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**Patriarchy and Women's Silence as a Devastation in
Anita Desai's *Fasting Feasting*, George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, and
Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye***

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ABSTRACT

Patriarchy is a social system where men are considered as superior and holds a position in the society as supreme power and benefit from all the privilege assuming females as subordinate, and inferior to them. For ages, women are suppressed and made to accept male domination as their fate. In contemporary society, many women revolts, protest, emancipate, and fight for their rights but on the other hand, there are many who shield themselves under silence and accept devastating life willingly or unwillingly.

*The current research paper will investigate three novels (Anita Desai's *Fasting**

*Feasting, George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*) from different countries/continents trying to explore the women characters, their silence, domination by males who are none other but their own. The paper will also highlight the destruction brought to the female characters, their psyche, and their submissive nature.*

KEYWORDS

Patriarchy, Women, Silence, Submissive, Destruction

RESEARCH PAPER

Patriarchy is a social system that literally means the rule and power of the father (patriarch) and is used to describe a male-dominated society. Today, it is more generally used –to refer to male domination, to the power relationships by which men dominate women, and to characterize a system whereby women are kept subordinate in a number of ways| (Bhasin, 2006:3). According to the feminists, the term patriarchy is used to describe the power relationship between men and women. Kate Millet in her book *Sexual Politics* (1970) analyzes –patriarchy as a political institution. According to her, the word politics refers to all –power structured relationships and a –relationship of dominance and subordination which has been unexamined and neglected. Thus, patriarchy is a male ideology that is inherited through ages from generation to generation where females are the main victim of this inherited ideology.

Literature is a mirror of society. Writers have always tried to depict the reality and facts of society. Patriarchy, gender discrimination, women's oppression, is some of the major themes in the writings for decades and centuries including writings by both male and female authors. Anita Desai is one of the distinguished writers of India. Her contribution to Indian English Literature is incredible. She avoids social documentation as other novelists but rather focuses on exploring the dark recesses of woman's consciousness and presenting different facets of women's lives in her writings. Desai is concerned with feminine consciousness rather than analysis of its causes and remedy that gives her writings an exceptional status. George Eliot (Mary Evans), one the prolific writer is well-known for her presentation of female characters. Critics condemn that she doesn't allow her female character to grow and flourish. Her novel represents her notions of women, gender, social structures of the Victorian Age. She did not openly engage in feminist consciousness or activities but her personal trials and tribulations gave her a new insight into life which she very efficiently projects in her writings. Toni Morrison a celebrated African-American novelist is distinguished for her epic themes, vivid dialogue, and richly detailed characters especially her women characters. One of the central issues of her writing includes the dual victimization of black women in American society. Her work explores the tragic life of Black female characters defining themselves according to the desires of their menfolk and white standard. Her quest for a Black self is reflected in all her works.

Anita Desai's *Fasting Feasting* explores the victimization of women characters in the backdrop of oppressive Hindu patriarchal ideology. The novel reconnoiters the helplessness of females and their submissive nature in the patriarchal society. The title *Fasting Feasting* itself is ironic with its binary insinuations. The birth of a male child is to be feasted whereas the birth of a female child is believed to be a bad omen and spell misery as she is supposed to be married off with a dowry and adds expenditures to the family thus implying fasting nature as per the title of the novel. The novel is divided into two parts and is said in third person point-of-view. The first part focuses on the Hindu women set in Hindu patriarchal family structure whereas the second part focuses on Arun's studies and Patton's family in America.

The novel opens with the contemplative mood of MamaPapa sitting and swinging. All of sudden deluged with an idea of their eldest daughter Uma they demand her immediate presence. One after the other she is been asked to carry on her duty of informing the cook to prepare sweets for her father, pack the parcel for her brother Arun who is in America for his higher studies, and also to write a letter to him. Uma's character projects her submissive nature and silence in the start of the novel. For Uma, it is not only the patriarch role that is harming her personality but here Mama too is merged with Papa, hence, throughout the novel, the name

MamaPapa appears as if they are one entity. Despite a slight variation in the roles they have chosen to play, Papa's of -scowling and -Mama's scolding (p. 10), but in terms of opinion and decisions, they never differed from each other. Anita Desai very keenly and artistically has handled various women-related issues like; marriage, the status of divorcee daughter, widowhood, education and freedom for women, desperation for a male child, etc. in this novel through tales of various females. The novelist concentrates on various social and psychological obstacles which women face in their day-to-day life through the story of Uma who is the protagonist of the novel and also through other female characters. Violence and control over women can be seen through the lens of Uma. For her happiness is a farfetched dream where she is seen as a victim of male hegemony which dictates a woman's life completely - politically, economically and social behavior. Uma's marginalization and silence start at her own home at the hands of his father.

