

Introduction

Anita Ashwin Desai is one of the most prominent Indian writers in English of international repute, whose works have been greatly admired both at home and abroad. Her contribution to fiction writing has been quite commendable and substantial. She comes face to face with the intangible realities of life, the innermost depths of the human psyche and the chaotic underworld of human mind through her novels.

Anita Mazumdar was born on 24th June 1937 in Mussorie, India, to a German mother, Toni Nime and a Bengali businessman, D.N.Mazumdar. She grew up speaking German at home and Bengali, Urdu, Hindi and English outside the house. Although German is her first language she did not visit Germany until later in life as an adult. She first learned to read and write English at school and as a result English became her "literary language". She began to write in English at the age of seven and published her first story at the age of nine.

Anita Desai is a voracious reader and widely read literary books. She did not receive any formal training but by her personal reading and constant practice of regular writing she became a writer. If we read her novels we will know that there is a poetic touch in her novels. She is expert both in poetry and prose. When she was only seven years old she took to writing short stories, poems and letters for children's magazines. While she was a college student, she penned few stories which were published in her college magazine. She also penned for the writer's workshop journal and the English magazine *Envoy*. Her first novel *Cry the Peacock* was published in 1963. She also wrote novels on a small scale in her twenties. She was conscious of being a writer since her very childhood; writing of literature was great part of her character, temperament and her life itself. She could not do without writing; writing had rather become her second nature.

We know that Anita's father was a Bengali gentleman and her mother was a German lady, so it is quite natural that she inherited both Bengali and German languages from her parents. But it is strange enough to understand that she has never written a book in either of these two languages which she inherited from her parents, and wrote so many books in English language.

Anita Desai devotes three or four hours every morning at her study and writing work. The work she does during this period of time vary from six words to six pages. Whenever she is busy in the writing of some particular novel, its ideas keep on disturbing her. In case she keeps notes to some extent usually, it is her habit to depend primarily on her wonderful memory. Her writing is very regular and systematic: she is not at all free to allow irregularity in her writing work. She takes usually one year to complete the first draft her novel. It is followed by rewriting work at places where she finds it necessary to do so.

She regards writing as an intellectual exercise which sharpens the intellect and refines the art to a great extent, and gives practical experience of writing to the writer. She needs a particular environment which most of the writers need for their writing work. She needs loneliness, a quiet room where there is no noise and disturbance. Since her creative work is a 'secret one' she needs therefore a separate place where she can have deep thinking, and can create literature by using her creative talent bestowed upon her by God. Whether she is writing a short essay or novel, in the beginning her idea appears to be unclear having no literary significance but it becomes clearer and clearer as her work continues. It has been seen that most of the composition have appeared in the beginning as mere sketches, but with the development her work turned out to be an important piece of literature.

She was a student at Queen Mary's Higher Secondary School in Delhi and received her B.A. in English literature in 1957 from the Miranda House of the University of Delhi.

The following year she married Ashwin Desai, the director of a computer software company and author of the book *Between Eternities: Ideas on Life and the Cosmos*. They have four children, including Booker – Prize winning novelist Kiran Desai.

Anita Desai's writing evokes characters, events, and moods rich in visual imagery. The range of characterization is vast as she depicts her women as well as men characters drawn from all strata of liege. The existential dilemma, suppression and marginalization of women as well as men in metropolitical cities are the major themes of her writing. She has been influenced by Virginia Woolf, E.M.Forster, D.H.Lawrence, Anton Chekov, Fyodor Dostoevsky and Marcel Proust.

Anita Desai as an eminent writer in Indian writing in English sensitively articulates inner psyche of the female characters. However, we can say that her female protagonists do not have touch with the earth, as they are unable to survive on the contrary; they accept the path of either suicide or murder. Committing suicide or murdering husband or child or losing mental order is not the way to survive. If one wants to live as a full human being then he/she has to make adjustments with the life, otherwise he or she has to lose life.

About Anita Desai, Prema Nandkumar says, "she has in her fiction sensibility adhered to the Lakshman- rekha culture, and created her own distinctive imaginative word." According to K.R. Srinivasa Iyenger, "The explosion in Mrs. Desai's novels occurs only within narrow domestic walls. Always, always, it is her intolerable grapple with thoughts, feeling and emotions."

Like most of other Indian English novelists Anita Desai's novels are certainly presentation of social realities of female protagonists. But she closely examines the world of female individuals and reveals the various traits of personality. She occupies a prominent place in modern Indian English fiction. She distinguishes with other writers of Indian

English. Hence, we are going to make a brief survey from the inception of Indian English novel to make clear how she is different from other writers to deal with the female protagonists in her novels.

The Indian English novel has started its journey with Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's (1838-94) *Rajmohan's wife* (1876). This is a melodramatic tale of protagonist Matangani, a typical, long-suffering Hindu wife at the hands of her husband, Rajmohan who is a bully, the setting being an East Bengal village in the late 19th century.

The history of Indian English novel begins with Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. However the history of Indian Women novelists in English begins with Toru Dutt who died at the early age of 21. Her unfinished novel, *Bianca or The Young Spanish Maidan* (1878), is a romantic love story of protagonist Bianca. Other women novelist of this period are Krupabai Sattihianadhan whose *Kamala, A story of Hindu life* (1895) and *Saguna : A Story of Native Christian life* (1895), are autobiographical novels. Shevantibai M. Nikambe is another woman novelist of this period known for her novel *Ratnabai : A Sketch of a Bombay High Cast Hindu Wife* (1895)

