

TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

Women Characters and Systematic Discrimination in Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*:

A Study in Cultural Psychoanalysis

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By

Sharmila Sharma

Roll No: 59/072

T.U. Regd. No: 6-2-0048-1685-2013

Exam Roll No: 480054

Department of English

Prithvi Narayan Campus, Pokhara

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Department of English

SUPERVISOR'S RECOMMENDATION

This is to certify that Ms. Sharmila Sharma with T.U Reg. No. 6-2-0048-1685-2013 has prepared her master's thesis entitled "Women Characters and Systematic Discrimination in Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting: A Study in Cultural Psychoanalysis*" under my supervision, following the format as specified by the Research Committee at the Department of English, Prithvi Narayan Campus, Pokhara. I, therefore, forward it to the Research Committee for the final evaluation.

.....

Dr. Min Pun

Associate Professor

Department of English

Prithvi Narayan Campus,

Pokhara

Date: 3 November 2021

TRIVHUVAN UNIVERSITY

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Department of English

APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis entitled “Women Characters and Systematic Discrimination in Anita Desai’s *Fasting, Feasting: A Study in Cultural Psychoanalysis*” submitted to the Department of English, Prithvi Narayan Campus, Pokhara by Ms. Sharmila Sharma has been approved by the undersigned members of the Evaluation Committee.

Members of the Research Committee:

Supervisor

Expert

Head

Department of English

Prithvi Narayan Campus

Pokhara

Date: -----

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Sharmila Sharma

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ABSTRACT

The major objective of this study is to analyze the culture-based discrimination against women in the Indian society and the American society that is portrayed in the novel *Fasting, Feasting* by Anita Desai. In the novel, the males discriminate their female counterparts systematically or institutionally because their cultural practices are deeply rooted in the society. In the study, the novel is interpreted from the perspective of cultural psychoanalysis. In this novel, in particular, this kind of discrimination is related to the psychological suffering of women in both societies. The study concluded that, through her novel, Desai has portrayed the women characters as domesticated secondary beings, or systematically discriminated entities. The portrayal of women characters like Uma, Anamika and other women characters signifies how the patriarchy is prevalent everywhere regardless of culture or place. The patriarchal societies put men on a higher position while women on the lower rank. So the patriarchal system, also considered an institutionalized social structure, frequently disadvantages women psychologically, socially and economically.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Anita Desai and Her Women Characters

The Context: Issues of Women

Anita Desai is a well-known literary figure in Indo-Anglican fiction. She is one of those who tried to understand closely the predicament of women as her works demonstrate “anxiety, anguish and psychological inadaptability which threatens individual’s identity” (Begum 579). Her fictional works show what type of family relationship is in two countries, India and the United States. In this novel, most of the part focused in the Indian society in which women are discriminated systematically or institutionally, that is, women are oppressed under the patriarchal system based on the deeply rooted Hindu culture. The major characters of this study are presented as living in a small town in India. The people in this town think that girls need to be educated but boys must be self-reliant because after marriage boys should look after their family. The whole family dependent on their income. For instance, in her *Fasting, Feasting*, the main character, Uma, is unmarried and the first part focuses on her life. She is the family older daughter, who lives with her brother Arun. In her whole life, she spends her life, looking after her family, specially her small brother. She shows her interest in study, but her family gives important to her interest while her father gives importance to Arun’s education. When Arun grows up, his father is serious about Arun’s placement in a university in the United States.

The story of Desai’s novel begins with Uma’s father and mother, instructing Uma to complete the household works, as for Ludmila Volna, it deals with “the condition of women” (1). Due to the arranged marriage of Uma’s father and mother, they have a happy married life. The flashback technique is used to narrate the story in the novel. When Uma and her sister Aruna were young, there was a big surprise as her mother was pregnant at her middle age. To their surprise, their father was hoping his wife to have a male child. For instance, he

does not like to abort a child, hoping a male child. Eventually, the mother gives birth to a son. After this, there is a change in Uma's life. Her father wants her to remain at home, taking care of the newly born brother. Although she was not good at study, she wanted to attend her school regularly. Her family did not support her to go to the school. This was the biggest surprise for her life.

