

Development of Rebellious Female Psyche in the Select Novels of Anita Desai and Arundhati Roy : A Comparative Analysis

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Abstract. Anita Desai and Arundhati Roy are the two most celebrated feminist novelists, whose personality and vision have been shaped and designed by the traditional Indian society. Both the novelists have quite poignantly depicted the development of the rebellious female psyche under the influence of oppressive patriarchy. This is an age of globalisation where individuals try to make their self-identity reveal to the whole world. Freedom is the demand of every human being. Now, women are also well aware of their hidden potential and education has provided them enough inner enthusiasm and confidence to break the boundaries of dos and don'ts bravely. They are trying their level best to regain their lost identity by self-assertion. The present research paper aims at analysing the depiction of the development of rebellious female psyche in the select novels of Anita Desai and Arundhati Roy comparatively. This analysis attempts at finding out all those instances which made Desai and Roy create female protagonists like Maya, Monisha, Amla, Tara, Bimla, Mira Masi, Nanda Kaul, Raka, Ammu, Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, Rahel et al.

Keywords : Patriarchy; oppression; self-assertion; globalisation; self-identity.

Anita Desai and Arundhati Roy are the two most celebrated feminist novelists, whose personality and vision have been shaped and designed by the traditional Indian society. They both are the novelists who have raised their voices for the sake of women. Anita Desai is chiefly a feminist who speaks for the neglected womankind in familial and social set-ups whereas Arundhati Roy has a spirit of social revolutionary. She speaks not only for women but for children, untouchables and even the exploited nature as obvious from her magnum opus *The God of Small Things*. She is a feminist who turned social activist as well. Anita Desai is basically a writer who has written many novels depicting the mental, physical and emotional traumas of Indian women in hostile circumstances, chiefly at their homes by their own people. Roy does not spare even corrupt policemen and politicians from her whip of questions. Both Desai and Roy are the novelists who have quite poignantly depicted the development of the rebellious female psyche under the hellish umbrella

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of the oppressive patriarchy. This is an age of globalisation, where individuals try to make their self-identity reveal to the whole world. Freedom is the demand of every individual. Now, women are also well aware of their hidden potential. Education has provided wings to their thoughts and has filled them with much inner enthusiasm and confidence to break the boundaries of dos and don'ts bravely. Now, they are trying their level best to regain their lost identity by self-assertion.

Discrimination is the mother of all types of rebellion. In the Indian society women are the worst sufferers of dual behaviour. They are the victims of injustice everywhere, at home and outside the homes. The society provides respect to them when they are the daughters, sisters, daughter-in-laws, wives or mothers, that is, when they are associated with men. The moment, they start giving voice to their individual identity, many start suppressing their zeal and enthusiasm. The society has got habituated to see women in respect of men. No doubt, there are exceptions, but exceptions are not rule. Men are free to do anything, but when women want to live their lives as per their own will, the whole society starts frowning at their audacity.

Leaving few exceptions, men cannot tolerate women excelling and outshining them. They want women to be their subsidiaries. The moment, they start feeling that the women associated with them are proceeding forward, and they will be left behind them, they start making conspiracies to cow them down. Anita Desai and Arundhati Roy have shown their women characters as the victims of double standard by the people at home and outside both.

If one reads the novels of Desai and Roy, one finds the development of rebellious female psyche. The female protagonists like Maya, Monisha, Amla, Tara, Bimla, Mira Masi, Nanda Kaul, Ila Das, Raka, Ammu, Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, Rahel et al., all have been the victims of patriarchal double dealings and got rebellious slowly and gradually with the passage of time. They all have suffered at the altar of marital obligations due to incompatible or treacherous life-partners. If a woman gets married, she suffers like Maya, Nanda Kaul, Mira Masi, Monisha, Mammachi and Ammu. If a woman remains unmarried she suffers like Monisha, Bimla, Ila Das and Baby Kochamma. If a woman turns widow, she is tortured by her in-laws as Desai has shown poignantly in the case of Mira Masi. If a high caste divorcee woman happens to be indulged in a love affair with an unmarried but an untouchable man, she

is tortured like Ammu. This shows that the lives of Indian women are the stories of sorrows and sufferings.

