



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF PHARMACY & LIFE SCIENCES
(Int. J. of Pharm. Life Sci.)

**A Comparative Study of the Psychology of the Female
Characters in the selected Novels of Virginia Woolf and
Anita Desai**

Nidhi Pathak

Department of English, APS University, Rewa, (M.P.) - India

A critical and comparative study of Women Characters as portrayed by Virginia Woolf and Anita Desai needs preliminary discussions of the major prevailing conditions that had their corresponding impact on these writers. When Mrs. Woolf started writing her major novels, she had been influenced by the new technique in modern novels known as the Stream of Consciousness that became an influential force in the field of modern fiction. All the psychological theories propounded by Freud and Jung influenced the major writers of the twentieth century like D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf and others. Almost every modern writer tried to explore various psychological theories relating to human behavior and human relationship. Fresh exploration in psychological studies opened new vistas in the field of criticism, poetry and novels as a result of which we had the emergence of such critical concepts as 'Oedipus Complex,' 'Stream of Consciousness' and such other concepts. But the main influence of the new psychology was on the art of characterization leading to the emergence of some of the major writings in modern fictions. Novels like James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves* are some of the important examples of this group of novels.

As one the characters, one finds that a particular novelist is chiefly guided by altogether a new psychological theory, concept, or idea. Thus, a study of the portrayal of women character by Virginia Woolf immediately makes us confront with the major psychological crises that are created in the lives of women character vis-à-vis the various changing social circumstances that surround them.

Virginia Woolf must have absorbed many of the new ideas of psychology from her Bloomsbury friends, before 1920. Her short review, 'Freudian Fiction' shows a working acquaintance with the main principles of psychoanalysis. Lytton Strachey's brother James translated Freud's works into English, and they were first published in Britain by Virginia and Leonard

Woolf's Hogarth Press in 1924. Though Virginia Woolf did not read Freud for herself until the late 1930s, but obviously psychoanalytical interest and features of her novels can be accepted as part of the artistic community's response to new psychological theories of time. This new subject-matter was revolutionary, and was shocking to many. The traditional structure of human activity and of motive–decision– action– result was wiped out by Freud's theory of the unconscious. Dark impulses and hidden instincts took the place of speeches, conscious intentions, public behaviour and manners which gradually seemed to become irrelevant. Thus, there was a radical change of emphasis from the description of external reality to an attempt at description of the inner feelings. So the new subject-matter of psychology was an inseparable part to smash the conventions of the novel, and the need to find new technique and forms.

Further it may be noted that the exploration of feminist insight and experience is a recurrent theme in Virginia Woolf's novels. At the time when she was arguing against Arnold Bennett, Woolf had been particularly offended by the argument in his *Our Women* (1920) that intellectually and creatively man is superior to woman. She expressed her displeasure in essays, articles and letters to newspaper. She considered Bennett, Galsworthy and Wells as inferior writers whose conventions were ruined and whose tools were dead. She thought of them to be tyrannical patriarchs. Her consciousness of being a woman and a writer also urged Virginia Woolf cast down the conventions the patriarchs had built. The feminist subject-matter of her novels both influenced, and developed with her innovations in form and technique. Thus, being influenced with the new psychological thought and form, she is chiefly concerned with an unconscious level of experience in her characters. This means that her characters do not always work in a logical or rational way. We cannot expect to know what they will or what they feel from reading about their thoughts. In other words, Virginia Woolf presents most complicated

characters whose feelings and thinking can be properly understood only by an analysis of their mental processes. This is seen in almost all her novels where the characters' thoughts seem to contradict their feelings. This is chiefly because of the new psychological impact.

