



**Research Article**

**PSYCHO ACOUSTICAL TRAUMA IN SELECT NOVELS OF ANITA DESAI**

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**ABSTRACT**

Anita Desai announced a new epoch of psychological realism with her novels and concerned with their psychic life. Psychological trauma is the damage to mind due to severe stress and anxiety. Trauma differs between individuals according to their experiences in life. Anita Desai's protagonists are psychologically disturbed and abnormal with abusive relationships, rejection and co-dependence. Many people with trauma related psychological symptoms are not identified and do not receive any help. Anita Desai's women protagonists psyche and personality disturbances are studied. In *Fire on the Mountain* and *Cry the peacock* women are psychologically suffering. Her concern is with the psychic and emotional impulses of her characters. Anita Desai brought nature very close in her novel's, but Nanda Kaul had no interest in nature. These three characters are cut off from the real life and lives in the world of fantasy. The "fire" metaphorically burns slowly with her characters before it literally ignites at the end of the novel. The peacocks dance symbolizes death and freedom from her tortured psyche. Maya identifies herself with peacock. Maya developed long term tendency to be in a negative mood. She suffered from guilt, irritability and anxiety. Neuroticism is a higher order personality traits. Due to advancements in all the areas there has been increase in the treatments of personality disorders which is possible with medications and psychotherapies. Economic empowerment and prosperity of society is possible when women are physically and mentally sound.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Anita Desai has added a new dimension to the achievement of Indian women writers in English fiction. In her novels illusion and reality are emphasized in her fictional world. Her works are different from those of other Indian women writers in English. The concept of stream of consciousness is shown in her novels as her characters thoughts, feelings and reactions are depicted in a continuous flow. Her novels shows the inner climate, the climate of sensibility that lours and rumbles like thunders. Anita Desai announced a new epoch of psychological realism with her novels and concerned with their psychic life. Psychological trauma is the damage to mind due to severe stress and anxiety. Trauma differs between individuals according to their experiences in life. Some people try to cope up with trauma but some threatened to violent death. Trauma is caused due to violation, extreme confusion, insecurity and depression. Anita Desai's protagonists are psychologically disturbed and abnormal with abusive relationships, rejection and co-dependence. Many people with trauma related psychological symptoms are not identified and do not receive any help. Even if any one is identified as in need of help they do not obtain any services.

Every one reacts to depression and stress in their way, understanding and showing concern can give expectations of recovery.

"The dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his characteristic behavior and thought". -Gordan w. Allport, 1961. Personality chaos are a type of mental disorder that can damage lives and relationships if left untreated. They express a different emotions which are pernicious to relationships. Anita Desai protagonists disorders are due to family upbringing and dysfunctional home life. By getting a better understanding of women personality a warm and happy society is formed. Despite many recent advances, there is need to increase the current treatments in traumatic stress disorders. In this paper Anita Desai's women protagonists psyche and personality disturbances are studied. In *Fire on the Mountain* and *Cry the peacock* women are psychologically suffering. Her concern is with the psychic and emotional impulses of her characters.

***Fire on the Mountain***

*Fire on the mountain* is the master piece of Anita Desai which tells about the personality chaos of women. In this novel one little girl Raka and two old women Nanda Kaul and Ila Das expressed their insecurity and lack of self identity. Nanda Kaul is the central character in this novel, Raka is her great - grand daughter and Ila Das is her friend. Raka is an abnormal

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child showing some behavioral problems showing an abnormal behavior that requires some type of mental intervention. The plot of this novel is almost brief and straightforward showing the psyches of Nanda Kaul, Raka and Ila Das. Nanda Kaul leads her life according to social norms but she did not find pleasure and satisfaction in her life. When Ila Das is raped and killed, that brutal action takes place at the back stage and almost with the Raka's announcement that she has set the forest on fire. Anita Desai prepares the readers for the horrific ending by carefully embedding violence in her imagery and symbolism. This novel is written in three parts which are closely related to each other. In the same way all the three characters are also inter-related to each other. The symbolic image of fire shows the inner fire present in Nanda Kaul, Raka and Ila Das. Anita Desai put fantasy and reality together in this novel. Ila Das suppressed with her pathetic life and lives in the world of fantasy. Fire on the forest shows the psychic wound of Nanda Kaul and Raka 'Look Nani, I have set the forest on fire. Look, Nani-look-the forest is on the fire (FOM-158). In this novel the birds, trees, mountains, gardens, fruits symbolize the nature. Anita Desai brought nature very close in her novel's, but Nanda Kaul had no interest in nature. These three characters are cut off from the real life and lives in the world of fantasy. The "fire" metaphorically burns slowly with her characters before it literally ignites at the end of the novel.

