

An Analysis upon the Portrait of Anita Desai as an Artist

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Abstract – Anita Desai is a distinguished Indo-Anglian novelist and has been popularly known as a literary genius both in India and abroad. Mrs. Desai has written in, and experimented with varieties of the genres of fiction like short story, the literature for children and review, articles and interviews which carry her own fictional interest and flavour. The present dissertation is an effort to bring forth some of the major aspects of Desai's writing in all its essential facets. My chief endeavor has been to present a systematic study of Desai's major themes, technical aspects.

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INTRODUCTION

Anita Desai was born in Mussorie on 24 June 1937 of Bengali father and a German mother. When she was a child, German was used for conversation by her parents, her sister and brothers at home. She received her early education at the Queen Mary's school Delhi and later on studied in Miranda college, University of Delhi. Her graduation in literature was completed from the same college when she took her Bachelor's degree in English in 1957. There is no formal training that has helped her in writing except for reading and constant practice. Though her novels are poetic, her temperament is actually prosaic. At the tender age of seven, she started writing small stories, poems and letters for children's magazines. While at college, she had a few short stories published in the college magazine. She wrote quite a bit for the writers workshop journal and an English magazine called 'Envoy' till her first novel was published in 1963. In her 20s, she started writing novels on a small scale. In her novels she follows, her own instinct which is a kind of compulsion, an inner urge. She writes down the scenes and impression, moods and emotion. Being a creative writer, while writing she is conscious of its value.

Mrs. Desai is one of the most significant of the Indo-Anglian novelists. She took the literary world by storm with her first novel, 'Cry, The Peacock'. Unlike the majority of Indo-Anglian novelists, Mrs. Desai is more interested in her characters than creating the environment which is used to define the characters. Infact, for Mrs. Desai background is important only in so far as it reflects the obsessions of her characters. Free from the political enthusiasm Mrs. Desai makes each work of her a marvel of construction. She uses the medium of English with the remarkable is which adds a new dimension to Indo-Anglian novel.

Unlike many of the other Indian writing in English, Mrs. Desai is not interested in merely telling a story. Her technique is not that of a mere narrator who subordinates character to main subordination of telling the story. She is more interested in her character and the story is of secondary importance. This makes her work something very unusual in Indo-Anglian fiction. It gives to Indo-Anglian novel, a poetic depth, a psychological sophistication which is merely lacking. The interaction between poetic texture and the narrative structure in the first two novels raises Indo-Anglian novels to a higher level of artistic success.

Many of the Indian women novelist focus on women's issue. They have a women's perspective on the world. In fact there has been a great need for and interesting in words in note that university grants commission and Indian council for Social Science and Research have decided that women's issues would be a separate subject of study and that the social sciences would take a special perspective on women in society. This has given rise to the emergence of new area of study and research women's studies. It involves the writing of the material and integrate that deal in a direct or implied fashion, women's improvement and their general enlightenment. This has given a great impetus to the growth of the creative writing in English and a number of writer including Natyatarra Sehgal, Shashi Deshpande and Shobha De have dealt with issues related to woman. As a novelist, she does not consider herself to be a part of any well-defined ideological movement. Describing her art as the product of instinct. Silence and waiting she confesses that her novel do not convey any conscious philosophy.

Anita Desai's search for truth through the presentation of individuals and the exploration of

their psyche has resulted in the sensitive portrayal of several interesting characters both male and female. But a quick glance through her novels reveal that out of eight full-fledged novels that she has written so far, at least five has women as the central character. Besides it is evident in the observation she makes in her article on – “Women writers ‘that the novelist is conscious of some of the problems faced by women’”. Inviting our attention to the absence of a well-defined female tradition in our written literature, she observes in this article that the literary achievements of Indian women are severely limited because of their poverty of experience and improper physical and mental. According to Anita Desai:

“Such a situation becomes a handicap because it directly effects their capabilities for social observation and documentations, both very important to the writing of fiction. (12).

