

Predicaments and Contradictions of the Family Members in Anita Desai's *Voices In The City*

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Abstract

Monisha lives out a servile existence within the rigid and stiff confines of a traditional Hindu family. *Voices in the city* examines the predicament of two sensitive women, Monisha and Amla, as the products of an unhappy home. They find themselves trapped in the city of Calcutta which fails to offer them any solace. The traditional Joint family system, which is nothing but a manifestation of the traditional Indian Society, is responsible for Monisha's anguish and suicide. Monisha becomes a neurotic and immolates herself. It is a reckless attempt to free her from the clutches of a mindless society. Amla is equally sensitive and conscious of her role and place in society. Amla meets with little success in her attempts and is given a raw deal by Dharma, the painter. Amla reacts silently to the sufferings of Monisha and that of her brother Nirode, both victims of society like herself. But unlike Monisha gathers the poise and courage to brave the odds of life. This paper reveals their obsessions, eccentricities, tremors and traumas. The enduring human characters and the emotional life of the human characters are her chief concern.

Keywords - emotion, family, identity, marriage, struggle,

Introduction

Voices in the City has four parts, in part one, Nirode uses third universal observer technique with Anita Desai as the historical narrator. In part two, Monisha suddenly shifts to a documentary narrative technique with Monisha as a diarist biographer. The documentary technique enables Monisha to present freely the oddities of her own thoughts and temper to confide her won secrets to the diary, which she could not to a human being. In part three Amla suddenly resorts to the third novelist herself observer technique enabling the narrator the novelist herself to describe in detail idiosyncrasies of Nirode, Amla, Monisha and Dharma and to present a detached picture of the lives they are leading and the aims they have in view. Part four mother is in the universal observer technique again. Amla is affected like Nirode by the character of her mother and her search for freedom and independence.

Nirode has inherited it from his mother knowing it. Like Nirode, she is in possession of a spirit. Anita Desai gives example evidence through Monisha, Amla and their mother apart from Nirode's eccentric behavior. Through Amla, the novelist writes: that mortality seemed to creep into her bones like the damp itself and she heard it sing in her ears like a mosquito. Quickly, she began to pick "the fallen flower waxes white and golden hearted, and put them in her aliveness, her courage" (Rao, *The novel of Mrs. Anita Desai* 150). In Anita Desai's novels the female protagonists will cherish good memories of their affectionate fathers. Such authentic sketches of Monisha

unfold the psychic disorder of her character. Also another thing to be noted is the debilitating effect the city of Calcutta makes on the characters in the novel. These characters strive continuously to exist in this metropolitan city, but the cruel and suppressive role of the city, baffles them. Nirode loses his identity as a man in the welfare of social, he goes into oblivion. The environment of Calcutta is not in accord with Nirode's temperament. He desires to have silence and stillness for his existence. One can imagine that when a man like Nirode is fatally affected by the hostile effects of the city, the same perceptiveness would thwart all the feeble efforts of the women characters. In fact all of them from Monisha and Amla, the weakest of the siblings succumb to the effect of the city of Calcutta.

Monisha and Amla finds themselves as incapable beings who cannot fulfill the expectations of society or the roles given to them. So, they fell a sense of rootlessness, and can thwart the individual's mental psychic development in an alarming manner. The present study examines thoroughly the dark interiors of the human psyche and a description of various forms of loneliness and isolation with the meaningless cry and struggle against unmanageable hostile forces. It has associations of historical nature with various generations living and dying in it, without any change over the city. The city is not only an object but also a symbol having an obsessive emotional and spiritual significance. "Calcutta seems an active agent pressing upon the multination's voices in the reducing most of men and women into the insignificant position of insects, ants and months" (Wire, *the Illusions* 32). The central voice in *Voices in the city* is that of Nirod, varying, rising and falling according to his own moody reactions to diverse situations in life. In the beginning of the novel he feels revulsion towards the dullness of the office going life and the muddy river air' and he soars in the air like a paper kite on the wings of his own fantasy swollen by exhilaration, determination and pride. The other important voices in the city reverberating in the novel are those of Monisha, Amla, Dharma and the friends of Nirod. Monisha is so panicky and different that eve the voice of neighboring child preparing for examination terrifies her. The inner weight of thought and feeling of Nirod finds expression in deliriums during sickness. Then the voices drip and drop and become inaudible. Monisha voices her feelings about their mother in conversation with Nirode. Amla's is muffled and cindery voice, "I have to keep things secret in this horrible city" (Iyengar, *Indian writings* 79). Monisha's life is totally different. She comes to live with her insensitive laws in Calcutta. Monisha punishes herself by setting fire to her body.

Monisha aim has been to seek after the core of intense feeling in life. Nirode represents in all aspects the psychic strangeness of other characters, Nirode rejects both faith and the need for faith surviving only through doubt and questioning. The fear that one day he may turn to religion momentarily passes his mind but he suppresses whatever inflication there may have been. Nirode reduces the needs to the barest minimum thus rebelling against the imposition of any pattern on his life and death confront each other during his illness. His bare, vulnerable self, which has frightened Monisha, now and begun to grow another cover Monisha says that she realizes that Nirode progressed beyond Monisha

Here is a combination of acquiescence and renunciation. Monisha's childlessness further disturb her privacy. Looking around the women around her, she asks herself " why are leave such as those left". (Iyengar, *Indian writings* 79), Hence her choice between death and mean existence, and that surely is not a difficult choice. Mrs. Desai points out the horrible environment in which her characters have their lives in *Voices in the City*.

