

PREFACE

For centuries, women have been denied justice – social, economic, political and constitutional and largely devalued as ‘the second sex’. According to Simon de Beauvoir, ‘one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman ... it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature’ (Simon de Beauvoir 1949, Rept. 1987 : 295). The mid-twentieth century saw the upsurge of the new awareness about women’s marginalization, resulting in the birth of Women’s Liberation Movement that professes ‘ personal is political.’ Its politics was directed at changing the power relations between men and women in the existing society. Literature, as a discursive practice, does not remain unaffected but explores the ‘Woman Question ’ extensively and vociferously. In recent times feminist scholarship participates in the large efforts to liberate women from the structures that have marginalized them and as such it seeks not only to reinterpret the world but to change it.

Anita Desai, an outstanding postcolonial woman writer, articulates her deep concern over women’s victimization in her works. Her multicultural affiliation enables her to imagine and convey the battle between the sexes artistically in the postcolonial condition. In all her novels published during the period from 1963 to 1999, which this dissertation seeks to study in Foucauldian feminist perspectives, Anita Desai resurrects ‘ the subjugated knowledges’ of different Third-world and western women seen against the background of a patriarchal capitalist society. In resurrecting ‘the subjugated knowledges’, Anita Desai, like a genealogist, locates many discontinuous individual women’s struggles against different forms of power in patriarchal capitalist societies. In their struggles they are made either to take different positions of resistance or negotiate in power relations. The struggles are mainly organized from two strategic positions : appropriation and abrogation. As a corollary of this, the female protagonists selectively appropriate and abrogate different social institutions and cultural practices to serve their personal ends. The protagonists are neither selfless, passive and docile nor conventional and traditional, rather they are equipped with oppositional consciousness and even sometimes endowed with a vision of an alternative world. She can be therefore said to have effected an ‘insurrection of subjugated

knowledges' thereby positing herself as a postcolonial feminist novelist with a vision of women's sub-culture that underlines a bond of mother-daughter in opposition to an aggressive patriarchal culture and prefers multiculturalism to a purely national one.