

Anita Desai's *The Village by the Sea* – A Case for the Study of Characterization from the Third Force Perspective

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Abstract

*Anita Desai's Young Adult novella *The Village by the Sea* is a true story of the lone struggle of Hari and Lila who succeed in transforming their otherwise bleak world into a paradise of affirmation and hope. A ground breaking children's text offering intense realism and mimetic characterization, the novella challenges the established tradition in children's writing in many ways. The article brings out the literary merit and contemporary significance of works written for children through the character analysis of Desai's novella as an illustrative text. The characters have been studied with the help of Third Force, a holistic psychological approach that takes an optimistic stance regarding human nature. It also provides an insight into the inner dynamics of the character structures and enables us to see the character that the writer has created rather than the one she may assumed to have created. The purpose of the article is to uncover the psychological dynamics of character portrayal and offer hope through a confirmation of the human will to succeed.*

Keywords: Characterization, Third Force psychology, poverty, hunger, self realization

Young Adult fiction in India is at an embryonic stage, ironically so for a country that boasts of being the birthplace of famous tales like the *Panchtantra*, the *Jataka*, the *Hitopadesha*, The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Literature written for the young in India remained a shared domain and it is difficult to find a distinct and continuous stream of literature written specifically for the young till as late as mid twentieth century. Often overlooked by authors, critics, readers and publishers as minor works, not deserving scholarly attention due to its preoccupation with simplistic themes and predictable characterization, Young Adult literature continues to be a marginalized entity consistently pushed to the academic periphery in the literary canon. The literary retreat from postmodernism has brought to the foreground a renewed interest in literature that engages with real world problems, a trend that has become increasingly palpable in the modern Young Adult fiction. It forges ahead to examine complex social and personal issues like hunger, poverty, illness, gender, politics, sex, gay and lesbian culture, drug abuse, female infanticide, injustice and the discovery of self which were hitherto tabooed subjects in this genre. Emotions are once again playing a central role in literary fiction as authors insist on our connectedness as the human race stressing on fictional characters as representation of our real selves. In a scenario where the world appears to be a precarious place where we can no longer be nonchalant about our future, Young Adult literature arrives to offer us hope.

This essay attempts to draw the attention to the literary merit and contemporary significance of Young Adult literature by taking up Anita Desai's *The Village by the Sea* as an illustrative text. Written in 1982, the novella deals with complex adolescent experience through the agency of psychologically intricate characterization, which is studied here from the perspective of Third Force psychology. Desai celebrates the heroic lives her young protagonists, Hari and Lila, as they emerge successful in retaining their individuality and move towards self realization despite crushing circumstances. It marks the passage of these young protagonists from an alienated existence into a world where they realize their dreams and desires while conforming to their social institutions and traditional roles therein.

Anita Desai's much acclaimed novel for teenagers, unlike most of her adult fiction, is a portrayal of stark poverty in post independent rural India. Straddling the rural and urban Indian milieus simultaneously, the novel ventures into the inner sanctums of the family of an Indian fishing community and renders a poignant account of a displaced and dispossessed childhood. It is a harrowing depiction of the intimidating experiences that Hari, a twelve year old boy and Lila, his thirteen year old sister undergo to carry out their familial responsibilities. The novel opens amidst serious problems which do not seem to allay through the development of the plot, yet the courage, positivity and resilience of its young, indomitable characters, makes it a relevant object of study under Third Force psychology.

Like most children's narratives, the pattern of *The Village by the Sea* is comparable to the monomyth in that the male child protagonist Hari has to depart from his home, cross a threshold, journey into a different world to seek his identity and eventually come home enriched with experience. Hari, much like the mythical hero, has to face many perilous tasks in the quest of identity and ultimately returns to the point of departure, his home, with the promise of a better life. However, a careful analysis of the thematic concerns, patterns of characterization and the authorial presentation of the novel prompt the readers to regard its structure more seriously. Realistic characters have been a part of children's fiction for long but their existence at the low mimetic level in fiction is a recent development in children's fiction in India. The emphasis on character focalization in children's literature allows the writer to portray the world through the eyes of child characters. *The Village by the Sea* places Lila and Hari in a world of social and moral upheaval, struggling with menacing poverty, hunger, illiteracy, onslaught of industrialization, migration from villages to cities and unstable family conditions. Poised against the backdrop of social turmoil is the personal strife of these young children who are burdened by the needs of their family and expectations of the society at a very tender age. Desai's portrayal of childhood is a critique of an unjust society which exerts unnecessary pressure on its individuals who feel obliged to live up to its expectations and consequently face frustration due to the loss of self. The final positive affirmation of Hari and Lila amidst a hostile and despairing environment is indeed the hallmark of the novel's characterization.

