
SEVERANCE FROM UNREAL TO REAL WORLD

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Abstract: Women are under surveillance; and they are well aware of it. From the time she is born, she is being focused by many, tamed by many, restricted by many and gradually she is entangled in the web knitted by her beloved one's in the name of tradition, culture and so on. She has started to be cautious enough about herself and decided to follow the unwritten rules of her men. Like a statue she stands for dedication, diligence and devotion towards her family. She may be a daughter, mother, grandmother or great grandmother, her assistance towards the members of the family never changes off. She loves to work, share and help others but at the same time she expects others also to do the same for her. But we find the people who receives love from her never cares to return the same, as they feel that it is her duty. A duty that never ever been rewarded. So, there arises the crisis of identity among the women folk especially in the patriarchal society. Anita Desai, a feminist writer, depicts her women emotionally and psychologically disturbed because of the loss of identity. Though they are educated modern Indian women still they face the discrepancies especially when it comes to gender issues, discrimination which fog among the people in the society. In the present article I have made an attempt to analyse the novel 'Fire on the Mountain' written by Anita Desai published in the year 1977 to indicate the traumatic condition of educated women folk in the society.

Keywords: Seclusion, Psychological Disturbance, Male Chauvinism, Gender Discrimination.

Introduction: Literature is a parody of life, a life with expectation, a life with dedication, a life with determination and so on. Human life is intertwined with lots of duties and responsibilities towards the other. He or she strives hard to gratified others especially the beloved ones with utmost care. So, gradually we find ourselves enslaved to others especially, a woman in the name of a daughter, mother, wife, grandmother, great grandmother and so on. Whereas the man intellectually escapes from the scene, and burdens only the woman pointing it as her sole responsibility. So, a fume of regression and suppression of woman is going on and on, though they are educated, modernized still they find very hard to sustain themselves in the cocoon of woman's role. We find very few women break the sheath and become independent, whereas many remains to accept the things despondently.

Anita Desai's woman folk are educated, well developed, modernized but struggles hard to raise their voice against the injustice done to them. They remain silent and fall in mental depression where upon commits suicide or remain ostracized. 'Fire on the Mountain' depicts the condition of a woman and her offspring who have been in a severe psychologically depressed condition due to male domination and negligence. Nanda Kaul had a secured life materially but not emotionally taken care well both by her parent's and by her in-law's. Nanda Kaul was married to Vice Chancellor, started her life in a small university town in Punjab. The house was with hussle and bustle of children, grandchildren, with surging guests and serving servants restlessly. She moved heaven and earth to make the things done in an orderly fashion. She had enough of household chores for the day and at the same time she needs to appear in silk sarees and entertain her husband's guests.

"Isn't she splendid? Isn't she like a queen? Really, Vice-Chancellor is lucky to have a wife who can run everything as she does,' and her eyes had flashed when she heard, like a pair of black blades, wanting to cut them, despising them, crawling grey bugs about her fastidious feet. That was the look no one had dared catch or return." (18)

Nanda Kaul's sons and daughters also led a life of discomfort at home and some at the small filthy missionary run hospital in the bazaar. Her life in the hub of the busy world hadn't ever pleased her

much. Her husband never loved her or cherished her but provided materialistic satisfaction like a queen mannequin to maintain status quo. She never urged to question her husband about his illicit relationship with Miss David, the mathematics mistress, whom he loved much but couldn't marry her as she is a Christian. She became silent and the same silence is also continued towards her sons and daughters who were more indifferent in their attitude. They were more like strangers to her. She couldn't understand them nor was able to love them wholeheartedly.

Weird life, being despondent she moves far off from the people after her husband's death. Fulfilling the responsibilities towards her husband and her children, she decides to lead a life of her own without anyone in solitude. She purchased a house Carignano- the place where maiden ladies of English people used to stay, where the Indian were not allowed to trespass it. After independence, they felt unsafe to live in Carignano and deserted the place. Nanda Kaul bought the house. "She did not live here alone by choice- she lived here alone because that was what she was forced to do, reduced to doing" (145) She kept it clean, true, open for the wind to blow through but not for any human whom she felt as stranger in her life. "She has suffered from the nimety, the disorder the fluctuating and unpredictable excess." (30). Nanda Kaul was glad to leave behind everything, as she felt she had discharged all her duties. She is not ready to read the past, and does not want anyone to remain her of the past. So, whenever the postman arrives with a letter, or whenever the telephone rings her heart palpitates with the fear of reminiscence.

Nanda Kaul's only companion is the cook Ram Lal who is always busy in his work and never dares to disturb her seclusion. The arrival of the post man with the letter from Asha, Nanda Kaul's daughter brings a blow in the weak heart. Asha, the least loved, the most infuriating of her daughters who always dedicated her life in concentrating on her beauty, hair, skin and least bothered to care for her unfortunate daughter Tara. Tara was married to Rakesh, a diplomat. Tara being illtreated by her husband, vexed of his affairs, his drinking and brutality decides to move away from her husband. But Asha, persuades her daughter to give him another chance. "He is not really so bad as Tara might make you believe, she simply doesn't understand him, doesn't understand me, and she really is the wrong type of wife for a man like him so I can't blame him entirely although it is true that he does drink- well" (15) Though her daughter was illtreated, she falls in depression and couldn't sustain herself with her husband, Asha advises her to adjust to the man and satisfy his needs. As they were moving from Delhi to Geneva, and her granddaughter was fatally attacked with typhoid, Asha requests her mother Nanda Kaul to assist Raka, as Kasauli helps to recuperate her health in the quiet summer.

