

## **SUBJUGATION OF WOMEN IN THE NOVELS OF ANITA DESAI AND SHASHI DESHPANDE**

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Fiction, especially in the form of novels, embodies the personal and social experiences and ideas of our time. For the most part, fiction mirrors reality, and documents social traditions and cultural changes through ages. It is a tool most used to portray both the goods and evils of the society. The objective of mirroring the ills of the society is to help the society realize its wrongs, and make amends. Fiction on feminism is a category of literature that has had the most impact on women's lives all over the world. In India, the emergence of female novelists to prominence coincided with the struggle of independence. In the , feminist movement, in the beginning stage every one participated and submerged in the freedom struggle whole heartedly. The freedom struggle liberated women from the chains of social conventions and constraints, and gave them Constitutional rights.

Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai, amongst the elite of Indian Female authors, were born in pre-Independent India, and were raised in the middle of the bitter strife between male chauvinism and female rights. The atrocities that the women of their time dealt with, seems to have left an indelible mark on the psyche of these writers. This is evident in the portrayal of women in their novels. The women characters from their books rebel against patriarchal society to achieve their potential. Their fight for identity, and a deserved place in the society, showcases the moral fiber of these women.

Born in a multicultural family with a German mother and Bengali father, Anita Desai's dual ancestry has helped her observe the Indian society as an insider as well as an outsider. This is evident the way she portrays alienation in her books. Shashi Deshpande comes from traditional family with a regional background, and all her novels are set in India. Her writing delves deep into tradition, mythology and rituals. The families portrayed in her novels are often big, with complicated relationships.

The women characters in Desai and Deshpande's novels are vibrant with life, and eager to learn about themselves. Time and societal pressures, as they often do to all women, take a toll on the souls of these women, and try to reduce them to clichés. The way these women fight the suffocating despair and the invisible chains of the society forms the crux of the books. Two kinds of women are portrayed in their stories. The first category come from traditional backgrounds, with minimal education, and self-sacrificing in nature. The hardships they face, often after marriage, or in a relationship, ignite the fire of self-analysis, which

transitions them into strong-willed characters capable of making their own decisions. The second category, ironically, are women like Nanda Kaul (Fire on Mountain) who despite their education, fail to find any real choices to stay fighting.

Scouring through the works of these novelists, we observe that Deshpande's books focus on women in traditional joint family households, who face societal pressures and conflicts stemming from the relationships with the members of their family. The struggle of these women to circumvent the stringent social codes of behavior, is very real in Deshpande's books. Desai's societal pressures, on the other hand, are more understated. Her heroines struggle with the psychological trauma and upheaval they experience because of loveless relationships, and inability to live in harmony with the reality.

While there are similarities in Desai and Deshpande's writings in the form of self-analysis and a fight to survive in this male dominated society, the way their women fight back marks a major difference in these author's stories. In this paper, we undertake the task of highlighting the women characters from Desai's novels Cry, the Peacock and Voices in the City and Deshpande's novels The Dark Holds No Terrors and A Matter Of Time, their struggles and quest for identity, and present the literary similarities and differences in these authors' works. In her first novel Cry, the Peacock, Anita Desai tells the story of Maya and Gautama, an ill fitted pair of contrasting characters. Maya is closely attached to her husband Gautama. As wife she lost her identity in a hetero sexual social space offered to her. Gautama, Maya's husband, wants his wife to be traditional, submissive, patient, tolerant, compromising and understanding. Maya also tried to be like that but when she found that her physical and emotional needs are unattended, she became a different person, a neurotic, a mad woman. Desai portrays her mental state, her agony, her alienation and the resultant loneliness. Maya is not ready to accept her husband's foolish detachment to philosophy. Gautama is a rational, realistic person, detached from emotional life, as taught in Bhagavad Gita. Maya's emotional nature struggles to understand how her husband could be completely detached from any emotional connection in life. This inner conflict in Maya's world, and her neurotic condition brought out by the struggles in her marriage, are vividly portrayed by Desai in this novel. Desai traces Maya's state of madness, a neurotic which is developed in her family life.

Desai highlights the husband – wife alienation in the relationship of Maya and Gautama. Maya, a daughter of wealthy man and compelled to marry an older man, who is a industrious lawyer. In their temperaments and attitude to life, they are completely different. Their marital life is punctuated with matrimonial silences and Gautama's hardness, coldness, and incessant take of cup of tea and the philosophy of detachment. Maya becomes hypersensitive and highly disturbed woman; haunted by loneliness. It results in marital discord and obsessive and compulsive death-wish. Her identity as a housewife is disturbed. Maya's thrust for identity is eternal. It denotes a collective neurosis which shatters her own

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identity in a patriarchal society. Maya's quest assumes a universal dimension. She alienated herself and struggles for a socio-psychic release from the reality to escape from the present scenario.

