

Anita Desai: Reading the Other Way

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Anita Desai's distinct narrative technique is explicit in all her novels. Her deviation from the previously accepted norms of novel writing in English in India and experimentation with the non-traditional themes, form, structure and language and at the same time, her effort of retaining the original flavor of traditional techniques of narration and "point of view" of novel writing in English makes her a pre-eminent figure among all Indian novelists writing in English. Anita Desai's caliber of narration lies in the exploration of the interior world of her characters. In this regard, M. Charkranarayan, quoting Ralph Freedman, says:

At the turn of century it was realized by many writers, prominent among whom are Andre Gide, Conrad, Herman Hesse, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Henry James that the traditional technique of novel writing, such as "point of view and narrative plot can be utilized not only to produce a likely world of action but to find formal analogues for a private world". (qtd. in Chakranarayan 82)

Undoubtedly, Anita Desai's power of analyzing the interior or the private world makes her modern. To Irwing Howe, modernity in fiction refers to "sensibility and style" (12) and it can be analyzed in terms of "critical placement and judgment" (13). Meena Belliappa's evaluative comment on the modern narrative technique that Anita Desai uses in her fiction deserves our attention:

The focus of interest lies in the portrayal of states of mind rather than holding up the mirror to society. The fiction tends to be structured vertically. The effort is to capture the atmosphere of the mind and directly involve the reader in the flow of a particular consciousness. A marked learning towards such introversion is seen in Anita Desai's writing. (52)

Anita Desai's main concern, as pointed by Meena Belliappa, is to portray the internal property of the mind of her characters. The thematic orientation of her novels is organic. Her novels are not mere narrations of stories but they are the psychoanalyses of the minds of the characters. She admits:

I think the purpose of my writing is to discover — for myself — and then describe and convey the truth ... the Dutch Old masters who could paint a loaf of bread so incomparably were not merely painting the meaning of that loaf, its significance to man, its quality, even its flavor. My writing is an effort to discover, underline and convey the significance of things. (qtd. in Inamdar 262-63)

And this is perhaps the reason why Anita Desai prefers the word "pattern" to "plot".

Anita Desai's debut novel, *Cry, the Peacock* (1963) [hereafter *CP*], is psychological in nature. The author has used "stream of consciousness" technique, "a point of view within character's consciousness, manifesting his or her feelings and evaluations of the events and characters of the story" (Chakranarayan 85). The novel, at a point of least supposition, begins with the death of a pet, Toto, and ends with the death of Gautama. The images concerning the death and burial of the pet contribute to the development of the theme of the novel. The death of the pet and an astrologer's prediction of the death of one of them (Gautama or Maya) move Maya, the protagonist, deeply. Her act of associating herself with peacocks and her obsessions with the death issues lead her to frustration and dejection in her life. The consequent incidents in the form of psychological movements reveal the complex inherent qualities of the protagonist's mind. The soliloquies and the hallucinations of Maya and her idealist approach and Gautama's practical approach in their conversation help the audience in analyzing her innermost self. The novel ends at a point where the reader has a complete understanding of the way the two, Maya and Gautama, differ in their approaches to life. Hence, the readers are not shocked by whatever happens at the end of the novel.

The novel is structured in the tripartite division. With a separate identity in the first and the last part of the novel, the implied author becomes one with the protagonist, Maya, in the second part of the novel. Part I serves as a prologue and Part III is like an epilogue. It is Part II, which is narrated by the protagonist, Maya. The implied author has been successful in creating the background for presenting two opposite worlds of Maya and Gautama. It is the implied author who justifies actions taken by Maya and makes the readers feel sympathy for her.

The novel is written in the first person. The readers feel themselves to be one among the characters. In one of the interior monologues of the novel, where Maya and Gautama are involved in the debate on logic and faith, Maya seeks answers to some questions from the readers. Her way of questioning and giving answers to the questions at the same time directly involves the audience:

Where was safety, reassurance gone? Peace? Gautama? He was betraying me: having led me to calm water, he now left me to drown in a treacherous sea. The dark, the sound of drums—all closed in on me. ... and I began to perspire. (CP 104)

The mirror view or interior monologue plays an important part in the novel. It helps the audience in analyzing the inner-goings of the minds of characters. It also reflects the duality of a character: one, which is in public, and the other, which that character tries "to beguile to look like the time".

