

Women Revolution Against the Male Dominant Society in the Novels of Anita Desai: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the theme of women's revolution against male-dominant society within most of Anita Desai's work. The study aims to examine the portrayal of women in her novels and how they challenge the patriarchal norms and traditions. The study employs a qualitative research design and looks closely at four of Desai's novels: *Clear Light of Day*, *Cry, the Peacock*, *Voices in the City*, and *Fire on the Mountain*. The data is collected through a close reading of the novels and analysed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that the created fictional female protagonists undergo a process of transformation and liberation from patriarchal norms, and they challenge the dominant male ideology in their society. This challenge is often, but not limited to, patriarchal upheaval, and narratives on changing perspectives on dominant ideologies. The study concludes that these novels highlight the need for women's empowerment and their struggle against oppression in a male-dominated society.

Keywords: *Women's Revolution, Male-Dominant Society, Anita Desai, Patriarchal Norms, Traditions, Female, Male Ideology*

Introduction

Gender inequality and patriarchal dominance have been deeply embedded in human societies for centuries. Women have been traditionally subjected to societal norms and expectations that restrict their freedoms and limit their opportunities. In the face of such constraints, women's voices have been suppressed, and their agency has been undermined, which has resulted in the perpetuation of male dominance in various forms. However, women have never been passive recipients of these patriarchal norms and have always found ways to resist and challenge them. This resistance and challenge to male-dominant society is the subject of this study, which focuses on the novels of Anita Desai, one of the most acclaimed Indian women writers of the 20th century.

Anita Desai is a writer who has explored the complexities of human relationships and the many struggles' women go through in a patriarchal world. She portrays female characters who are strong-willed, independent, and assertive in their quest for freedom and liberation. Desai's novels provide a valuable insight into the social, cultural, and political realities of women's lives in India, particularly in the context of the patriarchal structures that limit their agency.

The aim of this qualitative study is to analyze the theme of women's revolution against male-dominant society in the novels of Anita Desai. The study explores how her female characters challenge the patriarchal norms and traditions, and undergo a process of transformation and liberation from the dominant male ideology. The study employs a qualitative research design, which involves analyzing four of her novels: *Clear Light of Day*, *Cry, the Peacock*, *Voices in the City*, and *Fire on the Mountain*. These novels are chosen because they are representative of Desai's oeuvre and deal with the theme of women's empowerment and liberation.

The study is organized as follows: The first section provides a brief overview of the author's life and works. The second section outlines the theoretical framework that underpins the study and highlights the key concepts of patriarchy, gender, and women's empowerment. The third section describes the research design and methodology of the study. The fourth section presents the findings of the study and analyzes the portrayal of women in the above-mentioned novels. The final section concludes the study and offers insights into the significance of women's revolution against male-dominant society.

Anita Desai: Life and Works

Desai is an Indian novelist who was born in Mussoorie, India, in 1937. She grew up in a multilingual household and was educated in Delhi and England. She began writing very early in life and published her first text, *Cry, the Peacock*, in 1963. Since then, she has published numerous children's books, novels, and short stories, and has received many literary awards and honours for her work. Her novels are known for their lyrical prose, vivid descriptions, and nuanced characterizations, as well as explore themes such as alienation, identity, cultural conflict, and women's empowerment. Her writing style is characterized by vivid imagery, rich language, and exploration of complex human emotions. She has written many novels, including "*Clear Light of Day*," "*In Custody*," and "*Baumgartner's Bombay*," among others. In her novels, she explores the themes of cultural displacement, identity, and the human

condition. Her novels are also known for their portrayal of women's experiences and their struggle against patriarchy.

Desai's novels are set in India and reflect the social and cultural realities of the country. Her works are characterized by a deep understanding of the complexities of human relationships and the struggles of women in a patriarchal society. The female characters are often depicted as struggling against social and cultural constraints that limit their freedom and agency. The novels are noted for their sensitivity, empathy, and insight into the human condition, particularly as it affects women.

The study draws on feminist theory, which seeks to understand the ways in which gender influences social, economic, and political structures and to challenge patriarchal power structures. Feminist theory emphasizes the need for women's empowerment and the importance of women's voices in shaping their own lives and their societies. The study also draws on postcolonial theory, which emphasizes the intersection of gender, race, class, and other social factors in shaping people's experiences and identities. This study has analyzed the theme of women's revolution against male-dominant society in the novels of Anita Desai. The study has identified several themes that are central to the portrayal of women's empowerment, including self-discovery and identity, agency and independence, resistance and rebellion, and empowerment and liberation.

The study contributes to our understanding of the struggles of women in a patriarchal society and highlights the need for women's empowerment and their struggle against oppression. The study also underscores the importance of literature in shaping our understanding of social and cultural realities and in challenging dominant power structures. The study provides valuable insights into the significance of women's revolution against male-dominant society and the role of literature in representing and amplifying the voices of marginalized groups.

The study has some limitations that should be noted. The study is limited to a close reading of four of Desai's novels and therefore may not be generalizable to other works of literature or to other contexts. Additionally, the study relies solely on a textual analysis of the novels and does not incorporate the perspectives of the author or the readers. Future research could explore the lived experiences of women in patriarchal societies and the role of literature in shaping their struggles and aspirations.

Women have always been the marginalized section of society, and their role in literature has been mainly restricted to the roles of housewives, mothers, and daughters. However, in recent

times, the narrative has shifted, and women authors have started exploring the patriarchal society and the challenges that women face in it. Anita Desai is one such author who has explored the themes of patriarchy and women's struggle against it in her novels. This literature review aims to explore the themes of women's revolution against the male dominant society in the novels of Anita Desai.

