

# Male-Female Dichotomy in the Novels of Anita Desai

Shobha S M

Research Scholar, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule Rohilkhand University, Bareilly, UP

**Abstract – The theme of the male-female dichotomy, the tension between husband and wife, because of the incompatibility in their temperament is present in many of Anita Desai's novels. She is not interested in pre-marital relationship between man and woman but deals with the problems of marital relationship in all its dimensions and manifestations. Marriage which is a means of self-fulfillment and self-knowledge eludes most women and fails to come up to their anticipation and aspirations.**

**Keywords- Fiction, feminine, sensibility, woman, protagonists, psyche**

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## INTRODUCTION

Anita Desai was born on 24 June 1937 in India. Daughter of a German mother and an Indian father. Anita Desai, a well-known Indian English woman novelist, is a contemporary Indo-English writer, widely celebrated not only in India but also in the world of fiction writing.

As such she has an extra element and marvelous flavor to the contemporary Indian English fiction. She has innovative concerns and deals in her fiction with feminine sensibility. Her obsession is with the enlightening and investigative of the deep psyche of her characters, especially women characters.

Anita Desai is the main advocate of the psychological novel dealing with the complex nature of woman. She has explained in detail the inner disturbance of her characters in a very superior manner. Her novels deal with the contradictions and predicaments faced by the individual in the struggle for life.

She belongs to the group of Indo English writers who have studied in detail the actual problems faced by the individual political, and cultural importance. Anita Desai has chosen to deal with the particular event which threatens the normal tempo of life. She has explained the effect of emotions and sentiments about the behaviour of man and woman and how they react to different situations. She has explained the behaviour of people under strain.

## INDIAN WOMEN NOVELISTS

Indian Women novelists have explored female in order to set up an identity that is not imposed by a patriarchal Society. Thus, the theme of growing up from childhood to

women hood, that is, Bildungsroman, is current strategy. Santha Romu Rau's **Remember the house** (1956). Ruth prewar Jhabvala's first novel to **whom she will** (1955) and her later **Heat and dust** (1975) which was awarded the Booker prize, and Kamala Markandaya's **Two Virgins** (1973) are good examples.

Anita Desai solely concerned with the internal conditions of the characters. Desai discusses the problems of unpredictable inaptness, marital disorder and harsh man – woman relationship. In her novels, most protagonists separated from the world, the social order, families, and parents and even from their own selves. Anita Desai's major concern is not with society or community forces but the human being psyche and its interaction with social values.

## ANITA DESAI'S NOVELS-

### **Cry, the Peacock (1963)-**

Anita Desai's first novel Cry, the Peacock appeared in her baroque-lyrical language and with her mastery of family themes. The conqueror of the novel Maya is a young woman; this novel reveals the emotional response of Maya. She is married to Gautama, who is elder than her. He is a disconnected and indifferent man. The novel presents the trait contract between the two and it shows a bright portrayal of the sensibility of Maya. But the sketches enable us to make the differences that persevere between the ill matched couples. In Cry, the Peacock novel, it provides a background about the death of Toto. The communication used by Desai in this novel is lyrical, full of images and attraction. In the novel Desai explores the desire of the protagonist Maya for the usual things which

are denied to her. This novel is an exploration of the sensibility by Maya.

#### **Where Shall We Go This Summer (1975) -**

Where shall we go this summer is Desai's another major novel in which importance has been given for the feminine sensibility by revealing the inner psyche of the protagonist Sita. The character Sita is a woman of violent and unadjusting Character. She is married to Raman. Raman and Sita remind us of Rama and Sita of The Ramayana.

They are mentally separated beings in the same shelter. If Raman goes in forward direction then Sita opt for backward direction. She is set aside and expressively active. She does not like the family dominating over her. Ever her husband's recommendation irritates her. She does not even love towards her children. She wants to be lonely and happy. This novel is Desai's portraiture of an Indian woman who rebels against the tradition – bound old mode of life in the life of the western liberty. In transforming her knowledge in the form of art, Desai uses visual Details and generalized method in an attempt to communicate a sense of meaning fundamental everyday behavior and substance.

