

**CRITIQUING PATRIARCHAL SYSTEM IN INDIAN  
WOMEN FICTION: A STUDY OF SELECT FICTION OF  
ANITA DESAI AND DALIP KAUR TIWANA**

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## **CHAPTER- 7**

### **CONCLUSION**

An attempt has been made to understand, discuss and critique the patriarchy in the writings of Anita Desai and Dalip Kaur Tiwana. The selected works of both the novelists have been analysed from the feminist view point to show how they project women in their novels from urban and rural milieu and how women characters respond to the oppressed situations in the patriarchal society.

Patriarchy is the politics of male authority, domination or power that is used to keep women in subordination. Women are marginalized, discriminated, oppressed and suppressed on account of their gender. Patriarchy plays a vital role in the creation of gender roles as the classification of men and women into masculine and feminine identities is acquired through socialization. Patriarchy views masculinity with strength, courage, violence, assertiveness while femininity is associated with sensitivity, meekness, frailty, passivity and domesticity. Patriarchy operates as a social institution that is linked to every aspect of human existence. As discussed earlier, historians, philosophers and feminists pay attention to patriarchy that keeps on subordinating women from the ancient times. The works of Frederick Engels, Gerda Lerner, Kamla Bhasin, V. Geetha, Sylvia Walby, Maria Mies, Michele Barrett, Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf, John Stuart Mill, Betty Friedan, Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millett, Judith Butler shed light on the concept of patriarchy that keeps women under subordination on social, economic, religious, political, artistic and existential levels. Patriarchy is implicitly viewed as belonging to the domain of the male.

Literature is a great source to examine the patriarchy in the writings of male as well as female writers. Tracing women's silence in Indian fiction substantiates that Indian culture is patriarchal from the old times. It has never given freedom to women to explore this aspect. Women's identity is shaped by cultural ideas that have played a crucial role in the creation of gender based identities. The image of women as depicted by male authors presents women as passive, obedient and object of pity. After receiving education, women try to look beyond the horizon of male authors and started viewing women's suffering keeping the actual real situations in mind. The

oppression of women in Indian patriarchal society is the central conflict of Indian women writers. The second chapter of the thesis presents a brief overview of women's exploitation and sufferings in Indian fiction.

In the patriarchal society, family becomes an institution of oppression where social norms only favour males and women remain at the receiving end. Social roles imposed on women keep them marginalized as our society views women's fulfilment from being a wife and mother. Women are brought up in patriarchal societies differently and become the victims of inequality as both the writers have depicted in their writings. The question of marginality is related to identity and the self. A woman who does not have her own identity, feels suppressed and subordinated and is marginalized on the basis of her gender. But women who have gained education, love to become independent and they always struggle in order to form their individual identity. Those who fail to make their identity, suffer from marginalization as Desai highlights in her novels.

Traditionally, man is considered a breadwinner as Desai has presented through Gautama in *Cry, the Peacock*. It is he who only thinks of money, property and clients and ignores his wife who suffers from marginalization. She is treated like an insignificant thing as her husband does not try to understand her emotions. Her husband fails to satisfy her emotional and physical needs because of her age and detached behaviour. Even Maya is married in a family where nobody talks of love, care and affection. They just talk about social and political matters in spite of personal love and familial relationships. She feels alienated and lonely in the company of busy people who do not have time to share her feelings. She feels insignificant and neglected everytime and there is no moment of enjoyment in her life. She is not allowed to participate in the familial matters although she wants to involve herself. Gautama never allows Maya to express her views and join his male parties. She is a marginalized woman who feels suffocated in the house. Her struggle can be considered to be for her own self. It is a struggle to achieve her individual identity whom her father, husband and in-laws never give chance to grow as an individual. She is a submissive girl who has spent her childhood under strict restrictions, under the influence of her father and silently accepts the husband of her father's choice. In her life, she needs sympathy and close understanding but she

continues to suffer of her loneliness. She wishes to lead a meaningful life but she is deprived of all the occasions by her husband. Desai tries to show that male members of the family are responsible for creating a vacuum in the lives of women as Maya's father and husband stand between Maya and her destination. Maya wants to enjoy the ecstasies of life but she is even deprived of the greatest bliss of being mother. Her barrenness also indicates that she is incomplete as a woman; she misses the contentment and bliss of motherhood.

