The Representation of Women in Anita Desai’s Novels:  
A Frail Bark upon the Waters

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Abstract:
The application of deconstructive feminism to the texts and discourses reveals the place of women, their struggle for their identities, the challenges and the threats to such efforts and the operations of patriarchy, overtly and covertly, in such texts. Anita Desai is the foremost writer of India. Her works have been critiqued by countless critics from diverse angles and perspectives. The present study means to read the four major novels of Desai (Fasting, Feasting, Clear Light of Day, Fire on the Mountain, Cry the Peacock) from a feminist perspective, with the objective to highlight the place and the plight of women in a world governed by patriarchy. The study also means to investigate the role and contribution of patriarchy and patriarchal values towards the misery, suffering, loneliness and unhappiness of women or other psychological, social and economic problems experienced by them. Desai’s novels in addition to being the finest specimens of poetic and lyrical prose, the ultimate examples of form, also attain the status of feminist counter ideology to debunk and subvert the myths of superiority of men constructed by patriarchy for containing women, by exposing their superficiality and hollowness and worthlessness. The study found that the unhappiness of the women represented in the novels of Desai is due to operations of patriarchy.

Key words: Oppression; Subjugation; Ideology; Sorrow; Despair; Patriarchy; Loneliness

I. Introduction:
Anita Desai’s novels have been examined from many angles, especially from formalist and artistic perspectives. The present study means to investigate the representation of women in the selected novels of Desai, with the objective to find answers to the questions regarding their quests for identities, their social place and the presence or absence of opportunities to be themselves. The study intends to probe whether Desai’s novels support feminism and undermine patriarchy or whether they are in the cause and service of patriarchy. Four major novels of Desai have been selected and analysed in the light of feminist theories and the techniques of deconstruction. A brief literature review has been presented to establish the context and the justification of the study.

II. Research Methodology:
The research methodology for the present study is the exhaustive analysis of the texts of the selected novels in the light of deconstructive feminism. The study means to benefit from the earlier researches conducted on Desai, which are to be used as a context and background. The main assumption of the study is that the novels of Desai hold patriarchy responsible for the misery and suffering of women. She is a feminist writer and her novels strengthen feminism and undermine patriarchy. To make the study more
systematic and result-oriented, research questions have been formulated in the light of suggestions given by Tyson (2006):

a) Do women occupy the center place in Desai’s novels?
b) Are women represented in her novels happy and with opportunities of self-realization?
c) Does her work present the social reality from the perspective of women and reinforce feminism?
d) Does her work hold patriarchy and patriarchal values responsible for the misery and suffering of women?
e) Does her work present the struggle of women for their self-discovery and identity?
f) Do her novels undermine patriarchy?

III. Literature Review:
Desai’s novels have been commented upon by many critics from different angles and perspectives. Shubha Mukherjee (2011) has viewed her novels from the point of the portrayal of women. She has focused upon the misery and suffering of women as portrayed by Desai, but has failed to fix the responsibility of the pain of these women on anyone. At times Mukherjee seems raising unnecessary questions or even passing her judgment on these women. Many of her assertions and findings are unjustified. Incidentally, she regards the patriarchy, without naming it, as the basic norm of life. She hardly says that the women of Desai actually revolt against patriarchy and their misery and loneliness is imposed upon them by patriarchy. Wrongly she claims that women in the past Indian society had honour and place which needs to be restored. Mukherjee herself is a patriarchal woman. There are many serious gaps with Mukherjee’s study of Desai. The present study intends to address such issues.

Meena Pandey (2011) has undertaken a comparative study of Cry the Peacock by Desai and That Long Silence by Shashi Deshpande from the feminist perspective, though she declares that feminism or feminist theory has nothing to do with her paper. She claims to have investigated the two novels from the angle of existential crises. Like, Mukherjee, Deshpande also betrays her patriarchal inclination, by declaring women as tender creatures. She further declares the world of Maya, the protagonist of Cry the Peacock, as impractical and the world of her husband, Gautama as practical. Her patriarchal bias makes Deshpande critical and unsympathetic towards Maya. She finds Maya “a morbidly dependent woman”, a woman who has lost her contact with reality or even as “a special child”. She misses the real issue and finds faults with the person of Maya.

