Chapter I
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Fiction, being the most characteristic and powerful form of literary expression, has acquired a prestigious position in Indian English literature, popularly known as Indian writing in English. It is generally agreed that in India, the novel is the most acceptable way of embodying experiences and ideas in the context of our time. Fiction, as form of art, mirrors the social fabric and reflects the thoughts of an age. Many good Indian English novels and many more short stories have demonstrated the feasibility of Indians, writing fiction.

Fiction has become in our times the most powerful and popular literary genre. This form which was evolved more than two hundred years ago has uninterruptedly and comprehensively depicted the saga of human activities and experiences, rich and varied, unfolding thoughts and feelings, hopes and dreams, down the ages.

According to Robert B. Henkle, “Fiction and drama present men and women reacting to each other in the way that is closer to real life” (1). Even as the visual media make a steady progress conquering multitudes, the popularity of fiction has not ebbed. It is a form or genre people will never willingly let die as it depicts effectively “…the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varities, the liveliest effusion of wit and humour to be conveyed to the world in the most chosen language” (Liddell 6).

It is definitely the fact that it holds the mirror up to life that gives this genre an extra ordinary power and makes it very popular. In a novel we try to discover things
which we know and which we do not know. It offers us insight and adventure more than many other genres. We move to a different world created by the writer to share his discoveries and to discover our own self. This exploration of the self makes our life rich and profound.

The beginnings of any genre are closely associated with social and political movements in a particular historical context. When we trace the rise of Indian fiction in English specifically to a moment in history, we are convinced that it evolved in the wake of our contact with the west. Most of the critics feel that English education along with the influence of the west made this genre very popular in India. According to Pratima:

The synthesis of eastern and western literary modes has given a comprehensive perspective to the Indo-English writers, and they have successfully analysed the psychological, emotional and spiritual crisis experienced by the Indian intellectuals as well as men and women representing the different layers of Indian society (180).

The novel acquired a distinct identity especially during the colonial period. The flexibility of the form and the freedom of the genre, was the main reason which made it very popular among the intellectuals. Many writers of the old order discovered that it was an effective way to inveigh British imperialism. The story tellers wanted not only to entertain but also to create awareness about the pathetic life of Indians in general.

Thus in the beginning the Indian novelists presented an acute awareness of traditional values, spiritual concepts and also the urge to infuse modernity in Indian life. The novelists, we feel, were delicately poised between the two powerful worlds.
Meenakshi Mukherjee evaluates the early Indian novels thus: "Inspite of the various limitations and incompatibilities, the novel in India which began under the British tutelage soon acquired its own distinctive character" (6). The works of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Sarat Chandra and Toru Dutt bear testimony to this fact.

The tension that was brewing in the socio-political arena also triggered the rise of novels in India. English was at that time the lingua-franca and most of the committed writers chose this medium which would draw the attention of people easily. Even when they followed the pattern of English writers, there was the cloaked intention of popularizing patriotism and nationalism. They were not fully successful in exploiting the potential of this form but depicted the Indian social, political and domestic scenes effectively. The tragedy of the mute and the oppressed Indians is clearly portrayed by these novelists. The intrusion of the author is very self-evident and it affected the spontaneity of the narration. Characters are victims of the powerful establishment and their struggle is presented as futile in most of these novels.

The pioneers of modern novels in India are Raja Rao, Mulkraj Anand and R.K. Narayan. In their novels there is a tension between the native experience and the alien medium. But they are successful in exploiting the form rationally to give it a concrete identity. Anand’s fight has always been against exploitation, oppression and caste.

Twentieth Century has witnessed many changes in Indian literature in English especially because of the arrival of many women writers. Their presence has deeply influenced Indian fiction. According to Susie Tharu:
These writers contested the structures that were shaping their world. Tactically redeployed dominant discourses, held on to older strains, and recharged them with new meanings and even introduced new issues and new emphasis, new orientations (Tharu and Lalitha 154).

In the light of these perspectives, the novels of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sehgal, Anita Desai, Bharthi Mukherjee and Shashi Deshpande have become powerful paradigms of the struggle of Indian woman. These women novelists have been focusing on the social, political and psychological struggles that Indian women encounter. Their conflicts, victories and defeats, their struggle against the Establishment, the resultant frustration take a thematic significance in their work. The earlier Indian women writers in English like Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Pravar Jhabvala portray life in post-independence India. Both novelists probe whether the social changes and cultural diversity affect the stability of the nation. To them, men and women are victims of these socio-political and economic changes. The tragedy of their characters is contributed by these changing socio-political ideologies that have the power to de-centre the individual and finally contribute to his or her tragedy.

