

Lost Contented Life in Searching Riches: A Thematic Study in Anita Desai's *A Village by Seaside*

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Anita Desai is a popular Indian novelist, shortlisted for the Booker Prize for three times and winner of Sahitya Academy Award has written sixteen works of fiction. Most of her plots deal with her personal experience of life and portraying truth as it is. She explores the tensions between family members in searching riches. Hari, the main character in the novel struggles to up bring the family. So he tries to earn in village, when he doesn't get good job he moves to city, Bombay hoping better life. He feels alienated when he moves to city leaving family.

Alienation is the separation or estrangement of human beings from some essential aspect of their nature or from society. Often resulting in feelings of powerlessness or helplessness. According to Judd Nelson, "Young alienation, disappointment and heartache is all a part of the first real growing up that we do". Money is particularly described as an abstraction and plays a role in the making of artificial needs which alienate men; that is why money is a specific form of alienation. It transforms pure quantity into value in order to estimate everything.

In this novel *The Village By the Sea* Anita Desai has been clearly replicated the theme of Alienation for chasing riches through the character Hari. Poverty condition of life makes him to alienate himself from his village Thul. Hari is a young protagonist about thirteen, is the main embodiment figure where he undergoes great responsibility with struggles through the novel. Identity and self-esteem play vital roles in the novel. Hari wants to make his own identity and tries to come out from the poverty life. The ongoing action of the novel is combined with an exploration of Hari's emotions and feelings. His struggle along with his sister Lila is both significant and serious. His struggles as an adolescent are to pull his family out from the dark poverty, mother's sickness and father's drunkenness. In raising his family out of poverty, he

makes his mind to move to Bombay city. He goes to Bombay to settle his family out from financial crunch. Here the author portrays the innocence of a rural boy who was alienated from his village by himself. In the novel, Hari finds it difficult to feel optimistic about himself and his village. His poor self-esteem is connected with the idea of being poor and even believing that he deserves to be poor.

Basically, the boys in the age of Hari were more adventurous, mischievous and playful. But in Hari's case, it is different. He is an innocent boy with responsibilities. He has an elder sister Lila and two younger sisters Bela and Kamal. Hari drops his school to help his poor family. He does all the odd jobs in his village to earn money for his family. As he finds out that the income, which he earns from fishing and selling coconuts from their land; will be too little to run his family; he becomes a responsible boy who strives lot. He doesn't wish to be like other ordinary boys in that village Thul and realizing the miseries of his family. He wants to move out from the village Thul. Desai has portrayed the dreams of Hari's venture in Bombay through these lines.

Bombay! He stared out of the window at the stars that shone in the sky and wondered if the lights of the city could be as bright, or brighter. It was a rich city: if he could get there, he might be able to make money, bring home riches, pieces of gold and silver with which to dazzle his sisters. (45)

Some situations make Hari to move out from this village Thul. He always feels his house only isolated from the neighborhood houses because of his father's irresponsibility behavior. Every day he goes to the toddy shop and drinks alcohol. Frequently, he fights with others and somebody's coming to his house for getting the money which his father borrowed from that person. He is extremely affected by the alcoholic father. Whenever he sees the pinto, which is the pet

dog they are raising in their house, it reminded of his father's foolishness. He thinks that "He was not clever but he was not going to be fooled" (31).

Hari, shows great interest on going to the Bombay city, which is 14 kilometers away from Alibagha. The full responsibility of taking care of the family falls on Hari's shoulders. He always thinks about his sisters Lila and Bela. He has to find the husband for his sisters. He knows that the weddings are very costly because bridegroom often demand scooter, bicycle, gold buttons jewelry, Buffalo, piece of land etc.

A sense of being grown was deepening both in Hari and Lila. So his interest to living in Thul is decreased day by day. As a elder sister, Lila also could understood the changes of Hari. Hari says, next time when De Silvas family comes to Thul, he will ask them for job in Mumbai. After hearing this Lila cried because she thought very soon Hari will leave them. Lila needed,

She felt relieved now to think Hari was growing up and would soon be able to find work and earn money. Of course he was still young younger than her and she could not expect him to work and earn like a man, change would not come suddenly or quickly to their home and family, but it would come. She had to believe that it would come. (17)

Throughout this novel, Anitha Desai also has pointed out the importance of wealth. Wealth is important for survival, poverty leaves to distress. Hari could easily understand that he has to do some work and earn money for the better living of his family. He was always dreaming about to lift up his life. He funds out three possibilities in his village to come out from the darkness of life. Hari thinks that he can get a job in Biju's boat, Who is the wealthiest man in Thul. He is building one of the biggest boats in Thul. Then he can get a job in upcoming fertilizer factory or get a job in Mumbai. He is over dreaming if he get all these jobs, he will become the rich man in Thul.