Fawzia Afzal-Khan (1993) rightly declares realism as the moral bedrock of Desai’s novels, which in its turn, is balanced by myth. The focus of Khan’s critique is British colonial past and Indian postcolonial reality, the inherent paradoxes and contradictions. She has also dwelt upon the loneliness, withdrawal, regression, retreat and isolation of Desai’s women, but has failed to point out the imposed nature of these situations. Many of her interpretations are quite debatable. However, at times Khan rightly equates the cruel reality of Desai’s novels with the masculine world. There are many gaps in the study of Khan and many assertions which need to be re-visited.

P. Madurima (2011) starts her critique of the novels of Desai with a reference to their formalist perfection and lyrical texture. Like other critics she also regards the major
issue of the novels to be the extreme self-introversion of the protagonists, who are labeled as the obsessed lot by the learned critic. She has failed to highlight external agency responsible for their nervous breakdown and suffering. The present study intends to fill this gap.

Shishu Paul (2011) in her critique of *Clear Light of Day*, has identified the real cause of the misery and unhappiness of women. She holds patriarchy responsible for this. This study is the first step in the right direction. The present study means to use it as the stepping stone for a full-fledged and comprehensive study encompassing four novels. Shantha Krishnaswami (2001) has examined the novels of Desai from the perspective of the female characters. Krishnaswami has analysed the selected novels with great insight and understanding. She holds the insensitive social norms responsible for the malaise women suffer from. Even then her interpretation of the novels cannot be last interpretation. Kamilashamsie (2012) in her introduction to *Clear Light of Day* has referred to almost every aspect of the novel, its formal beauty, its uncertainty, ambiguity, its status as Partition novel and Desai’s intense faculty of observation. She has, however, missed on the place and nature of women in the novel. Radha Chakravarty (2008) has also come up with a comprehensive, commendable but a general critique on Desai’s novels. MG Vassanji (2012) in an introduction to the *Fire on the Mountain* has commented upon the skill and artistry of Desai and her interest in the inner world of human beings. The learned critic has not focused upon the nature of women represented in Desai’s novels.

The brief literature review presented here has established the context and the justification of the present study, which is to investigate the representation of women in Desai’s novels and the cause of their misery and unhappiness.

**IV. Discussion and Analysis:**

**Women in *Clear Light of Day***:

All the women characters represented in the novel, *Clear Light of Day*, are unhappy, miserable and lonely. Women and their plight occupy the foreground in the novel. The novel starts with two sisters Bim and Tara in the midst of koels, roses and purple bougainvillea. They both adopt different approaches to attain happiness, they both fail because they are let down by men. In this world of men, women simply cannot be happy. Their dreams of happiness are to be constantly broken by the laws of men. Unhappiness, misery, loneliness, frustration and neurosis are in store for them. The women, do not, cannot fit comfortably into this world, designed for and by men. Tara hopes to have a life of happiness and fulfillment, through her marriage, but is soon disillusioned. Bim struggles for her own individual identity but fails even after working like a slave for the family. Patriarchy is too tough to be tackled by women.

