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## GENDER TROUBLE : QUANDARY OF MONISHA IN ANITA DESAI'S VOICE IN THE CITY

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### ABSTRACT:

*Gender inequality is not only a biological difference but also a social construct. The world seems to be a gender sensitive now a days, as there are incidents of dowry-deaths, malnutrition, sub-ordination, exploitation in the socio-political systems. The gender inequities are not associated with any particular race; this evil has travelled in space and time from the pre-mordial time to the present day. The human civilization itself is ignoring the vital half of its race i.e., woman, and woman is a mute sufferer of endless miseries. They have been treated as social sub-ordination to men.*

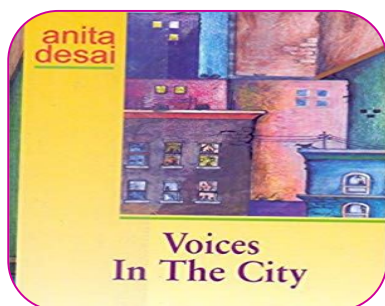
**Key Words** – Gender inequality, Sub-ordination, Male-domination, Dilemma Feminine, Neurotic, Quandary.

### INTRODUCTION

Anita Desai shows in her novel *Voice in the city* how the protagonist Monisha feels tormented and tortured at her home and wants to finish her life. Desai depicts a women's search for identity, her pursuit of liberty and equality and her protest against oppression at every level.

#### \* Monisha as a victim of ill-matched marriage -

Monisha, Nirode's elder sister is childless and a victim of an ill matched marriage. Amla, her sister puts it very sharply when she asks, 'Aunt, why did they marry!' They had nothing common between them and were married, because he belonged to a respectable, middle class family which was safe, secure and sound. Monisha changes after marriage from a sensitive, mild, quiet sensible girl into a barren, distant, a pathetic, neurotic, diary writing woman, which she herself hates. She is not happy with her husband and his family. The overcrowded in-laws house makes her uneasy. Jiban, her husband is the prisoner of a conventional culture in which a woman's most important roles are cooking, cutting vegetables, serving food, brushing small children's hair etc. He clearly favours the static and stable social structure in many circumstances and considers his wife worthless in consequence. Desai has revealed Monisha not as an individual woman but as a representative of all women who face the problem of adjustment in their married lives.



#### \* Quandary of Monisha

Quandary means a situation that presents problems which are difficult to solve. A person finds himself or herself in a most awkward predicament. In the Indian society women have no freedom to take their own decisions or to act freely in any way. They are totally ignored and neglected, their views do not keep any importance for the men. In such a situation Anita Desai tries to show the predicament of women in the society. In the novel, Desai shows how Monisha feels tormented and tortured at her home. She goes through a severe pain & wants to finish

life. Life has become unbearable for her, she is in dilemma and finally the time comes when she commits suicide.

Moreover Desai shows the creative release of the feminine sensibility. The young characters of Desai show the unrest desire for the liberation of women. The recurring themes of her novels are identified as woman's struggle for self-realization and self definition. She depicts a woman's search for her identity; her pursuit of liberty and equality, and her protest against the oppression at every level. In her article 'A secret connivance' Anita Desai criticizes a deep rooted form of suppression in India and complete dependence of women on men for their livelihoods.

Monisha, the protagonist of the novel has been shown as the victim of quandary and loneliness. She got married in a middle class family to a dull husband. She was not able to adjust properly and does not identify herself with her in-law's family. She considers her husband's house a prison. She does not belong to it. Her husband feels secure in this cage and thinks that the house is a symbol of safety and shelter but Monika feels herself as a lonely and cold person. She does not want to mix with her in-laws family.

It is quite impossible for Monisha, socially to live into a big joint family with so many traditional bindings. Her parents forces her into a marriage with a man, who is not suitable to her taste and temperament. After marriage her life is limited to cooking and washing which hurts her pride. She is not like other women, for her the choice is between the meaningless life and non existence and she prefers non existence here. She feels safe in the belief of her own significance. She lives in an ivory tower of her pride and cuts herself from family life. It is true that in Indian society a woman gets respect only when she becomes mother, she gains status only as a mother. For Monisha to feel superior to others is not enough but she wants to make her image perfect. The negative healthy intense desires made her incapable of accepting the challenges of life. She wants to remain solitary and work alone.

