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THE CONCEPT OF MARGINALITY IN SELECTED NOVELS OF ANITA DESAI.

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Abstract:

Marginality is a product of unequal treatment of individuals in a society due to different reasons. The object of this dissertation is to explore the concept of marginality in the selected novels of Anita Desai. Marginalization can be broadly defined as the lack of importance and acknowledgement that leads to a sense of powerlessness and oppression. The marginalized are the ones who see themselves at the periphery of the system.

INTRODUCTION:

The typical Indian does not concern himself/herself with much beyond family. Their values and perspective of life are governed mostly by the traditions and conventions of the society in which they inhabit. Thus even in literature the male-centric view is usually expressed and the feminine experience takes a back-seat. But Anita Desai lets her women characters speak for themselves.

She tries to bring out the truth about her protagonists' inner life, analyzing and exploring their feelings and emotions in depth. As she puts it, she likes to portray the heroism in facing the day to day struggles of life. Most of the women depicted in her novels embody this struggle and show a heightened awareness of life in all its sordidness and make an effort to come to terms with it in their own way. These women are individuals who consciously search for and try to move towards their goal.

An example of marginalization at the community level is the marginalization of women. The feminist movement emerged as a direct relation to the marginalization of white women in society. Women were excluded from the labor force and their work in the home was not valued. Feminists argued that men and women should equally participate in the labor force, the public and private sector, and in the home. They also focused on labor laws to increase access to employment, as well as recognize child-rearing as a valuable form of labor. Today women are still marginalized from executive positions and continue to earn less than men in upper management positions.

In India, the women novelists writing in English, began to appear on the literary scene by 1874. They brought in a different perspective of life. They saw life from a different angle altogether. The women novelists were limited in their experiences and as such the subject matter was not wide ranging. It can be divided into three major categories. The theme of the struggle for independence was one of the major themes.

Later on, Indian writers in English focused on the East-west confrontation. Recently, more and more writers are focusing on the individual and Desai falls into this category of writers. Her depiction of the inner life of the characters clearly delineates their marginalization and the resultant frustration and agony that they suffer.

As Desai herself admits, her novels are not populated by heroic characters, whether male or female, at least in the traditional sense. Her protagonists are marked by a certain passivity. And have been criticized as being swept away by historical and social forces rather than being able to face and control them. Yet, Desai claims that her characters who appear like losers or victims, show a kind of heroism, of

survival. She thinks that if one can come through the experience of life with the heart and mind intact, without compromising oneself, that is a heroic act that needs to be celebrated.

Desai's women long to be free of all societal norms and live life in their own way. This results in a search for their identity and also an exploration of the ways out of their marginalization that is available to them. They flounder and struggle and in the process reveal their inner psyche to the readers. Loneliness, alienation, fragmentation and emotional deprivation are recurrent themes in Desai's novels.

Maya, the female protagonist in *Cry, the peacock* is a sensitive and intensely sensuous. Person she does not find anybody who can understand her morbid fears and her unique way of looking at life and this alienation pushes her into a state of insanity. Her tendency to give in to her Fate is the direct effect of her feelings of being unimportant and marginalized existence. As her name suggests, she creates an illusory world around her and trying to come to terms with her marginalized status, she assumes that for Gautama, her husband, life is not of much valued and pushes him off the roof. *Cry the peacock* shows in Maya the awareness of the rigidity of the patriarchal structure which shuts the women off from a major area of human experience and refuses to acknowledge a woman's experience as significant. It also shows a young woman and her confrontation with society leading to the annihilation of herself. In other words, there is a conflict between two sets of values-one standing for the supremacy of social hierarchy and the other for that of the individual.

Fire on the mountain shows the protagonist as a mature woman and her confrontation with the environment leads to a greater awareness and compromising attitude.

All the three characters are marginalized and try to cope with the fact in their own way. *Fire on the Mountain* is considered to be one of the best works of Anita Desai, both by her critics and the author herself. It deals with the withdrawal of Nanda Kaul from life itself after she has fulfilled the duties imposed upon by her husband, family and society at large. The society depicted has a complex structure, patriarchal nature being only one of its dimensions. The conventional expectations of marriage and mother hood have been fulfilled and found lacking in Nanda Kaul's life. Nanda Kaul smiles at the depiction of, *When A Woman Lives Alone* as the author, Sei Shonagon, talks about the dilapidated condition of the house and the pond overgrown with water plants and the weeds growing through the sand in patches. She is well able to manage her house and it is certainly not in this area of her life that a lack is felt.

The next paragraph, "I greatly dislike a woman's house when it is clear she has scurried about with a knowing look on her face, arranging everything just as it should be, and when the gate is kept tightly shut" (27) shows society's dislike of self-sufficient women and Nanda Kaul's rebellious attitude in presenting herself as one of them.

Ila Das is presented as a misfit who is nevertheless brave enough to face life and help others in the process. She is most aware of the marginalized women in society as she tries to reform their ways.

Little Raka has also gone through traumatic experiences that naturally pushes her outside the social milieu. Raka's attitude, like Nanda's is one born out of the need to avenge themselves for their past on the society which made it happen.

Cry the peacock, is Anita Desai's first novel about a young woman, Maya, who seems to be highly sensitive. Her husband, Gautama, an advocate, is the down to earth man, busy earning his livelihood and worrying about his cases, the little time that he spends at home. Already three years into his marriage he does not feel the need to pay any attention to his wife and her needs and expects her to adjust to his way of life. The novel begins with the death of Maya's pet dog Toto. Maya's feelings are overwhelming, no doubt, but they are also misunderstood and almost regarded as the tantrum of a very young child, of no consequence at all. This marginalization of her feelings and as a result, herself, is keenly felt by Maya. Concept of marginality shown in the novel.

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