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ANALYSIS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA IN CRY THE PEACOCK AND WIFE

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ABSTRACT

Indian writing in English has produced a galaxy of women writers touching various facets of woman's life. Women's writings in India with its varied dimensions and themes have occupied a very important place in the field of literature. Indian English women novelists have favorably responded to the changed psychological realities of Indian life after Independence and have an authentic treatment to this situation. An interesting preoccupation of these writers appears to be delving into the labyrinthine depths of the Indian psyche and showing its relation to society. And nowhere is this concern more obvious than in the novels that figure neurotic characters. Anita Desai's *Cry, The Peacock* and Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife*, portray sensitive individuals in their moments of intense struggle and their efforts to seek neurotic solutions to their problems. In the course of the ordeal called living, the protagonists of these novels find themselves at odds with society and undergo various degrees of psychological transformation. The women characters of Anita Desai undergo strange psychic experiences and suffer from failures and frustrations. They undergo trauma due to their hypersensitive nature and their insensitive husbands. Both the characters Maya and Dimple are living a life justified by the metaphorical implications of their names, like illusion and depression and always find themselves away from the elixir of life, a life of love and consummation

KEYWORDS:

Alienation, Frustration, Isolation, Psychological Trauma

INTRODUCTION

Psychology utilizes the scientific method to understand the positive and emotionally fulfilling aspects of human behavior. It is the study of what actions, pursuits, and motivations best contribute to the good life. Psychology is the scientific study of mind and behavior. The word Psychology comes from the Greek words Psyche meaning Life and Logos meaning explanations. Psychology is the scientific

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study of behavior and mental process. Psychoanalysis is the school of Psychology founded by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). Psychoanalytic propose that most of mind is unconscious a Seething Cauldron of conflicting impulses urges and wishes.

Sigmund Freud (1856 -1939) was a physiologist and father of psychoanalysis and is generally recognized as one of the most influential and authoritative thinkers of the twentieth century. His work has been tremendously influential in the popular imagination popularizing such notions as the unconscious, defense mechanisms, Freudian slips and dreams of symbolism while also making a long lasting impact on fields as diverse as literature film, Marxist and feminist theory, literary criticism, philosophy, psychology. He is best known for his theories of the unconscious mind especially involving the mechanism of repression. The concept of the unconscious as proposed by Freud of allegedly groundbreaking in that he proposed that awareness existed in layers and that there were thoughts occurring below the surface.

A major goal of psychology is to predict behavior by understanding its causes making predictions is difficult in part because people vary and respond differently in different situations. Individual differences are the variations among people on physical or psychological dimensions. For instance, although many people experience at least some symptoms of depression at some times in their lives, the experience varies dramatically among people. Some people experience major negative events, such as severe physical injuries or the loss of significant others, without experience severe depression for no apparent reason.

Psychological Trauma is a type of damage to the mind that occurs as a result of severely distressing event. Psychological trauma threatens one's survival and sense of security. Typical causes and dangers of psychological trauma include harassment, embarrassment, abandonment, abusive relationships, rejection, co-dependence, physical assault. A person may re-experience the trauma mentally and physically, will avoid trauma which triggers. Triggers and Cues act as reminders of the trauma and can cause anxiety and other associated emotions. As this can be uncomfortable and even painful .They may turn to psychoactive substances including alcohol to try to escape the feelings. Re-experiencing symptoms are a sign that the body and mind are actively struggling to cope with the traumatic experience. Consequently, intense feelings of anger way frequently surface, sometimes in inappropriate or unexpected situations, as danger may always seem to be present, as much as it is actually present and experienced from past events. Upsetting memories such as images, thoughts, or flash backs may haunt the person, and nightmares may be frequent. Insomnia may occur as lurking fears and insecurity keep the person vigilant and be on the lookout for danger, both day and night.

