

A Critical Study of the Novels of Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal and Shashi Deshpande in the Light of Feminist Movement

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Abstract

The inequities, and imbalance of rights against which feminists protest have existed and continue to exist in all civilizations. The movement seems new as it turned into new phases in subsequent years. Female- Feminine- Feminism- Feminist, encompass the beginning of existence of biological formation and the present radical need of transformation of social order.

Newton's universal law lays down that a body continues to remain at a place until a force or momentum is applied to displace it. Similarly traditionally existing position of woman remains the same until intellectual, social political or economic momentum is precipitated. Feminists are putting intellectual resistance against those males who oppose women's rights.

All Feminist writing is born out of a desire for self-assertion and self-affirmation when a woman writer's suppressed voice finds its way into her writing, she battles forces that have marginalized her position. As remarked earlier these forces may be intellectual born out of inspiration ideologies, economic, social, political or moral but they have their roots in patriarchal set up. Anita Desai's *Nayantara's* and Shashi Deshpande's voices resonate the class, cultural racial and psychosexual conflicts and gender politics that reduce women into objects of oppression, suppression in the hands of men.

Keywords: Female- Feminine- Feminism- Feminist, Self Existence, Hysteria, Alienation, Self-Assertion, Self-Affirmation.

Introduction:

Their works have originated from their personal experience. The pain and suffering that they have felt in Indian social set up. Their works portray victimized women and lonely figures filled with feelings of footlessness, despair and fear. They exhibit conditions despair and dear they conditions of hysteria, paranoia, and schizophrenia resulting out of a particular environment formulated by male dicta. Since men or the male figures dominate their women characters and regulate their psyche, thoughts and actions, it becomes imperative to study their feeling, analyse condition in the light of feminist movement.

Problems of women which were hitherto in the periphery have now shifted to the center. Through the eyes of these women writers, one gets a glimpse of a different world till now not represented in literature and if represented, not discerned, not recognized. These novels present a picture of the impact of education on women, her new status in society and her assertion of individuality.

The works of Indian novelists like Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and Nayantara Sahgal can be compared to Canadian novelists like Margaret Alwood, Margaret Lawrence and Aritha Van Herk. All these novelists write of life as seen by women and life as affecting women.

The feminist movement in the West has inspired a new approach to reality in relation to woman and her portrayal in literature: “Coined by feminist scholar Elaine Showalter, the term gynocriticism has now become synonymous with the study of women as writers, and provides critics with models concerning the nature of women’s writing that helps answer some of the chief concerns of feminist criticism. Each of Showalter’s models is sequential, subsuming and developing in preceding model(s) as follows:

1. The biological model, with its emphasis on how the Female body masks itself upon the text by providing a Host of literary images and a personal, intimate tone;
2. The linguistic model, concerning itself with the difference between women’s and men’s use of language and with the question of whether can and do create a language peculiar to their gender and utilize such a language in their writings;
3. The psychoanalytic model, based on an analysis of the female psyche and how such an analysis affects the writing process and
4. The cultural model, investigating how the society in which female authors work and function shapes women’s goals, responses and points of view.

(Charles, E Bressler. 105-06)

Aim:

The aim of the paper is to study novels of all the noted novelists in the light of Feminist Movement and to analyze and evaluate how much they have succeeded to in high lighting the pathetic and pitiable plight of Indian women. The female protagonists in these novels adopt various courses to assert their self-existence in defending male subjugation.

Scope:

There are ample works of these novelists delineating female protagonists victimized by their male counterparts and they have been subdued within conjugal bonds. All of them fight against male dominance and retaliate for self-existence, self-reliance and to prove that they are human beings not the colonies where the Man can rule.

Analysis:

“Why does God give us daughters.....?”

(Binding Vine 60)

One is not born a woman, but rather becomes, a woman.

(Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 283)

Anita Desai, in her novels, mainly explores the emotional world of women, revealing a rare imaginative awareness of various deeper forces at work and a profound understanding of feminine sensibility as well as psychology. She sets herself to voice the mute miseries and helplessness of millions of married women tormented by existentialist problems and predicaments. She is concerned with the psychological angle of the problem faced by her protagonists. Her serious concern is the “Journey within” her characters, the central character, mostly being the women. The recurring theme in her novels is the trauma of existence in a hostile, male dominated society that is conservative and taboo-ridden. She portrays the inner conflicts of her characters and also underlines their individuality and quest for freedom.

