

Portrayal of Women in Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain*

Ms. Shalini Jaiswal^{1*} Dr. Apsara Stanley²

¹ Research Scholar

² Assistant Professor, Department of English, Sam Higginbottom University of Agriculture, Technology and Sciences, Prayagraj-211007

Abstract – A feminist reading involves a close examination of the way the female characters are portrayed in a work of literature as the feminist critics consider literature to be an important tool of socialization. Looking at *Fire on the Mountain* from a feminist perspective, one finds that Anita Desai has scored indeed high in the creation of her female characters. The tale starts with Nanda Kaul living alone at Carignano, joined by Raka, her great granddaughter and Ila, her friend. The novel ends with the rape and murder of Ila. Instead of creating female stereotypes that fit into the social mould of perfect women, Anita Desai has created real women, complete with their strengths and weaknesses, virtues and foibles. The three protagonists are all women of substance who face their life with grace and dignity.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Socialization, Isolation, Marriage

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INTRODUCTION

Anita Desai is one of the prominent novelists in Indian Writing in English. Her *Fire on the Mountain* grabbed the scholar's attention when it was distributed in 1977 and won the Sahitya Academy Award in 1978. Anita Desai herself thinks about it as her most fulfilling work. As the women's activist she has projected the female characters in her work and the quandaries that they face in their lives.

All civilizations have assigned women a secondary role. Since the ancient times women have needed to battle for their rights. Women needed to wage a long fight for the option to cast a ballot in the western nations. Equivalent compensation for equivalent work is still an unrealized dream in numerous nations. Women's liberation rose in the West as a response to the open victimization of women. In spite of the fact that it began as a socio-political development, before it made advances in different fields including writing. Women's activist scholars share a profound worry about the portrayal of women in writing, since they consider the portrayal of women in writing as quite possibly the most significant types of 'socialization' since it gave the good examples which demonstrated to women and men, what comprised satisfactory adaptations of the ladylike and authentic female objectives and yearnings. The women's activist scholars, in this manner, brought up significant issues on the portrayal of women in

writing. This sort of awakening in women has achieved an adjustment in the portrayal of women in writing. Presently countless writings portray women who will not find a way into the form that has been projected for them by the general public.

Fire on the Mountain has Nanda Kaul as its focal character. The tale is separated into three sections. Part I "Nanda Kaul at Carignano" manages her separated life in a rambling house called Carignano. Part II is named "Raka comes to Carignano." Raka is Nanda's extraordinary granddaughter and this part portrays the underlying antagonism and the ensuing affinity that creates between the two. Part III titled "Ila Das leaves Carignano" shows Nanda Kaul's gathering with her beloved companion Ila Das. This part manages the terrible assault and demise of Ila Das.

Nanda Kaul is one of those heroines who have suffered a life-time of unhappiness caused by a loveless marriage. At one time, a University Vice Chancellor's better half, she had been the "center of a little however extreme and occupied world." Throughout her life, Nanda has adjusted to the desires of her significant other and has satisfied the prerequisites of his economic well-being. In any case, she has never gotten any friendship from her spouse. Or maybe, he has consistently treated her "as some improving yet valuable

mechanical apparatus required for the proficient running of his family unit."(Desai 4)

Like all the male centric social orders the world over, Indian culture has likewise built up an entire arrangement of female qualities like obedience, submissiveness, modesty, humility, devotion etc. Nanda has consistently fitted into this form of an ideal woman. Rather than valuing her, her husband has gone ahead, has had a deep rooted illicit relationship with Miss David, a Christian woman.

At the point when we meet Nanda Kaul in the start of the novel, her husband has passed and she is carrying on an isolated life in slopes. She appears to have outlasted her utility, as she has fulfilled all of her duties as a wife and a mother. Every one of her sons and daughters has families of their own and she is left at Kasauli to live alone. In this way, Nanda Kaul faces separation; push on her by the male centric culture. Presently, she needs to detach herself absolutely from the rest of the world. She even maintains a strategic distance from the appearance of postman as he is an image of the world she has abandoned. The tranquility of this resigned grandma is again upset when her girl Asha needs her to shoulder the obligation of her granddaughter, Raka. Nanda wants to ask:

"Have I not done what's needed and had enough?.... Can I not be left alone with not all that much?" (Desai 17)

