

Transnational Feminist Subjectivities: Virginia Woolf and Anita Desai on Voice, Agency and Constraint

Beenish Bashir^{1*}, Dr. Uma Mishra²

ABSTRACT

This comparative study investigates how Virginia Woolf and Anita Desai articulate feminist subjectivity, agency, and resistance through their fiction and non-fiction, paying special attention to intersections of class, culture, colonial history, religion, and gender. Woolf's modernist experiments in early 20th-century Britain reconfigure interiority and the politics of writing, while Desai's post-independence Indian novels negotiate the legacies of colonialism, tradition, and modern pressures. Employing feminist literary theory (including theories of voice, writing, and gender), narratology and postcolonial feminism, this paper argues that though both authors foreground women's interior lives and constrained social spaces, they diverge in formal strategies and in how intersectional determinants shape female possibility. By placing Woolf and Desai in dialogue, the research uncovers broader currents in feminist thought across cultures and offers new readings of modernism and postcolonial writing in relation to gender.

Keywords: *Transnational Feminist Subjectivities, Virginia Woolf, Anita Desai on Voice, Agency, Constraint*

Feminist literary criticism has long examined how women's writing both reflects and resists patriarchal structures. Comparisons across national and cultural boundaries help illuminate how feminist subjectivity is formed in differing contexts, and how formal literary strategies respond to these contexts. Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) is one of the key figures of British modernism: her essays and novels explore the material, psychological, and aesthetic conditions under which women think and write. Anita Desai (b. 1937) is among the central women writers in Indian English literature: her novels often articulate the tensions between tradition and modernity, individual desire and familial duty, colonial legacies and new social realities. A comparative study of Woolf and Desai is justified on several grounds:

1. **Temporal and Cultural Contrast:** Woolf writes before, during and shortly after World War I; Desai writes mainly in the latter half of the 20th century and early 21st. The historical contexts differ sharply: suffrage, empire, class hierarchies, gender norms in Britain vs. colonialism, independence, caste, religion, gender in India.

¹Research Scholar, Department of Humanities and social science, Shri Venkateshwara university, Gajraula, Uttar Pradesh, India.

²Associate professor, Department of Humanities and social science, Shri Venkateshwara university, Gajraula, Uttar Pradesh, India.

*Corresponding Author

2. **Formal Experimentation vs Realism:** Woolf's narrative techniques stream of consciousness, temporal fragmentation, free indirect discourse allows for interiority and subjectivity to be foregrounded. Desai's style is more realist/lyrical, relational, often centered on the domestic, but manages subtly intense psychological portraits. Comparing these strategies helps us understand how form intertwines with feminist content.
3. **Intersectionality and Global Modernities:** Feminist theory internationally (postcolonial feminism, intersectionality) insists that gender cannot be abstracted from class, race/ethnicity, colonial history, etc. Woolf's middle/upper-class British context offers certain privileges; Desai's Indian context often includes class, caste, religion, colonial discourses. A comparative study can illuminate how these intersectional axes differentially constrain or enable female agency.
4. **Expanding Canonical Understanding:** Woolf is rightly canonical and much studied in feminist modernist criticism; Desai is also well-studied within Indian writing in English, but comparative engagements with British modernism are less frequent. This study aims to bring Desai into dialogue with Woolf in order to enrich both fields.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study draws principally on three theoretical strands:

1. Feminist Literary Theory / Gender and Writing

Key concepts: voice, vocation, gendered language, patriarchal structures. Woolf's own theorizing (especially *A Room of One's Own*) on economic independence, privacy, and writing as political are central. Also drawing on Simone de Beauvoir, early second-wave feminists, and more recent feminist theorists. The theory of "writing the self" (autobiographical impulses), women's access to the literary sphere, and the silences of women's writing (what is omitted or unsaid).

