

PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN CHARACTERS IN THE WORKS OF ANITA MAZUMDAR DESAI

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ABSTRACT

Women have been the subject of discussion since times immemorial and they have been depicted in various hues and shades especially in the Indian English Literature. They have been an object of oppression and suppression in the male dominated society. However, with the passage of time, feminism has been established in India, setting aside the patriarchal predominance to a certain extent. As a result women have started snatching suitable spaces for themselves. Feminist writers in India today proudly advocate their cause of 'womanhood', through their writings. In the present paper, an attempt is made to study the women characters in the prominent works of Anita Desai. The authors intend to look at the behavior of women characters in adverse circumstances. Do the female characters act rationally and break the four walls of the boundary created by the society or do they suffer as it is because they are destined to do so by virtue of their nature? The paper lays stress on the emotional crisis of her protagonists who live in a chaotic society and delve deep to find out the factors responsible for such a despair. Further, it attempts to suggest solutions to overcome it. The paper takes into account the heroines of "Cry, The Peacock", "Where shall we go this Summer", "Clear Light of Day", and "Fasting, Feasting".

KEYWORDS: Emotional Crisis, Feminism, Patriarchal, Predominance

INTRODUCTION

Womanhood in Indian English writers is not at all a new concept and over the years, a number of new writers have broken into the literary circuit and successfully formed a reader base. Indian women writers such as Toru Dutt, Kamala Das, Anita Desai, Sarojini Naidu, Suniti Namjoshi, Arundhati Roy, Shahsi Deshpande etc to name a few deal with the amazing variety of themes, in a style, that poetry and novels are capable of offering. Each writer, in her own way, has tried to convey her thoughts in a distinct personal voice, yet have been successful in forming a part of the chorus, a collective tone emphasizing the dominion of women. Women writers have often raised their voice against social and cultural practices that restricted their freedom and led to their institutional seclusion.

A prick into the mystical crusts of the mind of Anita Desai's heroines exhibits the cosmic emptiness, continual isolation and an abysmal desolation from which they suffer. Desai's women characters are not ideally humble and docile but defiant by nature and indifferent to patriarchy. They flip the idea that women should be confined to the "four-walls" and their primary duty is towards their family. They silently rebel and take recourse to nature – a world of their own, a world where they can affirm their independence, femininity and womanhood not limited by familial bonds.

DISCUSSIONS

Cry, the Peacock, the first novel of Anita Desai reveals the mood observation, detachment and abnormal behavior of protagonist Maya, along with the gruesome fright, culminating into madness, and finally suicide because of her

entrapment in a loveless, arranged marriage to Gautama, a misogynistic lawyer much older to her. The novel points out the problems of independence and communication, the influence of the West, and the tensions between religious and domestic interaction. The novels brings to fore the fears, insecurity, loneliness and sufferings of Indian women and the reasons for them. It is noticed that the main cause of marital discord and loneliness of Indian women lie in age difference, difference in maturity, Indian philosophy of detachment and communication gap between husband and wife. In addition, the very mindset of Indian women that they are supposed to be meek, docile, submissive etc adds to their vacuity.

Maya shares a very affectionate relationship with her father and is pained to leave her home at marriage. Her problem upbringing caused by her mother's death makes her detached from the outside world. Thus she says:

“.....my childhood was one in which much was excluded, which grew steadily more restricted, unnatural even, and in which I lived as a toy princess in a toy world. But it was pretty one”.

The expectations she had at marriage are not fulfilled and as a result, she becomes fuzzy. She finds Gautama, her husband, as a man in whom “understanding was scant, love was meager”. As time elapses, she gets more and more restless, brooding over her barrenness that she feels at heart.

“.....I had yearned for the contact that goes deeper than flesh- that of thought- and longed to transmit to him the laughter that gurgled up in my throat as I saw a goat nuzzle, secretly, a basket of sliced melons in the bazaar while the vendor's back was turned, or the profound thrill that lit a bonfire in the pit of my stomach-when I saw the sun unfurl like a rose in the west, the west and farther west....,But those were the times when I admitted to the loneliness of the Human soul, and I would keep silent”.

Thus, she is portrayed as an extremely sensitive character; she represents a woman who has failed to come to terms with the dominion of patriarchy. Though she lives in the male's world, she refuses to identify herself to it and revolts in her own ways. She adopts an escapist path and becomes a “nature's child” wherein she tries to seek solace in the natural landscapes and gardens. The emptiness at her heart is filled by birds and animals, a space that humans fail to fill in Maya's life.

