



TRAUMA IN WOMEN IN ANITA DESAI'S NOVELS

Kanchan A. Gaonkar

Associate Professor, Department of English,
Karnatak Arts College, Dharwad-580003
Karnataka State

ABSTRACT

Anita Desai is one of the leading novelists of Indian writing in English. She has written more than half-a-dozen novels and she portrays the plight of an intelligent, sensitive middle-class married woman in her novels. These women do not find any pleasure in marriage, for, they are married to insensitive and uncaring men. It is obvious that a marriage succeeds only when the man and woman are complementary to each other. It is this aspect of marriage that Mrs Desai highlights in her novels like "In Custody," "Voices in the City", "Bye, Bye, Blackbird": "Cry, the Peacock" etc. Such women undergo a lot of mental suffering and often end up as neurotics. The novelist has traced the descent of these women into a trauma in a graphic manner, making use of Images and symbols in the process. Trauma is an emotional shock following a stressful event. It also leads to long-term neurosis. This paper attempts to highlight the plight of Mrs.Desai's heroines focusing particularly on Maya, the heroine of "Cry, the Peacock". Sarala, the central character in "In Custody, and Monisha the Chief protagonist in "Voices of the City". Maya, who is the wife of Gautam, is an over-protected child. She is suffering from the fear of death, father-obsession etc. She is very disappointed when she finds that her husband does not understand her. She wilts under the pressure of marital discord and loses her mental equilibrium. Monisha, the central character of "Voices in the City" becomes an incurable victim of claustrophobia when she is misunderstood by her family. Sarala, the wife of Deven in "In Custody" becomes a victim of loneliness for, she is unable to understand her husband Deven. She is stone-faced. All these women are sensitive and intelligent. But they find no harmony in marriage thus ruining themselves, This article attempts to analyse how these women who are all from middle-class background end up as failures in life.

Key words. failures, trauma, loneliness, sensibility. neurosis, disappointment

Cite this Article: Kanchan A. Gaonkar, Trauma in Women in Anita Desai's Novels, International Journal of Education (IJE), 2(1), 2020, pp. 11-16.

<https://iaeme.com/Home/issue/IJE?Volume=2&Issue=1>

Trauma in women in the novels of Anita Desai

The field of trauma studies and that too concaps treifesentation in lingua Prychological trauma, and the role of memory in shaping individual and Cultural identities the concept of trauma, itself Source of critique, is generally understood as a severely disruptive experience that profoundly impactter the self's emotional set up and perception of the external world. The present article focurren on the trauma that the women characters g through in the novels of a noted Indian English novelist. Anita Desai along with other women novelist like Arundhati Rey, Sudha Murthy, Chitra Banerjee Diva -karuni and others has focused on were the sensibilities of women. They have discurred issues like patriarchy, trauma, neurosis orthodoxy, gender feminine sensibilitias in their novels. The present article focurrer an trauma in women character. in three novels of Anita Darai.

Trauma in Portrayal of Neurosis-Affiliated of Women in Anita's Desai's Novels

Anita Desai is one of the leading novelists in Indian Writing in English. She is the author of novels like "Cry. The Peacock", "In Custody", "Voices in the City", Where shall we Go This Summer etc. In all, she was written more than half a dozen novels and it is obvious that she focuses on the depiction of women and their sensibilities. In fact, in most of her novels, women have a significant place and in a majority of her novels, there are women narrators, because the stories are presented through the feminine consciousness. Mrs. Desai portrays women as the victims of the actual, social and emotional shackles that bond women. Her women are all intelligent, sensitive and quiet, married to complacent, insensitive, uncaring, but dutiful men. They feel fed-up with the drab and dull matrimonial life as a result of which they feel frustrated. They end up as neuroties. The issue of an unhappy marriage and mental unhappiness forms the crux of Anita Desai's novels. There is no harmonious relationship between the husband and wife, be it Maya and Gautam, Monisha and Jiban. Sita and Raman, Sarah and Adit, Deven and Sarla cic: Maya ends up as a neurotic, Sarla is lonely. Monisha feels out of place. This article takes up for analysis three novels by the author, "Cry-the Peacock." "In Custody and "Voices in the City,"

In most of Anita Desai's novels, feminine sensibility plays a very important role. The women characters in her novels are like the women whom the reader meets almost every day each grappling with one problem or the other. In fact, they are all real women. presented in flesh and blood. They are women who possess the same feelings and qualities like love, compassion, grace, dignity etc. They all hail from a middle-class background and are fed-up with the mundane routine of life. They crave for a break from routine life, a desire which is never fulfilled. Naturally they all end up as emotional wrecks. Women like Maya, Sarah, Monisha, Sarla, Sita, Bum keep on suffering. They have uncaring and insensitive husbands who play no role in comforting their traumatized wives. All that these women need is a little bit of understanding from their husbands.

