

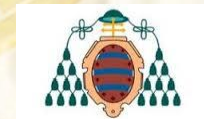
# **GENDER VIOLENCE IN CONTEMPORARY INDIAN LITERATURE**



TUNKASILA

CENTRO

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1. THE CONCEPT OF VIOLENCE.

2. GENDER VIOLENCE INDIA

3. GENDER VIOLENCE IN CONTEMPORARY  
INDIAN LITERATURE.

# **VIOLENCE:**

Wars and genocides.

The urban scenario.

The domestic scenario.

# **THE CONCEPT OF VIOLENCE.**

1. Violence is an intended act; violence always has a purpose.
2. The act of violence transgress human rights: every person has the right to live without violence.
3. The act of violence causes physical and emotional harm
4. The act of violence aims to exercise control and power upon the subject of violence.

**Gender violence in India affects women all through their**

**life cycle**

**even before birth.**

# GREAT PARADOX

**The Indian Constitution.**

**Governmental action.**

**Institutional action.**

**Social action.**

Great obstacle:

The religious context in India  
and traditions.



# **Veneration of the feminine power in mythology:**

*Devi-Bhagavata-Purana:*

The body of Goddess Devi=Mother India.

Rabindranath Tagore:

National anthem.

◆ The myth of Durga.

◆ The Code of Manu.

