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Bharati Mukherjee and Anita Desai as psychological novelists

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Abstract

Bharati Mukherjee and Anita Desai are undoubtedly the major novelists in the field of Indian English literature. With their hard work, both the novelists have achieved name as well as fame. They have given a new direction to the field of psychological novels with their realistic and interesting psychological novels. They are the novelists of human psyche. They carry a deep insight to examine the inner status of human mind. They are novelists of human mind. With their extraordinary skills and capabilities, they have achieved success in bringing out the inner working of their women characters in a clear state.

As the novelists of psychology, both of them have tried to delve deep into the crevices of their women characters. They are just perfect in portraying the women characters as well as their predicaments. They have also made sincere efforts in order to investigate the various features of human psyche like inner sensibility, conflicts, anxiety, disorders, confusion in mind and husband-wife relationship etc. The novelists have given their best in portraying the inner psyche of their chief women protagonists. We find them quite concerned about creating the portrayal of Indian life of women interesting and fascinating to the readers. Their novels are undoubtedly the best examples in the field of psychological novels.

Keywords: Bharati Mukherjee, Anita Desai, psychological novelists, women characters, psychological crisis, inner psyche, immigration, cultural conflict

Introduction

Bharati Mukherjee is undoubtedly one of the major novelists of Indian Diaspora. She is a famous Indian born American novelist, journalist, short story writer and non-fiction writer. Within a very short creative span, the novelist has become successful in achieving such an enviable place in the field of English literature. She went to America as an expatriate. It helped her in capturing the immigrant experiences of Indian who have migrated from their home country. The same experiences have been shared by the novelist in her several novels and short story fiction. In her novels she has talked about the life of Indian immigrants who have shifted to U.S. It works as the subject matter in her novels. She has explored the theme of immigration, transformation. The Indian immigrants who move to America carry one desire with them. And that desire is to settle down in the new land. These immigrants have to face the whole process of adjustment as well as transformation. During this process of adjustment and transformation, they experience a change in their personalities. This process involves various phases such as the phase of expatriation, phase of transition and phase of immigration. During this process, cultural conflict leads to the creation of psychological crisis. It forms the main crux of her major novels. The novelist has very well depicted cultural clash between the two very different worlds. The East on the one hand and the West on the other hand. This cultural clash results in the formation of psychological crisis in the inner mind of the chief protagonists in the works of Bharati Mukherjee. The novelist has given her best in portraying the inner psyche of her chief women protagonists. We find her quite concerned about creating the portrayal of Indian life interesting and fascinating to the readers. She has focused on the sensitive women characters that generally lack a stable kind of sense of both personal identity and cultural identity. The novelist seems quite curious about the survival of her chief women protagonists in the new world, new surroundings and new atmosphere.

One can clearly witness the psychological conflict in the women characters of Mukherjee. Most of her immigrant characters go through both the cultural as well as psychological conflict in the new foreign land. The novelist has very effectively highlighted the issues, anxieties and the pathetic condition of the characters. In the present times, cross cultural

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crisis has become one of the major themes which directly results in psychological issues and problems. This topic has gained a worldwide significance. The novels of Mukherjee are undoubtedly the best examples in this field of psychological novels.

Mukherjee has selected her women protagonists from the various fields of life. They have divergent cultural, ethnic and religious preoccupations. The novelist has made in order to explore the inner psyche of her various protagonists. Her famous women protagonists include Dimple, Jasmine, Tara, Maya and others. All these women suffer and become the victims of both cultural alienation as well as psychological alienation.

In her first novel, *Tiger's Daughter*, the novelist has provided a manifestation of conflicts in culture. It portrays the uprooted state of Tara. Her uprooted state creates psychological conflict in her. One can call her the autobiographical representation of the novelist. She also married an American and settled there.

Mukherjee's *Wife* is a psychological novel. It is a tale of Dimple's unfulfilled dreams and sufferings. She is a neurotic personality who is dissatisfied with her life both in India and outside India. She has her own world of fantasy. She is not happy with her husband and her in laws. Her unfulfilled expectation, dreams, desires and fantasy bring her to such a state where she kills her own husband.

Jasmine is one of the famous novels of Mukherjee. In this novel, the novelist has talked about Jasmine who is the chief character. She is an immigrant. Born in India, she is pushed from one problem to another problem. In her whole journey, she faces mental, emotional and physical agony. Her agony takes her to such an extent where she is left with no option but to choose violence. In the whole process, the protagonist comes out not as a pathetic and tragic character but as someone who is fully determined to change her life and destiny.

Mukherjee's another character is Hannah Easton, in the novel *The Holder of the World*, who is the citizen of New York. She goes through transformation in her journey from the West to the East.

