In contemporary Indian English fiction, Anita Desai occupies a significant place. In all her novels, she has concentrated on her characters. By focussing on her characters, she deals with different aspects of human existence and shows that she is true to life. To present human existence as it is, she poignantly portrays in her novels through her characters human problems and conditions that have permanent human significance. Astutely depicting the inner as well as outer realities of the existence of her characters and effectively employing innovative techniques and novelistic devices in her novels, Desai stands apart from other Indian English novelists.

The thesis "The Anatomy of Human Existence in the Novels of Anita Desai" critically analyses the agony of existence experienced by the major characters of Desai. While analysing their existence an attempt is made to show how they are affected by familial, social, racial, cultural, hereditary, psychological and economic factors. Zeroing in on the tragic characters, escapist characters and regenerated characters, the thesis establishes that Desai is an astute interpreter of life, that she convincingly holds a faithful mirror of human existence, that her vision of life is a balanced one and that she is neither a complete pessimist nor a thorough optimist.
The thesis also stresses Desai's view that those who have the qualities of adjustment and compromise can survive.

The first chapter "Introduction" argues that Desai is one of the greatest Indian English novelists and that many of her novels are great works. By giving a brief thematic analysis of the works of major Indian English novelists, it proves that Desai has enriched Indian English fiction by adding a psychological dimension to it. A short note on Desai's biography and her formative influences is provided. A brief survey of her novels and of the critical works and articles on her novels is given. Stating the purpose of the thesis, the general characteristics of Desai's characters and Desai's vision of life, this chapter distinctively classifies the characters.

The second chapter "Degeneration and Disintegration" analyses the tragic existence of the first group of characters of Desai. The chapter clearly shows how the characters become the prisoners of unfavourable circumstances generated by familial, social, racial, psychological and hereditary factors and how their miserable existence cause their degeneration and disintegration. Showing that neurosis is caused by the domination of id and the development of father-fixation, it
focuses on the fear of death produced by an astrologer's prediction.

That the hereditary trait of lovelessness results in incapacity to love, powerlessness to intensely feel and forcelessness for contact is established. It delineates how the stigma of a mother's infidelity stirs the feelings of agony, frustration and alienation in her son. It shows that the absence of matrimonial pleasures, incompatibility of temperaments and loveless and meaningless existence pave the way for suicide. Stressing that frustrating and disappointing childhood experiences generate the feelings of resignation, loneliness, helplessness, despair and withdrawal, this chapter establishes that racial discrimination produces a deep sense of rootlessness.

The third chapter "Maladjustment and Escapism" focuses on the miserable and pathetic existence of the second group of characters of Desai brought about by the intricate concatenation of circumstances produced by familial, racial, cultural and psychological factors. It establishes that the failure of these characters to understand the significance of fully adapting themselves to the harsh realities of human existence is the real reason for their undergoing a cornucopia of agonizing moments. This chapter stresses that the survival
strategy of escape resorted to by these characters does not help them to solve their problems.

Focussing upon the humiliation heaped on the immigrants, this chapter presents the impact of the racial and cultural prejudices on the personality of some of the characters. While proving that strange and unusual childhood experiences sow the seeds of insecurity, alienation and revolt, it shows that the irreconcilable temperaments of the characters cause their marital discord. Portraying the alienation, frustration, disappointments, bitterness and disgust of these characters, this chapter stresses that both extreme withdrawal and complete involvement result in tragedy and points out that lack of a sense of accommodation creates mental torture. Presenting the unjustifiable tragic death of some characters, it underlines the absurdity and futility of human existence in this meaningless world.

The fourth chapter "Resolution and Regeneration" examines the insupportable problems and insuperable difficulties of the third group of characters of Desai generated by familial, psychological and socio-economic factors. While focussing on the tragic circumstances of these characters, this chapter shows how they refuse to surrender to them and how they become victorious with adjustment, patience, prudence, understanding,
determination and optimism.

Highlighting a paradox of human existence this chapter explains the process of self-discovery and presenting an acute domestic struggle for existence it portrays a family's economic independence and regeneration. It delineates how failures, frustrations, ill-treatment, betrayal and aesthetic experience lead to attain self-reliance. Portraying the grim struggle of these characters for meaningful existence, it shows how they accept the realities of life and face the challenges of human existence. This chapter stresses that regeneration is possible through love, repentance, forgiveness, compromise, perseverance, self-discovery and reconciliation.

The fifth chapter "Art of Fiction" deals with the innovative techniques and novelistic devices that Desai has utilized in her novels to explore inner and outer realities of human existence. It establishes that in the plot construction and in the art of characterization Desai is unique among the Indian English novelists. The symbols, images and similes that Desai has employed in her novels, which help to increase the aesthetic value and enrich the textural density are dealt with.

The techniques of stream of consciousness, contrast, objective correlative, flash back, irony and fantasy used by
Desai are elaborately discussed. This chapter focuses on the beautiful prose style of Desai that has the qualities of lyrical splendour, picturesqueness and lucidity. It shows how Desai employs the devices of long and short sentences, sentences with many adjectives, parenthesis, repetition and interrogation. This chapter points out how Desai's novels suffer from a few limitations.

The sixth chapter "Summation" briefly restates the chief points of what has already been said in the preceding chapters. Focussing on the tragic characters, escapist characters and regnerated characters of Desai it reiterates that Desai sincerely presents a faithful mirror of human existence, that she is neither a complete pessimist nor a complete optimist and that her vision of human existence is a balanced one. This chapter also points out the scope of the novels of Desai for prospective scholars.

Regarding the format of the thesis, the researcher has adhered to the mechanics of writing outlined in MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers 3rd ed. 1989.