

The Notion of Seeking Refuge in Anita Desai's Literary Works

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Abstract: Anita Desai is largely regarded as one of the more observant, trustworthy, and human-psychology-savvy writers of Indian English books working today. The main topics in the writings of Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and Desai are interpersonal relationships and human nature. In addition to being escape artists, the protagonists in her works lead interior lives that are fraught with alienation, sadness, frustration, and anxiety. Even though Anita Desai's characters are unsophisticated, they often resort to escape retreat and rejection of reality in order to survive. Her book's heroes struggle with realizing how limited human nature is as well as pursuing self-actualization. The author, Anita Desai, say.

Keywords: Alienation, Escapism, Isolation, Imagination.

I. INTRODUCTION

Anita Desai is a well-known Indian author. She received three nominations for the Booker Prize. She is a writer from another class among Indians. She draws attention to the difficulties of residing in modern Indian towns. She has written many short stories and eight books over her writing career. Her novels have strong female protagonists. Her female heroes defy expectations and are fiercely independent. Her female heroines struggle to accept reality as it is because they are so sensitive. The feminist movement does not have Anita Desai's support. She makes it very obvious that she is focused on that one person male or female. It takes time and space to think, write, and engage in other mental pursuits. Her first book, Cry, the Peacock, published in 1963, signaled the start of a new trend in psychological realism. Anita Desai, like Kamala Markandaya, concentrates on interpersonal connections in her works. Her primary focus is on the characters she writes, most of whom are female leads. The artwork of Anita Desai depicts the agony of living in a patriarchal environment. In the end, the protagonist's heroic efforts both elevate herself and the cause of liberty in her tale.

Biography of Anita Desai

German-born Anita Desai was born in 1937 to Bengali and German parents in Mussoorie, a hill resort north of Delhi. During India's transition from colonial rule to independence, she was nurtured in the province of Old Delhi. She was bilingual and multireligious, speaking German at home, English at school, and Urdu, which is the language that practically everyone in her area spoke. She followed both Hinduism and Islam (Prasad, 2011). From a young age, she was able to distinguish the disparities in social class, hometown, and national ties between her family and the locals. Even though her mother cooked and appeared Indian, she didn't feel the same way, especially in her classroom. Her father died abruptly in 1955, and the family relocated to Calcutta. Remarkably, for someone who regularly writes about the benefits of escape, Anita Desai seldom goes back to directly address the issues raised in her works. Anita Desai is one Indian author who has pushed back against the clichés of modern Indian culture and succeeded in achieving a more complex and genuine perspective. The loneliness and isolation her protagonists face after their marriages fail and they establish nuclear families is a recurrent theme in her books. In "Extensive Growth of Nuclear Family in Anita Desai's Fiction," the author examines the development of families in her works and places the characters and stories within the social and cultural background of Indian households.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Virender Kumar Gill (2012)

Anita Desai is without a doubt one of the most significant writers in modern India. An in-depth examination of Anita Desai's publications demonstrates that the study of the human mind is her primary field of interest. She is in favor of showing the inner reality of a character. Anita Desai is a singular talent in the realm of literature, unlike other Indian women novelists. Desai, who was born to a Bengali father and a German mother, bravely tackles upper-middle-class roots in her writing, whilst Nayan Tara Sehgal and Kamal Markandya focus more on the characters' external political and social environments. Writing for her is all about "plugging into the depths of my characters' minds," as she puts it".

Erum Altaf (2018)

When Indian women began to challenge patriarchy, there was a literary revolution in that country. Something changed when women's voices started to compete with men's. Our study is on the feminist message present in two of Anita Desai's best-selling books, *Where Shall We Go This Summer* and *Cry, the Peacock*. Our goal is to conduct a critical analysis of the ways in which Indian women writers who write in English have contributed to the understanding of women's issues since the end of the modern era. They have started a revolution inside themselves or fiercely condemned gender-based discriminatory standards. Anita Desai is one of the most well-known Indian authors of English-language literature. Her books *Cry, the Peacock*, and *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* center on two strong, self-reliant female heroines who are sometimes depicted as femme fatales: Sita and Maya. The focus of this research is to use Desai's writings as an example of postmodern feminism.

