CHAPTER – V

Conclusions

Theme of Alienation, Isolation and man-woman relationship seems of particular interest to Desai, for in most of her early novels she writes on this theme. She concentrates on the predicament of modern women in this male-dominated society and her destruction at the altar of marriage. According to her, most marriages prove to be unions of incompletely men who 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 to the same situations differently. Not only is the man himself different, but as often happens in the society of changing values, his family ways, his surroundings to which she is expected to adjust herself are entirely different. The result is that there is gradual erosion of marital relationship, and for a woman, marriage comes to symbolize nullification of everything she has come to cherish. She feels tied down. This affects her entire psyche and behavior which soon destroys her sensibility and her very self. Anita Desai has stated in one of her interviews that “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
we call reality. Writing is Desai’s way of plunging to the depths and exploring this underlying truth. Anita Desai’s novels are 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.

As one goes through her novels, one can see a definite sequence and pattern emerge. In this pattern one can be, trace the growth and development of her attitude to this theme. The very titles of her novels are symbolical and suggest this pattern. Every wife yearns for the intense intimacy with her husband but Desai’s protagonists have in their fate hostility and indifference rather than tenderness and affection. She portrays the silence, solitude and dark world of shadows which envelops her women characters. To trace the inner world of famine psyche, Anita focuses on women’s responses to preachments. The old values of luring together is made optional by the modern transferable jobs. The new waves of consciousness open vistas of liberated life under whose influence educated married women aspire for small nuclear families and that ‘convergent fabric’ has ended and today parents and children, brother and brother, and even husband and wife, find shadows sprawling between them, dividing and isolating them.
Anita Desai’s characters such as Maya in *Cry, the Peacock*, Sarah in *Bye-Bye Blackbird* and Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* are well-known examples of the women, who adjust in their married life. Anita Desai’s characters can be classified into two distinctive groups, those who fail to adjust to the harsh realities of life and those who compromise. The hero or the heroine is no longer absolute and invulnerable in modern fiction but rather insecure, apprehensive, inward-looking and brooding, conveying the daily pains involved in the act of living.

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. Concerned with the selective analysis, Anita Desai shifts her attention to the inner sensibilities. With the help of outer conditions she reveals the inner workings of her characters. So vividly portrayed are their introspection and mood-swings that a pertinent question is often posed if her characterization is autobiographical, to which her reply is that minor characters, incidents and settings have personal bearings to some extent and are based on experience. But the
major characters and their eccentricities are imaginary or an amalgamation of several characters from real life.

Anita Desai’s characters reveal her vision of life. They share her perceptions, and they set out in quest of meaning. Like their creator they love solitude and privacy. Preoccupation with the psyche of her men, women and children drives Desai’s attention to the nausea of existence. This complicates of her writing emanate from her existential roots and impart it a tangible form. But fortunately, for her, existence is not wholly irredeemable. The panacea, for most of them, lies in the aesthetics of life. Desai’s works are also a search 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 a disparity between the higher needs of the individual inner nature and the inalterable cosmetic conditions of existence. Those who are able to comprehend and surmount their personal difficulties gain a healthy vision of life. In the Indian context more often than not, the concern of the typical Indian is restricted to the family. The affairs of the family constitute, for the average ordinary Indian, the highest concern of life. He does not ordinarily involve himself with values or preoccupations that are entirely unconnected cultural concerns would be of a traditional character. Even intimate personal experiences tend to be
dominated by conventional moves and traditional perspectives. But the Indo-Anglian woman writer attempting to describe the life of the ordinary India is largely satisfied in portraying the outer shell and rendering him more conventional and typical than any human being really is. Thus for example, man-woman relationship in the novels of those writers is mostly characterized by the conventional Indian male viewpoint without any proper insight into the complicity of the feminine experience. One note the nostalgia in treating the joint – family and in order to seek their own identity consciously try to break away from the kind of life they are nostalgic far. The institution of the joint family gives opportunity for group human behaviours; it symbolizes an expansive pre-industrial way of life and it represents a deeply entrenched form of orthodoxy against which the individual may find himself helpless. It gives way for presenting the conflict between two sets of values, supremacy of social hierarchy and emergence of the individual. In India Anita Desai was the one novelist who added a new dimension to English fiction by concentrating on the explicating of sensibilities.

