CHAPTER • I

INTRODUCTION
Chapter I

Introduction

Anita Desai (born 1937) is one of the prolific authoresses of Indian writing in English. She occupies a distinct and distinctive place in the realms of contemporary Indian fiction in English. Her fiction is serious, yet appealing in the Indian English firmament. She is the authentic cartographer of the inward terrain, a leading Indian novelist of the post-Independence era. Due to her treatment of inner life of the characters in her novels, she has become one of the best known and celebrated Indo-Anglian novelists. In fact, Anita Desai has often been compared to Irish Murdoh, Doris Lessing, Margaret Laurence and Flora Nwapa. Her works are different from those of other women novelists in Indo-Anglian novelists like Nayantara Sahgal, Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Prawar Jhabvala because unlike these novelists, Anita Desai unravels the mystery of the inner life of her portrayals. A thematic study of her works reveals that she attempts to explore the psychological states of her characters, because she thinks that the inner life of a man or woman decides his or her character more than the external condition of life. Anita Desai attains an immense popularity as a novelist. In this reference it is worth to quote the words of Neeru Tandon:

"Anita Desai is one of the few distinguished Indian writers in English of international repute, whose works have been greatly admired both at home and abroad. Her contribution to fiction writing has been quite commendable and substantial. She comes face to face with the intangible realities of life, the innermost depths of human psyche and the chaotic underworld of human mind through her novels. Her distinctive stature as a novelist derives primarily from the fact that she has made extensive use of the stream of consciousness technique in her novels."²

Anita Desai is a prominent and proficient woman novelist in English today. She has carved a special niche for herself in the annals of Indo-English fiction by shifting the retrain of her fiction from outer reality to inner reality, and by carrying the flow of the mental experience of its characters. She has lifted the contemporary Indian English fiction from the cauldrons of
stigmatised affection to the levels of international acclaim. The authoress is one of the major voices in the modern Indian English fiction, which ushered a new era of psychological realism in this genre with her novels. Being a subjective and psychological novelist Anita Desai is often forced to peep the inner recesses of the psyche rather than in the outer spectacle of the world. The contemporary Indian English fiction would have been poorer without her.

Anita Desai has given a number of interviews, but she has never revealed the most intriguing aspects of her life. Hence the biographical material that is available is very meagre. She was born on 24th June 1937, in Mussoorie, the queen of hill stations in India. She was a child of an Indian father and German mother. Desai’s mother named Toni Niame was a teacher in Berlin, Germany. She left Germany for India a decade earlier for an entirely romantic reason. She was very well aware of the fact that during the war her nationality was against her. D.N. Mazumdar was the father of Anita Desai. He was an engineer who married Toni Niame in 1920, when Nazi period was knocking at the door of Germany. Later on the partition of the nation brought chaos and disappointment in the entire country. It had broken the links that Anita Desai’s father had with East-Bengal, now became Bangladesh. He brought his wife to Delhi, a place that was completely cut off from their land and so it appeared like an exile for both of them. During the war period the elder Desai children asked their mother not to wear German dresses or speak to them in German language in public, to avoid harassment or worse situations.

She has two sisters and one brother. Anita Desai was brought up in Delhi. She has her early education in Delhi, first at Queen Mary's School and later at Miranda House. She obtained her Bachelor’s degree in English literature in the year 1957 from Delhi University. In the following year, she married Ashvin Desai, a businessman. They had four children named Kiran, Tani, Arjun and Rahul. In her childhood her parents, brothers and sisters used to speak German for conversation as in an interview with Jasbir Jain in 1979, she says:
"Yes, we all spoke German as children. My parents spoke German to each other so probably it was my first language, I should think as a child.”


Anita Desai grew-up during World War-II and could see the anxiety her German mother was experiencing about the situation and her family in Germany. After the war her mother never returned there, nor had any desire to return. Even Anita Desai did not visit Germany until she was an adult. The formative influences in making the genius of Anita Desai need a microscopic vision. It is endless to go in details about her parentage and birth; still it is obligatory to mention her infancy with lovely natural surroundings and ravishing beauty of Mussoorie. As her unpretentious childhood was surrounded by a large number of pets like cats, dogs and birds, her propinquity with the natural world crystallizes in her characters, overwhelming alertness to flora and fauna, the mystery, beauty and solitude of the nature's beauty. She has lived in the metropolitan cities like Calcutta, Mumbai, Delhi, Pune and Chandigarah.
Her blooming married life with Ashvin Desai flowered in the healthy surroundings of these metropolitan cities.

This rendered her to come in contact with men and manners in every walk of life. There is an ample reflection of these cities in her novels. She has grown-up in bi-cultural household and maintained ties with three countries viz. India, England and United States. In India, her two elder children still live, in England she has her publishers and literary circles and in United States she works as a Professor of English in Mount Holyokes. She has been also a Professor of creative writing at Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Though a number of novels written by Anita Desai are small, yet because of excellence, the prestigious 'Sahitya Academy Award' has awarded her in 1978 particularly for her commendable novel Fire on the Mountain (1978). She also won the Winifred Holthy Prize of the Royal Society of literature for the same novel. She also received the Padma Shri Award from the Government of India and the Taraknath Das Award for promotion of Indo-US relations. The Author's Guide Award has also awarded her for her excellence in writing for Where Shall We Go This Summer? (1975). She also won National Academy of Letters Award and the Guardian Award for children's literature for The Village by the Sea (1984). She won the Alberto Moravia Prize for literature. Her three novels Clear Light of the Day, (1980), In Custody (1984) and Fasting, Feasting (1999) are short listed for the prestigious Booker Prize. Ismail Merchant, starring Shashi Kapoor, Shabana Azmi, Om Puri and screenplay by Anita Desai, made In Custody into a film. She was recently elected a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Letters in New York, Grinton College at the University of Cambridge. Anita Desai influenced her own daughter, Kiran Desai whose second novel Inheritance of Loss received the very famous Booker Prize.
Joan Rockwell in her study of fiction tells us that whenever historic moments occur in the life of a nation, the period round that moment see intense fictional activity. She calls such moments nodal periods. The post Independence period of Indian writing in English has been a nodal period in Indian literary history when a number of Indian writers have tried to explore and manifest Indian reality. Anita Desai is a unique chronicler of the socio-cultural aspects of Indian life, more or less the same array of plots, people, portrayals of poverty and para-psychological presentations persistently kept the writers pre-occupied. The creed for the value of the individual and individualism is presented in the fictional world of Anita Desai, as she points out in her interview with Ketaki Seth:

"To a novelist it is always the individual who is of primary interest and not the anonymous multitude, always the particular rather than the general."  

The concept of exploring the inner recesses of a man's heart was unknown to both the pre-Independence and post-Independence writers. With the arrival of Anita Desai a new impetus was gained by Indo-English fiction. Hers is the literature of psychoanalysis and she had been aptly referred to as the uncrowned queen of psychological novels. As she herself says that she is not concerned with "the one-tenth visible section of the iceberg that one sees above the surface of the ocean" — but with "the remaining nine-tenths that lie below the surface." An important phase in the growth of fiction in India, as elsewhere, is the gradual shift from the external world to the inner world of the individual. Gifted with exceptionally fine feminine sensibility, Anita Desai takes the credit for shifting the focus from the outer gross reality to the inner experience of her characters.

Lord William Bentick's decision was a momentous one to make English the medium of education in India and it caused a tremendous ferment in the life and literature of the people. Indians learnt at first to read, speak and
comprehend English. They soon started writing in English. Indian writing in English had to range from the most utilitarian prose to the most ambitious verse. Indian writing in English was but one manifestation of the new creative urge in India that is called the literary Renaissance. Raja Rammohan Roy was the first master of Indian English prose. He started the trend of writing autobiographies. He has been considered as the veritable morning star of Indian Renaissance. The pioneers of Indian Renaissance paved the way for the growth and development of Indian English fiction are Raja Rammohan Roy, Ram Gopal Ghose, Surendranath Banerjee, G.K. Gokhale, etc.

