

Feminine Sensibility: Diverse Approaches in the Novels of Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal and Shashi Deshpande

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Abstract

The term Feminism was first used by the French dramatist Alexander Dumas, the younger, in 1872 in a pamphlet “L” “Homme-femme” to designate the then emerging movement for women’s rights. An anti-masculinity movement of the women for the assertion of their individual rights, feminism is also called Aphraism after Aphra Behn, a seventeenth century feminist and political activist. While defining the nature of feminism a noted author Dr. S.P. Swain in *Roots and Shadow-A Feminist Study* has rightly observed:

Feminism recognises the inadequacy of male-created ideologies and struggles for the spiritual, economic, social and racial equality of women sexually colonized and biologically subjugated. An expression of the mute and stifled female voice denied an equal freedom of self-expression, feminism is a concept emerging as a protest against male domination and the marginalisation of women.(48)

It can be pertinently remarked here that Feminism strives to undo the distorted image of woman whose cries for freedom and equality have gone and still go unheard in a patriarchal world, a male culture. Thus denied the freedom to act and choose on their own, women remained solely inside the field of vision, mere illusion to be dreamt and cherished. A woman is a woman, and a woman she must remain but not a man’s shadow-self, ‘an appendage,’ an ‘auxiliary’ and the ‘unwanted and neglected other’. A woman is held to represent the ‘otherness’ of man his negative. The development of Feminist thought at the outset of this century has brought about a perceptible change in our outlook towards women. Now, women are one with man and not their ‘othernesses’.

It is important to note here that men have also espoused the cause of women, though it may sound a little strange. No longer are they callous to their sexual and gender exploitation. Gandhi gave a new direction and dimension to the Feminist movement in India and freed women from passivity and servility. Raja Ram Mohan Roy

and Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar did no less. The ideal of Ardhangini enshrined in Indian culture renders man as the complement of woman, her other half. Man and woman are one in the concept of **Ardhanariswara**. Traditionally, India is a male-dominated culture. Indian woman covered with many thick, slack layers of prejudice, convention and ignorance' has hardly any autonomous existence. "Our country belongs to its men" observes Aunt Lila in Anita Desai's **Voices in the City**. The woman's voice is an insurgent, subaltern voice. The Indian woman especially the middle class woman today is no longer Damayanti. She is a Damini or a Nora or a Jona of Arc. Social reformers championing the cause of woman like Raja Mohan Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and Mahatma Gandhi gave a new direction and infused a fresh spirit to the women's lib in India. Thus, feminism has now emerged as a new way of life, free of the "dependence syndrome". A new perspective has dawned on the Indian social horizon with the feminine psyche trying to redefine woman's role in the society and re-assert her self-identity.

Keywords: Subjugation, Male-Dominance, Feminine, Self-Existence, Self-Identity, Rights of Women,

Introduction

An attempt is made to present an overview of three living legends of feminist fiction and their major works representing feminist assertions through their protagonists. Elaine Showalter posits three phases in the growth of feminist tradition: First "the prolonged period of limitation, second, "a phase of protest against these standards and values" and finally a phase of self-discovery, "a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity". These three phases are aptly marked in the works of the novelists under review but it will be profitable to present an overview of these novelists, especially for a through appreciation of their mind and art.

This overview may also help us to understand the process of creature development of these novelists. Anita Desai for that matter is one of the three creative feminist writers taken up for study here. She was born in 1937, of a Bengali father and a German mother. Her first language as a child was German as her parents spoke German to each other. She was brought up and educated in Delhi. Jasbir Jain quotes her in *Stairs to the Attic*:

By the age of seven or eight I was certainly writing a great deal and determined to be a writer. I didn't pick English out, I don't think a child of seven is capable of doing so. I must have simply picked the language which came most fluently and easily to me. Why it came so fluently to me, I should think because I did, most of my reading in it.(8)

As evident in her statement, she is endowed with natural gift of creation; she started writing at the age of seven in prose and fiction. The writer in her constantly without ease developed in her later age. In the college magazine, she occasionally contributed. She has been "an observant person" as she admits as quoted in *Stairs to the Attic*:

I think a writer simply has to be an

observant person. If he is not, he is not going to write, not write a novel any way which entails so much acute description and also an eye for detail.(9)

She has been a keen observer of Indian social life, its cultural heritage and has been greatly influenced by the philosophy of Gandhi, as Anita Desai is also one of those noted women novelists who have enriched Indian English fiction by a creative release of feminine sensibility after Independence.

