

Isolation and Identity Crisis in the works of Anita Desai

Dr. Abhinandan G. Pakhmode

Assistant Professor, Manoharbai Patel College of Arts Commerce and Science Deori. Dist- Gondia

E-mail: abhiponly@gmail.com

Abstract:

This research paper explores the pervasive themes of isolation and identity crisis in the literary works of acclaimed Indian author, Anita Desai. With a focus on select novels, including "Fasting, Feasting," "Clear Light of Day," and "In Custody," the study delves into the multifaceted manifestations of isolation and identity crisis in the lives of her characters. These characters often deal with emotional, cultural, and geographical disconnection, and their struggles serve as a lens through which Desai examines the complexities of human existence and cultural adaptation. This research paper provides an in-depth exploration of isolation and identity crisis in Desai's literary works.

Keywords: Isolation, Identity crisis, Cultural adaptation, Cultural identity, Indian diaspora

Introduction

Indian diaspora writers have artfully presented the profound themes of isolation and identity crisis within their literary works. These authors, often deal with the complexities of living in foreign lands while retaining connections to their Indian roots, present narratives that delve into the human experiences of dislocation, cultural adaptation, and a sense of being neither here nor there. The concept of isolation manifests as an intense disconnection from one's ancestral homeland, and the resulting quest for identity, where characters traverse the boundaries of their heritage and the society that surrounds them. These authors shine a spotlight on the internal conflicts, external pressures, and the negotiation of multiple identities that mark the lives of the Indian diaspora, creating narratives that resonate with readers worldwide as they explore the intricate intersections of personal and cultural identity.

Anita Desai is a distinguished Indian author celebrated for her insightful and eloquent exploration of complex human emotions and relationships. Throughout her prolific career, Desai has consistently delved into the themes of isolation and identity crisis. These themes, deeply rooted in the socio-cultural context of her narratives, provide a compelling framework for her exploration of human psychology and behaviour. This research paper investigates the intricate interplay of isolation and identity crisis in Desai's works, focusing on select novels, including "Fasting, Feasting," "Clear Light of Day," and "In Custody." In these novels, Desai's characters deal with a range of circumstances and personal dilemmas that put them into a state of isolation and crisis of identity.

Isolation

Isolation is a recurring theme in many of Anita Desai's novels. Her exploration of this theme often revolves around characters who experience emotional, psychological, and sometimes physical isolation. Desai frequently portrays characters who find themselves isolated due to cultural differences. For example, in "Fasting, Feasting," Uma is isolated within her own family due to traditional gender roles and cultural expectations. She is confined to the domestic sphere, leading to a sense of isolation. Many of Desai's characters deal with emotional isolation. They are often unable to communicate their true feelings or connect with others on a deep emotional level. This emotional distance can be seen in characters like Bim in "Clear Light of Day," who feels isolated from her siblings and disconnected from her own emotions. In some of her works, Desai explores characters

who are physically isolated due to their geographic location. For instance, in "In Custody," Deven, the protagonist, travels to a remote village to interview a renowned poet. His physical isolation in the village reflects his emotional and intellectual isolation from the world of literature. Desai's characters often deal with social isolation, feeling disconnected from the broader society. This can be due to social status, as seen in the character of Nanda Kaul in "Fire on the Mountain," who is isolated due to her advanced age and lack of social connection. In "Cry, The Peacock," Maya is isolated from her husband and other older characters who cannot understand her inner turmoil. Some of Desai's characters choose to isolate themselves as a form of escape or self-discovery. This is evident in "Journey to Ithaca," where Sophie isolates herself on a Greek island in an attempt to find her true self. Desai often uses the physical environment as a metaphor for isolation. In "In Custody," the decaying, isolated state of the haveli reflects the decay of Urdu poetry and the isolation of the poet.

In Anita Desai's novels, isolation is a complex and multifaceted theme. It is used to explore the inner lives of her characters, the impact of culture and society on individuals, and the quest for identity and self-discovery. Through her skilful storytelling, Desai provides readers with a deep understanding of the various forms of isolation and its effects on her characters.

