



DISSENSION BETWEEN THE COUPLE IN ANITA DESAI'S *CRY THE PEACOCK*

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ABSTRACT

The present paper is a detailed study of the relationship in between husband and wife. It also studies dissension between the couple. Anita Desai has special interest as regards Man-Woman relationship in her novels. She is more interested in the interior landscape of human mind than in political and social realities. Desai's protagonists are person for whom 'aloneness' sole is the only natural condition. It is the treasure worthy of securing. These protagonists are mainly women. They have reached different stages in life – from school girl to grandmother. They are all fragile introverts trapped in their own skins. Their emotional traumas sometimes lead to violent death in the end. Same are fragrant minds of Gautam and Maya in Desai's Cry The Peacock. The present paper is a lucid attempt is perceive the interrelationship between the couple, Maya and Gautam.

Key Words: *Dissension, couple, traumas, Maya, Gautam, fragrant minds, Society, human relationship etc.*

INTRODUCTION

Anita Desai is one of the prominent novelists writing in English in the Post-Independence period. Writing for her is an attempt to discover, and then to underline and finally to convey the true significance of things. Her novels deal with the terror of facing single hatred, the ferocious assault of existence. She is more interested in the Man-Woman relationship. Her *Voices in the City* [1965] is set in Calcutta. It is another tale of alienated individuals. It is a

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tragedy. *Bye, Bye Black Bird* [1971] is the only novel of Anita Desai in which social and political realities are focused. The theme of East-West encounter is seen in the novel, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* [1975]. In *Fire on the Mountain* [1977], there are two alienated souls confronting each other. The novel, *Clear Light of Day* [1980] shows the main theme of seeing the light. Anita Desai quotes the tortuous involutions of sensibility with subtlety and fineness. The changing aspects of Nature are tuned with human moods.

Cry The Peacock [1963] is the first of her novels. The protagonist of the novel is Maya. She establishes no effective communication with her husband in spite of her efforts. This is so because their natures and thoughts belong to two poles following the difference in their age. The symbol of 'peacock' shows the dance of joy i.e. the dance of death. It has however no adequate relevance to Maya's plight. Anita Desai was awarded the Sahitya Academy Award in 1978 and the Guardian Award U.K. in 1983. The novel is the product of a mellowed craftswoman.

Maya is a young woman of about twenty five, as the protagonist. She is the peacock who cries from the outset of the novel till the end. She goes mad and meets with her tragic death. She unravels her past history in the novel and the novel presents a complete picture of her as a woman of unusual psychic caliber. She is married to Gautama four years ago at the behest of her father, who was a friend of Gautama. Gautama is an advocate in Delhi. He is double the age of Maya. He mainly says that his friendship with her father was the ground for her marriage with him. They belong to Brahmin community and it was not unusual among them to marry a teenage girl with a man of her father's age about the mid twentieth century. This disparity in age is not much accountable. Both have been brought up in entirely different kind of environments. Maya's father was rich and she was doted to an excess. The father never refused what she wanted. She was brought up in luxury. Baskets of orchids used to be brought to her house. When she lives with Gautama, his various conditions remind her of the sumptuous and happy condition of her life with her father.

Maya thinks that her childhood life was the happiest one in her life. The heat in Delhi reminds her of the ice-boxes her father used to bring and place in the house. She used to drink cold water and all kinds of cold fruit juice. But here she gets only tea. One reason for doting her by her father was that he did not approve of the low and indignant ways of his only son, Arjuna. Thus, his love was turned towards Maya. He used to take her to cold places like Darjeeling in the summer. She remembers this because Gautama never once takes her out. The innate nature of Maya is quite opposed to that of Gautama. This is one of the significant disparities between them.

The husband, Gautam does not seem to be rich. His mother's frugal acts show that they are neither rich nor very poor. So, when Maya wants to go to Mysore and Travancore and see

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Kathakali, the fantastic dance in masks, he says that she could see it in Delhi which would save a lot of money. Maya is not satisfied with the amenities that are provided by her husband. He is busy in his profession. He gives very little time to his wife. Maya is seen often complaining about it. He is less interested in love, romance and sex. The novelist tries to show that his age is the cause of disinterestedness, as she gives no other reason why he often avoids the touch of his wife. He never caresses her and never speaks loving words even in bed. Actually, his age was not the obstruction for his behaviour. There is the fact that the couple has no issue causes disturbance in relation. Gautama is a practical man. Emotions and beauty or art are unknown things to him. Even this fact does not repel one from sex instinct, if romantic. He does not believe in religious rites like worshipping idols. He criticizes those who bathe and clothe the idols and offer them sweet meats. Maya believes in customary rites. She does not like Gautama condemning the orthodox people. On the other hand, Maya believes in idol worship and justifies the act of those. Though he gives her freedom, he does not concede with her demands.

