

Feminine Sensibility in the Selected Works of Anita Desai and Arupa Patangia Kalita: An Analysis

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Abstract:

Through this study attempt has been made to focus on how feminine sensibility was reflected in varied forms in the selected novels of Anita Desai and Arupa Patangia Kalita. Both of the novelists are the leading novelists of Indian perspective who wrote several novels focusing the discourse of women identity, marginalization and oppression. The predominant theme of novels of both the writers is marriage. Besides that gender inequality, violence, social injustice, and the consequences of political unrest are also common theme in their literary works. Both the writers draw the realistic picture of the various aspect of gender barrier on the basis of the societies that they represent. They present the pain and struggle of women from different angles. Their women characters try to break the gender barrier and thus both of them express their social sense. Through this paper attempt has been made to discuss the feminine sensibility as reflected in the works of both the writers on the basis of the textual analysis of two prominent novels namely "Cry, the Peacock" by Anita Desai and "Dawn" by Arupa Patangia Kalita. The original novel "Ayananta" was published in Assamese in the year 1992 and later translated into English by Ranjita Biswas. It has also been translated into Hindi.

Key Words: Women, Sensibility, Empathy, Marriage, Oppressed, Marginalized.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Anita Desai is one of the leading novelists of Indian writing in English. She has written more than half-a-dozen novels and she portrays the plight of an intelligent, sensitive middle-class married woman in her novels. These women do not find any pleasure in marriage, for; they are married to insensitive and uncaring men. It is obvious that a marriage succeeds only when the man and woman are complementary to each other. It is this aspect of marriage that Mrs Desai highlights in her novels like "In Custody," "Voices in the City", "Bye, Bye, Blackbird", "Cry, the Peacock" etc. Such women undergo a lot of mental suffering and often end up as neurotics. The novelist has traced the descent of these women into a trauma in a graphic manner, making use of images and symbols in the process. Trauma is an emotional shock following a stressful event. It also leads to long-term neurosis. She has carved a niche for herself in the realm of literature through her poignant exploration of the intricacies of human relationships and the silent struggles embedded within them. One of the recurrent themes in her works is the nuanced portrayal of feminine trauma, which she navigates through a spectrum ranging from profound silence to powerful expression. Through her novels she tries to project the agony and predicament of her female characters within an indifferent and hostile milieu. She is often described as a novelist charting the interiority of her female protagonists' mind. For her, literature is neither a means of escaping reality, nor a vehicle for parading her political, social, religious and moral ideas, but an exploration and an inquiry of the psyche. Her approach is anti-realist and anti-empirical. She dwells on moods, feelings and on emotions, on all those things that leave their imprint on the human psyche. Her novels are based on subjective objectivity, expressed through a progression of images in which the protagonist is the poet's mask, engaged in self-analysis, its quest leads to a moment of recognition, and transcends the temporal and causal, unifying the individual self with the infinite or universal self. In Desai's novels, "it is the image that matters, the symbol, the myth and the feat of

relating them" (Sharma 1981). Her other novels are "Where Shall We Go This Summer?", "Fire on the Mountain", "Clear Light of Day", "Baumgartner's Bombay", "Journey to Ithaca", "Fasting, Feasting", "The Zigzag Way", "The Artist of Disappearance". She also penned children's books like "The Village by the Sea" and short story collections such as "Games at Twilight". She received lots of awards and recognition for her literary contributions. Her novel "Fire on the Mountain" won the Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize in 1978. "Clear Light of Day", "In Custody", and "Fasting, Feasting" were all shortlisted for the Booker Prize. "The Village by the Sea" won the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize in 1983. She was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award for "In Custody" in 1984. She was awarded the Padma Bhushan, India's third-highest civilian award in 2014 for her significant contribution to literature and education.

