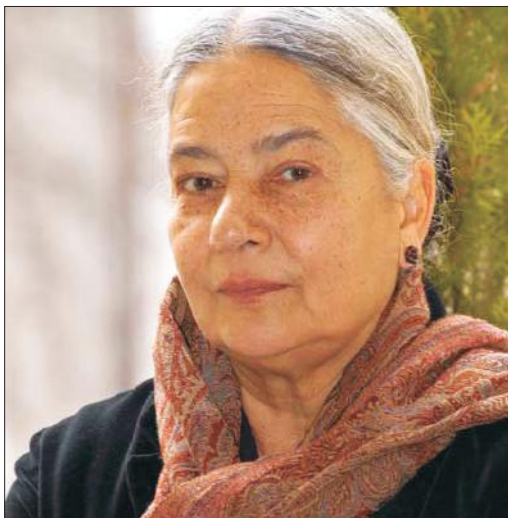


EXISTING RELATIONSHIP IN ANITA DESAI'S NOVELS

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Post-Independence Indian English fiction constitutes an important part of the world literature today and women novelists have made significant contributions to it. Anita Desai has emerged as the most significant novelist on the contemporary literary scene. Anita Desai is a modern Indo-English writer, widely acclaimed, not only in India but also in the world of fiction writing. She emerged on the literary horizon after independence, focusing on the contemporary issues. She has added a new dimension to the Indian English Fiction.

THE NOVELS OF ANITA DESAI ARE DIFFERENT FROM THOSE OF OTHER INDIAN WOMEN WRITERS :

Kamala Markandaya , Ruth Jhabvala and Nayantara Sahgal.

In Kamala Markandaya's fiction, the stress is on the rural background; in Jhabvala's the social background is more important than the characters who enact the various roles; in Sahgal's the accent is on political and social awareness. But in Desai's novels, it is the exploration of sensibility, the inner workings of the mind that assume significance. Anita Desai is interested in the psychic life of her characters and her novels portray that the real concern is with the exploration of her characters.

The most common theme in Anita Desai's novels is human relationship particularly the man-woman relationship. Now a days, this theme has become more important due to rapid industrialization. D.H. Lawrence points out- the great relationship for humanity will always be the relationship between man and women.

The relation between man and man, women and women parent and child will always be subsidiary.(D.H. Lawrence 130)

Twentieth century novelists treat this subject from a different point of view in comparison to earlier novelists. They portray the relationship between man and woman with original colours as it is, where as earlier novelists stressed on as it should be. Christopher Hanson thinks: "The modern writer is concerned with the quality of life and people, with world and value. His investigation of a number of unsatisfying lives has to its basis in the deep conviction that it is man's sacred duty to fight for a life that will express the inherent dignity and worth that, he is capable of. He is aware of that pain, pathos and failure but sure of the values of the struggle towards fulfillment and perfection.(Harison Christopher 82-85)

Indo-English novelist is constantly concerned with the problem of interaction between man and woman, between the individuals and the social world. Her main objective is to portray the psychic states of

her protagonists at some crucial juncture of their lives. Therefore, the most recurrent themes in her novels are "The hazards and complexities of man-woman relationships, the founding of individuality and the establishing of individualism of characters". (Raji Narsimhan 23)

The novels of Anita Desai serve as an "ax" to cut the frozen sea. She writes about the predicament of modern man. Literature for her is an exploration and an inquiry rather than a means of escaping reality. She explores the human psyche, inner climate and thus brings forth really called "taboo Subjects".

Thus the most common theme in her novels is the complexity of human relationships, particularly the man-women relationship. She depicts in her novels that social system is patriarchal and man is the controller of the sexual, economic, political and physical power. There is a very sensitive depiction of the way woman suffers due to the sexist bias in the patriarchal society which gives a subordinate position to woman and always treats them as second rate citizens. In regard to the pitiable condition of woman, Sushila Singh quoted Simone de Beauvoir :

"The situation of women is that she-a free and autonomous being like all creatures-nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the other." (Singh 22)

In most of the novels of Anita Desai, protagonists are alienated from the world, from society, from families, from parents and even from their own selves because they are not average people but individuals. When these characters have to face alienation, they become rebels. Disappointment, worries, depression, anxiety and fear become their lot and they lose their sense, for example Maya in *Cry, the Peacock*, Sita in *Where shall we go this summer?* And Nanda Kaul in *Fire on the Mountain*. Some characters like Monisha and Nanda Kaul are unable to reconcile to alienation and meet with a tragic end.

Undoubtedly, Anita Desai treats very beautifully the feminine sensibility. Anita Desai gives a space to her female characters who raise voice against age old traditions and desire to seek individual growth. They struggle for their own existence. Desai suggests that a balance between the conventional, pre-set role of women and the contemporary issues has to be struck.

