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## Analysis Of Nabaneeta Dev Sen's Novel 'Albatross' In The Light Of Psychoanalysis (Freudian And Lacanian)

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### **Abstract:**

In the poem 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' penned by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, a mariner snatched the life of an albatross thinking that the bird was the secret agent of his enemy. When all shipmates felt a severe thirst and found no way to get rid of it, they blamed the sailor as the sailor murdered the albatross which signifies good luck. Shipmates hung the bird on the neck of the mariner as a punishment. Instead of the holy cross the bird hung on the sailor's neck became like a burden of evil. So, albatross is not only the name of a bird. Metaphorically it is the curse of a mental burden. Considering this point of view there is a mental disease called 'albatross syndrome'.

Nabaneeta Dev Sen wrote a novel titled 'Albatross'. There is no direct context of Coleridge's poem in the novel, but like the mariner in this novel there is a character who has a mental burden, a cursed illness. Same like the albatross syndrome, that character 'Piu' (nick name) never get liberation from her mental disease. Piuli Banerjee works in Kolkata and stays there as a paying guest of Ms. Mitra. Padmini Sing is her roommate. Piu calls her aunty though Padmini is usually called by others as 'Paddy'.

Our aim is to analyze the novel through the light of Psychoanalysis. Sigmund Freud is the father figure of Psychoanalysis. It is a process mainly belongs to the domain of Psychotherapy. Though it has a great impact on literary criticism. Freud published his famous book 'The Interpretation of Dreams' in the year of 1900. The main objectives of this analysis are to find out the psychological reason behind the particular behaviour of the characters and the influence of unconscious mind on the activities that one's conscious mind does. 'Unconscious', 'Pre-conscious' and 'Conscious'---these are the mind's three topographical aspects discovered by Freud. Mind has three functional aspects also---'Id', 'Ego' 'Super ego'. Freud also told about some complexities of mind that plays an important role in making someone's personality. 'Oedipus Complex', 'Penis Envy' 'Castration Anxiety', 'Madona-whore complex' are prior aspects among those complexities. Jacques Lacan is one of the eminent successors of Sigmund Freud though he has his own kind of influence in the world of psychoanalysis. He proved that the structure of unconscious mind is equal to the structure of language. It indicates that he linked between

the activity of mind and the language processing. Language is prime indicator here as it is impossible to understand mind's complex mystery without the understanding of language processing. Lacan gave many unique ideas like 'signifier', 'signified', 'imaginary'- 'symbolic'-real', 'jouissance', In the present paper we have applied many aspects of psychoanalytic theory to understand the novel 'Albatross'.

### Key words:

Nabaneeta Dev Sen's novel 'Albatross'. Freudian psychoanalysis, Lacanian psychoanalysis. Id-ego-super ego, narcissism, defence mechanism, introjection, identification, push-pull theory, need-demand-desire, imaginary-symbolic-real, Psychosis, delusion, hallucination.

### Analysis:

#### I

Every night Padmini Singh talks to Piu about her personal sexual experiences, love-marriage issues. How in childhood she came to know about sex from her uncle, how she was attempted to rape by colonial goons, sex experiences with four divorced husbands etc. Piu gets tired and irritated. Nevertheless, she is compelled to hear endless sex related talks. When Padmini talks to nobody, spends the whole night with gin and tonic in the dark room, Piu understands that his aunt is in depression. From this incident we can conclude that the endless talking about sex and being mute in depression have deep connection with each other. Memories, experiences, emotions are accumulated in unconscious mind. Unconscious mind has influence on conscious mind that we can say the interaction between ego and id or super ego. Ego attempts to calm the mind when it is wavered by all those unconscious elements like memory, past experiences, emotions. Freud called it 'defence mechanism'. There are many types of 'defence mechanism'. Among them we can find two types in the character of Padmini: a. Projection b. Projective identification.

Padmini Singh is always trying to project her own ideas about sexuality, female body, relationship etc on Piu. She tells Piu, "...look at yourself in the mirror everyday, and love yourself a little bit more. What a wonderful figure you have, sexy waist, awesome hip."<sup>1</sup> In this way Padmini projects her own idea about body on Piu's body. Secondly, by projective identification one not only projects his/her idea but wants to change other's mentality, behaviour also according to one's own manner. Not consciously but unconsciously persons are trying to manipulate each other. "...till you don't know the men, you are a baby, and see---you will find out---nobody forgets to have fun...this is not anything holy or unholy, darling. Sex is indifferent to holy or unholy matter. Sex stands by itself! Virtue, sin these are your intention, nothing else."<sup>2</sup> These talks can not be said are only Padmini's opinion, there is an implicit intention to direct Piu's mentality. This projective identification proves that in the deep unconscious Padmini feels an unsteadiness from which she wants to escape, for this reason using her ego she chooses projection and projective identification as her defence mechanism. Hence, she not only compels Piu to hear her talks, but she is also compelled to tell.

