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## THE IMPRESSION OF GLOOMINESS IN ANITA DESAI'S *CRY, THE PEACOCK*

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Anita Mazumbar Desai, an Indian woman novelist, occupies a distinguished place among the Indo-Anglian writers. She was born on 24 June 1937 in Mussorie, India. She received numerous awards, including the SahityaAkademi Award in 1978 for her novel *Fire on the Mountain*, the Guardian prize for children's fiction for *Village by the Sea*, and she has been shortlisted for the Booker Prize three times. She was specially noted for her sensitive portrayal of female characters and the alienation of middle class women in India and problematizing their individual quests in a self-contained Indian landscape.

*Cry, the Peacock* is the story of a young girl Maya. She is the daughter of a rich advocate in Lucknow. She is mostly alone in her home and spends most of her time in garden with animals and birds. She lost her mother in her childhood days and her brother went to America to make an independent living. So, she enjoys the fullest affection and attention of her father and in her moments of affliction she exclaims that *no one, no one else, loves me as my father does*. The excessive love of her father makes her to feel the world to be a toy made especially for her, painted in favorite colors and set moving according to her wish. Maya is an upper class Brahmin woman married to a non-Brahmin Gautama, a protégé of her father and a brilliant, ambitious, rational and serious-minded lawyer. Maya desires to have similar love and affection from her husband Gautama who is always busy in his own vocational affairs, fails to meet her demands. And hence, she feels neglected and miserable in her life. On seeing her morbidity, her husband warns her not to be emotional and sentimental and further he blames her father for spoiling his daughter by showering excess of love and affection. According to

the prophecy of an albino astrologer, she or her husband would die during the fourth year of her marriage. Her father dismisses the prophecy as nonsense and orders it to be forgotten. Obeying his wish, Maya keeps the prophecy rigorously repressed in her unconscious until her marriage with Gautama. She knows that she is haunted by a *black and evil gloominess*- her fate and the time comes when it was the fourth year of her marital life. She feels that her husband fails to satisfy her intense longing for life and love. She is always left alone in silence of the house where fear haunted upon her. She muses over the lack of love from her husband. The visit of her mother in law and Gautama's sister Nila brings a brief sense of happiness and she enjoys her busy life in their company but once they leave the house she finds the home and herself self empty and lonely with horrors of death and nightmares. Now all of sudden, Maya's fear was triggered off by the death of her pet dog Toto, and she is possessed by the vision of albino astrologer and she recalls his talk about the myth surrounding the peacocks cry which she happens to hear in rainy days. She realizes that she never sleeps in peace. Maya suffers from terrible headache and honor haunts her. As she moves towards the verge of madness, she envisions rats, lizards, snakes and iguanas creeping over her, slipping their club-like tongues in and out. Then suddenly the sense of spiritual reflection is keenly depicted in the intense flow of story. During the interval of sanity, she is reminded that the astrologer had predicted death to either of them, and hence thinks that it may be Gautama and not she whose life is threatened. She therefore transfers her death wish to her husband Gautama as he is detached and indifferent to life and that it will not matter to him if he misses life. So she decides to murder

her husband. One day in the course of a dust storm, they go up to the balcony and there Maya, in a fit of frenzy pushes him and he falls down and dies. Three days later, Gautama's mother and sister take her to her father's house at Lucknow and it is tacitly understood that she will have to be put in an asylum.

Maya is a young neurotic heroine who kills her husband Gautama thereby fulfilling the prophecy of an albino astrologer which she has rigorously repressed in her unconscious mind. She kept it as secret and later took the form of gloominess in her mind. Maya is sensitive, poetic, emotional, intuitive and illusive personality whereas Gautama, her husband is just her opposite. He is insensitive to transient beauty, a pure rationalist, logical in thinking. He is concerned only with absolutes. While he views *nothing subjectively, nothing with passion* (150) but she is *flooded with tenderness and gratitude* (11). Anita Desai has given appropriate names to both the characters in order to epitomize their irreconcilability; Maya means illusion or gloominess and Gautama is the name of Buddha who rends the veil of Maya. Illusion or gloominess must be overcome by reality if not, it ruins the entire life and ends up in misery.

Maya, the protagonist of *Cry, the Peacock*, suffers from gloominess aspects of Carl Jung's archetype. The sufferings and frustration of Maya from her childhood have been a trace for the formation of gloominess in her deep unconscious mind. Maya lives a lonely life even from her days of childhood. It is the absence of her mother that has stunted her growth as a complete individual. Maya finds solace only in her garden, an enclosed landscape. Nature becomes a private comfort and a speaking figure. In Maya's world, nature and living creatures fill the empty space and vacuum created by her distorted human relations. Maya felt the loneliness and separation first from her mother's death and then from her loving father in the form of marriage which in fact aggravated her neurosis. Companionship to her is a necessity which she fails to receive.

