

EXPLORING THE CULTURAL CONFLICTS IN ANITHA DESAI'S *FASTING, FEASTING*

Ms. Blessila Mary C(23PEL0001), M A English Literature, Dr. SNS Rajalakshmi  
College of Arts and Science, Coimbatore-49.

Dr. D. Divya, Head of the Department, Department of English, Dr. SNS Rajalakshmi  
College of Arts and Science, Coimbatore-49.

**ABSTRACT :**

*Fasting, Feasting* is a novel written by Anitha Desai an Indian writer, novelist and professor. Who received Sahitya Akademi Award and shortlisted as a writer for Bookers prize three times. This novel was first published in 1999 in Great Britain by Chatto & Windus. It was shortlisted for the Booker Prize for fiction in 1999. Anita Desai's tenth novel, *Fasting, Feasting* deals with themes of deprivation, abundance and being trapped in society's claims. It also deals with male and female roles in two completely different cultures, Indian and American cultures. This paper revolves around the Cultural conflicts which contrasts between the Indian and American culture.

**Keywords:** Culture-Conflicts-Struggles-Gender Stereotypes-Social Circumstance.

This paper briefly narrates about Anita Desai's one of the remarkable novel, *Fasting, Feasting*. Which masterfully illustrates the theme of cultural conflict through the experiences of its two central characters, Uma and Aruna. The novel compares the traditional Indian values with Western ideals, creating a rich tapestry of tension and identity struggle. It profounds the exploration of identity, cultural contradiction, and the complexities of familial relationships. It also contrasts the lives of two central characters, Uma and Aruna, highlighting their struggles within the limits of traditional expectations and personal aspirations. Uma expresses the traditional Indian woman, trapped by societal norms, while Aruna's life in America presents a different set of challenges and freedoms, reflecting the tension between tradition and modernity. The novel critically examines the rigid gender roles imposed on women. Uma's lack of guidance and Aruna's pursuit of independence highlights the societal pressures that shape their identities. Anitha Desai looks into the difficulties of family relationships, describes the emotional distance within Uma's family. The parent's expectations and their indifference to Uma's aspirations reveal the intense issues in familial bonds. The title itself symbolizes the dual nature of survival. "Fasting" signifies deprivation, both emotionally and physically, while "feasting" reflects abundance and fulfilment. This mystery resonates throughout the character's experiences. And analysis the differing gender roles within these cultural contexts. Uma's life is defined by the expectations of a traditional Indian woman, highlights the sacrifice and duty. On the other hand, Aruna's struggle for independence in a Western context reflects a broader conversation about women's rights and personal agency, complicating her identity further. Uma is portrayed as the essential sacrificial figure, exhibits the suffering of many Indian women. Her unfulfilled dreams and societal marginalization evokes sympathy, serving as an account of patriarchal norms. Her life choices are dictated by familial obligations and societal expectations. The lack of agency and repeated failures evoke a sense of tragedy, positioning her as a representation of countless women trapped in similar circumstances. Anitha Desai's fine portrayal invites readers to empathize with Uma's suffering, making her a powerful voice in the narrative.

In contrast, Aruna represents the search for self-identity amidst cultural dislocation. Her attempts to navigate her dual identity highlight the challenges faced by immigrants in adapting their past and present. Her journey in America exposes her to a world of possibilities but also a profound sense of disconnection. Aruna's struggle to balance her Indian heritage with her new identity highlights the theme of cultural dislocation, making her experience representing of the immigrant narrative. Anitha Desai employs a rich, logical narrative style that often blurs the lines between internal thoughts and external realities. Her use of vivid imagery and symbolism deepens the reader's engagement with the character's inner lives, making their struggles more relatable and emotional. This novel is a multi-