In childhood a girl first feels sexual attraction to her father. The girl's 'libido' desires to engage with her father, but at the moment when the girl understands it is the mother who is engaged with her father and she is totally unacceptable for such an engagement, the girl's mind becomes envious to her mother ( Oedipus complex---in Carl Jung's language Electra Complex). Through the emergence of 'incest taboo', the girl clearly understands that she can never own her father sexually. As her libido in the very beginning gets hindrance to express externally, it turns into internal dimension. According to Freud that means her libido becomes engaged with her own self, therefore she becomes narcissistic. Narcissism and incest taboo play a great role behind Padmini's feelings about sexuality. Padmini was reared by her grandmother as she lost her mother at very early age, and her father was a vagabond. She never got close contact with her father usually, so there was no chance for the libido to engage with father. As she lost her mother, it is easy to say, there is no chance of Oedipus complex. But this complex is very important for natural sexual growth of a child. Sex ethics based on incest taboo did not grow in Padmini and the main reasons are---being raped by her uncle, becoming a sexual object to the neighborhood goons, the short-term four time marriages.

Padmini believes in short term relationship. So bodily pleasure is more important to her than mental connection. She never feels a strong bond of emotion or ethics. In her opinion, “Nobody owns my body or my soul...and I like to use men for my own pleasure.”<sup>3</sup> It comes from the childhood experiences, lack of incest taboo, and narcissism. Narcissist woman usually thinks herself as a sexual object, and as an attraction of all men. We can find this attributes in Padmini's character. “Padmini aunty spends a lot of time at night to wash her face, clear all pores with a soft cotton dipped in cleansing milk....Padmini aunty really loves her body”,<sup>4</sup> Piu describes. Freud explains that “...it is only themselves that such women love with an intensity comparable to that of the man's love for them. Nor their need lies in the direction of loving, but of being loved.”<sup>5</sup>

Piu is the opposite type of Padmini. Piu's libido is not narcissistic, but anaclitic or attachment type. This kind of women are generally ‘selfless’, ‘self sacrificing’. Piu loves Ritwick. As Piu's love is of anaclitic type, to her Ritwick is ‘not a toy, not a glass of water to quench thirst, but the half of her life.’<sup>6</sup>

Freud said about ‘turning into opposite’ to fulfill one's desire. That indicates if any desire is left unfulfilled, the opposite desire arises. For example, if love remains discontented, hatred may appear. Many lovers become vengeful after being rejected in love. Padmini always talks about sex, she is drowned in sexual thoughts, the big reason is that her desire has an opposite direction towards suicide. Padmini has a suicidal tendency. To get rid of it, she expresses herself into sexual desires. The terrible depression in deep inside of Padmini pushes her to suicide. Though there is no sign of inner depression in her talk. In her talk she always expresses excitement, intent sexual desire. The repressed thought of unconscious mind makes her depressed, but the ego does not let it come out.

Piu imagines that Padmini is like a big vagina. Padmini's whole body is stuck with linga in the same way as Shiblinga is placed on vagina. In this context narrator mentioned a feminist drama named ‘Vagina Monologues’. Padmini talks in the same way as ‘vagina monologues’. we find some similarities between this drama and the present novel. In that drama a woman also talks about sexual desires, experience of being raped. When she was ten years old, she was abused by her father's friend. When the girl grew adolescent, she met with a beautiful educated lady who taught her about sex and broke down the inferior feeling that the girl had to her body and vagina. There was a controversy (Robert Swope Controversy) whether the girl was raped by the lady or not. Though the girl says, “If it was rape, it was a good rape.”<sup>7</sup> Padmini says alike about the incident with her uncle, “I learnt how to grow. This learning is useful.”<sup>8</sup>

## II

At her early age Padmini once being frightened rushed to her father. Father was behind a closed door. Someone else was with him, so, he did not open the door. Padmini burst into tears. In days later that closed door had haunted her frequently. When the whole world became like the closed door of her father, Padmini got depressed. Why has the image of that closed door been haunting her? What is the relation of depression with it?

