



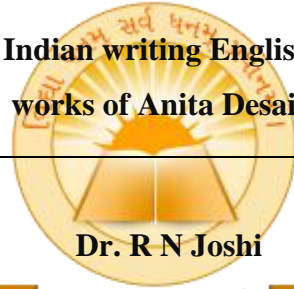
VIDHYAYANA

An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal

ISSN 2454-8596

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

Representation of Women writers in Indian writing English novels with Special Reference to the works of Anita Desai



Dr. R N Joshi

**Dean, Faculty of Arts
C U Shah University**

Wadhwan City

Vimal Patel
Research Scholar
Dept. of English
C U Shah University
Wadhwan City

Dr. Audrey E. Barlow
Associate Professor
Department of English
M. P. Shah Commerce College,
Surendranagar



VIDHYAYANA

ISSN 2454-8596

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal

Introduction:

Indian women novelists have played very important and historic roles in enriching the manner and magnitude of the Indian Writing in English. They have enhanced the point of view of the other sex: the women to the fictional world. Some of the novelists have also ventured into the representative aspects of the women of the society and their outlook. It is needless to say that there were many women of the contemporary society of the time who actively contributed during the freedom struggle of India and also participated on the forefront in reforming the society of the previous century of the British rule. These and many more aspects of women contribution and participation can be seen reflected in writings of the women novelists.

Indian women writers have made remarkable contribution in the fiction writing. Their novels revolve around the themes and setting that represent the foremost fragment of the contemporary Indian English novels. In the modern times, women have been recognized in almost all walks of life and have earned commendable recognition. Many feminists consider themselves to be the precursor of the women's emancipation. Further, some of these feminists have turned out to be radical in so far as rational and freedom of expression is concerned. Many of them have so far that they are beyond recognition.

Unlike in the west, India women writers have not lost their clarity of mind and concept while expressing women's issues in their work of art. Sarojini Naidu is one such woman writer who has kept her sanity awake and alive while creating her fictional world. Through her writings, Sarojini Naidu has not only represented women's issues in the Indian society but she has also captivated her readers. There are authors like Nayantara Sahgal and Rama Mehta, who used feminism themes. Kamala Das, Anita Nair and Suran Viswanathan used regional fiction theme. On the other hand, Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai have portrayed quite realistically the raw character of Indian culture and represented the traditional values that India stands for. It is interesting to note, that many Indian women came to be recognized during the era and became a popular during decade of 1990's.

Literature prepared during any period of time but if it is written by women writers was believed to be an influential tool of modernism and feminist statements in the contemporary times. Phenomenal success in feminist writings of Indian English literature have witnessed in the last two decades. In the modern context, one can consider this for the fact that those women novelists, who are self-reliant and have received modern education, are bound to be feminist in their mindset. And if they happen to be novelists, their novels tend to incorporate the contemporary issues related to women as well as those issues that exist in the society since



VIDHYAYANA

ISSN 2454-8596

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal

ages. Some of the women novelists have done their job beautifully whereas the other has gone so far that they are beyond recognition.

Life and Works of Anita Desai

Anita Desai is believed as one of the world famous novelist in English literature and she is one of Indian's most influential best modern novelists in Indian Writing in English. She has also written short story, screenwriter, and children's literature to name a few. As an author, she has made an entire generation of writers inclined towards a kind of English fiction writing. By her significant literary outputs, she has made a prolific contribution to the Indian world of fiction writing in English. Anita Desai is an Indian citizen by birth. Later on she immigrated abroad. Since last many decades, she has been migrated to the United States of America. She falls under the category of the expatriate authors. The term 'expatriate' stands for the authors of a country who have settled to a foreign country. Anita Desai can also be illustrated as a writer of Diaspora community. They mostly focus on historical and cultural issues. The Indian society and culture is visible in her characters.

Anita Desai was born on 24th June, 1937, in a beautiful hill station of India called Mussoorie. The Himalayan ranges are known for its beauty and, in the North Indian state of Uttaranchal, India. It is also conveniently connected by road to Delhi and major cities. It is also called "Gateway to Yamunotri and Gangotri, Shrines of Northern India." Formerly, she was known as Anita Mazumdar. She is a daughter of Dhiren N. Mazumdar, a Bengali business executive, and the former Toni Nime, a German expatriate, a teacher.