2. Narratology and Modernist/Formalist Analysis

Formal methods: point of view, free indirect discourse, stream of consciousness, temporality, interior monologue, fragmentation. How form shapes subjectivity, how narrative voice mediates the representation of identity and constraint. Woolf exemplifies modernist formal experimentation; Desai, though more realist, uses particular narrative choices (temporal structure, focalization, interior psychological detail) that can be analyzed narratologically.

3. Postcolonial Feminism and Intersectionality

Key concerns: how colonial history, nationhood, class, caste, religion, and cultural traditions intersect with gender; how modernities in colonised and postcolonial societies differ; how feminist subjectivity is not uniform. Works by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, bell hooks, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and more recent postcolonial feminist criticism. Also studies on Indian feminism and feminist Indian English fiction, which point to how Indian women's experiences of gendered oppression are entwined with caste, religion, colonial legacies and social class. To situate this study, below is a sketch of the crucial existing scholarship, both on Woolf & modernist feminism, and on Anita Desai and feminist/postcolonial critique, indicating gaps that this comparative approach seeks to fill.

Transnational Feminist Subjectivities: Virginia Woolf and Anita Desai on Voice, Agency and Constraint

Scholar / Work	Key Insights (about Woolf)	Key Insights (about Desai)	Gap or Relevance for this Study
Makiko Minow-Pinkney, Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject	Considers how Woolf's modernist formalism addresses subjectivity and the "problem of the self" in feminist modernism.	—	Helps with formal/theoretical lens for reading subjectivity; less about comparison with non-British contexts.
Uddin, "Gender and Feminist Consciousness in Anita Desai's Novels"	—	Shows that Desai portrays the psychological plight of female characters and suggests Indian feminism is distinct from Western feminism.	Supports thesis that feminist subjectivity is culturally inflected; need for deeper comparative work with British modernism.
Rajnesh Kumar, "Feminism in the Novels of Anita Desai: A Critical Exploration"	—	Analyzes feminist undertones in Desai's novels (Clear Light of Day, The Village by the Sea, Fasting, Feasting).	Provides material for Desai's feminist themes; scope mainly thematic, not formal or comparative
Papers on Fasting, Feasting (e.g., "Patriarchy and Resistance in Anita Desai's Fasting, Feasting")	—	Explore how gender inequality, family expectations, domestic oppression operate in the novel.	Useful for intersectional and thematic analysis in Desai; less attention to narrative form or comparisons with Woolf.
Studies of Clear Light of Day (e.g., "The Perspective of Woman in Anita Desai's Novel Clear Light of Day")	—	Focuses on Bimla's struggle, gender, voice, effects of partition.	Provides detailed case study useful for comparative mapping.
Modernist Feminism & essays on Woolf (e.g., "Feminism and Modernism in Woolf")	Examines Woolf's contributions to feminist modernism, her formal strategies, her political engagement	—	Lays groundwork for formal/theoretical side.

Gaps Identified:

Transnational Feminist Subjectivities: Virginia Woolf and Anita Desai on Voice, Agency and Constraint

Comparative studies between Woolf and Indian women writers are relatively rare; much of the work treats British modernism and Indian English literature in separate silos. Existing Desai scholarship is strong in thematic/existential/psychological analyses, but less so in formal comparative critique with modernist experiments (e.g. point of view, temporality) and less attention to how colonial/imperial contexts modify feminist subjectivity in contrast with British contexts. Intersectionality (especially caste, religion, colonial history) is present in Desai criticism, but even there some axes (e.g. caste) are underexplored. This study aims to fill those gaps by bringing Woolf and Desai into comparative dialogue, analyzing both thematic and formal dimensions, under an intersectional lens.

