CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Indian English literature is a distinct inheritance to the Indian culture. Foreign invasions have brought with them inimitable features into India and the English language is one of them. The English language has acclimatized itself into the structure of Indian life and has become a vital aspect. Indians have displayed an immense capacity in adopting the language and using it vigorously for literary expression.

Fiction is a very distinct, forceful and dominant form of literary expression as it epitomizes the experiences and ideals of the times. It is a powerful and accurate documentation of the social traditions and social changes. Most of the indigenous literatures in India had made considerable progress in literature by the 1920s and 1930s, when fiction in Indian English made its emergence.

Indian fiction in English has received a great critical acclaim both in India and abroad. Indian English novels have won immense cognizance, acknowledgement and respect in the international literary domains. They are now being published abroad by distinguished publishing companies. This aspect only serves to convey the august position accorded to Indian English fiction. This denotes that Indian Fiction in English, today, is popular and willingly chosen by international
readers. As an evidence to this fact, Indian English novels have won accolades and at the zenith of their literary excellence, awards and prizes have continued to flow in. The most prominent are: Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight Children* (which won the Booker prize in 1981; it was also acclaimed the “Booker of Bookers”). Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (which also won the Booker Prize in 1997) and Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* (which won the Booker Prize too).

Indian fiction has passed through various milestones; one of them is the occasion for writing in a foreign language. Yet it has surpassed all barriers and has acquired the prerogative of international critical appreciation. It has been accorded a prodigious reputation even in commonwealth literary fields. A historical view of what embodies Indian fiction in English would establish a background to present the achievement of the subject of this study, that is, Anita Desai. It is essential to give a brief analysis of the road trodden by Indian English fiction.

English fiction in India has crossed several stages before it could assert its presence on the literary scene. The predominance of the British and the English language impressed upon the psyche of the writers to such an extent that, the thematic concerns were all imbued with a strong nationalistic spirit coupled with the Gandhian principles. The writers
pondered upon the historical aspects very cognizably. It was implicitly understood that the historical consciousness of the writers had to be given an apt expression; and that one could not, as a writer, detach oneself from it. The historical aspect is the common strain running among the Indian English novelists. Writing in an alien language was not an easy task. English was the language of the colonizers and portraying the Indian sensibilities in English was a real challenge. Therefore the writers were grappling with the search for identity in the colossal and dominating influence of the rulers and their language. There was a continual conflict between the English and the native cultures which resulted in a feeling of alienation among the Indian English writers. As a consequence of all this, a psychological rootlessness prevailed. The depiction of rootlessness and alienation with a severe suffering due to the predicament was a common phenomenon. It is a fact that literature, especially fiction contemplates upon the contemporary social, cultural and political scenario. Thus it lends a truthful picture of the existing conditions and developments. Therefore, the present study of Anita Desai’s novels from the realistic perspective is definitely a considered rewarding one.

The present topic—“Realism in Anita Desai’s Novels: A Critical Study”, has been chosen for research as the researcher has observed that Anita Desai’s works have been explored from many other angles. As
there is immense scope to fathom in the realm of realism, the researcher has chosen this area for critical analysis. The present study is based on the belief that a study in this area is quite advantageous and a fruitful endeavour. This study is unique in that, the magnitude of the study is very comprehensive as it includes all the twelve novels of Anita Desai put together.

A Brief Note on the life and works of Anita Desai: Anita Desai has written the following novels:

