
Understanding Anita Desai – As a Feminist Novelist in her Select novels

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Abstract

Anita Desai is a highly sought-after Indian novelist; Anita Desai, known as the mother of the Indian psychological novel genre, is famous for her exact representations of modern life in India. Her depictions of contemporary Indian life have earned her an honored place among India's writers, and her realistic portrayal of human emotions in a changing society still remains relevant. Having won the Sahitya Academy Award, she is an author who has written around sixteen novels or so.

Keywords: Feminist, isolation, physical landscape

Introduction:

Indian writers have been making great contributions to the literary world at national and international levels. They focused on Indian culture, tradition, race, politics, and self-identity. Many Indian writers have made their own place in the world of literature. Today, Indian writing in English has to be viewed in a global context. Indian fiction in English emerged almost 8 to 9 decades ago. Harvesting of the novel has been begun in the 1930s with great writers R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, and Mulk Raj Anand. They were followed by new-generation novelists like Amitav Ghosh, Salman Rashid, Geeta Mehta, Anita Desai, Shobha De, and Arundhati Roy. They explored various subjects. All of them have earned considerable fame for their fictional contribution. Indian women novelists explored female subjectivity to establish an identity. Out of them, Anita Desai is one of the prominent Indian women novelists in English. She is one of the most popular, world-famous, and best novelists. She has enriched Indian fiction at large. She has held a unique place among Indian writers in English.

Anita Desai can be categorically regarded as one of the gifted novelists who emerged from the literary context of Indian English. He was born in Mussorie on the 24th of June in the year 1937. Her father was Bengali, and her mother was German. English, Hindi, Bengali, and German were staple languages in her childhood. It was actually her first language, which was English. She started writing at the age of seven, and it was in English. She has written novels, stories, Children's books, and articles. She is an acclaimed psychological novelist and a pioneer of the feminist tradition who explores such important issues as solitude, people's inability to speak, -working on the internal consciousness, relationships between men and women, and marriage problems. Her protagonists are female.

Basically, the language and the technique employed by Anita Desai are in concordance with the respective theme and situation. Memory of the past, which is also referred to as Nostalgia, is also used by the author as a narrative technique. Her style of writing, creation of new characters and diction, choosing a realistic theme, and her kind of narrative writing have made her writing style adorable, for which many words, recognitions, and awards have been given to her work. Most certainly, she has given her best to the world of literature, which cannot be doubted. Analyzing all the aspects of her writing, the paper is arranged as follows:

The entry of Anita Desai gives the birth of an era that promises a new deal for Indian English fiction. She is the foremost Indian novelist of the post-independence era. She is one of the most prominent writers in Indian English. She is regarded as a writer who introduced psychological novels in the tradition of Virginia Wolfs in India. She introduced psychological realism in her first novel 'Cry the Peacock' in 1963. She is without doubt the most-read contemporary writer in Indian English. This talented Indian Novelist was born Anita Mujumdar on June 24th, 1937, in Mussoorie, Uttarakhand. Her father is Bengali, and her mother is German. The positive atmosphere at home and a very creative imagination helped her to be mature in her vision. Her father was a Bengali businessman, and her mother was of German origin. She received her education from Queen Mary's higher secondary high school and Mirinda House, Delhi University, where she received her B.A. in English Literature.

Her career as a writer started with short stories which were published in magazines. Her short story Circus Cat, How Gentle is the Mist? Tea With the Maharani, Ghost House, Mr Bose's Private Bliss, and Private Tuition by Mr Bose are famous. She has written essays, articles, and reviews also for many magazines and newspapers. Collection of short stories, Games of Twilight, which contains stories such as Pineapple Cake, Sale, The Accompanist, A Devoted Son, The Farewell Party,

Pigeons, and At Daybreak. She has written books for children like Peacock Garden (1974), Cat On A House Boat (1976), and Village By the Sea (1982).

Her stories followed by her first novel Cry, the Peacock in 1963. Desai has contributed to the Indian English literature by her valuable novels as Voice in the City (1965) Bye- bye Blackbird (1971), Where Shall We Go This Summer (1975) Fire On the Mountain (1977) Clear Light Of Day (1980) In Custody (1984) Baumgartner's Bombay (1989) and Journey To Ithaca (1995).

Anita Desai is a very popular and sensitive novelist in India. Her popularity can be seen in the increasing number of researchers taking up critical studies of her works in the universities in India and abroad. She is an honorary fellow at the University of Cambridge. She has been a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in London. She has been an honorary member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. She has been awarded numerous prizes and honors, including Padmashri and Padmabhushan from the Government of India and the Taraknath Das Award for the promotion of Indo-US relations. She won the Sahitya Akademi Award for her novel Fire on the Mountain (1977), for the year 1978. Her three novels, Clear Light of the Day, In Custody, and Fasting Feasting, have been nominated for the prestigious Booker Prize Award. Her novel In Custody was adapted by Merchant Ivory Production into English film by the same name. It was directed by Ismail Merchant; It won the 1994 President of India Gold Medal for best picture. The noted Indian film personalities Shashi Kapoor, Shabana Azmi, and Om Puri acted in the picture.

