


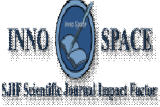



<p>Research Paper in English</p>	    
<p>Dr. Vivek R. Vishwarupe</p> <p>Associate Professor, Department of English Amolakchand, Mahavidyalaya, Yavatmal</p>	<p>Anita Desai: A Study in Psyche of Select Characters</p> <p>Abstract</p> <p>Anita Desai's works are different from those of other Indian women writers writing in English. Nayantara Sehgal, Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Praver Jhabvala are always compared with Anita Desai but these novelists mainly concern themselves with Politics, East-West encounter and social themes. Desai seems to be concerned with the psyche of her characters. For her it is "depth which is delving deeper and deeper in a character or a scene, rather than going round about it". As regards almost all the characters of Anita Desai, we find her exploring the mental and emotional tumult of her characters. But, in this research endeavor it would not be possible to concentrate both on male as well as female characters since the present research pursuit has limitations of its own. Therefore, the present researcher makes it clear that he has deliberately restricted the scope of this research paper to Desai's female characters only.</p>

Anita Desai has tried to understand the predicament of her female characters. Through her keen and neutral observations she portrays woman characters and major events in their lives. So also woman psyche as reflected could be explored she delineates the female predicament, psychological turmoil and their endless efforts for self assertion. Anita Desai, as an author, does not give a solution rather she makes her readers think over it. She represents the feminine sensibility and for this she has been considered as a novelist of moods, of persistent state of mind and psyche. Usha Bande explains: "Anita Desai disowns all social concerns and asserts more than once that she is interested in individual and not in social issues. Social issues intrude only where they affect the character." What distinguishes Anita Desai from other writers is her preoccupation with an individual and his/her inner world of sensibility - the chaos, so to speak in the individual's.

Anita Desai is seen exploring the inner reality or in her own words, she is not concerned with "the one-tenth visible section of iceberg that one sees above the surface of the ocean" - but with "the remaining nine-tenth of it that lies below the surface" (*Kakatiya Journal of English Studies*). For Anita Desai, literature is neither a means of escaping reality nor a vehicle for parading her political, social, religious and moral

ideas, but an exploration and an inquiry. She feels that besides having a creative genius, a novelist should be sensitive and should have a power of keen observation so that he could give an acute description and pick up the tiny details that others might not notice. She discards the traditional form of realism and focuses on disintegration in the inner and outer lives of her female characters.

R.S. Sharma considers Desai's first novel *Cry, the Peacock*, "the first step in the direction of psychological fiction in English" Maya, a sensitive woman, suffers from neurotic fears. These fears are caused by the predictions of an albino astrologer about her premature possible death. She fears from her marital disharmony also. Through this novel, Anita Desai, tells us about a hypersensitive Hindu woman of orthodox background seeking unorthodox means of fulfilment. Instead of getting fulfilment she is found alienated. Maya's fascination for life clashes with her husband's rational and practical approach to it. Both of them can never understand each other and they separate. Gautam, Maya's husband, is a different kind of person. There is a temperamental difference between Gautam and Maya and this proves fatal. This temperamental difference between Maya and Gautam is the main factor to the theme of psychic disintegration. We witness the tragic end of their

conjugal life. Monisha, in *Voices in the City* could never adjust in the joint family of her in-laws and always craves for silence and solitude. She too, like Maya, is sensitive and suffers from an ill-matched marriage. She lacks understanding and love from her husband and alienates herself by taking to diary writing. She is an example of maladjusted woman who is an introvert. She revolts in the form of setting herself afire. *Where Shall We Go This Summer* depicts the tension between a sensitive wife Sita, and a rational and materialistic husband Raman. Sita is an emotional person. Violence and death are two very sensitive issues for Sita. She is not happy with her married life. Her husband is always busy with his work and has no time for Sita. She feels alone and goes to the island of Manori, her childhood home. Here, she looks for peace of mind but instead she feels alienated. Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* throws light on the disturbed and frustrated life of Nanda Kaul, wife of the erstwhile Vice Chancellor of Punjab University. Nanda Kaul withdraws herself to a lonely and secluded house in Kasauli. Nanda lives her life all by herself in her old age and she does not want to be disturbed by anyone and anything. Anita Desai makes Nanda realize the truth of her life from which she is trying to escape. The novelist refers to Nanda's dreary life and her tragic death in the end of the novel. The title of the novel alludes to Raka - the great grand daughter of Nanda. R.S. Sharma's opinion that it is "expressive of Raka's resolve to destroy the world where a woman cannot hope to be happy without being unnatural..."⁵ could be agreed upon, partially Clear *Light of the Day* talks about the protagonist 'Bim', who shoulders the responsibilities of her brother and sisters. She sacrifices her life for her siblings. She takes the responsibilities of their education and marriage. Desai's novel *Fasting, a Fasting* deals with the story of 'Uma' who is the protagonist of the first part of the novel and represents the attitude of the author. Through this woman character, the novelist shows how a woman has to bear many insults and abuses flung by her own parents. Though Uma is the most neglected child of the family, she is needed by the family at almost every stage.