Anita Desai is one of those few Indian novelists in English who have tried to understand intimately the predicament of their female characters. She represents the welcome creative release of the feminine sensibility which began to emerge after World War II. Desai is a novelist of considerable merits and has enriched the Indian novel in English in ways more than one. It is her thematic concerns and technical innovations that have been chiefly responsible for making her a disturbing and demanding presence in Indo-Anglican fiction.

Desai is not a novelist whose predominant interests are social or sociological. Desai herself has written excellent psychological novels, which she describes as purely subjective. She writes:

It has been my personal luck that my temperament and circumstances have combined to give me the shelter. Privacy and solitude required for the writing of such novels,

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thereby avoiding problems a more objective writer has to deal with since he depends upon observation rather than a private vision. (Anita Desai , "The Indian Writer's Problems", in R.k.Dhawan ,ed. Exploration in Modern Indo-English Fiction P 255)

Cry, The Peacock published in 1963 is Desai's first novel. It broke new grounds and is considered to be a trend-setter in feminist writing. Here Anita Desai portrays a hyper-sensitive, and cultured Maya and dives deep into her trapped feminine psyche from childhood to her untimely death as a youth. She is the victim of many social and psychological predicaments. Her social status affects her psyche to the extent that she becomes an easy victim of many known and unknown inner traumas. There is no denying the fact that Maya receives a comfortable upbringing. She has no shortage of material comforts, but the high intensity of pain she faces at mental level takes her to tragic end.

Cry, The Peacock the opening part of the novel depicts the mourning over the death of her dog, Toto, to be eaten by scavengers, soon after "crows sat in a circle around the corpse and crows will eat anything entrails, eyes, anything. Files began to hum amidst the line, driving away the bees and unthinking butterflies." (P 7). The death motive is built skillfully into the structure of the story. Maya, obsessed with the idea of death from the beginning is achingly responsive to the acquire, poetic beauty of life. After four years of their married life Maya and Gautama have not been able to get better sense of understanding and mutual adjustments between them. There seems to be a sense of frustration reigning in her. Even people sometimes say, no, you are too young. But Gautama is indifferent to his physical structure. He does not give any importance to it as a means of attraction for a woman particularly his wife, Maya, but she sighs for this type of Gautama's negligence to her. Gautama is however, deeply lost in thinking or official duties of "some musty old case, about money, or property, or sometimes dreary like that." (P 23)

Maya's views are always opposite to Gautama's. She always labors under father fixation whose crippling impact on her is quite in the novel. Anita Desai is deeply influenced by D.H. Lawrence. *Cry, The Peacock* reminds us of Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*. She is also influenced by Freud in the novel. Gautama is conscious that Maya suffers from father-fixation in his discussion with Maya. He utters.

If you know your Freud it would all be very straight forward and then appear as merely inevitable to you taking your childhood and upbringing into consideration. You have very obvious father-obsession which is also the reason why you married me, a man so much older than yourself. It is a complex that, unless you mature rapidly, you will not be able to deal with, to destroy. (P 23)

Gap of communication between husband and wife is well developed and felt throughout the novel. Ego and complex should not come after marriage. This is the main reason of failure of married life. Maya and Gautama always disagree with each other. Maya herself reflects upon her unsuccessful marriage. It was discouraging to reflect on. Much in our marriage was based upon

nobility 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 as of a scared icon with which, out of the pettiest superstition, we could not bear to part. And one might have said that their marriage was grounded upon the friendship of the two men, and the mutual respect in which they held each other than upon everything else.

The clash between the irreconcilably difficult temperaments of Maya and Gautama is highly significant throughout the novel due to the lack of communication between them. The married life of

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Maya and Gautama is not successful. The worlds of both husband and wife are sharply contrasted and both represent the extremities of masculine and feminine principles. Both are opposite in their nature. Maya is sensuous, and leads a meaningful life, on the other hand Gautama represents himself into the form of order, discipline and career. Maya is not so much into aberration and insanity as she is into her longing for love, of the peace that comes from companion life, from brother flesh. She wants to bathe in the lambency of contact, relationship and communion. Gautama has no sensations – he cannot distinguish the smell of petunia from the smell of lemons – he is into abstract thought. She has the capacity to differentiate between her childhood pranks, the indulgence of a doting father and the clamorous demands of her lawyer husband. She castigates Gautama for his grossness, for his concern with the fundamentals and basics of life in terms of money. "It is always money or property – never a case of passion and revenge murder, and exciting like thatNot for love or life, or basic things – like Toto dying." (P 49)

