



**CHAPTER – I**

**ANITA DESAI :**

**A WRITER IN HER MAKING,**

**INTRODUCTION**

## **Anita Desai : A writer in her making**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **I**

Though the literary forms such as lyric, epic, drama and short story have a long history of centuries, the novel as a form of literature developed in India recently. Since the publication of *Rajmohan's Wife* by Bankimchandra Chatterjee in 1864, the novel as a literary form began to flourish in India. However, earlier the writers like Bana and Subandhu used such kind of a form to write novels in Sanskrit. Bana's *Kadambari* is the best example of this development.

The nineteenth century proved to be important in the life of the Indians. There was a great impact of the western culture and philosophy on the minds of the people – learning began to take place. Slowly the English language became the important language in India. Through the study of English language people began to read the literature and it paved many Indians a way to the study of the world literature. Naturally translations of the master works began to appear in India. It certainly helped writers to follow the

pattern for their writings. Most of them got the inspiration from these translations. Though translations of the novels were easily available, the Indian writers began to produce novels in English.

The first novel in English in India appeared in 1864. Bankimchandra Chatterjee wrote his *Rajmohan's Wife* in 1864. Later some Bengali novels appeared in translation in English. Bankimchandra Chatterjee wrote about the middleclass families and their problem. His *The Poison Tree* reveals his concern more explicitly.

Meanwhile, Raj Laxmi Devi's *The Hindi Wife* (1876), Toru Datta's *Bianca* (1878), Kali Krishna Lahiri's *Roshinara* (1881), H. Datt's *Bijay Chand* (1888) and Kshetrapal Chakravarti's *Sarata and Hingana* (1895) were published. These novels, written in English have historical interest.

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee was a master of romantic as well as historical novels. He was also humorous writer. In both "The Poison Tree" and "Krishakanta's Will", there is a story of a married man who falls in love with a young widow. Generally, the sad plight of the widow in Hindu joint family, in Indian society is the

distinct feature of Indian fiction. Perhaps inspired by Todd's writings Bankimchandra Chatterjee wrote his novels. *Anandmath* (1882) is his popular novel. He became the pride of the nation when his *Bande Mataram* appeared. Bankimchandra Chatterjee was a gifted novelist. Sarat Chandra Chatterjee (1876-1938) also imitated Bankim in the Beginning. Sarat Chandra Chatterjee is known as a realistic novelist. He depicted the tears and sweat of the lower middle class people.

Before 1947 the English models were used by the Indians and after the independence they turned their attention towards American and European models. Before the independence the writers turned their attention towards the past. They began to glorify the past. Further the sex and crime began to appear as the theme of the novel. After the independence the Indian novelists used the theme of freedom. The novelists were also aware of corruption, inefficiency, poverty and misery in the Indian society.

It is a delight to note that the novel is a living and evolving literary genre. The novel written in the spoken languages of the people is rather more enterprising, richer in content. Nirad C.

Chaudhari has advanced the ingenious theory that, for the Aryans in India, the ' river cult ' is a symbol of their pre-Indian existence. The river background is found in many Indian novels. Humayun Kabir's *Men and River* (1945) is with its action on the banks of the Padma river. R.K. Narayan's novels centered in Malgudi-on-Sarayu. In Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* the river Hemavathy is a person and a presence and in his *The Serpent and the Rope*, the Ganges is a goddess almost.

There are some writers who dealt with the social and historical things in their novels. Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and Manohar Malgaokar deal with the social problems while T Ramkrishna dealt with history. Ramesh Chandra Dutt's *The Slave Girl of Agra* (1909) and Sir Jogendra Singh's *Nur Jahan* (1909) are historical romances.

R.K. Narayan, Bhabani Bhattacharya in their novels depict the mounting frustration and misery after the second world war. Khushwant Singh, Balachandra and Malgaonkar projected the horror in their novels. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956),

Balachandra Rajan's *The Dark Dancer* (1959), and Manohar Malgaonkar's *Distant Drums* are novels of partition horrors.

## II

### Women Novelists

Some women writers made the most significant contributions to the growth of the English novel. Jane Austen, George Eliot, The Brontes, Mrs. Gaskell, Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf have established their own 'great tradition'. Torulata (Toru Datt) wrote a French and an English novel at the age of 21. Other women writers too have since made their mark in Indian fiction in English.

Though Toru Datt was precocious, she had also limitations. The memory of the death of her brother and her sister, Aru, seeped into her sensibility. Her two novels *Bianca, or The young Spanish Maiden* and *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers* are autobiographical projections. Raj Lakshmi Debi's *The Hindu Wife* or *The Enchanted Fruit* (1876) and Mrs. Krupabai Sattianadhan's *Kamala*, *A story of Hindu life* (1894) and *Saguna, A Story of*

*Native Christian life* (1895) are early novels in Indian English literature.

