

IMPACT FACTOR: 7.86

ISSN0976-8165

THE CRITERION

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

14 Years of Open Access

Vol. 14 Issue-III June 2023

Bi-monthly Peer-Reviewed e-Journal

DR. VISHWANATH BITE

Editor-In-Chief

DR. MADHURI BITE

Managing Editor

www.the-criterion.com

AboutUs: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

ContactUs: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

EditorialBoard: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>



ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal
www.galaxyimrj.com

Place and Position of Women in the Selected Novels of Anita Desai

Neelofar Mohammad

Ph.D. Research Scholar,
CPU Hamirpur

&

Dr Priyanka Kaushal

Assistant Professor English
CPU Hamirpur.

Article History: Submitted-23/05/2023, Revised-26/06/2023, Accepted-29/06/2023, Published-30/06/2023.

Abstract:

The application of feminism to the texts explores the position, status of women, their struggle for their identities and challenges which they face in male dominated society. Women have always been considered inferior to men. They have not been given the respect and recognition in society which they deserve. They face countless problems, hurdles and difficulties in their lives. Women have always been treated as a product and materialistic thing. Anita Desai is an accomplished and a prominent writer of India. She has depicted the lives of women and their sufferings, trauma, depression, oppression in her novels. The present study means to read the selected novels of Desai from a feminist perspective with the aim to highlight the place and position of women in a patriarchal society. The study also focuses to highlight the role and contribution of patriarchy and patriarchal values towards the depression, suffering, trauma, unhappiness of women and other social problems faced by them.

Keywords: Dignity, Sorrow, Subjugation, Loneliness, Patriarchy Women, Culture, Depression.

Introduction

The concept of gender equality is cherished in Indian constitution. The constitution gives equal right to both men and women without any discrimination. The woman performs the role of a mother, daughter, wife, partner, organizer, doctor, engineer, teacher and above all the queen of a family. Women also plays an important role in the development and upliftment of society.

Despite the progress and development in modern society women are treated as inferiors. From early ages women have been exploited in society. Women writers have highlighted the condition and status of women in their works. Anita Desai an acclaimed Indian writer also describes the condition and status of women in her works. Desai is an astonishing painter of her characters. She in her works has highlighted the misery, sufferings, and hardships of women in Indian society. Desai presents women as protagonists in her novels. She talks about women subject in her novels. She remarks,

“Especially in my earlier work I found myself addressing the same things over and over again: very much about the life of women, particularly those women who are confined to home and family, also the solitude from which a person can suffer even if living within a big family or surrounded by crowds.”(Desai).

Desai has been shortlisted for the Booker prize and her novel *Fasting Feasting* describes the role and status of women in the society. The novel is divided into two parts. The first part is set in India and second part is set in the USA. The first part of the novel shows that in Indian household all love and affection is bestowed to a boy child. In the family father (papa) is the head of the family and mother is the helper who helps and assists the father. The family is bound by traditions, norms and customs where boys are educated and girls are married. More importance was given to boys that is why Mama says,

“In my days ,girls in the family were not given sweets, nuts, good things to eat. If something special had been bought from the market, like sweets or nuts it was given to boys in the family”.(page 5).

This story revolves round the life of a married woman in general and the life of an unmarried woman in particular. Uma, the protagonist of the story struggles her whole life for her identity. She wishes to live an independent life but she spends her whole life in fulfilling the demands of her parents. And in return she was not been given the love and respect which she deserve. No one in the family cares about her. Even after the birth of a boy namely Arun in the family, the whole atmosphere of the family was completely changed. After his birth everyone in the family was deeply attached to him. Even papa’s happiness knew no bounds-

“Papa, in his elation, leaping over three chairs in the hall, one after the other, like a boy playing leapfrog, his arms flung up in the air and his hair flying. A boy! He screamed, a bo-oy ! Arun, Arun at last”.

After Arun was born, Mama was proud that she has finally given birth to a son (Sun of the family) and Papa was proud of producing a male offspring. All the love and affection was given to Arun and Uma was being totally neglected. Not only this, she even lost her right to education.

