

Feminist Literary Inquiry: Analyzing Gender Dynamics in the Works of Begum Rokeya and Anita Desai

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Manuscript Received: 28 May 2024

Accepted: 23 July 2024

ABSTRACT

This research explores gender dynamics and feminist perspectives through a comparative analysis of the works of two prominent South Asian authors: Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and Anita Desai. While Rokeya, a pioneering Bengali feminist, critiques the patriarchal structures of early 20th-century colonial India in *Sultana's Dream* and *Abarodhbashini*, Desai, a postcolonial Indian English writer, delves into the psychological complexities of contemporary Indian women in novels such as *Cry, the Peacock* and *The Domestic Maid*. Both authors challenge gender norms and address the subjugation of women within patriarchal societies, though they do so in distinct ways. Rokeya presents an idealized feminist utopia where women hold power and lead society, using satire and progressive narratives to advocate for women's education and liberation. In contrast, Desai's works reveal the inner emotional and psychological struggles of women, emphasizing the impact of societal and familial expectations on their lives. This study applies feminist literary theory, with a focus on intersectionality, patriarchy, female agency, and resistance, to examine how these two authors portray gender relations and the impact of social, cultural, and historical contexts on women's experiences. By comparing their approaches, this research underscores the importance of feminist literary inquiry in understanding the complexities of gender and power in South Asian literature.

Keywords: Feminist Literary Theory, Gender Dynamics, Begum Rokeya, Anita Desai, South Asian Literature, Patriarchy, Female Agency, Psychological Realism, Resistance

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INTRODUCTION

A feminist literary inquiry is a critical approach that examines works by feminist theorists to comprehend, evaluate, and interrogate the influence of gender dynamics on literature and cultural narratives. Critics and scholars used this method in the middle of the twentieth

century to discuss female characters in literary pieces. They emphasized their thoughts and opinions first, challenging the patriarchal values that had been overstepped or stereotyped them unreasonably long ago. It began with the larger socialist tradition and resulted in the reexamination of canonical texts and the rediscovery of women in literature, which had been ignored or marginalized in criticism.

The depiction of gender disparity and exercise of power are some of the fundamental aspects of feminist literary analysis. Generally, the highest mark of feminist literary analysis is attained to the extent of questioning the fundamental elements of the plot, the roles of different characters, and a diversity of themes in challenging or reinforcing the conventional gender-biased expectations. As an example, critics of early feminism, such as Simone de Beauvoir and Elaine Showalter, established that norms and norms of literature about the official position and independence of women, as well as their code of behavior. The chapter "Gynocriticism" offered by Showalter presents an opportunity to approach the study of how the life of female writers and their social condition colour their literary works by reversing the perspective and thoughts towards their unsurpassed perspectives and life experiences.

Combined with other essential interpretations, including ecofeminist, postcolonial, and Marxist interpretations, feminist literary interpretations indicate how closely gender dynamics in literary works are interrelated with other phenomena, including the aspects of race, the social structure, class, and environmental abuses. In questioning accepted meanings and promoting the integration of previously ignored perspectives, the feminist literary study pursues the development of a more people-friendly literary environment that is more accommodating to the ignored opinions. This text sharpens our understanding of literature by prompting readers and researchers to consider how literature tends to either support and/or contradict gendered power relations and dynamics.

Anita Desai and Begum Rokeya are considered central authors in literature, especially in South Asian literature, and both raise some essential social issues and problems with the aid of their literary styles and approaches. The feminist, social activist, and Bengali author Begum Rokeya (1880-1922) is often remembered because of her bold protests patriarchal limits imposed on women in India and other colonized territories in the colonial era. Until the end of her life, her writings ascribed much weight to the physical and intellectual life of women, and on women's issues, especially on *The Secluded Women* and *Sultana's Dream*, which expressed the important need for social change or reform, the need for the education of women, and the freedom and liberation of women. Begum Rokeya criticizes the common ways of society and makes it clear the restrictions that are put on women and the way they live. Through satire, an imaginative and progressive narrative, she achieves a victory for women in gaining social and intellectual power and enjoying it. Her landmark publications have had enormous influence on feminist thought in South Asia, and even in the present day, they inspire new generations to develop increasingly socially critical and gender-related personalities.

