

**A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF ANITA DESAI, HER SHORT-STORIES,
AND DESAI AS A NOVELIST, IN PERSPECTIVE OF, OTHER
PROMINENT INDIAN WOMEN NOVELISTS IN ENGLISH**

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Abstract

Anita Desai is once again in the news, the seventy-six year old eminent writer for her immense contribution in the field of literature and education, was chosen for “ Padma Bhushan “ the third highest civilian award, in the Republic of India, which is announced on the occasion of Republic Day every year. This paper reflects the roots of Desai’s creative genius, her biographical sketch, an analysis of her short-stories, and Desai in perspective of her contemporary female writers. The paper portrays her evolution from a child, who was born in a multicultural household, her education and marriage, after which she created her own multicultural household and her journeys across continents, that her novels and short-stories vividly portray. Her Booker Prize winning daughter Kiran and her style of creative writing has also been compared and contrasted along with, the other famous Indian women novelists.

When Anita Desai began writing in the 1960’s, the world and especially, India was a very different place, to what it is now. She started her writing career at a time that was not only significant for India as a nation at a critical period of its history when it was trying to come to terms with its imperial legacy and assert its own distinctive uniqueness, but also for Indian literature, when women writers in English were striving to carve a niche and an identity for themselves both in India and abroad.

As she says, “a great work of literature is always a paradox: it confirms your own thoughts and feelings about the world but also reveals more than you ever knew or guessed. It takes you out of yourself and your own world but it also puts you in touch with your inner world. The writers I admire are more than I can name in a sentence or two and in every case, it is certain books and not others”.

In the Indian scenario Mulk Raj Anand , Raja Rao, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Khushwant Singh, Manohar Malgonkar have made their mark in the Indo-Anglian novel like Desai, and her contemporaries like Nayantara Sahgal, Rohinton Mistry, M.G. Vassanji, Firdaus Kanga and

Farooq Dhondy, Shashi Tharoor, Salman Rushdie have influenced the Indian English novel like never before. This age with all its cultural complexities and globalized scenario could be considered as the best periods of the Indian English Novel.

She was born on June 24, 1937, in the hill station of Masoorie, Uttar Pradesh. She was one of four children. Her brother and two sisters were like her, all raised in what was a British India. Desai's father, Dhiren N. Mazumdar, was a Bengali engineer, whose father had migrated from Dacca (now Dhaka) in East Bengal (which later was to become Bangladesh) to West Bengal. Dhiren was later to settle in Delhi.

Desai's mother, Antoinette Nime, traced her origin to France, but she was a German Jew. She married Desai's father in Germany, and the couple later emigrated to India in the 1920s. Desai believes that it was this beautiful experience of her mother's European culture that allowed her to understand India as both a native and a foreigner at once. She has said that she grew up surrounded by Western literature and music, not realizing until she was older that this was a pleasant change from a world in which she also learnt Eastern culture and customs. Her family background thus gives Desai a unique perspective when she writes about India and Indians or about immigrants in India from abroad and Indian migrants to the West as well.

Desai was formally educated in English; she was brought up speaking Hindi, German, Bengali and Urdu, as she grew up in a multicultural and multilingual environment, in the old part of Delhi. She grew up speaking German and Bengali at school, and, Urdu, Hindi and English at school and with her friends on the city streets. She credits the diversity of her imagined characters to having lived amongst her Hindu, Muslims and Christian neighbours while growing up in the capital of India with its own multicultural art and traditions.

Desai began writing from the age of seven. At the age of nine, her first literary submission to an American children's magazine was accepted and published. Desai says, "I have been writing, since the age of seven, as instinctively as I breathe. It is a necessity to me: I find it is in the process of writing that I am able to think, to feel..."

Desai did not deliberately decide to write in English. English was the formal 'first language' which she learned at school, while a fusion of Hindi, German, Bengali and Urdu were only 'spoken languages' for her. She attended British grammar schools and after that Queen Mary's Higher Secondary School in New Delhi. She graduated with Honours in English from Miranda House, an elite women's college in Delhi, in 1957. The following year, she fell in love with Ashvin Desai and married him. They had four children, and lived in many different parts of India. They lived in Calcutta from 1958 to 1962, then moved to Bombay, Chandigarh, Delhi and Poona. These different places provided a beautiful and rich backdrop for her fiction. Her daughter Kiran, who is a writer as well, and who won the Man Booker Prize in 2006, was born in Chandigarh and raised in Bombay in their Altamount Road residence. Desai is thus a product of India's multi-cultural, multiethnic and multilingual tradition and literary landscape. Desai remembers that she used to take her children to Thul (a small seaside village near Alibag) for weekends, and this is where she set the story of Hari and Lila in her famous children's book. *A Village by the Sea*.

Desai wrote whenever her children were at school or out at play, and quickly put it all away when they returned. Writing was her secret and she did long for a room of her own, but did not acquire one till she was much older. She published her first novel in 1963, *Cry, The Peacock*, which was somewhat autobiographical, but she considers *Clear Light of Day* (1980) her most autobiographical work till date, as it portrayed her coming-of-age as well as the multicultural old Delhi neighbourhood she grew up in. In 1984, was published another famous novel *In Custody*,

in which among other things a dichotomy between Hindi and Urdu is portrayed brilliantly. This novel was also short listed for Booker Prize.

She has won several awards including the Royal Society of Literature Winifred Holtby Prize, 1978; Sahitya Academy award, 1979; Guardian award, for children's book, 1982; Hadassah Magazine award, 1989; Tarak Nath Das Award 1989; Padma Sri award, 1989; Literary Lion Award, New York Public Library, 1993, Fellow, Royal Society of Literature, 1978; Girton College, Cambridge, 1988; Clare Hall, Cambridge, 1991 and so on and so forth.

Besides her published work she has also authored her uncollected short stories like, *Tea with the Maharani*, *Grandmother*, *Circus-Cat Alley Cat* and *Mr. Bose's Private Bliss* and so on.

Desai has been the Purington Professor of English, Mount Holyoke College, from 1988 to 1993; professor of creative writing, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1993 – Helen Cam Visiting Fellow, Girton College, Cambridge, 1986 – 87; Elizabeth Drew Professor, Smith College, 1987 – 88; Ashby Fellow, Clare Hall Cambridge, 1989 and since 1972 member of the Sahitya Academy English board. Her travels to the different parts of the world are also reflected in her novels. Her novels portray not only her story but also her sympathy for different people of many different races, ethnicity, colour, countries and characters. She has a deep love and understanding for Mexican culture, which she feels resembles that of India in more ways than one.

Desai herself describes her writings and says, "...While writing my novels, I find I use certain images again and again and that, although real, they acquire the significance of symbols. I imagine each writer ends by thus revealing his own mythology; a mythology that symbolizes his private morality and philosophy. One hopes, at the end of one's career, to have made some significant statement on life – not necessarily a water tight, hard and fast set of rules, but preferably an ambiguous, elastic, shifting, and kinetic one that remains always capable of further change and growth."⁴ she further says:

"Next to this exploration of the underlying truth and the discovery of a private mythology and philosophy, it is style that interests me most – and by this I mean the conscious labour of uniting language and symbol, word and rhythm. Without it, language would remain a dull and pedestrian vehicle. I search for a style that will bring it to vivid, surging life. Story, action and drama mean little to me except in so far as they emanate directly from the personalities. I have chosen to write about, born of their dreams and wills. One must find a way to unite the inner and outer rhythms, to obtain a certain integrity and impose order on chaos."

