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Gender discrimination in the novels of Anita Desai & Githa Hariharan

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Abstract

Gender discrimination is deeply ingrained in human nature and physiology in Indian context clearly revealed in the writings of Indian writers who write in English. This is universal across cultures and manifests itself in nearly every aspect of life. God made man in His own image and man created male and female according to the Biblical perspective of humanity. Hindu writings, on the other hand, give a variety of paradoxical viewpoints on the roles of women in Indian society ranging from feminine leadership as the ultimate goddess to an insignificant unit of a family, confining her duty to that of an obedient daughter, housewife, and mother. In today's patriarchal society, marriage is a source of power for both husband and wife. A woman's identity is lost after marriage in the traditional system, but women today are hesitant to give up their independence. Because she is educated, career-oriented, and entrepreneurial, she is emotionally and financially self-sufficient. Anita Desai and Githa Hariharan were the catalysts for this shift. The research reveals how they express their feelings on gender interaction in their female characters in their writings. They emphasize an individual's identity, particularly that of an Indian woman. They emphasize the benefits of trans-affecting one's identity in resolving gender-based problems. This article delves into the origins of gender disparity in India, as well as the Socio-cultural factors that contribute to it. It also highlights the advantages of having a new self-concept, of being a new woman or being a modern woman. A new woman's self-concept evolves from a series of gender interactions set in the framework of sociology, psychology, ideology, history, and feminism in the novels of Anita Desai and Githa Hariharan.

Keywords: Gender inequality, Indian society, discrimination, injustice

Introduction

Throughout history, male writers have portrayed and marginalized women as inferior and feeble in their works. The present research looks at every aspect to demonstrate that how men and women interact differs greatly from the conventional gender interaction paradigm. It makes an attempt to understand the long-term effects on Indian women's psyche of a new self-concept picture that results from a series of gender interactions. Thanks to the integration of Eastern and Western literacy techniques, Pratima asserts that "the Indo-English authors have effectively appraised the psychological, emotional, and spiritual crises faced by Indian Intellectuals as well as men and women reflecting the numerous tiers of Indian society." (1991, Pratima, p. 180) [17]. In this power battle, there is a complex web of power exchanges with varying levels of domination and submission. This way of thought is centered on binary oppositions such as man and woman, society and nature, and mind and heart. The disparities and kinds of inequality that exist between men and women are varied; some of them are unrelated to one another. Recent feminist concepts have focused on narrative texts that analyze how authority, sexuality, and gender identities are created culturally. The *Thousand Shades of Night* by Githa Hariharan and *Cry the Peacock*, a book with a gendered platform, by Anita Desai are contrasted and compared in this research. The investigation of the origins and consequences of the gender gap is intended to address the gender misunderstanding that is the main issue in this circumstance. This might facilitate understanding and respect for each other's differences. Gender sensitization is the modern term for this notion. Anita Desai and Githa Hariharan have established themselves as female psyche experts. They aim to reveal the tradition of a woman being groomed to play a subordinate role in the home by focusing on marital relations and gender interaction.

The man-made patriarchal customs and the Indian woman's discomfort with them are revealed in the novels by Anita Desai and Githa Hariharan. The study covers disagreements, struggles, and debates that both men and women deal with on a daily basis. The female characters in their novels are victims of masculine dominance. Female docility has been a persistent issue since the dawn of human existence. The social structures of a community provide shape and meaning to the concept and practice of gender. Analysing the female characters in Anita Desai and Githa Hariharan's works their woman-centred novels and short stories give us a psychological understanding of how a woman's mind functions, especially one from a typically Indian upbringing. These works demonstrate the presence of a clear search for a true self-identity.

