

CONCLUSION and SUMMING UP

In ten minutes how can I sum up
This life, this voyage on uncharted
Sea, this flight over radarless ports
This endless worship at plundered shrines
This love transformed into mere pain and
This emptiness that hangs from brackets
Of withered arms, the strangers who have
Come to wipe my tears, the oyster's ache
For the pearl it has lost, the scent of talc on
Baby-skin tended three decades ago
Still lingering on. Change the world with
Rhetoric? Never; cynicism
Takes the driver's seat for time perhaps
Personified as stillness, all its
Fury gelled, tanned. Life spreads its moulting
Wings to sicken me but do not judge
Me harshly, I am your kith and kin
I gathered your laments into a song.

(Kamala Das: *Summing Up*)

So far we have discussed the themes of alienation and quest, self and the other, ignorance and knowledge, past and ancestry of the characters woven into the very fabric of the novels of Anita Desai. As her strength lies in her ability to speak in many voices, she exposes her sensibility to the diverse facets of life. Her novels become the portrayals of searching souls, humanized by pain and turbulence. In the perspective of her novel, search is related to survival and its recognition is the condition for the defence of individual awareness and realization.

An overall critical perspective on Desai explores certain basic notions of literature and literary reading. We can read her works in varied ways in order to get a variety of things. An empirical reading of a work, as to agree with Jeremy Hawthorn, "can generate a range of different reading experiences, over time, between cultures and groups, (or within them) and even for the same individual, leads necessarily to the question of the status and authority of these different reading experiences" (1994, 240). Although it seems difficult to read her novels from every literary perspective, yet we can briefly explore the various facets of the writings of Anita Desai.

The themes of alienation, quest and survival has brought about great revolution in the spiritual

evolution of her characters. Her novels portray man as a stranger in an indifferent, if not actually hostile world. Yet the very sense of alienation paves the way for his quest for identity, consequently leading to realization of the self. It also helps him to recognize his self as different entity from the rest of the world. In this way Desai uses the idea of alienation in two senses - alienation as a deterioration of the self and alienation as a way to a realization of the self. Alienation also makes room for self-dignity and the separate identity of individual. It can be understood as a process of bringing man into a unity within himself. Such alienation can be characterized as self-differentiation and self-identification of the individual.

Anita Desai shows her characters fighting against the alienating conditions of their life. Some of them are caught up in the dilemma whether to create a mythic world or to accept the burdens of reality. Creating an isolated and mythic world remote from the unpleasant realities of life is not a mere escapist indulgence. Situations arise in human life when one likes to transcend reality. Such attempt of transcending reality is mighty psychic effort which proves how chained and tied we are and how desperately we long for freedom from the mundane. Her novels point towards infinite possibilities and the dynamic growth of humanity through the independent act of choice. Their great

struggles to transcend time and space, and the chains of confined life can be considered symbolical of human efforts in transcending the shackles of tradition and to plunge into new unexplored regions of experience.

Most of her characters try to give meaning to their existence through communication and involvement with others. When some of them finally recognize the cavity of their long cherished myth or fantasy, they come to a state of realization. Desai seriously considers the enduring human condition against human destiny through her characters that are essentially existential in nature. They exercise their free will trying to define themselves by their actions, both conscious and unconscious. Although the freedom of choice does not offer them much hope, yet their exercise of freedom makes them appear courageous and meaningful, leading to immortality. They grow and develop through their acts of individual choices. The thematic development of their mental experience can be traced through the three stages of self-delusion, fragmentation and finally visionary intuition. They journey from ignorance to knowledge, from alienation to quest and finally to survival. The sense of mutability and their capacity to know and realize make them capable of transcending the torments of alienation.

Characterization is a significant feature of Anita Desai. She chooses to analyse exceptional characters in

exceptional circumstances. According to herself her aim is 'to express the truth or the final essence of subjective life and consciousness' (Kumar 84). Her characters display significant vigour and variety. They may be considered as higher human species, gifted with deeper emotional and artistic powers. They are conscious of their individuality and refuse to conform to the mundane reality of life. Mostly rooted in some infinite experience, they suffer from a kind of obsession. Their awareness or sensitivity in both physical and mental faculty leads them to several dilemmas. They attempt to know themselves and in the process undergo revolution leading to self-realization.

