CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Literature should deal with most enduring matters, less temporary and less temporal than politics. (Desai, "Replies to the Questionnaire" 2)

Literature evolves from human existence that consists of innumerable aspects. Presenting complex and multiple problems of existence a writer communicates many insights into life. A perusal of the novels of Anita Desai shows that she has written about unique aspects and enduring problems of human existence that constantly keep disturbing the readers. Unlike most other Indian English novelists Desai tries to explore the inner reality of her characters. The purpose of her writing is to reveal, to quote her own words, not only "the one-tenth visible section of the iceberg that one sees above the surface of the ocean" but also "the remaining nine-tenths of it that lie below the surface"(Desai, "Replies to the Questionnaire" 1). Investing her novels with the qualities of truth, originality and craftsmanship, she convincingly portrays not only the inner but also the outer realities of human existence.

Specifically choosing the form of novel and realizing the power of novels written by great writers she is convinced that a novel can communicate "the truth far more vividly, forcefully
and memorably than any number of factually correct documents, exhaustively detailed histories or excellently documented biographies" (Desai, "Replies to the Questionnaire" 2). What Desai says about the effectiveness of a great novel recalls to mind Boulton's observation on the same point:

A good novel is true in the sense that it gives a sincere, well observed, enlightening picture of a portion of human life. George Eliot's Middlemarch, Jane Austen's Mansfield Park, Henry Fielding's Tom Jones, Henry James's Portrait of a Lady, Joseph Conrad's Lord Jim, William Golding's Lord of the Flies, Graham Green's The Heart of the Matter, tell us far more about realities of human experience than would seven evenings of 'truthful' but superficial chatter. Good fictional pictures of life widen our sympathies, help our sense of proportion, educate our moral judgement; they make human goodness, frailty, sufferings, needs, relationships far more real than abstract definitions or vague exhortations can. (5)

It is common knowledge that Desai is one of the greatest Indian novelists of the post-Independence era. Most of her novels are great novels. When Boulton writes about the
... the greatest verisimilitudes of the greatest novels are their insights into the human heart.... deeper and stranger mysteries of self-discovery, reconciliation or redemption, the nature of freedom, the learning of humility and compassion, the unlearning of self-hatred, the finding of purposes, the generosities and healing sacraments of love, the recognition of our real aloneness. (24-25)

Viewed in the light of the verisimilitudes of great novels mentioned by Boulton, Desai's novels such as Cry, the Peacock, Voices in the City, Where Shall We Go This Summer? Fire on the Mountain, Clear Light of Day, In Custody, The Village by the Sea and Baumgartner's Bombay are obviously great novels. Deftly exploring the complexities of human existence and sufficiently providing a sense of discrimination, these novels endow the readers with a new perspective with which to scan life carefully. Examining the feelings and passions of men and women, some of them highlight the significance of love, compromise and reconciliation.

A close study of the novels of Desai reveals that they have the following themes: human relationships, lack of communication, marital disharmony, emotional incompatibility, man-woman rivalry, human predicaments, the quest for meaning,
boredom, guilt, alienation, despair, identity crisis, violence, agony, anguish, loneliness, belonging, emptiness, dilemma, the absurdity and futility of human existence, death, East-West encounter, withdrawal, decay, degeneration, disintegration, maladjustment, escapism, superstition, poverty, attachment, detachment, sacrifice, resolution, adjustment, accommodation, love, forgiveness, compromise, optimism, reconciliation, affirmation and regeneration. These themes of her novels perfectly distinguish Desai from other Indian English novelists, who are mainly concerned with social and political themes. A brief analysis of the works of major Indian English novelists from a thematic perspective will not be out of place here.

