CHAPTER V

NOVELS OF LATER PERIOD

In this chapter the last four novels of Anita Desai are considered for the study of the treatment of realism in them. The novels are *Baumgartner’s Bombay*, *Journey to Ithaca*, *Fasting Feasting* and *The Zigzag Way*. They were published in 1988, 1996, 1999 and 2004 respectively. There are the signs of perfection of maturity in Anita Desai as a novelist with the experience of having written eight novels and having gained name and fame at the international level. Yet her obsession with psychological realism has continued in the novels during this period also. Therefore each novel is undertaken in this chapter for a detailed enquiry with reference to realism.

*Baumgartner’s Bombay*

**Introduction**: This novel belongs to the phase of Anita Desai’s career where she shifts to a male-centred narrative and her main focus is on the male protagonist’s psyche. In 1986 Anita Desai had immigrated to England and in 1988 the book was published. *Baumgartner’s Bombay* is a story of pain, of rootlessness, homelessness, of lack of communication. *Baumgartner’s Bombay* is a depiction of the loneliness and detachment experienced especially by exiles and immigrants. The novel depicts the
life of Baumgartner who is a Jew. He experiences the realities of disillusionment with human company, strained relationship with society, victimization, homelessness, racial discrimination and rootlessness which are sensitively treated. The study analyses the actualities of victimization of an individual by impersonal forces which are beyond his control. Further, the researcher examines the aspects of loneliness, nostalgia, misfortune, the enigma, absurdity and meaninglessness of life in this novel. The unpredictability of human existence, the bitter experiences of exiles, isolation and alienation, the impact of childhood on adult personality, the impact of war and communal riots on individuals- these are some of the aspects of realism explored in this novel. However, the II world war and the communal riots in the wake of the partition of India forms the backdrop for the novel. The researcher also examines the stark realities of violence, cruelty, disgust, frustration, suffering, pain and the crucial search for identity. Real life with its void, its perfidy and its betrayal is brought out in varied aspects through the story of Hugo Baumgartner.

The origin of the character of Hugo Baumgartner, lay in an Austrian Jew whom a friend of Anita Desai knew. He was in the habit of collecting leftovers for his brood of cats. Although he was not poor, he lived a life of penury. It is said that while Anita Desai was strolling
around in the Lodhi gardens, that the whole gamut of the novel, its title and the memory of the Austrian Jew, scintillated her mind and the idea of *Baumgartner’s Bombay* was born.

**Plot:** Hugo Baumgartner, a German Jew, lives in Germany. His father, is a prosperous furniture dealer. The II world war being imminent, Hugo’s father loses all his wealth under the Nazi rule. He is tortured and humiliated, and is reduced to the status of psychological devastation and he ultimately commits suicide. In Germany, the Jews were tormented and banished by the Nazi Germans. The onset of the II world war, precipitated torment for the native Jews even in India, under the British rule. They were arrested and detained in Internment camps. Circumstances force Hugo to leave Germany and come to India through the assistance of Herr Pfuehl, his father’s business partner. As directed by Herr Pfuehl, Hugo arrives in Bombay, and meets Chimanlal, who is Herr Pfuehl’s business associate. Hugo finds a kindred soul in Chimanlal, who provides him with security and help. An intimate friendship develops between the two, along with the enhancement of business. Hugo occasionally even visits his home and also accompanies Chimanlal to the horse race course. Soon, both Hugo and Chimanlal together buy a horse and train it to participate in races. It wins several races and obtains fortune for Chimanlal. Chimanlal is overwhelmed by love and gratitude
to Hugo and persuades Hugo to keep the silver trophies for himself. Though his early life in India is happy and quite prosperous, through his business with Chimanlal, as wood merchant, it does not last long. As Hugo holds a German passport, he is arrested by the British and taken to the Internment camp in Ahmednager. Hugo is a very lonely man and he makes no attempt to initiate friendship with Indians, except with Chimanlal. However, he maintains friendly relations with Lotte, a German cabaret dancer. But it is not possible to forego his belief in Germany and his childhood days. He remains fastened to Germany and to his childhood, even after his mother’s death; he can no longer go back to Germany. With Chimanlal’s death, Hugo loses his business connections. He develops into a bedraggled, shabby, solitary and desolate man. He becomes a recluse and leads an atrophied existence. He keeps numerous stray cats for company and becomes known in the vicinity as the ‘billiwallah pagal’. He exhibits peculiar traits, in that, he regularly collects leftovers from restaurants to feed his brood of cats.

In Germany, he had been dark—his darkness had marked him the Jew, der jude. In India, he was fair— and that marked him the firangi. In both the lands, he is not accepted. Hugo remains an outsider throughout. In Germany, he was an outsider marked by his dark complexion. But in India he is a foreigner marked by his fair complexion. Hugo aspires for
acceptance and friendship only from Germans. This trait of seeking friendship only from Germans lands him into trouble and claims his life. He befriends a young German drug addict, by name Kurt. Out of compassion for the vagabond, he takes him to his poor lodgings. But Kurt murders him and decamps with some of Hugo’s silver trophies.

**Analysis:** The unpredictability of life is a stark reality that every human being has to accept and acknowledge. The enigma, that life is, at times, poses such dire forms of uprooting, that man caught in its throes, is hauled recklessly. The predatory Nazi forces disintegrate the innocent Baumgartner family. With the support of Herr Pfuehl, the gentleman from Hamburg who is now, the new owner of the Baumgartner furniture showroom, Hugo emigrates to India, in the hope of earning a livelihood in the timber business of exporting wood.

But Chimanlal’s death comes as a shock to Hugo. Chimanlal’s son refuses to acknowledge Hugo as his father’s business partner. This misfortune postulates a huge disaster for Hugo, who is now deprived of his means of livelihood. This calamity utterly reduces Hugo to the life of penury. He finds better camaraderie with cats. Lotte is his friend and confidante.

The absolute unpredictability of life is displayed in Hugo’s attempt to abide in a particular location. He is dragged from one predicament to
another. His dream of setting up home for his mother in India remains futile, and he ends up a ‘nobody’ and an ‘outsider’. The pre-war casualty and the threatening atmosphere in Germany, force Hugo to leave his motherland. He has to move, in order to survive. With his father’s death, the furniture business, (as noted above), is taken over by Herr Pfuehl. Eventually, Hugo faces the fact that as Jews, he and his mother are in grim danger. The confidence and dependability of home vanishes and Hugo ventures to India. In India, he remains aloof, he does not introject harmoniously. His loneliness deepens with his habit of keeping to himself.

The outbreak of the II world war was a political paroxysm of extraordinary immensity and brought in terrible heinousness and disquietude among the people. The collapse of human values was the most deplorable fact of the war. The repercussions of the war impregnated the psychological and emotional consciousness of the victims caught in its turmoil. The reality of life’s decrepitude and precariousness is thoroughly substantiated by the war. Anita Desai has laid the backdrop of this war for the novel, thereby the danger and uncertainty of those times is portrayed. Hugo is arrested by the British police as he holds a German passport. Hugo, along with other German refugees is condemned to pass six years in the Internment camp. Hugo
feels incapacitated to lead a normal life in the camp. The impending doom imminent back home in Germany, and contact with his mother is blocked and this unnerves Hugo.

Life flows on, inspite of the blankness and vacuum created by war in the lives of the surviving dear ones. The suffering and violence of life is however, arrested by death, as in the case of Hugo’s parents, but life moves on. Life appears to come to a deadlock with the death of a loved one. Despite this life moves on. Even with the reality of the imminent danger of war, preparations are made for Hugo’s immigration to India. Life has its own requirements and it has to continue. Hugo’s father was in the prime of his life, when the Nazi regime claimed his life. Hugo’s mother has also succumbed to a similar fate. With the death of his mother, Hugo becomes dejected and downhearted. Through their agony, Anita Desai expresses the monstrosity of war on innocent victims. The consequent meaninglessness of life is poignantly portrayed. Although the mother’s death creates a deep void, Hugo continues to live in her memory. He acknowledges the fact and continues with life. Hugo had nurtured plans of bringing her to India, but fatebuffets them, as is true of life. His mother is the focal point of his being and her death creates a vacuum, but life moves on.
Pain is an inimical and harsh reality of life. Withstanding pain at various stages of life, Hugo develops resilience and one realizes that pain is a prerequisite for the growth of an individual and therefore, an essential part of life itself. Hugo has to deal with the pain of his uprooted identity. The painful memory of his mother reinforces Hugo’s agony. Hugo attempts at establishing his own identity in India through his business association; but he comes to a disastrous failure. Therefore, he comes to a predicament where he has no identity and his is a struggle towards mere survival. An identification with the home country strengthens an individual’s identity. The outcome of the war brought in, individuals in the throes of uprooted identitities. Nobody identifies and sympathizes with these individuals.

Lotte’s plight is that of a mistress, which has no legal sanctions. She cannot express her agony to anybody except to Hugo. But, she has enjoyed a harmonious relationship with Kanti, and the position of a memsahib, however, for a short while. Lotte too suffers from the predicament of rootlessness and she has dwindled into a state of hard and cold survival. Lotte tries to stabilize her position through reminiscencing her past under Kanti’s benevolence. Lotte cannot reconcile herself to the present and this augments her agony which is expressed through her drink sodden habits. The unbearable loneliness of her life being reflected through her excessive drinking reveals her need for an empathetic companion.
Hugo and Lotte suffer intensely because they are not able to share their anguish with anybody else. The pain of being a refugee creates a sense that their beings are seared apart. Her memories of her glorious past as a memsahib sting her with pain. The insulting treatment of her neighbours make her suffer the harrowing pain of a foreigner. She cannot adjust with the Indian ways of life and each day brings her the agony of loneliness and her painful memories of her past. She escapes imprisonment under the shelter of Kanti Sethia’s name. She and Hugo suffer an overpowering sense of homesickness. It is for the feel of the German language that Hugo visits Lotte. The mental void suffered by these individuals is understandable. Their tension, emotional vacuum and anxiety is due to estranged penchants towards their adopted country.

Hugo and Lotte are in a peculiar predicament. As refugees, they dangle between two destinations. They are uncertain about their homeland and at the same time, they are not able to fraternize with their adopted homeland. Their perpetual visualization of their past and imaginative yearning towards their original homeland, notwithstanding, incapacitates them to recapitulate here. Especially, for Hugo, separation is dual-edged –it is separation from Nazi Germans and from the Indian society. This deep agony has created a trauma, a wound in their psyche. Baumgartner is incapable of striking friendship. Even if he strikes a
friendship, it would be with people like him. As is true, trauma is always associated with a bereavement or deprivation or a sense of loss. Their loss is the loss of their homeland, sense of belonging, culture, language and above all, the loss of family and loved ones. What can be more agonizing than all this? Their pain is real and distinct. A castaway sense of feeling or the feeling of an exile has been implanted in Hugo, right from his childhood days. The very process of his growing up is marked like an outsider. It is a state or circumstance of his subsistence. The sense of an outsider is reinforced in his school experiences and it continues to haunt him. J.Wilson quotes Marx and Engels: “It is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness”.

Hugo’s consciousness of continued rejection has begun with his childhood in Germany. The cruelty of racial discrimination dawns on him only after a series of subtle forms of rejection have been forced on him.

Illustrations such as these–his mother arrives at school after all the mothers have left with their wards; the word ‘jude’ painted on their showroom window. The sense of rejection which agonizes Hugo when he finds that his parents have not sent him a present on Christmas. The realization that he did not belong to the triumphant bright world-these experiences have quite tellingly impressed upon the sensitive mind of Hugo, that he is an outcast, the sense of rejection being strongly
implanted in him from his early childhood. Moreover the scathing remarks of the children made on his nose and his appearance solidify his sense of rejection. The experiences at the Internment camp even harden and consolidate his sensitive psyche. The hostility expressed by the Nazi fellow prisoners killed his desire for his mother tongue. He is cognizant of the fact that he is condemned to survive only in India, the doors of his homeland, being closed forever.

Loss, which is an intrinsic reality of life, has been traced in this study. The loss of home is the predicament of Hugo. Hugo is unable to adjust to Indian life even after fifty years, and eventually he has to return. But he cannot return to his own homeland, because, the Germany of his childhood is destroyed by the war. The fear of survival perpetually gnaws Hugo. This is the sore consequence of the political forces of war and racialism which have also ushered in Hugo the sense of isolation. Disintegration of the family, coupled with war reinforce Hugo’s sense of alienation, isolation and detachment. Hugo’s migration from Germany to India, is not by choice. It has been an involuntary action done to protect himself from oppression caused in his homeland. It is difficult for Hugo to disjoin his relationship with his motherland, till, it is severed by circumstances. Long after he loses track of his mother’s whereabouts in Germany, Hugo survives with just a mental relationship. Therefore, it is
hard for him to detach himself from his past. He lacks the assurance of a bright future. Moreover, the friendlessness and loneliness cause tremendous emotional stress.