The rise of these women writers marked the birth of an era which promises a new deal for the Indian fiction in English. These few educated women tried to communicate to the world their own bitter experiences as women as well as their ideals of social reform. These women writers particularly shared experiences of Indian women in general and presented them into fictional form. Women's joys, sorrows and experiences of inner life are better and more truly depicted by the women novelists. The literature which was male dominated started to reflect the sparks that
have emerged from the struggle of women to be free, to be herself. The change in her status in society could be assessed by the image in literature produced by her. The reason was that in this period a number of educated women began to feel an urgent need to voice their feelings.

The women novelists of the nineteenth century tried to portray their characters by showing various problems but due to lack of experience they soon turned to romanticism and sentimentalism. This resulted in the weakness of their novels. This can be put in the following words of Margret Cavendish, “Our sex takes so much delight in dressing and adorning themselves ... and instead of turning over solid leaves, we turn our hair into curls, and our Sex is as ambitious to show ourselves to the eyes of the world when finely drest, as scholars do to express their learning to the ears of the world, when fully fraught with authors...” (Dobree and Davis 391-92)

Anita Desai is widely acclaimed as one of the foremost Indian novelists. She has almost a worldwide readers making her a literary celebrity of lasting significance. Her uniqueness lies in the fact that in her novels we witness a long interrogation of the self through introspection, psychological analysis and stream of consciousness technique. She recasts the essence of Joyce, Proust and Kafka, in her own way, mostly treading over alienation with special reference to feminine psyche in her novels. The interior landscape peopled by women characters is set against the background of man’s domination of social and domestic life with accumulated authoritarianism as its foundation. According to P.E. Patil “…in Anita Desai’s novels the inner working, the inner sensibilities are more compelling than the outer weather or the visible action” (47).
But it was not so with the later women novelists who emerged in the post independence era. The process of awakening was generated particularly by these creative women writers who had lived abroad for quite some time and then returned to India. This bifocal dimension to Indian writing in English is very important for the manner and method of story telling. Among all these writers, Anita Desai is a very distinguished and distinct female novelist. Because her aim is not merely to tell a story, to amuse us or move us, but to force us to think, to understand the hidden meaning of events. Dostoevsky too says “to write a novel there must be one or more strong impressions that the author has really experienced to the depth of his being” (76).

In Anita Desai’s novels, life is depicted as it really is life, as rule of the upper middle class which she knows very well and which she can treat sympathetically. Anita Desai herself states in an interview:

In countless, small ways scenes and settings certainly belong to my life. Many of the minor characters and incidents are also based on real life. But the major characters and the major events are either entirely imaginary or an amalgamation of several characters and happenings. One can use the raw material of life only very selectively. It is common among writers to pick out something from real life and develop their situations around that while there are others who start from some real experience, which continuously grows in their imagination. You use it as a base but don’t confine yourself to it (TOI 4).

Most of the female novelists concentrate upon the development of a story in a casual sequence, whereas Anita Desai writes in a symbolic mode. Anita Desai’s novels have a structure, for her characters exist in a relationship to the situation which is the
backbone of the network of relationships. Anita Desai, born in 1937, of a German mother and Bengali father, is a north Indian novelist remarkable for her sensibility of inner world rather than the queer world of action. She shows a remarkable skill in handling the stream of consciousness technique. Though we can’t categorise her as a feminist but she believes that a man is concerned with action and experience whereas a woman is concerned with thought, emotion and sensation.

Anita Desai has been considered as the forerunner of contemporary women’s fiction because her novels show the realities of life. Her imagination is occupied with the emptiness of modern life just like Soul Bellow’s. It is a well known fact that there is much more intellectual life in India now than there was before Independence. And it can be considered as the main reason for the abundant growth of the novel during this period. Anita Desai is undoubtedly one of the most powerful Indian woman novelists in English. She grew up surrounded by Western literature and music. She herself describes her upbringing as “the greatest gift I could have been given as a writer” (web). She has lived in Calcutta, Chandigarh, Delhi and Pune and this accounts for the fact that all her novels are set in one or the other of these cities. She began to write in English at the age of seven and published her first story at the age of nine. Her stories appeared as favourite pieces in the children’s magazine and she contributed short stories to the magazine when she was in the college. Desai writes in English only. She has said many times that this was a natural choice for her. “I can state definitely that I did not choose English in a deliberate and conscious act and I’d say perhaps it was the language that choose me and I started writing stories in English at the age of seven and have been doing so for thirty years now without stopping to think why” (web).
If we want to place Anita Desai in proper perspective than we have to compare her with other women novelists who deal with the same themes. The treatment of the theme by women novelists is a three faceted affair.

