CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

ANTIA DESAI THE CONNOISSEUR
Anita Desai is a distinguished artist of high order and her concern for human lot has imported profound appeal to her novels. Of all the contemporary Indian English novelists, she is indisputably the most popular and powerful novelist. She has made commendable contribution to the Indian-English fiction. She is a novelist of urban milieu and is a fine mixture of Indian, European and American sensibilities. She writes instinctively as if writing is an urge for her. Writing is a process of her self-discovery to go deep into the complexities of existence. She is essentially a psychological novelist. She claims that her novels are no reflection of Indian society, politics, or character. She does not reflect on social issues in her works, like Mulk Raj Anand. She sees social realities from a psychological point of view and does not look at them as a social reformer or a moralist. Her focus of attention is on the inner climate, the climate of sensibility. Her main concern is to depict the psychic states of her protagonists at a crucial juncture of their lives. She creates a limited world by observing minutely what is going on around her.

In her excellent study of Indo-Anglian fiction *The Twice Born Fiction* (1971-74), Meenakshi Mukherjee calls Anita Desai "a rare example of an Indo-Anglian writer who achieves that difficult task of bending the English language to her purpose without either a self-conscious attempt of sounding Indian or seeking the anonymous elegance of public school English." Her growing popularity is seen in the increasing number of researchers taking up critical studies of her works for their doctoral degrees. in the
publication of research books and articles on various aspects of her works. In the words of G. Rai, "She is almost alone among the Indo- Anglian writers who has used stream of consciousness technique in her novels." She makes a clear cut distinction between the writing of the inner and outer world and proceeds to delineate character and depict the situation from the personal angle. She is an uncrowned queen of the inner emotional world. Endowed with boundless imaginative resourcefulness and creative vitality, she writes remarkably well about only those aspects of life she has minutely observed and deeply experienced. As a novelist her distinguishing qualities are many. The chief among them is the subordination of the background to the characters and the deft handling of language, imagery and syntax in order to convey an intimate expression of the inner world of her characters. She makes each of her work a haunting exploration of the psychic self.

Having a Bengali father and a German mother Anita Desai had diverse influences to fertilise her poetic imagination even from her childhood. When she was a child, her parents, sisters and brother conversed only in German for conversation. At the age of seven she began to write prose, mainly fiction and published some small pieces in children's magazines. As their family lived in Delhi she had her whole education there. She took her Bachelor's degree in English literature in 1957 from Delhi University. She could speak German, Bengali and Hindi besides English quite fluently. The choice of medium is very important for her. According to her an idea or an image is seldom vital enough to make one write and must have a passion for language as well. She comments: "My language (of the novels) is English and I find it answers all my needs. It is rich and flexible, supple and adaptable, varied and vital. I think it is even capable
of reflecting the Indian character and situation." She accepted in one of her interviews that her roots were divided because of the Indian soil on which she grew and the European culture which she inherited from her mother. She feels that she has a bridge between these two worlds. Thus she has double sensibility which gives her novels an objective effect. She is very fond of reading books since her childhood and perhaps this habit has encouraged her for creative writing at an early age. She has much time and space, moving alone in a vast world so that her imagination had space to grow. She travelled widely in almost all the parts of India and her experiences of different sort of people and places have enriched her writing. She still devotes most of her time to reading books.

Anita Desai feels that the medium a novelist chooses should be the one in which the writer is most fluent. Of the four languages she knows, she is more fluent in English. In addition to her fluency in the language, she has a passion and love for it. So she chose English as her medium or rather it was the language (English) that chose her. In her interview with Jasbir Jain, she says, "I did not pick English out, I don't think a child of seven is capable of doing so. I must have simply picked the language which came most fluently and easily to me." She found English to be a suitable link language, a compromise. Absolutely there is no doubt that she has a perfect command over English.

The writers Emile Bronte, Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence, Henry James, Proust, Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Kawabata, Rimbaud and Hopkins have made significant impact on Anita Desai's thinking and writing. Indeed, she has written her novels under the impact of these celebrated modern writers. Admitting it, she says, "In my twenties when
I first began to work seriously and consciously on my novels, it was D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, Henry James and Proust that influenced me more strongly. Laterly, the novels of Japan writer, Kawabata and more and more modern poetry - particularly that of Rimbaud, Hopkins and Lawrence." She was only nine years old when she read Wuthering Heights. Although she could not have understood half of it, it struck her "with a gale force, it set my hair on end, I vibrated to it - I have never forgotten that experiences and reality has never again seemed to me half as intense significant or overwhelming as the world of books....." Ever since, literature has seemed to her more interesting more significant and more overwhelming than the real world.