In pre-Independence India, the period 1920-1947 is known as the Gandhi Age. The Indian English novel of the period was deeply influenced by the epoch-making political, social and ideological ferment caused by the Gandhian movement. The Indian English novel firmly established at the hands of the big three, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan in pre-Independence India. Protagonists of their novels show various philosophical aspects of the Gandhian ideology. They are highly influenced by Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of truth and non-violence. There is patriotic vigour in their minds, and they are also ready to revolt against cast-creed. Mulk Raj Anand's first novel *Untouchable* appeared in 1935. Bakha, a young sweeper from the outcastes' colony of north Indian cantonment town is the

protagonist of the novel. The novel describes an eventful day in the life of Bakha. Anand's second novel *Coolie* (1936) portrays the pathetic odyssey of protagonist Munno who is an orphaned village boy from the Kangra hills. In this novel Anand portrays the miserable life of Munno, who does several roles to his livelihood. At a time he is a domestic servant, a coolie, a factory worker and a rickshaw-puller. The novel is an indignant comment on the tragic denial to a protagonist of the fundamental right to happiness. Protagonist Munno and his fellow coolies are exploited by the forces of industrialism, capitalism, communalism and colonialism. His next novel *Tow Leaves and a Bud* (1937) focus the miserable life of protagonist Gangu, a poor peasant. Thus, while talking about Pre-Independence novels of Mulka Raj Anand his protagonist is either an outcaste or a peasant.

R.K.Narayan is another great figure in the history of Pre-Independence Indian English novel. Protagonists of R.K.Narayan's novels are much different from the protagonists of Anand. Protagonists of R.K.Narayan's novels are young. They are studied whether in a school or college. Narayan highlights the situation of youth through his novels. His first novel *Swami and Friends* appeared in 1935. Swaminathan, whose name abridged as 'Swami', is the protagonist of the novel. Swami is a school boy who does many pranks in his school and is always punished by his teachers for that. His second novel *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937) is the story of protagonist Chandran, a sensitive youth caught in conflict between the western ideas of love and marriage. Towards the end of the novel, his frustration drives into become a *Sanyasi* for a time. After that he returns home to find that a traditional, arranged marriage is not after all an imposition. Thus in this novel Narayan portrays the inner and outer conflict of the protagonist Chandran. Here, Chandran is a representative example of all Indian youth.

Raja Rao is the youngest of the trio. He is deeply influenced by the movement of Mahatma Gandhi. Raja Rao's first novel *Kanthapura* is published in 1938. It is the period of nationalism. There is a patriotic vigour among the minds of every Indian. Everyone is

ready to fight against Britisher to get freedom. For whole nation Mahatma Gandhi was the ideal figure. Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938) is the finest evocation of the Gandhian age in Indian English fiction. Raja Rao's protagonist is a staunch follower of Mahatma Gandhi. He is much influenced by the philosophy and ideology of truth and non-violence of Gandhiji. Young Moorthy, the Gandhian is the protagonist of the novel *Kanthapura*. It is the story of a young Moorthy who transforms his village Kanthapur, caught in the maelstrom of the freedom struggle in nineteen thirties and transform so completely in the end of the novel.

Thus, protagonists of the Pre-Independence novels are mainly men, and they are patriotic or sensitive about social issues or just a school boy or college youth. Pre-independence Indian English novel established at the hands of big three and there is no prominent woman novelist in the Gandhian age. But after the independence, the situation changed, and many women novelists came forward and developed their own literature.

Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prasad Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De and Anita Desai are the prominent figures in nineteen sixties and nineteen seventies. Indian women novelists of this era, try their best to deal with the pathetic plight of forsaken women. Mostly their protagonists are women; whether from higher middle class, middle class or lower class. But women novelists of this age portray mostly the miserable life of an average Indian woman. For women novelists of the era, women are no longer object of pleasure but a reservoir of all healthy values of life.

While thinking about post Independence Indian women novelists, Kamala Markandaya stands first. Her novels deal with the rural Indian life. She focuses the realistic picture of Indian villagers, their customs and cultures, rites and tradition. Her protagonists, men or women belong to lower or working class. There are many ups and downs in their lives. So they fight the situation to survive. Kamala Markandaya's first novel *Nectar in a*

Sieve (1954) portrays the ups and downs of her protagonist Rukmini. She faces so many ups and downs, 'fret and fever' of life viz. her husband's infidelity, her daughter's sacrificial going to the streets to save the family from hunger and starvation; the premature death of the child Kuti, the ejection from the kiths and kins so on and so forth.

Kamala Markandaya's other novel *Some Inner Fury* (1955) shows the protagonist Mira's recollection of the past, her emotions, passions and ecstasies. K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar holds the view, "*Some Inner Fury* is a tragedy of protagonist engineered by politics, even as *Nectar in a Sieve* is a tragedy of protagonist engineered by economics". In both the novels, the protagonists transcend the bludgeoning of economic or politics and mischance and assert the unconquerable sprit of humanity.

Her third novel *A Silence of Desire* (1960) is the story of a protagonist Dandekar, a government servant, who gets tortures and sufferance because of his wife, Sarojani whose attitude is just opposite of her husband. Her next novel *The Nowhere Man* (1972) deals with the theme of the protagonist's anti-immigrant wave of the sixties, which engulfs the life of Srinivas, the protagonist of the novel, who is an old Indian widower and a Londoner, who is persecuted mercilessly by a number of fanatics. In this novel the image of the disease of 'leprosy' suggest the protagonist's sense of isolation and disintegration.

Thus, Kamala Markandaya's protagonists are not only women but also men, who belong to any strata of the society. Through her protagonist, Markandaya portrays the pessimistic picture of their lives. Even though she is a woman novelist, she independently portrays the real picture of woman through her novels.

Ruth Prawar Jhabvala, the contemporary of Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai, also left an indelible imprint in the history of women novelists in English. Most of her writings deal with the various sets of Indianness. Her protagonists are mostly from an urban

middle class Indian life and they are tinged with domestic problems of an average joint Hindu family and an ironic study of the confrontation between occidental and oriental attitudes. Jhabvala's protagonists suffer a lot because of tragic married life. They fail to manage the harmony between husband and wife. Some of her protagonists are the victim of male dominancy.

