CHAPTER-I
INTRODUCTION

Indian English Literature has a relatively recent testimony which is aged only one and a half centuries. It records a drastic development in the world. Singh points out, “Indian literature is one though written in many languages” (10). Writers use literature as their weapon to express their rebellious and thought provoking ideas. So, they enjoy their freedom of writing. They express their thoughts through their seminal writing. Since the pre-Independence era, the Indian authors wrote in different genres like poem, essay, drama and short story. In the past few years, authors have been substantially contributing to world literature. ‘Novel’ is a new literary genre in India which showed its face in formal prose form and slowly emerged as an artistic form. Novel experiments the creative transformation of writers to be Indian in notion, sensation and experience, yet also to encourage the graces and submit to the authority of English for expression.

Indian novelists in English attempt to employ Indianess in their works. Writers treated political and social themes till 1970s. The characters of their stories are princes, paupers, saints, sinners, farmers, servants, untouchables and coolies. They developed their story in the city or village. The most interesting and dedicating themes are like the country’s independence movement, East-West encounter, tradition –modernity, materialism and spiritualism. In the later years, the gradual growth of fiction in India is made by gradual shifting of focus from the external world to the inner world of the individual.
Indian English fiction in the middle of the 19th century was largely sociological, national and at times philosophical. The writers were committed to their ideals of humanism and social justice. They were propelled by a vision of building a free and secular India. After 1990s, India provided imaginary homelands to many of the writers for their creative vision and control. Writers used new techniques to express their creative imagination. They asked cultural questions to find some way of living tolerantly in such a dangerous world. One of the major elements that appears common to all such works of fiction is that they try to distance themselves from their contemporaries.

Indian women novelists give a new dimension to the Indian literature. They have developed their writings over a period of time. They change the old trends not only in novel but also in all genres. Many women writers composed songs before they wrote novels. One of the recurring themes in their novels is female experiences in the family and in the society. It also affects the cultural and language patterns of India. Nowadays, people enjoy reading the anglicized novels presented by the new age of women writers. They are mostly western educated, middle class who express in their writing with the plight of upper caste and class traditional Hindu women. Most of their characters trap in repressive institutions such as child marriage, dowry, prohibition on women’s education, arranged marriage and enforced widowhood.

Today, fiction is the most characteristic and powerful form of literary expression in Indian English literature. Despite its delayed entry, it has evolved as a dominant literary form in the twentieth century. In our time, people enjoy reading novel which is
one of the acceptable ways of embodying the experiences and ideas. Both men and women writers of India portray women from different perspectives. They discuss different roles played by women. The intellectuals observe Indian Society as a male-dominated society. Here, the women have very little options to take up. They are grown up with a submissive nature inculcated in them even from their childhood. According to Komorovsky, “to be born a woman means to inhabit, from early infancy to the last day of life, a psychological world which differs from the world of men” (Dhawan 160). They never rebel against the actions the male-dominated society. The Indian women accept and adapt themselves to the demanding circumstances. Their feelings are never taken into consideration. They are never recognized as persons in their family or in the society. They are deprived of opportunities to prove their individuality. They are constantly reminded of their commitment to the forth-coming family and their husbands. Thus, the society refuses to give equal rights to the women folk. So, Indian women are the examples for dependent figure: dependent to father, husband or to the society.

The novel is a long sustained piece of prose fiction and it is a new variety which landed India a little before a century. The first novel *Alaler Gharer Dulal* (1858) was written in Bengali. The journey of the Indian English novel was started by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee with his *Rajmohan’s Wife* (1864) and this literary form underwent speedy evolution. It is quite appropriate to mention some important Indian writers and their important works: Rajalakshmi Devi’s *The Hindu Wife* (1876), Toru Dutt’s *Bianca* (1878), Kali Krishna Lahari’s *Roshinara* (1881), H. Dutt’s *Bijoy Chand* (1888),
Mrs. Krupabal Satthianandhan’s *Kamala, A Story of Hindu Life* (1894) and Saguna’s *A Story of Native Christian Life* (1895) and Khertrapal Chakravarti’s *Sarata and Higana* (1895). Rabindranath Tagore wrote both in Bengali and English. He was responsible for the translations of his own works into English. His novels *Binodini* and *Yogayog* became popular. Other prominent novelist was Sarat Chandra Chatterjee and his novels are *Srikantha, Grihadaha, PatherDabi, Bipradas* and *SesPrasna*. The most popular writers in India are the literary trio such as Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao. They mirror the society through their works.

Mulk Raj Anand can be rightly called a Renaissance Man, novelist, essayist, and thinker. His status as a novelist has been widely debated since the appearance of his classic work *Untouchable*. His articles have appeared frequently in Indian Newspapers and Magazines. He has written on a mind-boggling variety of subject including Indian cuisine, art, literature, the Kamasuthra, western philosophy and humanism, Indian handicrafts, travel and tourism. He has also tried his hand at every conceivable form of writing from novels and poetry to drama, Journalism, essays travelogues and children’s fiction. He is undoubtedly a Master in deputing the subterranean feelings and the rhythms of daily existence in the chaotic life of protagonists.

