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## Portrayal of Children's Psychoanalytical World in the Village by the Sea

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### Introduction:

The Village by the Sea subtitled "An Indian Family Story" is a novel for young people by the Indian writer Anita Desai, appeared in London in 1982. It is based on the poverty, hardships and sorrow faced by a small rural, community in India. Desai won the annual Guardian Children's Fiction Prize, a once-in-a-life time book award judged by panel of British children's writers. Much of the novel's interior plot is developed by Anita Desai's childhood experiences at the hill station, Mussoorie. Exquisitely written, with sensitivity and delicacy, Desai's this book remains one of her most beloved works. The Village by the Sea is a story of an Indian family, staying in a village, called Thul, in Western India, which is 14 kilometres away from Mumbai one of the most famous cities of India. It focuses on a poverty ridden family trying to make two ends meet. The main protagonists are Lila, the eldest child who is 13 years old, and her 12-year-old brother Hari. They also have two younger sisters, Bela and Kamal. They live with their mother, who has been persistently ill and is bed-ridden. Their mother is an invalid and needs constant care and nursing. Nobody knows what exactly is wrong with her but she grows weaker and weaker with every passing day. Their father, who has been out of work for months, is in a permanent drunken state of unconsciousness, from which he arises occasionally to shout at his family, so the responsibility of managing the family is on the shoulders of Hari and Lila. Though only 13, Lila already has the outlook and maturity of an adult. Her brother Hari, twelve is the only person with whom she can share her troubles. The father was earning money, but he used to spend it on alcoholic materials, So there is much stress on Hari and Lila due to the constant demand of meeting the need of money, as the family is almost always in debt. These two the elder sister and the younger brother are the sole food provider to the family while having nothing behind them or at hand. Their only income is the occasional sale of bunches of coconuts from their palms to Malbaris. They hardly eat anything but "dry bread or dry rice every day." (TVBS 15) They have merely a very small hut and a small piece of land which is not adequate to make a living on, so the life is very tough and full of sorrows for them. Paucity and poverty of the worst type are reflected by a picture of Hari's hut/house in the village Thul: "The hut should have been rethatched years ago- the old palm leaves were dry and tattered and slipping of the beams. The earthen walls were crumbling. The windows gaped, without any shutters..." (TVBS 9) With two younger sisters to rise, life for Lila and Hari is too hard. Their family shares the hardships collectively: "There was nothing he could do...to make their mother well, to keep away the drunken neighbour or his threats...to save them all from the cruelty all around them, but it helped that he, too, knew their fears and shared their troubles." (TVBS 57) Hari decides that he has had enough and leaves for Bombay-the Bombay where dreams come true and ambitions grow into reality.

Hari who had bought neither tea nor fruit at the pier nor food from home in the night, sat very quietly on the floor of the boat and no one paid him any attention at all. There was no one else from Thul in his boat, it was full of strangers from other villages along the coast, and he sat listening to them, feeling very hot and thirsty, and very afraid of the journey he had undertaken without thinking at all, simply because he had been upset and angry and simply could not bear to live another day in Thul in the old way. The time for change had come, he had felt that. He had to make the break he had been thinking about for so long. Had he done wrong? Lila is left alone to take care of everybody in family, to manage her sisters Bela and Kamal and her mother and somehow keep the family strings together and struggles to do so. Help comes from an unexpected source, the rich De Silvas who have a bungalow-Mon Repos next to their hut. Meanwhile, Hari is new in the great city of Mumbai and all alone. A kind restaurant proprietor, Jagu, takes pity on him and welcomes him to work in his restaurant. There, Hari builds a strong friendship with Mr. Panwallah, the lovable watch repairer whose shop is just beside Jagu's. Through his experience with Mr. Panwallah and Jagu and the chain of events that take place in Bombay, Hari realizes that he could actually make a career as a watchmaker. Meanwhile, Lila, Bela and Kamal admit their sick mother in town hospital with the help of the De Silvas. Their father turns over a new leaf, and accompanies their

mother throughout her seven month treatment. When Hari returns to the village soon after, he finds the environment of his home totally changed. As Hari reunites with his sisters, they all begin sharing stories with each other detailing the changes that took place after Hari left. Hari also explains the watch repair skills he learned in Bombay and reveals his plans to start a small repair shop in the village. Together Lila, Hari, Bela, and Kamal all form a plan to use Hari's saved money which he made and brought back from Bombay to start a small chicken farm as a startup business for the family and financial support base for Hari's future repair shop. As Hari goes to the village to buy chicken netting fence and tools to build a chicken pen, a traveler talks with him and marvels at Hari upon learning his plans. As the novel ends, the traveler highlights Hari and his sister's resolve to adapt and change in a growing and ever developing world.

