CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya are modern Indo-English writers, widely acclaimed, not only in India but also abroad. Both the writers emerged on the literary horizon after independence, focussing on the contemporary issues. Anita Desai has added a new dimension to the contemporary Indian English fiction, being "a disturbing and demanding presence in Indo-Anglian fiction." Other contemporary Indian writers like Ruth Prawar Jhabvala, Nayantara Sehgal, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R.K.Narayan, Shashi Deshpande, Barathi Mukherjee, Santha Rama Rau have also been ranked as some of the great Indian novelists and they too have an impressive corpus of fiction to their credit but Anita Desai has secured a unique and significant place due to her innovative thematic concerns. While Jhabvala’s fiction deals with contemporary social issues, Sehgal’s fictional world lays stress on political and social awareness, Anita Desai, in her fiction deals with feminine sensibility. She explores the inner life of her characters. Her "preoccupation is with the inner world of sensibility rather than the outer world of action." She is "an uncrowned queen of the inner emotional world" that makes her fiction a deep psychological study of her characters. Kamala Markandaya’s fiction on the other hand is largely sociological in its focus. Her greater interest is in the narrative
and social comment than in psychological characterization, complex technique or a profound vision of life. Her novels give a faithful account of contemporary Indian reality. The relevance of their fiction lies in this that the fiction of both, Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya is universal. They may write about a particular situation and about particular characters but the fact is, that the problems they deal with are faced by man anywhere in the world and at any time - not only in the present but may be in future too.

Anita Desai was born on 24th June 1937 in Mussoorie. Her father was a Bengali and mother a German. She started writing prose at the age of seven and appeared on the Indian literary horizon in 1963 when her first novel Cry, the Peacock was published and was considered a "trend setting novel" and a "poetic novel" by many. Her second novel Voices in the City (1965) was published in The Illustrated Weekly of India in a serial form. She has some other novels to her credit as well - Bye-Bye Blackbird (1971), Where Shall We Go This Summer? (1975), Fire on the Mountain (1975), Clear Light of Day (1980), Village By the Sea (1982), In Custody (1984), Baumgartner's Bombay (1988), Journey to Ithaca (1997) and Fasting Feasting (1999). She has been awarded the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award as well as the Royal Society of Literature's Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize for the novel, Fire on the Mountain and Author's Guild Award for Excellence in Writing for Where Shall We Go This Summer? The other two novels - Clear Light of Day and In Custody were considered for Booker Prize.
Kamala Markandaya was born in 1924 in an educated Brahmin family. She was brought up in Madras and after her education at Madras University, she went to London where she supported her writing by working in a solicitor's office. She has written nine novels in twenty three years. She gained recognition with her very first novel, *Nectar in a Sieve*, published in 1954, followed by *Some Inner Fury* (1955), *A Silence of Desire* (1960), *Possession* (1963), *A Handful of Rice* (1966), *The Coffer Dams* (1969), *The Nowhere Man* (1972), *Two Virgins* (1973) and *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977). She has achieved a world-wide distinction as a significant Indian English novelist. Stephen Ignatius Hemenway writes about Markandaya that, "Markandaya is definitely one of the most productive, popular and skilled Indo-Angolian novelists and a superb representative of the growing number of Indian women writing serious literature in English."\(^6\)

The fiction of Anita Desai is relevant to all times because she writes about the predicament of modern man. She portrays the psychic recesses of a man's heart, digs into his inner psyche, and goes beyond the skin and the flesh. She does not feel satisfied with uncritical, unprosaic documentation of social reality. For her, literature is not a means of escaping reality, but an exploration and an inquiry. She prefers the private to the public world. The subjects of her novels are not poverty or riches, wars, political upheavals, social evils but the intricacies of human relationships, the incompatibility of marriages and inharmonious man-woman relationships. Her real concern is the
exploration of human psyche and she unravels the mystery of the inner life of her characters, the psychic reverberations of her characters in her fiction. Anita Desai’s fiction is away from the traditional grooves of external reality and physical world. She is not concerned with the social, political or moral problems but "the inner climate, the climate of sensibility that clears or rumble like thunder and suddenly blazes forth like lightening is more compelling than the outer weather, the physical geography or the visible action." She lays emphasis on the interior landscape than on exterior characterization; on invisible than visible life. She shows complete inwardness of her characters. What mattered for her were not philosophical or social ideas of a character but their individuality, their motivation, their consciences and consciousness and their tensions.