Uma's childhood memories are full of bitter experiences and segregation. Uma's parents' distinctive attitude towards Uma and his brother Arun regarding their education indicates two sheer different parameters for their own boy and girl child, "If one word could sum up Arun's childhood...that word was education" (p. 121). Uma has to leave her school to take care of her younger brother though she is passionate about education. For her school is the most favorite place where she reaches school early before arrival of others "and every day she searched for an excuse to stay on" (p. 21). Uma does not like Sundays and long vacations rather waits eagerly for the re-opening of her school. She feels exhilarated to "buy the new books, gloated over their freshness, and wrapped them in brown paper covers to keep them clean, eager for the day when they would be put to use" (p. 21). But unfortunately, all her dreams are shattered and does not have the courage to raise her voice against this injustice. Later when Arun grows up he is sent to America for his further studies. There is no value of education in the lives of his sisters. They are "being raised for marriage" (p. 121). Uma's mother's role is dually presented. One is submissive to Papa and second, being the woman she is pushing her own daughter Uma into the same fire. She urges Uma to accept injustice happily. She makes her association with the ultimate aim in her life, which is marriage. The mother says, "you will be happier at home. You won't need to do any lessons. You are a big girl now. We are trying to arrange a marriage for you" (p. 22). When her mother fails to convince her, she blackmails her emotionally and sentimentally, "I need your help, beti" (p. 22). This shows her own helplessness and the worst victim of the patriarch system as she is aware that she is exploiting her daughter. Further, to survive in the system she is bound to perform her assigned roles. Chandra Chatterjee comments, "Uma, as she is named after the reincarnation of the mother goddess as a daughter, reinforces the idea that society and religion have thrust certain roles on women" (2001: p. 218). Her marriage with an old overweight man with an ugly face didn't seem to be what she had expected. She spends her 'suhagraat' in the train, with the very odd situation in the midst of the perspiration, and rhythmical snoring of her mother-in-law. She realizes her husband lying among the "mounds of flesh heaped on other bunks" (p. 93). On the very next day of marriage to her surprise, her husband says to her, "you may rest. I am going to work" (93) shatters all her dreams of a new bride. At her in-law's place, she was treated as a creature in the museum, "they stood in a ring" (94) around her to inspect her. Their examination and standing in a row around her resembles the act of the animal kingdom where the hunting tigers get any prey. This affects her psychologically makes her feel helpless and compels her to surrender completely. At the very next moment, her mother-in-law demands her to work, "change your clothes and come-we to prepare food now" (96). Here too Uma can be seen as silently accepting her fate.

The second ill-fated character is Anamika. She is very good at studies and obtains scholarship to study at Oxford, "where only the most favoured, and privileged sons could ever hope to go!" (p. 69) but unfortunately she is denied for such privilege by her father because "she was an age to marry" (p. 69). In the society girls are educated with the sole purpose that is to get good match and not to project their talent and stand on their own feet. Anamika is very beautiful and hence gets a good match. Her parents find out someone who is highly educated with degrees, medals and certificates. But fate has something disastrous for her. Anamika's husband is a narcissist, who always suffers from superiority complex. His educational qualification rather than making him a gentleman he is arrogant, feels himself self-sufficient, and does not feel the need of marrying someone nor giving any space for anyone. This makes Anamika's life terrible. After marriage, physical and mental tortures become a part of her life, "Anamika had been beaten, Anamika was beaten regularly by her mother in law" (p. 71). Her husband who has no emotional attachment with her, finds pleasure by the action of his mother beating his lovely "soft, petal-skinned, bumblebeeyed, pink-lipped...dove like" (p. 68) wife. With the continuous physical torture she faces miscarriage which makes her situation worse. It is assumed and suspected that "she could not bear more children" (p. 72), thus losing holds of her in her family "now Anamika was flawed, she was damaged goods" (p. 72). She is tortured more and beaten regularly but her parents have no concerned about it do not come forward to save her because a patriarch thought in India that it is her fate. Once a girl gets married and goes to her in-laws only death is the escape in her life. Her aunt says, "how can she be happy if she is sent home? What will people say? What will they think?" (p. 72). Finally, her married life ends with her mysterious death. Her in-laws report that she commits suicide, but her neighbor opines murder. In this regard, Neeru Tandon comments, "the novel throws light on the misery that can follow a marriage too hastily arranged and the lot of women in a typical joint family where the new bride is a prisoner and a slave to the mother-in-law" (2013: p. 73).

