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Voicing The Internal Trauma of Female Folk in Anita Desai's "Fire On The Mountain"

ABSTRACT

Anita Desai has done well in exploring different aspects of female psyche which also includes man-woman relationships. Women writers of all ages have a natural preference for writing about women characters. Desai has written by and large about women characters and her novels move round women characters. Anita Desai's novels are a probe into the dark interiors of the female psyche and a description of the various forms of loneliness. Her novels reveals inner realities and psychic reverberation of her characters.

Keywords: Female, Carignano, Nanda Kaul, Raka, Society, Novel, Character, Queen, Family etc.

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Desai possesses high sense of sensitivity which compels her to disclose the psychological patches her characters suffer due to the humiliating treatment they are subjected in one or the other way.

Desai's women crave for personal space. When they fail to achieve this they attempt to take refuge in the lap of nature to slur over the untold miseries they had been subjected to in their post-marital life. They long to have a kind of joy and relief they never could have due to being overoccupied in the marital duties and responsibilities. Consequently, they wish to discharge themselves from all of them and live a secluded life in the company of nature.

Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* is the best illustration of this. Divided into three parts namely 'Nana Kaul at Carignano', 'Raka Comes to Carignano' and 'Ila Das leaves Carignano', the novel deals with the life of Nanda Kaul, wife of Vice-Chancellor and "mother of several children in the house always busy" in her marital duties as a housewife. Nanda fails to derive any kind of pleasure from her marital relationship. After her husband's death, she takes refuge to Carignano, in Kasauli where she tries to occupy herself truly with nature. But unfortunately, her search for personal space proves futile due to her great granddaughter's unexpected arrival there.

Nanda Kaul suffers psychologically in the four walls of her house overloaded with the household duties. Desai painfully asserts, "The house, the full house, of that period of her life was when she was the Vice-Chancellor's wife and at the hub of a small but intense and busy world, had not pleased her. Its crowding had stifled her"(p.31).

Quite unhappy and unsatisfied with the discordant marital bond, she suffers from the disorder called *nimiety*. After her husband's death, she moves to Carignano where she gets recovered from this disorder. She could enjoy the moments of solitude for which her heart craves since a long. She had been happy "to leave it all behind, in the plains, like a great, heavy, difficult book that she had read through and was not required to read again"(p.32).

Nanda could not bear the thought of interruption in her solitude as she could get it after a long time. That's why she is seen disturbed internally when she hears the news of her great granddaughter's upcoming arrival at Carignano.

One can see the abnormalities in her behavior. Actually all of a sudden, she is unable to cope up with the loss of solitude. She does not wish to shoulder any kind of responsibility or duty again. To quote, "Sighing, she went off to bed, dragging one foot uncharacteristically. Discharge me, she groaned. I've discharged all my duties. Discharge"(p. 32).

She is truly fed up. She is unable to reconcile with the thought of her great granddaughter, Raka who is coming to her to take rest after being ill for longer time. She fails to decide how she would take care of Raka. Her arrival is painful to her. Desai asseverates:

She could not summon Raka out of the common blur. She was no more than a particularly dark an irksome spot on the hazy landscape- a mosquito, a cricket, or a grain of sand in the eye. Hanging her head miserably, it seemed too much to her that she should now have to meet Raka, discover her as an individual and, worse, as a relation, a dependent. She would have to urge her to eat eggs and spinach, caution her against lifting stones in the garden under which scorpions might lie asleep, see her to be at night and lie in the next room, wondering if the child slept, straining to catch a sound from the bedroom, their opposing thoughts colliding in the dark like jittery bats in flight.(p.38).

Desai beautifully voices the inner trauma of Nanda Kaul who is at once paused due to unexpected break in her solitary existence at Carignano.

Nanda Kaul becomes a victim of patriarchal society where a woman surrenders and does not dare to cross the verge of the house. Her mismatched, loveless marriage brings untold agonies to her. Desai sadly asserts, "Nor had her husband loved and cherished her and kept her like



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a queen-he had only done enough to keep her quiet while he carried on a lifelong affair with Miss David, the mathematics mistress, whom he had not married because she was a Christian but whom he had loved, all his life loved" (p.158).