Anita Desai (b. 1937) is a very well-known Indian English writer who presents the psychological and emotional landscapes of contemporary Indian culture through quite the other angle. She wonderfully describes existential problems of women, and her works, like *The Domestic Maid*, *Cry*, *the Peacock*, and *In Custody*, rejoice their elaborate portraits of people and the topics of existential loneliness. These compositions criticise such vital questions as self-definition, cultural dilemmas, and family ties. The reflective writings of Desai bring out the challenges of women caught between traditional customs and modern social changes. It is the

need to feel that they belong to a specific community or are different that is strengthened by her depiction of the unnoticed struggle and personal lives of her characters.

Both Anita Desai and Begum Rokeya are considered outstanding in South Asian literature. They put the matters of gender identification and social transformation into perspective, both in the past and in the present. Demonstrating the life experiences and hardships of women in patriarchal countries, both authors play the role of increasing the demand for changing patriarchy and maintaining the writing and cultural dialogue in the arena of social justice and gender issues.

Gender relationship provides an opening into the social, cultural, and psychological grounds of the original landscapes of literature. With this objective, the paper will explore how these two famous writers, Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and Anita Desai, reveal and express criticisms of gender relationships in their books. The theme that Begum Rokeya, a Bengali feminist heroine who is quite renowned in literature through her short novel titled "Sultana's Dream," struggles against so called terms and norms of patriarchal society that exist during the early part of the 20th century is her vision to look forward to some progressive society that is owned and run by women. How Rokeya depicts her strong female characters and how they defy conventional gender norms gives us a very powerful retort to the social and political restrictions women of her age went through. On the other hand, how Anita Desai extravagantly explores all those intricacies that the modern Indian woman often must deal with, including the notions of being alone, finding herself, and having to come to terms with family expectations and family duties, is quite a powerful statement itself. Her novels, such as *The Domestic Maid* and *Cry, the Peacock*, present an intricate picture of the struggles faced by women to understand how to realize their ambitions and meet the requirements of society. The inner conflict of the socialized expectations and social power of the individual, as examined by Desai, shows the internal struggle faced by the women in her stories. It brings out the issues that crop up when they attempt to establish their identities within a patriarchal system.

The works of Rokeya shed some light on the sharp criticism of gender imbalance. On the contrary, the works of Desai bring out the pathetic challenges and problems brought upon women in modern India. The present study aims to contribute to the debate about gender relations in literature, revisiting the individual and related, but different, views of both authors and therefore clarifying the development of feminist thought (within a great deal of historical and cultural backgrounds).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Feminist Theory the Faustian mirror of feminist literary studies looks at how stories, characters, and topics subvert or confirm gender ideals and roles. Feminist theories of postcolonial literature, as discussed by Akter et al. (2023), provide essential insights into the intersectionality of race, class, and gender in South Asian narratives. This school of thought focuses on the widespread effect of patriarchy and the structural limitations of women's power and expression (Rushing & Onorato, 2003). The literary feminist criticism has acknowledged that race, sexuality, and class are the causes of female subordination, which serves well to embrace the complicated female characters, particularly the peripheral female characters (Gringeri & Roche, 2010). This feminist worldview is represented by two well-known authors of South Asia, Begum Rokeya and Anita Desai. The two authors criticize the patriarchy by addressing issues such as resistance, intersectionality, gender struggle, agency, and gagging of female voices, exposing the intricate gender relations in South Asian literature. 1. Patriarchal Structures and Gender Norms Begum Rokeya and Anita Desai raise

their voice against patriarchal norms that affected the lives of women in a particular manner in their books.

