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Study of Anita Desai's novels- A new perspective

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ABSTRACT

Studying the novel as an expressive style enjoyed the highest level of glory in the 18th century. The term 'novel' derived from the Italian word 'novella' was first used for each of a collection of about one hundred narratives which appeared in later half of the 13th century. The very term 'novel' means something new. The novel last literary form to come into being among the major forms of literature, the other two being Prose and Drama. A 'novel' is a sustained story which is not historically true but might very easily be so. The novel has been made the vehicle for satire, for instruction, for political or religious exhortation and for technical information. It's plain and direct purpose is to amuse by a succession of scenes painted from nature and by a thread of emotional narrative.

Keywords— *Novella, Satire, Emotional, Nature, Satire, Fiction*

1. INTRODUCTION

Indian fiction in English began as an interesting by product of an eventful encounter in the late 18th century between a vigorous and enterprising Britain and a stagnant and chanter India. It may be defined as literature written originally in English by authors Indian by birth ancestry or nationality many poets, dramatists, novelists and short- story writers who have contributed for the growth of Indian fiction in English according to Srinivasa Iyengar. Indian writing in English interprets India's aspiration and hopes and records her arduous and defeats and her partial realization just not before the outside world alone but even before the diverse linguistic regions within the country.

Indian novelists hold their own reputation among the novelists of the world. Indian novelists win prestigious awards and distinguish themselves. Beginning with early writers of the nineteenth century from Bengal and Maharashtra, the Indian English novel has come a long way. It is now capable of technical excellence and of handling varied themes. There are novels that deal with social life, with political developments, with history, with the human mind and with spiritual concerns. Very modern themes are handled by Indian writers.

The rise of the educated middle-class people further increased in writing of English in our nation. In considering Indian writing in English, we see some significance in the generations that came before and after independence. And the writers who came before independence are themselves divided into groups to help us my the history of this vital literature. The writers who wrote during the great national struggle for liberation from British rule were the writers who gave the writers of the post-independence generation their immediate literary background.

In the very recent times women have become quite popular in the area of fiction. During the last two and half decades a large number of women novelists in Indian fiction in English have attracted a great deal of attention and favourable comment. Famous among them are kamala Markandaya, R.P. JaVale, Nayantra Sahagal, Neenah Paintal, Attia Husain, Jayashree Chatterjee, Nargis Dalal, Namita Gokhale, Tapti Mukherjee, Santha Rama Rao and Anita Desai.

Anita Desai, who finds place in book reviews, journals, interviews and seminars is one of the most significant fiction writers of today. Anita Desai always finds an important place in critical literature on Indian writing in English. She is one of the prominent India women novelists. Her writings have attracted attention in not only India but all over the world. Daughter of German mother and Bengali father, she started her writing career at the age of seven. At seven, she began to write prose, mainly fiction and they were published in children's magazines. She had her education first at Queen Mary's School and the at Miranda House, Delhi University. She passed her Bachelor's Degree in English literature in 1957. She worked for a year in Max Muller Bhavan,

Calcutta. She has written ten novels and a dozen of short stories within a short period of about 30 years and thus she is prolific author.

She lays greater emphasis on the exploration of the inner-self because it is the inner self that decides the character of a person. As she has lived in metropolitan cities – Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi, Poona and Chandigarh. She describes these cities in her novels.

Anita Desai explores the disturbed psyche of the modern Indian women and also tries to strike a balance between instinctual needs and intellectual aspirations. Desai's fiction can be analysed taking into consideration the psychological motivations of her novels as psychic drama through flash back, diary entries, self-analysis, ruminations, rumbling of dialogues and descriptions of places and people. Looking inward in her characters, she explores the intricate facts of human experience bearing upon the central experience of psychic tensions of characters. Her chief concern is human relationship. Her central theme is the existential predicament of an individual which she projects through incompatible existential predicament of an individual which she projects through incompatible couple's very sensitive wives and ill matched husbands. Whenever she creates a typical situation, she gives it a perfect poetic treatment to every detail.

Though her characters are self-conscious of the reality around them they carry with them a sense of loneliness, alienation and pessimism. She deals with the dislocation of normal life, morbidity of temperament and maladjustment in family life.

