the individuals in their struggle of life. Anita Desai belongs to that group of Indian English writers who have concentrated on the actual problems and situations confronted by the individuals instead of the wider theme of social, political and cultural significance. Instead of general themes pertaining to human life she has preferred to deal with the particular events which threaten to throw the normal tempo of life into jeopardy. The psychological conflicts faced by the individuals are analysed in depth by Anita Desai. She has also described the hold of emotions and sentiments over the behaviour of men and women and how they react to different situations. The actions and
behaviour of people under stress and strain are also analysed by her in different novels. The anxieties felt by individuals in different situations are also explained by her. The narrative power of Anita Desai is very impressive. She can provide an interesting account of even the smaller and insignificant event with warmth and conviction. Her characters are never alike and they have qualities which are always different. It is due to this reason that Anita Desai’s fiction seldom possesses anything in common.

Anita Desai humbly admits that she is allergic to writing social novels. However, she is involved in the problems of marital discord and the hypocrisy, the faithlessness and the soul-destroying, grinding process of compromise which accompany it. In each of her novels one encounters with the traumatic experiences of married lives. Each novel maintaining the basic features of marital discord presents different features of the problems to which Mrs. Desai gives a dimension and vision. She fearlessly puts forward the fact that in society marriages generally follow the jungle law of the survival of the fittest. Being physically stronger the man survives.

Desai’s protagonists are persons: “...for whom aloneness alone is the sole natural condition, aloneness alone is the treasure worth treasuring” (History of Indian English Literature, 241).

Desai’s characters are mostly women and are all weak introverts trapped in their own skins. This emotional trauma makes them feel alienated and their quest for individual identity always remains as an undercurrent. A marriageable daughter is handed over to the male partner without considering the delicacy of her mind and her feelings. She has to fulfill either the parents’ responsibilities or the relatives’ demands with
different intentions. Maya's marriage with Gautama has been settled through her father’s friendship with him.

In the fiction of Anita Desai the themes grow in a dialectical way. The conflicts and tension generate sufficient material for the movement of the story. The dialectical contradiction between events, social institutions, modes of behaviour, beliefs, ideologies, value systems and sentiments provide the warp and woof of the fiction of Anita Desai. The characters in her fiction and stories try to gain self-sufficiency through dialectical interaction with others. Therefore in the fiction of Anita Desai the tension between tradition and modernity, individualism and social unity, convention and innovation determine the trend and direction of narration. The themes of her fiction are deeply connected with the dynamic foundation of human life. All the variety of life and the events figure in her fiction. The treatment of the event is always sympathetic bordering on sentimentality. The human factor gains the upper hand over the mechanical social conventions and the rigid cultural norms.

Desai says:

Again not deliberately but unconsciously and intuitively not writing the kind of social document that demands the creation of realistic and typical dialogue by writing novels that have been catalogued by critics as psychological and that purely subjective, I have been left free to employ, simply the language of the interior (The Indian Writers' Problems, 225)

The world of Anita Desai’s novels is an ambivalent one, it is a world where the central harmony is aspired to but not arrived at and the desire to love and live clashes – at times violently- with the desire to withdraw and achieve harmony.
Involvement and stillness are incompatible by their nature yet they strive to exist together. Instinct, emotion and passion seem to be strangers in the world of daily routine and scurry away into dark corners to flourish in conditions of solitude which have been presented in its varying shades and meanings.

In fact, the length of time generally taken by the writing or making of a book is indefinable because it is so much longer than anyone would be willing to believe- its seeds lying in one’s ancestry and heritage and history – even after it is published, read, reviewed and forgotten it continues to live a life and spin a web of its own.

In all the novels of Anita Desai there is a striving on the part of the protagonist towards arriving at a more authentic way of life than the one which is available to them. There is a need to be loved: Maya, Monisha, Sita- almost all of them- desire this above all else but they also resist surrender and involvement. Surrender of the self appears to her protagonists to be a subtraction from their personal freedom and wholeness. In each successive novel the problem of involvement versus detachment, of surrender versus freedom is viewed from various angles and psychological perspectives. It becomes in the ultimate analysis a question of reason versus unreason and the balance is precariously held.

