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## Analysing the Insurgent Female Psyche in Patriarchal Settings

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the insurgent female psyche in patriarchal settings, with an emphasis on the mental and emotional states, as well as psychological resilience, of women who challenge patriarchal standards across varied cultural contexts. Their rebellion is both personal and political, as they fight to restore autonomy and affirm their identities in a world that seeks to marginalise them. Historically, male hegemony has governed the universal interaction between men and women, with women accepting societal rules that limit their freedom. Contemporary women, on the other hand, are questioning this acceptance by pursuing autonomy and discovering strategies to overcome painful events. Modern literature depicts women who break conventional standards by demonstrating confidence, relaxation, and vocal defiance. Characters such as Devi of Githa Hariharan, Maya in Sobha De's Second Thoughts, Sarita of Sashi Deshpande, Simrit of Nayantara Sahgal, Lucy of J.M. Coetzee's Disgrace, Chantal of Milan Kundera's Identity, Clara Velde in Saul Bellow's A Theft, all of them have represented the rejection of enslavement, torment, and alienation, showing the changing dynamics of man-woman relationships.

**Keywords:** *Insurgent, Patriarchal, Subjugation, Conventions, Feminine Protests, Male Hegemony, Defiance, Psychological Resilience.*

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### Introduction

In the annals, the question of gender equality has remained a persistent complex narrative, particularly in patriarchal societies. Women who resist oppression have psychological profiles for examination. Through hermeneutic methodologies, we can explore the narratives of individual agency and systemic oppression. The paper aims to illuminate the mental and emotional states and psychological resilience of women who defy patriarchal norms in different



cultural contexts. Their actions are not only personal but political too because they struggle to reclaim autonomy and affirm their identities in a world designed to marginalize them.

### **Concept to Explore:**

**Narrative and Memory:** The role of personal and collective narratives in shaping the insurgent female psyche.

**Intersectionality:** What intersecting identities (race, class, sexuality) influence the experiences and actions of insurgent women?

### **Potential Challenges:**

**Unbiased Interpretation:** Ensuring that interpretations are not biased by the researcher's perspectives.

**Complexity of Psyche:** The human psyche is complex and multifaceted, making it difficult to draw definitive conclusions.

**Contextual Variability:** The influence of specific cultural, social, and historical contexts on the insurgent female psyche.

Devi, an American-educated heroine of Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night* is unable to bear her husband's non-recognition tendency. Her husband Mahesh is working as a Manager in a MNC and she is to him just a woman—a woman to be tied down to household chores, a woman who has no right to aspire to become anybody other than a full-time housewife. He is unable to sense in her the undiscovered concern of her interests and ambitions which she reveals in cherishing a career of her own. Mahesh needs a child but Devi is unable to give him, when he attributes her gloom to her American education, she argues, "Am I neurotic because am a lazy woman who does not polish her floors every day? An aimless fool because I swallowed my hard-earned education bitter and indigestible when he tied the thali round my neck? (74)

Ironically, it is the love that Devi seeks in her husband. She has a definite view regarding marriage: "a marriage cannot be forced into suddenly being there, it must grow gradually, like a delicate but promising sapling." (49) Devi leaves Mahesh, unable to cope with his attitudes, and her solitude. She runs away from home to Gopal, her neighbour's brother. But here again,

Gopal, the singer, does not fully comprehend her. When she becomes part of Gopal's entourage for months, his music also becomes no longer romantic or magnetic. She defies her husband and her lover and leaves them to live in her own home by the sea. It is only the male domination, the male unwillingness to identify her individuality that leads her to break off all ties with both men.

Like Devi, Maya in Sobha De's *Second Thoughts* suffers from being marginalized in her existence. She is a degree-holder in textile design and is married to a Bombay-based Bengali bank officer. Maya's fate is also within the confines of the routines of a housewife. Ranjan, her husband, has almost alienated her from his realm, where he enjoys a strong tie with his mother. His mother is his confidant and guide and he even denies motherhood to Maya. Frustrated with the hopeless emptiness of her marriage, she ultimately falls prey to the ruthless seduction by Nikhil, a college-going neighbour. He has trapped her into what she describes as "the most wonderful, the most unimaginable, the most moving experience of my life." (271) It pains her that Ranjan does not recognize her individuality and when he cautions her to be wary of Bombay women she petulantly asks, "As if I'm a kid who can be so easily influenced. As if I don't have a mind of my own. As if, I lack any sense of judgment." (55) She is confined to the background of household duties and when she tells him that she has decided to join a few classes on pottery, he is taken aback and frightens her by saying that those are the places where recruitment is done for prostitution. She is depressed and feels ill in her husband's presence, "Was it his smugness that froze me? Or his judgmental, supercilious attitudes that conveyed superiority over me? ... It was no use telling myself that I was lucky compared to women married to alcoholics or wife beaters. ... He was generally kind to me, but this kindness was the sort people reserved for the physically handicapped or the abject poor." (163) She could not sublimate her desires and so when Nikhil takes her honour, she feels a sense of enrichment and as if she has reached a world of transcendence. It is her way of protest, of taking revenge on Ranjan. It becomes a manifestation of her long-cherished dream. She basks in the feeling of superiority over Ranjan because she has defied him by being an accomplice in the adultery.

