

A STUDY OF 'WOMANISM' IN ANITA DESAI'S NOVELS

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Abstract:

Anita Desai is the distinguished representative of Indian English Fiction. Her novels reveal the extreme complexities of human life. For centuries, women in the traditional social order and system have always been considered subservient to men. In patriarchal Bourgeois society, the matriarchal community has been humiliated, afflicted, silenced and tortured socially and economically. With the post-modernizing age, women began to see the universe with their own eyes and not through the male gaze. In India, with manifesting itself in struggle against patriarchy another inner revolution started manifesting itself in literature, especially woman's writings. The voice of women began to vie with those of men. The purpose of my paper is to focus on the feminist message as articulated in Anita Desai's well reputed novels, Cry the Peacock and Where Shall We Go This Summer? My intent is to examine critically how in the post-modern ear Indian women writers in English have highlighted women's question. They have raised a fiery voice or initiated an inner revolution against the traditional customs and gender discrimination with a view to equalizing human rights. Considering, the femme fatale characters of Anita Desai, one of the most renowned Indian writers writing in English, especially to powerful and domineering female protagonists, Sita and Maya of Cry, the Peacock and Where Shall We Go This Summer? This paper proposes to draw attention to Desai's works as exemplary instances of postmodern womanism.

Keywords: Womanism, Feminism, Postmodern Feminism, India women's writings.

Introduction

Anita Desai has tried to probe into the depths of a woman's psyche and showing its relation to society. And, this concern can be drawn through the portrayal of the neurotic like Maya and Sita. Both these women present sensitive individuals in their moments of intense struggle and

their efforts to seek neurotic solutions. Anita Desai is widely recognized as the pioneer of psychological novel in modern Indian English literature. The prominent feature of her works is her art of the portrayal of characters. She examines the psychological inner workings of women and presents their reactions. Her two novels *Cry, the Peacock* and *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Present the traumatic experience and mental tensions that Maya and Sita undergo. Desai explores the emotional world of neurotic Maya, who is haunted by a premonition of her husband's death on account of her belief in astrological prediction; while in Sita, Desai highlights the theme of repressed childhood neurosis. The repressed impulse and memories lie buried in the unconscious of the protagonist Sita but return later in a form of all full-blown neurotic pictures during her fifth pregnancy. The theme of both novels is disharmony and discord confined to the family and at times to the jaws of death and violence, while Sita suffers from Oedipus complex. Both Maya and Sita are representatives of Postmodern Indian Feminism. They both represent the Indian personality structure which is very complex and multilayered. During psychoanalytical study, we may realize Maya and Sita likely to be the representatives of repressed female community. Maya's unexpected to deal with neurosis goes for violence while Sita's compromising and adjusting with it returns home peacefully.

A representation of Womanism in Anita Desai's Novels:

Anita Desai's novels symbolize the universal feminism. Through her novels, Desai has unveiled the grim as well as mysterious truth of human psychology, especially women's questions in most of her novels of our postmodern era. As a self-conscious social critic and reformer, Desai has divulged the unnoticed images of the inferior and hatred feminine community of her age. Feminism is one of the top most issues of her fictional world; she has pictured a paradigm of the whole women community with a view to spreading the message of the second sex. She has dealt her fiction with feminine sensationalism and vivid themes which are innovative and potential concerning the miserable, drudgery plight of the weaker working class of women's untold affliction, agony, and psychological, conflicting senses under the unconscious and unwise, inconsiderate husbands, fathers, and brothers. Desai has wanted to highlight the matriarchal struggle, self-freedom, and self-identity and self-power against the male dominated world, where she has universalized the feminist message with the inner gaze. Though Desai attempts to analyze women's sensationalism and vivid

expressionism in the field of fictional world, however, she has no willingness to sense herself as self-conscious feminist writer.

Anita Desai, in her psychological novels, focuses on the minute and subtle image of a tormented, tortured, toiled, trodden and self-frustrated feminism preoccupied with her inner heart, soul and mind, her sulking depression, melancholy, pessimism, self-storming pragmatics surrounding the atmosphere of mankind. The existential predicament of female world contradicts the masculinity. Though her female protagonists or femme fatale figures, Desai makes a fervent appeal and plea for a radiant dawn for the whole female community. The novelist discusses the vivid and clear-cut problematic features of temperamental incompatibility, conjugal chaotic and conflicting dilemmas and ever growing hatred and despised disparity between male and female. In her novels, most protagonists cum heroines are segmented and alienated from the world, society, family, parents, and even from their own selves, because they are not average people but individuals who hardly enable to cope with the patriarchy, unable to keep abreast with this setup, rather they drift into their own sequestered world where they spin their great expectations, ambitions, dreams, which automatically disappears in the realm of vision.

