



# Gender Inequality in Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* : A Critical Reading

Abhijit Choudhury

University of Science & Technology, Meghalaya

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The notion of 'gender inequality' formulates a vibrant environment after the publication of the report of the "Committee on the Status of Women in India" in 1974 (Sadhna Arya, Alternative Economic Survey). Particularly believes in male dominance and female subordination. The same thing is intensified by Anita Desai in this novel.

Desai explores the predicament of women in which they combat with the traditional norms of society. The aim of this paper is to show the obstacles of 'Women' faced in the society and how they are mentally forced to ostracize themselves from the society or are bound to suffer under patriarchy. Why they are oppressed just because of their born as women? Why they can not protest against social inequality. The parents of Raka behaves rudely to her as if girl child is a kind of curse for them. Ila Das is raped by a male figure and her death is shown as nothing is happened. My paper will raise this kind of questions.

Nanda Kaul leaves alone in carignano but not in her but not in her husband's house and with her sons and daughters; which is a portrayal of her dissatisfaction with the society. She even avoids the arrival of postman which traces her mental conflict. Raka, the grand daughter of Nanda unveils the treatment a 'girl child' in Indian society. She has just recovered from Typhoid. Her parents send her to great grand mother's house in which their main motif is to keep her aside from them which indicates her parents disliking towards girl child. Ila Das, the friend of Nanda Kaul is also the victim of male exploitation who protest against child marriage and is raped horribly by 'Pretty Sing' because of her agitation towards 'child marriage'. She is even mocked by school boys due to her shrill voice as if God make a role that women should behave like this and should respect like that. It perturbs the minds of a serious thinker like Anita Desai and depicts the condition of 'subjugated class' through unalloyed description.

**Key words :** Gender, Inequality, Subjugation, Subordination, Ostracize and Patriarch.

There is not the iota of doubt that Anita Desai can be regarded as the master of representing the circumstance of women in Indian society. She is a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Girton College, Cambridge and Clare Hall, Cambridge. Her writings are really evocative which bring the situation and the cultural heritage of India.

Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* also traces the exploitation of women and how social inequalities obligate Nanda Kaul to live away from the patriarchal world and merges with nature to stay happily.

The novel mainly deals with the problems of Man-Women relationship as a basic component. Desai traces how woman is assumed as object in Indian society. Nanda Kaul describes the inhumanity and hostility of male dominated society and explores the failure of marriage in Indian society as her husband has lifelong affair with Miss David. Even her children are so selfish that only in the time of need they ask for help. The traumatic married life of Nanda is sketched in these times.

“Nor had her husband loved and cherished her and kept her like a queen. He had only done enough to keep her quite while he carried on a lifelong affair with Miss David. And her children were all alien to her nature. She did not live here by choice she lived here along because that what she was forced to do, reduced to doing.

As a wife she still finds herself in a state of loneliness, nervousness and in a desolate situation. And then she decides to move away from family and finds solace in Carignano. The garden of Carignano is a projection of Nanda Kaul's yearning for loneliness and privacy. ‘The fire is highly a symbol of females mental agony towards the male-dominated society. R.S. Sharma rightly states that : “The Raka's words are expressive of her resolve to destroy a world where a woman cannot hope to be happy without being unnatural. The fire embodies the violence of feeling and a strong purifier. It destroys in order to annihilate certain traditions and to leave space for new values.” Anita Desai irradiates the tragic view of life, in which the female section is found to suffer endlessly in male dominated society.

Male Chauvinism is the root of gender inequality. The focal point of this indiscrimination is the proposition that the task of woman is to be at home. Anita Desai exposes the gender ideologies that oppress women and also show how they try to break away from society to seek comfort in a world of their own. Apart from Nanda, Desai introduces two other women character, Raka and Ila as carriers of reality. Nanda Kaul describes Raka's name, which means the moon because of her resemblance to an insect. Raka is shown ‘life less’ person or identityless due to her status as a women. Raka arrives in Carignano in the second part of the novel. In the beginning, both avoid each other. Raka does not speak much and drowns in her own world. She has a drunkard father who does not like her. Raka's mother, Tara, does not appear anywhere in the novel but Asha, her mother considers her own daughter to be responsible for the rift in her marriage. Asha write to her mother... “his not really so bad as Tara might make you believe... although it is true that he does drink.” Contrary to what she had feared, Nanda's world is not at all disturbed by the stay of Raka. Surprisingly however, this indifference on the part Raka disturbs Nanda and she tries to attracts Raka by telling her fascinating stories of her own childhood.

Nanda's old friend, Ila Das is introduced in the third part of the novel who visits Nanda at Carignanos Ila's tragic death bestows a new dimension to this novel. She is raped because she had raised voice against patriarchal norms who tries to stop the marriage of a seven year old girl to a widower. She is raped and murdered by the father of the girl, whom she has tried to protect. Raka sets fire to the mountain and her shout “Look Nani, I have set the foret on fire” is symbolic of the fact that” a world where woman cannot hope to be happy without being unnatural, should be destroyed.”

A kind of psychological conflict of women characters exhibit the pathetic condition faced by women. It is Ila Das who suffers the darkest fate of all. She has to pay the price of questioning the morge of male society. The women of this novel are trying to get a way to live life happily in a patriarchal society. Nanda has spent a very boring life without her husband and children. Raka regularly witnesses the abuse of her own mother in which she is even neglected by her own father. Ila Das, a child activist is raped by Preet Singh

because of her protect against child marriage Anita Desai brings the three women characters in Carignano and Galvanizes the predicaments of women as a whole. Anita Desai has won a niche by exploring the emotional world of women. The novel becomes the emblem of destruction and purgation. Evidently it shows that modern Indian woman has also embarked on a quest to find the true meaning of life. In *Fire on the Mountain*, it is possible to interpret the concept of exile as feminist motif. The mental tension has culminated and as Nanda Kaul recalls,

“Looking down, over all those years she had survival and borne, she saw them, not bare and shining as the plains below, but like the Gorge, Cluttered, Choked and Blackened with the heads of children and grand children, servants and guests all restless surging clamoring about her”.

Looking *Fire on the Mountain* from a feminist perspective, one finds that Anita Desai crosses the ladder of success in the creation of her female characters. To Feminists, it describes the trauma of the emerging self, liberating itself from the feminine role-play to attain creative identity.

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