

IMAGE OF WOMEN IN ANITA DESAI'S THE SELECT NOVELS

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Abstract

Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya's "A Comparative Study of Selected Novels" is an attempt to investigate the plights of women as they are portrayed in the novels that were chosen for this study, as well as the methods that the protagonists of these books employ in order to overcome the challenges they face. An experience that is both intriguing and satisfying is one in which one compares and contrasts the writings of two different writers. Both Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya are well-known authors in the realm of English literature. However, with the exception of a number of publications, very few scholars have sought to compare the horrors that are experienced by women in the books written by these two authors. The female protagonists in these books are on a journey of self-discovery that takes them from self-negation to self-affirmation as well as from self-denial to self-acceptance. They are willing to give up their life. Both independently and together, a substantial number of critical essays and even a few full-length monographs on the two authors have been produced.

keywords: Women, Anita Desai's

INTRODUCTION

Women account for about half of the population of the world and, therefore, form a very significant segment of society. Woman plays a very predominant role in the perpetuation of human species. Since the inception of literature, however, women have been projected as mere sex-object as playthings in the hands of men to satisfy their carnal urges, whims and fancies without being given the status of an equal human being. In nineteenth century India, Fakir Mohan Senapati in his novel *Six Acres and a Third* (1896) depicts the complexity of the life of rural women very effectively. Many of the narrator's comments reveal society's misogynistic, tyrannical and humiliating attitude towards women, comparing them to animals. The narrator in the novel projects the traditional and modern view about women saying that traditional Indian literature compares women to elephants, while the new writers are no better since they also compare women to horses in tune with the perverted and atrocious attitude of the English. How absurd, preposterous, demeaning and humiliating it is that women are dehumanized. It is a well known fact that woman has long been conventionally accepted as an embodiment of self-effacing virtues in playing her roles as homemaker, a dutiful wife, a loving mother and a caring daughter and it is said of her that she is born in her parents' house, but her dead body is supposed to be taken away from her in-laws' house, signifying that her loyalty to her husband is steadfast and marriage for her is an indissoluble, life-long commitment. Indian literature has been quite generous in lavishing praise upon her sacrificing nature. Indian society had been respectful and liberal to women even much before the Aryans in India. Goddess Shakti was worshipped and so was mother earth. In the Vedic Period, kings respected their mother as Rajmata and her opinions regarding political and personal matters were valued immensely. Several communities in India like the Nair's of Kerala, certain Maratha clan and Bengali families are matriarchal rather than being patriarchal in the sense that it was the eldest woman and not the eldest man that ruled the

family. The Sikh culture also accords great respect to woman without being discriminatory against them in anyway. The Status of Indian women has improved considerably since independence in 1947. Though Indian women were granted the right to vote in 1855, yet they seldom exercised it due to illiteracy and social taboos. Indian Council of Women was set up in 1921. The First All India Women 's Conference was convened in 1927 evoking a very massive response. In the conference the slogan _As a man is free, so is a woman. 'resounded. Growing resurgence and awakening among women came to be seen when they participated in the freedom movement jealously, marching ahead along with men. Not all women can endure the atrocities meekly and sheepishly. She does try to protest but sometimes gives in, surrenders and reconciles. It is their fighting spirit which makes them feel special. Our freedom fighters and social reformers like Mahatma Gandhi, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Pandit Ishwar, Chaudhary Vidyasagar, Jawaharlal Nehru etc. fought for equality of rights and opportunities for men and women. Their unbiased viewpoint reinforced the feminist movement. They stressed upon the idea that men and women are equal partners, and deserve equal rights. Sarojini Naidu led the Satyagraha Movement and many others fought in the freedom struggle. Gandhiji also worked a lot to ameliorate the condition of women in the society. A woman is destined to play multiple roles in her life. She stands by her husband through thick and thin, acts as a responsible home maker, joins her husband in performing varied religious and customary rituals, caring and sharing in her role as mother, a friend and a sexual partner. Being more sensitive to her duties than rights, she acts as a submissive and obedient daughter to her parents, a devoted wife to her husband, a caring beloved to her lover and a loving mother to all her children. Many Indian writers have contributed a lot for ameliorating their condition by voicing their rights vociferously and protesting against the inequities and atrocities, they are subjected to through their writings. Sarojini Naidu wrote a number of poems which advocate for equal rights to women. Rabindranath Tagore, our Nobel Laureate, motivated women to play a leading role in various socio-cultural and political issues. He etched the concept of _new woman' in his writings. Mulkraj Anand, an Indo-anglian writer tried to build up the concept of new woman by portraying suffering of Indian women and their struggle to break out the chains of slavery and indignity in his novels. Amrita Pritam, Nayantara Sehgal, Sashi Deshpande, etc. are among the few noted writers who campaigned for t hecause of women and forged a link between sexuality and feminism.

