



THE PROBLEM OF MARITAL DISCORD IN ANITA DESAI'S CRY, THE PEACOCK AND WHERE SHALL WE GO THIS SUMMER?

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ABSTRACT

Marital Discord is rather a lack of adjustment and harmonization between the couple after their marriage. Somehow they are not in a position to live together happily and want to live separately. It symbolizes a breakdown of the pledge they make on the occasion of their marriage and also the promise they make during their marriage and put an end to the co-operation between them. Usually, marital discord starts when enmity develops between the partners through internal and external manifestations such as constant finger-pointing, physical abuse, aggression, antagonism, etc. The cases of marital discord have been increasing at present and the reason is simply the marriage in India and the cods related to it. Marital discord is as old as the beginning of the custom of marriage itself, even though it has altered slightly from time to time and from person to person. In the pre-industrial period, men and women who came jointly into the agreement called marriage shared intellectual values, mutual dedication, belief and hope which subordinated the interests of the individuals, concluding in the smooth relationship of the family life. There were many tensions in their marital relationship also, particularly women did suffer countless miseries, but the ethical and religious convictions, economic belief and most importantly the fear of social condemnation kept them together for years and also throughout their lives. But now the trend has changed and women too began to think of their individuality and are constantly striving for their identity. Secondly, they are more independent with regard to money matters. Males too are not in a position to lose their supremacy for the sake of family and society. As a result marital discords increase. No doubt they increase until there are some common adjustments between the partners and hopefully it happens sooner or later. Anita Desai being an exquisite writer of the present depicts marital discord in her outstanding novels Cry, The

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Peacock and Where Shall We Go This Summer? As usual she adds psycho analysis to show the gravity of the problem. This paper focuses on that subject precisely.

Key Words: harmonization, aggression, antagonism, supremacy, predictor, counterparts, privileges, imbalances yearning, incompatibility, disharmony, frustration, chronic etc.

INTRODUCTION

It is a fact that women's liberation continues to get a place of importance for many decades, particularly in nations like India. It has repeatedly questioned the available sources which are basically patriarchal and not impartial at all. This questioning has been intensified now-a-days because of the brave and modern women writers. At present there are many women writers who sincerely oppose the age-old system of male-domination but with little or no response from their counterparts on many occasions. But the efforts of these women writers are unending until they get equal rights on par with men. The list of the sufferings of Indian women is a big one which consists of marital conflict, men-leading the house, subjugation of women, emotional abuse, physical abuse etc. These are a few of the major themes of feminist writings for many years. Female quest for identity has been a common concern for many women novelists. Significantly after the Second World War, it has become possible for women novelists of quality to inspire Indian English fiction.

A brief account of the author:

Anita Desai is one of the most inspiring novelists in bringing out the grave problems of Indian women in her novels. Hers is certainly a very special place. The other women writers include Kamala Markandaya, Rama Mehta, Shashi Deshpande, Jhumpa Lahiri, Dina Mehta, Shobha De, Bharati Mukherjee, Anita Nair and Arundhati Roy to name a few. They have written largely on women-related issues in their novels and tried to give some reasonable solutions to the problems. In the process of writing, they have tried to touch each and every problem with regard to women. In India a female's life may broadly be divided into two parts, one is life prior to marriage and the other is after marriage. On many occasions their later part of life is dependant largely on their husbands. Surprisingly, it is confined to women and for men marriage is just a stepping stone in their career. Here, it is better to give light on Indian Marriage system.

Marriage in India:

Generally two individuals with different backgrounds and attitudes come together on the occasion of marriage. They are two individuals and therefore their thinking, nature and their behaviours may not match in the beginning. Naturally it takes some time for them to know and understand each other. So it is the duty of both the husband and the wife to make some



sacrifices and get them adjusted to each other for living their lives happily. Husband and wife after marriage have to make efforts to adjust to one another's tastes and temperaments by subordinating personal interests and by compromising between themselves instead of breaking with each other in the event of differences and dissatisfactions. Their understanding, resulting in compatibility in marriage, can thus develop only gradually and steadily and it is desirable.

