



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

## Emergence of Modern Woman in Anita Desai's 'Cry, the Peacock'

Ravindra Kumar Yadav

Research Scholar in the Department of English

T. M. Bhagalpur, University, Bhagalpur

**Abstract--** Anita Desai is one of the most prominent names in the arena of the writers of feminine sensibility. She writes about a domestic world with a focus of delving deep into the interior of mind. The novelist illustrates the anxieties of the middle-class women involved in the family's isolation and alienation by making marital disharmony in their lives. Her novels correctly depict the exact notion that women need something more than food, clothes and accommodation. She is one of the Indian writers who tried to change contemporary society with her pen. Each of her novels is an endeavour to tackle the central problem of modern man--the problem of identity-crisis. The present paper 'Emergence of Modern Woman in Anita Desai's 'Cry, the Peacock' focuses on life of Maya. It is an attempt to explore the predicament of Maya in a dehumanized society. It is an attempt to explore how she gets a release from a life of gloom and despair. Maya, the protagonist of the novel, cries for love and understanding in her loveless marriage with Gautama. He is the reason for the tragedy that has happened in the life of Maya. His lack of understanding and dominant nature does not yield to the desires of Maya. The Male characters in Maya's life have brought her into the madness and death. Her fate is determined by the male society, her father, husband and Albino, the astrologer. Desai successfully sets it as a typically feminine novel and a novel of sensibility rather than of action. She highlights the female predicament of maintaining self-identity as an individual woman in her novel. Her emerging new woman is contemplative about the plight and is in a

traditional society who has the nerve to question the indifference of man. So, she chooses to remonstrate and fight against the general accepted norms and currents.

**Keywords:** Alienation, Dilemma, Psyche, Loneliness, Patriarchy, Tradition, Novel, Astrologer, Prophecy, Duality. Exploration, Character, Relationship, etc.

**Introduction:** --The subject that divides Anita Desai's novels from the novels of other novelists is alienation. Female alienation stands out heroically in her novels. Her characters are an investigation into the psyche of women alienated by a lack of fellowship. Their dilemma is even more poignant because these women have longed for their husband's human trace, sensitivity and friendship. Although Desai's characters are uncomfortable with their reality they have a sense of isolation, alienation and pessimism in mind. Anita Desai is known as an explorer of her woman's interior life. The inner turmoil and tension of her female characters are always very aware of her. Therefore, it becomes a recorder of the dilemma a person faces in the urban set-up in India. In the analysis and depiction of human relationships, she is more interested. Anita Desai always uses novels to explore the inner psyche of her women characters. All her women characters such as Maya, Monisha, Sita, Nanda Kaul, Sarah, Uma etc are physically and mentally isolated.

In 'Cry, the Peacock', from the beginning to the end the theme of loneliness, alienation and loss of identify of the characters, is often stressed by the novelist to create an atmosphere of dramatic tension and conflict. Anita Desai's concern, in the novel, is primarily with human relationships and how in the absence of a meaningful relationship the individuals suffer. She probes the psychic compulsion that may pollute an individual in forging long term and significant relationships and how an individual is affected if he or she is unable to forge such relationships.

Novels are the finest tool to reflect the real society with solutions. The basic source for the novelist comes from the world where they live, whom they meet, social customs, traditions and belief. According to their work of art, novels which mirror the social fabric reflect the thoughts of the age.

Novels by women writers share a major segment of the contemporary writing in Indian English Literature. Through the eyes of women writers, one can see a different world and with their assistance, one can realize the potential of human's achievement. So, they have successfully projected dreams, desires and the urges of a woman who refuses to be bounded and suffocated by the patriarchal society.

Anita Desai focuses primarily on the psychological exploration of Indian women's mind through her writings. Being a woman the novelist permeates deep into the inner mind of the depressed women and brings into light their issues, which are the outcome of Indian women's psychological and emotional inequalities in a male dominated society. Her novel 'Cry, The Peacock' explores in search of a woman to fulfill herself basically as a human being, independent of her various traditional roles as daughter, wife and so on.

In the patriarchal society, women are quite suppressed and oppressed. The transfer is expressed when she is ready to live her life as per her wishes. This search for self is the predominant theme in the postmodern writings. Anita Desai, a living postmodern Indian woman writer in English, produces some good works. In a little span of her career, she has gained an international reputation. Desai's protagonists are traditionally associated with women and the thoughts of these women characters are sure to crop up in their struggle to live their desired life.

Anita Desai has a sharp flexible intelligence. She has an intense emotional understanding of human motivations. In 'Cry, the Peacock', she deals with the concept of patriarchy and signifies a relationship of inequality. The story is an attempt to show how in life, suppression and oppression do not always come in recognizable forms but often under the guise of love, protection and the assurance of security. Patriarchy is a common concept in every woman's life. Women's suppression is rooted in the very basis of Indian society, in traditions, in religious doctrine and practices, within the education, legal systems, and within families. Traditionally, women bear the primary responsibility for the well being of their families. Anita Desai depicts carefully the diversity within each woman, as she does not want to put the lives of women to one ideal. Anita Desai's novels show that how carefully she expresses the frustration of women who experience in the social and cultural oppression in the male-dominated society. Anita Desai's 'Cry, the Peacock' is an individual's journey in search of one's true self who confronts the gender oriented tradition.