A vast majority of children's books are plot oriented and give little or no place to the intricacies of character and characterization. Desai strikes a delicate balance between plot and characterization and portrays the inner life of her child characters through action, events and the narrator's comments. External representation is tackled dexterously in her novel by carefully avoiding explicit judgments or external descriptions of her characters, but by keenly observing how they feel, at the same time. Desai's art of characterization allows the readers, to a certain

extent, to interpret their actions and reactions according to our own understanding. The narrative perspective of *The Village by the Sea* never lets character focalization out of view which imposes an internal, subjective dimension enabling the readers to partake of the psyches of its characters.

In an interview with Corinne Demas Bliss, Anita Desai says that she sees suffering as very much a part of human existence, “The subject of all my books has been what Ortega y Gasset called ‘the terrors of facing, single-handed, the ferocious assaults of existence’” (Web, “Against the Current”), she states. In the light of the above claim by the author, *The Village by the Sea* offers an interesting opportunity to study the work from the Third Force perspective. It presents the world as a pernicious agency trying to destroy the individual, yet concludes in the positive affirmation of human nature as proposed by Maslow. We gain a better understanding of Lila and Hari when we consider them as ordinary human beings faced with existential dilemmas. Usha Bande in her study of Desai’s characters opines that the novelist does not portray neurotic characters on the edge, but rather she gives them human dimensions. Bande avers:

Anita Desai’s characters are not case studies of neurosis, nor are they evolutionary histories of psychological phenomenon. They are living individuals, interested in life with its hopes, dejections and chaotic flow. (Bande, *Novels* 168)

Each human being is endowed with unique capacities, a real self, which can be realized if he finds a warm, loving and secure environment in which to grow (Horney, *Neurosis* 13). Unfortunately, *The Village by the Sea* presents a grim and rather oppressive picture of the basic human conditions which adversely influence the childhood of Hari and Lila. The opening pages of the narrative tell us that Lila and Hari’s father, unlike other villagers, does not fish because he has sold his boat to pay his debts. To add to their troubles their mother has been ill since a long time and is confined to bed. They seemed to have once lived a normal life, albeit poverty-stricken, of usual pains and pleasures of growing up. A sick mother, a drunkard father, dilapidated hut and no food provide a dismal picture of childhood where survival becomes a constant struggle.

Maslow calls the physiological needs most prepotent of all human needs and takes them to be the starting point for his theory of human motivation. Deficiency of basic needs breeds psychological illness. Lila, Hari and their sisters Bela and Kamal, are a part of a family that fails to satisfy their basic needs. They experience emergency conditions of unremitted hunger and poverty so that all their capacities are put into allaying them and seeking relief from them. Lila cooks whatever little is available at home. Hari is the man of the house in the presence of a passive father and we meet him for the first time fetching milk to make tea. He works hard at the barren field, brings coconut from the trees and tries to catch fish with a damaged net, to be able to bring back something to feed his family. All they eat is dry bread or dry rice and they hardly ever have any money to buy things from the market. Despite being from the fishing community, they get to eat fish only when they sell coconuts to the Malabaris or when Hari manages to catch some fish. The alcoholic father does not even pretend to work and has relinquished all his responsibilities as the family’s breadwinner. Hari’s behaviour is organized and completely determined by his need to get rid of this chronic state of hunger and poverty. He starts looking

for a new kind of life where he and his family will not have to starve and fall ill or live merely for the sake of dying slowly.

The safety needs of Hari and Lila are challenged in three ways: in being economically challenged, in the breakdown of parental authority and in having to play adult roles for the welfare of their family. Parental failure is a recurrent theme in Desai's novels for adults like *Cry, the Peacock, Fasting, Feasting* and *Voices in the City*. Hari and Lila's predicament is also the outcome of their parents' failure to deliver their roles as food givers, love givers and protection givers making the world of their children insecure, unstable disorderly and unorganized. Their need for safety, security, stability and dependence is thwarted completely by the presence of a drunkard father and an ever ailing mother. Lila, though only thirteen years old, has to take on the role of a mother to look after her family. She collects firewood, makes tea, cooks for the family, and dresses up her sisters for school, besides doing the other household chores. The inconsistent and insecure family environment makes Lila very anxious and she wonders if anything will ever change. Seeing Hari stand idly in the barren field, she is unable to contain her anxiety and asks him, "What will we do?" (15). Her inner turmoil is reflected in her isolation and helplessness that she shares with Hari in the following words, "Father's still lying there, asleep. He sleeps all day. He will only get up at night and go straight to the toddy shop" (15). Hari is well aware of their troubles and shares Lila's fears. He develops a defiant attitude towards the situation and when Lila says that their father will kill himself drinking toddy, he replies unfeelingly, "Let him" (15). Lila's insecurity is reflected in her fear and vulnerability about the future while Hari's anxiety takes the form of rebellion against the present. Lila asks Hari, "And Mother? And Mother?...And us? What about us? Who will look after us?" (15). A sound family is the most important requisite in the growth and development of children as psychologically healthy adults but Hari and Lila's family lacks a stable structure on which the children can instinctively place their fragile trust. The children cannot count on the love and support of their family and never expect their parents to shield them from dangerous or harmful things. Hari's assertive claim, "He [father] does not look after us....We look after ourselves, don't we?" (15), is a declaration of a social order gone awry, an inverted family structure where the children are placed at the receiving end.

