

**THE THEME OF 'ESCAPE' AS A TECHNIQUE IN ANITA DESAI'S NOVEL****N. G. JADHAO**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The present paper is concerned to study the recurring theme of escape in Anita Desai's novels. While studying the novel penned by her, it is noticed that most of the female characters in her novel try to escape from harsh reality of life. It is also noticed that the pattern is repeated in every novel. Hence, it is concluded that the recurring pattern may be taken as a technique to represent the point of view.*

**Introduction**

The Indo-Anglian literature is much enriched by the contribution of the women's writing. Their writing provided them an opportunity to outlet their age-old suppressed hopes and aspiration, longings, desires and anguishes. In real sense, women's contribution makes literature a true reflection of society and its life. In his preface to 'Women's writing in India': New perspectives', K.V Surendra says 'Women's writing continues to occupy a place of importance for more reasons than one. It projects the response of more than half of humanity and reflects a consciousness constructed by gender. Their writing has questioned the existing viewpoints which are essential patriarchal. Through their first-hand experience, ways of thinking and taking, they have projected the internal problems of the women's world, which are far away from the reach of men's writing. It is women's writing which has given true justification to projection of women's characters in literature.

It is to be noted that most of the Indo-Anglian women writers are influenced by the writings of their British predecessors who with great difficulty found a way in English literature to register their voice. Of course, they could not achieve success in every genre of literature but the success in novel and poetry is notable. In the realm of novel, a

tradition set by Fanny Burney was continued by the women novelists of the 19th century with intellectual and emotional variations. Mary Wollstonecraft, Jane Austin, the Bronte sisters, George Eliot. Mrs. Gaskell tried to represent the various shades of women's world. Thanks to the innovative method set by Virginia Woolf and Dorothy Richardson which has given ample way to inner exploration of women's consciousness through their 'Stream of Consciousness Novel' at the beginning of the 20th century. The projection of women's images by the women writers as a much-discussed issue of the age, in further time, ushered the gate of feminine criticism that absorbed much intellectual duel on women's status in man-made society. Elaine Showalter, Olive Schreiner, Toril Moi, Helene Caxias, Simon de Beauvoir, Kate Millet, Juliet Mitchell, Julia Kristeva, Terry Lovell, Sandra Gilbert, Susan Guban, Jane Gallop and many more women having intellectual mind-set jumped in the hot discussion to wide its scope in the Post-modern criticism.

When we discuss the contribution of Indian women novelists in English to Indian Literature we have been forced to mention the names of Toru Datt, Raj Laxshmi Devi, Gornelia Sorabji, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Nayantara Sahgal, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Shobha Day, Arundhati

Roy, Kiran Desai. Through their writing, they have enriched Indian literature by representing various facets of women's internal make-up. They have tried to represent the real dilemma of women's emotional-world in traditional Indian Society that has given subordinate role to them. They raised their voice against injustice, which was going in Indian Society, a society notorious for its patriarchal set up. They discussed the problem of women's existentialism in man-made world to search their real identity.

The present paper is concerned to discuss the projection of women's characters in Anita Desai's novel from women's point of views. It is also noted that the purpose of the paper is not to discuss her characters under the light of feminine criticism. But, it should be remembered that any discussion of women's writing about women tends towards a set of culturally defined characteristics which are formed by patriarchal society.

Anita Desai, one of the most promising, the most consisting, the most thought -provoking and the most innovative of all women's novelists in Indian English Literature, was born in 1937 out of Bengali father and German mother. She has come in light with number of novels with a special colour of 'psychological exploration' of the women's characters. Influenced by the psychological novels of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and D.H. Lawrence she sets a new trend in the history of Indian English novel that is 'Psychological novel'. Srinivasa Iyengar remarks "Anita Desai added a new dimension to the achievement of Indian woman novelists of English fiction. In her novels the inner lives of the characters are as important as their out lives and their environment." Her serious concern is with the journey within of her characters which are prominently female. She has concerned herself with the inner conflict and

anguish of her female characters. She describes the emotional tension which goes in the heart of her female characters. Basavaras Naikar in his article 'Marital Disharmony in Anita Desai's Novel's praises her 'of all the contemporary Indian novelists Anita Desai is, perhaps, the most perceptive and consistent explorer of the inner life, especially that of Indian women'. Several novels of Anita Desai explore tensions between external world of relation and internal world of emotion with its longingness. Her ultimate object of writing novel is the exploration of sensibility, the particular kind of Indian sensibility. Naturally, her novels deal with recurring theme that is female's agony of existence and identity in a hostile set patriarchal society. She represents the female worlds with confidence which emerges from her personal experience as women. Her pre-occupation is always with the inner world of women's sensibility rather than external world of action and result.

The female characters in Anita Desai' novel have got the best expression through the first-hand experience of the writer as a women. She succeeds to capture the complex shades in the nature of women. In most of her novels, she represented women as a protagonist. Naturally, her novels are full with the qualities or feelings associated with female-world. Her novels describe the disillusionment, emotional depression, longingness, barrenness of heart, escape and surrender of female characters in a stereo typed society. Her novels are representative of the Socio-economic cultural environment typical of India, in which men are considered superior to women. She has brought an innovative chapter in the history of Indo- Anglian novel through psychological realism that makes them able to represents various facets of women's living.