In Indian patriarchal society, men remain at the centre while women are pushed to the margin. Desai has shown a typical discrimination against a girl child in Indian middle class family where girls are expected to live a life which is full of prohibitions and they are raised only for marriages whereas male child enjoys all love, care and freedom. She has presented Uma as a submissive and docile girl who is not even allowed to study and is kept busy with housekeeping and child care by her parents. In this novel, Desai has shown the supremacy of male head (papa) in orthodox Indian family and he rules over all the family members. He does not support his daughter Uma who is forced to carry the burden of domestic responsibilities by her parents. Uma is a victimized woman who is not even supported by her own mother who keeps taunting her everytime and snatches her privacy. Uma's mother holds no individual identity as she is also the victim of male-dominated society. Her life, decisions and needs are controlled by her domineering husband. In this novel, Desai shows how traditional parents crave for a male child and ignores the feelings and needs of female child and keeps indifferent attitude towards girls while raising children. Being a mother, Uma's mother never helps Uma while teaching her to be passive. Uma has her independent desires and ambitions as she wants to study and enjoy her life but she has not been given opportunity by her parents to do so. She is treated as a slavish girl who does not have her independent existence. Moreover, she is considered as an unlucky woman who is rejected by many marriage parties. Her parents have deprived her every opportunity which could give her chance to explore and create her identity.

Uma's cousin Anamika also falls in the category of marginalized woman who being a pretty and outstanding student remains passive and suffers at the hands of her husband and mother-in-law. She finds no meaning in her life as her own parents

deprived her of all opportunities for higher studies in spite of winning a scholarship to study at Oxford. They marry her with a man who remains impervious to her grace and beauty. She continually suffers from tortures and harassment and finally ends her life by committing suicide. Mrs. Patton while living in independent society, is also a victim of patriarchal society which also deprived her identity. She has no freedom even in the choice of her food. She mutely submits to her husband's choice of non-vegetarian food although she loves vegetarian meals. Melanie Patton is a victim of parental indifference. She is hungry for parental love and care.

In the novels of Desai, women remain marginalized as they find themselves suppressed and some of them do not have the courage to resist the forces. Some of them like Maya, try to struggle for identity but they fail miserably. On the other hand, Uma lacks the courage to resist and mutely accepts her fate while her bold sister, Aruna enjoys her life and fulfils her desires. Through Aruna, Anita Desai has tried to provide a solution for the young women who are suffering under the patriarchal society. The novelist seems to advocate that 'boldness' is the only answer for all the tortures that women are confronting from the time immemorial. They will have to shed their meekness in order to lead an honourable and respectable life in the society. The suggestion of R.S. Pathak is suitable in this connection:

The marginal has no other option. It has to speak, voice, not hide its tears, fears and angst and wrath in as many forms as possible. Tongue, if unused, is a fleshy burden, tantamounting to its own detonguing. Moreover, even marginals cannot for long persist with their monologue of identity or difference. It has to disidentify itself and open itself to intervening positive influences for larger identity (15).

Having associated with zagirdar society, Tiwana has a profound understanding of rural women's sufferings in feudo-patriarchal society. Her novel *And Such Is Her Fate* delineates the miserable journey of submissive rural woman Bhano in feudo-patriarchal society. She is a woman who has to bear sufferings silently and meekly in male-dominated society. She has no room in society as she is always a woman bought by someone. She feels insecure and unprotected in this society where every man tries to use her like a thing of pleasure. The commodification of women in feudo-patriarchal society has been presented by Tiwana where women have no identity or

