



Feminism in the Selected Novels of Anita Desai, Shashi Despande and Manjukapoor

Research Paper—English

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Feminism emerges as a concept that is based on a critical analysis of male privilege and woman's subordination within any given society. It opposes woman's subordination to men in the family and society. Feminism is a global and revolutionary ideology that is political because it is concerned with the question of power. A feminist is one who is awakened and conscious about woman's life and problems. The feminist apprehends certain features of social reality as intolerable as to be rejected if one is to transform the society for a better future. The concept of woman is of central importance in the formation of feminist theory. Themes explored in feminism and feminist theory include patriarchy, sexual objectification and oppression. In literary theory Feminism means challenging the patriarchal canons Feminist theory studies a structural inequality of women caused by systematic social injustice.

The study of feminist theories begins with the eighteenth century and continues until the present times. Feminist theories try to identify such biases and then negotiate them by sensitizing readers to their existence. Feminism is a political perception based on two fundamental premises. Gender difference is the foundation of a structural inequality between women and men by which women suffer systematic social injustice. The inequality between the sexes is not the result of biological necessity but is produced by the cultural construction of gender differences. Sex refers to the determining of identity on the basis of biological category while gender connotes the cultural meaning attached to sexual identity. In other words gender is the product of cultural

conditioning. Feminist theories range themselves against various structures and inter relationships of power- the state, the Church, law and the academy which they see as patriarchal. Socialism and feminism at the beginning of the nineteenth century emphasized the ways in which discrimination against women is manifested and how this can be resisted.

For feminist the text is battleground where actual power relations between men and women are placed out. The representation of women in literature was felt to be one of the most important forms of socialization. The women's movement of the 1960s was a renewal of an old tradition of thought and action. This movement was literary in the beginning in the sense that it realized the significance of the images of women promulgated by literature. The women's movement became a major political issue in economics and culture. Literary critics influenced by the movement undertook a whole new project. Feminist critics assume that literary texts operate on the lines of power struggle between men and women. The text naturalizes the oppression of women. Feminist critics argue that literary texts reproduce social basis that see woman as only the other partner of male. Religion, social conditions and cultural traditions perceive the woman as an adjunct to the male. This means that the women's identity is never separate but is subsumed under that of the male. The woman is typecast as "Mother Nature" thus reducing her to the perpetually giving all forgiving nature that never demands anything and is willing to suffer anything for her son. Sex is biological while gender is socially constructed. There is no

necessary link between gender and biological sex. Masculinity and femininity are essentially coercive categories. In 1960s and 1970s feminism largely represented and was concerned with problems faced by Western middle class women while at the same time claiming to represent all women. Feminist activists emerged from diverse communities. Many feminist argue that feminism is a grassroots movement that seeks to cross boundaries on social class, race, culture and religion. In 1970 in feminist criticism the major effort went into exposing what might be called the mechanisms of patriarchy and women which perpetuated sexual inequality. In 1970 Elaine showalter detects in the history of women's writing a feminine phase. In 1980 feminist criticism explored the nature of the female world and outlook.

ANITA DESAI born on June 24, 1937 and educated in Delhi is the writer of about nine novels, a good number of short stories and two books for children. In her first novel '**Cry the Peacock**', Desai shows the women characters suffering from neurosis. They are guided by fear, guilt, jealousy aggression and their psyche loses grip of their own central position. The movement is backward and forward.

On the other hand Gautum is dry, matter-of-fact and prosaic personality. He looks at maya's love for the good things as sentimentalism. He is indifferent to the beautiful and pleasant things around him. Like Maya peacocks are the creatures of exotic wild. It is their agony of life denied of pleasure that compels them even to kill snakes to ease out their pain. For Maya peacocks represent the struggle for survival. The 'Cry of the Peacock' is simply a symbol Maya's consciousness has been deeply disturbed by her nightmare and sub-human existence. The novel 'Clear light of Day' covers the two generations of Das family. The misunderstanding hatred and hostility caused by deep seated prejudices represent the darkness of the night which is removed by the clear light of day which stands for clarity of vision brought about by sympathy, friendliness and wisdom. The novel is set in old Delhi and shows the changes that the Das family goes through since 1947. The story deals with the life of four family members of

the family: Tara, Bim, Raja and Baba. The focus of narration is on Bim. She sacrifices her whole life firstly to look after the brother and sister educating and marrying them. She takes care of mentally retarded Baba and senile Mira Mosi.

