

Theme of Alienation in Anita Desai's Novel Voices in City

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Abstract

India has contributed significantly to the World Literature. In its early stages, the Indian Writing in English was heavily influenced by the Western art form of the novel. This contribution is chiefly through the novelists of Indian writing and these writers are still in the fore-front in this respect. The Indian English novelists were most responsive to the call of equality, freedom and human rights, and thus their writings had a social implication. Indian writing in English was a vehicle for the writers to express themselves to people all over the world. Their writings were more centered towards human relationships within family and society.

The Indian English writers were most responsive to the call of equality, freedom and human rights, their writings had a social impact. Anita Desai has earned for herself a healthy niche in the annals of Indian writing in English. She has firmly established her reputation as one of the outstanding creative fictionists. As a remarkable Indian woman writer in English, she has won several prestigious literary awards. *Voices in the City* (1965) has been divided into four parts and presents the lives of one brother, two sisters and their mother. One part of the novel is in the form of diary. *Voices in the city* is considered a remarkable existentialist novel in which its main characters Nirode, Monisha, Amla and the city of Calcutta itself are engaged in the search for true meaning of the lives. The paper focuses on the theme of Alienation that the characters suffer in the novel *Voices in the city*.

KEYWORDS: Social Implication, Freedom, Social Impact, Human relationships.

Indian Writing in English has enriched with the Indian Independence movement, materialism and spiritualism, east-west encounter, political unrest, socio-cultural ethos, clash between tradition and change, materialism and spirituality, personal relationship, public interest as well as tradition and modernity as the modern themes. Indian fiction in English is usually and summarily equated with the 'Big Three' Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao. They are also known as the 'Triple Pillars' because there has been a steady growth of Indian Fiction since they appeared on the scene. Many novelists describe the human sufferings of rural life and urban life in their novels like hunger, evil, poverty, pollution and family problems. Some of the novelists demonstrate the traditional Indian attitude towards sufferings. Indian Women writers emerged and soon became prominent through their novels in the field of Indian Literature.

Anita Desai's second novel *Voices in the City* Nirode, a male and typical Bengali youth, who is the protagonist, is a nonconformist and rebel by nature. Nirode expands as the narrative progresses from Part I to Part IV. Nirode is a person suffering from alienated identity. In fact, he suffers from alienated identity as he gets caught in the cross currents of the social changes.

He calls himself a "journalist" out of an inferiority complex, he feels rejected when his younger brother is sent abroad for higher studies. Nirode remarks: I think what I hate most about this magazine of mine is the people it has attracted to it, and therefore, to me. Not one of them I'd like to see anywhere except at their funerals. I hate

them breaking down my necks as though they have the right to do that. (VC 94)
Nirode wishes to begin his journey as he desires and to find way of escape. When an individual has a goal to fulfill he has some satisfaction, but for Nirode there is no goal to reach to. He struggles to hold on to his identity. Gradually, he learns to look at himself as a person "for whom aloneness alone was the sole natural condition, aloneness alone the treasure worth treasuring". (VC 24)

The problems he faces are aimlessness, fear and blockade of his consciousness. Nirode's bitterness, anger, stress and psychotic perversions are effectively communicated to the reader through stream of consciousness technique. Nirode feels that life has not treated him fairly enough. His brother Arun was adored and given complete encouragement by his parents which is in contrary to the way he is treated by them. This difference in behavior shatters him and gradually he distances himself from them. Nirode does not strive for freedom as an individual but he tries to move away from situations so as to escape problems. Nirode negates life's possibilities, Nirode's ardent wish, throughout the novel, is to fail at everything. It is an attitude. He tells:

I want to move from failure to failure, step by step to rock bottom. I want to explore that depth. When you climb a ladder, all you find at the top is space, all you can do is leap off fall to the bottom. I want to get there without that meaningless climbing. I want to descend quickly. (VC 40)

Nirode fails to start on a new project, which makes him to be heroic. He is abnormally sensitive. He moves from one false solution to another, he changes his goals very rapidly. The novel explores the role of human creativity in man's quest for happiness. Each character in the novel makes a successful attempt in a particular kind of activity and each activity suggests a typical failure.

The problems and the symptoms of alienation take roots in Nirode's home. The worst situation arises when the children notice hostility and contempt between their parents. Nirode's father an idle man put an unconcealed malice for the mother. The mute sufferers of this situation are the children. All the children grow up with this malice and contempt within Home resulting in failure to grow as self directed individuals. The worst sufferer is Nirode, being the eldest. His father always neglects him and instills a greater confidence in Arun, who is his favourite son. Nirode starts losing his basic confidence and broods over his unfortunate boyhood. If he had the confidence he would have sailed to England for higher studies instead of his brother Arun. He was an emotional disorderly school boy. Nirode has fallen from his horse and declared to his father, through tears, that he hated horses, sports and would never ride again. If Arun had ridden the horse like a Prince, captained the cricket team and won top honours in examinations the father would have been happy. If his father, while dictating his will to an obese solicitor, had not weighed these distinctions before laying aside, a sum of money for the education of one of his two sons. Though in comparison with Arun he appears to have unfulfilled his mission in life. He shouts in a rebellious voice, "I will have it . . . I will have it . . . you'll see how I get it". (VC 12)

Nirode keeps changing his goals consequently suffers from a deep sense of isolation and alienation. Nirode makes several plans, but he fails to make an attempt on the task, he succumbs to an obsession with failure. He has an intense desire for self-

esteem and therefore he feels disgusted and rejected when he faces failure after failure. He is deeply conscious of his own incapability and irrelevance to the whole of life.

Anita Desai records Nirode's sense of defeat:

. . . he drifted, a shadowy cipher, and his life consisted of one rejection following another. He loathed the world that could offer him no crusade, no pilgrimage and he loathed himself for not having the time, unwavering spirit of either within him. There was only this endless waiting, hollowed out by an intrinsic that was nothing to wait for. (VC 25)

Nirode has lost his hope, faith and emotional strength owing to his alienation from his mother. He tells Amla that he has been sentenced death:

I am prepared and waiting for it. I have heard her approach – death, Kali . . . while she watches I grow more and more vividly alive by the minute and also closer and closer to my death. (VC 256).

Nirode's mother's behaviour violates Nirode's moral and social standards, he is not able to digest the loose conduct of his mother and attitude heightens his alienation, he experiences extreme loneliness and separation. The other characters in the novel are also equally alienated.

In fact there is lack of communication and understanding among the members of the family. Monisha, Nirode's sister and her husband are also alienated from each other. Monisha considers any contact or communication to be dangerous. She does not crave for contact and relationship with Jiban, her husband. In Jiban's household she often feels disturbed when surrounded by his people and prefers to be alone.

Alone I could work better and I should feel more. But less and less there is privacy . . . I wish they could leave me alone sometimes to read. (VC 115-116)

Monisha's father feels that marriage in a middle class society like that of Jiban's will cure Monisha of her morbidity. She is unable to adjust herself with the new surrounding and totally fails to build a lasting rapport with her husband. Monisha, Nirode and Amla see the city as a force to be reckoned with. Nirode feels the pressure of the city and feels suffocated. Monisha is in love with loneliness, reacts against her relatives in Calcutta and feels trapped in her husband's house. Monisha refuses to identify herself with her inlaws' family. Her self-hate is symbolized by the personification of the dancer woman as Kali, representing total destruction. This attitude of her takes her to total isolation. Monisha commits suicide out of despair at not being able to experience life. The characters of *Voices in the City* are the products of same social and cultural ethos and are victims of Alienation their own way.

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