

Modus Operandi of Empowering Women in Some Selected Novels of Anita Desai

Dolan Ghosh¹, Dr. Anita Singh²

¹Research Scholar, ²Associate Professor,
^{1,2}Jharkhand Rai University, Ranchi, Jharkhand, India

ABSTRACT

Because of the rigid rules and regulations of the patriarchal society we have to empower women for the development of the society itself. In the Vedic Ages women were highly respected in Indian society. "Sahadharmini" which means equal partner was used in that period. Women enjoyed respect, equality, education, and reverence at that time. It was in the age of Sutras and Epics i.e. in 500 B.C. to A.D.500 that the status of women changed considerably. Their position within the society was deteriorated day by day. Manu said that a woman has to be dependent before marriage on her parents and after marriage on her husband. Throughout their life they have to maintain their role as an obedient daughter, as a devoted wife, and as a caring mother. They became the subordinate and silence second sex under the strong clutches of the patriarchal society. The feminist of India consider him as a misogynist. However since independence, the role and status of women have been gradually changed. Through different type of feministic movement which is the outburst of centuries of struggle for women's rights, women become successful to snatch a respectable position for them within the society. Being a woman, the Indian novelists of the contemporary literature raised their voices against the suppressed cultures and traditions of the society where women are considered as inferior to men, through their writings. In this particular paper, the contemporary Indian novelist Anita Desai's two novels 'Cry, the Peacock' and 'Clear Light of Day' have been taken up for a brief discussion to understand the status of women in Indian society.

KEYWORDS: *women, empowerment, patriarchal, subordinate, inferior, suppressed, right, status*

INTRODUCTION:

Empowering women is a burning topic in the contemporary Indian society. As the patriarchal society thought themselves superior in power so they don't need any kind of empowerment for them. Since ages they have enjoyed this kind of superiority by dominating matriarchal part. As women are soft-hearted and physically weaker than the men according to the patriarchal society traditions so they are given a lower and subordinate position under the male domination. They have no right, no freedom, and no dignity. Throughout their whole life it is their duty to be dependent on the male persons of their family. They are always supposed to need a support for their survival within the society. Society has imposed a strict role for them to be an obedient

daughter, a devoted wife and to be a caring mother. According to patriarchy these are the natural way of living. Indian women have skillfully handled all her roles imposed by the patriarchal society, with a blind faith. And Indian women being silence the matriarchal part of the society had tolerated every kind of suppression as their duty and virtue. But this faith came out with an outburst of feminist movement when they became misconduct by the crucial rules of patriarchy. Because of that women have to meet various types of challenges in their life and these challenges have been subjected on them by the rigid rules and regulations of the patriarchal society and also thrown by the customs, traditions and even religion also. They broke their silence and raised their

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voices for their rights and freedom. Since independence the role and status of women gradually changed. Through various feministic movements which are the outburst of centuries of struggle for women's right they succeeded to acquire a respectable position within the society. They are in the right track towards attainment of selfhood, independence and above all personal dignity.

Status of woman in Indian literature:

Indian Literature in the pre-independence era, depicted women as seductive, self sacrificing, the very embodiment of selfless love and a veritable monument of patience, ever willing to suffer. These all qualities are highlighted as the virtue of true womanhood. In the male dominated society, woman is compelled to bind within the narrow confines prescribed by man. And since ages this kind of domination creates female enslavement within the society. But with the wide spread of education women both at home and abroad, has been succeeded to achieve a step forward from the manacles of age-old servility and subordination. And these aspects of woman's life have been expertly depicted in the Indo-Anglican novels of the post-independence era. Women are no more silence; rather they are fighting for their rights, for honesty, for equality, for identity, for freedom and for dignity. A galaxy of Indo-Anglican woman novelists have sprung up with their commendable contribution on the issues that concern woman's status and their feelings in life. Dealing with feminine sensibility writers like Ruth Power Jhabwala, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sehgal, Santha Rama Rao, Anita Desai, Padmini Sengupta, Attia Hussain, Sashi Deshpandey, Arudhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri and the host of others have been commendably highlighted the true virtue of womanhood in their writings.