The Bengali heroine of Wife has been named Dimple, which Oxford English Dictionary defines as any slight surface depression. As the novel progresses Dimple is much more than specifically depressed, for "she leaves more of a gash than just a dimple" (P 6) on the surface of her life. The story is an upsetting account of the conflict between the Western and Indian cultures and the modern and conventional traditions as embodied in the life of Dimple Das Gupta, and these conflicts are related with some sort of comic ferocity. Dimple appears a very brutally drawn character who ends in depression, madness and murder. The murder which is expected to be as self-assertive act, on the part of the author, ends up in a misguided action. Her background of a Bengali college educated girl, suddenly thrown into an alien West, becomes a prisoner of the Ghetto. "She never left that Flushing area in Queens." (P 7) The essential problem therefore remains one of communication, the inability to face up to one's emotional crack-up. Superficially, of course, it can be read as the predicament of an Indian wife, finding herself out of depths, in a foreign country with alien milieu. This situation of cultural shock is perhaps a little too trite, for it could also be explained as the agony of a voice, struggling for identity, and getting stifled repeatedly.

The passion and fulfillment that Dimple thought "would become magically lucid on her wedding day," (P 10) eludes her once she is married to Amit Basu, a consulting engineer, who is ideal in the sense that he has already applied for immigration to Canada and US, also has job application pending in Kenya, besides with important family connections and hence in the process of getting passport, visas etc.

Dimple Dasgupta,

Had set her heart on marrying a neurosurgeon, but her father was looking for engineers in the matrimonial ads. Dimple wanted a different kind of life- an apartment in Chowringhee, her hair done by Chinese girls, trips to New Market for nylon saris- so she hoped, would bring her freedom, cocktail parties, on carpeted lawns, fund raising dinners for noble charities. Marriage would bring her love. Dimple was happy about that decision, her thoughts of premarital life as a dress rehearsal for actual living. Years of waiting had already made her nervous, unnaturally prone to colds, coughs and headaches, wasted years- she was twenty- lay like a chill weight in her body. (P 9)

Significantly Dimple's problem does not lie outside her. She would remain foreigner wherever she is to go. Her problem lies within her. She suffers from a psychic disorder, as is clear from her behavior

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all along and "it is difficult to treat the novel as a study of cultural shock for even while in Calcutta, Dimple is an escapist and lost in her private world of fantasy." (P 11)

Her dreams are more directly related to sexual awareness and how she can step out of the limits imposed by the Sita legend rather than independence or self-realization: "At no juncture does she posit a word which is more integrated or more free than the one in which she is placed. Her isolation is rooted not merely in loneliness, in isolation or cultural differences but in her estrangement from her own past and her own inner being." (P 12)

She is obsessed with the T.V programme which shows love, murder, death, and frustration in love, and her interest for the newspapers is confined to scary deaths, ugly and at random. She neither finds interest nor time to make friends with Archana or for that matter other children. As T.V insidiously erodes an already warped sense of reality. Dimple finds increasing difficulty in distinguishing between what she has seen on T.V and what she has imagined. Her husband too becomes indistinguishable from the characters of T.V. Dimple's resentment insidiously toward Amit, sporadically erupts into little acts of rebellion, as when she starts talking back or challenges him in her growing awareness of sensuality.

The final surreal sequence shows Amit and Dimple watching a discussion about suicide on the Johnny Carson show, when Dimple is transfixed by an episode in which a baby face in a bird cage is poked at, till it turns into a mangled bleeding mass, then wrapped in newspaper, from which silk-scarves, rabbits are extracted. The incident makes no impression on Amit. Mukherjee's emphasis is on Dimple's consciousness and perception of reality. The Jacket of the novel claims: Dimple, the pliant, obedient daughter of middle – class Indian parents, is married off to Amit Basu – Dimple finds the adjustments to marriage more difficult than she had expected but the move to New York leaves her in a state of shock and finally despair.

