

Female articulation of Anita Desai's novels

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Through her themes, characterization and images about confinement and lack of freedom, Anita Desai has raised important questions regarding the status and role of women in society. The most vital issue that she takes up is the quality of women's articulation and freedom. Anita Desai's young women protagonists long for freedom. They are against being treated as individuals without individuality and have raised their voice against forces which are out to throttle their freedom to make their own choice. Women want to be treated at par with men and are against the males being granted a privileged position everywhere. The freedom they crave for is denied to them. Maya, in *Cry, The Peacock*, who does not appear to be sufficiently mature and intelligent, is not unaware of this kind of treatment. She complains of being treated as "a wild beast on a leash" (201). Her experiences in life are such that she comes to have the feeling of being bruised, she feels suffocated when no one including her husband tries to understand her feelings and out of sheer desperation she pushes her husband Gautam out of the parapet wall and thus gives expression to her pent-up feelings.

Monisha, in "Voices in the City" who happens to be far more intelligent and unfortunately circumstanced is even unhappy owing to the denial of freedom to her. She articulates her feelings to get out of the sheltered life and breathe the air of freedom. This is expressive of her longing to be treated properly and does not hesitate to give expression to her feeling in bold enough terms. The entire novel is filled with meaningful suggestions about Monisha's

identity crisis. What women like Monisha really need is the essential congenial environment characterized freedom for their development.

In “Where Shall We Go This Summer” Sita is desirous of being free and discontented with a woman’s life. Her desire to be free is brought out in her fascination with the foreigner whom she encounters on the roadside. She is ever ready to escape from her unhappy surrounding. In “Fire On The Mountain”, Nanda Kaul moves to Carignano after allowing her husband to have a lifelong affair she reacts against petrified dullness of the mainland and her husband’s house. She hates that which inhibits her from acting and thinking in bold enough terms. She does not revolt openly like Sita, but feels that she could be “shipwrecked” (82). There is also Sarla ‘In Custody’, whose aspirations have dwindled into thin air when placed against the harsh realities of life. Sarla’s miserable routine life has not turned into a perpetual pool of humiliation. Anita Desai’s novels are an advocacy for the legitimate rights and freedom of such unfortunate women.

The repression, prohibition, exclusion and dominance of Anita Desai’s woman characters can be analyzed in terms of the dynamics of the spirals of power, knowledge and pleasure. As Michel Foucault has remembered, “pleasure and power do not cancel or turn back against one another. They seek out, overlap and reinforce one another”.¹ Anita Desai’s women characters do attempt to assert their feelings and attempts are made from time to time to thwart their voices of protest. But they fail to change their lot. Anita Desai deals with sexual repressions of her characters such as Maya, Monisha and Nanda Kaul. Maya, of all her women characters, is the one who is most aware of the urges of her body and its appeal. She feels pained to find Gautam

over busy with his papers giving no thought to the demands of her body. This turns her into an emotionally starved and physically hungry person. This results in her becoming neurotic and hostile to her husband who remains indifferent to her bodily needs. Maya loses no time in articulating her feelings in this regard.

Anita Desai has thus introduced in her novels the predicament of sensitive women who find it very difficult to adjust in the present mechanical and urbanized set-up. The world in which these protagonists move about is very narrow and Anita Desai is aware of this and has observed, “she explores a very tiny section of this territory”² Elain Showalter talks of the phases of the emergence and growth of feminine tradition i.e. the phase of limitation, protest and self-discovery”³ Anita Desai’s fiction is directly related to the third and the final phase. Her novels contain germs of her awareness of her various problems pertaining to women, which she has tried to tackle from a psychological point of view. Her women characters do assert and articulate their feeling at times and this is an indication of women becoming more aware of their rightful place society.

Work Cited :-

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2. D.S. Naini “The Achievement of Anita Desai” in K.K. Sharma ed. Indo-English Literature (Chazibal, Vimal 1977), P.216.
3. “Women Writers”, Quest 65 (April-June, 1970) P.43.