Desai has not only written about the two main religions communities of India, but also other communities and their myriad cultural characteristics. She writes about an India, which now only exists in fiction. The innocent India, of yore when people still followed norms and there was a sense of compassion and sympathy, a surging sense of self worth and belief in the idea of a nation, that would later turn into despair and hopelessness, amidst of all kinds of corruption. Her novels are refreshingly reassuring that its all right to be different, and that in India, these differences are gradually being respected and introspected.

The hideous darkness of a life intertwined with a doomed indigenous culture of the East and the West, with all its meaningless and intricacies of empty materialism seem to be an image of Desai's own multicultural belongings.

Desai's life has been full of constant upheavals. Her mixed ethnicity, which sometimes resulted in her feeling of not belonging anywhere, in any culture, this is reflected in great detail,

in almost all her novels. The events which played out in her own life constantly, occur in almost all her creative creations. They form a background to the multifarious mingling of imagination and reality in her art. Like most novelists, her substantial body of work consists of the experiences, events, traumas, tragedies, rebellions and bliss experienced by her own self, in her various roles as a daughter, sister, wife, mother and now grand mother. Along with this the division of Indian along religious lines which involved mass migration and perhaps a million deaths, is etched deeply in her mind and soul and finds expression in many of her novels.

There are also, indirect references in her works, to the problems in Kashmir, which had a Hindu King ruling over a Muslim majority and has been a bone of contention between India and Pakistan since, 1947 and afterwards when Pakistan sponsored mercenary soldiers infiltrated it, time and again.

Desai hopes for reawakening of the same camaraderie amongst the different castes, classes, creeds and religions as she hopes for re-witnessing the commendable communal harmony, which was the hall-mark of a nation in which she spent most of her life. The collapse of peace and trust amongst the various tribes and communities, and an emergence of a culture of blood shed and death has been very well documented by her in her novels. Nonetheless, the many excited anticipations and the magical and mystical experiences of the East, to the mindless materialistic pursuits of the West, constantly intermingle in her various works, and make them unique and intense. Her own life has been full of interesting and wonderful experiences besides the sad and painful ones. In her novels, Desai wants to forget the painful past hers as well as that of the country, and looks forward to a hopeful future.

Anita Desai has here self experienced and documented in her novels, the feeling that immigration is not an easy venture to undertake, it means leaving family and friends and a country one is born in. There is always a sense of un-belonging, alienation and a heartbreaking dislocation, readjustment along with a sense of great loss and serious doubts about one's decisions and a deadlock between person's pragmatic and logical understanding and their emotional upheavals.

All my writing is an effort to discover, to underline and convey the true significance of things. That is why, in my novels, small objects, passing moods and attitudes acquire large importance"

The xenophobia and distrust of the Indian immigrants to Britain in the 1970's, has been brilliantly revealed by her in her famous novel *Bye-Bye, Blackbird*

At the age of ten, Desai witnessed a traumatic, life altering experience; she watched India fragment into two and saw the violence thereafter, which shook the Indian subcontinent as it broke up into the separate states of India and Pakistan in 1947. Her classmates and friends disappeared overnight as they were fleeing from the violence. This tragedy left an indelible imprint on Desai's sensitive mind.

As in Jane Austen's, novels historical events do not colour her writings, but are definitely there in the background Desai also portrays the Hindu faith as a complex preserve of a multitude of Gods and Goddesses, myriads of deities and mystical, strange striking, mesmerizing and spectacular practices, that would fill anyone with a sense of awe and admiration. To her mind, the centuries old harmony between Hindus and Muslims seems to have receded, and bitterness grown manifold firstly due to the partition of the Indian subcontinent and secondly due to the politics that further accentuated this whole crisis in an unforeseen unfathomable manner. She has shown a precarious peace and a genuine affection between the Hindu and Muslim characters in her novels. Desai, like a lot of Indians, feels that the British were to be blamed for India's

partition as up till their arrival Hindus and Muslims lived harmoniously. This feeling is reflected in some of her novels, where traditional Indian religious harmony and secularism go for a toss. She portrays brilliantly, the feelings of mutual suspicion and discomfort, which these two communities suddenly have for one another in the wake of the partition of India. Desai has lived in the old Delhi neighbourhoods, which have a composite culture and a thriving sense of multicultural existence. This composite culture was torn apart by the tragic partition and the resulting mayhem. It also exposed the fragility of the newly created India and Pakistan. India's tryst with destiny was far from over because destiny had other plans. Almost overnight there was a rapid change in people's perception of one – another while four and half million Hindus and Sikhs were forced to migrate to India. The carnage was unprecedented and chaotic. The worst atrocities were in the newly divided Punjab. Many women were killed by their own families to avoid shame, it was a nightmare of unprecedented proportions, ten million people were displaced and one million people were dead. This murderous mess was unforeseen, even by the Indian standards. There was large scale violence and extermination, and Desai's stories unfold in the midst of this carnage and catastrophe as she witnessed the trauma of partition at the age of fourteen and experienced this disastrous tragedy first hand.

When Desai was asked that had she been a woman writing in India at present, how would she have written differently, she said, "I am sure my writing would have been different if I had stayed in India and not left. The subjective quality would have been much stronger than the objective. If I were living and writing in India now I think I would choose to write of more public, less private lives."

Desai's travels to the different parts of the world are also reflected in her novels. Her novels portray not only her story but also her sympathy for different people of many different races, ethnicity, colour, countries and characters.

When Desai moved to the west, she was shocked to experience the racism, intolerance, racial bias and prejudice, hostility, offence and discrimination towards the immigrants, especially of the non-white earlier origin, whose cultures are belittled. These issues find a brilliant connection in the themes of her various novels.

The small universe of her novels, is sometimes misunderstood as essentially domestic, but Desai writes about certain kind of neuroses which strike women at some point or the other in their lives. She plunges into the depths of human psychology to discover what is damp "dark" and "invisible", like Kafka, who described writing as "taking an axe to the frozen seas within", or E.M. Forster, who talks of books "as trophies won by mind from matter."

Desai expresses her novels a feeling that human beings are basically good and that common people irrespective of any religion, caste, community have a natural inclination towards living in harmony. It is only a few bad eggs amongst them, especially politicians, who for their petty gains, divide communities. People's behavior towards one-another depend on the values that their parents have given them and the kinds of environment they have been brought up in.

She has also portrayed the lives of women in our country since 1947, and in modern India, where their rights are protected by the constitution of India. She also expresses lack of harmony and a feeling of being misunderstood, aloneness and depression that women sometimes suffer in a marriage, their migration and inner exile. Desai also portrays, the second class treatment which is meted out to Indians abroad and the resultant symptoms of an identity crisis are realistically revealed in her works, and some of her novels are almost visionary in this respect as they are way ahead of their times.

Her novels are also considered as fabulous fables on feminism. Her female characters resemble her in more ways than one. She has been a house-wife and homemaker in the earlier phase of her married life along with being a freelance writer. She has herself suffered with the various traumas and psychological problems, which a woman has to undergo on a daily basis. The mental turmoil of being an immigrant and a woman, and all the various cultural and personal setbacks that Indian women suffer in the Western world, are realistically sketched in her novels. They bring out in a most touching fashion, the traumas of mal- adjustment of women be it in the Indian society in a dysfunctional marriage or in the western society as an immigrant who is still coming to terms with her environmental traumas. Desai has also extensively written about life in the West, its facets, facts and illusions. And especially about how an Indian mind and heart, reacts to culture shock. Desai also point out the fact that in the West regardless of how much money or happiness People find, eventually they returns to their roots. The lack of apathy, Indian customs, traditions, and vibrancy, in the West and how a culture of materialism and capitalism found in the West creates a paradox and disillusionment in the mind of the migrant is also highlighted by Desai.

