

Chapter 4

Indianness in the Novels of Mamoni Raisom Goswami and Anita Desai

CHAPTER 4

INDIANNESS IN THE NOVELS OF MAMONI

RAISOM GOSWAMI AND ANITA DESAI

4.0: Introduction:

Indianness is a particular Indian identity that can be conceived only in an Indian context. Being a secular country India has diverse ethnic groups, culture, religion and languages there by contributing to its Indianness. Indianness is also a feeling of being an Indian wholeheartedly. The very feeling of being an Indian relates a person directly to the inhabitants, language, tradition and culture of India. Indianness is a strong perception of nationalism.

Indianness is the very soul of Indian literature. Indian literature reflects the life and thought of the Indians. The most peculiar quality of Indian literature is that it is written in 22 languages that are recognized by the constitution of India. But Indian literature is no more confined to regional languages only. Now a days, many Indians and non-residential Indians write in the English language. The Indian writers who write in English are called Indo-Anglian writers and their writings as Indo-Anglian literature. Salman Rushdie, V. S. Naipaul, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Aravind Adiga etc. are versatile writers of Indo-Anglian literature.

Mamoni Raisom Goswami and Anita Desai create an Indian atmosphere in their novels by introducing Indian customs, habits, life style, mixed culture, philosophy etc.

Their novels are Indian both in theme and treatment as they select their themes and characters from Indian society and people. The rich tradition and cultural heritage of India are celebrated in their novels. The very essence of Indianness gives their novels a new identity and value. The novels of both the writers exhibit their love for India. Their delineation of the theme of love, familial relationship, socio-economic condition have helped them to create a pan-Indian culture in their novels.

4.1: Indianness in the novels of Mamoni Raisom Goswami:

Mamoni Raisom Goswami has crossed the geographical boundary of her home state Assam and entered the national boundary as a versatile writer. Her literary works are widely read and appreciated in both national and international level. Many of her novels and other literary works have been translated into other languages besides English. The translation works have given an access to the readers world-wide to read her works. She writes about the dispossessed section of the society. She writes about the women, deprived and exploited by the patriarchal society. It is the society of India where women suffer in a patriarchal society. She writes impartially about the corruption against women in the name of religion but without hurting the religious sentiment of the people. She is sympathetic to all the victims from Ganga to Brahmaputra. In this context Prof Hiren Gohain, a renowned critic and scholar of Assam writes, “In novel after novel she turns her searching gaze into the dark and sombre backyards of Indian life almost as an obsessive act of exploration and

expiation.”¹ The rich elements of Indianness in her novels have made them purely Indian.

4.1.1: Indianness in *Chenabor Shrot*:

The novel *Chenabor Shrot* is set in Kashmir, India. The novel centres round the labourers of Hindustan Construction Company. The company has been assigned with the construction work of an aqueduct over the river Chenab. Chenab is a famous river of India. The company has appointed workers from different parts of India. The novel encompasses different culture, religion, lifestyle and languages of India.

‘Respect for elders’ is a part of Indian culture. This is reflected in this novel. The female protagonist Soni is a poor widow who has no source of income other than working as a temporary labourer. She is unable to feed herself. Moreover she is pregnant. Yet she brings her old father-in-law Rambir to the branch as he has nobody to look after him. Rambir is too old to earn his living by himself. Therefore Soni feeds him as her own father.

The problem of the company workers is same across India. The company workers work hard for their living. They can not give a good meal to their family even after working from morning to night. If there is no work, there is no food. In the novel the critical condition of the poor labourers are shown.

The novel also shows different cultures. India has rich culture. The Indians

1. Hiren Gohain, Some Remarks on the major fiction of Indira Goswami, Nikumoni Hussain (ed.), Mamoni Raisomar Abha Aru Pratibha, page 319.

carry their culture wherever they go. Hence the Harijan labourers observe religious ceremonies and festivals even in their work places away from home. The novel is highly Indian in tone.

4.1.2: Indianness in Nilakanthi Braja:

Goswami's *Nilakanthi Braja* is set in Vrindaban. Vrindaban is a holy town in Mathura District, Uttar Pradesh, Northern India. It is considered as a sacred place associated with Hindu culture and philosophy. It is situated on the bank of Yamuna, one of the sacred rivers of India. Vrindavan relates the story of Lord Krishna and Radha, the two mythical characters of Indian philosophy. It is believed that Lord Krishna spent his childhood here in Vrindaban along with Radha and other companions. Vrindaban is a place of Vaishnavite temples. Radha and Krishna are worshipped here in all most all the temples. Devotees from all over India and also from outside India throng every year to worship here. The Hindus believe that if anyone dies here the soul will go to heaven. Therefore thousands of widows come to Vrindaban in hope of getting salvation after death. We have seen many widows in this novel who have come to pass the rest of their life here in Vrindaban.

