

# Feministic Approach: The Game of Power: Anita Desai's clear Light of the Day and Shobha De's Snapshots

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**Abstract**—This paper attempts to focus on their writings in feministic approach. Here depicted the struggle of individual to live in the society despite several forces suppressing their survival. Anita Desai, along with Shobha De are writes primarily women's novels—novels that are addressed to deal with women. Throughout their novels whose focuses on the personal struggles of anglicized, middle-class women in contemporary India as they attempt to overcome the societal limitation imposed by a tradition bound patriarchal culture. This paper will scrutinize woman's struggle for power as a basic demand of her sensibility.

**Index Terms**—Confrontation, Empowerment, Bildungsroman

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In fictional discourse, the simplistically dualistic conflict between good and evil, now has been strategically designed to manipulate and project the web of power politics between the strong and the weak: cultural, racial sexual, economic, ideological, political and specific confrontations. The historical context reveals that man is the traditional controller of power and woman the archetype of powerless. In the novels, *Clear Light of Day* and *Snapshots* woman's increased awareness through altered 'gender roles and gender identity' has projected her as serious contenders of power-politics. In these, the progressive ideologies of female empowerment have been achieved through the inscriptions of radical consciousness that has responded rationally to the ideological struggle of reclaiming and redefining herself. It would be wise to remember that state and economics are not then only powers that operate to oppress woman [1].

The battle between the sexes for domination and control is as old as creation. Power and powerless tend to identity with success and failure, knowledge and ignorance, superiority and inferiority, gender and sexual discrimination. In socio-psychological context, all forms of freedom and slavery uncover the precarious balance of power in all intimate and day –to-day interaction. The female characters of Anita Desai and Shobha De participated actively in this game of power of manipulate, transform and create new tradition for their advantage. By their powerful and authentic performance they re-define feminine archetypes.

In patriarchal literature adulthood has different connotation for man woman.

According to hidden gender norms, the social and psychological development of the female protagonist implies 'dependent, submissive and non-adult' behavior pattern. Thus, the so-called positive images of the 'good woman' are

negative in nature. 'Speech is knowledge' and knowledge is power. Females are deliberately muted or left ignorant to orchestrate man's supremacy in the political and economical power-game. Woman's indoctrination with the idea of adulthood as the emergence of 'female sexuality' more a 'danger that a power' and 'male sexuality as power' altered the meaning of growing up. Under the powerful male dominated institutions, women suffered because of their ignorance, non-adult attitude often eulogized by the masculine gender. Woman's sensibility marginally conscious of the need for power continued to enjoy security /male dominance at the cost of self- ownership. This paper will scrutinize woman's struggle for power as a basic demand of her sensibility.

Anita Desai's novel *Clear Light of Day* more womanist than feminist in nature picturize a moderate power struggle through altered 'identity' and 'gender' roles. Woman's desire to imitate man's role is embedded in her unconscious because at some point of time, she feels that man is privileged and power is concentrated in patriarchy. The novel reveals human tensions present between two sisters, Bim and Tara, and two brothers, Raja and Baba. Bim the eldest and now college teacher is left behind to shoulder the family responsibilities of Baba the imbecile brother and Mira Masi the alcoholic aunt. Tara had married Bakul and escaped from this life; Raja too, selfishly had married a Muslim girl and migrated to Hyderabad (Sindh) to live a life of opulence and comfort. The action begins with Tara's annual visit to her parental house and immediately, the power related confrontation between sisters becomes evident. Tara is made to feel her impotent status: Bakul her husband has to consume milkless tea but there is enough milk for Bim's pet cat. Bim's authority in household through her marital status and motherhood a psychology tutored by patriarchal power structure.

The opening pages of the novel reveal clearly that Bim is the most powerful character in the novel. In the game of power, Tara could never excel as she was always 'weak willed' and was never strong enough to 'face challenges'. In her childhood she was led by Bim and in her adulthood, she meekly follows her husband and children. The psychology of the weak had developed in her not because of any patriarchal control but because of her inherent weakness. Tara, never a serious contender had donned the mantle of gender identity very meekly as a woman, younger sister and a wife. Initially, she was an unconscious victim; but now she resents her door-mat status. Sexually she is more attractive but she also knows that Bim despite being ordinary appear, has exerted greater power on the opposite sex [2]. The reason of her popularity and power was her confidence and steadfast mission of life. In her younger days, she had repeatedly claimed, 'I won't marry. I shall earn my own living and look after Mira Madi and Baba and –and be independent'. After Raja's desertion she had accepted the new gender role of the family guardian and the bread-winner [3].

