



Psychological Perspectives and Marginalised Women in the Select Novels of Anita Desai and Githa Hariharan

Firdous Rashid
Research Scholar

Department of Comparative languages and culture Barkatullah University Bhopal, (M.P).

Dr.Kranti Vats
Professor of English

Dept of English, Govt M.V.M Bhopal, (M.P).

Abstract

Anita Desai and Gita Hariharan attempt to explore the various characteristics of women in Indian society today. Both illustrate the diversity and variety of India among Indian English writers. The characters' writings are made up of their repressed desires, their passion, and their inner experiences. Besides that, it investigates the nature of aspirations and fights to achieve self-definition while illustrating the protagonists' moral and emotional solitude. The goal of hermeneutics is to interpret signs, and this paper examines the art of interpretation practised by Anita Desai in *Cry The Peacock* and Gita Hariharan in *Thousand Faces of Night* for the accomplishment of women's identities. The emotions, aspirations, desires, and constraints of their protagonists are projected by women writers. In particular, they emphasise the difficulties faced by women in a repressive patriarchal culture. They also portray the dramatic experience of women. The study reveals the writers' methods for expressing their thoughts on gender relations in their fictional female characters. In the works of Anita Desai and Githa Hariharan, a new woman's self-concept develops from a sequence of gender encounters set within the framework of sociology, psychology, ideology, history, and feminism.

Keywords: Gender inequality, discrimination, injustice, Hermeneutics, facets, complexity

Introduction

The spiritual climate in our day is quite challenging. The modern guy experiences an inner dilemma of meaninglessness in his way of life and loneliness. Every aspect of existence is threatened by the existential crisis because it is so important. In this situation, female authors like Arundathi Roy, Gita Mehta, Gita Hariharan, Kamala Markandaya, and Anita Desai demonstrate a keen interest in human nature. They do a fantastic job of accurately capturing the spirit of India. Anita Desai and Gita Hariharan, two prominent novelists, focus on the struggles of their female protagonists who are experiencing identity crises and are on the hunt for independence as they depict the diversity and variety of India. Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretations and Wilhelm Dilthey, a religious thinker in his last essay "*The Understanding of Other Persons and Their Manifestations of Life*" (1910), makes it clear that this move from outer to inner, from expression to what is expressed, is not based on empathy. The empathy involves a direct identification with the other. The interpretation involves an indirect or mediated understanding that can only be attained by placing human expressions in their historical context. He further explains that understanding is not a process of reconstructing the state of mind of the author, but what is expressed in the work (Makkreel 480).

The women of Anita Desai are searching for freedom because they are fed up with social and marital shackles. Female protagonists struggle to achieve freedom from the restrictive mould because they are burdened by the consciousness of their gender. Shanta Krishnaswami points out that in Desai's novels, "Being a woman is problem. All the rules and restrictions against which little girls chafed and woman grumbled about were designed only to block all routes to escape from the conventional mode of living, from the society that beastly tamer..." (258). To discover the purpose of their existence, her characters set off on a prolonged journey of reflection.

The hierarchy of social and moral norms between the sexes is symptomatic in a culture where women are subordinated. It stands for the opposition between action and inaction, between submissive submission and disobedience. David Lodge in his work *Modern Criticism and Theory* explains Cixous's statement that "A male privilege can be seen in the opposition between activity and passivity. Traditionally, the question of sexual difference is coupled with the same opposition: activity/passivity". Women are frequently seen as passive symbols. Cixous further explains that, "Either the woman is passive, or she doesn't exist. What is left is unthinkable, unsought of. She does not enter into the opposition; she is not coupled with the father who is coupled with the son" (288). These waves of female writers fearlessly take on the challenge of portraying,

defining, analyzing, and debating the actual status and functional roles of modern Indian women. The focus of Desai and Hariharan's work is on the inner experience of the female protagonists while also examining how they interact with the outside world.

Women are regarded as autonomous individuals within the setting of the family. Undoubtedly one of the most well-known contemporary women writers in India is Anita Desai. Her writings address important issues including a woman's desire for self-identity, an examination of the female intellect, an understanding of life's mysteries, and a woman's encounter with the difficulties of modern Indian culture. In her writings, the women explore and define their identities as daughters, sisters, mothers, wives, and, most significantly, as humans. The female characters in Hariharan's works possess their own strength, and they don't back down in the face of hardship or aggression. Most of her paintings reflect the life of a typical middle-class housewife. Her main area of interest is the need to find oneself to make space for oneself. The role of memory in her writings and her creative bursts Instead of using cryptic characters, she uses real individuals to convey a convincing story. She believes that life should be shown as it is rather than being idealized. She depicts the struggle of middle-class Indian women, their inner conflict and identity-seeking, problems with marriage and sex, as well as their exploration and disillusionment. Offering primed solutions are incompatible with Hariharan's principles. "The Indian novel in English preserves problems and enigmas," says R. S. Pathak. However, it has stood the test of time and proven its worth". (Pathak, 1996, p. 6) The purpose of this study is to analyze how female characters in Anita Desai's and Githa Hariharan's novels seek identity through their relationships with males.

