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POSTMODERNIST CONCERNS IN ANITA DESAI'S NOVELS

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Abstract

This writing is an attempt to examine the term postmodernism and the major characteristics of postmodern Indian English fiction and the different map makers in India who paved the way of forming a conceptual background of postmodernism, being a many faceted formation and particularly about Anita Desai's fiction "The Artist of Disappearance". Love, sex and marriage or its failure become the leading themes of postmodern Indian English novels post 1980. Post modernists question any form of rationality of life and relationship. They argue the traditional interpretations of humanity and morality. As regards relationship the post modernists believe that the operations of power relations have been manipulated to establish male dominance and for the subordination of female in society.

The writings of Anita Desai are undoubtedly influenced by the postmodern consumer culture that we inhabit. Her fictional world is multi layered and complex. Anita Desai presents the Indian tradition when marriage is a matter of convenience, decided by the parents. Here also the marriage is sacred bonding decided by parents and fate. Anita Desai's novels constantly reverberate between the past and the present. In "The artist of Disappearance" the bonding of the two Ravi and Miss Wilkinson in the novella also breaks the traditional notions of the mindset of the people. In fact she was more than a mother, she and her pet cats were the only things who he could tolerate and want of live with. We can witness post coloniality and globalization in this novel. Desai's. The Artist of Disappearance consists of three novellas that are tied together thematically. Protagonist plays an important role in her novels. Desai's novels reveal inner realities and psychic reverberation of her characters which is a major concern in post modernism.

Key words: Post modernism, protagonist, female psyche, globalization, post coloniality, feminism, transformation, contemporary.

Introduction

Postmodernism, having a stake in almost every area of intellectual enquiry, has been defined in relation to different movements of the past from

various perspectives and on the basis of its varied focus and impact. Some critics adhering to its literal construction consider it as a betrayal of modernity. To them the advent of post modernism has stopped the project of modernity as it attacks the

modernistic ideals of reason, clarity, fixed truth and linear progression. However, most critics consider post modernism as a reconstruction of modernistic literature in its wider aspect. Both modernism and post modernism present contemporary life as fragmented but the attitude towards the emerging trends is different. Whereas modernism laments the loss of traditions and idealises the past, post modernism favours incoherence, discontinuity and ambiguity these being a reality of the present situation. Postmodernism indicates a tendency towards self relativity dejecting the idea of following any specific historical approach or cultural or moral conduct. This article focus on Indian women writer Anita Desai's work in the light of postmodernist concepts and theories and will make a study to elaborate our perspectives.

Anita Desai's world in her novels, is the present age which has shrunk in spirit languishing in confusion, frustration, disintegration and rootlessness, Anita Desai is one such literary voice which is pointedly devoted to the task of unearthing and exploring female psyche in the contemporary world.

Anita Desai's three novels clear light of day. In custody and fasting, feasting depicts post modernism concepts. The Artist of Disappearance is Anita Desai's latest novella, which depicts the challenges of contemporary life and throws light on the concepts of change and permanence. In her earlier works, the female self was the major subject of contention, whereas in this novella the concept of the self is reconstructed using memory as an important medium. Keeping this as the major themes in most of her novels she explore the nuances in the portrayal of post modernism theory in the contemporary times.

In her novella "the Artist of Disappearance, Ravi is the protagonist. The story unfolds in a flash back where Ravi remembers that he was adopted by a rich couple and they treated him cruelly. He can be considered as the other in spite of coming from an aristocratic family. He decides to live like a hermit in the foothills of the Himalayas. In this novel the dominant class is represented by Ravi's adopted parents and the other would be Ravi, whose life

ironically changes into a recluse after being treated cruelly by his parents. It is the exchange and interaction of these to binaries which cause havoc in the life of Ravi. The bonding of the two Ravi and Miss Wilkinson in the novella also breaks the traditional notions of the mindset of the people. The changes in their thinking and way of living adds to the life of simplicity and prosperity.

In consonance with Anita Desai's writings we discern that the postmodernists believe in taking an interrogative stance towards everything, even if it is well accepted. The postmodern movement is not an indicator of any particular style but it is a procedural concept which co-relates with the radical transformations taking place in contemporary culture with the emergence of a new types of social life and individual equations. The thinkers project the view that society in postmodern culture is far from equilibrium. Post modernism gives way to differences and loves to talk about major thinkers and writers.

All three novellas feature different forms of Disappearance. The first, the museum of final journeys. The translator translated, the artist of disappearance. Anita Desai brings her brilliant miniature expose of contemporary culture to its merciless conclusion. Under capitalism many things have been shattered. Anita Desai is based on the fact that the writer and his work are inseparable. Although her predecessors like Raja Rao, Kushwant Singh dealt with society or social form as the predominant concept in their writers.

Desai's Novel "Voices in the city" is more sensational than her other novels Where shall we go this summer is another microcosm of a woman's intense struggle to escape from the mundane duties and responsibilities of a house wife and live in a world of silence and stillness. "In custody" is unique in the sense that it has a male protagonist who seeks self fulfillment, as against her other women centric fiction. In the novel fire on the mountain there are two overlapping stories of two awkward pairs – Nanda Kaul and her great granddaughter Raka. "Fasting, Feasting" is a tragic story of an Indian household. In all these novels she brings out the postmodernist concern and her way of expressing

female psyche. The post modernist believe that it is not the problem of the artist to understand whether what they imagine is conceivable by others or not. Their sole aim is to present what they want to. He makes us aware that instabilities and paradoxes are inherent in any society and social organization and so any representative narrative must be open to multiplicity of theme as well as form to a ridiculous extent. Anita presents a flexible concept of relationship here which justifies the postmodern theory of relativity, of demand and fulfillment of needs.

The novels of Anita Desai bear affinity to each other in the depiction of her themes and employment of technique she portray the post modern culture that we inhabit in the contemporary times. The spirit of post modernism is reflected in her works where she focus on consumerism, new life of choices and belief in the relativity of self. Desai has the skill of using the same motif from different perspectives suiting the psychological image of the character she wants to draw. Desai's mastery of revealing the psychic functioning of the characters is exhibited in many of her novels. Desai images, though simple, are dramatically powerful and interrelated. They contribute to the theme by evoking the stark sense of isolation of the characters and their desperation for self identification.

Thus, Anita Desai believes in the enormous strength vested in womanhood. She depicts entirely innovative concept of a new woman, who is aware and conscious of her own identity. She is ready to struggle with an aura of masculinity. As post modernist novelist Anita Desai do not wish to please the minds of traditionalist she reconstitute to explore the true potential of a woman, who struggle to be acknowledged as an individual and fulfill her urges and wishes in the contemporary world.

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