

Delineation of Domestic Relationships, In Selected Novels of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande

Dr Shaswati Ghosh

H.O.D. Department of English
N.A.S. (P.G.) College
Meerut (U.P.)

Alka

Research Scholar
N.A.S. (P.G.) College
Meerut (U.P.)

ABSTRACT

The present study, based on the selected novels of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande deals with the treatment of domestic relationship, specially disturbed human relationship and the resultant alienation in middle class Indian family. The main reason behind this is temperamental incompatibility, which is further aggravated by loneliness, lack of communication, escapism, isolation and also quest for identity. An attempt has been made in the present study to identify the concept of domestic relationships with reference to three novels of Anita Desai namely Cry, The Peacock (1963), Voices In The City (1965) and Where Shall We Go This summer? (1975) and three novels of Shashi Deshpande namely The Dark Holds No terrors (1980), That Long Silence (1988) and The Binding Vine (1992).

Keywords: domestic relationship, alienation, temperamental incompatibility

INTRODUCTION

The world of Anita Desai's characters is filled with their lonely strivings and their neurotic urges. Most of Desai's characters undergo experiences which lead them towards their split personality. These experiences damage their domestic life, paralyze them physically and cause their psychic death. So various factors like alienation, loneliness, isolation, lack of communication, clash between the irreconcilably different temperaments and childhood experiences play important roles in shaping the domestic life. Maya in Cry, The Peacock despite her over-protected, sheltered childhood does not seem to be a spoilt woman. She has the capacity to differentiate between her childhood pranks and the clamorous demands of her lawyer husband. Maya in Cry, The Peacock and Monisha in Voices In The City both try to adjust themselves but lack of support from their husband lead them to their ends, Sita in Where Shall We Go This Summer? fails to achieve her goal and compromises to the harsh realities of life.

Anita Desai intends to expose the inner psyche of the characters in her novels. The modern life especially that of the middle class women, is burdened with mental stress, unfulfilled aspirations and unsatisfied desires. The domestic and social situations cause and even aggravate a kind of neurosis. The diagnosis and analysis of this mental ailment is invariably manifested through her female characters created in her novels. Monisha in Voices in The City and Maya in Cry, The Peacock are circumscribed in an uninspiring environment. Yet besides being sensitively analytical about their own condition, they do not assert against their circumscribed status. Desai brilliantly contains the defiance of her protagonists in death. In fact in her death, Monisha attempts to transcend the pettiness of her colourless existence. She has the right to take her own life though she had no right to alter the circumstances that led to her death.

Anita Desai usually starts by presenting a person who is cut out in a different grain from others. They resist demands of society and turn out to be rebels. Because they do not find a proper channel of communication they become alienated and start brooding on their lives. Most of her major characters have a near-neurotic quality about them. They are constantly disturbed by familial ties they find uncomfortable and inescapable at the same time, and with which they cannot reconcile their individual values. The absence of any hope and love from interpersonal relations naturally lead Anita Desai's

sensitive and emotional characters towards psychic disintegration . Marital relationships are established with the explicit purpose of providing companionship to each other . The element of companionship is sadly missing in the relationship between husband and wife in the novels of Anita Desai.

Thus Anita Desai has presented marital disharmonies as they exist in Indian male – dominated, traditional families. A marriage is a union of two souls. Some adjustment must be there. Of course this adjustment must come from both sides – the husband and the wife. However, in Indian social situation, if a marriage is unsuccessful, the woman is many a time held responsible for the same, while In fact, very often a marriage becomes successful because of the woman’s grace, love, wisdom, sense of understanding, tolerance and sacrifice. However, the domestic relationships described in Anita Desai’s novels are not intimate and happy relationships . They are affected by alienation , lifelessness , quest for identity and psychic disintegration .

