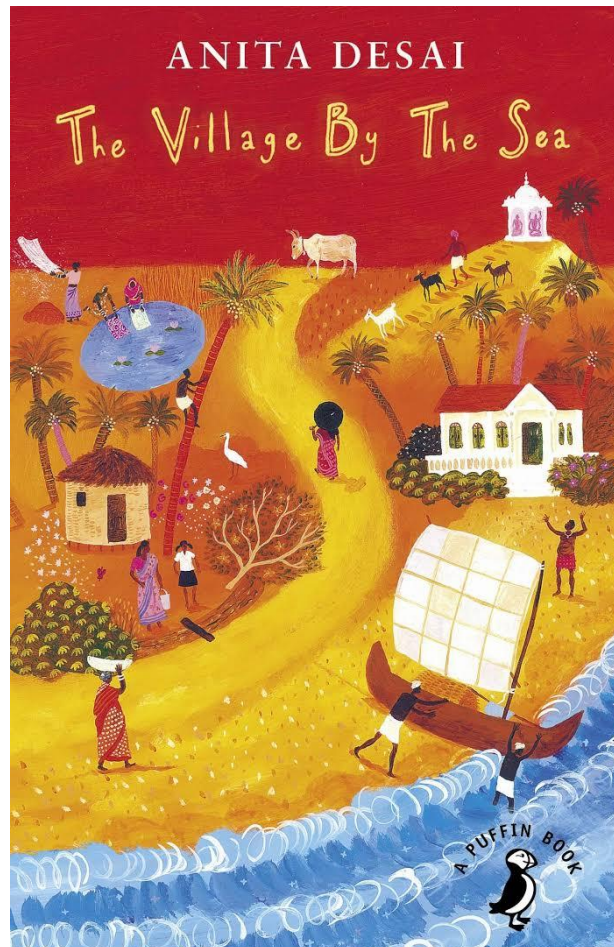


## The Impact of Anita Desai's *The Village by the Sea* on the Adolescent Psyche

K. Kaviyarasu and Dr. Shobha Ramaswamy

---

---



### *The Village by the Sea*

Adolescence is the period of transition from a child into an adult which involves a lot of physical and mental changes wherein they tend to get distracted away from their regular, disciplined way of life that needs to be taken care of by people around them. Literature of such educating kind could help children keep themselves under check and control. The work taken for discussion is one such story *The Village by the Sea* by Anita Desai that revolves around the lives of two adolescents undergoing one of life's greatest miseries. This paper highlights the positive psychological development of one of the major characters of the work that turns out to be opposite to the kind of its stereotypic characters.

## **Hari, the Young Protagonist**

Hari, a young protagonist about thirteen, is the main embodiment figure where he undergoes great responsibility with struggles through the novel. Identity and self-esteem play vital roles in the novel. The ongoing action of the novel is combined with an exploration of Hari's emotions and feelings. His struggle along with his sister Lila is both significant and serious. His struggles as an adolescent are to pull his family out from the dark poverty, mother's sickness and father's drunkenness. In raising his family out of poverty, he makes his mind to move to Bombay city. He goes to Bombay to settle his family out from financial crunch. Here, the author portrays the innocence of a rural boy who was alienated from his village by himself. In the novel, Hari finds it difficult to feel optimistic about himself and his village. His poor self-esteem is connected with the idea of being poor and even believing that he deserves to be poor.

Basically the boys in the age of Hari were more adventurous, mischievous and playful. But, in Hari's case, it's different. He is an innocent boy with responsibilities. He has an elder sister Lila and two younger sisters Bela and Kamal. Hari drops his school to help his poor family. He does all the odd jobs in his village to earn money for his family. As he finds out that the income, which he earns from fishing and selling coconuts from their land, will be too little to run his family, he runs out without informing his family members. He does not wish to be like the other ordinary boys of his village and on realising the miseries of his family; he becomes a responsible boy who strives a lot. He leaves out to Bombay from Thul and there he learns the world by facing difficulties of life with innocence. Desai has portrayed the dreams of Hari's venture in Bombay, as in the following lines:

Bombay! He stared out of the window at the stars that shone in the sky and wondered if the lights of the city could be as bright, or brighter. It was a rich city: if he could get there, he might be able to make money, bring home riches, pieces of gold and silver with which to dazzle his sisters. (Desai 45)

## **Hari and His Friend**

Hari was happy with the company of his friend, Ramu. He was directed by Ramu's ideas of life in their village, Thul. Ramu did not see the opinion of leaving Thul for Bombay as a good deal. In fact, Ramu advised Hari that being in home village is the best thing for

good will. But, Hari did not pay any heed to the advice. He dreamt of city life. His dreams were good but paradoxically he suffered a lot for survival.