After the second world war, The Indian women novelists found new track , a new dimension for their novels. They began to enrich the Indian fiction in English. Of these writers Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, and Nayantara Sahgal are the chief novelists of this period. Kamala Markandaya's first novel, *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) made her a lovable writer. Markandaya takes us to the heart of a South Indian or Tamil Nadu village, where life has apparently not been changed for a thousand years Markandaya emphasises that fear, hunger, suffering and despair are the continuous companions of the peasants. Markandya's other novels which earned admiration in India and abroad are, *Some Inner Fury, A Silence of Desire, A Handful of Rice & The Nowhere Man*. In all these novels Markandaya has dealt with the common theme of East-West encounter and the women in different life roles.

Ruth Praver Jhabvala is the significant contributor to Indo-Anglican fiction. Born of English. Later she married an Indian &

lived in India more than twenty four years . She dealt with two important subjects: The first she described the urban middle class Hindu family with an average domestic problems & secondly the conflicts between the western & eastern attitudes. She focused her glance at the upper Class North Indian people who are ardent, sensuous and emotional. She portrays the day today life in her novels. She published six novels so far - *To whom She will* (1955), *The Nature of Passion* (1966), *Esmond in India* (1958), *The House Holder* (1966), *Get Ready for Battle* (1962) and *A Backward Place* (1965).

Nayantara Sahgal is basically a novelist of politics. Her novels are admired for simplicity and boldness. She discusses about the latest political ups and downs with the tinge of occidental liberalism. She holds the mirror against the contemporary Indian Political theme. Besides politics, she describes Indian women's search for sexual freedom. *A Times to be Happy*, *This Time of Morning*, *The Day in Shadow* and *A Situation in New Delhi* are Nayantara Sahgal's well known novels.



Shashi Deshpandey's, *The Dark Holds no Terror*, *The binding Vine*, *That Long Silence* are her good novels.

Shashi Deshpandey in her novels deals with the pathetic and heart rendering plight of women in a male dominated society. Shobha De, a modern novelist is famous for depicting the sexual aspect of the commercial world in a straight forward way. *Socialite Evening*, *Starry Nights*, *Sisters*, *Sultry Days*, *Serving Men* and *Speed Post* are her novels.

Mahasweta Devi is the winner of *Jananpeeth* and *Megasassy* Awards for her novel, *Mother of 1084*, The novel deals with the psychological and emotional crisis of a mother whose son is lying dead in the police morgue. Manju Kapur, another woman novelist, is successful in winning the prestigious *Common Wealth Writers Prize*, for her novel *Difficult Daughters*. The novel deals with sadful married life of a woman. Arundhati Roy, a popular novelist, won the *Booker Prize* for autobiographical novel, *The God of Small Things*.

Miss Attia Husain's novel, *Sunlight on a broken Column* (1961) and her collection of short stories, *Phoenix Fled* (1953)

gave evidence of a talent for reminiscence and sensitive observation.

### III

Anita Desai gives a new dimension to the Indian English fiction. Anita Desai (nee Mazumdar) was born of German mother and Bengali father, in Mussoorie, on 24 June, 1937. Anita Desai one of the prominent Indian novelists and short story writers, belongs to the post-independence period. She is one of the most significant North-Indian women writers in English. She educated at Queen Mary's Higher Secondary School, New Delhi, Miranda House, Delhi University and passed B.A. in English literature in 1957. She married Ashvin Desia in 1958 and she has four children. Since 1972, she has been a member of the Sahitya Academy English Board. She is recipient of Royal Society of Literature Winfred Holtby Prize in 1978, Sahitya Academy Award 1979, Guardian Award for Children's book 1982. She was fellow of Royal Society of Literature.

By the age of seven or eight Anita Desai started writing. She has shown her interest in writing a short story from her childhood days. Further perhaps she decided to be a writer. She can speak German, Bengali and Hindi, besides English quite fluently and therefore she decided to write in English.

Meenakshi Mukharjee observes :

" Anita Desai is a rare example of an Indo-Anglican writer achieves that difficult task of bending English language to her purpose without either a self-conscious attempt of sounding Indian or seeking the anonymous elegance of public school English <sup>1</sup>

Anita Desai is influenced by Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence, Henry James, Dostoevsky, Emile Bronte, Rimand and Hopkins. Not much is known about her life. But from various sources and her interviews, one can frame a life sketch of Anita Desai, as a person and as a writer.

