

## Novels of Anita Desai A Feminist Perspectives

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### ABSTRACT

Anita Desai's selected novels serve as a lens through which to examine the role of women in Indian society. It illustrates the significance of women in a variety of contexts, including the home, the community, and the workplace. In addition, women in society confront a number of other moral and social responsibilities. There is a wide range of ladies to choose from in about every facet of women's lives at Desai. There are many different groups of women in India, and her work shows how they are all intertwined with each other. Rather than escaping the traditional world of Indian women, she interacts with the middle-class Indian lady, who represents the vast majority of Indian women. She has written extensively on the subject of contemporary Indian women and the difficulties they face. Indian women's roles and responsibilities to themselves and society have also been examined by her. They have a strong sense of self-consciousness. A wife and a mother will not suffice for them; they seek more. A good effort has been made to compare and contrast the quest for the identification of female characters in Anita Desai's works.

**Keywords:** *feminist perspectives, women equality, opportunity, goal*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Writers and researchers have traditionally placed a strong emphasis on women. She has captivated everyone's attention, whether as a silent sufferer, a sacrifice mother, or a domestic angel. Many regional novelists have served as role models for us. Most early male novels deal with child marriage, widow remarriage, the restricted lives of widows, and women's struggles to overcome patriarchal constraints and standards, albeit their perspectives may differ significantly from those of female authors.

Desai's ladies are generally preoccupied with self-scanning and searching ecstatically for the fulfillment of the void they experience, even in ties between guardians, kin, and companions, fragmenting them. Nonetheless, unlike the heroes in journalistic compositions, Desai's heroes do not respond to explicit acts of self-liberation; rather, her protagonists face their obstacles in their own unique way, in Desai's own style, through idealism in one form or another. Being stubborn and irregular in their approach to the male-dominated requests and structures, Desai's female characters are quietly revolutionary, adopting social and financial naturalism and realism in their own world, where women can confirm their attestation, assurance, and freewill.

The novels by Anita Desai were used in this study to investigate the predicament of Indian women as depicted in the novels. Because of their portrayal of women's position in Indian society, Anita Desai's novels were chosen for this paper's research. Women's social lives in India, according to my understanding, are extraordinarily diversified in practically every manner. India's society is divided into linguistic, ethnic, regional, religious, economic, caste groupings, and class, and enormous urban-rural and gender divides. The disparities between the north and the south of India, particularly in family and marriage systems, are striking. No other great civilization, to our knowledge, has a society as intricate as Indian society. Changes in Indian culture are touching numerous regions and socioeconomic levels at a rapid pace, adding to the woes of the common Indian lady.

The majority of Indian writers were concerned with issues concerning women in one form or another. They were depicting the role of women in society, either directly or indirectly, idealistically or realistically, with the goal of bringing about change. The female characters, on the other hand, appear to be dominated by their male authors. The female protagonist continues to be influenced by their creator's feelings and thoughts. Women were inspired to become authors and communicate reality to the world as a result of this. Because it began with the development of the English language and education in India, Indian literature published in English is smaller than that written in various regional languages over a shorter period of time. There has been an incredible blooming of Indian women writing in English in the last two decades, which need an audience both abroad and in India.

### **1.1 Women's Equality**

Feminism refers to a set of movements and ideologies aimed at defining, establishing, and defending women's equal political, economic, and social rights. Feminism also aims to ensure that women have equal access to education and employment. Feminists are "advocates or supporters of women's rights and equality."

Feminist theory, which arose from these movements, aims to understand the nature of gender inequality by examining women's social roles and lived experience; it has developed theories in a variety of disciplines in order to respond to issues such as sexism and gender construction. Some early forms of feminism were chastised for focusing solely on the perspectives of white, middle-class, educated women. As a result, ethnically specialized or multiculturalist varieties of feminism emerged. Feminism is the belief that all people, regardless of gender, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or other identifying characteristics, should be treated equally in legal, economic, and social arenas. Feminism is the belief that a person's gender does not define who they are or their value, and that being a woman (or a male) should not put a person at a disadvantage in general, let alone institutionally. India's official language is Hindi.