Dr. Hitendra B. Dhote (2020)

A person's heart and mind are just as much a part of who they are as their body. These characteristics make up the core of his character. He has fought to survive his entire life on Earth. His internal vulnerabilities, the ones that control his thoughts and actions, are an equally powerful enemy in this fight for survival as those that are external to his body. There are stories of individuals who let their own failings bring them down in the mythology and history of every major religion. There are many examples of people overcoming significant obstacles by using their inner strength and determination. Given this, Anita Nair's 2000 debut book, *"The Better Man,"* focuses on the unique characteristics and problems that the state of Kerala faces.

C. Tina Joshly (2021)

One social idea that appears in contemporary writing is the diaspora. Diaspora literature explores the perspective of an outsider. It looks at the difficulties that immigrants face both at home and overseas. A wide range of topics are covered in diasporic literature, such as diversity, the dilemma of culture, the search for identity, and the universal qualities of human existence. Anita Desai was the subject of this study. Anita Desai is one of the most well-known modern Indian woman writers of English-language literature. Critics believe that Anita Desai's 1980 book *Clear Light of Day* is her best effort to date. She claims the narrative is autobiographical because it is set in the same neighborhood in which she grew up. Out of the three novels that Desai has published so far, this was the first to be longlisted for the Man Booker Prize. Making the connection between the division of India and Pakistan and the reunion of two sisters in New Delhi is highly relevant and timely. This article examines the ways in which themes from Diasporic literature are used in Anita Desai's book *Clear Light of Day*.

Seema Maheshwari et.al (2021)

Renowned for her work in Indian English literature today, Anita Desai is a writer of novels as well as short stories. Author Anita Desai writes about women's rights and equality. She is fully aware of her responsibilities to her people. Even though she belongs to the larger Indian culture, her speech patterns and vocal inflections are distinct. The diaries of Anita Desai provide a window into the minds of her female characters. By delving further into the characters' academic pursuits, she reveals more about the inner lives of the feminine characters. The fem psychology of the Anita Desai workshop was described in this experimental paper. *Cry the Peacock*, *Voices in the City*, *Fire on the Mountain*, and *Fasting, Feasting*, four of Anita Desai's best-known books, are replete with exquisite portrayals of womanly psychology and womanly settings.

III. ESCAPISM IN ANITA DESAI'S FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN

The purpose of my writing is to recognize, highlight, and convey the significance of items. I have to seize that incomplete, seemingly meaningless mass of reality that is all around me and try to uncover its significance by going below the surface, exploring the depths, and then shining light on those depths until they reflect the outside world in a way that is more lucid, brighter, and understandable.

Rather than conforming to conventional realism, Anita Desai focuses on the psychological and emotional collapse of her characters. Through her writing, she attempts to convey the intricacies and intricacy of human nature and uniqueness. Her constant preoccupation with irritation, her uncertainty about her identity, loneliness, dread, and despair are all expressed in her works. Her writings usually deal with psychoneurosis, social isolation, and insecurity. For most people, life in the real world is challenging, unpleasant, and complicated. Neurosis patients often experience persistent anxiety. Abraham Sperling claims that anxiety is a sign of suppressed annoyance and a signal of suppressed emotional excitement. Occasionally, the individual suffering from this kind of anxiety will repress memories of a cause, a barrier, or the want to defend or flee. One or more of these annoying features terrify the person, and they suppress the problem as a whole.

Fire on the Mountain, Anita Desai's fifth novel, examines loneliness, especially the kind of loneliness that drives one to turn to fiction for solace. Nanda Kaul, our heroine, understands the value of reading, particularly fantasy and fairy stories. However, the issue appears when reality gives way to imagination. The psychological problems of the main character Nanda Kaul, who lets his imagination run wild to the point where reality has to take over, are examined throughout the book. Anita Desai's ability to explore the depths of the feminine mind is greatly enhanced by her choice of eccentric characters.

After years of unhappiness, Nanda Kaul finally finds contentment in her solitude in Carignano. It was her interactions with other people that were causing her anguish and suffering. It's evident early on in the story that she no longer thinks a true relationship—marital or parental—is feasible. She has had a lot of individuals cheat and disappoint her throughout her life. She reflects on her past as the wife of the vice chancellor and mother of a sizable brood of children after moving to the isolated village of Carignano. "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," she says.

