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COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MAN AND WOMAN RELATIONSHIPS IN THOMAS  
HARDY'S *A LAODICEAN* AND NOVELS OF ANITA DESAI

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ABSTRACT

Thomas Hardy has been acclaimed as one of the most eminent novelist and serious visionary of Victorian era having reflective writings of great movement from the Victorian to modern. He showed his sympathy to the women in Victorian age who faces problems of marriage, unhappy wedlock, divorces, love affairs, merciless fate, mistreatment of woman and man because 19<sup>th</sup> century illiteracy does not allow friendship between both the sexes and tried hard to change the view of male dominated society for the benefit of women through his fiction, short stories, verse and epic drama. However, Indian English literature may be called as by-product of India and Britain which have been started around 1930s. Anita Desai is one of the most remarkable and notable Indian writers who has revealed and broadened the thematic horizon of the Indo-Anglian novels. She has published many novels, short stories and fictions. She has portrayed female protagonists as hypersensitive, solitary, retrospective and protested against monotony, injustice and humiliation in all her novels. The main aim of the study is intended to analyze thoroughly how social principles and laws, snobbish ethical bias and pernicious morality standard can affect the life of woman and overall treatment of man and woman relationship in Thomas Hardy's *A Laodicean* and Anita Desai's major novels respectively.

**Keywords:** Feminism, Man-woman relationship, marriage, unhappy wedlock, migration

Introduction

Thomas Hardy (1840 – 1928) was one of most popular novelist of Victorian era and his writing is reflective of the great movement from the Victorian to the modern and sympathy went out to the women in the Victorian age that were unequally treated due to the unjust marriage law. He work tirelessly in order to change the male dominated society and to bring about the desired changes for the mutual benefit of women as well as men. The Victorian society of that century was rigid and uncompromising one towards woman. Friend ship between man and woman was not acceptable in 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century.

*A Laodicean* (1881) is a novel of Thomas Hardy that has been written under the stress of physical incapacity due to his illness, which deals with the aesthetic and cultural implications of social revolutions. This

novel reflects the central problems of Victorian culture, class and the relationship of men and women through the love story of George Somerset and Paula Power. Somerset, an architect very much interested in Gothic Architecture while Paula, an heiress admires everything that is modern. Both the main character of the novel falls in love quickly but having different opinion about life viz. Somerset love his architectural profession but didn't get inherited property as his father was an academician enjoying social prestige while Paula got inherited wealth and wants to pursue a profession as she was well educated woman. Around Victorian age women were trained only for courtship and marriage but Paula's attitude to her sexuality is entirely free from frigidity and submissiveness. Miss Paula Power inherits the habit of vacillating from her father. She is undecided whether she should be baptized according to the rites of the Baptist persuasion to which her father belonged. She does not have the courage to take the plunge. Next she is undecided about marrying George Somerset and consequence or to take Captain De Stancy, an heir of an ancient family which once owned the castle in which she lives now. Her romantic desires cause her to prefer De Stancy, but at almost the last moment she backs out when the plot to blacken George Somerest character in her eyes by Willy Dane, an odious villain and the illegitimate son of Captain De Stancy, is discovered. She marries George Somerset.

The lovers kept apart by a series of misunderstandings engineered by Dare trail across Europe from one fashionable centre to another, the heroine followed at a distance by the hero. These episodes are tediously protracted and are has the sense of feeble material being stretched like elastic. The latter part of the novel involves a buddle of arrivals and departments, telegrams and eaves dropping easily secrets, blackmail and unexpected encounters: Hardy indeed returns briefly unsuccessfully to the sensation novel as his model (AL: 180). In the final chapter after the couple are at last united.

On the other hand, Indo-Anglian fiction was the inevitable outcome of the Indian exposure to western culture and it may be explained as an expression of those people whose mother tongue is not English. The stream of Indo-Anglian fiction starts with the writings of R. C. Dutt, B. C. Chatterji and R. N. Tagore, Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayanan, Raj Lakshmi, Rajan Iyer. Almost all novelist of this era portrayed poverty, hunger, diseases, traditions, modernity, social evils, tensions (inter-racial relations) etc.

