



## Maldevelopment of Survival Disquietude Sensibilities in Anita Desai's *The Village By The Sea*

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### Abstract

*Anita Desai is a versatile novelist and also one of the most distinguished Indo-English writers of the post-colonial era. Desai focuses on several other debatable issues pertaining to contemporary Indian society through her novel, The Village by the Sea. The Village by the Sea was published in 1982 and was awarded Guardian Children's Fiction Prize in the year 1983. The maldevelopment of survival disquietude sensibilities is the supreme phase of the thematic concerns in The Village by the Sea in which maldevelopment of survival disquietude sensibilities set in a small fishing village Thul near Mumbai. Lila struggles to keep her family at aged 13 with her own younger brother Hari as well as two young sisters, disappearing when their mother is ill and their father is usually the worse for a drink. Here, Desai, focus mainly on the societal dynamics in which the children live with the pastoral life and the lower classes of the public. Hence, Desai criticizes society for not taking better care of those who are unable to care for themselves. Here we can also experience the crash of the modern technological development on a customary community of fishermen and farmers at the village.*

**Keywords:** Survival disquietude, Pessimism, Maldevelopment, Alienation.

Indian Regional Literature is fiction and poetry that deals on the dialect, characters, customs, history, topography and other features particular to a specific Indian region. The setting is particularly important in it. Anita Desai's novels can be described as Indian regional because of the way she makes use of these elements in relation to a part of the north of India. She is a very popular Indian novelist and creative writer of the modern life in all its complicated aspects. She was born in 1937 and now lives in Bombay. Her novels are now winning her wider recognition as a writer with an original voice, a remarkable subtle voice which conveys atmosphere and character in vivid and striking terms. Her main concerns were the contemporary issues i.e. just after independence.

Desai's novels are seen with the lives of frustration, loneliness and alienation. She mostly talks of poor and middle class. She presents her character as sensitive, individual and spiritually destroyed. She is concerned with the dark inner world. D.S. Maini said; "a disturbing and demanding presence in Indo-Anglican fiction." Her novels are generally based on love, marriage and sex, but *The Village by the Sea* is a different novel based on the thesis of survival disquietude, continued existence and endurance. There is a question mark on



India becoming independent country. Was this the dream of Indian becoming India a free country? One needs to think over with the novels of Anita Desai. What is the actual condition of Indian Village and its people, what is to be done and many more things? According to Anita Desai; “all my writings is an effort to discover and then to underline and finally to convey the true significance of things.”

The novel, *The Village by the Sea* is a survival of maldevelopment. It is the world in which Anita Desai brings the real society living and talking about the rustic society based on realism. For *The Village by the Sea*, she won the British Guardian’s fiction award. Anita Desai has tried to bring the real picture of real Indian village. She talks about the downtrodden people who were deprived of basic and fundamental rights i.e. education, cloth, food etc. The novel shows how the children of poor family get mature before their age. They come to think about their responsibility. The responsibility which was in fact to be carried over by the parents is left for the children. It is shifted on the weak shoulder of the poor children. How the eldest child of the family take the place of parents in the age of play wood and carefree life. The novel has a very common scene of a drunkard father, wailing, bed-ridden mother children left alone to find their livelihood.

The novel opens with a very beautiful scene and landscape, where the day starts with the most common practice of an Indian family, prayer. Again we find the ancient tradition of worshipping nature, the sacred rock to which Lila and other village women put flowers and kumkum. The worship of the rising sun is seen practised which is still a common practice in real life. The work of worship are performed by the elderly lady of the house but its different for Lila, as her mother is not well, even cannot come out of the bed so the job was to be performed by Lila instead of her mother. Lila was the elder child of the house and had to take the responsibility of the house. Desai have been created the hearts touching scenes in which to understand and bring the realism.

Anita Desai as a participant observer lived sometime in Thul which is village nearby Mumbai. The survival is such an important thing in everyone’s life. So Anita Desai has done in her novel *The Village by the Sea*. *The Village by the Sea* is about Lila’s family. It is based on the poverty, hardships and sorrow faced by a small rural, community in India. Lila and Hari were sister and brother respectively. Lila is main and most appealing character in the novel. They have to look out their ill mother and drunken father and two younger sisters permanently. When Hari runs away to Bombay in desperation, Lila was left by herself to safeguard her family. In her family she is the eldest daughter and conscientious for the whole thing in the family. Though she is thirteen years old, Lila is soft and caring to her sisters Bela and Kamal, ill mother and drunken father.

