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The quest for Identity in Cry, the Peacock of Anita Desai and Maun Raag of Kaajal Oza Vaidya: A Comparative Analysis of protagonists

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Abstract:

The Indian women writers in English literature have played an important role in describing the Indian society, especially Indian women. They have given voice to the feelings of many women characters; the feeling of isolation, the sense of alienation, detachment, mental trauma, emotional outbursts, etc. Anita Desai, the prominent name in the list, has been on the quest for meaning and identity in life in her fiction. Similarly, in the field of Gujarati literature, Kaajal Oza Vaidya is an emerging name whose protagonists undergo a struggle and try to find meaning. Their writing has focused on females and their role in society. The relationship between husband and wife, the problems in the family, misunderstandings leading to internal conflicts and depression cover the major part of the novels of these eminent female writers. Anita Desai's *Cry, the peacock*, and Kaajal Oza Vaidya's *Maun Raag* deal with the theme of isolation in a very effective way. Both the female protagonists, Maya in *Cry, the peacock*, and Anjali in *Maun Raag*, go through the period of introspection and the depression. They experience an inconsistency between the inner desires and outer reality. Both the novelists delve deep inside the psyche of the protagonists and reveal the inner struggle to fight for individuality. This paper attempts to show how two female novelists have treated the same concept differently, showing the same journey, leading towards different destinations.

Key Words: Isolation, Alienation, Detachment, Quest for identity, internal conflicts, Introspection, Depression

Introduction:

Identity denotes the existential struggle of a human being to get the meaning in life. It is an internal journey that leads to the destination through the roots. A woman's identity crisis is where she tries to get free from the traditional chains of society and makes efforts to give voice to the inner desires. Desai and Kaajal both portray the protagonists, struggling against the given situation of life. They also try to explore the inner realm of their being, which is



like an iceberg. The inner world of Maya and Anjali are wider than the real world. For both the novelists, the depth is more interesting than the superficial relations and behavior. Earlier, women sought their identity in the relationships as a daughter, wife, daughter-in-law, and mother. They accepted this identity willingly. But Maya and Anjali struggle to accept this relational identity. Both of them are obedient wives, but the love and feelings from the husband are not matching with the inner desires. However, the same journey of Maya and Anjali leads them to different destinations.

Maya in Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock*:

Desai mainly explores the emotional world of women, depicting a rare imaginative layer after layer, revealing the profound understanding of feminine sensibility. In Desai's novels, modern life especially of a middle-class woman is burdened with stress, unfulfilled longings, and unsatisfied emotional needs. The social and domestic set up cause serious disturbance mentally and emotionally. Desai portrays the inner conflict of Maya and reveals the psychological trauma due to her constant conflict between the inner and outer worlds. Maya tries to compromise on her realities but by the end of the novel, she is led to mental trauma, neurotic rages, and fears.

Maya is a very emotional and sensitive girl, very fragile for the harsh realities of life. Her main problem is her father's fixation. She tries to find her father in her husband, Gautama. She marries Gautama, who is almost double in the age of her, expecting the father-like qualities. She is destined to suffer emotionally as her expectations from her husband are very high. Moreover, she is childless and strives for human attention. The constant want can be felt at several incidents in the novels like she cannot bear the death of her pet dog Toto. Gautama's cold and casual behavior triggers the trauma more. Gautama does not fulfill her emotional and physical needs. He leaves her alone even during her crisis. This constant cold behavior suffocates Maya and her internal self which leads to an unbridgeable gap between Maya and Gautama. Her dreams and desires from her marriage and the reality are two different things.



Gautama's lack of attention and care towards her add distress and tension between them. She is unable to strike the balance between reality and her desires. The more disturbing thing is the prophecy made by an albino astrologer which stated that either of the partners will die in the fourth year of their marriage. This childhood prophecy remains deeply rooted in her mind and this causes abnormal behavior. She feels the rage of terror and revolt. She is confused over her own identity. Maya, the motherless child, and the childless woman develop a strong desire to live. But the fear of death drives her crazy to that extent that she decides to kill her husband. She believes that her husband Gautama is already detached from the world, and if anyone of them has to go, then it should be her husband. She becomes a pathetic psychic figure who kills her husband as he is the root cause of her suffering, according to her. She fails to find her own self-identity which leaves her devastated; emotionally and psychologically.