Tara is married to a diplomat Bakul, because he thinks her to be more pliant and docile, compared to her sister Bim, who is known for her firmness and resolve. For Tara it is an opportunity to grasp happiness, love, pleasures of life and freedom to be herself. She takes Bakul for prince charming; he turns out to be a cruel, insensitive tyrant. Instead of discovering herself and finding her identity, she is reduced to the level of a guilty, ashamed creature. Tara is made ashamed and embarrassed on visiting her sister Bim. Her husband Bakul is such a snob. She is not more than a puppet before her husband. Her job is to hold up a cluster of ties for her husband to choose from. Her husband does not allow her to stay with her sister and brother, though she has come after a very long time. She
cannot pick up a guava from under the tree and bite into it for fear of her husband, who would taunt her for lack of sophistication and being rustic (23). He is an insensitive brute. She is frightened of him thoroughly. He does not care for her feelings, sentiments, wounded or otherwise. Time and again, he reminds her of her low social background, her hopeless position before her marriage. It is he who decides what, when and where she can be happy. Her psyche and personality is ruined and damaged in the name of training and orientation (38). She is expected to be virtuous and dutiful wife without any rights. Poor Tara is ruined psychologically. She cannot be herself. She is desperate to enjoy a delicious, melting ice-cream in the company of her sister, but cannot, for fear of Bakul’s disapproval. She dare not afford him an opportunity for his criticism and disapproval. What other outcome of such a situation can be other than strain, frustration, collapse and disillusionment? Where is her identity, space, place and the freedom to be herself?

Bim is the main female character in Clear Light of Day. She strives for her own identity and individuality in a world governed by patriarchy. She loves her pets and is comfortable and at peace with her Old Delhi house. She is the only female character who is true to herself. After the death of her parents, she assumes the responsibility of the head of the family. She is brave enough to face the challenges in the form of the illness of Raja, Tara’s marriage, housekeeping and the constant attention to Baba, the crippled younger brother. She earns her own living and enjoys teaching her students and can have fun in their company. She is happy and satisfied that she supports her family. She is confident and sure of herself and asks the visiting doctor to a cup of tea. She refuses to marry Dr. Biswas partly for his unimpressive and ridiculous ways and partly due to her commitment to the family. She does not regard marriage as the way out of her challenges. She is hurt deeply by the worst betrayal of her brother Raja. Raja is a selfish, greedy and a man without any self-respect. He marries a Muslim girl for financial considerations. She might not be very impressive, but at least she has the guts to stand upon her own two feet, has her own individual identity. Needless to say, that all her misery and suffering is because of men and the socio-cultural system designed by men.

Misrasisters, Jaya and Sarla, are ruined by men. Instead of attending college, they stayed at home to help their mother and aunts with the housekeeping and waited for their marriages to be arranged. They are grey-haired, spectacled and middle-aged women, who were rejected by their husbands soon after their marriages. In Indian patriarchal culture, a divorcee carries a stigma; they are left with no option but to eke out their living in very challenging circumstances. Ironically, they devote themselves playing the role of Radha and singing songs and dancing in honour of Krishna, a symbol of patriarchy. The story of Mira Masi is a serious charge sheet against men and patriarchy. Her subjugation and oppression is total, complete and extremely depressing. She got married at the age of twelve, and she was still a virgin when she became a widow. Her student-husband died in England of clod. She was declared cursed and blamed for the death of her husband. She was required to serve the household of her husband as a slave to compensate for the tragedy. She scrubbed and washed and cooked for the family at day time and massaged her mother-in-law at night. She nursed the babies and stitched trousseaux for her sisters-i-law. Throughout her life, she wore white. When she aged, she was thrown out of the household as a torn rag, cracked pot a picked bone, (171—72). This is how she landed with Tara and Bim. Mira Masi devoted herself to the service of her new masters. She fed Raja, Tara and Bim with her own hands. She has a nervous breakdown when Raja plans to leave for his Muslim in-laws. It is very significant that
she tries to tear away the rats, lizards and snakes from off her dying body. These rats, lizards and snakes are responsible for her wretched and miserable life and death. The text has ample references to present her as a sacrificial bride-cow, who drowns on day one in the well of patriarchy. Ironically, she is dressed in her silk sari, with a broad border of crimson and gold for cremation, which according to the laws of patriarchy she was forbidden to wear as a widow, when alive (157). Bim remembers Ophelia, the Shakespearean heroine in *Hamlet*, another sacrificial bride-cow, who is sacrificed at the altar of patriarchy (Shakespeare, 1982). It is too obvious that Mira has fallen victim to the laws of patriarchy. Desai has very successfully shown the cruel face of patriarchy. Desai has debunked the myth of the superiority of men by presenting them as parasites. Misra boys don’t do any work. They are given to drinking and other social evils. As boys they had the reputation of being rough and loud-mouthed and lecherous. They are men with bristly jaws, swelling thighs and big bellies. They live on the money earned by their sisters. Even their father calls them as fat, lazy slobs, drinking whisky, paid for by their sisters. The father of the Misras proudly admits to being a booser, a womanizer, and bankrupt, during his younger days. Raja, brother of Tara and Bim, turns out to be extremely selfish and greedy. He betrays his family by marrying a Muslim girl for mercenary reasons and material prospects. Other male characters are either corrupt or absurd and ridiculous.

