

Conjugal Relationship in Anita Desai's *Games at Twilight*

K. Sangeetha, Ph.D. Scholar in English, E. R. K Arts & Science College, Erumiyampatti, Dharmapuri, Tamilnadu, India.

E mail id: gunasangeetha1981@gmail.com Ph. No. 9543458177

Abstract

Anita Desai, a momentous novelist and short story writer is distinguished for her short story collection *Games at Twilight*. The stories of Desai are furnished with various themes with different psychological sequences. The characters are sustained by domestic dissensions which cannot be ignored easily. Desai's works portray modern urban society. The characters are suffered by the intimate relationships. The intensity and infirmity of the characters with the family are clearly pictured by Desai. Among these short stories some stories discussed connubial relationships. The current paper focuses upon the four short stories of these collection. The stories 'Private Tuition by Mr Bose', 'Surface Texture', 'Pigeons at Day Break' and 'Sale' are chosen for study. Anita Desai presents an Indian way of life styles and expectations to her characters. The world of her characters are efficacious. Desai's works are fabricated with a technique of its own and express congenial effects.

Key words: Psychological sequence, Domestic dissensions, efficacious and congenial effects.

The stories of Anita Desai comprehends modern- sensibility. In the words of Sharma the work of Desai gives, "effort of discover, to underline and convey the true significance of things" (12). Shyam in his article states that "Turning inward her fiction grapples with the intangible realities of life, plunges into the innermost depths of the human psyche to fathom its mysteries, the inner turmoil, the chaos inside the mind" (44). Desai chiefly touches female sensibilities in her works. Men are used as periphery and at times their role gets specific identification. The story 'Private Tuition by Mr Bose' exposes the psychological insight of a middle class private tuition teacher. He conducts private tuition to enhance his economy. He pays his engrossment towards his two students and his wife at kitchen. Mr Bose takes his tuition at his house at balcony. He gets cool air from Hooghly River which reduces his hot temper at the time of teaching to his uninterested students. His wife placed some pot plants like 'tulsi' in the balcony

like most of the houses in India. The wife fixes the pot plants in the balcony to provide fresh air to her husband. By sitting at the balcony he runs his family and tuition. His tuition students are not paying much attention towards his teaching. The two students come for tuition because of their parents' compulsion. Whatever he asks his students they say "I don't know sir," (202). Mr Bose explains with forced patience. To come out of this pressure he looks upon his wife and child. He hates the paleness of his wife as: "Her head was bowed so that some of her hair had freed itself of the long steel pins he hated so much and hung about her pale, narrow face" (203). This shows the middle class husband's striving and inability to execute his rudiments. A kind of secret love is interchanged between the husband and wife.

... Mr Bose whose lips were wavering into smile beneath the ragged moustache. The woman, disturbed by the break in the recitation on the balcony, looked up, past the child, down the passage and into Mr Bose's face. Mr Bose's moustache lifted up and out with almost a laugh of tenderness and delight. Beginning to laugh herself, she quickly turned, pulled down the corners of her mouth with mocking sternness, trying to recall him to the path of duty,... (204).

Mary Pratt comments the practicability of Desai's story in her article as "... the moment of truth stands as the model for the short story the way, the life stands as the model for the novel" (183).

The story echoes the human sensations and passions. Mr Bose is unwillingly teaching his students, his mind is surfeited with the noise makes by his wife and her discourses with their child. His students exasperate him but he handles his wife and child in tender manner. After the departure of the students he spares his time with his wife and child. The story narrates the reliable situation of a middle class Indian husband and his internal and emotional conflicts. He does not get any satisfaction with the students apart from the money as he narrates "It was intolerable. Intolerable, all of it- except, only for the seventy- five rupees paid at the end of the month" (206).

The next story 'Surface Textures' speaks of a husband's irresponsible attitude towards his family. Through this story Desai reveals the unhappy married life of Indian women and her striving to save her children. The adjustments of women picture the beautiful life and family set-up of India. In most of the works of Desai she unmasks the ardent world of Indian women. She touches the psychological problems of women in India. The wife in the story 'Surface Texture'

haunts by monotony. The protagonist Harish is a technician whose adoration of surface textures starts at the beginning of the story when his wife asks him to cut down the melon. She borrowed it for her children but her problems start with that melon. Harish barely looks at the melon whereas Sheila his wife is getting ready in a rush up manner. She asks him to cut down the melon but he spends most of the time in wasteful looks. On seeing this she shouted “Are you going to sleep? She cried, a little frightened. ‘Oh no,’ he said, in that low mumble that always exasperated her—it seemed a sign to her of evasiveness and pusillanimity, this mumble” (225). Harish does not like to cut it down and spoil its texture.

At office he cannot focus on his files so he was dismissed. Sheila shocked and shouted as:

Sheila stormed and screamed like some shrill, wet hurricane about the house. ‘How am I to go to market and buy vegetables for dinner? I don’t even have enough for that. What am I feed the boys tonight? No more milk for them. The washerwoman is asking for her bill to be paid. Do you hear? Do you hear? And we shall have to leave this flat. Where shall we go? (227).

As a typical Indian wife Sheila alone worries to run the family. But Harish does not ruminate the words of his wife and neighbours. She wept “on her bed in a bath of tears and perspiration” (227). In Chitra Baneerjee’s short story ‘The Bats’ the narrator’s mother, an Indian wife struggles in the hands of a tyrant husband. She moves to grandpa’s house to get comfort but afraid of the village women’s gossips and return back to her home. This is the condition of Indian wives in many families. To protect her children Sheila leaves her husband in solitary state and approaches her father to save them. The problem of marriage is discussed by Sashi Deshpande as: “A marriage you start of expecting so many things. And bit by bit, like dead leaves the expectations fall out. But... two people who have shut themselves in two separate jars. Who can see each other, but cannot communicate. Is this a marriage?” (26). Marriage gives displeasure in many women’s life. Their expectations and dreams get collapsed in the hands of male chauvinistic society.