Arupa Patangia Kalita also occupies a very distinct place among the prominent Indian novelists and short story writers. She comes from Assam. She is well known for her significant contributions to Assamese literature. Her literary works reflect her deep understanding of Assamese history, culture, and socio-political landscape. She is famous for her short stories, which gained critical acclaim for their realistic portrayal of the lives of ordinary people in Assam. Besides the short stories she contributed a lot to the Assamese novel. Most of her works are concerned with the struggles, aspirations and challenges of common people of lower strata of the society. Gender inequality, violence, social injustice, and the consequences of political unrest are also common theme in her literary works. She has enriched Assamese literature by many short stories, novels, travelogues and translation literature. Her novels are "Mriganabhi", "Ayananta", "Kaitot Keteki", "Arunimar Swadesh", "Felanee", "Tokora Bahor Sonor Beji". Her short stories collections are "Moruyatra Aru Anyanya", "Morubhumit Menoka Aru Anyanya", "Deopaharor Bhognostupot", "Pas Sutorial Kothokota", "Mileniyamor Sopun", "Alektan Banur Jan", "Kuruswuar Sopun", "Mur Sopun", "Hihotor Sopun", "Sonali Egole Koni Parile Beliye Umoni Dile", "Moriyom Astin Athoba Hira Boruah", "Jalatarangar Sur" and "Pani Gabhini Asil Aru Anyanya". Her works have been translated into many languages including English, Hindi and Bengali. She achieved critical acclaim through her works. She has received numerous literary awards like the Bharatiya Bhasha Parishad award, the Katha Prize, Assam Valley literary Award, Lekhika Samaroh Sahitya Award, the Prabina Saikia Award, Sahitya Sanskriti Award etc. Her collection of short stories titled, "Mariam Austin Othoba Hira Barua" begged the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award in 2014. Besides being a prolific writer she is an educationist.

The prominent subject matter of these two writers is women. Both of them are too much concerned about the gender discrimination which is a major problem in the society of various times that they represent. The weak position of women in society is the result of the gender discrimination in social and economic life. Both the writers draw the realistic picture of the various aspect of gender barrier on the basis of the societies that they represent. They present the pain and struggle of women from different angles. Their women characters try to break the gender barrier and thus both of them express their social sense. Through this paper attempt has been made to discuss the feminine sensibility as reflected in the works of both the writers on the basis of the textual analysis of two prominent novels namely "Cry, the Peacock" by Anita Desai and "Dawn" by Arupa Patangia Kalita. The original novel "Ayananta" was published in Assamese in the year 1992 and later translated into English by Ranjita Biswas. It has also been translated into Hindi.

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

It is worth mentioning that lots of studies have been done upon the works of Anita Desai and Arupa Patangia Kalita. There are lots of studies upon the both novels of the two novelists namely "Cry, the Peacock" by Anita Desai and "Dawn" by Arupa Patangia Kalita. All the scholars approach these novels from different angles. The significance lies behind the fact that through this study attempt has been made to study the feminine sensibility reflected by the two novelists in different social backgrounds and different times. But the common aspect is that both represent the Indian societies from different regions within the country.

3. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:

The objectives of the study are as following –

1. To find out various aspect of the feminine sensibility as portrayed by Anita Desai in “Cry, the Peacock” and Arupa Patangia Kalita in “Dawn”.
2. To analyze how the two novelists draw gender issues of the societies of their times in their novels.
3. To find out how the novelists raise the women’s voices in different situations through textual analysis of the selected novels.

5. METHODOLOGY:

Research methodology is the most important aspect of any study. It facilitates the materials and provides reliability and validity to it. The paper has adopted mainly textual analysis under the qualitative research methodology to analyze the feminine sensibility reflected in the selected works of Anita Desai and Arupa Patangia Kalita. The two novels “Cry, the Peacock” by Anita Desai and “Dawn” by Arupa Patangia Kalita have been chosen as the primary data sources. For the secondary data sources the other related available literatures have been discussed.