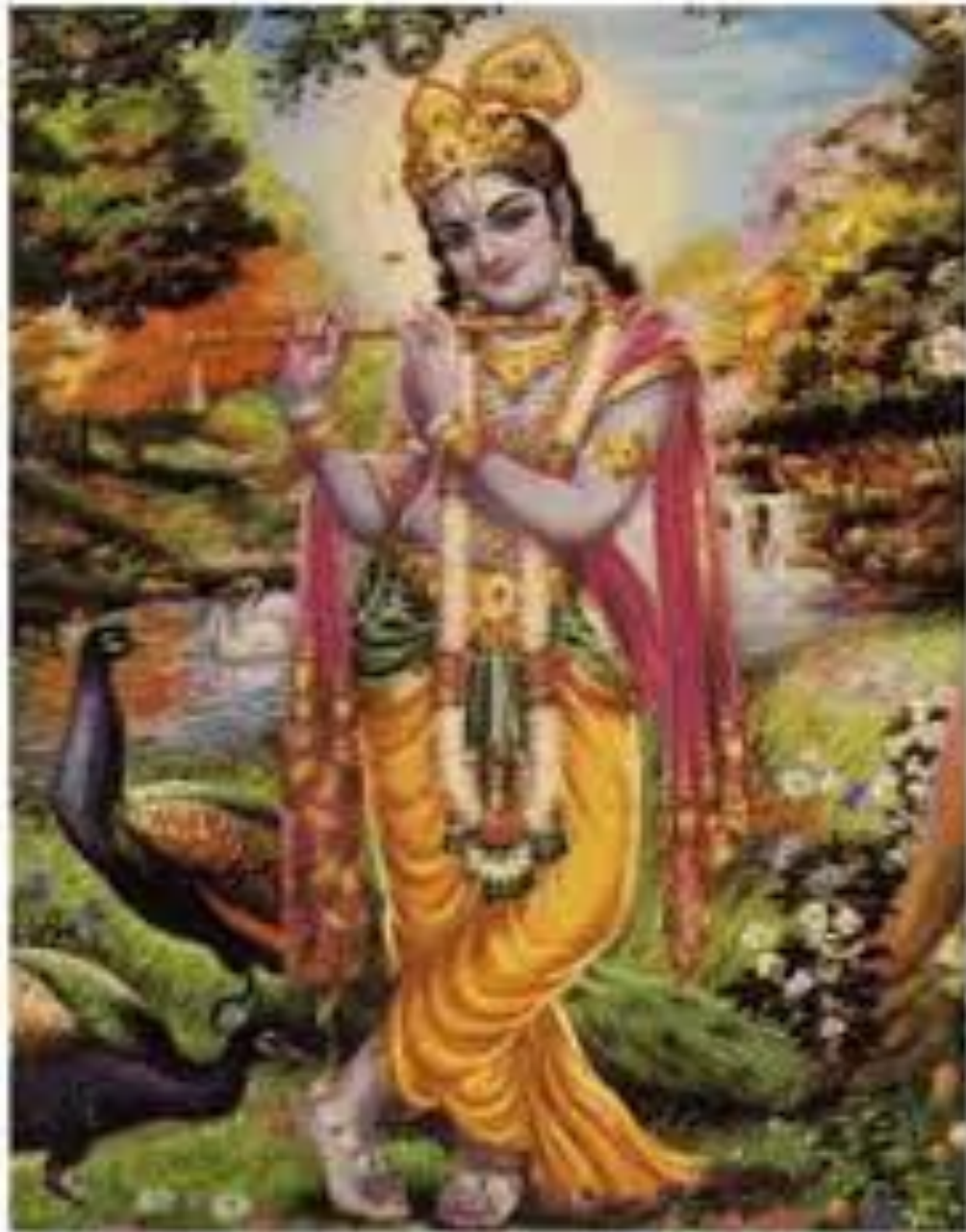
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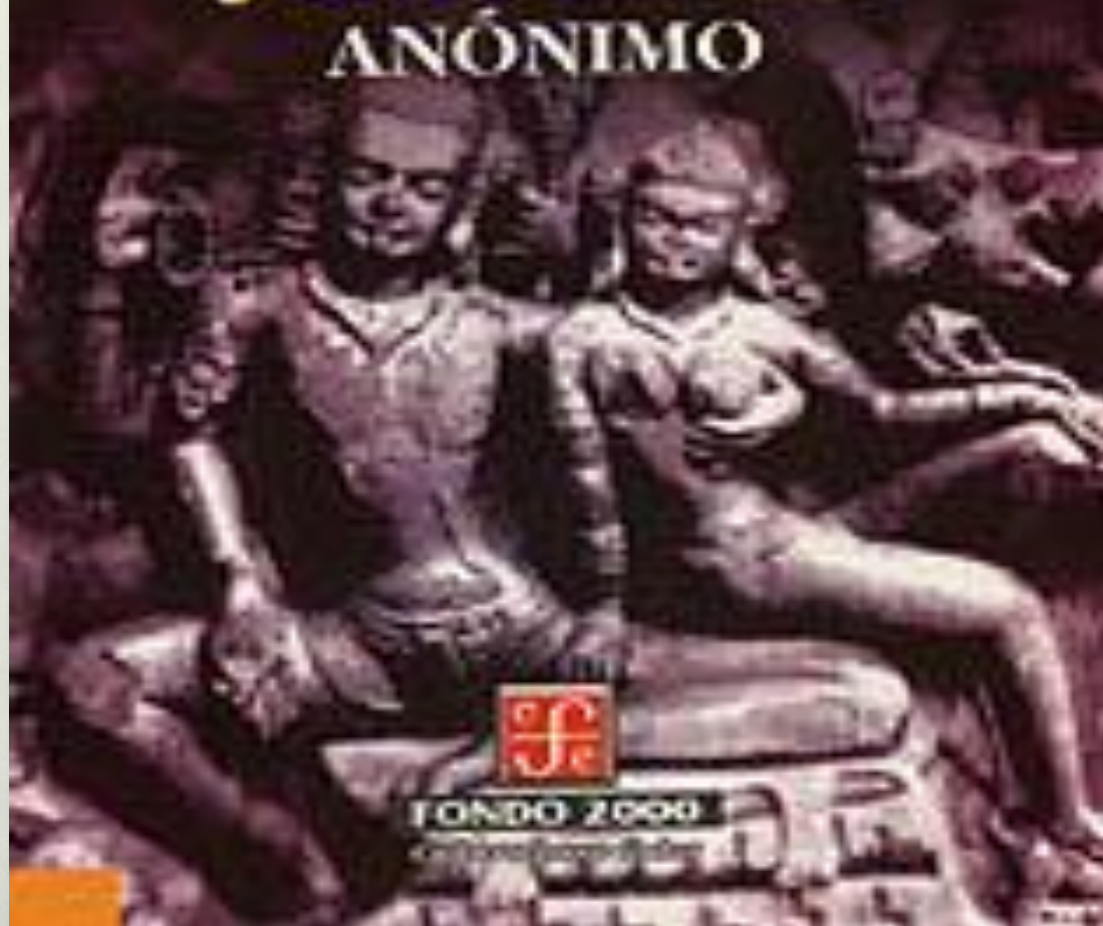