Sarita, a medical doctor in Shashi Deshpande's *Dark Holds No Terrors*, and Simrit in Nayantara Sahgal's *The Day in Shadow* are similar victims of male aggressiveness. Sarita, who is married to Manohar, the poet-teacher, leaves home unable to bear the animal-like behaviour of her husband in bed. She leaves "to sleep peacefully the night through. To wake up without



pain. ... Just to live." (27) She is not in any sense a fatalist. She braves it out knowing fully well that Manohar's brutal treatment of her at night is an ego-function. His ego has been scarred by her success in the profession.

Simrit in Nayantara Sahgal's *The Day in Shadow* is another victim of a selfish husband Som. She has always felt like an obedient, domestic animal, but when she fails to rise to Som's goals, he takes revenge on her by imposing the Consent Terms of the divorce. Som, a junior executive in a company has been unchivalrous in making her pay taxes for the shares that would come not to her but to their son at maturity. She finds solace in Raj, a rising Member of Parliament, who is understanding and sympathetic towards her. Finding an anchor in Raj has been the outcome of her determination, to meet Som on equal grounds.

The cultural phenomenon of treating woman as a subordinate sex or in other words as a need-satisfying object is empirically universal. Despite all claims to equality, the devaluation of women still exists in the world. It is a global phenomenon, irrespective of the East and the West landscape. Lucy, the daughter of a middle-aged scholar, in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* is gang-raped by three visitors, but she keeps it a secret even from her father for some time for fear of the disgrace, the shame that has been brought to her. The agony of her traumatic experience leaves her helpless with psychological wounds, while the three culprits leave with a sense of achievement. She does not succumb to her fate but withstands the oppression and views it as the price she has to pay for living in the Black Country.

Her attitude sustains her through the experience. Like Sarita and Simrit, Lucy also survives till the end, much to the dismay of her father, she agrees to the proposal of marriage to Petrus, a native and helper. It is almost a deal that he has struck: "He is offering an alliance, a deal. I contribute the land, in return for which I am allowed to creep in under his wing. Otherwise, he wants to remind me, I am without protection, I am fair game." (203) Lucy has succeeded in breaking the ice in the conventions of society by viewing rape in a new light.

Milan Kundera's *Identity* is a psychological study of the subtleties of man-woman relationships. When Chantal understands that her lover Jean Marc is testing her—a test born out of destructive jealousy, she is unable to compromise with the situation. When she tells JeanMarc that "men don't turn to look at me anymore," (36) He feels jealousy which manifests in writing letters to her and delineating the real personality of a man. She dares to discover the correspondent but



she cannot forgive him immediately. She takes her revenge by planning to depart for London. Chantal had earlier left her husband when he insisted on having a second child to forget the loss of the first one. She could not rebel when her first child was alive though she felt disgust living with her husband's family. But when Jean-Marc suspects her fidelity, she rebels and leaves him though temporarily.

Clara Velde, the corporate executive in Saul Bellow's *A Theft* lives with her fourth husband, Wilder Velde, who thinks everything will be well as long as he occupies the cushions. Clara runs the household and handles the burden lonely. Her husband's superego provokes her but he cannot understand why she is so provoked. She finds moral consolation in Teddy Regler, her all-knowing lover. He is the one way left for her to give an outlet for her pent-up emotions. Her sentiment for the emerald ring gifted to her by Teddy shows her passion for her lover. She says that her four husbands and three kids have not cured her as Teddy has done. The woman leaves her husband and finds solace in her lover.

The same is the case with the Mistress in Philip Roth's *Deception*. The married woman goes away from her husband and comes closer to the writer-lover Philip. From her conversation, we understand how she has run away even from her baby so that she can be with her lover, who is a great writer. She tells him that her English husband packs her off only because she accepts the job of a guide. But she feels she is different. "I want to be myself... I am not necessarily going to be married to someone." (59) She tells the writer-lover that her husband behaves beautifully when she is on top of the world but annoys her when she is defenseless, it is painful to bear. She is a victim of her husband's whims but she bears her situation boldly in an unperturbed manner registering her protest at his aggressiveness by defying him, making love with her lover.