The tone of the novel is determined by the two separate voices of Maya and Gautama, though the beginning and the end of the novel are written in a third voice. Maya's voice is so strong that it takes over the voice of her husband. The following extract from the novel approves the triumphant call of Maya:

And then Gautama made a mistake – his last, decisive one. In talking, gesturing, he moved in front of me, thus coming between me and the worshipped moon, his figure an ugly, crooked grey shadow that transgressed its sorrowing chastity.

'Gautama!' I screamed in fury, and thrust out my arms towards him, out at him, into him and past him, saw him fall then, pass through an immensity of air, down to the very bottom. (CP 173)

Anita Desai, unlike other Indo-Anglian novelists, does not pay much heed to society and social forces. Her main concern is to explore the psyche of her characters and their relationship with the social values prevalent in their social milieu. In her novels, one finds the multiplicity of values. In *CP* Maya's attachment to life is quite conflicting to Gautama's detachment from life. This leads to ironic juxtaposition. To Gautama, she is what her father taught her to be. In a complaining tone, he says:

He is the one responsible for this — for making you believe that all that is important in the world is to possess, possess riches, comforts, posies, dollies, loyal retainers — all the luxuries of the fairy tales you were brought up on. Life is a fairy tale to you still. What have you learnt of the realities? The realities of common human existence, not love and romance, but living and dying and working, all that constitutes life for the ordinary man. (CP 98)

Values in the novel have also been put forward with the help of references to religion and worship. The sermons of Lord Krishna in the Gita serve the basic purpose of the discussion of values in the novel. Anita Desai has portrayed her character Maya as an inhabitant of the "Utopia". Maya, as her name suggests, lives in a world of illusion and fantasy. On the other hand, Gautama, her husband, if we can dare to associate his name with Gautam Buddha, loves to live in the real and actual world. He has a practical outlook on life.

Maya believes that pleasure is the most important thing in life, while Gautama denies the life of self-pleasure and sense gratification. Gautama believes in the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita whereas they are extremely unpleasant to Maya. The world of Maya is the dystopic one for Gautama. The moments of her childhood-life are the "happiest times" for Maya but Gautama calls those moments a crime — "A crime because it was a delusion" (CP 98). Gautama tries to make her understand:

You must decide, you must see for yourself and realize what are the important things in life, what are the true values. That is why I am quoting the *Gita* so profusely tonight. I know you know it, and wish you would recall those lines, understand their meaning now ... the necessity in each human being for a — vocation ‘He who, controlling the senses of the mind, follows without attachment the path of action with his organs of action, he is esteemed.’ ... Action — or work, or life, whichever you please—of that order is what I mean by vocation. (CP 99)

The logical arguments and references from the *Gita* that Gautama puts forward make the readers feel as if he were an advocate of the traditional ideals and values of leading life. Repeatedly, he tries to explain to Maya the real meaning of life. He says:

That is the end of our philosophical aspirations — to exist like a lily upon the water, rooted in the water yet with its petals dry, untouched by it. The lamp placed in a windless corner, unflickering. The tortoise with its limbs withdrawn from the external world — oh, the entire cult of symbols that we have for this ideal existence. But who is capable of it? I with my books, my work, or you with your sensual pleasure in living? Christ, who went out into the world to mingle with people, acquainted himself with their suffering ... or Buddha who mediated beneath the bo tree, his eyes closed to death, misery, pleasure, the temptation of helping, the temptation of saving, the temptation of attaining success? A question that has employed thinking minds for centuries. The answer, of course, is there —in the *Gita* once again, the *Gita*. “He whose joy is within, and whose light is within, that Yogi, being well-established in Brahman, attains to absolute freedom.” (CP 101)

The above narration by Gautama, though logical, creates ambiguous environs. This serious speech of Gautama strongly supports the notion that there is no one way of attaining peace of mind. It is the vocation, which makes one’s mind calm and happy. Here, Gautama does not seem to be against Maya’s approach to life because her way of

looking at things can be just another way of achieving what Gautama calls the real life. However, Anita Desai seems to be against her own approach to life, which she puts in the mouth of the narrator, Maya. The novel has been narrated from the point of view of Maya. Maya takes detachment as a negation of life. Because of Gautama's indifference to her sensuous approach to life, she turns insane. That she, in a state of insanity, kills her husband towards the end of the novel further proves that the husband and wife differ in their approaches to life.

