

Locational Evocational and Emotional Topography in Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain, Clear Light of Day and Cry, the Peacock*

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ABSTRACT

The nature with all its phenomena governs the whole universe and it is a principal source for civilization to exist on this planet. This whole natural system cannot be controlled or governed by man. Though, being free gifts of nature, human beings stated misusing these resources for their personal gain and desires. As a result, natural resources are being degraded and gradually fading away the natural setting with the concern of the universal threats revolving around us.

India is blessed with the wide range of natural resources, beginning from the Himalaya Regions to the dynamics of Sunderbans and the dry land-desert in Rajasthan. With the passing of time, these natural resources are harmed by population, pollution and other avarices of humankind. Now the writers come out with the global concerns for the degradation and depletion of nature and environmental landscapes. During the post- colonial era, Anita Desai is a leading Indian author in English who construct nature in their works. She remarkably writes on those aspects which she has observed. She succeeds in capturing and delineating the spirit of surroundings, places and social values. Nature has been known to reflect the inner state of human mind more than ever, either through as it is in its immediateness or by its phenomenal happenings like drizzle or heavy downpour. Griffin rightly interprets on it in her book, '*Woman and Nature: Roaring Inside Her*', that

“I know am made from the earth, as my mother’s hands were made
from this earth, as her dreams came from this earth... you... are earth
too, and listen as we speak to each other of what we know, the light is in us.”

(Griffin 227)

Based on this aspect Anita Desai's masterpieces *Fire on the Mountains* and *Clear Light of Day* portray a beautiful significance of nature in every aspect of human nature. Set in the natural backdrop of Kasauli and Delhi respectively, these two novels aptly portray not only the isolation and loneliness haunting the human mind but also specifically demonstrates the passage of time in the life of people, connected by blood and the ups and downs in their relations, signified by their immediate surroundings and it's protection by Carson.

Keywords- eco-criticism, topography, nature-conservation, identification.

I. INTRODUCTION

Ever since being fascinated by the rain-drops on the glass window panes, and at times being fascinated about how it aptly or rather perfectly captured the inner turmoil or the exact mood of my mind, the reflection of the environment caught my immediate attention.

Being enthralled by this amazing similarity and co-incidence which repeats itself time and again, my mind was really determined to portray this similarity which is captured by Anita Desai in her novels. Thus, *Fire on the Mountains* and *Clear Light of Day* are the specific novels in which the role of nature has not only been pointed out but also magnified to a great extent.

II. ABOUT DESAI

Anita Desai is indubitably one of the foremost modern Indian authors in English. She has an exceptional natural quality of intellect in literature. She has been recognized all over the world as a literary genius. On June 24, 1937, she was born in Missouri, a hill station near Dehradun in northern India. She became gradually grown surrounded by Western Literature and music like the music of Ludwig Van Beethoven, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Ludwig van Beethoven and Edward Grieg and books by Johann Goethe, Friedrich Schiller, Heinrich Heine. Dhiren. N. Mazumdar, her father was a Bengali and Antoinette Nime, her mother was a German. They both came together in Germany. She acquainted with him and in 1920s she immigrated to India. Anita Desai was one of the four children; she had two sisters and a brother. She spoke German because as she explains, her parents spoke German with each other. German therefore became her first language as a child. But she communicated with her friends and neighbours in Hindi.

She initially learnt to read and write English language when she was in school which is why it turned out to be her literary language. Initially she was provided schooling and training in English language. On the contrary, at home she was brought up by speaking both Hindi and German. She observes that it had a tremendous effect on her. Because it is English language that she saw, ever read and also wrote for the first time. Desai was always craving for to be a part of that world of books where she felt that English was the language of books. Due to her formal education in English, she went on writing in English too.

III. IDENTIFICATION OF SELF WITH TOPOGRAPHY IN CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY

Desai's *Clear Light of Day* is her semiautobiographical novel, although the characters are not related to her brothers and sisters. In this novel, she discovers the momentous of childhood memories in our life. It focuses on the struggles of a bourgeois family during the partition of India against the forces of disintegration and their often abuse and violence. One can clearly distinguish her in the character of Raja. Raja is involved deeply in all different types of literature and culture, and also is so worried about protecting the multicultural Indian heritage, much in the same way as she is. Her fears for Muslim neighbour family and in the whole worries about the loss of all the Muslim culture and literature contributed to India.