On another occasion, she states that women novelist necessarily have a special way of looking at things in their works, because they live in severely confined spheres. There is no suggestion that this makes their vision inferior – it is only different. Anita Desai considered this essential difference in experience both as handicap and as a privilege for even as it restricts their field of observation, it renders it more intense. As a result, basis writer place their emphasis differently from men, and have a very different set of values.

Anita Desai first novel ‘Cry, The Peacock’ has a visionary authentic which makes it a spiritual experience. It is no doubt the most poetic and evocative Indo-Anglian novel. It covers the subliming aspect of Indian life and reality. It very well illustrates Desai’s ability to closely combine fun with content. The novel is divided into three unequal sections. The first section focuses our attention on tensions and conflicts between two characters of contrary temperaments. The large middle section which is rendered in the first person presents the tragedy of the central character but interestingly enough the story is narrated from her own point of view. The last section of the novel narrated in the third person and ironic comment on the world of sane and rational people. Gautama’s mother and daughter have always ‘Dreaded’ passion as wise men dread their flesh. And they do not really understand why Maya killed her husband. The novel is there something of a technique triumph. Anita Desai’s ability to use English language in a unequally individual fashion is clearly demonstrated by this novel. Her artistry is illustrated by her intelligence of the first person narrative with the third person redressing of the story for the purpose of contrast. And although Desai’s sympathy as a writer or with Maya maintains a distance of character is able to see the character in all its complexity and richness.

In “Voices of City” Anita Desai adopt a slightly different technique, she employs the move

conventional third person made of narrative the story of the three voices in the city. However, the important feature of her art are once again displayed in second novel. The novel presents the bewildering variety of sight and sound of city, of Calcutta. The picture of the environment in which the three central figures struggle for existence. Each character sees the city as the threat of its ingrate as an individual. The ugliness, the poverty and the misery of the poverty and the misery of the city of Calcutta are all are all evoked through very powerful images. Monisha is unnerved by ‘The mindless, meaningless, monotony of empty sound hair upon hair ; Anita see the city in term of images of softness and even the biers are contaminated by the touch of the city. There are ‘a vision of disaster, symbolized by the stirring birds who were not afraid who, waited for the painter, drama, the city is dead.

‘Clear Light of Day’ is Anita Desai’s most ambitious effort to date. It is a secrete bitter story of a family recession: The middle age sister, Tara and Bin, remebered their childhood in Delhi Just before the partition. There is a movement in the novel a movement in time for the past to present and present to the past. The canvas it crewed it and the novelist present a large number of characters than she has done ever before. The character are treated with the usual mixture of satire and sympathy of detachment of sight. The inability of the human being to really know each other is very well communicated by the novelist through analysis of love, hate maundering that colour the relationship between the various characters. The novelist, novel after novel goes back again to the same theme and employs the same technique for the purpose of narration evocation and description. But Anita Desai was a novelist so uniquely original that she may still surprise her reader by doing something absolutely different.

Like most of the woman writer, Anita Desai confines her novels to the inner landscape of the protagonists, delving into it with an intensity that would compensate for the limited scope of the exterior. About her practice as a writer, she admits.

“I do restrict myself to writing about people and situations I know or I can understand Yes, this is the reason for my emphasis on inner action”. (13)

Thus, it becomes clear that the main women characters of Desai’s fiction consciously reflect upon and analyze their own feeling and commitment. At the same time, they also analyze the absence of such commitment in the people around. It is because of the presence, of these qualities that the phrase. The new women proper can be applied to the women characters of Anita Desai.