METHODOLOGY

Primary Texts:

Virginia Woolf: “A Room of One’s Own”, “Mrs Dalloway”, “To the Lighthouse”, “Orlando” (selected parts)

Anita Desai: “Fire on the Mountain”, “Clear Light of Day”, “Fasting, Feasting”, “Baumgartner’s Bombay” (or “Voices in the City”)

- Close Readings: Detailed textual analysis of selected passages illustrating interiority, voice, spatial descriptions, domestic scenes, dialogue, silences, symbolisms.
- Comparative Analysis: Mapping thematic overlaps and contrasts; comparing formal strategies.
- Contextual Inquiry: Historical context for British gender norms, modernism, the suffrage movement, class; for Indian context: colonialism, partition, post-independence social change, urbanization, changing gender roles, caste & religion influences.
- Secondary Sources: Critical works on Woolf, modernist criticism, feminist theory; critical literature on Desai and feminist Indian writing; journal articles, monographs, reviews.
- Intersectional Lens: In analyzing characters, attention will be paid to multiple axes: gender, class, colonial/racial identity, religion/caste.
- Limitations: Access to unpublished archival sources is limited; translation and reception studies are not central here though they could expand the study; focus is on English texts (Desai writes in English) and may not fully account for vernacular literatures.

Woolf and Desai: Historical and Literary Contexts

Virginia Woolf: Virginia Woolf is rooted in the late Victorian and Edwardian milieu, moving into the interwar period, with the disruptions of World War I shaping a crisis of values and modernity.

Key historical factors:

- The suffrage movement: women’s fight for voting rights in the UK (partial in 1918, full in 1928).
- The class structure: Woolf belonged to the upper-middle class, was educated, with access to literary circles; yet gender limited what she could do.
- Questions of mental illness, sexuality: Woolf’s personal history with mental illness, and her relationships (including same-sex friendships) influence her writing.

Transnational Feminist Subjectivities: Virginia Woolf and Anita Desai on Voice, Agency and Constraint

- Modernism: as literary movement, breaking with Victorian realism; experimentation with subjectivity, time, consciousness.

In this context, Woolf's essays such as "A Room of One's Own" explore what it means for women to write, what material conditions they need (money, space), the symbolic underpinnings of patriarchal tradition, and the invisibility of women in literary history.

Anita Desai

Anita Desai's fiction emerges in post-colonial India, with all its legacies and contradictions: British colonialism and its cultural legacies, including English education, colonial institutions, partition. Post-independence changes: political, social; modernization, urbanization; rural-urban divides. Patriarchal norms deeply embedded in Indian society; roles defined by family, caste, religion. Education, class, social mobility; women's increasing education but persistent limitations on roles. The tension between tradition (family, rituals, community expectations) and modern aspirations. Desai's settings are often domestic or semi-domestic, but the scope of her work ranges from the remote and rural to the urban; characters often reflect those caught between cultures, times, and expectations.

Comparative Close Readings and Thematic Analysis

Below are key thematic areas, with illustrative textual analysis, showing how Woolf and Desai deal with subjectivity, space, marriage, language and intersectionality.

Subjectivity and Interior Life

Virginia Woolf:

In "Mrs Dalloway", we see interior monologues: Clarissa Dalloway's thoughts, memories, associations. Woolf dissolves boundaries between past/present, self/other. The fluidity of consciousness shows how gendered social expectations (role of hostess, wife, mother) are imposed upon inner life. "To the Lighthouse" similarly tracks multiple consciousnesses: Lily Briscoe, Mrs Ramsay, others. The novel's structure (three parts) disturbs linear time; inner consciousness is what persists. "Orlando" plays with gender and temporality: the protagonist changes sex, lives centuries; this allegory allows Woolf to explore gender as performative, identity as mutable.

Anita Desai:

"Clear Light of Day": Bim's interior world is marked by regret, memory, longing, familial responsibility. Her thoughts are often interrupted or overshadowed by domestic obligations. The inner tension between what she desires and what is expected.

Fasting, Feasting: The two sisters, Uma and Aruna, have very different interiors. Uma's inner life is limited by being at home; small pleasures, silences; Aruna's is more socially mobile but still constrained. The interior is less spectacular than in Woolf, but subtle psychological detail builds up.

Fire on the Mountain: Nanda Kaul's isolation in the hills, her memories—Desai explores solitude, aging, loss and the interior as a refuge but also a site of haunting.