In such a situation, Lila confronts the world with a threat reaction; she feels like an unsafe child and in her desire for protection questions Hari, "But how?" cried Lila. "We don't go to school anymore, you and I. only Bela and Kamal go – and next year we won't be able to buy them any new books. We hardly eat anything but this dry bread, or dry rice, everyday. There's hardly ever any money to buy anything with in the bazaar – only when we sell our coconuts to the Malabarists. The only time we eat fish is when you go fishing. Father never does. And then, Mother: how will mother get well if she never gets any medicine?" (Desai, *Village* 15) Her reaction to their condition is like a frightened child who perceives the world to be antagonistic, intimidating and overpowering and ironically, the one from whom she seeks an answer is not her parent, but her younger brother.

Hari feels as helpless about the situation as his sister Lila. His insecurities are akin to Lila and he too feels isolated in a hostile home environment. He is overstrained by too much responsibility and thinks about salvaging his family from this gnawing situation all the time, "What could he do? He worked in the field, he climbed the trees and brought down the coconuts to sell. When he

had time, he took a net and fished along the shore. What more could he do?” (15). Hari is driven by compelling but incompatible forces, over which his frail purpose has no control. He tries to “reassure” (16) Lila and himself by telling her that a factory was to come up in Thul and like the other boys in the village, he could get work there. If that would take time, he could ask the de Silvas to take him with them to Bombay and give him some work or if he were to stay in the village, he could find work on one of the fishing boats. Lila is relieved to hear of Hari’s plans and she is glad that “Hari was growing up and would soon be able to find work and earn money” (16). Hari makes a laudable effort to allay Lila’s fears but his own insecurities make his words sound like unkept promises to himself, “Although he had felt hopeful when talking to Lila of the future, he now wondered if he could really do anything about it. He stared at the dry, stony field that he had to plant with vegetables. What if he did clear and dig the field and sow some aubergines and marrows? The vegetables would be eaten. Then there would be nothing. It was simply not enough” (16-17). The passive presence of their parents gives rise to profound conflicts in the minds of Hari and Lila so that they feel alienated from their real needs and feelings. Their disarrayed family conditions pose a constant threat for the realization of their true self and make them regress from higher needs to the lesser but more prepotent needs of safety and security. Unable to satisfy the human need for love and belongingness, the familial environment breeds negative emotions of self- alienation and loneliness in Lila and Hari.

The first reference that is made to the father in the novel brings out the rift that persists within the family. Lila only has bitter memories of her father in the past and cringes to see him lie completely unconscious of his family’s troubles. Hari does not like going to the village for the fear of meeting his father outside the toddy shop. Whether his father is alive or he dies of consuming toddy, doesn’t alter anything for Hari, he appears completely indifferent to the presence and also the absence of his father. He had given up going to school some time ago not out of boredom like other village boys, but because he had to provide whatever little he could, for his family. In fact, their father was responsible for their penury. He had been duped of money by a man named Pinto who had come to Thul to do business. It maddened Hari to think of the incident and he could never forgive his father for this imprudent and thoughtless act.

Both Lila and Hari are relieved when their father is away, and disgusted too, knowing fully well that he would be at the toddy shop with the other drunks. He comes home one night with his friends, walking unsteadily in the dark, disturbing the peace of the night with his loud singing and hideous laughter. They had a lantern with them but it had fallen and broken as these men bumped into each other. It was the problem of their wives to think how to buy a new lantern and meet the expenses of putting oil in it. Lila and Hari try to shut out the presence of their reckless father by plugging their ears and shutting their eyes tightly. The narrator tells the readers about the hatred that the children feel for their father without mincing words:

Lila hated and feared the noise so much that she cried to herself. Hari did not cry but he bit his lip and thought, ‘Maybe a poisonous snake will bite him. He may step on one and be bitten, there are so many of them and it is dark. Then he would die.’ He did not say that in fear, he said it with hope, as if he wished that was what would happen. (26)

The father's entry jars the house, makes the mud walls tremble shakes the decrepit thatched roof and it seems that the hut will fall to pieces just like its inhabitants. He hisses at the dog and growls at his wife before falling into a heap and snoring away to sleep. Hari simmers in "silent rage" (40) over the incapacity of his father to ever make amends for his wrongs and start afresh. The strong father – son relationship which forms the innermost core of the Indian patriarchal society is unfortunately missing in Hari's life and unable to locate his place in the social matrix, the world around him seems to be chaotic and incomprehensible.