The Indian woman has been trained to be self-effacing, subordinate, and obedient to males through many years of institutional and cultural conditioning, enabling her to suffer in silence as a victim of patriarchy. Githa Hariharan's heroines through phases of self-introspection and self-reflection that force them to develop into more liberated beings than their inherent basis or culture would let them to be. These courageous women boldly fight against social norms, restrictions on behavior, and cultural indoctrination. Over time, they develop into autonomous, self-sufficient people who are eager to take the initiative rather than follow. The institution of marriage, wifehood, and motherhood must be considered in the context of India while defining a woman's sense of self. These were the only identities that women could have in the past. These three phases of life had to be completed by everyone, even women who wanted their own identity. In order to preserve the status quo of the Indian family, women are still searching for their own identities, mostly within the familial framework. Both the female protagonists in Githa Hariharan and Anita Desai go through this process of discovering who they are.

Within the context of the family, women are considered as autonomous persons. Anita Desai is one of India's most well-known modern women writers. Her works explore essential topics such as a woman's search for self-identity, a study into the female mind, a comprehension of life's riddles, and a woman's meeting with the challenges of contemporary Indian culture. In her works, the women question and define their identities as wives, mothers, sisters, daughters, and most importantly, as human beings. Hariharan's female characters have their own power, and they remain unfazed in the face of adversity and hostility. A typical middle-class housewife's existence is depicted in most of her works. Her primary focus is the desire to discover oneself in order to make room for oneself. Memory's function in her works and her inventive flashes. She tells a plausible story with real people rather than enigmatic figures. She thinks that rather than idealizing life, it must be portrayed as it is. for the way she portrays the hardship of Indian women from middle class, their internal turmoil and identity-seeking, issues with marriage and sex, as well as their discovery and disappointment. Offering pre-made solutions is contrary to Hariharan's beliefs. "The Indian novel in English preserves problems and enigmas," says R. S. Pathak. However, it has stood the test of time and proven its worth". (Pathak, 1996, p. 6) ^[16] The purpose of this study is to look at how women characters in Anita Desai's and Githa Hariharan's novels strive for identity in

their relationships with men. Anita Desai is known for his inner world sensitivity and she embodies the welcome creative liberation of feminine sensibility. Desai debuted as a novelist in 1963 with *Cry the Peacock*. Desai is a poet who uses poetry and fine prose to depict a woman's sentiments, emotions, alienation, isolation, and longing for self-identity. *Clear Light of Day* (1980) ^[6] is her most autobiographical work because it takes place during her adolescence and in the same neighbourhood where she grew up. The book *In Custody*, which follows an elderly Urdu poet, was a Booker Prize finalist in 1984. It was in 1993 that she first taught creative writing classes at MIT. Her most recent book, *The Zigzag Way* (2004), is a novel about Mexico in the twentieth century.

Desai illustrates India's cultural and social revolutions by highlighting the repressed struggles of women while highlighting the tremendous influence of family and society, connections, and familial estrangement. The increasing marginalization of women in today's mostly male-dominated societies is a major social trend; for example, in India, women are legally barred from holding elective office. In her play, Anita Desai hopes to draw attention to the struggles faced by women in today's society and the inner agony experienced by her characters. In her works, she deals with feelings of helplessness, anguish, struggle, and eventual resignation. Her unique writing voice is what gives her protagonists' inner lives substance. We learn a great deal about the characters' disturbed psyches because to the author's clever use of imagery, symbolism, metaphors, and other narrative tricks. Desai is a rare example of a successful fiction writer who eschews both realism and idealism. She delves deep into her characters' psyches to explore themes like hopelessness, anguish, struggle, and acceptance. Desai is a major literary sensation because of the acclaim and fanbase that have flocked to her books throughout the world. Among the themes she delves into are the inner worlds of her female protagonists, against the foundation of male authority in society and the home. The notion of the suffering yet stoic woman who ultimately overcame conventional restraints was popularized by Hariharan and her fellow postcolonial women authors of the second generation. These writers have given the English language a new lease of life so that it may better serve their portrayals and tales of women and life in contemporary and postcolonial India. Githa Hariharan began her writing career by attempting to tackle a topic dear to many female writers' hearts: female subjectivity, and she uses her female characters to depict the shifting image of women in the modern and postmodern eras. Hariharan's writings show the world in three different epochs: the traditional, the transitional, and the contemporary. The thousand faces of the night in *Devi's* character seems to suggest that her personas are all representations of 'new' women struggling to break free of traditional gender norms. When her female protagonists find answers that correspond to a re-definition of women's lives, she achieves the underlying political objective of using her books as a vehicle for exploring new realities and a subtle projection of ideals by raising issues and urging re-evaluation and redefinition. In other words, "they are less prescriptive and allow alternatives" rather than "victimizing the poor" (Arundhati Roy and Githa Hariharan, 2005, p. 38) ^[14]. Because she has always been assigned a subservient and relative status, a woman is never considered an autonomous being. Men may imagine themselves without

