



ANITA DESAI: QUESTS FOR SELF- IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

Anita Desai is the best known of the contemporary women writers Of all the contemporary novelists, she is indisputably the most popular and powerful novelist. She has made commendable contribution to the Indian English fiction. She is a novelist of urban milieu and is a fine mixture of Indian European and American sensibilities. She is essentially a psychological novelist. She claims that her novels are not reflection of Indian society or character. She does not reflect on social issues in her works like Mulk Raj Anand. She sees social realities from a psychological point of view and does not look at them as a social intimate expression of the inner world of her characters. She makes each of her work a haunting exploration of the psychic self.

KEYWORDS: Self identity, Silent thought, Feminine psyche

INTRODUCTION

Indian Writing in English has attended new height with the emergence of modern women writers. Their name and fame spread widely not only in India but also in other countries. Among the modern Indian women writers, Anita Desai is one of the prominent writers. Anita Desai has not adhered to conventional theme, technique and narrative patterns prevalent in India. She adopted innovative theme in her first novel *Cry, the Peacock* in 1963. Thus she has introduced a new idiom and direction to Indian English Novel and literature. Anita Desai delves deep into the mind of her characters, their psyche and silent thoughts rather than their outer appearance. Her motto of writing fiction is to expose the truth. Talking about the ability and method of portraying Anita Desai's female characters in her novels, C.V. George states,

Anita Desai has an innate ability to peep into the inner recesses of the psyche of her characters rather than the outer spectacle of action. She has enormously contributed to the growth of Indian fiction in English by incorporating psychic aspect of her female characters who have suffered privation and humiliations, neglect and silence, aloofness and alienation (George 127).

She has depicted through her characters feminine personality and feminine psyche better than most other indo-anglian novelists Anita Desai's character's are not all the time searching for a life partner or are they after the glamour or outward show of the society ladies . Hers is a world of the mental preferences and dislikes. D.S Maini has rightly said it when he writes, Cry, the peacock is typically a feminine novel a novel of sensibility rather than of action.

N.R. Gopal states that a woman feels pride when she attains motherhood in her married life. Speaking regarding this, Gopal states,

Motherhood is the ultimate objective of the woman and that is why the importance of and craving for children if male, all the better is the feeling described by the novelist. Anita Desai has explored the psyche of both the childless women as of Maya in Cry, the Peacock, of Monisha in Voices in the City, and also of women with children, like Sita in Where Shall We Go this Summer?and Nanda Kaul in Fire on the Mountain (Gopal 26).

As a modern woman novelist, she deals with the fundamental issues of human struggle for existence and identity in her novels. Her female protagonists quests for self- identity and individual value, existential value reveals her main concern for the antagonistic situations of her female protagonists.

According to Anita Desai, though art is like life and reflects it, it is not life. According to her,"...life is reality you see on the surface- the visible world while literature plunges the depth below that lie hidden and need to be explored and described. Therefore she is correct in her approach and through psychological analysis of her character, which often resulted in the depiction of frustration, rootlessness, hopelessness and longing for death as an "orifice" to escape from all the tensions of life.

Existential concern is a global phenomenon. Chiefly, existentialism as a philosophy has European origin historically and culturally, but it has left its strong impact on literature that has both been substantial and significant. Modern man undergoes existential problem. He or she fails to comprehend the meaning and purpose of human life in the materialistic world. Desai, particularly, endeavors to depict the substantial issues of the human life and dilemma. Being a modern author, it is her intention to explore the thoughts and emotional world of her female characters and bring to light the various deeper psychological problems of feminist. She highlights the mute miseries of married woman who is under the grip of existential problems and predicaments. She gives a picture of the mute miseries and vulnerability of millions of married women, tormented by existentialist problems and predicaments. She also highlights the way her protagonists, belonging to the contemporary urban milieu, persevere with the struggle against the relentless forces of absurd life.

She herself has explained how she gives shapes to her novels, "I believe the idea- which may be no more than a leaf dipping under a rain drop, piquant scraps of news casually read, a face seen in a bus- comes into being as silently and unconsciously as a grain of sand inside an oyster. There it grows and develops, silently and almost unconsciously, eventually this grain grows into such a mass that it begin to exert a pressure. It no longer resembles a pearl that has come to birth in silence and secrecy and lies pale and lustrous inside a closed oyster. But becomes like a monster that one has inadvertently brought to life and that is now bursting and clamoring to be let out". She further says that she has no control over it and it grows of it own volition .Only when it is out on paper she has any semblance of control to Domesticate it. Thus her novels are just like in their origin and development

Anita Desai has tried to present her pains organically with appropriate adjustment in adaptation in spheres of style in her point of view. By deft management of the form she succeeds in attaining the proper form on which Lubbock is so insistent. After having discussed the basics of Anita Desai's fictional method we are now equipped to analyze her novels in detail so as to discover how she attains remarkable success as a novelist.

The normal woman is known by her subservience and compliance, and any deviation from this automatically renders her abnormal. This kind of abnormality and insanity in women is traced undoubtedly to the result of oppression in a male-dominated society. The early protagonists of Anita Desai's novels are seen as neurotic or crazy. Maya's neurotic in Cry, The Peacock seeks to probe into the forces acting strongly on women that turn them crazy. The primary force of the cause is perhaps the need for attachment, affiliation or affection. Since women have been both culturally and emotionally dependent on men, any disruption of this affinity or consanguinity is seen not as a loss of relationship but "a total loss of self" which is then perceived as neurosis. Balaram S. Sorot states regarding neurosis,

Mrs Desai, with her subtle 'cognitive-perceptual powers yoked with a hypersensitive emotive faculty', has created these extremely sensitive characters whose thoughts, reactions and wavering defy the norms of conformity and adequacy. These fictional personas view themselves as much wronged then wrong-doing in a 'bad,' world. They suffer the pathological co-existence of several distinct personalities, dissentient with or antithetical to each other, resulting in their isolation and neurosis (Agrawal 205).

CONCLUSION

The psychic or the existential needs of each individual vary according to the cultural set-up the social status, and sex women (at least in India) leading the life of earth mother – heightened by the qualities of self sacrifice, lavish in their love and basically naïve - survive on the threads of attachment and symbiosis. The world or the society at large is acceptable only through man. If the thread of attachment is broken the very meaning of life is lost for them. It is thus necessary to differentiate the sources leading to abnormal behaviour in Canadian and Indian contexts. The cultural set-up of each country has certain norms governing the behaviour of women. One common goal, however is to please men. The western woman has already gone through the stress and strain of breaking the shackles of meekness and docility, but does not yet seem to have found the ground firm enough to stand all by herself. For the western woman, as Miler puts it, to be treated like an object is to be threatened with psychic annihilation. Her aim is not be reduced to an object for the use and pleasure of others but rather to be treated as an individual in her own right. And if she is treated superciliously it amounts to total psychic trauma- to the extent of being called neurotics –in their attempt to either forestall or fight the threat of being reduced to being moronic.

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