



WOMEN – THE VICTIMS OF MALE CHAUVINISM

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Abstract

Anita Desai is a voracious reader, constantly poring over books of all kinds. Writing is only her spare time engagement. A very busy housewife, she has learnt to adjust her working hours to her family life. She writes because of her inner compulsion and urge to find out the inner self or women like her, and it is here she exceeds and gets differentiated from other ordinary writers. She has carved a special niche for herself in the Indo-Anglican novels because, with her, comes a distinctive change in the content and purpose of the social novel. Most of Anita Desai's works engage the complexities of modern Indian culture from a feminine perspective while highlighting the female Indian predicament of maintaining self-identity as an individual woman. Desai's works rightly focuses on these sensitive issues.

This article aims at bringing out the portrayal of women characters in the novels Anita Desai's novels. It also shows its lights on the situation under which women lived and fought to identify the sexual inequalities within the household and the society at large.

Key words: *feminism, male-chauvinism, self, etc.,*

INTRODUCTION

Anita Desai in her novels makes clear that women feel more frustrated with a sexist society that reduces them to clinging to these men who cannot provide them with what they want. Her novels analyse the situation under which women live and identify the sexual inequalities within the household and the society at large. She points out the male-chauvinist traditions of patriarchal societies in her writings.

As a young woman, Anita Desai says she felt her own life was not big or broad enough to feed her writing. "My whole life was about family and neighbours. It was very difficult for a woman to experience anything else was bored and needed to find more range, which is why I started to write about men in books. Men led lives of adventure, chance and risk. It just wasn't possible to write that

from an Indian female perspective". Desai's heroines tend to argue in a sense of self-justification. Men are filled with fear and insecurity when their superiority over women becomes questionable. They are not guilty to assume that because they are males, they have a right to brains, talent, reputation and achievement and just because women have been born as females, they are condemned when they do some adventure.

In the male's perspective, women are born and bred only to satisfy their lust, and to look after the family's domestic needs, and at last as a carrier of their generations. Women are not meant to seek the pleasures of their own will and wish. The male dominators occupy their own body and mind. Even an animal has no conflicts. A buffalo does not wonder whether she should be according. But women life is governed by instincts. Desai obviously views at these measures in her novels. Her heroines are the subjects of this male chauvinist, pervert society. She examines this view in many dimensions. The lines below taken from *Fasting, Feasting* focus her view. Mama said, "In my day, girls in the family were not given sweets, nuts, and good things to eat. If something special had been in the market, like sweets or nuts, it was given to the boys in the family" (Page. 6). Even they were given the choice in carrying their children. This too happened according to the men's' will. Mama in *Fasting, Feasting* was not given a chance to terminate her very late pregnancy.

They had two daughters, yes, quite grown-up as anyone could see, but there was no son. Would any man give up the chance of a son? (*Fasting, Feasting*, 16). Papa, who's quite an ample testimony of domination, is characterized as a typical Indian father, longing for a son. Here we have to accept the fact; priority is given to the boys. As the Indian Cultures, one cannot deny the truth that only boys are meant to perform their parents' rituals after their death. Perhaps, this may be the primary reason for their anxiety towards a son.

After the birth of a baby boy, Papa can't control his emotions. He could hardly hide his happiness.

Papa-in his elation, leaps over three chairs in the hall, one after the other, like a boy playing leap-frog, his arms flung up in the air and his hair flying, "A boy! he screamed 'a bo-oy! Arun, Arun at last!" There are many more instances, to quote his nature.

The finger bowl is placed before Papa. He dips his fingertips in and wipes them on the napkin. He's the only one in the family who's given a napkin and a finger bowl; they are emblems of his status. (*Fasting, Feasting*, 24)

Anamika, cousin of Uma, is another victim of this male-dominated society. While Uma is pressurised to stay at home as a baby sitter, Anamika does so excellently in her school final exams, that she wins a scholarship to Oxford. Yet Anamika lives in a patriarchal society that considers higher education to be the prerogative of males and marriage as the major pre-occupation of females. The scholarship obtained by her is used only as a means to win her a husband, but not anything more in her life, in her career. And again, we meet another dominating father of Sita in *Where Shall We Go this Summer*. It was what Sita and her brothers were deprived of the mother hood. They never felt the warmth and affection of their mother as their father brought them up. Perhaps this may be the reason, for Sita's lunatic behaviour.

