



Maya's Lonliness and Serch For Self Identity in Anita Desai's Novel CRY,The Peacock

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ABSTRACT *Cry, the Peacock (1963) is considered as the first step in the direction of psychological fiction in Indian writing in English. This paper attempts to make a passage through the isolated psyche of maya, the central character and seeks the reasons behind her lonliness. The time still relevant in contemporary Indian family circumstances after its publication of more than fifty years.*

The novels of Anita Desai present characters undergoing an inner psychological turbulence arising out of conflict between reality and illusions that the characters build for themselves. Desai excels in writing psychological novels. She would however call them "purely subjective" "It has been my personal luck" She confides "that my temperament and circumstances have combined to give me shelter, privacy and solitude required for the writing of such novels, thereby avoiding problems a more objective writer has to deal with since he depends an observation rather than a private vision" It is this 'private vision' that she tries to encapsulate in her novels. Her writings reveal inner realities and psychic reverberations of her characters

Anita Desai's novels tries to tackle the central aesthetic problem of modern writer - the problem of rendering "complete human personality ...in an age of lost Values , lost men, and lost gods " The twentieth century has been rightly called " The age of Alienations." The modern man is doomed to suffer the corrosive impact of alienation , which manifests itself variously in the form of generation gap, the compartmentalization of life, the stunning of personal development and the conspicuous absence of a sense of meaning punters of life, and so on . In her novels Anita Desai has chartered this very crisis tormenting a sensitive soul. The pervasive sense of alienation has corroded human life from various quarters. The modern man has shrunk in sprit languishing in confusion, frustration, disintegration, disillusionment and alienation. The self alienation is the more basic form of rootless ness and can thwart an individual's mental and psychic development in an alarming manner It is this human has occupied Anita Desai's primary interest 'Cry the Peacock' gives expression to the long smothered wail of lacerated psyche. The narrowing tale of blunted human relationships being told by the chief protagonist herself. The novel represents the story of a young sensitive girl observed by a childhood prophecy of disaster, whose extreme sensitivity is rendered in terms of immeasurable lonliness.

The very beginning of the novel highlights the husband wife alienation theme by unfolding the relationships of Maya and Gautama extremely frustrated, Maya looks back to the days of her childhood spent with her father. The reminiscence of those long lost days serves as the defense mechanism to set her free from her inner frustration and conflicts.

The dark state of affairs is again totally unacceptable by the conscious mind of Maya. She therefore relaxes her ten-

sions causes her frustration by pondering unconsciously on how "peacocks breaks their bodies" in order to relive their pair. Here comes the sense of violence, the feeling of killing or getting killed which engulfs Maya. The violent desire of killing her husband awakening from her own frustration as revenge against his icy cold impressiveness and indifferences weaves the story of *Cry, the Peacock*

Maya an introverted favorite daughter of a wealthy artistic father, is married to an older man, a detached, sober, induct lawyer. In their temperament and attitude they are completely opposite to each other. The novel seeks to explore the metaphysical conflict between two different approaches to life, manifest in the story of Maya and Gautama. Maya loses her sanity because of an obsession with a predicament about the impeding marital disaster, moreover her intense imaginative faculty and acute sensitivity makes her more inquisitive about the meaning of life and debits. Her intense sensuous apprehension of the world contradistinguishes her from her husband Gautama, who holds a more prudent attitude to life. At the root of Maya's psychic retrogression lies the disparity between their dispositions. She experienced the world through the senses while Gautama looks at it through reason and common-sense. While on the metaphysical level, the tension represents a conflict between two approaches on the literal level it turns out to be a conflict between objective reality and self nurtured illusions of Maya. Because of her illusions she loses her sanity.

Maya believes in and fears the astrological predictions that in the fourth year of her marriage later she or her husband would die. Her extreme inwardness fostered by her delicate up brining makes the prophecy an obsession and drives her insane. As the plot develops the gap between sanity and insanity diminishes and Maya frees herself from incertitude by killing her husband. On the metaphysical level it becomes the clash of two polarities - the life of the senses and the life of reason - leading to the destruction of one of them. An average evening for Maya is hardly more than ' a quiet waiting' (7) their married life is punctuated all along by 'matrimonial silences' (12) and Gautama's hardness his coldness and incessant take of cups of tea and philosophy pain Maya lost in her citer lonliness in their house " I was alone' she complains. " Yes, I whimpered , it is that I am alone" (9) she fails to understand the total lack of communication on the part of Gautama.

