



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 4. Issue.1., 2017 (Jan-Mar.)



INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA

2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY OF *MAYA VIS- A- VIS MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS*

SANGEETHA NOVAL

Assistant Professor

Jaipur National University, Jaipur

Email – [sangeetha\\_noval@yahoo.com](mailto:sangeetha_noval@yahoo.com)



ABSTRACT

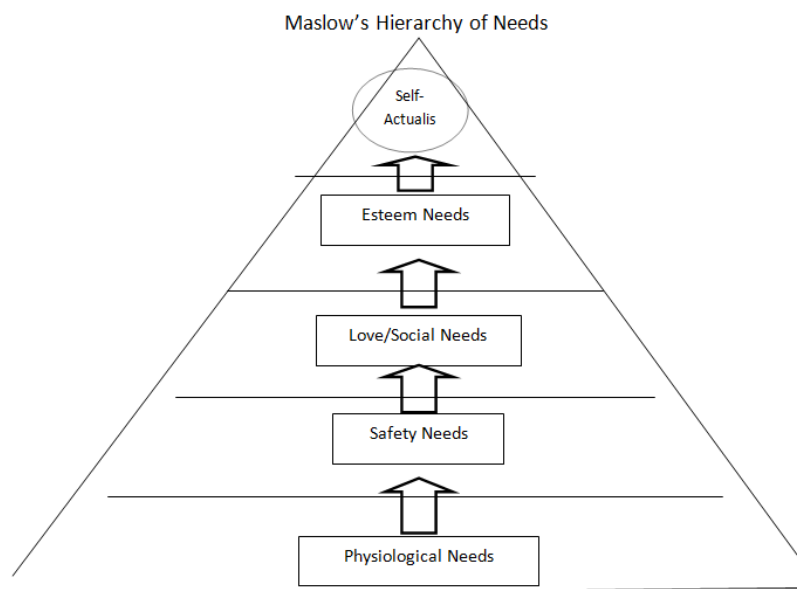
It is found on keen observation that the major reasons of the psychic turmoil in the life of Maya, the main protagonist of *Cry, the Peacock* could be directly assigned to the frustration of certain needs which are crucial for maintaining psychological and emotional equilibrium. Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of basic needs emphasizes on man's fundamental needs. According to him all human beings have a set of survival needs which include physiological needs, need for safety, for love, for belonging, for self esteem and finally for self actualization, arranged in an order of hierarchy. Once the fundamental need is fulfilled, (lowest in the hierarchy) other needs go on arising till the human being reaches the need for self actualization. This paper aims to study the deprivation Maya faces at this level of need (i.e.) the *Need for love and belongingness* and to unveil the submerged motivations of her obsessions and her neurotic behaviour as a result of the frustration of this need.

Key words: Self-Actualization, Neurosis, Psychic-disintegration, Frustration, Deprivation.

©KY PUBLICATIONS

Anita Desai is a writer, who with her serious concern for human condition shows an intense skill in exploring the emotional life of the characters in her stories. She has a serious concern for human condition and is highly concerned in her novels with the inner psychic turmoil and conflicts arising in the mind of Indian women. She explores the inner landscape of her characters so as to lay bare their psychic crises in their existential predicament. The exploration of the inner working of minds and sensibilities of her characters is revealed realistically in her novels.

There could be various reasons for Psychic disintegration. It is found on keen observation that the major reasons of the psychic turmoil in the life of Maya, the main protagonist of *Cry, the Peacock* could be directly assigned to the frustration of certain needs which are crucial for maintaining psychological and emotional equilibrium. Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of basic needs emphasizes on man's fundamental needs. According to him all human beings have a set of survival needs which include physiological needs, need for safety, for love, for belonging, for self esteem and finally for self actualization, arranged in an order of hierarchy. Once the fundamental need is fulfilled, (lowest in the hierarchy) other needs go on arising till the human being reaches the need for self actualization.



