
Conflict between Self and Society in Anita Desai's *Fire on The Mountain*

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Abstract

Anita Desai is recognized as the first Indian author writing in English who portrays the inner conflict of her protagonists to highlight their individuality and hunger of self identity. She not only express the miseries, pain and agony of women who are tortured by day to day problems, but very silently make the analysis of all problems to reach to the cause of problem.

The novel Fire on the Mountain deals with the problems of Man-woman relationship as a basic component of dissatisfying family life. Anita Desai's exploration of female domain historically the family and the home. Among all Indian writers Anita Desai holds a peerless status due to her unparalleled ability to unfold the human psyche of all her characters.

Keywords: *Quest for freedom, disillusionment, rebel.*

Article

Anita Desai is recognized as the first Indian writer who expresses feminist themes seriously, specially condition of women in India. She always believes that a woman novelist has something new to bring and she has brought it as she is considered the writer who introduced the psychological novel in India. Her treatment of modern themes like alienation, isolation, conflicts between self and society with psycho analytic method considered to be quite successful. All her novels have themes chiefly explaining human psyche to its deepest depth.

Anita Desai's exploration of female domain historically, the family and the home, as well as his focus on female characters and feminine dilemmas of marriage, child bearing, care taking and widowhood provide insight into how Indian femininity and more specifically Indian Motherhood is constructed and maintained within the society. Among the Indian writers in English Anita Desai holds a peerless status due to her unparalleled ability to unfold the human psyche of all her characters more particularly the woman protagonists.

In a society like Indian women are bound to perform their role as dependent, weak silent and as a subordinate to their male counterparts. Thus desires and feelings of patriarchal ideologies and expectations which makes them alien toward their own self.

In her novels, the moral values of women are conveniently altered to suit the demands of men who treats them as their 'objects' 'possession' to be ruled and controlled by psychological insecurity nurtured in them through myths, customs and social discourse.

In *Fire on Mountain* female character Nanda Kaul describing the inhumanity and hostility of male dominated society by her struggle in life and explores the failure of marriage in Indian society as her husband has a lifelong affair with Miss David, who doesn't provide solace, love and affection to his wife Nanda. Even her children are so selfish that only in the time of need they ask her for help. The traumatic married life of Nanda Kaul is sketched in these lines;

"Nor had her husband loved and cherished her and kept her like a queen. He had only done enough to keep her quite while he carried on a life long affair with Miss David... And her children were all alien to her nature. She did not live here by choice she lived here along because that what she was forced to do, reduced to doing (145).

A feeling of despair emerged in her mind that after performing her responsibilities as a mother and as a wife she still finds herself in a state of loneliness, nervousness and in a desolate depressed situation. And then she decide to more away from her family and the society and she starts to live in isolated place Carignano. She decided to detached herself from all kinds of responsibilities, demands and relationships.

The fire is highly symbolical as it highlights the mental trauma of both Raka and Nanda. The fire lying suppressed in her heart is suddenly set ablaze by the shocking death of Ila Das who was raped and later killed. Gradually Nanda is there between fantasy and reality, ultimately reality assets itself and she accepts the reality. Nanda wants to destroy the suffocated being within and find a new life by burning in this fire. For this purpose R.S. Sharma rightly states that:

The Raka's words are expressive of her resolve to destroy a world where a woman cannot hope to be happy without being unnatural. The fire embodies the violence of feeling and a strong purifier. It destroy in order to annihilate certain traditions and to leave space for new values.

Nanda bears all burden. She accepted confinement and domesticity at that stage of life as she couldn't gather courage to stand after being shunned by the society. Nanda was in her home but was not contended Seema Raizada assets that:

We find that Nanda like many other characters of Anita Desai suffers from loneliness unfulfilling relationship. She weaves a world of her own, the waste in the landscape mirrors the waste of her life (Raizada, 174).

Nanda Kaul like many protagonist of her novels appears to us as our next door neighbour. She is an epitome of a person who bears all pain silently, collecting all agony which builds into a mountain and then she revolts by quitting the same society which forces subjugation. Her garb of pretense of happiness and contentment suffocate her pathetically. She even suppress her emotions before her husband in spite of the socio-economic and educational awareness. Malti Aggarwal expresses:

Courage and not escape in is what woman of today requires. She should have the courage to uphold what is right for her and adhere to it. With firm determination and tenacity (Aggarwal, 113).

Nanda Kaul arrives at Carigana for self discovery for she feels that in the gust of family empty. Somehow she tries to hide her hollow interior with her sold exterior. She enjoy the perfect peace and tranquility of the hills and finds desired time for retrospection. She becomes so engrossed with the beauty and serenity of Kassauli the she doesn't even wish to have the company of her great granddaughter, Raka and her childhood friend Ila. The intrusion of both these characters links her with the past. P.D. Dubey has rightly commented that:

The garden of Carignano is a projection of Nanda Kauls yearning for loneliness and privacy. Nanda like many of us portrays to be an assertive, strong personality whereas inside she was totally shatters by her husband's infidelity (Dubey, 118).

As one finds that because of so many evils in the society as infidelity, physical tortures and sexual abasement dual nature of patriarchy all the main characters go with different strategies in search of their own self. But these strategies not adopted very well by these characters.

Male chauvinism and patriarchy have been at the root of reinforcement of gender inequality throughout the history of Indian civilization. And it has continued even to the present day. Inflicting torture upon women and snatching their birth right of being considered equal to men are but a few examples of the ill-treatment meted out to them. The focal point of this indiscrimination is the proposition that the task of woman is to be at home, to manage kitchen and household activities and rear children and nothing else. They have been relegated merely as sex objects and considered inferior to men in the realm of knowledge. Sati pratha, purdah system, child marriage, dowry system, widow practices etc. have been the tools to restrict her from evolvment and keep her aloof from all sources of development. From the time immemorial women have not been able to attain the desirable position:

For most of this long history women were not only deprived of education and financial independence, but had to struggle against a male ideology condemning them to virtual silence and obedience, as well as a male literary establishment that poured scorn on their literary endeavors, Indeed, the depiction of women in male

literature as angles, goddesses, whores, obedient wives, and mother figures was an integral means of perpetuating these ideologies of gender. (Habib, 2013)

In this way *Fire on Mountain* deals with loneliness and isolation as well as the resultant anguish and agony in the deserted life of an old widow. It presents Anita Desai's tragic view of life, in which innocent people are bound to suffer endlessly. In her novels the moral values of women are conveniently altered to suit the demand of men who treat them as their object, possession to be ruled.

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