freedom to live independently and they are treated as a commodity to be used for their benefits. Tiwana shows the importance of male child in rural society and a woman like Bhano is rejected by patriarchal society when she fails to give birth to a male child. Traditional Indian culture expects women to submit mutely to the authority of the males where a woman can't enjoy her freedom living in an orthodox patriarchal society which blocks her way to achieve identity. In *Twilight/Mark of the Nose-Ring*, Tiwana depicts the sufferings of the protagonists in both the novellas because of the feudo-patriarchal society which only establishes the values of male-oriented culture and gives women no right to live independently and take decisions freely. Tiwana has depicted this philosophy through the suppressed life of female protagonists, Harjit in *Twilight* and Kiranjit in *Mark of the Nose-Ring*. Harjit is rejected by her husband because she tries to look beyond the lines drawn by the traditional society. Tiwana shows how the orthodoxy feudal thinking has created a vacuum in their married life. Harjit's benevolent friendship with Amrik is a sin in the eyes of Rajinder who blames Harjit of destroying his pride. The novel explores Harjit's helplessness in male-dominated society where her husband has not even given her chance to prove her part. Through Kiranjit, Tiwana proves the lustful desires of man in feudal-patriarchal society. At the end, Kiranjit sublimates her desires and starts living an isolated life. She surrenders herself before the patriarchal culture and decides to follow age old patriarchal culture by symbolically removing her nose-ring.

The comparative study of Anita Desai and Dalip Kaur Tiwana's select fiction clearly shows that patriarchy is a social construct that subjugates women. Throughout the history, patriarchal culture has kept women marginalized, docile and subordinate as it firmly believes in the superiority of males over females. Patriarchy is the cause of gender inequality and the subordination of women. Gender relations are skewed in patriarchy. In patriarchal society women experience subordination in a number of ways and in various forms- discrimination, insult, domination, exploitation, violence, oppression within the family and in society as presented by Desai and Tiwana. Both the writers reveal the gender discrimination in their fiction to show how patriarchal culture constructs the gender identities of women so as to make them inferior. Desai in her *Cry, the Peacock* and *Fasting, Feasting* and Tiwana in *And Such is Her Fate* and *Twilight/Mark of the Nose-Ring* highlight that patriarchal culture, male power, social norms and socially and culturally constructed gender identities become obstacles in

women's freedom. They ruthlessly bind them to the four walls of the house from where the escape is difficult.

Anita Desai and Dalip Kaur Tiwana question the stereotype images of women in the patriarchal society. Both the novelists can be considered as feminist as their personal lives reveal that they have only explored what they actually felt, experienced and lived. They give voice to marginalized women and realize that patriarchy is a creation of culture which keeps women silent and subordinate from their childhood. However, they write about different societies and some of the problems of their characters are similar and some differ but they explore feminist issues which are universal like women's marginalization, oppression, suppressed desires, loneliness, anxiety, frustration, alienation, identity crisis, institution of marriage and commodification of women. The novels of both the writers have been examined as the manifestation of female predicament. They present the realistic picture of women's suffering as experienced in their marital lives. Both have explored the feminist issues that challenge the age old patriarchal traditions which allow men to become the masters of women.

Writing is considered as an ideal and significant form of self-expression for women writers and the quality of the subject matter depends upon the richness of their own experiences. Both the writers are concerned with depiction of real life in representing the reality of women's life in a socially constructed gendered world. The fictional world becomes real world when it presents problems and conflicts that keep women suppressed in real life. The fiction written by women is mostly autobiographical as it explores their personal lives, relations, struggles, confusions, frustrations, love, trauma of suppressed desires, emotional upheavals and tensions within the family and society. Desai's main focus is on the labyrinths of human mind and the disturbed psyche of Indian woman. She weaves the stories from our real lives and presents those human conditions that are part and parcel of our daily life. N.R. Gopal says, "Her stories are peopled with men and women such as we see around us and with happenings such as might occur any day to such people" (10). In her fictional world, Tiwana presents the experiences of her life and reveals the truth about her struggled life in feudo-patriarchal society. She has observed her mother's marginalized position in rural society and herself experienced male-domination. The

themes of her novels are selected by her from her real life and her novels reveal women's oppression in rural feudo-patriarchal society.

The present study of the select fiction of two women novelists have dissimilarity in socio-culture background and show different women's experience in urban and rural societies. It also depicts how these women (the women of both societies) respond and react to the unpleasant situations. Women's experiences under patriarchal culture of different societies presented by both the writers clearly show that oppression and marginalization of women is a universal phenomenon. Thus, patriarchy is a global phenomenon in varying forms. Women of different classes experience it in different forms in different societies as Anita Desai and Dalip Kaur Tiwana has presented. The experience of patriarchy may be different for upper class, tribal woman, urban and rural women. The writings of both the novelists show that the functioning of patriarchy differ in different social systems.

