

THEMES IN ANITA DESAI'S MAJOR NOVELS

S. Suganya

Assistant Professor of English,
Arasu college of Arts and Science for Women,
Karur

Abstract

Anita Desai is considered to be one of the most distinguished novelists in Indian English literature. She is different from other contemporary women writers in Indian writing in English in terms of her perception and of her unique style. Anita Desai has emerged as a very serious, skilled and promising novelist in India. As an uncrowned queen by the inner-emotional world, she dexterously transcribes the subconscious, the phantasmagoria of her highly sensitive protagonists. Desai has tried to present her themes originally with appropriate adjustment and adaptations in spheres of style and point of view. Desai is no doubt a great artist with a remarkable and astounding technical efficacy. Her technique enriches the novel by lifting it above the mere narration of a story or depiction of a character and provides it the very life, blood and the soul. She is interested in exploring life and illuminating the depth of visible world.

Most of her plots deal with her personal experience of life. She never patronized a single theme or message. She believed in citing the truth as it is. Her sensitive portrayal of the inner feelings of her female characters is excellent. Many of Anita Desai's novels explore tensions between family members and the alienation of middle-class women. In her books, Anita has managed to deal with topics ranging from anti-Semitism to western quintessential ideologies of India and the death of Indian traditions and customs. Desai's works deal with contemporary Indian life, culture clashes between the East and the West, generational differences, and practical and emotional exile.

Keywords: Alienation, anti-Semitism, western quintessential ideologies, Emotional exile.

Introduction

Themes in fiction include almost everything to make the novel. The novelist uses for narrating technique with the help of speaking, monologue, and symbols. The aspects of theme and technique in Anita Desai's novels are not isolated elements. They are inter-related with style, structure and texture. In order to convey her theme, the novelist uses character, situation, dialogues, and other elements to the plot. Language is the main element of her narrative style. In

Desai's novels have adopted different narrative strategies in keeping with the demands of her themes.

Cry, the Peacock

Her first Novel *Cry, the Peacock* (1963) is a poetic novel with imagery. Her descriptions are poetic. The theme of the novel which may be described as an incompatible marriage with the focus on the heroine's psychic. It is a psychological novel, The narrative is not chronological order, probing the workings of Maya's psyche. There is a constant movement between the past and the present in the mind of Maya. Maya is an extremely sensitive married girl. After her mother's death, she lives alone with her father. She gets all attention from his father because her brother has gone to America. She expects same attention from her husband too. Both her father and her husband are lawyer. Being busy man, he does not fulfill her demands. So often he blames her father. Maya is romantic, lovable and caring wife to Gautama but Gautama is not such a romantic person. She wants his love but he does not understand her feelings. She is left to solitude. She is alone at home and silence of the house prey her. She visits her friends house and spent time with them. When the visit of Gautama's mother and sister give her busy life in their company. When they are gone, she finds herself alone with nightmares. Maya is always disturbed by prophecy. Listen to the cry of peacock in rainy season, she realizes that she cannot sleep in peace. She sees the vision of rats, lizards and snakes creeping over her. These creatures may be Gautama, who threaten her. she decides to kill him.

In this novel she uses the animal imagery which says about the state of mind. Imagery of the peacock which is the central symbol of the novel as suggested by the title. Cry, the Peacock is a psychological study of the hypersensitive, childless, young protagonist Maya who, haunted by a childhood prophecy of disaster, kills her detached husband. Finally, she becomes completely mad and commits suicide. Desai describes the loneliness of Maya and described about her mental, psychological state and aimlessness of life.

Fire on the Mountain

Desai's next novel *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) is a novel in which she makes use of symbolism. She uses the flash back technique to narrate the story. This novel deals an extra marital affairs disturb the relationship between Nanda Kaul and her husband The novel goes around the character of Nanda Kaul. Nanda Kaul who lives in the world of fantasy. Her husband does not love his wife. He considers her as a decorative things and instrument to do the household works. Even though she feels comfort and social status, she feels loneliness and alienated. Her commitment is mere discharge the duties. There is no emotions at all. In Her life, these needs are thwarted by her husband's affair with his colleague Miss. David, which makes meaningless of her existence. Feeling of distrust of humanity reveals when she learns that her friend Ila Das has brutally raped and murdered. Her husband life long affair with Miss.David makes Nanda and her children are alienated. It makes her distrust all affairs and attachment. She keeps herself distance from the family members who disappoints her in many ways. She wants to away from all humans and her past which disturbs her. Even though she does her dutifully, she alienates herself. Here Desai employs the technique of presenting two contrasting characters together so that each is defined in terms of the other. This is the only novel of Anita Desai in which nature plays such a vital role and deals with isolation as well as agony of deserted life of an old widow.

Fasting, Feasting

Desai's latest novel *Fasting, Feasting* (1999) examines family life in two contrasting cultures, and two different countries -Indian and American. Appropriately the novel is divided into two parts. The main themes of this novels are family, cultural, traditional, sexism and patriarchy. In this novel Desai uses quotes from the Bible, Hindu devotional songs, American phrases. The women are not supposed to raise their voice. There is no authentic voice in their home or society. The family has great importance but extend family has impact the character's lives. The narrator through flashback explores Uma's quest to find identity. Her failures start from schoolings and follow in marriage. Uma's failures at both leave her with no choice. Her younger brother Arun goes to America for his higher education. Her younger sister Aruna marries rich man in Bombay. Uma remains with her parents' home where she remains as servant. She longs for her freedom and independence.

Conclusion

Anita Desai in her different novels shows that she uses different fictional techniques according to the demands of the story. From the point of view of technique what is important is not innovation or novelty but how effective the technique is in conveying the meaning and narrating the story effectively. In her style, Anita Desai is very much occupied with the skill of communication, irrespective of 'the nature of experience', embodied in her novels. Anita Desai's penchant for sound of words persists in all her novels.