

# Feminist Paradigm Shift: Cross-Cultural Perspectives (A study of feminine novels)

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**Abstract:** We have been grown up with listening this saying that “**God made the man. Man made the society and Society made the relationships**”. Since ancient ages, the main questionable state of relationship is feminist relations. There is strong belief that “**The feminine side of love, receptivity and longing, is neither valued nor understood. We are taught to struggle, not to surrender**” but there is other point of view as well in this respect where the different females have different retrospections for themselves and for them who are in their surroundings. The novels written by different female authors emphasize the relationship of two females whether they may be mother-daughter or companions in society. But my point of view is whether this kind of relationship exists in these novels or there might be other perspective also like in Manju Kapur’s novel *Difficult Daughters* the humanic content also dominates which I have tried to figure out with my minuscule efforts. My research further extended to the content of Shashi Deshpande’s *Dark hold no terror* where I tried to dig out the feminist state of mind in patriarchal family though the centre content is mother daughter relationship somewhere. The reason for their bonding is somewhere they both are soft targets of male dominant society as they face all atrocities together. The feminist novel by Anita Desai is *Fasting, Feasting* where the justification of title is viable issue with centre stage theme of state of minds living in two different worlds. These novels have other feminist point of views apart from mother daughter’s relationships which I tried to highlight in my research work.

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## Part I

Manju Kapur’s first novel *Difficult Daughters*, published in 1998, located against the backdrop of India of 1940’s presents the problems of an upper middle class urban Arya Samaj Punjabi family in Amritsar. The novel went on to win the Commonwealth Writers Prize in 1999 for being the best published book in Eurasian Region. Kapur speaks with great narrative eloquence on the idea of independence and the novel set against the background of partition deals with issues like women education and feminine freedom. She probes into the psyche of Indian women living in joint families under male domination and writes about the multi layered Indian experience in colonial and post colonial times, reflecting upon the holocaust of partition and the problems of women in particular.

One peculiarity of the images of women throughout history is that social stereotypes have been reinforced by archetypes. In every age woman has been portrayed either as a mother, a wife, a mistress or an object of attraction and their roles have been defined in relationship to male counterpart. Depictions of women as achievers or leaders have been comparatively few. But even these exceptional depictions of power or strength also manifest the extraordinariness of women which tend to ignore the lives of the ordinary and average ones. The search for control over one’s destiny constitutes the key theme of the novel and refers to the Independence aspired to and obtained by a nation as well as by a woman residing in the same nation at the same time.

The very title of the novel *Difficult Daughters* subtly alludes to the patriarchal convention that a woman, who undertakes a quest for an individual identity, is branded as a difficult daughter by the family and the society as well. Although Virmati succeeds in breaking all man-made boundaries, there are certain priorities so deeply embedded within her that she struggles to shake through the shackles. In the course of the novel she grows up from a naïve girl to a woman matured by suffering and through experience. India’s victory against the imperial rulers is mirrored through Virmati’s life. No doubt India attained freedom from colonial rule but at the cost of partition and communal hatred. Virmati was victorious in breaking the age old shackles of a patriarchal society in a tradition bound country but at the cost of much mental, torture and constantly struggling but failing to erase the tag of being the ‘other’ woman.

The humanic content is viable in Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters* as feminist discourse not because she is a woman writing about women’s issues, but because she tries to understand a woman both as a woman and as a human being

pressurized by visible and invisible contexts. She presents a glimpse of feminism keeping in mind the Indian context. Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* manages to be simultaneously both Indian and Universal.

## **Part II**

Shashi Deshpande is one of the living dynamic women writers in Indian English literature and she published many novels and collections of short stories. It deals with the problems of a career woman and her marital constraints. This paper deals with *The Dark Holds No Terror* which is reflective of the feminist aspirations. The discord and the disillusionment of the educated woman in a tradition bound 'Indian Society' is the theme of the novel. There is the ultimate realization at the end after a prolonged mental dilemma and a long drawn introspection. Women's quest for self exploration is the principal theme of this novel.

Literature is a truthful expression of life through the medium of language. Its success lies in blending both art and morality in such a beautiful way that art, in the long run, becomes the thought. Novel is a product of post colonialism in India. It has come through English language and western education. Its progress in India is due to the liberal thought from the west, which again is a product of post colonialism. The image of woman in Indo-English novel is based on the traditional ancient literature of India, which showed woman as a devoted wife or a devoted mother.

The post colonial writers of Indo-English novels equipped with a new education and sociability have different perspective of the images of woman. In the post colonial period liberal thought was brought in to our country and it was also propagated by western education. The woman novelists were responsible for the new image of woman struggling against the oppressive social norms of the male dominated society. The image of the woman in the postcolonial fiction is a crystallized form of the two different cultures. The image of woman as a custodian of extraordinary moral virtues incorporated with devotion and sacrifice has become an archetype. The image of woman in quest of her identity has emerged from the archetype.

In this respect there occurred changes in theme, emphasis and design in the literature of women novelists like Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande make straight journey into the psyche of their women characters that are torn on account of the tensions generated by the discord between the individual and the surroundings. They have started trying to understand Indian women and portray her in their novels.

