

ANITA DESAI AS A MOTHER OF INDIAN PSYCHOLOGICAL NOVELS

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Abstract

Indian authors have made significant contributions to literature both domestically and internationally, often exploring themes related to Indian culture, tradition, politics, and self-identity. One such writer is Anita Desai, who is considered a pioneer in the Indian psychological novel genre. Her insightful depictions of modern Indian life have earned her a prominent place among Indian authors. In addition to her writing, Desai has also been involved in teaching. She is widely recognized as one of India's premier writers, particularly in the psychological genre. While she may not be a trailblazer in the field, she is widely respected and praised for her outstanding work in literature. Her novel "Cry, the Peacock" is a famous novel which belongs to the psychological genre and it was published in 1963. Actually, the suppression and oppression of Indian women were the subjects of this novel. This work immediately established her as a major voice in Indian literature in English. Moreover, it is assumed that Anita Desai's fiction is a reflection of the disturbed psyche of women who are the serious victims of alienation and male domination. This research paper aims to highlight Anita Desai's contributions to Indian literature, specifically as the mother of Indian psychological novels.

Paper Identification



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INTRODUCTION: Actually, throughout the centuries literature has attempted to describe the world of human passions such as; joy and sorrow, love, power and hatred. Most of the scholars agree with the fact that all the artists let their own conscious experiences of human life into their fiction. Therefore, the psychological approach to literature found its expression in the late works of Henry James, but manifested itself fully in the works of Joyce and Woolf. We know that all the psychological novels emphasize on internal characterization, motives, circumstances and inner actions that develop into outer actions. These novels not only show what happens, but also explain the motivation for that action. In this way, a unique feature of the literature emerges as psychological novels genre.

In this context, Anita Desai got a name and fame in the field of psychological novels and today she is known as the mother of the Indian psychological novel genre. Her detailed portrayals of modern Indian life have earned her a respected place among Indian authors. Desai's novels are characterized by their psychological realism and focus on the inner lives of her characters, using techniques such as stream of consciousness to depict the thoughts, feelings, and reactions of her characters in a continuous flow. A recipient of the Sahitya Academy Award, Desai has published a large number of works of fiction and has received many honors for her writing. She has also been shortlisted for the Booker Prize three times in her career. In addition to writing, Desai has also been actively involved in teaching, and continues to serve as an inspiration for young aspiring writers, as she successfully balanced her writing and teaching career with raising her children without any reported conflicts.

Early Life: Anita Desai was born in 1937 in Mussoorie, India, to a German mother, Toni Nime, and a Bengali businessman, D.N. Mazumdar. She grew up speaking Hindi with her neighbors and only German at home. She also spoke Bengali, Urdu, and English outside of her home. Her early education was in English and it became her primary literary language. She began writing in English at the age of seven and published her first story at the age of nine. She received her B.A in English literature in 1957 from the Miranda House of the University of Delhi.

Her career as an author began with short stories which were published in magazines. Some of her popular short stories include "Circus Cat," "How Gentle is the Mist?," "Tea with the Maharani," "Ghost House," "Mr. Bose's Private Bliss," and "Private Tuition by Mr. Bose." Desai has also written essays, articles, and reviews for various magazines and newspapers. Her career as a writer started with short stories which were published in magazines. Her short stories 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 also written essays, articles and reviews for many magazines and newspapers.

Anita Desai's Fiction: Anita Desai is a renowned author who has published many works of fiction. Throughout her career, she has received numerous awards and recognition for her writing. She has also been shortlisted for the Booker Prize on three occasions. Along with her career as a writer, she also took on the responsibilities of being an educator and a mother to four children, and was able to balance these responsibilities without compromising her work. Despite the challenges that she may have faced as a woman and a mother, her unique approach to writing and her skillful portrayal of characters have solidified her place in the literary world.

The majority of her plots draw from her personal understanding of life. She never limited herself to a single topic or message. She believed in depicting reality in a practical manner. Her stories often explore themes such as alienation, lack of communication, inner conflict, relationships between men and women, and marital issues. Her characters are mostly female, and her focus is on their inner lives. This has led her to be considered as a writer of mood and psychology. Her sensitive portrayal of the inner feelings of her female characters is particularly noteworthy. Many of Anita Desai's books examine tensions between family members and the struggles of working-class women. She has also addressed issues such as anti-Semitism, the Westernization of India, and the decline of traditional Indian practices and customs. Her work explores contemporary Indian life, cultural conflicts between the East and the West, generational differences, and emotional and practical exile. Her professional career began with her first novel, *Cry, the Peacock* in 1963 and since then she has written many books that belongs to the psychological genre, some of her notable novels are:

Cry, the Peacock: It is a well-known and celebrated novel by Anita Desai, first published in 1963. The novel addresses the concealment and mistreatment of Indian women and established Desai as a prominent voice in Indian literature written in English. The protagonist, Maya, struggles with self-discovery and introspection as she fails to fulfill her traditional role as a wife. Desai's works reflect the troubled minds of women who are serious survivors of alienation and male domination. However, they also find a way out through self-discovery and introspection. The novel portrays that women must confront and challenge societal structures and practices that subject them to patriarchal control in order to free themselves and move forward. However, it is also acknowledged that since the beginning of the women's rights movement, women have made significant progress in every aspect of life. The novel concludes with Maya's death, as she reflects on her strong and damaged childhood. Anita Desai addresses the issue of women with

sensitivity and awareness, and through Maya's journey, she presents another facet of feminist literature.