Her female characters try to discover and rediscover meaningfulness in life through the known and the established. These characters due to the lack of proper channel of communication become aloof and alienated and start meditating about their lives. In this manner, characters in her novels are generally neurotic females, highly sensitive, emotional and alienated from their environments.

The novel *Cry, the Peacock*, is mainly concerned with the theme of disharmony between husband and wife relationship. She portrays the psychic tumult of a young and sensitive married girl Maya who is haunted by a childhood prophecy of a fatal disaster. Being alone in the family as her mother is dead and brother has gone to America, She gets the excessive love of her father. She feels the world to be a toy made especially for her, painted in her favourite colours and set moving according to her tunes.

Having lived a carefree life, she wishes to have similar attention from her husband Gautama, a father surrogate. When Gautama, a busy prosperous lawyer, too much engrossed in his own vocational affairs fails to meet her demands, she feels neglected and miserable. In this novel, Maya and Gautam have strained relationships because of their incompatible temperament. Maya is dreamy, sensitive and emotional, while Gautama realistic, insensitive and rational. Maya is poetic and stung, strange, Gautama detached remote and insensitive. Maya has tenderness, softness and warmth, Gautam is hard and cold.

The matrimonial bonds that bind the two are very fragile and tenuous, the growing complexities between them reaches its climax when Maya kills Gautam and then commits suicide.

Maya is a victim of the past, lives almost perpetually in the shadowy universe of memories whereas Gautama lives in the present and accepts reality and facts with originality. The mechanical behavior makes Maya brood over Gautama's insensitivity.

Showing how little he knows of my misery or how to comfort me. But then, he knew nothing that

concerned me. Giving me an opal ring to wear on my finger, he did not notice the translucent skin beneath, the blue flashing veins that ran under and out of the bridge gold... telling me to go to sleep while he worked at his papers, he did not give another thought to me. It is hardness- no. no, not hardness, but the distance he coldly keeps from me (Cry the Peacock 9)

In *Voices in the City*, Anita Desai's concern is primarily with human relationship and how in the absence of meaningful relationships, the individual suffers. She probes the psychic compulsion that may affect an individual in forging long term and significant relationships and how an individual is affected if he is unable to forge such relationships.

Nirode, one of the main characters is obsessed with the relationship of his mother with Major Chadha. Nirode feels that even marriage is destructive, negative and decadent. His view on marriage after meeting Sarla is that it is heinous. The novel also depicts the incompatible marriage of Monisha and Jiban. Monisha's husband is the victim of conventional culture. He believes that besides child bearing, a woman's most important roles are cooking, cutting vegetables, serving food and brushing small children's hair under the authority of a stern mother-in-law. Monisha realizes that her privacy is denied to her. Her husband doesn't have enough time for her as well as have no desire to share her feelings. Consequently, She is alienated and feels aloof and abandoned. She leads an equally fragmented and starved life. She is separated from her mother as well as from her husband. The graph of her psychic life can be constructed from her long searching and self confronting entry in the diary.

Monisha's ill matched marriage, her loneliness, sterility and stress of living in a joint family with an insensitive husband push her to breaking point. She shrinks everyday due to frontal assaults on her, bodily and mentally. In a flash of visionary intuition, she realizes to finish the painful journey of her life. In the atmosphere of complete alienation, she thinks that her action to end it all would be the most courageous of all her acts. She says : " I am really too small to be regarded much by any one. I shall be invisible yet." In complete alienation, she sets herself ablaze and gives up her hope before human help could reach her. Except Nirode, none knows the value of her death. Nirode realizes in Monisha's death "too great a value to forge out of distress or guilt or deceit but the very key of all grace, all design to like, the very essence of its exquisite and irreducible."

In *Custody* focus is on theme of marital discord and relationship problem. The novelist deals with a purely marital problem of this materialistic world of glittering civilization in a pent-up city like Delhi where people have little time to stand and stare. In this novel, Deven and Sarla lead an unhappy marital life. They are entirely different from each other in their temperaments. Deven is Hindi lecturer in a college and Sarla has no interest in literature. His "plain, penny-pinching and congenitally pessimistic wife presents the picture of an abandoned wife."

To conclude, among the Indian woman writers in English, Anita Desai has established her name and fame on the horizon of fiction. She also presents new dimension to English fiction through the exploration of human sensibility. She presents very beautifully to readers her opinion about complexity of human relationships as a big contemporary problem and human condition. She takes up significant contemporary issues as the subject matter of her fiction while remaining rooted in the tradition. She brings forth the anguish and worries of individuals living in modern mechanized society. She does not like to separate art from life and always see them as a part of one pattern drawing upon each other for their existence.

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