



THE THEME OF ALIENATION IN ANITA DESAI'S CRY, THE PEACOCK

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ABSTRACT

This research paper focus on the theme of alienation with reference to Anita Desai's novel, Cry , The Peacock. Anita Desai is one of the leading Indian women novelist writing in English. Most of the themes found in her novels are the problems of alienation, immigration, marital disharmony and so on. This novel points out the theme of husband-wife alienation by portraying the characters of Maya and Gautama. He cares her a lot but she think that he doesn't care much. She is mentally frustrated and disappointed, and results in alienation. She is unable to adjust the situation, which results in frustration and disappointment.

Key Words: Alienation, frustration, isolation, Loss of fear, Loss of identity

Anita Desai is one of the most prominent Indian novelist in English. There are more than dozens of novels to her credit. Beside this, collection of short stories and articles too. She is status of women in the male dominated society. There are number of scholars who have studied and published many valuable accounts and comments on her works. She has an independent approach to women's problems in Indian society as well as life in general. Anita Desai is specially prominent for the insightful depiction of the inner life of the female characters in her writings. Many novels of Anita Desai explores the tension between family members and the alienation of middle class women. She once remarked that, "writing is a process of discovering the truth- the truth that nine-tenths of the iceberg that lies submerged beneath one-tenths of visible portion we call reality".

Anita Desai's literary career began with her novel, Cry, The Peacock, which was published in 1963. The novel has been admired throughout the all the section of the society. It is her significant achievement in the realm of Indo-Anglian fiction. Meena Bellipa considers it, "a remarkable attempt considers it to fuse fantasy with perpetual experience". This novel is one of the most poetic Indian novels in English. Darshan Singh Maini terms it "a poetic novel". It gives expression to the harrowing tale of blunted human relationship told by the protagonist



herself. This novel is the most famous and it presents the predicament of Maya in the male oriented society and her destruction at the altar of marriage. The novel presents the story of a young sensitive girl obsessed by a childhood prophesy of disaster, whose extreme sensitivity is rendered in terms of immeasurable loneliness. R.S.Sharma considers it as “the first step in the direction of psychological fiction in English”.

Alienation is one of the major problem confronting the post modern man. The present era can be rightly called as “the era of alienation”. In the present era, the impact of alienation is due to many things as the generation gap, loss of identity, fear, loss of credibility, isolation and so on.

The tremendous progress of science, the rapid growth of industrialisation and urbanisation and the changing value systems in the society are the reasons for loneliness of man. One of the cardinal characteristics of alienation is the anxiety, about which John Macquerrie writes thus: “it confronts the individual with his responsibility and the call to grasp his authentic being”.

The novel opens with the depiction of husband-wife alienation and discord by exposing the relationship of the prominent characters Maya and Gautama. The theme of alienation is the outcome of the hypersensitive nature of Desai’s female characters and their inability to establish a point of contact with their partners. In her novel the stress is shifted from the external and the internal world. The protagonist Maya, is obsessed with the fear of death as a consequence of an astrological prediction that one of the spouses will die in the fourth year of their marriage. She cannot establish any effective communication with her husband, Gautama, who is detached, rational and twice of her age. Her husband’s indifference to her agonised predicament and her childless life heightens her sense of alienation and isolation and consequently, she kills him in a fit of insane fury. In the novel the protagonist Maya receives hostility and indifferences rather than delicacy and affection. In this novel Desai presents the silence, solitude, melancholy and dark world of shadows in Maya’s life.

The marriage of Maya and Gautama is more or less a marriage of convenience as we can say a marriage of traditional bond. Maya’s marriage with Gautama has been settled through her father’s friendship with him. But Maya is not conscious of unpleasant realities of life. But ironically she is married to a non-Brahmin lawyer whose family does not know the joy of life, Instead of the individual’s urgency and feelings, they converse of big things and national events.

In Gautama’s family one did not speak of love,
Far less of affection. One spoke-they spoke-of
Discussions in parliament, of cases of bribery and

Corruption revealed in government...(P.46).

Both Maya and Gautama are different in attitude. Maya is dreamy, sensitive, emotional, While Gautama is rational, professionally busy man, insensitive and practical. Maya is poetic, instinctive, and Gautama, detached and philosophical. K.K. Sharma rightly remarks that the novel “highlights the problems of un-equal marriage”. Gautama and Maya cannot have emotional bond because of incongruous nature. Frustrated, Maya rightly observes “our marriage was based upon a nobility forced upon us from outside, and therefore neither true nor lasting. It was broken repeatedly, and repeatedly the pieces were picked up and put together again”. Their tragedy happens without any ill-intension on the part of either Gautama or Maya. Though they live together, yet as a matter of fact, Gautama knows little about her. Her heart intensely feels that ecstatic agony of all consuming love and therefore she considers:

His tenderness was the cathartic I desired, and
Now at last I began to cry again, pressing my face against him. (15).

