Treating Psychological Trauma in the Female Character of Anita Desai's Voices in the City through Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Communication

#### Abstract

Anita Desai has added a new dimension to Indian –English fiction by focusing on the inner world of her characters. In a sense, she has ushered in the psychological novel in Indian –English fiction among women writers. The writers like James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence and G.M. Hopkins who used stream of consciousness as a genre for writing, made an impact on her mind, so she is more interested to the inner world of the character instead of external world. She has written thirteen novels. All these novels in different forms present the concept of Psychological Conflict, Alienation, Isolation, Indian Migrants and their struggle for Cultural identity and individuality, oppressions. She plunges deep into the psyche of her characters and exploits the underlying truth. Anita Desai has extensively elaborated her views on creativity. She has clearly defined in most of her novels that communication is the key to many psychological problems. This paper dissects how the disruption of phallogocentric account and landscapes involve the attack of connection among sexual orientation and re- conceptualization of female want. Such catastrophe is because of disappointment endeavor a re-conceptualization among fantasy and reality. Desai has suggested intrapersonal and interpersonal communication helps the women characters to come out of their psychological trauma.

Keywords: Inner world of character, Psychological trauma, Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Communication.

## Introduction

Anita Desai is mainly a novelist of moods, of human psyche and has a deep insight to examine the status of human brain in a clear and critical state. Being a novelist of human mind, she is perfect and wonderful in portraying female personality and present her novels as a predicament of compassionate, tender and aware women characters who are not up to standards of mechanical urban society. She investigates several features of feminine psyche like man-woman compatibility,

husband-wife bonding, inner sensibility, mind confusion and causing of serious libidinous problems in the mental life of female characters. The state of great disorder in mind produce conflicts in their married life. As a psychological novelist she tries to delve deep into the emotional built-up and crevices of her female characters. Desai has introduced various phases of human brain research particularly of ladies. Her range is very wide. Her characters are from the ladies of all age groups Anita Desai's novel "Voices in the City" is a story of three siblings who are struggling to find their identity in the post-colonial India. The female character of Monisha is portrayed as a victim of patriarchal society and her infertility is a major cause of her psychological trauma.

### Desai's Psychological treatment of her female Characters

Desai a specialist in treating her characters psychologically A.N. Dwivedi has rightly argued: Anita Desai is the first among Indian English novelists to have forcefully expressed the existential problems of womankind; she is the first to have laid bare the inner recesses of the human psyche; she is the first to introduce the deep psychological probing of her characters. Anita Desai moves inward in her subtle psychological probing and grapples with the abnormal or the hyper-sensitive to lend a dimension of psychological depth and a poetic parable of consciousness to the Indian novel in English. Her work projects the difficulties faced by her characters in shedding their fears and insecurities, which results in disruption of their family ties. Anita Desai herself describes her creative writings as "purely subjective" thus avoiding those problems, which a more objective writer has to deal with since she depends on observation rather than on the private vision, which she tries to encapsulate in her works to see what the subconscious does to an impressionable person. She is more interested in portraying the response of a sensitive mind in the enveloping world, K. R Srinivasa Iyengar calls her novels: The intolerable grapple with thoughts, feelings, and emotions. The fictional world of Anita Desai is located in the corridors of the human consciousness. She is almost obsessively concerned with the dark uncannily oppressive inner world of her intensely introvert characters. Her characters, especially the females, have been portrayed on the verge of a psychological breakdown. With a view to capturing the prismatic quality of life in her fiction, she uses the stream of consciousness technique, flashbacks, and interior monologues. These techniques are appropriately used in capturing authentically a psychological realm, an intensified impression, and a quickened multiplied consciousness. The center of her fictional construction becomes some dominant consciousness artistically realized. For this, she has often been called as Virginia Woolf among the Indian fiction writers. She plunges deep into the psyche of her characters and exploits the underlying truth. She discovers underlines and conveys the true