Anita Desai's first novel *Cry, the Peacock* was published in 1963 and it can be considered a trend – setter. It deals with the psychic aspect of its characters. Maya, the chief protagonist, is a spoiled and pampered child of a wealthy Brahmin family. She is married to Gautam, an in-sensitive, pragmatic and rational advocate. He fails to understand Maya's sensitive nature. Maya suffers from father fixation. An albino astrologer had predicted that four years after their marriage, one of them would die. This makes her obsessed by the fear of death. For this her psychic looser grip of her own central position.

Desai's second novel *Voices in the City* (1965) depicts the miserable plight of Nitride to, Monisha and Anita in the city of Calcutta. In this novel the scene shifts from Delhi to Collate, which was a strange city of ambivalence – “a city of crowds, now passive and depressed, now sullen and angry”. In this novel Desai portrays the failures of a Bengali youth Nirode, the troubled life of Monisha and the commercial are of Amla also the indifferent attitude of their mother. Monisha – Jiban marriage re-enacts the tragedy of Maya- Gautam marriage in *Cry the peacock*”. It articulates an impression of in-completeness. Monisha revels through her diary, the inner land scope of her psyche, which proves fatal for her end. If Maya had father – fixation, jiban had mother – fixation. Both of them are abnormal in this respect. When he goes to meet his mother after Monisha's death, he is so fascinated by her beauty that he needs must embrace her and cling to her. The family gets united after Monisha' death as if the life war nothing but a preparation for death.

Desai's third novel *Bye-Bye, Black Bird* published in 1971 portrays the plight of Indian immigrants in London. The novelist in three parts 'Arriva', 'Discovery' and 'Recognition' and 'Depurative'. The novel is a study of two persons of contrary characters Adit and Dev. Adit has come to England and gets married to an English girl who is loving and submissive. Adit doesn't react against the humiliation caused by the English. Dev has recently migrated to England. He is disillusioned. He rebels against the humiliations caused to him by English boys. The critics opine that it subscribes Kipling's view that East in east and west is west and never the twain shall meet. Dr R.S Sharma is of the view that like all regional novelists, Anita Desai believes that every place has its own character which in turn moulds the character of the inhabitants. In *Voices In the City*, the novelists find that Kolkata has a creative destructive quality which is reflected in the character of the inhabitants of that place.

Desai's next novel *Shall We Go This Summer* (1975) describes the tension between a sensitive wife Sita and rational husband Raman. Though Sita is married to a rich man, she lacks the sense of achievement fulfilment and satisfaction. She thinks that everybody around her is living on animal's life- food, sex, and money are the chief considerations. She has rebellion inside. Sita has four children and she is now reluctant to deliver or to about the fifth one, even though with seven months pregnancy. She goes to the Island of Manori, where instead of a peaceful life, she gets alienated. Finally, she re-establishes her contracts with the soils. she intensifies her desire to recapture the experience and excitement and as such she is in a fix to decide as to where she should go that summer. Naturally, the novel presents conflicts between conformity and rebellion.

Anita Desai's fifth novel *Fire on Mountain* was published London in 1977. It won the 1978 National Academy of Letters award. In this novel Desai describes Nanda Kaul's motherly feelings of humiliation and desolations for life time alienation. The poor Raka is bewildered when she finds her home completely shattered as her father continues his habit of drinking, her mother visiting various nursing homes and she herself suffers several nervous breakdowns she finds no mother to speak and to nurse. Though Raka is solitary but self-sufficient girl to work like an explosive to set fire to the mountain side.

Desai's *Clear Light of Day* was published in 1980. This novel is four dimensional as it is about Time as a destroyer, as a preserver and about what the bondage of time does to people. The novel is set in Old Delhi and records the fast changes happening in a Hindu family since 1947. In this novel Desai paints the backdrop of the major incidents exclusively with the support of her character- Bim, Meera, jara and Baba who form the major action. After the death of their parents, Raja and Tara leave the house to live their own way. Raja goes to Hyderabad where he gets married to a Muslim girl. Bim is left alone in the old house to look mentally retarded Baba. Bim achieves what she wanted and tries to make up for her past failure by looking after Baba concerned only with Baba and her work of a lecturer in History in a women's college, she alienated herself from Tara and Raja, who had once written insultingly to her. But when Tara comes to pay a visit with her husband. Bim recalls the past, makes introspection.