Gender Discrimination in Marriage:

While marriage is very significant for both men and women in India, surprisingly it influences partially in the life of the male, particularly in the Hindu society. In most cases, the male continues to live in his house with his parents and secondly, the marriage does not influence his roles as a son or a brother. Everything is similar and there is no change with regard to his person. Moreover, his privileges towards life will be the same as it was previously. In addition he has to take up a new responsibility in his life, but that will not change his life much. He will be the head of the family automatically and this aspect will work a lot in his favour. Thus marriage is an advantage to him in many ways. In total contrast to this, the life of a woman in India after marriage undergoes many unavoidable and permanent changes. She is expected to leave her parents' house and move to totally new surroundings. She would build relationships with all the relatives of her husband and it is a must for her. Her role is more definite and her duties are more specific than those of the husband and she has to stick on to the set pattern of conduct that is prevalent in that family. Her individuality is ruined and she is forced to accept and follow her husband in all matters.

Indian culture gives supreme importance to the life of a married woman and adds several important responsibilities to it. Indian mythology describes a married woman as the life partner who has to play a multifold character: she is ardhagini, one half of her husband, symbolically speaking; sahadharmacharini, associate in the implementation of human and celestial goals; sahakarmini, a part to all her husband's deeds and sahayogini, a complete co-operator in all his activities. Everything she has to do in favour of her husband and only then she is called pativratha. Husband and wife mutually are called dampatulu, the joint holders of the house, sharing work in terms of their genetic, emotional and individual dharma. Here, very astonishing fact is that the wife should follow her husband as a subordinate and obey him always and on no occasion the husband is forced to adjust. Being a progressive writer to the core, Anita Desai strongly opposes all these traditional imbalances in her fictional writings. She concentrates more on the bias in favour of men in the ritual called marriage. Then broken marriage unfortunately leads to Marital Discord between the couple. Here, it is important to define marital discord which is the outcome of imbalances between the couple, (wife and husband).

Marital Discord: It is a process that begins before physical separation and continues even after the marriage is legally broken. Marital discord is a very effective stressor that can prompt individuals to enter mentally disturbed stages or engage in behaviour that will lead them to have psychotic or hysteric manifestations. It is an important predictor of subsequent law-breaking and depressive symptoms for married couples. It is evident that marital problems are more likely to cause depression than depression causing marital problems.

Anita Desai stresses on very imperative issues about the density of human relationships as a big current problem and human condition leading to marital discord. In her novels, like, *Cry, The Peacock* and *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* She depicts the broken marriage relationship which often leads to separation and isolation of the characters. The concept of failed marriage is dealt with care in her debut novel – *Cry, The Peacock*.

Cry, The Peacock consists in it the intuitive uproar of a young and very sensitive girl Maya who is bothered a lot by a childhood prophecy of a deadly disaster. Thus, she was a psychic patient before her marriage and at the same time marriage destroys her completely. The novel elaborately depicts Maya's futile attempt to search for love and warm relationship in her loveless wedding. She seeks something which her husband never understands at all. Her fervent appeal for love has fallen on her husband's deaf ears. The peacock's cry is an implication of Maya's distressed cry for love and life of involvement and intensity from her husband's side. It "explores the turbulent emotional world of the neurotic protagonist Maya who smarts under an acute alienation stemming from marital discord and verges on a curious insanity." (Madhusudan Prasad 1981: 3).

In this novel, Maya, who is in fanatical condition brought about by more than one factor, include marital discord, dullness and a psychic disorder. She is a weak personality and an introvert and always expects sympathy from others. Sympathy seekers always trouble themselves in their lives. At the same time her husband is a practical man without much sensitive feelings to his individual credit. The result is marital discord and there exists no other way since both are opposite to each other. In this way, Desai looks in to the cause for marital discord and illustrates how such discord affects the family and ruins it totally. Most of the times, the inability of an individual to be responsive to the behaviour patterns of her partner leads to tension and stress in the relationship, while sometimes it is on adaptation of various levels of affection that strained relationships occur. This novel explains both husband and wife's relation in depth. It has been mentioned that both have strained relations because of their mismatched attitudes. Maya is pensive, receptive and sensitive, while Gautama is pragmatic, insensible and lucid. Maya is mundane and high-strung where as Gautama is isolated, thoughtful and inaccessible. Maya has gentleness, quietness and affection, while Gautama is rigid and bitter. Thus, both are opposite to each other and the marital bond that binds the two is very brittle and shaky. The growing tension between them reaches its climax when Maya kills Gautama and then attempts to kill her. In this way Maya is a convict of the