Despite her relative isolation, Carignano's sense of futility and disillusionment does not go away. She isn't content even when she is by herself, thus she lacks great ideas for things to do with her time. She's not interested in talking to anyone. Just the postman's appearance annoys her, and she always hopes he won't stop in Carignano. She does this because she thinks she has finally escaped the world below the mountain, with all of its requirements, duties, and annoying Ness. "Nanda Kaul saw the postman slowly winding his way along the upper Mall and she paused under the pine trees to take in their scented sibilance and listen to the cicadas fiddling invisibly under the mesh of pine needles," the narrative begins, discussing the themes of abandonment and loneliness. She didn't want any letters, didn't want him to stop in Cignano, and didn't go out looking for him.

During her self-imposed exile, Raka, Nanda Kaul's great-grandchild, turns against her. Despite their differences in age and life experiences, Nanda Kaul and Raka can still communicate with one another. According to Usha Pathania. The conversation between Nanda Kaul and Raka shows that Nanda's need for acceptance of herself surpasses her wish to enjoy her privacy and quiet desolation free from outside influence. She inadvertently gives Raka permission to ruin her quiet dejection.

The extent to which Raka disregarded Nanda astonished her. Raka desired only to be by herself. She desired to live in secrecy amidst Kasauli's craggy peaks and tall trees. Her natural interest in other people and their activities had faded. Raka said nothing when Nanda broke the horrible news that she had been placed in a nursing home in Geneva. She had, after all, always been affected by her mother's illness. This was not at all surprising. Her father was too busy to be concerned about Raka. She has since lost the ability to trust people and the joy that comes from being among them as a result of her horrific childhood experiences. Raka's emotional detachment is exacerbated by her lack of emotional support. She becomes withdrawn from social interactions and begins to find strange beauty in the isolated and forlorn parts of the natural world.

Even though Nanda Kaul has cut herself off from her responsibilities and relationships, she is still unhappy with who she is. The only quiet she's found outside of the mental, emotional, and social war is this fake calm, really. She is unable to comprehend that ignoring the past won't make it go away. Although most people are proud of their past accomplishments, Nanda Kaul really finds this to be frustrating. She is free to live her life as she pleases now that her hubby has passed away.

When it was over, she was ecstatic. In the plains, she had been a good lad to leave it all behind. Similar to a fantastic, thick, challenging book that she had already read and didn't have to read again.

Nanda is attempting to escape her past by traveling to Carignano. Nevertheless, the agonizing reality of her situation continues to firmly hold her thoughts and feelings, making a physical escape unfeasible. Not even in her isolation cell at Carignano, can she escape the notion of it, regardless of how near death she actually was. She has therefore been able to physically and emotionally escape her taxing existence of duties and responsibilities, annoyances and irritations, and a certain amount of sorrow. Her past, present, or future are all out of her control. She can't help but feel the emotions her past brings up; it keeps bubbling to the front of her consciousness.

Raka is here, but Nanda Kaul hasn't altered his mind. She sees her as an intruder and an unexpected guest. She is willing to disguise herself as a pine tree if required because she is so determined to keep her identity a secret. She feels compelled to employ this method due to her lack of faith in human relationships. She finds Nanda so unaffected that she can barely breathe when she sees him. Ruka still feels like a caged bird, a wild animal that has been tamed and made to feel comfortable, despite the fact that they live together. People who detest and wish to avoid one other's company coexist in an odd way. Though her reasons are different, the youthful Raka needs isolation just as much as the elderly woman does. However, Nanda Kaul's arrival in Carignano has left her in a situation from which she is unable to escape. Anita Desai captures their seclusion in the following lines: "If Nanda Kaul was a recluse by nature, by instinct, then her great-granddaughter was a recluse out of vengeance for a long life of duty and obligation."

Raka withdrew and kept quiet as a result of her grandmother's harsh excitement and her mother's mental breakdown. Her fascination is in the ruined, broken, and barren landscape of the hilltop with the burned-out house. Having grown up in a large city, she has witnessed horrific images of people acting in supposedly civilized ways all around the world. Her choice to leave her past and present behind keeps her distinctive. She obviously doesn't like being around children. There's an obvious chemistry between her and Carignano. But as time passes, it becomes evident that Raka is neither naturally introverted nor socially awkward. The domestic abuse she and her family suffered led directly to her estrangement from them and from other children. Her severe nervousness prevented her from socializing with other people.

Anita Desai did a good job of expressing the progressive change in viewpoint. First of all, Nanda hates the thought of even organizing Raka's meal. "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 had to," she says, avoiding the taxi stand. When Raka finally arrives, she doesn't appear to be overjoyed to see her great-granddaughter. The sound of breaking bones could be heard. The moment they realized how angular, bony, and inhospitable the other was, they parted ways.

