

Geetanjali Shree's Ret Samadhi Reflection of the Psychology of the Elderly

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Abstract

Human psychology is meaningfully expressed through literature. The human mind is very strange and mysterious. Some of this diversity and mystery can be seen through creative literature. Like child psychology, adolescent psychology, and women's psychology, geriatric psychology has also provided a vast field of literature. Many stories and novels are based on the psychology of the elderly. The recent Booker Prize-winning novel 'Ret Samadhi' by Geetanjali Shree is a meaningful reflection of the psychology of the elderly. The novel is a new perspective on the mood of the elderly.

Important terms: Elderly psychology, Tomb of sand, Partition of the country, Borders, Patriarchy, Collective unconscious

1.1 Introduction:

Geetanjali Shree is a renowned storyteller of modern Hindi literature. Geetanjali Shree, who has nourished Hindi fiction with her novels like 'Mai', 'Hamara Shahar', 'Us Baras' and 'Khali Jagah', is the latest novel to be 'Ret Samadhi'. The novel, published in 2018, has won the 2022 prestigious Booker Prize. Indian writers like Arvind Adiga, Arundhati Roy, and others have been awarded the Booker Prize in the past, but the language of their works was English. No book written in Indian regional languages was selected for the award. The award is given to a book written in Hindi for the first time. Certainly, this is a source of hope for the regional languages of India. The novel is titled 'Tomb of Sand' and has been translated into English by Daisy Rockwell, an American illustrator, writer, and translator. The original author and translator have both been awarded the prestigious Booker Prize. The novel is full of Eastern and Western styles of the Hindi Language, the diverse cultures of both regions and various traditional legends and folk songs. The novel is also based on quotations from famous authors of Hindi literature, classic literature, and dialogues from classic movies. Daisy Rockwell has translated the novel into English without losing its uniqueness. Therefore, the translated text has become as useful as the original text.

Geetanjali Shree's novel 'Ret Samadhi' is considered to be an excellent work of art in terms of content and production technique. As innovative as the narrative is, the content is significant in many ways. Instead of a straightforward narrative, the storytelling is a chaotic, seemingly disjointed complex structure. The production process of the story is innovative. Instead of an exact reflection of reality, we see the construction of reality. The novel is characterized by the use of magical realism, multiple choices, and symbolism. The theme of the novel is also significant in several ways. The novel is as important in terms of feminist thought and gender studies as it is in terms of aging psychology, existential thought, and social and political consciousness.

1.2 Content and Scope of the Study:

The novel can be analyzed in terms of various styles or theories of literary terms. However, due to the limited scope of the paper, we will not cover all aspects of the novel but will analyze the reflection of the psychology of the elderly. The novel is based on the life of an eighty-year-old woman. Therefore, along with the psychology of the elderly, the subject of women's psychology and gender studies will also be covered to some extent. The novel is mainly about women. Playing a female character in the hands of a male writer cannot be the same as playing a female character in the hands of a female writer. The text is a source of inspiration for the author's subconscious mind. There is a deep relationship between the Creator and His creation. In 'Ret Samadhi', a woman examines the desires, hopes, and aspirations of the female mind on the scales of reason. A woman has to take on different roles at different stages of life. She appears in various forms as a daughter, daughter-in-law, wife, mother, grandmother, etc. The discussion will also cover the direction in which a woman's thoughts move in the afternoon of life, whether the desires of the unconscious mind and the Id are extinguished, or whether they wake up according to the circumstances.

1.3 Objectives and methods of the study:

The elderly are a large part of society. These elderly people are often neglected by society and their families. Even literature is more concerned with the mental reactions of youth. However, novels have been written with an emphasis on elderly characters or with elderly psychology as the central theme. The psychology of the elderly can be properly understood based on such novels. Since the central character of the novel is an eighty-year-old woman, it can be assumed that the novel reflects the psychology of the elderly. Our study aims to shed light on the psychology of the elderly based on the novel. The discussion will continue through a close textual analysis of the selected novel. The English text (Tomb of Sand) has been chosen instead of the original Hindi text for the quotations.