Anita Desai Says :

"I confess I can afraid of peaking out about the art of writing, the mechanics of my craft. I have an intuitive and

deep fear that by speaking of something subterranean and sub-conscious, I will destroy it, it is something so frail"<sup>2</sup>

As a writer she appeared on the Indian literary horizon in the year 1963. She proved herself as a novelist by publishing her first novel *Cry, The Peacock* (London 1963 and Calcutta 1964). This novel was admired by the readers and critics. Her second novel *Voices in the City* (1965) published as a serial in *The Illustrated Weekly of India* ( in the year 1965) Then she wrote eight novels, so far, *Bye - Bye, Block Bird* (1971) --- set in London..., *Where Shall We Go this Summer ?* (1975),... Set in Mumbai and off that coast..., *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) ... set at Simla Hills, *Clear Light of Day* (1980), *The village by the Sea* ( 1982 ), *In Custody* (1985 ) and *Baumgartner's Bombay*(1988), *Fasting Feast* (1999). This last novel published recently, has been treated as a landmark in the history of Indian English fiction. She won the Sahitya Academy Award for her fifth novel, *Fire on the Mountain*. This novel was nominated for Booker Prize twice. She has two books for children on her credit such as *The Peacock Garden* (1974 ); *Can on a Houseboat* (1976 ).

Anita Desai is the most popular short story writer. She published a collection of her short stories under the title, *Games at Twilight and other stories* (1978). There are eleven stories in this volume. Anita Desai's other stories are published in different periodicals and magazines. They are : "Circus Cat Ally Cat" (Delhi : Thought, 1957), "How Gentle is the Mist " (*The Illustrated Weekly of India* 1958), "Grand Mother" (Calcutta, *Writers Workshop Miscellany*, 1959), "Tea with Maharani" (London : Envy, 1959).

Anita Desai is one of the most distinguished among the younger group of Indo-English writers. With her ten novels so far and a collection of short stories she gives a new shape to the Indian -English novel. Unlike other women novelists Anita Desai does not deal with the social, political or moral problems. She concentrates her mind on the character. She says :

" Writing is to me a process of discovering the truth that is the nine-tenth of his ice-berg that lies submerged beneath the one-tenth visible portion we call reality. Writing is my way of plunging to the depth and exploring this underlying truth.

All my writing is an effort to discover to underline and convey the true significance of things..."<sup>3</sup>

It seems that Anita Desai's notion of life may have been greatly influenced by Virginia Woolf. According to her :

" Literature should deal with more enduring matters less temporary and less tempered than politics. It should deal with life and with death. It should be too ironical and also too mystical to accept the world at face value and regard it as the whole or the only truth. "<sup>4</sup>

As a writer, Anita Desai is interested in peculiar and eccentric characters rather than everyday common people. She does not portray her characters in traditional manner. She creates people with " dreams and wills " <sup>5</sup>

Anita Desai writes in a very complex way. As Prof. D.S. Maini has pointed out :

"She does not explore the metaphysical and extential ramification of the problem." and in her writings "Loneliness is chiefly a lyric emotion, innocent of Philosophical Significance " <sup>6</sup>

Anita Desai plunges into the innermost depths of the human psyche to fathom the inner turmoil and the chaos inside the mind.

In her "Replies to the Questionnaire", Anita Desai replies :

"My writing is an effort to discover, underline and convey the significance of things. I must seize upon their incomplete and seemingly meaning less mass of reality around me and try and discover its significance by plunging below the surface and plunging the depth till they become a more lucid, brilliant and explicable reflection of the visible world".<sup>7</sup>

She has a strong imaginative power and her observation of woman's mind is very keen. She has a sharp awareness of life. Her structuring of the pattern indicates her true craftsmanship. Regarding her style, the reviewers reacted in her favour, which follows :

"She writes an extra-ordinary delicate, lucid English which puts many English writers to shame".<sup>8</sup>

She has created an inner world of sensibility for her characters. Like other novelists Anita Desai is not interested in social or political affairs, or the visible action. Her thrust on the

inner life of the individual and wonderful fancies and flowing thoughts are perceptible in all her novels. Anita Desai's main theme, in the novels is the existential predicament of an individual which is embedded through incompatible couples. Her female protagonists suffer because of their acute sensitiveness, and ill-chosen husbands.

Anita Desai prefers the inner reality of the individual. The intention of her entire writing is to explore for herself and then to describe and convey the truth. She wants to differentiate between truth and reality. For this purpose she takes truth as synonymous of art, not of reality. She does not find discrepancy between the terms truth and reality.

"Reality is merely the one-tenth visible section of the iceberg that one sees above the surface of the ocean- Art the remaining nine-tenths 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." <sup>9</sup>

Of all Indian-English women writers, Anita Desai is the only writer who has discussed the art of fiction more forcibly and



comprehensively. Her art of characterization, social surrounding, selecting of themes, skill of narration and artistic vision are proves her to be the competent novelist in Indian English literature.

Thus Anita Desai secured reputation as a writer in Indian writing in English. The present dissertation intends to study the women characters as revealed by Anita Desai in her *Cry, The Peacock* (1963) , *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975) and *Fire on the Mountain* (1977).

I wish to classify my present work into the following Chapters.

- I Anita Desai : A Writer in her making, Introduction :
- II Maya : *Cry, The Peacock*
- III Sita : *Where shall We Go This Summer?*
- IV Nanda Kaul : *Fire on the Mountain*
- V Minor characters
- V Conclusion.