In her novels, the novelist has portrayed the pathetic and miserable condition of her various women characters. These women characters are either the victims of household duties, patriarchal society or cultural conflicts. They have their own issues, problems and conditions. Some of them are forced to face trials, conflicts, tribulations etc. They also have to pay heavy price in order to reach their destination. While there are other characters who have positive approach in their life and move towards their destination with optimism as Anjali in the novel, *New Miss India* and Jasmine in the novel, *Jasmine*.

Anita Desai is one of the distinguished Indian English novelists. She carries a fabulous penetration of vision. She has achieved worldwide acclaim with her writings. She has undoubtedly added a new dimension in the English literature though the exploration of inner psyches of humans in her various novels. She has the capacity of peeping inside the chief women characters in her novels. She gives more importance in portraying the inner psyche and reality of her characters rather than paying focus on the outer world or reality. Through the portrayal of her characters, she has presented the insecurity, strange behaviour, fear, isolation, loneliness generally faced by the characters. In her novels, the novelist has shown the psychic conditions of women

who are on the verge of insanity. She has also highlighted the various factors responsible for it.

In her first novel, *Cry, the Peacock*, Desai has given a powerful psychological analysis of her chief women character whose name is Maya. She is a hypersensitive, introvert and neurotic woman. She becomes the victim of inadequate human relationships in her life. Her madness takes her to the path of horrible and miserable end.

In her novel, *Bye-Bye, Blackbird*, the novelist has highlighted the dilemma of immigration which results in psychological conflict in the mind of the chief protagonist. In this novel, alienation, nostalgia, acceptance and rejection work as major themes. The novelist has also very well shown the clash between East and West.

Her other important novel, *Where Shall We Go This Summer* revolves around the chief protagonist, Sita. She is a woman in her forties. She is just fed up with her present situation and just wants to run away from all the hustle and bustle of the city. She wants to go to Manori Island in order to experience peace. She has loveless and inharmonious relationship with her husband, children and other members of the family. She is so much depressed by the circumstances around her that she takes the shelter of smoking. She does not like to interact with anyone even with her husband as he hardly pays any kind of attention towards her.

The chief protagonist Monisha in the novel, in *Voices in the City* is a depressed housewife who is unsatisfied with her husband and her life after marriage. She is dissatisfied with her daily life and daily routine. She wants a kind of change in her life. Her dissatisfaction takes her to the path of miserable end.

The novels of Desai contain a psychological, deep rooted and philosophical concern about the real and true meaning of life. Most of the women characters are dissatisfied with their daily life and daily routine. They make efforts in order to search a more lively and meaningful life.

While there are various women characters who carry a positive and optimistic approach in their life. Although they face several problems, issues, traumas and tribulations in their day to day life but they do not allow negativity to enter in their psyche. In her several works, the novelist has shared own personal experiences. She does not believe in patronizing a single theme or idea. She believes in portraying the truth in its real and actual sense. Her real and sensitive depiction of inner feelings, emotions, and sufferings of the women protagonists is remarkable. She has explored the conflict and tension between main woman protagonist and the family members, especially her husband. Through her novels, she deals with the contemporary life in India, emotional exile, culture clash, and difference in the generations, inharmonious and loveless relationship.

We all know that there is a lot of difference between the traditional woman and the new woman of the present times. Both the novelists have portrayed new women in their respective novels. Earlier, traditional women used to limit themselves and their lives to their parents, husbands, and children and in laws. They were supposed to remain within the four walls of their house. They had no rights to dream. They were supposed to suppress their dreams, desires, wishes and expectations. Such women do not appear in the novels of Bharati Mukherjee and Anita Desai. They have portrayed new women in their novels. Their chief women protagonists are the women of the present times. They are

different. They have their own expectations, dreams, and desires. They are not confined to the four walls of the house. Their world is not limited to their parents, husbands, and children. They are not suppressive like the traditional women used to be.

Conclusion

The women characters in the novels of Bharati Mukherjee and Anita Desai crave for their own real and true self. They want to change their image by coming out of their previous image of Sita and Savitri. They raise their voice against the ill treatment, patriarchal and male dominated society. They are fed up with old and conventional traditions. They do not want such norms in their life.

One can easily get psychological insight of the chief women protagonists in the novels of Bharati Mukherjee and Anita Desai. Both the novelists have portrayed their protagonists with psychological tint. The various experiences and situations faced by these women characters play crucial role in analysing the inner psyche of these women characters. The various themes employed by these women novelists are important in the study of psyche of characters. Both the psyche and inner mental world of the various characters in the several novels of Bharati Mukherjee and Anita Desai are interesting study.

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