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GEORGE ELIOT VS ANITA DESAI - A STUDY OF THE THEME OF MARITAL DISSONANCE

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ABSTRACT

Mary Ann Evans, who wrote under the 'pen' name George Eliot was an eminent Victorian novelist. She was also known as a psychological novelist. She aims at 'soul dissection of her characters as Browning does in his poetry. In her childhood, she had an evangelical upbringing. She studied the scholarly writings of the great German psychologists like Comte, Feuerbach and Freud. Most of her novels are autobiographical in nature. 'Middlemarch' (1871) is regarded as 'master piece' of her writings. 'Suffering in Silence' is the major thematic concern in the novel. In delineating the character of Dorothea, George Eliot stands between the best of her masculine intelligence and feminine sensibility. Intellectual progress is the chief motif of her characters. This paper is an attempt to bring out the significance of 'Dorothea's two marriages' in the lives of several women in the contemporary society.

Anita Desai is an Indo-anglian woman writer and a winner of sahitya academy award. Like George Eliot, she also aims at bringing out 'psychological realism' through her novels. Her first novel 'Cry, the Peacock' is chosen for the study of the theme of 'marital dissonance' running parallel to Middlemarch.

Keywords: George Eliot, Women Marriage, Silence, Repression, Anita Desai, Incomparability, Emotional.

Introduction

Of all the women writers, who contributed a place in the English novels at the head of the world's fiction, George Eliot unquestionably holds the highest rank. The general characteristics of her novels may be described in her own words as psychological realism. She brought to do in her novels what Robert Browning attempted in his poetry. George Eliot explains the motives, impulses, and hereditary influences that govern the action of the characters. She also depicts the moral lesson to be learned from them. Her characters gradually develop themselves they move to the end. She extends the Horizon of Feuerbach's views of religion of humanity in her novels. By depicting the inner turmoil, she lays their souls open in front of the readers' imagination.

George Eliot's feminine sensibility is further highlighted in Dorothea's two marriages. One with Casaubon and the other with his cousin Will Ladislaw, which formed the major part of the novel "Middlemarch". Dorothea Brook is open, vehement and self-admiring in nature. She is theoretical in her ideas of life. She has child like ideas about marriage and wishes her husband to be like a father and should be able to teach her Hebrew. Her ambitions are innocent rather than foolish. She is generous by nature. In delusion, she sets her heart on Casaubon, who is senior to her by twenty-seven years. She finds in him a person who can understand her well. Her desire of marrying him is like an enthusiasm lit by its own fire and includes neither the scrupulosity of the touseau nor the Honours and delights of blooming Muses. She begins to trust more and more on his effective spiritual wealth. The first movement of disenchantment comes to her only after six weeks of their marriage. All these days, she considers Casaubon an Augustine, who is the combination of a doctor and the saint. She resigns to bitter disappointment as he neglects her in the foreign land of Rome, when they have gone on a trip for honeymoon. She is left all alone in a beautiful apartment, where Casaubon spends all his time in the Vatican library. In utter loneliness, she begins to suspect Casaubon and regrets her own choice of marriage. She feels she has married a stick instead of a man. She comes to know the truth that Casaubon is impotent and their marriage cannot be consummated. Her error of choice in marriage is similar to that of Lydgate and Rosamund.

'Suffering in Silence' is one of the leading motives of the novel "Middlemarch". The novelist uses Silence as a sign of concealed psychological trauma. Through silent suffering, Dorothea moves towards personal growth and Lydgate resigns towards public failure. Both are oppressed due to their incompatible marital partners. The influence of incompatibility in the lives of Dorothea and Lydgate signifies the importance of communication in marriage. Dorothea is able to overcome the self conflict to a greater extent than Will Ladislaw. Dorothea's sensitiveness to the inward tension represents the stage in her emotional progress. She exercises her own passion through the renunciation of love. Through achieving a balance between Desire and Renunciation, they protect their autonomy in the outer world. She drives out her emotional energy from a source of internal conflict rather than her consistent generosity. Her



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widens her reflective passions for Will Ladislav at which stage her private Desire and public wider sympathy are united together on a common platform of regeneration.

According to critic FR Leavis, "Dorothea is a product of George Eliot's soul hunger - another day dream ideal self".

George Eliot herself had St. Theresa Complex and therefore she portrays a similar character in each of her novels. She allows her characters to possess what she cannot have in real life. She sympathizes with Dorothea in her marriage with Casaubon. To give her a Happy Ending, allows her to marry Will Ladislav. Her identification with Dorothea is deflecting. She is compared at the outset to Saint Theresa.

Despite being impudent and thoughtful, Dorothea is blind to the inner tumult of Casaubon. The novelist shifts her sympathy from Dorothea to Casaubon as the former is unable to understand the sufferings of the latter. When Casaubon comes to know through Lydgate, the danger of his illness, he invites Dorothea into his room and speaks in quite voice of melancholy. They begin to walk happily in the broad corridor. Their happiness rescued from egoism reminds one of the happiness of the fallen couple in TS Eliot's The Cocktail Party. The novelist insists on the responsibility of Casaubon for the break-down of their marriage.

