Marital Discord in Anita Desai’s Cry, the Peacock

Abstract

In a male dominated society, a woman is supposed to be an ideal wife, a mother and an excellent homemaker with multifarious role in the family. As wife and mother, service, sacrifice, submissiveness and tolerance are her required attributes. The series of adjustments she makes yet she is not an equal to man. This is the predicament of women all over the World. The status and position of woman degraded and deteriorated with the passage of time. Anita Desai creates characters that experience a terrible isolation in the suffocating darkness of their life in which no communication is possible. The novelist, however, does not challenge the validity of marriage as an institution but discloses the inner psyche of the characters through their relations. In Anita Desai’s novels most marriages are unions of incompatibility. Men are considered rational whereas women are sensitive and emotional. In the Fictional world of Desai, the creed is the value of the individuals and individualism. Anita Desai focuses on the negative side of a woman in Cry, the Peacock (1963). She does not take a positive stand of woman. This paper discusses about the insensitivity of a man and the neurosis of a woman combined together to cause marital disharmony between Maya and Gautama, due to blocked communication and temperamental incompatibility.

1. Introduction

Anita Desai is indisputably one of the most powerful Indian Novelists in English. She is known as a literary genius both in India and abroad. She excels in writing psychologically realistic novels. Her writings reveal the inner realities and psychic reverberations of her character. Her reputation has been steadily rising since the publication of her first novel. In Desai’s Novels most marriages are unions of incompatibility. Men are considered rational where as women are sensitive and
emotional. In the fictional world of Desai, the creed is the value of the individuals and individualism Desai’s female characters are generally neurotic, highly sensitive but alienated, but thrive in the world of dream and fantasy, separated from their surrounding as an outcome of their failure or unwilling to adjust with the present reality.

2. Theme Of The Novel

Cry, the peacock is the story of a hypersensitive young woman, Maya, pitted against a taciturn husband. She lives a life of cute sensibility and dies in her quest to lead a fuller life.

Cry the Peacock is Anita Desai’s first novel, is one the most poetic and evocative Indian novels in English, It gives expression to the long repressed trauma of lacerated psyche, the harrowing tale of an impotent human relationship being told by the protagonist herself. This is a family story mainly concerned with the theme of marital discord between Gautama and his wife, Maya. The fiction is about Maya’s cry for love and relationship in her loveless wedding with Gautama. The Peacock’s cry is an implication of Maya’s anguished cry for love and life.

Desai creates a woman highly sensitive and emotional that is married to Gautama, a man elder to her. He is a man detachment as far as his wife is concerned. He is obsessed with his own affaire. He does not meet with the demands of his wife, Maya, which are party temperamental and party spiritual. Gautama is the friend of Maya’s father. Gautama fails to understand the sensitive nature of Maya, who suffers from father fixation and looks for a typical –father image in her husband, but fails to find him as such. And temperamentally Gautama and Maya are opposed to each other. They belong to different worlds. Hence, this marital bond suffers disintegration. Desai in cry, the peacock presents a typically sensitive woman. Maya is afflicted with neurosis, Jamkhendi puts it succinctly thus:

Maya’s distraught mind, her mental writing, and her eventual fall into the labyrinths of insanity… these are the contents of this analytical novel. (The Journal of Indian Writing in English, 36).

Maya stands for the poetry of life, whereas Gautama is for the prosaic in life. As such, cry, the Peacock is typically a novel of sensibility rather than of action, Ann lowery weir rightly assesses the character of Maya in terms of man-woman relationship in the background of Indian ethos and culture. By way of critical estimation of Maya, weir suggests,

Maya is an Indian and her thoughts have an Indians about them, despite their disturbed state, she reflects on Indian weather, Indian flora and fauna, Indian religions and mythical figures… (Pande, Usha, 157).

3. Interior Monologue Technique

The novel deals with the inner life of an individual, much less then with extreme events, It deals with experiences where only the consciousness of an alienated soul matters. The novel is also an investigation of an isolated self. The entire novel deals with the exploration of the psychological conflicts in Maya’s mind. For better projecting the mind conflicts of Maya, Desai employs the interior Montague technique. The novel narrates the Story of Maya’s dull marital relationship with Gautama. The novel is divided into three parts. The first part describes the death of Toto, her pet dog and the reactions of Maya and Gautama. Normally, the beginning of the novel presents the characters and situations in which one episode leads on into another. But is a psychological novel the character look into the past, which leaves deep scars on their minds. The novelist manipulates the shift in the view points from the dramatic (Part- I) to the first person (part – II) and the emotionally to the omniscient (part – III).
4. Collective Neurons

The very beginning of the novel highlights the disappointments of Maya. And she is very much affected by the death of her pet dog, Toto. Maya expects consolation from her husband. The action in the novel begins in the fourth year of their marriage. Gautama, who is a practical man, does not make any fuss over Toto’s death and makes arrangement for its burial. Her disappointment with her husband makes her behave like a neurotic. This disappointment and deep sorrows oppress her heart and soul. Maya is much attached to the dog because of her childishness and it appear that the dog becomes a child substitute.

