

EXPLORING FEMINIST THEMES IN THE WORKS OF ANITA DESAI, SHASHI DESHPANDE, AND BHARATI MUKHERJEE

Dr. Neelima Pareek*

ABSTRACT

The stories of women oppressed by patriarchy needed to be heard so that males might be held accountable for the unfair treatment they endured. The women's resistance to the men's domination was essential. Community, class, and racial boundaries were all maintained by women. Through their writings, they sought to promote feminism. Though Indian women authors portray their female characters as powerful and goal-oriented, the truth is that women could only achieve success within the boundaries set by males. Nonetheless, the feminist authors did their utmost to assert themselves in a patriarchal society. The women had a tough road ahead of them since the culture was deeply entrenched in male-dominated norms, taboos, and beliefs. On top of that, detractors said that colonialism had a very different impact on men and women. Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, and Bharati Mukherjee's (three Indian novelists) feminist perspectives are the primary topic of this essay.

Keywords: *Feminist, Community, Racial Boundaries, Patriarchal Society, Indian Women.*

Introduction

Both Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai belonged to a cohort of female authors who came of age in India before independence. They are prolific authors who, like Nayantra Sehgal and Kamala Markhandaya, were trailblazers in India's literary canon and whose works shed light on the experiences, perspectives, and challenges faced by women. But they also use women's silence as a symbol for the lack of the woman's voice, which was muted or overlooked. She was almost a cultural outcast while she was engaged. Once the Desai and Deshpande surpass expectations on the personality trip, the woman's quieting process comes to a close.

She grows into her own person as she learns about herself and challenges her role in society. The apparent diversion into women's themes is due to the authors' shared fondness for female protagonists who, against societal norms and rigid conventions, strive to find their own unique place in the world and take charge of their own destiny. Finding one's own identity within a larger male-centric framework may often be a really purifying process. The books revolve around that important cleansing knowledge and concentrate on the feminine experience.

This study compares and contrasts the works of three authors—Shashi Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, and Anita Desai—who are similar in some ways and quite different in others. The books written by Anita Desai, who is of mixed German and Indian ancestry, are firmly rooted in India and revolve on the inner lives of the women protagonists.

* Assistant Professor in English, Shri Mahaveer College, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India.

Similar to Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande does aim composition; she maintains a detachment from her works. The protagonists of her stories are strong women who fight for equality in a patriarchal culture. Deshpande, like Desai and Bharti Mukherjee, doesn't want to be called a feminist writer even though most of her works include female protagonists. "Since writing is derived from personal experience, the way I am a woman will undoubtedly surface," she admits, revealing her empathy for sensible sex. No one other than a woman could possibly write my works; they are, in a sense, internally constructed.

The heroine Maya suffers severe psychological harm as a result of her marriage to the much older, socially unacceptable Gautama in *Cry, The Peacock*. Her overprotective upbringing and preoccupation with her father make her vulnerable, and Gautama's brutal treatment of her senses leads her to finally dispose of him by forcing him off the terrace. After taking care of her family's needs, the protagonist, Nanda Kaul, of *Fire on the Mountain*, retires to Carignano. "Please, just leave her alone with the pines and cicadas," she said at this point. No one was necessary for her; that was all. She is accompanied by her remarkable granddaughter Raka while she recovers from typhoid. She creates her own imaginary world out of her father's brutality and her mother's unending patience. She is timid and shy, and her grandmother Nanda Kaul is surprised to see that she doesn't ask for anything special. In letting go of the traditional cultural role of an Indian woman, this compels Nanda Kaul to reflect on her previous roles as a caring husband and mother.

Because they are cut off from themselves and society, the protagonists in Anita Desai's stories suffer from severe mental damage. As a result of living in a man-centered world, they realise that they aren't getting the attention or opportunities that society suggests they should have. There have been many changes in the institution of marriage, which is a major concern for many women authors. Sexual relations are no longer seen as taboo, and the traditional view of marriage and love as sacred observances is fading. A woman must adapt to the changing values of her husband, her family, and society at large. This leads to a gradual breakdown of married relationships and the loss of everything that women hold dear. These kinds of weights crush a woman's true identity and destroy her sanity.

Novelists Desai, Deshpande, and Mukherjee all include protagonists who, in their own unique ways, struggle to figure out who they really are. Expounding on the upper-white collar class is what the authors do. In Desai's works, every single connection is really a commercial transaction.

Freeing Female Characters from Societal Boundaries: (focusing on "cry the Peacock" by Anita Desai) There are many doors open to women in modern India, where they may make their voices heard in politics, business, and everyday life. Whatever the situation may be, India is still a patriarchal culture that views women as inferior to males. But despite India's continuous departure from male-commanded culture, segregation is still glaringly apparent in rural and urban areas alike, across all socioeconomic levels. Legitimate assurance has little influence, when male-centric conventions dominate, even if women are guaranteed parity by the constitution.

Anita Desai's Novels on Gender and Feminist Awareness

It is impossible for a writer to separate himself from the events of his period. As an indirect critique on the behavioural ethics of that time and place, as well as outside its local circumstances, the socio-cultural-political milieu is sure to discover creative interventions in writings. Feminist representations in literature force readers to reevaluate the relevance and significance of feminism in general and of feminist theory in particular.