2.1 Subject Entry:

The novel is based on the journey of an eighty-year-old woman in search of herself. The story is based on the pain of partition and the breakdown of dreams. As an inevitable consequence of the partition of the country, a huge wall was built between the love of teenage Chandra and Anwar. Chandra's family moved from Pakistan to Uttar Pradesh to save their lives. In time, teenager Chandra got married. Chandra lost her identity in marriage. Even her name was lost somewhere. She became known as Amma. Amma did her duty as a daughter-in-law, wife, and mother. While carrying out her responsibilities and duties toward every member of the household, Amma became an eighty-year-old woman. After the death of her husband, a deep sense of sadness overwhelmed her. Amma turned her back on her love for all the members of the extended family including sons, daughters, and grandchildren, and entered a different world. The more she became absorbed in the inner world, the more she moved away from the outer world. She slept day and night without eating anything facing the wall and the family members tried to make her normal. But all their efforts failed. Amma left home to find her true identity, crossing the boundaries set by society for women. Amma was found with the help of the police. Amma told the police her name was Chandraprabha and her husband's name was Anowar. The family members thought that Amma had such delusions due to her age, but she appeared in a new form. The unmarried daughter 'Betty' gives Amma a new life. Amma's transformation took place in her daughter's flat. The eighty-year-old woman became a playful, agile teenager. Amma developed a special

intimacy with her childhood friend Roji of the third gender. With the help of her daughter, Amma went to Pakistan without a visa in search of the scent of lost love. After much effort, they found Anowar who was unconscious. Amma is of division, breaking the boundaries that hinder human emotions. Amma called on everyone to look at the politics of partition from a new perspective.

2.2 The psychology of the elderly reflected in the novel:

Old age is a time of rest. It is a great time to self-evaluate one's faults, achievements, and failures by getting rid of the limitless work engagements of youth. According to renowned psychologist Carl Jung 'For a young person, it is almost a sin or at least a danger, to be too preoccupied with himself, but for the aging person, it is a duty and a necessity to devote serious attention to himself'¹. Amma is also now free from responsibility. Son and daughter are self-reliant: capable of finding the way of their own life. After the death of her husband, Amma resigned from the responsibilities of the family. As a result, Amma is facing herself. She is talking to her conscience. Amma, who goes to her lonely daughter's house and gets a taste of free life, feels: I will indulge in some silence. I'll just be me, and no one else. I'll have my rhythm, none other. No one else will make me fall, make me wobble'(Page – 239). Psychologist Carl Jung has mentioned the behavioral changes in women and men in old age. For a proper analysis of this point, one can approach the collective unconscious theory of the psychologist Jung. The collective unconscious is some of the universal concepts that are more or less embedded in all human beings. These flow from ancestors to descendants. Collectives are associated with some universal Archetypes. Archetypes are some of the symbols, ways of thinking, or behaviors. People learn from their ancestors. Jung also mentions male and female power (Animus and Anima), the public identity of the individual (Persona), shadow, etc. among the archetypes. Anima is the feminine character embedded in the subconscious mind of a man, and Animus is the masculine character embedded in a woman's subconscious mind². It is important to note that the feminine character (Anima) in men and the masculine character (Animus) in women become more pronounced in old age. That is, women become stronger than men. For so long Amma could not challenge patriarchy. Amma could not cross or even try to cross the strong wall made of stones and bricks. But in her old age, Amma has turned her back to the world and is facing the wall attached to the bed. Amma is determined to cross the wall. This change that time has brought to the psyche of women is described in the novel as follows:

"This was the custom in the time of this tale, and this was the room where one arrived by walking through the door, and this was where Ma lay, back to the world, as though dead.

She has grown tired of breathing for them, feeling their feelings, bearing their desires, carrying their animosities. She was tired of all of them, and she wanted to glide into the wall with a tremor; if a bug slipped into a crevice would the crevice itself start breathing?'" (Page – 39)

In old age, Amma has become rational, thoughtful, and powerful. She has encroached into Pakistan without a visa. There is a fear of death step by step. The positive aspect of Animus is that Amma can overcome them.

Old age is a great time in terms of mental strength even when there is physical weakness, but the traditional thinking of our society does not allow the elderly to realize this. So the elderly have no choice but to wait for death. Every member of the household is worried about Amma. Because in their minds an archetype is stored in the source of inheritance. Compassion for children, sacrifice, and patience: these are intertwined with motherhood. Similarly, they also have a familiar image of the elderly in their mind. Old age is receiving care from family members and living in anxiety about the afterlife. The son-in-law

and grandson are all ashamed to see the opposite picture being reflected in Amma. Betty realizes this. So she assures her mother of a new lease of life:

'Because the new age tangled with the old, it needs time to detangle its tresses and find a new way to style its bun. But we think the order of our life has become separate, we are different, we can't lean on the old walls, the knot of the old shoelace is gone, and there's a new horizon in our embrace. Then why are these walls closing in on me ? The daughter assesses her wrists and fingers, she touches her forehead to make sure it's free, happy, no one has coloured it, there's no tikli, no bindi ?' (Page - 232)

Betty is also deprived of the love and affection of the family because Betty has moved away from the traditional concept of womanhood. She has a boyfriend but does not want to get married. She lives alone not living under the shadow of a man. There is a strong belief in society that men must have masculine qualities and women must have feminine qualities. Psychologist Jung has opined that such ideas hinder the mental development of the individual. People of the third gender are also not given the status they deserve in society because of the archetype embedded in the human brain. The feeling of resentment of the members of the family about Rosie, and the unusual death of Rosie is the reflection of it.

