

PESSIMISM" IN ANITA DESAI'S NOVEL CRY, THE PEACOCK



English

KEYWORDS:

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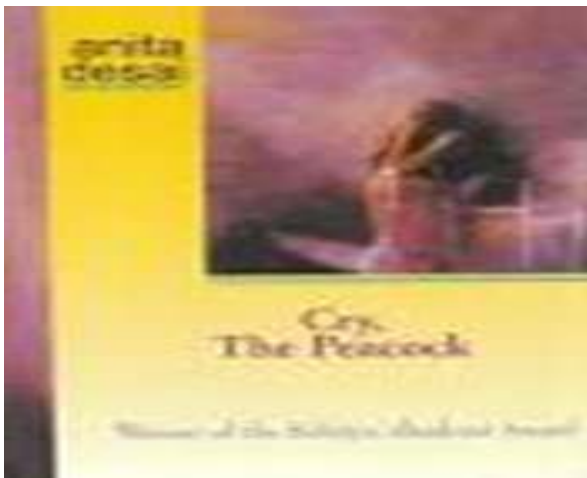
ABSTRACT

Anita Desai focuses on personal struggles and problems of contemporary life that her Indian characters must cope with. Her protagonists show loneliness as the only natural condition which maintains regularity in the flow of life. It is also discerned that their fragile introversion is trapped in their own skins: they think, feel, and act with their pessimistic vision of life. Desai's fictive world shows us a psychological state of mind. It evinces how men, women, and children come to develop the sense of despair, frustration, disillusionment, and negation. In *Cry, the Peacock*, Anita Desai presents pessimism unweaving the web of husband-wife relationship. This pessimism brings about unhappy changes in their relationship.

Anita Desai is one of the world's best-known authors, and a writer who has influenced generations of writers. Desai is part of a new literary tradition of Indian writing in English, which dates back only to the 30's or 40's. Throughout her novel's, children's books, and short stories Desai focuses on sense of loss. There is hardly any novel of Anita Desai which pulsates with humor, laughter, and smiles. Anita Desai deals with painful, pitiable, and futile affairs of life. The psychology of her leading characters is shaped and fashioned by their frustration and disillusionment, as there is the pronounced note of pessimism in her novels.

Prasad rightly says, "Anita Desai took the literary world by storm with her very first novel, *Cry, the Peacock*, which

Advance from the vision of 'aloneness' as a psychological state of mind to that



apparently strikes the reader as a poetic place."1 Apart from her poetic sensibility, it is her keen perception of reality and her powerful imagination that have gone a long way to shape and fashion the nature and extent of her theme of pessimism within the limits of life—in India. Nevertheless, Naik holds that if Anita Desai's fiction is "able toof pessimism as a metaphysical enigma and one hopes it will-Anita Desai may one day achieve an amplified pattern of significant exploration of consciousness comparable to Virginia Woolf at her best."2 It is evident how, in *Cry, the Peacock*, like all her novels writer's preoccupation with a sense of loss and pessimism prevails over her overall spectrum.

What actually accounts for its artistic beauty and excellence can be seen in how the novelist can bound together the causes and consequences of the negation of fulfillment in a young girl, Maya, who is obsessed by a childhood prophecy of disaster which can't be averted, and she, as a married women, develops marital discord imbues with a

strong streak of neurotic fantasy on her part. The novelist says; "I think of the world as an ice-berg, the one-tenth visible above the surface of the water is what we call reality, but the nine-tenths that are submerged make up the truth, and that is what one is trying to explore."

The opening part of the novel depicts the cause of Maya's neurosis;"All day the body lay rotting in the sun. It could not be moved onto the verandah for, in that April best, the reek of dead flesh was overpowering and would soon have penetrated the rules. So she moved the little string bed of which it lay under the lime trees, where there was a cool shade. say it's eyes open and staring still, screamed and rushed to the garden tap to wash the vision from her eyes, continued to cry and ran, defeated, into the house(CTP)". Maya headed towards pessimism just because she could not bear with the death of Toto, the pet dog.

Part-2 opens with the hint at Maya's abnormal psychology;"There remained certain unease, a hesitance in the air, which kept the tears swimming in my eyes and prevented their release. I was not allowed the healing passion of a fit of crying that would have left me exhausted, sleep-washed and becalmed (CTP)". Emphasis on the gulf between life and death is the cornerstone of alienation, despair and introversion. It is unfortunate that Maya's husband, Gautam, could not think in terms of death and it's ugliness;"I crept into a corner of the bed, crouched there, thinking that it perhaps because of Gautam not understanding (CTP)".

