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## **Female characters portrayed in the selected novels of Anita Desai and Manju Kapur (A comparative study)**

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### **Abstract**

In a comparative study a reader gets an idea of different literature and studies the literature thoroughly. To study a literature theories are needed. Most of the writings of female writers are written from feministic point of view. Feminism is a theory to highlight the fights, struggles of female against the traditional, male-dominated society. Various writers have presented this struggle of women through their writings. Of which Anita Desai and Manju Kapur have presented their female characters very well. They are following Indian traditions as well as opposing these rituals at the same time. Maya, Sita, Sarah, Nanda Kaul all are being presented by Anita Desai as the victims of time and society. All are fighting to have their self-identity, but all of them never go against their rituals, never give up their duties instead they bend in front of the situation. Who doesn't bend she makes her life end. On the other hand, Virmati, Shakuntla, Astha, Nina, Shagun, Ishita all these women are presented by Manju Kapur. They have fought till last and get what they want to. They go against the wishes of their family and society.

**Keywords:** characters portrayed, anita desai, manju kapur

### **Life and characters portrayed by Anita Desai**

Anita Desai was born on 1937, she is nourished under a mixture of two cultures; one is of Germany and second is of India. English is her literary language. She has written many novels, short stories, and poems. *Cry The Peacock* is her first novel. In this novel, she has presented her protagonist from a psychological point of view. Maya, the protagonist is overprotective by nature. Her father takes care of her; his protective nature has made her dull. She can't take decisions of her own. In a male-dominated society, women are supposed to live under the shadows of the male members of their family. No protest, no opposition to reform their status is done by women. Women mould themselves as a rubber band according to their needs. Women think of themselves as decorative pieces of the houses.

Maya is just like a typical Indian woman, who never goes against the wishes of the family, nor she raises any voice. Instead, she is suffering from self-exile and mismatch of their views. She feels frustrated and becomes a victim of the traditional rituals. The aim of Anita Desai is to present her characteristics behaviour and her response to the situations. Maya cannot hold her situation and become mad. In her insanity, she has killed her husband and committed suicide at last. A famous critic Pathak has described about Maya as,

"It gives expression to the long-smoother wail of a leveraged psyche, the harrowing tale of a blunted human relationship being told by the chief protagonist herself. (Pathak 20)

Sarah is the protagonist of her second novel, *Bye Bye Blackbird*. She always lives in a puzzled state of mind. She is nowhere, absurd, feeling exiled within her own country. After being a wife of an Indian man, she has lost her own identity and recognition in society. She is caught in two cultural conflicts, where to go, what to do and how to do. Sarah finds herself,

"In the middle of a mud from, she can't go anywhere. She longs for higher density as an Indian or English. She said who she was; she had so little command over there to erase. She played each day in the morning at school and one in the evening at night. They were born and when he was not playing, then she was nobody, where was Sarah? (BBC 35)

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Like all Indian women, Sarah never opposes her family. In spite of her English blood, she has neither opposed the situations, nor made any protest against the domination of her husband Adit and her in-laws family. She compromises to the situation and accepts the reality. Leaving behind her English self, Sarah becomes a meek spectator of the time. Sita is ambitious and struggling to gain her identity in *Where shall We Go This Summer*. Just like Maya, Sita is feeling self-exiled within her own family. Sita wants to abandon the hypocrite life of middle-class society of Bombay. She is a mother of four children and the fifth is going to be born. She doesn't want to give birth to this fifth child. For this, she decides to go to an isolated place Manori,

"She saw that Iceland illusion as a refuge, a protection. It would hold her baby safely unborn magic. Then there would be the sea-it would wash her frenzy out of her, drown it. Perhaps the tides would lull the children, too, into smoother, softer beings. The grove of trees would shade them and portal them."(WTS 91)

She thinks that this magic Iceland of Manori can release her all tensions and worries. But her all efforts go in vain. There is no magic left at Manori which can behold her unborn child and gives Sita comfort. In spite of having any help from Manori, She gains a new approach to life. She regains her past memories, lives through them and realizes that she can't resist the situation; she cannot live without her family and husband. She realizes the importance of family and finally decides to go back with Raman instead of her cold response. She understands that she has to fulfil all the responsibilities whether she likes it or not.

