

"Unravelling the Psychological Impact: How do Anita Desai's Protagonists Navigate Distortion from an Early Parental Negligence"

Dr. Sujatha.B

Associate professor

Dr.G.R.Damodaran College of Science

Coimbatore

Abstract:

Anita Desai, the renowned Indian author, is celebrated for her intense exploration of the human psyche and the complex intricacy of her characters. Throughout her works, Desai adeptly portrays the psychological turmoil, inner conflicts, and societal pressures experienced by her female protagonists. The protagonists of Desai often grapple with circumstances that lead to psychological distortions. As Desai is ultimately a novelist of intuition she is concerned mainly with the exploration of the restraints and shades of the human psyche, which is toiling under trauma. She is interested in characters who are not average but have retreated, or been driven into some extremity of despair and so turned against, or made a stand against, the general current. For her, "The inner climate, the climate of sensibility that lours or clears or rumbles like thunder suddenly blazes forth like lightning, is more compelling than the outer weather, the physical geography or the visible action"(Dalmia, Times of India 45).

Key words: Suppression, Monotony, Psyche, Repression, Nostalgia, Emotional Orphans, Suffocation, Existential Pressures and Destiny.

Life of women in India after marriage undergoes a significant transformation. She has to leave her parent's house and move to a completely new environment. She has to build a good rapport with all the close relatives of her husband. Her role is more definite and her duties are more specific than those of the husband and she has to adhere to the set pattern of conduct that is customary in that family.

The protagonists are able to withstand this kind of suffocation for a certain period of life, where all the suppressed feelings and emotions get intensified after a period of sacrifice, gushing out like a volcano eruption. As the intensity of the eruption has no limits so the suppressed emotions forcibly pour out in the way of its expression. As a result, they are unaware of the consequences of their actions, cross the limits and the tedium instructs their ways to be proceeded on further.

A common factor prevails in all the lives of Desai's protagonists are monotony; a dreary life is experienced by dreamy sensitive beings. Desai depicts the suffering of her characters through various images especially she often uses bird images to most of her women characters. As Kamini Dinesh rightly puts in her work, *Between Spaces of Silence* "There is a remarkable use of bird image in almost all the novels of Desai, signifying the fettered condition of the human beings. Some titles of the novels such as *Cry, the Peacock*, *Bye Bye Blackbird*, *In custody* are indicative of the enclosed, entrapped life the humans as against the birds live..."(55).

As Desai is ultimately a novelist of intuition she is concerned mainly with the exploration of the restraints and shades of the human psyche, which is toiling under trauma. She is interested in characters who are not average but have retreated, or been driven into some extremity of despair and so turned against, or made a stand against, the general current. Thus, it is seen that Anita Desai's primary concern is the delineation of extreme characters rather than with the action of the novel.

Anita Desai's first novel *Cry, the Peacock* can be considered a trend-setter. The chief protagonist Maya is over thinking and a pampered daughter of a wealthy Brahmin. She is married to Gautama who is more than double of her age, a rather insensitive, practical and logical advocate. Gautama fails to understand her sensitive feelings as a husband. In her childhood, an albino astrologer had predicted that four years after her marriage, one of them would die. This prediction makes her obsessed by the fear of death. Guided by this fear her psyche loses grip of her own central position. Her longing for love, forces her to kill her husband first and then herself.

Desai's second novel *Voices in the City* (1965) depicts the miserable plight of Nirode, Monisha and Amla in the City of Calcutta. In this novel Desai portrays the failures of a Bengali youth Nirode, the troubled life of Monisha and the Commercial art of Amla and the indifferent attitude of their mother. *Voices in the City* has a larger canvas than *Cry, the Peacock*. Monisha reveals through her diary, the inner landscape of her psyche, which proves fatal for her end. *Voices in the City* is an unforgettable story of a carefree brother and his two sisters caught in the cross currents of changing social values.

Where Shall We Go This Summer? (1975) is shorter in size but deeper in meaning and it is this novel that artistically unifies two journeys. One is an immediate escape from surroundings and the other is towards the futures. The novel deals with the inner outer world of its protagonist Sita and her fatigue for life. It tells the story of the middle-aged Sita, who is fed up with the mundane routine of a meaningless existence. She feels suffocated in her well-ordered posh flat in Bombay and struggles hard to break away from it all.