The renowned novel *Sultana's Dream* (1905), written by Begum Rokeya, sends the males in the domestic surroundings with the females running the world. Being subversive to the gender roles and the superiority of masculinity, this fictional setting overturns old traditions and standards. Rokeya is a social activist and novelist in colonial Bengal, who struggles against patriarchy to make women independent and seeks education and freedom of thought. Desai, on the contrary, depicts in his books such as *Maya* in *Cry*, *The Peacock*, and *Bimla* in *Clear Light of Day* that patriarchy is an emotional turnover that enslaves women into the confines of home and social dictums. Her heroines are women who struggle with submissive, virtuous, and self-denying norms. The dominance of the patriarchy, however, is demonstrated through Desai's compelling characters, family expectations, societal and cultural norms, and outside pressure. Such paradigms oppress women and keep them quiet and, on the sidelines, restricting self-expression and control.

2. Female power and agency

Feminist literary theory assesses the tactics and means by which the female characters can reach, claim, and reclaim their agency within a confining setting. In the *Sultana's Dream*, Rokeya has shown a utopian world where women are utilizing science and technology to create a liberal and progressive society. Its ideological account contributes towards the autonomy and empowerment of women as a crucial aspect of the well-being of society. It also presents female autonomy about patriarchal norms. Rokeya demonstrates that women's empowerment in terms of intellectuality and social importance can eradicate gender bias and facilitate equality. Female bureaus or agencies are hard to describe by Desai because patriarchal beliefs lead to the creation of psychological tangles. In *Maya* in *Cry*, *the Peacock*, and *Bimla* in *Clear Light of Day*, her characters, Maya and Bimla, respectively, fail to reconcile the wish to become independent with societal norms concerning gender. The findings of the massive research conducted by Desai reflect that women, in general, find it hard to pursue self-empowerment because of emotional and family reasons. Her characters demonstrate the intricate manners through which women use their freedom to resist and conform to patriarchal norms.

3. Intersectionality: class, religion, and culture.

One of the points highlighted by feminist philosophy is an account of intersectionality, that is, the admission that class, race, and religion influence the lives of women (Okin, 1989). The works by Begum Rokeya present her colonial experiences as a Bengali Muslim. She illustrates the oppression of women through gender, class, ethnicity, and religion. Rokeya supports the position of Islam that encourages education and independence among women in opposition to the theological interpretation that legitimizes slavery. The middle class portrayed by Desai in her books is also done through an intersectional analysis, and it also explores the impact of culture and economics on women. Bimla has social and economic constraints as well as loyalty that characterise the family caregiving in the book *Clear Light of Day*. The analysis by Desai shows how these intersections require the consideration of gender and other identity traits vis-a-vis the need to understand women's oppression. So, intersectionality plays an important role in explaining how different women are struggling against injustice in a multifaceted manner.

4. Resistance and defiance to gender norms:

The issue of resistance is at the center of feminist scholarship. It depicts women rebelling or breaking the imprisoning structures. The original intention behind *Sultana's Dream* by Begum Rokeya is to break the gender stereotypes and to envision a future where women are in control of affairs and are innovative. Also, Rokeya is against patriarchy because she dreams up Ladyland and condemns the belief that a man is superior to a woman. She writes about the need for gender equality and creating a world free from patriarchy. Desai has

