

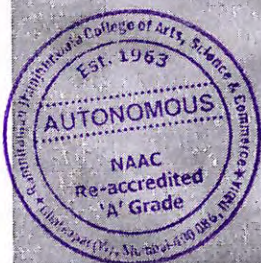
POST- COLONIAL PRAXIS:


Ramifications and Intricacies

People, Paradigm and Practice

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Post-Colonial Praxis: Ramifications and Intricacies, with the sub-title People, Paradigm and Practice offers a perspective of the future by looking through the scope of the past, meeting in a focal point of the present. The paradox echoed models concerns that are relevant to the current climate of the Global Economy: "Where are we now?" "How do we move forward?" The subthemes explored dissect the influence of Postcolonialism across a diverse spectrum and its relation to socio-economic application. We take a dive into the minds of a selected few of the foremost authorities on these disciplines, proposing their synopsis in a critical exploratory manner. Through these papers, the provocation that brings along revelation, enlightenment, introspection, refreshed perspective, context, self-realization and inevitably change, marks the genesis of a new frontier in chartering the way forward.

"Until the lion learns how to write, every story will glory the hunter" J. Nozipo Maraire

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Existential Crisis in Anita Desai's Fiction: A Postcolonial Perspective

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Abstract: The corona virus disease, the pandemic has emerged as a global crisis and brought the nations to a standstill. The human society is struggling for survival owing to the varied problems faced by public internationally such as health, gender discrimination, immigration, virtual, socio-economic divide etc., and its impact on personal and public life resulting in chaotic, complex and traumatic situations - hunger, suicide, death, accidents, loneliness, domestic violence, migration and reverse migration, etc., due to the lockdown all over the world. COVID-19 has also led to the realization that culture, equality, immunity, positivity, self, selflessness and traditions are indispensable with socio-economic, scientific and technological developments in life; the time and tide wait for none; nature and its cycle plays an important role in our existence; Both, individual and collective efforts, have its own significance in finding solution for existential issues. In the light of these observations, this paper seeks to elucidate Anita Desai's fiction to underline the existential crises faced by her characters-children, adult, aged- male, female, not only within the country but outside the country at familial, societal, psychological and spiritual levels.

Keywords: corona, crisis, existential, hunger, psychological

It is a well-known fact that every writer is product of the age in which s/he lives because the social, political, economic conditions of that particular period leave an indelible mark on the writer's psyche. Anita Desai too was influenced by contemporary scenario and it found a reflection in her creative output. Desai was 10 when India became independent. She comments, Anita Singh has expressed about Anita Desai's childhood in Desai's own words,

“As a little girl I lived in Delhi made up of three communities. The Hindu was dominant, but the skyline was full of Islamic monuments. Urdu literature was in the air -poetry recited, ghazals sung- and the British still had a presence, affecting me through the school and the books I read. When I was 10 these were all packed and shipped away, gone. We were left with a new country to build. That sense of loss and trauma have pursued me ever since.” (Desai 1)

Hence her novels mainly portray the post-colonial India incorporating the various changes which have affected lives since independence. Although her novels differ radically in subject matter, they attempt to find patterns in the chaos of modern India and modern life. In independent India women have been radically affected by issues such as – the western-style education, choice in marriage, career expectations, and the loosening of joint family. These transformations led to existential crises- a sense of drifting lives, a general alienation and nostalgia, failure, withdrawals into the self, which Desai has recorded sensitively in her writings. Each of Desai's novels focuses on a life at a particular stage and is set in a social context. Her works are often marked by self-assertions. The main characters have escaped confining limitations, but after being liberated they have even more sterile experience. Desai's concern is mainly with the lives of women, the limitations and handicaps placed on them by society and the resultant existential trauma as they are unable to balance internal and external surrounding.

Therefore, it is essential to share existentialism as a literary approach which emerged in Paris following World War II. It

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developed into a powerful revolt against reason, rationality, positivism, and traditional ways of man. It virtually affected every form of expression including literature which can be easily seen in the plays and novels of Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, others being influenced are Heidegger, Jaspers, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche etc. All these philosophers had a common concern regarding existence, human existence, the conditions and quality of the existing human individual. Existentialism is a doctrine which makes human life possible and declares that every truth and every action implies a human setting and a human subjectivity. Human being's autonomy, assertion of the subjective self, the flouting of reason and rationality, denial of traditional values, institutions and philosophy, exercise of freedom and will, experience of the absurdity and nothingness of life are some of the characteristics of the works of these exponents.

