



SCRUTINY OF HUMANISTIC CONCERNS IN THE WORKS OF ANITA DESAI

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ABSTRACT

There are fascinating glimpses of how the female species has been fictionally patterned and characterized by the creative writer. The distinction between what women are and what they are made to look like or imagine is very crucial. Women in private may be found to do certain things but since our civilization predominantly-male, has stereotype them in a certain fashion we are not inclined to accept them. The variety of roles that women can perform is too restricted. Undoubtedly, it is the effect of patriarchy. A little reflection will show that they are assigned such roles as will best satisfy men's dreams and fantasies about them. Being representations in their body-blood reality, the women protagonist generally are men's imaginative projections about them. Images of women have been so much influenced by male bias that one cannot escape being struck by the discrepancy between the way women behave and the way they are made to behave. Certain courses of action are simply ruled out for them. All chivalry and heroism falls in the account of the heroes.

Women writings reflect the general, social reconsiderations of the ideas of "women" and the formulations about genteel, proper conduct of women. The society's serious involvement with defining women's relation with the patriarchal state, the society and tradition, was multi layered and highly complexed with significant political and cultural issues. Indian women writers built up a strong ideological resistance to recast the image of women on more westernized egalitarian and humane principles. The contest of image construction was guided by a strong lead to create a new type of Indian woman.

Keywords: Insensitivity, In-communication, silence, alienation, relationship

The conflict between tradition and modernity and women's relation to both continues to be an important subject in women's writing. Women writers have increasingly looked into the validity of the traditional values. Today the 'New Woman' challenges the ancient notion of 'Goddess in the house' and 'sexually voracious' image. The 'New Woman' is a woman of awareness and consciousness of her low position in the family and society. But In spite of this awakening evolving around us, today also there are women who have lack of individualism and identity in the society.

Anita Desai questions age old traditions and portrays women in a new context. She unveils the acute sense of entrapment and suffering of women in the upper and lower middle classes. Education encourages them to nurture idea of western style self-hood, identity and equality among sexes. Desai depicts young, sensitive women becoming victims of social situation that first encourages and then punishes them for such ideas of self-development and fulfillment. The themes persistently recurring in the novels of Anita Desai are human relations, particularly that of man and woman; alienation,

loneliness and lack of communication brought upon the individual by the pressures exerted by existential realities. Her women protagonist in *Cry, The Peacock*, (1963), *Voices in the City*(1965), *where shall we go this summer*(1975), *Fire on the Mountain* (1975) experience bewilderment and confusion as they are consistently thwarted in marriage and other forms of social relations. These women experience insecurity and anxiety at the lack of proper, paternal, filial and patriarchal care and protection. The women struggle for self-hood and fulfillment as human beings within family and social relations. There is a new perception of the use and abuse of power in the different forms of human bonds. Desai has shown how power operates at a deeper level within personal relations. There is misuse of power between husband wife, parents and children. Women are portrayed in different classes, caste, generations experiencing violence and enforcement of life-denying values. Women's growing disillusionment and alienation from patriarchal control of relationship, and devaluation of women's roll as daughter, wife and mother emerge from the writing of Anita Desai. She questions the roles women perform within family and leading insignificant and meaningless lives. According to her, women experience psychological frustrations and deprivations which split their private and public self-creating schizophrenic disintegrating selves.

In her novel *Cry, the Peacock* (1963) , Desai portray the psychic tumult of a young and sensitive married girl Maya who is haunted by a childhood prophesy of fatal disaster.it gives expression to the long-smothered wail of a lacerated psyche, the harrowing tale of a blunted human relationship being told by the chief protagonist itself. Maya who enjoyed a lot of attention at her parents place makes her have a lop-sided view of life. She feels the world to be a toy made especially for her painted in her favorite colours, and set moving according to her tunes. Having lived, thus, a careless life under the indulgent attentions of her loving father Maya desires to have similar attentions from her husband Gautama, a father surrogate. The very beginning of the novel highlights the husband-wife alienation theme. Their married life is punctuated all along by

matrimonial silences. What pains Maya most is her utter loneliness in this new house. There was no bond, no love, and restlessness always boils within her. This alienation of Maya is rooted essentially in Gautama's philosophical detachment thereby increasing her rootlessness every day. Ultimately Gautama begins to appear to her as a guest who might never be encountered again and as an unreal ghost. Her intense absorption only enslaves her. This is the typical condition of an unfortunate person who is alienated through and through. Her obsession drives her to a curious insanity. This novel is a pioneering effort towards delineating the psychological problems of an alienated person.

In the novel *Fire onThe Mountain* (1977), Anita Desai explores the intricacies of human relationships that are turning savour in the light of modern awakening. The focus in the novel is on the relationship of Nanda Kaul and her great granddaughter Raka. The loneliness and the isolation of the two had been presented in much ingenuity and minuteness. In the perfect privacy of her sprawling house 'Carignano', Nanda Kaul, the protagonist, lives like a recluse. After living the life as the Vice Chancellor's wife, as a pivot of a busy world, which has stifled her, all she needed was to live like a recluse out of vengeance for a long life of duty and obligation. It was the place, and the time of life that she wanted and prepared for all her life. And at lasts she had it. She wanted no one else and nothing else.it was with these feelings that Nanda Kaul had to welcome her great granddaughter, Raka, into her house and her life. She was totally unprepared for this new contingency and she loathes the very idea of involving herself in anyway and anymore. The arrival of Raka would only mean letting the 'noose' slip once more round her neck. (19). Raka on the other hand, just like any other character of Anita Desai, is herself suffering from the pangs of loneliness and solitude. The irony lies in the fact that two people related to each other by blood cannot find a way to communicate. They are happy living their own independent life under the same roof. It is this incommunication, this insensitivity, and this deep dark silence, in relations that Anita Desai works to project in her novel.

Anita Desai's novels serve as a helping tool to understand the intricacies, minutiae and workings of human relationships in the modern scenario. The glue that bound the relations earlier has gone dry. In the modern scenario, no relation has been left with its ingenuity and authenticity. The relation of daughter and father, mother and son, sister and sister and even of husband and wife has come under the dark shadows of suspicion, distrust, incommunication and above all silence. The thread of relations has lost its tenacity. Her characters are modern men and women living a dead life. The relations they make are only for namesake. On a surface level, they are somebody's mother, father, daughter, son, husband and wife, but on the deeper level they all are alone and lonely. They can hardly find words to communicate with their loved ones. This in communication and mournful silence has piloted them to a strange place, where they are surrounded by strange people, whose language and dialect they cannot understand. Anita Desai has very beautifully explored this strangeness in her novel and opened a whole new world in front of us. Her novels are indeed an excellent study not only in human relations but also present a thesis on human psychology.

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