

NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES EMPLOYED IN ANITA DESAI'S NOVEL
THE VILLAGE BY THE SEA

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ABSTRACT

Anita Desai is a part of a new literary tradition of Indian writing in English, which describes back 30's to 40's of 20th century. The most prominent aspect of Anita Desai's art is the narrative technique. The village by the Sea is a story describes the life of fishermen who lives in Thul by the sea of Maharastra. Persons & places in the novel are described in a tremendous way. Problems like Simple men looking for jobs, family problems of characters, theme of friendship and reflection of Indian Tradition are portrayed. It is to note that an excellent glimpse of the village life is depicted. Third person narrative is employed very well. The village Thus and its inhabitants, particularly Hari, Lila and the people close to them vividly. Being a lover of nature, costal village life is shown a very breath of this novel. Colourful hangles and colourful saris, the cries of sea birds have been brought out splendidly. This paper aims to describe the narrative techniques employed by Mrs. Desai in *The Village By The Sea*.

Key Words: Narrative techniques, Fiction, Plot construction

INTRODUCTION

Mrs. Desai presents complacent, idle people of the middle or upper middle classes. This is true of *The Village by the Sea* and as well as her other novels like *Cry, the Peacock, Voices in the City, Fire on the Mountain* and *Where Shall We go This Summer?* . Emotional and psychological problems dominate than the economical problems. Economic hardships come up for examination in *Clear Light of Day* and also *In Custody* to some extent. Hari and Lila in *The Village by The Sea* struggle for economical needs actually and their hard work raises the family from abysmal poverty to subsistence level. Anita Desai deals with the lower strata of society and rural life here for the first time. Simply because Hari and Lila, the central figures of the novel are a young boy and a girl, some critics as a book for children even though it deals with issues

and problems of the adult world. She uses current words of common English speech in this novel.

DESCRIPTION OF SURVIVAL AND CHANGE

The Village by The Sea stresses that hard labour is imperative for subsistence and survival. Hari, the protagonist works hard in the patch of the land for growing vegetables, breaks and sells bunches of coconut, tries to catch fish by net on the sea-shore as long as he is at Thus, and works very hard in Jagu's restaurant, cleaning pots, kneading dough, baking chapattis, serving the visitors with food and tea and lighting the stoves and hearths and keeping awake almost all through the night. In his spare time, he learns the art of watchmending from Mr. Panwallah. His elder sister Lila works equally hard. She attends to her sick mother, looks after her drunken father and her younger sister Bela and Kamal by working hard for the de Silvas and Sayyid Ali Sahib at Man Repos. In fact, she manages her family with poise and grit during the absence of Hari and by her hard work, she gets the poor man's plenty. It is further supplemented by the description of the Sri Krishna Eating House of Gowalia Tank, Bombay, the meanest and the shabbiest restaurant, frequented by beggars and coolies. The owner of the restaurant lives in a shack in one of the slums called *zopadpattis* in Bombay. During the monsoon these *zopadpattis* become uninhabitable because of leaky roofs, shaky walls and shabby and damp floors. People there live a precarious existence.

PLOT CONSTRUCTION IN THE NOVEL

The Plot construction in the novel *The Village by the Sea* is based on substantial and solid human action namely the heroic struggles of Hari and Lila, which is serious and significant. Lila works in her house, *Mon Repos*, does marketing, cooking and cleaning. Bela and Kalam gather moluses for dinner. Hari's action in the field, in Jagu's hotel and Mr. Panwallah's watchworks redeem the family's condition. Desai presents humming human action at Thul, at sea and in Bombay. In addition to the action, the plot is carried through solid description of scenes and situations and incidents, which is a favourite device in Desai's novels. The plot is divided into thirteen chapters with Hari seeking a release from Thus, his earning of money in Bombay and

return and the possibility of future economic independence. In the chapters attention is focused alternately on Bombay and then on Thul. In more than half of them pictures Bombay viewpoint predominates, and in the other half and in the early chapters Thul viewpoint dominates. Mostly the spectacle is rendered through the eyes and mind and attitude of Hari. The dominance Hari's point of view not only gives unity to the plot but also a freshness of outlook. Hari's longing for the uplift of the family combined with that of Lila imparts another unifying effect to the tale. The alternation of the two points of view adds another harmonious effect. In *The Village by the Sea*, rural India is brought out alive for almost the first time. Countryside is no mere picnic ground but vital part of India scintillating with density of human interest and problems. De Silvas come for repose in Thul and Sayyid Ali for serious bird-watching. Adarkar's organization of protest against the proposed fertilizer factory is for rural welfare. There is no gulf between the Haves and Have-nots; they lead harmonious life of mutual help and interdependence. The novel thus achieves a happy fusion of the village and the city; the rural and the urban life; the rich and the poor. De Silvas and Sayyid Ali are ambassadors of good will who bridge the interests of the city and the village.

