CHAPTER - VII

CONCLUSION
The published works of Anita Desai show evidence of departure from current modes of fictional writing in India and of an earnest effort to break new grounds. Desai's forte of psychological delienation of characters has earned her a place which very few Indian writer have. She has also been recognised in the *Dictionary of Indian Women Today.*

There is no doubt that Desai may one day achieve an amplified pattern of significant exploration of consciousness comparable to Virginia Woolf at her best. Desai, like Virginia Woolf reveals the twentieth century "preoccupation with flux and the shifting centers of personal identity, and hence has tried to emphasize a personal, subjective sense of reality." With this record to her credit, Desai has made a rich contribution to the contemporary English fiction writing in general and Indo-Anglican fiction in particular.

Desai's novels consist of many themes which are mainly alienation, maladjustments in man-woman relationship and place of women in homes and in society. Desai's concern as a writer is also with the individual, the solitary being and his problems. She believes that all human relationships are inadequate and basically everyone is

1 In Ajeeet Cour (ed.), *Dictionary of Indian Women Today*, India International Publications, Delhi, 1976.
solitary and the loneliness of her characters is the result of this inadequacy of human relationships.

A common theme of Desai's novels is the unhappiness, misunderstanding and complexities of married life and the loneliness rising out of all these. Love and marriage constitute the main element of Indo-Anglican fiction, but the chife motive of Indo-Anglican fiction is not so much crossed love as the misery of married life. Desai's novels are not so much about love as they are about adjustments that married couples are compelled to make. As 'strange' and 'eccentric' characters are of Desai's interest, none of her protagonists have a normal family history. They are mostly victims of broken homes and uncaring parents. Maya and Sita are motherless and brought up in unusual circumstances by their fathers which makes them introvert and withdrawn. Monisha, Raka and Bim's parents never had harmonious relationship which resulted in the introvert personalities of their daughters.

Broken homes, cold, uncaring and indifferent parents are responsible for socially maladjusted and lonely children. Rejection also plays a significant role in the unusually high level of alienation reported by persons whose parents are indifferent and uncaring. Maya, Sita, Bim and Raka, are totally unsocial and feel suffocated in the presence of other people. Turmoil and frustration also increases their sense of loneliness which makes them unfit in society.
Writing in an essay entitled "The Indian Writer's Problems", Anita Desai remarks: "I know the creative act is a secret one. To make it public, to scrutinize it in the cold light of reasons, is to commit an act of violence, possibly murder." 3 She further says elsewhere:

Writing is to me a process of discovering the truth—the truth that is nine-tenths of the iceberg that lies submerged beneath the one-tenth visible portion we call reality. Writing is my way of plunging to the depths and exploring the underlying truth. All my writing is an effort to discover, to underline and convey the true significance of things. 4

Desai constantly works the exploration of the reaction caused by the social and enviormental situations. The reactions of her female characters are different from the behaviours bound by social environment and religious, moral and cultural values.

Writing for Anit Desai is thus a process of discovering the truth, but truth does not mean the superficial truth for her because she is not interested in the external reality. It exists for her in the dreams and wills of characters she creates. Her characters do not have outlined personalities. The situations they are in, create the action and continuity in the novels. Anita Desai possesses one of the healthiest and psychologically most balanced minds in the realm of Indian-English fiction. The

sanity of her tastes and attitudes, is exemplary and worth emulating by other writers. She has the sharpness of vision in an extraordinary degree. She cuts things clean and enters into the inside of things with perfect ease. The ratiocinative powers of her intellect are as keen as any philosopher's. She seems to possess to a high degree the intuitive power of seeing into the nature of things. Thus she is, to use Iris Murdoch's label for novelists like Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Conrad and Proust, "a novelist proper" who is "a describer rather than an explainer". Anita Desai herself declares: "My novels are no reflection of Indian society, politics or character. They are a part of my private effort to seize upon the raw material of life—its shapelessness [and] its meaninglessness." It is for the quality of her novels that Anita Desai has received many awards and honours including the Padmashree. She has also been short-listed for some foreign awards and enjoys a good reputation as an excellent novelist, in and outside India.

