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A Psychological Interpretation: Self alienation to feminine consciousness in Anita Desai's Novel Cry the peacock

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ABSTRACT

A fiercely individualistic novelist like Anita Desai is always an enigma to the traditional reading public and the self-styled critics of Indian English Novels. As far as the Indo English literature is concerned it is a bridge connecting the Indian ethos with modern sensibility. In this context Anita Desai explores psychological aspect and the changing concept of the woman's subjectivity. The analysis of Desai's novels would unfold goal or a metaphysical absolute; rather it will reveal a prospect of achieving feminine consensus where each novel voices her story. Indian women novelists are part and parcel of Indian society. They are essentially concerned with the representation of women in society. Anita Desai described the women's problems, sufferings, marital conflicts and human psyche in the life of female characters.

Anita Desai has been hailed as a pioneer of Indian feminism. Considered as a whole, her novels reveal a progression in the psychic awareness of women about their position in their society. She breaks a new ground in the world of Indian English fiction by shifting the emphasis from the external to the internal world. Anita Desai is indeed a name to reckon with in the field of literature. A Winner of the Sahitya Akademi Award expressed deeply her inner voice through the medium of literature. The paper focused upon the position of women's self-alienation to feminine consciousness. In today's scenario people have quest for self-realization, the hypocritical mind set, selfish motives and lack of passions in their relationships. The concept is well-built and visualised by Anita Desai in her art of characterization in all her work. The researcher wants to examine the ground reality of life, through the medium of Indian literature.

Introduction

Time has a powerful bearing on man's life, emotions, thoughts and experiences. It makes its presence felt on the physical and the psychic planes of human experiences. As in life, so in literature, Time asserts itself in one way or the other. Time plays a crucial role at least, in the structuring of events. At the turn of the century, we find an almost simultaneous change in the concept of Indian literature. In Indian culture and civilization, a woman

represents beauty auspiciousness and prosperity. How far this reality come true? There are a large number of educated Indians who use English literature as a medium of creative exploration and expression of their experience of life .Anita Desai is one of them who is the most powerful contemporary Indian novelist. She represents creative release of the feminine sensibility. Feminism has always meant independence of mind, spirit and body. With the advent of feminism, each and every female oriented subject has become an issue of contemporary literary debate. She not only explores and portrays the feminine psyche of a common man but also of the subnormal bordering on abnormal women. These are the woman who because of various factors are under so much of mental stress that they cannot be called insane but then certainly they are not. she is unable to face the ordinary realities. Her present characters undergoing an inner psychological turbulence arising out of a conflict between reality and the illusions that the characters build up for themselves. Her several novels explore tensions between family members and the alienation of middle class women .In her later novels Desai has dealt with such theme as the demise of traditions. She has depicted the psychological aspect through man-woman relationship religious taboos, male dominance, alienation, existential predicament of an individual, culture and tradition, childlessness, superstitions. Among man- woman relationship she seems to have devoted her attention to marital relationship. All female characters are presented by rifts between the partners. Older concepts of woman s slavery were being rapidly demolished and woman was trying to free herself from the shackles of male dominated society. Further industrialization and urbanization had poured selfishness in minds resulting coldness in relations. Anita Desai s work represents a unique blending of the Indian and western society.

a new dimension to the achievement of the Indian women writers in India. 1 (Seshadri 50).

Anita Desai is the vanguard of a new generation of Indian writers who are experimenting with themes of inner consciousness she gives her readers valuable insights into the feminine consciousness through her memorable protagonists. 2 (Dodiya 3).

The opening of the novel wherein Maya is shown to be washing her eyes in order to wash off the sight of Toto s dead body gives a glimpse of Maya s obsessive compulsive neurosis. 5 (Sujit 5).