Both the novelists understand the predicament of their female characters. Desai chooses her characters from urban middle class where the problems are more psychological than social or economic. Her novels reveal the inner frustration, emotional turmoil of women who find themselves trapped in traditional society and find difficulty in adjusting themselves with the oppressed urban milieu. She presents this through Maya who suffers from the cold, insensitive and detached behaviour of her husband and finds many hardships in coping with the chaotic, mechanical and urban set-up. She shows through the barren urban milieu that there is no room for love and emotion. Her novel *Fasting, Feasting* reveals the problem of education and arranged marriage. She throws light on the oppressive family atmosphere of middle class in which girls are kept subordinate in different ways while the birth of son brings joy and happiness and he becomes the centre of attraction in the family. On the contrary, Tiwana's real contribution lies in the portrayal of the predicament of Indian rural woman in feudo-patriarchal society. She has presented the traditional image of a woman in rural society through Bhano in *And Such Is her Fate*. She faces hardships in life without questioning. In this novel, Tiwana shows that poverty or economic crisis force Bhano's father to sell her off. She can be called the true daughter of soil who has inherited the established traditions which she does not question. The novel shows



women as the victims of social inequalities and they are exploited on account of the gender and class in rural society.

Both the writers show how the institution of marriage oppresses women in different ways and in different milieu. Tiwana's women have their roots in old traditions which they do not question. She has presented the impact of traditional patriarchy on the lives of rural women in which they are bound to live passively and in subordination. But Desai's novels go beyond these caste/cultural conflicts as her protagonists are rebellious in which they try to get rid of cultural obligation and they assert themselves in order to gain individual identity. Both the writers have deep understanding about the socio-cultural factors that subdue women. They believe in the growing awareness among women in terms of rights and duties.

Education is a potent tool for social, political and economic changes in any society especially in changing women's social position. It is the first step in defeating patriarchy from the society. Women remain oppressed in these male-oriented societies because of the lack of education. From the ancient times, women are educated to be obedient, submissive, to nurture children and to please the husband and the family. They are not groomed to live independently. Patriarchal society has enslaved women by hindering or blocking their intellect. The patriarchal society has never given any chance to women to exercise their own will, to be independent and make her self. Women are not allowed to have sufficient chances to prove their worth. They are taught from their childhood to be obedient like their mothers and even male-dominated society demands blind obedience from them.

Virginia Woolf lays emphasis on the equality in education for both the sexes. She argues that women should have freedom of mind to take independent decisions. Education is a vehicle for bringing change in society. Beauvoir expresses similar views, "To be a complete individual, equal to man, woman has to have access to the male world" (741). Like Woolf, Beauvoir also opines that education is necessary for women to live independently in the society. Beauvoir also states, "The restrictions that education and custom impose on woman limit her grasp of the universe" (SS 765). So, women should be encouraged to live independently and inspiring them to do what they like. Proper education and free mind help them to live with dignity and enables them to find real happiness in their own way.

Education plays an important role in bringing awareness, freedom, confidence and readiness in women. The absence of education especially in rural areas makes women credulous. Because of their illiteracy, they remain inferior to men as Tiwana has exhibited that women do not get sufficient opportunities for studies in rural patriarchal society. They are just trained in household affairs and they blindly submit to traditional beliefs due to their illiteracy. Tiwana has shown that the social life of rural people is also quite circumscribed. They cannot look beyond their caste, creed and the local issues. They remain bound in traditions and customs. The uneducated and poor rural women believe in various superstitions. Such women live in a world which is dominated by blind faith rather than by reason and logic. Thus, the absence of education and blind faith in superstitions make them credulous and gullible. Bhano in *And Such is her Fate* remains marginalized because of her ignorance in patriarchy and continues to accept subordination as a part of her life and refuses to resist and break off her silence.

Social privilege and culture make men believe in themselves and have control over women. So, there should be a change in women and only education can save them from suppression and exploitation and it can improve their status. Education opens new doors for women and they can grow in life by acquiring this tool. It will help them to counter the oppressive tradition and customs that treat women as a subordinate creature in the family and in the society. Education makes women better and enables them to attain self-confidence and a sense of freedom. It helps women to understand their rights and responsibilities towards themselves. It also makes women powerful to face the challenges of life and to overcome injustice done to them in life.