Feminism as a social movement aims to correct societal imbalances by giving women the same rights and opportunities as men, allowing them to take their rightful place in society. Following the feminist reawakening in the 1970s, feminists realized that equal rights alone would not be enough to free women from sexual and social oppression. Despite laws to the contrary, intellectual deprivation, physical abuse, sexual harassment, economic expression, domestic dominance, commercial exploitation, and a lack of personal freedom continued to affect women's lives. As a result, Western feminist writers and critics were forced to re-analyze and re-access the socio-cultural setting in search of evidence to explain patriarchy's mechanism of perpetual subjugation of women.

## **II. REVIEW LITERATURE**

Dr. Venkatesh (2016), the Post-Pioneer debate was sparked by two factors: To begin with, both male-centric society and the government may be thought to employ various forms of control over women who continue to define the network's periphery, such as class and race. Through their work, they attempted to apply women's rights. Despite the fact that Indian women's journalists strive to portray women as strong and focused, whatever the case may be, feminist essayists strive to imprint their power in a male-dominated state as the most ideal for what it's worth to them. It was a difficult path to take, as the women had to navigate long periods of male dominance, taboos, and convictions that had heavily infected the general population. Furthermore, critics said that expansionism functioned differently for men and women. This was because women were seen as provincial subjects, and explicit separation as women was referred to as "two fold colonization." In the realm of the English epic, Indian female English scholars have made the most notable contribution. In terms of mass collection and development, the Indian epic has progressed significantly. The advancement of the Indian epic follows a few different examples, and it's not difficult to follow its consistent, one-of-a-kind position. During this time, a few very inspiring female writers were distributed faultlessly from the start. Improvements both in India and outside. These Indian women writers' writings, like those of third-century women writers, reflect their creativity and unusual imagination. The development is luxuriant, with several headings.

The stress on expressing and recognizing women's perspectives on their own experiences is one of the main topics of feminist literature. Unlike in the past, when it was mostly males who wrote about women from their own point of view, feminist writing aims to put women in a position of authority over their own lives and experiences, and to hear and believe women's voices.

If there is one fundamental element that can be claimed for feminist literature and feminist literary evaluation, it is the significance of listening to female voices of all colors, as well as male voices, and treating women's experiences seriously.

Indian women writers have received critical acclaim for their dazzling literary prowess and for incorporating social themes into their work. Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai, two Indian women writers who write in English, have achieved international acclaim.

There has been an explosion of women's writing in every genre since the advent of feminism in the nineteenth century, which peaked in the later decades of the twentieth century. Women's literature studies have revealed some similar themes that appear in women's work.

Since the inception of the women's movement, there has been a significant increase in the amount of writing that is self-consciously feminist in tone, plainly supporting the principles of female equality. Other women's writings, especially those from previous periods, have also been researched by feminists, who are curious about what distinguishes women's writings and what commonalities they may have.

Madhuri V. Khanna (2016), this essay is a modest attempt to handle the position of women in a man-centered civilization from the Vedic period to the present day. From one point of view, a lady is lauded to the heights of paradise by encapsulating her as a goddess. However, from another point of view, she is destined as an able-bodied weakling who relies on

a man for her reality and nutrition. The essay depicts a shift in viewpoint in which a woman develops her own personality in both her personal and professional life, despite obstacles. A lady isn't put in the place of a man, but she is no longer an assistant to him, but rather a friend, a real-life companion who is equal to him in every way. A man occupies a prominent position in every circle of existence, leaving a lady as a vulnerable animal to rely on him for everything from her reality to her sustenance. A woman's struggle in a male-dominated culture can be better understood in this context. When it came to accomplishing something scholarly or masterful, she was seen as useless. Going to class, reading, and writing were not things she was willing to do. Her sole responsibility was to deliver children, raise them, and care for the family unit. Working with such a basis, it was incomprehensible that women could think, study, or be ready to decide, and could communicate through discourse, verse, narrative, and craftsmanship, among other things. Ladies in India are, all things considered, victims of social, monetary, and political exploitation, writes A. Sinha, because of the British idea in India, it turned out to be a surprisingly good development, as it hinted at the possibility of women being allowed to receive formal or creative education. In the middle of this internal conflict, India discovered a prophet in Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who, inspired by English education and reality, set out to improve the status of women in India. Smash Mohan Roy was a man of intelligence and foresight, Firoz Alam writes. He was well aware that mastering the English accent was crucial to his advancement. His commitments should be appreciated since he was convinced that, in order to alter society, it was necessary, rather than creative, to protect the grandeur of women and their liberation. In this approach, Roy urged the ladies to "leave the four walls of their houses and seek knowledge of the cutting-edge world." He advocated for widow remarriage and was helpful in spreading awareness of one growing socially savvy practice known as "child marriage."