Besides this, her afflictions are aggravated by the indifferent nature of her children whom she could neither understand.

Nanda suffers alienation and fragmentation of identity due to her insensible and self-centered husband. For him, she becomes a show-piece to be displayed proudly to the society to which he belongs to. He wishes not to diminish his stature in any ways. That's why in the eyes of his friends and people of his acquaintance, they are considered as good couple.

But the reality is much different. Her husband never loves her. She never complains and discloses this to anybody. We find Nanda a woman of different stuff. She never keeps grudges against her husband. Instead, she keeps on gratifying her husband's desires and producing children.

There is an unusual grace in her tolerance, ungrudging nature that invite too much reverence and sympathy from the readers. Though she is referred to as the Queen of her territory, she never can enjoy any sense of belonging in that territory of her husband which remains alien to her throughout her life. She never can reign the territory like a queen.

Another important character who becomes prey to the male-centered society is Nanda's friend Ila. In the third section of the novel, we meet Ila who comes to Carignano to meet Nanda Kaul. Ila's life was very different when her father was alive. She with her sister and mother undergoes utmost agonies after the death of her father when her drunkard brothers leave them homeless and penniless.

If we look into the pages of her life, we find her bold, courageous and rebellious. She is not like her friend Nanda. Destiny doesn't favour her. Rather she faces varied critical situations more boldly and retains faith in herself. Adversity fails to break her. She is not at all submissive to the so called norms and customs of the society that are humiliating and discriminating. Her defiant nature

brings her tragic end. Actually, she opposes the seven year old girl's marriage with the widower. Consequently, she is raped and murdered by Preet Singh, the father of the girl. The male dominated society cannot bear the interference of a woman as far as established norms are concerned. She tries her best to protect herself but all her efforts turn futile and she loses her life.

Desai unveils the darkest horrible side of male-dominated society where women at large have to suffer a lot and have to bear with all the blames. Many a time, she surrenders, remains submissive, sometimes she rebels and consequently meets with death. On the one hand, Anita Desai dares to raise her voice against those black norms of society that make female existence quite hellish.

On the other hand she expresses a kind of hope for the enlightened bright world for women. Ila's voice against child marriage, Raka's setting fire on the mountain and Nanda's maturity of coping with her husband's extra-marital affair, all raise woman to the pinnacle of courage and reverence. Her women are not ultimate failure. They leave indelible marks on the psyche of the readers.

The novel reveals the outcomes of the mismatched marriages and discordant marital relationships. Raka is the best example of this. She behaves abnormally. Her disturbed childhood is the horrible outcome of the loveless, hostile relationship between her father and mother. Her mother Tara is alone blamed for this.

But her drunkard father also is responsible for the eccentricity in her demeanor. She is unable to have a secure, loving childhood due to the indifference in her parents. She is always haunted by the feeling of being unheeded which disturbs her psychologically. Desai's women mostly suffer due to this sense of being unimportant in and out of the four walls in this suppressive society.

Exceed oppression and victimization compels one to withdraw totally from the family and society and sometimes from the self even. This withdrawal provokes the person to lose the sense of identification. Gradually the person considers oneself alien. This grave sense of alienation affects the person psychologically. Anita Desai succeeds in giving voice to this internal



trauma of her female characters who find no place to feel at home with and struggle painfully with the feeling of alienation.

Conclusion:

This paper presents the recluse, loneliness and neglect of Nanda Kaul, the chief female character who has suffered pathetically from married life. Isolation from her husband, the most disagreeable reality in her life, is intentionally curbed in the subconscious mind. Mr. Kaul loved a

Christian lady he could not marry, and so, out of desperation, he regarded his wife as a non-entity.

The indignation and agony with which the novelist recounts the rape and killing of Miss Ila Das and the abuse by Raka's father to her mother are representative of the most outstanding insult to the pride and worth of a woman. Principal figures who are the victims of the social, economic, emotional, and psychological breakdown in this patriarchal society are *Nanda Kaul*, *Raka* and *Miss Ila Das*.

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