Anita Desai’s first novel, **Cry the Peacock** (1980) presents the story of Maya, a young sensitive obsessed by a childhood prophecy of disaster, whose extreme sensitivity is brought out in terms of immeasurable loneliness. The very beginning of the novel highlights the theme of husband wife alienation by unfolding the relationship of Maya and Gautama. Their fate reminds one of Mrs. & Mr. Ramsay’s in Virginia Woolf’s **To the Lighthouse**. In **Cry the Peacock**, Anita Desai explores the disturbing emotional world of the neurotic resulting from marital discord. Maya, who cannot communicate with the cold Gautama laments: “He was not on my side at all, but across a mountain, and would always remain so” (**Cry, the Peacock, 131**). Husband –wife alienation caused by the temperamental incompatibility between the two—an important existentialist theme forms the very core of the novel.

Gautam is pragmatic, unromantic, and un-sentimental 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. The death of Toto which upsets Maya is nothing to Gautam. This is suggestive of the lack of any possible emotional communication between them. Communication-gap between husband and wife is felt throughout the novel. Maya and Gautama disagree with each other even over trifles. Although their marriage has been a complete failure, they continue to be together, leading a mechanical life. Maya herself reflects upon her marriage which has become a misalliance:

“It was discouraging to reflect as how much in our marriage was based upon nobility neither forced upon us from outside, and therefore, neither true nor lasting. It was broken repeatedly, and repeatedly the pieces were picked up and put together again.” (*Cry, the Peacock* 45). Unable to establish a rapport with her husband and to find a meaning in her ‘arid existence’, Maya remains throughout an utterly lonely creature in this helpless and indifferent world.

Father-daughter relationship is the leitmotif of the novel. Maya suffers from father fixation. She marries Gautam who is much older and a friend of her father, and for her he serves, perhaps, as a father- surrogate. Her neurosis is a result of her love-wish which she transfers from her father to her husband and which remains unfulfilled. Her neurosis is further heightened by her awareness of her horoscope and the macabre prediction of the albino astrologer, which leads to her killing Guatam and her committing suicide.

In spite of her neurosis, Maya commands sympathy of the readers because she reminds one of Nora of *A Doll’s House*:

“.....our home’s being nothing but a playpen.

I have been your doll-wife here, just as at home.

I was papa's doll-child..... .”

(Four Major Plays, Vol. I 110)

If Maya suffers because of psychological alienation, Sarah of **Bye- Bye Blackbird** (1971) suffers because of cultural alienation. The novel portrays the problems of Indian immigrants in London. 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 West is West and that the twain shall never meet. What is more significant, from a feminist perspective, 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 characters viz. Adit, Dev and Sarah. Among these three characters, 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. As Krishnamoorthy Aithal rightly explains, “Anita Desai's novel **Bye-Bye Blackbird** deals with the theme of East-West encounter, covers numerous aspects of this encounter between the British and the Asiatic immigrants in England, including the most intimate and demanding encounter, marriage” (101).

Through a few flash-backs, the readers are told about the love affair of Adit Sen with Sarah. Christine Longford, a friend of Adit, introduces Sarah to Adit in a cocktail party. Even in the first meeting, Sarah's shyness attracts him and he chooses Sarah for company because “you are like a Bengali girl. Bengali women are like that, reserved, quiet. May be you were one in your previous life. But you are improving on it. You are so much prettiest” (**Bye-Bye Blackbird**, 73). Except this, nothing is known about their love affair. After their marriage, they settle down in Clapham, a small city. Adit and Sarah have to adjust much because of their different cultures. To satisfy Adit, Sarah cooks Indian foods. But the typical Indian male-chauvinist in Adit finds pleasure in ill-treating Sarah: “there English wives are quiet manageable really, you know. Not as fierce as they look—very quiet and hard-working as long as you treat them right and roar at them regularly once or twice a week.” (**Bye Bye, Blackbird**, 29). Sarah, as a typical submissive wife, on the other hand, always speaks well for her husband. She pretends that she is treated nicely by her husband. When Sarah's mother asks about her cooking, she says: “Adit still does most of it.”(133).