This is one novel that is about time where time plays different roles in the lives of her characters. *Clear Light of Day* is the sarcastic title of the novel so thoughtful with the indistinguishable border between illusion and reality. The clear and bright light of the day,

in which one can see everything, has made Bimla's life miserable because she has the realization of her imperfect love for them all. Even so, she wants to love shade, quiet and darkness. Thus, Bimla's despair and loveliness is given a spiritual and sacred element in the novel. Thus, it is time that brings about a change in the lives of the characters of the novel.

IV. NATURE WITHIN HUMANS IN FIRE ON THE MOUNTAINS

To start with, *Fire on the Mountains* (1977) which is generally considered as the masterpiece of Desai, has derived its title from the noble prize winner William Golding's celebrated novel entitled *Lord of Flies*' second chapter *Fire on the Mountain*.

It is a beautiful novel focused on two orderly women who retire to a hill station house in their old age to lead a peaceful life there and a great granddaughter Raka who comes to stay with them. Nanda Kaul had made her ready after a long time to get pleasure from the peace and beauty of the alone place Kasauli. She wished to retreat to her small house with nature. But, one more strange character Raka intruded to her loneliness. Due to lack of attention and affection from her husband and family, she desires only to be left unaccompanied to pursue her loneliness amongst the rocks and pines of Kasauli. But there is not complete escape from the past memories as Nanda is also a failure in her efforts. Although as a busy and ideal wife in the past, she performed all her duties, formalities as well relations. Her husband and her family members too never concerned about her desires which forced her to wish for privacy.

“To be left alone and pursue her own secrets of life among the rocks and pines...”

(Desai 48)

Desai has portrayed Nanda Kaul as a wife, mother, and grandmother who spent her whole life for her family, bringing up the children, and performing all the household duties and responsibilities by ignoring her own desires, crushes, expectations, sacrifices etc. and in short losing her own identity she merges with the family which is not expected as something extraordinary but considered usual in Indian context.

Nanda Kaul is pleased Nanda Kaul is pleased only when she is left unaccompanied to mount higher. She hates Raka's intrusion in her life. Unfortunately, by nature or by birth, Mrs. Kaul is not an alien. Her alienation is imposed upon her by herself. She desires to live in isolation because she is fed up with the state of affairs she handles daily in her old house. There is symbolic end when the mountain has been set on fire as well as a symbolic fire in the heart of Nanda Kaul. In the Modern societies and also in the traditional Indian family, elderly women to be marginalized and so Anita Desai centers her novel on the character of an old woman, Nanda Kaul, who

chooses a marginal place to lie in and she identifies herself with ‘_barrenness and starkness’ of the surrounding landscape.

V. HUMAN EMOTIONS IN JUXTAPOSITION OF NATURE- REFLECTIONS

Moreover, Anita Desai describes the human sentiments in juxtaposition with not only their action but with the environment so well, as she did in her novel *“Fire on the Mountain.”* In the very first chapter of the book, Desai portrays the Kausauli, the place where Nanda Kaul, the Protagonist devotes her best years of her life; she describes her character with everything around nature, how she is influenced by her surroundings and each at of hers defining her mental status so that we can read her mind. With the close reading of the works of Anita Desai like *Where shall we go this, Summer?* and especially, *in Fire on the mountain*, one finds the connection between the nature and woman, and the importance of nature. Even the title itself points out the Nature symbolism. Desai’s fully involvement with the atmosphere, background and to the details of Indian scene is the leading element in the novel like trees, season, birds, mountains, gardens symbolize the grim reality of existence, originality, hope, freshness etc.

