

# Feminist Assertion in the Novels of Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal and Shashi Deshpande

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## Abstract

Assertion for rights is not the sole privilege of the Man but it has been yearning of the subdued woman with throbbing pulse to liberate herself for recognition, self-expression and individual fulfillment. Indian women is in the grip of oriental tradition as they crave to shackle and come out of traditional frame cautiously since they have seen the drastic consequences of Western feministic tendencies. They can't bear the loss of family, loss of husband and loss of children yet they wish to emerge as a New Woman. They wish to be conformists and simultaneously non conformists. To create one's own space, identity, existence and individuality unlike the western woman, Indian woman asserts her presence as equal by remaining with in the periphery of family even if they are highly educated and self-dependent. The plight and dilemma of a woman is the limited choice in decisions which are mainly determined by man. Indian Women have a compelling urge for a decent way of living with freedom and self-dignity fighting for her rights with in conjugal bonds. The works of the three novelists with diverse approaches address and evaluate social concern relating to Indian women and their place in society.

**Key Words: Subjugation, Feminism, Women's rights, Individuality, Existence, Dignity**

## Introduction:

Feminism is women's liberation movement and a rapidly developing ideology committed to liberate woman's self handicapped by the male dominated society since ages. Feminism, in its real sense, is an advocacy of extended recognition of claims and achievements of women and their rights. Feminism or Feminist assertion in literature is not only identified with a political movement for equal wages started in nineteenth century in America but its roots can be exclusively traced back to the works of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818).

Feminist literature in English is certainly not a recent awareness of women rights. It has been there ever since perspectives on life were recorded in the medium of literature, though it certainly has come to its own of late, of recent origin again is the feminist perception of literature. Feminist Criticism in its broadest implication has three distinct subdivisions, each distinct with its own adherents. The first two are well defined and frequently practiced without raising any ideological outrage. These are: the examination and analysis of the portrayal of women characters by themselves or in relationship with their male counterparts, and the appreciation of female authors. What is noteworthy is that in the last few years these commonly accepted critical practices have been over handed to accommodate the possibility of exclusively feminist perceptions of human relationships. The third direction is that of the so-called 'prescriptive criticism' that attempts to set standards for literature that is good from the feminist perspective.

Feminism in the Indian context is the recent renovation of early Vedic concepts of man-woman relationship and a byproduct of Western liberalism in particular and feminist thought in general. The indigenous contributing factors have been the legacy of equality of sexes inherited from the freedom struggle, constitutional rights of women, thrust on women education, and new awareness due to electronic media among women. Indian woman caught in the flux of tradition and modernity, saddled with the burden of the past and the present to cast off her aspirations, constitutes the crux of feminism in Indian literature. In literary terms it precipitates in search for identity and a quest

for the definition of the female self. In critical practice, it empathetically scrutinizes the plight of women characters and their struggle for emancipation of self.

Feminist Literature is a spectrum of many colours and shades- soft, prominent and strident. The voices emanating there vary from the traditional - but conscious - of their selves to exclusively self-seeking with a seeming vengeance. When clearly articulated well argued and precisely defined, feminist sentiments rather than mere faint echoes thereof can be traced as already referred in early works of Mary Shelley and Jane Austen, one feels chary of dubbing feminism as merely a late twentieth century phenomenon. The feminist perspectives on literature - creative or critical- whether in third world countries or elsewhere has had to confront issues of similar persuasion: male chauvinism, sexist-bias, psychological and even physical exploitation, hegemonistic inclinations in not merely the male but also the female sections of the society, the utter disregard for women's psychological, cultural, familial, and spiritual quests. Predictably enough the way out suggested subtly or propagated more avowedly has ranged from mild protest seeking accommodation through moderation, love, persuasion and separation to carving out a self-sufficient exclusivist 'self'.

