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## THE NOVELS OF ANITA DESAI: PROBLEM OF COMMUNICATION

Shubhpreet Sandhu  
PGGC, Sec 11, Chandigarh

### Abstract:

Problem of communication between the individual human beings continues to occupy her attention but Anita Desai's major concern is with racial prejudices which alienate human beings from each other. She dramatizes the cultural contrast between India and England. East-West encounter is one of the major themes in Indo-Anglian writings but Desai concentrates on the psychological reactions of the persons facing such situations.

The writer retraces her footsteps. Once again the problem is that of adjustment between the husband and the wife, the mother and the children. The heroine Sita in her novel feels that she is leading an inauthentic existence. Her husband Raman lives an ordinary life and he doesn't see anything wrong. They cannot understand the ways of each other. Sita feels, totally ignored by her husband and her children. Sita wants to assert herself but she is unable to do so. Her conflict is between 'yes' and 'no' ultimately she compromises.

The problem is projected on a large scale. The characters can neither adjust with each other nor with the world outside. For Anita Desai's characters the problem is not of how to earn a living. Their problem is how to live.

**Keywords:** Attention, Encounter, Adjustment, Consistent, Dilemma and Compromise

Anita Desai, Arun Joshi And Chaman Nahal are among those novelists who constitute the second generation of Indo Anglian writers. One cannot overlook the different between the concerns of the Indo-Anglian novelist of the Pre-independence era and the interests of the new generation of writers. Narayan and Anand have reminded consistent in their visions. But, in contrast to the earlier fiction which was concerned with national or social problems, recent fiction has turned introspective and the individual's quest for a personal meaning in life has become a theme of urgent interest for the Indo-Anglian write.

Anita Desai is accepted as a writer of good standing in India as well as in other countries. The first generation of Indo-Anglian writers is almost on the verge of decline. Among the modern writers it is only Desai who enjoys so much popularity. Besides a number of stories and two books for children, she has written five beautiful novels - the sixth being on its way out. Recently she has been awarded The Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize for her latest novel, Fire on the Mountain. Anita Desai is one of the twenty writers who have been chosen for Sahitya Akadmi Award for the year 1977-78. It is her own impression that Indian readers are very cautious about appreciating an Indian writer. They visit for some English critic to take the lead. Most of Anita Desai's novels were first published abroad and it was only after that her own people became aware of her achievement.

Anita Desai depicts the dilemma of modern man. She is not a social realist in the conventional sense of the term. She is more interested in portraying the response of a sensitive man to the enveloping world. Although living in the midst of material comforts man is always restless. He is haunted by a sense of loneliness. Man is lonely because he is cut off from his fellow men. The modern man is entangled in the complexities of life. Most of the problems would be solved only if we can really express ourselves. We say something but mean something else. Men and women live on a superficial level. That is why communication between human beings is difficult. Different people have different temperaments and therefore, they can neither understand others nor are they understood by others.

Mrs. Desai is constantly concerned with the problem of communication between man and woman, the individual and the world. *Cry, The Peacock* is the story of a disharmonious married life. Gautama cannot understand his sensitive wife Maya and he fails to respond to the poetry of her young heart.

The husband is a normal and practical man. He cannot understand her abnormal psychology. He cannot realize the painful and traumatic experiences of his wife. He does not even know that Maya is haunted by an astrologer's prophecy and the image of the dancing peacocks. Maya strives for communion a contact deeper than flesh. But the gulf between the husband the wife cannot be bridged. The end of the novel is tragic. In a fit of frenzy she kills her husband and she herself goes mad.

In *Voices in the City* also Anita Desai deals with the problem of communication. Once again we meet a couple who cannot adjust because of their temperamental incompatibility. The Maya - Gautama tragedy is re-enacted by Monisha and Jiban but this time it is the wife who dies. The writer also deals with the problem of communication between the mother and the children, the sisters and the brother. Nirode and his sisters Amla and Monisha all are strange characters. The problem is projected on a large scale. The characters can neither adjust with each other nor with the world outside. For Anita Desai's characters the problem is not of how to earn a living. Their problem is how to live. They suffer from an existential anguish.

In her third novel *Bye-Bye Black Bird* we have seen that the novelist slightly deviates from her main theme. The Problem of communication between the individual human beings continues to occupy her attention but Desai's major concern is with racial prejudices which alienate human beings from each other. She dramatizes the cultural contrast between India and England. East-West encounter is one of the major themes in Indo-Anglian writings but Desai concentrates on the psychological reactions of the persons facing such situations.

In the next novel *Where Shall we go this summer?* The writer retraces her footsteps. Once again the problem is that of adjustment between the husband and the wife, the mother and the children. The heroine Sita feels that she is leading an inauthentic existence. Her husband Raman lives an ordinary life and he doesn't see anything wrong. They cannot understand the ways of each other. Sita feels, totally ignored by her husband and her children. Sita wants to assert herself but she is unable to do so. Her conflict is between 'yes' and 'no' ultimately she compromises.