R.K.Narayan is considered one of the foremost Modern Indian writers in English. Narayan’s major novels deal with a range of material exploring the intricacies and often comical complications of living in a traditional society. His Malgudi mirrors time and
image of whole India. It combines the old and the new tradition and modernity, the mood of the novelist, and that of the contemporary world.

Raja Rao is a respected and honored Indian writer of English novels and short stories. He is a dedicated writer with a high conception of the writer’s art—“a writer for whom writing is rite” (Naik 8). Rao’s semi-autobiographical novel, *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) is a story of the seeking of spiritual consciousness in Europe and India. It perfectly portrays the breakdown of the couple’s marriage. Rao’s work mirrors his deepest concern for humanity. His characters echo the human sufferings under social injustice caused by centuries of social stratification and British colonization. In spite of their miserable lives, his characters hold on to their faith.

The woman novelists of the Indian English fiction appeared in the literary scene in the late 1874 and they chose English as their medium of expression. After Independence, the status of women in the Indian society underwent perceptible changes due to the spread of literacy, legislation and the experiences of the freedom movement. The renewing themes in many of their works are an exploration of their identity and a study of their arrival at self-awareness. They are concerned with everyday Indian life, its customs, traditions and cultures and the consequent clash of the orient culture with their Western values and ideas. The women writers are traditional and modern at the same time and they are often highly self-conscious. They imitate the pictures of isolated women particularly during the period of adolescence and they portray social world. Some of the
women writers give a realistic picture of India in its poverty, squalor, oppression and the human suffering ensuing from the evils of an unjust social system.

The positions of women underwent a metamorphosis. The present day feminist thought seeks to destroy hierarchy of masculinity but not sexual dualism. Changes and revolutions take place, and women are too advanced to acquire their own identity in the society. The post-independent India lays a great stress on women’s education. Women’s education ensured refinement of their role in family and society. Women’s higher education inculcated confidence and they emerged successfully in all walks of life. They started proving their individuality and their best selves in all emerging fields.

The concept of feminism and feminist movements from the West brought drastic changes in the women’s society. Women were no longer treated as a ‘property’. Nayantra Sahgal, a noted Indian novelist, strongly condemns those who regard women as ‘property’: “When I heard someone remark, ‘We never allow our daughter to go out’ or ‘I can’t do that, my husband would not like it’, it sounded very peculiar, alien Jargons. As if, I thought, women were property, not persons” (Dass 220). This kind of awakening among the women writers helped them to project women as the image of ‘New Women’. Most of the women in India desired to accept this radical change and they tried to distinguish themselves out from the conventional role.

There is a process of social change in the position of women in the families and also in the society. The changes naturally affect the man-woman relationships on the whole. The social changes in India have brought significant changes in the structure of
families and relationships. The feminist movements make the women confident and independent. Literature takes a vital role in redefining the image of women and man-woman relationship. It has become the medium of communications, which express these changes through its characters.

In the seventies and after, female figures in the works moved within a framework larger than their authenticity and idealization. Seshadri states that “even though they are still conditioned by the ‘models’ handed down to them by their literary ‘foremothers,’ new perspectives are visible owing to the political and social events” (3). The themes, the treatment of the plots and their resolutions, and the narrative strategies reflect not only the literary but also the socio-cultural changes that women have experienced since the political independence of India.
Today, women novelists in Indian Fiction in English occupy prestigious position. A variety of shades, colours and visions is reflected in their writings. The women novelists feel that they deserve a better treatment by their male counterparts. They try to assert their identity in the society. They protest against the cruelty perpetrated on them. The women novelists portray their responses and reactions. ‘In editor’s note’, Pandey observes, “Though they easily withdraw or compromise they have spirit of revolt against mechanical life, mismatched marriages and wayward ways of their life partners” (ii). They try to depict the ill-treatment, abuse and exploitation of the women in the male-dominated society. In a conservative family, women feel like a caged bird flapping its wings to break the cage open. These writers, through their writings, skillfully and successfully capture the Indian ethos. At the same time, they show their deep insight into human nature and understanding of day-to-day’s problems. They also analyze the socio-cultural modes and values.

Women novelists contribute a major segment of the contemporary Indian writing in English. Their writings provide insights, a wealth of understanding, reservoirs of meanings and a basis of discussion. Through women writers’ eyes, one can see a different world, and with their assistance, one can seek to realize the potential of human achievement. “In women’s writing,” Chellappan comments, “they are rewritten as women’s journeys into their deeper selves and their discovery of a new authentic identity (ii). In any appraisal of the Indian English Literature, an appreciation of the writing of its women is essential. In the present day literary world, there are several great creative
women writers in all Indian languages and many of these writers have taken up issues related to the stations of women in India.

In the galaxy of Indian novelists in English, Indian women writers too shine luminously like their male counterparts by their significant contribution to the enrichment of Indian English novels. The women novelists, who have risen to celebrity and won global recognition in literature, are Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawar Jhabvala, Anita Desai, Attia Hussian, Nayantara Sahgal, Kamala Das, Shobha De and Arundhati Roy. These novelists seem to have derived inspiration and influences from the British novelists in respect of art and device in writing novels. They resemble to a great extent Jane Austen, George Eliot, Bronte sisters, Mrs. Gaskell, Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf in the art of characterization and portrayal of psychic mind of women. These women novelists have awareness which comes because of their wide acquaintance with the nuances of life in the East as well as the West. Their high educational and intellectual standards have sharpened their observation of life and have imparted a psychological depth of their writings. Especially after independence, Indian English women novelists have favorably responded to the changed psychological realities of Indian life.