Anita Desai excels at the subjective form. Of all the novels of Desai it is Clear Light of Day which has brought her art to the point to which it always seemed to gravitate to the point at which the individual life and the collective life of all intersect and the uniqueness of personal experience begins to exemplify a whole cultural pattern, one validating the other. In this novel she is fully in command of the powers she harnesses in the service of her fictional purpose in the earlier as well as the later novels.
In *Clear Light of Day* Anita Desai adroitly focuses on the seething inner tensions in the life of two sisters Bim and Tara against the backdrop of the changing Indian society in the turbulent period around 1947. With her subtle and keen perception Desai telescopes the past with the present: “...to reveal in small, common-day preoccupations, and minute shifts of feelings a larger, bigger world” (*New Dimensions of Indian English Novels*, 97).

In most of her novels Anita Desai has sought to examine the whole range of relationships in her characters and this essentially shapes the thematic value of all her novels. She has explored these relationships with a remarkable intensity and consistency. Her characters are intense, self-absorbed and even morbid and are possessed by a conscience that never allows them peace of mind. They constantly analyse, probe, question and are merciless in passion for introspection.

Anita Desai has explicitly shown in her novels how young men are always ready to work against tradition and their own families whereas the young women of the new generation are propelled to far greater tragedies and spiritual struggles which put them in the sufferance of unspeakable agonies. These women having no faith in conventional religion and joint family and not following any conspicuous ideal meet nothing but disaster in their lives. Thus eventually they meet with their unnatural death or lose their mental equilibrium – Monisha in *Voices in the City* seeks refuge in suicide and Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* loses her mental balance to get rid of her suffocating environment.

Anita Desai’s novels are documented with Indian setting, Indian culture and Indian background. Her younger characters try to imitate the western culture but without a proper means and do not succeed in their lives. The elder generation is painted in
another hue. They are in all respects Indians and adhere to Indian culture. So they do not suffer like their young ones. Elderly characters such as Gautama's mother and Aunt Lila turn to social service for self-fulfilment. Gautama's mother unlike her daughter does not face unspeakable agonies. She has the capacity to combine her complete devotion to her husband and family and towards social service. Aunt Lila who Nirode names 'Black crusader' feels that: "Women themselves are responsible for their predicament" (Voices in the City, 221). She bluntly asserts, "...women place themselves in bondage to men, whether in marriage or out. All their joy and ambition is channelled that way, while they go parched themselves" (221).

Aunt Lila has an absolutely different temperament which Monisha, Maya and Sita will never have. She alone can say: "...it doesn't cost men much to show spirit. It's when I see it in a woman that I am pleased. A girl must have a spirit and a profession, I always say, and no one can take up a profession from which she gets pleasure" (143).

Aunt Lila has a strong aversion for man dominated society and for women without a vocation. She tries to convince Monisha if she could not take pride in her independence she at least can choose and undertake any career. Her aversion for women becomes vehement when she upbraids Amla:

What is the good of our growing old and suffering and working in order to show you what we've learnt by our experience? Every generation is as foolish as the last, and yours is surely the most foolish one of all, the most selfish and frivolous. We at least were dedicated to a very great movement outside our own immediate wants and whims, and we won you your freedom, but what do you do with it? Give it back to the old, dying
generation to hold and look after while you carry on with your petty affairs, too timid and hopeless to concern yourself with anything bigger?

(222)

Anita Desai has explicitly shown the problem of loneliness, of utter isolation from one's fellow human beings and of lack of real communication that every human being faces all through one's life. As a novelist she is acquainted with the dilemma of the modern woman who has to continue to play the role of the Propagator of the human race and housewife and also that of a human being with a vocation seeking full expression of her personality. With the decay of the joint family in India the modern woman who was happy with patriarchal and rural society is left to fend for herself in city life often without even the consolation of religion. Anita Desai through her use of the stream-of-consciousness technique has treated this theme equally well. Maya, Sita, Monisha, Nanda or Amla all her protagonists are afflicted with this problem of rootlessness. Monisha becomes the prey of modern civilisation. Leaving her own beautiful house in Kalimpong Monisha comes to stay with her husband's family in Calcutta radically different from her former environment. The whole house has all the appearances of the atmosphere of a prison to her. She tries to find comfort and happiness with her husband Jiban but she is destined to get nothing but disappointment from him. So she is driven to her tragedy as she fails to take an active interest in the life around her. Her husband could have taken her out of her shell but he never tries to know her or to recognise her.

Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* deprived of the affection of her mother as she lost her mother in her early childhood longs for maternal protection. She is married to Gautama a protégé of her father and a brilliant, ambitious and serious-minded lawyer. But Gautama
leaves Maya emotionally and spiritually starved and insecure. Perhaps their great
difference of age worked as a big gap in their lives thus, four years of marriage without
children or a vocation leads Maya towards her insanity. The death of her pet dog Toto
aggravates her mental condition and makes her increasingly conscious of the mysterious
working of destiny. Gautama’s rational mind initially fails to suspect it but when he
realises it the situation has gone out of control. He is totally indifferent and insensitive to
natural beauty, smells, colours and sounds in the way so characteristic of Mr.Ramsay in
To the Lighthouse. Maya realises,

Already we belonged to separate worlds, and his seemed the earth that I
loved so, scented with Jasmine, coloured with liquor, resounding with
poetry and warmed by amiability. It was mine that was hell. Torture, guilt,
dread, imprisonment. These were the four walls of my private hell, one
that no one could survive long. Death was certain (Cry, the Peacock, 102).

It is not that Gautama and Maya have never tried to understand each other. They
have made several attempts to reconcile with each other but all the time they are
prevented by a nameless barrier. What is real for Maya is nothing but an abstract concept
for Gautama. Maya loses interest in Gautama’s facts and hard realities. Maya feels even
if she tries to formulate a comprehensive answer for the truth of living Gautama would
not perhaps could not understand it. Thus it becomes futile for her to try to make him
understand the truth of living.

Desai’s forte is the quest of sensibility and her writings expose inner realities and
psychic echoes of her characters. The most recurrent themes in all her novels are the
hazards and complexities of man-woman relationships the founding and nurturing of
Anita Desai presents the plight of introspective and hypersensitive woman in her earlier novels. Anita Desai comments through her central characters on the violence and aggression in society - the aggression between man and man and between man and woman. She also comments on the narrow mentality which makes mankind blind to the realities of life and on the confrontation between inner and outer reality but her primary preoccupation remains with the absurdity of human life with the existential search for meaning in it and the inability of men to accept a religious solution. It becomes in the ultimate instance a question of reason versus unreason. Reason in itself is inadequate therefore man turns to unreason and those like Gautama who live merely by reason also die by it. Others who move towards self-knowledge and recognition of their true selves move towards it through unreason by rejecting the pattern of normalcy.

Keeping in view the seriousness of their self-alienation and the possibility of self-actualisation Anita Desai's characters may be studied in four groups. In the first category are placed Maya and Monisha who are sensitive and are pitted against insensitive spouses. Their defence strategies are, however, not alike. Maya is a case of severe psychosis. She is a morbidly dependent person who values love and sex beyond everything else in the world. When Gautama does not stand upto her expectations she turns violent. Her self-hate comes to the surface which turns self-destructive. She first kills Gautama and then commits suicide. Monisha on the contrary is a withdrawn creature. She weaves a glorified picture of herself as a superior being much above her in-laws. When charged with theft her self-image suffers a shattering blow, her neurotic pride is hurt and self-contempt overpowers her. Under its impact she commits self-immolation.
The two solutions adapted by Maya and Monisha—morbid dependency and resignation—are the outcome of detrimental home conditions. Through these moves the protagonists try to defend themselves from their pathogenic environment. The alienation and consequent trouble are not due to marital disharmony but from their own inner conflicts.

The destructive effect of self-alienation is much discernible in Sita. In the beginning Sita has compulsive drives as she is almost a neurotic. However, later she compromises with life. For her the answer to life's problems does not lie in running away but in facing those problems bravely. The revelation helps her to integrate her self. There are not fully self-actualising individuals. Their brief moments of self-discovery and affirmation give a hope that they can gain more spontaneity of feelings in later life provided they do not shift from one neurotic solution to another. There is greater clarity of perception in Bim and Amla. 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. Thus Desai's characters fall into four groups:

The thesis is an endeavour to create the virtuous woman, a modern Sita. The women are the strivers and aspirers of freedom, goodness and compassion. Their virtue is a quality of heart and mind and spirit, a kind of untouched innocence and integrity. This is a dominant quality in Indian women. For women sex is not an appetite but a fulfilment. Joseph Campbell observes:

Every man carries within him the eternal image of woman, not the image of this or that particular woman, but a definite feminine image. This image is fundamentally unconscious, an hereditary factor of primordial origin.
engraved in the living organic system of the man an imprint or archetype of all the ancestral experience of the female, a deposit, as it were, of all the impressions ever made by woman. In short it is an inherited system of psychic adaptation. Even if no woman existed, it would still be possible exactly how a woman would have to be constituted physically. The same is true of the woman. She too has her inborn image of man (Portable Jung, 173).