Nanda Kaul, the deserted character of *Fire On The Mountain* is presented by Anita Desai. She has suffered throughout her life because her husband has an extramarital affair with Miss David, and never loves her. These feelings of detachment and deceive always haunts Nanda, and it makes her sick. Throughout her life she has played a role of a perfect wife, a mother and a good organizer. She is always making arrangements for the parties and well dresses in silk, pearls and emeralds. But all this is just a show to the society. She lives a lonely life even in the company of her children. She wants retirement from all the burdens of family and cries in pain,

"Discharge me; I want discharge from all my duties. Discharge, discharge (FOM)

Nanda chooses an isolated life intentionally and wants nobody to come to her place. She wants complete isolation and peace. After the death of her husband, she goes to Carginano and lives there alone,

"She had been so glad when it was over. She had been glad to leave it all behind, in the plains, like great, heavy, difficult book that she had read through and was not required to read again."(FOM 29-30)

Her friend Illa Das comes at Carginano to meet her and her granddaughter Raka. When she goes back Illa Das is brutally raped and killed by Preet Singh, a villager. This news breaks her completely and she suffers a stroke and dies at once.

### **Life and characters portrayed by Manju Kapur**

Manju Kapur was born on 1948. She has devoted her life to writings and has written five novels, four poems, and short stories. Manju Kapur has presented her characters from a new perspective. All of her female characters are very bold and courageous. These women fight against the traditional, male-dominated society and gain their own identity. Women are modern, bold and very ambitious.

Dora Sales Salvador gives her views on *Difficult Daughters* that,

"Kapur emphasis the effort made at that time by numerous women who, which demanding equal opportunities, equal access to education and life opportunities going beyond convention were a visible force in the non-violent resistance to the British." (Sales 361)

Virmati in *Difficult Daughters* becomes the difficult daughter of her parents. She goes against the wishes of her family and rejects to marry Inderjeet, a boy chosen by her family. Virmati falls in love with Harish, a married man. Their relationship develops and she gets pregnant before marriage. Somehow she manages to abort the child with the help of her friend.

She wants to go for higher studies. She always follows her cousin Shakuntla who is living in Lahore. She attempts suicide but fails and is saved by her grandfather's servants. She discloses the reason behind her attempt of suicide that she wants to get higher studies. But in reality, she doesn't want to marry Inderjeet.

The family of Virmati has tried their best to control Virmati but of no avail. Virmati goes to Lahore for doing BT. Again Harish comes there, and they start meeting again. She gets a job of a principal but fired from the job after knowing about her illicit relationship. Virmati decides to join Nari Niketan. She is on the way to Nari Niketan; again she meets with Harish through a common friend. This friend has managed for their marriage and both go back to Amritsar after getting married. Virmati has given another shock to her family. Her family abandons her forever.

Virmati gets her love at last, but she has to pay a heavy price for this. Throughout her life, she fights to have her desires fulfilled. Her family doesn't allow her to come into the house. At last, when the city is attacked by the agitated mob, people take shelter in the shrine to save their lives. There she meets with her mother and finally gets some satisfaction at last.

*A Married Woman*, This novel of Manju Kapur has blasted the Indian culture by its approach to gay relationship. Astha, the protagonist is having a relationship with her female friend Pipeelika. This has created much sensation in society and has changed the viewpoint of critics.

