



## AN OVERVIEW OF ANITA DESAI'S NOVELS

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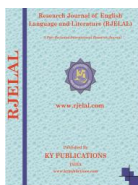
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### Abstract

Anita Desai is one of the prominent and prolific Indian English novelists of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. She has been shortlisted for the Booker Prize three times and was acknowledged with the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1978 for her novel, *Fire on the Mountain*. As a great social visionary, Anita Desai, with her sharp insight keenly observes the position and status of women in the contemporary Indian society for which she has occupied a unique place in the history of Indian English fiction. In her early novels she has explored the family problems, which lead to the estrangement of the women from their family. In the later novels she has projected her stereotyped Western views on India. She is more interested in the interior landscape of the mind than in political and social realities. She is sensitive in portraying the diasporic sensibilities in the characters of her fiction, *Bye- Bye Blackbird* and Baumgartner's *Bombay*. Anita's descriptions are simple, uncomplicated and vivid, promising the reader a journey through the wriggles of life. The present paper explores an overview of Anita Desai's contribution to Indian Writing in English novels.

**Key Words:** Social, Western, Psychological, Fictional Technique



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### Objective of Paper

The present research paper aims at making a fresh reappraisal of the contribution of Anita Desai in relation to the canon of Indo-English fiction. Hence an attempt has been made here to critically examine the new experimental techniques employed by Anita Desai in her fictional works.

### Place of Indian English Fiction

India has emerged as one of the most preferred destinations for her new contributions to literature, science, travels, economy and cultural efflorescence. In the twenty-first century, India is playing a vibrant role in its multicultural ethos and commitment to globalisation in all fields of activities. This achievement is also based on the rich traditions of the twentieth century life, literature and culture.

It is significant that India has the largest number of English speaking people in the world. Indian English Literature after passing through many vicissitudes and having experienced both appreciation and recognition has achieved the literary acme today. It is undoubtedly a major contribution to the larger canvas of the English speaking people of the world. Consequently, Indian English fiction is recognised as a powerful and popular genre of this literature. In recent decades, Indian English fiction has secured its prominence because of bold experiments undertaken in the fictional mode. Moreover, fiction provides a vast canvas which other genres do not normally possess. The richness and novelty of the genre have provided the basic impetus to the fiction writers for making it a powerful medium of expression. It is significant that in recent years,

Indian English literature has received wide recognition and accolade in the global arena. It has now been successful in carving out its own niche not only in commonwealth literature but also in the World Literature. In this process, Indian English fiction has acquired a prestigious position and status in India abroad.

#### **Notable Indian Women English Novelists**

It is significant that Indian women novelists in English have been successful in creating a special status for themselves which is evident from the prestigious awards and prizes they have received in recent decades. To their credit they have won some of the prestigious literary awards like Man Booker Prize, Commonwealth Writers' prize for best first book and the noted Sahitya Akademi award which undoubtedly brought good reputation for them. The major women novelists who achieved laudable success in this domain include Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Ruth Praver Jhabval, Sobha De, Sashi Despande, Anita Desai, Manju Kapur and to name a few. In fact, they have added a new dimension and depth to Indian fiction in English. Among the young women novelists who have contributed an impressive corpus of fiction to their credit for enriching Indo-English literature and strengthening this tradition, the name of Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Anita Nair, Namita Gokhale and Nina Shibal etc. figure prominently.

#### **Anita Desai's Art of Fiction**

Comparison and analysis are the chief tools of a critic. With this criterion in mind, attempts have been made here to sharpen our understanding of Anita Desai's art of fiction. The present paper is taken as a kind of critical expedition for exploring the experimental techniques of Anita Desai. She has emerged as a dominant and influential novelist of the twentieth century Indian English fiction. It is significant that her novels are both thematically and technically different from those of the other eminent contemporary Indian women novelists writing in English. She excels in writing psychological novels which contain the most striking features of modern fiction. Desai is the first women novelist who has vigorously portrayed the existential problems of both modern men and women. She has

introduced the deep psychological probing of her characters. Her fictional world is located in the corridors of human consciousness.