She established herself as a pioneer of Indian fiction writer in English from her novel **Fire on the Mountain** when she was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1978. To date she has enriched English fiction with eleven great novels and for three decades she has been engaged in shaping literary scenario of Indian fiction in English.

To Anita Desai the purpose of her writing is to discover her-self and then describe and convey the truth. She opines that truth is synonymous with Art, not with Reality. There is no discrepancy between the Truth and Art. Reality is merely the one-tenth visible section of the iceberg that one sees above the surface of the ocean- Art the remaining nine tenths of it that lie below the surface. This is undoubtedly an irrefutable fact. Commenting upon her writing as Malikaarjun in Indian Fiction in English mentions, she says that:

My writing is an effort to discover, underline and convey the significance of things. I must seize upon the incomplete and seemingly meaningless mass of reality around me and try and discover its significance by plunging below the surface and plumbing the depths then illuminating those depths till they become a more lucid, brilliant and explicable reflection of the visible word.(152)

In her works this literary philosophy is manifest and she has succeeded in projecting the truth of this social panorama. She chose fiction as a métier of writing, realizing the fact that a novel can convey the truth far more vividly, forcefully and memorably than any number of factually correct documents, exhaustively detailed histories or excellently documented biographies. Gifted with this perception, she preoccupied herself with the feminine sensibility which is unique in the annals of the Indo-Anglian novel. In the following pages an attempt is made to give an introductory glimpse into her major work.

Aim

Study of female Characters in the novels of noted writers enables us to understand female psyche and pain agony under male dominance and subjugation. Indian woman being at the center emerges as a human being, essentially Indian in sensibility and likely to remain so in future. Understanding the protagonists can arouse feminine sensibility in Indian women to fight for their right by remaining within the conjugal bonds. Though the methods of interpretation vary in their complexity and also in accordance with the problematic of individual novelists, the Indian woman being at the center emerges as a human being, essentially Indian in sensibility and likely to remain so in future.

Scope:

Anita Desai was born in 1937. Her father was Bengali, her mother German. She was educated in Delhi and now lives in Bombay. She is one of the most creative writers of the modern life in all its complicated aspects. Her novels are now winning her wider recognition as a writer with an original voice, a remarkable subtle voice which conveys atmosphere and character in vivid and striking terms. She presents an amalgam of the east and the west. As she upholds the cultural heritage of India, She is the most appropriate novelist to be taken up for a critical study.

Shashi Deshpande, another living feminist legend was born in Dharwad (Karnataka), daughter of the renowned dramatist and Sanskrit scholar Shriranga. At the age of fifteen she went to Bombay, graduated in Economics, then moved to Bangalore, where she gained a degree in Law and began writing in 70s. She reveals many bitter and startling truths about women in India.

Nayantara Sahagal, Born on May 10, 1927 in Alahabad to Vijay Lakshmi and Rajit Sitaram Pandit is the second of their three daughters and the child of rich heritage. Her parents and a number of other relatives, including her maternal Uncle Jawahar Lal Nehru, were actively engaged in the country's freedom struggle. Her ideology from the onset of teenage started taking an unrestrained political shape and she emerged as a political fiction writer and journalist.

Analysis:

it will be worthwhile to evaluate the works of these novelists in the light of feminism movement. One may naturally enquire as to why these novelists have been bracketed together. Apart from being living legends of Indian English novelists, the three novelists are not simply the viewers of the pathetic conditions of Indian woman but all the three novelists originated and emerged through the pathos, ethos of Indian social life and were nourished by Indian culture and have shared pains and perturbances of Indian woman and have consoled her and have encouraged her to struggle to re-establish her self-seeking identity. Their whole body of work deserves a fresh interpretation in terms of the concept of feminism. Besides, they cover almost the whole of diversified socio-cultural structure of Indian life, right from Bengal to Chandigarh, covering Uttar Pradesh, and expanding up to the southern part of India in Karnataka. A careful peep into the entire corpus of these novelists will enable to conclude that they represent the three phases of feminist movement in India right from Independence up to now. They also incorporate all the aspects of about social, moral, cultural, political, psychological, economical, change in the status of Indian woman. They are dedicated to the cause of Indian woman as revealed from their works. These novelists of feminist perception exhibit, by and large in built social, cultural, political, economic handicaps when it comes to denigrating the 'One' despite their being 'all sirens with in'.

