

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Male Characteristics in Anita Desai's Novels

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**Abstract:**

Anita Desai is an existential writer who is pre-occupied with internal conflicts and agonies of her sensitive characters in an insensitive world. The most common themes in her novels are human relationship, particularly the man-woman relationship. In Jane Austen's novels, husband-hunting fills an important place in the action. In Mrs. Jhabvala's novels there is much stress on wife-hunting as on husband-hunting."1 But in the novels of Anita Desai the intricacies of relationship gains an enunciation. Her forte is the exploration of sensibility rather than the outer world of action. She has tried to forge a style supple and suggestive enough to convey the fever and fretfulness of the stream of consciousness of her principal characters. The theme of man-woman relationship in Anita Desai's novels reveals her consummate craftsmanship. Nowadays this theme has become more important due to rapid industrialization, growing awareness among women of their rights and individualism and the westernization of attitudes and lives of the people. Twentieth century novelists treat this subject in a

different manner from that of earlier novelists. They portray the relationship between man and woman as it is, whereas earlier novelists concentrated on as it should be. Indo-English writer is concerned with the problem of interaction between man and woman, between the individuals and the social world. Therefore, the most recurrent themes in her novels are "The hazards and complexities of man-woman relationships, the founding of individuality and the establishing of individualism of her characters."

**Keywords:** Man-woman Relationship, English learning styles, Novels of Anita Desai, Male Characteristics

**I. Introduction**

Literary manifestations of the specialization process create a different linguistic experience and environment for male and female experience. Especially, in the novels, we can move much closer to the female experience. Novels, therefore, are

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seen as structured and extended statements about reality. A closer study of Anita Desai's works reveals her struggle for female autonomy, played out against the backdrop of the patriarchal cultural pattern. At the outset, it seems that she is asking a new and different question. Her writing can be viewed as a self-conscious reaction to overwhelming masculinity of privileged dominant gender. We can identify in her characters a defiant tone of voice in asserting the personal and the subjective. Her emphasis is psychological rather than sociological. Her profound intellectual maturity provides a frame work based on gender (female) as the ideological scheme for the analysis of society in general.

Anita Desai is concentrated in terrifying isolation, finding it hard to reconcile with the world around "self". Her protagonists, therefore, are Shukla: 54 constantly confronted with the stupendous task of defining their relation to themselves and to their immediate human context. Acceptable behavioural pattern is alien to them. The root is not far to find. Her central characters, by and large, have strange childhood from which they develop a negative selfimage and aversion. The immediate result is - their fragmented psyche to view moving but their movement is always on the periphery. If they are placed within the female space, they are shown as threatening presence. Thus, the principal male characters in her works play negative roles in their relations with the females.

**1. Anita Desai Added New Dimension To The Contemporary Indian English Fiction**

She has secured a unique position due to her innovative thematic concern and deals in her novels with feminine sensibility. Desai sincerely broods over the fate of modern woman more particularly in the male dominated society and her annihilation at the altar of marriage. In Desai's novels most marriages are proved to be unions of incompatibility. Her fiction is relevant to all times because she writes about the predicament of modern man. She digs into the inner psyche and goes beyond the skin and flesh. Literature for her is not a means of escaping reality but an exploration and an inquiry. Desai writes mostly about the miserable plight of woman suffering under their insensitive and inconsiderable fathers and brothers. So man-woman relationship brings characters into alienation, withdrawal, loneliness, isolation and lack of communication. Most of her protagonists are alienated from the world, from societies, from families, from parents and even from their own selves because of their individuality. When these characters have to face alienation, they become rebels. There is a series of 16 questions that are related to the three main learning styles. Read the question and select the answer that closest fits your answer. Don't think about the questions too much. Go with your first choice.