George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* was a great success because of her character Maggie. The novel presents the dilemma of females in Victorian patriarchal society. Women were obliged to take care of the domestic life and take care of the children. The woman in the Victorian home was like a decorative trophy' and spiritual guardian' to her husband. The novel is about a girl, Maggie Tulliver, who suffers mental trauma due to the double standard practiced in society – one for men and the other for women. She witnesses gender discrimination right from her childhood. Like Uma in *Fasting Feasting*, she is denied the privilege of education. Her brother is lucky to go to school to receive better education and be –a sort o'engineer or a surgveyo'or an auctioneer and Vallyer, Like Riley, or one o'themsmartish business as are all profits and no outley. (p. 3), while she is forced to go on with her patchwork like a little lady of Victorian Age: –Oh dear, oh, dear Maggie, what are you thinkin'of, to throw your bonnet down there... do, for shame, an'come an' go on with your patchwork like a little lady(p. 7). Maggie is supposed to follow her father's orders. Her father gets angry when he sees Maggie reading a book and orders her to shut it and follow her mother in the kitchen, –... shut up the book and let's hear no more o' such talk. It is as I thought-the child ull learn more mischief nor good wi the books. Go, go and see after your mother. (p. 17). Like Mama in *Fasting Feasting*, Maggie's mother also follows the instructions of her husband without a second thought. She confirms her role as an obedient wife as expected by Victorian patriarchal society. Maggie doesn't want to carry on the past condition and role of women but is forced to. Like Indian Mythology testing chastity of women through fire test; in Victorian England, women have to undergo water test. It was a belief that if the accused woman takes action and swims, she is considered a witch, and if

she does nothing and drowns, then she is just a –silly old woman. Like the witch in the picture, Maggie takes action, or swims, further, creating a voice throughout the novel. She fights the social definitions for her gender, and to prove her innocence she willingly wants to get drowned. Her refusal to Stephen Guest's proposal and returning to St. Oggs, alone and unmarried seems to be a curse for her as is considered a witch by society. Philip Fisher notes that Maggie is tested twice by the water, one of which –is the boat ride with Stephen Guest, where Maggie faces the choice of the witch: to die socially, her reputation ruined, whether she returned or eloped (p. 521).

Maggie's father, Mr. Tulliver wishes her to submit like his sister Moss. Mrs. Moss has been extremely oppressed by the boundaries of her marriage and her social status as a woman that she –had quite thrown herself away in marriage, and had crowned her mistakes by having an eighth baby (p. 66), and is –too fagged by toil and children to have strength left for any pride (p. 69). Maggie's condition can be well stated as –Maggie... Like her Aunt Moss and as a female, Maggie encounters various pressures to smother her energies, both mental and physical. Unlike her aunt... her fires are the fires of youth which her aunt has lost (p. 382). Maggie listens to her aunt's troubles and comforts her realizing how difficult Mrs. Moss's life is. She is not only a concerned mother, but she is also an obedient wife who shoulders financial burdens as provides ease and affluence for her family. Maggie, though as a child tries to reject the societal norms but finally has to surrender in front of a male-dominated society.

Tom takes control of his sister Maggie, expecting her to comply with his demands like his mother does to his father. After all, Tom –shall be a man, while Maggie is –only a girl (p. 87). To Tom, this seems to be natural according to societal norms but for Maggie, this path is frustrating and unfair. Tom's relationship with Maggie is a relation of oppression and submission. He sees his job to take over his sister in the name of care and protection. Later in life, when misfortune befell on Tulliver's family, Maggie takes on additional plain sewing work to help the family. She would have done better in life if she was allowed to be well educated rather than taking up traditional sewing roles destined for women. After the death of her father, Tom takes over the duties of his deceased father, and charge and care of Maggie. Maggie has no option but to accept Tom over her. According to McTizic, –A Victorian woman would have had to trust that her will was in accordance with her father's or husband's wishes because she lived under the authority of her nearest male relative and he had legal rights to direct her movements (p. 4). After finishing Miss Firniss's boarding school, along with Lucy, Maggie finds a situation for herself. She joins as a position of a teacher and governess. Maggie is determined to live independently and not with aunt Pullet. Tom, who represents a fatherly figure doesn't accept her decision. He claims she is always in extremes and is not capable of taking decisions in life. What outrages him the most is the fact that she thinks she knows best, and will not submit to be guided' (p. 497). Throughout the novel, the sister-brother relationship is portrayed in a difficult and estranged manner, especially because of their different personalities. Tom deeply thinks about every consequence of his sister's behavior, including her meeting with Philip and escape with Stephen. The only reason behind his control over Maggie is to prevent her from doing wrong and mostly disgracing their family as in the Victorian Era, the reputation of their family was of major concern. After knowing Maggie's secret meeting with Philips Tom forces Maggie to swear to the Bible that she will not see Philip again. Men in the Victorian Era are often excused for their misdoings and faults whereas, on the other hand, women are made to feel guilty and the burden is often on their shoulders. In the end through her sacrificial death, Maggie practices the essence of Christianity—selflessness—without the religion, and thereby