Explaining the cultural incompatibility, Krishnamoorthy Aithal observes: “the rituals and beliefs of the one mean nothing to the other, which makes each of them groan in pain at the lack of regard shown by the other, for what each holds dear”. (104). In the course of time Sarah completely alienates herself from the public and private life. In the school where she works, she avoids conversation with her colleagues— who often discuss her married life. Her colleagues wonder how she is able to adjust with an Indian husband. She avoids their probing questions. She loves India. She knows something about India through the pictures of Indians stamps. She slowly changes herself so that she can adjust with Adit in all matters. She stops cooking English foods and learn to cook Indian food. After marrying Adit Sen, Sarah feels that she is nameless: She had so little command over these two charades she played each day, one in the morning at the school and one in the evening at home, that she could not even tell with how much sincerity she played one role as the other.

They were roles—and when she was not playing them, she was nobody. Her face was only a mask, her body only a costume..... Staring out of the window at the chimney pots and the clouds, she wondered if Sarah has any existence at all, and then she wondered, with great sadness, if she would ever be allowed to stop off the stage, leave the theatre and enter the real world— whether English or Indian, she did not care, she wanted only its sincerity, its truth (34-35). As the “other”, Sarah sacrifices lot and she is treated like the “other” by Adit.

Seema Jena looks at this predicament of Sarah from a wider perspective. “Anita Desai draws our attention to the annihilation of self that marriage involves, for a female”.

(Voice and Vision of Anita Desai 47)

Adit, naturally, is a typical male-chauvinist. He never cares for his wife and her sentiments. Almost all the decisions in their family life are taken by Adit. Without consulting Sarah, he decides to return to India so that “My son will be born in India” (204). Sarah is a passive victim, “the other” in the hands of the male-chauvinistic Adit. Ironically, when Adit prepares himself and Sarah to leave England, Sarah gets a promotion. When Sarah informs Adit about it, Adit gets angry and accuses Sarah that she does not want to leave England whereas she had already decided not to accept the promotion. The discussion leads to a confrontation and Sarah begins to weep. She seems to be more an Indian wife than a English woman. Usha Bande explains the sources of Sarah’s alienation:

“Sarah in **Bye-Bye Blackbird** is a case of both social and psychological alienation. The social factor stems from her marriage to an Indian settled in England; her psychological trouble emanates from her pride system.” (119)

Sarah’s existentialist dilemma reaches its peak at the end of the novel. Her inner conflict is the result of three problems: “....one pursuing Adit on his voyage to the East, one holding back to cradle and comfort the uneasy, Unborn child and the third tackling the exigencies of a carrier that had surprisingly revealed a future” (207).

After her marriage, she has sacrificed many things to buy peace in her family life. Now she has to say good-bye to England itself where she has lived for twenty four years. The end of the novel suggests a peaceful conclusion: “Sarah and Adit held hands like a pair of children, feeling Bengal, feeling India sweep into their room like a flooded river, drowning all that had been, English in it. “(224). In man-woman relationship there would always be a need for sacrifice and surrender. But the paradox is, in reality, it is always the woman who does so. Hari Mohan Prasad compares Sarah to a Volcano: Sarah’s character has more power. In her there is a real split, a real dilemma, a real suffering, but she triumphs over all these. She is a silent volcano, not dead. Yet not bursting.” (Journals of Indian Writing in English, Vol. IX No.2:64).The irony is, the volcano never bursts in the novel.