Hari automatically slips into the role of his family's caretaker being naturally predisposed to his position in a patriarchal society but soon finds himself trapped in a hopeless situation. Poverty has made his life difficult and almost unlivable. The factory would take a few years to come up and besides, lack of education obscures Hari's prospects of securing a job in the factory. Hari's inability to cope with the situation gives rise to a sense of discouragement, lack of self worth and inadequacy and he starts considering himself out of place in the world of Thul. His self esteem suffers a setback and he seeks freedom from his cramping life in Thul. His desire for freedom, independence and mastery over his life takes him to the world of dreams, Bombay, where he expects to find prestige and glory.

Lila's presence in the family is silent, submissive and stereotypical. She inherits a readymade universe where her role as a homemaker is predefined. Lila's life is confined to the domestic milieu in consonance with the Indian cultural tradition which deifies women who serve their family with unquestioning devotion. Subservience and modesty become her ornaments. To walk out of such a state like her brother would imply conflict, an undesirable state of being for a young woman, by traditional standards. Lila's identity is defined in the context of her relationship with her family and it is judged by a standard of responsibility that she is successful in performing.

Cultural meanings exercise a great deal of influence on the creation of the psychic life of young Lila. Lila's mother, although very frail and weak, does not forget to remind Lila of her household duties. The mother becomes an individual as well as a cultural agent in the construction of Lila's feminine psyche by constantly reminding her to do the household chores, even though Lila performs them meticulously day after day. The writer informs the readers that Lila had to give up going to school before Hari, so that she could, cook, wash and look after the other members of the family at home. Her life is confined to the domestic milieu in consonance with the Indian cultural tradition which deifies women who serve their family with unquestioning devotion. Subservience and modesty are considered to be a woman's ornaments and to walk out of such a state would imply conflict, an undesirable state of being for a woman by traditional standards. Lila's identity is defined in the context of her relationship with her family and it is judged by a standard of responsibility that she is successful in performing. Lila's traditional upbringing tends to suppress her independence, self esteem and individuality, and sets up a conflict between her set of values and that of the environment around her.

Conflicts between an individual and his environment and within the individual are an inevitable part of human life. "It is not neurotic to have conflicts" (Horney, *Inner* 9) says Horney, but the type, extent and potency of the conflict determines, to a large extent, its impact on a young person's character formation. The environment in which Hari and Lila live is in a highly

transitional state where contradictory ways of living exist simultaneously. On the one hand Hari is expected to take up the traditional occupation of farming and fishing like his father and on the other there is the hope of jobs that will come up in the village after the setting up of the factory as told to him by Ramu and other friends. Traditional occupations neither provide sufficient food nor satisfaction while securing wages from the factory job to run the home is a distant dream. Hari is significantly dependent upon the external environment and a person in this dependent position cannot really be said to be governing himself, or in control of his own fate. Commenting on the situation in which an individual finds himself trapped, Maslow states:

We must certainly grant at once that human motivation rarely actualizes itself in behaviour except in relation to the situation and to other people. (Maslow, *Motivation* 28)

An anxious dependence upon the environment which is a “fixed” (Maslow, *Toward* 34) and unchanging variable in case of Hari, breeds hostility and lack of freedom preventing his inner capacities from being realized. A combination of cramping factors makes him worried and insecure about his future. Hari is faced with the situation that seems impossible for him to solve or cope with, yet he wants immensely to solve it and he *must* solve it.

Lila rests her sense of identity and places the greatest value on her relationship with the family. She systematizes her true self according to the needs of her family and surrenders her need for self-realization to the requirements of her family. However, this innate goodness of Lila as a young woman in a patriarchal society is ignored by the world around her and indirectly contributes to her own dependence, deprivation and subservience. The traditional upbringing of Lila tends to suppress her independence, self-assertion and individuality. She simply adopts the deep rooted societal values conforming unquestioningly and adapting unknowingly to a prohibitive and restrictive environment.

Lila is unconscious of the presence of this conflict between herself and her environment and does not make any effort to resolve it. Individuals like Lila, “drift and let themselves be swayed by accident” (Horney, *Inner* 34). She compromises her personal desires to the interests of the family without even being aware of it. On rare occasions, when Hari managed to sell some coconuts and earned a little money, Lila got the opportunity to go to the market. She dresses up in her best sari, looking and feeling “younger and happier” (Desai, *Village* 27), and goes excitedly to buy rice and sugar for the home. On the way she meets her friend Mina who invites her to watch the play that was to be performed at night. Although Lila has a strong desire to watch the play but she cannot ignore her responsibility towards the family and has to deny Mina’s offer. In the process of growing up, Lila is conditioned to believe that her ultimate goal in life is to serve the needs of her family and she comes to internalize it. She becomes the self effacing and self sacrificing woman archetype who is highly venerated in a patriarchal society and it becomes impossible for her to realize her true faculties or work towards self development.