Through her women's projection, she has shown the truthful image of woman in the world, which remains unseen and hidden from the physical world. She herself would say that writing is to me a process of discovering the truth - the truth that is nine-tenth of the iceberg that lies submerged beneath the one tenth visible portions we call reality. Writing is my way of plunging to the depths and exploring this underlying truth.

Unlike Nayantara Sahgal or Kamala Markandeya, her contemporary novelists, her novels focus on the complicated emotional world of women which provides real existence to their living. She is more interested in her female's characters emotional despair, disillusionment of their hopes and aspiration, anguish resulted from longingness and their desire of escape from the tangle of relation by surrendering before death. She never concerns with the political, social or economical sceneries of her time. Naturally, we get the effective and thorough projection of women's world with all its facets, shades, colours and barrenness.

In her literary career, Anita Desai has penned more than dozen of novels. In writing these novels she has shown great dexterity which is supported by profundity of thought. She adopts the technique of symbolism like T.S. Eliot to project the real image of women in literature. Her novels have several layers of meaning hence it is difficult on our part to take them with the surface meaning.

In Anita Desai's first production 'Cry, the Peacock' explores the consciousness of the female protagonist Maya- the consciousness that is moulded and charged by her intense involvement with life and its fear. She succeeds to show the turbulent emotional world of the neurotic Maya. The title itself is symbolical which conveys

disillusionment that results out of the feeling of longingness. We can see Maya's inner world with all its complexity which can be only shown by the women writer. It is a story of married-life of young woman, Maya, who marries at the early age to her father's friend, Gautam, a successful lawyer. Gautam was twice elder than Maya. Her father gets her marriage with Gautam on the basis of his success in life. Her marriage goes against her hopes and aspiration related with her future. That is the beginning of crisis which creates endless cycle of problems in Maya's life. However, she cannot do anything except surrendering. Anita Desai also gets success to represent the clash between intellectual set up of men with emotional basis of women. As a successful and busy lawyer having intellectual attitude to life, Gautam keeps an emotional distance from Maya. Now she comes to know that she is born in this world only for emotional starvation.

The first emotional crisis she confronts at the very beginning of novel is the death of her pet dog 'Toto' on whom she has been lavishing of all her affection. Instead of getting any consolation, as she expects, from her husband, she gets frustration from his handling the situation. She wants to outlet her grief but she fails to get a way as nobody is there to share. She suppresses her grief, anguish which ultimately leads her towards neurosis. The reaction of Gautam to the incident reveals the clash between emotionalism and intellectualism having different basis of living and taking. Gautam says 'it is all over, come and drink your tea, and stop crying. "The incident reveals the cold attitude of Gautam having sense for present and tender attitude of Maya having sense for past. It also reveals the predominance of the present and intellectual over the past and emotionalism which provide real setting

of women's living. Anita Desai, as a woman, captures the very basis of women's living.

The second incident which leads Maya towards neurosis is the prophecy made by the astrologer who predicted that in the fourth year of her marriage life, the couple would lose either Maya or her husband. Now it is the fourth year of their marriage and she develops the feeling of fear for the future. The neurotic Maya lives her life in the whirl of past and future, but in that process she loses her present. Through this incident, Anita Desai shows the universal nature of women who love past and future rather than present.

The novel also focuses on the imaginative and sensible living of Maya which is the very nature of women in contrast to Gautam's real and insensible living. Her unawareness of present detaches her from the Gautam's family. She lives a life particularly inner life in the company of disillusion and despair, longingness, unfulfillment, anguish, bareness, frustration and hopelessness which cut the very nerve of her external life. Through this, Anita Desai tried to convey the universal nature of women by showing that emotional disturbance might be a kind of death for women.

The end of the novel is terrific and blood-curdling. The neurotic Maya ultimately escapes from the shackles of tradition and disillusionment to surrender her life and herself to death. It shows that escape with surrender is the main motive in Desai's projection of women characters.

Once again, we can see how do disillusion, despair, barrenness, anguish govern women's internal life in man-made social life in Anita Desai's projection of Monisha in her novel 'Voices in the City'. The presentation of Calcutta city as a city of dirt, squalor, disease and death is a symbolical projection of fabricated world. It is a story of married life of Monisha and

Jiban. They live in Calcutta city. The protagonist, Monisha, lives a life without emotional stability as Anita Desai projects the longingness, nostalgic pining for past, disillusion for future, frustration, depression as an internal part of women's living in the world. Once again Monisha's life, like Maya's, goes beyond toleration in a traditional structure of society. She fails to establish any thread of affection for Jiban and his family. She lives a life of barrenness. She laments on the futility of married-life which is so dry and so empty. She laments:-

**“They put me away in steel container a  
thick glass Cubicle  
and I have lived in it all life,  
without touch of lover.....and warmth.”**

She feels strange and alien in the crowded world of city. The tragedy of Monisha's life is a tragedy of every woman. Anita Desai succeeds to give subtle or minor details of women's inner world.