Woman in Anita Desai's novel:

Anita Desai, who is one of the major voices of the Indo-Anglican novelists, has introduced a new era in Indian novel writing i.e. psychological realism. In this context, Dr. R. K. Dhawan has rightly remarks in his 'Introduction to Indian Women Novelists' - 'Anita Desai's serious concern is with 'the journey within of her characters', the chief protagonists being female characters. Therefore, the recurring theme that we come across in her novels is the agony of existence in a hostile and male-dominated society that is not only conservative but also taboo-ridden. The metaphysical world too attracts her attention and so do the mental apprehensions and sense of insecurity in the lives of her protagonists who are undergoing traumatic psychics experience due to the collapse of a value-system and lack of satisfactory alternatives.

Despondency, failures, and frustration, particularly in the matter of human relationships do not, however, give rise to complete chaos and anarchy. On the other hand, we perceive the struggles of the protagonists as heroic attempts that finally bring glory to the individual and add dignity to the spirit of freedom.'

Born of a German mother and Indian father on 24th June, 1937 at Mussoorie in India, Anita Desai refuses to see herself as a feminist, actually she never likes to label herself for a particular genre. Although she has admitted that as a writer she is interested to depict the women's world. Desai's female characters suffer from solitude, assimilations, identity crisis but through these kind of inner sufferings they became ultimately successful to find out their virtues and dignity in life. Being a post independent woman writer, Desai, through her female characters, portrays the changing images, positions and awareness level of the Indian woman within the dominated patriarchal society. She believes that-

"The feminist movement in India tends to be rather impatient of my books and to think of them as books about completely helpless women, hopeless women, they find it somewhat that the women do not fight back, but they do not seem to realize how very new this movement is." (Indian Women Novelists, (45)

Her lonely female protagonists present the world of woman who is dissatisfied in their life and challenges the male dominated society in search of fulfillment of their loneliness. The female characters of Desai's novel never follow the contemporary track for protests against the patriarchal oppression rather in a self search mood they protests according to their own way to find self liberation without any hesitation. Her women suffer to extreme but never succumb. However as a self conscious social critic and reformer Desai has divulged the ignored images of the inferior and hatred feminine world of her age which become universally acknowledged. In the tradition of Virginia Woolf, Desai introduced the psychological novel in Indo-Anglican writings. She tries to depict the inner psyche of her characters.

Maya in Cry, the Peacock:

Desai's debut novel Cry, The Peacock published in 1963, explores the inner psyche of the protagonist Maya, an introvert and a pampered child of a rich aristocratic father, Raisahib. Though Maya is a motherless child but her father showers all his love on her. She has been brought up as a princess:

"As a child, I enjoyed princes like, a sumptuous
Of the fantasies of the Arabian Nights, the glories
And bravado of Indian mythology, long and
Astounding tales of the princes and regal
queens....."(41)

Maya is seen as a phobic, introvert and love-famished character who became a victim of the inadequacy of human relationship. The childhood experience of Maya creates a great havoc in her adulthood. Because of her father's over-protectiveness, Maya remains a child, longing for parental pampering even after marriage. Her instability in life traced back to her childhood experience. Her imbalanced psyche in her adulthood is the ailing outcome of her childhood experience. This is a perfect feministic novel which deals with feminine sensibility. Maya as a hypersensitive woman protests against three traditional forces; i.e. male domination by her husband, role of stereotype-submissive wife played by her female friends, and her religious faith in karma all the way of her life. Under various types of pressures she became instable in her life. As she admits:

"Am I gone insane? Father, Brother, Husband, Who is my saviour? I am in need of one. I am dying, and I am in love with living. I am in love, and I am dying. God, let me sleep, forget, rest. But no, I'll never sleep again. There is no rest any more - only death and waiting."(95- 96).

