

Anita Desai as the Spokesperson of Spirituality in *Journey to Ithaca*

Anita Desai's ninth novel *Journey to Ithaca* exposes individual character's quests in the world of spirituality. Matteo is in search of the mystery of India whereas Sophie is in search of the true identity of the Mother, and Laila is in search of the blue god Krishna. Whatever be their diverse goals and routes, their spatially and temporally separate journeys converge upon each person's discovery of their self. As such, the novel reveals the dichotomy that a search for the other brings man face to face with his own self. One cannot access the world without knowledge of the self. In other words, knowledge of the self is the ultimate knowledge one can attain. Such a spiritual culture has become a part of India's tradition and modernity, philosophy and way of life, theory and praxis. Revolving in its three chapters the present thesis unearths the elements of the valorization of Indian cultural uniqueness borrowing the insights from the thinkers of spiritualism and mysticism.

Desai constructs the non-western society and culture in its full vigor. There is, of course, the journey to a symbolic Ithaca, where the journey itself is important, not the destination. The Mother's passage to divine love forms the core of the novel. Then, there's Matteo, the Italian, who, like many in the '60s and '70s, comes to India in search of spiritual enlightenment. Matteo, who has left his family and aristocratic way of life, is on his own journey: he is writing the Mother's official biography for the Ashram. Sophie wants to prove to Matteo that the Mother is not all that she seems, and in so doing tears him away from her. Her journey takes her on a rewind of the Mother's life to Egypt, Europe, the United States and finally Bombay where she meets the ageing, toothless Krishna who was once Laila's lover. Here, Desai has turned orientalism on its head: the myth of the passive, spiritual, almost-feminine Orient and the aggressive, materialist and masculine Occident; the problem raised by the text is solved using the

theoretical modality of spiritual and mystical studies. Then, Western people are guided by materialistic and individualistic life style. They enjoy with the mechanism. But eastern society is full of spiritual enlightenment and non-western culture. Desai concludes that from the perspective of western beliefs and thoughts, eastern culture and their practices is savage and barbaric but in the reality when they visit in eastern culture, they find out the reality of the non-western culture and heritage. Then, they valorize the eastern culture and practices. This Research proposal addresses the following questions: What are the elements of spirituality in the novel? How Desai accomplishes the self-celebration of mystical culture? Which characters promote the philosophy of spirituality? What are the authorial motifs behind the depiction of the spiritual and mystical culture? How does spiritualism valorize the entire part of the novel? The above-mentioned problems are solved by implementing the theoretical modality of spirituality and mysticism.

The purpose of the research is to unearth the spiritual elements inside the text. The main objective lies to find how *Journey to Ithaca* is a germinal book that offers infinite possibilities like India, the destination of the pilgrimage of the three major characters of the novel. While Matteo and Sophie represent migration of the 60s and the 70s, Laila represents that of the 20s, suggesting that India had always drawn people who were willing to ponder and wander. Such as India also offers possibilities of alternative lifestyles which combine the best in both the East and the West, thus making the Indian version of modernity palpable to all. The inclusion of Indian culture, practice of non-western mysticism, issues of salvation and the victory of the non-Western cultural practices in the novel counter the West versus non-West binary.

Different critics have analyzed the novel from the multiple perspectives which manifests the diverse quality of the novel. The novel has been analyzed from the perspectives of thematic

and technical aspects since the time of its publication. Though the novel is claimed to be one of the truest stories of the world but many critics like Dave have given skeptic eyes on its trustworthiness. For Jollyan the novel has the greater degree of efficiency to present the notion of the truth and reality in relation of the society. He argues:

Throughout the book and the author describes how courageous protagonist is and how much she works for the rights of women. However, I didn't really see any evidence of this - as far as I could see Laila was driven by her selfish self-interest and nothing else. In fact she comes across as a selfish and not very pleasant person. (94)

Thus, the novel is rich in mirroring the real feature of the social and political reality. Dave doesn't seem in the line with Laila. He unboundedly gives credit to the protagonist and her dare but regarding Laila, the critique develops negative attitude. The intact representation of the social and political reality in the novel adds the effort of social realism which is one of the features of Desai's writings.