With her early childhood nurtured in a Brontean world, she has imbibed depth and hue of the fiction writers of the West. If the Western writers presented her with general criteriology for her choicest field, the poets of the East furnished her with the charms of rhythms and style; whatever she heartily welcomes was deeply and successfully entranced within, to enrich her creative perspective. While she was studying in Delhi University, she occasionally contributed short stories to the college magazine. In her twenties as she has already said, Anita Desai started writing novels on a small scale. She follows her instinct while writing novels. To her, writing is an 'intellectual exercise'. It is a compulsion and inner urge to her. The scenes and impressions, moods and emotions that make up the world do not find final form until she has written them down. So long as the work is in progress, she tried to discover its true value in the scale of things. She claims this "has become such a deeply ingrained habit, it is like a chain-smoking; I chain-smoke with words, with books. There is a difference, of
course—what begins as a self-indulgence eventually becomes a self-discipline."\(^7\) She holds a prominent place among the younger group of Indian English novelists.

Anita Desai is popularly known for sensitivity in structuring the pattern of her novels, integrity of her artistic vision, imaginative mind, keen observation, sharp awareness and competent craftsmanship. She has become a much sought-after writer sought after by publishers and readers alike. She has written to date twelve novels. But this work is strictly limited to her. first published ten novels. 1. Cry, the Peacock (1963); 2. Voices in the City (1965); 3. Bye, Bye, Blackbird (1971); 4. Where Shall We Go This Summer? (1975); 5. Fire on the Mountain (1977); 6. Clear Light of Day (1980); 7. Village by the Sea (1982); 8. In Custody (1984); 9. Baumgartner’s Bombay (1988); 10. Journey to Ithaca (1995). Her novels have an existential and psychological bearing.

Anita Desai’s novels are not a documentary on rich contemporary society. She chooses those parts of society which she knows deeply and presents them with her vision. She herself accepts that she is not at all interested in writing about typical families. She further says. "... there has to be some kind of vision beyond observation. Situations must be such that you have not handed all the conclusions. Your imagination must be free to reach out."\(^8\) Her novels are from instinct rather than observation. She seems to be well acquainted with the inner life of the women of upper middle class and that is why she effectively depicts the complexities and compulsions of the intelligent and sensitive women of this class. She selects from her social experiences the relevant ones and leaves the irrelevant experiences. She looks into the future with her keen insight and instinct. She probes deeply into the social forces which decide the
development of a woman in a family of the male dominated society of India. She writes in a private world of her own. Her creative process is not for a public show. She herself feels that to scrutinise the creative process in the light of reason is to commit an act of violence. She accepts that the creative writer prefers the flashes of individual vision and depends on a kind of instinct that tells him what to follow and what to avoid.

Desai’s primary concern as a novelist is with the lonely individual. Her fictional world postulates an engaging tussel between the alienated individual and chaotic milieu. She deftly explores the emotional ecology of her protagonists who are shown “facing single handed, the ferocious assaults of existence.” She is mainly concerned with the projection of the “psycho-philosophic, psycho-emotional and socio-psychic states of the female protagonist living in an alien, closed, and cloistered world of existential problems and passions, loves and hates.” She writes “instinctively”, carried away by her compulsions, allowing the novel “to sprout and grow freely like a tree under the blue sky, and then trimming its ugly branches and uprooting the weeds growing around it.”

The object that triggers her imagination could be very significant. As she says to Atma Ram in an interview; “a leaf dripping under rain drop, a face seen on the bus or a scrap of new read in the papers...” are really significant to her as she is very sensitive.

Unlike R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Bhabani Bhattacharya who confined themselves mostly to the portrayal of outward reality, Anita Desai goes to explore the inner reality. She always depends on her private vision than the subjective rendering of external reality. One of the most important aspects of her work is her ability to fuse form and content. Form becomes a mode of discovering content. Her preoccupation is
with the individual and his inner world of sensibility. Her fictional world is half-revealed and half-concealed, partly real and partly fictitious. She is like the imaginative contemporary of the European, American and Commonwealth modernists - Iris Murdoch, Saul Bellow, Patrick White, Margaret Atwood. Her fiction presents a beautiful blending of American, English, Russian and French streams in novel writing. She perceives life more profoundly and privately. Her emphasis is on the portrayal of reality with a view to bring order to disorder of life in the new world. She expresses her deep affections concerning the unjust and discontinuous cosmic order. She rises her inner cry of the absurdity and meaninglessness of the world and emphasises the powerful urge of man for liberation and freedom.

