CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters, the researcher has endeavoured to analyse the novels of Anita Desai from the point of view of realism. The study reveals that psychological realism is present in the novels. In this chapter, the researcher would like to provide a brief note on the study conducted so far.

The first chapter commenced with the Introduction. An evaluation of the distinct features of Indian fiction in English was given along with a summary of the prominent position it has acquired over the years. A few words were said about the international acclaim won by the Indian writers of English fiction and then a catalogue of the novels which have won the prestigious Booker awards was given. The topic of the study was proposed, followed by a brief note on the life and works of Anita Desai. The chapter closed with a survey of the Indian writers of English fiction.

The second chapter gave a note on the growth and development of realism. This was followed by an appraisal of the different types of realism. The term was also explained with illustrations. Then a note on how the author has dealt with realism in her works was given.
The third chapter dealt with the novels pertaining to the author’s initial period of creativity. *Cry, The Peacock, Voices in the City, Bye-Bye Blackbird* and *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* were dealt with here. *Cry, The Peacock* yielded the aspects of psychological realism, such as neurosis, depression, alienation, fear psychosis and regression. The father-fixated Maya was married to an elderly gentleman, Gautama. The novel portrayed the agony which she undergoes with an insensitive husband, (although dutiful), which finally led to madness, murder and suicide.

Maya, the sensitive heroine was seized by two maladies. One was the albino astrologer’s prophesy of death for either her or her husband before the completion of four years of marriage and other was the meaningless relationship with Gautama, her husband. The prophesy had been told to her during her childhood and this continued to cast its ugly shadow throughout her adulthood. Coupled with her childlessness, her married relationship resulted in an unfathomable loneliness. The study was supported with illustrations from literature on Abnormal Psychology and Psychiatry.

The absence of adaptability was found to generate a sustained conflict and tension, as seen in *Voices in the City*. The realistic aspect of trying to escape from the entanglement of an abusive marriage could also
be witnessed. Monisha was presented in the tangle of a conventional marriage where her individuality was shredded. This led her to suicide. The reality of a wife as a psychological jailbird was manifested here.

The reality of the callous behaviour meted out in some joint families was manifested. Monisha succumbed due to the utter lack of freedom. The analysis proved that joint family might be a convenient way of living if the atmosphere was congenial and the members sympathetic. Traditional women might have cherished self-effacement. But the same principle may not be applied to an intellectual woman. The reality that even birds stop singing if they are imprisoned, rings true to life.

In *Bye Bye Blackbird* the researcher explored and analysed the issues of alienation and the lack of identity that confronts an Indian in a white man’s land. The predicament of an English girl Sarah married to Adit, an Indian was also analysed. Thus the study has dealt with the affliction and oppression of the immigrants’ experiences in an alien country. The story revolved around three characters Adit, Dev and Sarah.

*Where Shall We Go This Summer?* has brought out the aspects of parental rift and estrangement, homelessness and the effects of childhood experiences on adult personality. These aspects were supported with certain illustrations procured from literature on Child Psychology.
The study also explored that Sita, the protagonist sought to undermine the claims of the male-dominated world by trying to empower herself. This, she showed through her escape to Manori. Being just a woman was different from being a mother. She realized this the hard way. In this novel, as the study revealed, Anita Desai permeated an acquiescence with male attitudes. This deference worked towards a healthy inner strength as well as a compliance with the social norms. Therefore, the woman in this novel discovered the hard truth of viewing her disappointments with a sense of indifference and thereby attained to a level of maturity and inner strength.

The fourth chapter examined the novels such as *Fire on the Mountain*, *Clear Light of Day*, *The Village by the Sea* and *In Custody*. The aspects such as barrenness and its repercussions, suicide, neurosis, loneliness and effects of marital disharmony were examined.

