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The Domestic as Dystopia: A Critique of the Patriarchal Home in Anita Desai's Novels

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Abstract

Anita Desai's selected novels serve as a lens through which to examine the role of women in Indian society. It illustrates the significance of women in a variety of contexts, including the home, the community, and the workplace. In almost every aspect of women's lives in Desai's novels demonstrate how the groups of women in India are entwined with one another. She engages with the middle-class Indian woman, who is representative of the great majority of Indian women, rather than fleeing the conventional world of Indian women. She has written a great deal on Indian women today and the challenges they encounter. She has also studied the obligations and responsibilities Indian women have to society and to themselves. They are quite cognisant of themselves. For them, a mother and a wife are insufficient; they need more. The search for female characters in Anita Desai's writings have been compared and contrasted on different view of points.

Keywords: feminist perspectives, women equality,

Introduction

From past to present, women have been the subject of numerous literary works. It is difficult to overlook half of the population in a time when everything is changing and developing. English-language Indian writers have also emerged from their "non-attachment" shells and begun to recognise the importance of Indian women in a culture dominated by men. The idea of Indian women has changed dramatically throughout the years and is as diverse as the nation itself. India has experienced several transformations, including from agrarian revolution to cyber technology, from spiritual supremacy to communal conflicts, from captivity to independence, and from a brilliant past to deterioration. The role of the Indian woman has also changed from that of deity to devadasi, from shakti to abala, and from homebound creature to a professional outfit.

It is crucial to note that Indo-Anglian fiction also consistently depicts the shifting socioeconomic conditions of this turbulent century. It might be easy for those who want to categorise Indian English fiction to split it into two main groups: writers from before and after independence. Her concept of the "nodal period" when several Indian writers of English-language fiction attempt to examine and manifest Indian reality, is aptly matched with the post-Independence era of recent Indian history. Those authors attempt to bring together the traditional outlook of the past with the rapidly changing realities of modern living conditions, but they lack the dedication of the earlier era or even the humorous narration of the middle

class's struggles.

The authors of the post-Independence era turn inward in this endeavour. They attempt to assess the societal impact on their characters' psyches and become increasingly psychologically prepared. This shift from externally glaring realities to internally complex issues found its spokesperson in a number of female novelists who, due to their unique circumstances, have been able to observe Indian complexities up close, where sensitive people are subjected to limitations of many hues and shades. Women authors' fiction offers perspectives, a plethora of knowledge, a storehouse of meanings, and a topic for conversation. Women's issues have gained attention, and female writers concentrate on them. Such topics have been covered in a number of English-language creative works by authors such as Nayantara Sehgal, Shashi Deshpande, and Shobha De.

Anita Desai is one of the various voices of contemporary Indian English fiction among the myriad hues and colours of women novelists. She documents the problems that people encounter in the metropolitan environment of India. Her 1963 book *Cry The Peacock* ushers in a new era of psychological realism in this genre. Similar to Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai has made human relationships the focal point of her creative work. With female characters serving as the primary protagonists, she is primarily interested in the journey that her characters take. Therefore, the suffering of living in a conservative, male-dominated, and hostile culture is a recurring theme in her writings.

Though their approaches differ, contemporary women writers have similar subject concerns. They are all chroniclers of the conflict that has arisen since India became a developing country. A conflict between tradition and modernity can also be found. Women who are conventional in their lifestyle yet have a modern perspective and the ability to maintain their individuality are described in the novels written by women authors. The supremacy of the traditional social fabric, where the individual finds his weakness, clashes with awakened individuals. Anita Desai has looked for fresh ways to express the recently discovered inner and exterior reality. In order to capture the eddies and currents in her characters' stream of consciousness, she has employed a style that is flexible and suggestive enough to portray the fever and anxie-

ty.