Feminist theory is by no means a single or homogeneous body of speculation and argument. If one discerns a common strand in the great diversity of the feminist scholarship it is its critique of the patriarchal modes of thinking and its political and humanistic approach to literature and literary criticism. Feminist literary theory has evolved according to the needs and demands of the international women's movement. This women's liberation movement was initiated in 1960s by women who were politically committed- women who were active participants in the civil rights movements or in the protest actions against the war in Vietnam or those who belonged to the various progressive or Marxist groups. It was their bitter experience of the blatantly sexist attitudes that were evinced by their male associates in these politically progressive movements that finally led women to form their own groups and associations. For instance, in America Betty Friedan, the author of *Feminine Mystique* founded National Organization of Women popularly known as NOW, so that women could voice their grievances and fight for their rights. By the late 60s and 70s feminism had emerged as a political force in the western world.

As the early feminists were mainly concerned with social and political change, little attention has been paid to literature and literary criticism at the initial stage of the women's movement. But soon enough their political action was extended, to the cultural field, as it is here that gender differences are created and naturalised. The feminists who worked in academic institutions became convinced that literature and literary criticism are powerful cultural weapons in the hands of male hegemony to perpetuate its sexual politics in the name of universality, objectivity and neutrality. Opposed to their claims made by the humanist discourse is the central tenet of feminist criticism that no account whether creative, critical or theoretical, can be neutral. A work of literature invariably reflects the personal or cultural bias of its author. The first objective of feminists, therefore, was to lay bare the patriarchal practices in literary discourse as they had done it in other walks of life. That is why, as Elaine Showalter observes:

In its earliest years, feminist criticism concentrated on exposing the misogyny of literary practice: the stereotyped images of women in literature as angels or monsters, the literary abuse or textual harassments or women in classic and popular male literature and exclusion of women from literary history. (*The New Feminist Criticism* 5.)

Katharine M. Rogers claims that patriarchal feeling or the desire to keep women subject to men is the 'most important cause of misogyny, because the most widely and firmly entrenched in society' (Rogers, 272).

In *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millett defines sexual politics as the process whereby the ruling sex seeks to maintain and extend its power over the subordinate sex. In the first place, she emphasizes the need to study social and cultural contexts if a work or art is to be properly understood. Recent feminist scholarship is alert to the manner in which women's subjectivities are formed by the cultural mores and values. As Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan has remarked,

The construction of women in terms of recognizable roles, images, models and labels occurs in discourse in response to specific social imperatives even where it may be offered in terms of the universal and abstract rhetoric of "woman" or "women" (or the "Indian Woman" as the case may be)...If we acknowledge (a) that

femaleness is constructed, (b) that the terms of such construction are to be sought in the dominant modes of ideology (patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism) and (c) that therefore what is at stake is the investments of desire and the politics of control that representation both signifies and serves, then the task of feminist critic becomes what Jacqueline Rose describes as “the critique of male discourse” born of “a radical distrust of representation which allies itself with a semiotic critique of the sign.” what is required here is an alertness to the political process by which such representation becomes naturalised and ultimately coercive in structuring women’s self-representation. (*Real and Imagined Women*, 129)

One may find all varieties of feminist critics, from liberalism to de-construction. This creates disagreements and differences among the feminists. For example, there are de-constructionists like Toril Moi who charge Elaine Showalter and others for their empiricism and bourgeois humanism, while a radical critic like Josephine Donovan feels that deconstructionist theory magnifies the assertion of political identity. There are also feminists who would like to do away with gender differences as they lead to the discrimination against and repression of women, while there are others who celebrate these differences between men and women and even valorize womanhood as a part of their political strategy against male domination.

The western feminists tend to universalise patriarchy and thereby homogenize women especially the third world women. As Chandra Mohanty points out:

An analysis of “Sexual difference” in the Form of a cross- culturally singular, monolithic notion of patriarchy or male dominance leads to the construction of a similarly reductive and homogeneous notion of what I shall call the “third world difference”- that stable, a historical something that apparently oppresses most if not all the women in these countries. (Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse, Feminist Review30, 63.)