IMAGE OF WOMAN IN ANITA DESAI'S CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY (1980):

Anita Desai's the most autobiographical novel Clear Light of Day (1980) puts forward an Old Delhi educated middle class family-in-disintegration. The Das family, for its inadequate parental care, left the children poorly sensitive to their parents. That is why the parents' demise didn't shake their everyday reality. Raja is expected to fill it up but he frustrates the traditional expectations. He prioritizes his narcissistic pursuit for sophistication through a marriage with a Muslim girl, leaving the family to the guardianship of her sister Bimala Das who propels the family through an effective agency. It keeps the family steady amidst uncertainties. Desai's typical notion of femininity has been depicted engaging Bim to the traditional roles without causing her total resignation to the typical patriarchal expectations.

This story set in old Delhi at the time of India's Partition. It weaves a tapestry delineating a variety of images from a middle-class Indian family. It fosters a curious environment for the siblings namely, Raja, Bimala, Tara and Baba. Their attitude to life is so distinct from each other. They end up with the temperamental obsession in their own ways. But in the person of Bim, what Desai explores is a complex

figure of a woman who may not be a conscious creation of the new woman, as Desai knows that she never thought of writing about new woman but still the character of Bim can suggest a constitution regarding how a woman should accommodate family values and a disposition of opposition to male chauvinism to live with some meaning which can consequently take her farther off the shore where she is associated with all the weaker attributes. To finalize such an outline, what Desai does is to make a binary exploration of femininity and motherhood in the person of Bim whose guardianship secures stability for the Das family and whose mode of assertion facilitates her autonomy in everyday experience. A balanced consonance between her sense of domesticity and her concern for autonomy is what makes her stance prescriptive to battle male hegemony. Das family worries of their children.

The family faces breakdown due to male irresponsibility and socio-political environment of the partition of India. Radha Chakravarty comments, a 'life of complacent consumerism' through a marriage into a Muslim family. Bim has to attend on everything and everyone in the family. Her newly-assumed guardianship makes her responsible for marrying her sister, Tara. Bakul who takes care of the alcoholic Mira Masi who ends up with a wretched suicide afterwards; and also looking after her handicap brother, Baba whose only fixation is to listen to the old records. Tossed and torn by a psychic state originally developed by some relational flux, Bim goes on sustaining the family unflinchingly. However, the novel closes with a sense of hope as Bim reconfigures her communion with her siblings especially, Raja. For Radha Chakravarty the character of Bim as an individual who is made to overpower the control mechanisms set by the masculine framework of the society. At the end, Desai moulds the character of Bim and surveys all the expressions of her personality to effectively fortify a resistance to male superiority which in its turn turns out to be prescriptive for the females and thereby instrumental to clip the wing of patriarchy.

According to Radha Chakravarty, through Bimla Das, Anita Desai, in a response to the post-independence Indian women activists, offers a 'challenge to traditional representations of female subjectivity' (Chakravarty, 2008: 76) through the person of Bim who negates the typical formula of ideal womanhood. She also makes it clear that in one of her articles: "Typically, the middleclass educated Indian woman was encouraged to perceive herself as the ideal homemaker, who, unlike her Western counterparts, would devote the benefits of her modern education to the service of her family. In the definition of ideal womanhood which evolved in the decades following independence, the elision of femininity and maternity was a determining feature" (Chakravarty, 2008:77). Desai's dissociation from any feminist movement makes Bim's characterization free of category as Bim's individuated personality neither employs her education to homemaking nor omits her femininity and maternal instinct by running into one of these two extremes though her mothering is surrogate here. But doesn't the fact of her remaining unmarried can be a point of critical discussion as well? As I have shown elsewhere in this paper, "marriage is the sanctioned code of conduct for a female in the Indian patrilineal society, which considers marriage to be the prerequisite for the fulfilment of the feminine grace. Failure to conform to this stigmatizes the respective woman with the tag of 'monstrous outcast'. Bim herself is the challenge incarnated through the conscious disregard for the patriarchal recommendation for the female in the society.

