

'To Love' or 'Not-to-Love'
A Spiritual Delineation of Anita Desai's Characters' Unconscious Self

Dr. C. Ramya, MBA, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.

=====

Abstract

Love, the universal emotion and an unexplainable experience, has always been talked about, filmed about, written about, sung about and expressed about through various forms of art. But it is unfortunate that it still remains an unknown phenomenon that only hurts, wounds and makes people into a chaotic state of mind. As Osho rightly puts it, one is born fully equipped with the capacity to love and to be loved. But somewhere later in life, man and woman hold a voluminous idea of 'finding a perfect woman/man' in order to reach their life's "happily ever after". And this thirst and hunger keeps them in starvation and finally, most of the men and women are left just starving. According to Buddhism, there are four elements of true love, say, loving-kindness or benevolence, compassion, joy and equanimity or freedom. This article brings out how Anita Desai's characters suffer obnoxiously rather than giving or getting these four elements of true love.

Keywords: Anita Desai, unconscious self, love, emotion, experience, art, phenomenon, freedom, compassion, benevolence

Anita Desai's Characters

"Love is a kind of Politics, Power Politics. Wherever love is contaminated by the idea of domination, it is politics... Love is nothing but politics, sugar-coated, a bitter pill sugar-coated" (TBOW 70). This is a radical idea of universal glorification of the very emotion 'love', 'to love', 'to-be-loved', and 'being in love', Osho affirms that love is political. Osho, called as an Indian God-Man, was a spiritual leader and his teachings on the insightful religious traditions, mystics and philosophy, though controversial, reached world-wide. Being surrounded by never-ending controversy, his message of sexual, emotional, spiritual and institutional liberation contradicted traditional values and provoked a great deal of anger and opposition world-wide. Osho's characterization of love seems to coincide with Anita Desai's characters: they are the ones who are 'love' personified unconsciously, but at the conscious level, they are the ones who struggle expressing and professing what they love. And hence, all their repressed and suppressed unconscious emotions at the conscious level put them in an abnormal psychic and social milieu. Anita Desai, the most compelling Indian-English writer, is known for her in-depth exploration of human psyche through her characters' projection. But this article gives a spiritual speck of the 'haves' and 'should-haves' of Desai's characters' psyche.

What Is Love?

The most predominant and universal topic of debate or a question, that bough about various facets of answers, and that still entices different forms of answers through Art and Literature is ‘What is Love?’. According to Gautama Buddha, it is the happiness of one’s inner soul. Bhagwat Gita claims pure and divine love arises from detachment, Christianity proclaims true love towards Jesus Christ is proportionate to one’s love towards their fellow beings. On the contrary to all these ideals, Osho defines love as ‘domination’ – the deep desire to exploit the other. As he puts,

“There are as many loves as there are people there are many layers, many planes of love” (TBOW 70)

It all depends on how different each and every person differs in the hierarchy of love. Love has different layers and planes, stressed Osho, and the one ‘Who exists in the lowest rung will have totally a different idea of love than the person who exists on the highest rung. Adolf Hitler’s idea of love will be diametrically opposite to that of Gautama Buddha as they are personas of two exactly different extremes.

Voices in The City

Anita Desai’s *Voices in The City* is one of her most pessimistic novels where the protagonists remain totally detached and aloof, alienating themselves from the rest of the world. They are more self-centered and nurture silence and stillness.

Grief is definitely love; a form of love that one wants to give but cannot. All of the unspent, unspoken, unexpressed, unreciprocated love gathers in the corners of the eyes, as the lump in the throat, as repressed or as suppressed desires in one’s unconscious mind and therefore, Grief is nothing but love that has no place to go. As alienation is the only solace that one can give to oneself, to be away from the noises and voices around them, Desai’s characters in ‘voices in the city’ choose to stay in the shadow and silence. Nirode, a neglected child in ‘Voices in the City’, is an exact example of Grief-Personified. He mumbles,

“I am a leper, ... leave, me do not come near. I am a leper, diseased with the loneliest disease of all.”

He despises his father as he had shown a partisan attitude towards him but he worships his mother. Later after the death of his father, Nirode always sympathizes him and hates his mother as she shares and intimate and unfaithful relationship. With Major Chadha, her neighbour at their home at Kalimpong. When it comes to the relationship with his siblings, there are no traces of his affection and expressions of love towards them. He feels inferior to his brother Arun, the favoured, bright and celebrated child in the family who is encouraged and adored by his sisters because he aspires to become a surgeon and he is an active sports personnel bring the captain of his school cricket team. His aspirations and dreams to become a famous surgeon has been set in action with the help of his father’s will where a large amount of money allotted to pursue his higher studies in London.