#### ***Cry the Peacock (1963)***

Anita Desai's first novel, *Cry the peacock* (1963) focused on the women protagonist Maya's psyche and personality in which she was suffering from insecurity and lack of freedom. Maya is a young brahmin girl who got married to a middle aged christian lawyer Gautama, he is a friend of Maya's father Rai Sahib. Being alone, in the family, mother being dead father had pampered her a lot. Father expressed lot of attention and love. Maya recalled her childhood days in Lucknow during the spring. Maya recalls whispers of breeze, blades of grass, stronger odor of milk and cows, honey, butterflies and flowers in her garden. The world is like toy specially made for her. She spent with her father who always cared so much so that no one can replace him. Maya enjoyed like princess engaged with fairy tales and fantasies. Prophecy was given about Maya by an albino astrologer that any one of them will die within four years of their marriage. Maya asked Gautama to accompany her on the terrace. As he moved in front of her, hiding the moon from her view, pushed him over the parapet down to the very bottom. Gautama's mother and sister took psychotic Maya to her father's house, in the end Maya commits suicide.

#### ***Personality Chaos of Anita Desai Protagonists Nanda Kaul, Raka, Ila Das and Maya***

Nanda Kaul is a widowed woman who wants to lead an isolated life. She spent all her young age for the service of her family. Being a wife of Punjab University Vice Chancellor, she was very busy to manage her social life with visitors. She did service with commitment to her children. She never thought of her personal life. For a married woman, her happiness lies in the care and love shown by her husband. But her husband had an affair with Ms. David, who is a mathematics teacher. It is very much difficult for a woman to accept a painful marital life. If we shower emotions to others then the same is expected, if not shown it lacks satisfaction in life. It is the

common attitude of women. Especially women are very sensitive to some issues. It is very difficult for a wife to accept her husband's affairs with others. But Nanda Kaul silently accepted the fact. In her early days she was very busy, that busy schedule forced her to lead a life in isolation, as anything too much leads to aversion. Nanda Kaul feels disgusted when she received a letter from her daughter Asha about the problems of her granddaughter Tara. It shows that Nanda Kaul doesn't want a woman to suffer, as she herself suffered with her husband. After her husband's death as a widow old woman she completely decided to lead a solitary life with a feeling of emptiness because of her personality chaos, when she was young she completely led a disturbed life. Nanda Kaul strongly decided to spend her life at Carignano in Kasauli, even postman's arrival is unwelcome to her. It shows her mood disturbance and adjustment disorder. She even doesn't want to attend the telephone call, she doesn't want to disturb herself from her loneliness. Her great-granddaughter Raka's arrival is unpleasant in the beginning, because she was vexed up with her previous life and doesn't want to express emotions to others. Nanda Kaul has shown a split personality, it is due to severe trauma in life. In the beginning she had shown Extrovert behavior with a lot of socialization and easy-going attitude. She wanted to be isolated but she developed an attachment with Raka and tried to share her emotions and feelings but Raka ignored with that, Nanda Kaul developed disturbances in her attitude. She felt inferior, insecure and changed from extrovert to introvert due to the disturbances in her real life. She expressed anxiety disorders with emotions towards Raka, when Raka's mother was ill again in Geneva then Nanda Kaul bitterly cursed her failure to comfort Raka. She expressed her inability to place herself in her mother's position and act accordingly. Raka completely ignored her great-grandmother and went to exploration during the afternoon time. But Nanda Kaul wanted her and pouted childishly. According to psychologists old age is the stage of second childhood, she behaved childishly like a baby thwarted, wanting attention which she did not get in her life. Nanda Kaul shows mood extremes including outbursts of rage and expression of little or no emotions. She feels no hope for future life. According to Erik Erikson's "Stages of personality development", the human personality is developed in a series of eight stages that take place from the time of Birth and continue on throughout an individual's complete life. Those who are unsuccessful during this phase will feel that their life has been wasted and will experience many regrets. Nanda Kaul also expressed the same feelings of despair and bitterness. Successful completion of this phase of life gives satisfaction which she lacks and feels insecurity. In the beginning Nanda Kaul decided to ignore Raka. But Raka ignored her. She ignored so calmly and totally that made Nanda Kaul breathless and exhibited mood disorder. She wondered at this total rejection, natural, instinctive and effortless. When compared with her own planned and willful rejection of the child, Nanda Kaul felt that Raka was the finished, perfected model of Nanda Kaul herself. She had a good attachment with Ila Das, her childhood friend, Nanda Kaul had shown the melodramatic behavior. When she heard about her friend's death news, she rejected to accept the fact and reacted badly to lose her friend presenting Histrionic personality disorder. Raka is a girl of tender age. Her mother is Tara and grandmother Asha. Nanda Kaul received a letter about Raka's visit from her