The novel is divided in two parts. The first part is about all the condition of Indian society and how this society has an effect on Uma's life as she is a daughter who looks after the family, preparing food, washing clothes, taking care of her small brother and many more. So in the first part of the novel, the character of Uma is shown as a dominated character due to her gender. There are also other interesting characters in the novel. Ramu-Bhai is another character who is a very positive character, and always supports Uma. He always motivates and tries to show the good time for her, but he is banished by her family. Mira Masi is the next character who is the religious person and tells Uma the tales of Lord Krishna. She always said to Uma leave this family and come to her in Ashram and be free from this chain of family domination. Uma's father and mother all the time forced her to marry a boy and settle down. On the first occasion, the boy came to look for Uma, but he liked Aruna instead of Uma. Surprisingly, on the second occasion, Uma's parents forced her to marry another boy, but when the boy's family asked for the dowry, Uma's parents cancelled her marriage. On the third occasion, when Uma was married, her husband had a wife already.

In this novel, there is also another girl named Anamika who is Uma's cousin. Anamika is also dominated in the family like Uma, revealing "the striking fact that educational qualification and degrees did not until recently impel women to create their space in the out world and acquire self-sufficiency" (Rahman 82). For instance, Anamika is a talented girl and has received a scholarship at Oxford University for her advanced study, but her parents force her to get married. The family wants her to have a child as she is not

interested to have a child. The family treats her like a servant. At the end, she dies by burning. It was mysteriously killed by her in-laws. In the novel, the dead body of her is not described and there is no description of the suspect. But her ashes can be seen floating into to the river. In this case, Hanifa Rahman illustrates the character of Anamika in this way,

Uma's polar opposite, her graceful, beautiful and brilliant cousin, Anamika's fate is far worse. While Uma's failure in her school exams pressurizes her to stay at home, Anamika does so excellently in her final school exams, that she wins a scholarship to Oxford. Yet Anamika lives in a patriarchal society that considers higher education to be the prerogative of males, and marriage as the major preoccupation of females.

Thus the scholarship obtained by her is used only as a means to win her a husband who is considered an equal to the family's prestige. (82)

In this way, both characters, Uma and Anamika, suffer a lot as being females, facing an unfriendly world, dominated by the patriarchal society.

In the second part of the novel, the story revolves around Arun who is Uma's privileged brother. In the same family, Uma had to leave the school because of her family, but her family is serious about her brother, getting a placement in a university in the United States. Eventually, he is successful to attend a university in Massachusetts and lives with his American patron during his holidays. His family puts every effort for Arun to settle down in the United States that brings into focus "the state of their oppression in a male dominated patriarchal framework" (Rahman 81). However, Arun is not interested in the American ways of life. He has also an interesting experience of being with Melanie whom he is upset at her behavior. She is also troubled by her family in the United States. Like he experienced about his family life in India, she also felt distant from her family. So both have the similar feelings about their family, spending their most of time alone and isolated. In addition, he wants to

escape from the western ways of life, but he cannot do anything because of his family pressure.

Desai's novel focuses more on the oppression of women that is based on the Indian cultures as the oppression of women in the United States is based on psychology, considering women as "domesticated secondary beings with little scope to open up themselves in society as well in family" (Begum 578). Through her novel, Desai wants to say that women are considered the domesticated secondary beings. The oppression of women happens in the family, which is portrayed through the characters of Uma, Melanie and her mother Mrs. Patton. This proves the fact that women are those who are oppressed everywhere no matter where they belong to or the type of culture they have. So this also signifies that the patriarchy is all encompassing regardless of place or culture, indicating that men are superior to women and women as inferior to men. In this way, the patriarchal societies impact women in three ways: economically, socially and psychologically.

In this study, the pathetic condition of women characters is portrayed in Desai's novel, which brings into focus "the interaction of women's traumatic experiences, the psychological plight of the female characters" (Rahman 81). Uma is one of the examples of victimized women as the family including her father who does not allow her to go to the school rather he wants his daughter to take care of him, her mother and her small brother. This is an inhuman treatment by her parents. In contrast, her sister Aruna is treated better by her parents. Her sister Aruna is more beautiful, intelligent and confident due to her parents' behavior towards Aruna. Similarly, Uma is also treated differently regarding her marriage proposals. Quite differently, her brother Arun is treated well by the same parents as he is supported well by his parents to pursue higher education in the United States. In the similar way, like Uma, Melanie who suffers from bulimia is also treated badly by her parents.

The different treatments shown towards their children indicate that the Indian culture gives value to sons. It means that having sons are more advantageous than having daughters. This is the psychology of the Indian culture. There are many reasons for this. The first one is that the sons have better opportunities outside their home. Similarly, sons would support their parents in their old age; sons do not require any dowry; sons are the only ones who can perform the death rituals. These are some of the examples that make the sons more valuable to their parents. In the psychology of the Indian people, having sons are more advantages than having daughters. So, in Desai's novel, the male characters show the negative mentality towards female as the novel can be viewed as having a systematic discrimination upon women characters. In this study, the concept of cultural psychoanalysis developed by theorists like Harry Stack Sullivan and Erich Fromm to analyze the novel by Desai. They argue that a person and his or her culture interact with each other, creating an approach called a cultural psychoanalysis.