2. Voices in the City, 1965
4. Where Shall We Go This Summer? 1975
5. Fire On The Mountain, 1977
7. Village By Sea, 1982
8. In Custody, 1984;
10. Journey To Ithaca, 1996
11. Fasting, Feasting, 1999
12. The Zigzag Way, 2004
Born of a German mother Toni Nime and a Bengali father Mazumdar, Anita Desai was born in Mussorie in 1937. She completed her education at Queen Mary’s College, Delhi and at Miranda College, University of Delhi. A graduate in English literature, she is a member of the Faculty of Mount Holyoke College, Massachusetts, USA. She is a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in London, the American Academy of Arts and Letters in New York, Girton College and Clare Hall at the University of Cambridge and the Sahitya Akademi in India. She has been honoured with awards like the Alberto Moravia Prize for Literature and the Padma Shri. Her mixed parentage and her mother’s expatriate experience has afforded her an edge to understand the most agonizing human predicaments like loneliness, alienation, rootlessness etc. She depicts the unexplored world of the female mind and its predicament. Her themes are of enduring concern to her female as well as her male readers. She treats the aloneness of the individual in a highly materialistic and ununderstanding environment. Anita Desai’s status as a non-resident Indian has sharpened her sensibility to comprehend the cultural flux and emotional instability of modern individuals. The cultural and emotional dislocation and sense of alienation ailing her individuals are seen as the reasons behind myriads of psychological problems, physical ailments and lack of adaptability. The women in her novels suffer as a result of an incompatible relationship. She explores the inner
reality of sensitive individuals. As the author portrays the inner reality rather than the outer reality, the present study analyses the submerged feelings and agonies of the characters. The approach of the research is to analyse each of the twelve novels and examine how they reveal realism. The method employed by this study is to analyse the individual characters in each of the novels. The study explores into how each character deals with herself as a human being and as an emotional being, in particular. The study also involves in examining the protagonists’ consciousness as a social being and its effect on her relationships with the family. The study takes into consideration the intricate thought processes of the protagonists.

In the following chapters an attempt has been made to show how the author has dealt the themes realistically in her novels. The novelist expresses the real anguish and agony of the protagonists. The intention behind the study is to see and lay bare the nature of afflictions and mental struggles of the woman and to see how Anita Desai has reacted to this unfortunate psychological phenomena. Therefore, the prospective chapters explore to what extent Anita Desai penetrates into the experiences, thought and emotional processes of sensitive women. The present study explores how Anita Desai presents the woman’s psyche realistically.
Therefore, from this point of view, the researcher believes that all the novels of Anita Desai deserve to be examined from the perspective of realism and as the foregoing study will prove that realism is the dominant note in her novels. The proposed study, will throw more light on the themes and form of Anita Desai’s novels, which will subsequently provide a very significant contribution to the existing texts on Anita Desai.

**Structure of the study:** The structure of the present study is divided into six chapters. Chapter-I is entitled Introduction. Here, the researcher provides the title of the intended study and justifies the reasons for selecting the particular title. The chapter also contains the structure of the study, a note on the life and literary works of Anita Desai and a brief survey of Indian Fiction in English.

Chapter II provides a note on the growth and development of realism, the different types of realism, the meaning of realism and how it is portrayed in the novels of Anita Desai.

Chapter III takes up for study the first four novels which mark the author’s early period of creativity. They are *Cry, the Peacock, Voices in the City, Bye-Bye Blackbird* and *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*
Anita Desai’s first novel, *Cry, the Peacock* took the literary world by storm as it was the first work of its kind on the Indian English firmament. Anita Desai has enriched Indian fiction in English by providing a new dimension to it in the form of the psychological novel. The study seeks to analyse the psychological realities of marital incompatibility and its consequences on the sensitive psyche of the protagonist, Maya. Anita Desai concerns herself with portraying the life of the upper middle classes, especially the women, who are psychologically and spiritually torn apart. She depicts the predicament of those who cannot adapt healthily to normal circumstances. She is more concerned about the fate of married women. Women feel the need for a kind of life which caters to her innermost longings for a true companionship. Anita Desai portrays the reality of sensitive, educated women, without careers, married to insensitive men. The study examines such of the tribulations of the woman in this novel. Marriage, being the corner stone of a healthy society at large, is infested with this hypocrisy and notion that the woman is being provided for and that she is happy. But the truth or inner reality is far away from the general idea. Anita Desai tries to bring to light the plight of the educated women in this way. She tries to show that it is the communication of spirits, which is true marriage and this spiritual companionship gives significance to life. The author persuades the reader to think deeply. Her work involves itself in human nature and human relationships.
The study seeks to portray how the author presents life and reality in her works. It evinces life and its tender, sometimes sore reality, especially of the suffering women. She unveils the life of the upper middle class woman, the life which she knows very well. She puts forth life as she observes it and it is inner reality, that she puts forth. The present novel is a harrowing tale of the father–fixated Maya who is married to an elderly gentleman. The novel portrays the agony which she undergoes with an insensitive husband, (although dutiful), which finally leads to madness, murder and suicide.