Anita Desai’s *Fire on the Mountain* is set in Carignano in Kasauli, at the surroundings of the Shimla hills and she magnificently portrays the Indian life. The novel deals with the three women characters - the worst sufferers being the women character -Nanda, Raka and Ila’s the personal struggle of and their oppressed life,. Throughout the novel, these characters have fire burning inside; confront to triumph over the societal boundaries imposed on them by the Patriarchal system. The road of self discovery is found through the characters of the novel. The novel is written in three parts which are interconnected:

- 1) Nanda Kaul at Carignano,
- 2) Raka comes to Carignano and
- 3) Ila Das leaves Carignano (Anita)

Respectively is divided into several unequal short chapters, like acts of a drama followed by epilogue in which the writer examines the significant action occurring within the psyches of Nanda Kaul and her great granddaughter Raka as well as her friend Ila Das.

The opening part of *Fire on the Mountain* depicts the geographical and Psychological setting of the protagonist Nanda Kaul to the arrival of Raka- her great granddaughter.

Part II of the novel deals with the interaction and later on the lack of it between Nanda Kaul and Raka. Despite the generation gap, they are quite similar in behaviour.

VI. ANALYSIS WITH RESPECT TO NATURE

The novel deals with the marginal, unimportant, loneliness, isolation and agony in the life of the protagonist, Nanda Kaul. Nanda Kaul, a great grandmother, has abandoned her complete world living in isolation, comes to Kausauli to consume her remaining days in the peace of mountain. It was her love for nature which brought her to the desolate place Carignano: the place of isolation and bareness as her past life was full of suffering and miseries. She wants seclusion as nothing to do with any of the people in her life.

Here, we can compare Nanda’s Taruma with Mother Nature Taruma with Mother Nature. Like Nature, she is also giving everything and sacrifices herself to her family silently, without thinking of her own desires. Both women and Nature bear everything mutely. So there is a connection between the dominations, exploitations and subjugation of women and nature by patriarchal attitudes. These two must act to save themselves from the exploitations.

Nanda Kaul becomes a rebellion and protests against the forced relationship by freeing herself from the shackles of her married life. And becomes a part of nature and spends some time with her and identifies her with tress, mountains and wind. She wants to be remote, solitude like the eagle soaring above the mountain, to be totally alone, and still,

“To be a tree, no more no less, was all she was prepared to undertake”

(Desai 4)

However, destiny has one new test in her old age. Raka- her great granddaughter comes in Nanda’s life. She has decided to live in a calm place; once again she is called for nurturing, caring, and comforting by her children. The news of the arrival of Raka upsets her. Both have secluded themselves from external world just like the isolated place Carignano. She is disappointed by Raka’s arrival at Carignano,

Ultimately Nanda is tired of her busy life and arrives at Kasauli- Carignano in search of peace and calmness, and she enjoys the company and beauty of nature at Kasauli and wishes not to interfere by her granddaughter Raka as well her friend Ila Das. P. D Dubey accurately described the loneliness of the characters in his book entitled,

Feminine Consciousness in Anita Desai’s *Fire on the Mountain*, Critical Essays on Anita Desai’s Fiction, that

“The Garden of Carignano is a projection of Nanda Kaul”’s yearning for loneliness and privacy. Nanda like many of us portrays to be an assertive, strong personality whereas inside she was totally shattered by

her husband's infidelity. Nanda discovers herself in Raka, because Raka is what Nanda always wanted to be."

(Dubey, P. D. and Dodiya 118)

Nanda kaul's secluded life at Carignano can be compared with nature- to River. As the surface of the river is clear and untouched which reflects isolation like Nanda kaul, and the arrival of Raka is like stone, when a stone thrown into the river, it creates ripples, means disturbs the isolation of the river, so Nanda Kaul's isolation is disturbed by the arrival of Raka because she needs to withdraw. Social life that is the important aspect for every human being in society, but Nanda is in opposition to it and exhausted of it. She decides to be just very formal and aloof with Raka,

"To Nanda Kaul she was still an intruder, an outsider, a mosquito flown up from the plains to tease and worry."

(Desai 44)

She seeks adventures such as looking for berries, snacks, jackals, ghosts in the loneliness and peaceful atmosphere of the mountains. Raka wanders at the different sites of Cariignano.

