Chapter - I

The Conscious Craftsmanship
JHUMPA LAHIRI

Jhumpa Lahiri, an author of Indian origin, won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction on Monday April 10, 2000 for her debut collection of short stories, *Interpreter of Maladies* "a slim collection of nine superbly crafted Short Stories ..."

(Sumit Mitra with Arthur J. Pais., 73)

She is the first novelist of Asian Origin to win the prestigious American Prize. She is also a recipient of Trans-Atlantic Review award from Hanfield Foundation and Fiction Prize from Louis Ville Review and as fellow at the Fine Arts work centre in Province Town. She is named by *The New Yorker* as "One of the twenty best writers under the age of forty." Lahiri has joined the elite company of such illustrious winner of Pulitzer as steinbeck, Norman Mailer, Saul Bellow, Ernest Hemingway, Pearl. S.Buck and John updike.

Born in 1967 in London to parents who emigrated from Calcutta and raised in Rhode Island. Her father is a librarian and mother is a teacher. She graduated with a B.A. in English Literature from Bernard College and received an M.A. in English from Boston University. She also has an M.A. in creative writing, an M.A. in Comparative Literatures and the Arts, and the Ph.D. in Renaissance studies. As a child Lahiri wrote extensively, sometimes in collaboration with friends for her school newspaper. This stopped spontaneously when she went to college, but resumed writing again after a short gap.
Speaking about what made her write again she said:

For the first time I had a computer of my own at my desk and I started writing fiction again more seriously. I used to stay late and come into work on stories. Eventually I had enough material to apply to the creative writing program at Boston university. But once that ended, unsure of what to do next I went on to graduate school and got my Ph.D. In the process it became clear to me that I was not meant to be a scholar. It was something I did out of a sense of duty and practicality but it was never something I loved. I still wrote stories on the side, publishing things here and there. The year I finished my dissertation, I was also accepted to The Fine Arts Work Centre in Province Town, and that was something of a miracle. In seven months I got an agent, sold a book, and had a story published in The New Yorker. I’ve been extremely lucky. It’s been the happiest possible ending...

(Lahiri Wins the Pulitzer, 1)

Lahiri has travelled several times to India. She says that her experience of India is neither of a native nor of an emigrant “It is a middle position.” Of Calcutta she says. “I’m very fond of Calcutta, I’ve been coming here since the age of two. I have been learning about the city
where my parents were born and still have a vital connection with. It's been a wonderful part of my life but it's not home."

She states:

It is the place where my parents are from, a place I visited frequently for extended time and formed relationships with people and with my relative and felt a tie over time even though it was a sort of parenthesis in my life to be there...

(Surabhi Khosla. Beauty Brains Bounce and Bengal, 155)

Clearly admitting that her relationship to India changed as she grew older “As I grew, older, going to India was frustrating, because growing up in America is different ... in Calcutta, we had to respect the family concerns”.

In an interview to News week she emphasized the role that Calcutta plays in her imagination. I spent much time in Calcutta as a child but rich time-often at home with my grandmother. It enabled me to experience solitude-ironically, because there were so many people where I began to think imaginatively. Calcutta nourished my interest in seeing things from different points of view. There’s a tradition there that we just does not have here. The ink has not dried yet on our lives here.

With life settled in Boston English has become her first language although Bangla continues to be her mother tongue. On the use of language, she says:

On the use of language, she says:
English in many ways has ended up becoming my first language eventhough technically my first language is Bengali (Bangla) of (English) is the language I feel most confident in. I don't approach English as a foreign language or even as a bilingual language...

(IANS. Interpreter of Indian Americanness, 24)

She also confesses:

I went to Calcutta neither as a tourist nor as a former resident a valuable position. I think as a writer I learn to observe things as an outsider and yet I also know that as how difficult is Calcutta from Rhode Island. I belong there in some fundamental ways I did not seen to belong in the United States...

(Pulitzer for Jhumpa Lahiri, 1)

Jhumpa Lahiri’s Interpreter of Maladies is a collection of nine stories that deal with the characters from Bengal Boston, Calcutta and other locales of the U.S. The nine stories offer a wonderful variety of experiences gathered from the cultural clashes rippling outward in many directions Her stories are the statements of human despair felt particularly within the institution of marriage. The trauma of dislocation, an acute sense of estrangement suffered by the millions of “exiled Indians” who try unsuccessfully to balance themselves between ‘home and abroad’ are the major maladies.
Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* is a precocious debut. It is a sensuous Prose, economical with metaphor and richly abundant with descriptions that voice the alieness of her character in American scene. It is "A riveting mosaic of uprooted character at different stages of success. In their adaptation to the American life with all its triumph and failures"...

( *Jhumpa Lahiri Calcutta Pilgrim*, 1)

Lahiri's book, has been sold in Germany, India and U.K. and several other countries and has been 'a welcome' due to its global relevance. *Los Angeles Times Book Review* praises her for delicate yet "assured" touch "leaving no room for flubbed notes or forced epiphanies"...

