

Reflection of Familial Relationships in the Writings of Anita Desai and Nirupama Borgohain: A Comparative Study.

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Abstract:-This paper is an attempt to re-read selected novels of two writers one representing the national scenario and other from the regional scenario .The two writers selected for the study are Anita Desai and Nirupama Borgohain. Both the writers wrote extensively about the women's issues and identities .Anita Desai's novels and Nirupama Borgohain's novels deserve special mention as both the novels are full of episodes of familial relationship.

In Desai's novels like *Voices in the City*, *Fasting Feasting* and *Fire on the Mountain*, there are beautiful description of familial relationships. But behind this scenic description, there is a cry of the novelist to be observed in the novel. In spite of being a feminist, Desai also truly reflects the picture of a typical Indian sensibility. There is abundance of familial yearnings in the novels of Desai. On the other hand, Nirupama Borgohain's novels like *Aragamani*, *Abhijatri* and *Mur Naam Champavati Kakoti*, we could locate strong bonding of familial relationship.

Therefore the paper will try to investigate the traces of familial relationship in the writings of the two writers. The paper will conclude with an affirmative note that there are traces of familial relationship in the writings of the two writers.

Key words- familial, feminist, Yearnings, Comparative.

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper is an attempt to re-read selected novels of the two writers one representing the national scenario and other from the regional scenario .The two writers selected for the study are Anita Desai and Nirupama Borgohain. Both the writers wrote extensively about the women's issues and identities.

Anita Desai, an Indian English novelist and short story writer, happens to be a leading voice in Indian English literature. She is occasionally referred to as an 'explorer' of inner life of her female characters. She is always very conscious about unravelling the inner turmoils and tension of her female characters. She becomes therefore a recorder of the dilemma faced by an individual in the Indian urban set up. She gets interested in analysis and portrayal of human relationship. The novel is essentially a vehicle for delineating human relationships mostly baffling in nature in the sense that man's actions and volitions often take to uncertain ways under different situations. Thus Desai always adopts novel as a vehicle for exploring the inner psyche of the female

characters. There are traces of 'existentialism' theories in her novels as her work gives emphasis on the alienation of man from an 'absurd' world, his consequent estrangement from the 'normal' society and his recognition of the world as negative and meaningless—presents the sensitive individual, fragmented and spiritually destroyed by the particular social conditions of life, a life complex enough to make him obsessed. All the characters in her novels like Maya, Nirode, Amla, Monisha, Sita, Sarah, Uma—suffer from a sense of isolation that is not merely physical but also psychic. Some of her novels present very realistically various issues of the environment.

Nirupama Borgohain's writings are also feminist because she deals with the issues of women. Many of her novels are feminist as they deal with the women problem. *The novelist* Borgohain address women's issues extensively and she also adopts certain means by which her character speaks. She believes in the idea of socialist Feminism, where women should work for the society and other women. Therefore, it can be said that Borgohain

II. SIMILARITIES IN FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIP

In the first novel '*Voices in the City*', Desai explores the intricacies of the underlit, sub-conscious self in an attempt to solve the complexities of a lonely individual in relation to society. It can be called as an interior journey into the dark forces of a 'closed' mind in order to resolve the psychological knots within the world of the individual. In the novel, Monisha is at the centre of the subjective world and it reveals the 'invisible' nature of a sensitive woman.

In the novel, Desai explores four major 'voices', Monisha, Nirode, Amla and Otima in the city of Calcutta. The locale is Calcutta and the lives of these four characters are inextricably linked with the city of Calcutta, which is otherwise known as the city of Mother Kali.

The entire novel is a discourse on the familial relationship between the major and minor characters- the relationship between Nirode and Monisha, the relationship between Monisha and Amla, and the relationship of the mother towards their children. All these relationships within the family throw excellent light on the various issues of contemporary society. The above depicted relationships are

tioned to the bond of mutual respect characteristic to a normal family.

In addition to these relationships, mention is also made of a fragile relationship between Monisha and Jiban. Desai has very realistically delved in to the intimate personal relationship between them. After her marriage with Jiban, Monisha tries to make the necessary adjustments so as to make herself a part of Jiban's family.

