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**Exploring Child Psychology and the Concept of Ideal  
Childhood: The Village by the Sea**

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**Abstract:**

*This paper throws light on Child psyche holds a significant position in the area of research in psychology. It not merely refers to the study of physical, biological growth of a child but also traces and studies the development of its mind and behavior from prenatal stage through adolescence. In this context of child psychology, this paper draws attention to the age-old concept of child along its psyche and development in order to analyze the depiction of child psychology as well as childhood in Anita Desai's selected work 'The Village by the sea' successfully depict the lives of children, society's influence on them, capturing the subtle intricacies of their minds. Thus, to explore child psyche and society's effect and impact on child in Desai's works in light of child psychology helps in questioning the concept of ideal childhood.*

*The story is about lower middle class people who face a lot of hardship but still succeed in familial bonding, developing good relationships and having an indomitable spirit in achieving success in the end by the brushing aside all those hardships. Finally the story ended with happy note as the siblings namely the Hari and Lila remain cordial in relationship throughout. All these are narrated in great detail by Anita Desai in this work "The Village By The Sea".*

*The novel offers a glimpse into the complexities faced by a poor family in a small Indian village Thul. 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. Hari and Lila were born and bred in the village and their struggle for the survival of their family to make matter worse the mother is sick and the father becomes a drunkard as he was duped by someone who promised to get him a good job.*

*This novel shown is self-control and the way Lila is able to keep the money she earns from the De Silvas to buy food for the family and not spent on useless things. Other examples are the way Hari makes a lot of money in Bombay, but although there so many nice things in there, he does not spend it but saves it. One character that is able to show this is Hari's father by the way he is able to control himself from drinking toddy.*

**Keywords:**

*Poverty, Relations, Economical Reality, Drunkard, Child Psyche, Self - Control, Pessimism and Rusticity.*

**Introduction**

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. 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.

Poverty forces Hari to go to the 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. The way the siblings make their way through this story and their grinding poverty is remarkable!

### **ANITA DESAI**

Anita Desai was born in India's Dehradun in the year 1937. Later she immigrated to England. She lived her further life there till the last breath. She too suffered a lot in new culture with alienisms in which there were only depression, upsets, sad and sulky life. The confused life in between eastern and western cultures made bit bitterer.

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. In most of her novels Mrs. Desai presents complacent, idle people of the middle or upper classes where money is no problem. Their problems are mostly emotional, cultural or those that are related to higher pursuits.

Anita Desai's seventh novel, *The Village By The Sea: an Indian Family Story* is a novel for young people by the Indian writer [Anita Desai](#), is a heartwarming, life-enriching story about a poor family in the small village (by the Sea) named Thul which is situated on the western coast of India and published in London by Heinemann in 1982. It is a departure from her familiar preoccupation with the problems of human psyche. In a special introductory note, she states that the story is based entirely on fact, poverty, hardships and sorrow faced by a small rural community in India. Desai won the annual [Guardian Children's Fiction Prize](#), a book award judged by a panel of British children's writers.

*The Village By The Sea*, for the first time, she deals with rural life and the lower classes of society. The novel deals with the impact of modern technological development on a traditional community of fishermen and farmers at Thul. The enthusiastic and poverty-stricken teenagers of the village like Hari, Ramu, Bhola and Mahesh etc., welcome the government's proposal to construct a multi-million fertilizer-factory at Thul, hoping that they would get jobs in the factory and live a new life of pleasure and good fortune. But the farmers who never had considered anything beyond fishing and farming react bitterly because in the new industrial set up they will have to lose their land and all the filth of the factories will be dumped in the sea, killing the fish for miles around. The villagers, thus, decide to protest: "they can't take the sea from us the land is ours, the sea is ours!"

**IMPACT ON CHILD IN ANITA DESAI'S WORKS 'THE VILLAGE BY THE SEA':**

A story of survival set in a small fishing village Thul near Bombay. All the characters in this novel are based on people who live in this village, only their names have been altered. The villagers are poor but content. They are hard workers and religious-minded. In *The Village By The Sea* novel is based on family two main characters are Lila and Hari, aged 13 and 12, both have been forced to stop going to school because of their father's debt and mother is ill. Lila, older than Hari, advises the latter to do something to save the family from disintegration because she knows that in the presence of male breadwinners the women's only role is to do the house work. However, she is hopeful that Hari is growing up and would soon be able to find work and earn money.

