



The Dichotomy of Man- Woman Relationship in the Novels by Anita Desai

Abstract:

This research paper aims at highlighting how Anita Desai penetrates deeply, poignantly and silently the inconsistencies and the intricacies of modern city dwellers. She brings before the readers the undercurrents of the psychology of her characters, and largely plays upon the interior landscape. It seems that Anita Desai sheds real tears for the unfortunate lots who are always at receiving end. Anita Desai's chief concern is human relationship. Her novels bring out the futility and vanity of the couples who are incompatible, largely due to the sensitive nature of the wives and callousness of the husbands. The relationship between man and woman has been the focal subject in literature and has been described in various ways. The subject is to be untiring and with changing of time and social situations have plug out the varieties as well as some magnificent diversity.

Key words: - Man- woman relationship, subjugation, society, Fiction

As a result of industrial expansion and technological progress, the representation of man-woman relationship in literature has been affected by various invisible as well as visible factors. In this age of anxiety, therefore, the simplicity of this relation has been changed to a large extent. All human relationships have become complicated in the rising complexity of this age and many profound forces work to make them much more difficult and delicate. In literary writings, especially in fiction and psychological researches have gained indisputable value and this effort is made to delve deep into the bottom of the unconscious mind of a man and to unwrap the mysteries of the human mind.

The depiction of man-woman relationship in Anita Desai's novels has been inspired by the current social situations. To her repute, it must be said that her novels have encapsulated a wide range of man-woman relationship. We could rarely find an indication of the joy and ecstasy of reciprocal love in her nine novels. As a substitute, the readers observe misery, despair and the resentful shocks of man-woman relationship.

Anita Desai in her novel *In custody* talks about an unhappy married life. Deven and Sarla, married but their marriage is not happy as husband and wife. Incapable of do something for each other they are frustrated in their own ways.

Although each understood the secret truth about the other, it did not bring about any closeness of spirit, any comrade, i.e. because they also sensed that two victims ought to avoid each other, not yoke together their joint disappointment. A victim doesn't look for help from another victim, he looks for redemption. At least Deven had his poetry. She has nothing and so there was an added accusation and bitterness in her look. (In *Custody*, 80)

Job, family and marriage are like a cage for Deven and he finds no way to come out of them. In this sense, he believes that he was a prisoner. In this manner it is credited to Desai that it is not vivid but a reminiscent one. The traditional society is being criticized in Anita Desai's novels especially in the novel *In Custody*, it brings together the pathos of a male character Deven, whose wife Sarla hates his failure of being financially successful. Deven who is burdened by debts is less supported by his wife, and it is the

reason that he moves from poorness as a lecturer to awaiting financial and professional ruin. So finally he decides to undergo it than to commit a suicide.

His wife supports him a little- actually the female characters in the novel seem a nasty, particularly a furious wife of Deven's idol, Nur, the poet. Deven – a non-heroic central character and an anti-hero of this novel is in a sense a pathetic character. He is an illustration of a person who has no direction and also no control over the things that take place in his life. He lacks self-direction. His life appeared as if it is full of the tales of imaginary subjugation but in reality if he is truly trapped by them he ought to look for an escape from them. This incapability of Deven is depicted best by Desai in Deven's conversation with Nur. Deven took an entrance in the relationship as slave, worships his idol Nur like a God:

“Fool, are you a fool?”

Deven responds, “Sir I am I am”. (In Custody, 38)

When Nur called Deven into the house it was: “as if god had leaned over a cloud and called for him to come up” (In Custody, 39)

Anita Desai wants to make it clear as the story progresses, that how the male characters are ensnared in a land full of possibilities for being successful, the females even have more right to feel irritated in this world with these types of male characters around who are unable to give them they wanted. Prasanna Sree remarks:

Penetrates psychologically deep into the inner working of women and externalizes their passive reaction. (Sree 22)

In Desai's another novel *Clear Light of Day* a relation between a man and a woman or a husband and a wife is not explained deeply, but to the readers it has been suggested that Tara and her husband Bakul do not hold a healthy relationship. In one hand his tie and in another his shoes Bakul came out of their room and asked Tara, “aren't you getting ready Tara? We'll be late, the car will be here any minute and you know uncle is very punctual. We must not keep him waiting”. He finished his dressing without getting a look at his wife's face.

He noticed nothing – missing shoe horn and frayed laces having presented him with a problem. Meanwhile she came in her shoulders sloping, her hair hanging and sat down on the foot of the bed instead of going into dress. Then he spoke more sharply, “why aren't you getting ready?” “I don't think I'll come after all” she mumbled. She always mumbled when she was afraid, as is she hoped not to be heard. (*Clear Light of Day*, 17)

Tara waits for Bakul to go off the house but for him it is too hot, and the old house's climate was pompous to control (or) drive. She became conscious about her life with Bakul that she lived in a clean land, with some rules and regulations of it, its tidiness and method. The way of life her husband chases was lacking of manly sentiments- this is what she believe. Apart from these differences in the married life of this couple Tara and Bakul, the readers find nothing in deep.