The tragic projection of Monisha's character-sketch comes from the writer's experience as a being a woman in the fabricated world. Emotional longingness, alienation from the self and spiritual despair dominate Anita Desai's novel. We can see a hidden self-quest for identity, for existence but all become futile in man-made world. All negative qualities, which govern women's internal world, lead them towards their end. Ultimately, when Monisha realizes the reality of life being a woman, she escapes from this world and surrenders herself before death. It is impossibility to fulfill life's longing in women's world takes her life. We cannot see any physical struggle or ideological revolt, only tolerance, patience and surrender and death that's all.

Like Maya's, the life of Sita is governed by loneliness, longingness, disillusion, ugliness, hopelessness, despair, and frustration in Anita Desai's

novel, "Where Shall We Go This Summer" which is also the best projection of female-world through the mind of the writer. The scene swifts, like other novels, in metro city, Bombay. We can see man-made materialistic world in which emotional world of women never gets secure place. The projection of Delhi, Calcutta, or Bombay as a setting for novel has a symbolic significance. These cities are symbol of emotional exploitation of women by the world. It is also married-life's story. Sita lives in Bombay with her husband, Raman, along with four children. She can see her husband a symbol of corruption and four children as a gray, dull lit, empty shell. She tries to adjust herself in alien world but can't. She leaves Bombay for her parental-house in Kerala. In some extent, she revolts against patriarchal tradition in which women have given subordinate role. The journey of Sita from Bombay to Manori is a symbolical journey of women from external to internal, from familiar to alien. She escapes from the stern reality of external world, which is disturbing her inner. She cannot get love and affection of her husband, even from her children who are habitual to live in Bombay. Ultimately she adjusts herself in alien society. She fails to get the answer of her existential dilemma. She feels that women are born in this world only for suffering and tolerance. They have to live a parasite life without self-respect and existence. That is reality, that is fact and that is culture. She surrenders herself to such cultural mind-set and reconcile to reality of women's life. Though her sketch, Anita Desai represents the dilemma of women's life in patriarchal society.

Nanda Kaul is also the projection of women's longingness with disillusion. She wants to live a life far away from the madding crowd. Having the experience of women's anguish and pain, she wants to escape from the turmoil of society. She purchases a house and with it, she

starts living in the house of her self-consciousness. But arrival of Rekha, her great grand- children disturbs her life. The world never allows her to live a life as per her own will and wish, and to establish her personal identity. The novel is masterpiece of superb excellence in which Desai describes the existential struggle of Nanda Kaul. It is not a Nanda's individual struggle but a struggle of all typical women in the Indian society. Ultimately she surrenders. She puts herself in her prison against the crime of being woman in man-made world. The fire on mountain is a fire of longingness, fire of anger, fire of disillusionment or might be a fire of women's longing. She desires to escape from the faded-world of reality into the charming-world of sensibility.

In her novel, 'Clear Light of Day', Anita Desai has shown the change which is going in the world of women in present age through the delineation of two female characters -Bim and Tara. Bim represents the traditional women who scarify everything for the sake of family, relation and Tara represents the changing modern attitude of women to scarify everything for personal achievement. We can see contradictory natures of two sisters who are brought up in the same family. Like Desai's other novels, it is also a study of disillusionment, despair and dilemma of women's being a women. Mysia Daniel in her article 'Silence and Shadows, says that Anita Desai's Clear Light of Day' is study of youthful dreams that fall apart or get drowned like the cow that falls into well with a welter of sounds no one hears. Bim (Bimla) like a cow tolerates everything with silence. She tolerates everything without any complain. Mira Masi's nature, attitude and behavior show the complex nature of women which goes beyond the understanding.

Anita Desai's projection of women-characters in her novel shows her

first-hand experience about the female world with all its facets. In her art of characterization, she has put more light on the emotional or internal world of female-class than the external. She has seen the world through the eyes of very Indian women, not through the eyes of intellectual woman with western education. The female characters that show her sincerity to the class dominate all her novels. She succeeds to portray complex nature of women through her creations of Maya, Sita, Monisha, Nanda Kaul, Bimla, Tara, and Mira Masi. She has explored the unconscious as well as conscious parts of women, and given the presentation through experience. The suffering of Indian women, marital disharmony, existentialism, anger, dual tradition all find a place in the novels of Anita Desai. She has given a great deal of contribution in bringing forth light of women and has shown a glimpses into the world's heart which had laid concealed from outer world. The disillusionment, the frustration, the

despair, the dilemma, the longingness, and the hopelessness of the female world can best be seen from such women writers. Being a woman the writers has also given justification to female world by writing about them. We can see all her novels handle the story of family-drama which is mostly played by the female characters.

The discussion shows that Anita Desai has used the theme of escape to explore the nature of the female world and outlook, and reconstructing the lost or suppressed records of female experience. By the technique, she has tried to show that women are not born, they are made. She takes women not as a biological species but culturally defined characteristics. We can conclude the paper with Simone de Beauvoir's words 'one is not born a woman, one becomes a woman. Hence, the recurring theme of escape should be taken as a technique to get the suppressed world of female-characters.

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