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## A Close Study of Power Structure in the Short Stories of Anita Desai

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### Abstract

Anita Desai emerges out as one of the most outstanding writers of modern period. The treasure of Indo-English fiction has been enriched by her valuable contributions. She is a versatile genius because her fictions are universal in appeal. In writing she parallels the art of Nayantra Sahgal. Their writings are so much elevated that readers feel the sublimity of their art. In Indian writing in English she has been recognized as one of the major substantial voices of her age. Her short stories and novels have credited her several readers in her account not only in India but worldwide. This is one of the reasons that she is the most quoted writers of Diaspora. Her first novel Cry the Peacock along with other novels and a collection of short stories has added new dimensions to Indo-English Literature. It is interesting to note that in most of her plots we can figure out her personal experiences of life. Thus, there is a sense of realism in her works. She is the kind of writer who cannot escape the real incidents of any society.

**Keywords: - universal, Diaspora, realism, life, substantial.**

In the short stories of Anita Desai we can figure out that she never advocated a single message but presented the truth as it is through her fictional characters. Her most of the stories bring out the miserable lives of the Indian middle class women. It is also right that her female characters present an insight on their strained relationships. This is the result of power structure of a typical patriarchal society. Most of her lady protagonists feel alienated in her life. Frank Johnson is of the opinion that-

“By alienation is meant a mode of experience in which a person experiences himself as an alien. He has become, one might say, estranged from himself. He does not experiences himself as the centre of his world, a creator of his own acts....The alienated person is out of touch with any other person. He like the others is experienced as things are experienced, without being related to oneself and the world outside, productively.”<sup>1</sup>

The above mentioned lines reveal that her stories highlight the fomentation of her characters. Her works have been described as “modern sensibilities”<sup>2</sup> because she is also a follower of modernism. Scholars and critics have said that her sense of modernism has an effect of delineation. Almost all of her works of fiction highlights temporal dislocation and formal fragmentation of her characters. It can be understood by the remarks of R.S.Sharma who says that her stories are-“effort of discover, to underline and convey the true significance of things.”<sup>3</sup> the sense of realism based on the power structure of the society shifts from the realms of private affairs to public platforms. It is a kind of exploration from oppression to affirmation. It is not an easy task to understand because it is psychological in nature.

“Games at Twilight”, is a collection of short stories which got published in 1978. It has eleven short stories in it and it is considered as a work of transition. It uncovers the philosophical pressures of a prevalently innovator author who looks to accommodate her initial festival of the changing intensity of constraints. In her short stories we can find out stages of awareness. This kind of awareness is so fanatical that it once in a while brutally isolates the mind from the social setting. This case is molded by a perusing that benefits them over structure or form of writing. The division between singular mindfulness and social setting isn't so much the aftereffect of Desai's —obsessive worry with subjectivity, a purposeful getaway to the sanctum of the mind, but instead, a longing to investigate the basic connections between the individual and the society. A central theme related to epiphany runs across the short stories of Anita Desai. James Joyce calls it as “sudden spiritual manifestation.”<sup>4</sup> This kind of idealistic epiphany has also been considered by several critics and scholars as one of the key elements structuring almost all the writings of Desai. Mary Pratt has remarked that-

“the moment of truth stands as the model for the short story the way, the life stands as the model for the novel.”<sup>5</sup>

Short stories like *Studies in the Park* and *Surface Textures* questions the values of insight. It is also a fine example of Desai's concentration on epiphany. Other central key theme of Desai's short stories is illumination. It is a manifestation which seems real but metaphorical. It provides a typical pattern to the whole collection of short stories. Thus, it can be said that-

“It's real and metaphorical manifestations not only structure individual stories, but also serve to provide the collection's overall pattern, that element of fiction that Desai has claimed is of most concern to her.”<sup>6</sup>

A deep sense of multi cultural sensibility and diversity is reflected through the short stories of Anita Desai. The life style of Indian Cities and the world are reflected through most of her characters. This is one of the reasons that critics have also said that she mirrors the life itself. The sagacity of her short stories lies in the fact that it uncovers themes like Violence, self assertion and globalization. One of the important sub themes in most of her stories is a dichotomy between modern values and traditional values. She is a supporter of modernism yet he gives some space to traditional values of the society. Nadine Gordimer has different point of views regarding short story writing. He says that-

“—a discrete moment of truth is aimed at not the moment of truth, because the short story doesn't deal in cumulative.”<sup>7</sup>

