



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 3. Issue.3.,2016 (July-Sept. )

**ISSN** INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA  
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

THE NUANCES OF FEMINISM FOUND IN THE WRITINGS OF DIASPORIC WRITERS  
BHARATI MUKHERJEE AND ANITA DESAI

MAHALAKSHMI SHANMUGAM

MA Student

Jamal Mohammed College, Trichy, Tamilnadu



MAHALAKSHMI  
SHANMUGAM

**ABSTRACT**

The term feminism is a major aspect of every literature. Especially diasporic female writers have tried their hands in Feminist writing. By focusing on Feminist writing, we can get to know that the theme or the main intension of the writers is often achieving men and women equality. Diasporic writers' works subconsciously deals with the themes of alienation and feminism this paper emphasizes mainly these elements found in the works of Indian women novelists Anita Desai and Bharati Mukherjee. There is no doubt in this fact that their works are legacy to Indian English literature. Here we are going to inspect the characteristics and nuances of feminism prevail in their novels.

©KY PUBLICATIONS

The term feminism is not a new term in English literature. In fact it is a part and parcel of every literature. Women writers like, Arundhati Roy, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Jumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Kamala Das, and Manju Kapur are frequently contributing to the growth and development of women. This female writers are fast emerging phenomena, that too in last two or three decades. In country like India, feminism is an unavoidable scenario. When we go through the history, there were no equality between men and women. There have been a regular trafficking of women, the female fetuses have been killed mercilessly, and many girls have been burnt for the sake of dowry. Not only that, the women have always been restricted and their talents are not being applauded by the society even now. They are refused their identity and individuality. Dale Spender in her essay "Women and Literary History", acknowledges that, the literary history what we are having now is peculiarly biased and inaccurate. The male dominant historians have made the distorted history. According to Virginia Woolf For most of history, Anonymous was a woman.

As feminism, diasporic literature also plays a vital role in the growth of English literature, writers like Vikram Chandra, Anita Desai, Amitav Gosh, Bharati Mukerjee, V.S.Naipaul, R.K.Narayan, Raja Rao, Arundhati Roy, Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Bapsi Sidwa are frequently contributing their works. Their works are highly pertaining to nostalgic elements so as to adapt themselves to the new culture. By their writings, we can see both the longing for their homeland and the influence of the host land. However, the perspective insight of diasporic literature helps us to understand and makes us get connected with various cultures. As the diasporic writers play both the roles of refugee and ambassador, they have a great responsibility over literature. They should have adequate knowledge on their own culture as well as the culture of their host land.

Bharathi Mukherjee is a girl of upper class reputed Bengali family. Born on July 27, 1940 to Sudhir Lal and Bina Mukherjee. Almost first two decades of her life were spent in India. Educated mainly in Kolkatta, England and the USA. She is a scholarly person graduated from the University of Calcutta in 1959. And gained her Master degree in English and Ancient Indian Culture in the USA and also got M.A in Creative Writing (1963) from Iowa University. Then she finished her Ph.D from the department of English and Comparative Literature in the same year. She married to a young Canadian writer, Clark Blaise and took teaching as her career.

Mukherjee's works are highly notable for their autobiographical touch. Major part of her works focuses on the mentality and the sufferings of the expatriates and their struggle for gaining identity as she trusts America as a land of opportunities for immigrants, her characters also subconsciously dominated by this thought. Her works are predominantly having female protagonists rather than having male by them she expresses the current position of women in the modern society. Mukherjee does not want herself to be labeled as "Feminist" but she gives significance to women's rights and their identity. Her major novels are, *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971), *Wife* (1975), *Jasmine* (1989), *The Holder of the World* (1993), *Leave it to Me* (1997), *Desirable Daughters* (2002)

Mukherjee's works are essential contribution to the multi-ethnic literature of United States. Her short stories present the experience of Indian immigrants in a multi-cultural country like America. She advocates how the people from various countries are weaving America as a multi-textured and multi-cultured country. Her famous short story series, "The Middlemen and Other Stories" won the National Books Critics Award in 1988. The protagonists of these short stories are from different countries and by them she describes America is not only a melting pot, but also the molder of a perfect democratic Culture.

Her non-fictional works depicts the real life experience of Bharati Mukherjee in multiple phases. *The Days and Nights in Calcutta* was written by her in collaboration with her husband, a Canadian writer Clark Blaise. Which is about Calcutta the cities of Calcutta are described beautifully. It is partly travelogue and partly autobiography. *The Sorrow and the Terror: The Haunting Legacy of Air India Tragedy* deals with the tragedy of Air India, the fall of Air India into the ocean and its consequences. Her *Political Culture and Leadership in India* highlights Bharati Mukherjee's knowledge in Indian Politics and her independent thinking and mastery in writing. *Regionalism in Indian perspective* explains us the problems and issues related with Indian-regionalism.