George Eliot through a process of deflection tries to idealise Will Ladislav. The novelist is genuinely successful in sentimentalizing the love between Dorothea and Ladislav. In Dorothea's happy marriage with Ladislav, the novelist carefully portrays her lot as being a common lot of human life. She is not clear in bringing out the satisfaction it provides for Dorothea's active conscience and great emotional need. Dorothea is a typical feminine character whose determination of acts is a result of struggle in an imperfect social world. But the novel is not completely feministic in her approach.

After her translation of Feuerbach in 1854, George Eliot is able to recognise the importance of psycho sexual freedom. It enables her to create Dorothea, who expresses a socially advantageous love in her marriages. Dorothea's terrible repression in her marriage with Casaubon is corrected by her expression of love in her second marriage. According to the concept of Freud, Dorothea resembles a particular type of women who get arrested at a particular stage of psychological development called 'electra' stage. Such people develop a kind of attachment to their father prefer to choose a husband whom they can control and begin to act as a mother. Had Dorothea been married to Lydgate, she would have found in him the fulfilment of her need for affection and her desire to minister unto her society and he would have found in her a wife, who would completely cooperate with his desire to bring about a medical reform among the Middle Marchers. Her puritanical upbringing to an extent might have led to her marriage with Casaubon. Her suffering from a basic distrust in herself lack of self esteem makes her fall prey to the father figure, Casaubon. The tyranny of Casaubon acts as a parental force in repressing Dorothea's lust. In Dorothea, the novelist expresses her realisation of struggle of the anti-repressive forces to express themselves. She undergoes three fold repression, sexual emotional and intellectual in her marriage with Casaubon. The revived fragments of the Roman art represent Casaubon's impotency and sterility and Dorothea's dispossession. Her inability to understand the Roman art symbolises her emotional repression caused by her puritanical upbringing that makes her read the history art of Rome from a puritanic way. It is also indicative of George Eliot's distrust of medieval art as being separated from the realities of nature. Casaubon's refusal of her helping in publishing his 'key to all mythologies' leads to her intellectual repression.

After the death of Casaubon, she undergoes hysterical illness for over a period until she finds a kind of sexual love in Ladislav as explained by Freud. In her belief about Ladislav's unfaithfulness to her through his attachment to Rosamund Vincy, She imagines him like a child and begins to feel herself as a mother. Dorothea's marriage with Will Ladislav, despite several protest from the Middlemarch society suggests Feuerbachian and Freudian views of love. She always tries to win a man who is bounce to another women. By the time she begins to love Ladislav, he is already attached Rosamund Vincy. She never regrets her breach of estate due to her marriage with Will Ladislav. Dorothea is a Feuerbachian angel.

Dorothea is full of noble actions. She is further depressed after knowing that Casaubon suspects about her relationship with Ladislav. His distrust of her affection to him is further intensified. She feels guilty and regrets:

"What have I done - what am I - that he should treat me so - he never knows what is in my mind - he never cares. What is the use of anything I do? He wishes he had never married me. (Middle March 1 page number 377)



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Dorothea is the compromise of all the three great psychologists. She is Feuerbachian in her generous attitude to Lydgate, Freudian in her repression of her marriage with Casaubon and Horneyan in partially fulfilling the needs of sexual love and service to community through her marriage with Will Ladislav.

The novelist chooses the subject matter of her novel "The Great beginning of marriage". She centres her novel around it. Dorothea's marriage with Casaubon epitomes ideal happiness where everything is given to the other and nothing is claimed for self. He used to think he had unnecessarily married her. She struggles with a hostile relationship between private and romantic Desire and impersonal Desire which is characteristic of the 19th Century writers. Dorothea's Desire divides against itself into two coherent and self-contradictory forms. This clash in the private and public lives of individuals in their repressive and expressive energies is a characteristic of Victorian bourgeois.

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George Eliot conceives that, this inward tension produces a wider sympathy. Dorothea's need for self-denial, irrespective of her social constraints and her altruistic nature generates an inward tension in her private sexual involvement with Will Ladislav. Both Dorothea and Ladislav can see love through the perspective view of self contradiction.

The marriage of Lydgate and Rosamund runs parallel to the relationship of Dorothea and Casaubon. Lydgate regards women as relaxation and atonement to life. Such an attitude never leads to a successful marriage.

The novel runs parallel to Anita Desai's (an eminent Indo-anglian Woman novelist) 'Cry, the Peacock' (1963). Maya, a young village girl, is Feuerbachian in her attitude and marries Gautama, a fatherly figure. Later, she discovers the incompatibility and lack of understanding between them. The theme of marital dissonance is explicitly brought out by the author.