Her husband's undisturbed attitude antagonizes her. An ever-widening gap in communication between husband and

wife is felt throughout the novel. She muses "had there been a bond between us, we would have felt its pull but of course, there was one... restlessness always boils within her and the staidness holds them apart. She feels "defenseless and utterly alone" in the company of the "bleak comfortless figure" passing as her husband.

The alienation of Maya is essentially in Gautama's philosophical detachment, his imperviousness to the beautiful yet tremulous beauty of natural world and his gross unconcern over the basic in life' In a different situation Gautama would have proved to be a remarkably successful husband. But he and Maya are irreconcilables. Their union is likely to ruin each others life and happiness, Maya's rootless ness keeps on increasing everyday. It culminates in a kind of schizophrenia - "a body without a heart, a heat without a body"" (196). Ultimately, Gautama begins to appear to her as an 'Unreal ghost her intense absorption only enslaves her.

Being a successful lawyer, engrossed in his profession and does not care for her, rather because of his mental make up is incapable of reciprocating tender feelings of his wife. Being brought up in a fairytale world, she fails to establish rapport with real human beings in her adult life. Her inability to communicate with Gautama proves sinister for her, for in the process of suppressing her emotions she grows insane.

Her obsession drives, her to a curious insanity " Yes I am going insane" she herself admits " I am moving further and further from all wisdom, all clam, and I shall soon be mad, if I am not that already" (124). The unnaturalness of her life and stance keeps on haunting her. This all shows the deep frustration in her married life, her inability to express herself it also suggests the wide charm between her illusions and the reality of other, between what she expects and what happens. This contradiction, nevertheless, reinforces the prediction of the albino astrologer and in an attempt to escape from reality by taking refuge in the imagination she fosters the intensification of the prediction in her mind which ultimately proves disastrous.

She is in love with life. The world of nature, which is, foil at the same time she is haunted by death. This speaks of her quality of existence which is expounded in the more powerful symbol from which the novel derives its title- the cry of the peacock Maya visualizes the peacocks dancing and she is appalled by their dance of Joy and love and the dance of death. The peacocks rejoice in the coming of the rains knowing that it would be the cause of their death. Maya perceives - "Dying they are in love with life"

(96) - the significance of their mortal agony which she herself is experiencing the idea of death while one is in love with life,

Maya lives in this mortal agony in the duality of life and death "Illusion and reality and she fail to reconcile them. She fails because she has partial visions of the objective world- a world devoid of the existence of other human beings and perceived through senses. By contrast, the identity of Gautama, though he is not the perfect model of an integrated person, centers round an intellectual apprehension of the world which of course allows him worldly success but which deprives him from seeing the sensuous and beautiful apart of nature which demands sensitivity. The contrast is dear Maya lacks intellect and reason as much as Gautama lacks emotion and sensuousness, and therefore they cannot come close to this. The catastrophe is the logical outcome of their temperamental disparity. One of them has to perish and unfortunately it is Gautama who perishes.

To cap it all her frustrations, she is not even sexually satisfied. Goutama does not response " to Other the soft, willing body or the lonely, wanting mind that waited near his bed" (a) once it is delicately suggested that even the naked body of Maya fail to evoke any response from Gautama either because of exhaustion or boredom. The sensitive wife appears to him petulant, pampered, childish and immature, unable to cope with hard facts of life. The sexual hunger gives another blow to the shattered woman. In the psyche of Maya we have moments of revelation. This is the wisdom of the peacock, its hundred eyes trying to understand life and death. The peacock's association with wisdom as described by Maya is to be seen with eye symbolism, the eye which is window to the knowledge

The dust storm, which precedes the final catastrophe, is an indication of the disaster to come. The uncertainty that Maya feel us described in her' dosing the doors and windows of her house and yet watching the dust storm with anxiety. Her resorting to the personal world once have creates an anguish in her, "I been tortured by a humiliating sense of neglect, of loneliness, of desperation that would not have existed had I not loved him so, had he not meant so much" (201) This is the anguish caused by her deep frustration in her marriage. At the same time a self doubt creeps into her. " Why should I love him? I wish I did not" She is also haunted by the descriptive images of lizards, snakes (201) and albinos, which show the degree of her insanity. Due to prolonged existence between two contradictory worlds, Maya loses her sanity completely and she killed Goutama by pushing him from the roof.

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