Her mother Toni Nime was a German Christian. Her father was a Bengali Indian. She was dark and did not have the Teutonic fair looks. She also had an un-German name, Nime. She claimed that the ancestors had come from France, from Nime. Her first name was also very French, Antoinette. Then, it is shortened to Toni. Her mother, Antoinette Nime, could trace her origin to France. Her father, Dhiren Mazumdar's native place was Dhaka, now in Bangladesh. But he had settled in New Delhi. He also spoke German very well. Because of this mixed parentage of complex origin, she gets an advantage of having double perspective when writing about India and Indians. She also writes about migrants in India and Indian migrants to the west. If we see her from mother's side, she is outsider and if we see from father's side, she is a native.

Anita Desai spent much of her life in New Delhi. Her father Dhiren Mazumdar was an engineer. He met a German woman with a strange name Antoinette Nime and married her as the Nazi period was knocking at



VIDHYAYANA

ISSN 2454-8596

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal

the doors of Germany. Her mother was not a Jew but she was brought up a Christian. By the upheavals of the Second World War and Indian Independence, her parents were effectively exiled from Germany and East Bengal. For which Desai's Bengali grandfather and uncle fought and they were imprisoned. They recalled mythic homelands that predated their twin partitions. Her father spoke of Bengal as "a wonderful green and fruitful land," while her mother, who had rich, warm, vibrant personality. She quoted German nursery rhymes and tales of Christmas in Berlin. Her mother was German and her father was Bengali, and although she was never discouraged from pursuing a career. She felt that there were few options available to her. There was a strict progression from school to university, to marriage and motherhood, with no break between them.

In her interview with Magda Costa, Anita Desai asserts:

She was a French Woman who setup this ashram in Pondicherry with a very famous Indian sage, Aurobindo. She outlived him by many years and died in her nineties. She was very much revered in India. What intrigued me was that, being a foreigner, she became this Indian mystic. (Costa 4)

Anita Desai married on December 13, 1958 to Ashvin Desai, a businessman, a Gujarati gentleman. She began writing during times salvaged from house, husband and children. She received her B.A in English in 1957 at Delhi University. Later she met her husband, Ashvin Desai, at the age 19 and married at the age of 20. Later she moved to Bombay and brought up two sons and two daughters. She wrote in term time and put away her manuscripts in the school holidays. She was also encouraged by her neighbour, the author and Merchant – Ivory screenwriter Ruth Prahler Jhabwala. He now lives in New York. So he remains a friend and neighbour. She has brought up four children: two sons, namely Arjun and Rahul, and two daughters, namely Tani and Kiran during her writing career. She was multilingual. She has lived in various cities like Calcutta, Bombay, Chandigarh, New Delhi and Poona since the 1950s. We can see that descriptions of some cities in her novels. When she was a child, she spoke German at home in Delhi. She spoke Urdu and Hindi to friends and neighbours. Moreover, she spoke Bengali, Urdu, Hindi and English at school and in the city streets of Delhi.

Anita Desai has taught in the United States since 1987. She now divides her time between Boston, Mexico, Massachusetts, Cambridge, England and India. She lives in India and in Massachusetts (US) with her family. She has spent for one semester each year at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge and the rest of her time in India. From October 1993 through the fall of 2002, Anita Desai was the John E. Bruchard



VIDHYAYANA

ISSN 2454-8596

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal

Professor of Humanities, Emeritus at MIT in Cambridge.

Since her Childhood, she has been conscious of being a writer. Writing is a part of her character, temperament, nature and life. She has added to her genius by learning from other writers. Except for reading and constant practice, she got no formal training for writing. Most of her writings have been started with mere sketches. Like Jane Austen's her world is a restricted one. She restricts herself to writing about people and situations that she knows or can understand by deep probing. Therefore, she is known as a pioneer in writing psychological novels or a writer of inner action.