Anita Desai is renowned for his inner-world sensitivity, and she personifies the welcoming creative emancipation of feminine sensibility. *Cry the Peacock*, Desai's maiden published book was published in 1963. Desai is a poet who employs poetry and exquisite language to capture the sentiments, emotions, alienation, and yearning for self-identity of women. Desai highlights the oppressed struggles of women while underlining the enormous significance of family and society, relationships, and familial estrangement to demonstrate India's cultural and social upheavals. A significant societal tendency in today's largely male-dominated societies is the increasing marginalization of women; in India, for instance, women are legally prohibited from entering electoral office. Anita Desai wants to highlight the difficulties that women encounter in society today as well as the suffering that her characters go through internally. She explores feelings of hopelessness, agony, struggle, and ultimately despair in her works. The inner lives of her protagonists have depth because of her

distinctive writing style. Through the author's deft use of imagery, symbolism, metaphors, and other narrative devices, we learn a great deal about the individuals' disordered psyches. A successful fiction author who rejects both reality and idealism is uncommon, but Desai is one such writer. She dives deeply into the minds of her characters to examine concepts like helplessness, agony, struggle, and acceptance. Because of the worldwide popularity and following that her novels have attracted, Desai is a great literary phenomenon.

Female subjectivity is a theme that Githa Hariharan first attempted to write about in her early works. She employs her female characters to illustrate how women's roles have changed in the modern and postmodern periods. The world is depicted in three different epochs in Hariharan's writings: traditional, transitional, and current. Devi's character, the "*Thousand Faces Of The Night*," seems to imply that each of her personalities is a symbol of a "new" woman who is trying to reject societal conventions that have been in place for generations. She succeeds in her overarching political goal of using her novels as a platform for exploring new realities and subtly projecting ideals by raising issues and urging re-evaluation and redefinition through the resolutions that her female protagonists find that correspond to a re-definition of women's lives. In other words, "they are less prescriptive and allow alternatives" rather than "victimizing the poor" (Arundhati Roy and Githa Hariharan, 2005, p. 38) A woman has never been regarded as an autonomous entity since she has always been given a submissive and relative status. Men may envision a world without women. She finds it impossible to imagine herself without a man. And that is exactly what a man wants—she comes across to him as a sexual being first and foremost. He defines and distinguishes her concerning him, not the other way around; she is the incidental, the non-essential, as opposed to the essential. What a well-known feminist stated about marriage holds a lot of weight for Simone de Beauvoir: "We build factories, offices, and facilities for women, but we continue to believe that marriage is the most dignified career for a woman, liberating her from the need to participate in society in any other way" (De. Beauvoir Simone, 1974, p. 67)

Women have not learned to perceive themselves since the mirrors they gaze in do not reflect them. They show how males view all women, whether they are married or not. Mirrors reflect the males in their lives, such as their dads and brothers, while forcing the women to wear purdah, or modest clothing to conceal themselves. The complex and even tumultuous web of Indian women's life can be seen through their interactions with men. Because of her fleeting urges, frustrations, disappointments, warped perspective on life, and emotional and transient feelings, a woman's personality has a fractured texture. If a man and woman's connection is not enjoyable and useful, the relationship suffers and their state of mind is twisted. Many of these

people cheat on their partners and ruin their relationships. When spouses are deceitful to one another, divorce is the only viable option. Couples should manage their relationships with a healthy dose of mutual understanding, justice, care, dedication, compromise, and appropriateness

You must improve your personal connection if you want to have a happy marriage. Physical compatibility is necessary for the development of a strong emotional connection. Divorce can result from ordinary reasons of discontent, such as sexual unhappiness or reproductive limitations. If you have a little tolerance and patience, you can escape the terrible and emotional scar that is divorce. Nowadays, if a couple's relationship starts to feel uncertain, they may think about consulting a marriage counsellor. The most productive environments or contexts for the study of gender relations have been identified by theorists.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Due to the predominance of male-dominated societal systems during the 20th century, women have faced substantial human rights issues and social hindrances. Literature and inequality are closely related. In literature, sad events, horrible situations, and the treatment of women in the 18th and 19th centuries are frequently portrayed. Women are typically expected to go three steps more slowly than men. Whether Anita Desai is playing a male or female part, the dominant characters are always women. The Bhagavad idea Gita inspired Gautama to adopt a non-attachment parenting style with his wife. This is how the protagonist of the story comes to be abandoned by her spouse. When her dog, Toto, dies at the start of the novel. This trauma has played a key role in her mental health concerns. Gautama is angry, unsatisfied, and troubled by how he handled Toto's death. She had a wide gap between the two because her childhood was more comparable to a fairy tale than reality. The main theme of the novel, fighting and mating peacocks, not only underlines Maya's pristine recollection but also contrasts with her current overwrought thinking, which is filled with bird and animal pictures.

