



## The Concept of Opposite Gender in the Works of Anita Desai

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### ABSTRACT:-

Desai's novels also evolve a typical setting or "world" of their own. Most are set in the city, which comes to represent the undesirable, unimaginative reality; most also have a romantic counterpoint to the city in a hill station or an island that seems to represent the remote, romantic, ideal but is revealed to be an unreal or unsatisfying delusion. At the hearts of the novels are usually big, old houses with several verandas, green shutters, gardens, servants, and pets. The garden is extremely important in Desai's world because her characters show an unusual sensitivity to it. Trees, creepers, tendrils, flowers, fruits, seasons, pets—the concerns of the so-called woman's world—are more vividly perceived in Desai's novels than anywhere else in Indian English fiction. Also part of Desai's world is a brooding, Faulknerian obsession with the past; the present is usually seen by the characters as a decadent remnant, a husk of a glamorous past. Finally, the characters are all members of the upper class who belong to once-affluent, now-decaying families. The city, the hill station, the big house with a garden, a decadent family, an obsession with the past—these make up the typical world of a Desai novel.

**Keywords:- Alienation, Protagonist, Skill, Gender, Psyche**

### INTRODUCTION

#### THE ALIENATES

*The term [alienation] allows precarious bridges to be built between clinical psychiatry, popular notions of madness, Hegelian metaphysics and the Marxist tradition in social theory.*

Alienation is estrangement from other people, society or work, a blocking or dissociation of a person's feelings. The alienation of the individual is inalienable. One cannot banish the world, if alienation is present in one's psyche. It is too easy to detest it or abjure it but it is too hard to shed it. Alienation being the root-cause of schizophrenia, the problem has been analyzed in depth by the psychoanalytical theorists. Re appropriating the notions of Freud, Jung, Lacan and a few other theorists, (Anita Desai brings into focus the part played by the unconscious and the fractured self in the transformation of the subject. Under unbearable societal pressures, her men and women characters struggle with their alienated selves and sufferings. This chapter takes up the study of six men characters of Anita Desai as alienates, Jean Paul Sartre, the well-known existential thinker, defines alienation as: 44 loneliness, the absence of relationship, the feeling of dissatisfaction or the explicit rejection of values and norms... it is the individual's experience of himself as an object, which is not a disparity to be overcome, but a fact to be acknowledged. Alienation, then, is self-imposed. It arises because of one's non conformist postures and one's unwillingness to acquiesce to the diktat of the society and the Establishment. As Lewis S. Feurer remarks, "it is a closed circle, a squirrel cage from which there is no release... Pettiness and selfishness creep in, even in the midst of their community based on equality and fraternity" (The term, alienation, is generally accepted to refer to powerlessness, in the sense that one's destiny is not under one's control. The other dimensions and constructed scales to measure statistically a person's degree of alienation, are meaninglessness, purposelessness, norm lessness, cultural estrangement and social isolation. A person's fractured consciousness and his fractioned function are the repercussions of alienation. In this context, Malcolm Bowie draws his observation from Lacan and says that though the T in a baby promises coordination of the motor control, "the 'alienating destination' of the T is such that the individual is permanently in discord with himself: the T is tirelessly intent upon freezing a subjective process that cannot be frozen, introducing stagnation into the mobile field of human desire" The industrial society of the present age has not only deepened the problem but also brought its characteristic mode of alienation to the laborer. Ely Chinoy describes the scenario.

*Nearly four-fifths of... workers cherished the dream of leaving the factory forever. Mostly they longed for the independence of small businessmen. As he approached middle age, the worker sadly renounced his dream, and resigned himself to the assembly line. This alienation of man from the machine, which stands against him, imposing its rhythm on him so that he is satellite to its motions, is something, which is common to all industrial societies, whether they be capitalist or socialist.*

In this machine age, everyone is driven to boredom. Perforce, he has to submit himself to mechanicalness, dailies, and dull daily routine. As a result, he is reduced to the position of an automaton. He becomes like everyone else a mere cipher in the cog of the society. In fact, he turns into a square root of minoune. In fine, he loses his individualism. If he fails to identify himself with the workings of the institution of his society, if he finds the society around