While doing so, she imparts her duty as the elderly child in the family after the death of father. Bim is a lecturer in History. Her responsibilities and isolation develop a kind of antagonism against Raja and Tara. Raja is married to a Muslim woman and is in Pakistan while Tara is abroad with her ambassador husband leaving Bim behind at the hands of destiny, seeking their own pleasure in their matrimony. The novel has got a long space of time. After a lapse of time Tara comes to Bim in anticipation of the wedding of Raja's daughter Moyna, Bim thinks and rethinks and Bim's shedding of sarcasm is seen. Time plays an important role. Raja and Bim's love for poetry is significant. Raja is fond of Urdu poetry and poetry in general reflects Bim's feelings and thoughts. But the most significant use of poetry is at the end of the novel which signifies that this is the clear light of day. It is the realization that dawns upon Bim dispelling all her confusion and arousing motherly feelings for her brother and sister.

SHASHI DESHPANDE was born in 1938 in Dharwar in Karnataka. She is the author of seven novels four volumes of short stories and beside s number of story books for children. Her first published novel **RoOts and Shadows** has won the Thirumathi Rngammal Prize for the best Indian novel of 1982-83. She opposes certain long preserved notions and taboos about the woman.

In 'Roots and Shadows' Indu, an educated young woman is highly sensitive. She wants to become independent and complete in herself. She does not believe in the age old beliefs and superstitions of the society. As a motherless child she was tended by the members of the joint family and old uncle, Kaka and Atya always helped her. But she finds that akka is dominant and Indu had always hated Akka for her narrow mindedness. Right from her childhood it has been in Indu's mind by the women members of the family that she is a female. She hates the utter femininity of the girl's

hostel where she resides. She develops a vague sense of guilt and feels that her womanhood closes so many doors for her. She differs from those who follow tradition as a virtue.

Defying the traditional role she is expected to play, Indu seeks fulfillment in education and career. She works as a journalist for a woman's magazine but then gives it up, Indu marries Jayant and Jayant would enable her to realize the need to belong to be wanted needed and loved. But she is physically and spiritually dissatisfied. She is not happy with him but at the same time she feels she cannot live without him. But she comes to live in her ancestral home. Indu has extra-marital affair with her cousin Naren in her ancestral home.

The novel **"Dark Holds No Terror"** rejects the traditional concept that the sole purpose of a wife's existence is to please her husband. It reveals a woman's capacity to assert her rights and individuality and become fully aware of her potential a human being. In the 'Dark Holds No Terror' Saritha confronts reality and realizes that the dark no longer holds any terrors to her. Saritha hates her parental home and her guest lead her to discover the hidden strength in human being which shapes her life. Saru is a successful doctor who wishes to become a free individual and says "My life is my own". When Saru gets the news of her mother's death she wants to visit her father's house. She had left it fifteen years ago and had married Manu even when her parents had opposed. She is now a mother of two children. She is alienated from her husband but she comes to her parental house to see her sense of belonging to the world. Saru has had an insecure childhood when her mother had shown gender discriminating. She feels jealous of her brother. But when her brother dies by drowning in the pond and she does not help him she feels that she is responsible for the tragedy. As her mother snubs her she says "If you're a woman I don't want to be one". Even after much opposition from her mother Saru marries Manu, a boy from a lower caste. Her attitude had changed when she goes to Bombay to study medicine in spite of her mother's opposition. As long as Saru was a student, Manu had been the breadwinner;

there had been peace at home.

