

Identity Crises in the Novel of Anita Desai “Voices in the City”

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Abstract

Novel “Voices in the City “ deals with protagonists who are siblings Nirode, Monisha, Amla how they deal with the situations comes in life though they never loved Calcutta but they have to live in such adverse environment with full of dirt, filth and poverty. Nirode lives a life of vagabond which he has chosen deliberately because he don't want to take a penny from his mother accounts. He has forsaken various profession due to his instability, he wants something curious to do in life, ultimately he wrote drama whose script he gave to Monisha, when he fell seriously ill and got admitted to hospital by Monisha. He quelled over his mother affection toward Major Chadda which is the cause of his hatred for his mother. Monisha married with Jibon in large joint family, having huge house amidst Bow Bazar though she felt lonely and alienated among large number of people to the extent of neurosis, that she has to end-up her life to get rid of entangle in isolation. Amla on the other hand came to Calcutta to find her identity but loath City Calcutta with foul sight of beggars, lappers dirt and filth. She finds relief in the company of Dharma. Nirode and Amla acceptance of City to gain their identity but sudden demise of Monisha already shaken roots under their feet.

Keywords: Neurosis, Existential, Dystopia, cacophony, Acceptance, Goddess Kali, Destroyer, Preserver.

In an interview with Yashodhara Dalmia published in ‘The Times of India’ on April 28, 1979 Anita Desai says that she is , “interested in character are not average but retreated or been driven into some extremity of despair or so turned against ,or made to stand against the general current”.

Anita world hover around psychic and subconscious mind of protagonist. She is aloof from other novelists who deal with the outer world or reality but Anita Desai delve deep into the psyche of her characters whether male or female, inner dilemma of protagonist is the chief concern to purport the plot of novels further.

‘Voices in the City’ justify Anita statement in the Times of India. Interview, She goes to the extent to major cause of protagonists reason of yearning. Her characters are greatly influenced by outer surrounding in which they reside but to their own reaction also about exterior ambience in which they live.

‘Voices in the City’ where protagonists are siblings Nirode, Monisha and Amla are drawn in detail while their brother Arun and their mother briefly portrayed. “Calcutta”(Kolkatta) too is caricatured with all its dystopian elements filth, dirt, poverty both colonial and post -colonial remnants. City with over-carrying capacity.

The Novel open with Nirode see off his brother Arun, who is leaving India to foreign land in order to fulfill his dreams, Nirode somewhere glad that Arun able to get out of dire dirt of City and finally would be able to gain his Identity. Where he (Nirode) would be still bohemian and vagabond, still to continue his journey without any help of anyone not even of single penny even from his mother side. He adopts defiant attitude when Amla asks him why don't he want any help even of their own mother. He reproaches her for hearing about Mother help. Nirode broods whether he ever see Arun again. "Nirode felt his brother arms and shoulders still, their solidity beneath the light material of clothing" {pg -5)

He called himself journalist. But the dismal truth was that all he did, to cut out long strips of Newspaper and paste and file them (pg-7) he regards himself utter failure man. "I haven't still begun yet." He felt a little envy in his heart "three drinks a night and room to himself, that's all I ask...." He dislikes his mother favoured for Major Chadda somewhere in his subconscious mind "thinking of major Chadda-how ashamedly she wrote that hideous name, so like a cooking pot full of yellow food or rag of dirty underwear. How helpful this Chadda providing her with male company and admiration. How solidly he planted himself on her little squire chair gay with 'Tibetan tapestries how he cleared his throat whenever he paid her patronage she waited for him to finish before and youthfulness" (pg-38) He abhors "like the rattle of reckless trains; Calcutta, Calcutta – the very pulse beat in the people like the survivors of an atomic blast , than poured to let a procession of beautifully laundered Bangalis in white carry their merrygold decked Durga or Laxmi or Saraswati or Kali –on their shoulders down to Ganges amidst drums and fevered chantingthe City haunting ghost of the past as frenzied dystopia to Nirode." His wavering attitude about himself he told about to Jit, "what he become the black age to the stability in life" he says "I certainly didn't grow upon live amongst cockroaches and edit a stinking useless magazine should I further says. "should I" tell you what I expected to find myself doing at twenty-five? I always certain I would be a stowaway a traveller and live in London or Paris, be a poor and a brilliant students there spend my time drinking absinthe and talking dazzlingly of Hindu philosophy and kamasutra.....Then it seems such a face-this wandering about in fowl streets wasting time with useless creatures like Sonny and Bose and dramatically tearing up my mother letters into tiny little bits." He clearly reveal and has himself acquainted "No, no said Jit insisted. "stand on your head, Nirode stand on your head that the only way to get a correct view of this stupid senseless country that one horde of individual after the other has taken over and shaken about and destroyed till we've lost all sense or proportion" seem very practical if one has to stay in this world. Jit further says "I never invited my mother to visit me. It is their right as my honoured parents to live with their son but I never invited them and they never come. I cannot, you se. I cannot" at this juncture, we come across how Nirode hatred for his mother to visit me." Nirode said beckoning to the waiter for another bottle of beer "I never will. I won't honour that old Cannibal and I wouldn't have her in my house if I had one."

