



# Contemporary Identity: Inner Voice Of Anita Desai

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**Abstract:** Anita Desai, a renowned author of Indian-English literature, was born in 1937. She has been undoubtedly one of the most well-known authors of Indian-English fiction. Among modern Indian women authors, she has a unique position. She has significant creative work and a consistently expanding global following. Twelve of her novels, as well as several other noteworthy literary works, have been published. Regardless of the effects such a rebellion may have on their lives, Anita Desai's female protagonists did rebel against the patriarchal society to realize their potential or to live their own lives. To confront and critique the societal norms that restrict them from being autonomous people, they adopted the persona of outsiders. These women used self-selected disengagement as a weapon to survive in a patriarchal society. Desai's women wanted freedom within the community of men and women since it is the only way they could accomplish their goals. Similar to other of Desai's married female characters, such as Maya in *Cry, a Peacock*, Monisha in *Voices in the City*, Nanda in *Fire in the Mountain*, and Sita in *Where Shall We Go*. This Summer, she used Bimala, an unmarried woman, as her inspiration for a free woman in the book *Clear Light of Day*.

**Keywords:** Self-realization, Truth, Sensibility, Alienation, Loneliness, Explore, Despair, Character, Relationship

## Literary Contribution

Anita Desai was the author of various literary awards and has been named to the Booker Prize shortlist three times for her works *Fasting, Feasting*, *In Custody*, and *Clear Light of Day*. *Clear Light of Day* is Desai's most autobiographical novel. It was set in Old Delhi and spans the period of partition. The story was split into four sections, beginning post-partition, when the children of the Das family were adults.

The novel then moved back in time to the Dases' adolescence pre-partition, then their childhood, and finally ended back in the post-partition present day. *Clear Light of Day* was set during Desai's childhood in the neighborhood where she grew up.

*Custody* (1984) was the second novel of Desai to be shortlisted for the Booker Prize. The book is set in Delhi and is told from the point of view of a male protagonist. It told the story of Deven, a professor of Hindi literature with a passion for Urdu poetry. One day, he had the opportunity to meet a great Urdu poet. Deven imagined that this meeting might lead to an interview or a chance to write the poet's memoirs, and he went to great lengths to procure a tape recorder for the meeting. However, things did not work out in his favor.

*Fasting, Feasting* was published in 1999 and shortlisted for that year's Booker Prize. It told the story of an Indian family, focusing on the eldest daughter, Uma, and the youngest son, Arun. The novel was divided into two parts, the first of which followed the story of Uma. She was the eldest of the family and was unmarried. Therefore, she was responsible for caring for her parents, leaving school as a young girl to manage their home. The novel's second part follows Arun, the family's youngest child. Arun's education was prioritized as a child, and he was sent to a university in Massachusetts. He got married, and the novel details his new life in the United States.

*Diamond Dust and Other Stories* (2000) and *Games at Twilight and Other Stories* (1978) were two collections of short stories written by Anita Desai. A 2011 book called *The Artist of Disappearance* comprises four interconnected novellas. *The Complete Stories* (2018) was a single volume that more recently compiled the stories from these three collections. Many of Anita Desai's well-known quotes focussed on her portrayal of India or showcased her lyrical writing style.

Most of Anita Desai's novels occurred in India, often lending much historical and cultural significance. This quote came from *Clear Light of The Day*, Anita Desai's most autobiographical novel. The book detailed a time of significant change during the partition of Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan. It used the birth of modern India as a backdrop for the story of the Das family.

In *Custody*, the protagonist, Deven, loved literature and poetry. However, he was also disillusioned and dissatisfied with his life. In this quote, he wished that poetry, and art in general, could be defined and understood as clearly as the sciences. But he also understood that its very indefinability gives poetry its allure. Anita Desai was known for her lyrical, poetic writing. A sense of place was crucial in her novels; the author's detailed descriptions bring these places to life.

Either they went mad and murdered others or committed suicide or killed themselves. The antagonists these women face were not personal but arised from their interactions with their spouses, close relatives, and the complex social context. Desai presented some of her primary characters as single females. Desai advocated no social exclusion or disrespect for the institution of marriage. Her female characters—like Tara in “Clear Light of Day”—foud satisfaction in their relationships in several of her books. Contrarily, Bimala was a sign of a kind of feminist liberty that involved awakening women to various possibilities rather than preserving them in their preexisting roles. They were liberated from dependency on men by their way of life, which was also energizing. Simon De Beauvoir characterized an independent woman as having personal independence, and Bimala embodied this idea. She claimed in *The Second Sex* that she no longer needed a male intermediary between her and the cosmos because she ceased to be a parasite, and the mechanism supporting her reliance collapsed. As Anita Desai puts it, I don't believe that someone's isolation from society can fix any issues. The problem is how to be a part of society while retaining one's unique identity rather than experiencing a lack of community and a sense of belonging.