Anita Desai spotlights on extremely complex nature of life. Her notion of reality of life seems to have been greatly influenced by Virginia Woolf who maintains that "Life is not a series of big lamps symmetrically arranged; life is luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelop, surrounding us from the beginning of conscience to the end." The purpose of her writing is to discover for herself and then to describe and convey the truth. She clearly differentiates between truth and reality and finds no difference between them. She thinks that the world is like an ice-berg, the one-tenth visible above the surface of the water is what we call reality, while nine-tenth submerged make up the truth and that is what one is trying to explore. For her "it is depth, which is interesting, delving deeper and deeper in a character, a situation or a scene rather than going round about it." This technique is used by her in capturing a 'psychosocial realism' and an 'intensified expressionism'. She is very much interested in exploring the psychic depths especially of her female protagonists. K.R. Srinivasa Ayengar rightly says, "since her
preoccupation is with the inner world of sensibility rather than the outer world of action, she has tried to forge a style, supple and suggestive enough to convey the fever and fretfulness of the stream of consciousness of her principal characters."

Today there is a great change in fiction writing all over the world. It shifts gradually from the external world to the inner world of the individual. It captures the atmosphere of the mind and directly involves the reader in the flow of a particular consciousness. Desai declares, "All my writing is an effort to discover, to underline and convey the true significance of things... Next to this exploration of the underlying truth and discovery of private mythology and philosophy, it is style that interests me most... and by this I mean the conscious labour of uniting the language and symbol, word and rhythm... One must find a way to unite the inner and outer rhythms to obtain integrity and impose order on chaos."

Among all the Indo-English novelists, Anita Desai lays stress on the landscape and correlates it to psychic states of her protagonists. Her gift of suggesting things is rare. She employs various devices such as flashbacks, asides and painting the landscape scenes in order to throw clues to the action of the story. As Shyam Asnani says, "her technique is the natural outcome of her preoccupation with the individual psychology combined with her painter's eye, her vivid awareness of external world." She makes use of the language of the interior which requires a delicate and subtle handling with hints and suggestions. So her liberal use of symbols and images leaves the reader breathless. She is "an Indian Jane Austen and Virginia Woolf blended together." Her novels are psychological revelations. The technique she has selected for her novels is the technique used by Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence, E.M. Forster and Henry James. There are
flash backs and stream of consciousness technique in some of her novels. With her, technique becomes a matter of predominant concern. She uses the technique of contrast between various settings, characters and even between the different stages of the same character. She employs the 'language of the interior' to delineate the inner tensions, crises of her characters. The problem of her characters is 'existential'.

Desai is adept at picturing beautiful symbolic scenes. The scenes she creates are appropriately suitable to the situations of her characters. Her imagery and symbolism are very remarkable. They are always charged with tremendous significance and unlike other novelists, she registers as does the seismograph, the mental vibrations of her characters and articulates them by hints and suggestions, symbols and images. Like D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Andre Gide, Thomas Mann, Franz Kafka and William Faulkner, she has made use of symbols copiously in her novels. There is abundant symbolism in her novels. As a matter of fact, to discover and convey her vision of the hidden meanings of things, she feels the need of using symbols frequently. Symbols are an integral part of her novels. She has interwoven them artistically and functionally into the texture of her novels. In fact the compulsive and functional use of symbols in her writings is due to the fact that for her what is important, to quote her own words, "is the movement of the wing one tries to capture, not the bird. That is, it is the image that matters, the symbol, the myth, the fact of associating them, of relating them, of constructing with them." 19

Being essentially a modern psychological novelist in thought and technique, she employs symbols spontaneously and unconsciously. Thus she resembles D.H. Lawrence, one of her favourite authors. She resorts to symbolistic technique in her writing out of
dire necessity to portray the inner mystery, the unconscious and subconscious of the characters. She proclaims that she imparts symbolic significance to her images taken from real life, by repeating them. Mr. Madhusudan Prasad says, "Through symbolism and imagery she has tried to crystallised the various complexities of man-woman relationship as well as the varying states of human psyche." Symbols endow her novels with rare compactness and richness. Symbolic strain in her fiction is the keynote, with the help of which, one can properly understand and evaluate her art and ideas. Symbolism is an integral aspect of her mind and art.

