CHAPTER-I
INTRODUCTION

Indian English Women Fiction: A Brief Survey

Anita Desai is one of the famous Indian novelists short story writers, screen writers and story writers she has enriched Indian English Fiction with her significant literary contribution. The present topic “Anita Desai as a writer: A critical reassessment”, has been chosen for research as the researcher has observed that Anita Desai’s works have been explored from many angles and has scope to reassess. The present study is based on the belief that a study in this area is quite advantageous and a fruitful endeavour. This study is unique in that, the magnitude of the study is very comprehensive as it includes all the twelve novels and short stories of Anita Desai put together.

In India Toru Dutt is one of the earliest woman writer. She wrote both in French and an English novel before she died at the age of 21 in 1877. Other women writers too have since made their marks in Indian fiction in English. But she lived a life insulated from the currents of the seething world outside. Her understanding of a romantic love was largely drawn from literature while death was something she had seen. When she turned to the writing of fiction, it was natural she should draw upon the limited fund of her own experience. In the result, both her novels - Bianca, or The Young Spanish Maiden and Le Journal de Mademoiselle d’Arvers - became inevitably, at whatever remove autobiographical projections. The unfinished Bianca appeared posthumously in the Bengal Magazine, in 1878; Le Journal was published, also posthumously, in France, and recently (1963) an English translation by Prithwindra Mukherjee came out serially in the Illustrated Weekly. The story of Bianca and her sister Inez and the story of Marguerite and
Sister Veronique are two separate attempts to tell the same inner tragedy of sisterly love and bereavement. Her creation of women characters in English reinforcing the conventional myth in a patriotic manner was a necessity in the contemporary society. She followed Raja Ram Mohan Roy in the social backwardness, stifling conformity and cruelty of Indian caste-society in the middle in the 19th century.

The thematic concerns of the early women writers led to the emergence of the Indian women in the fast changing social milieu. Among other early novels by women writers may be mentioned Raj Lakshmi Debi's *The Hindu Wife*, or *The Enchanted Fruit* (1876) and Mrs. Krupabai Satthianadhan's *Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life* (1894) and *Saguna: A Story of Native Christian Life* (1895) were autobiographical. The first woman novelist in Bengali and two of her novels were translated into English as *An Unfinished Song* (1913) and *The Fatal Garland* (1915), a historical novel. As in Toru's Marguerite story, in *An Unfinished Song* also the heroine, Moni, changes from Romanath the sophisticated but flawed barrister to Doctor Chotu whom she marries happily in the end. In *The Fatal Garland*, Ganesh Dev is torn between Shakti whom he loves and Nirupamam whom he marries under the misapprehension included by his mother that Shakti is married already. S. B. Nikambe's *Ratnabai*, was a semi-autobiographical sketch with characteristic emphasis on subjectivity and private experience. Rockey Sakhawat Hossain’s *Sultana’s Dream* presented topsy-world in which men were kept behind purdahs. Man takes the status of a women and the narrator had a caustic laugh at man.

Swarna Kumari was one of the most distinguished literary figures of the time, and a torchbearer in the tradition of women's writing in Bengal. The advent to Swarna Kumari on the literary scene
of Bengal heralded a new era of women. She was the first writer to show of the strength of women’s writing and raise women’s creations to a position of respect.

Santa and Sita Chatterjee daughters of Ramananda Chatterjee, editor of the Modern Review, had a Brahmo background, and wrote novels and short stories in Bengali and had them translated into English afterwards: *Tales of Bengal* (1922), *The Cage of Gold* (1923) and *The Garden Creeper* (1931). Already there is a hint of the new realism breaking into the mould of traditional romance. Anindita of Sita Chatterjee’s *The Knight Errant* has vague affiliations with Tagore’s *Binodini* but lacks the latter’s psychological subtlety.

Cornelia Sorabji, the Oxford-educated lawyer, with a spirit of adventure and missionary zeal, fought for the cause of women, especially widows and women in purdahs, was the author of a large number of stories, some of which appeared in the Macmillan’s Magazine and the Nine-Tenth Century and after. Her best work was collected in *Love and Life behind the Puradh* (1901), *Sun-Babies: Studies in the child-Life of India* (1904) and *Between the Twilights* (1908). Coming from a Parsi-Christian background, in her most successful work Miss Sorabji tried to penetrate the silken curtain of the 'purdah' and reveal the nuances of femininity. Are love and exciting life possible behind the purdah? Indeed, yes; with just a shade of difference, may be, yet love and life all the same. Ecstasy, tragedy, tragi-comedy, comedy are all possible behind the purdah. The situations are often touched with sadness, melancholy, sometimes even despair; and early widowhood (if not sati or self-immolation) made woman’s life a precarious affair. The silent suffering, however, is often more eloquent than violent action or speech that tears passion to
tatters. A later writer, Iqbalunnisa Hussain, in her *purdah and Polygamy: Life in an Indian Muslim Household* (1944), has also tried with commendable success to present the currents and cross-currents in a typical Muslim family.

Only after the Second World War the women novelists of quality have begun enriching Indian fiction in English. Of these writers, Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala are unquestionably the most outstanding. An eminent critic, Dr. A. V. K. Krishna Rao, holds Kamala Markandaya in high regard. He has said:

"Kamala Markandaya's novels, in comparison with those of her contemporary women writers, seem to be more fully reflective of the awakened feminine sensibility in modern India as she attempts to project the image of the changing traditional society. As such, Markandaya merits a special mention both by virtue of the variety and complexity of her achievement, and as representative of a major trend in the history of the Indo-Anglian novel"\(^1\).

Kamala Markandaya's first novel, *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), has been compared with Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth*, though a nearer and after analogy would be K.S. Venkataramani's *Murugan the Tiller*. Markandaya takes us to the heart of a South Indian - or Tamil Nadu - village where life has apparently not changed for a thousand years. Now industry and modern technology invade the village in the shape of a tannery, and from this impact sinister consequences issue. Markandaya writes about fear, hunger and despair are the constant companions of the peasant - "fear of the dark future; fear of the sharpness of hunger; fear of the blackness of death". What 'nectar' was to be churned out of the muddies ocean of poverty and misery? Where was the cure for the advancing disease of over
population or the hopeless wailing of the helpless?. Work without hope draws nectar in a sieve, and hope without an object cannot live.