Gautam never tried to know what concerned Maya. He could not know her misery, nor did he know how to comfort her. Maya rightly says, "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 of gold and jolted me in to smiling with pleasure each time I show it. Telling me to go to sleep while he worked at his papers, he didn't give another thought to me, to either the soft, willing body, or the lonely, wanting mind that waited near his bed (CTP)". "Childless women, says Maya "do develop fanatic attachments to their pets, they say (CTP)". Maya was doubtful about the future; she could not hope for having a child in future. When Maya and Gautam strolled up and down, they felt of "the peace that comes from companion life alone, from brother flesh (CTP)". Maya feels that contact, relationship, and communion are necessary for eluding the nets of negation. The prophesy too was responsible for making Maya morbid and negative. Maya wanted Gautam to share her happiness. When she went to rouse Gautam from the couch, with a touch, she saw that he had closed his eyes not with mere tiredness but in profound, invulnerable sleep, and was very far from any world of hers, however enticing." I hesitated, wishing to summon him to me, yet knowing he could never join me. It was of no use. After all I sighted and, once more, was sad(CTP)". Maya heard peacocks calling in the wilds, and the idea of their love-life flashed before her mind's eye.:"before they mate they fight...Living, they are aware of death. Dying, they are in love with life(CTP)". The effect of pessimism is seen in Mayas endless introspec-

tion: "I m gone insane...Who is my savior? I m need of one .I m dying, and I min love with living God, let me asleep, forget, rest .But no, I'll never sleep again .There is no rest any more-only death and waiting (CTP)".Gautam sleeps soundly, and his wife is wide awake. Maya does not find any good in their husband wife relationship. Therefore, the darkness of the night makes her rightly feel that "our caged in this room what I hated- severe without even the grace of symmetry (CTP)".For want of reciprocal liking, love and understanding, Maya is an engulfed by pessimism, she is thirsty for her right to be a real partner of her husband.

Gautam could leave his own world, and identified himself with his friends who belong to another world: and the question is why he could not belong to Maya's world. "Already we belong to separated worlds, and his seemed the earth that I loved so scented with Jasmine, colored with liquor, resounding with poetry and warmed by amiability .It was mine that was hell;torture,guilt,dread, imprisonment these were four walls of my private hell, one that no one could survive in long. Death was certain (CTP)".Nevertheless Maya could not determine if these were the destinies that have been chosen for them ,nor could she confirm if Gautam was fated to live on in this world that daily grew more desirable ,and she to unite and die in the cruelest of hells. What she wanted was the right to touch him, feel his flesh and hair, hold, and tighten her hold on him.

Pessimism has been cankering husband wife relationship .Maya's question and qualms are indicative of her agony, and it is this agony that has made her pessimistic towards her husband. She realizes, with a sense of disappointment that her pessimism was paramount and therefore she kept silent. Not to speak of serious affairs touching Maya and Gautam's conjugal relationship, even petty matters like Arjuna's departure and arrival could not received their common covenant .Gautam's mother wanted to take back Maya, to Calcutta with her, but Maya decline to go to Calcutta, she was again alone, and she said of herself:"Maya-my very name means nothing, nothing but an illusion (CTP)".Maya's pessimism, as it was, brought the tragic end of her husband's life .And her death as given in part 3 of the novel, and was imminent. The husband-wife pessimism engendered by the temperamental incompatibility between Maya and Gautam forms the very core of the novel. Both Gautam and Maya are conscious of what they need, but they seldom care to know and offer what the other needs and demands .This kind of attitude to each other goes on creating pessimistic air in domestic life and this pessimism brings about unhappy changes in their relationship

In Cry, the Peacock, Anita Desai presents pessimism unweaving the web of husband-wife relationship .The widely different individuals, Maya and Gautam were united in marriage: as such they are unable to lead a harmonious and purposeful domestic life; marital discord is the result of Maya's strong neurotic fantasy and Gautam's phlegmatic and stolid attitude. Maya is capable of absorption though she can't organize it in to a pattern; and Gautam is incapable of making that distinction in his own life that he elaborates so assiduously before his wife. This paper helps us to notice distance between Maya and Gautam as wife and husband which remains in their thoughts, feeling, and actions. It may further be emphasized that the pessimism between the two arises because knowledge exist for Gautam unrelated to the mystery of existence.

REFERENCE

- 1.Madhusudan Prasad ,Anita Desai: The novelist (Allahabad: New horizon, 1981),p.21|2.M.K Naik, A history of Indian English literature (New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 1983, p.243.3.Anita Desai, Cry the Peacock (New Delhi, Orient Paperbacks, 1983).