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Land and Landscape in Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock*

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Anita Desai's novels unravel the mystery of the inner life of her characters. Anita Desai is interested in the psychic life of her characters. For her it is a depth which is interesting, delving deeper and deeper into a character or a scene rather than going round about it. She incorporates themes such as the agony of existence, the meta-physical void, the fears and trembling of her protagonists whose values, beliefs and structures are jeopardized, which, in turn, stand in the way of the individual's self-realization. However, there is a genuine attempt suggesting a struggle to attain a maturity of outlook, and positive growth. Her forte is "the exploration of sensibility – the particular kind of Indian sensibility that is ill at ease among barbarians and the philistines, the anarchists and the moralists.(Iyenger 1983: 464).

According to her, the warp and woof of her works attract attention when " the themes are analysed, the social and political elements are subtly camouflaged and subdued by dwelling on emotions and responses which are far more engrossing than the hard facts of reality.(Jain 1987:1). As her discussion progresses from thematic concerns to philosophical and psychological issues.The primary task of this paper is to dwell upon the female strength without losing the inner self of the character in all critical situations. The focus will remain on the politicization of land and landscape through the study of women's search for identity in this complex social world where alienation, disintegration and submissiveness are inherently attached to female psychology. For example, *Where Shall We Go This Summer* is based on relating Sita's desperate search for direction of India's anxiety to find her identity.

Meenakshi Mukherjee observes that the theme of rootlessness is a part of the vital experience which is attracting the attention of many Indian writers. She makes a comparative study of Kamala Markandaya's *Nowhere Man*, and Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, and feels that loss of ego is a humiliating experience of the immigrant situation (Mukherjee 1978: 225-35). The Karma theory running through the entire narrative of *Cry, the Peacock* and the depiction of the woman's plight in modern Indian society in Desai's novels confirm the fact that modern Indian woman's psychic turmoil reveals an era of awakening.

Being a novelist of moods and the state of the psyche, her characters have a tendency to turn inward. *Cry, the Peacock* is the story of a hypersensitive young woman Maya, pitted against a taciturn husband, Gautama. She lives a life of acute sensitivity and dies in her quest to find fuller life. The novelist employs an apt symbol of a lamp extinguished because of too much of oil that "drowned the wick" (*Cry, the peacock*: 1980:1).

Cry, the Peacock revolves around Maya's and Gautama's concept of life and death. Life is meant to be lived fully, in case of impossibility, one yearns for life. Death is meant not to live and not living a life fully is a metaphoric death. This metaphoric death occurs when one is unable to live life the way one wants to. The shadow of death occurs when living life happily and richly is not possible. The metaphoric death that Maya experiences are different from the physical death as of Toto. Light is a metaphor of day and a continuous movement goes on slowly from light to darkness and then from darkness to light. Similarly the narrative is like a

sea-saw battle, anguish persisting and life moving between life and death like light and darkness.

Maya is caught in the most disturbing conflict which continues within her leading obviously to the obsession of life and death. The conflict has its roots back in Maya's childhood when the prediction of the astrologer penetrated deep into her psychic compartment and the normal passive arrival of death is transformed into a violent catastrophe. The narrative opens with the dead body of Toto lying rotting. Toto's death is an event of great sorrow as he was her pet but something pinched her more than can be imagined and that was her hidden fear that worked strongly in her sub-conscious and was triggered by Toto's death" There remained a certain unease, a hesitation 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 been left me exhausted, sleep-washed and becalmed. Something slipped into my tear-hazed vision a shadowy something, that prodded me into admitting that it was not my pet's death alone that I mourned today, but another sorrow, unremembered, perhaps as yet not even experienced, and filled me with this despair. I could not focus my mind upon it, so swiftly and constantly did it move" (Cry, the peacock 1980: 8).

The end is nothing but disappearance, a word that was felt like a pang by Maya as the solidity of real existence just for a little while and soon collapsed. The cry of peacocks is a passionate utterance and for Maya it is the continuation of the movement of passion, of fear leading to the inevitable end. This excess of passion in the peacocks 'cry' has an essential relation to the well determined inner mental state of Maya. The peacocks fearing themselves to bleeding shreds in the act of love and screening with the agony of the death of love is a continuation of a movement of Maya's passion. Passion always been excessive and disproportionate also suggests its intensity that cannot be calmed but satisfied to some extent.

