

Portrayal of Women Characters and their Socio-Cultural Roles by Anita Desai: An inner feeling on Marginalization of Women in the Society.

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Abstract

Anita Desai's contribution with her personal experience of life, a sincere and sensitive portrayal of inner feelings of her female characters exhibition by her novel's mainly explore tensions between family members and the alienation of middle-class women. It's not only included anti-Semitism but also western quintessential ideologies of India and the death of Indian traditions and customs. Desai's work deal with contemporary Indian life, culture clashes between the East and the West, generational differences, and practical and emotional exile.

Keywords: Feminism, Alienation of middle-class women, Marginalization of Women, Socio-Cultural Role, Discrimination between Male and Female.

Introduction

Women have always been expected to remain, as has been nature, and men, taking support of the patriarchal notions, have kept on creating and enacting methods of their exploitation. Both woman and nature are life sustaining and resource giving, but they themselves have remained neglected and ignored, they themselves have been devalued and oppressed. But, now-a-days, there is a growing awareness at global level regarding the need to make as well as, to the planning and implementing activities for sustaining the existence of life on the Earth, so that, their own exploitations may be checked. Feminism aims at ending discrimination between men and women, whereas, the branch of feminism which attempts at involving women in order to curb the exploitation of nature. Physical and psychological violence, sexual abuse, acid burning, genital mutilation, femicide, human trafficking, slavery. These and many others are the risks faced every day around the world by millions of women of all ages, social classes and cultures. Violence against women is the consequence of inequalities in the power distribution between men and women within society, both past and present, which if not properly and promptly tackled will remain a cause of future death among women. Women in colonized societies are often marginalized not only because of their race, but also because of their gender. Their experience of domination in a patriarchal system makes finding their own place in society and their own identity extraordinarily difficult. It is imperative to acknowledge that women across the globe and across cultures experience denial of personal development, denial of educational development and also denial of voice. Although female's ethnic background may vary significantly, the experience of marginalisation remains the same. A feminist perspective, then, is critical in exploring post-colonial literature so that we may be better able to understand the position of women as marginalized individuals. Females conveying female experiences in their own discourse allows us to perceive the impediments and burdens the colonizers and the patriarchy have imposed upon them in addition to recognizing the strengths that they have had to develop in order to cope with their marginalized position in society.

Objectives

1. To study the novels of Anita Desai and to enhance the knowledge of English literature
2. To comprehend the portrayal of women characters and their socio-cultural roles
3. To throw light in the marginalization of women in the society.
4. To study the social and family problems of women in the writings of the novelist.

Hypothesis

1. To study the marginalization of women and the feminine consciousness in Anita Desai's novels will help to know her from this angle and also to understand her contribution.
2. To find out more about Anita Desai and her identity as a feminist writer and her attempts to show women's fight against injustice.

Research Methodology

The present research work would depend upon the primary source that is original works by Anita Desai, which would be read, analysed and interpreted critically. By using the descriptive method, it is presented in order to find out the ways in which Anita Desai has presented her views on the image of the marginalization of woman, by collecting the data from her selected novels. It will discuss social status of women in India and for this the investigator will take help of different libraries and the randomly selected two novels of Anita Desai.

Significance of the study

Anita Desai undoubtedly occupies a supreme position of the contemporary Indian feminist novelist. With her poignant, hypersensitive knowledge, erudition and inner psychological power concerning the natural and real everyday affairs of familial, societal dealings as minutely impacted in her major novels. Her purpose of writing is to discover herself and then aesthetically convey the truth. She has unveiled the grim as well as mysterious truth of human psychology, especially women's question in most of her novels of our post-modern era. She has pictured a paradigm of the whole women community with a view to spreading the message of the second sex. Her women in her novels need to confront clashes endeavour to split away, to state their independence and think whether their choice to do as such is the correct one, how to determine the identity emergency and rise triumphant from the injury. Her subjects absolutely touch the crude nerves of human experience. Feminist long fiction features female characters whose quest for self-agency leads to conflict with a traditionally masculinist and patriarchal society. These novels have been harshly criticized and dismissed—and even ridiculed—for their non-traditional female characters.

Feminist ideology in the Western world traces its roots to the late eighteenth century. One particular work considered foundational to feminism is *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* (1792), by English writer Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797). Not until the twentieth century, more than one hundred years later, would women begin to reap some of the benefits of a long campaign for basic human rights. Feminism led to radical changes for women in politics, the public sphere, the workplace, the home, and the cultural realm, including the arts and literature. Popular literature, especially, began to reflect women's previously silenced voices.

As early as the end of the seventeenth century, however, women were publishing works of literature. Aphra Behn (1640-1689), likely the first Englishwoman to support herself through writing, published the highly popular *Oroonoko: Or, The History of the Royal Slave* (1688), a prose romance. This novel was the first in English to express sympathy for the plight of slaves.

