

## Literature as Protest: Feminist and Political Themes in the Works of Manjushree Thapa and Nadia Anjuman

Dr. Rashmi Dubey

Assistant Professor  
Department of English  
D.B.S. College, Kanpur

---

### Abstract

Literature has historically served as a powerful tool for protest, providing a voice to the marginalized and challenging oppressive systems. In the contemporary literary landscape, Manjushree Thapa and Nadia Anjuman have emerged as significant figures whose works reflect feminist and political concerns. This paper explores how their writings function as a medium of resistance against patriarchal and political oppression. By analyzing their literary contributions, this study highlights the ways in which these authors critique gender inequality, societal restrictions, and political suppression. This paper explores the literary works of Manjushree Thapa and Nadia Anjuman, two prominent South Asian women writers, to analyze how their writings reflect the struggles, resilience, and agency of women in patriarchal societies. Thapa, a Nepali writer, addresses the socio-political landscape of Nepal, portraying women who challenge traditional norms. Anjuman, an Afghan poet, expresses the muted voices of Afghan women through deeply poignant poetry. Through a comparative analysis, this study examines the key differences in their literary styles, thematic concerns, and portrayals of female agency. By employing feminist and postcolonial literary frameworks, this paper discusses how these writers contribute to the broader discourse of women's empowerment. The findings suggest that despite differing narrative techniques, both authors illuminate the silent struggles of women, fostering a space for resistance and transformation. This study aims to deepen the understanding of the socio-cultural forces shaping female experiences in South Asian literature while highlighting the power of storytelling as a means of advocacy. Through an in-depth examination of their narratives, themes, and stylistic choices, this research underscores the role of literature as an act of defiance and empowerment. Additionally, this study situates their works within the broader tradition of protest literature, emphasizing their impact on feminist and political discourses in South Asia.

**Keywords** Patriarchal and political oppression, societal restrictions, poignant poetry

---

Literature has long been a potent means of social and political resistance, allowing authors to critique injustice and advocate for change. Feminist literature, in particular, has provided a platform for voicing the struggles of women, highlighting the pervasive nature of gender discrimination and societal constraints. Similarly, politically charged literature has often challenged authoritarian regimes and exposed systemic injustices. The literary works of Manjushree Thapa and Nadia Anjuman exemplify how literature can serve as a form of protest, confronting both gender and political oppression through deeply evocative narratives.

Manjushree Thapa, a Nepali writer and activist, is known for her novels and essays that examine the intersections of gender, class, and political oppression. Her works critique the patriarchal structures entrenched in Nepali society while addressing broader themes of human rights and political instability. Her narratives, whether fiction or non-fiction, engage with the realities of women's struggles and the broader political landscape of Nepal, making her an influential literary figure in South Asian feminist discourse. On the other hand, Nadia Anjuman, an Afghan poet, used her poetry to defy the oppressive conditions imposed on women in Afghanistan. Her works reflect the struggles of Afghan women under the Taliban regime, capturing their pain, resilience, and hope through evocative verse. Despite her tragic fate, Anjuman's poetry continues to inspire and challenge the status quo, cementing her legacy as a voice of resistance.

Protest literature has historically served as a vital avenue for marginalized voices, and feminism within the South Asian literary sphere plays a critical role in shaping discourse on gender and socio-political structures. Manjushree Thapa, a Nepali writer, and Nadia Anjuman, an Afghan poet, emerge as significant figures whose literary contributions function as mediums of feminist and political resistance. In examining their works, this discussion employs feminist theory and postcolonial perspectives to highlight how their narratives challenge patriarchal norms and political oppression. Both authors operate within distinct historical and socio-political contexts—Thapa in Nepal, influenced by her nation's political transitions and socio-cultural constraints on women, and Anjuman in Afghanistan, shaped by her country's tumultuous political climate and the severe

