

FEMINISTIC APPROACH IN ANITA DESAI'S CRY, THE PEACOCK

Rajesh Sakharam Gore
Department of English
Toshniwal College, Sengaon
Dist. Hingoli (MH)

Anita Desai is a prominent modern women writer in Indian writing in English and considered to be one of the eminent Indo-Anglian Novelists. A study of her works will reveal that she tries to explore the psychological state of her characters, because she thinks that inner life of a man or a woman decides his or her character more than the external conditions of life. She brought in fame with the publication of her first novel. *'Cry the Peacock (1963)* and *Voices in The City (1965)*. The present paper postulates Anita Desai's notion of modern ideal building of the society free from male domination. Desai represents the theme of consciousness and sensibility of women as compounded with the men and how they suffer on the basis of emotional as well as physical repression and become the victim of male dominated social and cultural order.

The term 'feminism' has its origin from the Latin word 'femina', meaning 'woman' (through French Feminism) and there by refers to the advocacy of women rights, status and power with men on the grounds of equality of sexes. In other words, it relates to the belief that women should have the same social, economical and political rights as that of men. Anita Desai seems to be aware of relationship between feminism as a political movement, a literary and theoretical commitment to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism and not only gender study in Literature. In fact, feminist critical perspective and theory became pertinent to the study and analysis of the social, institutional and personal power relegations between the sexes. The rendering of feminine sensibility and the dilemmas of women oppressed by male dominated social order and recurring themes in her fictional work.

'Cry, the Peacock' is an essentially a study of the marital situation resulting from the conflict between two irreconcilable temperament of two diametrically opposed attitudes towards life. In Desai's first two novels, marriages are shattering failures because Maya and Manisha are unable to adjust themselves with their challenging new roles. Thus, in Anita Desai's fiction there is rich variety of themes and her treatment deserves critical attention. She analyzes the ambience with clinical precision and her fiction represents a vivid and comprehensive picture of the human predicament.

Prof. K. R. S. Iyengar says: "*Cry, the Peacock* scores because Maya is at once the centre and circumference in this world. Her insanity, sane or insane fills the whole book and gives it form as well as life." (16). *Cry, the peacock* is Maya's story, of married life with Gautam and almost the entire story is 'remembrance of things past' by Maya herself. The novel begins with the death of Maya's pet dog Toto, and how it affects her, "Something slipped in may tear gazed vision"; she says: "a shadowy something the probed me into admitting that it was not pet's death

alone that I mourned today, but another sorrow, unremembered perhaps as yet not even experienced and filled me with this despairs.” (16).

As a girl she had gone with her ayah to an astrologer with an albino eyes and he had prophesized unnatural death after her marriage to either husband or wife. And four years, it was now, we have been married four years ----- I knew time to come. It was now to be either Gautam or I. The prophecy of an astrologer acts upon Maya as the prophecy of witches acts upon Macbeth, Maya’s consciousness and the terror in her mind & heart.

Simon de Beauvoir in her pioneering work *The second Sex*’ (1948) seeks the primary inquiry of modern feminism. In critical venture when a women tries to seek her identify. She tries define herself by saying, “I am a woman”. ‘The factual analysis suggests the basic symmetry between the terms masculine & feminine. In fact both terms.- “feminine and masculine represent social construct-patterns of sexuality and behavior imposed by cultural and social norms.”

Maya feels desettled even after four years of marriage, Gautam had failed to fecundate, “no you are too young”— perhaps of the (barrenness) bareness of Maya had developed a slightly greater capacity for philosophy that she was born. Maya blames Gautam for his grossness, for his concern with the fundamental and materialistic life in terms of money:

“Its always money with property never a case of passion and revenge, murder and exciting things like that-not for love or life basic things-like Toto dying.” (Dhaliwal 24).

Cry, the Peacock is a highly emotional, sensitive and imaginative women told by a women novelist. Maya is married to an irresponsible and insensitive husband Gautam, she is driven from emotional instability in the beginning to madness, insanity and murder at last. Anita Desai defines the uniqueness of feminine sensibility through the reaction and responses of the heroine to the events and situation in the novel. It is clear from the following statement regarding marriage:

“----- It was broken repeatedly and repeatedly the pieces were picked up, and put together again, as of sacred iron with which out of the prettiest superstition, we could not bear to part.” (Dhaliwal 40).

Maya has a delicate conscience and fine sensibilities and craving for love, temperamentally they are poles apart. There is a complete lack of communication between these two, the attitude of her husband towards her after the death of Toto. Even he fails to realize her misery and does not know how to comfort her. In sensitivity of her husband clear as follows:

“----- he knew giving me an apal ring to wear on my finger, he did not notice the translucent skin beneath the blue flashing reins that run under and out of the bridge of gold and jolted me.” (Dhaliwal 9).

The cold and unresponsive attitude of husband becomes further clear as he asks Maya to go to sleep, ‘while he worked at papers.’ Maya became victim of emotional as well as physical depression. She says:

“---- He did not give another thought to me, to either soft willing body or the lonely waiting mind that waited near the bed....” (Dhaliwal 9).

Maya’s attitude to mature and physical world also shows her obsessive love of life. She is highly sensuous about the account of the world of nature of flowers and fruits, forms and colours and she is deeply inclined by the sights & sounds, forms & colours of the natural world. She is infurlated when she finds that her husband fails to notice the dust storm which indicates his insensitivity and irresponsibility of life. Gautam for her representative of male centered

materialistic civilization and culture. She kills her husband due to her obsessive love of life on the act of murder is revolt against callous social materialistic order. She becomes more or less bounded slave and wants to be free from the chains of slavery based on customs and established norms of society. Her revolt against the social order and sensibility against normality;

“All order is gone out of my life, all formality, there is no plan, no peace nothing to keep me with the pattern of familiar every thing living and doing.” (195).

Anita Desai has delved deep into the psychological depth of woman like Maya. She has used images of horror like that of albino monster to present Mayas lacerated feelings. Maya's relationship with her husband, father, brother refers to archetypal feminism.

If we study the feministic approach of Modern Indian Writer in fiction, we find that Kamla Markandya, Ruth Parwar Jhabvala, Anita Desai & Shashi Deshpande's novels are mainly concerned with the self assertion and loneliness of women. Anita Desai's chief concern is the human relations not the rationalized but felt, perceived and real not the theory of western feminism. In fact she has no theories: she rejects them and she gives her own assessment of the predicament of Indian women caught between tradition & modernity, family & profession, culture & nature, assertion and confrontation, freedom and loneliness. The problems and conflicts faced by women in her novels are existential in nature.

Dorothy Richardson rightly terms of her attempt to create 'feminine prose' and Virginia Woolf describes 'a women's sentence.' Anita Desai's treatment of women characters looks the past to anatomize the pain inflicted on women in the past and present in passionate affirmation of female identity & experience. The hallmark of Desai's fiction is "to focus on the inner experience of life". She expresses a unique Indian sensibility that is yet completely at ease in the mind of the west. Finally, we can say that sensibility of Indian women is bound to institutions and practices, civilization and culture.

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