

“Struggles of Women In Anita Desai's “Fire on The Mountain”

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Abstract:

Anita Desai is a significant and prolific woman novelist of modern Indian fiction. She has certainly given a new viewpoint to Indian English novels. She deserves special mention for her treatment of women in her novels, with the focus on her female characters undergoing mental struggles. It has been unanimously accepted that of all the contemporary Indian English novelists, Anita Desai is perhaps the most perceptive and consistent explorer of the inner life. The protagonists of her novels are torn between their search for authentic existence and the limitations of the human situation that prevent them from such realizations. Anita Desai herself states. The paper also highlights the breathlessness of survival, stereotyped social conventions, dictated roles, unrewarding motherhood, tattered parent-child relationship, suppression of Nanda, Ila, and Raka in particular, and women in general, and how they strive for some final comprehension of life. Desai's characters speak of the unavoidable situation and circumstances that society and patriarchal norms impose on Indian women. Their sense of spirit is free despite the shackles society has created for them—Desai's novels, along with her contemporary writers like Nayantara Sahgal, Kamala Markandaya, and Shashi Deshpande.

Keywords: Society, Sensitization, Self-expression, Patriarchal Society, Environment. Nature

Introduction:

Anita Desai is a significant and prolific woman novelist of modern Indian fiction. She has certainly given a new viewpoint to Indian English novels. She deserves special mention for her treatment of women in her novels, with the focus on her female characters undergoing mental struggles. As a novelist and short story writer, Desai is especially noted for her perceptive representation of the inner life, which highlights the face value realities and emphasizes the various corners of the inner self of female characters. This paper will explore the silent voices of the three central female characters of Desai's Fire on the Mountain Nanda, Ila, and Raka.

The title Fire on the Mountain has many layered significant connotations. The Fire indicates not only the forest fire or, for that reason, the ultimate self-expression of

Raka, but it also specifies the Fire burning within the souls of the three ladies and three ladies. The Fire within them desires to liberate through self-expression and seclusion, apart from family ties and beyond the fringe of the sophisticated world.

The Fire has set ablaze and possesses a different hunger for peace, isolation, rules, betrayal, hassles of children, parental abuse, and the curses of seclusion. The Fire is fed with the inner chaos and hostility added by patriarchal society. There are also significant sub-themes in the novel. The breathlessness of survival, stereotyped social conventions, dictated roles, unrewarding motherhood, and tattered parent-child relationships are all-pervading sub-themes in *Fire on the Mountain*. It adds to the suppression of the protagonists. The isolation created by preference and obligation for Nanda's state of affairs, autocracy of fate for Lla, and cognizance of truth and its dimensions for Raka are all the consequences of various sub-themes in its levered proportion of suffering. Nanda's relationship with her daughters, especially Asha, is estranged because of her contemptuous ways, and Asha's relationship with her daughter Tara is also in bad shape. The situation worsens when Raka is packed off to Nanda in Kasauli by Asha to settle a marital discord between Raka's parents. Raka is emotionally alienated and without the bond of parental love. The frayed parent-child relationship is also evident, and along with it comes the inner trauma to which the readers are the witness. Lla is a victim of society with the endurance of her fair share of pain. Her role keeps on being jerky with the final encounter with death. However, they are the same characters who display zeal to live their life. The motivation may come from the negativities of life only and transcend to meet their soul and self.

The saying "Childhood is not always a happy and innocent time" can aptly define what Raka is for her great-grandmother and to the readers. Worn out and ragged, with complete independence, this little child is an example by herself. Her inner chaos is of a different level, not too quickly expected at her age. She is overtly independent, reserved, stoic, insolent, and not given to the child's world of daydreaming. Her world is entirely different. Stressed from parental strain, mental violence, physical anguish, unhealthy parental relationships, and the hard-core realities of life, Raka understands the bare facts of life very well. She is not someone to play with fantasies and be filled with niceties. Raka is more practical than others of her age. Though too real for her age, she is willing to accept the truth as the truth, however harsh it may be.

The sketches of images that abound in the novel give the readers a feeling of subjugation, restraints, departure, and an unhelpful nature that remains uninvited in social circles. The house of Carignano has a colonial history suggestive of the interior colonization of the mind of Nanda Kaul. The house has chosen its chain of forlorn dwellers hungry for love and affection. Phrases like --- corrugated iron (uneven graph of her married life), rusty grey (age and bitter experience), worst gales (fallacies of fate), stony soil (hard exterior she kept in her Kasauli days), auctioned off (bid of life to husband, husband's mistress and daughters), thrashed and whipped (the harsh realities of life accumulated) all taken from the text, in some way define Nanda Kaul in various shades. House imagery poignantly symbolizes the inner self of the protagonists: It was only the charred shell of a small stone cottage. The veranda roof

