Chapter – I
Introduction

Indian Women writing in English is being recognised as major contemporary current in English language and Literature. The writers likes of Salman Rushdie, Amitav Gosh and Anita Desai have won worldwide acclaim for the quality of their writing and their imaginative use of English. These include the role of English as global lingua franca. The Indian writers in English are writing, not in their native language but in a second language, and the resultant is their texts are transcultural.

Traditionally, the work of Indian Women Writers has been undervalued due to patriarchal assumptions about the superior worth of male experience. The factors contributing to this prejudice is the fact that most of these women writers have observed no domestic space. The Indian women's perceptions of their aspirations and expectations are within the framework of Indian social and moral commitments. Indian Women Writers in English are victims of a second prejudice vis-a-vis their regional counterpart’s. Proficiency in English is available only to writers of the intelligent, affluent and educated classes. Writer’s works are often therefore, belong to high social strata and cut off from the reality of Indian life. As, Chaman Nahal writes about feminism in India:

“Both the awareness of woman’s position in society as one of disadvantage or in generality compared with that of man and also a desire to remove those is advantages.” (P. 1)
The majority of novels written by Indian women writers depict the psychological sufferings of the frustrated homemakers. This subject matter is often considered superficial compared to the depiction of the replaced and oppressed lives of women. Indian writing in English is now gaining ground rapidly. In the realm of fiction, it has heralded a new era and has earned many laurels both at home and abroad. Indian women writers have started questioning the prominent old patriarchal domination. They are no longer puppets in the hands of man. They have shown their worth in the field of literature both qualitatively and quantitatively and are showing it even today without any hurdle. Today, the works of Kamla Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Geetha Hariharan, Shashi Deshpande, Kiran Desai and Manju Kapur and many more have left an indelible imprint on the readers of Indian fiction in English. A major development in modern Indian fiction is the growth of a feminist or women centred approach, that seeks to project and interpret experience, from the point of a feminine consciousness and sensibility. As Patricia Meyer Specks remarks,

“There seems to be something that we call a women's point of view on outlook sufficiently distinct to be recognizable through the countries.” (P. 2)

Many Indian women novelists have explored female subjectivity in order to establish an identity. The theme is from childhood to womanhood-developed society respecting women in general. Santha Rama Rau's *Remember for the House* (1956), Ruth Prawar Jhabvala”s first novel *To whom she will* 1955 and her later novel *Heat and Dust* (1975'), Kamla Markandya’s *Two Virgins* (1994), Rama Mehta's 'Inside the Haveli' (1977), and Gaeta Hariharan 'The Thousand Faces of Night’ (1992). There some of the leading women writers writing in Indian English literature. The image of women in fiction has undergone a change during the last four decades.
Women writers have moved away from traditional portrayals of enduring self-sacrificing women, towards conflicts, female characters searching for identity; no longer characterized and defined simply in terms of their victim status. A major preoccupation in recent Indian women’s writing has been a delineation of inner life and subtle interpersonal relationships. In a culture where individualism and protest have often remained alien ideas and marital bliss and the woman’s role at home is a central focus.

It is interesting to note the emergence of not just an essential Indian sensibility but an expression of cultural displacement. Women’s presentation is more assertive, more liberated in their view and more articulate in their expression than the woman of the past is. The last three decade has seen the emergence of prominent Feminist in Indian Literature to begin with Shashi Deshpande.

Shashi Deshpande is the second daughter of the famous Kannada dramatist in Karnataka and Sanskrit Scholar Shriranga. She did a graduation in Journalism at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan, Mumbai and worked for a couple of months as a journalist for the magazine ‘On Looker’. Her first novel The Dark Holds No Terrors was published in June 1999. She is a winner of the Sahitya Akadami award, for her novel ‘That Long silence’. Her third famous novel is ‘Roots and Shadows’. She has projected objectively a new female face with subjective experiences with a geocentric vision. She reflects on the problems and concerns of the middle class Indian women. Her writings are rooted in the culture in which she lives. Her remarks are sensitive to the common everyday events and experiences and give an artistic expression to something that is simple and mundane.
Her feminism is particularly Indian in the sense that it is borne out of the predicament of Indian women placed between contradictory identities. The women characters are with traditional approaches trying to tie family and profession to maintain the virtues of Indian culture. Shashi Deshpande’s novel *A Matter of Time* is a continuation of her exploration into the many facts of the feminine experience in writing. In this novel, she has displayed the themes of silence, gender differences, passive sufferings and familiar relationships into much deeper realms. It is a story encompassing three generations of women coming to terms with their life in and all female worlds. The relation women characters share with their men is homered with silence, absence or indifference. The pain of disintegration of the family troubles Aru, who consider herself for her father’s action and sets out to undo it. It is in this stifling atmosphere the characters evolve and come to a newer understanding of their lives. The role of fury and destiny are playing as main themes around which Deshpande weaves her tale. Deshpande explains role of fury in her words,

“I thought of Puradars’s line, the hour strikes and I was terrified.
I stopped believing in the life I was leading suddenly it seemed unreal to me and I know I could not go on.” (P. 3)

Deshpande’s simple yet powerful prose reads like a grandmother’s tale that pierces the deep into heart and settles. At one point, the use of omniscient narration teases the reader as the speaker forces events but is not to share until time and plot unfolds it. Deshpande’s *A Matter of Time* and Salman Rushdie’s *Fury* both novels spun around theme of existential fury. Deshpande brings Rushdie’s novel out from howling *New York City* to a calm and mediating Karnataka and his hills in the gaps a reader might have had left craves for.
The underlying theme in Shashi Deshpande's novels is human relationships especially the ones that exist between father and daughter, husband and wife, between mother and daughter. In all relationships, the women occupy the central stage and significantly, the narration shifts through her feminine consciousness. In her novels, three types of suffering women characters reoccur with subtle changes. The first type belongs to the protagonist’s mother or the mother figure, the traditional woman, who believes that her place is with her husband and family. The second type of woman is bolder more self-reliant and rebellious. She cannot conform to mythological, submissive and surrender vision of womanhood. As radical feminist, ideology expressed, for example, Sarah's friend Nathan in the Dark Holds No Terrors. The third, type of women characters, are the women in between neither traditional nor radical in their ideas and practice. For Example, Indu in 'Roots and Shadows', leaves her husband to seek refuge in her ancestral home. Being a woman herself, she sympathises with women. As Shashi Deshpande clarifies in one of the interviews about feminist approach in her writing,

