

A STUDY OF DEPICTION OF WOMEN CHARACTERS IN THE SELECTED NOVELS OF ANITA DESAI

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ABSTRACT

It is impossible to talk about women's issues without bringing up the subject of men's interests in the process. Even now, an examination of patriarchal views reveals that circumstances have not improved significantly for Indian women, albeit there has been some improvement when compared to previous generations. Furthermore, the gender stereotypes prescribed by a patriarchal culture suffocate the true roles played by men and women in society. The repression of women results in a serious conflict of interest in their personal and professional life. Anita Desai was chosen for this article from among a large number of other female writers because she is often regarded as the typical Indian Woman Novelist in English, and because she has made a significant contribution to post-independence Indian literature in English. A continual desire for individuality and independence is pursued by the female protagonists in Anita Desai's literature, despite the fact that they are cognitively and intellectually mature individuals in a patriarchal society.

KEYWORDS: Women, Patriarchal, Society, Culture, Literature, Society.

I. INTRODUCTION

Anita Desai was born in 1937, and she is an Indian actress. Her father was of Bengali descent, while her mother was of German descent. She received her education in Delhi and currently resides in Bombay. She is considered to be one of the most innovative authors of contemporary life in all of its complexities. A broader audience is now becoming aware of the author's distinctive style, which is noteworthy for its subtlety and its ability to capture the essence of a setting or a character in vivid and striking words. She

embodies a fusion of the eastern and western cultures. She is the most acceptable writer for a critical study because she preserves India's cultural legacy, and she is the most appropriate novelist to be studied critically. Despite the fact that the author has received a great deal of critical attention, and a number of critical studies on them have appeared in a number of different journals and periodicals, it will be important to analyse the works in the context of the feminism movement. The current endeavour will very definitely encourage more

research in this area and will serve as a springboard for further critical inquiry. Aside from being a living legend among Indian English novelists, Anita Desai has evolved and emerged from the pathos and ethos of Indian social life, and has been nourished by Indian culture. She has shared the pain and agony of Indian woman, and has consoled her and encouraged her to fight for re-establishment of her self-seeking identity, among other things. The entire body of work, in terms of the notion of feminism, ought to be re-examined and re-interpreted. Furthermore, they cover virtually the whole spectrum of India's diverse social and cultural structure, from Bengal to Chandigarh, encompassing Uttar Pradesh, and extending all the way down to Karnataka in the southernmost section of the country's southern region. A thorough investigation is conducted into the full corpus of various periods of the feminist movement in India, beginning with Independence and continuing to the present day. They also include all of the dimensions of social, moral, and cultural politics, as well as psychological, economic, and political changes in the position of Indian women, among other things. As seen by their efforts, she is devoted to the cause of Indian women in particular. When it comes to disparaging the "One," the novelists of feminist perspective suffer from a variety of social, cultural, political, and economic disadvantages that are inherently built into their characters, despite the fact that they are "all sirens with in." In a series of essays, she questions the dogmas of theology, philosophy, and social behaviour one after another. She demonstrates "how women may live afresh" by calling into question the idealistic, attractive, but submissive and weak images of women that are typically utilised by males to promote their interests. Traditionally, India has been a civilization dominated by men. The Indian woman, who is clothed in numerous thick, loose layers of prejudice, convention,

and ignorance, has little opportunity to live a free and independent life. "Our nation belongs to its males," Aunt Lila remarks in Anita Desai's *Voices in the City*, which is set in Mumbai. Desai has been associated with a new literary tradition of Indian writing in English because of her status as a contemporary Indian female novelist. She finds a home in book reviews, journals, interviews, and symposiums, among other publications. She is a member of a new literary tradition of Indian literature in English that has emerged in recent years. I believe her works may be examined and evaluated while keeping in mind the psychological motives of her books as psychical dramas, which are told through flashbacks, self-analysis, conversations, and descriptions of places and characters. She delves within her characters, investigates the realities of human experience, and considers how these facts relate to the fundamental experience of psychological tensions of the characters. The fundamental topic of her works is the existential situation of a person, which she portrays via mismatched marriages, very sensitive women, and ill-matched husbands as well as through other characters. A common thread running through her works is "the dangers and complexity of man-woman interactions, and [the] establishment of individualism among [her characters'] characters." She is actually a silent spectator who observes everything minutely and sensitively whenever she produces a typical circumstance. She is not a participant in the situation. Insurgent and subaltern, the woman's voice is heard throughout the song. Damayanti, the Indian lady, particularly the middle-class woman, is no longer in fashion nowadays. She is a Damini, a Nora, or a Joan of Arc, depending on who you ask. In India, social reformers supporting the cause of women, such as Raja Mohan Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, and Mahatma Gandhi, gave the movement a new direction and

