

**Women in Kiran Desai and Anita Desai:  
A Study of Narrative Style**

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**Abstract**

The Study titled “Women in Kiran Desai and Anita Desai: A Study of Narrative Style” presents women characters of Kiran Desai and Anita Desai. Their women are disinherited in their life and tormented psychologically. This paper adopted psycho-neurosis as an approach. It is a comparative study of Kiran Desai and Anita Desai women characters. This research illustrates abnormal behaviour of their women. This study has a moderate endeavour to flow Desai’s female characters’ quest for identity shaking the traditional shackles with which women are subjected. In their women’s life, there is aloofness, isolation, loneliness and annui. These writers have shown different natures of women and gave voice for emancipation of women.

**Keywords:** Kiran Desai, Anita Desai, Women characters, Narrative Style, Stream of Consciousness, Objective Correlatives, Acculturation, Displacement, Replacement, Emancipation, Identity Crisis, Socio- Cultural conditions.

**Introduction**

This present research is entitled “Women in Kiran Desai and Anita Desai: A Study of Narrative Style”. The purpose of the research is to examine women characters of Kiran Desai and Anita Desai with reference to their narrative style. It is a thematic and comparative study of narrative style employed of Kiran Desai and Anita Desai. It is a style of women characterisation. This research deals with Kiran Desai’s novels *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, and *The Inheritance of Loss*. This paper also focuses of Anita Desai’s *Voice in the City*, *Cry*, *The Peacock*, and *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* the common thread found in their novels are Stream of Consciousness and Interior Monologue. Kiran Desai and Anita Desai’s women undergo psychological turmoil. Their women are tormented in psychological insight. Thus, this paper represents the disinherited life of Kiran Desai and Desai’s portrayal of women.

**Women Characters in *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard***

In the novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, Kiran Desai portrays the dreams and aspirations of an Indian middle-class family. She invests the story with a keen sense of humour. The

Guava Orchard becomes the epicentre of all the characters when Sampath Chawla, a middle-class, good for nothing post office clerk tries to escape his failures by climbing a guava tree and gaining the reputation of a hermit. He spends his free time reading the mails of the people of Shahkot and after climbing the top of a guava tree reveals amazing and interesting facts to the people of the locality. From his perch, Sampath becomes comically misconstrued as a great visionary, a religious guru of considerable merit. He proceeds to find fame, fortune, and eventual chaos in the form of bumbling bureaucrats and a group of unruly liquor-loving monkeys who only Sampath can tame by bestowing his wisdom upon the people, who make the pilgrimage to meet the *Monkey Baba*. Mr. Chawla, Sampath's father is presented as a middle-class opportunist, when he tries to commercialize his presence atop the tree. Sampath is joined by many followers and businessmen who try to sell their goods to the visitors who come to the orchard. Some drunken and dreaded monkeys also join him in the orchard. He is re-named as *Monkey Baba*. Monkeys turn everything topsy-turvy in their hunt for more liquor. Real Hullabaloo begins when civilians, military-men, policemen all try to get rid of the monkey menace. Waves of impending chaos are presented throughout the novel. On the other hand, befooled people listen to Sampath's words of wisdom. The visitors bring gifts that Mr. Chawla can sell, the family bank account begins to grow and he looks at investment plans. The ending of the novel is reminiscent of a great magician's final trick. At the end, Desai narrates how Sampath, the protagonist disappears as a guava over the crest of a high hilltop.

This gripping narrative sustains the humour of the story. Sampath's dream-like life represents a journey deep within oneself to the expanse of emptiness, reminiscent of the Buddhist ideal of nirvana, it means the being of nothingness. It is significant that *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* is a whimsical tale, which blends fablesque magic with satirical comedy. Kiran Desai sustains the interest of the readers by the powerful command of her narrative technique.

The novel can be read at several levels as a fast-moving comic tale full of rich descriptions and cartoon like characters, but also a deeper study of the pathos of familial misunderstanding, the ridiculousness of hero-worship, the unpredictability of commercialism and the inefficiency of officials. Desai gives us wider scope to ponder upon the gap between what people actually hear and what they want to hear.