In the novels of Anita Desai, the focus is one the inner climate of sensibility. Her main concern is to depict the psychic state of her protagonist, at a critical juncture of their lives. To support this theory she has forged a style supple and suggestive enough to convey the
fever and fretfulness, the currents in the stream of consciousness of her characters. They grapple with thoughts, feelings and emotions are reflected in language, syntax and imagery.

As her forte is the presentation of individual human being, the narrative is rightly allowed to move freely and not clogged by clock and patterns artificially imposed from outside. But it is not as if there is no subtlety or control of plot structure. But the plot is always well defined enough to present her vision clearly, her plot strictures, therefore show a splendid fusion of form and expression, contrivance and spontaneity. Anita Desai uses what may be called deconstructive device in her solves. Anita Desai’s fiction is, thus bound by what may be called existentialist framework both theme and technique. She declares: “My novels are no reflection of Indian society, politics or character. They are a part of my private effort to seize upon the raw material of life – its shamelessness, it’s meaningless” (Contemporary Novelists, 348).

Anita Desai stands supreme as a distinguished novelist among Indian writers in English whose novels put her in the front rank of contemporary novelists. K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar says “…in her two novels – Cry, The Peacock and Voices in the city – Anita Desai has added a new dimension to the achievement of Indian woman writers in English
fiction”(64). Anita Desai’s maiden novel, Cry, The Peacock has become immensely popular soon after its publication for the artistic design with which she weaves around a significant situation with a graceful rhythm and poetic felicity.

The three major aspects which are necessary to understand Anita Desai are her characterization, themes and plots. She puts a lot of emphasis on her characters as her novels deal with the psychic aspect of the mind of individuals. The characters often indulge in a self-analysis and discover themselves in the process. The writer shows through their narrative, their fears obsessions and neurosis and how they accommodate or estrange themselves from their surroundings. Extremely sensitive, they are quite intolerant towards any adversity and often rebel against the oppression from the family or society.

Anita Desai’s female characters are more realized and more neatly drawn. The problems and passions of most of these characters than reality, which often irks them. However, in her novels characterization is given more importance and story, plot and style are employed only to delineate them more clearly. The poetic style of the novel has drawn the attention of many critics and Meenakshi Mukherji finds that “the style in Cry, The Peacock has a curious compatibility with the theme”(The Twice-Born Fiction,189).
Dr. Ramamurti argues out “a case for a great common factor among the Indian women novelists namely a poetic potential demanding an ecstatic lyrical outburst in words”*(Littcrit,38).* Anita Desai’s *Cry, The Peacock* and *Voices in the city* are much acclaimed novels. Her main concern is the exploration of inner sensibility rather than the outer world. Her fiction is elaborately introspective in theme.

**Bye-Bye Blackbird**

Her third novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird* presents a love story and the title is directly related to the theme and signifies that England has said good bye to one black bird (Adit) but has offered a cuckoo’s nest to another (Dev). Both Adit and Sarah are playing theatrical roles, Adit, that of the successful, foreign-based Indian, while Sarah maintains the façade of happily – married Britain wife into an over-enthusiastic family of Indian in-laws who are waiting to welcome her with outstretched hands, as soon as she decides to visit India. But again, it is Sarah, who blindly, impulsively is more involved than Adit and thus suffers more “she had so little command over those two characters she played each day, one in the morning at school and the other in the evening at home, that she could not tell with how much sincerity she played one role or the other” *(38).*
In *Bye-Bye, Blackbird*, the sense of belonging comes in the life of Adit when he decides to return to India from England where he is alienated and has lived as an outsider. He conveys to Sarah, his English wife, his resolution to put an end to the alien life in England and also invites her to India: I've done with England now. Sarah. I'm going back . . . come, Sarah, come, we must go ... But I must be in India . . . I've got to go home and start living a real life. (BBB 234).