significance of things. Though very reticent about her personal world, Anita Desai has extensively elaborated her views on creativity. She claims not to have any set theories of the novels. She feels that a writer does not create a novel by observing a given set of theories', he follows flashes of vision and a kind of trained instinct that leads him, not any theories. She feels that writing is not an act of deliberation, vision or choice but a matter of instinct, silence, compulsion and waiting. As an artist, she handles the raw material of life and conveys it through a pattern and a design. She is much interested in life with its hopes, frustrations, negations, rejections and chaotic flow of events as she is concerned with the art of giving shape, purpose, and wholeness to life. Mrs. Desai elaborates her protagonists in an interview with Yashodhara Dalmia, I am interested in characters who are not average but have retreated, or been driven into some extremity of despair and so turned against or made a stand against the general current, it makes no demands it costs no effort. But those who cannot follow it, whose heart cries out 'the great No' who fight the current and struggle against it, know what the demands are and what it costs to meet them. Desai's aims through these characters. Anita Desai's characters reveal her vision of life. They share her perception and they set out in quest of meaning. She is often seen as an experimenter who deals with many existentialistic problems and predicaments. Primarily interested in exploring the psychic depth of her female characters, Anita Desai may be said to be doing something unique among the contemporary Indian English fiction writers. Her novels, apart from focusing on the intricacies and complexities of human relationships, inevitably move around the theme of alienation and isolation. According to Usha Bande, her characters can be classified into two distinctive groups: Those who fail to adjust the harsh realities of life and those who compromise. The premise, which provides the momentum to her creative activity, is the basic human condition. In a novel, as in life, there are those who always remain, outsiders, because they cannot accommodate themselves to the world of realities. The psychological novels of Desai retain the fundamentals of Indian sensibility and socio-cultural ethos. She focused her attention on the status of women in India in the male-oriented and maledefined social and moral codes. She portrays their quest of self-assertion and self-actualization in the face of rigid norms of behavior in a conformist and status-quo society. Though Anita Desai traverses a broad territory of themes, yet she mainly touches: The physical and psychological life of her characters in general and the protagonists in particular mirrors the multidimensional reality in all its contours. She is interested in characters that are not average but are driven into despair and as a result turned into the general environment and trend. She believes that a writer must have certain traits of the head and heart, which are essential for writing a novel. Besides being a creative

genius, a novelist must be sensitive and have a power of keen observation so that he can give an actual description and pick up the tiny details. In an interview with Jasbir Jain, she says I think a writer simply has to be an observant person. If he is not going to write a novel anyway, which entails so much acute description and also an eye for details. I find certain people tend to take in abstract ideas; others might take in some other aspect of the society they live in. A writer generally tends to pick up the tiny details that other might not notice.

# Desai's aims through these female characters

Anita Desai's characters reveal her vision of life. They share her perception and they set out in quest of meaning. She is often seen as an experimenter who deals with many existentialistic problems and predicaments. Primarily interested in exploring the psychic depth of her female characters, Anita Desai may be said to be doing something unique among the contemporary Indian English fiction writers. Her novels, apart from focusing on the intricacies and complexities of human relationships, inevitably move around the theme of alienation and isolation. According to Usha Bande, her characters can be classified into two distinctive groups: Those who fail to adjust the harsh realities of life and those who compromise. The premise, which provides the momentum to her creative activity, is the basic human condition. In a novel, as in life, there are those who always remain, outsiders, because they cannot accommodate themselves to the world of realities. The psychological novels of Desai retain the fundamentals of Indian sensibility and socio-cultural ethos. She focused her attention on the status of women in India in the male-oriented and maledefined social and moral codes. She portrays their quest of self-assertion and self-actualization in the face of rigid norms of behavior in a conformist and status-quo society. Though Anita Desai traverses a broad territory of themes, yet she mainly touches: The physical and psychological life of her characters in general and the protagonists in particular mirrors the multidimensional reality in all its contours. She is interested in characters that are not average but are driven into despair and as a result turned into the general environment and trend. She believes that a writer must have certain traits of the head and heart, which are essential for writing a novel. Besides being a creative genius, a novelist must be sensitive and have a power of keen observation so that he can give an actual description and pick up the tiny details. In an interview with Jasbir Jain, she says I think a writer simply has to be an observant person. If he is not going to write a novel anyway, which entails so much acute description and also an eye for details. I find certain people tend to take in abstract ideas; others might take in some other aspect of the society they live in. A writer generally tends to pick up the tiny details that other might not notice. Desai visualizes the life of common