instilled a new spirit into the women's liberation movement. As a result, feminism has now evolved as a new way of life that is not characterised by the "dependency syndrome." A whole new viewpoint is emerging on the Indian social horizon, with the feminine psyche attempting to redefine women's roles in society and re-establish their own sense of self-identity. According to Anita Desai, the goal of her writing is to uncover the truth for herself, and then to explain and communicate that reality to others. Rather than being identical with reality, she believes that truth is synonymous with art. In this case, there is no difference between Truth and Art. Reality is just a tenth of the iceberg that can be seen above the surface of the water, with the remaining nine tenths of the iceberg visible below the surface of the ocean. Indeed, this is an unquestionably true statement.

II. ANGELS IN THE HOUSE IN 'FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN'

Women are targeted by males in Anita Desai's novel, *Fire on the Mountain*, and the writer deals with a few of instances of female victimisation. In this work, sexual politics and severe bodily violence in hostility to women are made explicitly apparent. Ila Das, Nanda Kaul, and Rake are three of the novel's female characters who suffer. Ila Des' victimisation is social and cultural in nature, Nanda Kaul's victimisation is sexual politics and domestic violence, and Arkansas' victimisation is domestic violence. In all of Anita Desai's works, it might be argued that no one is probably more victimised than Ila Das, who is subjected not just to social and cultural abuse, but also to psychological and sexual assault. The fact that in a patriarchal culture, guys are presented as much as they are competitive, insisting on dominating others, or possessing energy is seen when the boys ridicule Ila Das about her manners upon entering Nanda's

house. Whistling, mocking, caressing, shoving or pawing her little person are all ways in which they tease her because they fail to identify her as a human being who desires to be recognised for who she truly is. It is like to demeaning her own being, her very personality. As a person, she is, on the other hand, of fragile build, and as a result, they are forced to live in poverty. With their little earnings from teaching piano and track courses, Ila and Rima are forced to fend for themselves, provide for themselves and care for their ailing mother who has a bad hip, among other responsibilities. The consequences of those who have been taught to carry the financial burdens of ageing parents and care for sisters are that they abandon their responsibilities, and this cruel cure turns into social and cultural persecution.

In her work *Fire on the Mountain*, Anita Desai portrays the female characters as timid, subservient creatures who softly take care of all the home duties. Do you think this is accurate? "Angles in the home obligations" may be summarised as follows: providing safety to children by fulfilling their expectations and being attentive and gentle to everyone in the family. I am also reminded of one of the most celebrated feminist writers' work, Virginia Woolf's "professions for women," in which Woolf claims that "the Woman was devoted to the killing of the Angel in the house," Coventry Patmore's notorious poetic idealisation of Victorian nurturant-domestic femininity; to Woolf, the term "Angels in the house" represents an impediment to her writing and work as a writer as it is a term that seeks to coerce. Surprisingly, the female protagonists of the storey possess less of the qualities of gentle, spiritual beings who are completely committed to domestic tasks and who live as subservient tiny creatures who satisfy men's demands. Desai portrays their decision to remain in the home

realm as something that was "forced" upon them rather than something they chose to do. "Angles" are preferable than "angles." Both Kaul and Ila das are subjected to oppression in the domestic realm and are treated as if they are men's property. The experiences of oppression, suppression, and self-determination that Nanda Kaul, Ila Das, and Raka have had will be examined in connection to the private and public spheres of their lives. I will also look into whether or not women's existence can be separated from men's domain; in other words, whether or not the female characters can exist as self-determining individuals after escaping from the autocratic patriarchal culture, or whether or not they can achieve total independence even after escaping.