They crave for little words of comfort from their husbands But unfortunately, they do not get any. This takes a toll on their sensitive mind and they resort to some kind of escape

This escape could be in the form of suicide or even abandonment. Prof. Jasbir Jain points out "The World of Anita Desai's novels is an ambivalent one, it is a world where the central harmony is aspired to but not arrived at, and the desire to love and live clashes-at times violently with the desire to withdraw and achieve familial harmony." It is clear that Mrs. Desai presents women who are not totally out off from their families and society Whether it is Maya or Monisha, Sarah or Sita, all these are women who are not idealized as goddesses. Neither are they mechanical as robots. They are self-actualising and self- realising individuals. Mrs. Desai excels in the description of the inner life of her female characters. Her female characters are so introspective and like to dwell in themselves.

They are introverts, rather. But at the same time, they refuse to surrender their own selves. They are full of self-respect. Mrs. Desai has created such characters that are abnormal and eccentric in their mental make-up. And to bring out this point. Mrs. Desai has employed the stream of consciousness technique and has used symbols and images to convey her point-of-view. This is best seen in her first novel, "Cry, the Peacock." Here, the title is derived from the exciting dance of the peacock at the approach of the rain. Here, Maya is the chief protagonist and the problems in her is that her father had made her unfit to live in a middle-class family. He treated her like a princess and showered all his love on her. He never made her see the harsh realities of life probably because she was a motherless child. All this made her to be too obsessive of her father and she makes a comment that "her father is like a Mughal garden, gracious and exact, where breeding culture leisure and comfort have been brought to a nice art. Such a girl who knows nothing about the harsh facts of life and has been brought up in a fastidious manner is married to the elderly advocate Gautama. He was a protégé of her father. She married Gautama just because her father wanted her to do so. Gautama was an intellectual and an insensitive man. He was bereft of feelings, sentiments and emotions. Even his family members also do not think it necessary to give love a place in their lives. "In Gautama's family, one did not speak of love, far less of affection." The conversation in Gautama's family, revolved round the proceedings of the Parliament, prevailing corruption newspaper editorials etc. Gautama's father was busy with the freedom movement, while his mother was busy with social activities. They had no time, not the inclination to appreciate the beauty of nature or of life. They could not feel the beauty of nature or of the banyan tree. They loved to live in the world of their own. The dichotomy that Maya was able to see in the two homes-that of her father's and the other of her husband's makes her confused. She soon realizes that she was married to a frigid man who had no interest in sex. Maya, on the other hand, desired for sex, and like any other woman wanted to have a child of her own. She had several images of the man-woman relationship and she was frustrated to find her husband fast asleep invulnerably before she came to him after changing her dress. Gautama's attitude further frustrates her and she soon realizes that she was a princess who was married to a peasant. They were simply mis-matched and their tastes were never the same. Gautama never made even an attempt of understanding his wife. The childless and the desolate Maya had been fond of a dog. Toto. This dog was her companion. But as fate would have it, this dog died leaving Maya alone. Maya wanted to give the dog a decent burial but her husband Gautama merely telephoned the municipal authorities and asked them to take the carcass away. Any other husband in his place could have easily seen through his wife's feelings for the dog and empathized with her. But Gautama did not understand his wife at all. This lack of sensitivity on the part of her husband made Maya a mental wreck. She realized that she and Gautama were poles apart. Added to this was her father's helplessness. He asked her to quietly accept her fate. He too did not realize that his daughter was in great pain. Incidents like the above mentioned ones keep on happening and they harm the sensibilities of Maya. She is even prevented from attending a Mushayira or a poet's meet for, it is open only for men. All this bruises "Maya's already wounded psyche. As if to add insult to injury, Gautama, with the help of some quotations from the Gita told her that the sentiment of love was not necessary for it was only attachment and attachment was bad. This shocks Maya and her descent into depression has begun. To aggravate the situation a letter from her brother Arjun reminding her of the astrologer's prediction that one of them i.e. either she or her husband would die within four years of marriage and his endorsement of Gautama's viewpoint regarding sentiments makes her all the more sensitive about her own existence. She started fearing that since Gautama was bereft of love would certainly kill her if he came to know of the astrologer's prediction. She felt that he would never hesitate to take her life, This fact started working on her mind and she had a quick glance at her past life and bade farewell to her father, when she met her husband the following evening, she felt that she would not meet him again.