In an interview, the author reveals that all her characters are concerned with their 'selves' and they learn to be honest to themselves. The novels of Shashi Deshpande are about women's self quest and struggle to free themselves from the restrictions imposed by society, culture and nature. It is a story about a doctor who is disappointed as a daughter as the rapport between her and her mother is little bit strained. She is unable to identify herself as a beloved daughter to her mother and when she grows up she is unable to be attractive enough to be a beautiful young maiden having rapturous power. And so she realizes that what she is as a girl is not what that makes her. A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband. If he's an M.A you should be a B.A. If he's 5'4' tall you shouldn't be more than 5'3' tall. If he's earning five hundred rupees, you should never earn more than four hundred and ninety nine rupees. That's the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage... No partnership can ever be equal. It will always be unequal, but take care it is unequal in the favor of the husband. If the scales tilt in your favor, God help you, both of you.

She decides to assert herself and fight her own battle. She realizes that her life is her own which she will have to shape as well as face the events of her life. There is no refuge, other than one's own self. With this mind she confidently waits to confront her husband and decides to go back to Bombay. Actually this going back to her husband is not to endure the humiliation.

She makes Sarita's consciousness to be touched by her experience as a doctor. Sarita realizes that one has to be sufficient within oneself because there is no other refuge elsewhere, puts an end to her problems. She realizes that we come into this world alone and go out of it alone. The period in between is short. "And all those ties we cherish as eternal and long lasting are more ephemeral than a dewdrop. The intelligent and educated protagonist soon begins to feel restricted in the traditional claustrophobic existence. In this regard Deshpande once remarked, "It is necessary for women to live within relationships. But if the rules are rigidly laid that as a wife or mother you do this and no further, then one becomes unhappy. Their balanced and practical approach towards life makes them realize the importance of marriage and family. Concentrating on traditional values Deshpande almost always shows her woman seeking the solution of their problems within marriage.

The novelist brings out powerfully the psychological problem of a career woman and discusses it artistically without crossing the barriers of art. The novel also transcends feminine constraints and raises issues, which the human beings in

general encounter in their lives. The novelist's objective is to show that one should take refuge in the self which means here that woman should assert and ascertain herself so that she can overcome or thrash the suppressing forces.

### **Part III**

Anita Desai's novel, *Fasting, Feasting*, published in 1999, seems to have been influenced by the radical phase of feminist movement. Radical feminists essentially demand complete emancipation from the shackles of oppressive patriarchal stereotypes. The basic problem faced by such feminists is how to challenge and subvert the norms of patriarchy while, simultaneously, being parts of the same system itself. Anita Desai is, undoubtedly, one among such radical writers who tend to challenge the stereotypes of motherhood. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to examine how the mother's negation of her motherhood poses threat to the growth and development of the child, especially of daughter, and simultaneously focusing on the oscillation occurring in the relationships of mother and daughter in Anita Desai's novel in question.

Uma is the main character in the first half of the novel. She is a clumsy, uncoordinated woman who finds it difficult to succeed in almost everything she does - she fails in school, can't cook, spills food and drink and can't find anyone worthwhile to get married to. I am quite interested in one of the psychological aspects of Uma, that of repression. Uma is not free to be what she wants to be, to do what she wants to do, so she is utterly repressed in her passions, in her feelings, in her personality; this last dimension is completely neglected to her. These inner forces run inside her veins and arteries, like water permeating through the cracks of a rock and when temperatures gets colder, it becomes ice and causes the explosion of the rock. The same happens inside Uma and the implosion is disguised as a sort of disease. **Sigmund Freud** stated that mental patients are like diamonds, whose structure is based on its corners. In these lines the diamond would break in case it fell on the ground. Uma is like that. Her body seems possessed by a demoniac spirit, her limbs; her bowels are rocked by the unique act of rebellion which is allowed to her.

The story in itself is told from the perspective of the protagonist, Uma, who starts out as a wide-eyed child at a convent who shows an enthusiasm for education but with the birth of her brother Arun, Uma takes on the role of nanny. Here, one encounters the distinct preference parents have for the male child.

The character of Mumdad is what emotionally touched me most, maybe because to a certain extent I can detect in them some traits my parents have. The image of Mumdad on the swing describes their indissoluble bond. Mumdad are a unique person/entity made up of two different souls. These two souls are always at unison, they never take opposite decisions, they argue but they always find a compromise, they are, in a word, complementary.

It highlights the Indian traditions, cultures and mostly the place of a woman in an Indian family. I liked the character of Uma because she is both willing to take a chance with life and at the same time dedicated to her family. She takes whatever happens to her life with such grace that she does not give me a chance to cry for her. I like her inner strength.

Desai next explores the conventional belief that ties a woman's worth to her physical appearance. A woman who lacks beauty is often rushed into the first marital offer she receives, only to pay a heavy price later on. Desai shows the challenges a single woman faces regardless of how successful she is. By contrast, Uma's cousin is portrayed as the ultimate success because she is able to marry well thanks to her looks. She makes the reader wonder how happy she truly is, when she eventually takes her own life.

I was struck by the way the writer presents two worlds that apparently have nothing in common: India and the United States. I think the title is very effective: the words *fasting* and *feasting* show the comparison, the similarity, between two sides of the world: both American and Indian people live under a form of slavery, even if this form of slavery is very different.

Uma and Arun live in a world that expected something very precise and determined from them: Arun had the privilege of "**feasting**" with life, of consuming the opportunities he has been given, but he decides to "**fast**", to avoid human contacts, to be extremely controlled, to renounce the right of being filled with emotions; Uma had the duty of "**fasting**", of putting aside her dreams and desires, of living silently, but she tries to "**feast**", although she knows that she can only have a minute to taste life. Moreover, it seems to me that these two words of the title contain all the contradictions of our time and our society.