

The Marital Discord: an Analytical Study in Anita Desai's Novels *Fire on the Mountain*

¹Anamika Majhi

¹Assistant Teacher

Chakirban High School, Purulia, West Bengal

ABSTRACT:

Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* carries perspective of Ecosophy appropriately. Anita Desai's main concern in her writing is human relationships. The crisis in her friction is born out of marital discord, a lack of understanding between man and woman. Though, existential aspect is also very prominent in her works. She often projects her character through incompatible couples, very sensitive wives and ill-matched husbands. It can be noticed that her female characters are generally neurotics, highly sensitive by nature and almost of them are in conflicts with their external environment that is their husbands, in-laws and circumstances. And so the marital dissonance is quite prominent in few of Desai's novels. The psychological and experiential reasons of this discord may vary from one character to another.. Women's inscription continues to engage a place of substance for more reasons than one. It has questioned the accessible viewpoints which are fundamentally patriarchal. All women's writing need not necessarily be feminist. But feminist interpretations can appear through absence and denial. The sufferings of Indian women, marital discord, existentialism, annoyance are the major themes of feminist writing. Female quest for individuality has been a pet theme for many a woman novelist.

Keywords: Anita Desai, Marital Discord, *Fire on the Mountain*, personal consciousness, sensitivity.

INTRODUCTION:

Marital discord, the conflict in married life, is as old as the institution of marriage itself, although it has varied in degrees from time to time and from person to person. In the pre-industrial era, men and women who came together in marriage shared cultural values, mutual commitment, trust and faith which subordinated the interests of the individuals resulting in the smooth relationship of the family. There were tensions and maladjustments in their marital relationship too, but the moral and religious convictions, economic dependence and the fear of social disapproval kept them together. In the wake of the industrial revolution, marital discord has come to assume greater importance. Men and women who came together in marriage lacked knowledge of various sexual, psychological, spiritual and social aspects of life, the proper understanding of which alone ensured peace, adaptability and self-control. In the commercial age, the increasing independence of married woman has pulled her further apart and has changed the concept of marriage, in the words of Virendra Kumar "from stability, permanence and indissolubility to discord, separation and divorce". Marital discord represents a breakdown in the consensus and cooperation of the married couples. Usually, marital discord originates when rivalry develops between the partners by internal and external manifestations like separation, physical violence and vituperation. They drift apart when they are unable to sort-out their problems which result in the strain and tension in their relationship.

Marital discord recurs as the theme of the novels of Anita Desai. Her novels, with a touch of feminist concern, portray the failed marriage relationship which often leads to alienation and loneliness of the characters. Her novels, like, *Cry the Peacock*, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, *Voices in the City*, and *Bye-Bye Blackbird* also deal with the theme of marital disharmony, but the aim of my present paper is to study the marital discord in her Sahitya Academy Award winner novel *Fire on the Mountain* published in 1972. Her novel *Fire on the Mountain*, grapples with the theme of in communication and lack of understanding in

marital life. The novel records the story of Nanda Kaul, the Vice-Chancellor's wife who has chosen the house of top of a mountain in Carignano in the village of Kasauli, as her shelter away from the disturbances of family and society. Life with the Vice-Chancellor had long ordeal with only the duties and responsibilities of her position without any love attached to it. She is disillusioned with her selfish, infidel husband, who "treated her simply as some useful object".

