
Women's Degradation is a Sign of Cultural Decay: A Pathetic Feminist Perspective in the Novel of Anita Desai

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ABSTRACT

At the origination of civilization, men and women attain equal status in the society. With the due course of time, men begin to gain more power and proclaim themselves superior to women. Many social and religious groups in their volumes started highlighting women as frail and submissive. Society also started believing that men and women have different characteristics which are unchangeable and natural as well. The attitude of society who believes that nature designed men and women equal but society believed men more superior than women. This viewpoint of society sets women down in a degraded position mostly in all of civilization. This deep rooted issue became a global problem and is still a challenge to pull it up and recapitulate gender equality in the present century too. Anita Desai is an Indo-Anglian writer who attained the tough task of blending the English language for the motive of highlighting self-analysis. Her writings are a contribution to pierce the veil over the pathetic social conditions, degradation of women, their identity crisis, male-female discrimination and their protest against all these social evils. She writes about how women perform their duties selflessly for society keeping herself unaware of the value of individual personality. In this research paper, through the literary works of Anita Desai, the pathetic condition of women will be

revealed in the patriarchal social set-up and how women's degradation is a cultural decay for society from feminist perspective in the selected novels of Anita Desai.

Introduction

Gender inequality is similar in almost all cultures and communities. They fasten women's self-respect and freedom in one form or the other. This partiality against women by society has become a barrier in their overall progression. The voices of many women have been quieted in the name to safeguard their honour and chastity. Many women have raised their voices for their emancipation from the penitentiary of patriarchal standards and principles. Various feminists advocate that women are not physically and mentally different from men since birth but social treatments tend to be distinct. Society has assigned certain roles to men and women which are entirely biased against women. The gender differences have constructed the male-world to command the female-world so as to keep the females ever remain slaves of males. Some feminists believe that gender bias is a socially constructed phenomenon which could be changed by the times.

Through her literary works, Anita Desai disclosed the pathetic condition of women in patriarchal society. From an early age, she started her literary career by publishing her first novel, '*Cry, the Peacock*' in 1963 with a motif of her female protagonist struggling for a meaningful life. In the early days of civilization, men and women held equal social status. Men began to gain authority as time went on, and they eventually deemed themselves superior to women. In order to build a harmonious community, gender discrimination has grown to be a severe issue. In one way or another, it has imposed its order on society. This issue plagues all cultures, even the so-called industrialized ones. We shall look into the causes of women's degradation in this small research, focusing particularly on Uma, the main character. Here, there are issues: Was Uma maid, or is she already Uma? Who is in charge of Uma's failure in every aspect of her life? There had to be another option outside Uma's current pitiful state. Uma is forced to discontinue her studies after her brother is awarded a scholarship to the United States. What element makes her life likely to end tragically? The research paper will look for solutions to these issues.

'Fasting, Feasting' illustrates how the patriarchal system gradually degrades women. Due to the society's

unfair treatment of them, they are forced to give up their true strength. Without a doubt, if they are given equal opportunity and treatment, they may demonstrate that they are effective and competitive as well. However, social injustice and a discriminating mindset have rendered them unsuccessful and uncompetitive. Because gender discrimination has a profound impact on everyone's thinking, at least to some extent, this study will be centered around the hypothesis that "women's potentiality gets stifled mainly because gender-discrimination either knowingly or unknowingly imposes its order upon the society. "Every member of society must reconsider the relevance of this prevalent phenomena and work toward gender equality in order to remove this so-called patriarchal worldview.

In the male-dominated society, women are systematically oppressed. Social mores and practices that degrade women physically and psychologically include discrimination against them. This study examines Indian society in the late 20th century, where patriarchy still has a significant impact even on well-educated families. The study will be important for seeing how gender discrimination is practiced inside the family and society, as well as how women's potential is inhibited. Only academic research is intended by the study. While Part One of the book *Fasting, Feasting*, which tells the story of Uma and the Indian patriarchal culture, is broken into two parts, Parts One and Two, the study will be concentrated on Part One. The Patton family in the US will not be the main focus of part two. Uma's failure and her brother Arun's achievement are the main topics of the research. The position of Anamika and other female characters will be used as evidence to support the hypothesis. The thesis makes no mention of any individual studies of language, design, or other aesthetic elements. Additionally, it does not view the issues in terms of a specific theorist's theoretical presumptions.

Her main characters are caught up in a perplexing scenario that is directly tied to their existence. Problems with loneliness, alienation, and pessimism influence them. The concept of existential crisis is present in the social context in which men and women are depicted in opposition to one another as the ruler and the subject, respectively, is what interests her most. Existential conflict arises in this circumstance as a result of the self's need for satisfaction. Additionally, her female characters suffer from males and the social conventions that they, together with other men, have established. Because of this change, her characters' struggle takes on a warped form. Her characters serve as her spokespeople while she searches for the actual meaning of life. The protagonists are so overcome by existential dread that they all dive headfirst into this abyss in an effort to get some understanding of life's issues. As Robert Browning did, she delves deeply into the minds of her characters and reveals the wounds that

society, family, and one's own self have left on them. Desai has been compared to other authors who exhibit existential angst and are seeking the meaning of life because of her alternating passion with life and obsession with death (Devika 240).

