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## The Postcolonial and Feminist Perspectives in select plays of Manjula Padmanabhan and Mahasweta Devi

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### Abstract:

This paper examines the postcolonial and feminist viewpoints found in a few plays by prominent Indian authors Mahasweta Devi and Manjula Padmanabhan, who are renowned for questioning social systems and conventional gender standards. The paper looks at how these playwrights challenge and dismantles popular misconceptions and stereotypes about women in Indian culture, drawing on Simone de Beauvoir's ideas of The Other, immanence and transcendence, Situation and Freedom, and myths and realities and Said's *Orientalism*. The paper examines how women's agency and hardships are portrayed in various situations by analyzing Padmanabhan's *Escape*, *The Island of Lost Girls*, Devi's *Mother of 1084*, and other works. While Devi's realistic depictions highlight the intersections of gender, caste, and socioeconomic variables in determining women's experiences through postcolonial era, Padmanabhan's dystopian stories question social norms and expectations.

**Key words:** Postcolonial, Myths, Socioeconomic, Conventional gender, Freedom

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### Introduction:

The globe has altered as a result of postcolonial concepts, and the western world has seen tremendous transformation. The postcolonial concept of equal pay and equal labor chances has gained prominence in both the workplace and academic institutions. Additionally, post colonialism and feminism are a social and political movement that supports women's rights (some extend), opposes conventional gender norms, and calls for gender equality. "*Feminism is the radical notion that women are human beings*" (hooks 28). The fundamental tenet of postcolonial thinking and its fundamental demand for human dignity are established by this seminal quotation.

In addition to addressing important problems like sexism, oppression, and discrimination those women face in many areas of society; this is a core postcolonial belief. Another crucial component of post colonialism is this additionally; it includes a wide variety of viewpoints and methods, including intersectionality. When this is taken into account, it encompasses elements like sexual orientation, race, and class, all of which will interact with gender. Postcolonial thought emphasizes both comprehension and action. *Describing the world is insufficient; we also need to alter it* (Hooks 8). This demonstrates the fundamental tenet of postcolonial theory, which is to confront and combat the sexism, discrimination, and oppression that women experience in society.

It highlights how crucial it is to act in order to bring about change rather than only comprehending the problems. The quotation highlights postcolonial theory's intersectionality acknowledging the intersections between gender and elements including sexual orientation, race, and class. In general, post colonialism involves both active efforts to create a society that is more equal for all people as well as world analysis. For more than a century, the country has been engulfed in the postcolonial movement, which has empowered many women, contributed to the destruction of patriarchal systems, and helped to create a society that is more inclusive and equal for all genders. It is crucial to keep in mind that the postcolonial movement has many branches and viewpoints.

We can build a more cohesive and successful movement for gender equality by recognizing these distinctions and cooperating to achieve shared objectives. Post colonialism's ultimate objective is to establish a society in which every person, regardless of gender, has equal rights, opportunities, and representation. Simone de Beauvoir, one of the most significant figures in postcolonial philosophy, has criticized authors for their inability to universalize personal experiences. She has made several attempts to set herself apart from previous female authors. She examines women's circumstances and shows how everything has altered after World War I and II. In her piece *Feminity: The Trap*, she also discussed the causes of women's problems. Numerous intriguing concepts are presented in this. A woman is not born; rather, she becomes one (Beauvoir 283). Beauvoir's view that gender is socially manufactured rather than biologically determined is summed up in this famous quotation. Beauvoir has questioned social standards and fought for equality and sexual freedom.

