



DORIS LESSING AND ANITA DESAI: A FEMINISTIC APPROACH

Dr. Archana D. Bobade

Associate Professor, Head, Department of English,
Shri Shivaji Arts And Commerce College,
Morshi Road, Amravati .



ABSTRACT:

This article is an attempt to study feminism in the novels of Doris Lessing and Anita Desai. Their characters in the novels appear to be seeking freedom from male domination by speaking out, reacting against social norms, naming and defining themselves. Doris Lessing and Anita Desai fiction focuses on women's problems i.e. search of identity, independence and inner self. Although they both belong to western and Indian culture, they portray the same problem of women in their novels like motherhood, marriage, and emotional dependence.

KEYWORDS: social norms, naming and defining themselves.

INTRODUCTION:

Feminism is not about hating men, but feminism at its core attempts to celebrate womanhood; it attempts to validate the experiences of women; it attempts to right the wrong inflicted on women by society. Feminism as we know it, is a reaction against societies that have subverted the efforts of women, dismissed their opinion, and failed to recognize them as independently functioning human beings.

The feminist ideology or feminism as a critical discourse addresses a wide variety of issues related with the role of gender, the position of gender, and the ways in which the gender is constructed in the different cultural, historical and social set ups. As an ideological movement it questions the attributes of gender and the ways in which the gender as a biological category has been constructed into sociological and cultural norms.

Feminism in literature refers to a mode that approaches a text with foremost concern for the nature of female experiences in it. The fictional experience of characters, the relation, intuitional or imaginative, capacity of an author, the experience implicit in language of structure that interrogates the cultural prescriptions that subordinate and trivialize women and treat them as inferiors are the primary concern of female fiction writers. Feminism demands an activity, not passivity, which analyze our sense of female presence in the world. A feminist fiction is a work where language and imagery are employed to impart a new vision of reality- perceived from a woman's authentic mode of seeing, feeling and measuring the existence without subscribing to the male cultural course. Whatever may be the content of their fiction writing the women writers never forgot to deconstruct themselves then they had to write interpretations of history and literature.

The late nineteenth century is recognized as a period which thrust women at the forefront of political scenario. Beneath the façade of democratic ideals, women were subjected to unfair treatment. In industries they were paid less than men and were denied the right to vote. The present article is focused on Doris Lessing and Anita Desai's fiction. English has come a long way both in Britain and in India, as have the women of both India and the West. The western feminist theory on the fiction of both

of these writers of British and Indian traditions, study brings out the mutual eradication of literature and theories.

This present article is an attempt to study feminism in British and Indian English fiction. In their fictional work these two women writers appear to be seeking freedom from the male version of women by speaking out, naming and defining themselves. An author is Willy nilly influenced by social milieu. Conditions are very different in India and Britain. In Britain, an average woman does not have to struggle for her existence whereas in India, where abject poverty is not unusual, people have to strive for sheer survival. No heroine of Doris Lessing and Anita Desai have to crush their conscience simply to keep the wolf from the door. Anita Desai portrays the lives of women belonging to educated and affluent sections of society. With their heroines the problem is not economic but psychological. With a happy background as children being financially well off as married women, they can afford to attend more refined feelings and emotions. Like the sensitive heroines of Doris Lessing, Anita Desai's heroines have psychological problems and are, in fact, regarded as abnormal by the people who come in contact with them.

On the other hand Doris Lessing gives pictures of women as complex human beings, sometimes strong willed, but sometimes acting as helpless onlookers, who are sensitive to conditions around them and longing to take control. Her women are intense and troubled, for whom life is a succession of traps created either by their mothers, or their lovers or finally by themselves. Lessing's protagonists, all women are from the white privilege class, and thus are free from racial discrimination and oppression. Her female protagonist though they come from different classes and different social mileaus faces similar problems in sexist society. Her female protagonists are aware, assertive and intellectually independent: the women who resist social discrimination against women, which begin right from childhood. Lessing expresses double standards of men in her novels. Lessing's heroines are politically active and socially conscious. She gives a sensitive portrayal of women who chart painful courses of self discovery and search of self. Anita Desai's heroines have psychological problems and are, in fact regarded as abnormal by the people who come in contact with them.

