
Rendering Women as a Powerful Social Constituent In

Anita Brookner's *Family And Friends* And *A Closed Eye*

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ABSTRACT:

The word Novel, when it is considered with its parts of speech falls under the category of noun and adjective. Popular dictionaries give the meaning as a story long enough to fill a complete book, in which the characters and events are usually imaginary. As adjectives it forms a different meaning: different from anything known before, new, interesting and often seeming slightly strange. It is true that some novels stay with the readers for a long time. Of course their theme strikes those who read a novel. The present paper is on how the genre is relevant for all time and retains its place so far. Two novels of a British author are taken for discussion with common perspective for its analysis some unusual way of its characterisation. Though the novel tells about the women perspective it is very cautious to evade from regular lamentation of women. Anita Brookner would be a novelist of present day after reading this paper. This paper focuses on two novels of her: *Family and Friends* and *A Closed Eye*.

Key Words: Novel; British Literature; Anita Brookner; Characterisation; Women;

INTRODUCTION:

The paper discusses a relevant theme which is related to women from British Literature. Anita Brookner is such a novelist who can reflect the present ambience through her novels. The biography of Brookner will be interesting that it gives the details as such. She is not only a novelist, but also an art historian. She was born in Herne Hill in London in July 16, 1928. She is Jewish by nature. Brookner spends her childhood days in a lovely atmosphere because her family members were treated as refugees due to the World War II. Her novels are highly influenced by her own life experience; they explore the theme from life and of isolation, emotional loss and difficulties in associating her with the English society. Her novels typically depict the intellectual, middle-class women, who suffer due to isolation, emotional loss and disappointments in love. The novels of Brookner say about the children of European immigrants who experience difficulties with fitting into English life. Many of the characters appear to be of Jewish descent. The peculiar things in Brookner's novels are the titles are catchy to the readers. The trademark heroine of Brookner's early novels is middle-aged intellectual who had sacrificed her youthful happiness to a controlling parent. The protagonist is characteristically contrasted with non-intellectual or selfish figure, who is rewarded at the end. Often Brookner's central character unknowingly competes with this figure for love and traditional role in society and losses. Brookner's *Family and Friends* (1985) a generational story centers upon a family of German immigrants in England over several decades. Brookner's style of writing has the lonely theme; it has been compared to Henry James, Jane Austen and George Eliot. Critics praise her novels and her ability in portraying the complex psychological motivations in simple and

eloquent language. Brookner has been praised for her style of depiction of the middle-aged women and their sufferings.

The characters in Brookner's novels are more in number. The present paper confines the view on her two novels *Family and Friends* (1985) and *A Closed Eye* (1991). Characters do not merely support a plot to move further; they have conflicts and dimensions, which aid the plot to fix into a genre. As Gass says in his *The Concept of Character in Fiction*: "Great character is the most obvious single mark of great Literature. Great Literature is great because its characters are great, and they are memorable" (269). Characters are categorized as simple, complex, detailed, flat and round. However, meaningful characters have hope, concern, fear, and looking forwardness; in that way the readers could sometimes relate themselves to a particular character. Students of literature can always remember some of the remarkable characters of Jane Austen, Virginia Woolf and other writers. Anita Brookner is such a woman writer who well understands the psyche of women. In that sense there are a few unique women in her two novels *Family and Friends* (1985) and *A Closed Eye* (1992). An accepted idea is there that women are soft by nature. Women are treated as extreme elements, likes either celebrated as God's gift or beaten as Devils. Some of the universal codes for characterisation of a woman include beauty-conscious, motherly concern and prolonged dependency.