# Código de Manú y otros textos

ANÓNIMO

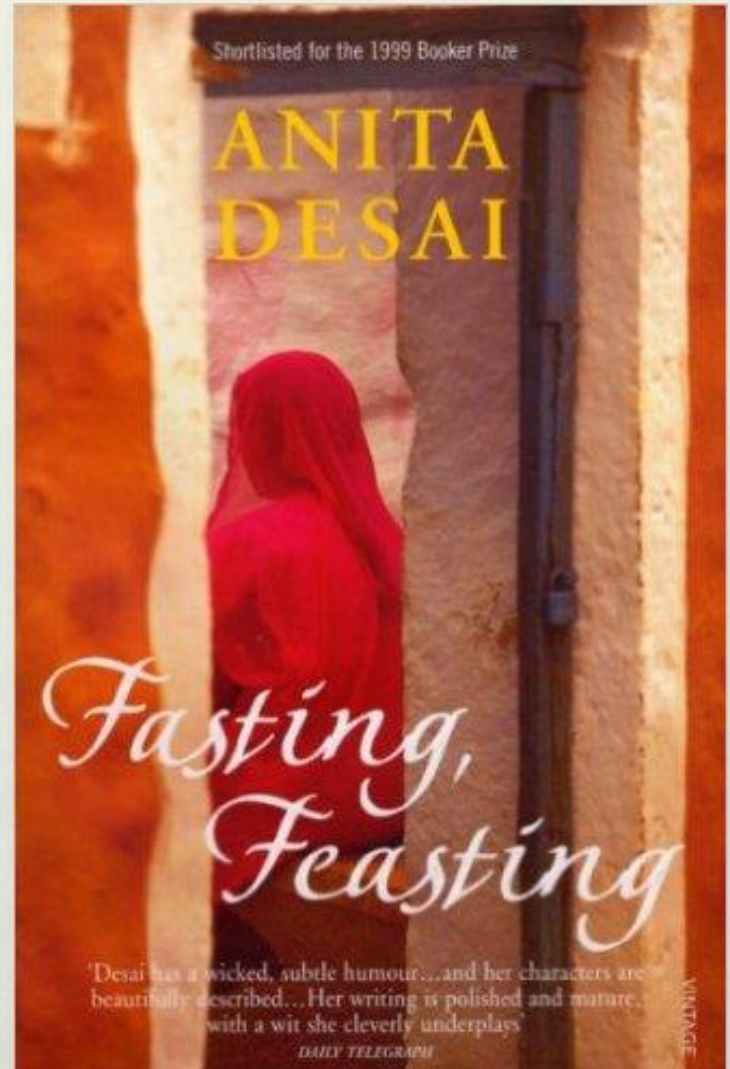


FONDO 2000



**Indian literature in English as  
an active social tool to  
denounce the situation of  
Indian women.**

Desai, Anita. 1999.  
*Fasting, Feasting.*  
London: Vintage Books.



Bama (translated from Tamil by Lakshmi Holstrom) (2005).

*Sangati: Events.*

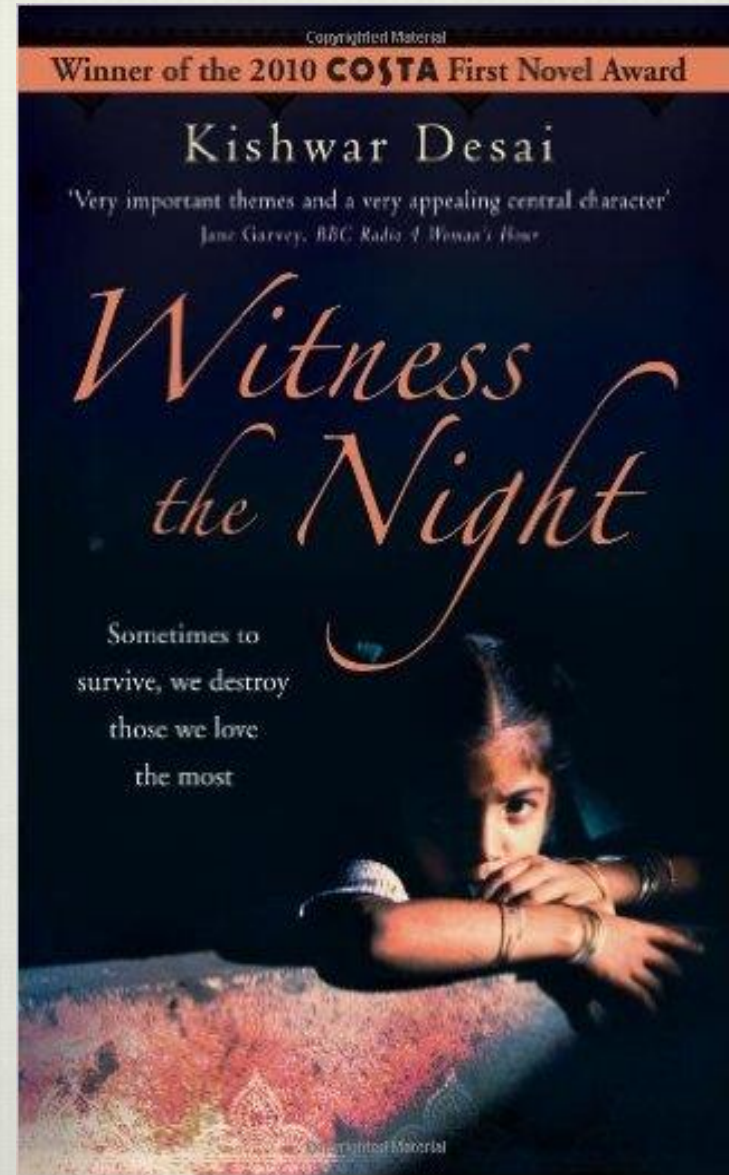
New Delhi: Oxford University Press.



