

## **Anita Desai: An Exponent of Stream of Consciousness**

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**Abstract:** Stream of consciousness is a psychological term, but it also used in literature to explore the human psychism. The term is connected to the state of mind. It is a complex evocation of the inner states of the character. The reader is able to comprehend the characters' inner difficulties through to this strategy, which fosters a feeling of intimacy with the characters. William James is known as the father of American psychology. He coined this term in his *The Principles of Psychology* (1890). May Sinclair employed this technique in his literary context 'Egoist' in 1918. In the year 1922, this technique was employed by James Joyce in his novel *Ulysses* and Dorothy Richardson in her novel series *Pilgrimage*. Anita Desai, an Indian author, used the stream-of-consciousness approach in her works *Cry*, the *Peacock* (1963), *Voice in the City* (1965), and *Clear Light of the Day* (1980), just as Virginia Woolf did in her novels *Mr. Dalloway* (1925), *The Lighthouse* (1927), and *The Waves* (1931). This technique is generally used to highlight the constant, uninterrupted flow of thought through conscious mind. Anita Desai's contribution in the enrichment of this technique has taken it to a newer height. Her literary power in employing this technique must be assessed in positive approach.

**Keywords:** stream of consciousness, unconscious mind, traumatic experience, psycho-neurosis, Oedipus complex.

### **Introduction:**

The Stream of Consciousness approach is clearly demonstrated in nearly all the novels of Anita Desai. But in this research paper only *Cry*, the *Peacock* (1963), *Voice in the City* (1965), and *Clear Light of Day* (1980) are taken into consideration. This technique/approach is connected to our feelings, emotions or images. Our feelings are the parts of our inner life. What is running in our mind is always invisible and beyond anybody's recognition. Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf, Samuel Beckett, William Faulkner, James Joyce, Jack Kerouac,

Marcel Proust, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Tony Morrison, Sylvia Plath, Anton Chekhov, James Kelman, Leo Tolstoy, Henry James, and Anita Desai are among the authors who have used this approach and made it popular. William James, who coined this term, describes it: "Consciousness as an uninterrupted 'flow': 'a river' or a 'stream' are the metaphors by which it is naturally described." (Principles of Psychology, 1893).

Anita Desai the writer of the 20th century employed this term in her all novels. But the above mentioned three are the most important. She has proved this technique studies the inner feelings, thoughts of the character. This is a continuous thought process in the mind the character/characters. Through this technique the writer has successfully unfolded the thought process of the character. This thought process does not follow any word or time order and the reader also does not judge it inaccurate.

### **Stream of Consciousness and Anita Desai:**

On June 24, 1937, Anita Desai was born in Missouri, India. She was the daughter of Bengali father D.N Muzumdar and German immigrant mother Tony Nime. She spoke Bengali, German, Urdu, and English as a child. She has made the renowned Booker prize short list three times. In 1978, she won the Sahitya Academy Award for "Fire on Mountain," her novel. With the publication of 'Cry, the Peacock' she got lots of admiration from all over the literary world. She had everlasting impact of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and D.H Lawrence. She was highly influenced by the 'Stream of Consciousness—a narrative technique' of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf.

Maya is the central character in the novel 'Cry, the Peacock'. She is a daughter of a renowned lawyer. She enjoys her childhood to the fullest. Her husband Gautama, a lawyer was a silent person. But the prophesy of death of one of the couples after four years of their marriage haunted her extremely. Her loneliness disturbed her peaceful life. Meena Belliappa remarks, "Gautama who touches without feeling and Maya who feels without touching." This prophesy took charge of her mental stability and she started thinking about this and that all the time. Vinod Bhushan Gulati quotes, "The present and past are juxtaposed to highlight the temperament incompatibility between Maya and Gautama." (Gulati, 1984)

Although she tries best her level to come out of this traumatic situation. But unfortunately, whenever she tries, she found herself thrown into the valley of alienation. She is content when she is with Nila and Gautama's mother, but her suffering is severe when they depart. She arrives home to an empty house and is left to her "horrors and nightmares" by herself. (The Peacock Cries 162). She says, "I am insane, insane," after realising her neurotic chaos. She is fully under the control of her crazy self. At the end sensitive and poetic mind woman becomes a victim of psycho-neurosis. It is, in the words of R.S. Sharma (Sharma, 1981), "the first step in the direction of psychological fiction in English".