BROOKNER'S *Family And Friends*

Brookner adopted some codes; however, she is very clear in portraying these qualities. She has immense examples to explain. The protagonists of her novels are multitaled, independent but still dependent. They are courageous but cautious. One such character is Sofka, the protagonist of *Family and Friends*. She is educated belonging to an aristocratic family. Though she is a widow she is able to bring up her four children. She is very keen in maintaining the aristocracy. Therefore she has to be strict towards her children. Mimi and Betty are the two daughters of Sofka. She sends them to music class. She wants them to be well-educated and be best in maintaining the great heritage of their family. This attitude is very clear towards her sons, Alfred and Fredrick: "The boys will marry eventually but their brides must be carefully chosen; they will have to be of a suitable pattern to conform with the family destiny. For the family by that stage would once again be rich, very rich"(11). Women are capable of doing multiple works at a time. Sofka is such a woman who is well versed in supervising. She has the quality of bringing others to her control. In that way she has Fredrick in her hold. Sofka wishes that he should resemble her husband, Mr.Dorn, in all his attitudes. She engages him to their family business with Alfred, her younger son, for his support. As a mother she should be in support of maintaining the basic etiquette. Sometimes, she should encourage her son's mischief towards his girl friends. Both her sons are two sides of a coin; they differ in their character. Fredrick seems to be a playboy: "Fredrick might break hearts and he will have her permission to do so"(11). On the other hand, Alfred is a serious soul who has business as a primary thought. Sofka believes Alfred completely for the improvement of their business: "Alfred in her hope and her investment" (11). With Alfred's help Sofka is sure that she will once again come into her kingdom. As how Sofka dedicates her sons to business, she dedicates her daughters to establish their richness.

A remarkable point to be noted in Brookner's *Family and Friends*, other than characterization, is the introduction of characters. The author has used a kind of new technique by using photographs. She introduces almost all characters through photographs. This seems to be innovative because it does not give an effect of reading a novel; instead it gives an effect of seeing a movie. First person narration is used in the novel. The narrator in the novel is not related in any other way to the characters. It starts with introducing Sofka, the protagonist of the novel, her two sons and daughters. Each and every main character is introduced and it moves on from their childhood to the present age of the scene. This is known as zooming or telescopic movement. Opening lines of the novel stands as a fine example for this technique:

Here is Sofka in a wedding photograph; Sofka stands straight and stern, her shoulders braced, her head erect in the manner of two generations earlier. Behind her stand her two daughters, beautiful also but looking curiously tubercular. Sofka's eldest son, her pride and joy, smiles easily, already a lazy conqueror. He stands between the two girls, an escort rather than a brother. Yes, Alfred must be the one on the right. All around, there are lesser members of the cast, relations by marriage. (7)

Sofka comes under the category of flat character, for she does not undergo any change. Though she is the protagonist, her character strengthens with the help of minor characters. Initially her character appears to be rude, but it is meant to bring up her family. This is the single idea in her mind; she ponders on it, and lives on it.

Sofka's daughters, Betty and Mimi, are independent in their way. Sofka allows them to learn piano. She wants her daughters to represent their aristocracy. When one analyses the character of these two daughters, one could see the contrast images. Mimi and Betty will be helpful to each other. Mimi is a girl who would be adjustable and responsible in all her works. Betty is more modern and she wants her purpose to be fulfilled somehow. Maintaining long hair reflects the fertility of a woman. This is a tradition in Indian culture too. Brookner has adopted this idea and presented it for the two daughters. Both brush each other's hair. Sometimes they go hand in hand. Mimi is more mature than Betty. Mimi who has more love on her family can be compared to God of Venus. God of Venus is a mythological character.

Robert Graves in his seminal work *The White Goddess* describes three kinds of women. He compares them to three mythological characters. According to him,

First comes the elusive Diana or Maiden figure, the young girl; next the Venus figure, Goddess of love, sex and fertility; then the Hecate figure, called by Graves the Crone, Goddess of the underworld, who presides over death and has oracular powers. (Qtd. in Dhawan 1989, 228)

Thus he compares a woman who gives love and fertility to Venus. This will be more suitable for Mimi. She is older to Betty; naturally she is matured in her behaviour. She takes more care towards Betty and provides whatever she needs. Frank Cariani, son of her music teacher Mr. Cariani admires Mimi, but Betty tries to turn his attention towards her. When the girls attain their 18th birthday they are legally eligible to take over their share. This is an asset issued to the girls of the family. When Betty runs away from home with all those property in search of Frank,

it is Mimi who traces Betty's move : "... as Mimi rounds the corner by the blind stone wall and comes alongside the Cafe- Bar des Acacias, she is quite relieved and even moved to see Betty sitting there" (63). It is Alfred and Mimi who go in search of Betty, but only Mimi could find Betty.

At one point of the novel Mimi is compared to Goddess of love and fertility, she undergoes the trauma of common woman. It is inevitable that every woman has to marry a man. It is not because of love they have for that particular man whom their parents choose. Many times it is for the sake of society they live in. Let it be any woman for that matter, across the boundary, they have to obey the unwritten law. This happens to Brookner's Venus, Mimi. Mimi happens to marry a man who is older to her. She refuses initially because she does not love him. Every woman reader will have the question 'Is marriage not a bond of love between the couple?' unanswered. It is understood that marriage is different from love. This is further emphasised through the conversation between Sofka and Mimi. Women can be named in other way as scapegoat. This will be a suitable name for women of all periods.