Nobody tries to find out if she is happy to assume the liability of a little youngster. Raka shows up in Carignano in the second part of the novel. First and foremost, both maintain a strategic distance from one another. Raka doesn't talk a lot and is drenched in her own reality. Her strange conduct might be credited to the way that she comes from a wrecked family. She has an alcoholic father and a steadily weak mother. Raka's mother, Tara, doesn't show up any place in the novel, however we are told about her by her mother Asha. Her mother believes her own girl to be answerable for the break in her marriage. Asha writes to her mother,"... he's not actually as terrible as Tara would make you accept... despite the fact that the facts confirm that he does drink."(Desai 15) Contrary to what she had feared, Nanda's reality isn't at all upset by the stay of Raka. Shockingly, this indifference on the part of Raka disturbs Nanda and she tries to attract Raka by telling her fascinating stories of her own childhood.

Nanda's old companion, Ila Das, is presented in the third part of the novel. Ila stays with Nanda at Carignano. She had encountered better days when her father was alive. In any case, after his passing, the family fortune was shared among her three brothers. Ila and mother didn't get anything. They even took "the last of the jewellery, and soon had them driven out into the rented rooms and boarding houses, finally to whatever roof charity would hold

them." (Desai 124) Ila has never been wealthy. Nonetheless, the difficulties in her life have not affected her ability to stand up in the face of adversity or shake her confidence in herself.

Ila meets a shocking end in the novel. She is raped and murdered because raised a voice against patriarchal norms by attempting to stop the marriage of a seven year old girl to a widower. The male-dominated society can't stream any sort of interfering with its standards and in particular by a woman. Ila Das is assaulted and killed by the father of the girl, whom she has attempted to protect. Meanwhile, Raka sets fire to the mountain and her yell: "Look Nani, I have set the timberland ablaze" is representative of the reality that "a reality where a lady can't would like to be upbeat without being unnatural, ought to be devastated." (Desai 5)

The fire consumes the invented universe of Nanda. She understands that being completely powerless is in the destiny of a woman. The truth hits her hard and being not able to deal with it, she at last passes on.

Anita Desai like a genuine women's activist has uncovered the appalling truth of the man centric culture of India. It is a world where sensitive women like Nanda shrivel away under the hard glare of the real world. It is where little youngsters like Raka neglect to bloom as from the get-go in their life, they encounter the shameful of the world, where the fault of a mismatched marriage lies soundly on the shoulders of a female, her own mother Tara, despite the fact that the shortcoming lies with Raka's father who is an incorrigible drunkard. It is Ila Das, nonetheless, who endures the haziest destiny of all. She needs to follow through on the cost of scrutinizing the mores of a patriarchal society. The ugliest essence of male power is uncovered through the punishment that is dispensed to Ila Das.

It is an inconsistent world, therefore, which the female characters of novel possess, where the dice is stacked vigorously for male species. Anyway everything isn't pitifully dim in the realm of *Fire on the Mountain*. The basic strength and poise that the female characters show do enlighten this dim world. These characters counter the ruthless might of a world governed by patriarchal laws in their own way with courage and dignity. No doubt, the tragic end that Ila meets is very depressing. But to state this is to altogether misinterpret all that she represents. She can never be known as a disappointment for she has confronted life at its most awful with incredible boldness. Ila Das has raised a banner of revolt in her life, Raka's setting the mountain on fire raises the hope of the reader that the next generation will not take things lying down and that a change for the better is imminent. Nanda Kaul additionally stands her ground through her calm effortlessness and nobility. She is a profoundly delicate woman,

noble under all conditions. Despite the fact that life has not treated her reasonably, it has not succeeded in bowing her down completely. She handles her better half's extramarital undertaking with an uncommon elegance. Another example of her attestation of uniqueness can be found in her saving an hour in the early evening for herself, even as a youthful spouse and mother. Subsequent to settling down in Carignano, she again attempts to live autonomously, on her own terms.

It is Ila Das who suffers the darkest fate of all. She has to pay the price of questioning the male society. The women of this novel are trying to get a way to live life happily in a patriarchal society. Nanda has spent a very boring life without her husband and children. Raka regularly witnesses the abuse of her own mother in which she is even neglected by her own father. Ila Das, a child activist is raped by Preet Singh because of her protests against child marriage. Anita Desai brings the three women characters in Carignano for living a pleasurable life. Anita Desai has won a suitable position by exploring the emotional world of women.

Fire on the Mountain will consistently be associated with Desai's ground-breaking female characters that leave permanent imprint on the memory of the reader.

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Corresponding Author

Ms. Shalini Jaiswal*

Research Scholar