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DEPENDENCE ON MASCULINITY IN CRY, THE PEACOCK BY ANITA DESAI

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Gender inequality is not the fight against the men or women; it is the fight against the existing system of society. Our system is structured with the idea that a female should depend on male financially and even mentally. Our motherland India is no exception to it. From the childhood, children are made to depend on masculinity, which has become an inevitable part in their upbringing. Women are made to depend on her father, then her husband later her children. Her thoughts, her ideas, her dreams and her emotions were always taken for granted. She has always been a victim of male chauvinism in the society. She finally reaches the prison of mental turmoil.

To bring out this query of female in the society, there are a hand full of Indian feministic writers. One among them was Anita Desai, who is one of the prominent Indian novelists. Anita Mazumdar was born in 1937 in Mussoorie, India to a German mother Toni Nime and a Bengali business man, D. N. Mazumdar. She was well versed in German, Bengali, Urdu, Hindi and English. She has been shortlisted for Booker prize thrice. She received a Sahitya academy award in 1978 for her novel *Fire on the mountain*. She owns the British Guardian Prize for the novel *The Village by the Sea* in 1983. She has been awarded with Padma Bushan in 2014.

Anita Desai's first novel *Cry, The Peacock* was published in 1963 and had been awarded with Sahitya Academy Award. In *Cry, The Peacock*, Anita Desai brought out the cry of the young married girl, Maya who suffered from neurotic illness and fear of childhood prophecy by an albino prophet. From childhood she was so much dependent on her father. To her life is but a fantasy world painted in her choice of colour. She lived like a princess in the fairy tale. She was so lively and free spirited enjoying every little facets of nature. She was married to Gautama, a father surrogate who was a complete realist. His way of looking at life is completely different from Maya's. He has no attachment to emotions and always believed in detachment from emotion. Maya was a very sensitive woman who mourns deliberately for trivial matters. This adds disharmony and detachment in their marriage life. She was always in thirst for words and affection. Gautama's practicality and Maya's fantasy never matched. Gautama and his entire family were interested in the political issues and other facts of life. But for Maya these are the subjects of irrelevance. These discrepancies, detachment and disharmony added up to her mental illness. Her loneliness never cascaded and increased day by day. As a father surrogate without emotions, Gautama could not meet with the expectations of Maya.

As the days passed Maya's fear of death as prophesized by an albino prophet during her childhood that either Maya or her husband will die on the fourth year of their marriage heightened. Loneliness of the house feasted upon the mental state of Maya. She started developing hallucination of odd creatures such as dead ants, shrill of owl, lizards in the dessert and snakes. Her insanity extended to the limit of killing her husband by pushing him from the roof top of the house while admiring the moon. She gives a lame excuse that Gautama had no means of living and was aware that death is inevitable of every individual. It is better for

Gautama to die instead of Maya who always had great love for living life to the fullest. The novel ends with death of Gautama, extreme insanity of Maya who was sent to her father's house.

The entire novel *Cry, The Peacock* deals with the mental turmoil of Maya. The title of the novel *Cry, The Peacock* depicts the cry of Maya. Peacocks fight, bleed and mate after they are exhausted. Similarly Maya always fights to get her love. As the father surrogate without the strain emotions Gautama couldn't provide her with needs which she expected. To Maya the shrill of the peacock always reminded her death which she explains by saying that, "'Pia, Pia', they cry. Lover, lover. 'Mio, Mio' – 'I die, I die'" (Desai 91).

Maya's life of fantasy and her thirst for love reminds unquenched by Gautama. He never gave interest in her ideas and thoughts. He is always a man of few words who is a complete contradict to Maya. She states that "you know nothing of me and of how I can love. How I want to love. How it is important to me. You never loved. And you don't love me..." (Desai 97). This sense of disharmony and loneliness added to her illusions which heightened her neurotic disorder. From her childhood Maya was so much dependent on her father which was clearly seen through the statement of Gautama that, "A spoiled baby, so spoiled she can't bear one adverse word. Everyone must bring a present to Maya – that is what her father taught her." (Desai 99).

Maya's description about her surroundings, her admiration for the nature around her, her minute notification of shrills of birds and her aesthetic outlook of trees depict her love for tiny facets of nature this in turn portrays her life in solitude. She says that, "His coldness and incessant talk of cups of tea and philosophy in order to not to hear me talk, and talking reveal myself. It is that – my loneliness in this house" (Desai 14).

Maya always mused over her detachment with Gautama. She grieved that "childish face, pretty, plump and pampered its smooth silken skin with one small velvet mole... but it was not the face that a man like Gautama could love" (Desai 91). These lines depicts Maya's emotional downpour. Maya was completely dejected with her married life. Each and every day she tried to recollect her broken expectation. She says that, "It was discouraging to reflect on how much in our marriage has based upon nobility forced upon us from outside and therefore neither forced upon us from outside and therefore neither true nor lasting. It was broken repeatedly, and repeatedly the pieces were picked up and put together again." (Desai 40).

We can also apply Freudian concept of sexual obsession as Maya was too much obsessed with her father which in turn made her accept Gautama who was much elder to Maya. Gautama also states that, "If you know your Freud it would be very straight forward and then appear as merely inevitable to you taking your childhood and upbringing into consideration you have a very obvious father obsession – which is also the reason why you married me" (Desai 40).

Maya was too much attached to her father from her childhood and she expects the same care and love from her husband. She was denied of making decisions on her own from her childhood. She was so much dependent on her father and husband that even her mental state of happiness depend on them. She states that, "Am I gone insane? Father! Brother! Husband! Who is my saviour? I am in need of one" (Desai 84).

This statement bares a baggage of message that a woman who depends upon her father or husband to the greater extend will ruin their life. Maya's destiny could have been different if she had hold of her mental happiness rather depending upon her husband for it. Maya throughout her life tried to find her own identity. But her major flaw is her dependency on her father and husband in addition to her fear of death. Thus each and every woman of the society should have hold on their mental happiness rather depending upon their father or brother or husband. Each woman should find their own identity in her life. They should not get emotionally attached to the masculine power. The society is structured with connotation that a female should depend on her father then her husband and then her children. But a female can find her own identity in the society without depending upon the masculinity on greater extend. Though men and women in the society are interdependent, it should not exceed its limitations.

Works Cited

Desai, Anita. *Cry, The Peacock*. Orient, 2005. Printed.