Bim identifies with the image of mother and women. She has her early relationship of undeveloped trust. Her mother had an authentic relationship to her as a person. A girl's gender and role are dependent upon real relationships. Recognition with her mother is not positional. Mrs. Das shocks us for the basic

understanding of her strange motherhood. She is caught with these expressions at the time of informing her children of their new governess Aunt Mira: “You have become too much for me – you are all so noisy and naughty. She will discipline you. And look after your brother. I don’t know what is wrong with him ...She will keep him in her room and look after him. And you will have to learn to be quiet.” (Desai: 104) Mrs. Das’s mother has lack of sensitivity.

Personality development is not the result of attentive parental purpose. The environment and excellence of the social relations that the child experiences are appropriate, internalize organized by her/him and come to constitute her/his personality. Bim’s personality comes out to be neutralized through a qualitative social relationship sponsored by a meaningful studentship and a gradual but steady absorption of her rebel brother Raja’s disposition. Bim’s schooling further instils liveliness and enthusiasm. Bim became patrol leader of the Blue birds earlier. Girl guides captain of the netball team and Head Girl in her final year. In a comparative projection, Desai helps the sisters’ schooling and brings out their fundamental trait. School brought out Bim’s natural energy and liveliness that was kept damped down at home because of the peculiar atmosphere of their house. To Bim, school and its teachers and lessons were a challenge to her natural intelligence and mental curiosity. Her sense of social commitment consistently makes choice of some personalities like Florence Nightingale and Joan of Arc. She is seen to ‘hand out vitamin drops to pregnant women and mix powdered milk for the babies’ (88) even in her mature years. Such development in Bim’s formative years sufficiently prepares her for the role she has to play later. Moreover, Bim finds her ego in Raja whose eccentric personality contributes to making her own to the considerable degree: ‘Bim and Raja were not only closer in age but a match for each other in many other ways’ (116). Her involvement with Raja throughout her childhood and youth shapes her ways of experiencing the world.

Feminine categorization is not based on outwardly defined distinctiveness but on the steady learning of a way of being common in everyday life. It is exemplified by the women. It is constant with her childhood identification and attachment. So the absence of mother’s patrilineal transmission and the combination of a more assertive manner from the brother in the one hand and support to reconstruct her own world by her natural talent on the other help to her contain the values of tradition and the mode of conflict. However, Bim doesn’t let her essential feminine instinct lapse. Bim’s feminine support finds its relief in taking care of ‘the everlasting baby. Besides, the non-transference of cultural values through a ‘normative motherhood’ (Chanda: 74) endows her faculty with an untouched reasoning. So the husband-rejected Misra sisters’ ever favourite dance, pining for Krishna and songs of Radha praising Krishna can’t mask the irony for Bim. As for the other vehicle of transmission, older women, next to mother, play a gigantic role to frame femininity after patriarchal set-up. Geetanjali Singh Chanda tells it plain in her “Mapping Motherhood, The Fiction of Anita Desai”: “...often it is women older women, who have internalized a patriarchal ideology and who perpetuate the system victimizing those who do not conform.” (74) But the widow Mira Masi tattered by experience of life. She couldn’t create any threat to Bim’s forging a liberated self. It survives without looking for recourse to marriage and children’, patriarchal instruments to endanger women’s emancipation. Motherhood is further challenged by Anita Desai. Bim along with Mira Masi is made to represent Desai’s attempt to separate the task of mothering from the biological functions of pregnancy and childbirth’ (Chakravarty, 2008:77). Anita Desai observes that women culturally understood as good wives and mothers. Some remain unmarried. Hence childless is painstaking as contrast to woman’s Dharma. So Bim’s spinsterhood can be interpreted as a challenge to this social code. Childless woman has even a lower

status than a widow. An unmarried woman living in the house of her parents can be neither a pativrata nor an angel. She has freedom to do any type of work. So she is destined to be an ugly. Here Bim's surrogate mother is made to be victorious. It's not dictated and restrictive.

Bimala Das: An image of an intellectually strong woman

Bim is the most outstanding character in *Clear Light of Day*. She is the protagonist of the novel. She is shy and the inner landscape of her mind is brightly and practically portrayed by Anita Desai. The image of liberal, strong, idealistic, intellectual and realistic is reflected by Bim. When Tara expresses a desire for curly hair, Bim cuts off her hair with tailor's scissors and Tara is miserable with her stub of hair which grow back into the same straight hair. Bim shares many of Raja's interests in Urdu and in English poetry. Bim does not know Urdu but she develops taste for English poetry. She is attached to Raja that she looks after him when he contracts TB. She is also attached to her mentally retarded younger brother Baba whom she cares for at the cost of her own happiness. She vows to marry so that Baba doesn't feel neglected. In the school she studies well and becomes a Head girl. She is decisive and purposeful. She is an organizer, and sharp contrast who is dynamic and daring. Her desire is to get away from the gloomy and depressing atmosphere at home and gives consent. She raises no objections because these are "modern times" and Tara is a "modern" girl who is free to make her choice of Bakul which is in the Indian Foreign Service as her husband, though Tara is five years younger to her.