The story of the novel, *The Village by the Sea* is woven around an alcoholic fisherman, his sick wife and their four children - Lila, Bela, Kamal, and Hari. It is Anita Desai's classic children's fable about a brother and sister, Hari and Lila, who have to face the darkness and difficulties of the adult world. This family consists of a mother who is very sick and lying in bed all the time, father who drinks all the time and is unable to work due to his hard drinking habit, three sisters and a brother, the two younger sisters who are studying at school, and an elder sister who has stopped going to school due to economic problems, and now looking after the family and a younger brother who also stopped going to school due to the same reason and is supposed to look after the family. The drunkenness of the father, sickness of the mother, food for all and clothes are to be arranged etc. may be considered in a way, as the family motive in the novel. The entire family has a collective fate of joy and pain, poverty and prosperity. Lila and Hari have a corporate family loyalty. The picture of the family union and rejoicing verges on sentimentality. (TVBS 136) Here Desai describes human relations, man's relation with woman, and man's relation with God in the real village Thul, situated in the western coast of India. Village life with the introduction of modern technology and machinery becomes commercial. Consequently, the purity and chastity of human love is violated. The happy married life is richer and better in Thul without industrial development. It is really very clear that the condition of living in a village is having very low standard comparing to cities. There is very less opportunity of a job in a village than in a city. There is no clean water, very poor health care facilities, having low standard schooling and many more problems. And so are the people very simple, having no high ambitions and are satisfied with whatever they have at hand. They have got a small piece of land, a fishing boat, a hut and nothing else. And at the same time they are having a very calm and relaxed type of life. They have to work only season wise and have their daily midday sleep very joyfully which are mentioned in a very good flow in this book.

The vigilant boy and girl who are really very young and are vulnerable at this phase of age but still manage it. When one hears the name parent's one's feelings definitely join with the loving ones who really takes care for their children, who raise them, who make them laugh and cry for them, who provide foods, clothing, shelter and medicine for them and still don't want any compensation and never regrets for their doings. The role of the parents in a family is very vital and crucial. But in the book *The Village by the Sea* it is utterly different; the father is careless the mother is unable due to her sickness and weakness. Consequently the boy and the girl play the role of them respectively. They become vigilant, loving and concerned about their sorrowful life. They develop more consciousness, and make wise decisions but at the same time the condition of the village living, especially their status is making them very vulnerable at this stage of life. But still they have the spirit to survive and manage their life through different ways that they can afford to do. Set against the backdrop of a typical Indian fishing village, *The Village by the Sea* leaves a lasting impression on the mind of the reader. Anita Desai is capable of evocation of most beautiful and vital pictures of nature not only as a source of sensuous pleasure, but as an elemental object on which man lives. In the very first chapter we come across a lovely picture of flowers: "Scarlet hibiscusblooms, sweet-smelling spider lilies and bright butter-yellow allamanda flowers." (TVBS 7). It is followed by a very fine view of butterflies: "Butterflies flew up out of the tussocks and bushes of wild flowres-large zebra-striped ones with a faint tinge of blue to their wings, showy black ones with scarlet-tipped wings, and little sulphur-yellow ones that fluttered about in twos and threes." (TVBS 9)

The picture of birds is delightful and lovelier: "Flute-voiced drongoes swooped and cut through the air like dazzling knives that reflected the sun and glinted blue-black, and pert little magpie robins frisked and flirted their tails as they hopped on the dewy grass....Pairs of crested bulbuls sang from the branches...and a pigeon's voice cooed and gurred on and on." (TVBS 9)

In the course of the novel, beautiful evocative pictures of the sky in monsoon and post-monsoon period and the clouds and the sea mixing into awful mystery and drenching the earth are presented. The sea is studied in different moods as though playing with sea-coast visitors at occasions, and then "trenching out all the way to Africa." (TVBS 112) Mrs. Desai's vivid imagery and appropriate settings and a good plot make this, a book well worth reading. Thul and Mumbai in *The Village by the Sea* symbolize agricultural rural life with magic cures and freedom, and industrialized urban life in metropolitan cities with science and medicine. Anita Desai's imagery is derived from varied sources- botanical, zoological, meteorological and colour imagery. Her imagery is central to her fictional strategy and spotlights her tragic vision of life..." Anita Desai clarifies that she uses "certain images

again and again and that, although real, they acquire the significance of symbols, I imagine each writer ends by thus, revealing his own mythology that symbolizes his private morality and philosophy." Anita Desai has explicitly described in her very own style of writing, and she shows how Hari in the dilapidated conditions of the Sri Krishna Eating House finds warmth and affection through Mr Panwallah-owner and watch mender of the Ding-Dong watch shop. Mr Panwallah instills confidence in Hari and comforts him when he terribly feels home sickness. He even gives Hari a vivid and inspiring future and teaches him watch repairing. This shows that even in one of the busiest and ramshackle cities such as Bombay there is still hope, love and affection He also goes back to Thul with the help of Mr Panwallah and Jagu insisting to buy the bus ticket. Jagu shows generosity by giving him some extra money to be brought back to his family.