women. She can't see herself without a man in her life. And she is exactly what a man desires—she appears to him first and foremost as a sexual being. She is defined and distinguished in relation to him rather than he in relation to her; she is the incidental, the non-essential rather than the fundamental. What a renowned feminist said about marriage has a lot of weight for Simone de Beauvoir: "We build factories, offices, and facilities for women, but we continue to believe that marriage is the most dignified career for a woman, liberating her from the need to participate in society in any other way" (DeBeauvoir Simone, 1974, p. 67)^[5].

Because the mirrors in which women look do not reflect them, they have not learned to perceive themselves. What they reveal is how men see women in general, whether married or single. The males in their life, such as fathers and brothers, are reflected in the mirrors while the women are forced to hide behind purdah, the chilman, or modest clothing. Interactions with males provide a window into the intricate and sometimes turbulent weave of Indian women's lives. The texture of a woman's personality is fragmented as a result of her transitory impulses, frustrations, disappointments, distorted perception of life, emotional and transient sensations. The relationship is harmed and their peace of mind is distorted if the connection between man and woman is not pleasant and beneficial. According to Nilufer E. Bharucha, Biologically, female space is hidden. The womb's enclosure protects the developing foetus, thus it's a good thing. The comparison of biological female inwardness has been extended to produce a feminine reductiveness in an androcentric environment. A biological advantage has been turned into a sociological and cultural disadvantage. After imposing this restriction on women, the masculine world has glorified it via song and dance. The circumscription of women's worlds has been documented through literary language. Religious scriptures have also defined the outside limits of women's life. While poetry and literature have idealised these worlds, religious teachings have given them moral and theological legitimacy. Men have traditionally projected their rights of ownership on women as the ultimate territories and countries. (Nilufer E., 1998, p. 93)^[2].

Many such men and women commit infidelity and destroy their own relationships. Divorce becomes the only option when spouses are disloyal to one another. Couples should run their relationships with a healthy dose of succinctness, care, devotion, compromise, and appropriateness, along with some mutual understanding and justice. If you want to have a happy marriage, you need to work on your personal connection. To form a strong emotional bond, physical compatibility is required. Sexual unhappiness or reproductive incapacity are common sources of frustration, which can lead to divorce. Divorce is a painful and emotional scar that can be avoided with a little patience and tolerance. If a seed of doubt sprouts in a couple's relationship these days, they contemplate seeing a marriage counsellor. Theorists have pinpointed specific locales or contexts in which gender relations can be researched most effectively. For instance, the manifestation of identity as a process involved may be seen on both the individual and the institutional level. To understand better the diversity and patterns found in gender relations productions and their influence on health, research on gender relations and health may and should take undertaken in a wide range of settings and circumstances. The topic of gender relations is exciting

and expanding quickly, and it should get greater attention from the medical community. Behaviours that promote health can't be studied in a vacuum; rather, they must be understood in the context of the internal and external interactions that occur at the individual, interpersonal, and institutional levels of men's and women's lives. Health interventions, both in terms of research and policy, will benefit immediately from a deeper understanding of gender relations and health, since this will illuminate the relative efficacy of group, interactional, and solitary programs.

