

## **Pangs of Alienation In The Novels of Anita Desai.**

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### **Abstract**

Born in Mussoorie in 1937 of Bengali father and a A.D. German mother, Anita Desai received her early education at Queen's Mary's School, Delhi. Later on, she studied in Miranda College, University of Delhi, and completed her graduation in literature. She started writing when she was just seven years old. Her novels deals with some of the issues, an anxieties and tensions which the modern Indian woman faces in a thoroughly changed socio-cultural-economic environment. In Desai's novels, it is the exploration of sensibility and the inner workings of the mind that assume significance. She is interested in the minor life of their characters and her novels reveal that her real concern is with the exploration of certain human situations.

**Key words: Issues, Anxieties, Tensions, Environment, Inspiration, Recurrent, Turmoil, Hostile, Protagonist, Alienation, Loneliness, Relationship, Consequence, Existence Struggle & Freedom Compromise.**

### **Introduction:**

Today of all the literacy, genres, the novel is the most popular form. According to H.M. Williams "It is undoubtedly the most popular vehicle for the transmission of Indian ideas to the wider English speaking World". To a greater novel as an art form because it has been imported to India from the West. In other words, it is gift of Western literature.

The publication of Bankin Chandra Chatterjee's *Raj Mohan's Wife* (1864) and Lal Behari Day's *Govind Samatha* (1874), the Indian novel in English has group of by leaps and bounds in respect of thematic variety and linguistic maturity. But it has been assumed that Indian novel in English has its roots in the nineteenth century realistic tradition of English novel. The impact of English education, national awakening and the influence of European models are the chief factors responsible for the rise and development of Indian novel in English. And with the passage of time the Indian novel in English has become thoroughly Indian in terms of the themes, techniques and the human values.

In this regard, Meenakshi Mukherjee observes that

“The Novel in India can be seen as the product of configurations in philosophical, aesthetic economic and political forces in the larger life of the country. Despite obvious, regional variations, a basic pattern seems to emerge from shared factors like the Puranic heritage, hierarchical social structure, colonial education, disjunction of agrarian life and many others that affect the form of novel as well as its content”. According to K.R.S. Iyengar “A novel is a “living and evolving literacy genre, and is trying in the hands of its practitioners, a fusion of form, substance and expressions that is recognizably Indian yet also bearing the marks of universality.”

Anita Desai appeared on the Indian literary horizon in the year 1963, when her debut novel *Cry, The Peacock* was published. The novel received much acclaim from the readers and critics, which earned her a secure position in the field. She was given the Sahitya Akademi Award in the year 1978, for her novel *Fire on the Mountain* (1977). She also secured the Award for Excellence in writing for her novel *Where shall we Go this Summer?* (1979) from the Federation of Indian Publishers and the Authors' Guild of India. All these awards and recognition have certainly encouraged her to pursue her avocation with greater inspiration and success.

This article tries to explore and examine how the psychic turmoil of Anita Desai's fictional characters in order to analyse and discuss the ways and means they employ for surviving through this unknowable and hostile world. Common forms of mental disorders like neuroses, psychosis, and schizophrenia and different forms of survival strategies like withdrawal and escape, violence as a defence mechanism, role of fantasy are all taken into consideration. It is only in a living communication with the world and one's fellow brings that man can discover his identity and potential. Such awareness is essential for surviving in this hostile and mysterious world of objective reality, and Anita Desai is aware of this reality.

Anita's Desai's first novel, *Cry, The Peacock* (1963) is one of the most poetic and evocative pieces of writing in Indian English fiction. It gives expression to the long smothered wail of a lacerated psyche, the harrowing tale of blunted human relationship told by the chief Protagonist herself. The novel presents the story of a young, sensitive girl obsessed by a childhood prophecy of disaster, resulting in immeasurable loneliness.

The novel begins with the death of Toto, Maya's Pet dog, which plunged her into intense affliction. The vision of the dead dog haunts her like a passion and she is never normal, again she is shown rushing to the top to wash the vision from the eyes. Maya regards the death of Toto as cataclysmic whereas for Gautama, it is a natural happening (when he coldly says "to me, it has always seemed the ultimate absurdity, appropriate only in that it brings a meaningless life to a suitably meaningless end". (p.14). This gap of communication between husband and wife is projected throughout the novel. Though their marriage is an unsuccessful one, they continue to live together. In the process, the novel becomes a probing psychological study of neurotic fears and anxieties caused by marital incompatibility and disharmony.

The very beginning of the novel shows the husband-wife alienation. Theme by unfolding the relationship of Maya and Gautam. She suffers from further fixation and looks for the typical father image in her husband. In her childhood, an astrologer had predicted

that four years after her marriage one of them would die and the prediction makes her obsessed with the fear of death. What pains Maya most is her utter loneliness. ("It is that my loneliness in this house. I was alone. Yes? Whimpered, it is that I am alone" (9). A restlessness always boils within her and the strainedness holds them apart. She realises that one of the two could be Gautama as well and in the end she kills him by pushing him off the parapet and then commits suicide.

The alienation of Maya is rooted essentially in Gautama's philosophical detachment, his imperviousness to the beautiful yet tremulous beauty of the natural world and his gross unconcern over the basis in life" (p.20). It is an account of this temperamental differences that strolling together does not prove to be a delightful affair and conversation seems to be useless.

*And so we strolled up and down the lawn, talking desultorily, not really listening to each other, being intent, on our own path which, however, ran parallel and closely enough for us to briefly brush against each other now and then, reminding us, or, perhaps only myself – of the peace that comes from companion life alone, from brother flesh (p.18).*

This is a presentation of a typical feminine predicament in which the instinctive cry for life and the terror it involves falls on the deaf ears of the husband.