Shashi Deshpande, as a novelist is also deeply concerned with the subjective realities of human existence like Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya and Nayantara Sahagal. In the process of delineating her fictional characters, Deshpande reveals their frustrations, their strong sense of isolation; their agony and despair, their reflective self-awareness and their sincere effort to achieve integration of their fragmented “self”. It is natural that in the act of delineating the world of women, different aspects of feminine life should find expression in her novels. Deshpande’s women protagonists emerge from a male dominated society which is conservative in its outlook of life. Educated as these women are, they are conscious of their individuality and desire to live their lives according to their own frame of values, but the socio – cultural values which they imbibe from tradition bring them into conflict with their own set of values and cause alienation and fragmentation of their personality. The fractured domestic relationships are also visible in her novels like That Long Silence, The Dark Holds No Terrors and The Binding Vine. All the protagonists of these novels, after getting married find their husband’s family at first fantastic, almost unreal, but they fail because their quest for meaning is based on illusion. Shashi Deshpande projected well the emotion and experiences woman as a wife, mother and as an individual facing psychological and sociological problems. She also influenced the Indian life and society to an extent. She concerns herself with the plight of the modern Indian woman trying to understand herself and to preserve her identity as wife, mother and above all as a human being.

Significantly, Deshpande’s leading woman characters learn in due course how to arrive at a compromise and find a sense of balance in life. At the end of The Dark Holds No Terrors, Saru for example, goes back home. The spirit of affirmation is clearly felt, somehow more or less in this novel. Even Urmila in The Binding Vine, who thinks that human nature is the hardest to bridge, the hardest to accept, and to live with does not remain unaffected by the healing touch of love. The case is same with Jaya in That Long Silence, who is not exhausted, even after a lot of suffering, and is prepared to start life afresh. They are candid enough to accept their earlier misgivings about life and their approach towards it. Their preparedness to change themselves according to the situation indicates that they believe in eternal goodness of life. Theme like husband-wife relationship, women’s search for identity, childhood experiences, clash of home and the world, sexuality in marriage etc are the same in both the novelists. Shashi Deshpande’s concept of affirmation is different from Desai. Her protagonists change themselves according to the situation which indicates that they believe in eternal goodness of life. In this way the conflict caused by illusion and misunderstanding which at one stage threatens the existence of her protagonists is brought under control through acceptance, accommodation and understanding. These positive values mark the triumph of the novelist.

Shashi Deshpande, too dwells on the themes of alienation, isolation, maladjustment and the eternal solitariness of human beings. Of course, her characters do suffer from such maladies but they do not succumb to it because of their inherent wish to live life with all its shortcomings. Shashi Deshpande feels that the fountain of hope flows in all human beings. Through his hope and patience one can fight worldly obstacles, as her characters do , who, after undergoing suffering, come out shining like gold . Thus Shashi Deshpande is a writer , who is committed to make this society better. Her writing is a process of exploration of self discovery and self realization . Undoubtedly she is one of the most noteworthy among the writers writing in English in India at present .

CONCLUSION

The protagonists of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande are alienated from their husbands, from family and from the society. But the way and sources of alienation are different. In Desai's novels the protagonist suffers more due to the psychological problems and the lack of adjustment. Theme like husband-wife relationship, women's search for identity, childhood experiences, clash of home and the world, sexuality in marriage etc are the same in both the novelists. Shashi Deshpande's concept of affirmation is different from Desai. Dynamism is always there in all the female characters of Shashi Deshpande. They uphold her vision of life quite perfectly. Her protagonists do not feel shy of making decisions about life at the appropriate time. In spite of facing so much agony and pain in life, they never shed their positive attitude. Unlike Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande's characters never ponder over suicide. Life is too precious for them to end it so easily. Sufferings tend to make them sturdy and strong and bring out the best in them. There is no ambiguity about the actions of her protagonists who clearly pick their right path. Their preparedness to change themselves according to the situation indicates that they believe in eternal goodness of life. Desai's protagonists, curiously enough do not assert in a pragmatic manner. They suffer in silence, perceive the agonies of existence and quietly withdraw into their own worlds. Being modern feminist writers Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande do not deal with traditional morality but their novels are centered on the redefined human relationship of today's culture.

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