Comparative Insights

Both Woolf and Desai use interiority not merely for character depth but as critique: to show what is suppressed, what is socially censored.

Transnational Feminist Subjectivities: Virginia Woolf and Anita Desai on Voice, Agency and Constraint

Woolf's interiors are often experimental: time shifts, multiple focalizations, sometimes dreamlike. Desai's are more contiguous, often grounded in sensory description and relational contexts.

The nature of constraint in the interior differs: in Woolf, constraint may be symbolic, related to gendered tradition, societal expectations; in Desai, often material, spatial, familial, economic, with more concrete impediments.

Domestic Space and Gendered Rooms

Virginia Woolf

A Room of One's Own famously argues that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction." The room symbolizes more than privacy: it stands for intellectual freedom, economic independence, symbolic space where a woman can develop her thoughts. In "To the Lighthouse", the Ramsay house is both protective and suffocating; domestic rituals, mealtimes, the drawing-room are spaces for social performance and also containment of roles. Lily Briscoe painting in the house struggles to see beyond these confinements. Mrs Dalloway's London: homes, parties, streets, yet Clarissa's walk through the city gives her a sense of space and mobility; contrast between private rooms and public facades.

Anita Desai

In "Clear Light of Day", the large family house in Old Delhi becomes a container of memories, regrets, sisterhood, distance. The domestic space holds the past; physical rooms are gendered (kitchens, servants' quarters, drawing rooms) and partitioned.

"Fasting, Feasting": the house in India, the guest house in the U.S., the familial home—all spaces marked by gender; Uma's room, her limited movement within the house; the domestic chores define spatial boundaries.

"Baumgartner's Bombay": urban spaces, as well as domestic interiors, show the tension between public visibility and private confinement.

Comparative Insights

For both authors, domestic space is not neutral. It is gendered: expectations, performances, work, relationality shape spaces. Woolf tends to make the symbolic dimension of space very explicit, the interrelation between interior and exterior, and the desire for a literal and metaphorical room of one's own. Desai often shows how space is socially stratified and physically constraining (rooms, social distance, familial expectations). The contrast: Woolf sometimes imagines escape, transformation, or reclamation of space; in Desai escape is difficult, intermittent, often internal or symbolic rather than literal.

Marriage, Work and Economic Independence

Virginia Woolf

Woolf's essay "A Room of One's Own" argues that women historically have been denied economic independence, which hampers creativity. In "Mrs Dalloway", Clarissa's position as a wife and hostess is socially privileged but sometimes feels hollow; her earlier desires, her friendships suggest alternate desires not taken. Orlando offers a critique of gendered roles via a protagonist who changes sex; through centuries, the prohibitions and expectations of marriage, sexuality and identity shift.

Anita Desai

In “Fasting, Feasting”, Uma never gets chance for education, is relegated to domestic caretaking; the expectations of daughter, sister, caring for parents are non-negotiable; economic dependence is a given. Aruna’s marriage and its burdens show that marriage may bring some opportunity but also constraints. Anamika’s thwarted education (Oxford fellowship which she cannot take up) reveals systemic barriers. ([The Achievers Journal]) “Clear Light of Day”: Bim remains unmarried; her relationship (or lack thereof) with marriage reflects her own agency but also the limitation of choice. She also works (teaching, etc.), but the societal expectation remains. “Fire on the Mountain”: Nanda Kaul is wealthy, relatively independent, but age, solitude, loss bring constraints. Financial security does not fully translate into freedom, because family, social expectations, memory shape what agency is possible.

Comparative Insights

Woolf tends to depict marriage as institution limiting creativity, endorsing the necessity of economic independence. She imagines alternatives (e.g., in “Orlando”) or the conflict between marriage and vocation. Desai’s characters often live in a milieu where marriage, or familial duty, are default expectations; economic independence is scarce; when present, does not always yield full autonomy. Desai shows trade-offs: working inside domestic sphere, caring roles, or sometimes public roles but constrained. In comparative perspective, this shows how feminist ideals (economic independence, vocation) that develop in British modernist thought may have different material resonance in postcolonial Indian contexts.