The new vistas that English education opened to the Indians, the literature of the west and the Indian socio-political conditions were conducive to the rise of the Indian English novel in the nineteenth century. Highlighting the multi-dimensional features of the Indian English fiction, Ramamurti points out:

The rise of the novel in India was not purely a literary phenomenon. It was a social phenomenon as much, rather the fulfilment of a social need. It was associated with social, political and economic conditions which were comparable to those which favoured its rise in England. The appearance of the
novel as a literary form in nineteenth century India as it did in eighteenth century England synchronized with the rise of individualism and with the consequent political and social reorientations which followed. (24)

The political and social situations in India in the early years of this century offered new themes to the Indian-English novelists. Writing about the most predominant themes of the Indian English novelists Radhakrishnan observes: "Among the many thematic concerns of the Indo-Anglican novelists of this century, the major ones have been (a) The Nationalist Movement (b) The Partition of the country and its aftermath (c) Gandhian Image and Influence and (d) Protest against social injustices" (10-11). The important novels that project the theme of nationalism are R.K. Narayans Waiting for the Mahatma, Nagarajan's Chronicles of Kedaram, Raja Rao's Kanthapura, Mulk Raj Anand's The Private Life of an Indian Prince, Manohar Malgonkar's The Princes and Khushwant Singh's I Shall not Hear the Nightingale.

Many novelists have exploited the image of Gandhi in their novels: Venkataraman's Kandan, the Patriot, Mulk Raj Anand's Untouchable and Sword and Sickle, R.K. Narayan's Vendor of Sweets, Mrs. Saghal's A Time to be Happy and Bhabani Bhattacharya's Shadow from Ladakh. The riots and other ghastly
incidents which occurred during the period of partition are graphically portrayed in some novels: Gill's The Rape, Malgonkar's A Bend in the Ganges, Padmini Sengupta's Red Hibiscus, Nahal's Azadi and Khushwant Singh's A Train to Pakistan. The notable novelists who have used the novel as an effective instrument of social change are Mulk Raj Anand, Abbas and Bhabani Bhattacharya. The themes introduced by these writers are "political dependence, class exploitation, caste distinctions, capitalistic injustice, superstition, economic inequality and the growing disillusionment of the people" (Radhakrishnan 92).

Ascetics have played an important role in the social and religious life of Indians. Many novelists have depicted various types of ascetics in their novels. The remarkable novels that have attached great importance to these characters are: R.K. Narayan's The Guide and A Tiger for Malgudi, Nargis Dala's The Inner Door, Bhattacharya's He Who Rides a Tiger, Sudhin Ghose's The Flame of the Forest and Desani's All About H Hatterr. One of the recurrent themes one finds in the modern novel is that of alienation. Some of the Indian English novelists have introduced this theme in their novels: Dilip Hiro's A Triangular View, The Immigrants by Reginald Massey and Jamila Massey, Murari's Marriage, Balachandra Rajan's Too Long in the West and Dark Dancer, Arun Joshi's The Foreigner, The Strange Case of Billy Biswas and The Apprentice, Saros
Cowasjee's Good-Bye to Elsa and Trishanku's Onion Peel.

Though a number of Indian women novelists have written novels in English "it is ... only after the second world war that women novelists of quality have begun enriching Indian fiction in English"(Iyengar 438). The prominent women novelists are Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawar Jhabwala, Nayantara Sehgal and Anita Desai. The novels of Markandaya depict various aspects of Indian society. As Jena rightly points out:

Her novels explore the social change in India in all its complex manifestations. She seeks to examine the transition from a traditional society to an urban industrial metropolitan society in all its comprehensiveness. She aims to project the Indian life in the villages portraying the change in their lives as a token of the profound change taking place in the entire nation.(6)

While Nayantara Sehgal's novels mainly deal with politics, Ruth Prawar Jhabwala avoids political matters. Focussing her attention on Indian middle-classes, Jhabwala explores and depicts family life and social problems with a rare critical acumen.

Avoiding political themes Anita Desai concentrates on the idiosyncrasies of the inner psyche of her characters with a
sympathetic tolerance, though this does not mean that she is unaware of the other dimensions. For the first time psychology has been exploited successfully. That she is unique among the Indian English novelists is forcefully underlined by Srivastava:

The thought of bringing the unexplored recesses of a man's heart, to dig into his inner psyche, to go beyond the skin and the flesh was foreign to them, till Anita Desai came on the scene, added some sophisticated items, withdrew others, and paraded them in equally sophisticated cartons. It goes to her credit that by shifting the domain of her fiction from outer to inner reality and by carrying the flow of the mental experience of its characters, she has brought it in the main stream of European and American fiction. (Introduction xxiii)