Maya and Gautama lack the vital ingredient of a loving relationship. Marriage provides them only physical proximity, the union of two bodies; the mental closeness or understanding eludes them. Maya is extremely faithful to her instincts. She craves and longs for qualified and wild satisfaction. Maya appears to be intricately woven with and highly dependent on her instincts. She expects some emotional and physical satisfaction in her married life. Sex is not only and intensely and intrinsically pleasurable experience but it can act as a revitalizing force in an otherwise sterile life. Maya's earth – bound nature makes her well-inclined to derive the fullest satisfaction from the intimate experience, but she is disillusioned in sex. Maya's sexual demands are highlighted by the use of two powerful symbols : the Peacock's voluptuous dance, and the mating calls of pigeons. The title of the novel also symbolizes the agony of an unfulfilled desire.

In Desai's novels all the women characters accepted their life which is forced to them. Even the momentary intimacy shown by their spouses help they pretend to feel companionship. The security which marriage offers and the confinement within a self-enclosed world have reduced them to the status of emotional beggars. The resentment is strong; yet unexpressed. Maya longs for real love and affection and needs emotional security. When she is denied this affection, she turns away from her husband, and tries to find an outlet to all her frustrations and unsatisfied passions by experiencing the power of nature. At the end, she finds solace only in the murder of Gautama and her suicide.

Even on the fateful day, Gautama remains so much lost in his work that Maya finds him even oblivious of the dust storm that has raged earlier in the afternoon. She invites him to come along to the terrace to get some air and enjoy the cool wind. He does, lost in his own thoughts. But there is an inferno raging in Maya's mind. There is a lot of symbolism depicted in the last few minutes of the incident – Desai pulling symbolic references to the events that are to unfold. Leaving the room, Maya catches sight of bronze Shiva dancing and prays to the Lord of Dance to protect them. As they go near the terraced end, Maya is captivated by the moon's glow. As Gautama move in front of her, hiding the moon from her view, she in a fit of frenzy pushes him over the parapet to "pass through an immensity of air, down to the very bottom". This almost makes the incident an impassioned one, and not pre-meditated.

Voices in the City, one of Desai's early novels, tells the story of the three siblings Amla, Nirode and Monisha, and their different ways of life in Calcutta. Amla sees the city as a monster, Nirode sacrifices everything for Amla's career, and Monisha cannot bear her stifling existence in the household of a wealthy old Calcutta family. City juxtaposes the city

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of Calcutta with the chart of Nirode's life. The novel involves the din, the clamor, the mercenary indifferent nature of the city and its corrosive effects upon a family. Nirode settles down in Calcutta and adopts a Bohemian way of life, while his elder sister, Monisha, leads a servile existence within the rigid confines of a traditional Hindu family. Their younger sister arrives from Bombay and becomes involved with an artist.

Unlike Maya, who wants to be attached to her husband but ceases to be, Monisha in City wants to be free but unlike her she finds it difficult to free herself of her appendages / appurtenances and duties. She longs for freedom and solitude. Jiban's posting to Calcutta and Monisha's childlessness further detract her from privacy. She feels death or mere existence is her only choices. She finds detachment in her sufferings. But the detachment she achieves, like the detachment of Gautama to Maya, is not born out of experience but out of fear and attachment.

Monisha seems to suffer from claustrophobia. The greatest claustrophobic event occurs in her life when she is accused of theft. She feels total alienation not only from the family but also from Jiban. As a result, she withdraws from the family and retreats behind the barred windows from where she advises Amla to go in the opposite direction and rebel. She becomes a will-less, helpless, passive woman. She stands in direct contrast to Maya, who is filled with sensuality. Monisha's is passivity. She understands herself and herself in the brilliant black eyes of the street dancer. She is scared that a "glance of those enormous and black eyes would dissolve and disintegrate her into a meaningless shadow". She feels terrified by her emotional vacuity. She feels herself entrapped. She realizes the futility and meaninglessness of life. The futility of life kills her mental agony. She is more and more tormented. She withdraws from the family concerns.