There are numerous personal experiences in the novel which reveal the deep sense of belonging to a familial tradition. On one such instance Monisha is seen to echo her experience in a joint family system. She was left in the midst of the family members of Jiban and here she learns a lot of adjustment tactics. Being a new member of a joint family system it was really difficult to make adjustment in such a situation. On the such condition, Manisha experiences her new life in this way-

"The Bow Bazar house. Central, an idol in the shape of an umbrella stand. Hung with folded black umbrellas like the offerings of pilgrims and worshippers. On either side of it, the reputation arranged by the heads of this many headed family. In the small of my back, I feel a surreptitious push from Jiban and am propelled forward into the embrace of his mother who is all in white and smells of clean rice and who, while placing her hand on my head in blessing, also pushes a little harder than I think necessary and still harder till I realize what it means and go down on my knees to touch her feet. They are rimmed red with Alta. Another pair of feet appears to receive my touch, then another. How they all honor their own feet! More-I lose count-but many more. Feet before faces here, but the jumble of sounds are soft, tolerant."¹(P-109)

In the next novel *Fire on the Mountain*, Desai tries to explore the life of three women, Nanda Kaul, Raka and Ila Das. Here Desai discusses in detail the familial relationship of the three characters Nanda, Raka and Ila Das.

Nanda Kaul has always aspired to stay at such a place where she can get total mental satisfaction. She is seen to lead a secluded life in the mountainous region of Kasauli. But that does not mean she remains aloof from worldly affairs. There are instances in the novel, when Anita Desai describes the condition of Nanda Kaul as a familial person. All through her life she has performed her duties efficiently having led a very active and hectic social life as the wife of a university Vice Chancellor. She was always at the beck and call of her husband and children. She was a constantly fixity in the lives of her husband and children.

Desai's Nanda represents a typical picture of a woman, who had really no intention of cutting herself away from the familial bondings. She was performing the role of a mother, wife and a friend to all the members of the family. In the relationship with Raka, Nanda appears to be a perfect

1. Desai Anita, 1965, 2007, *Voices in the City*, Orient Paperbacks, New Delhi, P-109.

grandmother, who supports her great granddaughter in a big way. Her relationship with Ila Das also deserves special attention as both Ila and Nanda share a special bonding with each other. They are good friends, who share each and every moment of their life. Thus familial relationship cannot be totally negated from Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain*.

The third novel '*Fasting Feasting*' basically deals with the description of two contrasting cultures. The novel, describes in very convincing language the relationship of Uma in India and of Arun in America. Uma, the eldest daughter in the family is depicted as a woman who is always busy with her family. Being the eldest daughter she shares a special bondage with her parents, Arun and Mira Masi, a distant relationship of Uma. Desai presented the character of Uma as the worst victim of familial tradition. During the entire course of the novel, we find Uma as a victimized figure subjected to the whims of the family. Though Uma can be considered as the worst sufferer, others in the family like Anamika, Arun and Aruna too suffered because of stringent patriarchal mores.

The two are fused together and they are inseparable, because they have the same opinion over all familial issues. The novel throws light on the relationship of Anamika with her husband's family. She was never satisfied being married to a person who was quite different from her. There are instances in the novel where we are shown Anamika sharing a close intimacy with Uma. Both belong to the same age group but Anamika marries earlier and settles down, where as Uma remains unmarried.

Desai in the novel *Fasting Feasting* throws light on the relationship between Uma and Mira Masi. Mira Masi, a distant relative of Uma paid occasional visits to their house on the way to her pilgrimage. Both Uma and Mira Masi share a special relationship. It is Mira Masi who introduces Uma to the different world of Hindu legends and tales. Uma feels a special attraction for Mira Masi. With her she feels that she can escape from the world of Mama Papa to the world of her inner sensitivity with Mira Masi. Desai presents these two characters as suitable companions for each other. And it is through the company of Mira Masi that Uma finds a unique identity of her own self.