The present study focuses on the critical analysis and evaluation of Anita Desai's novels in the context of post-colonial critical canon. It at exploring the themes and the techniques of Anita Desai and thus presents her distinctive contribution to the twentieth century diasporic fiction. In addition to this an effort has been made to bring out the significance of the central characters, the narrative technique, and the use of language, symbol, imagery, metaphor, and humour etc. in a holistic perspective. The psychological motivation of Anita Desai's novels as examples of psychic drama emerges through flashback, diary-entries, self-analysis, powerful dialogues, description of places and people. These technicalities of fiction are certainly bold experiments in the art of fiction. Her central theme is the existential predicament of individual's which she projects through incompatible couples, very sensitive wives and ill-matched husbands. It is noteworthy that a detailed analysis of technicalities of the art of fiction will sharpen our understanding of Anita Desai's art of fiction and the vision which she embodies in her fiction.

Desai's fictional techniques include her delicate presentation of concerning the existential predicament of modern man, the art of character delineation, skilful use of imagery and symbols, varieties of narrative devices and craft of plot construction. Her forte lies in the exploration of human mind and its sensibility – that is the distinctive kind of modern Indian sensibility.

The aforesaid features of Desai's fiction reflect her ingenuity as a frontline novelist. In fact, she has added a new dimension to the thematic spectrum of Indo-English fiction. It is significant that her novels are technically different from those of her other eminent contemporary Indian women novelists writing in English. The contemporaries like Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala and Nayantara Sehgal concern themselves mainly with the social, political, and moral themes of East-West encounter. But Anita Desai goes a step ahead of them as she excels in writing psychological novels

containing the most striking features of modern fiction. Her novels are deeply moving stories of individuals on the horns of a socio-cultural and existential dilemma. Desai's novels also constitute an artistic success formally for powerful presentation of images, symbols, and fictional devices. She deals with the psychic life of her characters. Thereby she delves deep into the inner recesses of their minds.

### Background and Contribution

Anita Desai is one of the world famous writers and of India's well-known modern novelists in English. Having a literary career of over four decades, she has enriched Indian literature in English through her significant literary outputs such as novels, short stories and children's literature. Being born with the bilingual parents gives her the advantage of having double perspective while writing about India and Indian migrants to the west. Her view of India influenced by her family situation has always been a special one. Regarding this fact she aptly suggested in her well known novels include *In Custody* and *Baumgartner's Bombay* as she wrote: "I see India through my mother's eyes, as an outsider, but my feelings for India are my father's, of someone born here." Thus she is gifted with double consciousness; she often views Indian history and culture through European eyes. Thus, her dual heritage both racial and cultural has had a strong impact on her life and has also influenced her writings at the thematic as well as stylistic levels. In this process, an understanding of the global panorama of fiction permeates her art of fiction.

### Literary Works

Anita Desai appeared on the literary horizon of Indian writing in English in 1963 with the publication of her first novel, *Cry, the Peacock*. The novel received wide acclaim from the readers and critics. It is remarkable that *Cry, the Peacock* is hailed in India as a major achievement in the arena of Indo-English fiction. Over the years, Desai has enriched Indian literature in English through her novels, short stories and children's literature. Her fictional technique is distinctively original and powerful. Her major literary works include:

- 1 *Cry, The Peacock* (1963)
- 2 *Voices in the City* (1965)
- 3 *Bye-bye Blackbird* (1971)
- 4 *The Peacock Garden* (1974)
- 5 *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975)
- 6 *Cat on a Houseboat* (1976)
- 7 *Fire on the Mountain* (1977)
- 8 *Games at Twilight* (1978)
- 9 *Clear Light of Day* (1980)
- 10 *The Village by the Sea* (1982)
- 11 *In Custody* (1984)
- 12 *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988)
- 13 *Journey to Ithaca* (1995)
- 14 *Fasting, Feasting* (1999)
- 15 *Diamond Dust* (2000)
- 16 *The Zigzag Way* (2004)
- 17 *The Artist of Disappearance* (2011)

There is no doubt that with the publication of these works, Anita Desai has made significant contribution to the bulk of Indian English fiction. The reader's prime impressions of reading her novels are her novelty, variety, and uniqueness of character sketches. Consequently, her novels have drawn worldwide attention and she stands in the frontline of the world of fiction. Anita Desai is of the opinion that art is an exploration and enquiry and not an escape from reality. Her notion of 'reality' is strikingly similar to Virginia Woolf's perception. She aptly observes:

Life is a reality you see on the surface – the visible world, while the literature plunges the depths, below that lie hidden and need to be explored and described. (Perspective of Anita Desai 128)

Anita Desai picks up a few analogies to explain her process of writing. She selects an appropriate example of the fluids in a chemical reaction. She aptly puts her observation:

A writer or a novelist selects his own material, he selects whatever seems significant to him and putting all these fluids together, he boils them until they are reduced to a certain essence. That is what a novelist can do, being able to give his readers the essential truth. (An Interview with Anita Desai, *TI*).

