

Feminine Psychology in Anita Desai's Cry, the Peacock: A Critical Study on Psychological Aspects of the Protagonist in the novel.

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Abstract –

Feminism should be defined not merely as social movements carried out for establishing the equality of the feminine gender in society. The concept of womanhood and female psychology is much beyond than social movements and political alliances. The purpose behind this research paper is to differentiate and point out the same and conclude how women psychology is a topic much beyond the normal psychological subjects and why is it crucial to contemplate upon the same. The reference taken here is the protagonist from Anita Desai's novel – Cry, the Peacock, a woman named Maya whose psychological conflicts, despair and hopelessness from her life as well as her marital discord leads towards her tragic end and to establish a connection between the significance of women psychology and the disastrous consequences that can occur if the subject is not deeply contemplated upon. Moreover, the paper aims to study the critical aspects of a woman's psycho-social conditions by critically analyzing the mental conditions and mindset of the protagonist, Maya in the novel and the impact of her childhood and adolescent memories in her later stages of life, even after her marriage. The paper also aims at presenting the impact of the society and people living nearby through the character of Maya, who affect the mindset of a woman and the support or criticism she faces when she expresses her true feelings or emotions about her life and when she reflects her accurate mindset.

Keywords –Anita Desai, Cry the peacock, neurosis, psychosis, psychology, feminine, womanhood, Psychological Conflicts, Marriage, neurotic

Introduction –

Anita Desai, born as Anita Mazumdar is a prolific writer and has 10 prestigious novels under her name and is garnished with various prestigious national and international awards and other recognitions. Her daughter, Kiran Desai is also a renowned writer of fiction. Anita Desai's novel Cry, the peacock grabbed attention of many readers around the world especially the one with an added interest in psychology and psychopathy. Psychopathy is a mental condition in those people who have not just a simple lack of empathy but also those who are mentally unstable; unstable in terms that they are not just vulnerable but also those who are callous and detached due to which psychopaths are often manipulative

in nature. This unbearable strain that she carries in her heart, she mentions in her words when she felt that strain has been then into suppression of desires and dreams, she expresses:

Yet they had been friends -Gautama almost a protege of my father, who had admired him and, I believed, still did. Coming slowly up on his bicycle, in the evenings, it was my father Gautama used to come to call upon, and had it not been for the quickening passion with which I met, half-way, my father's proposal that I marry this tall, stooped and knowledgeable friend of his, one might have said that our marriage was grounded upon the friendship of the t

wo men, and the mutual respect in which they held each other, rather than upon anything else. To watch this respect being broken, reduced, or, at any rate, concealed, at a steadily growing rate, by Gautama, had been almost the most searing pain of the first year of our marriage, especially as I knew that I was, in some way, responsible for it. But now I had a headache, such a fierce headache, I really could not bear to worry about it any longer (Cry, the Peacock, p. 34).

Thus, we find how a rifted self of Maya on account of various strands in her life goes through a pitiable psychological phase, which has been explored by various researchers as a case study not only from the discipline of psychology and its streams, but also in social-cultural terms such case study expressed through a fictional framework creates a discursive forum for scholarly purpose. Below are some of the referenced review of existing literature that foregrounds the study of the research paper on the topic: Feminine Psychology of

the Protagonist of the Novel 'Cry, the Peacock' by Anita Desai.

Most people who can relate with a situation like this can easily relate with the character of Maya, the protagonist in the novel Cry, the peacock. The similarities in the mentality of such people will call themselves similar to Maya and find themselves in a situation similar with that of Maya. Although, the factor of father-fixation or the theory of Oedipus Complex as defined by Sigmund Freud in the study of psycho-analysis is rare to find, but no one can ever find out the dimensions of psychology. Similarly, through this novel, not just the factor of women psychology is displayed but also the budding factor of psycho-analytical concept of father-fixation or any other form of Oedipus Complex is also highlighted. So, it can be said that through this research paper, the themes of both women psychology and her mental conditions pre- and post-marital alliance which leads to tragic ends are highlighted. The delusional and deluded construction of Maya's character in the novel has highlighted the psycho-analytical dimension of a woman's mindset and the level up to which neurosis can reach. Ultimately, the tragic end of the novel shows the adversity of those suffering from a neurotic condition.

