

FEMINISM IN THE NOVELS OF ANITA DESAI'S CRY THE PEACOCK

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ABSTRACT: *Feminism refers to any ideology that seeks equality in rights for women, usually through improving their status. Feminism is rooted in ending men's historical power over women. Feminism is a range of political movements, ideologies, and social movements that share a common goal: to define, establish, and achieve political, economic, personal, and social equality of sexes. This includes seeking to establish educational and professional opportunities for women that are equal to those for men. The present paper attempts to probe Desai's expression of her pre-occupation with the modern ideal of building the society free from male domination. The study also means to investigate the role and contribution of patriarchy and patriarchal values towards the misery, suffering, loneliness and unhappiness of women or other psychological, social and economic problems experienced by them. The present research work will undertake a study of feminist awareness in Anita DESAI's novel CRY THE PEACOCK, with the objective to highlight the place and plight of women in a world governed by patriarchy.*

Key words: *Feminism, Feminine Sensibility, Awareness, Patriarchy*

INTRODUCTION:

Feminism is a collection of movements and ideologies aimed at defining, establishing, and defending equal political, economic, and social rights for women. In addition, feminism seeks to establish equal opportunities for women in education and employment. A feminist is "an advocate or supporter of the rights and equality of women". Feminism refers to any ideology that seeks equality in rights for women, usually through improving their status. Feminism is rooted in ending men's historical power over women. Recrudescence's in feminist theory particularly focus on issues that disproportionately hurt females, such as ending gender pay gaps, enacting female voting and political rights, and reassessing what is considered "female" and "male". While modern feminist thought is largely rooted in the Western intellectual tradition, the ideology is gaining currency throughout the whole world. In many cases, the feminist goal of equality for women has helped push movements around the world to change the entire way private society. One of the greatest vindications of feminism is the power women in Liberia showed when, with some assistance from the international community, they ended the civil war^W and subsequently replaced the chaotic, unabashedly corrupt, and genocidal dictatorship with a reasonably functional democracy. Feminism can be studied from the perspectives of the actual movements for equality or from the writings of both observer, commentator and participant addressing the underlying issues of why women have not been and are not seen as equal.

The term 'feminism' has its origin from the Latin word 'femina', meaning 'woman' (through French Feminism) and there by refers to the advocacy of women rights, status and power with men on the grounds of equality of sexes. In other words, it relates to the belief that women should have the same social, economical and political rights as that of men. Anita Desai seems to be aware of relationship between feminism as a political movement, a literary and theoretical commitment to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism and not only gender study in Literature. In fact, feminist critical perspective and theory became pertinent to the study and analysis of the social, institutional and personal power relegations between the sexes. The rendering of feminine sensibility and the dilemmas of women oppressed by male dominated social order and recurring themes in her fictional work. 'Cry, the Peacock' is an essentially a study of the marital situation resulting from the conflict between two irreconcilable temperament of two diametrically opposed attitudes towards life. In Desai's first two novels, marriages are shattering failures because Maya and Manisha are unable to adjust themselves with their challenging new roles. Thus, in Anita Desai's fiction there is rich variety of themes and her treatment deserves critical attention. She analyzes the ambience with clinical precision and her fiction represents a vivid and comprehensive picture of the human predicament.

The novel has been interpreted by the critics from different perspectives. Her work reveals another dimension she had added to her fiction- the importance to women- a neglected class of society. True picture of women is also given by Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, "Beat them, starve them, how you like them, they will sit and look with animal eyes and never raise a head to defend themselves. P. Sharma and Kamal N. Awasthi point out that Maya despite her over-protective childhood does not seem to be a spoilt woman. She has the capacity to differentiate between her childhood friends, the indulgence of a doting father and clamorous demands of her lawyer husband who often withdrew in asking her for a cup of tea; Maya feels destabilised even after four years of marriage, Gautama had failed to fecundate, "no you are too young"- perhaps of the bareness Maya had developed a slightly greater capacity for philosophy that she was born with. She blames Gautama for his grossness, for his concern with the fundamental and basic prosaic life in terms of money: "...it's always money or property – never a case of passion and revenge, murder and exciting things like that –not for love or life basic things- like Toto dying." Mrs Desai, by powerful search light of her observation dives deep down and presents the world with her findings which include her prime concern to bare the hard covering of emotions to bring out sheer womanliness in them, to prove that they are actually devoid of feelings but in search of a pit of love and life.