Maya is quite different from the typical Indian women. She rebels against the idea of “ideal housewife”. Her total economic dependence on her husband makes her feel rather insecure and powerless because she sees herself ineffective to her “protector's” eyes. Here she becomes a new woman who defies patriarchal order; she, infact, represents a strong contrast to the “adarsh Indian nari”. She tries to find out a new vista for a woman's world- a space where she is at parity with man.

Despite the fact that Maya's world is full with attachments, pleasure of affluence, of the smell and beauty of her garden's flowers, she feels vacuity, meaninglessness and a lack of belongingness. Though she fears solitude, she refuses to open up to the world for fear of being not understood as an independent existential being. Thus, she generates a private space for herself that is filled with the colors of flower after being pained by the indifference of her husband Gautama to her world:

“Grey, grey, all was grey for Gautama, who lived so narrowly, so shallowly. And I felt sorry, infinitely sorry for him, for his slow, harmless, guideless being who walked the fresh grass and did not know he touched it”

Similarly, in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Anita Desai depicts the inner – outer world of its female lead Sita and her fatigue for life. Sita, a non-conformist young wife is torn between the desire to abandon the boredom and hypocrisy of her middle class and apparently comfortable existence and the realization that the bonds that tie her to it

cannot easily be broken. As she is highly emotional, sensitive, intellectual and freedom loving, she finds it very difficult to adjust to the patriarchal culture and practically civilized world. She feels asphyxiated due to the "vegetarian complacency, the stolidity", 'insularity' and unimaginative way of life of her husband, children and other people around her. Consequently, her life becomes dull and boring. She finds it difficult to live with her husband in, 'their age rotted flat', which is marked by 'sub-human placidity, calmness and sluggishness' and feels that 'their sub humanity might swamp her'. In order to get rid of her seclusion, and to preserve her individuality, she behaves in a despicable manner by smoking openly.

She along with her husband and children move to a small flat but she doesn't find life any better as she has to attend to people whose "insularity and complacency as well as the aggression and violence of others" serves as "affronts upon her tiring nerves". Raman's deep involvement in his business and the children's independence add to her isolation and thereby marital disharmony increases substantially. To assert her individuality and her existence as an independent existential being, she carves a niche for herself by escaping to 'Manori' indicating her inadaptiveness in her husband's house. When she finds herself pregnant by her fifth child, she is unhappy and is apprehensive at the thought of losing its innocence in this world where nothing except "food, sex and money matters. Her escape to Manori provides her some kind of solace:

"She had come here in order to give birth...she was on the island, in order to achieve the miracle of not giving birth, Wasn't this Manori, the island of miracles....She had four children with pride, with pleasure-sensual, emotional, Freudian, every kind of pleasure-with all the placid serenity that supposedly goes with pregnancy and parturition"

Her reason for her coming to Manori is to achieve the miracle of keeping her baby unborn. Her morbid fear of the people in the city and the emotional alienation from her husband led her to the island. She considers the world wicked and full of destructions and does not want to give birth to her baby in this cruel world.

Her initial enthusiasm that the island will work miracles on her slowly wanes.

Unlike the true bhartiya nari, Sita tries to triumph over the chaos and suffering of her rather unusual existence.

Her children, who lived in the city comfortably, could not adjust with the life in the island, accuse Sita and regard life on the island as madness. They want to escape from that island to their 'beloved' city. So, Menaka, her daughter, without the knowledge of Sita writes a letter to Raman to come and take them home. When Raman arrives, Sita is reluctant in leaving the island and after much conflict, Sita, goes back to Bombay to live with her children and husband. Her expectation of a miracle in the island did not happen and she joins her family in the city. Here she resembles the typical Indian woman. She suffers because of her biased attitude towards life. Sita is over-sensitive who finds herself confined in the urban life after leading a carefree life in rural area under the protection of her father. The artificialities, fast pace and harshness of city life nauseate her to such an extent that she longs to go back to an island where she has cherished all the delicacies. After being taken away from her father and her place, she feels the void and expects more love and care from her husband- quite true of every Indian nari. Raman who is pragmatic in his approach fails to understand her. Sita accuses her husband and hates her kids for being practical and insensitive- like their father. Raman tries to enlighten her mind about the 'contraries' in life, saying "other people put up with it – it's not so – so insufferable." (143) But she lacks courage, practical knowledge and wisdom which make others believe that "life must be continued, and all its business...why can't you? Perhaps one should be grateful if life is only a matter of disappointment, not disaster."(143)