him meaningless and empty and if he prefers to be a bohemian non-conformist, he suffers alienation and becomes a classic alienate. In fact, the great problems of contemporary society have all been described as arising from different modes of alienation. Edmund Fuller makes a cryptic observation that, "man suffers not only from war, persecution, famine, and ruin, but [sic] from inner problem... a conviction 46 of isolation, randomness, [and] meaninglessness in his way of existence". R. S. Pathak enlarges Fuller's views: The modern man is doomed to suffer the corrosive impact of alienation, which manifests itself variously in the form of generation gap, the credibility loss or gap, the compartmentalization of life, the stunning of personal development and the conspicuous absence of a sense of meaningfulness in life... The modern man has shrunk in spirit languishing in confusion, frustration, disintegration, disillusionment and alienation... He suffers from an acute sense of rootlessness, which may manifest itself as the alienation from oneself, from one's own fellow men, and from nature (The different kinds of alienation that characterize the modern people have been labeled as Artistic Alienation, Self-imposed Alienation, Alienation of the Superior Intellect, Alienation of the Inferior Intellect, Alienation of Race, Alienation of the Neurotic, Alienation of the Generations, Alienation of the Class Society, Alienation of the Competitive Society, Alienation of the Mass Society and Alienation of the Industrial Society. These personal, private and public varieties of alienation are the out come of psychic malaise. Sigmund Freud has tried to explore the reasons for this and has given a theoretical framework related to the workings of the mind. ( Freud views alienation as the result of the split between the conscious and unconscious parts of the mind. He makes a distinction among the terms conscious, unconscious and preconscious. The unconscious, a primary process that seeks immediate gratification, is driven by the Id, the deepest unconscious part of the mind, devoted entirely to pleasure principle driven by blind instinctual impulses. The end result is always disillusionment and un pleasure Id is like a man on the horseback, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse - the unconscious. The preconscious is a secondary process that takes a more circuitous route to gratification through temporary toleration of un pleasure. Ego (that is, I) the link between the unconscious and preconscious consists part of Id and is associated with reason and common sense. Ego uses borrowed forces to control the horse and represents a more coherent organization of mental processes. The unconscious and preconscious interact constantly. The conscious is related to presence and represents reason and logical thought. Repression, says Freud, is a storehouse of all unfulfilled desires and traumatic past events and experiences that are forced out of the conscious and preconscious into the realm of the unconscious. The Superego represents the conscience or morality. As a consequence, the alienation of the inner needs of the people, their Id, causes mental illness. Two other parts of the personality engaged in a dynamic and dialectical relationship with Id are the Superego, repressing natural instincts, and the 48 Ego, mediating the dialogue in consciousness. Neurosis and alienation are thus the result of a conflict or split between the Ego (conscious) and the Id (unconscious), according to Freud. Freud also viewed that the heightening of the sense of guilt as the most important problem in the development of civilization. Freud calls civilization's discontent as a malaise. This malaise is the result of a problem in the individual's libido in which the civilization requires the renunciation of instincts towards aggression and sex often sublimating them into an intellectual form. The process involved is a two-stage alienation. First, the aggressive desires are, "the greatest impediment to civilization... are inhibited by weakening and disarming them and by setting up an agency within him to watch over it, like a garrison in a conquered city". This is the fear of authority. The second stage is a fear of the superego itself, which compelling one to take punishment, "is ready to put in action out against the Ego the same harsh aggressiveness that the ego would have liked to satisfy upon other, extraneous individuals" Man, thus is ever under the grip of this double fear, namely, of authority and of his own inner psyche. However, Jung makes a deviation from the personal unconscious and promotes a deeper layer called the Collective Unconscious, the repository of archetypes. Freud views the unconscious as alienated 49 through excessive guilt, whereas Jung sees the unconscious as alienated by social forces. In the mid-life of an individual, Jung opines, the one - sidedness of the personality takes its toll. It is the Ego's alienation (disconnection) from the Self (the unconscious). As the connection between the Ego and the Self is essential for psychic health, this alienation is often experienced as meaninglessness, despair, emptiness and a lack of purpose. This disconnection of ego consciousness from the unconscious epitomizes the stage of ego-self alienation, according to Jung. Likewise, Jung sees the libido as morally neutral, while Freud insists upon evaluating its dark characters and conceiving it as an allied death instinct, distorted from erotic drives. Thus, driven by the inward psychic and the outward social forces, man succumbs to the inevitable alienation in his sphere of operation. As such, the inalienable alienation of the individual is a reality as reflected in some men in the novels Anita Desai. In addition to her men, some women characters also suffer due to self-imposed alienation. Anita Desai does not treat alienation as a myth but as reality. A neurotic like Maya in *Cry, The Peacock* and a hypersensitive woman like Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* suffer from self-imposed alienation and self-estrangement and the resultant isolation and loneliness. They have all their material needs fulfilled but are emotionally deprived. The 50 alienation of self-estrangement is equated with the notion of other directedness. alienated status. However, other-directed and inner-directed share the A mentally deficient person experiences alienation; similarly persons of superior talents and competencies suffer imposed alienation and alienation of superior intellect at the hands of less-capable, minimal- knowledge, non-understanding persons and the unsympathetic and hostile society around. This, then is the case of Gautama, in *Cry, The Peacock* and Raman in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* One's behavior is dependent on future rewards. The person becomes self estranged because he enjoys nothing for his own sake. Men like Nirode in *Voices in the City*, Dev in *Bye-Bye Black Bird* and Baba in *Clear Light of the Day* suffer from self-imposed alienation, artistic alienation, alienation of the race and alienation of the competitive society. They are the victims of neurosis, unreason and loneliness. Raja of *Clear Light of the Day* too suffers from alienation. His obsession with Urdu poetry and a Muslim family way of life and his own alienated feelings because of his parents result in self-imposed alienation, artistic alienation and alienation of the race and society