The novel reminds us the invasion of India by different invaders in different times. The novelist mentions here the attack of Mathura in 1018 by Mahmud of Gazni. In this attack he defeated the ruler Chandra Pala. Mahmud of Gazni attacked India for 17 times between 1000 and 1027 AD.

In Mathura Mahmud continued his savagery for a long twenty days in 1018.²

2. Mamoni Raisom Goswami, *Nilakanthi Braja*, page 11

He looted the temples, killed thousands of people and put fire in the houses. Some of the weak kings surrendered to Mahmud and some others preferred death. Later on, Mathura was invaded and destroyed by Sikander Lodhi. Lodhi destroyed all the temples and replaced them with butcher shops.

The novelist mentions the rich cultural heritage of India through the artist Chandrabhanu Rakesh. The temples of Vrindaban are examples of Indian sculpture.

Gandhian philosophy of non-violence is also found a place in this novel. Artist Chandrabhanu Rakesh believes in non-violence. Chandrabhanu Rakesh is saddened at the death of unfortunate Saudamini. He considers it a violence against her. He has given up all his belongings however small to the poorest of the poor. His decision to wear a Gandhian cap is symbolic of Gandhian ideology of India.

The setting of this novel is Indian. The theme, the plot and also the symbols used in *Nilakanthi Braja* are Indian in real sense.

4.1.3: Indianness in Ahiron:

Ahiron is one of the novels that are set outside Assam. Written in the Assamese language, Ahiron speaks of the labourers employed in the construction of an aqueduct in the river Ahiron. Ahiron is a river of Madhya Pradesh, India. The theme of the novel Ahiron revolves round the employees and labourers working under a construction company.

The characters of the novel are brought from different parts of the country.

The impact of the partition of India between India and Pakistan is also mentioned in the novel. The novel shows how some Muslims living in Pakistan after the partition of India are unable to forget their parent country India.

The novel reminds us of different construction works of the company in different places of India.

The novelist mentions some Indian rivers here in the novel. For example, Hasdeo, Shivnath, Maniyari, Shon, Borai rivers of Madhya Pradesh are mentioned in the novel.

The novelist writes about widow remarriage in this novel. In ancient India Hindus did not allow widow remarriage. But a movement was started by social reformer Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar to allow remarriage of the widows. Here in this novel the female protagonist Nirmala, a widow marries Harshul Sahib.

4.1.4: Indianness in *Mamore Dhara Tarowal*:

Mamore Dhara Tarowal is an Indian novel by nature. The novel is set in Raibareilly district of Uttar Pradesh. Here in Raibareilly the Duncan construction company is constructing an aqueduct over the river Sai. The theme of the novel is basically the release of the temporary labourers working at the construction project. The Harijan labourers and other daily paid or temporary workers are released from the work after the construction. The workers protest against the decision of the company. The novel shows the sad plight of labourers during the strike. The problem of the poor labourers is a universal one.

The Gandhian philosophy of non-violence is reflected in the novel. The plight of the Harijan workers is also seen in the novel. They generally work as sweepers. The society has considered them as untouchable. Therefore, they are not allowed to cook in upper class families.

The novel mentions the bond signed between management and All India Duncan Worker Union of 1975.

4.1.5: Indianness in *Datal Hatir Uye Khowa Howdah*:

The novel *Datal Hatir Uye Khowa Howdah* is written in Kamrupi dialect. The place Kamrup is in Assam. Assam is a state of India. So it can be said that the novel is based on India in broader sense.

The child marriage system of ancient India is mentioned in the novel. It is found in the novel that the Hindu Brahmin girls are married off before reaching their puberty. Actually this was an old marriage system of India. Thus, Giribala the protagonist of this novel is married off before reaching her puberty.

It is a common Indian practice that marriages are generally arranged by the elders of a family. The daughters or the sons do not generally go against the decision of their parents or guardians. The problem of incompatible marriage in Indian society is mentioned in this novel. In some of the Indian societies generally young girls are married off to elderly men. Many problems arise from these ill-matched marriages including early death of the husbands leaving behind young widows. Here, Giribala is a victim of incompatible marriage.

Moreover, in ancient India, Hindu Brahmins believed that it was a sin to keep unmarried daughter at home after reaching puberty. Therefore, young girls are married off in an early age before reaching puberty only to save the honour of the family.