The analysis of *Fire on the Mountain* exhibited the realism of marital disharmony, male chauvinism, domestic violence, rape, gender discrimination and alienation. *Fire on the Mountain* portrayed the reality of societal and patriarchal expectations, that a woman should suppress her own longings and sacrifice herself on the altar of the family. The wife/mother should make herself totally non-existent in order to avoid conflict. This is the reality of the wife’s predicament, even today, in an educated household. Reticence on the part of the woman is always regarded as a virtue.
Nanda Kaul realized that violence is widespread, pervasive and it reigned supreme. Even the silent Kasauli was not an exception where the heinous act of murder and rape took place. This indicated the reality of violence in society. Even unselfish people like Ila Das were not spared. She was a conscientious social worker, who endeavoured towards the good of the society. But her predicament pointed out to the bestiality of a materialistic society.

One realizes that love is extremely essential for life to move on. Nanda Kaul tried to deny what she required most, that was love and relating to one another. The warmth of a human relationship was what she needed most. She had withdrawn only physically from a life of responsibilities and annoyances. But she could not escape her past, nor could she come to terms with her present. Fire on the Mountain directed attention to the fact that a woman degenerates into a pawn in the hands of the man. She has to perform to his whims and fancies. Even after her husband’s death, Nanda Kaul, who craved for liberty, but was again enmeshed with Raka. One is forced to accede to the fact that a woman has to be always at others’ disposal. She cannot claim freedom except in her death. The same was true of Ila Das. Fire on the Mountain mirrored the plight of the society, that it failed to gratify the longings and aspirations of its women. It also pointed out that the cruel world did not
leave its women unscathed. Therefore, any endeavour on the part of human beings to determine a definite plan for life, is bound to flounder. Life is uncertain and unpredictable. Conflict, dilemma and suffering is inevitable. Peace and solitude elude grasp.

The evaluation of *Clear Light of Day* showed the facts of the independent, modern woman, parent-child relationship, sibling relationship, the psychological problems of spinsterhood and widowhood. Bim was the new woman who had developed a hostility towards men. She questioned marriage and strongly held the belief that education could make a woman capable of leading a financially, self-sufficient, single and fulfilling life. Bim had shattered the myth of a weak, clinging, dependent woman. The study revealed the author’s rebellion against the chauvinistic attitudes of men. The opposition was more pronounced in this novel, where Anita Desai imbued Bim to determine the course of her own life, which was however, very positive.

In *The Village By The Sea* the researcher has sought to examine the general influences of civilization and industrialization on a small village. The life of the people was oppressed to such an extent that they decided to migrate to the city in search of sustenance. Thus, in this novel the author has dealt with social realism, that of the socio-economic transformation, natural calamities and the aspect of migration.
The protagonist, Hari exhibited a sharp perception of the forces that were at work in his rural environment. Therefore, he stood out as an enterprising young man, who came to terms with the transformations that were in the offing. His decision to migrate to Bombay portrayed him as role model to his family and society.

Thus, the novel depicted the movement of the characters to a fuller life and towards positivity. Anita Desai portrayed a real slice of life. Therefore, the novel reveals an onward march. Anita Desai depicted an unflinching dedication to portray felt and lived experiences of individuals. In this way she illustrates her grasp of social reality.

The examination of *In Custody* revealed the inner realism of the agony of failure, frustration and powerlessness. The study explored the reality of the twists and turns that life took when the protagonist wanted to redeem the material and temporal nature of his experiences to the indestructible and abiding realm of poetry. *In Custody* portrayed Sarla, who put up with her loneliness with stoicism. Out of this wisdom there originated the tenacity to carry on her life meaningfully. Sarla developed an inner strength and tolerance, even in the face of cool indifference from her husband, Deven. She engaged herself in practical domestic chores and balanced her sense of disillusionment. This was revealed in *Clear Light of Day* too, where Bim found happiness in her job. This was her prime
weapon to beat the indifference of her familial ties. Sarla divulged herself as resourceful, in that, she manoeuvred her home affairs, inspite of financial straits. She exuded an inner strength. The same was true of Bim in *Clear Light of Day*.