Review of Literature

Many critics interpreted Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* in different ways from different perspective since its publication. Their views have been discussed in the following paragraphs. Regarding the world portrayed by Desai in her novel, she focuses on the themes like loneliness, betrayal and loyalty. The novel is viewed in this way, "The book is an extensive study Indian upper middle-class culture. It compares the lives of people living within India with those of Indians residing outside India. The novel is character driven while it focuses on the theme of gender bias and parental expectation" (Indiabookstore, para. 2).

Interestingly, the images of food have been used by the creative writers like Desai whose idea of food is important for an individual's life. Sathish Kumar Vellamuthu has studied this novel about food and its role in an individual's life as he argues:

The novels of Margaret Atwood and Anita Desai have a profound impact on the readers. The main aspect of their writing is to present the condition of women in the patriarchal society. However, Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* have innumerable images of food. This project aims to highlight how these writers have represented food and how it plays a major role in the life of individual. (66)

Here, Desai's idea of food and its relation to an individual's life is different from that of the women writers of the west. She emphasized on the humanistic type of feminism while the western writers emphasized more on the forms of feminism. She is more interested to the man-woman relationship in the Indian context. In this way, her women characters are closer to accepting the patriarchal norms and values though they look for individual freedom. In her novels, the women characters are in dilemma as they accept the patriarchal culture as well as protest against it silently. So through her novels, she wants to explore the human psyche rather than a direct fight against the patriarchy.

Another critic Afroz Ashrafi views Desai's novel as yet another extension of what Desai is basically known for and the canvass of the novel that remains confined to the quest of the meaning in a life dominated by the unspoken dilemmas and unseen dream. Desai writes on the hope, entertained by the complex feminine obsessions mysteriously that represented the inability to come to terms with the fact of circumstances and remain grappled with an unexpected desire to determine the direction of life. She plunges into the feminine intricacy but fails to suggest the thought mechanism of the fair sex, being a woman herself has not been able to resolve the contradiction permeating the women's world as Ashrafi notes,

The novels *Fasting, Feasting* by Anita Desai and *Half a Life* by V.S Naipaul share themes, character constellation, and structural characteristics. Both novels deal with sons who resist their father's dietary practices, who are raised in post-liberation India

and later emigrate to the west, and whose lives highlight the political meanings of food and appetite in India. And both novels are driven by the tension between food and appetite, and dietary restrictions and self. (qtd. in Wiegandt 126)

Thus, Ashrafi means to say that sons and daughters have dietary practices in the Indian society. For instance, while sons go against the dietary practices adopted by their fathers, daughters follow such practices in their habits. This shows that women in the Indian society are more loyal to their culture. In this case too, Wiegandt claims,

I argue that understanding the politics of food and appetite in these novels requires a postcolonial approach that exposes how a history of domination has charged material practices with political meanings. I show that Desai's and Naipaul's novels implicitly relate the fates of their protagonists to Indian nationalism's ambivalence about whether to embrace the meat-eating of the former British colonizers or promote vegetarianism and fasting elements of national identity. Both novel's point of references is Mohandas Gandhi, who first made meat-eating and both protagonists struggle with the legacy of their fathers' who either rejected or embraced Gandhi's call for a meatless diet. In this way the novels offer different critiques of the politics of food and appetite in post-liberation India. (Wiegandt 132)

Desai's underlying meaning of describing dietary practices is to discuss the politics of food and appetite in the post-liberation India. She is of the opinion that fasting is closely related to the national identity of India. It is related to the movement for independence in India.

In Desai's novel, Arun, the male character, goes against his father's habit of eating meat. The politics here is that the habit of not eating will be beneficial for the economy of the family and the country. In this sense, he is the follower of Gandhi who was against the meat eating. He was a vegetarian as a supporter of women as described in the following lines,

In Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*, the male protagonist turns against his father's practice of meat-eating. The novel suggests that the politics of food benefits men at the cost of the physical and mental starvation of women and that Gandhi usurped the position of women when he used vegetarianism to fashion men as representatives of a feminized Indian polity. Gandhi's focus on vegetarianism also reinforced the caste system. At the same time the novel points out that vegetarianism is an alternative to the unlimited appetite associated with western modernity. In Naipaul's *Half a Life*, the protagonist rejects his father's culinary and sexual self-restraint, which was inspired by Gandhi as a strategy, reserved for Brahmins, to maintain status under colonial rule. *Half a Life*'s political agenda is quite different from that *Fasting, Feasting*: it critiques Gandhi as well as Indian traditions of self-restraint. (Wiegandt 133)

In this way, Desai's novel deals with the politics of food and appetite. She indicates the differences between the food practices of the east and the west. The western culture views appetite as sexually not restrained. As Gandhi was in favour of self-restraint regarding women and eating, the western culture of viewing women is opposite to what Gandhi did for his society.