The earlier novels were written in various languages of India, especially in regional languages as Meenakshi Mukherjee rightly comments:

"... the flowering of Indo-Anglian fiction coincided with the novels coming of age in the regional languages of India."  

Early Indian English novel is derivative and imitative of English fiction. The early Indian English novelists copied English Romantics and Victorians. They evinced little creative effort. The technical viewpoints are shabbily written in most of the early novels and these novels are mediocre. Social concern, realism and its unfailing interest in man are the points which differ Indian English novel from its beginning as Ralph Fox observes:

"The novel is not merely fictional prose, it is the prose of man's life, the first art to attempt to take the whole man and give him expression.... the great feature which distinguishes the novel from the other arts is that, it has the power to make the secret life visible."  

The Indo-Anglian fiction was deeply influenced by Mahatma Gandhi and the period during the freedom and after the freedom was the most fertile period for the growth of Indo-Anglian fiction. This fiction is highly associated with social, historical, political and economical status of the people. Men and women novelists of Indo-Anglian fiction brought a new orientation to the development of it as Meenakshi Mukherjee remarks:
"The Indo-Anglian novel made a different appearance in the nineteenth twentieth, then gradually gathered confidence and established itself in the next two decades. The momentum has yet to subside, and more novels have been published in the sixties than ever before."  

Indo-Anglian fiction is the most advanced and important branch of Indian writing in English. There are numerous novelists, born and did significant contribution to the development of Indian writing in English, but the credit goes to Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgaonkar, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawar Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal and nevertheless Anita Desai.

Unlike Anita Desai the novels of Raja Rao usually deal with social and political change of human life. His Kanthapura is the thought-provoking novel depicting the profound impact of Mahatma Gandhi on Indian villages. The Serpent and the Rope has more complex fabric than that of Kanthapura, which describes the whole gamut of the Gandhian revolution in a microscopic way. The Serpent and the Rope attempts to turn Indian mysticism and Vedant philosophy into a subject as a regular novel. Raja Rao's The Cat and Shakespeare has been well received in America. In this novel the novelist produced heavily symbolic exploration of the Indian consciousness.

Mulk Raj Anand is nevertheless a well-known novelist of Indo-Anglian fiction. He has written six novels between the period of 1930 and 1942. His first three novels: Untouchable, (1935), Coolie, (1936) and Two Leaves and a Bud, (1937) from a trio have been the victim hero of the oppressed and doomed outcast proletariat. The Village, (1939), Across the Black Waters, (1940) and The Sword and the Sickle, (1942) are based on realism. As a novelist he always oscillated between outright propaganda on the one hand and more universal sympathetic realism on the other. In The Old Woman and the Crow, (1960) and The Road, (1961), the tendentiousness is too obvious. But his autobiographical novel Seven Summers, (1951) and Morning Face, (1968) are more relaxed and less obviously coloured by prejudices.
"The Indo-Anglian novel made a different appearance in the nineteen twentieth, then gradually gathered confidence and established itself in the next two decades. The momentum has yet to subside, and more novels have been published in the sixties than ever before."  

Indo-Anglian fiction is the most advanced and important branch of Indian writing in English. There are numerous novelists, born and did significant contribution to the development of Indian writing in English, but the credit goes to Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgaonkar, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawar Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal and nevertheless Anita Desai.

Unlike Anita Desai the novels of Raja Rao usually deal with social and political change of human life. His Kanthapura is the thought-provoking novel depicting the profound impact of Mahatma Gandhi on Indian villages. The Serpent and the Rope has more complex fabric than that of Kanthapura, which describes the whole gamut of the Gandhian revolution in a microscopic way. The Serpent and the Rope attempts to turn Indian mysticism and Vedant philosophy into a subject as a regular novel. Raja Rao's The Cat and Shakespeare has been well received in America. In this novel the novelist produced heavily symbolic exploration of the Indian consciousness.

Mulk Raj Anand is nevertheless a well-known novelist of Indo-Anglian fiction. He has written six novels between the period of 1930 and 1942. His first three novels: Untouchable, (1935), Coolie, (1936) and Two Leaves and a Bud, (1937) from a trio have been the victim hero of the oppressed and doomed outcast proletarian. The Village, (1939), Across the Black Waters, (1940) and The Sword and the Sickle, (1942) are based on realism. As a novelist he always oscillated between outright propaganda on the one hand and more universal sympathetic realism on the other. In The Old Woman and the Crow, (1960) and The Road, (1961), the tendentiousness is too obvious. But his autobiographical novel Seven Summers, (1951) and Morning Face, (1968) are more relaxed and less obviously coloured by prejudices.
The Private Life of an Indian Prince, (1953) has a political theme, which deals with princely states in free democratic India. The theme is assimilated to a psychological theme. The tragic collapse of the hero's will power and his self-destruction in the face of events are beyond his control.


Bhabani Bhattacharya is another important fictionist of Indian writing in English. He has been a novelist as well as a short story writer. His significant novels are So Many Hungers, (1947), Music For Mohini, (1952), He Who Rides a Tiger, (1954), Shadow From Ladakh, (1967) and others. He was awarded the coveted 'Sahitya Academy Award' in 1967 for his famous novel Shadow From Ladakh. Although Bhabani Bhattacharya is not a prolific writer but his bulk of novels is an impressive and memorable achievement. All his novels have a social purpose.

Manohar Malgaonkar is a popular novelist of Indian writing in English. As a Lieutenant Colonel in Indian Army, his experiences are artistically collected in his famous novel Distant Drum, (1960), Combat of Shadows, (1962), The Princes, (1963), A Bend in Ganges, (1964), Spy in Amber, (1971), The Devil's Wind, (1972), and Shalimar, (1978). These novels give ample testimony to his talent and his flawless craftsmanship as a novelist. His novels
are remarkable for thematic frenzy during the partition of the country and the mutiny of 1857.


Anita Desai belongs to the group of Indian women novelists of Indian writing in English. Women have made remarkable contribution to poetry and fiction in Indian English literature. Poetry and fiction provide an ample scope for the expression of feminine sensibility, which fails to find spontaneous expression in prose.

Anita Desai prefers to write novels instead of short stories, because she feels that to write a short story is a less satisfying job and by writing novels, she can give full expression at lengths, due to the enough space of the novels as compared to that of short stories. She believed that in writing a novel one can, "give a good deal of thought and time, get round it, see it from different angles and aspects, whereas a short story demands something quite different, you have to have the whole of it, quite clear in your mind and just put in down at one throw." 8

In the realms of literature in English there are many women novelists who did significant work for the development of it like Jane Austen, George Eliot, Mrs. Gaskell, Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf. They have
described about western tradition and culture, social and political life, domestic and social pattern, love, sex and marriage.

Including Anita Desai Indian women novelists have been an integral part of Indo-Anglian fiction. During the post-Independence period these novelists have made a galaxy of works of artistic feminine sensibility. Their works are replete with art and culture, emotions and feelings, humour and pathos, satire and irony, lust and fantasy, east and west traditions and customs etc. Till a few years ago some critics both Indian and foreigner dismissed their writing as "feminine", feminity being regarded as something derogatory—that anything coming from a woman could only be melodramatic or sub-stuff. Even Anita Desai does not hold high opinion about Indian women novelists in English:

"With all the richness of material at hand, Indian women writers have stopped short from a lack of imagination, courage, nerve, or gusto of the satirical edge, the ironic tone, the inspired criticism or the lyric response that alone might have brought their novels of life. In these last few years of their articulacy, they have been content to record and document—but to satirize, criticise, lament? No, not yet. They seem unable to throw off the basis of reticence and acceptance of being uncritical and unobtrusive. Oddly, enough, they have not gone to the other extreme of feminity or fantasy either. With their vast inherited store of myth, fable, legend and superstition, one might have expected here and there a touch of the fantasy of Narayan or Sudhin, but they have remained rigidly, self-consciously prosaic. Perhaps here lies the crux of the matter—rigidity and self-consciousness, the natural descendents of the silence, the falsehoods and the shackles of the past."  