Her art of feminine characterization are superb but who are haunted by a peculiar acute concept and judgments of doom, withdraw themselves into an imaginative world of their own, get hysterical, neurotic, self-agitated and unhappy mood changed. A prick into the mystical crusts of the psychology of the female protagonists of Anita Desai upholds the universal emptiness, conventional alienation and solitude and an abysmal segregation from which they are victim of mental agony and pang of tormenting psychology. Her feminist superb creations are adamant and eccentric towards the male dominated order and system. They silently rebel and take recourse to naturalism and realism socially and economically a world of their own, a world where they can be able to confirm their determination, affirmation and freewill.

Feminity and womanhood are not bounded by social contracts. Her tale and novel are presented through the feminine sensibility and pragmatic sense. Desai aims to examine the natural, social and fanciful bonds that unchain the women's issues and in this way she is concerned with the destiny of the house minded woman in the typical Indian society of the

postmodern period. The theme of the martial unhappiness and sorrowful heart and an unadjusted marriage-bond cause depression and alienation in the mind of women as impacted in her popular novels. Anita Desai is considered as an inner psychological novelist as her prime concern is mingled with the nocturnal and nebulous atmosphere of the women's psyche. The motivations, the conscience and the psychic excitement and turbulent agitation of the storming psychology of the female community of their surroundings are dealt with the cardinal and excusive incidences of Desai's oeuvre. A particular trace and trait in the women's characterization, a tragic downfall turns into a psychic malady making their mentality over neurotic and hysterical as Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* who suffers from the father-fixation. Desai's fictions are auto-biographical, in the sense they impact her silent temperament. Anita Desai pictures the glaring portrayal of the women's quests by fostering out the profound and deeper universe of her powerful protagonists.

Anita Desai is magnified with the comprehensibility and intelligibility which brightens her aestheticism through her novel-worlds. Desai's characters belong to the affluent sections or Indian society they hardly realistically and comprehensively have to tackle the pragmatism of struggle of life for survival and existence. Desai writes regarding the classified characters because she senses them with an acute knowledge and sagacity. The main motto of the postmodern novelist is to find out her true identity, existence and independence and then, aesthetically convey the deeper meaning of truth and beauty. Anita Desai has rendered a new dimension to Anglian fiction by handling the pitiable and awful predicament of the rifted self, especially of housewives facing singly handed by the torments and fortunes of their insensitive and temperamentally callous husbands.

Desai presents a kaleidoscopic image of the profound minds of her women's personality. Existential predicament of her protagonist by various factors is her main issue in her novel. Women, in Desai's fiction embody the author's quest for the psychological insight, awareness and harmony. They are the focal point of contact between the writer's consciousness and the world form which women are deviated. Desai's female protagonists are, generally, caught in a web of painful circumstances, their struggle and the outcome of which is usually the basis of the novel. The problem invariable in each case, is the difficulty of adjustment in conjugal relationship, of building bridges, of bringing together of harmonizing and taking a holistic

view of one's circumstances. The major concerns of Anita Desai are hatred love and affection, depression and solitude. The purpose of my paper is to focus on the feminist echoes as articulated in Anita Desai's famous novels, *Cry, the Peacock* and *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* My intent is to examine critically how in the post-modern era Indian women writers in English have highlighted women's questions, demanding the rights, suffragettes. They have raised a fiery voice and initiated an inner revolution against the traditional order, system and gender discrimination with a view to achieving human rights. Considering the femme fatale characters of Anita Desai, one of the most renowned Indian writers writing in English, especially the powerful and domineering female protagonists of *Cry, the Peacock* and *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* This paper proposes to draw attention to Desai's works as exemplary instances of post-modern feminism. Conclusion To conclude, we may say that the theme of both the novels is disharmony and discord confined to the patriarchal structure and at times to the mal-adjusted or ill adjusted self. Alienation and unrequited love drives Maya to the jaws of death and violence, while Sita suffers from Oedipus complex. According to many critics and Desai Scholars, both Maya and Sita are representatives of Post-modern Indian Feminism as impacted on *Cry, the Peacock* and *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* They both represent the Indian personality structure which is very complex and multilayered. During psychoanalytical study, we may find Maya and Sita likely to be the representatives of repressed female community.

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