

Escapism In The Writings Of Anita Desai

Rahul Sharma

Department of Humanities, Graphic Era Hill University, Dehradun, Uttarakhand, India 248002

ABSTRACT

Anita Desai, among the current crop of Indian English novels, is generally agreed upon as being particularly astute and consistent in her probing of human psychology. Human nature and interpersonal relationships are central to both of Desai's books and those of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. The inner lives of the characters in her works are rife with escapism, alienation, misery, frustration, and worry. Primitive though it may be, the characters of Anita Desai often resort to escape — retreat and rejection of reality — as a means of surviving. Throughout her books, the heroes struggle with their desire for self-actualization and their knowledge of the limits of the human condition. The author, Anita Desai, says.

KEYWORDS: Escapism, Knowledge, struggle, Human, Psychology

INTRODUCTION

Anita Desai is a well-known Indian author. She was a Booker Prize finalist on three separate occasions. Among India's authors, she is in a class by herself. She exposes the difficulties of life in modern Indian cities. She has written 10 books and several short stories over her career as an author. Her works feature strong female protagonists. Her female protagonists defy convention and are fiercely independent. Her female protagonists are too sensitive and, as a result, they refuse to accept the world as it is. The feminist movement does not have Anita Desai's support. The single human person, whether male or female, is the focus of her attention, and she makes this quite evident. To engage in contemplation, thought, or writing, solitude and silence are prerequisites. *Cry, the Peacock*, her first book published in 1963, ushered forth a new era of psychological realism. Like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai centres her stories on interpersonal connections between people. Her primary focus is on the growth of her characters, usually a female protagonist. The works of Anita Desai depict the pain of living in a patriarchal culture. In the end, the protagonist's heroic efforts bring praise to themselves and honour to the cause of liberty in her tale.

Biography of Anita Desai

A Bengali father and a German mother gave birth to Anita Desai in the hill station of Mussoorie, north of Delhi, in 1937. During India's transition from colonial rule to independence, she was growing up in the Old Delhi province. She was multilingual and multireligious; she practised Islam and Hinduism and spoke German at home, English at school, and Urdu, the language spoken nearly universally in her neighbourhood (Prasad, 2011). Even at a young age, she could see that her family was different from others in her neighbourhood in terms of the ties they

had with the nation, their hometown, and their social strata. Even though her mother looked and cooked like an Indian, she still felt different, particularly in her classroom. After her father's untimely death in 1955, the family uprooted and moved to Calcutta. Remarkably, Anita Desai seldom turns around to address the issues head-on in her novels, despite her tendency to praise the efficacy of escapism. Anita Desai is one of the Indian authors who has used their pen to challenge the clichés of modern Indian culture and achieve a more nuanced and realistic worldview. Her protagonists' isolation and loneliness when their marriages end and they form nuclear families is a common theme in her books. This paper, titled "Extensive Growth of Nuclear Family in Anita Desai's Fiction," seeks to investigate the development of families in Desai's fiction and to examine the stories and characters therein in light of the social and cultural contexts that shape and define Indian households.

LITERATURE REVIEW

C. Tina Joshly (2021) One social idea that is reflected in contemporary writing is diaspora. The perspective of an expatriate is explored in works of diaspora literature. It explores the internal and external struggles faced by immigrants while living in a foreign country. The cultural conundrum, the search for identity, diversity, and the universal features of human life are only few of the topics that Diasporic literature explores. Anita Desai was the subject of this study. Anita Desai is one of the most prominent modern female authors of English-language Indian literature. Critics agree that Anita Desai's 1980 book *Clear light of day* is her best work to date. The author claims it is autobiographical since it is set in the same community where she did. To far, three of Desai's novels have been longlisted for the Man Booker Prize, but this one was the first. The comparison between the reuniting of two sisters in New Delhi and the division of India and Pakistan is both timely and relevant. This article examines how the book *Clear Light of Day* by Anita Desai incorporates themes common to Diasporic literature.

Seema Maheshwari et.al (2021) Anita Desai is a prominent figure in contemporary Indian English writing, where she writes both novels and short stories. Anita Desai is a writer who focuses on women's rights and equality. She is really aware of the debts she owes to her people. She is a part of the larger Indian culture, yet she has her own particular speech patterns and vocal inflections. The journals of Anita Desai provide a window into the minds of her female protagonists. She delves more deeply into the intellectual explorations of the feminine characters in order to expose their inner lives. This exploratory article portrayed the fempsychology of the eponymous Anita Desai workshop. *Cry the Peacock*, *Voices in the City*, *Fire on the Mountain*, and *Fasting, Feasting*, four of Anita Desai's most well-known works, are rife with fantastic definitions of womanly psychology and womanly circumstances.