Another critic Eugene makes the feminist reading of the novel. For her, the novel is the exact representation of the feminine subjugation. The exploitation of the females in the novel tempts the feminist critics. As claiming for the feminist tone Eugene makes a point:

It does not matter whether you are a feminist or not, if there is a crime committed against humanity then as a human being you have to seal the fate of the oppressor and feel and try to assuage the pain of the oppressed. But while many victims can be rescued, reinstated or taken care of, for the woman of the country. It's a whole different ball-game whatsoever. (101)

Thus the novel is rich in the preservation of the feminist tone. *Journey to Ithaca* has touched multiple facets of the history and culture. The feminist criticism in the novel questions the contemporary patriarchal society. Similarly, the novel is also viewed from the viewpoint of multiculturalism and multilingualism. The novel becomes the melting pot of different culture that proves the relevance of the multiculturalism. For this Sect Gondola claims:

The biography leads us from Heroine's childhood to adulthood, and with that we witness the horrors experienced by women through her words, and the terror develops as we realized that despite being in the royal family, even Princess are mistreated, so think about the regular female. We get a real insight of what the Sophie saw, and this book does teach you a great deal. There isn't really a plot? As such for the novel, for it is a biography, so of course it just records her life. But her experiences are extraordinary for the western readers that this book was aimed at. It is difficult to say much about the biography itself and pick out examples of her experiences because these should be left to be discovered, by the reader. However the biography covers aspects of her childhood, her family life, her married life, and all the other important periods of woman's life. With each case emphasizing the horrific sense of Male Dominance in the East. (75)

Thus, the amalgamation of different cultures and languages in the novel provides the polyphony and heteroglossa, which is one of the qualities of Desai's novels. As the novel is also rich in its technical aspects, different critics have analyzed it from the viewpoint of structural aspects.

The sole culture and day to day life style of the easterners and westerners is plainly presented in the novel. How the personal works like that of bathing and eating is carried out in different places of the world is very clearly and simply surfaced in the novel through the

perspective of Sophia. Along with this, different critics have analyzed the novel from other perspective too. They have closely seen the narrative structure, the style of story presentation and locations used in the novel relating to the major theme of the novel. A critic named Philip Jameson finds the following features of the novel:

The complex narrative structure, with layers of flashback, quantum shifts of location, and recurrent imagery make this a book that repays re-reading. More importantly, Desai's exploration of the universal yearning for meaning in life is carried out with an intelligence, generosity and a total lack of pretension that make her book exceptional.(91)

Jameson believes that the richness of the novel is added not only by its theme but also by the complex narrative structure, layers of flashback along with quantum shifts of location and heavy and suitable use of imagery. The quest of meaning of life is paralleled and supported by the technical part of the book. Novel seems technically sophisticated and structurally maintains the unity of the plot in the novel.

Likewise, the novel has also been interpreted from the viewpoint of modernity. Lakshmikant Troy finds the elements of modernity on the basis of the monolithic notion of modernity became problematic by the end of the two world wars and with the advent of post colonialism, postmodernism and post structuralism. She is focusing in the unique Indian variety of modernity characterized by the diversity of its mosaic culture. Troy believes that modernity is remedy even of poverty and impoverishment. He puts:

The concept of modernity had to be revised as colonial imperialism gave way to globalization. With the increase in the number of free nations, pluralism was introduced into modernity. Amidst the multiple, global, indigenous and alternative

modernity, India developed a unique variety of modernity characterized by the diversity of its mosaic culture. It is the essence of Indian spirituality which enables even the most deprived to endure poverty and it is the modernity which provides the prospect of improvement. Anita Desai, in her ninth novel *Journey to Ithaca*, presents an effective mixture of the Indian modernity, as diversified as the Indian culture itself. (1)

In this way, above mentioned critics have given multiple views to the novel, but issue of spiritual studies has been yet abandoned, the gap, which is fulfilled by the research. The concept of western modernity is often considered synonymous with eurocentricism, a term evolved during the decolonization period of the early twentieth century. The progressively mechanized character of the European culture was contrasted with the traditional hunting, farming and herding societies in Africa, Asia, Australia, America Australia, America and other Pacific, which were being newly conquered and colonized by the Europeans. The history of Europe, as a result, was presented as a universal paradigm to be followed by the rest of the world. Other cultures were identified as having reached a stage through which Europe itself had already passed. Only Europe was supposed to have achieved the last stage of the development- the modern liberal Capitalism.

Spirituality is *not* religion and is not even necessarily affiliated with religion. While the definition of spirituality is different for everyone, here are some common themes associated with spirituality. This is a process or journey of self-discovery and of learning not only who we are, but who we want to be. In order to get involved in this process we should make our mind open, question current beliefs along with much endeavor for better understanding of other's beliefs.

