

Quest for Space - A Feministic Study of Anita Desai's 'Fire on The Mountain Clear Light of The Day And Fasting, Feasting'

B. Germendal Chitra

Assistant Professor

Department of English, G.T.N Arts College
Dindigul-624005

Abstract

Novels are meant for exhibiting the values of life and to show case the societal issues. This paper focuses on the women's experiences, in the three novels of Anita Desai's Fire on the Mountain, Clear Light of Day and Fasting, Feasting. Her fiction focuses on women experiences in the patriarchal society. Female protagonists are often placed in an antagonistic position in relation to traditional ideology, which are strongly upheld by men and some older generations of women in Indian society as normative behaviour. Out of such traditional ideological systems, Anita Desai's women are given voices and spaces to articulate their experiences. Desai has created female characters that rebel against those unjustifiable ideologies which demand women to become self -sacrificial victims in patriarchal society, forgoing their individualities.

Keywords: traditional ideology, generation, rebel, individualities.

Introduction

This paper deals with the women's suffering and their struggle for emancipation and quest for the autonomy in patriarchal society in the novels of Anita Desai. The new perspectives opened up by the feminist discourses have led to analysis the literary texts which had been under the patriarchal control. Women are dislocated and displaced in the society and various attempts have been made by them to escape from the undesirable experiences they mostly encounter in the domestic sphere.

Quest for Identity

The women are confined to some social space because of a perceived threat from men like what Ila Das has experienced in Fire on the mountain. This echoes what Mossey has argued that, it's not just that the special is socially constructed. It illustrates that space is

constructed by social relations, that is to say, the way in which social groups operate and interact in everyday relations. Men in these patriarchal societies play the role so - called protector of the family and their domination extends to the public sphere as well, whereas the Women's role is to domestic work. It is also mandatory that they should restricted look after the family members and satisfies their needs. Thus, the spatial boundaries between the public and private spheres are constructed by social factors. The different spheres also show power relations between the two sexes and genders. Most of Desai's characters are powerless not only in the public sphere but also the domestic sphere where their existence is at the mercy of the parents or the husbands. As claimed by Suma Chitnis,

“Devotion to the husband is cultivated among girls of all religious particularly idealized and firmly institutionalized in the Hindu concept of pativarata. The term pativarata connotes a wife who has accepted service and devotion to the husband, and his family as her ultimate religion and duty”

Chitnis also observes that even educated women follow the ritual of commemorating Savitri who devotes entire life to her husband. Thus, believing in traditional values by women has also promoted their subjection in the community.

Gender Discrimination:

The gender inequalities between the two sexes; they question and condemns male supremacy and suggest an overhaul of the patriarchal system. And yet, as Fawzia Afzal Khan observes, most of Desai's female characters choose the mythic mode, that signifies a retreat, an escape from the pressures and responsibilities of everyday existence over the realist mode that concerns itself with portraying everyday “real” life problems of people about survival and achieving a balance between individual desire and communal responsibility. They should redefine the roles they have been playing. Education, employment, and economic self-reliance have not so far ensured the space they have been demanding. This harsh reality should not dampen their struggle. Their pursuit should continue and gradually their dream for space would set fulfilled. Their persistent would enable the future generation to accomplish their aspiration for space.

Conclusion:

Women tried to expose the conflicts that arise when they try to struggle for independence and self-determination. In order to achieve equality and resolve tension between the genders, the traditional ideological systems that deprive women of their rights should be reviewed. The society's attitudes towards women that privilege their existence as wife, mother and daughter need to be changed. Women should have the right determine their own lives. They should have opportunities to achieve independent social and economic existence both in the public and private domains if equality is to be achieved in society.

References

Desai, Anita. *Fire on the Mountain*. London: Vintage, 1999

---. *Clear Light of Day*. London: Vintage, 2001.

---. *Fasting, Feasting*. London; Vintage, 2000.

Chitnis Suma (2004), 'Feminism: Indian Ethos and Indian Convictions in Chaudhuri, Maitrayee (ed), *Feminism in India: Issues in Contemporary Indian Feminism*, New Delhi, Kali for Women.

Dekoven Marianne (1999), 'Modernism and Gender', in Michael Levenson (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.