The novel further concentrates on the complexity of the city of Mumbai, the crowd, the tough living condition of the city life especially for the poor people. The life in a city is well standardized comparing to villages, but still we don't have to forget that all the comforts in a city come through money and wealth, so we still have people under poverty line even in the cities. Those who live in the slums have a painful life. They see all the modern things but cannot afford, they do work but do not earn enough, they are alive but with pain and grief. In the course of the novel we come across the difference between rich and poor, the city man and a villager, an educated man and an uneducated person. The rich, the city man and an educated stand in one category and the poor, a villager and an uneducated stand in another category. The rich has a distinguished feature, a city man is supposed to be smart and an educated person intelligent, and the other category is just the opposite of them. Many a times the first category of the people fools and ridicules the second category of the people, which is unfair.

It is good to observe the changes taking place in life and how people should adapt to them. As we see today's rapid growth and so many other changes in life are all due to globalization, deregulation, free movement of the people, free markets and free trades, in fact all are tremendous changes which have taken place in a very narrow span of time in this twentieth century. The villages and their lands, groves and deserts have been replaced by great companies. The natural environment does not exist anymore as it was earlier. These changes are profitable in the short-run but destructive in long-run. The villagers are opposing but who will listen to their yelling. The government is implementing its master plans with force. And in result the small farm and land owners become the labors and workers of the various companies established in the area or start doing something else. Their calm, relaxed and joyful life turns to a hardworking and restless labor life. Anita Desai follows the conventional way of developing the plot in *The Village by the Sea*. She begins with description on the setting and characters involved, brings out the conflicts, resolve them and end the story with a happy ending. Another way she develops the story is by describing two things which is happening at the same time. At first, she tells the readers about Hari's first days in Bombay, and then only she leaves Hari's stories to describe about what is happening to his family in Thul. By looking at the summary, the difference on the way the plot of each story is developed could be seen. It is a story about the life of a family of six which consists of the parents and their four children, who live in Thul, in a village which is near to Alibagh. Here the main activity for the villagers to earn their living is fishing. Lila's family represents the typical lives of families in the small fishing village of Thul. While other children are fortunate enough to have parents or at least the fathers to go fishing and provide food for them, Lila's siblings have to survive on their own since their mother is sick while their father has always been drunk. For that reason, Lila plays the role as the mother by doing the house work while Hari works in the field behind their hut. One day, Hari is being told by his good friend, Ramu that their fishing village is going to transform into industrial place with many factories will be built. Since that, he keeps thinking about the idea that the factories would give the villagers new jobs. However, Hari is not sure about the idea since it seems to take long time for the transformation to happen that he should think of another way to earn a living. Then he decides to leave for Bombay secretly, leaving Lila the full responsibility to take care of the family. In Bombay, Hari works at Sri Krishna Eating House owned by Jagu, a watchman of the de Silva's house in Bombay. De Silva has a large house in Thul and he knows Hari since Hari used to help him to settle down in Thul. Meanwhile, Lila and her sister are doing well since the De Silva's family come for summer vacation in Thul. They work for the family like Hari used to during his presence. Mr. De Silva is the one who helps them to admit their mother to the hospital in Alibagh when Lila asks for his help. Since that, their father stops drinking and he stays in the hospital to take care of their mother. After that, a bird researcher replaces Mr. De Silva's place to stay at the house but Lila and her sisters are still doing the job to serve the researcher whose name is Sayyid Ali. In the novel Hari and Lila stand for all the working classes of rural India By hard work for De Silvas and Sayyid Ali in the beach house 'Mon Repos' Lila gets the poor man's plenty: "It was wonderful to earn money. There was enough now to stock their kitchen with rice and tea and sugar, and Lila went every week to the hospital in Alibagh by bus to take some to their father who bought extra milk and fruits for their mother with it." (TVBS 111)

#### **Conclusion:**

It has been seven months since Hari left his village and it is right before Diwali that Hari goes back to Thul, astonishing his sisters with the money he has brought. He eagerly tells them everything that has happened in Bombay and his dream of building better life for them in Thul. Among the thematic studies of human

relationships, the most significant is the teacher-taught relationship between Mr. Panwallah and Hari. While working at the restaurant, Hari builds a good relationship with this watch mender, Mr. Panwallah who then teaches him the art of watch mending. Hari acquires the skill that he manages to repair a watch of Mr. Panwallah's customer and make money for that. Mr. Panwallah inspires Hari to learn the skill so that one day it could be useful for him to earn a better living. Besides this Mr. Sayyid Ali teaches him general wisdom. Both these relationships are educational for facing general life. Anita Desai is more pre-occupied with aesthetic than didactic concerns. Her intention is not to give a didactic or moral lesson. Still her works are built on solid framework of ideas significant for society. Likewise, *The Village by the Sea*, on ideative level, presents the concepts of evolution, change and adaptations friendship and fellowship, service motive, a sense of optimism etc. peculiar to this novel.

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