Journey to Ithaca lays its emphasis on the search rather than the destination. It is the journey or means that matters, not the end; for the end itself could be different from what we had expected. The attainment of self at the end of the tunnel might be a serendipitous discovery; yet all knowledge, all exposure and experience are meant for the improvement of the self. India in the novel is seen through the eyes of the three foreigners—Matteo of Italy, Sophie of Germany and Laila of Egypt. Themselves never having been a part of the Indian culture, they have their personal prejudices and perspectives regarding India. They have come with the preconceived notions as to where to look for and what to see, which means they don't see what they don't want to see. The foreign pilgrims would like to view India as an ancient land of sages and beggars, as a fit Other to their own homeland, namely, Europe. Oriented towards viewing the Orient as the Other prevents them from seeing it differently. With their partial vision, they see only the traditional aspects of the Indian culture, while Desai has laid bare the aspects of Indian modernity before the discerning eyes of the Indian reader. Anita Desai presents two time spans in the novel—the twenties and the seventies of the twentieth century—to mark the arrival of Laila (the Mother) and that of Matteo and Sophie respectively. The pilgrimage of Matteo and Sophie form the real time of the novel, while that of Laila is reconstructed through Sophie's research, and therefore, further removed from the novel's time.

According to Waaijman, one of the famous 20th century critics of spiritualism, the traditional meaning of spirituality is:

A process of reformation which aims to recover the original shape of man, the image of God. To accomplish this, the re-formation is oriented at a mold, which represents the original shape: in Judaism the Torah, in Christianity Christ, in Buddhism Buddha, in the Islam Muhammad. In modern times spirituality has

come to mean the internal experience of the individual. It still denotes a process of transformation, but in a context separate from organized religious institutions: spiritual but not religious. (87)

Waaijman points out that spirituality is only one term of a range of words which denote the praxis of spirituality. In the traditional sense spiritualism is identical to the image of God. But in modern times spirituality refers to the internal experience of the individual. In simple words it is the process of transformation from the world of illusion and hallucination to the world of real and organic.

This thesis is a library-based research; it uses a close, discursive analytical style which draws on the spirituality concepts and vocabularies. The research is based on the authentic cites. Guidance from the lectures and professors is taken as the supportive tool. In addition to it the texts draws upon the issue of mysticism as supporting tool in making the application of the stories from the viewpoint of spiritual studies.

Though *Journey to Ithaca* displays the spiritual leanings in one level, the present thesis being based on the works and actions of Sophie discloses the mystic and spiritual notions inherent in the novel. Sophie's mocking laugh over the eastern way of bathing and eating initially surface the hierarchal perspective of westerns. The sentiment of 'Othering' of non-west by west is rampant in the novel.

The novel opens with Matteo and Sophie, husband and wife respectively. Like all the other couples in Desai's novels, they are also not happy with their married life. But, here, the problem is not alone of temperamental incompatibility; rather it is something deeper than that. Matteo is an ascetic, a mystic and Sophie is a practical woman. It is the search of the Eternal Truth which makes Matteo alien to Sophie. They have two children but Matteo does not feel any

attachment to them. They live their grandparents in Italy. Matteo has been feeling the qualms of a disquiet soul since his childhood. He was a failure at school; in the studies and in games too. He was kept at home under the guidance of a tutor who had given him Herman Hesse's *The Journey to the East*. This book, alone revealed him meaning of the meaningless life. It whetted Matteo's quest for God. All the efforts of his parents, to involve Matteo in business proved futile. He set out for India after his marriage. From one temple to the other, from one guru to the other, till in the presence of the Mother, he realized the Supreme Bliss. Matteo is presented as ascetic, spiritual and uncaring in the novel whereas Sophie is presented as one of the practical women of the west.

The very beginning part of the novel states very uneven and thoughtful situation and action of Matteo. As Prologue states, "She was taken up the stairs to the upper floor and shown into the room where he lay on an iron cot, clothed only in pyjamas and the upper half of his body emaciated and moist with perspiration. Sophie thought he must be dying" (1). The very lines are the opening lines of the novel where the female protagonist Sophie's thought towards Matteo is disclosed regarding Matteo's internalization of eastern way of living. Dressing of Matteo to Sophie is very surprising who is accustomed with western way of living. Matteo and Sophie are in a pilgrimage to understand the eastern power and lifestyle. Matteo is presented as one who wants to understand the eastern strongly and spirituality fully but Sophie is presented inversely. She mocks the way easterners eat and speak not only that she even mocks the way easterners bath and change the wet dress.

In the very beginning of the novel Sophie is depicted as one of the frustrated woman to be there in India. She wants to return to her homeland very soon. She is faded way with the eastern Gurus, their *Darsan* and the livings at *ashram*. She even gets sick so many times and

taken to hospital frequently. Even in such condition, Matteo, leaving her at hospital bed, gets back to the *ashram*.