Cry The Peacock is a story of highly emotional, sensitive and imaginative woman told by a woman novelist .Maya is shown to be fast disintegrating under the pressures of marital discord. Married to an unresponsive and insensitive husband Gautama, she is driven from emotional instability in the beginning to madness, insanity and murder towards the end. Even though Anita Desai owes no explicit allegiance to feminist cause, she is preoccupied with the plight of woman in the male- dominated oppressive order. Her Cry The Peacock is a unique example of or an illusion of the feminist point of view. The novel has almost all the features of women's writing. Anita Desai defines the

uniqueness of feminine sensibility through the reactions and responses of the heroine to the events and situation in the novel. A highly emotional, sensitive and sensuous woman, Maya has obsessive love for life. Anita Desai is a prolific living writer churning out fiction with consummate skill who has brought out ten full-length novels of varied length, innumerable short stories and couple of write ups. In a short period of time, she aroused a lot of critical attention. She is considered the writer who introduced the psychological novel to India and is pioneer of writing on feminist issues.

Anita Desai dealt her fiction with feminine sensibility and her themes are innovative, mostly about miserable plight of women suffering under their insensitive and inconsiderate husbands, fathers and brothers. Though Anita Desai attempts to analyse Feminine Consciousness in her fiction however, she has been particularly cautious of labels and refuses to see herself as a feminist. Mostly she portrays a world of a dissatisfied woman who is a lonely protagonist. She challenges the prevalent version of Indian women stereotype by subverting their quest for fulfillment with an intense dissatisfaction with the family system hence a resultant unsatisfied ego. Desai's women are mostly in self-search and in search of fulfillment of the emptiness they feel even in ties between parents, siblings, friends and yet incomplete. Desai has created a feminist discourse of literary writings showing signs of a seething discontentment, hatred for the patriarchal norms of civilized human existence, aspirations for liberation from societal and traditional family norms made compulsory for their acceptable existence in the mainstream male dominated society. Her family characters are mostly in search of self- authenticity, independent of the identity that has been dumped on her. Desai has a typical style of her own to register protest against patriarchal norms. Her characters are usually women, haunted by peculiar sense of doom, so withdraw themselves into a sequestered world of their own, become neurotic, self-destructive and unhappy.

Anita Desai's „Cry The Peacock is a unique example or an illusion of the feminist point of view. She defines the uniqueness of feminine sensibility through the reactions and responses of the heroine to the events and situations in the novel. A highly emotional, sensitive and sensuous woman, Maya has obsessive love for life, she is perfectly normal and healthy woman. Her only sin is that she is sensitive, imaginative, passionate and sensuous and thus represents the disturbed psyche of modern Indian woman. She tries to strike balance between institutional needs and intellectual aspirations and is deeply bewildered when the existential absurdity of life is brought before her. When she experiences loneliness and lack of communication, she feels herself in mental crisis.

Anita Desai is seen to share a very affectionate relationship with her father and is at pain to leave her home at marriage. Her problem upbringing caused by her mother's death makes her detached from the world outside. Thus she wrote, "... my childhood was one in which much was excluded, which grew steadily more-restricted, unnatural even, in which I lived as a toy princess in a toy world. But it was a pretty one. The expectations she had at marriage of her husband, who is much older than her are not fulfilled. As a result, she becomes stultifying. She funds her husband Gautama, as a man in whom understanding was scant, love was meagre. But as one reads through the novel, one finds that her husband loves and cherishes her, but does not take her seriously and that too because she is a woman. He identifies her with "Maya", which repulses her and to which she objects. As time passes, she becomes more and more restless, starts brooding over the feeling of emptiness in her heart.

CONCLUSION:

Before independence the women were not given the equal status and were getting exploited. But after the independence and introduction of women liberation movement which led to the rise of new women with her own choice, taste and preference and breakage of bands started that had bounded the women and devalued her. Most of the women who are educated grow under self-conflict in terms of marriage, traditional roles. The writers of the post-independence have attempted to show the educated women in the present scenario where women socio-economic conditions have totally changed and they are now revolting against their rights and exploitations. They are now showing better marriage lives and even follow the traditional as well as modern roles in their lives. The writers The current case study on Anita Desai has performed a significant function of instilling a positive "Feminine" identity rather than a female identity, role model women who deters the dependence on men. She has raised voice for the India women. Almost in all novels of the Anita Desai, she has always tried to convey the inner urges of her female protagonists through her writing and depiction of situation in a proper way that has echoed to all. These things have helped her to peep into the inner world of the women and delineated their reality in totality. She has always acted in her own way and attempted to express the feminism in her own way. She has contributed to the India with the feminist concern; the most important thing about her is the way of expression. Her all novels revolve around men and women of exception, incompatible couples and have always tried to explore the feminism in varied ways She has always covered the women of all age group and all types like children, old, intellectual, dull etc. in her writings which has made her one of the great feminist of the times.

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