



ANITA DESAI'S THE VILLAGE BY THE SEA: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Indian author Anita Desai is an animator, life enriching writer with a simple sensitivity. The novel offers a glimpse into the complexities faced by a poor family in a small Indian village. This ingenious, inspiring work of fiction has touched the hearts of millions. The story describes the life style of the poor families living near Indian Sea, their only hope of fishing and the palm trees and a family of a poor people “of Thul, a village in India. These were the few central characters, the writer needed to discuss the pros and cones of lifestyle of fishermen living near sea; how badly monsoon affects them. Hari and Lila were born and bred in the village, but now his family is falling into despair: the father of alcohol while the mother is gravely ill. As for the money that there is not enough to meet the most basic needs between. In this paper a critical review of the work done on Desai's work with reference to The Village by the Sea and her novel characters.

Key words: Pessimism, aloneness, poverty, drunkard, rusticity, alienation

1.0 INTRODUCTION – STORY REVIEW

The story is set in a small fishing village, Thul on the western coast of India,. In the beginning of the book, Desai mentions that the story is based entirely on fact, as she visited Thul during weekends with her family. Her characters are based on people living in the village. There are certain words in the native Indian language in the novel, which may be unfamiliar to young English readers, and Desai has provided a glossary. The main characters of the story are Lila and Hari, two siblings in a family struggling to make ends meet. Lila is 13 and Hari is a year younger. They have to shoulder the responsibilities in order to survive the harsh realities of their



family's bleak financial situation. With their mother chronically ill and their alcoholic father, they have to earn money to run the household and educate their two younger sisters. As a result, both Hari and Lila have given up their studies. Life is miserable for them. Lila has only a few days of work as a servant and Hari works a small plot of land to grow crops. The crops never yield enough food for them and his small fishing net never catches enough fish to fill the stomachs of his family. Hari is strong and wants to get a better job but he cannot tolerate the turmoil of his family. He runs away to Bombay, known as "The City of Dreams," without telling his family, leaving Lila to manage things on her own. The way the siblings make their way through this story and their grinding poverty is remarkable! Poverty forces 12-year old *Hari* to go to city (Mumbai) and find work, and soon he finds a small job there in a restaurant owned by someone called *Jagu*. *Hari* also befriends a nice person Mr. Panwallah there, and learns watch-making skills. The family back in the village gets some support from De Silvas, who are very rich. The treatment of the mother also starts. Hari comes back, and meets everyone and is delighted by the positive changes. With whatever *Hari* has earned and saved up till now, the family plans to start a family business which in turn will also help in *Hari* setting up his watch shop in the future. In this way, *Hari* and *Lila* do a remarkable job of easing up their hard life.

2.0 THE VILLAGE BY THE SEA - CHARACTER LIST

1. **LILA:** She is one of the main characters in the book, a young girl of thirteen living in a poor fishing village somewhere in India. She has three younger siblings and together they are forced to care for themselves after their mother gets ill and their father starts drinking and stops working. Despite the hardships she is forced to endure, Lila remains optimistic and tries to help her family. She takes over the responsibilities her mother had and takes care of her younger sister while also cooking and cleaning around the house. 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.
2. **HARI:** Hari is Lila's younger brother, a boy of twelve years old. He too like Hari is forced to grow up rapidly because of their family situation. Hari gives up going to school because their family is no longer being able to afford it and starts working in the fields



instead. Hari realizes that his sister's future depends on him and that force him to work hard and think about new possibilities to make money. He is an intelligent boy and Mr. Panwallah notices this and decides to teach Hari how to make and repair watches. It is clear that Hari loves his family deeply and that he would do anything for them.

