

Cultural and Philosophical Perspectives in the works of Anita Desai and Arundhati Roy

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Abstract

The writings of Anita Desai and Arundhati Roy provide perceptions into current Indian literature's culture and philosophy. They examine identity, memory, social structure, and spirituality as part of the context of modern India. While Desai tends to focus on the psychological experiences and existentialism of the individual, Roy provides a more extensive socio-political commentary on hierarchical cultures, marginalization, and power. This paper examines how the stories developed by these authors demonstrate the conflict between tradition and modernity, the conscious experience of the individuals they describe, and how each author describes cultural change within India. Examined here are Desai's introspective views on alienation in her characters and Roy's politically driven narratives, as they both reveal the philosophical construct upon which they base their writing. Also examined is how both authors utilize symbolism, memory, and experimentation with narration to illuminate the deeper truths of the human experience and social reality through literary creations. In this manner, works by Desai and Roy can help one understand the Indian culture from a broader perspective by providing a basis to study issues of identity, oppression, resistance, and spirituality in the context of the changes occurring within postcolonial India.

Keywords: Indian Literature, Culture, Philosophy, Identity, Spirituality, Social Reality.

Introduction

During the post-colonial period, Indian English literature has seen a massive evolution which reflects significant and complex cultural identities, memory, history and philosophical questioning [1]. Two of the most significant writers within this context are Anita Desai and Arundhati Roy, whose works reflect different perspectives of Indian society while also addressing many of the universal questions about humanity, morality and justice. Both authors focus on how cultural traditions are being integrated with modernity and investigated how people construct their identity in response to quickly changing social realities. Desai's fiction often investigates the internal world of her characters, including alienation, loneliness and internal conflict; they showcase a character's philosophical journey to find themselves. Her works include *Cry, the Peacock* and *Clear Light of Day*, both show characters' with strong feelings of emotional isolation and existential uncertainty [2]. In her tense explorations of psychology, Desai reinforces how complex the relationship between consciousness and culture can be for an individual and how difficult it is for people to reconcile their individual desires with cultural expectations. While Desai's writing demonstrates a philosophical attachment to existentialism, finding meaning is the major focus of her characters' lived experiences. In contrast, Roy combines culture commentary with political critique.

Roy's acclaimed work, *The God of Small Things*, explores social conditions of Indian society, such as caste discrimination, gender inequity, and the legacy of trauma in the context of the present. *The God of Small Things* brings to light both the private struggles experienced by individuals and the societal workings that have created their struggles [3]. Roy's investigation into these struggles has caused her to portray the plight of these groups and to illustrate the necessity of a reformation of society and culture. While their narrative styles differ, both authors share an interest in cultural and philosophical issues. More specifically, both authors present their readers with questions about identity, memory, tradition, and moral obligation. By combining their personal experiences with their broader cultural viewpoints, both Desai and Roy can gain additional insight into the complex nature of India and human existence from a philosophical standpoint.

Philosophical concerns are central to Desai's writing. Her works often reflect existentialist ideas, where characters struggle to understand their existence and find meaning in life. Many of them experience loneliness and inner conflict as they search for self-awareness. For instance, in *In Custody*, the character of Mirza Saeed Akhtar feels neglected and isolated, representing the existential struggle for relevance and recognition [4]. Similarly, in *Journey to Ithaca*, Ritu undergoes a spiritual journey that leads to self-realization [5].

Like Desai, Arundhati Roy also engages with philosophical ideas, but her focus is more on social and political realities. In *The God of Small Things*, she addresses issues such as caste discrimination, gender inequality, and historical trauma. The novel portrays the struggles of marginalized groups, including the oppressed Ezhava caste [6]. Roy's work also reflects important cultural concerns, particularly the need for social change. She highlights how injustice and inequality are embedded in society and calls for transformation toward fairness and equality.

Desai focuses on inner psychological reflection, whereas Arundhati Roy examines the social and political systems that influence cultural life. In *The God of Small Things*, Roy presents a strong critique of caste inequality, the lasting impact of colonialism, and patriarchal control in Indian society. Through the experiences of the twins, Estha and Rahel, and their family's tragic story, she reveals the harmful effects of strict social hierarchies [7]. Roy also shows how cultural traditions can support inequality and oppression. The idea of the "Love Laws," which define "who should be loved, and how," highlights how restrictive social rules govern relationships [8]. These rules prevent people from forming connections across caste and class lines, leading to painful and tragic consequences for those who defy them. Beyond social criticism, Roy celebrates India's cultural richness by vividly portraying the landscapes, languages, and traditions of Kerala. Her storytelling style blends memory, folklore, and non-linear narration, capturing the complexity of postcolonial Indian society. By combining personal stories with historical context, she demonstrates that cultural identity is shaped by both individual lives and shared histories. Roy's writing has a distinct philosophical element as she examines the themes of memory and moral integrity in addition to how humans resist oppression. In Roy's *The God of Small Things*, memory is central in how the characters relate to their past experiences. The narrative structure of her work traverses multiple temporalities in an effort to show how traumatic experiences will continue to affect your present even though the events have occurred sometime ago. This is consistent with a philosophical perspective which maintains that history is more than a series of events and actually is a lived experience that shapes the individual's identity through the extent of their lived experience. In addition, Roy's writing encourages the reader to consider the ethical aspects of power, social justice, and human dignity [9]. The emotions she evokes through her writing compel the reader to empathize with those who have been marginalized or otherwise faced adversity because of their social status. She is therefore compelling the reader to consider the moral ramifications of inequality in the context of how they apply to the reader personally. Roy's narrative suggests to the reader that the promotion of human rights and the eradicating of oppression are both required for meaningful cultural progress. Lastly, Roy's writing demonstrates a philosophical element through her exploration of the idea of resistance to oppression and that hope is the second most powerful form of resistance to oppression [10].

Despite what are oftentimes tragic events that occur throughout her narrative(s), Roy points out numerous instances of compassion, support from others, and resilience.

It demonstrates that even within an oppressive environment, the individual has the ability to resist injustice and to envision a different future.

Conclusion

The contributions of Anita Desai and Arundhati Roy to modern Indian writing in English cannot be overemphasized. Both have an individual style of writing and approach to themes, but both explore the philosophical and cultural dimensions of human existence. Desai uses her introspective approach to examine the psychological challenges individuals face in trying to find their own meaning and identity in a world filled with different cultural influences. Her work reveals the challenges people face as they try to reconcile their own needs with the expectations of their societies. On the other hand, in her work, Roy's writing primarily concerns itself with the social / political realities of cultural identity and human relations. Her work reveals the injustices that exist within social structures, while also recognising the strength and diversity of Indian culture. She brings together the personal with the global by incorporating personal stories of individuals in their greater historical and political context; therefore creating a powerful critique of the inequalities and oppression that exist within society. Despite their different styles and approaches, both writers are deeply interested in examining the fundamental nature of human existence through their writing. In their work, they both attempt to demonstrate that the way in which we exist as individuals and as a community is shaped by culture, history, and philosophy. Through themes such as identity, alienation, social justice, and moral obligation, Desai and Roy encourage their readers to think about what it means to live in India's complex society. In the long run, their writings demonstrate that literature can be used as a medium for both cultural and philosophical exploration, enabling us to gain new insights into the realities of contemporary life.

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