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**Retracing the Narrative of
Subalternity: Historical
Evolutions and New
Applications.
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27th and 28th of July 2021



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E-Seminar

Retracing the Narrative of Subalternity: Historical Evolutions and New Applications

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Self- determination and Women's experience in Anita Desai's Novels

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Abstract

Anita Desai's novels, is not a sociological phenomenon, rather it is psychic. She sets herself to voice the mute miseries and helplessness of millions of married women. These women are tormented by existentialist problems and predicaments. Desai reveals a rare imaginative awareness of various deeper forces at work and finds a profound understanding of women sensibility. In this way she unravels the subconscious of her highly sensitive protagonists. She writes about helplessness, agony, anger, struggle and surrender.

Self- determination and Women's experience in Anita Desai's Novels

Introduction

The subaltern characters in Indian novels have been waiting for rationale treatment which can be justified. The conclusion of the novels has been waiting passionately for its end with optimistic note. The inhumane treatment given to subaltern characters and their tragic end has been used as readymade recipe. It definitely guarantees literary values but at the cost of social values. It has created a mysterious atmosphere around subaltern literature in India. Most of the writers contributing to subaltern literature in India are not subalterns. This makes difference in sense and sensibilities. Meaning – The word ‘Subaltern’ denotes a person holding a subordinate or an inferior position. ‘Subaltern Studies’ gained momentum in the last part of the 20th century. Anita Desai’s characters are self-conscious of the reality around them, they carry with them a sense of loneliness, alienation and pessimism.

Self- determination and women Experience

In this study the focus is the interaction of women’s experiences, that is the state of their oppression, suppression and self-determination, with their spatial existence in the three novels written by Anita Desai, namely, *Fire on the Mountain*(1977), *Clear Light of Day* (1980) and *Fasting, Feasting* (1999). In many of her novels, Desai focuses on her women Characters’ Experience in the patriarchal society. Anita Desai’s fifth novel *Fire on the Mountain* describes Nanda Kaul’s motherly feelings of humiliation and desolation for life time alienation. This novel is four dimensional as it is about time as a destroyer, as a preserver and about what a bondage of time does to people.

Her female protagonists are often placed in an antagonistic position in relation to traditional ideologies, which are strong upheld by men and some older generations of women,

who see the subservience and passivity of women in Indian society as normative behavior. Out of such traditional ideological systems, Anita Desai has made her women characters speak by giving them voices and spaces in her novels to articulate their experiences. Does Anita Desai depict the woman characters in the novel, *Fire on the Mountain*, as meek, submissive creatures gently taking care of all the household responsibilities? Simply speaking, Angles in the household responsibilities. Offering protection to the children by taking good care of their needs and being considerate and gently to everyone in the household. The term Angles in the house also reminds me one of the most celebrated feminist writers work that is Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, professions for women.

Anita Desai has wonderfully depicted the lives of the women characters and how they strive for their autonomous existence in patriarchal society. Though the use of flash back techniques that depict the memories of the female characters in the novel, we see both Bim's and Tara's past experiences, and the narrative also co-ordinates these female Characters are able to pass „out of the tunnel“ and see the „*The Clear Light of Day*“ at the end. Daughters in *Fasting, Feasting*: The Traditional nuclear family, consisting of a closely-Knit unit of parents and Children and dominated by a strong father, has protected and perpetuated patriarchy. This quotation can to some extent correspond to Uma's family narrated in *Fasting, Feasting*. Papa is the dominant figure and the sustainer of patriarchy in the household. The woman in the household, for example, Mama does everything to fulfill all his desires, and acts as his staunch supporter. He is an authoritative figure who does not wish to see his position Challenged in public or at home.

Through the novel, Mama, papa is never written as separate units: father and mother speak as one, and are united in their support of absolute patriarchal authority. On the other hand,

the Idea of the family as traditional and consisting of a closely-Knit unit of parents and children cannot really be applied to Uma's family. The parents are cold and uncaring, and often callous in their treatment of the Children. In turn, as adults, the children distance themselves from their parents and become self-centered and uninterested themselves from their parents and become self-centered and uninterested in each other.

In the novel, Desai Vividly comments on the experiences of children in the family under the rule of tyrannical parents. Focusing on Anita Desai's novels, *Fire on the Mountain*, *Clear Light of Day* and *Fasting. Feasting*, the interlocking themes that emerge are women's suffering and women's struggle for emancipation and autonomy in patriarchal society and culture. The reading perspectives opened up by feminist discourses enabled me to discern the next of the patriarchal control and its extraction of women's subservience.

Desai's work does not rehearse traditional portrayals of women pleased to fulfill the rolls expected of them by patriarchy both in the household and the public domain. Though the use of third person narration and the stream of consciousness that portray the subconscious feeling of her female characters, we see their stat of oppression, suppression and self -determination.

In the traditional Indian Community in all the three novels examined, we see 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. By analyzing their experiences in the domestic sphere and the public sphere, I have tried to argue that Desai's women are subjected to varying degree of oppression and suppression. By reading the outcome of these woman characters struggle for independence,

I have also argued that most of them have experienced various degree of self-determination but they are also haunted by the past memories and are isolated from the community. Thus most of them are not able to achieve full liberation through their struggle against the dominant males. (Anita Desai)

Women have always been strong on the inner side but have been either unable or unwilling to externalize this innate strength. Hence Anita Desai wants to probe the innermost depths of the human psyche.

Conclusion

Anita Desai claims this right for women which is opposed to the conventional assumption that women should be protected and sheltered. The routine of women's lives, the greater number of poorly rewarding social roles, the unique position of the woman as the bearer, producer, feeder and nurtures of children often without choices to the contrary, exposes them to several stress related effects.

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