demonstrates to St. Ogg's the new type of religion which they should embrace. (Bates, p. 8) Further, -her death is not simply a matter of character flaws, poor choices, or natural selection. Rather, it is the pinnacle of Maggie's development from a selfish child to a young woman who moves away from traditional faith and lives according to the values of George Eliot's religion of humanity. (Bates, p. 8). By making Maggie Tulliver die, Eliot has created a most memorable and remarkable character in the literature.

Toni Morrison's first novel *The Bluest Eye*, tells the heartbreaking story of Pecola Breedlove, a vulnerable black girl, living in Ohio, in the early 1940s related to society's perception and acceptance of white culture and its impact on African-Americans. Pecola Breedlove is a little black girl, who grows up in a small community, longing to be as beautiful as the white girls in movies, yearning for love, and blue eyes. Through Claudia's narration, we come to know the tragic story of Pecola's life and her ultimate breakdown after her father rapes her. The novel is a plethora, a glimpse into the psyche of Pecola and her parent's traumatic and shameful upbringings. Like *Fasting Feasting's* MamaPapa, Pecola too is a victim in the hands of her parents. In this regard, Willner writes, -fathers dominate their daughters by virtue of male dominance over females and by virtue of household authority (1983: p. 139). Pauline's self-loathing is transferred to her daughter. She rejects her daughter and distances herself from her feeling worthless. To Pecola, the only thing that can save her is getting blue eyes. According to Delgado: -minority children exhibit self-hatred because of their color, and majority children learn to associate dark skin with undesirability and ugliness (200: p. 134). Interestingly, Pauline shows the white girl more affection as compare to Pecola. She makes her own child feel inferiority complex. -Them she bent toward respectability, and in so doing taught them fear: fear of being clumsy, fear of being like their father, fear of not being loved by God, fear of madness like Cholly's mother's (p. 126).

Both black and white women are sufferers from oppression by men but black women are dual victims of racism and sexism. This double oppression becomes a hindrance in their lives. This is something Morrison tries to highlight and portray in her novel and according to Mahdi, Morrison does not only blame the white society for oppression against the black woman, but she also criticizes the sexism practiced by black men against their women. The tragedy of black women is, therefore, caused by white racism and black sexism as well (2015: p. 46). Cholly's childhood traumatic experiences make him cruel develop disgust and anger towards women. His rape of his daughter Pecola is the result of a psycho-break in his life. Pecola's innocent act of scratching her leg with her toes, just like her mother confuses Cholly with his tender affections with sex and instead of protecting his daughter, he commits one of the worst crimes anyone can commit is that he rapes his daughter Pecola. Talking about the mother-daughter relationship relation between Pauline and Pecola it can be very close, but in the case of Pecola and her mother, they are far apart, not just physically, but emotionally, struggling for love.

After this painful incident, Pecola withdraws herself from the world and covers herself in a shell by trying to make herself invisible. According to Benson, dealing with -body shame by disappearing also marks the beginning of her experiences of depersonalization: that is her estrangement from the world and self (2009: p. 62). Pauline instead of consoling tries to be indifferent to her shows no affection and joins in with society's disgust and isolation of Pecola. Further, Pauline beats Pecola after the rape, as if it is her fault. Even though the community knows about the rape and the abuse, nobody mentions it; nobody supports her nor sympathizes with her, thus leaving Pecola to her way to insanity.

Through the characters of Uma, Anamika, Maggie, Mrs. Moss, Pauline, and Pecola; Anita Desai, George Eliot, and Toni Morrison has tried to portray male domination and destruction caused to women by patriarchal norms which further affects their psyche and make them unwillingly submit themselves to the male-dominated society. Women are the marginalized lot and have to sacrifice their dreams and are shattered like broken glass. They are the birds whose wings are cut thus making them unable to fly and touch the sky. Women whether talented or educated have to submit themselves to domestic needs and accept silence as a part of their lives running in their blood vein. In this day and age when a lot of women lose their lives in the hands of their husbands, controlled and tortured by their male members, induce gender inequality, society at large should arise against this great injustice, end this patriarchal system because God has created woman as equal to man and not their slave.

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