The four major novels of Anita Desai such as *Cry, The Peacock, Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, *Fire on the Mountain* and *Clear Light of Day* reflect the sensibility of women through the female protagonists – Maya, Sita, Nanda Kaul and Bimla or Bim. Thus, she explores feminist concerns in Indian literature in a genre she handles effectively and powerfully in a convincing manner. A close study of her novels reveal her zest in managing the themes of anxiety, anguish and psychological crises of her protagonists. For instance, in her Sahitya Academy Award winning novel, "*Fire on the Mountain*", she explores the inner emotional world of Nanda Kaul and Raka. Thus, she dives deep into the hidden depth of her characters obsessed by nostalgic reminiscences of their past life and events. In fact, she is recognised as the herald of psychological novels in Indian English literature.

Desai is more interested in the interior landscape of the mind than in political and social realities. She is the most celebrated and powerful Indo-Anglian women novelists of post-independence era. She has made a significant contribution to the development of Indian novel in English with her central theme of complexity of human relationship, exploration of human psyche and also her poetic prose. She delves deep into the inner psyche of her characters. In fact, she has heralded a new era of psychological exploration of inner mind in her novels.

Like James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, Anita Desai is widely known as the pioneer of psychological novel in modern Indian English Literature. The most significant features of her novels are the treatment of existential themes and fine portrayal of characters. She also shows a remarkable skill in her use of highly suggestive imagery and symbol in handling the stream of consciousness technique. She has created an

intricate style of her own to suggest the frustrations of her hypersensitive characters. In this context, M. K. Bhatnagar has made a few succinct remarks:

Anita Desai has incontrovertibly added a new dimension to the thematic spectrum of Indian fiction in English. Her novels are deeply moving stories of individuals on the horns of a socio-cultural and existential dilemma (The Novel of Anita Desai: A Critical Study 68).

Her first novel, *Cry, The Peacock* traces a passionate young woman's degeneration into insanity. The central character, Maya is trapped in an unsuccessful marriage to Gautama, an older man, who fails to communicate and compromise with her. As she is childless, the inadequacy of her life becomes quite evident. She is constantly haunted by presentiment of her husband's death on account of her belief in an astrological prediction. She looks for someone to ward off the shadow of Gautama's imminent death but she finds none to share her sentiment, emotion, and tension. On the contrary, her insensible and unsentimental husband. Gautama treats her as a spoilt child. Maya also hates Gautama for his authoritarian approach to life and this develops a wide chasm between them while living under the same roof of a house. Finally, Maya condemns Gautama to death and then burdened with guilt and haunted by self-contempt she commits suicide.

In her second novel, *Voices in the City* she delves deep into the inner mind of three siblings, Nirod Ray and his two sisters, Monisha and Amla. The story of the novel depicts the nihilistic influence of Calcutta (now Kolkata), personified as Kali, who is both goddess and demon, both the universal mother and the Goddess of Death, has detrimental effects on three main characters. These three characters feel utterly frustrated like Maya. They profess a mysterious longing to come back home in Kalimpong and enjoy the solitude and serenity of the jungles. But they are compelled to live in Calcutta as they dislike their mother who is portrayed as a symbol of Kali like the city.

*Bye-bye Blackbird*, Desai's third novel, is set in London and deals with problems confronted by

Indian immigrants. The story of the novel depicts love-hate relationship of the expatriates in England. It juxtaposes two friends, Adit Sen, well settled and culturally assimilated, who still feels alienated and finally returns to India and Dev, who, despite the blatant racial prejudice he encounters, decides to stay on because he wants to live in the land of the romantic poets. The novelist delicately portrays the psychological effects of Sarah, Adit's Anglo-Saxon wife. Being married to Adit Sen, she becomes a "nowhere woman" in England, a land of racial hatred. Sarah's withdrawal at psychological level breeds conflicts which she overcomes when successfully relates to the realities of her life with an Indian husband.