Nanda Kaul hates interacting with people since her personality is fragmented. Disengagement and overinvolvement are two conflicting forces that undermine her sense of wholeness and connection. Her retreat into seclusion is not the solution to her internal conflict. Nanda has been plagued by an unreasonable sense of aggressiveness because her life has been nothing but disappointments and frustrations. She isolates herself in an attempt to stop thinking about her past, but the memories never go away. She doesn't tell anyone about her wishes or fears; she keeps things to herself. Her internal conflict won't stop till she passes away.

As we've already established, Nanda Kaul creates a pleasant fantasy world to counterbalance the terrible realities of reality. Raka realized the importance of tales and myths in her life after relocating to Carignano.

Nanda can only hope to overcome Raka's indifference by reducing his own level of cognitive maturity to that of a child. Given this, it's commendable that she attempts to write a fictional story that revolves around her incredibly contented upbringing and her loving, adventurous father. She draws Raka in by sharing tales from her own childhood. She talks about her father and how he always saw to it that the children's emotional needs were met. "He loved to go riding with the children," she said to Raka. He also set up a badminton court for the kids, and we would all play these sports on the grass together, sometimes even by moonlight. We could have everything we wanted from him at all.

The way in which the fantasy is abused in "Fire on the Mountain" has nothing to do with the protagonist's quest for self-awareness. Two separate types of fantasy vocabulary run parallel to one other. There are the ones that Nanda Kaul deliberately weaves as Raka becomes older in order to catch her eye, and there are the ones that both Ram Lal and Raka find appealing. In addition, Raka imagines a third, fanciful world that is fragmented and foreign to her, much like the reality of her parents. Ram Lal's identity and way of life are greatly influenced by his religion. Raka accepts its validity and consents to use it. She finds a sight very different from what she had anticipated when she suddenly stops by the club one night: instead of seeing women "dressed as queens and men as princes," she sees a swarm of "mad men and rioters" chasing each other and appearing like monsters. "Her father was coming home from a party somewhere behind them, behind everything. He was stumbling and crashing through the night curtains, his mount opening to release a flood of foul stench, and he was abusing her mother with hammers and fists, harsh, filthy abuse that made Raka cower under the bedclothes and wet the mattress in fear."

Even though the novel's ending is complex and has multiple meanings, it all happens in just four pages: Raka starts a fire, Nanda dies, confesses, and Ila is horribly murdered. The rape shocks the readers so much because the author gives such a comprehensive picture of Ila's ugly physique. It is unclear that Preet Singh's actions were motivated only by his satisfaction at having eliminated a potential obstacle to his daughter's marriage; it is possible that he also took pleasure in seeing Ila dragged low as payback. Ila goes away feeling so crushed and regretful because of how unfortunate the timing of her graphic death announcement was. How Raka felt about Nanda's unreachable state is not made clear. The book closes like this: "Black smoke spiraled up over the mountain as flames flared and crackled around the dry wood and through the dry grass down in the ravine."

The three sections that make up the book's structure each concentrate on a distinct aspect of solitude. The first addresses romanticized seclusion, the second, combative seclusion, and the third, loneliness brought on by outside circumstances. Throughout the story, Nanda alternates between several mental images of herself and those around her. She refers to the postal carrier as an ox or donkey, Raka as a mosquito, moth, rabbit, mouse, cricket, or parrot, and Ila as an owl or spider, displaying her perverted worldview. It's admirable that *Fire on the Mountain* tries to delve into different realms of imagination. Nanda, Ila, and Raka are three equally captivating escape stories. Every one of them makes us confront the truth once more.

With her rich characterizations, Anita Desai hopes to evoke strong feelings in her readers. She has included a respect for logic, a humane sensibility, and a knowledge of society challenges into her writing. The writers, who are female, are addressing the important roles and skills of women who no longer have access to education and information and who do not value their own distinct identities. She no longer has to fulfill her duty to all women because of her publications. Fiction written by Mrs. Desai is a release of psychic and emotional experiences. It is not an escape mechanism, but a way of expressing life. "Literature cannot be torn away from the fabric of life as if it were decoration embroidery upon it," she has stated quite clearly in an essay (Desai, P. 27).

Suffering from prenatal neurosis, Sita turned to flight as a coping mechanism. She breaks off contact with her family and makes her way to Manori Island.

IV. 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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