Jacques Lacan told about three instincts and three interconnected circles of mind. These instincts are—need, demand, desire. And the three circles are imaginary, symbolic and real. ‘m(Otherer)’ who may be the mother or father or somebody else very closed to the child fulfill the ‘need’ and ‘demand’ of the child. But when the child understands that motherer is incapable of fulfilling all the need, the child's need becomes separated from the motherer. From this unfilled need, child's desire comes out. Desire plays an important role to make one's personality grown up. Desire may alter its preferable objects even it can stay alive after being repressed. Desire can never be fulfilled as the desired objects are not permanent or limited.

The ‘real’ circle of mind is made of desire. The ‘real’ is not a reality. The impossible things, unreal happenings that repeatedly come into someone's mind are ‘real’.<sup>9</sup> little Padmini being frightened rushed towards her father (to demand love from him). But as she saw the closed door and got no response from her father, her need/demand became divorced from his father. Discontented need turns into desire. The child's desire is influenced by the desire of the motherer. Desire makes one's personality and personality is not something inherited but it is influenced and many times constructed by others. Padmini's father did not open the door as there was someone else inside the room. So, the child clearly understood that her father had a desire beyond her own mere need. Father's desire has intruded into Padmini's desire. Through the whole life that closed door has haunted her because her most desire has been controlled by her father's desire (the desire which is the cause of separation between the child and motherer)—“There remains something essentially unfathomable in the desire of the Other for the subject...Separation involves the coincidence, or overlapping, of two lacks, the lack in the subject and

the lack in the Other. The interaction between the two lacks will determine the constitution of the subject...while the desire of the Other always exceeds or escapes the subject, there remains something that the subject can recover..."<sup>10</sup>

Sometimes the whole world becomes like the closed door to Padmini. Behind that closed door lies the unfathomable desire, which can be called 'real', according to Lacan. Everybody's life circles around such undetermined, inexpressible 'real'. As it is inexpressible, and indeterminate to oneself, it causes trauma. Trauma expresses itself through symptoms. Suicidal tendency in Padmini is the expression of the torment caused by the 'real'.

### III

About two years Piu is hearing Padmini whose talks are against Piu's value system. So usually those talks have created mental pressure upon Piu. Gradually she grows a distaste for sex, description of body. The inculcated values of super ego that Piu has and the constant battle against id and ego are the cause of such distaste. Yet, why had Piu been hearing to Padmini? Why did she not shift to another room? Because besides disliking, Piu has felt a sexual pleasure by Padmini's story. Reminding Lacanian theory, it can be called 'jouissance'. We feel an excitement while suffering. Woman's jouissance is phallic and non-phallic at the same time. Her sexual pleasure is not only bound to any particular sex organ but she has the ability also to enjoy sex overwhelming the body. "My whole self turning into ear listens to each word (of Padmini)." <sup>11</sup> Piu says. This happens because of jouissance. Even within the accuses that Piu does of Padmini to psychiatrist Dr. Majumdar, there is an excitement emerging from jouissance. According to Lacan a patient actually enjoys telling her symptoms, "Jouissance expresses that paradoxical situation where patients appear to enjoy their own illness or symptoms."<sup>12</sup>

Piu likes Padmini as Padmini feels affection for Piu. On the other hand Piu dislikes her as she abuses Piu verbally. Dr. Majumdar rightly said that Padmini has verbally abused Piu and the victims generally have a love-hate feeling to their abuser. For this reason, sometimes Piu wants to kill Padmini by mixing toxic into the coffee. But it can not be possible for Piu as she loves her aunt and she is empathetic also. Through the process of 'introjection' Piu got unconsciously few qualities of Padmini. Gradually Piu started to think like her, dress like her. By this process one's ego gets other's quality entered into one's mind. So there occurs a big change in Piu's behaviour. Not only in dressing but in mentality also. Now she thinks that besides being her lover Ritwick is a 'man'. Another defence mechanism that works in Piu is 'identification'. Jacques Lacan said that our personality actually is made by others. In the process of identification one can not identify that he or she is behaving like others. Ego here is totally engrossed by id. As a consequence one loses the ability to judge something. This is a mental illness called 'neurosis'. Padmini has the serious problem of neurosis. How it does happen is our later discussion.

Though Piu started behaving like Padmini, dressing like her, thinking like her she felt an insurmountable restriction from her super ego that holds her belief, values. So unconsciously Piu wanted to be like her aunt, but failed to be so. We can take an example from Lacan's research to make a better understanding. In the research paper Lacan mentions the name of a lady 'Aimee' who attempted to murder a famous French actress. While finding the reason behind such astonishing behaviour Lacan discovered that the French actress was her ideal. Aimee desired freedom, fame, respect like the actress had. Ideal may lead somebody to a fragmented self. People want to be like their ideal but when they fail, many of them indulge in hatred for their ideal. Because of this hatred Aimee wanted to murder the French actress.

