

MARGINALISATION OF WOMEN WITH REFERENCE TO ANITA DESAI'S “CRY, THE PEACOCK”.

N. RADHA

Associate Professor, Department. of English, NGM College, Pollachi, Tamil Nadu, India

ABSTRACT

The Indian English literature has gathered a respectable academic industry. It is a product of a evolutionary, creative process. The mode, theme and taste of the writers are influenced by the Indianess in the selection of subject matter, in the texture of thought, play of sentiment and language, in expressing experience, and Indian values.

A good part of the Indian literature of the modern period, is concerned with certain ever-recurring themes, the theme of love in all its aspects and moods; the simple lad and lass love, the tear – sodden anguish of unrequited love, the ecstasy of love's fulfillment and even love as a catalyst to spiritual revelation. The theme of nature covers a vast realm, from simple appreciation of beauty to majestic love seeking communion with nature. Theme of the philosophical quest represents the bewilderment of man in a mysterious universe and his effort to find the meaning of life and to solve the mystery of death.

KEYWORDS: Literature, Anita Desai, Indian English Women Novelists

INTRODUCTION

Anita Desai the youngest of the major Indian English women novelists is more interested in the interior landscape of the mind than in political and social realities. Writing for her “is an effort to discover and then to underline and finally to convey the true significance of things”. Her novels according to her, deal with what Ortega y Gasset says “the terror facing, single handed, the ferocious assaults of existence”. Desai's protagonists are persons for whom aloneness alone is ‘the sole natural conditions, aloneness alone the treasure worth treasuring’. They are mostly women, who, though they have reached different stages in life, are all fragile introverts, trapped in their own skins. Their emotional traumas sometimes lead to violent death, in the end.

When Meena Bellappa (1971) states about Desai she says: “Anita Desai's writings clearly indicate the new direction that Indian Fiction is taking in the hands of the third generation Of urban varieties – a deliberate growing away from the debased tradition of fiction as romance to a meaningful wrestle with Reality” (Meena Bellappa (1971).5).

Anita Desai stands great among the Indian novelist in English in probing deep into the human mind, the human situations and inner rhythms. Though she doesn't attempt to convey a set of philosophical theories and concepts ,she follows her instinct and flashes of insight .At the end she succeeds in seeing the “Pattern of footprints on the sand” .Her aim seems to be research into the human problems .She takes up the question of the existential predicament of Modern man viz., His rootlessness,detachment,identity,crisis,selfdismemberment,psychic quest of individual for better alternatives in the ethics .She talks about the alienation of the protagonists , loneliness and lack of communication.

Most of her female protagonists are sensitive and solitary to the pain of being neurotic. (E.g.) Maya in “Cry, the Peacock” .she rebels against the absurdity of the chaotic world and brings out truth to the lime light. It’s an eternal quest for meaning, value, freedom and truth, that can sustain us in this chaotic and seemingly meaningless world. K.R.S. Iyengar (1980) says that here strength lies in “The exploration of sensibility, the particular kind of modern Indian sensibility that is ill at ease among the barbarians and the philistines, the anarchists and the amoralists”.

“Cry, the Peacock” tells the story of Maya’s married life with Gautama. There is lack of emotional communication between the wife who is highly sensitive creature gifted with poetic imagination and neurotic sensibility and the husband who is a pragmatic, unimaginative and unsentimental person. In the novel Desai deftly delineates the turbulent emotional world of the neurotic protagonist Maya. She is a specimen of suffering hysterical Indian house wife. She suffers due to acute alienation caused by their inability to separated the real from the illusory, the material from the sensual.

Her melodramatic tendencies heighten the horror of her horoscope and she is thrown to the verge of insanity .As critics quote women are the neglected class of the society. True picture of the women is given by Ruth Praver Jhabwala , ”Beat them , starve them how you like them, they will sit and look with animal eyes and never raise a head to defend themselves”(Ruth Praver Jhabwala,97). Prof.K.R.S.Iyengar says : “Cry the Peacock scores because Maya is at once the center and circumference in this world her insanity-rather she is sane, historical or insane-fills the whole book and gives it form as well as life ”.(Prof.K.R.S.Iyengar,16).

Meena Bellapa asserts that it is , “a remarkable attempt to fuse fantasy with perpetual experience”(Meena Bellapa,25).Some critics like Some P.Sharma and Kamal.N.Aswathi point out that Maya despite her over-protective does not seem to be a spoilt woman. She has the capacity to differentiate between her childhood friends, the indulgence of her doting father and clamorous demands of her lawyer husband. (Orient Paperbacks,24).

In “Cry, the Peacock”, Antia desai has explored skillfully an enduring existentialist predicament with her profound understanding of human psychology. As Shanta krishnaswamy says,“Cry, the Peacock” is the story of marital discord imbued with a strong streak of neurotic fantasy on the part of the women and the corresponding phlegmatic and solid attitude on the part of the husband”.(Shanta KrishnaSwamy, 1984, 244)

In the novel Maya complains that her husband does not love her so much as she wanted him to. Here she compares herself to the peacock. This image is remarkable relevant to the very theme of the novel. Gautama her lover miserably fails not only to feel the intensity of her inner most craving but also to listen to the pathetic cry of her anguished soul and thus when she murders him in the end, she in a way symbolically substantiates this very agonised cry of the peacock, carving for the love of its mate.