*Nectar in a Sieve* recalls Venkataramani’s *Murugan the Tiller*, Markandaya’s *Some Inner Fury* (1957) recalls his *Kandan the Patriot*. Where Venkataramani is poetical and masculine, Markanadaya is suggestive and feminine. If her writing is less rich in imagery, it has more ease and partakes more of life's fitful fever. Like her earlier novel, this too is cast in the autobiographical form and exploits the freedom of reverie. But, of course, there is a world of difference between Rukmini and Mira, the heroine of *Some Inner Fury*. Mira is a creature of imagination and memory, and in her, naturalness and sophistication are in uneasy partnership. The story begins with the return of her brother Kit with his Oxford friend Richard. Govind her adopted brother, Premala who marries Kit, and Roshan the rich lady who angles in the troubled waters of emancipation and revolutionary politics comprise the principal *Dramatis personae*. As H. M. Williams has rightly observed:

“Yet Markandaya’s picture is not despairing. Human dignity survives, especially in the passionate and loyal Rukmani, a brilliantly conceived character who changes from dignified stoicism to acts of near lunatic madness when goaded beyond patience are made vividly credible. The dignified religious sense of fate in the Indian peasant is portrayed with sympathy”².

*Some Inner Fury* is a tragedy engineered by politics, even as *Nectar in a Sieve* is a tragedy engineered by economics; and in both novels the chief characters transcend the bludgeoning of economic or political mischance and assert the unconquerable spirit of humanity. Kamala Markandaya’s third novel, *A Silence of Desire* (1961), leaves
economics and politics behind and invades the imponderable realm of spiritual realities. 'Quit India' has been followed by partition and independence, and ten years have elapsed since then. The scene is an obscure town, a white-washed house in the suburbs, and a village beyond the river reached by a ferry. Dandekar, a government servant, tortures himself and nearly goes to pieces because his wife, Sarojini, ailing from a tumour, seeks faith-cure from the 'Swamy', sometimes at the white-washed house and sometimes in his village retreat. *Possession* (1963), fourth novel, is in a sense, a continuation of *A Silence of Desire*. The swamy figures again, but he seems to have grown in the meantime; he is a 'modern' Swamy, he flies to London, he is as much at home in society as among the silences, and he has admirers (if not disciples) in the most sophisticated circles.

In her fifth novel, *A Handful of Rice* (1966), Kamala Markandaya avoids the disturbing extravagance of possession - extravagance in scene and situation. If the outer theme of *Nectar in a Sieve* was rural economics, the theme of *A Handful of Rice* is urban economics. In her latest novel, *The Coffee Dams* (1969), Kamala Markandaya returns, in a sense, to the theme of her first effort at fiction, *Nectar in a Sieve*, but of course her art, in the intervening years, has grown sophisticated, and she writes now, less from the freshness and compulsion of spontaneity and rather more than the assurance of her mature craftsmanship.

Like the woman poets of the post-Independence period, the women novelists too form a sizable and significant school. The work of the earliest of these writers of fictions, Mrs. Ruth Prawer Jhabvala has published eight novels - *To Whom She Will* (1955), *The Nature of Passion* (1956), *Esmond in India* (1958), *The Householder* (1960), *Get Ready for Battle* (1962), *A Backward Place* (1965), *A New Dominion* (1973), and
Heat and Dust (1975)- and two collections of short stories, Like Birds, Like Fishes (1963) and A Stronger Climate (1968). Born in Germany of Polish parents, she came to England in 1939 when she was twelve, and took and M.A. degree at the London University; and having married an Indian architect in 1951, she has since settled down in Delhi. Mrs. Jhabvala is the Indian - or Indo-Anglian - approximation to Joseph Conrad, but hers is a feminine contemporary urban sensibility in contrast to that of the masculine Victorian novelist of the sea and of lands beyond the seas. Living in Delhi in the years after independence, Mrs. Jhabvala has had opportunities of exercising her powers of close observation on a milieu that changes chameleon-like from local to cosmopolitan, from traditional to conventional, from naive to sophisticated; only, sometimes one hardly knows which is which! In Delhi the Unreal City, there is such a confusion of categories, such a jumbling of modes, such a pot-pouri of manners, customs, poses, affectations attitudinisations that one cannot say for certain whether one is dreaming or awake.

In To Whom She Will, while Amrita and Hari think have fallen in love and desire to marry, their families have other views and succeed in marrying off Hari to Sushila Anand, and so the way is cleared at last for Amrita's marriage to Krishna. The families muddle through somehow, and all's well that ends well. This is a simple plot, uncomplicated by inter-racial or illicit relationships. But, then, To Whom She Will was Mrs. Jhabvala's first exercise in fiction, and indeed appeared with a glossary followed by a list of recipes.

In the second novel, The Nature of Passion, a background of sherbet-drinking and pan-chewing helps two wilymen, Dev Raj and Lalaji, to throw out feelers with consummate circumspection. Lalaji
desires a particular contract; Dev Raj’s relative could certainly help Lalaji in the matter - but how about giving Lalaji’s daughter, Nimmi, in marriage to that influential relative’s son? Nothing of course is said openly; the talk is apparently all about renting out houses to foreigners (to Americans preferably) and the taste of aniseed in a pan, but the owl can infer what the jackal has in mind, and vice versa. It is the most enjoyable social documentation.

In *Esmond in India*, the strands of comedy, irony and satire mingle and fuse to make a fabric of fiction that teases and fascinates at once. Rejecting the very eligible Amrit, Gulab has married Esmond Stillwood who is that rare combination, a prig and a pig in one. In Mrs. Jhabvala’s later novels, the comic spirit is focussed, not on marriage-negotiations, but on the trapped married couple who either wriggle within the cage for better understanding as in *The Householder* and in *A Backward Place* or break loose to live their separate lives as in *Get Ready for Battle*, - the rich Gulzarilal living in sin with a widow, his wife living with her improvident brother and feeling frustrated with her efforts to find solace through social welfare activities, and both husband and wife feeling ill at ease with their worthless son, Vishnu. In *The Householder*, the newly married couple, Prem and Indu, start with rudimentary cross-fire; when he says, "I have forbidden you", she flares up, "Who are you to forbid me?", and snorts and stamps her foot. Here Hindu concept of the householder by Yasmine Goonaratne tells that:

“The dominant Hindu view of life, which took shape during the ten centuries that are generally believed to have elapsed between the composition of the Upanishads and the formulation of the codes of Manu and Kautilya (roughly 5000 B. C. to A. D. 500) classifies the life of the ‘householder’ as the second of four Ashramas or stages in Aryan
life: preceded by the period of studentship, it is followed by one of retirement and calm reflection, and at last by renunciation of all worldly interests”.