characters that mentally or quietly resists, so her resistance chronicle is deeper and more of the inner person. In *Cry, the Peacock*, Maya's inner turmoil shows her silent protest her marriage's emotional neglect. In the novel *Clear Light of Day*, Bimla refuses to be subjected to traditional female tasks by not getting married. As the distinctions by Desai portray, even under backward conditions, women struggle against gender. Silence, language, and female voice. Feminist critique stresses that language can be both empowering and oppressive. In *Sultana's Dream*, Rokeya resorts to language to establish a utopian world in which women have a chance to voice their thoughts and take part in the works of cognition and education, hence contradicting the suppression of the female voice in the past. Her powerful narrative style encourages women to join in public speech and intellectual interests, putting more focus on the female voice in literature and culture. In *Cry, the Peacock* and *Clear Light of Day*, Desai portrays the stillness as oppressive yet has an empowering effect. Maya's quiet in *Cry; the Peacock* symbolizes her adherence to societal norms and her defiance of conventional rules. The silence is also present within her sculptures, meaning the emotions and desires that people cannot reveal. This non-speaking ability enables characters to maintain inner independence, which turns society on its head. The subject of *The Language and Silence* by Desai indicates the influence of patriarchal associations on feminine voices and how language may function as an instrument of discrimination and empowerment. The literature of feminism is critical and speculative, as it reflects the perspectives and opinions of marginalized women and their lives (Mitchell & Miller, 2011). The essays of Begum Rokeya and Anita Desai focus on a feminist perspective revolving around gender, agency, and resistance. The stories of Rokeya promote the cause of women's emancipation through independence of thought and political dominance. In contrast, the subtle images of female characters in the stories of Desai demonstrate the conflict of the battle against patriarchal norms. The feminist literary heritages that they take are against systematic injustice, and they focus on the numerous ways that women are discriminated against. It is through the feminist praxis or the application of feminist theory that one can envisage the benefits of feminist research about adopting an understanding of structural barriers and bringing motivation in the name of justice and equality among women. The paradigm throws light on the intricate lives of the South Asian women, which underline the centrality of feminist literary inquiry in the subject of gender dynamics, resistance, and empowerment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Relation to current literature: Feminist literary critique plays an essential role in the study of literature, as it emphasizes understanding and interpretation of gender relations and the power patterns established in literature. This work not only respects the characters of women but also respects their identity and dignity. The play ventures into complex orchestrations that define, enforce, and challenge the existence of gender roles within the literary text. Such a literary and critical approach has been instrumental in appreciating and celebrating the work of women writers who are now given their due against a very male-centric literary world. Again, it expands and diversifies literary history. Once more, it enriches and fosters a more inclusive literary history (Plain et al., 2007). Feminist literary criticism discovers the specific issues faced by female writers in different historical epochs and the achievements made by them in the literary field. It evaluates how their gender influenced their artistic choices and is reflected in the perception of their texts (Sharistanian, 1979). Through their research, scholars explore the gender-biased characteristics of the languages and how the struggles between the power dynamics dominate in literature and literary discourse (Feminist Criticism(s) in Canadian Literature, 2013). Unbalanced power relations can also be observed in a literary setting, i.e., with familial