6. DISCUSSION:

Kanchan A. Gaonkar in the scholarly article “Trauma in women in Anita Desai's novels” mentions rightly that in most of Anita Desai's novels, feminine sensibility plays a very important role. The women characters in her novels are like the women whom the reader meets almost every day each grappling with one problem or the other. In fact, they are all real women presented in flesh and blood. They are women who possess the same feelings and qualities like love, compassion, grace, dignity etc. They all hail from a middle-class background and are fed-up with the mundane routine of life. They crave for a break from routine life, a desire which is never fulfilled. Naturally they all end up as emotional wrecks. Women like Maya, Sarah, Monisha, Sarla, Sita, and Bum keep on suffering. They have uncaring and insensitive husbands who play no role in comforting their traumatized wives. All that these women need is a little bit of understanding from their husbands. They crave for little words of comfort from their husbands but unfortunately, they do not get any. This takes a toll on their sensitive mind and they resort to some kind of escape. In the novel, “Cry, the Peacock”, Maya is the central character whose father’s excessive care and concern makes her behave abnormally in her later life. Maya’s sorrow begins with her marriage to Gautama who is a rational, middle-aged, busy lawyer. He is nurtured by her father. Gautama is insensitive to the desires of his young wife and therefore she feels lonely, isolated, alienated, neglected and frustrated. On the other hand the vast difference between their ages creates a vast difference between them. Maya expects more attention from Gautama, like the one that is given to her by her father. He is busy with his profession and does not have time to take care of her emotions. S. L. Paul opines in “Commentaries on Literary Classics-1 – A Critical Study of Anita Desai’s Cry, the Peacock” that he should not only cater to her childish illusions of happiness but also protect her fantasy from encroachments of the outside world of sorrow. It is one of the earliest Indian English novels to explore profoundly the psyche of a woman. The novelist try to show Maya’s increasing paranoia, emotional turbulence, and detachment from reality. Maya was brought up by her father as the princess. She married Gautama just because her father wanted her to do so. Gautama was an intellectual and an insensitive man. He was devoid of feelings, sentiments and emotions. Even the family members were also not concerned about the love in their lives. They were busy with the contemporary politics and other proceedings. Gautama’s father was busy with the freedom struggle while his mother was busy with social activities. All the family members loved to live in their own world. She had to face a different situation after her marriage. She soon realizes that she was married to a frigid man who had no interest in sex. Maya, on the other hand, desired for sex, and like any other woman wanted to have a child of her own. She had several images of the man-woman relationship and she was frustrated to find her husband fast asleep invulnerably before she came to him after changing her dress. Gautama's attitude further frustrates her and she soon realizes that she was a princess who was married to a peasant. Gautama never tried to understand his wife. The childless and the desolate Maya had been fond of a dog named Toto. This dog was her companion. But as fate would have it, this dog died leaving Maya alone. Maya wanted to give the dog a decent burial but her husband Gautama merely telephoned the municipal authorities and asked them to take the carcass away. Any other husband in his place could have easily seen through his wife's feelings for the dog and empathized with her. But Gautama did not understand his wife at all. This lack of sensitivity on the part of her husband made Maya a mental wreck. She realized that she and

Gautama were poles apart. Added to this was her father's helplessness. He asked her to quietly accept her fate. He too did not realize that his daughter was in great pain. Incidents like the above mentioned ones keep on happening and they harm the sensibilities of Maya. She is even prevented from attending a Mushayira or a poet's meet because it is open only for men. All these tortured Maya very badly. When Gautama, with the help of some quotations from the Gita told her that the sentiment of love was not necessary for it was only attachment and attachment was bad she was shocked and depressed. At that juncture she received a letter from her brother Arjun. It reminded her of the astrologer's prediction that one of them i.e. either she or her husband would die within four years of marriage and his endorsement of Gautama's viewpoint regarding sentiments makes her all the more sensitive about her own existence. She started fearing that since Gautama was bereft of love would certainly kill her if he came to know of the astrologer's prediction. She felt that he would never hesitate to take her life. This fact started working on her mind and she had a quick glance at her past life with her father. When she met her husband the following evening, she felt that she would not meet him again. Gautama went up the stairs to have a stroll, and instead of enjoying the odor of limes or counting the stars, he got lost in a court case. As he was explaining the case, Maya was looking at the moon and was almost worshipping it. But unmindful of this, Gautama came between bay and the moon. In a rush of ideas, Gautama fell off to meet his death. Though Maya tried to hold him she could not and he died. Maya now lost her mental equilibrium. She thought that she was responsible for her husband's death. This feeling and trauma caused by Gautama's death as well as the feeling of guilt made her crazy to take the extreme step of committing suicide. Thus the life of a noble but true woman was ruined and it ended in a tragedy. Through this novel Anita Desai very skillfully depicts the protagonist's extremely fragile and tormented psyche as she battles with the overprotective, unfeeling and even hostile world of men – in her case the father and the husband. Maya's trauma is therefore to be viewed as a consequence of marital incompatibility and parental control. A psychological novel par excellence, "Cry the Peacock" makes a passionate case for women's private traumas as potentially catastrophic experiences. This novel is a powerful analysis of feminine sensibility of a woman living in a world where she was oppressed by the patriarchal society. Through the character of Maya, the novelist pays close attention to the issues of mental illness and trauma of the contemporary women folk in the society.

