

Feminist Approach in Anita Desai's Novel

Aruna Kannan

Assistant Professor of English, Annai Fathima College of Arts and Science,
Thirumangalam, Madurai, India

Abstract

Feminism is a collection of movements and ideologies armed at defining, establishing and defending equal political, economic and social rights for women. The term feminism can also be used to describe an academic discourse or to describe a political, social or economic movement aimed at more rights and legal protection for women. Anita Desai is a prolific living writer who is considered the writer who introduced the psychological novel to India and is pioneer of writing on feminist issues. She challenges the prevalent vision of Indian women stereotype by subverting their quest for fulfilment with on intense dissatisfaction with the family system hence a resultant unsatisfied ego. Desai mostly deals with the predicament of women in a male dominated society and gives prime importance to the place of women in men - women relationship. She portrays the splintered psyche of suffering women, who are tormented with a sense of alienation which leads to a search for identity.

In addition to being a summing up attempt to focus on all the protagonist of Anita Desai who are alienated from their family and society, their mental upheavals, their marital discord and search for their identity. Most of Desai's characters live in solitary confinements. All protagonists taken for study in her novels live in their own secluded world and are unable to accept the dictates of a male dominated society. They put up a brave fight which makes them undergo many psychic upheavals and sets them on in a quest for identity. But they are not altogether lost in the whirlwind of their emotions because in the end, they are capable of attaining emancipation and finding solution to their ills by self-discovery or at least by self-destruction.

KEYWORDS: Subverting, dissatisfaction, alienation, identity and emancipation.

Desai's portrayal of man- women relationship has been influenced and conditioned by the existing intricate social situation. It must be said to her credit that in her nine novels she has covered a wide gamut of man-woman relationships. It is none of her fault that in her novels are hardly get a glimpse of the delights and exultations of mutual, reciprocated love instead are meet with the agonies, the heart-aches and the shocks of embittered man -woman relations. The importunities and imperatives upon her with such intensity that she cannot depict the sweetness and delightfulness of the richest experience of human life. It is the predicament of the modern human situations that affected the most tender and sweet aspect of this human relationship.

Desai has added a new dimension to the Indian English fiction. Her works are different from those of other India women writers Kamala Markandeya, Ruth Pravar Jhabvala and Nayantra Sahgal. In Markandeya's fiction, the stress is on the rural background is more important than the characters who enact the various roles: on 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. Desai is interested in the psychic life of her characters and her novels reveal that her real concern is with the exploration of the human psyche. Desai unravels the mystery of the inner life of her characters. She does not face any difficulty in the handling of the English language for a subject such as this. Like Khushwant Singh and Mulk Raj Anand, Desai is of the opinion that writing in English is not necessarily a handicap. She is neither apologetic nor definite about her use of this language as medium of expression. She finds English to be a suitable link language, a compromise between Bengali and German that she inherited from her parents she has not chosen "English in a deliberate and conscious manner. The language has come to her in a natural way. And she is glad to be writing in a language, as rich, as flexible, supple, adaptable, varied and vital as English. It is the language, she says, of both reason and instinct, of sense and sensibility. It is the language, she says, of both reason and instinct, of sense and sensibility. It is capable of poetry and prose. Of course, Desai is conscious of the fact that she is writing in a language that has no tradition. Although it has never taken its presence is always felt.

By writing novels that have been catalogued by critics as psychological, and as purely subjective, Desai feels free to employ, simply, the language of the interior. And the use and the free play of this language amply suits the temperament of Desai. As a writer, she is not willing to go in for self-exploration. What she writes is not an act of deliberation, reason and choice. For her, it is a matter of instinct, silence and waiting. Desai consciously engages in the exploration of the human situation which often tends to be existential rather than bound by heredity, social environment and the religious, moral or cultural values of the character or the author. Writing for Desai is a process of discovering truth; but this truth for her is not metaphysical reality, nor is it the superficial reality. She is less interested in the external reality or absolute truth existing outside the human situation. The truth for her exists on the dreams and will of the people she creates. Her characters do not have fixed personalities. Only the situation they are in, along with their will and dreams create the story, action and drama of the novels.

It provides a method of presenting character outside time and place; in the double sense that, first, it separates the presentation of consciousness from the chronological sequence of events, and second, it enables the quality of given state of mind to be investigated so completely by means of pursuing to their end the remote mental association and suggestions, that we do not need to wait for time to make the potential actual before we can see the whole. A security of Desai's art shows that the novelist is growth-oriented. In the development from her first heroine, Maya, to her latest creation one discovers this expanding vision of authenticity in her short stories, where her characters show an ability to integrate their disintegrated personalities in moments of epiphany. Her artist-protagonists, or those with an artist inclination, manage to see beauty and harmony through the sordidness of life. In Desai, the urge for self-expression is in itself a powerful drive towards self-actualization.

Perhaps her own urge for self-realization bequeathed to some of her protagonists in the shape of their artistic visions, is responsible for the fullness of compassion in her fiction. There is a rich vitality in an ordinary life, even. Some characters are free of spirit who, dissatisfied with the routine or ordinary world, break

away from their existing life patterns, only to realize that family and social ties cannot be substituted. For some of Desai's characters, the realization comes sooner or later that individual freedom must create some kind of a new relationship. After all, apathy, inertia and uninventiveness are not the answers to life. Strategies are, however, not alike. Maya is a case of severe psychosis. She is a morbidly dependent person, who values love and sex beyond everything else in the world. When Gautama does not stand up to her expectations, she turns violent. Her self-hate comes to the surface turning self-destructive. She first kills him and then commits suicide. The solution adopted by Maya - morbid dependency and resignation - are the outcomes of detrimental home conditions. Though these moves the protagonists try to defend themselves from their pathogenic environment. The readers feel that her alienation and consequent trouble are not due to marital disharmony, but that their marital emanates from their own inner conflicts.

An analytical study of the novel of Desai, suggests that the portrayal of human relationships, particularly the kin bonds, is the dominant concern of this woman novelist. The emotional bond between and woman in Desai's is characterized by dissonance and despair. The delineation of filial bonds also, highlights their differing attitudes, towards the significance and role of primary ties. For Desai, over pampering as well as emotional deprivation creates psychological blocks in the way to maturity and the ability to establish and maintaining harmonious inter-relationships in adult life.

In Desai's novels the jarring notes of dissonance and despair emanate from temperamental incompatibilities. The emotionally sensitive and impulsive Maya is pitted against Gautama who believes in detachment, as it is preached in The Gita. The temperamental polarities between Sita and Raman create havoc in their emotional attachment. Temperamental difference are a universal phenomenon. This essential wisdom eludes Maya and Sita, who move in limited familial and social circle and find the familial ties, to be a noose around their neck.

Desai's characters put individually above everything else. The desire to live and love clashes so violently in them that their interpersonal relationship becomes dissonant and jarring, driving them to withdrawal and alienation. Desai's characters do not achieve harmony in their interpersonal relationship, because they lack involvement and surrender, acceptance and resignation, Maya and Sita all fail to accept their limitations. Desai's characters strive to achieve harmony and tranquility, by alienating themselves, by escaping from the demands and expectations inherent in life. They do not know that adopting make on derive real pleasure, genuine joy and fulfillment anywhere and with anyone.

Anita Desai's novels may very well be that the contortions are to many, and are often the result of excessive cerebration on the author's part and not always determined by the movements in the consciousness of the characters. Nevertheless, Anita Desai's is an original talent that has the courage to go its own way, and her two novels carry a burden of rich promise as well as the marks of present achievement.

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