Bim decides not to marry because of her responsibilities towards her family. She has an ardent suitor in Dr. Biswas, a music loving, Bengali doctor who attends upon Raja and Mira-Masi during their sickness. She goes with him on a date to a western classical music concert and his house to meet his mother, but she is shocked. She lavishes all her love and affection on her pet dog and cat. As she grows older, Bim has premature grey hair and she starts smoking. Bakul likes some of her qualities like decisiveness and independence. He finds in her a stubborn coarse and dominating where as Tara as gentle adaptable woman. Bim is upset when her sisters, Jaya and Sarla are married off instead of going to college for higher education. She sarcastically points out to Tara, "They were married together and abandoned together" by their husbands. The Misra sisters now run a nursery school in their house in the morning and teach dance to young girls in the evening in order to support themselves, their three good for nothing brothers and their old father. Their condition reinforces Bim's decision is never to marry. Then she doesn't feel the need for marriage when she takes up a teaching job in a local college spending time with her students, looking after Mira-Masi and Baba and running the household with an iron hand.

Bim doesn't think herself a martyr to her family responsibilities. She is furious and frustrated at being "so misunderstood so totally misread" that she later laughs at this ridiculous reading of her character by Dr. Biswas. When Raja decides to go to Hyderabad to join the Haider Ali there, Bim maintains a frigid silence because Raja is escaping responsibilities towards his family. Her cold reserve at his departure is indicative of her deep indignation at Raja's desertion. She can't forgive him for this. She keeps Raja's letter with her and shows to Tara. But she refuses to have anything to do with her brother till the end of the novel. Finally she forgives Raja and invites him to visit her in the winter with his family by Tara. She also realizes how intolerant she has been towards everyone else and that everyone has his or her own limitations and shortcomings. One should accept them as they are. In the last episode of the novel, in Bim's case, the

old rented house is the unbreakable bond between her and her siblings. This reveals to us her nobility of soul. In the novel, the image of Bim is presented as idealistic and realistic woman. It strikes to the readers. They sympathize with her during the trials and tribulations of her life. She faces the vicissitudes of life bravely and emerges a winner. Bim brings up her siblings and cares for them. She softens down the bitterness in mutual relationship and accepts them back into the family told without any resentment.

The chief character of this novel is Bimla who is one of the four Children in the Das family. There are series of death in the family. The elders are passed away including the parents and an aunt Mira. There is no one who cares and looks after the children. It is Bimla being a female child character who takes the initiatives to be the role of a mother. After the death of the elders, the responsibility of Baba who is the mentally retarded abnormal boy, whose presence is only physical in the family and who is in dire need of motherly figure to serve him, is come forth on Bimla. Bimla nurses him as a mother till the end of the novel. The second brother Raja who also suffers from disease is served by Bimla as a mother. The aunt Mira at the time of death takes help from Bimla. Everyone is in need of Bimla and like a mother, she never leaves the responsibilities. She never cares her dreams and desires and handles the situation courageously.

Even she never gets marry at all in order to serve the others. She plays a role of surrogate mother who dedicated her life to the history.

In this novel we get the image of woman as the traditional caring mother for her family. Every country has some common contemporary issues. It is the question of woman whether in Western or Indian literary tradition; the women are seen flowing of their identity. New woman challenges to the traditional ideas of Angel in the house. She has sexually voracious' status. She is a woman of awareness and insight of her small position in the society. The feminist literary criticism has developed as an element of woman movement. Its force has brought about a revolt in literary studies. Anita Desai's rising 'new woman' is meditative about her predicament. The women are prepared to face the cost of their choice. Anita Desai asserts that her protagonists are new standard. They have been determined into some boundary of desolation. It is a challenge for their own personal existence. New women are diffident, meek and quiet to the face of exploitation. They are highly sensitive and intelligent and the desperate to find an outlet to their pangs. Their extreme sensitivity channelizes their mode of liberation in various directions. Clear Light of Day is chosen to demonstrate. It divides the two types of woman hailing from the same family- the woman who does not act but surrender and keeps the tradition alive and next the woman who choose not to surrender and take up a new road where no one can dictate to them.

Here, Anita Desai reflects the image of New Woman.