M.H. Abrams opines that Sartre and Camus viewed

“a human being as an isolated existent who is cast into an alien universe; to conceive the human world as possessing no inherent truth, value or meaning; and to represent human life – in its fruitless search for purpose and significance, as it moves from the nothingness whence it came toward the nothingness where it must end- as an existence which is both anguished and absurd” (Abrams 23)

Hence, the existential crisis is generally result of unusual behavior i.e. extremely overdone or underdone conduct, faulty perception, misinterpretation of reality, maladaptive behaviour, self-defeating and distressing behaviour in greater intensity or higher frequency as it disrupts our normal functioning partially or completely by disturbing the body, mind and human relationship. But it also differs from person to person because one person can interpret one particular behaviour as (ab)normal but family, friends, neighbours and even professionals may differ and disagree with it. However, the childhood experiences, past history, traumatic events, family environment and social milieu are the causal for such deviance leading to depression, alienation, phobia, obsessive-compulsive neurosis, suicidal

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tendencies, psychotic disorders etc. In the light of the above observations, it is easier to focus on existential crisis portrayed in Anita Desai's fictions especially in Children's fiction *The Village by the Sea*, and the two story collections- *Games at Twilight and Other Stories* and *Diamond Dust and Other Stories*.

The Village by the Sea is story of four children's struggle for survival in a small village, Thul in the backdrop of Industrialization. Their mother is ill and the drunkard father sells his fishing boat and cattle to pay his debts. The children, especially Lila and Hari, are worried as they had to look after themselves in a poorly built hut. Hari works in the fields, sells coconuts and also does fishing whenever possible; but it's not enough. He expects that he will get job in the factory to be built in Thul in near future. He dreams of so many things -going far off, doing good job and becoming rich. The children are full of joy with employment and wages they get when the de Silvas visit their holiday cottages on Thul beach. But Hari wants to escape the troubles. He thinks of "his drunken father, Mr. de Silva's insult, the lack of work and money ... wished he too could soar up into the sky and disappear instead of being tied to earth . . ." (Desai 59) and finds himself alone. It occurs to him if he stays in Thul forever, his family will fall ill like his mother and die. He has three sisters to be married off and nothing for dowry. So he thinks to going to Bombay to make a fortune either himself or with de Silva's help to fulfil the needs of the family. He decides to run away to Rewas and then to Bombay and never to return his sad house as their dog Pinto was poisoned by a villager for the father could not pay for some toddy. Out of despair and anger he reaches Rewas by a bullock cart and then to Bombay by a boat full of protesters from Alibagh. He has no food and water and is not sure whether he has made a right decision. At that moment someone offers him a stale chapatti which gives him a little energy.

Thus, Lila is now left alone to look after the sick mother. While Hari is surprised, shocked and full of awe as he has met variety of human beings in Bombay and had varied experiences. He suddenly is reminded of the Bombay address of de Silvas in his pocket. But on reaching there he finds that they left for Thul

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that morning only. Hari is too tired, hungry, weak and frightened by now. Then with the help of the watchman of de Silva's building he gets food for night in Sri Krishna Eating House and also starts working there as a help. Besides food and lodging he also gets one rupee per day. He also learns to repair watch by the grace of Mr. Panwallah, the watch mender in the proximity of the eating house and earns by repairing watches too. He saves the earnings without spending a single penny on himself although he faces many ups and downs – sleeps in the hot and stuffy air, then in the public park but has to return to the hot place in rainy season. He also falls ill but doesn't lose heart. He returns to Thul forever at Diwali as he has learned to 'grow, change, adjust and adapt' himself as demanded by his existence when got guidance from Mr. Panwallah 'how to survive' in changing times. Meanwhile Lila with Mr. Silva's assistance gets her mother treated who is suffering from anaemia and TB. The father also gives up drinking. Hari brings her mother home from the Alibagh hospital. Thus the novel ends happily despite existential concerns.