#### **Voices in the City (1965) –**

The novel, Voices in the City tells about the story of a brother, two sisters and their mother. But throughout the novel Nirode, the conqueror of the novel, remains the dominating shape. Nirode, one of the main characters, is fanatical with the connection of his mother with Major Chadha and considers her a she-cannibal. She is having an affair in Kalimpong which itself is a outcome of disagreement in husband-wife relationship. Nirode's relationship with his mother is a love-hate relationship. We have oblique suggestions of his mother-fascination and according to psychologists' hatred often is a protection mechanism of the psyche to stop one from committing incest.

The novel also deals with the mismatched marriage of Monisha and Jiban. Monisha's husband is the detainee of conformist culture. He believes that a woman's most important roles besides child bearing are food preparation, cutting vegetables, serving food and comb-out small children's hair under the authority of a stern mother-in-law. Monisha feels that her seclusion is denied to her. Her husband is busy with his middle rank government job with no time for Monisha and no desire to share her feelings.

Monisha's ailing matched marriage, her loneliness, barrenness and stress of living in a joint family with an insensible husband push her to breaking point. The building block of love is missing in her life and finally she

commits suicide.

#### **Fire on the Mountain (1977)-**

In the novel, Nanda Kaul and her husband Prof. Kaul - the former vice-chancellor, do not have a tepid relationship. He has cared little for his wife and family. He carried an enduring matter with another lady. Nanda could not connect with the family in the desired fraction and her position is no better than a house keeper. Her husband is totally answerable for this. He is such a coward that he could not marry a Christian lady because he could not taunt break social conventions. Externally, the Kauls are an ideal couple for university society but from inside their relationship is all-barren. The novel further explicates the alienation of Nanda Kaul and her grand-daughter Raka. The loneliness and separation of the two have been presented in it. Specially Nanda feels happy in the barrenness and enjoys in her own friendship. "All she wanted was to be alone, to have Carignano to herself in this period of her life when silence and peaceful were all that she wishes to entertain"

#### **In Custody(1984)-**

Deven and his wife Sarla lead a sad marital life. They are pretty different from each other in their temperaments. Deven is a Hindi lecturer in a college and Sarla has no interest in prose. Sarla is a typical picture of a forsaken wife. Deven is a provisional lecturer agreed in a private college, but he lives in a fool's glory. He is frequently lost in the pensive world of unbelievable fame that one day he will rise to the summit of glory by flying on the wings of his devotion to art and poetry. His great devotion to art leads him to be uncaring to his wife, Sarla. He cultivates a loathing to and dislike for his wife.

Here Desai deals with the marital problem of this materialistic world of glittering nation in a pent up city like Delhi. In such a metro city the relationship between husband and wife is in damage because of the unwarranted treat of husband in extra-curricular activities and his attachment to other women during work hours.

Anita Desai has an independent approach to women's problems in Indian social life and life in general. She does not believe that marriage is as farce as all human relationships are. Some of her heroines have the idea of a blissful, happy conjugal life, but the idea seems to remain only a rainbow dream. In most of the male dominated families the concept of marriage as a union of two different minds has not been realised. Women's individual identity has not been openly realised in Indian social life. She is taken for granted and this casual attitude is the cause of her suffering and miserable life. The difference between make believe supernatural horror and modern horror world of conjugal lives is just this, that the former can be wished away, but the latter demands the heaviest price

from the married woman to preserve the semblance of social prestige.

## CONCLUSION-

To conclude, for Anita Desai's novels discover the true implication of things. She shares to readers her views about the difficulty of human associations as a big fashionable issue and human situation. Anita Desai has turn out to be a recorder of quandary faced by the Indian urban setup. Anita Desai's novels is that relations and familial relationship play a very significant part in her fantasy world more often the relationship are not harmonious. Husband and wife estrangement in her novels is the consequence of the hyper-responsive nature of her women and their incapability to establish a point of contact with their partner.

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