If Maya, suffers from psychological alienation and Sarah from cultural alienation, and Sarah from cultural alienation, the sense of alienation experienced by Sita, in **where shall We Go this Summer?** is difficult to explain. In **Where shall we go this Summer?** The protagonist is Sita, a married woman in her Forties, a mother of four children, pregnant for the fifth time, living in a Bombay Flat with her husband Raman, an upper middle class factory owner. Now the problem is, she does not want the child to be born. Nor does she like to abort it. Her quixotic wish is that she should keep it safely in her womb and prevent it from being born in to this wicked world. Raman is unable to understand her unusual idea. Their level of understanding is not the same. Raman is pragmatic and outspoken whereas Sita is an introvert. Sita is a sensitive woman very much alive to the happenings around her, the cruel violence that she finds in the human and non-human world around her. She suffers from an existential predicament. Explaining her psyche, Usha Bende observes: “**In Where shall we go this Summer?** Sita shifts from compliance to rebellion and then to withdrawal, again coming back to compliance. Since she oscillates between her changing strategies, her behaviour is inconsistent and leaves much scope for disparity between her thinking and actions. In the first part of Novel, entitled “Monsoon 67”, she rebels against her family and decides to go to Manori; “what I’m doing is trying to escape from the madness here, escape to a place where it might be possible to be sane again “(35).....The second part” Winter

47” depicts Sita’s life twenty years back, her life with her father....This part enables us to understand her conflicts. Alternately, she resigned and aggressive trends dominate the third section “Monsoon 67” (106).

Sita’s husband, Raman is the son of her father’s friend (a situation similar to Maya and Gautama). When Sita’s father dies, Raman took her from the island, sent her to college, and – because it was inevitable –married her. As she recollects, when Raman came to take her away, he closed the theatrical era of her life and led her out of the ruined theatre-into the thin sunlight of the ordinary, the everyday, the empty and the meaningless. It is in those terms- “empty” and “meaningless”, that she views married life from which she derives no satisfaction.

The temperamental incompatibility between Raman and Sita is brought out through a number of incidents in the novel. Raman, for instance, sees no meaning in Sita trying desperately to save a wounded eagle from the crows: “They’ve made a good job of your eagle, said her husband, coming out with his morning cup of tea, “look, at the feathers, sticking out of that crow’s beak’, he laughed: “perhaps it flew away, she cried, knowing it had not” (41). Raman can only understand Sita’s idea of now wanting to deliver the baby as an intention to abort, which makes Sita hysterical: Mad! She gasped. “You’re quite mad. Kill- the baby? It’s all I want. I want to keep it, don’t you understand?” “No; he shouted in exasperation, feeling himself made a fool that she spun round and round her finger till he was sick and giddy.” You just said you don’t want it. Now you say you do want it. What’s up? What’s up?” “ I mean I want to keep it. I don’t want it to be born” (Summer 35).

Sita suffers from an existentialistic predicament and wonders if the world is worth living and if there is any meaning for life. Sita’s mental frame work can be compared to Maya and Monisha. Sita is also high strong with a heightened sensitivity and imagination that makes her emotionally vulnerable. She sees the world around exalting in destruction. Her husband and her children thrive in a world where wanton and cruel destruction is the main element and where creation is merely a freak, a temporary and doomed occurrence. She goes back to the concerns of Maya in the earlier novel. She wonders whether she has gone insane or the world around her.

Sita is psychologically affected by her life in Bombay. Taken aback by her too sensitive reactions towards the happenings around, Raman questions in a bewildered way, “But you’re not leaving for such small incidents, Sita? They occur in everyone’s life, all the time. If you are an adult- you know how to cope with them- they are only small incidents” (Summer 37)

But for Sita,” It is all a madness- the boys acting out that scene from the film they saw, fighting each other on the floor Menaka and her magazines and the way she’s torn all those drawings of her’s I’d kept so carefully; the ayah taking Karan to that- that roadside dump. Where all the ayahs sit and gossip and fight; the way you (Raman) laughed because I tried to keep the bird alive the people here all around us, living here, all around (Summer 36)

R.S. Sharma identifies Sita to be an escapist and has reasons to say So :

Sita seeks to escape essentially from the cannibalism that is operative, unseen and unobserved in contemporary city life The crows described in great detail in the first section are symbolic of this cannibalism. They are not the mighty monsters of fear and destruction which inspire awe or reverence the little crumb eaters who evoke only contempt and disgust.

They form “a shadow civilization” in a world of small men with big appetites. (95).¹

Sita Wishes to escape the mundane reality of her existence in the company of her husband and her four children and tries to discover peace in her childhood home in the island of Manori. She expects a miracle that will “keep” her child unborn during her stay in Manori.