Women writers in India are moving forward with their strong and sure strides, matching the pace of the world. One sees them bursting out in full bloom spreading their own individual fragrances. They are recognized for their originality, versatility and the indigenous flavor of the soil that they bring to their work. It is amazing to note that these writers and their Feminism in literature are essentially concerned with the representation
of women in society and their corresponding fluid position. Most of the attempts to define different views about a woman assume a universal connotation wherein woman is considered more as a product of cultural norms rather than a creation of nature. Feminist consciousness has certainly given a fresh ardor and excitement to literary studies. K.K. Sharma observes, “feminism aims at grabbing power – the position to dictate and direct action and thinking of others from men, and it is possible because in modern times, strength is all powerful and this can be achieved through intellect rather than through physical strength (201). A reasonably new perception of women in literature and the works by women writers have unveiled some of the prejudices at work in the traditional approaches to literature hitherto dominated by a masculine perspective. Moreover, a woman is bounded by certain other factors such as her individual circumstances, and society’s expectation related to age, creed, class, race etc.

The Indian English novelists before Desai portray man and his world in relation to the objective social reality. They give importance to the outer social problems. Later, Desai and her contemporaries are not ready to follow the same traditional approach. While dealing with the inner lives of the characters, the post-modern women novelists have simultaneously taken up several cultural, political and social issues. Thus, women characters evoke a continuous discussion on social values and they also become the focal point of contact between the novelist’s consciousness and the world outside. The awakening of the woman’s consciousness and her resultant protests may not always
resolve her problems but they certainly provide her with inner enrichment and a sense of satisfaction that she has at least successfully battled against the harshness.

The women novelist of 1960s and 1970s concentrate on the complex problems of women namely the career, motherhood, marriage, sexual and economic freedom. The battle of women’s freedom has not ended triumphanty. The women writers are still deeply concerned with the problems of women. They bring out the victories as well as the defeats of the women folk through their artistic works. In this instance, it is important to discuss the prominent post-colonial authors who are the contemporaries of Anita Desai.

Kamala Markandaya is the pseudonym of the Indo-British novelist. She uses fiction as a vehicle for communicating her vision of life. Her themes are East-West encounter, race and cultural conflicts, communal disharmony, industrialization and urbanization and the consequent conflicts between the cross cultural values. Her novels reflect the awakened feminine sensibility in contemporary India. The women characters in her novels are extracted from different strata of society like peasants, middle class educated women as well as from the royal families. However, the common thread among them is that they quest for autonomy of the self, compiled with care for the family and for the larger community of men and women. Thereby, women are confronted with several obstacles emerging mainly from the irregularities in the social system along with economic difficulties. As the women battle with these forces, they develop a mature vision of life. Markandaya has portrayed a gloomy scenario of Indian life due to changes in social, economic and political spheres. However, she believes that togetherness and
mutual understanding can create meaningful existence for mankind. She portrays strong women characters who face challenges in their life. She describes the life of village, cities, husband-wife relations, social conflicts and love for modernism. She is different from her contemporaries in her own remarkable way of depiction of a large variety of the realities of Indian life. Markandaya’s women characters emerge to come out of the darkness, throwing off legally their humiliation, dependence and resignation seeking equality with their responsibility to get their freedom.

Jhabvala’s works reveal inwardness and pictures of certain segments of Indian social life that it is difficult. Her eight novels fall into two distinct and evenly matched groups, like comedies of urban middle class Indian life, especially in undivided Hindu families and ironic studies of the East-west encounter. The first group comprises To whom She Will (1955), The Nature of Passion (1956), The House Holder (1960), and Get Ready for Battle (1920), To the Second Belong Esmond in India (1958), A Background Place (1965), A New Dominion (1973), and Heat and Dust (1975). In her novels, Jhabvala points out the weak will, the vulnerability and the lack of direction of Western youth. She has experienced cultural tensions sharply and continually and her experience has proved to be a rich store for her creativity.

Nayantara Sahgal is an exponent of the political novel and daughter of Vijayalakshmi Pandit and niece of Jawaharlal Nehru. She also has the themes of modern Indian woman’s search for sexual freedom and self-realization. Her feeling of politics and her command over English are rather more impressive than her art as a novelist. Her
women characters are strivers and aspirers toward goodness and toward a compassionate world. They have a kind of untouched innocence and integrity and their virtue is a quality of heart and mind and spirit.

