



**GENDER INEQUALITY IN SELECTED NOVELS OF SHASHI
DESHPANDE AND ANITA DESAI: A STUDY**



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"It is impossible to think about the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is impossible for a bird to fly on only one wing".

- Swami Vivekananda

ABSTRACT

The distinction between male and female is very real and very deeply rooted in human nature and human physiology. The research indicates that its universal from culture to culture and it finds expression in almost every area of life. According to the biblical view of mankind, we are told that "God created man in His own image; in the image of God, He created him; male and female. On other side, Hindu texts present divergent and antagonistic views on the position of women, ranging from feminine leadership as the highest goddess, to limiting her role to an obedient daughter, house wife and mother. The main purpose of the paper to highlight the issues related to gender inequality in Indian English literature with a special reference in the selected novels of Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai. And to understand the depiction of feminine issues in the selected novels and to study Indian women's

insecurities and struggle in accordance which social, historical, cultural, religious atmosphere of Indian society. This paper explores that as the society is developed in 21st century the position and respect of women become progressively worse after so many constitutional provisions are not sufficient to get the respectable position in society. In the course of time, the picture is completely changed. The position of woman in our society has undergone a drastic change. The predicament of women, the so-called 'Pre ponderance' was completely changed. The Goddess of ancient times now becomes an object of victimization by male dominated society. Our religion and culture makes woman a Goddess but unfortunately, we fail to recognize her as a human being.

KEYWORDS

Inequality, Gender, Women, Culture,
Indian Society

RESEARCH PAPER

Men and women are two basic components of a human society. It is noticed that where all citizens despite of sex are equal, women are clearly less equal than men. There exists high gender inequality in our country. Towards the end of Vedic period, women were deprived of social and religious rights. Gradually the position of women fell down to the extent that the birth of a girl was regarded as a curse in the family. Women are harassed in the name of religious and socio- cultural practices. Many cultures have different systems of norms and beliefs based on gender, but there is no universal standard to a masculine or feminine role across all cultures. A social role of men and women in relation to each other is based on the cultural norms of that society which leads to the creation of gender system. The Indian constitution provides equal rights and privileges for both men and women but still majority of women across India doesn't enjoyed these rights and opportunities guaranteed to them. This is because of a number of reasons. Some of them are Poverty, illiteracy, Patriarchal setup in our Indian society. According to Wikipedia," Gender inequality acknowledges that men and women are not equal and that gender affects an individual's living experience. These differences arise from distinctions in biology, psychology and cultural norms. Some of these perceptions are analytically grounded while others appear to be socially constructed. Studies show the different lived experience of genders across many domains including education life expectancy, personality, interest, family life, careers and political alliances. Gender inequality is experienced differently across different cultures. Gender impar still exists in India. Being born as women in the Indian society one has to face gender discrimination at the levels. Langston University says "Gender equality is intrinsically linked to sustainable development and is vital to the realization of human rights for all. The overall objective of gender equality is a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, rights and agreement in all spheres of life. English encyclopaedia says," Gender inequality is the difference in the status, power and prestige of women and men has in group, collectivises and societies." So, gender inequality is a concept related with men and women alike. Historically, the terms "Gender" and "sex" have been used conversely, but their uses are becoming increasingly distinct, and it is important to understand the differences between two. The term " gender" is more difficult to define, but it can refer to the role of a male or female in society, known as a gender role, or an individual's concept of themselves, or gender identity. While the term 'sex' refers to the biological difference between males and females, such as the genitalia and

genetic differences. And so, it is true to say that sex is natural characteristic of human being and gender is a man-made concept.

There is Poverty, illiteracy, lack of employment, facilities, social customs, beliefs and practices, social attitude, lack of awareness of women. As Desai has stated, if women get equal opportunities like men, they can work in every field like men. Today if she lags behind a little, it is not her fault but the fault of traditions which have suppressed them for the centuries, owing to this, her own thoughts like also hang around only familial life and her nearest and environment also does not provide favourable conditions for her devotion in the outside work. This type of discrimination is easily seen in Indian society.

The position of women in India has diverse in different periods and in different classes, religion and ethnic group. The pre- independence era has witnessed the exploitation of women in and outside their home.

