

Cry the Peacock: Suffering of a Neurotic Woman

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Abstract:

Cry, the Peacock, a purely psychological novel is written by Indo-American author Anita Desai. This novel published in 1963, is a landmark in Indian English literature. Anita Desai has introduced a neurotic heroine along with her psychological problems in this novel. The introduction of a female protagonist who is psychologically imbalanced has never happened before in the history of Indian English literature. This study tries to identify the strange behaviour of the protagonist Maya; and to examine the sociological and psychological reasons for such behaviour. In this novel, the central character assails through a strait of darkness, thoroughly confused and puzzle about her future. In this paper, an attempt is made to analyse the protagonist of the novel; thus, linking up literature with psychology, gaining an insight into her neurotic behaviour.

Keywords: *Aboriginal, Assimilation, Marginalization, Self-discovery, Indigeneity.*

Introduction:

In literature the use of psychological concepts is an old phenomenon as literature itself. Neurosis and its impact on human personality have engaged the attention of both the psychologists and creative writers. The parallel interdisciplinary engagement with the study of neurosis has given new dimension to the critical understanding of the subjects. Following the impact of Freud and with the development of various psychological theories in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, the attention of both the creative and critical writers was drawn towards a deeper understanding of human psyche. With the emergence of new theoretical assumptions, literary imagination was focused on exploring new techniques of narration and character portrayal. Anita Desai, one of the pioneers among the women writers, is greatly influenced by writers like Woolf, Lawrence and Henry James; as she has admitted that she has

drawn inspiration from them; which is reflected in her novels. In her writings Desai examines into the psyche of her characters. The protagonists in her novels show strange behaviour as a result of the identity crisis caused by the distressing shocking experiences they face. The novel which has been chosen for study in this research article is *Cry, The Peacock*. This study tries to identify the strange behaviour of the protagonist Maya, in Anita Desai's novel; and to examine the sociological and psychological reasons for such behavior. In this novel, the central character assails through a strait of darkness, thoroughly confused and puzzled about her future. Maya's trajectory is one of despair, sterility, madness, and vengeance. The novel explores the inner world of Maya. She is a tragic figure, encumbered by dissonance and pain, incessantly lost in the labyrinth of her anxious thoughts, and fearsome instincts. The bildungsroman novel traces the journey of Maya as a little motherless girl, one being highly pampered by her father. She is impulsive, emotional and idealistic.

Major Thrust

Anita Desai's *Cry the Peacock* is the sad story of the hypersensitive Maya, married to a cold intellectual Gautama. Gautama, her husband, is several years older and eminently successful in life in the worldly sense. Maya's sensitive nature finds it hard to live happily with this man. She cannot dissolve the relationship either. Every known social and moral code is in the favour of an adjustment. In spite of the terrible demands of her conscience, she is driven into a desperate situation where her sense of reality is totally lost, leading to harsh consequences. It is haunted by a demon like albino astrologer's prophecy that she or her husband would die during the fourth year of her marriage. Maya's anxiety that erupts out of this prophecy subsides under the filial love of her father, who dismisses it as nonsense and orders that it should be forgotten. The prophecy remains consequently repressed in her unconscious and fails to affect her given to the excessive care, love and friendly atmosphere found in her father's home. Unfortunately, Maya's marriage triggers off a storm in her mind given to her husband Gautam's impassiveness, sexual indifference and insensitivity. As Maya enters the fourth year of her marriage, her fear of death of either of them has increased. Gautama terms her talk of fear as 'nonsense talks'. Gautama has not tried to reduce her psychological burden by sharing her pains and worries. Gautama considers Maya's wills and woes as childish, tiresome and even distasteful. He calls it her madness considering her as a 'spoilt child'. She kills Gautama who

has all along personified insensitivity and all that is determined to a life faithful to instinctual forces operative within her to an unusual degree. Brought up in an environment of fatalistic intents and attitudes, she realizes the forces of fate are stronger than anything else, and would perhaps be like this in future too. In the abnormal mood she expresses her agony,

"And in camera of insanity I saw a future insanity. I saw a future insanity projected before me, beyond the window in a world where guilt, sin, crime, punishment all stock still, struck into threatening by a ruthless force of fate" (CTP p.185).

Maya is haunted by the idea of early death prophesized by an albino astrologer. Because of her failure to establish a fulfilling relationship with her husband, she inhabits a world full of morbid, fears and turns neurotic. Her tension and irritability is symbolized by the Peacock's dance which acquires a personal significance for Maya's life. It shows to her future course of life as she views her marriage with Gautam as a deadly struggle. The poetry of life, its passion, its love and its hatred—life and death are identified with the peacock and its dance. The peacock's dance is associated with the rainy season. It is seen that when dark clouds come over the sky, the peacocks start spreading their colourful feathers ready to dance and mate. However this dance of the Peacock merges with the colour of the Albino astrologer and the dance becomes somewhat the dance of the death. The novel is a disturbing portrayal of an individual struggle to experience life and love. The main objectives of this research is to analyze familial and social causes which are compiling Maya to be a neurotic character. Gautama is not only person who is responsible for her neurosis. In the novel Maya's neurosis arises out of various reasons. She doesn't get love from mother because her mother had already dead. As a child she doesn't play with the children of her age group. In the house she remains alone and her father is a guardian, protector and everything for her. Therefore, she develops a type of negative self from the very beginning of the life. After the marriage with Gautama, she wants to fulfil the gap of her father but it is impossible for her because of Gautama's coldness and intellectuality. Maya's dissatisfaction in sex is one of the major causes to make her neurotic character. Maya wants to fulfil her instinctual desire but it is impossible for her because of Gautama's old age and his attitude toward sex. Maya remains childless and the dog Toto becomes the major substitute of her child. After the death of Toto she becomes alone and crazy. These causes are responsible to make Maya neurotic and anxiety overridden women.

Conclusion

Anita Desai has skilfully delineated with the introvert and neurotic protagonist Maya in *Cry, the*

Peacock. Her neurosis growth, development and crisis are painted in all the three parts of the novel. Desai as her forte uses psychoanalysis as a method to explore the psyche of her neurotic heroine. Maya is psychologically torn between her happy childhood and unhappy married life. Being a psychological dwarf, Maya is unable to confront the harsh realities of life. Her hopelessness is not an individual but it spreads and becomes universal. Her neurosis is somewhat collective and poses a definite danger to the identity of woman as a whole.

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