



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCE RESEARCH, IDEAS AND INNOVATIONS IN TECHNOLOGY

ISSN: 2454-132X

Impact factor: 4.295

(Volume3, Issue1)

Available online at: [www.ijariit.com](http://www.ijariit.com)

## Personality Chaos in Select Novels of Anita Desai

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**Abstract:** - Personality is the combination of behavior, emotion, motivation, and thought patterns that define an individual. Personality psychology attempts to study similarities and differences in these patterns among different people and groups. Anita Desai is one of the best-known famous women writers of Indian fiction in English. In her novels like “cry the peacock” and “where shall we go this summer” she presents the personality disorders of women characters. Personality also refers to the pattern of thoughts, feelings, social adjustments, and behaviors consistently exhibited over time that strongly influences one's expectations, self-perceptions, values, and attitudes. It also predicts human reactions to other people's, problems, and stress. Gordon Allport (1937) described two major ways to study personality: the nomothetic and the idiographic. Nomothetic psychology seeks general laws that can be applied to many different people, such as the principle of self-actualization or the trait of extraversion. Idiographic psychology is an attempt to understand the unique aspects of a particular individual.

**Key words:** Personality, self-perceptions, attitudes, self- actualization and personality psychology.

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Anita Desai is one of the best-known famous women writers of Indian fiction in English. She was born to a Bengali father and a German mother; she is an apt example of the bicultural heritage of postcolonial India. Desai grew up in Delhi, receiving her education first at Queen Mary's School and later at Miranda House; one of Delhi University's most prestigious colleges. She published her first novel, *Cry the Peacock*, in 1963. She considers *Clear light of the day* (1980) her most autobiographical work as it is set during her coming of age and also in the same neighborhood in which she grew up. In 1984 she published Her novels include *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), which won the Winifred Holt by Memorial Prize, and *Clear Light of Day* (1980), *In Custody* (1984) and *Fasting, Feasting* (1999), each of which was shortlisted for the Booker Prize. *In Custody* was made into a film by Merchant Ivory productions. Her children's book *The Village by the Sea* (1982), won the *Guardian* Children's Fiction Award. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Girton College, Cambridge and Clare Hall, Cambridge. At present she is living in the United States, where she is the John E. Burchard Professor of Writing at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA. Her most recent book is *The Artist of Disappearance* (2011), a trio of linked novellas about the art world, each featuring a different kind of disappearance. In her novels like “cry the peacock” and “where shall we go this summer” she presents the personality disorders of women characters.

Personality is the combination of behavior, emotion, motivation, and thought patterns that define an individual. Personality psychology attempts to study similarities and differences in these patterns among different people and groups. Personality refers to individual's' characteristic patterns of thought, emotion, and behavior, together with the psychological mechanisms -- hidden or not -- behind those patterns. This definition means that among their colleagues in other subfields of psychology, those psychologists who study personality have a unique mandate: to explain whole persons."(Funder, D. C., 1997)" Although no single definition is acceptable to all personality theorists, we can say that personality is a pattern of relatively permanent traits and unique characteristics that give both consistency and individuality to a person's behavior." (Feist and Feist, 2009)

Personality psychology is mainly focused on

- Construction of a coherent picture of the individual and their major psychological processes

- Investigation of individual psychological differences
- Investigation of human nature and psychological similarities between individuals

Personality also refers to the pattern of thoughts, feelings, social adjustments, and behaviors consistently exhibited over time that strongly influences one's expectations, self-perceptions, values, and attitudes. It also predicts human reactions to other people's, problems, and stress.. Gordon Allport (1937) described two major ways to study personality: the nomothetic and the idiographic. *Nomothetic psychology* seeks general laws that can be applied to many different people, such as the principle of self-actualization or the trait of extraversion. *Idiographic psychology* is an attempt to understand the unique aspects of a particular individual.