*The Peacock Garden (80 pgs)* is an Indian children's book, a very young in which Muslim girl named Zuni hides with her family from the violence of Partition inside the walled garden of a mosque, and finds not merely a refuge but a whole new world, just the right size for a little girl to explore. She lines the ceiling of their hut with peacock feathers, picks fresh chillies and oranges, watches a peahen raise her family, and finally ventures out to see how the world outside has changed.

*Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Portrays an oppressed married woman, Sita who resignedly accepts her life in the end. Named after the Hindu mythological idea of womanhood, the wife of Lord Rama (Here Raman), Sita seeks refuge on a forsaken island, Manori where she goes for the summer with two of her four children. The derelict house, the barren surroundings and the memories of childhood spent on the island with a selfish father provide no relief. She realizes that she cannot escape reality and returns to an indifferent husband and a meaningless existence. Though Desai recognises Sita's inability to alter her condition, we get the impression that Sita also contributes somehow to her predicament by accepting, reluctantly a life devoid of joy.

Desai has also written three books for children, *The Peacock Garden* (1974), *Cat on a Houseboat* (1976), and *The Village by the Sea: An Indian Family Story* (1982). Two of her works have been adapted to film: *The Village by the Sea* in 1992 and *In Custody* in 1993.

The novel, *Fire on the Mountain* depicts the story of Nanda Kaul, an unhappy great-grandmother who, after her unfaithful husband's death, retires to Carignano, an island house on quiet mountain ridge in Kasauli. The novelist examines her attitudes towards her great-grandmother, Raka, and the old friend Ila Das, both of whom Nanda considers intruders into her privacy. She recognises that Nanda's present lone self is the result of her bitter past and, in this light, explores her relationships with Raka and Ila Das. Thus, Nanda's interior self and predicament has been properly analysed by Desai.

This title story in Anita Desai's acclaimed collection *Games at Twilight, and Other Stories* (1978) deals with a universal theme of children at play and their fantasies and disillusionment. Desai begins the story objectively from the third-person vantage, but as the action progresses and the tension mounts, she skilfully shifts the narrative focus to the consciousness of the central character, Ravi. The story is remarkable for its insights into child psychology, powerful evocation of atmosphere, vivid imagery, and symbolic use of setting.

The story opens on a hot summer afternoon in an urban house in India. The children who have been kept indoors all day to escape the oppressive heat of the sun feel confined and suffocated, and when they are finally unleashed, they thrill with joy and excitement and decide to play a game of hide-and-seek. Raghu, being the eldest, is chosen to be "it"—the seeker. All the other children run helter-skelter to find a suitable hiding place. Ravi hides behind the locked garage. When he hears his little brother crying because he has been caught by Raghu, he panics. As Raghu's whistling and the thumping sound of his feet grow louder, in a moment of fright Ravi suddenly slips through a small gap into an abandoned shed next to the garage. From this moment on, the narrative filters through Ravi's consciousness and the reader is brought into the deepest reaches of his psyche. Though the shed is dark, damp, and spooky, littered with discarded pieces of junk and infested with moths and crawling insects, Ravi finds it a welcome haven. His initial fear of darkness disappears the moment he entertains the thought that no one can possibly find him there.



*Clear Light of Day* presents Bim, who, like Nanda, is a strong female protagonist. Bim is a spinster who suffers from melancholic. The story of the novel focuses on Bim from whose perspective we notice the breakup of her family. The novel chronicles her family's history and portrays the effects of India's partition, which symbolises their disintegration. Her brother, Raja and sister, Tara leave the family nest, and only Bim is left to look after her retarded brother, Baba. Bim is compelled to run the family home and see to what is left to her father's business. Despite her frustrations, failures and pains, Bim's vision embodies a transfiguration of her sense of alienation into a new consciousness of wholeness through psychic renewal.

In Anita Desai's later novels, the feminist issue is pushed to the periphery and the loneliness of the individual is thematised as the central problem. Alienation is the greatest problem confronting the modern man. Desai's novels like *The Village by the Sea*, *In Custody* and *Baumgartner's Bombay* reflect existential plight of man. The stories of these three novels centre round male protagonists. *The Village by the Sea*, though classified under children's literature is equally enlightening and enjoyable as a mature fiction. It is a very powerful novel with a typical Indian milieu. Through the novel, the novelist projects the evil effects of dire poverty on the members of an Indian family who get divided at the beginning, but the reunion occurs at the end.

