



CHAPTER – II

MAYA :

CRY, THE PEACOCK

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While projecting women characters in her novels, Anita Desai seems to have taken proper care of all aspects. Perhaps her own life makes her careful about them. Maya is the best example of her presentation. Torn between happiness and misery Maya thinks of herself more. Whatever that happens to her, she thinks it is because of her husband. She seems to have become more sensitive. Unknowingly she assumes that her husband does not love her. Perhaps it is a psychological weakness that governs her mind.

Maya's life is a story of marital discard. On the contrary Gautama her husband takes care of her. He loves Maya with no limits. There seems to be drift between Maya and Gautama. Brought up in an atmosphere of safety and care, Maya has become more emotional. Maya loves her husband immensely and Gautama also looks after her

carefully. He provides her with all comforts. Yet Maya is unhappy. She is in need of emotional satisfaction. She realises that Gautama does not understand her emotional needs and feelings. Hence she thinks that she is frustrated, alienated and isolated. The death of her pet dog, Toto makes her sad. It upsets her terribly and she loses her mental balance. She does not forget the incident.

After making arrangements of its burial Gautama tries to console Maya at his own level. She feels unhappy over the views of her husband. He says :

"You need a cup of tea', he had said, showing how little he knew of my misery, or of how to comfort me. Giving me an opal ring to wear on my finger, he did not notice translucent skin beneath, the blue flashing veins that ran under and out of the bridge of gold." (CP, PP. 8-9).

Gautama does not understand the reason of Maya's misery :

"it was not my pet's death alone that I mourned today, but another sorrow, unremembered, perhaps as yet not even experienced and filled me with this despair " (CP, P. 8)

The temperamental differences in Maya and Gautama make them strangers to each other. Hence Maya feels lonely :

"His coldness, his coldness, and incessant talk of cups of tea and philosophy in order to hear me talk, talking reveal myself. It is that - my loneliness in this house." (CP, P.9).

Maya wishes to be romantic, ideal and poetic. On the other hand Gautama is unromantic, realistic and prosaic. In spite of Maya's romantic love, Gautama loves her tenderly. His only problem is he cannot poetically express

his feelings of love and concern for her. Maya also aware of his feelings. She herself realizes :

“When he touched my hair, smoothening it down carefully as a nurse would, I was flooded with tenderness and gratitude, thought of him as my guardian, my protector” (CP, P. 11).

Marriage is an unbreakable relationship between husband and wife. The marital relationships are based on providing companionship to each other. However, the companionship is unfortunately missing in the relationship between Maya and Gautama. Maya is a free bird. On the contrary Gautama is too busy in his profession to provide enough time to his young wife. Hence she feels neglected and disregarded. As she experiences:

"Telling me to go to sleep while he worked at his papers, he did not give another thought to me, to

mind that waited near his bed " (CP, P. 9). Even they both sit together in the evening for an hour. But it is in vain for Maya in driving away her loneliness.

Maya makes several attempts to have close relationship with Gautama. She tries to reach her cry to him. She wants complete involvement with him. They talk and converse while strolling together, but it is sheer meaningless. It does not bring them close. Maya expects only his presence :

“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. Contact, relationship, communion....”(CP, P. 18).

Maya knows that Gautama does not care for the married life. Hence she sighs : “You notice nothing at all” (CP, P. 19). Further she wants to know about the man who came to see Gautama this evening and spent an hour or more in the office. Maya guesses that Gautam strives only for money. She annoys, ‘Yes, but only for the sake of money, or property-or anything solid, and dirty. Not for love, or life, or *basic* things-like Toto dying Toto....’ (CP, P. 20). Gautama quickly cuts her thoughts away like a surgeon expertly removing a boil. Maya, then becomes an aggressive in her urge to join Gautama by "full of decisions to make haste in undressing, preparing myself, then joining him at last" (CP, P. 93). When she goes to rouse him from the couch, with a touch, she comes to know that he has closed his eyes not with mere tiredness

but in profound, invulnerable sleep. She considers that he is far away from her world, and he can never join her. After all she sighs, once more she becomes despair. Maya suffers from a terror of loneliness which is beyond the comprehension of Gautama. She is badly in need of his companionship, his tender understanding, closeness of mind along with physical closeness. Maya thinks that the spouses should share the joys and sorrows of each other. She is miserable because Gautama does not satisfy her intense longing for love and life. She is thus felt solitude. She is sure that Gautama is lack of love and understanding for her. She expresses her agony directly :

"Oh, you know nothing, understand nothing , ... Nor will you ever understand. You know nothing of me and of how I can love. How I *want* to love. How it is *important* to me. But you," 'You've never loved. And you don't love me ...' (CP, P. 112).