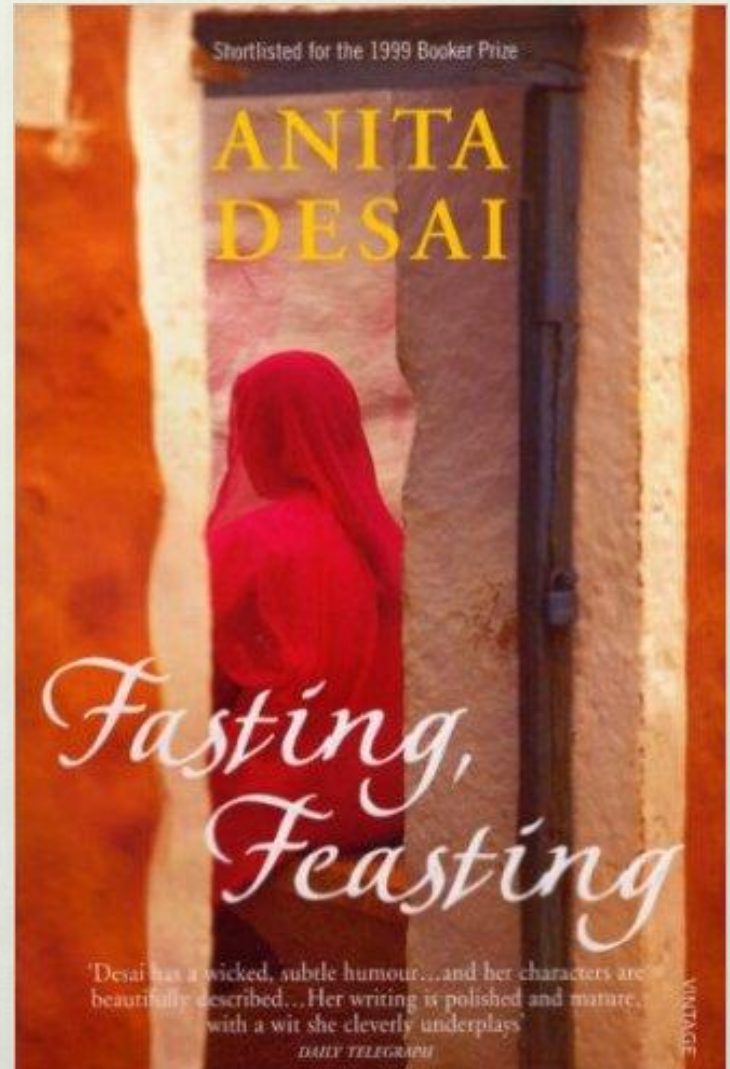
Desai, Kishwar. 2010.

*Witness the Night.*

London: Beautiful Books Ltd



Desai, Anita. 1999.  
*Fasting, Feasting.*  
London: Vintage Books.



# *Fasting, Feasting*

UMA

MOTHER

## **TRADITION VS MODERNITY.**

“In my day, girls in the family were not given sweets, nuts, good things to eat. If something special had been bought in the market (...) it was given to the boys in the family” (6).