Anita Desai's interest was not confined only to the short stories but she also took interest in essays, reviews and articles. She has also written several books for children. The illustrated weekly of India, published *Calcutta Kaleidoscope* in 1958, and *Pilgrimage* in 1966. The article *Gangtok* published in *Envoy*, London. Her articles on women writers, and *The Indian writer's problems* appeared in *Quest* in 1970 and *The Literary criterion* in 1975. Reviews like *Timid Movement of a wing*, *Memoirs of a Mendicant professor* were published. *Within and without Tradition*, there came out in *ACLALS New letter* 1979 and *out of the shadows* in *Indian Express*, 1984. Besides, she worked for a year in *Max Muller Bhavan*, *Calcutta*. She has also directed a number of documentaries about *India* for *BBC* and *NBC*. But she emerged as a promising novelist on the Indian literary horizons in 1963. Anita Desai explains:

I wrote small stories, poems and letters for children's magazines when a few short stories published. I wrote quite a bit for the writer's workshop *Journal* and an English magazine called *Envoy* till my first novel was published in 1963. (Srivastava 216)

Anita Desai is a very careful and precise artist and since she can speak German, Bengali and Hindi besides English, quite fluently, the choice of medium is very important to her. It is clear that English is just like her mother-tongue. Therefore, she has expressed her pleasure, in selecting English for her writing career. Anita Desai remarks:

My language (of the novels) is English and I find it answers all my needs. It is rich and flexible, supple and adaptable, varied and vital. I think it is even capable of reflecting the Indian Character and situation. (Dalmia 13)

She grew up in a house full of books. It led her to the early decision that writing would be her life. Although she was the very young mother of four children, later she managed to carve out productive time at her desk.



VIDHYAYANA

ISSN 2454-8596

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal

Because of her generosity, students praised her. She nevertheless believes that writing cannot be taught. Instead, she has said that her role as a teacher is because of to show students what kind of books should be read and how we can learn from other writers. Further, she simply provides the all-important “time and space” in which to write. From a very early age, she knew that she wanted to be a writer from a very early age.

Anita Desai has been discovering these truths since she started writing at the age of seven and published her first story at the age of nine. Even as a child, she had some of her pieces published in a children’s magazine, and while in college at Delhi University, She wrote stories and reviews that were published in journals.

Anita Desai was educated in Delhi at Queen Mary’s Higher Secondary School and Miranda House, Delhi University, where she received a B.A. (Honours) in English Literature in 1957. After studying English at the University of New Delhi, Anita Desai completely dedicated herself to writing. She has published novels, short stories, and children’s books. At the age of nine she had studied *Wuthering Heights*. Although she could not understand half of it, it was a thrill. In her twenties, she started writing novel on a small level but in her novel, she follows her own instinct when India became independent she wan ten.

Anita Desai is an honorary fellow at the University of Cambridge. She has become a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in London. She has also become an honorary member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. She has been awarded numerous prizes and honours. It includes the Winifred Holt by prize of the Royal Society of Literature in 1978, the Padma Sri Award from the Government of India, Alberto Moravia Prize for Literature in 2000, and the Neil Gunn prize for International Literature in 1993 from the Scottish Arts Council. She also received the Tarak Nath Das Award in 1989 for promotion of Indo-US Relations. She was awarded the Literary Lion Award in 1993. She has also been named Helen Cam visiting Fellow, Ashby Fellow and honorary fellow of the University of Cambridge in 1989.

The literary career of Anita Desai started with short stories which from time to time approved in leading Indian Magazine. Her first story *circus cat*, *Alley Cat* was published in 1957 in *Thought*. Her second story *How Gentle is the Mist* is published in 1958 in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*. And also she wrote some short stories like *Grandmother (1960)*, *An Examination (1960)*. But her excellence as a short story writer was proved with the appearance of *Ghost House* in *Quest* 1961 (Jan-March) and *Mr. Bose’s Private Bliss* in *Envoy* in 1961 (May-June). Her short story *Studies in the park* was first published in 1978, in her collection *Games at Twilight*. There are several themes in *Studies in the park* which are central to the stories of Anita Desai. With the internal consciousness of the central character, the narration is related. The central character,



VIDHYAYANA

ISSN 2454-8596

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal

namely, Suno struggles for a sense of individuality against the pressures from his family to conform to societal expectations.