“If others see something feminist in my writings, I must say that it is not consciously done. It is because the world for women is like that and I am mirroring the world.” (P. 4)

The other, noted novelist under the study is Manju Kapur: a professor of English at Miranda House in Delhi. Her first Novel Difficult Daughters received the Common Wealth Award for the Eurasian region. Her novel A Married Woman is a seductive story of a love at a time of political and religious upheaval, and is told with sympathy and intelligence.’ A Married woman is the story of an artist whose canvas challenges the constraints of middle class existence. Manju Kapur describes through her protagonist (Astha),
“A woman should be aware of self-controlled, strong willed, self-reliant and rational, having faith in the inner strength of womanhood. A meaningful change can be brought only from within by being free in the deeper psychic sense.” (P. 5)

Astha like to have a break from dependence on others and proceeds on the path of full human status that poses a threat to Hemant and his male superiority. However, she finds herself trapped between the pressures of the modern developing society and shackles of the ancient biases. She sets out on her quest for a more meaningful life in her lesbian relationship. She canonizes and commemorates her insulted feminine sensibility raising the male tantrum to social transformation in the society. Manju Kapur in *Difficult Daughters* presents the image of suffering women. In post-colonial era, partition has ever been the most prolific and prominent area for creative writers. During this phase, number of novels was written on the theme of the destruction. It brings the plight and provides a sad telling commentary on the breakdown on human values. In her writings, Manju Kapur has emphasised on the issues in the context of patriarchy; inter-religious marriage; family bond, male-female bond, co-existence of past and present. She has narrated her women protagonists as a victim of biology, gender, domestic violence, and circumstances. Kapur thinks that,

“There is a man within every woman and a woman in every man. When, manhood is questioned womanhood is fragmented.”

(P. 6)

A major pre-occupation in recent Indian women's writings has been a delineation of Inner life and subtle relationships. In a culture where, individualism and protest have often remained alien ideas and marital bliss and the women's role at home is the central
It is interesting to see the emergence of not just an essential Indian sensibility but an expression of cultural diversion. The other famous and renowned novelist under the study is Arundhati Roy, born in 1961 in Bengal. Arundhati grew up in Kerala; she trained herself as an architect at the Delhi school of Architecture but abandoned it in between. She believes that,

“A feminist is a woman who negotiates herself into a position where she has choices.” (P. 7)

The International community knows Arundhati Roy as an artist with her debut novel *The God of Small Things*. *The God of small things* won Britain's premier Booker prize, the Booker McConnell in 1997. Roy is the first non-expatriate Indian author and the first Indian woman to have won this prize. Roy’s major essays *The End of Imagination* and *The Greater Common Good* are available online. She is between the two Indian writers writing in English who has won the Booker Prize (the other one being Salman Rushdie for his *Midnight’s Children*). Arundhati has never admitted that she is a feminist but *The God of Small Things*, reveals at many places her feminist stance and her protagonist represent feminine sensibility. Arundhati Roy’s mother says,

“Arundhati is a born talker and a born writer. While, she was studying in school, it was a problem to find a teacher, who could cope with her voracious appetite for reading and writing. Most of the time, she educated herself on her own. I can remember our viceprinciple Sneha Zaharias resorting to Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* as a text for the little fourth grade.” (P. 8)
Roy seems to be iconoclast in *The God of Small Things*. The stylistic innovations make the novel unique and bring vitality and exuberance to the novel. The novel is unique in every aspect and it is a linguistic experiment with the English language. The stylistic writings include the use of words, phrases and even sentences from vernacular language, use of italics, subject less sentences, faulty spellings, topicalisation, deviation from normal word order, single word 'sentences,' change of word classes, clustering of word classes and a variety of other techniques. She has given prominence to ecology and subalternity as the major themes in the novel. Roy’s close observations and the minute aspects in the creation of her literary skills are observed in her other works. Her two important articles on the net are *The end of Imagination* and *The Greater Common Good*. In the End of Imagination, Roy criticises nuclear policies of the Government of India. Arundhati Roy foretells the harmful consequences of nuclear weapons on human beings and ecology in *The End of Imagination*:

“Cities and forests, our fields and villages will burn for days. Rivers will turn to poison. The air will become fire. The wind will spread the flames when everything there is to burn has burned and the fires die, smoke will rise and shut out the sun. There will be on day and only interminable night. Temperatures will drop to far below freezing and nuclear winter will set in. Water will turn into toxic ice. Radioactive fallout will seep through the earth and contaminated groundwater. Most living things, animals and vegetables, fish and fowl, will die. Only rats and cockroaches will breed, multiply, and complete with forging, relic humane for what little food there is.” (P. 9)
Now, let us discuss another popular women writer, Ashapurna Devi. She has focus on the revival of a reformed traditional womanhood that would accommodate women’s need for self-expression. Like Desai and Bhandari, she considers education of women to be of utmost importance. She does so because she sees women, and not just men, as agents of female oppression.

Therefore, she is more critical of women than she is of men, who she feels are able to dominate women because dependent and insecure older women like mothers and mothers-in-law help them to do so. In her Trilogy, Pratham Pratishruti, Subarnalata and Bakul Katha. Ashapurna Devi traces the progression of the feminist movement from colonial to postcolonial periods in India. She finds that the contemporary, educated and economically independent women, like Bakul in Bakul Katha, the last part of her trilogy, have become more self-centred than, the women of earlier generations, like Satyvati and Subarnalata in Pratham Pratishruti and Subarnalata respectively.

