

An Analyses of Anita Desai Protagonists in the Novel Voices in City's Amidst City Surrounding

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Abstract:

In the novel “voices in the city” Anita Desai, Characters gloominess resemble the surrounding of the City, Calcutta which surrounding is delineated with keen vivacity and similarity with it character here. In this paper it has been studied with special reference of character Nirode a male protagonist living a life of vagabond, surviving against the backdrop of metropolitan city Calcutta (Kolkata) leading a life of disillusion and abhorrence.

Keyword: Surrounding, vagabond, disillusion, loitered, stability, Goddess Kali

Introduction:

Anita Desai U.S.A based Indian Woman Novelist born in 1937. In her accolades she has plethora of Novels, Cry ,the peacock, Voices in the city, where shall we go this summer?, Fire on the mountains (1977) won Sahitya Academy Award , In Custody, Fasting Feasting, Zig Zag way, Journey to Ithaca.

Anita Desai portray vividly the surrounding of the city of Calcutta with all its bustling and hum-drum life. The backdrop of Novel influences the protagonist of the novel Nirode and his sisters Monisha and Amla. In this paper study has been done on male protagonist Nirode and his life mould amidst the environment in which he is living, how the environment of the City Calcutta co-related with his own dilemma of dismay and despair and echo his wayward existence of living in the City. He laid a life of a vagabond. He does'nt know where to start his life.

Mrinalini Solanki observers: The novels of Anita Desai depict the workings of unseen forces on the human mind and psyche...she portrays with amazing accuracy the inward odyssey and psychic upheavals of hyper-sensitive people struggling to survive in difficult human situations. Desai's characters are exceptional beings who are victims of anguish, anxiety and a terrible self consciousness, and are unable to accept life as it comes. Consequently, they suffer from terrible inner conflicts. (Solanki 4)

Nirode while leaving his brother Arun, who leaves for U.S.A for studies, the backdrop is painted “Those who felt him brush past them ,the grimy station master, the tea vender ,the coolie –thought nothing of a young man in haste, perhaps in despair, so many such passed them each –day” VTC (p. 6). He felt somewhere in his heart an envy, agony and failure in life to start yet. The planned he has made already failed or he is use to living such life of vagabond.

As Prasad says: The past is not past but continues into present through the vehicle of memory. But memory does not recover the past as it was. For each person reconstructs his past in a unique way

dependent upon his experiences, prejudices and opinions. Thus the way a character experiences time, helps the reader to grasp the very essence of that character. (The Novelist 8)

“Striding off the corrugated blaze of light and sound adorn that was the city of Calcutta, Nirode cried unfair, life is unfair” (p.7) he has not begun yet this guilt of instability reflect in his personality “a soft November mist rose from the river. Like steam from cauldron cool and frozen steam.”

Now fog- horn were blowing full of warning and melancholy, as he listened to them, his heart quietened again “three drinks and a room and a –princedom, too far away have to be reached how captured” (p.11) while talking to the Professor (Mr Bose, Nirode Friend) his nickname, he is not a professor, but writes children books. He knows his condition and feels worried about Nirode. He thought “ the boy was clever in those early days of his in Calcutta, at the strident coffee house gatherings , he had easily been the brightest young man who discarded there, he had been aggressive , then too but not rapacious , not cruel” (P.16)

As H. M. William Observes : It is an existential novel that explores the inner climate of youth despair, epitomized by the over - acutely self conscious Nirode that quoter of camus, finding no meaning in his own life or in life at all. This existential ‘angst’ is duplicated in Monisha in whom it assumes a fatal rhythm from which Nirode was once narrow why saved but which in her reaches its inevitable end.(William 54)

He loathes his work of cutting , gluing and pasted newspaper strips in the scrape book. He decided to start a Magazine. He also called on a visit to his aunt in Ballygunge for tea and asked her for help but his soul ultimately deny to take anybody help. His friend David gunny, who is an Irish, Sonny Ghosh and Dharma, with whom, his life revolves around. Nirode and David gunny both lives a life of bohemians, they switch off one profession to another. They haven’t known yet what is best for them. Their search for self-actualization remain incomplete and unachieved.

Nirode started publish his magazine named “Voice” with the monetary help of his friend, Jit but still does’nt satisfy while his friend David embraced with an art of ceramics but turn to learning “Veena” moving ‘Shantiniketan’, finally come to Clay potteries, which he once did. They both really don’t know what they should do in life. They loitered here and there in order to find stability in life but unable to choose. Anita Desai minutely portray the squalid and morbidity of City Calcutta, strewn with poor, leaper and beggars.