The story of the novel *Datal Hatir Uye Khowa Howdah* revolves round the protagonist Giribala. Giribala is a widow. She represents the widow fraternity of India. Widowhood is a curse on the Indian woman. The novel shows how Giribala struggles to get out of her cocoon but fails. The plight of widow is same all over India. Giribala's tears are the tear of all Indian widows.

The novel talks about a Gosain family that runs a Satra under feudal system. Feudalism has been a social system of ancient India.

The characters of the novel are so Assamese and yet so Indian. The dilemma of Indranath is the dilemma of any reformative Indian. The plight of the widow women is same with the other widowed women across India. The pain of Indranath's mother looking at her young daughter is same with any mother from any corner of India. Indranath's mother's long waitings for Indranath to come back home at night and her worried eyes are the eyes of any Indian mother.

The novel mentions the observation of Ambubachi in India. Ambubachi is a national festival of India. During Ambubachi the Hindus observe some rituals. Basically the Hindu Brahmin widows observe it very strictly.

4.1.6: Indianness in Tej Aru Dhulire Dhusharit Pristha:

Tej Aru Dhulire Dhusharit Pristha is completely an Indian novel. The setting of the novel is Indian. The plot of the novel is Indian. The theme of the novel is a dark

chapter of Indian history. The writer was an eye witness of the killings of Sikhs following the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1984. Sikhs were burnt alive or murdered. Their houses were set in fire. They were looted of their property, There was a terrible odour of burnt human flesh and animal in the air in 1984, Delhi. The Harijans living in the slum areas also became a victim of regression. The violent mass killing touched the heart of the author.

It talks about the Operation Blue Star, 1984. The novel represents India in pre and post Indira Gandhi's assassination. This novel is based on fact rather than fiction.

4.1.7: Indianness in Chinnamastar Manuhto:

Chinnamastar Manuhto is a pen picture of Assamese culture, myth, religion, history etc. The novel has a universal appeal. The theme of the novel revolves round the blood sacrifice at Kamakhya temple. Blood sacrifice to God or Goddess is an Indian concept. Most of the Hindus believe in animal sacrifice to please the Gods.

Kamakhya is one of the fifty sacred places or peethsthans of India where lord Shiva's deceased wife Sati's body parts had fallen during Shiva's journey placing her body on his shoulder. Lord Shiva and Sati are two famous mythological characters of Indian mythology.

The Kamakhya temple is very famous in India. During Ambubachi, devotees from entire India throng in the temple premises to worship Goddess Kamakhya.

Child marriage system of ancient India is mentioned in this novel as mentioned in *Datal Hatir Uye Khowa Howdah*. Here Bidhibala's marriage is arranged with an aged man. Bidhibala is yet to reach her puberty when her father has fixed her marriage.

The problem of incompatible marriage in India is again mentioned in this novel as mentioned earlier in *Datal Hatir Uye Khowa Howdah*.

The mighty Brahmaputra is an Indian river. It flows through different states of India. The novelist glorifies the Brahmaputra in her novel.

4.2: Indianness in the novels of Anita Desai:

Anita Desai is an Indo-Anglian novelist of worldwide repute. She is a born Indian. Desai's novels are basically Indian because they have Indian background. She picks up her themes and characters from Indian society. She deals with Indian tradition, culture, custom, history etc. in her novels. She collects her materials from India. In this context Anita Desai herself said in an interview with Susannah Palk for CNN's 'connect the world said, "the truth is that wherever I am, I am Indian, and wherever I go, I carry India with me. We are inseparable, joined at birth ... India is the source of all my work. It is my material."³

India has great influence on her writings. The influence of her motherland India is distinct in her theme, setting, character, structure etc. Desai writes about the richness of India and at the same time, criticizes its drawbacks. Desai herself admits that while she 'feels about India as an Indian she thinks about it as an outsider.'⁴ She shows her Indian sensibility through her novels.

3. www.cnn.com/world/asiapcf

4. Satish Barbuddhe, Indian Literature in English: Critical Views, page -200

4.2.1: Indianness in *Cry, the Peacock*:

Anita Desai's first novel *Cry, the Peacock* is an Indian novel. It is all about an Indian married woman who suffers in a male-dominated traditional Indian society. The female protagonist Maya, being the only daughter of a loving father, reaches her girlhood within the four walls of her house. It is to be mentioned that in an Indian society girls are kept under strict observation than the boys. For example Maya's only brother Arjun goes away from his house in search of his fortune in England but Maya remains at home with her father.