The following statement of Dr. Susmita Banerjee, who quotes Edmund Fuller is very relevant. It is that “man not only suffered from war, persecution, famine and ruin, but also from inner problems like despair, isolation, randomness, meaninglessness in his existence.”

Isolation from others is an inherent fact of his existence for Hugo. His feline family gives him a sense of acceptance. For Lotte, drink obscures her inner sense of emptiness. Hugo has his identity with his company of cats, a meaningful and concrete moral being, but it is in fact unsubstantial. People detest his very presence and they decline his company. Therefore, he shies away from company. In his acceptance of the German hippie, Hugo shows concern and love for the society, but the society does not love him. Hugo, a naive, simpleton refugee finds the forces in India, the war and the internal war, too overwhelming.

Apathy is another feature which characterizes an isolated person. Hugo is apathetic towards the goings-on in India. He lacks the political information and therefore, does not participate in any of India’s movements or revolutions. He withdraws and remains unconcerned. Hugo suffers from the predicament of powerlessness and
meaninglessness. He is powerless, in that, he is incapable and incompetent of influencing the decisions in the political and social arena, although they lend a powerful impact on his life. He does not comprehend the details of the forces which loom large in his society. Therefore, this originates in him a sense of meaninglessness. Hugo feels mercilessly ensnared by the existing political and social forces.

The study shows that Hugo suffers a thwarted individuality. The disdainful treatment and ostracism meted out to him and his family in Germany, subject to his Jewish origins, has stunted his personality. He nurses a perpetual fear of being exterminated. His translation into a quiescent and neutral disposition is due to the destructive forces working incessantly around him. Hugo’s life is one of chaos, as he is heaved and lugged by the political fluctuations. In Calcutta, the environment is one of looming absurdity and insanity, in the name of religion.

Isolation and alienation is an intrinsic reality of life. Stephen Koff asserts that,

“a number of scholars from various disciplines have given overt and\or tacit recognition to alienation as one of the central features of existence. .......it is generally acknowledged that alienation involves estrangement,........ one can be estranged from family, friends, church, an
economic organisation, a government, or even from oneself. Certain social (including political) conditions will produce alienation in almost all persons, regardless of their individual personality traits. Alienation is a syndrome of related feelings. It includes a range of attitudes from extreme pessimism to hopelessness, from cynicism to despair."

Therefore, the researcher feels that this statement is relevant to Baumgartner’s condition.

Mingling with people and socialization imbues an individual with culture and shapes his identity. An individual possesses an indigenous aptitude to take in the different aspects of a foreign culture. The lack of this ability would naturally mould him into a weak and timid, sickly personality. A healthy and benevolent attitude should be nourished for a healthy and mature person. Otherwise, an individual faces difficulty in adjusting and relating to others. Loneliness creeps in and he may lose his sense of belonging with the group. One finds that Hugo’s sense of belongingness is absent; he is downright lonely and alienated. No effort is made on his part to belong to the mainstream of life and he withdraws into a cocoon. Disintegration or loss of family can cause a sense of loneliness and isolation in a person. It is very plausible that immigrant situation can cause a sense of isolation and a sense of dislocation.
An unbroken sense of silence conjoins with the sense of isolation. Therefore, as Hugo suffers a sense of isolation, he remains reticent and mute. Hugo is agonized and he holds on to his past rigidly. Hugo is presented as a disintegrated individual. As a refugee, Hugo suffers from an intricate psychological condition that induces in him an inconsolable yearning for his home and his mother. There is an intense sense of homelessness. Often, there is an endeavour to come to terms with the hostile and cold environs and receptions. Therefore, Hugo exists in an ivory tower, shunning company.

Lotte is also an epitome of loneliness. She remarks: “This is how we go, Hugo......in the end– alone.” Hugo and Lotte are consanguineous in their nostalgia, rootlessness, loneliness and misfortune. Home or motherland is a place of refuge, shelter and also a potent fountain head of her individuality and identity, an affinity. Especially the woman identifies herself with her home because she is much more preoccupied with home affairs than her male counterpart. For a woman home is haven. Therefore, these foreigners do not internalise the Indian atmosphere. They are always in quest of a sense of belonging, home and motherland. For Lotte home lies elsewhere. The same is true of Hugo and Julius. But Lotte remains silent about her experiences. It has been a fierce and forcible movement from the homeland, which tugs at their very roots. They are
ostracised from society. Hugo suffers psychological alienation, in that, he has no desire to involve or imbibe Indian culture or values. Nostalgia is his malaise. This bane hinders him from accommodating psychologically to Indianness. A healthy accommodation would have a liberating influence on him. Even after fifty years of stay in India, he remains an alien.

Their encounter with the partition violence and the II world war violates their basic human dignity. Their individuality and identity changes. This is equally severe with Lotte and Gisela. Lotte has to condescend to the position of a mistress and Gisela flippantly moves from one relationship to the other. When the lives of these migrants is scrutinized, one realises that this uprooting or dislocation which takes place not only on the physical plane, but also on the emotional and psychological plane. This is an inevitable reality. Lotte and Gisela become victims of male exploitation. They are victimized not only because they are foreigners with a fair skin, but also because they are women. These women are forced to orchestrate a bargain with Indian men for new identities. However these relationships fail to give them life-long security. And in the bargain they lose their worthiness and honour. These women are severely threatened. Their financial penury and their vulnerable womanhood expose them to brutalities and sexual exploitation. Therefore, they cover the trauma of their loneliness, their
sense of unbearable loss under the garb of cabaret and foul language. They can never return to their homeland. These women, deprived of everything—relatives, family, material belongings, have to start life afresh. Now, this cruel uprooting has changed their attitude and outlook towards life. They have to reconstruct and rehabilitate their lives in an alien land. They are forced to take to the disrespectful profession of cabaret dancing which further exposes them to exploitation. Uncertainty looms large in their lives. If one empathizes with such individuals’ experiential reality, one understands the extent of the undeterminable condition of their present as well as their future. The bleak and uncompassionate reality of the present and the painful reality of past oppression is very difficult to forget. Related to these facts is the apprehension of an unpredictable future. The atmosphere in their homeland which was overloaded with oppression and cruelty, pressurizing them to leave their homelands, has built a sense of fear and apprehension in their psyche. This makes them look back on their childhood days with nostalgia.

Bijay Kumar Das opines—“It has been rightly said that one can take a person out of his country but not the country out of his mind.” It is a legitimate fact that, when a person is forced out of his homeland by oppression or such other cruel circumstances, a sense of panic and misfortune coupled with a separation from one’s ancestral tradition and culture prevails.
Hugo lives in Bombay with a sense of detachment, quite removed from its teeming life. Whereas Gisela whom Hugo had been acquainted with in Calcutta before the war broke out, has come to terms with her present. She is dauntless and positive about her subsistence in the country of her adoption. Gisela rejoices at the fact of her new birth in a new country. She is married to Julius and is quite prosperous. She has been able to accept change and she herself has changed to suit her surroundings. Previously, she had married Om Sahni, a noveau rich; she is an opportunist. She dupes Om Sahni into believing that she is good and she exults in her position as his wife.

However, Lotte embraces the place of the other woman. Kanti, a rich merchant from Calcutta, has provided her with all the exigencies and comforts, a flat in Bombay. He has engaged a servant for her. But soon after Kanti’s death, Lotte is thrown out of the flat by Kanti’s sons. In comparison, with these women, Hugo emerges as an unreservedly impassive and quiescent individual.

“The life of Bombay which had been Hugo’s life for thirty years now, or rather, the setting for his life; he had never actually entered it, never quite captured it; ..........elusive still.” Usha Bande opines, “He lacks the joy of sharing someone’s troubles and having someone to partake his. All his life he stands at the periphery, too aloof to plunge into a relationship, too wary to get involved.” The study proves that, based on the childhood of Hugo, one can govern that he is afraid of involvement in
any friendship. Therefore, the researcher feels that Mrinalini Solanki’s statements are also appropriate. Mrinalini Solanki asserts that Baumgartner was an inhibited child. She quotes Jean Paul Sartre’s statement: “Our essential and immediate behaviour with respect to anguish is flight.” Thus the study evinces that retracting and shrinking back from society is the only technique that he discovers is congenial. Further the discernment of a deep rift between his parents fosters a sense of apprehension and anxiety. Consequently, his adult life is vitiated with the nullifying influence of withdrawal from company.

Hugo’s life reflects emptiness and the incongruity and senselessness of life. He is entrapped into his past, his present life being aimless and meaningless. But Hugo does not resort to suicide as a means of evading failure and despondency. His brood of cats give him unconditional love and acceptance and a meaning to his ruptured sense of identity. Hugo’s is an inexorable, vain struggle against his sense of isolation. Hugo does not overcome his sense of detachment and he is not rehabilitated in the Indian society. The atmosphere around him might furnish the causes. The II world war, the outbreak of communal riots, society’s degeneration into barbarism, the complexity of a new social order of turbulence, doubt, perversion, intolerance, greed and the like are found as some of the causes.
His mute observation of his father’s torture and his consequential suicide, has caused a psychic death in Hugo. “He did not belong to the radiant, the triumphant of the world.”9 “Germany when it flourished had not wanted him.....”10 He is reduced to a number in the Internment camp, thereby validating the fact of anonymity of modern life. Hugo intensely covets loneliness, isolation and non-involvement. Fear looms large, and therefore, Hugo, who is in a state of psychological inertia cannot access human company.

The II world war and the partition riots nourish the social atmosphere with bitterness. Hugo’s struggles are chiefly due to the social conditions. In the midst of such an environment, Hugo’s conflicting struggle is also against his sense of rootlessness. Hugo is emaciated and left without drive to assimilate himself in the Indian society. This is due to the constant blows of destiny on his sensibilities. The little movements on his part to develop brotherhood and amalgamation in the society are blocked half-way by death or separation. Chimanlal in Bombay and Habibulla in Calcutta were Hugo’s business associates. Hugo had shared fraternal relationship with them. The partition riots which ushered in animosity between Hindus and Muslims, drove Habibulla out of Calcutta. Chimanlal’s sad demise served to dissipate Hugo’s business ventures. The issue of rootlessness, estimates the authenticity and sincerity of
relationships among people in society. A man who should be rehabilitated into society, should be envisaged with charity, tolerance and understanding. The social atmosphere being one in which such graces are not able to thrive, Hugo finds all ways towards orientation are blighted. Therefore, Hugo’s feelings of nonchalance and frigidity, result in his being hemmed in into himself. But in order to overcome his sense of loneliness, he has to cultivate relationships in the neighbourhood. Human company alone can save him. However, he is friendly only with Lotte, because with her, he has an affinity of nationality and language and also the misfortune of homelessness.

Subhas Chandra aptly remarks: “It is a mutual rejection that is involved in Baumgartner’s relationship with society. The society does not accept him, but then nor does he remain in the mainstream of society.....”

Hugo, who is thus lonely and friendless, finds himself in a queer dilemma. It is one in which he cannot free himself from his past. He cannot affiliate with the present and uncertain condition of his future. Frank Johnson says that individuals reveal their suffering with regard to their “consciousness of estrangement and idiosyncracy.” He lists out the following symptoms in association with this condition:
A tendency to display excessive anxiety and concern in quite ordinary interactions with people.

A tendency to be engaged with ideas and fantasy.

A tremendous sense of uncertainty at both mental and actional levels.

An all consuming sense of awareness of a lack of “fit” with other individuals or groups.

A tendency to withdraw from others.

An alternating/intermittent fluctuation and indecision toward and away from social contact.

These symptoms codify a ‘schizoid personality.’

The policy of withdrawal or retreat is usually followed to minimise contact with people and to reduce conflict and anxiety. According to Frank Johnson, “exaggerated shyness” is also present. Further he points that, “severe states of separation......are accompanied by eccentricity, peculiarity, and the experience of symptoms which, at times, are disabling.”

Frank Johnson quotes—

“This behaviour pattern manifests shyness, or sensitivity, seclusiveness, avoidance of closer competitive relationships, and also eccentricity. Autistic thinking without loss of capacity to recognize reality is common, as
is daydreaming and the inability to express hostility and ordinary aggressive feelings. These patients react to disturbing experiences and conflicts with apparent detachment”.¹⁶

He also opines that if as a child, the individual has had a super abundance of horrible and miserable experiences with ‘threatening external objects’, then the individual feels that “many objects in the environment must be selectively processed and divested of their threatening quality in order for the individual to survive and continue interacting.”¹⁷

The humiliation and torture of his father at the hands of Nazi Germans, his father’s death and the consequent fall of the family to abject poverty has left an indelible mark on the sensitive Hugo. The arrival of the police car which whisked away his father, to an unknown destination; Frau Baumgartner’s run around from one police station to another culminating into no news of her husband—all these events have very pathetically moved the little Hugo. Words were hardly exchanged but Hugo knew that his father and they were in grave danger. Hugo’s father returned after a fortnight, but life could never return to the normal. He had returned a mere psychic wreck. The novel reveals that,
“when they came near him, he began to shiver– the shiver stated in the back of his neck, making his head jerk like a hen’s, and then ran down into his shoulders so that they shook....”