**Where Shall We Go this Summer?**

In *Where Shall We Go this Summer?* Sita thought that may be she could make a compromise i.e. live with her husband and travel mentally, emotionally. But after witnessing that tender scene in the Garden one evening of a young woman being tenderly caressed by a man, she suddenly became acutely conscious of what she was missing in life. After that is became impossible for her to make any compromise. At the end of her escape, Sita remained a person derided within herself. When her husband turned back to go, leaving her behind, she felt as if he had released her and she was free to go where she wanted: “She felt so high that she could have risen and floated out to sea as a black sea-bird.” But she did not. She began to trail after him knowing she would follow him,
follow the trail of footprints he had laid out for her. Like the freed seabird she circled about and then dropped lower and lower towards her home.

In her forth novel, *Where Shall We Go this Summer?*, the estrangement prevails in a supreme way. The author herself enters and makes the point many a time in the novel that “having no true alternative, she accepts it” (*Where*, 64). It is the point where different polarities come into convergence with each other in a spirit of mutual reconciliation. In such an enlightened state, whether forced by nature or stimulated by her self-interest (partial involvement and resignation), Sita follows Raman when she cannot find peace and harmony in Manori. Pathak argues, quoting the words of M.Sivaramkrishna that this is a "move from alienation to a 'mythic acceptance' of life and its myriad problems" (33). Suresh kohli points out that this sense of belonging is differently manifested in *Cry, the Peacock* because, here "Sita neither dies in the end nor kills anyone nor does she become mad. She simply compromises with her destiny". He further argues that "She realizes that escapism is no answer to life's problems. But now she is convinced that life must flow on and she too must have courage to flow on with the current of life"(37).
The flash back technique is frequently employed by Anita Desai. For example in *Where Shall We go this Summer?* when Sita arrives on the island, after a passage of twenty years, scenes of her bruised life in Bombay are flashed back, somewhat accounting for her present predicament and her flight to the island.

In *Fire on the Mountain*, there are three characters who are living in their own world and lead life almost equivalent to death. Their suffering make them preoccupied with death. Ila Das is forced to accept death by Peter Singh. And the other two namely, Nanda Kaul and Raka, lead their life of deprivation alone in an alien place called, Carignano. When Raka sets fire on the mountain, they are trapped in the fire. They belong to as far as their desperate worlds are concerned. Their withdrawal from society is a destructive force. It is difficult for them to be like Buddha and meditate amidst suffering. Like Maya's aggression, which kills Gautama's life in *Cry the Peacock*, the aggression of Raka sets the forest on fire which destroys the whole life on the mountain. The ‘fire on the mountain’ purifies their deprived souls at the end. In *Fire on the mountain*, Nanda Kaul’s real and unhappy past as Vice-Chancellor's wife presiding over a teeming and glamorous family is flashed back, accounting for her rejection and withdrawal.
The fourth novel, *Clear light of day* is divided into four parts, suggesting the four quarters of a musical structure. The first and last parts of the novel deal with the present and the middle two, with the past of the protagonists. And yet past and present meet and merge to forge continuity to the narrative, portraying the spectrum of images of women.

In *Clear Light of Day* the sense of belonging is stressed in "the Bim's reintegration with her family, society and nation and her perception of a unity between divergent elements within herself and in the world" (Gupta 129). It is, indeed, amazing that Anita Desai is able to engage her reader's attention in her narrative in spite of the fact that her novels are not action or plot-oriented. She is able to achieve this by employing a variety of narrative devices, one of which is the stream of consciousness technique.

Although her novels lack complex plots, they are well constructed and compact in form. For example, *Fire on the Mountain*, brief and well knit, divided into three parts. Part one sets the scene and introduces the chief protagonist of the novel, the lonely Nanda Kaul. Part two introduces Raka and portrays her relationship between Nanda Kaul and Raka. While the third part introduces Ila Das and
explores not only the relationship between Nanda and Ila Das but also the nature of two - ways of life- the images of women and the way of compromise.

Raka's freakishness is also explained in quick flash of the horrors of her home life. The climatic moment of the novel too, makes deft use of flash back. NandaKaul's real past, contrast to her self- created illusory present. As for Clear Light of Day, the entire novel shuttles between past and present, with the past ever present in the present.