Bim is psychologically and efficiently independent. She does not like to marry. She would not depend on anyone, not even on her father. She had depended on her father for education. She would have been an illiterate. She gets education in history, a subject which has immense significance for her. The past is important as the progenitor of the present. Bimla has confidence much like her creator. Desai reflects the great significance of time in the life of man because we can't neglect the concept of time. Bim's desire is to be independent, to be courageous, and to reform smoking like person enables her to grow up both strong and confident. It is only because she has trained herself to be different that much eulogized characteristics

of woman i.e., weak will, dependence and shyness are alien to her perception. Bim refuses to confine herself to her role as a traditional woman, showing an insignificant victim or object for other use and pleasure.

“Woman in our society are still trained from infancy to entertain, to please and to serve men.”

But Bim was fortunate in her family. Bim has confidence to herself that she could survive the shock of the sudden death of her parents, the alcoholic Mira Masi, the tubercular Raja and mentally retarded Baba without drawing back any stage. The confused condition of Bim's mind disappears. She is able to consider her inner psyche “by the clear light of day.”(65). Her calmness of mind is the emblem of the silence before the storm which is to overtake her. The growth of Bim's self is not yet to complete. By this way her mind starts thinking which turns out to be the life of Aurangzeb. After glance of the emperor's death, she is highly impressed. It is common universal truth that when we enter in this world, there is the great joy around us but when we depart through this world, we have to depart alone. It is skillfully described in the above incident. The images of birds, animals and insects enrich the landscape of the house. They depict the atmosphere, participate in the emotional tumults of the chief characters, and throw their mental states into sharp relief. The novelist starts with the call of the Koel presenting the soul of the day-break. Through the crying of birds, Anita Desai presented the emotional cry in the mind of Bim and her sorrowful life. Bimla is an educated unmarried working woman. She enjoys financial freedom. Women can be developed if they are financially self-sufficient and self-assured. The man-woman relationship becomes more significant due to rapid industrialization, growing alertness among women of their rights. The great relationship for civilization will always be the relation between men and women, parent and child will always be supplementary.

Bim has all responsibility of the family. During his days, her father passed his time in the office, and in the evening at the Club. But after his death, Bim accepts the role of a father care of her sisters and brothers and later marrying them. Due to the responsibilities, she has no time for her own love and life. She has an affair with a doctor who becomes her family doctor. In this novel, she appears as a middle aged woman teaching history in a college. She is living an ascetic life. The only luxury she affords is to buy books. She explores her solace and refuge to buy books and reading of them. Bim is fairly representative of a new woman of contemporary Indian urban woman-single, independent, self-assured. This type of woman may be seen as “westernized”. Madhusudan Prasad comments that her image combined with the image of Sisyphus. It is complete with deeper symbolic significance. It is connected with the image of Sisyphus and the theme of the novel enlightening the real character of Bim. Here, novelist compares the image of Bim with the image of Sisyphus. Responsibility for the family and for Baba makes her feel strong and in control of herself. She does not lose courage with the burden of responsibility.

She shows that women can look after the family much better than any man. Bim is careful and conscious enough not to think the need of protection or love of anyone. She hates Mira Masi who craves for love and protection and is elated to receive it from the children if not from anyone else: “They crowded about her so that they formed a ring, a protective railing about her. Now no one could approach, no threat, no menace..... They owned her and yes, she wanted to be owned.” (109) Here, Bim expresses that she has no desire to be owned. She doesn't want anyone to feel either kindness or responsibility for her. Bim gets

success in building up her ambition. She is triumphant in being independent. Tara and Bakul who realizes this. Bim had found everything she wanted in life. It seemed incredible. Here, Bim has succeeded and fulfilled her ambition of life. Bim appears as a new woman. She is independent and liberated and yet there is no mark of arrogance or superiority in her. Though she is very clear about her aspirations urges expectations, she is not the one to roll in pity about her alienation. She was ready to forgive them. She was ready to see every flaw of other in the light of understanding. Bim is able to obtain everything in life without the help of the masculine forces due to her confidence in her. Bim is becoming the new and independent woman. Bim and Tara in their quest for identity, liberty and individuality act and react in radical ways. To set conventional construct Tara was happy in obeying her husband but the question, which finally perturbs her, is 'how long'? She realizes that she does something that she never likes. She felt she had followed him enough.

Tara analyses her position as a young and hopeful girl. She always craved for but never received affinity from anyone at home. So she became meek and her submissiveness and reverence were used to keep her at the level of a compliant and unquestioning wife. Tara feels that it is time for her to stop being obedient. She does not want to make Bakul bend to come to her level, rather she would stretch out and reach over to his position. In comparison, Bim has everything that Tara has not in which she has all this, and not what the society and tradition expect her to be she is mostly misunderstood. Through this we find out the caring nature of Indian woman for her family. Bim compromises to carry the burden of responsibility in spite of the miserable atmosphere of the house. She uses to do manly duties and breaks the traditional norms and currents. Here, Anita Desai presents the significant sign of new woman.