Anita Desai is one of the most remarkable Indian writers in English with outstanding sensibility of inner world whose works have been greatly praised both at home and abroad. She is a writer having great range of writings to situations, places and people that she knows about or can understand them by her personal thinking and being regarded as a pioneer in the field of writing psychological novels. She has quoted "Whereas a man is concerned with action experience, achievements however, a woman writer is more concerned with thought, emotion and sensation". She has been awarded by The Sahitya Akademi Award, The Royal Society of Literatures Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize, and National Academy for Letters Award (1978) for the novel *Fire On The Mountain*; Author's Guild Award for excellence in writing for *Where Shall We Go This Summer*; Bookers Prize for two novels *Clear Light of Day* and *In Custody*. She portrayed women as not totally cut off from familial and societies but women who remain within these orbits and protest against monotony, injustice and humiliation. As per Prof. Jasbir Jain "The world of Desai's novel is an ambient one; it is a world where the central harmony is aspired to but not arrived at and the desire to love and live clashes – at times violently with the desire to withdraw and achieve harmony".

Anita Desai came into the literary world by a storm with the publication of her first novel, *Cry the Peacock* (1963). The title of this novel belongs to the exciting dance of the peacock at the approach of the rain bearing clouds. Maya, the heroine is a neurotic young woman whose madness is fast disintegrating under the pressure of marital discord and of certain vague but frightening childhood memories. Maya is a deserted daughter of wealthy Brahman and is married to Gautama. He is insensitive, pragmatic and rational advocate who does not understand her sensitive nature. She suffers from father obsession and looks for the typical father image in her husband. In her childhood an albino astrologer has declared that four years after marriage one of them would die and the prediction makes her obsessed by the fear of death. As an afterthought, she realizes that one of the two could be Gautam as well and she kills him by pushing him off the parapet and then commits suicide.

In *Voices In The City* (1965), presents a set of young educated people of Calcutta – Nirode Ray and his sisters Monisha and Amla. Nirode is a person without family, neglected even from his mother who meets failures after failures and refuses to make even the most necessary compromises that life demanded. His elder sister, Monisha married against her will to a blind moralist finds her life a real prison and develops an incurable claustrophobia. She suffers terribly and at last commits suicide. The younger daughter, Amla is like her brother and sister, real extrovert decides to lead a gay life with the painter Dharma, but in vain. Thus, they all are the product of the same social ethos and are the subject of the same kind of pressure. P.P. Mehta comments “Desai seems to excel in drawing tightly strung supersensitive women whose dissatisfaction with their surroundings leads to tragedy”.

Third novel, *Bye Bye Blackbird* (1971) is story of stained mal-adjusted marriage having utter confusion and escapism of Adit – Sarah, Samar – Bela who were victims of alien culture based on immigration problem. Adit marriage a English girl Sarah incurs the anger of white society had broken the social code of England and is subjected to taunts out of colleagues but also of the young pupils of the school where she work as a clerk. Both Adit and Sarah pretend the facade of happily married life and the tension between pretension and actuality, appearance and reality, anxiety and insecurity resulting in schizophrenia. In reality both are afraid of rejection, vicious distrust and making pity from their own people, transforming them into escapist. She never protests and is ready to sacrifice anything for her marriage. Erich Fromm’s words: “Both persons involved have lost their integrity and freedom, they live for each other and from each other, satisfying their craving for closeness yet suffering from lack of inner strength and self-reliance which would require freedom and independence and further more constantly threatened by the conscious and unconscious hostility which is bound to arise from symbiotic relationship”. On the other hand, the marriage of Samar and Bell is identical to the marriage of Adit and Sarah. They are also victims of separate culture mal-adjustment. Anita Desai also commented on the material disharmonies existing not only in the times of Indians but also in the lives of English people.

*Where Shall We Go This Summer* (1975), based on the theme of alienation, lack of communication, loneliness in married life. The middle aged woman, Sita, is sick of the daily routine of meaningless existence feels suffocated in her well-ordered, posh flat in Bombay and struggles to break away from it all. She wishes to recapture her past and escapes to the Manori Island where she had spent her childhood with her father. She was obsessed with her loveless marriage with Raman who is a businessman, practical, faded having ordinary and sensible expectations. He was puzzled by the irrational behavior of Sita and also considerate and tries his best to make her happy. He belongs to a traditional Hindu family where even men do not smoke openly but Sita, just to spite the in-laws smokes openly. Slowly things become bad. He could not know the basic fact about her that she was bored with life. The mal-adjustment between Raman and Sita is based on values, on principles, on faith even or between normal and double standard. She had "lost her all feminine, all maternal belief in childbirth, all faith in it and again to fear it as yet one more act of violence and murder in a world that had more of them in it than she could take" (*Where shall we . . .*: 56).