These are the needs which underlie as motivating forces behind an individual's behaviour. Maslow feels that the needs at the upper end of the hierarchy are weak and depend on the gratification of the lower needs. He postulates that man is an evolutionary creature whose higher nature seeks gratification just as surely as does his lower nature. Sickness arises when this upward evolution is blocked leading to psychic disintegration. Maslow terms neurosis as a deficiency disease. According to him:

Most neurosis involved along with other complex determinants- ungratified wishes for safety, for belongingness and identification for close relationships and for respect and prestige (*Toward a Psychology of Being* 21).

The Maslovian tenets facilitate to probe the consciousness of literary characters, to study their psychic conflicts, to examine their potentiality for full humanness. Carl Jung in his explanation of neurosis utilizes the concept of psychological equilibrium. Neuroses arise out of clash between an individual's attempt to adjust to some situation and "his constitutional inability to meet the challenge" (Page, *Abnormal Psychology* 91).

The unfulfilled needs psychically disintegrate some characters of Anita Desai. One such classic example is *Maya* who turns neurotic, kills her husband retrogresses to the state of her childhood and tries to ends her life, as she experiences a great deprivation of needs and gets gripped by neurotic anxiety as a result of combating the stress generated due to the frustration of needs in the hierarchy. But one cannot overlook the fact that Maya's exaggerated reactions to difficult situations in her life, in a major way could be assigned to the deprived 'sense of belongingness and love' in her life both before and after her marriage. In fact, her neurosis gets aggravated for the want of love and sense of belongingness. In Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs* this need for *Love and Belongingness* is on the third level. People have different approaches to cope with anxiety based on their childhood trainings and personality traits. Some cope with objectivity where as some incapable of doing so develop neurotic anxiety. Individuals experiencing loneliness and isolation feel a strong urge to affiliate. They feel motivated to belong and associate with other people and also to feel loved.

This paper aims to study the deprivation Maya faces at this level of need (i.e.) the *Need for love and belongingness* and to unveil the submerged motivations of her obsessions and her neurotic behaviour as a result of the frustration of this need.

It is quite clear that many characteristics of the healthy adults are the positive consequences of gratification of the love needs in childhood, such as the ability to allow independence to the loved one, the ability to withstand lack of love, the ability to love without giving up autonomy etc. In fact, the family and familial bonds are the greatest sources which not only cater towards the feelings of love but also generate a

sense of belongingness. Maya unfortunately is brought up in a family lacking bonding relationships which not only impairs her perceptions but also stunts her maturity.

As per the theory of Maslow, the central role of the parents and the normal family set up are indisputable. According to him:

Quarrelling, physical assault, separation, divorce or death within the family may be particularly terrifying. Also parental outburst of rage or threats of punishment directed towards a child elicit total panic and terror in the child, while it is true that in some children this terror may represent also a fear of loss of parental love, it can also occur in completely rejected children who seem to cling to the hating parents more for sheer safety and protection because of hope of love (*Motivation and Personality* 40).

The fact that she is brought up without her mother goes a long way in shaping her tragedy. She grows under the shadow of her authoritarian father, lacking all the tender qualities of a mother. Though, he focuses all his attention on her but instead of giving her freedom to grow as independent personality, he offers her a life of protection and resultantly of submission. She becomes emotionally dependent on her father and wishes to run to her father for his assurances, even after her marriage. This apparently loving father pampers and pacifies her irrespective of the gravity or trivialities of her fears. Maya grows physically but does not mature. Due to the vacuum created by not having a mother, she clings more to her father to mask her insecurity. Maya fails to grow up as an independent entity due to over-protection and sickly love dealt out to her.

Maya from her childhood regards the world as 'a toy world' specially made for her, painted in her childhood fantasies, ignorant of the adult world realities that hamper her adjustments in life. If Maya had her mother, she (mother) might have exposed her to the realities and hardships of the world, lacking which; Maya clings emotionally to her father, in order to feel secure. This repressed insecurity surfaces out when she experiences security in the presence of her mother-in-law after her marriage. Maya expresses it in her own words in the following lines.

