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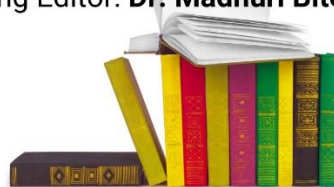
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Characters Return to Nature to Reintegrate the Human Self into the Ecological System in Anita Desai's Work

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Abstract:

Anita Desai's works include individuals who embark on treks back to nature in their quest to reintegrate with the natural world. These travels reveal profound spiritual and existential inquiries at the same time. In her works, Desai typically portrays characters fleeing the disillusionment and hardships of contemporary life by finding solace in the natural world. A longing to reconnect with the natural world, untainted by human-made constructs, is often expressed by retreating into the wilderness. By employing this pattern, Desai draws attention to the fact that the ecological system is essential for Spiritual fulfilment and aesthetic enjoyment. She implies that the only way to discover inner peace and completeness is to acknowledge our interdependent relationship with nature. Her protagonists usually seek consolation in nature, which enables them to contemplate their lives, recover from previous injuries, and finally regain peace with the natural world. She does this by having them seek refuge in nature.

Keywords: Anita Desai, nature, ecological, environments, solitude, peace.

Introduction

Anita Desai is a well-known figure in the field of Indian English writing. She has been honoured with several accolades, including the Sahitya Akademi Award and the Guardian Prize. Because she has written extensively over more than half a century about a wide variety of factors in Indian society. As a result of her discovery of the unacceptable prevalence of patriarchal culture in Indian society, she has violently fought against it in several pieces, including *Cry, the Peacock* (1963), *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975), *Bye Bye Blackbird* (1971), and *Fasting, Feasting* (1999). She describes the poet's predicament in his dying days as an observant Indian writer in the novel *In Custody*, which was published in 1984.

Literature has dedicated a significant amount of time and energy to investigating the intricate relationship between humans and the natural world. The natural environment has a significant impact on the human psyche. The subject matter that Anita Desai explores in her writings is much more than just a location; it is an essential component of the development of the characters and the investigation of their feelings. The protagonists of Desai's works usually seek refuge in nature when they are confronted with existential dilemmas, social pressures, or personal catastrophes. Desai can communicate a yearning to reconnect with the natural world, essential to human existence and the construction of identity, through the travels that they take to the natural world.

Desai uses nature symbolically to mirror the inner lives and broader perspectives of her characters, rather than solely appreciating its natural beauty. In “Fire on the Mountain” and “The Village by the Sea”, Desai depicts nature as a source that allows characters to escape their hardships and undergo transformation temporarily. These works of Anita Desai show nature as a

place where characters can grapple with their demons, conquer their inner turmoil, battle their dark side and self-discovery. Nature is a vital factor that brings peace and calm in a chaotic world, located amidst the chaos of modern life. Her artifice is a critique of the unvaried theme of alienation by modernity. They highlight the tension that exists between city life and nature. Her protagonists' excursions into nature are more than escapes; they yearn for spiritual growth, inner discovery and a crossing beyond human bounds. This research aims to illuminate the character's recovery from grief after returning to nature by examining the symbolic significance of nature in Desai's works and illuminating nature's role in human flourishing and self-discovery, especially in chaotic and urban environments.

Objectives

1. To research Environmental Concerns portrayed in Anita Desai's work.
2. To examine The Love of Nature and the Ensuing Refusal of the Anthropocentric World.

Almost immediately after the effects of global warming were apparent, people started seeking a way to resolve the issue. Given the fact that the subject of global warming has become a highly contentious issue, literary critics have started to investigate the subject. Because Anita Desai has a profound affection for the natural world, she has been a strong supporter of efforts to preserve natural ecosystems and wilderness places. A handful of her works, such as "The Village by the Sea," "Fire on the Mountain," "The Artist of Disappearance," and "Cry, The Peacock," are examples of works that deftly address the current state of the environment. Post-independent Indian fiction writers started keeping an eye on various environmental issues, they were concerned about the environment. Kamala Markandya's work is particularly notable for critiquing the Indian government's post-independence development plans, which prioritised human interests above all

