

**“ECOCENTRIC ESSENCE” IN ANITA DESAI’S,CRY, THE PEACOCK**

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**ABSTRACT**

This research paper aims to study the ecocritical aspects in the Anita Desai’s Cry,the Peacock.The works of Desai were claimed to be Angliophile and Eurocentric,based on her German origin,by the critics.However,when examined ecocritically, it can be seen that the works are “Ecocentric”.Ecocritical examination of the works also brings out the Nature’s Intelligence,importance of Nature in our lives and how we can deal with the “ecological crisis” in the contemporary society.So Her work, Cry,the Peacock, have been examined ecocritically, in order to bring out the “Ecocentric Essence” in them.

*KeyWords:Ecocriticism,Eurocentrism,Nature’s Intelligence,Ecocrisis.*

Anita Desai born (on 24 June 1937) is an Indian novelist and professor of Humanities at the MIT. She was born in Mussorie, India to a German mother,Toni Nime and a Bengali businessman,D.N Mazumdar. Host of her works are underrated and has not been given its proper place as her works are labelled as “Eurocentric” by the critics due to her German origin. Eurocentrism (also Western-centrism) is centered on and biased towards Western civilization especially Europe. The term “Eurocentrism” as the term for an ideology was coined in the 1970s by the Egyptian Marxian economist Samir Amin..I will argue further that this term has not been rightly used for the work of Anita Desai by her critics.

“Ecocentric”oreocentrism;from Greek, “House” and kentron,”Center” is a term used to denote nature-centered, as opposed to human-centered. This research paper will focus on this term as most of the works of Desai are ecocentric. The vivid and detailed description of nature and the profound sense “of being one” with nature, which she paints in our psyche are the notions of her work being “ecocentric”. Her major worklike Cry, the Peacock is examined ecocritically.

Ecocriticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affected it and affected by it. It negotiates this human and non human world. Its main subject is the interconnectedness between nature and culture. It gets its motivation from the troubling awareness that we have reached the age of environmental

limits, human actions are damaging the planets basic life support system. So there is an intense desire to contribute to environmental restoration. In order to examine a text eco-critically various questions are put forth.

Hence some of the questions are as follows –

Does the author give the nature a voice in text? Is nature evil, benevolent or different to human? How characters are related to the humans? Do they peacefully co- exist with their environment? How is the text related to environmental? Do they control or subdue nature? How is the setting of the text related to environment? How do we see issues of environmental disaster and crisis reflected in popular culture and literary works? Are they caretakers or destroyers of nature? Do we see land or place and its effect on people? How humans are making ecological disaster of self and environment? Environment is fertile or waste land?

Anita Desai's major works were viewed as Eurocentric and Angliophile due to her German origin. It is not justified to see the works of an author just due to her origin. I will futher argue that her work is not Eurocentric but Ecocentric.

#### **Nature as a soother:-**

When Maya was in agony due to the death of her pet Toto and Gautam refused to realise the depth of the agony, she often turned towards "Nature" to soothe herself. Following lines represent how even the darkest aspects of nature soothed her-

(Page. No. – 16) "The balm of darkness met me with a little shock, like a strong and effective medicine on a wound still fresh."

#### **Nature as provider of life through food:-**

Maya often feels generous towards nature due to its bounties. She discusses about the chillies, the vision of crisp pink fruit speckled with fresh green, a row of papaya trees, tangle of vines, beans etc which she ardently observes in her grief. At times remembers of the odour of milk and cows and honey.

#### **Nature as a foreteller:-**

Maya often considered 'stars' as the foretellers and relied upon them. Then searched them whenever she was in anguish or lonely. At times she also felt as moon was the foreteller of some unwelcomed event as she described it as a "demonic creature."

The following lines shows, to what extent Mrs. Lal's life depended upon nature-

(Page .no: 68) “But the stars- I believe in the stars. It was written in any destiny, one astrologer told me that I was many man from west of the Jhelum, and I did and that I was to bear two sons, and I did?”

One of the most important sections of the text is when Maya recalls the prophecy of the astrologer and connects it with the peacock. She says that peacock calls in the wilds and we can hear their shrieks of pain. ‘Pia, pia’, they cry. ‘Lovers, lovers. Mio , mio,- I die, I die’. In the text peacocks are seen as the foretellers of the death of one of the spouses.

#### **Symbolic derivations of Nature:-**

Cry, the peacock, consists of varied ‘Symbolic’ interpretations of nature which is unique and delves deep into human psyche to co-relate it.

Death of Maya’s pet “Toto” was symbolic of the death of her child as she was a childless woman so she considered her pet as a child. ‘Rhythm of stream’ represents, pulse through which she could see backwards and feel the presence of Toto, The “Milky way” represented the vastness of the universe we lived in. “The moon” symbolise the upcoming storm in future.

