Chapter – V
Conclusion

Through a psychological study of the various novels, a picture of the subject matter of Anita Desai’s novels has emerged. Anita Desai brings forth some marked deviations from the style of her predecessors. She tries to grasp her characters based on time concepts; she is a great analyst of human mind and human relationships, a creator of brilliant characters and astute interpreter of life and its problems. The world of Anita Desai is an ambivalent one where the central harmony is aspired to but not arrived at and the desire to love and live clashes at times violently, with the desire to withdraw and achieve harmony. Most of her characters are pre-occupied with themselves, and are lonesome. Yet they are tried to rebel against the established norms and struggle to protect their privacy.

The 'Introductory' chapter specifies and introduces in details the overall picture of Anita Desai as one of the major contemporary novelists among Indian women writers in English. Much has been said by different critics about her grasping of human psyche, and how far they work by means of the influence of time especially of her female characters. The purpose of this study has been to establish Anita Desai as a feminist writer although she has no literary and theoretical commitment to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism. None of her novels can be considered as a political discourse and a feminist critical theory. In fact, her feminist critical perspective and theory are concerned only with the analysis of the personal power relation between sexes. Her purpose is to see her women characters as humans with their weaknesses and potentialities, who are caught in the web of time as a preserver and destroyer but cannot be regarded as haunted protagonists who do not come to terms with life by means of the
inevitability of the action of time. So Anita Desai's novels have been examined as the manifesto of female predicament and creative release of the feminine sensibility. Her feminism is not anti-male and her women need man's loving company and aspire for the happiness of life which they are not able to achieve. It is, however, clear that she raises the woman's question in all its aspects that is, all the issues pertaining to the growth and needs of women. Her characters are neurosis, have psychological phenomena; and they are interested in living as individuals with its hopes, dejections and chaotic flow. At the beginning of her novels, Anita Desai's protagonists are, in general, unhappy with the society they are unable to communicate with the social milieu around them.

Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* is distressed at the pretentiousness of the people she is made to socialize with. Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* is mortally scared of violence inherent in the city life and Nirode in *Voices in the City* abhors compromises, which society demands of one, to make. They are all misfits who nurture utopian dreams. Going through Anita Desai's novels in a chronological manner, one can trace a steady progressive change in her attitude towards the problem of communication. The strained relationship of Maya and Gautama in *Cry, the Peacock* results in the murder of the latter and madness and suicide for the former.

Monisha in *Voices in the City* has the same fatality hovering around her and ends up in committing suicide but, Amla, her sister, reconciles herself to the existing pattern of society. It is in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* that Anita's approach is entirely positive. Sita (Where Shall We Go This Summer?) is able to gain the courage needed behind carrying on with a life of anti-climaxes and disappointments. Sita of Like Amla, she resigns herself to an uncertain future not out of any hope but out of weakness.
It is only Sita who is able to realize that others suffer as much from the ugliness of a meaningless life without creating a fuss about it like her. Towards the end she feels that the rift between them i.e. would be securely bridged. *Fire on the Mountain*, reverberates with the agonized Cry of Nanda Kaul, Raka and Ila Das. Nanda's life has been just like a barren mountain, devoid of all human love and faith. All the three characters have one thing in common. They are lone individuals trying to guard their privacy in their own shells, in their own distinct manner. They are mentally very close to one another, yet at the same time are quite distanced from one another in age as well as in their attitude towards the outside reality of life. And still more daring psychologically the protagonist Bim in *Clear Light of Day* who with her new realization and acceptance of life in all its shades wins over the hearts of her readers.

She also suffers the pangs of mental upheaval, withdraws inward (though temporarily) and ultimately accepts not only the reality outside but also cheerfully forgives and forgets everything unsavory to give new meanings to life itself. Once again she embraces everyone in her folds of love, faith and understanding. She turns the time positive on herside. She comes out to be the most heroic of all the major protagonists of Anita Desai. Perhaps this was Anita Desai's version of a complete woman. Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* like Amla, is a sensitive and self respecting person.

She is reluctant to deliver or abort her fifth child even after seven months pregnancy and, in her dissembled frame of mind wants to retain it in her womb, as she is scared of the world outside. She flees to the island of Manori. Anita Desai confesses that to her, the name Sita conjured up a feeling of "exile" and "loneliness", she detaches herself from her family because of her unhappy marriage.
The tension between the sensitive individuals and the insensitive world is conveyed through the image of eagle and the crows. Sita compares Ayahs and cooks to animals involved only in food, sex and money she tries to assert herself by going to Manori and seeking her fulfillment there but her coming back to reality shows her inner strength for compromises.