The plot of the novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* is based on real life stories familiar in Indian life and culture. In fact, Desai clearly depicts the staple of common beliefs on hermits and saints. The characters in the vast canvas of Indian life attract her.

Consequently, she builds her plot around these characters. Thereby, she has done a remarkable job of presenting the Indian culture in an appealing way. The mundane background and characters are transformed into something unique having their own identity and significance. Desai's rich imaginative colouring and perceptive humour make the story of the plot lively and attractive.

The novel "*Hullabaloo*" reaffirms Kiran Desai's major experiments in diasporic fiction. It seeks to explore the backgrounds of social, psychological, religious, and spiritual events that steadily

moulded Kiran Desai's fictional art. In particular, her innovations in the technique of magic realism ensured her success as a great writer of Diasporic English fiction. Thus, she enjoys a major presence across the global scenario. From her humble beginnings of fiction writing, she has come a long way in the twenty-first century to emerge as a serious contender to some of the most coveted literary prize winners in the world. In terms of popularity and market presence she has experienced phenomenal success in recent years. While diasporic fiction has emerged as a major genre to celebrate its success and glory, one should also delve deep into its strengths and weaknesses, its achievements and failures, its present status and future prospects of fictional art. This new novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* shows underlying realities of life in Indian fiction.

### **Women in Narrative Style in *The Inheritance of Loss***

What strikes us most is her observation of minute details of characters at every nook and cranny of their living space. In fact, sustained vigour of her narrative keeps the reader spell bound. The exposition of the novel's setting and characters in the background of Kanchenjunga and its majestic summit is a fascinating portrayal of Nature's beauties and bounties. The readers of Kiran Desai recapture this colourful picture in the first paragraph of chapter one. The metaphors flash in the locale of mountains and shadows. The description of natural scenery at the beginning of the novel brings freshness of thought and metaphor in the novel.

The major theme running throughout the novel is one closely related to colonialism and the effects of post-colonialism. The loss of identity and the way it travels through generations as a bitter sense of loss. Being a young spirited novelist at the most conscious point of the age she highlights most of the outstanding issues and themes of contemporary society in her novel. Thus, Kiran Desai's self confidence, committed views on terrorism and weaknesses of a poverty-stricken society are candid, bold and forthright. In addition to this, she focuses our attention on alienation, cultural clash, displacement, exile, exploitation, economic inequality, fundamentalism, globalisation, hybridity, insurgency, immigration, loss of identity, loneliness, multiculturalism, poverty and racial-discrimination

The novel *The Inheritance of Loss* explores colonial neurosis, multiculturalism, insurgency gender-bias, racial discrimination, and impact of globalisation. Above all, their bitter experience of immigration problems comes to sharper focus. The novel is a brilliant study of Indian Culture and its transitional phase. In fact, craze for the western values, manners, language, and glamorous life-style; impact of modernisation, consumerism, and globalisation is manifest in all walks of Indian life.

It is pertinent to note that *The Inheritance of Loss* is a saga of loss that a human being has to face due to circumstances of his/her life. Most of the characters, especially the central characters have to face losses in life due to their diasporic existence. Sai, who has suffered the loss of her parents' death at her early age, and also, she is bereft of love and affection from her grandfather, the Judge. There is a love story of Sai and her Nepali mathematics tutor, Gyan. Their happy love story suffers a blow with the Nepal uprising – the result of a demand for a separate state for the Gorkhas by the GNLF. Their demand was “Gorkhaland for Gorkhas” (IL126).

As a post-colonial novelist, Desai has depicted losses not only in the personal level but also in the larger ambit of the society. The seventeenth chapter of the novel pictures the poverty stricken tribals of Zanzibar. In fact, poverty itself is a great loss of life. The natives of poor nations are also at a loss as they inherit poverty and ill-treatment in another country. The cook is badly treated by the Judge only because he is poor. All that he gets in lieu of his twenty-four hours of services is the little money that he spends on himself. The cook had to tolerate the rough behaviour of the Judge towards him.