Anita Desai’s second novel, is *Voices in the City*. The study seeks to elaborate on the realities of familial detachment in the urban milieu, the reality of the different forms of detachment and non-involvement of the characters, the destructive effects of parental incompatibility and resentment over the lives of the children. The study focuses on the experiences of the absence of love, companionship and communication in familial relationships, especially in an atmosphere of callousness and selfishness. Thus the novel is an attempt to embody the different planes of reality. The study seeks to examine all the above mentioned aspects of realism.

*Bye-Bye Blackbird* explores the crucial experiences of immigrants in adapting to their new land. They experience a kind of love-hate
relationship towards the nation of their adoption and this is manifested in the lives of the protagonists, Adit and Dev. The fact that they should endure a sense of marginality and inferiority, and the consequent awareness of the impossibility of their being accepted by the adopted country, creates a tumult in them. They speculate about how to subsist in a foreign society. The study probes into the reality of the situation of immigrants and envisages both the social and psychological aspects of their experiences. The affliction and oppression of the immigrants’ experiences, both in the rural and urban milieu in an alien country is vividly examined. Dev, Adit and Sarah are the three characters whose conflicts and struggles provide the reality of immigrants’ predicament. The story revolves round these three characters. It grapples with the inter-racial marriage of Adit and Sarah and its impact on Sarah’s psyche.

*Where Shall We Go This Summer?* was published in 1975. The author depicts the upper middle-class milieu in this novel. The protagonist, Sita is a hyper-sensitive, extremely emotional and middle-aged woman. She is perturbed by the violence and cruelty that she witnesses around her. She suffers from an inherent inability to adapt to her social milieu.

Here, the researcher has analysed the following aspects of realism in this novel: the effect of childhood experiences on adult personality,
parental rift and estrangement, the effect of homelessness in childhood and the resultant insecurity, loneliness and boredom of city life, communication gap between spouses and temperamental incompatibilities.

Sita is the mother of four children and she is expecting her fifth child. She wants to escape to Manori island as she presumes that it might be possible to be sane again. She resents the pregnancy and in order not to give birth, she goes to Manori under the impression that the magical atmosphere of the island may prevent her child from being born. But her ultimate realisation that life is based on a sense of reconciliation, saves her from utter mental chaos and destruction.

Chapter IV deals with *Fire on the Mountain*, *Clear Light of Day*, *The Village By The Sea* and *In Custody*, that mark the author’s middle period of creativity.

The *Fire on the Mountain* which was published in 1977, won the Sahitya Academi Award for 1978 and the Royal Society Award. The novel portrays Nanda Kaul who suffers from alienation and detachment. She lives alone in a bunglow in Kasauli, a hilly resort, near the Himalayas. She values complete solitude and she has done away with family cares and concerns. Nanda Kaul’s efforts at maintaining a total seclusion ends in utter failure and an eventual disaster.
The study has explored the realities of responsibility, concern and involvement as well as a life of denial, detachment and retreat that ultimately lead to the great reality of death. The senselessness and purposelessness of life, which amounts to meaninglessness is the essence of life as portrayed in the novel. *Fire On The Mountain* is built on this vision and idea. The study analyses the plight of the protagonist, Nanda Kaul, who is entangled in the throes of her own singular nature and agony of detachment. Her internal encounter with the sense of meaninglessness and rejection has been explored into.