Anita Desai's view is distorted because Indian women novelists have not remained self-consciously prosaic in their performance. The novelists like Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Ruth Prawar Jhabvala, Attia Hossain, herself Anita Desai and many others have evinced remarkable artistic skill for
satire, humour, criticism, irony with pathos, serious tragic emotions, fantasy and even poetic touches. In fact Indian women novelists succeed in developing their own style. Each one is different from the other because every one of them is having her own personal experience, her own way of looking at the world, her own way of portraying characters.


Ruth Prawar Jhabvala is one of the significant and leading figures of Indo-Anglian fiction. She belongs to high rank of the novelists of Indo-Anglian fiction like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan and Anita Desai. All her novels find a remarkable place in the history of Indo-Anglian fiction. Her novels are *To Whom She Will*, (1955), *The Nature of Passion*, (1956), *Esmond in India*, (1958), *The Householder*, (1960), *Get Ready for Battle*, (1962), *A Backward Place*, (1965), *A New Dominion*, (1972) and *Heat and Dust*, (1975). Her novels deal with love and affair, marriage and marital discord, emotions and feelings, reality and artificiality, east-west traditions and cultures and impact of western culture on Indian people. She also explores poverty, illiteracy, superstitions, customs, traditions, occupation etc.

Nayantara Sahgal is the only woman novelist who has written political novels and her political novels present man-woman relationship, east and west cultures, social and political life of men. She exposes the political world, pretensions of modern society and solutions to the feeling of alienation. She has written more than half a dozen novels but her famous novels are *A Time to be Happy*, (1957), *The Time of Morning*, (1965), *Storm in Chandigarah*,
Anita Desai is one of the considerable novelists of Indian English fiction. She belongs to the group of Indian women novelists who are mentioned here. In fact Indo-Anglian fiction has turned more inward in the mind of Anita Desai who recurrently stresses the loneliness of the female protagonists. In her novels she usually deals with emotions, feelings, loneliness, suffering, alienation and sensitive nature of the female portrayals. She is an expert in portraying inner personality and predicaments of female characters. Her novels unfold the sensitive relation between husband and wife. She explains how a woman suffers due to her husband and in-laws. According to K.R.S. Iyenger, Anita Desai has "an original talent that has the courage to go its own way."

Anita Desai is an innovator and more interested in depicting the mental rather than physical experiences of her characters, mental anguish rather than pangs of hunger. As a novelist she has propounded her own views. She is the pioneer of psychological novels in the modern Indo-Anglian fiction. Her novels unravel the mystery of the inner life of her characters and that is why, she has been considered as the most serious yet appealing novelist of Indo-Anglian novelists. Her reputation has been steadily rising since the publication of her first novel Cry, the Peacock, (1963). A study of the themes and characters of her novels provide a vast area to study and analyse. Her novels are materially different from those of other eminent Indian women novelists, writing in English, such as Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawar Jhabvala and Nayantara Sahgal, who concerned mainly with the social and political themes. Unlike these novelists Anita Desai unfolds the mystery of the inner life in the characters. For her novels it is the "depth, which is interesting, delving deeper and deeper in character or a scene rather than going about it." 

The characters in Desai's novels are very dominant. Being a renowned novelist she is one of the high rank novelists of Indo-Anglian fiction. She is
really one of the crispest of Indian writers. She is the most prolific woman novelist, because even critics rate her higher than other women novelists. Her novels are widely read and highly appreciated by all and sundry. She has achieved international recognition and overwhelming response for her scope and quality of art. She incorporates themes such as marital discord, urban life, agony of existence, female psyche, alienation, loneliness, rootlessness, spiritual quest and awakening, entrapments at home and abroad, the fears and trembling of her protagonists, whose values, beliefs and structures are jeopardized, which in turn, stand in the way of the individual's self realization. Dr. K.R.S. Iyenger rightly opines that her forte is "the exploration of sensibility—the particular kind of Indian sensibility that is ill-at-ease among barbarians and the philistines, the anarchists and the ammoralists."  

The contemporary writers that Anita Desai reads with interest are Salman Rushdie, Hanif Quereshi and Bharti Mukherjee. It is indeed an amazing fact that at the tender age of nine Anita Desai read the renowned novel *Wuthering Heights* completely. There have been array of women novelists before Anita Desai heralded her arrival on the firmament of Indian writing in English. Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawar Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal and Nargis Dalai were among those who had made marks for Anita Desai. Those artists were mainly concerned themselves with politics, east-west encounter and social themes respectively.

There have been countless writers who influenced Anita Desai's thought process and writing as Emily Bronte, Virginia Woolf, David Herbert Lawrence, Henry James, Marcel Proust, Dostoyevsky, Chekhov, Rimbrand and Hopkins as in one of her interviews she tells about the authors she likes and reads:

"I like the Russians, Dostoyevsky and Chekhov. Among the English authors, I like D.H. Lawrence, Henry James, Virginia Woolf, amongst the Americans I do respect Saul Bellow."
Unlike her predecessors Anita Desai does not cope with the traditional pattern of novel writing. She is an excellent fictionist who involves her creativity in writing her novels. She is concerned with the predicaments of human relationship on the basis of the psychic realities of human mind. Anita Desai excels her contemporaries in the art of fiction. In her novels the novelist mostly explores the emotional world of women. She reveals a rare imaginative awareness of various deeper forces at work and profound understanding of feminine sensibility as well as psychology. She sets herself to voice the mute miseries and helplessness of millions of married women, tormented by existentialist problems and predicaments. The novelist is keenly interested in the psychological angle of the afflictions, faced by the protagonists in her novels. Her serious concern is the journey within her characters.

Among the Indian women novelists who have been able to see the Indian complexities from close quarters, Anita Desai happens to be the leading voice. The usual themes are missing in her novels but she has fascinating tales to tell about individuals, who have to tread a treacherous and lonely ground. She has depicted various themes at a time in her novels and in each novel these themes recur again and again. Her characters are usually existential, lonely and alienated rebels whose reflections finally open new arenas of understanding for them. Anita Desai's themes are thus original and radically different from those of other Indian English novelists. Thus the themes of alienation, despair, loneliness, rootlessness, frustration, anxiety and the emotional life of the individuals find a prime place in the novels of Anita Desai.

As an artist Anita Desai handles the raw material of life. She delves deep into it and conveys it through a world of fiction through a chiselled pattern and design. The writers like Virginia Woolf and James Joyce left a deep impact on Anita Desai and like them she also used the stream of consciousness and flashback techniques. Prof. Jasbir Jain views Anita Desai's works thematically, bringing out in the process of psychological concerns: "Somehow when her work is approached, it is the closely woman warp
and woof which absorbs one's attention and not the autobiographical elements; when the themes are analysed, the social and political elements are subtly camouflaged and subdued by dwelling on emotions and responses which are far more engrossing than the hard facts of reality."  

Anita Desai does not emphasise on plot construction with the traditional notion of having a beginning, middle and an end. Story, action and drama are meaningful in so far as they emanate directly from the characters she writes about. In the reference of the selection of themes in her novels Anita Desai herself opines:

"My novels don't have themes, at least not till they are finished, published or read, do I see any theme. While writing I follow my instinct, I follow flashes of insight, I veer away from or even fight anything that threatens to distort or destroy this insight, and somehow come to the end and look back to see the pattern of footprints on the sand."  

Anita Desai has added a new dimension to English fiction by concentrating on the exploration of sensibility. She forges a style, supple to convey the stream of consciousness of her portrayals. Her characters are generally neurotic or highly sensitive females who take refuge in a world of imagination and dreams, unable to adjust with reality they get alienated from their surroundings. They fail to find the proper channel of communication and often keep brooding on their lives. Anita Desai through her interesting characterisation and various themes has made an indelible mark.

