

The theme of Alienation and Isolation in the novel of Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock*

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Modern age is an age of anxiety as well as an age of alienation where man suffers not only for destruction, war, drought, famine and persecution but also their inner problems like a conviction of isolation, randomness and meaninglessness in his way very existence.

Man has become a confused, frustrated, disintegrated and alienated soul. The suitable gap between what an individual aspires for and the unpleasant reality of what he gains, what he actually is and what he would wish to be taken for, has crumpled his own life leaving a subtle effect on his inner-being. The marks left on his psyche make him realize both his helplessness and hopelessness. In our times, we suffer not only from wars, persecution isolation, randomness and meaninglessness in our way of existence.

The novel has become a powerful means of exploration of this human situation. The Indian English fiction in Post –Independent India has freed itself from social and political overtones. This dilemma of the modern world has affected many an Indian English writer. They are no longer contented with uncritical documentation of social reality but are concerned with exploring the human sensibility.

The theme of alienation and isolation is also dealt by Ruth Pravar Jhabvala in her novel *Heat and Dust*. She portrays the effect of the Indian environment on European sensibility. It creates demands on them which are tough to reconcile they either break or flee. The heat dust, noise and germs in India` are responsible for frustrating and disintegrating their personality.

Women novelists have a unique way of looking at things because they live in severely confined spheres. But that has neither distorted Anita Desai's vision nor make it inferior. It actually adds more sharpness to it. In

the novels where her protagonist is a woman, this vision focuses on the circumstances, perhaps shaped by the predominance of patriarchy. In the novels of Anita Desai, mostly the characters like Maya, Amla, Nirode Monisha, Sita, Sarah, and Nanda Kaul all suffer from sense of alienation that is not only merely physical but also neurotic. These characters are separated from their loved ones both physically and psychologically. The harsh judgmental conditions of Puritan Society are the cause of isolation for these characters and eventually lead to their damnation. “They develop in communication and tend to ponder over existential problems and end up in alienation.” (George 1999:127)

Cry, the Peacock (1963) is considered as a new landmark in the study of alienation of woman characters in Indian literature. The central character in the novel, Maya the protagonist who struggles this type of isolation. Anita Desai has delineated the self-alienation, death, despair, desolation and socio-psychic fragmentation of the protagonist. Through her novel, Anita Desai describes stillness, glum and dark realities of the world in the life of Maya. The novel enquires into her turbulent inner world and depicts her isolation. She is deeply concerned by her childhood prediction of disaster which cannot be removed.

She “is obsessed almost from the beginning and the novel with the gloomy prophecy of an albino astrologer” (Rajeshwar 1999:03). Since astrologers prophecy proved as true in the case of her brother, Arjuna. Her husband Gautama as a rationalist fails to realize Maya’s emotional, mental state. The death of her pet dog, Toto shows her sense of fear. It was unbearable to her. The notion of death horrifies Maya and she is obsessed with it.

Anita Desai depicts the vivid image of intellectual woman trapped in relationship which refute her attachment, she longs for. She desires for a world where she may be an object of desire, the center of alienation. She longs for a caring and loving partner who can love and kiss her tears away, patiently listen her with interest, can give her happiness. But her husband like her father does not understand her flaming heart. Maya “has no conviction to fall back upon” and Gautama, “has no sensibility to comprehend the intricacy of her suppressed physical demands and the resultant emotional state.” (Bande 1999: 28-29). In her confessional voice, she tries to convey her sexual dissatisfaction born of her husband’s negligence.

“Telling me to go to sleep while he worked at his papers, he did not give another thought to me, to either the softly willing body, wanting, mind that waited near his bed.” (14)

In Anita Desai's female characters, the sense of alienation an isolated world become keen and these extremely responsive females try to convince their material desires with less exertion but are psychologically breakdown. Anita Desai wanted to take more interest in portraying day to day, an average character and shows the inner state of an individual clearly so that the outer world appears to be noticeable.

In Cry, the Peacock, Maya is obsessed with fear of death. The death of Toto, the pet dog, shows Maya's psychic death for he was a child surrogate to her. Maya expressed all her likeness towards Toto, and in turn Toto, too, loved her with speechless tone. After the death of Toto, this condition leaves Maya in a void. Toto's good memories haunted Maya throughout the day. And on the other side, for Gautama, the death of Toto was just a casual incident but for Maya, the death of Toto was not over in her world.

Gautama knew very well that Maya's father can bringing her up in world of fancy, and he believed that Maya had been very close to her father. Comparatively, Maya's dreary life with her father was quite different with Gautama. At this situation of loneliness, isolation and discarding, Maya yearns to be by her father's care, who would appease away her cry, anger and worries. Gautama didn't understand the need of Maya, she wanted to convince Gautama of the reality of the world but he had no time to spare time with her at this moment of isolation. As marriage was imposed from outside, it was not as marriage of true minds. As Gautama was much elder than Maya in age ,he fails to fulfill her needs in terms of care , love and affection .Gratifying the wants of the body was not a big demand for Maya .She was expecting beyond this.

In the family of Gautama, no one was like Maya. No one shows such feeling of love or affection. As Maya has no child, so she needs a mother figure which is readily available in her mother-in-law. She finds herself for the company of her mother-in-law and sister-in-law.

Her own children teased her, consulted her, lived with her and understood her, but they did not caress her. She did not have time for caress, very little of it, and nor did they. And yet I yearned for her to hold me to

her blossom. I could not remember my own mother at all. My throat began to swell with unbearable self-pity. I would cry, I knew it, in a while, and dreaded it in their sane presence, 'please' I whispered. (136)

Maya is looking for the substitute as mother in her mother-in-law, she is unable to forget her mother-in-law. Gautama's father was always travelling away from family whereas his mother finds herself busy in household's chores. And Gautama was totally devoted to his profession. Therefore she deeply felt herself isolated. The words of albino haunted her throughout the day. Due to this, her loneliness increases, she wanted to find peace but she has to defend her own love of life which Gautama despises. All these circumstances made the life of Maya towards isolation and gloominess.

Since Maya loved so much Gautama. The countless nights of neglect, of loneliness and of depression made her question. Gautama's silence totally destroyed the expectation of Maya. In their life, lack of communication between Maya and Gautama was not main problem. It was the lack of understanding. Again and again, Maya wanted to share time with Gautama, her desires to live in the moment. But Gautama was always busied himself in his profession. The self is gradually separated and it leads to the state of alienation and isolation. Her husband Gautama wanted to make her happy. But his every action proves as wrong step. Even Maya also wanted to console him, like to love him, and provide him comfort but every attempt leads her life towards alienation and isolation.

In Anita Desai's novel, alienation has been the thematic motif that directly connects it. This proves Anita Desai a unique novelist.

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