Redressing Gender Inequality: Feminist Views from an Indian Perspective

The patriarchal social structure in India causes women to behave aggressively against other women, treat them as inferior, and manipulate them emotionally and physically. The country also has a high rate of female foetal death, rape of children as young as five years old, insufficient medical facilities for mothers to give birth peacefully, and the practice of burning girls as a form of dowry.

Viewed through a social lens, the imaginative figure

Reading Anita Desai's works requires situating them within this social milieu or this era of evolving Indian women's rights. The intricacies of the "have-not" section might be safely disregarded while contemplating the feminist themes presented in her works, since she mostly addresses middle- and upper-class white-collar culture. Reading her works as a whole reveals a shift in the mystical focus on women and their place in society. None of Anita Desai's books seem to have a particular strong suit. Both "Summer?" and the author's continuing work *Fasting, Feasting* explore sexual orientation from an

authentically Indian sociocultural perspective. In her first three books, Desai explores the decline of women as a result of their inability to think critically about their familial situations.

Feminist Features

It is clear that Anita Desai is more interested in the lives of women than in feminism. Women in her books are fighting for control of their own life; as Nanda Kaul's sad ending shows, this may lead to horrific repercussions when the heroine has lived a lie or when the burden of the past becomes too great. Physical, emotional, or mental forms of violence against women often plague female heroines in popular culture.

They need to stop being so subservient if they ever want to feel good about themselves. The language of Deshpande is straightforward, often uses dialectical structures, and is very argumentative. Desai is known for his contemplative, elegant, and solemn writing style. In her work, she explores themes such as hybridity, identity and persona changes, the weight of responsibilities, and how perspectives change as events develop in various parts of the world. The elements of nature play a crucial role in her writing style and shape the personalities of her characters. *Fire on the Mountain* and *Cry, the Peacock* both use nature as a symbolic element in their storytelling styles. The storyline and mood of each of Desai's works are enhanced by minute descriptions about the flora, temperature, slope, and sky. As the hero delves into self-reflection or endures pain, it becomes a trusted companion.

Isolation and being Silent

A combination of estrangement and silence haunts the characters created by the two authors. Smothered rage causes psychological alienation: they resent the lack of opportunity and the stifling relationships, yet they are forced to demonstrate their professions as young girls, wives, and parents. When it comes to privileged insights, families carry the weight of their own units:

Transfer of Areas

Desai seems to place a premium on the geographical locality; for example, in *Where Shall We Go This Summer*, Sita is essentially leaving one location for another when she runs away to Manori, the island from her youth. The domesticity and oppressive nature of Sita's existence motivate her to flee the city she hates. Although men play a minor role in the patriarchal mode of gender inequality (*Fasting, Feasting*), the story primarily revolves around the female protagonists, who frequently blame younger women or widows for their own inner violence rather than the men. Deshpande also suggests that shifting one's position in space might indicate a shift in perspective. Both Sarita and Jaya are forced to leave their homes in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *That Long Silence*, respectively. A common thread among women who have been unable to manage their lives is a desire to end it all rather than give in to societal pressures and accept a life over which they had no control.

The Fiction and Writing Style of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande

Both Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai belonged to a literary cohort of women who came of age in India before independence. Along with Nayantara Sehgal and Kamala Markhandaya, these pioneering women writers from India are prolific authors whose works are deeply concerned with women's experiences, struggles, and challenges. On the other hand, they also use the silentness of women as a symbol for the silence of a hushed or unheard voice. She was deeply entangled with a marginalised position inside the cultural framework. As a result of completing the personality mission—in which Desai and Deshpande surpass all expectations—the woman's agitation subsides.

As she grows into her own person, she learns about herself, challenges her position in society, and doubts her role in the spotlight. The focus on women's difficulties is deliberate, and both authors seem to have a soft spot for female protagonists who, despite rigid societal norms, yearn to find their own path to fame and fortune. Many people find that coming to terms with their individuality within a larger male-centric culture is a very cleansing process. The books revolve on the basic cleaning experience and mostly focus on the feminine experience.

Conclusion

Issues pertaining to women's education and their pursuit of autonomy and meaningful participation are addressed in the most recent book. Women who have benefited from training are elaborated upon by Anita Desai. On the other hand, as her books show, women's educational attainment and degrees have not yet empowered them to carve out a place for themselves in the world. This begs the intriguing psychological issue of whether cultural influences are the only constraints on women's breaking point decisions in postcolonial literature. As a result of the women's exploitation of cultural

norms and devotion, the enthusiastic equilibrium of the people has been upset. Typical female protagonists in Deshpande's works are either trying to escape or are actively resisting societal expectations placed on them by their conventional family structures. There is frequent communication inside the joint family, yet there are also strict rules that may restrict women's opportunities.

But Shashi Deshpande would Writings by Anita Desai and Bharti Mukherjee capture the bleakness of is not a depressing depiction of the lives of women. The heroes in her stories find a fulfilment and harmony in one's life. They learn to integrate their many functions into a whole by recognising the value of human connection. Various female characters The characters, particularly the protagonists, in the books written by Shashi Deshpande often face challenges from both their home and society.

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