Lila’s young life did not develop in the “normal way in the existence problems of survival in her village ‘Thul’- located on the Western coast of India. She grows up really quickly and we can see the difference between how Lila thinks and how another girl who is her age thinks when Lila accompanies her friends while she goes shopping in the village. Lila’s maldevelopment of survival disquietude sensibilities is about being isolated from other families, Mother’s disease and her disappeared brother’s life.



### 1) Alienation

Lila's family is financially hard pressed and materially alienated. Lila's house in the Thul Village serves as a symbol of alienation and maldvelopment of survival disquietude. It has been well expressed by Anita Desai in the novel as

'The hut should have been re-thatched years ago- the old palm leaves were dry and tattered and slipping off the beams. The earthen walls were crumbling. The windows gaped, without any shutters. There was no smoke to be seen curling up from under a cooking pot on a fire as in other huts in the surrounding groves of coconut and banana.'(P.5)

Her neighbour house was also at some distance. When her mother was sick, she sent her sisters to their neighbour's house to call Hira-bai, So that she'll arrange for a doctor. So, every night, she was in fear till her brother or father came home. Afterwards Lila got used to it and became bold to live alone with her sisters when her brother was in Bombay and her father and mother were in the hospital.

### 2) Disquietude about Mother's Disease

Lila's mother suffered fever frequently so needed help and no sense in her mother's body sometimes. Following quotes reveals the survival disquietude and fear that Lila undergoes.

She has fever today', Lila murmured. 'High fever. Go tell – go and tell.  
(P.69).

She spoke in a trembling voice that she tried to control... Go and ask  
Hira-bai to come. Or to send a doctor. (P.70)

Lila gets nervous and dreadful when her mother gets sick. This made her ask for help from De silvas to admit her mother in the hospital. They admitted and gave money for treatment. At last her mother gets cured from anaemia.

### 3) Disappeared Brother's Life

Hari went to Bombay unannounced to his parents and sisters. Lila and her sisters were waiting for him whole night. Her mother once again 'burning with fever' (P.128) called her sisters and said "Go to the bazaar and get some ice for ma. See if Hari is there. Call him, he may have stayed in the village at night to see the drama in the temple. Tell him to come home and bring some ice'. (P.128)

Lila's friend Mina told her sisters that their brother Hari went to Bombay along with other men to give a petition to the government. 'Lila frowned as if she could not understand. Could hari have been so angry and so upset as to leave home and run away? ...She would never have run away herself... It was all very frightening and difficult but she was here, her sisters and her mother were in her care, and somehow she would have to manage.' (P.129).

During monsoon, when the storm struck their village, they were worrying and frightened about Hari's life in Bombay. Lila's sisters asked her 'why did Hari not come? He had sent them a post card to say he was in Bombay, safe, but why did he not return? They say in silence, listening to the frogs clamouring in the dark'. (P. 204) Lila answered them that 'He can't come now- the ferry will have stopped for the monsoon,'... trying to sound sensible and brisk. 'Perhaps he will come when the monsoon is over. Perhaps he will come at Diwali'. (P.



204) Though Lila too had the same doubt, why he didn't return, she hidden her fear and consoled her sisters.

Anita Desai has explicitly described in her writing, and she shows how Hari in the dilapidated conditions of the Sri Krishna Eating House finds warmth and affection through Mr. Panwallah-owner and watch mender of the Ding-Dong watch shop. When Hari is terribly home sick, Mr. Panwallah makes confidence and comforts in him. Even Mr. Panwallah gives Hari a bright and inspirational future and teaches watch mending to him. This shows that even in one of the busiest, insecure and rickety cities such as Mumbai there is still hope, love and affection. With the help of Mr. Panwallah and Jagu, Hari wants back to Thul and insisting to buy the bus ticket. Jagu's magnanimity which reflects in by giving some extra money to be brings back to Hari's family. Hari's realization that he can turn his watch skills into a business, and the resolution is the family coming together to start that business.

Lila's maldevelopment of survival disquietude about her being alone from other families, mother's disease, disappearance of brother and all made her determine, to maintain patience, suffer a lot and work hard to uplift the family. Hence, Lila's disquietude implicates the development in Lila's character and such development reflects in the family surviving against all odds.