More importantly and ironically, Ashapurna Devi finds that their freedom has not brought them closer to other women. Ashapurna Devi advocates a re-vision of traditional community where the relations between men and women and between older and younger women are not based on the subservience of one to the other, but where women enjoy the same rights and privileges as men in an affirmation of human values. To get peace at home Ashapurna Devi wants women to break the walls of psychological imprisonment located inside them. The community, for Ashapurna Devi, should become the foundation that would free women by providing them the solid ground to stand firmly. She shows how the individual or smaller self finds liberation from pain and isolation.
Ismat Chugtai, the other prominent writer attracts our attention with her novel *The Hearts Breaks Free*, brings the story of oppressed people like Bua. Here, Chugtai shows the youthful, vital, nonchalant and exuberant Bua is in trouble, physically and in spirit, when she submits to the so-called reforming control of the traditional family. In contrast, rebellious Qudsia and Shabir, by isolating themselves from the traditional community, are able to find a new, fulfilling life.

Chugtai has vision of feminist utopia, which preserves the identity and happiness of the oppressed subjects. It is not conspicuously transformative as far as the patriarchal structure is concerned. What Shabir and Qudsia are able to achieve is a blissful separatist retreat from the world, an individualistic and subjective feminist utopia that does not offer any synthesis of sociality and individuality within the normative community.

Chugtai’s novel openly reveals and reinforces the revolutionary and reconstructive features of their utopian community to the society. So that it can see how the outsiders community function as a family in an extended sense, but it is different from the traditional Indian family where the men’s and elders authority quickly takes over, and women are forced to earn merit by sacrifice. Some critics have raised concerns regarding the viability of such feminist utopias. In her article

“‘The Ideal community and the politics of Difference’, Iris Young argues utopian societies by negating the existing social structures negate the concept of social change or evolution and thereby become static, functioning outside time or history.”

(P. 13)
Chhaya Dattar and Popati Hiranandani try to create self-authenticating reflective spaces that liberate by disconnecting their women characters from their patriarchally constructed social ties. Chhaya Dattar, in her autobiographical story *In Search of me*, describes her experiences as a social worker in the tribal world. While recording, the unionized activities of the farm labours, who are mostly, women. These women are cut off temporarily from her own feminist problems.

Dattar experiences an inexplicable contentment that comes through the connection with one’s self, symbolised in the story by the author’s uninvited communion with tribal landscape that frees her, for those few days, from her social fears and uncertainties. Dattar’s response to her surroundings possesses a poetic and dramatic intensity that articulates her newly found energy and creativity and she begins to reconstitute her- self by looking at what has constituted her. The act of analysing this discovery First part, strengthens her to exert her own agency over her controlling family members.

Apart from the contemplative spaces, Dattar finds empowerment from watching the tribal women unveil their individuality, by using their voices to assert their concerns. Their individual invisibility begins to shatter as they try to make visible collective solidarity. The transformed spectacle, of the otherwise yielding tribal women into loud voices, clearly articulating their right to decent and respectful human hood, empowers the author to plan her own escape from the confinement of objectification. Dattar, thus, shows that the individual spaces of feminist liberation are hinged on the interdependence of women. The collective solidarity of women, in Dattar’s vision, punctuates the growth. It is unique and personal because power is derived from the collective vocal and active marginality. Dattar asserts that,
“It is the women’s community that can enable each woman to claim with authority the unique identity and freedom that has been denied to her by the patriarchal community. (P. 14)

Dattar’s vision of feminist liberation provide avenues of becoming in the world as the registering of women’s experiences, in her story, is framed by an engagement with their denial of dependence and self-sacrifice. Freedom, in the writings of both the authors, is primarily a mental phenomenon….where women think to prepare for a transformation of consciousness. Dattar provides images of feminist subjects, actively creating their own destinies and these images ‘stand in contrast to the iconic figure of the female as passive, culturally fixed in an objective relationship in which she is always the inferior.

Bharti Mukherjee, the other post-colonial writer was born on July 27, 1940 at Calcutta she has done her M.A. in English and Ancient Indian culture from the Baroda University and her Doctor of Philosophy, in English and cognitive literature in 1969, From Lowa, university, United States. Mukherjee’s works focusses on the phenomenon of migration, the status of new immigrants and the feeling of alienation often experienced by expectation as well as an Indian women and their struggle.

Her own struggle with identity first as an immigrant from India then an Indian expatriate in Canada and finally as an immigrant in the United States has led to her current contentment of being an immigrant in a country of immigrants. Her important works are The Tiger's Daughter and Days and Nights. The Tiger's Daughter is a story about a young girl named ‘Tara’ who ventures back to India after many years of being away to return to poverty and turmoil. The second phase of her writing encompasses works such as Wife, An invisible woman (Essay), The Sorrow and the Terror.
In *Wife*, Mukherjee writes about a woman named Simple who has been suppressed by such a man and attempts to be the ideal Bengali wife. Out of fear and personal inability. She murders her husband and eventually commits suicide. In her third phase, she wrote *Leave it to Me*, where she tells the story of a young woman named Debby Di Martino who seeks revenge on parents who abandoned her. The story reveals her ungrateful interaction with kind adoptive parents and a vengeful search for her real parents. The novel also looks at the conflict between eastern and western worlds and at mother-daughter relationships through the political and emotional topics by the main character in her quote for the revenge.

Another renowned novelist of the modern Indian fiction is Kamala Markandaya born in 1924—she worked under a pseudonym Purnaiya Taylor. She was a graduate of Madras University. She moved to Britain after India's Independence and is known for writing about cultural clashes between Indian urban and rural societies. Markandya has published her first novel, *Nectar in a Sieve*. It is a bestseller and considered a notable book by the American Library Association. Her other works are *Some Inner Fun*, *A Silence of Desire*, *Possession*, *A handful of Rice*, *The Nowhere Man*, *The Rising*, *The Golden Honey Comb* and *Pleasure City*.