Desai moved to the U.S. in the mid 1990's and lives a very quiet life, now that she has retired from teaching. She lives in Cold Spring, a village near New York, and she does not uses the Internet. She enjoys the countryside, spends her mornings at her desk, and indulges in her favourite pastime; writing. She has a few ideas that she is thinking about translating in to novels or few novellas, according to a recent interview that she gave to the *Indian Express*. Desai made it thrice to the Booker short list but unfortunately did not win any time. She says, "Everyone gets excited, but in the end you have to get on with your next book".

She is an elegant teller of stories that are full of charm, wisdom compassion, self assertion, sadness and struggle and a confluence of cultures that belong to the East and the West and of the various cultures which exist in different parts of India and come across one another in different manifestations, regularly. She writes about how they blend together and enrich each-other and bond the nations in which they exist.

Her greatest achievement as a novelist is to bring together, the ancient Indian philosophical wisdom and spirituality, and the multicultural understanding of her own diverse thoughts and experiences. She descends from her own social and mental status to understand and portray each and every character in her novels, high or low, rich or poor educated or illiterate, evil or noble. She has a phenomenal vision which is very rare and truly inspiring for Indians and Westerner's alike. She not only describes the feelings of living in India, but also experiencing it as an outsider, with all its good and evil, with its deep intensity and superficial artificiality.

Desai's has exemplified tremendous grace, elegance wisdom and hard work, like the characters in her novels in whom she has managed to assimilate the qualities of a pragmatic Westerner and a dreamy Easterner. Her lineage and multicultural background gave her the best of both the worlds. She has reflected the same qualities in her literary work. She is a living example of the impossibility of a foreign culture, totally absorbing an individual and how one is completely bound to be attached to the roots that they left behind. The tradition and appropriateness which women follow in India is relevant even to day in this day and age, has been shown by Desai in her characteristic portrayal of Indian sensibility in almost all her novels. The detail is stunning and extra ordinary, and aptly balanced with emotional excesses and logical reasoning, coupled with a pure, simple reasoning, that characterize these real portrayals. Desai has poured her own emotion and experiences of various culture and subcultures portraying things as they really are instead of making them up. She has created stories that are authentic and awe-

inspiring. Rather than judging people she tries to understand and empathize with them by stressing on the eternal universal truth of life, according to the ancient Indian philosophy. Anita Desai is a truly remarkable novelist and a wonder full human being.

Desai is one of the most distinguished novelists of our times along with her contemporaries, who are based in India and abroad. For instance Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande have a lot of similarities as well as dissimilarities; they both belong to the upper echelons of society, are English educated women, deal with the difficulties of being a woman in a predominantly male world. They portray in their meaningful novels the sensitive side of women, which men have difficulty in understanding and interpreting. Women characters are dealt with sympathy and understanding by both these novelists and for them characterization takes more importance than plot. They depict women in all their positive and negative shades and aspects. They have shattered the ‘happily ever after’ myth, that seems to plague the Indian mindset which considers marriage as the be all the end all of a person’s life. They both are autobiographical novelists on the one hand but also objective observers on the other. When Desai’s first novel *Cry, The Peacock* was published in 1962, it was considered a revolutionary novel much ahead of its times, similarly Deshpande is also hailed as a novelist who has made a difference through her writings.

Both Desai and Deshpande, have depicted the sometimes bitter reality of marriage, in their novels and tried to tell that marriage is a part of a woman’s life but not her whole life and certainly not a bed of roses. Deshpande (who is based in India) and Desai (who is based in the United States) have different ways of expressing their thoughts on women’s issues and feminism. While Deshpande portrays feminism quite openly, Desai portrays it covertly in her sincere descriptions of the marital relationship of her female protagonists, where most of their problems arise from a deep sense of emotional un-fulfillment; Desai has shown marriage in a real – life setting and different attitudes and interpretations and marital discontent and discord of men and women towards it. There is certainly a portrayal of a loss of identity of women in Desai’s novels like Deshpande’s and women who fight for their dignity, identity and rightful place in society are also portrayed genuinely by both Desai and Deshpande.

They both are the post independence, Indian women novelists who created unique identities of their own, and craved a special niche for themselves in Indian writings in English. Their novels are another expression for celebrating womanhood and its precious uniqueness.

Desai’s novels are about the psychological perspectives of her characters and their infinite thoughts, her characters flow against the current and break down various mental barriers and transcend all the social prejudices. When they are pushed against the wall, they take a definitive stand and come out of their shells and over protective family life to take up challenges thrown at them by life, just like Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer*. (1982) Their attitudes are sometimes considered outrageous but in the end they definitely manage to assert their own identities. Similarly Deshpande also delves deep in to the mental alleys and labyrinths of the woman mind in her novels like *That Long Silence* (1989), *The Dark Holds no Terrors* (1980), *Moving On* (2004) and *In the Country of Deceit* (2008). They both portray the traumas of human existence and the intense struggles of the apparently rich women who seem to have it all, but lack something absolutely essential like peace and happiness for fulfilling their lives, in a meaningful manner. Both Desai and Deshpande allude to the Hindu philosophy as well they are exceptionally gifted and the two most renowned and eminent writers of fiction in the landscape of the Indian English novels.

Similarly Githa Hariharan and Anita Desai have a somewhat identical style of writing as far as their interest in women's issues is concerned. Their novels have left a profound impact in transforming the Indian mindset and thinking. In their novels there is an intensive use of imagery, poetic language, courage, rebellion, character- delineation. The best things are left unsaid and one has to read between the lines to understand their thoughts and the technique which they employ to take their thoughts to the readers. Gita Hariharan's novels expose the hypocrisy and prejudice that are widespread in the Indian society. Some critics accuse her of anti Brahminism as well, but there is an openness and direct approach in Hariharan's works, that make her stand apart from her contemporaries. She is based in India and has seen widespread discrimination and oppression, from close quarters. Speaking of her own life Hariharan is also known for winning a case against her ex-husband, in which she applied for declaring the mother as the natural guardian of the children so that the children could use their mother's surname, instead of their father's. She is courageous, and has been triumphant like the female protagonists in her novels but also her own personal life, that was full of difficult trials and tribulations. She is a firebrand and an idealist, who strives for social, economic, political equality for women and all the marginalized subalterns in our society, and the country at large. Desai also has a similar view point and strives for more equality. Hariharan shakes her readers out of their complacent attitude and makes them notice the inequalities and injustices that are prevalent in the Indian society. Like Desai there is an inherent harmony in her novels, which underline all the chaotic and confusing situations and makes us think.

Hariharan's novels portray the tragedies, displacements and heroic life and struggles of ordinary women with extraordinary qualities. Her novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992) depicts a woman's quest for her cultural roots and has won the Commonwealth writer's prize in 1993. Her other novels include; *The Ghosts of Vasan Master* (1994) *When Dreams Travel* (1999) *In Times of Siege* (2003) and the latest, *Fugitive Histories* (2009) A collection of her highly appreciated and acclaimed short stories, *The Art of Dying* was published in 1993, apart from a book of stories for children *The Winning Team* in 2004. Hariharan's novels have also been translated in to a number of languages; including German, Dutch, Greek, French, Spanish, Italian and Vietnamese. She also writes a regular column for the Indian newspaper *The Telegraph*.