By way of comparison, the characters in Desai's novel *Fasting, Feasting* are of Hindu background and – like Layla's *Family in Madras on Rainy Days* – part of an elite social class. Because of their similar class positioning the Hindu Uma and Muslim Layla experience patriarchy in remarkably comparable ways – both being kept in a dependent position through the denial of opportunities available to the men in their families. For instance, neither Uma nor Layla are given the opportunities to go to school. This point is emphasized in *Fasting, Feasting*, in which Uma's brother Arun, despite not being particularly academic, is sent to a university in the United States because of "the value of a foreign degree, the opening this would create later in life, the opportunities" (Desai 68) for him, while a college education is

considered unnecessary for a daughter. Indeed, When Uma's cousin Anamika is awarded a scholarship to Oxford University, the offer letter is considered a passport the marriage as "naturally her parents would not countenance her actually going abroad to study just when she was of an age to marry- everyone understand that, and agreed" (Desai 68-69). The third person narrator deploys a sarcastic tone to describe the community's social disapproval of an Oxford education for bright young women in contrast to their enthusiasm about a rather unpromising young man attending a less prestigious institution.

According to T. Ravichandran, Desai's novel differentiates the Indian culture from the American culture. As the title of the novel suggest, the Indian culture represents 'fasting' and the American culture 'feasting'. This difference can be seen in two characters in Desai's novel: Uma represents the Indian culture and Arun represents the American culture.

Ravichandran has elaborated this contrast here,

Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*, as it is implied in the title itself, is a novel of contrast between two cultures, the one, Indian, known for its pious and longstanding customs representing 'fasting' and the other, American, a country of opulence and sumptuousness epitomizing 'feasting.' The plot unveils through the perceptions of Uma in India, and of Arun, in America. Both of them are entrapped, irrespective of the culture and enveloping milieu, by oppressive bonds exercised by their own parents, Mama papa. They are just mama papa or papa mama but remain nameless throughout the novel. Yet this namelessness does not indicate their anonymity but signifies their universality. They are the prototypical parents found everywhere in the middle-class families of India, who discuss, plan, plot, control, govern the activities of their children, be it marriage or going abroad for studies. And in their over-dominating concern, they tend to ignore the inadvertent possibility of entrapping their own offspring. Thus, they do not give contingency to the fact that perhaps their

children too can have a life to call their own. May be even their own preoccupations, their own priorities, maybe an agenda for themselves that goes beyond what they actually want for their children? (122)

Thus, Desai's novel clearly demarcates between two cultures: one is the Indian culture through the character of Uma and another is the American culture through the character of Arun. The children of the same parents have adopted two different cultures as they grow up, associating their relationship to their upbringing and the treatment that they receive from their parents. Ashley Nicole Batts has a different opinion about Desai's novel. For him, the novel is a modern fiction that does not deal with the traditional subject matters. It is described in the following lines:

Anita Desai does not easily fit into traditional molds, and the scholarly criticism written in references to her body of work illustrates this by its variety of themes, topics and opinions. Most scholars agree that Desai uses mundane, everyday activities and the seemingly ordinary domain in order to portray something greater and universal, in an existentialist sense, although identifying and describing exactly what that something greater is where most of the consensus among critics ends. (12)

According to Batts, the subject matter of the novel taken by Desai is not serious, but the seemingly ordinary subject becomes "something greater and universal" that can be contrasted between the Indian and American ways of life.

The critics have conflicting views about Desai's fiction. For instance, in her fiction, Desai is "a mistress of synecdoche, a writer whose delicate portraits of the quotidian resonate outwards to convey tumultuous swathes of history" (Hunter 3). But K. D. Verma has a positive view of Desai as a woman writer because she has an important role in the formation of postcolonial literature as she notes, "the poststructuralist and postmodernist correction in which Desai's work participates brings out the moral and psychological truth of history –

collectivity's overassertive narcissism and overindulgent egotism" (3). As mentioned above, Desai's women characters are mundane, but they are of great importance to the study of diverse cultures. The critics have taken Desai's women characters positively as they are powerfully considered a powerful agenda.

