

## Antinovels of Diaspora Women Writers between Continents: A Comparative Study

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The paper centers on “Antinovels of Diaspora Women Writers between Continents.” Anita Desai has proved herself the most accomplished and admired chroniclers of middle-class India. Her novel, *Fasting, Feasting* shows the family life of two different cultures of India and America. It provides a rich tapestry of characters, detailed observation and contrasts. On the other hand, Afro-American women writer Toni Morrison predicts the veracity of life through her novels. The characters in her novels suffer from interracial conflicts and gender issues. Her recent novel ‘*A Mercy*’ is set in 17th century. It depicts the situation when slavery is deprived of its racial situation. It shows similarities between the white indentured servants and black slaves. Since women face a multifaceted oppression that is manifested in racism, sexism, classicism, women writers find it chiefly important to define and express their experiences.

### Women Writers & their Works:

Most of the women writers have portrayed the enclosed domestic space and perceptions of their personal experiences. Women are the chief upholders of a rich oral tradition of storytelling, through myths, legends, songs and fables. They have composed almost every imaginable type of work: novels, poems, letters, biographies, travel books, religious commentaries, histories, economic and scientific works. Many Indian women novelists have explored women related issues as theme in their writings, ranging from childhood to womanhood that is considered as the Bildungsroman, i.e., development of a young person usually from adolescence to maturity.

### Significance of Antinovels:

The celebrated works of Women Writers and their contribution is recognized in history. The works of Diaspora women writers are termed as Antinovels that coined by experimental fiction that gives out certain traditional elements of novels. It is coined by Jean Paul Sarte in 1948. It illustrates everyday reality which contains all cultural conflicts and worries as its content. It is the proper subject matter of the novelist interested in representing reality without imposed interpretations. The reader would be able to reconstruct reality from direct experience.

### Recent Themes in Women Writers:

Interestingly, the last four decades have noticed a change in the image of women in their works. The traditional portrayals of enduring, self-sacrificing women are replaced by

conflicted female characters searching for identity. They assert themselves and defy marriage and motherhood. Recently their writings depict the diversity of women rather than limiting with the lives of women to one ideal. Further, the novels emerging in the twenty-first century furnish examples of a whole range of attitudes towards the imposition of tradition. Some of the novels offer an analysis of the family structure and the caste system as the key elements of patriarchal social organization. Indian women writers' work is significant in making society aware of women's demands, and provides a medium of self-expression.

### **African Literature:**

The article also deals with African American or Black Literature that begins in the 18th century. Most of the African descends arrive America when they are sold into slavery as prisoners of war by African States. As the number of blacks grow in the United States, majority of them live in poverty. Racial discrimination starts and the blacks are not allowed in establishments and business by the whites. They are denied to educate by their slave owners and from speaking their own language. They are forced to speak in English. Hence, African slaves have to create their own forms of communication and expression. Subsequently Blacks start organizing their own community and fight against slavery. Gradually they set up their own community, schools and churches. African American literature explores the issues of freedom, democracy, equality which were long denied to Blacks in the United States. It also discovers further themes such as African American culture, racism, slavery and a sense of home. With this the African-American oral literature begins in the form of stories and tales. The slave narratives became an integral part of African-American literature.

All these aspects are reflected in the works of Toni Morrison. The history of African-American literature stresses on several recurrent themes like combating racism, searching for a black identity, and maintaining a unique quality of life. Contemporary authors such as Alice Walker and Maya Angelou continue to expand the canon of African-American literature.

### **Anita Desai**

Many Indian women novelists have explored female inequality in order to establish an identity that is not imposed by a patriarchal society. Their novels depict the psychological suffering of the frustrated housewife, their experiences, and the repressed and oppressed lives of women of the lower classes.

The paper is confined to a few women writers whose works reflect the above mentioned themes. One of them is Anita Desai, an Indian novelist, a short story writer who is especially noted for her sensitive portrayal of the inner life of her female characters. Most of her novels explore tensions between family members and the alienation of middle class women. She is born to a Bengali father and a German mother on June 24, 1931. She has grown up imbibing both western and Indian cultures.

### **Toni Morrison**

Tony Morrison was born in Lorain Ohio. She is the most American recipient of the Nobel Prize for literature. In 1949 she entered Howard University, where she received her graduate. She earned a Master of Arts degree in English from Cornell University in 1955. She became a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority. She played vital role in bringing black literature into the mainstream in her books Toni Cade Bambara, Angela Davis, Gayl Jones. Before the civil war, the literature focuses on the issues of slavery.

Tony Morrison is the most American recipient of the Nobel Prize for literature. She plays vital role in bringing black literature into the mainstream in her books. A Mercy is her 9th novel, first published in 2008. It reveals what lies beneath the surface of slavery in early America.