Review of Literature –

Name of the Journal.	Title of the Paper.	Author(s).	Year of Publication.
Psychology of Women Quarterly.	Psychology, Women and Social Issue Research.	Phyllis A. Kats.	2006.
International Journal of English and Literature (IJEL).	Temperamental Incompatibility in Anita Desai's Cry, the peacock.	Rumita Sharma.	2012.
Research Scholar – An International Journal of Literacy Explorations.	Feminist Approach in Anita Desai's Cry, the peacock.	Rajesh Sakharam Gore.	2013.
Scientific Research.	Depressive Expression and anti-depressive Protection in Adolescence: Stress, Positive Affect, Motivation and Self-Efficacy.	Mats Lindahl, Trevor Archer.	2013.
Indian Journal of Applied Research.	Psycho-social Aspects of Infertility.	N. Jessie Priyanka, Dr. K. Jayashankar Reddy.	2013.

IOSR – Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences.	Feminine Sensibility in Anita Desai’s Cry, the peacock.	Bilquees Dar, University of Kashmir.	2013.
University of Liverpool.	An Introduction to the Psychology of Women.	Sergio A. Silverio.	2015.
International Journal of Multifaceted and Multilingual Studies.	Thematic Study of Anita Desai’s Cry, the peacock and Where shall we go this summer?	Amir Mohammad Reza Taheri, Dr. V.A. Rankhambe.	2015.
International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities (IJELLAH).	Marriage Conflict characterized in Anita Desai’s Cry, the peacock.	Dr. Anugrah Tiwari.	2015.
IMPACT: International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Literature.	A Psychological Conflict in Anita Desai’s Cry, the peacock.	Manu Verma.	2016.
IOSR – JHSS	Neurosis and the Incompatible Marriage: An Analysis of Anita Desai’s Cry, the peacock.	Asmat Jahan, Shaifita Ayoub.	2016.
Bharat Institute of Engineering and Technology, Telangana.	Desai’s Women and their portrayal in the Patriarchal Society.	Batool Fatima Khaleel.	2016.
IJELLAH	Ordeals of Suppressed Womanhood in the novel Cry, the peacock by Anita Desai.	Tarne N. Kulshrestha, Raj K. Dhar and Shriya Goyal.	2016.
International Journal of Engineering Research and Technology (IJERT).	A study of Anita Desai’s Protagonists – Maya and Sita in reference to Cry, the peacock and Where shall we go this summer?	Suman Singh, Vandana Popli.	2017.
The Creative Journal.	A Feminist Study of Maya’s Predicament in Anita Desai’s Cry, the peacock.	Dr. Shantilal I. Ghegade.	2017.
International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences.	Cry, the peacock: Portrayal of Feminine and Masculine Doctrines.	Dr. Shashikala P.	2018.
Pramana Research Journal.	Cry for self-esteem: A Psychological study of Anita Desai’s Maya in Cry, the peacock.	Dr. Sangeetha Noval, Ms. Prerna Shrivastava.	2018.
International Journal of Academic Research and Development.	Maya’s Cry for sleep in Anita Desai’s Cry, the peacock.	—	—

Maya’s Psychological Conflicts: An Insight into Maya’s Inner Conscience –

Maya, a young and once able-minded girl gets married to Gautam, a well-settled advocated with good reputation and stature. But as all that shines is not gold, similarly, Gautam was not all gold and Maya's marital life wasn't shining either. In Sanskrit Maya means "illusion", and is also an alternate name of the Hindu goddess Durga. According to tradition, Queen Maya of Sakya was the name of the mother of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha. (Mount Maya is a Japanese mountain named for the mother of Buddha.) [1].

The novel opens with Maya sitting in the corridor of her house, full of tears and gloom because of the death of her dear dog. She was so attached with the pet as if it was her child. Her husband Gautam comes in and tries to cheer her up but all in vain. Maya couldn't be cheered up not because she was traumatized with the death of her pet. But because she could not relate with Gautam's practicality and casual attitude about this. Just the way Gautam could not relate with Maya's attachment and love for the pet. That dog was the only creature which Maya thought of as her own. Her mother already been dead for years and brother living abroad, Maya was only attached to her father in a really complex manner. She had developed a father-fixation for her father. She had a feeling that no one in the world, not even Gautam can love her the way her father loved her. No one can caress and strengthen her the way her father did. No one could hold her the way her father did. Although, all this was in Maya's head, but still, she suffered and her marital discord with Gautam were somehow because of this illusion of hers. Gautam blamed her father for spoiling her too much and accused her of being neurotic.

However, the main reason behind Maya's neurosis was not the death of her pet or her undying craving for her father, but the astrology she heard from the Albino man. The Albino guy, an astrologer who predicted death of either Maya or Gautam after 4 years of their marriage haunted her memories so badly, that she was scared day and night about that prediction coming true.

All the surrounding sounds – like the sound of a crying peacock, drum beats and even the Kathakali dancers and their expressions recalled this prediction in loud words in her mind. As it is said, brain is the master part of our body, Maya's brain was like the parasite who fed on her. Gradually, she turned neurotic and became scared of death. Or in other words, looking at her psychological condition, we can say that she became scared of living for even another day of her life.