Anita Desai and Kiran Desai brought with them a new world of East-West encounter, loneliness, alienation, human relationships, economic inequality, globalization, etc. On the one hand, Anita Desai is a silent writer making her points quietly and profoundly whereas Kiran Desai is more vocal in her representation of issues. From the treatment of the themes to characterization, we can see many junctures of overlapping styles and contradictory viewpoints as well.

Anita Desai brought up during world war-II. She could see the anxiety of her German mother, who was experiencing about the situation and family in Germany. After the war, she had known that Germany was divested. She also knew that her mother will never return there. She had no desire to return of her. She has also worked as a lecturer at colleges including Girton College, Cambridge. She is currently a visiting fellow at Balliol College, Oxford. Best known for her studies of Indian life, Anita Desai has written exclusively in English since she debuted in the mid-1960s. As a contemporary Indian female writer, she has been identified with a new literary tradition of Indian writing in English. It is stylistically different and less conservative than colonial Indian literature. It also deals with such issues as hybridity, shifting identity, and "imaginary homelands". A phrase "Imaginary homelands" was coined by Indian novelist Salman Rushdie.

Anita Desai has been a member of the Advisory Board for English of the National Academy of Letters in Delhi since 1972. Anita Desai now lives in New York's Putnam Country. Her extensive teaching career includes positions as the Elizabeth Drew visiting professor at smith college 1987-88, the Gilder: sleeves professor at Barnard College; the Parington professor of English at Mount Holyoke College 1988-93; and a visiting scholar at the Rockefeller Foundation in Bellagio, Italy. But of all the Places where she has worked with budding writers, she concedes there is something uniquely intriguing about MIT. Anita Desai learned English at mission school and her father's language, Bengali, only after he died when she was 18 and the family moved to Calcutta. However, it was the language in which she first learned to read and write at school, and so it became her literary language in which she publishes her works.

Anita Desai also deals with the theme of 'foreignness', being hailed as an 'alien'. She is famous for her colourful and touching studies of Indian life. In her work, we can see gentleness and empathy. There are poignant and amusing characters in her work. These characters struggle to achieve their personal dreams in a complicated and unsympathetic world.



VIDHYAYANA

ISSN 2454-8596

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal

Her work is characterized by its gentleness and empathy with its often poignant and amusing characters. These characters struggle to achieve their personal dreams in a complicated and unsympathetic world. One of the recurring themes of her is that the struggle of women to assert their independence in a restrictive Indian Society. In her novels, she depicts the cultural and social changes that India has undergone as she explores the power of family and society and the relationship between family members. In her colourful novels and short stories portraying life in India, She depicts the aspirations and struggles of ordinary people in her homeland. She also focuses on the obstacles encountered by these women who are suppressed by Indian society. She believes:

It's difficult to say, because there are Indian writers in so many different languages, some of which I read and most of which I don't. I do know writers of Hindi, Urdu and Bengali. I don't know writers in twenty different language. I can't say any of them has been an influence on my writings simply because I did not read as many of them as I did of Western literature. But of Indian writers there are certainly many I admire very much. (Costa 3)

Throughout her novels, children's books, and short stories, Anita Desai focuses on personal struggles and problems of contemporary life that her Indian characters must cope with. She has presented in her novels the predicament of sensitive women figures. Her novels are an expression of the Psychic condition of an Indian Woman. Most of Anita Desai's works engage in the complexities of modern Indian culture from a feminine perspective while highlighting the female Indian predicament of maintaining self-identity as an individual woman.

Anita Desai is a prolific writer of economical; precisely rendered prose. Salman Rushdie describes that Anita is a deceptively quiet writer. Anita Desai, a prominent and upcoming Indian English writer, has written a number of novels such as: *Cry, the Peacock* (1963), *Voices 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) was the first of Desai's novels to be shortlisted for Britain's Booker Prize, joined in 1984 by *In Custody*, *Journey to Ithaca* (1995), in 1999 by *Fasting, Feasting, Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988), a Hadassah Prize Winner, and *The Zigzag Way* (2004). Anita Desai's prizes extend to the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize for her book, *The Village by the Sea* in 1982.

