

# A village by the sea essay sample

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



A Village by the Sea is Anita Desai's "private attempt to seize upon the raw materials of life and is no reflection of Indian society, politics or character", (Desai's comment on her work) but the novel is on the whole based on Indian Culture. Anita Desai has successfully blended India's tradition, environment and a bunch of more problems that surround the poor Indian family who are being torn apart by illness and alcohol. The children of the family work and fight to keep their family together.

On the way they have to deal with change and tragedy. Anita Desai through the book and life of people in Thul explains that the term culture includes arts, beliefs, customs, inventions, language, technology and traditions. She creates a vivid picture of family, of life in a small Indian village and of all the teeming hustle and bustle of Bombay. The novel is set in a village on the west coast of India, some where around Bombay, a land of varied cultures and diverse traditions.

Traditions in the life of a Hindu play a vital role and it is these traditions only which has kept the Hindu religion alive today, as these traditions have been followed generation after generation and is hoped to continue till the end of the world. Tradition is the main aspect focused on in Anita Desai's book. The book revolves around poverty stricken people and people who face hardships and difficulties from day to day. Anita Desai uses vivid imagery for the readers to visualize the lives of people in these rural villages such as Thul.

The setting of the home immediately enforces the idea of poverty onto the readers. "The hut should have been re-thatched years ago- the earthen walls were crumbling, the windows gaped without any shutters. There was

no smoke to be seen curling up from under a cooking pot on a fire”, this shows that the families did not even have enough to protect themselves, that is need to shelter and food. She uses her descriptive style to show evidence to the readers how a family was forced to live in such unpleasant conditions.

The words ‘ slipping, crumbling and gaped’ enforce the idea of the pain and anguish the families in the village had to experience. The word ‘ gaped’ is personified and windows are given the human quality of gaping that is they are always in the search of happiness and wealth. What city people threw, villagers admire, take and use, “ she carefully folded up the torn sheets and put them away in a neat heap... ” this how the poverty stricken villagers are.

Poverty is evident in the novel, as she has linked the lives of the common people in Thul with the lives of two very young children, and their struggle to survive she does this by informing us that that life was not so easy for Lila and Hari as their father, “ had sold his boat to pay his debts,” and they once, “ had a buffalo but, she too, had been sold to pay debts. ” Anita Desai very effectively emphasizes on the fact “ had been sold to pay debts” through her literal technique of repetition.

The family’s food habits also expose their simplicity and misery as “ there was nothing to eat with the chapattis but a pinch of salt and a few green chilies. ” This line also gathers sympathy from the readers for the family as they feel pitiful for those who don’t possess proper means to stay and survive. “... cooking pot on a fire” this statement shows us the Indian

tradition of cooking food; as they didn't not use the gas or cooking range to make their food but used to fire wood. Dry bread and dry rice' was all they ate and this makes us introspect how fortunate we are of not being in their place where even the basic necessities of life couldn't be satisfied.

The children in the village were also robbed off their childhood as they are made to shoulder responsibilities at a tender age; they made these sacrifices for the welfare of their families. Lila's poverty forces her to take on responsibilities very early in life, " it was time to start work. " " She had given up school a long ago... as she was forced into labour because her father " took to drinking toddy" and neglected his job as a father. This shows that the education in the village was not of primary importance and when the children reached a particular age they had to do household chores or supplement the family's income. Through the lives of Hari and Lila we get a picture how the rest of the village survived. In a way they represent the rest of the village. Anita Desai has admirably described the attire of these villagers.

She uses the attire of the villagers as a means to give a deeper insight into Indian customs and traditions. She shows her aptitude to describe and respect the villagers for what they were. Women wore vibrant colored saris, and this particular aspect shows how the women tried to brighten their dull lives with color. Anita Desai has described these saris to have bright colors and patterns that remind one of spring, a season of happiness and joy. Lila whose is only thirteen had to also employ the ways in which the older women lived in the village.