Beleaguered by these hostile and conflicting conditions, Lila and Hari try to find ways to cope with the intimidating environment and disturbed human relationships. According to Horney, neurosis begins as a defensive strategy against basic anxiety which is produced by the frustration of basic needs (Horney, *Inner* 34). Although Hari and Lila are young children, it would not be appropriate to categorize them as neurotics, but a study of their dominant solution is imperative

for an in- depth analysis of the development of their characters. In the acuteness of their deprived situation, Hari and Lila suffer from basic anxiety and instead of focusing their energies towards healthy growth, they organize their internal capacities to alleviate their basic anxiety. Horney states that in doing so a child may develop ad hoc strategies as coping mechanisms to overcome feelings of helplessness and isolation. He may develop as a defensive strategy a self compliant solution and move *toward* people; he may develop an antagonistic and expansive solution and move *against* people or he may become detached and move *away* from people (Horney, *Inner* 42-43). When a child perceives the environment to be insecure, unreliable, unrelenting, unappreciative and unjust, he attempts to relate himself to others and to the environment not by his real feelings but by strategic necessities.

Lila's unconscious strategic move is toward people and she adopts the compliant solution. She shows a distinct need for the affection and approval of the people around her which she tries to gain by an unquestioning acceptance of the subservient role handed down to her by her family. Lila's dependence upon Hari operates beyond his intrinsic worth as well as Hari's real feelings towards the situation. She needs to be of importance to others, to be liked, accepted, helped and appreciated by them and tries to attach herself to them by being good, loving, self effacing and weak. She ignores her intrinsic capacities in order to fit into the role that has been assigned to her by a restrictive culture and adopts a subordinate role without any protest. The self effacing attitude gives rise to a particular set of values in Lila, that of goodness, sincerity, unselfishness, humility and generosity. All these are certainly desirable qualities but these character traits develop due to an insatiable need for security and not because of an innate human potential for goodness. The general goodness and docility of the self effacing Lila invites being stepped on and being inordinately taken advantage of by others. She becomes exceptionally vulnerable and dependent on the affection of her family and represses her inner core to gain their constant approval. By abandoning her intrinsic desires, feelings and impulses Lila makes an effort to resolve her chaotic life and create a feeling of unity, oneness and wholeness. She finds happiness and tranquility in the morning hours when she goes to pray on the beach away from home, alone. The ocean, the birds and animals, the "voice of the village Thul" (9) appears to tell Lila, "to be calm and happy and all would be well and all would be just as it was before" (9) but as she comes closer to her decrepit hut near a swamp, she looks at it and seems to know that "nothing was as it had been before, and nothing was well either" (9). By choosing to be compliant she automatically gives up being ambitious and her desire to excel, if any, is rather diminished.

Horney, in her book *Our Neurotic Conflicts* states that conflicts in our life are an expression of disturbance in human relationships. "Human relationships are so crucial that they are bound to mould the qualities we develop, the goals we set ourselves, the values we believe in. all these in turn react upon our relationship with others and so are inextricably interwoven"(47). Lila as a young woman is a nurturer and caretaker who tends to value relationships more than self enhancement. She grows and develops in context of attachment and affiliation with others resting her sense of identity and placing the greatest value on her relationships. Hari's ad-hoc strategy, on the other hand, is derived from his estranged relationship with the family and he adopts to move away from people. The loosening of the family bond becomes a significant cause of Hari's inner conflict. In the patriarchal world of Hindu culture, the responsibility of the care and instruction of young boys falls upon the father. Formation of the son's identity is distinctly a

filial duty. The drunken and irresponsible father does not present himself as someone who can be idealized by the young Hari. He is always missing from the family scene and never encourages, guides or supports Hari in his effort to grow up. He is unable to identify himself with the realistic image of his father. This situation bewilders Hari as he has no role model to look up to. He lacks the conviction that his father is a dependable figure who can be loved, idolized and emulated. He wants to break away from his constricting environment by moving away to another world. He dreams of going to “Bombay, to Africa, to ArabiaIf only he could sail away in one of them- even if only to Bombay” (33).