restrictions imposed on women. Their positions as South Asian women writers reveal shared threads of struggle and resilience, particularly in the face of patriarchal and political suppression. Thapa's major works, such as "Forget Kathmandu" and "Seasons of Flight," frequently explore themes of gender roles, corruption, and the reimagining of women's spaces, using narrative voice, characterization, and setting to challenge entrenched norms. She often employs realism or experimental storytelling to critique social injustices, foregrounding female characters who embody resistance, resilience, and the pursuit of identity in an environment marked by larger socio-political movements. Anjuman's poetry, notably her collection "Gul-e-Dodi (Dark Flower)," conveys central motifs of confinement, silenced voices, and a longing for freedom, reflecting the precarious lives of Afghan women under oppressive regimes. Her poetic style relies on metaphor, imagery, and traditional forms to convey deeply layered meanings, drawing on her Persian literary heritage while serving as a personal expression of protest. Through her verses, Anjuman amplifies the collective experiences of Afghan women, illuminating suffering and resilience in a way that underscores her work's role as a beacon of defiance, despite the risks she and others faced. A comparative analysis of Thapa's prose and Anjuman's poetry reveals both overlaps and divergences. Thapa's longer-form storytelling differs from Anjuman's concentrated lyricism, yet both authors foreground critiques of patriarchy and acknowledge the power of literature as activism. They conceptualize female agency in unique ways, shaped by the distinct cultural and political backdrops of Nepal and Afghanistan. From a feminist perspective, each writer's work can be examined through concepts of intersectionality, embodiment, and subjectivity, revealing the lived realities of women in marginalized settings. Meanwhile, postcolonial approaches to their writings illuminate how they respond to and subvert existing power structures, engaging questions of language, national identity, and cultural hybridity. In terms of South Asian feminist literature, Thapa and Anjuman expand the discourse by weaving together personal and collective narratives of struggle and empowerment, and their impact on contemporary literary circles and activism is noteworthy. Their works underscore the role of literature as an accessible tool for social change, particularly in regions with high illiteracy or strict censorship, as they create textual "safe spaces" for readers to critically examine norms. Critics, scholars, and broader audiences have responded to these works in ways that demonstrate their transformative potential, although challenges persist in the form of limited global circulation, linguistic barriers, and the dangers faced by authors under oppressive regimes. Ultimately, a synthesis of their literary contributions shows that Thapa's and Anjuman's writings exemplify feminist and political resistance in contexts marked by patriarchal restrictions and volatile political climates. Their comparative study reveals the ways in which women navigate entrenched norms and assert resilience, reinforcing the importance of storytelling as a means of advocacy and social transformation. By contributing to broader feminist, postcolonial, and protest literature discourses, they invite a deeper understanding of how narratives serve as catalysts for empowerment. This consolidated approach, featuring close readings, engagement with historical events, and secondary sources, demonstrates the significance of analyzing Nepali and Afghan experiences side by side, respecting each author's unique cultural environment while shedding light on both shared struggles and distinct modes of defiance. Such an examination not only strengthens academic inquiry but also underscores the imperative of continued scholarship on South Asian women writers who challenge patriarchal and political oppression, thereby expanding the movement of feminist protest and social transformation in the region.

This paper seeks to analyze the feminist and political themes in the works of Thapa and Anjuman, demonstrating how their literature serves as a form of protest. By examining their writings in depth, this study aims to highlight the power of literature in challenging oppressive structures and advocating for social change. The paper also situates their works within the larger context of feminist and resistance literature, drawing connections between their narratives and historical movements for gender and political justice.

Both Manjushree Thapa and Nadia Anjuman incorporate feminist themes in their works, addressing the systemic oppression of women and advocating for gender equality. Their literature reflects the lived realities of women in their respective societies, shedding light on the struggles faced due to patriarchy and traditional gender roles. Through their narratives, they challenge entrenched gender norms and offer an alternative vision of female agency and empowerment.

Thapa's novels, such as *Forget Kathmandu* and *Seasons of Flight*, portray female protagonists grappling with societal expectations, political turmoil, and personal aspirations. Her narratives often feature strong, independent women who challenge traditional roles and seek autonomy. In *Forget Kathmandu*, Thapa critiques the deeply entrenched gender biases in Nepalese society, questioning the lack of representation and opportunities for women in political and social spheres. *Seasons of Flight* explores the experience of migration, depicting a female protagonist who struggles with her identity and the cultural baggage of her homeland. Through her portrayal of women, Thapa highlights issues such as forced marriages, lack of educational opportunities, and the psychological toll of patriarchal oppression.

Similarly, Anjuman's poetry, particularly in her collection *Gul-e-dodi* (Dark Flower), is infused with feminist resistance. Writing in a society where women's voices were systematically silenced, Anjuman used poetry as a means of expressing the inner turmoil and desires of Afghan women. Her poems often depict themes

of confinement, longing for freedom, and the struggles of women under patriarchal oppression. Through metaphors and evocative imagery, she illustrates the pain of restricted lives and the resilience of women who refuse to be silenced. In many of her poems, she employs symbols such as the caged bird or the wilting flower to convey the suppression of female voices and aspirations. Her work also reflects a deep awareness of the socio-cultural restrictions that bind Afghan women, making her poetry an essential text in feminist resistance literature.