Games at Twilight and Other Stories is a collection of 11 stories but only "Studies in the Park" and "A Devoted Son" have been analysed in detail due to special treatments of themes. The first story Games at Twilight is about child Ravi's sense of victory marred by sadness at his insignificance in his friend circle when they play the hide and seek. Private Tutions by Mr. Bose tells how the tutions affect the mental states of Mr. and Mrs. Bose and their domestic life negatively. "Studies in the Park" depicts the conflicts of a student Suno who always gets advice from elders to keep himself fit and to study for exam amidst all the worldly affairs while he has something else in mind. He goes to a park to study but is unable to concentrate. One day he comes across something strange- a young anaemic Muslim woman is loved by an older man and it changes his mind forever regarding his studies, family and life. He finds all these things lifeless and purposeless. Now "life has taken a different path for me, in the form of a search, not a race as it is for ... them . . . I have accepted it and don't struggle, I find it satisfies me entirely . . ." (Desai 32) He goes to park regularly to study and hopes to get another glimpse of that vision which changed him. Surface

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Textures is about strange behavior of Harish which is interpreted as abnormal by family, employer and public but later on he is respected as a swami. Sale is a touching picture of a poor artist forced to sell his beautiful paintings for the survival of family due to the indifference of buyers. Pineapple Cake is about different level of sensitivities of different persons as the child Victor doesn't like to eat the pineapple cake he longs for while his Mrs. Fernandez eats quickly when the bride's father dies during wedding. The Accompanist underlines the respect and faith in the relations between the master Sitar player and his accompanist Tanpura player.

"A Devoted Son" is about man's existential problem in the old age when a person is totally dependent on the children or grandchildren. Mr. Verma has retired from his job and also lost his wife. Rakesh is his devoted doctor son whose every achievement brought glow and glory to him. He takes care of his father lovingly. But gradually Rakesh starts controlling his father's food habits- first fried items, then sweets and lastly everything he enjoys. Now Verma doesn't get enough to eat as dried bread, boiled lentils and vegetables or boiled chicken/ fish has also become things of past. He only gets pills, powder, mixtures and tonics to keep himself alive. Therefore, he has developed so many complaints that his own doctor son could not understand the reality behind the scene. He sits huddled on his string bed most of the day. But sometimes suddenly he stretches out and lies absolutely still like a corpse allowing the whole family to wail and weep; and then suddenly gets up as if to mock their behavior. He realizes the change in his son's behavior: "Outwardly all might be the same but the interpretation had altered: his masterly efficiency was nothing but cold heartlessness, his authority was only tyranny in disguise." (78) The Farewell Party is about grown up's pretences of intimacies in contrast to children's joy without any such exhibition and inhibition at Ramans' farewell. "The Pigeons at Daybreak" depicts how a good natured woman attends to his asthmatic husband the whole night to experience the peace next morning. Scholar and Gypsy portrays the marital discord due to different inclinations of David, a scholar and his wife Pat who doesn't like to tour like the scholar.

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Diamond Dust and Other Stories is a collection of 9 short stories set in Canada, England and India but only two stories have been analysed in detail for their peculiarities. The first story *Royalty* picturizes Raja's nostalgia, the East-West encounter and jealousy of siblings. *Winterscape* is about generation gap and cross cultural barriers which results in alienation and lack of communication in the life of the two sisters - Asha and Anu and their shared son Rakesh and his wife Berth. *Diamond Dust*, a Tragedy is a story of tragic end of Mr. Das who is very much obsessed with his dog Diamond. Mrs. Das moans in the beginning "That dog will kill me, kill me one day!" but he ignores it. He loves and cares for Diamond more than his wife, children and grand- children and considers him his friend. Like Mrs. Das, neighbours and their children, postman, men from municipality, electricity, telephone, gas services etc., everyone complains about Diamond's howling, biting and attacking them for he is "a full-fledged badmash, the terror of the neighbourhood." (Desai 56) and "... he behaved as if the men were bandits, as if family treasure was being looted." (Desai 57) but Mr. Das proudly says at least no thief dares approach their house. Once Diamond chases a bitch and disappears for five days in summer; Mr. Das like an abnormal person searches him everywhere including filthy places. He brings stronger chains and collar; closes every door but the dog like a demon breaks free. Again Mr. Das like a forlorn lover roams in his search and finds the dog badly bitten, thrashed and stoned. But neither he gives up his badmashi nor Mr. Das his obsession till the day the dog catcher's van comes and catches Diamond in Mr. Das's absence who while returning from market sees the dog wailing in the passing van. He cries and chases the van rapidly, falls down on the stones as the van jerks and dies immediately. *Underground* is about tender relationship of Jack Higgins and wife Meg who search for a hotel and ultimately satisfy themselves with an underground room.