Mukherjee's novels are having powerful women protagonists. They are from different walks of life. In *The Tiger's Daughter*, protagonist Tara is married to a US returned man and finds that she will not belong to her motherland. In *Wife*, Dimple Dasgupta comes as a girl dreams of her marriage life that the marriage will bring her happiness and freedom. But, she gets neither from her marriage and at the end she murders her own husband and ends the novel with horror. In *Jasmine*, Jyoti Vjih comes as an innocent Punjabi girl, after husband's death, she becomes bold enough to reject the old traditions of her homeland and migrates to Florida then to New York and then to Iowa and there she suffers a lot. Throughout the novel she changes her name and identity as Jasmine, Jazzy, Jane. And lives a carefree life. Her fourth novel *The Holder of the World* is highly a "Mainstream American Novel". In which, protagonist is an American. It is the history of USA and India. Her fifth novel *Leave it to Me* deals with the story of an abandoned girl child Debby at her twenty three years, she wants to find out her biological parents so as to take revenge on them for abandoning her. *Desirable Daughters* deals with female identity. Which tells us the story of three Bengali Sisters living in USA.

Bharati Mukherjee is one of the contemporary Indian women writers who has settled in USA as American citizen. Unlike other diasporic writers, Mukherjee likes her host land more than her home land. As a diasporic novelist, Mukerjee stands apart from other writers. Instead of highlighting the immigrants' alienation, nostalgia for their homeland, she highlights assimilation, adaptation and acculturation as a solution for immigrants to overcome them. She thinks geographical boundaries are man made and claims her a "Mainstream American Writer". She acknowledges that she has adopted America as her homeland, not by any compulsion but by her own wish. She says, I am an American at heart though Indian by birth

We can divide Mukherjee's works into two phases, the period upto 1980, the period after 1980. The first phase consists the novels of direct autobiographical touch. Especially deals with her life in Canada where

she had several unfavourable experiences both as a writer and as a writer. Her works were not accepted by the Canadian publishers, she was rejected vehemently. In one of her famous articles *Immigrant Writing in New York Times Book review*, attacks the racial discrimination against Indian writers prevails in Canada. The second phase deals with the theme of "Immigration". Thus Mukherjee's novels are symbolic depiction of her life journey from Expatriate to Immigrant.

Anita Desai is one of the pioneers of Indian English Literature as Bharati Mukherjee, Anita Desai also an expatriate writer. Unlike Mukherjee, Anita longs for homeland. She was born on June 24, 1937 in Mussourie, she is a daughter of German mother and Bengali father. Much of her life time was spent in New Delhi. As a daughter of parent belong to different linguistic background, Anita became multi lingual and had exposure in many languages. At her home she used to speak in German and with her friends and neighbours, in Hindi. When she went to Queen Mary's School at Delhi, she learned English. It was the first language in which she was taught to write and read so it became the language of influence. Desai became fond of writing in English. On that regard she says, "I think it had a tremendous effect that the first thing you saw written and the first thing you ever read was English. It seemed to me the language of books." Her college education was at Miranda House, Delhi University, where she got her graduate degree in English literature in 1957. After her studies worked in Max Muller Bhavan, Calcutta, and on December 13, 1958 and married to Ashvin Desai. It was after her marriage, she started publishing her books. Desai has four children- Rahul, Tani, Arjun, Kiran. Anita's family was residing in Calcutta from 1958-1962, then they went to Bombay, Chandigarh, Delhi and Poona and finally settled there. All the experience she gained there helped her to write her fictional and non-fictional works with realistic view. Desai has been one of the members of the Advisory Board of English at Sahitya academy in New Delhi (1975-1980), American Academy of Arts and Letters, Royal Society of Literature.

Anita Desai's novels are great legacy to Indian English literature. She is the proud contributor of Psychological Novel in Indian English fiction. Some of her novels are, *Cry, the Peacock* (1963), *Voices in the City* (1965), *Bye-Bye Blackbird* (1968), *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975), *The Peacock Garden* (1974), *Clear Light of Day* (1980), *In Custody* (1984), *Journey to Ithaca* (1995), *Fasting, Feasting* (1999) Desai became a freelance writer in 1963, and has contributed to various publications like, *The New York Times Book Review*, *London Magazine*, *Harper's Bazaar* and *Quest* and has written three Children's books.

Theme of Feminism & Alienation in Anita Desai's Novels: *Cry, the Peacock* is her first novel, in which she portraits her heroine "Maya" as a neurotic girl, affected by the prophecy of the albino horoscope reader. He foretells that she or her husband will die at their fourth year of married life. Anita depicts Maya as a girl who is longing for love and freedom. Her husband "Gautama", a famous lawyer belongs to an aristocratic family is having no care or concern over his wife. At the end of the novel, Maya haunted by the prophecy pushes her husband from the terrace and she also commits suicide.