Her *Esmond in India* (1958) and *A Backward Place* (1965) are the novels that ring the note of east-west encounter. *Esmond in India* is the story of protagonist Esmond Stillwood, an English man, who marries Gulab, the beautiful Indian girl. But the marriage fails due to the different nature of both the characters- Esmond is selfish and mean, Gulab is rough and unsophisticated.

In *A Backward Place*, Judy is an English girl and a protagonist of the novel who marries an Indian actor Bal. But this marriage also does not succeed because of their indifferent mentality. Her next novel *Heat and Dust* (1975) won the prestigious Booker Prize in 1975. It deals with the sad and moving stories of English woman Olivia who is the protagonist of the novel paid her visit to India and return she became victim of this country.

Shashi Deshpande is another contemporary woman novelist of Anita Desai. Shashi Deshpande through her novels portrays the pathetic and heartening condition of female protagonists in a male dominated society. Her, *The Dark Hold No Terror* (1999) is the story of Sarita, protagonist of the novel. She challenges the age old tradition of marrying a man of outside of her caste. The love marriage between Sarita and Manu doesn't prove to be fruitful. In, *The Binding Vine* female protagonist Urmila, fights her own battle as well as endeavors to help other women, the poor and downtrodden. It is a feminist novel which represents woman as a spineless, wooden creature subjected to male domination.

Nayantra Sahgal, the niece of Pt. Jawaharlal Neheru and the daughter of Vijayalaxmi Pnadi is a novelist of politics. While Ruth Prawar Jhabvala mirrors the social background in her works, Kamala Markandaya deals with the diverse contemporary problems – social, cultural of the contemporary society. Nayantra Sahgal deals with the politics. Anita Desai is satisfied to dive deep into the inner working of the female protagonist and brings into the hidden depths of human psyche. Anita Desai deals with the mind and soul of a protagonist, his/her inner workings and hidden and silent thoughts rather than outer appearances. Her main business as a fiction writer is to expose the truth.

Anita Desai is primarily a novelist of moods, of persistent states of mind or psyche. She is interested in the psychic life of her female protagonists and the other characters in her novels. In her novels she shows that her real concern is with the exploration of human psyche. Anita Desai comes face to face with the inner realities of life, the inner most depths of the human psyche and her chaotic underworld of human mind through her female protagonists. Desai is also known for her extensive use of the stream of consciousness technique in her novels. The fiction of Anita Desai has become self-analytical and introspective and the individual's quest for a personal meaning in life. Thus, she primarily emphasizes both physical and mental consciousness of her female protagonist. Her protagonists are usually sensitive women who, noted by a peculiar sense of doom, withdraw into a neglected world of their own.

In Anita Desai's novels women have a significant place. As a women novelist she has raised women's questions through her novels. In almost all of her works there are women narrators. While reading her novels we come to know that Desai has a particular interest in analyzing female characters and suggesting the unusual struggle of their fate. As a novelist she examines the actual, social and emotional bonds that shackle women. In her novels the

setting is the upper and lower middle class Indian family life. In her novels she shows the unhappy situation of the Indian women. Her novels are the presentation of the strong reactions of quiet, sensitive and intelligent Indian women married mostly to complacent insensitive, uncaring though dutiful men. Her female protagonist's lives turn into a bog of dull and drab matrimonial relationship with mostly emotionless and loveless husband. The novels *Cry the Peacock*, *Voices in the City* and *Fire on the Mountain* are the best examples of this type.

Thus, Anita Desai is primarily concerned with situation of the married women in Indian society. The theme of marital unhappiness and an unhappy marriage causing loneliness and alienation in female protagonists is repeated in most of her novels. The cord of harmony is never struck between female protagonist Maya and Gautama in *Cry the Peacock*, Monisha and Jiban in *Voices in the City*, Sita and Raman in *Where shall We go this Summer?* And Nanda Kaul and Mr. Kaul in *Fire on the Mountain*. Mostly her female protagonists struggle for their freedom and emancipation from the clutches of a male dominated society.

Anita Desai has got a distinguished place as her works are deviating from those of other Indian women writers, Kalama Markandaya, Ruth Prawar Jhabvala, Nayantra Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De and Kamala Das.

Kamala Markandaya stresses more on the rural background. In Jhabvala's fiction the social background is more important than the characters who execute the various roles. Sahgal emphasizes on political and social awareness and Kamala Das between the man-woman relationships. Shobha De is more for physical desires and social framework, while Shashi Deshpande follows of Desai to a certain extent only. But in Desai's novels it is the exploration of sensibility, the inner working of mind that assumes the most important place and is unparalleled. She unravels beautifully the mystery of the inner life of her characters. As

a novelist she seems to be highly dissatisfied with most cotemporary novelist's way of writing a novel.

Anita Desai is specially noted for her insightful depiction of the inner life of the female characters in her writing. In many of her works Anita Desai highlighted the tensions among the family members and estrangement of middle class women.

Literary Works:

Literary career of Anita Desai began with short story-writing. Her stories were published in the outstanding Indian magazines are which popularized her name among her story readers. Some of the stories written by her are still uncollected and unpublished. Her first story was 'Circus Cat, Alley Cat' which was published in 1957 in *Thought*. Her second story 'How Gently in the Mist' was published in 'The Illustrated Weekly of India'. 'Tea with Maharain' followed it which was published in the same or different periodicals. In this way she established herself as a writer gradually through her works being published in the well known periodicals. Her story 'Grand Mother' was published by Writers Workshop Miscellany. In 1960 and the same year another short story 'An Examination' was also published by Writers Workshop Miscellany. With the publication of 'Ghost House' in *Quest* (January-March, 1961) and 'Mr. Bose's Private Bliss' in *Envoy* (May-June 1961) her greatness as a story was established. She continued writing and 'To Sell a Picture', a story which she penned came out in Writers Workshop Miscellany. Her other stories 'Private Tuition by Mr. Bose' (1970), 'Indian Literature', 'Decent from the Roof Top', 'The Illustrated Weekly of India' (1970), 'Surface Texture', 'Femina' earned fame and a good name for her in the field of literature.