layered narrative that invites readers to reflect on the complexities of cultural identity and the often conflicting desires that shape human experience. Anitha Desai's fine portrayal of her characters serves as a powerful commentary on the societal structures that influence their lives, making the novel a timeless exploration of the human condition. It weaves together the lives of two sisters, Uma and Aruna, reflecting on themes of identity, cultural dichotomy, and the impact of familial expectations. The novel's structure, character development, and thematic depth invite a comprehensive analysis of the complexities inherent in their lives. At the heart of the novel, the author elaborates the contrast between Indian and Western cultures. Uma, who remains in India, battles with traditional expectations that limit her to a life of slavery and sacrifice. In contrast, Aruna's life in America represents a broader spectrum of possibilities, yet it is filled with its own set of challenges, highlighting the dual nature of freedom and isolation. This mystery raises questions about the nature of identity and belonging, suggesting that neither culture provides a complete solution to the character's struggles. The novel provides a brief explanation of the anti-feminine structures that define gender roles. Uma's character explains the sufferings of many Indian women who are expected to conform to societal norms, often at the expense of their own desires and ambitions. Her frustrated aspirations and ultimate submission to familial duties expose the systemic limitations imposed on women. Likewise, Aruna's journey reflects the complexities of seeking independence in a foreign land. While she initially experiences freedom, her attempts to navigate her identity often lead to sadness, illustrating the emotional toll of dual cultural existence. Desai emphasizes that liberation in one context can lead to isolation in another. Desai looks deeply into the dynamics of the family unit, particularly the emotional distance that penetrates Uma's household. The parents, particularly the mother, embody traditional expectations, often exhibiting indifference to Uma's struggles. This emotional detachment highlights the broader theme of detachment within familial relationships, as each member suffers with their own expectations and disappointments. The contrasting relationships between Uma and her siblings further underscore the fragmentation within the family. Uma's sacrifices for her family often go unrecognized, leading to a profound sense of isolation. Aruna's eventual departure to the U.S. signifies a physical and emotional distancing, emphasizing the fractures in familial bonds. The title serves as a powerful metaphor for the duality of human experience. "Fasting" symbolizes deprivation be it emotional, spiritual, or physical reflecting Uma's internal struggles and her inability to assert her identity. It summarizes the societal impositions that limit her life choices. In contrast, "Feasting" represents abundance and fulfilment, paralleling Aruna's experiences in America, where she is exposed to new opportunities and lifestyles. However, even in this abundance, there are underlying themes of loneliness and existential crisis, suggesting that feasting can also lead to emptiness. Anitha Desai employs a rich, introspective narrative style that blurs the lines between the character's internal thoughts and external realities. This stream-of-consciousness technique invites readers into the psychological landscapes of Uma and Aruna, allowing for a deeper understanding of their emotional trauma. The use of vivid imagery and sensory details enhances the narrative's emotional impact. Anitha Desai's descriptive language captures the essence of both the Indian setting and the contrasting American environment, emphasizing the characters' internal conflicts and external realities. Both sisters experience profound isolation, albeit in different contexts. Uma's isolation is rooted in her domestic life, characterized by a lack of recognition and fulfilment. Her existence is a continuous struggle against the constraints of her environment. Aruna, on the other hand, experiences alienation in a foreign land, grappling with cultural dislocation and the complexities of identity. Her attempts to assimilate into American culture often lead to a sense of loneliness, reinforcing the notion that freedom does not necessarily equate to fulfilment. Anitha Desai's novel is a richly layered narrative that resonates with universal themes of identity, culture, and the human condition. Through the lives of Uma and Aruna, as the author presents an emotional exploration of the challenges faced by women in contemporary society, making the novel a timeless reflection on the struggle for selfhood amidst societal expectations. The interplay between fasting and feasting serves as a powerful lens through which to examine the

dualities of existence, inviting readers to reflect on their own lives and the broader human experience. Uma, who remains in India, embodies traditional roles and expectations, often facing societal pressures to conform to familial obligations. In contrast, Aruna's life in America represents the pursuit of individual freedom and modernity. This mystery highlights the clash between adhering to cultural heritage and embracing new opportunities, raising questions about identity and belonging. Aruna's transition to life in the United States reveals the challenges of cultural assimilation. Although she initially experiences newfound independence, she struggles with feelings of alienation and the pressure to conform to American societal norms. This struggle emphasizes the conflict between her Indian roots and the desire to adapt to a different culture. Both sisters confront familial expectations that shape their life choices. Uma's dreams are constantly overshadowed by her family's demands, leading to a deep internal conflict. Aruna, while seeking freedom, also feels the weight of her family's traditional values, complicating her ability to fully embrace her new life. The themes of fasting and feasting symbolize the cultural conflict at play. "Fasting" represents deprivation and the restrictive nature of Indian society, while "feasting" signifies abundance and the possibilities offered in the West. This duality reflects the inner trauma faced by the characters as they navigate their identities within conflicting cultural frameworks. Both Uma and Aruna experience profound emotional isolation, but in different contexts. Uma's isolation arises from her adherence to familial expectations, while Aruna feels disconnected in her new environment. This shared sense of isolation underscores the complexities of navigating cultural identities. This novel presents a delicate exploration of cultural conflict, revealing the complexity to identity formation in a globalized world. Through the lives of Uma and Aruna, Desai highlights the ongoing struggle between tradition and modernity, ultimately inviting readers to reflect on the multifaceted nature of cultural identity. Desai's novel is a richly layered narrative that resonates with universal themes of identity, culture, and the human condition. Through the lives of Uma and Aruna, Desai presents a affecting exploration of the challenges faced by women in contemporary society, making the novel a timeless reflection on the struggle for selfhood amongst societal expectations. The interplay between fasting and feasting serves as a powerful lens through which to examine the dualities of existence, inviting readers to reflect on their own lives and the broader human experience. The cultural conflicts in Anita Desai's novel *Fasting, Feasting* include Gender roles and stereotypes in Indian culture, as seen in the struggles of Uma and Aruna in a patriarchal society. It between traditional Indian values and modern American ways of life, as experienced by Arun in the United States and the generational gap between parents and children, reflected in the differing values and expectations of Mama Papa and their children. The tension between individual desires and familial obligations, as the characters navigate their own dreams and the responsibilities imposed upon them by their family and society. The comparison of dysfunctional family dynamics in both Indian and American settings, highlighting the universality of family conflicts across cultures Anita Desai's novel. It masterfully explores the complexities of cultural identity, generational conflict, and the struggle for self-discovery. The novel skilfully weaves together themes of tradition, modernity, and the quest for individuality, creating a rich tapestry of experiences that transcend cultural boundaries. Ultimately, the novel reveals that true freedom and growth can only be achieved by embracing our own unique rhythms, whether in the midst of familial chaos or in the silence of solitude.

#### **WORKS CITED:**

- Desai Anitha's *Fasting, Feasting*. Penguin Books by Penguin Random House India, 2020. Print  
Desai, Anita. *Fasting, Feasting*. London: Vintage 2000.  
Desai, Anita. "A Secret Connivance." *Times Literary Supplement* (14 September 1990): 972  
Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1979.