Cry, the Peacock: First published in 1963, the novel explores the inner world where fantasy and experience alternate with psychedelic effect. The novel begins with the death of the dog and ends with the death of the heroine. The novel projects a deep concern over the female loneliness of female protagonist and inhumane violence of non-communication by the male protagonist against his counterpart and in their relationship, the predicament as a torture inflicted by passive insidious miasma of indifference and unconcern. The resentment of the female protagonist reminds one of Nora of A Doll's House:

.....Our home's been nothing but a playpen.

I've been your doll- wife here, just as at

home I was Papa's doll child.....(110)(Four Major Plays)

Maya, Gautama, Rai Shahib, Arjuna, are the major characters of the novel but central theme revolve round Maya and Gautama. Gautama is pragmatic, unromantic, and unsentimental and believes in "detachment" on every count. Maya on the other hand, is a highly sensitive creature gifted with poetic imagination and a neurotic sensibility. It is communication gap between the husband and wife which is felt throughout the novel. Maya remains throughout an utterly lonely creature in this helpless and indifferent world.

Voices in the City: First published in 1965 the novel is the second novel of Anita Desai. This novel presents the plight and trauma of two women doomed and circumscribed in the claustrophobic space of Calcutta, which is described as a "City of death". The story is based exclusively on the life middle class intellectuals, caught in the vortex of changing social values.

Monisha, Amla Nirode, Jiban, Anita, Arun, David, Auntlila, Jit Dharma and Prof, Bose, are the main characters woven to exhibit the compelling urge for a way of living which would respond to the innermost yearnings of women for freedom and self-dignity. Both the sisters Monisha and Amla seek solace, love, and dignity in a rigid, codified society and both are disillusioned in the end. As a result Monisha commits suicide as she finally accepts the fact that the parameters of the choice for a woman are almost always predetermined while Amla realises the stark truth that the world outside and the transient love of Dharma is like a mirage and no escape into permanent happiness.

Bye-Bye Blackboard: First published in 1971 the novel is based on the cultural alienation of the female protagonist. It portrays the problems faced by female protagonist due to cultural difference between her and her husband. The title refers to England's bidding farewell to an Indian-a "blackbird". One is reminded of Kipling's view that the East is East and the West is West and that the twain shall never meet. What is significant is that East or West, woman is the underdog and the novel underscores this aspect as well.

The novel **Bye-Bye Blackbird** centers on three major characters viz. Adit, Dev and Sarah. Among them Sarah plays a vital role in the novel. Sarah is an English lady married to Adit Sen, an Indian immigrant. By marrying an Indian immigrant Sarah faces cultural crisis. Even after a lot of sacrifices, she is treated by Adit like the "other". Sarah is a passive victim, "The other" in the hands of male-chauvinistic Adit. The end of novel suggests submission by a woman before her counterpart only to bring peace and harmony in man-woman relationship.

Where shall we go this Summer published in 1975 is yet another remarkable novel of Anita Desai. The novel dwells on the theme of incertitude, alienation, and non-communication in married life. It is the alienation of a woman, a wife and a mother, an alienation conditioned by society and family.

Sita, Raman Rekha, Jeevan, Menaka, Karan are the major characters in the novel. The novel highlights the fact that the female character Sita has always been loner and the novelist establishes the existential predicament of a woman in this wicked world. Sita, the protagonist a married woman in her forties, a mother of four children, pregnant for the fifth time living in Bombay flat with her husband Raman an upper middle class factory owner leads an "empty" and "meaningless" married life which provides no satisfaction to her. Her escape to the island of Manori in quest of happiness provides her no comfort. The novel presents sensibility of a modern housewife who is under constant stress and mental agony to establish her identity as an individual.

Fire on the Mountain: First published in 1977 it presents reclusion, isolation and desertion resulting out of pathetic sufferings of married life of female protagonist Nanda Kaul. Her alienation with her husband is the most unpleasant fact of her life which deliberately suppresses in the subconscious mind. Mr. Kaul was madly in love with a Christian lady whom he could not marry, and out of despair he treated his wife as a non-entity.

The anger and pain with which the novelist narrates Miss Ila Das's rape and murder and the ill-treatment given to Raka's mother by her father is suggestive of the highest insult to woman's pride and dignity.

Major characters who spot out the social, economic, political, emotional, and psychological disintegration woman suffers in a male-dominated society are Nanda Kaul, Raka and Miss Ila Das.