Any woman has certain self-esteem and that is one of the commonest experiences of a woman in all cultures. Women in general become trapped in a self-destructive gender based situation not because they form a destructive relationship but because the relationship is thrust upon them. Parental, religious and cultural authorities compel women to accept exploitative relationships. The pressure of male power often frustrates the redemptive exercises initiated by women.

A fictional representation of gender problems acts as an effective tool to fight against the injustice. Acknowledgment of defeat is a necessary means of respecting the vulnerability of the female sex. Though culture, religion and society prohibit the articulation of women yet their voice is heard sometimes as a murmur and sometimes loudly. All religions and cultures expect women to maintain the traditional roles heavily loaded against them. Any deviation, any defiance is sure to be punished severely. The intensity and insight regarding gender-related issues establish the wide and dark pervasiveness of the point in question. It is a quest for self-sustaining dignity and meaningful identity. Their dependence on friends and community gives them strength of character. They voluntarily ensconce in community activities. They are happy, however,
with a physical movement within a certain boundary though the boundaries are self-defined and different. These women aspire for higher intellectual and emotional awareness which they want to be recognised. Their journeys are internal but not external. J.M. Everett observes of Desai: “To me the female sex is not the weaker sex; it is the nobler of the two: for it is even today the embodiment of sacrifice, humility, faith and knowledge” (Women and Social Change in India, 76).

Both Maya and Monisha are sophisticated and sensitive, finding no pleasure in the mundane affairs of lives. Moreover, they have been brought up in a way that makes it difficult for them to adjust themselves to the rather unimaginative atmosphere and the unimaginative lives of their husbands. Maya had a different rearing up. Her childhood was full of joy. She “…lived as a toy princess in a toy world” (Cry the Peacock, 80).

To Monisha’s sister Amla, Monisha is a lost princess of the fairy tales. There is a conspicuous similarity between Maya and Monisha—both of them are childless—deprived of the normal pleasures and distractions of motherhood. Her husband’s relations discuss her sterility in her presence considering it as her fault. She herself also feels for this void. Her visit to the zoo with her nephews and nieces makes her sad. After seeing a kangaroo she says: “A kangaroo on its back to the sun the soft honey fur on its belly but its pouch alas, is empty” (Voices in the City, 119).

Monisha also feels for the tragic lot of women:

I see many women, always Bengali women, who follow five paces behind their men—Kalayani and Jiban’s mother—and I think of generations of Bengali women hidden behind the barred windows of half dark rooms, spending centuries in washing clothes, kneading dough and murmuring
aloud verses from the Bhavad Gita and the Ramayana in the dim light of sooty lamps. Lives spent in waiting for nothing on men self-centered and indifferent and hungry and demanding and critical, waiting for death and dying misunderstood, always behind bars, those terrifying black bars that shut us in, in the old house, in the old city,(120).

This feeling drives her towards her tragedy as it so poignantly puts her mind in its grip. Eventually when she commits suicide the reader is not at all surprised at her action. Human mind is unique in its own way – it has its own foibles, own morbidity, own feeling- perhaps the possessor of the mind is not aware of it. Human mind is so strange and unique that it is hard to reckon what makes the mind happy or sad. Sita the main character of Where Shall We Go This Summer? is such a unique case. Though Sita is less morbid than Maya the case of her morbidity is absolutely different from the one which Maya faces. Sita’s husband is not indifferent and insensitive to her. There was no place for Maya in the world of Gautama. Neither he understands nor does he wish her to enter his world. Thus his world was totally strange to Maya. Maya feels: “…on his part understanding was scant, love was meagre” (Cry the Peacock, 93).