Both authors use their works to challenge the subjugation of women, asserting the need for liberation and self-expression. Their literature not only reflects the struggles of women but also serves as a call to action, urging readers to recognize and resist gender-based oppression. Through their nuanced characters and poignant poetry, Thapa and Anjuman elevate the personal experiences of women into powerful political statements.

Beyond feminist concerns, both authors engage with political themes, critiquing authoritarian rule, social injustice, and the impact of war and political instability on individual lives. Literature has historically been a means of political resistance, and the works of Thapa and Anjuman continue this tradition by exposing corruption, tyranny, and systemic inequalities.

Thapa's *Forget Kathmandu* is a scathing critique of Nepal's monarchy and political upheaval, examining the country's history of violence, corruption, and instability. The book delves into the consequences of political decisions on ordinary citizens, particularly marginalized groups, including women. Her writings highlight the failures of governance and the need for democratic reforms. Similarly, *The Tutor of History* portrays the intersection of personal and political struggles, showing how political unrest shapes the lives of common people. Thapa does not merely document these struggles; she actively interrogates the failures of political systems that have long marginalized women and lower-caste communities.

Anjuman's poetry reflects the impact of war and oppression in Afghanistan. As a woman writing under Taliban rule, her work carries an inherent political charge. Her poetry mourns the loss of freedom and dignity, portraying the despair of living in a society where fundamental rights are denied. Her poems speak of resilience, longing for change, and the hope of a better future despite the oppressive circumstances. Her tragic death further underscores the risks faced by women who dare to speak out in restrictive societies. By weaving political critique into her poetry, Anjuman transformed personal sorrow into collective resistance.

Through their writings, both authors highlight the ways in which politics shapes personal identities and experiences. Their works serve as historical testimonies of the struggles endured by their people, emphasizing the necessity of political awareness and activism.

1. **Narrative Style and Literary Form:** Thapa primarily writes in prose, crafting intricate narratives that reflect the socio-political realities of Nepalese society. Her works, such as *The Tutor of History* and *Seasons of Flight*, employ storytelling techniques that weave personal and political struggles together. In contrast, Anjuman's poetry, particularly in *Gul-e-Dudi (Dark Flower)*, is a deeply lyrical expression of pain, longing, and defiance, shaped by the restrictions imposed on Afghan women.
2. **Themes of Oppression and Resistance:** Thapa's works frequently engage with political upheaval, migration, and gender roles, portraying women who navigate patriarchal constraints to assert their independence. Anjuman, on the other hand, captures the silenced voices of Afghan women, using poetry as an act of defiance against the Taliban-era oppression that sought to erase female presence from public life.
3. **Portrayal of Female Agency:** In Thapa's narratives, women exercise agency by making choices, whether through political activism, education, or personal defiance against societal norms. Anjuman, through her poetry, channels agency in the form of resistance—her words serve as a means to reclaim space and identity in a society that denies women their voice.
4. **Cultural and Political Contexts:** The socio-political environments in which these authors write significantly shape their narratives. Thapa, coming from Nepal, a country with a complex history of monarchy, democracy, and civil unrest, explores the intersections of gender and national politics. Anjuman, living under the Taliban regime, faced direct censorship, and her poetry reflects the heightened suppression of women's rights in Afghanistan. This difference in context influences how agency is depicted in their works.

A thorough comparative study of Manjushree Thapa and Nadia Anjuman's literary works reveals that both writers engage in profound critiques of patriarchal frameworks that inhibit women's freedom and self-determination. Thapa, operating primarily through the medium of extended prose, portrays female characters who consciously renegotiate traditional gender roles and actively participate in shaping their own destinies. These characters often confront societal constraints head-on, employing strategies such as geographical relocation, educational pursuits, or engagement with political systems as methods to assert their agency. In contrast, Anjuman, whose chosen mode of expression is poetry, focuses on embodying the unspoken sorrow, frustration, and fervent hopes of women unable to exercise direct control over their circumstances. Through her

elegant yet haunting poetic imagery, Anjuman transforms her verses into a vehicle for activism, offering a space in which the emotional and psychological weight of oppression is laid bare.