### **Hope Change and Development**

Life is a process where people have to move from one stage to another if they want to improve their lives. When Hari comes to know about the factory coming up in the village a hope arise in him. He thinks of getting a job in the factory which will help him to run the house effectively. Next, Hari decides to move from Thul to Bombay. In *The Village by the Sea*, by Anita Desai "Where there is life there is hope" this very statement has been reflected and also reflected the aware with the modern society and development. She knew the importance of science and scientific development in the life of modern India. It was infact the need of modern independent India, as employment was a big issue. Therefore Anita Desai refers to the word 'Factory' as synonym to employment. She has tried to pay emphasis to the significance of skill development. We find Hari and other boys talking about factory, skill and employment. Hari says that only a high technical degree can fetch employment whereas the other boys say the training it in the factory can help to fetch employment.

The large uneducated population of India suffering from unemployment can be helped out with the skill development programmes. This can help India to get rid of unemployment among its people. This infact will benefit the larger section of the society. The development can only come with change and every family unit struggling for survival disquietude wants change and development as seen in the case of Hari. Hari thinks of going to Bombay for job, and on the extra side he also thinks of getting job on Bijju's boat which is to come with modern engines and technology. India is a land of agriculture and this has also been reflected by Desai's novel *The Village by the Sea*, as a result of showing it as a main source of survival. It also has a message that to bring development in the fields of agriculture, modern technology is very essential it has to be added in the fields of agriculture. The



emphasis of contemporary technology can also be seen in the reference of Biju's new boat with deep freeze.

The three magical words equality, fraternity and liberty was the dream of independent India. The feeling of liberation can too be seen in this novel *The Village by the Sea* when Hari frequently thinks of moving away from his family and he seems to be a frustrated character who wants to get rid of drunkard father. This can well be seen in the statement of Hari; "Maybe a poisonous snake will bite him. He may step on one and be bitten, there are so many of them and it is dark. Then he would die." He did not say that in fear, he said it with hope, as if he wished that was what would happen.

### **Class Difference and Lost Identity**

Desai portrays industrialization of the remote village of Thul as a threat to the traditional way of life of inhabitants, both men and women. The villagers who live by the ocean and some agricultural land are gradually deprived of both sources of food. First, big boats leave no fish to be caught with nets on the banks, and later the chemicals from the factory poison all the fish, and the agricultural land was forcibly taken for the fertilizer factory. Anita Desai describes to the word 'Factory' as synonym to employment. Villagers cannot even find work in the factory since they are not trained to work with machines. This development in the type of factory is clearly would call 'maldevelopment'. However, Desai does not portray only women as victims of 'maldevelopment'. All the villagers including men, women and children who did have some occupation before the encroachment of industrialization in the form of the factory are now the victims since none of them is considered suitable to effort in the fertilizer factory.

Desai is acutely aware of this rural-urban divide besides her insight on the hierarchical power structures within each community. Desai's work not only highlights dualisms like man / woman, rich / poor, urban / rural, culture / nature etc. where the former denies the dependence on the latter, it also shows how the internal hierarchical structures are developed as strategies to cope with the economic crises resulting from 'maldevelopment'.

Anita Desai clearly depicts that villagers' concern for the depletion of fish in the sea and the fertilizer factory as a risk to the traditional way of life is supported on their material conditions. Villagers living close to nature are also dependent on nature for the similar reason. In the sake of the residents of Thul, they are all fishers and agriculturalists. The sea not only grants them food but also provides a source of income for the fish they catch is sold inside Thul and moreover exported to the huge cities. Their land produces rice and coconuts not only for them to eat but also to be sold in the huge market. Villagers, for this reason have a well-built attachment with the sea and the land. Public in the big cities too are dependent on nature for food since all the seafood and the crops they consume are received from nature but the difference of both the pastoral and town people is so as to of their attitude toward nature.

### **Sense of Responsibility**

The survival is such an important thing in the life of human being. So Anita Desai has done in her novel *The Village by the Sea*. It the important factor in this novel. Hari has taken place of his father. It is a common practice in Indian family where the eldest boy is replaced





by the father. Hari acts as guardian of the family. He is aware of his responsibility towards his mother and sisters. He adds in a serious way saying;

“Go on go on you are late. Hari shouted raising his switch.”

And even the younger children in the family consider the elder brother next or equal to father. They think it is right to make demand and ask to full their needs; it is also the work of the elder brother to fulfil the needs of younger. As seen in the words of Lila’s sisters; “Hari bhai buy us some sweets”. Hari as a responsible guardian was worried about his sisters’ marriage. He thought about dress, jewellery etc. Things required for the marriage. Thinking about all these and worries led him to move to Mumbai to earn money. As Hari thought;

He would have to find them husbands, and buy them their wedding finery- silk sarees and gold jewellery- and arrange their wedding to which the whole village would have to invite. The bridegroom’s might demand a dowry- a bicycle or even a scooter. Gold buttons, coins and jewellery. A cow or a buffalo. A piece of land.