In the second part “ “ Winter 47” one gets a glimpse of Sita’s childhood, her relationship with her father- a popular freedom fighter- his disciples, his magical spells and miracles. She is uncomfortable in this place. Sita’s relationship with her elder sister Rekha and brother Jeevan is described elaborately. Jasbir Jain critically analyses Anita Desai’s use of “ memory” in *Stairs to Attic*:

Anita Desi uses memories of the past as method of evaluating the individuals’ relationship with the present....., The movement backward is both a medium of self- knowledge and of confrontation with the reality. Her protagonists are caught in adult life and it is from a particular stage in their life they try to relate their past to the present. Nostalgia is both- merely a backward glance and a backward glance with longing. (33)

The unusual nature of her childhood and the horrible circumstances in which Sita was brought up must have had an everlasting influence on her Sita’s father was more a man of the community than an affectionate father to his children. He was busy with his public activities as a social reformer. His children grew up with the crowd of people around him forever. He looked like a saint and not as a father. Sita was puzzled by her father’s magic, miracles, cures and clinic. She could admire, respect and adore him, but could not treat him as her father.

Another way that makes Sita behave strangely is the way her mother deserted them. Sita has always imagined that she came into this world motherless. She was upset when Jeevan , her brother informed her that their mother ran away to Benaras. This loss of motherly love has its impact on Sita throughout her life. And the question that tormented her throughout was “why had she left her husband whom they called the second Gandhi?. (Summer 6). All the efforts to trace her were in vain. Sita gave up the pursuit in search of her mother, whose name she did know, whose face she did not remember and whose photograph she did not possess.

Sita could not decipher the mystery that surrounded her father either. His life was illustration of the magnifying quality of faith which made life ultimately meaningless. Sita had to face her dying father alone because Jeevan had left the island a few days earlier and Rekha, within minutes of his death or” It was sita alone, who bewildered and confused, was left on the island for someone to arrange the funeral” (61).

It is Raman who takes her away from the island and later marries her. But Sita’s inner conflict forces her to misunderstand Raman’s act as one of pity and lust. Sita, with such an unpleasant mysterious childhood passes to her children her own experiences as a child. Throughout the novel Sita is as a picture of gloom to her children. Certain trivial incidents stir her sensitivity and she acts in an absurd manner. Menaka, her daughter, says that the behavior of their mother has brought disgrace to the family. The novel highlights the fact that Sita was always a loner. She did not enjoy the company of her father, brother, sister or her children. This pitiable predicament of sita is the leit-motif of the novel.

Fire on the Mountain is pervaded by an over-powering sense of loneliness and isolation in the deserted life of the protagonist, Nanda Kaul and her great granddaughter Rekha. It portrays a reverberating and pathetic picture of old age through the protagonist. Nanda Kaul is an old lady who lives a life of recluse in her village at Carignano in the Shimla hills. Ramlal is the only other person in the house who helps and cooks for Nanda Kaul. Carignano is exactly to Nanda Kaul's expectations and liking. Its "barrenness" and its "starriness" please her most. She has preferred to live at Carignano because she does not wish her privacy to be disturbed at any cost. Nanda Kaul's desire for privacy is so domineering that the very sight of the postman slowly approaching the house, irritates her quiet mind. The letter brought by the postman breaks the news of the arrival of her great granddaughter at Carignano. It is the most unwelcome news to Nanda Kaul. She is living in an atmosphere of self-imposed exile at Carignano. Rekha's arrival at Carignano is a threat to Nanda Kaul's consciously guarded "privacy"

Nanda Kaul's alienation with her husband is the most unpleasant fact of her life which she deliberately suppresses in the subconscious mind. Mr. Kaul was madly in love with a Christian lady whom he could not marry. Nanda Kaul endures all the sufferings in her married life patiently. The married life on Nanda and Mr. Kaul appeared quiet attractive, at the beginning. But, for Mr. Kaul, a wife is a none-entity. In this connection it has been rightly observed:

Far from being a happy wife, she felt like an animal put into a cage and very skillfully trained to dance at the command of the ring master-her domineering husband, whom she could not defy. (127)

Even her children were alien to her and that was why she was living alone:

And her children- the children were to her nature. She did not live here alone by choice – She lived here alone because that was what she was forced to do, (Mountain.145).

