1. INTRODUCTION

Anita Desai has been a prolific writer and several articles have been written on her novels. All those books that are available will be reviewed and studied in detail. Anita Desai is an eminent contemporary Indian English woman writer of fiction. She has written on a variety of themes but a majority of them are based on women’s sufferings. Anita Desai has a unique inner approach to women psyche which she explores with careful sensitivity that shows her deep understanding of women’s problem in India. This study concentrates on the pivotal roles of female characters in her novels and their status in the intricate realm of her fiction writing. The study has contemporary relevance because it deals with issues that are representatives of contemporary reality. It is with this intention of honest social and psychological research of contemporary fiction that this study will be carried out. Indian English literature originated as a necessary outcome of the introduction of English education in India under colonial rule. In recent years, it has attracted widespread interest, both in India and abroad. It is now recognized that Indian English literature is not only part of Commonwealth literature, but also occupies a “great significance in the World literature.

“In psychology, psyche stands for the mind functioning as the centre of thought, emotion and behavior and consciously or unconsciously adjusting or mediating the body’s responses to the social and physical environment. A common trend runs through feminist groups that a male undermines a woman’s psyche by projecting her with patriarchal notions. Feminists want to represent feminist spirit and character in a completely different manner and thereby portraying various shades of feminine psyche.”

In the 19th century, more and more women actively participated in India’s reformist movement against the British rule. It again led to the women’s literature. Indian English writing started with authors like Sarojini Naidu. This great poetess charmed the readers with her writings. Feminism themes have also been used by authors like Nayantara Sahgal and Rama Mehta. Regional fiction also comprises popular names such as Bharati Mukherjee, Nergis Dalal, Krishna Sobti, Dina Mehta, Indira Goswami, Malati Chendur, Gauri Deshpande, Namita Gokhale. Novelists like Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai captured the spirit of Indian cultures and its traditional values. During the 1990’s India became a popular literary nation as a number of women authors made their debut in this era. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Suniti Namjoshi and
Anuradha Marwah Roy used realism as main theme of their novels. The list of Indian women novelists Ruth Jhabvala, Shobha De, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri and many more. “They have demonstrated that women are no longer shy, diffident, vulnerable and a willing prey or victim of male prejudices or tyranny.”

The novels of authors like Namita Gokhale or Shobha De are really out-spoken. Most of these female novelists are known for their bold views that are reflected in their novels. Basically, these are the novels of protest and an outburst of reservations and contaminations. Unlike the past, where the works of women novelists were given less priority and were actually undervalued, classification of feministic or male writings hardly makes any sense today. Majority of the Indian readers look for some "Indian-ness` in the write-ups. Only the women novelists of India are capable of conveying the messages of feminism in an Indian way.

“...the womanistic manifestations of Jhumpa Lahiri in her various works of fiction provide an insightful point of exploration Jhumpa Lahiri’s novel -The Namesake is a stunning example of feminism incorporating maternity that is both physical and cultural on the part of two protagonists, a mother, Ashima, and her son, Gogol, who, fittingly, searches for his own name and identity in Lahiri’s new womanist novel. Lahiri’s newer short story and novella collection,Unaccustomed Earth, repeats a maternal womanism, but to a quite different, even, at times, opposite effect, and again the physical and cultural maternity becomes a duty shared by female and male protagonists”.

“Lahiri’s technique of both raising awareness of the power of womanist maternity in the lives and actions of Indian- Bengali-American women is greatly aided by the representation of positive Indian and Indian-American men, often narrators of much of the story themselves, and this collaborative womanism greatly exemplifies even as it re-articulates a brand of womanism that is unique in Lahiri, Indian-American literary culture and womanism alike.”

Manju Kapur's woman characters reflect her views on the role or religion, tradition and myth in molding Indian women, as well as suggest a way to promote women’s right. Female protagonists in her novels show how the change is occurring in the image of the Indian women. Women like Virmati in Difficult Daughters, Nisha in Home and Astha in A Married Woman go against the stream of the traditional way of life and accept the new way with new ideology. All these women characters break the social conventions and emerge as new woman with independent ideology.
Nisha in Manju Kapur’s novel portrays her revolt against the male dominated system to find her own identity.

The female quest for identity is clearly observed in Shashi Deshpande’s novel- That Long Silence through the female protagonist, Jaya. She portrays the image of modern women who faces void and feel vacuum in their life. It shows that how the character Jaya tries to go against the social convention to fulfill her thirst for self identity. Shashi Deshpande uses first person narrative to register women’s protest against the male dominated society in the novel - That Long Silence. While in Anita Desai’s novels, the philosophy of existentialism and exploration of female psyche is presented through the struggle of women character’s predicaments which are imposed upon them by the contemporary male dominated society. The traditions of the male dominated society disturb their psyche and causes marital discord through the character of Ila Das in the Fire On The Mountain.

Since long, feminism has been used by the women novelists. Their novels reflect that the present age women have realized that she is not helpless and is not dependent. They feel that a woman is an equal competent just like a man.

These women writers say that feminism means putting an end to all the sufferings of a woman in silence. Authors like Kamala Markandaya, Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai have chosen the problems and issues faced by the women in today’s male dominated world as the main theme of their books. For instance, some of the novels of Anita Desai like ‘Voices in the City’ and ‘Where Shall We Go This Summer?’ she has portrayed the complexities between a man and woman relationship. She has tried to explore the psychological aspects of the lead protagonists.