Dr. Hitendra B. Dhote (2020) A person's mind and heart are just as much a part of him as his body. These characteristics make up the core of his character. His whole existence on Earth has been a never-ending battle for survival. His internal turmoil of vulnerabilities that overrun his perception and action are just as much an enemy as the external ones he must battle in this quest for existence. Stories of individuals who let their own character flaws to bring them down may be found in the mythologies and history of every major religion. There are other examples of people who overcame significant obstacles by channelling their inner strength

and drive. With this subject in mind, 'The Better Man' (2000), Anita Nair's first book, focuses on the unique qualities and problems facing the state of Kerala.

Erum Altaf (2018) -When women in India began fighting back against patriarchy, it sparked a literary revolution inside the country. There was a shift when women's voices competed with men's. Our paper's emphasis is on the feminist message in *Cry, the Peacock* and *Where Shall We Go This Summer*, two of Anita Desai's most critically acclaimed books. Our goal is to critically analyse how Indian women authors in English have brought attention to issues facing women since the end of the modern period. They have spoken out passionately or started a revolution within themselves against discriminatory norms based on gender. Anita Desai is one of the most well-known Indian authors working in English. Her novels *Cry, the Peacock* and *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* feature two strong and independent female heroines, Sita and Maya, who are often portrayed as femme fatales. As an example of postmodern feminism, this study hopes to highlight Desai's writings.

Virender Kumar Gill (2012) There can be no question that Anita Desai is one of the most influential authors writing in modern India. Studying Anita Desai's works in depth indicates that the examination of the human mind is her primary preoccupation as a writer. She is an advocate for showing the truth inside a character. The fiction art of Anita Desai stands apart from that of other Indian woman novelists. Desai, who was born to a German mother and a Bengali father, confidently tackles characters from upper-middle-class backgrounds in her fiction, whereas Nayan Tara Sehgal and Kamal Markandya focus more on the characters' external political and social contexts. In her own words, "plugging into the depths of the mind of my characters" is what writing is all about for her".

ESCAPISM IN ANITA DESAI'S FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN

"My writing is an effort to discover, underline and convey the significance of things. I must seize upon that incomplete and seemingly meaning-less mass of reality around me and try and discover its significance by plunging below the surface and plumbing the depths then illuminating those depths till they become more lucid, brilliant and explicable reflection of the visible world."

Anita Desai eschews traditional realism in lieu of a focus on the psychological and emotional collapse of her protagonists. Her writings are an attempt to portray the complexities and tangled webs of human nature and personality. Her creations are reflections of her persistent fixation on irritation, identity confusion, loneliness, dread, and despair. Her writing often deals with issues of psychoneurosis, social isolation, and insecurity. For the great majority of individuals, life in the real world is challenging, unpleasant, and complicated. Neurosis is often characterised by chronic anxiety. Abraham Spierling says that:

"Anxiety is a symptom of repressed emotional excitement, a sign of repressed frustration. At one time or the other the victim of such anxiety represses the memory of a motive, an obstacle, or an impulse to fight or flee. One or more of these elements of frustration frighten the individual and the entire situation is repressed."

Fire on the Mountain, Anita Desai's fifth book, is an examination of alone, specifically the kind of solitude that seeks solace in fiction. Nanda Kaul, our heroine, understands the value of fiction, including fantasy and fairy tales. The issue, though, emerges when fiction replaces reality. The story explores the internal conflicts of protagonist Nanda Kaul, who allows his imagination to run away with him to the point that reality needs to take control. Anita Desai's ability to explore the female mind to its depths is greatly enhanced by her choice of eccentric characters.

After years of being unhappy, Nanda Kaul finally finds fulfilment in her isolation in Carignano. Her interpersonal interactions caused her pain and anguish. We learn early on in the story that she has lost hope in the possibility of any meaningful relationship, whether it parental or marital. Many people have let her down and betrayed her throughout her life. After moving to the remote village of Carignano, she reflects on her past as the wife of the vice chancellor and a mother to a big brood of children:

“Looking down, overall those years she had survived and borne, she saw them, not bare and shining as the plains below but like the gorge, cluttered, choked and blackened with the heads of children and grand children, servants and guests, all restlessly surging, clamoring about her.”

Even in Carignano's relative isolation, the feelings of futility and disappointment do not leave her. She isn't content even when she's alone herself, thus she has no good ideas for how to spend her time. She isn't interested in communication of any kind. The mere appearance of the postman is enough to irritate her, and she spends her days hoping he won't stop in Carignano. This is because she believes she has finally escaped the world below the mountain, along with all of its demands, impositions, and bothersome Ness. The story begins on this theme of abandonment and isolation:

“Nanda Kaul paused under the pine trees to take in their scented sibilance and listen to the cicadas fiddling invisibly under the mesh of pine needles when she saw the postman slowly winding his way along the upper Mall. She had not gone out to watch for him, did not want him to stop at Carignano, had no wish for letters.”

