



THEMES IN WRITINGS OF ANITA DESAI & NAYANTARA SAHGAL'S

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the recurring themes present in the literary works of Indian authors Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal. Both writers have played significant roles in the realm of Indian literature, delving into the complexities of human existence and society. Through their distinctive styles and compelling narratives, Desai and Sahgal have portrayed the multifaceted dimensions of the human psyche and the socio-cultural landscape of India. Anita Desai's writings often revolve around themes of loneliness, alienation, and the clash of traditional values with the forces of modernity. She skillfully explores the inner turmoil of her characters, particularly women, as they grapple with societal expectations and the search for personal identity. Desai's richly descriptive prose and insightful storytelling provide readers with a deep understanding of the challenges faced by individuals in a rapidly changing world.

Keywords: - Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Indian, Author, Female.

I. INTRODUCTION

Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal are two prominent Indian authors who have made significant contributions to the world of literature with their captivating writings. Both writers have delved deep into various themes, exploring the intricacies of human emotions and societal complexities. Through their evocative storytelling and compelling narratives, they have offered profound insights into the human condition and the ever-changing landscape of India.

Anita Desai, born in 1937, is known for her poignant portrayal of characters grappling with loneliness, alienation, and the clash of traditional values with modernity. Her works often revolve around the lives of women, depicting the challenges they face in a patriarchal society. With a keen eye for detail and a richly descriptive prose style, Desai has the ability to transport readers into the

heart of her characters' struggles and aspirations. Themes of identity, cultural displacement, and the search for self-discovery are recurrent in her writings, making her a sensitive chronicler of the human experience.

On the other hand, Nayantara Sahgal, born in 1927, has earned a reputation as a powerful voice in Indian literature. Her writing reflects a strong commitment to social and political issues, making her a prominent figure in the feminist movement. Sahgal's works often explore themes of power, corruption, and the struggle for justice in a rapidly changing India. Through her keen observations of society and its dynamics, she has been able to highlight the contradictions and challenges faced by individuals and the nation as a whole.

In this essay, we will delve into the common themes found in the writings of Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal. Their



works offer a fascinating glimpse into the human psyche, examining the complexities of relationships, the impact of societal norms, and the quest for personal and national identity. By analyzing their literary contributions, we hope to gain a deeper understanding of the shared concerns that these two remarkable writers have woven into the tapestry of Indian literature. From exploring the inner world of individuals to critiquing the outer world of society and politics, Desai and Sahgal's writings remain both timeless and relevant, transcending cultural boundaries and touching the hearts of readers worldwide.

II. THE DARK HOLDS NO TERRORS – WHERE SHALL WE GO THIS SUMMER?

Sarita (Saru) is the protagonist of *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, which was first published in 1980; the story follows her as she moves backwards and inwards to engage with herself, clearing the "picture" by erasing the conception of a self-image and re-examining an image constructed by "others." The focus is on the individual, who is interested in learning more about herself in the context of her family and community.

After publishing short pieces to women's publications, Deshpande claims she finally felt fulfilled when she penned *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. She said that the idea of the empowered female protagonist from her short fiction "A Liberated woman" has been percolating in her brain for quite some time. She continued by saying that she felt that she had gotten near to her goal with that work. She insists that she never considered it a "women's novel" and that it was instead "a serious novel about a serious human predicament." When asked

about the challenges of writing *Of Concerns, Of Anxieties*, she said, "It was difficult to write; it was different from the other novels I had read written by Indian writers... but all the reviews that came spoke of it as novel about a woman, a middle class woman, a professional woman, etc." A book written from a female perspective. (178)

Deshpande says that she found her voice and her topic in the book *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. This work introduced her to her genre, and once she discovered her voice in novels, she abandoned short fiction. Even while she found it challenging to write the book, the struggles experienced by the story's female heroine, Saru, came naturally to her.

This introductory passage is taken from the *Dhammapada*, one of the fifteen canonical Buddhist texts known collectively as the Buddha's Basket of Discourses. The *Dhammapada*, also known as "The Way of Truth," is an expository work on Buddhist philosophy and morality that consists of 423 Pali verses spoken by the Buddha. The epigraph makes Saru the one responsible for his own redemption.

III. THE BINDING VINE – THE VOICES IN THE CITY

Urmila, the main character in *The Binding Vine*, finally speaks out after a lengthy period of quiet that has been the norm for women. Women's roles, responsibilities, and even behaviors are called into question by some of Shashi Deshpande's early characters. They have come to the realization that they must break free of the bonds that have restricted the rights of women for millennia. They are painfully aware of the suffocation and debasement



to which they have been subjected by time-honored social conventions and their assigned duties. They achieve self-awareness, but only as it pertains to their immediate circumstances. These women don't share the current feminists' desire to purify society of its ills and burst out in a trial of glory by raising their voices in anger.