*Voices in the City* is Anita's second novel, as her first novel had created much expectations, this second novel was not satisfying to the readers. It portraits Calcutta as "Blood-thirsty Calcutta", "The City of Death", where the Goddess of death Kali resides. Plot wise, this is the story of Niroda Ray and his two sisters Monisha and Amla. The heroine of this novel Monisha, more like Maya, tangled into unhappy married life. Who is married into a rich orthodox family against her will. Her husband Jiban is not mature. If Maya pushes her husband off, Monisha burns herself out of depression. But in both novels, theme is the search of love and identity. *Bye-Bye Blackbird* deals with the theme of alienation, loneliness and frustration, the immigrant faces in a new country. And at the same time, it tells us the innermost thoughts of Sarah, an English girl, who feels whether she lost her identity after marrying an Indian. The major characters are Dev, Amit and Sarah. Dev is a new comer to England. At the beginning he feels that he is humiliated. But gradually he finds English life "rich". Adit is another immigrant who is very proud of his education and knowledge in English. He hates the people who cannot accept their host land as their own. His wife Sarah is an English girl, she feels this hard to decide which is her real identity. An English girl or a wife of an Indian. She suspects that outwardly she plays both roles successfully, but what will be her real identity? Thus, the novel deals both with the themes of Feminism and Diaspora. *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* is the story of a middle-aged depressed girl "Sita".

Like before, Anita has written this novel as the portrayal of alienation and longing for love. Sita along with her two children Menaka and Karan, goes to her father's house in an island. She is highly depressed with her fifth pregnancy. This novel has three major parts. In the first part, Sita leaves to her father's island with her two children. In the second part, she remembers her childhood days. The final part projects her as a depressed wife. In this part, her husband Raman comes to bring her back to their home. She doesn't want to go back with him, feels unloved and rejected. But finally, for the sake of their children she accompanies him. Thus the novel ends. *Fire on the Mountain* Anita's fifth novel won the Sahitya Academy award in 1978. The title of the novel was derived from William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. This novel deals with the innermost world of an old widow Nanda Kaul, wife of a former Vice-Chancellor. After her husband's death she tries to escape from the haunting past memories. When she became aware of her Great granddaughter Raka's visit by her daughter Asha's letter, she feels disturbed and thinks that her privacy will be affected by her. Anita has weaved her characters Nanda Kaul and Raka as extroverts. They both hate human contacts and love solitude. This might be the outcome of their past. *Clear Light of Day* shows Anita's maturity in plot construction. This is the story of two sisters Bim and Tara. They have two brothers. Raja and Baba. After their parents' death, Bim takes care of her ailing brother Raja, her aged aunt Mira, mentally retarded brother Baba. Unlike Bim Tara hates her family and domestic situation. She marries Bakul and moves away from her family and lives her life happily in abroad. Raja then gets cured from his ailment, marries his neighbor Hyder Ali's daughter and settles in Hyderabad. But Bim sacrifices everything for her family. Thus this novel magnifies the significance of Sacrifice. *Fasting, Feasting* deals with male-female inequality and discrimination. The protagonist of this novel is Uma, who is dominated by her parents. They treat them inferior to her brother Arun and not even give her basic freedom and education. Thus throughout the novel, Uma has portrayed as a poor helpless girl longing for freedom. Thus Anita Desai's works are predominantly having powerful backdrop of female sensuality.

**Bharati Mukherjee & Anita Desai – Compare & Contrast:** In this paper we have come across two powerful diasporic female writers of Indian English Literature. They both are having many similarities along with their individuality. Anita Desai started writing only after her marriage, but Mukherjee starts that earlier. Anita's characters are weak and depressed ('Sita' in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, 'Nanda Kaul' in *Fire on the Mountain*, 'Uma' in *Fasting, Feasting*), longing for their identity ('Sarah' in *Bye-Bye Blackbird*), longing for care and support ('Maya' in *Cry, the Peacock*, 'Monisha' in *Voices in the City*), self-destructive ('Maya' in *Cry, the Peacock*, 'Monisha' in *Voices in the City*). On the other hand Mukherjee's characters are, Self-adaptive ('Jyoti Vijh' in *Jasmine*) Dreamers of Married life ('Dimple Dasgupta' in "Wife"). Aggressive ('Debby' in "Leave it to Me", 'Dimple' in "Wife"). In some cases Mukherjee and Anita's characters are reflecting each other 'Dimple' in "Wife" kills her own husband as 'Maya' kills her husband in *Cry, the Peacock*. 'Jyoti Vijh' in "Jasmine" is possessed by prophecy as 'Maya' in "Cry, the Peacock".

#### REFERANCES

- Sunita B.Nimavat, *Jasmine-A Critical Study*, Prakash Book Depot, Bareill.  
 Deepa Sethi. *Cry, the peacock* Rama Brothers, India Pvt.Ltd, New Delhi.  
 R.K.Srivastava, *Perspective on Anita Desai*, Vimal Prakashan, Ghaziabad.  
 R.S.Singh, "Indian Novel in English", Arnold