This move to break away can be seen in the emotional distance that Hari observes from his sisters. He becomes indifferent to their fears and troubles. He “draws around [himself] a magic circle which no one may penetrate”(Horney, *Inner* 75) and though apparently he gets along well with them, his needs and emotions are visibly detached from them. Late one evening, when Hari returns home, he sees the “frightened, tired and hopeless” (Desai, *Village* 45) figures of his sisters. He ponders over the hopeless situation of his sisters with an onlooker’s stance:

What were they waiting for? What were they hoping for? They could never look forward to working on a fishing boat or in a factory as he did. They would have to marry, one day, and he would have to see to it since his father would not. He would have to find them husbands, and buy them their wedding finery – silk saris and gold jewellery – and arrange their weddings to which the whole village would have to be invited. The bridegrooms might demand a dowry – a bicycle or even a scooter. Gold buttons, coins and jewellery. A cow or a buffalo. A piece of land. He had heard of the fantastic demands that bridegrooms made and that parents had to meet. How could he ever meet them? Even if he found a job, he would never earn enough to buy them such riches. He would have to borrow money from the village money lender and then pay him out of his salary, for years, perhaps all his life. And that was if he ever earned a salary, if he ever had a job. (46)

Another need of the detached person to tackle his basic conflict is a need for self sufficiency, mainly because “he has to be resourceful to live” (Horney, *Inner* 75). Hari knows that he can never be able to become self- sufficient as long as he lives in Thul and starts thinking of going to Bombay. The necessity of keeping a distance arises from Hari’s need to preserve his integrity in an environment that is cruel, unjust and unreliable. Moving away from people is the only way that Hari could perceive of maintaining his peace of mind in a world ready to fall to pieces. When he learns from his sisters that one of the Khanekar brothers had killed their dog Pinto to threaten their father to repay their debt, Hari breaks out in a fitful rage against his father he vows never to come back to “this sad house, his frightened sisters, his ill mother, his drunken father. He would leave them and run, run as far away as he could go” (66).

Many other situations also contrive simultaneously in determining Hari’s choice of going to Bombay. Hari goes to the beach to ask Biju to give him a job on his new boat and a chance for him to stay back in his village and earn money for his family. At that very moment, the upcoming factory’s watchman gets into an altercation with Biju criticizing the traditional ways

of living in the village. He shatters Hari's hope and that of the other village boys of ever being employed in the factory with his shrewd arguments. As of working on the fields or the fishing boats, it would become a remote possibility because the government was soon going to acquire their lands and build factories over there. Hari is rather impressed by the cleverness of the city man and could make out that the words of the "knowing watchman from the city" (64) made much more sense than the shallow defense that Biju had put forward. Then he had heard the social worker's speech who had requested the villagers to accompany him to Bombay to protest against the government's repression. Since the previous night when he had seen his sisters sitting huddled together, Hari had felt lost and bewildered about his future course of action. The thought of going to Bombay "excited him most" (64) but with excitement came fear and apprehension of choosing the mysterious and the unknown over the familiar world of Thul, "Did he dare to take it – a young, penniless boy who had never been anywhere?" (65) The next morning Hari departs to Rewas from where he would accompany the other farmers who were going to Bombay to stage a protest against the government's acquisition of their land. He is surprised to see a large number of people, men and boys, ready to go to Bombay. Once the boat sets sail and takes him away from Thul, his home and family, Hari's heart is filled with loneliness and despair. He still feels unsure of himself and wonders if he is actually ready to "stay, work and earn a living" (73) in Bombay. However, once the choice has been made, "there was no question of turning back" (73).

Hari's detachment to deal with his basic conflicts allows him a certain inner freedom, a kind of self-confidence that he is a mover of his own life, an "active responsible force in his life" (Horney, *Inner* 241). He makes a choice, a decision to live a different kind of life and leaves for Bombay. He renounces the village life and is prepared to assume the responsibility of his choice and meet the challenges that the choice entails. He sees the possibility of dealing with the conflicting forces by effecting a change in his restrictive environment and eventually outgrowing it. Along with developing the capacity to take responsibility for himself, Hari also accepts the responsibility towards his mother and three sisters and his obligation to carry out the family responsibility. The constructive forces within him urge Hari to realize his intrinsic potentialities and by choosing to assume responsibility for himself, Hari develops, in the true sense, towards psychological health.

The farmers with whom Hari had come from Rewas leave for their homes in the evening and Hari is left behind all alone. He feels scared to be by himself in a strange city; he had neither a home to go back to nor a family to seek comfort. The feeling of despair, however, fades away and very soon the experience of being in Bombay turns into a stimulating challenge. His first personal encounter in the city is with a coconut seller and then a beggar who seem to be dangerous people. Hari walks away from them thinking, "he had not come to the city to be a beggar, crook or murderer. He did not really know what he had come for except to run away from home and find out what the future held for him. Now he was in Bombay at last and he would find out" (Desai 86). He suddenly remembers that he has Mr. de Silva's address with him. He asks for directions to the house and goes to meet Mr. de Silva hoping that his life will eventually turn around. Unfortunately, he is humiliated and turned away from there by Mr. de Silva's servant who tells him that the master and his family have gone to Thul for a vacation and will return only after a month. The servant chases Hari away saying, "Go- there is no work and

nowhere for you to stay” (89), shutting the door angrily on his face. All opportunities for working in the city and earning money seem to shut along with the door. As Hari stands in one corner wondering what he was going to do and why at all he had come to that “frightening and friendless place” (90), he is offered help by the watchman of the building, Hira Lal. He takes Hari to Sri Krishna eating house, apparently a suffocating and squalid place but where Hari not only gets a place to eat and sleep but also a chance to earn some money.