One interpretation of *The Binding Vine* is as a book that brings together, on a grander and more dramatic scale, ideas from its predecessors. The concept of a guy controlling a woman and claiming monopoly over her body is one Deshpande wanted to explore further after having dealt with it in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. It's also possible to see it as a story about women reclaiming their voices and rebuilding their lives via the written word. Lakshmi Holmstrom, expanding on the themes of *That Long Silence*, states that the book *The Binding Vine* is about the silences of women's life as well as the silences that are broken and the tales that are spoken. The work is metafictional since it focuses on the genre of fiction written by women. Additionally, the work is "to a large extent, a novel about mothers and daughters," as Deshpande puts it.

In her latest work, *The Binding Vine*, Shashi Deshpande makes her most outspoken declaration yet on a woman's sexuality. Shashi Deshpande uses the narrative of Urmi as a springboard to explore the sexual mistreatment of women in traditional Indian culture via the eyes of Mira, Kalpana, and other characters. (Mohan 151)

Urmila, a college professor, is a middle-class professional lady in Bombay, like most of Deshpande's female heroines.

Urmila's young daughter Anu has died, and the tale opens with her in mourning. Deshpande's works often return to the idea of loss.

Most of Deshpande's books begin with the protagonist experiencing some kind of crisis that leads them on a journey of self-discovery. Urmila begins to deal with her grief, questioning, and self-evaluation following two major events: the discovery of her mother-in-law Mira's poetry and her engagement with Shakutai, whose daughter Kalpana had been brutally raped. Deshpande's strategy of contrasting the past with the present serves as a pivot point in Urmila's path to self-realization.

The ceremony through which a trunk containing Mira's documents is presented to Urmila is reminiscent of the ancient Indian practice of presenting the family jewels to a son-in-law's new wife. Also crucial is the fact that Kishore's foster mother, Akka, who was married to Mira's late husband, is the one handing over the confidential documents. What he truly wants now is a mother for that motherless kid," Akka had been informed of her future husband, who was still deeply attached to his previous wife, Mira. (TBV 47) In contrast to Mira's narrative, this one focuses on the immense severity of the circumstance, Akka's resilience, and her sudden, out-of-character tears for Mira. What follows is Urmi's quest to learn more about the lady she refers to as "Mira," rather than "Kishore's mother," and the recovery and reconstruction of a life that has made an unusual impression on her.

IV. NOVEL AS BIOGRAPHY: A STUDY OF STORM IN CHANDIGARH

Novel as Biography: Analyzing "Storm in



Chandigarh" and "The Day in Shadow" is the subject of the third chapter. The books *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969) and *The Day in Shadow* (1971) are analyzed in this chapter from a biographical perspective. After the success of *A Time to be Happy* and *This Time of Morning*, Sahgal has written his third book, *Storm in Chandigarh*. In its creative representation of the prevailing political volatility, *Storm in Chandigarh* is reminiscent of her first two books, *A Time to be Happy* and *This Time of Morning*. Both *Storm in Chandigarh* and *This Time of Morning* examine the complicated social and ideological conflicts that arose in India after 1947. *Storm in Chandigarh*, however, surpasses both in terms of its aesthetic growth and resolution of the novel's central dramatic struggle.

The story explores the complexities of human relationships through the lenses of love, friendship, honesty, freedom, and equality. Against the political background of the battle between the newly separated states of Punjab and Haryana over the problems of Chandigarh and the Bakhra Nangal territorial legislation, the 'Storm' in the lives of three married couples is shown.

The political outlook of this work is similar to that of the previous. In the aftermath of India's political freedom and economic prosperity since 1947, this book shares the captivating drama of fatal changes in social connections. The threads that connect her past biographical works to this book are present here. The human soul in its natural cultural setting, with its signature reaction of Freedom to the threat of transformation. Except for Dubey, none of the characters in his tale are public

workers or elected officials.

The novel's title alludes to the bloodshed on both the personal and national levels. The writer aims to portray the tumultuous male-female interactions in the novel's upper class, both positive and negative. The 1947 political cliché of India's Partition is central to the narrative. The writer choose Punjab's second linguistic split of the country. The novel's political action takes place against the backdrop of Chandigarh's turbulent history of partition. The story reads like an account of the causes and effects of a campaign for political power. The narrative therefore functions as a kind of biography. Twenty years after the first religious division in 1947, the story focuses on the issue of a forced linguistic bifurcation of the Punjab. When the Punjab was split in two in the late 1960s, Punjabi-speaking, Sikh-dominated Punjab and Hindi-speaking, largely Hindu Haryana were formed, with Chandigarh serving as the capital for both. Sahgal's depiction of the violence, chaos, and uneasy political situation was accurate. As such, the story may be read as a biography of the state of politics right now. The textile mogul is Nikhil Ray. This is his wife, Gauri. They both belong to New Delhi's elite social circles. Inder manages the Chandigarh textile factories for Nikhil Ray's firm. Indeer and his wife Saroj, according to the standards of Chandigarh, have a very comfortable lifestyle. However, the padlock of marriage has kept two unhappy people together. The first Indian alcoholic beverage producer was named Jit Sahni. His wife, the outgoing Mara, and he have a peaceful, seemingly content existence in Chandigarh. The current Union Home