Sita always prefers to live alone with her husband away from his friends and relatives. She could never tolerate Raman's friends visiting them for she feels 'appalled' and 'frightened' by the guests. He regards them with little humour

and with restraint. But to Sita, “they are ‘nothing’ – nothing but appetite and sex. Only food, sex and money matters. Animals” (47). She uses harsh words about her guests and calls them “pariahs... in the streets, hanging about drains and dustbins waiting to pounce and kill and eat” (47)

Raman is an ordinary husband who like any other man has great care for his family. He is quite affectionate towards his wife and therefore, is reluctant to send her to Manori. When she wants to escape to Manori, Raman says,

You must stay where there is a doctor, a Hospital, and a telephone. You can't go to the island in the middle of the monsoon. You can't have a baby there. (33)

Sita is a motherless child and she experienced partiality, neglect, indifference right from the beginning of her childhood. Sita's father had no time for his children. It was Rekha, Sita's sister who was close to his heart. She always has a doubt about Rekha and her relationship with her, for there is no resemblance between the two sisters. Her much suppressed emotions in her childhood is responsible for her perturbed mental state in future. The indifference of her father, alienation from sister, lack of love and care from her mother brings about many psychological changes in her.

The betrayal of her husband, his family, her children and acquaintances violently tears her apart; it is only later on does she start feeling bad about her doings. Wisdom dawns on her and she wants to return to reality. When Raman prepares to leave Manori, she mends her ways and follows his footprints like a ‘true bhartiya nari’.

She lowers her head and searched out his footprints so that she could place her feet in them, as a kind of game to make walking back easier, and so her footprints, mingled with his.(150) The magic and charm of the island vanishes and instead of silence and peace Sita experiences unrest. She realizes that, life in Bombay is the reality, the island represents a stage world, a utopian world, a world which collapses on close contact

Finally, Sita realizes that illusion and reality are two sides of life and they are inseparable. Of course if one is alive, in this world one cannot survive without compromise, drawing the lines means certain death and in the end, Sita opts for life – with compromise.(21) Unlike Maya in *Cry, the peacock*, Sita neither commits suicide nor kills anyone but she simply compromises with her destiny, which is quite relevant in the Indian scenario. Sita comes to accept the prosaic nature of life which runs through difficult human situations in different ways. She finds the courage to face life, in the end, with all its ups and downs.(119)

Though the heroines of Anita Desai often act violently but in this novel there is a positive change. Sita reconciles herself to her fate. She strikes a perfect balance between her inner self and the outer world. Unlike Maya, her alienation is not temperamental or environmental.

Clear Light of Day is the story of the Indian Das family, the members of which are no longer all together. Bimla, or Bim, is an unmarried history teacher who has never left her home and family in Old Delhi. She is the person who has the responsibility of taking care of her autistic brother, Baba. Her younger sister, Tara, is married to Bakul and has children. She comes back to visit her family in Old Delhi with her husband who is India's ambassador to America.

The story moves back in time from the characters' adulthood to their adolescence and then to their childhood. When they were children, Tara's wish to become a mother was often ridiculed by Bim and Raja, another brother now living in Hyderabad, as these two wanted to be a heroine and a hero respectively. In the final part, apart from family decisions such as whether or not to attend Raja's daughter's wedding, the significant climactic point is when Bim explodes at Baba and then decides that familial love can cover all wrongs.

Although Bim seems to have taken on the traditional role of a male within the family as the economically dominant person and the protector of the other members of the family, her mind is still busy with how to sacrifice herself and her own life for the sake of others, Birds and animals. Thus, the novel is a beautiful amalgamation of the clash between freedom and solitude on the one hand and attachment and the need to connect on the other. The idea of being a life-giver or a nurturer is reaffirmed in the personality of Mira-Masi, the woman who took care of the children after their mother's death. She later becomes an alcoholic, and when she loses her independence and needs care like a little child, Bim is there to take over the role of the mother. Thus, it can be said that the role of woman as the life-giver and the mother of the whole family does not disappear at all but instead, it switches from time to time among these female characters in the novel.

Bakul's claims to be the person who gave Tara a new and better life. This puts him into the position of the dominant male who directs the female subject- a characteristic feature of the Indian patriarchal system. This means she is not considered to have an identity without her husband's authorization. Secondly, Bakul's attitude towards Tara reveals the colonial power that still exists in people's everyday conversations and directs them by highlight the idea that the West is more like a proper life and a way of existence as opposed to Tara's life back in India. So Tara's voice is doubly silenced- by her husband as well as by the colonial power that still perpetuates in several ways. Even if these women had chosen not to surrender and instead tried to break the conventions and confront their situation as female subjects under the colonial and patriarchal system, their voice would not be heard and they would, at some point, be silenced by the system.