The menacing presence of Herr Pfuehl and his taking over of their business and their home as well; the intimidating noises outside; the strange behaviour of neighbours; moreover his father’s debilitated body when they pulled it from the gas in the kitchen. All these incidents have implanted an ineffaceable impression on the young Hugo. All these harrowing experiences with the ‘threatening external objects’ (mentioned earlier) have insinuated a sense of dread and trepidation in Hugo.

Mrinalini Solanki provides Horney’s explanation in these words, “such incidents have a ‘cramping influence’ on the mind of the child.” All these occurrences explicate his wariness and vigilance over interacting with people. Hugo leaves Germany in a helpless condition of bewilderment and fear, hoping, however to make a home in India for his mother. But his dream never becomes actualized. The stamp of an alien is perpetually affixed to his name. He is like “an old turtle trudging through dusty Indian soil”.

Hugo is perpetually in fear, as his is a disoriented and equivocal environment. And in such an environment, an individual is subjected to tremendous insecurity and helplessness. Disappointment, frustration, discontent and unhappiness are the familiar facts of human existence. His
hopes of establishing home and a secure life for his mother in India are shaken. There is no hope. Frustrated over his desires, hopeless, the only way to survive is to be all alone. Due to lack of social approval and favour, Hugo confronts uncertainty and instability in his relationships, however scanty they are.

Hugo loses connections with Gisela and Lotte, the two cabaret dancers, who had befriended him in Calcutta. With the outbreak of war, and his detainment for six years in the Internment camp, all relationships obliterated and died a natural death. Gisela and Lotte escape imprisonment owing to the alliance with Indian men. After a hiatus of several years, Hugo finds the occasion of meeting Julius (his German friend of the Internment camp days) and Gisela, his wife. The relationship does not blossom, once again, as Gisela wants to efface every trace of the relationships of the by-gone years.

Frustration naturally sets in. Despondency and gloom are realities that encounter every individual, at one stage of life or the other, in whatever form. Hugo is “.....a man without a family or a country.....” Such a man as Hugo suffers depression and misery is quite plausible and conceivable. Lotte’s words, “Yes, there was nowhere to go. Germany was gone..... Europe was gone ....there is no home for us......” These words only reiterate Hugo’s agony of homelessness. Hugo’s sense of security
has disintegrated with his father’s torture by Nazi regime. His father’s suicide comes as a great jolt which further serves to disrupt the child’s sense of security. However, with his arrival in India and the assistance of Chimanlal and a willingness to accommodate to the new environment, Hugo tries to reconstruct a new self, a new identity. But the order of things is disrupted initially by war and then by the internal war. Hugo withdraws into silence. “He realised at that instant that silence was his natural condition.”

V.L.V.N. Narendrakumar’s opinion is pertinent here. “A profound and unmitigated loneliness is the only truth of life”. He further says that life is a convoluted and confused maze which poses a puzzle to some of its unfortunate dwellers. This is the condition of Hugo. Thus he withdraws into a secluded shell.

Therefore, it is apt to quote Radha Chakravarthy’s statement regarding Hugo, which is as follows, “oblivious to the realities of Bombay, he lives in an illusory past........” Thus, any person who is under Hugo’s circumstances would progressively become nostalgic of home and motherland. The novel says,

“it was as if his mind were trying to construct a wall against history, a wall behind which he could crouch and hide, holding him to a desperate wish that Germany were
still what he had known as a child and that in that dream-country his mother continued to live the life they had lived there together.”

Anita Desai reveals their nostalgia (Hugo and Lotte) in these lines.

“Yet their thoughts, their taste buds, lingered over the food at home as if these comestibles were keys to the past, and in talking of victuals they were not just reminiscing over but actually eating, masticating the past, over and over to extract the last drops of juice, that last drop of flavour.”

Nostalgia extends to food as is natural of life. The foregoing lines from the novel depict the magnitude of their homesickness or nostalgia and their susceptibility to fantasize about their homeland and loved ones.

Anita Desai realistically portrays the emotional life of the foreigner Hugo, and she voices the feel of his language exactly as when he greets the watchman in broken Hindi; the tone of the voice of the watchman betrays repulsion. It is manifest to the fact that man cannot overcome pain and loneliness solely by his own actions and inclinations. The external forces such as, the society and socio-economic institutions have to cooperate in bringing about harmony and rejuvenation.
These refugees have migrated to an alien country. Migration from one place to another is an authentic fact. But migration creates restraints and inhibitions on the individual’s behaviour and in his relationship with society. Exploitation and abuse may arise as plausible consequences. One cannot repudiate the reality of migration in society which may be due to various causes, like marriage, economic reasons or even oppression, poverty, better chances and scope for employment. A woman migrating from one country to another is exposed to several dangers, as she is more vulnerable and weak. She may be exposed to even attacks and violence. Lotte and Gisela might have been induced into their profession of cabaret dancing, which is nothing short of prostitution in India. Lotte and Gisela have migrated from their motherland due to the onset of oppression and war. Both these women emphasize the reality of foreign women who cannot remain chaste. The study of this novel proves that moral values can function only with economic security. The fact remains that they have to establish themselves and get stabilized in their adopted country. The fact entails many adjustments on their part. It necessitates a social change, where the person has to be accepted by the society and where the individual should learn to live according to the traditions and customs of the adopted country. This aspect was faced with tremendous conflict in Lotte. Although she enters into a marriage with Kanti, she does it out of compulsion, in order to escape the gruelling life at the Internment Camp. She submits to the life of the other woman because that gives her a sense of belonging. Their migration is by no manner of means only
circumscribed to the physical plane. They carry an amount of socio-cultural mass which composes of their own original identity, language, food patterns and habits, values, traditions and customs, their memories. These socio-cultural constraints are very hard to go by. They psychologically and emotionally pummel the individual. Hugo, captured by racial turmoil even in the Internment camp cannot but reminisce about his home with melancholic yearning. The unwitting act of migration has left a deep wound in Hugo’s psyche. His sentimental attachment to his mother, and the sense of bereavement of estrangement from her, can be emphatically perceived. Recollecting the happy days back home can be the only panacea they can indulge in. The agony of homelessness, the nervousness and apprehension in the adopted country and the nostalgia of the homeland is intelligible, as shown by the present study.

Migrating from one country to another is an interminable phenomenon since primitive times. Christine Gomez asserts: “Expatriation is a widespread phenomenon in this century.”28 The causes for migration may be varied, like wars, oppression, agriculture, better resources, income etc. The circumstances like oppression, where the individual has to leave his motherland involuntarily, the change of language and culture can appal and petrify the individual to a drastic extent.
In order to combat the sense of isolation, these foreigners, including Hugo resort to engaging themselves in some activity. Kurt in drugs, Lotte in drinks, Hugo in fending for stray cats; Gisela and Julius in art etc. Lotte is in an abject state of loneliness and misery. She passively abdicates herself to her fate in drunkenness. Lotte suffers two-fold. One is that she has migrated to an alien culture and the oppression which she suffers in a male dominated society. Lotte is caught in between the two cultures. In the course of her orientation into the Indian soil, she loses her family life, economic and financial security and status. Due to this factor, she like Hugo, becomes isolated from Indians and spends most of her time in drinking. She perpetually pines away for her home. It is excruciatingly painful for her to realise that an exile can no longer go back home. Lotte, all by herself, cannot establish her own identity in India. She has to be Kanti’s mistress or a cabaret dancer, both roles are equally disrespectful in India. She succumbs to addiction of alcohol. Lotte is yet another woman, who is exploited and oppressed and later discarded by the male society. She cannot have any other identity, apart from that given by Kanti and she accepts it stoically for survival. She is used and abused by Kanti. She has to be deferential to his demands only because he has rendered her economic security. Many a time she bemoans his absence. She has to revel only in Kanti’s glory. Lotte is a woman who is not truly empowered and her search for self-identity does
not materialise. Lotte bears the brunt of the most excruciating forms of human rights abuse. Kanti’s sons throw her out of her flat, soon after his death. This incident in the novel corresponds with the reality of a woman’s experiences, especially when she is the second wife. The law which was mainly developed from male point of view, in those days, refused to respond to the particular protection needs of the woman. Lotte is left unarmed and she is unable to seek protection from law. Such a kind of violence against women is not unheard of. It is a stark reality which encounters many a woman, who have succumbed to the position of a mistress. The Indian government did not afford any opportunity to seek protection under law, because her position as a second wife was not a legal sanction. Further, in the case of Gisela, her movement to security and safety and an escape from the Internment Camp, has to be bought with a payment of sexual favours. Nobody recognized and empathized with the plight of these women. J.Wilson’s quotation is very relevant to these women’s state. “In patriarchal society, women are split subjects, who watch themselves being watched by men. They turn themselves into objects because feminity itself is defined by being gazed by men”.

Gisela’s loss of self is reflected in an accumulation of new names and guises. Deep within she feels she is none. Gisela uses the extent of her marginality to her own advantage. However, she accesses new worlds of possibilities and she strikes the reader as a dynamic woman. So is the
case with Lotte. Lotte cannot be legal Mrs. Kanti, because Mrs. Kanti is somebody else. Gisela drifts here and there, because it is money and fame that draws her. Both are popular cabaret dancers, very much esteemed and admired by men of wealth. But this does not earn them an identity. The disillusionment they experience over the course of time is a part of their intense loneliness.

The novel is laid against the formidable background of the II world war. The war brings in its wake the prospects of the disintegration of human values. Violence which is all pervasive cannot be rooted out of society. This aspect is an immanent, congenital reality in society and it appears in various contexts in society. So also in India, conflict perennially prevails between the two most powerful communities, Hindus and Muslims, which had led to the partition of India.

Drug abuse is a deviant behaviour and a formidable and overwhelming reality. It points out the fact of the individual’s maladjustment. The prevalence of drug abuse is increasing alarmingly. Kurt is addicted to drugs. Thus the study reveals that evil is a pervasive human reality found in this novel. It manifests in the form of addiction and murder.

Thus the present study reveals the facts of the II world war which gave rise to a diseased civilization with a paucity of values. The study
proves that, once man surrenders himself to demoralization, he becomes a part of the tyrannizing influences. Further, the dehumanization of man automatically breeds moral enervation, ignobility, illwill and devastation. There is failure to regard crime as sin. Kurt’s vicious and sordid act of murdering Hugo only illustrates the point.

The study reveals that marriage also breeds moral indifference in such a dehumanized atmosphere. The society which has become corrupt in every way, induces man to bondage and evil deeds. Victims, as a consequence, suffer fear, anxiety and alienation. Life turns mechanical and formal. Everything, even marriage can amount to an insignificant, customary ritual, like the ritual of Kanti and Lotte. There is absolutely no moral scruple in possessing a mistress and coming to her occasionally. There are no hassles regarding promiscuousness. The study depicts the reality that modern life has turned marriage into a facade. Usually women by the very nature of their psychological feelings are anxious for a settled life. It is the male who takes disadvantage of their natural weaknesses, making marriage perverted and abused through adultery. This is illustrated in Kanti’s example.

The researcher observes that Anita Desai voices her concern for women in characters like Lotte and that female unification and like-mindedness is the pre-requisite and imperative to struggle against
patriarchal oppression and exploitation. Camaraderie among women has to be promoted by women self-help groups. Women, black or white, must perceive and appreciate the fact, that they are part of one sisterhood, apart from personal differences. Freedom and the search for individuality of a woman is based on the issue of their empowerment. Unless the woman has her own freedom to act and decide, she cannot be said to be totally empowered. The truly liberated individual takes her own independent decisions; she is not restrained by any kind of violence or exploitation. The sense of freedom takes away bondage or the reliance upon anything or even the stereotyped ways of thinking. In Baumgartner’s Bombay, the individuals do not enjoy the freedom to challenge or dispute anything, even the very forces that impact upon their life situations. They fail to look at themselves as individuals because they are aware that they are not liberated persons, because their memories are cluttered with thoughts of their race and culture. Therefore, these aspects have made an impression on their minds. These individuals are the embodiments of insignificance and degradation. They represent a miserable privation, passivity and subjugation to violent forces.