Alienation has generally been delineated through images and symbols which draw contrasting attitudes of characters, depict bitterness and frustration of the psyche, indicate the changes which a relationship undergoes and deepen the characters and readers awareness of alienation. The images and symbols are very often used so as to reflect the deep sensuous love of life and refined state of the women characters and highlight the lack of interest in such things in their male partners.

As Anita Desai is a psychological novelist and largely concerned with the atmosphere of the mind of her characters, she swerves way from the main tradition of characterization followed by Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya and Manohar Malgonkar for whom it implied mostly the social and economic background, physical features, dress and behaviour of a person. The philosophical and political ideas dominated other traits of characters for Raja Rao and Nayantara Sahgal. But Desai is more concerned with her characters, their motivations, their consciences and consciousness and their tensions. Being a sensitive novelist and gifted with keen observation, a penetrating analysis and a skill to paint the scenes and
situations with appropriate words, she creates a rich gallery of characters. B. Ramachandra Rao feels that in her novels environment only adds to presenting "each individual as an unsolved mystery." 

Desai's characters are not ordinary ones and their problems are not the problems of food, clothing and shelter. Their problems are existential and psychological. Her very delineation of characters is different from that of other novelists. All her characters are hermit-like solitary individuals. They are living realities of day to day life. She says, "I am interested in characters who are not average but have retracted or been driven into some extremity of despair and so turned against the general current. It is easy to flow with the current, it makes no demands, it costs no effort. But those who can not 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." 

Desai's main characters are mostly educated women. They are highly sensitive and emotional and are tortured by the humiliating sense of neglect, of loneliness and desperation. Desai understands their problems deeply and highlights their miserable position. In an unpublished interview with Atma Ram she says, "If I write chiefly about women it is simply because I know and understand them best." She agrees that women are denied the existential freedom, the right for responsible self-hood for authenticity through individual choice. Desai's women are very sensitive and they generally rebel against their spouses, children, relations, society, culture and against their own selves. They suffer from different complexes and psychic diseases. There are some traits in their temperament. The novelist shows her depth in human nature by defecting the gradual conversion of a trait into a psychic block which assumes the form of a disease, making
her characters neurotic. A significant feature of her characterization is her connection of external objects or landscape with her characters. Besides making use of the landscape and myths for characterization, she uses various images and symbols particularly those of birds and animals for characterization.

Desai's characters are burdened with their uniqueness. They always want to exercise their freedom, makes a choice and refuse to conform and compromise. They continuously search for an authentic existence. All of them find ordinary routine of life boring and disturbing; full of whirlpools and long stretches of dreadful marshes. They refuse to see themselves as a part of an impersonal mass of mankind at large. They believe that they have individual potentialities of their own, to achieve an authentic existence they distinguish themselves from the mass and exercise the choice to say 'Yes' or 'No'. Some of her characters fail to adjust to the harsh realities of life and some of them compromise with life and some others always remain 'outsiders' as they fail to accommodate themselves to the world of realities. The non-conformist attitude of her characters shows that reality is unbearable to them. Therefore, they find involvement destructive and so they want to withdraw from it. But withdrawal which does not come naturally to them, leads them nowhere. Ultimately they realise that the path they have chosen, hardly matters, life by itself, is meaningless. Thus in Desai, the psychic travels of the estranged self indicate a measured and graded movement from 'self-desertion to self-assertion'. Their progress is a march from neurotic phobias and diseases to normalcy.

Desai's characters are generally neurotic females sequestered in a world of dreams and imagination and alienated form their surroundings as consequence of their
failure or unwillingness to adjust with reality. They differ often in their opinion from others and embark on a long voyage of contemplation in order to find the meanings of their existence. They always desire to be free from all kinds of social and familial involvement. They constantly strive to avoid emotional entanglement and social responsibility. Although they display a particular set of psychological complexes and represent certain universal predilections and conflicts, they are essentially independent individuals with special distinctive identities of their own. In each one of them there is a sense of deprivation caused by familial ties. They are not escapists and they discharge their duties quite effectively. But they resent the circumstances in which they have to operate.