The siblings luck improves when a wealthy family, comes to Thul. Desilva's family comes into the next door of Hari. They pay Lila and Hari to do some work around their home. Mr. Desilvia tells Hari he can get a job as a car washer in Mumbai. After hearing this he feels happy because very long time he was gotten a opportunity throughout Mr. De Silvia. Hari felt extremely suffocated and helpless in Thul. It was obstructive to his souring ambition. Hari knows that he would leave Thul one day. Thul cannot hold him for a

long time. The coconut groves and the fishing fleet really turns into factory site. If he would stay on here the family would surely and slowly starve, fall ill like his mother and die. Even if he finds a job he would never earn enough to buy them such riches. However, it is his realization that without a job, he cannot hind his sisters ways out of the dark gloomy house and the illness and drunkenness and hopelessness that surround them like, the shadows of the night. He also knows that he can never earn enough in Thul of green coconuts. He has to go Bombay to find his fortune.

In between this Hari ask the job to Biju in his boat. But Biju turned away his head because he did not want to give a job to poor boy Hari. He heard news that in the upcoming factory, villagers cannot get a job. City peoples only will get a job and the factories will be run by trained engineers with degrees from colleges in the city. Only villages get "jobs as sweepers, jobs as coolies the worst jobs, the most ill- paid jobs" (95). Hari no longer thinks of his sisters and sick mother. He is now obsessed with thinking of going to Bombay. He knew that upcoming factories would pollute the sea beaches and the fishing business would be ruined shortly. Fishing is the main occupation of the people of Thul. They will be deprived of their land and nor is there any guarantee of jobs in the upcoming factories. Anita Desai also has portrayed how the industrialists and politicians are exploiting the land of poor peoples. A factory is to be built up in Thul which will grab both the livelihoods of farming and fishing from the hands of the poor villagers. So they get together and organize a protest campaign to go to Bombay inorder to forward a petition to the chief minister. Using this chance, Hari plans to go to the Mumbai; it was a great desire to him for a long time. He thinks in his mind he is going to fight for his land as well as for his future life.

As he turned over these questions in his mind, he found it was the idea of going to Bombay that excited him most. That was partly because he was attracted to the thought of fighting for his land along with the other villagers and partly because of the thought of going to Bombay at last. Here was the chance to go that had been waiting for all long. (99)

Hari goes to Bombay unannounced to his family. Lila and his sisters are waiting for him whole day. Lila's friend tells her that Hari has gone to Bombay along with other men to giving a petition against the government, because the politicians and industrialists are taken the land of the farmers. Hari travels to

Bombay in a boat along with the protestors. Hari feels afraid of the journey, because the boat has been filled with the strangers. He feels lonely in the city.

Anita Desai has portrayed the city and village life in this novel, as well she has showed the vivid images about how the village boys struggles to stay in the city like Mumbai. Hari has come from a small village, so she feels like an isolated boy. Hari is shocked to see the terrifying traffic in the Bombay Street. He is amazed by the cars, highway roads. He thinks that in Thul he can see only bicycle and cycle rickshaws.

Desai very vividly brings to our limelight the aggressive disturbances of modern urban life marked with its enormous artificialities. The incessant sounds coming from factories, hauling of horns, and the rubbing, squealing and cracking sounds of the machineries penetrate through the ears; Desai further discusses the obstructing nature of the city as follows: "But here there was everything at once as if all the traffic in the world had met on the streets of Bombay cycles, rickshaws, hand carts, tongas, buses, cars, taxis and lorries- hooting and screeching and grinding and roaring past and around him"(155).

Hari feels like a newborn baby in the city of Mumbai. He was surprised to see the women who are carrying the rally. Hari feels shame because they did not bring any women to protest for their homeland. Hari suddenly thinks about his sister's life, their desires are locked in a small hut; they cannot come out to fly like the Mumbai city girls. Women's rally proved an eye opening on Hari's part and motivated to believe in himself. In the city Hari does not know to cross the road, because the place is filled with vehicles. Once a police man scolds Hari, "Where have you come from, fool?" The policeman roared at Hari. "Never seen traffic lights? Don't you know how to cross a street? Come straight from the pumpkin fields; have you" (116).

