



ANITA DESAI'S TECHNIQUES IN HER NOVELS



DR. PRAKASH NARAIN

Asstt. Professor & In-charge,
P. G. Department of English,
M. G. M. Degree College, Sambhal
(UP) INDIA

ABSTRACT

Anita Desai is considered as one of well known and popular novelists of Indian –English literature. She is acknowledged as a grand name in the world of psychological novels with excellent techniques and features. In her novels like ‘Cry, the Peacock’, ‘Voices in the City’, ‘Where Shall We Go this Summer’, ‘Fire on the Mountain’, ‘Clear Light of the Day’, ‘Journey to Ithaca’, ‘In Custody’ and ‘Fasting Feasting’, she portrays the dilemma of her female protagonists effectively. Being female she understands their problems deeply and pictures them minutely. She is chiefly interested in the themes of quest for identity, family relationships and mismatched marriage. She is more interested in the individuals than the anonymous multitude, in the particular rather than the general. She is the queen of inner psychology of the females of upper middle class. She deals with the pathetic plight of sensitive women in novels after novels and this dealing makes her one of the best novelists of modern age. Her women suffer from the sense of rootlessness and fragmentation despite of all pleasures. Their present disturbs them and they wish to go to their past. Maya in ‘Cry, the Peacock’ always complains against her husband Gautam and doesn’t involve in creative activity; Monisha in ‘Voices in the City’ craves for privacy and finds herself misfit in her surroundings; Sita in ‘Where Shall We Go This Summer’ revolts against the boring life of her family and goes back to the island of Manori. All these female protagonists are defeaters and suffer from the sense of isolation, alienation and rootlessness. In this research paper, I have attempted to find out the distinctive features and techniques used by Anita Desai in her popular novels.

Key Words – Techniques, characteristics, neurotic, alienation, stream of consciousness, Indian culture, symbols, imagery, lyricism, past, present, contrasting characters

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most distinctive characteristics of Desai's fiction is lively description of the agony of her female protagonist. Whatever they feel in their heart appears like a picture before our eyes. As in 'Voices in the City', Monisha feels irritated on the traditional customs of the in-laws family. Anita Desai not only portrays the pen-portrait of her protagonist's emotions and feelings but she gives the lively description of the events in the novel. Her use of lively words, solid action, visual images arrest the mind as if it were in a painting. As the scene of exploitation over Anamika has been given live description by the author in 'Fasting Feasting'.

So far as the characterization of Desai is concerned, it is unique. Her characters are neurotic females, highly sensitive but sequestered in a world of dream and imagination and alienated from the surroundings with consequence of their failure or unwillingness to adjust with the reality. They often differ in their opinion from others. Unable to solve the mystery of life, they envelop their sufferings like Maya and Monisha. Her characters build a large spectrum. A writer's mind is unfolded to the readers gradually with the progress of dealing with psychological aspects of characters has to employ a certain design by which the inner working of the protagonist's narrative. Her each character is the representative of her ideology that is suffering woman struggling for her identity. Maya is a hyper-sensitive lady; Sita, a revolutionary; Bim an emancipated; Sarah an adjusting; Monisha an intellectual; Sarla a traditional and Sophie a modern woman. Her women are from every class and age of society. She grasps the glimpse of her age in her characters. Hence, Anita Desai is expert in her character- delineation.

Anita Desai uses various techniques to make her work impressive. One of the most important parts of her style is to use stream of consciousness technique. 'Stream of Consciousness' phrase was used by William James in 'Principle of Psychology' to characterize the unbroken flow of thoughts and awareness in waking mind. Desai makes frequent use of flashback technique recalling the past happenings and experiences. Her success in making use of techniques isn't on the same level in all her novels but there are obvious limitations. When there is stream of consciousness, there is lack of actions. It enables the quality of a given state of mind to be investigated so completely by means of pursuing their end that we don't need to wait for time to make the potential actual before we can see the whole. From this point of view, particular mention can be made from 'Clear Light of Day'. Middle aged sisters Tara and Bim remember their childhood in Delhi just before the partition. There is a movement in the novel - a movement in time from the past and the novelist presents a larger number of characters that she had done ever before. Past is of supreme importance in the novel of Desai that is recalled again and again. It is the most skillfully woven with the present. Even the

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most casual reader is likely to be impressed with this weaving of past and present into a single and unified whole. Desai artistic economy in bringing the past and present is of high order. There is nothing in the present that is not related to past. Every incident of the past and of present is of integral part of the whole and fusion of the past and present has been brought about in a perceptible manner. Another aspect of Desai's technique is her skill of beautiful contrast between two characters and because of this contrast each character becomes clearer in the eyes of readers. As in 'Clear Light Of Day' Desai contrasts the characters of Bim and Tara, one challenging, curious, self-confident, active and purposeful while the another physically smaller, lacked the vigor having simple dreams. Bim is highly ambitious to do something great different from others but Tara only wants to be mother in her future. Even in childhood the difference in their temperament is quite clear in the novel.