Fire On the Mountain (1977) reveals the inner threads of the story through the struggles of Nanda Kaul, a widow of a Vice-Chancellor remains a lady of receptivity reveals the family of Nanda Kaul through memories. She is not happy to receive her great granddaughter to the mountain, but somehow she agrees to share her presence in this house.. The arrival of Raka unfolds the nostalgia of Nanda Kaul about past events. The old woman and the young girl live single as both of them are recluse. But as days pass by, Nanda Kaul finds herself drawn towards Raka, something she had not expected. But the little girl refuses to mingle and slips into the hills looking for company in solitude. It tells the result of ill parenting and the hard facts of life. It symbolizes the process of creation and destruction.

In *Clear Light of Day* (1980) the protagonist Bim is a confident young individual remains unmarried to support her family and an autistic brother. Finally she is exhausted serving her kins and frustrated at their ingratitude, yet blooms into a fresh glowing life by understanding the subtle nuances of practical and an ordinary life. All the protagonists of Desai seem to feel a kind of isolation slowly engulfs them and in return they become the victims of isolation which gives them a negative comfort and they want to retain such a gloomy state of life.

All the five women are the representatives of the suffering Indian society and culture. They all together represent the Indian personality structure which is very complex and multi-layered. During psychoanalytical study one is able to realize Maya, Monisha, Nirode, Nanda and Sita are likely to be the representatives of repressed levels. As the experience of their childhood differs at various angles, the urge of their actions too differ accordingly. Maya is unable to deal with neurosis goes for violence while Sita compromises and adjust with it and returns home peacefully. Monisha could not stand the follies and insults of her in laws and sets herself fire and ends her life. All these five novels paint the agonized picture of the protagonists in common and their misfortune, the destiny either made by them or a destiny made to them by unfortunate incidents in a chaotic rhythm.

Their reciprocation to life is not expressed in overtones as they make an effort to escape from a pressurized suffocation of life, only after a long period of barrenness. They are able to withstand the suffocation of life only for a certain period and project themselves in the form of an unacceptable one and in an eccentric manner. It is there the problem arises both in their mind and behaviour. They lose their emotional maturity which is much needed to lead a family life

Generally the emotional orphans of Desai hail from fractured families. They miss their parents either physically or psycho emotionally during their tender age. The empty space, which is meant to be filled with love, expands into a big bubble of vacuum. The bubble misguides them to bloom into a character of indecisive, pessimistic and a solitary drifter of life in the expedition of search for identity in want of love. Naturally, this vacuum tends to fill itself with the missing love and care of their parent from a close relative of them, being the husband. Unfortunately, the husband is of little knowledge about the wife's necessitating factors, as he is brought up in total contrasting climatic conditions of life. The souls of all these fragile characters were always at a look for some guidance in the guise of caressing them with supportive shoulders. As they have been weak in all their temperaments and perception towards life they tend to depend on someone who is strong both inward and outward. A continuous disappointment in their expectation leads them to frustration and finally makes them into existential characters. Moreover, most of Desai's characters lack

motherly warmth; they expect their better half to ease them with the same, wherein the entire problem arises. At least, had such characters been anchored with a better and understanding spouses, they would have been blessed with an opportunity to see their lives in a different perspective.

Had Desai's characters been engaged themselves in any social activities to keep their mind engaged positively, they would have attained the meaning of life in a more constructive manner, rather made them fall a prey to their self-made destiny. Anita Desai's novels *Cry, the Peacock*, *Voices in the City*, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* *Fire on the Mountain* and *Clear Light of Day* portray the suffocation of the integral sensitive characters.