As Desai is primarily concerned with the portrayal of psychological reality, she prefers peculiar and eccentric characters rather than the ordinary ones. Most of her major characters are 'imaginary' or an 'amalgamation' of several different characters. For her each character is an embodiment of some unexplained mystery. But the novelist unravels it layer by layer. Her characters especially female characters, come alive in their dynamic process always 'growing' and 'changing', 'viable' and 'mutable'. They are engrossed with the present, look back into the past and visualise the future as well.

Anita Desai does not lay any special emphasis on plot construction. Story, action and drama mean little to her. "Whatever action there is in the novels is a part of the integral whole composed of the human psyche, the human situation, the outer and inner rhythm." Of all the aspects of the novel discussed by E.M. Forester, she gives paramount importance to the 'pattern' and 'rhythm'. Therefore in everyone of her novels there is hardly any conventional plot. Although her novels are episodic in nature, they
are all well chiselled like sculptural masterpieces. In all her novels structure, texture, technique and language cannot be separated. Her plot construction shows a splendid fusion of form and expression, contrivance and spontaneity. Desai, no doubt, has added to the Indian-English between "an existentialist dimension, a typical splendour and technical richness that were hitherto lacking."²⁶

Desai is very much influenced by the social, economic, political, cultural and psychological problems of her age. She belongs to the post-independent era of India. During this period there was an alarming change in the form of value systems and reality. Scientific, technological and educational advancements have brought about revolutionary changes in the lives of the people. Industrialisation also has a given birth to many social evils such as anti-social activities, murder suicide and alienation. The individual felt lost, bewildered by the clash and confusion between the modern and the traditional view point towards life. He experienced the sense of nothingness and despair about the mystery of human existence. This lead the individual to a continuous quest for identity in the constantly changing social reality. It is against this backdrop that Anita Desai has been writing her novels. Her protagonists are constantly in quest for identity. Meenakshi Mukherjee rightly observed that in the post independent era the themes of the novels may be called "an individual's search for identity in changing India."²⁷

Anita Desai's conception of a theme is not unconnected with her concept of characterization. If her protagonists happen to be alienated characters who fail to establish a contact with people around them, her themes are so organised and developed as to enable her characters mature fully and portray themselves. Probably the most
recurrent theme in her novels is the 'hazards and complexities' of man-woman relationships, the 'nurturing of individuality' and 'establishing individualism' alienation, loneliness, lack of communication, helplessness, meaninglessness of her characters. The most common theme in her novels is the complexity of human relationship. The theme, of course is as old as the novel itself. But Desai has given to it a special dimension of her own. She explores so minutely the depth of her characters and analyse thoroughly their motives that they were unimaginable among earlier Indo-Anglian novelists.

Emphasizing the importance of the relationship of man and woman, D.H. Lawrence points out: "The great relationship for humanity will always be the relation between man and woman. The relation between man and man, woman and woman, parent and child will always be subsidiary." The man-woman relationship becomes more important due to rapid industrialisation, growing awareness among women of their rights and individualities and westernisation of attitudes and lives of the people. So Desai focuses her keen foresight on husband wife relationship in almost all her novels. The problem of alienation, loneliness, isolation, withdrawal and lack of communication are interrelated and so they exist as a corollary of disruption of good human relationship.

Desai's novels are from instinct rather than by observation. She says that writing is "a matter of instinct, silence and waiting." She also admits that there are no clear-cut themes in her novels. She makes no bones, about the selection of her themes when she says: "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 foot prints on the sand.

The themes of her novels are mostly related to women. She seems to be well acquainted with the inner life of the women of upper-middle class and educated sensitive women. These women react very strongly and sensitively to the forces of our tradition bound male-dominated society. They may have limited experience because of their lack of exposure to the external world but their insight and intuition are very powerful. They are very sensitive in this insensitive world. As Indian society does not allow them much freedom, they are in search of their identity and want to enjoy privacy and individuality. Whenever their feelings are hurt, they feel extremely dissatisfied and alienated. It is true that industrialisation, scientific advancements, poverty, and religions, political and marital problems influenced Desai's mind.