Horoscope reading is an Indian practice and it is found in this novel. The novel says about the horoscope reading of Maya in her childhood. The Albino astrologer who reads Maya's horoscope predicts a disaster in the life of Maya. The astrologer prophesies death of either Maya or her husband in the fourth year after her marriage. He also predicts her of an early marriage and it really happens in case of Maya. The astrologer says to Maya:

“Death to one of you, when you are married – and you shall be married young ... Four years after your marriage ...”⁵

Maya suffers from this childhood obsession throughout her life. Maya's death anxiety increases with time and after marriage she awaits upon her approaching death considering it unavoidable.

It is a common Indian practice that marriages are generally arranged by one's

5. Anita Desai, *Cry, the Peacock*, page – 30-31

parents or guardians. It is seen in this novel that Maya's marriage is arranged by her father with his friend. Maya's lawyer father chooses his lawyer friend Gautama for his daughter. Gautama is much older than Maya. But Maya marries Gautama without any complaint as she believes that her father can do nothing harmful for her. Maya thinks:

“my father's proposal that I marry this tall, stooped and knowledgeable friend of his ...”⁶

Here mention may be made of incompatible marriage relating to age in an Indian society. In an Indian society marriages are sometimes made between an elderly person with a very young girl. Hence Gautama a man of Maya's father's age marries her. Maya suffers from this ill-matched marriage as many other Indian girls do. In India generally a family consists of parents and their children. In such a family, children come closer to their parents. Maya, being a motherless child depends fully on her father. Hence she develops an obsession for him. She believes that her father can solve all the problems. For Maya her father is her hero. Therefore she expects Gautama to be like her father as most of the Indian girls project their would be husbands after their father.

Maya, is born and brought up in a cultured Hindu Brahmin family. Her intuition does not allow her to talk about sex openly. Therefore when after marriage she remains physically unsatisfied she finds it impossible to share her problems even with her husband. Maya remains starved and lonely. Maya represents most of the young

6. Ibid., page - 39

Indian wives who are love-famished in their conjugal life. Maya is a victim of male dominated Indian society.

Maya as many other young beautiful Indian wives, suffers psychologically being a victim of ill-matched marriage. Maya cannot break her marriage or cheat on her husband. She is also childless.

The novel mentions of Bhagavad Gita. The Gita is a 700 verse Sanskrit scripture. It is a part of the Indian epic Mahabharata. The Gita consists of the dialogues between Lord Krishna and Arjuna the third of Pandava at the very beginning of the kurukhetra war or Dharma Yudhha. Lord Krishna talks of Detachment. Lord Krishna advises Arjun for selfless action. In this novel Gautama to make his wife Maya realize – what are the important things in life and what are the true values refers to the Bhagavad Gita. Gautama quotes from the Gita:

“He who, controlling the senses of the mind, follows without attachment the path of action with his organs of action he is esteemed.”⁷

Gautama explains to Maya that we get the fruits according to our action. The Gita says to perform our actions without contemplating their success or failure. When Maya questions about love Gautama replies that love is detachment. The Gita explains detachment:

7. Ibid., page - 99

“He whose joy is within, and whose light is within that Yogi, being well-established in Brahman, attains to absolute freedom. The freedom of the lotus from water, of the lamp from winds, of the tortoise from all contact. Detachment in a word, detachment.”⁸

The novelist shows how the Hindus in India accept the philosophy of life as mentioned in the holy text, the Gita. The Gita is the guide book for most of the Indians. The Gita teaches us how to lead life directing us through the righteous way.

Maya is unable to follow the preaching of the Gita. Maya being a very young woman seeks for sensuous pleasure and happiness. Maya, already obsessed with death, reaches the height of abnormality and in a fit of sudden frenzy hurls her husband down from the terrace of her house and kills him. After three days of Gautama's death, Maya suicides. Maya's death by suicide can be considered as her self-penance. Maya is a Hindu Brahmin woman. A Hindu woman is taught to consider her husband as her God. Maya, being a Hindu married woman feels as a sinner after murdering her husband. Therefore she, to get rid of her agony chooses the path of death by suicide.

The novel displays a very much Indian environment. The novel introduces us with Indian flora and fauna. Maya being an Indian thinks like an Indian. Maya recalls how she has passed her childhood playing in her father's orchard like a princess. The orchard in her father's house has different types of common Indian fruits such as mandarin orange trees. Even at her husband's house there is a beautiful garden full of

8. Ibid., page - 101

different kinds of fruit and flower. Maya sees:

“A row of papaya trees – tangle of vines beans, all mixed ...”⁹

The novelist draws a pen-picture of a typical Indian household in the novel.

