



## A psychological conflict in Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock*

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### Abstract

The aim of the study is to explore the psychological cry of an alienated woman, Maya in Anita Desai's novel *Cry, the Peacock*. Desai spotlights on extremely complex nature of life. The real life has an infinite variety; it may take as many forms as there are individuals. Her notion of reality of life seems to have been greatly influenced by Virginia Woolf. We can say that Desai is the first novelist among the Indian women writers who introduced that word 'psychology' in the Indian novels written in English. *Cry, the Peacock* Anita Desai's first novel, has been described as a trendsetter in the field of psychoanalytical realism. It explores the inner world of the main protagonist, Maya and demonstrates her fear, insecurity and strange behavior. Through her she depicts a world of alienation, loneliness and suffering. Maya is described as a hysterical character whose impending tragedy's suggestively foreshadowed, time and again. This paper is an effort to portray the psyche of a woman on the verge of insanity and the factors responsible for that.

**Keywords:** psychoanalytical realism, Indian English fiction, alienation, insecurity, loneliness, insanity

### Introduction

*Cry, the Peacock*, the first novel of Anita Desai, is a powerful psychological analysis of Maya. She is seen as neurotic, introvert and love-famished character, victim of the inadequacy of human relationships. Maya's claustrophobia, loneliness and frustration are effectively brought out by the writer. Anita Desai prefers to explore the private to the public world. Her real concern is the exploration of the human psyche, inner climate and she unravels the mystery of the inner life of her characters like Maya. Desai's female protagonists are alienated from the world, society and family because they think of themselves as individuals. Her characters are self-centered who want to change either the situation or things around themselves. Desai's female characters projects the battles that are fought fought and those left unsought. The psychological battle is fought against traditionally defined womanhood. The psychological suffering of finding themselves and their identity along with the pressures felt by women to fulfill the demands by the so-called ideal concept of womanhood, culminates in withdrawal, regression, neurosis and suicide mania.

### Discussion

*Cry, the Peacock* is a psychological novel which involves the study of a hypersensitive, childless, young married woman Maya, who is obsessed by a childhood prophecy of disaster, kills her elderly husband in a fit of anger, goes mad and finally commits suicide... "pursued an haunted by the idea of early death prophesied by an albino astrologer and her ineffectual lonely struggle against fate, that drives her to homicide, insanity and finally to suicide." Maya, daughter of a rich advocate in lucknow and being alone in the family, gets the excessive love of her father. When she gets married, she desires the same love and affection from her husband

Gautama, a father surrogate. She dreams of human love and her dreams link her conscious and unconscious levels of mind but Gautama fails to distinguish between fact and fancy. Therefore, a trauma visits Maya's unconscious mind, leading to an obsession in her psyche. Moreover, the prophecy that one of the husband or wife would die after four years of their marriage becomes troublesome to her unconscious mind. This constant anxiety in Maya makes her to develop a separation of idea and emotion. She develops a negative approach towards life and finds its entire essence as useless and meaningless. We can say that Maya's unconscious mind never reconciles with her conscious mind. Maya says: "All order is gone out of my life, all formality. There is no plan, no peace, nothing to keep me within the pattern of familiar. Thoughts come, incident occur, then they are scattered and disappear. Past, Present, Future, Truth and Untruth and I am tired of it. My body can no longer bear it; my mind has already given way. See, I am grown thin, worn. (Desai 179)

The over loving attention of her father makes Maya oblivious of the deadly shadow, but as her husband Gautama "knew nothing that concerned her." This loneliness makes her a psychosis patient. She makes a conscious journey through her dreams to an unknown world. Temperamentally, there is absolutely no compatibility between Maya and Gautama. Dissimilarity in attitude, results in unsatisfactory mental and physical relationship between Gautama and Maya. Maya marries a father like man who is without sentiments and emotions. Maya has been alienated through and through and slowly she moves towards insanity. The fear of death threatens her so much that she is forced to think about the death of one either Gautama or herself. But her psyche is so dominant on the human relations that ultimately she decides for Gautama who will not miss life because he is already detached to it. Her obsession for life drives her crazy.

Desai takes a bold step in projecting women's biological needs. There is lack of emotional communication between the husband and wife, they are poles apart one being pragmatic, unromantic and unsentimental and believe in 'detachment' on every count and the other hand is a highly sensitive, gifted with poetic imagination and a neurotic sensibility. Unable to establish rapport with her husband and to find a meaning in her 'arid existence', Maya becomes helpless, alienated and lonely in the indifferent world: "The incompatibility of character stands revealed - Gautama who touches without feeling and Maya who feels even without touching." Gautama is unresponsive to her desperate calls for intimacy. A continuous frustration of the body's sexual needs can be disastrous to somebody like Maya, given her fierce instinctually. A healthy emotional and sexual life would have given her a sense of security and stopped her psyche from decaying.

### **Conclusion**

*Cry, the Peacock* is the greatest attempt of Anita Desai to reach the psychological problems of the alienated persons. Through her novel, she tries to describe the complexities and working of human relationships in the modern scenario. Maya's tragedy is fully formulated in the symbolism of peacocks. Maya echoes the agony of their cry for love and death. The mental incompatibility and disharmony is made clear by her reactions to the things around her and her attitude towards death. Gautama thinks that she is immature and has never been brought her face to face with the quotidian realities of life. According to R.S Sharma, "the novel makes a gripping anxieties caused by marital incompatibility and disharmony and compounded by age-old superstition" (24). Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* exposes the psychological troubles that are induced by the disintegrated marital relationship of a disharmonized women.

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