The domestic scene in *A Backward Place* is superficially the reverse of the one in *Esmond in India*, for here an English girl, Judy, is married to Bal, so impossible. But Judy does her best to sustain him and their children, and sustain the marriage as well. In some of her short stories, Mrs. Jhabvala probes the mind, the sensibility, the agitated heart of the lonely or trapped woman. In 'The Widow', Durga the young rich widow struggles for a while unavailingly against her fate before she resignedly accepts her lot in life and decides to live barely and humbly. In 'The Man with the Dog', another widow, an old woman and a grandmother, develops for the aged Boekelman, a Dutchman that great all devouring love that she should have for God alone. In another story, Lekha who is married to an elderly widower and respects him is suddenly swept off her feet by love, and is as suddenly left high and dry to live in memories alone. Peggy of 'The Aliens' is married to Dev, but life in the Hindu joint family irks her, her "in-laws" are after all "aliens" to her, and even of Dev she is not quite sure. Cathy of 'The Young Couple' is married to Naraian but feels likewise trapped in an uncongenial situation. From excitement to indifference, from indifference to boredom, from boredom to bickering - Cathy and Narian might be "two ruffled birds in a cage". And she needs must agree at last to shed her individuality and become a part of her husband's "large well-fed family".

While Kamala Markandaya and Prawer Jhabvala are the two major women novelists, each with an impressive corpus of fiction to her
credit, there are some other novelists too, each with her own distinctive
talent, her particular range of interests, even her individual style.

Fiction by women writers constitutes a major segment in Indian
English literature. The struggle to establish one’s identity and to assert
one’s individuality has led the women to wage a desperate fight against
the existing social order of the day. It is therefore, imperative for women
to determine their new role and to redefine its parameters. The portrayal
of women in literature helps them to do so as it provides them with role
models drawn from the suffering of the women characters, harassed
under the chauvinistic male domination. Their thematic concerns and
ideological preoccupations paved way to establish the synchronic and
diachronic developments and continuity in the construction of the
subjective of women. The similarities and dissimilarities in the writer’s
perceptions of the selfhood of women, given their different socio-cultural
milieu, suggest a continuum of different possible responses.

Shashi Deshpande holds great worth as an Indian English woman
novelist. She is the only Indian author to have made bold attempts at
giving a voice to the disappointments and frustrations of woman despite
her vehement denial of being a feminist. Referring to her writings K. R.
Srinivas Iyengar expresses a positive outlook and adds:

“In this unpredictable world, even total despite can open up a
new spring of elemental self-confidence. Her language according to
Iyengar flows down undisturbed and there is flexibility wherein she
moves from present to the past and to the present with less strain to
herself as well as the reader”4.

Shashi Deshpande’s novels are concerned with the woman’s search
for her identity – an exploration in to the female psyche her protagonists
undergo an arduous journey to discover themselves and this leads them through a maze of self-doubts and fears. Small wonder if the *Times Literary Supplement* showered praise on her creative use of language:

“Deshpande eschews linguistic pyrotechnics and formal experimentation, but has sufficient command of her tradition to give the lie to the belief that the English language is incapable of expressing any Indian world other than a cosmopolitan one”

*Roots and Shadows*, her first novel, depicts the agony and suffocation experienced by the protagonist Indu in a male-dominated and tradition-bound society. She undergoes great mental trauma when she refuses to play the straitjacketed role of wife imposed upon by society. The man she marries after her heart, to her great disappointment, is no different from the less educated and conservative Indian men. She is even more pained to realize that she herself has all along been unconsciously aping the role of the ideal Indian wife. In her quest for identity, she even develops an extraspatial affair to finally realize that it is possible to exercise autonomy within the parameters of marriage. Shashi Deshpande thus exposes the gross gender discrimination and its fallout in a male-dominated society. *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, the second novel, is about the traumatic experience the protagonist Saru undergoes as her husband refuses to play a second-fiddle role. Saru undergoes great humiliation and neglect as a child and, after marriage, as a wife. *That Long Silence*, the third novel, is about Jaya who, despite having played the role of a wife and mother to perfection, finds herself lonely and estranged. Jaya realizes that she has been unjust to herself and her career as a writer, as she is afraid of inviting any displeasure from her husband. Her fear discourages her from acknowledging her friendship with another man. *The Binding vine*, her fourth novel, deals with the personal tragedy of the protagonist
Urmi to focus attention on victims like Kalpana and Mira. Urmi narrates the pathetic tale of Mira, her mother-in-law, who is a victim of marital rape in marriage. Small Remedies, her latest novel, is about Savitribai Indorekar, the aging doyenne of Hindustani music, who avoids marriage and a home to pursue he genius.

Shashi Deshpande can be added in to the group of domestic novelists because most of her female protagonists and the events in her novels revolve around domestic spheres. M. K. Naik says:

“Understatement is the hallmark of her work, she never indulges in verbal pyrotechnics, her lucid prose never attracts attention to herself by using Indian words. Nor is she interested in the exotic aspects of India, there are no Maharajah’s, tiger hunts and holy men in her works”.

The noted novelist Manju Kapur, a professor of English at Miranda House in Delhi, received the Commonwealth Award for her first novel Difficult Daughters. Her novel A Married Woman is a seductive story of a political and religious upheaval at a time, and it is told with sympathy and intelligence. It is the story of an artist whose canvas challenges the constraints of middle class existence. Manju Kapur in Difficult Daughters presents the image of suffering women. In post-colonial era, partition has ever been the most prolific and prominent area for creative writers. During this phase, number of novels was written on the theme of the destruction. In her writings, Manju Kapur has emphasised on the issues on the context of patriarchy; inter-religious marriages; family bond, co-existence of past and present. As a women writer, Manju Kapur says she wrote in a female voice because she knew no other voice. About the influences on her writing style, she has stated:
“I have evolved my own style, to suit my subject-matter and temperament”.

