

Tribhuvan University

Psychological Repression of Women in Anita Desain's *Fire on the Mountain*

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By

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Letter of Approval

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## Abstract

*The thesis focuses on the Psychological Repression of Women in Anita Desai's Fire on the Mountain. Women in the third world are psychologically repressed as they have to follow patriarchy and take orders. Their identity is associated with male members of their families. The characters in the novel suffer from psychological repression. The women characters are modern and they want to go beyond patriarchy seeking freedom and independence. However, they face many problems. The women are caught in-between traditional and modern roles. The study focuses on the psychological repression of women from the perspective of third world feminism. Traditionally, women are expected to be confined within their houses and nurture children and other family members. However, the women in the novel like to be westernized and want to live in their own. Consequently, they face innumerable problems in their society. Nanda Kaul wants to live solitude life after her husband's death but gets disturbed when she receives letters from her daughter. She is irritated by the disturbance. Raka, her granddaughter, disturbs her life by intruding her loneliness. Ila Das is close to them but Nanda feels bad when she hears that Das is raped and killed. Thus, the characters suffer from patriarchal system controlling them socially and psychologically.*

Keywords: patriarchy, repression, alienation, feminism, fragmentation

## Contents

Acknowledgements

Abstract

Introduction: Anita Desai and Her Women Characters 1

Psychological Repression of Women in *Fire on the Mountain* 7

Conclusion: Victimization of Women 26

Works Cited

## I. Introduction: Anita Desai and Her Women Characters

The thesis deals with Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* using feminist criticism and focusing on psychological repression of women in patriarchy. The study centers on the issues of the women of the novel how they have been exploited by patriarchy from innumerable ways and they suffer from personality disorder as they cannot adjust to the surroundings they live in. Consequently, they lose their natural power, creativity and imagination and are compelled to live fragmenting their personality. The research project also studies how women are dominated socially, economically and psychologically. Women do not have their single and complete personality in the post-modern era. They are known by different roles in different circumstances. The thesis takes the help of prominent feminists such as Talpade, Uma Narayan, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Gyatri Chakravarti Spivak, Bell Hooks to study the condition of women in the light of third world feminism. The researcher dwells upon the issues of the novel such as the factors creating discord and disharmony in Indian married life, how the protagonists of the novel cause self-destruction and how the characters realize their fate at last. The researcher tries to find the answer that domination of women characters in the novel is reflected through their language and narrative technique used in the text.

Sonal Jha comments the novel as the depiction of colonial life of the characters in the Indian village. The Indian life of women is portrayed through the eyes of Raka, according to Jha. Jha postulates:

There are many nuances to *Fire on the Mountain*, for such a short novel. The hypocrisies of the colonial life of the brown sahib are exposed with as much craft as the dark side of the otherwise bucolic Indian village. The most skillful portrayal is that of the world through Raka's eyes. It brings out the contrast

between the disturbing nature of the artificially constructed world and the solace that unpretentious nature provides. (np)

As Jha asserts in the comment there is contrast between artificial life created by colonial life and the natural setting where the characters of the novel experience in their environment.

According to G.S. Balarama Gupta, the novel is about the existentialism in which characters struggle for their life and freedom. Gupta asserts: “Philosophically, Anita Desai’s *Fire on the Mountain* is a lyrical fictionalization of the quintessence of existentialism” (185). The old lady Nanda Kaul, for example, faces an existential dilemma when she receives a letter from her daughter Ash. She can neither refuse to house Raka nor can she look forward to the visit as anything other than intrusion.

In the novel, there is a conflict between the characters and their circumstances. Women do not have enough power to face the problems. Nanda Kaul cannot stop letters from her daughter though she wants no letters. She cannot help but answer the phone when she would like to cut all connection with the world outside. Her inability to stem the tide of time is an age-old existential problem.

Likewise, Nanda Kaul is shown as honest in her lukewarm response to the coming of the child. She is a strong-minded and authoritarian but she also likes to live in a world of make-believe. But she fails to understand the mysterious child Raka where Raka is an intelligent, independent, and introvert who does not confide her troubles even in Nanda. She is rebel and does not conform to any codes of accepted behavior. She has a powerful yet weird imagination and finds strange things fascinating.

The protagonists of Anita Desai are all trying to lead an authentic life and in the process the existential angst which they go through and the elucidations of their

problems are all varied in nature. Each of the novelists has brought about a different struggle of the postmodern man/ woman and each of them tackles their issues in a different manner, thus various different perspectives of the philosophy of existentialism is brought and analyzed. There is no singular approach or solution to existential angst, a wide approach and empathetic study of human psychology can be of help in analysis of the tenets of existentialism.

