

Emotional Suffocation of Indian Women as Projected in the Selected Novels of Anita Desai: An Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Anitha Desai, a novelist of remarkable spirit and enchanting skills of presenting women's psyche, carves her female protagonists as the freedom – loving dejected individuals who struggle with the system and experience intoxicating feeling of dullness and meaninglessness of life. Maya, Monisha, Sita, Tara and Raka are pictured as the embodiment of unsolved mysteries and never cope with the current that they get suffocated living amidst the money-dominated society that gives no room for emotional stability and sensual gratifications. This Article is all about how Anita Desai has dived deep into the female psyche and explored the feminine sense and sensibilities by probing deep into their mystic meaning.

Key words : Emotional Suffocation

Anita Desai, an important writer of the brilliant group of women novelists of Indian Literature, displays the feminine sensibility matching her aesthetic goals, in almost all her novels. Being a skillful women writer of Indian literary horizon, Desai reveals her remarkable spirit of scanning the Indian women's psyche which is a whole package of emotion, sensation, and thought. Do relationships carve a women's personality? Desai's characterization and plots of her novels answer the question. The reason why Desai's novels and presentations of social realities in psychology of a person that motivates his life activities. Her characters are solitude – lovers, dejected, perfect individuals who are free- minded and aware of the absurdities of life but fight with their emotions and agonies with a view to

accomplishing an identity and a meaning of life.

Desai sees today's society as a picture of dullness and meaninglessness, where by the women in her novels struggle with the system in search of personal freedom and individuality. Dr.M.K.Srivatsava rightly says, "Anita Desai does not portray character in a traditional manner. The characters come alive in their dynamic process always growing, changing, viable and inevitable" (1). Maya, Monisha, Sita, Tara and Raka are presented as an embodiment of unsolved mystery and never cope with the current, rather get themselves suffocated living amidst the money – dominated society that gives no room for emotional stability and sensual gratifications.

Maya, in *Cry The Peacock* thinks she is denied even a chance to express her feelings and alienates herself. Monisha, in *The Voices of The City*, curtails her creativity and freedom within the bounds of a traditional marriage. Sita, in *Where Shall We Go This Summer*, being a mother of four children, exhausted with the fact that she has little influence either on her children or husband or her own life. Raka, in *Fire On The Mountain*, a child of an unhappy marriage and broken home, needs exceptional love and care to get her out of her isolation and willful rejection.

Maya, as her name signifies, is a creature of graceful illusion. She lives a life packed with fantasies and her unhappiness is related to her process of growing up. Maya, the pampered child of her loving father, has led a protected life void of sorrows and mishappenings. Mother-less Maya has been comforted by her father's loving company, his cozy fairy tales, evening walks, fun filled vacation times, close-to-heart conversations, praises and recognitions for her petty trails made her childhood days to travel in a over-protected and never had entered an adult world. When confronted to the disappointments and reality of life she struggles to face it – her present tension and misery is being triggered off by Toto's death. And it is not the tears and the mourning helped her to get relieved but “a fir of furious pilloro – beating, kicking, everything but crying from childhood experiences, I knew

this to be sweetly exhausting (2)”. Filled with a child's desire for consolation, Maya longs for a motherly affection and comfort that she wants to be assured that everything will be set wellsoon. In spite of Gautama being attentive to her sorrow and wiping away her tears, philosophizing with her on the merits of emotional intensity, Maya feels lonely and being neglected when he is called away by a visitor. She remains childlike and Maya herself is aware that her relationship with the adult world is tenuous.

“Like a foolish baby, I sat down upon a pillow and saw, opposite me, a round – faced child in a white petticoat gazing bleakly out of the silvered mirror. (3)”

Maya's consciousness of not being in tune with the reality arouses unexplained tensions within her which in turn gives rise to severe headaches. Her fears and thoughts crowd her mind and her own fear about Gautama's insensitivity towards her emotions lead to obsession, hallucinations and finally insanity.

While Maya's own life is hallow and void of harmony and cheer, her small circle of friends lead an unhappy grey-life and hence Maya feels trapped into a crater of un happiness and sorrow. This kind of atmosphere makes her believe the astrologer that she is condemned to die. This certainly leads her to value every single moment of Gautama's company. But unfortunately, all her needs,

desires and wants are left unheard leaving her in loneliness of no room to breathe.