(Editorial Reviews)

The best selling writer Amy Tan Commenting on its ethical form writes "You will not be able to put the book down. It is not a mystery novel but in its nine stories, Lahiri 32 offers suspenseful tales. She navigates between Indian traditions ... and the intriguing new world they (her characters) live in. Her stories seem "to have sprung full grown, like Athena from the head of its creator, with all the force and assurance of art". Therefore, the collection is aptly called "a timeless treatise"...

SHOBHA DE’

Shobha De’ “Vatsyayani”, the gelignite, has recently emerged as the most provocatively marvellous, vibrant and sizzling writer in the galaxy of fiction writers in India. Her reactionary writing cuts across caste, class, age, sex race and religion and vibrates the entire world of her readers. The vibration is of course of romanticism and liveliness to life. She wants to be serious in her views but in a prurient way. It is for this reason that she is described as the ageless Queen by the readers who love the beauty of her mind and art as sincerely reflected in her writing, which suits the temperament of modern age.

Born in Satara in the year 1948 in a middle class Maharastrian family she was the youngest in the family with two elder sisters and one elder brother. Her father Mr. Govind Hari Rajadhyaksha was in government job she was a pampered child with her parents fulfilling all her desires and being the youngest she got the attention of everybody in the family. She was educated in Delhi and Mumbai. Shobha De’ did her graduation in Psychology and Sociology from St. Xavier’s College Mumbai. By nature she was Quite a rebel and obstinate. At the age of Seventeen she started modelling without taking it seriously. It provided her opportunity to travel around the globe. Around 1970. She came into the world of journalism with a six months course of mass-communication. She remained associated with popular Bollywood magazines, Star Dust, Society, Celebrity, Sunday and Megacity. At
present, she is just a free-lance writer and she is settled in Mumbai with her family. Yet, her craze for writing is incessant.


The writing of De's present a variety of themes, such as social and individual crisis, existentialism, agony of alienation boredom caused by the world of passions and yet the unending craze for passion. The popularity of Shobha De's novels is due to their contents her mastery over the art of story telling and her use of the language. In fact her novels seem to be the modern vision of picaresque novels of the
eighteenth Century. Her novels also owe there in comparable popularity to her intimate understanding of the Psyche of women and their problems.

Shobha De' claims to be "a pioneer" in the field of "popular fiction" writing. She also claims to be among the first to explore the world of Urban woman in India ...

(C.P. Surendran "Just Another De")

Despite their titillating details, what Shobha De's novels indicate is the arrival of a new Indian women eager to defy rebelliously against the well-entrenched moral orthodoxy of the patriarchal Social system. To David Davidar, they are serious attempts at "discovering India through Indian eyes ..."

(Sarita Vellani, "Interview with David Davidar". 43)

The women character in De's novels revolve around the very Indian concept of romance, sex and love of course through modern temperament in the given social environment. Shobha De' loves the good and beautiful things of life without actually craving for anything. She says in her autobiography:

It makes me feel light. No mountain peeks to conquer nothing to prove. As for waiting it will
always be there in one form or the other, like a comfortable quilt to draw around myself when there is chill in the air...

(Shobha De’, “Getting Personal Selective Memory. 206)

**Small Betrayals**, a collection of some short and beautiful stories, examines the everyday people, their subtle nuances in the characters, the pathetic cravings of the inner Soul of both men and women; wild and uncontrollable longings for sex; Obsession with beauty; the protagonist’s discovery of himself or herself; a newly married couple and their so many mutual problems etc. The author very well tries to study the structure of despair that emerges out of a feminine discourse on the sad tale of hapless women and men. We may recall in this regard the remarks of Luce Irigaray, an eminent exponent of French feminism:

... the relationship of women to their mothers are rare subject to total narcissistic “black Out”; these relationship are completely devalued. Indeed I have never come across a woman who doesn’t suffer from the problem of not being able to resolve in harmony; in the present system, her relationship with her mother and with other women. Psychoanalysis has totally mythologized and ‘Censored’ the positive Value of these relationship...

(Luce Irigarary, *Women’s Exile*. 75)
ANITA DESAI

Anita Desai is among the first Indian novelist who has added a new dimension to Indian English novel by providing an insight into the enduring human situation. Her pre-occupation with the agony of human existence distinguishes her from other women novelists, like Ruthprawar Jhabvala, Kamla Markandaya and Nayantara Sehgal. Anita Desai is perhaps the only Indo-Anglian novelists Who lays stress on the inner landscapes the psychic state of her protagonist, combined with their vivid awareness of the outside world and environment. In Jhabvala the clash between traditional norms and modern aspiration finds exposition; Nayantara Sehgal gives a vivid account of what happens in the corridors and lobbies of political establishment as well as the suffering produced by the upper class aristocracy Kamla Markandaya explores the social change in India in all its complex manifestation where as santa Rama Roa and Attia Hussain have variegated facets of Indian life, Anita Desai’s novels reveal her persistent concern with the themes of anxiety anguish and psychological adaptation impelled by a danger to the individual’s identity in context with the world around. Therefore, she delineates the inner lives of those individuals who suffer from a nagging sense of insecurity and futility in search of means of living in this unsympathetic world. She also reveals their keen struggle to keep alive their individuality while searching some means of reacting to the hostile milieu. Their incapacity set-up within family and daily chores. Therefore,
family, marriage and parenthood intrude necessarily to reveal how and where their effect the characters, resulting in their withdrawal and isolation. Assessing her critically R.K. Shrivastava comments:

Unlike a photographer concerned with the portrayal of surface reality. She is a painter of moods, of wills, of conflicting choices of inner experiences...