Her novel catch the bewilderment of the individual psyche confronted with the overbearing socio-cultural environment and the ever beckoning modern promises of self gratification and self fulfilment. Desai excels in writing psychological novels. She would however call them purely subjective It has been my personal luck she confide that my temperament and circumstances have combined to give me the shelter, privacy and solitude required for writing of such novels thereby avoiding problems and writer has to deal with central aesthetic problem of Indian writer the problem of rendering complete human personality in an age of lost values, lost men and lost gods. The twentieth century has been rightly called The Age of Alienation The modern woman is doomed to suffer the corrosive impact of alienation, Which manifest itself in the form of generation gap, absence of a sense of meaningfulness of life, and so on. The novel is to be examined in this paper is Anita Desai. Cry the peacock. In the novel the identity crisis of the protagonist Maya stems from several inter-related factors. She is passionate and sensitive young girl married to her lawyer father s protégé Gautama, Being a practical minded person detached from emotions, she is totally antithetical to her. Maya requires a love partner with wide sympathies, highly sensitive, imaginative and responsive temperament which Gautama lacks.As she complains “How little he knew of my misery, or of how to comfort me Telling me to go to sleep while he worked at his papers, he did not give another thought to me to either the soft,willing body or the lonely,wanting mind that waited near his bed 1.(9)

She belongs to a traditional Brahmin family who believes in astrology and other prophetic strains of Brahminical order. On the other hand Gautama's family represents the rational side of life. Her unhappiness is, however, more a product of her own consciousness and her inability to outgrow her romantic and protected childhood as also the prophecy of the Albino priest. She said "It has to be one of us, you see and it was so clear that it was I who was meant to live you see, to Gautama it didn't really matter. He didn't care and I did." (215-16) She is unable to face the ordinary realities of life.

The first section of the novel functions as a sort of exposition scene. A number of things are done in the most economical manner. In the second section of the novel Maya the protagonist of the novel comments their marriage was broken repeatedly the pieces were picked up and put together again as of sacred icon with which out of the pettiest superstitions we could not bear it. The right emotions is elicited from the reader through a series of objective descriptions. Anita Desai has depicted the failure of marriage between Maya and Gautama.

Turning his back to me he stood talking to a friend a glass in his hand and his voice rose in order that I might hear when he said Blissful yes, because it is unrelated to our day unclouded by the vulgarity of ill educated men, or of overbearing women (104)

The two persons are entirely opposed to each other in their temperament and emotional responses. Maya enjoys the life in the lap of nature because of her instinctive impulse but Gautama does not show any interest for it for he is a creature of intellect. Through the concept of these characters we find agonised cry for love and life of involvement. While Maya believes in a life of total absorption and involvement. Maya is sensitive high strung female while Gautam has abstract thinking. The tragic end of Maya's and Gautama's married life is seen in her act of killing her husband and afterwards killing her own self by committing suicide. The novelist's own attitude in the matter does not appear to be ambivalent. She seems to give implied suggestion that the private vision of every individual be made open so that mankind may have a sigh of relief from the endless tortures of the unconscious. The knowledge of depth psychology holds the promise of examining her irrational and superstition belief from an entirely new angle.

The prophecy comes as a convenient external justification to her unconscious wish and for that reason tenaciously cling to it. The psychosomatic growth of a female character who can't cope up with the practical world and feels dejected, forlorn and demoralized which ultimately gains catastrophe when the wife kills her husband out of this frustration. In traditional Indian context woman is denied all freedom and privacy in marriage. She has to subject her wishes, joys according to her husband's will. Anita Desai advocates that in marriage a couple is constituted by two individual and they have entities of their own and also each should learn to respect the otherness of the other. She has not depicted man folk absolutely devoid of attachment. She has portrayed Gautama not indifferent to her wife's miseries but the wife's extra sharp sensitivity fails to understand her husband's love.

Anita Desai says that the real success lies in the exploration of the lonely spirit and working out the configuration of the inner world. The author helps to establish the subjective reality of being as the most crucial part of living. The ardent introspection of Maya marks valuable introversion in Indian fiction. It points to a line of significant development-exploration not of the social man, but the lone individual.

Conclusion

In *Cry, the Peacock*, Desai explores the turbulent emotional world of the neurotic protagonists, Maya, who smarts under an acute alienation, stemming from marital discord, and verges on a curious insanity. (10 (Bhatnagar 22)).

Self-identification in Desai's novels is thus realization of psycho-emotional and psycho-moral values. She tries to depict feminine sensibility. What is remarkable in the lives of these women is that even though the quest for self-identity and individualism ends ultimately in failure, resignation and death, there has been an inner consciousness for the right values of life and a more meaningful existence.

Future scope

The attempt will be made in the present paper to discuss the psychological aspect and feminine consciousness of the protagonists facing the dilemma of self-alienation. A comprehensive and meaningful understanding of life means the genuine attempts and heroic struggles of the individual to establish human relationship with other individuals and through them with community and humanity.

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