The second part of the novel focuses on the convivial relationship between Arun and the Pattons. Arun is shown as a man who suffers from the feeling of entrapment in an alien land. His easy equation with Mrs. Patton presents before us a novel picture of a new culture. There is a perfect cultural assimilation between the Indian culture and the American culture through the character of Arun and Mrs. Patton.

On the other hand, with Nirupama Borgohain, we enter into a world of familial relationship. Her novels throw interesting light on the relationship of the various characters found in her novel.

In the first novel '*Mur Naam Champavati Kakati*', the delicate relationship of a father and a daughter is presented by the novelist. Champavati lost her mother at an early age and thus she was raised up by her father, who provided her the right guidance that is required for a girl to lead a happy life. Jibanath Kakati supported his daughter in every walk of life. Borgohain presents Jibanath Kakati as a perfect example of a supportive father. We have seen how in the novel Jibanath was concerned with the education of the girl child. He always desired that Champavati should have proper education because education is the only tool by which social stigmas against women can be eradicated from the society.

There is also a strong bond of friendship between Champavati and Sadori. Both of them share the same passion for developing the lot of women and both joins the women block of the communist party. Through these two characters, Borgohain exposes her opinion about the socialist feminist concept as she believed that if women worked together in groups they can create a feeling of unity, and thus help in eradicating the social evils of the society.

The second novel '*Abhijatri*' is a biographical one, which is based on the real life experience of a great feminist and freedom fighter of Assam, Chandraprabha Saikiani. The novelist presents the character as a very strong and rebellious one. From a very young age, she was a feminist who did not believe in the patriarchal set up of the society. In this novel, Borgohain showcases the familial bond between Chandraprova, her sister Rameshwari and her mother Gonga Priya. When we read the novel, we realize that Chandraprova is closely attached to her sister Romeshwari.

She further shares a good relationship with her father who acts as guide and guardian to Chandraprova. Being a man with strong ideals and determination in life, Ratiram Mazumdar gave unstinted support to his daughter to arm herself with education and thus have a fulfilling existence.

Another relationship which gets prominence in the novel is the mother-son relationship. There are references in the novel which highlights a strong relationship between Chandraprova's mother and her son Atul. She brings up her son Atul with great care. She performs the dual role of a father and a mother in bringing him up in a perfect atmosphere.

Thus the novel throws light on some strong and positive familial relationships. The next novel of Nirupama Borgohain is '*Aragamini*', which is again a continuation of '*Abhijatri*' in the sense that both are biographical in nature. To go with '*Aragamini*', Nirupama Borgohain has portrayed the real life figure of a great educationist and social reformer of Assam, Indira Miri. Her life is a tale of suffering, full of hardship as she trudged forward in search of an identity in a male dominated society. The theme of familial relationship finds its place in the novel from the beginning to the end of the novel. Indira, the chief protagonist of the novel, is mentored throughout by father Sonadhar Senapati.

The novelist has painted the picture of a beautiful relationship between a father and a daughter. Both share a relationship of mutual understanding and fellow feeling towards each other. During the course of the novel, we find Indira referring to her father as an inspirational figure in her life. He was the source of inspiration and the person behind her success.

Another relationship that emerges clearly in the course of the novel is the relationship between Indira and her husband. Both husband and wife is seen to share a unique relationship. During the course of the novel, we find that Indira is greatly influenced by her husband in each step of her married life. In one part of the novel Indira even remarked that her husband Mahichand Miri has given her life a new direction. They are seen to be happy in the company of each other. Further, there are other familial bondings that are highlighted in the course of the novel.

III. DISSIMILARITIES IN FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIP

There is not much of dissimilarities in the writings of Anita Desai and Nirupama Borgohain. Anita Desai believed in presenting various facets of familial relationship whereas Nirupama Borgohain also has similar traces of familial relationship.

IV. CONCLUSION

Thus it can be concluded by saying that both the writers share the same thematic thrust in their writings. They show strong points of affinities or closeness where the thematic structure of familial relationship is concerned.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am grateful to the two writers whose writings inspire me to delve deeper into the world of women writers.

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