
Female Existence in Anita Desai's "Cry-the Peacock"

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Abstract

Anita Desai has added a new dimension to the Indian English fiction. Female Existence is one of the most burning issues in the novels of Anita Desai. She has dwelt upon the problem of Love, marriage and sex in her own way. Psychological adjustment is a key to healthy compromise in a married life. In her novels, there is a striving, there is a need to be loved. Her novels "Cry-the

Peacock" grapple with the politics of gender and deal with Female experience in a male dominated society. To raise the voice of women is the main object of the novel. We should erect a Heavenly Horizon for Female existence. My article is an attempt to explore the hidden mysteries of female universe.

Key words: - Existence, Psychological, Grapple, Mysteries etc.

Introduction

Anita Desai is one of the most distinguished Indo English writers who portray life with all its original colours. How beautifully with all its pungent realities, she has painted Indian women! In a patriarchal society of so called

„VishwaGuru India“, women are still striving for their rights, their identity, their freedom, and of course for their real existence. The female universe which seems to be glorious outwardly has neither peace nor joy inwardly. Such dark universe must be considered, must be listened. So through her literary masterpieces, Anita Desai has given a voice to dumb and reticent bird.

Anita Desai's novels grapple with the politics of gender and deal with women's experience in a male dominated society. She challenges traditional image of women presented by patriarchy. Her novels present women caught in oppressive stereotypes from which some women struggle to create a female space for themselves. Most of her novels are concerned with the beginning of the quest of women for herself. The world of Anita Desai's novel is "a world where the central harmony is aspired to but not arrived at and the desire to love and live clashes – at times violently the desire to withdraw and achieve harmony. In her novels there is a need to be loved: Uma, Maya, Manisha, Sita almost all of them desire this above all else but they also resist, surrender and involvement."1

The most common theme in her novels is the complexity of human relationship, particularly man woman relationship. D. H. Lawrence, Richardson and Virginia wolf also focused on the same theme. D. H. Lawrence states: "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."2 In Desai's novels, it is the exploration of sensibility, the inner working of the mind that

assume significance. She is very much interested in the psychic life of her female characters and the harsh attitude of male towards female. Her novels reveal that the real concern is with the exploration of female psyche.

In our Indian society, the girls are brought up with a lesson that in every circumstance they have to surrender to tolerate, to apologize. Consequently, every second the same girl dies. After marriage the condition reaches at its worst she feels a lot but not allowed to express. She wishes to cry but not permitted to speak, she wants to fly but the feathers have been cut by so called „Husband“ Why? Why? Anita Desai in her novel *Cry-the Peacock* deals with the philosophy of detachment and with the psyche of her characters. The very first novel is the story of a hypersensitive young woman Maya who cannot get over the prophecy of an albino priest who forecasts the death for Maya or her husband in the fourth year of their marriage. Both Maya and Gautama stand poles apart in their attitude to life whereas Maya is emotionally in her love for life. Gautama is a dry type of a matter

of fact person who possesses no sentiment. So Maya visualizes him as “a meditator beneath the Sal tree.”³ Because of the temperamental differences throughout the novel, there is a tussle between husband and wife. Gautama is unable to understand that material amenities and physical comforts do not give what a wife needs. Maya craves for emotional love. He gives pain to his wife who expresses thus:

“There were countless nights when I had been tortured by a humiliating sense of neglect of loneliness, of desperation that would not have existed had I not loved him so.”⁴

Anita Desai very beautifully picturizes in the novel as how there was a battle between intuition and intellect, between madness and sanity. Maya longed for the life of satisfaction. Its really difficult for Maya to live in Gautama’s empty world of analytical mind. The theme of marriage and love is deeply rooted in the novels of Anita Desai. She describes “the marriages in India and various complexities involved with them. Her worldliness and down – to – earth approach to life keeps her detached and makes her art a delightful experience for the people.”⁵ In the novel, Maya is emotional but her husband is remote and detached. Happy marriage life depends upon the healthy understanding of husband and wife. This is not the case of Maya but almost every woman in India. The egoistic man never tries to understand wife. In the novel *Gautama* while walking along with Maya, quotes a beautiful Urdu couplet but he remains untouched to tender feelings which are inherent in it:

“Even if star in the sky were O heart what of it? Give me one heart that is sorrow.”

But Maya’s attitude is quite different she finds that couplet is full of compassion and touching documents Desai artistically depicts this moment of Maya’s appearances:

“... and my heart stretched painfully, agonizingly expanding and swelling with vastness of a single moment of absolute happiness and my body followed its long sweet cure arching with the soaring, annihilating torture of it Ultimate, a world dropped down the tall tunnel of memory it had been used that evening ultimate. Ah, this was it, the ultimate absolute joy, there lay perfection suspended bearing all that it could bear so full was it. Were one more flower to unfurl that night, one small bird to cry if one bright star were to be shattered and fall now – I could have born it, no I was filled to the point of destruction”.⁶

In the novel Gautama's aspiration to stability appears to her to be a negation of life in all its vivid aspects. These types of short comings and trifling create in Maya acute mental tension. Thus in the hours of tension, Maya returns to childhood memories to escape the present during her past infancy, she enjoyed life with all its vividness. She is unable to recapture that pleasure of the past "I had the happiest childhood, they were my happiest time."⁷ In the very first chapter of the novel, Maya's heart is filled with pity at the death of dog Toto. Her husband Gautam telephoned to the public works department to take the corpse away and "its all over". „Come and drink tea and stop crying". He does not understand her feelings and breaks her heart. He indifferently leaves her. A girl who leaves the house of her parents, devotes her life to her husband and other family members in return she gets humiliation, suppression and siblings. This is the main reason of failure of married life.

Anita Desai through various instances in the novel leaves a message that marriage is pious bond which needs love, care, proper understanding faith trust and equality Maya once expresses her desire to see the kathakali dance to him and says

: "I want-I want to see the kathakali dances. I have heard of the ballads they have in their villages. They say they go on for days and days. And the dances are all men, and they wear such fantastic mask. And the drums.....The masks thy wear...you must have seen them? Yes, I suppose they dance by torchlight...⁸ But

Gautam is unable to read her eyes and heart. These are the reasons of unhappy married life.

Cry-the Peacock deals with the story of Maya – a woman who faces marital discord – differences and struggle in married life. Maya finds that she is a dead weight and nothing else. With the loneliness of her soul, she realizes that sindoor, kum-kum and rose powder – all are meaningless. Mental peace is the most precious gem. The title is quite justified. Maya's cry was unheard by Gautama. It was really the cry of the peacocks in the wild during monsoons. Maya feels that peacock fate is her own. She needs someone to secure her from madness.

Anita Desai undoubtedly is successful in depicting the theme of love and marriage in a philosophical vein. The novel is told in the form of a first person narrative. The past memories of Maya which form the bulk of the novel are recalled by her or they come automatically after the death of her husband Gautama. Gautama's long discourses on detachment appear to her life negating. She draws a conclusion that since life and death are alike to him he could as well die. It is she who loves life and wishes to live. In a fit of madness, she kills him in order to find a life for herself.

The novelist shows how Maya and Gautama fail to meet on a common platform of married life regarding their comprehension of detachment. Gautam only and only works for „name, fame and money", He is unable to control his egoistic tendencies. The very philosophy of detachment is the main cause of the failure of their married life. Her novel reveals the hidden universe of her female protagonist. Her female protagonist points out „the mad clarity" of all family relationships, the nature of marriage. Moreover, the novelist has given a message that collapses of society will change its attitude and aptitude. We should erect a Heavenly Horizon for Her existence.

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