



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

## Depiction of Women in Anita Desai's Works

Sarika Soni

Ph.D Scholar (English)

Mats University Raipur (C.G.)

### ABSTRACT:

Women, in this hypothetical social system, have always been suppressed undervalued and depreciated under the male-chauvinistic assumption. The current research paper reflects umpteen feminist issues which are raised in the illustrations novels 'Cry, the Peacock' and 'Where shall we go this summer?' of Anita Desai. She is one of the most effective Indian feminist novelists, writes in English sketching the femme fatale characters like Maya and Sita of the above-mentioned novels, whose feminist message to substantiate is the focal point of this paper. She is made several conscious and persistent efforts in order to sectionalize a good deal of quandaries of these forthcoming female characters Maya and Sita. In India, the works of the female writers have invariably been looked down by this male-dominated society as their writings were called as 'Kitchen Literature' owing to the reason they were supposed to write only about their firsthand experience inside the four walls of their domain. In the past, female writers had to toil hard even to make their works acceptable such as with Anita Desai. With the beginning of the post-modern era, women started appearing for their prerogatives, dignity and equiformity against gender discrimination, traditional and conventional customs.

### KEYWORDS:

Hypothetical, suppressed, undervalued, depreciated, conscious, persistent, quandaries, firsthand, discrimination.

**INTRODUCTION:**

In her novels, Anita Desai deals with psychological realities very precisely. She aims to impart the truth pre-eminently through her compositions and most significantly to discover herself. She is endeavoured to penetrate deep into the astuteness of the women's psyche and painting out a casual relation to the society which one can perceive via the depiction of the depressed and neurotic Maya and Sita both of them acting being delicate and fragile characters in their conspicuous struggles and fighting tooth and nail with their neurotic trends. Anita Desai is recognised as the pioneer of the female psychological novels to a great degree in India's modern English literature. The distinctive part of her works is her art of portraying the characters which look into the inner workings of women and being their responses under notice. The novels 'Cry the Peacock' and 'Where shall we go this summer?' deliver about the inner chaos and the nervous strain of the two protagonists Maya and Sita. Here Desai enquires into the emotional world of Maya, who has been forewarned of her husband's death by some albino astrologer, on the other pole she emphasizes on Sita's repressed childhood neurosis. The deeprooted memories unfulfilled desires having been squashed in the unconscious of Sita appear again as a through neurotic image in the course of her fifth pregnancy. Both of the novels carry a thrust of acrimony and dissension with themselves. One sided love and friendlessness leaves Maya doomed at the gates of death and violence while Sita undergoes 'Oedipus complex'. They both display the Indian personality structure which is very intricate and multi-layered. Maya's aversion to cope with her neurotic trends shots for violence while Sita's settlements and alterations in her disposition send her home back modestly.

**Anita Desai's conduction of feminism**

Anita Desai indubitably owns a position of the uttermost merit in the modern Indian feminism. She substantiates the natural and everyday issues of the family, society and economics symbolising the general women through her inborn, penetrating and vivid knowledge, erudition and psychological dealings. Desai's strived to display the horrible and mysterious truth of the psychology as well as focused on women's questions in almost every feminist novel of her. Her words go like this:

"I am to tell the truth about any subject, not a romance on fantasy, not avoid the truth. My writing is an effort to discover, underline and convey the significance of things. I must seize upon the incomplete and seemingly meaningless mass of reality around me and try and discover its significance by plunging below the surface and plumbing the depths then illuminating those depths till they become a more lucid, brilliant and explicable reflection of the visible word.

Desai's characters belong to the affluent category of the Indian society that they really need to struggle sensibly and comprehensively for their existence to be continued. She pens down portraying the classified characters with her great erudition and sensibility. And her style of writing too isn't that much similar,

"I start writing without having very much of a plot in my mind or on paper. Only a hazy idea of what the matter of the book is to be. But it seems to work itself out as I go along quite naturally and inevitably. I try to trace the connections between the characters and that way a story or plot emerges."