## **THE REPRODUCTIVE ROLE.**

“ (Uma) discovers what it was to have periods, Mama (...) found herself pregnant” (15).

“(...) she delivered what she had suffered so much for – a son. A son” (16).

## EDUCATION.

““I have to do my homework” (18), Uma tells her mother, “Leave all that” (18) she answers back ”

“We are not sending you back to school, Uma. You are staying at home to help with Arun” (18).

“You are a big girl now. We are trying to arrange a marriage for you (...) And learn to run the house” (22).

## LOVE WITHIN MARRIAGE.

“She (mama) had matched Papa’s achievement, you could say, and they were now more equal than ever” (31).

but

“Was *this* love? Was *this* romance?(32).

# WIDOWS.

## **Mira-masi:**

“(she) had in her widowhood developed an unsettling habit of travelling all over the country, quite alone, safe in her widow’s white garments, visiting one place of pilgrimage after another like an obsessed tourist of the spirit (...). Ever since her widowhood, she had taken up religion as her vocation” (38).



## Uma (and Mira-Masi):

### **CONTRADICTIONARY FORCES:**

“(...) an air of abandonment about them that made her feel Uneasily as if MamaPapa, those enemies of abandon, were standing behind her and watching her and all of them, with scorn (...). She felt uneasily caught once more between powerful forces pulling in different directions” (58).

### **SEARCH FOR FREEDOM IN NATURE:**

“(...) wandering down the river. (...) she picked berries too hard and green too, watched insects (...) sat in the sparse shade of a thorny grey tree (...) watched the fishing eagles soar into the vast sky. (...) walking barefoot through the sand along the river (...)” (59).

## ARRANGED MARRIAGE.

““(…) their lips take on a glisten and all the giggles and whispers would arrive at the one decisión – *marriage*” (66).

### Anamika and Aruna:

“Anamika (…) lovely as a flower, soft, petal-skinned, bumblebee-eyed, pinked lipped, (…) loving smiles and with good nature. (…) Wherever she was, there was a peace, contentment, well-being (67).

“(…) Anamika was beaten regularly by her mother-in-law while her husband stood by and approved – or at least did not object” (70).

## Uma:

“having cost her parents two dowries, without a marriage to show in return, Uma was considered ill-fated by all and no more attempts were made to marry her off.” (96)

“crept away in the dark of the shadows (...) an outcast from the world of marriage (...)” (96).

“A CAREER. Leaving home. Leaving alone. These troubling secret possibilities now entered Uma’s mind”(119).

“Her vision of an escape, a refuge, took the form of a huge and ancient banyan tree with streaming grey air roots, leafy branches in which monkeys and parrots feasted on berries”(131).

““ (...) she would feel herself drawn by an undercurrent into a secret depth, so dark that she could see nothing at all – just the darkness,” (132)

## Anamika's death.

“She turned off the gas cylinder they used for cooking. She filled a can with kerosene oil. (...)She wrapped a nylon sari (...) knotted around neck and knees (...) she poured kerosene over herself. Then struck a match. She set herself alight”(150-1).

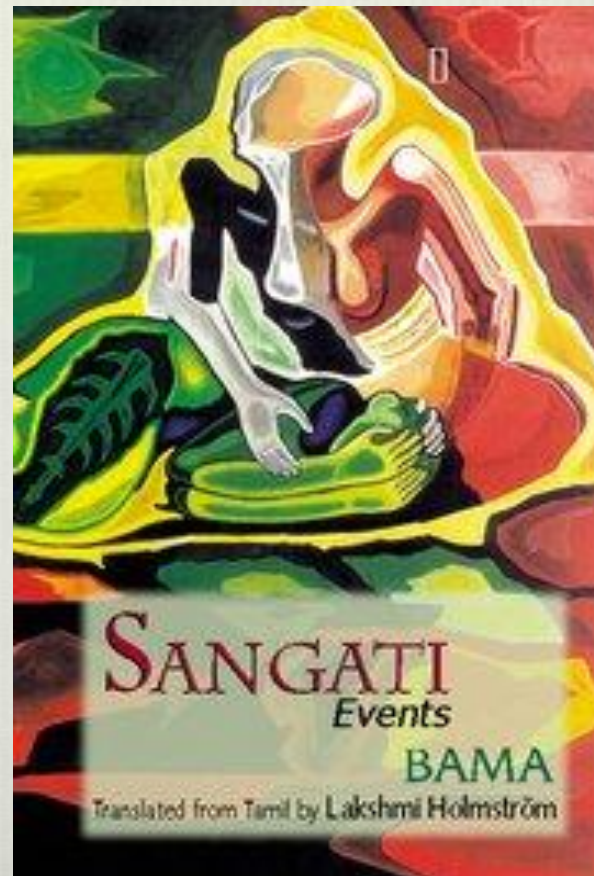
## Uma.