V. Women in *Fire on the Mountain*:

The novel *Fire on the Mountain* foregrounds Nanda Kaul, Illa Das and Raka as central characters. The novel starts with Nanda Kaul arriving at the mountain resort of Carignano, Kasauli. This is her attempt to escape from the world of men, from patriarchy and exist by herself, like a lonely eagle. She has suffered a lot, while tending to the needs of others, throughout her life. She has lived the life of sacrifice, and service to her family and husband. Now she is left with neither the strength nor the will to undergo the same. This is why she is not interested in watching the hoopoe feed its nestlings. She watches the approaching postman with irritation and disapproval, for fear of any news from or link with the world she has left behind.

The postman brings the news of the arrival of Raka, the great-granddaughter of Nanda Kaul. The mother of Raka, Tara, has an unhappy and miserable life because of hedonist life style of her diplomat husband, Rakesh. Rakesh is neither a good husband nor a responsible father. He is a brute. He ill-treats his wife, has affairs and is given to drinking. Since Tara is not in a position to look after herself, and her mother Asha is a typical patriarchal woman, she does not blame Rakesh for the misery and suffering of Tara. Asha contends that Tara does not understand men or her husband (16). She suggests that it is the privilege of men to have this life style and women need to accept it and make the required adjustments. In reality, the conduct of Rakesh is the cause of pain, agony and anguish to Asha, Tara, Raka, and Nanda Kaul. Poor Asha still wants her daughter Tara to try the role of the wife of a successful diplomat.

Nandra Kaul has suffered a lot at the hands of her vice-chancellor husband and the joint family system they lived under. In spite of her inner anguish and pain, she was expected to play the role of a happy wife. She managed the house of her husband with utmost diligence. She supervised cooking, housekeeping, entertained the guests, both personal and official and performed the role of a charming wife as well. She was required
to look after too many children, too many guests (32). Theirs was quite a big family. It is because of the memory of those tough, demanding days; she yearns for silence and loneliness. She is totally fed up with the world in which she existed at the margin and lived the life of a slave. She has escaped into this world of peace and silence. Her present annoyance, distress, agitation, and apprehension at the slightest prospects of any contact with the old world is quite understandable. She never had a moment of peace or privacy. It is significant that Nanda Kaul thinks lapwing to be a hunted, nervous, agitated and fearful bird. Probably she compares herself to this night crying bird. She recalls her days as wife to her vice-chancellor husband, and finds them crowded and stifling (31). It vexed her terribly. She did suffer from nimiety in everything, disorder, the fluctuating unpredictable excess of sacrifice and service (32). On top of this all her vice-chancellor husband has had a lifelong affair with the math teacher, Miss David (158). No wonder she has come to this remote and isolated, God-forsaken place to have her peace and privacy. She is totally disillusioned and fed up with the duties laid upon her by patriarchy for the comfort and pleasure of others. She has finally rejected the demands and callings imposed upon her by patriarchy in the name of religion and tradition. She has grown reclusive in reaction to her long life of duty and obligation. Her children, for whom she slaved and suffered, stripped the house of its belongings at the death of their father. She takes relief in her pared, reduced and radiantly single life (34). “She did not live here alone by choice—she lived here alone because that was what she was forced to do, reduced to doing”(158).