The technique of flash back, as Anita Desai uses it, is not a device for recapitulation of the past merely to explain certain matters in the present while keeping separate the two entities. In Clear Light of Day one can see the interactive use of some images that gives the effect of a leit motif. While enriching that texture of the novel, these images emphasize the theme, accentuate mood and throw light into character. Garden lays stress on the theme of Bim's desertion - her abandonment not only by Tara but by Raja as well.

The reiteration of the image of the well and the cow, not only accentuates the atmosphere of death and horror in the novel, but also images of women the role and character of Aunt Mira-masi at first and
later extends itself to "envelop Bim, whose life takes on the complexion of her aunts life", and gives poetic depth to the novel,

The well then contained death as it once had contained merely water, flogs and harmless floating things. The horror of that death by drowning lived in the area behind the Casvanda hedge like a mad relation, a family scandal or a hereditary illness waiting to re-emerge. It was a blot, a black stinking blot. (Clear, 107 - 108).

... the cow has died, drowned in the well. In that well, deep and story and still, in which all must down to die. The novel of the world it was secret and hidden in thick folds of grass, from which they all emerged and to which they must return, crawling on their hands and knees (Clear, 90).

The repeated surging, in Tara's consciousness, of the image of her mother's "flabby, floury skin punctured with a hundred minute needle-holes" (Clear, 23), intensifies the atmosphere of sickness and unwholesomeness that hangs about the house and its inmates.

For the most part, the images Anita Desai uses are morbid, and revolting but she is equally capable of employing pleasant images of life and vitality. The image of the ‘tree’ to which Aunt Mira is compared or the images of idyllic childhood joy in the same novel. The choice of her
images are, therefore determined by themes and characters. Her use of imagery is to capture the subtleties of both inner and the outer world of her characters. She believes, It is the movement of the winy one tries to capture, not the bird. That is, it is the image that meatless, the symbol, the myth, the feat of associating them, of relating them, of constructing with them... it must be done spontaneously, compulsively subconsciously, 'only connect'. That is what a writer existence is all about - he connects, he connects, all the time, he connects. It is a process that does indeed employ language, but also transcends it.

Anita Desai's use of images serves variety of ends such as development of theme, evocation of the tone, of atmosphere growth of character and feminism. Her artistry is seen in the perfect correlation between images and themes on the one hand and images and characters on the other.
Anita Desai remains primarily a novelist of moods, of persistent states of mind or psyche. Most of her novels are extended narratives of states of being which do not cohere into plot or structure in the conventional sense. Anita Desai sees the world in terms of experience as it emerges from the encounters of the experienced self with the world outside. Her primary emphasis is, thus, on sights and sounds, on movements and patterns both physical and mental as they impinge on the consciousness of her protagonists. Her protagonists are usually sensitive women, who, haunted by a peculiar sense of doom, withdraw into a sequestered world of their own. Anita Desai dwells on the variety and complicity of this limited world with the sensitivity and imagination of a poet. She observes every sight and sound with an intensity that not only damages but also baffles us. This intensity and density of texture compensates for the absence of a strong plot or story line in her fiction.

SUMMING UP

Strangely enough Anita Desai herself denies using the stream of consciousness: I have often been accused ... I mean said to indulge in the
stream consciousness in a rather according voice... I haven't actually because for an entirely subjective like myself, this could easily become self-indulgence, and therefore one has to observe a certain discipline, set one self certain limits. If I didn't, the stream of consciousness would become a dangerous method for me. Then there is another reason, I didn't wish to exclude the prismatic quality of life from fiction ... I find it too interesting and purely subjective method of writing purely make it impossible (K.B.Vaid 41). In a sense, she is right in so denying, since the stream of consciousness as she handles it is not quite the same as the one used by Joyce and Woolf. However she makes deft use of 'the interior monologue' to explore the consciousness of her characters. And it is this use of the 'interior monologue' that leads a confessional tone to her narrative.

