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### WOMANLY PERCEPTIVENESS IN ANITA DESAI'S CRY THE PEACOCK

#### ABSTRACT

Feminism emerges as a concept that is based on critical analysis of male privilege and woman's subordination within any given society. It opposes woman's subordination to men in the family and the society. It is a global revolutionary ideology that is political because it is concerned with the question of power. A feminist is one who is awakened and conscious about woman's life and problems. The concept of woman is of vital importance in the formation of feminist theory. Themes explored in feminism and feminist theory consist of patriarchy, sexual objectification and oppression. In literary theory feminism means challenging the patriarchal canons. Feminist theory studies a structural inequality of women by systematic social injustice.

Keywords: Feminism, loneliness, reality, introspection, predicament, relationship, consciousness

Feminism is concerned with gender inequalities and equal rights for women. This encases social, cultural and political movements, theories and moral philosophies that affect women in everyday life. It also takes up the fight against forms of discrimination. Some feminists argue that "gendered and sexed identities, 'man' and 'woman' are social constructs, meaning that some gender roles are socially conditioned rather than innate." Feminist political activists have challenged and brought women issues in the forefront while also creating debate. They changed laws in the women's right to contract and property and the right to bodily integrity

and autonomy. They are advocates for the protection of women from domestic violence, rape and sexual harassment.

Anita Desai is one of the most powerful and distinguished Indian English novelists. She has an extraordinary sharpness and penetration of vision. She is endowed with searching psychological insight and often peeps into inner recesses of the psyche, rather than merely presenting the outer spectacle of the world.

She is a pioneer in writing psychological novels and she explores the psychic depth of her characters and analyses in detail their motives. Her characters are distinguished by the qualities of introspection, introversion and a refusal to surrender their individual selves. There are some characters that are not average but have retreated or have been driven into despair and so turned against or made to stand against the general current. It is easy to flow with the current, it makes no demand, and it costs no effort. But those who follow it, whose hearts cry the 'great no, to fight the current and struggle against it. They know what demands are and what it costs to meet them.

Among the post-independence Indo-English writers Anita Desai holds an important place because of the immense popularity she commands as a novelist of human predicament of anxiety, frustration and loneliness in the insensitive and inconsiderate contemporary world. Alienation refers to estrangement that occurs in the relation between an individual and that to which he or she is relating to. It is a feeling of not belonging. This feeling can be physical, mental, religious, spiritual, political or economic. And one time or the other each one of us has experienced alienation in one form or other. This aloneness for them is the treasure worth treasuring.

Anita Desai uses different set of language to depict the inner crisis and tensions in the lives of characters. There is a sense of loneliness and pessimism. The theme is social milieu, family relationships, dislocation of normal life and morbidity of temperament. She dives deeply, darkly and silently to bring out inconsistencies that she finds in modern family life. Thus she adds a new dimension turning invert into the realities of life. She is more concerned with the exploration of psychic depth of a female character in context of present day world situation. Hence all her characters are existential, nonpolitical or social. It is noteworthy that a trivial situation becomes an important situation through evoking subjective and neurotic response.

Desai through her novel stands as a representative of the millions of helpless women who are tormented by existentialist problems and predicament. She displays through her novel profound understanding of womanly perceptiveness. She focusses on the helplessness, agony, anger, struggle and surrender of her chief characters. Most of her characters feel alienated, dejected, exiled, disillusioned, though they are in the thick stream of life, yet feel all alone. Unlike her contemporary fiction writers, she is interested in the revelation of the inner world, the interior landscape of human psyche than the political or social realities. Her novels deal with ferocious assault of existence. Her women characters are introvert, who suffer from psychic deficiencies like, schizophrenia, neurosis, super-ego, self-reservation, frigidity, inferiority complex, claustrophobia, etc. But her male characters are unsentimental, philosophical, practical and prudent.