Voice of The City, more specifically mirrors the loneliness-struck obsessive nature of Indian married women. Monisha, starving for privacy and comparison with her husband Jiban, finds it difficult to free herself of her appurtenances and duties. Her meaningless monotonous routine drives her crazy that she, like Maya, finds death a flee from her lonely choice-less life and attempts committing suicide. When Jiban's money is found missing from their cupboard, Monisha confesses that she took it to pay her brother's hospital bill and to her shock, she was questioned why she has not informed him before she took it. She is heartbroken of not able to digest the fact that her act of responding to her need is labeled as theft and she remains silent, not knowing what to do or feel, She feels still; her stillness is not steadiness or detachment but a death like silence. This silence changes all her hopes to disaster and dreams to right mares. She feels curiously untouched while watching a dancer in the street; "unnaturally cool, too perfectly aloof, too inviolably whole and alone and apart (4)"

All of a sudden, Monisha found herself lost and was conscious of her relationships that stolen her right to exist. Her death-like isolation stimulates her instants to attempt to

gibe meaning to her death, for her life has not been able to acquire one.

"...I have not given birth,
I have not attended death. All
The intervening drama has gone
By, unwound itself like a silent,
Blurred film that has neither
Entertained nor horrified me"(5).

The tragedy of Maya and Monisha serves to highlight the predicament of the educated and intelligent women in our age. When the educated women find solace in 'resting in peace', here Sita, an uneducated simple woman and a mother of four children, says a big 'no' to adjust to the complacent routine of life which is her desire to free herself not only from her husband but also from an entire civilization of which he is the representative figure. Sita's reluctance to cope with the norm, provocative attitudes towards the womenfolk of her husband's family, drives her to the extent of arriving at an island, Manori "in order to give birth: In spite of the physical and emotional imbalances due to her fifth pregnancy, she raises high to rebel for her freedom. It is not just a search for her that was buried under the encrustation of her present life but also a protest against society and its violence.

"More and more she lost all feminine,
all maternal belied in Child birth,
all faith in it, and began to fear it as
yet one more act of violence and murder

in a world that had more of

Them in it that she could take” (6)

The escape to Manori is Sita’s way of telling thus far and no further. Instead of brooding over the fun-filled carefree childhood days and choosing death for life and its struggle, Sita made a trip to Manori. A vacation actually back to her childhood in the quest for self-discovery and recognition of reality. Her return allows her not only to see the face of reality but also to understand that there can be no running away from the reality as the glaring illusions of the world and self-delusions remains scattered amidst the real and practical world. The destruction around her overwhelms that she sees an element of destruction in all her children’s behavior. When Menaka crumbles a sheaf of the new buds, Sita over-reacts for it that she cries,

“destruction came so naturally; that was the horror...

The creative impulse had no chance against the

Overpowering desire to destroy” (7)

Sita’s return to her home island is symbolically a return to the great womb that protects her unborn baby and herself as well. Sita compares her own emotional sensitivity with that of the wounded eagle that is being tortured by the city crows.

Isolation is struck deep inside the inner chords of Anita Desai’s heroines, irrespective of their age, education, societal status and

family background. Raka, the young child in *Fire On The Mountain*, has a love for lonely, rugged, and barren aspects of nature and has weird imagination. Raka’s state of being away from harmony peace and colorful aspects of nature, unlike a normal child, shows that she is the victim of a broken home. As she sings,

“I’m shipwrecked and alone. She clung to a rock-my boat,

Alone in my boat, alone in my boat on the sea” (8)

Raka shuns away all the intimacy and tenderness. The very sight of her sick mother being beaten up with hammers and filthy abuses by her officer father who comes home late at night gives Raka a frightening consciousness and her father remaining a nightmare for her. The sick, frustrated and unhappy mother is not capable of giving her the love and affection that she demands. The traumatic experiences deprive her of child’s innocence, trust and feeling of joy in the company of others. Her childhood emotional gratifications are not just delayed but denied and this hypersensitivity shapes her traits as person who is not able to establish and maintain harmonious and joyous relationships later in life. William Walsh stresses,

“Affection is the seed of time. It is love – intensifying the delight in the present and correspondingly bringing discomfort in absence which introduces an element

of performance in a child's experience"
(9).

Raka, undoubtedly, is a 'freak' child but after all she is a human being who needs love, protection and attachment to grow into an individual. When Raka is sent to her great grandmother, Nanda Kaul, she is considered as an element of annoyance. When Nanda discovers that Raka is unusually quite, she is pleased but not concerned with the child's abnormal trait, because the girl can be left to her own devices and she wouldn't bother Nanda. She wonders at Raka's;

"total rejection so natural, instinctive and effortless when compared with her own planned and willful rejection of the child"
(10).

Raka's obsessive love for silence and solitude drives her to the extent that she sets fire to the forests and stealthily enters the ruined house and locations to enjoy the silence after the fire.

Thus, Anita Desai's female characters go through traumatic experiences in their incompatible marital bonds that push them into an emotional deprivation. The women of Desai's novels seek a serene state of loneliness in order to fly away from the suffocation that the society impels on them.

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Be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are.

– John Wooden.