Anjali in Kaajal Oza Vaidya's *Maun Raag*:

This novel is the journey of Anjali, who is a middle-class girl in her earlier phase of life and then becomes a self-sufficient woman. She is the ideal example of the modern woman of today. The confident, outspoken Anjali and the submissive, obedient Anjali are two different layers of her life. Anjali is a modern independent woman who undergoes a mental trauma. The life of Anjali is divided into two parts; one is before her marriage with Akshay and another is after her marriage. The young Anjali is an adored child of her father, who is always taught to be confident and who is conscious of her identity. After the death of her mother, her father nurtured Anjali with love and care. The young Anjali falls in love with Aniruddha, a promising youth from the USA. Anjali lives the best years of her life with Aniruddha. But, destiny has a role to play. Aniruddha has to go to the USA and promises her to return soon. But he gets stuck and cannot return. Meanwhile, Anjali's father dies and Anjali is numb and isolated in the world. The constant wait for Aniruddha makes Anjali weak and restless and she finally agrees to marry Akshay.

From here, the new phase of her life begins. She adjusts herself in the new environment. As Mrs. Anjali Desai, she plays all her roles perfectly, but she buries her



original self, deep inside her. After 20 years of her marriage, she is a famous writer, having all the luxuries of life but not satisfied with within. The indifferent behavior of her husband makes her more and more submissive. The inside turmoil is so acute that she has to consult the psychiatrist. She is constantly getting neurotic strokes and the reason for this is her suppressed desires and unvoiced thoughts for years. She feels trauma and tries to get meaning of life and in the end, she finds solace as an individual and this leads to her destination.

Comparative Analysis of Maya and Anjali:

Both, Anita Desai and Kaajal Oza Vaidya have explored the psychic self of the protagonists Maya and Anjali. Loneliness and quest for identity are addressed by both. The inner yearning and isolation are not just physical but psychological. This estrangement from which they suffer is the result of the absence of desired relationships rather than the absence of contacts, the lack is not of the company but a companionship. Bewildered by a world, which they do not understand and a world that does not understand them, they feel tragic and pathetically alone, even amidst the bunch of people around them. In the effort to escape from situations of loneliness, end in the traumatic situation; in both the cases of Maya and Anjali. There are certain similarities and dissimilarities between the two.

Similarities:

Maya and Anjali both are depicted motherless. Both are brought up with affection, care, and concern by the father. Both of them have been the apple of their father's eyes. Both are emotionally attached to their respective fathers and the intensity is high. Both consider the father as the ideal person in the world. Another similarity is in their marriage life. Both are married to the well to do family, having all the luxuries of life, but the main thing which is lacking is the love of a husband. Maya and Anjali constantly strive for the love and attention of the husband. Gautama and Akshay are very calm and casual in the behavior and at times they seem very indifferent to their respective wife. Another similarity is that Maya is haunted by the childhood prophecy and Anjali is haunted by the past memories of Aniruddha. The past keeps on coming again and again in the present. Maya and Anjali both suffer from a



neurotic stroke. Maya and Anjali, both, desire to get meaning of life and strive to balance between the inner and outer world.

Dissimilarities:

Though Maya and Anjali walk on the same path and have many similarities in their lives, there are certain dissimilarities too, which take them in different directions. Both, being the motherless child, are nurtured by the father, but the treatment is different. Maya is always over pampered and protected by her father. This over care makes her weak and submissive. She cannot stand independently, without the support of her father or husband. Whereas Anjali's father has always taught her to be independent. Anjali is very confident and self-dependent because of the type of upbringing she has got in her childhood. Her father is her strength, whereas, for Maya, her father is her weakness. Maya is a housewife who is trying to adjust in the domestic environment, Anjali is a renowned and acclaimed writer, performing all the responsibilities of her house as well. Both get tragic psychic blows, but Maya's mental instability leads towards the destruction of her husband, and Anjali tortures her self. The emotional outburst of Maya makes her kill her husband, which is the extreme condition. Anjali gets hospitalized, gets treatment, and controls herself from turning out to be total lunatic. Maya's inability to control her mental trauma leads her to commit suicide at the end of the novel. But on the contrary, Anjali realizes the cause of her suffering and finds the meaning of her existence. She accepts the reality and finds solace at the end.

Conclusion:

The paper attempts to draw the comparative analysis of two protagonists of two prominent Indian female writers. Desai and Kaajal portray the human psyche, internal climate, and the mystery of emotional desires and traumas. Tensions, depression, worry, anxiety are common traits in both the novels. Both the protagonists fight the psychological battle, in which, Anjali wins and Maya succumbs to the situation and fails to overcome the trauma. Their psychological journey to get the true meaning of life and identity leads them to a different



path. The constant regression and conflict force Maya to kill her husband and to commit suicide, whereas, after suffering a lot, Anjali embraces the reality and manages her mental imbalance. Both search for the order in life, peace of mind, meaning of existence, but both have dissimilar ends, though having multiple similarities.

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