The renowned and famous novelist Arundhati Roy, author of the only novel, *The God of Small Things*, which won Britain’s Premier Booker prize, the Booker McConnell in 1997. Roy is the first non-expatriate Indian author and the first Indian Women to have won this prize. Roy’s major essays *The End of Imagination* and *The Greater Common God* are available online. She is between the two Indian writers writing in English, who has won the Booker prize, the other one being Salman Rushdie for his *Midnight Children*. Arundhati has never admitted that she is a feminist but *The God of Small Things*, reveals at many places her feminist stance and sensibility. The Booker citation describes the novel as one written with extraordinary linguistic inventiveness.

“With extraordinary linguistic inventiveness Roy funnels the history of South India through the eyes of seven year old twins”.

The novelist reveals a child’s vision of the adult world in this novel, she herself being an unprotected child in some ways as she had reported in an interview:

“I had an unprotected childhood... Two things happen. You grow up quickly. And when you become an adult there is a part of you that remains a child. So the communication between you and your childhood remains open”.

Miss Attia Hosain’s novel, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961), and her earlier collection of short stories, *Phoenix fled* (1953), gave evidence of a talent for reminiscence and sensitive observation that doesn’t seem to have been exploited since to the full. The title story in
the collection starts with the description of an old woman and suddenly works up to evoke the horror of the partition when neighbours turned murderers, and villagers who had once feared the arrival of soldiers now dreaded their departure: when the dread moment was upon them naked of their disguising hopes, they remembered only the urgency of their frenzied need to escape. Terror silenced the women's wails, tore their thoughts from possessions left behind; it smothered the children's whimpering and drove all words from men's tongues but hurry.

The very qualities that gave distinction to her short stories seem to have stood in the way of Attia Hosain’s structuring a full-length novel. Cast in the autobiographical form, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* is a novel in four parts and covers a period of about 20 years in the life of Laila the narrator-heroine. When the novel begins she is fifteen; at the beginning of Part II, she is almost nineteen; and towards the end of the narrative we find her a mother and a widow, and the second half of a century was now two years old. An orphan, Laila is brought up by her rich relatives, and she spends the impressionable years of her girlhood in Lucknow, keeping terms in the University, making friends, and dreaming dreams. Belonging as she does to an influential Muslim Taluqdar family, she is half-distracted by the politics of the thirties, the nationalist being ranged against the alien bureaucracy, and the Muslim Leaguers against the Congress. Sarla Palkar comments rightly:

“In the first place, one cannot neatly compartmentalize the personal history of Lila from the social or national history – in fact what makes Sunlight on a Broken Column a three dimensional novel is the manner is which the personal, the social and national issues keep interacting and reflecting on one another”10.
Of the other women novelists, Shakuntala Shrinagesh published in 1955 a book somewhat out of the ordinary, *The Little Black Box*, in which the story is presented in the form of a diary by the narrator-heroine, Sarla. In his great novel, *The Knot of Vipers*, Francois Mauriac has given us a terrifyingly revealing picture of what family life can become when love and trust are replaced by self-interest, suspicion and intrigue. On his 68th birthday, Louis starts his letter or diary, and he dies in the middle of a sentence. His family are after his money, and resentment wells up in him; his mind is warped almost, - he plans a total 'act of vengeance'! But of course things do not happen as he plans and even such an 'ogre as Louis is ultimately redeemed by Grace. Sarla of *The Little Black Box* is young, unmarried, inexperienced, and a woman; but she shared with Louis a sense of persecution by the family, and her mind - like Louis' - is far from normal, it is clearly neurotic. Fleeing from her family, she is forced by her illness to send several months in a hospital.

Thoughts of 'revenge' alternate with thoughts less bitter, and at last she decides to leave her money to little Nimmi, her brother's daughter, who is uninvolved in the past and is symbolic of innocence and grace. *The Little Black Box* is a morbid novel, and it is sad that a woman so young as Sarla should live so much on a diet of resentment and bitterness. The nurse and the doctor, being outside the family, start the process of her recovery, and Nimmi unconsciously lends her hand too. Like Louis in The Knot of Vipers, Sarla too is redeemed in the end.

Nayantara Sahgal has also published both fiction *A Time to be Happy, This Time of Morning* and non-fiction *Prison and Chocolate Cake, From Fear Set Free*. To essay autobiography - whether veiled or
unveiled - is in her blood. In her first novel, *A Time to be Happy* (1957), the hero Sanad begins by wanting to resign from the British firm of Selkrik and Lowe, and ends by forging his links stronger with the firm. The narrator says, "This is really Sanad's story"; and so indeed it is. The son of a Zamindar, Sanad joins Selkirk and Lowe at their office in Sharanpur, learns to drink and to make love, laes in the waters of sophistication, marries the worthy Kusum, and when freedom comes at last, he has the best of both worlds. There are references to Congress activities and the events of 1942, and although the tale is interesting enough, it is difficult to escape the feeling that the action and characterization haven't been properly integrated and placed in right relation to the background.

In her more mature novel, *This Time of Morning* (1965), Nayantara Sahgal liberally draws upon her knowledge, part firsthand part hearsay, of what happens in the corridors of power, in the drawing rooms of politically very important people, or in the lobbies in parliament; such knowledge must be second nature to her, for she is her mother's daughter as well as Jawaharlal Nehru's niece. Much of the action takes place in Delhi, and particular context is the decline and fall of one of the pillars of the Government, Kalyan Sinha. In her latest novel, *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969), the scene is set in the exotic city designed by Corbusier as the capital of the Indian part of the partitioned Punjab. When this State is again cut up into the Sikh-dominated Punjab and the largely Hindu State of Haryana, Chandigarh being the common capital, there is invitation to trouble from the very beginning. Besides the political background which is very well projected, there is a human background also. Vishal's marriage had been a failure, and after his wife's death he has remained a widower, eking out a furtive satisfaction in a liaison with Gauri, a Bengali businessman's wife. At Chandigarh,
Vishal develops a deeper attachment to Saroj, wife of Inder, who has an affair with Mara, wife of Jit - Inder and Jit being bot in business. It is almost like a chapter from John Updike's Couples! Jit and Mara, however, find one another in the end, Saroj escapes to Delhi to be met there by Dubey, and the insufferable Inder is left to fend for himself. What a set!

