



VIDHYAYANA

ISSN 2454-8596

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal

Depiction of Intricacy and Predicament in the lives of Maya in Cry, the Peacock by Anita Desai & Anjali in Maunraag by Kaajal Oza Vaidya: A Comparative Analysis

Ms. Shivangi Dipakkumar Oza

Assistant Professor

Atmiya University, Rajkot (Gujarat)



VIDHYAYANA

ISSN 2454-8596

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal

Abstract:

This paper attempts to show the comparative analysis of two female protagonists portrayed by two well-reputed and self-made female writers from two different languages. Anita Desai is an innovative and original writer and stands unsurpassed among contemporary Indian women novelists in English. She concentrates on exploring the submerged depths and dark recesses of women's consciousness, in fictional representation. Her novels unravel the mystery of the inner life of her characters. Kaajal Oza Vaidya is the leading voice in the contemporary Gujarati literature. She has captivating stories to tell about individuals who have to move about in society, combating for the independent existence. She gets interested in analysing and portraying human relationships, mostly indulging in some kind of dilemma and searching for the answers. Both the writers have portrayed the female protagonists, their Existence in life, their Identity, their Emotional Trauma and the Conflicts. The complexities and crisis arise in Maya and Anjali's lives due to various social and psychological aspects that lead them to Isolation, Alienation and Self-Destruction. The marital disharmony born out of inarticulateness disturbs the internal peace and turns out to be the nervous breakdown. The comparative analysis of these two characters give insight into the treatment of similar themes in two different languages, written in two different periods. The complexities and crisis in Maya & Anjali's lives provide an interesting study of similarities and dissimilarities of two females searching for their identity and meaning of life.

Keywords: Existence, Human Relationships, Identity, Emotional Trauma, Conflicts, Isolation, Alienation and Self-Destruction.

Introduction:

This paper is an attempt to compare two female protagonists of two female writers who belong to two different parts of India, portraying the female plight and trauma. The two writers selected for the study



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ISSN 2454-8596

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are Anita Desai and Kaajal Oza Vaidya.

Anita Desai is a ground-breaking and original writer and stands matchless among contemporary Indian women novelists in English. She distillates on discovering the immersed depths and dark recesses of women's consciousness, in fictional representation. Her novels unravel the mystery of the inner life of her characters.

Among major Gujarati novelists, Kaajal has secured the place wherein she not only writes about the characters and human relations but focuses more on women characters; instead, they become the central part of her fictional works. Kaajal has nicely depicted the female suffering in the form of the Indian woman trapped in a traditional but incompatible marriage or in social bonds from which she cannot come out. The social changes have greatly influenced the female author's projection of woman in literature.

The protagonists in contemporary women's fiction in India faces a fundamental problem which is a natural result of the shift in socio-cultural conditions. The females want to determine their true identity, which leads to problems. In India, the traditional, as well as modern ideology, can exist together. Most modern women still find their roots in tradition. The new women writers in fiction project a self-confident and self-assertive woman. This is the change in projection from the way the women were projected earlier.

The portrayal of Female Protagonist by Anita Desai and Kaajal Oza Vaidya:

The protagonists of Anita Desai are such remarkable females who find themselves imprisoned in the situation which are not under their control and for whom the traditional-bound, the patriarchal family set up is accountable. The sufferings of life threaten their individual identity and questions on their existence force them to alienate themselves from others around them. Their separation comes out from a lack of companionship with which they could feel secure and their reactions range alternatively between rebellion



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ISSN 2454-8596

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and acceptance. All the same, there is a quest for self-identity and self-realization.

The central concern of Anita Desai as a novelist is the exploration of women's consciousness in its conflict with the traditional patriarchal family and social set up. Desai remains mainly the novelist of moods, persistent states of mind, and the inner psychological world. Most of her novels are extended narrations of the being which is struggling to get the meaning of the existence. She tries to see the world in terms of experience as it comes out of the encounter of the self with the outer world. She portrays the journey in order to expose not only the extremity of the suffering endured by the women but also the deep psychological problems that affect many human beings. Desai conceptualizes the existential problems of her characters; with the help of psycho-analysis. The principal motifs of her works are "basic needs" and "unfulfilled requirements". Her treatment of alienation, isolation, the absurdity of human existence, the quest for ultimate meaning are important aspects which she uses to make her protagonists and other characters sharp.