The technique of stream of consciousness is beautifully applied by Anita Desai in Voices of the City (1965). This is traced in three characters Monisha, Nirode and Amla. Monisha while reading Gita expresses her detachment. All the above characters want to fulfill their will but every time they are restricted from reaching their goal. This experience makes them think

over why this wrong with them always? The city of Kolkata has a huge negative psychological effect on the mentality of the trio. The relationship between Nirode's mother and Major Chadha causes her to have an Oedipus complex. Ask her love, he commands Amla, "that made her swallow her father whole, like a cobra swallows a fat petrified rat." (Voices in the City, 190). Nirode is always jealous of his mother. He feels his mother is responsible for the detachment of the family bonding. His wide experience of meaninglessness, emptiness and alienation in life convinces him, "He was a man for whom aloneness alone was the slow natured condition, aloneness alone the treasure worth treasuring." (Voices in the City, 24) About the city he says, "...the city was as much atmosphere as odor, as much a haunting ghost of the past as a frenzied passage towards early death (41-42)." When it comes to Monisha's demise, Nirode describes her as having "died from an excess of caring, in a fire of care and conscience."

The oldest of the three, Monisha, has a neurotic, sensitive personality and is prone to overthinking situations. She has married into a very traditional family where she played her role of a dutiful wife. But ugliness of the surroundings crushes her. Her brief soliloquy before suicide makes the reader aware of her inner feelings and internal trauma. Her diary highlights her inner struggle.

Amla is the youngest daughter of the family. She equally struggles in her life as her siblings. When she first encounters Dharma, she thinks he is a good artist. She works as a model for his paintings. But soon she grows tired of his cynicism and she finds him a philanderer, who is mistreating her daughter. Death of her sister made her contemplate over life and her self-attitude. She moves towards illustrations of the Panchatantra book with a new vision of life.

Bimla (Bim) is the protagonist of the novel *Clear Light of Day* (1980). A typical Bim aspires to dwell in the world of legend and the past. But she sacrifices herself, suppresses her desires for the upbringing of her siblings. Unfortunately, none of her sibling's care for her inner thoughts and feelings. Her mental trauma reflects her feelings. Her self-consciousness convinces her to develop a tendency of love and forgiveness. When she tells Tara, "Most of the time we just sat there on the veranda steps, staring at gate," she is speaking from the heart (*Clear Light of Day*- 149). I find it remarkable how little one ever observes or comprehends about one's own house or family, the author claims (148). When Bim expresses her lovely sentiment, she relinquishes her resentment for her siblings. Bim has been wrestling with time and memory the weight of the past for decades. But after having seen the world, she quotes a line from T.S. Eliot's *Four*

Quartets that read, "Time is the destroyer and time is the preserver (182)." She knows people change, houses decay and dust settle over everything but it is only love and forgiveness that help in strengthening the family bonding. This change in her attitude refers to the lightning of the way of reconciliation and clearance of all her misunderstanding and long-held emotional barriers.

**Conclusion:**

In short, stream of consciousness is a consistent theme in the novels of Anita Desai. This technique affords multiple viewpoints capable of shining the light of objective truth on personal events that occur through different subjective memories. The author uses a central theme to illustrate how the past has affected the present. Maximum of Anita Desai's characters dwell in the past in their mind, thinking on different grievances and memories that shape their career. Following strictly the footsteps of stream of consciousness of Virginia Woolf, James Joyce and T.S Eliot, she has successfully highlighted this psyche, flow of thoughts or feeling that makes her a prominent exponent in the field of stream of consciousness technique.

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