Clearlight of the Day: Published in 1980 the novel dwells on existentialist theme of time in relation to eternity. It is a domestic novel set in old Delhi. The novel exhibits the aspirations and despair of four children alienated by their parents. At the end of the novel they adopt a middle course by making a compromise between the ancient and the modern social values. It is the novel which reflects the despair, and isolation of female protagonist Bim and also at the same time reflects her endeavour to accept those responsibilities which are designated to only Man in this world. The novel depicts the struggle of the two female protagonists to re-establish their lost identity-Bim achieves her "feminine self" by association, by fusion and by harmony. She represents the modern New women of India who is constantly struggling for identity, and emancipation. The novel revolves round two brothers Raja and Baba, and two sisters Tara and Bim, who grew up in a house in old Delhi. The mental agony of a delicate young woman Bim in the pattern of movement and stillness has been very optimistically printed by the novelist.

A Village by the Sea: An Indian family Story was published in 1982. The novel sets out into a village 'Thul', portrays economic class, and is quite different in nature from her earlier novels. The novel has in it an exotic touch. The novel opens with exotic dimension, and disintegration of family and ends with "mythic acceptance". It is the story of a family disintegrating under the pressures-not of alienation but due to poverty, illness, and drunkenness disintegration stops only when disruptive forces are over powered. The family relationship has been explored and refined in terms of the self in the novel.

In Custody is the eighth novel published in 1984. The novel reflects the male protagonist Deven's failure to form congenial and harmonious conjugal ties. It also reveals the couple's marital isolation and conjugal chaos leading to insanity. The major characters in the novel are Deven, Sarla, Murad, Nur, Siddiqui and minor characters are Jayadev, Mr Jain, Mr Trivedi and Imtiyaz Begam wife of the poet Nur. The novel prefigures how the central character Deven, instead of bringing a little respect, happiness, permanence, daintiness and order in his life and family, courts turmoil. He is trapped in the world of illusion, materialism, serving as a lecture in a college is caught with high aspirations travels to Delhi to meet the derelict poet Nur and returns to his village Merpore with transformed vision of awareness and reality of life. He finds locked into a "barred trap" and her wife is as much victimized by his state of mental agony.

Baumgartner's Bombay: The novel was published in 1988. A notable novel for its departure from her obsessive pre-occupation with representation of complexities of an aspiring woman, as it appears on the surface, portrays and asserts the need for self-identification and self-reliance of a woman. The novel explores the psyche of a male protagonist Hugo Baumgartner, a German Jew. He is dispatched to India as India is considered as a safe place during the Nazi persecution. Hugo arriving in Bombay travels to Calcutta and is later shifted to internment camp. When he is freed, he confines himself to one room apartment with cats as pets, substitute for his family until finally; he is murdered by an Aryan German boy whom he has been helping across the barrier of racial hatred.

Journey to Ithaca: (Published in 1996) The novelist's prime concern in the novel is to expose the difference of two cultures and civilizations. **Journey to Ithaca** is a spiritual quest for self-definition, for contentment, and for faith and love. It is a story of transformation of a biological mother into the spiritual Mother, brought about by Indian spiritualism. The East sustains one's belief in human values, helps in comprehending the meaning of life while the west abstains for values and is the message revealed through the major characters Sophie and Matteo other characters of the novel are Laila, Fabian, Krishna, Madame Beaunier, Montu-da, Nonna and Dr Bishop. The novel is an attempt to explore woman's psyche, and its habitation with the familial and the outer world.

Fasting, Feasting: Published in 1999, the novel can be viewed as cultural contrast or as "Feminist discourse which prioritizes the body and reverses the male view of the female body as an object of desire". The major characters of the novel are Mira Masi, Uma, Arun, Aunt Lila, Anamika, Bakul, Ramu Aruna, Sister Agnes, Mrs O'Henry and Mrs Dutt Mrs. Patton and Melanie. Uma, a forty-three year old divorced woman the central character of the novel and Mira Masi a widow, reveal neurosis, hysteria, depression, anorexia and bulimia of Indian woman in family relationship. Another novelist who deals with similar feminine problems is Nayantara Sahgal, who has personally undergone through such bitter experiences in her life. One's experiences certainly are reflected in one's works, and these experiences may be asset or drawback or both simultaneously. Jasbir Jain in *Stairs to the Attic* observes:

There is always a connection between a writer's life and his literary work; in the case of Nayantara Sahgal this connection happens to be far more intimate and deep than it ordinarily is, for her work ranges from factual and emotional autobiography to fictionalized autobiography. A study of the early influences on her life is of particular relevance in her case for the have helped mould her political and social attitudes....(85)

For a thorough understanding of her politics-social and mental make-up a brief biographical account may prove to be of much relevance. Backed by a rich family background and a highly eventful life Nayantara turned to journalism and creative writing. Since then continuously Nayantara Sahgal has been active on the scene both as a creative writer and political columnist. She has opened new dimensions and perspectives in novel writing by adopting politico-Social genre. She has been arousing awareness in readers with a purpose, that no problem can be solved without power. Merely knowing a problem is not sufficient. A solution to the problem needs to be found out. As such, political awareness coupled with political will is absolutely essential.