“Childless women do develop fantastic attachment to their pets, they say it is no less a relationship than that of a woman and her child no less worthy of remembrance (Cry, the Peacock”, 2). Maya’s restlessness always seriously affects her and the strain tears her apart. Maya’s restlessness always seriously affects her and the strain tears her apart. Maya’s neurosis also denotes a collective neurosis, which tries to shatter the very identity of woman in our contemporary society dominated by the patriarchy in which woman longing for love is driven mad and compelled to commit suicide? Gautama is pragmatic, unimaginative, unsentimental, a “Thinking red” and believes in detachment on every count as the Gita preaches. Maya is a highly sensitive girl gifted with poetic imagination and neurotic sensibility.

5. Physical Incompatibility

When Maya approaches Gautama to fulfill her physical needs, he simply closes his eyes and pretends to engage in a profound, invulnerable sleep; Gautama’s behavior makes her sad. Maya fails to turn Gautama to her world. Maya and Gautama attend a party in Lal’s House. She observes then the people watching the cabaret dance. The cabaret dance contains a symbolic meaning to her. Maya being physically and passionately unsatisfied uses this chance to participate in the dance and it symbolizes the death of her chastity, which as the supreme quality of a woman in Indian ethos, and culture, and tradition. The cabaret girls have their carnal desire. This way Maya fulfills her sensual appetite by participating in the cabaret dance. Due to this reason, she has no good marital relationship with her husband, and ultimately kills her husband. But she realizes later on and repents and immolates herself as a penance of her sin of having killed Gautama. Besides her father she should have lived happily in the security of her husband, Gautama, but due to her inability a lead a compatible life with her husband. She loses all things, and the result is that she herself is forced to commit suicide because of her moral compunction.

Another aspect portrayed in the novel, cry the Peacock is the dance of Lord Shiva, and the myth logically signifies the dance of death. In this novel, it is a symbol of liberation, a way out of the embarrassing existential predicament in which Maya finds herself. The title of the novel also refers to this very thrilling dance of the Peacock at the advent of the monsoon. Maya hear the Peacock calling “Pia, Pia” It appears to her as if they cry, “Lover, Lover Mio, Mio…I die”, “Go out into the jungles before the monsoon come”. (Cry, the Peacock, 95)

The Peacocks love rain. They spread out their tails and begin to dance, like Shiva’s dance, the dance of joy of the Peacocks is the dance of death, for they dance knowing full well that they and their lovers are all bound to die.

Philosophy of Bhagavad Gita:

Gautama tries to persuade Maya to give up her efforts to get her share in his life with the help of the Bhagavad Gita, which he interprets as the exhortation to the people to live a life of an ascetic, unattached to the evils this philosophy by saying that she was positive engagement for
happiness. She points out that she is passing through a life of meaningless activities such as playing with a cat and visiting friend. Maya knows that Gautama will not be prepared to pass life in such meaningless activities. But Gautama thinks that Maya is not bored and that she is not trying to give further meaning to her life.

Disharmony in marriage:

Maya marries Gautama because he is elder and is also a friend of her father. She identifies Gautama with her father, although her identification in capacitates her from understanding in right perspective, the reality around her. Her neurosis is heightened by her awareness of her horoscope and the macabre prediction of the albino astrologer. Her childhood world of fantasies and her adult world of realistic events clash producing imbalances in her life. There are moments which she sincerely tries to follow Gautama’s recommendation of the philosophy of Gita. But her feelings are too weak to last long. Her marriage with Gautama is less of comfort and more of inconvenience. Both have dissimilarities in age, in temperament, and in the strain of their physical and mental outlooks to keep them close to each other. Gautama loves and cares for Maya in his own unique manly way. But Maya wants to treat her as if she were his child. This clash between the irreconcilably different temperaments of way and Gautama is highly significant throughout the novel, which results in many episodes that denote the lack of communication between the two. The disharmony between Gautama and Maya is not solely due to Gautama’s inability. It also arises out of Maya’s in capacity to understand Gautama. The entire plot of the novel revolves around Maya’s neurosis. The incompatibility and the discord in their married life are the outcome of Maya’s immaturity and Gautama’s insensibility. Maya’s sensitiveness and feelings servers as the main focus.

6. Conclusion

A permanent union can be established only on the basis of common objectives, Ideas and interests, their mature attitude, broad mindedness and understanding as well as adjustable temperament help a lot in establishing marital harmony.

7. References

[6] The Artistic Effects of the shifts in points of view in Anita Desai’s Cry, the Peacock.:The Journal of Indian writing in English. 38