In this novel Desai has portrayed both male and female characters and presented the real image of a patriarchal society. Female characters in this novel are victims of male dominated society, especially Uma who suffered a lot. She had to look after her family .Her desires are in constant check by her parents. She cannot do anything on her own. She yearns to be free from the constraints of her family. She develops a freedom of spirit in her own world. Uma, her sister, Mira masi they all represent freedom from family expectations and social norms. Uma despite making everyone happy in her family is considered burden by her parents. This novel deals with a very sensitive story depicting the human values through its characters. In this novel uma wished for her freedom. She spends her life by fulfilling the demands of her parents, but no one has sympathy for her.

Anita Desai has made clear difference between male and female characters in this novel. The man is the personification of freedom while the woman is struggling for identity and freedom. To quote Simone de Beauvoir, “one is not born, but rather becomes a woman”. (*The Second Sex*).

Fire on the Mountain another fulfilling work of Desai won the Sahitya Academy Award in 1978. This novel depicts isolation, desertion and sufferings of female protagonist. This novel is divided into three parts. Its main character is Nanda Kaul . Nanda Kaul is one among those protagonists who have suffered unhappiness throughout her life. Even her married life was disastrous. She did not get any love, affection or friendship from her partner. Her husband always treated her, “as some improving yet valuable mechanical apparatus, required for the proficient running of his family unit”.(Desai 4).

Fire on the Mountain is separated into three parts. First part deals with Nanda Kaul who lives at Carignano and manages her life there. Second part deals with Raka (great granddaughter of Nanda Kaul) who comes to Carignano to stay with her. Third part deals with Ila Das (Nanda Kaul's friend), who had come to visit Nanda Kaul and Raka in Carignano and she left Carignano after her visit.

Nanda Kaul is one of the heroines who have suffered a lot throughout her life because of her loveless marital life. At one time, she used to be the centre of attraction for everyone as she was the wife of a Vice-Chancellor. Her outer life was full of craze and fame but internally she was upset, depressed, alienated and totally not happy. She did not have any bonding or affection towards her husband because her husband treated her like a materialistic thing.

Nanda Kaul lives in a haunted and isolated house in Kasauli in Carignano. She wanted to live all alone there without the disturbance from anyone because she was broken from inside. For her, "whatever else come or happened would be an unwelcomed intrusion and distraction". This novel deals with the Nanda Kaul's determined detachment and non-involvement which is brought about by the unhappy conjugal ties which is seen in Desai's earlier works like *Cry the Peacock*, *Voices in the City* *Bye Bye Blackbird* also.

Nanda Kaul played the dutiful role of a wife and almost everyone praised her for that. She seems to be happy from outside but her inner reality was very different. She was very sad and alienated with her married life. Her husband wanted her to live a life according to his choice. Even though being a vice chancellors wife, which was full of crowds and social gatherings was totally unsatisfying and meaningless for her. Once she discharged her duties and responsibilities, she does not want any perturbation, "discharge me, she groaned, I have discharge my duties, discharge". She became a hermit. Emotional disenchantment is at root of Nanda Kaul's disillusionment with human bonds. Her husband treated her as a materialistic thing and did not love her at all. she believes that all socialization are fake.

Indian culture has built arrangement of female qualities like disobedience, modesty, devotion humility etc. Nanda Kaul has adjusted herself according to such norms and proved herself to be an ideal woman. But despite all this her husband had neither any love nor affection

and respect towards her. He did not value her sentiments. He had an extra marital affair. He had a deep rooted illicit relationship with Miss David who is a Christian woman.

Nobody bother about her, no one tries to out whether she is happy or not. Ila Das, Nanda Kauls old companion stays with her in Carigano. Ila Das has lived golden days when her father was alive. After her fathers death, the family property was divided among her three brothers. Ila and her mother did not get anything. They even took “the last of the jewellery and soon had driven out into the rented rooms and boarding houses, and finally to whatever roof charity would hold them.” (Desai 124). Ila has never been rich but still she did not lose her courage. She has faced so many hurdles and difficulties but nothing shake her confidence.

Ila meets a very tragic and sad end in the novel. She was murdered and raped because she raised her voice against the patriarchal norms by attempting to stop the child marriage of 7 year old girl to a widower. Ila was killed by the father of the girl. Her only fault was that she raised her voice against the male dominated society. Ila realized that being completely powerless is in the destiny of a woman. This unbearable truth hits her hard and at the end she passes away.