relationships, love affairs, and in society in general (Feminist Approaches to Literature, 2012). The recognition of female characters as individuals with their identity, desires, agency, and motivation prove to be one of the foundational aspects of feminist criticism. Using this analytical prism, feminist criticism addresses the marginalization of women as objects of the narration or the propellers of the plot (Rosner, 2006). Feminism as applied to literary text began incorporating the concept of intersectionality since gender interacts with other aspects of society, e.g., race and class, sexuality, and ability, thus contributing uniquely to individuals. When speaking of the gender play in the works by Begum Rokeya and Anita Desai, previous studies have already provided a rather convoluted explanation by focusing on the way these authors depict the female gender as they deal with patriarchal conventions and social roles. After a close interpretation of the revolutionary work of Rokeya, *Sultana's Dream*, scholar critiques have applauded the imagined idealistically perceived utopia but also rejected its condemnation of gender roles and its support of women's education in early years of the 20th century Bengal (*Sultana's Dream and Its Conception of a Feminist Utopia*, 2017). Sharma (2022) further argues that *Sultana's Dream* challenges gender roles and presents a progressive vision of women's power in society. The rest of Rokeya's works, brimming with drollery and irony, approach the social atrocities that the women in colonial India encountered, especially in Muslim society, that provide a very acute criticism of oppressive tyrannical systems (The Begum's Dream: Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and the Broadening of Muslim Women's Aspirations in Bengal, n.d.; Hossain, 1992). Unlike Begum Rokeya, it is very common to find women in the novels by Desai who are restricted within the four walls of their homes and have to face family and social pressure but are waiting to explore the self. Desai, through the aspect of psychological realism, addresses the inner worlds of her characters and their desires, fears, and the feeling of getting control over situations (Devi, 2020). According to Desai, through her literature, Desai defines the need for feminine identity in postcolonial India, where female characters promoted the idea of self-expression as the social system becomes oppressive and violates the dynamics of tradition and modernity (Jackson, 2010). Although sufficient literature exists that deals with Rokeya or Desai separately, a major research gap exists that involves the comparative analysis of their respective writings. This research gap disregards the insights that one can gain on the differences and similarities of how these two authors describe gender dynamics, despite being based on different cultures and different eras. Themes of comparative studies might reveal: 1. Feminist Consciousness: Notwithstanding the differences in time and contexts, both writers show a much deeper understanding of gender inequality and challenge patriarchal rules with references to the lives of their characters. 2. Literary Representations of Resistance: Characters developed by Rokeya and Desai take part in the show of rebellion in explicit and subtle ways, and seek agency in their social conditions, demonstrating multiple types of resistance. The understanding of how Begum Rokeya and Anita Desai have represented the experiences of the Bengali women restricted by socio-cultural, religious, and economic conditions is a highly significant gap. However, these two writers have undergone an in-depth assessment. This research paper seeks to shed some light on such highly underrated kinds of narratives, focusing on certain feminine concerns that are faced in such situations. Sultana from the phantasmagoric world of Rokeya imagines the perfect world of women who are not educated, Muslim ones in undivided Bengal. In contrast, the psychological realism of Desai focuses on the emotional dilemmas of contemporary women in post-independence India. Even though the authors may be separated by decades, their works gradually raise the problems of female characters, including depression and oppression. The purpose of the study is to expand on the experience of women and their views on several new dimensions that create a significant gap, which is closing the gap between historic issues through consideration of feminist issues in the present world.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The discussion of gender in the writings of Begum Rokeya and Anita Desai uses feminist literary theory and qualitative analysis. The paper uses a comparative literary assessment to analyse the ways these two authors echo the norms prevalent in society, gender roles, and female autonomy in their own historical and cultural contexts. Begum Rokeya and Anita Desai have different views about patriarchal rules and hierarchies: the former is a prominent Bengali writer of feminist movements, and the latter is an Indian writer, but she writes in English. The ideology strives to comprehend the gender norms of South Asian literature through the comparison of feminist themes and scenarios. The *Secluded Women* and *Sultana's Dream* of Begum Rokeya and *The Domestic Maid* and *Cry, the Peacock* of Anita Desai are two of the primary texts to be studied. Their choice is predetermined by the thematic development of the works about female oppression, resistance, and agency in patriarchal systems. The *Secluded Women* promotes women's education, confidence, and empowerment in colonial Bengal, and Rokeya *Sultana's Dream* shows a perfect world governed by women.

The Domestic Maid and *Cry, the Peacock* by Desai draws a picture of complicated female characters living in a modern world that should solve postcolonial issues. In this research paper, feminist literary theory is applied to help understand the concepts of "patriarchal structures", "resistance", and "female agency". The chosen works on gender and power will be discussed through feminist theorists Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. It investigates the influence of the respective socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds of both authors on how they have portrayed female characters and how their texts also advance the women of the texts in South Asian literature. Gender dynamics will be identified in the works of Rokeya and Desai through a comparative study. The thesis areas given to this study are gender norms, female agency and resistance, and social and cultural criticism. Since the given study is based on literary and theoretical research, the data collection will be relatively narrow and presuppose a thorough investigation of original texts and the theme of secondary sources. The source texts will discuss narrative style, character development, thematic topics, and women's experiences. Secondary sources will include scholarly articles, books, and feminist readings on the writers and their sources. Data will be analyzed by first studying the primary texts in detail. It will be required to find sections that reveal gender relations, female subjugation, and social standards. The thematic study of feminist patterns, symbols, and language will be put in focus. Read the two feminist critiques by Rokeya and Desai to compare the differences their cultures have on them.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Begum portrayed women *Abarodhbashini* and *Sultana's Dream* by Rokeya

