LITERATURE REVIEW

As a researcher to analyze the history portrayed in Anita Desai’s novels will not inappropriate on the researcher’s part to project some light on the origin Indian English Fiction.

It is generally agreed that the novel is the most suitable literary form for the exploration of experiences and ideas in the context of our time and Indian English fiction occupies its proper place in the field of literature. There are critics and commentators in England and America who appreciate Indian English novels.

Prof. M.K. Naik remarks:
“….one of the most notable gifts of English education to India is prose fiction for though India was probably a fountain head of story-telling, the novel as we know today was an important from the West.”

It was in Bengal that a literary renaissance first manifested itself, but almost immediately afterwards its traces could be seen in Chennai, Mumbai and other parts of India. The first Indian English novel was Bankim Chandra Chatterji’s Raj Mohan’s Wife (1864). It was followed by Indian’s first political novel which gave them their National Anthem, “Vande Mataram.” Novels published between 1860s up to the end of Nineteenth century were written on social and few on historical issues. A Madhaviah and T. Ramakrishna Pillai, belonging to Madras presidency were two important contemporaries. Madhaviah wrote Satyananda (1909) while Ramakrishna Pillai wrote Padmini (1903). The impact of the far-reaching change on the Indian social and political scene can be seen in the novels of Mulk Raj Anand (untouchable (1935), R.k Narayan Swami And Friends (1935). In the modern era, Khushwant Singh came into the limelight as a crude realist with the publication of his Train To Pakistan (1956). An important feature of this period was the growth of Indian women novelists writing in English. Their appearance added a new dimension to Indian English novel. The dominant figures were Ruth Jhabvala, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal and Anita Desai. “Anita Desai, one of the literary luminaries of cotemporary Indian fiction writing in English, is the most prominent among the Indian English novelists who have tried to portray the tragedy of human souls trapped in the circumstances of life. She is more interested in the interior landscape of the mind than in political and social realities in her novels. Indian English fiction acquired a depth which it seldom had before.”

“Anita Desai’s work represents a unique blending of the Indian and the western. Her novels catch the bewilderment of the individual psyche confronted with the overbearing socio-cultural environment and the ever-beckoning modern promise of self-gratification and self-fulfilment. In the face of this dual onslaught, her protagonists, male or female Maya, Sita, Monisha and Amla; Sarah, Nanda and Raka; Bim and Tara; Devan, Baumgartner are seen poised rentalingly at different junctures of the philosophic spectrum.”

Dr. Sumitra Kukreti (2000)

“Anita Desai dives deep in the unconscious and sub-conscious psyche of the expatriates and reveals their nausea, nostalgia and longingness to their native land. Her depiction of character and situation is not one-sided and her protagonists seem to be cherishing a strange love-hate relationship with the land of their adoption. With great precision and brilliance, Adit, the chief protagonist is weighing the merits and demerits of this foreign land but at the close of the novel, he comes up with a conclusion when his English self was receiving and fading and dying—that to achieve their real self and to have a “real life” (204) he must go to India, his native place. Anita Desai’s Bye Bye Blackbird depicts circular journey of a soul searching for a perfect life as she feels that all these immigrants are prone to schizophrenia and predicament to live or not live in England.”

Dr. M. Rajeshwar (2000).

“Maya, the central character in Anita Desai’s Cry The Peacock is obsessed almost from the beginning of the novel with the gloomy prophecy of an Albino astrologer. According to the prophecy, she or her husband would die during the fourth year of her marriage. Her father dismisses the prophecy as nonsense and orders that it should be forgotten. Obeying his wish, Maya keeps the prophecy rigorously repressed in her unconscious until her marriage with Gautama enters the fourth year.”

Dr. S. P Swain (2000)

“From fire to light, Clear Light of the Day dwells on existentialist theme of time in relation to eternity. Existentialism which is basically concerned with the enduring human predicament in relation to unchanging human destiny has been the sole concern of Anita Desai. Desai quotes in the last pages of her novel a very significant line from Eliot’s Four Quartets: “Time the destroyer
It is time which brings about a change in the lives of the characters in the novel. The childhood intimacy of the four children—Tara, Bim, Raja and Baba is gradually lost as they grow older and become aware of their variegated dreams and aspirations. Anita Desai presents their polarities of personalities through images of sound and silence.”

Dr. M. Mani Meitei (2008)

“In her fourth novel, Where Shall We Go This Summer? (1975), Anita Desai presents an intense identity crisis of the central character Sita, a sensitive woman in her early forties. Unable to live in the strife-torn present, she is in the throes of identifying herself with the past, represented by her childhood on Manori island twenty years ago. The past becomes a psychic residue in her ‘personal unconscious’, the backdrop of her life and her obsessive preoccupation with it gives her the strength to leave her home, husband, two children and the urbanized life of Bombay for Manori island, where she thinks she would be able to live under a magic spell”:

“She saw that island illusion as a refuge, a protection. It would hold her baby safely unborn, by magic”.  

Dr. Kanwar D. Singh (2011)

“Anita Desai’s novel Baumgartners Bombay (1988) focuses on the vicissitudes, discrimination and persecution suffered by a person who is uprooted and supplanted away from one’s roots, thereby losing anchor and failing to get recognition and conviviality anywhere else. Hugo Baumgartner, the protagonist of the novel is forever in exile once he leaves his home/land. The notions of race and native land come out strongly in the delineation of Hugo.”

Dr. V Sreenathachary (2011)

“Like Virginia Woolf, Ania Desai’s preoccupation is with the inner world of sensibility rather than the outer world of action. She traces the impact of the outer events on the inner consciousness of the character. The emphasis is on the impact of sights and sounds and physical movements on the consciousness of her characters. To convey this stream of consciousness, she uses a style that is supple and suggestive and a language that is poetic. The use of symbols, therefore, becomes inevitable.”
Dr. K Suneetha Reddy & P Madhurima, 2011

“Anita Desai’s literary career began with her novel Cry the Peacock, in which she reveals the grim psychological battle fought in the mind of Maya. A study of her novel reveals that she uses fiction as a site for studying the role of women in society and thereby indirectly offer a critique of the existential social set up that marginalizes women” 15

Iphigene , 2011

“Sandwiched between these two is “Translator Translated,” an example of another of Ms. Desai’s preferred topics: literary and academic politics, which were also the subject of “In Custody,” a 1984 novel later made into a Merchant-Ivory film. Prema Joshi is a “prematurely aged” instructor of English literature at a girls’ college, “a tired woman going home from work with nothing to look forward to, nothing to smile about,” who sees a way out of her malaise when she unexpectedly gets a chance to translate into English a set of short stories written in one of India’s many regional languages. The focus here is the hierarchy that separates writer and translator, with the latter clearly in an inferior position and frustrated by it, and what happens when a translator violates that order.”16