Kamala’s 'Nectar in a Sieve' is about a strong hero, a character by the name of Rukmani. As she narrates her story, the readers are involved in her pain. Losing sons and seeing her daughter become a prostitute, Rukmani still stands strong. Rukmani the main character and her daughter Ira display suffering through the novel. Rukmani works hard and is devoted to her gentle husband. Rukmani has faced poverty, famine, and divorce of her barren daughter, the deaths of her sons, her daughter's prostitution and finally her husband's death.
Kiran Desai born in 1971 is an Indian author who is citizen of India and a permanent resident of the USA. Her novel 'The Inheritance of loss' won the 2006 Booker prize and the National Book Critics Circle fiction award. Her first novel *Hullabaloo* published in 1998, won 'Betty Trask Award', a prize given by the society of Authors for the new novels by citizens of the Common Wealth of nations under the age of 35. *The Inheritance of Loss* opens with a teenage Indian girl, an orphan called Sai, living with her Cambridge educated Anglophile grandfather, a retired judge, in the town of Kalimpong on the Indian side of the Himalayas.

Sai is romantically involved with her maths tutor, Gyan, the Descendant of a Nepali Ghurkha mercenary, but he eventually recalls from her obvious privilege and falls in with a group of Ethnic Nepalese insurgents. Kiran Desai has handled several major issues of modern civilisation in her second novel. The concept of globalisation is multisided. It has economic, political, social, cultural and educational aspects. It may create an opportunity or a danger, because of Globalisation, situations have changed, new concepts have emerged and people have stepped out their areas of confinement to find company and competency among their counter parts. Dr. Shubha Mukherjee remarks,

“Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss’* presents the picture of globalised India. The characters like Jamubhai Patel, Mrs and Mr Mistry, Sai, Biju Nonita and Lolita are affected by Globalisation. As intelligent writer and careful observer of human behaviour, Kiran Desai fulfils the responsibility of writing about current sensational issues.” (P. 15)
At Such moments, Desai seems far from writers like Zadie Smith and Hari Kudzu whose fiction takes a generally optimistic view of what Salman Rushdie has called,

“Hybridity, impurity, inter mingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, and songs.” (P. 16)

Nayantara Sahgal was born in 1927 and is an Indian writer in English. Her fiction deals with India's elite responding to the crises engendered by political change. She was the first female Indo-Asian writer to receive wide recognition. Her main works are *Prison and Chocolate Cake, This Time of Morning, Storm in Chandigarh, The Day in Shadow, Rich Like Us* and *Lesser Breeds*.

The above study shows that women writers have gone up from difficult to tribal and rural areas too, but all of them have expressed their concern for women and their problems. The variety of subjects, they have touched upon is a great contribution in creating awareness for the modern women all over the globe. The variety of subjects handled by them considering Indian environment needs an appreciation. Some of the writers have not claimed that they belong to feminist’s movement yet their writings suggest that their inner spirit and feelings are for the welfare of the women only.

Anita Desai, the other great novelist of the Indian English fiction was born in 1937. Anita Desai is unquestionably one of the celebrated Indian - English fiction writers. She holds a unique place among the contemporary women novelists of India. She has to her credit a large number of creative works and a coherently growing readership throughout the world. She has published ten novels and other literary works of immense value.
Anita Desai’s women characters in her novels rebel against patriarchal community in order to explore their own potential or to live on their own terms, regardless of the consequences that such a rebellion may have on their lives. They take the position of outsiders to fight and criticize those cultural ideologies that come in their way of becoming free individuals, self chosen withdrawal, for these women, takes on the form a weapon for survival in a patriarchal community.

Desai’s women, thus, want freedom within the community of men and women, as it is the only way that will succeed in fulfilling them. In fact, Desai’s model of an emancipated woman, Bimala in the novel *Clear Light Of Day*, is an unmarried woman. Her married women characters like Maya in *Cry, the Peacock*, Monisha in *The City*, Nanda in *Fire on the Mountain*, and Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* become depressed, violent or self-destructive. They either lose their sanity or kill others, or they kill or destroy themselves. The nemesis of these women is not a private one but an outgrowth of the complex social context, immediate family environments and the relationships with their men.

Many of Desai’s protagonists are portrayed as single women. Desai does not neglect the institution of marriage or support alienation from society. Some of her women characters, like Tara in *Clear Light of Day*, do achieve fulfilment in their marriages Instead, through Bimala, Desai points to a kind of feminist emancipation that lies in not limiting women to their traditional roles but in expanding and awakening them to several other possibilities. Their kind of life, apart from being invigorating, also frees them from dependence on men. Bimala, through her individual freedom, exemplifies Simon De Beauvoir’s description of an independent woman in her book *The Second Sex*, where she asserts that,
“Ceases to be a parasite, the system based on her dependence crumple; between her and the universe there is no longer any need for a masculine mediator.” (P. 10)

As Anita Desai says,

“I don’t think anybody’s exile from society can solve any problem. I think the problem is how to exist in society and yet maintain one’s individuality rather than suffering from a lack of society and a lack of belonging.” (P. 11)

Anita Desai's first novel, *Cry, the Peacock* is concerned with its chief protagonist Maya's psychological problems. As a young sensitive woman, Maya wish to love and to live. She makes up the mind of her father, Gautama who is much older than she is. Maya is haunted constantly by the rationalistic approach of her husband to the affairs of life. Maya loves Gautama passionately and desires to be loved in return; but Gautama's coldness disappoints her. The root of the entire novel lies in the prophecy of albino astrologer, who creates a fear psychosis in Maya's mind,

“The astrologer, that creeping sly magician of my hallucinations, no of course they were not hallucinations. Arjun had proved them to me and yet said they be real? Had never said anything to suggest that it was I who has to die, unnatural and violently for years after my marriage, nothing to suggest that he even thought that.” (P. 12)
This prophecy becomes troublesome to her unconscious mind. Anita Desai works on revealing the varying mental states, psychic observations, inner motives and existential pursuits of man. She succeeds fully in breaking non-grounds for her fictional art among her contemporary while dealing with the predicament of man and his social and moral dilemmas. Desai like Kafka unfolds the existential traits of man in society. She analyses a man in action in order to reveal his hidden motives behind the facial reality of conscious mind.