Shashi Deshpande is an eminent Indian novelist in English. She is a versatile writer. In her short stories, Deshpande has tried some unconventional subjects such as rape within marriage reversal of gender role, forbidden love, burden of motherhood and female sexuality. Most of Deshpande’s protagonists are educated middle-class women who have taken care of their own. With the altered demands of women and men in society, power relations within the family need to be renegotiated. The institution of family is served but not without its basic requirement of love and understanding. The best form of freedom comes with choices and responsibilities. Generally, the protagonists in Deshpande’s novels are also on the road to self-discovery. Usually, some domestic crisis propels them in this quest. Even though they may not reach the desired destination by the end of the novel, there is often hope and determination. Their struggle is to realize their own identity, not with their family members. Past resides with the present and the novels often digress into Indian myths, fables and folktales that show the power of tradition and the change in society. But her novels are infused with a rich inclusiveness which in itself enhances the possibilities of the hope with which many of them end.

Jhumpa Lahiri is an Indian American author. She is a recent entrant into the world of Indian writers. She tackles much debated topic of cultural identity of Indians in a far
Lahiri’s writing is characterized by her ‘plain’ language and her characters, often Indian immigrants to America who must navigate between the cultural values of their adopted home. Her fiction is autobiographical and frequently draws upon her own experience as well as those of her parents, friends, acquaintances and others in the Bengali community. In her novels, she examines her character’s struggles, anxieties and biases, and chronicles the nuances and details of immigrant psychology and behavior. Her fiction shifts to the needs of the individual and she shows how later generations depart from the constraints of their immigrant parents, who are often devoted to their community and their responsibility to other immigrants.

Gita Hariharan is another renowned novelist in India. In her works, she portrays the plight of woman under patriarchy, tradition and stereotyped ideals. Her female characters revolt against considering marriage and motherhood as ultimate goals of an ideal woman. Her characters represent the truly contemporary women who are bringing about a silent revolution. They provide us with a peek into the Indian tradition and culture and the position of women in the Indian society. It is about the journey of Indian women through tradition to modernity in search for self-identity. Finally, the protagonist returns to her mother or her roots to rediscover her true identity.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni writes the stories which focus on gender and culture. It allows her to create universal themes. Her *Sister of My Heart* is about the lives of two cousins Anju and Sudha, their friendship and how their life get completely transformed by marriage, leaving Anju in California and Sudha in India. The immigrant experience is
also dealt with poignantly as they experience it in two ways – one as a woman and the other as a foreigner. When tragedy hits them hard, they long for each others’ comfort as women. She writes to unite people as she is firm in her belief that the friendship between a woman and another woman is always better than the friendship between a man and a woman. A woman’s flight from innocence to experience helps her in the process of self-actualization despite experiences of various hardships.

Shobha De concentrates upon women of the upper middle-class. Her characters are working women and social workers who are intrinsically attracted towards the world of glamour. In her novels too, the women are placed in their varied roles as daughter, sister, wife, mother and the career woman but their problems are different from the rural women as portrayed, in the novels of Kamala Markandaya. Her novels *Starry Nights*, *Socialite Evenings*, *Sultry Days* and *Sisters* expose the upper middle class culture of urban people and life of people in Bombay. Her world is jam-packed with fascination, sex and riches.

Bharati Mukherjee’s novels are an engrossing study in the progression of women from feminine to female. The women in Mukherjee’s novels are docile creatures who believe in wrestling with their own problems rather than trying to dominate their male counterparts. Their attitude is one of affirmation, not of negation or rejection.

After making a brief survey of novels by Indian Women novelists, one comes to a conclusion that women writers in India are psychologically concerned with the tragic life of Indian women. As there is necessity to arouse public consciousness about their
travails and tribulations for the purpose of their emancipation and amelioration of their condition, the women novelists exploit their novels as an instrument of effecting social reform in the interest of suppressed Indian women. Thus, their novels occupy a unique place in Indian English Literature as invaluable works of psychological study of Indian women’s inner psyche from a feminist perspective.

The post-modern Indian women writers in English especially after independence create a pattern of new study because they have dared to shatter the myth of a male dominated social system. Markandaya, Desai, Shobha De, Deshpande and Mukherjee have laid a firm foundation in the realm of female study in Indian literature in English. Thus, these writers have created a new canvas for the younger generation of Indian English women novelists.
On the literary map of Indian women writing, Anita Desai appears to be the leading luminary. R.K. Narayan and his contemporaries concentrate on Indian life from the perspective of its traditions and values that are rooted essentially in villages. But the trend changes in the later years whereas Anita Desai and her contemporaries comprehend life in metropolis that leads to identity crisis. Desai’s predominant concern is not with society or social forces but the individual psyche and its search in the society. She is more interested in the psychological aspect of her characters. Commenting on the language and style of Desai, Srivastava states: “among the Indian novelists experimenting consciously with the English language, Anita Desai has a unique place” (Singh 8). Her artistic short stories, trend-setting novels and carefully constructed other literary articles have earned for her a literary fame at international level in the modern age. In Indian writing, she has made remarkable contribution to the development of art and ethos of novel-writing technique. Desai breaks the old trends and inserts new methods to her novels. In her novels, fantasy juxtaposed with reality and brings out a change of perspective in the realization of reality. The narrative mode of her fiction is controlled by her characters who in their freedom to act and think weave a pattern of existence and a form of meaning through various strategies of triptyche structure, first person and third person narrative, fantasy and poetic intensity (Dash 17). Her novels create colonial effects on our mind and heart and present the microcosmic study of man-woman relationship in the changed atmosphere of the modern times.
Desai’s novels deal with mostly the urban city life in contact with Nature and the socio-psycho attitudes of human mind caught up in change and values. Many Indian novelists depict alienation of the protagonists from nature and society. But Desai’s protagonists are torn from their socio-psycho self and psycho-emotional milieu. It results in a psycho emotionally identity crisis. She achieves the cohesive design of content and form in her psychological novels, and bridges a thought-provoking harmony over different streams of feeling and sensibility found in the different settings of human society. Hariom Prasad observes that in Desai’s novel, “one finds a fine match between ‘what is life’ and ‘how it has to be lived’ with the natural make-up” (Kumar 101). In many places, Desai delves deeper and deeper into the inner world of her characters and brings out many realistic truths of psychological interest. In most of her novels, she tries to make a distinct break from the traditional themes and techniques used by the earlier Indo-English novelists. She is not ethically concerned with the social, political or moral problems of day-to-day life that beset the characters in the early Indo-English fiction. She rather chooses new themes and characters. Breaking old trends, Desai paves the way for a new kind of novel which means the novel of psychic sensibility.

