






<p>Research Paper in English</p>	    
<p>Dr. Uddhav Jane, Principal, Arts, Science College, Kamargaon, Tq. Karanja, Wasim, Maharashtra</p>	<p>Victimization of the Woman in <i>Clear Light of the Day</i> by Anita Desai</p> <p>Abstract In this paper it is found that Anita Desai writes of the woman as a victim in a patriarchal, patrilineal and father-dominated Indian family. The Indian woman is, forever, dominated by and dependent upon a male member of her family-be it the father, the brother, the husband, or the son. These are the various phases of an Indian woman's life and the novelist sharply focuses upon the emotional reactions of the woman as she experiences these stages. It is not always an attitude of compromise, there are moments of rebellion and sometimes she gathers sufficient courage to speak out a word of resistance. Saved this rebel as backdrop, this paper has dealt in detail with the complex social context of old norms and notions entrapping the woman under clutches of tradition.</p>

The treatment of the woman in the novels of Anita Desai certainly evinces the onset of a new age in Indian writing. Desai has depicted women characters not superficially but as made of flesh and blood with its respective strength and weaknesses, by portraying characters that are governed by a sense of compromise, sacrifice and surrender, rather than complete revolt against the system for the sake of physical and emotional liberty. It is found that Anita Desai in her novels has tried seriously to explore and demystify the realities of life for which she delved deep into the complexities of life. She states: writing to me is a process of discovering the truth... the truth that is nine-tenth of the iceberg that lies submerged beneath the one-tenth visible portion we call reality. Writing is my way of plunging to the depths and exploring this underlying truth. All my writing is an effort to discover, to underline and convey the true significance of things (James Vinson, 348).

Anita Desai's novels are female oriented. She probes into their problems, be it of a mother, a daughter, a sister or a wife. She writes of the woman as a victim in a patriarchal, patrilineal and father-dominated Indian family. The Indian woman is, forever, dominated by and dependent upon a male member of her family-be it the father, the brother, the husband, or the son. These are the various phases of an Indian woman's life and the novelist sharply focuses upon the emotional reactions of the woman as she experiences these stages. It is not

always an attitude of compromise, there are moments of rebellion and sometimes she gathers sufficient courage to speak out a word of resistance. Anita Desai has a limited range but still she finds ample opportunities to observe minute details while portraying life in its totality. Shantha Krishnaswamy has rightly pointed out that:

Anita Desai's novels constitute together the documentation, through fiction, of radical female resistance against a patriarchal defined concept of normality. She finds the links between female duality, myth and psychosis intriguing; each heroine is seen as searching for, finding and absorbing or annihilating the double that represents the socially impermissible aspects of her femininity. (Shantha Krishnaswami, p. 237)

It is also seen that Anita Desai depicts the Indian woman as a fighter, a victim, a heroine and ultimately a winner because of her indomitable spirit and attitude of compromise. She has portrayed both kinds of women-those who are symbols of growth and change; those who are powerful means of withdrawal, regression, decay, death and destruction. A woman is a giver of life, a means of moving forward and perpetuating the human race, at the same time the cruel onslaughts of fate lead to her dependency and withdrawal. Anita Desai designs

the exploration of the disturbed psyche of the Indian woman laying emphasis on the factors of loneliness and alienation. Women are suddenly confronted with the enigma of survival. However, the women in her novels do not give up the strife so easily. They indulge in self-analysis, self-discovery and ultimately compromise with the situation to live life stoically becoming assets to the family by developing the power of sustenance. True enough some women characters prefer to remain in the world of illusion while many others endeavor to find a way out.

In *Clear Light of Day* (1980) Desai wove the history of Delhi with a middle-class Hindu family. The central character is Bim (short for Bimla) Das, a history professor, an independent woman. Bim's memories of the family past dominate her sterile existence; she feels betrayed by her unambitious sister Tara and replays her memories in the decaying family mansion in Old Delhi. Their mentally retarded brother-in-law plays old records. Tara does not understand why Bim doesn't want anything to change, when she rejects the hopeless atmosphere of the house. It seemed to her that the dullness and the boredom of her childhood, her youth, were stored here in the room under the worn dusty red rugs, in the bloated brassware, amongst the dried grasses in the swollen vases, behind the yellowed photographs in the oval frames-everything, everything that she had so hated as a child and that was still preserved here as if this were the storeroom of some dull, uninviting provincial museum.

