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CARING FOR HUMANITY AND NATURE IN ANITA DESAI'S NOVEL, *FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN*

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Abstract:

Humanity is a matter of the utmost state of being a human. It involves the love and compassion that every human has towards their fellow beings. Nature is a source of life of all things that exist in this planet. It is a force that can control the lives of every living being on earth. The paper focuses on caring for humanity and nature in Anita Desai's novel Fire on the Mountain (1977). The novel is set in Kasauli. The protagonist of the novel is Nanda Kaul. She has a great love for nature. She spent all her life serving her family. She moved to Kasauli to dwell in the company of nature. She wants to live for herself and know herself. But the humanity that lies deep down in her heart arises when she encounters her great granddaughter, Raka and her friend, Ila Das. Raka's life in Kasauli recounts the natural habitat of that region. She does not want to be around the company of human beings because she finds comfort in nature. Ila Das is the true epitome of humanity. Though the local people do not understand the true nature and care of Ila Das, she never fails to show her concern on the lives of people, this becomes the reason for her death. All her life, she lived for the welfare of others. At the death of Ila Das, Nanda Kaul realizes the true value of life.

Keywords: *Humanity, Nature, Compassion, Natural habitat, Mountain, etc.*

Humanity refers to the state of being human incorporating the values of compassion, sympathy, love and kind behaviour. Unlike other living beings, the ability to think, learn, communicate with others and controlling the environment belongs to human activities. It also refers to caring for others and helping them whenever they need help or care. The true value of humanity lies in the interpersonal relationship of human beings with other people.



Caring refers to protecting and being cautious over an action or situation. The human tendency to care for someone or something happens due to the importance or affection over that person. Trust is most important in caring because people will not care for someone or something if there is no trust. Nature includes all the things that are present on the earth that are not made by human. It encompasses all the things that support life on this planet. A natural environment includes all the living and non-living things. Human beings are a part of the environment. To make life possible on earth, natural environment is important because it encompasses all living, non-living things, species, climates and resources that support life on earth.

Anita Desai is an Indian novelist and an eminent writer. Her writings describe the life of ordinary people in everyday life. The profound writing style of Anita Desai made her an eminent writer. Her famous works include: *Cry*, *The Peacock* (1963), *Bye-bye Blackbird* (1971), *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), *The Village by the Sea* (1982), *Fasting, Feasting* (1999) and *Zigzag way* (2004).

Fire on the Mountain was published in 1977. It is set in the mountain region of Kasauli. The novel revolves around the life of three women characters, Nanda Kaul, Raka and Ila Das. Their life in Kasauli is highly associated with nature. This novel deals with the struggles of the human soul and how the characters in the novel care for humanity and nature in their everyday life, irrespective of the struggles they faced in the past.

The protagonist of this novel Nanda Kaul is an elderly widow woman. After completing the duties as a wife, and a mother, she moves to Kasauli to live a peaceful life. Her life as a wife of a university Vice chancellor or a mother of many children did not give her happiness. All her life, she cared for the welfare of her family members. Every day, every minute, she cared for everyone and everything around her. Only in the latter part of her life, she realized that she forgot to take care of herself. So, she decided to live in Kasauli. It is a mountain region. The atmosphere soothes the struggled past of Nanda Kaul. She finds comfort in nature. She never plants any new plants or trees in her place. Her care for nature is that she left it undisturbed because nature is already in its best. So leaving the nature and environment undisturbed is a way of caring for nature. One day she receives the news about the arrival of her great granddaughter Raka. Nanda Kaul never liked the idea of someone living with her because she no longer wants to care for anyone. Raka is recovering from typhoid. After the arrival of Raka, Nanda Kaul tries to keep herself away from Raka but the basic humanity that lies deep in every human gradually brings her towards Raka. She wants to take care of her great-granddaughter, but Raka never shows any affection towards her great-grandmother. Nanda Kaul wonders at the attitude of Raka because children of her age usually crave for attention but Raka never needs the company and care of other people.

Raka's father is a diplomat. Every day he drinks alcohol and beats her mother. Raka never received any parental love and care. There is no one to support her and care for her when she was in great pain. So, she gradually lost interest in people and care of others. In Kasauli, she felt comfort in nature. She wanders through the mountain regions. She cared for nature in more sensible ways. She was deeply hurt by the actions of her parents. So, she never tries to take comfort from any human beings. Raka's life in Kasauli gives her unconditional peace from nature which she finds nowhere else. Though she knows her stay in Kasauli is



temporary, she wants to take the best out of every moment. She never spares any chance of exploring nature. Her curiosity about nature made her explore many places in Kasauli which made her know more about Kasauli than the local people who live there or tourists who visit the best place in Kasauli.

The other prominent character in the novel is Ila Das. She is a childhood friend of Nanda Kaul. They went to the same school and college. Ila Das has a deformed voice. So nobody likes to befriend her except Nanda Kaul. Ila Das works at a welfare office. The local people around the region did not like Ila Das, but she worked for the welfare of the people. One of the local men, Preet Singh wants his seven year old daughter to marry an old man. "Now I've run into all this trouble over trying to stop child marriage. That is one of the laws of the land, isn't it, aren't I there to enforce the law? (Desai, 141). Out of humanity, Ila Das tries to stop the marriage but Preet Singh got furious about Ila Das and he raped and killed her. Ila Das never expected humanity from other people. She never received the care from her family. At the end of the novel, she dies of inhuman acts.

Nanda Kaul's humanity is seen in the novel at times when she helps Ila Das become a lecturer at the home science college with the help of her husband Mr. Kaul. "By the time Ila Das had come to the university campus as a lecturer in Home Science, at Nanda Kaul's suggestion and Mr. Kaul's invitation" (Desai, Anita 135). Further, she advised Ila Das to study a course in social welfare, this kindly advice helped Ila Das to get a job at the social welfare office.

Nanda Kaul's care for nature is that nature is already in its good state. So, she left it undisturbed. She never wanted to care for the people because of the sad past. The basic humanity of Nanda Kaul arises after the arrival of Raka. Her kindness towards Raka represents that Nanda Kaul cares for humanity. Raka on the other hand cares for nature whenever possible. She never let her chance of protecting nature. But Raka never tries to care for human beings because the innocent child has seen the inhuman act of her father towards her mother. Raka wants to protect herself. So, she never allows the company of others. Ila Das faces the direct attack of inhuman act. She always cares for people around her. Caring for humanity and nature are true values of life. Anita Desai's female characters in the novel expressed their care for humanity and nature in a realistic way.

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