daughter Asha. She wrote unfortunate life of Tara who married a diplomat and had affairs with drinking and brutality. Tara's husband Rakesh was posted at Geneva. Raka was just recovering from typhoid. So Asha and Tara felt that it would be better for her to stay at hillside for her early recovery. But Raka was not like all other children, when she went to Kasauli along with her uncle after seeing her great-grand daughter she didn't hugged her or talk to her. She was very silent, she wanted to spend time lonely at the hill side. After coming to Kasauli she started questioning about the Pasteur Institute to Ram Lal, servant of Nanda Kaul. Raka is an abnormal child. The personality development of every individual starts at the early childhood. During the childhood children starts playing with toys and like to imitate their parents. This shows the sex stereotyping. Home is the first place where every child learns socialization and moral values. Man is a social animal, so socialization is essential for every individual which didn't happen with Raka because of her family situations. In her family the male dominating picture is seen. Father was drunkard, he punished her mother every day during the night time. Mother is the first teacher for every child but because of lack of sound atmosphere in her house, mother was not able to teach her anything, resulting in lack of interest in education. Children grown up from unhealthy house develops lower self esteem. They are devalued more frequently and almost never allowed to be the center of admiring attention at home. Raka's drunkard father used to beat her mother with hammers and fists of abuse, harsh filthy abuse that made Raka cover under her bed clothes and wet the mattress in fright, feeling the stream of urine warm and weakening her legs like a stream of blood and her lay down on the floor, shut her eyes and wept. Raka's mother Tara demanded the largest share of sympathy and attention with her unhappiness and breakdowns. Poor Raka looked like a ghost. She even can't share the sufferings of her mother with her great - grand mother, she just silently accepted her fate which was bonded with her parents. Raka was a perceptive child, disappears silently and suddenly for many hours at the foot of the hill. Raka didn't like to go to school as normal children, she exhibits abnormal behavior. She was shocked when Nanda Kaul asked her to go to school as a boarder at Sanawar in Kasauli. She had shaken her head doubly rejecting the very outright thought of school, of hostels, of discipline, order and obedience. Children with mental illness are at high risk of achieving education. Raka wanted to spend her time lonely, but when Nanda Kaul accompany her for a walk, she disliked it. She wanted loneliness on a solitary afternoon expedition, secrecy was to have been the essence of it. Raka had a jealous guarded instincts, she hated her great -grand mother intently watching her ascent. When Raka sang a song "I'm ship wrecked-I'm ship wrecked and alone in my boat of sea" shows her lonely attitude. Raka's long illness in Delhi and her weak exhausted state thereafter had absolved her of any further need to socialize. It was obvious that Raka loved secrecy, she even found darkness to be friendlier. When Nanda Kaul receives letter from her daughter Asha, she wrote that Tara was admitted in the nursing home in Geneva. At that time Raka interrogates about her mother, then Nanda Kaul replied briefly about her mother's illness, she kept quiet and avoid to meet others unless they are liked and restrains intimate relationships Her face was pale, but composed, she might have different although deliberately, without expressing any kind of emotions for her mother. She neither shocked for

her illness. Raka had shown the impaired thinking and marked disturbances in her personal relationships. The abnormal personality of Raka had directed to an abnormal behavior with anxiety and mood disorders.