THE ESSENTIALS OF ANITA DESAI

Themes of anxiety, anguish and psychological adaptation -

Anita Desai's novels reveal her persistent concern with the themes of anxiety, anguish and psychological adaptation impelled by a danger to the individual's identity in context with the world around. Therefore she delineates the inner lives of those individuals who suffer from a nagging sense of insecurity and futility in search of means of living in this unsympathetic world. She also reveals their keen struggle to keep alive their individuality while searching some means of relating to the hostile milieu. Their incapacity of reaching out to the wider world is localized to a narrow setup - within family and daily chores. Therefore, family, marriage and parent-hood intrude necessarily to reveal how and where they affect the characters, resulting their without and isolation assessing her critically, R.K. Srivastava comments, "unlike a photographer concerned with the portrayal of surface reality, she is a painter of moods, of wills, of conflicting, choices and inner experiences." (Srivastava xxxiii)

But she delineates the social phenomenon necessarily as a projection of the mental makeup of the individual. The shift from the eternal to inner world portrays the flux of particular consciousness that determines her vision of life consequently, she discards the tradition from of realism and explores the turbulent emotional world.

Anita Desai has shown admirable psychological insight while creating her women characters. Her concern is to probe, analyses and delve deeper in to secret recesses of her characters and present them in flesh and blood. Inclined to turn in words, her characters take refuge in their inner worlds confronted with uncongenial surroundings and insurmountable hurdles their sharp sensitivity makes them vibrate, respond and react pleasingly to every minute of insignificant happening. Their unnatural obsessions preclude them from objective reality. Baffled, battered and bruised by the hostile realities that situate them, they seek their shelter in dream castle that they are constraint to fabricate, however, like all dreams castles those soon crumble and crush them all.

Existential predicament of women as an individual is the central theme of Anita Desai's novels. She projects this problem through incompatible couples acutely sensitive wives and dutiful but un-understanding insensitive husbands. Her fictional milieu is the India in transition with its cultural and ethical values in the melting pot.

Social concerns -

Anita Desai's novels are exploration of individual, their passions and emotions. She is

primarily concerned with the sequestered individual living in an abandoned world of personal privation. To be brief her sole concern is the solitary being and the lone individual. She, no doubt represents the protagonist who, consciously travels through the world of self - alienation to the another world of self-identification. In doing so she disowns all social concern and asserts repeatedly that she is interested in individuals and not in social issues except where they intrude and affect the characters.

Anita Desai's novels unravel the mystery of the inner life of her characters. Her works are different from those of other Indian woman writers in English who mainly concerns themselves with politics, East west encounter and social themes respectively.

Anita Desai disowns all social concerns and asserts more than once that is interested in individuals and not in social issues. Social issues intrude only where they affect the characters. In an interview the novelist also admits of her preoccupation with the "essential human condition". Most of the thematic studies of Anita Desai's novels have concentrated on loneliness and withdrawal of her characters. Many critics appreciate her uniquely Indian sensitivity, while several other view her fiction on the national canvas.

TECHNIQUE AND STYLE IN THE NOVELS OF ANITA DESAI

Unlike other novelists such as Raja Rao, Mulkraj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Bhabani Bhattacharya; Desai opts a different set of language and style to depict the inner crisis and tension existing in life of a character. All her characters are existential, non-political and far from being much social. She presents the situations and characters of her novels as an unsolved mystery. Her novels constitute together the documentation of radical female resistance against a patriarchally defined concept of normality. Her female protagonists point out the mad clarity the farcical nature of all marriage, the relationships of male and female. There is not unquestioning acceptance of the traditional female role but also deeply felt rebellion against the entire system of social relationship.

The word "technique" is derived from the Greek "techikos technē" meaning an art, artifice. The hypothetical Indo-European root of the word in 'tekth' - meaning to weave to build to join whence the Greek word 'takton' meaning a carpenter. Similarly later in Latin 'texere' means to weave, to build. Thus the word in its original form meant an applied art whether of building a house or of weaving a piece of cloth and from usage in such practical art, the term was later applied to literature. Literature being a world of imagination has to borrow words from the 'practical' world for its uses. As an artisan or a skilled worker used some tools, methods and devices in creating a literary work. As

mentioned in the epigraph to the chapter above, the word technique in the context of literature has a wide scope of meaning when a novelist writes a novel, he conveys his theme with the help of a story which consists of certain characters.