According to Namita Mohanty and Ananya Pratihari, the women characters portrayed by Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* and Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe* explores the various feminist vision of life asserted in these novels, based on their attitudes toward the situations and the traditional roles they play. Both Desai and Nair started writing in their moments of emotional outburst. The middle class family stories being their forte, both of them are not primarily obsessed with women's despair. Desai's novel depicts the mental conflicts winding the protagonist whereas Nair makes her characters suffer and enables them to come out of it. In these novels, Desai's heroines brood, weep and sink in grief and gloom but Nair's characters carve out strength from their suffering and fight back their impasse.

In this study, Desai's women characters are varied and not just the Indian housewives, they are also experienced as non-mothers. They represent multiple characters, allowing her characters to choose their femininity and conflicting ways that they choose to interact with the male domain. Overall, the novel is about the women characters who suffer from the patriarchal society, which involves a systematic or institutional discrimination, based on the cultures that they are adapted to.

Organization of the Study

In this study, there are three chapters. The first chapter provides a background to the study. The chapter briefly introduces the author Desai, her novel and its plot, characters and themes of the novel. The chapter also includes the major issues raised in the study as the novel focuses on the oppression of women in the Indian society that is based on its cultures.

In this study, the issues of women in India are associated with the psychological suffering of women in the United States.

The second chapter is an analysis the women characters in Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*, applying the perspectives of psychoanalysis in terms of cultural effects on the characters. The study has adopted the theories and concepts of many cultural psychoanalysts in order to answer the research questions and justify the claim made in the study.

The last chapter is a conclusion of this study. The chapter concludes the study, summarizing the whole discussion of the novel. This study has aimed to establish a link between the specifics of the Indian culture how cultural psychoanalysis affect the women relating to the quality of attachment in a parent-child relationship. It was thus looked into the characteristics of the position of women and the gender bias that hinders their prospects.

CHAPTER 2

Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*: A Culture-Based Analysis

Cultural Psychoanalysis

Originally, 'psychoanalysis' was used as a medical term to treat mental illness. Now, the term is used to analyze the inner workings of texts. It is also used in the cultural aspect of a text such as arts, literature, film, painting and many other art works. This study aims to connect psychoanalysis and culture to analyze Desai's novel *Fasting, Feasting* from the perspective of feminism in relation to cultural psychoanalysis. In this study, feminism and cultural psychoanalysis are combined in terms of the theories of identity, which are discussed based on the theories of identities, difference and gender developed by Kathryn Woodward and Judith Butler. So based on their theories, the study has discussed the problematic question of the women in the novel.

Cultural psychoanalysis offers a perspective to deal with topics related to cultural psychology for textual analysis. The cultural and social factors are important for psychoanalytic theory and practice. This study has discussed the attempts made by the previous studies to bridge psychoanalysis and culture. There is also another attempt to bridge psychoanalysis and anthropology that emerged in the 1920s until the 1950s. To further develop this theory, Harry Stack Sullivan and Erich Fromm developed an approach called 'cultural Psychoanalysis.' They worked on the sociocultural agenda in psychoanalysis as they saw the role of culture in the psychological development that is relevant to other aspects of the theory. They gave emphasis to the connection between culture and the person, establishing another approach known as 'integrationist' approach. They also developed the concept of culture that critiques cultural and social values and norms. The discussion of culture focuses on diversity of aspects that ignores cultural and social values that is prevalent

in human experiences. Thus, the perspective developed for this study is based on the ideas of Sullivan and Formm. In the following lines, Carola H. Mann has illustrated their insights:

From its beginning interpersonal psychoanalysis was eminently suited to address theoretical and clinically issues when working with patients from different cultures. The open-ended quality of the detailed inquire was a particularly useful tool to get to know the "stranger," as American social scientists of the fifties and sixties were quick to acknowledge. It therefore comes as a surprise how few interpersonalists have addressed themselves to cross-cultural issues. Particularly lacking has been attention to countertransference problems in analyzing patients from other cultures. In addition, the impact of the cultural climate on the analytic process itself has rarely been explored. As cross-cultural contacts in the consulting room have become more frequent it is important for analysts to consider that developmental sequences, family relationships, interpersonal distance, concepts of time and openness to emotional sharing may differ from what Western psychoanalysis considers to be "normal".