A few critics, who have studied the early novels of Desai are of the opinion that she has entirely ignored outer reality. As Ramachandra Rao, who has analysed the first four novels of Desai, points out:

Her characters are from the well-to-do sections of Indian society. Their problems are psychological or spiritual, not social, or economic. They passionately discuss issues like conformity and rebellion, attachment and detachment. But the
ordinary problems of everyday life are never really touched upon. Since Desai's characters belong to the affluent sections of Indian society they never really have to face the problem of the struggle for existence. Hunger, starvation, poverty, the mute misery of the millions of Indians are never touched upon by Mrs. Desai. (63)

But in her later novels such as The Village by the Sea, In Custody and Baumgartner's Bombay Desai reveals greater awareness of outward reality and largely deals with social, racial and economic aspects of human existence. In The Village by the Sea she poignantly presents the pathetic plight of a very poor family. As Solanki rightly points out:

In her latest novels, one finds a marked change of technique. Her portrayal of the individual's response to the external world becomes more realistic. The world is seen from the outside not from the inside, or through the mind of the character as it was seen in Cry, the Peacock, Voices in the City and Where Shall We Go This Summer?. (179)

Regarding Desai's life, only a scanty biographical information is available. She was born of a Bengali father and a German mother on June 24, 1937 in Mussoorie. When she was
seven years old, she began to write small stories and they were published in children's magazines. She had her school education at Queen Mary's School and studied B.A. English Literature. Married to Ashvin Desai she has four children.

Though she chooses to be secretive about her personal life, she does not hesitate to answer queries regarding her creative process. When Desai was asked by Atma Ram to tell about any episode that has had great impact on her sensibility, she said:

Those long summer days of the north, I think. The oppression, the devastation of that incredible heat that kept one almost immobile through the day, lying flat under a hypnotically ticking fan with a book, speechless and almost lifeless with heat. Then the poetic balm of the evening bringing with its darkness, cool stars, and those poetic, inspiring nights when one slept out in the open, under the stars. I really think those summers of the north make me whatever I am. ("Interview with Anita Desai" 23)

Desai's originality and uniqueness that are strikingly found in her novels are to a great extent due to the strong influences of Nature and great writers on her thinking and writing. The notable writers whose valuable works have had a
telling impact on her are Emily Bronte, George Eliot, Virginia Woolf, E.M. Forster, D.H. Lawrence, Henry James, Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Kawabate Rimbaud and Hopkins. When Desai was nine years old she read the great novel *Wuthering Heights* and this novel has had a significant effect on her. Commenting on the crucial factors that have immensely contributed to the enrichment of the creative capacity of Desai, Jena succinctly observes:

With her early childhood nurtured in a Brontean world she has imbibed the 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 welcomed was deeply and successfully entrenched within to enrich her creative perspective. (11-12)

Having seriously begun to write novels in her twenties, Desai has so far written nine novels and a collection of short stories. Her first novel *Cry, the Peacock* (1963) deals with the psychological dimensions of its characters. This poetic novel explores the inner realities of hypersensitive Maya, who indescribably suffers from neurotic fears. Neglected by Gautama, Maya becomes miserable and her misery gradually leads to the disintegration of her personality and her disintegration
paves the way for her tragedy.

Voices in the City (1965) presents the pathetic predicament of Nirode, Monisha and Amla in the city of Calcutta. It analyses the dim domains of the psyche of these characters who are constantly haunted by the city. Alienated from society and their mother, Nirode acutely realises the meaninglessness and emptiness of existence and Monisha meets the fate of Maya in Cry, the Peacock. The novel depicts the degeneration of Nirode and the distintegration of Monisha.

(Bye-Bye, Blackbird (1971) is concerned with the sad plight of Indian immigrants in London. Exposing the psychological problems of Dev, Adit and Sarah, the novel brings out the loneliness and emptiness of these characters. Where Shall We Go This Summer? (1975) is about the incompatibility of temperaments between Sita and Raman, Sita's boredom, frustration and loneliness. Alienated from her husband and society, Sita resorts to the strategy of escape. Probing the inner emotional world of Sita, the novel effectively presents her utter confusion about life.