### **Major Thought in the Select Novels:**

Anita has presented an ideal image of modern 'New Woman'. Her novels are certainly reflections of social realities from psychological perspective. She closely examines the emotional world of womankind. She deals with various thoughts, emotions and sensations of women. Most of her characters are members of the Anglicized Indian bourgeoisie; whose marital problems are in the forefront. Her works engage the complexities of modern Indian culture from a feminine perspective while highlighting the female Indian predicament of maintaining self-identity as an individual woman

Anita Desai's Fasting, Feasting explores the different aspects of Indian and American culture. The title explains the two parts of the book, Fasting in India and Feasting in America. It shows gender inequality across two cultures, in India and the USA. Anita Desai writes about India as we Indians know it. Gender inequality can be a way of life in India is brought out powerfully by her.

Fasting, Feasting is woven around an Indian middle class family, with two daughters and a son. The Indian tradition accepts sons going abroad for studies and daughters getting married. The pathetic condition of a girl is that if she is not very high in the looks it might be difficult for her to get married. The character of Uma is one such protagonist who undergoes various trials in her life. She is portrayed as a traditional Indian woman born to suffer. She is an ordinary girl trying to live in the society, accepting all sufferings, miseries, injustices and humiliations.

### **Slavery & Female Victimization in Toni Morrison's 'A Mercy'**

Toni Morrison's 'A Mercy' reveals what lies beneath the surface of slavery in early America. It is both the story of mothers and daughters and also the story of a primitive America. Florens, a slave, lives and works on Jacob Vaark's rural New York farm. Lina, a Native American and fellow laborer on the Vaark farm, relates in a parallel narrative how she became one of a handful of survivors of a smallpox plague that destroyed her tribe. Vaark's wife Rebekkah describes leaving England on a ship for the new world to be married to a man she has never seen. The deaths of their subsequent children are devastating, and Vaark accepts a young Florens from a debtor in the hopes that this new addition to the farm will help alleviate Rebekkah's loneliness. Vaark, himself an orphan and poorhouse survivor, describes his journeys from New York to Maryland and Virginia, commenting on the role of religion in the culture of the different colonies, along with their attitudes toward slavery.

Morrison said in an interview about A Mercy

*"The only difference between African slaves and European or British slaves was that the latter could run away and melt into the population. But if you were black, you were noticeable."*

A Mercy clearly mentions about Interracial discrimination. It states very clearly that white has got the license to kill any black for any reason and the whites are all separated and protected. The gender discrimination is between landlords and women slaves. Racial discrimination is manifested between masters and servants in the society in a race, in a cult or in a country.

*“A Negro boy had been summoned and now brought six tankards, the handles of three in each hand, and set them on the table” pg7.*

The novel’s main narrator Florens is a slave born in America of an African mother. African mother offers her small daughter to a stranger in payment of her master’s debt.

*“Take the girl, she says, my daughter, she says. Me. Me.” pg 5 (A Mercy)*

On one side shows the desperate condition of a slave girl Florens’s mother unable to avoid the condition of slavery and on the other hand girls are not respected, never cared their feelings nor equal treatment compared to boys. This pathetic situation is happening today in many places.

The conversation goes between Jacob and D’Ortega about choosing slaves in their farms. Women are not given any importance or respect and they are subjected to slavery.

Jacob - *“Her. That one. I’ll take her”*

D’Ortega - *“She is our main cook, the best one”*

*“But there are other women here, More. You see them.” (A Mercy)*

Morrison examines the roots of racism going back to slavery’s earliest days and showing the relationship between men and women. Women in early America often ended in female victimization. Slavery goes to an extent that women degrade from the womanhood. They are sold and exchange like goods.

*“Use her? Sell her!” pg 23 (A Mercy)*

They are "of and for men," people who "never shape the world, the world shapes us." As the women journey toward self-enlightenment, Morrison often describes their progress in Biblical cadences, and by the end of this novel, the reader understands the significance of the title, "A Mercy".

### **Gender Inequality in ‘The Bluest Eye’ & ‘Fasting, Feasting’**

Another work of Toni Morrison is The Bluest Eye published in 1970 which examines the tragic effects of imposing white, middle class American ideals of beauty on the developing female identity of a young African American girl during the early 1940’s. It also portrays of Afro-American female identity. This novel poignantly shows the psychological devastation of a young black girl Pecola Breedlove who search for love and acceptance in a world that denies and devalues people of her own race.

