



**CONFLICT AND INSECURITY IN SELECT NOVELS OF ANITA DESAI**

**Nasreen Begum<sup>1</sup> and Glory K. B<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>KL University, Vijayawada, AP

<sup>2</sup>Department of English, KL University, Vijayawada, AP

**ARTICLE INFO**

**Article History:**

Received 15<sup>th</sup> September, 2017

Received in revised form 25<sup>th</sup>

October, 2017

Accepted 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 2017

Published online 28<sup>th</sup> December, 2017

**Key words:**

Conflict, insecurity, self-confidence, depression, Psychic disorder

**ABSTRACT**

Anita Desai's protagonists are psychologically disturbed and abnormal with personal relationships, rejection and co-dependence. Her works are different from those of other Indian women writers in English. Conflict is the difference of feelings, ideas and attitude in different individuals. No two individuals will be the same we have our own way of thinking the differences in interests, feelings and desires will result in conflict which affects our actions and decisions in our real life. The opposing ideas in relationships will continuously cause mental struggle. The oppressive atmosphere prevailed in novels depicts the psychology of fear in women. Anita Desai protagonists are forced to involve completely in routine life regardless of their interest and tendencies and they are in thirst of justice, security and identity. Security and identity are essential for a woman to develop a better quality of life. It is well known that darkness prevails in the absence of light. In the same way insecurity and depression filled the hearts of women. In 'cry the peacock' (1963) the protagonist Maya suffered from Neurosis, the feeling of insecurity is one of the symptoms of psychic disorders. Monisha in 'Voices in the city' (1965) is in conflict about to live in that bizarre city or to succumb herself. She is in conflict of survival in that tough orthodox, Bengali family and committed suicide. Nirode is depressed with his failures in life and feels exile to busy city Calcutta. Anita Desai has shown different view of protagonists in 'Bye Bye Black Bird' (1971) in which Sara and Adit were in the existential conflict for their settlement. 'Where Shall We go this summer' (1975) is a very interesting novel which revolves round the city Mumbai and Manori Island. In 'Fire on the Mountain' (1977) Nanda Kaul had shown conflict in her identity. The ability to imagine one in others place and understand their position, feelings, desires and sufferings leads to contented life. Acquisition of problem solving skills is essential for every woman to occupy a very significant role in the society

Copyright©2017 **Nasreen Begum and Glory K. B.** This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

**INTRODUCTION**

Anita Desai is famous for her continuous expressions of thoughts in her own simple and familiar style. Anita Desai's protagonists are psychologically disturbed and abnormal with personal relationships, rejection and co-dependence. Her works are different from those of other Indian women writers in English. Her fictional world is a world of defeat and disillusionment. Memory, illusion and hallucination revolves round the Desai's novels. Her novels highlights the plight of women who have insecurity, lack of identity and conflict in their relations. Conflict is the difference of feelings, ideas and attitude in different individuals. No two individuals will be the same we have our own way of thinking the differences in interests, feelings and desires will result in conflict. Consequently, conflict affects our actions and decisions in our real life.

\*Corresponding author: **Nasreen Begum**  
Scholar, KL University, Vijayawada, AP

The opposing ideas in relationships will continuously cause mental struggle. In her novels husbands are conveniently neglecting women clearly shows their duplicity. The characters feel suffocate and deprived of every kind of freedom. The oppressive atmosphere prevailed in novels depicts the psychology of fear in women. Lack of self-confidence causes insecurity and develops inferiority complex which makes them to feel less worthy and the fear of being humiliated or with drawl into oneself. The paper shows on the issues surrounding the insecurity, lack of identity in a predominantly patriarchal society. In her works, she portrayed the issues of parenting, orthodoxy, marital discord and sense of helplessness in women. Anita Desai protagonists are forced to involve completely in routine life regardless of their interest and tendencies and they are in thirst of justice, security and identity. These novels repeatedly stress the alienation of women by an array of expressions. Decision making in critical situations helps to solve the problems. If the situation is in conflict it becomes difficult to take decisions. Especially women are not given freedom to take decisions because from

