Women in Exile and Alienation

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The Fiction of Margaret Laurence and Anita Desai

By

Kaptan Singh

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Kaptan Singh

FOREWORD

Since time immemorial, woman's place in society has always been one of the significant issues of debate. The statistics prove that whatever the texts proclaim about equality of the sexes and prominent place of woman in ancient civilizations, the equality exists only in theories. Woman has remained on the periphery, not only in India but all over the world. The reason for this goes back to the pre-historic age when the society valued physical prowess of humans over creative or intellectual qualities. Undoubtedly she is not privileged enough in that case due to specific functions and conditions of her body, be it menstruation, child birth or lactation. Barring the physical proves a woman can compete, even overpower man in other qualities of head and heart. But the Patriarchal society has neglected these issues to a great extent.

Novelists Anita Desai and Margaret Laurence have both vociferously expressed their dedication to the cause of gender discrimination and unfair treatment of woman in family and society. All their fictional works are focused on exposing the double standards of society in India and Canada as far as the position of women is concerned. The society that completely focuses on male supremacy has set up unwritten laws for the opposite sex—follow the norms, be submissive and devote yourself for the family, especially for the husband, and if you fall out of line then be prepared to be discarded or dumped. A woman is a home-maker, bread earner, daughter, wife and mother but in none of these positions she is treated equally. As a daughter her capabilities remain unrecognized and, like Hagar, she might be seen as a threat to her brothers in the family. As a wife she is treated as a decoration piece, like Nanda Kaul, who would give pleasant appearance to the visitors in the family, but would not dare to express her independent or different opinions. Both these situations seem somewhat tolerable when compared to the heartless treatment given to women as mothers. In the autumn of life, if a woman is not financially independent then she is regarded as a burden on the household and left all alone to face the hostile world. Sometimes she even becomes victim to emotional blackmail and is compelled to surrender her peace of mind and her right to live on her own terms. If this exile and isolation is her own choice, she is even deprived from it. If she wants to get engaged in some meaningful social work that might hurt and expose scoundrels, she is brutally raped and murdered no matter whether she is eight or eighty.

The present volume broadly focuses on multiple kinds of exiles—social, physical and psychological—woman has to undergo in society. It also presents the wounded, broken alienated self of woman, constantly striving for self-identity and self-dignity. Interestingly, the condition of woman is almost similar, no matter which part of the hemisphere she lives in—Canada or India. Geographical boundaries do not bring much positive change in perception of patriarchs and like the woman in Eliot's *The Wasteland*, she is treated as "the broken finger nails of dirty hands". This situation is not only alarming but it shakes sensitive minds from slumber and compels to change their perception towards woman.

The twenty-first century has witnessed changes in the social, political and economic conditions of women though the process is slow, but there is definitely remarkable hope for improvement. Even this book is a part of this realization that the exile and alienation of woman can be removed only when man would be free from his complexes and be sensitive towards the needs of woman and would participate in the process of her empowerment.

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EXILE AND ALIENATION: VARIOUS APPROACHES

Modern human civilisation is passing through a terrible ordeal. With the advent of the twentieth century, the psyche of people was shattered by the catastrophic consequences of two world wars. Today, people are mostly overwhelmed and overawed due to the growth of science, technology, and urbanisation. Their work culture and ethics alienate them from their self and society. Alienation, as a feeling of not belonging, has filled the life of the modern human with uncertainties and disappointments, obstructions and frustrations.

Alienation has become one of the most pivotal issues of the time, and the modern age has rightly been called "the age of alienation." In every affair of the world today, the human feels alienated and isolated from the self and detached from the centre of their world. Erick Fromm rightly observes that, "the alienated person is out of touch with himself as he is out of touch with any other person. He, like the others, is experienced as things are experienced; with the senses and with common sense, but at the same time without being related to oneself and the world outside, productively" (Fromm 1966, 111). Lack of time and a heavy work burden compels people to work as a machine. They have no time to think about their "primary self" and remain busy with making their "secondary sense of self" meaningful and worthwhile. Their journey from human being to a sophisticated modern person has alienated and isolated them from their own being.

The motif of literature, as observed by Jean-Paul Sartre, is "both to disclose the world and to offer it as a task to the generosity of the reader. It is to have recourse to the consciousness of others in order to make one's self be recognized as essential to the totality of being: it is to wish to live this essentiality by means of interposed persons" (Sartre 2009, 45). So, the exile and alienation of the modern human from society and self have always been major concerns in world literature. Basically, alienation is, "the state of feeling of estranged or separated from one's milieu, work, product of work or self" (Encyclopedia Britannica 1911, 270). So, in alienation, a person is out of touch with themselves as well as from

society. On the other hand, though exile appears as a synonym of alienation, it has different connotations.

Since time immemorial the term "exile" has been associated with the idea of physical banishment or separation from one's country or society, either voluntary or forced. In a conventional sense, exile is a form of political punishment where the exiled person had to be away from their home city or state. Their return was strictly refused, and they were threatened with imprisonment or death to enforce this. The Encyclopedia Britannica explains exile as:

> A prolonged absence from one's country imposed by the vested authority as a punitive measure. Exile and banishment probably originated among early people as a means of punishment. The offender was made an outcast and deprived of the comfort and protection of his group. Exile was practiced by the Greeks chiefly in cases of homicide, although ostracism was a form of exile imposed for political reasons. (Ibid., 631)

In present prospects, the term has been explained as separation, banishment, withdrawal, expatriation, and displacement, which result in the emotional expression of loss manifested as sorrow and nostalgia. Though the term exile is commonly used to describe an individual's situation in a society, it also applies to groups, companies, and even governments. Diaspora, refugees, and immigrant exile are termed as group exile. Due to foreign occupation the government of a country is forced into exile, relocating to argue its legitimacy from outside that country.