“When will we leave, Matteo? She asked sharply, out of a wish to interrupt more than anything else, and break into his privacy, his maddening privacy. Must we wait till the Mother’s death?” (37). The aforementioned words of Sophie show the frustration dipped in the heart. Each and every words and actions of India becomes nonsensical to Sophie that is why she frequently woos Matteo to get back to their homeland. “You are free to leave when you like, Sophie”(37).Matteo replies. The spiritual and mystical situation takes place in this conversation while Sophie states that “yes, I know, I’m free but I want to know are you free?” the answer to this question of Matteo to Sophie is very spiritual as he says “I am free Sophie, But I am waiting for a sign" (37). Matteo has firm belief that the world of India has mystical and spiritual power that rules each and every. The devoted soul can perceive such power. Those bliss of power and freedom can be enjoyed only by the one who can ignore this sensual world and can engage his soul and mind to something upperworld. In one of the preaching school, the following lines are evoked:

You only smile! Why? ... and you are smiling because you know that together we experience Bliss, experience Joy. We feel we are in the presence of the Master.

Yes? You feel his light coming to you like the light of the sun that has set over there but still sends out light. No longer hot, no longer blazing, but tender, loving, good. Yes? And in this light, we feel ourselves loved and we are filled with Bliss.

Yes? (110)

The very lines presented in the novel lights the importance of spiritual knowledge upon a person’s life. Smiling is not only the power of material world, bliss and joy. It can be achieved

only through alignment of soul with Guru. The light comes through guru is very different than the light of sun. It's never scorching and unbearable but it is tender, good and loving. That is the light that makes us feel ourselves loved and we feel as if we are filled with Bliss.

Actually, the title *Journey To Ithaca* refers to three journeys in the novel: Journey of Sophie, of Matteo and of the mother. Ithaca is the city where all the journeys end, it is the ultimate goal. To reach there, one has to cover a long path, full of joys and sorrows; providing invaluable gems of knowledge. What Ithaca itself promises? Nothing like riches, but it has already given one a beautiful journey. On reaching Ithaca, one can understand and value the precious possession of knowledge and experiences.

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Sophie marks a remarkable change in the perception of Desai's heroines. She is self-reliant, a journalist by profession, frank and believes in logical explanation of things. She is a big, strong woman, square-shouldered; she wore her hair cut short and her eyes were a level grey. Her marriage with Matteo took place in the summer of 1975 and since then they had been traveling. Matteo took her to India though Sophie had no interest in the spiritual ways of life. However, they joined the group of gypsies there and moved from place to place. Sophie found all the pining and yearnings of Matteo as useless and meaningless. She married him to be always together. But it was all different with Matteo. She could not tolerate Matteo's indifferent attitude towards her. In India, Matteo learnt Sanskrit and read *Katha Upanishad*, *Vedas* and became more eager to meet the almighty. Sophie accompanied Matteo on his travels unwillingly.

Sophie could not bear separation from Matteo. After giving birth to two children, she leaves Matteo and moves to Italy, but there, she realizes that she cannot live without him. She was consumed by restlessness. She tries to be busy in shopping and roaming about but "she knew she must fill the huge emptiness of Matteo's absence and this required some effort on her part (8). when a young man Paolo showed great interest in India and questioned Sophie about India and yogis, he also offered Sophie to accompany him to India and give a surprise to Matteo. She spat at him, "You? You are not fit to even enter his presence. He-he is a god" (9). She became a total introvert. But when she received the news of Matteo's illness she packed her bag and left with "such speed it seemed nothing mattered to her but to be with him" (32). She loved Matteo intensely and passionately, but Matteo's coldness stabbed her love-lorn heart. It was Sophie's love for Matteo and his carelessness, which had made her violent.

Spirituality is connectedness to us and to others. It is personal but also rooted in being connected with others and with the world around us. This connectedness can facilitate us finding

our place in the world. Spiritualism has got severe criticism regarding its unique nature of individuality. So many people blamed that spirituality is the game of scape from the social responsibility but spiritual lining clears it proving that it is a transcendental practice. Superficially it seems to be personal but in reality it is connected to the world and its emancipation.

Role of Lila is not also minor to realize the importance of spirituality in the novel. Nobody understood Laila and she became solitary. But what she learnt there made her understand the language of the wild beasts. Once she exercised her influence on Black Panther who seemed to understand Laila's movement and responded in a friendly way. Loitering on the streets, in the markets, she came across the bookshop of Madame Lacan. Her entry in this bookshop opened for her vistas of knowledge about Oriental countries. There were books of travel, art, philosophy and religion. Laila, thirstily, slid a great heavy volume of the shelf, the *AttreyaBrahmanan* of the '*Rig Veda*' and read:

There is no happiness for him who does not travel, Rohita! Thus, we have heard. Living in the society of man the best man becomes a sinner...Therefore, wander! The feet of the wanderer are like the flowers, His soul is growing and reaping thee fruit; And all his sins are destroyed by his fatigue in wandering. Therefore, wander!(24)