It is not only for the subject matter and characterization, but also the use of narrative technique, symbols, images and the disturbed time-scheme that Anita Desai deserves to be called a psychological novelist. In each one of her novels she tried to tackle the central aesthetic problem of a modern writer - the problem of rendering "complete human personality ... in an age of lost values, lost men, and lost gods." The twentieth century has been rightly called 'The Age of Alienation'. The modern man is doomed to suffer from the corrosive impact of alienation which manifests itself variously in the form of generation gap, the credibility gap, the compartmentalisation of life, the stunning of personal development and the conscious absence of sense of meaninglessness of life. Edmund Fuller suggests, "in our age, man suffers not only from war, persecution, famine and ruin, but from inner problem.... a conviction of isolation randomness (and) meaninglessness in his ways of existence." Man in modern times
suffers from an acute sense of rootlessness, which may manifest itself as alienating from oneself, from one’s fellowmen and from nature; the awareness that life runs out of one’s sand like sand.\(^3\) The hiatus between the individual’s aspirations and the harsh reality he achieves, leaves the injuries inflicted and scars left on his psyche and makes him realise only of his helplessness. Angst ridden and utterly hopeless, he finds life ‘infinitely vast’ without any proper ‘linkage’ to hold it together from falling apart. Painfully aware of his precarious position, man experiences today severe limitations arising out of randomness and alienation.

The aim of this study is to examine the theme of alienation in the novels of Anita Desai. The scope of this work is strictly limited to her first ten published novels and each novel is taken as a chapter. The work of Desai is studied from a number of points of view. So far the theme of alienation in her novels is not delved in depth and detail even though many critics, have made occasional observations. There are a few critical essays on this issue as presented in a particular novel. Therefore it is felt that a systematic examination of Desai’s portrayal of the theme of alienation will be of great help to the present study and appreciation of her art. Her chief concern with regard to the theme of alienation in her novels is mainly the continuing problem of man-woman relationship in the contemporary tradition-bound Indian society, ‘the enduring human condition’. This theme has been dealt with in terms of husband-wife, parent-children, brother-sister and individual-society relations. Among these the husband-wife relationship figures most prominently but it is seldom harmonious and satisfying. Her fictional world according to Madhusudan Prasad is "full of imperfection and unfulfillment, bankering and helplessness, agony and anger, struggle and surrender"\(^3\).
She mainly explores the emotional world of women. All her female protagonists have a heightened physical and emotional sensitivity whereas their male partners tend to be comparatively stolid, practical, and matter of fact persons, hardly able to share or even appreciate the world of their wives. This temperamentally incompatibility, naturally leads to alienation. In all her novels Desai has ably dealt upon such existential themes as alienation and maladjustments. Her treatment of basic human condition remains same despite day-to-day changes. Her world is sharply characterised by alienation. Prof. S.P. Swain keenly observes that "Alienation in her novels is represented in the form of tension-the tension between the poetry of life and prose of form, between self and society. It is socio-psychic in nature. Repressive tolerance on the part of the alienated self in her novels leads to self-abnegation or self-immolation." Her characters feel intensely lonely. Probably because of this loneliness and emotional insecurity they tend to be oversensitive to violence and death. Alienation acquires a broad significance and range of meaning in her novels.

The term "alienation" is an ambiguous one. It often expresses various shades of meaning. It means loss of self", "loss of beliefs", loss of values", anxiety states", "apathy", "atomisation", "despair", "depersonalization", "isolation", "pessimism", "ruthlessness", "social disorganisation", "loneliness", etc. According to Oxford English Dictionary alienation means, "the action of estranging or state of estrangement in feeling or affection".

According to Nettler, "alienation is a... psychological state of an individual and... alienated is the person who has been estranged from, made unfriendly towards his society and culture it carries". For Sartre, "alienation is the individual's experience of
himself as an object which is not disparity to be overcome, but a fact to be acknowledged. To Sidney Finkelstein, alienation is a "psychological phenomenon, an internal conflict, a hostility felt towards something seemingly outside oneself which is linked with oneself, a barrier erected which is actually no defence but an impoverishment of oneself." To Schacht it "is a condition which occurs when a certain change in a person's self-conception takes place. It is neither something one does nor the intended result of a deliberate action." Erich Fromm in his popular book *Sane Society* defines alienation as "A mode of experience in which the person experiences himself as an alien. He has become estranged from himself. He does not experience himself as the centre of his world, as the creator of his own acts... The alienated person is out of touch with himself as he is out of reach with any person. He, like others, is experienced as things are experienced, with sense and with common sense, but at the same time without being related to oneself and the world outside productivity." 