Maya does not get a child even after four years of her marriage. Naturally women are crazy for children. According to Indian mythology a childless person does not get redemption in the life. Giving birth to a child is an important fact in the life of woman. Maya's love for her pet dog reveals that childless women love pet animals, when it dies she is shocked. Maya struggles for love and life and for child. When she is failure in all her efforts she becomes frustrated and despair. She realizes that it is impossible to release her mental tensions. Her solitary musing add to the morbidity of her thoughts and quicken the process of mental disintegration. In her seclusion she observed with the prophecy made by the albino and is all the time haunted by the fear of death. She is lurked in the dark to pounce upon one of them any moment. With increasing despair, neurosis overpowers her completely

and she becomes insane. Due to futility of her attempts she reveals her unhappy and meaningless of marriage :

"It was discouraging to reflect on how much in our marriage was based upon a 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 sacred icon which out of the pettiest superstition, we could not bear to part." (CP, P. 40)

In order to come over the feelings of loneliness she says :

" No one must presume, that our marriage was an empty one, a failure. Nor that Gautama was no more than a figure of granite to me, a mound of books that smelt faintly of mouldy rice and wisdom." (CP, P. 201)

She loves and hate her husband at the same time. She agrees :

" I had been tortured by a humiliating sense of neglect, of loneliness, of desperation that would not have existed had I not loved him so, had he not meant so much. " (CP, P. 201)

Sometimes it seems that the atmosphere around compels her to be unhappy. She has a protected life in her father's house. She has been brought up on fantasies. Before her marriage Maya was the only child in the family with her father. She was *a spoilt girl*. Her mother had died and brother Arjuna went to America. As a result of this surrounding, Maya get her father's undivided affection and attention. At the time of extreme despair in the house of Gautama she exclaims to herself : " No one, no one else, loves me as my father does. " (CP, P.46). Maya expects the similar affection and attention from her husband as her

father showered on her. Gautama is a busy and prosperous practitioner of law. He is always engaged in his professional affairs. Hence he has no leisure time to fulfil her unending demands. He can not understand her misery. Maya has a father-fixation, which leads her to disillusionment and disappointment. She has enjoyed her childhood in a very comfortable and luxurious way. Her father never says " No " to her. He fulfills each and every demand of his daughter. She herself expresses that :

" As a child, I enjoyed, princess-like, a sumptuous fare of the fantasies of the Arabian Nights, the glories and bravado of Indian mythology, long and astounding tales of princes and regal queens, jackals and tigers,the lovely English and Irish fairy tales as well, that were read out to me by him. " (CP, P. 43).

Her marriage with Gautama only serves to highlight her total involvement with her father. She constantly thinks about her father and unconsciously searches for him in Gautama. However after her marriage the things have been changed. In her despair situation she tries to console herself by remembering how her father would have helped to remove her fears. " with a slow melancholy smile. " She even refers to her father as " gentle father, " " rejoicing father," "amused father." Regarding Gautama she feels ignored and unwanted. She considers her husband as an adversary in the quest for happiness. Now Maya is a grown up woman. She still believes that her father is the panacea to all ills. In her childhood he used to hold her in his arms, wipe her tears and pacify her. Maya is grownup physically, but she has not come out of her childhood stage. Consequently Maya is living where pain and

pleasure exist side by side. Maya is aware of this deficiency :

"Yes, now that I go over it my mind, my childhood was one in which much was excluded, which grew steadily more restricted, unnatural even, and in which I lived as a toy princess in a toy world. But it was a pretty one "(CP, P. 89).

Because of her father's excessive affection Maya becomes an incapable of facing the sordid realities of life. She was brought up in the world of romantic faith. Naturally it seems that she fails to adjust herself with her husband who is practical. She is in search of an identity. she is psychologically disturbed person. She has neurotic fears caused by marital incapability and disharmony and in compounded by age-old superstition. She is capable to appreciate the meaninglessness of her existence. Due to her extreme sensuousness she cannot understand

Gautama's philosophical theory towards life. This attitude results in an intense feeling of alienation and deprivation in Maya, who faces tragic consequences. Like Monisha and Nanda Kaul, Maya faces a particular disharmony and meets a fatal end.