Anita Desai creates contrasting character to highlight the main character. Porn is foil to Maya's character. If Maya is traditional, sensitive, refined, Porn has none of these qualities. The Peacock is an important symbol of the novel. B. Ramchandra Rao finds in the dance of Peacock as both the dance of life and the dance of death. P.K. Pandey has worked out the religio-cultural aspects of the symbol and finds it to be.

Thus Anita Desai's novel, *Cry, the Peacock* is a technically well written novel. The above survey of fictional technique of Anita Desai found in her novel shows that she uses different fictional techniques according to the demand of the story in her novel. We may not call her a technical innovator and who can be an innovator when the novel is being written in English for last two hundred years. From the point of view of technique what is important, is not innovation or novelty but how effective the technique is in conveying the meaning and narrating the story effectively.

Desai is interested in exploring the social structure through the individual protagonist of her novels. She seems reluctant to accept abstractions and idealistic representation and study the disturbed psyche and predicament of modern Indian woman. She also endeavors to strike a balance between instinctual need intellectual as aspiration. She throws light on the intricate facts of human experiences bearing upon the central experience of psyche of her character. Her prime concern is human relationship and theme is the existential pains and predicament of woman, an individual presented in the novels as incompatible couples i.e. very sensitive wives sewable husband etc. She is a minute observer of society existing around the fair sex, perceiving everything minutely and delicately in order to present situations in a typical poetic style.

LYRICAL ELEMENTS

On the cover-page of the novel *Cry, the Peacock* a small piece of a review is given and that says " ... a poetry-novel. Has a great sense of place." This shows the kind of the novel *Cry, the Peacock* is. Really when I went through it I found that it has all the characteristics of a lyrical novel. The theme of the novel is the disintegration of Maya's consciousness and Anita Desai chooses the first person narration to write it. K. Meera Bai says "Anita Desai explores the consciousness of Maya - the consciousness that is moulded and charged by her intense involvement with life, her fears of impending death, her loneliness and her absorption with herself (185). We see Maya, the protagonist of the novel, is

a young girl married to a friend of her father named Gautama who, with his academic and detached nature, is totally antithetical to her. Their opposing temperaments cause marital conflict. The novel begins with the scene in which Maya mourns the death of her pet dog Toto and this incident in her life surfaces a disturbing memory of the prophecy of an albino astrologer who foretold the death of one of the partners four years after their marriage. She is afraid of the occurrence of this incident in her life as this is the fourth year of their marriage and she becomes an introvert and a neurotic person. K. Meera Bai rightly comments: "The opening of the novel wherein Maya is shown to be washing her eyes in order to wash off the sight of Toto's dead body gives a glimpse of Maya's obsessive compulsive neurosis" (186). She counts the cooing of the doves to each other for mating as omens of ill-fortune.

CONCLUSION

Anita Desai is one of the most significant of the Indo-Anglian novelist. She took the literary world by storm with her first novel, *Cry The, Peacock*. Unlike the majority of Indo-Anglian novelists, Mrs. Desai is more interested in her characters creating the environment which is used to define the character. In fact, for Mrs. Desai background is important only in so far as it reflects the obsession of her characters. Telling a story is less important than creating character. Free from the political enthusiasm Mrs. Desai makes each work of marvel of her construction. She uses the medium of English with the remarkable ease which adds a new dimension to Indo-Anglian novel. She brings something new to Indo-Anglian novel instead of portraying character in terms of environment or defining an individual term of a social or cost function.

Anita Desai's novels reveal her persistent concern with the themes of anxiety, anguish and psychological adaptation impelled by a danger to the individual's identity in context with the world around. Anita Desai's novels are the exploration of individual, their passions and emotions. She is primarily concerned with the sequestered individual living in an abandoned world of personal privation. To be brief, her sole concern is the solitary being and the love individual she, no doubt, represents the protagonists who consciously travels through the world of self-alienation to the another world of self-identification.

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