

Gender discrimination in Anita Desai novel

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Abstract: Gender inequality has been prevailing in Indian society from ancient period. Women are treated as the second sex, and they are considered as inferior to men in our society. While male children are allowed to enjoy all kinds of freedom female children are deprived of it. Anita Desai is among the feminist writers who raise their voice against this partiality. In all her novels she criticizes gender discrimination in Indian society.

Keywords- gender, discrimination, society, alienation.

Introduction:

Anita Desai is a renowned Indian novelist of our contemporary period. She was born in June 1937. She has been awarded with the Booker Prize, the Sahitya Academy Award and British Guardian Prize for her works. Most of her novels are set in India and completely immersed in Indian life. As a feminist Anita portrays the suffering and alienation of women in Indian male-dominated society. This paper examines the novelist's view on gender discrimination and the precarious existence of women in our country.

UN Human Rights Publication (2014) defines gender as the identities, roles and attributes formed or designed by the society for men and women. (1) According to K.M. Rahman, "Gender discrimination is the consequence of constant inequality between men and women in all spheres of life". (2)

Women are mostly the victim of prevalent gender discrimination in our country. As a feminist writer Anita does not admit any difference between man and woman in society. She demands equal opportunity for both sexes and desires complete freedom of women. According to her the male-dominated society is responsible for the wretched existence of women. In her novels, the female protagonist always struggles for liberty and protests male oppression. Uma, Anamika, Mama, Nanda Kaul and Raka etc. are burning examples of gender discrimination. Despite of their innocence they must suffer from male oppression in Indian patriarchal society.

The protest rally of women in “*The Village by the Sea*” reveals the disgust of women with gender discrimination in our contemporary society. They are now inspired by feministic ideals and no longer prepared to tolerate male oppression.

The novelist displays the superiority of male over female realistically in “*Fasting Feasting*”. Uma is not allowed to study by Mama and Papa, but her younger brother is allowed to get higher education. She is only ordered by her parents to take care of her younger brother Arun. While Arun is brought up with affection, Uma and Aruna are seldom given proper care by their parents. Mama says, “In my day, girls in the family were not given sweets, nuts and good things to eat”. (FF6) Mama’s parents do not afford her proper education. Papa warns Mama to terminate her late pregnancy for want of a son. He doesn’t like Mama until she gives birth to a male child. Papa’s excitement at the birth of Arun reveals the high status of male child in contemporary Indian society.

Hindu society does not give much importance to a female child than a male. Parents think their daughters as burden in our society. In “*Where Shall We Go This Summer*” Anamika’s parents remain silent after her unnatural death in her father-in-law’s house out of social shame. They think it better to keep silence rather to protest it. They are not even prepared to rescue her from her in-law’s house when she complains about their oppression.

“*Fire On A Mountain*” reveals how the exploitation of women and social inequalities force Nanda Kaul to escape from the society and merge with nature to find happiness in life. Raka witnesses her father’s oppression to her mother and his neglect for his own daughter. J.W Wilson remarks, “In a patriarchal society, women are split subjects, who watch themselves being watched by men”. (3)

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