Set up in a different landscape, Arupa Patangia Kalita's novel "Dawn" reflects the feminine sensibility from a different angle. Priyakshi Saikia in her scholarly paper "Fire on the Soul -Quest for Freedom through a Silent Revolt: Exploration of Women Psyche in Dawn and Felanee by Arupa Patangia Kalita" observes that quest for identity by women in patriarchal bondage is always a conflict – a silent revolt that has been there from time immemorial. In such a situation women writers try to focus on the predicament of women in the society as they themselves have experienced the conflict at some point in their lives. Through women writers we can see a different world, with their assistance we can map out the problems in a woman's world. In India too, Women writers, pioneered by Anita Desai and Arundhati Roy, have written about their native women, their conflicts and predicaments against the contemporary society. While doing so they have analyzed the socio-cultural modes and values that have given Indian women their image and role towards themselves and towards the society. The trend got extended to regional level too. Hence we have seen a feminine discourse that is popularized in Assam by the writers like Arupa Patangia Kalita. Personally, she has sensed the scent of Anita Desai in her, while exploring the emotional world of women and bringing to light the various deeper forces at work in feminine sensibility. The novelist tries to give her women characters their own psychic world, where they are empowered. Through the novel "Dawn" Arupa Patangia Kalita presents a picture of Assamese people who fought for a Promised Land. The whites did not care about the low-caste people. They dominated and punished them for their mistakes. The Sahib considered the coolies as worthless; those coolies who had decided to resist the order of the sahib. It was mostly the poor people who were striving for freedom. The upper class people were different to it. But Indra Gossain was one of the people of high class who supported the resistance against the British. Mahananda Barua and his family was the victim of the situation who lived in a dilapidated house and half starved. But they resisted the colonial rulers. On the other hand, a part of the society was busy adopting the foreign culture. Instead of resisting the whites, they tried to develop a friendship with the whites. They were ready to accept the modernity under British rule. The novel depicts how the colonial modernity starts making inroads into Assamese society and brings about changes in the traditional way of life and mindset. Besides

this point of view the novel deals with the issues related to women like education, marriage or even freedom in their daily life. The character of Binapani is shown to be inquisitive, someone who has the power to move customs despite her little form. Since her childhood she was rebellious in nature and refused to obey the traditional customs imposed upon women. She climbs trees, fishes with bare hands and attempts to ride a horse. She stoned the White Sahib when he whips Monglu and this is one of the many scenes that showcase her bravery, her ability to counter what others obey diligently. She married Chaliha though unwillingly. She carried out the household duties like a powerful administrator. She had taken care of all members in the family who were dependent to her. On one occasion, she brought back Tagar with her. But when her husband abused her she had taken the bold decision to leave him. It seemed that she had taken the maternal position in the patriarchal society when her won dream was shattered. Though she was rebellious against the customary traditions that suppressed the women folk but she had to sacrifice her hopes and aspirations at the end of the day. Through this novel the novelist depicts the condition of women in the patriarchal society in India where women were regarded as second class citizens, oppressed, marginalized and dominated by the male folk.

7. CONCLUSION:

Writers like Arupa Patangiya Kalita following the feminists of other countries set themselves upon the task of highlighting the impact of established doctrine of patriarchal hegemony and constructed cultural authority. Arupa's success as a woman writer is a landmark in the struggle for female emancipation and assertion of sexual identity of women.

Women from diverse societies, caste or religious beliefs are subject to social exclusions when it comes to education or industry. Once customs and later those equivalent to legal procedures are instrumental in monitoring their day to day life. Their worth was questioned in pre independent India and continues to be done even now. The honourable occupations are decidedly said to be unfit for these Others. And the misery arising out of these prejudices are rarely addressed, the emotions arising out of imposed failures on the womenfolk just because of their biological status amount to great injustice which impacts their psychological standing as well. Their wasted lives create disproportionate development in the world stemming from a restricted arena of acceptable activities that struggle continuously against set norms overtly or covertly. The castrating notions that keeps on nagging at their personal life deprive them of activities that one might want to carry out and happiness that one derives from them which is so easily available to the male sex. Thus, culminating in a degraded and under - appreciated halve of species which undergoes endless discriminatory practices in an uninspired orb of dejection that they are put in.

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