



ISSN: 2249-894X
 IMPACT FACTOR : 5.7631 (UIF)
 UGC APPROVED JOURNAL NO. 48514
 VOLUME - 8 | ISSUE - 8 | MAY - 2019



THE PSYCHE OF WOMEN CHARACTERS OF ANITA DESAI'S SELECTED NOVELS

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ABSTRACT:

The literature in Indian English has made remarkable contribution in the socio-culture development of Indian society. Kamala Markandaya, Arundhati Roy, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Shobha De are some of the important literary figures in Indian English Literature. Anita Desai is one of the most significant Indian women novelists. Her novels have focused upon the miserable life of women in India. Her experiences and knowledge about Indian society is very deep and outstanding. She has deeply studied the psyche of Indian women through the various resources. Anita Desai's multicultural family background has helped her in depicting the reality of Indian women in male dominating society. Her

novels reveal the alienation and detachment of her women characters. The psychology of characters gets disturbed completely due to the problems like loss of identity, isolated life, inferior treatment in family and complexity in human relationships.

KEYWORDS: Anxiety, Compatibility, Emotions, Psychology.

INTRODUCTION

Anita Desai is an Indian novelist and short story writer. She is well known for her characters' selection. Her all characters are the representative of men and women in Indian society. Desai is deeply concerned with the human relationship. The women have always been the centre of her novels. Being an Indian, Anita Desai has deep observation about the positive and negative changes in human relationships. Her approach towards life is very different and she honestly feels to encourage women in Indian society to struggle for their own

identity in home and in society as well.

Her novels 'Fire on the Mountain', 'Cry the Peacock' and 'Where Shall We Go this Summer'? are the most remarkable examples of how the women in India suffer in personal and married relationships. The three novels bring out the plight of women characters due to lack of love, care, sympathy and communication in very proper manner. Sita, Maya and Nanda are the major characters from three novels, each of them have different context of life but their suffering in personal and married relationship is the same in this research paper an attempt has been made to focus upon the psyche of women

characters of Anita Desai.

'FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN':

This is one of the best novels by Desai. In fact this novel differs from the other novels by her. It brings out the loss of identity, complexity in married and other relationships. Nanda Kaul is the major character in this novel. She is the wife of Vice Chancellor of Punjab University. The family is joint family in nature. The entire responsibilities of family are on Nanda. It is mandatory for her to look after the desires and demands of the family members. She has no relief from her family duties. However, she feels proud of her husband's highly respected career as Vice- Chancellor. She

takes every care that her husband should not divert his attention from his official duties to family responsibilities. Her love for family and husband is very remarkable. She makes herself available to the service of her husband and children. Her husband wants her to be in silk sari always to entertain his official guests in dining room. Nanda takes care of all guest, students and official visitors of her husband. She says,

“Too many guests coming and going.... Too many trays of tea would have to be made and carried to her husband’s study, to her mother-in-law’s bed room, to the veranda that was the gathering-place for all, at all times of the day. Too many meals, too many dishes on the table, too much to wash up after”. It can be seen that Nanda is extremely busy in her family responsibilities. She does not have her own way of living life and have right to think about her own existence away from her family. Nanda’s status in family is like a servant. She has to do everything for everyone and should not expect anything either from husband or from children. Nanda is always taken for granted by her near and dear ones. Nanda herself does not understand that she has lost her individual existence due to ending household duties. Nanda is shocked to know about her husband’s extra marital affair with Miss David. Nanda feels to be deceived by her husband. She sacrifices her life and all the happy moments in order to support her husband but in return she gets insult, detachment and a life in isolation. Nanda’s complete withdrawal from responsibilities of family indicates that she has been hurt very badly by insensible children and unfaithful husband. Nanda’s living alone in Carignano shows the change of her psychology. Her transformation from very sensible and caring to insensible and self-centred nature is the result of failure of personal and married life.

The life of Raka, the great granddaughter of Nanda Kaul in Carignano is the relief from her parents. Raka is the teenager girl who has just cured from typhoid. She comes to stay at Carigana. The character of Raka is very much similar to Nanda’s character. Nanda is happy to live a life in isolation whereas Raka feels relaxed in the company of natural things at Kasauli Island. The constant quarrelling between Raka’s mother and father brings negativity in Raka’s mind. She is fed up of human relationship hence, she finds relief in Carignano. She sets fire on the mountain which shows her psychology of her mind.