### III. FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES

Anita Desai is a well-known post-Independence Indo-Anglican novelist. Her contribution to the development of Indian novels in English is seen as more significant. Although creative authors are frequently objective artists, the reality that their genius is the result of influences or external factors cannot be overlooked. They express their religion, goals, and compulsions consciously or unconsciously. A microscopic vision is required to see the formative factors that shaped Anita Desai's talent.

Various critics have claimed that Anita Desai's novels of the human psyche, particularly those featuring her female characters, are among the most important contemporary Indian female writers in English. The preceding study of the psychological topic and numerous themes in Anita Desai's novels Character situations, feminist perspectives, and psychological components in relation to the plot are used to convey her topic. She strives to get a psychological understanding of her characters. She is an expert on the human mind and relationships. She is also a fantastic character creator who deals with life and its issues. Another issue that Desai exploited was feminism's sensitivity. Her feminism is not anti-male, and her women, in order to be happy, require the affection of a man. In her stories, Desai emphasized women's quest for self-realization and self-definition.

As a result of her understanding of English classics and Hindu texts, particularly *The Gita*, she has become a prolific novelist of Indo-Anglican fiction with a feminine sensibility that elevates the English language to lyrical heights. Through her novels, Anita Desai has attempted to raise the issue of Indian women's misery after marriage. It makes no difference whether a woman is superior or inferior to a man. In all of her works, Desai depicts the helplessness of millions of married women as well as the emotional world of women, their sensibilities, and psychology. Anita Desai discusses Indian marriages and the myriad challenges that they entail.

Anita Desai's third novel, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, is a departure from her previous works. Although this novel explores the issue of loneliness, the style and goal are different. Sarah, the novel's central character, has vanished from the world of her upbringing. She is unlike the other characters in that she dislikes returning. In this novel, nostalgia is used as a storytelling device. In her fourth novel, *where shall We Go This Summer?* Anita Desai elegantly and minutely depicts the theme of love and marriage. It appears to be the acme of an insatiable need for a meaningful life. Sita, the novel's female protagonist, is a sensitive young lady. Marriage will not be able to cure the heart-racing sufferings of others or give them the best times of their lives. More faith is required in marriage. Anita Desai outlines the marital status that arises as a result of the dispute between two characters, Raman and Sita. In her own words, she has described the difficulty of marriage, love, and sex, and she has stated that marriage does not provide a solution for life. Happy married life entails better communication between good partners. Sita and Raman, on the other hand, are unable to form a harmonious whole.

*Fire on the Mountain* is her fifth novel. Anita Desai's photographs of Indian life are exquisitely observed, and her depiction of old age is indelible. The novel explains Nanda Kaul's and her granddaughter Raka's journey. In comparison to other novels, this one places a strong emphasis on seclusion. Nanda and Kaul's married life was nothing more than a series of responsibilities and obligations to each other. In *Custody*, Desai deals with a frequent dilemma of post-marital life in this story and illustrates the thematic topic of love and marriage in a very delicate manner. Deven considers his marriage to be an extra

responsibility. In terms of love, Anita Desai has done her best in her novel about a current community of fisherman. The Seaside Village In the genuine village of Thul, on India's western coast, Anita Desai explores human relations, a man's relationship with a woman, and a man's relationship with God.

Female characters are frequently ensnared in a web of difficult situations, which often serve as the plot of a novel. The father's attitude toward his daughter could be the sole reason for her sorrow and sadness. The protagonist's psychological problems were discussed in this chapter. Depression, psychological struggle, psychotic anxiety, and regression are all elements of psychological reality in the novel Cry, the Peacock. The second chapter delves into the topic of "Man and Woman Relationships in Anita Desai's Novels." It appears in the majority of Anita Desai's early works. She appears to be particularly interested in male-female relationships. Anita Desai has focused on modern women's plight in a male-dominated culture.

Most marriages, she claims, are unions of incompatibility. Men and women have different perspectives on things and react in various ways. The fact that males are more sensible is the deciding factor. Instead of mutual adjustment, only women are expected to alter and adjust to a new environment after marriage. As a result, the marital relationship gradually deteriorates. It renders the values she has held dear null and void. This has an impact on her mental health and conduct. In her novels, Anita Desai has highlighted this facet of the man-woman connection.