The fifth chapter took up for study the novels *Baumgartner’s Bombay*, *Journey to Ithaca*, *Fasting Feasting* and *The Zigzag Way* that mark the author’s later period. The study revealed the inner realities of loneliness, detachment, racial discrimination, victimization and rootlessness as experienced by the exiles and immigrants in *Baumgartner’s Bombay*. Nostalgia, the unpredictability of life, isolation and alienation were explored and discussed. *Baumgartner’s Bombay* revealed that life is grovelling and excruciating and many a time it was constantly grim. The struggle for existence led Hugo to a sense that happiness was very transient. He was appalled by his own helplessness at the forces of war that he encountered. But the struggle to overcome which was always on, helped him to mobilize his sheer will to survive.

*Journey to Ithaca* portrayed the conviction that spiritual or religious faith was essential for the internal health of the individual. Without this aspect life heads towards disaster. This aspect was inferred through the present novel. The study analysed the predominant spiritual realism of the journey of the soul towards salvation. Displacement and rootlessness were also traced here.
The study of *Fasting Feasting* revealed that equality in opportunities and treatment between men and women was yet to be achieved. Thus the social realism of gender discrimination was evident in this novel. Subsequently, the study sought to expose the detrimental impact of such attitudes on the female protagonist’s psyche.

*The Zigzag Way* revealed that Anita Desai has great faith in female potentiality and power. *The Zigzag Way* presented woman in an ultimate position of power in the family and social structure. The author also gave a perfect portrait of the complexities and yearnings of the sensitive female heart. The novel illustrated that the woman does not remain in her traditional roles of the wife and the mother only, but apart from these she has developed intellectually and economically. Therefore, Anita Desai’s insight into the female psyche registers the woman’s onward development into an independent being. This contemporary social realism was effectively depicted in the novel. Further, the contemporary modern man does not treat the competent woman as his rival. This is revealed in Eric, his father and even Eric’s grand-father.

Thus, an appraisal of Anita Desai’s novels from the view of realism was made in the previous chapters. Therefore, an assessment of Anita Desai as a pioneer novelist may now be undertaken.
The study manifests the presence of a psychological or inner realism in most of the novels. Anita Desai has a deep comprehension of the human heart. It is seen that the author does not idolize life. But she depicts the plight of human beings in their familial and social relationships. She analyses the reasons why life does not remain pleasant and amicable all the time. Therefore, the study reveals that she examines marital life and the causes of disharmony. It is seen that attitudes and ways of thinking clash. Domestic life is portrayed and in the process, the psyche of the protagonists is laid bare. The novels voice out the psychological turmoil of many a, middle-aged, educated woman who is ill-adjusted in her marital life. The actual human condition is realistically depicted.

The protagonists battle against the domestic responsibilities heaped upon them. They labour against the reality of the humdrum existence and they grapple with their gender-based roles. One can deduce that the depiction of female characters in Anita Desai’s novels is a cogitation the author’s own experiences of the condition of women in the contemporary society. One cannot deny the facts of the subsidiary placement given to women in a male dominated society. The study shows the women as enmeshed in their domestic circles and societal attitudes. Their moves towards independence are choked by the self-centred men.
The callousness of men in being insensitive to the feelings of women who look after the domestic front is a pertinent reality. This kind of insensitivity brings out the gender disparity which is ubiquitous in most households.

Anita Desai’s novels are more occupied with thoughts, emotions and sentiments than with the outward actions and achievements. In the exploration of the inner life of her female protagonists, Anita Desai imparts to the reader the whole of the internal aspect of a woman. The plots of the novels of Anita Desai are not disconnected or even unrealistic combination of events. A systematic organization is found between the physical environment and psychological atmosphere of the protagonists. This organization is found to lend a realistic profundity to her novels.