III. OUT OF THE TUNNEL TO THE CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY IN CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY:

Anita Desai has done an excellent job of portraying the lives of the female characters and how they struggle to maintain their autonomy in a patriarchal environment in her novel. Bim's and Tara's past experiences are revealed through the use of flashback techniques that depict the memories of the female characters in the novel. The narrative also co-ordinates these female characters' ability to pass through "out of the tunnel" and see the "Clear Light of Day" at the conclusion. "Out of the tunnel" refers to the process of escaping from one's unpleasant events that have taken place in order to attain self-determination in one's current circumstances. I use the metaphor of "the tunnel" to refer to women who are limited to their home realms and disadvantaged in society as a result of patriarchal authority; it also refers to women who are plagued by their previous experiences and sorrows in the current. A movement that is not only physical, but also psychological, is

suggested by the phrase "out of the tunnel." The title of the work, *Clear Light of Day*, alludes to the female protagonists' liberation from oppression and repression, as well as their arrival at their own self-determination. It may also be understood as the accomplishment of some sort of spiritual enlightenment, which results in a greater knowledge of their current position and the ability to come to terms with their situation. Based on the results of the female characters' attempts to flee patriarchal society, I would want to suggest that the female characters would be unable to achieve complete independence and emancipation. In contrast to Woolf's vision of a woman's movement that incorporates a completely transformed society,⁵⁵ we can see in Desai's novel that some female roles, such as Tara, have only moved from one domain of oppression to another, and others, such as Bim, who rejects the conventions of becoming a wife and subservient to men, have only faced isolation. Bim must make changes to her own value system and come to terms with truth if she is to reconnect with her family and, by extension, with the rest of the community. In the course of anti-colonial resistance, Indian political leaders encourage women to continue to stay in the home and at the same time encouraging them to strike for independence from British rule. While some progress has been made in the area of female self-determination, I believe that they have not yet reached the "Clear Light of Day." „Gandhi. When Bande. Usha states that, "under the new order of my imagination...women will be part-time employees, with their principal duty being to care for their families," he is encouraging women to join the national battle for independence, but he also limits their major sphere of activity to their homes.

The sun is shining brightly. When it comes to her female characters, Anita Desai's most essential focus is placed on the Identity Crisis

and Emancipation of the modern woman. Furthermore, she demonstrates that even emancipated women are unable to break free from some form of social or cultural oppression. Bidad's early years, like Sita's, were marred by deprivation, as she lacked the direction, assistance, and experience that she lacked from her parents. It was common for her parents to be preoccupied with household chores such as going to the gym or playing cards, or to be absorbed in many other activities, leaving little time or attention for their children's intellectual and emotional development. As a result, in Anita Desai's works, women are victims of the way society is structured.

IV. DAUGHTERS IN FASTING, FEASTING:

It has been patriarchy that has been preserved and perpetuated by the traditional nuclear family, which is a tightly-knit unit of parents and children that is dominated by a strong father. This remark can be seen as a parallel to Uma's family's storey, which is told in the novel *Fasting, Feasting*. Papa is the household's dominating person and the upholder of patriarchal values. Mama, for example, is the lady in the home who goes above and beyond to meet all of his wants and who is his most ardent supporter and cheerleader. He is a powerful individual who does not desire to have his authority called into question in public or in his own house. Throughout the course of the novel Mama Papa is not ever written as a pair of distinct units since the father and mother talk as one and are unified in their support for ultimate patriarchal power. It is not possible to apply to Uma's family the traditional notion of a family as consisting of a closely-knit unit of parents and children, as Uma's family is anything but traditional. The parents are cold and indifferent, and their treatment of the children

is frequently cruel. When the children grow up and become adults, they begin to detach themselves from their parents and to become self-centred and uninterested in one another, as well. Desai expresses himself passionately in the novel on the experiences of children growing up in a home under the tyranny of authoritarian parents. The word "Children" is used to illustrate the control of authoritarian parents in this context. In this section, I use the term "Children" to demonstrate that both boys and girls in the Novel suffer from oppression from tyrannical parents, and that such oppression is not directed specifically at one gender, despite the fact that the level of oppression suffered by the daughters far exceeds that suffered by the sons. Additionally, Desai demonstrates that women may, to a certain extent, rebel against patriarchal authority in the home realm, and this chapter will examine how the female characters deal with male authority in the domestic domain. Do they accept it, do they question it, or do they actively revolt in opposition to it? First and foremost, I will look at the experiences of the three daughters, Uma, Aruna, and Anamika, in both their parents' spatial domain and in their husbands' spatial domain to determine if these female characters are subjected to the same kinds of oppression and suppression as the other female characters examined in the previous chapters. Women are oppressed by patriarchal beliefs, and this oppression prevents them from obtaining their emancipation, as I shall explain in my presentation. I'll also look at whether or not the three women are subjected to various degrees of oppression, or, in other words, whether or not each woman's experiences are distinct from the others. I will also demonstrate whether or not the three protagonists attain any level of self-determination, and whether or not this is connected to their decision to enter the public arena and leave their own domestic spheres, among other things.