The novel *In Custody* reveals the complicated world of human relationship. The story of the novel hinges round three major characters – Deven, Nur and Murad who struggle hard to realise their respective ambitions. But Deven is the chief male protagonist who comes from a lower middle-class family and seeks to reach out into a wider world in the hope of self-fulfilment. Though he is a lecturer in Hindi in a muffed college in Mirpore, a small town near Delhi, he has lofty literary aspirations and longs for distinction. After many failures and frustrations, Deven finds his own strength and realises his inner potentiality. Thus, the novel ends with a positive note.

*Baumgartner's Bombay* is a portrait of loneliness of alienation and immigrants' existential problems. The novel depicts a moving account of the plight and travails of Hugo, a simple and submissive Jew who is said to be the hero of the novel. Desai delicately depicts the barriers, betrayals and disillusionments that Hugo encounters both in his native country, Germany and his adopted country India. Baumgartner, like Kamala Markandayas's protagonist in the *Nowhere Man* belongs nowhere. As a matter of fact, *Baumgartner's Bombay* is a serious study of a lone human being at the mercy of impersonal forces too large for him to comprehend. Yet the picture is not completely gloomy, it is lit by flashes of humanity.

*Journey to Ithaca* is published in 1995. The novel takes its name from a poem by Constantine P. Cavafy. The novel describes a pilgrimage to India by a young couple, Italian Matteo and German Sophie and the life of a mysterious woman, Laila who runs the ashram where they live and is known there as "The Mother". The novel further develops a theme that Desai explored in an early short story, *Scholar and Gypsy*; the difference between the characters who feels the world is all we need and the character for whom the world is limited. Actually, the title refers to three journeys in the novel: Journey of Sophie, of Matteo and of the mother. The novel derives its title from C.P. Cavafy's poem 'Ithaca', translated by Roe Dalven. Ithaca is the city where all the journeys end, it is the ultimate goal. To reach there, one has to cover a long path, full of joys and sorrows; providing invaluable gems of knowledge. What Ithaca itself promises? Nothing like riches, but it has already given one a beautiful journey. On reaching Ithaca, one can understand and value the precious possession of knowledge & experiences.

Desai's novel *Fasting, Feasting* reflects two different situations in two different cultures. It is the story of two worlds, the oriental world housed by Uma, Aruna and the western by Melanie and Rod. The two worlds are representatives of the diverse ways of geographical cultures in which self grows. Uma and Melanie are placed in two different historical situations, which have existential effects on them. Uma, in spite of her repeated agonising experiences transcends herself to something better

whereas Melanie, despite all the freedom that she enjoys, falls a victim to negligence and misunderstanding.

*Diamond Dust and Other Stories (2000)* contain nine stories. The third story is the title of the book. This book contains 200 pages. The title story, "Diamond Dust: A Tragedy," is the shortest in the collection, somewhat comical in the description of Mr. Das's overblown devotion to Diamond, his dog "of an indecipherable breed." Indeed, the dog becomes the most precious part of Mr. Das's life, in spite of Diamond's pariah status in the neighbourhood – the dog is not only dirty, mangy, and a repeat runaway, he's also exceptionally mean with a special hatred for the postman. In the end, tragedy is inevitable.

In her long distinguished career, Anita Desai has focused her illuminating vision on the questions of culture and identity. Her mesmerizing novel *The Zigzag Way* tells three interweaving narratives. The male protagonist, Eric, who accompanies his girlfriend to mythical, lush Mexico, becomes enchanted by the lovely landscape of the country and its history. He goes to search for his ancestral successors there. With vivid sympathy and brilliant narration in detail, Desai conjures up Eric's grandmother and her poignant story that of a young Cornish girl whose grave is in a cemetery on a Mexican hillside.