As Edmund Fuller puts it, "In our age, man suffers not only from war, a conviction of isolation, randomness, (and) meaninglessness in his way of existence."<sup>4</sup> The pervasive sense of alienation has

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corroded human life from various quarters. Consequently, he suffers from an acute sense of rootlessness, which may manifest itself as "the alienation from oneself, from one's fellowmen and from nature, the awareness that life runs out of one's hand like sand."<sup>5</sup>

The novel *Cry, the Peacock* is mainly concerned with the theme of disharmony between husband and wife relationship. The play is about Maya's Cry for love and relationship in her loveless wedding with Gautama. The peacock's cry is an implication of Maya's anguish cry for love and life of involvement. The novel shows her despair, anxiety, dread, anguish and her choice in the given situation, which ultimately leads her to insanity. The novel begins with the death of her pet-dog Toto which throws her into a frenzy of grief. Maya is much attached to the dog because of her childlessness and it appears that the dog becomes a child substitute. She wants to provide a decent burial to the dog but the gardener fails to do so. Later on, when her husband Gautama comes, he takes it casually and makes arrangement for its burial. This shocks and hurts Maya. Gautama consoles her that he would bring another dog for her.

The second part of the novel is Maya's long narration of her inner life. Maya is a prisoner of the past, lives almost perpetually in the shadows of world of memories which engulf her; Gautama lives in the present and accepts reality and facts. Maya keeps on remembering her childhood days or the treatment of her father meted out to her. She feels that no one else loves

her as her father did. She seeks other father in her husband who is much elder to Maya and is a friend of her father. Gautama keeps on criticizing Maya's father as he knows that Maya suffers from father-fixation. He says to Maya:

"If you knew your Freud it would all be very straight forward, and then appear as merely inevitable to you-taking your childhood and upbringing into consideration. You have a very obvious father-obsession which is also the reason why you married me, a man so much older than yourself. It is complex that, unless you mature rapidly, you will not be able to deal with, to destroy..."

Like his mother and his sister, Nila, Gautama is man of the world. He runs after fact and reason and has nothing to do with the world of feelings and emotions which forms the core of Maya's existence. Gautama's myopic intelligence fails to establish communion with the emotional self of Maya, his wife. Maya suffers in her loneliness and tries to gratify her emotional starvation with her nostalgic reveries of childhood days. She was brought up tenderly as 'a toy prince in a toy world'. No wonder that Maya's childhood world of fantasies and adult world of realities clash producing more imbalance in life. Inner demands and outer realities also create a conflicting situation. Maya wants to escape from realities whereas Gautama desires to live in it.

**I. Anita Desai Highlights**

Anita Desai highlights Maya's sexual demands with the help of two powerful

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symbols—The peacock's voluptuous dance and the mating calls of the pigeons. Maya compares herself with the peacock who mate only after fighting. The cries of the peacock, 'Pia, Pia, Mio, Mio'—assimilate in Maya's mind with her own anguish. Like the peacocks she loves intensely and her love is unreciprocated. Like Maya, peacocks are creatures of excess world and will not rest till they had danced the dance of death.

For Maya, Gautama was only a 'figure of granite' for 'there were countless nights when I had been tortured by a humiliating sense of neglect, of loneliness, of desperation.' In a fit of frenzy one evening she pushed down Gautama to death and later commits suicide by jumping out of the balcony carrying her mother-in-law along with her. Desai writes :

"The old lady was up on her feet... They met for an instance, there was silence, and then both disappeared into the dark quiet. All around the dark was quite then."

**II. Anita Desai's Second Novel Voices**

Anita Desai's second novel *Voices in the City* offers the picture of another Maya named Monisha. Desai's concern in this novel is primarily with human relationship and how in the absence of meaningful relationships the individuals suffer. She probes the psychic compulsion that may affect an individual in forging long term and significant relationships and how an individual is affected if he is unable to forge such relationships.

Like Maya, Monisha also suffers emptiness. But unlike Maya, Monisha has stilled her emotions and has trained them to submit. Maya pushes Gautama off the roof so as to protect her world of sensuous abundance but Monisha sets herself afire to reach the case of intense feelings.

The novel deals with the incompatible marriage of Monisha and Jiban. The theme of alienation is treated in terms of mother-children relationship which itself is a consequence of dissonance in husband-wife relationship. Monisha's relationship with her husband is characterized only by 'loneliness and lack of communication.' She is also childless like Maya. She understands that her husband Jiban is unable to understand and fulfill her emotional needs and begins to grow world-weary. She is alienated from her mother as well as her husband. Her husband reckons her as worthless. Monisha's ill-matched marriage, her loneliness, sterility and stress of living in a joint family with an insensitive husband push her to breaking point.