Rekha too loves a life of loneliness: "Rekha wanted only one thing- to be left alone and pursue her own secret life amongst the racks and pines of Kasauli" (48). There is a similarity between Nanda and Rekha but with a difference as well. Nanda kaul was "a recluse out of vengeance, for a long line of duty, obligation and her great granddaughter was a recluse by nature, by instinct." (48).

Violence and death form and aspect of the theme of loneliness in the novels of Anita Desai: **In Fire on the Mountain**, Anita Desai exploits the situations of Ila's rape murder and Nanda's death to highlight problems that confront women in a male dominated society. Exploration of this theme is the central focus of the novel. The rape of Ila is presented in elaborate detail. Preet Singh's rape is an act of vengeance. It was the only successful revenge that Preet Singh could inflict on Ila who had interfered in the matter of his seven years old daughter's marriage to an old man. He worked to humiliate Ila for the injury she had caused to his male ego.

Rape implies the highest insult and injury to the woman's pride and dignity. It symbolizes the rape of woman's dignity and her worth as a woman. Nanda's death and Ila's rape murder point out the process of disintegration- social – economic- political- emotional- psychological- ethical- spiritual disintegration woman suffers in a male- dominated society. Nanda too suffers the psychological shock of rape and feels, like Ila, that her womanhood is defiled and insulted. She realizes the helplessness of women in the world.

The anger and pain with which Anita Desai narrates Ila Das's rape and murder, is a pointer towards universal violence against the Female. Rekha's final utterance – against the death of two sensitive lives- “Look, Nani, I have set the forest on fire. Look Nani, Look, the forest is on fire” (145) acquires tremendous symbolic significance. It is expressive of Rekha's resolve to destroy a world where a woman cannot hope to be happy without being unnatural Anita Desai seems to suggest that loneliness is the problem for all women- girls spinsters as well as married women- and death alone serves as release from loneliness.

Nanda Kaul is an old woman caught in the web of” self- contradictions”. She wavers between two contradictory forces “withdrawal and involvement, detachment and attachment, “the need to withdraw in order to preserve ones wholeness and sanity and the need to be involved in the painful process of life” (218) as Martin Buber would put it. Nanda, the oldest of Anita Desai's Protagonists and Rekha, the youngest character take recourse to self-destructive isolation. While the older woman has a tendency to look back and regret, the younger one is terrified of past, present and future, striving to shut out the agony of experiences. Both of them suffer from self-alienation of a severe kind leading them towards.

They suggest a sickness of soul which is imposed upon from inside, other forces to affect the working of their minds. Rekha's predicament, for instance, is identified in her confrontation with the painful reality of her home; the” harsh filthy abuse” her mother is subjected to and her pathetic condition. Nanda's difficulties arise out of her intense self-contempt resulting from her failure in life.

Rekha's psychological alienation can be considered to be the result of her unfortunate home which leaves the child insecure and isolated. Rekha's childhood impressions of reckless and dissipating revelries associated with social life in clubs play an important role in making her unsocial. Her reactions after watching secretly the fancy frees ball in the club of Kasauli reveal how she associates these entertainments with her father who ill teats her mother. She is reminded of her father returning home from parties in the club late in the night, beating her mother that made Rekha hide herself under bed clothes and wet the mattress in fright. These traumatic experiences make her dislike any need “to socialize”.

The telephone call, announcing the death of Ila Das overwhelms Nanda Kaul with spite of herself. The deaths of Ila and Nanda are interpreted as the final reality. Ila dies because of her concern for others. Nanda dies because of her concern for her loneliness. Usha Bande has very cogently observed: Feminist criticism out a social reality in their deaths, signifying the social forces which destroy woman from within. (100)

If one reads the major novels of Anita Desai. One can realize that Desai belong to the “ female” phase as identified by Elaine Showalter- during which phase” the focus on uncovering misogyny in male texts- is being replaced by a turn inward for identity and a resulting rediscovery of women's text and women.” This inward search for identity is a common factor among the central women of Desai- right from Maya up to Nanda Kaul. Whether it is the immature and psychologically alienated Maya, or the cultural alienated English girl Sarah, or the rebellious Sita or the stoic Nanda Kaul, - all the four suffer owing to male domination. This can be interpreted in terms of Millet's concept as revealed in her *Sexual Politics* (1970,1971)” Millet wrote that “ the essence of politics is Power”, and that the fundamental and pervasive concept of power is our society in male dominance. (25)