### **In an Alien City**

To set his identity in an alien and strange city, Hari faced a lot of challenges for survival. He was almost an orphan in the hands of Bombay city. Desai has portrayed the grief and trauma of the boy while portraying Bombay. Hari felt very lonely in the crowded city Bombay. Hari struggled a lot, worked hard, and earned some money in Jagu's Sri Krishna Eating House. His ultimate aim was to earn some money and go back to his own village Thul. In the eating shop, he encountered two Tamil boys of his age and he saw himself in the faces of the two boys. He kept aloof from them but he was amiable to the boys. Hari was shocked by the story but he did not like to be the thought of another orphan in Jagu's care (Desai150).

Even outside the eating house, he found a friend, not only a friend but also a philosopher and a guide, at Bombay Mr. Panwallah, a watch repairer. He learned to mend watches with the help of Panwallah. Anita Desai, through this part, points an optimistic view on the life of Hari. He has earned good people in the unknown city. He earned money and gained the worldly experience from those people he met. Those good men were men who had the life's lessons and experiences. Mr. Panwallah seemed to be a mentor like figure in the novel, carrying him with moral teachings and preaching of life. There Hari acquires wisdom. Panwallah's worthy ideas, advices and guidance teach an epiphany reaction in him.

### **Challenges in Life**

As an adolescent, Hari faced several challenges in his life. On account of the poor dark side of life, Bombay tended to commit more crimes and produced more criminals. One such fellow was the beggar, who Hari encountered with. He told Hari that during the daytimes, they begged and at night, they involved in crimes. Here it is evinced from the novel that the extremity of poverty demoralises the young ones and plunges them into crimes and other anti-social elements. Those immoral catalysts were suppressed and repressed in the minds of Hari and his longings were on returning to his native village and to reconcile with his family. He saved every single penny which he earned for his family. With great hope and confidence, he wrote to his mother promising that he would bring his earnings to his family for a propitious future. Though he was far away from the home and left all alone to face the

challenges of life, his mind found pleasure in thinking of the better future of his family, which he foresaw through his earnings. The boy's hope was not his own but his family's.

### **Painting the Reality of Rural Life**

The writers living elsewhere out of native world feels hyphenated to the adopted culture and become nostalgic for their roots. The immigrants have to adjust or adapt the culture of the adopted land where they meet with contempt and segregation. They feel alienated from native culture (Singh 92). Through Hari, an adolescent protagonist, Anita Desai successfully paints the reality of rural life, the migration and the false glory of urban city. The rural charm wins through the inheritance of moral consciousness, mentor-hood and the extroversion of the characters. The use of contrast scheme between rural and urban lives with the company of the protagonist leaves a deep impression on the minds of the readers. Childhood dreams and disillusionment are skillfully implied by the author all over the novel. The young minds can react, adapt, generalise, and rationalise the world with facing challenges with the broad minded mentors. The soul, mind, and personality of the adolescents can achieve an optimistic life by having endurance, positive outlook and ability of openness. To consolidate, the novel *The Village by the Sea* suggests the inevitability of changes and the need for adjustment and adaptation in the changing world.

=====

### **References**

Desai, Anita. *The Village by the Sea*. London: Puffin Books, 1982. Print.

Singh, Sudidta Prasad. *New Concepts of Post-Modern Novelists*. New Delhi: Sarup Book Publishers, 2010. Print

Vaidyanathan, G. *The Village by the Sea: A Critical Study*. New Delhi: Rama Brothers India Private Limited, 2005. Print.

---

---

### **K. Kaviyarasu**

PhD Research Scholar  
Department of English  
Kongunadu Arts and Science College  
Coimbatore – 641029  
Tamil Nadu  
India  
E-mail: [kavienglit@gmail.com](mailto:kavienglit@gmail.com)

**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 **16:9 September 2016**

K. Kaviyarasu and Dr. Shobha Ramaswamy

The Impact of Anita Desai's *The Village by the Sea* on the Adolescent Psyche

104

**Dr. Shobha Ramaswamy**  
Assistant Professor  
Department of English  
Kongunadu Arts and Science College  
Coimbatore – 641029  
Tamil Nadu  
India  
E-mail: [ramaswamy.shobha@gmail.com](mailto:ramaswamy.shobha@gmail.com)