

ANITA DESAI'S NOVELS: A CRITICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Anita Desai is an Indian novelist and short story writer. She is known for her sensitive portrayal of the inner feelings of her female characters. Many of her novels explore tensions between family members and the alienation of middle-class women. In her later novels, she wrote on varied themes such as German anti-Semitism, the demise of traditions, and Western stereotypical views of India.

Anita Desai is a critically lauded 20th-century writer, and her novels on the experiences and inner lives of Indian men and women are known for their compassion, eloquence, and lucid prose. Having come of age when India achieved independence in 1947, Desai weaves politics and gender issues into her works. Anita Desai is an internationally acclaimed novelist of Indian writing in English. She has won coveted Sahitya Academy award in 1978 for her novel "Fire on the Mountain", and the British Guardian Price for "Village by the Sea". Her novel's "Clear Light of Day", "In Custody" and "Fasting", Fasting were shortlisted for Booker Prize. She has always been a favourite novelist for the reader of psychological novels. Her presentation of socio-cultural aspects is full of realism. I have chosen to work upon because of the superb feminists' mode and true to life depiction of various happenings in Indian sub-continent.

Keywords: *Century, Writer, Deasi, Sahitya Academy, Novel's, Realism, Mountain.*

INTRODUCTION:

Anita Desai is one of India's most well-known and creative novelists. On the 24th of June 1937, she was born in Mussorie, India. Her father was Bengali, while her mother was German. She spoke English, Hindi, Bengali, and German as a child. Her first language was English. She began writing in English when she was seven years old. She's written books, stories, children's books, and essays. Desai was up speaking English, German, and Hindi, but it was at Queen Mary's Higher Secondary School in New Delhi that she learned to read and write in English. As a result, when she was seven years old, she began writing in English. "At home, we spoke German, and that's how I learnt nursery rhymes and fairy tales." With all of our friends and neighbours, we spoke Hindi. When I was in school, I studied English." Desai went on to Miranda House, a world-class school of Delhi University, where she earned her B.A. in English Literature

in 1957. She began her abstract career at the age of seven, and her first tale was published when she was nine years old. Sri. Aswin Desai, the CEO of a computer software company, was her husband. They had four children together. In 1986, she was a meeting individual at Cambridge University's Girton College. She attended Smith College from 1987 to 1989. Desai's first publication was a tale in a children's magazine in the United States. She issued twelve fiction works as well as a variety of expositions, audits, and essays. Apart from Games of Twilight (1978), an anthology of stories, the remaining works are books, three of which are for children. She is frequently referred to as a "Feminist" and a "Mental Novelist." In her novels, she discusses estrangement, intellectual journeys, and humanistic character. She portrays modern emergency and confrontations between two shafts of human experience, social and heavenly mission, as a cutting edge and post autonomous lady. "The anxiety of confronting, isolated, the fierce attacks of presence," Desai describes the central theme of her fiction. She is frequently regarded as a feminist mental writer who addresses key issues such as solitude, lack of correspondence, psychological struggle, man-woman relationships, and conjugal difficulties. Her heroines are all women. Anita Desai's language and tactics vary depending on the issue and situation. She employs Nostalgia, or recollections of the past, as an account approach. Her distinct style of writing, distinct characters, language use, practical theme, and account approach have made her writing so appealing that she has received numerous accolades, awards, and grants for her work. Her dedication to the academic community is unquestionable. All areas of her composing are examined in the paper.

Identity is a state of mind that is granted by the interaction with the fellow beings in the society and also, by the acceptance in the society. A woman's identity crisis is that where she struggles to achieve as a human being in its full sense against those forces of society who bind her in chains and reject her as a being in comparison to man. Earlier, woman sought her identity in the relationship as a wife, mother and daughter. She accepted this identity willingly. But now-a-days woman rejects this relational identity. Now she is able to understand the duplicity of this identity that is imposed on her by society so that she may restrain herself as a being. But now, woman wants to stand on her feet as a full human being, equal to man in society. She doesn't like to know herself as someone's daughter, wife or mother, rather than she seeks separation from these relations and wants to make her own identity that shows her individuality. She also does not like the support of man she revolts against the traditional image of Indian Woman in words and deeds. She is conscious of herself as a being, not as an object. She realizes that she is not an appendage of man. A woman is not the "other". She is not an addition to man. She is an autonomous being, capable of through trial and error, finding her own way to salvation. Therefore, a new modern girl is reluctant to play the conventional role of a sex object and a yoked wife. In a sense, she is the symbol of the emancipated woman, the forerunner of the emerging Indian woman with her liberated woman hood.