Both Desai and Hariharan highlight the problems of gender, caste, language, culture, subaltern identities and write about rebellious men and women, who when faced with abject oppression emerge more determined and courageous. In the perspective of the Indian society and its various facets, namely that of ethics, aesthetics, religion, philosophy nature and multiculturalism, their accomplishments are indeed outstanding. Both Githa Hariharan and Anita Desai are hailed as legends and pioneers in the contemporary Indian women writing in English.

Likewise, Anita Desai and Manju Kapur both write about the feminine perspectives, identity and the inherent goodness of men and women. Their novels have backgrounds which are historical as well as cultural. They portray the city of Delhi in all its multicultural beauty, and the trauma of the partition of India in 1947, in all its ugliness. Kapur highlights the quintessential loving and caring nature of women in her novel *Difficult Daughters* (1999) where a woman makes a great effort to reconcile herself to her destiny, which is a result of her mistakes and its disastrous consequences. Kapur highlights the self-effacing and destructive tendencies of perfectly normal women who are ready to give up everything for the sake of love.

Like Desai, Manju Kapur also uses intense imagery and detailed descriptions in describing the emotional upheavals of women who are bound by family honour on the one hand and their hearts on the other. Both Desai and Kapur draw pictures of the male dominated families

where men are often insensitive brutes and have no remorse for their they behavior with their wives. They find it difficult to curb their domineering tendencies and are authoritarian, no matter how much it hurts their wives.

Both Desai and kapur draw their inspiration from the Indian contemporary history and mainly the partition of India. Kapur's characters are impulsive, moody and reckless, who do not bother about the approval of the society before taking extreme decisions, regarding their lives. They also are trapped in abusive and uneventful marriages, which is quite tragic. Just like Desai she highlights the various problems of women in many contemporary situations. Both show the fragile male ego and the vulnerability of women as a result. Their stories are drawn from their own families (as in Manju Kapur's novels) or are autobiographical (as in Desai), and highlight female consciousness and thoughts in times of great turbulence and the transformation, it brings along in its wake. Kapur writes with intense passion and clarity just like Desai and portray how women struggle and tells of their chaos and the resultant order, that stems from this pandemonium. Manju kapur also talks about incest, which happens in some Indian families and the shame which emanates from such incestuous relationships. Kapur's novels like *Home* (2006) and *A Married woman* (2002) and *The Immigrant* (2009) are very revealing and realistic, they resemble Desai's novels in its intensity, imagery and emotional depths, in an extremely subtle manner, sometimes pessimistic and bitter, but ultimately triumphant . Her latest novels *The Immigrant* (2009) is about Nina, a thirty year old English lecturer in New Delhi, living with her widowed mother and frustrated by her lonely life. She decides to accept a marriage proposal and move to Canada; the consequences of this emigration are catastrophic and more disastrous than she could have ever imagined, in her worst night- mare. Giving up her home and her country, for a precarious new life in Canada, is more than she ever bargained for. The new revelation shocks her and puts her home, country and culture in a new perspective, for her The novel is based on the difficulties and challenges of immigration and moving to a new country and culture and making it one's own. Manju Kapur is not only a feminist writer but a humanitarian as well, just like Desai she warns women about the disasters of too much rebellion and the vulnerabilities of too much submission.

Kapur and Desai have put the entire multicultural concept in a refreshingly new perspective and more importantly from a feminine point of view. There are many aspects of multiculturalism in India and the world like the differences of class, sex, caste, creed, race, culture and for instance both Desai and Kapur draw inspiration from the worship of the mother goddess that is prevalent widely in the Hindu religious and philosophical traditions.

India born Bharati Mukherji is an eminent American novelist, short story writer, journalist and a writer of non-fiction books. Her novels and short stories are biographical just like Desai's and they both write about how women are driven to acts of violence as a result of their mental and physical traumas. Her protagonists are mainly women who face racism and sexism in the West. They also realize that they do not identify with the culture of either the West or that of the Indian society. Her style is intense and ironic. The struggle of immigrants is a recurring theme in her works. Of late there is an optimistic note in her works about the successful cultural assimilation of immigrants, not only that of the Indian origin but also Asians, Hispanics and Europeans, in to the mainstream. Mukherjee is magnificent because she paints a completely real picture of life, as an immigrant, and does not gives us a rosy and artificial portrayal of her female protagonists, who find it difficult to come to terms, with an alien culture and especially their own individual identities, in a completely different cultural landscape. Their insecurity, fear, sense of loss, alienation and exploitation are realistically portrayed by Mukherjee without

any superficial trappings or moral weaknesses. Mukherjee deals with theme of the Indian expatriates and their cultural isolation and the impossibility of coming to terms with life in America which by no means is as simple or easy, as it appears at first glance from India, or one's native country.

Bharti Mukherjee is a versatile writer, who writes about warm, interesting, strong, courageous, cautious, attractive, worthy and graceful women who are deeply scared with some tragedy or trauma and how they overcome their ordeals, in spite of everything going against them.

Mukherjee also underlines the Indian immigrant experiences in the United States on one hand and the strange and unique Indian customs and traditions, which are difficult to explain to the west on the other. There is a dichotomy which characterizes her novels and brings out clearly the reality of living in the west, with all its positive and negative aspects. Cultural values are questioned; there are shocking revelations, disillusionment, anger double-alienation of women and severe identity crises.

Desai and Mukherjee, though born and brought up in India, moved to the West, later on. They view India from outside, more than inside, at the moment, like foreigners, who are neutral observers of the many events that happen in India. They also have the benefit of interpreting these various events in a much more balanced way as a result.

Bharati Mukherjee was born in 1940, which was a period of great cultural upheavals. She has been an avid observer of the various socio-political, economic and cultural conditions in India United States and Canada. She also portrays the problems of, the migrants who moved to other countries after the partition of the Indian subcontinent, and creates stories in which women have the dominant role to play both in the oriental as well as the occidental settings, cultures and societies.

The cold distant surroundings of the alien country, where a woman, finds herself at the mercy of strangers and is solely dependant on her husband and his relatives is a scary prospect in even today's day and age. This situation is portrayed in a very real and elegant manner by Mukherjee in her many important novels. She has also used some autobiographical references like Desai, for instances, the racism she had to face in Canada and the humiliations one has to face when they emigrate to a foreign country, because they are never completely accepted or made to feel at home in the West, almost everywhere.

The Tiger's Daughter (1972) *Wife* (1975), *Jasmine* (1989), *The Holder of the World* (1993) *Desirable Daughters* (2002) *Leave it to me* (1997) are some of her favourite novels. It also highlights the hippie culture of the 1960s. In *Leave It To Me* and *The Tree Bride* (2004), Mukherjee transcends from an immigrant or diasporic novelist to a truly multicultural one. She has also portrayed cultural diversity from a western perspective, and has like Desai tried to present the problems of the Indian women of different background and cultures. Her style is not only concerned with the Indian Americans or Canadians fighting to make sense of their chaotic cultural identities, in their new environments, but also trying to understand and make sense of their self-worth. Some times the story is narrated from the point of view of just one major character, in the story. The first person narrative helps to enhance the presentation of events in a much more effective manner, just like Anita Desai, who also uses the first person narrative, in her novels sometimes.