Maya's hopes are frustrated by the prediction of an astrologer who foretold that either she or her husband would die, four years after her marriage. Maya remembers the astrologer's voice :

" 'Death', he finally admitted, is one such moment, 'to one of you. When you are married and you shall be married young' " (CP, P. 30).

And the matter is worsened by Gautama's avid rationalistic way of life. Maya lives in the world of love, tenderness, flowers and Urdu poetry. On the contrary Gautama's is a world of absolute detachment and philosophy. Both Maya and Gautama involve in lengthy discussion on the nature

and philosophy of life and death. In this regard they have different opinions. The death of Toto brings physical violent impact. For Gautama death is an end, a termination of human activity, and is a 'disappearance'. Maya is serious about it. For her it is cruelty of the world. She gives up her efforts to make him understand her feelings. She realizes that her relationship with Gautama is relationship with death. Hence she tries to escape. Her anguish finds its co-relation in the agony of the peacocks. Annoyingly, Maya imagines the cry of the peacocks : "*Pia, Pia* " They cry. " Lover, lover. *Mio, mio* , - I die, I die. " (CP, P. 95) Maya knows that before the monsoons come peacocks go into the jungles. When it rains they spread out their splendid tails and begin to dance. But like Shiva's their dance of joy is the dance of death, and they dance, knowing that they and their lovers are all to die. Maya discovers this identity and becomes aware of her

own predicament and cries " I am dying, and I am in love with living. I am in love and I am dying, " (CP, P. 98). Maya rebels against the denial of life. Maya reads the lines from the *Gita*, but her perception of detachment is different than that of Gautama. They both fail to meet on common ground. Thus Gautama's death is not a calculated murder or accident but a result of sudden impulse, Maya feels that she has a right to live as she loves life.

There are remarkable traits in Maya. Her helpless nature is almost childlike. Her intense longing for love, is nearly diseased and the main cause for her trouble. She is also compliant woman. One more fact related to her tragedy is that she is motherless child. Her father did not give away freedom to grow her as an individual instead he offers her a life of protection and consequently of submission. Maya compares her father's neatness and carefulness to a Moghul garden. She says,

"gracious and exact, where breeding, culture, leisure and comfort have been brought to a nice art, where no single wood is allowed to flower, no single flower to die and remain on the stalk no single stalk to grow out of its pruned shape. As the streams in a Moghul garden flow musically through channels of carved marble and sandstone," (CP, P. 45).

Jasbir Jain mentions that Maya's father is responsible for her tragedy. He says, " The reader realises that Maya's father had not really loved her; the relationship had merely fed his own ego. Maya is the sacrifice offered at the alter of his own image." ¹ Maya's basic needs for love and companionship are nor fulfilled in real sense. Her personality development is stopped. She remains " light headed-child " throughout her life.

Maya's life is an imbalance one. Her childhood world of fantasies and adult world of reality create more

imbalance in her life. She wants to eternize the " fairy tale " atmosphere and simultaneously she is aware of the necessities of a matured married woman. She craves to grapple with the realities of life. She tries to understand her in-laws, and also wants to charm Gautama by her feminine charm. It is her sincere effort to follow Gautama's philosophy of *Gita* . Unfortunately her urges to experience the realities of life are so weak that cannot be last longer. Maya considers the unreality of her situation but she cannot come out of it. There is no sincere attempt at self analysis. Jasbir Jain remarks that :

"Maya's unhappiness is not related to the reality of her consciousness; it is a product of her own consciousness. Her unhappiness is in part related to the process of her growing up."²

Maya wants to establish uniqueness and dominance. She builds around herself a bower of bougainvillaea and

jasmine buds " palpitating with living breath, open, white, virginal. " (CP, P. 106). Maya is extremely desperate at Gautama's insensitiveness regarding the fragrance of petunias and lime blossoms. She does not like Leila and Pom, because they accept life as it is. Maya is horrified by the scene of prostitute because they do not live true life. They are all busy in the " gross and *useless* that they don't see what really matters. All the truth in living just passes them by, and I am so sorry for any one... who misses it " (CP, P. 91). Maya thinks that she is different from them all. She has separate identity. In the company of Gautama she feels elevated and happy with, " tenderness and gratitude. " She thinks of him as her protector and guardian. A slight touch of his fingers brings out spontaneous reaction of joy in her. When he does not respond in the expected manner, her neurotic pride is hurt. She feels insulted and rejected. Maya complains of

Gautama's insensitiveness. Her expensive traits remain suppressed in her unconsciousness because she does not want to master her life. It is fact that Maya's difficulties start with albino priest's prediction, because his words shatter her self-image. Neither Gautama's logic nor father's fatalistic exhortations could help her to get over the anxiety. It is true that Maya has an exaggerated opinion of herself which falsifies reality.