Anita Desai has been appreciated for her uniquely Indian sensibility. Critics and scholars have largely dwelt on the thematic and philosophical aspects of her writings. Her skill in dealing varied themes is very catchy and attractive. The discussion of Prof. Jasbir Jain about the thematic analysis of Anita Desai's novels show the powerful feminist trends in Anita Desai because this thematic concern progresses and reaches to philosophical and psychological issues. She disowns all social concerns and arrests more than
once that she is interested in individuals and not in social issues. Such issues intrude only where they affect the characters. Prof. Jasbir Jain discovers the vision of ambivalence in Anita Desai's fiction:

"The world of Anita Desai's novels is an ambivalent one, it is a world where the central harmony is aspired to but not arrived at, and the desire to love and live clashes at times violently with the desire to withdraw and achieve harmony. Involvement and stillness are incompatible by their nature, yet they strive to exit together. Instinct and emotion and passion seem to be strangers in the world of daily routine and scurry away into dark corners to flourish in conditions of solitude which is presented in its varying shades and meanings." 16

Anita Desai excels in recording the dilemma faced by individuals in urban setup. Her novels present the inconsistent nature of human relationships. A wonderful artist like Anita Desai weaves exceptional story patterns out of this complicated web of human relationships. The emphasis on human relationships continues in all her novels. Anita Desai's novels are the novels of thought rather than of action. The catastrophes usually happen within the narrow domestic walls.

Feminism is a significant aspect of Anita Desai's novels. As a philosophy of life it seeks to discover and change the more subtle and deep seated causes of women's oppression. In most of her novels Anita Desai has dealt with the feminine sensibility. Anita Desai is not a hardcore feminist.

The recurring theme in her novels is the trauma of existence in a hostile, male-dominated society that is conservative and taboo-ridden. She portrays the inner conflicts of her characters and also underlines their individuality and quest for freedom. Anita Desai may not be radical feminist in the real sense of the term. Being a woman novelist she presents the women's problems with such an understanding that she is feministic to say the least. By presenting the stereotype women and her problems in an understanding and sympathetic way,
she makes everybody realize the predicaments of women in a male chauvinistic society. The protest element is implicit. To say that Anita Desai is a feminist writer is not to deny her artistic achievements. She is not just propagandist. Socio-psycho, philosophic dimensions in her novels are quite impressive. Woman is the pivotal of her novels. This fact is not only natural but also quite convincing.

Anita Desai's very first novel *Cry, the Peacock* (1963) got overwhelming appreciation and brought name and fame to her. The most conspicuous feature of Anita Desai's novels is the delineation of female characters. The female portrayals in her novels that live in separate, closed, sequestered world of existential problems and passion are portrayed with remarkable ease and adroitness. In fact Anita Desai does not portray everyday average characters; on the contrary she is interested in peculiar and eccentric characters as she herself opines:

"I am interested in characters who are not average but have retreated, or been driven into some extremity of despair and so turned against, or made a stand against, the general current. It is easy to flow with the current: it makes no demands, it costs no efforts. But those who cannot follow it, whose heart cries out "the great No", who fight the current and struggle against it, they know what the demands are and what it costs to meet them." 17

Anita Desai's sensitive handling of characters gives us a sympathetic insight into her characters that are real life but blood people. She projects a deep psychological insight into the social situations of which all her characters are products. She describes very skillfully the crisis in the life of characters in her novels. This crisis arises out of change of environment-their own culture, tradition and values. Through interesting characterisation Anita Desai has attracted a great deal of attention and favourable comments. Anita Desai projects a great creative ability in dealing her thematic issues. Her characters reveal her vision of life. Like their creator they love solitude and privacy. In her
novels, the minor characters, incidents and settings have personal bearing to some extent and are based on experience. Through the characters in her novels, she delves deep down the mysteries of the mind. In the following passage Anita Desai herself opines about her object of writing:

"My writing is an effort to discover, underline and convey the significance of things. I must seize upon that incomplete and seemingly meaningless mass of reality around me and try and discover its significance by plunging below the surface and plumbing the depths, then illuminating those depths till they become more lucid, brilliant and explicable reflection of the visible world."

Anita Desai is a born writer and has been writing as instinctively as she has been breathing. For her writing is a necessity and it is the process of writing that she is able to think, feel and realize at the highest pitch. As she deals with female protagonists her point of focus is women, the lonely women in the Indian context. We witness the emergence of the New Woman in Maya, Monisha, Sita, Nanda, Uma etc. They all aspire for socio-psychic emancipation though they are basically *pativrata*. They strive for the liberation of their feminine self from the shackles of a socio-psychically maladjusted environment. They desire to stay whole but when offered the choice, some like Sita retrace and retract.

In each of her novels one could sense the author's urge for a way of living, which would respond to the innermost yearnings of the Indian woman for self-emancipation and self-identity. The metaphysical world too attracts her attention and so do the mental apprehensions and sense of insecurity in the lives of her protagonists, who undergo traumatic psychic experience due to the collapse of a value - system and lack of satisfactory alterations. Despondency, failures and frustrations, particularly in the matter of human relationship do not, however, give rise to complete chaos and anarchy. On the other hand we perceive the struggles of the protagonists as heroic attempts that finally bring glory to the individual and dignity to the spirit of freedom. Desai's novels are
concerned with the conflicts and predicaments of the characters. She always describes about problems of adjustment and acceptance. Her skill in characterisation has received but scant attention. As a novelist she is interested in the individual only—whether men or women, young or old or children. The characters in the novels of Anita Desai can be divided into two parts—those who fail to adjust to the harsh realities of life and those who compromise. They always remain outsiders.

The novels of Anita Desai deal with varied thematic issues like marriage, urban life, female psyche, alienation and rootlessness but the central theme is the existential predicaments of women as an individual. In her novels the existential characters live on an ad-hoc basis. They suffer from inner problems like conviction of isolation and meaninglessness in their way of existence. Alienation and rootlessness are other reasons of their sufferings. The problem of existentialism is treated in considerable detail in American and European literature. In Indian writing in English Arun Joshi and Anita Desai are interested in picturing the existential afflictions of the characters in their novels. Arun Joshi frames the helplessness of man, fermented by existential problems. Anita Desai explores the theme of existentialism through the miseries of married women, fortuned by existential problems and predicaments.

The theme of existential dilemma is presented through incompatible couples, acutely sensitive wives and dutiful but insensitive husbands. Her fictional milieu is replete with ill-matched couples. The existential absurdity in Desai combines lack of communication and brings it to a mental crisis and further makes her novels as dramas of pressures and pulls. The central theme in her novels is the existential predicament of an individual which she projects through incompatible couples.

Anita Desai deals with the theme of existentialism. Existential theories leave a deep impact on her. The framework of her novels encompasses various aspects of existentialism. She deals with human nature and human relationships
like Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. Kamala Das and Ruth Prawar Jhabvala also explore the theme of human relationship but Anita Desai has dealt this theme through existential tones.

*Cry, the Peacock* is Desai's maiden venture, concerned with many themes - existentialism, marital disharmony, urban life, husband-wife relationship, father-fixation, alienation, rootlessness, neuroticism and so on. This novel was published in 1963. Through this novel Anita Desai arrived on the firmament of illustrious writers and received substantial critical acclaim. This novel is one of the most poetic and evocative Indian novels in English. For her first major novel she won the Sahitya Academy Award and became a trendsetter. Though she has successfully authored a dozen brilliant and thought-provoking novels since then her first novel remains indelibly in the minds of her readers as the most disturbing and demanding psychological novel of our times.