Sita's mother left away to Benares leaving the infants in the care of their father. All through her life Sita was left alone. She never mingled with any of her relatives. What happened in future: is she couldn't bear with her own kith and kin?

She had to struggle to free herself from the chain or she might have spent her life in the cold meshes, regarding the enigma of her father, a slave to his underlined magic. (Where shall We Go This Summer -79)

Her father had been a wizard. He had a cast an illusion as a fisherman cast a net, with the faintest susurrant of warning, upon a flock of fish in the sea. His chelas were the first to be caught, then the villagers, most inescapably the women. His wife had torn a hole in the net and escaped into the dark depths of the ocean.

The others along with Sita had been in his net and smiled upon, most inscrutably. It was this wizardly, this magic (what others called to be), this loneliness in the island, which made Sita not to cope with the real life, which made Sita more illusionary. And her more sensitiveness, more proclivity was suspected to be drama, theatre and emotion.

She mostly resigned herself from the happenings around her, and had invited herself into more imaginations and wild searches. Illusions crowded her mind like massed clouds.

A sense of insecurity has always prevailed in her mind. Had her father brought her up as commonly as other children, she would not have fell into despair as now. Ila Das is one more prey of this male dominated society in Fire on the Mountain. Ila is the name of both misery and persecution combined. It was just a quirk of fate that her brothers were healthy and strong, while she was deformed. Fate had given her a figure and a voice, which startled not only humans but also animals.

The three brothers, hale and healthy, who were sent to foreign universities-to Heidelberg, Cambridge, Harvard, instead of getting education to make their careers, squandered money freely and incurred debts.

At last after the death of her parents, the three brothers pestered her for her jewellery and left her penniless. She was herself leading to mouth life, virtually starving, yet it was the greatness of Ila, that she worried about other poor reasons around and was trying to help them as a Welfare Officer.

She fought against the priest who was conservative, reactionary and orthodox, while she being an educated, was pragmatic in her approach. She would advise people to go to the doctor, but the priest would export them to stick to the old age treatments that worsened their condition and often killed them.

Ila Das ran into trouble as she tried to stop child marriages. There was one Preet Singh who was going to marry his minor daughter to a landowner because he owned a quarter of an acre of land and two foats. When Ila tried to explain to him the ultra vines of child marriage and detrimental to the health of the girl, it all went in vein.

Ila fought against obscurantism and died for it Pritam Singh waylaid her, raped her and strangulated her to death for trying to save his minor daughter from the affliction of child marriage.

The tales of woes and sufferings of women happening all over the world are brought out partly through the media of mass communication. Men subject women to both physical and mental torture.

Many happenings seem to pass unnoticed. Physical ailments are recovered in time. But women thronging with mental illness, their blown-up status, their lost self-identity, the prejudices they face are not exposed in any extent. Particularly in India, women's position still stands where it was in the 19th century. She has to think and eat and live in the shadows of men. She may be patronized and spiritualized. Still she's identified as a daughter or a mother or a wife but not as "she".

The inner self of women still remains a vacuum. Untouched, even unnoticed by anyone. The vacuum can be filled neither by luxuries nor by familial bonds. We can assure that no woman in this world lives or dies with her quest satisfied.

In this male-dominated society, the options and opportunities available to women are limited and restricted compared to those of men. Even women authors write under pressure of various kinds, the main one being the need for an audience. They cannot afford to say anything that may antagonize male readers. At the same time, they must address issues that will appear to their female readers. The female writers' search for the self, for their creativity, is a struggle for self-definition.

Virginia Woolf has advised women writers "to kill the angel in the house" (The angel being the drudge who cooks, cleans and looks after all family members' needs) before they start writing. But it's not possible.

References

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