Millon's description

Psychologist Theodore Millon, who has written numerous popular works on personality, proposed the following description of personality disorders:

Millon's brief description of personality disorders	
Type of personality disorder	Description
Paranoid	Guarded, defensive, distrustful and suspicious. Hyper vigilant to the motives of others to undermine or do harm. Always seeking confirmatory evidence of hidden schemes. Feel righteous, but persecuted. People with paranoid personality disorder experience a pattern of pervasive distrust and suspicion of others that lasts a long time. They are generally difficult to work with and are very hard to form relationships with. They are also known to be somewhat short-tempered.
Schizoid	Apathetic, indifferent, remote, solitary, distant, humorless. Neither desire nor need human attachments. Withdrawn from relationships and prefer to be alone. Little interest in others, often seen as a loner. Minimal awareness of the feelings of themselves or others. Few drives or ambitions, if any. Is an uncommon condition in which people avoid social activities and consistently shy away from interaction with others. It affects more males than females. To others, they may appear somewhat dull or humorless. Because they don't tend to show emotion, they may appear as though they don't care about what's going on around them.
Schizotypal	Eccentric, self-estranged, bizarre, absent. Exhibit peculiar mannerisms and behaviors. Think they can read thoughts of others. Preoccupied with odd daydreams and beliefs. Blur line between reality and fantasy. Magical thinking and strange beliefs. People with schizotypal personality disorder are often described as odd or eccentric and usually have few, if any, close relationships. They generally don't understand how relationships form or the impact of their behavior on others
Antisocial	Impulsive, irresponsible, deviant, unruly. Act without due consideration. Meet social obligations only when self-serving. Disrespect societal customs, rules, and standards. See themselves as free and independent. People with antisocial personality disorder depict a long pattern of disregard for other people's rights. They often cross the line

	and violate these rights.
Borderline	Unpredictable, manipulative, unstable. Frantically fears abandonment and isolation. Experience rapidly fluctuating moods. Shift rapidly between loving and hating. See themselves and others alternatively as all-good and all-bad. Unstable and frequently changing moods. People with borderline personality disorder have a pervasive pattern of instability in interpersonal relationships
Histrionic	Dramatic, seductive, shallow, stimulus-seeking, vain. Overreact to minor events. Exhibitionistic as a means of securing attention and favors. See themselves as attractive and charming. Constantly seeking others' attention. Disorder is characterized by constant attention-seeking, emotional overreaction, and suggestibility. Their tendency to over-dramatize may impair relationships and lead to depression, but they are often high-functioning.
Narcissistic	Egotistical, arrogant, grandiose, insouciant. Preoccupied with fantasies of success, beauty, or achievement. See themselves as admirable and superior, and therefore entitled to special treatment. Is a mental disorder in which people have an inflated sense of their own importance and a deep need for admiration. Those with narcissistic personality disorder believe that they're superior to others and have little regard for other people's feelings.
Avoidant	Hesitant, self-conscious, embarrassed, anxious. Tense in social situations due to fear of rejection. Plagued by constant performance anxiety. See themselves as inept, inferior, or unappealing. They experience long-standing feelings of inadequacy and are very sensitive of what others think about them.
Dependent	Helpless, incompetent, submissive, immature. Withdrawn from adult responsibilities. See themselves as weak or fragile. Seek constant reassurance from stronger figures. They have the need to be taken care of by a person. They fear being abandoned or separated from important people in their life.
Obsessive–compulsive	Restrained, conscientious, respectful, rigid. Maintain a rule-bound lifestyle. Adhere closely to social conventions. See the world in terms of regulations and hierarchies. See themselves as devoted, reliable, efficient, and productive.
Depressive	Somber, discouraged, pessimistic, brooding, fatalistic. Present themselves as vulnerable and abandoned. Feel valueless, guilty, and impotent. Judge themselves as worthy only of criticism and contempt. Hopeless, Suicidal, Restless. This disorder can lead to aggressive acts and hallucinations. <sup>[34]</sup>
Passive–aggressive (Negativistic)	Resentful, contrary, skeptical, discontented. Resist fulfilling others' expectations. Deliberately inefficient. Vent anger indirectly by undermining others' goals. Alternately moody and irritable, then sullen and withdrawn. Withhold emotions. Will

	not communicate when there is something problematic to discuss.
Sadistic	Explosively hostile, abrasive, cruel, dogmatic. Liable to sudden outbursts of rage. Gain satisfaction through dominating, intimidating and humiliating others. They are opinionated and close-minded. Enjoy performing brutal acts on others. Find pleasure in abusing others. Would likely engage in a sadomasochist relationship, but will not play the role of a masochist
Self-defeating (Masochistic)	Deferential, pleasure-phobic, servile, blameful, self-effacing. Encourage others to take advantage of them. Deliberately defeat own achievements. Seek condemning or mistreatful partners. They are suspect of people who treat them well. Would likely engage in a sadomasochist relationship.