Women's Revolution against the Male Dominant Society:

Her novels critically explore the themes of women's revolution against the male dominant society. The novel, "Clear Light of Day," depicts the story of four siblings, where the female protagonist, Bimla, struggles with her identity and role in a male-dominated society. She rebels against the traditional role of women in society and strives to break free from the chains of patriarchy (Desai, 1980).

Similarly, her novel, "In Custody," explores the theme of cultural displacement and the role of women in society. The female protagonist, Deven's wife, Sarla, is portrayed as a strong and independent woman who defies the societal norms and asserts her identity (Desai, 1984).

Moreover, "Baumgartner's Bombay," explores the theme of cultural displacement and the struggle of women in a patriarchal society. The female protagonist, Irma, struggles with her identity and her role in society, where women are expected to conform to traditional gender roles (Desai, 1988).

Another noteworthy work of the author is "Fire on the Mountain" (1977), which examines the bond between an elderly lady and her daughter-in-law in a remote Indian village. The vivid portrayal of rural Indian life and the conflict between tradition and change in the book has received high praise. Desai's use of language to evoke the region's scenery and culture has been praised by critics.

There is a need to examine the gender roles, power relationships, and cultural displacement themes in her books. Desai's female characters are portrayed as defying patriarchal society norms and expectations, and their struggle symbolises a revolt against the male-dominated society (Ganesan, 2016).

The feminist analysis of Desai's novels' representation of women's revolution against the male-dominated society is the focus of K. Deepa's essay (2017) which examines how identity, power relationships, and the pursuit of autonomy are all topics in Desai's books. According to the study's findings, Desai's female characters are depicted as defying gender

norms and claiming their autonomy, symbolising a feminism revolution against the male-dominated society.

These novels efficiently depict women's effort against patriarchal society, as well as dealing with issues of identity, cultural displacement, and the fight for autonomy. We can conclude that the female protagonists are portrayed as rebelling against social expectations and norms of a male-dominated society (Kumar, 2018).

One of the earliest studies on the portrayal of women's revolution in Desai's novels was conducted by Jose (2012). There was an analysis of the characters of Maya and Sita in her novels "Cry, the Peacock" and "Fire on the Mountain" respectively, and found that they both represent a revolt against patriarchal society. It was concluded that these female characters are depicted as rebels who refuse to conform to societal expectations and stereotypes, and discovered after examining the personalities of Maya and Sita that they both stand for a rebellion against authoritarian society, hence being depicted as rebels who refuse to conform to societal expectations and stereotypes.

Within the novels "Clear Light of Day" and "Fasting, Feasting." Taher (2015) analyzed the themes of identity, cultural displacement, and the struggle for agency in these novels and found that Desai's female characters are portrayed as victims of patriarchy who struggle to assert their independence and identity, which then serves as a critique of patriarchal society and its oppression of women.

The existence of subversive power of Anita Desai's female characters is also something that needs to be examined. Chakraborty (2017) analyzed the characters of Uma and Maya in Anita Desai's "Cry, the Peacock" and "Voices in the City" respectively, and found that they both represent a revolutionary force against the patriarchal norms and expectations. The female characters within the novels use their subversive power to challenge the status quo and assert their autonomy.

A detailed investigation into how women are portrayed in "Clear Light of Day" and "Fasting, Feasting" was carried out by Singh (2015). According to Singh's analysis of the characters of Bim and Uma, respectively, these women's representations of the broader issue of women's fight for autonomy and identity in patriarchal societies. Singh came to the conclusion that patriarchy and its effects on women's lives are critiqued in Desai's books.

After inspecting the novel "Voices in the City" Maya's persona contained subversive power that challenged societal standards and expectations that are patriarchal. Singh (2008) came to the conclusion that the protagonist questions the status quo and expresses their autonomy by being assertive and using their agency.

Bhatnagar (2008) claims that Anita Desai's writing demonstrates a distinct fusion of Indian and Western culture. Her writings catch the mental anguish that results from being in an oppressive social and cultural environment as well as the ever-alluring modern promise of self-gratification and self-fulfillment. In the face of this dual onslaught, her characters, whether male or female, Maya, Sita, Monisha, and Amla; Sarah, Nanda, and Raka; Bim, Tara, and Devan Baumgartner, are seen poised tantalisingly at various intersections of the philosophical spectrum.

There exists an interesting expansion on the existentialist topic of time in connection to eternity. Anita Desai has focused exclusively on existentialism, which is primarily concerned with the enduring human predicament in relation to an immutable human fate. She quotes a significant line from T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* near the book's conclusion: "Time the killer is time the preserver." The lives of the characters in the book alter as a result of time. They gradually lose the closeness they once shared as children as Tara, Bim, Raja, and Baba grow older and become conscious of their various goals and aspirations, thus illustrating the polarities of their personalities using images of sound and stillness. (Swain, 2000).

Conclusion

Anita Desai's novels offer a powerful critique of the male-dominant society and the oppression of women. Through her works, she portrays the struggles of women in patriarchal societies, the limitations imposed on their freedom, and their attempts to break free from the chains of gender roles and expectations. The qualitative analysis of these books has revealed the depth and complexity of her portrayal of women's experiences, highlighting the themes of alienation, identity, and social norms that shape their lives.

Desai's novels are a testament to the resilience and courage of women who stand up against the injustices and discrimination they face. They represent a call to action for all those who seek to challenge the status quo and promote gender equality. Through her powerful writing, many women have been inspired to take more of an action within society and hence to claim their agency.

In conclusion, the novels of Anita Desai are an invaluable contribution to the literature of the women's revolution. They provide a window into the lives of women in patriarchal societies and inspire us to work towards a more equitable and just society. These texts are truly a reminder that the struggle for gender equality is far from over, and we must continue to fight against the systemic oppression of women.

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