Fasting, Feasting, deals with the condition of women in India. Desai employs the Hindu imagery of sun/fire to represent the patriarchal power and water represents recognition of women's condition and a possible way to liberation. Uma, the main character of the novel, achieves recognition of her condition to some extent. Further, a parallel pilgrimage of Arun, is analysed through his recognition of the suffering of both American women/girls and of his own sister Uma. He realizes that it is only through the fusion of both male and female recognition and effort, a woman can be released from the oppressive conditions of patriarchy.

The words "fasting" and "feasting" stand for the two parts of the novel respectively: the first is situated in India (the country of "fasting," which refers not only to the religious aspect, but also to an unwilling "fasting" of the many poor of the country) and the second in the United States (the country of "feasting," abundance). Uma, the main character of the novel, fasts the most particularly with respect to access to education and the free development of personality. As her awareness of her own hunger and suffering grows, she becomes sensitive also to the other characters' "feasting" on power, freedom, and education. Her feelings are not paid any attention to within the family circle, at least not by her parents and "superiors". It is only as Arun, the main protagonist of the second part, becomes aware of her suffering, he who himself, is forced into "feasting" as to education simply because he is a boy and he must receive "the best" in all respects, whether he wants it or not.

The novel portrays the life of an Indian contemporary middle class urban Hindu nuclear family. The parents are on a garden swing, thinking over what they should have for tea. Their adult daughter Uma, who is packing a parcel for her brother, a shawl and tea, is called by her mother to tell the wish of the father to the cook. This environment represents the hierarchy of power. The "orange ceremony" beautifully supports the hierarchy. The father "patriarch on the top of the hierarchy pyramid," enjoys a kingly status and does not even have to utter a word. The mother, a well-trained instrument of his power, strengthens this power in the consciousness of the subject member by performing a ritual: "She taps Uma on the elbow. 'Orange,' she instructs her. She picks out the largest orange in the bowl and hands it to Mama who peels it in strips, then divides it into separate segments. Each segment is then peeled and freed of pips and threads till only the perfect

globules of juice are left, and then passed, one by one to the edge of Papa's plate... Mama sits back. The ceremony is over. She has performed it. Everyone is satisfied" (23, 24).

Thus only the male (here the father) is feasting on power as represented by the orange ceremony; Females (whether wife or daughter) don't have any access to the orange. The mother, an instrument of the patriarchal power, becomes a part of the patriarchal structures.

Similarly, in a far off place an analogical introductory ritual is going on- an American patriarch presiding over the ceremony. In a scorching hot American summer, the preparation of a barbecue is described openly in religious terms. The members of the congregation, Mrs Patton, the "minister's" wife, and Arun, do not eat the sacrificial meat but they assist at the ceremonial presentation of it; Uma, her American counterpart Melanie, and other girls and women then find themselves in the oppressive environment of sun and fire where it is difficult to survive.

Uma's behavior stays unmarried. In India, a woman lives for the sake of others, namely for the sake of her husband. Uma is not found attractive either by her family or by any of the possible suitors and husbands-to-be. When still at school she fails almost all the exams, grown up she is often reprimanded for being childish, slow, and "always sleeping" (Fasting, Feasting 101).

Uma's pilgrimage begins soon after the birth of her brother Arun when she is in her early teens. Mama is proud to have fulfilled her life role by giving birth to a son, Papa is proud to have been able to produce, finally, a male offspring and lets Mama into the realm of patriarchal structures, although only as an instrument. Then Uma is not allowed to continue her education and she, although not a good student, is an eager one and zealously resists her parents' decision. The parents feel that "there is no need" to waste money and education on girls which in turn can be utilized for the boy. Consequently, Uma feels she has to escape but she does not know yet exactly what for. She is progressively introduced into the inner world of Hindu legends and tales by Mira-masi, an ardent worshipper of Shiva. Mira-masi's stories show the dual character of the woman's fate: death of a victim after having been abandoned by her husband; the other is a poetess, independent, struggling for recognition; in the meantime she is considered a madwoman. With Mira-masi, Uma feels that she is "admitted into some sanctuary that had been previously closed to her" (42). The nuns at St. Mary's had not admitted her into their chapel, where she had always wanted to go. Now "she was counted in, a member, although of what, she could not say" (43). But there is then some progress for Uma; she realizes that it is necessary to search for a different reality than that defined by her parent.. In the company of Mira-masi, she feels that at least she receives a certain attention and recognition as a person. The inner world of contemplation of existence is open to her. The inner structures of her culture are revealed to her so that she can better understand how they work. Further on, in another escapist action she undertakes with Mira-masi when they go to an ashram as pilgrims, she is free enough to think. While Mira-masi carries on her worship duties, Uma wanders around, feeling she is caught between two forces pulling in different directions, the power of patriarchal education and tradition, and the urge to get free of it. There is a river there but is not easy to approach during the day because the sand is burning from the sun. But towards the evenings Uma can walk along the river and she becomes sure that she cannot turn to Miramasi any more for guidance.