A personal story slowly develops into a wider conflict. In other words we can say that the story is used as a signboard to explore social change in India in all its complexities. They seem to examine the transition from a traditional society to an urban industrial society. The comparative achievement of Anita Desai becomes clear when we notice that her fellow women writers like Kamla Markandeya, Ruth Jhabvala, Atiya Hussain seldom try to portray the psychic elements involved in these themes. Anita Desai adds a new dimension to English fiction by exploring a typical modern Indian phenomenon. In contrast to her in Jhabvala’s work the social background is more important than the characters whereas in Kamala Markendeya’s works the emphasis is on matters like economical, political, social and cultural. Nayantara Sehgal deals with social problems but she confines herself to upper class and aristocracy. To be brief... “Every novel is an extended metaphor of the author’s view of life and every novelist gives us in his novels his own personal idiosyncratic vision of the world” (Allen 17). This is how Sir Walter Allen establishes the relationship between the novel and the novelist.

Anita Desai thus clearly stands apart from the others because she shifts the focus from the outer to the inner world of human psychology. Her main concern is to depict the psychic states of her protagonists at different junctures of their lives. She is considered the writer who introduced the psychological novel in the tradition of Virginia Woolf to India. She herself admits that her writing is realistic, “Women think I am doing a disservice to the feminist movement by writing about women who have
no control over their lives. But I was trying, as every writer tries to do, even in fiction, to get at the truth, write the truth” (Desai 348).

As a novelist Desai made her debut in 1963 with *Cry, the Peacock*. Prof. Desai won the Winifred Holtby Prize of the Royal Society of Literature for the novel; *Fire on the Mountain* (1978) and the Guardian Award for *Village by the Sea* (1984). Desai likes to lead a quiet life. She likes to read books which explore human nature. Her favourite authors are Chekhove, Henry James, Lawrence and Dostoevsky. She also received the Padma Sri Award from the Govt. of India and is a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature of London. She also won the Sahitya Academy Award and National Academy of Letters Award. Her three novels *Clear Light of Day*, *In Custody* and *Fasting, Feasting* have been nominated for the Booker Prize.

Anita Desai is exciting on many accounts. Her growth as a novelist is there for all to see. Her novels are always in a state of ‘becoming’; they never ‘become’. It is the process, the journey, the expectation, and the halfness that mark her creations. There is never a satisfying end. The journey is never complete. There is no solace and complete union at the end of her novels. Reconciliation, compromise, helpless resignation may be there but no gratifying or complete experience is offered to the reader. Restlessness is celebrated and alienation is highlighted. Anita Desai comes very close to present day dilemma of human existence. When we look at all the works of a novelist, we are able to identify the peculiar smell, the unique texture of that novelist’s world. Anita Desai’s world is made up of seemingly contradictory forces. On one hand, we have deep psychological exposition but at the same time there is something very raw and primitive about this world.
There are a number of novels to Anita Desai’s credit. The present thesis work studies at least her nine novels covering almost every phase of her literary career from the start to the present.

The first chapter named ‘Anita Desai and her Critics’ deals with the theme that how various critics have evaluated her works so far. Madhusudan Prasad studies characters in the light of existentialism in Anita Desai’s novels. Usha Bande and Jasbir Jain study the psychological aspects of characters. Ramechandra Rao studies the poetic and lyrical aspects of her novels. R.S. Singh, G.P. Sharma, B.O. Vyas and a few others have all commented upon Anita Desai’s fiction following a thematic approach. Anita Desai’s novels have excited both the readers and critics alike. The central concern in both the cases is very much similar—alienation. The interaction between the old and the new, the dilemma of choosing between the instinct to conform and the urge to rebel. The essays on different novels of Anita Desai touch these vital issues in a precise and systematic manner. Dr. S.S. Rangachari in “Fate and Fatalism in Anita Desai’s Cry, the Peacock” attempts a keen observation for sorting out how for the protagonist wrills her fate in the novel. Dr. Inamdar’s article, “Treatment of Neurosis in Cry, the Peacock” focusses on the state of mind of the protagonist. The theme of immigration and its human fallout, as dealt with in the novelist’s work has been brought out in Dr. Sumitra Kukreti’s “Love Hate Relationship of Expatriates in Anita Desai’s Bye-Bye Blackbird.” Another critic Dr. Brahmananda Chary’s “Raka as a Metaphor for Ruined Childhood in Anita Desai’s Fire on the Mountain” isolates some particular dimensions of the novel for detailed analysis.
The analysis of the themes, characters and formal strategies in Anita Desai’s novels in different essays bears a testimony to the success of the novelist in capturing the dilemma of the modern psyche. The form of her work gives her novels an artistic significance, independent of the time. As she herself puts it, “Writing is to me process of discovering the truth—the truth that is nine-tenth of the iceberg that lies submerged beneath the one-tenth visible portion we call Reality. Writing is my way of plunging to the depths and exploring the underlying truth. All my writing is an effort to discover, to underline and convey the truth significance of things” (web).