(309)

So, for Mann, the interpersonal psychoanalysis is closely related with the clinical issues such as later it was further developed by other psychoanalysts. One of the examples is Freud's theories of psychology. Although Freud's theory was developed from an observation of individual phenomena, he applied this phenomenon to the study of society, religion, culture and arts. He viewed these issues from the perspective of psychoanalysis. Having considered Freud's theories as an approach to literary texts, this study shows that his theories can be applied to the study of social issues and many others. His theories are still relevant in the study of texts, including literary works.

Later, the anthropologists have also adopted and applied psychoanalysis as an approach to see the issues of human behavior such as religion, sexuality, culture and so on.

They took advantage of psychoanalytic insight, but they did not copy the Western models of psychoanalysis. For instance, in *All the Mothers Are One*, Stanley Kurtz has explored “the psychology of Hinduism, opening with his account of his field discovery of a ‘new’ Hindu goddess” (16). Kurtz has interpreted Hindu goddesses as mothers, transforming human identities, showing them as powerful as Hindu goddesses.

In this study, psychoanalysis has been used as tool to study the cultures of many societies in the world. For instance, Desai’s novel is an example of this where the eastern and western cultures can be studied from the perspective of psychoanalysis. So Desai’s novel has been studied from the standpoint of cultural psychoanalysis as psychoanalysis can be related with other aspects of the society.

The Condition of Women Characters

In Desai’s *Fasting, Feasting*, the condition of women characters is pathetic. They are systematically victimized by the male counterparts. For instance, the major character Uma who is the eldest daughter of a middle class family in a small town in India. Her appearance is not attractive and even not intelligent mentally. Her father is playing the role of boss who takes all decisions on family matters that includes the decisions about his children’s every lives. Not only this, her parents start treating her inhumanly, considering her as an imperfect daughter. After her brother Arun is born, her parents ask her to quit her school to look after them and her small brother. She requests her teacher to talk to her parents to let her go back to school, but her teacher is unable to convince Uma’s parents about this. Desai’s main concern in this novel is to illustrate the condition of women in India in particular and the condition of women in the world in general. To discuss the condition of women in India, the Western term ‘feminism’ does not fit into the interpretation of Desai’s novel because, as Vrinda Nabar argues, "feminism hasn't even begun in any real sense in India" (6). According to Nabar, the Indian socio-cultural setting is quite different to the socio-cultural setting of the

West. She discovered that the Indian socio-cultural context is unique because its history is "the extent of the insistence on such discrimination, the preference given to boys over girls as being historically and traditionally prescribed and therefore indisputable" (9). In this way, what Nabar says is closely related to Desai's novel in the sense that when the characters are observed closely, they are typically Indians in their nature.

In contrast to Uma, her sister Aruna is the second daughter of family. Aruna is more beautiful, intelligent and confident than Uma. Aruna is also bright in her studies. Their parents do not treat their two daughters equally. Although Aruna is treated not badly by her parents, she is luckier than Uma as she has more opportunities than Uma. When marriage proposals are poured in for Uma, the boys rather like Uma's cousin Anamika and Aruna. Anamika is beautiful and talented, so she got opportunity to study in Oxford University. But her parents force her to get married and settle down. The problem in India is that Anamika is a girl, so she has to settle down by pleasing her husband. The patriarchal society in India does not allow women to choose their own lives. After her marriage, she fails to make her husband and family happy. Eventually, after twenty-five years of mistreatment from husband and her in-laws, she is burned to death. During her funeral ceremonies, as it is described in the novel, "the sun is rapidly turning from a small white disc like a shell in the sand to a shimmering blur like a fire in full daylight" (155). It is not mentioned in the novel, but she was killed by her in-laws. Even after this incident, her parents do not want to investigate the case.

On the other hand, the parents of the poor girl Uma stop looking for a boy for her marriage. Uma is not beautiful, which does not mean that she should be treated inhumanly. The patriarchal order of the society does not support ugliness in women. This is a typical traditional Hindu culture that is responsible to continue the patriarchal order in the society. Uma remains unmarried, which is considered outcast in the Indian society because "Hindu marriage is a sacrament -- for the husband one among many, but for the wife the only one

through which she can acquire spiritual gains. ... If a grown up woman dies without this sacrament she roams about after her death as an evil spirit" (Mondal). Like the character Uma in Desai's novel, there is a mythical character who longs for her husband, but her mother repeatedly exclaiming, "Oh, no! U ma!" (Desai 123). In Desai's novel, Uma's mother never does this exclamation for the sake of Uma. She rather stops further arrangements of marriage for Uma because she cannot offer a dowry for Uma's marriage. This is what the patriarchal order of the society is expected for. In contrast, the mythical mother does everything for her daughter Uma. In this sense, the mythical mother takes care of her daughter and does not fall under the patriarchal order. Although the mother in the novel does not speak up the expression "Oh, no!" like the mythical mother, but it is clearly sensed that the literary mother Desai does through her novel. She does for all the oppressed women in India and in the world. In this sense too, she stands against the patriarchal order of the society.

