



Projection of Men in the Novels of Anita Desai

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Abstract:

The intent of the present paper is to focus especially on the male characters of Anita Desai. She has minutely observed the male and female characters in her society and she presents them through her words. In the paper, Cry the Peacock, Voices in the City and Where Shall We Go This Summer?

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1. Introduction

Anita Desai is considered as one of the influential female writers in the world. In her novels, she talks about the victimised, harassed and meek girls and women. Her contribution to the world of literature is immense. In most of her works, she delineates pains, sufferings and desires of the female but at the same time she does not remain back in the projection of the male. Since ages, male has been the dominant power in the home and society. Women have been not given much importance in the family and society as well. Women are always considered to be either the sub ordinates or inferior to the men in the society. They are always in the clutches of the men, they may be father, lover, husband, son or grandfather or father-in-law. They cannot take any decision of their live independently. Anita Desai has dived deep into the characters of male and female as well in her novels.

2. Projection of Male

Man has been associated with everything that was specific to mankind, while woman was only concerned with things in general. In short, as P.M. Nayak suggests;

Human experience has only been a masculine experience, in other words a 'Malist experience. Man has been glorified from all angles. He distorted the female voice, denying her an equal force. Philosophers with no exception have contributed to the glorification of man's Image. Dale Spender looked at woman as incomplete without man (Nayak: 1996, 6).

With the advent of feminism and feminist consciousness, the male oriented world has been questioned leading to several conflicts of placement of women. Feminist theorists like, Simone de Beauvior, Eva Figes, and others gave great importance to the issue of women experience. Education expanded their consciousness of the world and ensured them a place in the society. The suppressed female voice has been articulated. Today women take up challenging careers and prove their ability. They feel greater responsibility towards society and even accomplish their responsibilities. Fighting out all odds has not solved the problems. Instead, it gave way to the complicated and confused issue of gender difference. And this gender difference has only been understood through a set of binary opposition, which leaves no room for an authentic difference set outside the established system. An analysis of a few novels shows that things have changed but not completely. In spite of concentrating on the modern concepts of feminism and viewing each piece of fact, novelists tend to remain within the patriarchal norms. Thus an attempt is made in this paper to understand the projection of men in the novels of Anita Desai. Novelists like Anita Desai has her education in English seem to concentrate on the problems of women alone. In their novels, women characters are given importance right from the title, to that of central

characters. But as the story progress the various forces in the society that affect them invariably turn out to be men. A careful study of Desai's novels beginning with, *Cry, the Peacock* to *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Show that women characters and their actions revolve round the men in their lives. It is noticed that in *Cry, the Peacock*, motherless child, Maya is influenced by her father. Maya's father in his eagerness to protect her and fulfil the gap of her mother's absence indirectly imposes his thoughts, learning and set pattern of livelihood on her. The father figure further stands responsible for her failure in establishing a mature and emotionally satisfying relationship with Gautama in her married life. Though Maya lives in a nuclear family and is given the utmost freedom, she craves for male company as she cries before Gautama:

is there nothing in you that would be touched ever so lightly, if I told you I live my life for you (Desai: 1963, 114).

While Gautama influenced by modern concepts instead of understanding her confuses her with his theory of detachment saying;

He who, controlling the sense of the mind follows without attachment the path of action with his organs of action he is esteemed (Desai: 1963, 114).

Thus, Gautama's theory of detachment and his father's excess attachment result in disharmony between Maya and Gautama. As a result, Maya crushed between two male powers turns neurotic. Added to this her feeling of inadequacy disturbs her already perturbed state and leads to Gautama's murder and her suicide. While Patriarchal attitudes end in a murder in *Cry, the Peacock*, *Voices in the City*, take a different turn. The two female characters Monisha and Amala fall prey to two different visages of patriarchal attitudes. Monisha when married to Jiban, a conservative man against her taste by her father, fails to adjust herself in the new environment, she remains aloof like her brother who seems to be a part of her as she claims;

I suffer his fever so deeply because it is mine also (Desai: 1965, 130).

While her brother controls her with his theory of detachment Jiban with his conventional ideas intensifies her mental agony and is responsible for further disharmony in Monisha's life. Amala Monisha's Sister is also a victim of patriarchal system to some extent as she fall a prey to the whims of Dharma. In Desai's third novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* we observe the father shaping and reshaping the patterns of life for Sita. Sita like Maya a motherless child looks forward for love and affection of her father, but his negligence and uncommunicative behaviour creates an insurmountable block in her life. Despite being uncommunicative and an enigma to her, he tends to dominate her mind. Further the disturbing scenes and impossibility of talk between her father and her sister develops a fear of psychosis in her towards men, as such it adversely affects her relationship with Raman her husband. In order to discover herself she ventures alone in her own world. However, in the end she realises her dependence on Raman and returns to his world, unable to fight life alone. Hence patriarchal needs win over the conflict of self in her. In the end, we notice that in all the three novels, women are forced to depend on male companionship. If not economically, they are psychologically trapped by men, the following statement proves the same;

Men are either marginally present or entirely absent, but the physical absence does not entail an absence from the minds and lives of their women relations (Jain: 1987, 56).

3. Conclusion

To conclude it can be said that Anita Desai's women are dependent on the Men when they face critical situation. It is true that women have been the victims of the Men but they are always protected by the

Men only in their critical condition. Thus, in Anita Desai's novels the beginning, the middle and the end remain incomplete without the role of men.

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