#### Literature Review:

- In this paper, Argha Basu and Priyanka Tripathi examine femininity in the futuristic dystopian literature of Manjula Padmanabhan, namely in *Escape* (2015) and *The Island of Lost Girls* (2017). The review seeks to understand how Padmanabhan redefines women's roles in society and questions conventional ideas of womanhood through an analysis of these writings. "*Authenticity becomes both precious and dangerous in a world of clones and copies*" (Padmanabhan, *Escape* 157). This illustrates how uniformity dehumanizes personal identity. In the end, Padmanabhan's work illustrates the multiplicity of truth in action within the paradigm of femininity, enabling a more nuanced view of what it means to be a woman beyond reproduction and menial labor via a postmodern lens.
- *The Island of Lost Girls*, a work of speculative fiction that examines the idea of marine animals being reduced to simple flesh, is thoughtfully analyzed by Shivam Singh and Gunjan Sushil. Through the perspectives of animal rights advocates like Val Plumwood, Gary L. Francione, and David Eaton, the paper examines the hyperseparation of humans and animals in a dystopian society where anthropocentric thought predominates. It pushes readers to reevaluate how they view animal identity and the moral ramifications of how we view creatures who are frequently disregarded in our culture.
- *The play Lights Out* (2000) by Manjula Padmanabhan is thoroughly examined in this research article, with an emphasis on the themes of violence and gender insensitivity. Padmanabhan's practical approach to tackling societal challenges, especially those pertaining to women, is praised in the article. The dramatist effectively illuminates the difficulties women encounter in society by portraying their viewpoints and stories in a convincing way. Overall, this research emphasizes the significance of Padmanabhan's work in addressing societal realities and encouraging good behavioral change among women.
- Using literature as a tool for resistance, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak examines the cultural norms and socioeconomic structures in India that support violence against women in her

work about Devi. "*The patriarchal society paints its dystopian story on the body of the indigenous lady*" (Spivak 118). This sheds light on how female bodies are used as platforms for social interaction.

- Prominent Bengali author Jhansi has a strong interest in both her female heroine and history. She is well-known for advocating for the rights of the "Untouchables" and taking a firm stand against the oppression of lower castes, especially women. Through her powerful work, "*Draupadi*," she illuminates the terrible reality that those battling for liberation from political persecution and social restrictions must endure. Jhansi's paper highlights significant social justice challenges by exposing the hidden realities beneath political and economical constraints.

### **Authority manipulate people by enforcing ignorance:**

*"Perfect ignorance opens the path to perfect obedience."* (Escape 33) This quotation emphasizes how those in positions of authority manipulate people by enforcing ignorance, stifling free thought, and encouraging mindless compliance. It illustrates the idea of "the other" as those who are oppressed and subjugated by those in positions of power. We can oppose repressive structures and advance a more equitable society by exposing this manipulation and encouraging critical thinking. In the end, this process of knowledge and education can help break down the boundaries that divide us from one another, promoting harmony and understanding among all societal members.

*"Uniqueness and individual talents belong to the past; today we can duplicate and standardise anyone and anything"* (Escape 64:1).

This quotation illustrates how people have been dehumanized and turned into commodities that can be controlled and copied. It reinforces the idea of "the other" as people deprived of their humanity and autonomy by highlighting the elimination of identity and agency. We may oppose this dehumanizing tendency and instead advance inclusion and empathy by acknowledging and appreciating the diversity of people. We may strive toward a society where each individual is respected for their own contributions and viewpoints via activism and education.

We may identify the common thread of suffering, loss, and resiliency that unites all people by exploring the individual accounts of those affected by violence and instability. These stories serve as a reminder of our common humanity beyond linguistic, cultural, and ideological divides. We are forced to reconsider our own convictions and ideals as we get grossed in these stories of hardship and survival, allowing our hearts and minds to be opened to the experiences of others. By doing this, we not only increase our empathy and comprehension but also aid in the global community's overall healing and reconciliation.

Immaturity and transcendence are the following concepts that are observed. While transcendence entails overcoming constraints and achieving a higher state of being, immanence refers to the innate presence of divinity in all facets of the world. We may strengthen our spiritual comprehension and connection to something bigger than ourselves by investigating these ideas. The ideas of transcendence and immediacy are evident in both Padmanabhan's texts and Devi's play. Through the portrayal of humans attempting to rise above their terrible circumstances in a dystopian society, Padmanabhan's "*The Island of Lost Girls*" delves into the concepts of immanence and transcendence. This also reflects the ongoing battle to survive in a hostile world.