In the novel, 'Cry, the Peacock', Desai concentrates on the predicament of modern woman in the male-dominated society. She views that Men are apt to be rational and matter of fact whereas women are emotional. Naturally they look at things in different ways and react to the same situations differently.

As a reflector of the society, Desai seeks to probe into the forces by acting strongly on women that turn them crazy. The primary force of the cause is the need for attachment and affection. The cultural set-up of each country has certain norms which govern the behaviour of woman. Sinha states:

“A women’s normal destiny is still marriage, which practically means total subordination to man in the existing context of things.” (Post-Colonial Women Writers. p. 45)<sup>1</sup>

In India, family plays a dominant role in the life of a woman. The family ties are more important to a woman than her own welfare. Her own emotional well-being depends on her relationship with her family members. According to woman, Tradition seems the dominance of male society who always creates the limits.

In ‘Cry, The Peacock’, Maya, the protagonist’s loneliness is not something but is rather imposed on her. What really renders Maya as insecure and timid in life is the fatalistic attitude to life which marks her upbringing. It is significant that her father burns her horoscope which prophesies death in the fourth year of her marriage but he does nothing to allay the fears of Maya. The changes of Maya are not the cause but an effect of being left alone, ignored and humiliated.

“The cause for the atrophy is by and large the socio-familial background and upbringing.” (Post-Colonial Women Writers. p. 70)<sup>2</sup>

Maya is not a pessimistic about her situation. She doesn’t see her turmoil as something which cannot be stemmed. Her deepest yearning is for love and affection on which she fails to receive. What have driven Maya towards insanity are the unfulfilled desire and the perpetual longing for Gautama’s love and affection.

Maya, being a hyper-sensitive and affectionate wife of the cool and distant Gautama, already is in deep distress, not so much because of the lack of warmth, sympathy and understanding of Gautama. She says:

“I sobbed into my pillow as Gautama went into the bathroom, loves me as my father does.”(CTP, p. 43)<sup>3</sup>

To Gautama, what matters in life is the solving of problems. For him the realities of common human existence, not love and romance but living and working all that constitutes life for the ordinary man. Women according to him can neither be an intelligent nor logical. Maya is oppressed psychologically.

Maya has a positive approach towards life and values. She affirms her existence with womanly dignity. She is conscious of her womanhood and susceptibility. She observes the different values of life and stands on the side of humanity and true morality. There is no hesitation as far as concerned. As a married woman, her motherly instincts remain unfulfilled and also she sees in her pet dog, Toto a transferred love object. Maya says:

“Small white Toto, whining a little, out of fear, his futile barks dying away into a hopeless silence. Small white Toto, small white corpse in the blaze of sun, abandon. I shall miss himself-terribly, Gautama, I cried then, the confession fearing out of me in a stormy lush and even as I wiped away my quick tears and wept more, I cried to myself – what is the use? I am alone.” (CTP, p. 24-25)<sup>4</sup>

Whenever Maya remembers her pet dog, Toto, she is aware of her childlessness. Through Maya, Desai creates an epitome of most of the women who have passively accepted their inferior status within marriage. Without any other way, they cling desperately to their husbands pathetically grateful for occasional movements of intimacy.

Inamadar remarks:

“Through this Desai is unique in probing the depth of the mind diseased.” (Treatment of neurosis in Cry, The Peacock, p. 25)<sup>5</sup>

Maya says:

“He tolerated my hold for a moment in consideration of my bereavement, I expect, then moved away pretending to gesture to the gardener who was sprinkling the lawn.” (CTP, p. 16)<sup>6</sup>

The lure of security which marriage offers, the confinement within a self-enclosed world have reduced them to the status of emotional beggars. Maya’s intense yearning for communication is combined with a resigned acceptance which has no meaningful communication. There is a pathetic awareness of the

inability to make demands on her husband. He gives only the awareness of the inability and when he thinks as fit she awaits his pleasure. Maya knows very well about Gautama, and she hesitates to ask him to join with her. Maya says:

“I hesitated, wishing to someone him to me, yet knowing he could never join me. It was no use.”(CTP, p. 93)<sup>7</sup>

The entire pulsating world around Gautama serves to deepen her own dull and fearful existence. Her infatuated obsession with the idea of death makes her passive to the passions and charms of the world around her. The vague prophecy of the Albino Astrologer shatters her identity as a house wife. In the male dominated society a submissive housewife suffers a lot. The Astrologer as a male throughout her life dominated her life through prophecies. Astrologer predicts that four years after the marriage of Maya, her husband or she will die. It may not be true but the word of Astrologer haunts her and gives her the fear of death.

Day by day Maya hesitates to wish Gautama to summon to her because Maya knows very well that Gautama will never join with her. Gautama's attitude towards her shows the dominant nature of a male. Maya the submissive longs for the love of her husband but her husband who is one of the members of the male dominated society rejects her love and he never fulfills her desire.