Both Desai and Mukherjee reflect in their novels both the Indian culture and also a great deal of multiculturalism, which is experienced by the Indian immigrants not only in other foreign countries, but in India as well, where there are so many different regional cultures and traditions

in various different parts of the country. The immigrant experience is of course reflected magnificently in all their works. The art and culture of the Indian subcontinent as well as its integration in to the immigrant's new way of life, finds prominence in the novels of both these wonderful novelists. They use wit, humour, deep insight and tell of the complexities of adjusting to an entirely new way of life, which is liberating but also excruciatingly difficult. They have all the first hand experience and authority on the various issues which are faced by immigrants. Along with the scary prospect of a complete self-transformation of a person, they bring genuine feelings and emotions of pain and rootless-ness in their novels.

There have been many eminent other Indian women novelists, who have explored the feminine perspective in order to assert the identity of women in their novels. For instance Santha Rama Rau's *Remember the House* (1956), Ruth Prwyer Jhabvala's *To Whom She Will* (1995) and later her famous novel *Heat and Dust* (1975) which won the celebrated Booker Prize. Kamla Makandya's *Two Virgins* (1973) where feminine mystique and self-worth are explored, and later women writers like Shobha De portrayed sexual escapades of her generally Bombay based female characters in novels like *Socialite Evenings* (1989) *Starry Nights* (1989), *Sisters* (1992) *Uncertain Liaisons* (1993), *Shooting From The Hip* (1994), *Sultry Days* (1994), *Small Betrayals* (1995), *Speed Post* (1999) were considered quite controversial and much ahead of their times, in the strictly hypocritical society of modern India! Her books and novels depict the lives and passions of high society social butterflies, Bombay actresses, models, heiresses and others of their ilk.

Nayantara Sehgal is one of the most prolific novelists amongst the modern Indian women novelists, and holds her own unique identity in Indian writing in English. She is the daughter of Mrs. Vijayalaxmi Pandit and niece of our first Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and had differences of opinion with her famous cousin Indira Gandhi during the most critical phases of the political propriety of Indian Democracy in the late 1960's and through out the 1970's. She is a very sensible, independent women who always maintained her sense of freedom and was not easily intimidated by power and powerful people, also an independent thinker, she lived her life on her own terms regardless of social pressures and criticism about the choices she made in her personal life.

Her novels *Rich Like Us* (1986), *A Situation in New Delhi* (1989) *Prison and Chocolate Cake* (memoir. 1954) *From Fear Set Free* (1963) are fascinating and controversial as well! Rama Mehta's *Inside the Haveli* (1977) portrays traditional Indian culture; Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), inspired by Salman Rushdie in its use of magic realism portrays the life of an Indian woman in San Francisco.

The southern Indian state of Kerala was put on the mainstream literary map of India, by four women writers, namely Arundhati Roy, who won a booker prize for her novel *The God of Small Things* (1997), Anita Nair, Kamala Das; who was the first to bring out the female sexuality out of the closet, and shocked her critics and admirers equally when she converted to Islam in the later part of her life and was known as "Suraiyya Begum". She also highlighted the cultural confusion, which is often experienced by Hindu women, who are given a Western or English education in India, and the intense experiences of guilt which is experienced as a result of getting caught between two distinct cultures, is beautifully portrayed in her various works. Susan Vishwanathan has also made a remarkable contribution, to the field of the Indian literary tradition.

Second generation immigrants in North America like Jhumpa Lahiri, who is the winner of the Pulitzer Prize for *The Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), and her famous novel *The*

Namesake(1993) which was adapted in to a film by the same name. Lahiri, in her novels, writes about the cultural clash, the East/West encounters, nostalgia and dichotomy between new values and the old. These are also pressed in the novels of Meera Syal, Shauna Singh Baldwin, Anita Rau Badami, Anjana Appachana and Uma Parameswaran and also Bharti Kirchner's *Shiva Dancing* (1998) Ameena Meers *Bombay Talkie* (1994) talk about these serious issues.

These brilliant women novelists have changed the way Indian women are perceived all over the world; as they challenged the patriarchal male dominated system and won a hard earned victory for their human rights. It is not only a great achievement but also foretells of a bright future for Indian English Writings by women. It is a form of self expression and conviction that is not only rare but also a tremendous legacy for all the future female creative writers, who look up to these and many more other women achievers in the literary domain, who have not only shown true courage and conviction but also their collective feminine consciousness and wisdom.

The 2006 Man Booker Prize winner Kiran Desai is the brilliant daughter of Anita Desai. Her exceptionally fabulous, first novel (she is youngest female novelist to win the Booker Prize) which took a long time to be created, won her this prestigious honour. *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) she has been also published in the *New Yorker* and *Mirror work*, an anthology of 50 years of Indian writing that was edited by Salman Rushdie.

When talking of the characters in *The Inheritance of Loss*, and her own life, she says, "The characters of my story are entirely fictional but these journeys (of her grandparents) as well as my own provided insight in to what it means to travel between East and west and it is this I wanted to capture. The fact that I live this particular life is no accident. It was my inheritance."

Some part of *The Inheritance of Loss* is set in India and other in the U.S.A. Desai says that it's a book that tries to capture the essence of being an immigrant. She also has intense insights to share about the introduction of Western lifestyles and attitude into India, and compares the advances of the United States, to that of the in India. She has also researched about her Hindu heritage extensively and believes that Hinduism is a faith, whose history has been recorded in geological time and not human.

She also portrays the British colonization of India and the impact of these external influences vividly. She feels that the past definitely makes a great impression on the present as well as the future and also characterizes the effects, positive and negative of placing a person from a poor country in to a wealthy one. These incidents she has probably incorporated from her own and her family's various multicultural experiences and legacies. She has tried to explore all the truths of existence, which life has to offer with out compromising her individuality and uniqueness.

Kiran Desai loves to travels and reaching out to people she tries to understand the various problems that face humanity and also her Indian identity is a source of her cultural belonging and her personality, has been greatly influenced and transformed by it. Being from such a diverse cultural background Kiran. Desai's multicultural heritage has also influenced her writings. Her mother's influences can be clearly seen in her works but she has an identity and characteristic style of her own. It is more in keeping with the times and problems of today's world, which is complicated and full of old prejudices, racism sexism besides terrorism, which has raised its ugly head once again in the last decade.

Desai says about her daughter Kiran "since my daughter took to the writing life, we have shared a companionship that is the deepest and happiest I have known. We talk a little about our work, not much and just as much or more about our reading. I think her achievements as a writer are spectacular."

Desai's writing style has been more psychoanalytical and serious on the contrary her daughter's writings are more humorous and contemporary. She is influenced by her mother's style as well and they both stay in the same house, Desai lives downstairs and her daughter lives upstairs! and although Kiran Desai is a fan of her mother's work they both write differently.

Kiran Desai, also spent a part of her childhood in Kalimpong, (She writes about Kalimpong in *The Inheritance of Loss*, and it was around the time that the insurgency began there. Although she had a unique individuality of her own, she realized that it was very important for her to understand the problems of other's besides being involved in her own life. She reached out to people and that's how expressed so many different emotional experiences in her novel. It took her six years to write *The Inheritance of Loss*, it's is a novel which also tells of loss, and also about the fused complex relationships in post-colonial India, England and the United States. Desai, in an interview to Sophie Rochester says that her perspective of her life is reflected in her books just like her mother. She "grew up in an India, when globalization, had not touched it, it was relatively quiet time and the world was understood only through books." She feels that "while living in New York City she has lost the intensity and charm, which India instilled in to her, and other writers like Salman Rushdie."

She also feels that "the Indian perspective in her work is too important to give up and that America did give her half of her narrative, but she had to return to India for the other half! for emotional, historical and cultural depths and besides her mother, she is also inspired by Rushdie for the confidence and the attitude that he gave all the Indian writers of expressing that they were not ashamed and that it was OK to write from their own beings in their own English. She also admires V.S. Naipaul for writing of the parallel experience of people from African, Asian and Latin American countries.

