

THE HEARTLAND OF THE INTERIOR SELF

A STUDY OF THE WORKS OF ANITA DESAI


A Thesis
submitted to the University of Mysore
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in English

by

S. N. VIKRAM RAJ URS



DEPARTMENT OF STUDIES IN ENGLISH
UNIVERSITY OF MYSORE
MANASAGANGOTTHRI
MYSORE - 570 006

DECEMBER 1993

THE HEARTLAND OF THE INTERIOR SELF
A STUDY OF THE WORKS OF ANITA DESAI

A Thesis
submitted to the University of Mysore
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in English

by

S. N. VIKRAM RAJ URS

DEPARTMENT OF STUDIES IN ENGLISH
UNIVERSITY OF MYSORE
MANASAGANGOTHRI
MYSORE - 570 006

DECEMBER 1993

DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled, **THE HEARTLAND OF THE INTERIOR SELF : A STUDY OF THE WORKS OF ANITA DESAI** is based on research carried out by me under the guidance of **Dr. D.A. SHANKAR**, Professor of English, University of Mysore, Mysore. This thesis or any part thereof has not formed the basis for the award of any degree or diploma of this or any other University.

MYSORE

DATED: :

S.N. VIKRAM RAJ URS

CERTIFICATE

I certify that the thesis entitled, **THE HEARTLAND OF THE INTERIOR SELF : A STUDY OF THE WORKS OF ANITA DESAI** is based on bonafide research carried out by **Sri. S.N. VIKRAM RAJ URS**, under my guidance at the Department of Studies in English, University of Mysore, Mysore. This thesis or any part thereof has not formed the basis for the award of any degree or diploma of this or any other University.

MYSORE

DATED:

Dr. D.A. SHANKAR

CONTENTS

	PAGE NO.
DECLARATION	ii
CERTIFICATE	iii
PREFACE	v
INTRODUCTION	vii
CHAPTER I IMAGINATION AND DISCIPLINE: THOUGHTS ON THE ART OF FICTION	1
CHAPTER II CRY, THE PEACOCK: A THEMATIC STUDY	36
CHAPTER III VOICES IN THE CITY	97
CHAPTER IV WHERE SHALL WE GO THIS SUMMER ?	171
CHAPTER V FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN	229
CHAPTER VI CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY	261
CHAPTER VII NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES	285
CHAPTER VIII TOWARDS CONCLUSION	349
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	363

PREFACE

The thrust of the following lines "O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall/Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed" (Hopkins, Sonnet No. 42) seems to be the focus of interest in the novels of Anita Desai. Her creative energy is directed towards exploring these 'no-man-fathomed' depths and the heights 'till they become a more lucid, brilliant and explicable reflection of the visible world' (Anita Desai). The present thesis is an attempt to understand how far she has been successful in presenting fresh flashes of truth in her 'solitary' characters.

I am grateful to my guide, **Dr. D.A. SHANKAR**, Professor, Department of Studies in English, Manasagangothri, University of Mysore, Mysore, who supervised my work at all stages. He is not only the inspiring spirit behind my work but also the most important contributing factor in the working out of my main argument. I must also thank my senior colleague, **Sri. L. DWARAKANATH**, Reader, Department of English, Institute of Correspondence Course and Continuing Education, University of Mysore, Manasagangothri, Mysore, with whom I had useful discussions on Anita Desai. I am grateful to my friend and colleague, **Dr. R. RAMACHANDRA**, Reader, Department of Studies in English, Manasagangothri,

Mysore, who encouraged me to complete my thesis within a span of four years. It is with love and affection that I remember the help rendered by my wife **Smt. VIJAYALAKSHMI URS** during my research period.

How shall I articulate my debt to my father, **Dr. CHADURANGA** who has always wanted me to do disciplined work? This thesis, in response to his eager expectations, is a meagre attempt at disciplining myself.

Special thanks to **Sri. A. SRINIVASA RAJU** and **Sri. K.S. RAMASHESHAN** who have neatly typed the final drafts of my thesis.

Thanks too to **VIDYADHAR** and **MARIETTE** who have read the final computer print out.

I am grateful to **Sri. B.K. VENKATESH**, for his Computer Processing of this thesis in an elegant manner.