Anita Desai is a renowned contemporary Indian woman novelist in English. She is a very sensitive novelist who associates more with the inner world of her characters. The hall mark of Anita Desai’s fiction is to focus on the inner experience of life. She is a vanguard of a new generation of Indian writers who are experimenting with themes of inner consciousness. She gives her readers the valuable insights into the feminine
consciousness through her memorable protagonists whose problems are not related to food, clothing and shelter. They are rebels and their rebellion is not so much directed against society as against individuals. Their problems are neither physical nor social. They are psychical and emotional and they also suffer from various complexes and mental diseases which obstruct the healthy growth of their personality. A particular trait in the character, a tragic flaw develops into a psychic malady making the character neurotic and hysterical or exiles various places to search for identity.


Anita Desai was born on 24th June, 1937 in Mussoorie, a hill station of Delhi. She was formerly known as Anita Mazumdar, a daughter of Dhiren N. Mazumdar, a Bengali business executive and her mother, Antoinette Nime, a German expatriate, a teacher. Anita Desai’s mother was a German Christian and her father was a Bengali Indian. Her mother was dark and did not have the Teutonic fair looks. She also had another name,
Nime. She used to claim that her ancestors had come from France, from Nime. Her first name was also very French: Antoinette, later shortened to Toni. Her mother, Antoinette Nime could trace her origin to France, and her father Dhiren Mazumdar’s native place was Dhaka, but he had settled in New Delhi. He spoke German very well. The mixed parentage of complex origin gives Anita Desai the advantage of having double perspective when writing about India and Indians as well as about migrants in India and Indian migrants to the West. Desai began to write in English at the age of seven, and published her first story at the age of nine. She grew up speaking German at home and Bengali, Urdu, Hindi and English outside the house. She first learned to read and write in English at school and as a result it became her “Literary Language”. Though her first language was German, she did not visit Germany until her adolescent age.

Desai was educated in Delhi at Queen Mary’s Higher Secondary School and in Miranda House, Delhi University, where she received in 1957 her B.A. degree in English Literature. In the following year, she married Ashwin Desai, a business man and they had four children: two sons, Arjun and Rahul and two daughters, Tani and Kiran. Anita Desai is multilingual. Since the 1950s, she has lived in various cities – Calcutta, Bombay, Chandigarh, New Delhi and Poona – some of which are well described in her novels. She has been a member of the Advisory Board for English, and of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, as well as a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. She has also worked as an educator at colleges including Mt. Holyoke, Smith and Girton College at Cambridge University. She received three Booker Prizes for her novels Clear

Desai’s key novels are significant discourses on modern Indian feminism. She portrays the discord between chiefly ratiocinative, stolid male characters and predominantly sensitive and introspective female protagonists. She documents the pernicious gender-based polarities of intellect and instinct, rationalism and passion, culture and nature prevalent in modern India. But amid the evolving sensibility of the new middle-class Indian woman, delineating progressive degrees of female resistance is found in her fiction. The traditional Indian society gives little scope for the independent growth of a woman. She has to undergo a number of restrictions and inhabitations, originating from her terrible controlled life during her childhood, youth and old age. The search for self enables them to throw away the rotten customs and rituals and to instill a sense to dignity and self-respect in their lives. Her narratives emanate from neurotic protagonists, invariably casting a distorting groom upon the world where they enact their sick designs. Her novels are centered mainly on the woman’s world, dealing with a whole range of the relations and phases of woman’s life cycle: woman as granddaughter in Fire on the Mountain, as daughter in Cry, the Peacock, as wife in Where Shall We Go This Summer, as grandmother again in Fire on the Mountain and as mother and sister in Clear Light of the Day.
Desai is highly regarded for the ability to portray the inner life and feelings of her female characters. Her writing is meant of discovering one’s identity. She builds her novels round the struggles within the self, the dismal and morbid moods of men and women. Her treatment of the psychological problems and the inner sensibility of her characters make her stand apart from the other novelists. Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* and Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer* are the predicament of sensitive woman figures. Desai’s novels portray Indian setting, Indian culture and Indian background. She has explicitly shown the problem of loneliness and utter isolation from one’s fellow human being and a lack of real communication that every human being faces all through his life. As a novelist, she is acquainted with the dilemma of the modern woman who has continued to play the role of the propagator of the human race and house wife and also that of the human beings.