*Clear Light of Day* was published in 1980. The novel is set in Old Delhi and it records the enormous changes that a Hindu family goes through since the Indian independence. It portrays Bim, the protagonist, who marks a progression from the weak and sensitive protagonists whom the author had portrayed in her earlier novels. Bim does not suffer mental trauma. She does not cherish suicidal tendencies. In fact, she is a dynamic woman who is in total control of her life. Bim does not remain confined to the domesticity. She officiates between the private and the public. For her, her education is the emancipating factor, bringing her an assurance of rich intellectual life, economic relief and autonomy from the dismal atmosphere of her own home. Therefore, the study explores into the realism of the new woman.
The *Village By The Sea* has won the 1982 Guardian award for children’s fiction. The story is based entirely on fact and the author presents the realities of the rural poor with clarity. It is the real life story of a family in a village called Thul, situated on the western coast of India. The characters are all real, based on living individuals. But their actual names have been changed in the novel. The present study spotlights the critical situation of poverty. The pathetic economic circumstances suffered by the characters point to the stark reality of life. The study examines the realities of the agony and anguish of the peasants as they haggle with the complications and challenges of life and living. The various aspects of realism examined here are, the way in which man develops resilience when he confronts trials and afflictions, and how he musters the sustenance required to navigate himself through hindrances, inconveniences and obstacles. The study seeks to examine the identity problems of the protagonist and how he responds to the cultural transformations around him. The realities explored here are the facts that show that life is an adventure at times, for certain people; and that one needs to cast away old social values and conventionality and move forward with time. The study also explores the conflict between the urge to flourish in life along with the enhancing of one’s capacity for growth, and the urge to remain in the old set-up.
In Custody was published in 1984. It marks another stage in the career of Anita Desai as a novelist. It digresses from the usual preoccupations of the author with hyper-sensitive and neurotic female protagonists. Here the author delves into the male protagonist’s psyche. The present study explores into the reality of the twists and turns which life suddenly takes when the protagonist wants to redeem the material and temporal nature of his experiences to the indestructible and abiding realm of poetry. The study envisages the struggle of the protagonist who seeks a positive freedom from a self-imposed trap of self-effacement and suicide.

As this novel explores the male psyche, the female characters are on the periphery of the narrative. It asserts the author’s belief in the positivity of life. The struggle with repeated failure and exploitation leads the protagonist, Deven into a mellowed understanding of life. The study also examines the strain of marital incompatibility that further aggravates the existing problems of the protagonist. The reality of an idealistic spirit that is enclosed in materialism is explored.

Chapter V deals with her later novels such as Baumgartner’s Bombay, Journey To Ithaca, Fasting Feasting and The Zigzag Way.

Baumgartner’s Bombay 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. The study analyses the actualities of victimization of an individual by impersonal forces which are beyond his control. 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 that the researcher explores 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. Real life with its void, its perfidy and its betrayal has been 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.

*Journey To Ithaca* 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 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 has also explored here.

*Fasting Feasting* 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. Thus the study exposes the impact of these attitudes on the protagonist Uma, who is subjected to untold misery. Therefore, there is the need to recognise the urgency to question this kind of domineering attitude, even in modern times. The exploration of this 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. 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, have been examined. Patriarchal tyranny in the guise of parental oppression, that works 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 male child, even when women are educated and relatively independent. 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.

The study attempts to reveal that *The Zigzag Way* marks 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.

Chapter VI is entitled Conclusion. Here, the researcher sums up the analysis of all the novels of Anita Desai undertaken in chapters III to V. The researcher also records the inferences drawn from the present study.

A Survey of Indian Fiction in English: At this juncture, it is considered essential to give a brief survey of the works of Indo-Anglian writers of fiction. Indian English fiction evinced a very meagre beginning. It is said to have had a beginning with Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s Rajmohan’s wife. The novel was published in 1935, after a period of initial serialization in the Indian Field of 1864. K.S.Ramamurti
asserts that Bankim Chandra established the novel as a major literary form in India and that the English novel is said to have emerged with his *Rajmohan’s Wife*. Thus it cannot be denied that *Rajmohan’s Wife* succeeded in creating a popular taste for the novel. This novel exemplified Indian life. It appeared at a time when romance was the adequate trend, and there was absolutely no prototype in fiction of the reproduction of domestic life. Bankim Chandra highlighted the sufferings of the Indian woman. It is a realistic description of the everyday life of women in an East Bengal village. These writers employed an alien language to depict the Indian sensibility. K.S.Ramamurti says:

“What was important about Bankim’s role as a pioneer of the Indian novel was that he showed how the novel could be used to portray social life and manners, and how Indian writers could do it in their vernaculars as well as in English”

Thereafter, came Lal Behari Day’s *Govinda Samanta*(1874). This is an outright representation of rural Bengali life of the 19th century. This book was an illustration of formal realism. The combination of reality and reform could be witnessed also in Romesh Chander Dutt’s *The Lake of Palms* (trans.1933). Subsequently, Raj Laxmi Devi published *The Hindu Wife*(1876), Toru Dutt, her *Bianca* or *The Young Spanish*
Maiden (1878); Krupabai Satthianadhan’s Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life (1895); Kali Krishna Lahiri, Roshinara (1881); Khetrapal Chakravarti Sarata and Hingana (1895). These novels were social documents dealing with Indian manners, traditions and customs. The latter part of the 19th century, saw the emergence of the novel in Bengal and in other provinces. This was due to the fact that after writing Rajmohan’s Wife, Bankim commenced his literary expression in Bengali. This is true of other writers like Romesh Chander Dutt and Michael Madhusudan Dutt also. These pioneers of the novel represented mostly the middle-class standpoint. Thus between the years 1865 and 1890, writers produced novels in almost all the Indian languages, which included English. It could be noticed that these writers’ sensibility was essentially native, although the mode of expression was alien. K.S.Ramamurti asserts that the writers found their own medium of expression and the fact that the writers inclined towards India for inspiration and material proves that they were not “blind imitators” of British literature. The writers saw to it that the English language adjusted itself to the Indian sensibility. The novels of this phase were authentic portrayals of contemporary social and domestic life. Shevantibai Nikambe’s Ratanbai: A Sketch of a Bombay High Caste Hindu Wife (1895) and Romesh Chander Dutt’s The Lake of Palms: A Story of Indian Domestic Life (1902) deal with social reforms. Thus the novelists of the early period embodied the contemporary
problems and issues in their novels. One finds that the novelists of this early period were most experimental and the English language adapted itself to the Indian sensibility.

Thus the years between 1874 and 1900 saw the rise of various writers of fiction in English. The writings of Behramji Malabari, Nagesh Vishwanath Pai, T.Ramakrishna Pillai in the late 19th century demonstrated the method of inculcating accurate details of scene and atmosphere in novels.

The novels of B.R.Rajam Iyer (True Greatness of Vasudev Sastri), A.Madhavia’s Thillai Govindan and Clarinda portrayed social conditions of contemporary times. T.Ramakrishna Pillai’s Padmini and A Dive for Death are significant as historical romances. Sirdar Jogendra Singh’s NurJahan, the Romance of the Indian Queen(1909) is a historical novel; it gives the details of the life of the mughal empire. His Kamala(1925), Kamini(1931) and Nasrin, an Indian Medley(1911) are significant as social documents of the times. These novels serve to provide an effective documentation of historical facts, details of contemporary life as well as the details of life of the history they depict.

Writers like S.K.Ghosh, Kali Krishna Lahiri, Romesh Chander Dutt also were not far behind in registering the social conditions of their times. They effectively displayed the atmosphere of skirmishes between Indians and English. The novelists discussed can be considered as the forerunners of ‘Big Three’ novelists.
The Gandhian era which had commenced in the 1920s is marked by a more growth of the Indian English novel. This was the time when the whole of India was set ablaze by the Civil Disobedience Movement in the 1930s. The country was agitated and excited in every sphere—political, social, economic and literary fields. The pre-independence period evidenced an upheaval due to the political disturbances. This certainly provided tremendous scope and material for the novels. Therefore, the novels of this period mirror the socio-political and cultural life of India. The three major novelists—Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao began their writing career. Prominent themes like the east-west encounter, freedom struggle, the plight of the peasant and the downtrodden occupied the pages of the novels. The Gandhian vision imparted an inspiration to these writers.