Hazardous personal and social adjustments happens as a result of deteriorated human relationships. The most significant phase is the relationship between the parents and their children. A harmonious parent-child relationship gives the children, a feeling of security and belonging. When there

is a deterioration in this condition, then predominantly, a havoc happens in their feelings of security and belongingness Elizabeth E. Hurlock rightly puts it as,

“For boys the Major threat to parent-child relationship during early childhood is the lack of a father to identify with or lack of emotional warmth between father and son....” (DP 148)

Nirode’s lack of attention and affection from his parents during his early childhood created a lasting feel of insecurity even after he has become an independent adult. He even acknowledges himself as a ‘congenial failure’.

Nirode’s sister Monisha covers herself up in her own world and sinks into depression after her despondent relationship with her husband. She feels her actual world is surrounded by harsh, cruel and selfish people and hence she has a stronger existential and nihilistic self, that entices herself to choose death for life. Monisha’ lack of identity and her longing for her strong sense of self and her struggles with identity issues usually leads to depression, anxiety and other hazardous psychological issues and hereby, Mrs. Desai portrays Monisha’s love for her ‘self’ which was forbidden for her to be felt on expressed by any means.

Elizabeth B. Hurlock, rightly expresses the developmental psychological patterns in humans’ early adulthood during their vocational and family adjustments. Adjustment to a mate, sexual adjustment, financial adjustments and in-law adjustments are the four most important factors for Marital happiness, of the many adjustment problems in marriage. And considering Monisha’s Marital life, she had serious adjustment problems on all the factors mentioned above. In B. Hurlock’s words,

“For more important to good marital adjustment is the ability of husband and wife to relate emotionally to each other and to give and receive love.” (DP 306).

As the primary factor for Marital harmony is the delightful interpersonal relationship between the husband and the wife, Monisha’s endearing self is left unnoticed by his aloof husband for whom, being cold and withdrawn or being haughty is a attitude that he regards as masculine. Men, those who were trained to control the expression of their emotion, may not have learned to show affection just like the way they have learnt not to show fear.

She glooms,

“Alone, I could work better and I should feel more whole. But less and less there is privacy.... Sisters-in-law lie across the four posters, discussing my ovaries and theirs..... But I wish they would leave me alone, sometimes, to read”

Monisha’s yearning, her hankering for being loved for what she really is, her aching crave for the love of being herself, pushes her into a wide valley of despair and despondency that her melancholy drives her to take insanely existential decisions. She inwardly cries,

“But I have no faith, no alternative to my confused despair, there is nothing I can give myself to and so I must stay. The family here and their surroundings tell one such a life cannot be lived – a

life dedicated to nothing – that this husk is a protection from death. Ah yes, yes, then it is a choice between death and mean existence and that, surely, is not a difficult choice.” (VITC 121)

Basic Requirement

The basic requirement between for a couple, or within any individual person is that there should be harmony and happiness within them and around them. But the problem arises when the prejudices raises on who sought to make whom happy. As a pseudo and fairy tale love promises a ‘happily ever after’, men and women claim ‘love’ to be an elixir for a life void of unhappiness or any unpleasant feeling on the contrary, love, actually, is a natural phenomenon that cannot be defined. It is just a flow of life that needn’t be shaped to perfection. A loving person would simply love just as he breathes, drinks, eats, walks and sleeps. Right exactly how a person lives, a person loves. One wouldn’t say that unless the air is perfect and unpolluted he/she isn’t going to breath. In spite of one’s being in Australia or Mumbai. We all keep breathing. Hence, in Osho’s spiritual ways,

“An alive and loving person simply loves. Love is a natural function..... don’t ask for perfection; otherwise you will not find any love flowing in you. On the contrary, you will become ‘unloving’ (BIL 8).

To Conclude

In a nutshell, looking deep into the psycho sexual development of Anita Desai’s characters, one could hardly sense the gratifications and fulfillments of their needs during their psycho-social stages of mental maturity that, in turn, leads towards a spiritual insight of dealing with love and life.

=====

Works Cited

1. Desai, Anita. *Voices in the City*.
New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 2011.
 2. Hurlock, B. Elizabeth. *Developmental Psychology: A Life-Span Approach*.
New Delhi: McGraw Hill Education (India) Private Limited, 2013.
 3. Osho. *The Book of Woman*.
India: Penguin Books, 2002.
 4. Osho. *Being in Love*.
Switzerland: Osho International Foundation, 2008.
- =====

Dr. C. Ramya, MBA, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.
Asst. Professor in English
Yadhava College,
MADURAI-14
Tamilnadu
India
rramyachelliah@gmail.com

=====

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 18:8 August 2018

Dr. C. Ramya, MBA, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.

221

‘To Love’ or ‘Not-to-Love’ - A Spiritual Delineation of Anita Desai’s Characters’ Unconscious Self