

SUFFERING OF WOMEN IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF ANITA DESAI AND KAMALA MARKANDAYA

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ABSTRACT

A Comparative Study of Selected Novels by Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya endeavours to examine the sufferings of women as depicted in the selected novels, as well as the strategies used by the characters to solve their difficulties. Comparing and contrasting the works of the two novelists is a fascinating and gratifying experience. In the field of English fiction, Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya are two renowned artists. However, with the exception of a couple of articles, few academics have attempted a comparison of women's sufferings in these two authors' novels. The women characters in these novels are prepared to give up their lives, they progress from self-denial to self-affirmation, as well as from self-negation to self-acceptance. Individually, a great number of critical pieces and some full-length monographs about the two authors have been published. This research aims to examine the sufferings of diverse female characters in the context of major parts of women's lives such as marriage, migration, parenthood, and midlife in the select novels of Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya.

Keywords: *Women Sufferings, feministconsciousness,exploitation,neurotic, self-destructive, miserable, self-identity.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature is commonly regarded to be a reflection of society. Literature reflects society's perceptions and attitudes. It depicts human existence through characters who, through their words and actions, deliver messages for the sake of education, knowledge, and entertainment. It is not an exaggeration to suggest that literature has witnessed the progress of women over time. In the world of English fiction, Indian women novelists have established a persistent presence. They are given out not only in the United States, but also internationally. In the majority of their publications, they have attempted to liberate women's minds from male dominance, which has lasted for centuries. Of short, the protagonists in their stories are primarily female characters who have been abandoned and alienated by a male dominance that is completely sapless, hypocritical, and callous. Whatever political, social, cultural, and individual knowledge we see today in women is largely due to these fiction writers, who hailed a new consciousness in the sphere of traditional thought. If women continue to work tirelessly for women's rights, the day will come when they are equal to, if not superior to, men in every way.

This study aims to put the feminist assertions in the novels of contemporary Indian women novelists in a critical light. The study focuses on women's struggles, 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 appears as a human person, inherently Indian in sensibility and likely to stay so in the near future, despite the fact that the methods of interpretation vary in their complexity and also in accordance with the problems of particular novelists.

Preliminary discussions of the major prevailing situations that had their commensurate impact on Anita Desai and Kamala Markandeya are required for a critical and comparative examination of sufferings of women characters and their family as portrayed by both writers. Anita Desai is widely considered as the first Indian novelist to write in English about the feminine subject, the condition of women, their relationships with men, and their inner thoughts, with a significant focus on the state of women in India. She was unlike Kamala Markandeya, who dealt with their female characters' exterior, social, and political issues. Anita Desai, on the other hand, focuses on exploitation, the inner recess, and the psychological state of oppressed heroes. The researcher chosen the following novels of Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock, Where shall we go this summer?* and *Fire on the Mountain*; Kamala Markandeya's *Nectar in a Sieve, Possession* and *A Handful of Rice* for analysis of theme and characters.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

As an author, Anita Desai achieves enormous success. In this context, Neeru Tandon says, "Anita Desai is one of the few notable Indian English writers of international repute, whose works have been much admired both at home and abroad." Her contribution to fiction writing has been significant and respectable. Through her works, she confronts the intangible realities of existence, the innermost depths of the human psyche, and the chaotic underworld of the human mind.

Sita is portrayed as a sufferer of father-fixation in her character portrayal. The tragedy in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* develops out of the incapacity of the protagonists to connect the writing and the passion in their lives," writes B. Ramachandra Rao.

Anita Desai has "*an original talent that has the bravery to pursue its own path*," according to K.R.S. Iyenger. Anita Desai is a trailblazer who is more interested in describing her characters' emotional rather than bodily experiences, mental pain rather than hunger pangs. Her works reveal the mystery of her characters' inner lives, which is why she is regarded as the most serious yet appealing novelist among Indo-Anglian novelists.

Vinay Dubey in his study "*A Study of Love, Sex, and Marriage in Anita Desai's Novels*" indicates that the women characters in Desai's novels are frequently haunted by a strange sense of dread; they withdraw into their own isolated worlds, becoming neurotic, self-destructive, and

miserable. These female characters are far too introverted to cope with their personal circumstances, adjust to life, and confront their problems with courage and aplomb

Shanta Krishnaswamy (2011) details Anita Desai's books can be examined as a female manifesto predicament "*in the light of feminist critical theory.*" She also exemplifies the conceiving "creative unleashing of feminine sensibilities." *Cry, the Peacock* is a tour based on feminism that emphasises genuinely felt sensations over masculine intuition and intellect. The connection between Maya and her husband, father, and brother Arjuna exemplifies traditional feminism. "Anita Desai is a pioneer of a new generation of Indian writers who are exploring the issue of inner consciousness in novel ways.... She provides her readers with distinctive female heroines."