STYLE ADOPTED IN THE NOVEL

Anita Desai has excellent mastery over language and style. In this novel, Desai used current words of common English speech. She does not employ high-sounding, big ornate words as she does in her other novels. The subject matter of *The Village by the Sea* is simple unlike the complex emotions expressed in novels like *Cry*, *The Peacock*. Therefore here the style is plain and lucid without any labyrinths of analysis and explanation, which hamper the prose. At times, it is lyrical as in the evocation of cheerful moods of nature and the sea. It is racy and businesslike in description of scenes and places, analytical and minute in capturing the yearnings and reveries of Hari. Sentences are free and unburdened and the rhythm and cadence flow smoothly. At times description have suggestive meanings: "The horizon was highly lit by the sun that seemed to be melting into the sea like a globe of molten glass. The sky had paled to lemon-yellow and in the east it was already mauve. A star appeared the brilliant evening star that was always the first to shine. This is one of the most charming pictures of sunset to be found in prose. Hari and Lila, Bela and Kamal are together and playing after long separation. In

the pleasant dusk of their hardships a bright star of hope has begun to twinkle. Mrs. Desai is an excellent painter of cities and city life. The gloomy haunting city of Calcutta is painted in *Voices in the City* and snatches of Delhi are described in *Cry*, *The Peacock* and in *In Custody* are examples of that. In *The Village by the Sea*, a brilliant, vivid picture of Bombay is presented, Bombay in monsoon, the fair like scenes of Chowpatty, “the great looming sides of steamships berthed at the docks, cranes lifting and lowering huge bales, men bare-bodied and sweating” huge crowds thronging and moving in the street, huge buildings and inscrutable life inspiring awe are brought in lively.

DESCRIPTION OF NATURE IN THE NOVEL

Mrs. Desai is capable of evoking the most beautiful and vital pictures of nature. She presents nature not only as a source of sensuous pleasure, but also as a elemental object on which man lives. In chapter one, we have an excellent picture of flowers: “scarlet hibiscus blooms, sweet-smelling spider lilies and bright butter-yellow allamanda flowers”. It is followed by finer view of butterflies: “Butterflies flew up out of the tussocks and bushes of wild glowers-large zebra-striped ones with a faint tinge of blue to their wings, showy black ones with scarlet-tipped wings, and little sulphur-yellow ones that fluttered about in twos and threes. “The picture of birds is lovelier still “Flute-voiced drongoes swooped and cut through the air like dazzling knives that reflected the sun and glinted blue-black, and pert little magpie robins frisked and flirted their tails as they hopped on the dewy grass. Pairs of crested bulbuls sang from the branches. A single crow-pheasant, invisible, called out coop-coop coop”. Then follows the picture of wide elemental music: “It was the voice of the village Thul as much as the roar of the waves and the wind in the palms.” These are lyrical miniatures in prose and evoke a picture of nature, which is quite unlike Hardy’s Egdon Heath. Mrs. Desai presents beautiful and evocative pictures of the sky in monsoon and post-monsoon period and the clouds and the sea mixing into awful mystery and drenching the earth. She depicts the sea in different moods as though playing with seacoast visitors at occasions, and the “stretching out all the way to Arica” and swallowing boatmen in angry storms and growing milder and friendlier for human commerce in post-monsoon period.

CONCLUSION

Desai adopts the traditional historic or epic mode of narration in this novel. The narrative here is direct and charming and gives one the impression of an old primitive ballad narrating the adventures of an adolescent boy and his sister trying to pull the family out of the mire of poverty, sickness and drunkenness. Desai employs the stream-of-consciousness technique and memory flash backs to give us a peep into the workings of the minds of the protagonist. But she skillfully subordinates them to the general need of objective descriptions. Life in the city is portrayed excellently. The novel reveals the expertise of Desai to adjust her prose style to meet the requirements of peculiar situation. She adopts her style to suit all moods, though she specializes in the language of introspection. In conclusion, it is clear that she excels in describing most vividly and convincingly the thoughts and ideas, which pass through the mind of a character. In other words, she is an expert in narrative technique.

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