The changing existing power relations between the sexes would constitute a social revolution, which would eventually disrupt the current world order. The true goal of a true feminist should be a healthy shift away from the current rigid definition of gender discrimination, not so much the discrepancy between men and women. Notable in this context is Chetan Bhagat, author of the international best seller *Three Mistakes of My Life*, who argues passionately that "when we don't enable our women to come up, or cause stress for them, we're not letting half of India to rise up." Chetan Bhagat's (2011, p. 16)^[1] The struggles of Western women center on issues of self-identity, workplace equality, and traditional gender roles in relationships. "Life is not a collection of uniformly positioned gig lights," Woolf opines. From the time we become aware of our existence until the time we die, we are encased in a semi-transportive membrane. Women have been treated as second-class citizens from the very beginning of our civilization, and they have been denied equal rights, protections, opportunities, and political agency. According to (Woolf, Virginia, 1952, page 58)^[19].

"Women should lean into their jobs and take responsibility for the work they accomplish, be ambitious and unafraid to compete, to question the status quo, and to fight for a better world with a unique viewpoint," writes Facebook COO and bestselling author Sheryl Sandberg. Sheryl Sandberg (2013)^[18], page 36. Sandberg just hoists the banner, indicating that it is now time for women to pursue their goals with purpose and self-assurance. On the other hand, it encourages men to share the burden with their partners in a way that empowers women to lead and improves the quality of life for everyone. This agrees with D.H. Lawrence's observation in "Morality and the Novel". "The bond between man and woman will always be a great partnership for humanity. The relationship between a man and another man, a woman and another woman, and a father and a child will always be secondary". (Lawrence D.H., 1972, p. 130)^[11]. Women's fiction accounts for a sizable section of contemporary English literature. An overarching perspective, a wealth of data, a deep well of interpretation, and an open forum are all provided. Women authors provide a lens through which we might explore the bounds of human potential. When discussing Indian English literature, it is crucial to give credit to women writers.

In Furlough's view (2005), the purpose of speech is to investigate different forms of inequality and injustice. Therefore, Lazar's (2005)^[12] understanding of feminism may be used to examine gender inequalities. In Lazar's view, feminism has been variously defined by feminist academics such as Mills (1995), Christie (2000), and Kittzinger throughout the years (2005). Current study analyzes how authors Anita Desai and Githa Hariharan handle the topic of discrimination and inequality based on gender. M. M. Lazar's (2005, 2007)^[1] feminism was

employed as a theoretical and analytic framework for this study. Lazar's feminism seeks to probe the intricate interplay between gender, ideology, and authority in societal discourses. Power is defined as "one's capacity to influence the actions of the others" (Lazar, 2005, p. 32)^[12].

Discussion

All during the 20th century, women have faced significant human rights challenges and social impediments due to the prevalence of male-dominated social structures. There is a direct line between literature and inequality. Sad occurrences, terrible circumstances, and the condition of women in the 18th and 19th centuries are often depicted in literature. In most cultures, women are expected to lag three steps behind males. Whether Anita Desai is portraying a male or female role, it is always the women who end up being the dominant ones. After reading the Bhagavad-idea Gita, Gautama was moved to practice non-attachment with his wife. This is how the story's heroine ends up forgotten by her husband. When her dog, Toto, dies at the beginning of the book. This trauma has been a significant contributor to her mental health issues. The way Gautama has dealt with Toto's death has angered, dissatisfied, and disturbed him. Since her upbringing was more akin to a fairy tale than reality, she had a significant gap between the two. The story's major theme of fighting and mating peacocks not only emphasizes Maya's pure memory, but also acts as a contrast to her present overwrought thinking, which is packed with bird and animal images. Maya takes her own life at the conclusion of the novel. She is scared of being the one to die, the astrologer claims. Among the female protagonists created by Indo-Anglian authors, she is the most memorable. She's giving a voice to the many silenced victims of men's abuse against women. In Anita Desai's canon, neurotic outbursts resulted from internal struggles with anger and sadness. Their fragile love is what ultimately kills Gautama in *Cry the Peacock* and drives Maya mad before she kills herself. As a writer, Anita Desai explores many facets of interpersonal relationships. She has to deal with serious issues including loneliness, suffering, and boredom. Her use of the peacock as a "myth" in *Cry the Peacock* is integral to the story's concept. The reproductive success of peacocks is declining, and the art of peacock dancing is going the way of the dodo. This is why the story of the peacock serves as a reminder of the need of fighting for one's own existence. When *Dreams Travel* and *The Thousand Faces of Night* by Githa Hariharan, the colonizer challenges the identity of the colonized, which may also be seen as the colonizer challenging his or her own identity. As she defines "colonizer" and "colonized," it becomes clear that the female characters can only restore their self-identity via the artistic expression and writing about their own culture. Githa Hariharan, an advocate for the human spirit, argues that the pursuit of worldly success causes people to neglect their moral and spiritual needs.