Gautama went up the stairs to have a stroll, and instead of enjoying the odour of limes or counting the stars, he got lost in a court case. As he was explaining the case, Maya was looking at the moon and was almost worshipping it. But unmindful of this, Gautama came between her and the moon. In a rush of ideas, Gautama fell off the parapet only to meet his death. Though Maya tried to hold him she could not and he died. Maya now lost her mental equilibrium and thought that she was responsible for her husband's death. And this feeling and trauma caused by Gautama's death of guilt made her take the extreme step of committing suicide. Thus the life of a noble but true woman was ruined and it ended in a tragedy.

Though the character of Maya was that of a sensitive woman, she is not totally eccentric or abnormal. She is an ordinary woman who feels that she should be loved and cared for by her husband and accepted and loved by his family as well. There was nothing wrong in her craving to become a mother and to have physical relations with her husband. But she was married to the wrong man who was insensitive and uncaring. Through the character of Maya, Anita Desai seems to make a statement that mismatched couples cannot have a happy marriage. Further, the parents cannot shirk their responsibilities once the daughter is married. They cannot absolve themselves of any responsibilities for it is their duty to step in, case there is a problem. But the solution offered in the novel is suicide. For suicide is not the answer to the problem. Maya was an intelligent woman. She should have realized that her marriage will not be successful and should have walked out of it or, she should have made Gautama realize that only practical approach to life will not help, for, life has much more to offer than only practicality and mundaneness. She should have been more pragmatic in her approach towards Gautama, for a woman does have it in her to change a man either for the better. or for worse. At the same time, it must be noted that Maya does not become neurotic all at once. Shocked by the difference in the atmosphere of the two families, the atmosphere in the homes of her father and in-laws respectively, Maya is confused. She is used to love and care. But she gets nothing of it in her husband's family. This is the first step towards neurosis. Maya does not get any love or understanding from her husband Gautama. He is insensitive towards her feelings. He does not satisfy her physically or mentally, In fact, they were mismatched. This heightens the trauma in Maya. If she had a child to love then she would have escaped from being a neurotic. But that was not to be. Gautama was traumatized and frigid. This fact caused an indelible scar in Maya's mind. And she became depressed. The depression increased when her brother Arjun's letter reminded her about an astrologer's prediction that either she or her husband would die within four years of their marriage. The neurosis reaches its climax when Maya takes her own life because she feels guilty trauma subsequent that she was the cause for her husband's death. This descent into neurosis could have been prevented if Maya was taken care of by the members of her family. Her father could have taken the responsibility of Maya once he knew that she was depressed. The older members of Gautama's family could have advised Gautama to be a little sensitive to Maya's needs. All that was needed was a little understanding to prevent a noble lady's life from tragedy. But the fact remains that for a successful man-woman relationship, understanding is the key and if understanding is not there then what happens is depicted in the character of Sarla in the novel "In Custody." Sarla is the traditional Indian wife of Deven. Unlike Maya, she is face to face with the harsh realities of life. This reality causes a deep sense of bitterness and disappointment in her. Just like her husband Deven, she is also a victim of circumstances. As Deven's wife, she could not have kept herself away from the pain and distress that he was going through. But Sarla does not empathise with her husband. She is unable to understand his problem, Sarla was all the while dreaming of a "Magazine dream of marriage" She dreams of a high society life-style which Deven, a struggler, himself, is unable to give her. In fact, Deven feels rather intimidated by Sarla's stony face, her sulk and her silent, furious mood. He is very fearful of her sullen and ill-humoured. Withdrawn into a shell because of all this, Deven finds it impossible to communicate with his wife.

Neither does Sarla open up to him. They are like two like poles repelling each other. A victim being unable to help another victim appears for redemption from a redeemer. Lost in their own worlds and busy with their own individual concerns, both of them do not come close to each other. They avoid the spiritual affliction of any kind or any type of camaraderie. This leads to a distance between them and they stay together only because of circumstances. But in this case Sarla is more to be blamed because she is unable to strike a chord of understanding with her husband. She is unable to care for the comforts of her husband and though she is good on the social front, she cannot identify herself with the aspirations and ambitions of her husband. Both of them are able to break the ice with each other. It is true that some comforts like the fan, refrigerator, miner etc are necessary for life. But these are not the only things in life. Lillie goes beyond all this. This was the single obsession with Sarla and she made it the chief objective of her life. Thus she ruined her marriage.