Anita Desai's fourth novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975) [hereafter *WGTS*] is the story of Sita who is a no less extraordinary character than Maya in *CP*. She always lives in the world of fantasy. Her mad pursuit can be very clearly seen in the following dialogue between her and her husband, Raman:

'What do you mean—abortion?' she gasped, her eyes burning.

'I suppose that's what you mean—you want one.'

'Mad!' she gasped. 'You're quite mad. Kill the baby? It's all I want. I want to keep it, don't you understand?'

'No,' he shouted in exasperation, feeling himself made a fool that she spun round and round her finger till he was sick and giddy. 'You just said you don't want it. Now you say you do want it. What's up? What's up?'

'I mean I want to keep it—I don't want it to be born.'

'Mad,' he breathed in relief, understanding all in a stumbling access of clarity.

(*WGTS* 31-32)

Sita comes to Manori to "achieve the miracle of not giving birth" (*WGTS* 28). Through presentational and psychological sequencing, the author, like Maya in *CP* and Nirode in *VC*, presents Sita, the protagonist of *WGTS*, as a person who, too, is in the quest of a meaningful existence. With the help of the stream-of-consciousness device, Desai takes us in the flux of time. The novel is divided into three parts. The first part of the novel,

'Monsoon 67' is about the present time in the life of Sita. Sometimes the author, with the help of flashback technique, takes Sita into the reminiscence of her childhood. The past is embedded in the present in Part II, entitled 'Winter 47'. Part III, which again brings the reader back to 'Monsoon 67', discusses the future of the protagonist. The inner-goings of Sita's mind are associated with the different monsoons. Desai, in an interview says: "I wanted the book to follow the pattern of monsoon to gather darkly and threateningly, to pour down widely and passionately, then withdraw quietly and calmly" (215). In the last and concluding section of the novel, Sita agrees to lead the way of life as suggested by her husband, Gautama. The following extract from the last part of the novel may be quoted as one of the representative extracts of the above-discussed idea:

Giddy from kneeling and bending so long, she felt herself whirling round and round as well. She felt the long, straight, monotonous track of her life whip itself round her in swift circles, perhaps a spiral, whirling around and around till its very lines dissolved and turned to a blur of silver, the blurred silver of the mirror-like windowpanes. All was bright, all was blurred, all was in a whirl. Life had no periods, no stretches. It simply swirled around, muddling and confusing, leading nowhere. (WGTS 140)

The novel is written in the third person narrative with occasional first-person voice. "The third person [in WGTS] is so arranged as to give more and more emphasis on objective analysis of human weaknesses and qualities" (216). Conflicting voices of Sita, her father and her husband with the implied author in the background further the theme of the novel. The beginning and the end of the novel are full of the implied author's indirect comments on the personality of Sita. Sometimes, the comments of characters on their own personal traits put the reader at ease for analyzing their character. Authors, generally, make their characters speak about themselves in interior monologues so as to give the reader an idea of what the person is as an individual and

what they want to look like before others. The implied author throws light on the type of person Sita had been:

'But I [Sita] don't want to have the baby,' she cried. 'I've told you.'

