

## A MISANTHROPIC PERSPECTIVE IN THE NOVELS OF ANITA DESAI

V.S. Bindhu\* and R. Pranesh Kumar\*\*

---

**Abstract:** Anita Desai's sensitive portrayal of the inner life of her female characters explores the tension between the family members as a collective body and the alienated sensitive woman. The life of women who are mechanically confined to home and family leads them to a misanthropical attitude. This paper explores the reasons for hatred towards mankind and how each character in different novels of Anita Desai reacts when they happen to face miserable situations.

**Keywords:** Hatred, Misanthropic, Depression, Domination.

Indian culture gives supreme importance to the life of woman and their responsibilities in family. Indian mythology describes a married woman as life partner, ardhangani, sahadharmini, saharmini and sahayogini. After centuries, the role of married Indian women has under gone several transitions. There by the importance given to women has gradually changed and they are in a kind of trapped situation. The pattern of husband-wife relationship has become male dominance and female dependence. Traditions have made the Indian women unselfish, patient, self- denying and their pride is in their suffering. Due to this hardship, sacrifice and suffering, later a misanthropic attitude can be vividly seen in the character of Indian woman as portrayed in Anita Desai's novels. Women are capable of sacrificing their pleasures and happiness for the betterment of their family in spite of their misanthropic attitude. The character Nanda Kaul in *Fire on the Mountain*, is a Vice-Chancellor's wife and is treated like a queen in front of others and her husband Mr. Kaul "had wanted her always in silk, at the head of the long rosewood table in the dining-room, entertaining his guests"(FOM 20). Many a times, it's the disparity and dissatisfaction in her life which leads her to misanthropic attitude. Disparity in marital life happens for many reasons. Sometimes it's about the age difference between husband and wife, as in *Gautama and Maya* in Desai's novel '*Cry the Peacock*'. When a young wife's sensual desire is not satisfied by her older husband, there arise dissatisfaction and conflict which further results to more conflict in her husband's family at all levels. Facing all these obstacles the present day women are trying to create identity for themselves but when they fail to attain independence, it breeds misanthropism in them. The hatred which prevails in the mind of these women grows and further multiplies their problems. Marital discord seems to be on the rise in today's way of life. This has been highlighted by Anita Desai as a serious concern in most of her works. Faithlessness and infidelity

---

\* Assistant Professor, Dept. of English, Noorul Islam University, Kumaracoil. VIT University, Vellore

\*\* Assistant Professor (Senior), Dept. of English

cause misanthropism between Nanda Kaul and her husband Mr. Kaul in Desai's novel *Fire On the Mountain*. High level of restrictions imposed on a girl who recently parted from her parents affects her psychology and lead to frustration. The character Rakain *Fire On the Mountain* is one such victim. The misanthropic attitude in her paves way to suicidal tendency and psychological irritation. Women experience transition during various stages of their life and Desai sharply focuses on the emotional reactions of women against this transition. She is an expert in depicting the reaction of women against apathy of parents, ill-treatment by in-laws and indifference of the husband. Desai describes the Indian woman as a fighter, a sufferer, a brave woman and a winner. In Desai's writings the focus is upon women, their depression, household responsibilities, irritating habits, large family circle and unfulfilled expectations. These are also many a times the reasons for misanthropic attitude in women.

The mental disturbance accompanied by hopelessness and helplessness create disinterest towards life. Desai's women characters are depressed with feelings of frustration and rejection in their life naturally posing them as misanthropists who do not want to communicate or mingle with others. They show a sort of hatred towards others without any reason. In "*Crythe Peacock*" Maya's depression is depicted as "All order is gone out of my life. There is no plan, no peace, nothing to keep me within the pattern of familiar everyday life"(79). Another reason for misanthropic aspect is lack of time and attention given by the male characters to their wives. Spending less time together creates frustration in their life. In '*Crythe Peacock*' Gautama spends no time with his family. Maya broods over her husband as "Telling me to go to sleep while he worked at his papers, he did not give another thought to me"(CP 19) Irritating habits of people cause impatience and sometimes anger and lead to frustration and friction in relationships. In the novel '*Cry the Peacock*', Maya keeps on thinking about her childhood, lives in a world of fantasy that is far removed from reality and this irritated Gautama who is a mature man. For Gautama the death of Toto seems unimportant and he considers Maya's concern towards Toto as a mysterious one. He tells her, "To me it has always Seemed the ultimate absurdity, appropriate only in that it brings a meaningless life to a sympathizing end"(CP 14). He feels irritated, but could not sympathize with Maya. Joint family comprises of the married couple and husband's other relations. If In-laws do not provide enough support to the newly married woman, it causes frustration and difficulty to the women to adapt to the new environment in the husband's family. In the novel, '*Voices in the City*', Monisha's deprived life is due to the domination of her in-laws. Because of her inability to conceive, the repeated harsh comments by her in-laws make her to lead a miserable misanthropic life.