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## THE WANDERING HEROES ...

*archetypes... are not mere names, or even philosophical concepts. They are pieces of life itself - images that are integrally connected to the living conditions of the individual by the bridge of the emotions. That is why it is impossible to give an arbitrary (or an universal) interpretation of any archetype. It must be explained in the manner indicated by the whole life-situation of the particular individual to whom it relates.*

Anita Desai seems to be preoccupied with the archetype of the 'wandering hero' when she portrays the male characters, Hari, in *The Village by the Sea*, and Dev and Adit Sen in *Bye-Bye Blackbird*. This chapter discusses the concept to show how these characters are presented as illustrative models, conforming themselves to Jung's theoretical mode, 'journey of individuation'. Archetype means an original pattern, the creative unit of manifold copies. Jung in his *Analytical Psychology*, applies the term 'archetype' to what he calls 'primordial images', the 'psychic residue' of repeated patterns of experience in the lives of our ancestors which survive in the 'collective unconscious' of the human race. Jung in his famous essay, 'Approaching The Unconscious' in the book *Man and his Symbols* observes:

***when it is a matter of obsessive dreaming...the personal associations produced by the dreamer do not usually suffice for a satisfactory interpretation. In such cases... elements often occur in a dream that are not individual and that cannot be derived from... personal experience. These elements...are what Freud called "archaic remnants" - mental forms whose presence cannot be explained by anything in the individual's own life and which seem to be aboriginal, innate, and inherited shapes of the human mind.***