The concepts of individuality and difference are well-established in her novels "The Thousand Faces of Night," "The Ghosts of Vasu Master," and "In Times of Siege." The three female protagonists of *The Thousand Faces of Night*—Devi, Sita, and Mayamma—each have distinct personalities. Mayamma remembered her previous marriage poorly, but she learned to move on with her life. Sita was married when she was 20 and was a wonderful wife and daughter-in-law. She was able to work through the challenges her marriage

presented without sacrificing who she was as a person. She made substantial adjustments to suit her tastes. In the end, she succeeded in gaining "Devi's" support in real life. A large portion of Devi's formative years were spent fantasizing. Even though Devi had two options, not one of them worked out. As Mahesh and Gopal did not treat her with any dignity, she was ultimately compelled to leave. She returned home to her mom, who was overjoyed to see her again. She fell, but Sita was there to assist her up. In her work *The Thousand Faces of Night*, she relates to the plight of Indian women caught between the old ways and the new. She effectively portrayed the dual mindset by populating her ensemble with people that are both dominated by and obedient to others. The story centered on Devi's quest to develop a positive sense of self. After Devi failed to see herself as a bride in an arranged marriage or as a rebellious lover inside a male-dominated cultural framework, she returned to her mother. Devi was trying to find herself via her interactions with her mother. The story of Devi, who was socially stigmatized as a failure, was connected to that of Sita, who was "becoming" on her own terms as a lady who exemplified flawless motherhood. The tales of Devi, Sita, and Mayamma in *The Thousand Faces of Night* illuminate the dark side of Indian women's lives and highlight their individuality.

Anita Desai, whose parents are German and Bengali, is widely considered to be one of India's preeminent contemporary authors. She is well-known for her perceptiveness of people's emotions and motivations. She is a symbol of the "creative unleashing of feminine senses" that occurred after World War II. Desai's first book, *Cry the Peacock*, was out in 1963. Desai is a brilliant writer because she vividly depicts the inner turmoil and identity crises that women face, such as isolation, loneliness, and coldness. The majority of contemporary works written in English are works of fiction. An overarching perspective, a storehouse of insights, and a platform for debate are all provided. Women in Hariharan's literature travel through three distinct phases: tradition, transition, and modernity. Her protagonists seem to embody the "new" women who are yearning to break free of traditional roles. In evaluating Indian English literature, we might look to novelists for insight into the human potential. The value of women's writing cannot be overstated.

A major patriarchal strategy used to prevent women from realizing their actual identities as independent self-existence is the vivid depiction in literature of patriarchal ways of imposing a false identity on them. When it comes to the challenges women experience in jail, authors Anita Desai and Githa Hariharan go into considerable depth. The writers clearly wanted their point across and made an effort to do so. Only through forging autonomous personae will they be able to realize their potential for personal liberation and meaningful social impact. A woman can't expect her spouse to treat her fairly if she doesn't think she is on an equal footing with him. Nobody will respect her possessions if she doesn't. Thus, she must demonstrate her ability to function as a fully autonomous individual across all spheres, just as would be expected of a guy.

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