Nanda Kaul's great-grandchild Raka becomes an adversary in her self-imposed exile. Nanda Kaul and Raka are able to communicate with one another despite their age and life experience gap. Usha Pathania says that.

“The conversation between Nanda Kaul and Raka reveals that Nanda's need for belongingness is stronger than her desire to enjoy her loneliness and quiet desolation without any intrusion from the world outside. Unconsciously, she invites Raka to destroy her unquiet desolation.”

Nanda was taken aback by how completely Raka disregarded her. Raka only wished for privacy. She yearned to lead a covert existence amid Kasauli's craggy peaks and towering pines. Her natural interest in other people and their activities had faded. Raka said nothing when Nanda broke the tragic news that she had been placed in a nursing home in Geneva. After all, her

mother's illness had been a constant presence throughout her life. This came as no surprise. Her father was too busy to worry for Raka. As a result, she has lost the ability to trust others and the pleasure that comes from being around them as a youngster because of her horrific experiences. Raka is emotionally distant because of her lack of emotional nourishment. She stops interacting with other people and instead begins to find weird beauty in nature's bleak and isolated features.

Nanda Kaul has gotten away from her responsibilities and relationships, but she is still not at peace with herself. In reality, the only calm she has found outside of the mental, emotional, and social battle is a false one. She fails to comprehend that evading the past won't make it go away. While most people take pride in their prior successes, Nanda Kaul actually finds this to be a source of frustration. Since her spouse has passed away, she may now do as she pleases with her life.

“She had been so glad when it was over. She had been glad to leave it all behind, in the plains. Like a great, heavy, difficult book that she had read through and was not required to read again.”

Nanda's flight to Carignano is an effort to break free of her past. However, the painful truth of her existence still maintains a firm grasp on her thoughts and emotions, making physical escape impossible. Even in her solitary confinement at Carignano, she can't shake the thought of it. No matter how close she was to death. So, she's been able to mentally and physically escape her demanding life of obligations and responsibilities, irritations and annoyances, and a certain sorrow. She has no control over her history, her present, or her future. Her history is constantly bursting to the surface of her mind, and the sentiments they evoke in her are beyond of her control.

Nanda Kaul has not changed his mind despite Raka's presence. She views her as an invader, an uninvited visitor. She is so determined to conceal her identity that she is even willing to disguise herself as a pine tree if necessary. Because of her disillusionment with interpersonal connections, she sees little choice but to resort to this technique. She herself is so unfazed by Nanda that the sight of him leaves her gasping for air. Even though they share a house, Ruka still feels like a caged bird, a wild animal that has been domesticated and made to feel at home. A peculiar coexistence exists when people dislike and want to avoid one another's company. The young Raka shares the elderly woman's need for solitude, albeit her motivations are different. But Nanda Kaul's entrance in Carignano has placed her in an impasse from which she cannot withdraw. In the words below, Anita Desai portrays their isolation:

“If Nanda Kaul was a recluse out of vengeance for a long life of duty and obligation, her great grand daughter was a recluse by nature, by instinct.”

The mental collapse of Raka's mother and her grandmother's cruel enthusiasm led Raka to retreat and remain silent. She is fascinated by the devastated, damaged, and desolate expanses of the hill-top with the burned home since, having grown up in a huge urban area, she has seen horrifying photographs of the so-called civilised behaviour of people all over the globe. Her uniqueness is preserved by her decision to flee from her history and present. It's

clear that she dislikes being with other kids. The chemistry between her and Carignano is palpable. However, as time goes on, it becomes clear that Raka is neither an introvert by nature or by nurture. Her estrangement from her family and other children is a direct result of the domestic abuse they endured. Because of her extreme anxiety, she avoided spending time with other people.

The progressive shift in perspective was well conveyed by Anita Desai. Nanda first despises the idea of even planning Raka's dinner. She avoids the taxi stand, and when Raka does come, she doesn't seem too happy to see her great-granddaughter:

“Then it was not possible to postpone the meeting any longer and both moved a step closer to each other and embraced because they felt they must. There was a sound of bones colliding. Each felt how bony, angular and unaccommodating the other was and they quickly separated.”

Nanda Kaul's personality is in pieces, thus she avoids talking to anybody. Her feeling of connection and wholeness is hampered by two opposing forces: disengagement and overinvolvement. Her escape into solitude is not the answer to her inner turmoil. Nanda's life has been one continuous string of frustrations and letdowns, and as a result, she is racked by an irrational sense of aggression. She tries to avoid thinking about her past by isolating herself, but the memories keep haunting her. She keeps her worries and wishes to herself and tells no one about them. Her inner turmoil does not end until she dies.