In Fasting, Feasting a heartrending situation of Uma being forced to stay at home and do the household tasks instead of going to school. She tries to protest,

*'I've got to get my sums done and then write the composition'. 'Leave all that,' Her mother snaps at her.'* Pg.18

Her mother never encourages her to attend school. Though she is interested in studies, she hardly gets time for it. Ultimately, she fails,

*'You know you failed your exams again. You're not being moved up. What's the use of going back to school? Stay at home and look after your baby brother'* Pg 22

## **Gender Discrimination**

Gender discrimination is one of the prominent themes in Indian women. Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* reveals how women have suffered both physically and mentally in a male dominated patriarchal framework. Her Papa and Mama entrap Uma, by discontinuing her education in order to look after Arun in turn is entrapped by the clutches of the new culture. Uma does not try to come out of her entrapment where as Arun moves away in a possible manner but both of them learn to adjust themselves with the situation.

Uma is forced to look after her baby brother. *"He needs proper attention"* pg 30

Thus, she is forced to take up the role of the mother when her brother Arun is born. Her mother escapes her duty and leaves him safely in the hands of her elder daughter.

Morrison examines the roots of racism going back to slavery's earliest days, providing glimpses of the various religious practices of the time, and showing the relationship between men and women in early America that often ended in female victimization. They are "of and for men," people who "never shape the world, The world shapes us." As the women journey toward self-enlightenment, Morrison often describes their progress in Biblical cadences, and by the end of this novel, the reader understands the significance of the title, "A Mercy."

## **Interracial Conflicts in 'Fasting, Feasting'**

Desai explores Arun's loneliness struggles with internal questions and conflicts. Arun poses this question to himself in part because he is not only unfamiliar and cautious of his natural surroundings, but also of the people around him. The idea that Arun questions both his natural and human surroundings further emphasizes his absolute. He misses his parents, relatives and everybody.

*"He had no past, no family, and no country."*pg 176

Arun was not given any identity or importance because of his race. No one talks to him and was not given even a proper room. Interracial discrimination is mentioned very clearly by showing on the other side of the coin in America through Arun's character.

Uma is entrapped at home and smothered by her parents and the Indian tradition which brings off her an unsuccessful marriage.

Finally Uma is married to an elderly person.” *The man looked as old as Papa*” pg 90

Uma travels to her in-law’s place by train. After reaching it, Uma’s husband leaves for Meerut .She sits on the bed for the whole night waiting for him. He never turns up. She is humiliated and insulted by her in- laws. She is unable to understand her husband’s lack of interest in her. After a few days Uma is shocked to see her father there. To her surprise he tells Uma that her husband, Harish is already married and has four children. Uma is taken back to her home. She faces a lot of humiliation. Papa tries to get back dowry and jewellery . She is divorced within a few days. Thereafter, she is considered ill fated by all and no more attempts are made to marry her off.

### **Racial Discrimination in ‘The Bluest Eye’**

Pecola connects beauty with being loved and believes that if she possesses blue eyes, the cruelty in her life will be replaced by affection on respect. The desire of beauty leads to madness. Her strong inclination of blue eyes relates to stream of consciousness which Pecola has been facing for a long time. She feels that if she possesses blue eyes, people would not do ugly things in front of her or to her. She is raped by her gather Cholly. Morrison portrays majority of the men in African Society mistreat women and envision them as inferior who exist to satisfy their sexual needs.

Pecola is the protagonist of The Bluest Eye remains calm and mysterious. She longs to possess the conventional American standards of feminine beauty like white skin, blonde hair and blue eyes which are popular icons and traditions of white culture. She is being told continuously and reminded of what an “*ugly*” girl she is. She under goes a series of degradations impregnated by the father and disintegrated into merciful madness. She is talking to herself, imagining that she would at last transferred into one of the blue-eyed dolls.

*‘I am cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly…….’*

The black characters Geraldine and Mrs. Breedlove are excessively concerned with house cleaning of the white employers which indicates slavery. Cholly’s rape of Pecola culminates the psychological, social, person depreciation by white society. Her wish for blue eyes, lighter skin transcends racism; she hates herself for being black.

*“Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of ugliness, the ugliness that make her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike”.*  
(The Bluest Eye)

At the same time every African American character hates in various degrees like race. Besides exposing the inherent racism of the American standard of beauty, it also examines the child abuse in terms of violence. She undergoes a series of degradations by her father.

### **Conclusion**

The piece of writing concludes with an observation of pitiful trials and sufferings of women despite their cultural background. It tries to project through a few characters like Uma,

Florens and Pecola Breedlove as depicted in the works of Anita Desai and Toni Morrison. All the women characters lose their self identity and are pawns to gender discrimination. The theme of Inter racial discrimination is shown clearly in the works of Toni Morrison. The theme of Gender discrimination is depicted in the works of Anita Desai. The themes of the two Diaspora novelists reflect the min characteristics features of Anti Novels. It is pathetic to mention that women suffer in the male dominant society though they belong to Asia or Afro-America. The reader would be able to reconstruct reality from direct experience.

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