In contemporary literary and sociological studies, exile is a multidimensional and bi-lateral phenomenon. In the modern aspect of twentieth-century philosophy and literature, the approaches to exile are completely changed and the term is taken as, "a result of the experience of economic modernization, mass migration, extended warfare, and the breakdown of traditional notions of individual belonging and social order" (Nordin 2005, 9). Whereas, in the poststructural philosophical point of view, ontologically, exile is examined as an essential state of being, the outcome of the essential human condition.

Exile can also be examined as a self-imposed departure from one's homeland, race, and milieu, and termed self-exile. It is often described as a form of protest against the social and political circumstances which the person does not feel are suitable for their life. Self-exile is a feeling of estrangement from the society where one feels unable to adjust to new places and situations, and deliberately keeps a distance from the people and the society. Gradually, such accepted alienation becomes a fact of exile, and ultimately the self-imposed exile becomes one's lifestyle. Their

personal separation from the social, cultural, and collective history makes them isolated from the society.

The terms exile and alienation are used not only in literature, but also as significant devices in all social sciences, i.e. theology, sociology, psychology, philosophy, economics, politics, education, and anthropology.

Like exile, alienation also encompasses very old roots. Saint Augustine states that due to their sinful nature, human beings are alienated from God, and theologically he believes that reconciliation could be achieved only through belief in Christ or spiritual God.

Hegel, the famous German philosopher, also explained alienation in his theories. The concept of alienation is one of the most important and fruitful legacies of Hegel's spiritual philosophy. For him, the concept of alienation is the central account of the development of the spirit. In his famous books *On Christianity* and *The Phenomenology of Mind*, he thoroughly discussed the concept of the self-development and self-consciousness of the human being. According to him, the soul or self can be developed only through a process of alienation. He explains alienation as a journey of the finite human spirit towards the infinite spirit, i.e. God, and in this process their subjectivity move apart from them, and ultimately they become an object. Hegel observes:

> The objectivity of the deity increased in direct proportion to the increase in the corruption and slavery of men, and this objectivity is, in reality, no more than a revelation, a manifestation of this spirit of the age … The spirit of the age was revealed in the objectivity of its God when … it was introduced into a world alien to us, in a realm in which we had no share, where we would not acquire a place through activity, but at most by begging or conjuring our way in; it was an age in which man was a non-ego and his God another non-ego … In such an age the Deity sheds all its subjectivity and becomes nothing but an object. (Lukas 1975, 69)

After Hegel's death the Hegelian movement split, dividing into new groups. Some old Hegelians remained loyal to the conservative view of Hegel's spiritual approach. Later, Karl Marx (1818–83) and Friedrich Engels (1820–95) neglected Hegelian views of contemporary society and developed a new and radical approach known as the socioeconomic approach.

Marx, Comte, Spencer, and Hobhouse developed modern economic theories, analysing the matter of alienation as the result of a faulty economic structure. Karl Marx is considered the most prominent thinker of the nineteenth century, and his approach to alienation is basically socio-economic. As a radical socioeconomic thinker he forcefully emphasises

the issues of industrial labour, private property, social class, political power, and the communist society.

Marx and Engels, in their famous work *Communist Manifesto*, expose the alienation of the labour force throughout the capitalist world. In reference to the modern world of industrialisation, they argue that, "the lower strata of middle class—the small trades people, shopkeepers and retired tradesmen, generally the handicraftsmen and peasants—all these gradually sink into the proletariat" (Blanc 2006, 23). Moreover, the proletariat, the modern working class, do not have any means of production, so they are compelled to sell their labour in order to exist in society, which deteriorates their standard of living. Ultimately, the wide gap of living standards between bourgeois and proletariats alienates the proletariat class from the capitalist society.

Thus, the incredible changes in the fundamental mode of "material production" have affected the class structure of the society. It divides the society into dominant and subordinate classes, and consequently, in their struggle for economic, political, and social advantage, the subordinate class feels alienated from the world of the dominate class. Marx and Engels eloquently discussed the solutions to all these problems in their works. They neglect the thinkers' interpretation that it is the consciousness of the human that determines their living. Marx and Engels oppose this idea and establish the fact that it is "one's social being that determines his consciousness." Undoubtedly, it is necessary to change the condition that isolates people from each other and arrange them into new social groups (Communism, capitalism, and the working class) and refer them to, "the categorical imperative to overthrow all conditions in which man is a degraded, enslaved, neglected, contemptible being" (Ibid., 23), and where they are isolated and alienated. Despite the socioeconomic approach to alienation, Marx has also discussed the political alienation of the human being in terms their feeling alienated and neglected by the state:

> The state does not care about the individual's society without communion between people and that individual in his relation to such a state does not experience a feeling of solidarity; he is only able to relate himself to it as an isolated nomad, an individual. Man's inner life is divided into a world split up as such a way. (Blumenberg 1972, 15)

Marx suggests that the faulty political and economic conditions of any state where the works of the labour are not kept in focus, and capitalists have the freedom for mass production, lead to the rich becoming richer and the poor remaining poor, and the latter are ultimately bound to live alienated and humiliated lives. He observes:

> The alienation of the worker in his object is expressed as follows in the laws of political economy: the more the worker produces, the less he has to consume; the more value he creates the more worthless he becomes; the more refined his product the more crude and misshapen the worker; the more civilized the product the more barbarous the worker; the more the work manifests intelligence the more the worker declines in intelligence and becomes a slave of nature. (Ibid., 61)