In the protest, Hari is wondered by the words of Sayyid Ali. He looked like a city man but, he is speaking for the village peoples. He is aware that if the village people are forced to give up farming and fishing they has to leave away from the village and come to Bombay to find work. "Look around the city now that you are here: is there room for twenty to fifty thousand more people? See how the poor and unemployed live here. Do you wish to change your life in the country amongst your green paddy fields" (121). Hari feels

that the gentleman is speaking with him, because Hari has come to Mumbai for searching a job.

As contended by Dr.M.S.Ansari in his paper, "A study of the themes of Alienation, Detachment and relationship crisis in Anita Desai's major novels", in the hands of Desai, the novel is not a tool for escaping the reality, but a microscope with which she zooms in on the untamed complexities of the human life and the inner psyche of her characters. Therefore, Desai's timely thematic concerns seemed to have blended together with her innovative approach and keen sense of observation in enhancing her popularity as one of the greatest writers of all time of Indian Literature in English.

Now, Hari feels that deserted and friendless. None of his friends come from the village along with him. There is no one speaks with him, no one noticed him. Now he feels so lonely and thirsty, but he bears all his pain for his family. The protestors, who are coming from the villagers left away from the city. Now Hari is alone in Bombay. He thinks that, "He had no fields or fishing boats to fight for nor did he know any of the marches who were mainly farmers and fishermen, not the sort of people who would know his landless, boat less, jobless father" (126).

Hari gets a chance to interact with one coconut seller, who is selling coconuts in the Bombay Street. Hari proudly says that he has come for attending procession. Coconut seller ridicules and gives the advice not to believe the government. They don't have the ears to hear the weeping sound of the poor peoples. They know only to eat the citizen's taxes. Hari was impressed by the word of the ordinary coconut seller in the city, and for a while he wished he could sit at his feet and learn from him lessons of life. The coconut seller says:

Take my advice and keep clear of the government don't ask it for anything don't depend on it for anything. They tell you the government is your father and your mother. I tell you my father and my mother threw me out when I was six years old to go and earn my own living. I don't need them I find myself I am a man and depend on myself. That is the best way to be boy you take what you want. Be man be independent. (133)

Also, it is in a very effective manner that Desai reports the fearful atmosphere of the city through the character portrayals of Billy, the beggar and the coconut seller. The beggar says that Billy is very dangerous and

delinquent though he acts as a person who sells coconut by day. Paradoxically, the beggar also seems to be engaged in anti-social activities. What both of them do during the day is just a cover to their criminal activities at night. The people in the city cannot exist on the meager income earned by just selling coconuts or begging alms since the cost of living in towns is very high. Once they find it difficult to bear up starvation, they tend to steal or murder with which to make a living. Therefore some people tend to make money by indulging in underhand dealings and criminal activities. While leading a double life which will protect them from the authorities. it is hence perceived that poverty drives people to be violent and resort to criminal acts.

Suddenly, Hari remembers De Silvas family, once they had offered him a job as a car washer in Bombay. So, Hari shows the address on the piece of paper to the stall owner to find out his house. That man mocks at him and says,

Very good address you have there, boy. You must be a prince in disguise. Go straight on up the road, it will take you to the top of Malabar Hill and there you will find your palace, just short of the hanging Gardens. Perhaps there is a princess waiting for you with a garland. (137)

Hari feels very ashamed for the ridicule words of that man. Hari is new to the Mumbai city; he doesn't know in the place like Mumbai, it is very hard find out the persons, because the city is filled with crowd of population.

At last, Hari found the house of De Silva. So, he rushed towards their house, one man stopped him and questioning that who sent you to meet him. Hari shows the bit of paper in which his name and address of Desilva. The man curses him and couldn't believe that. Because Hari had wore a shabby dress and so tired, 'He didn't get any food for a long time. He never knew anyone in the city except Mr.De Silva, He doesn't has a money for eating a food in the Hotel. The man says Hari, Sahib is not here, he has gone for their summer vacation. After coming back from there he will go to abroad because, he is a big businessman. Hari starts crying and says "I am looking for work, I wish to stay"(141). It disturbed that man and he shouted.