Betty is complete contrast to the character of Mimi. Brookner has shown the dominant character and the warm character in parallel. According to Grave's theory, Betty can be called the elusive Diana, the young girl. She wishes to be young forever. She does not care for other's wish. She does everything whatever she needs. Sofka thinks that hair is a great possession for a girl. Despite these naughty characters Betty is described as a beauty queen. Brookner before becoming a novelist was known as a world – renowned art critic, specialist of eighteenth century French painting. She sometimes uses painting as a reference to describe the beauty:

With the ivory cigarette-holder between her teeth and her finger nails painted bright red, with her legs crossed high, her brooding eyes and her sharp teeth, Betty looks like a painting by Forijita, a native Parisian, a Bohemian, a fallen angel. (40)

With that beauty she thinks of attracting Frank. She decides to follow Frank and not to return home: "Betty is not entirely bad. She wants to capture Frank Cariani before her sister comes to realize how much she cares about him". (43)

The characterisation of Betty can be fixed to the image of Pocahontas' Daughter too. Pocahontas loved one man and married another. Likewise Betty initially has an attraction and love for Frank. However, she marries a Hungarian by origin Markus. The appearance, mannerism and the banner, a producer's son, attracts Betty more. She desires to become an artist. She learns dance and music. She changes her name as Bunny after coming to Paris. She wants to call her name by this way and she decides to keep this as her stage name. Thus she plans to marry Markus: "Half an hour after meeting Max Markus who has taken his uncle's more influential surname, Betty does something entirely out of character. She falls in love with him" (94). The destiny of Brookner's women characters is that they would feel lonely or lack of humanity at a point of time. Whether it is intentional an unintentional is a different question. Betty faces the destiny in this novel. Though she is a next major dominating character to Sofka, she too experiences a kind of distress in her life. All the other minor characters are Netti, Dolly, Evie, daughter-in-law of Sofka, Muriel, Lilie and Ursie contribute their strong presence in a few events.

BROOKNER'S *A Closed Eye*

Brookner thus presents the women characters completely as the way she wants them to be. They are independent, lovable, self-respected, and mentally strong. Similarly she portrays some of the women characters in another novel *A Closed Eye* (1992). Harriet Lyton is one of the characters who represent modern women, where they face confusion after their marriage. She too faces loneliness, but recovers herself by taking an alternate. She is a woman who awakens at her middle age. She is not in a way as Sofka sees life. Brookner designs the character of Harriet as a round one. She undergoes the changes, awakening, at her middle age. Harriet is happy with her friends Tessa, Pamela and Mary until she faces an unexpected pressure that she has to marry a man who is older to her. This is one of the destinies, which Brookner's heroines have to face. It is one of the major reasons which feeds up Harriet in her life. The second reason is series of death in her family--her intimate friend Tessa of cancer, her own daughter Imogen of car accident and her husband due to illness. After all these she decides that Lizzie, daughter of Tessa, would be a fine shelter. Brookner's characterisation almost reflects her real life incidents. Therefore she designs Harriet's character in such a way that, sometimes one might hate her or empathise with her. Tessa, Pamela, Mary, Lizzie, Elizabeth, Imogen, Mrs. Dodd, Dawn and Miss Wetherby are some of the other round characters in the novel.

Reading this novel gives the layout that Harriet has a complex because of her birthmark. It becomes a vital reason that she bounds herself to very few friends. Merle, mother of Harriet, worries much about the birthmark,

Except, 'Oh Lord', said Merle when shown the baby. 'It may fade as she gets older', said the nurse, pulling the shawl a little tighter round the baby's face, where the red mark appeared so incongruous beneath the wide innocent eyes. Merle felt for her, as well as love, a wide innocent eyes. Merle felt for her, as well as love, a kind of reluctant pity, almost a distaste. (16)

Harriet is known as Hattie in her friend's circle. A child which is brought up in isolation will face practical difficulties in its life time. The child will have a hesitation to mingle with others; it remains as a silent soul forever. That will not give freedom for the child to come out with its ideas. Communication and sharing thoughts lead the life of a human being. Everyone in the world is dependent. Reading the novel gives that most of the characters face psychological problem, not in terms of medical ideology but in general. Hattie's character is more applicable to this ideology. Regarding Hattie she is brought up in a secular state. She never gets a chance to worry about anything. She lives the life in her own terms. She does not even show any sign of opposition when she ought to marry Freddie Lyton who is older to her. She remains the same until she meets Jack. She could feel the change when she sees Jack. She longs to have a man like him. Her days are lifeless unlike Imogen, daughter, comes into her life.