*The Village by the Sea* (1982) has been described as 'a brilliant resonant story of change in older India'. But as it unfolds through the conflictual relationships of different discourses, it appears to offer no change for women. The wheel turns for men only the narrative opens and closes with the discourse of spirituality in which the women belonging to the fishing community of the village Thul are seen to be performing morning prayers at the sea, rather than at the local temple. They appear to enjoy a sort of power and autonomy in this sort of religious practice because they are not to depend on the priests of the local temple who, as per Hindu religious norms, are expected to be paid for performing any religious act on their behalf. Their willing performances of the morning prayers for their husbands' or fathers' well-being or for a good start of the day show that they do not feel oppressed by the so-called spiritual domain of culture.

On the contrary, Anita Desai resurrects the 'subjugated knowledge' of Lila, a burgeoning woman, as to why she silently refuses to be incorporated in the traditional religious role. Lila finds herself exposed to the knowledge that it is not spirituality but money that, like magic, can do everything possible. In making her refuse the spiritual role and thereby eschew the power of Indian spirituality, Anita Desai creates resistance to the discourse of the nationalist resolution of women's question that locates women in the inner sanctum of culture.

The family depicted mainly in the novel consists of an alcoholic fisherman, his sick wife and their four children, Lila, Bela, Kamal and Hari. Lila among women and Hari among men are the central figures. Hari also feels that he must stand beside his fellow- villagers and fight for the rights of the farmers and fishermen to earn their living by traditional ways.

Hari and Lila's struggle for survival is economic in nature. Their hard work raises the family from below subsistence to subsistence level. Hari's father is a jobless drunkard and his mother is sick and bed-ridden. Hari and Lila's education has ended because of lack of money. There is no provision for purchase of books for Lila and Kamal. They hardly eat anything but "this dry bread, or dry rice, every day". There is "nothing to eat with the Chapatis by a pinch of salt and a few green chillies Lila had plucked from a bush near their hut". They earn money only by selling bunches of coconuts to the Malabaris.

Hari, being the only son of his parents, understands his responsibility towards his family. He has to do something for the sake of his sisters and family. Although he is helpless, he is not hopeless. He has faith in himself and does not lose his patience. Anita Desai beautifully describes his self-confidence:

"He knew in his heart that he would leave one day. Thul could not hold him for a long at least not the Thul of the coconut groves and the fishing fleet. Perhaps if it really did turn into a factory site one day, he would stay on here, living a new kind of life. Otherwise he and his family would surely and slowly starve, fall ill like his mother, and die. No! He would go away-cross the sea in a boat, somehow find his fortune in Bombay, either with Mr. De Silva's help or even without it."

When he desires to go to Bombay, he leaves Thul and reaches Bombay with the processionists. Billu, the coconut man, comments on the government's cruel attitude and tells Hari: "I tell you, the government has only one mouth with which it eats—eats our taxes, eats our land, eats the poor". He encourages Hari and advises him: "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 one was six years old to go and earn my own living. I don't need them, I find for myself, I'm a man and depend on myself. That is the best way to be, boy—free and independent. Don't say please and don't say thank you take what you want. Be a man, Be independent".

Chance favors Hari and brings him to Hira Lai, Jagu and Mr. Panwallah and sends Sayyid Ali to Mon Repos in Thul to enable his sister Lila to earn some money. Mr. Panwallah teaches Hari watch-mending and prepares him to change with the time and accept new techniques. He tells Hari. "Learn, learn, learn so that you can grow and change yourself. Things change

all the time, boy - nothing remains the same and if you want to survive, you will have to change too. The wheel turns and turns and turns: it never stops and stands still until they will reach their destination.

Hari gladly accepts the philosophy of change. His success at earning money by watch-mending provides him self-confidence. He returns home as a better-equipped boy and becomes a successful caretaker of his parents and sisters. At the end he feels quite “confident”, “cheerful” and “optimistic” because he plans to become a village watch mender when the factory comes up. Anita Desai’s message of clear-cut optimism is arrived at through Biju: “One day everyone will have to build boats like mine. Things have to change. Then they will improve. Yes,..... Improve! Change!”

When we analyze the concept of free or new woman in this novel, we take it for granted that Mrs Anita Desai’s understanding of feminine sensibility is well exhibited in all her novels. Her protagonists, most of whom are women, battle desperately with their traditional roles. In *The Village By The Sea* Lila, the protagonist of the novel, is a young village girl of thirteen living in a poor fishing village Thul, 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.