There are four significant events in the novel; Toto's death; the visit to the Lai's home and the ensuing trip to the cabaret; a visit from Gautama's mother and sister and a shopping trip to which Maya accompanies them; and the arrival of a letter from her brother, Arjun. The novel begins with the death of Toto, Maya's pet dog. Its death causes a great incertitude and fear in her mind. This is the opening scene of the novel which brings us face to face with a sorrow-stricken Maya, mourning the death of her beloved dog, Toto. Being a childless woman, Maya had developed a fanatic attachment to her pet dog Toto. This event fills her with an unknown fear and connects her to the past. Toto's death makes her lonely. The pet was more than a pet to her.

Maya is a pampered child of Rai Saheb. Maya's neurotic life is nevertheless related with her father's undivided attention. Maya is a motherless child and therefore the influence of her father goes a long way in shaping her personality. She acquires a hypersensitive nature towards the beauty of art, literature, music and nature under the protective care of her father. After her marriage she retains this attachment, but finds her husband unaesthetic,
unsentimental, unresponsive and practical. Both Maya and Gautama possess contrary temperaments. As a matter of fact he is twice of her age. There is no effective communication between the two and as a result, Maya becomes more and more lonely and starts lavishing her love on her dog and flowers. The attachment of Maya with life and Gauntama's detachment forms the basis of the maladjustment that creates the fear complex in Maya. The title of the novel *Cry, the Peacock*, very sensitively relates the spiritual agony of Maya, the childlike heroine who identifies herself with the peacocks in the ecstasy and pain of their fatal love experience.

This novel gives expression to the long smothered wail of a lacerated psyche, the harrowing tale of blunted human relationship. In this novel the poignant saga of a beautiful woman Maya is explored. She is a hypersensitive, romantic and emotional woman while her husband Gautama has been portrayed as a taciturn, rational, industrious, practical, busy and down-to-earth lawyer. Maya is obsessed with death. She is haunted by an astrological prediction. The prediction is that Maya's marriage is going to end in the fourth year; with the death of either wife or husband. Maya's extreme sensitivity is rendered in term of immeasurable loneliness. Her childlessness accentuates her isolation. Maya stands for total involvement, emotional binding and heart touching attachment while Gautama stands on the other side of the fence. He is a detached intellectual for whom logic is the one and only uncompromising touchstone, no matter what the situation calls.

A humanistic approach to Maya-Gautama relationship reveals that Gautama fails to treat Maya as an equal human being. He does not find anything in her to esteem or respect. He assumes superior airs and shows to Maya that her wants and cares are childish, distasteful and petty for him. This is a novel of feminine sensibility, which is brought out by putting characters and situations in sharp focus.

Desai's second novel *Voices in the City*, (1965) is perhaps her most ambitious work and it adds yet another dimension to her fictional art. Her art
and sober craftsmanship lie in her smooth style of narrating the story in contemporary Calcutta. Like Egden Heath in Thomas Hardy's *Return of the Native*, the city of Calcutta plays an important role in the development of the story. Calcutta conceived as a force of creation, preservation and destruction, is ultimately identified as a symbol for goddess Kali. The city of Calcutta builds up the right atmosphere and proper background for the coming tragedy. The city of Calcutta in which three young people Nirode, Monisha and Amla live is projected as a very powerful character, affecting their respective moods and attitudes. In this reference, Perry D. Westbrook observes rightly:

"Calcutta as depicted in the novel is a place of death in which no ambition or hope can survive."  

This novel is divided into four parts named after the four main portrayals of the novel: I 'Nirode', II 'Mohisha', III 'Amla', and IV 'Mother'. Each part is closely linked with the next part and the continuity is maintained till the end. Part-I, 'Nirode' begins with Arun's departure for abroad to become a surgeon and ends with the arrival of Monisha. Part-II, 'Monisha' presents her first person narrative. Her diary serves as a reliable medium of communication. Part-III, 'Amla' narrates Amla's story. She comes to Calcutta from Bombay to get a job. When she meets Monisha, she comes to know about the marital disharmony of Monisha and Jiban. The remaining section of this part describes Amla's involvement with Dharma and her disillusionment with love. The IV part 'Mother' deals with Monisha's suicide. It opens and ends with music.

The major themes in this novel are existentialism, marital dissonance, urban life, female psyche, alienation and rootlessness and etc. The theme of marriage is explored in this novel. Monisha epitomizes the incompatible marriage, which is a regular phenomenon in Anita Desai's novels. Monisha's marriage is proved to be a discord. Her marital life is full of frustration and sufferings. Her husband Jiban seldom efforts to create mutual understanding with Monisha. Monisha becomes a victim of an arranged marriage into a
bourgeois family. Unable to bear the brunts of existence Monisha ultimately commits suicide by self-immolation.

The novelist projects the theme of urban life. All three major characters become the victims of the metropolitan milieu. The metropolis becomes a symbol of the sense of alienation, futility and meaninglessness of existence and promotes a tragic view of life. There are so many voices to be heard in the city but one's voice goes unheard. The novelist presents a negative picture of urban life. The urban life of Calcutta is depicted, full of alienation and rootlessness. In this reference it is worth to quote the words of B. Ramachandra Rao:

"The theme of this novel is the clash between the city and the voices. It is a struggle between unequal forces and the three voices. They make spiritual journeys from doubts, frustrations and disillusionment." 20

The theme of female psyche is portrayed through the character of Monisha. Her childlessness and ill-matched marriage are the causes of her diseased psyche. In her joint family she suffers from the problem of claustrophobia. She never gets rid of the boring routine of cleaning, cooking and combing the hair of younger ones. She is unable to breathe in privacy. She becomes Anita Desai's second lonely protagonist in search of her lost identity.

The theme of existentialism is presented through major characters like Nirode, Monisha and Amla. Amla starts a career as a commercial artist but her initial enthusiasm for her work and the city ends in desolate disillusionment. She is attracted towards Dharma, a painter but her love world is destroyed when she comes to know that, Dharma has disowned her own daughter. Nirode becomes alienated from the family and society.

The novelist frames the disintegrative effects of residence in Calcutta on the lives and personalities of these three talented young people - two sisters and a brother-who come to the metropolis from a Himalayan hill station. Dr. R.S. Pathak rightly opines:
Anita Desai's second novel, *Voices in the City*, (1965), sketches the spiritual odyssey of a world-weary, lean and hungry looking journalist named Nirode, doomed to reside in Calcutta, the city of death. The novel is a tragic exploration of personal suffering, which arises not of the feverish sensitivity of this young intellectual who has lost his way in contemporary India. It explores in a convincing way the inner climate of youthful despair and is permeated by the existential angst.\(^21\)

*Bye-Bye Blackbird*, (1971) is Anita Desai's third novel, winner of the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award. It is widely appreciated by critics of both national and international repute. In this novel the novelist delineates human relationships, which are affected, governed and directed by cultural and racial encounters. Of all the novels of Anita Desai this one is the most closely related to her own experiences, as Anita Desai herself writes:

"Their (immigrants's) schizophrenia amused me while I was with them and continued to tease me when I returned to India. I wrote it in an effort to understand the split psychology of the immigrants."\(^22\)

There are three significant portrayals Dev, Adit and Sarah. Dev and Adit are presented as Indian immigrants in London. They try to get accustomed to different social conditions, prevailing in that country. Sarah is an English character. She is married to Adit. Adit is a prototype of the oriental in love with the cynical west. When the saga begins Dev, who harbours hatred for Britain, visits Adit in England. Sarah suffers discrimination in her own society for getting married to Adit, an Indian.

The novel is divided in three parts-I, 'Arrival', II, 'Discovery and Recognition' and III, 'Departure'. It consists of eight chapters. The first chapter deals with Dev's arrival in England as the sub-title suggests. The second chapter brings us face to face with Sarah's conflict. The third chapter shows that Dev is getting entangled in the magic web of England. The fourth chapter deals with Emma's ideals about the 'Little Indian Club' of Clapham and the
invitation of Sarah's parents to spend the weekend with them. The fifth chapter transports us to the abundant natural beauty of English countryside, when a trip is made to visit Sarah's parents. This chapter also shows the intense but different effects of the beauty of English countryside on Adit and Dev. The sixth chapter presents Adit's conflict and his nostalgia for India. The seventh one intensifies Adit's conflict and shows Sarah getting an offer for a better job with a better salary. The last chapter deals with Adit and Sarah, departing from Waterloo station to India, leaving Dev behind, disillusioned, demoralized and defeated.