Mulk Raj Anand deals with social reform and he depicts an enthusiastic humanitarian zeal. In Untouchable (1935), he depicts the plight of the downtrodden; Coolie (1936) deals with the sufferings of the peasant class; Two Leaves and a Bud (1937) deals with the exploitation of the tea estate labourers. His trilogy Village; Across the Black Waters and The Sword and the Sickle remain unparalleled in Indian fiction in English. Seven Summers (1951), Morning Face (1968) and Confession of a Lover (1976)—these novels are the first parts of a long series of
autobiographical narrative. Then came the other part, *The Bubble* (1984), which describes the long journey of Krishan Chander through England, Ireland and Wales. *Little Plays of Mahatma Gandhi* (1991) followed. This book narrates Krishan Chander’s experiences in Gandhiji’s ashram. The narrative is based on the author’s personal experiences with Gandhiji. Anand’s most recent novel *Nine Moods of Bharata: Novel of Pilgrimage* (1998), portrays the hero Krishan Chander’s return to India. Anand’s socialistic concerns are accurately depicted in all of his novels. The novels also portray the influence of Gandhism on him. Anand gives an Indian colour to his style, in that, many Indianisms find place in his fiction. Thus he has introduced ample innovations in diction.

most of his novels. He created Malgudi an imaginary village, which is a replica of his idealized picture of India. His novels are the novels of social portraiture. He was known for his significant experiments in technique that could be witnessed in *The guide* and *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*. His recent novels are *The Painter of Signs* (1976), *A Tiger for Malgudi* (1983), *Talkative Man* (1983), *The World of Nagaraj* (1990) and *Grandmother’s Tale* (1992). All these novels also portray Malgudi as their setting. His novels live by the amalgamation of gentle irony and serious moral concerns. His fiction is considered to be thoughtful fiction. M.K. Naik says that R.K. Narayan is

“a single-minded practitioner of the novel of local colour, he however produced his best work after Independence, when the little small-town ironies of his microcosm developed into an awareness of the larger existential irony of human nature and life itself.”

Raja Rao is the third greatest exponent of Indian English fiction. His *Kantapura* is an illustration of harikatha style with an admixture of narration and description. The plot involves the Indian freedom struggle in a small Indian village. He introduces innovations in the use of Indian idioms and words into English. His other novels include include *The Cow of the Barricades* (1947), *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960), *The Cat and
Shakespeare (1965), Comrade Kirillov (1976) and The Policeman and the Rose (1978). Raja Rao depicts an awareness of the historical and political forces that were moulded by the Gandhian movement. His most recent novel is The Chessmaster and his Moves (1988). Raja Rao’s philosophical concerns come to the fore in this novel.

Bhabani Bhattacharya comes next in the chronology. His novels of repute are as follows: So Many Hungers (1947), Music for Mohini (1952), He Who Rides a Tiger (1954), A Goddess Named Gold (1960), Shadow from Ladakh (1966) and A Dream in Hawaii (1978). Bhattacharya grapples with economic and social problems. He advocates renunciation and self-sacrifice in his novels as the sole virtues in gaining Indian independence. He is also sensitive to the misery and exploitation of the downtrodden. His novels present the protean picture of the reality of life. Khuswant Singh is another novelist of repute. His Train to Pakistan (1956) and I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale (1959)- reflect the tragic circumstances that led to India’s partition. Manohar Malgaonkar has a natural talent for the narrative and he depicts socio-political problems. He is regarded as a historical novelist. His novels of repute are as follows: Distant Drum (1960), Combat of Shadows (1962), The Princes (1963), A Bend in the Ganges (1964), The Devil’s Wind (1972). His novels are a significant record of facts and history and they are deeply rooted in the
Indian ethos. G.V. Desani is remembered for his classical work *All About H.Hatterer* (1948). The novel was paid little critical attention when it was published. But now it is considered a pioneer novel; it is a class by its own self, in that it is an experimental novel. K. R. Srinivas Iyengar asserts that the novel is “........an astonishing feat of verbal legerdemain....”