The discrimination against women begins from her birth and she realizes her secondary status first in the family where the brother and sister are groomed in different manners. So there should be a favourable change in the social status of women in the family which creates different identities for both the sexes. Women get only small opportunities to explore in male-oriented families. The traditional families do not want to educate girls as Desai highlights in *Fasting Feasting*. Uma's parents want to educate only their son for better future and raise their daughters for the sake of marriage. Uma lives a restricted life in her own home where her parents do not provide her opportunity to create individual identity. This narrow outlook narrows her

growth and ultimately, she loses her capacity to act independently. She is politically rejected by many marriage parties as she is not good in studies and dull in her look and behaviour. Women should be allowed to enjoy their freedom of mind. The women who are totally dependent on their husbands and act according to their will, are meek like Uma's mother. She is a foolish mother who preaches her daughter Uma to be submissive and never helps her to have self-confidence. A woman who is not allowed to govern her own conduct, will never have sufficient sense to manage her children properly. Girls aspirations, hopes and expectations remain unfulfilled within the self-centred family as Desai presents the picture of self-centred parents in *Fasting, Feasting*. Uma and Melanie are hungry for love and affection. They crave for their mother's love and understanding but they remain neglected. Being self-centred, their parents ignore their children's needs and emotions resulting into their unsuccessful and depressed life.

The oppression of women is rooted in the patriarchal family where males are the dominant head and exercise their power for their own benefits without thinking about the feelings of others. The research also highlights that even educated women also have to suffer at the hands of the traditional families, dominating man-woman relationships and their weak inner power to overcome the problems that they face in the stiff and ruthless world. Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* is a victim of arranged marriage set by her father without taking the opinion of her daughter. She has to suffer in her life because of the age disparity of her husband, incompatibility in nature and the patriarchal attitude of her husband. Secondly, she has not been prepared by her father to understand and tackle with the real problems of life. From her childhood, she is treated as a child that hinders her individual growth. Being educated, Harjit in *Twilight* also has to suffer because of lack of mutual understanding between husband-wife relationships. She has a career but not freedom of mind to enjoy her life fully because of her feudal thinking husband. Maya and Harjit's marginalized position in male-dominated family leads them to mental breakdown because they find themselves weak to overcome the problems. So, a big change in the family set up and male attitudes toward women can improve their position.

Family also plays a vital role in bringing a change in the oppressed position of women by resisting discrimination among sexes. In the family, women are also

educated or trained like boys to realize their full identity and power in all spheres of life. Family can enhance women's capabilities to create their individual identities like men. In the family, it is necessary to educate both the sexes equally to make them perfect. Women must be taught values based on knowledge and experience. Girls should be encouraged to have self-confidence and courage like boys. Women also possess abilities like men but male-dominated society does not give them a chance to explore. It is necessary to raise the status of women to build strong nation and to give liberation to their mind to act and live independently. When women are kept under the bondage of ignorance and confined to the feminine duties and are not allowed to exercise their reason like men, then it stops their growth of mind. So in the families, they should also be excited to think for themselves in order to enjoy their independency. Women should have been given intellectual freedom to explore and create their own identity. The education system should be like that it can create awareness among women about their rights and duties. If women have freedom of mind, then they can take decisions freely. Women should be motivated to think and act independently. Awareness is necessary for women to develop their inner strength.

However, their writings can be considered as a revolt against women's oppression, discrimination, unequal treatment and a vehicle for bringing social change. There should be an effort to create a new man- woman relationship based on equality, non-oppression and non-exploitation. Women must be treated first as a human being, prior to becoming a wife or a mother. It can be concluded that these patriarchal societies are not created by God but they are male-oriented. The present thesis serves to bring a change in the psyche of males as well as women who support patriarchy so that they start respecting women. This research also highlights that a woman should be aware of her rights through education leading to self-reliance and faith in the inner strength of womanhood. The primary thing is to bring awareness in both the sexes about the concept of equality and the other things become secondary. The things will automatically be rectified when they learn the primary things.