If one of the major themes of the book is a clash of the two irreconcilable temperaments-the one poetic and other philosophical-the novel is replete with incidence which highlight this lack of communication between the two . There is a kind of naturalistic inexorableness about the whole story.The feeling to be expressed is so subtle or complex that a few lines of prose or verse are not enough to convey them without distortion.Maya’s character arouses in the the reader their fighting spirit, their tenderness, their sense of tragedy, their laughter, their superstitiousness, their cupidity, their sensuousness, their piety.

Anita Desai’s novel ‘Cry, The Peacock’ deals with what Ortega y Gasset called the terror of facing ,single handed

ferocious assaults of existence-Desai's protagonist are persons 'for whom aloneness alone' is 'the sole natural condition, aloneness alone the treasure worth treasuring'. Her heroine is a fragile introvert 'trapped in her own skins'. Her emotional traumas lead to violent death in the end Maya is obsessed with death and hunted by astrological prediction that her marriage is going to end in its fourth year, with the death of either wife or husband; her husband is unsentimental, matter-of-fact and twice her age. There are no children of the marriage and this accentuates Maya's isolation which becomes total when she murders her husband in a fit of insane fury. The symbolism of the peacock, whose 'dance of joy is the dance of death' has however no adequate relevance to Maya's flight.

The author tries to communicate through her novel how a sensitive, poetic, demanding, young woman from a rich family, safely protected from the ugly things of life, having the imagination and leisure to observe the beautiful things in life and, in love with life, is frightened by the prospect of death. She is obsessed with the dread of an impending disaster and is tottering on the brink of insanity. The most remarkable thing about the novel is the building up of the tension of presenting the hideous transformation of a sensitive poetic young woman into an insane individual.

Through the dance of the peacock the heroine was able to foresee her destruction. The dance of the peacock serves as the vehicle through which the tenor, the real situation is conveyed. The Peacock stands for the heroine and her mental state, her thinking stands for the dance. The dance portrays the very nature of the heroine. Just as the peacocks search for their mates, Maya longs for the love of her husband.

As the peacocks tear themselves to bleeding shreds in the act of love, Maya too is tortured by her own thoughts and feelings when she is disappointed by the acts of Gautama and when she is not able to get enough from him. As the peacocks scream with agony at the death of love, Maya does. When she finds that her husband is a man of detachment, who had not lived and would never live this screaming turns into the act of murder. The darkness found between each eye in the thousand-eyed tails speaks of distance, separation, loneliness—that each one is isolated from the other by so many things.

It was not the peacocks which screamed at the sight of the rain clouds, but it was Maya who screamed at her life's destiny. Screamed at their disappearance stands for the disappointments in life – screaming in mute horror, foreseeing death stands as a matter of existence. As each one of the thousand eyes upon their shimmering feathers were gazing steadfastly upon the final truth – death, so was Maya aware of every step she was taking leading to the final destruction. She was aware that both her life and that of the peacock were lives led on a wasteland where final destruction remained a challenge.

The dance of the cabaret-girls is not simply something vulgar and debasing. Maya regards it as another reminder of an approaching and inevitable disaster. It becomes the simple of an inescapable fatality. "danger, danger....the warning came whispering over a vast distance to me, struggling through the maze of truths and lies in the nightmarish disguise". Here through the dance we are made to visualise the building-up of tension, of presenting the hideous transformation of a sensitive, poetic young woman into an insane individual.

Gautam's mother is a woman of hard work. She was for social service. She had her own dispensary, her crèche, her workshop for the blind, the disabled, the unemployed. She was ready to render her helping hand to all even at her old age. This attitude of hers was only due to the recognition she received which Maya failed to get. As Engel quotes, women are originally equal to, if not more powerful than man in communal forms of production with matrilineal family organizations. Women lose power when private property comes into existence as a mode of protection. Men's control of private property, and the ability thereby to generate a surplus, change the life of a woman who always becomes the property of the father or

husband.(the origin of the family, private property and the state ,1942)

Gautama for her represents the male-centered materialistic civilization and culture.act of murdering her husband due to her obsessive love of life, represents the revolt against callous materialistic social order. Maya believes that she is not fit for this world based on male-centered social order, male-centered wisdom, reason and order, and logic and normality. Her revolt against the social order is an aesthetic revolt- the revolt of sensibility against the chain of slavery.

Maya represents the disturbed psyche of modern Indian woman. She tries to strict a balance between instinctual needs and intellectual aspirations. Deeply exhausted by this crucial act, When she experiences loneliness and lack of communication .Feminine studies shows that Indian woman-passive or aggressive, traditional or modern reflect the writer's sense of isolation, fear, bewilderment and emotional vulnerability ,and their love for reality and salvation .They are not only symbol of growth, life and fertility, but of withdrawal, regression, decay and death. She is powerful figure protesting against social and sexual inequalities and discrimination.

Liberal, Marxist and radical feminists have all characterized woman as doubly alienated in capitalism because of the public/private split that relegates their work as mother and house workers to the home, and psychologically denies them full personhood. Citizenship and human rights.Millet assets that patriarchal authority has given woman a minority status that inflicts on her a "self-hatred and self rejection, a contempt both herself and for her fellows." (Kate Millett, 55).

CONCLUSIONS

Desai through her protagonist tries to project feminine theory that women must develop determination to speak and act in public she must learn to fight her fears, must recognize her full personhood, citizenship and human rights. When women makes it up against patriarchal order she will definitely reinstate and redefine herself.

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