““Uma dips her jar in the river, and lifts it high over her head. When she tilts it and pours it out, the murky water catches the blaze of the sun and flashes fire” (156).

Bama (translated from Tamil by Lakshmi Holstrom) (2005).

*Sangati: Events.*

New Delhi: Oxford University Press.



# *Sangati*

## **GENDER VIOLENCE FROM BIRTH:**

“(...) it is quite true that the women in our street led hard lives. When they are infants in arms they never let the boy babies cry. (...) he is instantly picked up and given milk. It is not so with the girls”(7).

“(...) a boy is breast-fed longer. With girls, they wean them quickly, making them forget the breast” (7).

“They’ll eat as much as they wish and run off to play. As for the girls, they must stay at home and keep on working all the time (...) and they should take care of the babies even when they go out to play” (7).

## **IMAGE OF SUPERWOMAN.**

“She went into labour (...) delivered the child (...)cut off the umbilical cord with the sickle she had taken with her to cut the grass, dug a hole and buried the placenta, and then walked home carrying her baby and her bundle of grass”(6).

““If you are born into this world, it is best you were born a man. Born as women what do we get’ We only toil in the fields and in the home until our very vaginas shrivel”(7).

## **RAPE.**

“If upper-class fellows clap your eyes on you, you are finished. They’ll drag you off and rape you”(8).

## **FIGHT.**

“(...) if you have courage in your heart, you can live fearlessly. We need not fear peys and, what’s more, neither do we need to fear men”(58).

“once a girl comes of age she has no freedom. They tell us stories to take away our freedom, and control our movements. (...) we become frightened, we gaze about us in terror, we are afraid of every little thing, we shiver, and die”(58).

“our men don’t have the same problem. Even if they work really hard, they still have their own freedom. They still control their women, rule over them, and find their pleasure”(59).



## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.

“That girl....and her husband have got into fierce fight”(62).

“Paakiaraj was abusing her in a vile and vulgar way, and was just about to kick her” (62).

“she was pregnant, besides. Right behind her, her husband chasing, a stick of firewood in his hand. (...) he caught up with the woman and dragged her along by the hair, abusing her. (...) Because she was heavily pregnant, her whole stomach dragged on the earth as he pulled her along” (62).

“you brute, you animal, haven’t you got a drop of human feeling or compassion on you? How can you torture her like that, without even caring that she’s pregnant?”(62).

“Ayyayo, he’s killing me. Vile man, you’ll die, you’ll be carried out as a corpse, you low-life, you bastard” (61).

“If I let the whore go, she’ll surely run away. (...) He carried her home”(63).

“This is the bridegroom she chose for herself. Did we (parents) arrange her marriage for her? When she run away with him, she didn’t feel pain, did she? Now she is being destroyed by him. So what can we (parents) do about it?”(63)

## CHILD ABUSE.

“(…) goes off to our neighbouring town to work in the match factory because her mother cannot go to work in the fields then”(70).

“Maikkani (…) looked after the children, and did all the housework.” (70)

“(…) going to the match factory every day (…) she managed to earn forty or fifty rupees a week. Every Sunday she brought her wages home and handed it to her mother” (71).

“He (maistri-Annaacchi) gave me a sharp knock on my skull. My whole head felt as if it was spinning”(23).

“her father got angrier still and began hitting her as hard as he could” (25).

“It is you female chicks who ought to be humble and modest. A man may do a hundred things and still get away with it. You girls should consider what you are left with, in your bellies. (...) Whatever a man does, in the end the blame falls on the woman” (26).

“Mariamma didn’t sleep a wink that night. She even thought that it might be best to hang herself with a rope.”(27).

## **COLLECTIVE CLAIM.**

“We must be strong. We must show by our own resolute lives that we believe ardently in our Independence. I told myself that we must never allow our minds to be worn out, damaged and broken in the belief that this is our fate. Just as we work hard so long as there is strength in our bodies, so too, must we strengthen our hearts and minds in order to survive” (59).