K. J. Phillips claims that there is domination of males over women. The three main characters suffer from different problems. As they seek for independence, they suffer, Phillips implies. According to Phillips:

. . . society punishes all three female characters for departing from the norm prescribed for women. Ila with her squawking voice, Nanda with her aloofness, and Raka with her independence transgress the expectations for femininity: demure quietude, care giving, and dependence. The disaster results in this case not from personal lack or metaphysical flaw but from societal limitation, a failure to recognize the worth of the two women and the little girl, who become innocent victims. (4)

Phillips argues that the flaw in the characters does not come from their personal problems but from the societal limitation, failure to identify their values and being innocent.

Anita Desai stands apart from other Indian women writers in that she feels that there should be a conspicuous difference in the writings of men and women and that difference should be concerned with the sense of values. She gives more prominence to thought, emotion and sensation than to action, experience and achievement as depicted in the novels of other novelists. Desai has mentioned that her primary aim is to discover “the truth that is nine-tenths of the iceberg that lies submerged beneath the

one-tenth visible portion we call Reality. “Anita Desai herself writes as:

My writing is an effort to discover, underline and convey the significance of things. I must seize upon that incomplete and seemingly meaningless mass of reality around me and try and discover its significance by plunging below the surface and plumbing the depths, then illuminating those depths till they become more lucid, brilliant and explicable reflection of the visible world. (6)

In fact Desai’s female characters have been the significant studies of the complexity of the mind of the fair sex. She explores into women’s mind through the characterization of women characters such as Maya, Monisha, Sita and Sarah and highlights some of the burning issues in women’s society, the issues which arise out of male domination over women.

Her mother being a German and father an Indian had given Anita Desai the advantage of exposure to German and English, besides Hindi the local language. Her published works include short stories, children’s books and novels numbering more than ten. Two of her novels – *Clear Light of Day* and *In Custody* – were short-listed for the Booker Prize. She has been a Visiting Fellow at Girton College, Cambridge, England and has taught Creative Writing and English at Mount Holyoke College in the United States. She has received Sahitya Academy and Authors’ Guild Awards for excellence in writing.

Anita Desai refers to the inner world, talks of the language of the interior and thereby refers to both form and subject. She not only recognizes this division between the inner and the outer worlds but acknowledges its validity too. Anita Desai adds a new dimension to her novels through her exploration of troubled sensibility, the obvious part of Indian feminine sensibility. She has a “rare imaginative awareness” and “profound understanding of feminine sensibility.” (R. Krishnamurthy 15).

Though Anita Desai has been influenced by writers such as D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, she maintains her individuality in her writings. In getting deeper into the unknown mysteries of the mind of her protagonists, she discovers and underlines the true significance of the lives of people.

The novels of Anita Desai are an exploration of individuals, their passion and emotions. Desai probes into the inner recesses of her characters. In dealing with the growth of the protagonist from alienation to self-actualization, J.P. Tripathi discovers “a pattern of positive growth” (157). It is through self-assertion that a character finally becomes able to feel a way out of inner crisis. S.P. Swain and P.M. Nayak attribute “The individual self struggles for the attainment of an authentic existence, and hence moves from a mistaken and confused awareness of identity to quiet self-assertion of individuality” (18). In Desai’s novel self-actualization springs from the inner urge to strike a balance between the constructive and destructive aspects of self-alienation. In the words of S.P. Swain and P.M. Nayak “It is a kind of self-fulfillment, a consumption of the split self of the down-hearted individual” (18).

What matters for Desai is the motivation, the conscience of the characters. Her characters rebel and their rebellion are not so much directed against society as against individuals. She builds her novels round the struggle within the self gradually tracing the movement toward harmony. Desai’s protagonists face the problem of communication. They want to articulate their human problems. Against the forces of isolation, they strive to assert themselves. S. P. Swain, in this context, maintains that “they are mainly concerned about things that every individual longs for the courage to live and the capacity to love as well as beloved” (118).

Anita Desai strikes the strongest note of hope and affirmation. Regarding the ability to see meaning in an apparently absurd existence, S. P. Swain and P. M. Nayak

observe “all the elements that threaten to disrupt the pattern of life in all its aspects are brought under control through love, understanding, and mutual acceptance “ (15). The journey from darkness to light, from despair to hope enables to discover positive identification with the existential problem of human being.

Thus, Desai’s chief concern is human relationship. Her issue is the existential predicament of the individuals projected through the problems of alienation. Though the characters are in company with other people they feel lonely. They share the same milieu but lack the effective communication and harmonious existence. Desai’s novel is controlled by the characters, who in their freedom to act and think weave a pattern of existence and a form of meaning through realization for a life of duties and responsibilities.

## II. Psychological Repression of Women in *Fire on the Mountain*

Third World feminism has been described as a group of feminist theories developed by feminists who acquired their values and took part in feminist politics in so called Third World countries. In many different societies women like colonized subjects have been relegated to the position of 'Other', 'colonized' by various forms of patriarchal domination. They thus share with colonized races and culture an intimate experience of the politics of oppression and repression. Women from third world have been engaged in the feminist movements Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Gyatri Chakravarti Spivak, Sara Suleri, Ketu Katrak and Uma Narayan who criticizes western feminism on the grounds that it is ethnocentric and does not take into account the unique experience of women from Third World countries or the existence of feminists indigenous to third world countries. According to Chandra Talpade Mohanty, women in Third World feel that western feminism bases its understanding of women feminism in internal racism, classicism and homophobia. This discourse is strongly related to African feminism. Similarly, Ketu Katrak says that women in postcolonial countries were colonized and this resulted in domination.