Women are all hostile about their circumstance in the society. Their protest is for the right treatment as individuals. They do not look for freedom outside the house but within their lives. This leads us to the image of 'New woman'. It has been explored. She is new in the aspect of time. She makes revolt against the general current of the patriarchal society. Through the character of Bim, Anita Desai presents the typical image of bachelor middle class Indian household woman who shoulders her responsibilities after the parent's death.

Tara: Image of New Woman Emotionally and Economically Independent

Tara is the third child of the Das family. Her arrival from Washington in Old Delhi sets the narrative in motion. Tara's husband Bakul, a prosperous diplomat, is in the Indian Foreign service who is presently posted in Washington. She visits her elder sister Bim in the dilapidated house where she spent her childhood and youth before she escaped from the gloomy and depressing atmosphere of the house by marrying Bakul. Bim now lives there and looks after their young sibling, the mentally retarded Baba. Bim, a prematurely graying spinster runs the household with her salary from a teaching job in a local college which supplemented by the income from the family insurance business that their father has left behind. Tara visits her family every three to five years. She has now come there on way to Hyderabad to attend the marriage of their elder brother Raja's daughter in Hyderabad along with her husband. Her two teenage daughters join her later. Till the arrival of Baba, Tara is the youngest child in the family but after Baba's birth she loses her privileged position. Her two elder siblings, Bim and Raja, are closer to each other in their growing –up years and Tara is isolated. She keeps aloof from their activities, interests and pursuits

and she becomes closer to the much older Misra sisters in the neighborhood. Her portrayal is a study in child psychology. Stream of consciousness technique is employed by the Anita Desai in the novel.

Tara is always looking for a treasure her childhood. She wants to be a princess. Once she finds a snail in the garden mistaking it for a pearl but it also slithers away from the leaf in which Tara picked it up to show her indifferent mother, who is expecting Baba late in her life. She left to her own devices as a child because of the closeness of her two elder siblings, Raja and Bim. Both of them love poetry and often go across the Jumna River to the melon fields to eat the water melons growing there. While Bim and Raja memorize and recite poetry in Urdu and English, Tara can never memorize a line of poetry and recite it. She hates school while Bim is an all-rounder. Bim is a good student and a born organizer. She takes part in sports and other extracurricular activities with the result that she becomes Head girl of the school in her final year. Tara is an idler. While Raja and Bim want to become a hero and heroine when they grow up.

Tara simply wants to be a mother. Mira Masi, a child widow who looks after Baby and was close to the children. She serves as a character contrast to Bim and Raja who are ambitious and outgoing, while she is laid back and unambitious. She makes no friends at school. She never wants to do anything in the world except only to hide under Aunt Mira's quilt or behind the shrubs in the garden. Tara is timid while Bim is bold and aggressive. When Bim is stung by a swarm of bees in Lodhi Garden, where they have gone on picnic with the Misra, Tara runs away instead of coming to her sister's rescue. This sense of guilt gnaws at her conscience and she now seeks Bim's forgiveness. Tara also feels guilty at not having been able to look after Mira-Masi, to whom she was close as a child in her last years when the Aunt became an alcoholic and died. She regrets at not coming to Mira Masi's funeral. Bim forgives her lapses. But Bim cannot forgive her errant brother Raja as she was close to him during their childhood and adolescence. Tara takes up for Raja repeatedly but Bim brushes her aside. She is in no mood to accept her brother back in the family through Tara. In this way Tara acts as a bridge between her two elder siblings and brings them together although they had neglected her in childhood.

Tara escapes from her responsibilities towards her family by rushing into marriage with Bakul as soon as she completes School. Like the Misra girls who get married after school, Tara marries Bakul with Aunt Miras and Bim's permission. But she remains passive as the wife is a diplomat and allows herself to be molded.

Aunt Mira: Image of Weak and Exploited Woman

Aunt Mira Masi is the pathetic character in the novel. She is the child widow and a cousin of Mrs. Das. She has the poor relation of the family who has been ill treated as a domestic slave. She becomes a widow at the age of fifteen. She has married at twelve and her husband left for higher studies soon after. He died abroad. The marriage was never consummated. She is called a virgin widow. When she is sent by Mrs. Das to look after Baba, her in-laws are glad to get rid of her as she has been frequently ill. Since she is the cousin of her mother, the children call her Mira Masi (Mother's sister). Mrs. Das warns the children because Mira Masi is coming for maintaining discipline them because they are all so noisy and naughty. Her appearance in the Das family is as a scarecrow. She has protruding teeth, thin dry hair and the narrow-minded eyes.

