



# The Psychological Impacts Through Retrospection and Introspection in Anita Desai's *Cry The Peacock*

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## Abstract

The aim of the research paper is to explore into the psychological problems of modern life. This article deals with Anita Desai's first novel *Cry, The Peacock*. The novel describes the pen portrait of Maya who is the protagonist of this novel. Desai illustrates Maya's sufferings deeply and the tragic end of her married life. Her characters neither live a happy life nor live an epicurean. All of them are struggling against odds. Some of them are not happily married. For them marriages are not made in heaven. They are very much affected by the sense of loneliness, alienation, pessimism etc., They are struggling for their survival in a hostile world. But their problems remain unsolved. Therefore all her novels breathe the air of tragedy. As Maya is a motherless child her father showers ample affection on her that leads to a heavenly life at her father's home, because her father fulfills her desires forthwith. So she expects the same sort of bliss at her husband's home also. Problem arises there, she sees fully materialistic and emotionless people there. She notices showy people at Mr. Lal's party, which she attends with Gautama. She is shocked on hearing their abusive criticism over others at the party, besides she is shattered much by the Albino astrologer's prediction about their tragic end. Maya is a victim of utter loneliness. What she longs for is companionship, love, affection and care but which unfortunately remains a perpetual void. The tender sensibility of a woman is intricately woven into the pattern of social fatalism through the tragic life of Maya because Anita Desai is more interested in individual characters than the social concern and issues that is why her characters are a combination of many characters from real life, they are 'composites' or 'hybrid'.

**Keywords** Todo's death, loneliness, mental agony, bereft of emotion and love, nightmare, alienation, restlessness, etc.,

## Introduction

Anita Desai is of the view that the inner life of a man or a woman largely decides the fate of a person. *Cry, The Peacock* exhibits the psychological state of both the main characters, Maya and Gautama, though Maya is considered to be the central character of this novel. The story revolves around Gautama. Since Maya is a motherless child, her father showers his excessive affection on Maya. It makes her feel to be an angel in the fantasy world of happiness, so she expects the same happiness and love from Gautama even after her marriage. The problem arises there and her unfulfilled expectations lead her to meet with her tragic end after the death of Gautama. Since she is a childless woman, she cannot bear the death of her pet dog Todo. Maya is so sensitive and wants love and care from Gautama, but he is quite materialistic and does not know the meaning for love and care, he always quotes the word detachment from *Gita* and talks about his profession perpetually, so Maya is discontented. The message of the novel is clear and loud. Mis-matched marriages might bring misfortune to both, or may even kill both husband and wife. If they do not die, they will be worse than the dead. Secondly the parents should not step aside as Maya's father has done. Thirdly, love is not the sin of attachment as Gautama thinks. Finally, the wife of any man for that matter should not be confined within the four walls of the house. The following research paper deals with the above said concepts.

Anita Desai born in 1937, is one of the prominent Indo-Anglian novelists. She is a prolific author as she has written ten novels and a dozen short stories within a short period of about thirty years. She has received many awards, she has been shortlisted for the Booker Prize for three times. She has won a Sahitya Akademi award in 1978 for her novel *Fire on The Mountain*. She has won the British Guardian Prize for *The Village by The Sea*, etc.

Anita Desai's characters can be classified into two distinctive groups – those who fail to adjust and those who compromise. Maya, the protagonist of *Cry, The Peacock* seems to fall into the first category, that is one who goes into depression, alienation and psychic turmoil rather than adjust. The novel consists of three parts. The first part describes the death of Todo. The second part is divided into seven chapters each of which presents an episode, revealing new aspects of the characters of Maya and Gautama. In the third part Maya loses the equilibrium. She comes to know that Gautama has no love for her and ends in the death of both of them. The novel begins with the mental agony of Maya over the death of her pet dog Todo. She laments helplessly, and needs the help of Gautama to overcome the tragic ambience. She feels sad with the attitude of Gautama because he often takes his references from *The Gita* in connection with attachment. According to Gautama *The Gita* preaches the principle of detachment. It makes Maya compare her life in her husband's house with that of the one she had in her father's house, and it makes her desperately sad. She is quite emotional whereas Gautama's family members sensibly deal with every happenings. So they treat Maya as a toy. The prediction of the Albino astrologer disturbs Maya constantly. Gautama is fully busy with his profession which in turn leaves Maya to be aloof always, which becomes the ultimate cause of the tragedy.