the childhood it was decided that women should become a home maker and bonded to the four walls of the society. So the sex stereo typing is decided based on gender roles. From the childhood parents develop the inferiority and dependence attitude. Women are forced to depend on others which ultimately destruct their thinking ability. Security and identity are essential for a woman to develop a better quality of life. It is well known that darkness prevails in the absence of light. In the same way insecurity and depression filled the hearts of women. These novels highlight the sufferings of women who are bearing the isolation and conflict.

In 'Cry the Peacock'(1963) the protagonist Maya suffered from Neurosis, the feeling of insecurity is one of the symptoms of psychic disorders. Maya from the childhood spend her life without mother, so her father Raisahab pampered her like a toy princes which developed father fixation. Maya felt insecure in her life as mother had died and brother left her and went to America to settle. Her father did her marriage with Gautama who is more elder than her. She is a childless woman, which resulted for insecurity and had a desire to live a happy and prosperous life with her husband, but he is a busy lawyer and not interested in Maya. She felt insecure of her childhood prophesy that either of them will die within five years of their marriage. Maya developed conflict in her life. The fear of death haunted her like a dark cloud. She is in a conflict of life and death situation. 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)Maya is suffering from the internal conflict and became psychic which made to kill her husband. She felt free with her husband's death and her inner conflict dissolves but she herself commits suicide as she cannot return to the real state because of insecurity in her life.

'Voices in the city' (1965) is a very different novel in which anguish and exile is clearly presented by the protagonist. Nirode felt exile in the city Calcutta. The city Calcutta plays a vital role in the lives of Nirode, Monisha and Amla. Monisha recorded her expressions in a diary. She lives in a joint family with her in-laws, uncles and cousins but nobody treated her as one among them. She felt insecure with lack of self-identity. Her husband Jiban expected women to be an ideal, perfect worker bonded in the four walls of the house. Monisha lacks freedom and suffers from insecurity. She is a childless woman, her in -laws and cousins even discussed about her personal organs and her inability to become mother and brought a lot of anguish in Monisha. Even her husband also did not shower any kind of emotions and care towards her. Monisha transforms herself from extrovert to introvert resulting in the disturbances of her personality. She felt insecure in the city Calcutta. The strange location of city and busy life haunted her. She lived in a joint family but felt insecure due to lack of sharing of emotions and caring of people. . The city has no conscience and the people are mesmerized with the busy city, and this city of Goddess Kali is a city of death for her. Monisha had no interest to continue her life like a caged bird. She developed a lust of freedom and identity and said 'Do you hear me, city of Calcutta? City of Kali, Goddess of death. Not one word from you, I said, not a sound .No shriek, no groanm, no cry. I come here for silence, my few moments of night silence, so cease your moaning and wailing a while.'-137. Monisha is in conflict about to live in that bizarre city or succumb herself

She is in conflict of survival in that tough orthodox, Bengali family. Because of the conflict in her personality she committed suicide Nirode is depressed with his failures in life and feels exile to busy city Calcutta. He was addicted to smoking and liquor. He even suspects his mother and not interested to share his feelings. When Monisha committed suicide his rebellion attitude was calm down. Nirode is a man who lived in conflict of relationships. He wanted to be bounded with the relationships but he was in confusion and decided to lead a life of isolation as he was in an existence dilemma whether to live in strange city Calcutta or to give up his life. It is the city which affected the personality of individual more than people around him in this novel. At the end the situation is that probably all the characters are concerned for their survival and identity but they succumb to the vagaries of psychic conditions.