*Fire On The Mountain* (1977), Nanda Kaul, agonized old woman having quiet and secluded life is another example of marital disharmony. Husband Professor Kaul, the Vice Chancellor having extra marital affair based on physical lust and circumstantial convenience with Christian Lady Miss David, the Maths teacher. “Not that her husband loved, cherished and kept her like a queen - he had only done enough to keep her quiet while he carried on a lifelong affair with Miss David, whom he had not married because she was a Christian but whom he had loved all his life (*Fire on the Mountain*: 145). Nanda performed her duties and obligations like taking care of family, house, children, supervising the cooks and servants, entertaining the guests but loses her individuality and identity. Tara, grand-daughter, also gone through mal-adjusted marriage with diplomat, practical, modern man of modern society Rakesh resulting in nervous breakdown. The psychological strain and brutality of Rakesh gives negative impact on their daughter Raka as devastated, death like solitude and abnormal child.

*Clear Light of Day* (1980), a story of bond between two brother (Raja, Baba) and two sisters (Bim, Tara). Two young daughters, Bim and Tara have to look after her diabetic mother passes in coma, father and mentally retarded brother. Tara wanted to escape from the dark, forbidden house to a life of laughter and gaiety married to impressive, caring and wonderful man Bakul, too older than her has molded her according to his likings. Love is not the major criteria for their marriage and both accept it as form of biological need. At times, Tara felt that she had followed him enough, "*it had been such an enormous strain, always pushing against her grain, it had drained her strength too much, now she could only collapse, inevitably collapse*" (*Clear Light of Day*: 18). Bim is also very close to her second brother Raja. Raja has great interest in Urdu poetry and his enthusiasm increases in Urdu verses as he goes to his neighbor Hyder Ali's house and married to his daughter Benazir a Muslim girl, then after relocated to Hyderabad, adopts their life style. This marriage builds up resentment between brother and sister. Bim feels bitter, rejected, deserted, unwanted, isolated with Raja and Tara, who, she thinks, have broken apart from their childhood closeness and become very different. Unmarried Bim, free from the traumas of an incompatible marriage and devotes her life in caring of her mentally retarded younger brother, Baba, and old Mira masi. This novel shows the clear light of day i.e. the realization which is the ultimate wisdom of life, the intuitive understanding and with it Bim forgets her bitterness and achieves peace.

*In Custody* (1984), the novelist too dealt with the marital disagreement between husband Devan, a lecturer of Hindi in college, aspires to become a poet in Urdu poetry and wife Sarla whom his mother and aunts had observed for many years. Deven's marriage was against his choice and thinks Sarla, a person with high aspiration and wanted to be rich, surrounded by luxurious atmosphere. The dreams were unfulfilled and both were disappointed with each other. Deven expresses his disappointment on simple ground taking extreme action and shows double standard, in home he behaved aggressively but socially quiet and humble. On the other hand, Sarla, a typical woman who never complains about injustice done by her husband but expresses her anger by suspecting on Deven's relationship with other woman. Interestingly, both of them try to hurt each other by action and words. Sarla accuses with her expressions of sullenness, however, Deven gets irritated by her shabbiness, her hunched, twisted posture, her untidy hair.

His friend Murad, editor of Urdu magazine suggested Deven who was in financial crisis to interview Nur Shahjehanabadi, the renowned Urdu poet and appointed as secretary. Nur is an old poet who has been declining with time, not only in the field of art but also in his personal life and has two wives, the older wife straight forward having firmness lives in an inner courtyard of the house. Later, he married to a singing & dancing girl Imtiaz Begum, for a son. She takes advantage of the poet and his position: *She wanted my house, my audience, my friends. She raided my house, stole my jewels - those are what she wears now as she sits before an audience, showing them off as her own. They are not her own, they are mine! and she sent my secretary away too* (*In Custody*: 87). The lines express the frustration and anger of the old poet when he sat silent, neglected, and uncelebrated in a corner in the birthday celebration of his wife. Deven observed that the poet personal life is more or less similar to him.

*Baumgartner's Bombay* (1985) deals with the life of two Germans, Lotte, cabaret dancer married to second man Hugo Baumgartner, the protagonist uprooted from their own culture, lives in India. Loneliness, frustration and agony arises by hatred of son of Kantilal Sethia her former late husband. This situation brings Hugo and Lotte to choose each other as companion. Lotte has no other place to turn to except Baumgartner: *He visits her, understands her, sympathizes with her and the two make an island of mutual understanding, reciprocal tenderness, insulating themselves from the harshness, bullying and cruelty of the world around* (*Baumgartner's Bombay*: 10). This novel reflects different treatment of man woman relationship from her earlier novels. Both characters are interdependent and are alone in a different country, Lotte, fills the gap to a certain extent which is caused by his uprootedness. She is left alone after the death of Baumgartner. Her reaction on his death expresses the intensity of their relationship.