As we've already established, Nanda Kaul spins a delightful web of dreams as an antidote to the harsh facts of the world. After moving to Carignano, Raka realised the value of fables and myths in her life.

Only by lowering his own cognitive maturity to that of a kid can Nanda hope to win over Raka's apathy. In light of this, it's admirable that she tries to create a fictional narrative centred on her very happy and fulfilling upbringing and her doting, adventurous father. She uses stories from her own upbringing to capture Raka's interest. She talks about her dad and how he always made sure the kids were taken care of emotionally. Her words to Raka:

“He loved to go riding with the children. Another thing he god up for the children was a badminton court and we'd have such games out on the lawn, all of us, at times even by moonlight...we could have anything we wanted of him, anything.”

The fantasy in "Fire on the Mountain" is exploited in a manner that has nothing to do with the protagonist's search for self-knowledge. In parallel with one another are two distinct varieties of fantasy vocabulary. There is the one that Nanda Kaul weaves purposefully to pique Raka's attention as she grows up, and there is the one that Raka and Ram Lal both like. Moreover, Raka has a third, fantastical world in her head, which, like her parents' reality, is fractured and alienating to her. Ram Lal's religion has a significant role in shaping his identity and his everyday life. Raka buys into its veracity and agrees to utilise it. When she unexpectedly drops by the club one night, she is met with a scene that is the polar opposite of what she had

imagined: rather than women "dressed as queens and men as princes," she sees a mob of "mad men and rioters" pursuing each other and looking like monsters.'

"Somewhere behind them, behind it all, was her father, home from a party, stumbling and crashing through the curtains of night, his mount opening to let out a flood of rotten stench, beating her mother with hammers and fists of abuse, harsh, filthy abuse that made Raka cower under the bed cloths and wet the mattress in fright. "

Though the novel's conclusion is dense with several meanings, it all happens in the span of just four pages: Ila is brutally murdered, Nanda confesses, Nanda dies, and Raka declares a fire. The author provides such a detailed description of Ila's unattractive body that the rape comes as a sickening shock to the readers. Preet Singh's satisfaction at having removed a potential hurdle to his daughter's marriage is unlikely to be the sole motivation for his actions; he may also take satisfaction in seeing Ila brought low as retribution. The timing of Ila's grisly death announcement is so unfortunate that she passes away feeling completely defeated and guilty. It is not revealed how Raka felt about Nanda's unreachable condition made him feel. This is how the book finishes:

"Down in the ravine, the flames spate and crackled around the dry wood and through the dry grass and black smoke spiraled up over the mountain."

The book is divided into three parts, each of which focuses on a different kind of isolation. The first deals with romanticised isolation, the second with defiant solitude, and the third with loneliness as a result of external forces. Nanda constantly shifts between disparate mental pictures of herself and the people around her throughout the narrative. Her twisted worldview is on full display when she calls the mail carrier an ox or donkey, Raka a mosquito, moth, rabbit, mouse, cricket, or parrot, and Ila an owl or spider. *Fire on the Mountain* makes a commendable effort to explore other dimensions of fantasy. All three of Nanda, Ila, and Raka are equally compelling tales of escape. Each one forces us to once again face the facts.

Anita Desai aims for emotional resonance with her readers via the depth of her characterizations. She has infused her writing with an awareness of societal issues, a respect for reason, and an appreciation for humanity. The authors are women, and they are addressing the significant responsibilities and abilities of women who have lost their access to education and information, and who do not recognise the worth of their own unique identities. Her publications have freed her from her obligation to all women.

Mrs.Desai's fiction is a turning loose of emotional and psychical experiences. It is an expression of life, not a form of escapism. She has observed rather clearly in an essay, "literature cannot be torn away from the fabric of life as if it were decoration embroidery upon it" (Desai, P.27).

Sita, who was plagued by prenatal neurosis, resorted to escape in order to cope. She cuts up all ties with her family and flees to Manori Island.

CONCLUSION

The authors of this article examined escapism through the lens of the newly developed dualistic model of escapism, which categorises escapism into self-suppression and self-expansion sub-types. Some links have been found between these dimensions and other ideas including positive and negative affect, depression susceptibility, self-control, flow, emotion suppression, and coping techniques, among others. Specifically, we wanted to look at how a propensity to enter a flow state can be related to escapism, self-alienation, and mindfulness. Our findings lend credence to the escapist theory. The fantasy in "Fire on the Mountain" is exploited in a manner that has nothing to do with the protagonist's quest for self-awareness. When it comes to her characters' inner and exterior existence, Anita Desai abandons the usual type of realism and instead concentrates on disintegration. Her works are an effort to capture the contradictions of human nature, the unravelling of the self, and the ambiguity of life.

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