V. MONISHA IN VOICES IN THE CITY

Voices in the City, Anitha Desai's second novel, portrays Monisha as the most sensitive and poetic of the story's characters, and she is portrayed as such by Anitha Desai in her second novel. The fact that she reads Kafka and Camus demonstrates how exceptional she truly is. She is a delicate woman who is unable to comprehend the taboos of traditional culture. She shows herself via the smallest of things. Monisha comes at Jiban's ancestral home, which is also known as the bow bazaar house. It is a huge joint family with many members that greet her in the usual way. A large number of uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, cousins, and in-laws cram into the house, which has four floors and is surrounded by family. Marriage conflict is shown in a touching manner in the storey. Several of the family's senior female relatives make fun of her inability to bear a kid. She is not afforded any pity or consideration. There is no communication between her and her spouse, and she is always plagued by an overwhelming sensation of loneliness. Monisha is not only a well-educated woman, but she also possesses impressive intellectual accomplishments of the highest kind. She has her own personal collection, which is comprised of great works in a variety of languages. However, she does not have the time or privacy to go through these novels and feel thrilled. When she discovers that her enthusiasm for literature is also being mocked, she is terribly hurt. Monisha is plagued by a horrible sense of isolation from the world. Jiban, her spouse, is a realistic and down-to-earth individual who is fundamentally mediocre. To make matters worse, she is subjected to the insults and tortures of the combined family. While caring for her brother Nirode, who is in critical condition, Monisha has plenty of opportunities to ponder the nature of existence. His sickness

provides her with several opportunities to escape the house. During the most of the day, she is expected to assist with domestic tasks. There is no such thing as privacy. Only in the evenings does she get to see her spouse. She is a free-thinking lady who begins to despise her regular existence with Nirode and decides to return home. After her husband's departure, she withdraws money from her husband's savings account the next day. It is difficult for Monisha to continue to live in this environment when her relatives and aunts are suspicious of her where she comes from. The event brings to light the economic dependency on which Indian women are subjected. Despite her sad circumstances, she serves as a perfect illustration of the educated unemployed women of our day. Monisha is dissatisfied, lonely, and isolated from her friends and family. Her need for touch and closeness, as well as her lack of contact with her spouse, make her existence bland and unimportant in comparison. She ruminates on the pointlessness of her existence. The only way out of this state of life is to accept seclusion and exile from the rest of the world. When I reach this level of seclusion — which is where I feel at home — I am prepared to accept this position and to live here as an exile, a bit further and lower than everyone else. Monisha considers the Bengali women who have worked for generations behind 'barred windows' in the United States. As they go about their business, they are anticipating death. They are not dead, but they are anticipating death, as they do everything with resignation, in the eyes of these quiet Bengali ladies.

She feverishly searches for a genuine meaning in her life, but she is left feeling completely defeated. She gets the impression that her life is devoid of any significance, and she believes that the only option she has is to choose between death and a meaningful existence.

She comes to the realisation that not just her existence, but also human life as a whole, is an unsolvable mystery: "Is my life, is my existence simply a riddle that I will dwell over with passion and anguish for the rest of my days, never to find a solution to?" "Isn't life just a conundrum?" you might wonder. The concert she attends gives her with the opportunity to ponder any and all of her life's questions. She looks for solutions to her questions in the Bhagawat Gita, which she reads. She is torn between returning to her mother in Kalimpong and dismissing the idea since she is concerned about her mother's displeasure. In the end, she is left with no choice but to commit herself in order to find an end to her painful questions. "I have been transformed into a lady who maintains a journal," she says at the end of the storey. A lady who maintains a journal does not sit well with me. No traceless meaningless uninvolved – does this not amount to non-existence, please?" "Doesn't this amount to non-existence, please?" Monisha is a victim of traditional society's expectations. Monisha's challenge is figuring out how to be alone oneself in a private space. She despises the rapacity of the city of Calcutta, as well as the uncomfortable lassitude of its conscience. The fact that she is the eldest daughter-in-law of a typical joint family, along with her sensitive temperament and educational background, makes accepting her role as the eldest daughter-in-law difficult. Monisha is oblivious to the outer world and is consumed with thoughts about the futility of her existence. Monisha is on a quest for stillness in Calcutta, the vast metropolis and the birthplace of the goddess Kali. During her exploration of Calcutta, Monisha encounters two distinct personalities: "one voracious, the other apprehensive." The garden of Kalimpong is Monisha's haven of serenity, a place where she may escape via memory to forget the violence, the crowds, and the lack of privacy she