Astha, the wife of Hemant (a beurocrate), mother of two children, is leading a very luxurious and peaceful life. Before marriage, she has developed an interest in two boys, but that doesn't go so long. After getting married, she enjoys a luxurious life but feels bored at home. To avoid her boredom she starts teaching in a school. A theatre group comes in the school; Aijaz is the leader of the group. Astha gets attracted to Aijaz and feels the sensation when he touches her on her knee. Soon this attraction comes to an end. Theatre group goes away after completing its work. After some days Hemant reads in a newspaper that a theatre group in a van is burnt alive by an agitated mob. Aijaz is

also in that van. Astha gets a big shock. Astha makes her busy in household works and in school works. Astha wants love and time from Hemant, but he is too busy in his business.

Astha meets Pipeelika, another theatre artist. She comes to know about her identity that Pipee is the widow of Aijaz. Astha indulges in a gay relationship with Pipee. She ignores her family after Pipee. Everyone get a shock when their gay relationship discloses. Both go to Ekta Yatra from Kashmir to Kanayakumari just to be with each other. There Astha finds out Pipee's other gay relationships. This has given another shock to Astha, she feels cheated. She asks about this to Pipee. After some days Astha gets a news that Pipee is leaving for abroad. On the other hand, Hemant gets heart attack. Astha has to support and take care of her husband now. Her mother-in-law asks Astha to be with Hemant all the time. The doctor also suggests family members that Hemant should be given a peaceful life and advises them not to give him any shocking news.

After Pipee's going to abroad, Astha too realizes that she is doing wrong and she should have come back to her family and should take care of them now. This proverb comes true in Astha's life that East or West Home is the best.

Nina, the immigrant of *The Immigrants*, highlights the problems of cultural conflict, racial discrimination and male domination even in abroad. Nina is over thirty when she gets married to Anand, an NRI of Canada. He is a practicing dentist there. Alka, sister of Anand has chosen Nina for her brother. The marriage takes place in an Aryan Samaj Mandir and the registration of marriage takes place at Alka's house.

On her first night when Nina is waiting for Andy (Anand), she comes to know about Anand's physical weakness. After some days both of them go to Canada. Nina is very new to the western culture. She takes time while adjusting, but she has changed herself according to the needs. Anand gets busy in his clinic and Nina feels alone at home. She feels isolated, feels nostalgic and wants to go back,

"She longed to breathe the foul air, longed to sit in a scooter, rickshaw and have every bone in her body jolted." (The immigrants 179).

To get rid of this isolation she joins a job of the library, now she needs a relevant degree. She takes admission in a library course and meets Anton, a British guy there. Nina longs for the love of Anand and her sexual needs remain unfulfilled. She also gets attracted towards Anton, and involves in a physical relationship with Anton. At first, Nina feels relaxed and happy, but this affectation comes to an end brutally when Nina is raped by Anton on the last day of their summer trip. It breaks Nina.

Nina's mother dies. She has to go back to India. There she shares everything with her best friend, and comes to realize her mistake and thinks of not repeating it again. She comes back to Canada. She finds Anand's relation with Mandy and decides to break her marriage. She starts living alone at last.

Shagun and Ishita are the protagonists of *Custody*. Both females suffer due to their divorce and deals with legal proceedings. Shagun suffers due to her infidelity and Ishita suffers due to her infertility.

Shagun being a mother of two children falls in an illicit relation with Ashok Khanna (Boss of Raman, her husband). Shagun is the wife of Raman. Her over ambitious nature, extra modern thoughts makes her a deceiver. She leaves her

husband and children. Shagun fills a divorce case and starts living with Ashok. After fourteen years of court proceedings Shagun gets custody of Arjun and Raman gets custody of Ruhi.

On the other hand, Ishita, the second protagonist of *Custody*, gets a divorce due to her physical inability of not being a mother. Suryakanta (husband of Ishita) has left Ishita because she can't be a mother. Her in-laws family also abandons her. Ishita doesn't want to give divorce, but she is forcibly divorced. Ishita's maternal house is in the same locality of Raman's. There she meets with Ruhi and develops a motherly affection towards Ruhi. Ishita wants to adopt Ruhi. They often meet, Raman and his family members also like Ishita. Raman gets attracted towards Ishita and both get married. The marriage takes place even before Raman's divorce from Shagun. Suddenly Ishita being a divorcee and a childless becomes a mother, a wife and a daughter-in-law of a huge family. She is living a happy family life with Raman and Ruhi.