Desai presents the traumatic experience of Maya that she has to undergo in her life. This is the mental agony which ruined a young sensitive mind. This novel deals with the story of a couple who are dissatisfied in their marital relationship. The highly sensitive and emotional Maya is married to Gautama, a promising and over busy practitioner of law. Though Goutam tries to fulfill Maya's all expectations but Maya is not pleased and happy because he followed his own way. Lack of communication creates her mental crisis and she is seen in pursuit of her individual identity. As a result she become more stultifying and found her husband as a feeling less impassive person who never cares for her. After the death of her pet dog Toto, Maya's agony and depression gradually transform her from sanity to insanity. Her father Raisaheb's over protective consciousness and his husband's impassive love make her obsessed in life. She is also obsessed with the prophecy of the astrologer Albion who predicted that in the fourth year of her marriage either Maya or her husband would die. The novel depicts a picture of the marital incongruity and unhappy married life. She suffers from the feeling of suffocation and disassociation of her inner self which leads her way to be a criminal. It is a woman's fight against the horrifying destiny predicted in her childhood. She longs for her husband's love and this longingness creates a frustration within her mind. Cry of the peacock is the cry of her frustration. Maya

symbolizes herself with the peacock's longingness for love. In the monsoon season the peacock dances madly and cries for its lover and finally kills itself in a infatuation of love. Maya's heart also broken with the conjecture of same kind of despair. As she admits:

"When I heard one cry in the stillness of night, its hoarse, head-torn voice, pierced my whit flash and plunged into its knife to hilt my palpitating heart." "Lover. I die. Now that I understood their call I wept for them, and I wept for myself, knowing their words to be mind."(97)

As a result in an insane mood Maya had pushed off Gautama from the roof top and then committed a suicide. Her mental agonies and tensions make her existence miserable. Her father, her husband everybody tries to sooth her physically but the problem was psychical which has never been understood either by her father or by her husband. Maya is confined to womanhood within the male dominated world and fails to restore and redefine herself within this society.

Presentation of Bimla in Clear Light of Day:

Clear Light of Day, another novel of Anita Desai published in 1980, deals with the story of a post-partition Indian family. The main theme of the novel is the importance of family with the inclusion of the status of women in modern India. In this novel Desai presents the different aspect of women in India. It is a story of a middle class family who lives in Delhi. Bim (Bimla) is the protagonist who like her other female protagonists is in search of validation for her survival. As a history professor Bim is an independent woman who portrays the acute sensibility of an agonized woman. It is a story of the siblings Bim, Tara, Raja and Baba who had faced a troubled and tormented childhood because of the negligence and accidental death of their self-occupied parents. This kind of unhappy situation creates fear, insecurity, distrust, and anxiety in their life.

Bim was a very close and affectionate towards her siblings but was deeply wounded by the desertion of his brother Raja. At his crisis she looked after her selfless love but Raja and Tara escaped from the clutches of the claustrophobic family and established themselves separately in their life. Thus, Raja's departure for Hyderabad deeply hearts her and leaves her in a state of disappointment and frustration. After Tara had gone away to a foreign country, after the death of Mira masi, and after Raja had left to settle in Hyderabad, Bim was left all alone to look after her mentally retarded brother, Baba. Bim's self dignity is injured by the ill behavior of her parents and her siblings and others. As she points out:

“They had come like mosquitoes-Tara and Bakul, and behind them the Misras, and somewhere in a distance Raja and Benazir-only to torment her and, mosquito-like, sip her blood.”(153)

Bimla is unable to articulate her feelings but Dr. Biswas, diagnoses her dilemma and says:

“Now I understand why you do not wish to marry....you have sacrificed your own life for them.”(97)

The domestic disharmony had choked Bimla's adventures spirit. However after reading the book *Life of Aurangzeb* Bim felt deep refreshment in her mind. At last listening to the guru's music Bim can realize the philosophical truth about herself and others. Ultimately in a new light of clear thought she forgives her siblings and lives in reconciliation.

Conclusion:

Desai's characters are unusual in manner. She depicts the invisible, private rather we can say the darker side of woman's world. As she aptly remarks in an interview: “I am interested in characters who are not average but have retreated or been driven into some extremity of despair and so turned against, or made a stand against, the general current. It is to flow with the current, it makes no demands, it cost no efforts. But those who cannot follow it, whose heart cries out “the great No” who fight the current and struggle against it. They know what the demands are and what it costs to meet them.” (Dalmia Yashodhara: 13)

However, Desai's female characters are not like stereotype silenced characters rather they seek freedom from the patriarchal bondage to achieve their dignity and self respect.

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