

ANITA DESAI'S CRY, THE PEACOCK AS PSYCHOLOGICAL NOVEL

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Abstract:

Anita Desai is one of the prominent Indo-Anglian novelists. She is a prolific authoress, as she has written ten novels and a dozen of short stories within a short period of about thirty years. A study of her works will reveal that she tries to explore the psychological state of her characters, because she thinks that the inner life of a man or a woman decides his or her character more than the external conditions of life. In this we can see her women psychic issues and pictural qualities.

Keywords: Psychological, novel, social purpose, neurosis.

Anita Desai is of the view that the inner life of a man or a woman largely decides the fate of that of that person. Cry, the Peacock charts out the psychological state of both the main characters, Maya and Gautama though Maya is by and large the central character of this novel.

Daughter of a Doting Father

The main problem of Maya is that her doting father had rendered her unfit to live in a middle class society. Maya remembers that her father had pampered her by treating her as a

princess-“As a child, I enjoyed, princess-like, a sumptuous fare of the fantasies of the Arabian Nights, the glories and bravado of the Indian mythology, long and astounding tales of the princess and regal queens..... People say he spoils me..... I can get anything I want from him.”

Maya was a motherless child. It was perhaps for this reason that the father showered all his love on her. She had the best of life that one could imagine. She used to stroll with her father amidst the vegetation, and would wait for her father under bugainvillaea if he was called by a visitor. There she enjoyed the light turning from black to mouve to purple, from peach to orange to crimson. Her father had shown her a ruby saying it would be hers when she was old enough to attend her first grown up party, if she would stop crying.

Insulated From Realities

Her father had kept her away from all harsh and unpleasant realities of life. Maya recalls that once her father was speaking to someone angrily, called him a “charlatan”. When Maya wanted to know what the matter was he replied, “what would it mean to you if I told you of a naughty cleark, or a lying client. ” To save her from the heat of the summer, he would take her to Darjeeling or any other hill station of her choice.

Her father had given her full freedom to do whatever she liked to keep herself happy and gay and would never show annoyance howsoever trying she would become. She would play battledore-and-shuttlecock with small oranges which would fall down broken, egg like, on the grass, but her father would only laugh to see her leap and fly. She remembers-“It is only from me that he tolerates such things.”

Fastidious Tastes

Under the loving care of her father Maya learnt to be fastidious and squeamish. Seeing the ditched wife of Sapru, her friend, she asked, “why was she wearing a dirty sari?” and added “she hadn’t even done her hair.” Her father was delighted to see that she had inherited his fastidious tastes.

Her regard for her Father

As her father treated her with utmost and care, she also thought that she had the best of a father under the sky. She observes that “her father is like a Moghul garden, gracious and

exact, where breeding culture, leisure and comfort have been brought to a nice art..... As the streams in Moghul garden flow musically through channels of carved marble and sandstone, so his thoughts, his life, flow, broken into small, exquisite patterns by the carving, played upon by altering nuances of light and shade, but never over-stepping their limitations, never breaking their bounds, always moving onwards with the same graceful cadence.”

This poetic out-flow in the description of her father indicates that father-daughter relationship was on the highest pitch, bordering on an obsession.

Marriage with Gautama

It is not difficult to presume that a princess like her will find it difficult to be at peace with the world, more so in the family of Gautama. Maya was married to Gautama who was a protégé of her father, who admired him. Her father proposed that she should marry with Gautama, who was “tall, stooped and knowledgeable friend of his.” Maya thinks that her marriage “was grounded upon the friendship of the two men and the mutual respect they held for each other.” She also met her father’s proposal half-way with a “quickning passion”.

In this new life with her husband, Maya finds that Gautama had never been able “to go away for the summer.” To her it was “unmasked misanthropy” when Gautama brushed her off on being requested to take her to south summers. It caused “the most searing pain of the first year of our marriage.”

Couldn’t get love of the husband and in-laws

She was further disconcerted to see that Gautama is bereft of the emotion of love, while her father had inured her to love. She is shocked to find love has no place in the family of Gautama. She observes: “In Gautama’s family, one did not speak of love, far less of affection.” The discussions in the family were held on the proceedings in the parliament, prevailing corruption, editorials in the newspapers and so on, but none talked of personal feelings, love or affection. Gautama’s father was engrossed in freedom movement, and his mother had dedicated herself to such social activities as taking care of pariah pups, a crèche, a dispensary, gathering funds, keeping accounts, etc. etc. They considered Maya as a toy, “Their indulgence, not to be taken seriously, and the world I came from was less than that-it was a luxury they considered a crime to suffer, and so damned it with dismissal.”

In for a Shock

As she compares her life in her husband's house with that which she had in her father's house, she is greatly distressed. She said in anguish, "I will never go there again, I will never go there again." She believes, "It was not for them that I longed with the fiercest desire." When she said that she wanted to go to see her father, Gautama's towel with which he was wiping hands fell down "like a limp dead bird thrown down." Her father appeared before her because she had never witnessed such violence from her father.

Father's Helplessness

The situation became unbearable when her fatalist father said with a deep sigh of sorrow, "You will learn one day, Maya, that these things you must put up with. If one cannot do anything about them, why not accept?" Her father could not realise that his daughter was in a great distress. It was now a question of life and death for her. How could she accept it "when it is a question of death"? She was so dejected and desperate in the beginning of her married life.