Uma stays unmarried; and she has to go a long and painful journey through this suntrap of the valley of marriage arrangements. Inside the realm of patriarchy the angelic features of Anamika become more expressive compared to the other two girls or rather reversely: she is too perfect so that she is to be perceived, rather, as an archetypal pativrata and even more so in contrast to Uma whose outcast and monstrous characteristics become also just a construct. Anamika has thus also become a model and consequently her fate is carried on to its utmost because to remain a pativrata a woman has

to go as far as her own destruction. After twenty-five years of abusive treatment and enclosure in the house of her husband she literally goes through fire (she is burned to death by her husband and mother-in-law). And while Anamika is married off easily and rapidly, all efforts to marry the monster-girl Uma have to be stopped in the end. Poor Uma is not found beautiful by any of her suitors as if to show that the patriarchal order cannot support the "monstrosity" of "ugliness" in women. Staying unmarried literally makes an outcast of Uma, because in Hindu custom "marriage is a sacrament". In Uma's case it is emblematic that she is, for one thing, suffering from an eye disease, and, for another, prevented to go and see an ophthalmologist. For the eyes are a primary means of getting to know, reading, studying, getting out of the bonds of ignorance. And now that same dark corner of Uma's inside, a very remote one, is occupied by the thoughts about a job, "a career." The offer of a job is finally made and the last necessary relevant explanations are furnished to Uma, but despite her overflowing eagerness to accept the job, she submits to MamaPapa's refusal. As to Uma herself, in spite of all her hunger or desires, she is not yet capable of grasping the opportunity because she is not allowed to. Participating in the funeral ceremonies of her "married" alter-ego Anamika, she feels as if she too were cold ashes as having gone through fire, sacrificed as Anamika has been for and by the rules of patriarchy.

The second part of the novel highlights Arun and his figurative pilgrimage "to the other side." There is more relativization there. In a country of abundance, there is feasting, but there is also fasting; the female characters are feasting only seemingly; the mother supplies the household with tons of food but she herself does not know what to eat, and nobody cares. Her daughter Melanie suffers from bulimia, the emblematic disease of young women neglected emotionally; seemingly she is feasting on peanuts and candy bars, which, in reality, brings about starvation (fasting). Arun himself, although receiving a first-class education, is starving because he has difficulties to adapt to the American "diet," and the American culture. Understandably, the account of Melanie's -- and her mother's -- condition is not systematic sufficiently to constitute as detailed a journey as is that of Uma because it is conveyed as perceived by Arun. Arun has to move cautiously because he meets objects about which he "knows nothing" as he makes his way as someone "venturing alone across the border" (160).

He finds himself in an unknown area, where he has never been before and he can only find his way to the recognition of the unknown objects or "the other side" of the border by moving through the "masses of water." So the pilgrim Arun has to make a journey analogical to that of Uma. It is the journey towards recognition, but this recognition is and at the same time is not the same as that of Uma. It is the same because in both cases it is the recognition of the unfavourable condition of women, their suffering, and the necessity to act for their benefit. And the recognition cannot be exactly the same because Uma is affected directly as she is exposed to the mortifying effects of the patriarchy sun and her pilgrimage is a journey towards the recognition of the inside.

Arun's pilgrimage approaches its climax when he finally recognizes Melanie's suffering and its cause. It is the recognition of the "other side," of the "object" so far unknown and as such it becomes almost a kind of enlightenment: "Then Arun does see a resemblance to something he knows: a resemblance to the contorted face of an enraged sister who, failing to express her outrage against neglect, against misunderstanding, against inattention to her unique and singular being and its hungers, merely spits and froths in ineffectual protest. Nevertheless, neither he nor Mrs Patton, herself a victim incapable of resisting the paralysing effects of the beams of patriarchal sun, are capable of doing anything for Melanie until the three of them escape temporarily the oppressive heat of the family's males' presence. Then, at the pool, enlightenment and discovery finally start to work for Melanie's benefit. A cooperation of two complementary agents is necessary: Arun, although he is well aware of the real state of affairs and acknowledges the necessity to act, is "paralysed" as to action, he is unable to do anything himself.