Further, Ketu Katrak defines Third World women's body under the title 'Theorizing a Politics of Female Body' and says that women's body has been colonized by patriarchy. So third world women writers try to decolonize their body in their writings and resist the patriarchy through internal and external exile. Mostly women are dominated through language and their sexuality in so called patriarchal society. By using the English language colonizers impose racial superiority as well as they make women linguistically and culturally alienated from the native language and culture. Ketu Katrak says that, "The uses of English (over indigenous languages, in this case, Shona) imposed by colonialism and how linguistic choices encode cultural

belonging or alienation and second the female body and generated inequalities in patriarchal postcolonial society” (1).

The women in the Third World postcolonial societies, become victim of gender inequalities existing both in the indigenous and the colonial culture often simultaneously oppress women. Ketu Katrak who argued that in India, Mahatma Gandhi’s resistance to British colonial rule in India during the 1920s and 1930s used specially gendered representations for the purposes of Indian nationalism but ultimately did little to free Indian women from their patriarchal subordination to men. According to Katrak ‘Gandhi appropriated images of passive women to promote his campaign of ‘passive *résistance*’ to British colonial rule. Both men and women were encouraged to adopt a passivity exclusively associated with femininity, although only for the purposes of breaking colonial authority and not patriarchal authority’ (179). Several critics have hinted at a trend towards male chauvinism to many forms of nationalism. Such icons of the nation as mother India or mother Africa are used in nationalist representation to reconstruct the image of the passive female who depends upon the active males to protect her or restore her honor.

The beginning part of the novel shows the activities of Nanda Kaul, who feels lonely and alienated despite the family members. She has a lot of wishes and wants to perform many tasks but she is not sure whether they can be fulfilled or not. The narrator explains:

Nanda Kaul paused under the pine trees to take in their scented sibilance and listen to the cicadas fiddling invisibly under the mesh of pine needles when she saw the postman slowly winding his way along the upper mall. She had not gone out watch for him, did not want him to stop at Carignano, and had no wish for letters. The sight of him, inexorably . . . blocking it stupidly: bags and

letters, messages and demands, requests, promises and queries, she had wanted to be done with them all, at Carignano. (3)

There is the sense of detachment from the society she lives. She does not want to involve in any happy matter. She is irritated when she receives letter from her daughter Asha.

Her further psychological repression can be seen when she utters that she is satisfied and pleased with the barrenness of her place Carignano. It implies that she is alone and does not have any expectation of happiness in her life. She is in fact suffering from psychological problem or psychic disorder. It may be because of modernism or human thoughts. Moreover, she is pleased to be close to the nature. The narrator describes her situation:

What pleased and satisfied [Kaul] so, here at Carignano, was its barrenness.

This was the chief virtue of all Kasauli of course –its starkness. It had rocks, it had pines. It had light and air. In every direction there was a sweeping view – to the north. Of the mountains, to the south, of the plains. Occasionally an eagle swam through this clear unobstructed mass of light and air. That was all.

(4)

It means many women have the same kinds of feeling. They are not happy in this area. Barrenness refers to the spiritual dryness of the people.

Likewise, Helen Carby explains in her essay “White Women Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood” that black and Asian women are barely made visible within its discourses. And when they are addressed, their representation remains highly problematic. Western feminism is criticized for the Orientalist way it represents the social practices of other ‘races’ as backwards and barbarous, from which black and Asian women need rescuing by their western sisters. Further Carby

presents the Western feminist horror concerning the arranged marriages of Asian women. In advocating an end to arranged marriages for Asian women because they are deemed oppressive, Western feminists do not consider Asian women's views and assume instead that their 'enlightened' outlook is the most progressive and liberating.

In the novel, there is conflict between Colonel Macdougall and his wife, as the narrator talks about the history of Nanda Kaul's house. The narrator exposes the unwanted relationship with his wife. The narrator reveals:

His joy would have been complete if his wife had made him apricot jam. But she would not. She hated him too much to cook jam for him. The longer their marriage the more she hated him and almost daily she made an attempt to murder him. But he survived. When she had her back turned she would pour out the tea she had brewed for him into a pot of geraniums beside his chair. (7)

Thus, there is psychological repression of Colonel's wife. She is alone at home and is supposed to serve him. She suffers psychologically. This is one of the examples of traditional people who put all women under their control. The women become aggressive and wish to take revenge for this. She is fed up with her relationship to her husband and expresses her agony in such way.