Anita Desai provides a vivid picture of woman's plight for which domesticity is a trap. They crave for freedom for their budding ideas but there is an unbridgeable gap between their ideas and reality. The conflict between the need to withdraw in order to preserve their sanity and to be involved in the painful process of life continue in Fire on the Mountain where Nada Kaul, a great grandmother wishes to spend a quiet life in her Carignano cottage. She is averse to the thought of being involved in relationships because she has suffered from different psychic shocks but anyhow managed to lead a life of dignity and discipline. Nanda Kaul's alienation and withdrawal are forced ones.

Deep inside her self, she longs to love and be loved. The reality of human relationships, which she wants to obliterate, keeps intruding in her life. The familial time has its favourable side to torture Nanda Kaul. This is the story of the retreat of a fatigued individual who constantly battles with the past. Raka, Nanda's great-granddaughter, makes her realize that negation and withdrawal lead nowhere and make life meaningless. The same realization comes to Bim at the end of Clear Light of Day. The novel has a rich gallery of female characters - Bim the protagonist is a middle aged spinster; Tara, a married woman; Mira Masi, a child widow; and Misra girls, deserted wives. Bim sacrifices her life for the sake of her brothers and sister and becomes a symbol of self-less devotion. Her sister Tara and brother Raja disentangle themselves from family ties and leave.
This is a moving picture of the disintegration of a family. Bim leads a lonely life not out of choice, but out of feeling of responsibility after the death of her parents and the indifference of her brother. She is full of grudges against Raja but forgives him at the end and undergoes purification of the soul. From negation, she is able to attain positive detachment and involves herself in action without caring for the result. The expectation of reward for her sacrifices had earlier clouded her vision of life but she manages to gain serenity of mind as a result of her healthy attitude towards life.

Though Anita Desai does not belong to any feminist movement yet her stories analyze the Indian culture that marginalizes women and let them enjoy only a subordinate position. In *Fasting, Feasting* Anamika's parents at the news of her death and the manner in which she dies, Desai has a passionate sympathy for her, she has probed well into the miserable prevailing conditions and suggests a solution for them. She protests strongly in her stories against the refusal on the part of family and society to treat women as individuals. Women are supposed to fulfill their sense of individuality and personal aspirations within the terms of family. Anamika's story suggests that we require educational developments catering to the intellectual needs and cravings of the hitherto ignorant and ignored sex.

We appreciate Uma's courage to try to take up a job and emerge as a stronger character in the end. The male-female dichotomy in the novels of Anita Desai is a multi-dimensional perspectives, explains the presence of psychic tension in all her novels. Here after reading her some novels one can come to understand that a marriage is nothing but a convenience, when two souls come together through their marriage some kinds of difference is bound to be there. But the wedlock's are used to be settled blindly and without considering the attitudes, feelings and outlooks of the males and females, which are compelled to fail in every spheres of their conjugal lives.
Proper understanding of each other, a sense of wisdom and love for each other can make their conjugal life successful. But in Indian male-dominated society only woman have to adjust. Adverse attitudes of the family members make the marital lives, a great menace. The lives of her female characters e.g. Maya, Monisha, Sarah and Sophie are full of turbulent passions, unfulfilled dreams and chaos. To some extent the females themselves are responsible for their miserable conditions caused by their own temperaments. They are sensitive and emotional and refuse to adapt themselves to the rational and practical ways of life.

But even here, the fault lies in their up bringing and their abnormal behavior seems to be the outcome of some strange experience of their childhood. Maya of Cry, the Peacock is overprotected by her father, however, in the case of Sita in Where Shall We Go This Summer? the role of the father is quite deplorable, as she is often careless and unsympathetic. The role played by the males in the life of Anita Desai’s female characters is another reason for their emotional turbulence. A careful study of Desai’s novels reveals that men are responsible directly or indirectly for the suffering of these female characters. Spinsters, widows, divorcees, childless married women, all suffer alike, and males, as fathers, brothers, husbands, strangers, act in such a manner that they aggravate their suffering.