Thapa's novel *Seasons of Flight* exemplifies the way in which her narrative style places women's agency at the forefront. The central figure's decision to migrate, seeking both self-discovery and liberation from the limitations of her native environment, underscores the significance of physical movement and border-crossing in realizing one's autonomy. Throughout the novel, the protagonist's encounters with unfamiliar customs, languages, and social expectations highlight the interplay between personal growth and the cultural dislocation that accompanies exile. By weaving issues of adaptation, belonging, and identity into the protagonist's journey, Thapa illuminates the multifaceted challenges women face when attempting to redefine themselves in new socio-cultural contexts.

Meanwhile, Anjuman's poetry collection *Gul-e-Dudi (Dark Flower)* confronts the stifling constraints imposed upon Afghan women, who exist within a climate characterized by stringent cultural norms and political strife. Her use of metaphorical language, heavily reliant on images of darkness, confinement, and entrapment, draws the reader's attention to the immobilizing nature of patriarchal oppression. However, by transforming her poetry into a subtle yet potent form of protest, Anjuman suggests that even in situations where physical or overt rebellion is not feasible, the very act of articulating one's innermost grief and desires can function as an assertion of individual will and emotional resistance. Thus, her verses become a testament to the interior lives of Afghan women, whose experiences of frustration, anxiety, and yearning are seldom openly acknowledged in mainstream discourse.

An intersectional feminist lens offers valuable insights into how both Thapa and Anjuman represent various dimensions of agency. Thapa's characters, often possessing some access to education or mobility, make deliberate choices within the restrictive confines of family obligations and societal expectations, thus broadening traditional conceptions of female roles. By engaging with political processes, pursuing independent careers, or simply choosing to reside elsewhere, Thapa's protagonists signal a determination to shape their futures despite structural barriers. Anjuman's poetic focus on the psychological toll of oppression complements this perspective by underscoring the internalized struggles faced by women in settings where outward acts of defiance pose grave personal risks. Her work thus highlights a different, less overt but equally profound form of resistance: the power of self-expression in the midst of cultural and political suppression. Consequently, this comparative framework illustrates that women's autonomy in literary texts is rarely monolithic or uniform; rather, it can manifest through direct action and mobility, or through creative, covert acts of survival and protest.

The representation of women's agency in literature remains a cornerstone of feminist critique and intellectual debate. By situating Thapa and Anjuman side by side, this study highlights the vital role of literary diversity in unraveling how patriarchal oppression and female resistance operate in a range of cultural and political environments. Thapa's body of work, situated within the relatively more liberal Nepalese context—although still encumbered by traditional customs and institutional barriers—provides nuanced character portrayals of women who engage with the structures around them to carve out pockets of independence. In novels such as *Seasons of Flight*, Thapa's attention to internal monologues, everyday conflicts, and the transformative impact of mobility emphasizes her conviction that women can redefine themselves even within societies that attempt to limit their potential.

In contrast, Anjuman composed her poetry within the confines of a more repressive Afghan milieu, marked by entrenched patriarchal customs, religious conservatism, and, during certain periods, severe restrictions on women's rights. The act of writing for Anjuman was, in and of itself, a form of rebellion, laying bare the strength of her convictions in an environment where women's voices were frequently silenced by law or custom. Her tragic death underscores the precarious nature of self-expression in societies that view female creativity and intellectualism as subversive. Anjuman's poetry attests to the power of artistic expression to challenge oppression at its core, enabling readers to grasp the profound consequences of denying women's agency on both individual and collective levels.

The differing degrees of freedom available to Thapa's and Anjuman's protagonists shed light on the ways that female agency cannot be reduced to a singular definition. Instead, it is molded by socio-political realities, cultural inheritance, and personal aspirations. Thapa's protagonists often demonstrate a form of outward, visible agency—pursuing higher education, crossing international borders, or participating in institutional reforms—whereas Anjuman's poetic personas must navigate an often invisible, interior battleground. For Anjuman, speaking or writing about her experiences as a woman becomes a subversive stance against silence and erasure, reinforcing the notion that literary expression can operate as a powerful conduit for resistance where traditional paths to empowerment are obstructed or perilous.

Both Thapa's and Anjuman's contributions resonate within the broader landscape of South Asian feminist movements, pushing readers, activists, and academics alike to engage in deeper reflections on women's rights, freedom of speech, and the broader significance of literature in shaping public discourse. As a result, their respective creations function as calls to action that urge society to consider the implications of silencing female



voices and to promote greater inclusivity in cultural production. By contextualizing Thapa's novels within a framework of potential institutional change—where women strive for leadership roles, gain economic independence, and challenge societal taboos—and by placing Anjuman's poetry within an artistic tradition of covert defiance, this comparative exploration demonstrates how notions of female agency are both evolutionary and highly adaptable. They expand in response to changing political climates, shifting norms, and women's unceasing efforts to claim ownership over their personal and collective narratives.