In the Indian context, the woman who remains single is considered a socially incomplete being. Men have a perfect right to prefer solitude, but the Indian woman is not a free being in this respect. The woman who remains single, whether by choice or account of circumstances, is often assumed to be a frustrated or unfulfilled creature. In *Clear Light of Day*, Anita Desai projects this typical reaction, when Dr. Biswas says to Bim with a deep sigh,

Now I understand why you do not wish to marry. You have dedicated your life to others - to your sick brother and your aged aunt and your little brother. You have sacrificed your own life for them. We are further told, that Bim's mouth falls open in astonishment at being "so

misunderstood, so totally misread".
(CL, p.97)

Regarded as an abnormal creature, the single woman's eccentricities are more readily pounced upon. Tara covertly watches Bim talking to herself and takes note of her excessive meanness in scraping leftovers from meals into tiny saucers. She sees these as significant and even if she doesn't say so directly-as somehow related to Bim's spinsterhood.

Bim at one point, while petting her cat, shows that she is aware of this kind of attitude: "You are thinking how old spinsters go gaga over their pets because they haven't children... You think animals take the place of babies for us love-starved spinsters". (CL; pp.6-7) Someone like Ila Das in *Fire on the Mountain*, with her ancient courtshoes, wobbly top-knot, ragged petticoat and moth-eaten shoulder bag, would be readily labeled a "typical dried up spinster." The tourists think of her as "the crazy woman" (FM, p.197). As she hobbles along, people invariably knock into her, shove her aside, burst into guffaws and make jeering remarks. Even critics tend to view her in this light of the "typical spinster- like the other spinsters of Carignano, Ila Das has her own whims and idiosyncrasies" Now all had left Ila Das, ... she had become a dry, shriveled, shrieking old woman. (Sunwani, V.K, pp.87-88) Ila Das's qualifications are of the genteel sort that are not put on paper and rubber-stamped. Her background has not equipped her to manage alone in a world of harsh realities. Anita Desai shows how the single woman in India who lacks financial security becomes a victim of the social system.

Mira-masi in *Clear Light of Day*, is not technically a single woman. However, being widowed at a virginal fifteen, her plight is similar to that of the woman who is alone and without a husband in India. It seems logical, therefore, to deal with her here. Mira-masi's situation, wherein she is made to suffer for her solitariness, is a fairly typical one. She experiences a loss of status simultaneously with the loss of her husband. Her horoscope is blamed for her husband's death by his family and she is made to pay for her guilt by scrubbing, washing and cooking until she ages young, growing greyer, shabbier, seedier. It is ironically stated, that her unattractive appearance at least saves her from sexual assault by her brother-in-law. The very mention of this fact, however, is a reminder of such exploitation of

widowed women in India. The magazine 'Social Welfare' bears an article by Lop Amudra bringing out this point. Mira-masi's brothers-in-law make her the butt of their ridicule. Finally, when they tire of her they turn her out. She's nothing more than a "cracked-pot, torn rag, picked bone" (CL, p.108). Lop Amudra's article shows how Indian widows merit only an inferior status and are expected to practice lives of renunciation (Lop Amudra, p.15).

This is portrayed by Anita Desai in the case of Mira-masi. When the children wonder why she always wears white, their mother explains, smoothing down her own rich silks, that white is the widow's colour. Mira-masi herself admits that she has given away her wedding finery to her sisters-in-law to augment their dowries. The one sari she has been allowed to retain because it is white has a stripe of crimson and gold. This makes it "impossible for her to wear: taboo" (CL, p.108). Anita Desai uses Mira-masi to depict how an Indian woman is victimized, exploited and humiliated on account of being alone—a woman minus a husband. What makes such victimization possible? Primarily, the economic factor. Most widows are far from being self-dependent and are therefore considered a burden both by parents and in-laws. Mira-masi, for instance, is turned out by her in-laws when they suspect her of being a parasite. It is the lack of financial independence which makes such women victims of their solitary status. In *Bim*, Anita Desai depicts an aspect of Indian womanhood which has been emerging in recent years. She is the kind of new Indian woman who has begun to think anew about traditionally accepted norms regarding a woman's life and behavior (Sharma R. S., 138).

Even at a very young age she questions, for instance, why marriage should be the only vocation for a woman, the only means of expressing herself. When Tara asks what else there can be, she replies, "Can't you think? I can think of hundreds of things to do instead." (CL, p.140) She wonders why the Mishra girls are in such a hurry to get married instead of going to college. "... They're not educated yet," she exclaims. *Bim* refuses to accept the common Indian notion that education and career are not serious pursuits for women, and, if undertaken, are more in the nature of stop-gap arrangements. Her attitude to the course of study she undertakes and later to her career, is one of

commitment. She does not use them as compensations for marriage. She is one of those genuine existents with a profound and permanent interest in their work and projects (Parshley, H. M.). It is partly because she has a firm belief in herself and her work, that she can function as an independent existent, associating with men on a level of equality. Simone de Beauvoir makes the point, that society requires the "true woman" as it calls her, to make herself object, to be the other (Simone de Beauvoir, 291).