In her first novel, *Cry the Peacock* (1963), Anita Desai portrays the psychic tumult of a young and sensitive married girl Maya who is haunted by a childhood prophecy of a fatal disaster. She is the daughter of a rich advocate in Lucknow. Being alone in the family, her mother being dead and brother having gone to America to carve his own independent destiny, she gets the most of her father's affection and attention and in her moments of affliction exclaims to herself: "No one, no one else, loves me as my father does". The excessive love Maya gets from her father makes her have a lopsided view of life. She feels the world to be a toy made especially for her, painted in her favorite colors and set moving according to her tunes.

Having lived a carefree life under the indulgent attentions of her loving father, Maya desires to have similar attentions from her husband Gautama, a father surrogate. When Gautama, a busy, prosperous lawyer, too much engrossed in his own vocational affairs, fails to meet her demands, she feels neglected and miserable. Seeing her morbidity, her husband warns her of her turning neurotic and blames her father for spoiling her. Although the reason for Maya's neurosis is, however, not her father fixation though it aids to hasten her tragedy, but persistent obsession of the prediction by the albino astrologer of death either for her or her husband within four years of their marriage. The terrifying words of the prediction, like the drumbeats of the mad demon of Kathakali ballets, ring in her ears and unnerve her. She knows that she is haunted by "a black and evil shadow"- her fate and the time has come: And four years it was now. It was now to be either Gautama or her. The loving attention of her father makes Maya oblivious of the deadly shadow; but as her husband Gautama fails to satisfy her intense longing for love and life, she is left to the solitude and silence of the house which prey upon her. She muses over her husband's lack of love for her and once, in a fit of intense despair and agony, tells him straight to his face: "Oh, you know nothing of me and of how can I love. How I want to love. How it is important to me. But you, you've never loved. And you don't love me. . . ." Temperamentally there is no compatibility between Maya and Gautama. Maya has romantic love for the beautiful, the colorful and the sensuous; Gautama is not romantic and has no use for flowers. Maya is creature of instincts or a wayward and high strung child. As symbolized by her name she stands for the world of sensations. Gautama's name on the other hand, symbolizes asceticism, detachment from life. He is realistic and rational. He has philosophical detachment towards life as preached in the Bhagavad Gita. Such irreconcilably different temperaments are bound to have marital disharmony.

Had Gautama shown an understanding towards and been attentive to Maya, he would have saved her from the haunting fears of "shadows and drums and drums and shadows." The gap of communication between them leaves her lonely to brood over the morbid thoughts of the albino astrologer's prophecy. Her attempts to divert herself by visits to her friend Leila and Pom or Mrs. Lal's party or the restaurant and the cabaret, prove powerless to dispel the creeping terror. The visit of Gautama's mother and sister Nila brings a brief respite to her and she enjoys her busy life in their company. But once they are gone, she finds the house empty and herself alone with her horrors and nightmares.

Maya is so much possessed by the vision of albino astrologer that she recalls his talk about the myth surrounding the peacock's cry. Listening to the cries of peacock in the rainy season, she realizes that she should never sleep in peace. She is caught in the net of inescapable. Being intensely in love with life she turns hysteric over the creeping fear of death, "Am I gone insane? Father! Brother! Husband! Who is my savior? I am in a need of one. I am dying, and I am in love with living. I am in Love and I am dying. God let me sleep, forget rest. But no, I'll never sleep again. There is no rest anymore- only death and waiting."

Maya suffers from headaches and experiences rages of rebellion and terror. As she moves towards insanity, she sees the visions of rats, snakes, lizards and iguanas creeping over her, slipping their club-like tongues in and out. Her dark house appears to her

like her tomb and she contemplates in it over the horror of all that is to come. Then suddenly, during her interval of sanity, an idea hopefully dawns in her mind that since the albino had predicted death to either of them, it may be Gautama and not she whose life is threatened. She thus transfers her death wish to Gautama and thinks that as he is detached and indifferent to life, it will not matter for him if he misses life. In her perversity she is even haunted by the word 'murder'. Gautama remains so much lost in his work that Maya finds him even oblivious of the dust storm that has raged earlier in the afternoon. When she asks him to accompany her to the roof of the house to enjoy cool air, he accompanies her, lost in his own thoughts. Passing out of the room, Maya catches sight of bronze Shiva dancing and prays to the Lord of Dance to protect them. Climbing the stairs she finds her cat suddenly speeding past them in a state of great alarm. They walk towards the terraced end, Maya looking enraptured at the pale hushed glow of the rising moon. As Gautama move in front of her, hiding the moon from her view, she in a fit of frenzy pushes him over the parapet to "pass through an immensity of air, down to the very bottom". It remains in the end for Gautama's mother and sister to take away completely insane Maya from the scene of tragedy of the house of her father.