Anita Desai ensures to project through different episodes, Bim's progress from passivity to action. The symbolic gesture of pruning Tara's curls or wearing Raja's trousers is a signifier of the desire of resistance for woman's traditional roles; Bim seeks freedom from the limiting gender identity. Sexual politics tends to deprive her of power and she opposes it by opting for a behavior pattern that is a taboo for women. She smokes, of course, this offers her no power but it surely declares her autonomy. Bim decides to earn her own living and leads the life of a spinster but no aspersions can be cast on her 'singleness'. She grows up in the true sense. In this bildungsroman, she becomes the archetype of Shakti and knowledge. Bim, in the novel controls the power game; none in the novel, can really challenge, main, dwarf or suffocate her. Desai weaves Bim's intellectual, economic and spiritual rebellion into the narrative structure but avoids the issue of erotic longings, in woman. Desai is obliquely suggesting that a woman's power need not reside in woman's sexuality. The same thematic pattern is followed in all her novels.

The images of women radically altered by the modern feminist writers illustrate exploitation carried out not by males but females. In fact, the power-madness has trapped the females of the modern society. Shobha De's *Snapshot* project an urban society where men stand on the periphery and women battle for power and supremacy. The power-hungry female characters of the novel fly at each other throat, invent schemes to control and dominate over the weakness of their so-called friends [4].

The novel *Snapshot* unveils the life of six 'girls of Santa Maria High School, leading predictable mundane lives of domesticity and imagined bliss. Through predictable roles of mothers and wives, they have drifted to their respective world of routine marriage and divorce. Swati, one of the girls now residing in London, has been asked to write a 'bold and

meaty' serial on urban women plans a meeting with her school time friends at Reema's place. Others like Aparama, Surekha, Rashmi and Noor, despite their delirium for Swati decide to join the party because since their school days Swati always had 'some kind of power over' others. All she had to do 'snap her finger' and the rest of them 'jumped'. Undoubtedly, Swati is the most powerful female who demonstrates her control over males and females alike [6]. The relation between woman's power and motherhood had been established way back by patriarchy for personal gains. Women manipulated by social norms wound and insult each other. The process invariably diminishes female power [5]. Marriage 'a patriarchal enclosure' can no longer hold woman down. Marriage and motherhood symbols of parental authority and power are diffused by De through Rashmi, an unwed mother; Swati and Aparna are divorcees and yet sufficiently powerful to reject the sexuality of man. Swati may marry on her own terms but for Aparna 'husband is an awful' and dirty word, Reema uses her husband for her material comfort. The sanctity of marriage prescribed specially for women, is conveniently diluted by De's women. Reema enjoys a relationship with her brother-in-law; Noor's mother is man crazy, Surekha has a more satisfying relationship with a woman: Swati considers man to be a commodity that she can acquire from the open market. The basis issues and values of life have been totally transformed by these ladies. Man's loss had been woman's gain. With the awakening of the power consciousness, sexuality and economic independence, new sensibilities have been included in woman's personality. Power grabbing through ethical and non-ethical means, no longer remains to be the rights of man. Woman like her counterpart has realized the truth that all is fair in love and war. Power has ceased to remain a personal property of patriarchy. It is only Rashmi who remains physically and emotionally violated by male intrusion. Her family life a consequence of male power has been deeply affected. In the novel, she is the only one who despite her rebellion remains a victim.

## II. CONCLUSION

The analysis clearly uncovers the fact that Anita Desai and Shobha De are clearly concerned with the alignment of power that exerts physical, political, economic and social control over woman to fragment her. Each of these writers have recommended different means and methods though the result is the same. Offered liberates herself by profitably utilizing the power of her sexuality and knowledge; tradition bound Bim learns to manipulate her environment by formal education, economic self sufficiency and a change of gender identity and gender role; the six friends of *Snapshot* disregard male power totally by negating the norms of traditional female behavior. In fact, they prove that things that man can do better. They are neither deficient physically nor intellectually. They hold the rein of power firmly in their

hands. In these feminist or womanist novels one can see that though their progress is not very smooth yet they triumph ultimately through many tactical retreats. It becomes increasingly clear that man's powerful status had been destabilized and he is losing out in the game of power as he is finding himself incapable of dwarfing, maiming, victimizing and threatening woman for his personal gain. These Bildungsromantic novels concentrate on woman's realization of power-control and self-awareness.

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