There are so many situations where the husband and wife get in confrontation. Maya once asked Gautama to be off from his work and they should go to the South-Travancore, Mysore etc. and see Kathakali. She has heard that the men dancers wear fantastic masks and dance following the drums. Gautama says she should wait till the dancers' troupe would come to Delhi. They would perhaps come in the winter and by that they can save a lot. She expresses her romantic tastes and he often crosses her. This does not deter her from indulging in romantic thoughts comparing her present life of an eternal nay with the luxurious and free life in Lucknow before her marriage. Her father encouraged her upon her deeds of choice. So she loves her father very much. She says that no one speaks of love in Gautama's family. If there is a parole, they speak of politics, corruption, trials, trade pacts etc. Her mother-in-law would speak with a reserve.

Maya remembers her friend, Leila who loved and married a tuberculosis patient and he died soon. Such thoughts continuously disturb her. Maya now remembers another friend, Pom who spent most of her time before the mirror making her up. She would not be pleased with her husband Kailash whenever he bought a sari for her. She would ask Maya to come for shopping with her. She had a lust for newness, brightness, colour and gaiety. She did not want to live with her parents-in-law and planned to move to an independent house with her husband. These instances again disturb Maya. To make matters worse, Pom said that she was pregnant. She went to Birla Mandir to pay for that she would have a son. When Maya speaks of Pom and her pregnancy, Gautam only laughs at her.

Gautama is aggressive and Maya is often in tears after their dialogue. Her body is willing and her mind wants it and she waits near his bed, but every time, she is disappointed. His coldness to her advances and his incessant talks of cups of tea and philosophy in order not to



hear her talk show his apathy. He snaps her talking and stops her with his logic. So, Maya experiences loneliness in the house. When she is not satisfied from her husband, she gives herself to a fit of furious pillow-beating, kicking, and almost crying. Maya is weak minded. She weeps and mourns at the death of her dog. But, it is immaterial for Gautama whether people lived or died. In his opinion, the mass are sheep not to be regarded. Those who are capable of logic and analysis are of significance. They argue on the matter whether the dog should be buried or cremated. In some instances, Maya is not justified of her insistence and his not justified in most of the cases. Gautam does not have belief in fortune telling and Maya believes in it. Her over-anxiety in communication with him is the result of her belief in fortune telling as she was told when she was very young that she would marry young and in the fourth year she or her husband would die. Maya gets disturbed, because, it is the fourth year of her marriage. They do not agree with each other whatever they spoke, to each other. Maya said –

“We should never walk a step farther or say a single other word.” [87]

Thus, their conversations were often interrogated by their ‘buts’ and ‘nos’. This disparity ended in her insanity. She pushed Gautama from the top of the house. Maya also goes mad.

Maya’s brother Arjuna was disowned by his father. He kept company with low-class boys. He participated in the Quit-India Movement and was jailed. His father did not like it. Arjuna went to New York and was working in a tanning factory. Maya comes to know about it through his only letter now receives. Her mother is dead and brother is lost. All these combinedly make an effect on her mind. It is shadows and drums, drums and shadows. Something has gone wrong. She feels she is ill and fears the danger of the prediction. Gautama’s sister, Nila is unhappily married. She wants to get divorce from her husband, after ten years. Maya’s sleep was rent by the frenzied cries of peacocks pacing the rocks at night. She creamed with the peacocks. She lives a stormy life. One day, Maya and Gautama is a poor fellow not to be able to notice the melancholy voice singing somewhere. She speaks about the Bengali girls who are slow in music. He does not heed to it because, he is facing a difficult case in the court. Maya speaks here not as a wild, violent, mad woman, but as a cunning woman by calling him ‘poor’. She sees he is standing near the parapet in a shaky position. She does not want to caution him about the danger of his falling. She describes the moon as if she is lunatic and when he comes in between the moon and herself, she sees his ugly crooked figure and crying his name she thrust him down the building.

At the end, Maya is confined to a room in her Lucknow house to be sent to a lunatic asylum. Her mother-in-law and Nila are with her thinking of the incidents – the death of Gautama: At last they hear her shriek and perhaps she died. Thus, novel shows incessant struggle of the minds of the couple in immense form. The novel proves to be the best example of dissension

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between the couple – Maya and Gautam. It is a requisite that both of them meet tragic end. The novel has so many instances that show the confrontation of two minds and subsequently resulting in to the disorder of their relationships. Anita Desai has perfectly dealt with the theme of dissension between the couple in the novel.

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