As the novel comes to an end, Maya commits suicide. According to the astrologer, she is afraid of dying. She is the most memorable female protagonist produced by Indo-Anglian authors. She is giving voice to the countless women who have been silenced under the male dominance. In Anita Desai's canon, neurotic outbursts were a result of internal conflicts with melancholy and fury. In *Cry the Peacock*, Gautama is ultimately killed by their flimsy love, which also drives Maya insane before she commits suicide. Anita Desai examines a variety of aspects of human connections in her writing. She has to face with difficult problems including loneliness, misery, and boredom. In *Cry the Peacock*, she uses the peacock as a "myth," which is

essential to the plot. Peacock reproduction is becoming less successful, and peacock dance is becoming extinct.

The peacock tale serves as a reminder of the necessity of battling for one's own existence. Githa Hariharan focuses on how a spouse frustrates an educated woman's desire for company and depicts the psychological traumas of the angry housewife.

The main character Devi, her mother Sita, her grandmother, and Mayamma, the retainer in the home of Devi's father-in-law, are all nominal protestors in Githa Hariharan's *Thousand Faces of Night*. After being tortured to subjugate them, their opposition is frequently silent and suppressed. The definition of an individual, and a woman in particular, underwent fast transitions as well as subtle and unpredictably changing alterations. Since the spread of education is also a factor that has a significant impact on the life of women, the cultural transformation has been forcibly expedited. Even while the extension of education was only intended to increase literacy rates, it also served other purposes. Women were redefined through education and employment to become a crucial component of this wave. Devi, the main character, gave in to this marital pressure despite earning a degree from the USA, and when she returned, she was once again subjected to the same oppressive demands brought on by the previous social order. The practices surrounding marriages were demanded of her. "So they were looking for an accomplished bride, a young woman who would talk intelligently to her scientist husband's friends, but who would also be, as all the matrimonial ads in the Sunday papers demanded, fair, beautiful, home-loving and prepared to adjust." (TFN: 17) As he met her mother's requirements, a stranger by the name of Mahesh regional manager eventually won her approval and became her partner. Her marriage ended, and she wanted to express her thoughts to her husband. Unfortunately, he was distant and only spoke about himself. Devi grows weary and believes that all she has done is listen to his accomplishments and anecdotes. "I find I can barely suppress my increasing longing to say, yes we have said enough about your work, your tours, and your company. A marriage cannot be forced into suddenly being there, it must grow gradually, like a delicate but promising sapling." (TFN: 49) These thoughts of sharing and a desire to be understood arise because of her education. When Mahesh was away for his office accomplishments she spends her time with her father-in-law and listened to his music and collection of records. She is interested in learning Sanskrit and expressed her wish to her husband and immediately gets the reply that it is useless.

She felt as though the stranger had stripped her as he snapped his fingers and demanded a cheery handmaiden. She believed that her education had underprepared her for the ensuing, yawning middle chapters

of womanhood. She attempted to apply for a position as a research assistant due to her loneliness, but her husband dissuaded her. Even though she was educated, she was unable to learn about her husband's profile, and when she questioned about his profession, he interrupted her, stating that she wouldn't comprehend and that it was important for her to learn. "There is a lot of paperwork of course, letters, reports, plans of action and targets. Then we have to know what the market wants. More important, some of us have to tell the market what it wants." (TFN: 71).

Devi is part of the group of woke women who desire more. She is not a hard-core feminist who immediately protests, but rather a more moderate feminist who first works toward an amicable solution. She is brave enough to accept risks since she has seen life up close and wants to live. She walks out of wedlock bravely in her search for care, compassion, and commitment. Devi's degree and knowledge prevent her from accepting a practical approach in her life, thus she takes the ultimate step. Her education prevents her from accepting social conventions, and her grandmother's stories have already troubled her. She is not a passive acceptor of what life has to offer; rather, she inherited her father-in-spirit laws of resistance. Her grandmother's stories have had a significant impact on her thoughts. She rejects her grandmother's interpretations of the puranic women Amba, Gandhari, and Damayanti. She becomes an active participant, considering the stories as a source of overflowing, "unadulterated nourishment" that fills her mental canvas and serves as a weapon of empowerment. Even though she doesn't quite believe her grandmother's stories, she nevertheless feels depressed when her grandmother passes away. The desperate efforts of an estranged lady to find safety and shelter can be witnessed in her final relationship with her mother. Readers can identify with Devi as a contemporary young woman with roots in Hindu tradition, myths, and legends who is also courageous enough to seize her freedom.

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