Anita Desai has repeatedly used spring imagery, and color to brighten up the colorless village life. She shows a deep understanding of village women. “ All the women in Thul love gold and silver jewellery so much... ” is one line which proves this. At different intervals, Desai describes different features of the sari, making the attire of village women more traditional and pleasing. Most of the women decorated flowers in their hair. Men usually wore multi-colored “ magenta turbans”, and “ dhotis”. The mention of the traditional Indian clothing makes every scene more dramatic.

The description helps to make the novel more attention-grabbing, and it shows us how Anita Desai respects the simplicity of these village people. She also shows how the women “ automatically adjusted the fold of their sari over their grey head” when visitors appear, this again shows us the Indian tradition and custom. As the “ Jati or “ Varna” system states that in Hinduism the man of a particular caste has to follow a particular occupation which has been passed on by the ancestors or their forefathers.

As the story is set in a small fishing village, people there will strive for fishing and farming. Their main source of livelihood was always at stake as it was the only means through which the villagers received their incomes and as their income is not consistent, they hardly had any money to buy anything.. As this was the only way they earned money each and every person in the life was involved in some work, even the young children who were made to shoulder such responsibilities at such tender age.

The words said by Hari “ only boy in the village with no boat” prove the fact that each and every person was involved in fishing as a source of survival.

Even though Hari didn't have any work to do he earns a living in a variety of ways. " It was true he had done nothing but dig, sow and break coconuts from the trees and drag nets in the sea. " This line tells us about how Hari's life at twelve was a contrast to those who live in the city. In the novel, the role of people and their importance of existence is given great significance as it is these people who benefit the village in everyway possible.

The village was based on a male dominate way or living. It was the man who was the head of the family who has the soul right to dominate and control. On the other hand the women were very submissive towards their husbands and this is proved through the statement- " No one dared to tell him, least of all their mother. " This also proves that the women were not able to stand up against the men and had no means of power or control over anything. They were basically portrayed delicate and afraid of risking an argument with the men.

The women didn't work for the household income as it was the work of the men to do so, so the women kept themselves busy in the house work or other sorts of pass time such as- " sit outside on a string bed outside her house, competently chopping up a heap of betel nuts" Buying fish and picking barnacles, and mollusks is said to be the, " occupation of the women. " The men spend most of the time drinking toddy, and Desai has spoken about this throughout the novel at regular intervals.

It was considered the men's favorite past time. Most of the men earn a living, and spend a large amount of it on toddy. Hari and Lila's father is also a drunkard, who doesn't work and is deep in debt. The children of the village

were supposed to be the bread winners in the village. The children are the one who would help in the household chores and the cooking. It was the work of the young girls to cook at home and the boy had to do outside work in order to bring home some money.

These children left school at a very young age and forced to work for the survival of their family as it is the boys only in Hindi culture who after the father's support is responsible for bringing up the family, but in this case in the village the young ones were made to do this at the ages of twelve and thirteen. Each one of them had high hopes of one day being successful in life with good and secured jobs. Marriages in the Indian community in villages are all arranged.

The girls were not asked before they were to get married, it was all decided by the parents this shows that the Indian community was rather orthodox in the villages, and it was not considered important for the girl and the boy to get to know one another before marriage. In the same way Anita Desai shows how Hari, " would have to find his sisters husbands", since his father spends most of the time in a drunken stupor and his mother was bedridden. The girls were forced to accept the man the parents chose without questioning them.

The bridegroom was to be given a lot of importance. The bridegrooms might demand a dowry -a bicycle, or even a scooter. Gold buttons, coins and jewellery, A cow or buffalo, A piece of land," The words, " silk saris and gold jewellery" are repeated when Anita Desai speaks about marriage, this is to enforce the idea into the readers mind. We see that a wedding is a very

expense occasion or ritual in Hinduism, as it is celebrated with all family friends and “ the whole village would have to be invited. ” The unity in the villagers is shown here. Getting a girl married was considered an achievement, a major task in life achieved.