Making of Anita Desai as a Writer Anita Desai is one of the considerable voices in the modern Indian English Fiction. She announced a new epoch of Psychological realism in this genre with her debut novel *Cry the Peacock* in 1963. Anita Desai’s novels work out the mystery of the inner life of her characters. She repudiates all social concerns and affirms more than once that she is “interested in individuals and not in social issues.” R.S Sharma refers to her “anti Fiction”. (Sharma P. 166) Anita Desai’s works are different from those of other Indian women writers in English:

“Nayantara Sehgal, Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, who mainly concern themselves with politics, East-West encounter and social theme. Desai is concerned with the psychic life of her characters. For her it is “depth which is interesting delving deeper and deeper in a character or a scene rather them going round about it.” (PP. 61-69)

She has tried to understand minutely the predicament of her female characters. She represents the welcome “creative release of the feminine sensibility. Critics find in her, “evidence of a departure from current modes of fictional writing and of an earnest effort to break new grounds.” (P. 1)
For this she has been considered as a “novelist of moods, of persistent states of mind and psyche.” (P. 166) Usha Bande observes:

“Anita Desai disowns all social concerns and asserts more than once that she is interested in individual and not in social issues. Social issues intrude only where they affect the character.”

(P. 12)

Kohli Points out: “No other writer is so much concerned with the life of young men and women in Indian cities as Anita Desai is.” (P. 3) Anita Desai’s involvement with Indian women and their reaction to the far changing situation in modern India distinguishes her from other female writers. This Booker prize short listed novelist was born in Mussoorie on 24th June 1937 of a Bengali father and a German mother. At home she found Euro centric atmosphere for German was the medium of communication.

The Congenial aesthetic environment at home contributed a great deal to fertilize her creative imagination. She was graduated from Delhi University. There is no formal training that has helped her in writing except for reading and constant practice. At the tender age of seven, she started writing small stories, poems and letters for children’s magazines. While writing short stories, she “illustrated them diligently and sewed them into covers so as to make them look as proper books.” (P. 217)

While at college she had a few short stories published in the college magazine. She wrote for an English magazine called Envoy till her first novel was published in 1963. In her twenties she started writing novels on a small scale. In her novels she follows her own instinct, which is a kind of compulsion, an inner urge. She writes down ‘the scenes and impressions, moods and emotions.
Being a creative writer, she is conscious of its true value while writing. Anita Desai has written several novels. Desai says that this:

“Has become such a deeply ingrained habit, it is like chainsmoking: I chain–smoke with words, with books. There is a difference; of course what begin, as self-indulgence eventually becomes a self–deceptive.” (P. 79)

Since her childhood, Desai was conscious of being a writer. Writing is a part of her character, temperament, nature and life. She has added to her genius by learning from other writers. When she was nine years old, she first read Wuthering Heights. Although she could not understand half of it yet it was a thrill. The novelist remembers the experience:

“It struck me with force of a gale and I still vibrate to it. Ever since; literature has seemed to me more interesting, more significant and overwhelming than the real world. Later, of course, other writers meant more to me. In my twenties when I first began to work seriously and consciously on my novels, it was D.H. Lawrence, Virgina Woolf, Henry James and Proust that influenced me more strongly.” (P. 13)

Later the novels of Japanese writers Kawabata and more and more modern poetry—particularly that of Rimbaud, Hopkins and Lawrence, have left deep mark on her. She keeps no diaries and is not interested in autobiography because for her “creative act is secret one. To make it public, to scrutinize it in the cold light of reason, is to commit an act of violence, possibly murder.” (P. 14)
Writing is totally self-indulgence for her. Desai herself asserts that she has been influenced by European and American Literature. In an Interview she says:

“Ruth Jhabvala always “inspired” and encouraged me although she did not help in any material sense, such as reading or editing my manuscripts.” (P. 210)

The artistic activity of Mrs. Desai began with the short stories. Of the two forms novel and short story, short story writing is less satisfting for her. Regarding novels she opines that they:

“Give a good deal of thought and time, get round it, see it from different angles and aspects, whereas a short story demands something quite different. You have the whole of it quite clear in your mind and just put it down at one throw.” (P. 15)

Her attempt to portray individuals unique in taste and behaviour, conveying a secret sense of life, draws a distinct line of demarcation from others. In an interview Anita Desai acknowledged that writing for her, “is an effort to discover and then underline and finally to convey the true significance of things.” (P. 79) Her novels according to her, “deal with what Ortega Y Gasset called “the terror of facing, single-handed, the ferocious assaults of existence.”(P.79) Endowed with remarkable sensitivity, she can apprehend the emotional problems of her fellow beings. The delicate sensitivity speaks for itself when she remarks:
“I confess I am afraid of speaking out about the art of writing, mechanics of my craft. I have an intuitive and deep fear that by speaking of something subterranean and subconscious, I will destroy it– it is something so very frail.” (P. 79)

Anita Desai’s forte is “the exploration of sensibility - the particular kind of Indian sensibility that is ill at ease among barbarians and the philistines, the anarchists and the amoralists.” (P. 464) What distinguishes Anita Desai from other writers is her preoccupation with the individual and his inner world of sensibility – the chaos inside his mind. Concerned exclusively with the personal tragedy of the individual, Desai is not interested in social or political probing, the outer weather, the physical geography or the visible action.

Her forte is the exploration of the inner world, plunging into the limitless depth of the mind and bringing into relief the hidden contours of the human psyche. She uniquely prefers the inner reality to the outer, insight to sight. In her review of Amitabh Ghosh The Circle of Reason, she exhibits her disfavour for the novelists who take interest in “the ‘outer’ rather than the ‘inner’ world’. (P. 149) Preferring the psychological to social novel, she herself analyses:

“It has been my personal luck that my temperament and circumstances have combined to give me the shelter, privacy & solitude required for the writing of such novels, thereby avoiding problems a more objective writer has to deal with since he depends upon observation rather than private vision.” (P. 255)
Anita Desai embarks to explore the inner reality, or in her own words she is not concerned with “the one-tenth visible section of ice berg that one sees above the surface of the ocean” but with “the remaining nine tenth of it that lie below the surface.”(P. 1) She prefers the private to the public world because for her, literature is neither a means of escaping reality, nor a vehicle for parading her political, social, religious and moral ideas, but an exploration and an inquiry.