Anita Desai and Manju Kapur have portrayed a different types of female characters in their writings. Anita Desai has portrayed her protagonist from a psychological point of view. Maya and Sita are suffering from isolation and struggling to gain their identity within the sphere of their own houses. Maya's over depended nature become the reason of her drastic end. Sita's obsession with love, want of parental affectation makes her absurd from the harsh realities of life. She has left her family, but in isolation, she has gained a new approach to life and comes back to her family. Sarah, being an English by birth doesn't go against the wishes of her family. Sarah has lost her individuality and her English identity just to maintain peace in the family and she tries her best for the success of her marriage. Nanda Kaul throughout her life suffers isolation and negative attitude of her husband due to his extramarital affair with Miss David. She lives in despair. After the death of her husband she feels relieved from all the worries and of being a decorative piece. She goes to Carginano and lives there alone till her death.

On the other side, Manju Kapur has presented a new type of woman who is bold, extra modern in her ways, courageous, and a fighter kind of. Virmati in *Difficult Daughters* fights to get higher education and her illicit love. For this, she is abundant by her parents but she doesn't care about it. She achieves what she wants. Other character Astha creates a sensation with her gay relationship with Pipeelika. In spite of a loving family, her two children and her husband Hemant, she goes outside and breaks the traditional rituals. Her morality declines. But after sometime when she finds Pipee having a gay relationship with other also, Astha realises her mistake, and comes back to her family. Nina, being an Indian traditional lady is married to an NRI. She has to go to Canada and she is forced to change her ways of eating and also accepts the western culture. She feels alone because Anand is not physically fit, Nina's sexual needs remain unfulfilled. To get rid of her isolation she goes outside and develops a relationship with Anton. She feels good at first but forcibly raped without her consent at the last of their trip. Somehow she realises her mistake and mends her ways. But she fined Andy's physical relationship with Mandy and decides to break her marriage. She has left the house and goes somewhere else to live alone. Shagun and Ishita are the protagonists of *Custody*. Both of the woman are representing modern society. Shagun is very

beautiful, extra modern and very ambitious. Shagun is a wife of Raman a C.E.O in an international company. Ashok Khanna is his boss there. Shagun gets attracted towards Ashok and their extramarital relationship starts. After many years of happy marriage, Shagun develops an illicit love and fills a divorce case. Shagun wants custody of her children not because she loves them but she wants money through them. She makes physical relations with Ashok and starts living with him, leaving behind her husband and children alone. After fourteen years of court proceedings, Shagun gets Arjun and Raman gets custody of Ruhi.

On the other hand Ishita, the second protagonist of the novel also goes through a divorce because of her infertility. She can't be a mother. As Indian culture says a woman is nothing without children. This typical thinking has ruined the life of Ishita. She is forced to give divorce. Ishita and Raman live in the same locality. She comes close to Ruhi, two years daughter of Raman. Ruhi and Ishita feels comfortable in each other company. Ishita wants to adopt Ruhi. Also, Raman's family likes Ishita. Both get married even before Raman's divorce and lives happily.

### Conclusion

This present study describes the differences and similarities between the work of these two writers and in their viewpoints towards women. All these characters are presented in the search for independence, love, respect, equality and their own identity. Some characters are successful in achieving their goals. If anyone fails she has to meet her drastic end. All the characters are bold and ambitious, but the characters portrayed by Anita Desai belong to traditional rituals and strictly follow them, they bow in front of the situation, never fight enough to get rid of their difficulties. But the characters portrayed by Manju Kapur are very bold. They are independent, fight for their goals and achieve whatever they like to, they never bend before the situations, and they fight till last. Whether they are right or not, they struggle and succeed in their life. They never follow the typical Indian rituals instead break them and goes on to fulfil their desires.

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