

# Peggy Mohan' Deeda: Feminism Decoded

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## ABSTRACT:

Peggy Mohan's most significant text *Jahajin* offers an acute exploration of identity, gender, and social constraints through the character of *Deeda*, a woman who challenges marriage, patriarchy, and social expectations. This paper examines how the character of *Deeda* represents feminist ideals, and her empowerment through language, focusing on her resistance to traditional gender roles and her eventual self-discovery. By analysing *Deeda*'s struggle with the limitations placed on her by patriarchal society and her continually evolving relationship with her husband. This paper argues how women can redefine their relationships and identities with oppressive structures, additionally, Mohan represents a distinct portrayal of feminism which highlights the intersectionality of class, caste, and gender. Through the feminist lens, this research exhibits how Mohan's works and women's characters critique patriarchal norms and offer a vision that redefines femininity and women's roles in both public and private spheres. (Mohan, 2007)

## 1. Introduction

Peggy Mohan's novel *Jahajin* is rich in its exploration of identity, gender, and societal structures, specifically focusing on the condition of women within these patriarchal systems (Mohan, 2007). Through the character of *Deeda*, Peggy Mohan delves into complex feminist themes that reflect both the restrictions placed upon women in patriarchal societies and their efforts to redefine their identities within this existing framework (Chakrabarti, 2019).

*Deeda*, as a central character, embodies the contradictions of traditional gender roles, on the other hand challenging them. This paper will examine how *Deeda* presents feminist ideals, focusing on her evolution as a character and how Peggy Mohan uses her character to criticize social norms, gender, and cultural expectations. While examining *Deeda*'s character, and her relationship with social mobility, language, marriage, and personal autonomy, this research paper will argue how *Deeda* serves as a symbol of feminist redefinition, resistance, and empowerment (Butler, 1990). Her journey is not merely one of the survival stories of women, but the story of growth, self-discovery, and resistance. By examining these dimensions, the paper will situate *Jahajin* within the broader context of feminist literature, exploring how Mohan's narrative contributed to contemporary dialogues on gender equality, identity, and the resilience of women in the face of systemic adversity (Chandra Mohanty, 2003).

## 2. Objectives:

- To analyze the feminist themes in Peggy Mohan's novel *Jahajin*, in the context of the character of *Deeda*.
- To explore *Deeda*'s challenge to traditional gender roles asserted by society and her journey towards self-empowerment.
- To consider how *Deeda*'s relationship with language reflects her feminist transformation.
- To examine the intersectionality of class, caste, and gender in shaping *Deeda*'s feminist experience.

- To criticize the patriarchal structures within Deena's marriage and their role in her constant personal growth and resistance to patriarchal structure.
- To investigate how Mohan uses Deeda's character to offer a broader commentary on women's empowerment in modern society.

### 3. Literature Review

Feminist literature, specific to postcolonial contexts, often examines the intersectionality of class, identity, and gender (Crenshaw, 1989). Scholars such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) have emphasized the significance of understanding women's oppression through a lens that accounts for class, cultural dynamics, and race (Mohanty, 2003). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988) provides a framework for exploring how women are marginalized like Deeda in Jahajin, her character navigated systemic silencing and oppression (Spivak, 1988).

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity (1990) is instrumental in understanding how Deeda challenged patriarchal expectations and norms by redefining her role as mother and wife. Similarly, Simon de Beauvoir's critiques on marriage in *The Second Sex* (1949) highlight the limitations applied to women through the patriarchal structures, which are similar and central to Deeda's story (Beauvoir, 1989).

Indian feminist literature, presented by writers like Shashi Deshpande and Mahasweta Devi, has long explored themes of caste and gender oppression. Peggy Mohan's significant text *Jahajin* contributes to this tradition by portraying Deeda as a figure who embodies both the triumphs and struggles of women in postcolonial societies, criticizing gender norms and cultural expectations (Devi, 1995; Deshpande, 1989).

### 4. Analysis

#### 4.1 Deeda's Struggle with Patriarchy

In *Jahajin*, Deeda's story is marked by the stress between societal expectations and personal desire. From her early years of life, she is shaped by the norms of a patriarchal society that defines her worth only about her roles as wife, mother, and daughter. Deeda's marriage represents the traditional role of women in her community, where being subordinated to a male is seen as virtuous (Beauvoir, 1989). However, Mohan complicates this traditional role by giving Deeda a rich inner life, marked by different questions of independence, dissatisfaction with her current role passivity expected of her, and desire for agency. While she has been pursuing her social expectations, Deeda's internal world tells a completely different story. Her silent rebellious behaviour against her situation is one of the most compelling feminist elements of the novel. Every reader witnesses her gradual awareness of the limitations that are imposed on her life by a male-dominated society. Deeda's refusal to completely submit to her marriage and her longing for intellectual and emotional freedom, speak about the feminist struggle against the traditional gendered roles.

#### 4.2 Challenging Traditional Gender Roles

One of the defining characteristics of Deeda's character is her resistance to the traditional roles assigned to her by society, her relationship with her husband is central to the dynamic. Mohan does not represent their marriage as an ideal and harmonious union, rather it is marked by miscommunication, tension, and unsystematic balance of power. Deeda's husband was a figure of authority, which represents the traditional patriarchal norms that asked for sacrifice, loyalty, and submission from women (Mohan, 2007).