**Conclusion:** The study shows that expatriation and displacement are bound to cause a strong sense of depression, deprivation and marginality. The reality of the abruptness of Hugo’s transportation affects his
adjustments in India. It also incapacitates his functioning. The reality of
the shock effects in Hugo involves extreme stress, aggravated emotional
responses. Hugo also faces a feeling of incompetence due to his
ignorance of the prevalent political and social events and developments.
Thus Hugo’s isolation and his fear of survival is the natural outcome of
the conditions and historical forces prevailing in India. Thus the study has
analysed the trauma of the exile, who has left his own land under
conditions of crisis.
Introduction: The novel was published in 1996. Anita Desai was living in the USA and her time was divided between England (Cambridge) and the USA, when she was writing it. This novel records a change from the author’s other novels. It treats a subject with a difference. It depicts the inner realities of the pilgrimage of the soul towards salvation. The present study analyses this predominant realism, along with the aspects of displacement, dislocation, rootlessness and a loss of a sense of belonging with a longing to go back to one’s country. The realism of identity crisis and a quest for spiritual fulfilment is also explored here.

Plot: Two threads form the plot of *Journey To Ithaca*. One is the transformation of the Egyptian girl Laila into a spiritual Mother and the other thread is the spiritual search for salvation by the foreigners Matteo and Sophie.

Matteo and Sophie are travellers from Italy. Matteo is in quest of the truth or salvation. His wife, Sophie is sceptical about it. Matteo yearns for nirvana, but his quest is aimless. He shifts from one ashram to another, till he encounters the Mother. Matteo has the seeds of spiritual quest right from his childhood. His reading of Herman Hesse’s *Journey To The East* inspires him towards the spiritual search. Matteo and Sophie move from one squalid hotel to another, from one ashram to another and through
various hippie pockets in Goa. Anita Desai presents a very repulsive and negative picture of India by portraying the wanderings of Matteo and Sophie through the heat, dust and filth of India.

Matteo is a simpleton and he does not share the scepticism of his wife. He wholeheartedly accepts the spiritual experience which India has to offer. After he comes in contact with the spiritual guru, who is the Mother, he feels India is the ultimate destination and he decides to stay on, in the precincts of the Mother’s ashram. But the complexity of the Mother’s personality is not tenable to Sophie’s logical mind. She cannot tolerate the exercise of the Mother’s control over Matteo’s mind. Therefore, Sophie is bent upon probing into the Mother’s life and history. Sophie demands to have a normal married family life. She cannot sympathize with Matteo’s spiritual hunger. Sophie turns bitter when Matteo is unable to carry on a normal family life. She decides to send their two children away to their homeland, Italy, so that they are not influenced by the negativity of Matteo’s spiritual concerns.

Sophie’s work experience in journalism helps her to undertake the investigation into the Mother’s past life. This takes her to Egypt, Venice, Paris, New York and Bombay. Sophie discovers that the Mother was Laila, a dancer prior to her transformation into the Mother. She interviews various devotees of the Mother and discovers that this Mother (Laila) was the member of a dancing troupe headed by Krishna. The facts and details of Laila’s life gain in obscurity as the probe progresses.
Sophie traces that Laila was herself a quester, in quest of eternal life. She was an exile and had reached India with Krishna’s dance troupe. In the course of her quest in India, she metamorphoses into the Mother and a unique motivating force for such other questers. Sophie’s quest for the Mother’s ambiguous past which had been sparked off by Matteo’s quest, ends in Sophie embarking on her own spiritual quest.

Thus these foreigners find a powerful philosophical force in India and they leave the luxuries of their home to quest for eternal bliss. As victims of inner emptiness, Laila and Matteo hanker after spiritual solace which India offers them in the form of asceticism and ashrams.

Analysis: The study explores the underlying reality of life, which prompts people to desire to be led by more powerful individuals. The inability to manoeuvre their own lives goads them to designate the responsibility of their life to a ‘god’ or to a greater human being. This reality is very much relevant to Indian life. People allocate the responsibility of making momentous decisions of their lives to ‘gurus’ or ‘saints’. The guru’s decisions and suggestions are obediently accomplished. This device is one way of escaping responsibility for their life. Thus the guru is designated with the authority of the position of power for their life. The study examines the predicament of the protagonist Matteo. His life revolves round the power and magic of the
enchanter-figure, the Mother. The Mother is attributed with power and
great omnipotence. The truth is very practically and authentically
depicted, that the confused and spiritually blind captives like Matteo and
others take a human being to be their ‘god’. They further look for the
conscientious attention and consolation from the ‘god’. Here, it is the
Mother. The Mother is the power-figure. The power is bestowed upon her
by her vulnerable and confused followers. They continuously look up to
her for solutions for the various complexities of life. This is a very
common aspect of realism seen in mundane Indian life. The Mother has
assumed a role which has put her in a morally superior position. But one
can very well see that any power that is bereft of accountability leads to
nullify the noblest human motives.

The Mother attempts to formulate Matteo’s life in her own image.
Sometimes one comes across so many instances in real life that these
power-figures are totally insensitive to their disciples’ likes and
requirements. Whatever it is, the vulnerable disciples are so enchanted
and fascinated by these power-heads, that they generate into
defencelessness. Sometimes, it so happens that these authorities generate
situations in the lives of their disciples where they can exercise their
power and authority, which usually is secured from some diabolic
resources. The ignorant disciples walk into such well-set traps.
Matteo becomes subject to an intimate relationship with the Mother. This continues to the extent that he becomes an alien to his own family. The Mother casts a stultifying impact on him. He and the other devotees deify her and thereby help establish her authority. Thus Matteo suffers a crippling sense of alienation. His detachment with mundane life, afflicts his marital life. Sophie is a practical minded journalist. But Matteo is inclined towards spiritual quest. These contradictions in their interests and ways of thinking do not encourage marital harmony. Matteo identifies with spiritual visions and sanyasis. The world of gurus and sanyasis is more real to him than the real daily life. Matteo feels there is an appalling distance between day-to-day life and himself. Matteo finds it difficult to identify himself with his milieu. He does not conform to social and cultural values. He is detached and isolated from everybody in society. He is solely dependent on the Mother and apart from her, he realizes he has no meaningful existence. This dependency is so acute that he fails to achieve any meaningful relationship with Sophie. He accuses Sophie saying: “I have given myself to her. Why do you want to keep me, Sophie, from pursuing my beliefs?”

The severity of Matteo’s beliefs mounts to such an extent that, he straggles midway without help or comfort, at the death of the Mother. His spiritual hunger remains stunted and unfulfilled. His hunger for the union
with the Divine remains unsatiated. He has alienated himself from his family by his affinity to the Mother. His thought-life has been severely affected and he is unable to carry on his normal duties as a householder.

The study shows that this is the predicament of the affluent modern man. He nurses a spiritual hunger for the Ultimate, but he is unable to achieve it through the spiritual gurus. The fact remains that even the spiritual gurus are subject to human constraints. The study examines the details of this spiritual conflict which the materialistic man undergoes. Matteo’s spiritual fetish and Sophie’s passion to quest after the Mother’s past depicts the ineffectiveness of both. Spiritual quest and its fulfilment can take place only when the soul embarks upon its pilgrimage. It does not depend upon a physical journey. The researcher opines that spirituality can never be administered in a nutshell. Spirituality does not depend upon intellectual attributes and wisdom. It cannot be replaced by intellectual pursuits. The enigma of spiritual experiences cannot be fathomed by rationality. Therefore, quest for the spiritual is always a part of life.

However, modern materialistic life has ushered in a loss of faith among people. Sacrifice is the means to spiritual growth and restraint is the basis of all sacrifice. Matteo has tried to simplify the claims of his will. But Matteo’s attempt to cleanse himself of his life of egoism in his
service of the Mother, only brings calamity on himself. Therefore, the renunciation proves wrong. Matteo renounces his affluent life in Italy and comes to India in the hope of attaining salvation through gurus. The Europeans envision India as a very fascinating land and as a land which endows spiritual solace. India has continued to allure foreign visitors for its exoticism and magic. It is also evident that the Indian religion-oriented philosophies continue to mystify and charm the west.

Matteo has always been an unusual boy with an attitude of stoicism and passivity. His shyness and withdrawn behaviour set him apart as an unusual personality. He evinced a desire to be all by himself. He showed a total non-involvement with mundane life. The usual parent-child relationship was also absent. The novel reveals: “Failure followed him up and down the long corridors of the school.” Matteo is enlisted in the football team. His movements are awkward. He learns that he is expected to play for the team and the school. “But he did not know how to do that”. He kicks the ball away from the goal and incurs the wrath of his side of the team. He depicts a withdrawn behaviour. “He tried to keep clear of others and to run if anyone came towards him.” He was always anxious to run from his parents. He answered them in monosyllables. This introvertedness is natural to his personality. Even when his father assumes that Matteo would have a brilliant future in banking or the silk
business, “Matteo looked at him with the faintest smile as at something so absurd it merited no more than that…." Matteo is not fit to be worldly-wise. He has always sensed the roots of spiritual hunger within him.

This novel depicts a very common aspect of realism which the researcher would like to explain as mystic realism. Since time immemorial man has craved for a direct communion with the Divine. Therefore, this quest for truth is a strong motivation for the seeker. Through spirituality man focusses on an inner transformation. Thus man begins to perceive the indwelling of the Divine in every creature. At the same time, he accomplishes a deep cleansing of his inmost thoughts and motives. A spiritual quester is never fettered with the creeds of religion or caste, but is free to the touch of the Divine.

Laila depicts a remarkable fervour and hunger to be united with the Divine. Laila laments:

“Where is my home? I left my home so long ago and so far behind that I cannot return to it. Yet I have not found the Lord’s dwelling that I came to India to find. I am lost. In which direction can I go now? O Lord what have I done that I am cast out without refuge or haven? Am I to perish alone in darkness?.......I cannot believe that this is so, and that the dreams and hopes that propelled me on my travels
and brought me to India had no Truth and no Power and were merely delusions. Somewhere there must be One who is mighty and wise, who will open up to me the Cosmic Infinity where I may dwell in peace and make my search for Eternal Knowledge and the Supreme Light…..”

Thus desperation grips Laila when she realises that her search for the Divine has yielded nothing. Therefore, she laments and cries out for providential succour. She experiences extreme humiliation and remorse on her awareness that Krishna was only a dancer, a fake guru. Her soul longs to go home to the real Divine and she pines with all her soul for union with the Divine. The suffering caused due to detachment from the Divine fosters intense spiritual hunger. Laila eventually realises the Divine Presence within her soul and around her. Her ambition to attain the Divine and her fulfilment being achieved through self-denial and self-discipline, that is the hard way, is quite convincing. This mystic reality is acknowledged by saints and yogis. The total dedication and firm determination transforms the hard way of the spiritual path into a smooth communion with the Divine. Laila has developed a tenacity and firmness that builds her spiritual stamina. Thus she is immune to insults and scoffs. She experiences the illumination of the Divine, both within and without. She is unable to repress herself. She bursts out into dancing. This happens
at the culmination of her journey to the Himalayas. The novel reveals it like this:

“In its shade sat a holy man……. It was clear neither the station nor the train nor the passengers; he cared not for the commerce and the hubub of the world; he dwelt in another realm, and for him time and space had no meaning other than we could comprehend who travelled bodily but escape from ourselves. I stood and gazed upon the holy man’s serene visage, and there stirred in my sick, starved body the great desire I had always had ever since I was a child, to be free of this world and escape into another, a better and brighter. I believe I cried out to him, in appeal for his help, and before my eyes the great banyan tree burst into light…….fire revolved through my body. I was on fire, the tree was on fire…….I cried out and covered my face with my hands.”

These are the words traced in Laila’s diary.

Laila (Mother) advocates meditation as a supreme value in pleasing the Divine. She rejects difficult practices like fasting. According to her, punishing the body is of little value in the quest of the Divine. Therefore, she offers fruits to Matteo, so that hunger does not come in the way of the
quest. She does not place any intrinsic significance on Brahmacharya. One can remain a householder and still lay emphasis on the internal state of mind. The external state is not important. Matteo asks the Mother: “Tell me what to do….living as I do, as a householder with a family, can I continue to live here amongst the sadhus?......” The Mother replies: “You are like the lotus that blooms in the ponds and lakes of India. Your roots may be in the mud but your petals are pure, the water does not touch them and the mud does not stain them...”

Therefore, the external aspect is not assigned any value, so far as the inner aspect of spiritual aspiration and meditation is concerned. These thoughts authenticate the doctrines and teachings of various religious scriptures. Despite cultural variations, the mystic reality remains the same. What the Mother considers as Union with the Master, is in fact, the destination of the quester, irrespective of his culture. Since time immemorial, saints and yogis have stressed this aspect of realism. This aspect is hardly seen and understood, but has to be sensitively perceived. This is the mystic reality that is explored in the present novel. This aspect thrives on love.

The sceptical Sophie tries to quiz Dr. Montu-da about the Mother’s past. She is told of the Union between the Mother and the Master. Montu-da says: “They were not separate but two aspects of one divinity.....The
Mother told us she could only exist because of him, but without her he would not have become manifest to us in the form of love.”39 This concept of the spiritual marriage has been used in the novel to convey the experience of Divine Love and Union. The images of earthly love are used to explain the same of the divine realm. The core of spirituality is love. This is a mystic reality that love contains the dormant faculty of transforming into Divine Love. Laila is indebted to her guru, who initiated her into the Divine. This kind of initiation is a fact which is evinced in all the cultures.

