

# ANITA DESAI'S FASTING FEASTING AS A RESERVOIR OF PAIN: A SUBALTERN PERSPECTIVE

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## Abstract:

*This paper explores the subaltern perspective in Anita Desai's novel Fasting, Feasting, focusing on the intricate portrayal of pain and suffering experienced by marginalized characters. Through the lives of Uma and Arun, Desai delves into the socio-cultural constraints and gendered expectations that shape their existence. The novel vividly depicts the oppressive structures of a patriarchal society, highlighting the silent suffering and resilience of its subaltern characters. By examining the nuanced representation of their inner turmoil and external struggles, this study aims to uncover the layers of suppression and confrontation embedded in Desai's narrative. To a long extent, it can be seen that her novels present the characters' agony due to the feeling of oppression, marginalization, and gender discrimination. Anita Desai's writing emphasizes the societal and cultural effects leading to pain in the characters' lives. The present paper deals with the analytical study of her most popular novel Fasting Feasting. It is an indicator of the clash of different cultures which unknowingly presents the reality of a woman's life and how she is considered other in India and foreign countries like America.*

## Keywords:

*subaltern, patriarchy, oppression, marginalization, gender discrimination*

## Introduction:

Being an acclaimed Indian novelist; Anita Desai has crafted a diverse array of novels that summon readers into the distinct landscape of otherness present in the life of the characters. The analysis underscores how Fasting, Feasting serves as a poignant commentary on the broader issues of gender inequality and social injustice, offering a profound understanding of the subaltern experience in contemporary

Indian literature. This research employs the lenses of subaltern studies to unravel the agony of life. An Indian-born fine fiction writer in Indian English Literature living abroad and teaching in various renowned universities outside Indian territory; Anita Desai focuses on the existential dilemma of human beings leading pain in their life through her prominent novels. Desai is famous for addressing women's experiences in the domestic realm especially those associated with middle-class, living in urban areas, setting the theme of her works in post-colonial India. She encounters discrimination and social prejudice and, suffers a distorted sense of Identity. Anita Desai successfully draws a painful portrait of tragedy by using various literary devices like different images, symbols, metaphors, and myths bearing the interior region of human sight and suppressed desires, which are under the situation's demand. The multifaceted landscape of the writing of Anita Desai weaves with the profound insights of subaltern theory and the novel Fasting Feasting itself shows paradox through its name as the terms fasting and feasting used in the title of the novel have opposite meanings. Fasting shows lack of food, and hunger whereas feasting means a lot of food. Fasting Feasting presents the story of two families from different countries and societies. One family is Indian whereas another is American. In the novel, the common themes are present in both families. Patriarchy is the first common theme which is described very well in the novel, then another is gender discrimination followed by oppression and marginalization.

## Methodology:

The present paper research methodology employed in this study combines qualitative analysis and literary criticism to explore the thorny back-and-forth of Indian women's narratives, subaltern theory, and the literary

brilliance of Anita Desai's work, specifically focusing on the novel *Fasting Feasting*. The qualitative analysis involves a detailed examination of the characters, particularly Uma, Anamika, Mira Masi, Mamma, and Mrs. Patton utilizing the major themes of subaltern literature. The novel deals with the various themes of subaltern theory like oppression, marginalization, gender discrimination, inferiority complex, etc. One can easily understand the narrative in the novel through the subaltern theory. The female intellectual has a confined task that she must not disown with a flourish. The research study follows the APA style manual for the references. Literary criticism is used to dissect the narrative structures, linguistic elements, and symbolism, and provides an insight into the broken desires and conflicts of characters caused by subordinate conditions.

**Discussion:**

The heart of this research lies in exploring the pain in Anita Desai's *Fasting Feasting*. The lack of love and deprivation, isolation and alienation, suppression and subjection, and submission and silence characterize the lives of the subaltern, even when they battle to rise, they feel restrained and overpowered by their subject positions. So, this ultimately creates a tragic situation in the lives of the novel's characters, further leading to a reservoir of pain.

Before inferring the pain in the novel let's have a glance at the story. It revolves around the lives of two families, the Indian family consists of characters like Uma, Aruna, Arun- these are siblings, their Mama and Papa, cousin Anamika a daughter of Lily auntie and Bakul uncle. The other family has Mr. and Mrs. Patton, and their son Rod and daughter Melanie. It is a perfect portrayal of a patriarchal society in which the father is the main figure of the house and who leads every decision in the house. The mother has less importance and daughters are deprived of their basic rights. The pain in the novel can be studied through the following themes....

**Oppression:**

According to Oxford Language Dictionary Oppression can be defined as- a prolonged cruel or unjust treatment or exercise of

authority. In the novel Uma got such a unjust treatment as she was made to leave her education in order to look after her younger brother. Though she was not bright in studies yet, she had a fond of education, and studies but she always offered households from her Mama and Papa, to be a pure domestic lady in the future. All her desires were oppressed.

**Gender Discrimination:**

The story is set in 1970 and in those days gender inequality was common in families. The reason behind those thoughts was women were housewives and men were the ones who brought home the bread. It was believed that boys would earn and take care of their parents in their old age and boys are considered as a treasure of wealth. In the novel, Uma is the primary figure facing gender discrimination. Where Uma was made to leave her education early of her age, because she was a girl, due to stereotypical thinking of her parents, she was pressured by her parents to look after the newborn baby brother and household chores. Arun her brother is forced to study, he is sent to a foreign for further studies. The other girl Anamika in the novel was a cousin of Uma who had win the Oxford scholarship, but was not sent to a foreign because she was a girl and her parents consider this scholarship would be a badge in finding the right match for her.

**Marginalization:**

According to Encyclopedia.com marginalization comprises those processes by which individuals and groups are ignored or relegated to the sidelines of political debate, social negotiation, and economic bargaining—and kept there. In the interconnected world of the 20th century, the issue of marginalization remains a pressing concern. Homelessness, age, language, employment status, skill, race, and religion are some criteria historically used to marginalize. Women are subordinated to men all over the world. The novel is set in the 1970's so it was a period when a woman had no value. In Indian society, a woman without a man is considered incomplete. In the present novel, Miramasi, another character is introduced as a widow woman, who is abandoned from all happy events, and sacred ceremonies. This makes her feel the

marginalized state. Therefore, to stay away from all these painful experiences she accepts a spiritual journey and often goes on pilgrimages, even Uma joins her on a pilgrimage to get rid of her familial responsibilities. Here it can be seen that Uma and Miramasi both are marginalised. Uma represents the "other" in the traditional notion of Indian femininity. In many ways, Uma represents how traditional Indian society views women that do not conform to the immediate reality of marriage.

She has wreathed the garland of novel, Fasting, Feasting with different flowers of themes, gender discrimination in family, Quest for identity, etc. Gender bias in family creates a strong impact on the progress of women. Mostly, parents underestimate girls and overestimate the boys. The needs of the boys are considered of higher regard than those of women.

**Conclusion:**

To conclude we may say that the themes of the novel Fasting Feasting likewise oppression,

marginalisation, and inferiority are the key themes of subaltern theory which are often in the postcolonial period. This is the wonderful tail of a tragedy that sets the painful and frightening life of the characters before the readers due to their experience as 'other'.

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