Anita Desai is one of the most seminal writers today. She finds a place in book-reviews, journals, interviews and seminars. In critical literature on Indian Writing in English, Anita Desai is seldom obliterated. She is different from other contemporary writers. Her inner world of sensibility through poetic prose gives a peculiar poetic quality to her novels. She has social structure but a unique individual penetration. She refuses to accept abstractions and idealistic representation. She explores the disturbed psyche of the modern Indian women. She also tries to strike a balance between instinctual needs and intellectual aspirations. Her heroines with fractured and fragmented consciousness enter the direct tussle with the city and its sensibility. Sometimes, they appear mere dwarfs
before the titanic powers of the city which acts like the real protagonist in almost all the novels of Anita Desai. Sandhyarani Das has displayed beautifully the role of the city and its sensibility in the novels of Anita Desai:

Desai’s novels not only embody a realistic view of the city with its sick hurry and divided aims, but also encompass it as a metaphor of existence that sharpens the ironic mode of her fiction. The city eventually assumes a symbolic dimension that reflects existential anguish of the tormented souls who are in constant quest of selfhood, the urban milieu provides an artistic backdrop to her novels and the city becomes an overbearing presence. (18)

Desai’s fiction can be analyzed taking into consideration the psychological motivations of her novels as psychic drama through flashback, diary-entries, self-analysis, ruminations, rumbling of dialogues and descriptions of places and people. Desai explores the intricate facts of human experience bearing upon the central experience of psychic tensions of characters. Her chief concern is human relationship. Her central theme is the existential predicament of an individual which she projects through incompatible couples, very sensitive wives and ill-matched husbands. Desai is a mute observer perceiving everything minutely and delicately whenever she creates a typical situation. She gives it a perfect poetic treatment with minute detail.

Though Desai’s characters are self-conscious of the reality around them, they carry with them a sense of loneliness, alienation and pessimism. She deals with the
dislocation of normal life morbidity of temperament and mal-adjustment in family life. She dives deeply, darkly and silently to work out the inconsistencies of modern life and adds a new dimension turning inward into the realities of life. She scores out life’s mysteries, turmoil and chaos. They never have any hope or delusion and charity or passion. Her married women characters like Maya in Cry, the Peacock, Monisha in Voices in the City, Nanada in Fire on the Mountain and Sita in Where Shall We Go This Summer? become depressed, violent and self-destructive. They either lose their sanity or kill others or they kill or destroy themselves. “The nemesis of these women is not a private one but an outgrowth of the complex social context, immediate family environments and the relationship within their men” (Singh 94). As a woman novelist, Desai is deeply aware of feminine problems of married women who are victims of maladjustment.

In Desai’s fiction, there is an effort to discover, underline and convey the significance of things through imagery and symbols. Sometimes she completes and sometimes she does not complete whatever she perceives. But she knows to select from the vast amount of material and presents it with the heap of flash back technique and interior monologues capturing the inner qualities of life. Here, it is relevant to quote what Dodiya states: “Anita Desai’s novels epitomize the dynamics of the spirals of power – knowledge pleasure” (24). Being a woman novelist, she sides more intensely with the heroines of her novels, yet very honestly, she presents her heroes too. She does not associate with any feminist movement as she makes it clear that she is concerned with
only individual men and women. She is only interested in exploration of psychic depths of her characters. Desai is not a psychiatrist but deals with the social problems caused by the tensions of modern womanhood and “the remedy lies not in individual therapy but rather in social reconstruction” (Komorovsky 188-89). Thus, Desai chooses the method of narrating the story to meet the challenging possibilities. A trivial situation or an unimportant incident in her novels evokes subjective and neurotic response.

The major theme in Desai’s novels is the struggle of women to assert their independence in a restrictive Indian society. She depicts the cultural and social changes in India and she explores the power of family and society and the relationship between family members. Her novels reveal her persistent concern with the themes of anxiety, anguish and psychological adaption necessitated by the threats to the individual’s identity and relation to reality. Anita Desai explains in a key passage thus: “Writing is to me a process of discovering truth – the truth that is nine – tenths of the iceberg that is submerged beneath the one – tenth visible portion we call reality writing is my way of plunging to the depths and exploring the underlying truth” (Naikar 117). Many of her characters find the real world too harsh, difficult, unpleasant and also too complex. They withdraw from reality into their inner world and search there for ways and means of living through the hostile and unknowable world.

Desai comments through her central characters on the violence and aggression in society, the aggression between men and men, between men and women. She also pictures the narrow in growing vision which blinds mankind with the confrontation
between inner and outer reality. A close study of her works reveals that her struggle for female autonomy is presented against the backdrop of the patriarchal cultural pattern. Her writing can be viewed as a self-conscious reaction to overwhelming masculinity of privileged dominant gender. A common trait in all major women characters of Anita Desai is their longing to be free of all kinds of social and familial involvement. Her novels reveal inner realities and psychic reverberates of her characters. Her women characters are rebel against patriarchal community in order to explore their own potential or to live on their own terms regardless of the consequences. They take self-chosen withdrawal as a weapon to survive in the patriarchal community. They want freedom within the community of men and women.