Laila dissociates herself from the creed and doctrine of her religion. She is only eager for a direct communion with the Truth. She wishes to be unfettered by any kind of dogma. The freedom from dogma is the core of her harmony with the Divine. Thus she is the repository of the concentrated spiritual energy that helps her to rise from her mundane mortal thinking. She represents the rise of the human being to a divine consciousness.

Thus, the present study explores the quest for spiritual fulfilment. This aspect of the East serving as a site for spiritual fruition and fulfilment to foreigners, who are bored with western materialism, is a well-known reality. Matteo has recognised the worthlessness of materialistic life and is drawn towards the heady spiritualism of the East.
Just as it is true of Laila who finds a spiritual guru, who draws her away from her volatility to eternal bliss, so it is with Matteo. The Mother’s identity of a spiritual guru offers a sense of purpose and inspiration to Matteo. Matteo’s need for spirituality is induced by the book *The Journey To The East* by Herman Hesse. The book metamorphoses his life. He develops an intimate friendship with Fabian, his tutor, who has given him the book. Matteo hits a close friendship with Fabian as both are like-minded. The friendship ushers in a sense of belonging in Matteo’s life.

After their marriage Matteo and Sophie travel to India. Matteo tells Sophie: “It is the spiritual experience for which you must search in India, nothing less”. Matteo moves on aimlessly from one ashram to another in search of Truth. Such reckless efforts affect his health adversely. He comes across the Mother through a bookstall. There he sets his hand upon a book *The Mother*. Matteo senses a kind of joy at the sight of the Mother’s photograph. He goes to her ashram. At the sight of the Mother, he realises: “the unity of the spiritual with the physical, the dark with the light, the human with the natural”. He sees the Mother in conversation with her devotees. Through her words, he realises that the Divine power is everywhere and this awareness leads to his knowledge of the Truth. Matteo comes to the realisation that “any time spent away from the Mother was wasted time, empty time, dead time....... In the Mother’s
company he and everything came alive”.42 This realisation is sufficient for Matteo to renounce his responsibilities as husband and father. Matteo feels that he has experienced the Ultimate through his devotion of the Mother. But Matteo visualizes Sophie as a threat to his spiritual life. He says: “You are trying to destroy me by destroying the only part that has any value”.43

The study proves that spiritual hunger takes control of most people sooner or later in life. The existence of various monasteries or ashrams, not only in India, but also in foreign countries is an evidence to the above named reality. In India, this reality takes the shape of various customs, traditions and pilgrimages.

Matteo who sought after a significant way of life, that of spiritual satiety, is deceived by the fake gurus. Finally he reaches the Mother’s ashram where he seems to have attained his goal. Matteo’s attitude towards his family is that of renunciation, as is common with monks. He forfeits all his responsibilities and feelings towards his family and concentrates only on his devotion to the Mother. The Mother asserts: “What I wanted in India was the outward manifestation of what already existed within me.”44 She confirms the thought that only the spiritual hunger within can make the journey to India greatly significant. Only then, the real knowledge of the Divine Truth can be attained. She
understands the joy that lies at the core of the Indian philosophy. The
Mother’s advice to Matteo that “one has to be like the lotus, which is not
wetted by water or mud,” holds the truth of a spiritually satiated life.

Matteo’s intense spirituality leads him to look for signs and
directions from the Divine. His thorough conviction of this helps him to
see even the most unpleasant experiences as divine signs. Sophie, as
skeptic cannot agree. Sophie believes in everything that is “concrete,
material…….” But for Matteo “it is the spiritual experience for which
you must search in India, nothing less.” The novel depicts the
experiences and responses of the devotees when they confront some
semblance of the divine or the miraculous. Pierre Eduard, a friend who
“was busily collecting saints as earlier travellers had collected gold,
spices or shawls” conducts Sophie and Matteo to a saint. But for Sophie
it is just “a performance of magic tricks……”

Pierre and Matteo are impressed by the saint’s occult practices.
But Sophie refuses to accept it. Mr.Pandey is another Indian devotee who
has studied yoga. He keeps himself buried underneath the sand for a few
hours as a method of worship. He conducts Matteo to saints and
“siddhis” who profess to possess divine energy. Thus Matteo and
Sophie shift to one such ashram. Sophie is astonished to find that there
are only Indian devotees. Physically and mentally sick patients resort
there for healing.
Here, Sophie’s “….. lack of language excluded her even when she was physically in such close contact that they could touch, even smell each other, sharing the same stretch of earth for a bed”. Sophie feels alienated in the company of the Indian devotees. They view her either with contempt or curiosity. Sophie is totally opposed to their idea of worshipping a saint or his silver footwear. Therefore, Sophie leaves Matteo and moves to Goa with foreigners of the Hare Rama-Hare Krishna group. The novel describes very realistically the dissipation of the hippie pockets in Goa:

“In places like Goa they formed whole communities by themselves and scarcely ventured beyond them. By day they milled around the open markets that they set up on the sands under the coconut palms where they picked over each other’s ruck sacks…… and the less visible contraband of drugs that had to be concealed from vigilant Goan police. By night they gathered in bars where feni was cheap, and drank till they needed to sleep and crawled away to their huts along the beach or the houses they rented in the villages to share between.”

Thus their absorption with drugs, marijuana and alcohol is realistically described. Sophie comes to herself only after she has totally wasted herself over drugs. She traces her way back to the ashram where Matteo lives.
Sophie and the other foreign devotees face tremendous discrimination and harrassment from the swamis. The foreigners are served meals on the leaf plates on the veranda. The leaf plates are thrown away after meals. Pollution of Indian devotees is prevented in this way. Sophie experiences great agony in the ashram. The swamis saw to it that these foreign devotees recognised their low status:

“Collecting water at the hand pump in the bathing enclosure…….was a perpetual occasion for bickering; it seemed to Sophie that she was always being edged out of the queue and never came up to the front of it and was made to wait for what seemed hours to fill a bucket…..”

Sophie resists this treatment and therefore she refuses to dine in the veranda. She would rather eat peanuts on the steps, behind the kitchen. Her defiance enrages Matteo. She finds that the roots of incompatibility between her and Matteo are securely implanted. The novel shows it like this:

“It was difficult to remember, let alone regain the spirit of adventure with which they had set out to India.” She confronts “the dark inexplicable gulf that now existed between them”. But Sophie’s determination that, “they had come to India together, to share an adventure: they would go through it together, stay together, recover their unique and essential love.”
However Matteo asserts his male chauvinism. He manhandles her as if to hurt her. It seemed as though he had triumphed over her. Thus the present study has explored the realism of marital disharmony, identity crisis, the lack of a sense of belonging and the diasporic realities of Sophie’s condition.

The study examines the elements of realities of the essence of human expectations. Real life never allows one to get what one expects. But if one would like to introduce oneself to what is really there, then, he will attain something else. This reality of life is examined by the researcher. This aspect could be explained in the following way. Sophie has arrived here to enjoy the exotic beauty of India. Her intention is devoid of the quest for Truth. When disharmony sets in her relationship with Matteo, she leaves him to join the hippie camp on the shores of Goa. She comes back to him totally sick and broken. She only demands a normal family life from Matteo. The nomadic life with him has disgusted her. His movement from one ashram to another, from one guru to another carries no significance to her. Sophie finds it impossible to accept the spiritual way of life as she is a pragmatic minded person. Her ethos and attitudes are different from Matteo’s. Naturally a deep rift is engendered between them. She is unable to return to Italy as she is expecting her first baby. Soon after, she is pregnant with the second child. After the two
children are big enough she leaves for her parents’ home in Frankfurt. Now she realises that she involuntarily identifies with Matteo’s ethos. She cannot bear the gross materialistic life outside the ashram or even in her own homeland. The diasporic reality of Sophie’s predicament manifests itself. She cannot accommodate herself to the conceited worldliness of the life around her. Although the idea of exposing the Mother takes control of her, deep within her psyche the spiritual hunger takes over. Her life illustrates the reality of the essence of human expectations.

After Sophie goes back, she lives with her parents for sometime. Her mother’s insistence on the children’s baptism enrages Sophie. The novel says: “….Sophie rebelled. ‘No, I did not leave India and all its superstitions and rituals to come here and submit to the tribal rites of Europe’.”55 Sophie cannot submit to the rites of the church. Thus Matteo’s ethos have had a deep impact on her. But very soon she leaves her parents’ home in Frankfurt to Matteo’s parents’ home in Italy. Here Sophie relaxes as the children settle down happily in their grandparents’ home. But Matteo’s thoughts burst upon her psyche: “Then it was Matteo who came surging back in a way she had not imagined would happen. To have left him behind in the ashram, with the Mother- that tormented her now.”56 His thoughts hurt her. She had intended to forget him, and in the
effort she had believed to remove the pain. This made her suffer restlessness. She however tries to overlook her pain and concentrate on the children. But the unexpected happens again:

“She might have put India behind her completely, but when the telegram arrived to say Matteo had been taken to the hospital, she grasped the news and reacted to it with such swiftness that it was clear her mind had been with Matteo all the time, her senses alert to receive any messages from him. Now she packed her bag, bought her ticket and left with such speed it seemed nothing mattered to her but to be with him”.

Matteo and Sophie move to an ashram where Matteo expects to be rewarded with spiritual wisdom. There he offers himself to be the guru’s disciple. As a token of gratitude, he offers fruits. To his surprise, he finds that the drawer is filled with cigarettes, lighter, money and such other worldly commodities. The ashram is also replete with favouritism. Matteo’s expectations are shattered and he is on the verge of a breakdown. Such experiences happen time and again, till he reaches the Mother’s (Laila) ashram. Laila’s past also echoes the same. She moves through Paris, New York and finally India. Laila is disenchanted with Indian spirituality. She says:
“The world is as much with me here as in New York, or Venice or Paris. I thought we had left it behind when we had sailed from America and that once on Indian soil we would dwell in a temple of devotion. But it is not so…….”

Another reality that can be pointed out here is that an individual tries to project his fantasies upon reality. The same is true of all the three significant characters in the novel—Matteo, Sophie and the Mother. This projection results in misery. Matteo tries to project his fantasies upon reality in this way. This happens even when Matteo is yearning for the Divine touch, before he could come in contact with the Mother. Matteo witnesses a bier being carried to its funeral. It is a girl-child in a lace dress and a lace veil, a prayer book is laid upon her chest. She is decorated with flowers and the people are shuffling slowly. Matteo leaps in front of the procession and begins to dance saying: “The goddess……..the goddess is going to be married. Let me go…….”

At another time Matteo nearly drowns himself in the sea as he had gone there for a bath at high tide. He fantasizes that it is the holy Ganges and he has to bathe while the sun is in eclipse. Some fishermen rescue him. Francis and Theo, their friends advise Sophie that it is a guru that Matteo needs, as his search for the Divine cannot materialise without a guru. Francis explains: “He has it bad; all that searching and meditation can drive you crazy if you haven’t a guru to guide you”.
Human expectations of total spiritual satiety is not guaranteed. The study reveals this element of reality. The spirituality ceases with the death of the guru, here it is the Mother. The guru is a human being and therefore, subject to mortality. Therefore, Matteo is shattered, as he has no spiritual support, after the death of the Mother. The Mother, previously Laila, has embarked upon a journey to discover the Truth. She has been duped by a false guru Krishna who has used her ignorance to further his ambitions. The following lines from Laila’s diary reveal that she is shocked to discover Krishna as a false guru:

“I did not know it was your career we came to make in India. I thought we came here to find the Eternal Truth. You told me it existed only in India and that we would together search for it and find it.”

But her sincere search for salvation has saved her from further misery. An individual’s search for salvation usually begins with affliction or sometimes any kind of betrayal. Laila has attained her goal when she finds her true Master in Northern India. Laila’s discovery of her true guru has not however stopped the journey of her soul. She has discovered joy and peace, but her soul’s march towards higher truth still continues. Her total surrender to her guru in an attitude of trust and worship enables her the knowledge of the divine. But her master is under the constraints of human mortality.
Man observes and experiences the practical world. But at the same time he is goaded to grapple with the mysterious. He reasons with practical knowledge along with the hunger of the soul that yearns towards the Divine. Man is endowed with a potentiality for love. This love is manifested in his inclination towards the Divine. This aspect is beyond the intellectual purview. Mere ideology, religion or creed cannot satisfy the claims of the soul. Man’s yearning for the mystic or the profound is a reality which cannot be denied.

