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The Pursuit of Identity by Women in the Works of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande

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ABSTRACT:

The writer looks at the process by which female characters learn about themselves in the works of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande. They have helped Indian English literature a lot by describing the experiences of women who have faced the world as it was centuries ago and as it is now. It discusses the main ideas authors cover, their use of plot and how women's identities develop in their key novels. Studying existential concerns and the role of gender, the investigation examines how they write about women seeking freedom from authority of men

Keywords:- Indian English literature Women's identity, Feminism, Female subjectivity, Patriarchy, Gender roles,

1. Introduction

After independence, women's identity is a common subject explored in Indian English literature. Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande spend a lot of time in their writing discussing emotions, ideas and experiences that matter to women. Quite frequently, the main characters in their novels experience emotions that don't fit the expectations of those around them. It closely examines how women are represented in the novels of these writers and links these stories to major cultural and feminist ideas.

Most of Shashi Deshpande's novels highlight both the personal and social issues that educated middle-class Indian women in cities have to deal with. Her realistic novels allow women's voices to be included, something they rarely had in the past. Questions of unfair treatment for women related to sex, marriage, being a mother, work seeming less important and understanding life get discussed by the main personalities in Deshpande's work. Rather than matching the ideal or romantic picture of women, Deshpande shows them as ordinary, human and far from flawless.



2. Contextual Framework

2.1 Women's voices started to be heard after British rule of India.

After India gained independence, a number of new writers began asking questions about accepted behaviors. Women authors showed women characters as real human beings with emotions and thoughts, instead of just caring for everyone.

2.2 Theory about feminist literature

With feminist literary theory, it becomes possible to highlight the ways women are restricted by patriarchy. Although Desai and Deshpande don't focus on feminism, their characters represent themes such as freedom, gender, self-identity and facing problems which are typical of feminism.

3. Anita Desai's Focus on Character Psychology

Her novels try to understand why women behave the way they do. Often, her characters choose solitude or to innerly detach themselves while trying to cope with oppressing circumstances.

The novel *Cry, the Peacock* was published in 1963.

As the main character, Maya represents a woman in marriage who is lonely because her spouse lacks emotional closeness with her. By going mad, she shows that she cannot act as herself in a world where men are dominant.

3.2 *What Should We Do as a Family This Summer?* (1975)

Sita goes to Manori Island in the hope of finding a place where no violence or control exists. She faces difficulties by trying to blend her role as a mother with what she has gone through.

- The third installment is *Fire on the Mountain* (1977).
- Kaul leaving the city means she is apart from society's standards. Nonetheless, her hidden past is revealed to her by her great-granddaughter, whose questions make her face her troubles.
- Topic three is all about the main themes and special ways writers use to build them into their work.
- Inner Monologues and Symbolism are central to how Desai writes.
- The internal struggles of women are shown in their choices to isolate, stay quiet and withdraw.
- Nature and the characters' feelings often go hand in hand

4. Shashi Deshpande Focuses on Identity Both at Home and in Society

Instead, Shashi Deshpande's fiction describes how Indian women deal with their identities while living in marriage, family and their jobs. Her stories clearly show some of the ways women challenge the control of men.

The author's fourth work was titled *That Long Silence* (1989).

Jaya shares what silent acceptance and lack of self-expression look like within a marriage. Waking up slowly allows her to find her voice again and reclaim who she is.

4.2 *No Path Of Fear In The Dark* (1980)

Sarita is successful as a doctor but is still trapped emotionally in a marriage where her husband feels insignificant. The book investigates the price of having high ambitions and being independent.

In the book *Roots and Shadows* (1983), Ross describes the government's ploys to sell fake democracy to everyone.

Indu moves between old and new, considering the benefits of being open about her sexuality and staying loyal to her parents. The conflict she faces with her identity shows how old values clash with those of her generation.

4.4 *Little Things: What Really Matters in Politics* (2000)

Los que sufre la pérdida de su hijo, Madhu inicia una reflexión sobre sí misma. She reconstructs her identity from her memories and relationships, although it is broken in parts.

4.5 *Methods and Managers*

First-person stories allow us to see into the minds of women.

He uses vigorous dialogue, flashbacks and gives the story a realistic background.

Reflection, resistance and reconciliation are common paths for women in her stories..

5. Comparative Analysis

Dimension	Anita Desai	Shashi Deshpande
Narrative Style	Lyrical, symbolic, introspective	Realistic, reflective, linear
Character Focus	Emotionally fragile, introspective women	Middle-class, educated, working women
Setting	Isolated, symbolic locales	Urban/domestic spaces
Feminist Stance	Implicit, psychological focus	Explicit, socio-cultural critique
Identity Quest	Existential, often ending in ambiguity	Practical, culminating in assertion

6. Problems That Are Important to Both Authors

6.4 *What spiritual practices exist and how to become a good and honest person*

Dahlgren and Steinberg discuss the way women can be silent and, as a result, do not talk about their thoughts or they choose to pause and think their feelings over. As soon as they begin to talk, kids begin to form a sense of who they are.

Marriage and Patriarchy are the main subjects discussed in the sixth principle of feminism.

Many books and stories show marital problems as a major source of tension. Both academics focus on the challenge of emotional isolation and limited learning in the daily lives of many Indian women.

6.5 *Assigning a Price to a Private Space*

Sometimes, plays and movies portray characters as moving to various locations or parts of the self to figure themselves out. Women in Desai's works often isolate themselves which does not happen in Deshpande's books.

Various methods people have of exploring and fulfilling their sexual needs

Desai paints pictures with bodily images to explain ideas of repression or weakening. Expressing how women feel passionate, powerful and their experience of being abused is done in a more honest manner by the author in this book.

6.5. *How You Hold Memories and What Shapes Your Uniqueness*

Because of memory, characters can recall their history and find parts of themselves that were lost. Both writers suggest that understanding our own thoughts and emotions matters for development as a character.

7. Development of what it means to be a woman

Both authors' portrayals of women have changed: they start out as quiet victims and gradually become women who can voice and meet their own needs. Her hopeful message comes through the ways characters in her novel change the meaning of their roles and relationships.

8. Better understanding of what it means to be a woman

The authors show women first as being silent and later developing the ability to express and achieve what they want. The characters in the novel grow to find new meaning in their relationships which reflects the hopeful message of the book.

9. Conclusion

Both Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande have changed the way Indian women are presented in books. Although they employ different styles—Desai through reflecting thoughts and symbols and Deshpande through real life scenes and speech—their intentions are identical: to portray the tough and confusing path women go through to find themselves in a world that refuses to acknowledge them.

They play a role in literature and also inspire by writing about the evolving nature of the Indian woman, who resists, asks hard questions and survives in the end.

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