women of India Anita Desai lays special stress on the existential problems of womankind in general and Indian women in particular. Although she does not belong to any feminist movement yet there is a touch of persuasive feminism in her writings. She marks a revolutionary departure without involving herself in any controversy and is contended to have women protagonists in her novels. She visualizes life for a woman as a series of obligations and commitments. Her themes and characters depict the existential reality and evoke the sensibility of her females. She is constantly concerned with the problems of communication between men and women and has a talent of probing the psyche of her women characters. She depicts the inner world of sensibility and the chaos inside the mind of characters with a special stress on the female psyche. The psychological turmoil creates psychic imbalances, which in turn, handicap them in establishing harmonious and gratifying interpersonal relationships. The protagonists possess a defiant individuality and fight against the common place conformity and stick to their own vision of life. Despite a variety of themes in her novels, the problems of relationships remain essentially central, and all the themes and issues finally get subsumed in this problem. The most recurrent themes are the problems of communication between husband and wife, between the individual and the social world. Alienation in filial relation is a newly emerging idea of our modern society for parents and children are equally alienated from each other. In fact, their meetings have just become Sunday rituals. While discussing their relationship Jasbir Jain has rightly said Desai prefers to delude deeper and deeper in a character, a situation, or a scene rather than going around about it. She is an expert at depicting female psyche and holds an enviable position as a psychological novelist dealing with the psychic problems of women, particularly Indian ones, Our male-dominated society has idealized her pride in suffering from her Sati-Savitri images. Anita Desai has emerged with a new awareness dealing the subject with her fine feminine sensibility. Her female characters are educated, well to do and hypersensitive women who are burdened by the contemporary chaotic milieu. Anita Desai reflects the inner struggle of such women, their desire to break the shackles and come out of the shell of their cocoon existence and assert themselves as human beings. In this struggle, they often get alienated from the mainstream of life. When her characters come out of their cocooned existence and face the harsh realities of the life outside, they feel frustrated and the cruel urban surroundings, in addition to the lack of sympathy and understanding on the part of their near and dear ones only serve to enhance their isolation. Loneliness renders them helpless, torn and indecisive personalities, who research for love and are unable to get it. As R.K. Gupta has commented Desai's female characters are generally neurotic, highly sensitive but alienated in a

world of dream and fantasy. They are separated from their surroundings as an outcome of their failure or unwillingness to adjust to the reality. As a psychological novelist, she tries to delve deep into the emotional build up and crevices of her characters. She employs all techniques of a psychological novel like flashbacks, a stream of consciousness, diary-entries, self- analysis, and ruminations. She herself confesses about her novels: My novels are not reflections of an Indian society, politics or characters. They are part of my private effort to seize upon the raw material of life-its shapelessness, it's meaningless . . . despair and to mould it. Although Anita Desai cannot be directly related to any feminist movement to secure the complete equality of women with men in the enjoyment of all human rights, moral, religious, social, political, educational, legal and economic, yet she is well aware of the fact that, for Indian women, hearth and heart are two extremes and now they have to strive against their circumstances to break apart from the cordon of customs and redefine themselves. The Rig Veda labeled women as the eternal temptress's driving males to the pleasures of the materialistic world. The religious support given to the evils of 'sati', 'purdah', 'Devadasini', and 'polygamy' took the enslavement of women a step further.