The realities of a “dual affiliation” is explored in the present study. This predicament can be traced in Sophie. She yearns to go back to her country. But this longing is frustrated by the incapacity to move out. Her confinements and the consequent problems frustrate her return to her homeland. Sophie suffers from her inability to identify herself with the inmates of the ashram. The inmates, too, treat her like an outcaste. She depicts a strange reluctance to jeopardize her relationship with India, while she is in her own homeland. This can be illustrated in the following way. She gets involved in a brief friendship with a young man Paolo, after she goes back to Italy. But his insistent questioning about India tires her. “The day he suggested they travel together to India……and visit Matteo, she spat at him, ‘You? You are not fit to even enter his presence. He—he is god—…….’” She finds herself participating in Matteo’s ethos.
and identifying herself with India. Thus one finds this experience of ‘dual affiliation’ very much intrinsic to the human predicament. When she is at home in Italy, she fails to identify with her home. She displays a sense of rebellion to the well-established cultural patterns prevailing at home.

**Conclusion:** The researcher feels that the phenomenal growth of science and technology has displaced the faith element from man’s life. Rootlessness and meaninglessness plague the modern man. This is due to the fact that conflicts and materialism have bred an amount of scepticism. In order to heal himself of this bane, man turns inwards to his soul and to spirituality. India is a land of spirituality. Thus the study has examined the aspects of mystic realism, marital harmony, rootlessness and a lack of a sense of belonging.
**Fasting, Feasting**

**Introduction:** The novel was published in 1999 and it was short-listed for the prestigious Booker Prize. The study aims to reveal that the societal attitudes towards women, restrict their potentialities and also serve to maintain their servility. The study seeks to expose the impact of these attitudes towards gender on women’s psyche right from their young years and recognises the urgency to question this kind of domineering attitude, in order to attain an independent full-fledged personality. The novel depicts the debilitating influence of parental and societal attitudes towards gender, on women’s life and psyche and the predicament of children embroiled in the ambitions of the parents. It portrays the realities of the lack of education of women which leads to thus being caught in the turmoils of parental tyranny on the one hand, and on the other, the very education leading to a deep discontent and entrapment. The truth that even marriage which apparently presents an opportunity of freedom from parental domineering, serves to tighten the noose around the hapless woman. The attributes of beauty, education or even the riches fail to provide the security of a happy married life. The study also explores the reality of the repercussions of the despotic and over-bearing demeanour of parents with respect to their children. The fact of patriarchal tyranny in the guise of parental oppression, working in the lives of women is probed.
into, along with the deplorable inertia on the part of women to overcome the tyranny. It also probes into the truth of the parental discrimination for the male child, even when women are educated and relatively independent. This study presents the mute protestations of the female protagonist against the patriarchal value system working incessantly towards the disruption of the individual freedom and growth. It is the exposure of the reality of the system which is over-ridden by men and further manoeuvred by women which only succeeds in suffocating the life of the woman, even in the current contemporary society.

**Plot:** The novel consists of two sections– the first part laid in India; it portrays a conservative upper-middle class family and the second part in an inconsiderate, peremptory American family in Massachusetts. The Indian family consists of the parents, Uma, Aruna and Arun. The American family has Mr.and Mrs. Patton, Rod and Melanie. Arun serves as a bridge between the two families. The two parts are compared and contrasted as they express the glaring contrast between the two opposed cultures, India and America. The reality of good life and good fortune, evading certain people and the same being heaped upon some fortunate few, is depicted here.

Uma, the protagonist of the novel is an humble girl, overpowered by her parents’ attitude. Her dreams and aspirations towards education
and independence are all dampened by her parents’ dictatorial attitude towards her. She is an ordinary girl, who is not so fortunate to be endowed with beauty and intelligence. Her parents over-power her to the extent of choking out her individuality, her aspirations and her desires. They are highly insensible to her wants and opinions. Uma has to discontinue her convent education at a very early stage to take care of her baby brother Arun. Uma is, in every way, tyrannized to submit to the wishes of her parents. The parents’ effort to marry Uma fails twice, along with the loss of the dowry. Uma’s catastrophic marriage to a married man, ends in a divorce and loss of the dowry money. With that, all efforts towards her marriage close down and she is reduced to the life of a familial slave, forever. From then on, she is even denied the status of a normal individual. The parents always have a work for her and any attempt on her part to go out or socialize is curbed with a heavy hand. Uma’s failure to win an eligible bachelor proves to be a great distress and plague to the parents. Her long-awaited marriage proves to be a disaster twice, as it is a huge betrayal for dowry. The ‘bachelor’ is a married man with a wife and children. Uma’s father takes her home after the deception is disclosed. The earlier attempt at marriage, also proves calamitous as that is also a trap for dowry. Therefore, Uma has failed at the marriage and she has impoverished her parents; and they in turn, see to it that she is solely dependent on them. Uma is not more than a common drudge in her
parents’ household. Aruna is the second daughter who is beautiful, intelligent and fortunate to be married to an eligible bachelor. She is married to Aravind who works in Bombay. The male baby, Arun is the parents’ late and much awaited for off-spring. Arun goes to Massachusetts for higher education. Arun’s life is one of suffocation as he has to work hard towards clearing several exams. He does not enjoy his childhood as he has to satisfy his ambitious parents with excellent academic records.

Arun is the over-protected and pampered son, who is unable to adjust in the American cultural milieu. America, which is always figured as the ultimate haven of the technically and professionally accomplished, is laid bare with its emotional barrenness. This novel treats of various social concerns. The deception meted out to naive families by devious men, by seducing their daughters for the dowry they fetch; the extremely ambitious and over-protective parents towards their offspring, leading the children to be maladjusted in life; the American family set-up marked with its emotional barrenness and spiritual starvation; the cultural maladjustment of Indian immigrants in America—all these problems are treated unflinchingly. This study aims at depicting these aspects of realism.
The second part reveals the predicament of Arun leading a harrowing life in America. The cultural and geographical location has created a detachment and cautiousness in mingling with people. With the onset of vacation, Arun has to shift from his hostel to the Patton family, which his father has arranged for him. Even in America he experiences the suffocation of his parents’ over bearing demeanour. He is also appalled by the emotional barrenness and indifference of the Patton family. Anamika is Uma’s cousin who meets with a tragic death at the hands of her crafty in-laws. The fact that marriage imposes extreme conditions on some unfortunate women, is driven home in the catastrophic marriage of Anamika. There is Mira masi, an old widow who is free to travel to religious places. Uma and Arun are the two individuals who are smothered by the possessive and selfish parents. Thus their incomplete and starved lives continue.

**Analysis:** The study shows that a woman is the epitome of suffering, humility and sacrifice. This truth is illustrated in the life of Uma. Simone De Beauvoir says: “one is not born, but rather becomes a woman...”\(^{64}\) The study proves that this statement reflects the truth of this situation. Uma feels suppressed by the familial mind-set. Even the mother who is supposed to understand the yearnings of the daughter, is indifferent. She too, is conditioned by the shackles of patriarchal thinking. Mama says:
“In my days, girls in the family were not given sweets, nuts, good things to eat. If something special had been bought in the market, like sweets or nuts, it was given to the boys in the family.”

A girl-child has to be controlled and curbed and be denied education that is due to her. The novel reveals it like this: “‘See what these nuns do’, she raged to Papa. ‘What ideas they fill in the girls’ heads! I always said don’t send them to a convent school. Keep them at home.......” As is the fact that marriage is considered as the predestination of a woman, efforts are made to get her married. The tyranny of the father is unflinchingly brought out in the following lines: “‘Costs money! Costs money!’ he kept shouting long after. ‘Never earned anything in her life, made me spend and spend on her dowry and her wedding. Oh, yes spend till I’m ruined, till I am a pauper.” Uma’s movements are guarded. She is not allowed to make a single phone call. She is not permitted to attend the tea party of Mrs.O’Henry. Independence is banned for Uma. The parents are cautious not to let Uma be idle for even a moment.

The desire for a son is an ubiquitous factor in an Indian family. The wife prides herself on mothering a son. These lines in the novel point out this fact: “He had not only made her his wife, he had made her the mother of his son. What honour, what status....” This is a prevalent aspect of
female submission that is common to all cultures. Mama is proud at the birth of a son. “Mama continued to deck herself in silks........She had matched Papa’s achievement, you could say....” Male chauvinism is a universal phenomenon. Mamma or Mrs. Patton, both cherish a servile attitude toward their husbands. If Papa wanted Mama to continue her third pregnancy, she has to be obedient. Mrs. Patton also has to make severe compromises. She is a vegetarian, but she has to eat non-vegetarian food because Mr. Patton wants it. He is indifferent to her longing for vegetarian food. He pretends not to understand it. A woman has a sense of belongingness to her family, but at the same time, there is an urge to have a space of her own. Right from birth and childhood, a girl grows up with the preparation of a mind of servitude towards the family. Even in modern days this kind of an implantation of the submissive attitude in the girls’ psyche is very much a relevant fact. It is indoctrinated in the girl especially by the mother.

The male attitude of superiority of dominating women and the women taking a delight in being servile causes many problems. The fact that women do not assert themselves, finally poses a threat to their very lives. Anamika, who is Uma’s cousin, is a point of illustration. A girl who had won a scholarship to Oxford and who possessed all the qualities to lead an independent and happy life is married off to an ‘eligible
Many a time the parents expeditiously marry off the daughter without seriously probing into the background of the boy or his family. The idea that is prevalent is that the girl has to be married off at the earliest opportunity; even if she has the best chances of pursuing her education, she has to sacrifice it for a career in marriage, because normally marriage is considered as the ultimate opportunity. Anamika is sacrificed at the altar of marriage. This is a familiar reality even in modern times, where a girl is usually not sent out for studies, except that she is married. However, it is the in-laws’ prerogative. Anamika “could never bring herself to contradict her parents or cause them grief.” These lines only serve to bring out the reality of the self-effacing and sacrificial tendency of the daughter. Many a daughter has been obedient enough to her parents’ wishes to be sacrificed for marriage.

Gender discrimination is not related to any one civilisation or culture. It has been an ubiquitous reality since ancient times and it is so even in modern times. The human race has constantly been ignoring women. It is true that providence has trusted women with the most significant task, that is, of procreation. The sociable nature of man is the basic foundation on which society is built. However, society is fastened together by love which is predominantly a female instinct. Love is manifested in motherhood. But still, the male-dominated society has been
exploiting and victimizing women in all respects. The male-oriented society sees to it that the woman is rendered dependent in every way. It is a fact that a girl hardly enjoys her childhood. She is required to play the role of motherhood quite early. Girls experience severe discrimination with regard to right to education and other facilities. They suffer due to the bias of parents who treat them as liabilities and burdens, while they treat sons as assets. As girls are considered a burden to be given away in marriage, parents prefer not to spend money on their education; they do not consider it advisable to invest on their education. It is a fact that many parents express indifference to the birth of the female child. Gender disparities persist even in the modern world. This is the dark reality which exists even today. It is common for girls to drop out of school for several reasons like–domestic responsibilities, early marriage, migration, financial problems etc. Therefore, as noted above, the study focuses on the reality of parental discrimination and their experiencing a sense of superiority and prestige about possessing a son. In the novel, Uma and Aruna have to cater to the upbringing of their baby brother. The novel says: “‘I have to go and do my homework,’ she (Uma) told her mother......’ ‘Leave all that’ Mama snapped at her.”71 The parents do not want to waste their resources on Uma any further. But Uma loved school. “She prickled with impatience for the fifteenth of July when school would re-open and a new term begin.”72 However, she fails in the
examination. So, they force her to discontinue her convent education. Uma becomes prone to epileptic fits, as she is under depression, for discontinuing her education.

This study explores the attitude of the parents towards the daughter which is the traditional conviction in the superiority of the son. Everything is special for the son— a foreign education, extreme care, food and attention. The parents are intent on facilitating and advancing Arun’s educational career; whereas they are indifferent about Uma’s. This presents the glaring difference in the treatment of the daughter, which shows a miserable lack of even the amenities like the right to education for the girl. Daughters are always raised with the intention of marrying them away, as though it is a career. They blatantly discriminate between the children. The novel presents this reality unflinchingly. Even Anamika who has an Oxford scholarship is not encouraged for a career. Whereas Arun is sent to America. Uma is not sent to continue her schooling—all these aspects show the reality of the extent of disparity of parental responsibility. The society treats male offspring as an ultimate panacea to all problems. But the daughter is an unwanted burden as she cannot fulfil the parental needs or their ungratified ambitions. The plenitude, warmth and importance given to the son is denied to the daughter and this makes her either depressed or rebellious. The boy is always synonymous with
freedom and the girl with servitude. It is true that even in modern days, gender discrimination is hardwired into a social reality. Uma’s father is not bothered of educating Uma. Uma’s mother’s remarks are full of criticism and censor, moral strictures. Men and women are judged by different standards. The woman has to achieve greatness through suffering and privation, that is, lack of comforts and necessities of life. This attitude has its source in the Indian culture. Therefore, Uma cannot widen her horizon as she is incessantly controlled by her parents and she lacks the opportunity of associating with girls of her own age and with modern ideas. Uma’s father has apparent modernity and westernization in fashions and manners; but he is conventional as regards Uma. This echoes the reality of the life of many an unfortunate girl. He does not encourage individuality and freedom. His wife conforms to the theory of passive wifehood. This is an evidence of the monolithic and all-pervasive patriarchal power structure holding its sway over the woman.

