



ANITA DESAI'S CONTRIBUTION TO INDIAN FICTION

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ABSTRACT

Anita Desai is one of the prominent gifted novelists in Indian English. She was born in Mussorie on 24th June 1937. Her father was a Bengali while her mother was German. She grew up with English, Hindi, Bengali and German. English was her first language. She began her writing at the age of seven it was in English. She has written novels, stories, children books and articles. She is often considered as psychological novelist and a feminist who deals with major themes of isolation, lack of communication, inner struggle, man woman relationship and marital discords. Her protagonists are female. Language and technique used by Anita Desai is as per theme and situation. She uses memories of past that is Nostalgia as a narrative technique. Her distinct style of writing, original characters, use of language, realistic theme, and narrative technique has made her writing so endearing which earned many words, recognitions and awards for her work. Her contribution to the literary world is without any doubt is great. All aspects of her writing are discussed in the paper.

Keywords:- Feminist, isolation, physical landscape

INTRODUCTION

Indian writers have been making great contribution to the literary world at national and international level. They focused on Indian culture, tradition, race, politics and self-identity. Many Indian writers have made their own place in the world literature. Today Indian writing in English has to be viewed in a global context. Indian fiction in English emerged out of almost 8 to 9 decades. Harvesting of novel has been begun in 1930s with great writers R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand. They were followed by new generation novelists like Amitav Ghosh, Salman Rashid, Geeta Mehta, Anita Desai, Shobha De and Arundhati Roy. They explored various subjects. All of them have earned considerable fame for their fictional contribution. Indian women novelists explored female subjectivity to establish an

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identity. Out of them Anita Desai is one of the prominent Indian women novelists in English. She is one of the most popular, world famous and best novelists. She has enriched Indian fictions at large. She has held a unique place among Indian writers in English.

The entry of Anita Desai gives the birth of an era which promises a new deal for Indian English fiction. She is foremost Indian novelists of post independence era. She is one of the most prominent writers in Indian English. She is regarded as a writer who introduced the psychological novels in the tradition of Virginia Wolfs in India. She introduced the psychological realism in her first novel '**Cry the Peacock**' in 1963. She is without doubt the most read contemporary writers in Indian English. This talented Indian Novelist was born as Anita Mujumdar on June 24th 1937 in Mussoorie, Uttarakhand. Her father is Bengali and mother is German. The positive atmosphere in home and a very creative imagination helped her to be mature in her vision. Her father was a Bengali businessman and mother was a German origin. She received her education from Queen Mary's higher secondary high school and Mirinda House, Delhi University where she received her B.A. in English Literature.

Her career as a writer started with short stories which were published in magazines. Her short story *Circus Cat*, *How Gentle is the Mist?* *Tea With the Maharani*, *Ghost House*, *Mr Bose's Private Bliss*, *Private Tuition by Mr Bose* are famous. She has written essays articles and reviews also for many magazines and newspapers. Collection of short stories, *Games of Twilight which contains stories name Pineapple Cake, Sale, The Accompanist, A Devoted Son, The Farewell Party, Pigeons and At Daybreak*. She has written books for children like *Peacock Garden (1974)*, *Cat On A House Boat (1976)* and *Village By the Sea (1982)*

Her stories followed by her first novel *Cry ,the Peacock* in 1963.Desai has contributed to the Indian English literature by her valuable novels as *Voice in the City (1965)* *Bye- bye Blackbird (1971)*, *Where Shall We Go This Summer (1975)* *Fire On the Mountain (1977)* *Clear Light Of Day (1980)* *In Custody (1984)* *Baumgartner's Bombay (1989)* and *Journey To Ithaca(1995)*.

Anita Desai is very popular and sensitive novelist in India. Her popularity can be seen the increasing number of researchers taking up critical studies of her works in the universities in India and abroad. She is an honorary fellow at the University of Cambridge. She has been a fellow of Royal Society of Literature in London. She has been an honorary member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. She has been awarded numerous prizes and honors including, Padmashri and Padmabhushan from Government of India and Taraknath Das Award for promotion of Indo-US relations. She has won the Sahitya Akadami Award for her novel, **Fire on the Mountain (1977)** for the year 1978. Her three novels **Clear Light of the Day**, **In Custody** and **Fasting Feasting** had been nominated for the prestigious Booker Prize Award. Her novel *In Custody* was adapted by Merchant Ivory Production into English film

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by the same name. It was directed by Ismail Merchant, It won the 1994 president of India Gold Medal for best picture. The noted Indian film personalities Shashi Kapoor, Shabana Azmi and Om Puri acted in the picture.

She is often considered as a psychological novelist and a feminist she deals with the major themes of self –identity, isolation, inner struggle, man woman relationship marital discord, lack of communication and mental problems of women which lead them towards insecurity. The female characters are unsatisfied, unhappy, failure and frustrate .They try to escape from their cages and in the process get themselves mentally bruised. Female characters in her novels are chief protagonist. Her treatment of female characters, her feminist approach, analysis of gender sexuality and subjectivity are seen in most of her novels. In this respect her novels are different from other Indian novelists: Nayantara Sehagal, Kamala Markandaya or Ruth Jhabvala who concerned with politics east west encounters and traditions. Desai's concern is with psychic life of her characters. For this “She has been considered as a novelist of mood and psyche” (Sharma 166).

Kohli points out “No other writer is so much concerned with the life of young man and woman in Indian cities as Anita Desai.”

Her involvement with Indian woman and their reaction is different from other which distinguishes her from other Indian writers. It is explained with following examples-

- Maya is a protagonist of the novel *Cry the Peacock*. She is obsessed with death and haunted by predication of astrologer that her marriage is going to end within four years with the death of either she or her husband. Finally of insanity she kills her husband and commits suicide.
- Sita is a major character of *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* She finds alienated for her husband and children. She remains lonely in the broken family.
- In *Fire On the Mountain* Nanda escapes from house and leaves in the isolated place because of her unfaithful husband.
- In the novel *In Custody* ups and downs of human mind is illustrated beautifully.
- Desai's another novel *Voices In the City* has remarkable existential problem. It is a novel of three protagonist, Nirode, Monisha and Amla Alienation, isolation, loneliness and self identity is main concern of the novel.

Language and Technique:-

We cannot separate theme and technique from Anita Desai's novels. They are not isolated elements but inter related. In order to convey theme, she uses places, characters, situation,



dialogues and silence Her use of technique and narration give her distinct position among the Indian novelist. It is vital agent of thematic trust. Her dialogues are powerful and touch the heart. She uses different techniques of narration as per theme and situation. She uses memories of past Nostalgia as a narrative technique. In this respect she is compared with James Joyce and Virginia Woolf.

All readers and critics are anonymously agreed that beyond doubt Anita Desai is one of the most popular feminist Indian novelists in English. It is she who has enriched the tradition of the Indian novel in English. Anita Desai's contributions to fiction have made her special and uplift the position of Indian fiction in to desired height of world literature.

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