



ANITA DESAI : POSTCOLONIAL INDIAN FEMINIST



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ABSTRACT

Anita Desai appear courageous enough to record protest of women to regard them as individual. Their struggle for self-identity commenced way back and continued till present day. But very few Indian Novelists can project inner conflict and struggle of women in true sense, the problem of identity crisis thus very much explored by modern Indian novelist, especially by Indian women novelists of Postcolonial period. Anita Desai is among those few Postcolonial Indian Women novelists who try to protect and secure a woman pace in society and family. Various issues related with her self-respect, economic independence and individuality are thoroughly analyzed in her major works, present paper explores three novels of Anita Desai . The study involves female protagonists of all novels as well it exposes intense passions lay buried in their subconscious. Mrs. Desai also analyses their tortured psyche that finally need relax atmosphere to breath freely .Thus a passage of escape is sought out by every protagonist to save their psyche from sheer harm .Finally , it can be hypothetically concluded that the feminist tone of Postcolonial writers not only point out need of an emotional attachment and domestic security for psychological wellness of a woman but it also try to prove that effect of tortured married life and a sense of insecurity leads to fatal rapture in man –woman relationship . It also advocates elevated social status of a woman and promotes gender equality in society.

KEYWORDS: Postcolonial, discrimination, individuality, domestic security, escapism , Neurotic complexities, new woman , redemption

The tension and anxiety of being modern in Traditional society have been overlooked by most of these writers who have devoted their attention to the broad social features that emerge in course of the gradual meta- morphosis of the old order , so intense was their devotion to the physical aspect of this change that they failed to properly take note of and project the psychological reality.
..... [1] [VVAD, Jena Seema]

The oft –quoted remarks of noted author and critic Seem Jena are quite accurate when she explore works of modern Indian novelist and compare it with the Indian English literature of

the past . In the same limelight an overview of Postcolonial Indian writing proves the point that it deals in more subtle way with issues of feministic sensibility, thus it can be said that Postcolonial Indian English literature added a new perspective to the issues related with feminine world . Feministic approach of Indian Novelists helped to delve deep into new genera of literature that analyses internal as well as external tumult of women . The traditional approach of pre-colonial Indian writers have been altered and given new dimension to portray needs and challenges of modern woman . Though the Indian ethnic values have always

been on priority, the postcolonial writers put forward revolutionary ideas and took initiative to voice out injustice faced by traditional Indian woman. The concept of male supremacy has been changed by postcolonial Indian writers, they sought to change phallogocentric attitude in literature deeply rooted since ages. The idea of considering woman as the object and delineating her as a subordinate has been given new form by changing her role in family and society. Thus a changed image of female is sought out by postcolonial Indian writers. Indian women writers broke new ground in Indian English literature that exhibits new woman's world filled with hope for upgraded social status. Such type of literary outbreak increased momentum of self-realization on part of woman that imparted impetus to Feministic literary movement in India. Her identity as an independent woman emerged due to revolutionary writing and protest recorded in literature. The issue of gender discrimination came on paper and thoroughly discussed by number of woman writers of Postcolonial era among them Anita Desai was the most eminent. Her portrayal of 'changed woman' or, 'new woman' brought new wave in the realms of Indian literary circle. Thus quick access in to her major works imparts insight in to new image of Indian woman and her struggle to alter her domestic responsibilities with professional one. In this way Indian feminism is a reflection of western feminist movement. Anita Desai accurately records dilemma of faced by a woman, she is a master in projecting Indian urban life and its influence on woman. She received reputed Sahitya Akademi award for her work, 'Fire on the Mountain'.

Indian women were very much **disturbed** by stigma of identity crisis, they were confused due to influence of traditional aesthetics to follow and waves of modernity beckoning them towards new social role. Feminism as a literary

movement has been of immense importance in the task of creating pro-feminist social atmosphere. With the rise of globalization and woman's education Indian women became aware of their social and economic rights. They started stepping out of their cozy closets to wage a war against age-old traditions. Thus Indian social reformers and writers paved way for new woman's world devoid of gender discrimination, in nutshell Indian fictional literature in a true sense rejuvenated social system to form woman centric thought process. Postcolonial Indian literature thus appears to be a fertile ground for discussion of issues related with woman's welfare, it is indeed a literary movement that heralded a dawn of new era that imparted justice to woman's identity. In same regard words of India's celebrated writer Namita Gokhale appear very appropriate, she always try to delineate and construct new identity of woman like Anita Desai, she says:

".....things haven't changed earlier women used to try to be nice traditional wife materialGirls from good families were made to carry one big towel in their bags so that they would always bend as it was not supposed to be good to stand straight. They were told to have a slight bent posturenowadays you suppose to look slim and glamorous all the time. I am not anti that but the whole thing to fitting into a mould, not being who you are. That is what I find. I think, somewhere all my books try to push women Subconsciously to just be natural, spontaneous and themselves.....[2]

[CBN, May,29]