A Study of the Character of Sita which shows personality chaos in Anita Desai's 'Where shall We Go This Summer?'

Sita is the female protagonist of Desai's where shall We Go This Summer? The story is essentially a study of the marital discord resulting from the conflict between two irreconcilable temperaments and two diametrically different viewpoints represented by Sita and her husband Raman. Sita is a sensitive, emotional middle aged woman saddled with four children. She feels alienated from her husband and children and undergoes acute mental agonies silently in isolation solely because of her sharp existentialist sensibility and explosive emotionality. Though she is placed in comfortable circumstances. She feels utterly lonely at heart where ever she was, with her husband and his family or away from him. Sita, is a highly introverted character and the very appeal of her character consists in her inwardness, introversion and the resultant psychic odyssey.

Disgusted with the sweaty hustle and bustle of humdrum life and tortured by the 'Paranoic' fear of her fifth undesired pregnancy and imminent parturition, Sita along with her two children Menaka and Karan, leaves behind her husband in despair, runs away from Bombay and comes to Manori to achieve the miracle of not giving birth to her child. This is actually ascribable to her deep seated reverence for life, and to her unwillingness to accept violence. Moses the caretaker of the house takes them across the sea to the island house built by Sita's father. She discovers the house deserted for over twenty years. She feels highly disappointed to find her father's house in a sorry state.

Sita's alienation from her husband is inherent in her relationship with her mysterious father. Temperamentally they are poles apart. This temperamental schism between them is in fact nowhere more effectively communicated than in the little scene where they talk about the stranger they encountered on their way back from Ajanta and Ellora. "He seemed so brave", she blurted when Raman asked her why she had once more brought up the subject of the high-hiking foreigner, months later. "Brave? Him?", Raman was honest amused. He was a fool - he didn't even know which side of the road to wait on. "Perhaps that was only innocence". Sita faltered, "and it made him seem more brave not knowing anything but going on nevertheless".

Sita's unconscious recognition of the irrationality of the stranger is illustrative of her own longing for a life of primitive reality as well as her alienation from her husband. After her marriage, Sita begins to live in the house of her husband's parents, she feels like a square peg in a round hole. She finds everyone disgusting and family life insufferable. They are incapable of introspection and have no inwardness and capacity for self examination which are the signs of an authentic existence. To challenge them, to shatter their complacency, and to shock them into recognition of the reality, Sita behaves provocatively -she starts smoking and begins "to speak in sudden rushes of emotion, as though flinging darts at their smooth, unscarred faces". Sita also alienates herself from society. The ayahs, cooks the nameless and forceless multitudes appear to her to be animals. She finds the majority of people living like animals. She says "They are nothing - nothing but appetite and sex. Only food, sex and money matter, Animals. My pet animals - or wild animals in the forest, yes. But these are neither - they are like pariahs you see in the streets, hanging about drains and dustbins, waiting to pounce and kill and eat".

Later on, Sita moves to a small flat where she lives alone with her husband and children. But even then she thinks the same way for the practical and matter-of-fact, people continue to intrude upon her privacy. She finds them absolutely unacceptable, and 'their vegetarian complacency and 'stolidity 'not only infuriate but also humiliate her'. "She took their insularity and complacency as well as the aggression and violence of others as affronts upon her own living nerves". The greatest threat to Sita's existence is boredom. Her husband engrossed in his business and the children were growing independent, she finds herself struggling in the grip of the monster boredom. But tragically enough, her husband fails to comprehend how or why or with what she gets bored. Desai beautifully brings out Sita's boredom, "She herself looking on it saw it stretched out so vast, so flat, so deep, that in fright she scrambled about it, searching for a few of these moments that proclaimed" her still alive, not quite drowned and dead.

Sita's life tormented by loneliness and boredom represents modern married woman's existentialist predicament to which others offer no solutions but Anita Desai offers a positive one in this novel. The agony and unhappiness in Sita's soul spring from her inability to flow with the general current of society. She uncompromisingly makes a strong stand and refuses to accept the cruel dictates of society to which the average people submit so uncomplainingly. Her anguished soul cries out. "He who refuses does not repeat should he be asked again. He would say No again .and yet that NO - the right No. crushes him for the rest of his life".