So far as the plots of Anita Desai are concerned, they are not so much deliberate contrivances as natural and inevitable outgrowth of the theme and perspective. As the story advances, she seems to be to quietly sliding in her scenes, setting and characters without much of advance preparations. As her forte is the psychic presentation of individual human beings, the narrative is rightly allowed to move freely. But her plots are always simple, neat enough to impede the psychological revelation. Her plot structure therefore, shows a splendid fusion of form expression and spontaneity. Regarding structural part of her fiction it is only proper to quote the novelist herself,

"I start writing without having very much of a plot in my mind or on paper- only a very hazy idea of what the pattern of the book is to be. But it seems to work itself out as I go along quite naturally and inevitably."

In Desai's stories action is subordinated to psychology. The central theme revolves around the mental and spiritual development. All the protagonists of her novels develop throughout the course of the novels either towards good or worse. Maya goes to insanity in the end of novel; Sita turns to be mature; Sarah adjusts with the conditions; Monisha meets her downfall. All the characters develop or go down; they are not static throughout the novels. The theme of Desai's novels like that of the novels of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, is human nature and human relationship. Her stories are peopled with men and women relationships in which Desai deals, has been treated by several other Indian writers like Nayantara Sahgal, Nargis Dalal and Kamla Das.

His art of contrasting characters can be easily observed again in 'Fasting, Feasting.' Here she portrays the plain girl Uma in direct contrast to the naughty and fashionable girl Aruna. Uma serves her parents throughout her life; works according to the finger-hints of her parents and sacrifices her own ambitions at the feet of her mama-papa. She can't attend even a tea party

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according her own wish. On the other hand, Aruna was somewhat more stylish than Uma. At fourteen, she revolted against the blue cotton tunic and white hair ribbons. Ribbons were replaced with little shiny plastic clips and clasps. She took her time, showed her reluctance to decide, played choosy but made the wisest choice the handsomest and the richest man for marriage while Uma had dismay failed to make the good marriage. Everything was of her choice-the reception hall, jewellery, dancing music, cocktail party, elaborate sarees, and groom's maharaja's style turban. Her married life was also like a dream because her husband Arvind had a job in Bombay, bought a flat in juhu, facing the beach. She became fonder of make up. Thus it is a contrast presented by Desai between Uma, the plain older daughter and ambitious and successful sister Aruna. One enjoys life fully before and after marriage and another sacrifices her life at the feet of her God-like parents serving them throughout her life. One of the most distinctive parts of Desai's technique is her lyricism. She is often considered as a lyrical novelist as the language used by Desai is of special type. She quotes poems after poems in her novels and words come as spontaneously from her pen as music from a musical instrument. Poetry has been used by Desai as a fictional technique right from the beginning of her career as an author. Her lyrical language often separates her from other Indian-English writers. In this quality she can be compared with R.N. Tagore whose word-pictures create a lively image of something before readers even in his prose work.

The use of symbols is also a very important technique in the novels of Desai. Her novels abound in variety of symbolic situations, episodes, events and characters. These symbols are drawn from human life and nature - trees, birds, animals etc. In 'Cry the Peacock' death of Toto is a symbol of death as an inevitable thing in human life. Maya's shock at the death of Toto is symbolic of her unawareness of the harsh realities of life. Her fear to see the death of Toto is symbolic of her own fear from death. It shows her first closeness to death, an end of life. Day and night are also used as symbols in her novels. Day is symbolic of the naked reality; night is for darkness of ignorance.

Another important aspect of Desai's artistic technique is use of imagery. Imagery lends a poetic and lyrical coloring of the estranged self and enlarges the critical and interpretative horizon of her art. Images in Desai aren't confined to the world of art but they are scientific images. She makes an unending search for the suitable images to express subconscious. Her imagery is always in character which suits the love plight of her character. Her novels are based on the texture of a rich and splendid medley of images which is functional rather than decorative. These images don't conflict or contradict each other but are in perfect harmony and accord with the nature of the character's alienation. Zoological, metrological and color images add to the aesthetic beauty and textural density of her novels. Her images give poetic coloring to the problems of her alienated self.