Mrs. Sahgal's feeling for politics and her command over English are rather more impressive than her art as a novelist. There is too much contriving, and the principal characters are hardly convincing; and there are satirical patches that stand out as though they have been lifted from Mrs. Sahgal's journalism.

A few of the women novelists of the period have so far attempted sustained fictional writing, most of them remaining content with a solitary novel or two each. Of Santha Rama Rau has a number of travel books to her credit- *Home to India*, *East of Home*, *My Russian Journey* and *Gifts of Passage* - and she has also made a successful dramatic version of Forster's *A Passage of India* (1960). Her novel, *Remember the House* (1956), rings true because she writes of things well within the range of her experience. Childhood and girlhood at Jalnabad are recapitulated with sensitiveness though not with an accession of sentimentality. One outgrows one's childhood, and inevitably life makes its demands on the narrator-heroine, Baba. She meets Nicky and Alix, she dallies with romance till she sees at last that her hero has but feet of clay. *The Adventures* (1970), the story of a young Philippino girl stranded in post-war Japan, however, fails to rise above the level of superficiality, though the exotic setting is portrayed with some expertise. Santha Rama Rau's writing has an ease and
urbanity appropriate to the theme, and she explores and exposes ever so gently the dividing gulf between the East and the West.

Nergis Dalal’s experience of journalism has hardly proved a salutary influence on her fiction. Her Minari (1976) is an account of high class life at a hill station; with conventional characters a Byronic, hero in stock situations. Two Sisters (1973), a contrastive study of twins at opposite poles both physically and mentally, starts promisingly as a keen probe into jealousy but ends in melodrama. And in The Inner Door (1976) the Guide motif of enforced sainthood is handled as crudely as the stock theme of East-West encounter is treated in The Girls from Overseas (1979).

The post-independence India witnessed a spurt of fiction writing by women writer of greater quality in depth. The period between 1915 and 1950 had not produced any significant women writer. Consequently a clear gap of 35 years existed between the post-independence writers and their fore runners. These writers were more realistic in their approach than those of the first generation and were able to project a vision of their own.

Minor fiction by women offers some authentic chronicles of social life in Hindu, Muslim and Parsi households. Venu Chitale’s, the early post-independence novelist portrayed in her novel, In Transit (1950) is an evocative picture of three generations of a Poona Brahmin joint family between the two World Wars and it is the emotional trauma of a traditional middle class Brahmin window weighed down by the age-old traditions and customs. Two novels provide revealing glimpses into the lives of Muslim families: Zeenuth Futehally’s Zohra (1951), provided
realing glimpses in to the Muslim life, culture and manners with Hyderabad in the Gandhian age as its setting.

Vimala Raina’s *Ambapali* (1962) is an ambitious historical novel set in the ancient India of the Buddha’s time. The legendary Ambapali was a celebrated dancer, as beautiful and rich as she was honoured in her Vaishali, and the first woman to be admitted into the Buddha’s fold. The history of Ambapali seems to have fascinated Vimala Raina, to have clamoured to be brought into life, as she confesses in her Introduction, - and her novel is an attempt to bring to light the live force of my country as far back as 600 B.C., and to portray its culture, religion and philosophy and the glory that was. Had she concentrated on the life and personality of Ambapali, Vimala Raina might have succeeded in making her novel a more finished - a more articulate - work. The main story is moving enough. Although surrounded by wealthy admirers, Ambapali gives her heart to the disguised Ajat Shatru, not realizing that he is Vaishali’s enemy. Years later, King Ajat Shatru subjugates Vaishali and comes to claim her. But already she has been accepted by the Buddha, and she has nothing but scorn for the lover who had won her under false pretences and become her country’s courage.

The 1950s and 1960s witnessed comparatively few novels by women. Among these are Lotika Ghose’s *White Dawns of Awakening* (1950); Bani Ray’s *Srilata and Sampa* (1953); Sally Athogia’s *Gold in the Dust* (1958); Tapati Mookerjee’s *Murder Needs a Staircase* (1962) and *Six Faces of Eve* (1963); Padmini Sengupta’s *Red Hibiscus* (1962); Muriel Wasi’s *Too High For Rivalry* (1967) – a fine picture of a girl’s school drawn by an insider; Hilda Raj’s *The House of Ramiah* (1967); Sita Ratnammal’s *Beyond the Jungle* (1968) and Meenakshi Puri’s *Pay on the First* (1968). Veena Paintal’s *Serenity in Storm* (1966) and other
novels including the later *Midnight Woman* (1979) are unabashed pot-boilers.

Rama Mehta's first novel, *Inside the Haveli* (1977) won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1979. The heroine, Geeta, moves from the large freedom of Bombay, where she had received her education to the sheltered prison-like security of an aristocratic 'haveli' in Udaipur. *Inside the Haveli* is a sensitive piece of realistic fiction, even an authentic sociological study, and it is written with a naturalness and poise that are disarming and effective at once. The evocation of scene, character and especially of atmosphere is almost uncanny. Covering a period of 15 years, the novel is properly structured into three roughly equal parts. The balance between repose and movement is well sustained, there is romance but no cheap sex, there is tension but no violence and there is a feeling for the values and the verities.

