



## DISCUSSING THEMES AND TECHNIQUES USED IN ANITA DESAI'S WORKS

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### ABSTRACT

Anita Desai's novels delves into the lives of women who are unhappy in their marriages, who feel deceived and trapped by socio-cultural conventions and expectations. Women, particularly in the Indian social context, must either adhere to or rebel against conventional standards. Regardless of their decision, the results could be disastrous for them. The protagonists of Anita Desai's stories are generally women who are independent and lonely. Anita Desai, as a great social visionary, has occupied a unique place in the history of Indian English literature for her careful observation of the situation and status of women in contemporary Indian society. She has tackled familial problems that lead to women's separation from their families in her early works. She has reflected her stereotyped Western notions on India in later writings.

**Keywords:** Themes, Techniques, Novels, Literature, Protagonists.

### I. INTRODUCTION

For her fresh contributions to literature, science, travel, economy, and cultural efflorescence, India has emerged as one of the most popular locations. India is a vigorous player in the twenty-first century, thanks to its cosmopolitan ethos and commitment to globalisation in all fields of endeavour. This success is also built on the rich traditions of life, literature, and culture in the twentieth century. The fact that India boasts the world's largest English-speaking population is important. After numerous vicissitudes and receiving both admiration and respect, Indian English Literature has reached its literary pinnacle now. It is undeniably a significant addition to the greater picture of the English-speaking world. As a result, Indian English fiction is regarded as a powerful and popular literary genre. Indian English literature has risen to prominence in recent decades as a result of ambitious experiments in the fictional mode. Furthermore, fiction offers a large canvas that other genres do not usually have. The variety and uniqueness of the genre have given fiction writers the necessary motivation to turn it into a potent medium of expression. It is notable that Indian English literature has recently acquired widespread attention and acclaim on a global scale. It has now carved out a space for itself not only in Commonwealth writing, but also in World Literature. Indian English fiction has gained a renowned place and prominence in India and internationally as a result of this process.

Anita Desai is regarded as a respected writer in India and abroad. The first generation of Indo-Anglian authors is nearing the end of their careers. Only Desai receives such widespread acclaim among contemporary writers. She has authored five wonderful novels, the sixth of which is on its way out, in addition to a number of stories and two books for children. For her most recent novel, *Fire on the Mountain*, she was just awarded The Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize. Anita Desai is one of the twenty writers nominated for the Sahitya Akadmi Award for 1977-78. Her personal experience is that Indian readers are wary of praising an Indian author. They come to see if an English critic can take the lead. The majority of Anita Desai's novels were originally published in other countries, and it was only after that that her home country became aware of her accomplishment. Anita Desai highlights modern man's problem. In the traditional sense of the phrase, she is not a social realism. She's more

interested in conveying a sensitive mini's reaction to the engulfing environment. Even when surrounded by worldly comforts, man is constantly restless. He is plagued by feelings of isolation. Because he is separated off from his fellow men, man feels lonely. The modern guy is befuddled by life's complications. Only by being able to truly express ourselves will we be able to solve the majority of our difficulties. We say one thing but intend something completely another. Both men and women exist on a surface level. That is why human-to-human communication is tough. Because various people have distinct temperaments, they are unable to understand or be understood by others.

With the release of her first novel, *Cry, the Peacock*, in 1963, Anita Desai entered the literary sphere of Indian writing in English. The novel was well-received by both readers and critics. *Cry, the Peacock* is praised as a notable achievement in the field of IndoEnglish fiction in India, which is outstanding. Desai's novels, short stories, and children's literature have enhanced Indian writing in English over the years. Her unique and powerful fictional technique stands out. Her significant literary works include the following:

- *Cry, The Peacock* (1963)
- *Voices in the City* (1965)
- *Bye-bye Blackbird* (1971)
- *The Peacock Garden* (1974)
- *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975)
- *Cat on a Houseboat* (1976)
- *Fire on the Mountain* (1977)
- *Games at Twilight* (1978)
- *Clear Light of Day* (1980)
- *The Village by the Sea* (1982)
- *In Custody* (1984)
- *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988)
- *Journey to Ithaca* (1995)
- *Fasting, Feasting* (1999)
- *Diamond Dust* (2000)
- *The Zigzag Way* (2004)
- *The Artist of Disappearance* (2011)

## II. CHARACTERIZATION, TECHNIQUES AND PLOTS USED IN THE NOVELS OF ANITA DESAI

When it comes to Desai's portrayal, he is one-of-a-kind. Her protagonists are neurotic ladies who are very sensitive but alone in a realm of dreams and imagination, alienated from their surroundings as a result of their inability or reluctance to adjust to reality. They frequently have opposing viewpoints to others. They envelop their pains like Maya and Monisha, unable to grasp the enigma of existence. Her characters span a wide range of emotions. The inner workings of the protagonist's story must utilise a certain design by which the writer's thinking is gradually revealed to the readers as the course of dealing with psychological features of characters. Each of her characters represents her ideology, which is that of a suffering woman searching for her identity. Maya is hypersensitive, Sita is a revolutionary, Bim is emancipated, Sarah is adaptable, Monisha is a thinker, Sarla is traditional, and Sophie is modern. Her women come from all walks of life and are of all ages. In her characters, she captures a glimpse of her own age. As a result, Anita Desai is a master at defining characters.