Anita Desai began to publish stories in the late 1950s and became one of India's prominent post-independence novelists. Her primary interest has been the mental and social struggles of middle class Indian



VIDHYAYANA

ISSN 2454-8596

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal

people. A collection of stories *Games at Twilight* published in 1978, contains a number of stories such as pineapple cake, sale, The Accompanist, A Devoted Son, The Farewell Party, Pigeons at Daybreak, Scholar Gypsy, Private Tuition by Mr. Bose and Surface Texture. Her fascination for the inner world of the mind, in preference to the outer world becomes apparent in the short stories.

Her story *Games at Twilight* set in contemporary Bombay and other cities, and other. Some other stories reflect the Kaleidoscope of urban life evoking the colour, sounds and white hot heat of the city. Her stories are warm, perceptive, humorous and touched with sadness. These stories are peopled with intensely individual characters the man spiritually transformed by the surface texture of a melon; the American wife who, homesick for the verdant farmlands of Vermont, turns to the hippies in the Indian hills; the painter who lives in a slum, fills his canvasses with flowers, birds and landscapes that he has never seen.

Similarly, conviction of an artist pervades the whole story in *The Accompanist*. *A Devoted Son* is an ironic story about perception: how good things that you wish for have a dark underside. It also shows how modern life has changed India. Anita Desai has written a few books for the children. *The Peacock Garden* (1974), *Cat on a House Boat* (1976) and *The Village by the Sea* (1982). Professor, the Head of writing and Humanistic Studies, Alan Lightman said:

Her novels are distinguished by her focus on the inner life of her characters and her concern with people previously marginalized in Indian fiction, primarily women, children and the elderly. (201)

Her novels *In Custody* and *Baumgartner's Bombay* exemplify her liberal ideas and interest in the outsider. Her novel *Fasting, Feasting* was the third of her works shortlisted for the Booker Prize. *Clear Light of Day* is her most autobiographical novel. Her characters have often developed escapist's ways to concern with their world outside comfortable living or everyday boring lives. She has been nominated thrice for the prestigious Booker Prize. Her novel *Baumgartner's Bombay* earned her the Harold Ribalow Prize.



VIDHYAYANA

ISSN 2454-8596

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal

Conclusion:

Anita Desai is a very sensitive novelist. She associates more with the inner world of the characters. Philosophy is a great fascination for the heroines of Anita Desai. It is this philosophy, interpretation of sentiments that regulate the pattern, they follow. In moments of difficulty, she recites passages from the Bhagavad Gita. Anita Desai is the representative of the present trend in Indian English novel. Anita Desai's works occupy a unique place in Indian fiction in English for their richness, intensity of emotion and sophistication. Coming years may show some new aspects of her flowering personality.

References:

Arnold, Matthew, 'On the Modern Element in Literature', Inaugural Lecture delivered in University of Oxford, 14 November 1857, Print.

Costa, Magda, Interview with Anita Desai, Barcelona, 30, January, 2001, Print.

Dalmia, Yashodhara, Interview with Anita Desai, The Times of India, 29, April, 1979. Print.

Das, B.K., ed., *Comparative Literature*, New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2000. Print.

<http://in.news.yahoo.com.040903/43/2funn.html>.

Naik, M. K. *Dimensions of Indian English Literature*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1985. Print.

Noted Novelist Joins Writing Faculty, September, 29, 1993, June, Issue of MIT Tech Talk, Volume 38, number-8 ([Http:// web.mit.edu.newsoffice/1993/novelists-0929.html](http://web.mit.edu.newsoffice/1993/novelists-0929.html).)

Prawer, S.S. *Comparative Literary Studies: An Introduction*. London: Duckworth, 1973. Print.

Shakespeare, William. *The Plays of William Shakespeare*. London: C. Bathurst, 1773. Print.

Shrivastava, R.K. *Anita Desai at work: An Interview Perspectives on Anita Desai*, Ghaziabad: Vimal Prakashan, 1984. Print.

Srivastava, R.K., ed., *Introduction, Perspectives on Anita Desai*, Ghaziabad: Vimal Prakashan, 1984. Print.