*Journey to Ithaca* (1994), the novel reveals the journey of two characters Matteo and Laila searching for enlightenment moves from ashram to ashram and from one Yogi to another for peace of mind, inner happiness. Matteo, alienated, escaping and an introvert man by nature married to Sophie, a confident journalist set out for India but does not find satisfaction, happiness with his wife Sophie too and their marriage undergoes the bitterness frustration-trauma soon. She came out like just another adventurer bent on enjoying the exotic beauties and delights of India. She had come to India with no intention to find Truth or God or guru. Sophie is unable to adjust to Matteo's way of life and thinking because he rates the world of Gurus as more real and true than the world of Sophie or his parents.

*Fasting Feasting* (1999) is the story of contrasting association between two cultures, the one Indian (Uma), belongs to the country of "fasting," refers to the religious aspect as well as an unwilling "fasting" of the many poor of the country and the other American (Arun), belongs to a country of "feasting," abundance. The first part of the novel deals with Uma, a tragic figure who seems to fail in everything she tries like: enthusiastic about school but fails in the exams; clumsy and therefore not good at housework; marriage fall one after another and at last resides with parents. Uma's little sister Aruna, in turn, is ambitious and attractive, has no trouble in getting married and soon enjoys a modern life in Bombay. In addition there are many other minor characters involved in the Indian part of the story, such as Anamika, Uma's cousin, who eventually dies as a result of an unhappy and violent marriage. Arun, the only son of the family gone for studies in America and resides there did not stand according to father's expectations and always try to avoid human contact but realizes that freedom does not guarantee happiness.

*The Zigzag Way* (2005) is a magical novel of elegiac beauty with mysterious and disturbing splashes of high-spirited color and darker violence. This novel is set in Mexico and Cornwall having fragmented structure. It is divided into four parts, titled: 'Eric arrives'; 'Vera stays'; 'Betty Departs' and 'La Noche de Los Muertos'. The first part describes Eric's travel to Mexico and his 'private quest' to trace his family's history to a Mexican town where Cornish miners toiled to the death a century ago. The second section concentrates on an Austrian dancer, Dona Vera, who comes to Mexico during the Second World War by marrying into a Mexican mining family and who subsequently reinvents herself as an expert on the Huichol Indians. The narrative shifts back to the past in the third section through frame narrative to describe Betty's diasporic life in Mexico as a wife of a Cornish miner during the year 1910. The final section traces the cross-cultural histories of mining and the Shoah in a zigzag fashion and links them to the present. Hence, the novel *The Zigzag Way* explores European and Mexican traumatic history to study its effect on migration, dislocation and settlement. Therefore, an interrelationship between memory, migration and history is reinforced through the structure of the novel.

## Conclusion

Hardy's novel writing is reflective of the great movement from the Victorian to the Modern. The range of the novel is fairly wide. He deals with social problems of marriage, unhappy wedlock, divorce and love affairs, subjected to merciless fate and mistreatment of women by men. During the Victorian age, a number of male novelists began writing about women, offering fine examples of varied treatment of feminist aspects. Thomas Hardy occupies an important place. It is, therefore, of great interest and value to examine the treatment of this subject in the major works of Thomas Hardy. In a certain sense, he could be considered a precursor of feminist movement.

However, Indo-Anglian fiction writer, Anita Desai's novel offer us artistic and absorbing pictures of relationship between man and woman, parent and child, individual and society. The persistent themes of her novels are human relationships, alienation, loneliness, East and West encounter, violence and death. As a woman, she is capable of understanding woman's psyche better than male writer. This can be seen in her portrayal of woman characters in novels with a rare insight and fineness of sentiment. The characters of her novels are basically tragic for even they accept their destiny, they refuse to surrender. Apart from temperamental aloofness, the outside forces, such as the city, nature and family play a major role in making them tragic. The physical, moral and spiritual misery of urban life results in alienation, loneliness and loss of human values and the protagonist fall victim to them. It eventually results in the attitude of defeat and

disillusionment leading to preoccupation with the idea of death. It can be concluded that Anita Desai has explored different aspects of feminine psyche and its effect on the human relationship and she has definitely given a new depth and meaning to the theme of man-woman relationship in her novels.

In all the novels, we come across that woman who is passive and vain as well as women who are ambitious and independent do not conform to the rigid moral codes and social systems. Since love has by no means the same meaning for both the sexes. Both the eminent writer of different era points out that it becomes the cause for serious misunderstanding that separate them. For a woman, love is not only devotion but a total surrendering of body and soul without any reservation. Encodes in her own sphere, under male domination love becomes one of the means to assert her worth. Hence, we find that women are enchanted by men's virility, wealth, distinction of manners and social status.

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