

THE EMOTIONAL ESTRANGEMENT IN THE SELECT WORK OF ANITA DESAI'S *CRY, THE PEACOCK*

Abstract

The focus of this paper is to explore the Indian women's suffering and psychological turmoil of the female characters in the select novel of Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock*. By investigating women's struggle in the two major spheres in both public and domestic spheres, and also examine the existence of patriarchal ideologies enforced by men in the community. The study mainly focuses on the problem of alienation being faced by the female protagonists. Through her novels Desai peep into the interiors of the human psyche and various forms of isolation and loneliness that assail the characters. And also it brings out the sufferings of female characters who feels alienated, detached, isolated and separated in this modern world. Existentialism is the basic roots of alienation.

Cry, the Peacock

Anita Desai is a prolific contemporary novelists among Indian woman writer in English. Many critics have discussed about her specialization of depicting human psyche of her female characters. Anita Desai published her first novel *Cry, the Peacock* in 1963. It has been short listed for Booker Prize on three times and won Sahitya Academy Award in 1978. Anita Desai's work shows the emergence from outer to inner reality, pave a new phase in Indian English Fiction. She is in the new generation of Indian women writers who are deals with the themes of inner consciousness. Most of her novels encounters with the bewilderment of the individual psyche which confronted with high socio-cultural environment. And also it mainly focused on feminine sensibility and male-centered universe. Through her first novel, *Cry, the Peacock* Desai gives unique dimensions to Indian English Fiction. In this novel Desai shows the unexplored nature of female psyche.

In *Cry, the Peacock* Desai portrays Maya as a sensitive woman who is suffering from marital disharmony and neurotic fears. Throughout the entire novel Maya is seen as self-seeking individual for a change in her life. She always compares her present life with the past and longing for a sheltered life. When Gautama tries to heal the inner wounds of Maya, it fails because her inner consciousness gives it a dramatic turn. Generally protagonists of Desai's novel can be divided into two types: one holds

hypersensitive, neurotic, artistic sensibility and tough, cynical and acerbic. In *Cry, the Peacock*, the novel is constructed into three sections: a short introduction of the scenario, third- person narrative and the central part narrated by the neurotic heroine Maya. Through the voice of Maya, Desai brings out stream of consciousness in order to present Maya's past and her unsuccessful marital life with her husband Gautama. In this fiction Maya is a sensitive and unstable type of personality but her husband Gautama is extremely opposite to her. He is purely rationalist and insensitive to transient beauty. Even from the names of the character themselves shows their irreconcilability. Maya means 'illusion' and Gautama is the other name of Buddha who rend the veil of Maya. Therefore Maya is very much interested in merrymaking whereas Gautama entirely rejects it.

A close examination of Anita Desai's work reveals the barriers of female society in order to protest against the backdrop of patriarchal society. Her novels emphasis on psychological rather sociological. This novel *Cry, the Peacock* mainly points out the problem of 'misfit marriage'. In order to please her father Maya decides to marry Gautama who is double of her age. Maya is forced to lead her marital and bear the tortures of her in-laws. Therefore she compares her psychological condition with the nature. She compare herself with creepers, birds, leaves and clouds. The symbol of peacock has been used several times by Anita Desai to show the anguish of Maya. Maya is trapped like a bird who cannot escape from her present situation. And her childlessness is an another major reason for her miseries. Maya is gifted with poetic imagination, highly sensitive and a neurotic sensibility. In other hand, Gautama is unsentimental and unromantic and trust in 'detachment' in every count. He never thinks to spend some time with Maya who seeks her husband's companionship.

"Because when you are away from me, I want you. Because I insist on being with you and being allowed to touch you and know. You can't bear it, can you? No, you are afraid, you might perish" (113).

From the words of Maya it is clearly visible that Maya is physically and alienated by her husband. Maya is very much affected by the loss of Toto but it is nothing to Gautama. This clearly shows the absence of emotional communication between them.

Due to the unsuccessful marital life Maya is in a continuous frustration of sexual need which makes Maya physically and psychological fierce. A good emotional and sexual life may give her a sense of security and stopped her from emotional trauma. This view is based on Freud's observation:

Experience shows...that woman, who, as being the actual vehicles of the sexual interests of mankind, are only endowed in a small measure, with the gift of sublimating their instincts, and who... when they are subjected to the disillusionments of marriage, fall ill of severe neuroses which permanently darken their lives. (47)

The main reason for Maya's anguish is that she is childless. And it is the main reason for her psychological alienation. Maya lost her mother during her childhood days from itself she is longing for her mother's love. So that she is very much interested to give her full love to her child. Gautama is always against Maya's freedom, it is visibly seen throughout the novel. The death of Maya's mother and estrangement of her brother makes her being alienated. Maya's only happiness is her father therefore she tries to see her father-fixation in her husband. This finally lead her to a neurotic. When she tries to see the father image in her husband she miserably fails in it. Finally as a result it is her husband who falls as a victim to her psychological trauma.

Desai cleverly shows the character of Maya through psychological realms to a 'father-fixation'. In psychological theory Sigmund Freud proposes that during the phallic stages of their psychological evolution, men and women are fixed either father-fixed or mother-fixed, in accordance to her sexuality. When Maya decides to push Gautama from the rooftop shows her belief in fatalism. A critic Jasbir Jain says Maya pushes Gautama from the roof in order to protect herself from the world of abundance. In many situation Maya is being alienated by her husband both physically and mentally. Because of living in unhappy and frustrated life, it leads her into hallucinations and imaginations. According to Freud:

“experience shows...that women, who, as being the actual vehicles of sexual interests of mankind, are not only endowed in a small measure, with the gift of sublimating their instincts, and who...when they are subjected to the disillusionments of marriage, fall ill of severe neuroses which permanently darken their lives” (47)

Maya's encounter to free herself from fear of death which is due to the terrible prophecy of horoscopes and her blind belief in superstitions reflects her psychological trauma. This finally results in death and destruction of life. Through this novel Desai portrays the inner emotional world of Maya who falls victim to city life. Maya becomes estranged from her husband's world. Maya is made to alienated from her husband because Gautama wants Maya to be more practical and matured enough. But she is badly haunted by childhood memories and expectations.

The psychological disorder within herself becomes more feverish and she no more a sane. Both physically and mentally she is torn by doubts and dread. Her surroundings makes Maya shows subhuman existence. Her psychic transition depicts the confession of her guilt as if her wish to stay alive shifted the death sentence on Gautama. The hopelessness of Maya does not represent the individual but it is universal. Her psychic transitions is a collective neurosis which is definite danger of a woman as a whole. Maya fails to lead a successful relationship with Gautama and hard to find the meaning of her life. She stand as a lonely creative who live helplessly and searching out of her own existence. Her alienation, mental agony and gradual deterioration of her psyche turns her into an existentialist character.

Works Cited

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