

Exploring the Inner World of the Female Characters in Anita Desai and Nirupama Borgohain: A Comparative Study

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Abstract- This paper attempts to focus on exploring the inner world of the female characters in selected works of Anita Desai and Nirupama Borgohain. It is basically a comparative study of the two writers writing in two languages. Anita Desai writes in English whereas Nirupama Borgohain writes in a regional language; Assamese. In spite of writing in two diverse languages, the two writers possess many interesting similarities and dissimilarities. Therefore the paper intends to undertake a thorough comparison of the two writers and it also attempts to examine the points of similarities and dissimilarities in the two writers taking into consideration the female characters are concerned.

Key words- explore, psychological, comparative, alienation, feminist.

I. INTRODUCTION

Anita Desai, an Indian English novelist and short story writer, happens to be a leading voice in Indian English literature. She is occasionally referred to as an 'explorer' of inner life of her female characters. She is always very conscious about unravelling the inner turmoils and tension of her female characters. She becomes therefore a recorder of the dilemma faced by an individual in the Indian urban set up. She gets interested in analysis and portrayal of human relationship. The novel is essentially a vehicle for delineating human relationships mostly baffling in nature in the sense that man's actions and volitions often take to uncertain ways under different situations. Thus Desai always adopts novel as a vehicle for exploring the inner psyche of the female characters. There are traces of 'existentialism' theories in her novels as her work gives emphasis on the alienation of man from an 'absurd' world, his consequent estrangement from the 'normal' society and his recognition of the world as negative and meaningless—presents the sensitive individual, fragmented and spiritually destroyed by the particular social conditions of life, a life complex enough to make him obsessed. All the characters in her novels like Maya, Nirode, Amla, Monisha, Sita, Sarah, Uma—suffer from a sense of isolation that is not merely physical but also psychic.

Nirupama Borgohain's writings are also feminist because she deals with the issues of women. Many of her novels are feminist as they deal with the women problem. *The novelist* Borgohain address women's issues extensively

and she also adopts certain means by which her character speaks. She believes in the idea of socialist Feminism, where women should work for the society and other women. Her novels present before us many interesting female characters and take us to their inner world.

II. ANITA DESAI AND NIRUPAMA BORGOHAIN: A COMPARISON

Both Anita Desai and Nirupama Borgohain have strong points of similarities and dissimilarities in their writings as far as the study of characters from the psychological as well as symbolical level is concerned. During the course of the study, the researcher has also tried to look at and apply the different theoretical approaches of feminism to the characters of the selected novels.

The two women writers representing the two cultures are Anita Desai at the national level and Nirupama Borgohain at the regional level. The researcher has attempted to analyse the selected novels of the two writers. The works that were selected for the analysis were decided by the researcher after doing a short literary survey. But the main intention of the researcher in selecting the few novels was the suitability of the subject matter and the availability of the primary and secondary sources. Therefore it can be said that the research study has been successful in bringing out or fulfilling the main objectives of the study.

During the course of the study, much care has been taken to analyse the different textual and referential part of the primary sources. The research study, being analytical in nature, an attempt has been made to undertake a detailed and minute analysis of the primary sources.

Anita Desai and Nirupama Borgohain are prolific writers in the national and regional scenario. Both the writers write about the issues of women and their rights. They are very conscious about their responsibilities towards their respective cultures. Both of them belong to the Indian culture as a whole but they speak in different tongues and have their own voices, which is distinct and unique in their own ways. They have many points of similarities but they also possess some points of dissimilarities. Before coming to any final conclusion let us attempt a short survey of the two women writer taking into consideration the specific area of research.

III. THE INNER WORLD OF THE FEMALE CHARACTERS

In the writings of Anita Desai and Nirupama Borgohain, we find that the inner world of the female characters is revealed. Both the writers go deeper into the psychological probing of the female characters so as to unravel their inner world.

In *Voices in the City*, Desai undertakes a psychological analysis of the female characters so as to reveal the inner world of the female character. A close reading of *Voices in the City*, reveal that all the major characters in the novel like Amla, Monisha and Otima live another life: in the mental state of their existence.

