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## ANITA DESAI AS A FEMINIST IN INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE

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### Abstract:

Anita Desai is a distinguished artist of high order and her concern for human lot has imparted profound appeal to her novels of all the contemporary Indian – English Novelists, she is indisputably the most popular and powerful feminist. She has made commendable contribution to the Indian-English fiction. She is a novelist of urban milieu and is a fine mixture of Indian, European and American sensibilities. She is essentially a psychological novelist.

Anita Desai is mainly concerned with the projection of the “psycho-philosophic, psycho-emotional and socio-psychic states of the female protagonists to living in alien, closed and cloistered world of existential problems and passions, loves and hates” – 10 (p6). Her main characters are mostly educated women. They are highly sensitive and emotional and are tortured by humiliating sense of neglect, of loneliness and desperation. She understands their problems deeply and highlights their miserable position. She agrees that women are denied the existential freedom, the right for responsible self hood for authenticity through individual choice. Her women are very sensitive and they generally rebel against their spouses, children, relations, society, and culture and against their ourselves.

Key words: feminist, psycho- philosophic, psycho-emotional, socio-psychic.

Anitha Desai has been one of the best known women writers for over a half century, she was one of the first writers from the subcontinent to introduce western readers to post-independence India. Anita Desai continuous exploration of the tensions between social obligation and personal independence. The complex dynamics of families and the clash between old and new of all the contemporary Indian English Novelists, she is indisputably the most popular and powerful novelist. She is a novelist of urban milieu and is a fine mixture of Indian, European and American sensibilities. She writes instinctively as if writing is an urge for her. Writing is a process of herself discovery to go deep into the complexities of existence. She is essentially a psychological novelist. She sees social realities from a psychological point of view and does not look at them as a social reformer or a moralist. Her focus of attention is on the inner climate. The climate of sensibility her main concern is to depict the physic status of her protagonists at the crucial juncture of their lives. She creates a limited world by observing minutely what is going around her.

“In Diamond Dust her latest collection of stories, she expands her geographical and cultural terrain and with her customary skill and an often sly but tender wit, homes in on the little and large pin pricks of daily life.” In her excellent study of Ando – Anglian fiction, the twice born fiction (1971-74). Meenakshi Mukhrjee calls Anita Desai “A rare example of an Indo- Anglian writer who achieves that difficult test of

lending the English language to her purpose without either a self-conscious attempt of sounding India or seeking the anonymous elegance of public school English." Her growing popularity is seen in the increasing number of researchers taking up critical studies of her works for their doctoral degrees, in the publication of research books and articles on various aspects of her works. In the words of G. Rai, "she is almost alone among the Indo-Anglian writers who has used stream of consciousness technique in his novels." She makes a clear cut distinction between the writing of the inner and outer world and proceeds to delineate character and depict the situation from the personal angle.

Desai's characters are burdened with their uniqueness. They always want to exercise their freedom, make a choice and refuse to confirm and compromise. They continuously search for an authentic existence. They find ordinary routine of life boring and disturbing. They are generally neurotic females sequestered in a world of dreams and imagination and alienated from their surroundings as a consequence of their failures or unwillingness to adjust with reality. They always desire to be free from all kinds of social and familial involvement. In each one of them there is a sense of deprivation caused by familial ties. They fail to establish a contact with people around them.

Emphasizing the importance of the relationship of man and woman, D.H. Lawrence points out, "the great relationship for humanity will always be the relation between man and woman, the relation between man and man, woman and woman, parent and child will always be subsidiary" -28 (P.15). The man-woman relationship becomes more important due to rapid industrialization, growing awareness among women of their rights and individualities and westernization attitudes and lives of the people. So the novelists focus their keen foresight on husband-wife relationship in almost all her novels. The themes of her novels are mostly related to women. She seems to be well acquainted with the inner life of the women of upper middle class and educated sensitive women. Then women react very strongly and sensitively to the forces of our tradition-bound, male dominated society. They are very sensitive in this insensitive world. As Indian society does not allow them much freedom, they are in search of their identity and want to enjoy privacy and individuality. Whenever their feelings are hurt, they feel extremely disturbed and separated. Her novels depict the workings of inner forces on the mind and psyche of especially women. More over in her work, human relations are seen to suffer. Interpersonal relations are very weak in her novels.

A scrutiny of Desai's art shows that the novelist is growth-oriented. The development from her first heroine Maya to her latest creation Sophie is a story of steady ascent towards self-realization. Maya and Monisha are sensitive and fitted against insensitive spouses. Then there are cases of neurosis-Sita, Nerode, Nanda, Raka, Laila and Matteo, None of them commits suicide though each one is on the brink of it. The destructive effects of self-alienation is much less discernable in Sita, Sarah, Sarala and Sophie. We find greater clarity of perception in Bin, Amla, Devan and Hari.

Love is the answer to the problem of human existence, Separation creeps in the absence of love, Separateness is the source of intense anxiety. The deepest need of man is to overcome his separations and leave the prison of his loneliness. The desire for interpersonal fusion is the most powerful striving force in man.

This is an "age of anxiety and consequently human relationship, especially man-woman relationship has changed considerably. All human relationships have become so complex in the increasing complexity of this age. Desai's portrayal of man-woman relationship has been influenced and conditioned by the existing intricate social situation. In her novels we hardly get at least a glimpse of delights and exultations of mutual reciprocated love, instead we meet with agonies, the heart aches and the shocks of embittered man-woman relations. Her treatment of man-woman relationship is both artistically moving, psychologically sound. Each one of the frustrated characters adopts his or her own manner of facing the problem of sufferings and boredom. It is the predicament of modern human situation that has affected the most tender and sweet aspect of the human relationship. In Desai's fictional world most of the human relationships are seen to suffer from

acute breakdown of communication. Her female protagonists strive for harmony and fulfillment in human relationship.

Modern human relations are weak or rather farce. Interpersonal relationship in the world of Desai is weaker. There is temperamental incompatibility between wife and husband in her novels. The relationship between wife and husband, parents and children among brothers and sisters and between the individual and the society is hopelessly bad.

Among these the husband-wife relationship figures prominently. It is seldom harmonious or satisfying. All her female protagonists have heightened physical and emotional sensitivity while their male partners are practical and matter of fact persons. They are hardly able to support or even appreciate the world of their wives. This temperamental incompatibility naturally leads to separation. The women protagonists of Desai seem to value their individuality, privacy and freedom. They wish to love and be loved. This is hardly possible because love in this world is irreversibly associated with duty. Obligation and loss of freedom and individuality. They are hardly able to give any emotional or spiritual sustenance. The catastrophe in the domestic world of Desai is the outcome of the personal indifference of the husband and the wife's inability to cope with it. But Desai's women remain with dignity. They will make adjustments as Sita does at the end of the novel. Monisha, Nanda Kaul are able and capable of adjusting with the environment and people and thus they retain their dignity, Sita's protest is predominant. But her protest does not break the relationship. There is the momentary self-exile in the life of Sita. She returns with a compromise without losing the dignity. Desai aims not for severance or divorce but synthesis. She says, "I think basically the problem is how to exist in society and yet maintain one's individuality rather than suffering from a lack of society and lack of belongings" 30 (P310). So almost all main characters (women) in her novels are separated. "It is mainly an interpersonal alienation. They do not know how to relate to one another. Desai advocates the message of adaptation and compromise and recommends a robust coexistence of the conflicting values. Life becomes more problematic if we do not compromise with it. The life in all its forms and colours is seen in the fictional world of Desai. It is fully a world of reality, without love, life cannot be harmonious and peaceful. Love involves relationship. It is a concretising factor of human relationship.

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