Bim, Tara and Mishra girls in Clear Light of Day have insipid fathers, they are not only inconsiderate and unsympathetic, but are often responsible for their daughters' plight. Mr. Das of Clear Light of Day is too busy in his club and bridge games to have any time for his children. Males in the role of brothers are not depicted as protecting and loving by Anita Desai on the contrary they are portrayed as parasites on the Mishra sisters of Clear Light of Day, Ila Das of Fire on the Mountain, Bim of Clear Light of Day is an overbearing type of husband to Tara whom he married instead of Bim
because she was docile and submissive. Tara’s mother has also been depicted as a shadow of her husband. Maya is a tragic predecessor of Monisha and the two stands at the head of a long line of protagonist - Amla, Sarah, Nanda, Sita, Bim, from self alienation to self discovery from thence to self actualization. They grow from sickness to health and from neurosis to full human beings. While Maya and Monisha spell out their own destruction by their refusal to see and accept the ordinariness of life, Anita Desai's latter females realize that acceptance of existence will lead to fulfillment through affirmation and abandonment, not through destructive, self-abnegation. They hope that having acquired their positive approach, Anita Desai will continue offering more harmonious solutions to the riddle of existence.

As life’s string is tied to the centre of time. Maya's story ends with homicide and suicide; Monisha sets herself afire without harming others and Sarah compromises with time and situations. Though the novelist however doesn't challenged the futility of marriage as an institution but discloses the inner psyche of the characters through their relations. So in these three novels marriages are proves to be unions of incompatibility. Maya and Gautama in *Cry, the Peacock* have a strained relationship because of their incompatible temperaments. Anita Desai has depicted a sensitive Hindu woman of orthodox background, seeking unorthodox means of fulfillment that leads to despair and insanity morbidity and suffering surround Maya who is dreamy, sensitive and emotional.

Ironically, her husband, Gautama one of Buddha's Name is a busy and successful lawyer who is indifferent, rational and realistic. Maya is poetic and high strung; Gautama is detached, remote and philosophical. Maya has tenderness and warmth; Gautama is hard and cold. The matrimonial bond that bonds the two is very fragile and tenuous it is neither true nor lasting.
The Bhagwat Gita, which Gautama quotes, warns against strong attachments. Detachment is misinterpreted by both the characters - Gautama harping on this philosophy detaches himself from emotional objects so much so that he does not even involve himself in physical relations with his wife. For him, detachment is an abstraction and totally unrelated to life.

Maya withdraws herself from physical activity and lives in a world of illusions suffering from father-fixation whereas for a successful marital relationship she should never have compared Gautama to her father. Her hyper-sensibility and father-fixation make her a stranger and an outsider in Gautama's life. The world of her in-laws is completely incomprehensible to her. She grows psychic and feels surrounded by images of snakes, lizards, albinos, rates, the moon, darkness and storm. The growing tension reaches its climax because of the detached and unsympathetic behaviour of her husband.

Maya kills Gautama; in a fit of insanity. Her illusions overpower and destroy her as illusions can never survive reality. Ideal relationships elude Maya, her marriage fails for she is unable to come out of her illusions and face the world of reality, neither can she participate in then normal, routine activities of life. Anita Desai has highlighted Maya's problem by creating minor characters like her mother-in-law, sister-in-law and her friends who survive despite problems in their lives. Maya she fails to adjust herself in the stolid, unimaginative family who seems to her self-centered and self-complacent.

They remain strangers for her and scrutinize her with suspicion and in return she considers them petty-minded, common-place and has defiant attitude towards them. She feels let down justifiably when her husband, Jiban, sides with his family when they accuse Monisha of theft.
Shelarges for privacy in the over populated house and ultimately has to take recourse to suicide in order to releases herself. The theme of *Cry, the Peacock* is repeated in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* with a solution to the problem. The tension between the sensitive wife, Sita and a rational and worldly Raman is authentically depicted in the novel. Sita is reluctant to deliver or abort her fifth child in this world full of violence.

Her escape to the island of Manori is an attempt to revive the world of fantasy, childhood, innocence and magic. Manori is an evocative symbol of a lost world but Sita's quest for the world of lost beauty and innocence is doomed to fail as it never really existed. She realizes the impossibility of living in a world of fantasy and manages to achieve security and solidity in her home because she realizes that detachment does not mean escapism from one's routine life, rather it means involvement in life and taking it as it is. A major drawback in Anita Desai's portrayal of husband-wife conflict lies in her presentation of the husband only in terms of the impression that the wife forms of him a highly subjective impression and not to be taken as a complete truth about him.