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*"We are the present, the past, and the future. In the second volume, General declares, "We have made progress" (Padmanabhan 2015, 102).*

This demonstrates once more how women are still viewed as immanent and men as transcendent entities.

As people work through their own personal challenges and want a closer relationship with God, Devi's drama also explores the concepts of immanence and transcendence. The universal human experience of searching for something greater than ourselves in order to discover meaning and purpose in life is highlighted in both pieces.

*"If you have loved and revered the mothers who bore you and gave you suck, if the honour of wife, sister, or daughter has been dear to you." (15)*

The ongoing fight for gender equality and the never-ending pursuit of spiritual fulfillment are reflected in these ageless literary themes of immanence and transcendence. We are reminded of our common humanity and the yearning to connect with something bigger than ourselves via the investigation of these ideas. Devi's play serves as a reminder of the value of honoring and respecting every person, regardless of gender or socioeconomic standing, thanks to its profound wisdom.

Situational freedom is the next idea that appears frequently in Simone de Beauvoir. Both playwrights exhibit this idea. In Padmanabhan's *Light Out*, the protagonists' existential predicament and their constrained options under their repressive circumstances face each other in a way that makes one think about how context and freedom interact to shape personal agency and autonomy. Characters struggle with the limitations of their situations and the decisions they must make within them in both pieces, illuminating the nuanced link between situation and freedom. The characters' troubles are given more nuance by this investigation, which also prompts readers to think about how outside influences may affect one's own agency.

In *"The Island of Lost Girls,"* Meiji, the final girl to survive, embodies the myth element via a metamorphosis that subverts conventional ideas of what it means to be a woman. As Meiji battles her identity and social expectations, her adventures on the island have a legendary dimension. In a dystopian context, the story delves into issues of femininity, autonomy, and self-discovery, offering a complex viewpoint on the many facets of women. "I loved being able to see a dystopian world that I could recognise as specifically Indian and whose machinations didn't need a lot of exposition for me." Nadkarni Samira. Nadkarni expresses gratitude for not requiring much explanation to identify a dystopian society that is uniquely rooted in Indian culture. This implies that, as an Indian person, the dystopian features shown in the poem are recognizable and familiar to her, mirroring components of her own cultural reality. The story probably explores and questions societal norms and realities found in Indian culture by depicting a dystopian society with particularly Indian traits.

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, this paper explores the postcolonial viewpoints found in a few plays by prominent Indian authors Mahasweta Devi and Manjula Padmanabhan, whose works question social structures and conventional gender conventions. The paper examines how these authors challenge and dismantle prevalent misconceptions and stereotypes about women in Indian

culture, drawing on Simone de Beauvoir's ideas of "The Other," immanence and transcendence, circumstance and freedom, and myths and reality.

The paper examines how Padmanabhan's *"Escape"* and *"The Island of Lost Girls,"* Devi's *"Mother of 1084,"* and other works depict women's independence and hardships in their distinct settings. While Devi's realistic depictions highlight the intersections of gender, caste, and socioeconomic variables in determining women's experiences, Padmanabhan's dystopian stories question social norms and expectations.

The paper also looks at how Beauvoir's ideas are reflected in the themes and characters shown in these plays, from women's marginalized status as "the other" to the conflict between immanence and transcendence in their pursuit of autonomy and freedom. These playwrights support a more just and inclusive society for people of all genders and add to the larger postcolonial conversation by dispelling misconceptions and revealing truths.

In conclusion, this paper emphasizes the value of literature as a means of questioning social norms and advancing gender equality. The paper provides insightful analysis of the intricacies of women's experiences in Indian culture and emphasizes the continuous fight for gender justice and empowerment by examining Padmanabhan and Devi's writings through the prism of postcolonial theory.

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