Deeda, however, is not a character to accept these norms passively. Throughout the novel, she starts to question the validity of these roles and witnesses intellectual and emotional awakening. She rejects the passive role of women as a wife, mothers, and daughters. Through her nuanced portrayal of Deeda's emotional conflicts, Mohan criticizes the unequal power dynamics in a marriage. Deeda's growing realization of self-worth and her attempts to acknowledge her individuality within the institution of marriage.

#### 4.3 Intersectionality and Social Context

Deeda's feminist journey cannot be completely understood without knowing about the intersectionality of class, gender, and social status. Throughout the novel, Mohan emphasizes

that Deeda's gendered experience is shaped not only by her identity as a woman but also by the social system that dominates her actions. Deeda's marriage is not merely an individual dilemma but an institution that is tied to the larger socio-political context of class, caste, and familial expectations.

As a woman from a particular caste and class, Deeda faces additional layers of oppression that complicate her struggle for individuality. Her social status limits her options, and she is continually reminded of her rigid place in the hierarchy of social structure (*Kapadia, 2002*). These limitations make her eventual rebellion all the more powerful. Her defiance of gender norms cannot be separated from the broader struggle for social justice. Deeda's experience is a testament to how women's empowerment is tied to the dismantling of intersecting systems of oppression.

#### **4.4 Language as a Tool of Empowerment**

Language plays an important role in Deeda's feminist transformations. Differently, her evolving relationship with language shows her journey toward self-awareness and empowerment. At the start of the novel, her communication with others, especially her husband, is constrained by traditional gender roles, and her voice is often subordinated to male authority. However, as soon as she started to question the limitations of her life, her use of language became a tool for asserting her autonomy and independence.

Peggy Mohan uses language as a vehicle for Deeda's resistance. Her dialogue becomes more complicated and complex, reflecting her intellectual growth and rejection of the passiveness of expectations from her. Deeda's use of language, helps her to express herself and how it interprets the world around her. This reclamation of language is a key feminist act, it defies how women are silenced, and given limited communication opportunities in the patriarchal society, whereas Deeda's character continues to articulate her desires, assert her needs, and challenge the conventional gender roles through her use of Language (*Mohan, 2007; Tong, 2009*).

#### **4.5 Empowerment and Self-Discovery**

At the heart of Deeda's story is a narrative of empowerment through self-discovery. Throughout the novel, Deeda undergoes a profound personal transformation. Initially, she is depicted as a woman bound by societal expectations, but as the narrative unfolds, she begins to question and challenge the limitations placed upon her (*Ray, 1994*). This journey of self-discovery is central to the feminist themes in *Jahajin*, as it illustrates that true empowerment for women comes not from external validation but from internal growth and the ability to define one's own identity.

Deeda's empowerment is also connected to her evolving understanding of love. Her emotional growth allows her to redefine her relationship with her husband and ultimately transcend the conventional expectations of femininity. Mohan's portrayal of Deeda suggests that empowerment is not about rejecting love or marriage altogether, but about redefining these institutions in ways that allow women to maintain their autonomy and identity. This theme of redefinition is crucial in feminist discourse, as it challenges the binary notion of submission versus rebellion and offers a more nuanced understanding of women's choices (*Chakrabarti, 2019*).

### **5. Analysis and Discussion**

One of the most compelling aspects of Deeda's character is her silence and quiet, yet powerful resistance to societal expectations. While she operates within the rules and regulations of patriarchal structures, still her journey reveals a nuanced form of rebellion that challenges the patriarchal structure (*Mohan, 2007; Chakravarti, 1993*). Her subtle acts of- Questioning marital norms, using language as a means of reclaiming his identity and her autonomy and individuality in taking decisions, Deeda represents different layers and forms that women can use to resist patriarchal norms even in restrictive environments (*Butler, 1990; Spivak, 1988*).

Her resistance is not always overt but deeply transformative, reflecting the triumphs and struggles of women navigating intersecting oppressions such as caste, class, and gender (*Crenshaw, 1989; Mohan, 2007*). Deeda's evolution from a subordinated figure to a highlighted

figure of feminist agency, even under systematic oppression (Ray, 1994; Mohanty, 2003). Mohan's portrayal of Deeda not only critiques the deep-rooted gender inequalities but also celebrates the ingenuity and resilience of women in their pursuit of empowerment and autonomy (Devi, 1995; Mohan, 2007).

### Conclusion

In *Jahajin*, Peggy Mohan presents Deeda as a multifaceted feminist character whose journey embodies the complex process of self-discovery, resistance, and empowerment. Through Deeda's struggle with patriarchal structures, her challenge of traditional gender roles, and her use of language as a tool of empowerment, Mohan offers a rich and nuanced portrayal of feminism. Deeda's story reflects the importance of questioning and redefining gendered expectations, while also acknowledging the social contexts that shape women's lives. Ultimately, Deeda represents the feminist ideal of a woman who refuses to be confined by societal limitations and instead seeks to define herself on her terms. Through her, Mohan offers a powerful critique of gender inequality and highlights the potential for women's empowerment through self-awareness, resistance, and the reclamation of voice.

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