The Eighteenth Century

Fiction, a genre that did not fully develop until the eighteenth century, provided a perfect vehicle for women who sought a voice through writing. The first long fiction in England consisted of what may generally be termed “romances.” Men traditionally received credit for developing long fiction and, eventually, the novel form. Touted examples include Samuel Richardson’s epistolary novel, *Pamela: Or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740- 1741), and Henry Fielding’s *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1749). However, earlier novels were written by women, a fact not widely acknowledged until the twentieth century. Mary de la Rivière Manley (c. 1670- 1724) published *The Secret History of Queen Zarah and the Zarazians* in the early eighteenth century (1705). The novel is a version of the roman à clef. This type of fiction featured real-life personalities thinly disguised as its characters. Eliza Haywood (c. 1693-1756), a highly political figure, also wrote romances, including *The History of Jemmy and Jenny Jessamy* (1753). She is now frequently mentioned as an important figure in the development of the novel.

Jane Austen

The Nineteenth Century

The nineteenth century became a golden age of writing for women. Jane Austen (1775-1817) wrote seven novels, often called novels of manners that parody the ludicrous activities of genteel society and criticize inequitable social rules. *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1816), *Persuasion* (1818), and *Sanditon* (1925) uncover the oppressive lives of women, including confining environments, a shameful lack of education, and pitiful dependence upon male relatives for survival. Austen’s *Northanger Abby* (1818) satirizes as sentimental its heroine’s love for the gothic genre, fiction that offers readers mysterious castles or mansions with secret passages, dark shadowy beings, a damsel threatened by death, a hero with an obscure past, and visions and ghosts.

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (1797-1851) would rejuvenate the public’s appreciation for the gothic in her 1818 novel *Frankenstein*. Rather than emphasize the traditional elements of the gothic, Shelley produced a complex psychological study of her characters, imbuing her horror and science-fiction story with disturbing imagery of aborted creations and multiple deaths. Feminist critics link these elements to Shelley’s real-life experiences.

By mid-century, Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855) and Emily Brontë (1818-1848) were producing novels featuring a new hero based on the Romantic ideals of the English poet Lord Byron (1788-1824). Named for the poet and the heroes of his poetry, the Byronic hero most generally had a brooding, dark, independent, and sometimes abusive personality. Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) includes a Byronic hero in the form of Edward Rochester. More important, however, the novel introduces a never-before-seen heroine in the shape of a plain, small governess, whose values for truth and justice lead to her rejection of the romantic attentions of Rochester, her master. The character of Jane undercuts the popular female stereotypes of fiction: the angel of the house, the “invalid,” or the whore.

Although Charlotte Brontë’s novel was well received by her contemporaries, Emily Brontë’s masterpiece, *Wuthering Heights*, also published in 1847, was not. With its metaphysical suggestions that bordered on the gruesome and with an abusive, vengeful Byronic hero, its messages proved too strong for its time (especially so because they came from a woman). By the next century, however, this novel took its rightful place in the canon not only of feminist long fiction but also long fiction in general.

The Twentieth Century

Feminist fiction writer Kate Chopin (1851-1904) published *The Awakening* in 1899, a novel that many libraries refused to shelve, despite Chopin’s earlier popularity as a writer of “traditional” fiction. Her book shocked readers with its heroine who took pleasure in sexual relations and its suggestion of the connections between the imagination, the artist, and sex. The hostile criticism it received centred on its heroine’s rejection of the traditional oppressive role of wife and mother, causing even Chopin’s hometown library in St. Louis, Missouri, to ban the book.

With the exodus of men fighting the two world wars in the first half of the twentieth century, American and English women entered the workforce in record numbers to occupy positions other than that of the traditional nurse, teacher, or secretary. As women's roles in the world changed, so did the characterizations of women in novels. Female writers began to connect their work and their lives. They discovered a number of disparities between their own ambitions, ingenuity, and creativity on one hand and the limited, often secondary, roles assumed by the majority of traditional female fictional characters on the other hand. This reality was easily explained, as the majority of novelists were white men. By the mid-twentieth century, a plethora of long fiction by women began to appear, with realistic female characters. Women's fiction transformed from products of imitation of a male aesthetic to protests against that aesthetic, eventually becoming self-defining works of literature.

The success of these new novelists was propelled by the work of feminist literary critics, especially scholars in academia. In the 1960's, critics began questioning the characterizations of women as either angels or monsters. They also questioned the representation of women in popular literature written by men and, most important, refused to accept the exclusion of women from literary history. Their diligence in rediscovering female novelists from previous centuries and decades helped propel authors such as Woolf, George Sand (1804-1876), George Eliot (1819-1880), and West to their rightful place in the literary canon.

Feminist critics also traced the historical connections of recurring images, themes, and plots in women's writing that reflected their social and psychological experience in a culture dominated by men. One recurring image, for example, is that of the caged bird, which represents the suppression of female creativity or the physical and emotional imprisonment of women in general. Slowly, writings by women began to be accepted not only in the classroom but also the marketplace. Virago Press, which publishes the writings of women, reprinted, for instance, West's novels in affordable editions. While her work in its own day was deemed "too intellectual," feminist critics helped define a new study and a new appreciation of these works. In addition, the critical analyses of the aesthetic values that appeared in many of the novels that had long been considered classics led to a newly defined feminist novel.

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, it was no longer remarkable that stories about women's lives were indeed serious literature. However, much of the "seriousness" also has translated into increased sales and profits for publishers, especially because women surpassed men in terms of buying and reading novels. Books by women about women still are considered attractive primarily for female readers, whereas books by men about men are considered to have universal appeal.

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