It is very much Indian to have pigeon’s nests on the verandah’s of a typical Indian house. Maya sees:

“On our verandah, the pigeon’s nests were suddenly filled with babies that twittered and muttered ...”¹⁰

Maya tells about the weather of India. She explains how she feels in different seasons basically in summer. Maya tells about the chanting of Radha–Krishna repeatedly by the servants at night. It is also an Indian culture to sing hymn accompanied by musical instrument.

The novelist mentions of different Indian places such as Lucknow, Delhi, Darjeeling, Travancore, Cochin, Mysore, etc. in this novel. The novelist also writes about Kathakali dance, a classical dance of India.

Thus the novel *Cry, the Peacock* is an Indian novel in its content and flavor.

4.2.2: Indianness in Voices in the City:

Voices in the City is Desai’s second novel is rich in Indianness. The setting of the novel is Indian. In this novel Desai deals with a pure Indian theme of personal

9. Ibid., page – 26

10. Ibid., page - 34

suffering in contemporary India. It reveals young Indian's struggle for existence through the characters of three siblings – Nirode, Monisha and Amla, three siblings. They have come to Calcutta, a dream city in India, in search of bright future but in the long run the city proves to be a city of death where Monisha loses her life and the other two of her siblings face defeat.

Monisha's painful condition in her in-laws house and her self –immolation after bearing so much mental torture represents numerous young married women in India who, unable to bear both physical and mental torture at her in-laws place end their life by suicide. Monisha marries a middle class government officer who has no time for his wife. Monisha's husband Jiban is a typical Indian husband who cannot stand by his wife even in the hour of need in fear of his parents or elders. Jiban is a subdued son of his mother. Hence Monisha suffers more in her in-laws house.

The joint family concept is an Indian one and it is found in this novel. Jiban's family is a joint family consisting of so many aunts-uncles, nephew-nice, in-laws etc. Monisha feels uneasy when she comes as a bride to live in this many headed family. She finds it difficult to adjust with them as many other young brides in India. Monisha has no habit of a joint family in her girlhood but so tries to please every member of her in-laws family as a bride.

Monisha, as many other Indian women, has lost her private life after marriage. Though Monisha and Jiban have one room, it is always occupied by her aunts, sisters-in-laws, cousins, nieces and nephews. Monisha thinks:

“Only I wish I were given some tasks I could do alone, in privacy, away from the aunts and uncles, the cousins and nieces ... But less and less there is privacy.”¹¹

Monisha’s sisters-in-law irritate her asking about her stock of sarees and opening her wardrobe to inspect her belongings. It is a common Indian women sentiment that they are preoccupied with common womanly things like sarees and jewelleryes.

In many Indian families it is customary that the daughters-in-law have to massage the legs of their mothers-in-law. It is seen in this novel in case of Monisha. She massages her mother-in-law and aunts legs regularly after finishing her domestic works. While massaging Monisha feels:

“She thinks I am touching her. She thinks I am touching her feet.”¹²

Monisha is becoming a dwarf everyday under the pressure in her in-laws house. She tries to get peace of mind by reading the Gita. She reads the Gita:

“As the ocean remains calm and unaltered though the waters flow into it, similarly a self-controlled saint remains unmoved.”¹³

Monisha tries to console herself by the preaching of Lord Krishna.

Monisha is always considered as an outsider by her in-laws. The family has never tried to understand the woman inside her. One day Monisha’s in-laws accuse

11. Anita Desai, *Voices in the City*, page - 116

12. *Ibid.*, page - 139

13. *Ibid.*, page - 129

her of theft of Jiban's money. Monisha is shocked when all the family members gaze at her with distrust. There is suspect and hatred in their eyes for her. Her mother-in-law renounces not to keep a thief inside her house. They are also not allowing her to get in her room. Even Jiban considers her as thief. Monisha describes:

“ ... Jiban standing disconsolately down in the courtyard below, and he did not look at me ... ”¹⁴

Monisha feels ashamed not because of her mother-in-law's accusation but because of Jiban's expression of distrust on her. Day by day Monisha becomes lonelier at the house. Monisha's sterility adds fuel to the fire. Like every childless woman she also suffers mentally.