The researcher infers from this study that life’s afflictions teach an individual a sense of balance and wisdom. This is a well-known reality. One is drawn to relish and respect the ingenuousness of these protagonists. In *Clear Light of Day*, the author saturates Bim with the strength of introspection, from which Bim derives her sense of balance and wisdom. Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* experiences the same. Sita’s concern and consideration for Raman’s professional difficulties and sacrifices drives a sense of balance and wisdom in her. She constructs the need to compromise. In *Clear Light of Day*, the author
draws in Bim, the sense of oneness and brotherhood of filial ties, through
Bim’s sense of rumination and introspection. In *Voices in the City*, Amla
gains a new understanding of herself, through her disillusionment with
love. Thereby, she strengthens herself to a new perspective towards life.
*Zigzag Way* presents Dona Vera as a champion of the tribal society.

*Clear Light of Day* and *Voices in the City*, rectify the intrinsic
patriarchal ideas regarding a spinster, who is usually treated with disdain
and who has to abide by a strict code of social inhibitions. The study
reveals that the author revolutionizes the status of a spinster by depicting
the potential possibilities opening out for her. In other words, Anita
Desai, indirectly questions the social discrepancies between man and
woman. In *Clear Light of Day*, Anita Desai reverses the social concept of
marriage as the girl’s career. The protagonist Bim does not depict any
implicit adherence to the notions of an idealistic marriage.

The study throws light on the essence of female experiences and
struggles towards their identity. Anita Desai demonstrates her cognizance
of reality when she displays women striving with the problem of identity.
This is an ineluctable aspect of westernization and education. Woman
faces this conflict due to the expectations of her family about her. Some
possess the skill of adaptability, but for others it is an agonizing process.
Each of Anita Desai’s novels is created out of a specific inner reality and carries the stamp of contemporary times. The researcher feels that the author renews her own emotional and psychological conflicts and experiences as a woman, to communicate the longings of her characters. She connects it with the inner world of her characters.

The study illuminates on this aspect of reality that a sensitive woman is dependent on her man to validate her life. Acceptance and genuine love provide for emotional health. Anita Desai’s novels reflect the behavior and the psychological make-up of many a woman. The characters are honourable women and they comply with the society’s specified standards. But they fail to achieve happiness. In other words, Anita Desai succeeds in procuring the empathetic consideration of the reader, for the frustrations of the female characters who are in a conflict to satisfy the demands of the family and the society.

Anita Desai’s grasp of reality can be noted in the fact that any woman who cannot confirm to societal or family norms is ill-fated, as is seen in the examples of Maya in Cry, the Peacock and Monisha in Voices in the City. The severe independent nature of these characters is seen. Also is seen a conflict between a sacrificial acceding to the indifference of patriarchy, while they accept it and reject it at the same time. Thus, the female experience exudes complexity, in that, due to the conflict of yearning for security and authentication in man’s love and care, and at the same time, the humiliation of self-effacement.
Therefore, women experience a suffocation. The novels contain the omnipresent gloom of the characters’ sadness. Thus, they evince the persistent inner realism. With financial sufficiency, the educated upper middle-class couple has to combat against the onset of monotony, boredom and cynicism. As in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Sita sinks into deeper boredom and ennui, with the advent of children. The companionship with Raman is felt strongly, as he has to cope with his own professional pressures. Sita is reduced to staleness and a sense of futility.

The reality of most marriages are factitious and a dissimulation, with the wife walking the tight rope in majority of the cases. But, eventually they come to the point where they turn out to be relationships of non-communication. They live under one roof, but without shared lives. The study reveals that the relationship is like the plight of an individual who is tethered to a hard nail, with a limited circumference for his movement. The woman finds it difficult to relate to society without a husband. The reality of the hypocrisy of matrimony is very clear through the study of some of Anita Desai’s novels. Anita Desai’s female protagonists are fettered under the façade of marital ties. The author displays a comprehensive understanding of marital relationships and the plight of women caught in its mesh. This is so especially when the relationship is steeped in inequality.
The study reveals the basic realities of the society and the reality of the self-effacing nature of women. Their integrity and rectitude is not hard to locate. Thus the author brings out the powerful realism of psychological problems, trials and afflictions that relate to the human predicament. Anita Desai deals with human problems, these are relevant not only to the Indian scenario, but also elsewhere. She is conscious and well aware of the similarity in female human nature, whether Indian or foreign. National boundaries cannot obliterate the emotional cravings of women. This point is very much clear with the example of Mrs.Patton in *Fasting Feasting*. Her self-effacing personality and her emotional longing for her husband’s understanding ring authentic. Thus, there is a common bond which links Arun’s mother and Mrs.Patton in USA in *Fasting Feasting*.