Fire on the Mountain (1977) penetrates into the consciousness of Nanda Kaul. Presenting her alienation and withdrawal from her family, the novel portrays her vacillation between detachment and attachment. It also presents the
traumatic experiences of Raka's childhood that cause her isolation. Depicting the tragic ends of Ila Das and Nanda Kaul the novel demonstrates the absurdity and futility of human existence.

Games at Twilight and Other Stories (1978), a collection of eleven short stories, presents a number of ordinary human situations. "Games at Twilight" shows the deep sense of defeat and disappointment in Rayi. "Private Tuition by Mr. Bose" brings out the difficult domestic existence of Mr. Bose and his wife. "Studies in the Park" is a study of the plight of Suno and his enlightenment. "Surface Textures" reveals the anxiety of Harish and his escape. "Sale" narrates the difficulties of an artist.

"Pineapple Cake" sarcastically portrays the behaviour of Victor's mother, Mrs. Fernandez. "The Accompanist" delineates a tampura player's love and adoration for his master Ustad Rahimkhan. "A Devoted Son" presents the diametrically opposed attitudes of Dr. Rakesh and his father towards the problems of human existence. "The Farewell Party" describes the artificial existence of the upperclass people. "Pigeons at Daybreak" is about the existence of Amul Basu and his wife Otima. "Scholar and Gypsy" presents the temperamental incompatibility between David and his wife, Pat.
Clear Light of Day (1980) vividly describes the entirely different attitudes of Bim and Tara to their memories of childhood. Portraying how the great aspirations of Bim are tragically thwarted by the unexpected changes in her family circumstances, the novel displays how the passage of time inexorably causes the disintegration of human relationships. Describing Bim's realization of the significance of love, human affections and forgiveness, the novel portrays the magnanimity and regeneration of Bim.

The Village by the Sea (1982) with the sub-title, An Indian Family Story narrates the heroic struggle of Hari for the survival of his very poor family. This novel is definitely different from other novels of Desai in the sense that it does not explore the psyche of any individual. Rendering the tragic predicament of alienated Hari, it shows the economic hardships of his family. Displaying Hari's sense of independence, responsibility, adjustment, courage, perseverance, hope and optimism, the novel impressively presents the successful story of Hari's economic independence.

In Custody (1984) renders a moving account of Deven's artistic aspiration, helplessness, disappointments, despair, disgust, inferiority complex, economic difficulties and the temperamental incompatibility between him and his wife, Sarla. Projecting how Deven sacrifices his time and money and faces
humiliation for achieving the status of a custodian of Nur's poetry, the novel highlights Deven's strong resolution to boldly face hard challenges of existence.

Baumgartner's Bombay (1988) focuses on racial discrimination and the alienation of Hugo and Lotte, the two Germans, the hapless victims of racial, social, economic and psychological forces. Portraying Hugo's agonies, frustrations, helplessness and loss of identity, it narrates his heart-rending struggle for survival. Depicting the cruel murder of Hugo, the novel silently shows the meaninglessness and purposelessness of human existence.

All the novels of Desai have received great critical acclaim and her novels have so far elicited ten full-length critical studies. Meena Belliappa in her perceptive critical work Anita Desai: A Study of Her Fiction (1971) stresses that Desai's novels focus on the inner world of her characters and that the novelist's effort is an attempt to break new grounds. The Novels of Mrs. Anita Desai: A Study (1977), a penetrative study of Ramachandra Rao, examines the sensitivity of the characters of Desai. Declaring Desai as a true artist, Ramachandra Rao points out: "Mrs. Desai presents each individual as an unsolved mystery" (64).
In his comprehensive critical work *Anita Desai: The Novelist* (1981) Madhusudan Prasad claims that Desai has given to Indian English fiction an existentialist dimension. Highlighting the existentialist themes in Desai's novels, he explores imagery, symbolism and other narrative techniques elaborately employed by Desai. R.S. Sharma's insightful study *Anita Desai* (1981) evaluates the varied nature of her novels and short stories. He considers Desai "primarily a novelist of moods, of persistent states of mind or psyche" (166). Dispassionately examining her novels, he is of the view that her novels make the readers aware of the realities of human existence.