One of the many causes of concern in Indian society is the institution of joint family which demands a lot of flexibility and adjustability from a woman. If other members of the family are not sympathetic and broad- minded, a newly married girl has to face a lot of trouble and her experience may embitter her life, as happens in the novels of Anita Desai. In India sexual freedom for women, for example, has not assumed the enormous proportion in the west. In spite of conflicts, the Indian women in the last three decades has learned to assert herself as an autonomous human being. Her responses to her femaleness have been diverse and differ according to her class and upbringing. All the great novelist attach great importance to parental influence. In Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing*, Mary inherited her mother's contempt and derision for her father and an arid feminism. Mary does not consciously seek to explore her past and unhappy childhood, even though she makes every effort to live in existence different to the death of her mother, she resists marriage because when Mary thought of marriage, she remembered her father coming home red eyed and fuddled. When Mary thought of home she remembered a wooden box shaken by passing trains; when she thought of children, she saw her mother's face at her children's funeral anguish, but as dry and hard as a rock. Mary liked other people's children, but shuddered at the thought of her own. She felt sentimental at weddings but also felt strong distaste for sex; there have been a little privacy in her home and there were things she did not care to remember. It is partly Mary's refusal to come to terms with a sexual side of marriage that causes the later sterility of her own marriage. In *Briefing for a Descent Into Hell*, the focus is on all humanity, not simply males or females. Doris Lessing admits the limitation of women, their dependence on men to live which leads to fulfillment and inadequacy of mere physical sex.

Doris Lessing has deeply probed the problem of women identity in variation to sexual relationship with men. In *The Grass is Singing*, though Mary's marriage leads to her tragic death, Doris Lessing presents an interesting aspect of female nature which is reflected in Mary's wish to be dominated by man. In *Summer before the Dark* Doris Lessing depicts Kate Brown (the main

protagonist) to establish her identity. Kate brown has been performing the roles prescribed for her by the society, never caring for the dictates of her inner self.

A close analysis of Lessing's novels enables us to gather that despite her sympathy for women she is by no means a rabid feminist. It is true that women are placed at a disadvantage both by the exigencies of nature and the machinations of patriarchy. All the same, the realization of their full potentialities is the concern of women themselves.

Feminism being an important movement in the modern world, woman's place, position and specially the question of her identity are the major issues in India also. In India, since ages, a woman's role is strictly compartmentalized: she was a wife, a daughter or a mother. In all these roles, she had to adhere to certain appointed norms; she had no separate identity as a human being.

The most important points about the novels of Anita Desai is the weight she attaches to the upbringing of men and women. Generally her protagonists are not brought up in a healthy way, being either pampered or utterly neglected. Mothers in her novels do not enjoy status traditionally extended to them as their natural right, and they almost invariably fail their children. In *Cry The Peacock* by Anita Desai , Maya the protagonist craves for identity, sympathy, understanding, endeavoring in her own way to make Gautama her husband see her need and to respond to it. Unfortunately this sensitive impressionable woman is obsessed by a childhood forecast of death in her family four years after her marriage. Had theirs been a true marriage of minds the love of her husband would have proved a palliative to her inflamed mind.

Similarly Monisha in *Voices in the City* can't adjust herself to the soulless mechanical life of the city Calcutta, or the household of her husband Jiben. She is a refined soul, interested in the life of the intellect, but illicit derision from the ladies of Jibens family. Her wardrobes stacked with books simply annoy them as it is something beyond their comprehension. Monisha finds this atmosphere suffocating. Her husband Jiban is stolidly personified. She can either surrender or commit suicide. She chooses the latter one. Of course people could not read her psychology and fulfill her emotional needs. She found no way of expressing herself and preserved her identity by killing herself.

It can be said that the theme of motherhood and nurturance is multifaceted. Some claim motherhood to be an ideal, others say it causes suffering. In Desai's projection of Maya, and Monisha, motherhood has been subjected to multivalent treatment. It is therefore, we can say that in India the salvation of women lies in proper adjustments with the males. As our leaders have felt men and women are like the two wheels of the social chariot. Both should be treated as equals, only then can women can be happy and a woman's happiness, will lead to all over happiness including men, children and the society

- 1) Doris Lessing *The Grass Is Singing* (London; Michael Joseph , 1950)
- 2) Anita Desai's *Cry The Peacock* (New Delhi, Orient Paperbacks 1986)



Dr. Archana D. Bobade

Associate Professor, Head, Department of English, Shri Shivaji Arts And Commerce College, Morshi Road, Amravati .