Hari has to detach himself from the repressive family conditions in the village to be able to live life autonomously, that is, by being a deciding agent rather than a puppet, by being strong rather than weak, by being responsible for his actions and by creating his own destiny. Hari’s growth and development from this point on can be seen as being independent from culture and environment, as it no longer depends upon the extrinsic factors but is motivated by an indomitable intrinsic desire. He shows considerable strength and stability in the face of struggles, deprivations and frustrations that the Bombay life metes out to him. He starts working in perhaps the “meanest and shabbiest restaurant” (92) in Bombay with beggars and coolies as its customers who had to be served day and night. Hari longs for the “quiet” village nights and seeks occasional respite from the city din, “What he minded was not being able to leave the eating house and go home when the work was done. He was confined to it day and night: he worked in the kitchen and in the front room, washed and bathed under the tap at the back, ate his meals at the table when no customer was around, and slept on the bench or sometimes on the dusty black floor. This was the hardest of all” (103). The advice of the watch mender Mr. Panwallah makes life “easier to endure” (104) for Hari. He undergoes all the hardships of the ruthless city life as he has to fulfill the broader purpose of his family’s welfare rather than any selfish interests. Hari’s character is admirable for the courageous and stoic endurance of the hardships that he faces single handedly in the novel. It is not out of hopeless resignation or unrelieved despair that Hari bears the suffering. He remains calm and serene when destiny knocks him about and maintains his dignity even in the most undignified circumstances. Throughout his stay in Bombay, he concentrates solely on his purpose of coming there, so that he becomes completely oblivious to the tyranny of the external surroundings.

Growth towards self actualization entails not only pleasure but also many inherent pains. Each step that Hari takes into the unfamiliar but exciting city life, brings him away from the familiar and predictable world of Thul. It entails a separation from his family and brings with it the feelings of loneliness, fear and wistfulness but Hari chooses to forego the traditional way of life in favour of a new albeit mysterious and challenging Bombay world. Hari’s growth forward is “in spite of these losses” (Maslow 204) and the “courage, will, choice and strength” (204) that he displays as an individual enable him to reach out to his environment with wonder and interest. The life that Hari leads in Bombay becomes a psychologically delightful experience as Hari develops his own set of values through what he learns in the city and becomes psychologically more mature. Hari is fortunate enough to find protection and encouragement in the otherwise hostile and unfriendly city from people like Hira Lal, Jagu and most of all, Mr. Panwallah, the watch mender. Mr. Panwallah turns out to be the “kindest” and “most helpful” of all the people, a “benefactor” (Desai, *Village* 107) for Hari as he offers to teach Hari the enduring skill of watch repairing. Mr. Panwallah’s offer raises Hari’s self esteem and affirms his faith in his own freedom and independence. Mr. Panwallah’s faith in Hari’s abilities develop Hari’s sense of self

worth and boost his self confidence producing the feelings of strength and adequacy in him. He develops a feeling of being useful and necessary in the world. Mr. Panwallah's fatherly guidance and support colour Hari's perception of life with assurance, faith and optimism.

That Hari's conflicts are gradually resolving can be seen from the feeling of wholeheartedness, the conjugation of thought and feeling that he exhibits at being able to do something valuable and worthy. He affects a desired change in his set of adopted beliefs so that "He began to brighten up and look happy and alive" (108). Growth itself becomes a pleasurable and gratifying experience for Hari providing him an opportunity to fulfill his yearnings and desires, to acquire skills as a watch mender and increase his understanding about the people around him and about himself. Mr. Panwallah recognizes Hari's underlying capacity for growth and like a responsible parent or guardian shows him the way ahead. When Hari tells him his story and shares with Mr. Panwallah the circumstances that forced him to come to Bombay, Mr. Panwallah with his wise words inspires Hari to discover his hidden potential and to lead a more integrated and unified life. He advises Hari to "Learn, learn, learn – so that you can grow and change. Things change all the time, boy – nothing remains the same...they are still changing – they will go on changing – 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" (129). There is always a possibility in life as long as human beings are ready to work, learn to grow and are willing to adapt to change. The change does come for Hari towards the end of the novel.