Anita Desai employs a variety of approaches in order to make her work stand out. Using the stream of consciousness technique is one of the most fundamental aspects of her style. William James coined the expression "stream of consciousness" to describe the constant flow of ideas and awareness in the waking mind in his book "Principle of Psychology." Desai frequently employs the flashback technique to recollect earlier events and experiences. Her effectiveness with tactics isn't consistent across all of her novels, although there are clear restrictions. There are no acts when there is a stream of consciousness. It allows us to study the quality of a particular frame of mind so thoroughly by following their goal that we don't have to wait for time to make the possibility real before we can view the whole picture. The song 'Clear Light of Day' deserves special consideration in this regard. Tara and Bim, both in their forties, recall their upbringing in Delhi right before the split. The story moves forward in time from the past, and the novelist introduces a broader cast of people than she has ever done previously. In Desai's story, which is retold over and over, the past is of paramount importance. It's the most deftly intertwined with the present. This weaving of history and present into a single and coherent whole is sure to astound even the most casual reader. Desai's artistic economy in bringing the past and the present together is exceptional. There isn't anything in the present that isn't connected to something in the past. Every experience from the past and present is an essential element of the whole, and the past and present have been fused in a visible way. Another feature of Desai's method is her ability to create a stunning contrast between two characters, which allows readers to see each character more clearly. Desai compares the characters of Bim and Tara in 'Clear Light Of Day,' one demanding, curious, self-assured, active and purposeful, while the other physically smaller, lacked the vigour, and had simple dreams. Bim is driven by a desire to do something extraordinary, whereas Tara merely wishes to be a mother in the future. Even as children, their temperaments are clearly distinct throughout the narrative.

In the case of Anita Desai's storylines, they are more natural and inevitable outgrowths of the theme and perspective than planned contrivances. As the novel progresses, she appears to be softly slipping in her scenarios, settings, and characters without any forethought. Because her specialty is the psychological portrayal of specific people, the narrative is appropriately permitted to flow freely. Her plots, on the other hand, are invariably simple, clean enough to obstruct the psychological reveal. As a result, her plot structure exemplifies a brilliant marriage of form expression and spontaneity. "I start writing without having very much of a storyline in my thoughts or on paper only a very fuzzy sense of what the pattern of the book is to be," the novelist says of the structural aspect of her fiction. But it tends to work itself out spontaneously and inevitably as I go along."

Action is subordinated to psychology in Desai's stories. The fundamental focus of the book is mental and spiritual growth. All of her protagonists change for the better or for the worse during the course of the novels. Maya succumbs to insanity at the end of the tale; Sita matures; Sarah adjusts to the circumstances; and Monisha meets her demise. Throughout the novels, all of the characters grow and change; they are not static. Desai's novels, like those of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, are on human nature and human relationships. Desai's stories are on men and women's relationships, which have been explored by other Indian authors such as Nayantara Sahgal, Nargis Dalal, and Kamla Das.

In Desai's novels, the use of symbols is also an essential strategy. Symbolic circumstances, episodes, events, and personalities abound in her writings. These symbols are inspired by human existence and nature, such as trees, birds, and animals. Toto's demise in 'Cry the Peacock' is a representation of death as an unavoidable part of human life. Maya's amazement at Toto's death is symptomatic of her ignorance of life's harsh realities. Her anxiety of seeing Toto die is a metaphor for her own fear of death. It depicts her first encounter with death and the end of her life. In her writings, day and night are also used as symbols. The day represents the naked reality, whereas the night represents the darkness of ignorance.

The use of imagery is another significant part of Desai's artistic method. Imagery gives the estranged self a poetic and lyrical tint, and it broadens the critical and interpretative horizons of her work. Desai's images aren't just for the art world; they're also for science. She is constantly on the lookout for the right images to represent her subconscious. Her imagery is constantly in character, which complements her character's romantic predicament. Her books have a texture that is made up of a rich and magnificent jumble of pictures that are utilitarian rather than beautiful. These pictures do not clash or contradict one another; rather, they are in perfect harmony and correspond to the character's estrangement. Her novels' visual beauty and texture depth are enhanced by zoological, metrological, and colour pictures. Her paintings add lyrical richness to her detached self's difficulties.

Desai's most famous technique is to telescope the past into the present. 'Where Shall We Go This Summer,' 'Cry, the Peacock,' and other works have successfully exploited the concept. Sita recalls each experience of her old life one by one on the island. Her mind wanders back to her childhood. Her memories of the past shed light on her innermost selves. Her unfulfilled wishes are disclosed to us, and we learn about her father's temperament as a result of them. The approach of telescoping history and present has been successfully shown in 'Clear Light of Day.' The readers have the impression that they are moving in the present tense one moment and then are transported into the minds of characters in the past tense the next. This lovely blending of past and present can clearly be seen in her novels.