With her daughter's efforts, Amma felt the return of lost youth. Rosie, who works at the beauty parlor, brought about a radical change in Amma's beauty, costumes, and everything. Amma transformed into a young woman. Smiling and telling her daughter: Look how I am getting younger [page-12]. Her daughter has also realized this:

'These are the early days. Beti does everything: bathing, washing, feeding, and walking. But she will not need to do this always. Ma will grow strong. She will do everything herself. She'll bathe herself, wash, eat, and walk. Beti will leave the room and Ma will cheerfully morph into an eight-armed being once again.' (Page – 257)

Women have to take on new roles at every stage of life. She cannot stop in the same role. So Amma feels the unique significance of old age and she has found redemption here. She gets the taste of liberation. Frightened Amma, who endures her husband's exuberance, and son's exuberance, has become strong in old age and attempts to discover the true essence by opening all her veils-

'As though she'd removed all her layers, one by one, wife mother aunt this that, now at last she was simply herself, laid bare, apart, her own, untouched by the thoughts and concerns of any other. At eighty, Ma had turned selfish.' (Page- 529)

Old age is a great time to live according to their wishes. So old age can also be termed as the reincarnation of life. Women who can overcome the course of traditional reforms emerge in a new form with life-oriented energy at this time-

'A women, exhausted after years of subsuming her own rhythm to that of others, lying in bed for months, hanging on a breath which alone is hers, and after turning her back on everyone, she's started to recognise it somewhat, and granted, a cane had also come her way, which could be turned into the wishing Tree when extended, and anyway, even witches fly on canes, like brooms, so Ma was this Amma, who for so many years had remained immersed in her motherhood, who had now forgotten everyone and everything: is this not a birth, or a rebirth?' (Page – 224)

Such a change in old age is considered psycho-pathetic by traditional society. Only Beti and Rosie have been able to understand Amma's actions that seem strange in the eyes of Amma's sons and daughters-in-law, grandsons. Betty has therefore brought her mother to herself without listening to her brother-in-law's words. In the novel, the granddaughter abroad has sent a stick of special qualities for the

grandmother. In the entire novel, this stick has played a special role. The stick is presented as a symbol of the strong willpower of the old man.

Old age is called second childhood. Like children, old people are also seen to be stubborn. They feel comfortable talking about their illnesses in front of others. Many times the conversations are also seen to be incoherent. Such symptoms are seen in Amma as well. Although the beard grows like a man, feeling that it is menstruating again, etc., is also symbolically presented in it, the old psychology is also there. Amma has annoyed their daughter by traveling around Pakistan in search of a touch of familiar soil. The daughter is also overwhelmed by Amma's actions:

'I've heard about people becoming children in their old age. But to start considering oneself youthful? How crude. And she has turned me into an old woman and brought me here to Khyber to die.'
(Page- 667)

3.1 Findings:

1. The novel does not directly depict old psychology. It is only symbolically presented.
2. An old man seeks someone's companionship to maintain his weak body. Through that companionship, an old man can make life enjoyable.
3. The novel gives a new dimension to the heart-touching, cordial relationship between mother and daughter.
4. Knowledge and wisdom of old age can play a special role in bridging the generational gap.
5. Human relationships are above all relationships.

3.2 Conclusion:

Partition Literature's main purpose is to break through the boundaries of the country, caste, and religion and establish people as human beings. Nothing can be more than human relations. Such a statement has given its own identity to the partition literature. Geetanjali Shree's 'Ret Samadhi' is a worthwhile reflection of this line.

References:

1. Carl Jung, Memories, Dreams, Reflections, Page – 17.
2. Robert I. Watson, The Great Psychologists from Aristotle to Freud, Page- 475.

He discusses Jung's archetype as follows:

Jung held that at a psychological level masculine or feminine characteristics are exhibited by the opposite sex. Under certain circumstances, homosexuality may be an extreme manifestation of this condition. In his personality structure, the man has elements of unconscious femininity, while the woman has unconscious masculine tendencies. These elements are referred to in the man as a feminine archetype, the anima; those in the women as a masculine archetype, the animus.

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