It seems that priest occupies her life. His prophecy creates instability in her life. In her neurotic state of mind she sees something sinister about the priest. She calls him her fate. Her disastrous imagination magnifies everything out of all proportions. And everything she sees reminds her approaching death. In her sleepless nights, she sees: "the shadow of the dancer spring to life, and I know there was no time left, no time left at all". (CP, P. 52) The dark dancer represents death and Maya knows there is no time

left. She or her husband has to die. Leila who is married to a man dying slowly of tuberculosis. The vulgar Lala, the fun loving Sikh all increase her agony and her fear. Every moment brings her a fresh intimation of mortality. On another occasion when the extrovert Sikh says that he is a palmist, Maya feels frightened because she detects " in the leer something of the luscious evil in the smiles and the gestures of the albino astrologer " (CP, P. 91)

Maya makes several attempts to communicate with Gautama. But she fails and she withdraws into herself. The world which sometimes appears familiar and comforting suddenly becomes menacing and frightening. The cabaret, the bear dancing, the monkeys in the cage, the orchids kept in a basket in the veranda of Lala, all remind her death. The dance of the peacocks is traditionally associated with the rainy season. When the dark clouds gather the peacocks start spreading their splendid feathers and ready

to dance and to mate. For Maya, however, the dance of the peacock merges with the image of the albino priest. The cries of the peacock merge with the sibilant whispers of the priest and its dance becomes the dance of death. As the peacocks, madly in love, quarrel and destroy each other. Maya views her married life with Gautama as a deadly struggle in which one is destined to kill the other. Poetry and passion, love and hatred, life and death these opposites of experience are identified with the peacock and its dance.

Maya's imagination is ever active, creating and apprehending. She tries to tell her prosaic husband about the palm fringed villages of Kerala and the Kathakali dance. "I have heard of the ballets they have in their villages. They say they go on for days and days! the dancers are all men, and wear such fantastic masks. And the drums..." (CP, P. 42) Gautama only amused by her

strange desire. Maya wants to have their dinner in the dining room with the light switch off. Unromantic Gautama refuses it.

Maya is torn between her love of life and her fear of death. The gradual disintegration of her personality is very powerfully dramatized. Maya has nightmares and fears and she is going to be insane : "Yes I am going to insane. I am moving further and further from wisdom, all calm, and I shall soon be mad, if I am not there already" (CP, P.124).

Maya's dream of snakes and of rats suckling their young ones and spreading plague makes her aware of hidden danger:

Ah, they' ll not tell you them. Of the lizards, the lizards that come upon you stalking you, silently, upon clawed toes, slipping their club like tongues in and out, in and out with an audible hiss and

death's rattle, slowly moving up, closing in on you,
taking their time.(CP, P.127)

Being superstitious, Maya does not forget the dim
prophecy of the astrologer. On the contrary, there is no
place for superstition in Gautama's family :

"hoot with derision at the mention of superstition
with pity and scorn for those who allowed their lives
to be ruled by them, and ruined by them," (CP, P. 75-
76).

In the beginning of her neurotic affliction she often tells
that she herself was to die. But she loves her life too much.
Hence she changes her mind and begins to think about
Gautama's death, " I wondered why, from the very
beginning, it had never occurred to me that might be
Gautama's life that was threatened. " (CP, P. 164). Maya is
clever enough to keep her plan secret. She thinks :

"He must not know, not even guess. Never, never, never. If he guessed, new dangers would arise like sudden fires out of the cracked earth, and then there was no one, not even my father, to save me" (CP, P. 151).

Maya, obviously, has belief on her instincts. As per Freudian principle, common people would have affected by Maya's withdrawal and instinctual urges at the psychic level. But, tragically, Maya's life is woven intricately and depended on her instincts. Maya expects emotional and physical satisfaction in her married life. But her expectation is totally denied. Maya's longing for sensuous enjoyment of life is dampened by Gita's philosophy of non-attachment. Her emotion is always balanced by Gautama's analytical mind. Gautama says, "nothing subjectively, nothing with passion" (CP, P. 150).