VII. CONCLUSION AT ITS PAR

Thus, to sum up the novel, conflict between attaching and withdrawing are the essential features of the novel. That is performing vital in the lives of the characters.

Raka is different from other children, not all the children would dare to chase it. She has built her imaginary world around her and needs nothing from life. She wants to chase her inner world of fantasy or to chase her own secret of life, snakes, animals, ghosts amongst the rocks and pins of Kasauli. It is a life, she craved and yearning for as well as watched from the outer surface –in Delhi, in Manila, but she has never attempted to enter in it. The jackals are the symbol of the mystery of life and the child wants to chase it. She wants to see the jackals. And her quest for Monkey Point is a symbolic of her search for something unknown in her life.

Desai has written this novel in unique manner with the symbolic interpretation. In this novel, Nature is used as a motif as she has blended the nature and characters. This novel is prosperous with the images of woman environment interrelatedness. Here is the evidence of it such as the motifs and imagery - Fire, Sea, Ravine, Mountains, Raka as an insect, Garden are used to present the inner turmoil and anger of the characters- Nanda, Raka and Ila das. She uses the nature to represent the symbolism and imagery of character as it has its own importance in the novel. Desai exhibits several dominant zoological, botanical atmosphere and colorful imagery through the description of landscape, jackal, and imagination of nature. Desai skillfully draws a

meaningful link between human and nature to create a mosaic touch in the novel. By mentioning the efficiency of forest fire, Anita Desai tries to emphasis on the ecological imbalance on earth due to human beings misused of it. By using the metaphors of insects and animals like mosquitoes, lizards and jackals, Anita Desai draws our attention on how her female characters loathe the absurdity of their existence.

In *Fire on the Mountain*, Desai symbolizes, Nanda Kaul as a Mountain or forest which signifies her self-esteem and Raka represents as a wild nature or fire as well as their mental trauma. So, by the arrival of Raka, her life becomes hell.

Thus, through the oppression and domination of her woman characters, Nanda, Raka and Ila Das, Desai brings out the association between human and nature and she concluded the fact that "we have to return everything that we have borrowed from nature".

Secondly, to emphasize it even more *Clear Light of Day* (1980), we can rightly assert that Nature is omnipresent in this novel of Desai. The children are constantly in the garden to escape the stuffy interior. Gatherings happen outside, such as at Hyder Ali's house and the Misra's; Tara's guilt is physically represented by bees; Nature is present even on clothes and in the poetry that Bim and Raja recite. It is significant that the novel begins with a description of the garden ("the koel began to call before daylight"), and Anita Desai clearly places an emphasis on setting. Nature in the novel is a source of entertainment, but more significantly, it is often analogous to the relationships and actions of the characters.

The first function of Nature in the novel is as a source of entertainment and learning for the Das children. The first instance of this is when Tara, at the very beginning of the story, thinking she has seen a pearl, finds a snail instead and plays with it, as she did when they were children, performing "the rites of childhood over the creature". A few pages later, Tara muses over the "rastic pleasures" that she used to derive from the garden, longing to run to the guava trees and find a whole one to bite into. The garden is their source of refreshment in the heat of summer, and the nature filled surroundings provide Tara with reprieve from the business of her city life. The garden is "overgrown", "neglected" and "uncontrolled", not perfect and square, so she feels like she can relax and forget about her engagement book. It also shows the contrast between Tara and Bim.