was already torn off and flung onto the hillside: the paving stones of the floor were cracked and gaping. The doors swung open, the window frames hung askew, and shattered glass lay amongst the cinders. The stairs were a stumble of rocks and weeds. (90) The above passage reflects the burnt selves, and the words mention the stony lives the

characters have dealt with and lived. The abandoned building is a mirror to Raka, Nanda, and Ila. And so are its features of stillness, lightlessness, dampness cracked and gaping' like an invincible wound. The predicament of women is well understood in Beauvoir's *Second Sex*, which tells: She [the woman] can never find salvation in her work itself; it keeps her busy, but it does not justify her existence; she lacks the means requisite for. Self-affirmation as an individual; in consequence, her individuality is not recognized. Among the Arabs and Indians and in so many rural populations, a woman is only a female domesticated animal, esteemed according to her work and replaced without regret if she disappears. In modern civilization, she is more or less individualized in her husband's eyes. However, unless she completely renounces her ego, engulfing herself ... in a passionate and tyrannical devotion to her family, she suffers from being reduced to pure generality .." (Beauvoir 1998:541-42). The above quotation shows the hopelessness, hostility, and disappointment accumulated over years of authority and tyranny and the stereotypical role-playing dictated by society's patriarchal mores and manners. Nanda Kaul exemplifies the marginalizing of women because of the imposed patriarchal principles and the depressed bourgeois class rampant in both pre and post-independence times in India, of which Nanda Kaul is a burning example. It would be apt to understand the real nature behind Nanda Kaul's departure, her being an outsider and the unnoticed suppression that she went through. She ultimately realized the senselessness of care and fostering care for her children and grandchildren, an artificial instinct women have to internalize. The household tasks were too weighty for Nanda, which she dragged all along, and society crowned her with the title of womanhood and the happy family' tag. However, is she content?

The best answer is evident from her interior monologue, as it was in Carignano, the place and the time of life she had wanted and prepared for all her life. Whatever else came or happened here would be an unwelcome intrusion and distraction. (3) In the case of Ila, her English upbringing is void with just the show of affluence. All the money is spent on their son's education, and she is left alone. She does not. In the case of LLA, her English upbringing is void with just the e show of affluence. Growth. She prepared all her life and got the proper education to earn a living and her pennilessness. Ila has an unlikable outlook with her gross voice and absurd gestures. Social welfare worker to support herself. Her cause is dignified: to stop Hild. A split life with a broken self, penury-stricken, Ila finally takes up the job of a social welfare worker to support herself.

Her cause is dignified: to stop child marriage, but only to be doubly rewarded, at first, with rape and murder by Preet Singh, a local lout who wants to sell his daughter off in child marriage for a piece of land, and second, by patriarchal conventions. The news of Ella's death, in turn, kills Nanda because of the professed

shock and mercilessness associated with the former's death. The cruel murder of Ila Das identifies with the defenselessness of women, the cornering of women in society with the glamour crown as Nanda had, and the loneliness and hostility of women represented by Raka, Nanda, and Ila.

These women are the nuances of fatalities of psychological and physical boundaries and the cap of androcentric rule, thereby stunting their growth. The agonies of colonization, physical suppression, and tyranny remained unaltered even after India made itself free from English rule. With freedom comes liability, but it was the forced and dictated responsibility that was taken for granted by the Indian women. Biological motherhood, rearing children, and taking care of the husband's needs were the restrictive conditioning that society defined and fell into a pattern with other feminine responsibilities. Suppose colonization is a physical and mental phenomenon. In that case, decolonization has also left its mark by silencing and marginalizing women at times in untold abject misery under the weight of norms and institutionalism. Desai's novels strive for some final comprehension of life, but the wisdom is all in the striving. This is evident in the following lines of Woolf:

As summer neared, as the evenings lengthened, there came to be wakeful, the hopeful, walking the beach, stirring the pool, imaginations of the strangest kind of flesh turned to atoms which drove before the wind, of stars flashing in their hearts, of cliff sea, cloud, and sky brought purposefully together to assemble the scattered parts of the vision outwardly within. (Woolf 1987:150-151). The characters' search for individuality is somewhat comprehended in the last lines of the above extract. They stand apart and not with the current social conventions. They challenge the norms with a silent objection. There was a silent protest by Nanda, who chose to lead an alienated life of loneliness. Ila chose to undefine the defined parameters of patriarchal tradition by being a part of the social help group to stand against child marriage. Raka is an individualist; perhaps the harsh realities of life have made her so at such a tender age.

Conclusion:

To conclude, in *Fire on the Mountain*, Desai has highlighted the estrangement, silent miseries, and defenselessness of her female characters. Their sense of spirit is free despite the shackles society has created for them. Desai's novels and those of her contemporary writers, like Nayantara Sahgal, Kamala Markandaya, and Shashi Deshpande, have subtly touched upon the sensitizing areas of women's issues. Desai's characters speak of the unavoidable situations and circumstances that society and patriarchal norms impose on Indian women.

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