This discourse made clear to her, the value of adventures and journey in life. She became more interested in her mission. She became a regular visitor to Madame Lacan's shop and kept on borrowing books, reading them and then returned them. Excess of reading and lack of sleep began to tell her upon health. But Laila was a girl of steel. The books made her destination more clearly in her mind. She could pursue her dreams at the cost of her health. She became vegetarian

and accused the others in house as butchers who were eating meat. Now, Laila had equipped herself with the knowledge of the Eastern Gods and Goddesses. Her obsession with dance and her desire to speak through dance was fructified, when she looked at the poster of Krishan Lila in the same shop. She observed all the details carefully: one God, indigo blue, the other pale gold, both of them standing beneath the flowering trees, bare-footed, with anklets of rings of bells and looking at each other with elongated eyes of desire. Laila was dumb-found. She read the title: *Krishan Lila* and split in into two parts: Krishan Lila and then: Lila. Laila. Laila. Lila. Her heart danced at the thought of such approximation.

Most of the time spirituality floats beyond religion. It draws the line transcending the limits of customs and ghetto of religion. Spirituality pushes one towards the realm of limitlessness. It is not a temple, mosque or vihara. As the thrust of spirituality, here in the novel the woman in preaching states, "Religion makes one ashamed, makes one guilty, makes one fearful. The master has told you not to feel guilty, not to feel ashamed, not to fear and not to be afraid. Open your hearts to love and light and the joy of living, he said, and so we turn our backs to religion" (110). These lines in the novel prove the relevancy of spiritualism in the book. As it is already mentioned that religion and spirituality have distinct direction to perceive the world view. Spirituality blames religion for making one ashamed, fearful and guilty. As it claims, spirituality makes one free for opening their hearts for love and lighting the joy of living: "this effort, this endeavour, this exercise, it is sadhna! if the artist performs this exercise, it is artistic. if the farmer performs it, it is agricultural. if the devout practise it, it is spiritual and it all leads to Achievement" (116). In eastern environment everything needs effort. this effort is no other than sadhna. no people can be away from sadhna. it encircles each and every. The very effort mingles body and soul. The practice should be observed everywhere. there is no boundry where the

sadhna should be done. It can be practice even being a student, teacher, businessmen, farmer or ascetics.

The imagery of Bee in the novel is also important in order to present the spiritual dimension of the novel. Diya clarifies the role and importance of whole creatures in the universe through the presentation of bee and their actions. Diya, held up a card with a picture of a bee and calls out:

'Bee-ee!' Then she asked, 'What does the bee make?' and the children called back 'Hunn-ee!' And where do the bees live?' 'Ha-eev!' Then she beamed and raised her voice to call, 'We too are bees! We live in a hive! We make honey out of nectar! And what is nectar?' Then they threw their arms up in the air and yelled, 'Love-ee!' (139)

The aforementioned lines spoken by Diya at the mid of the novel also indicates the spiritual inclination forbidding the western thought. The symbolism of bee, its work and living style with rhyming scheme of 'ee' demonstrates the correlation of Sophie's living at eastern culture. At beginning Sophie was completely out of track with the view of his spiritual husband Matteo but at the course of time she comes in line with Matteo and his thought.

Sophie's last conversation with Matteo in hospital began quietly when chapter three begins. heMatteo was reading the small, badly written and cheaply printed booklet on the Mother that he had bought so long ago. where he says, 'I have ben reading again the life of the Mother.' in these words Matteo seems to be eager to find Mother in her life. so Sophie questions 'Why? What do you think you will find in her life?' (179). Matteo is pretty sure tto find her in detail. He wants to go behind her superficial life to find out who she really is, how she came there and why. In this conversation also Mateo is found to spiritual and heartily devoted towards eastern culture.

He is sure that spiritual guidance can lead one to the destination. Understanding life is possible only through mystic believe.

The backgrounds of the novel are set in Italy, Egypt and India. The novel opens at a hospital in India with the Matteo- and Sophie. Sophie comes to see serious Matteo and wants to take him back to Italy but Matteo does not want to go back leaving his spiritual Guru, the Mother. The couple Sophie and Matteo has two children –Giacomo and Isabel who live in the loving custody of their grandparents in Italy:

The more happily the children settled into the life of their grandparent's home the more safe and secure and contented they became, the more she felt able to relax her fierce hold on them. It was as if the lioness who had guarded them so passionately earlier had now delivered them into a safe haven so that that zealous protectiveness dwindled. (174)