In compared to those of her contemporary women writers, Kamala Markandaya's books seem to be more fully representative of the awakened feminine sensibility in modern India as she seeks to project the image of the changing traditional society," says Krishna Rao.

Prof. U.S.Rukhaiyar considers Markandaya's "Nectar in Sieve" to be a large piece of irony, classifying it as secondary and tertiary ironies, which grow, sustain, and repeat the novel's fundamental irony and appear as imagistic variants on it.

3. SUFFERINGS OF WOMEN CHARACTERS IN THE NOVELS OF ANITA DESAI

Cry, the Peacock is an intense novel, the intensity stems from its author's heightened perceptions of the complexity of modern life. *Cry, the Peacock* has been acclaimed as the first 'Modern Novel' by English writers with the existential point view. Desai has often been called pioneer in writing of psychological novels in Indo- Anglican fiction. The times literary supplement hailed *Cry, the Peacock* as 'poetic novel'. It is now accepted by some critics as India's first major 'feminist novel'. As the diversity of these critical opinions indicate, *Cry, the Peacock* is one of the most complex novels ever written in English.

Maya, the heroine in the novel *Cry, The Peacock*, is a young, beautiful, bright woman who is unable to overcome her childhood traumas. The novel begins with Maya and Gautama's relationship, which underlines the issue of husband-wife alienation. Maya, a wealthy father's favourite daughter who is self-centered, marries an older guy, a remote, sober, and hardworking lawyer. Maya is hardly more than a "quiet, formal, waiting" and Gautama's "hardness....his coldness, incessant talk of cups of tea and philosophy" their married life is disrupted all along by marital stillness and Gautama's "hardness....his coldness, incessant talk of cups of tea and philosophy"

It's difficult to understand Maya's suffering in this abode of solitude. She is unable to comprehend Gautama's complete lack of reconciliation.

“How little he understood my pain or how to console me.... ordering me to go to sleep while he worked on his papers, he didn't give another thought to me, to either her soft, eager body or the lonely mind that waited near his bed?”

Maya is hypersensitive and mentally disturbed, as evidenced by the death of her favourite dog, Toto. She rushes to the garden tap to wash the horrible sight from her eyes, while Gautama is unconcerned by her grief and tears. She is irritated by his actions.

Maya has reached a point when suffering is no longer hidden and suppressed. The approaching storm symbolises her determined endeavour to rid herself of all sorrows, melancholy, annoyance, and worries.

“Ah! Storm, storm, magnificent, infidel storm, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh I was in tears..... Frightened? No! Oh no, no need for panic, I laughed as I hurried away from the thought. It's a comfort; I returned the call to the gods mocking in the dark wings. It's merely relief that I've survived, that I've regained the will and the ability to make a decision”.

In the end, the novel comes out as simply psychological, revolving around dissatisfaction, alienation, loneliness, estrangement, and sorrow. Anita Desai's clearly picture the struggling of women in this novel Cry, the Peacock.

Where Shall We Go This Summer make a return to the autonomous world of inner reality. Sita, the main character here, appears to be less morbid than Maya after four children. The cruelty and callousness of urban life stifle her and when she is with child again. She pines at the thought of bringing a new, fragile being into this harsh world and runs away to a small island, which has childhood association for her, but finally allows her husband to persuade her to return. The novel is tightly structured and the island is an evocative symbol of a lost paradise but Sita's sudden capitulation at the end comes as an anti-climax.

Anita Desai's main goal in her work is to show the real condition of women, and in Where Shall We Go This Summer, she raises a voice against violence against women. She portrays a lady who is yearning for her identity while being enslaved by so-called societal bonds. Her works depict the impact of family relationships and social ties on a woman's mentality. Through her work Where Shall We Go This Summer, Anita Desai has given voice to the quiet sorrows of a woman who faces psychological assault on a daily basis and does not dare to speak out against it.

The novel Fire on the Mountain shows numerous forms of female exploitation. In terms of women's victimisation, the story is a discourse on violence that focuses on the lives of three women

who are victims of the patriarchal system, either physically or mentally. Nanda Kaul, a widowed great-grandmother, is a victim of her duty as a devoted wife and mother to an unfaithful husband. Raka, her aloof, reclusive great-grandchild, is the victim of a controlling father. Nanda's childhood friend Ila Das is unmarried and a victim of her greedy brothers as well as her own reforming zeal.

“The women protagonists are portrayed as victims of an aberrant urban milieu, patriarchal family structures and bourgeoisie, bureaucratic, imperialistic, colonized, social scenario. It is in this context that the characters are in a state of revolt, despondency, morbidity and are driven to grapple with duality, fragmentation.”

Anita Desai's fifth novel, *Fire on the Mountain* contains the quintessence of her philosophy of life. This novel, which won her several laurels including the Sahitya Academy Award, gives complete expression to Anita Desai's predilection for portraying the human predicament. Though the glimpses of this aspect of her fiction are seen in her other novels also, *Fire on the Mountain* is an embodiment of her perception of the tragic nature of human existence.