On another level, Sarla was struggling up with station and Deves with disappointment. Both of them did not try to help each other and this widened the already existing gulf between the two. In fact, they should have sorted out the problems of life by going to the root of the problems. They should have gone hammer and tongs with the problems and arrived at some solution. This, they did not do. They remained distant to each other and became aliens as each other with only the circumstances keeping them together, ideally it should have been Sarla to first take up the initiative. But she lacked the sensibility to do so. She was insensitive and thus ruined her life while Maya, by being over sensitive made her life into a tragedy. Being insensitive is all a kind of mental disturbance. And Sarla falls a victim to it. But she could have improved herself if some kind of guidance was given to her by some older person. In the absence of this guidance she becomes morbid and ruins her life. Mrs. Desai seems to hint that a little sensibility should be coupled with sense.

Monisha is the neurosis-afflicted woman in "Voices in The City." She is the elder sister of Narode and is married to Jiban, for three years. Hers was also a loveless marriage like that of Maya. It was also a planned marriage. She is virtually a prisoner in the big ancestral house of Jiban's extended family in the Bow Bazaar Street of Calcutta. She is immersed in household chores and has no privacy at all. She is never alone in the family and she never gets the feeling of wholeness. She is not left alone even to read the books Kafka, Hopkins etc. She is the wife of the bureaucrat Jiban and she is stifled by the atmosphere in the house. Since she is unable to bear a child because her fallopian tubes are blocked, her position in the family becomes staid. She is merely tolerated by her mother-in-law and Kalyanidi. She is confined to a room on top and it is also a very troublesome room. She is fully occupied with her husband's family and she keeps thinking about the life she has spent in Kalingpong with her mother. She is tired about her cheerless life and she has to bear her life. She cannot even spend some time with her husband, for even when she goes out with him, the children in the family are with her. The only person whom she empathises with is her brother Nirode whom she takes care of when he is sick. The brother and sister sympathise with each other. The loveless and stifled atmosphere at home drove Monisha into committing suicide. Even in her death, she is not missed by anyone. In her husband's family, the reaction to her death is that of relief. Monisha had grown up as the daughter of the hills but led the life of a recluse. She has no time to voice her feelings. She craves for privacy. She says "I wish I were given some tasks I could do alone, in privacy away from the aunts and uncles, the cousins and nieces and nephews. Alone, I could work better, and I should feel more whole." Lack of understanding on the part of her family members made Monisha into a trauma neurotic. She suffers from claustrophobia and under its impact takes her own life. Just like, the life of Maya and Sarla are wasted, Monisha's life is also wasted. In conclusion, the essential problem that Mrs. Desai points out in the above mentioned novels is that lack of understanding, insensitivity, escape from reality can ruin a woman's life. One must remember that a woman is a human being full of feelings and desires. She too has a life to lead.

She too needs love, affection and above all-understanding. The lack of understanding and support from her from her spouse in particular and her family in general can ruin her completely. A woman cannot live in constant tension or stress. Anita Desai seems to point out that though tradition does play a role in a woman's life, she should not be stifled by it. She should be allowed to lead her life and guided and mended when she is in a problem or difficulty. Parental and familial support can be a source of strength and the lack of the same can ruin her. Maya's life is an example. A woman need not be idealized nor treated like a robot. She is not an idol to be worshipped. She is not a machine either. She is a human being with flesh and blood. If only the society understands a woman's predicament and allows her to lead her life without fear or favour or tr with a freedom to voice her opinions, then she can lead a happy life in the company of her husband

REFERENCE

- [1] B.Ramachandra Rao ” The Novels of Anita Desai
- [2] Darshan Singh Maini “The Achievements of Anita Desai”
- [3] R.A.Singh Essential Characters of Anita Desai and Arun Joshi Cry, the Peacock Pub: Orient Paperbacks, Delhi
- [4] Meena Belliappa” Anita Desau: A Study of her Fiction”
- [5] Mrinalini Solanki Anita Desai's Fiction

Citation: Kanchan A. Gaonkar, Trauma in Women in Anita Desai's Novels, International Journal of Education (IJE), 2(1), 2020, pp. 11-16

Abstract Link: https://iaeme.com/Home/article_id/IJE_02_01_002

Article Link:

https://iaeme.com/MasterAdmin/Journal_uploads/IJE/VOLUME_2_ISSUE_1/IJE_02_01_002.pdf

Copyright: © 2020 Authors. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

This work is licensed under a **Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0)**.



editor@iaeme.com