The psychological seclusion of the lady is echoed by the landscape of the mountain – rocky and barren. Her wish to be lonely and secluded is seen in her apathy to receive her great granddaughter. "Discharge me, she groaned. I've discharged all my duties. Discharge"(30). Carignano offered her the anonymity and escape she longed for. Mrinalini Solunki rightly observed: Her option for total isolation is not related to the spirituality of Indian thought. She does not opt for this isolation willingly, but circumstances have left no other way out for her. Her long involvement with the people and the affairs of the world gave her neither satisfaction nor a sense of belongingness. Therefore, in a bid to survive she opts for withdrawal, for an existence away from the world of messages and visitors". The novel tells of falsity to which Nanda is forced to. Her conjugal life was not peaceful. It was not all love and sincerity but the terrible betrayal of her husband prompted her to a life of silence. The children were alien. The graces and glories were a fabrication, to drive the present. "Her relation with her husband did not involve her inner "self". The novel gives an impression of her happy life with her husband, but the last page of the novel reveals that the whole story was a white lie. She had fabricated her life to Raka: She had lied to Raka, lied about everything. Nor had her husband loved and cherished her and kept her like a queen – he had only done enough to keep her quiet while he carried on a lifelong affair with Miss David, the Mathematics teacher, whom he had not married because she was a Christian but whom he had loved, all his life loved.

The children were all alien to her nature. She neither understood nor loved them. She did not live here alone by choice – she lived here because that was what she was forced to do, reduce to doing. There occurs another failed marital relationship in the novel – the relationship between Raka's mother and her excessive drinking and aggressive father. But the writer has focused on the plight of Nanda Kaul, who is deceived and betrayed by her husband. "Lack of understanding of the partner's expectations and temperaments is chiefly responsible for the marital discord of Mrs. Kaul". Thus Anita Desai lodges her protest against unhappy married life in the phoney world through her female characters.

Anita Desai's fifth novel is "Fire on the Mountain". In this novel, she works on unfulfilled and inharmonious relationships especially between husband and wife. Lack of marital harmony is a major part in the plot of the novel. Nanda Kaul a very dutiful, responsible wife of the vice-chancellor of Punjab University. She has a busy and hectic schedule, though she has many servants around her. She is known for her hospitality but she feels suffocated. Marital discord is a lack of adjustment and synchronization in the marriage. It symbolizes a breakdown in the commitment and co-operation of the married couples. Usually, marital discord originates when enmity develops among the partners through internal and external manifestations like constant finger-pointing, physical aggression, antagonism, and so on. It is a process that begins before physical separation and continues even after the marriage is legally ended. Marital discord is a very effective stressor that can prompt individuals to enter mentally disturbed stages or engage in behavior that will lead them to have psychotic or hysteric manifestations. It is a significant predictor of subsequent delinquency and depressive symptoms for married couples. It is evident that marital problems are more likely to cause depression than depression causing marital problems.

Marital discord is as old as the organization of marriage itself, even if it has diverged from time to time and from person to person. In the pre-industrial period, men and women who came jointly into marriage shared intellectual values, mutual dedication, belief and hope which subordinated the interests of the individuals, resulting in the smooth relationship of the family. There were many tensions in their marital relationship, women did suffer untold miseries, but the ethical and religious convictions, economic belief and the fear of social condemnation kept them together. Discord within marriage is a strong catalyst of suspension of

marital rights. However, in context in which divorce is rare and stigmatized, we might not expect marital dissolution to be as sensitive to marital discord. For examples, instead of dissolution occurring due to a general lack of emotional compatibility, marital dissolution in India may require more aggravate, or severe discord as perceived by at least one the spouses.

Marital discord in marriage is not new to India as well, and it has existed at all eras of well-known history. But separation was resorted to only in severe cases where there was intolerable malice, abandonment, mental illness, sterility, and disloyalty. In the wake of the industrial mutiny, marital discord has come to presume greater importance. Men and women who come together in marriage lacked knowledge of various psychological and social aspects of life, the proper understanding of which would make sure of attitudes of affability, flexibility and self-control. In the commercial age, the increasing liberty of married woman has pulled her further apart from compromise and has changed the concept of marriage. In the words of Virendra Kumar “from stability, permanence and indissolubility to discord, separation and divorce” (Kumar.1978:25). Frequent marital discord can lead to a growing dissatisfaction for the partners involved, which force people to consider an alternative to remaining married. For example, a person who is forced to deal with marital dispute on a regular basis, might grow dissatisfied and try to live life independently.