Nature's second function in the novel is to mirror or complement the actions or feelings of the characters in the book. Many paragraphs end with a reference to Nature, such as "the dog suddenly pounced upon the flea" or "a koel lifted itself out of the heavy torpor of the afternoon and called tentatively, as if enquiring into the existence of the evening". This offers a parallel between what has just happened in the story and the natural world. The dog pounces on the flea immediately after Bakul tells Bim that he will marry Tara, and could represent Bim's

isolation beginning to trap her. The koel calls tentatively after Bim has come to an understanding of herself and her relationship with her family and is finally at peace. It could be seen as her uplifting rebirth. Another parallel we can find is the heat of the summer and the political heat of 1947. The most important analogy between Nature and the human world is the garden. At the beginning of the novel, the roses are said to have grown smaller and sicker; they are “dusted with disease”. At the end of the novel, there is a dust storm which mirrors the discussion Bim and Tara are having about Raja, and which leaves the garden “shrouded in dust” and everything looking “ancient and bent”. The garden, so beautiful and enjoyable in their childhood, has become old and grey as the years have progressed and the Das children have grown apart. Nature in the novel is also beautiful and dangerous at the same time. For example, mosquitoes are mentioned at the beginning as “singing and stinging”, and when the gardener waters, “bringing out the green scent of watered earth and refreshed plants”, mynahs quarrel and parrots come, a “lurid, shrieking green”, ripping flowers to bits. This carries a warning and can be compared with human relationships, especially the relationship between Tara, Bim and Raja.

Finally, Nature is used as a point of comparison with the characters themselves. There is a long metaphor in which Aunt Mira and the children are compared to plants and trees, Aunt Mira being the “tree that grew at the centre of their lives”: “Soon they grew tall, soon they grew strong. They wrapped themselves around her, smothering her in leaves and flowers. She laughed at the profusion, the beauty of this little grove that was the whole forest to her, the whole world. (...) she would just be the old log, the dried mass of roots on which they grew. She was the tree, she was the soil, she was the earth.” This metaphor is continued when Baba is compared to a “plant grown underground”, emphasizing the difference between him and his siblings. It also contrasts with the image that we are given of the Das parents. The roses in the garden were supposedly planted by the father, but neither he nor the gardener knew how to take care of them, so although beautiful at first, they withered. The fact that Tara doesn't know for sure that her father planted them compares with his constant absence in his children's lives. Like the roses, the Das children were not properly cared for which has led them to bicker and row, ultimately failing to understand each other. The cow, warm and soft, can also be seen as the Das parents trying to offer comfort and nourishment to their children, but the cow, like the Das parents and Aunt Mira, dies, leaving the children alone, Raja and Tara longing to escape and Bimla bitter. Additionally, both Aunt Mira and Tara are compared to birds, at different moments in the book. Aunt Mira, weak with alcoholism, “almost ceased to be human, became bird, and old bird with its feathers plucked, its bones jutting out from under the blue tinged skin, too antique, too crushed to move.” Tara, when Bim cuts off her hair, looks “like a baby pigeon fallen out of its nest, blue-

skinned and bristly, crouching behind the water tank and crying.” The idea of a bird too weak to fly is an accurate representation of Aunt Mira, widowed and rejected, and Tara, who is an introvert with no grand ambitions. It seems to point to what Tara might have become without Bakul, and adds to the contrast between the two sisters.

Nature which gives peace and makes human beings in harmony, man tries to destroy this harmony and peace. In the world of today, we live in this fast turning life, and we get used to of it which has exploited nature like anything. We forget the fact that this nature gives us peace and energy, and everything we can find in the lap of nature.

In this modern era, Man becomes machine by using modern technologies and inventing new one's day by day. To satisfy his quest or desire, he uses natural resources. Here Anita Desai rightly gives the proof by the example of a Garden House. It was one of the most attractive homes in Kasauli. Now it has been adopted by Government as an army camp.

Similarly, the rose walks in Desai's *Clear Light of Day* especially the roses reveal the contrast between the past and the present, between Tara and Bim. The rose bushes are ‘overgrown’, ‘neglected’, and ‘uncontrolled’. Bim admits that the ‘roses grow smaller and sicker every year.’ While Tara has blossomed by marrying and gone away, Bim has not. the frustration of Bim reveals itself in her violence towards a blooming rose. She shakes a blossoming rose and it comes apart instantly. She is also perhaps the snail in the rose-walk, continually working like a Sisyphus, and never finding any change in her life.

So, nature is always in co-existence with the tit-bits of everyday life and also colourfully portrays every aura of human existence and mental stages and reflects it in the ambience in which humans live.

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