



SOCIAL REALITIES IN THE NOVELS OF ANITA DESAI AND KIRAN DESAI - A COMPARATIVE STUDY!

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the comparison of mother and daughter, with reference to the novels of Anita Desai and Kiran Desai. While Anita Desai's novels reflect the social reality, Kiran's novels manage to explore every contemporary international issue. Anita Desai is the one novelist who concentrates more on the exploration of modern Indian society and sensibility. She observes the realities from a psychological perspective. Truthfulness is its motto, realism is its animating principle.

Anita Desai's major themes are human relationships, alienation, loneliness, lack of communication, East West Encounter, violence and death. Her novels unfold the inner realities and psychic reverberations of her characters and tell the traumatic tales of blunted human relationships. The novels are certainly reflective of social realities. She is keen on projecting the social world.

Being the daughter of representative of Indian novelist, Kiran Desai has won the Booker prize, where her mother could not succeed though Anita Desai's novel was listed thrice. Kiran walked on the foot steps of her mother. She continued along the contours marked by her mother's experience and the way of writing. The aim of the social realities depicted in the novels of Anita Desai and Kiran Desai.

"It is clear to those of us who have read Anita Desai that Kiran has learned from her mother's work." Both write not just about India but about Indian communities in the world. The remarkable thing about Kiran is that she is aware of Anglo-Indian inheritance but she does something pioneering contemporary issues. While her mother is interested in exploring the social realities, she is more interested in the social upheavals.

Key words:

Acknowledgment, alienated, comparison, consciousness, feministic, protagonist, sensibility,

This paper deals with the comparison of mother and daughter, with reference to the select novels of Anita Desai and Kiran Desai. While Anita Desai's novels reflect the social reality, Kiran's novels manage to explore every contemporary international issue. Anita Desai is the one novelist who concentrates more on the exploration of modern Indian society and sensibility. She observes the realities from a psychological perspective. Anita Desai is in many ways a representative of Indian woman novelist in English world. Her contribution to fiction in Post-colonial India is more significant than the other women novelists.

Both mother and daughter do not believe that literature ought to be confined within the reality. Their novels explore the ordinary and common place in all their mystifying complexity. Truthfulness is its motto, realism is its animating principle. The aim of the social realities depicted in the novels of Anita Desai and Kiran Desai.

Anita Desai's major themes are human relationships, alienation, loneliness, lack of communication, East West encounter, violence and death. Her novels unfold the inner realities and psychic reverberations of her characters and tell the traumatic tales of blunted human relationships. The novels are certainly reflective of social realities. She is keen on projecting the social world. She is not only attended to the problems of women in the Indian society but was keen on projecting the social world. Her novels are certainly the reflective of social realities.

Kiran Desai, the daughter of Anita Desai has won where mother could not succeed though her novel was short listed for the Booker Prize thrice. The daughter continued along the contours marked by her mother but she is perhaps more interested in social and political upheavals. She says that her prize novel is "as much hers as it is mine". Kiran walked on the foot steps of her mother. She continued along the contours marked by her mother's experience and the way of writing.

"It is clear to those of us who have read Anita Desai that Kiran has learned from her mother's work." Both write not just about India but about Indian communities in the world. The remarkable thing about Kiran is that she is aware of Anglo-Indian inheritance but she does something pioneering contemporary issues. Inevitably odious and embarrassing mother-daughter comparisons were made and it speaks volumes for both women that they handled a potentially fraught situation with so much generosity and grace. Kiran always acknowledges the debt she owes her mother and the literary pedigree she has inherited.

Both Mother and daughter have their own different writing style. Anita is a deceptively quiet writer, Kiran is little bit more showy as a writer. While her mother had to learn how to teach in a different country, she struggles with learning to write. Her prize winning novel *The Inheritance of Loss* is like her mother's. Kiran manages to explore every contemporary issues like economic inequality, globalization, immigration, multi-culturalism and patriarchy.

Both Anita Desai and Kiran Desai surely succeeded in projecting Post-colonial Indian society to the English world through their novels.

Anita Desai's heroines exhibit the cosmic emptiness, continual isolation and an awful desolation from which they suffer. Kiran Desai's women characters are not ideally humble and passive but defiant by nature and indifferent to patriarchy. They flip the idea that women should be confined to the "four-walls" and their primary duty is towards their family. They silently rebel and take recourse to nature a world of their own. A world where they can affirm their femininity, independence and womanhood not limited by familial bonds.

When Anita Desai began writing in the 1950s, there were few writers writing in English and she used the home and family as themes before moving away.