Anita Desai's short stories reflect her deep sense of diversity and multicultural sensibilities. They are the true mirrors of human feelings and emotions and reflect her wonderful understanding of life in contemporary Bombay and other cities of India and the world. Her beautiful portrayal of lives of the middle class Indians and their encounters with the West as well as their concern for their situation and feelings of humanity, misery and momentary, fleeting happiness are unparalleled. Her short-stories have a lot of wisdom and are a fusion of many contemporary themes – globalization, self-assertion, violence, struggle between tradition and modernity. Her stories are woven together with concrete detail and reality, transcending all the boundaries of geographical limitations she has wonderfully interpreted the human mind and there is an intense imagination as well as imagery in almost all her writings. She is the representative of a culture in transition; and from tradition to modernity. If Jane Austen and Virginia wolf were based in India they would have written exactly like Anita Desai! Her description of the Indian household and surrounding is absolutely unparalleled and amazingly brilliant.

Desai's short stories portray how human beings connected with each other regardless of their culture country, race colour, sex, creed or caste. They show us that the religion of humanity is the ultimate religion on the face of the earth. She gives us hope and her characters survive through their sheer strength and grace in order to over come multiple crises in their life Desai has an amazing ability to portray the psychological effect of multiculturalism and cultural consciousness. The diverse cultures and colorful religious ceremonies are often witnessed in her various short stories. "Pigeons at Day Break" "Studies in the Park" "Surface Textures" "Pineapple cake" "Royalty", "The Rooftop Dwellers" "Winterscape" and "Scholar and Gypsy" are some of her short stories where she portrays depression addiction poverty, wealth, destiny, unemployment, hatred, loneliness, prejudice and mistrust, women trapped in unhappy marriages,

racial discrimination, appalling destitution, filth and squalor set in a limitless landscape of a doomed culture, that rises from the ashes like the phoenix and regenerates itself time and again with electrifying results. Her various short stories also tell about the intrinsic value and self worth of all human-beings. She wonderfully reflects and re-establishes the profound goodness of every person and how these social and multi cultural values harness peace and prosperity that create prosperous and powerful nations. Her stories are inspired by beautiful and empathetic understanding of imagery where surely redefine developing and developed countries in which globalization has an all pervasive role. The past, present and future intersect in her tales and revolutionize her readers. She portrays human nature at its best and worse, both as a blessing and a curse. She portrays in her stories the vulnerable groups of society, the cast-a-ways, the questionable values of the dominant forces in our society, complete ethical collapse, sadness and sorrows, racial hostility, cruelty, abnormal deep-seated psychosis and morbid-ness, lack of freedom and escalation of danger, in particular. She tells the stories that need to be told, and raises voices that need to be heard. Desai brilliantly shows how dramatically, the crumbling of the British Empire, and that of the multiracial Commonwealth of Nations have unilaterally unfolded and changed world history. Her characters are intelligent, intuitive, complicated, fragile, neglected, and full of disdain. Her portrayal of the grief and sadness of the downtrodden and their suffering is quite tragic at times, interesting and their dangerous encounters with life are rather melancholic. Her characters are sometimes petrified at the prospect of facing fearful situations and uncertainty in their daily existence and finally choose death over life but she also tells of the contagiousness of the ordinary pleasures of a simple life which are exhilarating and beautiful.

Desai writes both from a perspective of an India-born Indian, who has seen India from inside and also as a person of Indian origin who does not reside there. Her short stories reflect the good and bad consequences of our complicated legacy that cannot be shaken off easily, and forces us to think whether multiculturalism is a miracle or merely a mirage, if it's dysfunctional or the tolerant spirit of mankind would make it absolutely worth while some day, by lessening the negative impacts with tolerance. Desai has portrayed in her short stories under currents of volatility and massive restlessness that result in destruction constant rejection and pain, both on the outside and inside, on one hand and hope for the mankind on the other.

Desai is a constant campaigner for tolerance and mutual understanding in her portrayal of life. She is seldom judgmental and is an authentic teller of tales. Her characters successfully figure out their destinies through amazing adventures in their life.

Her first collection of short stories "Games at Twilight" was first published in Great Britain in 1978. In one her short stories "Scholar and Gypsy", Desai describes the experiences of American globe-trotters David and Pat. While David is a mature man who takes the sights and sounds of India in his stride and rises above the inanities and works on his thesis on sociology, his wife Pat is repulsed, home sick and morbid most of the time at the beginning of their stay in India. They visit Bombay, Delhi and Manali.

Desai portrays the hippie culture and their "macro-cultural bliss" in an unimaginable and remote corner of the world as well as their begging culture! which embarrassed not only Pat but also the Indian tourists who were surprised to discover that not only their own people but even hippies and white people were beggars!

Desai portrays marvelously the relief Pat experiences on escaping the suffocating, polluted and horrible cities of India. Here Desai portrays the warmth, honesty, independence and

beauty of the best of Hindu and Tibetan cultures. To David's mind there were many cultural dissimilarities between the West and the East, that baffled him.

Finally their relationship unravels during this journey and its varied experiences when Pat finds a place for herself in a commune at Nasogi, in the mountains, and rightly accuses David of narrow- mindedness, bigotry, egoism and conceit. She decides to live a simple life, pray and meditate in the forest and at the end, probably become a Buddhist!

In "Pigeons at Daybreak" Desai vividly paints, a picture of the fascinating old Delhi culture, where a fusion of the Hindu and Muslim cultures enrich life. She describes in detail the ritual of pigeon watching and the lives of Mr. Basu and His wife Otima.

In "Pineapple Cake" Desai describes sincerely the lives of the Goan Christian families (which are now a rarity), Mrs. Fernandez, her son Victor, the various marriage ceremonies which they attend, the beauty of Bombay, enshrined in different forms, colours, sights and sounds. The influence of Hollywood movies like "The Sound of Music" and Western music and culture which inevitably exercised a great influence on the Christian communities of Bombay and Goa, since times immemorial; their sorrows, their pleasures and life is fabulously portrayed in this story by Desai.

Desai's short-stories could be described as serious social portrayals of people caught between family and duty on one hand and their own individuality, choice and freedom, on the other. Her description of the city of Bombay is absolutely unparalleled. Her stories set there are sad, dark, melancholic, brooding, and could be described as real stories that tell of the meeting and merging of the Eastern and Western cultures. In her short-story "The Accompanist" Desai has captured the unique and beautiful relationship between a 'guru' and 'shishya'; Ustad Rahim Khan, a famous artist, and the relationship of humanity, love and musical tradition and culture he shares with his disciple. It shows how destiny, discipline, culture and music are intertwined and share a fine relationship. Desai also infuses her stories with an all pervasive Indian culture and here we find Hindi words like 'vina', 'sitar', 'sarod', 'tanpura', the ragas 'Megh', 'Malhar' and 'Desh', and even 'jalebis' 'Halwa' 'Pulao' 'mohalla' 'raginis' 'bazaar', interwoven with her very touching tribute to the Indian musical culture and the influence of cinema and screen goddesses like Meena Kumari and Nargis. on the impressionable young mind of Ustad Rahim Khan Sahib's disciple, which also goes on to show that the Indian film industry, has been one of the most unifying forces that has kept Indians, in India and all over the world united and given them a reason to identify with each other, regardless of their caste, sex, creed and religion. This story also portrays how classical Indian musicians like Ustad Bismillah Khan Sahib, Usatd Zakir Hussein and Pandit Ravishankar (who was a disciple of Baba Allaudin Khan of Maihar and later married his daughter.) are often told that they could go to the West and have a bright future performing there instead of remaining back in India where they would always be in the shadows. These suggestions also reflect the greedy and insensitivity of petty-minded selfish persons, and their attitude towards musicians. This story is set in the Indian tradition and reflects the reverence and dedication, which disciples in India have for their gurus, and how they are considered not mortal beings, but Gods.