If they stayed a while, they might help me, as my own father could not, by teaching me some of the marvellous indifferences to everything that was not vital immediate and present, I did not know how they could do this but somehow it had to be done (Desai, *Cry, the Peacock* 136).

Maya is haunted not only by her loneliness; she also yearns for a companionship in her life. Maya's tenderness finds an easy refuge in her mother substitute i.e., her mother-in-law. All her deprivations since her childhood for a mother surfaces out be gratified on seeing a motherly figure. She expresses her craving for her in this excerpt:

And yet I yearned for her to hold me to her bosom. I could not remember my own mother at all. My throat began to swell with unbearable self pity. I would cry, I knew it in a while and dreaded it, in their same presence, 'Please', I whispered (Desai, *Cry, the Peacock* 37).

Maya, neither does have a mother nor does she become a mother. She lacks love and belongingness again at a different level, where she is yet again deprived of fulfilling her maternal drive as she remains childless. Being childless, she is much attached to the dog and it seems that the dog is her child substitute. One of the important motives as given by the psychologist *Carrol* is the maternal motive. The Neo- Freudians, Neo- Jungians, Gestalt Therapist, Existential and Humanist psychologist believe commonly that a man is not a conditioned animal, but he has in him an 'evolutionary constructive'. According to Carol:

Every human being has an intrinsic nature. It is neither wholly good nor wholly bad, is rather neutral and weak. It can be pressurized by habit, cultural and social force, but it cannot be eliminated altogether. Forced by the evolutionary constructive every female feels dominated by her maternal drive. The behaviour involving the care and protection of offspring by the females of a species is called maternal behaviour and the motive that energizes a female to engage in such behaviour is called the maternal drive or motive" (as quoted in *Advanced Educational Psychology* 145).

Maya is deprived of the natural and innate maternal drive. It gives rise to self-hate, which ultimately generates frustration. If she had children, she might have had a positive self regard and a feeling of achievement which could have given her some identity as well as giving her a sense of bonding and affiliation.

Maya and her husband Gautama are of contrasting temperaments. He never loves Maya in the way she expects. This incompatibility builds a wide gulf between the two, depriving Maya of the feelings of the need for love and belongingness. At one instance Maya confesses the terror of her loneliness like this: "I cried then, the confession tearing out of me in a stormy rush, and even as I wiped away my quick tears, and wept more, I cried to myself-What is the use? I am alone" ( Desai, *Cry, the Peacock* 25). Maya, at various instances, is seen cribbing and complaining about Gautama's detached attitude towards her. Gautama is seen philosophizing sermons from Bhagvadgita highlighting the importance of 'detachment'. Maya in the beginning of the novel is seen experiencing loneliness due to Gautama's unfriendly and apathetic attitude over her pet dog's death which is portrayed in the following lines:

'You need a cup of tea,' he said. Yes, I cried, yes, it is hardness – no, no, not hardness, but the distance he coldly keeps from me. His coldness, his coldness, and incessant talks of cups of tea and philosophy in order not to hear me talk and talking reveal myself.' It is that – my loneliness in this house (14).

It is an accepted fact that some important personality dispositions that affect the success of a relationship are those associated with interpersonal behaviour and attachment styles. Thus, individuals with pre-occupied or fearful – avoidant styles have less satisfying relationship than those with secure. Though Gautama is a faithful husband who takes care of Maya and loves her in his own way, Maya is never satisfied and happy. She is deprived of the emotional attachment between them as he preaches detachment as a philosophy of *Bhagvadgita*. "The Gita does not preach involvement in traditions. It preaches –recommends rather detachment on every count" (21). Maya and Gautama do not share a strong bond though they live with one other. The distance is visible in the following lines of Maya.

And so we strolled up and down the lawn, talking desultorily, not really listening to each other, being intent, on our own paths, which however ran parallel and closely enough for us to briefly brush against each other, now and then, reminding us- or perhaps only myself – of the peace that comes from companion life alone, from brother flesh (21).