Aunt Mira endears herself to the three older children. She becomes a surrogate mother to them. She is their strong supporter during the childhood and youth. She teaches Baba to play marbles and keeps him busy. He starts slowly responding to her gestures as others are busy in themselves and their pursuits including his parents. She brings a ray of sunshine in Baba's miserable life.

She is concerned with the welfare of the other members of the family. So she sees the milkman mixing water in the milk one morning. She requests Mr. Das to get a cow so that the children can have pure milk and grow to be healthy. The arrival of the cow with her calf is a celebratory occasion for the children. But unfortunately, the cow drowns in the well at the garden. Aunt Mira is blamed by Mrs. Das for burdening her with unnecessary and unavoidable expense. This keeps her awake at night and she dreams about cow dying in the well. She looks after Raja and Bim when they are down with typhoid. The doctor says that they do not need any medicine but nursing. Aunt Mira nurses them back to health. Later when Raja contracts Tuberculosis, she helps in the fateful summer of 1947.

Aunt Mira is the main supporter of Tara who is firm. She has a habit of knitting. Tara can enclose herself up in Aunt Mira as in an old soft shawl. Tara needs her the most as she has lost all her human rights as the youngest child of the family after Baba's birth. She tells bedtime stories and plays game with Tara, Raja and Bim. The children form "a ring, a protective railing around her". They own her and she wants to be owned. She owns them too. The children need to be owned because their parents are unsympathetic to them. She neither commands nor chastises them and is certainly never obeyed. When the principal of Bim's school visits the family on Bim having been elected Head Girl, it is Aunt Mira who receives the principal and offers her tea as Mr. and Mrs. Das are away as usual at the club. Aunt Mira feels so awkward with joy and pride that she pours the milk into the sugar pot and offers the tea strainer instead of biscuits to the principal. She was totally confused at this incident.

Aunt Mira wears only white. Mrs. Das tells her children that it is the widow's colour. But she has one old and faded silk sari in her shabby trunk. When the children want her to wear it she says, "All right, when I die, you may dress me in it for the funeral pyre." At the time of Aunt Mira's funeral rites, Bim does as suggested by Aunt Mira. As she grows older, Aunt Mira becomes "quick, nervy and jumpy" and "vague absent minded" She becomes addicted to drink liquor for some mysterious reasons later years. At first she steals brandy from the Das's bottle but after his death, she manages to secure liquor through Haider Ali's old servant Bhakta. Bim has brought from Haider Ali's deserted house after Haider Ali's departure from Delhi to Hyderabad. Aunt Mira becomes a heavy drunkard. She craves for liquor in the state of intoxication; she behaves with most disorderly and wild manner sometimes she was running with naked, to the annoyance of Bim and the other inmates of the house. It is only Dr. Biswas's help that Bim can manage here. Eventually she dies in bed, contrary to her belief she would drown herself in the well in which the family cow had drowned years ago. She continues to haunt Bim for quite some time afterwards.

Aunt Mira who has suffered a lot in her life is as integral to the plot of the novel. She becomes the part and parcel of the Das family as she looks after not only Baba but the other children as well. She is an incarnation of the spirit of service and sacrifice, a mother figure not only to Baba but to Raja. Bim and Tara as well, she is their surrogate mother who supports to the Das family in the critical condition.

The character of Tara represents the Image of New woman who is emotionally and economically independent and of Modern advanced and liberal who never wanted to marry is reflected. The novel shows the destruction of the Das family. The indifferent parents die. We can identify with the Das children who suffer from their self-cantered parents. Bim is idealistic. She faces the difficulties of life bravely. She embodies the typical spinster in a middle-class Indian household who shoulders her family responsibilities. Bim devotes to her family. Anita Desai excellently portrays Tara's escape through marriage. She roles as a character contrast to Bim. Tara's presents her role in the family as a peacemaker between Bim and Raja. She brings a welcome change in Bim's life when she forgives Raja. Aunt Mira represents the supporter of the sheltress family. She entertains to the Das family telling some stories. She provides a means to happiness, something their parents never provide. At the beginning she is the practical who knows that Bim will never be a heroine and that Raja will never be a hero.