Anita Desai adds depth to her works by introducing deep and subtle themes. Most of her characters are shown as working for communication and perfect wisdom. She presents her important characters as realizing the worth of communication and communion in life, the principle of getting involved and working for higher goals. As a conscious artist, she works with care and caution building her plots and people so as to produce the result she has in her mind. She also attempts to bring into play the subconscious and unconscious of her characters. We can trace a string of thought working in her writings, the most abiding point of her mind and art being a process of growth, which adds to the philosophical depth and psychological insight to her novels.

The problem of existence is faced and discussed but not solved. Even after the quest and realization existence still remains inexplicable and indifferent. But her characters are shown as achieving true knowledge and also courage to survive on the higher plane of understanding. Desai presents them as recognizing the true nature of their existence after a long ordeal of search and research. They also realize that nature is not actually hostile though it appears to be irrational and indifferent. Nature and man have parallels, if not unity between them. Once the individual realizes the true nature of the universe as indifferent and inanimate, he can develop the right methods of dealing with it. It is futile to aspire something from an inanimate object. Desai seeks to break down the illusion that nature is a nursing mother or a benevolent guide. She does not consider it as being step-motherly either. Nature has not been considered friendly or hostile, but as an object. Since nature plays quite insignificant role in individual growth, the sole responsibility comes upon the individual. Desai not for a single moment considers nature as responsible for human becoming.

Desai also hints at her cosmopolitan view through her character portrayals. In her view, an enlightened mind may become the meeting-point of east and west. Through her mother she inherits European tradition

characterized by cosmopolitanism. The inheritance from father's side may be explained on the level of broad nationalistic and philosophical concern coupled with altruistic motives. She disallows culture and race in its extreme force. Her characters opt for interracial or intercultural coexistence in order to achieve their survival. The search for cosmic culture as a remedy for cultural alienation is often seen in their survival. Since they maintain a resilience of spirit and great dreaming capacity they consequently come to know that concepts of western dominance or eastern supremacy are false. It is the superiority of the self or primacy of the spirit that leads to human dignity and spiritual survival. They also recognize their liability to create justice, order and unity which they have sought in vain in social orders. Such realization creates an effort to create their own cherished values and order on the path of their survival.

Anita Desai brings a new dimension to Indian English fiction. Instead of delineating her characters in terms of environment or social milieu, she creates them as individuals, solely responsible for their being and becoming. Instead of merely telling a story, she seems more interested in character analysing, where the plots play secondary role. The environment too is presented as important only in so far as it helps the readers in understanding the characters. Her plots are

sketchy and thin, yet these are sufficient in conveying her idea of survival.

Desai uses the technique of interior monologue in most of her novels yet the universal observer technique is still predominant. The device of interior monologue or loud thinking is frequently used to convey the mental states of the characters. In *Cry the Peacock*, the story is narrated in the mixed technique of omniscient third-person narrator and also the first-person narrative. In *Voices in the City*, third person universal technique is employed except in Monisha's account of her own dilemma in documentary diary technique. The stream of consciousness technique is used to supplement plot, characterization and also the style. She exploits memory flash device in order to transcend the past, present and also the future. *Baumgartner's Bombay* is written in stream of consciousness technique. In *Journey to Ithaca*, both the techniques of omniscient third-person narrative and memory device are employed. Her latest novel, *Fasting, Feasting* is exclusively written in third-person narrative, yet the stream of consciousness technique is frequently touched upon. The employment of interior monologue, the extreme inwardness in characterization, refutation of phenomenal reality and justification of sensible and delicate feelings, and her attempts at psychoanalytical studies of the principal characters are some of the main features of her fiction writing.

She uses sensitive, highly responsive, rich and dynamic language in her novels. It also displays high-strung lyricism and poetry. Her vocabulary is often elevated and demonstrative of her capabilities.

Even in the midst of success and appraisal, her art is not without limitation. Most of her characters hail from the upper middle class of Indian society, whose problems are not social or economical, but psychological or spiritual. The ordinary problems of day-to-day life are rarely touched upon. Her sole interest becomes exploring the workings of the minds of the middle class people, who have nothing to worry about for a four square meal. Her concern of revealing the inner working of consciousness not always interests the reader. Her vision is confined to the life of cities, where external details are few and far between. Since her range of vision is constricted to the serious life spectacle, humour and comedy are yet far from her fiction world. Therefore, it is erroneous to take Anita Desai as a finished writer. She is not complete but only sailing through the core of her literary career with an immense possibility of a mighty advance. Despite such limitations, her works still evoke sustaining thoughts vital for humanity.