Minister of India humbly refers to himself as a "relic" of Gandhian history. He gives Vishal Dubey the mission of reconciling the Punjab's warring factions. Dubey is a reliable rising central officer who has made a name for himself as a problem solver. Vishal Dubey takes it upon himself to bring Chandigarh's men and women back to normalcy.

V. NOVEL AS BIOGRAPHY: A STUDY OF THE DAY IN SHADOW

Nayantara Sahgal's *The Day in Shadow* is her fourth book. The author nearly seems to be writing about himself in this work. Based on the author's own harrowing experiences, it is an authentic portrayal of a divorced woman's struggles. A male protagonist named Raj is at the novel's center. He has strong convictions about individual liberty and will not accept passive treatment. Delhi, the capital of a newly independent country, is the second main character. This city takes on a life of its own and influences the fates of those who live there.

Sahgal writes *The Day in Shadow* following his divorce in 1967. This book is the most autobiographical and "personal" of her works. Her "emotional autobiography," as this book has been called, is best understood when read in that context. This book has a strong autobiographical undercurrent. This book analyzes autobiographical details on several levels. In addition, the social history of colonial India after independence is deciphered. Based on the author's own harrowing experiences, it is an authentic portrayal of a divorced woman's struggles.

The protagonist, Raj, is a man in this book

as well. He is an advocate for individual liberty. He is not one to sit back and take it easy. Delhi, the capital of a newly independent country, is the other main character. This location takes on a life of its own, able to alter the paths of those who visit there. She writes, "In this book, I tried to figure out something that has happened to me — the shattering experience of divorce." Reference: (Sahgal, N. Dec. 12, 1979: p. Despite her distress, she made an effort to readjust. But the marriage did not work out, and she divorced Gautam in 1967. The book succeeds well as a work of literature.

Raj is a prominent member of parliament and a prominent Christian scholar in India. Som's ex-wife Simrit is a freelance journalist and writer. Ram Krishan is the editor of *Free India* and has decades of experience in the field. Sumer Singh is the dedicated Minister of State for Petroleum in the Union Cabinet. Old and sick in the hospital, Sardar Saheb is the senior minister. Som, Simrit's ex-husband, is a newly wealthy business mogul. The adaptable industrialist Shah is keen on Sumer Singh's approved contracts. Som has been working with Laffi and Vetter as business partners for some time.

Som and Simrit's kid Brij is 16 years old and he takes like his father in many ways. There are striking parallels between these fictional people and actual people. These are actual people from the history of Indian politics and culture. Sahgal highlights the variety of human personalities. In the theater of daily life in New Delhi, the microcosm and nerve center of contemporary India, she enacts the multiplicity of their reasons and mottos.



VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the literary works of Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal share a profound exploration of themes that offer a captivating glimpse into the human experience and the socio-cultural fabric of India. Through their unique storytelling abilities, both authors have woven intricate narratives that touch upon the complexities of human emotions, relationships, and societal norms.

Anita Desai's writings, with their focus on themes of loneliness, alienation, and cultural conflicts, paint a vivid portrait of individuals grappling with their inner selves and the world around them. Her empathetic portrayal of women and their struggles in a patriarchal society resonates deeply with readers, evoking a sense of introspection and reflection on the challenges faced by individuals amidst the rapidly evolving modernity.

On the other hand, Nayantara Sahgal's works bear a strong social and political conscience, addressing themes of power dynamics, corruption, and the pursuit of justice in the context of India's transformation. Sahgal's writing stands as a testament to her commitment to feminism and her unyielding exploration of women's roles and agency in society.

Despite their distinct approaches, Desai and Sahgal converge in their exploration of the search for personal and national identity. Both authors skillfully unravel the complexities of cultural heritage and the impact of societal norms on individual lives, illuminating the struggles faced by their characters in their journey to self-discovery.

Through a comprehensive analysis of their writings, it becomes evident that Desai and

Sahgal's themes transcend the boundaries of time and cultural contexts, resonating with readers from diverse backgrounds. Their works offer a universal appeal, inviting readers to reflect on their own lives, societies, and the broader human condition.

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