The novel *The Inheritance of Loss* is a thought-provoking novel. It clearly shows that Desai's critical intelligence is a part of her erudition and experience. It is evident that, her novel encourages plurality of approaches to problems of globalisation, modernity and immense possibilities of examining our value systems.

Desai is more interested in her characters than in creating the environment. If she describes the environment in her novel, it is not for decoration and the background is important only in so far as it reflects the obsessions of her characters. Manori, an island in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* is not just a background, but it depicts the sense of alienation in the heroine Sita. Calcutta in *Voice in the City* assumes the role of an antagonist.

The novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* pictures the tension between a sensitive wife Sita and the rational and worldly Raman. Sita has already four children and is reluctant to deliver or to abort the fifth one, even though she is in the seventh month of pregnancy. She wants to retain it in her womb because she is afraid of the violence in the world. She goes to the island of Manori where instead of finding peace, she becomes alienated. Finally Sita re-establishes her contacts with the soil, takes a ritualized mud bath gets over her loneliness by learning to laugh. Sita reveals her human, in particular, her feminine sensibility in different backgrounds. The universal predicament of human beings stands far above the mere descriptive locale.

The major characters whose stream of consciousness is to be traced are: Maya, in *Cry, The Peacock* Nirode, Monisha, Amla in *Voices in the City* and Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* by studying the stream of consciousness of these characters, their varied sensation can be captured. *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* is seen as a parable on the inability of human beings to relate to the inner with the outer, the individual with society. Those who say 'No' to society's purposeless, humdrum life undergo a deeper realization of life's realities, provided their loneliness is productive. On the other hand, a life of complete inwardness, of a neurotic subjective indulgence is not the solution to the problems of life.

Kiran Desai's achievements which lend universal significance to the hopes and aspirations of the diasporic characters in their approach to identity and response to multiculturalism in the midst of the trials and tribulations of their diasporic environment. This paper explores the challenges of

contemporary global issues which shape the new society confronting the problems of competition, cultural assimilation and the loss of inheritance.

Kiran has secured a distinctive place among the great contemporary Indian authors exploring life and society in India and elsewhere. Her novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* is a charming, lyrical, fable about destiny a work of comic eccentricity, charisma, and joy in language and life. Kiran's language is original; she brings something totally fresh and new to the writing scene in an era of diasporic fiction.

Kiran Desai's approach to the traditions and conventions of diasporic fiction in the last quarter of the twentieth century acquires a rich dimension in the twenty-first century. The depth-dimension of both the novels *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* and *The Inheritance of Loss* widely extend the scope and flexibility of global compulsions of the twenty-first century-its aspirations, challenges and artistic possibilities in a global society embroiled in ethnic strife. Indeed, the problems of commitment and artistic resolution of social and cultural issues constitute the central matrix of Kiran Desai's vision.

A perfect harmony is struck between the matter and manner, the stream of consciousness and the interior monologue. Kiran's novels to evolve a theme that is of perennial significance. The aspects of her novels can be synthesized in the words of Vyas: "the unerring self-analysis of her character's minds, the vivid realm lurking behind every thought of theirs, the engaging artistry and powerful force of details replete with emotions, the clear-headed sensitiveness of neat and eloquent lyricism, the radiating glory of the articulate sights and sounds of this little world, and the articulate sights and sounds of this little world, and the tenderness elucidating the author's idealistic commitment are a few aspects of her lively vision into the depths of uninhabited technique (B.O.Vyas, "Viscid voices of the Inner Kingdom", The Journal of Indian Writing in English, January 1981, 6).

The Eastern critic As Iyengar observes, that is the "exploration of sensibility" turns inward in Kiran's. Fiction probes with the intangible realities of life and plunges into the innermost depths of the human psyche to fathom its mysteries, the inner turmoil, the chaos inside the mind. Under the impact of the new pressures of the scientific and technological advancement, the world around us shows signs of disintegration of the individual. Hence she endeavours to raise the individual, though the background of the modern civilization is threatening his identity. Desai does not offer solutions to the evils in the society. She only suggests solutions by bringing out the light and darkness that she finds in an individual.