*Cry, The Peacock* by Anita Desai is her first work, and it mainly focused on the psychological challenges of Maya, the heroine. Young Maya wanted to love and live. She has a youthful appearance. Her considerably older father, Gautama, expressed in the ideas she created. Maya has trouble sleeping at night since her spouse approaches everything logically. Maya loved Gautama and longed for him to love her in return, but his coldness lets her down. Of course, they weren't hallucinations, but the astrologer and the sneaky magician from my nightmares were. Arjun had shown me evidence of them, but he insisted they were genuine. For years after my marriage, had he ever said anything to imply that I might have to die brutally and unnaturally or that he ever entertained that notion? This is what the whole book is based around.

She started to have difficulties with this prophecy in her subconscious. Anita Desai aimed to illuminate human beings' many mental states, psychic perceptions, underlying drives, and existential aspirations. She successfully established new ground for fictional art among her contemporaries while addressing man's plight and moral and societal problems. Desai exposed the existential traits of a man in society, much like Kafka. She observed a person in action to learn what hidden motivations lie under the surface of his apparent conscious thinking.

'*Voices in the City*' is an enthralling tale of a Bohemian brother and his two sisters caught in the counter-currents of shifting societal standards, according to the synopsis. The narrative painted a realistic picture of India's socioeconomic transformation in various aspects. The intriguing book, written by Sahitya Academy Award winner Anita Desai, shows the damaging impact of city living on an Indian family. Anita Desai is an Indian author, and *Voices in the City* is her second book. Despite dealing with many of the same topics as her later books, which garnered her worldwide renown and numerous significant prizes in India and abroad, it is regarded as one of the author's poorer works.

*Voices in the City*, first released in 1965, depicted the tale of three brothers who try to understand life in Calcutta, the capital of India. The book is a chronicle of the social changes in a modernizing India and is based on Desai's experience in Calcutta in the early 1960s. It examined what occurred when conventional Indian ways of life clashed with new ideas and how this impacted young people.

Throughout the article, Calcutta is often described. The three main characters in the story are seen to be shaped by the city as a force. Desai did not hold back while discussing the drawbacks of living in Calcutta, highlighting the chaos, noise, fast pace, and lack of quiet spaces. The city is also portrayed as one where young people experience continual pressure and cannot find pleasure in their lives or careers.

Monisha, Nirode, and Amla are the three siblings featured in *Voices in the City*. Monisha is the eldest and is neurotic, sensitive, and prone to overanalyzing events. She married into a fairly conservative household and portrayed herself as a dedicated and obedient wife on the outside. Nevertheless, she is deeply tormented on the inside due to her ugly circumstances. One of her key responsibilities as a wife is to carry children. Therefore she cannot do so, which she sees as a refusal to bring another life into what she perceives as an unpleasant and pointless world. After the book, Monisha kills herself by setting herself on fire in the bathtub. Despite their initial confusion, Monisha's siblings eventually discovered a journal that revealed her inner thoughts. Monisha's younger brother Nirode struggled to fit in with life in Calcutta. He has a decent job at a newspaper at the start of the book, but he quickly leaves since he cannot find fulfillment or a means of expression there. Although the affluent widow, who is his mother and lives in the country, offered to assist him in finding a new career, Nirode declined her offer, choosing to attempt and fail on his own.

Nirode has many business-related initiatives, such as launching his magazine and writing a play. All of his efforts, however, come to nothing when his magazine closes, and theatre companies reject his play. Beginning with the goddess Kali, a destroyer of expression and creativity, he compared the city of Calcutta. Nirode tried to live the life of a painter named Dharma, who seemed to please with his life in Calcutta. Still, Dharma is a mysterious figure, and Nirode eventually found it difficult to understand his motivations. A visit from his mother ultimately ended his dilemma when Nirode dreams about his mother as Kali and realized that the goddess with destructive powers also can protect what is vital. Amla, the youngest daughter, struggled with many of the same problems as her siblings but is still relatively naive and optimistic at the

start of the book. She also met Dharma, who has a more profound impact on her. Amla is invited into Dharma's social circle of educated, international acquaintances because he viewed her as the perfect model for his paintings. Amla is initially thrilled, but she quickly lost interest in the cynical artists and loses hope when she learned that Dharma is a philanderer who mistreats his daughter. Nevertheless, the experience also gave her a fresh outlook on life, helping her to accept her uninteresting job and the monotony of living in Calcutta. Her motivation to alter her attitude is further increased by her sister's death, which is a further shock. She discovered something that satisfies her even though her uninteresting work at an advertising firm does not: creating pictures for translating the Panchatantra. She considered this traditional Indian political theory engaging and imaginative in its content and the way it is presented—through stories about animals.

In Anita Desai's literature, unhappy people with their lives in contemporary society often appeared. Although some books that came after *Voices in the City* are set in Mexico City, London, and other international locales, many include protagonists who were dissatisfied with their lives, bored to death, or experiencing existential crises. Desai examined how individuals seek significance in their lives via her writing. Her characters, like Monisha, sometimes succeeded, as Amla did, and occasionally got failed.

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