The character of Clarissa in *Mrs. Dalloway* beautifully illustrates this concept. Clarissa thinks in a way that appears to contradict her feelings. And in case of men, Peter Walsh also appears with contradictory ideas. It is clear that his mind is a web of contradictory feelings and thoughts. He identifies with conformist boys or rebellious young men. He laughs at the conformists and respects them. He has 'been through' the 'troubles of the flesh', or he 'trampled under temptations' in great renunciations. There are lists representing each side of Peter Walsh's conflict: on one side, 'duties, gratitude, fidelity, love of England;' on the other side, 'sensual pleasures or daily preoccupations', 'life, with its varieties, its iridescences' and 'temptations'. Peter Walsh is emotionally carried away, marching with the young soldiers and passing statues. He is carried away following a strange woman, living in a romantic seduction fantasy. Peter describes the strange woman's character using paradoxes. She has contradictory pairs of qualities, being 'young, but stately; merry but discreet, black, but enchanting'. We know that Peter has been attracted to Clarissa for a long time, and we know that he is in love with a young fair haired woman called Daisy, in India. It seems reasonable to suggest that 'stately..... discreet black' may be the restrained and cold qualities of Clarissa; and 'young... merry... enchanting' are the qualities he looks for in Daisy, which he also looked for in Clarissa before she rejected him. The young woman of his fantasy then is better than either the woman he lost or the woman he has won: she is a combination of the two.

Similarly, when we analyze her novel *To The Lighthouse*, we find the same kind of psychological analysis that reveals the mind of the character: "for Mrs. Ramsay outside life falls away; and a sunken, dark self rises to the surface, becoming activities." (Marsh, 1988 : 32) The mental processes thus represented are plain. Mrs. Ramsay's conscious control of her mind is relaxing, and the part of her mind that is normally hidden, her unconscious, is rising to the surface. Phrases like 'children don't forget' are quite significant. We know that her son James has been hurt by his father, and that he only resolves the dispute on the eventual journey to the lighthouse years later, after Mrs. Ramsay's death. Mrs. Ramsay has negotiated between her husband and her son, and has tried to calm the boy's feeling but the underlying truth she knows is

that 'children don't forget.'

Next Mrs. Ramsay says 'It' will end'. Perhaps 'It' which has a capital 'I' refers to the details and duties of her everyday life. We know that Mrs. Ramsay acts as the focal point for her large family and for her visitors and takes all the pressure of their conflicts and moods upon herself. The underlying truth she knows is that this duty and labour is not eternal: 'It will end', as all activities end with death. Mrs. Ramsay's next 'little phrase' is 'it will come', which implies that death will come. We know that she has ambivalent feelings about the efforts she makes in her day-to-day life. She feels that she must continue to make these efforts, but she is weary and sometime longs to give up. So, her dual attitude to death both postponing it and desiring it is aptly expressed in the two phrases 'it will end' and 'it will come'.

Finally, she adds 'We are in the hands of the Lord.' This phrase expresses two relevant feelings; first, an absolute and passive submission to a greater power, second, the phrase reminds her of death's inevitability, further, the phrase suggests either religious faith or the desire for a religious faith. This is the thought that breaks the spell and Mrs. Ramsay reacts against it with annoyance. As we go through the novel the metaphors develop further. The light that helped to include her trance is now like a searchlight. Its power is hinted in 'met the third stroke' and confirmed in 'searching' and purifying out of existence'. It seems that this phrase, part of the 'wedge of darkness' that she willingly encouraged, is unwelcome and must be destroyed because it is a 'lie'. Also, the Lighthouse is Mrs. Ramsay looking at herself 'like her own eyes meeting her own eyes.' By the end of the passage, however, she has connected the identity she feels with the beam of light, with much softer and more natural things, 'trees, stream, flowers'; and looking into herself she no longer sees a lie being purified 'out of existence' but, 'there curled up off the floor of the mind, rose from the lake of one's being a mist, a bride to meet her lover'. A change has clearly taken place. There was something offensive, and she turned the light on it to destroy it. A moment later, however, the light sees 'a mist' which is compared to a woman's sexual desire expressed in the language of weddings; and we know how important marriages are to Mrs. Ramsay. In the middle of this process, Virginia Woolf says that she 'praised herself..... without vanity, for she was searching she was beautiful'. But this phrase 'without vanity' might be a 'misfit phrase'. And unexpected phrase 'without vanity' stands out because it is false modesty: everything else about the sentence emphasizes her pride in her beauty and in her stern, honest character.