Monisha as a common Indian daughter wants to take shelter at her paternal house but fears to go back. She cancels her idea of asking her mother to take her back fearing that that might bring disgrace to her mother. She thinks:

“... would mother take back this shrunken, etiolated, wasted thing into her house if I begged her to? ... but it is her disgrace in which I will not involve myself. I will involve myself in nothing anymore.”¹⁵

Monisha decides not to involve herself any more in anything. Therefore, she, to get rid of her tortured life, dies by self-immolation. Monisha happens to be a girl of a promising future. Monisha's attitude to life is quite different from most of the Indian girls. She brings her personal library with her instead of so many sarees and jewellery

14. Ibid., page - 137

15. Ibid., page – 139

when she comes to her in-laws house as a bride. She thinks herself superior to those of the other women in her new house. The family and even her husband fail to give her value as a woman. Thenceforth her miseries start and finally eat up her life. In this way many young Indian girls with so much potential meet premature death by suicide as a result of immense torture at her in-laws house. Even today many cases of bride-burning, suicide or self-immolation are found in different parts of India.

4.2.3: Indianness in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*:

Indianness is seen in the very structure, theme and technique of Desai's novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* The novel is set in a contemporary urban Indian background.

The novel delineates the character of a middle aged heroine Sita. Sita, as many other women of her time, has already given birth to four children and now is in the process of having her fifth baby. Sita is tired of giving birth after birth. Sita's plight is the plight of many Indian women.

It is already discussed that joint family is an Indian family system. Here again the novelist introduces to a joint family as in her earlier novel *Voices in the City*. Sita comes to live in the joint family of Raman as his wife. Through Sita, the novelist gives a detail of the life style of a joint family. The family has so many members and therefore has to cook a lot. Sita sees:

“The women ... bent over their trays on which they were chopping vegetables – chopping, slicing, chopping, slicing the incredible quantities of vegetable they daily devoured ... The whole house seemed

to be a kitchen ... if meals were not being eaten, then they were being cooked, or cleaned up after, or planned.”¹⁶

Sita is unable to adjust in such a crowdy environment and shifts to another house.

Sita does not want to give birth of her fifth baby. She doesnot want to get an abortion too. She just wants to keep it unborn. Therefore she wishes to go to Manori island only where it is possible. She considers the island as an island of miracle. She goes to Manori not to give birth. For Sita:

“She was on the island, in order to achieve the miracle of not giving birth. Wasn’t this Manori, the island of miracles?”¹⁷

Indians have faith in miracles. Being an Indian Sita has also faith that miracle can happen in her life. She also believes that the island Manori is an island of miracle. Sita passed her childhood in Manori and the island influenced her so much. Sita’s father is regarded as a man of miracle by the simple and trusting villagers and fisher men. They believed that Sita’s father cured patients by magic. Sita now an over forty woman continues the same belief that the island has the power of magic. Sita’s blind faith in miracle is conspicuous.

But Sita represents many other Indian women of her time who have tried to save themselves from unwanted pregnancy and unexpected motherhood.

16. Anita Desai, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, page – 44

17. *Ibid.*, page - 28

Like many other women, Sita, even after living a modern life in Bombay hopes that a miracle would happen to her at Manori to stop the natural process of birth. She expects:

“Her father had made it an island of magic once, worked miracles of a kind ... and he might work another miracle, posthumously.”¹⁸

Many Indian husbands fail to understand their wives. Raman is also unable to comprehend Sita when she shows anger discovering her fifth pregnancy. Raman says to Sita:

“... you were always so pleased about the babies. They always pleased you.”¹⁹

Sita says: “I’m not pleased, I’m frightened.”²⁰

Raman is incapable of analyzing the problems associated with late pregnancy. He thinks that it grows easier and easier. But Sita replies that it becomes harder and harder.

In an Indian society generally the husbands go out for work to earn living. They consider their work as primary and family, secondary. They are indifferent to their wives. Here in this novel Sita, as Maya in *Cry, the Peacock*, complains that he knows nothing about her condition.

Sita’s obsession of her father as that of Maya in *Cry, the Peacock*, is an Indian

18. Ibid., page – 28

19. Ibid., page - 29

20. Ibid., page - 29

condition. In India, children are very close to their parents. Our holy scriptures preach us to respect on parents as Gods. So, Sita hopes that being a God like person in his lifetime her late father can do magic even posthumously.

At the end of the novel, Sita comes back to Bombay from Manori. Sita's decision to return with her husband is an Indian situation. Basically an Indian woman is proud to be a wife and a mother. They consider their husbands as Gods and children, as the blessings of God. Sita follows her husband teaching that life must go on. Sita comes back to take care of her husband and children with pride and pleasure.

4.2.4: Indianness in Bye-Bye Blackbird:

Anita Desai's excellence as a creative writer is brilliantly exhibited in her creation of a little India in England in her novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird*. She haunts for Indianness in English self through the female protagonist Sarah in her novel.