Anita Desai explores the feminine sensibility in this novel through the heroine's reactions and responses to the events and situations in the story. Maya is a four-year-old woman who is young, beautiful, clever, and sensual. She is married to a lawyer named Gautama. They don't have any children, so she lives with him at his house alone. To comprehend their nature, one must first comprehend the nature and style of dominance, repression, and oppression. In a passionate statement of female identity and experience, Anita Desai's depiction of the female characters goes to the past to anatomize the agony inflicted on women throughout history, to the present. Women now bear a larger proportion of societal duties than men. They also have an endless number of options available to them. They still feel like they're on the outside looking in.

### **Goal**

The purpose of this dissertation is to emphasize and include the feminist problems highlighted by three well-known women novelists: Anita Desai, Anita Desai, and Anita Desai. This research also aims to put the feminist arguments in the books of these contemporary Indian women novelists into a critical light. The study focuses on women's waking consciousness and her encounter with a male-dominated, tradition-oriented society while seeking to determine the shift in general literary sensibility in the novels. The Indian lady at the centre emerges as a human being, inherently Indian in sensibility and likely to stay so in the future, despite the fact that the methods of interpretation vary in their complexity and also in accordance with the problems of particular novelists.

### **Opportunity**

In 1937, Anita Desai was born. Her mother was German and her father was Bengali. She received her education in Delhi and currently resides in Bombay. She is one of the most inventive writers of our day, with all of its complexities. Her works are gaining her wider recognition as a writer with an original voice, a stunning sensitive language that vividly and strikingly expresses environment and character. She embodies the best of both the east and the west. She is the most appropriate novelist to be studied critically since she upholds India's cultural legacy.

## **IV. ANALYSIS**

These novelists, like Virginia Woolf, are prose rhapsodists of feelings, sentiments, and emotions that flow through human consciousness. They're known for expressing the undulations of the female ego or self in the face of stressful human situations and emotional relationships. Their attention is also drawn to women's suffering as a result of the complex structural pressures and strains that exist in Indian society, which has significant historical origins. All three novelists focus on and analyses human relationships in modern Indian society, notably husband-wife relationships, with a feminist awakening and upsurge as their central theme. They cover all aspects of bringing about this change through passive awakening, being obedient, tolerant, and submissive, and being observant enough to seek her "own refuge" in a belated rebellion. One by one, they challenge the rigorous rules of theology, philosophy, and social conduct. They demonstrate "how women might live anew" by questioning men's idealized, beautiful, but meek and weak depictions of women. Attempting to do "an examination of women's subordination with the goal of determining how to change it" They believe that "the agency of change is located in the insurgent or the subaltern" (Gayatry Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*), and that "the agency of change is located in the insurgent or the subaltern" (Linda Gordon on Feminism).

Despite the fact that these novelists have received a great deal of critical attention, and numerous critical papers on them have appeared in a variety of magazines and periodicals, it is worthwhile to evaluate their works in light of the feminist movement. It's natural to wonder why these novelists have been grouped together. Apart from being living legends among

Indian English novelists, the three novelists are not simply observers of the pathetic conditions of Indian women; all three novelists arose from the pathos, ethos, and nourishment of Indian culture, and they shared the pains and perturbations of Indian women, consoled them, and encouraged them to struggle to reclaim their self-seeking identity. In terms of feminism, their entire body of work demands a fresh interpretation. Furthermore, they encompass practically the entire socio-cultural framework of Indian society, from Bengal to Chandigarh, covering Uttar Pradesh and extending all the way to Karnataka in the south. A close examination of these novelists' whole corpus reveals that they represent the three periods of India's feminist movement, from independence to the present. They also cover all areas of social, cultural, economic, moral, political, and psychological changes in Indian women's standing. As seen by their work, they are committed to the cause of Indian women. Despite being "all sirens from within," these feminist novelists have a number of social, political, economic, and cultural disadvantages when it comes to criticizing the "One."

Human beings' primary inclinations are love, peace, harmony, equality, identity, existence, survival, and domination, yet biological constructs, ignorance, resistance, conventions, deprivation, and traditions allow 'one' to dominate the 'other,' to enslave, oppress, and exploit them. Women have been victimized for centuries for many reasons, and men have been displacing, destabilizing, ruining, and demolishing the female world for their own secret agendas. Women's enslavement has been documented in both real life and fiction, but a lack of vision, whether intended or unintentional, has failed to draw the attention of the international community as a whole. In this regard, Anne Z. Mickelson has made an excellent point.

Sensitive writers from the social, political, and literary fields have taken up the mission of changing existing gender relationships and exploring new possibilities of humanistic development, as well as discovering the potential strength of women for the good of humanity's future. Although there is a necessary difference in concepts of family, social and cultural set-up, literacy, and economy, Western feminists go to the extent of divergence of family for the purpose, Indian feminists believe in convergence of family, mutual understanding, harmony, and adjustment, despite the fact that women's problems are the same.

Maya and Gautama's relationship in her first novel, *Cry, the Peacock*, is one of apathy. Maya's search for love and understanding is fruitless because Gautama seems unconcerned about her needs. Maya is captivated by the albino priest's predictions, but she receives little support or love from Gautama. Maya, who was obsessed with her father, was married to Gautama, an elderly gentleman. The work depicted her pain with an unsympathetic husband, which eventually led to insanity, murder, and suicide. Maya, the delicate heroine, was afflicted with two illnesses. One was the albino astrologer's prediction that she or her husband would die before the four-year mark of their marriage, and the other was her meaningless connection with Gautama, her husband.

Anita Desai delves deep into the female psyche, identifying psychic diseases and analyzing women's psychological issues in a patriarchal, male-dominated Indian society. She uses a liberal feminist approach to depict women's schizophrenic, invisible neurotic, and paranoid suffering as defined by male dicta, as well as their fight against forces that have degraded and marginalized them. Her characters explore all options for escaping the ongoing persecution, including separation, exile, suicide, and estrangement, as well as poetry and religion, but they are unable to find a solution. They re-establish connections through reconciliation, adjustment, and mutual understanding, as enlightened New Woman claiming independence and identity pointed out.

It has been observed that each novelist's area of discourse has its own set of constraints. They haven't addressed some of the most critical issues that Indian women face. Dowry, wife-beating, the caste system, intercaste marriages, female infanticide, foetal diagnosis, and other issues affecting working-class women are not addressed or given the attention they deserve. Women are sold into prostitution; their legal rights are suspended and consolidated in the hands of their husbands. She has no say in the family's finances or children's upbringing. These inhumane acts perpetrated against women must be addressed.

## V. CONCLUSION

Western feminists have identified one centrifugal factor that pushes women to the edges, but the novelists under consideration look at two similar forces at work. There is also a centripetal force that pulls women back to the centre and binds them to it. She is unable to leave the neighbourhood of "home" due to her love, physical and emotional attachment to the family. Western feminists believe in husband and wife co-existing independently. The oriental approach emphasises husband and wife co-existing harmoniously as one entity. There will be no need for any Maya to scream for aid if a woman handles her difficulties in the appropriate way, as suggested: "Father! Brother! Husband!" Who is my saviour, exactly? I'm in desperate need of one. I'm dying, and I'm madly in love with life.

Women's status in modern India is a bit of a conundrum. On the one hand, she is at the pinnacle of achievement, but on the other hand, she is oblivious to the violence perpetrated against her by her own family members. Women in current times have accomplished far more than women in the past, yet they have still travelled a long way. Their route is littered with

stumbling stones. The women have left the safe haven of their homes and are now fully equipped with their abilities on the battlefield of life. They had proven their worth. However, they have yet to receive their dues in India.

Their novels seem to have a repeating topic of marital strife. Marriage does not appear to provide them with a remedy, but rather exacerbates their predicament. Anita Desai's early works are mostly about man-woman relationships, and she depicts the predicament of modern women in a male-dominated society, as well as their destruction at the altar of marriage. According to Anita Desai, the majority of marriages end in incompatibility, despite the fact that there are a variety of reasons for this. A certain sequence and pattern may be found if one reads her novels in chronological order. Her novels' titles themselves are meaningful and hint at this trend. The prior chapters have gone into great detail about this. They lose their ability to reason. Desai's female characters reflect life's hardships, with more females attempting suicide in the end. Women require life independence and solutions to all of their problems. Desai portrays the entire chapter as a novel psychological trick. The majority of Desai's novels, which have a female protagonist, explore the mental problem.

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