Tripathi's study *The Mind and Art of Anita Desai* (1986) traces the development of the mind and art of Desai. While praising the plots, characters and stylistic devices and modes that Desai has introduced in her novels, he also points out the limitations of her works. *(Stairs to the Attic: The Novels of Anita Desai* (1987), an unbiased critical study by Jasbir Jain, analyses the novelist's narrative process and delineates the psychological attitudes of her characters.)*

Usha Bande's perceptive study *The Novels of Anita Desai: A Study in Character and Conflict* (1988) remarkably focusses on the inner world of her characters. Analysing her novels it probes the alienation and real nature of Desai's characters. In

Kajali Sharma in his insightful work Symbolism in Anita Desai’s Novels (1991) analyses almost all the symbols employed in the novels of Desai and brings out various symbolic meanings and their functional dimensions. In his elucidative work Anita Desai’s Fiction: Patterns of Survival Strategies (1992) Mrinalini Solanki probes the survival strategies adopted by Desai’s characters and portrays the psychological and other aspects of these characters.

There are innumerable articles on specific novels and particular aspects of the novels of Desai. Only the important articles are briefly discussed here. In his article "The Alienated Self in the Novels of Anita Desai" R.S.Pathak points out that the characters of Desai unavoidably face a number of crises that are tormenting them, that Desai is primarily concerned with human problems and that her novels deal with inner realities and psychic reverberations of her characters. "The Fiction of Anita Desai" is a good study by R.K.Dhawan. Contrasting the novels of Desai with those of Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawar Jhabwala and Nayantara Sehgal, the author says that in the novels of Desai, her main concern is with the exploration of the mystery of the inner life of her characters.
In their remarkable article "From Alienation of Identification: A Study of Anita Desai's Novels" P.M.Nayak and S.P.Swain observe that the novels of Desai explore the passions and emotions of the individuals and that they reveal the subtleties of human relationships. V.V.N.Rajendra Prasad's article "Anita Desai and the wounded self" is thought provoking. In this study he tells that Desai's novels are modernist and that they present and explore the complex family problems of her characters.

Usha Bande's critical study "Childhood in Anita Desai's Novels: A Psychological Interpretation" is highly insightful. She examines the childhood of Desai characters. The study "The Theme of Marital Disharmony in the Novels of Anita Desai" by P.F.Patil is constructive. He explores the causes of marital discord in the characters of Desai and affirms that all the marriages in the novels of Desai are like business transactions. P.Bhatnagar's brilliant article "The Theme of Man-Woman Relationship in the Novels of Anita Desai" focusses on the problems of women in the male-dominated society.

The article "An Existential Approach to Maladjustment in Marital relations in Anita Desai's Novels" by Uma Banerjee is penetrative. In her study she observes that most of the novels of Desai deal with the same theme of the existential problem of alienation of women characters caused by marital maladjustment.
In his fine study "The Forgotten Men: A Study of Anita Desai's Male Characters" Kamal N.Awasthi points out that in the early novels of Desai male characters are insignificant but in the later novels Desai isolates the female characters.

"Cry, the Peacock: Unraveling the Psyche" by Bharati Ashok Parikh portrays the intense inner struggle of Maya. "Anita Desai's Cry, the Peacock: A vindication of the Feminine" is a deep study by P.Sharma and Kamal N.Awasthi. The study explores Maya's psychic problems and presents the masculine and feminine principles. In her perceptive article "The Illusions of Maya: Feminine Consciousness in Anita Desai's Cry, the Peacock" Ann Lowry Weir analyses the character of Maya both as a female character and as an Indian woman. "The Poly-timbred Voice: Women in Cry, the Peacock" by Prabhat Kumar Pandeya discusses not only the character of Maya but also the other women characters of the novel who represent different dimensions of women.