The interplay of thoughts, feelings and emotions is reflected in language, syntax and imagery for her, "it is depth which is interesting, delving deeper and deeper in a character, a situation or a scene, rather than going round about it". (Jain: "Interview with Anita Desai" P. 68) Anita Desai attempts to introduce a contemporary psychological vein that is typically absent from other Indo-Anglian fiction writers by capturing psychological realism as intensified impressionism. She conveys an intimate expression of her characters' inner worlds by making the setting less important than the characters. "Facing, single handed, the ferocious assaults of existence," she writes of her characters. For her, the plot is significant mainly because it captures her characters' obsessions. Lesser scene and people are based on real life, according to Anita Desai's interview, although lesser characters and events are either wholly fictional or a combination of multiple persons and incidents. Virginia Woolf, who likewise penetrated the characters' thoughts and showed little regard for the actual outside action, is closely compared to Anita Desai. Similar to the works of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, Desai's novels focus on human nature and relationships. Existential tones control the main theme of Anita Desai's novels, which is the interaction between a man and a woman.

Alienation, despair, dissatisfaction, anxiety, and the emotional life of the individual are the primary topics that existentialists address. Desai addresses these issues as well because she studies the "emotional life" of individuals and is interested in the "human condition." Her main focus is on the extremely sensitive spouses and the depressing, heartless, thoughtless, poorly picked husbands. She has chosen to depict multiple subjects simultaneously in her novels, and these themes appear to repeat in each one. She typically introduces sensitive and dissimilar characters at the beginning of her novels.

They become rebels because they are unable to follow the prevailing trend. They consequently isolate themselves and lead a solitary existence on their own islands. These folks begin to obsess over their life because they are sensitive. In the end, they either reach a new insight or recognise the truth or reality from which they had attempted to flee. However, in some books, characters are una-

ble to deal with reality and seek solace in murdering themselves or other people. As a result, her subjects often diverge from those of other authors. Every element blends into the others, and occasionally several themes are interwoven. Using these themes as a foundation the writer is able to build up the characters into significant whole.

In her 1965 second book, *Voices in the City*, Anita Desai focusses on the impact of Calcutta on the three family members rather than the city's physical features. The four portions of the book are called "Nirode", "Monisha", "Amla" and "Mother." The personalities mentioned in the title are the focus of each of these parts. 'Nirode', the opening segment, discusses Nirode's mental turmoil and isolation. He is an artist who is having difficulties in both his life and his art. He launches a magazine called *Voice*, but he is dissatisfied with its performance and eventually sells it.

In this book, Anita Desai explores the issue of connections and alienation. In *Clear Light of Day*, she herself states, "about time as a destroyer, as a preserver, and about what time does to people," time plays a significant role in the book. In the book, she makes it apparent that although time goes by, nothing changes—except for the pattern. The four Das children—Bim, Tara, Raja, and Baba—are the focus of the family drama *Clear Light of Day*. The narrative is told from the perspective of the book's protagonist, Bim.

Their mother passes away from diabetes, and Bim and Tara are sisters. The parents lived a hectic life playing cards and had no time for their kids. Bim must take up the responsibilities of her sister and brothers. She educates and marries her siblings, giving up her life for them. She also assumes responsibility for the deteriorating house, her elderly aunt Mira Masi, and her brother Baba, who has a mental disability. Tara travels overseas after marrying Bakul, a foreign ambassador. Raja also departs from Bim and his home to see Hyder Ali in Hyderabad. He settles there after marrying his daughter. Bim feels abandoned and hurt by everyone. She can't accept Tara and Raja. Bim declines to travel to Hyderabad for Raja's daughter's wedding. She considers sending Baba to the wedding out of rage, but she quickly realises her error. She eventually admits her frailty and expresses regret for what she did to Raja, Baba, and Tara. She matures to forgive everyone after realising the truth in

Clear Light of Day.

Women have been shifted from various life stages, and the novelist pays close attention to the woman's emotional responses during these encounters. Since she accurately portrays Indian culture's issues, ambiguities, complexities, and paradoxes, she may be said to as its spokeswoman. She is skilled at portraying how women respond to various situations, such as the husband's disinterest, the in-laws' mistreatment, or the parents' apathy. Because of her tenacious spirit and willingness to make concessions, she portrays the Indian woman as a fighter, a victim, a survivor, a courageous woman, and ultimately a winner in her later novels.