The second part of the novel which is called 'Monisha' deals with inner experiences of Monisha in her in-laws family. This part unravels the inner psyche of Monisha that has been recorded in her diary. The personal experiences of Monisha can be read from the feminist perspective because these are not only the personal experiences of Monisha but these echo the collective 'Voice of Indian Women'. Through Monisha, Desai tries to focus on the nature of the sensitive woman who struggles to come out of the oppressive joint family system. She feels as though she is trapped by evil forces which go against the grain of her individuality. Monisha being married to Jiban enters into a new phase in her life. Her marriage was arranged and accordingly she starts living with Jiban in a joint family. But the experiences were far from fulfilling. She feels as if she is in a 'cage' like an entrapped bird.

Silence plays an important part in Monisha's life she longs for her personal 'space' in the midst of the extended family. Monisha records her personal experiences in a diary, which reveals the inner world of her private life. During the course of the novel we also find Monisha taking refuge in Kafka as she desired to escape from the monotonous world.

Monisha suffers from melancholia and mental disturbance and this can be located in the course of the novel. There are also references of musical concert in the second part of the novel. Monisha's liking for music is revealed in detail in her personal diary. Music offers a temporary refuge to Monisha from the complexities of the world. It is only through music that the inner trials and tribulations of Monisha are revealed.

This part of the novel ends with Monisha's self revelation that she has been suffering all alone. She silently accepts the defeat and finds herself to be invisible for the rest of her life. The other character that finds prominence in the novel is Amla. Amla is portrayed as an energetic person who wanted to live out her experiences 'in the centre of an exciting world'. But this does not last long as she was weary and disillusioned. Calcutta does not oppress her in the beginning but slowly the city creates an upheaval in her little world. Amla appears to be more of an extrovert when compared with Monisha. Through the character of

Amla, Desai presents some conflicting tendencies. These sorts of conflicting tendencies and urges in the mind of Amla are conveyed by the city birds and the horse that dies like an outsider. Desai's Amla represent the spirit of freedom. She longs for many things in life. She wants to fly and escape from the past. But she is helpless and becomes an outsider in the lives of Nirode, Monisha and Dharma. She becomes a failure in her life and all her youthful energy has been sapped dry.

The last part of the novel is termed as 'Mother', which describes Monisha's mother Otima. Desai presents her as a complex character in the novel. During the course of the novel we find that she accepts the full responsibility for her drifting children. The character of Otima is presented as a real embodiment of Goddess 'Kali'. In Indian mythology, Kali represents a Goddess who symbolises destruction and death. According to Hindu religious custom, whenever Goddess Kali appears in the Universe, it is to kill and destroy the wrong doers. Thus Otima also represents such a demythifying figure of the Goddess. Although Otima's physical presence in the novel is not felt, still she occupies a dignified position as she represents a 'mother' who is endowed with many qualities of heart and mind.

In the next novel of Desai, *Fire on the Mountain*, there is an excellent exposure of the inner world of the three female characters, Nanda Kaul, Ila Das and Raka.

Nanda Kaul's life is a life of retirement and renunciation. After her hectic life in the midst of her family, she retires from her earlier life and comes to Kasauli in search of loneliness. The novelist presents Nanda Kaul as a person who also suffers from melancholia as she has detached herself from human society. Earlier she had been fulfilling the demands of the family and now she wanted complete silence. The novelist adopts different symbols and metaphors to highlight the inner world of Nanda. Desai uses some symbols of nature to explain the mental state of Nanda's life. There is the mention of some old ageing trees that are seen to be withering away, just like Nanda Kaul's withering life.

Two other characters which get prominence in the novel are Raka and Ila Das. Raka symbolises an altogether different aspect of Desai's characterisation. Desai's writing is remarkable because she has dealt extensively with the feminine psyche of females of various age groups. In the present novel, Desai explores the inner psyche of Raka, a girl who is very young. She is the result of a distressing family situation. It is the traumatic childhood experiences that had such a dehumanising effect on Raka's mind that she becomes indifferent to any childish games and there was nothing child like in her character. It is significant that several animal images have been used in relation to her. Her refusal to play with toys which is so natural with normal children very well describes her psyche.

Another character which deserves special mention in the course of the novel is Ila Das. The novelist presents Ila Das, as a woman who suffers from mental

depression. In Desai's view, Ila Das longs for a life full of human company. She is presented as a disturbed woman who suffers from psychological imbalances. The novelist presents the character of Ila Das from two perspectives- as leading an active public life and from the point of view of her intimate personal life. Her public life is very active but her personal life is disturbing. A close analysis of her personal life reveals that she is a loner and a sufferer of inner crises.