One of the most prominent technique of Desai is to telescope past with present. The technique has been effectively used in 'Where Shall We Go This Summer', 'Cry, the Peacock' and other novels. In the island, Sita recalls all the episodes of her past life one by one. Her mind takes her to childhood. Her recollection of the past throw light on her inner beings. Her unfulfilled desires are revealed to us and through them we know about her father's temperament. In 'Clear Light of Day' the technique of telescoping past and present has been successfully presented. One moment the readers feel that they are moving in the present occurring and at the very next moment they are carried into the past incidents with the mind of characters. This beautiful mingling of past and present can be observed in her novels easily.

Anita Desai always surprises the readers by using special technique in her novels. For instance 'Cry, the Peacock' starts with the death of Toto and its effect upon the two characters- Maya and Gautam. One reading of the novel shows it's irrelevancy but the close analysis of the section prove the artistic device of Desai, her skill of building up a mood. Through the detailed description of things the novelist presents how the things are very important for one character and quite trivial to other and they are husband and wife. For others Maya is neurotic but for herself she alone is sensible to the events occurring around her and others are blind to them. The mode of the novels of Desai is also different.

In 'Cry, the Peacock', she uses first person narration. Maya is a narrator and she presents one sided view of the events and the writer allows the readers to critically examine the actions and reactions of the narrator. Every time Maya attempts to communicate her feelings sometimes she fails and then withdraws. The world which seems sometimes familiar suddenly becomes menacing and frightening. The last section of the novel becomes somewhat different and narrated in third person. It is an ironical comment upon sane and rational people like Gautam's mother and daughter couldn't understand why Maya murdered her husband.

In 'Voices in the City' the novelist uses the same conventional mode of third person narration. The three protagonists describe their experiences, hopes, aspiration through their words. The novel exhibits the astonishing variety of sights and sounds of the city of Calcutta, Chaos and confusions on the platform. Monisha's experiences are described through her diary. All these create a picture of environment in which three protagonist suffer for their existence.

In 'Where Shall We Go This Summer' again she discusses the theme of marital disharmony through a series of incidents. Desai's novels were of a different kind. The techniques and styles used by her hadn't come down to common use in India. People had rarely heard the

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names of Frame, Kafka, Freud, and Camus. The terms like psycho-analyses, existentialism and alienation weren't of popular use. Desai has the sharpness and the penetration of vision of extraordinary degree. She cuts things clean and enters the insides of things with perfect ease. She has penetrating eyes into the mental condition of her characters. Her sense perception is visible in the description of Maya's psyche and retarded movement of Baba in Clear Light of Day.

Another distinctive feature of Desai's writing is the use of native words to create Indian atmosphere. It shows her deep love for Indian culture; she employs many Indian words in the novels like puja, gupshup, samadhi, halwa, neem tree, roti and daal etc. She is also impressed by onomatopoeic words like thrum, drip- drip. Desai's skill in the sentence-construction seems to be breaking down in the later novels. Sometimes she uses rhetorical skill at several occasions. She is no doubt a great artist with technical dexterity. In her writing a beautiful presentation of structure, texture, technique and language is found. There are certain episodes which contribute harmoniously to the overall structure of the novel.

CONCLUSION

Being a subjective and psychological novelist, she is often forced to peep in the inner recesses of the psyche rather than in the outer spectacle of the world. She is more occupied with somber than the frivolous side of life. An undercurrent of irony, satire and sarcasm often surfaces in the pages of her novels and speak of their minimal presence in the artist's genius. In her moral and psychological preoccupation her talent comes close to that of George Eliot. She developed the art of psychological novels in Indian writing in English. Life is all motion and all motion leads to destruction, so the source which activates human beings also destroys them. All the characters in the novels are striving towards a proper vocation. As Dharma is projecting his alienation in art and Amla is planning to launch a career in advertising. They all share the same stirring are motivated by the same impulses, want to communicate and unite and yet they all fail. Desai's novels present a kind of paradox between activism there is no success leads ultimately to the destruction of the original impulse. Desai puts aside the conventional themes, techniques and narrative pattern prevalent in India with the publication of her first novel 'Cry, the Peacock' published in 1963 and develops her own unique style and technique still this gifted genius had various problems and difficulties in getting her novels published in the beginning years. Thus my paper has clearly shown almost all the distinctive and touching techniques, features and characteristics found in the novels of Anita Desai.



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