The diametrically opposed cultural backgrounds of the couple hinder the mutual understanding and mental affinity. When Jiban asks her why she did not tell it to him before she took the money, she is shattered, battered and broken. She finds no props which can support and save her from this shattering confusion. She does not contemplate going back to her mother's house because she is awed by her accomplishment and self-control and feels alienated from them. She feels utterly helpless. In a fit of uncontrollable emotional turmoil, she ends her nightmarish, unhappy, loveless existence by self-immolation. Maya and Monisha kill themselves. They are unique in their attempt and decision. Their lives are wasted and they fall victims to their sensibility.

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, her debut novel, Shashi Deshpande explores the dark theme of marital rape – a horrifying crime that is often not discussed in public, and which doesn't amount to violence in the eyes of the law because it is the husband who is the perpetrator. Sarita (Saru) is a successful doctor, but carries a lot of guilt on her shoulders

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about the accidental death of her brother drowning at a very young age. Saru's mother blames her for brother's death one can easily that saru is a iconoclast who breaks the foolish tradition which is forced by the ancestors without any meaning upon the innocent women. Her choice of education and life partner reveals her revolt against the society. But her husband Manohar's marital rape is a weapon to hurt ego.

This story demonstrates parrallely the accepted patterns in the drama of mutual co-existence and the pretense of submission. In it, Deshpande explores the irony of self-sacrificing martyrdom. Manohar attacks Sarita and physically assaults her in bed. This nightmarish incident is repeated whenever he feels humiliated by Sarita due to her popularity and economic independence. Sarita used to wake up at night as darkness and awareness of fear haunt her during night times. She feels panic and pain as she visualizes the hurting hands, the savage and the monstrous assault of a horribly familiar body. She is paralysed by a total non-comprehension and complete bewilderment of her husband .She would do nothing against the fearful strength which overwhelmed her.

Manohar doesn't realize the magnitude of his deeds, and doesnt fathom the consequences of his actions. The blow to his ego blinds him to the enormity of his wrongdoings, and thus he jeopardizes his own marriage and life. But he minds Saru's professional success. So Saru is put in a dilemma. Saru's attitude gradually changes towards Manu and marriage. Saru felt herself deserted, so she tries to find the occasion to talk with her father, because there is no one who could comfort her. Saritha decided to stay with her father to review herself . This helps her to heal her wounds . Now she is ready to face the challenges and obstacles. She introspects her marriage. She realized that her success in profession had kindled the jealous of her husband Manu.She decides not to tolerate anymore humiliation. She is not a refuge. But on deeper thought, it helps her to free herself from the feelings of guilt that she has made Manu what he is. She decides that she is not responsible for Manu's failures, and will not be humiliated for it. She realizes that she herself is her only refuge. Saru the wife finds refuge in Saru the doctor. Finally she arrives at a conclusion that she has to cure her husband from depression caused by inferiority complex. She takes great efforts to bring normal harmony in her life.

In the novel A Matter Of Time, Deshpande tells the story of Sumi who is deserted by her husband Gopal for no apparent reason, than to just unburden himself. Without any fault of Sumi's, Gopal deserts her without giving any reason. So, Sumi has to return to her father's place with her two daughters, and finds that her father Sripathi and mother Kalyani have been living in a strangely oppressive silence. Sripathi hasn't spoken to her for thirty-five years because he believes her to be responsible for the death of their four-year old mentally retarded son. Shripati is also the victim he fails to find reason for abandoning his wife.Gopal

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is the reason who causes many problems and entangle in their family life.. Both the male members shatter the life of their family, and the women are the sufferers.

Apart from Sumi and Gopal, this novel talk about other failed relationships that covers four generations of women. Manorama, belonging to the first generation, is dead, but her presence is always felt. Kalyani, Sumi's mother, is of the second generation, Sumi belongs to the third generation, and her daughter Aru is the fourth generation. Manorama was the daughter of a poor man, and was married in a very rich elite family. After marriage, Manorama broke all ties with her family. She and her husband Vithalrao both wanted a male child, as often happens in Indian society. Manorama was tormented with the fear that her husband may remarry if she did not give birth to a male child. But Manorama failed in her wishes and had Kalyani instead. Though Kalyani did not go unloved, she became the visible symbol of their failure to have a son.

Manorama chose her own brother Shripati as husband for Kalyani so she might save the family property that Kalyani would inherit from going to another outside their family. Kalyani is forced to accept her uncle as husband. Manorama and Kalyani's relationship is one of tension and friction. Only after Kalyani bore a male child that the rift subsided. But in an unfortunate turn of events, Kalyani's mentally retarded son is lost in a station, and Sripathi blames her for this. For the next thirty seven years he does not have any communication with her. Sripathi could not find it in himself to show the least bit of sympathy for his wife, who too had lost her beloved son.