Ila Das is described as a loner, who occasionally suffers from loneliness and despair. Through Ila Das, Desai presents a totally different character. She can be called a path breaker, who breaks the patriarchal norms of the society and accepts new challenges in life.

In the novel *Fasting Feasting*, we find female characters like Uma, Anamika, Aruna and Mira Masi who are seen to experience a different world of their own.

During the first part of the novel we find that Uma is presented as the worst victim of family tradition. She suffers for the whims of her family. She is suppressed by her domineering Mamapapa who tries to rule her life from the day she was born. But this instinct of domination or authority reaches its highest point after Arun was born, i.e., when Uma's education is stopped. Her status is relegated to that of an 'ayah' in the family. In the process of rediscovering her life, Uma now prefers loneliness to escape from the world of Papa Mama.

In the next part of the novel, we find Uma getting attached to Mira Masi and with Mira Masi, Uma is progressively introduced into the inner world of Hindu legends and tales. According to L. Volna, with Mira Masi, Uma feels that she is admitted into the same sanctuary that had been previously closed to her¹(42). Uma feels a kind of satisfaction that with Mira Masi, she can at least get some recognition as a person. As such, she looks forward to the company of Mira Masi.

Anita Desai presents these two characters as suitable companions for each other. Uma, the chief protagonist in the novel is seen to persistently hanker for some respite from the monotony of her existence and the only channel that offers her this is through Mira Masi's pilgrimage and her stories about Hindu mythological symbols. By adopting various images, the writer tries to unravel the inner workings of the mind of the female protagonist. The restless mind of Uma longs for complete peace and solitude, which she expects to get from her visit to the holy places with her aunt Mira Masi.

Another character which deserves mention is Anamika. The author strategically placed Anamika as a sharp contrast to Uma in the novel. Anamika is endowed with all the qualities of beauty and brain which Uma lacks. But during the

course of the novel we find that Anamika is married to a person who was a complete opposite to her. Her suffering after marriage ends only with her death in the hands of her in laws. Along the same lines, we have Anamika's life which runs parallel to Aruna's. The latter is portrayed to be the most wisest having mapped out her life to perfection. Her life can be considered better in comparison to Uma and Anamika. After her marriage she tries to liberate herself from the customs and dominating home rules. And in trying to negate the traditional codes, she attempts to involve herself in the mad pursuit towards a vision of perfection. Desai tries to delineate Aruna's character by showing her as someone who is totally caught in the web of life. It seems at times that she is caught in the mad pursuit of status and family and in the process of liberating herself, she seems to have rather invited destruction in her life.

As far as Nirupama Borgohain is concerned she writes for the cause of women in contemporary society. In her writings we find the strong urge of women to liberate themselves. As mentioned in chapter 3 of the thesis, Borgohain is a hardcore feminist, who is very conscious about the rights, obligations and better treatment of women in the society. Her novel '*Abhijatri*' is a biographical one, which depicts the real life story of a great feminist social activist and freedom fighter Chandraprova Saikiani. To unravel the inner world, the writer adopts different techniques like personal letters, images and symbols of the female protagonist. Self revelation is an important tool for exposing the inner world of the female protagonist.

In *Aragamini*, the novelist tackles the struggles of life faced by a great educationist of Assam, Indira Miri. Borgohain has been successful in presenting the two facets of her protagonists' life- the public image and the personal trauma of her existence. There are various textual references to prove the point that Borgohain has been successful in unraveling the inner psyche of the female protagonist. As for example we can take the case of Indira's birth. Indira's birth was considered unfortunate as she was born on the same day her grandmother died. To expose this inner feeling, the novelist presents self revelation and fantasy as two tools by which Borgohain lays bare the inner tension and turmoil of the female protagonist. Thus we can say that the two writers possess strong points of similarities as far as the exposing of the inner world is concerned.

IV. DISSIMILARITIES IN CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Not much dissimilarity can be noticed in the two writers as far as character analysis is concerned. Anita Desai believed in the psychological probings of the characters so as to unravel the inner psyche of the female characters whereas Nirupama Borgohain believes in the all-round as well as psychological development of the female characters.

Conclusion- Thus it can be concluded that the both the writers have been able to lay bare the inner world of the female characters very successfully. Each and every

1. Volna L., *Fasting Feasting and the condition of Women*. www.CLC.com

sentences presents before us the inner nuances and reality of the female characters.

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