past, lives almost eternally in the shade of a world of memories, which overwhelm her. Gautama, on the other hand, lives in the present and accepts reality and facts even though they are not very beautiful and cosy. On the contrary, Maya never tries to admit the truth, but she wants to live in her dreamy world. She keeps on recalling her childhood days and the love her father poured out on her. Maya herself is in two minds about her bond and love with Gautama as she always seeks her father in her husband and she knows well that the thought is unfulfilled. On other occasions too she looks at her marriage as a total failure as she says clearly, “broken repeatedly and repeatedly the pieces were picked up and put together.” (Jha, Uma Shankar & Pujari, Premalata, *Indian Women Today (Tradition, Modernity and Challenge)* Volume 1, New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers, 1996.). The incongruity between them emerges from their attitudes and approaches to life. With his pragmatic and practical attitude, Gautama fails to respond to Maya’s sentimental and emotional needs. She is conscious of the unsolvable stalemate between them. Sensitive to the core Maya is dreadfully distressed and loses her mental tranquil at the death of her pet dog and Gautama neglects the emotional yearning of Maya and says in a tone of resentment that he would buy another dog for her. This blank behaviour of her husband leads Maya to frustration – “Showing how little he knows of my misery or how to comfort me”. (Cry, the Peacock, p.14). Thus Gautama is so near to her, at the same time so far, a husband and also an unfamiliar person. This gap in mutual communication coupled with her obsession makes her an emotional break. She bursts out in irritation losing her self-control.

In the novel there are a few other characters as well to illustrate on the issues of marital discord. Leila, one of the friends of Maya, married a patient for her loves sake. She rejects the dreary marriage procedure, yet suffers all the childish acts of her husband patiently. Two marriages prescribed in the novel indicate that qualities and shortcomings, capability and weaknesses of husband-wife and projects how they have not cautiously and deliberately been balanced to make a relationship successful. There are a lot of similarities between the two husbands and also between the two wives.

Usually no proper importance has been given to such problems in the society. Therefore the negligence of the society results in conflicts, desperation, parting and finally marital discords. Women who are ill-treated by their husbands become sufferers in these cases. Their hypothetical reliability and traditional approach towards them cause hostility in their lives. They struggle without any result against strong, odd and self-destroyable environment. They become desperate, distressed and nervous and need some solace somewhere. Their problems have no end and so they are forced to commit suicide or run away hostile situation both physically and mentally. It is clearly depicted in the novel as finally Maya turns insane and kills her husband. The novel becomes a fascinating psychosomatic study of neurotic fears and anxieties caused by marital discord and disharmony in the life. Madhusudan Prasad briefly alludes to Maya as a neurotic figure: “In *Cry, The Peacock*, Desai explores the turbulent emotional world of the neurotic protagonist, Maya, who smarts under an acute alienation,

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stemming from marital discord, and verges on a curious insanity.”(Justman, Stewart, *The Apple of Discord*, Published by Viva Books, Raj Press, New Delhi, 2009) He partially agrees with the discovery of Maya’s neurosis in the novel based on ‘marital discord’ arising out of her ‘morbid preoccupation with death’ and it shatters the very identity of ‘women in our contemporary society dominated by man in which woman longing for love is driven mad or compelled to commit suicide.’ Here one has to observe that Maya’s insanity is not only because of ‘marital discord’ but also the sheer misunderstanding of her husband. When she was very anxious Gautama is very much worried about her troubled mind and acts as a nurse. Therefore, she admits that he is “her guardian and protector.”(Kohli, Devindra & Just, Melanie Maria., *Anita Desai (Critical Perspectives)*, Published by Pencraft International, D.K. Fine Art Press, New Delhi, 2008)

The marital discord arises out of her disturbed personality traits which are associated with her from the start of her life. The novel sensationalizes the fight for life and death of Maya who is already oppressed by her irrational personality. So only Srinivasa Iyengar makes it clear, as *Cry, The Peacock* is really “Maya’s effort to tell her story to herself, to discover some meaning in her life, and even to justify herself to herself.”(Kohli, Suresh “The World of Anita Desai” *The Tribune (Saturday Plus)* 11 July, 1992, p.4.) Thus, the complexities in marriage disturb the lives of the couple and thinkers try for amicable solutions.