Sex plays an important role in the life. Sex is an intensely and inherently pleasurable experience. It is an act of revitalizing force. Otherwise the life of woman is futile and sterile. In an opinion of Freud, sex is the prototype of all happy experiences of life. M. Rajeshwar observes :

"Freud in fact, views sex as the prototype of all pleasurable experiences of life. Maya's earth-bound nature makes her well inclined to derive the fullest satisfaction from this intimate experience " ³

It is not easy to estimate what course her psyche would have taken, if Maya were married to much younger man and has been satisfied sexually. But because of Gautama's age and attitude to sex she remains unpleasant woman.

When Maya urges to take her to south, Gautama coolly suggests that she has to wait till Kathakali troupe comes to Delhi. The fact that Maya's constricted life comes most vividly alive in the scene of Gautama's all make party.

Maya is charmed by the vibrating rich Urdu poetry recited by those cultured wine-drinking gentlemen. She breaks an age and rule and joins them.

Maya's tragedy is not only due to her living in the fantasy world as Gautama stamped it. Her capacity to love another human being other than her father would be the litmus test of her psychic health. Gautama is well-known lawyer has neither time nor ability of showing tenderness towards her, when she most needs it. Gautama's failure in the traditional role of a husband, as a protector is the significant cause for Maya's collapse.

Maya's quest is not only an individual's quest but it is the quest of human beings towards some understanding, some sympathy in her predicament. She feels lonely. Because her only brother, Arjuna had run away to America, her father is on a journey to Europe and her husband does not meet her with affection. The failure of

their marriage of minds makes everything doubtful. Maya is pulled into the fatal mechanism by Gautama, because he is pragmatic, unimaginative and always busy in his work. Due to lack of sexual interest in his wife Gautama looks down upon her as a tiresome, pretty but wayward infant. It is one more area caused for Maya's pains. All these factors are responsible for Maya's agony. Hence she thinks of death. Maya's compares herself to the peacock, who mates only after fighting :

When they have exhausted themselves in battle, they will mate. Peacocks are wise. The hundred eyes upon their tails have seen the truth of life and death and know them to be one. Living, they are aware of death. Dying they are in love with life. "Lover, Lover" you will hear them cry in the forests when the rain-clouds come, "Lover, I die"...(CP. PP. 95-96).

Like peacock she loves intensely and her love is totally not reciprocated. She is so sadful because Gautama cannot give her companionship. When Maya is longing for his love, he laughs of as a melodrama. When she desires a close contact with him he preaches the Gita's doctrine of non-attachment to her. When Maya confirms that her husband is totally unsympathetic, she feels he is not on her side at all; "but across a river, across a mountain and would always remain so" (CP. P. 114). She slowly gives up her attempts to catch his attention to force him to share in her troubled thought. She wearily states:

"You shall never help me. It is all rue. One of us will win, the other must lose" (CP. P.114).

Gautama is kept in the dark about the astrologer's prediction. He says that Maya is neurotic and insane. When the events and tensions are piling up leading to the

final catastrophe, Mays receives Arjuna's letter which forces her memory about the prophecy :

I remembered, remembered and how much I should have given to forget it all. What I had forgotten was the magic of my father's gentle words that had once had the power to sooth and console me. Now nothing calmed me. There was no magic that was not black. What I yearned for as the only thing that could save me from insanity, if not from the violence of an insane death, escaped me now (CP. P. 176).

Now the alienation is over. The battle between the two worlds is started. She is alert and sensitive enough to be aware of her schizophrenic state.

Yet she loves life intensely and it is not easy to give up. She recalls the golden days of her childhood spent at Luckhnow and Darjiling. She thunders at her husband: "The world is full-*full* Gautama. Do you know what that

means?" (CP,P. 118). Again she waits eagerly, she begs him to meet her in her own world. At last she gives up her conflict with him, the efforts to make him see her predicament, and banishes him from her life.

There after she does not raise any question of her sanity, about her relationship with Gautama. Her diseased brain begins to think that it is Gautama's life that is to be finished. She designs her strategy carefully. She decides to give relevant explanation after the event, after the impulsive push that tends him hurting down from terrace to death.

Maya and Gautama turned towards the end of the terrace. Gautama moved in front of Maya, then she thrust out her arms towards him and he fell down to the very bottom. She admits and confesses regarding killing of Gautama :

"It had to be one of us, you see, and 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." (CP, P.215-216).

Maya might have thought that after the death of her husband, her life will be empty. Hence ~~she commits herself suicide.~~