But the problems and subjectivities of women in various third world countries may differ according to their national, historical, socio-political contexts. The ideological construction of women in India, say, is not the same as that of a woman in Argentina though both of them are supposed to belong to the so-called third world. Even within India there are differences and divergences; the question is, whether and what a peasant woman from Konkan would have in common with her metropolitan, middle-class counterpart from Delhi?

The Indian feminists would like to empower Indian women with voice and action and the right to self-representation. The representation of Indian women as victims of the native patriarchal structures was a ruse that was often used by the British colonialists for their own material and political benefits. Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, writing on the subject of Sati points out:

The abolition of Sati in 1829 is the first major legislation of the East India Company’s administration in India. That it - like the series of laws that were subsequently enacted on behalf of women - served as the moral pretext for intervention and the major justification for colonial rule itself does not have to be argued further. (Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse, Feminist Review30, 42.)

Susie Tharu and K. Lalita proceed to create a separate tradition of Indian women’s writing and to rewrite literary history from their position of postcolonial feminists. Their anthology (*Women Writing In India* 1991) has brought out a rich haul of texts written by women in various languages, right from days of the Buddhist nuns in the sixth century BC to present day. These two critics have tried to place women writers and their works in their proper historical contexts, keeping in mind not only the issues of gender but also those of class, caste, nation, empire etc.

Feminist criticism is a political and humanist approach to literature, which cannot be bound in certain definition, rule or scale. It will keep on changing and evolving to the changing of mores, codes, of social structure, and exigencies of time. Representation of India women in the image of a Sita or a Savitri or an Ahilya still proliferates and will continue to proliferate in serious literature. Women who are fool hardy enough to go against the traditional role of

women as dutiful daughters, devoted wives, and self-sacrificing mothers, are ridiculed for aping the western models, are humiliated and chastised.

Traditional Indian woman wants to break through this web and emerge as a 'New Indian Woman' only to fulfil her duties in more improved manner, and to assist her husband as a partner and to become an educated mother though her counterpart may be unduly apprehensive of losing his empire.

The Indian feminist writers have been vividly presenting and are still highlighting this traditionally created imbalance. They are doing a great job by depicting the conflict of the weaker sex as has been called from traditions, against the superior, keeping well in mind the cultural and social structure of India. The depiction of modern Indian women in the works of these feminists does not deflect Indian women from her traditional roles and chores but facilitates her easy and efficient performance and thereby asserts her Indian identity. There are social, political, territorial, religious, economic and cultural differences across borders so there are separate modalities of movements against women subjugation. This difference is well-observed by Juliet Mitchell:

Women in the different countries experience a comparable oppression and the Women's Liberation Movements have comparable aims, but organizationally, and hence to some extent theoretically, they can be quite dissimilar. (Woman's Estate 43)

As discussed earlier, the exigencies of socio-political and cultural structure of a country gives an impetus and momentum to the conscious writers of the age. Indian English novelists are inspired by the freedom movement and Gandhi's political ideology. The Indian novelists took upon themselves the responsibility of giving artistic articulation to the problems that beset the common people and their small joys and immense sorrows, the crusade against the tyranny of poverty, illiteracy, suffering, disease, superstition, caste and sex. Resulting in a number of novels the protagonist is a farmer, a labourer, a factory worker, a patient or a virtuous women pitted against a zamindar, a landlord, a factory owner, or a ruthless, callous hardhearted man. It may be aptly remarked that Indian English novelists have fairly succeeded in their efforts to portray creatively in a realistic manner the problems of the age. They not only present the various problems: social, cultural, political, and economic of the contemporary society but also offer solutions in terms of fictional art.