Sociologists such as Herbert McClosky, Richard Schacht, Jan Haida, Michael Aiken, Jerald Huge, Melvin Seeman, Benjamin Zablocki, and Emile Durkheim opine that alienation is a result of human powerlessness, meaninglessness, cultural estrangement, social isolation, and self-estrangement. From the sociological point of view, alienation can be divided into two realms: structural, and socio-psychological. Structural alienation refers to the situation where a person feels alienated from society due to its societal structure, i.e. there is a distance between an individual and the work product and an individual's treatment on the basis of class, caste, race, gender, etc. The universal differences between privileged and non-privileged classes alienate and isolate the non-privileged, who find it very hard to break the vicious circle of poverty. In this regard, Jan Haida rightly remarks: "Alienation is an awareness of non-believing or non-sharing (which) reflects (one's) exclusion of self-exclusion from society, its social and cultural participation" (Haida 1961, 764). Richard Schacht, in his book *Alienation*, convincingly differentiates between social exile and alienation: "an individual who tries unsuccessfully to establish meaningful contact with others is in a different situation from one who chooses to live alone in order to achieve some special purpose" (1970, 157).

The socio-psychological feeling of alienation begins with one's realisation of their powerless, meaningless, and rootless existence, which gradually estranges and isolates them from the self and society. The feeling of powerlessness is the beginning point of their identity crisis or a precursor to self-estrangement. The domination by the superiors makes them feel powerless, and the feelings of inferiority alienate them from the powerful group. The feeling of meaninglessness is related to the emotions of the individual when they realise that they do not have any real purpose of their own. They feel disillusioned with the whole system because their expectations are not being fulfilled.

The social isolation is basically the inability to feel connected to the society. The constant rejection and degradation of people isolate them from the world around them. In reference to social isolation, Benjamin Zablocki rightly remarks that:

> the individual's low expectancy for inclusion, for social acceptance, is expressed typically through feelings of loneliness or feelings of rejection or repudiation (found for example among members of minority communities, the aged and handicapped, and various kinds of fewer visible strangers—the neglected natives, neglected on the basis of class, gender, caste, race and colour of the skin, etc.). (Zablocki 1941, 9)

Thus, the experience of negligence isolates the human from society. The loss of self-esteem and individuality generates feelings of self-estrangement, which makes them feel unable to find a reward in society.

Psychological approaches to alienation stimulate its meaning and explicate its reasons and problems. Time and again, psychologists have suggested adequate solutions to all these problems. The eminent analytical psychologists Frank Johnson, Sigmund Freud, Carl Gustav Jung, and Erick Fromm have presented detailed and analytical ways to interpret the problems of alienation, and they have analysed its psychological effect on the human psyche.

In their limitations regarding nature, the human feels a sensorial and emotional inconvenience; these are the two psychological methods that deal with the alienated psyche of the human. Sensorial inconveniences are the product of a direct and painful relation with nature, and emotional inconveniences are actually the product of the reflective relationship with nature. The realisation of all these inconveniences develops the feelings of fear in the human being, which ultimately alienate them from their self:

> Alienated determinations form in the man a conception of the conveniences and inconveniences which creates an alienated respect toward the power in nature, alienated emotional states, alienated needs, alienated actions. In this way, subjective consciousness develops an alienated knowledge. Alienated knowledge is false and, therefore, forms an alienated mode of the man's living. The alienated mode of living alienates the man from the nature and thus the process develops cyclically. (sarovic.com, *Psychology of Alienation*, 1 & 2)

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), the father of psychology, refers to alienation as "a self-estrangement" caused by the split between the conscious and unconscious parts of the mind. The constant blocking and suppression of a person's feelings, emotions, and sexual instincts make them less effective and detach them from their real nature, alienating them from their actual being. Freud defines neurosis as a result of alienation from his own being and nervousness, stress, disappointment, depression, and mental breakdown as the effects of constant alienation.

Erich Fromm (1900–80), a prominent psychologist, presents in his famous book *The Sane Society* a detailed and impressive thesis about the alienation of the human from the self and society, and he analyses alienation, as an experience where the human feels estranged from the society and self; they neither feel themselves to be the "centre of the world" nor develop an attachment with their own self. He defines alienation as where the human, "acts and feels like an automation, who never experiences anything, which is really his, who experience himself entirely as the person who thinks he is supposed to be, whose artificial smile has replaced his genuine laughter, whose meaningless chatter has replaced communication speech, whose dulled despair has taken the place of genuine pain" (Fromm 1966, 24).

In his next book, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*, Fromm explains that the human's estrangement from themselves is a real cause of their alienation. The growing gap of communication and their reluctance to share their joys and sorrows with others alienates them from the world around.

Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961), a Swiss psychiatrist, established a new psychoanalytic school of psychology called Analytical Psychology, and developed a distinctive approach to the study of the human psyche. The ultimate goal of his works was the reconciliation of the life of the individual with the world of the suprapersonal. He analyses the individual's encounter with the world around them, where the shocking consequences of their present life alienate them from their being. He explains:

> He [man] has seen how beneficent is science, technology, and organization but also how catastrophic they can be. He has likewise seen how all well-meaning governments have thoroughly paved the way for peace on the principle "in times of peace prepare for war" that the world has nearly gone to rack and ruin. And as for ideals, neither the Christian church, nor the brotherhood of man, nor international social democracy, nor the solidarity of economic interests had stood up to the acid test of reality. (Jung 1984, 460)

Undoubtedly, the two world wars and the impending danger of a third have casted a dark shadow on the sensibilities of the modern human.

Existentialism has become a very striking point of discussion in the modern phenomenon. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) and Soren Kierkegaard (1813–55) propagated some issues of existential philosophy, and later in the twentieth century European existential philosophers,

mainly Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) and Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–80), elaborately discussed the complex lifestyle of the modern human being.

A syllogism that "all humans must die; I am a human; therefore, I must die" seems very common, but when it is analysed from the experimental viewpoint of any individual who is about to die a very real and solitary death, the consequence of the experience of truth would be different. Consequently, nobody would like to die, but simultaneously the death of a human being is certain, despite all their efforts to exist in the world.