4. SUFFERINGS OF WOMEN CHARACTERS IN THE NOVELS OF KAMALA MARKANDAYA

Nectar in a Sieve is a beautiful and powerful novel, portrays a simple peasant woman in a primitive town in India whose entire life is a valiant and continuous battle to care for those she loves which "*will ring your heart out.*" *Nectar in a Sieve* depicts the life of Indian subsistence farmers and is filled with unvarnished scenes of horrific misery.

Rukmani is willing to bear her suffering in order to overcome her afflictions. There is one exception: when she finds she is infertile, she seeks Kenny's assistance. Rukmani bridges the philosophical difference by consulting Western medicine.

“It is not enough to cry out, not sufficient to lay bare your woes and catalogue your needs; people have only to close their eyes and their ears, you cannot force them to see and to hear—or to answer your cries if they cannot and will not.”

A psychological analysis of Markandaya's *Possession* finds that the ladies reflect feelings of solitude, fear, befuddlement, emotional fragility, and possessiveness as symbols of growth, life, and fertility, as well as withdrawal, regression, repression, neurotic anxiety, decay, and death. All the lovely ties of home and family are dependent on sex, as Kamala Markandya is well aware. However, she has depicted the evil side of it in this work. Through her novel, it is clear that she is the one who started the process of a woman's transformation from possession to person.

In *A Handful of Rice*, the main heroine, Nalini, grapples with the light on the dreary path she has chosen. She is content with her current situation. She is aware of the situation and forces him to disperse his romantic thoughts. She is undoubtedly conventional, but when she rescues her husband from the muck of an ethical world, another woman emerges in her. She draws him in from his whimsical developments to her own self, curbs his wild flights of creative talent, and along these lines, transforms into the voice of rationality and realism with the passage of time. She becomes enraged when he arrives home late at night, and she is not prepared to put up with you drifter once more.

Her husband's strange behaviour perplexes and astounds her. She has been oppressed by her husband, but she lacks the courage to confront Ravi about his heinous behaviour. She observes,

"What had changed him into such a ruthless outsider? Would it indicate it was certain to be this way from now on and in the foreseeable future? She needed to break the silence, to tear down the gloomy barrier that had divided them, but she was too nervous, too unsure of herself, and too afraid of his reactions".

Markandaya has created a new breed of daring and fearless women. In India, she was abused. She has so joined a slew of feminists in reclaiming power that had previously been stifled. This investigation aims to provide light on Markandaya's depictions of modern women in his works. Despite the fact that there have been other introductions of women in progress by other Indian women authors, Markandaya's novels remain relevant for modern women who strive for equality with men in all aspects of life. In her works, her defiance of standard notions of ethical quality and style is obvious. She strives for these goals and her comfort at any costs, creating a new image of herself in today's society and environment. She seeks power, wealth, and celebrity.

5. SUMMING UP

Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya portray the world of married women in India as they see it. These writers, writing in the second half of the twentieth century, don't express any particular fondness for women's activist speculations, nor do they find a consistent, anti-male attitude everywhere. Clearly, these novelists are concerned about the vexing question of women's presence, but they were not misanthropes seeking a world without males. These novelists deal with women who live in both rural and urban areas, in both poor and wealthy societies. In some ways, the heroes depicted in their works were similar to one other. In the interim, their unique characteristics have set them apart from other heroes, adding to the diverse cast of characters found in these books.

Desai's novels aim at presenting the plight of introspective and hypersensitive women doomed to live with an incompatible partner in docile surrounding. The characters are burdened by this uniqueness. They want to exercise their freedom, make a choice and refuse to conform or compromise. There is an intense Questioning within them, and they are torn between their search

for authentic existence and the limitations of human situations. All of them find the ordinary routine of life boring and disgusting. To accept life as it comes in routine is inauthentic existence for Desai's protagonists.

Kamala Markandaya's novels present to us a variety of women characters. Her characters "face the problems of adjustment at different levels". Kamala Markandaya has tried to show a way for harmonious life by bringing to light the causes of disharmony. In her novels we find women characters like the highly devoted Rukmani, the present woman and Nathan's wife who is a symbol of perseverance and Nalini the heroine of *A Handful of Rice* who is very patient, loving and a girl who is capable of enchanting a man's world.

The women characters of Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya drawn from the upper middle class and aristocratic sections of the society who have enough time and exposure to indulge in some introspection about the nature of their existence. They are conscious not only of what is actually done but what is really mated out to them. This chasm between what ought to be and what creates a tragic conflict in their lives. It is this conflict which gets enacted in the lives of her sensitive female protagonists. Such a predilection for the darker side of her female protagonist's existence leads Anita Desai to treat a few themes repeatedly in her fiction. They are alienation, solitude, marital incompatibility, social maladjustment, obsession with death, and ultimately the existential angst about the absurdity of human existence itself.

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