### **Maya as an instance of Indian Post-modern**

#### **Feminism**

In 'Cry, the Peacock', her first and foremost novel, she sheds light on inharmonious and harshness in a loveless matrimonial relationship between Maya, the protagonist of the novel and her husband Gautam. Desai has tried to awaken the distressed, mistreated and ignored women of the male-oriented society. The title of the novel, 'Cry, the Peacock' makes manifest Maya's cry for deep affection and adoration in her heartless and bound relationship. Their volatile disposition is the main ground for conjugal imbalance. Her state of childlessness magnifies her anguish of loneliness, which she feels in spite of being married. Maya longs to derive pleasure in life to the greatest possible extent and appreciates little things in life. On the flip side, she is married to Gautam one of her father's friends who is very senior to her age along with being an affluent middle-aged lawyer. He is a sort of active, good natured, civilized and well reasoned man occupied in his own business affairs. He considers her adoration for things and depreciates it once by telling her a low grade poetess. Her heart aches for companionship which she remains deprived of all her life. And there goes on her words,

"Because when you are away from me, I want you. Because I insist on being with you, and being allowed to touch you and know you. You can't bear it, can you? No, you are afraid, you might perish."

(1)

Her expectations and ambitions of a wedded bliss being not fulfilled, makes her neurotic, fragmented and mal-adjusted. Thereby she is represented as a fragile and oversensitive figure; who grows dim to to manage with the patriarchal system and yet carries on questioning the social and conventional circumstances which cause neurotic trends in her.

The plot of her novel is affected broadly by three white issues: her obsession with death, father fixation and her worlds-apart relationship with Gautam. Since the beginning of her nuptials, she is obsessed with a certain inadvertent prediction of tragedy by some Albino Astrologer. As stated in the prediction, either she or her husband would kick the bucket during the fourth year of their marriage. Her father lets go the prediction as a shit and straightens it out by telling them to neglect it. For this, Maya put aside this topic deepdown in her unconscious until the fourth year of her marriage.

On the other flight, despite Maya's alluring attitude, Gautam remains and unyielding and apathetic towards her. She puts her own words to this awkward situation:

"I turned upon my side, close to him, conscious of the swell of my hip that rose under the white sheet which fell in sculptured folds about my rounded forms." (2) Subsequently she endures to exist not only emotionally dissatisfied but physically too.

The seed of Maya's death brooding and preoccupation with death had been sowed earlier in her childhood by an albino astrologer's prophecy of either of the couple's death after the marriage. She gets frenzy over the alarm of the death as she's entirely in love with life and keeps a jolly desire to live it.

"Am I gone insane? Father, Brother, Husband. Who is my saviour? I am in need one. I am dying, God, let me sleep, forget, rest. But no, I'll never sleep again. There is no rest anymore. Only death and waiting." (3)

She becomes hypersensitive being childless and hence expands the tenderness for her pet, Toto.

Gautam was light austere and too reasonable to fathom her emotional bond for the pet and couldn't notice her grief for the dog's death. Maya's agony is conspicuous when she 'saw its eyes open and staring still' and promptly hurried screaming to the garden tap as to wash the view and then rushed weeping to the house. Toto's death reminds her of her loneliness which was suppressed inside her. It adds more loneliness in her life and here Gautam's uncaring and insensitive attitude is called attention to when he again depreciates it by calling her a chatting monkey while she was trying to share her feelings regarding Toto. Gautam is logical, inconsiderate, philosophical and detached since Maya is passionate and amorous which further becomes a reason for them to separate. He neither understands her nor tries to enter her world. "On his part understanding was scant and love was meager." (4)

Maya being childless demands for her husband's companionship which he wasn't to fulfill instead treated as a child. The bitter indignance of Maya reminds one of Nora of A Doll's House: "..... our home has been nothing but a play-pen. I have been your doll-wife here, just as at home I was Papa's doll child....." (5)

Maya, a pampered and overparented child of her father Rai Sahib, is raised in the heavens of grandeur and opulence. Her marriage with Gautam was a business of mutual benefit. Gautam and Rai Sahib were friends who thought in the same vein. He used to go Rai's house everyday and one day he was offered to marry with his daughter. So, their marriage is based on the friendship which Maya is extremely scattered by. That is a vague hint that her father's marriage too was not good as her mother was nowhere discussed significantly in the novel.