But when it comes to an intellectual like Gautama or a tolerant man like Raman, the reader longs for a glimpse of the other side of picture. The readers are left to wonder and draw our conclusions from whatever information one can gather form the one-sided version of the story as narrated from the female point of view. Gautama for instance appears to be a man who is capable of treating Maya as an individual, unique in herself. There are moments when he figures as a compassionate understanding husband. Maya's deteriorating condition alarms him and he offers to sit by her side and read to her.
He cautions his mother not to make Maya unhappy and let her strain herself too much. Such concerns may or may not be genuine but Maya is becomes neurotic by his cold attitude. She only ponders over certain incidents from a very subjective angle and colours them strongly through her perception of life. The same is true for Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Her irrationality over the subject of Menaka's decision to study science or her foolish attempts to perpetuate her pregnancy leaves her husband aghast. He tries to reason with her but all this is perceived as harshness and violence by Sita. Anita Desai has not done justice to the much maligned - male in this relationship by omitting his side of the story, however, she has successfully painted a pathetic picture of a woman's agony. The psychological and temporal conflicts form a quite significant and large aspect of her work.

An universality of the variety of human psyche, its reactions and responses, its deep inward delving and withdrawal from the outside world. In the given novels, their characters were undergoing psychic tension. Ila Das in *Fire on the Mountain*, though hard pressed between the basic necessities and her meager salary, is skillful of life and involvements. Anita Desai’s suggestion of compromises in family life is quite apparent because lack of compromise would lead to death and destruction, as it was in the case of Maya of *Cry, the Peacock* and Monisha of *Voices in the City*. In *Clear Light of Day*, Bim with her new realization and acceptance of life in all its shades wins over the hearts of her readers.

She comes out to be the most heroic of all major protagonists of Anita Desai. Anita Desai tries to link time past with the time present in order to create an impression of unified time. Time past merges with time present in her novels and we are reminded of the famous lines in T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*: "Time the destroyer is time the preserver". Time decides the existence of man.
The psychological time is realized through the memories of her protagonists. Defeated and disillusioned, they withdraw themselves to a secluded world of their own imagination and memories. They link their past with the failure of their present hence creating a clash between tradition at time and modernity time. The wheel of time turns ceaselessly and those who adopt themselves to the new conditions of life and environment while preserving their traditional values survive and emerge victorious.

The above mentioned novels in the given chapters have outlined the recurrent themes of Anita Desai as a novelist. For her the entire drama of man's life oscillates between two polarities of life the individual self and the social self. A person upholds in himself the internal and the external personality traits that cause nostalgia, depression, revolt, dichotomy and disharmony in him. The role of inorganic forces of society brings newness in Desai's fiction. The female protagonists like Maya, Sita, Monisha, Leila etc. have been shown suffering because of their failure to reconcile with their social surroundings and social obligations. The male protagonist in her themes appears as weak counterparts of the female protagonists.

The social forces remain a riddle to be solved by her characters. Adit and Hugo feel perplexed from their outlandishness, whereas. Most of her characters are involved in intellectual strife and emotional crisis. Her women are swayed by their instincts and emotions and as a result remains depressed for they are caught in self created problems and illusions. Some of her women like Bim and Leila really assert themselves and other like Sita and Nanda are on the periphery of assertiveness. Male-female dichotomy is another recurrent theme in Anita Desai's novels, the clash between husband and wife is mostly temperamental for which modernity and tradition is another reason too.
To conclude, Anita Desai from *Cry, the Peacock* to *Fasting, Feasting, Where Shall We Go this Summer?, Clear Light of Day* and *Fire on the Mountain* has delved deep into the crevices of human psyche and revealed the work of time through the inner motives of her characters and has successfully depicted the existential dilemma of humans.

“The existential dilemma occurs to them due to the lack of understanding of the value of time. Time is the best medicine, according to Ovid, ‘Time is the best medicine’, says Ovid. It is said that time heals all wounds and it even heals what reason cannot. All human beings are emotional. When negative emotions like fear, anger, envy and jealousy overtake them, they lose reason and act in haste leading to serious consequences. They may repent later, as emotions cool down. But the damage done is done and remains forever. Even that damage can heal with the passage of time. People involved may forget and forgive. That is the importance of time and its healing touch.”

(P. 23)

Anita Desai though drive home the importance and the role of time in human life through her characters, fails to stress them to realize the value of time and how far they can make use of it according to their need. With regard to familial time, as it has more value on human life, one has to try to make use of it in a positive way. To make use of the time in a positive way is nothing but always and in every endeavour of our life, one has to be an optimist.
The psychology of leading a life without troubles and struggles is in the hands of a particular person only. Maya the character in *Cry, the Peacock* suffers as she doesn’t know how to make use of the available and her own familial time, so as to be positive to play a good role as a wife and as a good daughter-in-law for her family members. Instead of doing this she began to dirge on the past time of the dead dogs toto. Actually time preserves and offers her a very good life with Gautama. As she fails to whilise it in a right way time turn to be destroyer. This is what is happening with all the characters of the works Anita Desai.