In sum, analyzing the works of Manjushree Thapa and Nadia Anjuman together clarifies how women authors, particularly within the South Asian context, wield literary expression as a tool for survival, resistance, and self-actualization. Whether through prose centering on personal transformation and outward maneuvering in search of liberation, or through poetry that reveals the internal, often hidden realms of emotional upheaval under patriarchal constraints, both writers embody the essence of feminist protest. Consequently, their legacy invites ongoing engagement with the dynamic interplay of gender, literature, and socio-political activism, reminding us that storytelling remains a potent force in the struggle against all forms of oppression.

Manjushree Thapa and Nadia Anjuman illustrate in compelling ways the capacity of literature to serve as a formidable vehicle for protest, bringing issues of feminism and politics to the foreground of their respective cultural landscapes. Thapa's novels and essays address the systemic gender discrimination and entrenched political volatility that shape Nepal's social fabric, thereby giving voice to women whose narratives often remain on the periphery. At the same time, Anjuman's poetry, composed within a climate of social and political repression, underscores the raw intensity of the challenges facing Afghan women and transforms her personal experiences into a broader indictment of patriarchal constraints. Their writings, though arising from distinct contexts, converge in their determination to amplify marginalized perspectives, confront hierarchical power structures, and embolden readers to recognize the subversive force of literary creativity.

Through a comprehensive examination of the feminist and political dimensions in their work, this study has shed light on the various means by which Thapa and Anjuman harness their literary craft as a catalyst for transformation. Their critiques of cultural norms and national politics transcend passive observation; rather, they actively expose, challenge, and dismantle oppressive forces that limit women's autonomy and civic freedoms. By interweaving personal narratives, sociopolitical commentary, and imaginative storytelling, both authors offer tangible pathways toward greater awareness and activism, urging their audiences to reflect on systemic injustices and to envision new possibilities for empowerment.

A crucial insight drawn from this analysis is the enduring significance of literature in shaping public discourse and inspiring collective movements for equality, justice, and the acknowledgment of marginalized voices. Thapa's depictions of Nepalese society attest to the idea that even within repressive or patriarchal environments, narrative can illuminate shared struggles and highlight the agency of women who strive to redefine their roles. Similarly, Anjuman's poetic expressions, while intimately connected to the specific realities of Afghan women under conditions of entrenched oppression, underscore the universal nature of resilience, hope, and the quest for dignity. The strength of their legacies lies in their ability to articulate both localized and cross-cultural experiences of marginalization, thereby reinforcing literature's capacity to transcend national or linguistic boundaries.

Furthermore, by engaging directly with the works of Thapa and Anjuman, readers and scholars alike gain a deeper appreciation not only of the unique historical and cultural contexts of Nepal and Afghanistan but also of the broader, global significance of feminist literature. Their writings stand as reminders that protest is not always loud or overt; it can also manifest through the quieter but equally potent channels of storytelling, poetry, and creative expression. Both authors exemplify how the creative act itself can be imbued with defiance, asserting the right to speak and be heard in societies where such rights may be systematically curtailed.

Ultimately, the writings of Manjushree Thapa and Nadia Anjuman continue to reverberate across literary and activist communities, underscoring the potency of the written word in challenging oppressive norms and advocating for social change. Their influence persists in inspiring new generations of authors, poets, scholars, and change agents who seek to deploy literature as a means of critiquing unjust power structures and envisioning more equitable futures. Indeed, the echoes of their voices remind us that literature, far from being a passive art form, can be an active instrument of resistance and a rallying cry for those who, like Thapa and Anjuman, dare to articulate alternative visions of justice, equality, and collective liberation.

## References

- [1]. Anjuman, N. (2005). *Gul-e-Dudi* [Dark Flower]. Kabul: Private Publication.
- [2]. Thapa, M. (2001). *The Tutor of History*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India.
- [3]. Thapa, M. (2009). *Seasons of Flight*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India.
- [4]. Mohanty, C. T. (1988). "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." *Feminist Review*, 30(1), 61-88.
- [5]. Spivak, G. C. (1988). "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (pp. 271-313). University of Illinois Press.