Monisha has two selves : glorified and the actual. Her actual self is tired, weary and sick and the glorified is greedy. To convey the two selves of Monisha Anita Desai employs the metaphor of the city, Calcutta. This city has also two faces : rapacious and weary. Monisha's real self is suffering. Physically she is trapped behind the criss-cross bar and the windows and psychologically her real self is shut behind the urgent need of her glorified self. Isolation suits her nature. She never considers Jiban's, her husband's house as her own house. She feels self important after looking herself in her room. She finds herself as an alien in her husband's house and treated as an outsider. Monisha's life in Jiban's house, has a monotonous routine and the love which she craved for is not to be found in Jiban. Moreover she was childless and it adds to her loneliness. She remarks "what a waste, what a waste it has been, this life enclosed in a locked container, merely as an observer and so imperfect ..... I have not given birth, I have not attended death" (*Voice in the city P, 235*)

a) She finds life meaningless. The circumstance around Monisha lead her to cut from the outside world. For her, life becomes neglected because she fails to achieve those things she had longed for. She thinks she has lost all rights to exist, as she could not give meaning to her life. After the charge of theft it is impossible for her to mingle herself with the family of Jiban. She can not mix with Jiban's family members. In the night she enjoys a communication with vast dark emptiness. Aggressive behavior of her in-laws makes her fearful and disturbs her psychologically. In the light of the reality, she is not able to bear the vision of herself. She finds herself unable to experience life. Here 'self-hate' turns into 'self-destruction'. She surrenders herself to death. In the battle of existence and death, death wins. She finds that death is the only path for her salvation from the life. Monisha tries to make a search for her identity, she wants to have a life full of liberty, and she does not want to be dominated by her husband.

#### **Monisha's Suicide as an Attempt to Rebel :-**

Her suicide is an attempt to rebel against the meaningless death – like isolation. Her death is an attempt to give meaning to life which she is not able to achieve when she was alive. Her suicide gives her the freedom, which she could not enjoy. It is the existence she sought for a long time. It is an exercise of her

choice. But a researcher thinks suicide is not a solution or an attempt to rebel against her situation. On the contrary Monisha should have fought against the situation and should have broken all the bars of injustice for her identity.

Married against her wishes and in her childless condition afterwards, she finds it difficult to lead her life in loneliness and alienation. She lives on other's mercy and struggles for her existence. Unable to find meaning to her existence, she prefers to die. So she may find it in another life. The end of her search of her existence is at last comprehensible. Her reaction is violent but common. She welcomes death than a mean existence.

To confront her isolation she starts writing a diary, though she does not like women who keep diaries. Monisha creates a composite picture of a woman leading a marginalized existence in India.

As we know that, after marriage, freedom of a woman becomes limited. As in most of the cases, a married woman is not permitted to meet her old friends or even relatives freely. In a conservative Indian society she cannot go out alone anywhere. Even though a lady may be educated her advice is not sought in any matter and cannot make decisions. She has to compromise and give up her self esteem. Thus the question of fulfilling her desire never arises and the end is similar to that of Monisha.

The significance of the theme is concentrated on the character of Monisha. Desai focuses on her trials and tribulations, tortures, and torments so as to portray her loneliness, despair and spiritual and mental emptiness in clear light. In many respects she resembles Maya who is also childless, sensitive and a victim of an ill-matched matrimony. Monisha suffers hell and untold oppression at the hands of her in-laws. She is a very sensitive, intellectual tied in a very hostile condition. She has no peace or happiness at all because her husband is indifferent, unresponsive and insensitive. He does not understand her feelings or agony. He does not care for her at all. The result is that she becomes a neurotic and commits suicide. "Her body was braced against fire then comes odour of kerosene when the blouse and sari were soaked, she lowered the tin. Her arms relaxed a moment, recollecting their strength. She might keep the matchbox steady, in order to strike the match. To her astonishment, the very first match struck fire. She brought it close to her face. The oil soaking her garments responded with a leap of recognition then a smoke ..... loud noise, the pain! there all over with her arms, she wrestled with it, she fought it, she screamed 'No' ! No! No! screamed, screamed. Fell unconscious". (Desai 240)

Anita Desai depicts the miserable plight of Monisha, she depicts her desire to come out of this plight but finally she was failed and commits suicide. Monisha's plight depicts not only her individual state but also the state of so many daughters-in-laws who live in the lock-ups of their husbands. Actually Monisha presents a typical social situation of several daughters-in-laws in India who have no voice in their houses though they suffer and bear endless torment and pinching behavior of the husband's family members. In Indian society Monisha's death is a subject of great social significance. She suffers because she was a woman, she was a daughter-in-law, she was a wife. It is so because the destiny of being male or female is determined by the society. There is a need of cultural space for a woman to form her own social and national identity. Gender and difference is a ubiquitous note found in feminist readings that has to be exposed in the context of social reality.

### CONCLUSION :

To conclude, traditionally Indian women are confined to a typical framework which is based on the ideals of class, race and gender. In an Indian society woman has to play the traditional roles like a submissive wife or incarnation of sacrifice and so on. Monisha as depicted by Anita Desai in *Voice in the city* belongs to this category and she shows the creative release of the feminine sensibility.

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