

Marital disharmony: A Central Issue in Anita Desai's Cry, The Peacock

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Abstract

Anita Desai is a very renowned figure as far as the Indian writing in English is concerned. She, one of the leading women novelists, is specially noted for her aware description of the inside living of the female characters in her writings. With her very first novel, Cry, The Peacock, she established herself as a successful novelist.

The novel is about marital conflict resulting in dejected, lonely and demoralized life on the part of wife, namely Maya who is the central character of the novel. Her own world and marital expectations collide with the practical and detached world of the husband Gautama. Maya has unwillingly to succumb to the patriarchal demands of the society and to suffer.

In almost all her works, Anita Desai treats life of Indian women and their suffering. That is why she is labelled as feminist writer though she is realistic writer. She deals with the problems faced by the women especially in Indian patriarchal society where they are always advised to compromise with the situation and circumstances after marriage.

Both physically and mentally, she remains unsatisfied. Nobody is there to take care of her or to understand her except her own pleasant past. Maya's internal conflict resulting in psychosis has been very beautifully presented by Anita Desai. In many ways, through the character of Maya, she represents Indian woman and their post-marital sufferings. Author is successful in putting before us the live picture of marital disharmony prevailing in Indian society.

Key Words: Marital Disharmony, Detachment, Patriarchy.

Introduction:

Among all the Indian women writers in English, Anita Desai can be ranked first. She was the pioneer in this field upholding the problems faced by Indian women. Her flowering career as a novelist started with 'Cry, The Peacock' in 1963 which was followed by many more. Her very first novel established her as a successful novelist and attracted the attention of the critic.

She has been petite scheduled for Booker Prize thrice and won the Sahitya Academy Award for her second novel, Fire on the Mountain, in 1978. Familial relationships and evolution

have been the main themes of her fiction. The contemporary India is aptly illustrated in her writings. The patriarchal culture, the personal conflict of self of the women of the Indian society gain a measurement in the hands of Anita Desai. Psychological development of the character is the basic crux which dominates almost all her works.

Themes in her novels:

Almost all of her novels are based on man-woman relationships, family problems and the problems faced by women. In her novels *Where Shall we Go This Summer?*, *Voices in the City*, *Fire on the Mountain* and *Cry; The Peacock*, she has dealt with the theme of suffering of women. Her novel *Cry; The Peacock*, she has treated marital conflict and its fatal consequences. The novel is set in completely Indian background focusing particularly on its marriage system, man-woman relationship and so on. The novel moves round the central female protagonist Maya.

Issue of Marital Disharmony in the novel

Maya is married to an older man, a detached, industrious lawyer, Gautama. It was not her choice. It was rather an adjustment to respect her father's feelings. She has to succumb to her father's insistence and to marry Gautama. Authoress here shows the hollowness of Indian society where girls have no right to choose their life partners. They mostly have to accept the choice of their family. Here we can observe the influence of patriarchy in our society.

Gautama is much older to Maya and is unable to recognize and understand the female sensibility. Maya had so many expectations from her partner both physical and mental. On the other hand Gautama fails to satisfy her. The following lines by Maya clearly show her expectations.

Maya, who was bring happy with huge concern and care for at her father's house, is totally neglected by her husband. He is unable to satisfy her both mentally and physically. To hide his physical disability, he takes the help of the Gita's detachment theory. Here Anita Desai shows the male dominance forcing to accept their views. The condition of Maya is same as that of the central female character in Shashi Deshpande's short story 'Stone Woman' in which she complains why males try to shape the females according to their like and dislikes. Sanjay Kumar in this connection rightly says,

In order to avoid the hovering of her present situation she gets lost in her past. It gives her momentary pleasure and relieves her off her sufferings. But her past reminds her of Albino prophesy and compels her to compare her past life with the present. She tries to find caring love and affection of her father from Gautama who is unable to do the same. We find both of them

standing on two opposite ends and both of them are not aware of each other. His negligence is more responsible for her indulgence and thinking of Albino prophecy.

She could have come out of psychosis with the help of love and care that was missing between them. There is a kind of communication gap between them. She doesn't find any consoling shoulder to share her grief. She is shocked to hear such reply from her father who used to act in accordance with all her desires before her marriage.

Maya gets used to escape into her past as Sita in 'Where Shall We Go This Summer?' escapes into Utopian world. Her frequent visits to her past do not allow her to return to her present. This conflict ultimately leads her almost to insanity very near to permanent escapism. She thinks, Gautama, her father are responsible for her condition as she says,

Maya herself is also responsible for her suffering to some extent. She has adopted a complaining attitude towards her husband, her father and the world too. In addition to this her hyper sensitive and possessive nature restricts her to make a meaningful relationship with her husband. Some co-incidences adds to her misery. Her watching the caged monkeys and Gautama's indifference to it makes her find resemblance between her life and the caged animals. Nila, Gautama's sister's failure of marriage and Pom's dissatisfaction with her married life also adds to the situation. About the marital relationship of Maya and Gautama, Usha Pathania says,

Anita Desai has very beautifully illustrated the concept. Maya expects the same from Gautama. Gautama never realize this thing and unknowingly and knowingly too avoids it. On the other hand Maya is expected to accept the truth as she says,

Till the end she fails to accept it and Gautama too fails to realize Maya's needs. It shows both communication gap as well as disharmony prevailing in their marital life. It eventually leads to catastrophic end of the novel where both meet the same end, end of life and end of suffering. From the very beginning of the novel it was clear that it was rather adjustment than a marriage and it was the root cause of the conflict which grew with time. There was a clash of Maya's emotional world with that of Gautama, an intellectual one. Meenakshi Mukherjee rightly says, 'The major blueprint of this novel is a compare between this woman's reaction to the world through her mind and her husband's reaction throughout his brain power.'³

Conclusion:

Anita Desai, being an Indian, has successfully depicted the Indian woman who is mostly on suffering side in such marital conflicts. First person narration of the novel gives biographical

touch to the novel. Such kind of narration gives closeness to the story. She has an expertise in portraying Indian women characters. Maya is one of its best examples. Her hyper sensitive nature and Gautama rigid attitude lead to tragic end of their marital life through end of their own life.

They were married only by ritual and social norms but the very need of the marital life, harmony is missing between them. The tragedy could have been averted if one of them had adjusted. For this an understanding is necessary, but where there is no harmony, we can not accept understanding. Anita Desai succeeds in presenting before us the real picture of Indian women and a marriage system and effect of patriarchy on marriage.

References:

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