What is more, Chandra Talpade Mohanty discusses in her essay 'Under Western Eyes' that the 'Third World Feminisms' address two simultaneous projects: the internal critique of hegemonic 'Western' feminists and the formulation of autonomous feminist concerns and strategies that are geographically, historically and culturally grounded. The first project is one of deconstructing; the second project is one of building and constructing. Mohanty further defines Third World geographically "the nation states of Latin America, the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa, South and South east Asia, China, South Africa, and Ocean constitutes the

parameters of the non- European Third World. In addition, black Latin, Asian and indigenous people in USA, Europe, Australia, some of whom have historic links with geographically defined Third Worlds, also define themselves as Third World people”(5). The use of the term “Third World women” by western feminist has been widely critiqued. Mohanty uses the term interchangeably with “women of color” (7). She argues:

What seems to constitute women of color or Third World women as a viable oppositional alliance is a common content of struggle rather than color or racial identifications. Similarly, it is Third World women’s oppositional political relation to sexist, racist and imperialistic structures that constitutes our political commonality. (7)

Although, she uses the term “Third World Women” Mohanty argues that western feminism appropriate the production of the Third World women as a singular monolithic subject for a ‘discursive colonization’(51). Furthermore, western feminism articulate a discursive colonization through the production of Third World difference, a historical something that apparently oppresses most if not all of the women in Third World countries.

Nanda Kaul and Asha are mother and daughter but they are not happy with each other. The patriarchy has made them separated from them. They do not find smooth life but fragmented and alienated. The exploitation of men is so severe that they like to live alone rather than being in contact with others. As Nanda receives her daughter’s letters, she does not feel happy because she gets more tension than happiness from her. The narrator describes:

It was addressed in her daughter’s handwriting. The least loved or, at any rate, the most exasperating of her daughters. Asha, the beauty, had dedicated her

life to the cultivation of long glossy hair and an unwrinkled skin and had little time left over for her unfortunate daughter, the one who married a diplomat and, as a result of his ill treatment of her, the affairs he had, his drinking and brutality. (15)

In this way, there is conflicting relationship between husband and wife, mother and daughter. They are not happy with their life. They do not think in smooth way.

Rather, they have splitting personality caused by the habit of drinking of the diplomat.

Nancy J. Chodorow talks about psychoanalytic feminism and argues that men and women understand their differences according to the context they are created or grown up. In other words, the differences are artificial. Thus, they are different from culture to another. The boys or girls know their roles how they are taken care by their close relatives. They internally know they are boys and girls as the society determines their role as they grow up. Chodorow asserts:

Men's and women's understanding of difference, and gender difference, must thus be understood in the relational context in which these are created. They stem from the respective relation of boys and girls to their mother, who is their primary caretaker, love-object, and object of identification, and who is a woman in a sexually and gender-organized world. This relational context contrasts profoundly for girls and boys in a way that makes difference, and gender difference, central for males one of the earliest, most basic male developmental issues and not central for females. It gives men a psychological investment in difference that women do not have. (111)

As Chodorow describes about the girls and boys, he claims that the girls and boys are familiar with their roles as they get experiences in the society they grow up. If they are grown up in liberal family where there is not disparity between boys and girls,

they behave equally regardless of sex and vice versa.

Chodorow takes the help of Sigmund Freud to talk about the feminism. She argues that women are not females in the earliest development but they become women later. Girls, women and mothers are defined negatively more than they are defined positively, according to Chodorow. Chodorow further explains:

According to psychoanalytic accounts since Freud, it is very clear that males are 'not females' in earliest development. Core gender identity and the sense of masculinity are defined more negatively, in terms of that which is not female or not-mother, than positively. By contrast, females do not develop as 'not-males.' Female core gender identity and the sense of femininity are defined positively, as that which is female, or like mother. Difference from males is not so salient. (111)

But there is no real difference between men and women, as Chodorow postulates.

Psychology starts from childhood. If the children are taught that all people are same and they play equal role in society, then boys and girls do not find each other superior or inferior. Naturally men and women are equal. As Sigmund Freud implies, the girls are considered weak and they develop the same psychology when they become old.

In the meantime, it is also necessary to understand men because some men are good while they are misinterpreted by men based on the experience with other bad men. Asha reveals such things when she talks about Tara and her husband. She discloses that Rakesh is not a bad person but Tara takes him negatively. The letter reads:

Darling Mama, just a note this time as I'm in a mad rush. Not that I've persuaded Tara into going to Geneva and Rakesh into taking her – one day I'll tell you how I did that, I had a long talk with him, he's not really so bad as

Tara might make you believe, she simply doesn't understand men, 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, I have to get Tara ready.

(16)

It shows the equality of men and women in natural way, but they blame and interpret in different ways. Men are interpreted wrongly by the women who support feminism while men think that women are weak in all manners. Thus, it is the cultural values rather than natural to show the difference between men and women.

