



A Comparative study between Anita Desai and Kiran Desai

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1. Introduction

Anita Desai and Kiran Desai are the prominent writers of Indian English Literature. Kiran Desai is the daughter of renowned writer and Anita Desai who took the Indian novel in English from its socio-political obsessions to the probing of an individual's psyche and basic human relationship in the post-independence period. Anita Desai is born in 1937 at Moussurrie. She is the child of German mother and Bengali father. Her parents belong the different civilizations, cultures and traditions. These different cultures and traditions affect a lot to her writings. She spent her childhood in Delhi, especially old Delhi. The picture of Delhi appeared in many of her works. 'In Custody' is the finest example of it. She portrays the fantastic picture of Delhi. She married with the Gujarati Businessman Ashwin Desai and settled in Delhi. They have four children. Famous Diasporic writer Kiran Desai is their youngest daughter. When Kiran was 13 years old, their parents departed and Anita went to America with her children. Kiran passed her childhood in Delhi and then lived in America. Anita Desai started her writing carrier after 1960s. She concealed her writing from her husband and children. She never shared her interest with anyone in the house. Her family came to know about it only after her first work had published. Growing up in India, with a German mother, Anita Desai was familiar with many languages, including German, English and Hindi. The German language had been spoken in Anita Desai's home, when she was child. So, German is her spoken language. She had studied in the Christian school, St. Mary's. So, English is the language of book for her. To write her literary work in English was not the intentional step for her.

She told in her interview that it was "not a conscious decision" to write in English. She said it became "the language of books for me", because it was the first language in which she learned to write at school. Hindi and German were only 'spoken languages' for her. She was the daughter from two different civilised individuals. Anita Desai often talked about her German mother that her German mother was 'in every way Indian'. She was a passionate cook who 'baked delicious European cakes, as well as, samosas, curries and wonderful Indian food'. She once wrote: **"I see India through my mother's eyes, as an outsider, but my feelings for India are my father's, of someone born here"**.¹

She said that my mother adapted so completely to the Indian way of life that nobody thought of her as a foreigner. They spoke German at home, listened western music, read western literature. Still, we can find pure Indian seed and soil in her literary works. Desai is only the third Indian writer in English to be honoured by the Sahitya Akademi Mulk Raj Anand and R .K. Narayan were the others. As a writer she has influenced by different writers at different times. When she was a young writer, she inspired or influenced by the British writers like- Jane Austen, Virgia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence, E.M. Forster, Russian writers like- Chekhov, Dostoievsky and many others. Anita Desai always writes about traditionalism, feminism, cultural predicament, class-distinction, conjugal conflict, generation gap, alienation, aloofness, nostalgia, man –woman relationship and inner world of characters. Her daughter and winner of Booker prize, Kiran Desai also works on these kinds of subject matters. Anita nominated three times for Booker prize but she couldn't get it. Her daughter Kiran Desai got it for her second novel 'Inheritance of Loss'. Like her mother, she spent her childhood in India. She got primary education in Pune and Mumbai. Then, she moved to Delhi with her parents. At the age of thirteen or fourteen she went to England and then US where she has settled down with her mother. She completed her schooling at there and joined Belington College with the intention to become scientist. After

sometimes she developed a strong desire for writing and joined a graduate writing programme at Hollins College at Virginia. The literary culture in the house, books of different types on the shelves and books and review of her mother's writing scattered all around developed her reading interest. She inspired to try her hands on writing skill. 'Hallaballoo in the Guava Orchard' is the first book of her. She spoke about her first novel; **"My first book 'Hallaballoo in the Guava Orchard' was my childhood which includes all my weaknesses, convections and intrigue nature."**²

Then, she decided to go to Brookline for writing her next work. She lived on rent, she suffered money crisis for eight long years. In spite of her another room mates' noise, she used to spend her night in the kitchen to write. These eight years proved worthy when she declared as the Man Booker prize winner. Her second novel 'Inheritance of Loss' made her more mature, responsible and honest towards her writing. She dedicated her award to her mother and said that she was the only person who stood firmly with me and spent many hours to discuss her experiences. She said, "This victory is the inherited value and talents which has given by my mother."³ When Kiran Desai won the Man Booker Prize, Salman Rushdie stated; **"Welcome proof that India's encounter with the English language continues to give birth to new children, endowed with lavish gifts."**⁴

Anita Desai's novels like- 'Cry-the Peacock', 'Clear Light of the Day', 'Fire on the Mountain' and 'In Custody' and Kiran Desai's works like- 'Hallaballoo in the Guava Orchard' and 'Inheritance of Loss' helps to denote some actual facts, comparisons and differences from both of their literary works.