The sentence shows the building up of an ego in Mrs. Ramsay. Meanwhile, the repetitive activity led her into dangerous trance when her knitting is 'suspended.'

By using the summary technique, one can find out the new process in Mrs. Ramsay: "*Mrs. Ramsay tries to expel a thought from her mind. However, it does not disappear, but changes into something vague and attractive,*" (Woolf 1927 : 57-59) These characters have tried to expel thoughts from their minds before but this paragraph reveals another consequence of the process: the unwelcome thought changes into something more attractive, with romantic attributes. So it seems that Mrs. Ramsay's character in the novel wholly confirms this process, which brings unwelcome ideas into romantic 'mist,' is at the heart of her character. Thus, it makes us understand why she imagines herself matchmaking for the Rayleys and others, and why Lily feels such pressure from her to marry William Bankes.

Moving deeper into the novel, we find the tone of internal argument. We see the mind of Mrs. Ramsay arguing against the 'lie', the unwelcome thought, trying to banish it thoroughly from her mind. Eventually, Mrs. Ramsay has fought her way out of the relaxations of her trance, and 'without being aware of it' she knits on, 'firm,' 'stiffened,' and 'in a habit of sternness'. The novel thus reveals certain mental process to us. First, Mrs. Ramsay's repetitive, passive state is conveyed as a kind of trance suggested by hypnotic agents (the Lighthouse) and automatic activity (her knitting). Second, she tries to repress an unwelcome thought, diverting her mind to pleasanter subjects, boosting her ego, and arguing against the hostile idea. Third, the hostile thought undergoes a change which manifests itself into something more attractive after it has been pushed out of her mind. This thorough self analysis brings us to an extraordinary subtler perception into the character of Mrs. Ramsay. It shows Virginia Woolf's creative insight and the detailed naturalness, the convincing logic of the way her character's mind works. While considering the novel as a whole, these small and short moments explain many of the larger traits of the character. But one should not forget that Mrs. Ramsay is a literary character created by the author to serve her purpose. Mrs. Woolf tries to expose how the prominent features of a personality especially their aims and dreams, have their origin in something else which has been rejected or 'repressed'. For example, Mrs. Ramsay's preoccupation with marriage is seen to arise out of her ambivalence about death, and her repressed desire for a religious faith.

Secondly, she is writing about modern consciousness: Mrs. Ramsay's rational analysis of an unjust world, her

concern for 'the poor' and her strict oppositions to belief she considers false, make up a rational liberal attitude that was relatively new when the novel was written. Finally, she writes about death. Mrs. Ramsay avoids the thought of death except in rare moments by filling her mind with duties and activities for her family. On the other hand, her weariness of constant struggle and effort is shown, suggesting that we may also desire death. It is also in the context of death that life seems without purpose, and responsibility for rationalizing our existence is an unnatural burden, impossible to sustain.

At the end, it may be noted that the themes of *To The Lighthouse* are broadly applicable to *Mrs. Dalloway* as well Clarissa's parties, and mending her dress are part of an effort she devotes to maintaining her self-image as 'Mrs. Dalloway', wife, mother and hostess Clarissa's regrets about Peter Walsh, and her ambivalent feelings about suicide, are an undercurrent comparable to Mrs. Ramsay's desire to give up, to rest, and her ambivalent attitude to death.

Thus, when we analyze the women characters of Virginia Woolf, we find that she chiefly goes into the mental process, psychological reaction and various other psychoanalytical exploration of her women character vis-à-vis the thoughts and actions of the male characters. Such psychoanalytical study adds new dimensions to her novels as well as makes her characters most lively and realistic.