Hindu tradition and culture were considered to be very important in the village. Anita Desai has given reverence to nature, and the importance of it in Hinduism. “ Large or small, rich or poor, each had a sacred basil plant growing in a pot by the front door. ” This shows that every man and house “ rich or poor”, has strong faith in their religion and its teachings and particularly in God. God creates nature, which is why it is considered sacred. The cow is also considered sacred, for in the temple we see it is associated with the Hindu God, Krishna. Feeding the cow was a pious act and they were glad to pay a little and perform it. ”

This line shows us their deep respect for Mother Nature, and Anita Desai has given the reader an insight into Hinduism. As cow is considered a scared animal no Hindu eats that meat (beef) in village cows are also considered a form of wealth, as in certain occasions people gift each other with cows and also the statement “ had a buffalo but, she too had been sold to pay debts” proves this point. This is how we can say the villagers often associated nature with religion as both man and animals are part of nature.

Religious significance was also brought out through the plays they enacted which spoke about Gods and Goddesses, some of which were, “ Radha-Krishna story”, “ Rama-Sita”, “ Nala-Damayanti” and also the “ Ram-Lila. ” Desai has used terms from the Hindu religion, and this arouses the reader’s



attention and interest. She gives a deep understanding of Hindu religion as she gives the readers an account of all the festivals, customs and religion. The way Hindu's worship is also described at the beginning of the story, and this magnifies their faith in their religion.

Pooja's were performed regularly, in which a number of offerings were made to the God, such as flowers, or a red powder- " kumkum". The God could be an idol in a temple or a rock in the sea. They also followed other customs which marked a good omen, one of which was to, " break a coconut on its prow where a pair of eyes had been painted, black and white. " The people in the village give a lot of importance to superstitions as they are uneducated and illiterate. Anita Desai has made use of details in order to describe the medicine man who was given great importance and was God like to the villagers.

The throbbing of the drum and the long eerie blasts on the trumpet which meant that the medicine man was near. " Anita Desai also gave the cow great importance " holy cow", and " sacred cow". The rituals were carried out with a lot of pomp and show, " He flung in packets of flowers that he took from a bag slung onto the cow's back-jasmine and marigold, hibiscus and frangipani. " We see that Anita Desai gives a lot of importance to nature, and she has realistically spoken about the uses of flowers during such superstitious rituals.

The, " fire crackled and spat", over here Desai has given the fire human qualities. In Spite of their poverty, the villagers celebrate festivals such as Diwali with a lot of splendor and showiness. " Every house in the village was

decorated with fresh garlands of mango leaves and marigolds”, this line tells us how much importance was given to flowers and plants in the Hindu customs. Desai has introduced different elements of nature at regular intervals through out the novel. This festival is once again associated with lights, and color , which is why it brings gusto in the dry lives of the villagers.

The air of festivity floods the village as and when women make colorful designs called, “ rangolis” and hang paper lanterns. “ Its streamers rustle in the wind”, her descriptive style helps the reader to understand her ideas better, and the idea of Diwali is automatically thought about as an event of great joy and happiness. Oil lamps are lit, and fireworks are lit in order to welcome the Goddess, Laxmi. Sweets and prepared, some being, “ jalebis”, and many other ones. These are the ways in which the children celebrate Diwali.

The fireworks are described so beautifully, and the image of a fountain of “ gold and silver” sounds heavenly, and once again emphasizes on the cheerfulness of the occasion. The movement of some of these fireworks is made very vivid in phrases such as, “ it whirled around dizzily” and the launching of rockets are compared to a “ comet”, which “ bang into a cloud of stars. ” Laxmi is considered to be the Goddess of wealth, it is said that she visits every home on Diwali. Idols of Laxmi , and Ganesha are bought and decorated in every household on this day.