The repeated use of 'cry' is an exclamation. It has no determinate meaning but is not independent of the realm of meaning. First it indicates presence and this is what Maya is always striving for, Gautama's realization of her presence. Second, it is for drawing attention of Gautama towards her. Third, it is a warning for Gautama to turn towards her and find a meaning of what she is experiencing. Maya identifies her condition with the condition of the monkeys in cages. There seems to be a dialectical relation between the two. Maya has no relief, the monkeys have no water to give them some respite. Both are at a stage of torture and waiting for death" Cage upon cage of them. Long furred bodies swarming upon each other, till limbs and tails were twisted together, the elegant lines of their muscles contorted nightmarishly – the work of some fiendish maniac. And one that I saw was perfectly still and quiet, backed into a corner by the frantic bodies of its companions, and gazed out with eyes that had melted into liquid drops about to slide down its pinched, in drawn cheeks. Its brow was lined with foreboding and the suffering of a tragic calamity, and its hands, folded across its thin belly waited to accept it" (Cry, the peacock 1980: 154).

Light and darkness is a metaphor of interplay of desire and depression. There are spaces in the physical and the mental world that are dark and light. Maya is a being who keeps on thinking constantly and during her thought process she is swayed from darkness to light and from depression to hope. Maya was always hoping to have a world of harmony, love and coordination. What she realizes time and again are transformed into depression. There is a juxtaposition of desire and depression. On one side when life seems to be better there is some hope but on the other there is no realization of ambitions. It is a dialectical relation of two sides. What Maya would have thought of life is not complete darkness, there is a possibility

of light or life and then it keeps on changing, light keeps changing into darkness and vice versa in the cob-web of her mental horizon:

“The verandah chairs had been taken out on the lawn for us, two large, comfortable chairs, rather battered, rather old, and we sat down, as we did each evening, to glasses of fresh lemonade and to an hour or so of matrimonial silences and conversation. The light in the verandah was on illuminating the white pillars with an inward glow, as of soft marble at sunset, though not quite so soft or quite so translucent – Winter was over, summer had not yet arrived. I lay back in my chair and breathed deeply, lay there waiting – for summer? For snakes? For the moon? Did not know?”(Cry, the peacock 1980: 160).

Maya at this stage of struggle is trying to keep up hope. There is undoubtedly despair and obscurity but there is not complete darkness. Maya and Gautama are caught up in a mental conflict. Maya is unable to see anything clearly as one is able to see in the light, there is obscurity leaving the situation hazy for both of them. Gautama and Maya are not simply two robots, they have yet not lost hope of establishing a congenial relationship. The main problem is that he does not understand her level of despair, as he now is unaware of her level of frustration.

An existential problem is a resultant of extreme despair where the being tries to find some way out. Cry, the Peacock is a story of struggle, a continuous effort to get out of the trap of destiny, cultural norms and astrology. Maya is caught in this existential situation which has been created not because of her doing. Whether it is a problem created by culture or by religion, she tries her best to steer through the situation. When there is little possibility, she feels it can be done, but when there is a slight possibility of defying then starts the real human struggle.

Reality is absolute and immutable. It dialectically contributes to practical ideology, a complex formation of nations, representations, images and modes of action, gestures, attitudes, norms which govern men in relation to the objects and problems as their social and individual existence.

“Freud talks about ‘EGO,’ ‘SUPER EGO,’ ‘ID’. Ego is what a child wants himself to be. Super ego is what prohibits. Id is what actually exists. ID is identity or identification and it is the inherited instinctive impulses of the individual as part of the unconscious. The primary desire which is not fulfilled is ID. There is a split subject when the super ego suppresses ego and this process goes on and on because there is a gap between the conscious and the unconscious and this development goes on and as the child grows up this consciousness manifests in psychological bubbles even in dreams. The area at which the unconscious surfaces is DREAMS or in the form of PONS, WORD-PLAY and SLIPS OF THE TONGUE. Freud calls these PARAPRAXES. More important than these functions are NEUROSES and PSYCHOSES and it can erupt in misreading, forgetting, the failing of memory and neuroses in the form of obsessional relationship while touching everything. Hysterical neuroses like pains and fever is caused by obsessional fears. In psychoses ego is partly used to press the unconscious and desire comes under its sway. When this happens the link between the ego and the external world is ruptured and the unconscious begins to build up an alternative disillusioned reality. There are two kinds of psychoses, one is the systematized state of delusion which leads to disillusioned jealousy and the second is the detachment from reality

and the turning in of the self with an excessive but loosely systematized production of fantasies. In the case of Maya we find no jealousy at all but what is clearly visible is her detachment from reality and the fantasizes she produces are nothing positive but all negative thoughts like death, suicide, murder".(Freud 1973).

The Ego is all the time positioning itself in terms of others. Maya causes destruction in her life as she is not able to position her ego in terms of others at a proper place causing imbalance in her personality. The Ego is formed in the mirror stage between six to eight months of age when the child looks into the mirror, the state of unbroken image of his or her body. The child has not constituted a misrecognized image – the gap between what the child is and what he will be. It is at this stage that the father, the law intervenes.