Anita Desai has shown different view of protagonists in 'Bye Bye Black Bird' (1971) In this novel Dev, Adit and Sarah all the three characters are psychologically suffering from identity dilemma. Dev and Adit are Indians and Adit got married to a tender foreign lady Sarah who is from London. Adit came to India after marriage but imagined about the unemployment problem in India and decided to adjust himself along with Sarah in London. Adit settled in London with Indian Nationality even though it is difficult to adjust in other country. Sarah felt insecure in her own country. She is called as Mrs.Sen. The anguish of loneliness is expressed when she was called with different name. She had become nameless; she shed her name as she shed her ancestry and identity. She is unable to express her individuality as a London lady as she got married to an Indian. Adit wants his wife Sarah to follow Indian tradition and culture by wearing sari and jewelry. Dev felt isolated and degraded in London. He expressed identity tumult in London. He faced many instances in London where he was degraded and insulted. Dev went to London for pursuing higher education but after sometime he had decided to give up the idea of joining the London school of Economics instead he started to search for a job in London. Dev explained Adit that to stay in London is a tumult for him and said 'It is only a tumult inside him, a growing bewilderment, a kind of schizophrenia that wakes him in the middle of the night and shadows him by day, driving him along on endless tramps in all weathers while he wonders whether he should stay, or go back' -86 It shows that he was agitated and in conflict of existence. Miller is a German land lady who talks freely with them and Punjabi Sikh neighbours. They enjoyed Indian food in evening parties, but felt lonely in a foreign country. Adit felt drained of the life, as though blood had ceased to flow inside him and felt depressed in London and decided to back and settle in India. Sara was pregnant and asked her whether she is willing to stay in London or want to go back and settle in India. Sarah thought that she will get an identity and her son will also become an Indian and get a perfect individuality. Adit was in the existential conflict in the novel for his settlement.

'Where Shall We go this Summer'(1975) is a very interesting novel which revolves round the city Mumbai and Manori Island .Sita is in conflict whether to settle in Mumbai or to go to Manori Island. During her childhood she spends very happy days in Island. Sita's mother also left them and went to Benares and missed mother's affection leading to insecurity. She got married to a busy businessman in Mumbai. The city life with busy and mechanical life developed the feeling of

insecurity in Sita. She is having four children and pregnant for the fifth child and not interested to give birth to fifth child and decided to settle in Island. Her husband Raman told her that he booked a room in hospital for her delivery and all are awaiting for her arrival but Sita said, 'I am only like the jelly fish washed up by the waves, stranded there on the sand bar. I was just stranded here by the sea, that's all. I hadn't much to do with it all, she sadly admitted, with that black, stripped truthfulness that she could never color or coat.' WSG-135. Mental and emotional struggle occurs in Sita with quest for identity and to get security in life. Sita's husband went twice to Island to bring her back but she is in conflict and unable to take a decision. Finally accepts her fate and goes to Mumbai with her husband. Even though she is surrounded with many people in Mumbai she felt lonely, insecure and isolated. Women should give chance for interaction and to shed their inhibitions for expressing their feelings and emotions.