Her literary interest was outstanding as it was not confined to the short – story writing only. She tried with equal interest essays, articles and reviews and worthiness of

writing on different subjects and different forms 'Calcutta Kaleidoscope' penned by Anita Desai was published in 'The Illustrated Weekly of India' in 1958 and 'Gangtok' in *Envoy*, 1959. She wrote an article on 'A Kulu Christmas' which was published in *Envoy*, London. Her Pilgrimage appeared in *The Illustrated Weekly of India* in 1966. She penned articles on 'women writers' and 'The Indian Writers Problems' which appeared in *Quest* (1970) and *The Literary Criterion* (1975). She also attempted reviews such as 'Timid Movement of a Wung', 'Memories of a Mendicant Professor' which was published in *ACLALS* News letter 1979 and *Out of the Shadows* came out in Indian Express in the year 1984.

Her collection of short stories presented on different topics are included in *Games at Twilight* published in 1978 which reveals a number of stories just as 'Pineapple Cake', 'Sale', 'The Accompanist', 'A Devoted Son', 'The Farewell Party', 'Pigeons At Day Break', 'Scholar Gypsy', 'Private Tutor by Mr. Bose' and 'Surface Texture'. She has also written a few books for the children, such as *The Peacock Garden* (1974) *Cat on a House Boat* (1976) and *Village By the Sea* (1982). All her works reveal her capability of her versatile writing. Anita Desai who started her career as a short story writer emerged as a promising novelist in the year 1963, who is still to be seen on the Indian literary horizon.

Anita Desai revealed sensibility and used distinctive technique which made her novels popular and prestigious in the realm of literature. Her first novel *Cry, The Peacock* published in 1963, in England. Then she wrote *Voices in the City* (1965), *Bye-Bye Black Bird* (1971), *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975), *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), *Clear Light of the Day* (1980), *Village by the Sea* (1982), *In Custody* (1984), *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1987), *Journey to Ithaca* (1995), *Fasting-feasting* (1999), *The Zig-Zag way* (2004) and *The Artist of Disappearance* (2011). Besides this she has notably recognized for her short story

writing. Her *Games at Twilight and other stories* published in 1978 and *Diamond Dust and Other Stories* published in 2000.

While studying female protagonists in the select novels of Anita Desai, it is better to divide Desai's writing into two phases, as Early novels and Later novels. Her early novels- *Cry, The Peacock, Voices in the City, Bye-Bye Black Bird*, focused on Indian women's sensibility suppressed under codes of patriarchal society. The extreme sense of alienation, lack of communication, marital disharmony, the complex network of relations and the mental disturbances of female characters are presented in her novels. While her later novels- *Where Shall We Go This Summer? Fire on the Mountain, Clear Light of the Day, In Custody*, deal with the existential anxiety of modern man trapped into wandering life.

Anita Desai's first novel *Cry, The peacock* published in 1963 and it is consider as a trend-setter. It dealt with the theme of the inner psyche of the protagonist Maya. The novel projects the theme of loneliness and alienation of Indian women under the impact of patriarchal society. The female protagonist Maya is the spoiled and pampered daughter of a wealthy Brahmin. She married to Gautama, who is rather insensitive, pragmatic and rational advocate. Maya becomes neurotic because of patriarchal atmosphere and her unfulfilled personal aspirations. The complex relationship between mismatched couple, Maya and Gautama is portrayed in the novel. The story deals with the sensitive wife's urge for emotional attachment and philosophical and practical husband's detachment. In Maya's childhood, an albino astrologer had predicted that four years after her marriage one of the spouse would die. This prediction makes her obsessed by the fear of death. Guided by this fear her psyche loses grip of her own central position. The tragic end of the novel shows the condition of the modern woman entrapped in suppressed codes of patriarchy and the individual exceptions.

Her second novel *Voices in the City* (1965) depicts the miserable plight of protagonist Monisha, her brother Nirode and her sister Amla who live in the city of Calcutta. In this novel Desai portrays the failures of a Bengali youth Nirode, the troubled life of protagonist Monisha, the commercial art of Amla and the indifferent attitude of their mother. In both the novels, the novelist points out the theme of alienation, marital disharmony, psychic disorder and a lack of communication. The female protagonists like Maya, Amla and Monisha have something lacking as they cannot survive in the existed society.

Female protagonist Monisha, in the novel *Voices in the City* (1965) finds loneliness and privacy in order to be her own self. She is oppressed by a sense of claustrophobia and longs to be free. Even her most private self is not spared by the members of the joint family. Love has no place in her relationship with her husband, Jiban. For her love is only a condition of conscience. She feels desperate and finds her life an enigma of passion and pain. She never arrives at a solution. She desires to be complete and fulfill confronted by uncondusive atmosphere. Monisha turns inward and realizes that alone she can feel better. The gulf between expectations and reality throttles her. She withdraws herself from her private world where darkness is the natural element. She feels like a caged bird. Sleep cannot comfort her. The loneliness and the rejection of the uncongenial external world are the characteristic features of Monisha's life. With the frustrated mind Monisha rushes to her room with a tin of kerosene, she pours it over herself and sets fire. According to Meena Belliappa, "Monisha's suicide is as much the result of her morbid nature and emotional sufficiency as the result of her uncongenial surroundings." Thus, through this novel Desai portrays the agony that a sensitive soul experiences in its quest for meaning and fulfillment in a hostile world.

Bye-Bye Black Bird (1971) is the third novel of Anita Desai. It depicts the plight of Indian immigrants in London. The novel is divided into three parts: 'Arrival', 'Discovery'

and 'Recognition and Departure'. The representative characters are Adit, Dev and Sarah. Protagonist Dev arrives in England for higher studies, stays with Adit and Sarah. Through the mingling of Eastern and Western characters, Anita Desai projects the love-hate relationship between the East and West in this novel. The intercultural marriage of Adit and Sarah has successfully portrayed. Adit's displacement and Sarah's intercultural or international marriage makes both of them uprooted. The novel *Bye-Bye Black Bird* is structured from Indian point of view, and it lights on European attitude towards Indians. The contrasted reactions of same native holder towards the foreign land and the native land, their sense of affection and aloofness, hanging between two cultures are pictured in the novel. The blackbird's feeling of an unwelcome tone in England and the tensions arising out of an alien atmosphere are faithfully described in this novel.