2. Psychological Comparison

2.1 Peace and Self-Content

Another resemble of both's work is their many characters struggle for the seek of peace. Mrs. Kaul and Sampath are the finest example taken from both's different novels who struggled to get peace and space in their lives. The seek of peace does not denote the spiritual sides of these characters, but the peace is just a way to escape from the calamities and problem of present time. Mrs. kaul is the character from 'Fire on the Mountain' written by Anita Desai and Sampath is the central character of 'Hallaballoo in the Guava Orchard' of Kiran Desai. Though their reasons to seek of peace are different, their lives and class are different, their ultimate desire is same to get peace in their lives. Mrs. Kaul has already spent her major part of life after her husband and children. She fed up to play the different roles of wife, mistress, mother and good house holder. She fed up to play the role of ideal wife whose husband is having an affair with another woman. so, She wanted to get rid of her family life. She wants peace and space for herself, the dissatisfaction that she got in relationships, whether with her husband or children or grandchildren filled her with futility, bitterness and sense of waste. Anita Desai writes; **" looking down, over all those years she had survive and borne, she saw them, not bare and shining as the plains below, but like the gorge, cluttered, choked and blacked with the heads of children and grandchildrden , servants and guests all restlessly surging, clamouring about her.."**⁵

Nanda Kaul being a wife, mother, grandmother and many other face, she started to fancied she could merge with the pine trees and be mistaken for one. such was her longing to be alone that she wanted to be a tree as she was not interested in any other thing or person. She wanted peace which found her at Carignano in Kasauli, " where hills melted in to sky, sky into snows, snows in to air."⁶

She was satisfied and pleased by the peaceful atmosphere at Carignano. she has been happy to leave it all behind like a great heavy difficult book that she had gone through once and did not want to pick up again. She said; **" Discharge me, she groaned , I've discharge, all my duties, Dischrge."**⁷

She believed that she had been tired from his hectic duties and responsible life, and she should take rest from it, she was living in the illusion that she is going to retire from her duties, but the arrival of Raka made her realised that her retirement is actually the escapicisim from her unwanted and unpleasant

past. She was forced to choose solitude to find peace. Another interesting character of young man named Sampath. Sampath's seek for peace has different reason from NandaKaul. She had past long life and want a shelter under which she could live with herself by her condition. whereas Sampath is a young man whose long life lies before him. but Sampath's past years determines his future travel of the seek of peace. He is twenty years old man who has gone through school facing many failures and then great difficulties in finding a job. He is one of those young men who had too many 'F 's' in their life. Here, Sampath symbolised how a 'normal' person yearns for some space and freedom. He has experienced many failures and finally he got desk job in local post office. he desires to retreat in to more peaceful and simple life. As the economic background of the family is not so strong so all the members of the family sleep in the same room under a single fan. While everybody enjoys sound sleep, he is unable to sleep because of their snoring. He is so sensible man that he suppresses his irritation without disturbing anybody. The novel describes man's carving to escape from his 'real' world to his imagined world of freedom, peace, space and solace. So, both from outer world and also from inner world, he wants peaceful environment for mind and heart. In present time, Anita Desai is living peaceful and isolate life in the remote area from Newyork city. She loves peaceful and alone place to spent the time. Kiran Desai also used to go there with her mother for her writing work. So, both mother and daughter love to live in peaceful place. their characters also like them. Mrs. Kaul and Sampath are the characters who follow the conventions of Anita Desai and Kiran Desai.