Maya a childless women and having no vocation to pursue finds herself in utter suffocating loneliness. She always longs to be with her husband. Sita on the other hand is blessed with four children and is proud of them. But her fifth pregnancy and the thought of parturition which follows automatically makes her panicky. She is reluctant to bring forth her new, fragile being into this harsh world and runs away to a small island which has childhood associations for her: “…in order to achieve the miracle of not giving birth” (Where Shall We Go This Summer?, 31).
It sounds unnatural — Sita has conceived the baby but wants to avoid parturition. At the same time she does not want to abort her child. Her husband got puzzled at her assertion. He says: “...you should have thought it earlier ...it's too late now...one can't have abortion at this stage” (34). His remarks make Sita furious.

Sita living in a congenial atmosphere devoid of any conflict with her husband rather happy with him leads an easeful life. But her fifth pregnancy upsets her and becomes the constant cause of conflict with her husband. All through their married life they had preferred to avoid a confrontation. All that they had done, he now sees, was to pile on the fury till now when it exploded. Perhaps, there had been incidents and thoughts during the day he had not known about would have left undisturbed had he known. It was as though for seven months she had collected inside her all her resentments, her fears, her rages and now she flung them onward, flung them for her. Every summer they go to some place or other. That summer they had decided to go to Manori, an island of miracles made by her father.

Anita Desai is primarily a novelist of the inner weather as she has the capacity to present the involutions of sensibility with subtlety and finesse. She has the ability to evolve the changing moods, the ebb and flow of emotion, the flux of thought and mysterious working of the human mind, perceiving and responding to reality. She has a rare sensitivity that enables her to explore the consciousness of her characters.

All the definitions about woman's conduct, behaviour and existence have been given by men. The aphorisms of a few of the great philosophers indicate the status of women in male chauvinistic society. The old conventional notions of male dominated society are so rude, unbearable, suppressive, oppressive and depressive that woman's
discourse takes shape of movement. Their consciousness seeks to analyse and understand
the material conditions through which gender has been constructed within specific
language and bodies of literature resulting in the strong wave of feminism in 1960s and
1970s for liberation of women.

A radical transformation in public attitude towards man-woman relationship is
essential. It must make people realise that physical love and domesticity are by no means
the sole concern of women. They have as much to do with the difficult and dark sides of
life as men do. A new definition of woman’s role in the wider social frame must take
shape.

Systematic subject deprivation of women has been a fact as much in life as in
literature. Women have realised that their primary duty is not merely to please and obey
the man but also to lead a life of dignity and equality. The great philosophers who have
immensely contributed to the existing values of life have paradoxically treated women as
an object to be used by man. According to Nietzsche woman is God’s sacred mistake. To
Aristotle she is an inferior man. He again says that the female is female by virtue of
certain lack of qualities. Machiavelle chooses to identify women with fortune. He says
that woman is fortune and if one wishes to master her one must strike and beat her.
According to Schopenhencer woman is by nature meant to obey. The saying Tota Mulier
in Utero, woman is nothing but womb, was in vogue. Shakespeare refers to a woman as
“Frailty thy name is woman” (Hamlet, 142-46).

In Indian Vedic age Manu the law giver of Hindu Dharm Shastra clearly assigns a
subordinate position to a woman. He says:
During childhood a female should depend upon her father, during youth, upon her husband, her husband being dead, upon her sons if she has no sons upon the near kinsman or her husband in default, upon those of her father, if she has no parental kinsmen, upon the sovereign, a woman must never govern herself as she likes (Woman in Ancient India, 55)

A common contemporary issue facing every country is the question of women in Western or Indian literary tradition; the women are seen as launching themselves for their identity. The new woman today challenges the traditional notions of ‘angel in the house’ and ‘sexually voracious’ image. The ‘new woman’ is essentially a woman of awareness and conscious of her low position in the family and the society. The feminist literary criticism has developed as a component of the woman’s movement and its impact has brought about a revolution in literary studies.

The introductory section of this thesis gives an overview of various forms of discrimination faced by Indian women taken from select novels of Anita Desai. This in part comes about as a result to address emotional violence against women as a psychological thematic issue. The research seeks to analyse the problems of female protagonists from the women characters of select novels of Anita Desai namely Cry, the Peacock, Voices in the City, Where Shall We Go This Summer? and Clear Light of Day and suggest solutions.

The research addresses key questions such as how men understand women as their brothers, parents and husbands and what efforts do they take to fulfil women’s aspirations and their difficulties as their guardians. What are the barriers that prevent the solutions?
In order to better understand the situation of women with respect to their roles as daughters, wives and mothers the research proposes an in-depth study of women characters focusing on their roles as found in the novels selected. An analysis has been made by revolving the characters through themes of discord, maladjustment, alienation and disharmony and the role of parents, family and the society in creating such a negative environment for their women folk in particular and women in general.

