

## ANITA DESAI

Born June 24 1937

### Biography

Anita Desai was born in the hill station of Mussoorie, Uttar Pradesh, India. Her father, a Bengali engineer, and her mother, a German teacher, met while the father was in Germany. The couple then moved to India in the 1920s. Anita Desai was educated in English-medium schools in New Delhi and later gained her BA in English Literature at Delhi University in 1957. That was also the year that she published her first short story. After working in Calcutta for a short time, she met and married Ashvin Desai, a businessman, and they had four children. She continued to write while raising her children and published her first novels in the early 1960s. The family moved a lot, due to her husband's position, spending time in Bombay, Poona, Chandigarh and Delhi. She also spent some time in England and Europe, which provided the background for her third novel (*Bye-bye Blackbird*). In 1980, she published her finest work, *Clear Light of Day*, which explores dynamics of family life and childhood during the turbulent times of the Partition (1947) and later. After the international success of this book, which was shortlisted for the Booker Prize, she began to take up teaching and research positions in England and the United States. Since 1993, she has been Professor of Writing at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston. She was thrice shortlisted for the Booker Prize but never won, although her daughter (Kiran Desai) did win that prize for her novel *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006). In addition to her many novels and several collections of short stories, she wrote literary criticism and essays for most of the world's leading literary periodicals.

### Achievements

In 1978, Anita Desai won the Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize for her novel, *Fire on the Mountain*. The same book also won the Sahitya Akademi Prize (India's Academy of Literature Award) in the same year. *Clear Light of Day* (1980) was shortlisted for the Booker, as was *In Custody* (1984) and *Fasting, Feasting* (1999). In 1983, her novel, *Village by the Sea*, won the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize. In 1993, she won the Neil Gunn Prize. She was awarded a Benson Medal from the Royal Society of Literature (London) in 2003 and received a Padma Bushan award for literature from the government of India in 2014.

### List of works

#### Novels

*The Zigzag Way* (2004)  
*Fasting, Feasting* (1999)  
*Journey to Ithaca* (1995)  
*Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988)  
*In Custody* (1984)  
*The Village by the Sea* (1982)  
*Clear Light of Day* (1980)  
*Fire on the Mountain* (1977)  
*Cat on a Houseboat* (1976)  
*Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975)  
*The Peacock Garden* (1974)  
*Bye-bye Blackbird* (1971)  
*Voices in the City* (1965)  
*Cry, The Peacock* (1963)

#### Short story collections

*Anita Desai: The Complete Short Stories* (2017)  
*The Artist of Disappearance* (2011) [novellas]

*Diamond Dust and Other Stories* (2000)  
*Games at Twilight* (1978)