3. **BIJU:** Biju is a wealthy fisherman in the village where Hari and Lila live. He starts to build a new boat around the time when the action of the novel starts and Hari becomes intrigued by the ship Biju built. Biju is regarded as a sketchy person in the novel and many assume that he earned his wealth through smuggling.
4. **BELA:** Bela is Hari and Lila's younger sister. There are not many information about her but it is mentioned that she continues to go to school even is Lila and Hari were forced to dropout.
5. **KAMAL:** Kamal is like Bela Lila and Hari's younger sibling. We are not offered many information about him except the fact that he is still going to school like Bela.
6. **MR. PANWALLAH :** Mr. Panwallah is an old watchmaker from Mumbai. He takes Hari under his wing and teaches him how to repair and make watches. He is described as an old, gentle, kind-hearted man who genuinely wants to help Hari. Because of him, Hari is able to return to his village with the prospect of opening his own repairing shop in the future.
7. **HIRA LA :** Hira La is a servant in De Silva's house in Mumbai when Hari arrives there. He pities the young boy and introduces him to one of his friends who is able to offer Hari work and a place to stay.
8. **JAGU :** Jagu is a restaurant owner in Mumbai, friends with Hira La. He meets Hari through Hira La and offers the young boy a place to stay and a job in his restaurant.
9. **MR. DE SILVA :** Mr de Silva is a wealthy man from Mumbai who sometimes came to the fishing village where Lila and Hari lived together with his family. He is a kind man and offers to give Hari a job in Mumbai. After Hari leaves, Mr. de Silva s the one who takes Hari and Lila's mother to the hospital.



10. **HEMA** : Hema is a walthy woman from the village where Hari and Lila live.
11. **MINA** : Mina is a young girl from the village and good friend with Lila.
12. **MRS. DE SILVA** : She is Mr. de Silva's wife who comes with him to the fishing village.

3.0 A REVIEW AND CONCLUSION

Desai's writing style is pure and passionate. Her stories are straight from the heart. They contain the flavor of the soil, and acquaint readers with Indian culture and traditions. This book is about how Hari and Lila rise above their struggles and emerge victorious in their quest for survival. The characters are well drawn. Hari represents hard work and determination; his moral fiber streaked with emotion. Lila is poised, patient, and tolerant. The story of their struggles and their indomitable spirit is inspiring to those in similar circumstances and sure to regenerate lost willpower and offer hope. The book is very well written and aroused my emotions; it made me feel sympathy towards all of the characters. I cried about their struggles and pains, laughed and rejoiced for their progress and gains. The characters, sketched in with Desai's usual blend of irony and tender sympathy, are people who look at pictures and read books: the rich who collect and neglect art, the civil servants who fail to support it, the adapters and critics and publishers who cluster round the edges, their restless jostling muddying and blurring its outlines. Last of all, but most beautifully, in her final story Desai writes about the secret part of all human beings that can create no matter how wretched our circumstances, a precious gift she suggests must at all costs flee the roaring, vacuous maw of 21st-century media. The vibrant descriptions help the reader delve right into the book and reach the place metaphorically. The only drawback observed was the lack of tension in the first half of the book. The story proceeds quite slowly in its initial phase. But as one reach the second part, the story picks up and won't want to close the book until the last page is turned. An important message the book conveys is the need for change for the better. Our surroundings and environment are constantly changing and we must adapt our outlook accordingly. The appeal of the novel, *The Village by the Sea* sounds very vital, touching and convincing. It is clear that almost every theme conveyed through the story has a special relevance not only to the Indian society but also to the entire world at large. Desai's acute sense of observation and her essential preoccupation with the common man become prominent in her masterly characterization, vivid descriptions of the settings and the fine organization of a



vigorous plot which is highly authentic. Also, the novelist's remarkable ability in the adoption of effective narrative techniques seems to have been immensely supportive in enhancing the richness of the thematic appeal of the novel. Hence, it is clear that the celebrated work of fiction, *The Village by the Sea* remains another feather in the cap of Anita Desai thus bearing ample testimony to her excellence as one of the leading Indo-English writers of the twentieth century.

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