In the personality of modern man a void continuously covers his mind, life and consciousness. He becomes a stranger to his daily routine. He is forced to separate himself from his companions and self and to become a stranger. The growth of the personality of man and the factors responsible for alienation are subject to the influence of social conditions in human existence. Alienation in sociological reference is man's detachment from any social or cultural side of his society. When old social norms are not changed man becomes alienated from those old values. This type of detachment can be called man's alienation from code of conduct of society. As he detaches himself from social norms, he tries to attach himself to popular culture which makes him free himself from all the bonds of human relationship.
The pervasive sense of alienation has corroded human life from various quarters. The modern man has shrunk in spirit, languishing in confusion, frustration, disintegration, disillusionment and alienation. The words 'separation', 'isolation', 'loneliness', 'dissatisfaction', 'interpersonal relations', (estrangement), 'insanity', 'schizophrenia' etc. are all manifestations of alienation. The word 'alienation' has been interpreted in different ways by different thinkers (writers). Generally for the psychologist self-alienation or psychological alienation is the most important and basic, for a social critic social, or political or work alienation, for the philosopher world alienation and for a theologian alienation from God is basic one. A study of the types would enrich the study expressly.

Self-Alienation

According to Victor George "Self-alienation means a lack of sense of an inner-core which integrates and gives personal meaning to the many-traits, emotions and acts identified with oneself. It includes self-estrangement, detachment from one's emotions, desires and acts". The blame for self-alienation falls sometimes on an unhappy childhood, more often on the human condition and most often on the society. Alienation by and from society frequently leads to alienation from self. Self-alienation often manifests itself in fragmentation of the self. It is the result of religious alienation, of alienation from God. Alienation from the self is nothing but the loss of identity. Total self-alienation may also be another expression of insanity. It arises in the absence of self-awareness. It decays man's general liveliness.
Social-Alienation

The meaning of social alienation in social reference, according to Rajiv Sharma, is, "the decay of creative meaningful relations between man and man and it is the separation of man living in the society and from the culture of his society, its principles and values". Some sociologists think that the reason for social alienation is feelings of dissatisfaction in the social relations. It is almost total and pervades the relationship of man in the society. It is human alienation. Millions of people in the world suffer from social-alienation. They have expressed alienation by their 'indifference or hostility, towards most of their fellow-men or towards society's organisation, workings and goals.

Psychological Alienation

As Frank Johnson says, "psychological alienation is close to the state of self-alienation. This refers to the awareness of separation from one's own inner reality". A purely psychological account of alienation implies that its only cause lies in individual life and personal pathology. It depicts salient and specific aspects of behaviour. Schizoid personality may have an exaggerated 'shyness', 'autistic thinking', 'heightened self-concern', 'emotional withdrawal' and other symptoms related to psychological estrangement. When a man does not feel the sense of self-awareness he can not realise his personality. In this situation a man becomes psychologically alienated. At the same time he loses the power of feeling.

World-Alienation

Man is stranger in the universe. Plato's teaching that man's soul no longer dwells in the realm of pure essences shows another instance of world alienation. Whenever an
individual feels how small and powerless he is in the world, how insensitive nature is to man's fate there is world alienation. Whenever somebody recognises or feels that truth is unattainable to the human-mind, there is world alienation. Ignace says "Since society is an important part of the world at least for the individual, social alienation may lead to world alienation and inversely world alienation may bring about social alienation"45.

Alienation from God

According to Plotinus human beings as individual souls originate from the one supersensible soul, God. In this way, people are alienated from Him and continue to live in this state of alienation. The story of Adam and Eve could be viewed as the story of alienation from God through conscience, and reason from home or nature in work and in marriage. Tillich says that alienation from God is the alienation from 'self'. It is clear that where there is existence there is alienation.

Alienation is one of the greatest problems confronting the modern man today. It is a curse for modernisation. It is excess in our age. The modern man is doomed to suffer the corrosive impact of alienation. It manifests itself variously in the form of generation gap, the credibility loss. It has developed as a deplorable bye-product of modern western culture. It is very rampant especially in America although it is a global phenomenon. It has become the very essence of their culture. The prevailing images of their culture are the images of 'disintegration, decay and despair'36. Their highest art involves the fragmentation and distortion of traditional realities. Their 'best drama depicts suffering, misunderstanding and breakdown'. Their 'worthiest novels are
narratives of loneliness, searching and fulfilment. Even their best music is ‘dissonant, discordant and inhuman’. Their ‘culture seems obsessed with breakdown, splintering, disintegration and destruction. The roots of alienation in America lie in a new-kind of society and in such a society alienation characteristically takes the new form of "rebellion without cause, of rejection without a programme, of refusal without a vision."37