## SILENCE VS CLAMOUR.

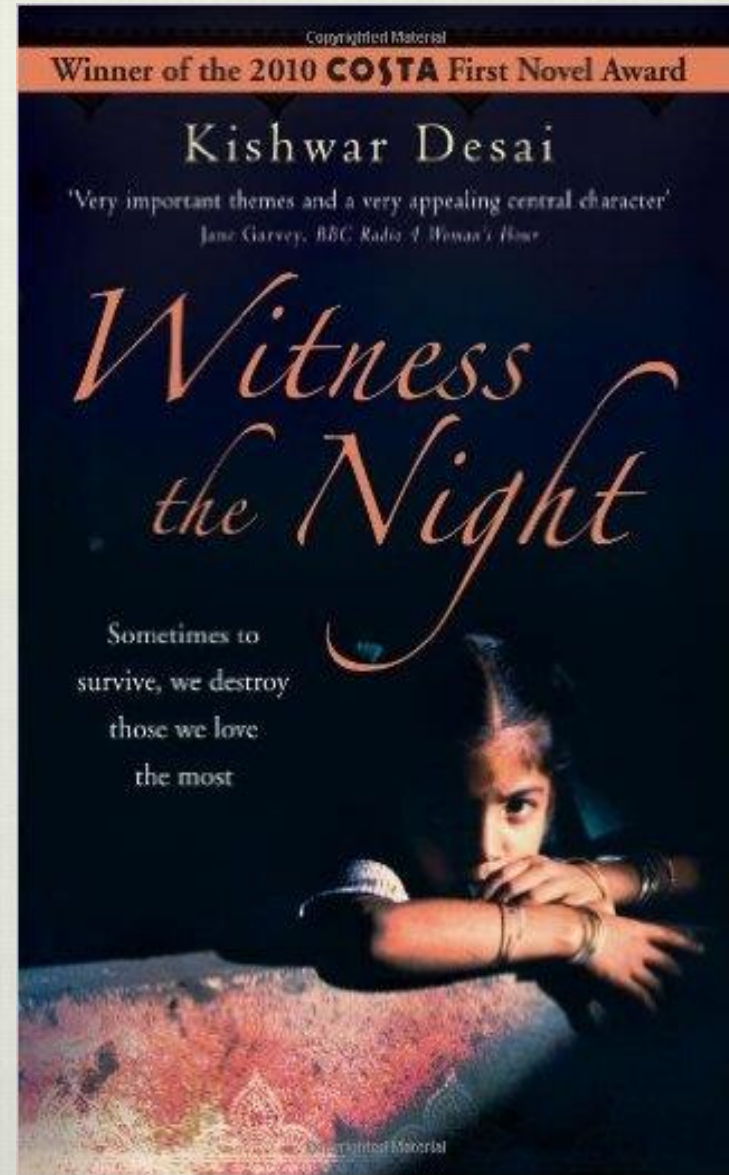
“(...)upper caste women give the superficial impression that they never quarrel amongst themselves nor with their husbands” (67).

“Somehow or other, by shouting and fighting first thing at dawn and last thing at night, if need be, our women survive without going crazy. (...) Upper-caste women, though, keep it all suppressed; they can neither chew nor swallow. They lose their nerve, and many of them become unstable or mentally ill.”(68)

Desai, Kishwar. 2010.

*Witness the Night.*

London: Beautiful Books Ltd



## *Witness the Night*

### **DURGA: A 14 YEAR OLD GIRL.**

“And in every room we found dead bodies.

All her relatives-her father, mother, grandmother, two brothers, aunts, cousins. The servants had the weekend off to attend a wedding. There was blood everywhere. They found her the next morning with one of her hands tied to the bed. She was naked but alive” (24).

“You asked me to write my thoughts.

But there are too many questions in my mind, too many fears. First I would have to remove all those worries, only then can I think again. You cannot understand how painful it is. No one can (1).”

“We went back into the house (after the crime had been committed), the two of us, and he slapped me across my face because I was crying too much, and then he tied my hands and told me to struggle to release them so that marks would remain on my arms. It should look like someone had tried to hurt me, and tied me up. Even though we were surrounded by blood and burn flesh, he pushed up my shirt and squeezed my breasts, and then he took me to my room, where he removed my salwar and pushed me down on the bed. I was feeling sick and did not want to do what he asked me to do, but he said he had to do this to me so our story seemed more credible. I listened to that familiar reasonable voice and drowned myself in the feel of his hands and his mouth” (3-4).