Likewise, scholar Perdita Huston has written about the effect of development policies on women in the third World. Women are affected positively or negatively by economic development policies, and this is the basis for cross- cultural comparison. She studies the effect of the development process on the “family unit and its individual members” (30) in Egypt, Kenya, Mexico and South Asia. She states that the ‘problems’ and ‘needs’ expressed by rural and urban women in these countries all center around education and training, work and wages, access to health and other services, political participation, and legal rights (116). Huston relates all these “needs” to insensitive development policies that exclude women as a group or category.

For her, the solution is simple: implement improved development policies that emphasize training for women field- workers; use women trainees and women rural development officers; encourage women's co-operatives. Here, women are assumed to be a coherent group or category prior to their entry into “the development process”. Huston assumes that all Third World women have similar problems and needs. Thus, they must have similar interests and goals. However, the interests to urban, middle-class educated Egyptian housewives, to take only one instance, could surely be seen as being the same house of their uneducated poor maids. Women are constituted as

women through the complex interaction between class, religion, and other ideological institutions frameworks.

Ila Das's problem was also the same as she was Nanda Kaul's school friend. Kaul is irritated by the phone ring. She does not want to receive the call from anyone because she wants to maintain secluded life. When she remembers Das, the readers understand that most of the women in the novel have troublesome life. They are not happy with their life because they are the products of patriarchal norms and values.

Moving the ear-phone a few safe inches away from her ear, Nanda Kaul sighed resignedly. She knew this voice was Ila Das's tragedy in life and wondered, as always when she heard of it, if Ila Das herself knew it. They had been together in school and college and from that time to this there had been no hint that Ila Das might harbor such a devastating suspicion about herself.

(22)

Ila Das has another story to tell. She is not happy with her life, either. She has also psychological repression not having unity and stability in her thought and manner. She is a victim of the society.

What is more, gender role is cultural setting rather than natural. In other words, a particular society determines the roles of men and women. Hence, the role of women and men differs from one society to another. The gender role is determined by various factors such as culture, religion, time, education and so on. In traditional society, marriage, children and family are crucial entity for the women as they are used for bearing children and rearing up them. In most of the societies, women are not considered real ones unless they give birth to children. The ancient society considers women as the weak, irrational, contingent, and dependent and so on. Therefore, they become happy when they are married and conceived. On the other hand, if they

cannot become pregnant, they regard themselves to be failure. Judith Butler argues that patriarchy is not able to give universal significance of gender:

The notion of a universal patriarchy has been widely criticized in recent years for its failure to account for the workings of gender oppression in the concrete cultural contexts in which it exists. Where those various contexts have been consulted within such theories, it has been to find 'examples' or 'illustrations' of a universal principle that is assumed from the start. (6)

In this way, she argues that gender is cultural notion. People socially construct it. Therefore, it is different from one culture to another.

For Huston, women in the Third World countries have 'needs' and 'problems' but few if any have "choices" or the freedom to act. This is an interesting representation of women in the Third World, one that is significant in suggesting a latent self-presentation of western women that bears looking at. She writes, "what surprised and moved me most as I listened to women in such very different cultural settings was the striking commonality- whether they were educated or illiterate, urban or rural- of their most basic values: the importance they assign to family, dignity, and service to others"(115).

No one seems to be happy in the family. Nanda her daughter, granddaughters, etc. have their own problems. They fail to understand each other as well. Nanda does not know who the sender was of the letters she is receiving from the postman. She gets the letters but the person who wrote the letters is unknown. It means they are all together but their life is different. The narrator explains:

Could it have been Asha, the writer of those terrible letters? It could, for Asha had been a small girl with curls all over her head and a round, soft hand with which she had patted her mother when she had approved of her sari and jewels

as she dressed before the mirror. When you are dead, I will get all your saris, she had smugly said. (37)

The women characters are confined within their problems apparently. As gender discrimination is prevalent everywhere, all women have their distinct experience in reality. Their psychology is different, feelings are different, problems are different and many more. Physically they may be very close to each other but spiritually, they are very far. Even the mother is not sure who has sent her the letters. The letters are not helping her but they are disturbing her private and desolate life.

Gayatri Spivak Chokravarty defines man and woman from the perspective of deconstruction. She argues that feminism cannot be defined as a general term. The definition rests upon the literary criticism. In other words, women are defined by critics more than their essence. Thus, their definition changes as the critics change in course of time. Chakravorty explains:

I cannot speak of feminism in general. I speak of what I do as a woman within literary criticism. My own definition of a woman is very simple: it rests on the word 'man' as used in the texts that provide the foundation for the corner of the literary criticism establishment that I inhabit. You might say at this point, defining the word 'woman' as resting on the word 'man' is a reactionary position. Should I not carve out an independent definition for myself as a woman? Here I must repeat some deconstructive lessons learned over the past decade that I often repeat. (54)

The society defines women in terms of other relative position in society. However, Chakravorty likes to define women independently. She takes the help of deconstruction and wants to define them all the time. Women change, their status changes, their position changes. Therefore, the definition also changes from time to

time, according to the author.