Anita Desai is specially noted for her insightful depiction of the inner life of the female characters in her writings. She designs the exploration of the disturbed psyche of the Indian woman laying emphasis on the factors of the loneliness and alienation. Women are suddenly confronted with the enigma of survival. They do not give up their friction so easily. They indulge in self-analysis, self-discovery and ultimately compromise with the situation. Ultimately, some women characters prefer to remain in the world of illusion while many others endeavor to find a way out. Desai’s fiction has covered themes such as women’s oppression and quest for a fulfilling identity, family relationship and contrasts and the crumbling of traditions.

Desai renders a new dimension to Indian English fiction by handling the pitiable and awful plight of the alienated self. Especially she depicts the problems of housewives
who face single-handedly by the torments and fortunes of their insensitive and temperamentally callous husbands. This is further enlivened by her unconventional concern with the inner reality of the characters. Her main theme in her novels is protagonists’ quest for identity without losing their individuality. Her writing is somewhat unique and her main characters are women, children, adolescents and elder people. She develops each character as a mystery and riddle. Characters are almost dizzy of life and their life revolves round the morbid psychic longings. Generally, her protagonists are neurotic females, highly sensitive, sequestered in a world of dreams and imagination and they are also alienated from their surroundings as a consequence of their failure and unwillingness to adjust with the reality. The loneliness that Anita Desai portrays in her diaspora figures is a result of the inner psyche of the figures like their external circumstances.

The unhappy, unfulfilled and mad women, who are occupying the centre stage in Desai’s fictions, prove to be attractive, rich and finely tuned beings. Their male counterparts are stolid, glum and impervious to their finer vibrations. This disparity in sensibility between male and female is the root cause of the tragedy in Desai’s novels. There is marital discord between Maya and Gautama in *Cry, the Peacock*, Monish and Jiban in *Voices in the City*, Sarah and her husband Adit in *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, Sita and Raman in *Where Shall We Go This Summer*, Nanda Kaul and her vice-chancellor husband in *Fire on the Mountain*. Women have to choose between death and a mean
existence for avoiding rebuff and humiliation in human whirlpool. Maya and Monisha choose the way out in death. Sita, Amla and Nanda Kaul compromise with bitterness.

Since Desai’s novels deal with the theme of the identity and the sensibility of the woman at deeper levels of meaning and complexity, the female protagonists are on a quest for psychic and transcendental unity. She is concerned with the psychological angle of the problem faced by her protagonists. Her serious concern is the “Journey within” her characters, the central characters mostly being women. The recurring theme in her novels is the trauma of existence in a hostile, male-dominated society that is conservative and taboo-ridden. In these novels, there is the gradual conversion of the abnormal consciousness from passive to active, negative to positive, from recorder of a reality to a creator of a reality.

The theme of alienation and search for identity are central to the works of Anita Desai. Both are also common problems all over the world. The characters in her novels struggle to overcome alienation and achieve personal and social integration “which is imagined as a freedom to love, to share, to meet, to touch” (Morley 19). However, her protagonists cut out from others. They resist the demands of society and turn to be rebels. They do not find a proper channel of communication with others. They become alienated individuals and start brooding on their lives. Alienation in Desai’s novels is neither moral nor spiritual but it is intellectual and emotional. According to Coomi S. Vevaina, in some literary works, “the characters seem resigned to the fact of being inexorably trapped and overpowered by the world, while in others they rebel against it and seek ways of
transcending their alienation”(6). The mental anguish of man, as depicted in modern literary works, mirrors reality.

Desai’s parentage, her upbringing and expatriate experience have given her a cosmopolitan outlook and sympathetic understanding of the painful aspects of the human predicament, loneliness, rootlessness and alienation of the sensitive and tender-hearted characters. In all her novels, there is striving at a more authentic way of life than the one which is available to them. In short, Desai depicts the mellifluous outpourings of the lone individual. Her characters reflect the mythic reality of our life through the complex interaction of the self and society.

Alienation and search for identity are the favourite themes in all her novels. Alienation is a universal theme and it is also one of the characteristics in our society. Today we live in the age of alienation. Because many people feel alone and they are not capable of communicating with others. It is also the greatest problem of the modern man. This kind of emotional and spiritual feeling of alienation and search for the solutions or the identity are the backbone of Anita Desai’s novels. These themes are differently portrayed by Anita Desai in her different characters. The term ‘alienation’ has many interpretations. It means ‘loss of self’, ‘loss of beliefs’, ‘anxiety’ ‘despair’, ‘apathy’, ‘depersonalization, solitariness, ‘isolation, loneliness etc. In Oxford English Dictionary, alienation means, “the action of estranging or state of estrangement in feeling or affection”. Alienation is the universal theme. It is a kind of sickness in our body. It is
caused by pride, integrity, failure, fear and depression. The loneliness that Anita Desai portrays in her characters is a result of the inner psyche of the figures.

