



PSYCHE OF NEUROTIC WOMEN IN ANITA DESAI'S *THE FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN*

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ABSTRACT

Indian writers of English fiction have put India on the Literary map of the world. Fiction in Indian writing in English is the most powerful tool of literary expression today. This paper focuses on Anita Desai's *fire on the Mountain*. Nanda Kaul is the elegant old widow. Long ago she queneed it as the wife of Mr. Kaul, vice-chancellor of Punjab University. She retires in her old age to the hill station resort of Kasauli. Nanda kaul feels herself superior free at last from the claims and demands of family, servants, position. She does not want to remember the past. Nor does she want to have any connection with her friends and relatives living in the plains below. She is intolerant of any intrusion in her life. Here on the ridge of the mountain is the quiet house. Nanda kaul leads a life of isolation and introspection.

Keywords : Culture , Psyche, Women, The Fire on the Mountain, Anita Desai

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The Indian writing in English is not a minor tributary of English literature, rather it continues to inspire a host of poets, prose writers, novelist and dramatists in India and outside India. Women novelist established a sort of great Tradition of novel writing.

First was Toru Dutt who initiated by writing both in French and English. Bianca or the young Spanish was her famous novel. Among the early novels written by women writers Raj Lakshmi Debi's *The Hindu Wife or The enchanted Fruit* was famous. After the Second World War, Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Praver Jhabwala are unquestionably the most outstanding.

Anita Desai one of the most serious yet appealing novelists on the Indian – English firmament. Anita Desai is interested in psychic life of her characters. For her it is “depth which is interesting, delving deeper and deeper in a character or a scene rather than going round about it”.

She incorporate themes such as agony of existence, the metaphysical word fear. A close study of Anita Desai's work reveals her struggle for female autonomy played out against the backdrop of patriarchal culture pattern.

Like all feminist literary artist a sustained analysis of allusive and elusive expression of individual is imperative for her. Novel is not a

sociological phenomenon. According to Anita Desai it is psychic. She seriously gets herself to voice the mute miseries of women and helplessness of millions of married women. They are formented by existentialist problems and predicaments. Desai explores the emotional world of women.

She writes about helplessness, agony, anger, struggle and surrender. She knows her limitation and does not go beyond. The existential states of disappartment, isolation and meaninglessness have received adequate attention.

Anita Desai is a minstrel of human heart. And her Chief concern is human relationship. Her Central theme is the existential predicament of an individual which she projects through incompatible couples. Though her characters are self conscious of the reality around them they carry with theme a sense of loneliness, alienation and pessimism. Being a women novelist she slides more intensely with the heroines of her novels. Her concern as an artist is with individual man and woman. But she chiefly interested in exploration of psychic depths of her characters.

This paper focuses on Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain*. In this novel she explored the psyche of a girl. The novel begins with the focus on Nanda Kaul but in the course of the novel the focus shifts on to Raka. The title also refers to her, for it is she who sets the forest on fire, hence, *Fire on the Mountain*. Nanda Kaul lives all alone at Carignano a place in Kasauli. She is content with her life of isolation. She loves her secluded existence and does not want to be disturbed by any one.

The postman's letter informing her about her great granddaughter's arrival comes as the first intrusion. The phone call of Ila Das also reminds her of her past busy life Nanda Kaul deliberately avoids Raka and postpones Ila's visit to Carignano.

It was all a lie, all she had lied to Raka lied, about everything, Nor had her husband loved and cherished her and Kept her like a Queen.... And her children the children were all alien to her nature she neither understood nor loved them. She did not live here alone by choice. She lived here alone because she was forced to do reduced to nothing. All those graces and

glories with which she had tried to captivate Raka were only a fabrication. (FOM Pg -158)

The illusionary world of Nanda kaul gets Shattered to pieces and the fire that Raka sets suggests its ultimate consumption. The 'fire' may be taken as the fire of love that Raka generates in the heart of Nanda Kaul. It may also be taken as the symbol of pyre- the funeral fire, and ultimate consumption of the fictive world of Nanda kaul. Through a number of evocative images, Desai portrays the basic human problems and the anguish of the lonely soul. In spite of all apparent relationships, man is alone. No human relationship can relieve him of his existential problems.