‘CRY, THE PEACOCK’:

It is the first novel by Anita Desai. It is one of the best literary works of her. She has very emotionally interwoven the tormented aspects of Maya’s psychology. Maya, the protagonist of Cry, the Peacock is a woman with the badly disturbed state of mind. Maya’s marriage with very practical natured person Gautama proves to be mismatched as there is no love, care and sympathy in it. Maya is extremely sensitive woman. She takes care of her pet dog ‘Toto’ as her own child. The childless Maya loves her pet madly. Unfortunate, the death of pet makes her so sad that she cannot control her feelings and wants Gautama to calm her through his tenderness. However, Gautama’s practical profession of lawyer does not make him emotional over the death of Maya’s pet. His cold reaction over pet’s death hurts Maya very deeply. Maya’s father is the hero for Maya. She misses her father very much. Maya’s father used to take care her in very delicate manner. He fulfils her all desires and demands. The motherless Maya never misses her mother due to her father’s excessive love and care. Maya feels very safe and sound in the company of her father. Her childhood is the happiest part of Maya’s life. Her father takes every care of Maya’s mood and happiness.

Maya expects the fatherly love from her husband Gautama. She feels that Gautama has to be very much tender with her and has to fulfil her expectations. Maya is unable to understand that the father and husband are the separate part of her life. Her expectation about love and care from both father and husband is not at all applicable in practical life. She is just unable to differentiate the love and care of father and husband. Gautama’s professional life is so realistic that he cannot be emotional like Maya. He faces the challenges of life with his practical mind set. For Gautama, the tenderness and affection has no time and value. His practical mind set is the result of his family’s background. His family has very realistic norms. The members of family do not have time for sympathy and emotions. They discuss the subjects like parliament’s affairs, newspapers, cases of corruptions and finance. When Maya

gets married with Gautama, the mother of Gautama does not take her into an account while discussing the important matters of family's development. Maya remains with the subjects like shopping, marriage and meals. The treatment given by Gautama's family members to Maya is very inferior in nature. The lack of respect, love and communication brings psyche to Maya. She does not find the way out of her predicament. She cannot live her present life with negligence and insensible behaviour of Gautama. Her physical needs are completely neglected by Gautama. She longs for physical pleasure but it's because of Gautama's age, tension in professional life and practical nature, he cannot fulfil her desires. There is complete lack of compatibility between Maya and Gautama. The broken heart with tormented feelings makes Maya's state of mind entirely disturbed. Her complete relief can be seen through her act of killing her husband Gautama by pushing him from balcony and then committing suicide jumping from balcony. Maya is the representative of all those women who are denied their rights at family level.

'WHERE SHALL WE GO THIS SUMMER?':

It is another important novel by Anita Desai. Her approach in this novel is different. Desai wants show that the urban city life has negative impact upon some people's lives. Sita is the main character in this novel. She is the woman with the middle age nearly forty years of age. She is the mother of four children and is bearing her fifth child. She is very much fed up with her present city and married life. The horror happenings around the city disturb her mind. She feels that it is not possible for her to breathe in such a suffocating atmosphere as there are always inhuman things happen around her. The married life of Sita is very much disturbed. Her husband, Raman has business and he has devoted to it. He all the time talks about his business only. His business oriented mind set and self-cantered nature has harassed Sita's married life. In fact, she is the subject of physical lust for him. Her fifth pregnancy is the example for it. He never bothers about Sita's unending family responsibilities. Her feelings are not entertained by Raman. The incident of killing of eagle is an example for it. The constant inferior treatment and lack of love and care are the basic reasons for her anxiety.

Sita is not at all happy in her married life. The city life haunts her in such a way that she is unable to give birth to child in the city. She misses her childhood at Manori Island very much. Her childhood with her father and brother is the best part of her life. She is determined that she would not give birth to her child in Bombay city. She feels that giving birth in the city would be an act of killing it hence she feels that some miracle would happen at Manori Island that would keep her child unborn. Sita decides to go to Island as she is mentally very much tortured by the various incidents in society and family as well. She feels to be detached by her husband and children. None of them considers her sadness and depression. Her decision to visit Island is the result of this all.

However, Sita finds that Manori Island has changed a lot. Her childhood beautiful island is full of dirty things now. The unbearable things that she faces in Bombay are in Manori Island now. Her decision to stay at Manori takes her in more frustration. She is not happy being over there. The end of the novel reveals that Sita for sake of family and her married life does not rebel when her husband comes to take them to Bombay. She again comes to Bombay. It can be seen that Sita accepts the realities of life. The change of her mind set is much appreciated.

CONCLUSION:

The novels of Desai are very realistic in their context. They are simply the mirror of the society. Through the above mentioned three novels; it becomes very much clear that Indian women face the unbearable family problems. The mismatched marriages have no meaning for their existence as they lack of love, sympathy and respect. The women characters of Desai are the victims of intolerable social norms and inferior treatment given by husbands and in-laws. The psychology of her characters gets disturbed because they are not supported and encouraged by their husbands. The traditional mind set about women and the anxiety that they face are reflected through the women characters of Anita Desai.

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