Language, Style and Narrative Ethics

Virginia Woolf

Woolf’s experiments with free indirect discourse, stream of consciousness, shifting focalization, an emphasis on interior experience and subjectivity. These formal features are feminist not simply as technique but as political: they foreground what is usually silenced or rendered invisible. Woolf’s metaphors, symbolism, poetic language frequently relate gender, memory, time. Her style often resists linear plot structure in favour of moments, images, associations. In essays, Woolf explicitly speaks to writing, to what women need to write, the legacy of literary history (male-dominated) and how that shapes female writers.

Anita Desai

Desai’s style is more restrained; she uses lyrical realism, evocative sensory description, memory, detailed description of domestic and natural surroundings. Dialogues are inflected with cultural specificity; silences, failed communication, unspoken tensions are crucial. Narrative focalization often alternates between characters (e.g., family novels) to show multiple perspectives; interior monologue though less experimental in form than in Woolf is present in reflective passages. Desai’s use of language: English with Indian inflections; sometimes the vernacular (in dialogue or cultural references); attention to caste, religion, tradition through linguistic detail.

Comparative Insights

Woolf’s style is more formally radical; Desai’s radicalism lies more in theme, character psychology, relational dynamics. Both see language itself as ethically charged: what is said, what is not said; how characters narrate or are narrated; how memory is evoked. The difference in style reflects their cultural positions; Woolf in a British upper-middle class, with access to literary tradition; Desai negotiating colonial legacies and cultural hybridity.

Intersectionality: Class, Coloniality, Religion, Caste

Virginia Woolf

Class is central: Woolf's consciousness is profoundly shaped by class privilege, by being part of a certain social circle; many of her characters are upper or upper-middle class. She often critiques classed hypocrisy (the manners, the social expectations), but the invisibility of race, empire is more implicit than explicit. Empire: although Woolf was contemporaneous with empire and the decline of empire, her fiction rarely inhabits colonial spaces, but essays sometimes engage with imperialism (e.g., "Three Guineas"). Scholars have noted Woolf's occasional blind spots or ambivalence about colonialism. (e.g., "Feminism and Modernism in Woolf's Problem of the Subject" by Makiko Minow-Pinkney). ([De Gruyter Brill])

Anita Desai

Colonial history and its legacy are more central: education in English, the partition, migration, cultural hybridity. The social hierarchy of colonial/postcolonial India influences opportunities, class status, family wealth. Class and economic status repeatedly shape the options for women. For example, whether a woman can attend school, pursue higher studies, or whether economic burdens force conformity or compromise. Religion (Hindu/Muslim) sometimes enters; caste less explicitly in some of Desai's works, but social stratification is always present. Also, cultural tradition, ritual, expectations grounded in religion/social norms influence gender roles. Intersectionality in Desai is lived: female characters face gendered expectations along with class constraints, colonial cultural legacies, familial obligations. Feminist possibilities are always partial, constrained, navigated rather than simply asserted.

Comparative Insights

Woolf's feminism is shaped by her class and context; Desai's intersects more visibly with colonial legacies, family duty, and social stratification. Comparing the two illuminates how feminist theory needs to be adaptable to context: what counts as "agency," "freedom," "voice" differs depending on material, cultural, historical constraints. The transnational feminist perspective reveals both common ground (women's interior lives, domestic constraint, gendered expectations) and significant divergences (in what is available as resistance, what voices are permissible, how much formal experimentation is possible, degrees of economic and spatial freedom).

ANALYSIS SECTIONS

Below are more in-depth readings with textual evidence, showing key moments in Woolf's and Desai's works that illustrate how feminist subjectivity is constructed or constrained, and comparing them.