In one of the interpretations of nature, Desai very well depicts how same things can be symbolic of two things-

Wild tracts of land were the symbolic representations of freedom in which everyone has their own intrinsic value and can live without any boundaries.

The chirping of a cricket loudly and then falling silent was symbolical of the stillness of her heart and her agony.

Rats sucking their young ones tenderly were symbolical of “the passion” which every living beings displayed in the nature.

The glaring of the sun on the subject of both dead and alive, were an indicator of life on earth but at the same time representation of sun exploding cloud was an indicator of the larger disaster and end of life on earth.

“Peacocks” are the most important symbolic representations of the nature in this text. They represent immense passion for love and life, but they are seen as very wise creatures as they are much aware of the death. The peacocks cry in very pain ‘pia, pia’ ‘lover, lover- Mio, Mio- I die, I die. Their dance is compared to that of the shine, which is both the dance of joy and death. They know that they were going to die, still they love and dance. Ever before they mate, they fight. Hence they are the representative of the greater truth of life where both fight and love form an integral part of life.

#### **Web of Interconnectedness:-**

Cry, the Peacock shows dextrous meaning of the relation between human, non- human and the nature. Through an interplay of work and the meaning, Desai is successful in displaying the deepest connection of human psyche and nature and how both of them influence each other. Human psyche has very unique way of connecting thing and deriving meaning. Maya's psyche is an example of this as she connects things randomly and derives meaning from them.

She was grieving the death of her pet 'Toto' and was thinking whether it was mundane or idealistic. Suddenly her thoughts of anguish were drawn away and she compared it with the the birds that awake from dreams and rise out of their trees amidst great commotion, circle a while, then settle again, on other branches. Then suddenly by their presence she was drawn away from her world of pain. But after when she saw the must, she became sad and there was no sensation left. Soon she observed stars, and noticed the new ones seemed to burst into birth, dying ones were to revive. She then observed the darkness in between the stars. These darkness was the symbol of death, distance, separation and loveliness. When Maya gazed at the stars and the darkness between them, she began to contemplate of the journey of dead from one birth to another. Soon she looked down and observed one soft- petalled flower which was white in colour. Now, this reminded of her small 'White Toto', whining and dying away into a hopeless silence. Thus we can see the various interpretation of human, non- human, trees, flowers, stars and the phenomena of nature. The way were perceive things, are affected by it and how we act accordingly. Thus we all are connected to each other in an inseparable way and form a "Web of Interconnectedness."

### **Nature as a wild place for people to discover themselves:-**

Nature can be seen as a burning Eco-school-of- thought which provides us immense knowledge and help us discover new things. It also helps us discover new aspects of ourselves if we are observant enough. According to Edward Abbey, a Transcendentalist- stylish, people are corrupt, and we can corrupt the world we live in. So he believes that true nature is only found but in the wilderness, that travelling in the said wilderness is the only way we can discover who we truly are.

Desai goes a step ahead and brings out the wisdom through characters that everything around us is natural. Even the man- made bungalows, restricted gardens or only the form of human creates is natural because man only reconstructs the material which nature provides. Everything is present in the nature itself which is re-arranged both in

terms of matters and mind to form something termed as 'new'. This can be seen when Maya recalls of the open valleys, lands, rock etc and saw her bungalow and restricted garden. We can thus rearrange, reconnect our thought and matter present in the physical from to create something new and also discovered new aspects of ourselves.

#### **Treatment of animals and nature in the text:-**

Cry, the Peacock has enormous representations of the treatment of the different species by human being. It can be seen that all human beings do not behave in the same manner. They have different value systems and ethics and they act accordingly.

Maya who is a childless woman sees her pet "Toto" as her own child. So the death of Toto sets her in deep agony and irreversible loss. He sees it as a simple and ordinary incident that had occurred.

Maya's character shows to what extent we can be compassionate and sensitive to the nature around us. She closed her eyes and listened to the shrilling of ecstatic insects. She sees grasshopper as brilliant as it sets in motion the flower- tinted air by its tender legs. She has a keen power of observance as she sees small, round, red insects . Such care and compassion for even the tiniest creatures is very rare to be seen.

Maya was so much disturbed by the caged bear that she could not sleep well and a doctor had to be called. She was given a little morphine so that she could sleep well. Some are very sensitive towards them but others treat them with cruelty which need to be changed.

Thus we can see in the text how different human beings treat nature differently.

#### **Nature's Intelligence:-**

The entire text can be seen as a perception of Nature's Intelligence. Maya can see wisdom in everything around her. The lawns, flowers, trees are symbol of the upcoming event as well as soother at the time of anguish and agony. Maya also considers the stars as the tellers of the upcoming events. It reminds her of the astrology and fortune telling which was done about her marriage.