To conclude, Anita Desai presents her opinion about complexity of human relationships as a big contemporary problem and human condition. So, she analyses this problem to show changing human relationships in her novels. She is a contemporary writer because she considers new themes and knows how to deal with them. Anita Desai takes up significant contemporary issues as the subject matter of her fiction while remaining rooted in the tradition at the same time. She explores the anguish of individuals living in modern society. Desai deals with complexity of human relationships as one of her major theme, which is a universal issue, as it attracts worldwide readers to her novels. She strives to show this problem without any interferes. A novel, 'a perpetual quest for reality' and 'the most effective agent of the moral imagination' in the present world deals with the problems faced by man. (Susheel 163). In the writings of Indian novelists, the thematic aspect takes with problems faced by men like crisis of consciousness and human predicament etc. The paper **"Unravelling the Psychological Impact: How do Anita Desai's Protagonists Navigate Distortion from Early Parental Negligence"**. studies how Desai delves deep into the mute sufferings of Indian women. Desai's female protagonists incessantly search for their identity of an introvert amidst an umpteen number of psychological turbulences arising out of a conflict between the reality and the illusory world.

The paper is an introspection of how Desai's women characters develop gradual cancerous growth in their sensitive minds thanks to their fractured childhood and how they

fall a prey to their own made diseases ever after and thereby it endeavours to examine all the sensations of humans to attain the ultimate truth in the hidden recesses of human psyche.

In conclusion, Anita Desai intricately weaves the impact of childhood experiences into the fabric of her narratives, shaping the psychological landscapes of her female characters. The exploration of cultural conditioning, family dynamics, education, trauma, socialization, and relationships during childhood adds depth to Desai's portrayal of the complexities and challenges faced by women as they navigate their adult lives. The nuanced depiction of childhood impact enriches the character development and thematic richness of Desai's works, making them powerful reflections of the broader societal dynamics at play.

Professor Sujith and Sreenivasa Reddy in *Existentialism in Anita Desai's Fire on the Mountain* expound Anita Desai's characters in the following manner:

Desai has always revelled in exploring the deeper recesses of human subjects and tried to bring out the grimmer and challenging aspects of their lives. Anita Desai has inarguably made yeoman service in adding new vistas in thematic treatment of existential issues dogging the common strata of society. Her novels create evocative and deeply moving narratives of individual lives caught in the throes of socio-cultural and existential dilemma. (7)

A critic expatiates on the value of motherhood in the novels of Anita Desai and Varsha Adalja in a journal. Krishna Mitra paints on the status of Indian Women beautifully in his exemplary work, *The Images of Indian Woman in the Select Novels of Anita Desai*. The psychological trauma of characters is enunciated well by Usha in her work, *Psychological Conflict in the Fiction of Anita Desai*. She makes an attempt to analyze the lacerated psyche of the protagonist and the other women characters especially the wives and mothers.

The brittle ones shuttle between the present and the past and also shift their mind from realism to fantasy not knowing where to stand and what to do and finally they learn to live in the chaotic universe finding no answers to their existential queries and quandaries; traumas and tribulations.

The paper is resolved to find out the factors for the failure of the protagonists and thereby suggests a few simple solutions to get over the inimical moments of psychic life, hence the title **"Unravelling the Psychological Impact: How do Anita Desai's Protagonists Navigate Distortion from an Early Parental Negligence"**.

The Childhood Reminiscences expands into a psychological trauma when they become adults. Desai has picked the minute details from the raw period of the characters and by viewing it through a magnifying glass in order to perceive the truth, a mystery behind an existential strain and pain.

The Suppressed Desires is indeed a reflection or reaction over a repressive way of a mundane life. The factors which are responsible for the fissure in their psyche are elaborated in a meticulous manner. The paper reaches out to find how the existential pressures bury away the subtle feelings of the protagonists, to take a new form of weird behaviours which push them into the threshold of their self made destiny.

Works Cited:

Bande, U. The Novels Of Anita Desai. Prestige Books, 1988.

Dalmia ,Y. "Interview with Anita Desai." The Times of India, 13 Oct. 1979, pp.8.

Dhawan, R.K. Indian Women Writers. Prestige Books, 2001.

Dinesh, Kamini. Between Spaces of Silence. New Delhi: Sterling publishers Pvt. ltd., 1995.

https://www.academia.edu/7307623/Thoughts_on_Anita_Desais_novels