Among novels by women published during the nineteen seventies may be mentioned Raji Narasimhan's two novels - *The Heart of Standing is that you cannot Fly* (1973) and *Forever Free* (1979) - certainly show a talent for observation, cerebration and effective expression. The first novel with its Empsonian title is set in Delhi, and the characters are drawn from a wide middle class background, and our wretched for sites are often caught off their guard and mummified in these pages. *Forever Free* is touched with more sombre hues and concerns the misadventures of Shree in marriage and outside. Her arranged marriage to Swami is a failure, and so Shree leaves him and seeks solace in Madhav Rao and Carruthers, who use her and then leave her.
Across the world women writers from Indian Diaspora have carved their distinct niche. Bharati Mukherjee is one amongst them. She is born in 1940 in Calcutta, married a Canadian fellow student Clark Blaise, at the University of Iowa, in 1963. She became a naturalized Canadian, got Canadian Citizenship and lived in Toronto and then in Montreal and held teaching positions at Mc. Gill University and Concordia University. While in Canada, Bharati Mukherjee published two novels, *The Tiger's Daughter* in 1971 and *Wife* in 1975. Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife* (1975) is a tale about dimple and her husband Amit Basu who move to New York to live in an appropriate ethnic hetto. Her other novel, *The Tiger's Daughter*, is about a Brahmin girl educated at Vassar (USA) and married to an American; but she returns to India and rediscovers the culture of her people. Veena Nagpal’s *Karmayogi* (1974) and *Compulsion* (1975), which follow the best-seller formula with a vengeance; Shanta Rameshwar Rao’s *Children of God* (1976), which has a Harijan woman as its protagonist; Kamala Das’s *Alphabet of Lust* (1976), which suggests that the novel is not the right medium for this talented poet; Shouri Daniel’s *The Salt Doll* (1977); Jyoti Jafa’s *Nurjahan* (1978); Uma Vasudeva’s *The Song of Anasuya* (1978) and Anita Kumar’s *The Night of the Seven Dawns* (1979).

Mrinalini Sarabhai’s *This Alone is True* (1977), describes the difficulties that have to be faced by a girl of good family who desires to make dancing her career. The endemic prejudice against the profession “the profession of harlots” is reinforced by opposition from the husband and his family. Parvati the heroine finally decides to follow her ‘inner voice’, which here means rejection of her lover Chetan and is possessive mother, and the sacrifice of the joys and fulfilments of a happy marriage.
The rest of the women novelists of the period have so far attempted sustained fictional writing, most of them remaining content with a solitary novel or two each. Of Santha Rama Rau’s two novels, *Remember the House* (1956) is a charming picture of the East-west encounter, particularly as it affects young Indira, whose growth from adolescence to maturity is another theme. *The Adventuress* (1970), the story of a young Philippino girl stranded in post war Japan, however, fails to rise above the level of superficiality though the exotic setting is portrayed with some expertise. Nergis Dalal’s experience of journalism has hardly proved a salutary influence on her fiction. Her *Minari* (1967) is an account of high class life at a Rajasthani hill station, with conventional characters in stock situations involving the ex-ruler, Tejpore, who is the apex of the eternal in famous triasngle, lover: Wife: Husband. *Two Sisters* (1973), a contrastive study of twins the fat Rita and Nina the lesn and pretty at opposite poles both physically and mentally, starts promisingly as a Keen probe into jealousy but when Rita finds that her husband loves Nina, she drugs in to death and it ends in melodrama. And in *The Inner Door* (1976), is located in Sukhananda Ashram, Rishikesh, financed by Chris and Myra from USA. The Guide motif of enforced sainthood is handled as crudely as the stock theme of the East-West encounter is treated in *The Girls from Overseas* (1979).

The minor fiction by women offers some authentic chronicles of social life in Hindu, Muslim and Parsi households. Venu Chitale’s *In Transit* (1950) is an evocative picture of three generations of a Poona Brahmin joint family between the two World Wars. Two novels provide revealing glimpse into the lives of Muslim families; Zeinunth Futehally’s *Zohra* (1951), with Hyderabad in the Gandhian age as its setting, and Attiah Hosain’s *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961), a nostalgic
account of aristocratic life in pre-Partition Lucknow. And Perin Bharucha’s *The Fire Worshippers* (1968) deals with Parsi life. Prominent examples of historical fiction are Vimala Raina’s *Ambapali* (1962) which takes us to the India of Bhuddha’s time and more recently, Monorama Modak’s *Single in the Wheel* (1978), a novel set against the fall of the last Peshwa in the early nineteenth century. Shakuntala Shrinagesh’s one novel, *The Little Black Box* (1955) is an interesting, though not wholly successful, experiment in psychological fiction, depicting the thought processes of Sarala, an embittered rich woman, who lies dying in a hospital with her money-box under her bed.

The nineteen fifties and sixties witnessed comparatively few novels by women. Among these are Lotika Ghose’s *White Dawns of Awakening* (1950); Mrinalini Sarabhai’s *This Alone is True* (1952); Bani Ray’s *Srilata and Sampa* (1953); Sally Athogia’s *Gold in the Dust* (1958); Tapati Mookerjee’s *Murder Needs a Staircase* (1962) and *Six Faces of Eve* (1963); Padmini Sengupta’s *Red Hebiscus* (1962); Muriel Wasi’s *Too High For Rivalry* (1967) – a fine picture of a girl’s school drawn by an insider; Hilda Raj’s *The House of Ramiah* (1967); Sita Ratnammal’s *Beyond the Jungle* (1968) and Meenakshi Puri’s *Pay on the First* (1968). Veena Paintal’s *Serenity in Storm* (1966) and other novels including the later *Midnight Woman* (1979) are unabashed pot-boilers.

Among novels by women published during the nineteen seventies may be mentioned Raji Narasimhan’s *The Heart of Standing is you cannot Fly* (1973) and *Forever Free* (1979) – an absorbing tale of a young woman’s search for fulfilment; Bharati Mukherjee’s *Tiger’s Daughter* (1973) and *Wife* (1976) a sympathetic study of a frustrated Bengali wife in New York; Veena Nagpal’s *Karmayogi* (1974) and
Compulsion (1975), which follow the best-seller formula with a vengeance.

Jai Nimbkar’s *Temporary Answers* (1974) and *A Joint Venture* (1988) deal with the middle class married woman’s identity crisis in the contemporary male-dominated Indian society. The protagonist in her first novel gives us a sense of lived reality, making the novel most autobiographical, authentic not only in terms of details of a ‘lived life’ but in terms of psychological reality as well. Her protagonists in general suffer due to the existing inequality between the sexes. Shanta Rameshwar Rao’s *Children of God* (1976) which has a Harijan woman as its protagonist; Kamala Das’s *Alphabet of Lust* (1976), which suggests that the novel is not the right medium for this talented poet; Rama Mehta’s *Inside the Haveli* (1977, Sahitya Akademi Award 1979) an engaging story of Rajasthan Purdah life; Shouri Daniel’s *The Salt Doll* (1977); Joyti Jafa’s *Nurjahan* (1978); Uma Vasudeva’s *The Song of Anasuya* (1978) and Anita Kumar’s *The Night of the Seven Dawns* (1979).