The stories *Abarodhbashini* and *Sutana's Dream* by Begum Rokeya are devoted to the oppression of women by men and strong traditions. Rokeya criticized the cultural mistreatment of women and revealed the risk of imprisoning half of the population. Miah (2014) explained that she spoke against the norm of the 'purdah' system and did not consider it as a part of religion but as a form of suppression that deprived women of both social existence and an education.

As noted by Peter Barry (2009), sexism tends to be perpetuated by the ideas of fixed femininity amid the attempts to change it. *Abarodhbashini* is a collection of 47 short stories in which one mocks the 'purdah' system through a blend of humorous and sorrowful stories. The system

relegated women to domestic, passive roles, and this made it appear that women were satisfied with being subservient. However, to contemporaries, this acceptance is strange.

The lady in the first story makes things fall out of control when a Kabuli woman pays a visit to a household, and the women identify her with him as a man, since she came wearing trousers. This experience demonstrates that such severe solitude causes ridiculous phobias. Other narratives (such as tales 26, 30, and 34) emphasize the inability of women to have autonomy in the matrimonial relation, the elders of the family selected husbands without the agreement of the girl. Tale 26 talks of three sisters with the same name who are not appropriately matched in marriage because of the confusion of the Mulla, but it pressures them to accept it.

In tales 3, 22-25, women share sufferings during the trip, the treatment as an object, and camouflage with sacks. In story 12, a Hindu female, who does not know the face of her husband, confuses a different man with her husband since she became lost in a crowd. In Tale 8, a woman dies in an act of house burning in the attempt to get out of her house when an instruction is given by a group of male strangers who can be described as strangers. The above examples emphasize that *purdah* was something that jeopardised women and not something that safeguarded the feminine gender.

Such realities bothered Rokeya, who was influenced by Western education. In *Jago Go Bhogini*, she was in support of female education to empowerment. In *Sultana's Dream*, her feminist utopian Dream, talks about Ladyland, a society where women dominate and men are relegated to isolation. The tale encourages equality among genders and attacks every patriarchal standard by swapping sex roles.

Parveen (1991) remarks that even being quite positive in its vision, Ladyland can be too simplistic in its attitude to gender problems. However, it is also clear that Rokeya wants to say that with equal opportunities and knowledge, women will be able to make the world and lead it. She suggests education as the main factor in countering stereotypes and empowering women.

Overall, *Abarodhbashini*, as well as *Sultana's Dream*, is a bold piece that condemns gender inequality utterly. Whereas the former displays the brutality of the truth through satire, the latter proposes a solution to continuing hope, which makes the works of Rokeya timeless works of feminism.

Portrayal of Women in Anita Desai's "The Domestic Maid" and "Cry, the Peacock"

Anita Desai effectively portrays gender relationships through the lens of psychology related to feminism in *The Domestic Maid* and *Cry, The Peacock*. Critics such as Roohi Rachel D'cruze (2016) note that despite the straightforward nature of her stories, they leave the reader with the question of the status of women following the colonial rule in India.

Geeta is an embodiment of poor rural women who face difficulties in the urban domain in *The Domestic Maid*. She is threatened by her employer, Asha, who accuses her of wasting time: "Have you taken on other work on my time?... Time to lower your pay." Geeta is full of anxiety and helplessness, which represents her class vulnerability. She regrets the absence of simple facilities and compassion of the wealthy: "They yell and abuse us for even little delays. To whom should I complain?"