But things changed when Manu felt jealous as Saru becomes a recognized doctor. Manu feels that Saru ignores him. She works for longer hours and reaches late at night. Manu feels inferior. But Saru realizes and tells Manu "I want to stop working. I want to give it all up my practice, the hospital everything." But Manu becomes an outright cruel person. Saru blames herself for not having an arranged marriage. When she visits her father she wants to tell her father about her sad and helpless state but she did not get that affectionate response from her father. On listening to Saru her father simply leaves her and goes away. When Saru had started appreciating Boozie Manu had kept quiet even when Boozie showed his affection to her. Year later Saru meets Padmakar who had been with her in medical college and with whom she has an extra marital relationship. While staying at her father's house acute confusion prevails upon Saru. She feels that she has done injustice to her mother, husband and children. Saru's father is sure how Saru should behave. It is Madhav who makes her realize the reality when he says "I can't spoil my life because of that boy. It's my life after all". Saru realizes and laments "It's all a question of adjustment. If you want to make it work you can always do it". Saru realizes that she has to accept all these selves-daughter, sister and wife as they are for she wants to accept these selves to become whole again. Darkness makes one incapable to see things clearly and objectively. Inspired by the roots of Indian culture, Saru realizes no that she is no longer a "guilty sister, undutiful daughter the unloving wife".

MANJU KAPUR is a professor in Miranda House, Delhi University. The novel 'Difficult Daughters' published in 1998 won the commonwealth Writers Prize. Kapur has presented the problems of the Indian women in a joint family in a male dominated society. The novel highlights the issue of patriarchy which denies woman's voice and freedom set at the time of partition. Problem of Men-women relationship, women sexuality, love, infatuation jealousy, marriage and gender roles have been presented at a time when

women had no voice to assert their rights. Ida is the narrator and daughter of the protagonist Virmati. Virmati is the difficult daughter of Kasturi. Virmati is the ten years old girl the eldest daughter of a traditional Punjabi household. She looked after the young ones and did the household work. But she never got any affection. At the age of thirteen she met her educated cousin Shakuntala. She decided to take education seriously but fails FA at the age of 17, but gets through in a second attempt. She wanted to study further but the family arranges a suitable match of a Canal Engineer for her to be married off, the family moves to a bigger airy house in Amritsar. She is introduced to Harish who arrives as tenant with his family in her aunt's portion. He teaches her in college and falls in love with her. Virmati rebels against tradition and attempt suicide when asked to marry the Canal Engineer. The family allows her to study further. After the completion of BT she gets the prestigious job of a Principal. She becomes rebellious for professor's reluctance to marry in spite of her frequent entreating and this enables her to understand the gratification of "male desire". Her identity as a respectable woman, a good daughter is at stake. Amidst confusion the professor is forced by a mutual friend poet to marry Virmati and takes her home. At her married home, the mother-in-law feels she is a woman 'strayed', the step son calls her bad mummy. The step-wife does not allow her into the kitchen or attend the family members. Whenever she visit her home to visit her younger ones she is beaten by the mother.

With the awakening of the country in nationalistic fervour and partition politics, the 'mighty empire was fighting for survival, While the country was politically active, Virmati's impression of bloody riot had made her depressed at the death of the civilization" and the beginning of the 'Dark age' she was only happy with the slogan 'India BELONGS TO INDIANS'. But she was dissatisfied with the Hindu Code Bill and she aspires to "remove the inequality between two wives" and assert a woman's right to achieve her dues from her husband who has a co-wife and her child will get share from her step mother. The turning point, for protagonist' quest for 'self

identity' comes with the birth of a daughter who is named 'Ida' meaning a new state and a blank beginning'. During her life time, her relationship with Ida, was one of misunderstanding, of accusations of 'Living only for one self, disappointing the father Ida, the narrator of the novel states in the beginning the one thing she had wanted, was not to be like her mother, and in the end, after having traced her mother's legacy, ask it to haven't her no more. This daughter too, has faced disasters in life- for she is husbandless because of a divorce and she is childless too. The family is sorry for this difficult daughter too but she is Virmati's daughter. 'Difficult daughters' represented the turmoil of a woman who tries to overcome her culture identity and forge a self-identification attempt which leaves a woman hard-hearted and desolate. Virmati's tragedy is the tragedy of ambition, quest for freedom and identity.

