

A CRITIQUE ON THE ART AND TECHNIQUE OF NARRATION IN ANITA DESAI'S NOVELS

B RAJASEKHAR REDDY, N HEMAMALINI, K R ESWAR REDDY

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR ^{1,2,3}

brajasekhar@svitatp.ac.in, nhemamalini@svitatp.ac.in, kollagieswar1981@gmail.com

Department of English, Sri Venkateswara Institute of Technology,

N.H 44, Hampapuram, Rappthadu, Anantapuramu, Andhra Pradesh 515722

Abstract

A lot of credit and magic go to Anita Desai for the narrative approach or tactic she used. The inner lives of her characters are just as important to her as their exterior lives. The mental environment, rather than the physical one, occupies her primary attention and care. Using techniques like stream-of-consciousness, internal monologue, and flashbacks and forth, Anita Desai expertly delves into psychological psychology in her works. If a novelist were to describe their characters' inner lives, they would inevitably touch on the emotional side as well as the intellectual. The emotional side is just as important, if not more so, than the intellectual side, which is often severely underdeveloped. An effort at discussing her books' art and style of narration is undertaken in this article.

Key words: Psychological, Interior Monologue, Stream of Consciousness, Flashback and Flash forth Technique

INTRODUCTION

Among the diasporic post-colonial women writers with a name in Indian English literature, Anita Desai stands head and shoulders above the others. Modern linguistic innovations, word and picture collocation, many narrative styles, and a healthy dose of code-mixing all contribute to the distinctive regional flavour and international renown of the Indian English novel. The work of postcolonial women authors adds depth and new forms of expression to the canon of Indian English novels. Anita Desai stands out for her innovative approach to form and her commendable creation of a

innovative sense in narrative craft. Her works shed light on the complexities of fiction, which helped her establish herself as a leading figure in Indian diaspora writing. Her method is characterised by code-mixing as a narrative form, but it is also characterised by imagery, poetic licence, and the stream-of-consciousness device. Her work is famously unique, and it takes a subjective approach that weaves together monologues, flashbacks, soliloquies, fantasies, recollections of the past, and specific historical locations to immerse the reader in a certain era. She fits in with her

latest literary style among Indian authors penning works in English that originates from no earlier than the 1930s or 1940s.

NARRATIVE DEVICE

Analysing the inner struggles of a person, Anita Desai uses narrative methods. The stream-of-consciousness approach is one of the main tools. In his seminal work, *The Principles of Psychology*, renowned American psychologist William James popularised the method as a literary-psychological tool. "A continual stream of thought" is how he describes human awareness. Associative memories and introspective thinking about the past help bridge the gap between the two times (*The Principles of Psychology* 224-225). The most common way to characterise it is as a river or stream. A language's rhythm conveys mental states, with each idea articulated in a phrase. Each instant in our awareness is like a tangible picture. In interior monologue, the character expresses their innermost thoughts in a way that the audience

can understand, as if the character were having a conversation with themselves. In contrast, the goal of stream of consciousness is to depict the real, chaotic, and distracted process of thought. Virginia Woolf and James Joyce were the forefathers of this style. In order to provide essential plot information or insight into a character's motivation, writers sometimes use flashbacks, which are brief interruptions in the current narrative that include events from the past. In contrast, a flash forward occurs when a future occurrence interrupts the current narrative timeline. It hints to future events in the tale or plot.

ANALYS OF NOVELS

Cry, the Peacock, Anita Desai's first work, earned her entry into the hall of fame. Surprisingly, *Cry, the Peacock* is the second most lyrical and evocative Indo-English book after Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope*. Through a broader lens, it offers a critical analysis of humanity's dilemma in an alien world. Not only does the work stand out for its "objective correlative" to the characters' mental states, but it also stands out for its lyrical language, internal monologues, and colourful and vivid depiction of the Indian terrain. With finesse, Desai makes use of a

literary methods used in the work, such as the use of symbolic and psychological language, flashbacks and recollections, a world of nostalgia, and stream of consciousness. Characteristics of the novel's heroine, Maya, including her use of stream of consciousness and other literary tropes, become apparent when one reads key sections of the book with a critical eye.

A schism forms between Maya's artistic, sensitive, and feminine side and Gautama's detached, philosophical, and duty-bound, more prosaic side. The storytelling approach of flashbacks highlights Maya's sufferings:

Whoever I trusted for comfort had deceived me at this point, and none of my pals could provide a steadying influence. I couldn't help but

fantasise about the albino magician every time I lay down. All too real. Even if I could remember every detail, it would still not be God, Gautama, or father. My heart broke. When the oneirodynia night was ended, I should feel the same, and when it's daylight, I should realise it was all a nightmare. Can I skip this? (54)

There are three important truths that are suggested in the sentence above that need to be considered. As Maya remembers her life with her father, husband, and God, she experiences feelings of estrangement and loneliness. During this time, she begins to worry that her hallucinations are leading to her being insane. Her unconscious mind has a prophesy, and the "night of oneirodynia" becomes a symbol of it.

