

Cultural Glimpses of Indian Culture and Customs: An analysis of selected work of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande

RUPINDER KAUR , Assistant Professor,
Department of Humanities, Graphic Era Hill University,
Dehradun Uttarakhand India 248002 ,

Abstract

Indian culture and customs are rich and diverse, spanning thousands of years and reflecting a complex interplay of various religions, languages, and traditions. The literature of India provides a unique window into this complex cultural landscape, and Indian authors have played a vital role in capturing the cultural nuances and complexities of their society. There is an increasing importance to provide a glimpse into Indian culture and customs through an analysis of selected works of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande, two of India's most prominent women writers. Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande are both renowned for their insightful and nuanced portrayals of Indian culture and society. They have explored various themes such as gender roles, family dynamics, religion, caste, and tradition in their novels, short stories, and essays. The following literature review will focus on their works, which offer a rich and varied portrayal of Indian culture and customs.

Keywords: *Indian culture, Indian customs, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Gender roles, Family dynamics, Caste representation,*

Introduction

India is a vast and diverse country with a rich cultural heritage that dates back thousands of years. Its culture and customs have been shaped by a complex blend of different religions, languages, regions, and historical events. The country's literature, art, music, and dance are a reflection of its vibrant cultural heritage. Indian literature, in particular, has contributed significantly to the understanding and preservation of Indian culture and customs.

Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande are two prominent Indian women writers who have explored and depicted various aspects of Indian culture and customs in their works. Their writings offer a glimpse into the complex and diverse cultural landscape of India, and provide insights into the lives of its people.

Through their novels, short stories, and essays, they explore themes such as gender roles, family dynamics, religion, caste, and tradition. They offer a critical perspective on these issues, challenging and subverting traditional norms and values. The authors' works depict the tensions and conflicts that arise between tradition and modernity, and between individual desires and societal expectations.

Desai's novels, such as *Clear Light of Day* and *Fire on the Mountain*, explore the theme of family and the changing role of women in Indian society. She portrays the complexities of familial relationships, the conflicts that arise between siblings, and the struggles of women to assert their independence in a patriarchal society.

Deshpande's works, such as *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *That Long Silence*, deal with issues of identity, tradition, and cultural displacement. She portrays the struggles of Indian women who are caught between traditional values and modern aspirations, and who must navigate complex social and cultural expectations.

Through an analysis of selected works, we can view how these authors provide a glimpse into Indian culture and customs. The following literature review also explores the authors' literary techniques and narrative styles, and how they depict the cultural landscape of India, as analyses and studies upon by several scholars. It discusses how their works offer a critical perspective on traditional norms and values, and how they challenge and subvert these norms to create new forms of cultural expression. Overall, it offers insights into the rich and diverse cultural heritage of India as reflected in the works of two prominent Indian women writers.

Objectives:

- To conduct an in-dept analysis of Glimpses of Indian Culture and Customs in the work of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande

Analysis of Work of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande:

An analysis of the selected works of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande reveals a nuanced portrayal of the cultural landscape of India, highlighting the complexities and contradictions that exist within traditional customs and beliefs. Their works offer insights into the ways in which cultural identities are constructed and how these identities impact individual experiences. The authors navigate themes such as gender, identity, and tradition versus modernity, exploring the tensions that arise when individuals try to reconcile their personal

desires with societal expectations. Through their characters, the novels offer a critique of patriarchal structures and highlight the struggles of women as they attempt to navigate their roles and expectations within traditional Indian society. Additionally, their works offer a nuanced portrayal of the changes that have occurred in Indian culture and society over time, reflecting the evolving social and cultural landscape of the country. Overall, these texts provide a valuable insight into the cultural and social complexities of contemporary India, offering a nuanced perspective on the challenges and contradictions that exist within the country's cultural traditions and practices.

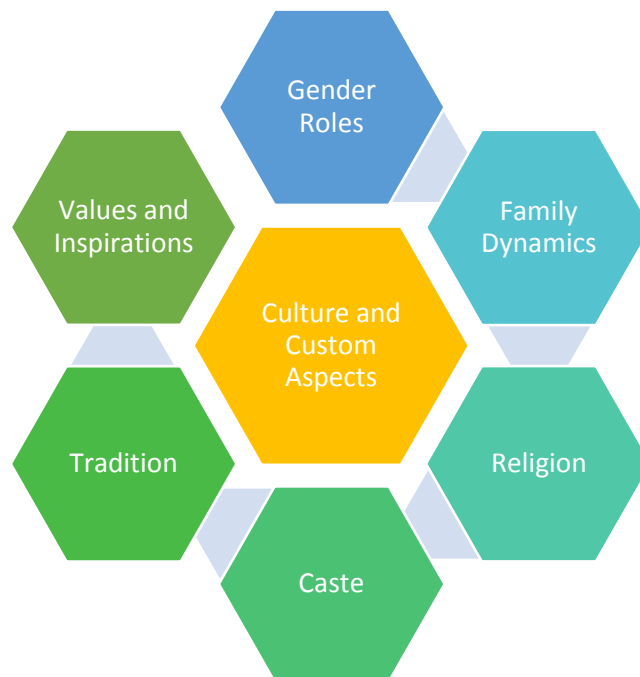


Figure 1 Cultural and Custom Aspects in Work of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande

Through their novels, short stories, and essays, there is an exploration themes such as gender roles, family dynamics, religion, caste, and tradition. The authors' works depict the tensions and conflicts that arise between tradition and modernity, and between individual desires and societal expectations. Following is the literature review which explores these ideas in depth.