In the nineteenth century, the Danish thinker Soren Kierkegaard and the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche argued about religion and existence of God. Kierkegaard, in his famous book *Fear and Trembling*, describes that the individual may save themselves from alienation only by surrendering to God. He further advocates that the individual is absolutely alone in the world, and therefore, to avoid loneliness, they must generate some irrational notions about the existence of God. Thus, they will not be isolated. Nietzsche opposes this idea of Kierkegaard. Being an atheist with a nihilistic vision, he believed that nihilism was the logical end-point of Western philosophy. Basically, his efforts were to challenge Kierkegaard's religious views of the existence of God. He said that, for the sake of asceticism, the constant suppression of desires leaves a person alienated because, "we imagine a truer and better world beyond appearance. When we fail to grasp that true world, we fall into despair or nihilism, for we have lost the higher world that we never had" (Colebrook 2002, 19). So, the feelings of loss alienate the human from their surroundings.

The existential thoughts of Heidegger and Sartre render the authenticity and unauthenticity of human existence. By authentic existence, Sartre means that a person does not live in a state of denial, whereas they fail to achieve the mode of being. According to him, the conscience of the human is eager to achieve an "authentic existence," but due to some external factors or their own internal dilemma they are detached from "authentic existence," and their situation compels them to live an "unauthentic existence," which ultimately becomes the reason for their alienation. He clears that "the point, as I choose myself as a tearing away from the other, I assume and recognize as mine this alienated Me" (1956, 285). On the other hand, Martin Heidegger defines alienation as resulting from the failure to live an authentic life. The human is everywhere in chains, and their limited freedom and choices make them helpless and alienated from the real existence.

Franz Kafka (1882–1924), an existential thinker, has time and again exposed the complex and psychological states of the modern human through fictional characters. He analysed the life of modern human beings

and their transformation into some "other" being, i.e. an insect, or an animal. He identified the loss of humanity in the modern existence of the human being. Their sense of loss of the present and presentable world alienates them and compels them to live a deserted life. Gregor Samsa, the protagonist of his famous treaty *Metamorphosis*, presents the existential dilemma of the modern human. His transformation into a beetle is probably a "symbol or allegory of inhumanity, alienation or displacement at the heart of all finite human life" (Colebrook 2002, 138). In *The Hunger Artist*, he interprets the submission of a man who feels alienated and guilty and perceives a notion that law, justice, and good are beyond any conception or measure, and any attempt to represent or articulate this law defines its essential purity. So, under the flux of his self-deprivation and alienation, he finally "decides to starve himself in order to inflict punishment upon himself precisely because any law will always be out of reach, always cruel and arbitrary" (Ibid., 38). Thus, Kafka, through his psychic character, tries to expose the modern condition of complex human existence.

All these approaches to alienation have become prominent parts of modern literature. Literature as a mirror of society helps to expose the alienation of the human through its genres, i.e. novel, drama, poetry, prose, etc. Time and again, writers have pointed out alienation as representing a social, political, and psychological evil, and portrayed a real picture of the pessimistic views of the sad realities of life.

Thinkers, critics, and academicians have given different opinions regarding the alienated and exiled state of modern humanity, but all of them unanimously agree on one common belief that as the human is a social being so communication and emotional and social bonding are essential for a healthy mental state, while the lack of communication has negative repercussions. Significantly, literature all over the world abounds with the themes of exiled and alienated beings who find it very hard to overcome their problems due to a lack of communication.

Margaret Laurence

Margaret Laurence belonged to a family of respectable lawyers, soldiers, craftsmen, and merchants of Scottish and Irish descent. Her Scottish family migrated to Manitoba, Canada in the 1870s from Helensburgh, Scotland. Her grandfather, John Wemyss, was a famous lawyer in Winnipeg and played major role in establishing the town of Neepawa in 1883. He had three children. The two boys, John and Robert were in the army and fought in France during the First World War. Robert, Margaret

Laurence's father, married Verna Simpson, "a shy reserved girl who was a gifted musician and gave piano concerts in Winnipeg" (Smith, 1975, 5–6). After two years of marriage, Margaret Laurence was born as Jean Margaret Wemyss on July 18, 1926 in Neepawa, Manitoba. When she was only four years old her mother died of a kidney infection. After Verna's death her sister, Margaret Simpson, a primary-school teacher, left her job and came to look after the child. A year after Verna's death she married Margaret's widower father. Peggy's (Margaret's childhood name—she was named Margaret after Margaret Simpson) stepmother was loving and caring towards her. In Laurence's own words, "she was a magnificent lady, with a great sense of home and responsibility, and she was devoted to English Literature" (Ibid., 6). Thus, she provided Laurence with a strong sense of literature and writing. Her father died on January 13, 1935 when she was nine. After Robert's death they had to sell the big old Wemyss house to get through the 1930s' depression, and settled themselves in their maternal grandfather's house. One year after Robert's death, another tragedy knocked on the door when Margaret Simpson also died and left the innocent child in the care of John Simpson, a cabinetmaker of Neepawa, where she lived under the strict discipline and authoritarian approach of her grandfather. During her early days in Neepawa, she was extremely lonely and, in isolation, developed her interest in writing. Her first story, *The Case of a Blonde Butcher*, was published by Winnipeg Free Press when she was only twelve. As she says, "I was always a writer," and of course, during school or afterwards, she always wrote. At the age of thirteen she started an epic novel, *Pillars of a Nation*. As a student of the Neepawa Collegiate Institute: "She played violin in the school orchestra, acted in school plays, was on the debating team, curled, and played baseball" (Ibid., 10). Through her early activities she personalised a growing artist in herself. When she was sixteen she became an editor of her school paper, *Annals of the Black and Gold*. Her achievement during her teenage years won her the Governor General's Medal in 1943.