Her next novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975) is about marital disharmony, alienation and lack of communication. It describes the tension between a sensitive wife Sita, the protagonist of the novel and the rational husband Raman. The novel is divided into three parts. Each part of this novel is concerned with a particular season, time and space. The story of the novel is about female protagonist Sita who has already four children and now she is seven months pregnant. She is now reluctant to deliver off to abort the fifth child. This time Sita wants to retain it in her womb because of her fire of violence in the world. She goes to the island of Manori, instead of living a peaceful life. She gets alienated there. Finally she re-establishes her contacts with the soil.

In this novel Anita Desai dramatizes two opposite conflicts. The protagonist, Sita is a nervous, sensitive, middle aged woman who finds herself alienated from her husband and children. Her sense of alienation is because of her emotional imbalances. She feels dullness, boredom and darkness in every individual. Here, female protagonist Sita intensifies her desire to recapture the experience and excitement. She is in dilemma to decide as to where

she should go that summer. Here Desai cleverly describes the very sensitive girl Sita and her marriage with Raman; both are diverse in their attitude like Maya and Gautama in *Cry, the Peacock*. However, novelist leaves the positive note in the novel. Unlike Maya and Monisha, Sita tries to adjust existing circumstances.

Desai's Sahitya Akademi award-winning novel, *Fire on the Mountain* is published in 1977 in England. It also won the the Royal Society of Literature's Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize. The novel is divided into three parts. The novel presents unhappy lives of the three women: Nanda Kaul, Ila Das and Raka. In this novel Desai describes female protagonist Nanda Kaul's motherly feelings of humiliation and desolation for life time alienation. Raka is bewildered when she finds her home completely shattered because of her father's continuous habit of drinking. Her mother visiting various nursing homes and she herself suffers several nervous breakdowns.

In this novel female protagonist Nanda Kaul lives in summer villa in the foothills of Himalayas, after the death of her husband, a University Vice Chancellor. Now she has put down herself totally from the world and wants to remain alone and nothing else. Both the female protagonists Nanda Kaul and her great granddaughter Raka attempt to live together avoiding each other, but the total seclusion of Raka brings a sort of self realization and metamorphosis in Nanda's attitude, and she begins to woo Raka with long stories about her imaginary childhood. Raka is so wary that she cannot be caught.

Ila Das is Nanda's childhood friend, a humorous unmarried woman. Her life represents another aspect of movement. Her barren unfulfilled life is contrary to that of Nanda Kaul. There is an irony in her tragic death. We are caught in a situation where there is no escape. This grim reality of Ila Das's rape and murder completely shatters the unreality of Nanda Kaul's projected reverie. The fire light on the mountain stands for the funeral pyre that

at last consumes and ruins.....everything. Thus, in the novel loneliness and isolation play important role in the shaping of the characters.

Anita Desai's next novel *Clear Light of Day* is published in 1980. In the novel *Clear Light of Day (1980)* Desai wove the history of Delhi with a middle-class Hindu family. Bim (short for Bimal) Das, a history professor is the protagonist of the novel. In this novel Desai paints the backdrop of the major incidents exclusively with the support of the major characters- Bim, Meera Masi, Tara and Baba. The novel is set in old Delhi, and records the fast changes happening in a Hindu Family since 1947. Thus in this four dimensional masterpiece, a family life moves backwards and forwards in a fixed span of time.

When Anita Desai was in Thul, near Alibagh, Mumbai for weekends with her children, she set her novel *The Village by the Sea*. It is published in London in 1982. Here, Desai develops the story of Lila (13) and her brother Hari (12). They have very bad days in their days they look after their younger sister. Their father is unemployed and dipsomaniac and mother is ill. In this situation they find it difficult to manage the household. While Lila stays at home, Hari goes to Bombay and he works as a boy-servant in a hotel. Mr. Panwala, a kind watch mender, inspires Hari and trains him in repairing watches. Lila transforms her father's old habit of drinking. Her father starts looking after his ailing wife. Towards the end Hari plans to set up a watch-mending shop in Thul. Thus the novel *Village by the Sea (1982)* describes the situation of how Hari survives in Bombay city and how his sisters suffer silently the problems at home.

In the booker Prize nominated novel *In Custody (1984)* Desai focuses on the existential dilemma of a protagonist Deven. He is a lecturer in Hindi at Lal Ram Lal College in Mirpore. He is very ambitious man and has a great interest in Urdu poetry. He is simple, direct, meek, sober man. He is unable to estimate other's crude schemes and he is also

unable to distinguish between good and bad people. But he is very sensitive, honest and aware of his domestic responsibilities. He has a wife, Sarala and a son, Nanu in his family. Murad is Deven's friend, and he is very cunning fellow.

In this novel, Anita Desai attempts to study the helpless nature of male protagonist Deven due to poverty, helplessness and lack of initiative. In this novel Desai transcribes the madness of Deven and his search for the safety of his little world. Deven has mediocrity and empty dreams. On persuasion of his friend Murad he interviews a great poet Nur in Delhi. Between his boyish expectations, and Nur's grim reality he discovers a new lease of life, dignity and the way to fulfillment of his dreams. Thus, in this novel, novelist Anita Desai exhibits male protagonist's existential anxiety and dilemma.