### **Humanism**

Humanism is an important factor in Desai’s *The Village by the Sea*. Human stands for human. The De Silvas come forward for Lila’s help. The De Silvas begin helping the family financially. Seeing Lila alone they help to take her mother to hospital for better treatment. They even help her father to get free of drinking. In the general public humanism has an significant role to play and that is reflected in the novel. The society can keep a balance only if they the rich and the poor stand for each other. As, seen in the novel ‘village by the sea’ where the De Silvas and Lila’s family stand for each other at the time when Lila’s mother was ill and there was no help for them.

Exploded de silvas; “of course we will pay for the medicine. Go and fetch your mother.”

Further; “wait here- I’ll go band fetch a stretcher and a nurse and go and talk to a doctor..... and take you home.

### **Wealth and Happiness**

The significance of wealth has been clearly replicated in the novel *The Village by the Sea* by Anita Desai. Wealth is important for survival, poverty leaves to distress. Hari could easily understand that he has to do some work and earn money for the better living of his family. It was due to debt that the dog Pinto was poisoned by the men from whom Hari’s father had borrowed money. Hari new that he had to go away from Thul to earn wealth otherwise he would never get a chance to help his family out of poverty and out of debts made by his father. Wealth can bring happiness, as seen in *The Village by the Sea*. De Silvas, the rich people who come to Thul for summer vacation help Leela to take her mother to hospital. He pays money to Leela and her sisters for their work they do for De Silvas. De Silvas were infact an employment for Leela and her sister in the absence of their brother Hari.

### **Women Independence**

Leela in the novel *The Village by the Sea* is a symbol of pride for women. Leela, being a teenage girl of dares to get the responsibility of her mother where her age was to hang



out with friends and think of other things as teenage girls often do. Sign of distress was never seen on her face, infact she becomes more independent when Hari leaves the house secretly. She realises the need and acts according to the circumstances. She starts working for De Silvas to support the family, asks for help from De Silvas and saves her mother. Leela is a girl with practical understanding. Though she was not educated but she acts sensibly according to situation. She is a symbol of faith. As seen when her mother is ill and Lila requests De Silvas for help;

Lila looked at her with gratitude and explained.... there is a hospital in Alibagh. I thought – I thought if you can take her there- and I'll work for you- then the money you pay me-uh- that can pay for the doctor and the medicine.

Desai is tremendous author who portray the apparent image of female in a modern issue with their deep intense emotion. Desai's sensitive portrayal of the inside feelings of her female characters is brilliant. In organize to shatter this human/other dualism, it is significant to consider all forms of oppression as connected and the liberation of one or the other unaccompanied is not the solution of the problem.

In *The Village by the Sea*, family plays a vital role in the enlargement and progress of individual and broken homes definitely has its worse effect on an individual. Apart from being living legend of Indian English novelists, Anita Desai is not simply the viewer of the pathetic conditions of Indian woman but originated and emerged through the pathos, ethos of Indian social life and was nourished by Indian culture and have shared pains and agony of Indian woman and have consoled her and have encouraged her to struggle to re-establish her self-seeking identity. The whole body of work deserves a fresh interpretation in terms of the concept of maldevelopment of survival disquietude sensibilities.

Desai is in accurate sense the representative of India and Indian Writing in English. In her novels she writes about India, Indian people and Indian problems in the social order. She uses the theme related to day to day life. Her novels are close to Indian heart and soul of the public, language is simple well readable to ordinary ones. Hari can save some money from restaurant while he learns how to repair watches on the side. When Hari returns from the city he and his family plans to begin a business with his new skills. It is a positive ending with life looking more positive, and all because of Lila's and Hari's ingenuity and courage. The story ends on an optimistic note reflected by the hope and aspirations of the protagonists soaring high.

Anita Desai portraits the society's orthodox beliefs which is typical of Indian living also. Though the plot does not seem to be unusual, it attracts the readers by its vivid description of the characters and beauty of the nature. But it can be said that the addition of the regional languages would have added to its aesthetic sense. Desai efficiently expresses the protagonists Lila and Hari facing and defeating change in a customary culture through the practices they surpass. Thus, Desai's novel *The Village by the Sea* is an inspirational story of pretty safe to say that this is a young adult novel of value. Thus, we can handle on the significance of maldevelopment of survival disquietude sensibilities here.



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