Maya is the daughter of a rich advocate. Having lost her mother in childhood, she was brought up by her father, towards whom she developed affection. In her childhood, she never used to mingle with other children of her age group. Maya is obsessed with a childhood prophecy of a disaster regarding her marriage. She is also a victim of 'neurosis', a psychological disorder. The novelist creates a psychic tumult in the mind of Maya, which is as torrid and oppressive as that of stifling Indian summer. Her marriage with Gautama, a father surrogate, further aggravates her agony. She suffers from marital cacophony. Like Casaubon, Gautama is also impotent. This leads to his indifferent behaviour towards Maya. Maya is sensitive and emotional. She is neither able to get his company nor physical and sexual satisfaction. Despite her sexual advances, Gautama, remains rigid and cold. Very often, I see, men entering into the institution of marriage to attain a status and to give a referential address to women. The catastrophe of such marriages is a disaster. They end in strained relationships arising out of psychic disintegration.

Gautama is a practical man. He develops an attitude of 'detachment' towards life. This is very common, most of the time, with men having physical deformity. Maya, develops an intense love towards absorption and involvement in life. Like Dorothea, Maya is emotional. The parallel between George Eliot and Anita Desai, lies in the fact, that both of them revolve their characters around thoughts, feelings and emotions.

Maya also suffers from three fold repression like Dorothea. The world of Gautama is completely eccentric to Maya. He feels he is intellectual. He never allows her into the vast areas of his mind. A conversation between them is hopeless. It ends in a fiasco. Being childless, Maya, considers her 'pet' dog Tito, a warm, passionate and faithful creature, the only companion in her solace. She is deeply moved by the detached attitude of Gautama at the death of Tito. Maya feels Tito has better qualities which Gautama lacks. Even in her grief-stricken condition, Gautama, orders her for a cup of tea. The gulf widens between them. Her agony is much aggravated by Gautama's attitude than her loneliness. She turns hysterical. I have seen, many a man, blames the woman for her hysterical illness, not confessing in public, that, he is the cause of her illness. Anita Desai explicitly highlights Maya's passion in her seductive postures. Maya's predicament in life a struggle for subsistence. The Cry of the Peacock is a versatility which represents her cries of love.

Both Maya and Dorothea are intensely in love with life. Dorothea develops an attitude of maturity in maintaining perfect human relationships. Maya, obsessed with neurosis, feels difficult to come out of the calamity.



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Dorothea Brooke is a typical representative of many women' suffering in silence 'even in the modern age. Maya 's life ends in struggle. There are several incompatible marriages in the contemporary society. The institution of marriage should be revived. In some cases, it is simply confined to 'living under one roof' condition. The novelist suggests a solution to Dorothea's marriage with Ladislav only after the death of Casuabon. I wonder how many women suffer from the same turmoil in the modern Middlemarch (contemporary society). Yet, some other women suffer from domestic violence in the hands of men, and still confine themselves to live in isolation. I am reminded of Madhu Malathi in 'Small Remedies' of Sashi Deshpande, who, despite her suffering in the hands of her husband, chooses to live in utter loneliness. In contrary, Deshpande cleverly portrays a contrasting woman, Savitri Bhai, who liberates herself from the threads of social restrains and chooses to marry Gulab Khan, a compatible partner.

Dorothea Brooke is not a product of her repressive anger, but an expression of her intellectual maturity. Many a women, like Dorothea Brooke, chooses to maintain a fabric of human relationships.

I wonder where is the end for this 'Suffering in silence? '

Will these suffering souls be redeemed? Is there any recognition for their sacrifice? Will anybody notice their languid demeanour? Do they have to wait for the death of Casuabon? Nay, they need not...

I have come across women like Dorothea, who develop a wider sympathy through their inward tension. Knowingly or unknowingly, they develop a platonic love for Casuabon and still lament for years at their death. They still remain unrecognised. Their grief is object oriented. But not subject oriented. They lament over the panic of the dead, but not that they have lost something out of their death. That is by developing wider sympathy for the other person, still ignoring their loss or repression. In fact, these women never win the sympathy of others, be that of men or women.

The clash between the private and public lives of individuals is not characteristic only of the Victorian prudery, but also of the contemporary society. Lack of proper communication leads to 'Suffering in Silence'. Let the women not suffer in the name of the institution of marriage. Let not the death of Casuabon be a solution...Let these souls, not exploited by other men, by posing false identity. Let these 'incompatible marriages' be openly abandoned before the woman becomes a source of universal sympathy. I still see, in some of the countries, marriages are based on convenience. As Russian writer Anton Chekhov delineates in his one act play, "The Proposal", in several instances, the bride and bride-groom are not allowed to come out with their whims and fancies. Yet, there are instances, in which a man simply thinks, marriage provides him a social status. Marriage is the only institution for which there is no eligibility test. The solution for the lives of these Feuerbachian angels should be provided at a much earlier stage lest they continue to play the 'sad music of humanity'... Yet, some of these angels make their lives meaningful and successful, just by living for the sake of their 'beloved charioteer' - the child they beget, perhaps, through divine intervention or whatever.

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