Where Shall We Go this Summer? One of her novels shows a wedded and a typical portrait of man-woman relationship with a notable pathos. In this novel, Sita- the central character is a married woman and a mother to four children but she is a portrait of suffering and gloominess. She shows herself as a prisoner in her own house and it results in boredom and never-ending frustration. Her melancholies in her married life discover the expression of hatred for the friends and colleagues of Raman, her husband.

Sita- a mother of four and is pregnant, does not wish to give birth to a child in her womb, so she makes her mind to move to Manori- an island which is said to be a soil of the supernatural.

“They are nothing- nothing but appetite and sex. Only food, sex and money matter”.

After finishing some months at that island, she becomes conscious about her effort of leaving her husband as well as her children with him is no more than an extravagant thought. She compromises with her situation when Raman gets on that island and convince her to come back to their home with him and she agrees to do so. Sita’s point of view at her own marriage is possibly an outcome of the experiences and acquaintances in regard to her own parents. This is an essential fact to take in mind here which is described in novel expressively. Sita’s mother runs off to Benares providing no details abandoned her children and her husband behind. There is no reason provided here for her mother’s act but it has been given that her husband had kept a mistress. After that the worst dreadful experience that Sita came across is: In spite of her father took part in the freedom struggle of the country, and a dedicated servant of common people in Manori, he had an incestuous desire for Sita’s step sister- his own daughter. P.M. Nayak states:

Sita is an uprooted woman who wants to regain her primitive self. Ironically, her pilgrimage with its promise of renewal and regeneration are the result of her social alienation. (Nayak 23)

By bringing this facet in her novels, Desai wants to enlighten her readers with the oddity of man-woman relationship. The suppressed desire of an uncommon man results in oddity and difference. This can be depicted as a theme of the novel *Where Shall We Go this Summer?*

Voices in the City, a novel by Anita Desai revolves around three characters: Nirode and his two sisters, Monisha and Amla. It has three parts on the name of these three characters respectively: 1. Nirode, 2. Monisha and 3. Amla. Nirode is a pessimistic character and has characteristics of Bim- Desai’s female character possesses in her novel *Clear Light of Day*. He quits his job at a newspaper, which he thinks is an uncreative one and never let him live meaningfully. Even he refuses his mother’s help, who is a widow and rich and gradually slips into the abyss. He runs a magazine for a brief period of time; his attempt of being a writer also goes as a failure when his play is refused by a theater group. He feels as if he were fighting with the city of Kali i.e. Calcutta, which has ruined his life. He denies giving up though surrounded by quitters and gives way to his own existence in this world.

Monisha is Nirode’s elder sister. She is as sensitive as Maya from Desai’s novel *Cry, the Peacock*. She is a kind of phobic character who married into a Bengali family, and compromises everything. She secretly leads an inner life which is damaged despite the ugliness of her surroundings. Her inability of giving birth to a child is a symbol of her refusal of another life in this mundane world. Amla is the youngest one in the three siblings, is the silent version of her elder brother Nirode. She looks more successful than her elder brother and sister because she has neither the obsession of Monisha and nor the pessimism of Nirode. They all struggles with Calcutta to save the honor, present inside them. Dharma (“righteousness”) - a minor character in the novel, who left Calcutta for discovering his ideal model, finds in Amla. He is only a character in the novel but projects himself as a character that fights against Calcutta for his living. His mystery makeshim inexplicable to Amla, Nirode and to the readers as well.

The ending of the novel is somewhat unnatural and a marvelous climax. Monisha succeeded in burning herself in bathroom, and this brings her mother back to Calcutta. Nirode thinks his mother as goddess Kali- the destroyer and the preserver, seemingly his conflict thus determined. Amla in fact is the only person in the novel who encounters success with a spiritual growth after meeting with Dharma and becomes more submissive to Calcutta. Paying no attention to the triviality of her job in an advertising agency, she draws sketches for professor Bose’s translations from *Panchatantra* –which makes her really satisfied. Her success is not an end, but it is avoided in favor of the more imitated vision of her brother Nirode. As N.R. Gopalan asserts,

The life of a woman like Monisha in the given circumstances in never happy and the result is that she burns herself to death. Her impending death by suicide has been poetically described by Anita Desai even before her actual death which comes later in the novel. (Gopalan 25)

Anita Desai has depicted her female characters' basic dependence on male characters. Sometimes, they do effort for their independence but their search for identity is saddened at some point of time. In Desai's novels, the readers can't find a character who frees herself from her feminine role as well as irons of femininity.

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