"Surface Textures" another of Desai's short- stories, tells of Harish; a government servant who is dismissed from his job, on account of inefficiency. His wife Sheila is completely devastated because she considers her husband, to be an irresponsible man who threatens the family's financial security and lands them in a serious unstable situation which is difficult and frustrating because they are evicted from their government flat. Harish becomes a vagabond and seldom speaks; he is unpredictable and inherently serene, amidst all the chaos surrounding him.

He accidentally lands in a village where his quiet demeanor is misconstrued and he is revered as a great spiritual guru ‘Swami Ji’! People worship, feed and watch over him. Harish admires their various offerings of faith! He finally becomes the center of their attention, admiration and adulation. This story portrays the faith of the Indian people and their dedication to their religion as well as their vulnerability and innocence. Desai also implies that this kind of faith and worship are only, to be found in India and no where else in the entire world.

In her “Studies In The Park” Desai has shown the struggles of ordinary Indians in their everyday lives. It tells the story of a simple Indian family where the father listens to the same news on radio in various different languages! Namely, Hindi, English, Tamil, Punjabi, Gujarati and so on and so forth. The uncle’s sent to Haridwar to clear a room for the son, as his examinations are approaching the dotting mother, the dominating and disciplined father who expects nothing less than perfection from his son, who goes to king Edwards park near his house for studies, to escape from the drab, morbid and suffocating environment of his home, which is too tensed for him to comfortably study.

Desai describes how the park becomes, almost like a public library during the examination ‘daze’! She describes magnificently, the activities, the crowds which pour out from “Darya Ganj”, “Mori Gate”, “Chandni Chowk” and “Jama Masjid Bazars” and slums who come to the park in the evening to escape, the petulance of their daily existence. The beauty of romance between a “burkha” clad young lady who looked like a dream and an old man with a long grey beard is excellently described by her. It almost was a divine vision of perfection, which had the power to change lives and set ordinary people who witnessed it, absolutely free from the shackles of their mundane everyday existence.

Desai’s short stories are a description of the various cultures that exist simultaneously in various cities of India. They are mirror to the contemporary Indian life, where so many cultures and centuries exist side by side and fulfill each other entirely. Her stories are about love, longing, belonging, meaning and depth, which is often not recognized.

Her short-stories are social portrayals about serious subjects in a witty and humourous manner and Anita Desai is one of the most dazzling and fine writers ever to explore the finer nuances of the convergence of Eastern and Western cultures. She subtly opens up an ensemble of the world which we never knew, existed! As well as the bizarre and fascinating landscapes of both the East and the West.

Desai’s *Diamond Dust* was published in 2001. It has been described by the Daily Telegraph as “. . . a gem of a book. . . where Desai creates visual and emotional excellence.”

In “Winterscape” , a short story in *Diamond Dust*, Desai portrays the homesickness, nostalgia and a sense of loss and displacement which is felt by two India women; Asha and Anu who happen to be sisters and have spent most of their life in India. Desai describes their first visit to Canada, to meet Rakesh, who is their son and nephew respectively. He lives in Toronto, with his wife Beth who is expecting their first child. Asha and Anu are judged time and again, by their Canadian daughter-in-law. They feel ill at ease in a strange country and awkward in her foreign presence like aliens in her country.

Their sense of dislocation is very striking, and comes across in the most profound manner, in this story. There is a strange disorientation in the atmosphere, that is narrated; most breathtakingly. Even amidst all the imaginable luxury, there is a constant sense of loss of something very precious. There is a relentless search for familiarity and a hope of making it back home; when this ordeal is over. Desai shows the sadness of the older women when Beth is shocked at their ‘alien’ culture and at the prospect of how one could give away their new born

child to anyone; even if the person in question happens to be a their extremely close relative, while referring to Anu, who made a great sacrifice, when she handed over her new born baby, Rakesh to her sister, Asha.

The contrast of cultures is portrayed amazingly well with real life situations like how the visitors could not tolerate extreme cold, how the extreme change begins to effect them physically and mentally, the unpredictable reactions of their, sometimes nice and sometimes hostile daughter-in-law Beth, who was as alien to them as they were to her. This short story also reveals how Immigration is a painful process of integration and forsaking one's own culture for a better future and the traumas resulting from such forced assimilation in to another culture. Displacement is the dominant them in this short story, and a feeling of alienation follows it. In this short story and her various novels, Desai also focuses on racism and oppression, where the immigrants are not acceptable and their influx more often than not infuriates the natives. They are offered menial jobs regardless of their training and qualifications. Desai shows that how, when people of different races, cultures and identities come to live together; there are pressing problems of intolerance, deprivation and cultural bigotry, and how they are the present days dangers to multiculturalism.

The terrible legacy of racism, where various indigenous native cultures are treated as non-valuable, and only the western culture, religions and values are given pre-eminence; has also been highlighted by Desai. Immigrants and coloured people always have a sense of fear, pain and isolation, because of which they are disorientated, time and again.

In "Underground" Desai tells the story of Jack Higgins and his wife Meg, who face a nightmarish time in an unknown small town hotel, Desai has fused it with the Hindu philosophy of the transmigration of the soul and its intense effects; real or imagined, on people of different cultures.

Desai's own personal experiences and her multicultural, sense of belonging has shaped almost all her short stories. They reflect her passion for not only her native cultural experiences but also the intense cultural experiences that she has undergone and many of them have transformed her art and imagination and made her a much richer individual. Desai's works have been described by the *New Statesman* and "absurd", "witty" "rueful" "sympathetic" with a sense of "cultural displacement and a Chekovian sense of nostalgia". "The Man who saw himself Drown" is one of Desai's awe-inspiring story. It reveals the pain of a person who witnesses his own death and there is an aura of mystical experiences of the Hindu belief of, transmigration of the soul, which is quite revealing. At the end of the story there is a mysterious twist which makes it quite tragic and exposes the momentary pleasures of human life, which makes us wonder and feel really defenseless.

"The Artist's Life" is a poignant story of an impoverished painter who paints beautiful, magical pictures, that is a complete contrast to the ugly life which he survives and tries to endure. He paints his dreams in his works of art. His inspirations, childhood dreams and artistic uniqueness are stifled and castrated. The life that an artist lives, namely that of a lonely, forlorn and ignored man is poignantly described by Desai in this melancholic short-story.

Desai's contribution to literature as a short story writer is sometimes, and more often than not eclipsed by the assessment of her awesome novels, especially her very best ones like *In Custody*, *Baumgartner's Bombay*, *Journey to Ithaca*, *Clear Light of Day*, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, and so on

"Five Hours to Simla or Faisla" describes the chaos on the Indian roads, that sometimes threaten to turn into a nightmare, but at the end, everything turns out fine as if magically; just

like a movie made in Bombay ! The Indian culture of tolerance, compassion, generosity, the spirit of humanity; regardless of caste, colour, creed or religion is beautifully reflected in this story. The story ends in a surprising manner. Desai takes an ordinary, everyday occurrence and transforms it into a study of human nature and the cultural heritage of India.