In the novel '**A Married Woman**' : Astha is the only child of simple, God fearing parents who are very protective and expect her to conform to traditions. Her father wishes her to have a successful career and so be independent. Astha's mother only thinks of her successful marriage. Astha's "diet of mushy novels and thoughts of marriage" makes her think that she should search for a boyfriend. Bunty and Rohan are the ones who come in her friend circle but their relationship leaves a sad yearning in Astha's heart.

Astha enters into an arranged marriage and accepts what her parents think right for her. She has a habit of submission and has a devotion to the family. She had seen how her mother had been devoted to the family and husband and she thinks that this is what she has to do in future. Astha becomes a school teacher obeying her husband's wishes. She looks after her husband and agrees whatever he says. Her husband does not give any importance to her job as it is just a past time. Astha's husband is "MBA foreign returned", and he craves for a male offspring. But when she says that the onus of bearing a male child rests on the man and not the woman, her husband looks annoyed of having an educated woman for a wife. He is seen busy in crafting a successful business and future

of his family and is less concerned for the wife. “Somewhere along the way Hemant’s attitude to Astha changed. She told herself it was only slightly but is oppressed.” The conflict grows in Astha. She suffers from recurring migraines and then a growing face problems distance from her husband. Astha has to fulfil the demands of growing children, pressure at home, silent disapproval of in-law and the attitude of an unresponsive and non understanding husband. Astha finds an escape in her writings and her sketching. Then she started writing poetry but the poems were not appreciated by the husband. The conventions of the patriarchal society make her husband go by his wishes and Astha is not treated as an equal by him. Even in money matters he does not consult her. Whatever Astha questions him he simply crushes Astha’s rights to speak.

A turning phase in Astha’s life comes when there is the political upheaval of the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri” masjid Movement. She meets a social worker Aijaz who appreciates her talents as a writer and narrator. Astha is naturally drawn to him. But a blow comes on Astha when Aijaz’s untimely death in a Hindu-Muslim riot bring other changes. She now participates in peaceful movements led by the secularists. She passively participates in all events concerning her. Astha has the courage to participate in rallies against communalism. She also starts producing paintings that depict her messages of peace. These paintings have a quick sale and her husband also admires her. She still craves for a complete loving and giving relationship, her need for romance which is still unfulfilled. “Astha was fed up with the ideal of

Indian Womanhood”. Her husband was changed into an adversary from a lover. Astha meets Pipeelika Khan who is a strong woman of the world. Pipee Initiates Astha into a secret lesbian relationship. It leaves her at once bewildered, wonderstruck fulfilled and happy. She falls in love with Pipee “Afterwards she felt strange making love to a woman, and it also felt strange making love, friend instead of an adversary”. The conflict between her roles of wife, mother and that of a lover continue making Astha feel guilty.

When Astha’s husband notices the changes in his wife he tries to bridge the gap. Even when she is physically present he feels he is missing her. He is totally committed to her but Astha is unwilling to leave her home life. She wants both Pipee and her home. Astha is neither bold nor so strong enough to live with Pipee forever. Thus Pipee leaves for the U.S.A. and the relationship breaks up. Astha devotes her time to prepare paintings. Her paintings are strong and effective statements. Astha questions the established norms to search for her identity. She had led a life of sacrifice and adjustment but it had failed. She had longed to have her husband who would appreciate her peaceful family but now she is a matured woman. As she continues with her paintings, she feels more confident she had ever been before. “She thought of her name. Faith, Faith in herself, it was all she had”. Hemant is a totally real and believable character who is the typical, insensitive, business oriented man who also loves his family deeply. Astha’s conflict between the oppressive patriarchal culture and her imagination and sensibility is brought out in the novel.

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