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EXPLORATION OF PSYCHE: A NEW NARRATIVE APPROACH OF ANITA DESAI

KEY WORDS: Perception, psyche, rootlessness, fragmentation, nostalgia, confront, creative.

Dr. Ritu Srivastava

Department of Applied Science, Madan Mohan Malaviya University of Technology, Gorakhpur

Dr. Sudhir Narayan Singh*

Department of Applied Science, Madan Mohan Malaviya University of Technology, Gorakhpur *Corresponding Author

ABSTRACT

Anita Desai is one of the most renowned novelists in the stream of Indian English authors. She stands distinguished from the rest of her contemporary women novelists in regard of her unique perception and matchless potential of understanding human psyche. In her novels like 'Cry the Peacock', 'Voices In The City', 'Fire On The Mountain', 'Clear Light Of The Day', 'Fasting Feasting', 'Journey To Ithaca' etc she has given a very impressive sketch of female psyche. Her female protagonists mostly suffer with a sense of rootlessness and inner fragmentation which prohibits them to widen their horizon of outlook and appreciate life. Their failure to confront the realities of present life throws them into their past. Nostalgia provides them a sense of solace. Anita Desai has championed the exploration of human psyche and has successfully painted the vivid shades of human emotions.

INTRODUCTION:

Anita Desai is one of the best fictionalists of our country who has ever strived to imbibe the native Indian traditions and culture in English language. She employs different types of narrative techniques according to the requirement of the character and plot. She always preferred an innovative approach towards the already existing narrative styles in order to delve deep into the conscience of her characters and thus to interpret the essence of their existence. In the words of LUB Pandey, "Anita Desai's gift as a prose writer are now acknowledged what is perhaps overlooked in the process is the fact that most of her problems as a fiction writer begin with her insistence on too much style on too small a canvas." The varied and the outstanding works of Desai, very clearly convey the fact that she was sincerely interested in probing the innermost recesses of human consciousness. She is credited to have given a new dimension to Indian English novels by shifting from outer actions to inner sensibility. Iyengar has very aptly remarked,

"Since her preoccupation is with the inner world of sensibility rather than the outer world of action, she has tried to forge a style supple and suggestive enough to convey the fever and fretfulness of the stream of consciousness of her principal characters."

Nostalgia is one of the favorite narrative techniques of Anita Desai. Her stories mostly moves from past to present and again from present to past and by doing so she tries to establish the fact that how the past of her characters influence and shape their present. It gives her an opportunity to search out the reason for the grief, loneliness, alienation, frustration, dissatisfaction and despair in the present life of her characters.

Cry The Peacock: The debut novel of Anita Desai which made its first appearance in the year 1963 is essentially rich in its imagery. Maya, the young female protagonist of the story stands as the representative of her disastrous marriage. She is an issueless young woman who endlessly bears the torments of an incompatible marriage with Gautama. In this novel also Anita Desai has employed the nostalgic narrative technique to understand the psychology of a lonely, neurotic, emotionally deprived young woman who is standing almost on the verge of emotional breakdown.

Maya's character has been portrayed as extremely sensitive. Her fine poetic sensibility makes her find delight in all natural beauty that surrounds her. With her sensitive nature and minute observation she vividly understands and beautifully

interprets the varied natural beauty. She is very affectionate towards her pets and other animals too. Gautama, her husband is just opposite to her. They both stand at two extreme ends. He is purely rationalist who is hardly capable of appreciating the transient beauty of nature. Gautama is only concerned with the absolutes. In fact the names of the couple Maya and Gautama itself illustrates and epitomizes the contrast in their characters. Maya means a veil of illusion whereas Gautama is the name of Lord Buddha who himself was capable of unveiling all the different shades of Maya.

Anita Desai has made use of the memories of the past in order to understand the psyche of Maya and also to connect her past with present. Maya was brought up in a very protective environment under the tender care and love of her father. She describes her childhood days, "The world is like a toy especially made for me, painted in my favorite colors, set moving to my favorite time." (p.36)

She remembers the love and care of her father with special tenderness, "He has looked after me alone and his beam is especially tender, his attention specially loving. I think that he is like a silver oak himself, with his fine silver white hair brushed smoothly across his bronzed scalp." (p.39)

But after getting married Gautama failed to reciprocate to the emotions of Maya. As such Maya was completely shattered from inside and finally being haunted by the childhood prophecy of disaster, kills Gautama, her elderly and detached husband. In the end she goes completely mad and commits suicide.