When Maya suffers from a sense of neglect and alienation and wants to meet her friend Lila, she is unable to appreciate her friend's concern and faithfulness for her husband. She fails to understand how Leila can devote herself so sincerely to the service of her ailing husband. It is something like mystery to her that Leila's husband "lay dying of tuberculosis" (p.51) but she was looking after him with extra ordinary care and concern. To

her it appears that Leila “had married the fatality of his disease” (p.57). The joys of friendship fail to bring any relief to the anguished and alienated self of Maya.

Alienation has many faces and Maya has to see many of them in her marital life. When Maya wants to eat her dinner by the dim light that comes through the open doors, in order to be able to look at the stars instead of appreciating Maya’s romantic mood Gautama grumbles, “Well, I hope, enough for me to spot a fly if it falls into my dinner” (p.24) Again Maya’s intense desire to go to the south to see the Kothakali dances by starlight is offset by Gautama’s practical but hard consideration. “I suggest you wait till a Kathakali troupe comes to give a performance in Delhi – it will be less expensive” (p.43)

Alienation also rooted in attitude finds expression through erotic imagery and symbols showing that every sensual advance and requirement from Maya’s side meets with a prosaic, practical and hard response from Gautama. For example the romantic description of the man as a “full-bosomed woman who had mounted the skies in passion, driven the silly stars away from her, while she pulsed and throbbed, pulsed and glowed across the breathless sky (p.51) fails to work with Gautama. It shows the symbolisation of Maya herself, who is passionate but starving of the attention and love of her husband. Similarly images which suggest togetherness stand out in sharp contrast to alienate have also been used by the novelist in order to enhance the effect. The image of the rhythmic chant of “Radha Krishna”, “Radha Krishna “ (pp. 25-26) a mythical symbol of external love and oneness of the lover and the beloved, makes Maya intensely aware of her loneliness.

The Sahitya Akademic Award winner novel. *Fire On The Mountain* (1971) explores the alienation of Nanda Kaul and her great grand-daughter, Raka. The loneliness and isolation of the two have been presented in detail. In the prefect privacy of her sprawling house ‘Carignano’ Nanda Kaul lives like a reclusive’ she has been conceived of as “a charred tree trunk in the forest, a broken pillar of marble in the desert, a lizard on the stone wall” (p.23) with only one difference, viz. unlike them, is capable of irrigation annoyance.

Her characters are generally neurotic females, highly sensitive, immersed in a world of dreams and imagination and alienated from their surroundings as a consequence of their failure or unwillingness to adjust with the reality. They often differ in their opinion from others and embark on a long voyage of contemplation in order to find the meaning of their existence. After all their wanderings are over they usually arrive at a juncture where either they find that after all their urgency has been in some essential manner very significant or may damage themselves unable to solve the mystery that envelops their suffering like Maya and Sita. Not finding a proper channel of communication they become alienated and start brooding on their lives. All their wanderings and reflections finally bring them into new vistas of understanding which they had formerly ignored and rejected. Hence her novels expose the labyrinths of the human bound and indicate the ways of psychological fulfillment.

Loneliness is not something unique but is in fact, a characteristic of the society of our time. Today many individuals feel alone, unrelated to others, unable to communicate with those around them, unable to feel at one with them. This problem of an individual who feels emotionally and spiritually alone forms the backbone of Desai's themes. The moving description of loneliness leaves a lasting impression on the readers' mind. What is more, their respective personality traits and attitudes also determine the mental and emotional effect of their isolation. This estrangement from which they suffer is in fact the consequence of the absence of desired relationships rather than the absence of contacts, the lack is not of company but of companionship. They find themselves alone and anxious in a world in which they are unable to establish emotionally satisfying social affinities. Hence the leading thematic motif of loneliness is brought home to us by a conscious effort on the part of the novelist to describe the contribution of factors to it. Her novels indirectly suggest that an awareness of their predetermined inequality in marital relationships is a necessary step towards the development of a feminist consciousness.

The world of Anita Desai's novels finds to be an ambivalent one. It makes us feel that the central harmony is aspired to but not arrived at, and the desire to love and live clashes at times violently. Involvement and stillness are incompatible by this nature, yet they strive to exist together. One wonders that instinct and emotion and passion seem to be strangers in the world of daily routine and scursy and into dark corners to flourish in conditions of solitude which is presented in its varying shades and meanings. In all her novels there is a striving on the part of the protagonist towards arriving at a more authentic way of life than the one which is available to them. From their personal freedom and wholeness. In each successive novel the problem of involvement versus detachment, of surrender versus freedom can be viewed from various angles and a question of reason versus unreason and the balance is precariously held and maintained.

### **Conclusion:**

Anita Desai is in the vanguard of new generation of Indian writers who are experimenting with themes of consciousness. She makes significant contributions to Indian literature and to world literature in English. At the same time she gives her readers valuable insights into the feminine consciousness. She explores human relationships in modern India society, particularly the husband-wife relationship. Her novels are peopled by women who are in perceptual quest for meaning and value of life. The existing struggle of the woman who refuse to float along with the current forms the core of her novels. Her characters refuse to surrender their individual selves. Their inability to compromise and surrender inevitably result in isolation and alienation. Her women are hypersensitive and highly individualistic. Though they do not voice their protest against uncongenial surrounding and insensitive people, their bruised selves lot out a silent cry. They refuse to yield and compromise and prefer death to miserable life.

Hence through the literary exercise Anita Desai seems to subtly and artistically suggest that the preliminary value system social institutions and other problems of

civilization should be thoroughly reformed so that life becomes more agreeable for both men and women and society at large.



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