MYSORE

DATED:

S.N. VIKARAM RAJ URS

INTRODUCTION

It is possible to argue that the major pre-occupations of Indian writers in English during 1920's and 1930's were Pan-Indian in nature with themes like universal love and brotherhood, removal of untouchability and re-creation of a new social order. The novels which appeared after the Indian Independence turn away from such themes and focus their attention on the individual, his problems of social and cultural identity. In other words, there is a marked shift in the interests of Indian creative writers from society to the individual. This is not to say that social issues are ignored; most certainly they are not. But the individual, his crises and his dilemmas occupy the foreground of the writer's attention.

The question of identity, particularly in the context of East-West encounter was another major theme in the Post-Independent period. The impact of Western civilization on Indian life resulted in generating cultural conflicts. Novelists like Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Balachandra Rajan, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal and Anita Desai have tried to comprehend the peculiar but true challenge of this confrontation in their works.

With the end of the Second World War, there appeared a new group of young women writers like Shanta Rama Rau, Attai Hosain, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal and Anita Desai. Anita Desai is inclined "to discover and then to underline, and finally to convey the true significance of things."¹ The fiction of Anita Desai is characterized by its exploratory nature both in terms of form and the experience that goes into its making.

The works of Anita Desai may be said to fall under the category of the Psychological Novel. She is primarily interested in exploring "unknown modes of Being". Her attention is turned inward, to the intricate workings within the consciousness of an individual. She deliberately leaves the kind of social document that demands the creation of realistic and flat characters. She has written novels that have been catalogued by critics as psychological, and that are purely subjective,"² This is partly because Anita Desai employs the language of the interior self. Even when two characters meet they use 'the language of their thoughts, their interior selves'.³

-
1. James Vinson. Ed. Contemporary Novelists, London, St. James Press; New York, St. Martin's Press, 1976. Comments by Anita Desai. P. 357.
 2. Anita Desai. 'The Indian Writer's Problems,' ACLALS News Bulletin, Fourth Series, No. 2, 1975, 12-14, New York, St. Martin's Press in The Literary Criterion, Summer 1975. No. 4, 29-32.
 3. Ibid., 29-32.

Through her extraordinary range of images and metaphors, Anita Desai works out a pattern of reaching out for concealed meanings. For her, novels grow from basic images. She clarifies that she uses "certain images again and again and that, although real, they acquire the significance of symbols. I imagine each writer ends by thus revealing his own mythology, a mythology that symbolizes his private morality and philosophy."¹

Commenting on her own prose style, Anita Desai has observed that,

"It is style that interests me most - and by this I mean the conscious labour of writing language and symbol, word and rhythm ... One must find a way to write the inner and outer rhythms."²

The focus of the thesis will be on locating new meanings in her fiction in the context of her philosophy of composition.

1. James Vinson. Ed. Contemporary Novelists, London, St. James Press; New York, St. Martin's Press, 1976. Comments by Anita Desai, P. 357.

2. In a letter to Dr. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, Indian Writing in English, Delhi, Sterling Publishers, 1989, P. 745.

The attempt of Anita Desai is to record a synthesis of the inner core of an individual with outer rhythms of life which determine the qualities of him. In each novel, she tries to see a pattern in the individual's attempt at recognising his/her weaknesses and strengths to discover hidden meanings. She tries to choose "the right word and the right accent"¹ to come to terms with the complex life of an individual.

Reality for Anita Desai is an exploration of a fragmented individual who passes through a jig-saw puzzle of his life to find out his/her meaning of existence. Her whole philosophy is aimed at finding out a meaningful order of life. Many of her protagonists are highly sensitive women characters. Here, the range of Anita Desai's characters is admirable, a nervous self-willed, elderly woman like Nanda Kaul to a hyper-sensitive lady like Maya; a determined, self-reliant, rebellious Bim to Sita who irons out a compromise within. The whole range comes under the close scrutiny of Anita Desai. The concluding chapter, attempts an assessment of Anita Desai's art and craftsmanship in the light of the textual analyses done in the preceding chapters.

1. Joseph Conrad, 'Familiar Preface', quoted by Walter F. Wright. Tone in Fiction in Ed. John Halperin, The Theory of the Novel, New York, Oxford University Press, 1974, P. 297.