

PREDICAMENT OF INDIAN WOMEN'S PSYCHE: A STUDY OF ANITA DESAI'S NOVEL *CRY, THE PEACOCK*

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ABSTRACT

The present research paper brings into light the dilemma of Indian women's psyche in relevance to the Anita Desai's text *Cry, the Peacock*. Anita Desai through her novels explores the psyche of Indian woman formulated by the surrounding atmosphere and socio-cultural construction of society. In the present novel, *Cry, the Peacock* Anita Desai efficiently explores the psyche of Indian housewife named Maya and precisely explores the consciousness of Maya appeals to universe. Maya's distraught mind, her mental writhing, and ultimate submission to inexplicable labyrinth of insanity form the core distinguish between real and imaginary world hence remain as inept to acquire the sense of detachment from sensual and material world.

Keywords: Consciousness, Predicament, Psychology, Imaginary Order, Sense.

INTRODUCTION

The novel *Cry, the Peacock* efficiently explores the struggle for survival of the simplest organism embodied in Maya. Anita Desai being a renowned voice of Indian writing in English effectually explores the psyche of Indian women clutched under numerous aspects and patriarchal norms. Maya is presented as a contradictory figure in the present novel because she behaves like a child in her desire and become violent when it comes to fulfill. Maya is an embodiment of honest and pure creature as well as aware of the fact that this world is not real. She is aware about the hurdles existed in fulfilling the desire of own. The love of Maya for birds and nature is pure and

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devotional. She frequently suspects the unconscious and instinctive responses. As she herself admits, she is a wayward and high stung and habitual to shift moods. Her sensibility gets easily touched by non fulfillment of her desire. She gets easily excited and disappoint with small actions and in a state of disappointment to her husband and world extensively. The creative zeal of Anita Desai can be fittingly defined in the words of Helen Cixous as, “Woman must write herself: must write about women bring women to writing, from which they have been driven as violently as from their bodies.”

HYPOTHESES AND METHODOLOGY:

The present research article explores the predicament and confinement of Indian women’s psyche applicable in universal way. The researcher attempted analytical method to study the selected problem. The research problem stands on the following hypotheses.

- a. Anita Desai effectually brings to surface the mental dilemma of women.
- b. Lack of comprehension and rejection of reality compels woman to nightmare.
- c. The solidarity of imaginary world leads to chaos.
- d. The fear of death and unfulfillment of sensual desire leads to psychic frustration.
- e. Illusionary order and strong belief in myth, story and foretells construct the fear in mind extensively.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS:

Though there is an extensive research on Anita Desai and her novels in accordance to multiple perspectives, yet the present study attempts a significant effort to explore the predicament of Indian women’s psyche confused under multiple threats and illusions. The research problem has scope for further study. The present study deals with her single novel Cry, the Peacock and barely touches to her other novels. The study highlights the notion that Indian women alike Maya

are stunned between imaginary and real order and the fear, sexual frustration and illusions enrich the psychological dilemma of these women.

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM:

The central protagonist of the novel Maya is an illusionary persona lives in the world of fantasy. She desperately follows illusions to face the reality and wonders in her unwounded mind. Whatever she speaks and thinks is probably incompatible because it is inexpressible. The cause of her failure in stabilizing herself can be attributed partly to her indulgent and over protected childhood as well as Gautama's dry intellectualism that forces the idea of detachment down to her reluctant throat. The other reasons can be her childlessness, sexual frustration and morbid preoccupation with death. The atmosphere she experienced in her father's home was gorgeous and well suited to her personality. "In the shade of bougainvillea arbor, where the light turned from lilac to mauve, to purple, from peach to orange to crimson". Maya experiences a world of security and freedom which she lacks in Gautama's house. She is a princess of fairy world in her father's home and enjoys the phantom of *Arabian Nights*. Maya is always concerned about her childhood and she never allows her true identity and interest to be explored in practiced structure of society. She keeps an alienation from the existing reality of society and reasonably torn of the fantasy world. The touch of reality and experiences of real life hurdles unfamiliar to her. Raji Narsimhan fittingly commented on the conceptual aesthetics of Anita Desai as:

"She project on her experiences, her awareness of man, society, human and moral dilemmas. The purpose of her novel is to study the matrimonial crisis. The hazardous and complexities of man-woman relationship, the founding of individuality and the establishing of individualism of her characters."

The father of Maya guided her in every way before marriage but after her marriage with Gautama her dependency shattered by the approach of her husband. Maya marries Gautama thought that being an elderly person he would accomplish her desires alike her father. She assumed that Gautama would protect her in every sphere of life and encourage her fantasy. Throughout her life

Maya compares Gautama with her father and receives disappointment every time. Her entire dependence on father was an extreme that she is unable to do anything without his assistance. Her excessive dependency on her father and disappointment from Gautama turned her as hypersensitive and that leads to neurosis. The presence of father is always there in her consciousness. Her intense attachment with her father frequently reflects the 'Electra Complex' phenomenon. Gautama in the present novel once stated as:

You have a very obvious father obsession which is also the reason why you married me, a man of so much older than yourself. It is a complex that unless you mature rapidly, you will not be able deal with, to destroy. But then it will probably destroy itself in the end, since passion of this sort is almost always self-consuming, having no object within its range that it can safely consume. Any little setback destroys it, leads it closer to its termination. The delay of a letter, a long separation, the realization that another person very close to both of you and father, whatever you might say.