Nanda Kaul’s house Carigano is the reflection of her mood because it stands lonely on the hilly region of Kasauli, and is totally cut off from rest of the world. Kaul wanted to be all alone there, she wanted to stay away from everyone, away from her all contacts as well as from her perturbing memories of the past. “She wanted no one and nothing else. Whatever else came or happened here, would be an unwelcome intrusion and distraction”. Even the book which she reads in Carigano, *The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon*, matches her moods and temperaments, sometimes annoying and sometimes lonely and depressed. One of her favourite scraps in the book was, when a woman lives alone reflects her mental state.

Anita Desai like a true female activist has highlighted the horrible truth of the man centric culture of India. It is the world where women like Nanda Kaul and Ila Das shrink away under the hard flame of the real world. The ugliest importance of male power is highlighted through the punishment that is given to Ila. It is Ila Das who suffers the darkest fate of all. She has to pay the price only because of raising of her voice against the social ills like child marriage. The women characters of this novel tried to live their life happily despite being broken from

inside. Nanda spend her sad and boring life without her husband and children .Despite being a good wife, she has been deprived of the love of her husband.

The novels of Anita Desai explores the women who are caught in a man's world with frustration and helplessness. Desai is known for her evocative narratives, who delves into the psychological and emotional realms of women characters. Her novels explore the conflicts and dilemmas which women encounter in their pursuit of personal fulfillment and self realization. Desai's works vividly depict the challenges of balancing individual aspirations with familial and societal expectations. Her female characters navigate societal expectations, cultural constraints and the tension between tradition and modernity. Her narratives unveil the intricate struggles which women face as they seek to carve out identities amidst social demands. Desai's portrayal captures the multidimensional experiences of women's lives.

Desai presents women characters who defy conventional gender stereotypes, challenging the established order and asserting their agency. She skillfully highlight and explore the diverse experiences of women, showcasing their resilience, aspirations and struggles against a backdrop pf social and cultural transformation. Desai offers unique insights into the position and status of women in Indian society. Through nuanced portrayals of women characters , she illuminate the challenges, aspirations and resilience of women as they navigate societal norms and assert their individuality. Her contributions provide a platform for introspection and dialogue, inspire readers to question societal norms and strive for greater gender equality and empowerment.

Anita Desai's contributions to feminism are both substantial and invaluable. Through her writings, she sheds light on the challenges faced by women in traditional Indian society, providing a platform for their struggles and aspirations to be acknowledged. Desai's female characters embody the multifaceted nature of womanhood, defying societal expectations and navigating patriarchal structures in their quest for self discovery and empowerment. By presenting women in diverse roles and contexts, Desai challenges stereotypes and fosters a deeper understanding of the rich and varied experiences of Indian women.

Conclusion

Anita Desai's most novels deal with the female characters whose lives are in total control of men. She has portrayed the meaningless and isolated lives of women who are totally ruled by

men. She has also highlighted that trauma and depression leaves such a drastic effect on women that they are not even able fight their own condition. Desai has also suggested through the novel, that men's domination damaged women physically as well as emotionally and mentally and limit their opportunities. Even today many people are of the opinion that women are bound to cook and look after the children and all household chores even if she is working outside like her husband. Not only this many people believe that it is the duty of the mother to teach moral values to children and raise them properly. The entire burden of household falls on the shoulders of women. Unfortunately, the fact is that many women do not argue or question the decisions which are made for them by others. In order to gain equal respect and status in society, women have to speak for themselves.

Almighty Allah has created women from the rib of a man, it means from the side of a man so as to be treated equal. God neither created woman from the foot of a man nor from his head. So they are not the individuals to be walked on neither to be treated superior. They are just equal to men and should be treated like that. They are not materialistic things. Women should be given equal respect, status and opportunities in every field as that of men. Any society will only progress if both men and women are treated as equal beings.

Works Cited:

Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. New York: Vintage, 1949.

Bhasin, K. *What is Patriarchy, Women Unlimited*. New Delhi: 2006.

Desai , Anita. *Fasting Feasting*. London: Vintage, 1999.

Desai ,Anita . *Fire on the Mountain*, New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1997.

Jena, Seema . *Voice and Vision of Anita Desai*. new Delhi: Sunil Printers, 1989.