Anita Desai documents the pernicious gender based polarities of intellect and instinct, rationalism and passion, culture and nature prevalent in modern India. Frank Johnson opines:

Alienation is meant a mode of experience in which a person experiences himself as an alien. He has become, one might say, estranged from himself. He does not experience himself as the centre of his world, as creator of his own acts… The alienated person is out of touch with himself as he is out of touch with any other person. He, like the others, is experienced as things are experienced, without being related to oneself and the world and the world outside, productively (Pabby 25).

Desai’s chief concern is human relationship and she explores the disturbed psyche of the modern Indian women. Her characters are preoccupied with loneliness, morbidity of temperament, marital-discord, male-adjustment in family life, search for self-identity. Desai is deeply aware of feminine problems of married women who are victims of male adjustments.
Desai ventilates her lyrical thoughts through soothing and poetic prose. She uses depth-psychology in her study of women. She expertly explores the psychic reverberations of her female character. Characters’ inner conflict is between two polarized and ambivalent choices and wills of the human psyche in the crisis of a transitional society. Childhood experiences determine conditions for neurosis. But they are not only the sole cause of trouble in adult life. Protagonists want to guard his/her identity but fails. Most of them are estranged women in quest of a new self or a new identity.

The existential dilemma of the sequestered self is more profound the intense in Desai’s novels. One of the aims of Anita Desai in her novels is to display how this characteristic spirit of the age has loosened the bond of husband-wife relationship.

Donald Oken rightly points out that the loss of identity results in alienation. Indian writers deal with search for identity in their works in a different way. Anita focuses on alienation and search for identity of the different age groups in her esteemed works. Through the portrayal of her alienated characters, Anita Desai distinguishes herself from the other contemporary writers. Meenakshi Mukerjee rightly observes, “the themes of her novels may be called an individual’s search for identity in changing India” (Mukerjee 66). Desai spotlights an extremely complex nature, inner reality and plunges into the innermost depth of the human psyche, the inner turmoil and the chaos inside the mind. Female characters in Desai’s novels are always growing and changing. They are
confronted with the present, they look back to the past and they visualize future also. Many of the minor characters and incidents are also based on real life.

The present thesis critically examines the sense of alienation and search for identity which are experienced by woman protagonists in Desai’s novels. Five novels have been chronologically chosen for research. It further analyzes how the portrayal of these themes by Anita Desai is different from that of other contemporaries. It seeks to explain whether the characters are alienated or find out solutions to their problems, and whether they are victors or victims. The object of this thesis is to highlight the sense of alienation and search for identity in Anita Desai’s novels, and to establish the thesis that Desai’s protagonists are unique and they refuse to be victims and they survive their predicaments. The thesis also attempts to give an interpretation of the strategies adopted by the protagonists to escape or find out solutions to their fulfillments. Desai is an artist. Solanki explains:

As a consummate creative artist, Anita Desai shows tremendous potential and vitality. In her writings she not only offers an expose of human life in its shocking shallowness or outward show, but also provides a down deep, a philosophical probe or basis to sustain out life, she emerges neither as a downright pessimist nor an incorrigible optimist. All along, her earnest endeavour is to hold a mirror of life, and in the process, to unravel the mystery of human existence(185)
Review of Literature:

There have been libraries of criticism on the works of Anita Desai. These prominent and leading critics cannot be ignored when one reviews the works of Anita Desai. The books include K. Manmohan Bhatnagar and M. Rajeshwar’s *The Novels of Anita Desai: A Critical Study*, Jaydipsingh Dodiya’s Critical Essays on Anita Desai’s Fiction, Usha Bande’s *The Novels of Anita Desai: A Study in Character and Conflict*, Jasbirjain’s *Stairs to the Attic: The Novels of Anita Desai*, Darshan Singh Mains’ *Perspectives on Anita Desai*, Madhusudan Prasad’s *Anita Desai: The Novelist*, Kajali Sharma’s *Symbolism in Anita Desai’s Novels*, Mrinalini Solanki’s *Anita Desai’s Fiction: Patterns of Survival Strategies*, J.P. Tripathy’s *The Mind and Art of Anita Desai*, V.L.V.N. Narendra Kumar’s *A Study of Anita Desai’s Protagonists*, M.Chakranarayan’s *Style Studies in Anita Desai* and Sudhakar T. Sali’s *Anita Desai’s Female Protagonists*. There are also critics who have published articles on Anita Desai in reputed journals like S.P. Swain’s “*The Alienated Self of Maya: A Study of Anita Desai’s Cry, the Peacock.*” *Journal of Indian Writing in English*, Ann Lowry Weir’s “*The Illusions of Maya: Feminine Consciousness in Anita Desai’s Cry, the Peacock.*” *The Journal of South Asian Literature*, Ramesh K. Srivastava’s “*Voices of Artists in the City.*” *The Journal of Indian Writing in English*, S.D. Sharma’s “*Where Shall We Go This Summer? A Crisis of Conscience and Values.*” *The Quest*, S.P. Swain’s “*Quest for Identity: Anita Desai’s Bye-Bye Blackbird.*” *The Atlantic Literary Review*, and Suresh Kohil’s “*From Crowds to Solitude.*”