



Depiction of Female Psychology in Selected Novels of Anita Desai

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Abstract

The facts about Indian women that they are comparatively disempowered by men society and get less importance than men. Although many steps and efforts have been initiated by the government but there are no changes in the society. This gender inequality exists because of un-education and unemployment. The power of taking decision for household and liberty of women for going anywhere depends upon their age, their educational qualification and service position. It differs from person to person on the above based facts. This paper shows the efforts made by great Indian writer Anita Desai in the field of women psychology. She wrote many novels to make awareness in the society regarding gender discrimination and inequalities. Few of her major works such as *Cry*, *The Peacock*, *Voices in the City* and *Where shall we go this summer?* are discussed in this paper.

Keywords: women, gender inequality, society, psychology



1. Introduction

It has been seen and experienced that the women status in India has been changed from the past few years. In the past the women growth was very low as the powerful society doesn't want to uplift the women in any level. At every level of the society women are criticized in India, besides the participation in social, economical, or political and gender inequality also exists in the country. But in recent times many Indian reformers had raised their voice in against of gender inequality and women exploitation. At the present situation of the country, women had received high importance and position in a country like India. The posts and power include of president, prime minister, Lok Sabha speaker and also opposition party leader. Women have also achieved a great experience in many fields of occupations like teaching, academics, media, defence and many other fields.



When the light is thrown at any English Literature of India, several writers and authors have contributed in depicting the condition and mental state of female characters through their novels and stories. Anita Desai is one of the writers who had clearly depicted the importance of women and to authorize the position and power of women in India. Harsh and pitiful condition of women is beautifully shown in her novels. The female characters of Anita Desai liberate the vision of life. Desai has often perceived as an experimenter who deals with several issues and intolerance done to the women. She has always focussed on the psychic depth of the female characters in her stories.

2. Anita Desai

About Author-

Anita Desai, is an Indian novelist, born as Anita Majumdar on June 24, 1937. She was born in Mussorie. She learned English from her school which further became her favourite language and she just started writing when she was only seven years and her first published work was when she was nine years. She had completed her B.A. from English Literature from Miranda House from Delhi University in 1957. Anita Desai was shortlisted three times for Booker Prize. Anita Desai got an award of Sahitya Academy for *Fire on the Mountain* novel in 1978 from the Sahitya Academy which is India's national Academy for letters. The novels of Anita Desai are basically female oriented. Anita Desai depicts the Indian women as a fighter, a victim, a heroine and in later novels ultimately a winner because of her indomitable spirit and attitude of compromise. She has portrayed both kinds of women – those who are symbols of growth and change, those who are powerful means of withdrawal, regression, decay, death and destruction.

Anita Desai is a dedicated observer of the society for the position of women and the way they are treated. The novels of Anita Desai throw light on the inner feelings of women which are bounded by the societies low class thinking. The novels discuss at the family problems which are being faced by them. The main focuses of her novels are also on the life of middle class family.

She had written thirteen novels in different forms which are based on the emotional and mental argument, division and separation and their struggle for cultural identity. *Cry the peacock*, *Voices in the city*, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, *Where shall we go this Summer?*, *Fire on the mountain*, *In*



custody, Baumgartner's Bombay, Clear Light on the day, Fasting Feasting had been analyzed psychologically.

2.1. Women psyche in novels of Anita Desai

As mentioned earlier that Anita Desai had started writing at a very early age. She wrote her first novel in the year 1963 "*Cry, The Peacock*". According to Desai, *Cry, The Peacock* is replete with the imagery of fear and loneliness describing a feminine psyche on the verge of madness speaks of a father-daughter relationship. The novel can also be seen as spectrum of presentation of the ways of dealing with the binary opposition of male versus women as object. The loneliness and insanity in Maya are suggested through several images taken from nature – the wind, the dust storm, the snake, and the desert. The vision of desert makes Maya conscious of her loneliness along with the rats, the lizards and the snake. As storm approaches Maya turns restless. The description of the cloud is lively and metaphorical. While the storm reveals the violent and malignant aspect of nature and its impact on the spirit of the protagonist corresponding to a similar storm inside her shattering the balance of her mind, the cry of the peacocks has an element of pathos in it which sharpens Maya's sense of separation, alienation and death.

Maya is a rebel woman who fails to identify herself with her husband Gautama's world and finds herself alienated from the affection she got from her father and besides her total economic dependence on her husband makes her feel rather insecure and powerless. There are other traits in Maya's character which transcends the idea of strong womanhood. She is in search of new vista for a women's world, a space in which she is at par with man. The dance of the peacock's who destroy each other in spite of being madly in love.

