



## A PEER GLANCE OF FEMINISM IDEOLOGY IN THE SELECTED WORKS OF ANITA DESAI

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**ABSTRACT** Anita Desai is one of the best-known contemporary women writers of Indian fiction in English. She has gained distinction in exploring the human psyche and the emotional feelings of her protagonists. She has added a new dimension and marvelous favour to the contemporary Indian English fiction and has a significant place due to her innovative thematic concerns and deals in her fiction with feminine sensibility. She examines the deep psyche of her characters, especially women characters. Anita Desai is a keen observer of the society and the position of the women in the contemporary society draws her special attention. This article explores feminism ideology in the selected works of Anita Desai.

**KEYWORDS :** Feminism, Alienation, Frustration, Psychosomatic, exploitation

### INTRODUCTION

Feminism is a complex set of ideologies and theories that at its core seeks to achieve equal social, political, and economic rights for women. Although feminism benefits everyone, its aim is to achieve equality for women, because prioritizing those who are most oppressed means freeing everyone else. Feminist literature in English is certainly not a recent awareness of women rights. It has been there ever since perspectives on life were recorded in the medium of literature, though it certainly has come to its own late, of recent origin again is the feminist perception of literature. Feminist Criticism in its broadest implication has three distinct subdivisions, each distinct with its own adherents. The first two are well defined and frequently practiced without raising any ideological outrage. These are: The examination and analysis of the portrayal of women characters by themselves or in relationship with their male counterparts, and the appreciation of female authors. What is noteworthy is that in the last few years these commonly accepted critical practices have been over handed to accommodate the possibility of exclusively feminist perceptions of human relationships.

The third direction is that of the so-called "prescriptive criticism" that attempts to set standards for literature that is good from the feminist perspective. Feminism in the Indian context is the recent renovation of early Vedic concepts of man-woman relationship and a byproduct of Western liberalism in particular and feminist thought in general. The indigenous contributing factors have been the legacy of equality of sexes Inherited from the freedom struggle, constitutional rights of women, thrust on women education, and new awareness due to electronic media among women. The Indian woman caught in the flux of tradition and modernity, saddled with the burden of the past and the present to cast off her aspirations, constitutes the crux of aspirations, in fact constitutes the crux of feminism in Indian literature. In literary terms it precipitates in search for identity and a quest for the definition of the women self. In critical practice, it boils down to scrutinizing empathetically the plight of women characters and their struggle for emancipation of self. Feminist theory is by no means a single or homogeneous body of speculation and argument.

Anita Desai is one of the considerable voices in the modern Indian English Fiction. She is regarded as an Indian novelist, short-story writer and children's author. Winner of the Sahitya Akademi Award and Guardian Children's Fiction Prize, Desai has written sixteen works of fiction, some of the best ones being 'Fasting, Feasting', 'The Village By The Sea', 'In Custody', and 'Clear Light of Day'. Desai won many awards and recognition for her work and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize twice. She has been also actively involved in teaching and continues to be an inspiration for many young aspiring writers today. Anita Desai's work are totally from other Indian women writers in English: Narayan Seghal, Kamala Markanday and Ruth Praver Jhabvala, who mainly concern themselves with politics, East-West encounter and social theme. Desai is concerned with the psychic life of her characters. Since her childhood, Desai was conscious of being a writer. Writing is a part of her character, temperament, nature and life. She has added to her genius by learning from other writers. When she was nine years old, she first read Wuthering Heights. Although she could not understand half of it yet it was a thrill. The novelist

remembers the experience: "It struck me with force of a gale and I still vibrate to it. Ever since; literature has seemed to me more interesting, more significant and overwhelming than the real world. Later, of course, other writers meant more to me. In my twenties when I first began to work seriously and consciously on my novels, it was D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, Henry James and Proust that influenced me more interestingly" Anita Desai explains the interior landscape of the mind rather in the politics or socio-political realities. In the novels of Desai, she always describes the protagonists women and the sufferings of women in the male dominated society, who have reached different stages in life due to the conservatism of counterparties. Even the women in her novel are fragile introverts rapid in their own skills but these emotional dreams sometimes led to a violent death. Besides that central theme of her novels is the existential predicament of women as an individual. In each of her novel, one should sense a novelist eager for a way of living, Which would respond to the inner most earning of the Indian women for self-emancipation and self-dignity. As from the novels it has been found that Anita Desai is more interested in the exploration of female psyche dealing with thoughts, emotions and sensations at various levels of consciousness. Desai feels that besides having a creative genius, a novelist must be sensitive and have a power of keen observation so that he could give acute descriptions and "pick up tiny details that others might not notice". Besides sensitivity and observation, a rich experience and a good training are also. It is not imperative, however, that a writer has all kind of experience. For in a writer "lack of experience may be handicap, but lack of sensitivity, thought, intelligence of memory would be far greater one.