Brookner's novels give much importance to relations. Reading Brookner's biographical sketch provides the information that she has experienced the same sense of loneliness. She belongs to Jewish family, having had her academic career in England. She finds difficulty in adapting herself to the new circumstances. Question of belongingness to which part of country, is always

there in her. That reflects in her characterisation. Brookner spends enough time in shaping the character of Lizzie, the next important character in the novel *A Closed Eye*. She is the daughter of Tessa; she travels throughout the novel on par with Harriet. Lizzie is introduced to the readers in a different way. Judging the character of Lizzie would take two more reading to the readers. Lizzie is physically weak from her birth. She is forced to spend her earlier days in Hattie's house. It gives her a feel of an alien and she longs for motherly love. Wellington Square where Lizzie spends her time is not a place for her to live peacefully. Immy, daughter of Hattie, was always there to show the domination. Dawn, the servant maid, takes care both children remarks the pathetic condition of Lizzie: " 'Lizzie might as well be a weekly boarder here,' said Dawn, who liked the child. 'And she's not happy. Anyone can see she's unhappy here'" (77). It can be taken that this statement is purely the acknowledgement of Brookner's childhood days.

Throughout the novel *A Closed Eye* one could feel the confessional tone of Brookner. In poetry there are poets who are called confessional poets. Similarly, if it is possible in fiction, Brookner can be named as a confessional Novelist or Writer. Brookner highlights the masculine quality in female. Generally woman has both masculine and feminine quality. A woman is known as bold when the male feature dominates. Lizzie is often portrayed as one who is endowed with the masculine features in her. That gives her maturity even in her younger age:

Lizzie made her way independently, sometimes driven by Tessa, sometimes trudging on her own. They saw less of Lizzie these days. She was capable of going straight home on her own, and she preferred to. For a child of eight she was oddly mature. (104)

A good writer would possess certain strange habits apart from reading books, like, migrating to a lonely place to write. Often a writer is portrayed as an odd person. As it is already mentioned that the characterisation of Lizzie is a mirror of Brookner, the idea of becoming a writer arises at her early days. When she is asked about her future plan, she is able to say that it is to become a writer.

Reading the novel *A Closed Eye* gives a thought that Brookner would have Lizzie as a protagonist rather than Harriet. The author sometimes strengthens the character of Harriet. Lizzie, as a child ought to spend her time with people who are secondarily related to her. This gives her a chance to move with books. She experiences the pleasure of reading books and she immerses into it. Scholars believe that books are the ever-good friends to a person. That would give the maturity, which a person gains in half his/ her lifetime. Lizzie experiences this reality, at her early days. Perhaps, Brookner would have experienced the same. But this novel cannot be included in the series of autobiographical novel.

Sometimes the novel would give a clue to readers that Brookner gives more importance to childhood days of a person. It is true that the circumstance in which a child is brought up decides the character of a child. Girl child can be given more importance for that matter. "Lizzie would work she thought painfully, and live a sensible life. Some children are born to lead sensible lives, others to folly and to joy" (125). Lizzie is strong not only at her childhood days; she has the same at her later days. Where she can be called a girl, for women are the soul who is capable of constructing and destructing.