Anitha Desai seems to have adopted a half - hearted approach. Monisha is vaguely drawn and flits like a ghost in the consciousness of her brother and sister. As is to be expected the middle

class environment which destroys Monisha is more vivid than Monisha herself. The cries of agony and frustration are never really convincing since very little attention is paid by the author to the primary task of breathing life into the character. "Monisha's suicide is rather the novelist's confession of failure in vividly visualizing the character. Anita Desai gives only limited scope of the mental aberrations of Monisha" (Upadhyay, *Cry* 165).

Monisha never really succeeds in establishing herself as a living character. The social forces looking in establish her to seek after privacy and isolation. She tries to seek her existences as a woman but fails in her attempt due to the blocked tube of her ovary. Monisha is shown analyzing herself, Monisha realized, through her introspection, that she is mere dirt, dross and the uneasy lassitude of conscience. This trauma of childlessness of sufferings and becomes a neurotic in her behaviour. The sensitive nature of Monisha makes her shrink. She loses her existence into obligation.

Monisha is the only person in the novel who has not fully realized herself. Monisha shows evidences of her intense hunger for human love. Whenever she is in such a mood, she feels heavy. Monisha comes under the terrifying influence of negative emotions, she loses her normal self and becomes hysteric and faints down to the ground; an idea of suicide enters her neurotic mind. The negation and the repression of her desires continually lead her to breakdown. She therefore shrieks in utter confusion for her future existence. Monisha finally prepares herself for death.

"Her it was, on her eyes, her face, here it came there all over with her she wrestled with it. She fought it, it as not what he wanted, she screamed No! No! No! Screamed, screamed. Fell unconscious very quickly fell unconscious. thus Monisha ends her life miserably" (Dalmia, *An Interview* 94).

Before finally ending her life, Monisha searches for possible avenues to let out her sorrows. She withdraws herself from the material concerns of family and retreats behind the barred windows. Amla notices her stillness and deathlike submission and thinks of her as lifeless statute, "Monisha tries to remain aloof; but her stillness is not steadiness of detachment; it is not even feeling or suffering. It is deathlike stillness while watching the dancer in the street, Monisha feels curiously untouched". (Jasbir Jain, *Interview by Jasbir Jain*, 68). She alone stood apart, unnaturally cool, too perfectly aloof inviolably whole all right and apart. She is suddenly conscious of having lost all right to exist, of having given quest too soon her victory over her mind has less value than intensive surrender of the women to their feelings of sorrow and sympathy.

Anita Desai through the women characters in *Voices in the City* provides a microscope view of the plight of hapless women in Bengal. She presents them as a miserable lot. The idea of independence of women and their freedom from men is heralded by Aunt Lia who thinks that women can be themselves sonly when they discover their own sprits. She expresses her sentiments as follows. "Women place themselves in bondage to men, whether in marriage or out all their joy ambition is channeled that way, while they go parched themselves." As jasbir jain says, "these two aspects of woman hood are paralleled by the two aspects of life - with drawl and involvement. And to a large extent these two are represented by the garden and city" (Jasbir Jain, *Interview by Jasbir Jain*, 81). Monisha is a mistress of solitude. She is married, but this marriage is the last thing. she wants in her small universe. Monisha craves for personal privacy, but the large family of her husband denies her attempt to have any sort of space to herself at all.

Monisha's life swings between death and emptiness which is pure anguish that penetrates each, even the smallest cell of her body. Monisha gives up on that precious gift called "life", which she was granted to find her destination, and unable to do so, Monisha commits suicide in a hysterical frame of mind. Monisha's younger sister, Amla, also comes to the promising city as she thinks of it to be. In the beginning, Amla seems to be so different from her siblings. Nirode, Amla and Monisha's decisions and thoughts make the *voices in the city* an unforgettable and skilful piece of art. Closer to the end of the novel, Nirode and Amla look at life from another perspective. A turning point is Monisha's death, which signifies the end of that painful transition of the values. The death of Monisha brings them some kind of revelation. Anita Desai has depicted the death of a girl as a sacrifice which brings out the new perception of the world for Nirode and Amla.

Conclusion

The *Voices of the city* concentrates more on feminine sensibilities and other related issues concerned to them. Monisha, Amla and Nirode are from affluent sections of Indian society. Their problems are psychological or spiritual and not social or economical. They have to tackle their own selves, Monisha has to overcome her inner problems, which she fails to do till the end. The attempt to put an end to their dislikable familial ambience in the life of Monisha, various factors have contributed to the degeneration in her inner being, since she was a pampered child from birth and was brought up with all comforts and luxuries by her doing father, her immaturity of mind has derailed the normalcy of her emotions. Nirode's mother acts contrary to the societal conventions after the death of her husband. Her illicit relationship creates psychological disturbances in the minds of Nirode, Monisha and Amla. They undergo disengaged existence owing to their mother's lack of concern for her kid's welfare. Anita Desai has pains taking drawn the family dissonances in the novels. A home is what everyone needs; when the ambience is not up to one's expectation then abnormal characters are naturally created.

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