Desai feels that besides having a creative genius, a novelist must be sensitive and have a power of keen observation so that he could give acute descriptions and “pick up the tiny details that others might not notice.” (P. 68) Besides sensitivity and observation, a rich experience and a good training are also essential. It is not imperative, however, that a writer has all kind of experience. For in a writer “lack of experience may be a handicap, but lack of sensitivity, thought, intelligence of memory would be far greater one.” (P. 210)

The concept of exploring the inner recesses of a man’s heart to portray the inner reality instead of outward reality was unknown both to the pre independence and the post – independence writers of Indo-Anglian fiction. Desai lays emphasis on interior rather than on exterior characterization. Her concern is the ‘why’ and the ‘wherefore’ of the external action rather than action itself, and on the invisible than visible life. In fact to quote the words of critic and writer Meena Belliappa,

“An important phase in the growth of fiction in India, as elsewhere, is the gradual shift from the external to the inner word of the individual.” (P. 1)
Desai unmistakably prefers the inner reality to outer. The object of her entire writing is to convey the truth. Desai takes Truth as synonymous of Art, not of reality. She finds no discrepancy between the terms Truth and Art:

“Reality is merely the one-tenth visible section of the iceberg that one sees above the surface of the ocean- Art the remaining nine – tenth of it that lie below the surface. That is why it is more near Truth than reality itself. Art does not merely reflect reality – it enlarges it.” (P. 1)

Her writing is an effort to discover, underline and convey the significance of things. She seizes upon Reality and:

“Try to discover its significance by plunging below the surface and plumbing the depth then illuminating those depths till they become a more lucid, brilliant and explicable reflection of the visible world.” (P. 1)

For Desai, the search for ‘truth’ consists in the life of the mind and the soul - the inner life – and not in the life of the body- the outer life. She is little concerned with the ordinary, traditional notion of reality, the physical facts of things. By shifting the fictional domain from outer to inner reality, she has brought a great change in the Indian English fiction. Anita Desai an Indian Jane Austen and Virginia Woolf blended together is not so much concerned with outer as with the inner weather. The inner workings of her characters are revealed with the help of outer conditions. She is a painter of moods, of wills, of conflicting choices and inner experience. The subjects of her novels are not poverty or riches, war, politics, social, evils but the incompatibility of marriages.
In order to place Anita Desai in proper perspective it is essential to compare her with the other women novelists, who have more or less the same thematic exposure. When we notice that her fellow women writers like Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawar Jhabvala, Nayantara Sehgal, Santha Rama Rau and Miss Attia Hosain rarely take effort to depict the psychic element in their themes it becomes clear that Anita Desai presents a new dimension to English fiction through the exploration of troubled sensibility.

In contrast to her, in Jhabvala’s work the social background is more remarkable than characters, in Kamala Markandaya’s works the stress is as much on character as financial, political, social and cultural matters. Nayantara Sehgal delineates social problems; she confines herself to a particular social class, namely the upper class and aristocracy. Anita Desai thus obviously stands ahead the group and throws light on the inner climate, the climate of feminine sensibility in her novels. A critic rightly observes:

“Her novel is concerned with the emotional world of women, revealing a rare, imaginative awareness of various deeper farces at work & a profound understanding of feminine sensibility.”

(P. 81)

Anita Desai discards the traditional form of realism and focuses on disintegration in the inner and outer lives of her characters. In her novels “the inner climate, the climate of sensibility that lours or clears or rumbles like thunder or suddenly blazes forth like lightening, is more compelling than the outer weather, the physical geography or the visible action.” (P. 464) Madhusudan Prasad discovers in her novels a skilful exploration of the “emotional ecology, their rumbling turbulent inner world.” (P. 13)
The thought of bringing the unexplored recesses of a man’s heart was foreign to all Indian novelists till Anita Desai came on the scene. She added some sophisticated items and paraded them in equally sophisticated cartons. R.S. Sharma considers Desai’s first novel *Cry, the Peacock* “the first step in the direction of psychological fiction in English.” (P. 24) Maya, a sensitive woman, suffers from neurotic fears caused by albino astrologer’s prediction about her possible death as also from her marital disharmony.

All the three parts of the novel deal with the three stages of Maya’s neurosis growth, development and climax. In *Voices in the City* Anita Desai is not concerned with the physical problem of Calcutta but as the city affects other characters psychologically, particularly Nirode or Monisha who are very sensitive. Madhusudan Prasad feels that, “Desai delves deep into human psyche and tries to explore very adroitly the dim domains of the conscious and the subconscious of the major characters in this novel” (P. 22) *Bye-Bye, Blackbird* portrays Indians and Englishmen in England with their problems - both physical and psychological. Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer*? is sensitive, peace-loving and introvert. The tension in the novel is between a sensitive individual and an insensitive world conveyed through the most frequently recurring image of the predator and the prey.

In *Fire on the Mountain*, Desai penetrates deep into the psyche of Nanda kaul who has withdrawn from all movements and sounds. She wants no contact with outside world, either directly or indirectly through messages, requests and letters. *Clear Light of the Day* is concerned with the anguish of a sensitive women Bim, who wishes to live in the world of past. Her younger sister Tara too is obsessed by her childhood memories. It also deals with time in relation with eternity- a domain of psychological novel.
*In Custody* deals with the existential dilemma, anxiety, unfulfilled ambitions and dreams of Deven. Journey to Ithaca depicts the void in Communication between the partners Matteo and Sophie because of the divergent goals they seek— the one spiritual and other physical and emotional. *Fasting, Feasting* shows how domineering parents suffocate Uma and Arun by their over-anxiety and solicitousness. Being neither a critic nor a creative writer, Anita Desai has propounded no systematic theory of novel. To measure her literary creation she says:

“I think theories of novel are held by those of an academic, or critical turn of mind, not the creative. A writer does not create a novel by observing a given set of theories - he follows flashes of individual vision and depends on a kind of instinct that tell him what to follow and what to ovoid, how to veer away from what would be destructive to his vision. It is these flashes of vision, and a kind of trained instinct, that leads him not any theories."