else. In "Nectar in a Sieve," published in 1954, she criticises the excessive emphasis on development. This work demonstrates how rapidly Indian culture is developing. To concentrate on social themes, Anita Desai has departed from the typical fiction writing style that is traditionally used in India. Even though Anita Desai has written about the achievements of "invisible characters" such as Hari in *The Artist of Disappearance* and Arjuna in *Cry, the Peacock*, as well as the suffering of oppressed women in *Fasting, Feasting* and the anguish of an elderly poet in "In Custody," her work as a writer from India after the country's independence brilliantly juxtaposes these themes. Her works had reached the pinnacle of the psychological fiction tradition established in Europe. Through her studies of environmental concerns, she has brought a new dimension to the realm of Indian fiction written in English. In a way that demonstrates her understanding of environmental news, Anita Desai skillfully shows the rising division between sharing and caring for our natural resources. Many of her works contributed to the development of environmental consciousness in Indian English literature.

Nature is a recurring theme in Anita Desai's work. Her characters are often observed returning to nature in search of peace and solace. In *Fire on the Mountain*, Nanda is a widow who lives in a house surrounded by trees and hills. She spends her days walking in the woods, studying animals and birds, and enjoying the changing colours of the sky. She often uses nature as a symbol by juxtaposing nature's moods to express the moods of her characters. Desai's work explores the conflicting cultural influences and urban environmentalism in India. Her work explores how people's individual experiences reflect broader environmental issues, highlighting how personal stories can illustrate and emphasise larger ecological concerns. Desai's work shows how modernity can vandalize the natural environment and human interactions with nature. In *Fire on the Mountain*, Nanda's great-granddaughter Raka disrupts her placid life by bringing the noise and

turmoil breaking the illusion of serenity she has surrounded herself with. Desai's work often portrays the clash between antiquity and modernity, with Nanda representing tradition and Raka embodying modernity. However, Raka is depicted as a character returning to nature, she often finds peace in nature, escaping to the wilderness and connecting with the wild surroundings of her grandmother's home., often seeking solitude in the hills and forests, drawn to the untamed aspects of nature. The author uses the name Raka, symbolising the moon, which holds natural and mystical significance. She is fascinated with wild places, particularly drawn to the ravine and burned cottage, places that represent untamed and unkempt nature. Raka is a character whom Desai has outlined as someone who has grown to value isolation. Raka enjoys spending time alone in the hills, taking in the scenery free from the demands of society. She feels a connection to wild animals and empathises with solitary and untamed areas, which highlights her strong connection to nature. Nanda Kaul, the protagonist of "Fire on the Mountain," retreats to the Kasauli hills to escape her family obligations and the societal expectations surrounding her. To escape the emotional burdens that come with human connections, she has made the conscious decision to return to nature. The hilly environment represents her emotional and physical isolation. Desai's portrayal of nature, on the other hand, is not only peaceful; instead, it is a reflection of the character's suppressed emotions. The presence of her great-granddaughter, Raka, interrupts her isolated life. Raka's bond with nature's unbridled forces is explored as a dynamic between withdrawal and engagement with life. Nanda Kaul finds solitude in the Kasauli mountains, seeking both physical and emotional healing in "Fire on the Mountain". The images of the environment that Desai provides highlight Nanda's longing for self-reflection.

“She wanted no one and nothing else. Whatever else came, or happened here, would be an unwelcome intrusion and distraction.” (Desai, *Fire on the Mountain* 10)

These lines perfectly capture Nanda's desire to be isolated from the rest of society and to seek hideout in the mountains. However, the arrival of her great-granddaughter, Raka, makes it nearly impossible for her to achieve the desire to live in harmony with peaceful nature. The language used by Desai shows the character's growing internal intricacy, with nature acting as both a shelter and a reflection of the character's internal conflict. Raka's connection to the untamed terrain is apparent from the moment she arrives.

“Raka was no city child and had never known comfort or security”. “She only wanted to be left alone to climb the rocks, to lie in the thorn bushes, to peer into the ravines.”