In his study "Voices of Artists in the City" Ramesh K.Srivastava probes the difficult predicament of various artists desperately searching for vision. In "Anita Desai's Voices in the City" Madhusudan Prasad says that this novel efficiently explores the inner landscape of the major characters -- Nirode, Monisha and Amla. Harveen Sachdeva Mann in his dispassionate critical study "Going in the Opposite
Direction: Feminine Recusancy in Anita Desai's *Voices in the City* affirms that the novel can be considered a remarkable study on modern Indian feminism. Indira Bhatt in her notable article "Voices in the City: Loneliness and Despair" examines the impact of the oppressive environment on Nirode and Monisha.

Jasbir Jain in her article "Strangers in Enemy Territory: Expatriates and Exiles" stresses that the main cause of the alienation of the Indians living in England primarily stems from the fact that the white people have once ruled the black Indians. "Sound or Sense -- A Study of Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye Blackbird*" by Hari Mohan Prasad is a significant contribution. In this study he examines the real nature of Dev, Adit and Sarah and charges that Desai fails to make use of the potentialities in the character of Sarah.

"The Visitor and the Exile: A Study in Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye, Blackbird*", a study by Chakradhar Prasad Singh, praises the poetic beauty of the novel and compares it with those of Henry James, Joseph Conrad, D.H.Lawrence, Melville and Faulkner. "Interracial and Intercultural Relationships in Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye, Blackbird*," a constructive article by S.Krishnamoorthy Aithal and Rushmi Aithal, points out that the novel deals with several aspects of the theme of East-West encounter.
In his "Past and Present: A Journey to Confrontation" Charmazel Dudt says that in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Sita undertakes two journeys, one to escape from her family and society and the other to the future through her past. S.P. Swain and P.M. Nayak in their elucidatory study "*Where Shall We Go This Summer?: Sita's Incarcerated Self*" observe that the novel focuses on Sita's alienation and incommunication caused by social and familial circumstances. In his article "A view of *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*" Atma Ram explores Sita's boredom, loneliness and dilemma of existence. "*Where Shall We Go This Summer?: A Critical Study*", an article by N.R. Shastri, considers this novel as a culmination of Desai's fictional art.

"*Is Sita Mad?*, an insightful study by Usha Bande, brings out the cause of Sita's predicament and explores her personality from a different angle. "*Being and Becoming in Anita Desai's Where Shall We Go This Summer?*" is a perceptive critical study by K. Chellappan. The study reveals a new kind of pattern present in the novel.

In his discerning article "*Anita Desai's Fire on the Mountain: A Fictional Metaphor of Existentialist Philosophy*" G.S. Balarama Gupta observes that the novel is a lyrical presentation of the essence of existentialism and that it expresses the basic truths of human existence. "*Movement and Stillness in Anita Desai's Fire on the Mountain,*" a thought-
provoking article by Radhe Shyam Sharma, brings out several patterns of movement and stillness in the novel. In "Sexual Violence and Death in Anita Desai's Fire on the Mountain" Ujwala Patil says that the novel highlights many problems faced by women in a male-dominated society. Laxmi Parasuram in her article "Fire on the Mountain: A new dimension of feminine self-deception?" points out that Nanda Kaul makes painful efforts to get a degree of independence and integration of personality.

In her critical study "Anita Desai: Fire on the Mountain" Francine E.Krishna points out that Nanda Kaul, Ila Das and Raka are victims of various circumstances. "Fire on the Mountain: An Analysis," a serious study by Chandra Ganguli, describes the forces that mercilessly destroy the world of Nanda Kaul. An insightful study "Varieties of Loneliness in Fire on the Mountain" by Premila Paul and R.Padmanabhan Nair, points out that this novel examines Nanda Kaul's tensions and struggles.

"The Image of India in Clear Light of Day," an article by Inda Nabar, highlights a definite dimension of the Indian urban reality. Santosh Gupta in his study "Bringing the Polarities of Imagination and Reason in Clear Light of Day" says that the failure of the characters of the novel to find out the meeting point between their polarities of imagination and reason is the main cause of the lack of mutual
understanding between them. "Desai's Clear Light of Day: A Study" is a critical study in which Brijraj Singh, concentrating on a few aspects of the art of Desai, tells that the novel is a part of Indian life. Sudhakar Ratnakar Jamkhandi in his enlightening article "Old Delhi Revisited: Clear Light of Day" explores the unique problems of the Das home and the home's impact on the characters of the novel.