The theme of existentialism is explored through the traumatic experiences of all three protagonists. The theme of urban life is projected through the locale of London. The theme of marital disharmony is presented through the inter-racial marriage of Adit and Sarah. In this novel Anita Desai attempts to portray feminine psyche through the character of Sarah. Dr. R.S. Pathak observes this novel critically as:

"**Bye-Bye Blackbird** had immense possibilities of being a great novel of profound psychological delineation. It is a pity that the novelist could not fully make the most of the opportunity given to her by the story. The interplay of characters, their cultures and motives, the crisis faced by each one of them and the resultant problems of disorientation have not been given as much attention as they should have been. For this reason the novel comes out to be another novel on the hackneyed theme of East-West encounter." 23

Expatriation and the complexities prevalent in the life of these expatriates have emerged as a major theme in the novels of 20th century authors, crossing the barriers of caste, creed and nationality. Novelists like E.M. Forster, Rudyard Kipling, Bharati Mukherjee, Toni Morrison and Farhana Sheikh have focused upon the lives of immigrants. The protagonists in this novel seem to be cherishing and displaying a strange love-hate relationship
with the land of their adoption. Westbrook opines about the thematic issue of this novel:

"Bye - Bye Blackbird deals with the conflicting loyalties of Indians who, living in London, are attracted to western cultures but are reluctant to let it supplement their Eastern heritage." 24

Where Shall We Go This Summer? (1975) unfolds unprecedented facets of Anita Desai's skill as a novelist. Winner of the Sahitya Academy Award, this novel explores a narrative, which is precariously perched between myth and social reality. In this novel the novelist emphasises the universal need for human ties with the protagonist Sita, awakening to the fact that even sky and earth try to meet each other near the horizon. This is the story of Raman and Sita, a married couple. Although they live under the same roof but there is no emotional bond between the two.

The novel is divided in three parts - Monsoon 67, Winter and Monsoon 67. The novelist makes a beautiful use of flashback technique to portray the mental ups and downs in Sita's life. The first part begins with the waiting Mores, the caretaker of the old house of Sita's father, for the arrival of Sita at her dead father's house at Manori after twenty years. Sita's father was considered like a God at the island but Mores is disappointed by Sita's looks and demeanour, which he feels is not at all like her father. All childhood relationships are missing in Sita's life. Manori the island becomes a link - connectivity with her childhood.

Part-II of the novel brings us twenty years back and in this part the development of characters especially of Sita and her father takes place. Her relationship with her father, stepsister Rekha and brother Jivan are brought out. The conspicuous absence of mother and its impact on Sita's personality are also pictured. Sita's marriage to Raman and her transition into a wife and mother take place in this part.
Part-III brings the readers back to Sita's present. Sita's life on the island is presented through the monsoon. She feels that the island is changed completely. The charm of the island and her father's house has completely withered. Sita cannot serve fish to her children. They have no entertainment or company and consequently Sita feels guilty of bringing her children to such a lifeless place.

This novel is a story of a sensitive young wife, who is torn between the desire to give up the boredom of her middle class routine life and the realisation that the bond that binds her to it could not be easily broken. She suffers from existential dilemma. The theme of marital dissonance is portrayed through the unsuccessful marriage of Raman and Sita. Sita suffers from alienation, rootlessness and identity crisis. Through the theme of urban life, the novelist is chiefly concerned with the life of young people living in cities. The city of Bombay in the novel symbolises violence and destruction for Sita. The city of Bombay is instrumental in accentuating the plight of the sensitive protagonist Sita. The character portrayal of Sita is presented as a victim of father-fixation. B. Ramachandra Rao rightly comments about this novel:

"The tragedy in Where Shall We Go This Summer? arises out of the inability of the characters to connect the prose and the passion in their lives. They have lived only in fragments. The novel ends with a defeated and despondent Sita unable to rediscover the passion of life and deciding to accept the prose of life. But the book ends with the implicit comment that this need not have been the only ending. It could have turned out otherwise." 25

Fire on the Mountain, (1977) is Anita Desai's fifth novel which won both the Royal Society and the Sahitya Academy Award. This short novel is very much in the style of Ruth Prawar Jhabvala, to whom it is dedicated. In this novel Anita Desai clearly shows definite signs of maturity and refinement in 'nouvelle form', which so aptly suits her talent, imagination and style. In a
small and compact 146 pages novel, Anita Desai has condensed the very essence of life. Vinod Bhushan Gulati rightly opines:

"I trust, this is probably Anita Desai's nearest brush with Jamesian nouvelle, a form which the master adored for its blessed deep-breathing economy." 26

Structurally this novel is divided into three parts. Part one 'Nanda Kaul at Carignano' as the title suggests, deals with the reclusive protagonist Nanda Kaul, living a secluded life in Carignano. Her residence is situated in an isolated portion of the Kasauli hills in Shimla. This part also pictures the total withdrawal and lifetime alienation of Nanda from the external world and her identification with the barrenness of Carignano. The second part 'Raka Comes to Carignano' unravels the experiences of Nanda Kaul’s great grandchild Raka. She seems to enjoy the richness of life on the hills. Raka is a convalescent child who visits her great grandmother. The third part 'Ila Das Leaves Carignano' deals with Nanda Kaul's friend Ila Das, who is a welfare officer, living the life of a pathetic spinster, steeped in penury and misfortune. It shows about the barren life and the tragic end of Ila Das. It is the tragic death of Ila, which draws the curtain to the narrative. In all the three parts of the novel, the common factor is 'Carignano', Nanda Kaul's residence. 'Carignano' is as important to the development of the story as the human characters of the novel.

This novel is full of different themes like existentialism, marital dissonance, female psyche, rootlessness and alienation. All three major characters strive for their identity. As Nanda Kaul had been an efficient mother and a graceful hostess, adorning the massive house of her husband, but tragically, she never felt a sense of belonging there. In Carignano she lives in a lonely and barren house. She likes to live lonely life. The maladjustment in Nanda Kaul's married life is not psychological as in Maya's case, but has a strong reason for it and the reason is the life long faithlessness of Mr. Kaul to Nanda.
Raka is a metaphor of ruined childhood and a victim of circumstances in which her mother continually suffers from the cruelty of her husband and leads a very unhappy conjugal life. She is quiet and reserve nature. She is thin nervous child and a fearful outcome of a marital maladjustment. Raka enjoys ugliness and devastation. She goes to the burnt house on the ridge and there she gives vent to her pent up feelings. The novel has very few events in it except Raka's arrival, her walk with Nanda to the Monkey Point, her visit to the club, Ila's visit to Carignano, and the last two very dramatic events, Ila's murder and Raka's setting the forest on fire.

Ila Das represents another aspect of a woman's ordeal in a sexist society. She had a very hoarse and strident voice, which was the cause of her tragedy. Being a welfare officer, she has a direct conflict with Preet Singh, a villager who wants to get her seven-year-old daughter married to a widower with six children, because he had a few acres of land. Finally she is raped and murdered by Preet Singh. Her life meets a tragic end.

The Village by the Sea, (1982) is a story of a family, disintegrating under the pressures, not of alienation but of poverty and starvation. This novel is a departure from Desai's previous practice. This novel is far from portraying the problems of human psyche. Social and economic problems of Indian society are presented in this novel. Anita Desai explores an Indian family life. Hari and Lila are important portrayals, which try to survive in the society, fighting against the drinking habits of their jobless father. Due to industrialisation Hari is compelled to leave his family and run towards Bombay to get job. For the first time Anita Desai attempts to probe into social and economic problems of the Indian society. The story of the novel takes place in a village of the western coast of India, Thul.