Maya's Dissatisfactions: Hopelessness and Despair –

Hopelessness and Despair – these were the two permanent companions of Maya. Gautam could be the one for her, but he wasn't and he could probably never be. The reason behind Maya's psychological disorder and her neurosis was the lack of any romance from Gautam's side. Because Gautam, as the name suggests, was rid of any illusions and did not believe in the perspective of love the way Maya did. For him, love was a thing for the weak and foolish. He although tried his hard to keep Maya happy, but he did not try his best. And that drove Maya into a state of total madness and psychosis. In addition to this, the only factor that could worsen up her mental condition was the lack of physical love. She was not just mentally dissatisfied with Gautam, but also didn't get the love she dreamt of from Gautam. Her body and mind both craved for love and attention from her husband. But every time she got nothing but despair and more and more hopelessness.

It was not so that Maya didn't try to fight with her condition. She tries her best to get out of this state on her own throughout the novel by meeting her acquaintances, but ultimately, this fight is not meant to be fought alone, so she lost every time until one day, she left all hopes and collapsed, destroying herself and everything around her. With each passing day, Maya's psychological condition kept on worsening and a girl, who once had so many colours in her dreams, so many hopes from life and so many expectations from her husband, was left with nothing but hopelessness on one side and despair on the other end. Maya was hanging in between these two places where there was valley on one side and a deep well on the other, so death was for sure and inevitable for her.

Maya: An Existential and an Alienated Character –

1. Existential Crisis of Maya –

Existential Crisis which is also known as Existential Dread are those moments in one's life when the individual starts questioning if his/her life has some meaning or purpose and are negatively impacted by contemplation. This type of a psychological disorder is

sometimes, though not necessarily tied up to depression or inevitably negative speculations on the purpose of life. Some probable reasons which may provoke this psychological disorder in people are various life events like a psychological trauma, marriage, separation, major loss, a life-threatening experience, a new found love, use

of psychoactive drugs, adult children leaving home or reaching a personally significant age (18 or 30 etc.). This existential crisis can be handled by either anchoring, isolating, sublimating or by distracting ourselves. Some believe that existential crisis is actually a good thing – a burden of gifted individuals and deep thinkers which sets them apart from those who don't think deeply about life.

Talking in context of the protagonist in this novel, Maya, it is evident that she was as well suffering from an existential crisis, but she was not in any way psychotic or neurotic. When we label Maya as psychotic, we fail to understand her fears, her nervousness, her anxieties and her undying quench for satisfying love, the kind of love she received from her father which Gautam failed to bestow upon her. As a matter of fact, Maya tried to save her marriage and stay normal with Gautam, but due to Gautam's lack of attention towards her, she ended up killing Gautam and later herself. If Maya would be psychotic, she wouldn't have been able to try and normalize herself and neither she'd be able to socialize with anyone. Hence, it is evident that Maya was afraid of the Albino astrologer's prediction about her marriage and the cry of the peacock and other dreams she had of creeping and crawling animals were all a result of her fear of the end and not because she was psychotic.

2. Maya as an alienated character –

Alienation is a condition defined as emotional isolation or dissociation from others. People who are alienated are

separated from their loved ones both physically and psychologically. Alienation may be due to a strong psychological shock or trauma occurring as a result of many reasons such as death of a loved one, separation, an accident or any other mental thump. Maya was suffering from severe alienation not just from her family and husband but also from herself. Maya's isolation from Gautam and herself proved to be very disastrous. To add more to the complexity of her sickness, Maya was bestowed with a prediction by an Albino astrologer that after 4 years of her marriage, either she or Gautam will die. Maya got so terrified with this prediction that she thought to herself that it'd be better if she killed Gautam and saved herself. But unfortunately, things turned reverse and Maya killed both Gautam and herself. All these incidents from the novel prove that Maya was an existential and alienated character and her tragic end was inevitable considering her mental character. In fact, in the novel, Maya herself says "And all the while I thought of Gautama.... Had there been a bond between us he would have felt its pull, I thought of him so deeply. But, of course, there was none... There was no bond, no love...." (Cry, the Peacock 108).[2]

Maya admits frankly of her sexual dissatisfaction born of Gautama's unpardonable negligence: "How little he knew of my suffering, 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".[3]

To sum up in the words of Meena Belliappa: "The ardent introspection of Maya marks a valuable introversion in Indian fiction. It points to a line of significant development—exploration not of the 'social' man, but 'the lone individual'.[4]

Works Cited –

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[2] http://creationandcriticism.com/tragic_pattern_in_anita_desais_cry_the_peacock_by_s_k_garg.html

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