Anita Desai’s another novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975) is also similar to her first novel *Cry, The Peacock*, and focuses on marital discord specifically. The unsuited couple, Raman and Sita faced the same problem of marital discord just as Maya and Gowtama. Sita’s marriage to Raman was again loveless because there was no understanding and mutual co-operation between them. Anita Desai in her response says, “and finally- out of pity, out of lust, out of a sudden will for adventure and because it was inevitable, he married her.” (*Where Shall We Go This Summer?* p. 99) Sita is the representative of sentiment and feminine sensibility and at the same time Raman is a man with perfect perception of life and the sense of the practicality. Sita is a very common, receptive middle-aged woman who possesses uneven and emotional responses to the happenings in her life. She is a dreamer and an escapist to the core and she always wants to run away from reality and does not want to admit the practical and real world, in other words she is an easy going woman. But Raman is the representative of a wilful personality and also a person who is ready to accept the codes and norms in the society. He is a planned personality and desires to build his career properly. However, he is not in a position to understand the resentment and passion with which his wife Sita reacts against every odd incident. In this way the readers understand that the partners in life are two opposite personalities. The husband’s retort to his wife’s unending complaints is a mixture of incomprehension, weariness, fright and at last an inevitable acceptance of her abnormality. He never tried to comprehend her tediousness and disappointment in his company. The theme of separation and lack of communication in marital life is discussed by the writer in detail in this novel. Since her childhood, Sita remains

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a disregarded character, a meek one and because she is an introvert, she could never come out of her shell. Truly, she is the result of a broken family. She expects a lot of attention and love from others, but her father is busy in other activities. In her later life after marriage also, her husband Raman fails in providing her with her rather needs. In the same manner as Gautama in *Cry, The Peacock*, Ramantoo is unable to understand her. Raman is wise and passive and whereas Sita is irrational and hysteromaniac. Through Sita, Anita Desai voices the awe of facing all alone “the ferocious assaults of existence” (TOI: 13). The disagreement between two raise their temperaments and the two discordant viewpoints represented by Sita and Raman, sets up marital discord and conjugal misunderstanding as the objective of Desai’s novels. They are temperamentally poles apart which accounts for their being unable to forge a harmonious marital relationship.

Where Shall We Go This Summer? is thus seemed to be a tale on the inability among human beings to relate the inner life with the outer one, the individual with society. Their interpersonal communication is poor and therefore they struggle. It does suggest that a life of complete inwardness is not the solution to the problems of life. It shows that human happiness is in balancing the opposites of life. The novel shows Desai’s terrible image of life, in which the innocent bear the brunt. They pay a heavy price for their honesty and virtue while traditional values of society push them over the edge.

Thus the problem of marital discord in the novels lies in the fact that Gautama in *Cry, The Peacock* and Raman in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* are practical and straightforward people who are also selfish to the core while Maya, and Sita in these two novels respectively are idealistic and prefer to live in dreams on many occasions. Maya and Sita each crave for love and sympathy but their misfortune is that they are married to heartless, callous and unfeeling men. All the marriages in Desai’s novels are relatively business dealings. The husbands are more materialistic and seek personal growth neglecting their wives’ simple desires. The wives suffer and try to adjust with their husbands but most of the times they face failure. Sometimes wives revolt, run away, commits suicide, all out of frustration. They seek liberation for not only their bodies but also for their minds. By implication Mrs. Desai makes it clear that either one should remain unmarried or marry and accept a private hell. Her novels are full of such hopelessness but some remedy is also visible.

Anita Desai is a modern writer as she considers new themes and knows how to deal with them. She explores the grief of women living in modern society. She presents her opinion about human relationships and human conditions as a big contemporary problem. Desai deals with the details of such relationships as one of her major themes, which is a universal issue. She endeavours to show this problem without any inhibition. Anita Desai’s novels can almost be examples of her idea that man is concerned with action, experience and achievement, a woman writer is more concerned with thought, emotion and sensation. Thus, each of the above is a very common trouble dealt with in a marriage.

Although these are struggles, they can also be considered as steps for improvement. The modern man wants to convert challenges into opportunities. Whether these issues remain problems causing stress in marriage, or become an opportunity for growth depends upon man-woman relationship. Being matured and living in the modern society people should use their intelligence making relations useful. The key to successful marriage is love, compassion, understanding, mutual respect, trust, commitment and togetherness. While many couples are able to find all the key ingredients in their marital relationships, others find one element or more lacking in their bond. This gives rise to consequences that are not always expected, or desired. That is the reason why a number of couples face adverse consequences, like divorce. Visible reasons why married couples find marriage as an intimidating bond is that they face issues like lack of trust, mutual respect, love and understanding in their relationship. Thus the paper may be concluded with the hope that the man-woman relationship would be better and marriage would become a beginning of honeymoon throughout the lives of the couple.

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