"The Man Who Saw Himself Drowned" is a fantasy where the nameless protagonist sees himself drowning in the river and attends his own funeral. It may be a case of duel/ split personality and man's desire for freedom. *The Artist's Life* presents a paradox of the artist Miss Mabel's life who teaches

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the delinquents and tries her best to deal with behavioural ugliness in her surroundings but is herself unartistic. Tepoztlán Tomorrow is about generation gap and nostalgia for one's native place Tepoztlán and its progressive downfall depicted through the life of Louis. Five Hours to Simla or Faisla is about the problems faced by people due to an accident on the road leading to Simla. A family which includes young parents and their three children travels in their Ambassador but suddenly every moving vehicle stops on the road owing to an accident and the truck driver gets off it. The other drivers too, get off from their vehicles and come to know that stone pelting has cracked the windshield of the truck. So he won't be moving and won't allow others to move until the person is caught and brought to a faisla. At this, all the drivers start arguing and questioning. Then the truck driver wheels the truck around and parks it squarely across the highway to obstruct movement of traffic in any direction. Now all other travelers in bicycle rickshaw, bullock cart and bus are also unreasonably delayed to reach their destinations. The children are hungry and no market, stall or vendor is seen in the proximity. But the news of traffic jam spreads and many vendors appear on the scene carrying eatables to provide services. A rickshaw driver goes to nearest thana to bring a policeman to put sense to that damn truck driver's head. The passengers pass their time by eating and cracking jokes though uncomfortable. The father reacts, "How can this happen? ...be allowed? Only in this bloody country. Where else can one man hold up four miles of traffic -" (Desai 126) Vendors start to disappear as it's getting dark. But the truck driver is not ready to move without getting compensation. At last police appears on the scene striking their cane. The truck driver calls to police, "Get them all moving now, get them all moving!" (Desai 129) and settles himself in the driver's seat and starts driving. "The police looking baffled, swung around, flourishing their canes. 'Get on! Chalo!... Chalo, chalo, get on, all of you' and they did." (Desai 129) Thus by creating the hurdle the driver satisfies himself without any compensation or faisla. The Rooftop Dwellers deals with the problems of a single working woman Moyana, an editor in the metro Delhi who hires a rooftop barsati and leads a life of insecurity.

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It can be easily inferred from this analysis that Desai's fiction is a deep study of human affliction, despair, disillusionment, disintegration, void, destiny and death of its sensitive characters. It projects the existential predicament of the individuals through the problem of self in a psychologically disturbed milieu and probe the generally unquestionable existential concerns of her protagonists who suffer from feelings of loneliness, alienation and pessimism. All her protagonists - Suno, Mr. Verma, the truck driver and Mr. Das; and her secondary characters - Betty and Leela crave for fulfilment of certain basic emotional needs and desire to overcome the nightmares of separateness, powerlessness and listlessness. They are either neurotic, or hypersensitive or both, suffer and struggle for survival out of depression and try to compromise the utter absurdity of life and search for meaningfulness badly till the end. It justifies Marjorie Greene's observation authentically as quoted by Anita Singh: "... every treatise that dooms men to destruction, every novel whose characters are bad or mad, every play that depresses without elevating, is labelled so existential. Hence existentialism, more even than the naturalism of Zola or Ibsen in their ways, comes to mean the shocking, the sordid or the obscene." Undoubtedly, the reasons for their existential traumas are varied outwardly – mismatched marriage, unhappy childhood, wrong upbringing, strained marital relations, stressful urban lives, immigration, traumatic past, cultural differences, different perceptions etc. However, the root of the problem is nothing but an attitude to life, a vision or what Kaufmann calls a "timeless sensibility that can be discerned here and there in the past." as quoted by S.P. Swain.

To conclude, Anita Desai's literary output discusses the changing aspects of the existential crisis in postcolonial India in the 20th-21st centuries due to the rapid transformation, sci-tech advancements, globalization and increasing human awareness in life.

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