If Maya and Sarah suffer as the “other”- as women- married women, Sita and Nanda Kaul suffer both as women and as mothers. Sita's one major grievance is her children are more attached with the father rather than with the mother. Sita has mixed feeling:

The thought of his adult, quiet, critical company gave her a sense of sharp pleasure. But the sight of the children's almost unbearable excitement dashed cold water on her delight. She thought, bitterly, that they were being disloyal to her.....

(Where shall We Go this Summer? 129)

The plight of Nanda Kaul is equally bad and that is why she chooses to abandon her whole family and lives alone. In *The lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature* (1980) Rich argues through myth that motherhood is the feminine status. She distinguishes between the fact and motherhood and the institution a patriarchal culture makes of it, finding that society's oppression of women comes precisely from its need romanticize the terrible and wonderful powers of the mother.

Anita Desai may not be a Radical Feminist, in the real sense of the term. But then, given the context, Anita Desai, the woman- novelist presents the woman's problems which such an understanding that she is feministic, to say the least. In the four novels taken for discussion, Sarah is the only girl with an employment and that too, that of a teacher. The other women are housewives. By presenting the stereotype woman and her problems in an understanding and sympathetic way, she makes everybody realize the predicament of the woman, in a male-chauvinistic society. The protest element is implicit. To say that Anita Desai is a feminist writer is not to deny her artistic achievement. She is not just a propagandist. Socio, psycho, philosophic dimensions in her novels are quite impressive. That woman is the center of her novels is not only natural but quite convincing. All said and done, Desai is an artist.

As a consummate creative artist, Anita Desai shows tremendous potential and vitality. In her writings she not only offers an expose of human life in its shacking shallowness or outward show, but also provides, down deep, a philosophical probe or basis to sustain out life, she emerges neither as a sownright pessimist nor an incorrigible optimist. All along, her earnest the process, to unravel the mystery of human existence. (185)

In the process she does present the plight of the woman, the underdog and that makes her a feminist. In the patriarchal structure it is always that the girl is given in marriage by one male to another. Simone de Beauvoir rightly says that woman is disposed of like a thing by the paternal clan. She writes:

The situation is not much modified when marriage assumes a contractual form in the course of its evolutions; when dowered or having her share in the inheritance woman would seem to have civil standing as a person but dowry and inheritance still enslave her to the family (Beauvoir 446).

It certainly reflects one of the major reasons for woman's miserable position in the society. Not only has it been the plight of the Indian women but the woman of world all over. In Victorian age she had no right over her own inheritance which belonged to her husband after the marriage. Elizabeth Helsinger makes it clear in her book, the woman question that she could not obtain a divorce even if her husband mistreated her, but the husband

could abandon his wife and still retain her property. Economic instability happens to be one of the basic reasons with the female characters of Shashi Deshpande who have to reconcile with the situations uncongenial to them. It is very difficult to agree with Simon de Beauvoir that: Woman is female to the extent that she feels herself as such... it is not nature that defines women, it is she who defines herself by dealing with nature on her own account in her emotional life. (Beauvoir 65)

As woman is not herself responsible for her own pitiable subjugation. It is brought by right from childhood by a powerful urge in men to dominate women. It is the consequence of their childhood training as pointed out by Nancy Chodorow in *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the sociology of gender*: The sexual division of labour and women's responsibility for child are linked to and generate male dominance. Psychologists have demonstrated unequivocally that the very fact of being mothered by a woman generates in men conflicts over masculinity, a psychology of male dominance and a need to be superior to woman.(214).

Urmilla in *The Binding Vine* learnt right from her childhood the patterns of social structure. Jaya in the long silence reconciles to her hapless lot. Indian women are trained right from their childhood to think, to feel, to behave, in terms of their superior lot.