Kaajal has the art to bring out the reality of the world, through a very ordinary story. Her characters seem real and familiar to all the readers. She projects the picture of a New-Woman very strongly. She portrays a variety of women from the traditional, dominated and suggests that she wants to protest against the good old image of women who cannot live their lives according to their own wish and who cannot lead their lives as per their will. Her female characters are free thinkers and they have a voice. Her protagonists are of higher class, marginalized to the extremely modern and unconventional women. Kaajal does not portray her female characters just as subordinates or mere helpers at home. She, as a writer, tries to mirror or portray her mindset through various female characters. The extensive evaluation of her works portray females educated and very sensible. She is in favour of self-realization and self-liberation. Majority of her female characters belong to the affluent class who do not have to face the traditional problems but still have some vacuum inside, who are fighting for the meaning of life and existence.



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ISSN 2454-8596

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Comparative Analysis of Intricacy and Predicament in the lives of Maya and Anjali:

Cry The Peacock, even though Desai's first novel, catapulted her name to the literary world, with its poetic language, narration, techniques and especially the portrayal of the female protagonist marked by her violent outburst and emotionalism. This novel resonates with the unappeased cry of a young girl for the love that drives her through insanity, frustration, and obsession with death's childhood prophecy. The character of Maya is sensitive and is pitied against an insensitive spouse. Maya is a case of severe psychosis; she values love and attention, more than anything in the world. When Gautama does not fulfil her needs, she turns violent. She kills him. Her alienation and consequent troubles are not due to just marital disharmony, but this marital discord emanates from her own inner conflicts.

Whereas *Maun Raag* is about the journey of a prominent Mumbai socialite Anjali, from a middle-class girl to a self-sufficient woman. The protagonist Anjali of the novel *Maun Raag* is a perfect representative of the modern woman of today. Her ambivalence and consequent mental turmoil make her a perfect picture of a present woman. Through Anjali's character, Kaajal has tried to portray the picture of a contemporary educated, independent-minded woman who undergoes a mental ordeal as she cannot reconcile to her husband's ignorance about her past which haunts her.

The prime similarity between Maya and Anjali is their motherless childhood. Maya is the daughter of an aristocrat advocate in Lucknow. As her mother being dead, Maya is the only female member at home; she gets all the attention of her father. Excessive affection makes her have a naïve perception of life. She has developed a refined taste for luxury and beauty. The overprotecting and over caring love of her father does not allow her to have her own independent thought process to grow as a human. The indulgent attention of her father makes her yearn the same from her husband Gautama as well. However, unfortunately, life does not act according to her wish.

However, Anjali is a father supported child and ambitious girl, tries to find the true meaning and



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identity of her life, in various roles assigned to her by various codes of culture and society. She lives with her father in a house situated in Nargol, a beautiful place near the seashore. Anjali's father, Parikshit Tripathi, the retired professor and a learned man nurtured Anjali with utmost care and love. She has got everything that is needed to live life peacefully. After the death of her mother, Anjali's father is her world. Her father gives her upbringing that denies compromise and adjustment at the cost of self-respect and happiness.

Maya's character has two very pronounced traits; almost childlike helplessness and an intense longing for love that is nearly morbid and the root cause of her trouble. The fact that Maya is a motherless child, delicate and sensitive, goes a long way in shaping her tragedy. Her father is a benevolent despot under whose shadow, she grows up. He gives her all of his attention and instead of giving her the freedom to grow as an individual, he gives her a life of protection and consequently of submission. On the other hand, Anjali's father teaches her to live her life on her own terms. He nurtures her with love, care and virtues. Anjali's intelligence is the gift of her father and this helps her to make the right decisions in life. The ideal upbringing, the extensive reading and the complete independence allow Anjali to become a perfect example of the new woman of the time. However, she too feels helpless at times. She too craves for the love. However, the treatment of the characters is different.

Maya and Gautama try to live peacefully, but the relationship between husband and wife lacks the emotional attachment; Maya is highly emotional, sensitive and full of imaginations; on the opposite side, Gautama is a completely unimaginable, very practical and less emotional person. This is the contrast that grows more and more as the novel proceeds. She has trained herself to live in the constant flow of love, sympathy and admiration but this is disturbed when her husband Gautama does not do the same. She feels unwanted, rejected and neglected. She is in constant need of support. She gets frightened to be without the company because she cannot approach her real self alone. Whenever Gautama attends her and pays



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ISSN 2454-8596

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attention, she feels gratitude. This happens because she considers Gautama as her protector, her guard. When he does not respond in a usual manner, her pride is hurt and she feels the insult of rejection. This is not just the simple household situation where the wife is shouting on an over-busy husband. It is actually a cry of an agonized woman who is feeling lonely and unwanted. She suffers a lot. She craves for the love and in this search, she surrenders herself to her husband. The wish to surrender to a stronger personality is inherent in a morbidly dependent character.