Whether it is Anuradha of Arun Joshi's *The Last Labyrinth* who refuses to marry because she can't marry everyone she loves, or Helen Bober in *The Assistant* of Bernard Malamud who resists 'Frank-Alpine's amorous advances because she cannot give herself unless she is really in love with the person,' these women have an awareness of their individuality. Women have always been a prized possession a commodity to be treasured. Wars have been waged for her and the epics of the East and the West are telling evidence of this. Sita was the cause of the war in *The Ramayana*, Draupadi in *The Mahabharata*, and Helen of Troy in *The Iliad*.



*My Story* is an autobiography book of Kamala Das. It is not fiction but rather a factual document, an interplay between the past and present. It is subjective because truth flows from the inside in many ways. Painful psychological experiences are revealed in it though autobiographers are generally silent at this point. Her dark complexion is unsuitable to parents who lived in their world, married at the tender age of fifteen to a lustful cousin who unashamedly boasted about his illegal affairs with friends, cousins, and maid-servants. These harsh realities and betrayal completely shattered her craving for an emotional bond with her husband. When marital love degenerates into lust, she is haunted by frustration which paves the way to extra-marital affairs. Love becomes an obsession for her. This marks Kamala as a unique writer. It is really hard to write and harder if the writer is a woman.

She is confessional in her autobiography and professes her strong dislike of the patriarchy that controls her life. In 'Introduction' she finds herself feeble in contrast to male hegemony who have unlimited power. She is struggling for her identity and finally steps away from the traditional role of wife. She finds that a man can sell his identity and is allowed to realize his choices and emotions, but when a woman does the same to prove that she, too, can do it.

*My Story* of Kamala Das reinvents the intimate voices, she expresses her resentment of being confined to gender roles and her desire to break them. She uses different pedagogies like introspection, self-analysis, self-expression, and self-revelation to establish her point. Her English is 'Indianized'. She musters her courage to stave off conventions and reveal her private life honestly. A few women writers talk about body and body expressions (sexual encounters). It is middle-class morality that checks them to discuss their body and physical dimensions for example, children are being born but it is prohibited to discuss sexual union, Kamala debunks these ideas.

After the Second World War, two auto-biographers in British and American literature were established and no woman writer was included in this genre because women writers were treated as sentimental chronicles and their stories 'made-up' and 'non-sense'. Post-colonial Indian women writing in English is more concerned with man-woman relationships than other issues. Writers like Kamala Das portray women as individuals in search of freedom rather than objects of sexual pleasure. Insatiate feelings are one of the features of Kamala Das. Shifts of emotions also surprise readers when she depicts her husband as a womanizer on the other side as 'darling'. The question arises, is a woman something a man would feel proud of possessing?



Sarita the heroine of Shashi Deshpande resents the pride with which her husband treats her as a showpiece. Som, the male hero of Sahgal, keeps heroine Simrit physically in the room, but mentally out. He enjoys her physical presence but alienates her mentally. Unless there is a societal change, women's conditions will be the same. This points out the naked truth that there has been no marked change in men's attitude toward women. Feminism is a movement for the liberation of women who exposes the inner side of men who control their emancipation. The impact of these liberal movements can be noticed in the lifestyle of today's women, they are more progressive than ever. Society can notice a drastic change in ethics and values followed by women, they have started awakening themselves as better half of men.

In many ways Feminism has been stronger in a modern social environment, the bond of understanding between man and woman has become the epitome of newly bestowed independence. The battle is half won; she must keep on working to get rid of her pathetic plight without giving up herself to fate. Gender equality remains a dream in middle-class Indian societies. Man has always escaped unscathed, even when the sin is committed together, as in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. The opinion of a man about a woman is that she is the 'weaker sex', this reality comes as an emitted reaction because society has pushed her hard towards dependency. What has remained unnoticed is that the feminist and liberated psyche of the modern educated woman has had its existence even in the past. In the epic *The Ramayana*, Sita resisted the advances of Ravana and when rejected at the end by her protector Sri Ram, she protested the society by vanishing into the womb of Mother Earth. In epic *The Mahabharata*, Draupadi had displayed her ferocity by washing her hair in the blood of Dushasana likewise Penelope in Homer's *Iliad* had rejected the wooing of her suitors in the absence of her husband. The mindset of male chauvinism counts women as inferior to age. Man treats her as a second-class citizen and when she cannot bear this oppression and starts revolt, her defiance shudders like a violent storm. Feminism is a movement of protest for the rights, safety, and upliftment of women. In nostalgic fondness, the modern woman ponders over the *ardha-narishvara* concept that guarantees equal status for women with men because the Eternal Male Principle and the Eternal Female Principle do not exist but co-existence lies in mutual proximity.

## **Conclusion**





A heuristic analysis of the insurgent female psyche in a hermeneutic framework with a patriarchal setting aims to deepen the understanding of how women navigate and resist oppressive systems. This interdisciplinary approach can provide valuable insights into the psychological and emotional dimensions of female insurgency and contribute to broader discussions on gender, power, and resistance.

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