Even the slightest movement of the bugs, grasshopper, rats, porcupines etc. were seen as some indications by Maya. In her loneliness and agony Maya sought pleasure and happiness in nature. Nature was only her guide, her friend and her life. She had no children and even her pet 'Toto' died. In such despair and agony, nature was only the way to escape and find happiness.

**Nature channelled through human psyche:-**

Nature is diverse and majestic. Human existence is just a part of it but human considers them central to all the surrounding. In the text *Cry, the Peacock* we can see how human beings view nature through their self-created lens. They see it according to their limited psyche and understanding. Human beings limit the nature through man-made buildings, and bungalows which decay after a period of time. They also associate their values and ethics in their self-made society. They also limit the freedom of animals and use them for their own purpose. On other hand Maya sees nature as everything in the life. She seeks wisdom from it and she also depicts the same things as good or evil according to her mood.

Nature has her own purpose of existence which is large and is the basis of the functioning and evolution of the universe. It is the human psyche which gives it his own meaning, value and ethics according to his needs which keeps own changing from time to time.

**Origin of ecocriticism and ecocritical Interpretation of text:-**

Ecocriticism is quite a new literary aspect for many of its perspective users. Therefore it is necessary to make it clear as to its origin. In fact globally speaking, literature itself originates from our love of listening and telling stories. This love of man to stories is based onto the richness of mother Nature in things that fascinate and seduce physically and inspire man with new perspectives to look at the physical setting of everything they do.

Henry David Thoreau was to come up with the idea of a very applicable technique in literary criticism. This was further development by Ralph Waldo Emerson simply wished to give a message-

“Live like a bean, live like simply”. Henry David Thoreau is a designated grand pappy of ecocriticism, he wrote *Walden*, which describe living in a simply- build claim, fishing, going on walks, raising his taxes as an act of civil disobedience to indicate his disapproval of the Mexican- American war and slavery.

So ecocritism has become very vital to understand our existence and interaction with nature. Often humans become self- centered and anthropocentric which in true is harmful for our existence. Nature is self evolving and maintain balance among us in a number of ways. We should therefore act in such a way which doesn't degrade nature or create any imbalance.

Some of the aspects are-

**Ecocriticism is nature:-**

Ecocritics get into some pretty heated arguments about what does and doesn't qualify as nature. In so doing, there're looking to problematize human 'self- centered views of the natural world. So, they put to possible definition of nature against each other: Nature = A place where human being are not- bath physically and metaphorically speaking, Nature = everything, everywhere. All the nature all the tune. Tay or- Lautner thinks nature is everything in the world they isn't man- made : grass, the wolves that aren't specifically bred by humans to be scary super- wolves or werewolves.

In this text we can see all the aspects of nature is brought out. Nature's significance in our lives and how we interact with each other. Nature is seen a soother, foreteller, wild place for people to discover themselves.

**Ecocriticism is Environmentalist:-**

Like that political movement of environmentalism, ecocriticism also strives to make people care equally about all creatures that live in any single environment. In practice, any side of the environment should be repaired as soon as possible so as to seat that equality of human and non- human individuals who should be cared about the same way.

Maya's hypersensitiveness towards everything that surrounds her, shows her compassion and care for nature. caring her pet dog "Toto" like her child shows how she cared equally about the creatures and considered them apart of her family.

**Ecocriticism is Anthropocentric-**

People tend to see themselves everywhere, in everything. The comparison made by man is intentionally setting for him a place in literature, botany, zoology and lone which is ecocritically abusive and unsuitable.

Adequately, when anthropocentrism enters the scene, nothing can be analyzed without being compared to or informed by human perception, affinities, desires and so on. Ecocriticism pushes back against this navel- gazing tendency of Mans, and requires the latter to consider, nature on its own terms. This text therefore rise above the anthropocentric notions and the characters are guided by the nature's symbolism and Intelligence.

**Ecocriticism is wilderness:-**

Ecocriticism tends to bring together returned aspects of this world and the fruits of technology. It calls therefore that magical land that is far away from human cities, cars, annoying appliance and respective office work.

Maya very well enjoys the wilderness being a house- wife- she feels solace and pleasure in the lap of nature.

#### **Ecocriticism is conservative:-**

The conservative aspect of this baby theory is meant by the fact that it is a powerful tool of speech for the defense of preserving this beautiful world we inhabit for future generation of human.

Conservationists, then spend a lot of time thinking up ways to reduce people's negative impact on the environment while also promoting the natural order of things.

In the text, the hidden message of conservation is given as it through the vivid description of nature it reminds us how our life is impossible without the existence of nature.

I have thus analyzed the text "Cry, the Peacock", ecocritically by Anita Desai.

This text fulfills all the essence of ecocriticism, hence it can be said that this text is "Ecocentric."

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