Anita Desai's *Baumgartner's Bombay* appeared in 1987 which portrays loneliness and alienation of immigrant existential predicament. It is a story of protagonist Hugo Baumgartner. He is a simple and submissive Jew. In this novel Desai narrates the life of Hugo Baumgartner from his childhood days in Germany to his death at old age of seventy in India. Baumgartner come India for two reasons. Firstly his father's business dwindles and he becomes bankrupt. Secondly, there is no security within the family and life is also insecure due to Hitler's rule. Even in India he is betrayed by his friends Habibullah and Chimanla's sons. In Kolkata he falls in love with a German cabaret dancer, Cotte but refuses to marry her. Baumgartner does not like the human company. So he prefers to live with his cats in a dark, dingy and shabby flat behind the Taj Hotel of Bombay. At last his boy Kurf kills Hugo and runs away with his trophies. Thus, in this novel Desai shows how absurd life comes to a futile end, and how one's existence remains from nowhere to nowhere.

Her next novel *Journey to Ithaca* is published in 1995. The title of the novel highly embarks on a journey to India with her husband, Matteo in order to gain cultural and spiritual

knowledge. Thus, the novel *Journey to Ithaca* revolves around existential predicament of the characters and indicates that the quest for journey is more important than the goal of life

The novel *Fasting, Feasting* is published in 1999. It is nominated for Boker Prize 1999, unfortunately Anita Desai missed it second time and the prize went to Coetzee for *Disgrace*. In this novel, Desai tries to recapture the family of two different cultures. The novel presents two extremes: one is fasting and the other is feasting. One deals with Indian life and other with the American life. Thus, the novel *Fasting, Feasting* pictures the cultural conflict by contradictory life style of well settled Indian middle class family and ill adjusted Indian emigrant in America.

Her latest novel *The Zig-Zag way* (2004) has the theme of psychic chaos and displacement. Thus, Anita Desai's all the novel articulates various themes, techniques and styles of Indian writing in English.

As a novelist Anita Desai herself admits that her novels are not populated by heroic characters, whether male or female, at least in the traditional sense. Her female protagonists are marked by certain passivity and have been criticized as being swept away by historical and social forces rather than being able to face and control them. Yet, Desai claims that 'my characters that appear like losers, victims show a kind of heroism, of survival. I think if you can come through the experience of life with the heart and mind intact, without compromising yourself, which to me is a heroic act that needs to be celebrated'. In spite of the heroic nuances of these survivals, Desai's characters often meet tragic endings. Desai portrays a fictional world where, according to her own definition, 'History is a kind of juggernaut' which completely drives over characters without mercy.

As a story writer, she has published a collection of stories under the title *Games at Twilight and Other Stories* (1978). In her volume Anita Desai deals with urban milieu. She

tries to capture the unique atmosphere of Indian cities. She deals with the main characters that are children, tutors, artists, housewives, musicians, old men and even foreign characters such as American. This volume contains eleven stories.

The first story of the volume entitled *Games at Twilight* is a study in child psychology. Ravi and Raghu are the protagonists of this story. They played the game hide and seek together at twilight. Ravi hides himself cleverly in the garage and through a crack slides into the shed where presence of crawling moths and insects revolt him. Ravi is secure; Raghu whistles and whacks his stick in vain. Ravi wishes 'laurels' of 'victory' to "defeat Raghu" the football 'champion'. Through this story Desai presents the silliness of children's notions of victory and defeat.

Her next story '*Private Tuition*' by Mr. Bose depicts another human situation of subtle psychological insight. The story portrays the pathetic condition of Mr. Bose, protagonist of the story. Mr. Bose's tuitions, undertaken to relieve the family of financial hardships, come in the way of his family joy and create awkwardness. Mr. Bose had to teach his weekly and daily pupils at a place where from his wife's activities in the kitchen are heard and the wife is encumbered with cooking also pacifying the child lest her should, by crying, divert the father's mind from his teaching.

'*Studies in Park*' focuses on the plight of a student in a family wherein father listens to the news in six languages, mother keeps on cluttering in the kitchen, constantly pressing her glass of sugared milk on the student, children disturbing; tap slashing always. Suno is the protagonist of the story, who is busy in hectic preparations for his I.A. (Indian Administrative) examinations. Through this story Desai shows how students face the difficult situation to study. Desai also focuses the female's role in her house.

'Surface Textures' is a study of the low spirits "evasiveness and pusillanimity" of Harish a supply office clerk, living with wife and children, shirking his duty in the office and at home. He neglects his office duty deliberately and he is working to achieve dismal to become a swami for worshipping and being worshipped. He is dismissed from his duty and his house is evicted and his wife with children goes to her father. Thus, Anita Desai implicitly condemns the cowardliness and irresponsibility of the conduct of Harish whose sainthood prospers on the grave of his family happiness and dignity.

'Sale' is a short story giving account of the plight of an artist whose painting does not sell. The artist's privacy and peace is violated by three bullying visitors who pretend to like his paintings and have apparently come for purchase. The poor artist pleads for the high quality of his imaginative and creative pictures in vain. Thus the title is fully ironical sarcastic because the sale never takes place.

'Pineapple cake' is a short dealing with Mrs. Fernandez's assurance to her son for a pineapple cake if he behaves in a church service at the wedding of Carmen Maria of Goa and de Millo of Bombay. Here we see an undercurrent of irony sarcasm in mother's assurance.

'The Accompanist' is the story of devotion of Mr. Misra the protagonist and the Tanpura player to his master Ustad Rahim Khan, a famous musician. He picked up the boy Misra as a Tanpura player at the age of fifteen and who has served him for fifteen years by now. The accompanist was trained, as a boy, to play at different musical instruments by his father, a musical instrument maker, who realized that the son could only be a player and not a great musician. He sent the boy with a Tanpura to Ustad Rahim Khan who made him a life-long accompanist. The relationship between the accompanist and Ustad Rahim Khan is that of love and adoration. Thus in the short story Anita Desai studies the teacher taught, the worshipper and the worshipped relationship.