The conflict between Sita and her uninvolved children is brought to focus in the concluding part of the novel. Menaka and Karan both fail to adjust to the primitive life on Manori. They long to return to the highly sophisticated urban life in Bombay to which they are used. The sharp conflict between Sita and Menaka is depicted in the scene in which the former discusses with the latter about the poverty of science and opulence of art. Sita says, "Science can't be as satisfactory. It is all - all figures statistics, logic. Science is believing that two and two make four-poo" And a little later continuing her argument, she says, "It leads you to a dead one. There are no dead ends, now in Art. That is something spontaneous, Menaka, and alive and creative..." But Menaka dismisses the argument saying, that is all nonsense" This temperamental conflict between mother and daughter also remains unresolved in the novel. On Menaka's invitation, Raman comes to Manori to take Menaka and Karan back to Bombay. Menaka wants to apply for admission to the medical college. The children are excited to see their father. So Sita feels "That they were being disloyal to her, disloyal to the island and its wild nature". After his arrival and through her reluctant conversation with him she cannot escape from the cold actualities of life. She feels she was a coward, an escapist. She had escaped from duties and responsibilities from order and routine, from life and the city to an unlivable island. She has refused to give birth to a child in a world not fit to receive the child. She had the imagination to offer it an alternative - a life un-lived, a life bewitched, She had cried out her great "No, But now the time had come from her epitaph to be written". Sita intensely realizes that life must flow on, and she must have courage as Raman has, to flow on with life. She admits to herself what Raman has felt. "Life must be continued, and all its business - Menaka's admission to medical college gained, wife led to hospital, new child safely brought forth, the children reared, the factory seen to, a salary earned, a salary spent... alienation is due to the humdrum life. She is forced to live with Sita's husband and children in the busy city like Bombay. The ending of the novel is positive. It is highly encouraging and life enhancing. Sita neither kills anyone nor commits suicide nor dies nor goes mad. She compromises with Sita and becomes courageous enough to face life boldly with its ups and downs to take the rough with the smooth by connecting the inward with the outward, the prose with the passion, the individual with society.

Thus we see how the stress and strains of a family life affects Desai's protagonist Sita who initially feels a sense of alienation, but finally resigns herself to accepting reality.

## **II. CAUSES**

There are numerous possible causes of mental disorders, and they may vary depending on the disorder, the individual, and the circumstances. There may be genetic dispositions as well as particular life experiences, which may or may not include particular incidents of trauma or abuse. Severity of abuse was found to be statistically significant, but clinically negligible. Child abuse and neglect consistently evidence themselves as antecedent risks to the development of personality disorders in adulthood. In the following study, efforts were taken to find the solutions with psychopathology from childhood to adulthood who were later found to have experienced abuse and neglect. In a statistical analysis taken from mothers and children, it was asked mothers if they had screamed at their children, and told them that they did not love them or threatened to send them away. Children who had experienced such verbal abuse were three times as likely as other children (who did not experience such verbal abuse) to have borderline, narcissistic, obsessive-compulsive or paranoid personality disorders in adulthood. The sexually abused group demonstrated the most consistently elevated patterns of psychopathology. Officially verified physical abuse showed an extremely strong correlation with the development of antisocial and impulsive behavior. On the other hand, cases of abuse of the neglectful type that created childhood pathology were found to be subject to partial remission in adulthood.

## **CONCLUSION**

The proverb: "No good deed goes unpunished" is a good introduction to understanding the much misunderstood condition. Any personality disorder is a fixed, lasting pattern of thinking, feeling and acting that usually leads the person into emotionally and/or physically dangerous situations. The most important tool is not to internalize the person's behavior, or take it too personally. People with borderline personality disorder aren't fully aware of their behavior and the effect on other people. Moreover, with women becoming more educated, economically independent and aware of their rights, divorce rates are increasing along with associated psychological ramifications. The fact that divorced women suffer from varying psychological stressors is often ignored. It has been concluded in various studies that such stressors could be harbingers of psychiatric illnesses (e.g., depression, anxiety, substance dependence), and hence should be taken into account by treating physicians, social workers and others who come to the aid of such women. A change in mindset of the society is required before these women get their rightful place, for which a strong will is needed in the minds of the people, and in law-governing bodies.

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