Illa Das is a friend of Nanda Kaul from her younger days. She is an old shriveled lady. She works for the rights of women, and as a social worker knows, that men are the biggest obstacle in the way of change and progress. They don’t allow their women to adapt to modern ways and thinking. Her campaign against child marriage is neutralized by the village priest. In one village a seven year old girl is to be married to a widower with six children. Illa Das has tried to convince the father of the girl, Preet Singh, against this inhuman act, but to no avail. At the end, the alliance between priest and the husbands proves more forceful than the efforts of Illa Das (141).

The novel Fire on the Mountain shatters the myth of the superiority of men. When her father died, the family fortune passed on to three dissolute, drunken sons. The two hard working intelligent and thrifty daughters, Illa and Rima, got nothing (135). The same sons were sent to Cambridge, Harvard and Heidelberg. They never went to their universities and never earned their degrees. They would drink themselves ill, and squander their allowances on horse-racing. They stripped their mother and sisters of the last pieces of jewellery and did not come to funeral of their father. Both the sisters struggled for their existence.

She is teased and made fun of by the boys. They have no respect or regard for her old age. Her umbrella, her protection against sun and rain is snatched from her, thrown and damaged. She is humiliated and insulted by the boys. They are immune to her protests and threats. They are being cruel and heartless, behaving like a pack of hounds. She is like a hunted, trapped animal; agitated and full of tears. The boys probably stood for the furies sent by the forces of patriarchy to chastise her (119). She has been through such scenes more than once for her work. She has been taunted, derided, pursued, obstructed and jeered at by mobs (120). Finally illa Das is raped and then strangled to death by Preet Singh, for daring to prevent the planned marriage of the seven year old
daughter of the Sikh to a widower (156). It is extremely significant that Raka sets the forest on fire as a protest at this outrage (158), therefore the title of the novel, *Fire on the Mountain*.

**VI. Women in Cry the Peacock:**

The novel, *Cry the Peacock*, projects the rejection of the masculine way of looking at the things. The real cause of the sorrow and despair of Maya is the absence of the will of Gautama, her husband, to understand his wife and his failure to try to see from her perspective. It is his insensitivity, coldness and indifference that slowly and gradually pushes her to frustration, loneliness and disappointment. He can hardly see the misery and pain of his wife or the way to comfort her. Gautama does not know that Maya is a sensitive creature. He cannot imagine that Maya can be very upset by the death of her pet dog. All he can offer and say is a cup of tea for Maya (14). The real cry of Maya, the peacock, is that her husband notices nothing about her. This is why only four years of her marriage with Gautama have ruined his psyche and damaged her sense of identity. For Maya, the marriage has become decadent and petrified, without any genuine and true strength of its own, due to the impositions of patriarchy. They are bearing it only as a social superstition.

Maya lives in a joint family. She does not deny her consent to this marriage, but no one has time or love for Maya. They all are like shadows to her. When she wishes to go to south in summer to see Khathakali dances, with their masks, costumes, music at night time by starlight, her husband advises her to wait till a Kathakali troupe comes to give a performance in winter in Delhi. He thinks it will be cheap (41). The insensitivity of her husband reminds her of the cruelty of a friend of her father towards his wife, when she was a child. That woman came to her father in a miserable condition, informing him that she could not live with her husband. The world of Gautama and his family is the typical world of men, of politics, of, trade pacts, of treaties, of revolutions, of rice scarcity and harvests. It is not the world of love and affection. Maya is the seeker of this feminine world of love and affection. The mother of Gautama is a patriarchal woman, a woman who has embraced patriarchy and its values in total. Maya feels she is neither loved by her husband nor missed by her mother-in-law. Her only utility is their link with her father, who sends them cheques regularly for their social and philanthropic purposes. She is not more than an instrument in their bigger designs. The constant cry of Maya is for her identity, for individuality for love and attention in the realm of men. She is excited to see the moon and wants to share her excitement and ecstasy with someone, but finds no body. The result is frustration and anguish. She knows there is no way out of her misery and suffering. On the part of Gautama, understanding is scant and love is meager. The world of Maya is filled loneliness and a sense of rejection. At her outburst of rage and rebellion, her husband calls her neurotic (98). It is the pain, neglect and desperation imposed by her husband that has pushed her to this neurosis (167). It is in this neurotic condition that one night she pushes her husband from the roof top and he falls on to the ground to his death (173).