Everybody is curious and has expectations to know what might happen in one's future. If a satisfactory life is not achieved as per ones expectations, naturally human mind becomes disheartened. In the novel '*In Custody*' Devan's wife expects

a luxurious life, but her expectations are shattered into pieces after her marriage with Devan. Her misanthropic attitude towards her husband is vividly portrayed in this novel. The problem between Devan and Sarala is the lack of togetherness and she expects her husband to take care of her with continued responsibility. The irresponsible nature of Devan makes Sarala to face mental isolation in her life. "The thwarting of her aspirations had cut two dark furrows from the corners of her nostrils to the corners of her mouth, as deep and permanent as surgical scars. The droop of her thin, straight hair on either side of her head repeated these twin lines of disappointment" (I C 76). Anita Desai thus highlights serious issues, such as the suffering of Indian women, struggle for existence and annoyance which cause misanthropic approach in a women

Woman who are overburdened with household responsibilities sometimes harbour a misanthropic attitude towards others. They prefer solitude and do not want to mingle with others. Even a minor unplanned incident can make them more disturbed. As in Desai's novel *'Fire on the Mountain,'* the character N and a kaul wants to escape from her very busy life. She needs a peaceful life. "All she wanted was to be alone, to have Carignano to herself in this period of her life when stillness and calm were all that she wished to entertain" (FOM 18) Angerbrews when she learns that her great granddaughter is coming to stay with her because she feels that her privacy is once again going to be lost. The refusal to cooperate and the inability to adjust and adapt to situations leads to separation and isolation. In the novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer* the character Sita finds herself alienated from her husband due to lack of communication. She remains ignored by others and as a result ignores everybody and becomes a misanthropist.

Domestic Violence is not limited to physical violence alone. It is the emotional abuse and the economic deprivation of women by men which causes domestic violence and makes their relationship more worse. Desai's novel *'In Custody'* reveals the domestic violence faced by Devan's wife Sarala, when Devan was enraged by her tacit accusations. "To relieve it, he would hurl away dishes that had not been cooked to his liking, bawl uncontrollably if meals were not ready when he wanted them or the laundry not done--- he was really protesting against her disappointment." (I C 76-77)

Misanthropic attitude results in conflicts, desperation, separation and loneliness which further results in psychological violence. In the novel, *Fire on the Mountain,* Raka becomes a misanthropist because of the violent nature of her father. She visualizes her father beating her mother with a hammer. The brutal incident makes her a lover of solitude and thereby she embraces misanthropism. In the novel *Voices in the City,* the element of love, missing in Monisha's life makes her commit suicide. The feeling of hatred and boredom are aroused as the offspring of the pressure of living in a joint family. The character Sita in the novel *Where Shall We Go this*

*summer* is a middle-aged woman who always is restless and does not want to face the responsibilities of life.

Desai's novels also suggest the incapability of human beings to relate themselves with the society. Desai's preoccupation as a novelist has been with the description of characters being driven into the extremity of despair. This paves the way for woman to turn against the general current of tradition. If they were not to undergo such extreme despair in their life, they would flow with the current as it is very easy. They will have no demands to make. Desai makes her characters face such predicaments and visualizes their escalation from a normal stage to an abnormal stage. There is an effort, in the novels of Desai to represent and understand the feelings, thoughts and doubts which remain locked up in the inner recesses of isolated female heart. Desai's characters expect more consideration from their dear ones. But out of so many struggles, they arrive at the solution that too much of expectation leads to disappointment and paves way for Misanthropism.

### *References*

- Bande, Usha. *The novels of Anita Desai*. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1988. Print.
- Bhushan Vidya & D.R. Sachdeva. *Text Book of Sociology*, century Printers, 2005. Print.
- Desai, Anita. *Clear Light of the Day*, India: Random House, 2007. Print.
- Desai, Anita. *Village By the Sea*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2006. Print.
- Desai, Anita. *Fasting Feasting*, Noida; Random House, 2008. Print.
- Desai, Anita. *Fire On the Mountain*, New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1988. Print.
- Desai, Anita. *In Custody*. New Delhi, Middle sex: Penguin Books, 1971. Print.
- Desai, Anita. *Cry the Peacock*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2006. Print.
- Desai, Anita. *Where Shall We Go this Summer*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2007. Print.
- Iyengar, Srinivasa K.R. *Indian Writing in English*, Sterling Publishers, 1985. Print.