As one moves from Virginia Woolf to the women characters of Anita Desai one finds that like Virginia Woolf, she presents her stories from the middle, flashing backward and forward revealing the entire story in a dramatic sequence. Above all, like Virginia Woolf, Anita Desai is interested chiefly in presenting the various reactions that the women make in altogether different situation as the success or failure of a woman lies in her tact of dealing with such situation. She believes that the role of women changes according to changing situations. Above all, she wants that her women character should find their true self only with a correct self realization. It is with such belief and art of characterization that Anita Desai has been able to project her women character in her novels.

Anita Desai is rated as a great artist chiefly in her art of characterization, displaying psychological insight into the inner self, painting a realistic picture of Indian setting and background. But it is her deep interest in her women and their reaction to the various aspects of life that add a new dimension to her novels. Not only does she excel in portraying these feminine characters but also makes a psychological study to lay bare the innermost feelings of these women. Such pre-

occupation seems quite natural on her part, for she, like her characters, is very sensitive and it is this trait that gives her an insight to make a very successful study of her women. Mr. Srivastava aptly observes on this aspect of her art:

Being a sensitive woman novelist and gifted with good observation, sensitive, a penetrating analysis and a skill to paint with words, Anita Desai creates a rich gallery of characters, both male and female though dominated by the latter. (XXXVIII)

It is to be noted here that the novels of Anita Desai are not meant to explain theories of philosophy and psychology, but they reveal her involvement for the upliftment of women who are seen as worst sufferers, highly suppressed by a social 'tantalization' or marital discord. Her sensitiveness and sincerity, therefore, have driven her to study the women and their reaction to the various social, economic, political and cultural taboos under which they are struggling in their destitute conditions.

Her feminine characters, while revealing their psychological reactions, usually point out to the changing environment in a given society. The conflict of a country with its history is seen through a woman like Sita's attempts to confront her past. Brijraj Singh thus observes:

And even as Desai works on the limited canvas of middle class Civil Lines Delhi. She is able to bring into her work the larger political themes of day: Partition, Hindu-Muslim riots Independence and the new India, and the emancipation of women. Desai's world may be small, but it is a world through which the same winds blow as sweep through the whole of the sub-continent. (Ibid : 190)

It becomes quite clear, as one comes across various characters that Anita Desai makes her own choice in portraying her characters; they are always selected from those women who have been subjected to social injustice and mental or psychological torture. Regarding the choice of these characters she observes:

I am interested in characters who are not average but have retreated or been driven into some extremity of despair and so turned against or made a stand against, the general current. It is easy to flow with current, it makes no demands, it costs no effort. But those who cannot follow it, whose heart cries out "the great". No who fight the current and struggle against it, they know what the demands are and what it costs to meet them. (Dalmia 1979)

Whatever may be the reasons, it is, as mentioned earlier, the feminine sensibility that always encourages her to emphasize on their portrayal.

Darshan Singh Maini considers her first novel, *Cry*,

The Peacock as "a typically 'feminine' novel, not because it is a story of a woman told by a woman, but because ... it is the fruit of feminine sensibility..." R.S. Sharma considers that the novelist through Maya's tragedy, conveys "social fatalism into a coherent pattern to communicate the tender sensibility of a woman." (quoted in Bande 1988 : 12)

Female characters are given prime importance in all her novels in which the artist focuses in displaying the innermost feelings and deep recess lurking in the hearts of these women. In all her major works like *Cry*, *The Peacock*, *Where Shall We Go This Summer*, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, *Fire on the Mountain*, *Clear Light of Day*, *In Custody* and *Baumgartner's Bombay*, she lays equal emphasis on the feminine characters and takes special interest in projecting the essential features that dominate their characters. In almost all these works, women, who are portrayed as the chief protagonists and who are depicted as suffering in a meticulous world dominated by men, who in the guise a father, a brother, a husband or a lover, presents a constant threat to their integrity, intuition, peace and happiness. These characters are painted in various colours and play varied roles – starting from the role of housewives to that of enlightened professionals in educational institutions; in each and every changing situation, they have reacted sometimes violently and sometimes silently, unheard, unknown by others. The restricted surroundings have treated them as helpless birds of cage. The shadow-play of success and failure of these women has opened a new vista in novel writing. The result of this anatomy will certainly be far-fetching and quite interesting.