In Western culture going back to the Pre-Biblical mythology, one notes, that woman's totality was fragmented in such parts as divine or temptress, as an Angel or a Medusa. In the Christian tradition Eve is portrayed as the first temptress seducing man towards evil and the conceiver of original sin. Hence she needed to be controlled with an iron fist. It is this original sin committed by women and the resultant image of being seductress determined the position of woman in the Western culture. The great philosophers who have vastly contributed to the existing values of life have paradoxically treated woman as an object to be used by man: "She is God's second mistake", said Nietzsche. To Aristotle, "she is an inferior man". Machiavelli choose to identify woman with a fortune, "fortune is a woman, and if you wish to master her, you must strike and beat her. (Singh 1994, 4)

Lizzie is a character where one could admire and wonder while completing the novel. Her mental strength and love towards her father, where he often keeps away from her, tells the readers to respect Lizzie. She is a woman, who speaks less where she has to speak. Readers are puzzled why Lizzie undergoes a strange condition. There is a talk in a country like India, where woman is respected more, that the depth of a sea can be measured easily than knowing the heart of a woman. Women are always portrayed as incomprehensible beings. That is true to certain extend for characters like Lizzie:

May Lizzie had made her gigantic leap into adulthood on that very night. Surely nothing would ever hurt her again as it had then. She would recover, might have done so already. There was something impenetrable about Lizzie: no one knew what she thought. She had not cried since she was very young, had learned, somehow lessons of endurance. (125)

Lizzie relates herself with Elspeth, in a way different from the way she moves with Harriet. Harriet shows different kind of love. Hers is a pure love. The only reason behind is that Lizzie is her friend Tessa's daughter. Harriet adores Tessa: "She had a friend, whom she worshipped, Tessa Dodd" (20). To Harriet, Lizzie is her own daughter. Therefore the worries and love to Lizzie come from her heart. After Tessa's death she worries much about Lizzie:

And Lizzie, she thought, wincing. The crime is all against her already. She saw the lonely trudging little figure, burdened with too much reflection, and now out of her reach in Elspeth Mackinnon's house in Windsor. Living, forced to live, with her father's mistress. (153)

Though Hattie pours her love, Lizzie maintains a distance. She could find the difference in love, yet she goes with Elspeth. Women are independent in their thought, yet they are bound by circumstance, which they ought to obey without any question. Lizzie lives her own life within the hold of Elspeth, because she has been with her from her childhood days. Women and children for that matter are concerned for the security. It may secure them from external force; it cannot give them the vision, which they gain only when they face the world. Tessa is the next important character in the novel. Harriet and Tessa are friends from childhood; their intimacy could be seen through Lizzie's brought up by Hattie. Tessa is married to Jack a journalist. He is the man Hattie gets attracted towards. She is a woman who leads the life practically. This is her

character and because of the practical sense her life ends up. She suffers from liver cancer, after begetting a child too she evades from telling it to anyone. Her carelessness towards her family leads her to be alone when she dies. Jack is a man who just accompanies her but not as a responsible father to his child. Members are still individuals when there is lack of understanding. A woman could change this kind of condition and bring it as a family. Tessa could not develop this happiness in her family. Still Tessa stands in the mind of readers because of her strong character. Brookner's words contribute strength to her characterisation:

Tessa had been strong, wayward but strong. And she had been right, entirely right, in forcing Jack to marry her- it was indeed a proof of her strength – for Jack would have passed on not unaffected, but unregarding, irresponsible ... Tessa until she was cut down, had wrestled with life, and her defeat was cruelly out of character. (164)

Therefore, reading these two novels *Family and Friends*, *A Closed Eye* enlightens the readers that there are women whose lives are more miserable than they think. It shows that life is beyond their vision.

CONCLUSION:

The women characters in these two novels played different roles as a woman. They are portrayed as wife, mother, and friend. Does she enjoy in doing these roles? She has to depend on men: where lies the independency of a woman? Does independence mean doing whatever she thinks? Does a woman with good education and sound knowledge come under the category of independent women, for good education will provoke good thoughts and give an opportunity to improve their economic status? Brookner's women characters are independent women. Yet that does not provide them a happy and peaceful life. Though they are high in their educational level they restrict themselves and they sacrifice their life for the family. This does not suit Harriet, because she is a woman who longs to have what she could not. The attitude of discontentment makes her life miserable. Her mind oscillates and that urges her to have a company at her last days. Though Brookner wrote these novels in 20th century, the attitude of 21st century women is highlighted. Women are known for their moral values. Getting a special attention depends on the medium one uses. Woman stands as a medium to magnify any issue. Brookner dares to bring this to light through the main character, how Hattie deviates from her husband's love and longs to get Jack's. In the past centuries a woman is portrayed as a soul that stands as an example for moral acts. Some women are there who are away from these ideas. Through her characterisation Brookner brings out these characters and unfolds the answers to all preconceived notions about women. Sofka in *Family and Friends* stands till the end to maintain their aristocracy. Harriet wavers till the end.

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