2.2 *Childhood in their Works*

Childhood plays an important phase of life for everybody. In the case of Anita and Kiran's works, we can point out two different opinion about childhood phase and memories. One is happy, pempered and beautiful childhood and another is bad, miserable and illusionary childhood. Both's works divided among these two worlds of childhood. As far as the concern of Anita Desai's novels, almost every character loses the charm and innocence of childhood life and the fun in the predicaments of the society. Anita describes the bad memories of childhood through her characters. Many characters portray miseries and sufferings during their childhood. For example, Raka, she has the worst childhood among all the characters of Anita's works. Raka is the product of an unsucessful and unfortunate marriage. she grown up by seeing the violence and tortures of her father towards her mother. Her parents fights and misbehavior made her abnormal girl. She used to chant under her breath and said to her self that I don't care, I don't care, I do not care for anything. Raka had known her mother ill for most of her life, mysteriously ill, mostly in bed, a victim of her husband's cruelty. She had lived in a broken family, these circumstances made her bitter, isolate and pessimistic from life. She made the hard shell around her that nobody can break it or enter into it.

Sampath has also passed 'fail' childhood. he always failed in exams and people called him 'looser'. So, he made the illusionary world around him. His 'making of the Baba' is the result of his childhood memories and frustration. Kiran Desai's another novel 'Inheritance of Loss' also includes the painful childhood of Sai, the important role. She suffered bad days during her childhood. She studies in convent hostel and met her parents just once or twice during year. At the age of fifteen, her parents died and she has to live with her grandfather unwillingly. So, basically she spent her life's most of time in loneliness and alone. she never enjoys the beauty of childhood. She never pempered by any of her elders. That is why she started to find love and care from her mathematics tutor, Gyan who played an important role as a insurgence. Another charater Bim from Anita Desai's novel 'Clear Light of the Day'also spent the responsibl childhood. Her parents spent their time plyaying cards at the club or home and do not think of the emotional needs of their growing up children. This emotional starvation gives these children an awareness of the meaninglessness of their existence. Then, their parents dies when Bim was not yet so elder. She has three brothers and sisters. She is the eldest daughters of hem. After her parents' death, she has to take care of her brothers and sisters. Tara, Raja and another mentally retarded brother. She spent her whole childhood to survive her family. Being an elder sister, she nourished them and made them capable to live their lives beautifully. So, she could not enjoy her childhood fully.

Biju, the son of the cook from Kiran Desai's 'Inheritance of Loss' represents the example of unhappy childhood. He spent his early days with the dream to go to USA. His father, the cook was living his life by his son Biju. So, Biju has all burden of his father's dreams and expectations. Cook wants that his son would go to USA and earn lots of money. He did not want the life of servant for his son. So, he gave the burden of dreams on him and these dreams split his childhood. Therefore, he could not enjoy it much. He just waits to grow up. So, he could fulfill his father's wish.

Anita Desai is able to narrate the story to portray the characters, to convey the mood to evoke the atmosphere to probe the psyche of her characters successfully and for this she uses flashback technique, stream of consciousness technique, use of contrasting characters, use of symbolism and effective use of language either to evoke an atmosphere or to transcribe the pronunciations or the characters or to use rhetorical skill for harangue. And to create realistic effort she also uses Hindi words but in moderation. We find in her major novels, different techniques; she has made use of Indian words, German poetry and a few nursery rhymes. Mainly she portrays dilemmas and doubts of woman who are 'misfits' in their own way, who do not want to be heroic but all the time we find them struggling for what they do not have for example love, affection, attention, acceptance, recognition, or appreciation. Her novel focuses on the inner climate, the climate of sensibility. The interplay of thoughts, feelings and emotions is reflected in language, syntax and imagery aspects of existentialism are in evidence in the total framework of her stories. Use of original Hindi words like Chelas, Garam Chai, Pani, Mantra, Billi wala pagal, Paan, lungi, saris etc has being used often. When Anita Desai had been asked in one of her interviews in 'The Hindu Opinion' that; When you read her book, not as a mother, but as a general reader, what is it that strikes you about Kiran's writing? What is it that stands out about her voice? She answered "**Kiran has a clear vision of life. There is no sentimentality. There is no hypocrisy. She is honest. She sees the complexity of life, and writes about it clearly.**"⁸