### Similar Psychological trauma faced by Desai's female Characters

Monisha in Voices in the City is not different in nature as of Maya of Cry the Peacock. While Maya violated every one of the limits with the dread, Monisha violated every one of the limits in the feeling of suffocation. There are four principle characters in the story-Nirode, Monisha, Amla and Mother. Nirode, who can be portrayed as the saint of the novel, decides to remain a solitary wolf. He needed to transgress every one of the limits of establishments of marriage itself in an antagonistic way. Anita Desai probes deeper into the psyche of Monisha. Devoid of any self-revelation and presentation, Monisha feels herself emotionally drained. Monisha is wedded to Jiban however their wedded life is without joy and fulfillment. There are fickle contrasts between them. Monisha is a woman with a scholarly twisted of psyche yet Jiban is a functional sensible man and is basically average. It is the joint family which demonstrates to be a snag in their bliss. She needs to endure the slings and bolts of the insults and torments of the joint family. The void of separation Monisha made around herself, the obstruction she worked among herself and the family, demonstrated to be a lot for her. She couldn't bear the agony of being separated from everyone else. This frightened journey for feeling drove her, to her downfall, making her recognize when it was past the final turning point that was not what she required and finally the perpetuation of the behavioral symbols of male dominance was ultimately responsible for Monisha's death. Another fact of traditional male psyche was critically discernible in Dharma's attitude towards his daughter

and also towards Monisha's sister Amla. Monisha felt stifled in the joint family of Jiban finding the loss of privacy of ethics, unbearable, she express the plight of Bengali women in general a truly feministic concern: "I think of generations of Bengali women hidden behind the barred windows of half dark rooms, spending centuries in washing clothes, Kneading dough and murmuring aloud verses from the Bhagwat Gita and the Ramayana, in the dim light of sooty lamps. Lives spent in waiting for nothing, waiting on men, self-centered and indifferent and hungry and demanding and critical, waiting for death and dying misunderstood, always behind bars, those terrifying black bars that shut us in, in the old houses, in the old city." Added to her misery is the fact that she cannot bear children. All this, she records her inner feelings in a diary. Her married life is devoid of love. These things lead to a sense of negation and isolation. Amla has a relationship with Dharma but this relationship gets fail in providing any mental peace and tranquility. Madhusudan Prasad commented on their relationship "This relationship been given stereotyped treatment instead it has been manifested through the medium of painting with a striking subtlety". A very different picture of women is found in Nirode's mother who was involved in her extramarital relationship with Major Chadha rather than caring for her children. Due to lack of parental love and affection the children suffer lot emotionally and almost become misfits in the society. Desai portrayed the image of independent lady with another female character named Aunt Leila in Voices in the city. Aunt Leila firmly believed that women can be self-sufficient, confident and free from the clutches of men only when they are able to discover their own sprits. Aunt Leila says emphatically: "Women place themselves in bondage to men, whether in marriage or out of it. All their joy and ambition is that way while they go parched themselves." (Voices in the City 221) Hence, according to Aunt Leila a woman has to set limit for things and must find her ways and means to have independence. A submissive suppressed life could lead to mental tension culminating in trauma as in the case of Monisha.

In "Voices in the City", Desai deals with the psychological trauma of an educated woman Monisha, married in a conservative Hindu Joint family this is not to her standard. There is no mutual love and understanding between the husband and wife. Monisha does not get the privacy, which is necessary to concentrate on some private work. She is in a way happy that they give her a lot of work to do which keeps her busy. She reflects, I am glad to be occupied in cutting vegetables, serving food, brushing small children's hair. Only I wish I were given some tasks I could do alone, in privacy, away from the aunts and uncles, the cousins and nieces and nephews. 9 Jiban, her