Anita Desai's language and style is as important as a plot of a novel. She writes to discover for herself and then describe and convey the truth to the world. It is an effort to underline and convey the significance of things. She uses words for their own sake and for creating magic and music in the web of her stories. Her language is marked by three characteristics: sensuous richness, a high-strung sensitiveness, and love for the sound of words. She has a love for the words and uses native words to appeal. Another remarkable feature of her style is that she evokes typical Indian atmosphere by the use of Indian imagery related to the events, objects and experience from real life. She uses parenthesis as a stylistic device for the purpose and indulges in the use of words having sensuous appeal and power of rhetoric. She uses words in accordance to the situation and the same to be depicted. Her vocabulary is forceful, violent, and evil. The structured sentence is abrupt and broken, full of exclamatory and interrogative phrases. Another important feature is the usage of the device of interior monologue. Sentences are not linked in a logical way. She also makes use of the device of repetition in order to achieve the rhythmic beauty of a lyric. However there is one serious flaw in her style that it lacks humour and irony which makes it sometime a dull reading, stereo-type and the sentence structures look mechanical. Her usage of imagery gives intensity and clarity to the novels textured. It shows the artist's skill to convey the exact meaning of her ideas. The emotions of the characters match the images, thereby enhancing the beauty of her work of art. Symbols are used to depict inner reality.

Anita Desai's *Cry the Peacock* is a poetic novel. It has a visionary aesthetic which gives the story a spiritual shape. Its poetry is a matter of vision, tone, temperament and atmosphere. It helps the imagination to grow into thought. It extends the events and actions and supplements

it like a positive force. Thus it is skillfully structured with incidents, characters, and details that the poetic elements become an abiding force in the novel *Cry the Peacock*.

Maya, the chief protagonist, is a childless young lady married to a famous lawyer, nearly twice her age. She is seen grieving over the death of a dog, Toto. The death motif is built into the very structure of the story and it is extended as an ode to the whole of the novel. Maya surfaces this motif in her fears and musings. Simultaneously she is responsive to the beauty and poetry of life as the tension in her makes her life miserable and aching. The husband-wife alienation is not the theme fully developed like other psychological novels; rather this theme is dramatized through simile, metaphor and symbol. The two spouses are of different sort. Gautam is an efficient, pragmatic and unsentimental person, whereas Maya is a creature of graceful illusion, song, dance and flower. Therefore their alienation has no sociological or philosophical connotations.

Maya is a prisoner of the past. She is always under the shade of her past memories-her memories engulfing her one after another like a wave. The painful past is always throbbing in her inner consciousness. It has taken the shape of a permanent fixation. The prophetic note to her-stating that one of the spouses will die four years after marriage- causes her a deep pain. Toto after death has widened the pitch and she is left with disillusion and extinction. The interior landscape of Maya's agonized soul is a tribute to her poetry of life. In her nightmare and sufferings Maya moves further and further from reality. She descends into the darker side of life. Loneliness and reality becomes her permanent companion. During this phase she is at times reminded of the dreaded prophecy and peacock's cries of death. The imagery of pit, corridor and well indicate her alienation and darkness though she desires for its end. The symbol of peacock is poetically structured throughout the novel which assumes meaning and it is never exhausted. Whenever the sultry mood of Maya deepens, she appears panting for a cloud burst and relief. The dust storm fury shows her emotional imbalances.

Maya's unhappiness in *Cry the Peacock* is not related to the reality of her circumstances; it is the product of her own consciousness. Her unhappiness is to some extent, related to the process of her growing up. She has led a protected life and has been brought up on fantasies and now when confronted with reality of life and its disappointment; she is not able to face it. Toto's death is but an event which triggers off a set of responses and becomes a reason for her present misery but even while moaning on his death, it is not tears which relieve her, "a fit of furious pillow beating, kicking, and doing everything, but crying". She is aware that her

relationship with the adult world is tenuous. When surrounded by her husband's family she is quite aware of this aspect of being left out. In a moment of lucidity, Maya acknowledges that Gautam is an ally and that it is in her love for him that he has experienced pain and reflection and that he had enlarged her world. She tries to analyse her feeling and examines her memories of the past so as to reach the source of this disturbance. She groups for some kind of meaning, and this comes to her in flashes, first during a conversation with Gautam, the word "ultimate" reminds her of a specific evening in her past and then in the stillness of the night when the moon acquires for her demoniac appearance.

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