We understand that some of the issues her female heroines face are neither unique to fiction nor to Indian women. They are a part of the universal ailment that affects women everywhere, in reality and in stories. Relationship conflicts between people of either gender. These characters also lack a certain level of life and sensitivity. In *The Novels of Anita Desai: A Critical Study*, Dr. S.P. Swain describes Desai's lacunae as follows:

Her major novels tend to disappoint the reader due to their one-

Dimensionality, turning the characters wooden and insensitive. They are not

Kaleidoscopic in their thematic projection. In most of them there is a repeated and dull harping on the isolation of the self. However, they are deeply moving in their existential and socio-psychic import. Microcosm of man's

endless struggle for survival, they voice the anguished ennui of the caged bird that symbolizes the modern man. Emblems of remonstrance and psychic protest, they strive for the protection and preservation of their dignity and self-esteem in a patriarchal society (Devika 247)

Her works show her engagement in the intense emotions of her women characters, who are perceived as the worst victims and are severely repressed due to social "tantalization" or marital strife. She is highly sensitive, much like her characters, which gives her the ability to produce a very effective in-depth study of her female characters, so it seems only logical that she would be preoccupied in this way. In her works, she uses these ladies to highlight a wide range of subjects,

including left-wing politics, Generational differences, feminism, sexual freedom, and the ongoing competition between marriage, profession, and self-fulfillment the debates over tradition, modernity, and religion; the complexities of personal and cultural liberty; the tug-of-war between members of one's own family; desire, guilt, incest; and feminine narcissism, Relationships between men and women are harmed by intellectual women's restlessness, which can result in self-delusion, fragmentation,

schizophrenia, and other fundamental issues (Krishnaswamy 239). Desai's *'Fasting, Feasting'* by Anita Desai (1999) continues her habit of portraying the femininesensibility and the devastating experiences of women in patriarchal society. Here, she focuses on the enormous influence of family, society, and the interactions among family members, paying careful attention to the struggles faced by women who are at least marginalized by Indian culture. The book is split into two sections. The first features a family of three in India, including Uma, Aruna, and Arun, as well as their parents. The oldest kid, Uma, falls victim to society's desire to force girls to conform to the rules of the patriarchal system. She needs to stop studying in order to care for her brother Arun following his birth. She still hasn't achieved her aim of attending college and furthering her education. Uma's decline starts. If the definition of success for women is "happy marriage," then Aruna may be called fortunate. Arun, the family's lone son, travels to the United States for further study to realize his parents' goal.

The Patton family is the subject of the second section. The Patton family consists of Melanie, a bulimic and anorexic daughter, Rod, a body-obsessed jock son, and Mr. Patton, a dissatisfied father who enjoys "barbecuing." They lead a robotic existence in which "happiness" seems a long way off.

The narrative of Uma is mostly about fasting and feasting. Desai has successfully represented the essence of two distinct regions of the world through food symbols. Fasting is intimately related with Uma and the Eastern side and represents starvation or the hunger of the shallow existence, which is undoubtedly in search of love, happiness, identity, etc. Feasting is associated with overindulgence, excessive delight, and personal freedom, particularly in Melanie and the Western world, which never bring about peace and happiness. When choosing between these two options, a significant conundrum is presented: "Of the two points, it is difficult to tell that which one is fouler. There is no comparison between Uma's frenzy brought on by lack of food and Melanie's pool of puke. These comments might be interpreted by readers as alarms for extreme civilizations (Tiwari 11).

The main character of the book, Uma, is a hapless member of an orthodox family that is once more situated in a narrow society. The patriarch controls the entire family and commands them to do as he pleases. He desires to use his power in a patriarchal manner.

The harmed party in this arrangement is Uma. Patriarchy not only oppresses Uma and the women on the Indian side, but Melanie and her mother, Mrs. Patton, on the American side as well. Likewise has the same issue. As a result, we discover that "the patriarch's response is the same everywhere, despite

differences in culture, environment, and socio-familial norms. Mr. Patton exhibits a lack of interest in his wife's vegetarianism, acting "as if he had simply not heard, or understood." [...] In contrasting affinity, we discover the subversive forces opposing women in both the stifling Indian civilization and the more free Western society (Choubey 95). Uma is designed to appear to be a victim of her own circumstances rather than being directly harmed by society, in contrast to other women characters of Desai who are victims of society. She "accepts her destiny quietly, ungrudgingly, and attempts to live like the dumb-driven cattle" because she is "a victim of her fate" (Khan 379). But she always appears to have inexpressible aspirations, fantasies, and expectations. She is sensible, intelligent, and conscious of her surroundings. But she is constantly required to put up with all the humiliations, injustices, pains, and sorrows without protesting or speaking out.

CONCLUSION-

Finally, we may draw the conclusion that society should appreciate the potential of women if it wishes to advance peacefully. Women might make significant contributions to society if they are treated equally. Now is the moment to look at how women are oppressed as well as find instances when women have demonstrated their true potential. Women must now fight their battles on their own, per the times. Use your knowledge, awareness, and talent to establish a respectable place for yourself in society. Last but not least, gender relations within the family must be changed to adhere to egalitarian standards in order to prevent a woman from being sacrificed on the altar of sacrifice and service.

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