Marital discord does have a negative consequence on developing children. One of the most awful things to a child is the possibility that their parents may break up. The concept of marital discord dominates the contemporary literature, may it be of British, American or Indian source. It is one of the fundamental themes in the works of Nayantara Sahgal, Kamala Markandaya, Virginia Woolf, Raja Rao, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Anita Desai and others. Anita Desai has highlighted marital discord as a serious concern in her works. She humbly admits that she is allergic to writing social novels. However, she is involved in the problems of marital discord and the insincerity, the faithlessness and the soul-destroying, grinding process of compromise which accompany it. Anita Desai while choosing marital discord as a theme, highlights how the lack of ability to put one's soul and convey freely one's fear and agony result in the snapping of communication between husband and wife. Unusual attitudes, individual complexes and fears add to this distancing between husband and wife resulting in conjugal disharmony.

In each of her novels, we encounter traumatic experiences of married lives. Each novel, maintaining the basic features of marital discord, presents different features of the problem to which Mrs. Desai gives new aspect and visualization. She bravely puts forth the fact that in society, marriages usually pursue the jungle law of the survival of the fittest and being physically stronger, man survives. In her novels, marital discord is reflective of the social parlance. Excessive bondage and high level of restrictions imposed on a girl who recently parted from her parents, hit her psychology leading to excessive frustration. This frustration emerges out in different forms like suicidal tendencies, non-adjustments, marital discords, psychological irritation and many more. Hence society and its restricted canvas play a great role in dealing with the girl's psychology.

CONCLUSION:

Anita Desai is a modern writer as she considers new themes and knows how to deal with them. She explores the grief of women living in modern society. She presents her opinion about human relationships and human conditions as a big contemporary problem. Desai deals with intricacies of such relationships as one of her major theme, which is a universal issue. She endeavors to show this problem without any interference. Anita Desai's novels can almost be examples of her idea, that whereas man is concerned with action, experience and achievement, a woman writer is more concerned with thought, emotion and sensation. Thus, each of the above is a very common trouble dealt with in a marriage. Although these are problems, they can also be prospects for growth, learning and accord. Whether these issues remain problems causing stress in marriage, or become an

opportunity for growth depends upon man-woman attitude. The result of this trend may be continuing declining of the bonds between the generations and a decline in the mean psychological well-being of the population. It should be kept in mind that controlling access to divorce will not address the central problem, as chronic marital discord between continuously married parents appears to be as detrimental as divorce. More generally, the psychological well-being of the next generation of youth will be enhanced if emerging social trends or policy lead to an increase in the number of children raised by parents with stable and harmonious marriages. Being a very prominent theme of Anita Desai's works, marital discord has deep roots in her works. Hardly we can find any novel which can escape this dissonance. The human being is always searching for fulfillment and completeness through love and companionship. Absence of it, creates a vacuum in the life of them and, it takes away the beauty and charm from their life. They lose their force to live. Let it be Maya, Monisha or Raka all are a victim of this marital discord and unsatisfactory relationships. Would they have little harmonious and cordial relationships with their partners their life would have been easier and happier. The key to successful marriage is love, understanding, mutual respect, trust, commitment and togetherness. While many couples are able to find all the key ingredients in their marital relationships, others find one element or more lacking in their bond. This gives rise to consequences that are not always expected, or desired. This is a reason why a number of couples face adverse consequences, like divorce. Visible reasons why married couples find marriage as an intimidating bond is that they face issues like lack of trust, mutual respect, love and understanding in their relationship. It is thus clear that catastrophe in the married world of Anita Desai's fiction arises basically because of unreliable incompatibility. What Desai pleads is a balance, a midway between the two extremes of practicality and fantasy and that is the only way to arrive at a fruitful solution of the problem of marital discord. This is an issue which is cause of anxiety to all times. Today also it is an acute problem and we need to trace the solutions as much as we can for more satisfying and balanced life.

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