His [Raman's] face, usually as stolid as soundly locked gate, receded half an inch in shock. It was not only the brutality, the murderousness of this statement that seemed to attack him with the clubs and spears of a bestial civilization, but it seemed so shockingly out of character with a woman who had once stood all day on the balcony, keeping away the crows that were attacking a wounded eagle on a neighboring roof top, and who winced dreadfully every time she heard a child cry. (WGTS 30)

And when Raman says, "'You've gone mad'. Sita accepts: 'I think,' she said, going back to the suitcase and the filling of it, "what I'm doing is trying to escape from the madness here, escape to a place where it might be possible to be sane again" (WGTS 32). The amalgamation of time past and time present helped the author in making the novel lyrical. The novel begins with the waiting of Moses's for Sita, the present owner of the house where Moses lives. There was a time when Sita's father had come to the island to fulfil his vision of doing miracles. Sita is coming to Manori to apply those miracles on her womb. Moses is waiting for Sita and Sita is waiting for the miracle of keeping the foetus unborn. Raman is waiting for Sita to be sane again. Thus, *waiting* serves as the keyword for the novel. The novel begins with the keyword: "*Moses waited. Waiting was what he did most of his time: it was not only his prime but also his legitimate occupation* (Italics mine)" (WGTS 07). The writer very skillfully describes the purpose behind Sita's waiting:

'Are you *waiting* for someone?' She was occasionally asked Sometimes she answered with a nod for it was true, she was always waiting I'm *waiting*, she agreed—although for what, she could not tell: for the two halves of this grey egg-world to fall apart and burst into festival fireworks, a woman's seaweed hair or bloodstained feathers? For the revolution of the world to alter in one mighty

swing that would fling them all, tiny grey sand-lice, into icy space? But, till she came to it, she would live on ... it seemed that these years of her life were dyed, coloured through and through, with the colour of *waiting*. But whatever its tint, its tone, it had seeped through her, flowed along every smallest capillary till she herself was turned to the colour of *waiting*, was turned a living monument to *Waiting* (Italics mine). (WGTS 48-49)

The tone in the novel, unlike in *CP*, varies as per the need of the structure of the novel. Whereas Maya's tone to express her victory over her husband in the end of the novel determines her psychiatric nature, Sita's tone, in the end of the novel, at the time of reconciliation with her husband, reveals her gentle and compromising nature. Though against the wish and suggestion of her husband, she comes to Manori, after a few months she realizes that her desire is no more than a fantasy. When Raman comes to the island, he, like a catalyst, tries to persuade Sita to go back with him. She agrees and creates a kind of atmosphere so as to make her husband realize that he is the winner:

She thought how nice he really was, how much the nicest man she knew. She allowed him, then, to have his triumph, not to try to cap it with her verse. He deserved that triumph, purely by being so unconscious of it, so oblivious. (WGTS 137-138)

Anita Desai has written *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) [hereafter *FM*] on the pattern of *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Written in presentational and psychological sequencing, the novel is divided into three sections: *Nanda Kaul at Carignano*, *Raka comes to Carignano* and *Ila Das leaves Carignano*. The implied author and the real author are mingled into one. Authorial voice in the novel is represented through Nanda Kaul and in some scenes through Ila Das and Raka. These three characters represent three different sets of values. All three lead the life of recluses but the circumstances behind their being reclusive are quite different. The circumstances that Ila Das faced in her life, made her a recluse. About reclusive nature of Nanda and Raka, the writer says:

If Nanda Kaul was recluse out of vengeance for a long life of duty and obligation, her great-granddaughter [Raka] was a recluse by nature, by instinct. She had not arrived at this condition by a long route of rejection and sacrifice — she was born to it, simply. (FM52)

The novel begins with the sentence: “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” (FM 3). This is ironically juxtaposed with “This was the chief virtue of all Kasauli of course—its starkness. It had rocks, it had pines”. And with “All the pine trees on the knoll shivered and cast their glistening needles in a hushed shower. The cicadas crept under the roasting stones and wept with little susurrating sounds” (FM 129). Nanda comes to Kasauli in search of “scented sibilance”, the sensuous pleasure of nature but the ironical tone is determined by its “starkness” and “susurrating sounds” of cicadas towards the end of the novel. The note of irony flows throughout the novel. Ila Das who comes to Kasauli to visit Nanda Kaul, is so excited after meeting Nanda that she exults:

‘Darling,’ screeched Ila Das, *‘darling,* what sort of a summer has it been? Why haven’t we met earlier, oftener? *My,* and we’re neighbours—you in your manorial hall and I in my village hut down below. I’ve so much to tell. (FM123)

Repetition of the word “darling” and use of the determiner “my” in isolation (a determiner is always followed by a noun to show how the noun is being used) are enough to prove that Ila was overwhelmed by the feelings of happiness. But the irony follows; while returning, she is raped. The author describes the ghastly and pitiable scene:

Her eyes still swiveled in their sockets, two alarmed marbles of black and white, and quickly he left the ends of the scarf, tore at her clothes, tore them off her, in long, screeching rips, till he came to her, to the dry, shriveled, starved stick inside the wrappings, and raped her, pinned her down into the dust and the goat

droppings, and raped her. Crushed back, crushed down into the earth, she lay raped, broken, still and finished. (FM 156)

The above quoted lines show the deterioration of human values. The ironical tone reaches its apex in the last page of the novel, when Raka says: "Look, Nani, I have set the forest on fire" (FM 159). In Lyrical, though ironical tone, the author writes in the third person narration: "Tapping, then drumming, she raised her voice, then raised her head to look in and saw Nanda Kaul on the stool with her head hanging, the black telephone hanging, the long wire dangling" (FM 159). And the novel ends with a pessimistic note: "Down in the ravine, the flames spat and crackled around the dry wood and through the dry grass, and black smoke spiraled up over the mountain" (FM 159).

To narrate the past of Nanda Kaul and Ila Das, Desai uses flashback technique in this novel. The novel revolves around the character of Nanda Kaul and partially around the personality of Ila Das. Nanda Kaul, a widow of a vice-chancellor, being tired of "messages and demands, requests, promises and queries" (FM 3), lives in a world of fantasy which compels her to retire to Kasauli and to live a life of seclusion. It is Ila Das who links Nanda's past with her present.

The novel has long descriptions with minimal dialogues. Though written in the third person point of view, here and there, especially in the dialogues, one finds the first person narration as well. Sometimes an amalgamation of the first and the third person is also seen:

Everyone in the house knew it was her hour of rest that she was not to be disturbed. She could hear a half-asleep ayah hiss at the babies "Quiet, go to sleep, you'll make your mother." She could hear her husband tell someone in a carefully lowered voice "Later, I'll have to consult my wife about it. I'll let you know later." (FM 25)

In Indian English fiction, male-female relationships often give an ample number of references to values. This aspect, in the novels of Desai, has been dealt very precisely but differently.

Desai's Monisha, Sita, Maya and Nanda Kaul – all aspire for socio-psychic emancipation. They crave for the liberation of their feminine self from the shackles of a socio-psychically maladjusted environ. They desire to stay whole but when offered the choice, they retrace and retract. (118)

It is the "body" and not the "soul", which gets paramount preference in the matrimonial relations. The "I" is often neglected. That is why Maya begins to tremble to think of "those awesome realizations that had followed, sometimes, a moment of union, and taught me how hopeless, how important is sex— where not union but communion is concerned" (CP 90). The absence of marital harmony can be clearly seen in the conjugal relations of Maya and Gautama, Monisha and Jiban, Deven and Sarla, Sita and Raman and in the life of Nanda Kaul and the vice-chancellor. The husbands, as many critics of repute have proclaimed it, do not seem to fulfill the emotional needs of their wives.

Maya's emotional starvation remains unfulfilled till the end of the story. For Maya, Gautama is "not a mind-reader at all, he had not the faintest knowledge of me" (CP 97) and "Traitor, you are the one to betray me" (CP 98)! The incompatible marriage of Monisha and Jiban is one of the most important themes of VC. Monisha's husband seems to be orthodox in the sense that women for him are to bear children, to cook and to serve the family. He is always busy with the responsibilities of his job and has no time to read Monisha's feelings.

Just like in CP and VC, Anita Desai pens down the theme of marital dissonance in her third novel WGTS also. Like Maya, the protagonist of CP, Sita is a sensitive wife while Raman, like Gautama, Maya's husband, is a rational and practical person. Sita, just like Maya, is unable to convince her practical husband of her hypersensitive demands, though Raman, just like Gautama, does whatsoever he can do for her. Raman's

approach to life is pragmatic. He is social and extrovert while Sita is introvert. These situations generally arise between a housewife and a working husband. The natural flow of affection disappears in such cases. Raman tries to make a balance among practicality, spirituality and the voodoo. Sita's obstinate decision of neither giving birth nor agreeing for foeticide leads to confusion, hence results in marital disharmony. R. S. Pathak puts this in the following words: "The marital discord results chiefly from the dichotomy between two irreconcilable temperaments and diametrically opposite viewpoints represented by Sita and her husband Rama" (qtd. In V. Sridevi, 3).

This can be a reason why some of the women of Anita Desai run away from the realities of life. Sita in *WGTS* leaves for Manoori, to fulfill her unattainable desire. Nanda Kaul in *FM* retires to Kasauli in search of peace, for she is tired of duties and responsibilities of the family. Elaine Yee Lin Ho puts this in the following words:

The conduct of Nanda Kaul's quest for truth, half-willed and half generated by the force of circumstance, takes the form of interior monologues for most of the novel; as in the short stories, there is minimal dialogue, which is a characteristic Desai's technique to suggest the break-down of social relations. (22)

To our surprise, we do not find any "force of circumstance", which led Nanda to lead an isolated life. There is no life without hardships, responsibilities and duties and if somebody is running away from realities of life, which is to blame? The portrayal of women, as it seems to be, is always one-sided. The availability of researches on Anita Desai's fiction, somewhat or to some extent, reveals an imbalanced narration of couple's life. Hundreds of doctorate researches, research articles and books of repute are written on the feministic perspective in the novels of Anita Desai but it seems, as it is clear from the third person narrative in her novels under study that the husbands did what they could have done in spite of their female partner's hypersensitive nature. One thing can clearly be noticed that almost all the male partners in Anita's fiction are working and their female partners are homemakers. On the one hand, the women are running away

from the realities and responsibilities, on the other hand, their male partners try their level best to maintain the marital harmony.

Anita Desai compares Nanda Kaul with “charred tree trunk in the forest, a broken pillar of marble in the desert, a lizard on a stone wall” (FM 24). She is like a tree trunk which “could not harbor irritation”. No one in the family could dare to “rouse her”. Anita Desai puts a rhetorical question “Who would dare?” (FM 24) ? In a sarcastic tone, the author comments on her sleeping habit after lunch:

She had practiced this stillness, this composure, for years, for an hour every afternoon: it was an art, not easily acquired. The most difficult had been those years in that busy house where doors were never shut, and feet flew, or tramped, without ceasing. (FM 25)

Everybody, be it the ayah, Nanda’s children or her husband do whatever they can to not disturb her sleep: “Everyone in the house knew it was her hour of rest that she was not to be disturbed. She (Nanda) could hear a half-asleep ayah hiss at the babies “Quiet, go to sleep, you’ll wake your mother” (FM 25). What more can a husband do than he does for the mental peace of Nanda Kaul? The writer says: “She could hear her husband tell someone in a carefully lowered voice “Later, I’ll have to consult my wife about it. I’ll let you know later” (FM 25).

But Ramesh Kumar Gupta, in his critical appraisal of Anita Desai’s fictional world from the feministic perspective, does not hesitate in calling Nanda’s husband a “selfish husband”: “Nanda Kaul’s life with a selfish husband is anything but compatible. Despite being ruthlessly dominated by her husband, she performs her duty faithfully towards her family” (Gupta 16). To prove such remarks as given by Mr. Gupta people quote Ila Das’s generic remark on the attitude of man: “It’s so much harder to teach a man anything, Nanda — the women are willing, poor dears, to try and change their dreadful lives by an effort, but do you think their men will let them? Nooo, not one bit” (FM 141).