2.3 Religious Comparison

Religious elements have been seen in both's novels. Atheism, superstitions, superficiality are the facets interwoven with the term 'Religion' especially in the Indian society. Here, both writers reveal the superstitious attitude of the common people through their characters and incidents presenting in to the novels. At the beginning of the 'Cry-the peacock', Arjun, Maya's brother left the house at very young age and ran away to another place. He was actually wanted to get rid from his father's ideology and protectiveness. Maya was also understood her brother and she wanted to go with him. Her father also liberal enough to accept that situation. But at that time Maya stopped herself to do so just because she is a girl, she is the inferior by gender. Her blind conviction about gender discrimination has bound her till the end of her life. According to her belief, her brother can run away from the house because he is a boy and he can live alone in the outer world and he can do anything what he thinks but she can't do the same thing just because she is a weak and feeble girl. This mentality is also responsible for the nature to dependant or reliable on another person. Another delicate example about superstition which takes deep thought of readers. This example proves that how a little religious conviction can change or ruin one's life. When Maya and Arjun were children, there has been prophesying spoken by a soothsayer. According to that prophesy, one will die among Maya and her husband in the fourth year of their marriage. Maya's father takes it lightly and suggests Maya to forget about this kind of false information. But after her marriage with Gautam and constant predicament forces her to rememories that prophesy. Eventually, the prophesy has been come up to Maya in the form of bad marriage experiences. But the effect of the prophesy becomes stronger when she receives her brother Arjun's letter which talks about the same prophesy. Her fear of death becomes more alive and strong because of her superstitious belief on some random prophesy. Maya is not the only example who ruins her life with her own hands but there are many people in real world who are constantly living under this kind of religious superstitions. Maya's life becomes more miserable and horrible after knowing her prophesy by her brother. This example denotes the bad result to follow the fake and stupid superstitions. Kiran Desai's first novel 'Hallaballoo in the Guava Orchard' is itself marvelous example of religious superstition and harsh satire on the religious conventions. As we know the character of Sampath, a

young man of twenty years who faces many failures during his childhood and schooldays. He also fails to find the job and set in life. He continuously finds distress and despair during his childhood and job. He starves of peace and calmness. Once he climbed up the Guava tree and decided to stay there. After some days, people considered him as Yogi Baba who knew every thing. Actually, Sampath had the desk job in post office and in free time, he read the personal letter of the people so, he knew all that secrets. Slowly and gradually people start to see 'Baba', people worship him, ask him about their problem and share their secrets with him. Not only people but the local government and media also give important to Sampath as a 'Baba'. Kiran Desai's this work is a great satire on the religious superstitious and typical mentality of Indian society. Creed and Class distinction is the drawback of religious superstition in Indian society. Its direct example is Mr. Kaul, Nanda's husband. He loves a Christian girl Miss. David who is mathematics teacher. She works with Mr. Kaul in Punjab University. They have lifelong affair and they also wanted to marry with each other. But just because she is Christian and Mr. Kaul brought up in Punjabi family, he had to marry Nanda. Still, they kept continue their affair and the results of this affair has been suffered by Nanda. Intercaste marriage is common issue now a day. But still, we have many families who strongly believe in caste and creed. This is purely superstition that inter caste marriage prove dangerous or harmful to the society. This superstition became cause of Broken and unhappy marriage of Mr. Kaul and Nanda. Mr. Kaul had feared that if he will marry with Miss. David, the society will not accept it and he will have to suffer socially, mentally and emotionally. Mr. Kaul has no guts or daring to accept Miss. David and go against the society. Religious and social superstitions are the intermingled elements in Anita and Kiran's works.

