



# PORTRAYAL OF FEMININE SENSIBILITY: A STUDY OF ANITA DESAI'S *CRY, THE PEACOCK*

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**Abstract:** Feminism is derived from the word 'Femina' which means the woman and 'ism' means ideology or philosophy. Feminism has been one of the most far reaching movements of 21<sup>st</sup> century, whose influence has been felt in every area of social, political and cultural life worldwide. Feminism is an ideology that recognizes that although all men and women are technically considered equal, but are not treated equally. Feminism talks about equality of women and men. The present study focuses not only on the struggle of feminist writers to give voice to the problems and issues of women in Indian society but also on the emersion of the treatment of women in Indian writing in English in the feminist and post feminist era. Various feminist issues were raised in the novels of the earlier authors like Raja Rao, R.K Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand . The earlier authors highlighted the traditional image of woman like Sati & Savitri; but after wards as time changed, the life like image of woman which is dealt very well by the modern Indian post feminist novelist like Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy and Manju Kapoor. Modern feminist novelist highlights the plight of women in Indian fiction from equality to the search of identity. Feminine approach as psychosomatic approach is applied in this study altogether with content analysis method. Anita Desai's, *Cry, the Peacock*(1963) is the faithful description of psychosomatic growth of a female character Maya, who can not cope up with the practical world and feels depressed. This study of paper depicts women's area of happiness, gives insight into heightened sensitivity and intensified, agonized self of the protagonist, Maya.

**Keywords:-** Feminism, Post Feminism, Identity, Equality, Psychosomatic approach.

The history of feminism in India can be divided into three waves: the first wave (1850-1915) of feminism in India was begun by men to abolish social evils of Sati (widow immolation) and to ensure property through legal intervention. This phase revolved around gaining basic legal rights for women. This wave is

begun with the signing of the 'Declaration of sentiments' at the Seneca Falls Convention, the first ever women's rights convention. The right of women to vote in elections became the objective of the movement. India's movement was initiated by men and later joined by women. The pioneering sex of women's rights and education Savitri Bai Phule who started the first school for girls in India (1848). First feminist text 'Stri Purush Tulana' was written by Tara Bai Shinde.

Second wave (1960-1980) focused more on both public and private issues injustices. This wave highlights reproductive rights, domestic violence, and workplace safety. It was a reaction and continuation to women returning to their roles as a housewives and mothers after the second world war. It was a movement that was focused on the patriarchal dominance, cultural practices throughout society.

Third wave feminism (1980 to present time) . The third wave feminism dedicated to support groups and individuals working towards gender racial, nationality, ethnicity, colour, economic, and social justice. This feminism that has transmitted ideas about womanhood, gender, equality, beauty, sexuality, femininity and masculinity. This movement also took up the rights of dalit and marginalized women. This section of women want to do away with all kinds of bias about the colour of one's skin and be recognized as women largely.

Anita Desai is a remarkable women novelist. She began her literary career quite early at the age of 26 and wrote many novels. She is born at Mussoorie in 1937 of a German mother and a Bengali father, and brought up in the capital city of India at the time of the influx of Punjabi culture, Anita Desai had her education in Delhi. Her novels offer a satirical view of social change in post independence India, with a strong sense of waste limitation, failure and frustration. Some of Desai's novels are *Cry the Peacock* (1963) *Voices in the City* (1965), *Bye-Bye, Blackbird* (1971), *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975), *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) and *Clear Light of Day* (1980). Her gentle short stories are collected and published in *Games at Twilight* (1978). She has also written works for children including. *The Village by the Sea* (1982). There is no doubt that with these works Anita Desai has made significant contributions to Indian English fiction. Her first novel *Cry, the Peacock*, to the literary world by surprise, it was acclaimed as 'a poetry novel' and as a first novel of unusual distinction.' She depicts human psychology and emotional of feelings in her literary works. She added a new dimension and flavour to the contemporary Indian English fiction. She deals in her fiction with feminine sensibility. Her debut novel '*Cry the Peacock*' is a genuine effort at explaining the psychological concerns. The study of paper depicts women's area of happiness, nevertheless, gives insight into heightened sensitivity and thereby intensified agonized self of the protagonist Maya. The novel is faithful description of psychosomatic growth of a female character, Maya who cannot cope up with practical world of the husband and feels depressed.

The themes of the novels of Anita Desai can be broadly classified four heads for the convenience of this study. They are as follows.

1. Theme of marital disharmony and psychic disorder
2. Theme of women sensibility
3. Theme of Alienation
4. Women's striving for a meaningful life

The first-novel, *Cry, the Peacock* is mainly concerned with disharmony between husband and wife relationship. Maya is dreamy, emotional and sensitive, while Gautama is realistic, insensitive rational, philosophical and remote. Maya and Gautama are poles apart and lack of conversation between them leads to loneliness. They have been constantly quarreling with each other, Maya reflecting on her unhappy marriages. It is Raisahib's fault that has related chaos in Maya's life and ruined not only her life but also Gautama's. Mani Meitei comments.