The murder itself may be ambiguous in many ways, but it is symbolic of Dimple's assertion of power at a critical juncture. It has freed her from becoming a prisoner of ghetto, unbearable to her free thinking mind, and she descends into depression, madness and murder.

The two characters, Maya and Gautama, has been studied and described so deeply that a reader gets a complete picture of the impact of psychology on their relationship. Both the characters are in total contrast of one another. On the one hand, Maya is sensitive and believes in imaginary or dream world, whereas, on the other hand, Gautama is insensitive and realistic. Maya's depression and uneasiness forces her to believe that Gautama has no love for her and her subconscious mind pushes her to kill her husband without any guilt. In the novel, we feel the communication gap between husband and wife throughout the novel. That is why, it is said: "Although their marriage has been an utter fiasco, they continue to be together, leading an explosive life of in communication." (Prasad P 5)

In the character of Dimple, her feelings of adequacy are seriously threatened by the adjustive demand, as a result of which her reactions tend to become defense-oriented, which primarily aims at protecting the self from hurt and disorganization. Every individual has the desire of some or the other need which they want to be fulfilled. In Dimple also, there is an urge for the need to understand and achieve a meaningful picture of the world around her. In psychology this need is also defined as curiosity. Dimple has lived in a fantasy world of advertising and advice columns because of which, the need of curiosity emerged in her. "She thought of pre-marital life as a dress rehearsal for actual living." (*Wife P 3*) She constantly imagines her future husband to be the very embodiment of the virtues of the commercial society.

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The signs of abnormality in Dimple are quiet obvious. She angers her husband by making fun of his dress, and by spilling curry on his shirt. She goes to the extent of condemning the gifts he brings for her. Her abnormality reaches the climax when she skips her way to abortion.

She had skipped rope until her legs grew numb and her stomach burned; then she had poured water from the heavy bucket over her head, shoulders, over the tight little curve of her stomach. She had poured until the last of the blood washed off her legs; then she had collapsed. (*Wife P 42*)

A sadist as she is, she derives self-satisfaction by harming others. To Dimple "the dead mouse looked pregnant." (P 35) In killing the mouse she has destroyed her own self, by killing her own child.

Both Maya and Dimple are psychically disturbed characters. Having been brought up in a realm where they were taught only to dream and yield to emotions, they both suffer physically, emotionally and psychically on entering a marital life which shatters all their dreams and expectations. The conflict in the life of Maya results because of temperamental differences but it should not be looked upon as social and domestic discard but it is deeply rooted in the fantasy of childhood experience and the prophecy of albino astrologer regarding death of one of the partners four years after marriage and it gets aggravated at the death of a pet dog Toto. Dimple of *Wife* on the other hand dreams of freedom and love, which marriage might confer upon but she is ambiguous regarding love and freedom, as she could not visualize the fact that freedom and love also have certain limitations and finds her dreams and aspirations shattered and unfulfilled. Both Maya and Dimple fail to grasp the real vision of life and are led to neurosis and become morbid due to vast gap between fantasy and reality.

To conclude it is discovered that both the characters Maya and Dimple are living a life justified by the metaphorical implications of their names, like illusion and depression and always find themselves away from the elixir of life, a life of love and consummation. They are alienated from the world, from society, from families and friends, and even from their own selves because they are not ordinary people but individuals made to stand against the general current of life; struggling against it to attain the aspired world. What they need utmost is, to enlarge their outlook and vision of life and to understand that life is more a matter of adjustment than achievement. Through this moderate attitude they ought to have exerted for the fulfillment of their aspirations but it could not be denied that people in society should also rise higher from petty gender distinction and should extend equal opportunity and freedom to female child.

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