Two contradictory stands are taken about the major contribution of Anita Desai. Maini expresses one stand that, she has achieved the highest peak in the very first novel, *Cry, The Peacock*: "Had she cried off after her first novel, *Cry, The Peacock*, I have a feeling, she would have acquired a kind of artistic destiny we associate with single-star novelists like of artistic destiny we associate with single- star novelists like Emily Bronte. Her silence in short, should have kept us teasing into

thought again and again. (D.S.Maini, “The Achievement of Anita Desai”, *Indo-English Literature* ed. 216).

But the same critic observes: *Cry, The Peacock* remains a splendid piece of writing, but not a great work of fiction the dramatic story is not potent and varied enough to carry the burden of sustained lyricism” (Ibid, .217). One may admire her lyrical outburst that fits into the canvas of the exploration of the individual sensibility. But, considering the dramatic output in her novels, one may expect a larger canvas.

Anita Desai gives more importance to the psychological study. This analysis of the psychological novel by Srivastava shows that, it lays more emphasis on the interior than the exterior. “The psychological novel, often termed the stream of consciousness novel steered fiction away from its traditional grooves of external reality and the physical world in which it had been moving for over a century to the new by lanes and labyrinths of inner reality – the world of fantasy, reveries and nightmares” (Ramesh K. Srivastava, *Perspectives on Anita Desai*, p.xxxi).

Anita Desai is interested in the psychic life of her characters and prefers to go deep into the inner circle of their minds to diagnose the strange behaviour of the characters. By this, she brings to the outer world the various shades and dimension of the characters. Her protagonist, when unable to cope with or have a rapport with others, particularly their husbands are electrified to abnormal behaviour.

Anita Desai has focussed the attention on the mind of the characters instead of their outward behaviour. Man struggles for individualism and self – actualisation. When unable to do so, his psyche is alienated from his self and he slowly withdraws himself from the external world. When man’s profound values, desires and fantasies are blocked, frustration emerges leading to the acceleration of neurotic condition in him. This paves way for personality disorders, and the person affected is unable to form a close relationship in the family and also around the world.

The novelist Anita Desai has discussed clearly that there should be some interaction between the inner world and outer reality in life. Tragedy occurs only when there is no cohesion or connection between the prose and passion in one’s life. Maya in *Cry, The Peacock* loses her life while trying to retain her passion in life. But, Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* triumphs because she is able to reconcile both of them.

The novelist has pointed out that her chief objective in writing is to find an “objective correlative to depict the universal predicament of human beings. The writers consciousness by finding symbols to express the stream of consciousness of characters and symbols used in the novel are of the objective correlative pattern of Eliot. The authors emotions are embedded in characters (Maya and Sita) and symbols (island of Manori) and thus the emotions are passed to the readers.

The stream of consciousness and the interior monologue readily serve as “Objective Correlatives” to depict the Universal sufferings of human beings. Desai is convinced that the moods

exhibited by her characters are true of all human beings and hence she discovers artistic modes to deliver the truth. Her conviction is high lightened in her “replies to the Questionnaire”: “Literature should deal with more enduring matters, less temporary and less temporary than politics. It should deal with life and death. It should be too ironical and also too mystical to accept the world at face value and regard it as the whole or the only truth” (Shyam, M. Asrani, *Perspectives on Anita Desai*, .7-8). It has been discussed in the earlier chapters clearly by the novelist.

Anita Desai seems to have realized the need for a wider canvas for her fiction. Her forte being the exploration of sensibility. She has tried to widen her scope with regard to the dramatic story. In her interview with Atma Ram Mrs.Desai hints at her development as a novelist: “Had I written the book (*Where Shall We Go This Summer?*) ten years ago, I would have ended it with Sita’s suicide. This clearly shows her widening vision which is hoped to find widening horizon in the days to come. A significant achievement of Desai lies in her languages of the interior monologue to depict the stream of consciousness of her major characters. M.K. Naik praises Desai for this talent: Writing for her “is an effort to discover, and then to underline and finally to convey the true significance of things” (M.K. Naik, *A History of Indian English Literature*. Delhi: Sahitya Akademic, 1982, 241).