The research methodology and process used provides a brief background of the evolution of the novel as a form of writing. The independence movement acted as the background for the growth of the themes. The problems faced by educated upper-class married women and the violence against women - on the difficulties women face in the domestic sphere was the catalyst for the thesis. As the women’s voices this research is a continuation of the study carried out by the novelist in her deep cogitations over the breakdown of the women with an intention to give a facelift to their otherwise low profile.

This thesis revisits the voices of women in the perspective of a woman novelist. This literature examines the role of women under an Indian gender familial perspective. Some vignettes about the voices of women have been investigated and presented. The thesis reaches a conclusion calling for an understanding and supporting attitude towards women who are neglected in Indian societies.

A woman is the embodiment of family pride, filial unity, congenial integrity and a symbol of consummate equanimity. She is the axis upon which the earth called family rotates. She adorns the whole world with her feminine grace. To unfold the women’s
experiences can enrich one's understanding the symptoms of problems in relation to a
gender, pre-marital, marital and domestic spheres and many possibly lead to a positive
change of the mindset.

The thesis is a declaration of attitude towards writing about, by and for the
women. Writing about women uncovers their unique experience from their perspectives.
Writing about them adopts a voyage into the unexplored realms of feminine psyche – the
better soul. Finally, writing for them advocates the society should pay attention to the
sufferings of these people.

The interesting aspect of the thesis is the sympathy and attention shown by the
brothers with their sisters. However, the fathers may not accept that they had any role in
bringing up their daughters. The cultural norms which restrict unmarried girls are
described. Some background is also given by the researcher concerning the political and
social context during which the novels were written.

The issues with regard to the role of women is analysed by airing their
aspirations. Particularly the key issues identified as significant in making their lives
difficult such as their low value and status, work, mobility restriction, and attitude of
parents, incompatible marriage and attitude of neighbours have been highlighted.

Many girls are not happy at being daughters. Education is bringing some
improvement in their lives. Because of cultural norms they are usually not given the same
opportunities as their brothers and are less supported by their parents in terms of
encouragement and basic requirements. In addition, the heavy workload they have to
undertake as opposed to their brothers or husbands means that in comparison they are at a
grave disadvantage succeeding in life. The girls resent the restrictions put on their mobility due to societal pressure and making men the custodians of the family honour. Because of the very different expectations of how girls should behave in comparison to boys girls are frequently reprimanded for their behaviour by parents, relations, neighbours, brothers and husbands while boys are allowed considerably to excessive freedom. Traditionally girls were married in their life early for various reasons. Some girls choose to marry early. Others want to put off marriage until after they have completed their education. Neighbours especially exert pressure on parents to remove their daughters from school once they have reached puberty and give their daughters in marriage. The solutions and the barriers to these solutions go to make the thesis.

As a generalisation, men get married of their own choice rather than having a marriage arranged by their parents. The men characters in the novels taken for study though passively dealt with in the thesis testify this fact. For most of the girls life became harder after marriage and they seem to have been ill-prepared despite all the hardships they experienced in their parent’s home for the isolation, reprimands and hard work they encounter. Majority of the women taken for study feel unhappy in their marriage.

In the novels taken for study one of the husbands remain detached giving no chance for even a chance understanding; Another gratifies his inexorable ego by subjecting his wife to all kinds of hardships; yet another husband suspects his wife for a theft pushing his wife to commit suicide; In their suggestions they advise other girls not to marry early but to continue their education. For those who do marry they recommend belonging to a support group. The barriers to their suggestions are listed as the researcher’s observations.
trafficking, eve teasing, sexual harassment, abusive language, rape, and resulting control over mobility. Physically through battering, acid throwing, stove burning, especially in the case of dowry.

Women work hard but they are not paid and the domestic work carried out by women is not recognised. They are paid lower wages for similar work. Media show girls and women as objects for male gratification. The reasons for legal exploitation of women include greed, lust, religion, superstition, social stigma, economic and cultural factors and the unacceptability of women being involved in the decision making process. Women are neglected in many aspects of their lives. This neglect is frequently seen in the family situations. Women tend to have more restrictions and fewer opportunities than men.