During her graduation she met with a young RAF man called Jack Laurence. At the time he was an engineering student in Manitoba University. Margaret determined to marry him at first sight: "That's the man I'd like to marry" (Laurence 1989, 102). Consequently, she married Jack Laurence on September 13, 1947. After their marriage, she became a journalist in Winnipeg and wrote for the community paper *The Winnipeg Citizen*. Undoubtedly, newspaper reporting is ideal work for a budding writer, but Laurence realised that it made it difficult to focus on her fiction. Luckily, the paper could not run for long and after a year it

discontinued publication. Laurence got a new job as a registrar for the Winnipeg YMCA.

In 1949 Jack graduated in engineering and they migrated to England. After a year, in 1950, Jack was appointed as a civil engineer in the Somaliland Protectorate to direct the building of thirty dams. During her early days in Somaliland, Laurence felt uncomfortable among people of a different culture and language, but gradually she developed a desire for keen observation about the tough life of the Somali people, especially the situations of women, which forced her to write about them. She identified more with the Somali people than the British/American people of the ruling class.

Between 1952 and 1957 she lived in South Africa and the Gold Coast. There she bore two children, a daughter Jocelyn (1952) and a son David (1955). Her keen observation of the life of African people provided her fame as a novelist. Through her African writing, she tried to sketch a portrait of the alienated selves of African people. Her first African story, *The Drummer of All the World*, was published in the *Queen's Quarterly* in 1956. In 1960 she published her first and only African novel, *This Side Jordan*, which won her the Beta Sigma Phi Award. In it, she poignantly depicts the impact of colonial administrators on the alienated psychology of colonised people. Her two autobiographical travelogues, *The Tomorrow Tamer and Other Stories* and *The Prophet's Comel Bell or New Wind in a Dry Land*, reflect the wide range of her African experiences. Her days in Africa shaped her as an emerging writer. Undoubtedly, her experiences in Africa and her encounter with Nigerian dramatists foregrounded a platform for her later writing. Broadly, her works can be divided into two parts: African and Canadian. Her African works are less popular than her Canadian fiction.

In 1962, a disturbance took place in her marital life when Jack accepted a Job in East Pakistan. However, after the grand success of *This Side Jordan*, Laurence did not want a break in her literary career, and refused to go with Jack. About their mental incompatibilities, Laurence once said that they were, "people with totally different lifestyles, both legitimate, but different" (Smith 1975, 30–1), and ultimately they decided on a legal separation. After separation from Jack, Laurence decided to settle in England to experience the great literary world of London. There, she lived in Elm Cottage of Buckinghamshire. Settled in England, she created her fictional world of Manawaka.

Laurence's fictional world of Manawaka is basically an amalgam of Prairie towns and her own private world. It is a geographical layout of the Scots-Canadian subculture. Through the Manawaka cycle she tried to

create a myth of her people. She says, "in raging against our injustices, our stupidities, I do so as *family*, as I did, and still do, in writing about those aspects of my town which I hated and which are always in some ways aspects of myself" (Morley 1990, 77).

The Stone Angel (1964), the first novel of the Manawaka cycle, is Margaret Laurence's most popular and successful novel. It has been translated into French, Norwegian, and Swedish, and is being translated into Danish, Dutch, and Italian. Since the novel came out, critics and reviewers have given their warm approval to the book, and it has been considered in different countries through different perceptions. In her memoir, Laurence shares: "It was interesting that the novel was reviewed in England as a study of an old person and in America as the story of a strong pioneer woman—but in Canada, Hagar was, and still is, seen as everybody's grandmother or great grand-mother" (Laurence 1989, 166). In the novel, Laurence weaves a story of an old woman who feels exiled and alienated from herself and the world around her. Due to its poignant theme of alienation of an old woman, it "has been used in geriatrics courses in Canadian hospitals to teach young nurses about the reality of old people" (Ibid., 165).

Away from her native land in Elm Cottage Laurence was struggling, and writing became her only source of income. Soon after the success of *The Stone Angel* she started writing *A Jest of God* and *The Fire Dwellers*.

A Jest of God (1966) and *The Fire Dwellers* (1969) deal with the story of two sisters, Stacey and Rachel. Stacey MacAindra, 39 years old, a mother of four children, feels alienated due to her incommunicative husband and children. On the other hand, Rachel, 34, an unmarried schoolteacher, seems caged and alienated in the company of her mother. She lives a life of exile and isolation. In her family, she is alienated in the company of her hypocritical, insensitive, conformist mother, and in her professional life she feels suffocated by the authoritarian, colonial, and repressive attitude of her school principal Willard Liddley, while the behaviour of Nick Kazlick tears her psyche, leading her to feel alienation. Thus, the constant negligence by her family and suppression of her desires by society create an atmosphere of isolation around her.

Both novels gave Laurence fame and helped her financially. Her increased popularity made her the first choice for publishers, and one after another she started receiving proposals. In 1969 she accepted the position of writer in-residence in Messey College for the academic year 1969–70. In the same year, after seven years of legal separation, Jack Laurence decided to divorce. At the time, Jocelyn was 17 and David 14. Now, the future of the family and the responsibilities of two growing children were

on her shoulders. As a writer, mother, and woman at that time, she was always under the flux of fear and isolation. She states: "loneliness was an almost constant part of my life, but I had always been a lonely person" (Laurence 1989, 170).