Ila Das is a very close friend of Nanda Kaul. When Ila Das visited Carignano, she had taken Raka into the world of fantasy. Ila Das father had never been to Tibet, nor had her husband cherished, loved and kept her like a queen. She even did not have bears and leopards at her house. She spent fantasy prone personality reporting most of the time in fantasizing. Ila Das was from a poor family, when she came to the Punjab university campus as a lecturer in Home science, her mother was bed-ridden and father died of a stroke. The family was divided with drunkard sons and two clever hard working daughters Ila and Rima. Her father paid debts and they sold their horses, house and land. When he died, nobody attended his funeral. There was nothing left for them to inherit. Nanda Kaul sheltered them and helped in their upbringing. Nanda Kaul suggested her husband, the vice chancellor of university to create a job in home science college for Ila Das. But she resigned the job and struggled from pillar to post to earn even 50Rs. Ila Das started interest in social service and she wrote for magazines and journals to earn 30Rs and thought it was a fortune for her. She has quest for identity in her life. Later Ila Das was appointed as a welfare officer in a village. Ila Das told about the superstitious beliefs followed in the village due to the force of priests. She objected Preet Singh for getting married to a seven years old girl to an old man. He is a widower and has six children, she warned Preet Singh not to sacrifice her daughter's life for a bit of land and goats for which he cursed Ila Das. She felt happy when she met her childhood friend Nanda Kaul, swinging her umbrella went to bazaar. Ila Das did not take the Garkhal road which leads to hill side of her village. The grain seller an elderly man looked benevolently at Ila Das. Shop keeper warned her not to go late to her house alone in the dark, but Ila Das laughed and touched with his concern because no one is there in her life to care and share her emotions so she said, I am always alone, I am never afraid. From her childhood, she struggled a lot for the survival of her family. She fulfilled all her duties as a son to her old parents and did service to her parents along with financial support. Financial security improves confidence but she was never secure so developed disorders in her personality. Preet Singh cursed Ila Das with obscene words, She became conscious of the dark by the grain seller. Hurriedly travelled all the way of hill side with shabby, rundown houses and dried up gardens. After reaching her hut, she relieved with pleasure. She is alone no one is there for her, loneliness is a very painful feeling. But Preet Singh in passion of rage dislodged her throat and raped her, pained her down into the dust. Nanda Kaul was informed by the Garkhal police officer that Ila Das raped and found dead. Ila Das spent all her life in fantasy, she struggled all her life. Her husband never loved her, even her children are alien to her nature, she neither understood nor loved them. All those graces and glories with which she had tried to captivate Raka were only a fabrication. They helped her to sleep at night, fantasy helped as tranquilizers and pills. The fire on the mountain is a symbol of bad happenings in the novel.

Maya was Neurotic from the childhood, but her father maintained it a secret even did not told to Gautama. Marriage is the important event which affects psychological status of an

individual. Maya desires to have similar attentions from her husband Gautama but did not received from him. He is a busy lawyer. Maya feels neglected and distrust. Gautama warns about this attitude and blames her father for spoiling her. Marriage is boredom for him. He was more elder than Maya and busy in his papers with work and his profession. He was cool, calm and responsible person but Maya was childish in her attitude so the individual differences had lead to marital discord. The unhappy marital relation and stress caused many psychological problems to Maya. She developed aggression, depression, paranoia and obsession which finally leads to disaster in her life. During her childhood a prophesy was given by albino astrologer who said that within four years of her marriage any one of them will die. It disturbed her and death followed as dark clouds and made her to scare so she was unable to pay attention on her personal life. Gautama said Maya want exhibitionism, a common disease of egoism. Maya recalled her childhood in which she lived as a toy princes in a toy world. Maya has no mother and brother Arjuna also left her in childhood and went to America. Her father had shown extreme indulgence and kindness to her. She was treated with lot of care and attention. She is a treasure for him. So Maya developed too much attachment with her father which is termed as father-obsession. According to Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical theory the father complex is a group of unconscious associations or strong unconscious impulses which specifically pertains to the image of the father. So Maya want everybody to care and love her as her father did. Maya's world looked like a toy specially made for her in her favorite colors in her father's presence but with the accompany of Gautama the world and the life is meaningless to her. Maya is a childless woman. The influence of childlessness will definitely affects psychological well-being. Marital relations also affects. It leads to mental health difficulties, depression. Being childless, is itself a great tragedy, gives much emotional pain and grief. Childless woman develops fanatic attachment with animals. Maya also developed interest in pet animals. She had a pet dog Toto, she loved it very much. When Toto died she felt very bad and felt lonely, filled with despair. Maya is very sensitive, she hiccuped and cried like a child. Gautama said discussion about death is meaningless but for Maya death, burial cremation are facts. Gautama shown sympathy and indulgence towards her behavior. Maya has no self identity and freedom. During her childhood, she depended on her father, after marriage depending on her husband. Maya's father was born of a brahmin family who believes in astrology and horoscopes. A prophesy was given about Maya by an albino astrologer that any one of them will die with in four years of their marriage. Whereas Gautama was a christian and educated, it was word alien from birth. Death lurked in spaces, the darkness spoke of distance, separation, loneliness. Maya thought of darkness hanging over her head and of a long journey of the dead one birth to another in the midst of chaos. Maya is so much depressed by the vision of astrologer the peacocks cry during rainy season disturbed her and realizes she could never sleep in peace. Being intensely in love with life she turns hysteric. Father! Brother! Husband! who is my savior? I am in need of one. I am dying, and I am in love with living. I am in love, and I am dying. God let me sleep. There is no rest anymore -- only death and waiting. (84). She is panic of pain. The hypnotic spell of drum beats outraged her and decided to kill Gautama.