In the novel, Raka shows the different behavior from what Nanda expected. Nanda thinks that Raka also falls in the same category of feeling dominated and exploited. But Raka seems more confident and satisfied. The narrator of the novel explains:

Raka slowed down, dragged her foot, then came towards her great-grandmother with something despairing in her attitude, saying nothing. She sucked at the loose, curly elastic of an old, broken straw hat that drooped over her closely cropped head like a straw bag. She turned a pair of extravagantly large and somewhat bulging eyes about in a way that made the old lady feel more than ever her resemblance to an insect. (43)

In this way, the women characters think in one way. Their world is different from other male characters. They make their own small universe and want to live in it. At the same time, it is wrong to put all women in the same category because they have their individual thoughts on everything. Women are changing their thoughts day by day. They do not want to cling to the traditional ideas of serving men as servants. Raka for example has changed herself and present

Raka is a modern girl who wants to discover and explore things in her own way. She does not like to be controlled by her great grandmother Nanda. The text reads:

Raka had not wanted to come here with great-grandmother. She had planned to come to Monkey Point alone, on a solitary afternoon expedition, without anyone's knowing. Secrecy was to have been the essence of it, she relished it so –Raka had all the jealous, guarded instincts of an explorer, a discoverer, she hated her great-grandmother intently watching her ascent, clenching her hands

with tension when the goats nearly knocked her off her feet or when she slipped on the loose pebbles. (67)

The conflict occurs due to generation gap between Raka and Nanda. Nanda thinks from the traditional way while Raka thinks from the modern way. Raka is an adventurous girl who wants to know the world in her own way independently. She is fed up with the controlling manner of her seniors. It means most of the characters have psychological repression. They do believe in individual experience.

With regard to the Oriental women Gyatri Chakravarty Spivak argues that even the Indian nationalism has failed to emancipate lower-class, subaltern women, and also challenges the assumption, predominant in western society and culture, that women's reproductive labor is unwaged, domestic work. Furthermore Spivak has criticized the western feminism, especially its universalizing claim to speak for all women, regardless of differences in class, religion, culture, language or nationality. She has questioned the 'lie' of a global sisterhood between 'first world' and 'Third World', pointing instead of the complicity of western feminism and imperialism.

For Spivak, the traditional disciplines of rational academic inquiry have restricted the way we think about texts ideas in relation to the social, political and economic world. She says that before learning about the economic text of globalization or the patriarchal oppression of 'Third World' women, we have to first unclean the privileged systems of western knowledge that have indirectly served the interests of colonialism and neo-colonialism.

One of the most important contributions that Spivak has made to contemporary critical thought is in the effective re-working of western theoretical concepts and ideas to address contemporary political concerns in the postcolonial world. It is this persistent endeavour to make western critical theory account for

contemporary forms of political, economic and social inequality and oppression in the contemporary world that makes Spivak's thought particularly engaging and valuable. Spivak uses term 'worlding' in her work to refer the way in which writing in general or textuality, has provided a rhetorical structure to justify imperial expansion. The literal, historical, legal, and geographical texts written during the colonial period describes the colonial territory as uninscribed earth and of indigenous communities as people without writing and political sovereignty are persuasive metaphors employed to justify colonial expansion. Indeed, what these metaphors illustrate is how people and territory have been controlled, subjected, dispossessed and exploited through dominant systems of western writing, textuality and knowledge. As Spivak puts it, "As far as I understand it, the notion of textuality should be related to the notion of the worlding of a world on a supposedly uninscribed territory. When say this, I am thinking basically about the imperialist project which had to assume that the earth that it territorialized was in fact previously uninscribed" (1).

Throughout the history of western culture and thought, there are certain people, concepts and ideas that are defined as 'Other': as monsters, aliens or savages who threaten the values of civilized society, or the stability of the rational human self.

Raka thinks that Nanda Kaul is confined in the kitchen while Ram Lal, the post man can take her wherever she likes to go. Raka feels different between her great-grandmother and the post man. Raka can rise above the social rules and regulations and wants to fly like birds. But she thinks that Ram Lal only can help her materialize her dream. The text reads:

Sitting together on their heels, watching the eagles soar and glide soundlessly in the gorge and out over the plains, they talked dreamily. Ram Lal could arouse Raka's interest and hold it as Nanda Kaul could not. Interest her, but at

the same time give her reassurance of safety. Nanda Kaul knew that a child needed to have the two elements combined, but she could not, or would not, be bothered to try, while Ram Lal did it naturally and comfortably, for Raka.

(84)

Raka sees the difference between Nanda and Ram Lal. Raka does not like Nanda thinking that she cannot arouse interest in Raka. Moreover, Ram Lal can arouse interest in her and he can provide her safety. Thus, from their childhood, girls learn that women are weak and helpless while men are strong and protective. The culture is embedded in everyone's mind to regard women as weak and needy.