husband wants her to be friendlier with his people. Being in a joint family she is unable to get much time for communication with her husband and he too fails to respond to her needs. Therefore, Monisha lives a frustrated and lonely life and longs for privacy and solitude. According to Dr. Suresh Singhal, she represents the tragic intensity of conjugal incompatibility suffered by a woman, in the Indian context, who becomes emotionally, psychologically and physically vulnerable to her husband, and at the same time, paradoxically, that the security of the wife's role justifies and maintains relations between man and woman on the basis of the family institution rather than on the basis of real human involvement with each other. Monisha becomes a topic of discussion among the members of Jiban's family because of her sterility. This results in a psychological emotional shock that upsets her behaviour. They talk very lightly about her infertility in her absence. They discuss whether her Fallopian tubes are blocked or whether her womb is in the wrong place that needs an operation. Monisha knew that they were discussing about her organs and her inability to conceive. Like a burst of wild feathers, released full in my face, comes the realization that they are talking of me, my organs, the reasons I cannot have a child. I can't leave these vegetables I am cutting up for them- that would create a disturbance - but I stop listening, and regard my insides: my ovaries, my tubes, all my recesses moist with blood, washed in blood, laid open, laid bare to their scrutiny. Monisha's condition further deepens when she takes Jiban's money from the cupboard. She is accused of theft by her mother-in-law for taking money from Jiban's cupboard without his prior permission. She feels hurt that she does not have the right to touch the money of her husband. She wants to pay the hospital bill of her brother Nirode, and thinks that she has every right to her husband's money. When her husband does not support her while she is being accused, she feels quite humiliated. She understands the futility of her being Refereed (Peer Reviewed) Journal www.ijellh.com 760 economically dependent. Her mother-inlaw's words were unbearable and piercing, who rather accuses her by telling, He left it in the cupboard when he went to the office: my son is always careful of his things. Only you were in the room at that time. When you left, you shut the door and none of the servants could have gone in. of course the servants will be dismissed, all of them. I will not have a thief in my house, I say, I will not have a thief in my house. Who is to tell who this thief is? After all, you were the only person who was in the room all day.1Monisha is already gripped by loneliness and neglect by her husband. When Jiban does not support her on being accused as a thief, Monisha gets completely disheartened. The words spoken by her mother-in-law seem to be very harsh and it upsets her, as Monisha expresses, I opened the door and went quickly in, and on my back felt their white-hot brands sink in and burn through my skin: Thief. Monisha's loneliness and false charge of theft weighs so heavily upon her mind that she completely loses hope in life. Monisha becomes sensitive and cannot bear the insult of allegation of theft and immolates herself. Monisha, like Maya, is a victim of the situation. The diminished dingy situation of the physical world drains out every drop of life from her. Though she is uncommunicative, her suicide is a confession of failure; through her reaction she disregards the idea that women place themselves in bondage to men, whether in marriage or out. All their joy and ambition are channeled that way, while they go parched themselves. The end of the quest is at last clear. Her reaction is violent but it upholds that death is more welcome than mean existence.

## Treating psychological trauma through intrapersonal and interpersonal communication:

This refers to the emotional and psychological distress experienced by one of the female characters in the novel "Voices in the City." Anita Desai often delves into the complexities of her characters' inner lives, exploring their emotional struggles and the impact of traumatic events on their mental well-being. Intrapersonal communication refers to the internal dialogue and self-reflection that an individual engages in within themselves. In the context of treating psychological trauma, it could involve the character's introspection, understanding their emotions, coping mechanisms, and attempts at healing or growth.

The character's psychological trauma could potentially be addressed or explored through communication and dialogue with self and others. In the context of literature or storytelling, characters' traumas are often revealed and processed through self- talk and interactions with other characters. These interactions can take various forms, such as:

**Conversations with friends or family:** The character may confide in close friends or family members, sharing their feelings and experiences. This can provide a sense of emotional support and understanding.

Therapeutic conversations: In some cases, characters may engage in formal therapy or counseling sessions, where they talk with a trained professional about their traumas, emotions, and coping strategies.

Inner monologues and soliloquies: Some literary works use monologues or soliloquies to let readers glimpse into the character's thoughts and emotions, allowing them to explore their trauma from within.

Self-reflection and introspection: Characters may engage in moments of deep self-reflection, analyzing their past experiences and their emotional responses to them.

Interactions with other characters who have experienced trauma: Meeting or interacting with characters who have also experienced trauma can create opportunities for mutual understanding and healing.

Through communication and dialogue, the female character in Anita Desai's "Voices in the City" can express her feelings, confront her trauma, and possibly find ways to heal or cope with the emotional wounds she carries.