Her characters "reminiscent excursions drawback the curtains of
time allowing the past to flow into the present and become the present" (Belliappa 7). Perhaps what gives Anita Desai's fiction its distinctive impress is the lyrical mode, in the handling of which she has few equals in Indian fiction in English. It is this mode more than any other aspect of her technique that lends intensity to her novels and makes poignant and authentic of her rendering of states of troubled minds, of tortured
consciousness, of nebulous shades of feeling and corresponding images of women.

In fact, her novels especially the earlier one like, Cry, The Peacock read like poems. Anita Desai has been declared unsurpassed" (Srinivasa Iyengar, 175) as a creator of mood and atmosphere whether it is the evocation of the incarcerating gloom of old family house situated in decaying old Delhi or the torrential muddy monsoon battering a sea lashed island or the lurid glow of a forest fire at top a still and barren Himalayan foot hill, Anita Desai is equally successful.

Anita Desai is portraying feminism and the images of women, the tortured psyche, of alienation and estrangement of an individual, a sensitive, 'not average' individuals and in using self-conscious, highly evolved stylistic devices, has broken new ground in Indian fiction in English and thereby added a new dimension to it.

The strength of Anita Desai lies in highlighting the readers awareness to 'centre of consciousness' within her lonely individuals. Her weakness is in her occasional failure to imaginatively synthesize her creative attitudes with the outer rhythms of language. The protagonists in each of these novels learning with oneself, with one’s conscience, one’s own illusions and despairs. Anita Desai projects their reconciliation, with
self and environment, by presenting their epiphany experiences in an artistic way.

The world of Anita Desai’s novel is an ambivalent one, it is a world where central harmony is aspired, but not arrived at and the desire to love and the desire to live clashes violently with the desire to withdraw and achieve harmony. Anita Desai is always primarily occupied with the subjective experience of her people, their sensations in the presence of one another, and at the same time, she is aware how she looks from the outside of their tone and manner, the setting in which they play their parts, and that which gives them an objective reality. Involvement and stillness are incompatible by their nature, yet they strive to exist together. In all her novels there is striving on the part of the protagonists towards arriving at more authentic way of life than the one which is available to them. There is a need to be loved.

All her characters desire this above all else, but they also resist to surrender and involvement. Surrender of self, appears to her protagonists to be a subtraction from their personal freedom and wholeness. Anita Desai’s protagonists are in quest for more satisfying and consoling conditions in a universe that is based on justice, unity,
harmony and concord. Most of her protagonists are in search of freedom, solitude and individual perfection. The quest for freedom and love haunts them forever. But the situation in which they find themselves enmeshed stifles and suffocates them. It is through their revolt that they project their futility and meaninglessness of existence. It is true their concept and scorn against demeaning and dehumanizing conditions that they cry for redemption.

They conceive themselves like condemned prisoners living in isolated death cells. They are restless to the extent of being irrational and mad, chronically obsessed and abnormally anxious to come out of the confines a lifeless deadly prison bars. Every novel of Anita Desai underlines the emergence of a hidden oasis in the desert of chaos and absurdity of the conditions of protagonists revealed through their inner impressions, passing fancies and vanishing thoughts springing from their self-created shields of myths and metaphysics. Anita Desai perceives inner life, profoundly and privately. Like her English counterparts, her emphasis is on the reality to discover the discrepancy and dilemma of the exempted territories of life in the new world. She expresses her concern over the unjust cosmic order and she raises her inner cry at the absurdity and meaninglessness of the world and emphasizes the powerful urge of man for liberation and freedom.
As a novelist her distinguishing qualities are many, the chief among them being the subordination of the background to the characters and the deft handling of language, imagery and syntax in order to convey an intimate expression of the inner world of her characters. She insists on analyzing her character and the story is important only in so far as it reflects the obsessions of her character. Free from a journalistic enthusiasm for depicting the socio-political life in India, Mrs. Desai makes each work of her, a hunting exploration of the psychic self. Even a cursory glance into the works of the writer would reveal three important areas of excellence: characterization, theme and plot structure. Her style, unique in its own way, is beautifully suited to her need and the characters and themes are neatly organized under a compact and distinctive world in miniature.