Uma Narayan, in *Dislocating Cultures* takes aim at the related notion of nation, identity and tradition to show how western and Third World scholars have misrepresented Third World culture and feminist genders. *Dislocating Cultures* contributes a philosophical perspective on areas of ongoing interest such as nationalism, post-colonial studies and the cultural politics of debates over tradition and westernization in Third World context. She says: "I am arguing that Third World feminism is not a mindless mimicking of western agendas in one clear and simple sense that for instance. Indian feminism is clearly a response to issues specially confronting many Indian women" (13). Issues that feminist groups in India have politically engaged with are the problems of dowry murders and dowry related of women, issues related to women's education, poverty, work, health and with other issues that affect women's lives. White women in the western contexts might be unfamiliar with the violence against women connected to the contemporary functioning of the institution of dowry and arranged marriages.

The Third World women are treated as slave domestic animals who are to be confined within the four walls of house remain submissive, docile and obedient. The

Third World man never considers them to be important one. So the suffering of Third World women is of its own kind. White feminist have founded a universal category of women and those who don't share those norms are excluded as others, unable to represent themselves, quiet and ignorant.

Nanda Kaul believes that people like fantasy, imagination and untruth. Nobody likes to face the reality. Kaul means to say that the truth is bitter. Women are living in such imagination as they like many fairy tales. Nanda cannot convince children by telling them the truth but by telling them lies like fairy tales. The narrator explains:

Nanda Kaul bitterly cursed her failure to comfort her children, her total inability to place herself in another's position and act accordingly. Fantasy and fairy tales had their place in life, she knew it so well. Why then did she tell the child the truth? Who wanted truth? Who could stand it? Nobody. Not even herself. So how could Raka? (97)

Women are grown up with such experience that they do not have enough strength to fight the truth. Women are not only dominated by men but also by women. The women who are grown up in such situation that they only live in imagination, like to impose the same to their next generation children like Raka. The women believe that they are different people from men.

Similarly, male chauvinism refuses to recognize woman as competitor in domains of society, in this situation, a woman is not born but made by the society. As Simone de Beauvoir goes:

One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determine the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between

male and eunuch, which is described as feminine. (25)

Thus patriarchal practices which reduce women's status to inferior social beings are further perpetuated by myths and traditions which unfortunately have been embedded in the fabric of society. Patriarchal society promoted two images: woman as the sexual property of man, and woman as chaste mothers of their children. Even though man is a civilized being now, there is still the savageness of primitive man in him. With savage selfishness he treats woman as an object that provides physical enjoyment, social companionship and domestic comfort. Man has subjugated woman to his will, used her as means to promote his selfish gratification, to minister to his sensual pleasure, to be instrumental in promoting his comfort; but never has he desired to elevate her to that rank she was created to fill. He has done all he could do to debase and enslave her mind.

Thus, denied the freedom to act and choose on their own, women remained solely inside the field of vision, mere illusion to be dreamt and cherished. A woman is a woman, and a woman she must remain but not a 'man's shadow-self', 'an appendage', 'an auxiliary' and the 'unwanted and neglected other'. A woman is held to represent the 'otherness' of man, his negative.

Simone de Beauvoir finds man-woman nexus quite unsymmetrical and uncomplimentary for— "man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general; whereas woman represents only the negative, defined criteria, without reciprocity"(9).

A woman is never regarded as an autonomous being since she has always been assigned a subordinate and relative position in our society. It is an appalling condition of women that they cannot live without men in our social set-up. As they are considered to be physically weak, and to go ahead in the society, they need protection

from males. This is the root cause of females' apathy in our society. As Beauvoir submerges:

Man can think of himself without woman. She cannot think of herself without man. And she is simply what man decrees . . . she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex . . . absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental the inessential as opposed to the essential. (1346)

We find references to this aspect of social life, where husbands dominate their wives, and make them the worst sufferer in the novels. The fundamental humanistic values which bind a man and woman into the bond of togetherness the fidelity and companionship are away in the male-dominated society where gender inequality is disseminated in each nook and corner.

Nanda Kaul remembers when she and her friend Ila Das used to study together at school and college. She recalls that the teachers used to wonder when Ila could recite the poetry. The male students used to laugh at her as if it was against the rule for girls to know how to read and recite. It shows that women are dominated and discriminated throughout the history.

In school, alas, Ila Das had to speak. Teachers shivered, their teeth on edge, as if a child had squeaked a pencil on a slate or slid a nail down a glass-pane, while children clapped their hands over their mouths, making giggles burst forth the more rudely when Ila Das stood up, almost prancing on her tiptoes, to recite *The Boy Stood ON The Burning Deck*. Hurriedly teachers hushed her, begged her to others, with normal growls and mutters for voices, a chance.  
(122)

It reveals the discrimination between men and women or boys or girls.

Psychologically, girls think that they are inferior to boys. It is surprising if they are able to read and write in traditional society especially when Ila Das and Nanda Kaul used to study in their time.