“Tepoztl’an Tomorrow” is set in one of Desai’s favourite country Mexico. She says that she often gets mistaken for a Mexican! And there is so much similarity between Indian and the Mexican cultures. When people in Mexico are told that she is an Indian, they give her a lot of regard and affection. There are literary, cultural and historical similarities between the two countries, and a sense of adherence to family, a strong bonding amongst clans, which Desai appreciates the most and writes about as it reminds her of India.

In “Tepoztlan Tomorrow” Dona Celia is a matriarchal matron of a large family, just like a ferocious dominating grandmother, in India ! she is the complete opposite of her sister, Teresa who’s son Luis comes to see her from Mexico city to Tepoztlan which has been Dona Celia’s home all her life, where after her husband’s death, she now lives with Nadya, a single lady who wants to marry the man she likes, but Dona Celia does not approve of her choice.

Desai has also shown various facets of human nature and their problems which are common to people of all countries For instance both India and Mexico are volatile nations with a long history of multiculturalism, corruption in the police department, the vanishing of green hills and pure streams, too many commercial ventures, deteriorating villages and small-towns, the disillusionment with the young generation, too many migrants from other places, settling in and destroying a town; greed, disenchantment with politics and unscrupulous politicians and mismanagement of the country, and its resources have also been described by Desai.

She draws a brilliant picture of life in a small Mexican town; the people, the customs, the culture and its intellectual tradition. She tells of the absolutely unknown facets of life in Mexico and its various aspects. Desai also mentions the famous Indophile Octavio Paz and Hindu Philosophy. Desai is extremely charmed and inspired by the Mexican diplomat and writer Octavio Paz, who was a die-hard admirer of India, and Latin American writers like Severo Sarduy, who traveled to India in 1971, and visited Varanasi, Agra, Khajuraho, Ajanta and even learnt some Hindi! According to Desai, the Mexican people are some of the most beautiful and the nicest people on earth that she has ever met in her life.

“The Rooftop Dwellers” portrays the agonies and the ecstasies of Moyna, and could be called Desai’s take on the ‘Barsati culture’ of Delhi. ‘Barsati’, which means a rooftop single room, often rented by families to young people. This story portrays the trials and tribulations and the ultimate discovery of herself by a single woman, who lives alone in Delhi, India’s most ruthless city. She works in a small, publishing house. The story also tells about single women socializing with, eligible bachelors (in this case Adrian, a young man who worked, with the British Council in Delhi) whom they meet during work. The problems that they face, while living alone in a big city like Delhi and the cruelty of their fellow Indian landlord, with an attitude that could be best termed as disgusting and wicked with no sympathy or humanity towards other people. The story also tells of how Moyna, the young single lady, finds ‘herself’ and her distinguished identity amidst her ordeal and the struggle for her dignity and survival.

Desai also has an interesting opinion on the attitudes of the Indian men, all over the country, towards women travelers, in ordinary DTS buses. Desai writes :

“In Calcutta all men call women Mother or Sister and never touch them. In Bombay, if any man did, the woman would give him a tight slap and drag him by his hair to the police station. But in Delhi – these Jats . . .”, she shuddered, adding, ‘Don’t you even try’. ()

This story is a take on the many different cultures and lifestyles that can be witnessed in the big cities of India.

“Royalty” is a very interesting short story about Raja, who is an Oxford educated, South-Indian Professor, who lives abroad and teaches in Berkeley, Stanford, and the universities in Los-Angeles and San-Francisco. The story humorously portrays his one of the many visits, to India. He visits Delhi to meet his college friends Ravi (who has been a former diplomat) and his wife, Sarla.

Raja travels all the way to the north, to meet his friends; crossing the scorching plains and ravines of central India, on board a train, in the month of June! Desai has shown so many cultures simultaneously in this short story, that it is overwhelming but definitely worth understanding. She reveals the life of a former diplomat and his wife (who likes to have servants to work for her, so that she gets a break in the scorching summer heat). Raja, in search of wonderful stories in mystical India, follows his heart and writes about all kinds of people he comes in to contact with, like his time spent with, the high-society social butterflies! Or the wonderful mysterious man he meets, on his way to Delhi, who brings the most amazing basket of fruits for him and tells Raja, that he was his grand-father in one of their many previous births! The beauty of Desai’s love for each and every detail of the Indian life comes across most profoundly in this story. Be it the experiences of Indians studying in Oxford, or teaching in the United States or for that matter dominating and governing the social scene in faraway countries as a diplomat’s wife, all these are portrayed so fantastically that one is amazed at the attention to each and every detail, which is given by Desai in describing her character’s lives.

Raja dreamt of Sarla’s garden which was full of lemon trees and jasmine vines, and of the mighty Himalayas, recitation of enchanting vedic hymns, of the soulful songs sung at the Nizamuddin “dargah” in Delhi, of Benaras and Rishikesh, while he was in Los-Angeles. All these years of exile in the United States had made Raja’s longing for his land of birth more and more intense. This deep faith in and search for his Hindu roots is most striking and extraordinary. His recitation of the Vedic shlokas in Sanskrit, in which the divine touches on the mundane and human, is absolutely fascinating.

Desai’s short stories will always be treasured for their capacity to influence and capture the hearts, as well as inhabit the soul of her readers, while completely transforming them. These are stories about our emotions, confrontations, loves, desires, likings, disliking and the mystery, passion and intensity of the human soul.

Desai describes the setting of her stories profoundly. Her imagery is real and vivid. She portrays the deep seated emotions with simplicity and an all-enduring reality. The apparent crisis and its ultimate solution are not only intertwined but also amazingly subtle. The determined journey to completion of the human mind and spirit is sensitively portrayed, without any judgments and Desai comes across as a humanitarian.

The Times has says about Anita Desai’s short stories : “Exquisite ... these are stories whose beauty is in the detail, and their knowledge of the human psyche. They sparkle, not with the brash glitter of rhinestones, but with the intenser, more complex fire of real diamonds”.

Desai’s keen sense of retaining the mysterious and traditional stories that were told to her as a child, is clearly reflected in “Diamond Dust, a Tragedy” , when she talks of a yogi in ‘Jabbulpore’ who lived in a cave outside the city, with a pet tiger and it was said that he fed it only on milk and brought it to town on festival days ! Mrs. Das, one of Desai’s delightful characters, claims to have seen it with her own eyes! And according to her it was healthy milk fed tiger, as harmless as a kitten.

Desai has recently, written her newest short story called “The Landing” and has used it as a foreword – to bring her collection of short stories up-to date which has her oldest and newest short stories as bookends; on a suggestion from her publishers Random House. The theme of this story is the woman and the house. The idea of this story came to her when she was living in an 18th century house in a little, Massachusetts (United States) town. The house has the invisible spirits of ancestors, and she writes about their presence and absences, longing and loneliness. Desai has successfully shown that how to belong or un-belong, in a particular place or environment is beyond or choice and choosing. Her craftsmanship, humor, humanity, beauty, resolve and descriptions in detail about not only the human characteristics but also the environment in which they survive, is what makes her stories moving, outstanding and incomparably rich.

Desai loves telling stories about India, its unifying factors India its great culture. She underlines the fact that we have to work through our differences, because the real relevance of multiculturalism is in teaching the world, to live in harmony, rather than engaging in torturous and futile conflicts, that will only weaken our co-existence and multicultural democratic traditions. Desai definitely succeeds in moving her readers to higher levels of understanding and wisdom.