Maya willingly marries Gautama, still faces the consequences; whereas Anjali is forced to marry Akshay under obligation, though she loved Aniruddha. This compromise leads her to the new phase of her life. In the third phase of Anjali's life, she is living the so-called perfect life with her husband, two children Anushka, Amol and all the luxuries of the world. Nevertheless, after the two decades of her life, Mrs Anjali Akshay Desai, the successful writer and national award winner for her works, goes into the deep introspection of her life. For twenty long years of her marriage, she successfully manages to suppress her feelings, thinking that it is more important to be a good wife than to be a good writer. Anjali pays respect to the traditional concept of wife and her role in the family rather than her self-aspirations. Closer scrutiny of her life reveals that to achieve the stage of fulfilment as a wife, under the moral obligation, she has surpassed her desires that lead to self-actualization and fulfilment. The real Anjali, brought up by Parikshit Tripathi and Mrs. Anjali Desai seem to be two different people.

Both the characters, Maya and Anjali, witness marital disharmony. The main reason is inarticulateness. They both lack the art of communication in their relations with their husbands. Gautama and Akshay are indifferent to the small needs of their wives and they remain unmoved to the strong desires of their counterparts. Maya and Anjali are victims of the identity crisis, though they are two different females from two different backgrounds and two different time periods.



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In *Cry, the Peacock*, Desai has depicted the mental trauma of Maya which gets even worse when she recollects a prediction made by an albino astrologer that she or her husband would die during the fourth year of her marriage. Her inner distress and disintegration are supported by the emotional vacuum between the husband and wife. She has two choices of life or death, and she decides that it is Gautama who has to die as he is already detached from life. She therefore decides and murders her husband. This happened out of mental imbalance.

In *Maunraag* too, the female protagonist suffers the mental trauma. At times, it seems that this compromising relationship has killed the soul of Anjali. She is living with the body only. Akshay loves her body but does not care to heal the wounds on her soul. This constant conflict in mind breaks Anjali completely. Many hours of contemplation prompt her to go back to her past memories. The flashback and forward technique used by Kaajal provide insight into the previous life of Anjali too. Anjali faces the nervous breakdown and she is in severe trauma. The hallucination and past images do not allow her to be reasonable. A doctor diagnosed her problem and revealed that this happened because Anjali has never shared her desires, feelings and has always kept everything inside her mind; this has caused severe damage.

Both the novelists have depicted the psychological trauma of the female protagonists. Through the tragic end of Maya, Desai portrays the intense yearning of the woman to be understood by her male partner. Through the novel, she shows how a woman is neglected, pushed aside, isolated. The society has played a vital role in making Maya insane. From childhood, she is not taught to be independent. She is so much pampered that she ends up becoming over-dependent. She is moulded in such a way that she suffered a crisis for an autonomous identity. Finally, she suffers from over-anxiety, self-denial, and lack of confidence and fear of facing reality. On the other hand, Kaajal's treatment of Anjali is quite different from Maya. Her internal disturbance arises due to her suppressed desires for a more extended period but gets the answer to her questions by the end of the novel.



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The over-pampered, overprotected girl Maya turns out to be hostile and takes up the wrong step. The strong, independent, free-minded girl Anjali turns out to be the meek, fragile, docile wife and a mother. She has accepted the fate and submerged the desires and feelings, which ultimately turns out to be the nervous breakdown. Both of them deeply feel alienated and deserted. The sense of insecurity in life smothers the dreams of these females. The family, especially the husband's negligence and indifference, push Maya and Anjali towards the verge of madness.

Conclusion:

Both Desai and Kaajal exploit common day-to-day issues in their novels. Their novels involve agony, grief, sorrow, marital disharmony, loneliness and self-destruction. Both of them aim to depict the reality of society. May and Anjali symbolize those females who suffer silently. The societal norms have been so deeply ingrained that her education too, does not make her confident to have her own voice. To become the "Ideal woman" becomes the goal of the majority of women's life. The continuous suppression of inner desires and sublimation lead them towards the internal struggle and intense anguish.

Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* explains the patriarchal attitude of society and writes,

"The identity issue for the boy is primarily an occupation- vocational question; he will be a husband and father but he will also and centrally be a worker, while the girl's identity centers more exclusively on her sex-role whose wife I will be, what kind of family will we have" (Friedan, 245)



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ISSN 2454-8596

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