Kiran explained that *The Inheritance of Loss* as exploration of post-colonial chaos, did revolve around the same initial story line as one of her mother's original novels. Both the novels (*Fire on the Mountain* and *The Inheritance of Loss*) deal with embittered old Anglophile people who withdraw from the world only to have their solitude interrupted by the arrival of a grandchild.

Unlike her mother Kiran said she does not think of marrying or having children where all her mother's women are the victims of marital incompatibility. "Marriage becomes part of your personality and your life" she said. "If I had a child, I'd have to break out of it and be sweet. But as writer and a daughter of writer mother I am trying to understand late and anger". (The Inheritance of Loss, *The New York Times*, (February 10, 2006)

Social Reality in the select novels of Anita Desai:

Most of Anita Desai's women characters registered protest against the circumstances which oppressed them. where Maya, Monisha, Nanda, Anamika and Uma failed to tide over the crisis. Sita, Bim and Sophie succeeded in doing so. Desai's entire fiction traces the changing image of women in the face of existential dilemmas. These female protagonists assert their right to exist not as shadows of their male counterparts but as independent human souls with a will of their own.

Indian women writers such as Toru Dutt, Kamala Das, Anita Desai, Sarojini Naidu, Sunita Namjoshi, Arundhati Roy, Shahsi Deshpande etc to name a few deal with the amazing variety of themes, styles. Each writer in her own way has tried to convey her thoughts in a distinct personal voice. It has been successful in forming a part of the chorus. A collective tone emphasizing the dominion of women. Women writers have often raised their voice against social and cultural practices that restricted their freedom and led to their institutional isolation.

A prick into the mystical crusts of the mind of Anita Desai's heroines exhibits the cosmic emptiness, continual isolation and an awful misery from which they suffer. Desai's women characters are not ideally humble and passive but bold by nature and indifferent to patriarchy. They flip the idea that women should be confined to the "four-walls" and their primary duty is towards their family. They silently rebel and take recourse to nature a world of their own, a world where they can affirm their independence, femininity and womaness not limited by domestic bonds.

In *Where Shall We Go This Summer*, Anita Desai depicts the inner outer world of its female lead Sita and her fatigue for life. Sita, a non-conformist young wife is torn between the desire to abandon the boredom and hypocrisy of her middle class and apparently comfortable existence. The realization that the bonds that tie her to it cannot easily be broken. She is projected as highly emotional, sensitive, intellectual and freedom loving. She finds it very difficult to adjust to the patriarchal culture and practically civilized world. She feels suffocate due to the vegetarian self regard, the stolidity, 'narrowness' and unimaginative way of life of her husband, children and other people around her.

Consequently, her life becomes dull and boring. Sita finds it difficult to live with her husband in their age rotted flat, which is marked by sub-human placidity, calmness and sluggishness and feels that their sub humanity might swamp her. In order to get rid of her seclusion and to preserve her individuality, She behaves in a appalling manner by smoking openly.

Sita is a motherless child and she experienced partiality, neglect, indifference right from the beginning of her childhood. Sita's father had no time for his children. It was Rekha, Sita's sister who was close to his heart. She always has a doubt about Rekha and her relationship with her. There is no resemblance between the two sisters. Her much suppressed emotions in her childhood is responsible for her troubled mental state in future. The indifference of her father, alienation from sister, lack of love and care from her mother brings about many psychological changes in Sita's attitude.

The betrayal of her husband, his family, her children and associates violently tears her apart. It is only later on does she start feeling bad about her doings. Wisdom dawns on her and she wants to return to reality. When Raman prepares to leave Manori, she mends her ways and follows his footprints like a "true bhartiya nari".

Finally, Sita realizes that illusion and reality are two sides of life and they are inseparable. Of course if one is alive in this world one cannot survive without compromise. Drawing the lines means certain death and in the end Sita opts for life with compromise. Unlike Maya in *Cry, the peacock*, Sita neither commits

suicide nor kills anyone but she simply compromises with her destiny, which is quite relevant in the Indian scenario. Sita finally accept the prosaic nature of life which runs through difficult human situations in different ways. She finds the courage to face life, in the end, with all its ups and downs.

Though the heroines of Anita Desai often act violently but in this novel there is a positive change. Sita reconciles herself to her fate. She strikes a perfect balance between her inner self and the outer world. Unlike Maya, her alienation is not temperamental or environmental.

In *Clear Light of Day* is the story of the Indian Das family, the members of which are no longer all together. Bimla or Bim is an unmarried history teacher who has never left her home and family in Old Delhi. She is the person who has the responsibility of taking care of her autistic brother, Baba. Her younger sister, Tara, is married to Bakul and has children. She comes back to visit her family in Old Delhi with her husband who is India's ambassador to America.