Literature and Writers

Growing number of writers describe man in various ways as ‘alienated’. The theme of alienation of modern man runs through the literature and drama of two continents. The theme has manifested itself in literature since antiquity. Yet"...it has been said that alienation is a modern concept and therefore could not have been used by writers... of the distant past."38 The American literature of the preceding years was" a literature of alienation."39 It produced many alienated heroes. Ignace stated that "almost the totality of modern literature is engulfed by alienation."51 Alienation has been the dominant theme of prophetic creativity in the last hundred years. It is clearly expressed in the writings of James Joyce, Eliot, Huxley, Sartre, Camus, Kafka, O’Neill, Tennesse Williams, Dostoevsky etc.

The theme of alienation has also been dealt with by American novelists like Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melvelle, Hemingway, William Faulkner and Saul Bellow to name only a few. Among the Indian-English novelists the theme is touched upon by Mulk Raj Anand and Kamala Markandeya and is extensively dealt with by Arun Joshi
and Anita Desai. Desai has given a new direction to Indian - English literature by taking up hitherto unexplored areas of woman's mental landscape. Her fictional characters in their various struggles, unusual facts, dreams, fantasies and disappointments seek to represent our times. She portrays the silence, solitude and dark world of her women. The themes of her novels are mostly related to women. They react very strongly and sensitively to the forces of our male dominated society. She is deeply concerned with the depths of the inner-self and psyche of her characters. She focuses on women's responses to the predicaments. Her characters feel alienated in one way or other. She has clearly depicted the causes and consequences of alienation. Emotional reality and alienation surpass each other and they reveal the causes and consequences of morbidity and loneliness. Most of her protagonists are alienated from families, from parents, from society, from their own selves and from the world because they are not average people but individuals "made to stand against the general current... who fight that current and struggle against it."  

Desai has presented the dilemma of modern man very effectively in all her novels. As Kohli believes "no other writer is so much concerned with the life of the young women and men in Indian cities as Anita Desai is."  

Alienation acquires a broad significance and range of meaning in her novels. The psychic tension in her protagonists stems out of their desire to overcome their anxiety. They feel terribly insecure, apprehensive and rejected. The phenomenon of psychic disturbance works at deep level in them. Almost all of them experience ungratifying interaction with their parents and find their environment injurious. It shatters their faith in life as also the goodness of the
world. In her work most human relations are seen to suffer from acute breakdown of communication. Incommunicability is expressed with great anguish by the women-protagonists. They find an abysmal barrier between themselves and the world. They are unable to relate to the space around them.

Desai has tried to portray the tragedy of human souls trapped in adverse circumstances of life. They feel themselves to be closed, sequestered and alienated beings in a cage. They conceive themselves condemned prisoners living in isolated death cells. They are restless to the extent of being irrational and mad. They are chronically sessed and abnormally anxious to come out of the confines of cruel, lifeless, deadly prison bars. They are in search of freedom, solitude and individual perfection. They are trying to discover a different world. To be sure, many of Desai’s characters are “the prototypical literary figures representing an alienated self in search of freedom. They are the rebel ‘the exile and the vagabond’. They sometimes... seek their liberation through violence and revolutionary activities, and sometimes through withdrawal and sometimes through... wanderings.”

Focus is turned to Desai’s vision of ever changing society, the individuality of her protagonists, the attitude of the people in the present society, the problems and predicaments of her characters, the causes for their alienation which highlight their weakness and strength, their virtues and their ability to rise up to the heroic heights or to tragic failures. Her novels depict the workings of unseen forces on the human mind and psyche. A close reading of her fiction reveals that she portrays with amazing accuracy the inward odyssey and psychic upheavals of hyper-sensitive people, struggling
to survive in difficult human situations. All her main characters are exceptional beings. They are victims of alienation, anguish, anxiety and terrible self-consciousness. They can’t accept life as it comes to them. As a result they suffer from terrible inner conflicts. But ultimately a majority of them come to a compromise with life. Anyhow her concern with the psychic lives of her characters endows her work with universality.

Moreover in Desai’s work, human relations are seen to suffer. Interpersonal relations are weak in her novels. She gives a clear picture about the plights and problems of alienated individuals caught in the crisis of a changing society. The existential problem of alienated self finally emerges to be the central theme of her novels.
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