Society's negative attitudes and actions cause parents to over protect women. The honour of the family depends on the daughter. Where she goes and with whom she talks may bring her in contact with threats of or actual sexual violence which would damage the family's social honour per culture and tradition. A women's first encounter with gender violence occurs even before she is born. Some have been killed by discrimination of some kind such as infanticide, selective abortion, deliberate under nutrition or lack of access to health care.

This project shows that the women's parents, brothers, in-laws and husbands and representatives express the wish for a social environment where women are encouraged in every sector and given the opportunity to lead a life without discrimination or violence. They know many of the solutions to change the life of women but the root of the problem seems to lie with the lack of will by mostly by males and to a lesser extent by females to change their behavioural attitudes to women. Women must have equal opportunities. The
The feelings and responses of women very much depended on their perception of their parents’ love and affection or the absence of such feelings. Parents force their expectations and aspirations on their daughters. The mothers want a better life for their daughters and the fathers expect to be honoured by their daughters’ deeds. However, the research shows that the powerful influence of neighbours and the long accepted divisions of gender make such a change difficult to achieve. The women face discrimination from birth noting that men are greeted with joy but not the women. They have put forward their suggestions for women’s development and the likely barriers one will have to overcome.

The situation of women is very bad and may be getting worse throughout especially in rural villages. In many areas women continue to be discriminated and continue to suffer. The disadvantage of being female tends to persist throughout life. Early childhood discrimination against girls may lead to poor educational achievement which severely undermines their development throughout their lives. The negative attitudes, social practices, proverbs, and myths which discriminate against women are supported by different institutions of society. Such practices result in various social evils in society and the continuation of discrimination against women.

The girl child is unwanted. Preference is given to sons because the son is traditionally the income earner; tends to be the caretaker of his parents in their old age; continues the family name; stays in the family -the daughter being moved out upon marriage; maintains religious rituals; does not have dowry liability; protects the family or property; is more valued for his labour -girls are undervalued; is not a social burden; is socially prestigious. The girl child is exploited sexually through child marriage, girl
society must give up its negative and inhibiting attitudes towards women. The saddest issue to emerge from this research is the prevailing low status given to women leading those women to express strong frustration and resentment. Despite the ratification of various international instruments little has changed for women worldwide. A positive attitude by men towards an equal status for women is seen as one of the major critical factors required for their real future development. Women also should shed their negative attitudes for themselves and the other women.

The need to mobilize the strengths of women, families and communities to work out solutions is emphasized. Building the capacities of women to analyze and identify issues and advocate for change with like-minded adults is essential and will require a new approach from all levels. Women should also be encouraged to carry out their own research. Strong commitment is required at many different levels especially by decision-makers to redress the grievances of women by recognizing their problem and changing discriminative attitudes and by responding to what women see as their most pressing needs.

The situations are typical for women in every sphere. The groups which have been studied live in affluent families with emotional problems. While they come from rich families they do not belong to a particularly vulnerable group. The women stay with their families in a protective environment almost all with sound education. They are not ordinary women living in families and their situation probably is similar to that of many women in rural areas and is little changed in reality from their mother’s time and previous generations.
From the analysis as a researcher it was found that from the arguments that people who work for the upliftment of women miss some finer sensibilities which the novelists bother to feel. With an understanding of self-opinionated yardstick the readers miss certain nuances which the novelist painstakingly struggle to express. With such shortcomings on the part of the reader the researcher is forced to arrive at a conclusion that the agencies that are working for women's empowerment are not raising their voices against the difficulties women face nor are providing support at all because they hardly comprehend the crux of the cause nor are they informed enough in most cases to comprehend their pain at the very outset.

The society tries to hide these issues instead of punishing abusers. Listening, encouraging, respecting their ideas and providing moral support to the women facilitating open-ended discussions among the group was more difficult. There was no difficulty for these women in discussing with their brothers the problems they faced. They expressed great sympathy for their sisters. But most of them were artistic failures. May be they were prepared for what the researcher would want them to do about the problems that their sisters face. They blamed the mothers for a daughter's future is shaped by the mother as expected by the society. But it is not the responsibility of the mother alone to raise the daughter in a fitting manner. There is a role for the father also where the responsibility has gone into oblivion— and what their responsibility would to their children becomes a stumbling block. The power role held by men is so deeply rooted in society that there is a misconception in questioning the women while the woman is blamed, as they do all the household activities, the men never share their work. Sons also learn from the father and daughters learn from the mother. This discrimination is more conspicuous in the novels
taken for study. The roles played by Maya’s parents hardly helped her in shaping her
destiny. The role of parents in the case of Monisha and Amla is an example of bad up-
bringing. Sita also falls a prey to similar circumstances without any one for support. Bim
and Tara at least have bolster like Aunt Mira who for some time remains as a bolster only
to become a burden later in their life. All these women with a possible exception of Bim
were turned down by their husbands by failing to locate their wives’ basic needs in life.