In the collection Games at Twilight the setting of the first story is a town of North India. Brother, sister and cousins gather together to beat the summer heat of North India. A game of hide and seek is planned by them initially. Raghu is a character who is not in a mood to play the game of hide and seek. Ravi is in search of a safe place to hide himself. He is successful in finding the unused shed of the household. Unluckily the detritus of the household is inhabited by the shed. He fits himself into the gap of the shed which is narrow. Later we find he comes out crying because he hurt himself and other boys looked him differently. He understood that the world is strange and he is a part of it only when he is alive. Thus, a fresh experience of life is learnt by him. Anita Desai has gone deeper into the child psychology and it is the power structure where she feels that every child has some space in the family. *Private Tuition by Mr. Bose* is another story which is very interesting. He is a Sanskrit teacher who provides private tuition to students in the evening. His wife cooks the evening meal and he keeps himself busy in his lectures. Pritam and Upneet are his students and it is noteworthy to find that throughout the story he can be located in the balcony. For Mr.Bose two worlds are running together. These worlds are his realms of professional world of being a being a teacher and a harmonious domestic life in which he can hear the sound of cooking by his wife clearly. *Studies in the Park* is the story of Suno who is young and energetic. He finds it difficult to concentrate at his studies because of his family members. His family members pressurize him to study and prepare for the exam but he feels disturbed while studying at home. For this reason he selects a park to study. He finds that many students study in the park. One day he finds a sickly woman in the park and he feels disturbed at her vision. He decides that life is a kind race but he has to life it in adventure. There is no comparison between race and adventure. Suno is motivated by his own experiences of life. He cannot take life as for granted. *Surface Textures* is another story where we can find a very interesting character whose name is Harish. He is an escapist by nature. He wants to become a Sadhu and get rid of his family burdens. He is a type of person who wants to do nothing in life. He wants to prosper by doing nothing. For this purpose he thinks that he should become a Sadhu. Anita Desai has unique sense of characterization and she has tried to show us that our

society is the admixture of characters. We can hate or love these characters but we cannot ignore them because they too exist. Characters like Harish show a denial from their duty because they present variety among characters. Their existence helps us to understand the proper strata of the society. Through the characters like Harish the writer has tried to show us the negativity associated with life. Looking into the dynamics of short stories written by Anita Desai we find *Sale* a very interesting story. It is the story of an artist who is a painter. It is the bad luck of the artist that his paintings never sell. His caliber and talents are unusual. His misfortune lies in the fact that he is unable to find customers who can appreciate his art of painting. One day few customers approach him only to find his life story interesting. They do not find his painting worthy to purchase. This is the real life of an artist. Anita Desai has reflected the agony of an artist through this story. Thus, there is a sense of realism in her writings. In the climax of stories written by Desai we can find some kind of pathetic touch. It is visible in stories like *Pineapple cake*. It is a memorable short story because here we can find child psychology through the characters like Victor. This child Victor has been promised by his mother named Mrs. Fernandez that she will buy her a pineapple cake. Maria and Millo are getting married and Victor is going to witness the marriage with his mother only if he behaves properly. In the marriage Victor is given a pineapple cake by his mother. A gentleman dies at the marriage and it shocks Victor. He stops enjoying the pineapple cake and ruminates over the loss of the life. It is ironical that his mother eats a lot in the marriage party whereas the child stops eating because he is shocked by the death of the gentleman. Thus, it is Victor who behaves properly in the marriage and it is his mother who is hardly concerned with the bad incident which occurred at the marriage. For Victor the behavior of his mother at the party was inconsistent. The life of virtue and commitment is pursued happily in the story *The Accompanist*. The story revolves around two major characters whose names are Ustad Rahim Khan and Mr. Misra. Ustad Rahim Khan is a musician who is famous for playing Tanpura. Mr. Misra is his student who is also a Tanpura player. A relationship between a teacher and a student is visible in this story as Mr. Misra always remains loyal to his master. He has an unbounded love for his master which is reflected in his learning. Tanpura connects both of them piously and thus, it acts like a symbol of divinity. Music has always been a symbol of divinity. Apart from such stories Desai has also written stories of relationship between a father and a son. It can be seen in stories like *A Devoted Son*. In this story Rakesh is a son who loves his father very much but there is a clash of ego between the father and the son. Rakesh was brilliant in his studies and as result he became a doctor. Being a doctor he used to give medicines to his father according to his health and needs but the father complained it to a neighbor and said that his son prescribes many medicines to him. Thus, his father suspects that his son is treating him well. This story is amazing because it shows how a father and son can have ego clash between them. Thus, it can be said that Anita Desai has presented unique characters in her short stories as well as novels. A close study of such characters along with the plot provides the readers a glimpse of realism. It can be said regarding her characters that-

“They[characters] undertake an inner voyage for the purpose of discovering their own selves.”<sup>8</sup>

This kind of inner voyage is not less than self discovery. It is one of the reasons that most of her female characters feel alienated from the society because of their oppression.

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