Maya goes back to her past whenever she visualizes her future and is scared of it. Death, loneliness, fear, frustration are all surrounding her. A series of images which are not only fantastic or physical but gusty images which have the sound and the resonance of the word. There are two impacts on the sub-conscious of the child, the experience of the object and its impression or psychic trace. The experience of hunger or the contact with an object like a mountain leaves a certain impression or trace but it also leaves a word that is used to express the gusty make of that experience. One is the trace of the experience, the other is the resonance of the same word. The meaning of the word and the word itself acquire a certain association with the child. Both are the expressions of the word, the linguistic expression and the other is what is left, not the substances but the form:

“God! God ! I cried and sat up in terror. There were no clashes and clamour after that I was aware of a great, dead silence in which my eyes opened to a vision that appeared through the curtains of the years, one by one falling back till I saw again that shadow. A black and evil shadow. Its names was not that of a demon in a Kathakali dance drama, nor was it one of the limpid appellations of the moon. It was I remembered it now, Fate” (Cry, the peacock 1980: 28).

Maya kills Gautama and goes back to her father’s house. This forces one to think why she is so excited to be back there, probably she never wanted to be away from her father. Gautama in a way had carried her away from her father and now by killing Gautama she had a clear way to go back to her father. All the times it was her father in her sub-conscious. She was all the time talking to him in her imagination and always kept comparing him to Gautama.

We can analysis Maya’s psychology with Freud’s example of a young girl of nineteen with superior education and intellectual liveliness changed into a neurotic without any visible reasons. She got into a complicated illness which was diagnosed as agoraphobia and obsessional neurosis but what Freud was more concerned was the sleep – the ceremonial with which she tormented her parents. Her nightly precautions were to exclude every source of noise. The clocks and watches were removed, she collected all the flower pots and vases on the writing table so that they might not fall over and break thus disturbing her sleep. The door between her room and her parents' rooms should stay half-open and she ensured this by placing various objects in the open door-way. The most important stipulations related to her bed. The pillow at the top must not touch the bedstead, the small top pillow must lie on the large pillow in the way to form a diamond shape. She would place her head exactly along the long diameter of the diamond. The duvet was shaken before been laid on the bed to make its bottom end thick and never failed to press the accumulation to put the feathers apart. What

was most abnormal about this ceremonial was that she spent almost two hours during which she could not sleep of course but did not let her intimidated parents sleep either.

Though this analysis the girl gradually learnt the symbols and their symbolic interpretations. She found out the central meaning of her ceremonial one day:

The pillow was a woman according to this girl. The shaking feathers and collecting them at the bottom causing a swelling meant a pregnant woman and her never failing to smooth them away was to smooth away the pregnancy for her fear of her parents intercourse resulting in pregnancy, having another child, or competition for her. The big pillow was a woman, the mother, the small one stood for the daughter.

Why did this pillow have to be placed diamond – wise and her head precisely along its centre line? It was easy to recall to her that this diamond shape is the inscription scribbled on every wall to represent the open female genitals. If so, she herself was playing the man and replacing the male organ by her head (Freud 1973: 307-308) .

Maya like the girl in this example could be in the grip of an erotic attachment to her father, the beginning of which went back to her childhood. This fact becomes clear when we gain an insight into the sense and intention of neurotic symptoms. Throughout the narrative whenever Maya is unhappy with either the environment or Gautama she immediately thinks about her father and that too in a very elevated manner”Gautama’s reaction was exactly what I might have predicted, had I thought before speaking. Immediately he stiffened, turned from me and picked up the papers. ‘Why don’t you?’ he said in a cold astringent tone. ‘Your father would take you wherever you wanted to go. He can.’ It was the tone he normally used in speaking of my father, but without any leavening of indulgence “(Freud 1973: 39-40).

In this passage we can clearly understand the difference of attitude towards her father and Gautama. The indifference by Gautama, his inability to understand and give value to her desires forces Maya to go her past, her father. Whenever she has her neurotic pangs she wants to lean against her father for support. She feels probably that he is the only person who could understand her and save her from madness. Or we can put it the other way round that because she cannot get over her father’s obsession, she in her inner core always wants to go back to him like the girl of our example who herself drew the conclusion that she was ill. Freud suspects that she became so ill in order not to have to marry so as to remain with her father. Freud comments:

We cannot dismiss the question of why, in what way and for what motivates a person can arrive at such a remarkable attitude to life and one that is so inexpedient – assuming that this attitude is a general characteristic of neurosis...

In every one of our patient analyses shows us that they had been carried back to some particular period of their past by the symptoms of their illness or their consequences. In the majority of cases, indeed, a very early phase of life is chosen for the purpose – a period of their childhood or even, laughable as this may sound, of their existence as an infant at the breast(Freud 1973: 314).

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