Other miscellaneous writers of fiction include Sudhin Ghose who was a prominent writer of yester years, known for his novels like *The Vermilion Boat* (1953) and *The Flame of The Forest* (1955). Santa Rama Rao was a woman writer of significance. Her novels *Remember the House* (1956) and *The Adventures* (1971). She is known to depict women sensibility. Attia Hussain is known for her novel *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961). K. Nagarajan is known as a good storyteller. His novels *Athawar House* (1939) and *Chronicles of Kedaram* (1961). His novels deal with contemporary social issues. Raji Narasimhan is more popular for her works on literary criticism. *Sensibility Under Stress* (1976) was authored by her. She has written a few novels like *Forever Free* (1979) and *The Sky Changes* (1992).

A significant discernable factor in the area of Indian English fiction is the rise of a cluster of women novelists. They have achieved distinction in that they have won many prestigious awards for their novels. A whole
gamut of themes have been dealt with. These writers may be listed as follows: Anita Desai, Nayanatara Sahgal, Kamala Markandaya, Shashi Deshpande, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala and others.


(1971) deal with agonizing relationships. She portrays a sensitivity of the political and socio-cultural issues of India. Chaman Nehal asserts that, “Nayanatara Sahgal is the major Indian novelist in whom we see the rise of the new woman.”\(^\text{7}\) The pain which women undergo with unsympathetic husbands is faithfully depicted. Bharati Mukherjee, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala are other significant novelists. Jhabvala presents the problems of marital disharmony and the impact of social changes in a conventional society in her novels, *To Whom She Will* (1955), *A Backward Place*, *Get Ready For Battle* (1962), *The Householder*.


Shashi Deshpande’s *The Dark Holds No Terror* portrays the modern woman who wants to assert herself. She explored the intricacies of the domestic lives of middle-class women. These writers describe the agonies and griefs of woman in adjusting to her diverse roles in a variant society. They also depict an understanding of the facts that govern the modern woman’s life. They provide a close view of the struggles of the modern woman, whose frontiers have been broadened along with her anxieties and burdens. These novelists have their own explanations to a woman’s problems.
Uma Vasudev’s *The Song of Anasuya, Shrela of Sonagarh*; Shobha De’s *Socialite Evenings, Starry Nights, Sisters*; Dina Mehta’s *And Some Take A Lover*; Geeta Mehta’s *Karma Cola Raj*. All these novelists have extended the picture of the modern woman. They present her not as a weakling, or as a dependent, but as courageous and assertive woman.

The woman’s endeavour to certify her own identity in the family and society, emerges as a potent theme in the women writers of Indian fiction of the post-independence period. They effectively present the predicament of women in a male-dominated society. They also evince a deep perception of the woman’s psyche and explore the desire for the quest of identity. Anita Desai’s novels are of a different class. She introduces the reader to the female protagonist’s inner world and their sensibilities. She probes into the protagonists’ psyche and records the perturbed lives of women in an evocative and impressive language. Shanta Krishnaswamy says: “What she portrays is the deeply felt and suffered rebellion against the entire system of social relationships. The passive feminine has ceased to exist.” Anita Desai portrays her protagonists’ search for deliverance from the traditional society, their conflicts and pressures. In these novelists there is seen an attack, not against the institution of marriage, but against the inequality and injustice that is meted out to women by men, usually in the name of marriage. Raji Narasimhan also voices this in her novel, *Forever Free* (1979).
The Indo-Anglian novels written after independence divert the attention to the inner turmoils and conflicts of the individual caught in the throes of modern life. Meenakshi Mukherjee asserts: “.....the majority of writers since 1950 have turned inwards to more private and personal concerns.”

Many post-independence novels depicted the modern Indian woman as the protagonist. The dissatisfaction and conflict which is so common to modern life, found expression here. Women writers pioneered in this arena. The psyche of the woman was explored and her inner turmoils were laid bare. The woman’s search for individuality and self-identity was portrayed realistically. As time went by, the portrait of the Indian woman was depicted in all its complexities and nuances. Further, the image of woman as a rebel against the atrocities, even against the assumed feminine offices was depicted. Thus the novelists portray the Indian woman as possessing various aspects. Woman is an intricate character. The earlier male writers of Indian English fiction had romanticized and glorified the image of the woman. But these women writers present the woman’s hardships. Thus, women writers have given a distinct dimension to the changing image of the woman, the family and consequentially to that of the society.
With Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981), a new generation of writers arose in Indian fiction. “But what makes *Midnight’s Children* an outstanding work is the fact that it has a distinctly existential dimension. One central theme seems to unify all the elements of political fantasy, comedy and surrealism in the novel.....”  