Identity Crisis

The theme of identity crisis is a prominent in many of Anita Desai's novels. Her works often delve into the complexities of characters struggling to understand their own identities, cultures, and places in the world. Many of Desai's characters deal with their cultural and ethnic identities. For example, in "Fasting, Feasting," Uma and Arun's identities are deeply influenced by their Indian heritage, which comes into conflict with Western influences when Arun goes to the United States. Gender roles and expectations often play a significant role in Desai's novels. Female characters, like Maya in "Cry, The Peacock" and Monisha in "Voices in the City," experience identity crises stemming from societal expectations of women. The conflict between different generations and their values is a recurring theme. In "Clear Light of Day," the characters struggle with their identities in relation to their family's history and traditions. Bim's identity crisis is rooted in her rebellion against her family's values. Characters in Desai's novels often deal with the shift from rural to urban environments, which can create an identity crisis. In "In Custody," Deven's identity is in turmoil as he moves from a rural setting to the urban chaos of Delhi. Characters frequently face internal struggles in understanding who they are and what they want. For instance, Sophie in "The Village by the Sea" experiences an identity crisis as she contemplates her place in a rapidly changing world. The clash between Western and Eastern values is explored in several of Desai's works, such as "In Custody" and "Bye-Bye, Blackbird." Characters find themselves torn between these two cultural worlds, leading to identity crises. Relationships, particularly marriage, are a source of identity crisis in many of Desai's novels. In "Where Shall We Go This Summer?" Sita deals with her identity as a wife and mother and the roles that come with it. Religion and spirituality often feature in Desai's works, causing characters to question their religious identities. For example, in "Baumgartner's Bombay," Hugo experiences an identity crisis as he becomes immersed in India's spiritual culture.

Anita Desai's exploration of identity crisis is multifaceted, reflecting the complexity of human identity in a changing world. Her characters' struggles to define themselves in the face of cultural, societal, and personal challenges provide rich material for understanding the theme of identity crisis in her novels.

Conclusion

The themes of isolation and identity crisis are intricately woven in the works of Anita Desai. She explores the multifaceted facets of human existence, where her characters feel sense of isolation driven by cultural, emotional, and geographical disconnection. She presents a deep and empathetic understanding of the human condition. Her characters, while facing isolation, embark on journeys of

self-discovery and transformation. Her novels provide insights into the universal struggle for belonging and self-realization. She explores the complex landscapes of human experience, where the search for identity and the experience of isolation are not isolated phenomena but rather interconnected facets of life. She encourages us to empathize with her characters, contemplate the significance of these themes in our own lives, and appreciate the enduring power of literature to illuminate the depths of the human soul.

References:

1. Grewal, A. (2005). Isolation and Identity Crisis in Anita Desai's "Fasting, Feasting." *Journal of South Asian Literature*, 40(1), 91-107.
2. Patil, S. S. (2012). Cultural Identity Crisis in the Novels of Anita Desai. *International Journal of English and Literature*, 3(8), 204-210.
3. Sinha, S. (2017). Exploring the Theme of Isolation in Anita Desai's "Clear Light of Day." *The Literary Criterion*, 52(1), 116-129.
4. Sharma, R. (2014). Identity Crisis and the Disillusionment of Characters in Anita Desai's Novels. *Literary Voice*, 4(1), 13-21.
5. Arora, S. (2008). Identity Crisis in Anita Desai's "In Custody." In B. K. Dhawan (Ed.), *Anita Desai: The Novelist Extraordinary* (pp. 87-100). Atlantic Publishers.
6. Thomas, P. (2016). Exploring Isolation in Anita Desai's "Fire on the Mountain." In S. Rani (Ed.), *Literary Landscapes: From Modernism to Postcolonialism* (pp. 105-118). Springer.
7. Chakraborty, S. (2019). The Labyrinth of Identity Crisis: A Study of Anita Desai's Fasting, Feasting. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Contemporary Research in Business*, 11(2), 72-85.
8. Mukherjee, S. (2016). Exploring Isolation in Anita Desai's Novels. *International Journal of English Literature*, 4(5), 56-68.