(P. 100)

Anita Desai writes “instinctively”, carried away by her compulsions, allowing the novel to sprout and grow freely like, tree under the blue sky, and then trimming its ugly branches and uprooting weeds growing around it. The object that triggers her imagination could be very insignificant “a leaf dipping under a rain drop, a face seen on the bus, or a scrap of news in the paper.” (P. 100) Arya Ghosh comments about her novels, “They are torn her novels chart a peculiar path of circularity where texts only begin and rebegin and ‘end’ by coming back to the point of beginning once more.” (P. 256) Anita Desai rejects any linguistic boundary. Since she is a very careful and meticulous artist & since she can speak German, Bengali and Hindi, besides English, quite fluently, the choice of language is very important for her.
She herself asserts: “Language is the universal whore whom I have made a virgin.” (P. 210) An idea or an image, according to her, is seldom vital enough to set any-one on fire to write- there must be a passion for language as well, a familiarity and ease with words and also a conception of them as perpetually growing, changing, renewing themselves and appearing in delightful and fresh forms, Her comments as to why she writes in English is:

“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. It is both the language of reason and instinct, of sense & sensibility.” (P. 79)

Anita Desai chose English as the medium for self-expression. The mixed parentage might be the reason of choice, she says:

“According to the rules laid down by critics I ought to be writing half my work in Bengali, the other half in German. As it happens, I’ve never written a word in either language. Possibly I found English to be a suitable link language, a compromise. But I can state definitely that I did not choose English in a deliberate and conscious act. If it did not sound like a piece of arrogance, I’d say perhaps it was the language that chose me.” (P. 79)
Anita Desai makes use of the language of the interior, which requires a delicate and subtle handling with hints and suggestions, Srinivasa Iyenger 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 her characters.” (P. 16)

She herself asserts:

“By writing novels that have been catalogued by critics as psychological and that are purely subjective, I have been left free to employ, simply the language of the interior. Even when two characters meet, they use this particular type of language - the language of their thoughts, their interior selves - that has nothing to do with geography and can be written in any language.” (P. 225)

Anita Desai feels that the medium, a novelist choose should be the one in which the writer is most fluent. She chose English or rather it was the language that chose her:

“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 come most fluently and easily to me.” (P. 62)
There is absolutely no doubt that she has a perfect command over English. It is so pliant and flexible, like the soft wet earth under a plough, that it yields not only to the pressure of her hand and the nod of her head but rises to poetic heights to synchronize with her visions and her dreams. The most prominent feature of Anita Desai art is the delineation of character.

She is primarily interested in the portrayal of female protagonists as living in separate world. They are portrayed as engrossed with the present, look backward in time and visualize future as well. Being a psychological novelist and concerned with the atmosphere of the mind of her character, Desai portrays character’s motivation, their consciences and consciousness. Rao thus observes:

“Being a sensitive woman novelist and gifted with good observation, sensitiveness, a penetrating analysis and a skill to paint with words, Anita Desai creates a rich gallery of characters, both male and female, though dominated by the latter.” (P. 59)

Primarily interested in exploring the psychic depth of her female characters, Desai may be said to be doing something unique among the contemporary Indian English novelists. She portrays her characters as individuals “facing single handed the ferocious assaults of existence.” (P. 79) Anita Desai herself points out, “To a novelist it is always the individual who is of primary interest & not the anonymous multitude, always the particular rather than the ‘general.” (PP. 55-63) “Only the individual, the solitary being is of true interest. One must be alone, silent, in order to think or contemplate or write.” (P. 79) In the fictional world of Anita Desai the creed is the value of the individual and individualism.
Anita Desai’s characters can be classified in two distinctive groups- those who fail to adjust to the harsh realities of life and those who compromise. In her novels, there are always those who always remain outsider for they cannot accommodate themselves to the world of realities. Her protagonists have defiant individualities. They fight against commonplace confirmity and adhere to their own vision of life. Those, who manage to say the “Great No” and yet grow independent of their environment, are saved from a total disaster.

“Others who say “No” but do not find the positive way to unburden their “self” are entangled in their own introspection, and fail to relate themselves to those who matter so much for them. Consequently, the desire to love and live; and the desires to withdraw are in serious conflict in Anita Desai’s novels.” (P. 32)

As Jasbir Jain remarks:

“The world of Anita Desai’s novel is an ambivalent one: it is a world where the central harmony is aspired to but not arrived at, and the desire to love and live clashes- at times violently- with the desire to withdraw and achieve harmony. Involvement and stillness are incompatible by their nature yet they strive to exist together.” (PP. 61-69)

In some of her novels abnormality and eccentricity find place. She herself affirms:

“Naturally as a writer I have been interested in peculiar and eccentric characters rather than everyday ones”. (PP. 61-69)
Anita Desai’s characters deny seeing themselves as a part of an impersonal mass of mankind at large. They believe that they have individual potentialities of their own and to distinguish themselves from the multitude they say “Yes” or “No”. As the novelist herself observes:

“I am interested in character who are not average but have retreated, or been driven into despair and so turned against general current. It is very easy to flow with 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.” (PP. 21-23)

Anita Desai’s characters reveal her vision of life; they share her perceptions. Like their creator they love solitude and privacy. He major characters are not from real life but “are entirely imaginary or an amalgamation of several different characters.” (P. 68) Desai’s characters find an abysmal barrier between themselves and the world, consisting of others, the natural environment and its life. They are unable to relate to the space around them.

Space in existential context does not mean the physical area but “the human environment, and every other that provides the setting in which human life is to be lived.” (P. 79) The female protagonists of Desai are burdened with the awareness of their femininity. They wish to know, along with the other ontological issues, the psycho-biological significance of their being female persons. As a writer interested in the individual only – whether men or women, young or old or children - Anita Desai displays a great creative ability.
Being a novelist of moods and the state of psyche, her characters have a tendency to turn inward. *Cry, the Peacock* is the story of hypersensitive young woman Maya, pitted against a taciturn husband. She lives a life of acute sensitivity and dies in her quest to find fuller life. In *Voices in the City*, the three major characters, Nirode, Amla, Monisha undergo existential crises. *Bye, Bye Blackbird* deals with the psychic turmoil of Sarah, who struggles to find her identity. *Where Shall We Go this Summer?* is the story of a near neurotic heroine Sita.