In same manner Anita Desai voice out economic independence, conjugal relationship and issues related with emotional sterility on family level to emphasis role of woman. Her fictions usually projects female protagonists in lead role. They play major role and appears true

soul of the story , thus her awareness about social problems , Indian social structure and drawbacks in Indian law system imparts vigor to her literature. She has recorded changed role of woman in her family and society and thus probed deep in to her psyche. Anita Desi along with her contemporaries like Kamla Das , Kamla Markanadaya , Ruth Prewar Jhababwala used to project female sensitivities and its by elements such as her aspirations and frustrations . The history of Indian English literature was very much flooded with ideas of woman's revolution but the writes in colonial era cannot impart justice to women centric topics like gender equality , rights of women , child marriage ,her sexual desires and emotional needs. She impartially studied a woman as an individual devoid of biased and oppressive restrictions laid down by orthodox Indian social structure , thus her efforts sought to mould liberated image of a woman who could breathe freely in independent world , in nutshell , 'New Woman' has become a term that provides feministic credentials to the Indian postcolonial literature . Anita Desai often talks about value of woman's education and economic independence which consequently bring changes in her outlook on conjugal relationship, love and marriage. Anita Desai's major works includes 'Cry , The Peacock' , ' Bye-Bye Blackbird' , ' Where shall We Go This Summer' and 'Fire on the Mountain'. The female protagonists portrayed in all works experiences sufferings in social and domestic scenario; their emancipation comes out with number of mental agonies and pain, which enables their psychic exploration on part of a reader as well as a critic. Their struggle to exhale is pictured vividly by Anita Desai. The passionless conjugal life, inferior social status and economic dependency collectively effects on psychic imbalance of female protagonists in her novels. Such tortured personalities finally turn in to phoenix and takes shape of new woman. Like forged metal she gets

a vital element that not only impart strength to her but also help her to play new role in society. In short Anita Desai can be called as a crusader in the movement of woman liberation, her act of exposing woman's internal tumult is not less than a social movement initiated for feminine redemption.

Among major works of Anita Desai 'Cry , The Peacock' reveals internal conflict of ' Maya' , the protagonist of the novel , who appears to be a symbol of disillusioned life . Her mental agony and emotional dissatisfaction put forward sterile family life in Indian scenario. In short Maya is an embodiment of sheer frustration that emerge out of passionless marital life as well undernourished childhood . Her marriage with aged Gautama is a sheer cause of dissatisfaction , the relationship lacks warmness of married life .She records her frustration in folowing words as:

Telling me to go to sleep while he worked at his papers, he did not give another thought to me , to either the soft willing body or the lonely , wanting mind that waited near his bed [3]

[CTP, 10]

Finally, her frustration turns in to neurosis when she was deprived by her own husband of respectable place in their family. Her suffocation leads Maya to take revenge on Gautama by killing him. Thus, though her negative image does not fit in the parameters of feminism and cannot be protected but it reveals painful experience one has to face in tattered relationship. The gruesome act of killing Gautama cold have been avoided if Maya had been carefully and emotionally handled by her husband and society. Anita Desai draw attention of the society towards neurotic complexities caused due to loneliness and emotionless relationship. Thus she voice out need of mental pampering which is as important as physical needs . Maya's cry for conjugal satisfaction

proves that feministic outlook of the society has become need of the time and it need to be nurtured by every element of the family too.

Anita Desai's next novel 'Where Shall We Go This Summer' portrays problem of identity crisis resulting from maladjustment in conjugal relationship. 'Sita' female protagonist of the novel is fed up of strict nature of her husband, who compels Sita to follow his decisions. Though she is a mother of four children and quite attentive towards her domestic duties, demanding nature of her husband suffocates her soul. She helplessly caters to whims of her husband but her patience ends with assurance of fifth pregnancy, she cannot withstand with the idea of giving birth to fifth child. Finally a sense of escapism overpowers her mind and she isolates herself at an island. Her act of refuge at the island is a notion of internal fear and rage that lurks in her subconscious. Thus Mrs. Desai has exposed how tyrannical nature of Sita's husband takes her to the boundaries of marital dissatisfaction. Her bold decision to revolting against her husband and society is absolutely in favor of her female sensitivity and a symbol of feministic attitude. Thus Anita Desai's writing provides fertile ground for women protagonists to judge their role in the family and in the society, her work thus realizes emotional needs, importance of affection and mental peace in a woman's life too.

Her last work under exploration is 'Fire on the Mountain' that too revolves around man-woman relationship and dissatisfaction emerging from false, empty relationship. The novel portrays candid picture of male hegemony existing in Indian society. The postcolonial scenario is quite suitable for woman writers to expose their internal urge for female friendly social atmosphere, Mrs. Desai try to expose sterility in well-earned and highly reputed elite class by delineating a dutiful and responsible

wife of a Vice—Chancellor. Her dual role as a wife of high positioned person and housewife crushed her, self, limiting her to a mere shadow of her husband. A sense of identity crisis disturbs 'Nanda Kaul', the protagonist in the novel. Finally her mind struggles hard for redemption giving vent to her suppressed soul. Nanda Kaul symbolizes mute reaction and retaliation of a female to exaggerated duties piled on her by matrimony, her escape to Carignano, a hilly place reveals her search for peace of mind and soul. Thus her withdrawal from chaotic acts of her familial responsibilities subsequently proves her passionate pursuit for real self and her own identity. Since Fire on the Mountain is a result of writer's quest for salvation on part of aged woman it naturally seeks for meaningful married life at least at the final step of life. Nanda Kaul is not less than a reflection of Anita Desai's idea of female redemption.

Post-independent Indian literature thus appears a new avenue for social balance that imparts justice to the feministic wave initiated by social reformers. Indian writers of postcolonial era are very much devoted to record their positive responses regarding place of woman in social scenario. Their efforts subsequently created fertile ground for generating image of new woman. Thus the objective of the paper is to explore changing image of female protagonists in postcolonial Indian English Literature.

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