This is something *Bim* refuses to do. She refuses to play the conventional role of a sex-object and a submissive woman. Sitting in the Mishra garden, watching *Bim* talk to the men, Tara has to admit that *Bim* certainly cannot be said to flirt. As *Bim* slaps hard at a mosquito in an "unladylike" fashion, telling Manu not to bother with the flit gun, Tara reflects that this is characteristic of *Bim*—she never bothers to consciously present herself in an attractive light to the opposite sex. *Bim* is someone who will never belie her own intelligence and blind herself to the shortcomings of someone like Dr. Biswas, or even someone like Bakul and marry in order to escape from a situation or even from a fear of remaining single. What enables *Bim* to live as a single woman in India, while still retaining qualities of a genuine existent (which is something Mira-masi and Ila Das cannot manage to do), is again largely the economic factor. She works and earns enough to support herself as she reflects at one point, a fact which would boost any woman's self-confidence.

It is through gainful employment that woman has traversed most of the distance that separated her from the male; and nothing else can guarantee her liberty in practice...when she is productive, active, she regains her transcendences; in her projects she concretely affirms her status as subject; (Simone de Beauvoir, p. 689)

Through the representations of single women, the reader is made conscious of how far social attitudes fetter such women. The attempt of someone like *Bim* to break through to broader perspectives is also taken in. However, one must take into account the fact, that while *Bim* does represent in many ways the new Indian woman, such a woman is still part of a very small minority and more likely,

perhaps to be found among the upper classes. A positive feature in Anita Desai, is that she never depicts a situation or character as merely black or white. Anita Desai herself says that she hopes through her writing to make "some significant statement on life-not necessarily a watertight, hard and fast set of rules but preferably an ambiguous, elastic, shifting and kinetic one..." (James Vinson, p. 348)

While Bim stays single and remains at home by choice, there are hints of the tinge of regret she experiences as she recalls her dreams of wider vistas. At the beginning of the book she speaks of the desirability of "going away-into the world-something wider, freer, -brighter." (CL, p.4) Anita Desai also shows how the Indian social set-up exerts an influence on Bim's choice. Bim has always been the only one to take up various responsibilities. If she had been a western woman, for instance, she may perhaps have put her aunt and brother into suitable Homes and then moved out to make her own life. While Bim doesn't "sacrifice" her life for her brother and aunt in the sense Dr. Biswas understands it, that is, by reluctantly renouncing marriage, the "caring" element does come in. The closeness of family ties does count with her, a fact which her western counterpart may be less affected by. This is what makes for Bim's Indianness and what rounds out Anita Desai's portrayal of Indian womanhood get chained in age old notions and customs.

Conclusion

In her fictions centered on women protagonists, Anita Desai has deftly sensitized women's predicament and thereby her falling prey to the old norms and customs associated with them merely being women. They have to seek their lot, happy future only in the family ties, most of all through the marriage bond imposed by social standards, norms and customs. Even, she is not free

to choose her partner. Ultimately, in progression of her marriage life she becomes victim of lust and power. Her human existence is reduced to an object. In this sense Anita Desai has given vent to the female agony. Her revolutionary approach is evident in her rebellious characters. It is not always an attitude of compromise, there are moments of rebellion and sometimes she gathers sufficient courage to speak out a word of resistance.

Works Cited

- Lynch, C. CNI White Paper on Networked Information Discovery and Retrieval.
- Anita Desai, *Clear Light of Day* (New Delhi Bombay Calcutta Madras Bangalore Hyderabad: Allied Publishers Private Limited, 1980. (Reference cited as CL).
- Anita Desai, *Fire on the Mountain*, Penguin Books, 1982, (abbreviated as FM.)
- James Vinson, ed., *Contemporary Novelists* (London: St. James Press, 1972),
- Krishnaswamy Shantha, *the Women in Indian Fiction in English*, Ashish Publishing House, New Delhi, 1984.
- Sunwani, V.K. (1979). Carignano - A quiet Place. *Journal of Literary Studies*, 2(2).
- Lop Amudra, "The Plight of Widows: Hiatus between Law and Social Acceptance", *Social Welfare: focus on Women* Vol. 29 No. 11-12 (February-March 1983)
- Sharma, R.S. *Anita Desai*, (New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1981),
- Parshley, H.M. *Preface to the Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir (Penguin Books, 1977),
- Iyengar, K. R. (1985). *Srinivasa Indian Writing in English*, New Delhi: Sterling publishers Pvt. Ltd.
- Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (Penguin books, 1977)