“Lack of mutual concern leads to apathy which causes the total break down of husband – wife relationship. In this case, it is Gautama who is solely responsible for this break down. Maya's is a kind of forced marriage in which her father's interest rather than her own is served. Such a marriage is an institution intended to exploit women socially and sexually. It never considers women's freedom and liberty; it leaves them chained in their husband's home.” (IndianEnglish Women's Fiction, P.33)

Anita Desai has dealt with the feminine sensibility more emphatically than the description of the man and his exploits. Maya in *Cry the Peacock* is married to an older man, a detached, solar, industrious lawyer, who is unable to recognize and understand female sensibility. The following passage in the novel is a telling predicament of the likes of Maya and the total disregard for their existence.

“How little he know my suffering or of how to comfort me[...], telling me to go to sleep while he worked at his papers, he did not give another thought to me. To either the soft willing body or the lonely wanting mind that waited near his bed.” (Critical responses to Anita Desai, P.42)

Alienation is one of the major problems confronting the post modern man. In present time alienation is due to the generation gap, loss of identity, fear, loss of credibility, isolation and so on. The novel deals with the complete alienation of its protagonist Maya- a hyper sensitive creature of pure instinct from her surroundings. The alienation between Maya and Gautama is because of Maya's intense involvement in her own inner world of phantasm. She is deeply attached to past, lives almost in world of memories while Gautama values the importance of action because of his rational nature.

Hypersensitive of Maya is responsible for her divided of alienated self that leads to an ever widening gap in communication between her and her husband. The image of this alienation and gap is cognized by her in the position of the stars in the sky: “[...] death linked in those spaces, the darkness spoke of distance, separation, loneliness- loneliness of such proportion that it broke the bonds of that single word proportion that it broke the bonds of that single word and all its associations, and went spilling and spreading out and

around, lapping the stars each one isolated from the other by so much....I cried to myself- What is the use? I am alone.[ Critical responses to Anita Desai, P.136-137]

Anita Desai is awakened and conscious about women's life and problems. The novel is essentially a dream-stuff of the down haunted Maya. There is also an element of tragic pathos in her another according to her anxiety-ridden moods. Maya also intones herself in dreaminess with the only difference that she is helpless and is haunted by the impending doom. Her life is shadowed by the three-fold effect of death; doom and destiny. In assessing Maya's agonizing struggle to wrestle within herself for a meaning life Being sensitive and having spent her childhood in comfortable conditions of parental care, it was expected that her marital life should be wholesome and happy; but it could not come about, mainly on account of her extra sensitiveness. Women are more emotional than men while men can counter balance the emotional surge by reason women find it well-nigh impossible to tame the uncontrollable emotions on the strength of their psychic resources.

Maya bore within herself the finer elements of life-love, devotion, gentleness, sensuous contact with the world around herself. After her marriage with Gautama, she missed her elemental life of childhood. It was the affection-filled love she got from her father. In Gautama's family one did not speak of love, far less of affection. She is imprisoned within the four walls of the house and remains isolated because there is no one to share her grief. Maya disenchanted with her married life. The growing tension between Maya and Gautama reaches its climax when Maya kills Gautama and then commits suicide. Maya's struggle for a meaningful life is a part of the sublimatory drama in rare specimens of womankind enacted all over the world in one form to another .Cry, the Peacock is a fine story of women as Virginia Woolf would also say "The greater part of any library is nothing but the record of (noticeable) fleeting moments in the lives of men, women and other creatures. Every literature, as it grows old, has its rubbish-heap, the records of vanished moments and forgotten lives told in faltering and feeble accents that have perished. But if you give yourself up to the delight of rubbish reading you will be surprised, indeed you will be overcome, by the relics of human life that have been cast out to moulder. It may be one letter-but what a vision it gives! It may be a few sentences but what vistas they suggest."

(Critical responses to Anita Desai,31)

The gloomy state of affairs is unacceptable to Maya. She cases her tension psychologically by thinking how peacock stamps its feet and strikes against rock to relieve its pain. Her unconscious desire to kill her husband is a revenge reaction arising out of her own basic frustrations through this murder and suicide, she is relieved from the anxiety of past and present dilemmas.

Anita Desai's world is made up of seemingly contradictory forces. On one hand, we have deep psychological exposition as is harped upon by so many of us. But at the same time, there is something very raw, primitive and pagan about the world. Her novels offers a satirical view of social change in post

independence India with a strong sense of waste, limitation, failure and frustration. She seems to champion the view that marriage alone does not provide ready made solution to life's tension, chaos and turbulence. Husband and wife are two sides of the same coin. They need to nurture the strong feeling that they are complimentary to each other. Mental satisfaction , happy married life means better understanding between them. Psychological adjustment is a safe key to a healthy relationship in married life.

Conclusions:-

Finally, Anita Desai stands to be one of the powerful contemporary Indian Novelists in English. She is excellent in depicting the inner furies of women and their rise to emancipation and empowerment. Mostly women are culturally as well as emotionally dependent on man and any disruption in relationship proves to be a loss of self. Her women characters undergoes many sufferings inside and try to overcome from it. She has explored man and woman relationship. She is concerned with the inner world of her characters. She portrays situation of women's suffering in her novels present problems that confront women in a male- dominated society. Her women characters handle situations and attain empowerment in their life. They want equal rights in every thing that they do. In this study, literary work shows that feminism thoughts, gender-inequality and women-oppression are interwoven each other.

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