Monisha, Nirode sister, who married in Calcutta in Bow Bazar in big joint family house. She married with Jibon that was the last moment she saw her brother Nirode, she is more attached with Nirode than anyone else. She felt at time saw her brother "there is nothing left in him but this small shrunken shell-no shell in the wrong word because it is the shell that is gone, the protective covering that one could touch, stroke or knock without fear it is gone and what is left is the snail inside transparent fragile something so bare and irreducible that I start back I cannot possibly touch anything so exposed, it might bruise." Due to living in extreme suffocating isolation and alienation she become neurotic, she hasn't any child also to be busied with, she react abnormally when she heard the recitation of her cousin-in-law incessantly, the sound goes unbearable to her, this indicated that she is so immersed in her own isolation

or use to on the verge of insanity, that any outside sound cause in her huge impatience. Every sound are cacophonies to her, she loath the City Calcutta, Jibon her husband routinely behavior make her sick, nobody in such a big house to listen her, she never develop any bond with anyone, only Nirode and Amla visiting, soothe her soul for a moments. She eagerly waiting for them and escapade with Nirode under some shade of tree in the garden. The escape seem complete absolute she also disgusted with city Calcutta with putrid and harsh voices, grim darkness and poverty “ No, there is no diving deep underground, there is not even the possibility of turning ones back, for fear they would spring on me, clear the flash off my back and devour it. There is no escape from them. There is no escape from them”(pg -126)

She saw the plight of women, specially Bangali women, when she visited zoo with her nephews, clad “in beige, fawn and off-white Saries, slowly walking behind their husbands like the birds in the cages infinitely gentle, infinitely patient about their long eyes, the curve of their shoulders, their manners of walking which arouses not aggressiveness as one of the women in north do, but a protective feelings.” She felt guilt when she stood for defiance toward kalyani and Jibon’s mother and she thought that “generation of Bengal women hidden behind barred windows of half-dark rooms, spending centuries in washing clothes, kneading dough and murmuring aloud verses from Ramayana in the dim light of sooty lamps, life spent in nothing but waiting for husband self –centered and demanding, indifferent and hungry and critical waiting for death and died misunderstood, always behind bars, those terrifying black bars that shut us in the old house in the old city”(pg- Havoc occur when one day she reaches on acute neuroticism. She lingers to come out somehow from cacophony which she always yearn to get over, when all woman lolling out their neck from windows to get a glimpse of procession going in the street, she get the flash of suicidal thoughts hovering in her mind, she rushed toward kitchen picked kerosene can and match box and closed herself in bathroom, just drenched herself with kerosene and light a match- box, found herself amidst flames, all screams merged into the sound of trumpets. She ultimately freed herself from the yoke of alienation and isolation, by having consummate herself in fire.

Amla on the other hand comes to Calcutta to prove her carrier in advertisement company from Bombay school of Art. She too somewhere hate Calcutta to see its poverty and over-crowded population. Amla somehow tried to cope –up when she came in contact with Dharma through Nirode. Dharma lives alone in the house, he has estranged relationship with his wife. He is peaceful with his paintings, pond, with his geese and small natural surrounding is a place of calmness and serenity amidst humdrum of Calcutta life. She is fascinated with Dharma way of existential living, she found Dharma company compatible for her, she agreed to be a Model for Dharma paintings. She felt deeply regret on her failure to get out Monisha from her barred house and sent her Killimpong. Its very late with no recuperation. Amla broods over herself plight “If Nirode’s suffering had made an ill-tempered Hermit, than Monisha’s suffering - but had she suffered? Where? Why? In what horrific country, by what evil hand?-had made her only distant, but devoid of any compassion which is Amla was so quick and unstinting”

In search of Identity ‘Voices in the City’ protagonists like Nirode comes to the conclusion when his Mother came to Calcutta, he told Amla that the grace in her Mother walk, with no sign of remorse revealed on her face, she was resembled with Goddess Kali who is the destroyer and preserver of the world. The gait with which she move as nothing happens, she seemed that she is far from the grief and joy as “ Kali” who is a creator and destroyer herself. Nirode adopts Existentialism while Amla finds her Identity in Dharma company and her final acceptance of Calcutta with all its shortcomings. Monisha succumbed by Calcutta (kolkatta). She finally freed only by giving up her life.

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