SENSE OF ALIENATION: ANITA DESAI’S CRY, THE PEACOCK

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ABSTRACT
Anita Desai is one of the most powerful and distinguished Indian English novelists. She has an extraordinary sharpness and penetration of vision. Her writings have drawn world-wide critical attention. Anita Desai has added a new dimension to the Indian English fiction: the exploration of human psyche. She is endowed with searching psychological insight and often peeps into the inner recesses of the psyche, rather than merely presenting the outer spectacle of the world; the creative field of imagination is her unfailing reserve. Cry, the Peacock, Anita Desai’s first novel, has been described as a trendsetter in the field of psychoanalytical realism. It explores the inner world of the main protagonist, Maya, and demonstrates her fear, insecurity and strange behavior. Through her, she depicts a world of alienation, loneliness and suffering. Maya is described as a hysterical character whose impending tragedy is suggestively foreshadowed, time and again. This paper is an effort to portray the alienated characters in Cry, the Peacock.

Keywords: Cry; The Peacock

INTRODUCTION
A work which utilizes one’s experiences, expectations, yearnings, dreams, doubts and dilemmas to look at the world in a different light with the intention of creating a better, more prosperous and more peaceful world stands a better chance of being accepted and acknowledged. Such a work not only draws the attention of the people but it attains their approval and appreciations too. The great legends irrespective of the language in which they have been written stand testimony to this by their deep concern for mankind and its betterment for the exiles and the ailing aliens. In other words the literatures all over the world are concerned with and build upon the strong feelings and passions of men and women all over the world in spite of their differences in nationality, race, religion, colour or government

The theme of exile and cultural alienation is common in the 20th century literary scene. Lost, lonely, drifting characters parade before us and their mechanical march point to the absence of meaningful relationship in the era of technological development and global interaction. Exile and cultural alienation has become a universal phenomenon. Anita Desai gives a graphic picture of the exile and alienation of uprooted individuals in the novels. Desai reads the minds and understands the fact that they are suffering from alienation.

Exile and cultural alienation is the most dominating theme in Desai novels. As an expert, Desai portrays the ontological insecurity, alternation and anguish of uprooted individuals in her novels. Her alienation of this problem is prevalent in most of her works. She remarks her conditions as:
“This has brought two separate stands into my life. My roots are divided because of the Indian soil on which I grew and European culture which I Inherited from my mother.”

(Desai, Anita. The Book I Enjoyed writing most. Contemporary Indian Literature, XIII, 1973, 24)

**Alienated Characters**

Most of Desai’s protagonists are alienated characters. She portrays her characters as individuals “facing single-handed, the ferocious assaults of existence” (The Times of India) Thus, characters in her novels are generally neurotic females, highly sensitive and engaged with their dreams and imagination, and alienated from their environments. They often differ in their opinions from others and embark on long voyages of contemplation, in order to find the meaning of their existence. That is why they suffer from their relationships more than others do. In other words, in Desai’s novels, the love encounters explode into marital disputes as the result of devastating post-marriage relationship between husband and wife.

In this close context of co-existence, mutual respect, mutual understanding and enthusiastic attitude to help each other, and also in the backdrop of relationship crises, let us take up the theme of Alienation in Anita Desai’s novel- Cry, the Peacock

**Theme of Alienation**-

The novel, Cry, the Peacock (1963) is “a remarkable attempt to fuse fantasy with perceptual experience” (Meena Belliappa: 25). It is the faithful description of psychosomatic growth of a female character, who cannot cope up with the practical world of the husband and feels dejected, forlorn and demoralized. It is mainly concerned with the theme of disharmony in the relationship between husband and wife. Desai looks into the reasons for marital discord and illustrates how such discord affects the family. Sometimes, the inability of an individual to be responsive to the behavior patterns of her partner leads to strain and tension in the relationship, while sometimes it is on account of varied levels of sensitivity, that relationships become strained.

In this novel, Maya and Gautama have been projected to live in sharp contrast. Maya, the central figure, is alive through all she senses and lives intensely for each moment. Her husband Gautama is remote, detached, intellectual and somewhat bewildered by his wife’s hyper-sensitiveness. Both of them are, as a matter of fact, poles apart in their nature. Maya is dreamy, sensitive and emotional, while Gautama is realistic, insensitive and rational. Maya is poetic and high-strung while Gautama is detached, philosophical and remote. Maya has tenderness, softness and warmth while Gautama is hard and cold. In this way they are plagued with the virus of strained relationship because of their incompatible temperaments and temperatures.
The matrimonial bonds that bind the two are very fragile and get fractured. And the growing tension between them reaches its climax when Maya kills Gautama in a fit of insane fury and then commits suicide.