In the similar way, in Desai's novel, Melanie is struggling with diseases like bulimia and anorexia, but her parents do not take care of her. Melanie is also difficult like Arun's sister Uma. Arun finds similarity between Malanie and his sister Uma in the sense that both parents are careless for their daughters. Both daughters suffer from their parents and neglected by the society as well. In this way, the women characters in the novel are portrayed as dominated characters who fall under the patriarchal social order.

Cultural and Psychological Impact on Women

In Desai's novel, the gender bias can easily be discovered, which are seen from the perspective of cultural psychoanalysis. The women characters in this novel are the victims of the traditional cultures of Hindu religion. This study has attempted to justify the claim that the cultural and psychological impacts are upon the women characters because women are left behind and oppressed. The novel is based on the periphery of Indian culture. The Indian people believe that men are still viewed to be the breadwinners and parents think that their

sons will help them with the income and household costs. On the other hand, a daughter is since her birth thought to belong to another family because she, after her wedding and sometimes even sooner, joins the house of her in-laws. This makes the parents to invest on sons for the future. The religious reasons that speak in favor of sons are that having a son is crucial for a Hindu man for it is his son who lights the burial pyre, providing his father with proper rites in accordance with Hindu beliefs. Furthermore, having a son also ensures a continuation of the family name. No wonder that a married couple without sons is looked upon with pity, especially upon the wife as she is usually blamed for the misfortune. It is also considered normal when women are dominated by the family. The novel is mainly focused on the Indian society, no matter where the story takes place.

It can be said that Uma's family is a typical modern Indian family. For instance, they live according to modern standards but still have traditional thinking, especially of what is or what is not appropriate for a girl and a boy. It is expected that a man shall take charge of women and protect them. In the psychology of the Indian people, having sons is more advantageous than having daughters. The reasons behind it is that the family will have better prospects if they have sons because the sons are considered the breadwinners for the family. Similarly, when there are marriages for the children, the sons do not require dowry. The sons will support their parents in their old age and perform rituals when they will die. In beginning of the novel, Uma's parents have only two daughters: the older one is Uma who is an obedient if somewhat slow-learning and clumsy girl, the younger one is Aruna who is self-confident, clever and pretty. The news that their mother is pregnant is very embarrassing as late pregnancies in India tend to be but because of a chance of being it finally a long-wished-for a son it is not aborted even though the mother suffers excruciatingly all through the pregnancy. The birth of Arun changes others in the family as well. The mother has an air around her of pride and of a highest achievement there could be in the life of a Hindu woman.

The gender bias is prevalent in Desai's novel. In this case, Karen Lumsden discusses the gender bias towards women through this novel. He argues that the female participation in the male-dominated 'boy racer' culture is not new. He further claims that little is known about girls who join male-dominated subcultures in which girls are considered peripheral participants and boys are considered masculine physically (80). Thus, his study provides an analysis of gender, which is understood as per formative and Connell's notions 'hegemonic masculinity' and emphasized femininity' frame the analysis (81). Lumsden has elaborated his discussion of gender bias in the following lines:

In order to be viewed as authentic participants, females were required to act like 'one of the boys through their style of dress, driving, language and attitudes. They internalized the gender norms of the culture rather than resisting them explicitly, for fear of being excluded from the group. However, the feminine ways in which they modified their cars allowed them to retain an element of femininity within the world of 'boy racers'. Thus, 'girl racers' resourcefully negotiated their way through the culture by employing a combination of complex strategies involving compliance, resistance and cooperation with the masculine values of the group. Findings are presented from participant observation, semi-structured and ethnographic interviews with members of the racer culture in Aberdeen, Scotland, and semi structure interviews with members of 'outside' groups. (83)

Here, Lumsden discusses the boy's masculinity to show that girls cannot do what the boys do. So the female characters are not able to do what they want. Because in the psychology of Indian people, men are given priority over women. Men can easily do whatever they want because they are protected by the society and evil people because they have masculinity power. Nobody can touch them. But female can be insecure if they go out alone. In this case too, the psychology of female is biased in terms of sex.