Aru sees that her mother Sumi looked hollow-eyed and very tense the first day they arrived at Sumi's parents' house, to stay permanently. But the next day, Sumi seemed bright, energetic and quite normal. Aru thought to herself: "Perhaps things will work out; maybe we will be able to go on, even if we can't go back." Sumi reacts to Gopal's desertion in most striking manner. Neither she rants or raves. The total despair and animosity arising from a series of patriarchal pressure and other family responsibilities didn't stop her, instead, gives her the strength to carry on. She becomes proud and bold and does not wish for anyone's sympathy. She thinks she needs to be strong and lead a good life for the sake of her daughters. Even she experiences the trauma and anguish of a deserted wife; she stands alone with her grown-up daughters and helps them to get on their lives as before. Without being emotionally shattered and broken Sumi liberates herself as a new independent woman from the utter desolation and strain of being an isolated wife. She exhibits unusual courage and self-confidence in trying to cope with the substantial dilemma, obscurities, disgrace and humiliations.

Desai and Deshpande used withdrawal as a tool for both introspection and self-realisation for their protagonists. Their characters withdraw themselves into the world away from the suffocating circumstances of their lives. Unable to adjust to the demands of the

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society, their characters attempt a temporary sociological and psychological withdrawal. They probe deep into their inner psyche. They attempt to understand their personality. For them, the technique of withdrawal becomes a means by which her characters rediscover their personality and dig up their hidden potential and learn not to repress their talents. In withdrawal, they acquire freedom and ensure a place for themselves. Their novels are concerned with a woman's quest for self. It is an exploration into the female psyche. Both Desai and Deshpande concern themselves with the plight of women trying to understand their selves and to preserve their identity. They unveil the subtle process of oppression in the family and in the male oriented society. These characters are very sensitive and status in the society. The factors that influence her include cultural aspects, social and psychological factors such as the family structure, woman's position in it, female sexuality, the trauma of a married and career woman and the quest for self-definition of women.

Both *Cry, the Peacock* and *Voices in the City* are a study of women's depression resulting from their inability to grapple with their family situations. Desai's women are not types but individual women – the solitary beings – who have retreated or driven into some extremity of despair and madness. Her characters are independent, agonized, and frustrated. They are almost sick of life. They are highly sensitive to the point of distortion and solitary and to the point of being neurotic. Desai is concerned with the inner world, her arena includes travails and turmoils, apprehensions and uncertainties, obscurities and shadows, joys and sorrows, ups and downs, impasses and imbroglios, confusion and mysteries in the life of her characters. Desai's women sometimes represent growth and progress, but also symbolize withdrawal, regression, decay, death and destruction. Women like Maya and Monisha represent withdrawal as their emotions are not comprehended by others. Their emotional ecological imbalance causes frustration and leads them to death. They transcend the problems in their life. The basic problem she raises is how to exist in society, and yet maintain one's individuality. The growing urge for self-discovery in Desai's characters exhibits the growth potential of her protagonists as the ever-developing vision of the creator.

Like Desai, Deshpande's writings come out of her own intense and long suppressed feelings about what it is to be a woman. Her writing comes out of her consciousness of the conflict between her idea of herself as a human being and the idea that society has of her as a woman. As a woman writer, she deals with gender-related experiences. Her characters grapple with their struggles which drag them through innocence and experience, ignorance and knowledge, girlhood and adulthood, repression and submission and rebellion and joy and sorrow. Her women characters are brought up in a traditional environment. They struggle to liberate themselves and seek their self-identity and independence. Most of her women characters transcend their identity crisis. Women are subjugated and made to be silent. They become slaves in the process of social conditioning.

Deshpande is not a radical feminist. Deshpande, like Desai also deals with a woman's psyche and the way she is made to feel an inferior being, an unwanted child, a burden of the family. The struggles of these women for identity launches into no rabid diatribes. She is very stubborn in showing and delicacy in her writings. The power of her books lies in the fact that her protagonists strike no overt postures. In Deshpande's novels, women rise up from the state of utter despondency and ascend to the very pinnacle of self-realization. They achieve maturity. Saru and Sumi were dealt a rough hand, one that would cripple most women, but through self-analysis, they find their own identities and stand up against the injustices meted to them.

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