Woolf on the Politics of Writing and Voice

Woolf's "A Room of One's Own" remains foundational: she argues for financial and spatial independence as preconditions for women's literary creativity. The metaphor of the room is literal and metaphorical: a private space in which women may think, write, inhabit interior life without interruption. Woolf also reflects on literary history: the erasure of women, the way literary tradition privileges men. Her style in this essay oscillates between polemical, philosophical, imaginative (the imagined sister Judith Shakespeare), making the argument not simply abstract but vivid, embodied.

Transnational Feminist Subjectivities: Virginia Woolf and Anita Desai on Voice, Agency and Constraint

In “Mrs Dalloway”, Clarissa is not a writer, but her interior life is powerful; her personal identity is shaped by her choices. The stream of consciousness allows us to see how gendered social expectations (duties, hostessing, marriage) intersect with her inner desires. The public sphere (London, social gatherings) and the private (her memories, her sense of self) are in tension.

In “Orlando”, Woolf posits a protagonist who changes sex and lives across centuries, thereby opening up time, gender, identity as fluid. This is radical for the period: it challenges the binary, fixed gender roles, and shows writing and identity as constructed and porous.

Formal techniques: time shifts, multiple consciousness, fragmentation (e.g. “To the Lighthouse”), interior monologues, poetic associations. These techniques serve feminist politics: to reveal what is internal, suppressed, multidimensional.

Desai on Familial Duty, Silence and Agency

In “Fasting, Feasting”, Uma’s life is one of domestic suppression: her education curtailed, her potential unseen, her dreams limited. There is an explicit contrast between her brother Arun, who is sent abroad to study, and Uma, who stays at home. The domestic sphere dominates her life. Her sister Aruna’s marriage gives her somewhat more mobility, but even in that, expectations, role burdens, jealousy, and societal gaze limit her. The detail of Anamika (the cousin) being unable to accept the Oxford fellowship because of gender-and social-family constraints is powerful. ([The Achievers Journal])

In “Clear Light of Day”, Bimla remains unmarried, which might seem a form of agency; but this decision is shaped by familial expectation, memory, and the absence of ideal alternative. The house of the family, the relationships with her brother Raja, her sister Tara, bring conflict, regrets and love; the past is ever present, and choice is always constrained. Silence (what is unspoken) functions: Bim does not always voice her resentment; she internalizes, reflects, which both shapes her subjectivity and limits her overt action.

In “Fire on the Mountain”, Nanda Kaul’s retreat to the hills is both an escape and a seclusion. Her solitude allows reflection and writing (journals or memories), but is also marked by loss, by missed connections. The environment gives her physical space, but emotional or social isolation remains.

Comparative Moments: Constraints and Resistance

“Woolf’s Clarissa” vs “Desai’s Uma or Bim”: Both characters live with the interplay of social roles vs inner desires. Clarissa cannot escape her role, though her inner self is rich; Uma doesn’t have even the opportunity for formal education, so inner life is wounded. Bim does teach, works, so has somewhat more public presence; but choice (marriage, vocations) remain socially constrained.

“Formal Resistance”: Woolf uses experimental form to destabilize norms (gender, time, narrative voice). Desai’s resistance often lies in minor but deep ways: in character refusal (Bim’s refusal of Dr Biswas), in the accumulation of inner consciousness, in depiction of silences and ruptures in relationality. The resistance is more demotic, less theoretical, but no less ethically potent.

Transnational Feminist Subjectivities: Virginia Woolf and Anita Desai on Voice, Agency and Constraint

“Spatial Mobility and Confinement”: Woolf’s characters sometimes experience mobility (walks, voyages, travel in “Orlando”); Desai’s characters often live in fixed spaces (houses, small towns, limited travel), though occasional movement (visits, migrations) mark exposure to new contexts.

“Economic Freedom”: Woolf emphasizes literary vocation; Desai’s characters have limited economic options; even those with financial means are often constrained by social duties or expectations. Woolf’s feminist ideal is more directly political; Desai’s is more filtered through familial, cultural compromises.