Alcock Comments her language: “she writes an extraordinary delicate, lucid English which puts many English authors to shame.” (Pete Alcock, *The Journal of Indian Writing in English*, January 1981, .15). An exaggeration this many sound but the fact remains that her language fully copes with her thought content.

Anita Desai development as a novelist becomes clear from one of her latest novels *Clear Light of Day*. She has incorporated the time-concept in her novel to give a deeper perception to characters and thus to her themes. She states: “in my novel, *Clear Light of Day*, I have tried to construct a four dimensional world, the although time appears to damage, destroy and extinguish, one finds instead that nothing is lost, nothing comes to an end, but the spiral of life leads as much upwards as downwards and is in perpetual circular motion, both the past and the future existing always in time present “(Ramesh K. Srivastava,” *Perspectives on Anita Desai*. 224 – 225). While her forte continues to be the “exploration of sensibility” her dramatic realm is being widened. Her preoccupation with time concept in *Clear Light of Day* may find grater expression in her later novels. Scholars may find it interesting to carry out an in – depth study combining the psychological exploration and the philosophical concepts of time and space.

The study of Desai’s novel’s, *Cry, the Peacock*, *Voices in the City*, *Bye – Bye Blackbird*, thus shows Desai’s highest and complete genius for presenting psychological themes in a convincing manner. It also shows her as an existential writer. The exploration of the inner sensibility, psychological, existential and philosophical question of the characters also can be found in her novels. In her attempt to find and explore ‘What is truth?’ she shares a comparison with Nietzsche and Marx, who tried to find the meaning of truth in the economic and social fashion and in psychological factors respectively. She declares that:

Writing is to me a process of discovering the truth. The truth that is nine-tenth of the ice berg that lies submerged beneath the one-tenth visible portion we call reality. Writing is my way of plunging to the depths and exploration this underlying truth. All my writing is an effort to discover, to underline and convey the true significance of things. (1)

Her novels deal with the spiritual collapse of the upper-class Indians whose traditional religion and manner of life have been thwarted by the modern concepts and ways. Her explanation of the human situation is existential rather than to be social or religious in its concern. Her existentialism lies in her treatment of alienation. In *Cry, the Peacock*, we can find the theme of alienation. Through Maya's stream of consciousness is unfolded the tragic story of an alienated women who is completely misunderstood by her husband. At the outset of the novel itself we are introduced to the contrast between a highly imaginative women and her detached, sober and hard-working husband who regards her nothing more than a household ornament. The existential concept of death also plays a significant role in the novel.

Anita Desai's second novel, *Voices in the City*, We have seen, that is on the existential motif of freedom and alienation. The three main characters Nirode, Monisha and Amla try to find freedom each in their own way. Monisha and Amla try to find freedom each in their own way. Monisha finds her freedom in death. In this respect she shares cares a comparison with Camus' Sisyphus in *The Myth of the Sisyphus*, where Sisyphus wonders why should he not commit suicide. It seems to him, 'the better choice than to carry on with this absurd life.' Like him Monisha wonders at the trivialities and pettiness of her mean existence and she tries to find a solution in death. For her the choice is between death and mean existence. Her death brings out a new kind of awareness in the other two characters Amla and Nirode. With her death their search for freedom and alienation come to an end.

While these two novels present the themes of alienation, death and freedom, *Bye – Bye Blackbird* presents the existential problem of adjustment and finding a place in an alien country regarding the Indian immigrants in England. To explore the inner sensibility, psychological problems and the alienation of her characters well Desai presents her characters in conflict with their own mind. They all tend to avoid familial involvement and ties. They all believe in the supremacy of individual freedom. Hence, they strive hard to free themselves from the worldly and emotional entanglement. She uses certain images to unravel the real, acquire a certain significance of symbols. Thus, by introducing various images she creates her own mythology, a mythology that symbolizes her private morality and philosophy.