### CRY, THE PEACOCK

Her first novel, "Cry, the Peacock" was published in 1963. This novel is based on disharmony between husband and wife relationship. Maya, the protagonist is poetic, sensitive and dreamy while Gautama, her husband, is realistic, insensitive, rational, hard and cold, and philosophical. There is lack of communication between Maya and Gautama, who is twice of her age. Gautama is a prosperous, middle-aged lawyer who was a friend of Maya's father. Maya is obsessed with the fear of death as an astrologer predicted that one of the spouses would die in the fourth year of their marriage. Maya's life is woven to her impulses and yearns for passionate and physical fulfillment in marital life, however, both of these are denied to her due to Gautama's learnedness, age and indifference. Due to it Maya remains neglected, tormented and melancholic. She is a hypersensitive young urban wife. Maya needs a beloved spouse with broad understandings, extremely conscious, caring and creative. Gautama lacks these qualities. So alienation grows between Maya and him. Maya feels miserable and lonely. She suffers a lot in her entire life. This affects her consciousness badly and she craves for an urgent outlet of her emotions. So she kills Gautama and commits suicide. Her unconscious desire to kill her husband is a revenge reaction arising out of her own basic frustrations-unhappy married life, unfulfilled longings and a reaction against Gautama's cold unresponsiveness. Maya yearns for freedom. In the novel, Desai represents a hysterical and neurotic woman who fails to cope with the patriarchal order and system where she revolts silently and helplessly like an inferior being. In this novel, themes of alienation, marital discord and domestic violence are present.

### VOICES IN THE CITY

In her novel, "Voices in the City" (1965), Desai depicts the incompatible marriage of Monisha and Jiban. Jiban is an orthodox man and believes that women besides child bearing are for cooking, cutting vegetables and serving food etc. under the authority of a stern mother-in-law. Jiban is busy with his job with no time for Monisha. As a result, she leads a fragmented life and is alienated and experiences loneliness. There is lack of communication between them. She is frustrated and helpless due to ill matched marriage, loneliness, monotony, and stress of living in a joint family with an insensitive husband. The element of love is missing in her life. Monisha seeks solace, love and dignity in a rigid society and is disillusioned in the end. As a result, she commits suicide.

### WHERE SHALL WE GO THIS SUMMER?

"Where Shall We Go This Summer?" (1975) is another novel by Anita Desai woven with feminist message. The protagonist cum heroine in the novel, Sita, is a nervous, oversensitive middle aged woman who experiences loneliness and alienation. She is a mother of four children pregnant for the fifth time. She is isolated from her husband and children. She lives in a Bombay flat with her husband, Raman, an upper middle class factory owner. She feels herself to be an encaged bird in a house which offers her nothing but boredom, hopelessness and disappointment. She leads an empty and meaningless married life. Sita represents a world of emotion and feminine sensibility and wants to escape the reality. She remains an ignored personality since childhood. On the contrary, Raman represents sanity, rationality and an acceptance of the norms and values of society. Sita's smoking is a trace of silent rebellion, of self-identity. She thinks that her decisions to say 'No' to society, to break its norms and not give birth to baby are correct. So she escapes to the island of Manori in quest of happiness and spiritual purification. Her stay at Manori has refreshed her repressed psychology and she can now look at the world realistically. She cannot find peace and solace whether she is in Bombay or in Manori. She realized that true courage is in facing the complexities and realities of life and that an escape from the realities is an act of cowardice. Real courage lies in standing up and trying to tackle the circumstances. Sita reconciles herself to her fate. This realization and subsequent reconciliation is a positive change in the heroine's attitude. She emerges as a compromising woman who shows perfect balance between her inner self and the outer world. This novel presents picture of Indian woman who rebels against the conventions and old modes of life.

### CONCLUSION

Anita Desai has highlighted the matriarchal struggle, self- freedom, self- identity and self- power against the male dominated world. She has dealt with the themes of alienation, isolation, family relationship, marital discord and domestic violence in her novels. She has beautifully portrayed the inner self of her women characters who struggle to free from the traditional norms of the society which are causes of their exploitation. The women characters in her novels are representatives of repressed female community. The women in her novels suffer the violence afflicted on them by their family members. So Desai is one of the best- known women writers of Indian fiction in English and she is a feminist writer who portrays women's desire and struggle for freedom from social and traditional bondages in the patriarchal society in her novels.

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