From the above survey we can conclude that there is an ample scope of writing on the technical aspect of Anita Desai’s novels. The present study makes an attempt to focus upon the way she narrates the story in the novels. There are several lengthy studies about her work but there is hardly any book or study that deals with the ‘narratology’ of almost all her novels. The third chapter entitled ‘Theory of Narratology’ discusses some important aspects of narratology in general and how it studies a particular text. Narratology is perhaps best understood as a term with a stricter and a looser sense. Broadly speaking, it is the name given to the critical and theoretical study of the numerous forms of narrative discourse, especially in literary and film studies. In the literary sense we can say that narratology is the theory and study of narrative and narrative structure and the ways they affect our perception. In principle, the word can refer to any systematic study of narrative. But in practice the use of term is rather more restricted. It is derived from the French word ‘narratologie’ coined by Tzvetan Todorov in his *Grammaire du Decameron* (1969).
Although a lineage stretching back to Aristotle’s Poetics may be traced, modern narratology is most typically said to begin with the Russian Formalists, and in particular with Vladimir Propp’s *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928). More precisely, however, it designates a theoretical movement with its origin in the French structuralism thought of the 1960s and 70s. Due to the origins of the term, it has a strong association with the structuralist quest for a system of formal description that can be applied to any form of narrative. The narratological approach is characterised by its overriding concern with narrative structure. And the close attention it pays to the effects that this structure has on the staping and unfolding of narratives.

The fourth chapter entitled ‘View Point or Perspective’ deals exactly with what the following words by Leech & Short explain:

A fiction writer, although not compelled to take one person’s point of view, can voluntarily limit, his omniscience to those things which belong to one person’s model of reality. He can also vary the fictional point of view, sometimes claiming authorial omniscience, sometimes giving us one character’s version of events. Sometimes that of another. He can even take the point of view of an animal, or of a man on the point of death, by passing the problem of authenticity (Leech and Short 174).

View point or Point of view generally refers to the impression which a reader gains of events moving rapidly or slowly in a continuous flow or isolated segments. It also includes disruptions of the natural flow of time by, for example, flashbacks, provisions or inter weaving of stories which concern different time spheres. Point of view also concerns a set of values, a belief system communicated by the language. A single set of values is not so interesting as opposed to different values in a work. In
major novels the underlying values are complex and ironical. Different points of view in distinct and contrasting linguistic styles, constantly challenging & contradicting each other give the novel an argumentative and dynamic nature. If we observe the point of view, then we find that the novels of Anita Desai give the impression of slow motion pictures with sharpness and perspicacity. The movement is in full control by recurring monologues and implicit dialogue very frequent in these novels.

The fifth chapter ‘Narrator’ explains what this term actually means when it is used in a literary sense and in, the novels of Anita Desai, how she employs this term. A narrator is within any story, the entity that tells the story to the audience. The narrator is one of the three entities responsible for story telling of any kind. The others are the author and the audience; the latter called the reader when referring specifically to literature. Critics have for a long time distinguished between author and the narrator. It is also noticed that the narrator does not always address the reader but may address person or persons in the novel itself.

Two types of narration however are quite common. ‘I’ narration, or the ‘first person narration’ is the technique adopted by epistolatory fiction writers, and novels with first person account of one’s own or someone else’s life experiences. Third Person narration is based on impersonal style of narration. The presentation is direct. The implied author & narrator are merged. In modern fiction, the indirect mode of narration is considered superior to any other mode. In the writings of Anita Desai there is a combination of all three types of narration. Desai adopts ‘I’ narration technique in only two novels, *Cry, the Peacock* and *Voices in the City*. The remaining styles of narration will be explained in the chapter in full detail.
Sixth chapter of the thesis named as ‘Handling of Time’ deals with the various ways in which time is treated in the novels of Anita Desai. Anita Desai herself has said that time plays an important role in the novel and the quotation from T.S. Eliot’s *Four Quarters*, “Time the destroyer is time the preserver” reinforces her idea. Almost the same idea is repeated later when she says, “What I have tried to prove is that although times appears to damage, destroy, and extinguish one finds instead that nothing is lost, nothing comes to an end, but the spiral of life leads as much upwards as downwards and is in perpetual circular motion, both the past and the future existing always in the present” (Shrivastava 224-25).