Maya is a prisoner of the past, lives almost perpetually in the shadow world of memories, which engulf her; Gautama lives in the present and accepts reality and facts even though they are not very beautiful. On the contrary, Maya never tries to accept the facts, but she wants to live in her imaginary fairy world. She keeps on remembering her childhood days or the treatment her father meted out to her. She is a father-obsessed child; she feels that no one else loves her as her father did. She seeks another father in her husband. But he does not respond to her accordingly. Sensitive Maya is terribly upset at the death of her dog that she loses her mental calm and Gautama neglects the emotional yearnings of Maya and says that he would bring another dog for her. This mechanical behavior makes Maya brood over Gautama’s insensitivity: “how little he knows of my misery, or how to comfort me. But then, he knew nothing that concerned me. Giving me an opal ring to wear on my finger, he did not notice the translucent skin beneath, the blue flashing veins that ran under and out of the bridge gold... telling me to go to sleep while he worked at his papers, he did not give another thought to me...it is his hardness – no, no, not hardness, but the distance he coldly keeps from me”(Cry, the Peacock:9).

In the final estimation, the novel attempts to discover the turbulent emotional world of the neurotic protagonist Maya who lived a carefree life under the indulgent attention of her loving father, and desires to gain similar attention from her husband; but she totally fails in her marital voyages.

So social pressure, created by the family, marriage, and the representation of home, attempts to annihilate the family members, especially children and women. We have seen that these points are deeply rooted in Indian tradition but that western countries are concerned too.

Female characters in Desai’s novels have their social identity linked to home and hearth, but the very notion of ‘shelter’ is negated – as ‘home’ becomes a trap for both women and children in Desai’s fiction. Fire on the Mountain can be defined as belonging to a phase of writing which explores the painful existential problems of Indian women, trapped by society (Coussy 250). Women are psychologically and socially dislocated because of the Indian home, and it leads to a fight to be freed (Ho 20). India is a challenge for women because stereotypes about them are present in legends, myths and religion, they are part of the culture (for example, the law of Manu: “Her father protects her in childhood, her husband protects her in youth and her sons protect her in old age; a woman is never fit for independence”8). So the female characters at home are ‘imprisoned’ and, for example, for Nanda Kaul, tradition was a real burden to her but she accepted confinement and domesticity because she could not choose at that moment to be an outcast. She fought to change this prison into a private space, but she achieved it only through loneliness. Domestic life is composed of repressed chaos and frustration overhung by a furious uproar of activities (Ho 21 8dumas-00929936, version 1 - 14 Jan 201415and 23). Home is often a prison where the characters cannot develop their identity (which is already fragile), where they are crushed every day and where they lose their individuality little by little. “Being ‘at home’ means searching for an adult accommodation to the ineluctable condition of imprisonment.”(Ho 85-86).

The very concept that women need something more than just food, clothes and accommodation is aptly illustrated in this novel. The hyper sensitive mind of the women is illustrated by Desai in the most tender way where the atmosphere of tension is set ideally against the backdrop of a sultry Indian summer. The oppression and depression, the anxiety and fear, the frustration and foiling of the female protagonist set against a typical Indian scenario brings out the very best of the writer in a coherent way.

CONCLUSION

The Definition of Alienation is “the action of causing to become unfriendly” Here in this novel of Anita Desai, We observe Maya's extreme sensitivity never alienates the reader because it is rendered in
terms of measurable human loneliness...How well Desai does in the business of carrying her narrative through to a satisfactory, even explosive end. Anita Desai creates a stained glass landscape with details of images, colours and odours...Cry, The Peacock is the product of a mellowed craftswoman. Maya's extreme sensitivity never alienates the reader because it is rendered in terms of measurable human loneliness...How well Desai does in the business of carrying her narrative through to a satisfactory, even explosive end.

To conclude, for Anita Desai, writing “is an effort to discover, and then to underline, and finally to convey the true significance of things”(The Times of India). She presents to readers her opinion about the complexity of human relationships as a big contemporary issue and human condition. So, she analyses this problem by projecting and expressing changing human relationships in her novels. She is a contemporary writer because she considers new themes like alienation and detachment and knows how to tackle them in brilliant manner. Anita Desai takes up outstanding contemporary issues as the subject matter of her fiction while remaining rooted in the tradition at the same time. She explores the anguish of individuals living in modern society. She deals with the complexity of human relationships as one of her major themes, which is a universal issue, as it attracts worldwide readers to her novels. She strives to show this problem without any interference. On the other hand, she allows to her readers to pass judgment over her characters and their actions in an objective and impartial way. Anita Desai unravels the tortuous involutions of sensibility with subtlety and finesse and her ability to evoke the changing aspects of Nature matched with human moods is another of her assets (M. K. Naik:243)

REFERENCES

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