"*A Devoted Son*" is the story of Dr. Rakesh's success as a physician and director of a hospital and working in his own clinic in his father's house who retires as a kerosene dealer's assistant. Dr. Rakesh was a very devoted son, all along, to his mother and also father touching their feet and taking every care of them with systematic uniformity. The son tyrannizes the father with dieting and powders and pills and medicines of all variety. Sweets, fried things, precious food items are taken off the chart of diet for the health of the father. But the father feels starved. Here Desai points out the conflict between the father and son's attitudes to life. The son wants the father to be healthy and live longer, the father to be healthy and live longer, the father finds such life totally burdensome when even relishing food cannot be had and is ready to part with such torture as life and health.

"*The Farewell Party*" is a story of the exaggerated warmth of guests for Ramans at a farewell party offered by the Ramans on his promotion in the Indian Mercantile Company manufacturing cigarettes.

"*Pigeons at Daybreak*" is the story of Amul Basu's asthmatic troubles, real as well as imagined and his wife Otima Basu's tending him. Otima has to find time, amid domestic botherations, to read newspaper to him. Here Desai shows the true picture of Indian women as she shows in her novels. Birds have always been symbols of release and freedom in Anita Desai. Here the pigeons have the added glamour of association with hope and joy of life. The tale gives fine insight into the valetudinarian mentality of Amul Basu.

"*Scholar and Gypsy*" is a story of an American couple visiting India, David the American husband being a scholar of sociology and Pat, his lady being an "American globe trotter." The story focuses on their temperamental disparity right from the beginning with David considering Bombay people modernized and Pat finding them very primitive.

Thus Anita Desai skilled novelist and short story writer records faithfully the likes, dislikes, vanities, prejudices, loyalties, eccentricities and jealousies of the human mind in her larger as well as shorter fiction. Her short stories also reveal the pathetic and heartening condition of protagonists as we see in her novels.

An Overview of the relevant critical literature:

A lot of critical work has been done on Anita Desai. Most of the critics such as Shyam Asnani, Prof. R.S.Sharma, Usha Bande, Dr. R.K. Shrivastava, Meena Bellippa, B. Ramchandara Rao, Prof. C.P.Singh, Kunj Bala Goel, Usha Pathania, Anjali Sharma, J.P.Tripathi and R.A. Sing explored various linguistic and thematic aspects of Anita Desai's novels through their books.

Shyam M. Asnani, in his famous book, *Perspectives on Anita Desai* (1984) deals with adrift and wandering of Protagonists of Anita Desai. He also points out the frustrated world of prominent characters with reference to her novels like *Bye Bye Blackbird* (1977) and *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975). Prof. R.S. Sharma depicts the alienated and frustrated youth and female characters in his famous book *Anita Desai* (1981). He also explores the reasons of frustration and alienation of her characters.

Usha Bande in *The Novels of Anita Desai: A Study in Character and Conflict* (1988) depicts the crucial conflict of her prominent characters with reference to various novels of Anita Desai. Dr. R.K. Shrivastava, in his book *Achievements on Anita Desai* (1984) analyses her language. He remarks that her language is consciously experimental. He also compares her language with Mulk Raj Anand and Bhabhani Bhattacharya.

Meena Bellippa in '*Anita Desai: A Study*' (1971) demonstrates the alienated characters in her novels. She also focuses on man woman relationship in her novels.

Emotional instability of heroine in *Cry the Peacock* and *Voices in the City* is the issue of B. Ramchandra Rao's book, *The Novels of Anita Desai*. (1987).

Minds and moods are analyzed of various characters with reference to *Cry the Peacock* (1963) and *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1971) by R. S. Sharma in *Anita Desai: A Study* (1981). Prof. C.P. Singh shows the exile, alienation and fragmentation of the prominent character in *Bye Bye Blackbird* in his famous book, *The Visitor and Exile: A Study in Anita Desai's Bye Bye Blackbird* (1983).

Kunj Bala Geol in the book *Language and Theme in Anita Desai's fiction* (1989) analyses the language and shows her experimental use of language. She also studies Anita Desai's novels thematically. She points out loneliness, barrenness and starkness of her characters. Usha Pathania makes comparative study of fictions of *Anita Desai and Kamala Markendaya*. (1981).

Kajali Sharma makes a study of symbols used by Anita Desai to show the dilemma and barrenness of her characters. Sharma demonstrates that Desai uses 'dust' as symbol to show pessimism in her female characters in *Symbols in Anita Desai's Novels* (1991). J.P. Tripathi focuses on the mind and psyche of Anita Desai's characters in *The Mind and Art of Anita Desai* (1986). And R.A. Sing in his book, *The Existential Characters of Anita Desai and Arun Joshi* (1991) analyses and compares existentialism depicted by Desai and Joshi in their novels.

In spite of these studies, numbers of research articles also have been written by foreign as well as Indian critics. However, there is no comprehensive study dealing with the study of female protagonists in her three novels together. This research will prove useful for the research scholars and research students. It will add new dimension to Indian English Literature.

Search for identity of female protagonist: Theory

The etymology of the word 'protagonist' is in the Greece when drama was performed on the stage with chorus in 2nd B.C. At that time, the drama was in verse and it was performed and sung by the chorus like religious rituals. The main character who performs the action as per the singing of the chorus became 'protagonist'.

According to Oxford English Dictionary, a protagonist is the main character of a literary, theatrical, cinematic, or musical narrative, which ends up in conflict because of the antagonist and with whom the audience is intended to most identify.

In the theatre to most identify, actors played all of the main dramatic roles in a tragedy; the leading role was played by the protagonist, while the other roles were played by deuteragonist and the tritagonist.

The terms protagonist and main character are slightly different concepts. In fiction, the story of the protagonist may be told from the perspective of a different character. Often, the protagonist in a narrative is also the same person as the focal character, though the two terms are distinct. The character is a person who performs the actions on the stage or in the novel or it may be in any literary work.

The principal opponent of the protagonist is a character known as the antagonist, who creates obstacles on the path of the protagonist that the protagonist overcome.

When the work contains subplots, they have different protagonists from the main plot. In some novels, due to multiple plots protagonist may impossible to identify. As we see in Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *The First Circle*, depicting a variety of characters imprisoned and living in a gulag camp. Another example is Leo. Tolstoy's *War and Peace* that depicts 15 major characters involved in or affected by a war.