Another area of interest in the literature on their works is the portrayal of family and relationships in their works. Many scholars have explored the complex dynamics of familial relationships in their novels and short stories, and how these relationships reflect larger societal structures and cultural norms. The authors' depictions of family life offer a glimpse into the changing social and cultural landscape of India, and the tensions that arise when traditional expectations clash with modern values and aspirations. The exploration of familial

relationships in their works also sheds light on the role of women in Indian families, and the ways in which women negotiate their roles and responsibilities within the family structure.

Sharma (2018) conducted an analysis of Shashi Deshpande's works, specifically focusing on the representation of gender roles. Her novels offer a critical perspective on the patriarchal structures of Indian society, and challenge traditional gender roles. These female characters navigate the complexities of societal expectations and constraints, while also asserting their own individuality and autonomy. The author's work demonstrates how her writings critique and challenge gender norms in Indian society.

Kumar's (2017) study investigates the themes of alienation and identity in *That Long Silence* and argues that the novel is a critique of the patriarchal structures of Indian society, and explores the ways in which women's identities are shaped by societal expectations and constraints. This analysis focuses on the protagonist of the novel, Jaya, and her struggles to assert her individuality and autonomy within the confines of traditional Indian gender roles. The study demonstrates how Deshpande's novel offers insights into the experiences of women in Indian society and how they navigate traditional gender roles.

Sasikumar's (2013) study explores the themes of identity, gender, and tradition *Small Remedies* and notes how the novel's characters struggle with the expectations of traditional gender roles while also navigating their own personal desires and ambitions. This shows how her novel offers a nuanced and complex portrayal of the tensions between tradition and modernity in Indian society and how her work offers insights into the experiences of women in Indian society and how they navigate complex cultural expectations.

Manikandan's (2014) study examines how *That Long Silence* portrays the tensions between traditional cultural expectations and the desire for personal freedom and expression. The novel's protagonist experiences a sense of liberation as she begins to assert her own identity and desires. This analysis notes how the novel offers a critique of the patriarchal structures of Indian society and offers insights into the experiences of women in Indian society.

Nirmala (2015) examines the representation of female experience in Deshpande's short stories. The stories challenge traditional gender roles and provide a nuanced and complex portrayal of women's experiences in contemporary India. It analyses the ways in which characters negotiate the tensions between tradition and modernity, and how their experiences reflect the changing social and cultural landscape of India.

Venkatesh (2013) offers an insightful analysis of Deshpande's work, particularly with regards to the theme of female identity and argues that the female characters in Deshpande's novels are in a constant struggle to define their identities in a society that is heavily patriarchal and values male perspectives over their own. There is also an emphasis on the themes of isolation, loneliness, and the search for self-identity that Deshpande's female characters often experience.

Luthra, the author focuses on "Small Remedies" and its critique of postcolonial India, and argues how the author exposes the contradictions and inequalities that exist in Indian society, particularly in the aftermath of colonialism. There is a grave examination of the themes of identity, memory, and the legacy of colonialism in the text highlighting the ways in which these themes intersect to shape the experiences of the novel's characters.

Overall, these studies demonstrate how Deshpande's works offer critical perspectives on the patriarchal structures of Indian society, and challenge traditional gender roles. They reveal how the author's constructed female characters navigate the complexities of societal expectations and constraints, while also asserting their own individuality and autonomy. These studies offer valuable insights into the cultural nuances of Indian society, and demonstrate how literature can provide a platform for exploring and critiquing societal norms and values.

Singh (2017) examines the theme of tradition and modernity in Anita Desai's novels. It is argued that her works depict the tensions and conflicts that arise between tradition and modernity, and how these conflicts impact individual identity and relationships. It also explores the ways in which her characters negotiate the complexities of modern life while also grappling with the traditions of Indian culture. There is also an analysis of the themes of alienation, identity crisis, and cultural displacement that emerge in these texts, and how they reflect the changing social and cultural landscape of India.

Prasad (2014) examines the role of food as a symbol of cultural identity in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, and argues that cultural identity is constructed in quite a complex manner and how food serves as a marker of cultural difference. There is also emphasis on the ways in which the author's characters navigate the tensions between tradition and modernity.

In her analysis of *Fire on the Mountain*, Kaur (2018) critically views the theme of spirituality and religion and argues that the author's novel portrays the complex relationship between spirituality, religion, and the natural world, and how this relationship shapes individual

identity. It also explores the ways in which the author's characters engage with spirituality and religion, and how their experiences reflect the broader cultural and philosophical traditions of India. There is also an analysis of how these characters seek spiritual fulfillment and connection with nature, and how their experiences challenge conventional religious and philosophical beliefs.