Anita Desai's rich poetic language is another distinctive aspect of her narrative approach; it is used to imply the main character's mood change and depth of feeling. In Maya's speech, it is revealed. "Fall, fall, long fall into the soft velvet wall of the primordium, of original instinct, of first-formed love," she cries out (11). Love has been at the core of human life since the dawn of time, and Maya's monologue beautifully encapsulates that need. This alternative paragraph rhythmically summarises the emotion. The truth is that Anita Desai's

Her interest in exploring feminine sensitivity and her effort at authenticity are both seen in the internal monologues and conversations.

The intriguing title of *Voices in the City* serves as a method example throughout the work. Images, analogies, symbols, figures of speech, and the stream-of-consciousness method to repeat significant phrases form the basis of its storytelling structure. The narrative of this book is heavily reliant on the biological function of Calcutta. Calcutta plays a key part as it establishes the narrating approach of flashbacks and forths. Indeed, Calcutta is the epicentre of *Voices in the City*'s social milieu. However, it becomes a "character" thanks to the "Voices" of the siblings Nirode, Monisha, and Amla, whose

parents have dissolved. So, they come to Calcutta in quest of self-discovery. Consequently, the city has a significant role in shaping the lives of our three main characters. Calcutta's ugliness reflects Nirode's misery to the fullest. The metropolis has a crippling effect on him. *Voices in the City*, a book by Anita Desai, explores the post-Independence era issue of urban alienation via the use of the polyphonic storytelling style. The risks of being alone are explored throughout the story via the misfortunes of Nirode, Monisha, Amla, and their mother. Effective communication is crucial in this kind of scenario.

Where Shall We Go This Summer? is Anita Desai's work that utilises the stream-of-consciousness device. Sita, the protagonist, is a delicate lady in her early forties who goes through a severe crisis of identity throughout the book. Time travel is shown in this book, which is structurally very identical to Virginia Woolf's *The Lighthouse*. It follows the same three-part structure as *The Lighthouse*: Part I, Monsoon 67, Part II, Winter 47, and Part III, Monsoon 67. The triangular format serves to emphasise the novel's overarching themes even more. As both a preserver and a destroyer, the heroine Sita represents time. The novel's structural divide into the past, present, and future highlights the recursive nature of time. A rainstorm like the one outside Sita's imagination is raging within. Notably, the story delves into the psychological exploration of

In the belief that the enchanted island will halt the biological process of giving birth, Sita, who is pregnant but does not want to give birth, returns to the island of Manori, where she had a carefree childhood. Bombay stands for the actual world, whereas Manori Island symbolises Sita's escape to imagination and her eventual return to reality.

Another look of Anita Desai's skill is *Fire on the Mountain*, her book that won the Sahitya Akademi Award. In telling the tale, the author employs techniques such as symbolism and

flashbacks. Despite living in a male-dominated world, the female characters in the author's *Fire on the Mountain* remain loyal to themselves and seek refuge in the sanctuary they've built. Even if society has bound them, they still want for independence. Indeed, the work expertly portrays the three main characters' (Nanda Kaul, Raka, and Ila Das) latent feelings of estrangement and alone.

One of the most popular books written by Anita Desai is *Clear Light of Day*. That Desai's mastery of narrative structure is on full display in this work is a major selling point. With its strong plot, exquisite prose, and lighthearted touches, this story is sure to leave an impression. Anita Desai's use of language, particularly the novel's incorporation of Indian speech rhythm and tone, is revolutionary and a watershed moment in her career. The novel's seedlings are propelled by recollection.

By using the stream of consciousness approach, the author gains insight into the unexplored and concealed parts of the human mind, which is crucial to her characters' development as storytellers. While Bim lives in a rundown family farmhouse in an Old Delhi neighbourhood and cares for their younger brother, Baba, who is mentally handicapped, Tara reflects over her visit. As the story begins, the summer sun's icy white glare and the song of birds in the woods herald the arrival of morning. The story begins with the sisters Bim and Tara, who are fighting for their reunion, focusing on the tiniest aspects of what they've seen. Given the glimpses into the past intercut with present-day recollections, the narrative structure of the book allows for the events to unfold in a continuous fashion. Tara has a wave of nostalgia as she steps inside her childhood bedroom at the ancestral home.