After completing her tenure as writer in residence she started her next Manawaka novel, *The Diviners*. During the writing of *The Diviners* she lived alone in Elm Cottage. The river that flows both ways in *The Diviners* is certainly Ontabee River, that ran near Elm Cottage. She completed the first draft of the novel in 1972; *The Diviners* was her most painstaking effort, and she called it "a team effort." Ian Camron composed songs for the script, and Jocelyn typed out the third draft. She accepts: "I had all kinds of help, help that I needed because writing *The Diviners* was one of the most different and exhausting things, I've ever done" (Ibid., 207).

After its completion, Jocelyn left home and David graduated. Laurence decided to move back to Canada, and sold Elm Cottage. In Canada, she served as a writer in residence to Western Ontario and Trent University. In 1974, *The Diviners* was published by McClelland and Stewart.

The Diviners deals with the isolation and alienation of a struggling writer, Morag Gunn, and seems to be an autobiography. Through Morag Gunn, Laurence depicts the ups and downs in the life of a woman writer who is struggling to trace her own identity. The novel was attacked as pornographic and blasphemous, and some critics even advocated throwing it out of school libraries.

In 1985 her books, including *The Diviners*, *A Jest of God*, and *The Stone Angel*, were bitterly criticised. Undoubtedly, this shocked her literary career, but she never felt disappointed. She took the challenges positively and decided that: "it was no longer appropriate for me to maintain a dignified silence. I spent about three months at the beginning of 1985 doing interviews on radio and T.V., with newspapers and magazines and writing articles on the whole subject" (Ibid., 215). As a result, her books have gained a reputed place and been restored to high-school courses.

She published her collection of essays, *Heart of a Stranger*, in 1976, and *Six Darn Cows* in 1979. Struggling with all challenges of life, she became the Chancellor of Trent University in 1981.

As a humanitarian and social thinker, she was worried about the increasing possibilities of nuclear war. Being a true lover of human welfare, she raised her voice against injustice and the inhuman activities of the modern world. In most of her lectures and statements, she bitterly criticized nuclear weapons. She believed that, "the question of disarmament is the most pressing practical, moral, and spiritual issue of our times. I'm

not talking about my life and your life and my kids' lives and the lives of people of everywhere, if we honour both the past and the future, then we must do everything in our power to work non-violently for peace" (Laurence 1984, 189).

As a novelist, she selected freedom and survival as the prominent themes of her writing. In all her discussions and statements, she frequently uses the terms freedom and survival to expose the motivation and direction of her writings. Basically, her efforts for women's freedom and survival are "the attempts of the personality to survive with some dignity" (Laurence 1983, 33–4). Through the characters of Hagar, Stacey, and Morag she successfully discusses the themes of struggle and survival. As a liberal feminist, she traces the path of women's freedom and survival and unveils a real and alienated condition of women's life before the society. She writes:

> The themes of freedom and survival relate both to the social/external world and to the spiritual/inner one, and they are themes which I see as both political and religious. If freedom is, in part, the ability to act out of one's own self-definition, with some confidence and with compassion, uncompelled by fear or by the authority of others, it is also a celebration of life and of the mystery at life's care. (Laurence 1981, 259)

Due to the lack of proper freedom, women are compelled to be exiled and alienated from the world. In the suppressed world of male chauvinism, they feel powerless and meaningless. Through her writings, Laurence rejects the male definition of woman's survival and advocates the equality of sexes and reciprocity of love. In one of her essays, she determines that the survival of a woman is, "not mere physical survival, but a survival of the spirit, with human dignity and the ability to give and receive love" (Ibid., 258). Thus, throughout her life she has made efforts to bring women out of the self-deprecating and uncertain world of alienation and allow them to survive with honour and human dignity.

As a novelist, humanitarian, and social thinker, Laurence's journey through life came to an end on January 5, 1987.

Anita Desai

Anita Desai, reserved and reticent by nature, never discussed any issue of her personal life in any of her interviews, articles, and letters. She was born in Mussoorie, India on June 24, 1937 as Anita Mazumdar, the daughter of D. N. Mazumdar, a Bengali businessman, and Toni Nime, a German lady. Her oriental and Western roots spontaneously led her to the

glory of Anglo-Indian writers. Instead of showing a preference for Bengali or German she chose English as the language of her career. She accepts that: "It is the language both of reason and instinct, of sense and sensibility. It is capable of poetry and prose. I do believe it is even capable of taking on an Indian character, an Indian flavour, purely by reflection" (Desai 1984, 2). Consequently, she started writing in the language of the world and became a most prolific and prominent writer of Indian writing in English.

Like Margaret Laurence, she too started writing from a very young age:

> I have been writing, since the age of 7, as instinctively as a breath. It is a necessity to me. I find it is in the process of writing that I am able to think, to feel and to realize at the highest pitch. (Desai 1972, 348)

Undoubtedly, she was a born writer. Since the age of seven, she began to write prose, mainly fiction, which was published in children's magazines. At the time her family lived in Delhi, where she received primary education through Queen's Marry School. Later, she graduated from Miranda House, Delhi University, passing her Bachelor's Degree in English Literature in 1957 at the age of 20. She also had one year of work experience in Max Muller Bhawan in Calcutta.

In 1958, she tied the nuptial knot with Ashvin Desai, a businessman. They have four children. Kiran Desai, the Man Booker Prize Winner of 2006 for *The Inheritance of Loss*, is one of them. Besides being a reputed writer, she is also a good, caring mother. As the wife of a businessman, she has lived in the Metropolitan cities of Delhi, Chandigarh, Calcutta, Mumbai, and Puna.

She established a new genre of novel in Indian writing in English. She refuses to follow the conventional themes and narrative patterns, introducing a new technique to the development of Indo-Anglian novels and literature. On the difference between her and the leading writers of the earlier generation, R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, and Raja Rao, she says: "They were experimental writers and great pioneers, and one respected them a lot for it. But I knew that I did not want to experiment. I knew I was different and I wrote in my own way" (Rao Jr 2006, 11).