Sarah is born and brought up in England. She gets married to Adit Sen, a clerk in a travel agency. Adit Sen is an immigrant Indian. Sarah knows nothing about India as she has no personal experience of this Eastern country of her husband. For Sarah, India is a country where the people do not take care of their sacred cows and leave them on the streets. Though Sarah, an English woman is alien to India of her husband, she is aware of its climate and ugliness. Not only Sarah but also Adit feels:

“The emptiness and sorrow, the despair and rage, the flat grey melancholy and the black glamour of India. They themselves were

tossed about by the flood like flotsam and then became a part of it, the black flood.”²¹

Adit comes to England in search of material happiness and settles down with an English wife in the new country. But there in his heart lies India, his own motherland. Adit teaches his English wife the Indian style of cookery. He teaches her how to prepare spices from raw spice seeds. Adit listens to Indian songs. He likes to listen to Bismillah Khans Shehnai. He compares the river Test silently flowing in England with the huge rivers like Mahanandi, Brahmaputra and those of Punjab that cause flood. Adit wants to see his English wife Sarah in Indian saree and jewellery on their wedding anniversary. Even he takes his English wife to a typical Indian restaurant ‘Veeraswamy’s’ in London to celebrate their special day.

Adit Sen and Dev represent all the Indian youths who go to England in hope of prosperity and settlement.

Thus, the novelist draws a mini India within England in this particular novel.

4.2.5: Indianness in Fire on the Mountain:

Fire on the Mountain is Desai’s another Indian novel with worldwide appeal. The novel shows a Vice Chancellor’s widowed wife who after living an unhappy life with her husband comes to live in solitude at the evening of her life. She is now an aged woman with grey hair. Nanda Kaul’s marriage was arranged with a Vice Chancellor of Punjab University. To be mentioned, arranged marriage is a tradition of marriage in India. It is believed in India that arranged marriage is better than a loved one. But

21. Anita Desai, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, page - 268

it is not that arranged marriages are always successful. For in case of Nanda Kaul, her marriage with the Vice Chancellor ruined her life. Nanda's husband had an affair with one Mathematics teacher all through his life. Nanda's husband did not marry his beloved only because she was a Christian but he kept her in the core of his heart even after having such a beautiful and obedient wife as Nanda.

Nanda represents many other Indian married women who live a subdued life devoid of happiness. These women rear their children and take care of their husbands but get no respect or love in return. They do not complain in fear of wreckage of their marriages. They also keep silence in fear of the society. Indian women are aware of their families' honour. They will suffer silently but bring no disgrace to them; neither to their parents nor in-laws. Nanda also suffers from her husband's open betrayal and neglect. But she continues her marriage with him and gives birth to his children.

Nanda's great grand-daughter Raka is a representative of many other Indian children who are destined to live an unhappy childhood due to regular quarrels of their parents. Raka is an ill-fated child who has lost her happy childhood and becomes a recluse by nature.

It is an Indian sentiment that a female should not go out or stay outside alone late at night. It is not considered safe as she may face many kinds of danger. When Nanda's friend Ila Das is seen in the market place alone late evening, a seller asks her to go. From the words of the grain seller one can understand that good advice is not rare in an Indian society. He says:

“You should not go so late. It is not good for a mem sahib to walk alone in the dark.”²²

Though Ila Das understands his sense she fails to save herself. She is raped and murdered in the same night.

Anita Desai celebrates the natural beauty of India in her novels. Here, in this novel she describes the beauty of the Kasauli hills. The pine trees, the langurs on the trees, the singing birds, the grazing cows- all have enhanced the beauty of Kasauli.

The novelist tries to give an Indian night situation with the howling of the jackals and moving of ghosts. Ramlal says to Raka:

“At night you hear jackals howling and people have seen ghosts.”²³

4.2.6: Indianness in Clear Light of Day:

Desai's novel *Clear Light of Day* sets in old Delhi. The novel covers both British ruled India and post-independence India. The novel is actually a family drama of Das family having four children – Bim, Raja, Tara and Baba. Raja having been reached his maturity goes to Hyderabad to live with Hyder Ali's family. Later on he marries Hyder Ali's daughter Benzir and adopts their life style and culture. Tara marries Bakul an eligible man engaged in diplomatic service and lives abroad. Bim, the eldest of all the siblings remains in the house being a caretaker of her mentally retarded younger brother Baba.

22. Anita Desai, *Fire on the Mountain*, page – 150

23. *Ibid.*, page - 49

Bim's plight is the plight of many Indian girls who sacrifice their own happiness for the sake of their families. Bim is an educated girl. She is a lecturer in History in a local college. She has a love affair with a doctor but she refuses to marry him as she has to look after her mentally retarded brother. Bim is a victim of time. Bim is a pure Indian woman with a motherly heart. She decides to remain a spinster for the sake of her mentally retarded brother.