"The Wheel Turns": Central theme in The Village by the Sea", an explanatory study by P.F.Patil, examines the impact of modern technological progress on a traditional community of fishermen. Sudhakar Ratnakar Jamkhandi's elucidative study "They'd Much Rather Step Down from the Pedestal: Women in The Village by the Sea" asserts that Lila, the young village girl and the protagonist of the novel, shows new paths to the new generation of Indian women.

Bipin B. Panigrahi and Viney Kirpal in their critical study "The Dangling Man: Deven in Anita Desai's In Custody" note that Deven undergoes a variety of experiences and eventually emerges with an optimistic view of life. In his article "Anita Desai's In Custody: A Study in thematic design and motive" Tripathi shows that though Deven physically goes away from Nur, emotionally and spiritually he is with the poet. The article "The Writer's obligation in In Custody" by Bipin
B. Panigrahi, emphasises the inseparability of art and life. In his constructive study "Pursuit of Art: A Study of In Custody" P. Bhatnagar points out that the novel does not have the quality of lyric poetry which is profusely found in her early novels because in this novel the stress has shifted from the internal to the external. In his critical study "In Custody: The Road Not Taken" N. Ramachandran Nair observes that "the word, deed, and world in In Custody is at variance and at a low ebb in comparison with the wonted Desai world of dense feminine psyche, ethos and tension" (78).

Suresh C. Saxena in his study "A Tale of Two Cities: Baumgartner's Bombay" focuses on the atmosphere of Bombay and Calcutta and its impact on the novel. In her article "The Outsider Situation in Baumgartner's Bombay" Usha Bande shows that both the German and the Indian characters acutely face the problems of personal identity, homelessness and insecurity. "Baumgartner's Bombay and the Myth of Sisyphus", a discerning article by Subhash Chandra, probes the nature of Hugo's plight and compares his predicament with that of Sisyphus.

The study "Anita Desai's Search for Roots in Baumgartner's Bombay" by Suresh C. Saxena, notes that the novel is concerned with human problems and that it raises some disturbing questions about the world of exiles. In their article "Baumgartner's Bombay: An Assessment" J. B. Mishra and Sharda
Dubey analyse the existentialist problems of frustration, alienation, isolation, estrangement and agony.

"Desai's Theory and Practice of the Novel," an article by Shyam M. Asnani, focuses on Desai's views on literature, fiction, reality, truth, art, plot, form, pattern and rhythm. It also sheds a fresh light on Desai's characterisation and technique. Madhusudan Prasad, in his study "The Novels of Anita Desai: A Study in Imagery," vividly scrutinizes the botanical, zoological, meteorological and colour imagery used as an effective technique in Desai's novels. "Structure in the Novels of Anita Desai", an insightful study by Vinod Bhushan Gulati, studies the structure of the novels of Anita Desai.

In his article "Technique in the Novels of Anita Desai" B. Ramachandra Rao reveals Desai's ability to fuse form and content and observes that unlike other Indian English novelists, Desai attaches more importance to form and technique. The article "Anita Desai's Prose Style" by F. A. Inamdar, is illustrative. Focussing on a variety of techniques used by Desai in her novels, it shows that all her novels give an impression that Desai is interested in using words for their own sake.

In his insightful study "The Influence of D.H. Lawrence on Anita Desai" V. Sam Sahayam says that the novels of Anita Desai
contain many Lawrentian features and techniques. He establishes that Lawrence's *The Plumed Serpent* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* have profoundly influenced Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* in respect of imagery, situations and verbal echoes. At the end of his study he observes: "A comparative analysis of the imagery in Lawrence and Anita Desai... offers enormous aesthetic delight to the readers on the one hand and on the other hand endows them with a critical insight to evaluate, in finer terms, Anita Desai's art which is an amalgam of a great tradition and a strikingly individual talent" (Sahayam 63).