Ashapurna Devi has focus on the revival of a reformed traditional womanhood that would accommodate women’s need for self-expression. In her Trilogy, *Pratham Pratishruti, Subarnalata and Bakul Katha*, she traces the progression of the feminist movement from colonial to post-colonial periods in India. She finds that the contemporary, educated and ecumenically independent women, like Bakul in *Bakul Katha*, the last part of her trilogy, have become more self-centred than the women of earlier generations, like Satyvati and Subarnalata in *Pratham Pratishruti* and *Subarnalata* respectively. Ashapurna Devi advocates a re-vision of traditional community were the relations between men and women and between older and younger
women are not based on the subservience of one to the other, but where women enjoy the same rights and privileges and have men in an affirmation of human values.

Gita Hariharan, the winner of the Commonwealth Award for her first novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* won the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize for Best First of Book, portrays women who battle in their relationship with men and society. Her protagonist passes through a lacerating process of identity crises. There is effective communication between the characters that keep her works flowing. Gita relates the relevance of Indian epic stories in the context of contemporary India scenario. Her women protagonists are the representatives of the present-day intellectual women, and she does not confront them with problems like loneliness and alienation. At the end, they feel that they have but an ephemeral existence. Her characters are not only interesting to read, but are thought provoking. Her work since then includes the short story collection *The Art of Dying*, and the novels, *When Dreams Travel*, *In Times of Siege* and *Fugitive Histories*.

Ismat Chugatai, attracts our attention with her novel *The Hearts Breaks Free*, which brings the story of oppressed people like Bua. Here Chugatai shows young and exuberant Bua in trouble, both physically and emotionally, when she submits to the control of traditional family. In contrast, Qudsia and Shabir, being rebellious isolates themselves from the traditional community, are able to find fulfilling life. Chugatai’s novel openly reveals the revolutionary and reconstructive features of their utopian community to the society. So that it can see how the outsider’s community function as a family in an extended scene, but it is different from the traditional Indian family where the men’s and elders
authority quickly takes over, and women are forced to earn merit by sacrifice.

Uma Vasudev’s women can be called truly liberated. They are not bothered by traditional middle class attitudes, views, opinions, and taboos, which render them destitute and condemn them to live within the four walls of their homes. In her novels, *The Song of Anasuya* (1978) and *Shreya of Sonargrh* (1993), her characters are depicted as liberated women their own clandestine affairs.

Chhaya Dattar and Popati Hiranandani tried to create self-authenticating spaces that liberate by disconnecting their women character from their patriarchally constructed social ties. Chhaya Dattar, in her autobiographical story *In Search of Me*, explains her experiences as a social worker in the tribal world. While recording the unionized activities of the farm labours who are mostly women, are cut off temporarily from her own feminist problem. Dattar’s responses to her surroundings possess a poetic and dramatic intensity that articulates her newly found creativity. Her vision a feminist liberation provide avenues of becoming in the world as the registering of women’s experiences, in her story, is framed by an engagement with their denial of dependence and self-sacrifice. Dattar provides images of feminist subjects, actively creating their own destinies and these images stand in contrast to the iconic figure of the female as passive, culturally fixed in an objective relationship in which she is always the inferior.

Zai Whitaker is the author of the novel *Up the Ghat* though she published her husband’s biography entitled *Snake Man* (1990). The novel *Up the Ghat* short listed for the *Commonwealth Writers Prize* in the Best First Book Category of the Eurasian region in 1993, which focuses
on the Indian woman’s frustrations in a humorous way. He works include *Andamans Boy*, *Kali and the Rat Snake*, and *Cobra in my Kitchen*. Dina Mehta’s singular novel *And Some Take a Lover* reflects the conflicting loyalties of a middle-class Parsi family in Bombay, enmeshed in the turmoil caused by the Quit India movement and the Naval Ratings Mutiny of 1946. The protagonist Roshni Wadia argues with her family about the British mal-administration, which led to the man-made Bengal famine of 1941, in which thousands of poor people died at starvation. Kiran Desai, author of *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* published while at Hollins in 1998, when she was twenty seven. The book was well received by critics, and the book received the *Betty Trask Award* from the British Society of Authors. Her second novel *The Inheritance of Loss* was published in 2006 and it was selected as a *Publishers Weekly* Best Book of the year 2006.

Anita Desai is one of the major voices in modern Indian English fiction. In her novel, there is a shift from the collective to the personal, from the communal to the individual. K. R. Shrinivasa Iyengar stated:

“The first two novels of Anita Desai, *Cry, The Peacock* and *Voices in the City* have added a new dimension to the achievement of the Indian women writers in India”11.

Anita Desai (1937- ), one of the youngest major Indian English women novelists, is more interested in the interior landscape of the mind than in political and social realities. Writing, for her, is an effort to discover, and then to underline, and finally to convey the true significance of things. Her novels, according to her, ‘deal with what Ortega Y Gasset called the terror of facing, single-handed, the ferocious assaults of existence. Desai’s protagonists are persons ‘for whom ‘aloneness alone’ is the sole natural condition, aloneness alone the treasure worth
treasuring’. They are mostly women, though they have reached different stages in life, who are all fragile introverts ‘trapped in their own skins’. Their emotional traumas sometimes lead to violent death in the end.

Anita Desai has added a new dimension to Indian English fiction by focusing on, the inner world of her characters. Her preoccupation with the individual and her/his psychic complexities sets her apart from her contemporaries. Shyam A, Asnani opines:

“Desai is not interested in social or political probing, the outer weather, the physical geography, or the visible action like Kamala Markandaya and Nayantara sahgal. Her forte is the exploration of the interior world, plunging into the limitless depths of the mind, and bringing into relief the hidden contours of the human psyche.”