Maya shares an ambiguous relationship with her husband Gautama and her father. Undoubtedly they are attached to her as a daughter and a wife and yet their Hindu consciousness thinks of her in terms of the

concept of illusion suggested by her name itself. She is pampered by her father's love which made her mind weak and shielded from reality, and totally away from the gross ugliness of the outside world. "My childhood was one in which much was excluded, which grew steadily more restricted, unnatural even, and in which I lived as a toy princess in a toy world. But it was a pretty one." (89)

The great difference in their age and four years of marriage without children leads her towards insanity. Sex is not only an intensely pleasurable experience but also a revitalizing force in a sterile life. But Gautama's age, unemotional personality and attitude towards sex disappoints her mind. Several passages in the novel have been devoted to the portrayal of Maya's disillusionment in sex. In the beginning of the novel, Maya makes a frank admission of her sexual dissatisfaction born of her husband's unpardonable negligence. "Telling me to go to sleep while he worked at his papers, he did not give another thought to me, to either the soft willing body or the lonely, wanting mind that waited near his bed" (9). The neurotic defense mechanisms such as sleep rituals, hallucinatory visions and nightmare, experience of split personality, advent somatic symptoms and religious avoidance of violence woefully fail to blunt the edge of her unconscious which serves as a gloominess behind her personality.

Maya's psychic struggles move from silence to chaos. The bear dance is related to Maya's past and her childhood experience which drives her close to madness and hysterical derision. The image of dancing Shiva and the peacock is thematically linked to the centrality of Maya's alienated self. These images of dance are the symbol of death and desolation, which obliquely connote isolation and separation. Like peacocks frantically longing for sexual communion, the poor soul of Maya craves for the company of Gautama, his touch and tickle. The cry of the peacock becomes the symbol of the cry of Maya's bruised soul. Her suicide at the end of the novel becomes an enactment of her long-cherished desire for isolation in death. In Maya, despair becomes hysterical and neurotic,

*Pia, pia, the cry. "Lover, lover, Mio, mio- I die, die..... like Shiva's, their dance of joy is dance of death and they dance knowing that they and*

*their lovers are all to die... before they mate, they fight. They will rip each other's breasts to strips and fall bleeding with their beaks open and panting. (95)*

To add to Maya's problem stemming from inactivity, she remains childless. The birth of a child would have given her a sense of achievement and her creative urge would have got focused on a helplessly dependent human being instead of getting diffused over nature and spread outside human interest. In the beginning of her neurotic affliction, she frequently tells herself that she has been fated to die. But she is ardently in love with life and soon begins to wonder whether it was not Gautama's life that was threatened (164) she fears for her life and would keep the secret for herself at any cost. The secrets have been hidden in her gloominess mind. "I glanced at him now, slyly, for sly I had grown with such a load of secrets that had to be hidden from him, such evil and awful secrets" (165). The image of dead Toto is analogous to Maya's psychic derangement and her ineluctable obsession with death. Several disturbing and horrifying images of slimy, creeping, crawling creatures such as snakes, lizards, rats and iguanas figure in close succession in a crescendo till Maya murders Gautama.

Maya's superstitious belief about the albino astrologer too originates from her suppressed, hostile and cruel impulses. She seems to hold Gautama responsible for her unfulfilled instinct in the marital life. She is also angry with him because after four years of life, she is compelled to lose her life. She grows anxious on the account of the threats to her self-preservation and neurotically perceives Gautama's death as a solution. The prophecy comes as a convenient external justification to her unconscious wish and for that reason she tenaciously clings to it. Her transition from neurosis to psychosis is powerfully underscored in the scene of the dust-storm. Maya indulges in violence that has been prolonged psychic struggle where her unconscious

gloominess dominates her reality. Maya has romantic love for beauty, color and all sensuous things whereas Gautama is not romantic and not romantic and sensitive towards life. Maya is a creature of instincts and a wayward and high strung child. As symbolized by her name she stands for the world of sensation. Gautama's name symbolizes asceticism, detachment from life. He is realistic and rational. He has philosophical detachment towards life as preached in Bhagwad Gita. "It had to be one of us, you see and it was so clear that it was I who was meant to live. You see to Gautama it didn't really matter. He didn't care and I did" (215-216). Maya is faithful to herself and therefore social and moral consequences of her actions do not matter to her any more now.

Maya is neurotic and hysteric. Maya fails to overcome the gloominess to face the reality and instead the gloominess dominates her mind and controls the reality of her life and makes a tragic flaw. A healthy emotional and sexual life would have given to her a sense of security and stopped her psyche from decaying but everything fails to happen in her life. Her superstitious belief thus helped her immensely in the process of unconsciously identifying her problem and which has its root from a gloominess figure of her unconscious psyche during her neurotic struggle.

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