A woman plays a very crucial role in fashioning the family. Her role can never be considered trivial. The stability and strength of the family depends upon the wisdom of the woman. The study brings out the reality of this aspect. It also reveals the facts of discrimination and inequality meted out to the girl. Even in the milieu of modern and educated father, the daughter is in the shackles of tradition and customs.
This suffering and oppression takes place in any household, where there is a discrimination between a son and a daughter. Especially where the mother is uneducated, the eldest daughter is forced to assist in domestic chores or in the responsibility of caring for the younger siblings. This is the plight of Uma, who bears the brunt of the household responsibilities and the oppressive domination of the aged parents. The fact that this treatment is given to a daughter even in modern days is alarming. Therefore, this explains the immense advertisement and awareness that the media imparts regarding the significance of educating the girl child. Uma’s parents fail to recognise her as an individual. Uma lacks the support of an understanding and affectionate mother. Her mother is preoccupied with the upbringing of Arun. Nothing else strikes her as significant. Even with economic independence and education, the modern educated woman is enslaved by traditional ideas of preparing her daughter for a career of marriage. This is due to the fact that Indian society is even now male-dominated. The status ascribed to the woman is still secondary. Thus the study focuses on the reality of such an atmosphere. Uma is denied the basic happiness and liberty. She is forced to lead a life of perennial financial dependence. She cherishes a life of liberty and financial self-sufficiency, but it is denied to her. This is due to the ignorance of her mother, who herself is uneducated. Therefore, she fails to realise the significance of education and career in a girl’s life.
The reality of the difficulty of finding a good groom for the girl, is shown in the marriage of Uma. Again and again Uma is subjected to the trial of being displayed in front of a prospective groom, only to be rejected, because Uma does not possess the attractive looks of Aruna. The possibility of getting her married is blighted. The difficulty of getting a daughter successfully married, after paying a huge amount of dowry, is the real predicament which the parents face. Uma’s parents are shorn twice of the dowry money, which forms a considerable part of their income. Therefore, the pain of losing the amount and at the same time, the fact of having their daughter dependent on them, is too much to bear. This frustration of the father is reeked out on Uma at times. Uma’s parents become so rigid about letting her out of the house, that she is even not allowed to go to Bombay to Aruna’s house for even an eye test.

The societal attitudes towards single women can be severe. They are expected to be subservient and to make themselves very useful to those around them. This is so especially if they are financially dependent. The family takes their service for granted. Uma is a single woman doomed to be in her parental home. She pines for love and understanding. Her inferior status of a servant is guaranted because she is past her prime. Her ordinary looks and accomplishments have not won her a good husband and she has no claim to any achievement or career. In such
circumstances it is natural for Uma to desire a job, especially when Dr. Dutt comes out with the proposal. Uma’s life emphasises the fact of how society sets apart spinsters for the role of only giving endlessly, without considering their feelings and longings or even their need for independence. Their existence is severely neglected. Uma suffers a hurt because of the supercilious attitude of her parents towards her. They take her for granted, that she should behave in accordance with her status of dependency and subservience. Uma has suffered a very traditional upbringing under her father’s regime; she is doubly disadvantaged because of lack of education. But Uma tries to ignore her longings and comes to terms with the reality of her life. Her domestic chores absorb her mind. The nuns of her school invite her to engage in some services. Uma comes to grips with the reality of her situation and continues to live on. But Uma too is beset with a deep need for a sense of love and belonging. It is noticed in her happiness in cousin Ramu’s company.

The need for love, to give love and be loved is a significant urge. Inspite of this, the society is replete with despotic relationships, where many a time the deplorable fact is that woman turns out to be woman’s worst enemy. Woman, in the role of a mother-in-law carries out cruelty and violence on the cowed daughter-in-law, this in fact, is a poisonous circle. The oppressed daughter-in-law, in turn becomes the cruel mother-
in-law, at times. Frequently women have become the victims of human rage. Violence targeted against women by women is a reality which has been prevalent. Threat of an assault or violence against women has been repeatedly occurring in the society. The cruelty of the in-laws and husband is portrayed in Anamika’s case. She is the cowed victim of domestic violence and she suffers mutely. Kaplan opines that social silence is part of the constitution of female identity. The study reveals that she is beaten mercilessly; she sustains a miscarriage and is permanently damaged as a woman. The disaster of dowry-death is a stark reality in our contemporary society. Anamika’s life points out to the catastrophic reality of many an ill-fated girl being killed by cruel in-laws. Her in-laws manipulate the truth and present the facts of her murder as a suicide. This point serves to highlight the reality of umpteen dowry deaths and bride burning issues which are so rampant in the contemporary society.

The fact that MamaPapa remain nameless throughout the novel points out the universal presence of such parents especially in middle class families. It is a prevalent fact that parents plan, control and govern the activities and lives of their children to such an extent so as to cause the danger of entangling them, without even a realisation that they have their own aspirations and desires. The study looks into the children’s
predicament caught in a mesh of pleasing and obeying their parents at the expense of the sacrifice of their own aspirations. Arun resents the increased attention and love showered over him. He feels suffocated. In Massachusetts, Arun experiences a total freedom. But at the same time, he is a man without a family or even a country. Such are the mental repercussions of his parents’ excessive attention and protective upbringing.

The reality that marriage yet remains an attractive option for a woman is voiced here. MamaPapa do enjoy a blessed marriage. There is no conflict seen between them. Due to the fact that the bliss of marriage has not materialised in Uma’s life, she is lonely and suffering a deep void. This void is absent in Uma’s mother. Marriage is projected as the terminal achievement for a woman, inspite of education. This fact is reflected in Aruna’s example. Marriage holds a dominant position in life. It enhances the security of a maiden’s life.

**Conclusion:** The study reveals that the stamp of gender is so fixed in the society that, people presume so many disparities between men and women. Thus women learn to restrict their personalities right from the beginning. The fixation of family roles as perceived by society influences the determination and disposition of women. Societal attitudes restrict potentialities and thus forces women to maintain their servility.
Therefore, there is the urgency to question this kind of domineering attitude, in order to attain an independent full-fledged personality. The study proves that women can attain independence only if they liberate themselves from the desire to be subjugated to male superiority. However, the protagonist has tried to challenge this attitude, but in vain. Her inclination to read poetry in the privacy of her room and her calling Dr. Dutt about a job in the hospital point out to the fact of her penchant to be emancipated and her need to bypass the patriarchal norms. But she falls short of success due to her parents’ negative patterning right from her childhood. This study claims to point out the reality of the straitening influence of the traditional differences in the rearing of boys and girls, on the young girls’ mind set. Privileges are conceded to the boy with every aspect of his life. The predicament of the woman under such circumstances needs to be realised. Uma is denied the right to education not because of lack of amenities, but because of the wrong perception of her parents.
**The Zigzag Way**

**Introduction:** The novel *The Zigzag Way* belongs to the author’s mature phase. It was published in 2004. This is her latest novel, and it differs from her earlier novels in that, the novel is set in Mexico. Anita Desai presents the Mexican locale in her supremely luxuriant prose. The novel blends history, mythology, superstition and sense of mystery. The study seeks to examine the realities of immigration, exploitation, subjugation, slavery, colonization, displacement and a search for space and identity. The novel has won the Orange Prize for literature.

**Plot:** The novel contains four parts entitled Part I: Eric Arrives; Part-II: Vera Stays; Part-III: Betty Departs; and Part-IV: La Noche de los Muertos. There are three strands of story in the novel: One is that of Eric and Em, research students; the second is that of Dona Vera; and the third that of Betty Jennings and David Rowse. All the three strands meet at the Part IV of the novel. The novel probes into the male character Eric, who is the protagonist. However, the female characters are very magnetic. The women are not marginalized. Eric is a Harvard graduate and presently he is working at his thesis on immigration patterns in Boston in the 1900s. Due to lack of fresh ideas he proposes to expand the topic into general immigration patterns. He and his girlfriend Em (Emily Hatter) study in Boston. She is a scientific researcher. She, along with her professors,
launches on a field study to Mexico; Eric accompanies her to Mexico. Soon Eric realises that his presence is an unnecessary intrusion to Em’s research work. Fascinated by the endless sights in Mexico, Eric sets out on his own to discover more of the country. An unpremeditated reference which had been made by Eric’s father that he (Eric’s father) was born in Mexico and was taken away to England as an infant, animates in Eric a sense of curiosity about his ancestral history. Eric gets an opportunity to attend a lecture in Mexico on Huichol Indians. The lecture is delivered by Dona Vera, a rich old widow, whose husband Don Roderigo had been a mining tycoon. The lecture is delivered in the Spanish language of which Erich understands very little. But a set of place names uttered by the old lady fire Eric’s reminiscence. He recollects those words as told him by his grandfather in England. They were place names like Sierra Madre Oriental, Sierra de los Catorce, Real del Monte, La Purisima, La Asunción, Los Lorenzos, La Luz, Valenciana. These were the names of gold mines in Mexico where Eric’s grandfather had worked years ago.

Eric’s curiosity is now motivated to find out more of his ancestral heritage. So he seeks to journey to the Sierra Madre Oriental. The first part of the novel concludes with Eric’s arrival to the Hacienda de la Soledad. This is the centre for the study and research of the Huichol Indians which has been established by the great legendary figure, Dona
Vera. Herself, the widow of Don Roderigo, a mining baron she has taken upon herself to be the Saviour of the Huichol Indians. She is well-known in the area as Queen of Sierra; she has sought to preserve the Huichol religion and culture from the destructive onslaughts of the mining companies. Eric stays overnight at the hacienda. He however, incurs the wrath of Dona Vera, because he makes it clear that he has come here to see the mining town where his grandfather had once worked. Dona Vera cannot tolerate any person who comes to the hacienda without the austere purpose of studying her Huichol Indian.

The second part of the novel capitulates the story of Dona Vera, who is a refugee of the II world war. She hold an ambiguous reputation of a theatre artiste, an Austrain Nazi, a prostitute, a dancer and so on. She has impressed upon the wealthy widower Don Roderigo, who has embarked on a journey to Europe to rejuvenate the prospects of his mining business. He is so affected by this magnificent coquette Dona Vera, that he is attracted to her and marries her immediately. He brings her to Mexico city, where his mines are located. Dona Vera, chooses to stay at the hacienda away from the Mexico city. The hacienda is located at the foot of the mountainous region where the mining town lies.

The third part of the novel yields information of the young Betty Jennings who is engaged to be married to David Rowse. They are
Cornish and they get married in Mexico. David has migrated to Mexico from Cornwall, to work in the mines there, as most of the mines in Cornwall have failed. This part illuminates on the lives of Betty and David. The labour of the miners is depicted realistically for sometime they live peacefully. But with the outbreak of the Mexican revolution, their lives are disrupted. Betty is pregnant. The revolution causes great tumult and bloodshed. The Cornish miners transport their families to safe destinations. As they proceed in this journey, Betty gives birth to a son and breathes her last. David comes to England, marries Madge and brings up his son Paul, who is Eric’s father.

The fourth part of the novel which is named La Noche de los Muertos, that means the ‘Day of the Dead’, gives Eric a peep into the past. It is a special day observed by the Mexicans, a day they honour their dead ancestors. Eric meets his grandmother Betty’s ghost. He meets Don Roderigo’s ghost too. This part of the novel fuses the past and the present and also blends the three threads of the novel into a harmonious whole.

**Analysis:** The study attempts to explore the female characters of *The Zigzag Way* and bring out a clear cut perception of their feminine strength as depicted by the author. Jasbir Jain opines that “Anita Desai’s novels are about the preoccupations of a woman in a male world, and in some measure they can be viewed as novels of domesticity as it is defined in a patriarchal society.”74
But the study shows that the present novel *The Zigzag Way* presents women characters who may not be said to accede to the above statement. The female characters presented here are extremely tenacious and strong. Each one is enumerated in the present study. It is a well-known fact that women had in past remained dependent on men. Men were considered the sole bread winners. But in modern days the proportion of women who are getting educated has increased, and therefore, the employment opportunities have also increased. One can also find that women-headed households are on the rise, where women meet most financial needs of the household. Thus it can be seen that women occupy a very significant share of the labour force as well as white-collar jobs. Nowadays women are so successful at their jobs that they have provided adequate role models for the next generation. Women are now practically, mentally and financially more independent than they were in the past. There has also been an increased awareness and consciousness about the rights of women. The present novel illustrates this aspect of realism.