The challenges of contemporary urban reality are also the concern of Anita Desai. The reality, for her, consists in the life of the mind and the soul - the inner life. Her characters, like ordinary individuals, are less concerned with the problems of food, clothes and shelter and more with various complexes and psychic realities. There are some traits in their temperaments which when developed out of proportion, check the healthy growth of their personality and Anita Desai shows her capacity for understanding this aspect of human nature by depicting the gradual conversion of a trait into a psychic block which assumes the form of a disease making her characters neurotic. Thus, the most common theme in her novels is the complexity of human relationships, particularly the man-woman
relationship. This relationship has become more important due to industrialization, growing awareness among women of their rights as individuals and the westernization of attitudes and lives of the people. She writes about the miserable plight of women suffering under their insensitive and inconsiderate husbands. In doing this she gives a new dimension to Indian novels by turning it from the outer to the inner reality.

Anita Desai tackles the problems of human beings, in the age which has lost its values. Owing to generation gap, loss of credibility, compartmentalization of life, the stunting of personal development and the absence of meaningfulness of life, the modern man suffers, feels alienated. The 20th century depicts the malaise of the contemporary man which has been considerably aggravated by the crisis of the present. In our age man suffers not from war, persecution, famine and ruin, but from inner problem, a conviction of loneliness and meaninglessness in his way of existence. This sense of alienation corrodes human life from various quarters and social alienation results from the sense of estrangement brought out by the sudden discovery that the social system is either oppressive or incomplete or incompatible with their desires and ideals. Self alienation, however, means the loss of content of the individual selves with any inclination or desire that is not in agreement with the prevailing social pattern, as a result of which the individuals are forced to manipulate in accordance with the social demands or feel incapable of controlling their actions. Broadly speaking, alienation refers to man's estrangement from
someone or something with which he was attached or identified - his family, his group, his society and even his own self.

This theme of alienation, withdrawal, loneliness, isolation and lack of communication frequently occurs in Anita Desai’s novels, being inter-related aspects of human life which exist as a corolery of disruption of good human relationships. In her novels, most of the protagonists are alienated from the world, from society, from families, from parents and even from their own selves because they are not average people but individuals "made to stand against the general current ... who fight that current and struggle against it."8 Anita Desai, thus, delineates in her novels the problems and plights of alienated individuals caught in the crisis of a changing society. When these characters have to face alienation, they become rebels. Tension, worries, depression, disappointment, anxiety and fear become their lot and they lose their sense of sanity and mental poise, for example Maya in Cry, the Peacock, Sita in Where Shall We Go This Summer? and Nanda Kaul in Fire on the Mountain. Some characters like Monisha and Nanda Kaul are unable to reconcile to alienation and meet with a tragic end. On the other hand, some characters are able to reconcile the discordant elements of lives either by subduing their ego or by surrendering themselves to the pattern of life as it is, are able to gain harmony in relationships and happiness in life as is the case with Adit and Sarah in Bye-Bye Blackbird, Sita and Raman in Where Shall We Go This Summer?, Tara, Bakul and Bim in Clear Light of Day.
Anita Desai charts the crisis tormenting a sensitive soul and Brunton rightly points out that, never before were so many people immersed in so much uncertainty so much confusion and unsettlement. Anita Desai’s female protagonists shrink in spirit, languish in confusion, frustration, disintegration, disillusionment and alienation. The hiatus between what the individual aspires for and the harsh reality of what he achieves, what he really is and what he would like to be taken for, crumbles the life of her heroines leaving an insidious effect on their inner being and injuries are inflicted and the scars are left on their psyche.