Desai does not idealize her women or depict them as self-sacrificing ones, but rather as powerless and unhappy. Patriarchy can take a toll on women of all classes in the sense that

even an educated working woman like Asha takes it out on maids. Geeta's note, "The only difference between their lives and ours is that their husbands do not beat them black and blue," observes that the only thing different in their lives and ours is that they are not beaten black and blue by their husbands. Smith observes that the role presented by Desai tends to deal with the theme of 'power and dependency' between the employer and employee.

Patriarchy is what continues to trap Asha right after she declares her independence, where it is shown just how an internalization of gender roles exists. Both Asha and Geeta, as D'Cruze observes, are working women, but only the sphere of the kitchen is open to them: there is "no way out of domesticity or kitchen sharing with men."

In *Cry, the Peacock*, Maya's psychological breakdown represents the smothering impact of Patriarchal expectations. Pathak sees the image of a peacock feather as the broken identity of Maya. Descending into the inner world, Desai attempts to criticize the gender roles and emotional neglect displayed by Maya. Her husband Gautama is cold, and he supports the stereotypical view of women as passive wives.

The price of the agency denied is the visions Maya has and their entanglement with loneliness. She commits a revolution and a tragic breakdown and demonstrates the risk of not accepting the gender norms. "The use of foreshadowing," says Shefali, "reflects Maya's growing alienation and tragic fate."

Maya is fighting his husband, but she is also fighting norms within. How patriarchy divides women is reflected in her relationship with her mother-in-law, Radha, who at one time supported her, and later joined Gautama. Desai, therefore, shows how the women who are poor and those who are privileged are restricted, ignored, and stressed out by social requirements.

Comparative Analysis: Gender Dynamics and Feminist Perspectives in the Works of Begum Rokeya and Anita Desai

Although Begum Rokeya and Anita Desai lived in different epochs and represented various regions, they both explored gender relations in South Asia. With *Sultana's Dream*, Rokeya is credited with the task of shifting the roles of men and women by putting men in the domestic role and women in the leadership role. This satire is the criticism of the early-20th-century Bengali society, namely 'purdah', and discloses power imbalances. She makes educated and aggressive women the leaders of her vision.

Desai is a postcolonial Indian writer who ventures to study the emotional conflicts of modern women. Her characters in *Clear Light of Day* and *Fire on the Mountain* negotiate identity in a patriarchal sense. In contrast to the external reversal of the roles performed by Rokeya, Desai employs a psychologically realistic approach to expose the inner contradictions informed by the family and social pressures.

Therefore, the style of Rokeya is down-to-earth and extreme, and Desai's is subtle and self-analytical. Rokeya picturises the womanly utopian world; Desai concentrates on the emotional torments of the traditional role. Collectively, they illuminate the gender relations formed by society and the inner conflict.

Themes and Approaches of the Two Authors

Both Rokeya and Desai, despite the differences of cultures and period, address women's self-control, gender norms, and challenges to patriarchy. They speak against social norms and promote liberation.

They both revolve around female agency. Rokeya in the *Sultana's Dream* places the heroine in a world full of confident and educated women and questions the cultural feeling of the time that a woman had no agency. As found in *Fire on the Mountain*, where the character Nanda Kaul is protesting isolation as a way of seeking freedom, it is through isolation or reflection that Desai lets her women strive to free themselves. The significant difference here is that whereas Rokeya depicts agency in terms of social change, Desai, instead, stresses inner strength and the power of self.

On the role of genders, Rokeya sarcastically turns all conventions on its head: women are rulers, men are cooks. The characters of Desai face the gender roles in a realistic scenario. Bimla, in *Clear Light of Day*, gives up her wants to serve the family. In her narratives, it comes out clearly how fatigued women are in their attempt to satisfy the expectations of society.