Raja represents the sentiment of those young Indians who go away leaving behind their family and own land in search of material prosperity. He gives up Hinduism and becomes a part of another culture and religion. Raja as many young Indians leaves with a promise but never comes back to his original home in old Delhi.

The rented house where the Das family has been living, represents Raja's Indian identity. Raja is now living with Hyder Ali's family as their son-in-law at Hyderabad. Hyder Ali has left all the property in the name of his daughter and son-in-law. After the death of Hyder Ali, Raja writes a letter to his sister Bim to continue living in the same house of Hyder Ali in the same old rate. He writes:

“... now that he (Hyder Ali) is dead and has left all his property to us, you may continue to have it at the same rate.”²⁴

The novel tells about the partition of India in 1947. The novel informs that in summer 1946 Md. Ali Jinnah made public demands for a Muslim homeland. As a result of the partition movement, India is divided into two parts – India and Pakistan in 1947. It also describes how Muslims like Hyder Ali escapes from Delhi to take

24. Anita Desai, *Clear Light of Day*, page -41

refuge at Hyderabad being terrified by ethnic violence. The novel also tells about the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi in 1948 and the incidents following this murder.

4.2.7. Indianness in *In Custody*:

Anita Desai's *In Custody* is a pure Indian novel. Like *Clear Light of Day* it is also set in Delhi, India. In this particular novel Desai shows her concern for social and economic upheavals in Indian society. Here Desai tells about Deven, a temporary lecturer in Hindi in Lala Ram Lal College at Mirpore near New Delhi. Deven is tired of living a mean life. His financial position is not up to his expectation. Therefore he dreams to upgrade his living standard by any means.

Deven Sharma is a typical Indian educated young man who strives to get economic freedom. Deven's lack of self-confidence brings miseries to his life. Deven's poor economic condition influences on his personality development. He suffers from helplessness, humility and inferiority complex. Deven comes from a lower middle-class Indian family. Deven's childhood memories are painful as he passed his time with his disappointed parents – an asthmatic father and a frustrated mother.

Deven, a lecturer in Hindi is madly in love with Urdu poetry. He is a follower of a famous Urdu poet Nur Shahjehan badi who lives in Delhi. Deven gets a proposal from his friend Murad to take an interview of Nur. Deven is very much happy and excited at the proposal and decides to go to Delhi for that purpose. Deven expects that the interview will change his position in the society by giving him financial security. Deven waits for the most momentous moment of meeting his hero Nur. But Deven's interview with Nur ultimately proves to be unsuccessful as his assistant records

unnecessary talks while omitting the vital recitations. Deven has to face humiliation from all the people associated with his project. In agony Deven remarks:

“We have no future. There is no future. There is only the past.”²⁵

Thus Deven represents all the Indian youths who face loss at the face of win while struggling hard to achieve success in life.

The novelist tells about the past glory of the Urdu language in India. She writes:

“Urdu was ‘the language of the court in the days of royalty – now languishes in the back lanes and gutters of the city. No place for it to live in the style to which it is accustomed, no emperors and nawabs to act as its patrons.’”²⁶

The British changed the total scenario of India during their reign. The post-colonial scenario and disillusionment also find expression in this novel.

Urdu poetry reached its height during Mughal rule in India but after India gets freedom the popularity is decreased. Urdu is replaced by Hindi in the post-colonial India.

The novelist shows the protagonist Deven Sharma as a victim of ill-matched marriage. She proves how arranged marriages are not always successful through the couple Deven and Sarala. It is already discussed that arranged marriage is traditional

25. Anita Desai, *In Custody*, page – 211

26. *Ibid.*, page – 8

system of marriage in India. Deven's mother and aunts choose Sarala for him. Sarala is also a desperate girl like Deven. Sarala's dream in life has not come into reality. Hence she remains sad and unhappy. Deven cannot bear her grief stricken mood and shouts at her. Deven also behaves like an average typical Indian husband who out of frustration quarrels with his wife.

4.3: Conclusion:

The above discussion on Indianness in both Mamoni Raisom Goswami and Anita Desai's novels shows that both the novelists pick up their themes from the contemporary Indian society. Their characters are essentially Indian. The setting, structure, situation etc. are all Indian. So to say, they have created a pan Indian society by presenting socio-cultural and economic problems of India in their novels. Both the novelists have maintained Indianness in their novels and tried to take Indian novels to the vast domain of world literature.