### III. SOME SIGNIFICANT THEMES IN WORKS OF ANITA DESAI

#### Feminine Sensibility as a Theme

Feminism is a philosophy that aims to alter the world for the betterment of women, not just to comprehend it. Women's perceptions of themselves as inferior to and dependent on males, according to Simone de Beauvoir, stem from the understanding that "the universe is masculine on the whole, those who fashioned it, dominated it, and still dominate it today are men" (1949 : 298). Despite the fact that there is a biological difference between men and women, feminists and women in general no longer embrace the premise that women are inferior to men.

Anita Desai's academic contributions in the areas of transgender, transcultural, and transnational aspects are vital supplements for a woman who shapes her identity around femininity and is always a target of gaze in a masochistic culture, whether she is a wife, daughter, artist, or writer. Unless she exceeds her bounds of inner uncertainty and inner difficulty to meet the outer world realities that are mostly dominated by a man's world, woman's passion and suffering is repressed and suppressed in all circumstances.

#### Uniqueness

Anita Desai investigates Indians' (particularly women's) use of makeshifts to avoid attachment and their attempts to find love and life in disillusion, which are the result of their alienation, obsession, transgression, and diffusion of self in double consciousness, i.e., as a woman and then as an Indian.

Anita Desai's fiction, on the other hand, is distinguished by her depiction of feminine sensitivity. Anita Desai argues for women who question age-old traditions and seek individual growth in India, where women's roles have

been constructed to leave no opportunity for individualism, identity, or assertion. They are attempting to review the familiar in a new context in order to find purpose in life.

According to Desai, a balance must be established between the traditional pre-determined role of women and contemporary challenges. Her female heroines struggle to find and re-establish purpose in life by examining the familiar and the established. These women aren't your typical, average, everyday women; they're unique. They are alienated and begin to be concerned about their lives since they cannot find an appropriate channel of connection. All of their wanderings and meditations eventually lead them to fresh understanding vistas that they had previously disregarded or dismissed.

### **Characters Who Have Been Alienated**

The protagonists in most of Desai's works are alienated individuals. Her characters are depicted as individuals "standing the fierce assaults of reality on their own" (The Times of India) As a result, the protagonists in her stories are typically neurotic girls who are highly sensitive and engaged with their dreams and imagination while also feeling isolated from their surroundings.

They frequently hold opposing viewpoints and embark on long contemplative journeys in try to discover the meaning of their existence. That is why they are more affected by their relationships than others. In other words, in Desai's novels, love affairs devolve into marital strife as a result of the husband and wife's disastrous post-marriage relationship.

In her novels, Anita Desai has explored issues of love, marriage, and sex in a fascinating and realistic manner. She appears to support the viewpoint that marriage does not give a ready-made answer to life's turbulence, instability, and strain. Instead, increased understanding between husband and wife leads to mental fulfilment and a happy married life.

One requires the sincere assistance of the other. At every level and phase, a demonstrated and trusted feeling of cooperation is essential. The safe key to a healthy compromise and cordial existence in a spousal life is psychological adjustment. Husband and wife must cultivate the strong sense that they are complementary to one another.

## **IV. CONCLUSION**

In the telling of her plots and stories, Anita Desai employs a variety of fictitious inventive tactics. Her works' approaches, in addition to the variety of themes, contribute to her success as an author. She is primarily interested in the deep cultural and philosophical issues that inevitably arise in modern society. She's also a fantastic storyteller with a lot of original ideas. Her narrating style is based on Indian and European culture, history, social structure, ethos, religion, and philosophy. Desai illustrates modern men and women's different mental states, psychic observations, underlying impulses, and existential goals. She completely succeeds in establishing new ground for her fictional art while dealing with her characters' predicament, societal and moral difficulties. Her writing explores psychological topics such as personality distortion, peculiarity, dislocation of normal life, human irresponsibility, and intentional malignancy. Furthermore, it encapsulates radical kinds of alienation, loss of identity, maladjustments, and inconsistencies that appear to have been preserved as the finest of both great traditions. These elements of Desai's work surely provide the Indian English book a new dimension and broaden the scope of her artistic expression. Her issues are treated in a way that is both informative and thought-provoking.

She is often forced to peer into the inner recesses of the psyche rather than the outer spectacle of the world because she is a subjective and psychological author. She is more concerned with the serious aspect of life than with the lighter side. Irony, satire, and sarcasm are frequently present in the pages of her works, indicating their

little role in the artist's genius. Her talent is comparable to George Eliot's in terms of moral and psychological preoccupation. In Indian writing in English, she perfected the craft of psychological novels. Because life is defined by motion, and all motion leads to destruction, the source that activates humans also destroys them. All of the characters in the novels are attempting to find a suitable profession.

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