This sense of self-alienation means for Anita Desai’s protagonists to be something less than one might ideally be if circumstances in society were conducive. This alienation being more basic form of rootlessness thwarts an individual’s mental and psychic development in an alarming manner. It is this human problem that has occupied Anita Desai’s primary interest and in most of her novels she has presented this dilemma of the modern individual.

The uniqueness of Anita Desai’s fiction lies in her treatment of feminine sensibility. In India where women have predesigned role, which does not allow any room for individualism, identity and assertion, Anita Desai talks of women who question the age old traditions and want to seek individual growth. They try to reaccess the known in a new context and find a meaning in life. Anita Desai suggests that a balance between the conventional, pre-set roles of women and the contemporary issues has to be struck. According to
Kamala Markandaya's fiction has no political or psychological concerns. She is a teller of tales of known tradition and rural background. The theme of poverty and hunger, of struggle for independence, of conflict between traditionalism and modernism and of east-west dichotomy are some of the major concerns of Kamala Markandaya. These themes are a matter of attention for the readers because they depict universal reality that never gets dated. The theme of individual and social uprootedness, racial tension and prejudice and conflict between faith and reason are some of the other areas of focus of Kamala Markandaya. Kamala Markandaya is a realist whose novels are generated by the tragic vision that finds in contemporary life a fruitful seed bed for conflict. She depicts inner conflict and gives to her novels tragic nuances, for conflict is the essence of tragedy. Her characters struggle against socio-economic problems and suffer due to struggle, superstition.

India is the country of her birth and upbringing and England the country where she lives. Hence, inter-cultural forces, as well as her personal, social and religious heritage may all have some bearing on the development of the tragic vision in the fiction of Kamala Markandaya. The sensitivity of an introspective nature, the perception of the artist, the probing mind of an analyst, the anguish of the tender-hearted, who recoil from any form of cruelty and suffer variously with others, all combine to contribute to this tragic vision. In her novels, the tensions prevailing on the Indian experience is realised through the dilemmas of the ordinary people - torn between traditional values and
those spawned by modernism; whose loved ones are destroyed by political violence, who have to make a choice between integrity and dubious prosperity and who in refusing to surrender his identity is destroyed by racialism.

Thus Kamala Markandaya's novels are fully reflective of the awakened sensibility in modern India and she attempts to project the image of the changing traditional society. Her novels are full of variety and complexity. In her novels, she not only displays a flair for virtuosity which orders and patterns her feelings and ideas but also projects the image of national consciousness on many levels of aesthetic awareness. Her novels dramatize the agony and ecstasy of cultural changes in India. She views the problems of human relationships in different contexts.

The most striking feature of Markandaya's fiction is the concept of cultural continuity in the din and bustle of social economic and political changes in modern India. She explores the impact of change in terms of human psychology. Her literary sensibility is also projected in her novels. She explores the vital formative areas of individual consciousness that project the images of cultural change.

The heroes and heroines of her novels are victims - victims of fate, victims of their own characters or of the follies and malice of others. Characters lie under inescapable doom and often there is a general air of despondency in their lives. Markandaya takes her characters from a very wide spectrum: Indian peasants, students, film producers, Indian emigrants in England, English engineers and their
wives on contract service in India English working class types culled from London pubs and suburban flats. Kamala Markandaya's moral idealism controls and influences a largely realistic and often very cruel delineation of life. She claims to be on the side of human life and emotions and against machinery, against exploitation of the weak, against war and violence.