She writes a letter to Raja for reconciliation and compromise. Bim remains a spinster finally, Bim realizes that the bond between her, Tara, Raja and Baba are abiding.

Desai's *Village by The Sea* was published in London in 1982. It is the story of Lila (13) and her brother Hari (12). Having had days, they look after their younger sisters. With their father unemployed and mother ill, they find it difficult to manage the household while Lila stays at Rome, Hari goes to Bombay and works as a boy servant in a hotel. Mr. Ranwala, a watch mender, inspires him and trains him in repairing watches. Lila transforms her father's old habit of drinking. Hari plans to set up a watch mending shop in Jhul. The novel describes the situation how Hari survives in Bombay city and how his sisters suffer silently the problems at home. This novel has a subtitle "An Indian Family story". In this novel Anita Desai presents pictures of freshness in rural life in contradistinction to the hobble in life of the metropolitan cities. She presents the view that the incense of the rural life can provide the healing touch to the bruised mind, while the curse of poverty can be removed by industrialization. It speaks in favour of family union and family ties. The whole family of Lila and Hari suffers and rejoices together. It is the Indian view of a corporate family life which is landed in this novel.

In *Custody*, Anita Desai shows the greatness of a poet. Deven, a lecturer in a small town Mirapore in northern India, has mediocrity and empty dreams. On persuasion of his friend Murad, he interviews a great poet Nur in Delhi who is gifted with extraordinary genius and power. Between his boyish expectations and Nur's grim reality, he discovers a new lease of life, dignity and the way to fulfilment of his dreams. Deven adores the poet Nur because Deven feels transported and elevated by the poetry of Nur.

Anita Desai's latest novel is *Baumgartner's Bombay*. It is a portrait of loneliness, of alienation and immigrant's existential predicament. It is touching account of the travails of a simple and submissive Jew, Hugo Baumgartner. The novelist narrates the life of Hugo from his childhood days in Germany to his death at the ripe old age of about seventy in India. Hailing from an affluent Jewish family in Germany, he leaves for India in search of a living. The reasons for his leaving Germany are twofold firstly, his father being a spend-thrift; the family business druids and the Baumgartners become economically bankrupt and fall into bad days. His bitter childhood remains him of the wooden characters of his father who has hardly any parental love for the child. Hence his longing for love, warmth and family is shattered. Moreover, there is no security within the family since his father cannot provide it and, in the society, too, life is insecure due to the tyranny of Hitler's rule. Therefore, even in a familiar milieu, he remains an outsider. He does not belong. In India also his features and language impede his essays to develop a sense of belongingness. He is betrayed by friends like Habibullah and Chimmanla's sons the memory of his mother haunts him obsessively. The political upheavals in India make it impossible for him to keep in touch with his mother. In Calcutta, Hugo falls in love with a German Cabaret dancer, but declines to marry her. He however continues his friendship. But human company does not suit him. He gets bored with it and prefers to live in the company of his cats in a dark, dingy and shabby flat behind the Jay Hot of his Bombay. He feeds his cats with the leftovers from Farrokht café. One day he runs into a Jentonic youth, a drug-addict and pities his plight. brings him home for rest and food. But ironically this wretched boy named Kurt murders Hugo and runs away with his silver trophies. Thus, an absurd and meaningless lie come to a smiloary futile end. His existence is an absurd Odyssey from nothingness to nothingness nowhere to nowhere.

Journey To Ithaca (1995) is regarded as the best work of Anita Desai. It tells the story of an Indian young man and his German wife. It has added a new feather to Anita Desai's cap.

2. CONCLUSION

The novels discussed various things related to Indian English literary scene. Post- Independence Indian English Fiction retains the momentum the novel had gained during the Gandhian age. Indian English novel has gone through a lot of developments from its initial days to the present time and has attained a whole new world.

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