It's important to note that the ways in which trauma is addressed or resolved in literature can vary significantly, and authors often use different storytelling techniques to convey the characters' journeys. In the case of Anita Desai's novel, the specific approach to treating psychological trauma for the female character would depend on the author's narrative style and the character's development within the story

#### Conclusion

In the context of psychological portrayal of female characters in novels of Anita Desai, Meena Belliappa observes: "What is new in Anita Desai is the effort to delineate a sensibility to locale, as it operates within the consciousness of her characters". In the presentation of inner mind reality, Anita Desai is perfect and her women characters are not ordinary but are eccentric and peculiar. Thus, novelist portrayed her female characters in that manner which present them in a real form. This gives us the picture of 'New Women'. As R.K. Shrivastava rightly said: "Unlike a photographer concerned with the portrayal of surface reality, she is painter of moods, of will, of conflicting choices and inner experience (xxxiii)." Desai has great contribution in the growth of psychological Indian fiction by portraying pschic aspects of her female protagonists where females are not able to escape from despair, agony, detachment, adversity and isolation. In a colossal piece of her books, Anita Desai directs rich cerebrum investigation. Noteworthy assessment of the wordy universe of Anita Desai's uncovers the creative possibilities of an individual, especially of her lady characters who handled their focuses by breaking social rules and which reflected through various incidents in novels.

Monisha, in "Voices in the City" is unable to live in a joint family set up as she lacks the solitude that she craves for. She cannot bear the sarcastic remarks of Jiban's family. Her only solution to escape from these mental agonies is death and she immolates herself.

Desai 's emphasis on the inner world of her characters the techniques she finds most effective in portraying it are stream of consciousness, flashbacks and interior monologues. She captures a psychological realism which submerges the story with the consciousness of the characters. Plot acquires only secondary importance. Simple plot line leads to complex situations. A story "imposed from the outside or a theme similarly imposed simply destroys their life, reduces them to a string of jerking puppets on a stage.

Monisha is portrayed as an introverted and troubled character who faces various challenges in her life, including traumatic experiences.

While the novel does explore the characters' emotional journeys and self-reflections, it's important to note that the process of recovery from trauma is complex and can take different forms for different individuals. Here are some ways in which Monisha, or any character, could potentially recover from trauma through communication and self-talk:

**Seeking emotional support:** Monisha may open up to someone she trusts, like a friend, family member, or therapist, about her traumatic experiences. Sharing her feelings and experiences with others can provide emotional support and validation.

**Processing emotions through dialogue:** Engaging in conversations with others can help Monisha articulate her feelings and thoughts, gain perspective, and understand her emotions better

**Therapeutic interventions:** If Monisha seeks professional help, therapy can offer a safe space for her to discuss her trauma with a trained therapist, who can guide her through the healing process.

**Engaging in self-reflection:** Monisha may engage in introspection and self-talk, exploring her emotions and thought patterns, and challenging negative beliefs that resulted from her traumatic experiences.

**Finding coping mechanisms:** Through communication and self-talk, Monisha may discover healthy coping mechanisms to deal with her trauma and its effects on her life.

**Recognizing resilience:** Monisha might reflect on her inner strength and resilience, acknowledging the challenges she has faced and overcome, which can empower her on her path to recovery.

Most of the traumatic problems can be solved through intrapersonal and interpersonal communication which has clearly portrayed in Anita Desai's Novels especially in Voices in the City.

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  Muthamil Selvi M.A., B.Ed. English Teacher Prist University, Tamil Nadu <a href="main.kanaga26@gmail.com">mani.kanaga26@gmail.com</a>
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- 24. Psychological Portrayal Of Women Characters InThe Novels Of Anita Desai Shweta, Dr. Swati Chauhan2 1Ph.D. Scholar, Department of English, FMeH, Manav Rachna InternationalInstitute of Research and Studies, Faridabad 2Associate Professor, Department of English, Manav Rachna International Institute of Research and Studies, Faridabad

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