After Independence the subject of novels took a turn due to the developments of intercultural relations between countries and fast developing electronic media and the awareness of human rights and thrust on women's education. The status and predicament of women in Indian society set another motivating force for the Indian novelists with a social purpose. Despite the fact that woman can contribute to social regeneration, family welfare she continues to be a victim of social prejudices and male chauvinism. However, Gandhi's call to the Indian women to participate activity in the freedom movement made them conscious of the much-needed liberation and equality of opportunity in personal, social and political life. Recognizing the potential of women to join their counterparts in their struggle against ignorance, superstition and backwardness, Indian English novelists in general, and women novelists in particular began to think women as legitimate, current and needful subjects for their purposeful social novels. Their endeavour was to be relevant to their culture by presenting characters and situations rooted in Indian ethos. In this connection Nayantara Sahgal has rightly observed that:

To be relevant to his culture, a writer's imagination has to be able to create the men and women and situations of the Indian environment and the Indian reality. If a writer can do this make people feel with him, stimulate thinking, and inspire action because of what he writes, then he is fulfilling his function. (The Indian Writer and the English Language, The Statesman.5)

It may be relevant to dwell here on the motivating force behind the contemporary novelists writing with a social purpose. It is also rewarding to discuss the reasons which led Indian women into this predicament. Why they need to struggle against their superiors for identity and status which once they so graciously enjoyed.

A retrospective look into Indian History will enable us to understand that women enjoyed self respect, dignity and honour in ancient times and a trace of women's status can still be marked in the recitation of the hymns and mantras at the time of all wedding ceremony and husbands 'vows made to allow all the privileges of a respectable partner to

their wives. Till the advent of Muslim rulers Indian woman enjoyed and availed herself of privileges but later it became the need of the time and compulsion on the part of the husband to safeguard the honour of his partner from the despotic ruling class. She was kept veiled and hidden within the confines of home till Independence. Hundreds of years of seclusion made her infirm.

Gandhian philosophy and Indian struggle for freedom, and fast growing globalization and steadily growing consciousness among women are the main motivating forces behind the novelists and writers of the present age; a writer who steps ahead of time in capturing the igniting spark and airs it in his work to set it in flames, always wins general approbation.

Among such writers stand distinguished are: Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal and Shashi Deshpande. They have been making efforts to pull out Indian woman from the quagmire of her lost identity with the same means, but with diversified idiosyncrasies and variegated aspects. The emergence of women novelists in Indian English literature took place as early as the last quarter of the nineteenth century. But, it was the post-Independence period, which had brought to the forefront a number of noted women novelists who have enriched Indian English fiction by creative release of feminine sensibility and who inspired Indian women to regain their lost battle of equity, comradeship and self-identity. Women have been the central figure of many a literary works in this era. Writers apart from these three renowned novelists under study are Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Kamla Das, Eunice d'Souza, Shobha De, Arundhati Roy, Gita Hariharan and Imtiaz Dharker.

The problems of women, which were, till now considered to be centrifugal i.e. to break the chains of bondage and captivity and to be free; are now reversed to centripetal i.e. to regain her self-identity. Through the eyes of these women writers, one visualizes a different world till now not projected in literature. Women, who were till then treated as second class citizens are assigned their due place in the novels of these novelists. Their novels present a picture of the impact of education on women, her new status in the society and her assertion of individuality. The works of these three novelists discussed here can be well compared to Canadian novelists like Margaret Atwood, Margaret Lawrence and Arithavan Herk. All these writers write of life as viewed by women and contemporary life affecting women.

#### Aim:

The present paper sets out to highlight and incorporate the feminist issues raised by the three noted women novelists Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and Nayantara Sahgal. This study also attempts to place in a critical perspective the feminist assertions in the novels of these modern living Indian women novelists. While attempting to determine the shift in general literary sensibility in the novels the study directs attention on women's awakening consciousness and her confrontation against a male dominated, tradition-oriented society. Though the methods of interpretation vary in their complexity and also in accordance with the problematic of individual novelists, the Indian woman being at the center emerges as a human being, essentially Indian in sensibility and likely to remain so in future.

#### Scope:

Anita Desai was born in 1937. Her father was Bengali, her mother German. She was educated in Delhi and now lives in Bombay. She is one of the most creative writers of the modern life in all its complicated aspects. Her novels are now winning her wider recognition as a writer with an original voice, a remarkable subtle voice which conveys atmosphere and character in vivid and striking terms. She presents an amalgam of the east and the west. As she upholds the cultural heritage of India, She is the most appropriate novelist to be taken up for a critical study.