In spite of dealing with the social, economic, political, and cultural matters, she delves deep into the psyche of her protagonists. She shares the literary heritage of D. H. Laurence, Virginia Woolf, Henry James, and Marcel Proust, and is also inspired by Japanese writer Yasunari Kawabata as well as the modern poetry of Arthur Rimbaud, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and D. H. Lawrence. She established psychological novels in the annals of

Indo-Anglican fiction. Literature, according to her, "should deal with more enduring matters, less temporary and less temporal that politics. It should deal with life and death. It should be too ironical and also mystical to accept the world at face value and regard it as the whole and the only truth" (Desai 1978, 2).

She believes that, besides a creative genius, a novelist ought to be a sensitive and keen observer of the human mind that portray the fractured psyche of the modern human. She deals with the individual rather than the society. In an interview with Jasbir Jain, she vehemently says: "I think a writer simply has to be an observant person. If he is not, he is not going to write, not write a novel anyway which entails so much acute description and also an eye for detail" (Jain 1987, 7). Through the psyches of the protagonists, she explores the deep sense of exile and alienation, especially of her women characters in Indian Society. India is basically a male-dominated society where women are kept to live in restricted and disciplined environments. They are not allowed to take part in the decision-making process, and are always isolated and alienated. Desai, as a humanitarian, focuses on the predicament of women. Although she is not a radical feminist, through hidden irony and mystical realities she time and again divulges the underlying truth of human existence. She asserts that: "Writing is to me a process of discovering the truth—the truth that is nine-tenths of the iceberg that lies submerged beneath the one-tenth visible portion we call reality … Writing is my way of plunging to the depths and exploring this underlying truth. All my writing is an effort, to underline and convey the true significance of things" (Desai 1978, 348). While dealing with the situation of women, exile and alienation became a dominant theme of her fiction. Her protagonists are excessively sensitive and over emotional. Their perceived notions are distinctly different from the confronted reality. Their psychological angst develops feelings of fear-psychosis, neurosis, paranoia, disillusionment, obsession, and schizophrenia, which ultimately exile and alienate them from their families and societies.

Anita Desai, a prolific author, has since the beginning of her literary career in the 1960s written eleven novels, three books for children, three short-story collections, one non-fiction book, and number of other stories, reviews, and articles. From time to time she has been honoured with many literary awards, including *The Sahitya Academy Award*, *The Guardian Award for Children's Fiction*, the *National Academy for Letters Award*, and many others.

Desai's first novel, *Cry, the Peacock*, was published in 1963 and is considered a trendsetter. The delineation of its hypersensitive central

character shows that she is "interested in peculiar and eccentric characters rather than every day average ones" (Jain 1987, 10). It is a story of a young lady, Maya, a hypersensitive girl who suffers from a sense of alienation, and who eventually meets with an existential malaise. Maya, the pampered daughter of a loving father, has a prosaic and workaholic husband. Their mental approaches are antithetical to each other; Maya is "instinctively passionate" and Gautama (her husband) is "essentially intellectual." A lack of proper understanding and communication leads Maya to isolation and alienation. In her loneliness, she remembers the prophecy of an albino astrologer who predicted that one of them would die after four years of marriage. Under a fit of constant physical and emotional alienation, she sees her own death, but in the existential dilemma she pushes her husband from the roof, and he dies. Thus, through the heart-rending story of Maya, Desai unfolds the tragic aspects of a lonely and isolated character.

Her next novel, *Voices in the City* (1965), expresses the voices of the sensitive individuals who feel exiled and alienated in the large and open arena of competition. It is a brilliant exposition of loneliness in the toughened life of the metropolis, the "Monster City." The novel is particularly interesting because of the delineation of male characters.

Her third novel, *Bye Bye Blackbird* (1971), has similarities with *Voices in the City*, which also deals with the life of its male protagonists Adit and Dev, two Indian immigrants in Britain. The novel is considered as the most accomplished of Desai's early novels. *Bye Bye Blackbird* depicts human alienation at different levels. It depicts a poignant struggle and the diasporic experiences of the protagonists. Through the novel, Desai eloquently depicts the dilemma of immigrants. The sense of exile and alienation make them feel insulted and unwanted and their bitter experiences on the foreign land make them nostalgic about their homeland. However, the growing opportunities for success make it impossible for them to return, creating their confusion and alienation in the land of opportunities. Undoubtedly, the novel is also about exile and the alienation of Adit's wife, Sara, who feels lonely and boycotted in her own country because of her marriage to an Indian.

Two novels were published during 1974–5. Her first fiction novel for children, *The Peacock Garden*, was published in 1974, with *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* following in 1975. *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* won her the Federation of Indian Publishers and Authors Guild of India Award for Excellence in Writing in 1979. The novel focuses on the alienation of a woman who is crippled with a sense of meaningless existence. The chief protagonist, Sita, feels neglected and like an

"outrageous outsider" amid her husband and children. She is a middle-aged mother of four children and is seven months pregnant. The constant and drastic experiences of alienation have made her neurotic. Without caring for her condition and the warnings of her husband, she takes very bold decisions in walking out and returning to her past and the island for a miracle in order to not give birth to her fifth child. *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* stands out in comparison to Desai's other novels, regarding its positivity towards life. At last, Sita decides to adjust and compromise with her situation and agrees to come back to Bombay with her husband and children. Thus, the realisation and acceptance of reality tears her sense of alienation and ties her to a harmonious familial bond.

A year after *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, her next book for children, *Cat on the House*, appeared in 1976.