The relationship that Raka has with nature is not one of peace; instead, it personifies a primitive to interact with the forest, which is a reflection of her wild and intimidating. In a manner that is parallel to Raka's psychological landscape, the natural world is harsh and crude. In contrast to Nanda, Raka appears deeply connected to the natural world and does not show any desire to escape into it. She embodies ferocity and chaotic power linked to the natural world, signifying a deep connection. This relationship is characterised by conflict and the acknowledgement of life's most treacherous and primeval facets. In his theory, Desai proposes that returning to nature functions not merely as a method of circumventing the complexities of existence, but as a modality for confronting the self and the intrinsic tumult that accompanies it.

Maya in “Cry the Peacock” is often interpreted as seeking a form of “return to nature” as a way to escape the confines of her oppressive social life and inner turmoil, finding solace in the natural world as a means to confront her anxieties and the haunting prophecy that plagues her; this is often expressed through imagery of the landscape and her connection to it throughout the novel. Readers can find symbolic use of nature as the novel heavily utilizes natural imagery like the

peacock, which represents both beauty and impending doom, mirroring Maya's internal conflict and sense of impending disaster. Maya can be seen seeking peace and escape. When Maya experiences a sense of entrapment due to societal norms and her tumultuous marital situation, she frequently turns to the natural environment for solace, finding deep peace and freedom amidst vast natural scenery. Desai uses psychological reflection. The changing moods of nature are frequently used to reflect Maya's emotional state, with stormy weather often mirroring her internal turmoil. She experiences a mental breakdown. This is primarily caused by the disordered relationship she has with her husband as well as the enormous demands that she is feeling in her life. The natural world acts as a reflection of Maya's mental state during this story. The internal tension that she is experiencing is reflected in her concentration on the cry of the peacocks, which is a symbolic sound that embodies both beauty and imminent. Within the context of this piece, the natural environment does not function as a haven but instead as a distressing reminder of her vulnerability and the impending fate that awaits her. The increasing preoccupation that Maya has with the natural world in *Cry, the Peacock* is a reflection of her subsiding into insanity. Her psychological situation is a distressing metaphor, and the call of the peacocks acts as a manifestation of her condition:

“The peacocks shrieked, heralding rain. The heat and stillness broke, and the rain came. It came stealthily, it came furtively, tiptoeing across the hot earth, bringing with it a smell of freshness, of the growing things.”

Maya's elevated emotional condition, the accumulation of stress, and the eventual release of her suppressed feelings are all reflected in nature, as this paragraph helps to illustrate. As a foreboding signal of her approaching psychological breakdown, the screams of the peacocks, which she inexorably associates with death, serve as a warning sign:

“The peacocks... their shrieks echo and re-echo. Will I also, one day, echo so?” (Desai, *Cry, the peacock* 10)

The mental anguish that Maya is experiencing is linked directly to the natural world in this situation. Nature's beauty and untamed state reveal her delicate mental state and inescapable downward spiral. The retreat of the character to nature in this work is connected to an investigation into the concept of insanity. Desai regularly draws parallels between the natural world and the subconscious, meaning that when characters retire into nature, they dig into the profound and frequently murky portions of their mind. Maya's psychological collapse takes place during her time spent in nature, which serves as a metaphor for the ultimate surrender of her fate. Sita in “Where shall we go this summer?” “Has a strong connection to nature, and the island of Manori is where she thinks she can find miracles. Sita's father once made the island magical, and she believes Manori will bless her with miracles., Sita says, "Wind, raise their wings and give voice to warning". This line may be a reference to nature's healing power. The island's mysterious occurrences and inexplicable sensations make Sita think it is a place of miracles. However, the island does not attract her as much as it used to, and her children find it difficult to adjust. Sita sees something thrilling on the island, but her children do not. When Sita experiences strong emotions, her children appear to her as “larvae in cocoons”. Sita is experiencing a great deal of emotional suffering as a result of her household conditions and the indifference of her husband. To escape the chaos that she experiences daily in Bombay, she decides to take refuge on an island. The island, which she visited when she was younger, is a representation of a simpler and more innocent period. Sita's return to this secluded area allows her to temporarily flee the pressures of motherhood and marital duties. Sita's emotional discontent and her yearning to escape her family's life are

symbolised through her visits to the island in the novel “Where Shall We Go This Summer?”. To convey Sita's feelings of isolation and disillusionment, Desai uses natural surroundings.