There are other women in this novel. Their lives are equally miserable, full of frustration and loneliness. Leila had to elope to marry the man she loved. Parents and relatives ceased their communication with her. She works to support her husband, who suffers from T. B. Instead of being grateful, he takes it as his due. Leila accepts it as written. Maya remembers another of her friend, Pom. Like Leila, she has also been
crucified at the altar of patriarchy. Her mother-in-law sends her to Birla Mandir to be blessed with boys, highlighting the lesser status of women. Pom’s life with her in-laws is very miserable. She does not have any privacy, space or freedom. She wants her husband to move out and live separate, but he does not listen (55). She finds her escape into day-dreaming for delicacies, sweetmeats and a chauffeur driven car. The suppression and subjugation has ruined and distorted the psyche of Mrs. Lal.

VII. Women in Fasting, Feasting:

The novel opens upon two distinct worlds, the greater world of men and the lesser world of women. Arun is being prepared for education and career, while girls are being raised for marriage. Uma, beyond her youth and prime days, is living with her parents, helping them with housekeeping, while her brother is studying in America. Mama was only sixteen at the time of her marriage and never went to school for education (16), while papa had already established himself as a lawyer after his education and training when he got married. Mama further recalls that during her younger days, girls were not allowed to have sweets, nuts or any such delicacies, a discriminatory attitude against women. Anything out of the ordinary would automatically go to the boys. Mama has lost her identity, and has got merged in the identity of Papa, and become Papa Mama, the two parts of one entity (13). There was a time when she existed on her own and would try, though surreptitiously, to indulge her innocent desires. Playing cards, tasting betel nuts and sharing laughter with friends were few such diversions. Needless to say that Papa can drink whisky and laugh heartily in the company of his friends. Gradually she acquired restraint, censure and tired decorum, under the impact of the heavy personality of Papa, who is such a tyrant that he does not allow one moment of inattention from his wife. He stands for authority and power. He is more than that. He controls the world like a master. The slaves must know his needs and mood without being told. Mama is totally cut off from her family and practically lives the life of an exile. Papa refuses to eat anything, unless Mama presents the same to him as an offering to a deity. After he finishes with the offered oranges, he is offered a finger bowl and a napkin. Mama sits back, derives an immense satisfaction that the offering is accepted at all and the ceremony is over (23). Such rituals are meant to assert and perpetuate the patriarchy.

The birth of a son, Arun, to Papa Mama, is a highly discriminatory phenomenon. Family has been expecting the birth of the son for a long son. There is an air of excitement, happiness and celebration. The birth of the second daughter, Aruna, was met with disappointment. Uma is withdrawn from school to help with the upbringing of the heir to the family name and fortune. In this male-dominant world, girls and their education are sacrificed at the altar of patriarchy. Uma is desperate for the continuation of her education. She goes to the principle of convent school, Mother Agnes. She promises to work harder and to pass all tests and exams and faints at the feet of the Mother, when no positive response comes from her. “Nor had she simply fainted—she was writhing, frothing a little at the mouth and moaning, banging her head to one side, then the other” (29). She is brought back from the school in the van. Mother Agnes’s many visits to the parents of Uma remain unsuccessful. Her mother blames the school and the teachers for filling her head with rubbish ideas. The nurses and the ayah as were good enough for the girls, but they cannot be trusted exclusively for the upbringing of the boy. He needs “proper attention” regarding the quality and quantity of his meals and nourishment. No laps or failure is acceptable. The whole household needs to be involved in this. A proper hierarchy, consisting of servants, ayah, Uma, Mama and Papa is established. Papa heads
this set up created for the rearing and nurturing of his son. Giving birth to Uma and Aruna is of no importance, but the birth of a sun has catapulted the status of Mama. She oozes with new found confidence and an extraordinary sense of achievement and pride.