There is no work for you here- the sahib has plenty of servants already, He doesn't need another one-not a boy from Thul

certainly Go- there is no work and nowhere for you to stay.He repeated harshly and stepping back, shut the door firmly. (141)

From these incidents, Anita Desai has described the mindset of the rich people, they are ill-treating the poor people like Hari. They are treating the poor people as an animal.

Hari lost his hope again because of that man. After seeing this, a old man helps Hari. His name is Hira Lal, who has been a watchman of seabird for twelve years. He suggests him to meet Jagu. He is a friend of Hira Lal. That same night he meets Jagu in his restaurant, he is the owner of Sri Krishna Eating House which was shabbiest restaurant in the Mumbai city. Hari hasn't seen any restaurant like this ever before even in his village Thul. As a kindhearted person, Jagu serves a food to Hari because he is very hungry for a long time. Since, he comes to Mumbai, he never eat any food, because he has no money. In the next morning Hari asks him, he wants to work in the restaurant, instead of giving money for what he had eaten in the last night. "I have no money to pay for all this food you are giving me; will you let me work in your kitchen instead?" (147).

Jagu also accepts to give a job such as washing the pot and rolling chapattis and also says him to stay there and work for his meals. Then he promised him to give one rupee for a day like the other boys who working in the same restaurant. This job is new to Hari, it is very difficult to do. At this small age he faces lot of struggles in the Mumbai city.

Hari started his work immediately along with other two boys who are not making friendly and never talk with him. They have endless work and it being very hard to Hari. Hari meet an old man who works at next store of Jagu's restaurant. He tells him about the story of two other boys who are working with Jagu. They are orphans and their parents died in a train accident. Hari feels happy because he has a home and parents. He is not orphan with no future and he doesn't want to group with this silent and sad boys. Hari is disturbed by the memories of his family. So, he decides to write the letter about his current situation, and what he is doing. But he did not mention that when he will come back to the village. In the letter he mentioned like this, "I am in Bombay. I have a job; I will bring you my earnings. I hope you are well. I am well. Remember me to my sisters" (151).

The work is not easy for Hari because the eating house seemed to grow hotter and never to cool down even at night. The eating house is never quite, and the customers has to be served with tea and bread, whenever demanded it day or night. Hari saves seven rupees in a week. He saves all this money to take home for his family. Hari worked in the kitchen and in the front room. He washed and bathed under the tab at the back; eat his meal at the table. During the free time he sleeps on the bench or some dusty black floor. Hari doesn't has a proper place park Bench. One day the mighty policeman who patrolled the park and threatened Hari. The old man reprimanded the police and asks him to tighter screw on the antisocial elements rampant in the locality.

Why bully la poor harmless boy, Mr. Mighty policeman? He piped in a small, shrill voice like a child. There are enough.

bad characters in the city- thugs, murders, thieves, gamblers; drunkards why not go after them instead? Why not start with those drunkard playing cards in that corner over there? They make life unsafe for us who live in this locality, we are all afraid to come to this park because of them not of his poor boy who has no home and nowhere else to sleep". (169)

In the other side, Lila is working hard to take care the family in the place of her brother Hari. She feels overmuch by the absence of his brother. Anita Desai has given a significant role to Lila like Hari in this novel *The Village by the Sea*. In the absence of his brother, she manages to lead the family with the help of De Silva's family. Lila always thinks about her brother "Lila frowned as if she could not understand, could Hari have been so angry and so upset as to leave home and run away?" (129).

The monsoon comes, Hari extremely disturbed by the memories of his sisters. He fears for whether his hut will be attacked by the storm. He decides to return back to his homeland Thul. From the city he learns lot and his experience with many people for living in upcoming years in the village Thul. He returns back to his village with the earnings and hope.

Through Hari, an adolescent protagonist, Anita Desai successfully paints the reality of rural life, the migration and the false glory of urban city. The rural charm wins through the inheritance of moral consciousness, mentor-hood and extroversion of the characters. The use of contrast scheme between rural and urban lives with the company of the protagonist

leaves a deep impression on the minds of the readers. Childhood dreams and disillusionment cure skillfully implied by the author all over the novel. The young minds can react, adapt, generalize, and rationalize the world with facing challenges with the broad-minded mentors. The soul mind and personality of the adolescents can achieve an optimistic life by having endurance, positive outlook and ability of openness. To consolidate, the novel *The Village by the Sea* suggests the inevitability of changes and the need for adjustment and adaptation in the changing world.

REFERENCE

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