Anita Desai’s twelve novels, collections of short stories, and children books, spanning a writing career of forty-five years, deal with a wide variety of characters and locations, reflecting her own multi-cultural experiences. They encompass the manifold facets of life in India for both Indian and foreigners. *Cry, The Peacock, Voices In The City, Where Shall We Go This Summer?, Fire on the Mountain, Clear Light of Day, Village By The Sea, In Custody* and *Journal to Ithaca*, life in pre-war Germany, *Baumgartner’s Bombay*, the Cross-cultural experience of life in England *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, the problems of assimilations for Indians in the United States. *Fasting, Feasting*; and, most recently, her newly-developed interest in Mexico have found expression in *The Zigzag Way*. 
Maya in *Cry, The Peacock* (1963) is obsessed with death and haunted by an astrological prediction that her marriage is going to end in its fourth year, with the death of either wife or husband, she can establish no effective communication with her husband, who is unsentimental, matter of fact and twice her age. There are no children of the marriage and this accentuates Maya’s isolation, which becomes total when she murders her husband in a fit of insane fury. In *Voices In The City* (1965) Desai tries unsuccessful to make her setting in this case, Calcutta, city of Kali, goddess of death – a contributory factor in another tale of alienated individuals. *Bye-Bye Blackbird* (1971) is the only novel of Anita Desai in which social and political realities take precedence over probing of the mind. This picture of the East-West encounter as revealed in the lives of Indian emigrants to Britain, however, adds little to our awareness of the varied implications of this phenomenon. *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975) marks a return to the autonomous world of inner reality. Sita, the main character here, appears to be a less morbid Maya after four children. The cruelty and callousness of urban life stifle her and when she is with child again, she panics at the thought of bringing a new, fragile being into this harsh world, and runs away to a small island, which has childhood associations for her; but finally allows her husband to persuade her to return. In *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) two alienated souls confront each other. Nanda, an unsentimental old widow living as a recluse in an isolated house in the hills, and Raka, her great grand-daughter a shy, lonely school girl, a convalescent guest, who is a ‘recluse by nature, by instinct’, as opposed to Nanda ‘a recluse out of vengeance for a long life of duty and obligation. *Clear Light of Day* (1980) indicates the main theme of seeing the light. The protagonist, Vimla, is an elderly spinster living in a decaying house surrounded by a neglected garden containing a disused black well, with a neurotic younger brother to
whom going out alone on the street is a nerve shattering ordeal. *Village By The Sea* (1982) is an inspirational story for young children. In a small village named Thul, there lives a poor family of six people Lila and Hari are the eldest children in the family, and are also the main characters. Lila, who is just thirteen years old, has to take charge of the entire household. She is shown to be mature in a very small age. *In Custody* (1984) portrays the mind of Deven and his wife Sarla. In this novel, there is more of action and story element with a chine of happenings, one leading to the other, which brings the protagonist on the verge of ruin. *Baumgartner’s Bombay* (1988) is a novel that deals with the modern phenomenon of displaced person like Baumgartner’s and Lotte, a cabaret dancer. *Journey to Ithaca* (1995) presents the theme of quest-of Matteo in search of the mystery of India, of Sophie in search of the true identity of the Mother, and of Laila in search of blue god Krishna. *Fasting, Feasting* (1999) deals with an Indian family and tells us in a flashback as how Uma, a protagonist, becomes a reluctant victim of entrapment at home. And *The Zigzag Way* (2004) is a story of expatriates and travellers adrift in an unfamiliar land.

Anita Desai’s short stories reflect her deep sense of diversity and multicultural sensibilities. Her short stories have a lot of wisdom and are a fusion of many contemporary themes like globalization, self-assertion, violence and struggle between tradition and modernity. Her first short stories *Games at Twilight and Other Stories* were published in Great Britain in 1978. And it is a collection of eleven short stories written at different times. Another short story is *Diamond Dust and Other Stories* were published in 2000 and it also consists of other stories in it like *Royalty, Winterscape, Underground* and others. Desai’s next work is *The Artist of Disappearance* which was published in 2011 contains three
novellas; they are *The Museum of Final Journeys, Translator Translated* and *Artist of Disappearance*.

Preoccupation with the fragmentation of reality and its impact on the human psyche is of continued interest to Desai in all her major works. She tries to convey truth which is associates with mind not with the body. She distinguishes clearly between truth and reality:

“Reality is merely one-tenth visible section of the iceberg that one sees above the surface of the ocean – art remaining nine –tenths of it that lies below the surface. That is why it is more near Truth than Reality itself. Art does not merely reflect Reality – it enlarges it.”

Anita Desai unravels the tortuous involutions of sensibility with subtlety and fineness and her ability to evoke the changing aspects of Nature matched with human moods is another of her assets, though her easy mastery of the language and her penchant for image and symbol occasionally result in precocity and over writing. If her fiction is able to advance from the vision of aloneness as a psychological state of mind to that of alienation as a metaphysical enigma – as one hopes it will – Anita Desai may one day achieve an amplified pattern of significant exploration of consciousness comparable to Virginia Woolf at her best.

In the present thesis Anita Desai’s twelve novels and collection of short stories are being analysed. The structure of the present study is divided into six chapters. Chapter-I entitled “Introduction”. Here, the researcher provides the title of the intended study and justifies the reasons for selecting the particular title. The chapter also contains the
structure of the study, a note on the life a literary works of Anita Desai and a brief survey of Indian Women Writing in English. Chapter-II takes up for study the first four novels which is titled as “Early Novels of Anita Desai”. They are Cry, The Peacock, Voices In The City, Bye-Bye Blackbird and Where Shall We Go This Summer?. Chapter-III deals with next four novels of Anita Desai and they are Fire on the Mountain, Clear Light of Day, The Village By The Sea and In Custody and it is titled as “Middle Novels of Anita Desai”. Chapter-IV deals with her later novels such as Baumgartner’s Bombay, Journey to Ithaca, Fasting, Feasting and The Zigzag Way and it is titled as “Later Novels of Anita Desai”. Chapter-V deals with the short stories of Anita Desai. Such as Games at Twilight andOther Stories, Diamond Dust and Other Stories and The Artist of Disappearance and it is titled as “Anita Desai’s short stories”. Chapter-VI is entitled as” Conclusion” here, the researcher sums up the analysis of all the novels and short stories of Anita Desai under taken in chapter-II to chapter-V. The researcher also records the inferences drawn from the present study.
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