Emily Hatter, called Em in the novel illustrates the amount of wide-spread change that now characterize women’s lives. Such changes have created a deep need in women for self recognition. An affluent environment also has ushered in great freedom. Em knows that she is an
independent self. Em is presented as a strong woman and she is in control of her life. She is academically minded and she always moves with a preoccupied air about her. This sobriety in her sets her apart from the other girls whom Eric has encountered. Em is a sincere girl and she has varied interests. Em possesses an aptitude of devoting her undivided attention to the subject on hand. This is her strong point and it helps Eric to brace up his own vacillating and indeterminate nature. She is an apt support for the diffident Eric. Em exudes a warm, sweet, self-confident and poised personality. Em is a strong-willed, and determined personality, quite unlike the female protagonists of Anita Desai’s initial novels. The novel reveals it in these lives: “He was to learn that it was Emily Hatter’s gift to give her entire and serious attention to the subject at hand, so much so that it bolstered his own rather uncertain confidence in it.”

Em embarks on a study tour to Mexico. She has exhausted the resources for her research at Boston. Therefore, she wishes to carry her research study into the field. Eric finds himself accompanying her. The author depicts Eric as a person who does not possess an independent identity. He depends on Em for support. The novel reveals that Eric feels like this “Usually it was steadying to think of Em.....”
There is more than one instance in the text to reveal that Em was the superior of the two. When Eric is assailed by confusion, he feels: “If Em were here, he thought, she would have understood and grasped the whole situation in no time.”

Now Em undertakes a journey to Mérida, all by herself, in fulfillment of her research studies. She receives great certainty and confidence from her work. Therefore, she strikes the reader as a wise girl with a deep sense of forethought.

Human experience amply evidences to the fact that when people devote themselves to any worthwhile tasks, it lends a worthiness and meaning to life. The devotion to a reputable mission imparts a sense of service. Dona Vera devotes herself to the education and upliftment of the Huichol Indians, a diminishing tribe. She emerges as a power-figure. Inspite of her foreign identity, Dona Vera succeeds in accumulating power.

Dona Vera undertakes the journey to Mexico through her marriage to Don Roderigo. The novel reveals that she had almost outgrown her prospects at cabaret dancing and such other professions. Dona Vera is an opportunist. She comes forth as a domineering and gritty woman. Although she is a victim of dislocation, wherever she goes, she identifies herself with the culture of the land and empowers herself.
The novel reveals that she is an Austrian exile, a refugee from the II World War. Dona has been exploited as a dancer. This exploitation denotes the realistic aspect of the social malaise of the exploitation of helpless women. But in Mexico she has transformed herself into Queen of Sierra. She has forged a relationship with the Huichol Indians and has exerted herself to protect their culture. She has conscientiously worked hard towards their upliftment. She creates a base for the marketing of their hand-made objects, embroidery and artefacts. Her endemic adaptability to mingle with the tribal Huichol Indians, transforms her into an awe-inspiring personality. Vera possesses a distinct sensitivity towards the needs of the Huichols. The novel reveals that she is not an educated woman. But her mind is singularly receptive to the work regarding tribals that is being accomplished throughout the world.

The novel realistically presents the details of Vera’s everyday life, her drudgery in order to work for upliftment of the Huichols. Although the world has moved ahead and has experienced transformation, yet there exist people who remain in blind beliefs and superstitions. Such are the Huichols. Vera redeems the Huichols who have been marginalized by the mining company. But the people around there, treat Vera as a controversial woman.
The novel records the subliminal development of Vera from an ordinary dancer to a woman of great popularity. Vera has given the Huichols the service of a redeemer. In this act, she has gratified her own need for self-esteem. This is due to the fact that she is a migrant in Mexico. Her Hacienda is a centre for studies on the Huichol Indians. Her remarkable work with the Huichols helps to raise her on a very high pedestal.

But Dona Vera suffers an amount of alienation and detachment from the community. She is uprooted from her own motherland. She has led a wayward life and she is uprooted from moral values as well. Now loneliness assails her. She cultivates eccentricities and thus she lives separately in the hacienda. She can identify herself with the Huichols as they are uprooted individuals like her. Her nightmare reveals that there is a deep void in her heart. She has developed detachment from society as she has not received adequate affection and emotional reinforcement from the individuals she expected. Thus she has developed the peculiarity of hating anybody who comes to her hacienda without the august purpose of studying her Huichol. This unhealthy alienation from society leaves Dona Vera sapped of her emotional vitality. She remains an oddity with her own bunch of rules and regulations governing her territory.
However the stereotypical role of the weak or dependent woman is totally absent in the present novel. Here, the woman is the repository of all positive values. Another such woman is Eric’s mother. She is bred in the fishing village of Maine and is the sole daughter in a family of sons. The novel reveals that “..... she made it evident that while she cooked, cleaned and washed up for the others, she had a mind of her own, separate and intact.”\textsuperscript{78} Her assertiveness and self-confidence can be witnessed in her insistence on Eric’s education. She chooses to send Eric away to school. Eric, the Harvard scholar is recognized as an oddity in a lineage of vigorous Maine fishermen. Eric’s mother uproots him from such a milieu and plants him in a boarding school for education. She exudes great pluck when she chooses to be different in two instances. She had insisted on marrying the English stranger who had arrived in their village; and when she sent Eric way to school, “The small, progressive school......”\textsuperscript{79} Eric’s mother indicates an extraordinary perseverance and strength, a superb intelligence and vigilance, when she questions Em about all her academic pursuits. This behaviour depicts an unusual cognizance of the world outside her domestic periphery.

Betty Jennings is another lady of grit and determination. She struggles against all odds and yet does not give up. Through her mundane existence, Betty expands and grows in resilience. She is in search of her individuality which is reflected in her love for freedom.
Betty is an educated girl; she has attended the Chapel school in Delabole, Cornwall. She is a dutiful and illustrious girl. She is imbued with a fertile sense of imagination and sensibility. Her letters written back home to her sisters and father are evidence to the fact that she is fastidious. She spurns David’s attempt at curbing her freedom. The novel reveals a vestige of male domination in David’s irritation at Betty’s independent ways. Betty expresses her desire to be of some help to the poor classes. She communicates her philanthropic tendency in her awareness of the potter’s struggle for livelihood. Betty experiences no uneasiness when she buys his cheap earthen ware. David’s snobbish response does not deter her.

The uniform acquisition of identity and individuality through various means as pointed above surpasses any gender discriminations. These female characters possess a self-appraisal of their status as individuals. These characters are not neurotic, but they are in conscious control of their lives. The Zigzag Way presents emancipated female characters. The patriarchal forces or any other force cannot persecute them. They defy such forces. These women would like to redefine their identities and they struggle when challenged. The male characters are not evil. But their indirect attempts at curbing the women render them powerless. This oblique oppression is manifested in their incapacity to comprehend their women’s search for identity. The idealistic tendencies
of these women pose a challenge to their men. The author employs the male characters - Eric, Don Roderigo and David to ignite the women’s urge to move beyond themselves. In Em’s it is her academic pursuit, with Dona Vera, it is her service to the Huichol and with Betty, it is her drive towards the oppressed class. The picture portrayed is not of weakness or neuroticism, but that of tenacity and a power to nourish others around them.

The study of the novel reveals the capabilities of the woman towards suffering and adaptability. It also examines the woman’s power to transmute her surrounding in such a way that it serves as a site for enhancing herself and her confidence. The fact emerges from the study that women contain more prodigality and depth than men. Patriarchy which symbolizes male authority in the family and society, at times, tends to become ineffective. In The Zigzag Way, the members who represent patriarchy become puppets at the mercy of the women. This is seen both in Eric and some extent in Don Roderigo. Male chauvinism seems to be utterly destroyed. Thus the researcher has presented the realistic study of the women characters in the novel.

Another aspect of realism studied in The Zigzag Way is phenomenon of the Huichol Indians. Mexico had been economically exploited by the Spanish. The following lines from Carl Sartorius’ book, Mexico and Mexicans, 1959, have been quoted by the author:
“When at the beginning of the sixteenth century the Spaniards landed in Mexico, they first met with the natives of Sempollan, not far from the sea…..the chiefs wore silver and gold ornaments that attracted the rapacious glances of the white adventures. Their first question was ‘Whence comes this?’ The natives pointed to the west. When, soon after, the ambassadors of Montezuma brought rich presents of the precious metals adorned with emeralds, in order to induce the unbidden guests to turn back, they were confirmed in their opinion that there were literally golden mountains in the interior, and the cry was ‘Forwards’!”

These lines reveal that the ancient and immaculate glory that had flourished on mining, was seized by the Spanish encounter. The Mexicans had tried to understand these alien invaders. They strove to satisfy them with precious gifts, but the invaders were bent upon establishing their foothold. Thus the Spanish hegemony had imposed the Spanish language upon the land. With the war of independence, the struggle against this foreign domination had come to an end.

The Spanish invaders dislodged these native dwellers and cast them out of their land. Therefore, the Huichols may be viewed as a marginalized group. The mining industry had exploited and destroyed the land by continuous mining, thereby they had destroyed everything that the natives had cherished as divine. They are the primitive population of
that place. They, as a tribe have been silenced and kept ignorant by the
domineering Spanish, that is represented by the mining industry.
Throughout the history of the world, there have been many instances of
enslavement and torture of different races by powerful ones. Thus, the
driving off of the huichols from their rich mines and using them as
labourers or as beasts of burden. This kind of exploitation of the Huichols
is very touching. The destruction of these people and their culture has
been literally disregarded. It is natural that other forms of destruction
claim attention. The fate of these Mexican aboriginals is miserable. They
have experienced exploitation and injustice from the mining industries.
The Huichols had cultivated occult practices and superstitions. As
elsewhere, they were in a state of physical and psychological
vulnerability.

Oppressive conditions have left devastating effects on their
personality. They experience fear and insecurity at meeting strangers.
This is witnessed in their movements. This is due to the domineering
oppression to which they are subjected since a long time. This insecurity
and fear has become second nature to them. The Huichols who are
present at the hacienda are shy and withdrawn. They speak their own
native language. Their depiction is very realistic. They do not even speak
broken English. The oppression has also caused in them a suspended
sense of individuality. They are unable to think or reason anything. They are pathetically disintegrated. They are innocent and harmless. Theirs was a state of powerlessness and helplessness. They are torn from their home and culture. Their religious beliefs and practices are also snatched away from them. As Dona Vera accuses, the miners sought to dehumanize and enslave these people. They also erased their traditions and culture. Therefore, these people experience a sense of rejection, low self-esteem and inferiority complex. At the same time, this diminishing tribe has not relinquished its culture and traditions. They led a community life, as it gave them a sense of security. Harmony and cohesiveness was maintained. Brotherhood and social affinity was practiced, as they felt a deep need to hold on together. The Huichol Indians felt it essential to understand the universe that was around them. Their existence was closely linked to the elements of nature. Perhaps their survival depended upon it. The peyote cactus held great significance for them. Therefore, they trudged miles together in search of this magic mushroom. Their religion was related to the peyote cactus and it constituted an important aspect of life for them. Their life was permeated with such religious rites and customs. The Huichol also upheld a strong conviction in spiritual upliftment. It is true that only spiritual upliftment can to some extent minimize the damage done to their culture. Thus the Huichols are seen as a group who cling to their religious traditions. They asserted their faith by
travelling long distances on foot in search of the peyote cactus. The author portrays the festival of the dead, which happened to be a ritual associated with the past. The festival presents a realistic presentation of the essence of Mexican life.

**Conclusion:** The study depicts that *The Zigzag Way* depicts a progression in the role of female protagonists. A dominant role is allocated to them in this novel. It portrays a celebration of womanhood. Dona Vera denotes a great resourcefulness and strength, and an illustration of women achievers in the modern day world. All the women characters are depicted with the real woman as an exemplar. These female characters are at the zenith of feminine accomplishment. Thus the female protagonists may be viewed as significant aspects of the present day realism where female dynamism has reached the acme of fruitition. *The Zigzag Way* denotes a total departure from the passive role of women with a limited space and influence on the outer world, to a very positive role. So with the presentation of female characters in such a positive way, the reality of the modern society can be evidenced. The present study finds that the depiction is very much in accordance with the present reality. The present day reality reveals that women are dynamic. They are conspicuous and invincible. They have emerged out of their domestic realm. The study reveals that the reality of woman as the fountain of
strength and resilience is firmly rooted and established. Thus the study finds that *The Zigzag Way* spurns the stereotyped depiction of the woman as docile and dependent.
Notes


6. Desai, 255.


9  Desai, 36

10  Desai, 16


13  Johnson, 54

14  Johnson, 61

15  Johnson, 61
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Desai, 133

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Desai, 140


26 Desai, 142

27 Desai, 144


29 Wilson, 245

30 Anita Desai, Journey To Ithaca, (New Delhi: Ravi Dayal Publisher, 1996), 160

31 Desai, 17

32 Desai, 17

33 Desai, 18

34 Desai, 28

35 Desai, 280
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Kaplan Cora: *Sea Change: Culture and Feminism*, (London: Verso, 1986), 79


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