Back when they were little kids, she and Bim shared this room. The thick guava trees that bordered the house's rear and the row of servants' quarters were visible through the opening. On this bright morning, they emitted the noises of activity.

Invisible parrots squabbled and squawked over the fruits (77), while a water faucet ran, a kid cried, a cock crooned, and a bicycle bell rang.

In her work, Desai expertly employs the flashback method. The past and the present blend together in her work. The events have not unfolded in the exact sequence that Desai had anticipated. The Das family lives in an ancient home, and she has given us short descriptions of sites like the Lodi Gardens, which is in the neighbourhood. Desai has used the contemporary technique of stream of consciousness and the approach of internal monologue to portray the characters' and protagonist Bim's mental states.

A few compound terms have been widely employed by Anita Desai to make her language more functional. "Jungle of Rag-ten" and the accompanying compound words are expertly used throughout the narrative.

the papal-tree lined street, "a fine-shelter egg," "birdboned. Wrists," "shell pink edged," "blue-tinged skin," and (122) "pink-flowered cushion" all contribute to an amazing and metaphorical language. The author has also made an effort to include Indian elements into the narrative. "Mausi," "Bhai," "Mithai," and "Mubarak" are only a few examples of the Indianized words that show how she had a big impact on the representation of Indian culture in Indo-English literature. Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* is a watershed moment in her career since it demonstrates her mastery of language via the incorporation of Indian speech rhythm and tone.

Traumatic events like the Holocaust and the partition of India and Pakistan have devastating impacts on the world, and Baumgartner's *Bombay* explores these ramifications.

The biography of Hugo Baumgartner. Leaving the confines of family relationships and commitments behind, Anita Desai delves inside the mind of her male protagonist in the story. The internal world of overly sensitive and

neurotic ladies is really what she moves away from in her previous obsessional work. The male psyche is the primary subject of Baumgartner's *Bombay*. The novel's plot primarily focuses on the immigrant and exile experiences of isolation, rootlessness, homelessness, and separation. The particular plight of a nationless traveller in an unfamiliar society is powerfully and poignantly dramatised by Desai. The novel's structure is based on Hugo's stream of consciousness recollections of various events throughout his life.

Anita Desai's use of letters, literary allusions, songs, nursery rhymes, and travellers' stories as intertextual elements in her work is very exceptional. There are seven uneven chapters in Baumgartner's *Bombay*, and none of them have names.

The mother-consciousness becomes the most effective narrative device in the book because of the profound impact that Baumgartner's mother had on shaping his personality. Baumgartner battles with his dual German and Indian identities throughout his life, but he never fully embraces either:

They scowled at the "Firangi" (foreigner), who was good-natured yet unintentionally malicious. He drew back in pain, hunched down, and attempted to avoid touching anything that may be harmful since the term "still the world" was so icy. He was known as the firangi in India because of his beautiful complexion. All around the world, the unsavoury (150).

In this work, the author employs both the flashback and the flashforward approach for narrative. Dreams, nightmares, and intuition serve as the flashforward mechanism in this work, while memories and stream of consciousness constitute the flashback approach.

Thus, compared to other modern Indian English novels, Anita Desai's subjects are fresh and distinct. Novelists who follow her tend to have their paths diverted by her subjects. Every facet combines, and sometimes one might discern

a multitude of interconnected motifs. The writer uses these issues as a basis to develop her characters into a substantial totality. One distinctive aspect of Desai's literary style is the way it skillfully combines several emotions into a multi-layered, emotionally impactful composition. There is no denying that Desai is a superb artist whose technical proficiency is nothing short of extraordinary.

Conclusion

When it comes to novels as an art form, Anita Desai is a master. Her fictional works transcend the boundaries of time and place because of her mastery of literary methods that captivate readers. It has been said before that Anita Desai has given modern Indian English literature a fresh perspective. Generally speaking, she works with feminine sensitivity, and she has achieved a distinct and important position as a result of her inventive methods and subject concerns. Her obsession is to delve into her characters' thoughts and reveal their darkest secrets. Despite all we've mentioned about Anita Desai's narrative approach being bad, we can say with certainty that it is extremely commendable. The narrative method and character representation are the reasons why all of her works are popular. Overall, Desai's books are groundbreaking works of technical creativity that fuse elements of novels with lyrical poetry. The storytelling style of Desai is mostly characterised by language. One device of her artistically crafted works is her use of language and conversations. Desai is also known for his liberal use of hybrid terminology, Indian components, and syntactic and grammatical variations across codes. Undoubtedly, one area in which she really shines is in using the narrative structure of her works to delve into the depths of the human mind.

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