Thus, the characters of Anita Desai – all of them – deliver the message to the author, who needs to receive information on the real concept of life. They are not mere figments or avatar-like figures; they do not represent a specific society or era in a specific time frame. In order to sum up Anita Desai's basic preoccupation in her novels, it could be said that her primary purpose is to explain and liberate the 'self.' As highlighted in the above examination of the socio-political prospects, it is quite apparent that the travails of the modern man actually fall among the many focal interests of the contemporary novelist.

These characteristics are evident in Desai's works, where the female characters are described as highly sensitive with neurotic personalities. They are responding and are not able to alter their behavior in relation to reality. These are individuals who live in a world of dreams and fantasy and are significantly socially alienated.

She is often considered a psychological novelist and a feminist. She deals with the major themes of self –identity, isolation, inner struggle, man women relationships , marital discord, lack of communication, and mental problems of women, which lead them towards insecurity. The female characters are an

unsatisfied, unhappy, frustrated, and frustrated. They try to escape from their cages and, in the process, get themselves mentally bruised. Female characters in her novels are the chief protagonists. Her treatment of female characters, her feminist approach, analysis of gender sexuality, and subjectivity are seen in most of her novels. In this respect, her novels are different from other Indian novelists: Nayantara Sehgal, Kamala Markandaya, or Ruth Jhabvala, who are concerned with politics east-west encounters and traditions. Desai's concern is with the psychic life of her characters. For this reason, "She has been considered a novelist of mood and psyche" (Sharma 166).

Kohli points out "No other writer is so much concerned with the life of young man and woman in Indian cities as Anita Desai."

Her involvement with Indian women and their reaction are different from others, which distinguishes her from other Indian writers. It is explained with the following examples- Maya is the protagonist of the novel *Cry the Peacock*. She is obsessed with this and haunted by the prediction of an astrologer that her marriage is going to end within four years with the death of either she or her husband. Finally, of insanity, she kills her husband and commits suicide.

Sita is a major character of *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* She feels alienated from her husband and children. She remains lonely in the broken family. In *Fire On the Mountain* Nanda escapes from house and leaves in the isolated place because of her unfaithful husband. The novel is praised for its poetic symbolism and use of sounds. It featured three female protagonists each subdued or damaged in some way.

In the novel *In Custody* ups and downs of human mind is illustrated beautifully. Desai's another novel *Voices In the City* has remarkable existential problem. It is a novel of three protagonist, Nirode, Monisha and Amla. Alienation, isolation, loneliness and self-identity is main concern of the novel. The novel encompasses the author's experiences in the city of Calcutta.

Clear Light of Day is praised for its highly evocative portrait of two sisters caught in the lassitude of Indian life. Its characters are revealed not only through imagery but through gesture, dialogue, and reflection. It is a study of Delhi that combines fiction with history to explore the lives of a middle-class Hindu family.

Language and Technique:

We cannot separate theme and technique from Anita Desai's novels. They are not isolated elements but interrelated. In order to convey the theme, she uses places, characters, situations, dialogues, and silence. Her use of technique and narration give her a distinct position among the Indian novelist. It is a vital agent of thematic trust. Her dialogues are powerful and touch the heart. She uses different techniques of

narration based on theme and situation. She uses memories of past Nostalgia as a narrative technique. In this respect, she is compared with James Joyce and Virginia Woolf.

All readers and critics are anonymously agreed that beyond doubt Anita Desai is one of the most popular feminist Indian novelists in English. It is she who has enriched the tradition of the Indian novel in English. Anita Desai's contributions to fiction have made her special and uplift the position of Indian fiction in to desired height of world literature.

Major Themes:

Most of her plots revolve around her personal experience of life. She was never single-minded about any one of them or her message. She believed in telling the truth as it is. Her exemplary portrayal of internal emotions in the female persona is sensitive. Many of Anita Desai's novels deal with family conflicts and middle-class women struggling with alienation. In her books, she has dealt with issues that range from anti-Semitism to Western archetypal notions of India and dying Indian customs and traditions. Desai's works tackle the contemporary Indian life, East-West culture confrontations, generation gaps, and real/existential displacement.

Setting:

The author has a recurring setting for her novels which is specific to her writing style. Most are set in the city itself. Mostly at their hearts are old big houses with many verandahs, green shutters, servants' quarter, gardens and pets.

Anita Desai is a writer of a new style of writing; once, in an Interview, she said, 'My style of writing is much natural – they grow', 'It is not dictated by me, I don't prescribe it much'. This is why her writings were so special, her 'voice', 'her characters', and her 'subject-line.' As for Desai's work, the critics recommend, among all skills useful for the writer, the descriptive one. Her novels are relatively slim or small in size. She has employed the image and the symbol very well. Her literary generations are especially characterized by poetic symbolism and sounds. It is evident that Desai's novels represent her more as a writer who is in a constant transformation or evolution and achieving growth as a writer.

Conclusion:

Thus Anita Desai is a great novelist. She is popular in the entire world. She has made a solid path for the coming generations.

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