Archetypes are expressed in myths, religion, dreams as well as in works of Literature. As a mythological figure, for instance, the dragon slayer repeats itself in the course of history, whenever creative history is freely manifested. In criticism, archetypes are images, heroes, or story patterns that persist, with variations, from writer to writer. To Northrop Frye they are the most radical and powerful elements of which imaginative works are constructed. According to Northrop Frye, the 84 principal literary genres identified as "tragedy", "comedy", "romance" and "satire", incorporate recurrent mythical archetypes that respectively mirror a season in the annual cycle. "Romance" typically concerns an archetypal hero who finally vindicates himself as victor over evil, often after severe and almost fatal sufferings. In 'The Mythos of Summer Romance', Frye uses the verb 'to wander' in four places to highlight the basic plan underlying Milton's *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*. One such place is, where Moses and the Israelites wander through a labyrinthine desert. According to Jung, archetypes are deep and abiding patterns of the human psyche that remain powerful and present over time. They exist in the collective unconscious or the objective psyche. Archetypes are numerous. However, personal histories and culture provide clues to dominant archetypes. To accept the challenge of a mythic quest, to set out in search of wholeness and to approach individuation is a typical archetype urge of the modern man in search of a self. By "individuation", Jung means "the process by which a person becomes a psychological 'individual' that is, a separate indivisible unit or whole" (*The Archetypes and The Collective Unconscious*. 275). M. L. von Franz, in his essay, 'The Process of Individuation', explains individuation: 85 This process (individuation) takes place in man by itself and in the unconscious; it is a process by which man lives out his innate human nature... The process of individuations is real only if the individual is aware of it and consciously makes a living connection with it... Man... is able to participate consciously in his development. He even feels that from time to time, by making free decisions, he can co-operate actively with it. This co-operation belongs to the process of individuation. (163-164) In the socialization pattern, the limiting stereotype is that of the 'wandering hero'. 'Wandering' essentially does not concern with the wanderer's itinerary. It is his mentality, his encounter with the unexpected that interests one. A 'wandering hero' in his journey, first receives a call to adventure. After initial resistance, he answers the call and leaving the ordinary world, he proceeds through a series of tests, encounters manifold problems and earns the necessary reward. Sometimes, he stays back and sometimes, he returns to the ordinary world. In some cases, the hero dies and is reborn symbolically before returning to the ordinary world. Incidentally, the stereotype is a laundered, domesticated version of the archetype from which it derives its power. The archetype behind the stereotype is full of life and power. Each of the archetypes carries with it a worldview, and with that different life goals and theories about what gives life meaning. Each archetype projects its own learning task on to the world. People governed by an archetype would see its goal as ennobling and its worst fear as the 86 root of all the world's problems. They complain about other people's ruthlessness, conformism, weakness or selfishness. Each archetype moves us through duality into paradox. Within each is a continuum from a primitive to a more sophisticated and complex expression of its essential energy. In such a context, the 'wandering heroes' willingly court Diaspora so as to attain independence and avoid conformity. Though at times, they experience a sense of alienation and despair, and pass through a feeling of void and emptiness inside, the 'wandering heroes' undertake journey to discover the treasure of their true selves. The heroism of the wandering hero is not defined by fighting. The act of leaving an oppressive situation and going out alone to face the 'unknown' is his 'heroic act'. A deeper representation of any myth or archetype, seen pervasively in the World Literatures is the type 'wandering hero', who appears in different cults in different patterns. Joseph Campbell explains elaborately the power of myth in popular culture in his famous book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. John L. Flynn in his article, 'The Hero Myth' summarizes Campbell's views: Joseph Campbell, in his treatise on the power of myth in popular culture explained that man typically celebrates tales of heroes and their deeds in order to understand his own place in the universe. The Greeks used mythological metaphors (about Hercules and other famous titans) to 87 define heroic ideals; the Romans depended on biographical archetypes, drawn from Plutarch and other great historians, to give their culture meaning; the Middle Ages on hagiography (or writings about the saints). (Website Ref.) However, in the Indian context, one can find 'wandering heroes' in the great epics *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*. In fact, Valmiki gives the text of *Ramayana* itself as an oral version by Naradha, the 'wandering saint' and this oral version form the First Chapter of the Sanskrit *Ramayana*. These 'wandering heroes' have been the source of inspiration to the later day writers who take up the positive and negative aspects of the heroes and venture creative writing. The 'wandering hero' goes out alone to confront the unknown. He learns to find truth and name that truth. He discovers that he can be his own self and also establish community with the majority race based on the principle of assimilation. He explores new ideas and new avenues. He turns stoic by going about alone, enjoying a certain autonomy and independence. He is so enamoured of independence that he gets stuck there, since independence in any culture is practically a synonym for masculinity. In fact, he confronts the fear that he will be unable to survive alone, and decides that whatever be the cost of loneliness, isolation or even social ostracism, he will be his own self. Moreover, everyone needs a period of solitude to know who he is. Thus, he becomes self-made. Indeed, the wandering hero teaches everyone to be 88 his own self - to be true to his own self at every moment. This takes enormous discipline and means staying in touch with our body, heart, mind, and soul at every moment of interaction. In fine, the 'wandering hero', as a result of his quest, allows for the full flowering of the self and its opening up to the experience of oneness with other people and attains clarity. In any culture, only masters of the world, like kings and princes have defined for the laymen what the heroic ideals are. However, the Hebrew Patriarch, Israelite leader, prophet and legislator, Moses, one of the greatest figures in the Old Testament of *The Bible* is a prototype of the 'wandering hero'. He led the Israelites out of slavery