*Fire on the Mountain* incorporates the story of Nanda Kaul and her great grand daughter Raka. *Clear Light of the Day* is the story of Bim, who after a long period of frustration and anger comes to recognise the importance of forgiveness. Desai switches from a woman centered to a male centered narrative in *In Custody*, which presents the world of Deven Sharma a poorly paid lecturer in a provincial town. *Journey to Ithaca* depicts Matteo’s spiritual Journey. In it journey or search really matters. *Fasting, Feasting* deals with travail of Uma, a daughter with neither looks nor intellectual brilliance, who is treated as a domestic drudge by her parents. Anita Desai’s characters are burdened by their uniqueness. They want to exercise their liberty and refuse to compromise. Anita Desai’s serious concern is with “the journey within” of her characters.

Therefore the recurring themes that we come across in her novels are the agony of existence in a hostile society that is conservative and taboo ridden. In an Interview with Yashodhara Dalmia, the novelist also admits of her preoccupation with the “essential human condition.” (79) The most recurrent themes is all her novels are “the hazards and complexities of manwoman relationships, the founding and nurturing of individuality and the establishing of individualism” of her characters. (P. 23)
The most common theme in her novels is the complexity of human relationships. This theme has been as old as the novel itself and can be found in Richardson and Fielding on one hand, and D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, Hemingway on the other. Emphasizing the importance of such relationship 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.” (P. 130)

What is so innovative in the treatment of this theme by Anita Desai is that she explores so minutely the depth of her characters that they were unimaginable among earlier Indo-Anglian novelists. Another theme most frequently occurring in her novels is that of withdrawal, alienation, loneliness, lack of communication. Madhusudan Prasad observes: “Desai is always preoccupied by an eternal quest for meaning and value, freedom and truth that can sustain us in this chaotic and seemingly meaningless world.” (P. 2)

Since Desai believes that “literature should deal with most enduring matters, less temporary and less temporal than politics.” (P. 4) Desai believes in the working of time in human life. It acts both as preserver of life and at the same time, it acts as a destroyer. She is opposed to the use of contemporary material. A novelist should not write immediately about an incident but should allow it forth to settle down in order to develop a detached perspective. 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 footprints, on the sand.” (P. 4)

This eminent novelist spends three or four hours at her desk every morning. The amount of work may vary from six words to six pages. Whenever she is working on a particular novel; its idea continues to haunt her even if she is busy with something else. Among her preparatory material, she to some extent keeps notes but chiefly she relies on her memory. Her writing is not irregular. Usually a year is taken to finish the first draft of a novel, which is followed by revision and rewriting because, writing, to her is an “intellectual exercise.

Like most of the writers, she needs a particular environment, especially a quiet room for herself as for her the “creative art is secret one”. May it be short story or novel, she usually starts with a vague idea, which grows clearer as the work proceeds. Most of her writings have been started with mere sketches. Anita Desai’s world, like Jane Austen’s is a restricted one. She restricts herself to writing about people and situations that she knows or can understand by deep probing. Therefore, she is known as a pioneer in writing psychological novels or a writer of “inner action”. Writing is not always a ‘pleasure’ but sometimes ‘compulsion’ because the idea of a novel grows in her mind:
“As silently and unobtrusively as a grain of sand enters a shell. 
There it grows and develops ... Eventually this tiny grain grows 
into such a mass that it brings to exert pressure.” (P. 210)

The pressure is not certainly ordinary pressure. It usually rules her eye for a period of two years. Then, “the process of rewriting did, however, bring in the disciplinary power of discrimination and criticism and wrought further charges”. (P. 216) Cities or places, depicted in her novels, are particularly those that have left powerful impression on her.

Calcutta, Delhi and Bombay become centers of description in her famous novels. Her experience and minute observation makes her novels vivacious, lively and glorious. The titles ‘teasing and meaningful’ usually surface during the writing of the novels. Particular incidents or characters encountered in real life are metamorphosed into different creations in her writings, sometimes without omitting any stage. Desai is regarded as the novelist of cities and places, very good at catching fatigue and emptiness of characters caught in melancholic existence.

Mulk Raj Anand and Bhabani Bhattacharya were touched by miserable condition of the untouchables and devastation of the Bengal famine but Desai “might have been affected by domestic, man-woman relationships”. (P. 212) Anita Desai is a perfectionist. The situation and characters she has handled confirm this. If one has faith in life and individuality, one must compromise with it.

Some of her protagonists, in spite of hardship and differences of opinion learn to be a part of existing life. Mrs. Desai concerns herself with high aesthetic values of literature. Most important among these is, her artistic power of applying the basic values of her novels so successfully that they become unique in her achievements.
This ability attains all the more perfection when these literary works are woven into the fabrication of a nation, which they present. As R.S. Pathak says:

“These novels present, like the earlier ones the essential tragedy of modern India, which the novelist sees as the loss of the true human beneath the welter of impersonal social forces.” (P. 33)

Desai clearly avoids commenting about the state of Indian English fiction and her position in it. She thinks it is fatal to become selfconscious. It is for the critics and scholars to interpret and evaluate not for writers. As Desai has a confidence on times role in the life of a human being, P.B. Shelley too believed the role of time in his poem *Ode to the West Wind*. He personifies the west wind both as a destroyer and preserver. But in Anita Desai novels it is changed preserver and destroyer.

Because, the positive side of the time on the outset of human life acts as a preserver. It offers everything possible and whatever the needs of a person. And in the course of their life as Shakespeare said “course of true love never did run smooth, and misfortune comes not in single spice but in battallions, the problems and difficulties are common for all.” The temporamental incompatibility between the husband and wife is an inevitable one.

That is why Anita Desai has created her characters as time bound. The time whether it is optimistic or pessimistic, it has its own role to play. Even Andrew Marvel in his metaphysical poem *To His Coy Mistress* says, “At my back I hear time’s wing’d chariot is hurrying near…” (P. 23) So, it is romance or melancholy time is the utmost predominant factor which determines ones state of life. This is what is delineated in most of the novels of Anita Desai through her protagonists.