Maya, the most important character in the novel *Cry*, *The Peacock*, is carefully drawn by the author. She experiences and feels more than it is discrete or desirable. Her sensitiveness obsessed by a childhood prophecy of disaster prevents her from leading a normal life with husband Gautama.

Toto's death is the first sign of her abnormality which invokes a series of consequent reactions. The usual decaying of flesh seems unusually terrific to her which suggests her highly emotional and hysterical response to worldly events. Soon after the incident, the agony of missing the pet lurks in the blank spaces of her mind, making her more and more restless. What disturbs her more is the crazy sense of self-centeredness of the material world and the deserted, abandoned line of appreciation of life both big and small. The cold indifference of Gautama is presented against deep concern of Maya for Toto.

It is important to note here that glimpses of changing modern life are brought for more constructive effect.

Maya's suffering is her own creation – this is the trait that governs the heroines of Anita Desai. Her classic sense of enjoyment fails to appreciate the club life. Mrs. Desai's heroines are not ordinary women. They are women of sense and sensibility. Maya, in the second part of the novel, with a high sense of values can differentiate right from the wrong. Dance and dinner cause her headache. The black mask of humanity, sadistic pleasure associated with the cabarets, and crazy colour of the dim-lit-club with the drummer – his teeth flashing 'white in a dark, simian face' are like fragments building up a citadel of highly hudiabastic display of humanity, of aesthetic life, is conveyed much more powerfully through this hatred for cabaret dancers. This ultra-modern sense of enjoyment that becomes a threat to modern life, squeezes her of ardency. She remarks herself:

..... I felt myself trapped at an oneitic ball where the black masks that I had imagined to be made of paper turned out to be of living flesh, and the living flesh was only a mockery, a gathering of crackling paper. It was perverse, it was wrong, but it was a fact, a fact that in that macabre half-light with its altering tints, at an hour when those values would have been all-important. (1973 : 242)

In a sense, it is this humanitarian trend of Maya's personality that influences her view of the parties. Parties, no more, provide entertainment. They are hollow parties giving detestable information about something or other, discussing loop-holes in other's family life. They are not benevolent but exhibit an air of superficiality and the children in the process are neglected, most, perspiring in sleep, chasing an imitation a foreign custom under the veil of falsity. The futility of shaking off this weakness, instead of making her character weak, points out more of her sense of morality and lack of acceptance of modern life.

Mrs. Desai, while projecting the character of Maya with all her miseries and sufferings, also analyses the shortcomings and drawbacks that add to her difficulties in life. One of the basic flaws in Maya's character is her inability to reciprocate. This is the fact behind a series of bitter experiences. She demands Gautama's attentions. She wants to be the centre of his thought and action and access to his exclusively enclosed male world. But one thing is strictly forgotten by her that demand should be accelerated by efficiency. The cross-currents of life drift them apart revealing more and more of their inefficiency. Arjun's complete dependence upon servants strengthen this.

Her failure to find preoccupation, submergence of her self and life is hinted. The way she shuts herself in her room in summer days and her leisurely and self-

contented life brings 'no promise', no sweetness but like summer heat burns her own self. Apart from these, Mays'a character unfolds a new vista of novel writing. She is delineated as a unique character of suffering.

