

Existentialist vision in Anita Desai's 'Voices in the city'

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Abstract : Anita Desai is unquestionably one of the celebrated Indian English writers. The characters in the novels of Anita Desai are the representatives of self identification. Her major characters are tormented by their fears and phobias as they feel circumscribed by their frightening, conditions of their existence. Her novel 'Voices in the city' is existential in character, for it explores the inward subjectivity of its main characters. She has given an existential dimension to the three most vital human predicaments anguish alienation and despair. She adds a new dimension to the genre of Indian fiction in English by probing the unquestionable existentialism concern of her protagonist.

Key Words : Alienation, Psyche, Existential, Protagonists, Consciousness.

Methodology : The entire study is based on the secondary sources of data. The secondary data has been collected in order to fulfill constructed objectives of the study here secondary data consists of books, articles, journals & websites.

Introduction : Anita Desai is unquestionably one of the celebrated Indian English writers she holds a unique place among the contemporary women novelists of India she succeeds immensely in analyzing her characters from inside and unfolds their desires and inner motives. Anita Desai is much conscious of the modern life and so she fixed her attention not only on its consequences but also on the feelings of human beings. The characters in the novels of Anita Desai are the representative of self identification. The instinct of revolt and rebellion is at the very core of existentialism. The uncertainty of 'to be or not to be' haunts the mind of the character. Anita Desai has used this technique very beautifully to express the inner most thoughts of her characters in her novels.

Anita Desai's main thematic concern is how people cope with society alien or not alien without losing their sense of self identify and individuality. The protagonist as shown in her novels is a lone individual and not a social man. Her major characters are tormented by their fears and phobias as they feel circumscribed by the frightening conditions of their existence. Her contribution to fiction writing has been quite commendable and substantial she comes face to face with the intangible realities of life, the innermost depths of human psyche and the chaotic underworld of human mind through her novels. Her novels are the exploration of sensibility the inner working of mind that assumes the most important place. She unravels beautifully the mystery of the inner life of her characters. Desai's central preoccupation as a novelist is with the existentialist outlook on human life. Her novel 'Voices in the City' is existential in character, for it explores the inward subjectivity of its main characters. As H. M. William Observes : "It is an existential novel that explores the inner climate of youth despair, epitomized by the over - acutely self conscious Nirode that quoter of camus, finding no meaning in his own life or in life at all. This existential 'angst' is duplicated in Monisha in whom it assumes a fatal rhythm from which Nirode was once narrow wly saved but which in her reaches its inevitable end"¹

The novel 'Voices in the City' deals mainly with the three major characters, Nirode, Monisha and Amla. In this novel the life of Calcutta has been portrayed. The characters of this novel especially Nirode and his sister Monisha feel themselves detached from this city. Living in a small, corrugated, tinted and filthy place his horizon also narrows down and vision gets blurred. Monisha's death brings the emotions of Nirode and amla to the climax, when at her funeral Nirode for the first time, feels the need of love and

compassion from her mother but she refuses. Even the company his friends dosent excite him and he becomes a loner. He gives up too soon and leaves the pursuit of existentialism. Nirode is unique in his feelings and thoughts. He is disillusioned with the outward glitter of the worldly success which attracts and binds other minor characters. He is a true existentialist. He moves from one failure to another in search of an abiding meaning in life. He is engaged in an unequal fight against the social and commercial values of life which the city of Calcutta symbolizes.

Nirode recognizes a lack of individuality and commitment to some higher purpose in life in all those who come and flatter him on the success of his magazine. Nirode's quest for identity and meaning in life leads him to a point where he perceives the worthlessness of all art. Monisha craves for privacy because she is unable to share the world of her in laws. Her in-laws are materialists to the core. The alienation between Jiban and her is rooted in their temperaments, and Jiban's inability to understand and fulfill the emotional needs of his wife Monisha is actually conscious of her adverse circumstances and suffers from a nervous anxiety which is certainly existentialist.

Monisha's anguish and despair increase in intensity with her discovery that in the absence of her present meaningless existence. Monisha is caught in a truly existentialist contingency when she is accused of stealing money from Jiban's wardrobe. It is true that she has taken this money but she has done so, with honest intention. Monisha cannot even dream of such distrust and the accusation of theft brought against her she is pained to think that the people, who themselves have a mean and animal existence; consider her as low as to be a thief.

The third major character Amla arrives in Calcutta to find a career as a commercial artist, but her search for a career is transformed into an existentialist search for love and joy unmixed with pain and suffering. Amla becomes anxious about the unpleasant change that has come over Monisha and Nirode after their arrival in Calcutta. She begins to suffer from a sense of loneliness. Her consciousness of the evil in life, her anxiety and anguish, her pursuit of absolute love, her despair at her failure in the search - all these make her a character of existentialist proportion. Among the minor character in the novel, Dharma is one of those who show existentialist values of life. His existentialist subjectivity made him feel responsible towards his wife who could not bear the loss of her daughter. Feeling responsible towards her, he choose to leave Calcutta and settled at the city's outskirts. It was an effort to prevent his wife from becoming insane. She believes in the process of discovering the truth. She has herself stated :

“Writing is my way of plunging to the depths and exploring this under lying truth. All my writing is an effort to discover to underline and convey the true significance of things”²

As a novelist Desai is unique as she has deviated from the path of realism and taken to the path of subtle psycho - analysis probing deeply into the inner working of a man's mind. Desai's interest in the consciousness of the woman in her novels enables us to see the Indian woman adequately from the inside. She is occupied with interiorizing the consciousness of the woman and the economics of life do not bother her except when they are noticed as adding to the monotonous aspect of existence.

'Voices in the City' is perhaps Anita's first novel of social atmosphere and locale. Her protagonists are unhappy with society in general and cannot communicate with the social milieu on one prefect or the other; they feel disturbed by the pretentiousness and violence in society and nurture utopian dreams. Society demands compromises, which they egotistically abhor. Her characters play this existential drama

but none of them outlines the situation. The novelist here ventures to juxtapose the external world with the inner one. Deeply affected by the existential problems of modern industrial age, Anita Desai has created unique characters that are largely eccentric and abnormal in their mental make up and as a novelist, Anita Desai exhibits a strong inclination towards the existentialist interpretation of the human predicament hence totally unable to confirm.

Anita Desai believed the “Literature should deal with the most enduring matters what matters is the psychic and the existential reality of the characters.” The enduring human conditions and the emotional life of the women characters are her chief concern. Anita Desai deals with thoughts, emotions and feelings and not so much with action because she voices the mute miseries and the helplessness of millions of married women through the stream of consciousness technique.

Thus Anita Desai adds a new dimension to the genre of Indian fiction in English by probing the unquestionable existentialism concern of her protagonists. Anita Desai has given an existential dimension to the three most vital human predicaments anguish, alienation and despair. She lends her women characters a voice and an audience by dramatizing ‘mute miseries and helplessness of married women’. Her characters possess an overwhelming sense of their own existence, fallibility with special focus on loneliness alienation and pessimism. Anita Desai takes her turn at being reflective, going deep into the psyche, going to these places in the heart and mind where things acquire.

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