Maya is disturbed much on seeing the dead body of Todo and she keeps moving from the garden to home and vice versa without knowing what to do next.

All day the body lay rotting in the sun. It could not be moved onto the verandah for, in that April heat, the reek of dead flesh was overpowering and would soon have penetrated the rooms. So she moved the little string bed on which it lay under the lime trees, Where there was a cool, aqueous shade, saw its eyes open and staring still, screamed and rushed to the garden tap to wash the vision from her eyes, continued to cry and ran, defeated, into the house (*Cry, The Peacock* 7).

She wants the help of the gardener to bestow an honorable burial to the dog, but he asks Maya to wait till the arrival of the sweeper but he never turns up till the evening. As the dead body had been fed by flies and crows, Maya is crying aggressively, but without losing her hope she waits for the arrival of Gautama who comes very late. Soon after his arrival,

He did all that was to be done, quickly and quietly like a surgeon's knife at work. He telephoned the Public Works Department, he had them send their scavenging truck to take the corpse away, and saw to it himself that they lifted it in with care. 'yes, yes, the bed too'. He said 'By all means, burn it too'(8).

He went into the bedroom where Maya was sitting and sobbing on the bed and tried to console her "it is all over", he said. "come and drink your tea, and stop crying. You must not cry"(8). Maya cannot digest the emotionless attitude of Gautama during the tragic ambience. She feels that Todo is the second fantasy world where she remains perpetually happy. Anita Desai explicates,

Childless women do develop fanatic attachments to their pets, they say. It is no less a relationship than that of a woman and her child, no less worthy of reverence, and agonized remembrance (15).

Anita Desai impressively pictures the characteristics of Maya and Gautama and their contrast approach in the view of Todo's death and burial. She is crestfallen after the death of Todo, because she feels that she is in the fantasy world with the company of Todo. As she is the childless woman, her affection with the dog seems to be inextricably intertwined. She badly needs the company of Gautama to commensurate the irreparable loss of the dog. Whereas he leaves her abruptly after knowing through a servant regarding the arrival of Sahib professionally. She becomes desperately sorrowful with the emotionless attitude of her husband. He does not understand Maya's feeling and longingness for love. After disposing the dead dog's body along with its belongings, when he enters into her room he calls her to the garden to have a cup of tea, she is disgusted with stony attitude of Gautama, who is not willing to share her sorrow over the death of Todo.

She expects love and comfort from him and his family, but they seem to be fully focused on the materialistic life, Gautama is realistic, Maya cocooned within her mental reveries goes off and on in despair. Maya's case is that of a woman who has not known how to grow with worked up personality. The important task of a newly married woman is to understand the nature of her husband and to act accordingly. Marriage is an occasion for self-discovery for the married couple and more especially for a woman; for at her husband's place she has an opportunity of knowing the wider world.

Maya cannot take things as such and not even an idea of changing her attitude. When Maya attends Mr. Lal's party along with Gautama, she is disturbed by the behavior of the ladies at the party, because they are very much particular in exposing their rich and luxurious lives and they pass a vulgar criticism over the hostess for not being able to employ an ayah for her little son. Consequently Maya notices many incidents, and requests Gautama to quit from there forthwith. Like all women, she too has imagination over lust and likes to have a child whereas Gautama did not realize her feelings, so her feelings remain unsatisfied. The prediction of the Albino astrologer regarding the sad message that any one of the two would die within four years of their marriage disturbs Maya much. Maya thinks that emotionless Gautama would deprive her, if he comes to know the truth. Maya things "Do you not hear the peacocks call in the wilds? Are they not blood-chilling, their shrieks of pain? 'pia, pia' they cry. 'Lover, Lover. Mio, Mio, - I die, I die'"(82). "And she lamented "Agony, agony, the mortal agony of their cry for lover and for death"(83). Maya is sad that Gautama fails to notice Lord Krishna's love for Meera, though he often takes references from *The Gita*. As they are talking on the terrace, when Gautama tries to touch her is leaning on the parapet of the terrace, Maya who moves from there unintentionally screams furiously. She thrusts out her arms to save him from falling down, but her effect becomes vain, Gautama falls down dead. Though this is an accident, Maya is held responsible for his death. After a protracted lamentation and scrupulously analyzing all the past incidents one by one, comfortably sitting on the chair, Maya says adieu to her father, loses the equilibrium, her innocence, emotion of love, desire for beauty, sorrow for her husband. She loses her conscience and ends her life.

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