THE CONCEPT OF MAN WOMAN RELATIONSHIP IN CRY THE PEACOCK

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ABSTRACT

Anita Desai is one of the most powerful contemporary Indian Novelists in English. She is concerned with the inner world of her characters. She tries to look for the deep desires, emotions and feelings felt by her characters and shows them as the influencing factor behind their action. Her portrayal of man-woman relationship is influenced and conditioned by complex social milieu. She basically portrays the plight of modern woman in the existing man dominated society where she makes an effort to voice herself. She basically portrays the disparity in temperament as affecting the man woman relationship. This paper puts forward the portrayal of women in man woman relationship. Mostly woman are culturally as well as emotionally dependent on man and any disruption in relationship proves to be a loss of self. It is through ones relationship that one evaluates his/her worth.

INTRODUCTION

Anita Desai presents a new dimension to English fiction through the exploration of troubled sensibility, a typical neo-Indian phenomenon. Best known for her studies of Indian life, Desai has written exclusively in English since she debuted in the mid-1960s. Desai has been identified with a new literary tradition of Indian writing in English, which is stylistically different and less conservative than colonial Indian literature and concerns such issues as hybridism, shifting identity, and “imaginary homelands,” a phrase coined by Indian novelist Salman Rushdie. She published her first novel in 1963, Cry The Peacock¹. She considers Clear Light Of Day (1980) her most autobiographical work as it is set during her coming of age and also in the same neighborhood in which she grew up. In 1984 she published In Custody - about an Urdu poet in his declining days - which was short listed for the Booker Prize. In 1993 she became a creative writing teacher at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Her latest novel published in 2004, The Zigzag Way, is set in 20th-century Mexico. Desai has taught at Mount Holyoke College and

Smith College. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and of Girton College, Cambridge University.

The uniqueness of Anita Desai’s is in giving voices to the psychological, emotional as well as physical needs of women which are hardly considered in an Indian society. She portrays her characters as individuals “facing single-handed, the ferocious assaults of existence.” (The Times of India). As a result of disillusionment and a result of isolation from this world there is a tendency towards revolt in female characters. The man woman relationship is based on different types of social, personal and emotional needs. ‘Marriage’ as Anita Desai shows is merely an adjustment rather than an involvement. She projects on her experiences, her awareness of man, society, human and moral dilemmas. The purpose of her novel is to study the matrimonial crisis “The hazards and complexities of man-woman relationships, the founding of individuality and the establishing of individualism of her characters”. (Raji Narsimhan pp.23): in “Cry the Peacock”. Marriage is a necessary bond in man’s life which has its foundation in understanding between man and woman. As a novelist she doesn’t represent the futility of marriage but explores the psyche of the female characters through marriage. She portrays the inherent disparity in male and female characters. Females are emotional whereas men rational. Women have shown to be emotionally as well culturally dependent on their mates; any loss in relationship becomes a total loss of self. Anita Desai has explored man woman relationship in “Cry the Peacock”. Anita Desai has mastered the technique of telling the untold, mute, psychosomatic miseries of women particularly of married women. Desai’s fictional world consist of the inner conflicts, visions of the characters, particularly female characters. In her approach she is influenced Emily Bronte, D.H.Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, Henry James and Japanese writer Kawa Bata. Her novels present a ceaseless quest for a meaningful life by educated, sensitive woman. In Desai’s novels the rejection in childhood or over-pampering creates psychological blocks in the way of maturity and healthy interpersonal relationship in adult life. In her novels the girl marry because of her parents wishes and latter on judges her husband according to her intellect and find him inadequate and takes her own path (suicide) by Maya. The theme has been as old as the novel itself and can be found in Richardson and Fielding, D.H. Lawerence, Virginia Woolf, Hemingway and Faulkner. Emphasizing the importance of such relationship, D.H. Lawerence in "Morality and the Novel" points out, “The great relationship for humanity will always be the relation between man and woman. The relation between man and man, woman and woman, parent and child will always be subsidiary.”3 (pp.130)