The theme of exile and alienation is most poignant and elegant in her fifth novel *Fire on the Mountain*. A year after its publication in 1977 it won Desai the Sahitya Academy Award. In the same year the novel was privileged by two more prestigious awards, including the Royal Society of Literature's Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize. The novel portrays the life of three women characters: Nanda Kaul, an elderly woman, Raka, her great-granddaughter, and Illa Das, her lifelong friend. Through the lives of these protagonists, Desai encapsulates the oppressive nature of the brutal power structure. Nanda Kaul, the wife of a vice-chancellor, suffers throughout her life from negligence and emotional deprivation, and shuts herself off from the world around her as a result. Raka becomes a victim of marital disharmony. The character of Raka's father, who is an alcoholic, exposes the conditions of family violence in Indian Society, and Raka is an outcome of faulty upbringing. Through three different sketches of women characters, Desai bares the unstable roots of a power structure that compels women to live lives of exile and alienation.

Before the end of the same year her first short-story collection, *Games at Twilight and Other Stories*, was published, and in the following year she released her only non-fiction work, *Peasant Struggles in India*.

Her *Clear Light of Day* (1980) became her first novel to be nominated for the Booker Prize for Fiction in 1980. The novel, according to its author, is, "about time as a destroyer and as a preserver and about what the bondage of time does to people" (Pathak 1989, 44). It is the story of an alienated female protagonist, Bim, who attempts to trace her identity within a family framework.

After *Clear Light of Day*, her third book for children, *Village by the Sea*, was published in 1982. The novel won her The Guardian Children's Fiction Prize in 1983.

In 1984 Desai's *In Custody* was short-listed for the Booker Prize for Fiction. In 1993 it became her only novel to have been made into a movie, directed by Ismail Merchant, with a screenplay by Shahrukh Hussain, and released by Merchant Ivory Productions. In 1994 it won the President of India Gold Medal for Best Picture and The News India Best Woman Writer Award. *In Custody* presents the existential dilemma of protagonist Devan, a middle-class man and a young Hindi lecturer at a college in a small town of Mirpore. His unfulfilled ambitions and dreams disappoint him, and he feels suffocation during his days in the town. However, during his days in Delhi, he cannot adjust to the shabby realities of city life and, in his failure, he feels self-deprecation and alienation. He remains in a complex existential state: "every effort he had made, had ended in defeat; most of the poems he had written … had been rejected; his monograph never published; his wife and son eyed him with blatant disappointment, nor had he won the regard of his colleagues or students" (1984, 128). Ultimately, the situations become too bewildering, and consequently his nihilism leads him to a life of isolation and alienation.

In her next novel *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988), Desai merges European and Indian culture in another astute portrayal of alienation. Through interior monologue and flashback, Desai looks through the alienated psyche of an elderly German Jew, Hugo, who came to India in the 1930s to escape the holocaust in Germany. However, in India, as a German and a Jew, he is doubly alienated from the society around him.

In her *Journey to Ithaca* (1995), Desai continues her interest in the East and West theme. The novel is a journey towards self-realisation and fulfilment. The chief protagonist, Matteo, with his wife Sophie, comes to India to fulfil his spiritual quest. Broadly speaking, it is a story of two persons with bipolar mentalities. Matteo is in the search of a spiritual guru and becomes a true devotee to the Mother. In contrast, Sophie is disgusted by the dust, heat, and squalor of India. These temperamental diversities part ways, but Sophie's realisation of the truth makes her start her spiritual journey.

After *Journey to Ithaca*, Desai's next collection of stories, *Scholar and Gypsy*, appeared in 1996.

Fasting, Feasting (1999) stands with her early novels. After *In Custody*, *Bhumgartner's Bombay*, and *Journey to Ithaca*, she returns to focus on a family where women are trapped and alienated in traditional and conventional society. *Fasting, Feasting* concerns the stigma of two sisters, Uma and Aruna, and their brother Arun. They belong to a traditional Indian family of the modern world. The novel is a saga of the loneliness and isolation of the neglected Uma. Uma, on the one hand, is a

little dumb, a hypersensitive, shy, and timid woman, while Aruna, on the other hand, is bold and confident, and intellectually aware of her rights. Arun, as the only son of his parents, is a pampered child. After his birth, Uma's education is stopped and she has to work as his Aaya. *Fasting, Feasting* was Desai's fourth novel to be recommended for the Booker Prize in 2000. That same year she published her third short-story collection *Diamond Dust: And Other Stories*.

Her next novel, *The Zigzag Way*, was published in 2004. It won her the Orange Prize for Fiction, Best Novel Nominee Award in 2005. *The Zigzag Way* is a poignant story of the young struggling historian Eric, who, after his graduation, follows his beloved Elm, who travels to Yucatan for her scientific research. After being left alone he isolates himself to trace his roots and identity. The *Zigzag Way* brings "together past and present in a moment of powerful epiphany. Haunting and atmospheric, with splashes of exuberant color and darker violence, The *Zigzag Way* is a magical novel of elegiac beauty" (Desai 2004, 2)

Desai's latest book, *The Artist of Disappearance*, was published in 2011. The book is a collection of three novellas. The stories reveal the existential angst of the modern generation who have great expectations and dare to hope to create a different identity, but the melancholy of life sinks them back into their isolation and alienation, leading them to disappear.

Thus, since the very beginning of her literary career, Desai has produced a great amount of writing, releasing a new work every year. Throughout her life she has been dedicated and devoted to the development of Indo-Anglican literature.

At present, she is a fellow of many prominent literary organisations, such as The Royal Society of Literature, the London and American Academy of Arts and Letters, and Girton College, Cambridge University. She has taught at Mount Holyoke College, Baruch College, and Smith College. At present, she is professor of Humanities, Emeritus at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and also writes for *The New York Review of Books*.

Thus, undoubtedly, Anita Desai, a sure-footed and emotional novelist, astute interpreter of the human psyche, is one of the major Indian English writers of her generation.