In *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, Anita Desai presents Sarah as a woman and reveals her dilemma and split personality which are the result of her marriage with Adit. Sarah married Adit in the hope of filling the hollowness of her life with the exotic but romantic world of her husband. But, she is deceived in her hopes as Adit stays in England living the unreal life of an immigrant. The theme of conjugal disharmony between husband and wife, which Desai projects in *Cry, the Peacock* and *Voices in the City* finds a faint subdued

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expression in this novel. The cause of disharmony between Sarah and Adit is not to be found in the difference of their culture; it emanates from their different temperaments rooted in the individualities. Adit's indifference towards Sarah's emotional sufferings is reflected in his half-hearted attempt to know the cause of her anguish. Towards the end of the novel Anita Desai shows that Adit does not care to know Sarah's feelings when he decides to return to India and settle there. Sarah is pregnant and has concern for her unborn baby. She comes out of her anguish when Adit asks her to accompany him to India.

In *Where Shall We go This Summer?*, Desai takes up the theme of marital discord as the subject matter of this novel. The major protagonist of the novel Sita, is a middle aged woman who finds herself alienated from her husband and children because of her emotional reactions to many things that happen to her. Sita is introverted and subjective as Maya. If Maya's father is over protective, Sita's father neglects her completely. Sita is badly disturbed by the violence around her. She was a sensitive woman who hankered for love and affection in life. She expected close communion with her husband Raman. The behaviour of ladies in her husband's house made her utterly helpless, disparate and disappointed in life. She always wants to escape reality. On the contrary, Raman represents the sanity, rationality, and an acceptance of the norms and values of society. Sita is the product of a broken family. Even after marriage, she remains lonely. Her husband is also busy. As a result, there is marital discord.

Sita had four children. When pregnant for the fifth time, she foolishly decides not to give birth to the child in a world of violence and hatred. When Raman asked her where shall we go this summer? She at once replied 'To Manori'—a pilgrimage, a place of wonder and miracles. She reaches the island accompanied by her two children Karan and Maneka. But she feels betrayed when she learns that Raman has come to Manori not to see her but to fetch Maneka. In order to bridge the gap Raman speaks to her in a calm tone and informs her that he is prepared to do some farming here. To Sita, suddenly Raman has become the nicest man in the world. The sudden harmony between the couple seems unnatural and unconvincing. D.S. Maini observes:

"But such a weak epiphany does not connect. Nor are we prepared for the sudden flow and the decision to return to Bombay and to sanity. Her final view which seems to uphold the exciting and teasing ambiguity of life again is not well-earned."

In *Fire on the Mountain*, Anita Desai studies the womanly sensibility and a woman's natural desire to know herself in terms of not only her relationship with her family but also in terms of her individual identity and its relationship with the world at large. *Fire on the Mountain* creates the problems of man- woman relationship as a underlying member part of uninteresting family life. Like Sita, Nanda Kaul lives alone in

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her palace. She's avice-chancellor's woman. Having been rejected and discarded all her life by her mister and children, Nanda Kaul decides to live alone in Simla hills at Carignano. Her mister is responsible for this. Outwardly the Kauls are an ideal couple for university community but from inside their relationship is all-barren.

**IV. Conclusion**

To conclude, Anita Desai presents to miscellany her opinion about complexity of natural unions as a big contemporary problem and natural condition. At the stratum of inner observation words aren't very meanings recorded in a wordbook simply are representative which touch off sensibilities and meanings that an individual draws out of one's subconscious warehouse. Her women characters make a miscellany look at them with wonderment with their relationship to their surroundings, their society, their men, their children, their families, their mental make-ups and themselves. Though not indeed a feminist, Anita Desai is well witting of the swamp of the Indian women and their relationship with men. Running inward her invention grapples with the impalpable realities of life. Man- woman relationship in the municipal society is her concern and in novel after novel she delves deeper and deeper in this dilemma. D.H. Lawrence duly points out that "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 accoutrement."

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