Working with issues of women is not easy. Theory is one thing but living with the
women’s human and social problems is another. They are afraid to talk with males,
especially those who are from the mansion of erudition. As a traditional rite the society
acts as a watch dog toward the women to see with whom she talks, where she goes,
especially dealings with males quickly arouse suspicion. Other females may be
unconsciously jealous of them. Women are also easily frightened; they have been used to
the unconditional authority of adults which if questioned is punished. The womb is seen
both as a blessing and curse. It stands as a major constraint hindering mobility, personal,
professional development and even to the extent of earning their livelihood. The womb
has increased women’s vulnerability to unwanted problems making their development
and independence more cumbersome. It is difficult to discover what the woman is yet it is
obvious to the woman but she remains silent and invisible because it causes social
stigma. Sita stands an example for this.

Sex before marriage has never been accepted because of the risk of pregnancy.
There is no culture of girls having a male friend in Indian context; friendships between
the genders are assumed to be sexual. Marriage is essential before having sex for those
girls and boys who like each other. The unmarried pregnant girl or woman has never been
accepted in rural society and this makes it difficult for girls to survive. The relationship between Amla and Dharma causes ripples and makes tradition bound conservatives nauseate at such eccentricities. For many girls marriage and the ability to give birth to children have provided them safety, a sense of security, a sense of respect and a better status at home. For Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* and Monisha in *Voices in the City* and for unmarried Bim in *Clear Light of Day* marriage and pregnancy have different roles to play.

Violence against women is one of the regional issues. Women’s rights to survival and development are systematically denied because of the discrimination and social violence suffered by women in the region. Objectives have to be set to reduce social violence, intolerance and discrimination against women by building social pressure and encouraging greater accountability. These objectives should enhance women to work towards securing their rights at all levels of society by increasing their access to resources, expanding their choices and enhancing the capability to counter violence and discrimination.

A female has many roles to play as a daughter, as a wife and as a mother. It is possible that these different roles may be effectively adopted by the same female. It is not that these roles are strictly compartmentalised. But these roles extend into and influence each other. In other words a daughter or a wife may become a loving and affectionate mother to her own father / brother / sister / husband. A mother at her extreme old age may become a child, a daughter of her own son. The only known obvious exception is that a mother can never assume the role of a wife to her own children in the Indian context. Whatever role a female plays it is diligent to realise that she plays a pivotal
unifying and harmonising role that is why she is described as ‘Shakthi’ (energy, creative energy) in Indian context and it is believed that the entire cosmos was the creation of ‘Maha’ (The Great) or ‘Adthi Para Sakthi’ (The Great Original Energy). She is the one who keeps things together so that things do not fall apart. This project tries to establish the unifying role played by a woman in her roles as a daughter, a wife and a mother and an earnest attempt will be made to establish the unifying role the women play by taking the women characters of Anita Desai in her select novels namely, *Cry, the Peacock*, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, *Voices in the City* and *Clear Light of Day*. This project will make a textual study of the chosen novels and also a critical study of the secondary sources to make an analysis and to establish the hypothesis. Passing references may be made to the other works of Anita Desai and works of any other author but the main concern of this project is to study the select novels of Anita Desai with a purpose and try to establish the hypothesis.

As the research focusses more on the psychological and emotional problems of women suffering in domestic spheres spatially and temporally this thesis has been confined within the novels taken for the purposes of research. The events and anecdotes discussed in the thesis if by chance have any bearing on life in the contemporary world it is only accidental. This is not an extensive study. It opens up many questions which should be followed up. It might be interesting to do further research in other areas with hopes that some of the cogitations of the researcher will be answered.

For documentation purposes the scholar has duly followed the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* Sixth Edition authored by Joseph Gibaldi, (Affiliated East-West Press Ltd. New Delhi, 2000)