On the other hand, Arun's presence seems necessary for Mrs Patton to discover finally the destructive consequences of Melanie's condition. As mother she is capable to act, although she ignores the true character of her daughter's suffering. Later, when on the point of Arun's leaving the Pattons' house, emblems of patriarchal hierarchy from his parents arrive (packed by Uma), a packet of tea and a shawl "to keep him warm" through the winter, Arun's luggage is already packed. He decides not to take the presents with him; he has all he needs and he has no space for the additional weight of the "patriarchal baggage." Mrs Patton seems quiet, placated, it is with her that these emblems are to be left, it is where they belong. It is another component of Arun's recognition that even here, in the country of "the other side," the hierarchy of the patriarchal structures has not yet been overcome. First, the recognition of her "inside chamber" is necessary for the woman to understand her condition. Her suffering must then be recognized by those who are around her and especially by those who would have capability (power) willingness to act for her benefit (as in the case of Melanie, who is not yet an adult woman and who has not yet acquired self-recognition). Uma, on the other hand, who has gone all the way of her pilgrimage to self recognition, is an adult and therefore she can act for herself; yet perhaps the traditional bonds of the Indian family are too strong to sever the ties all of a sudden. Arun, who has reached the recognition of the women's condition as "from across the border" from the "other side," can do something helpful, not for Melanie but certainly for Uma when he comes back to India, exactly because he is a male part of her family.

Western feminism follows the notion of "self" which is in relation to „individualism“ but in Indian Society individual is considered just as a part of the society. Anita Desai in her fiction searches out the causes of marital discord by presenting it from women's sensibility. Her fiction focuses on the struggles of middle class and anglicized women who try to come out of social limitation imposed upon them by the society. This endeavour leads to their alienation from the family and society and finally their marriage gets disintegrated.

Her woman characters are liberated or aspiring to be liberated and seething and silently groaning under the burden of "patriarchal bondage". She challenges the prevalent version of Indian women stereotype by subverting their quest for fulfillment with an intense dissatisfaction with family system hence a resultant unsatisfied ego. Her women are mostly in self search and in search of fulfillment of the emptiness which she feels even in ties between parents, siblings, friends and yet incomplete. Her female characters are mostly in search of self authenticity, independent of the identity that has been dumped on her.

Desai's brainchild a "MAYA" or a "SITA" may be groaning and seething in discontentment against the bindings that forcefully bind her to the socially recognized duties expected of women. They end up registering revolt against these in their own way, one by taking recourse to self destruction and the other by escaping to the island of her desire. Unlike in the writings of the writers like Tasleema Nasreen or Arundhati Roy, or Shobha De or Urvashi Bhutalia, Desai's protagonists does not take recourse to explicit moves of self liberation. But her characters protest in their in their own way, by escaping in one way or the other.

CONCLUSIONS

Thus, Desai's women characters are always in search of a landscape such as "garden" of Maya and "Manori" of Sita to accommodate their "refusal of the patrilineal society". Desai's women protagonists are conscious of their victimhood and abjection and they have an inert desire to respond to the need for self-representation, independent of their identity being intricately associated with her male relatives. The grant of equal status to woman with man by the constitution post independence, the women liberation movements of the 60s, post modern onslaught, western feminism all gave way to the creation of a new woman with her own desires and ambition, quest to break off the shackles of patriarchal

bondage. The woman protagonists are mostly educated groaning under self conflict under circumstances of marriage, to their traditionally assigned roles. Even Arundhati Roy's "God of small things" shows three generations of women projecting silent suffering, revolting and finally making way to herself. They are human beings who seek liberation, move from bondage to freedom from meek indecision to self assertion from weakness to strength.

Although Desai's women protest the commonly accepted societal norms, they are ready to face the consequences, and her portrayal of women is as people who are not completely cut off from familial and societal ties but do stand against "monotony, injustice and humiliation" (15).

The women in her novels keep their traditional position alive despite all their various reactions to the patriarchal system, such as having jobs of their own, getting married and leaving the country or even staying unmarried in order to gain their own economic power and so forth.

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