Naz and Khatoon (2018) examine the portrayal of women in 'In Custody'. They argue that her female characters challenge patriarchal norms and assert their agency in a society that seeks to limit their autonomy. There is an increasing impetus on the ways in which the author's characters navigate the tensions between customs and post-modern living, and how their experiences reflect broader social and cultural changes in India.

Selvaraj (2015) argues that the novel offers a critique of the cultural and social changes taking place in India during the 1980s. The novel's protagonist, Deven, experiences a sense of alienation and loss as a result of these changes. Similarly, Sharma (2013) explores the representation of India and its cultural traditions in the novel *In Custody*, which offers a nuanced portrayal of Indian culture that resists simplistic exoticization or stereotyping.

Narayanaswamy (2018) analyses the theme of cultural alienation in *Bye-Bye Blackbird* and critically explores the experiences of an Indian immigrant in Europe, and highlights the cultural tensions and challenges faced by the protagonist as she navigates her way through a foreign land. There is an interesting analysis here of how the characters engage with questions of cultural identity and belonging.

Ganvir (2018) examines the theme of identity in Baumgartner's *Bombay*. The article argues that the novel offers a critique of the postcolonial condition and explores the complex ways in which personal and cultural identities intersect in the aftermath of colonialism. It analyses the ways in which her characters navigate the tensions between tradition and modernity, and how their experiences reflect the changing social and cultural landscape of India.

Dhar (2015) analyses the theme of cultural identity in *Fasting, Feasting*. The novel explores the complexities of cultural identity and belonging, and how these intersect with questions of gender and individual agency. There is an analysis in which her characters navigate the tensions between tradition and modernity, and how their experiences are relevant to the ever-changing fabric of social and cultural India.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the selected works of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande provide a rich and nuanced portrayal of Indian culture and customs. Through their explorations of themes such as identity, gender, tradition, and modernity, they offer valuable insights into the complexities of contemporary Indian society. Their works challenge traditional gender roles and offer feminist perspectives on Indian culture and society. There is a promised highlight on the tensions that arise when individuals try to navigate the competing demands of tradition and modernity. Through their representations of food, clothing, language, and other cultural markers, the authors offer glimpses into the diversity and richness of Indian culture. One of the key contributions of their works is their representation of women's experiences and struggles. Both authors highlight the challenges that women face in patriarchal societies, where their identities and aspirations are often subsumed by those of men. They present complex and multifaceted female characters who negotiate the demands of tradition and modernity, family and individuality, and conformity and self-expression. Moreover, their works provide a rich and nuanced understanding of Indian culture and customs, offering valuable insights for scholars, marketers, and anyone interested in India's cultural landscape. Their writings demonstrate the importance of exploring culture and customs in tandem, highlighting the complex interplay between the two and the need for a culturally sensitive approach to marketing and business in India.

References

- Dhar, M. L. (2015). Cultural identity in Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Research*, 5(2), 8-14.
- Ganvir, B. P. (2018). Anita Desai's *Baumgartner's Bombay* and the postcolonial experience. *Language in India*, 18(4), 325-331.
- Kaur, H. (2018). Spirituality, religion and nature in Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain*. *Creative Forum*, 38, 68-75.
- Kumar, P. (2017). Alienation and Identity Crisis in Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*. *Journal of English Language and Literature*, 4(1), 1-9.
- Luthra, R. (2018). Shashi Deshpande's *Small Remedies*: A Critique of Postcolonial India. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*, 7(5), 238-245.
- Manikandan, N. (2014). Intersections of culture and gender in Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*. *Shanlax International Journal of English*, 2(2), 40-45.

- Narayanaswamy, S. (2018). Cultural alienation in Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye Blackbird*. *The Criterion: An International Journal in English*, 9(4), 111-120.
- Naz, N., & Khatoon, N. (2018). The Representation of Women in Anita Desai's *In Custody*. *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 6(2), 56-66.
- Nirmala, R. (2015). Female Experience in the Short Fiction of Shashi Deshpande. *Language in India*, 15(6), 321-327.
- P. B. Prasad. (2014). "The Symbolism of Food in Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors*". *Indian Literature*, 58(2), 121-129.
- Sasikumar, S. L. (2013). The complexities of female identity in Shashi Deshpande's *Small Remedies*. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 14(1), 1-7.
- Selvaraj, A. (2015). Alienation and the quest for identity in Anita Desai's *In Custody*. *The Criterion: An International Journal in English*, 6(1), 1-9.
- Sharma, S. (2013). The exotic and the mundane in Anita Desai's *In Custody*. *Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 1(8), 87-92.
- Sharma, S. (2018). Exploring Gendered Identities in Shashi Deshpande's Novels. *Language in India*, 18(5), 110-119.
- Singh, R. (2017). Tradition and Modernity in Anita Desai's Novels. *Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science*, 5(8), 1-6.
- Venkatesh, J. (2013). The Female Quest for Identity in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande. *International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies*, 2(2), 53-62.