Roy has depicted the saga of oppression meted out to Ammu quite heart-touchingly in *The God of Small Things*. Ammu had to rebel against her family in order to marry Baba, the man whom she loved very much, but she is cheated by him. Baba tried to send her to his Boss Mr. Hollick for satisfying the latter's carnal desire in order to get promotion in his job. This betrayal by Baba forced Ammu to leave her husband and return to her maternal home quite unwelcomed along with her two twins Estha and Rahel. The rejection of an infidel husband like Baba, whom Ammu had loved once and had dared to marry going against her family members, was indeed a very bold step taken by a lady with two children. However, Arundhati Roy has shown Ammu as a fearless lady who is not ready to accept a man who wanted to stain her piousness as a woman. There are many cases in our society where women having state similar to her commit suicide. Ammu however dares to return to her maternal home with her two kids Estha and Rahel. Arundhati Roy has projected another instance of double dealings here.

When Ammu divorced her husband, she was humiliated at her parental home, but when Chacko, her brother was divorced by his wife Margaret, nobody accuses him for his state. Mammachi, instead, justified even his lecherous advances towards the woman workers at their factory Paradise Pickles. At her home all were hostile towards Ammu and her little kids. She develops soft corner in her heart for an untouchable, a paravan Velutha, who showered his love over her children all the time. Ammu and Velutha loved and cared for each other which was not accepted by the society. Velutha was an untouchable, therefore, his loving a high caste divorcee lady with two children is despised by everyone. On the other hand, Chacko is a high caste man, left by her wife but his sexual advances towards the helpless factory woman workers is favoured and is considered to be "Man's Needs" However, the same Mammachi is not ready to accept Ammu's love relationship with Velutha. This proves the dual norms of the society :

She was aware of his libertine relationships with the women in the factory, but had ceased to be hurt by them. When Baby Kochamma brought up the subject, Mammachi became tense and tight lipped. "He can't help having

a Man's Needs", she said grimly. (*The God of Small Things*, 168)

The young female protagonist of Desai's first novel *Cry, the Peacock* Maya turns neurotic as she was married to an insensitive, pragmatic and stoic middle aged advocate Gautama, who was quite incapable to fulfil her emotional and physical demands to be loved and cared by her husband. The prediction made by an albino astrologer in her childhood proves to be true when Maya kills Gautama by pushing him off the parapet in a fit of irritation. After this mishap she herself commits suicide. The rebellious thoughts of Maya can be summarised with her expressions when she says :

Is it madness? Am I gone insane? Father!
Brother! Husband! Who is my saviour?
I am in need of one. I am dying, and I am
in love with living. I am in love, and I am
dying. God, let me sleep, forget, rest.
But no, I'll never sleep again. There is
no rest any more- only death and waiting.
(*Cry, the Peacock*, 84)

These expressions reveal Maya's heart-broken state at her in-laws home which may be analysed as the outcome of the suffocated state of a woman in a patriarchal Indian society as well. The emotional starvation of Maya, due to the incompatibility with her spouse, has been poignantly portrayed by Anita Desai. For doing so she uses the stream-of-consciousness technique, symbols, imagery, changes in the atmospheric conditions. The fearsome heat inside Maya's heart and mind and outside in the surrounding have been correlated with one another :

The hair on my neck was glued to the
skin with perspiration. No breeze lifted
the smallest strand, though I could hear
the fan, an old one, ticking, ticking,
metallically. Machinery...On the walls the
lizards were still. They might well have
been dead, with the open eyes of those
who have sighted the ultimate. (151)

Such a psycho-analytic depiction throws light on the inactive existence of women in an Indian family that fills their lives with monotony. One finds Maya questioning the astrologer's prophecy. She feels, if one of the partners is to die as is the prophecy, then why not Gautama should

die. When Gautama happened to come in between her (Maya) and the moon, she, in a fit of fury, pushes Gautama down the roof and the latter died instantly. Later on, Maya herself commits suicide. Whatever flabbergasting situations are in an unmatched married life, has been psychologically portrayed by Anita Desai has in almost all her novels.

In *Voices in the City* the novelist has shown the corrosive impact of city life on an Indian family. In this novel, the restless and disillusioned states of life of a brother Nirode and his two sisters Monisha and Amla have been delineated amidst the metropolitan impacts of Calcutta (Now Kolkata), the city of Kali, goddess of death. Even in such a city, where the conditions of women are considered to be a little bit more empowered than other places, married Monisha and unmarried Amla, both suffer in their own ways, according to their own destinies. Monisha commits suicide as she was unable to adjust with the family members of Jiban, whereas Amla is heart-broken when her love is rejected by an already married man Dharma. Dharma poses to love Amla but was not ready to leave his wife that was a big blow for the life of Amla. Desai describes the happiest state of Amla when she used to be in the company of Dharma:

In the hours she spent there, she became another Amla, a flowering Amla, translucent with joy and overflowing with a sense of love and reward. Here she could talk all day long. (*Voices in the City*, 207)

This always happens in our society, where married men are found to have a clandestine extra-marital relationship with an unmarried lady. On the one hand, they speak very high of their pious love, and on the other hand, try to be just to their married life as well. In both the cases these are woman who suffer, the wives are cheated and the beloveds are ruined. That is why, now-a-days, radical feminists favour the rejection of the institution of marriage and love both. A feminist writer Neeru Tandon has observed in *Various Feminist Theories* :

The feminists also attacked love as an institution that promotes vulnerability, dependence, possessiveness, susceptibility to pain, and prevents the full development of woman's human potential. (Tandon, 45)

In *Clear Light of Day* Tara gets married and goes abroad but her elder sister Bim, who was a professor in a college, rejects the institution of love and marriage both, and decided to look after the house and her mentally retarded brother Baba. She has witnessed the tortures which Mira Masi had due to her widowhood. Mira Masi was the victim of child marriage and her husband had died when she was only of fifteen years. She was sexually exploited at her in-laws' house :

Aunt Mira ...had been widowed at the age of fifteen and had loved with her husband's family ever since as maid of all work, growing shabbier and skinnier and seedier with the years....Aunt Mira had been frequently ill had aged young was growing dotty and bald. Useless, but another household might find some use for her, as the worn article, thrown away by one, is picked up and employed by another. (*Clear Light of Day*, 165)

In our society marriage is considered to be a gamble for a woman's life. If she gets a supporting husband, her life becomes heaven like; if she gets an insensitive and treacherous husband, her life becomes hellish. Nanda Kaul in *Fire on the Mountain* has been shown as a lady, who suffers due to infidelity of her Vice-Chancellor husband indulged in a clandestine relationship with a Mathematics teacher Ms. David. In *Where Shall We Go This Summer*, Sita, a mother of four children experiences an aching void in her life and suffers from loneliness, boredom and madness of lady. Her reluctance to give birth to her fifth child is a type of protest and her visit to Manori, an island of miracles, for peace, is a sort of escapism, which, later on, was considered by her wrong. She, finally, realises, "she had escaped from duties and responsibilities, from order and routine, from life and the city, to the unlivable island..." (*Where Shall We Go This Summer*, 128). She gets the answer from the life itself, i.e., "life must be continued, and all its business" (127). In *Fasting, Feasting* Aruna has been married to a very handsome person and spends her life happily in trivial enjoyments, whereas Uma is a never-married daughter of a middle class family who is tortured by her parents throughout her life. She is treated by them like a servant and caretaker. Mamaandpapa maltreat her very much and never consider her as a woman with wants and desires. While she was a school going girl her mother says, "We are not sending you back to school, Uma, you are staying at home to help with Arun".

(*Fasting, Feasting*, 18). Here the exploitation of Anamika has been described by Desai in it very heart-touchingly:

Anamika had been beaten, Anamika was beaten regularly by her mother-in-law while her husband stood by and approved- or at least, did not object. ...She had had a miscarriage at home, it was said, after a beating. (70-71)

The pain and sorrows given by one's own people are the worst sufferings on this very Earth. Women have been maltreated in all the ages by own people. This long-lasting saga of suffering and double dealing is the main reason behind the slow and steady growth and development of the rebellious female psyche. Desai and Roy have quite realistically sketched the agony of women in their novels which takes the form of protest. The decisions to remain unmarried throughout life, to marry the partner of one's own choice, to love or marry whosoever is fit for her, to commit suicide, to develop extra-marital affairs, to divorce, to deny giving birth to children, to be social activist are the rebellion of women towards the orthodox patriarchal norms. Desai have Roy both have portrayed many such women characters, who are rebellious in their thoughts and actions both.

The excessive suppression of anything or any individual takes the form of volcano, which ultimately blasts and the magma of change is erupted with much force. Anita Desai has projected the feminist protest delicately while Roy is very blunt in calling a spade a spade. She is not hesitant like Desai and writes anything openly and frankly. They both may differ in the style of writing but they both want change in the status of women. They want that women should not be treated as others in the society. Education is the milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges of lives bravely and cleverly. They get ready to confront their traditional role and start changing their life. They start taking important decisions for their lives, family and society. They develop the erudition of distinguishing between right and wrong, which ultimately takes them to the pinnacle of success and new achievements. Rebellion is necessary for development of character and woman novelists like Desai and Roy have yearned for the liberation of womanhood from the clutch of patriarchy by creating the rebellious women characters in their novels.

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