Anita Desai's own words "I think all human relationships are incomplete. Basically everyone is Solitary I think involvement in human relationship in this world invariably leads to disaster." Through they are defeated in the battle of life, they do not surrender their individuality. On the other hand, they accept stoically the challenges of life. Anita Desai's fiction not only leads to agony and suffering but also to an acquiescence of life.

The protagonists of Anita Desai confront with courage the sordiel realities of life that threaten to submerge the individual self in the welfer of cosmopolitanism and social obligations. Though they often fail in their mission, their confrontation assumes a tragic dimension in terms of their anguish and profound introspection. They are formented souls, who in their death in life, aspire towards life in death. It is in this sense that Desai's fictional world reflector tragic sense of life. The barren rocks and hills of Carignano in *Fire on the Mountain* become the projection of Nanda Kaul's self. she is herself lonely, has kept herself aloof from relatives and the society to spend a life of seclusion in the quiet house at Kasauli. The barren landscape the lonely pine tree, the rocks and hills of Carignano do not provide her the absolute tranquility of her dreams. It is Raka's intrusion on the one hand and the conscienceless of the grim realities of life on the other that come on her way.

The screams of the hoopoes are skrill and maddening . Nanda Kaul rushes to pick up a bright apricot which falls down from the

tree and is squashed by its fall. Suddenly she fined a bright hoopoe coming down and tearing at its bright flesh and flying off with a lump in its beak. (FOM Pg. 4)

The sight "did not fill her with delight". The house at Carignano has a history of violence, murder and death. Nanda Kaul had come here with the desire to enjoy the stillness and calm" but the letter from her daughter Asha perturbs, she leans over the wooden railing at the back of the house where the yellow rose creeper had blossomed "so youthfully" last month but now reduced to an exhausted mass of grey creaks and groans again her desires for privacy and freedom which she could never get as the vice – chancellor's wife and for which she has come to the hill side is suggested through the image of the eagle

An eagle swept over it, far below her, a thousand feet below, its wings out spread gliding on currents of air without once moving its great muscular wings which remained in response, in control. She had wished, it occurred to her, to imitate that eagle –gliding, with eyes closed.

The destructive aspect of nature is suggested by images of violence and destruction. The Pasteur institute is an image of violence where the doctors make serum for injection for dog bites. They kill mad dogs and use them for tests. They throw the bones and ashes of dead animals, into the ravine and jackal.

Nanda Kaul finds that Raka is totally absorbed in her own world without being bothered about her great grandmother. Nanda Kaul discovers Raka totally different from other children. She tries to attract her attention by creating a world of fantasy about her own childhood, because Raka's indifference becomes a challenge to her.

I'la Das is a piano teacher turned social worker, who breaks in Nanda Kaul's solitude. Ila Das inner crisis as turned into her capacity to face the odds of life and therefore, she always keeps smiling. She is assaulted and raped for her good intention. At her death, Nanda Kaul reaches inner crisis and reveals the hidden reality.

Both Nanda Kaul and Raka offer the pattern of self alienation of severe kind leading them towards neurosis. Metaphysically they point to the futility of human existence, the inevitability of

human suffering. Raka and Nanda suggest a sickness of soul which is imposed upon them from inside.

Nanda kaul and Raka are branded as crazy ones at Carignane, their retreat at kasauli. The major focus of the novel is on the interaction between the two. In her private world of isolation, Nanda kaul fancies enjoying the bliss of solitude. Both Nanda Kaul and Raka are equally outcast and so equally lonely Nanda feeding on an imagined past grandeur, trying to comfort her loneliness and live down a life of humiliation and desolation and Raka, recovering from typhoid and a battered home life, seeking relief in the fine on the mountain side. " The distinction Anita Desai makes between the two is subtle and persuasive."

In Anita Desai's fiction psychological unraveling takes place in several ways through imagery, through a shift in the point of view and through family relationships. Husbands, fathers, wives and daughters come together to make a family. They form the roots of psychological inhibitions, complexes and attitudes The structure shows them places within or outside. There is also a study of psychological conflicts and motivations.

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