In the last novel *Fire on the Mountain* too, the novelist deals with the same problem. But strangely enough this time the clash is between persons of two similar temperaments. The writer shows that man is gifted with the power of communication better than other living beings. Even if man tries to obstruct the natural urge to share his thoughts and feelings with others, he cannot help it. Nania Kaul tries to live an isolated life cut off from her relatives and friends. She feels disturbed when Raka her great-grand child comes to live with her. But once she is there, Nanda Kaul naturally wants to talk to her and feels sad when the child rejects her so rudely. Nanda wants to keep aloof at the same time she wants to make 'contact' with Raka. Nanda's friend Miss Das is killed because as a Welfare Officer she can't make herself understood by the villagers. Thus we see that throughout her career as a novelist Anita Desai has been dealing with the problem of communication which is one of the major themes in modern literature. In the treatment of this subject she comes closer to E.M. Forster who also tries to show that communication between human beings is difficult if not impossible.

Anita Desai is the first major Indo-Anglian writer who have given this fiction a new trend. She has given to the Indo-Anglian Novel a poetic depth, a psychological sophistication which were lacking. For the first time in the history of Indo-Anglian Literature Anita Desai turns the search light inward and studies her characters with deep understanding.

All the women characters of Mrs. Desai are mysterious and elusive figures. Very few of her male characters are memorable; but her heroines grip the reader with their insistent claims to be heard and recognized. The novelist's aim is not to give a physical description of characters and the atmosphere.

Instead of portraying character in terms of environment, of defining an individual in terms of his social or caste functions, Desai creates character and the environment is important only in so far as it enables the reader to understand the character.

Anita Desai probes into the depths of the individuals and shows how they live in their own worlds of problems and passions. The writer's main purpose is not of relating a story. She is interested in incidents only in so far as they are important to enlighten some aspects of the characters.

Every writer, however, detached he or she may be, cannot give a purely objective picture. The novelist may give a 'serial view' but he has to 'descend from the wing' sooner or later.

In Anita Desai's novels we find autobiographical elements no doubt. Her heroines may share some of her own traits or of other persons she knows. But it will be wrong to say that the characters are mouth pieces for Desai. A Maya or a Sita cannot be said to present Mrs. Desai's own view of life.

Anita Desai is a writer of limited themes. In terms of representativeness the world of Desai is not satisfactory. Other Indian novelists in English are representatives of the large masses. But Anita Desai's imagination is restricted only to the upper middle class people. She herself belongs to this class and she has seen this life close quarters. She writes about the boredom and loneliness of the rich people. Their problem is not of bread and butter. The novelist is unaware of the everyday problems of an ordinary person. Anita Desai seems to ignore starvation and poverty of the millions of the down-trodden.

Since Anita Desai writes about upper middle class people, she does not face a prominent problem which other Indian writers do. It is difficult to show a 'coolie' speaking English but a person like Nanda or Sita feels no difficulty in talking in English. They have the privilege of education, status and culture. Therefore, Desai doesn't have to face the problem of writing dialogue of Indian people in a foreign language.

It is true that Anita Desai explores only a restricted area but as a writer she excels all other Indo-Anglian novelists in technical skill. Her excellence is rejected in her style and imagery. To quote Meenakshi Mukherjee:

Another Indo-Anglian novelist whose distinctive style and intensely individual imagery deserves mention is Anita Desai ..... Her language is marked by three characteristics sensuous richness, a high-strung sensitiveness, and a love for the sound of words.

Anita Desai's novels are rich, poetic and perfect. She is very particular about the form of the novel. No superfluous details go into the making of her novels. A little more or less would have destroyed the beauty of her novels. This perfection is not the mere skill of a novelist obsessed with technique. It is the product of a nature artistly which fuses the different elements into a remarkable unity ... Mrs. Desai's first two novels are a happy example of the fusion of form and content, of texture with structure.

Anita Desai's novels make fascinating reading, for there is an inwardness about the themes. She never employs the formal and elegant language of the Public schools. She uses the language with an extraordinary sense of ease and involvement. Anita Desai concentrates on the inner world of characters. Her vision is romantic, while the framework of her novels is realistic. Mrs Desai can be viewed as a writer who definitely differs from the older writers. She is concerned with the protection of integrity of the individual self. Her characters struggle hard to retain individuality.

We can conclude with Dr. R.S. Singh's remarks about Anita Desai. She is undoubtedly among the most gifted Indo-Anglian's writing today, and it can be reasonably hoped that they will mature and reveal through their writings the psychic reverberations of the whole generations in the same way as the conch when blown into, gives insight into the uncanny depths of the sea. In psychology, psyche stands for the mind functioning as the centre of thought, emotion and behavior and consciously or unconsciously adjusting or mediating the body's responses to the social and physical environment. A common trend runs through feminist groups that a male undermines a woman's psyche by projecting her with patriarchal notions. Feminists want to represent feminist spirit and character in a completely different manner and thereby portraying various shades of feminine psyche.

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