The present study is an effort to assign women their due place in society, which till now has been as second class citizens. This study presents a picture of the impact of education on

women, her new status in the society and her assertion of individuality. Anita Desai in her novels mainly explores the emotional world of women, revealing a rare imaginative awareness of various deeper forces at work and a profound understanding of feminine sensibility. Her writings raise a voice against mute miseries and helplessness of millions of married women tormented by existentialist problems and predicaments.

Anita Desai intends to expose the inner psyche of the characters in her novels. The modern life especially that of the middle class women is burdened with mental stress, unfulfilled aspirations and unsatisfied desires. The domestic and social situations cause and even aggravate a kind of neurosis. The diagnosis and analysis of this mental ailment is invariably manifested through her female characters created in her novels. Anita Desai portrays the inner conflicts of their characters and also underlines their individuality and quest for freedom. Man and patriarchal power is responsible for all violent and disturbing things. Anita Desai's women know how they have been trapped and how they can begin to live afresh but, the obstacle is Man, entering in her world as a disturbing factor.

Anita Desai's characters can be classified in two distinctive groups – those who fail to adjust to the harsh realities of life and those who compromise. In a novel, as in life, there are those who always remain “outsiders” because they cannot accommodate themselves to the world of realities. Maya in *Cry*, *The Peacock* and Monisha in *Voices in the City* fail to adjust to the harsh realities of life and reach an unhappy end. But Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* compromises on these realities. But at the end of the novel we cannot tell whether she manages to lead a healthy life after her return to Bombay, or she simply strides back into her former neurotic rages and fears. In the novels of Anita Desai, almost all the protagonists wrestle with the forces working against their individual identity in society. All the protagonists show their willingness to wage a war against those social forces that block their smooth existence. Her *Cry*, *the Peacock* is an externalization of the interior of Maya's cocoon. *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Is a lyrical outburst of women seeking peace and quiet in life. *Voices in the City* are the reflection of the rattling reverberations of her sensitive characters under the tyrannizing force of the city of Calcutta. Thus the novelist solves an intrigue of human relationship and the problem of woman's search for identity.

Critical Analysis of Anita Desai's Novels

Cry, The Peacock (1963) her first novel, it is about the heroine of the novel Maya. She is a spoiled and stout daughter of a rich Brahmin. She is married to Gautama, who is sensitive, impolite and an intelligent advocate. When she was a child, she was predicted by an astrologer that after four years of her marriage, she or her husband would die. Due to the fear, she loses her balance of mind. In an insane condition she kills her husband. A few days later she too commits suicide. The peacocks are said to fight before they mate, “living they are aware of death .Dying,

they are in love with life.’ This novel describes the Psychological dilemma of Maya’s inner Psyche. Almost the entire story is “remembrance of things past” by Maya herself. It is really her effort to tell the story to herself to understand and find meaning in her life. The complexity of her inner life is effectively brought out through the landscape as is her resentment against her husband for his inability to communicate with her. In Maya’s mind reality and myth merge into a nightmarish outcome.

Voices in the City (1965) the setting of the novel is in Calcutta – the city of Kali- the goddess of Death. Desai makes the mother of Nirode and his two sisters, Monisha and Amla, also like Kali who unleashes her evil powers. Monisha kills herself because she cannot bear the strain of her marriage to Jiban. The great part of the novel is devoted to Nirode’s move from failure to failure. Amla, who has not been in Calcutta for long (and here Desai clearly shows the evil associated with the city) resists the city’s influence. The novel describes the miserable condition of Mirode, Monisha and Anita in Calcutta City. Through her personal diary Monisha reveals the mental state, which proves fatal for her.