Thus, in short we can say that protagonist is the focal character in the narrative. Protagonist may be male or female. If male character is focal character in a narrative, it is male protagonist and if female character is focal character in a narrative we say it is female protagonist of the narrative. In this context present study tries to search for identity of female protagonist in post independence Indian English fiction

Much of the world's literature has dominated by male superiority and it dismissed women's writing more than two centuries ago. This exclusion has helped to establish women's writing in mainstream culture. Of course Indian English literature is not exception to this. If we think about world's literature, women are subjected as other norm. Characters of women sketched by male writers are submissive. They show female is inferior to male. There we see much scope to male protagonist than female protagonist in their work of art. Thus women writers came forward and they developed their own literature. Women writers sketched their female protagonists in their own way. In Indian English literature we find such change.

The Hindu moral code known as The Laws of Manu denies woman an existence apart from that of her husband or his family. Since the publication of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Rajmohan's wife* a significant number of authors have portrayed Indian women as long-suffering wives and mothers silenced by patriarchy.

In mythical terms, the dominant feminine prototype is the chaste, patient, self-denying wife, Sita, supported by other figures such as Savitri, Draupadi and Gandhari. When working on these narratives silence is a useful guide to interpret women's responses to patriarchal hegemony.

The image of female protagonist in Indian English fiction has undergone a change during the last decades. Women writers have moved away from traditional portrayals

of enduring, self-sacrificing women towards conflicted female protagonist searching for identity, no longer characterized and defined simply in terms of their victim status.

Indian women novelists have given a new dimension to the Indian English literature. Indian English literature has developed over a period of time. It portrays a world that has in it women rich in substance. The female protagonists have the own identity. Female protagonists of these novels make relationship to their surroundings, their society, their men, their children, their families, their mental make-ups and they themselves.

In post independence Indian English literature, women's writing was considered as a powerful medium of modernism and feminist statements. Authors like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Kamala Das, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De, Arundhati Roy, and Anita Nair have witnessed phenomenal success in feminist writing of Indian English literature.

Author like Kamala Markandaya, Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai have chosen the problems and issues faced by the women in today's world as the main theme of their books. For instance Anita Desai in her novels like *Cry, the Peacock*, *Voices in the City*, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, *Bye-Bye Black Bird*, *Fire on the Mountain*, presents the image of suffering woman. Her female protagonists, such as, Maya, Monisha, Sita, Amala, Raka, Nanda Kaul became the victim of male dominated society. They are searching their own identity as a human being.

Besides these writers, many Indian women novelists have explored female subjectivity through their female protagonists in order to establish an identity that is not imposed by a patriarchal society. Santha Rana Rau *Remember the House* (1956), Ruth Prasad Jhabvala's first novel *To Whom She Will* (1955) and her later novel *Heat and Dust*

(1975) which was awarded the Booker prize. Kamala Markandaya's *Two Virgins* (1973), Shobha De's *Socialite Evenings* (1989) are good examples.

Post Rusdie Indian English novel emerges the image of the new women and their struggles for and identity of their own. The female protagonists of this period are self confident, and they are aware about their personal and social issues. Nayantara Sahgal's *Richa in Like Us* (1986), Rama Mehta's *Inside the Haveli* (1977), Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992) are well known examples.

Thus, the journey of female protagonist, in Indian English fiction, starts from Bankim Chandra Chatterji's *Rajmohan's Wife* till the end of this decade. By the optimistic efforts of the women novelists, they transformed an old image of the female protagonist, as they are substitute, inferior, secondary and typical religious woman in the works of male novelists. Today, we see there is an important place to female protagonist in the work of art created by women novelists.

Anita Desai's artistic skill has been honored by numerous prizes and awards from both India and America. In 1978, she was awarded 'National Academy of Letters Award' for her novel *Fire on the Mountain*. In 1983 she was awarded the 'Guardian Prize for Children's fiction' for *The Village by the Sea*, an adventurous fairy tale about a young boy diving in a small fishing village in India. She was awarded the 'Literary Lion Award' in 1993 and has also been named Heler Cam visiting fellow, Ashby fellow and honorary fellow of the University of Cambridge. She was shortlisted for prestigious Booker Prize three times. She also received 'Padmashri' award in 1990 by Indian Government. In 2000 she was awarded 'Alberto Moravia Prize' for Literature and in 2003 'Benson Medal of Royal Society' of literature. Besides this Anita Desai was a member of Advisory Board for English of the National Academy of Letters in Delhi. Moreover, she was a member of the American

Academy of Arts and Letters. Anita Desai was a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in London.

Hypothesis:

The novels of Anita Desai are rich with female protagonists. They play dominant role and cover the major canvass of the novels.

Aims and objectives:

- i. To study and analyze psychological bearings in Anita Desai's fiction.
- ii. Make the analysis of female protagonists in the fiction under study.
- iii. To perceive feminist consciousness in her fiction.
- iv. To provide comprehensive critical statement on the discoveries revealed through the novels.

Methodology:

The present study primarily adapts analytical, interpretative, evaluative and also comparative methods to study the female protagonists in the select novels of Anita Desai. In order to state critical views, the theories like modernism, psychoanalysis, feminism have been taken into consideration. The literary critics like Shyam Asnani, Prof. R.S.Sharma, Usha Bande, Dr. R.K. Shrivastava, Meena Bellippa, B. Ramchandara Rao, Prof. C.P.Singh, Kunj Bala Goel, Usha Pathania, Anjali Sharma, J.P.Tripathi and R.A. Sing Jasbir Jain, Uma Banerjee etc are referred for the study.

Similarly, Barr Khardekar Library, Shivaji University, Kolhapur, Library of Arts and Commerce College Vaduj (Satara), Library of Radhanagari Mahavidyalay Radhanagari (Kolhapur) and Library of Shahu College, Kolhapur have been consulted.