Will to murder the ideal indirectly make one hurt his or herself. The unconscious intention to murder Padmini hurts Piu indirectly. Piu's neurotic condition becomes worst after Padmini commits suicide. It is proved even to the police that Padmini committed suicide. But Piu had a delusion that it is she who had murdered Padmini. This belief engulfs her whole being in such a way that she finds no path to come out of it. 'Repression' is the main cause of such delusion. According to 'push-pull theory' if there is a connection between the first repressed feeling and the second repressed feeling, naturally the first repressed feeling grabs the second one. The desire to murder Padmini is the first repressed feeling in Piu. This feeling lay in her unconscious mind and sought the way to express itself. The second repressed feeling is the anxiety, nervousness that was drawn from Padmini's suicide. The first one finds the way. Regarding the theory, the desire of murder and the incident of suicide falls interconnected. So Piu grows the delusion that she had murdered her aunt.

Three types of defence mechanism can be observed (ego takes up this defence mechanism when id puts an intolerable burden on it). These are---a. displacement, b. Rationalization, c. Isolation of affect. By displacement process Piu rejects the truth and keeps his own idea of murder in that place. Though Piu is guiltless, she organizes reason one by one to support her guilt through the process of rationalization. In the third process that is 'isolation of affect' one can flawlessly talk about one's guilt without any emotional attachment. Piu having delusion describes indifferently how she had killed her aunt. One can turn on an unfulfilled desire to one's own self. In this way 'sadism' may turn into 'masochism'. Sadism means the pleasure to hurt others and masochism means the pleasure to be hurt by others. Piu wanted to cease Padmini's life and when Padmini committed suicide Piu makes the incident the cause of her self-distortion.

Jacques Lacan describes four types of mental disease—a. obsession, b. perversion, c. psychosis, d. hysteria. Any mentally ill patient is under one of these four types. Piu is of Psychosis type. Two symptoms of psychosis are delusion and hallucination. Piu has these symptoms. We have discussed about delusion now we are going to discuss hallucination that Piu has encountered.

Padmini is no more but every night she comes to Piu, talks incessantly. Piu smells the sweet scent of her body. This is caused by hallucination. When one can see or hear or smell without the presence of the outer object, that indicates hallucination. According to Lacan, hallucination is "perceptum without an object".<sup>13</sup> As the perception of an object depends on our senses, there are different types of hallucination viz. visual hallucination, auditory hallucination, tactile hallucination etc. Piu can see Padmini, hear her and talk to her. It means Piu encounters three types---visual, auditory, olfactory. Lacan gave a new explanation of hallucination. It is called 'meaning-generating process'. Through the hallucinated object persons wish to create a full-fledged meaning of their fragmented self. Lacan said that for language the whole world is meaningful to us. Language is the 'signifier', and its meaning is the 'signified'. The world is full of signifiers.<sup>14</sup> Padmini also exists as an accumulation of signifier in Piu's mind. Padmini had been talking about sex---it is a language also. By these signifiers Padmini had entered into Piu. So naturally there is a differentiated meaningful relation between the signifiers that Piu already had and that of Padmini. We have already said that our personality, desire is shaped in that of other's various kind. Desire is made of language also. So it can be said that it is not possible to separate the signifiers of Padmini from Piu's. In this case Piu's self would be distorted. In the absence of Padmini, Piu can see her, hear her, smell her. In fact Piu has perceived the signifier that Padmini had sent to her. Through this Piu is searching for a complete meaning of her existence. Lacan said that unconscious mind is structured like language and hallucination is the 'unchained signifier'.<sup>15</sup> As it remains unchained it tries to link with the meaningful interconnected signifier of mind and comes back again and again as the hallucinated object.

## Conclusion

We have discussed the psychological complexities of two main characters in this novel. By using Freudian and Lacanian theory we have tried to find out probable explanation of those complexities. We have found useful the Freudian theory of 'id'-'ego'-'super ego', Lacanian theory of 'imaginary'-'symbolic'-'real', 'jouissance', 'signifier', 'signified' etc in our analysis. It is the credit of the author Nabaneeta Dev Sen that without explaining the theory, through the expression of life she has instilled all the deep inner truth of mind into her writing. For this reason, to construct the theory Freud shelters in Shakespearian drama, Lacan goes to the world of Edgar Allan Poe's story.

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