Voices in the City: Anita Desai's second novel 'Voices in the City' which came out in the year 1965 is also a good example of writer's superb sensibility and her expertise in carving out the in-depth emotions lying somewhere in the innermost recesses of the characters. She has employed symbolism as the fictional narrative in the novel in order to portray the exhaustion, frustration and disappointment in Amla, Monisha and Nirode, all three leading characters of the novel.

Amla chooses the city of Calcutta in order to fulfill her aspirations of becoming a professional artist. Initially she bloats with enthusiasm and thrill about her dreams in a metro city but soon gets disappointed with it and she feels herself to be shattered in pieces after confronting the reality.

"A combination of all these revelations and inspirations filled her, expanded her, made her rise and float, and on its drift she left the house feeling as emptied out, frangible and exhausted

as if a high fever had drained her” (p.231)

The city of Calcutta itself has been used as a symbol of goddess Kali, the ultimate power of death and destruction. As such it has been extensively described as an oppressive and dying city but at the same time casting a great influence on the characters of the story.

“.....that this monster city that lived no normal, healthy red blooded life but one that was subterranean, underlet, stealthy, and odorous of mortality, had captured and enchanted or disenchanting both her sister and brother.” (Desai VC 150)

Amla on the other end feels weak and exhausted when confronted with truth. Desai has made a very vivid and wise use of natural flora and fauna to symbolize the exhaustion and emptiness of Amla. Birds are used as the symbols of the need for the continuity in life and thus help in transforming the finite self of Amla into infinite aesthetic self.

“These birds they stay in the trees in spite of all those crowds around them, all that shouting and jumping and pushing. They don't give up their trees. They are not afraid. Isn't that strange?” (p.232)

Fire on the Mountain: Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* which came out in the year 1977 makes an extensive use of symbolism and stream of consciousness technique as her favorite style of narration. In this novel the novelist has beautifully exposed the inner void of Nanda Kaul, the female protagonist by making use of various symbols and imageries.

Nanda Kaul, the widow of an ex Vice Chancellor is living a life of extreme seclusion and renunciation. She retires from her busy family life and shifts to Kasauli in search of loneliness and quest for self identification. She is so obsessed with her loneliness that sometimes she even desires to become a tree and get merged with nature.

“She was grey, tall and thin and her silk sari made her a sweeping, shivering sound and she fancied she could merge with the pine trees and be mistaken for one. To be tree, no more and no less, was all she was prepared to undertake.” (P.1-53)

The novelist has portrayed the character of Nanda Kaul as the one who is suffering with melancholia. She is extremely devastated from inside and therefore she is in search of complete seclusion. Desai has dwelled upon various natural symbols and imageries to carve out the psyche of Nanda Kaul. At some places she has also drawn a parallel between the old ageing trees that are seen to be withering and Nanda Kaul's withering life.

Talking about the apt depiction of the inner psyche of her characters, KRS Iyengar remarks, “ In her novels the inner climate, the climate of sensibility that lours, clears and rambles like thunder or suddenly blazes forth like lightening is more compelling than the outer weather, the physical geography or the visible action.”

Baumgartner's Bombay: It is one of the latest novels written by Anita Desai. The novel deals with the plight of a German immigrant, Hugo Baumgartner. He is basically a Jew who is forced to leave Germany after the rise of Nazism and comes to British India for seeking a new life. In this novel she has used the technique of nostalgia and stream of consciousness to cover the entire life journey of Baumgartner. She especially uses this technique to move down the memory lane and to give us a glimpse of Baumgartner's childhood in Germany. She has made ample use of German poems and songs which are sung by the Jew. During his imprisonment he sings the German patriotic song which very clearly establishes the fact he still becomes nostalgic about his country and feels

emptiness from within. In order to portray Baumgartner's rootlessness and infuriating loneliness the writer has dwelled has dwelled upon imagery. She has communicated the same sense through the imagery of a dog and it crucially crystallizes the predicament of a homeless wanderer living in his sequestered world. Jasbir Jain remarks,

“The world of Anita Desai's novels is an ambivalent one, it is a world where the central harmony is aspired to but not arrived at, and the desire to love and live clashes at times violently with the desire to withdraw and achieve harmony, involvement and stillness are incompatible by their nature, yet they strive to exist together. (Jain, 16)

CONCLUSION:

Thus it can be safely concluded that Anita Desai is one of the Indian English novelist who invented her own unique style of writing instead of following the traditional and prevalent ones and took it to the heights of success. She is a subjective and psychological fictional artist who believes more in peeping into the depths of psyche rather than observing the outer spectacle of the character. In order to narrate the story, delineate the character, evoke the atmosphere and to probe the depths of the psychology of her character she skillfully uses flashback, memory, nostalgia, perception etc as her favorite narrative modes.

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