(R.K. Shrivastava (ed.) Perspectives On Anita Desai, 132)

But she delineates the social phenomenon necessarily as a projection of the mental make-up of the individual. The shift from the external to inner world portrays the flux of a particular consciousness that determines her vision of life. Consequently she discards the traditional form of realism and explores the turbulent emotional world.

Anita Desai was born in Mussorie on 24th June 1937 of a Bengali father and a German mother. She received her early education at Queen Mary's School, Delhi and later on studied in Miranda College, University of Delhi. Her graduation in Literature was completed from the same college. At the tender age of Seven, she started writing small stories, poems and letters for children's magazine. There is no formal training that has helped her in writing except for reading and constant practice. While writing short stories she "illustrated them diligently and sewed them into cover so as to make them look" proper books...

(R.K. Shrivastava (ed.) Perspectives On Anita Desai, 118)
While at college, she had a few short stories published in the college magazine. She wrote quite a bit for the writer’s workshop Journal and an English magazine called Envoy till her first novel was published in 1963.

Since her childhood she was conscious of being a writer. Writing is a part of her character, temperament, nature and life. The congenial aesthetic environment at home contributed a great deal to fertilize her creative imagination and her grassroots level experiences helped in consolidating the maturity of her vision. In an interview, Anita Desai acknowledged that writing for her is an effort to discover, and then to underline and finally to cover the true significance of things ...

(Yashodhara Dalmia, *An Interview with Anita Desai*. 4)

She has added to her genius by learning from other writers. When she was nine-year-old. She first read *Wuthering Heights*. Although she could not understand half of it, it was a thrill.

It struck me with force of a gale and I still vibrate to it. Even since, Literature has seemed to me more interesting more significant and overwhelming than the real world. Later, of course, other writers meant more to me. In my twenties when I first began to work seriously and consciously on
my novels, it was D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, Henry James and Proust that influenced me more strongly ...

(R.K. Shrivastava (ed.). Perspectives on Anita Desai. 217)

Later the novels of the Japanese writer Kawabata and more modern poetry particularly that of Rimbaud, Hopkins and Lawrence have left deep marks on her.


The collection of short stories Games at Twilight published in 1978, contains a number of short stories like “Pineapple Cake”, “Sale”, “The accompanist”, A Devoted Son”, “The Farewell Party”, Pigeons At Daybreak”, Scholar and Gypsy”, “Private Tuition by Mr. Bose” and “Surface structure”. She has also written a

*Diamond Dust* and *Other Stories* published in the year 2001, is another collection of short stories. This collection contains nine stories. Thematically, *Diamond Dust and Other Stories* records a much noticeable growth and appreciative excellence as Desai’s forte as a storyteller. Here, the stories are a peep into adult Psychic conditions although the milieu is the same, but its hues are, Undoubtedly, more complex and intricate. The characters are from all phases of life and the locale of action transcends the boundary of India and reaches as far as Canada (Winterscape).

Anita Desai, the short story writer, flourished as a promising novelist in the year 1963 with the publication of the first novel *Cry the Peacock*. Her second novel *Voices in the city* was first serialise in *The*

Desai has also won the award for excellence in writing (1979) for her novel Where Shall We Go This Summer? ‘From the Federation of Indian Publishers and the Author’s Guild of India. Her Clear Light of Day was considered for the coveted Booker Prize- the English Literary Award which she lost to William Golding for his novel Rites of Passage. Mrs. Desai’s first novel for children Village by the Sea won her the Guardian Children’s Fiction Award in 1982. She has been a member of the Advisory Board for English of the Sahitya Akademi and has the distinction of being a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, London.

The short stories of Anita Desai spell out the theme of temperamental difference, some worldly Outlooks, some psychological insights, some miserable social plights, some pessimistic philosophies and some just sentimental outbursts.

Anita Desai’s two collections of short stories underscores her fascination for the journey of the mind inwards in preference of what
happens in the world of men and matters. Infact, her preoccupation with the Psyche of men, women and children diverts her complete attention to the questions of being and the business of the nausea of existence. Unlike most Indo-Anglian novelists, Anita Desai regards each of her individuals as unsolved mystery. Since, her characters belong to the affluent sections of the Indian society they really have to face the hardships of survival. Their emotional deprivation constitutes their tragedy. Seema Jena rightly comments:

In the character portrayal again, she is primarily interested in the projection of female protagonists living in a separate closed sequestered world of existential problems and passions, love and hatred. She portrays her characters as individuals facing single handed, the ferocious assaults of existence:...

(Seema Jena, *Voice and Vision of Anita Desai*, 33-34)
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