In the discussion of cultural psychoanalysis, the term 'sexism' is relevant. It means that any sort of institutional discrimination against women that is based on a person's sex. The beginning of the term is unknown, but it is believed to have emerged during the 1960s until the 1980s with the second wave of women's movement. It is based on a belief that one type of sex is superior to another type of sex. For instance, males are considered superior to females. The concept of sexism was originally developed to end the discrimination or prejudice based on one's sex. So it came to existence for raising consciousness of the discriminated sex such as oppressed girls and women. Desai, through her novel, has raised this consciousness of women in India and the United States.

The concept of sexism is further developed by Peter Glick and Susan T. Fiske in their theory of ambivalent sexism. According to their theory, the relationship between men and women is ambivalent, encompassing two attitudes on sex: one is hostile and another benevolent (496). This is directly related to the attitudes of male counterparts. While hostile sexism is expressed in the form of antipathy towards women, benevolent sexism is expressed in the form of patronizing attitudes towards women (499). For instance, in Desai's novel, the father has two attitudes towards his own daughters. He is negative towards Uma, but he is positive towards Aruna. In this way, the father has ambivalent attitudes towards his daughters.

In the theory of ambivalent sexism, the priority is given to the role of men because the theory is based on the attitudes of males. The attitudes are categorized from the male's perspective. In addition, the theory is purely based on the patriarchal social order. Even if Desai is a woman writer from India, she has written her novel from the perspective of ambivalent sexism theory because she has created two sets of sexist attitudes: antipathy and benevolent.

In this way, this study has focuses on the ambivalent relationships of a male towards his counterparts. For instance, in Desai's novel, Uma's father's attitudes towards his two daughters as he discriminates systematically have been taken to justify the issues of women characters raised in the study. In addition, the theory of ambivalent sexism is associated with the cultural psychoanalysis in order to analyze Desai's novel.

CHAPTER 3

Conclusion: A Systematic Discrimination against Women

This study has aimed to establish a link between the specifics of the Indian culture and how cultural psychoanalysis has an effect on women, especially on the quality of attachment in a parent-child relationship. It was thus looked into the characteristics of the position of women and the gender bias that hinders their prospects. In Desai's novel, this aspect of relationship has been shown in the fictional form as the role of patriarchy can be considered a systematic or institutional discrimination. For instance, Uma's life story was used to demonstrate this connection since it was used to describe how gender bias affected her life and damaged her relationships with her parents.

In the novel, how cultural psychoanalysis affected the mindset of people towards women. The story is based on the Indian society, which is the patriarchal society, institutionalized by the males. In this society, males are superior to females. So patriarchy is something that is related to the male's domain, which discriminates the females systematically based on the cultural practices. It means that, in the society and family, men hold the power and women are excluded from it. Many theorists hold diverse views about whether patriarchy is a social construct or just a contrasting gender issue.

In the novel, when mother gave birth two daughters, the father was not happy. If the mother follows what her husband wants, she became pregnant for the sake of happiness of her husband. The mother gave birth to the third child as a son although there was risk to the mother at the middle of her age. When father found out that his son was coming to his family, he started planning for son's future. He made a name for his son. When the mother gave birth to the son, the father told everyone that there should not be no shortage of care for his son. As a result, he did not let Uma to go to school for the sake of his son Arun. Being the oldest daughter, it was expected from Uma to help the family with small errands even though she

was just a child. Her parents diverted her attention from her study to fulfill their wishes and she obediently listened to their commands. But, the day Arun was born was perhaps the happiest day in his father's life.

However, the feeling of happiness was soon exchange for worries about his son's progress, diet, education and future. As his father wanted to be sure that his only son get the best of everything. He watched over Arun's achievement and made a step-by-step plan for him. Everything was for Arun as scheduled, including when and what he should eat, when and how and with whom he can play and this planning obsession. His constant need of control over Arun's life got worse as Arun entered a school. If his son refused to eat eggs and meat, a privilege his father was so proud of. Not only Uma's family, another character Anamika's family also did not let Anamika go to the university even though she got a scholarship. Her family forced her to marry. After her marriage, she did not find peace in her new family. In this new family also, she could not find happiness. In the patriarchal society, the family only used to worry about their daughters' marriage. After marrying their daughters, the family will consider their responsibilities being completed. The same case happened in the case of Anamika, too. Eventually, Anamika was burned to death. But her family did not question why this happened. However, they knew how much Anamika's in-laws dominated her. From this novel, the mindset of people towards women is negative.

In conclusion, the study has interpreted Desai's novel from the perspective of cultural psychoanalysis in which women are treated inhumanly by the family, especially the male counterpart. The male characters such as Uma's father involves in a systematic discrimination that he performs towards women. For instance, Uma's father is dominant over his mother and daughters. Uma represents the discriminated women of India in particular and the dominated women of the world in general.

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