The present study provides a broad spectrum on Feminist English literature with in depth analysis of the works of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande. Feminist theory focuses on analysing gender inequality. Themes explored in feminism include discrimination, objectification, (especially sexual objectification), oppression, patriarchy, stereotyping, art history and contemporary art and aesthetics. Feminist analysis is a system of thought that analyses the world through the experiences of women as subject. The concern feminism is the need of society where women have been colonised by men on the account of sexuality. Feminist theories that focuses on gender inequality recognize that women's location in and experience of, social situations and not only different but also unequal to men's. The first three decades of the 19th century marked the beginning of English writing in India but it was a period of slow incubation. Indian writing in English is a one of those voices in which India speaks of their own culture, heritage and modernization of values and system. It provides an opportunity to make a deep dive in Indian consciousness and sensibility.

In India, feminist writers uphold their cause of 'womanhood', through their writer-up. In the contemporary scenario, there are many women writers who through their writing have been successfully in projecting the existing gender inequality. This paper focuses on how feminism and gender issues have been dealt with in the Indian writing in English. Indian women novelists have given a new dimension to the Indian literature. Women novelist in Indian fiction in English occupies prestigious position. Kamala Das, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Namita Gokhale, Shobha De, R. P. Jhabvala, Kamala Markandaya and

Arundhati Roy are prominent names in this field. A variety of shapes, colours and vision is reflected when we go through their writings. All these writers have depicted the struggle of female protagonists against patriarchal society male dominated attitude of society, traditional, order, custom, system and gender inequality.

In history there is on consistent social issue, it would be the treatment of women. Certainly, the rights and equality of woman has always been a highly debated and controversial subject. The entire moment in the 20th century shows major issues and problems of human rights. Literature and inequality have closed intimacy with each other. Literature shows so many unpleasant experiences, regrettable situations and the plight of women in the 18th and 19th centuries. Through the whole of history, women have incessantly been made to follow three steps behind men. It is a truth, universally acknowledged that women consider to be weaker and lesser sex, society has always had strict ideals regarding how women should dress, how they should act and how they should behave in society.

Indian fiction in English has a formidable line of women novelist from Kamala Markandaya to Nayantara Sahgal, Ruth Praver Jhabwala, Attia Hussain and Anita Desai writing of Indian women, the conflicts and predicament against the background of contemporary India. While doing so, they have analysed the socio-cultural modes and values that have given a women their image and role towards themselves and the society. In the changing age of our country and times, the women now find themselves at cross purposes with themselves as well as the society. The women novelists examine the psychic and moral dilemmas and chain reaction of the situations in their women characters making efforts to accomplish a new harmony of relationships with themselves and their surroundings.

Shashi Deshpande is one of the newest voices to arrive on the scene. She is the daughter of Kannada dramatist Adya Rangacharya. She has written five novels, Roots and Shadows, It I Die today, and The Dark Holds No Terror, That Long Silence, The Binding vine. Her work Roots and Shadows has been awarded the Thirumathi Rangammal Prize for the best English novel published in English in India in 1982- 83. The novel deals with the women's attempt to assert her individuality and realise our freedom. According to this Deshpande " Literature presents reality, but it is not just a mirror image of reality, it goes beyond that to present the hidden truths, the complexities of human existence that are under the surface of life". With Evelyn Waugh she agrees "there is a moral purpose, a chance of salvation in every human life." She says, " One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. It is civilization as a whole

that produces this creation which is described as a feminism." Roots and shadows, Deshpande's first novel, ventures the internal world and opinions of Indu. She is radical woman. Right from her childhood Indu had seen the secondary place women occupied in the family. A simple situation like sending a cup of tea for her to room, was considered a breach of etiquettes. As she puts it sending up a cup of tea for a woman? Who ever heard of it? Women like children, were supposed to know their place. She writes "As a child, they had told me I must be weak and submissive. Why? I had asked. Because you are a female You must accept everything, even defeat with grace because you are a girl, they said. It is on the only way, they said, for a female to live and survive. As I... I had watched them and found it to be true". For a woman intelligence was always a burden. They liked their woman not to think. And when old uncles Saroja had wanted to learn music, Akka had put her foot down. " What learn music from a strange man! Sit and sing in front of strangers! Like those women? Are we that kind of a family? Isn't it enough for you to sing one or two devotional songs, one or two arti songs? What more does a girl from decent family want?" Through the character of Indu, the author depicted the internal fight of a performer to express herself. She swore that she would never pretend to be what she was not. And so, it appeared as if she had been accumulating." I won't since her birth. She desires to be a real woman and throw off the mask of a perfect woman. The knowledge of her womanhood had been brutally and gracelessly thrust on her with the cruel words." Don't forget, for four days now you are clean. Such had been her introduction to the beautiful word of womanhood.