2.4 Cultural Comparison

Another similarity lies in themes of the novels. In 'Fire on the Mountain', Anita Desai portrays the world around Carignano which is violent and full of superstition. Ila Das, Nanda's friend lives in the nearer village of Carignano as social worker. She prevents child marriage at there and she has paid for her good cause. She raped and murdered by the men of that village. Anita Desai shows the dangerous society behind the beautiful place of Carignano. Kiran also described the violent attacks of Nepalese Insurgency on the common people in Kalimpong. In fact, the novel starts with the attack of Nepalese on the Judge's house and snatch his guns and rifles, eat food in his house and run away. Kiran portrays the terrible and shocking atmosphere in the beautiful place Kalimpong. Cultural conflict is also common element in both's novel. Cultural conflict is the modern and large subject to discuss. It is not just about the conflict about different boundaries and countries. The cultural conflict also covers or defines the local boundaries, people or even among society. The conflict may be outer or inner. So, culture and conflict are constructed around human relationships within particular social context. Anita Desai's 'Cry- the Peacock', cultural conflict is one of the reasons of the failure of Maya-Gautam's marriage. Maya brought up in very protective atmosphere. She used to play with her friends, talks about her servant's old saris and stinky clothes. Her world is limited and bound around her father. She has no concern about society or outer world. Where as Gautam's cultural atmosphere is so different. His mother is a social activity who remains busy throughout the day. They live highclass and sophisticated life style. He has nothing to do with love, dream or affection. Gautam and his family discuss about political issues, social matters, articles, news etc. Maya and Gautam's background, surroundings and cultures are different. Gautam leads somewhat western life style which is very practical, free from feelings, money oriented. Maya feels shock by seeing that Gautam's family concerns about society, money and fame rather than love, feelings or relation. Gautam's culture is so different from Maya's. Maya never adjusts in his family. Another cultural difference can be seen in 'Fire on the Mountain'. Nanda married with Mr. Kaul who is the vice chancellor in the Punjab University. He belongs high class society which follows western culture. He has an affair with christian girl Miss. David. He maintains extra marital affair easily. His wife Nanda knows about his affair and keep mum to it. Nanda's life is very limited to her children, servants and guests. She has to look after her social and family life. Though Mr. Kaul and Nanda live in the same house, they led different cultures and lifestyles. Mr. Kaul drinks wine, attends parties, lead an affair all his facets implied to the western culture. He likes intellectual discussion; he maintains privacy even with his wife made his life more

private and high profile. He lived in Punjab with total western attitude and lifestyle in which Nanda found herself so detached and unknown from her husband's life. This kind of internal cultural conflict resulted into the broken marriage.

3. Conclusion

Kiran Desai beautifully defines the cultural conflict through her works and characters. She creates thoughtful study of culture and conflict in her two novels through various characters from their different cultural background. Her first novel 'Hallaballoo in the Guava Orchard' deals with the main theme of cultural conflict. Its main protagonist Sampath misfits in his middle-class society where every person engages in their routine struggle. He wants peace and works what he likes to do. But his surroundings do not help him to do so. Apart from him, the novel shows the different facets of Indian culture and tradition. The most important example of cultural conflict lies in Kiran Desai's Booker prize winning novel 'Inheritance of Loss'. Nepalese insurgency in Kalimpong and other local area denotes the cultural conflict. They felt alienated in Darjeeling and wanted to establish a political state based on their culture. Their insurgency was the result of their inner cultural conflict and the threat of their loss of identity and culture. A person's identity is related to the other. It is understood in the context of the other. The proper understanding of multicultural aspects of identities can give us the real knowledge of local and global form of culture.

Another character who faces the cultural predicament is Sai, the grand daughter of the Judge. She lived in USA. After her parents' death, she has to come to India with her grandfather. She comes from another culture and society which she likes but in India she has to adjust herself unwillingly. She could not find herself happy in the Judge's house. She could not mix up with anybody in the house or outside the house. She just talked with the cook. She is the character who suffers from cultural conflict. Biju, cook's son also faces two cultures and can not adjust both sides. Biju went to USA to fulfill his father's dream and make money. He suffers great hardship at there. The frequent change of jobs because of his body odour and his unsuccessful trials for green card all these years trouble his consciousness. He comes across many others from different countries who, too, share the same doomed fate. He worked for a country that was not ready to recognize his services and had left his own country where there was no work for him. He experiences great despair changing his jobs from one restaurant to another. Then, he joins Gandhi café in the hope that it would provide him some consolation to meet and work with people full of Indian sentiments. But after some time, he again experiences the same bitter treatment from his master. He could soon realize that only the name Gandhi could not soothe his wounds. At last, Biju purchases an air ticket and comes to India, to his native place. He took a jeep to reach his destination. But the GNLf men misguided him and robbed him of all his possessions he had bought so endearingly from US his clothes, cash and even his shoes were snatched and he was chased towards jungle to shed tears over his loyalty to his own land. He is disillusioned and regrets over his decision to return. So, Biju suffers the highest cultural conflict and bad experiences resulted by it. Cultural conflict is the general tone of both's works whether it is about inner conflict or outer conflict. Every character feels the predicaments resulted by unwanted culture and tradition.

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