A Princess is Married to a Peasant

Gautama is no company for Maya. They are mis-matched. A peasant is married to a princess as far as the tastes are concerned. Gautama took Maya to Mrs. Lal's party, where there was none of fine tastes. Ladies were interested in showing off their wealth and laughing at the hostess for not being able to employ an Aya for her little son. They made vulgar remarks at the cabaret dancers. Mr. Lal had no regard for his wife and Sardar Harbans Singh made non-sensical statements about his knowledge of astrology. The party on the whole was abominable. Maya cried, "I have to go, Gautama, I must go." But Gautama had no complaints. On the contrary he said that Mr. Lal was a very shrewd businessman.

The cabaret dancers reminded her of the bear-show, she had seen-the bear balancing on his tired feet with his snout up on the air. She took pity on the beast and gave him bananas to eat. The similar feelings she had for the cabaret dancers, but she was angry with those who did not have any feelings for their lives-"I am so sorry for anyone-yes, even you, unsuspecting husband-who misses it. it is like spending seventy years of one's life in a grave-yard-being born in one, and dying in one. It is a waste-a waste. And one life time is so short, it's over before you know it."

A Frigid Husband

Maya had like other women a desire for sex and also for a child. She had several images of man-woman relationship in her mind. A man winked to a woman who followed him to a shuttered house. She had heard the peacocks and peahens crying “Pia, Pia”, lover, lover. But Gautama was fast asleep invulnerably before she came to him after changing her dress. This summoned the vision of the “tenebrific Albino”, who had caught her in the net spread for her. As she was motherless, she remained childless all her life.

Depression

Incidents after incidents occur to shock the fine sensibilities of Maya. She had the desire to attend the Mushaiyra going on outside her room, but a woman had no place among men, no matter she had greater capability to appreciate the urdu couplets. She found that Gautama in particular had asked her by his gestures that she should not stay. She was shocked as if “I had truly found a blemish in my unscarred skin.” She felt that Gautama had no love for her because she didn’t have the longish face of a learned woman.

A Misconceived Notion

To add insult to injury, he made a long speech against the sentiment of love, laced with the quotation from the Gita, to tell Maya that she should not expect love which he calls attachment, from him. He did not know that Krishna had love for all, even for those whom he had to kill to make them free from their vicious lives of sin.

Arjuna’s Letter Endorsed Gautama’s View-Point

Maya was already disenchanted by Gautama’s lack of emotions, manners, and tastes when she received a letter from her brother, Arjuna, who had left the house at the age of twenty-two. When he was at home he took no interest in the life of ease and comfort that his father and Maya were living. He refreshed her memory of the horoscope which was once cast for her. She was also reminded of the prediction that one of them would die within four years of their marriage. She found that Arjuna’s letter had in a way endorsed Gautama’s view-point about love-“The stagnant days of sentimentalism are available only to the decadent.” This could be the statement of Arjuna as well as Gautama.

Her Fear for Life

As Gautama was bereft of love, she feared that he would kill her if he came to know that one of them was to die within four years of their marriage-“If Gautama found out, would he, might he not put me in peril of my life ?” she became so nervous that she got fierce headache and also the image of albino astrologer.

Gautama’s continued indifference to her advances exasperated her to the degree that she thought, “The man had no contact with the world or with me. What would it matter to him if he died and lost even the possibility of contact ?” she cried with the peacocks for a mate but Gautama did not hear it.

Desperate Maya

This situation agitated her so much that she started feeling the pressure of circumstances on her mind, “Innocence turning to guilt. Lilac to purple. Ochre to ugliness. Step by step.” In her state of desperation she saw her past life in her mind, and bade good bye to her father. when Gautama met her in the evening, she somehow felt that she would not meet him again- “I rose and went up to him, beginning to feel as tenderly solicitous towards him as towards a departing guest who might never be encountered again.”

After a long time she felt that Toto was dead, but to her chagrin, Gautama asked, “Toto ? who was that?” Maya thought that her marriage was “not an empty one”. Gautama taught her pain, “for there were countless nights when I had been tortured by a humiliating sense of neglect, of loneliness, of desperation that would not have existed had I not loved him so, had he not meant so much.” At times she felt “why should I love him ? I wish I did not ?” In the final moments, she and Gautama went up the stairs to have a stroll. Gautama did not notice the odour of limes, the melancholy voice singing somewhere behind the plantains, did not have time to count the stars; he was lost in a case. As had come between her and her moon that she was almost worshipping. As Gautama lost the balance, she could not get hold of him-“I screamed in a fury, and thrust out my arms towards him, into him and past him, saw him fall then, pass through an immensity of air, down to the very bottom.” Thus Gautama died.

Tragic Sense of Guilt

Since Maya had already some uncharitable ideas about him, she thought she was responsible for his death. Maya was a noble woman. Therefore the sense of guilt weighed

very heavy upon her mind and soul. She lost the equilibrium and was brought to the house of her father. Nila and her mother came to take care of her in the absence of her husband and her father, and both the ladies had love and admiration for Maya. The servants and Maya had given their own version of the story of Gautama's death, but Nila discounted the story, saying "It was an accident", since she had observed that Maya was "an affectionate child who met them at the door when they came to her in that still, secretive house of death", and had felt "her feline embrace, with a smile radiating out her swallowing, brilliant eyes...." Finally old lady went to Maya upstairs and both of them "disappeared into the dark quiet."

Conclusion :

The story of Maya is not the story of a neurotic woman, it is the story of sufferings of a noble woman, who was subjected to several psychological jolts which finally threw her off the balance. It was the tragic end of a grief stricken woman. Her father had inured her to a very decent living, but married to a man who was bereft of emotion of love, devoid of such human values as kindness to animals, and lacked in good tastes, yet the father tragically advised his princess daughter to put up with the peasant. All this caused the tragedy.

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