

Cry, the Pea-cock, A perpetual meaning and value of life :-

Dr. Felix Nayak
Assistant Professor & Head,
Department of English,
Mahant Laxmi Narayan Das College,
Raipur (C.G.)

Anita Desai's characters are distinguished by the qualities of introspection, introversion and a refusal to surrender their individual selves. What one observes is a chain reaction of one leading to the other with the emerging picture of a battered and bruised individual writhing in pain and anguish. Thus Anita Desai's novels indicate a shift from the external to the inner world of the individual. "A marked leaning towards such an introversion is seen in Anita Desai's writing".¹ Her women protagonists, strive towards arriving at a more authentic way of life than the one which is available to them.² They in vain long for love and communion of the spirit which they perceive as the panaceas of the ills of the world. Their refusal to compromise and surrender and their inability to accept the perspective of their patrons inevitably result in isolation and loneliness. Lack of faith as well as lack understanding drive them to indulge in a futile search for fulfillment which is a mirage in the inhuman and materialistic world.

Maya, the protagonist in *Cry, the Peacock* is an extraordinary creation. The novel is a powerful psychological study of a woman pursued and haunted by the idea of early death predicted by an albino astrologer and intellectual and lonely struggle against fate, that drives her to homicide, insanity and finally to suicide. The root of Maya's suffering lies in her excessive involvement with the sensuous beauty of life "Maya is alive through all her senses and lives

intensely for each moment". 3 Maya is tortured by the prophesy, haunted by guilt complex for having hidden it from Gautam and dreads to meet the reality. For her, marriage is an imprisonment for it binds her to fate as forecast by the astrologer. Her suffering is caused by clinging to the temporal pleasures and longing to hold on to the transient. Her inability to accept the eternal fate the external decay of a world of butterflies causes her suffering and intense agony. Trapped by lust for life and greed for experience, Maya is imprisoned by her obsession with her own self. It is not the incompatibility alone, the distance between Gautam and Maya, that is the cause of Maya's suffering. In fact Gautam understands her more than she herself and even cautions her against her desire to reach out and grasp everything and warns her not to mistake attachment for love.

Maya's unchecked intensity for felt experience, that which has already reached the point of satiation and even distraction and her continued effort to reach things and emotions unreachable combined with her fear of death throw her off balance. Gautam's detached and realistic attitude towards death should have balanced Maya's obsessive neurotic fears of death. Her inability to come out of her libido hinders her from coming to terms with Gautam. Maya herself is in two minds about her relationship with Gautam. Gautam is aware of her obsession with her father, observes that this is the reason she married him a man so much older than herself. Maya too sees Gautam as almost a protégé of her father. At times she looks at him as her guardian and her protector the incompatibility between them emerges from their attitudes and approaches to life. Gautam is rational and pragmatic but not totally insensitive. Maya is poetic and artistic and is carried off her feet by the sensuous and the sensational. Maya, at times, feels that she is neglected by Gautam. She also says that he can never understand and respond to her love for him. Yet, she is

also aware of her need for him. Her love for life overpowers her love for Gautam. When she accidentally realizes that the competition is between Gautam and her own self, the instinct for self preservation makes her shift the burden of the prophesy to Gautam. The realization that her desire to live is stronger than her love for Gautam has a shattering effect on her already battered self. She becomes more withdrawn, secretive and even suspicious, for now her neurotic mind which is on the brink of insanity suspects that Gautam counter her plans. Her awareness that neither her friends nor her father can provide her an anchor, leads to the disintegration of herself. The novel is really Maya's effort to tell her story to herself to discover sane meaning in her life, and even to justify herself to herself. Maya, in her sane moments, acknowledges the wisdom of Gautam's theory of detachment. The name 'Maya meaning illusion' is highly significant in that it explains Maya's tragedy. Maya has moments of realization of reality, but her inability to control herself leads to her tragic end. She sees the truth in Gautam's philosophy to exist like a lily on water, to learn to live without ambition, without any desire for a moment. But her overwhelming passion for life, carries her away from the solidity of Gautam's philosophy. In addition to creating temperamental incompatibility and emotional alienation, their polarity also helps Maya justify her idea that it might be Gautam who is destined to die. She throws Gautam down the balcony for the sin of coming between her and the worshipped moon. She sees his figure as an ugly crooked, grey shadow that transgressed the moon's sorrowing chastity. The moon here symbolizes Maya's love for life and the shadow of Gautam is the shadow of fate. She has to remove him in order to liberate herself from the doom. Maya is a neurotic and one can find both regression and repression in her. Maya carries the hell within her and yet she knows there is no escape from it. Though Maya mentions God, her lack of

faith closes that door on her. The albino astrologer, in fact, advises her to have faith and also suggests that prayer may avert the tragedy. Thus Maya's tragedy has its deep roots in her too much of involvement.

Notes & References

1. The Indian Writer's problems, "Explorations in Modern Indo-English fictioned. R.K. Dhawan, P-22'
2. Jasbir Jain, "Anita Desai, Indian English Novelists, ed. Madhadan Prasad P-21
3. Indian writing in English, P-465.