In this respect, it is worth mentioning that some critics are of the opinion that Desai fails to fulfil the promises which are presented in the very first few pages of her novels. The alienation Maya, the immigrants' problems not dealt with in a convincing and profound manner, while *Voices in the City* seems to offer a solution that life inspite of its problems and forces has to be lived, "because the existent lives in constant interaction with other existence or existence is being with others.

However, this charge is only a minor flaw. Desai's novels have paved the way for a new kind of psychological novels. R.S. Pathak observes: Each of Desai's novels tries to tackle the central aesthetic problem of the modern writers: the problems of rendering complete human personality in an age of lost values, lost men and lost Gods.

What R.S. Pathak says of Desai, is a true account on Desai's novels, and her attempt in exploring the psychological, and inner sensibility of her characters. We can safely conclude that in the treatment of the marital incompatibility, the annihilation of the self that marriage involves, alienation, freedom, and death, and her concern for the individual, and his self, and the way Desai treats these existential concepts, Desai shares a place with the existentialists Nietzsche, Marx, Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre.

### Conclusion

The novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* is a charming and lyrical fable about destiny. While, *The Inheritance of Loss* is a marvellous novel illuminates the pain of exile and ambiguities of post – colonialism. This novel explores cultural hybridity and connections between cultural, place, and identity employed by Kiran. This research also makes an investigation on hybridized identity and identity search as important themes. The novel *The Inheritance of Loss* states the themes of hybridized identity and relocation and explains how western and Eastern influences show different circumstances for the characters formation. *The Inheritance of Loss* is written in the third person narrative. Kiran's point of view is clear from her choice of the title for the novel. This novel reveals the pangs of alienation, displacement, homelessness, and unbelongingness. It also reveals nostalgia for home and homeland suffered by the most of diasporic community. The theme of alienation, dislocation, and search for identity plays a prominent role throughout the novel.

Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* projects the problem of alienation, search for identity, turmoil in relations, and her characters alienated milieu. Kiran explores her characters' sense of alienation within and beyond the sordid world all around them. Kiran describes her characters like Biju marginalized and out casted because of their low social class and their race. Hence, Kiran presents the idea that, alienation in social class not only affects hegemonic issues but also energy small units in society. Kiran's second novel *The Inheritance of Loss* focuses on the fate of a few powerless individuals. It explores contemporary issues such as globalisation, multiculturalism, economic inequality and terrorist violence.

In the novel fiction, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, Kiran Desai depicts the sense of alienation, negation, estrangement, social isolation and unhappiness in life. Kiran major characters Sampath Chawla, his father R.K. Chawla, his mother Kulfi, and his sister Pinky, they are tormented from alienation, isolation desolation and loneliness. They are all alienated and isolated not only because of their distress in life. But, it is also of their inability to understand and respond to one another. The treatment of Kiran's characters flows her increasing interest in complex, disturbed and alienated personalities. It is simply a study of the development of insanity. Kiran who prefers her mother Anita's style and oeuvre in her literary writings.

In all these novels the protagonist are Indian Women immigrants, who immigrate to America to realize the American dream. In their novels, they reflect immigrant experiences through different female characters and situations. They effectively depict immigrant themes like pangs of alienation, identity crisis and the sense of belonging to nowhere. Their character's psyche is disturbed by the thoughts of illusion and reality. Anita Desai and Kiran immigrant protagonist experience rootlessness, lack of "acculturation" alienation, violence in the alien society nostalgia, displacement and unfulfillment of diasporal dreams that drive them to an extreme state of depression.

This research concludes that, Anita Desai has not fulfilled the first few pages the novel contained. The interaction of the characters, their cultures and motives, the crisis faced by them are not given much attention. In its failure to express the East-West encounter, and psychological delineation of the characters the novel remains to be another novel on the hackneyed theme of East-West encounter.

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