Novel has always been a vehicle of social purpose since its emergence in the Eighteenth Century. A novelist has to be socially conscious before he hopes to deliver the goods to Nayantara Sahgal's remarks in this context in *The Indian Writer and the English Language*, are noteworthy:

To be relevant to his culture a writer's

imagination...has to be able to create the men and women and situations of the Indian environment and the Indian reality. If a writer can do this, make people feel with him, Stimulate thinking, and inspire action because of what he writes, then he is fulfilling his function.(P:v.5)

Her novels, thus, present the problem situations of Indian polity and provide solutions to political confrontation, Social evils, Individual conflicts, man-woman relationship thus educating the readers politically, socially and psychologically. She recommends a system of freedom and liberalism with a strong urge for humanistic concern which alone makes social change meaningful.

Her novels revolve round two themes: one that India is changing with the times and Indian people must also adjust their thinking to these changes; two that lack of communication between individuals, especially between man and wife, cause unhappiness and prevents human fulfillment. These two themes are not simply stated but are also woven into subtle and intricate patterns of multi colored tapestry. In order to focus on her world of fiction a brief discussion of her major novels may not be out of the way and as such an analysis of these novels is attempted here.

A Time To Be Happy first published is 1958 in England and in 1963 in India, it is Nayantara's first novel. In this novel, the hero Sanad begins by wanting to resign from the British firm of Selkirk and Lowe, and ends by forging his links stronger with the firm. The narrator says, "This is really Sanad's story"; and so indeed it is. The son of a Zamindar, Sanad joins Selkirk and Lowe at their office in Saharanpur, learns to drink and to make love, laves in the waters of sophistication, marries the worthy Kusum and when freedom comes at last, he has the best of both worlds. Sanad has the talent to be-happy and nothing can stop him from getting on. But Nayantara's main concern is self-expression with in conjugal ties of Sanad-Kusum, HariLal- Prabha, Ammaji- Govind Nayantara's father and Ronu- Lalita. The other characters of the novel are Marion Finch, Sohan Bhai, Mclvor, Raghuvir Sahdev, Girish, Harish Lakshmi, Bihari, Maya and Devika.

This Time of Morning is another more celebrated novel. Nayantara Sahgal liberally draws upon her knowledge, of what happens in the corridors of power, or in the drawing rooms of politically very important people, or in the lobbies in Parliament. As one reads the novel, and recapitulates the political events in India, in the last years of Nehru's Prime Minister span, one cannot resist the temptation of some of the characters in the novel with historical figures. But the novel deserves to be read as a piece of fiction rather than as a slice of history. Rakesh, a junior official in the External Affairs Ministry, returns after a term abroad to Delhi and even at Palam he feels the pace of change in the country. He is soon caught up in the whirl of politics, social life, careerism and intrigue. Personal and political ambitions criss-cross, and there are unpredictable affiliations and separations. The novel is peopled with upper class intellectuals, sophisticated officials, scheming politicians, ambitious civil servants and their pretty but disgruntled wives, foreign advisers with an intent eye on beautiful women and many others. The marital relationship portrayed in novel are significant for discordant ties, alienated wives, lack of communication, urge for identity, and fulfillment of life. The major characters are Kailas- Mira, Rakesh-Rashmi, Sir Arjun Mitra- Uma,

Neil Berensen, Mrs. Narang and Mira, while minor characters are Abdul Rahma, Prakash Shukla, Hari Mohan, Dhiraj Singh, Somnath, Salim Celia, and Barbara.