Anita Desai creates her characters 'with dreams and wills' who in turn continue to grow with the story and action of the novels. They come alive as they find situations where choices are involved despite the meaninglessness and shapelessness of the human condition. Desai's main characters are mostly oversensitive women who are unable to wrestle with reality. Seema Jena observes that most of these novels portray female protagonists who are not average, but have retreated, or have been driven

5 Ibid., p.348.
into some extremity of despair and so have turned against or are made to stand against the general current. Anita Desai has herself acknowledged that she is interested in characters who are strong individuals but weak persons, and not in those who concede but those who do not, in spite of the price that goes with saying "No". In an address in Delhi, speaking about her fictional characters, she said: "There are those who can handle situations and those who cannot. And my stories are generally about those who cannot. They find themselves trapped in situations over which they have no control."

One of the significant aspects of Anita Desai's fictional art is her language. Her prose style is marked by elasticity, dynamism and profundity. At times it is emotive, at others realistic and matter of fact and objective. But mostly it is subjective, utilising empathy, personification and humanising. When Fire on the Mountain (1977) was awarded the Sahitya Akadami Award for 1978, it brought great recognition to Anita Desai and placed her at the level of R.K. Narayana, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and Bhabani Bhattacharya. But some critics feel that "She stands apart from them, in certain aspects, ranks, decidedly much higher than them, as she, unlike all of them, sets herself to expatiate upon the existentialist problems and predicaments confronting middle class people,

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7 The Times of India (Delhi) Dated 18.6.1992.
particularly women." 8 Desai's forte of psychological delineation of characters has earned her great fame. M.K. Naik for example, predicts that one day we may achieve an amplified pattern of significant exploration of female consciousness comparable to Virginia Woolf at her best. 9 The question that needs to be considered in detail is why Desai has not made sufficient use of depth psychology. 10 It has also been pointed out that in her novels there is "excessive celebration on the author's part" and that adequate scope has not been provided for "the movements in the consciousness in the characters". 11 Some critics have gone to the extent of saying that they would "totally disregard all that she [Desai] has said about her own work in various interviews..." 12 The same critic has considered her major novels and shown his dissatisfaction for her depiction of characters. Talking about Maya, he says: "Maya is presented as being father obsessed, she is full of self-pity but surprisingly she is insensitive to the suffering of others. She is sensuous but self-centered, imaginative but superstitious. She has also what may be considered an immature love for melodrama." In Anita Desai's novels there is not a single instance of reasonably happy home or conjugal peace. Monisha's parents eke out an existence in an inferno of mutual distrust and contempt. Aunt Leila and her daughter have a very unpleasant experience of marriage. Jit's wife abandons him, Dharma's wife shuts herself up in a living tomb and Monisha commits suicide by pouring kerosene over herself and burning

herself to death. He concludes:

In The Clear Light of Day, the children have a distasteful memory of their clubgoing, cardplaying and children - neglecting parents. In Fire on the Mountain, the matrimonial discord of Raka's parents is hinted at, in the final kaleidoscopic review of her past, Nanda Kaul reveals to us the content of the delusions that she has harboured all this while. In In custody, Nur's wives are portrayed as lewd, deceitful and cantankerous creatures. Deven's wife is needlessly suspicious of her husband. On the whole, therefore, women in the novels of Anita Desai seem to be neurotic, unhappy, isolated and alienated creatures. There are no instances of normal (let alone ideal) mothers, wives, sisters or daughters.

On may ask: But why is this so? Are Anita Desai's perceptions unrepresentative and false? Or could it be that the sweeping gale of women's emancipation has overreached itself and has begun to tell upon the psyche of some of those it was supposed to have liberated? However, Anita Desai's capability of probing deep into the psyche of her female characters is proved beyond any pale of doubt by her in-depth analysis of Maya's masochism, Monisha's neurosis, Sita's regression and retreat, and abnormal behaviour, Nanda's love for isolation and so on. The novelist has very ably revealed the plights of Indian women and their psychological problems. Her experiments with non-traditional materials and techniques give her a distinct position among Indian-English novelists. She has been able to give a befitting expression to feminine sensibility and problems and plights of sentient young Indian women in her novels.
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