They are similar in their themes, but different in their tones. Rokeya provides an image of an abolitionist of change through education. Psychological conflict, loneliness, and missed opportunities are shown in the realism of Desai. The tone of Desai is somber; Rokeya is a revolutionary.

How Feminist Perspectives Influence Gender Depiction

Rokeya and Desai are feminists, and their perspectives influence the presentation of gender. As a feminist, Rokeya supports education as the solution to patriarchy; to her, education is critical as it gives women the power to rule. Sultana is a progressive, hopeful feminist, and she envisions a peaceful, advanced society governed by women, which is seen in *Sultana's Dream*.

Feminism by Desai is analytical. The female characters created by her are more prone to emotional and social alienation in the family. We can see the impact of patriarchy not only on the roles of women but also on their inner world in her stories. There is no direct resistance at all in the works of Desai; her characters tend to find inner power when they accept themselves.

The two authors focus on the strength and identity of women. The feminism of Rokeya is one of general social revolution; that of Desai, of the struggle of women even in restrictive surroundings, is personal. Whereas one is hopeful and external, the other is inward and grounded in emotional realism. The two of them combine to criticize the gender stereotype and preach about the emancipation of women from varying perspectives.

CONCLUSION

The article has achieved the aim of providing a comparative analysis of both Begum Rokeya and Anita Desai to exhibit how feminist literature could explore gender relations. In *Sultana A Dream*, Rokeya argues about gender inequality and urges society to change so that women receive their rights and are supported by a perfect society. Desai comments negligently on the inner world of women and their mental decay. She also presents the aspect of darkness behind patriarchy and the struggle towards self-realization. Feminism is ambitious and forceful, as desired by Rokeya, to change society through the liberty of women.

In contrast, it is subtle and introspective by Desai, as it touches upon the psychological implications of societal rules and conduct. Begum Rokeya and Anita Desai demonstrate that gender relationships are not easy. Their work represents gross cultural and social restraints that restrict female freedom and internal mental conflicts that follow. The writings of Begum

Rokeya and Desai reveal the use of various attitudes to combat sexism and empower women. The analysis of their work enables the reader to trace the struggle of South Asian women, displaying how the system of restrictions is deep-rooted and how tenacious women can be in their search for freedom and their self-discovery. Their divergent ideas on gender, culture, and identity shed some light on the intricate connection between them, and this led to some feminist literature research. This study examines gender relations in the works of Begum Rokeya and Anita Desai and reaches some interesting findings. Rokeya and Desai condemn patriarchy and the position of women despite all the social, cultural, and chronological conditions. *Sultana's Dream* by Rokeya is a feminist text that breaks gender stereotypes and values the education of women, besides pointing out the economic injustice of colonial India. Conversely, Desai focuses more on the psychological reality of women. She demonstrates how the life of postcolonial Indian women is restricted to family and cultural requirements, as well as their struggles, hopes, and dreams of liberation. Her emphasis on mother-daughter relationships and female identity offers a rich analysis of gender, family, and societal institutions. Feminist literary criticism plays an imperative role in understanding gender relations. The feminist lens examines the establishment, production, and challenge of gender roles in literature and provides novel tools to challenge the unevenness of power. It allows readers to view female characters as human beings with objectives, aspirations, and motivation, and not objects of the story. The nature of gender, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and other fields used to explain the experiences of characters is understood because of feminist analysis, as intersectionality gains acceptance.

The study of feminist theory and criticism: Comparing Rokeya and Desai can be helpful in the research of feminist literary criticism, and show how the social, cultural, political, historical, and gender questions can be combined. To explore gendered realities and the voices of women in other places, scholars can examine other works of Begum Rokeya and Anita Desai or apply a tool of feminist literary inquiry to other contemporaries and postcolonial authors. Lastly, an interdisciplinary approach by feminist literary criticism that includes interventions of history, culture, sociology, and psychology may reaffirm gender dynamics in the study of literature. This would bring to light feminine self and opposition.

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