in Egypt, and was their leader and lawgiver during the forty years of their wandering in the wilderness. With the rise of democracy and the development of the egalitarian society, working class men are portrayed as 'wandering heroes'. Mulk Raj Anand, in his novels like *Coolie* and *Untouchables* projects boy-heroes who emerge ultimately as 'wandering heroes'. Anita Desai's men like Hari in *Village By the Sea* and educated men like Dev and Adit Sen in *Bye-Bye Black Bird* claim to be the Heroic Archetypes on their own merit. The struggle to survive in this present-day existential predicament, to confront the trials and tribulations and to cross over the 89 stumbling blocks and barriers require a special sustenance. It is unlike the battle of yore with enemies in the battlefield; it is a war within, with the invisible, faceless foes. Every 'hero' has to proceed further, slaying all these dragons. The majority community identifies the 'wandering hero' as the outsider. He sees little or no hope in conventional politics. That is precisely why the 'wandering hero' prefers to be apolitical. On the other hand, he addresses identity problems and issues concerning values, and responds to major cultural changes. The 'wandering hero' begins a new life in the new environment, at a new level, confronting the unknown, as Dev in *Bye-Bye Blackbird* does. For one thing, the 'wandering hero' makes the radical assertion that life is not primarily suffering; it is an adventure. He develops a faith to discard the old social values which he has until worn for safety and pleasure. He tries to discover who he is and what he needs. He travels widely and experiments with new behaviors; or his behavior is conventional, but he explores his inner world with an independence of mind. This is the spirit that governs Hari's meanderings in *Bombay* in *The Village by the Sea* and Dev's wanderings in *London* in *Bye-Bye Blackbird*. In such a life of a 'wandering hero', there is uniqueness, importance, and intense vitality and that distrust of orthodox solutions and direct opposition to conformist norms. The 'wandering hero' perforce chooses to be radical and not conservative in his life patterns. In this context, Carol Pearson makes a pointed observation: In fitness, they (the wandering heroes) are likely to choose solitary exercise, like long-distance running or swimming. As learners, they distrust the answers given by authorities and search out their own truths. The wanderer's identity comes from being the outsiders. In their spiritual life, they may experience doubt, especially since they usually have been taught that God rewards a measure of conformity and traditional morality - qualities likely to be at variance with the needs of their developing, experimenting psyches. Yet the dark night of the soul they experience often leads to a more mature and adequate faith. There is always the ripple effect in the life of the wandering hero. He experiences aloneness for a while, but sooner or later, if he so desires, he develops better relationships, ones that are more genuinely satisfying because they are based on respect for that journey. Of course, when he steps outside consensus reality, he always faces perpetual isolation. This is precisely the case of Dev in *Bye-Bye Blackbird* when he strikes healthy relationships with Emma and others in *London* and thereby begins to take roots in *England*, shaking off his loneliness. The tension between the desires for growth, for mastery, for pushing the limits of one's capacity and to achieve versus one's desire to please and fit in, is a quintessential dilemma of the wandering hero. Hari of *The Village by the Sea* resolves this dilemma by returning to his village after becoming a self-made boy-hero, and Dev in *Bye-Bye Blackbird* by assimilating the *British* culture and deciding to take roots in *England* notwithstanding the racial prejudice of the *British*. However, Adit Sen, like a typical wandering hero symbolically dies and is reborn before returning to the ordinary world - here, in *India*. Hari in *Village By the Sea* is a wandering hero who finally emerges as a mature and self-made boy-hero. Hari's parents were rich once. But his father becomes a drunkard and sells his boat and buffaloes. His mother falls ill and is bed-ridden. Hari himself drops out of school. His family is now downtrodden and poverty-stricken. Lila, the elder girl is a classic homebound female, attending to her sick mother, taking care of her two younger sisters Bela and Kamal, looking after the needs of her irresponsible drunken father and also sympathizing with the hardworking Hari. Lila takes care of the family ably and astutely in a responsible manner and attends to all the household chores without a grimace on her face. Whereas Lila tolerates her father, Hari despises his father's irresponsible attitudes and approaches. His words come out of him like a gun-shot, revealing his deep hatred towards his father: "Father's still lying there, asleep... He will only get up at night and go straight to the toddy shop", Lila said, almost crying. "Let him", said Hari. "Hari, he will kill himself dinking the toddy . 92 "Let him", Hari said again, chewing. "And mother? And Mother?" cried Lila. "And us? What about us? Who will look after us?" "He does not look after us", said Hari, spitting the end of a very sharp chilli. We look after ourselves, don't we?" (VBS 15) This conversation between the brother and the sister projects Hari as one governed by the desire to be autonomous, independent, venturesome, bold, and assertive. Though a boy-hero, he has the makings of a responsible out-ward bound adult. Hari works in his field behind his hut. He learns that factories are going to come in his village, Thul. Hari is excited, but at the same time, he is worried because he cannot get any job in any factory, as he is not that much educated. He is however hopeful of getting a manual laborer's job. From the watchman, Hari understands that a fertilizer company is going to be started; when he asks for a job, the watchman contemptuously dismisses Hari saying that workers from all over *India* will be coming to work and the 'drunkards' of Thul won't get any job! Crestfallen, Hari then thinks of getting a job with Biju, who is building a big boat. As Biju's project does not seem to take off, he decides to go to *Bombay* somehow and get a job. With the hope of getting a job in *Bombay*, he helps the de Silva family from *Bombay* when they come to stay at Thul. Mr. de Silva, as he prepares to depart to *Bombay* invites Hari to go over to *Bombay*, and promises him to get a good job. The fire of hope of a visit to *Bombay*, the city of opportunities, is thus kept alive in Hari. He is convinced that a job in *Bombay* alone could save him and his family. It will also pave the path to gain affluence and help him see through the marriages of his sisters in a decent fashion.

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