Maya gets an apparent companionship from Gautama which does not satisfy her real need for love and belongingness. *Love and a sense of belonging* are crucial to maintain the mental equilibrium. Maya is deprived of this and as a result is unable to adjust to the demands of life.

Maya at many instances is seen cribbing about the non reversal of love and concern from Gautama's side when she undergoes utter emotional turmoil. Marital relationships are established with the explicit purpose of providing companionship to each other. However, the element of companionship is sadly missing in the relationship between Maya and Gautama. Maya never acknowledges that Gautama loves her because he loves her in his own way. She herself admits that the basis of her marriage is the friendship between her father and Gautama and not on similarities between herself and Gautama. They seem to belong to different realms of world. Maya does not find any similarity between their thoughts and passions. Maya grumbles over this deprivation of companionship in the following lines:

Was it so unforgivable to wish to share in human friendliness? in companionship? To Gautama it was – for a woman, for a light headed woman, a childish one, like myself. In his world there were vast areas in which he would never permit me and, and he could not understand that I could even wish to enter them, foreign as they were to me. On his part, understanding was scant, love was meager. Not to be loved as one does (89).

Despite living together, they remain alien to each other's emotion. Maya expresses this torment in the following lines – "Telling me to go to sleep while he worked at his papers, he did not give another thought to me, to either my soft willing body or the lonely wanting mind that waited near his bed" (14). The physical, mental and emotional isolation torments Maya who struggles in pursuit to relate to Gautama.

This attitudinal difference imposes a psychic struggle in Maya's mind, leading to her psychic disintegration. If Maya had received love and a sense of belonging from Gautama at the required intervals, she might have been more accommodative of Gautama's philosophy. Gautama philosophizes at wrong timings when Maya is starved of love and attachment; he tries to fill the vacuum by preaching detachment. This in turn, develops hatred for Gautama in Maya's heart and ultimately eases Maya's decision of murdering him. The lack of love and sense of belonging generates psychopathological symptoms as experienced by Maya in these lines:

This is not natural, I told myself, this cannot be natural. There is something weird about me now.

Wherever I go, whatever I see, whatever I listen to has this unnaturalness to it. This is insanity (122).

Maya moves towards gradual disintegration of her vanity, wisdom, calm and her approaching stage of madness. She blames Gautama for her suffocating life - a life without love and affection.

Gautama's preaching of detachment makes a void in Maya's emotional world which ultimately coaxes her to get rid of a loveless association. She hurls down Gautama to death in a blinding moment of unbearable agony. After murdering Gautama, she regresses to her childhood; in her childlike innocence she reveals the real motivation behind killing Gautama. "It had to be one of us, you see 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." (182)

Abraham Maslow correlates thwarting of love needs and belongingness with maladjustments in life. According to him:

In our society the thwarting of these basic needs is the most commonly found care in cases of maladjustments and more severe pathology. Love and affection, as well as their possible expression in sexuality, are generally looked upon with ambivalence and are customarily hedged about with many restrictions and inhibitions. Practically all theorists of psychology have stressed thwarting of love needs as basic in the picture of maladjustment (*Motivation & Personality*, 1954 44).

The discrepancy between what she needs and what she gets (harsh reality), pushes her into appalling anguish. Therefore, she is a loner who grapples to win some understanding out of an intensely privatized world of personal emotions. If Maya could sublimate her frustrated needs, it could have reduced her agony. She fails to live as contributing member of the society and develops impulsiveness which is a symptom of psychopathology.

#### **Works cited**

Desai, Anita, *Cry, the Peacock*. New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 2013. Print.

Maslow, Abraham. *Motivation and Personality*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1954. Print.

---. *Towards a Psychology of Being*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1968. Print

Page, James. *Abnormal Psychology*. New Delhi: Tata Mc Graw -Hill, 1970. Print.

---