A.V.Krishna Rao who also feels that it is Calcutta which is the hero of the novel and not Nirode: Thus although one may be tempted to consider Nirode as the hero of the novel, the city of Calcutta is indeed the protagonist of the novel. Calcutta, conceived as a fore of creation, presentation and destruction is ultimately identified as a symbol for the Goddess Kali.(Voices In The City p.15)

Nirode says “I am leaper, he wanted to ring and call, leave me, do not come near me. I am a leaper, diseased with the loneliest disease of all” such words he would like to call out for his Mother who resides in Killingpong. One of the major cause of his hatred for his mother for her over-praising of Major Chadha, somewhat shameful and incestuous as he felt.

The city revelation done in the dampness of alienation and full of melancholic surrounding “It was the first time in three weeks that he had left his room except for necessary visits to the tea stalls below and felt like a man who has spent three years in jail and immerses to find he is afraid of the largest and populated world”.

The sardonic attitude of Nirode disliking, filled in all the surrounding infused with detail description come out of Anita Desai pen “The glowing embers and ashes of the sunset sky were now beginning to

dim, the molten gold of the river turning to murk and he lent over the railing wondering if this was the climax of the failure he himself had willed. He failed obviously but where to was the will to get up, select another ladder and begin the journey of absurdity all over again”(P.66)

He reminded “What Dharma said, that this was a poisoned city and he who breathed its air was doomed”(P.68)

David meets him at river strand, which was no place for chance encounter David accompanied him to his abode where he dwells under corrugated iron shade which hired by Nirode in fifteen rupee a month, which in rainy season looks hospitable, but turn into hot furnace in summer. David has some money in his coffers, which he got by selling his klin. They headed to China Town to dine in Chinese restaurants Ta Fa Shun, Now there is picture of crowded city Calcutta with all its squalid and green painted Cinema houses. Neon lit sari shops. Marriage procession and brass band. The whole scene vivify in detail so that reader have feelings of been there in the market. They passed through the dark streets, trams packed and airless. They spent half an hour before shop of second hand books, before sweets shop where a young man in white ‘dohti’ relish over a glass full of curd three or four, which colors his moustache with pink layer of curd. They loitered and reached in the narrow lane where with “lamp lit pale, with redolent lard uncured leather and open urinals at its most pungent”(p.98) Outside the restaurants a young man stood playing guitar singing cowboys songs and love ballads skillfully matching the tune with the songs, in the corner the group of prostitutes waited in ribbons in their head, clad in spangling frocks and saris. Streets flooded with the water of bursting drain pipe to Ta Fa Shun lane.

Returning back, at the coffee house “Nirode confess” that he never want that his mother ever visit him. While visiting to Monisha who stayed in ‘Bow bazar’ her big house situated amidst the center of the market with large people inhabited there, he says to her “ I’m done with most things , most things I am done with . Very little is left now. Its suits me’(119) On Monisha side, she too become turned into mechanical life of serving her family responsibility, being childless she felt lonely. “I thought had been contrived solely to drive me mad”(p.120) Nirode told her that he is writing a play and it is nearly done, this sort of escapade with Nirode, Monisha get momentary relief other wise she always occupied in ‘cutting vegetable, serving food, brushing small children’s hair”(p.124) she yearn for privacy “away from aunts and uncles, the cousins and nieces and nephews. Alone I could work better and I should feel more whole”(p.124) She prefer Books than saris her wardrobe filled with books Kafka, Hopkins, or Dostoveysky but all her talent goes waste.

Amla, Nirode younger sister also comes to Calcutta after completing her graduation in Arts from Bombay. She started working in advertisement company but abhors Calcutta over-crowdedness and sights full of poor people—“that this monster city that lived no normal, healthy, red –blooded life but one that was subterranean, underlit, stealthy and odorous of mortality, had captured and enchanted both sister and brother”(P.162} somehow she managed to overcome her melancholy in the company of Nirode friend Dharma where she learnt existential living of life. But Monisha can’t bear her loneliness and alienation she succumbs to it. Being tormented of her loneliness she immolated herself one day to be freed forever.

R.K. Dhawan rightly observes. “Voices in the City sketches the spiritual odyssey of a world weary, lean and hungry-looking journalist named Nirode, doomed to reside in Calcutta the ‘city of death’ The novel is a tragic exploration of personal suffering, which arises out of the feverish sensitivity of this young intellectual, who has lost his way in contemporary India”.(The fiction of Anita Desai 3)

In the end ultimately Nirode comes to realize the city Calcutta and her mother who seemed satisfied, he

said to Amla “see how still and controlled her lips and hands are because she has at last seized and mastered death , she has become kali”(p.217) symbolize her mother with Mother kali, who has seemed satisfied with the sacrifice of Monisha. Who is the preserver and destroyer both. He further says that-- she is good and she is evil . She is our knowledge and our ignoranceshe is reality and illusion. She is the world and she is Maya”(p.277)

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