The three novellas in Anita Desai's new collection, *The Artist of Disappearance*, are filled with disappointments in human nature, inciting a melancholy that is hard to shake. The stories are all linked by a passion for arts, but they are actually more about ourselves – the selves that dare to hope, that desperately want to be different, but which then sink back and disappear into ordinariness. The first and the shortest story, "The Museum of Final Journeys", is narrated by a minor civil servant who is posted to an isolated rural district of India. The failed young writer survives this sentence in the wilderness, despite the lack of tennis or proper English tea, by becoming increasingly irritated by the people whose lives he governs. His beloved books run dry, and the loneliness and boredom become so

pervasive that he slips into an apathetic coma, until an elderly visitor awakens him with alluring stories about a mysterious museum on a once-grand neighbouring estate. The bored civil servant is enticed by the promise of a "Miraculous Xanadu", and the ancient curator takes him on a breathless tour of a museum which is filled with treasures that were sent home by the last son of the estate: priceless figurines, scrolls, ceramics and fans from the Orient. At last, the civil servant is once again surrounded by beautiful things. But then the real reason for the visit: will he intervene to save the collection from the son's final bequest, an elephant, who is desolately eating her way through the family's remaining wealth?

The second novella is about a bitter and depressed middle-aged English teacher, Prema, who for a while begins to believe in the literary dreams of her youth. A chance meeting with her high-school idol, now a feminist publisher, leads to Prema pursuing a new career as a translator of "undiscovered" novels written in her beloved mother tongue, Oriya, the language of the state of Orissa. This opens up, briefly, a window of possibilities beyond the mundane. But her desperation to have a voice actually results in the window slamming shut. Back to her life as a tired woman with nothing to look forward to, she wonders why she had dared even to hope.

The third protagonist is a recluse, Ravi, who lives in a house high in the foothills of the Himalayas. The adopted son of neglectful parents, who left him every summer while they "seasoned" in Europe, Ravi found comfort in the ants, crickets and trees, so that nature has become the only nourishment that he craves. After his parents' death, the family house is burnt down by his former governess, at last leaving him alone to create "art" from nature's precious materials. His peace is interrupted by superficial documentary makers who are looking for illegal logging and environmental degradation, but accidentally stumble upon his creation. For a moment the TV crew seem inspired by his work.

Each tale evokes flashes of a vanishing reality, taking us back to a post-colonial world as it literally fades and crumbles. Desai's writing is at times as

sensuous and charming as some of her best: birds sing with "piercing sweetness"; mushrooms resemble refugees with their "ghostly pallor and caps, hats and bonnets". But, the stories themselves fail to persuade and the disappointments are too explicit, the endings too abrupt. Perhaps aptly, these interlinked stories of human disappointment are beautifully written but ultimately disappointing.

### Stylistic accomplishment

Desai's stylistic accomplishment is noteworthy. Unlike many other Indian English novelists, Desai does not find it necessary to experiment with language. In her novels, no clash between English, her medium of expression, and the Indian subject matter is apparent. Indeed, her use of the language is natural and unselfconscious. Her writing is both supple and precise. Though each sentence is carefully crafted, the overall manner is easy, not precious or laboured. Stylistically, Desai is thus in the mainstream of twentieth century English novelists.

In fact, Desai was probably the first Indian English novelist to be concerned primarily with the inner lives of her characters—their fleeting moods, wisps of memory, subtle cerebrations. In her novels, Desai succeeds in capturing these evanescent moments of consciousness, preserving them from oblivion and investing them with the permanence of art. The result is that Desai not only creates something of value for herself out of the endless flux of her own psyche but also provides for readers the opportunity to share this rich inner life through her characters.

### Conclusion

Anita Desai applies varieties of fictional innovative techniques in the narration of her plots and stories. Besides the variety of themes, the techniques in her novels contribute to her success as a novelist. She is basically concerned with the deep cultural and philosophical problems that inevitably emerge in the contemporary society. Moreover, she is an eminent innovative story-teller. Her technique of narration focuses on both Indian and European culture, history, social structure, ethos, religion, and philosophy. Desai reveals the varying mental states,

psychic observations, inner motives and existential pursuits of the modern men and women. She succeeds fully in breaking new grounds for her fictional art while dealing with the predicament of her characters, their social and moral dilemmas. Her fiction deals with psychological issues like distortion of personality, oddity, dislocation of normal life, recklessness of human behaviour and malignancy of motive. In addition to this it also embodies radical forms of alienation, loss of identity, maladjustments and contradictions which seem to have been preserved as the best of both the great traditions. These aspects of Desai's fiction undoubtedly add a new dimension to the Indian English novel and extend the scope of her artistic expression. The treatment of her themes is both insightful and thought-provoking.

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