A study of the novels of Desai shows that she has attached the most importance to characters. As M. Prasad rightly observes: "In her novels, Desai has concentrated strictly on characters rather than social milieu" (142). By concentrating on characters, Desai portrays human problems and conditions and presents different aspects of existence. In her novels one finds that her characters are affected by familial, social, racial, cultural, psychological, hereditary and economic factors. Focussing on these factors and the problems and conditions of Desai's characters, the thesis "The Anatomy of Human Existence in the Novels of Anita Desai" stresses that Desai sincerely interprets life and holds a faithful mirror of human existence.
All the major characters of Desai inevitably live in tragic conditions which constitute a major part of the structure of human existence. As Solanki points out: "Anita Desai views the struggle of her protagonists in the context of the human struggle for survival from which she excludes no one" (182). Though the characters are ordinary they are not average and most of them do not accept life as it comes. As Desai herself affirms:

I am interested in characters who are not average but have retreated, or been driven into despair and so turned against or made to 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 demands are and what it costs to meet them. (Ram, "Interview with Anita Desai" 22)

Commenting on the characters of Desai, M.Prasad says:

Her characters, independent, acerbic, agonized, frustrated, somewhat domineering and combating with angry defiance, their individual problems and predicaments make us feel as though we have noticed in our neighbourhood -- and herein lies the charm of Desai's art of characterization. (142)
As "Shakespeare has no heroes" (Johnson 13) Desai has no heroes or heroines in her novels and they are human beings with ordinary strengths and weaknesses. Effectively presenting a gallery of brilliantly life-like characters, Desai convincingly interprets human existence. As Banda succinctly observes:

Anita Desai's men and women are not heroes or heroines, absolute in their strengths or devoid of human weaknesses. They are ordinary beings with normal human limitations. Indeed, Desai's world is not an "artistic Utopia". The great illuminative power of her fiction lies in its mimetic presentation of experience. (175)

Finding the real world too harsh, complex and hostile and being unable to face the cruel attacks of existence, most of the characters of Desai withdraw from reality. Many of them are sensitive, independent, emotional, neurotic, solitary, defiant, introspective and brooding and they inevitably experience alienation, frustration, psychic tension, anxiety, fear, despair, agony, anguish, unsatisfactory interpersonal relationships, loss of identity and rootlessness.

Though these characters face the above-mentioned problems, their attitude and behaviour are not similar. On the basis of the attitude and behaviour of these characters, the researcher classifies them in three distinctive groups. The first group of
characters becomes tragic victims of circumstances generated by the factors already mentioned. Making no efforts to make use of their will power, they miserably fail to integrate their degenerated and disintegrated personalities. The second group is unable to adjust to the difficult situations of existence and so they escape from the harsh realities of life. But their survival strategy of escape does not help them achieve a sense of authenticity. The third group, inspite of the trying situations and unfavourable circumstances, is stoically determined to live taking great efforts and making compromises with life. As Desai deals with the tragic characters, escapist characters and regenerated characters, the thesis emphasizes that Desai is neither a complete pessimist nor a thorough optimist.

In her early novels, Desai graphically delineates the tragedy of her characters and in her later novels she displays the growth potential of her characters -- their optimism, attitude of compromise with life, understanding of the supremacy of human affections and the value of love. But in her latest novel Baumgartner's Bombay, she again reverts to the presentation of human tragedy. Desai's portrayal of human existence in these ways shows that she is true to life and that her vision of life is "a tragic-comic vision" (Solanki 180). In future, she may again present the growth potential of her characters.
Making a comment on Baumgartner's Bombay, Solanki points out: "Her latest novel Baumgartner's Bombay ... ends on a note which makes one feel that perhaps Desai does not see any clear possibility of finding an abiding formula to solve the riddle of human existence" (177). It is true that Desai does not find a formula to solve the mystery of life. But no formula can solve the problems of existence. Finding a formula is not the aim of Desai. Desai's purpose of writing her novels is to reveal the truth about human existence. Keeping that purpose in her mind, she, as a true artist, presents both the tragic and happy aspects of life again and again in her novels.

Desai is of the view that to survive in this world one should have the capacity to compromise with life. She expresses this view in an interview: "Of course if one is alive in this world, one cannot survive without compromise -- drawing the line means certain death..." (Ram, "Interview with Anita Desai" 27). Desai seems to stress this opinion through the regenerated characters in her novels. Since she presents the realities of human existence through her characters, one can say that Desai is the novelist of human existence.