In her next novel *Voices in the City*, Anita Desai, presents another image of woman through the character of Monisha whose suffering, *The Peacock*, is her own creation. Her extraordinary power of visualization, as is usual with Anita Desai's heroines, endows her with sharp reactions against the two other voices, of Nirode and Amala, are presented to bring out the exact quality of the character. It seems that like Jane Austen, Mrs. Desai is also interested in comparative characterization. Gilbert Ryle puts it as follows:

She pinpoints the exact quality of character in which she is interested, and the exact degree of that quality, by matching it against the same quality in different degrees, against simulation of that quality, against deficiencies of it, and against qualities. (1986 : 108)

Voices in the City is a struggle for freedom. It is high sense of honouring euphoric individualism that separates Monisha, Amla and Nirode from the rest of the stream. Through personal suffering, through renunciation of the putrid world, to unite self and the soul-the characters chase their own solutions. To be freed from doubt and disillusion through her adoration for 'our feet in the grass,' Amla's appreciation of art, and painter Dharma and Nirode's experiments with failure enforce this. Ironically enough, elder characters like Aunt Lila interpret it as the 'diseased young generation' and feel dejected. Images of emancipation, the horse in the race course trying to escape beyond the city, the kite flying high, strengthen this. Monisha's unnatural silence and unobtrusiveness only emphasize the distance she has covered from 'reality into realm of colourlessness.'

Philosophy is a great fascination for the heroines of Mrs. Desai. It is this philosophical interpretation of sentiments that regulate the pattern they follow. In moments of difficulty, she recites passages from the *Bhagbat Gita*. She obligates herself with higher objects like the fruits of action, attachment, involvement, wisdom. These contrive to explain substantially her detachment through which the spiritual quest is made towards a greater attainment. Peace is the ultimate wisdom to end all misery—this principle captivates her for the attainment of meditative mind that will enable to land in a visionary secluded world of her won, devoid of all misery. The radical changes brought forth, put up a great challenge to the characters. Social changes have brought a remarkable devaluation in the standards of living. 'Harsh voice', 'Putrid breaths' and 'moist palms' emphasize increasing darkness poverty

and disease. Overflowing gutters, speak of the 'uneasy lassitude of conscience'. Trade houses with swelling iron safe; declare shunning of ethics and the modern cult of materialism. To Monisha, there is no escape from it. The 'yellow flame' of bitterness, the bonfire of anger- burning of trams and buses and of innocent - victims reminds us of T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* where we come across similar sickening sight. Monisha is terribly tired of this vast crowd, leans over and shivers at this ugly sight of the city. Even at night there is no relief. The sunset is all 'ashes and swamped by smog'. Images of decay, of disintegration, endow a suffocating sensation to the entire novel. The stars seem pale with tuberculosis. Monisha fails to pull herself on amidst this sordidness, the wasteland of civilized humanity.

In spite of clumsiness in spiritual crisis of the characters, Mrs. Desai has emphasized the monotonous cryptic bargains of a feminine mind. Monisha, like Maya, is a victim of the situation. The diminished dingy situation of the physical world drains out every drop of life from her. Her success is a confession of failure; through her reaction she disregards the idea that women place themselves in bondage to men, whether in marriage or out of marriage. All their joy and ambition are channeled that way, while they go parched themselves. The end of the quest is at last clear. Her reaction is violent but it upholds that death is more welcome than mere existence.

To sum up, Anita Desai's portrayal of women characters, the first feature that strikes everyone is her psychoanalytic method along with the use of what may be called the 'poetic prose.' She has, however, added a new dimension to her fiction by taking up the cause of the neglected class of the society. Her prime concern is to lay bare the hard covering of emotions and to bring out sheer womanliness in them to prove that they are also human beings who are in search of love and affection in life. Maya might not have been an introvert and a killer or Monisha, a self destroyer or Nanda, an exiled among the crowd, had they got sympathetic attention from their husbands. Feminine sensibility of Anita Desai has prompted her to explore those tender areas of characters which have been neglected for years in India. Their projection, therefore, marks a new age: "These rebel-victims are not the outcome of an eccentric vision of the author but they are indicative of the emergence of this disquieting stance which modern literate stands to project." (1988 : 20)

Each and every woman of her has a better understanding of marital life. Major and minor-every portrait is well thought and befitting to the position acquired in the novel. A helpless Mira Masi unfolds the shrunken past of Bim and her family. Thus, Mrs. Desai

by projecting women comparatively in sober roles tries to focus on their submissiveness. Sita at last reconciles and Nanda retreats to a lonely place with all their suppressed agonies to keep the wheel of life running. Bim excuses Raja by her introspection under clear light of day.