The plot of the novel is based on Sri Aurobindo's vision about 'the Mother' and is divided into six parts including the prologue and the epilogue, besides four other chapters. Journey to Ithaca is not only a portrayal of the spiritual philosophy of East and materialistic philosophy of West, but also it shows the cultural conflict between East and West through a European couple Matteo and Sophie. GauriShakarJha writes:

The plan behind Anita Desai's writing is to expose the interior self, its feeling, its experience and its responses; here, political and social realities relegate to the back seat; consequently, her characters become introvert, speak less and react more, and find themselves trapped. (86)

Chapter one tells us that Sophie comes to India to see sick Matteo and wants to take him back to Italy but Matteo as a devoted disciple and a strict follower of Mother does not want to go back

leaving Mother in her last days of life. She says “If the Mother is ill, it seems the devotees must fall ill too. Is she some pharaoh to take you all to the tomb with her” (3). But Matteo does not want to go back under any circumstance. Sophie, while running her fingers through Matteo’s hair to soothe him, tells him: “When you are well, Matteo, we will leave”,(4) but Matteo replies even in his intense weakness, “ You will leave Sophie ... but not I”(5). Sophie feels unhappy, neglected and displaced after marriage. She wants to live with her husband and children. She asks, “Why can we not be together again, at home with the children?”(5). She nurses the sick Matteo and says, “All you wanted was the Mother, you told me that. You said you needed the Mother- not me, not the children” (4).

Chapter two is about Matteo and Mother’s relationship and Sophie’s displacement. Chapter three is about Sophie’s discovery of truth about the Mother. Chapter four tells us how Laila is transformed into Leila and then the Mother. Epilogue is the final portion of the novel. It closes with the death of Mother and Matteo’s journey to Himalaya for enlightenment. The novel shows transformation of the Mother from Laila to Leila a Krishana devotee and then from Leila to the Mother spiritual Guru. The Mother as a young woman travels around the world i.e. Paris, Venice and NewYork in search of peace and perfection but ultimately finds her moment of transcendence in India.

Mother born in Egypt, at her young age was known as dancer Laila. Leila learns to dance in Bombay to achieve Supreme bliss. When Sophie learns about the past of the Mother from an old man called as Krishna she finds that Mother learns Indian dance from him at Krishna School of Dance in Bombay who reveals:

I trained her. She was a child; she came to me for training. I taught her Indian dance. She had never seen Indian dance before...I was like a father to her. I took

her everywhere—to Paris, Venice, New York-everywhere. But her in India...Here she began running after gurus. She said dancing was not for her, she wanted to live a spiritual life. (318)

The abovementioned lines of Krishna regarding the dance of Laila is very special in the novel. He claims himself as the godfather of Laila to train her dance. She visited Paris, Venice, New York and everywhere because of her dance which is taught by him. But when they are in India, he feels like being disrespected by Laila while she runs after some Gurus in the name of spiritual life. Laila stands before the Master like a statue and replies to his question that she was Lila, his devotee. Master regards her as:

Thou art Shakti, he pronounced, Supreme Power. Thou art Durga, Mother of us all. Thou art Kali, The Divine Force, And Parvati, Sweet Goddess of the Mountain. And all at once The Heavens burst into light and music. Of joyous celebration. The stars sang their jubilee. The Moon its blessing gave. Fresh Himalayan winds blew From the Abode of Snow. The Master stepped forth and placing on my shoulders A shawl of ochre silk, Maiden, said He, Come follow me, And henceforth my home Thy Haven shall be. (340-41)

The novel proves that description of spiritual experience is not bound in religion rather it is beyond religious practices and traditions of the world; it is only about attaining divine power. Mother says, “. . . Religion makes one ashamed, makes one guilty, makes one fearful . . . This is no church, my friends, this is no temple or mosque or Vihara. We have no religion”(110). The Mother says about religion symbolically relating it with crow, “Religion? Like the black crows up in the tree, caw –caw-caw, scolding, scolding! But do they crow at us now? No , they are

silent! We have silenced them! They know we do not listen to the black scolding voices of religion here” (92).

Journey to Ithaca encapsulates the process of self realization and spiritual bliss through Indian spiritual philosophy to attain peace, tranquility, divine love and meditation which comes from being totally connected with self or soul, body, and a higher power. It is a high experience of life, rich with the subtleties that open one up to a quality of life unmatched by the trappings of the material or linear world.

The conversation between Laila and Fatimah also presents the value of culture and its belief. while they were ready to have lunch at cafe Fatimah wants to join Laila. Fatimah is Egyptian whereas Laila did not like to confess her mother's French origin. Laila was reading French over there. Fatimah is so good at it but for Laila it is very hard.