Storm in Chandigarh (Published in 1969) is a novel with a perfect integration of the political and personal themes both of which meet in the person of Vishal Dubey. As indicative of the title, the political turmoil over Chandigarh between Punjab and Haryana remains at the center of the novel. Vishal Dubey, a young intelligent IAS along with Prasad, Trivedi and Kachru represents the bureaucracy, Harpal Singh and Gyan Singh the politicians, Inder, Jit Sahni, Nikhil Ray, Leela, Saroj, Mara, Gauri are the major characters in the novel. The novel provides unmistakable evidence that the novelist has developed a clear thought, vision, and maturity. The novel spotlights the fearsome jungle of man- woman relationship by the portrayal of three couples Inder- Saroj, Mara-Jit and Vishal-Leela. M.Narendra puts in Non-Violence, Freedom and Equality in Storm in Chandigarh as:

Through the portrayal of three couples in storm in Chandigarh, Mrs. Sahgal clearly proves that marriage has become 'a vanishing search for communication'. According to her torture means nothing but living in intimacy all their adult lives and still remain strangers to each other.(80)

The Day in Shadow(1971) beginning from the point where storm in Chandigarh ends, can be read as a sequel to Storm in Chandigarh not only from thematic stand but also from the thrust of sustained moral vision of the novelist that shapes and directs the destinies of the main characters. Simrit, the wife of social high-up son, disgruntled and dejected, yearns for freedom and finally gets divorce and with it come misery, hardship, and feeling of loneliness. The lack of sympathy and understanding in man-woman relationship leading to the failure of the marital bond and ultimate divorce is the linear theme of the novel. But the novel runs on two planes as in **Storm in Chandigarh**, the political and the personal. The novel is basically concerned with the emotional effects of divorce on a woman. It is the story of Som and Simrit. Simrit longs for a world whose texture is kindly and soft whereas som must have his pound of flesh, compelling her with his urgency, which she resists staying separate, excluded and rebellious.

Nayantara observes: “ In this book I tried to figure out something that has happened to me- the shattering experience of divorce. I wanted to show how even in a country like ours, where women are equal citizens, a woman can be criminally exploited without creating a ripple”.

A Situation in New Delhi (1977) is a purely political novel where different concepts and ideologies of politicians clash together. It is somewhat real unfold of the inner thoughts, interests and loyalties of political leaders as well as leaders of various pressure groups. It is a novel of ideas where conflicts of ideas have been portrayed. The story builds up towards a sense of crisis which takes place by confrontation between the central protagonist Devi and her cabinet colleagues and in the rejection of Usman Ali's plan for reforms in Educational System. At another level Rishad, leader of Naxalite group and son of Devi, involves himself in a crisis in the theatre where violence and non-violence are in Tense opposition and Rishad's opposition of violence costs him with his violent

death. Devi, an emancipated women, widowed sister of Shivraj who dies in the opening of novel is the central figure and other major characters of the novel are Michael Calvert, Devi's lover, Usman, Nadira, Naren, Skinny Jaipal (Suvrnapiya), Madhu, Pinky, Arvind. Reba and Tazi and minor characters like Devi's driver, and Devi's P.A. Apart from Shivraj's idealism and faith in human values, the novel reflects awareness and self-consciousness and passion for emancipation, self-recognition and a need for meaningful relationship through Nadira, Madhu and Skinny Jaipal.

Rich like US (1985) is dedicated to the Indo- British experience and what its shares have learned from each other, as ambiguous a dedication as the title which is both ironical and derogatory, says Jasbir Jain rightly in her appraisal of Nayantara Sahgal. "It is a novel that portrays various opinion and outlooks presented through various characters as they view the emergency imposed in 1977. "Central theme is one of obliteration, of being sucked in, imposed upon and becoming a willing partner to being wiped out." The theme of the novel is ingrained in the integrity and loyalty of Sonali and Rose and their sufferings and states of helplessness and how they are victimized. Both these women from two different cultures, social backgrounds and generations are women of a kind. Constantly they think of the past, relate to value-structures, believe integrity and integrated structures to be of significance to human being. But Rose's murder and Sonali's disillusionment reflects no way out of the degrading political system and devaluating human values. The major characters of the novel apart from Sonali and Rose are Dev, Ravi Kachru, Ram Swaroop, Kishorilal, Keshav Ranade, Nishi, Kiran, Monna, Bhabhijan, and Sonali's mother and Sonali's great grand-mother.

Plans for Departure (1986), Winner of the 1987 commonwealth Writers' Prize for Eurasia is a fiction much praised for its realism, presentation of socio-cultural change and visionary moments between late 19th century and early 20th century. The novel depicts the public issues subtly integrated and resolved with private issues. Sir Nitin Bose, the sixty- year- old botanist, his Danish Secretary Anna Hansen, Henry Brewster, the District Magistrate at Himapur, a serene hill station and the Missionary couple Mrs. And Mr. Croft and Nicholas are the principal characters in the novel. The novel apart from political upheavals and movements between 1885 and 1914 depicts Anna Hansen, the central character's assertion of "her need to grow, not to content with mere wifehood;not to be born a man but to create more space around herself".