Shashi Deshpande, another living feminist legend was born in Dharwad (Karnataka), daughter of the renowned dramatist and Sanskrit scholar Shriranga. At the age of fifteen she went to Bombay, graduated in Economics, then

moved to Bangalore, where she gained a degree in Law and began writing in 70s. She reveals many bitter and startling truths about women in India.

Nayantara Sahagal, Born on May 10, 1927 in Alahabad to Vijay Lakshmi and Rajit Sitaram Pandit is the second of their three daughters and the child of rich heritage. Her parents and a number of other relatives, including her maternal Uncle Jawahar Lal Nehru, were actively engaged in the country's freedom struggle. Her ideology from the onset of teenage started taking an unrestrained political shape and she emerged as a political fiction writer and journalist.

#### Analysis:

Though much critical attention has been paid to these novelists and various critical papers on them have appeared in a number of various magazines and periodicals it will be worthwhile to evaluate the works of these novelists in the light of feminism movement. One may naturally enquire as to why these novelists have been bracketed together. Apart from being living legends of Indian English novelists, the three novelists are not simply the viewers of the pathetic conditions of Indian woman but all the three novelists originated and emerged through the pathos, ethos of Indian social life and were nourished by Indian culture and have shared pains and perturbances of Indian woman and have consoled her and have encouraged her to struggle to re-establish her self-seeking identity. Their whole body of work deserves a fresh interpretation in terms of the concept of feminism. Besides, they cover almost the whole of diversified socio-cultural structure of Indian life, right from Bengal to Chandigarh, covering Uttar Pradesh, and expanding up to the southern part of India in Karnataka. A careful peep into the entire corpus of these novelists will enable to conclude that they represent the three phases of feminist movement in India right from Independence up to now. They also incorporate all the aspects of about social, moral, cultural, political, psychological, economical, change in the status of Indian woman. They are dedicated to the cause of Indian woman as revealed from their works. These novelists of feminist perception exhibit, by and large in built social, cultural, political, economic handicaps when it comes to denigrating the 'One' despite their being 'all sirens with in'.

Like Virginia Woolf, these novelists are prose rhapsodists of feelings, sentiments and emotions passing through human consciousness. They specialize in depicting the undulations of the female ego or self under the pressure of critical human situations and emotional relationship. Their attention is also focused on feminine suffering in the complex structural stresses and strains in Indian Society having strong past moorings. All the three novelists concentrate and explore human relationship in the modern Indian society, particularly husband-wife relationship and their thrust lies in feminist awakening and upsurge. They include all aspects or bringing this change by passive awakening, by being tolerant, obedient, and submissive, observant willing to seek her "own refuge" to a belated rebellion. They challenge the rigid norms of theology, philosophy, and social conduct one after the other. They exhibit 'how women can live afresh' by challenging the idealistic, beautiful but docile and weak images of women often portrayed by men. Attempting 'an analysis of women's subordination for the purpose of figuring out how to change it' (*Linda Gordon on Feminism*), they think that 'The agency of change is located in the Insurgent or the subaltern' (*Gayatry Spivak, Can the Subaltern speak?*).

Feelings of love, peace, harmony, equality, identity, existence, survival and dominance are the basic instincts of human beings but biological construct, deprivation, ignorance, irresistance, customs, and traditions allow 'one' to dominate the 'other', to enslave and to oppress and to exploit. Women since ages have been victimized for the assigned reasons and male for his hidden agenda has been displacing, de-stabilizing, destroying and dismantling the female world. Women's subjugation has been a fact in real life as well as in literature but the lack of vision, deliberate or indeliberate, failed to draw attention of the world community as a whole. In this connection as Anne Z. Mickelson has rightly pointed out:

Woman has been regarded as inferior, Yet somehow meant to be man's spiritual guide, half divine, intermediary between God and Man, but looked as temptress/sinner as well. She is passive but inclined to mysterious activity during certain phases of moon; intuitive, but lacking the practical sense to select

the correct- biologically weak, yet able to lift heavy bags of groceries and husky children; incapable of logic but full of cunning arguments; sexually pure if watched, uncontrollably sensual if not curbed; too feather-brained to create a great work of art; psychological subject to breakdown if faced with business or professional competition; yet designed to bear, nurture, children, act as her husband's helpmate, help him fulfill his potential, and resign herself to her' limitation" (455)

To change the existing patterns of gender relationships and to explore the new possibilities of humanistic development, and to discover the potential strength of women to the betterment of future of humanity, sensitive writers from social, political and literary field have taken up the task. Western feminists go to the extent of divergence of family for the purpose, as there is necessarily a difference in concepts of family and social and cultural set-up and difference of literacy and economy but Indian feminists believe in convergence of family, harmony, mutual understanding and adjustment though the problems of women being the same.

Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal and Shashi Deshpande in their novels have tested and examined all possibilities of western feminism applying to Indian context and simultaneously as oriental feminist writers are the spokespersons of feminine sensibility and advocates of female rights of equality. The depiction of middle class educated women in these novels doesn't dismantle the respected image of Indian woman remaining within the family and loyal to the family, she asserts her own presence and individuality and identity. Though the three novelists differ in their approaches in the portrayal of characters and the problems of conjugal relationship yet they reassert women's causes.

Anita Desai penetrates deep into the women psyche and delineates psychic disorders and analyses the psychological problems of women in male oriented, patriarchal Indian Society. She adopts liberal feministic approach to visualize the invisible neurotic, schizophrenic and paranoiac agony of women formulated by male dicta and their fight against those forces which decentred and marginalised them. Her characters search all possibilities to avert the on-going repression by suicide, exile, separation, and alienation turning to poetry and religion but fail to find any solution. By reconciliation and adjustment and by mutual understanding they re-establish relationships as enlightened New Woman asserting individuality and identity.

Nayantara Sahgal conforms to the radical feminists thought. Her characters strive towards goodness and she believes that virtue is a quality of heart and mind and spirit, it is not to be judged by chastity of body. Her novels deal with men and women in eternal search for freedom- freedom to express themselves. Her female protagonists resent the restrictions, laid down for them, for they are aware of the injustice in having dual morality- one for men and another for men. She doesn't blame man for woman's predicament but holds society, institutions and customs responsible for the imbalance and duality of principles.

Nayantara Sahgal's women protagonists are more blatant and stern feminists, as well as liberal feminists. They wish to drink, dine, smoke and dress as man and do not allow any discrimination of gender. She believes woman needs man biologically. Her stress on change in moral ethics, legitimizing amoral and immoral acts of woman can't be welcomed; instead thrust should have been there to check man's immoral and amoral acts remaining with in or out of conjugal bonds. Legitimizing woman's immoral acts won't lessen her exploitation.

Shashi Deshpande adheres to liberal feminist view regarding husband-wife relationships. She believes in compromise and mutual understanding with woman's personal identity and individuality. Her female protagonists are social and carry oriental gentleness and forbearance. They crave for love, identity and isolated in exile, return back enlightened to achieve self-fulfilment.

All these novelists portray themes and characters which are really Indian. Their female characters except Sarah of *Bye-Bye*, *Blackbird* and *Rose of Rich like Us* are Indian. Mira Masi of *Clear Light of Day* and Akka of *Roots and*

*Shadows* conform to the tradition. Both are victims of child marriage. Maya of *Cry, the Peacock* and Monisha of *Voices in the City* are devoid of love, undergo obsession and ultimately commit suicide. Saroj of *Storm in Chandigarh* suffers for her premarital relationships, in spite of her innocence and loyalty and purity of heart.

Sita of *Where Shall We Go This Summer* comes out of storm safe by her voyage of self-discovery to Manori Islands and returns to her husband as assertive and changed woman and compromises for harmonious balance in the marital relationship. Similarly Nanda Kaul of *Fire on Mountain*, Maya of *A Time To Be Happy*, Sarita of *Dark Holds No Terrors*, Indu of *Roots and Shadows*, Jaya of *Long Silence* are obsessed in conjugal relationship, seek unquestioned love, love that transcends self, seek identity and recognition as human. They suffer because they refuse to lose identity and remain alienated, isolated and unfulfilled. They go in exile to forget disappointments and return gathering strength for preserving self-expression, sustenance and stability.