Indu broke away from her family out of resentment and married for love in order to assert her freedom. Marriage subdues and dominates woman but Indu plays the part of a perfect housewife but it limits her self-development. Roots and shadows explore the inner self of Indu who symbolises the new women who are educated and who live in close association with society brushing aside all narrow social conventions. Indu say: We're gay and whimsical about our own people, our own country. We are rational, unprejudiced, broad minded. We discuss intelligently, even solemnly the problem of unemployment, poverty, corruption, family planning. We scorn the corrupt, we despise the ignorant, we hate the wicket.... And our hearts bleed, Naren, for Vietnam for the blacks for the Harijans. She wrote many novels that reflect the miserable condition of women suffering under their insensitive and inconsiderate husband. If we analyse her characters, we will find that Desai's focus is on disintegration in the inner and outer lines of her women characters. Like Lawrence, she also believes in the growing awareness among women of their rights and individualities. R. K.

Srivastva observes," Being a sensitive woman novelist and gifted with good observation, sensitiveness, a penetrating analysis and a skill to point with words, Anita Desai creates a rich gallery of characters, both male and female though dominated by latter. The protagonist of the novel Maya, has been completely neglected by her husband because Gautama has been influenced by the philosophy of non-attachment in the Bhagavad-Gita and practises it in his relationship with his wife. The novel begins with the death of her dog toto. This incident is one of her reason for her mental imbalance. She is deeply frustrated and hurt by her husband, Gautama reaction towards the death of Toto. As she has been brought up in a fairy tale world, a wide gap is created between her illusions and the reality of life. The image of fighting and mating peacocks, apart from being the central motif of the novel, underlines Maya's sexual frustration too. The memory of innocent Maya recalls all her childhood experiences and that becomes a foil to her present over- crowded mind, full of bird and animal imagery. In the end of the novel, Maya commits suicide. She is in fear of being the one to die, as predicted by the astrologer. She stands apart from all the women characters drawn by Indo-Anglian novelist. She represents a class of women who silently suffer at the hand of men. In Anita Desai world of frustration caused neurotic disturbances. The strained relationship of Maya and Gautama in Cry the Peacock results in the murder of the latter and madness and suicide for the former. Anita Desai, in her novels highlights different aspect of human relationship. She deals with the problems like alienation, suffering and boredom. In the novel Cry, the Peacock she uses the peacock myth which relates to the theme of the novel very well. The Peacocks struggle to mate: their dance is the dance of death. So, of the peacock myth tells us the story of the struggle for existence. The main aim of the present research work is to study the theme of gender bias, gender gap or gender inequality in the selected novels of Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai. We understand the depiction of feminine issues in the novels which are highly suggestive to their concerns about modern Indian woman. The present study explores the meaning of gender equality and gender inequality, the difference between gender-sex various reasons for female gender gap or inequality. As Swami Vivekananda said, 'Our duty is to put the chemicals together, the crystallization will come through God's law. Lest us put ideas into their head, and they will do the rest.' The greatest crime for Indu is that she is born a girl. She feels that womanhood is a curse:" I had committed a great crime by being born a girl". Thus, Shashi Deshpande's art of characterisation tends to create an affirmative impact on her readers. On the other hand, Anita Desai deals mainly with human relationships but in a different way. According to

Desai, human relationship has been dealt with in a very traditional way. Her novels highlight's different problems like alienation, suffering, boredom and a very deep imaginative insight, but being a woman, she also has the advantage of exploring the feminine psyche from different angles.

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