Her work reveals another dimension she had added to her fiction-the importance to women- a neglected class of society. Maya represents the disturbed psyche of modern Indian woman. She tries to strike a balance between instinctual needs and intellectual aspirations. Deeply exhausted by this crucial act, she is further bewildered when the existential absurdity of life is brought before her. There is no doubt she kills her husband due to her obsessive love of life. The act of murder is revolt against callous materialistic social order. Maya believes that she is not fit to live in this world based on male- centred wisdom, reason and order. She doesn't like the civilization



based on logic and normality. She wants to be free from the chains of slavery based on customs and established norms of the society. As a symbol not only of growth, life and fertility, but of withdrawal, regression, decay and death, she is powerful figure indeed as a protester against social and sexual inequalities and discrimination.

The novel *Voices in the City*, Desai has touched upon the essential questions of being through the delineation of psychological strains of individual behaviour. Monisha, Amla, Nirode, are the main characters woven to exhibit the compelling urge for a way of living which would respond to the innermost yearnings of women for freedom and self-dignity. Monisha is in many ways quite like Maya. After leading a stifling life in crowded Calcutta she hoped for a free life in Kalimpong and Darjeeling. Anita Desai probes deeper into the psyche of Monisha. Monisha feels herself emotionally drained. And finally the perpetuations of the behavioural symbols of male dominance are ultimately responsible for Monisha's death. On the other side, Desai also portrayed the character of Amla, as critical scrutiny and a strong female character. Amla is a foil to Monisha. As a modern woman, Amla has freedom of choice, and with choice comes the anxiety and stress of role conflict in deciding which direction her life will take. She is a sprightly young woman who keenly sees forward to her life and career in the big city. Though employed outside the home with career opportunities open to her, Amla hears Monisha's warning against marriage to 'go in the opposite direction', meaning not to follow the 'path that she, Monisha, had taken'. But regardless of the new experiences of her job and friends, "this sense of hollowness and futility persisted" (VC) and the atmosphere of under lit reality, of incomplete life, began to overtake Amla again. The message of Monisha's death is understood by Amla, she realizes that her sister had 'pointed the way for her.'

Both the sisters Monisha and Amla seek solace, love, and dignity in a rigid, codified society and both are disillusioned in the end. As a result Monisha commits suicide as she finally accepts the fact that the parameters of the choice for a woman are almost always predetermined while Amla realises the stark truth that the world outside and the transient love of Dharma is like a mirage and no escape into permanent happiness. This novel is significant as all the major and peripheral characters refuse to treat women in their own right and, compelled by the traditional mindset to treat women basically as secondary beings.



In her another novel “*Where shall we go this summer?*” Desai portrays the tragic intensity of her women characters with a psychological perspective. Sita in this novel, moves beyond the ‘interior space’ to the ‘exterior adjunct’, but to retreat back to the ‘interior space’ once again. Sita swallows her semiotic urges to determine her subjectivity through her compromise. The daughter’s obsession with her father is again traced in the story.

Sita, the protagonist of this novel like the legendary Sita, had spent many crucial years of her life on the island of her childhood, Manori. The modern Rama, unlike the legendary Rama does not understand his wife. The marital discord of the modern Rama and Sita is ironically referred with that of the idealized relationship that existed between the legendary Rama and Sita even though the similarity in names and situations is clearly seen as accidental. Sita feels herself to a prisoner in a house which offers her nothing but a crust of dull tedium and of hopeless disappointment. Living with her rational husband, she finds her surroundings too unpleasant and cruel to cope with. Her reactions like smoking, abusing her children for trifles and getting extremely angry when the servants talk in the kitchen shows her hypersensitivity, Desai shows the inner feelings depicting Sita’s behaviour. Being distressed, Sita grows a defiant behaviour to rebel against her family and in desperation decides to leave the house when her husband, Raman asks the innocuous question *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* She insists on fleeing from the mainland to the island of her childhood, Manori, where she feels she will find the same magic as she had found in her childhood. She soon realizes that the island does not bring solution to her problems and gives the feeling of being alienated. Hence she decides to return home facing the reality. Sita is bold enough, first to protest against her circumstances, and then taking the blame on herself for being a coward and not facing reality. Sita’s return to Manori is the outcome of her desire to indulge in fantasy or illusion rather than face the reality. She thus makes an attempt to shut down emotionally and isolate herself from her daily activities as a homemaker. She takes an illusion as protective umbrella and as the only alternative force to hide her incapacity to adjust herself to the existed norms of society that she belongs. Desai here embodies the common yearning of womanhood for an individual identity and a passionate longing for the fullest life



3. Conclusions

Anita Desai is a well known writer for her famous novels which are based on women psychology, where she discusses about the gender inequality and discrimination with women from the male dominated society. We can come at the conclusion that in her writing there is a strong depiction of brutal conditions of women, she tries to focus to bring the attention of the world towards gender inequality. She has also focussed on the psychological adaptations of women in harsh and difficult conditions. In her novels, it is clearly shown that man and woman need each other's company both in the emotional and mental situation. Although Anita Desai is feminist but not anti-male.

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