The novel shows Desai's clear understanding of the rural life, with its social evils and popular superstitions such as poverty, debt, drinking and ignorance. This is a thought-provoking novel, which compels us to think that education, advancement and industrialisation are the needs of the time.
novel is not divided into three or four parts. It simply consists of thirteen chapters. In this novel Anita Desai presents the heroic struggle, put by Lila and Hari, in order to save their family from starvation and other social troubles. The father is out of work. The mother is a patient of tuberculosis. When Hari goes to Bombay he feels friendless. Anita Desai introduces two small teenagers as the main characters. The novelist narrates the situation how Hari survives in Bombay and how his sisters suffer silently the problems at home.

In Custody, (1984) is an instance of the idea of mutuality, of the relationship of the individual to society, of interdependence between the creator and receptor of poetry. This novel unfolds individual human nature and brings out the unfortunate experiences of Deven Sharma. He is a temporary lecturer in a private college Mirpore. He is a non-descriptive teacher of Hindi. On persuasion of a friend Murad, Deven interviews a great poet Nur in Delhi. Between his boyish expectations and Nur's grim reality, he discovers a new lease of life, dignity and the way to fulfillment of his dreams. Deven is hardly fit to be called a hero. The title expresses very well the theme of the novel. Deven tries to take in custody the genius of the legendary Nur Shanjahanabadi by recording his poetry for posterity. This novel is replete with the theme of existentialism, urban life, rootlessness and marital disharmony. P. Bhatnagar rightly comments:

"This peep which Deven gets into the poet's personal life not only him of his idealism but makes him realise that it was not he alone who was living in a trap, but Nur himself was living in a kind of cage like some trapped animal. Realising that one victim cannot help another he decided not to have anything to do with Nur." 27

Dedicated to 'Alicia Yerburgh', this eighth novel of Anita Desai is an eleven chaptered book with no forward. This novel is different from Desai's previous works. This novel presents a deviation from Desai's earlier novels, which were mostly female oriented, where one or the other angle of the female psyche is explored deeply. But in this novel the main focus is shifted towards
novel is not divided into three or four parts. It simply consists of thirteen chapters. In this novel Anita Desai presents the heroic struggle, put by Lila and Hari, in order to save their family from starvation and other social troubles. The father is out of work. The mother is a patient of tuberculosis. When Hari goes to Bombay he feels friendless. Anita Desai introduces two small teenagers as the main characters. The novelist narrates the situation how Hari survives in Bombay and how his sisters suffer silently the problems at home.

In Custody, (1984) is an instance of the idea of mutuality, of the relationship of the individual to society, of interdependence between the creator and receptor of poetry. This novel unfolds individual human nature and brings out the unfortunate experiences of Deven Sharma. He is a temporary lecturer in a private college Mirpore. He is a non-descriptive teacher of Hindi. On persuasion of a friend Murad, Deven interviews a great poet Nur in Delhi. Between his boyish expectations and Nur's grim reality, he discovers a new lease of life, dignity and the way to fulfillment of his dreams. Deven is hardly fit to be called a hero. The title expresses very well the theme of the novel. Deven tries to take in custody the genius of the legendary Nur Shanjahanabadi by recording his poetry for posterity. This novel is replete with the theme of existentialism, urban life, rootlessness and marital disharmony. P. Bhatnagar rightly comments:

"This peep which Deven gets into the poet's personal life not only him of his idealism but makes him realise that it was not he alone who was living in a trap, but Nur himself was living in a kind of cage like some trapped animal. Realising that one victim cannot help another he decided not to have anything to do with Nur." 27

Dedicated to 'Alicia Yerburgh', this eighth novel of Anita Desai is an eleven chaptered book with no forward. This novel is different from Desai's previous works. This novel presents a deviation from Desai's earlier novels, which were mostly female oriented, where one or the other angle of the female psyche is explored deeply. But in this novel the main focus is shifted towards
the male psychology. Anita Desai analyses the interior motives of Deven's psyche and his existential trails. The novelist alters the focus from a predominantly female world to a matter-of-factly male one. In this reference it is worth to quote the words of A.N. Dwivedi:

"Mrs. Desai makes a notable departure here and creates a male protagonist instead of a female protagonist as usual with her, but that one alone does not change her general attitude towards mankind. There is the same agony, the same sadness, the same helplessness on the part of the protagonist as elsewhere." 28

Anita Desai's Baumgartner's Bombay, (1988) is a significant milestone in her literary career. Consisting of seven chapters alternatively this novel flashes light on the two isolated Germans without family and country. In this novel Anita Desai projects the individual in relation to society or to be more accurate the individual as a product of society. Hugo Baumgartner, the protagonist is the central character and the other is a female cabaret dancer, Lotte. Both the characters try to establish their identity in an alien world. Their sense of isolation is brilliantly painted with hunting pathos and evocative images. Their quest ends in tragic isolation, frustration and failure. The isolation leads Baumgartner to death who is murdered by a young German and the other remains to suffer in loneliness. Hugo Baumgartner finds himself stranger in the land of his birth, Germany. He is compelled to quit Germany. In India also he always remains an outsider. He tries his level best to accept India but he is never accepted.

Life and fiction overlap in this work. Likewise the time periods of Anita Desai's mother's life and that of Hugo overlap, but do not coincide. The story of lonely Hugo Baumgartner's fate is projected in between fact and fiction, reality and imagination. This novel has a contemporary relevance as it deals with the problems of drug-addicted hippies, found in all the big cities of India.
This novel is divided into eleven chapters. The life of Hugo Baumgartner is explored in a flashback. This novel deals with 'expatriation' and the distance consequence of 'genocide'. This novel reminds Anita Brookner's novel, *Latecomers*, which also pictures the life of four refugees. But Baumgartner's *Bombay* is gloomier than *Latecomers*.

*Baumgartner's Bombay* covers both India and Europe. It is the study of Hugo, an uprooted Jew, who is prosecuted in his own country, because of perverse Nazi anti-semitism, too dark to be accepted in his country and before the Second World War, when he comes to the British India in search of a better future; he is too fair skinned to be accepted by the Indian society.

Anita Desai's *Journey to Ithaca*, (1996) explores foreigners’s encounters with India - Matteo, an Italian ascetic and disciple of Mother and his more materialistic German wife Sophie, who prefers sybaritic Goa to the *ashram*. The central preoccupation of the novel is not alienated individuals, but the quest motif and the journey undertaken to reach the goal, though in the process they get alienated from the world. This novel is an addition to the novels of encounter in the field of Indian English novel that transcribe the quest theme of the three major characters in the novel. Sophie is at the centre of the narrative. The novel pictures the journey of Matteo and Laila, searching for enlightenment. In this reference Asha Susan Jacob points out:

"*Journey to Ithaca* is a saga of multiple quests made by three different personalities, at three different periods for different intentions. Desai transports us from India to Italy, Egypt and America accompanying three foreigners – Matteo, the Mother and Sophie. While the journey of the first two culminates in India, that of Sophie commences from India. Each of these quests is interlinked to the others and it never ends."

The novel also presents the pathetic conditions of Indian artists who have been selling Indian spirituality abroad. It presents one of the sublimest
manifestations of religious sensibility. The title of the novel is derived from the Cavafy's poem, also forms one of its two epigraphs.