The patriarchal domination over women from their childhood create problems in women's psychology. Women are installed with the concept that they are different from men. They teach the same thing to their children and grandchildren. Because of subservient position in the family, they have psychological repression. The women do not have good relationship with their husbands due to unequal relationship. Nanda goes to self-destruction because of the roles given to her by patriarchy. The women characters in the novel realize that they cannot go beyond patriarchal role unless they change themselves. Women are slowly changing their thoughts on themselves and the patriarchal society. Nanda Kaul, for instance, is traditional woman who wants to control her great grand-daughter Raka but Raka does not like her great grandmother. She likes to follow Ram Lal who can guide her, as Raka thinks. She likes to explore and discover the world from her own way and goes to the wilderness to see the animals. She enjoys there with the animals. At last, Raka realizes that to bring change in the world, she has to change herself. The women in the novel have almost same problems but they do not think of being united and fighting against the domination of patriarchy.

### III. Conclusion: Victimization of Women

This thesis is about the psychological repression of the main characters in Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* using feminist perspective. The research is based on the exploitation and domination of women in patriarchy in which women assimilate that they are weaker than men psychologically. The women characters in the novel, are aware about their present condition and they like to go beyond patriarchal norms and values. Moreover, they suffer from the transitional period as they shift from traditional ideas to modern ones. The novel depicts primarily three characters: Nanda Kaul, her granddaughter Raka and Kaul's friend Ila Das. Nanda is fed up with the present condition and wants to live alone without being disturbed by anyone. The female characters become the victim of patriarchy. Because of psychological repression, they like to remain separate from the patriarchal society rather than being dominated by the system.

The female characters do not have normal life but they are victims of psychological repression. They lose their natural power, creativity and imagination as a result of patriarchal domination. After researching on the thesis, the researcher came to the conclusion that the married Indian women in the novel feel dominated and exploited by their male counterparts and cause self-destruction choosing their secluded life. The domination of the characters is reflected through language and narrative technique in which the author herself experiences and writes. The Indian life of women is depicted through the eyes of Raka who experiences the lives of women characters very closely. There is contrast between artificial life created by colonial life and the natural setting where the characters of the novel experience in their environment. The novel also depicts the existential problems of the characters. The novel shows that women do not have enough power to face the problems. Nanda

Kaul, for instance, cannot stop letters from her daughter though she wants no letters.

Nanda Kaul fears that if she receives letters frequently, she may show interest in people and her secluded life may get disturbed.

There is contrast between the great grandmother and the great granddaughter: Nanda Kaul and Raka. Raka seems cleverer who presents herself intelligent, independent, and introvert who does not confide her troubles even in Nanda. She is rebel and does not confirm of any codes of accepted behavior. She has a powerful yet weird imagination and finds strange things fascinating. Their psychological repression comes from their inability to meet the standard set by patriarchy: Ila with her squawking voice, Nanda with her aloofness, and Raka with her independence transgress the expectations for femininity: demure quietude, care giving, and dependence. The flaw in the characters does not come from their personal problems but from the societal limitation, failure to identify their values and being innocent.

The protagonist of the novel is Nanda Kaul who feels lonely and alienated despite the family members. She has a lot of wishes and wants to perform many tasks but she is not sure whether they can be fulfilled or not. There is the sense of detachment from the society she lives. She does not want to involve in any happy matter. She is irritated when she receives letter from her daughter Asha.

The novel presents the conflicting relationship between husband and wife. Husbands like Colonel Macdougall want to dominate their wives. As a result, women get aggressive and want to kill them inwardly. It is because of extreme frustration and personality disorder. To create such disturbed life, patriarchy is sole responsible. Nanda Kaul and Asha are mother and daughter but they are not happy with each other. The patriarchy has made them separated from them. They do not find smooth life but fragmented and alienated. The exploitation of men is so severe that they like

to live alone rather than being in contact with others. Ila Das's problem was also the same as she was Nanda Kaul's school friend. Kaul is irritated by the phone ring. She does not want to receive the call from anyone because she wants to maintain secluded life. When she remembers Das, the readers understand that most of the women in the novel have troublesome life. Raka is a modern girl who wants to discover and explore things in her own way. She does not like to be controlled by her great grandmother Nanda. This is because of generation gap between Raka and Nanda. Nanda thinks from the traditional way while Raka thinks from the modern way. Raka is an adventurous girl who wants to know the world in her own way independently. Nanda Kaul believes that people like fantasy, imagination and untruth. Nobody likes to face the reality. Kaul means to say that the truth is bitter. Women are living in such imagination as they like many fairy tales. Nanda cannot convince children by telling them the truth but by telling them lies like fairy tales.

In this way, the novel presents the worsening condition of female characters who are victimized by patriarchy. The women characters do not try to understand each other because they are suffering from personality disorder and generation gap. The traditional women like their younger generation to follow them while the young generation like Raka want to fight against the traditional patriarchal systems and make their life independent. Raka wants to go away from her great grandmother and wants to understand the world from her perspective going to the wilderness and being in the nature. All these are concerned with psychological repression.

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