Maya asked Gautama to accompany her on the terrace. As he moved in front of her, hiding the moon from her view, pushed him over the parapet down to the very bottom. Gautama's mother and sister took psychotic Maya to her father's house, in the end Maya commits suicide. In this novel peacocks are used are imagery. Do you not hear the peacocks call in the wilds? Are they not blood-chilling, their shrieks of pain? 'pia, pia 'they cry,' Lover, lover. Mio, mio, I die, I die.' (82) The peacocks dance symbolizes death and freedom from her tortured psyche.

In *Fire on the Mountain*, Nanda Kaul had a married life with children but still she is not happy, there is no essence of pleasure and satisfaction with her marital relationship. In *Cry the peacock* the protagonist Maya is psychic there is also marital discord between Maya and Gautama but in this novel Maya is childless and she does not fulfilled her desire of emotions and care from Gautama. In both the protagonist there is marital discord.

Maya has a different kind of life style. She don't have socialization being only child father had shown extreme love and affection resulted in father-fixation. Nanda Kaul being a wife of University Vice chancellor, she was very busy with visitors and children to lead a socialized life.

In Anita Desai novels nature plays a significant role. Nature is presented very closely and clearly, Mountains, birds, butterflies, flowers, fruits all are very beautifully touched with an aesthetic sense. But Nanda Kaul had no interest and importance with nature. Nature's beauty is nothing for her. But for Maya in *Cry the peacock*, nature is everything for her, she enjoyed her childhood with nature. In *Fire on the Mountain*, the child Raka is an abnormal child because of the poor family brought up, her father was drunkard man and not expressed emotions towards Raka. So her mind is affected psychologically. Maya is childish. Her father had shown extreme love and emotions which developed in father-fixation and affected her psyche.

Ila Das in *Fire on the Mountain* lived a life of fantasy because of her unfulfilled desires which resulted in death. Maya also haunted with prophesy, murdered her husband and committed suicide. So Anita Desai characters are suffering from disorders with similarities and differences, Women are the pillars of the society Anita Desai had shown concern towards women for the growth of feminine world.

## **CONCLUSION**

Twentieth century is the age of stress and strain. At present majority of women are suffering with personality disorders but never provoke to consult a psychiatrist because they are panic of societal norms and traditional culture and feel that mentally disorder people will only consult psychiatrist to get mental health service. Personality disorders and mental disorders are two different issues. The exact reasons of personality disorder cannot be said but with the effect of society and environmental experiences disorders occurs. The relationship between parent and child plays an indispensable role in life. Positive parent child relations develop autonomy, curiosity, self esteem and better decision making skills. Trust brings security and confidence in children. Moral and ethical principles brings good reflection in personality development. In this paper, three different personality disorder women are identified. Nanda Kaul shown chaotic interpersonal

relationships and identity disturbance marking a Paranoid Personality disorder as she felt overly sensitive and humiliation. She tends to withdraw from others and struggled in building new relations. Raka displayed Schizoid Personality disorder with a tendency of getting attention towards inner life and away from the external world, showing detachment with others. She had also shown avoidant personality because of rejection by her parents in childhood and expressed incompetent, unappealing, inferior and rejected attitude. Ila Das shown Schizoid personality disorder as she lived in experiencing a deep sense of intimacy but finds maintaining difficult in close relationships and distressing. She lives in fantasy. The peacocks dance symbolizes death and freedom from her tortured psyche. Maya identifies herself with peacock. Maya developed long term tendency to be in a negative mood. She suffered from guilt, irritability and anxiety. Neuroticism is a higher order personality traits. She is at risk of development of mood disorder and anxiety. Severe depression resulted in suicidal tendency to Maya Due to advancements in all the areas there has been increase in the treatments of personality disorders which is possible with medications and psychotherapies. Economic empowerment and prosperity of society is possible when women are physically and mentally sound.

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