Why are you learning French?' Laila turned the question on her and Fatimah fumbled, dropped her eyes and looked sullen. 'You know, my parents want me to. They think if I learn French, I will get a good husband. Good husband! They mean a rich man, a smart man,' she cried indignantly. 'I will never marry that kind of man. I will marry a good Muslim.' (191)

Cultural difference and its importance is crystal clear in conversation between Laila and Fatimah. Desai's portrayal of Matteo and Laila strike home particularly hard because their search for the Supreme is laced with a lot of pain, doubt and conflict. The author is brilliant when she deals with strong emotions such as these. You can feel it sometimes like a body blow, when Matteo lies on the cold hard ground in wait and Laila weeps in agony to be united with her divine lover.

Sophie's bewilderment draws sympathy too, but not as much. The characters are stark and the plot sublime. From the description of value of French to the rejoicing of Muslim

husband, it proves the value of cultural identification that is prevailed in eastern culture. "Sophie glances up the spiral staircase to see if she can glimpse the little girl in the bright yellow dress in the gloom. Hanging over the anister, at the very top, she sees the face gazing at her, it pretty mouth pouting and long hair falling forwards" (201). Little girl in a bright yellow dress is the pure symbol of transformation of life from one way to another. The very pure source of life is always identical to Sophie times and again she is against the way eastern people are; the way they walk, eat, dance and even live in a society. But escape of time has made her believe in the way people are accustomed with. Krishna asks Laila to worship him and tells her that he is the Lord. "He held the peacock crown upon his head and laughed at me. That is to me a travesty and a mockery. His dancer's paint and costume is a mask behind which is an evil joker who mocks me (27). Laila becomes sicker. She suffers from migraine and acute pain in stomach. She is taken to hospital, where she finds a friend in the nurse, Mary. Mary thinks that Laila's agonies could be quenched with the name of Jesus. She presents a crucifix to Laila. Laila threw it on the ground, calling it an image of sin and suffering. She wanted truth and beauty. She declared herself as the daughter of beauty and joy. When Laila was taken home to Krishna, she was more defiant. She would scream if anyone came near to her. Krishna expressed his anger by tearing at his hair and shouting because his business was suffering. But Laila told him " I did not know it was your career we came to make in India. I thought we came here to find the eternal truth. You told me it existed only in India and that we would together search for it and find it" (28).

Laila dared, defied and doomed the fake dancer. Destiny provided her with another chance to meet her master. One of the dancers, Vijaya, booked her seat on a pilgrimage that her family was undertaking towards the Himalayas. Laila thought and believed that this was her last effort to reach her master. She was exhausted and could go no more in his search. The long

journey by rail, the prophetic words, the image of India, and her own visions combined to make her weep. Her life has been a journey, in quest of the master and she has continued her journey, by following signs, thrown on her way by the Lord. Even then, the wait was killing. She could not tolerate one more moment of separation. She encountered her first vision, on her way, in the banyan tree. The tree with its growing branches, long branches, touching the earth and taken root and spouted into yet other trees-she witnessed there 'Tree of Eternity'. "Sophie her head tilted back and her legs stretched out before her,drins in the liquid colours of the scence as if she were drinking sweet, syrupy sherbets. she feels within her a suffusing warmth. It is enough to call one first into a dream, and then slept" (245). The aforementioned lines show the Sophie's fluctuating mindset. She is of the view that even the liquor started to work as sweet syrupy sherbets. She got herself energetic and freshed. These all thinking and activities of Sophie discloses the slow changing mindset and effect of eastern culture upon her.

Sophie is lying as still as a stone, with an arm across her eyes, thinking in the dark of taht first pilgrimage she went on in India that had ended in the death of a child. Now she knows why the mother went to that pilgrimage, why anyone goes on apilgrimage, and why she must go too. she says in a flat voice, 'I'll have to,' and adds, 'what else?' (348)

In reality spirituality has no any religion or religious belief. Spiritualism gives mental peace and helps to keep one away from mental and physical retardation. At first Sophie is firm against the life pattern of Matteo and his way of life. She shuns everything that is eastern. She was blind having her physical eyes intact. But at the span of time, she changs herself slowly and gradually. She trained herself in the easter way of life. The ritual bathing, once she used to mock, has becoe her daily prayer. In this regard, through the transformation of Sophie, the novel clearly advocates

for the achievement of spiritualism that can simply change the way of life of people they are living.