The next story ‘Pigeons at Daybreak’ speaks of an aged couple Amul Basu and Otima Basu unbroken love. The amiable and tolerant behaviour of Otima towards her husband shows her devotee character. Amul Basu is a valetudinarian person who has some existent problems

and psychological sensibilities. The couple receives an information of power cut on that night. On hearing this news Amul's tranquility raises up and struggles to breath. His shock is narrated in the lines:

'Today? Tonight? No electricity?' he echoed... 'How will I sleep then?' he grasped fearfully, 'without a fan? In this heat?'... his chest to rise and fall as he panted for breath. Clutching his throat, he groped his way back to the cane chair. 'Otima, Otima, I can't breathe,' he moaned. (288)

But Otima without anxiety brings his inhaler and watches him like a sickly child. In the male chauvinistic society, female becomes the victim of male. Most of the women accept the absolutism with pleasure. Women are silent sufferers and they never care for themselves. Otima is aged fifty six but does not think of her physical disabilities. She understands the psychology of her husband and adjust herself to the circumstance. In the words of Dr. Sameer Malhotra, a psychotherapist who discusses in his article 'Marital Discord? Simply Outsource it' to Times of India:

Marriage is about mutual trust, healthy communication, empathy and responsibility. While a marital discord could arise out of personality issues, emotional instability, impulse control problems, misplaced priorities, or infidelity, it is imperative to understand the reason and get a timely treatment. (June 5, 2014)

On that night Otima too does not sleep and continuously massages her husband's body under his sobbing.

She tried of dragging around the pillows and piling up the bolsters, helping him into a sitting position and then lowering him into a horizontal one, bringing him his medicines, fanning him with a palm leaf and eventually of his groans and sobs as well. Finally she gave up and collapsed onto her own string bed, lying there exhausted and sleepless, too distracted by the sound of traffic to sleep. (292-293)

At early morning cool breeze along with pigeons fly at the sky which gives relief to both husband and wife. In Lavanya Sankaran's short story 'Closed Curtains' Mr D' Costa and his wife are living alone in Bangalore. His son is settled in abroad like the son of Amul Basu who do not find time to meet their parents. The longing for seeing their grand- children is seen in both of

the stories. Both of the grand- fathers fulfill their desires of spending their time with their grand- children through their dreams. In that story Mr D' Costa is taking care of his ill wife. The lines say about the condition of his wife as: "... no cure was available. As time went on, the doctor said, she would recognize less and less of her life. Mr D' Costa did not reply that the gradual erasure of his wife had rendered his own life unrecognizable as well" (33). Both of these stories speak about the mutual love of husband and wife at their old age. Through the story 'Pigeons at Daybreak' Anita Desai portrays the strength of marital relationship and communal understandings between an Indian husband and wife at their old age.

The story 'Sale' speaks of a poor painter who never has the skill of selling his pictures. The painter is with his wife and his young child. The family is in poor condition. Desai concentrates upon the complications in maintaining a family. In this story 'Sale' there is not many conversation taken place between the husband and wife. The wife silently observes the strivings of her husband of selling his pictures to the customers. The wife does not intervene between them. The appearance of the house and the family members say the parched condition. "He stands on the other side of the door, in the dusk- mottled room, fingering an unshaven chin and dropping cigarette butts on the floor which is already littered with them." (230) The wife too with distressed face 'her heavy, troubled face' resembles the pathetic condition. Even though the wife does not interrupt with the customers she notices all the happenings.

Sinclair Ross' short story 'The Lamp at Noon' speaks of the poor conditions in marriage relationship. The writer symbolizes the climatic conditions with the life of the married couple. Similarly Desai's description of the appearance of the artist house reveals the wretched condition of their family. In 'The Lamp at Noon' the climate is dry and the wind is blowing heavily. It signifies the desiccate condition of the couple and the family's destitution. The distress conditions push the couples to quarrel each other. But in 'Sale' the couple exchanges silent expressions.

In 'Sale' before the arrival of the customers the husband is impatient. He walks in and out of the house. It shows the family's starving for money. When the knocking sound hears the wife look at her husband who stands near the door "like dog hanging about, wanting something" (230). Their arrival gives excitement to him. The artist attempts his level to sell his pictures but it goes on unavailing. The lines narrates the sympathetic condition of artist:

The artist finds himself sweating and exhausted- he had not realized how he was straining himself. He has had nothing but tea and cigarettes since early that morning and there is no breath of air coming through the barred window. He wipes his face with his hand and blotches another crayon with his wet fingers as he picks it up and flings it away. ‘Then what do you want?’ he asks in a flat voice. (235)

The customer admires the pictures drawn by the artist and extols him. They raise more questions and collect more information from the artist. But the customers do not buy anything and leave the house and the artist in empty handed. The artist boggles to face of his wife who stands nearer to him. The wife who knows the poor conditions of her house does not disturb her husband. A kind of sympathetic love is shown by her at the end.

All the above stories of Desai picture different kinds of understanding between the husband and wife. No story resembles another, it has its own individuality. The wives narrated in these stories are in bitterness but tolerant. Desai says that she observes the real India and narrates the fatiguing realities of life. While comparing with other writers Desai studies the inner mind of her characters. She portrays the physical and mental devastations of modern existence.

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