DISCUSSION

From reading Woolf and Desai side by side, we gain several theoretical and critical insights:

1. **Diverse Feminist Epistemologies:** Feminism is not monolithic. Woolf’s feminism comes from a British modernist tradition concerned with individual subjectivity, class, literary tradition. Desai’s feminism is postcolonial, familial, rooted in the quotidian, in embodied, relational constraint.
2. **The Materiality of Space and Voice:** Woolf makes the material precondition (room, money) explicit; Desai shows how material conditions house, family, economic dependence intersect with social and symbolic constraints in everyday life.
3. **Form as Feminist Strategy:** Formal experimentation (in Woolf) is not just aesthetic; it is political. Desai’s more realist style is also political: the ethical weight of silence, of what is not said, of memory, of familial duty. Both forms are strategies of feminist witnessing.
4. **Intersectionality in Practice:** Desai’s characters experience multiple oppressions; Woolf’s are more circumscribed to gender and class, with some engagement with empire/cultural colonialism in her essays. The comparison underscores that feminist subjectivity is especially precarious in colonial and postcolonial contexts.
5. **Limits of Agency:** Neither Woolf nor Desai offers complete, triumphant agency. Agency is partial, fraught. The comparative reading shows how social, historical, material constraints limit what feminist subjectivity can do; resistance is often internal, incremental, symbolic, relational rather than overt.
6. **Global Modernities and Feminism:** The idea of modernity is often Western; but Desai shows how Indian modernities differ, are hybrid, uneven. Engaging Woolf (a modernist) with Desai helps us see how modernism intersects with colonialism, how formal experiments may not fully translate in postcolonial settings.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined how Virginia Woolf and Anita Desai portray feminist subjectivity, agency, and resistance via interiority, domestic space, economic independence, language, and intersectionality. While both foreground inner lives and constrained spaces of women, Woolf tends to employ more formal radicalism, imagining voice and writing as vehicles of feminist liberation; Desai works more within realist traditions, exploring how agency is negotiated in family, tradition, colonial legacies, and class. A comparative, transnational feminist reading reveals that feminist literary modernism and postcolonial women’s writing share certain concerns (voice, oppression, interiority), but their formal strategies, their relationships to material constraints, and their possible modes of resistance differ significantly. To assume a universal feminist model risks erasing these differences; but to attend to them enriches our theoretical and practical understandings of feminism.

REFERENCES

- Additional works in feminist modernist criticism, postcolonial feminism (Spivak, Mohanty, Bhabha), and literature on colonial/postcolonial India.
- Akter, Ferdousi. "A Study of Feminine Identity Crisis in Anita Desai's Fictional Work."
- Desai, Anita. *Clear Light of Day*. New York: Knopf / HarperCollins etc.
- Desai, Anita. *Fire on the Mountain*. New Delhi: Random House India.
- Desai, Anita. *Baumgartner's Bombay*. (or *Voices in the City*) New Delhi: etc.
- Desai, Anita. *Fasting, Feasting*. New York: Knopf.
- Kumar, Rajnesh. "Feminism in the Novels of Anita Desai: A Critical Exploration." *EPRA International Journal*.
- Minow-Pinkney, Makiko. *Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject: Feminism and Modernism*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Patriarchy and Resistance in Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*."
- The Perspective of Woman in Anita Desai's Novel *Clear Light of Day*."
- Uddin, Md. Eftekhari. "Gender and Feminist Consciousness in Anita Desai's Novels." *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*.
- Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. London: Hogarth Press.
- Woolf, Virginia. *Mrs Dalloway*. London: Hogarth Press.
- Woolf, Virginia. *Orlando*. London: Hogarth Press.
- Woolf, Virginia. *To the Lighthouse*. London: Hogarth Press.

Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Bashir, B. & Mishra, U. (2025). Transnational Feminist Subjectivities: Virginia Woolf and Anita Desai on Voice, Agency and Constraint. *International Journal of Social Impact*, 10(4), 29-39. DIP: 18.02.004/20251004, DOI: 10.25215/2455/1004004