Hari decides to leave Bombay and go back to Thul. He "was not a child any longer...he was a man" (131) and he could "manage" (133) to be on his own now. As Hari enters his village and looks at his forlorn hut, he resolves to "change it all: he would rebuild the hut, he would work on it now that he was home and make it bright and cheerful and happy"(136). He turns out to be a self assured young man as he discusses his plans for the future with Lila.

Once the poultry farm is set up, Hari also plans to open his watch mending shop. By affecting the desired changes, Hari is successful in bringing about a change in his personality. He strives for ideals that give him a positive direction in life and thereby moves towards maturity and development. Hari's homecoming on Diwali is a celebration of his place and importance in his family affirming his sense of identity and belongingness.

In the Indian social matrix, the male domain of creating an identity and fulfilling the quest for self clearly lies outside the four walls of the house as is depicted in the case of Hari. He nurtures hope of securing a factory job someday or maybe go to Bombay for a better future. Lila, being a woman develops in a context of attachment and affiliation with her family. She rests her sense of identity and places the greatest value on her familial relationships and we perceive her solution to be a move toward people, which is an expression of her need for intimacy and belonging. The roles expected of a boy and girl are neatly cut out in a male dominated society. Lila approves of her subordinate status by being unselfish and self sacrificing and never seems to harbour any kind of resentment against the others. The images and symbols that Desai uses in the novel clearly evoke the long existing practice of gender stratification in a hegemonic society. Lila is the self effacing and self sacrificing woman archetype who is highly venerated in a patriarchal society and the belief is propagated in such a way that it becomes impossible for Lila to realize

her true faculties. Hari and Lila's need for love, protection, security and belongingness makes her cling to relationships which hinder self growth and prevent self-actualization.

It is only in the absence of Hari that Lila discovers a higher purpose in her life and strives towards the higher life. When Lila's mother's sickness worsens, she makes serious efforts for her restoration by trying to call a doctor. When she realizes that a doctor would be unavailable, she musters up her paltry resources to be able to call a medicine man, if not a doctor, to examine her mother. Lila and her sisters face poverty, insecurity, abuse and despondency while staying within the family's ambit, but for Hari, as soon as the conflict thickens, he decides to go away. When Lila comes to know that Hari has left for Bombay, she is bewildered. A fleeting thought of running away herself crosses her tender mind, but she decides to stay there and hold the fort in place of Hari. The well being of her mother and caretaking of her sisters becomes Lila's prime concern. For the first time in the course of the novel she makes a decision to step out of her limited territory and resolves to take her mother for treatment to Alibagh but only because Hari is not there to carry out the responsibility. Lila acknowledges that things would have been easier had Hari been around, he could have taken their mother to Alibagh while she would have looked after the house.

This event marks a turning point in the novel just as it proves to be a turning point in Lila's life, a situation that the writer creates for the self validation of her girl protagonist. Lila does not revolt or protest but marches gracefully towards her freedom by transcending the traditional woman image, being driven by the same duties that she has all along been expected to fulfill. Lila no longer remains a victim as the readers start judging her on the strength of her inner self and the motivation of her inner desires. She has learnt to care and nurture her family and decides to do it willfully and determinedly. She attains self validation in relation with the community, bringing about a transformation in the gender stereotype while working from within the normative framework. She emerges successful in forging a link with her true self without alienating herself from the claims that the society makes upon her.

By the end of the novel, Lila has been successful in procuring treatment for her mother with the help of Mr. de Silva in a hospital in Alibagh. There is enough food in their kitchen and even sweets for Diwali when Hari comes back from Bombay. It is no longer the distressing and forlorn house that Hari had vowed never to come back to, but a home brimming with hope and promise for the future which Lila, Bela and Kamal have managed to create on their own. Hari praises Lila for managing everything wonderfully in his absence. Lila says that it wouldn't have been possible without the generosity and help of the de Silvas and Mr. Sayyid Ali. Hari wants to thank them for looking after his family when Bela, in a voice swollen with pride says, "No, we looked after ourselves" (143).

In their growth towards psychological health, Lila and Hari resolve their basic conflict, abandon their coping strategies and replace it with inner freedom and independence, courage and strength, of being responsible for themselves and creating a distinct individuality by conforming to the call of their intrinsic nature. They learn to gratify their own wishes and derive satisfaction from intrinsic factors rather than the external environment. The most valuable lesson that they learn from their life experiences is to discover their own set of values instead of passively adopting the ones that are passed on to them and part with the internalized belief system handed down by the

oppressive social system. They become responsible individuals who take pleasure in carrying out their duty. Work turns into play, fear is replaced by courage and weakness turns into strength. Their graceful triumph over oppressive circumstances is an affirmation of the intrinsic goodness of the indomitable human spirit.

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