Desai's exquisite, exotic 10th novel follows well-to-do European newlyweds who, in 1975, embark on a spiritual search in India. The husband, an Italian named Matteo, joins an ashram and becomes a fervent devotee of an aged, solitary guru known as "the Mother." But to his skeptical German wife, Sophie, the Mother is not a fount of Eastern wisdom but a "monster spider" who catches "silly flies" like the deluded Matteo. After giving birth to a son and a daughter, both of whom she raises in the ashram, Sophie flees with her children to her in-laws' Italian villa. Vowing to unmask the Mother's true identity, she then sets off to Alexandria. There, through flashbacks, we meet Laila, a free-spirited teenager, half-Egyptian, half-French, who moves to Paris, rebels against her bourgeois aunt and joins an Indian dance troupe. Falling in love with Krishna, the troupe's charismatic, aloof leader, Laila tours Venice and 1920s New York before moving with him to India, where she later renounces dance for enlightenment and transforms herself into the Mother. The story closes with excerpts from Laila's India diary and with Sophie's confrontation with the wizened, aged Krishna, whom she tracks down in Bombay. Desai (Baumgartner's Bombay) magically evokes the collision and melding of cultures and ideas as she maps the hazards and rewards of spiritual quest.

Journey to Ithaca is a fine presentation of spiritual experience of Anita Desai. Anita Desai is a distinguished persona in Indian English novels world who with her spiritual experience reveals that she is gifted with an extraordinary vision of life as she uses fiction as a medium to show the world that India is the name of the natural experience of self-realization, divine love and a profound awakening of the spirit. In the words of R.K. Shrivastava:

Among the Indian novelists experimenting consciously with the English language,

Anita Desai has a unique place. While the efforts of Mulk Raj Anand and Bhabani Bhattacharya have been towards making English close to Indian languages, to make it more adaptable to Indian needs, Anita Desai has raised it to lyrical heights, showing as it were, that Indians are capable of writing in a language which can compare well with the best in the English speaking countries. (42)

The theme of the novel revolves around the Mother and the couple- Matteo and Sophie. The couple soon after their love marriage join the 1970s flight of young Europeans to India. Matteo is an Italian, raised in the luscious countryside around Lake Como, restless since childhood for knowing the spiritual truth and getting divine bliss. He has been introduced by a tutor to Hermann Hesse's a book named as *The Journey to the East* which inspired him to go East and a desperate longing for India. On the contrary, Sophie is German, practical and worldly - is willing to follow him to the ends of the earth. In India, together they visit swamis, gurus, ashrams - always searching. Matteo is seeking spiritual enlightenment, but for Sophie fulfillment lies in earthly love.

With just the right blend of empathy and intelligence, Desai explores the West's long fascination with Indian spirituality via the story of a European couple who, like so many in the '70s, sought enlightenment in the subcontinent. When Sophie visits her ailing husband, Matteo, in an Indian hospital and begs him to return to Italy to be with her and their two children, Matteo refuses. "You will leave, Sophie, but not I," he tells her. By this time they've been in India for several years, it's the mid-80s, and Sophie now understands that their children no longer matter to him: "They were what we had left behind." Desai's narrative moves from continent to continent and back and forth in time, following the couple up to this impasse and beyond. In many ways, the story is also a brief, for Desai is assembling a case for understanding why people

like Matteo, a child of European privilege and the 1960s, chose to go on pilgrimage, to "journey to Ithaca." His unhappy childhood, and his own children's unease with their conventional grandparents, suggest some reasons for his desperate search for spiritual peace. Skeptical Sophie, on the other hand, goes to India simply because she loves her husband and thinks "the possibilities...endless and fascinating." After a few years, however, the squalor they live in, the drug-crazed hippies they meet, the charlatans they're gulled by along with Matteo's increasing estrangement from her, and his ever-greater attachment to "Mother," a charismatic guru all send Sophie on a journey of her own. Determined to prove the Mother a fraud, she travels to Egypt, Europe, and the US, returning to India only to find the truth more troubling and complex than she imagined. Still, Sophie must keep traveling: the Mother is now dead, and Matteo has disappeared. A splendidly nuanced evocation, never credulous or dismissive of those impelled to go on pilgrimage: *Pilgrim's Progress* updated and uprooted, but still as compelling.

In some cases mystical experience is seen as an important component of a religious tradition because it can offer validation of a tradition's belief system. It also can be important in attracting adherents because many people hope to have similar experiences. However, because the mystical experience is so powerful and has the capacity to provide moral, ethical, intellectual, and emotional direction, it is frequently mistrusted. Experiences which have other characteristics of Mystical Experiences but do not have this feature are said to bear a 'Family Resemblance' to Mystical Experiences but are not Mystical Experiences proper.

In this way, Desai sets her novel in full spiritual paradigm. The complete devotion of Matteo to the spiritual world in search of spiritual piousness is the prime representation of novel towards spiritualism. Not only that, Sophie, who was presented as practical woman of west at

first has got complete turnover in her actions and thinking pattern. Spiritual leaning of Sophie at the end of the novel also proves the relevance of spiritual reading of the novel *Journey of Ithaca*.

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