A research into the major novels of Anita Desai makes us know that the inward search for identity is a common factor among her female characters in her novels. Whether it is the immature

and psychological, alienated Maya or the stoic Nanda Kaul - all of them suffer due to male dominance. Anita Desai wants to stress in her novels the various qualities of an Indian woman - her emotions, her sensitiveness, and her tenderness. Anita Desai is primarily interested in the portrayal of female protagonists as living 'separate' world. Being a psychological novelist and concerned with the atmosphere of the mind of her characters, Desai portrays character's motivation, their consciousness and consciences. As has been said earlier she is interested in exploring the psychic depth of her female characters. Desai may be said to be doing something unique among the contemporary Indian English novelists. Anita Desai's female characters can be classified into two distinctive groups. First group is of those female characters who fail to adjust to the harsh realities of life and the second is of those who compromise. In her novels there are often those female characters who always remain outside, as they cannot cope themselves with the world of realities. Anita Desai seems to be concerned with the inner life of her female characters and therefore the recurring themes in her novels are the agony of existence in a hostile society that is conservative and taboo-ridden. What is great on the part of Anita Desai is that she explores minutely the depth of her female characters. These were unimaginable for earlier Indo-Anglian novelists.

A close study of Anita Desai's works reveals her struggle for women's autonomy. She is an expert at depicting female psyche and holds a key position as a psychological novelist dealing with the psychic problems of women, particularly Indian women. They have been depicted as dumb cattle without any will of their own. Anita Desai's female characters are educated, well to do and hypersensitive women who are burdened by the contemporary chaotic milieu. Anita Desai reflects the inner struggle of such women, their desire to break the shackles and assert themselves as human beings. In this struggle they often get alienated from the mainstream of life. Desai's pre-occupation with the individual, highlighting the psychological motivation and her keen awareness of the futility of existence radiate from each of her novels. Anita Desai focuses more on characters rather than the plot and delineates them by exploring their psyche through peeping into their feelings such their agony, anger, dissatisfaction and frustration. Women

are presented fictionally as having been caught between their intense desire for assertion on one hand and their inability to live according to the traditional norms, on the other. The fictional world of Anita Desai is centered primarily on the woman's varied emotions and turbulent inner feelings in daily life. She is more concerned with the depression and despair of female characters, which eventually result in frustration. Anita Desai is not much interested in social and economic problems. She deftly portrays the impact of social and family environment on the psyche of her women protagonists. For example, Maya is a hypersensitive woman who craves for her husband's love whereas her husband every now and then elaborates the Sayings of 'Gita' and imposes its teaching on Maya. In fact, the meanings which Gautama, Maya's husband, extracts from the 'Gita' show that he has not only misread the 'Gita' but misinterpreted it also. According to Gautama, 'Gita' is all about the renunciation which is absolutely wrong. Gita does not teach to elude the material life; rather it emphasizes that unless you perform your household duties sincerely, you are not sincere to Him and ultimately to the teachings of the Gita. Likewise, Monisha in the *Voices in the City* yearns for her husband's attention towards her which she cannot get. It happens with Sita in the *Where Shall We Go This Summer*. Nanda Kaul undergoes the same traumatic experience in *Fire on the Mountain*. Anita Desai masterfully peeps into the inner world of her female characters which seems to have happened never before in Indian English Fiction.

After going through Anita Desai's novels it becomes clear that she has dwelt upon the psychic world of Indian women. It is the assumption of common Indian people that if women are given

material comforts they have no reason to be unhappy. They think that as per Indian tradition they have got everything and hence they ought to be happy. But when we think of women in this way, we conveniently forget that they too have hearts and they too crave for intense emotional attention/satisfaction. Indian people think that women have no individuality of their own and hence they don't have any right to be happy by going out of the periphery laid down by male dominated society. Anita Desai has tried to show through her novels that this understanding of men about women is wrong and needs to be changed. Anita Desai is the first writer who has forcefully expressed the existential problems of women. This point makes the novelist stand apart from many of her contemporaries!

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