It reveals that tradition bound women run the risk of losing their identity but unconventional women are to face with castigation by the male dominated society in addition to the painful personal conflicts they have to undergo. What perturbs Indian woman is the fear of losing her honour, fear of being ashamed, and fear of being criticised. The fear which has been created by male oriented society is a monster for her. Secondly she clings to the angelic image of women. Until the educated women cast away that angelic image and kill the monster of fear they can't be assertive like Maya Sarita, Indu and Jaya.

The three novelists are humanistic in their approach by presenting the social evils still persistent in the society. Child marriage, rape, obsession of women, denial of equal opportunity to woman, denial of female education and husband-wife relationship have been the main concern of the novelists. The prevalence of child marriages caused great suffering and privation to the unfortunate victims Akka in Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows* and Mira Masi in Anita Desai's *Clear Light of the Day*. By presenting these characters these novelists draw attention towards this persistent social evil. Mira in *Clear Light of the Day* and Kalpana in *Binding Vine* are victims of male lust and are unwilling to report the case only for the reason that there are other sisters in the family likely to be married, reflect the plight of Indian woman who can't even go for justice.

The characters whether conformists, non-conformists, introverts or extroverts present the dilemma of Indian woman and expose the social evils drawing attention towards injustices and cruelties against women. These novelists have displayed that without breaking the conjugal bonds by divorce or separation; Indian woman can live afresh and still maintain her self-expression and identity. She can assert her existence as a human being and still live in harmony and love, unlike the western women. The novelists reveal through their depiction of visible and invisible dilemma and agony of Indian woman the social injustice resulting out of patriarchal, male dominated society. They have shown an admirable perception and a deep understanding in portraying subjects concerning women's equality, liberty and equal opportunity and assertion of choice. The portrayal of female protagonist's exile and return signifies that no outward support or sustenance is required and the potential and strength to assert ones identity comes from within.

Evading problems as Monisha, the female protagonists of *Voices in the City* and Maya, the female protagonist of *Cry, the peacock* does, hardly solves the purpose. Women of exceptional spiritual strength, who can rise to any occasion and face the challenges of life with tranquility, appear in these novels. They illustrate the fact that acceptance does not mean subservience and that it needs a deep conviction and strength of mind to resist and assert.

It is observed that there are limitations in so far as each novelist's field of discourse is concerned. They have not dealt with some of the serious problems that afflict Indian women. Practice of dowry, wife-beating, the caste system, inter-caste marriages, female infanticide, foetus-diagnosis and problems of working class women are not dealt with and do not receive the attention they deserve. Women are sold for prostitution; their legal survival is suspended and



consolidated in the hands of husband. She has no say in the money matters or the upbringing of the children. These inhuman cruelties levelled against woman need attention.

Portrayal of Nayantara Sahgal's urge for a change in moral ethics up to some extent, Shashi Deshpande's upsurge for feminine sensibility and Anita Desai's desire to avert the psychoanalytical dilemma of women, and their pragmatic and bonafide approach to women's cause place them higher among other Indian fiction writers in English.

#### Conclusion:

Western feminists could discern one centrifugal force that thrusts women to the margins but the novelists under review explore two equivalent forces working altogether. Centripetal force also exists which brings back to the centre and binds woman to the centre. Love, physical and emotional attachment to the family does not allow her to go away from the vicinity of 'home'. Western feminists believe in independent co-existence of husband and wife while the oriental approach stresses harmonious existence of husband and wife as one being. If a woman approaches her problems in the right perspective as suggested, there won't be any need of cry for help for any Maya: "Father! Brother! Husband! Who is my savior? I am in need of one. I am dying and I am in love with living." (*Cry, the Peacock*, 98)

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