## SIMRAN: THE SOCIAL WORKER:

“(…) a middle-aged, frustrated spinster, drowning her sorrows in drink and worrying about children who spent their lives in be.”(20).

“my job is to get her to talk. She was poisoned, tied up, raped, terrorized. Her whole family wiped out.” (49)

“She’s completely innocent. She’s only fourteen years old after all. You know what the justice system in India is like. I worry about her all the time. I believe *and* I know she’s done nothing wrong and yet she’s the one they’ve caught. The real culprits are out there, walking free”(42).

## Durga and Sharda:

### PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE:

“Strangely, (in the house) there weren’t any photographs of either Durga or her sister. There were a few portraits of men and women, probably other family members, but it was as though the two girls had never existed”(55).

“My sister was like me in the Inside. She wanted us never to leave, to stay close to each other. Also, we had just learnt that next door, the girl who had gone away as a bride had come back as a corpse within a month, she had been burnt because her dowry had been insufficient (63)”

## INFANTICIDE.

“So many women (stop feeding their daughters) do that because if a child dies of malnutrition you can't be charged with murder. You just say, she refused to feed, what can I do?

I remembered the story of a woman in Tamil Nadu who confessed that she tried to kill her daughter by not nursing her. Then tired of the sound of the baby crying, she took some poisonous juice from oleander flower, mixed it with castor oil, and forced it down the child's throat. Eventually the crying stopped. The crying had bothered her more than the act of killing” (149).

## **SELECTIVE ABORTION.**

“Or suffocation. Other women who witnessed the birth or the killing were invariably on the side of the mother: they knew the taunts and the troubles that would follow the birth of a daughter. But now things were more sophisticated than during my mother’s pregnancy. In the twenty-first century, female children were killed as a part of a package deal, while within the womb, during the pre-natal check-up. This way too, no one would ever find out.”(149).

“How I (Durga) slowly found out the most savage part of my family history, how my great grandmother had been told that she would have to leave the main house when she gave birth to the sixth daughter in a row. A great tradition culling out girl children that we maintain till today for ourselves and for others through the clinics we run, where test are conducted and babies are aborted. They are buried without fanfare in the fields around the house. Occasionally, while tilling the land, tiny skeletons are turned up in the earth, but the loyal family retainers never let anyone know. The bones are quietly ground into dust or thrown into the river Beas. Grateful families are only too glad to help cover up”(161).

## MENTAL HOSPITALS.

“health hospitals in India were still largely a dumping ground for the *inconvenient* (...)” (121).

“would simply tie up these unfortunate women to a cot or are chained inside a room (...) food was thrown at them, as they lay in their own filth and body waste” (119).

“were often found in rags and half starved roaming on the streets, secure in their madness, unaware of their own plight”(120).

## **SHARDA:**

“She was completely gone by then, those electric shocks, the beatings, had destroyed her completely. She was very ill. (...) I would never have recognized her. She used to be very beautiful. Now she was skin and bones, with no hair and boils on her body from malnutrition and the burns and the beatings. She had stopped eating and all the time, she would pick up small children and press them to her breasts, saying they were hers”(137).

## **DURGA:**

“In him, Durga had found someone who loved her sister. And through him and his body she could love her sister once more. In her desperation she never understood that he was using her emotions and her sexuality to manipulate her” (223).

“My only hope now is that Ramnath keeps his promise that they will eventually lock me up with my sister and in our madness, at least, we will be together again. My sister, my mother, my lover. Hopefully the darkness will come very quickly” (221).



## THE END...

**(Durga):** “They say nothing in life is easy and that we all have to struggle to find ourselves, and happiness. I suppose where I am now is finally a happy place. (...) trying to become *normal* , trying to do what girls are supposed to do, wear pretty clothes and paint my nails and wear jewellery” (235).

# CONCLUSION

## DURGA

“I want to be like everyone else but the dreams don't let me rest, they make me want and want and want...

They make me want to destroy the world and create it again, make it more loving make it more just...and then the anger, the awful anger comes back and I really do feel like Durga, the goddess Durga (...)with the myriad hands and the skulls around her neck, the Durga, that wants to slash and tear and hurt and wound...exactly the same way in which those por little babies were wounded” (236).

Thank you!