The element of companionship is sadly missing in the relationship between husband and wife. The devotion in Maya and thoroughly lack of it in Gautama is the root of the maladjustment that creates the fear complex in her. Maya feels lonely, companionless, physically and emotionally starved. She pines for Gautama’s contact, but he cannot spare long hours for his wife. We can say that the couple lacks the emotional bond. It is the marriage which provided them only physical nearness, the union of two bodies. They don’t have mental satisfaction at all. Maya’s subjectivity and attachment is sharp contrast to Gautama’s objectivity and detachment. Shanta Acharya rightly observes, “Maya and Gautama end up being two sides of the same coin; in each case the exclusiveness of the self makes it unable to accommodate the other”. The irreconcilable temperaments of Gautama and Maya result in the lack of communication between them alienating the latter from the former.

The affluence of Maya’s father, the evenings of red sunset and the recitations of Urdu couplets are contemptuously dismissed by Gautama. He is entirely unresponsive to the beauty of nature. He cannot differentiate the smell of lemons from the smell of petunias. Due to the diverse opinion of both, there is a wide gap in their attitude. After all, Maya is oppressed by a sense of loneliness and thought of death. After the death of Toto one night both of them look at the sky. The twinkling stars do not evoke as deep a response in Gautama as in Maya: “The stars surgeddying ones to revive”. Both doesn’t share their feelings with each other. Maya always feels miserable because Gautam doesn’t satisfy her inner feelings with great care. Their feelings of real are not shared together. Hence Maya feels miserable and lonely. She suffers a lot in her entire life. Gautama tries to console her outwardly, but of no avail. It is not her real relief from her husband. Prabhakar Pandey, a famous critic rightly says that- “Maya’s



tragedy is that there is no one to share her feelings. Childless, with uncaring husband, she is lonely and loneliness is the bane and burden of her psyche. And to cap it all, she is not even sexually satisfied”. After all, it is the loneliness that separates them from each other. Maya seems to cherish a continuous longing for something which she never attains. Whatever experience of love she got with Gautama was a transient one. The prediction of the astrologer shocked her a lot. The prediction was that one of them would die after four years of their marriage. She is haunted by this prediction of the Albino priest.

We can say that Maya expresses the agony caused by the haunting nightmare of death. Life was unbearable to her for a long time. She does not have any communication with Gautama. She comes to know that he is not capable of sharing his real feelings with her. Maya view that one can attain immortality if he keeps his senses under control by “stitapragna”. She also read some lines of Geeta, “He whose mind isn’t agitated in calamities and who has no longing for pleasure, free from attachment, fear and anger, he indeed is said to be of steady wisdom”. For Maya, separation is an essential component of life and action. But for Gautama, separation is an abstraction entirely unrelated to his life. Maya revolts against the denial of life and thinks of him in terms of an ascetic, like Buddha;”He looked very much the meditator beneath.....and rights won and established”.

Gautama who is anti-Brahminical relates Karma theory to logic, not to faith. For him, action is greater than inaction and hence one should perform one’s task in life. So far as Gautama is concerned, he is intellectual and mechanical in his understanding of the Gita. His detachment which almost borders on inhumanity becomes an abomination and curse leading to Maya’s estrangement and alienation from him. When Maya is passing through this mental crisis, she unexpectedly gets a letter from her brother. She recollects her brother, Arjuna who stands as contrast to her in his attitude to life. Her brother Arjun, who is alienated from his father, leaves for America seeking his own destiny. “He is gone, father had said, holding the letter in his hand like an empty cage from which a bird had escaped”(P.132). Maya is highly disturbed and excited by the dust storm. The outside storm is symbolic of raising storm storm in her mind. The dust storm is a physical manifestation of the struggle between life and death in the private world of Maya’s soul. “It gave me a sensation of flying, of being lifted off the earth and into the sunset, release from bondage, release from fate, from death and dreariness and unwanted dreams”(P.190). About the novel R. S. Sharma points out, “The Cry of the Peacock is a symbol of Maya’s life in death and death in life”.

We can say that in this novel Maya seems to represent the world of instincts as against Gautama’s world of intellect. Thus they remain like two parallel lines which never converge. Maya wants to merge with the elements of nature, but finds with Gautama a disgusting hurdle with his stress on intellect, standing rocklike between her and the elements of nature. So she



eliminates, this hurdle by throwing him down the terrace , “I saw the moon’s vast, pure surface.....down to the very bottom”. (P.208). In this way, with the death of Gautama’s and Maya’s alienation reaches the highest peak. We can say that the novel exposes unhappy conjugal life due to the problem of alienation.

Conclusion

Anita Desai occupies a very prominent place in Indian novelists in English. She has portrayed the lively characters from upper class to the middle class of the society. Through her most of the novels, it is clear that the protagonists are alienated from the society. In this novel she has explored the theme of husband-wife alienation. After all, the prediction of an astrologer makes a deep impression on her, owing to which she is obsessed with the fear of death. In the fit of insanity, she pushes her husband from the parapet of house and at last, she commits suicide. This is the tragic end of their married life.

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