Cry, The Peacock is her first novel. She has explored the theme of marital relationships and dissonance in it. This novel shows the real cause of disrupter in marriage of Maya and Gautama. The novel is about Maya’s cry for love and relationship in her loveless wedding with Gautama. The peacock’s cry is symbolic of Maya’s cry for love and understanding. The marital discord results from the temperamental disparity between Gautama and Maya. Even Maya’s childlessness exaggerate her agony of loneliness which she feels in spite of being married. She becomes highly sensitive as a result of it. Maya wants to enjoy life to the utmost. She loves life

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2 Raji Narsimhan, Sensibility Under Stress, New Delhi: Prakashan, 1976
in all its forms. She enjoys beautiful sights and sounds. She is an epicurean to the core. In contrast, she is married to Gautama, a friend of her father very senior to her age and a prosperous middle aged lawyer. He is a kindly, cultured, rational, practical and busy with his own affair of business. He looks upon her love for good things as nothing more than sentimentalism and once makes a disparaging remark about her that she that she has a mind of third rate poetess. Maya longs for companionship which to her despair she never finds in her marriage. The novel echoes in the cry of Maya the desire of a married woman to be loved with passion which few tend to get.

“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. You can’t bear it, can you? No, you are afraid, you might perish” (pp.113).

On another occasion, in spite of her seductive postures, Gautama remains rigid and cold; Maya herself describes her predicament in these words: “I turned upon my side, close to him, conscious of the swell of my hip that rose under the white sheet which fell in sculptured folds about my rounded forms” ( pp.41-42). Thus she doesn’t remain emotionally but physically dissatisfied too.

There is an identification of Maya with the Peacocks that represent for her cries of love which simultaneously invite their death. Like her, they are the creatures of exotic wild and will not rest till they have danced to their death. For her, they represent the evolutionary instinct of struggle for survival. She describes how they dance and the remarkable impact produced on her mind: “peacocks searching for mates, peacocks tearing themselves to bleeding shreds in the act of love, peacocks screaming with – agony at the death of love. The night sky turned to a flurry of peacocks’ tails, each star a staring eye.”

Maya’s preoccupation with death had been actually planted long ago in her childhood by the albino astrologer’s prophecy foretelling of the death of either of the couple after the marriage. She being intensely in love with life turns hysteric over the creeping fear of death. “Am I gone insane. Father, Brother, Husband. Who is my saviour? I am in need one. I am dying, God, let me sleep, forget, rest. But no I’ll never sleep again. There is no rest anymore. Only death and waiting” ( pp.98)

Being motherless she becomes more sensitive and as a result develops much attachment for her pet Toto. Her husband hardly realizes the emotional bond that existed in her heart for the pet. He is cold and too practical to understand her grief. Instead, Gautam is concerned with a cup of tea. He considers it replaceable just like other any other furniture item. Maya’s agony is quiet perceptible when she “saw its eyes open and staring still ,screamed and rushed to the garden tap to wash the vision from her eyes, continued to cry and ran defeated into the house” ( pp.7).Dog’s death reminds her of her loneliness which had been suppressed by her. “It was not pets death alone that I mourned today, but another sorrow, unremembered perhaps, as yet not even experienced, and filled me with despair”(pp.13). She becomes more lonely after that Gautama’s insensitivity is highlighted when he calls her a chattering monkey when she tries to share her feelings regarding her pet.
Gautama is detached, philosophical, rational and inconsiderate. Whereas Maya is romantic which further act as a dividing factor in their marriage. Gautama neither understands her nor wishes her to enter her world. “On his part, understanding was scant, love was meager” (pp.89). Maya being childless longs for her husband’s companionship. Gautama treats her like a child. Once when Gautama and she were sojourning in a garden. She talked of a flower and gave it to her by saying “Who should deny you that?” He said. This reminds of Henrik Ibsen’s play “A Doll’s House” where Nora too is treated as a child.

Maya, a pampered child of Rai Sahib, is brought up in an atmosphere of luxury. Her marriage with Gautama is based on a matter of convenience. Gautama and Maya’s father were friends. They have similar way of thinking, Gautama evermore used to come to Maya’s father. He used to come to her house everyday and one day her father proposes that she should marry him. So we come to know that their marriage is based on the friendship between her father and Gautama.

