



The psychological realism in Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock*

Sneha Kumari

Research Scholar, Department of English, B B A Bihar University, Muzaffarpur, Bihar, India

Abstract

Indian women Novelists have portrayed women's issues realistically both psychologically and physically in their novels. They broke the literary and social norms of the past. They studied deep into psyche of their characters and projected various images of women and their status in society. The novelist, Anita Desai is a famous Indo- Anglican writer. The theme of her works will reveal that she tries to explore the psychological state of her characters. She thinks that inner life of a man or a woman decides his or her character more than the external conditions of life. The article focuses on the novel *Cry, the Peacock* as a psychological novel. The novelist has a deep insight in the psychological and social problem of modern life with psychological motivation.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis, neurotic, feminism, psychic experience, trauma

Introduction

Anita Desai is one of the celebrated Indian fiction writers. For three times she was shortlisted for the Booker prize. She holds unique place among novelists of India. She is the recorder of dilemma faced by a person in Indian urban setup. In her career as a novelist she has published ten novels and other literary work. In her novels female character play important role. Her female characters are rebellious and rebel against the traditions. Her female characters are sensitive and as a consequence, they are unwilling to adjust with the reality. She introduces a new age of psychological realism in her novel *Cry, the Peacock* (1963). The women characters of Anita Desai undergo a strange psychic experience and suffer from failures and frustrations. They undergo trauma due to their hypersensitive nature and their insensitive husbands. Most of the female characters of Desai are either women with affluent background or are mere house-wives. The women in the novels under study are not those who play dual roles as that of a house-wife and a career woman in order to suffer from the tension of being over-worked. The restricted surroundings make the women suffer intensely, due to which they react silently or violently. This leads to incompatibility between the husband and the wife. The novel, *Cry, the Peacock*, depicts incompatibility between the husband and wife as there is no harmonious relationship between them. Maya suffers from hypersensitive fantasy and is unable to lead a normal life with her husband. The novel is divided into three parts. The first part describes the death of Toto and reactions of Maya and Gautama Maya was deeply grieved. The second part divided into seven chapters each chapter presents the episodes, revealing new aspects of the character of Maya and Gautama. The novelist has the power to peep into the minds of the characters. The third part focuses that Maya loses equilibrium. Nila and her mother have come take care of her. It completes the tragedy. Maya holds herself responsible for the death of her husband, though there is no evidence to prove that Maya had killed Gautama consciously. Like a noble character, Maya goes off the balance mentally and dead.

Major Thrust

Anita Desai is a writer of the 20th century, an era of modernist and postmodernist writers. Her forte of writing is the psychological turmoil of the modern Indian woman, which explores the hidden truth under the iceberg, the sensibilities that evoke feminist consciousness in the reader's mind. Her focus is mainly on the states of mind of the protagonists. She is also called the mother of all psychological novel genre. For Anita Desai, the theme and plot are not important, but the inner and outer psyche of society with regards to a woman. Anita Desai is a perfect writer who offers a bouquet of social, cultural, and psychological interventions of life through her novels. She has majorly focused on issues of feminine sensibility, like love, marriage, divorce, cruelty and violence towards the female sex, the female liberty and freedom, and crises of conscience and values. Anita Desai is one of the pioneer writers of psychological novels in Indian English literature. She has strongly brought to limelight the negligence of the physical and psychological needs of a woman by their male counterparts. She writes about the sensuous desires of women in a unique manner, avoiding vulgarity by deploying the appropriate symbolism and imagery.

Psychoanalysis offers a universal theory of the psychic construction of gender identity on the basis of repression. Psychology as the study of mind can be used for the study of literature. Psychoanalysis tries to understand individuals by unmasking the hidden desires in their psyche and revealing their links with the conscious surface. A literary text can be analysed and understood in terms of the human psyche because human psychology is the material with which literary artists have built up their art of writing. Thus, literature provides a field of verification for psychoanalytical propositions. Women's oppression, according to psychoanalytic feminists, is based in psychological structures and maintained by the constant repeating or reiteration of relationship dynamics created in childhood. Psychoanalytic feminists intended to change early childhood experiences and family relationships, as well as language patterns that develop and perpetuate masculine and femininity, as a result of these deeply ingrained patterns. Psychoanalytic feminists explored

political and social issues impacting the development of male and female subjects, challenging Freudian and Neo-Freudian ideas of women as physiologically, psychologically, and ethically inferior to men. They, like radical feminists, considered sexual difference and women's otherness in relation to males as major concerns.

Anita Desai broke new ground in Indian English fiction with the publication of her first novel, *Cry, the Peacock*, by portraying a hyper-sensitive, heterosexual woman who, for the first time in it, condemns her husband to death when she is denied love and sexuality, and thus deconstructs the cherished notions of Indian womanhood, which are still defined by the 'Savitri' metaphor. After reading these Anita Desai novels, one would infer that her canvas is large enough to accommodate nearly any form of fair sex. On the one hand, she writes about pure housewives, working women, and concubines, and on the other, she writes about mothers, sisters, wives, daughters, daughters-in-law, sisters-in-law, and aunts. Some of her female characters are even presented in many roles at the same time. In *Cry the Peacock* Maya, the protagonist, is well aware of the discriminating treatment meted out to her. Maya is perfectly normal, healthy and obedient girl. She is very sensitive, imaginative, passionate and sensuous woman. She lived a life of a princess in her father's house. Her obedience being taken for granted by her father, forces her to marry Gautama, who is much older to her and is close to her father. She is frustrated by Gautama's rational, insensitive and detached nature as a husband. She longs for the sensuous love of Gautama, but Gautama very passively preaches her the philosophy of life from the holy Gita. She tries to pull on her relationship with an emasculate Gautama, a man in whom understanding is scant and love is meagre which depicts that Maya is not a pampered and spoilt child. These are in fact the characteristics of normal female with reasonably good status and upbringing. In traditional Indian context, Maya has been an absolutely submissive and obedient daughter, sister and wife. On the other hand, she feels Gautama is responsible for her unfulfilled desires in their marital relationship. Prof. K. R. S. Iyengar says —*Cry, the Peacock* scores because Maya is at once the centre and circumference in this world. Her insanity – or, rather, sanity – pervades the entire book, giving it shape and life. Maya complains that she is being treated as a wild beast on a leash. She is deeply grieved to see her brother Arjuna and compares her fate with that of Arjuna. Arjuna enjoys —liberty like a young hawk that could not be tamed. She wishes only one thing that is the release from this kind of life-in-death. Maya is not traumatized by her dissatisfaction and marital discord alone but also by the incidents which she comes across like her sister-in-law Neila, her friend Leila, Pom and Mrs. Sapru, who are also victimized by the patriarchy and lead a subjugated life adds on to her psychosis and triggering towards neurosis. Her subconscious awakens her consciousness of the disrupted relationships and domination. The novel is open ended for the readers to decide upon the death of Maya to form their opinions.

Conclusion

Thus, the novel is the gradual process of diffusing her consciousness, where the questions arising from her subconscious are unanswered, heading her towards neurosis. Her neurosis growth, development and crisis are painted in

all the three parts of the novel. The reasons for her insanity lie in her own nature. The other people around her do not see her saner side. Her own name has obvious significance. She is a form of illusion (Maya). Though she is a creature of song, dance and flower, she goes beyond her control and as a result becomes mad. For Maya, the desert is full of hidden dangers and presenting those dangers. The novelist dramatizes the psychic drama of Maya; sometimes her disintegrating sanity and sometimes her cracking up under the pressure of fears. In this way, the novelist has given an opportunity to the readers to enter into the inner recess of a particular woman during her short critical period.

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