In 'Fire on the Mountain' (1977) Nanda Kaul had shown conflict in her identity. She decided to give up all the relations from the members of the family, relatives and friends. She determined herself to lead an isolated life at Carignano in Kasauli. She doesn't want to interrupt her loneliness even with the arrival of postman. She felt very uncomfortable with her great grand- daughter Raka's arrival. Her daughter's letter had shown that her grand - daughter Tara is suffering from domestic violence. Her husband is a drunkard man and beats her wife, Nanda Kaul don't want to listen all these sufferings because she don't want women to suffer. In the beginning she was detached with Raka and in conflict of relationships. She had shown conflict in her personality. Basically she had extrovert attitude but depending on the circumstances of her personal life like her husband's attachment with another woman and doing service to all members of the family. She was vexed up with her routine life and changed her attitude. Her husband is the Vice chancellor of Punjab University, after his death she became introvert and decided to lead an isolated life in the pleasant atmosphere in Kasauli. She felt insecure in her life and had a marital discord. Nanda Kaul had shown an interpersonal conflict which occurred due to unhealthy relationship. It leads to restlessness and even causes depression. Whereas Raka, Nanda Kaul's great grand-daughter is an abnormal child. She also felt insecure in her life because of unhealthy parentage and unhappy parent-child relationship in her family. Father is an irresponsible, careless and drunkard person. The family situations and secluded life of Raka developed conflict in her personality. She is in a vicious circle of dilemma to share her emotions and feelings with others which ultimately resulted in psychic disorder. When Raka sang a song "I'm ship wrecked-I'm ship wrecked and alone in my boat of sea" shows her lonely attitude. Ila Das is a childhood friend of Nanda Kaul She lived in a fantasy world because of her unfulfilled desires. She is from a poor family background and irresponsible sibling's. So she felt very insecure in her life. Her insecurity of life finally resulted her death, as Preet Singh raped and killed her. In Fire on the mountain all the three protagonists suffered from insecurity and conflict in their personal life.

## **CONCLUSION**

In 'Cry the peacock' and 'Voices in the city' the main protagonists Maya and Monisha committed suicide. In 'Fire on the mountain' Nanda kaul and ' where shall we go this

summer'Sita decided to lead an isolated life. In these three novels 'Where shall we go this summer', 'Voices in the city' and 'Bye Bye Black Bird' the cities Bombay, Calcutta and England affected the personality of individuals. In all these novels marital discord is shown as a common theme and all the novels are brought very close to nature but all the protagonists are suffering from psychological problems they did not enjoy the nature. We have to ponder over the fact that all the women should have a positive impact in building one's character.

Anita Desai had shown her protagonists as the sufferers either due to their life partner or due to the city. Pathetic situation of protagonists is presented in all the novels and carved for the assured and affectionate bonds from their families. The development of personality is possible through the all-round development of individual. In the same way the development of society and country is possible with the all-round development of women and must be physically, mentally and spiritually strong to face the different circumstances of life. The antithetical views of protagonists regarding life bring conflict. The freedom of speech and liberty to express their emotions and feelings enhances the problem solving and critical thinking skills to positive approach in conflict management. Lack of these skills developed aggression, depression and suicidal tendency. Anita Desai main characters Maya and Monisha ended their life by committing suicide instead solving their problems in life. The truthful dealing with trust and loyalty in one's relationships brings security to women. The ability to imagine one in others place and understand their position, feelings, desires and sufferings leads to contented life. Acquisition of problem solving skills is essential for every woman to occupy a very significant role in the society

## **References**

1. Srinivas Iyengar K.R. Indian writing in English, Sterling publishers(2006).
2. Desai, Anita. Fire on the Mountain. London: Penguin Book, 1977.
3. Desai, Anita. Voices in the city. New Delhi: orient paper backs, 1965.
4. Desai, Anita. Cry the Peacock. New Delhi: orient paper backs, 1980.
5. Dash, Sandhyarani. Form and vision in the novels of Anita Desai. New Delhi: prestige books, 1999.
6. Desai, Anita. Where Shall We Go This Summer. New Delhi: orient paper backs, 1982.
7. Desai, Anita. Bye Bye Black Bird. New Delhi: orient paper backs, 1984
8. Acharya, Shanta. 'problems of the self in the novels of Anita Desai,' Language Forum, 7, 1-4, April 1981-March 1982, 236-54.
9. Beck, A.T., Freeman, A & Associates (1990) cognitive therapy of personality disorders. New York: The Guilford press.
10. Erikson, E.H. (1963). Childhood and Society. (2nd ed.). New York: Norton.
11. Carver, C.S. & Scheir, M.F. (2000). Perspectives on Personality. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon
12. American Psychiatric Association (APA) 2000, Paris, 2009
13. J.P. Guilford: Personality Mc.Graw-Hill book Company, New York, 1959