Markandaya has also constantly been preoccupied by the East-West conflict of codes and convictions of which she herself is a living example. The clash between the Eastern and Western values leads to inevitable quest for identity and this concern is depicted prominently in her novels. She treats the tensions and points of contact between people belonging to two races and two views of life from different points of view by bringing them together in different relationships and situations. Balachandra Rajan points out that "the presence of two cultures in one’s mind forms a wider and therefore a saner basis on which to originate the quest for identity and that the discordance between these cultures can be creative as well as merely confusing." Her "mixed allegiance" makes her "contemporary Everyman," able to view with serenity the challenge of contrasting cultures. Her treatment of racial relationships is realistic and unbiased and the Englishmen and women of her fiction are not mere types but individuals infused with vitality of their own. She looks at the problem of racial relationships in its varied aspects and from different points of view and points the difference in the traditions and values of India and the West as a neutral observer and portrays different situations and characters.
objectively. The modern man’s tragic problem is not what values or loyalties to choose, but the bankruptcy of all values and loyalties and the consequent disintegration of the individual, the contemporary confusion of values and the dilemma in his own soul. He does not shape events - events shape him. Indecisiveness leads to paralysis of will and all these issues are tackled with by Markandaya in her fiction.

Much critical acclaim has been received by Markandaya for her concern with contemporary Indian society. She is involved with the changing ethos of post-independent India, particularly of villages down south and records the changes that were taking shape. Shiv K. Kumar gives her credit not for social realism but for sociological awareness. Markandaya shows great concern for the miserable lot of the poverty-stricken masses and their ruthless exploitation in her motherland in sharp contrast with the glitter and gloss, affluence and creature comfort of the West. The themes of colonialism and the consequent exploitation of Indians and the heroes of struggle for independence is also depicted in her novels.

Markandaya is a humanist, believing in the betterment of human lot and social amelioration. She considers her novels as a part of what she calls the literature of concern or socio-literature, which is basically corrective and aims at correcting social maladies. She offers through her novels positive message that cannot be ignored in the context of global chaos, turbulence and violence threatening large scale destruction.
The strength of Kamala Markandaya's fiction lies in her simplicity because through simple ordinary people she tells the tales of undying human spirit, human endeavour for dignity and growth. Her simple folk represent mankind and show man's heroic struggle - struggle against odds, be it nature or exploitation. Her fiction shows the human will to grow, to find new avenues of progress. Though the fiction is not psychological yet the human effort is immortal like the human soul.

Critics have often found similarities between the fiction of Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai. According to H.M. Williams both are typical of the nineteen fifties and sixties and explores the anguish in modern society. Their novels treat of tragic waste of despair or agony. Though both are contemporary novelists, there is a lot of difference in their writings. In Markandaya's fiction, the stress is on sociological and rural issues. In Anita Desai's novels, it is the exploration of sensibility, the inner workings of the mind that assume significance.

Anita Desai is an imagist novelist. Her novels teem with various powerful images and enrich the textual density of her novels, while Kamala Markandaya is not an imagist novelist and infrequently develops her images into independent units being more of a symbolist novelist.

Both the writers have dealt with the universal themes. The purpose of this study is to identify and probe various issues raised in the fiction of both Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya and to see
how they deal with the universal contemporary issues. The novels of Anita Desai taken up in this study are: *Cry the Peacock, Voices in the City, Bye Bye Blackbird, Where Shall We Go This Summer?, Fire on the Mountain, Clear Light of Day, In Custody* and *Baumgartner’s Bombay*. The novels of Kamala Markandaya taken for this study are: *Nectar in a Sieve, Some Inner Fury, A Silence of Desire, Possession, A Handful of Rice, The Coffer Dams, The Nowhere Man* and *Two Virgins*.

This study also aims at focussing on the significant aspects and style of the fiction of Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya. The two writers have common concerns, that is both write about human beings, their predicaments, the desire to overcome these predicaments, to forge a new meaning and understand life, to establish a connection between the self and the universe and yet both these writers are different in the manner and mode of dealing with these concerns. The study is an effort to study the writings of the two writers, their thematic concerns, approach and treatment.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