Anita Desai believes that "A woman novelist has something new to bring," and she has brought it or at least tried to bring. She has continued to produce novels which elicit wide-spread critical interpretation. Within the thematic context of exploring the depths of human behaviour, the settings range from the pre-and post-Independent India to England and Berlin. The wide variety of settings, the use of different tones and surface structures of her novels present dilemmas to critics who try to make an assessment of her literary works.

While projecting the various traits of her women characters, Mrs. Desai expresses her dislikes for warrior's attitude in women, though in spite of such attitude, she does create characters like Maya, Sita and Bim. She seems to point out that role of women changes according to situations. Therefore, Maya in a killer's role is as much acceptable as Sita in unruly wife's role. Bim is befitting to the role of a manager and teacher because of the peculiar situation. They want to fight and prove the power of women. But under this hard shell of a warrior, the soul of a brooding spirit with the desire of living like a perfect individual comes to the notice.

Mrs. Desai believes that elder women as manageress of family affairs should be in full control of the house. Their carelessness may bring disaster to the family. Monisha's mother, Bim's mother, Raka and Sita's mother are examples of this type. On the other hand, the Punjabi lady in *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, Gautama's mother, Aunt Lila and Mira Masi are quite successful as mothers and manageress. She also paints women in artist's role. Except Amla and Menaka, others are not seen with painting or drawing. But Mrs. Desai has described vividly the artistic bent of mind of the chief protagonists in every novel. In fact, this spirit of the artist is responsible for their personal agony and disaster. Each novel is rich with highly sensuous poetic passages. The appreciation of these passages describes the state of mind of the characters and their perfection as artists.

Mrs. Anita Desai seems to rise to great heights in her art of characterization, particularly when she makes use of history in order to make her women find their true self or come back to a correct self-realization. In his illuminating comparative study of the use of history and the individual, Dieter Riemenschneider aptly

observes :

Thus by directing her explorative beam of light deeper and deeper into their lives, the past of her adult characters, Desai reveals more and more of their true selves to us and to themselves. Tara and Bim eventually realize who they really are so that they can live more truthfully to themselves and each other. Bim becomes reconciled to her expectations from life; Tara accepts living with her past failings, as we have said, without blaming others or seeking their forgiveness. The past, experienced in its fullness needs no further explanation. (1990 : 190)

Thus, a comparative study of each of the two novelists in the parameter of psychological theories and psychoanalytical interpretation, distinctly reveals that both Virginia Woolf and Anita Desai are chiefly concerned with the psychoanalysis of the minds of their characters, essentially the women characters who

occupy usually the centre place in their novels. Needless to say, each novelist has been influenced basically by the modern psychological interpretation of their behaviour, actions, reactions and response under given circumstances. Of course, in case of Virginia Woolf, we may note that there is direct impact of the various psychological treatises and psychological doctrines which were easily available to her as she belonged to a literary circle that was close to the emergence of psychology as a fresh subject. In case of Anita Desai we find the artist is making use of such psychological study through a filtered process so as to arrive correct application of these psychological theories on her characters. In any case it can be concluded that both the artists have achieved great success in delineation of their characters in general and the portrayal of their women characters in particular chiefly through psychoanalytical process.

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How to cite this article

Pathak N. (2016). A Comparative Study of the Psychology of the Female Characters in the selected Novels of Virginia Woolf and Anita Desai. *Int. J. Pharm. Life Sci.*, 7(10-11):5332-5338.

Source of Support: Nil; Conflict of Interest: None declared

Received: 28.10.16; Revised: 09.11.16; Accepted: 20.11.16