experiences in the metropolis of Calcutta, where she grew up. While in the city, she feels a death-like stillness, and she spends the most of her time thinking about Kalimpong, the district that is far away from the city and her family. Monisha's monotonous existence in the home, as well as her lack of interaction with others, push her to create an interior garden of her own design. In her eyes, her life has been a waste, a life that has been confined in a steel container. Monisha's personality possesses a horrible destructiveness that is difficult to deal with. She is fundamentally gloomy in her outlook on life and in her approach to it. Monisha's bleak condition causes her to believe that death is the only option to her tormented existence, which she interprets as confusion and misery. Monisha commits herself when she is unable to cope with her mental difficulties. Conclusion Anita Desai is a well-known and prolific writer of fiction, and she is regarded as one of the pioneers of the 'stream of consciousness' book genre. In her works, she has definitely provided a fresh perspective on the Indian English novel, and she deserves special notice for the way she treats women. She might be considered a representation of a movement that is increasingly turning inward and dealing with the issues of individuals, the majority of which are of an existential nature, as time goes on. The female characters in Anita Desai's novels are extremely sensitive human beings. They are pushed to the brink of despair and forced to live within the confines of a constrained conventional framework. Her female characters are a tragic representation of the plight of Indian women. Normally, Anita Desai does not provide a response to the question 'What is life?' Anita Desai, on the other hand, provides a glimpse of the moment of vision, a sensation of reality that is too elusive to be captured by labels, and this elusive nature is a defining characteristic of her work. Her art is motivated by a sense of

dreadful loneliness that she has experienced herself. There is no question that this level of performance will stand the test of time. Unlike many other authors, Anita Desai never presents her heroes as a helpless group in need of pity and compassion. Their mental depths are fully explored in her books, in which they are presented as dignified strangers who are unpredictable and lovely persons. In addition to being a dedicated writer, she tends the art of fiction with the highest affection and compassion, as well as setting values in order to convert them into fiction. No character lives alone; instead, they are shaped to be the victims of society's injustices. After being forced to live in solitude and loneliness, they are provided for in terms of material needs by those who have wealth. What little action there is in her novels is a part of the essential role consisting of the human psychology, the human predicament, as well as the outward and inner rhythms that she portrays. When she fails to respond in the same way as the other viewers, Monisha becomes acutely aware of the passion of love that is suffocating her. It's only that she feels forlorn since she has forgotten and lost contact with it as a result of her current circumstances. "They locked me up in a steel container with a thick glass partition, and I've been there ever since, without a trace of love, hate, or warmth touching me." As she comes to terms with the fact that she has wasted her life, she becomes increasingly resentful of the idea of seeking freedom from her imprisonment and begins her 'panicked hunt for emotion.' She exits her chamber, which is filled with the noises of other people's emotions, and commits suicide as quickly as she can.

VI. CONCLUSION

Anita Desai's novels *Fire on the Mountain*, *Clear Light of Day*, and *Fasting* will be the focus of this discussion. Women's pain and the

battle for freedom and autonomy in patriarchal society and culture are the intertwining themes that arise throughout a meal. The reading possibilities finally opened by feminist discourses helped me to detect the next stage of patriarchal control and the extraction of women's subservience from the patriarchal order. Anita Desai brings to life the sensitivity of a woman in her storey. In general, women and men anticipate shooting in all of its forms and modes of recognition. They have fought for the equality of women's rights throughout history and in politics. They place a strong emphasis on the importance of ladies in the fellowship. In all three books under consideration, we find women who are displaced and exiled in society, and we see them making a variety of measures to avoid the negative experiences that they mostly meet in the home realm. I have attempted to demonstrate that Desai's women are subjected to various degrees of oppression and suppression through an examination of their experiences in the domestic realm and the public arena, respectively. Because of their battle for self-determination, I have also argued that the majority of these women have achieved varying degrees of self-determination, but they are also plagued by their previous memories and are separated from the rest of their community. The majority of them are therefore unable to attain complete emancipation via their battle against the male dominating culture.

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