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MARITAL DISHARMONY IN THE SELECTED NOVELS OF ANITA DESAI

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ABSTRACT:

The essence of a good marriage is respect for healthy relationship between husband and wife. The role of a marriage is to establish the fundamentals of society in order that the whole society can attain a state of peace and happiness. True meaning of life lies in good understanding and relationship. If one really wants to understand in one sentence what life means, it is that life means relationship. Without relationship, life has no significance at all. The closest relationship in the world is between husband and wife and next is the relationship between parent and child. Unsuccessful married life can be changed into successful life if the partners try to understand each other's feelings. A healthy compromise based on sacrifice of ego leads to success in married life. Almost all female protagonist of Anita Desai are the victims of marital disharmony. All the marriages in her novels are more or less business transactions. A marriageable daughter is handed over to the male partner without considering the delicacy of her mind and feelings. In all the three marriages, Maya and Gautama's, Monisha and Jiban's, Nanda Kaul and her husband, the individuals brought together in matrimony are palpably incompatible. There is an inevitable breakdown of communication and emotional estrangement that finally leads to unhappiness and tragedy.



KEYWORDS: Marital Discord, Disharmony, Temperamental Differences, Patriarchy, Incompatibility.

INTRODUCTION:

Anita Desai has delineated married disharmonies as they exist in Indian male-dominated society. She has deeply and objectively studied Indian married couples. Mrs Desai had therefore fearlessly commented on the marital disharmony existing in the lives of Indian married couples. The theme of marriage and love is deeply rooted in the novels of Anita Desai. She describes, "The marriage in India and various complexities involved with

them. In her novels most marriages are proved to be unions of incompatibility. Men are considered to be rational while women are sensitive and emotional. Desai's delineation of husbands, fathers and brothers are largely unflattering. Gautama fails in his efforts to understand Maya. Jiban betrays his wife. M.r Kaul is unfaithful to his wife. His love is reserved for another woman which reduces his wife to mere "womb on legs". Desai in her portrayal of man-woman relationship mostly concentrates

on the predicament of modern woman in the male-dominated society and her destruction at the altar of marriage.

Almost all female protagonists of Anita Desai are the victims of marital disharmony. All the marriages in her novels are more or less business transactions. A marriageable daughter is handed over to the male partner without considering the delicacy of her mind and feelings. She has to fulfill either their parent's obligation or relative's intensions. Desai has presented

marital disharmonies as they exist in Indian male dominated traditional families. A marriage is a union of souls. Some adjustment must be there from both sides. But very often, a marriage in Indian society becomes successful because of the woman's grace, love, and wisdom, sense of understanding, tolerance and sacrifice. Desai focuses on the inadequacies between the couples who attempt it. Within the private hell of maladjusted marriages, Desai presents the repressive forces of patriarchal attitudes. In her novels there is a sustained presentation of failed marriages, posing unstated questions regarding the functioning of marriages within the patriarchal structures of the Indian family. What is foregrounded is the psychological repression created through a male supremacist ideology which consumes any possibility of mutual love and concern, corroding the woman's self esteem and devouring her sense of identity and selfhood. In these fictional representations of reality, marriage becomes institutionalized form of domination of women by men within the most personal of relationships. Desai's forte is her handling of maladjusted marriages Maya, Monisha, Nanda, etc. are all woman of deep emotions and fine sensitivities who are entrapped in marriages with men who are never out rightly cruel, who carry out their husbandly obligations assiduously but are impervious to their wives pleas for understanding, communication and respect for their individuality. P. Bhatnagar discovers in Desai's novel the view that 'most marriages prove to be unions of incompatibility. P.F. Patil comments

All marriages in Desai's novels are more or less business transaction. A marriageable daughter is handed over to the male-partner without considering the delicacy of her mind and feelings. She has to fulfill either the parent's responsibilities or the relatives' demands with different intensions. Or either parents obligation or the relative's demands with different intensions.

Marital Disharmony in the Selected Novels of Anita Desai

Desai's first novel, *Cry, the Peacock* is about Maya, who is unable to relate her emotions to her, husband Gautama. Maya and Gautama's marriage is one such case where they both are ill-matched as a couple. Maya is a childless woman married to an unsympathetic, rational, down-to earth man. Maya a young girl in her full youth and emotions are compelled by the circumstances to marry an old man. She is highly sensitive and imaginative and of neurotic sensibility, and Gautama, who is unimaginative and pragmatic and unsentimental. He is very practical and always remains busy in his professional preoccupations. Although they continue to live together, they, find their temperaments irreconcilable and their sensibilities marked by divergence. Maya cannot establish effective communication with her husband as she is too introverted. She lives in utmost sensual and sexual dissatisfaction since he is twice of her age. Maya is never satisfied and happy. She feels that Gautama never cares for her and does not have any feelings for her. There is absolutely no understanding on the intellectual as well as sensual plane. Maya being the more sensitive of the two is unable to bear the strain of the relationship and is driven to insanity by the end of the novel. She craves for 'contact, companionship and communion', which Gautama with his rigid understanding of the Hindu philosophy is unable to fathom. Maya's marriage with Gautama is more or less a marriage of convenience. Gautama's friendship with Maya's father resulted into the marriage of Gautama and Maya. This marriage could not gratify Maya's basic need for love and belongingness. The death of a beloved pet and her husband's genuine inability to understand its impact on her stirs Maya from the complacency of a happy marriage. Gautama's casual indifference to her desperate need for sustenance brings to her a sharp awareness of the incomplete nature of the relationship. Maya considers her marriage to be a 'hopeless regret' and a 'broken affair'. She feels a torture, guilt, dread and imprisonment within the four walls of her private hell.