Raka had many painful occasions with their parents. Her long illness in Delhi and her weak exhausted state thereafter forbade her from being sociable with the others. The child wished to move all alone and enjoy. "Father home from a party, stumbling and crashing through the curtains of night his mouth opening to let out a flood of rotten stench, beating at her mother with hammers and fists of abuse- harsh, filthy abuse that made Raka cower under her bed clothes and wet her mattress in fright, feeling the stream of urine warm and weakening between her legs like a stream of bloods and her mother lay down on the floor and shut her eyes and wept." (71-72)

The news of arrival of Raka to Carignano made Nanda Kaul restless. But she has got the gift of avoiding what she regarded as dispensable. Raka, her great granddaughter was recluse by nature by instinct. She is like a closed book with secrets. She is a child who never depended on others, she can bed herself, and sleep silently alone. Her attitude, silence, seclusion, reflected Nanda Kaul of her past. "Raka you really are a great-grand child of mine, aren't you? You are more like me than any of my children or grandchildren. You are exactly like me, Raka. (64) So, Nanda Kaul also doesn't want to impose her way of living, her ways on Raka. Raka never listened, followed, waited for anyone except for Ram Lal as she fancied her with stories about Churails, Institute, doctors, Jackal, mad dogs and so on. Nanda Kaul also wished the child to be independent and enjoy her life.

Nanda Kaul and Raka though lived under the same roof, never dared to disturb the privacy of each another. The intimacy between Ram Lal and Raka went on unchecked. But Nanda Kaul worried a lot about her failure to comfort the child with fantasy and fairy tales. So, she started to describe her past to draw the attention of Raka, but Raka wants to withdraw from her great grandmother's fantasy world as she felt that the outside world was more appealing to her. Nanda Kaul wanted to be with Raka, she behaved like as she had arrived at her second childhood. But Raka seemed to be more independent by nature. "She was a wild creature- wild, wild, wild, though Nanda Kaul" (103)

Ila Das and Nanda Kaul were childhood friends. Ila Das's family fortune was divided among the three drunken, dissolute sons, and hence the daughters were left penniless. Father gave more importance to the sons and send them to foreign universities for their studies, whereas the daughters Ila Das and Rima were deprived of the chance. But sons became drunker and the father was forced to clear the debts. After the death of their father, daughters worked hard to make both ends meet and to nurse their sick mother. Nanda Kaul being moved by the destitute condition of her friend offered a job in Home science college through her husband, the Vice- Chancellor. After the retirement of the principal, Ila Das was deprived the post which she deserved, so Ila Das resigned the job. She, who was already on the verge of retirement started to move from pillar to post, trying hard to earn fifty rupees here and there to earn for her livelihood. Nanda Kaul made an arrangement to make Ila Das as a government employee as she felt that she could get pension after her retirement. Ila Das based on her experience was given the job as a welfare officer to find the poor people, to guide, support and show the right way to lead a happy life.

Ila Das has been independent in life, she never liked to be dependent on others. "Her absurd pride of being her father's daughter, her ridiculous failure ever to forget it. She had not asked, had not begged." (141) The village where Ila Das works is a place filled with superstitious beliefs. She lived in a crumbling hut of mud and thatch near the earthen heap of the hamlet. They dare not to go against the customs and traditions followed by their ancestors. "People die because of superstition belief. Boy died with nail cut" (128). People listen to the priest who treats them with chilli powder and cow dung to cure disease instead of going to the clinic. Ila Das finds very difficult to change the mindset of the people especially the men. "It's so much harder to teach a man anything, Nanda- the women are willing, poor dears, to try and change their dreadful lives by an effort, but do you think their men will let them. No not one bit" (129). When she heard the news of a seven-year-old daughter getting married to an old man, a widower with six children she tries very hard to stop the marriage but the parents turn over a deaf ear. Poor Ila Das unable to stop it remained in silence, whereas her action of raising voice against it made an adverse effect on Preet Singh, the bride's father. Ila Das, the old woman was being targeted by Preet Singh, who waited for an opportunity to take revenge against Ila Das. When she was hurrying back home in the dark, Preet Singh molests her and kills her. Ila Das who doesn't have anyone to support, protect or assist her remained as a single warrior to fight against the evil. But male domination, superstition, discrimination has put an end to her life.

The story is knitted with the life of three, Nanda Kaul, Raka and Ila Das, their emotions, their sufferings and their struggle for existence. All the three had faced the hardship in their life, isolated, psychologically disturbed, emotionally bounded and being unaware of their state of living, decided to remain in seclusion. The writer has beautifully brought out how a girl child if not being take care well by her beloved ones, remains silent, become impotent to raise voice against the injustice done to her. So, the society takes her silence as acceptance, and tires to act ruthlessly because she is a woman, who is weak, and a born labourer. A girl child should be given proper care, attention and a conducive environment for her physical and mental growth. She should be made familiar with the society rules that would help her in overall development rather put her in darkness. A girl is not a born labourer, she has feeling, she has love, she has ability; accept her, show her the path, and support her. For a woman struggle is a never-ending process, freedom is never really won, hence we must teach her, support her, and encourage her to win the race she is taking up in her life.

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