“The island – small, surrounded by a transparent, tremulous sea – represented a world apart from the mainland of human existence.” (Desai, *Where Shall We Go This Summer* 52)

Sita finds refuge in the intrinsic allure of the island's environment, aspiring to transcend the obligations associated with familial responsibilities. However, the island forces her to confront her unresolved emotions, as her desire for peace becomes a realization of her alienation. The island, which was once a place of refuge, transforms into a place where Sita faces her disillusionment with her existence, and nature, despite its beauty, transforms into a realm of confrontation rather than a place of peace. As with *Fire on the Mountain*, the natural environment in this story is not only peaceful but recalls the deep and unresolved feelings that Sita is experiencing. Even though the island offers a platform for her to address her anxieties, desires, and frustrations, it does not provide her with the calm or escape that she first craves. Desai portrays nature as symbolising the woman's inner turmoil, caught between her desire for liberation and her entrapment by emotional agony. Sita's decision to retire to the island is a symbol of her attempt to escape the expectations of society, while serving as a furnace for the anguish that she is experiencing on the inside.

Nature can be seen as a prominent theme in Anita Desai's “Clear Light of Day”, and it is used to convey the characters' emotions and relationships. The novel begins with a description of the garden, and the children are often found there to escape the stuffy interior. Nature is a source of entertainment for the children, such as when Tara plays with a snail in the garden. Nature is often analogous to the characters' actions and relationships. For example, bees represent Tara's guilt. The novel uses imagery of animals, sounds, smells, and vegetation to create tension and heat.

The natural setting is used to evoke the emotions of the characters. For example, the landscape is used to portray the complexities of Bim's life. The novel explores the impact of the partition on Indian society, and sibling conflicts symbolize the broader tensions between Hindus and Muslims. In "Clear Light of Day", nature plays a role that is both nuanced and significant. The story concentrates on the family home and garden in Old Delhi, where the three siblings, Bim, Tara, and Raja, were brought up. The garden is degrading, a metaphor for the passing of time and the loss of innocence that comes with being young. While her siblings have moved away, the main character, Bim, continues to reside in the family home, surrounded by memories of her past living experiences. Her attachment to the garden and the natural setting of the property is a representation of her inability to move on from everything that has happened in the past. In the novel *Clear Light of Day*, the deteriorating garden surrounding the home serves as a metaphor for both the passage of time and the characters' lives becoming increasingly stagnant. To emphasize Bim's connection to her past and her inability to move forward, Desai uses imagery regarding gardens.

“The garden had run wild, weeds grew in the flower beds, and the lawn was patchy and bare. Only the bougainvillea blazed – though in such disorder, its mad sprays had reached the highest branches of the trees...”

The garden, once a thriving and carefully maintained space, has wilted and died due to lack of attention. The bougainvillea's untamed beauty mirrors Bim's turbulent inner life. Using nature as a metaphor for memory, Desai demonstrates how the past can multiply, becoming entangled and difficult to control. The concepts of recollection and the passage of time are tightly interconnected to the novel's return to nature, which is a central motif. Bim's unwillingness to leave the family home and her unwavering commitment to the garden, which is in the process of degrading, are

both examples of her great connection to the past and the emotional struggle she faces in attempting to reconcile with it. Nature and memory are intertwined, reflecting cycles of growth and decay, and periods of renewal and stagnation.

Conclusion

The relationship that exists between individuals and the natural world is a fundamental topic that Anita Desai explores in her writings. Desai deliberately chooses to portray individuals who find solace in the natural environment as a strategy for attaining self-awareness and inner tranquillity. She does this by depicting them reintegrating into the natural system. The natural world is more than just a setting in Desai's works; it is a figurative realm that reflects the inner life of the characters and offers them a haven of retreat, reflection, and healing. An unremitting indication of the fundamental importance of achieving a symbiotic relationship with the natural environment for the advancement of human well-being, Desai's artistic creations consistently underscore this principle, notwithstanding the ever-widening chasm between humanity and the natural world.

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