The seventh chapter of this research work entitled ‘Packaging the story’ discusses the numerous facts that help a novelist represent his/her story to the readers. Stories are not always presented straight. Often writers make use of frame narratives (Primary narrative), which contain within them embedded narratives (secondary narratives). For instance, the main story in Henry James’ *The Turn of the Screw* is embedded within a frame narrative of a group of people telling ghost stories round the fire in a country house at Christmas. One of the stories told by one of the guests in these circumstances is the one which forms the substance of James’ tale. Notice that here primary narrative’ really just means the narrative which comes first, rather than the main narrative, which in fact it usually isn’t. The ‘Second narrative’ is the one which comes second and is embedded into the primary narrative. The secondary narrative is usually the main story. One of the most obvious tasks of narrative discourse is clearly to select and arrange the various events and participants constituting the story it sets out to tell. Initially this might
well seem to be a relatively straightforward affair, since stories essentially amount to the doings of particular actors involved in various events at particular times and in particular places. Narrative discourse is thus merely a matter of saying who did what, and when, where, and why they did it. Different types of narrative may well privilege one or another of these elements, but most ordinary readers will feel themselves reasonably entitled to expect all four of them to play an at least implicit role in any narrative. In this chapter we will consider first some of the implications of the solid world of story and turn then to an examination of some of the ways in which that world is presented through the medium of narrative discourse. We will discuss at length that how actors, place and story time transform into characters, setting and discourse time.

Chapter eighth named as 'Dialogue or Speech' discusses one of the crucial problems of narrative analysis that concerns the ways in which the characters' statements and thoughts appear in the text. In principle, the difference between sentences that have actually been uttered and unspoken thoughts does not really matter. In both cases we are talking about ideas and emotions belonging to characters, which an actual conversation may of course render more clearly that an unspoken reflection. An actually speaking character may have ordered his thoughts better than someone who is thinking or dreaming, but this does not always have to be the case. Conversations can be very tentative and chaotic, while a sequence of thoughts can be quite clear. In this chapter we will indicate the reproduction of both thoughts and conversations with the term representation of consciousness, and we will address this matter at length since it constitutes one of the major challenges to narrative theory.
The central problem of consciousness representation comes down to the relationship between the representing agent and the one who is being represented. If a narrator represents a character’s thoughts, one may ask to what extent this representation will be pure and authentic. The reader may think that he or she gets the actual ideas, while in fact he or she may only get formulations and opinions belonging to the narrator, who paraphrases the ideas in questions. We will also distinguish briefly three forms of speech representation: direct speech, indirect speech and free indirect speech.

Chapter ninth titled as ‘Thought and Vision’ discusses how Anita Desai has extended and enlarged the thematic horizon of the Indo-Anglian Novel. Sometimes her major novels tend to disappoint the reader due to their one dimensionality, turning the characters wooden and insensitive. However, they are deeply moving in their existential and socio-psychic import. Microcosm of man’s endless struggle for survival, they voice the anguish of the caged bird that symbolises the modern man. Emblems of remonstrance and psychic protest, they strive for the protection and presentation of their dignity and self-esteem in a patriarchal society.

Dealing with the thoughts, emotions and sensations at various levels of consciousness, Anita Desai found the technique used by D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner and Henry James quite suitable for her purpose of character delineation. Very few Indo-Anglian novelists have paid so much attention to form and technique. In this chapter we will also discuss that how Anita Desai’s treatment of her theme begins as a simple personal story of an individual woman gradually develops into a wider conflict for her identity and ends up exploring possibilities of
transition in the tradition bound Indian society residing in metropolitan surroundings. She brings about a new dimension to the Indian novel by drawing upon the troubled sensibility of a woman in an absurd world.

Desai finds the existentialist theories - so fashionable during the sixties compatible to her themes. She explores the inner working of her protagonists’ minds unfolding the inner recesses and revealing the fundamental human condition by placing individuals in situations of extreme tension.
Works Cited