Anita Desai's other Novels: "Her Voices in the City" is a novel by Anita Desai that reflects her experiences in the city of Calcutta. In "Bye-Bye, Blackbird," Desai captures the struggles of migrants and explores themes such as nostalgia, distance, rejection, and acceptance. The conflict between East and West is also depicted in the novel. "Where Shall We Go This Summer" deals with the struggles of a working-class Indian wife in a modern urban setting. "Fire on the Mountain," which won the Sahitya Academy Award in 1978, is praised for its evocative imagery and use of sound. It features three female characters, each of whom is oppressed or damaged in some way. "Clear Light of Day," which was shortlisted for the Booker Prize, is acclaimed for its deeply evocative portrayal of two sisters trapped in the mundanity of Indian life. The characters are revealed through symbolism as well as through gesture, speech, and reflection. It is a study of Delhi that blends fiction with history to examine the lives of a working-class Hindu family. "Baumgartner's Bombay" explores the German and Jewish character in relation to a tumultuous contemporary India. Other notable books by Anita Desai include "In Custody" and "Journey to Ithaca."

Writing Style: Anita Desai's work is a part of the contemporary trend of writing, and as Desai herself has stated, "My approach to writing is to allow the story to unfold on its own. I try not to structure my work too rigidly." Her unique writing style, her distinctive characters, and her realistic storylines make her compositions particularly captivating. Desai's skillful use of imagery is widely acclaimed by critics. Her books are relatively short, but her use of imagery and symbolism is complex. Her writing style is praised for its elegant imagery and use of sounds. Desai's work demonstrates her ongoing experimentation and gradual evolution as a writer. Her work offers a more nuanced perspective on the novel and portrays what is happening in Indian culture. Her representation of the setting is broad, and despite the fact that she has also traveled to other countries, she still has a concern for the perspective of India and attempts to dispel some of the generalized assumptions about India.

Plot Construction: Anita Desai's novels reveal specific recurring patterns in their plots, settings, and character portrayals. Her plots often involve a combination of two contrasting elements: a gothic mystery and a philosophical reflection. The gothic aspect can be seen in varying degrees in all of her books. "Fire on the Mountain" comes closest to being a thriller, while in "Cry, the Peacock," the masochistic protagonist Maya kills her husband, fulfilling the prophecy of a pale-skinned alchemist. In "Voices in the City," the protagonist Monisha, an agitated, overburdened

housewife, pours lamp oil over herself and burns herself to death. On the other hand, many of Desai's books also contain a deep philosophical concern with the meaning of life. Many of her characters are dissatisfied with their mundane existence and seek a more meaningful life.

Setting: Anita Desai's novels have their own distinct setting. Most are set in the city and typically feature large, old houses with multiple verandas, lush gardens, servants, and pets. The garden plays an important role in Desai's world as her characters often display a strong aversion to it. Trees, creepers, ringlets, flowers, fruits, seasons, and pets are more prominently featured in Desai's books than in other Indian English fiction. The characters belong to the upper class. The city, the hill station, the grand house with a garden, a decadent family, and an obsession with the past - these elements make up the typical world of a Desai novel.

Characterization: In her quest to explore the true meaning of existence, Anita Desai uses her characters as a means of expression. They are not just characters or caricatures, they don't just represent a specific culture or a particular crossroads. Anita Desai's primary concern in her books is to investigate and to illuminate the human mind and self. In the contemporary socio-political setting, the quandary of the modern man appears to be one of the author's predominant interests. Desai's female characters are mostly hypochondriac and highly sensitive. They are unwilling to adapt to reality. They live in an estranged world of fantasy and illusion and are disconnected from their surroundings. Maya is a prime example. Being a sensitive female writer, Anita Desai creates striking images of characters, both male and female. Her characters are rebels. Anita Desai is an expert in depicting the issues of her characters which are not physical but mental. Therefore, to Anita Desai, portrayal is just as important as plot-development or storytelling. Desai's characters can be divided into two main types: one type has a psychotic, highly sensitive, imaginative rationality; the other is skeptical, harsh, and bitter. Maya, Monisha, Sarah, Sita, Tara, and Matteo belong to the first category, while Nirode, Amla, Dev, Nanda, Bim, and Sophie belong to the second. Desai's characters are mostly in a state of conflict, either with themselves or with their current situation. The results of this fundamental struggle are murder, madness, suicide, compromise, and death.

Awards and Recognition: Anita Desai has received numerous accolades for her literary contributions, including the Padmashri and Padma Bhushan from the Government of India and the Taraknath Das Award for the advancement of Indo-US relations. She won the Sahitya Academy Award for her novel, *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) in 1978. Her three books, *Clear Light of the Day*, *In Custody*, and *Fasting Feasting* were shortlisted for the prestigious Booker Prize. *The Village by the Sea* was awarded the Guardian Children Fiction Prize. Her novel, *In*

Custody was adapted by Merchant Ivory Production into an English film of the same name. It was directed by Ismail Merchant, and it won the 1994 National Film Award for Best Feature Film in India. Thus, due to her outstanding works, she has been one of the most prominent and awarded Indian authors of all time.

CONCLUSION: Now it can be confidently stated that Anita Desai is a renowned name in the field of Indian literature. She has established herself as a leading novelist in India, particularly in the psychological genre. While she may not be considered a trailblazer in the field, her reputation as a critically acclaimed author is well-deserved, having produced a plethora of compelling and masterful novels. In addition to her writing pursuits, she also took on the responsibilities of being a teacher and a mother of four children, and still managed to excel in all of her endeavors. It is acknowledged that as a woman and a mother, she must have faced many challenges, but she overcame them and achieved greatness in all aspects of her life. She is a true inspiration for many, and a shining example of what can be achieved through hard work and dedication. All in all, it is without a doubt that Anita Desai deserves to be recognized as the mother of Indian Psychological Novels.

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