Bye-Bye, Black Bird (1975) This novel describes the condition of Indians, who have settled in London City. So, this novel deals with Indian immigrants in Britain and the emotional disturbances experienced by them. Adit Sen and Dev are friends. Adit is settled in England having married Sarah, an English woman. Dev comes to England for higher studies and finds the racism there very unpalatable, Gradually Dev adjusts to the alien country but Adit begins to get disillusioned with it and decides to return to India with his pregnant wife. Desai captures the psychological and emotional disturbances in Sarah brought upon by Adit’s decision. The novel is divided into three parts: a) Arrival b) Discovery c) Recognition and Departure. Through the main characters Dev, Adit and Sarah , Desai portrays the psychological conflicts of immigrants who feel rootless and alienated from both the country of their origin and the country to which they have migrated. Adit and Dev are facing the problems of alienation (the state of being a foreigner) in settling in London.

Where shall we Go This Summer (1975) This novel describes the psychological condition of Sita’s mind. The preferment stark is disturbed to see that the people are busy in earning and spending. They have no mission of life. Sita is trapped in a joyless marriage to Raman. She goes to a forsaken place Manori, an island in Marve, to escape the mundane reality of her husband and her four children. She feels it is inhuman to bring another life into this cruel world. The Island brings back her childhood memories of her time spent with her selfish father. She realizes that the island is no place for her problems. Peace eludes her there and she feels alienated. Finally, she concludes that it is better to get back to reality. So she returns to her family.

Fire on the Mountain (1977) It reveals Nanda Kaul’s motherly feelings insult and helplessness of alienation (forsaken state). Nanda Kaul is the heroine of this novel. In order to break with her past, she retires to a haunted house ‘Carignano’ in Kasauli. However, both the

past and the present impinge on her existence depriving her of any peace. The past intrudes through the memory of her husband's infidelity. The present appears in the form of her great granddaughter, Rakka, who disturbs her cherished isolation. Things get complicated further with the presence of her classmate and friend, Illa Dass who is now a welfare officer. Although she dislikes Illa, she pities her and decides to invite her to stay with her. But she does not execute her plan. One day a police officer calls Nanda and informs her that Illa has been raped and murdered. She finds it difficult to accept the news and finally succumbs to the shock. Rakka is the sole survivor.

Ironically, Nanda Kaul who longed for stillness and calm attains it in a very strange way. *In Custody* (1984) deals with Deven Sharma who loves Urdu but teaches Hindi to support his family. His friend, Murad, asks him to interview Nur, an old Urdu poet for a magazine that he edits. This simple project becomes very complicated as the novel progresses and instead of one interview, Deven takes on the responsibility of writing an entire biography of Nur. While implementing this project, Deven faces a series of disasters. He almost loses his job and gets used by the poet and his sycophants. But he learns from his experiences all about human limitations and gains a better understanding of life. Finally, through a series of events he becomes the custodian of Nur and his poetry.

Baumgartner's *Bombay* (1988) World War II is the backdrop against which the story unfolds itself. Hugo Baumgartner is the central character. He is a German refugee who comes to India before World War to escape persecution. While in India, Baumgartner gradually falls into a routine life. He has no family. During his fifty years of stay in India, he barely links up with anyone. He eventually meets a young German at a Café. Baumgartner nurtures this stranger and extends hospitality to him. The central irony is killed by this German Stranger who is a drug addict. So, it is a story of a German Jew, who feels himself as an outsider in his country because he is a Jew.

CONCLUSION:

Anita Desai's treatment of the themes of alienation, maladjustment, isolation, the absurdity of human existence, the quest for ultimate meaning, and time as fourth dimension, have an existential learning. In one of her interviews, she admits to having been influenced consciously by Proust, Dostoyevsky, Lawrence, Chekhov and Kawabata. Like some of the above writers, her works are also a quest for order and meaning in life. Her protagonists undergo a struggle to find their real self, which they had lost, because of the pressures of anxieties. They experience a disparity between the higher needs of the individual's inner nature and the unalterable cosmic condition of existence. Desai's self-alienated personages are often entangled in personal problems and cannot feel existential angst, because they are gripped by neurotic anxiety. Hence such characters lose their real self, forgo human values and create irredeemable conditions for themselves.

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