The works of Anita Desai have a direct bearing on societal reality. New family customs and social realities are linked, and a girl may find it challenging to cope with these situations. However, Anita Desai does not dwell on social issues like other people do. She delves further into the factors that influence a woman's development in this patriarchal, male-dominated environment. Without claiming to be a social reformer, she investigates social reality from a psychological perspective. Her novels explore the inner lives of humans, and she is skilled at describing small details that are typically overlooked.

It is a disorder that causes mental instability, extreme depression, and feelings of inadequacy and pessimism that make it difficult to stay interested in life. The same is true of Anita Desai's female characters, who struggle with rejection, despair, and frustration. They enjoy privacy and solitude. The despair and oppression of these highly introverted female characters who are unable to express their feelings are Anita Desai's concerns. As in *Cry, the Peacock*, moving from one pit of despair and depression to another, Sita's feeling of hopelessness and dejection is depicted by: "All order is gone out of my life. There is no plan, no peace, nothing to keep me within the pattern of familiar everyday life." (79)

There is a significant dispute, quarrel, or ongoing conflict between the sexes. Conflict is evident after marriage when men do not act in a way that meets women's expectations and vice versa. When Sita chooses to travel to the island while pregnant, her husband becomes agitated in *Where Shall We Go this Summer?* He says "Not much longer to go

now, Sita, it'll soon be over. You are doing a blunder." (Anita Desai: 1975; P.21) But she wasn't ready to listen and in frustration she says "I am trying to escape from the madness here, escape to a place where it might be possible to be sane again." (Anita Desai: 1975:P.23)

One of the main causes of marital discord in Anita Desai's novels was isolation. Isolation functions on both a mental and physical level in the novels. A woman may experience physical isolation if she is alone in her home and no one is available to take care of her, and emotional isolation if she believes her husband does not value her. *Custody*, the absence of unity between Deven and Sarla is the issue. She anticipates that her spouse will continue to be responsible for her care. Their temperaments are so different that they rarely spend time together. Sarla suffers from mental trauma and leads a solitary existence as a result of this isolation.

A major theme in Anita Desai's writings is the alienation between husband and wife that results from a lack of communication and erratic inappropriateness. The love and unity of strength that Anita Desai's women recognise as the solution to the world's problems are what they yearn for. Isolation and separation are inevitable outcomes of their unwillingness to give up and their inability to accept their partner's viewpoint. Because of their inability to communicate, Sita finds herself estranged from her husband, just like in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* She is still a forgotten figure. She constructs her own universe and populates it with incredibly sensitive creatures. Lack of understanding on the part of her husband, and incapacity in them both to strike a sympathetic chord between each other leads to discord.

Conclusion

Women's status in modern India is a bit of a conundrum. On the one hand, she is at the pinnacle of achievement, but on the other hand, she is oblivious to the violence perpetrated against her by her own family members. Women in current times have accomplished far more than women in the past, yet they have still travelled a long way. Their route is littered with stumbling stones. The women have left the safe haven of their homes and are now fully equipped with their abilities on the battlefield of life. They had proven their worth. However, they have yet to receive their dues in

India. Their novels seem to have a repeating topic of marital strife. Marriage does not appear to provide them with a remedy, but rather exacerbates their predicament. Anita Desai's early works are mostly about man-woman relationships, and she depicts the predicament of modern women in a male-dominated society, as well as their destruction at the altar of marriage. According to Anita Desai, the majority of marriages end in incompatibility, despite the fact that there are a variety of reasons for this. A certain sequence and pattern may be found if one reads her novels in chronological order. Her novels' titles themselves are meaningful and hint at this trend. The prior chapters have gone into great detail about this. They lose their ability to reason. Desai's female characters reflect life's hardships, with more females attempting suicide in the end. Women require life independence and solutions to all of their problems. Desai portrays the entire chapter as a novel psychological trick. Thus, it is identified that the majority of Desai's novels, which have a female protagonist, explore the psychological problems.

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