Uma is presented and made to parade as a saleable commodity before the families of the prospective bridegrooms. The mothers and sisters of potential husbands are looking for fairer, taller and educated brides. In the bargain, Uma collects disgrace and humiliation. They are cheated by one family and deprived of dowry, without marriage ever taking place. Finally she is married off after the payment of dowry. It turns out that the old gentleman, Harish, is already married, has children, he simply is in need of money to run his business. Uma is brought back, without being touched by her husband. She is burdened with the disgrace and stigma of divorce (98). She has started having fits of hysteria. She is called and considered an idiot. One day she jumps off the boat into the river, but is saved just in time (114). Her father denies her an opportunity to work in a hospital as a matron, with Dr. Dutt. He does not ask for the opinion of Uma, as suggested by Dr. Dutt. Though he taunts her for using phone, “costs money, never earned anything in life, made me spend and spend, on her dowry and her wedding. Oh, yes, spend till I am ruined, till I am a pauper” (149).

Anamika is a distant cousin of Uma and Aruna. She is beautiful and charming and is compared to flowers and pearls. She stands for moderation and good sense. Anamika is brilliant in her studies. She wins a scholarship to Oxford. Patriarchal values don’t permit her to avail the opportunity of education in such a prestigious university. Instead, she is married off to a man much older than Anmika. At her in-laws, she is regularly beaten by her mother-in-law in the presence of her husband (71). She is required to work in the kitchen, cooking meals for the big joint family. Men are the first to eat and women eat after everyone else has eaten. Anamikaeats the remains from the pots, before scrubbing them. If the pots are not scrubbed and cleaned to the satisfaction of her mother-in-law, she has to clean them again. After she is free from the kitchen, she massages her mother-in-law. She is never permitted to go out with her husband. She never goes out of the house except for pooja with other women. Her beating causes a miscarriage and she is declared to be permanently unfit to bear children. One day a telegram brings the news of her sudden death by burning in the midst of different and differing narratives (153).

VIII. Conclusion:

The exhaustive analysis of the four novels of Desai in the light of deconstructive feminism has proved the major proposition of the study that in these novels patriarchy is held responsible for the misery, agony and anguish of the female characters. The novels highlight the extreme pain, loneliness in a comprehensive and graphic way. It is too obvious in the light of the study undertaken, that in a world ruled by patriarchy and the patriarchal values, the women cannot think of any privacy, the freedom to be themselves, can have no say in the major decisions of their lives. Their position is lesser and lower as compared to men. They are eternally sacrificed at the altar of patriarchy. The misery, suffering and the neurosis of Uma, Anamika, Bim, Mira Masi, Maya, Nanda Kaul, Illa Das are due to and because of patriarchy. Theirs are truly frail barks launched upon dark, treacherous, raging and stormy waters. These barks are bound to be battered and ultimately destroyed. The study has also shown that the novels of Desai have shattered
the myth of the superiority of men by showing them as inhuman tyrants, cheaters, selfish, greedy and worthless beings.

The study has shown that Desai’s novels have presented the psychological and social reality from the feminine perspective. In these novels female characters occupy the center place. These novels project and strengthen the feminist ideology to counter and undermine patriarchy. Her novels present the struggle of women to discover their true selves and identities and challenges involved in this quest, though many of them perish on this journey of self-realization. The fact that very critics have ever tried to these novels from this perspective, indicates the severity of the problem. Like the mothers and mothers-in-law of Mrs. Joshi, Anamika, Uma and Mira Masi, the critics also tend to take the plight of as normal and for granted. No wonder they decided not pay attention to these issues.

References:


