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The Theme Of Alienation And Loneliness In The Major Novels Of Anita Desai

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Abstract: *Anita Desai is a prestigious representative of Indian English Fiction. Her novels reveal the extreme complexities of human life. The theme of alienation and loneliness is very striking in her novels.*

The present paper is an interpretation of the theme of alienation in the novels of Anita Desai. Her novels touch the inner and outer worlds of the individual's feelings and their relationships in the family.

Alienation is estrangement from characters, society or work. It is the root cause of psychological problems. Anita Desai brings into focus the part played by the unconscious and the fragmented self in the transformation of the subject under unbearable societal pressures. Both her male and female characters struggle with their alienated selves and sufferings.

Key words: *The Theme Of Alienation And Loneliness, prestigious, extreme complexities of human life, estrangement.*

A mentally deficient person experiences alienation. Similarly persons of superior talents and competencies suffer imposed alienation of superior intellect at the hands of less-capable, unsympathetic and hostile people around. The person becomes self-estranged because he enjoys nothing for his own sake. Men like Nirode in *Voices in the City*, Dev in *Bye-Bye Black Bird* and Baba in *Clear Light of the Day*, suffer from self imposed, artistic alienation of the race and alienation of the competitive society. They are the victims of neurosis, unreason and loneliness.

Anita Desai is a successful novelist in the literary world. She leaves an eternal impact on her readers with her psychological novels. Her imagination and lyrical fragrance are highly appreciable. According to Anita Desai,

This difference in attitude towards his father stands in sharp contrast with that of Nirode while it serves as a foil to his embittered attitude. It also suggests very powerfully that all is not lost in regard to human relationships. And in being so, we would have found ourselves, living in a world of unrelieved gloom and unmitigated despair.

Monisha, like her brother becomes a miserable person. The part that parental influences must have played in this respect can be easily understood, but there is no clear mention of this fact in the novel. Monisha is married to Jiben but their married life is devoid of happiness and satisfaction. There are temperamental differences between them. Monisha is a lady with an intellectual bent of mind but Jiben is a practical down to earth man and is essentially a mediocre. Most of her characters hail from the well to do sections of Indian society. They often run away from their homes to some hill station, some ancestral mansion, from village to city or vice versa. The ethical messages of the Bhagwad Gita have underpinnings in her novel like *Cry the Peacock* and *Voices in the City*.

The locales presented by Anita Desai exert their influence on the characters affecting their attitudes. The beauty of the gardens of Rai Sahib in *Cry the Peacock*, the deserted look of Manori in *Where Shall We Go This Summer*, the emptiness of Carignano in *Fire on the Mountain*, the attractive aspects of the city of London and the compelling forces of the countryside in *Bye-Bye Blackbird* are all a part of the novelist's plan and the locales correspond to the psychological states of the characters.

The alienation of Sarah from the English society in *Bye-Bye Blackbird* is the consequence of her fear, her intense desire to escape from the personal questions of the English. The image of her walk along the pavements hiding something reflects Sarah's wish to conceal the fact that she is the wife of an Indian.

Where Shall We Go This Summer depicts the image of Muslim woman and a man lost in love in the Hanging Garden (146) serve to render the alienation of the characters in a stranger way. Even Sita's withdrawal to Manori is significant as she badly needs love. The memory of that Muslim couple does not relate to her personal life. It is the dearth of love in her life which torments her. When she learns about Raman's visit to the island, in spite of her wish to 'lay down her head and weep' (131), she is left with a sense of having been betrayed by everyone.

Where the desired atmosphere in *Cry the Peacock* is effectively evoked by the prophecy of the Albino astrologer and the letter of Arjuna, the derelict houses in *Where Shall We Go This Summer* and *Fire on the Mountain* also create the imagery, deeply associated with the melancholic psychic life of Sita and the deserted condition of Nanda Kaul. Similarly the wild and unbridled nature of Raka is mirrored in the burnt house on the top of the Mountain. The titles of Anita Desai's novels are also suggestive. The Cry of the



Peacock to lover, its mortal agony, has been identified with Maya's fate, her sure knowledge of death. The image of fire, expressive of violence, life preying upon life forms the title *Fire on the Mountain*. The fire destroys everything, so it is like a devouring monster.

Mala, an immigrant housewife also narrates her distressing and painful experience when a gang of English children chased her son. Her son screamed in despair: 'I'm not black. I'm not black. I'm grey.' (26). The defensive mechanism of the boy evidences a sense of insecurity among Indian immigrants in England who are treated as 'outsiders' or others.

In *Bye Bye Blackbird*, Anita Desai tackles issues pertaining to racial and cultural prejudices, adjustment and acceptance, and the subjective and objective views of a historical situation hard to shake off. Racial discrimination and cultural dominance on the basis of colour of skin and nationality are the vulnerable and sensitive problems in British society. And rejection of the host country, leads immigrants towards weakening their existence in an alien land. The immigrants' desperate attempt to get back to their roots and identity is a result of their cultural rootlessness and discriminatory attitude of the host country.

Anita Desai presents the major theme of alienation to literary treatment adequately in her novels. Her main characters are caught in varied trying predicaments caused either by situation or by their wives or parents. Hapless as they are, they fall prey to knotty circumstances and become alienates of different kinds. Monisha feels alienation of loneliness in *Voices in the City*. Nirode also suffers in multiple sufferings, not only self imposed alienation of the competitive society.

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