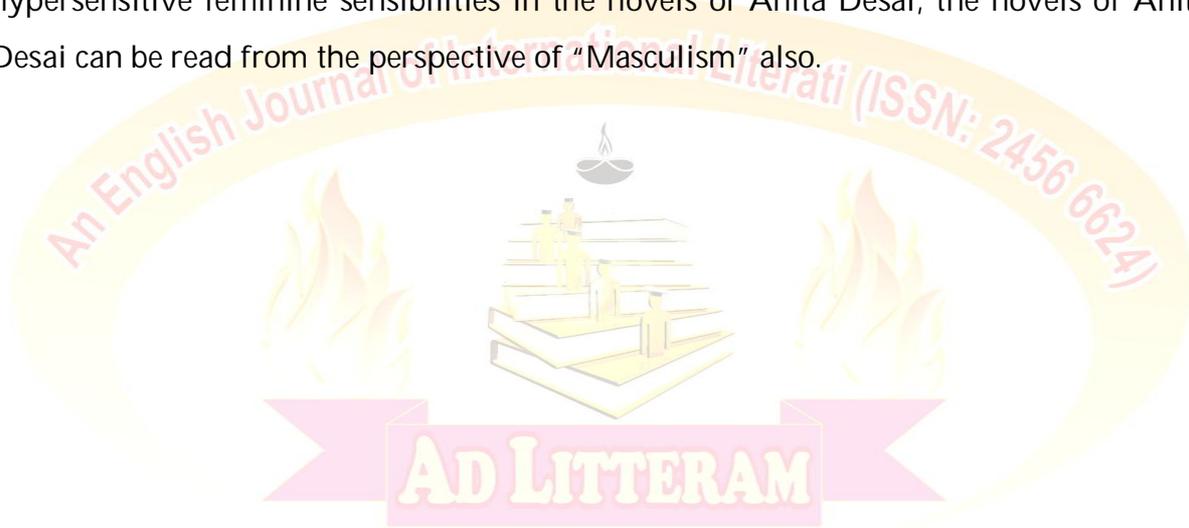
What to say about Sita? She is so lunatic that she comes to Manori “in order to achieve the miracle of not giving birth” (WGTS 28). In spite of all her rages that she showed when she was pregnant for the fifth time, Raman behaves very gently—“he spoke gently. ‘Everything will go well’” (WGTS 29). Her pregnancy was the result of their mutual consent. She had always shown “the placid serenity that supposedly goes with pregnancy and parturition” (WGTS 29). The writer admits that “all through their married life they had preferred to avoid a confrontation” (WGTS 30). After seven months of pregnancy, when she says that she does not want to have the baby, Raman is shocked by the brutal attack of Sita, a kind of woman “who had once stood all day on the balcony, keeping away the crows that were attacking a wounded eagle...” (WGTS 31). Raman was aware of family planning but he revered life as well. He assumes that Sita is asking for abortion so he says—“You should have thought of it earlier” (WGTS 31).

In fact, Sita does not want to kill the embryo neither does she desire to give birth to the child. Helpless and exasperated Raman blames her for living in the world of fantasy and for running away from life. But to Sita, this is not a fantasy; it is possible in real life. She is very eager to the act of sheer bravado. “She had no longer the nerve or the optimism to continue” (WGTS 52). And she leaves for Manori to make the impossible possible. Anita Desai herself admits: “She [Sita] had escaped from duties and responsibilities, from order and routine, from life and the city, to the unlivable island” (WGTS 128). Though, because of his bounden duty to his job, Raman is not able to accompany his wife but after a short span of some days, he goes to Manori to make Sita feel the reality. His practical approach to life and gentle behavior makes it possible to persuade Sita to believe in practicality. Where does one find feminism here?

It seems beyond human understanding that a researcher like Ramesh Gupta can write “Anita Desai, a prominent and up-coming Indo-English writer, has chosen English, a second language to her, as the medium for the “exploration of feminine sensibility” (Gupta 13). Md. Eftekhar Uddin, associate professor of English at International Islamic

University Chittagong, Bangladesh, goes on to the extent of saying, “Women are physically and sexually too repressed to find their subjectivity. Desai’s novels explore the neurotic explosions due to sexual repression in women. As a feminist critique, Anita Desai’s novels seek to analyze how the category of women as the subject of feminism is produced and restrained by the power structures through which emancipation is sought.” There are many others who have used even harsher words. It seems as if people are using as if people are using ‘feminism’ just for the sake of using it.

Writing for “feminine sensibility” does not necessarily make a writer feminist. This can be interpreted the other way as well— it can be arguably said that, because of the hypersensitive feminine sensibilities in the novels of Anita Desai, the novels of Anita Desai can be read from the perspective of “Masculism” also.



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