Even other marital relationship presented in this novel doesn’t represent harmony. Maya is deeply scattered by the hypocrisy and disgust exposed through other marriages around her. There is faint hint that her father’s marriage was no good. She is not found anywhere discussing about her mother.

Laila Maya’s friend marries a tubercular man against her parents’ wishes. She doesn’t wear bagels and if Maya is obsessed with Albino’s prediction Laila has accepted her fate as she says “it was all written in my fate long ago”. Even Mrs and Mr Lall’s marriage is no good. Mrs Lall calls her husband as opportunistic and quack. Nile a divorcee declares: “After ten years with that rabbit I married, I have learnt to do everything myself” (p.4). Mrs Sapru, who comes to Maya’s father as is to possess riches, comforts, poses, dollies, loyal retainers—all the luxuries of the fairy tales to you still” (p.98). Another factor that influences her marriage is the prophecy that constantly rings in her ears and is haunted by a “black and evil shadow of her fate and the time has come. “And four years it was now to be either Gautama or I” (pp.32). This long forgotten prophecy act as precipitating factor like in Macbeth the prophecy of three witches act as precipitating factor in his doom.

The dance of the peacock has an intense personal significance for Maya as the peacock destroys each other though madly in love. Her longing for love forces her to kill her husband first and then herself.

Maya’s other causes of suffering are her marriage to Gautama, a man of her father’s age who is detached and reserved even to an extent of not fulfilling her physical and emotional needs. Also the indifferent behaviour of the members of her husband’s family, the solitude and silence of the house after her marriage and the death of her pet dog accentuate her sense of loneliness which gradually develops into an actual sense of alienation. The void between her father’s love and her husband’s love make her conscious of the isolation that she lives in. She tries to gain respite from her loneliness by continually thinking about her childhood memories with her father. In her own eyes she is as one doomed already and throughout her life there hovers an uncanny oppressive sense of fatality. This leads to a state of neurosis which makes her kill her husband by pushing him from roof. Unaware of everything, Gautama accompanies Maya on the roof of the house at
her request. The pale moon rises and Maya is fascinated and bewitched by it. Both of them are at the low parapet’s edge and he casually moves towards her and hides the moon from her view. Maya waxes into a sudden frenzy and pushes him over the parapet to “pass through an immensity of air, down to the very bottom” (pp.208). Three days later Gautama’s mother and sister take Maya to her father’s house at Lucknow in order to put her in an asylum. But in the course of night, they hear a cry of horror and they rush upstairs and one could watch the other elderly “the heavy white figure goes towards the bright, frantic one on the balcony, screaming.”(p.218)

In the end Maya is not saved from becoming insane, a fate far worse than the one thrust on Gautama. Having tried, in vain, to transfix all that she experienced, she becomes once again, a part of a fairy tale, a toy princess in a toy world. Anita Desai is more specifically concerned with the fate of less loved mind of the Indian house-wife, Maya. Maya’s distraught mind, her mental agony, her fear of fate and her eventual fall into the labyrinth of insanity form the core of the novel, Cry, The Peacock and her actions are read by others in the light of traditional beliefs and customs. In his book, Indian Writing in English, K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar aptly states: “Maya is at once the centre and the circumference of this world. Her sanity – whether she is sane, hysterical or insane fills the whole book and gives it form, as well as life.”(K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar, pp.468). Thus this novel explores the marital relationship leads one towards insanity if they are not satisfying and the temperamental disparity among couples further adds to despair among the couple involved in the relationship. Without respect and understanding marital relationship are not mere than a lip service.

To conclude, Anita Desai presents to reader her opinion about complexity of human relationships as a big contemporary problem and human condition. So, she analyses this problem due to shows changing human relationships in her novels. She is a contemporary writer because she considers new themes and knows how to deal with them. Anita Desai takes up significant contemporary issues as the subject matter of her fiction while remaining rooted in the tradition at the same time. She explores the anguish of individuals living in modern society. Desai deals with complexity of human relationships as one of her major theme, which is a universal issue, as it attracts worldwide readers to her novels. She strives to show this problem without any interferes. In other hand, she allows to her readers who have their judgment about her novel characters and action.

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REFERENCES