The story moves back in time from the characters adulthood to their adolescence and then to their childhood. When they were children, Tara's wish to become a mother was often ridiculed by Bim. Raja another brother of Bim, who is living in Hyderabad. As these two wanted to be a heroine and a hero respectively. In the final part, apart from family decisions such as whether or not to attend Raja's daughter's wedding, the significant climactic point is when Bim explodes at Baba and then decides that familial love can cover all wrongs.

Bim is there to take over the role of the mother. Thus, it can be said that the role of woman as the life giver and the mother of the whole family does not disappear at all but instead, it switches from time to time among these female characters in the novel. Even if these women had chosen not to surrender and instead tried to break the conventions and confront their situation as female subjects under the colonial and patriarchal system. Their voice would not be heard and they would at some point be silenced by the system.

Social Reality in the novel of Kiran Desai:

In *The Inheritance of Loss* is the novel which claims her to win the prestigious Man Booker Prize. Kiran Desai has achieved the world wide popularity heaped upon her second novel in 2006. She has made a place for herself not as Anita Desai's daughter but as a promising, gifted novelist sharing with the likes of Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghose and Arundhati Roy. Having gone through this novel it is found that the novelist has raised many burning issues like women's quest for identity including the immigrants' life and struggle on the foreign land. She has portrayed the female characters with little meekness and with some sparks too. All women except nimi in *The Inheritance of Loss* are projected as successful in holding their position in a male dominated set up. But she doesn't fail to show how they are forced to consider subjugation against men. Despite it she has clearly revealed that the Indian woman has succeeded in redefining herself. Consequently women have come a long way indeed though a lot needs to be done still. She tightly holds the flag of feminism projecting her female characters with liberty and right.

Kiran Desai has projected many female characters with various colours that paint the picture of successive generations of women. Description in detail will throw adequate light on Desai's stances regarding female. Very skilfully Desai has described that seeking promising career people drifts to England, Europe, USA, London etc. But under the influence of westernisation they start to loss their own culture. Kiran Desai very skilfully presented the situation of married Indian women, how after the marriage she has no right to live in the parents' house and is taught to face everything whether good or bad. Because of that mostly Indian wives are having the life of isolation and loneliness despite having all relationship. They are not treated as human, their voices are not heard. Observing the female characters in Indian women Writings, Antonia Tejero in her essay Modern Indian Women Writers in English comments:

The ideal of the traditional, oppressed woman persisted in a culture permeated religious images of virtuous goddesses devoted to their husbands... when looking at these narratives silence, speech can be a useful guide to interpreted women's responses to patriarchal hegemony. Silence is a symbol of oppression, a characteristic of the subaltern condition, which speech signifies self expression and liberation.

Kiran Desai has endeavoured to distinguish the effective means of improving the Indian woman's second class social status. Her characters whether male or female are seen keeping their journey from subjugation to liberation. Among other female characters Nonita(Noni) and Lalita (Lola) are also significant who hang around to live their lives on their own way. Lola is widow and lives her life with her sister. They are not satisfied with their life for their pangs reveals time to time. That is why Noni suggests Sai to mould her identity and have a meaningful life. Her despondency and discontentment are reflected in her advice to Sai. These women show cosmopolitan views, they belong to a world of information boom. BBC gave them a worldwide coverage of news and they discussed literature amongst themselves. They had well passed their prime age of progress but they wanted the next generation to grasp the opportunity. Therefore, Noni advised Sai,

“Time should move. Don't go in for a life where time doesn't pass, the way I did. That is the single biggest bit of advice I give you” (TIOL,2006,93).

Thus, the novel has a moderate endeavour to show Kiran Desai's female characters quest for identity shaking the traditional restraints which women are tied with. No matter in the life of few female characters there is detachment, isolation, loneliness and annui. But other characters are shown with adequate potential and capacity to carve new identity on their own way. People worship goddess who is woman but they treat their wives not as human with flesh and blood. Women's voices are unheard while should be heard. As they are not heard means half population is not heard. They should be promoted and respected. In this regard it can be concluded that feminism has awakened them to proceed to have an authentic life as they have right and liberty which should be given in real sense. They know a little attempt is not less important as that may be just like the stone of foundation. On that new structure can be erected.

Conclusion:

To conclude Anita Desai has contributed significantly to the literary world in general and to the Indian writing in English in particular by investing her works with a inner voice of women perspective that widens and enlarges the frontiers of thought and which is therefore considered a very important literary characteristic by most critics and thinkers.

To conclude Kiran Desai has given a vivid and clear description of various relations that are found in the postcolonial Indian society. She has even a parallel picture of these relations in India and in the west. Desai has created a picture of different shades of life and relationships that people share in the changing Indian society.

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