So through the making of Bim's maternal feeling, Desai has reformulated the quasi-divine myth of mother which is typically associated with a woman fertilized and a perpetuator of a family line through a duly-solemnized marriage. Thus, the delimiting feature of motherhood manifested through the spinsterhood of Bim becomes prescriptive as a likely alternative to the typical image of a wife and mother which asks it for an all-enduring, all-sacrificing and all-rustic self at the cost of all freedom. Feminist writers untiringly instruct their fellow sisters what to be done or what not by redefining women's experience which consequently makes the writing prescriptive. Anita Desai here seems to have focused the dual function of education as prescribed by Wollstonecraft so aptly that the mark is evident in making Bim 'active, involved, purposeful'(122), to whom 'school and its teachers and lessons were a challenge to her natural intelligence and mental curiosity that she was glad to meet'(123). As for forming 'heart', she doesn't fall short either. The sacrifice she makes for the family assuming 'forced spinsterhood' and the entailing guardian role in absence of any capable male just reveal her integrity which is not independent of her earlier schooling. Desai, in her female-centric narratives, refutes this masculine tenet and through differently constructed personalities of Bim and Tara such chauvinistic principle is shown to be at its utter bankruptcy. So Tara's conformity to the state of a virtuous wife and mother is balanced through Bim's making a disruptive force in the society. Unlike Tara, Bim frustrates the expected feminine roles making her own person –a process that is made thorough bypassing the "Indian myth of true womanhood" Furthermore, disobeying 'hegemonical gender ideology' Bim goes after a 'subversive female search for selfhood and space'. Panna Majumder Bim's individuated identity that makes her prescriptive for all Desai's women can more conspicuously be shown on a comparative analysis made by RanuUniyal:

Married to affluent husbands, they have to rely on patriarchy for subsistence. Educated but servile, married but unhappy, they have nothing of their own to fall back upon. As wives they fail to understand or to be understood, as mothers their failure is of a greater significance forthey are unable to reach their children. As daughters they have received no maternal guidance. So what remains is a perpetual failure as a woman. They cannot respect themselves. They have no pride in being what they are. This lack of self-possession heightens their sense of victimhood which is left without any fulfillment, psychic or moral. Theses lives without fulfillment are lives deprived lives dissatisfied, lives unanswered. It is here that Bim emerges as an answer, an alternative, an image of a new woman. It is in her that we see 'a woman's landscape becoming a landscape of affirmation' (208).

Thus, women's empowerment, after Uniyal's formulation, in their 'response to the temporal order' (189) or the existing reality is either deciding for or dismissive of their worth as an autonomous self. A comparative study of some of Desai's female characters will bring out the justification to the research work. Through the character of Bim, Desai's women who 'evoke elaborate images of disquiet and of female repression and servitude' (Uniyal 207- 208). Maya in *Cry, The Peacock* (1963) doesn't respond to the 'temporal order' but in her extreme outburst and her murder of Gautama, her husband proves suicidal case.

CONCLUSION

The realistic portrait of the inner psyche of women is in Anita Desai's two novels, *Cry, the Peacock* and *Fire on the Mountain*. The female characters are alienated from the main stream of life and are cut off. Maya, Nanda, Raka and even Ila Das are hypersensitive, wayward and high-string individuals. Desai writes about her own class people, i.e., the sensitive class of the upper middle class with their inner conflict and existential problems, in general. Meena Shirwadkar feels like she has Her protagonists dream of a male dominated society attaining freedom and equality. Maya, Monisha, Amala, Nanda, Rakha, and Ila all try to find a way out of the male-dominated world and many headed families where they feel they are in danger of their existence. A study of *Cry, the Peacock* and *Fire on the Mountain* shows that their mental upheaval presented in those novels is responsible for emotional gaps. Her female protagonists are the suffering women in *Cry, the Peacock*, Maya, and in *Fire on Mountain* Nanda, Raka, and Ila Das. A realistic picture of our own society is the image of women presented by Anita. As a child, the excess care becomes the reason for Maya 's suffering. Her husband loves her like a baby, though. She wants her partner 's understanding, but it's missing in their relationship. Child in the life of married woman is supposed to be the most important thing in the past and now as well. She can't stand promptly without kid. Child fixes family place for her. But these two things are absent in Maya 's life and she's hungry for that. She wants a child but Gautama also doesn't give her child after the four of marriage. She wants alone which happens between sexual love, company, understanding between husband and wife. Nanda lives a life as a wife of vice-chancellors but as a wife the love of respect that she expects goes to another lady. She's only a wife because of her name and work. Her husband spends the night with another lady in front of her eyes; the most pathetic moment in her daily life comes in her life. She dies like a person in her life who has taken a slow poison.

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