Maya's memory of earlier happy days with her father serves as a foil to the unfulfilled loveless life with her husband. Drowned in silent bitterness, her marital world pushes her into the extreme state of fragility labeled as madness. As a married woman, she exists almost solely within her emotions and is excluded from certain kinds of marital experience that are vital to creativity. Maya's anguish comes out with the heart-rending, wistful veil of the peacocks. She symbolizes the panting and heaving peacocks. Maya says:

“I felt their thirst gazed at the rain clouds, their passion, as they hunted for their mates, with them, I trembled and panted and paced the burning rocks.”(CTP, p. 46)<sup>8</sup>

Maya refers herself with the peacock. She cries along with the peacock. She cries for them and for her. Maya's agony and peacock's agony are the same. The discovery of such kinship stifles her sensibility and she questions herself.

“Am I gone insane? Father! Brother! Husband!who is my savior? I am in need of one. I am dying, and I am in love with living. I am in love, and I am dying. God, let me sleep, forget, rest. But no, I will never sleep again. There is no rest anymore-only death and waiting” (CTP, p. 84)<sup>9</sup>

Maya fails because she has a partial vision of the objective world-a-world devoid of the existence of other human beings and perceived through the senses. By contrast, the identity of Gautama, though he is not the perfect model of an integrated person, centers round an intellectual apprehension of the world which of course allows him worldly success but which deprives him from seeing the sensuous and beautiful part of the nature which demands sensitive.

Her Mother-in-law and sister-in-law are very active in their mind and physic. They are not like Maya who is mentally disturbed because of her loveless life. It establishes the contrast between Maya's introverted turbulences and the human world of action. Maya is not ready to compromise and she refuses to participate in the world of others. The duality of Maya's existence continues till the end of novel. Maya goes to shopping with her mother-in-law and sister-in-law Neela that only brings forth her inability to deal with the situation. Due to a prolonged existence between two contradictory worlds, Maya loses her sanity completely and she kills Gautama by pushing him off the roof:

“Gautama I screamed in fury, and thrust out my arms towards him...saw him fall then, pass through an immensity of air, down to the very bottom.”(CTP, p.175)<sup>10</sup>

The killing of Gautama helps Maya to purge herself of her obsessions. Her action is condemnable and is clearly caused by her leap into insanity. Maini states:

“Maya is a woman whose neuroticism level is rather high, and who in the end does in fact, turn neurotic.”(Anita Desai and Feminine Sensibility, p. 4)<sup>11</sup>

Now Maya's final identity lies in her confrontation with her own act of madness. Her fear for death and so her choice of flight leads to death and destruction of life. As a woman of traditional society, her guilt and consciousness haunts her. Only prophecy makes her as a murderer. The prophecy is the main reason for her neurotic behaviour of Maya. Her conscious haunts her and so she commits suicide. Thus, Maya ends her life. Neela happens to view her at the last time, she says:



“The heavy white figure goes towards the bright, frantic on the balcony, screaming.”(CTP, p. 184)<sup>12</sup>

Maya tries to make others to believe that she only murdered Gautama. But no one listened to her. She says:

“I pushed him, hard and he fell.”(CTP, p. 181)<sup>13</sup>

The novels of Anita Desai deal with the cruel assault of existence. Her protagonists are persons for whom alienation is the ultimate reality. They are fragile, introverts longing for their existence. In most of her novels, Anita Desai deals with alienation with her craftsmanship. Thus Desai's 'Cry, The Peacock' highlights the predicament of maintaining self-identity as an individual woman.

**Conclusion:** Anita Desai's Desai's emerging new woman is contemplative about her flight. In a traditional society she has the nerve to question the indifference of man. Desai chooses to remonstrate and fight against the general accepted norms and currents. Her characters' existential, alienation and despair turn into an insistent longing for death as a possible exit out of their hollowness and is sought to be overcome by the inner awareness of protagonists. In 'Cry, the Peacock' Maya tries to search within the meaning of life but ultimately fails in this search and she is reconciled to the mental disorders. There is a dominant motif of death in Anita Desai's novels as her characters caught in the mire of existential alienation and turn into a compulsive longing for death as an outlet.

#### References:

1. Sinha, Sunita. Post-Colonial Women Writers New Perspectives. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2008. p. 45
2. Ibid, p. 70
3. Desai, Anita: Cry, the Peacock, New Delhi, Orient Paperbacks, 1980), p. 43
4. Ibid, p.24-25
5. Inamdar, Q.F. Treatment of neurosis in 'Cry, The Peacock'. The Novels of Anita Desai: A critical Study. Eds. Manmohan, K. Bhatnagar and M. Rajeswar. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors.2000, p. 25
6. Ibid, p. 16
7. Ibid, p. 93
8. Ibid, p. 46
9. Ibid, p. 84
10. Ibid, p. 175
11. Maini, Irma 1984. Anita Desai and Feminine Sensibility. Commonwealth Quarterly, 1984, p. 4
12. Desai, Anita: Cry, the Peacock, New Delhi, Orient Paperbacks, 1980), p. 184
13. Ibid, p. 181