“Don't tread paths barred to you

Obey, never utter a “no”

Submit and your life will be

A paradise, she said and blessed me.”(The Binding Vine 83)

It is perhaps pertinent to study the passivity, apathy and hysteria of characters of Shashi Deshpande. Sigmund Freud formulated his own views about female psychology and sexuality in three brief essays published between 1925 and 1935 namely, *Some psychological consequences of the Anatomical sexuality*: 1931 and *Femininity* 1933. He was trying to find out the reasons for female hysteria and neurosis through his study of the unconscious. In these essays he seeks to explain the anatomical deficiency of girl by basing his theory on the castration complex in the oedipal phase and her inability to come to terms with it.

The male is able to overcome his incest prohibition, in oedipal phase by developing a strong super ego as a result of the fear of castration complex. While female becomes the “defective male” castrated “non-sexed” and “indefinable” for Freud. Shashi Deshpande's theme of rootlessness, loneliness, paranoia in the lives of her heroines place as a modern feminist Indian writer as she depicts sex as one of the root cause of all feminine repression.

While Freud discovered the reasons for female neurosis in her “castrated self” Deshpande experiences it in the patriarchal structure of society, in the female's dependence on man economically, emotionally and sexually. She depicts neurosis, while Freud explains the theory behind it; neurosis as disabling, disjuncting and paralyzing, and as keenly felt by her heroines in the male world. Feminists are not ready to accept this version of the Freud “Female” it is a quite right approach of feminists that women has been marginalised not by gender identity and sexual behavior but by socialization. In *The Binding Vine*, Shakuntla's conception of a woman: “Why does God give us daughters.....? (60)”, reflects not the biological discrimination but the social patterns where women have no place of expression. A raped girls' mother is compelled to reconcile instead to protest to get the culprit punished.

Conjugal walls which enslave women satisfy men's ego and women's helplessness to find another alternative to the institution of marriage. Margaret Atwood considers the reasons, why woman tend to regard the institution of marriage to be inconvenient. She does it through Joe in "The Edible woman" when Joe says: I think it is harder for any woman who's been to university. She gets the idea she has a mind, her professors pay attention to what she has to say, they treat her like human being, when she gets married, her care gets, invaded....(Page 235).

What he says here is tantamount to saying that the views of a woman are not paid adequate need to by her husband with the result that a woman who has developed the capacity to think feels that her individuality is being suppressed on account of her having become a wife.

Conclusion:

In the novels of all the three novelists women protagonists are not happy with their husband's preoccupations and in them one can study the ways in which a married dissatisfied woman can try to liberate her. Some of the choices before a woman leading an unhappy married life are: she may kill the husband, she may kill herself; and she may part company with him. Three protagonists of Anita Desai chose these three ways in her novels. Maya in **Cry, the Peacock**: have heaps of complaints against her husband. The two of which are that he has very little time to spare for her and for her emotional needs and that he fails to appreciate her feelings. Her killing him by pushing him down the roof signifies her effort to free herself from the conjugal bonds.

While in another novel "**Voices in the city**" the protagonist finds the behavior of her mother in law and the other members of the family disgusting as she has not yet become a mother. The girl has been held responsible and her committing suicide in disgust signifies the institution of marriage unbearable to all sensitive women who can rationally think and evaluate the cause their sufferings.

Aunt Lila Chatterjee in "**Voices in the city**" remarks:

"I hope you will not think it enough
Merely to be young, to be able to read any
book you choose to read, to ride on a bus
amongst silly young men to go to a concert
at night. With such opportunities at hand,
you must surely want something greater than
pleasure alone, or the security of marriage
alone- something more rare, more
responsible.....(Page 145).

Monisha craves for something "more rare, more responsible, that is love, caring, respect, dignity and identity. Sita in "**where shall we go this Summer?**" takes steps much less drastic than Maya and Monisha as she decides to move out of conjugal walls for a brief respite which restores normalcy to her. Sita's dislike and distrust of married life takes her to the island in search and quest of refuge but she fails to find any alternative.

Similar quests for refuge are the distinct features notably found in the protagonists of Shashi Deshpande and Nayantara Sahgal which shall be discussed in the following chapter. This tendency deserves significant treatment because it is common to all these three novelists.

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