Mistaken Identity, 1988, another novel of Mrs. Sahgal is a comedy which displays decadent princely states of Vijaygarh's ruler's life and his family life. Though the central protagonist at one level is his son Bhusan Singh and at another level his wife Ranee. Bhusan Singh, a Hindu prince of small province falls in love with a Muslim girl, the daughter of comrade Yusuf and marries her. His mother also deserts his polygamous father and elopes with Yusuf. The novel ridicules the branding and identifying people into narrow spheres of Hindus and Muslims leaving behind the basic identity as human beings, as communal riots surge in the state as a result of marriage of Bhusan and Yusuf's daughter. It is the story of Bhusan forging new ties, while his mother getting rid of old ties with his father. The novel is set during world war-I when outward turmoil sets inward turmoil to re-visualise and reorganize beliefs and to widen human perspectives. Nauzer Vacha advocate of Bhusan, Razia the imbecile childhood beloved of Bhusan and Sylla, the Parsi girl and girl friend of Bhusan, Bhaiji the Gandhian leader are other characters of the novel.

Sashi Deshpande's novels represent a sensibility towards a novel cause a feminine psyche trying to redefine woman's role in society and re-assert her identity. Her characters assay to get out of the case of traditions by asserting through self-realization and self-discovery. In her novels, she explores and expose the long- smothered wail of the incarcerated psyche, imprisoned with in the four walls of domesticity. Her protagonists find themselves sand witched between tradition and modernity, between illusion and reality and between mask and the face. Thus positioned, the Deshpande woman disowns a ritualistic and tradition bound life in order to explore her true self.

Concerned with a woman's external quest for an authentic self-hood and an understanding of the existential problems of life, the Deshpande heroine is all- agog to retain her individuality in the face of disintegration and divisive forces that threaten her identity as a woman. Her protagonists are the representatives of a middle class educated woman in the patriarchal Hindu society. Deshpande's feminine sensibility is quite different from that of other prominent feminist writers as she remarks that her feminism is not "The strident and militant kind of feminism which sees the male as the cause of all troubles.

Her novels deal with psychic turmoil of woman within the limiting and restricting confines of domesticity. Her heroine is not like the heroines of Anita Desai, neurotic and hysterical. She is not like Maya or a Monisha ever ready to face the ferocious assaults of existence. Deshpande presents her heroine and woman characters as they are and her women characters derive strength from real life.

The post-independence era has inspired novelists to write for a noble cause of liberation of womanhood from the domination of the male. Shashi Deshpande also started writing in post-Independence era in 1969. Her writing career began initially with short stories, of which several volumes have been published. She is the author of four children's books and eight novels, the best known of which are, *The Dark Holds No terrors* and *That Long Silence*, which won the Sahitya Akademi Award.

The Dark Holds No Terrors, though her second novel but first published is a novel about a woman's will to succeed, of a man's frail ego, of a marriage that fails under disparity of achievement between partners. In a frank and forth right manner it narrates a woman's exciting discovery of her true self when she denudes it of superficial layers of daughter, sister wife and mother. It is a feminist novel in one sense; it reveals many bitter and startling truths about women in India. P.Spratt remarks in *Hindu Culture and Personality*:

The uncommonly intense desire for a son among Hindus is well recognized. It is traditionally attributed to the doctrine that unless his son performs the obsequies, a man's soul cannot go to Heaven.(193)

Further the epigraph of the *Dark holds to terrors* from the Dhammapada-

You are your own refuge
There is no other refuge
This refuge is hard to achieve.

Is the basic idea which the novel successfully delineates. The central character Sarita, an unwelcome child suffers from her childhood to her married life and finally reconciles with the circumstances only because she is a woman. It becomes difficult for her to cope with her husband Manohar with frail ego and she decides to leave him and her children to return to her parental home in search of attainment of woman self. She is a successful doctor but her husband is a mediocre lecturer. As she grows in stature, he seems to reduce in size. This causes the real trouble to her. Her husband becomes a sadist and their family lies forwarding towards a break are revived only by Sarita's

submission. Other characters of the novel are Prof. Boozie, Baba, Renuka , Abhijit Dhruva, Madhav, Smita, Nalu, Sudhir, Kamla Mavshi and some minor characters entirely befitting the situations.