The words of Gautama aptly mark the point that the consumption of Maya towards father not only destroying him but also detaching her life from reality. The absence of realistic approach and preserve of fantasy world deeply humiliates Maya because as a person she neither belongs to imaginary world nor realistic world.

Gautama and Maya are two different contrastive personalities represents contrastive world. Gautama is a realistic in his approach and believes in reality while Maya is locked within the boundaries of fantasy world. Gautama believes in the practices of conscious mind while Maya spends every minute of life in unconscious mind. The constant dialogue with self and denial of reality rooted in the persona of Maya. Psychologically she has created boundaries and comfort zone out of which she is unable to respond. Maya carries predilection for romantic while Gautama is pragmatic in his perception. Maya mourns the death of dog Toto while Gautama thinks about the cup of tea. She relates her own death with the death of her pet dog Toto but in reality nothing such happened. Maya has the singular trait of attempting to remove emotional and mental pain by indulging in some physically stressful act, though she can never involve herself in some physical activity like Nila, her sister-in-law. Gautama is totally indifferent towards the death of Toto. He

considers the death of Toto as cataclysmic and for him it is a natural process. “Ultimate absurdity, appropriate only in that it brings a meaningless life to a similarly meaningless end”.

Another crucial reason for Maya’s predicament is her morbid fear of death. This obsession is sparked off in the beginning of the novel with episode of Toto’s death. The death of Toto fills her with fear of unknown and she proclaims that:

“...Something slipped into my tear-hazed vision, a shadowy something, that prodded me into admitting that it was not my pets death alone that I mourned today, but a another sorrow, unremembered, perhaps as yet and even experienced, and filled me with this despair.”

The death of pet dog Toto symbolizes the death of Maya and connotatively the death of Toto is the psychic death of Maya. The idea of death that the predilection astrologer planted in Maya’s mind is neither completely excluded from her consciousness nor assimilated in her conscious demeneavour. The astrologer predicted to Maya that one of them would die early by an unnatural process and told Maya to remain conscious of this fear. The prediction assumed the dimension of an ominous obsession in Maya and surfaces in her conscious mind at crucial junctures. Even the funny Sikhs at the party in Mrs. Lal’s house, who talked of palmistry and astrology assumes a symbolic dimension of evil and reminds her of the albino astrologer. In this condition Maya remark as, “Torture, guilt, dread, imprisonment- these were the four walls of my private hell, one that no one could survive in long death was certain”.

Her obsession for death and eager thinking leads her into a curious insanity and she herself admitted that she is transforming into insane and departing from the wisdom of the world. She realizes that her encounter with astrologer albino is the real cause of her over thinking leading her to chaos. Instead of accepting the real facts of life Maya indulges in nightmare to avoid the problems of life. Here, the novelist Anita Desai tries to show that acceptance of reality and encounter with evil can resolve her psychological burden her isolation from psychological pressure leads towards chaos. Maya fails to adopt the fact and invested her mind in ignorance. “These were, she says ‘private thoughts and having thought them was sufficient”.

Maya realizes that she is not strong enough mentally and morally and looks about for a savior to whom she might cling to, one who will help her to face reality of her destiny. Everyone fails to quench her desire, her father is no longer an anchor of her life and her husband Gautama is engrossed in his own ecstasy. Her friends offer neither mercy nor shelter as they are well aware about the psychological dilemma of Maya. All her friends prefer the realistic approach in life on the contrary Maya revolve everything with fantasy. “There was not one of my friends who could act as an anchor anymore, and to whomsoever I turned for re-assurance, betrayed me now.

During her four years of life Maya never appears as normal with her husband and never receives the aesthetics of marriage. The approach of Maya towards life is nihilistic and absurd in a way she is frustrated in a psychological dilemma since her childhood after the foretelling of albino astrologer. Maya never tells her husband about her childhood encounter with the astrologer and his prophecy. She even does not tell him that she has a younger brother. She made her own and vice versa the life of Gautama as nihilistic. It is however, not completely true that she is unconscious of the intensity of her passion for life because she realizes that through dry and bleak. “A mass of rock, a large and steadfast rock, high and dry in middle of to sing sea”.

It is also observed in the novel that Maya is sexually frustrated and she herself admitted that her husband Gautama is her father surrogate, a successful one. Throughout the novel their relationship is that of father and daughter and not that of a husband and wife. Gautama is as gentle and tender to her as her father was and even Maya feels grateful to him. Her honest appraisal of herself in this regard brings fresh pain.

“But to capture him entirely, if a fleshy face could do it, it would have to be a finer one, the elongated the etiolated one of an intellectual, refined by thought and reflection, bereft of the weakness of impulses, aloof from coarseness and freshness,”

Maya expects the reflection of a father and the love of husband. He is a successor as a father substitute but fails to play other roles. He is detached and is involved in the quest for truth.

CONCLUSION

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The catastrophe of Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* falls out partly from the reality of surroundings and Gautama's indifference as well as from her largely over formed consciousness. Her discontent is part linked to the process of growing up. The incapability of Maya to acknowledge life and death as two sides of human existence results her catastrophe. The world of Maya is closeted one, where pity and fear intermingle to become terror and not compassion. The emotional fears she experiences cloud her sensibilities and she never grow up to live and love. The life of Maya is tattered between the imaginary order and real order of life and her frustration in sexual life enriches her callousness. The cerebral slavery she has accepted and grow up after the albino astrologer killed her true essence of life. Maya symbolizes those Indian women who are structured by the same psychological order and detached from the reality of life.

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