

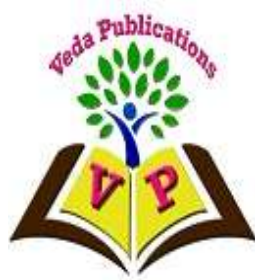


USE OF IRONY IN THE SHORT STORIES OF ANITA DESAI'S *GAMES AT TWILIGHT AND DIAMOND DUST*

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ABSTRACT



Irony plays an important role in constituting a successful short story. The short story writer uses irony to suggest the complexity of experiences, to furnish indirectly an evaluation of his material and at the same time to achieve compassion. The three types of irony, which are normally used by the short story writers are: the verbal irony, Dramatic irony, and situational irony. The situational irony is usually the most important kind for the short story writer, in which he shows the discrepancy between appearance and reality, or expectation and fulfilment or which is and what would seem appropriate. In Dramatic irony, the contrast is between what a character says and what the reader knows to be true. The value of this kind of irony lies in the comment it implies on the speaker or his expectations. In all, irony involves a contrast, a disparity, a difference between what is and what would seem to be. Anita Desai in her two volumes of short stories "*Games at Twilight*", "*Diamond Dust*" presents these three types of irony in a very successful way.

Keywords: *Short Stories, Games at Twilight, Diamond Dust, Situational Irony, Dramatic Irony Destructive Irony.*

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Anita Desai is deeply aware of life that is conceited by seeming innocence and tenderness. In many stories she unveils this brutality through characteristic irony. In fact in most of these stories, the protagonists happen to be a young adolescence struggling to come to grip with the adult world. Stories capture that moment in their life when reality intrude in their world of innocent life a hot blast and destroys their complacent acceptance of what happens them as something.

Anita Desai uses the situational irony in most of her stories. In the first story "Games at Twilight" Desai employs the situational irony. The protagonist Ravi is caught in helpless situation. He comes out of his hiding place expecting a great victory over his opponent Raghu. If he has reached a little earlier and touched the 'den' then he would have won the game but unfortunately he has been forgotten long back and the other children have started another game as well in the mean time. Even then Ravi cries out that he has won the game. The fact is that his final victory over Raghu turns out to be redundant and so ironical. All the children have already forgotten about him because their mother has changed the game and they have eaten strawberries, helped their father to clean the car and helped the gardener in watering the lawn. He has been forgotten long back and the other children have been playing another game. Even the children feel sorry for Ravi, but Ravi who always wants to win over Raghu cannot bear it, and does not join with the other children in the new game.

And the arc of thin arms trembled in the twilight, and the heads were bowed so sadly, and their faces tramped to that melancholy refrain so mournfully, so helplessly, that Ravi could not bear it. He would not follow them; he would not be included in this funeral game. He had wanted victory and triumph – not a funeral game.[1]

The situation in which Ravi finds himself is paradoxical because though he has won the game he is lost and forgotten by the other children and his victory has become null and void. His safe hiding

place has turned out to be the reason for his defeat over his counterpart Raghu.

As Paul Sharrad comments, "Desai's irony is exclusive and destructive though equally corrective in its creature: one may not go beyond the world and still function in the mere and now as a human individual." [2] In the story "Surface Textures" Desai presents destructive irony. Harish the protagonist of the story loses his job, leaves his family to fend for itself and discover his 'especial paradise' outside the town where each rock attracts him. He spends weeks together in observing the rough and silky-smooth stalks and reeds and leaves. It is ironical that Harish by observing the surfaces of the objects transforms himself into a swami. Desai employs destructive irony in the transformation of Harish into a Swami. In discovering the surfaces of different objects he loses his surface. He achieves a kind of Nirvana in this world of complete oblivion. The women in the village call him swami and 'holier' than any other 'sanyasi' and start worshipping him.

In the stories "Sales", "Pineapple Cake", and "The Farewell Party" also Desai employs the devastating and destructive irony. The stories, "The Accompanist", "A Devoted Son", "Pigeons at Daybreak" and "Scholar Gypsy" are also best examples for her pungent irony. In the story "A Devoted Son" she presents ironically how too much of attention on his father turns out to be hateful and disgusting to the father. Rakesh, Verma's only son, a doctor, takes too much care of his father. But the irony is that this extraordinary care by the son even with regards to his diet makes the father hate his son and shout at his son to leave him alone because he does not want to take any medicines and wants to die peacefully, as he is denied food which he likes. It is paradoxical that the son considers the dietary restrictions as conducive to the well being of his father, the father considers them to be an unjust denial of a worthy son. The final protest of the father against taking tonics proves to be the best example of a powerful paradox. When his son approaches him with his usual tonics,

His face was so out of control and all in pieces that the multitude of expressions that crossed it could not make up a whole and convey to

the famous man exactly what his father thought of him his skill his art..... Then he spat out some words, as sharp and bitter as poison, into his son's face. 'Keep your tonic- I want none – I want none – I won't take anymore of – of your medicines. None, Never,' and he swept the bottle out of his son's hand with a wave of his own, suddenly grand, suddenly effective.[3]

In the second volume of short stories *Diamond Dust* also Desai uses the situational irony and verbal irony in an effective way. In the title story "Diamond Dust", the protagonist Mr.Das develops an intense attachment with his dog, Diamond that leads to his death. His little puppy grows into a big 'badmash', a wild devil that always chases the children of the neighbourhood, from the schools and all the people in Khaki uniform as if they have come to loot the house. Every November the dog will be on its escapades and Mr.Das after it. Though Mr.Das brings stronger chains and collars for Diamond, the dog escapes from the house when the season comes. Mr. Das would go round in search of Diamond 'like some forlorn lover whose beloved has scorned him and departed with another'[4]. The irony lies in the fact that his intense affection for the dog brings his end at the end of the story. In his search for his pet dog he meets with his death. The dog in the dog-catcher's van appears sinister. "Behind the bars of the window receding into the distance Diamond glittered like a dead coal, or a black star, in daylight's blaze." 5(DD63)

CONCLUSION

In almost all the stories of Desai we find devastating irony. In other stories "Five Hours to Simla or Faisla", "Topoztlan Tomorrow", "Roof top Dwellers" also we find instances of biting irony employed by Desai to bring out the theme. She deals with all the types of irony in her two volumes of short stories, "Games at Twilight" and "Diamond Dust". Thus Anita Desai uses the characteristic irony situational irony in many of her stories. She uses situational irony when her protagonists are caught in the conflict with the situation in the story. In some

stories she uses exclusive and destructive irony to suit her themes. In some stories her use of irony is biting and bitter. In some stories she uses devastating irony to depict the primeval instincts of adults. She also uses dramatic irony to present how too much care and attention by adults on children and the children on their elders result in bad repercussions in many of her stories dealing with the themes of children, parents, and their relationships.

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