A challenge that Lila is confronted with is the challenge of aiding for her extremely ill mother. Love, affection and devotion are the characteristics expressed through Lila’s actions. Her relationship with her mother is very strong because of her condition. 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.

She is not averse to household duties, yet she breaks away the traditional notions of housekeeping and establishes her worth as an independent woman. She paves new paths for the younger generation of Indian women. She does fulfill many responsibilities. She does these as her share of the household duties, for her mother is an invalid and her father is a good-for-nothing drunk.

Lila is shown to have multiple characteristics that create depth to her personality. She assumes the role of breadwinner, continues to play homemaker, and nurses her mother back to health. With the departure of Hari for Bombay, with the arrival of Sayyid Ali Sahib and with the admittance of her mother to the Alibagh hospital, Lila experiences a new sense of personal worth. She knows that if the family is to survive she must work for Sayyid Ali. The De Silvas have arranged for her to work for him. She is to prepare his meals and keep the house clean. Even then, her loyalty to her home and family does not diminish. She becomes a foster mother to her younger sisters and the caretaker of her drunkard father and ailing mother. Since she is the eldest, she believes she is morally responsible for the welfare of the family. She would have suffered total poverty along with the other members of her family. Her instinct for survival triggers her sensibility and makes her assertive, enterprising and independent.

The relationship with Lila's father is somewhat different. Within the story it is shown that her father is intoxicated most of the time and he is unable to support his family so he looks to Lila and her brother Hari to support the family. Lila had to take responsibility ever since she was a little girl. 'It was the smell she had known and hated since she was a small girl.' In this case this is referring to the smell of alcohol. Lila is shown to have a fear of her father. 'But no one dared tell him, least of all her mother.'

When we find the Bombay women very assertive, demanding their rights and freedom, and Hari admiring them for their courage to picket in the streets of Bombay, we are led to believe that it is Anita Desai who wants these women how to come forward and fight for more sensible causes and issues, really favoring demonstrations and processions for the just cause. Their notion of freedom and justice is founded on the lower prices for groceries so that they might feed their ever-growing families.

In Indian ethos it is customary to believe that men, not women, are the breadwinners. It is difficult to find women living as true individuals. They are mostly dependent and cannot exercise their will. Only when the man is a failure or he is absent or is far away, does a woman assert her will and live independent as a true individual. Such is the case in this novel. As Lila's father is a good-for-nothing drunk and her mother is an invalid, she has to assert her identity. Like Hari, Lila gets matured. If Hari becomes a man with a profitable skill by going to Bombay, Lila develops a managerial ability even as she stays at home. She can offer



resistance to her personality and can defend herself in all circumstances. This is asserted by Bela when she tells Hari that Lila and the girls looked after Sayyid Ali Sahib and themselves.

“Desai makes a subtle comment on the strengths and capabilities of Indian women. Give the opportunity and favorable circumstances, the Indian woman can be as assertive and as enterprising and as productive as the Indian man and she can accomplish this without relinquishing her leadership role in the home.”

If Lila's position is considered to be the position of the novelist, it may then be said that through the construction of the discourse of femininity Anita Desai wants us to understand that the discourse of the nationalist resolution of women's question was andocentric. Through Lila, she transmits a message that the change that would come in the way of industrialization in the village areas should be meant not only for men but for women also. Despite this, Anita Desai, in this context, shows that where poverty is concerned, money is more powerful than spirituality. Thus, Anita Desai, like a Marxist, gives privilege to money-power that determines every aspect of our material life.

## **CONCLUSION**

Thus, *The Village by the Sea* ends with a number of positive and promising points. The Protagonists of Anita Desai refuse to be passive victims and merely survive, giving into oppressive and regressive forces. They suffer because of their strong feel of their right to be acknowledged as individuals who can better their own personal existence.

Anita Desai's novel not only portrays agony and suffering but also an acquiescence of life. The major thematic focuses of Mrs. Desai's novel reveal a marked change in a process of living that starts in suffering and ends in purgation. *The Village by the Sea* seems to be giving advice to adapt oneself according to the changing times.

*The Village by the Sea* a departure from her familiar preoccupation with the problems of Human psych presents the pathetic existence of a poverty-ridden family. This ends with a number of positive and promising points. Hari, after his return from Bombay is filled with confidence he needed. He seems to be encouraged to do something in life. His father gives up addiction to alcohol and feels sorry for becoming responsible for their misery. His mother recovers after her return from Alibagh hospital and is now happy and satisfied.



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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