*Midnight’s Children* was a path-breaker in Indian English fiction. It depicts a wilful irreverence for the traditional form and content of fiction. The arrival of Salman Rushdie on the scene of Indian English literature, proclaimed a new period in Indian English fiction. In fact it is considered that his work subverted the stable form of the Indian English novel. The writer experiments with a variety of narrative and linguistic traditions. It is considered to have broken a new ground in Indian English fiction. The work is “at once an autobiographical *bildungsroman*, a picaresque fiction, a political allegory, a topical satire, a comic extravaganza, a surrealist fantasy, and a daring experiment in form and style”. Thus the new fiction is said to have commenced. The variety and prodigy of the new fiction could be seen in the writings of Vikram Seth, Rohinton Mistry, Shobha De, Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy, Bharati Mukherjee, Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri and others.

Vikram Seth’s *The Golden Gate* (1986) is a novel in verse. It portrays the author’s skill of juggling with words. *The Suitable Boy* is a saga of modern India. Bharati Mukherjee is also a novelist of
international repute. She depicts the cultural clash between the west and the east. Her novels *Wife* (1975) and *The Holder of the World* (1993), reveal her peculiar approach to expatriatehood. Her novels trace the immigrants’ experience along with an understanding of women’s emotional problems. Amitav Ghosh is another celebrity novelist of the 1980s. His *Circle of Reason* (1986), *The Shadow Lines* (1986) and *In an Antique Land* (1993) depict a departure from the traditional Indian novel. Shobha De is an eminent novelist who depicts the life of the upper middle-class woman. She realistically brings out the insecurities and trauma afflicting the economically independent woman. Her novels are as follows: *Socialite Evenings, Starry Nights, Sultry Days, Strange Obsession, Second Thoughts, Snapshots and Sisters*. Arudhati Roy is a significant novelist. Her *God of Small Things* (1997) has emerged a literary prodigy. It won the Booker Prize in 1997. She has been ranked with Salman Rushdie for her outstanding novel. Roy has depicted realistically the agonies and hardships that women suffer in daily domestic life. Rohinton Mistry’s *Such a Long Journey* which is a classical work on modern India, was short-listed for the Booker Prize. It won the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize for the best book. Jhumpa Lahiri’s collection of short stories, *The Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) won the Pulitzer Prize in the USA. Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* won the Booker Prize. Anita Desai has won the Winifred Holtby Prize of
the Royal Society of literature for her novel *Fire on the Mountain* (1978), the Guardian Award for Childrens’ Literature for her *The Village By the Sea* (1984). Her *Clear Light of Day, In Custody and Fasting Feasting* had been shortlisted for the Booker Prize. Thus, one notices that Indian writing is highly acclaimed in the western literary circles. It is equally gratifying to note that considerable number of novels by Indian English writers have grabbed world attention. They stand on par with the English novelists. Now Indian English novel is influential both in India and abroad. The English language, too, is handled skilfully enough.

The rise of Anita Desai on the scene of Indian English literature denotes a mature stage in the development of Indian English fiction. R.K.Narayan, Rajarao and Mulk Raj Anand had embellished Indian fiction by their remarkable contribution. Cultural, political and socio-political issues were dealt with by writers like Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Manohar Malgaonker, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Khushwant Singh and K.A.Abbas. Anita Desai gave a new dimension to Indian fiction – that of exploration of the female psyche. She is a pioneer in the delineation of the female sensibility, her evocative imagery and her keen portrayal of the human predicament. She was twice short-listed for the honourable Booker Prize. She delineates the human predicament of loneliness, angst, anxiety, depression of modern life in a vivid man
Notes


2. Ramamurti, 47.


6. Iyengar, 489.