The female protagonists are intellectual women who are capable of analyzing their thought processes and behaviour patterns. They are always on the onward move. This defines a change in their thinking and actions. The researcher finds that as the novels of Anita Desai progress chronologically, there is a growth of the woman into a liberated and independent personality. Thus, the perusal of all the twelve novels shows that the protagonists make a movement from an intense preoccupation and mania with the self to the realization of their positive capabilities.
There is evidenced a grand admission of all the assertive traits. Sophie in *Journey To Ithaca*, Lila in *The Village By The Sea* and Sarla in *In Custody*, proficiently manage their lives. The climax comes with Dona Vera, Em, Betty and Eric’s mother in *The Zigzag Way*. This in turn, leads to a better adaptation with the family and the community. The reconciliation begins with Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* In *Clear Light of Day*, Bim addresses herself to her worth within the community and the family. Bim embraces womanhood and at the same time opts out of marriage. With the characters in *The Zigzag Way*, the positive traits are clearly evinced. *Clear Light of Day* brings into focus a major issue of all times, that is the acceptance of the equality of rights and opportunities between men and women. Here one witnesses that woman dwells on the fringes of patriarchy. This trend is seen more clearly in *The Zigzag Way*. Thus Anita Desai voices out an important aspect of realism—the movement of woman from the subservient wife to an assertive being. At the same time, they do not compromise on the values that sustain life.

A complete and perfect happiness is a delusion, but an amount of joy can be arrived at only through an inner poise. The immense materialism has taken its toll on human relationships. Thus the study proves that there is an aspect of negation or absence in human
relationships, may it be a marital, parent-child or sibling relationship. This reality is found to be ubiquitous in modern life. Thus it is found that all relationships are fragile.

The ordeals and afflictions in varied forms, such as physical, psychological, moral or social, bring out in man, sometimes the best and sometimes the worst. *Baumgartner’s Bombay* portrays the brutal murder of Hugo by Kurt, who is caught in the throes of addiction. *The Zigzag Way* portrays Dona Vera as the protector of the Huichols. Dona Vera was once subjected to moral ordeals. Man’s conscience is blunted on the one hand, and sharpened on the other. The author’s concern for human relations thus, helps her to scrutinize them in various ways.

Man’s struggle is not only limited to the outer world, but also continues to his inner self. Almost all of Anita Desai’s novels illustrate this point. All her characters suffer perennial agony and anxiety. But poverty and hunger is absent, except in *The Village By The Sea*. Degradation of the human soul caused due to poverty, depravity and addiction is seen in *Baumgartner’s Bombay* in the character of Kurt. The reason also lies behind the rootlessness caused due to war. One encounters the inadvertent and unwitting nature of life and of goodness.

Anita Desai depicts the Indian social scene in her portrayal of urban life in cities. The individuals reel under the burden of oppression
and bondage of the sordid atmosphere of city life. Almost invariably, one finds his/her psyche bruised by the social and cultural pattern. The individual is carried through conflict, detachment and again a sense of attachment revolving one after the other. This occurs not only in the familial set-up, but also in the social set-up.

The author effectively brings out the effect of childhood experiences and their upbringing on adult personality. The unhealthy behaviour on the part of the individuals could only be attributed to the unhealthy influences of their childhood. Her exquisite sense of characterization is evident in her portrayal of young people, children, and old people in a comprehensive manner.

The novels are a witness to the author’s ingenuity of transforming the female experiences into literature. The frustrations and anxieties due to a lack of understanding and loving relationships are voiced out in a realistic way. Further the strength emanating from these disillusionments is also revealed with equal authenticity. The author stands out as an excellent writer of psychological reality.