The novel is divided into four chapters. It is patterned skillfully on a new device of Prologue and Epilogue. In Prologue, the early life of Matteo, the hero of the novel, is made very clear to the readers, that school life was impossible for him. In Epilogue, Matteo's journey to India, his marriage with Sophie and the role of his parents in nurturing their children, after his departure from Italy to India is passed on to readers. Chapter first of this novel unfolds Sophie and Matteo's departure from Italy to India. This chapter consists of their experiences of Kumbh Mela at Allahabad and their arrival at an ashram in Bihar. The second chapter deals with another challenge to Matteo when Sophie becomes pregnant and wishes to go on a mountain of the Himalayan regions for her safe delivery. They come to an ashram at Himalayan region. Here they meet to Mother. Due to her jealousy, Sophie comes back to Italy to her parents. In this chapter Anita Desai upholds sanctity of relations between husband and wife. Chapter third explores Sophie's ceaseless efforts for discovering the past of Laila. Chapter fourth reveals Sophie's arrival in Bombay inorder to know the past life of Laila. Thus Anita Desai has united varied groups of people from different parts of the world to present cosmic vision of human life. Dr. Makrand Paranjape rightly remarks:

"Its central movement is anticipated in Desai's earlier novels. Protagonists seek a solution to their problems. They feel that the solution lies in discovering some lost essence which they have already experienced, usually as children, they undertake a journey to recover that lost essence; but after what is difficult voyage, they end up disappointed, disillusioned. In the later novels, this disillusionment is seen as a concomitant to real, adult maturity and therefore almost accorded a positive value."

Fasting, Feasting, (1999) adds another laurel to the already established versatile genius of Anita Desai. Short-listed for the prestigious Booker Prize, this novel offers a veritable treasure of possibilities to the readers. In many
manifestations of religious sensibility. The title of the novel is derived from the Cavafy's poem, also forms one of its two epigraphs.

The novel is divided into four chapters. It is patterned skillfully on a new device of Prologue and Epilogue. In Prologue, the early life of Matteo, the hero of the novel, is made very clear to the readers, that school life was impossible for him. In Epilogue, Matteo's journey to India, his marriage with Sophie and the role of his parents in nurturing their children, after his departure from Italy to India is passed on to readers. Chapter first of this novel unfolds Sophie and Matteo's departure from Italy to India. This chapter consists of their experiences of *Kumbh Mela* at Allahabad and their arrival at an *ashram* in Bihar. The second chapter deals with another challenge to Matteo when Sophie becomes pregnant and wishes to go on a mountain of the Himalayan regions for her safe delivery. They come to an *ashram* at Himalayan region. Here they meet to Mother. Due to her jealousy, Sophie comes back to Italy to her parents. In this chapter Anita Desai upholds sanctity of relations between husband and wife. Chapter third explores Sophie's ceaseless efforts for discovering the past of Laila. Chapter fourth reveals Sophie's arrival in Bombay inorder to know the past life of Laila. Thus Anita Desai has united varied groups of people from different parts of the world to present cosmic vision of human life. Dr. Makrand Paranjape rightly remarks:

"Its central movement is anticipated in Desai's earlier novels. Protagonists seek a solution to their problems. They feel that the solution lies in discovering some lost essence which they have already experienced, usually as children, they undertake a journey to recover that lost essence; but after what is difficult voyage, they end up disappointed, disillusioned. In the later novels, this disillusionment is seen as a concomitant to real, adult maturity and therefore almost accorded a positive value." 30

*Fasting, Feasting* (1999) adds another laurel to the already established versatile genius of Anita Desai. Short-listed for the prestigious Booker Prize, this novel offers a veritable treasure of possibilities to the readers. In many
ways, this novel is a contribution to her earlier themes like the afflictions of loneliness, marital disharmony, feminine consciousness and psychological concerns. In this novel, Anita Desai returns to her earlier subject of the middle class Indian family, in which the parents are indifferent and irresponsible.

In this novel Anita Desai focuses on the role of the family in perpetuating the patriarchal society. It captures the maladies of contemporary living, anorexia and bulimia of the twenty first century. Uma and Aruna are two sisters. Aruna is juxtaposed as a striking foil to her sister. Their brother Arun is another member of this family. The title is apt and justified. Metaphorically, this novel is a narrative of the body, which is subjugated to torture through fasting (deprivation) and feasting (indulgence).

The major part of the novel can be seen through the eyes of Uma, who is the eldest daughter in MamaPapa's family. This novel is divided into two halves. The first part of this narrative dominates the saga. The first part consists of 155 pages out of total 228 pages. In the first part of this novel the afflictions of the eldest daughter Uma are presented. Uma's only brother Arun remains in the background. He emerges in the second half of the novel. It is Arun's further education in Massachusetts, which shifts the locale of the novel from a nondescript provincial town in northern India to U.S.A..

Uma is presented as an attendant in her own home. She is expected to assist her mother in all the intricacies of bringing up her younger brother. She is compelled to leave her school. Her marriage proves to be a disaster, when her husband is found already married. Both Uma and Anamika live a life of entrapment. Anamika's marriage also makes her life a hell. Her in-laws burn her to death.

The second part of the novel explores Arun's life in Massachusetts. The university teachers torture him. Arun has to shift out of the hostel. When he goes to live at Mrs. Patton's house, it seems impossible to do so. Being a vegetarian Arun suffers too much because of contrary cultural surroundings.
The Zigzag Way, (2004) is a magical novel of elegiac beauty, presents Mexican landscape. In this novel Anita Desai has shifted to foreign land as the background. Unlike her earliest novels, she centers her attention on a male character Eric, whose psyche is displayed. The novelist narrates Mexico, its culture, vision and practices in detail. Her experimentation with foreign characters continues in this novel. This is the first novel where the locale is not India but a foreign land, Mexico, which for long had fascinated the novelist and she wished to write about it. The title of the novel comes from the zigzag way miners take on their way up out of mine shafts to prevent exhaustion. Mexico follows a similar zigzag pattern illuminating traces of information. Eric ruminates on his own zigzag journey to enter the part. Neeru Tandon opines:

"Desai here paints a subtle miniaturist history of 20th century Mexico, seen from unexpected perspective, that evokes the explanation of the Mexican Indians. With vivid sympathy and brilliantly telling detail, Desai conjures up Eric's grandmother, and her poignant story, that of a young Cornish girl whose grave is in a cemetery on a Mexican hill side." 31

The Zigzag Way is very short, no longer than a novella, really suggests far more than is compressed within its 182 pages. It is divided into four parts. The four parts are simultaneously 'Eric Arrives', 'Vera Stays', 'Betty Departs' and 'La Noche de los Muertos'. In the first part 'Eric Arrives' deals with Eric's arrival to Mexico, links all these four parts. He arrives from Harvard. Due to Emily's research project they come to Mexico. The second part explores Dona Vera - the queen of the Sierra. Eric's obsessive engagement with his ancestors' part keeps interested with the accounts of tragic irony in the life of Dona Vera. The third part unfolds Betty's departure. The final part unravels the Dia de los Muertos, the feast day, when the locals celebrate and remember their dead. In this part the various strands of the novel come hauntingly, bringing together past and a moment of quiet, powerful epiphany.

In The Zigzag Way, Anita Desai departed from her familiar territories and set up the story of identity and self-discovery in Mexico. Eric is the most
important character. He is an uncertain, awkward young man. He comes to Mexico in order to change his thesis into a book.

In Anita Desai's fictional world, it is the males rule over women characters. Her novels are a clash between existential concerns and male chauvinism. The growing urge for self-discovery explores the growth potential of her protagonist. Nirode, Sita, Nanda, Sarah, Amla, Bimla and Deven indicate steady progress in their march for self-alienation to self-discovery. Anita Desai's protagonists are highly sensitive and terribly bewildered of the burden of living helplessly in the society with absurd realities. The analysis of themes and characters in Anita Desai's novels bears an unmistakable testimony to the obvious success of the novelist. S.P. Swain puts:

"Her major novels tend to disappoint the reader due to their one dimensionality, turning the characters wooden and insensitive. They are not Kaleidoscopic in their thematic projection. In most of them there is a repeated droll harping on the isolation of the self. However they are deeply moving in their existential and socio-psychic import. Microcosm of man's endless struggle for survival, they voice the anguished emmui of the caged bird that symbolizes the modern man. Emblems of remonstrance and psyche protest, they strive for the protection and preservation of their dignity and self esteem in a patriarchal society."
References