Roots and Shadows (1983), represents the women's quest for identity, freedom and independence. It is remarkable for the exploration of the inner psyche of its central protagonist Indu who wants to be free and independent. She works towards that, but ends with a compromise to the traditional beliefs. Indu, a middle class orthodox Brahmin girl and a daughter of surrogate, authoritative, reserved, mother Akka, finds her-self-incompatible to cope with her mother. She wishes a complete free and independent life as each girl of modern new generation seeks by marrying as the only hope remains to achieve personal freedom. In her married life, Indu wants to be more assertive and self-reliant. But soon after her marriage to Jayant her hopes turn futile. To her great shock and surprise she finds that Jayant has not only expected her to submit but has taken her submission for granted. She establishes extra marital relationship with her cousin Naren out of silent sexual humiliation by her husband and also returns to her parental home in quest of refuge. It is here Indu learns from her mother Akka what are her roots, what freedom means, what her moral responsibility is. She reconciles with the circumstances and Tradition. This reconciliation and compromise contradict her deep longing for freedom, her struggles and pursuits. K.V. Raghupati in *Self-Assertion of Woman* comments:

Though Deshpande provides; the
 Compromise attitude' for Indu towards the
 End, the whole novel deals with the
 Existential dilemma of a typical modern
 Middle-class woman. The existential trauma,
 Conflict and anguish faced by Indu in the
 Novel can be ascribed to any woman in Society.
 It is this beautiful presentation of the inner psyche of
 woman by Deshpande that can deeply
 impress anyone in society.(69)

That Long Silence (1988) projects the struggles of the educated middle class heroine, fighting her own battles. She examines her relationship with her husband by his will she has been dominated and by his will her whole career as writer is in jeopardy. Jaya, the principal character of the novel is revolted by the insensitivity of her husband, Mohan. It is a story of Jaya told from woman's point of view, of absurdity of existence and nausea, of a tormented wife in a male oriented society. Jaya is affected by the idea of being a non-entity, of the irrationality of existence with a sense of excitement, fear and nausea Jaya's dreams of married life are shattered when after marriage she is overwhelmed and engulfed by a sense of

Seclusion, existential nothingness, Like Shashi Deshpande's other female characters Jaya is tolerant, obedient and submissive, but a feminist upsurge, and awakening is notable in her. The novel depicts a belated rebellion, a postponement becomes intolerable. The dam of silence breaks into egotistical assertions. She wants to flee from the cribbed confines of an incarcerated domestic life in order to find a new identity for herself, a new identity for

herself, a new mooring for her fugitive self but ultimately reconciles to her hapless lot. Apart from Jaya and Mohan, other main characters of the novel are Rahul and Rati, the two children of Mohan and Jaya, Tara and Kamat, Kusum, the cousin of jaya, brother of Jaya Dinkar, Mukta. While other characters of the novel are Ramu Kaka, Vanita mami, Saptagiri Ajji, a shaven widow servant Jeeja, Sweeper girl Nayana, Dada, Appa Ashok and Rupa.

The Binding Vine (1992): Projects feminist approach of the narrator and the protagonist Urmilla, grieving over the death of her baby daughter Anusha. She is surrounded by the care of her mother. Yamini and sister-in-law Vanna, who is also her childhood friend, is caught up in the depths of long dead mother-in-law Mira's (Nirmala) poetry, written when she was a young woman subjected to rape in her marriage by her husband and in Kalpana, a young girl hanging between life and death in a hospital ward, also raped by her uncle. In this web of loss and despair, her inquisitive vision searches women's "binding vine" for survival and hopes for their better standings in society. Ultimately she finds love, attachment, motherhood, security hope are the binding vines which keep, women alive and happiness as Mira's poetry exhibits, lies in submission, acceptance, never to say no to husband.

The novel explores the women's vision and her position in society and infuses to rethink her existence.

Conclusion:

The foregoing discussion based on the biographical and the creative aspects of the three novelists throws a good deal of light on their early vision of the life that shaped their creative faculty. It also underlines their concern with the magnitude of issues related to woman's emancipation. In order to have a critical probe into their life's philosophy and general attitude to problems pertaining to womankind, the outlook of these novelists in regard to life's vision and how it gets manifest in their writings, certainly helps us to understand mental, physical and social agony and dilemma of Indian woman. The perplexity of Indian women can only be resolved to fight for her rights by keeping herself with in conjugal bonds.

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