Novel gives us an impression of the marital incompatibility and unhappy conjugal life. Maya's tragedy is mainly caused by lack of response from her husband, non-reciprocation of feeling between the husband and wife. Many critics have pointed out this incompatibility. Usha Pathania tracing the cause of disharmony between the characters remark:

"Marital relationships are established with the explicit purpose of providing companionship to each other. However, the element of companionship is sadly missing the relationship between Maya and Gautama."

Desai introduces an impression of the marital incoherence and encountered conjugal life. The novel presents an incompatible marriage of the protagonist, Maya.

Her second novel *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) is also related to theme of Marital- dissonance which presents the trauma of housewife Nanda Kaul wife of vice-chancellor, The life- long faithlessness of Mr. Kaul to Nanda Kaul the hypocritical situation force her to avow this severance. Due to faithlessness of Mr Kaul Nanda Kaul has to pass through psychic suffering and bitter experiences of marital life. She just plays the role of hostess taking the care of guests. Externally it seems that she enjoys the comforts and social status of the wife of dignified person but internally Mrs. Kaul burns with fire of frustration. She feels lonely and neglected. Mr Kaul's illicit affair with Miss Davidson, a member of teaching staff produces in Nanda Kaul such disease of spirit that she distrusts all attachments and affairs. She has been violently injured and disappointed in her earlier life as a wife, mother and Housewife. Her withdrawal from life and family is not the result of any existential realization of Man's ultimate aloneness but she has just been 'reduced' to such state. She prefers her lonely isolated existence guarding her privacy fiercely. Nanda Kaul performed the duties of her Married life in very well way as mother and wife, but her husband and children never bothered about her inner psyche. This indifference of her husband and children made her pine for privacy. There is another character who had faced the marital dissonance is Raka granddaughter of Nanda Kaul. She is pathetic figure who too is victim of alienation and isolation because of her parent's marital discord, in marital life. Her parents do not love each other. Her grand-mother Asha, is worried about Tara's relationship with her husband Rakesh. Their marriage has been on the rocks all the time. Raka's parent have not time or inclination to cater to the emotional need of their child as this is the formative period. The mother is in such an unhappy predicament that she cannot do anything for Raka. Her shattered mental equilibrium and deteriorating physical strength render her abject and helpless. The father too has no time to look after the well being of this child. Consequently, Raka's traumatic experience deprives her of a child's innocent trust and feeling of joy in the company of others resulting into its alienation, loneliness, and frustration. The dissonance and chaos in the life of her parents make Raka averse to belongingness.

Like her earlier two novels we could see again the problem of marital discord in *Voices in the City*, which is much concerned with familial relationship. The novel is more about familial relationship gone sour rather than about fulfilling relationship. Novel is about Monisha, a lady of intellectual bent of mind. Monisha is similar to Maya in that she is also childless, sensitive and victim of ill-matched marriage. Her husband is too busy with his middle rank government job and has no time for his wife. He never shares her feelings. He is another Gautama although less vocal. Monisha is totally dissatisfied with her life after marriage. Like Maya she is also a miserable misfit among her in-laws. So she weaves a web of her own and remains imprisoned in its privacy. She feels lonely even in the company of Jiban, her husband.

This novel throws light on the mean existence of troubled soul Monisha in large joint family of Jiban. Her relationship with her husband is characterized only by loneliness and lack of proper understanding. She is happy neither with her husband nor with his family members. She seems to have been transplanted in the wrong soil. Monisha's ill-matched marriage, her loneliness, sterility, and the stress of living in a joint family with an insensitive husband push her to the breaking point and she commits suicide at the end. Monisha is educated, a prey of marital discord and disharmony. Through Monisha, Anita Desai has portrayed the psyche of a sensitive intellectual woman who is suffocated in uncongenial atmosphere of her in-laws' house. The kind of love Monisha wants is not available to her. Jiban doesn't try to understand the real meaning of their relationship. Her relationship with her husband Jiban, does not offer her any happiness and contentment. Her primary charge of theft by her in-laws prove too much for her and she is driven to commit suicide. In a fit of uncontrollable emotional turmoil, she decides to put an end to her nightmarish, unhappy, loveless marriage. She pours kerosene over her clothes, sets herself ablaze and dies before any help could reach her. Thus she tries to give meaning to her death since her married life has had gone.

Monisha's mother also did not have a happy marital life because of her ill-matched marriage. The Father of Nirode is a kind of sadist deriving pleasure in hurting her. After the husband's death when there is no restriction on her, she becomes free and carries on an affair with retired major Chaddha much to Nirode's anger and hatred. The children as well as their mother suffered the consequences of

her marital disharmony. They never enjoyed a unified happy family life where each member could offer and reciprocate love, affection understanding and adjustments to each other. In such uncongenial miserably empty married life. Monisha in *Voices in the city* is totally dissatisfied with her life after marriage. Aunt Lila hates men particularly her husband. The novel perpetuates the theme of maladjusted marriage with a wider aspect.

CONCLUSION-

Marriage is said to be merger of two minds. It is a union of two different minds and there is bound to be adjustments or mal-adjustment. Persons having similar tastes, interests, values tend to form stable relationship. But in the novels of Desai husband and wife have temperamental differences instead of union of two minds. Their attitudes and interests are different and their outlook and reaction towards the same things is different. This change in temperament of character is important reason of Marital disharmony.

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