For Maya, the dance of the peacock is of much relevance as the peacocks end each other's existence in spite of being intensely in love. Maya's hunger for love drives her to do away with her husband first and then herself. Maya's other roots of agony are her marriage to Gautam, a friend of her father's age who is not even able to fulfill her physical and emotional needs, the awkward behaviour of the members of Gautam's family, the silence and loneliness of the house and eventually Toto's death. The jumbo gap between her father's love and her husband's negligence continually coerces her into calling to mind her childhood memories with her father. This results in emotional disturbance which causes the death of her husband. One day at Maya's request Gautam goes with her on the roof. She gets bewitched

by the rising pale moon. Both of them are near the Parapet's edge and when randomly Gautam obstructs her view of the moon. Cracking in an abrupt madness, she pushes him over the Parapet. Gautam's mother and sister, after 3 days take Maya to Lucknow, her father's home so as to put her into asylum. Thus, at the end Maya isn't saved from becoming insane but leaves a message that marital relationship can drive one insane if there is a lack of mutual understanding, satisfaction and temperamental parity.

### **'Sita' as the personification of Indian Feminism**

In, 'Where shall we go this summer?', Anita Desai relates the obduracy and in humanness of the city lifestyle. It marks a return to the independent and intrinsic world of the inner self. When Sita is pregnant again, she gets freaked out at the thought of bringing a new and thus makes off to a small Island in order to escape the rasping actuality. Her unexpected succumbing brings an anti-climax to the story. Sita is an over sensitive and emotional middle aged woman who feels estranged with her children and husband. She confronts several mental traumas but silently in isolation owing to her sharp insight and turbulent sentimentality. The novel is to throw light on her introversion, solitary and then the sequent other-worldly peregrination where she tries to visualise her dreams. But eventually she steps up her desire to revive the experience and excitement in her. Hence, she gets stuck in a predicament as to where she should go that summer.

Sita now being over forty, hangs between her married life and self-fulfillment. While she was awaiting for her fifth child, her experiences of a mother and wife get amassed in her agony. She feels no pure happiness in her married life and then despair arises making her unconscious, hard hearted and alien to her husband and children. Her madness compels her to return to her childhood soil Manori, an island in the West-coast so as to preserve her sanity from escaping the the everyday life of Bombay apartment. Her undeveloped earnings inflict anguish on her. The attachment with her husband Raman and children causes adversities in her life. She has gone mentally ill in and out of the regular normalcy. She tells her husband in crystal-clear words, "What I am doing is trying to escape to a place where it might be possible to be sane again.....," She, having no conception of life, develops fluctuating and unstable attitude towards life. Though she takes up arms for the birth of her fifth child, yet she is itching for the abortion of the unborn child in order to protect it against the bitter and abusive ambience in which she is settled now.

And thus aims at fleeing to Monori. She perceives this Island as a place of miracles. Being exhausted

and dreary of the life of dismay and regret, she looks round her childhood soil for mental repose. Here she may attain a shelter for superior than the tedious day to day life of Bombay and far away from her family life. She tries to fix the alterations, imbalance and indulgence between the present and the past of her mid-life. Her desire for miracles forms her viewpoint but she remains unanswered and suffocating to her intense anguish. She thinks this Island as of a kind of hidey-hole which would hold the baby safely unborn by magic. Within these moments, her psyche would be cleaned and perhaps it could be that these ups and downs would cast her children into more delicate and softer beings.

Her misfortune, bewilderment, dubiety and compromises cause her suffer harshly. Though the island hasn't any miracle for her, yet the lolluillusion continues to exist. Her amity is now a false notion of mothering. She endeavours a fruitless quest for some motive in life. Her uneasiness, disquietude, and negativity result in outbursts of feelings for which she undertakes a search for distraction from her vulnerability. No sooner does she reach Manori than she encounters a fresh wakefulness and realisation. And now she grasps well now inane human nuptials they were.

She pictures in mind the world of her dreams and sharpens her desire to live afresh the experience, curiosity and innocence once more. Her sudden decision as to where she should go that summer and her decision to return to the island after 20 years in quest of her lost purity and innocence. The misunderstanding of Raman and Sita yields marital disharmony but even then she attempts to idealize her relationship pretending to be a flawless wife. However she has begun to alienate mentally, she gives sometimes to introspection and retrospection of her tasteless marriage after realising that just complete inwardness isn't going to make her life happier. She is repugnant to her life and her estrangement was inherent in her relationship with her father. She is impotent to continue and orthodoxy attitude towards the established social norms. Even if she tries to react productively, she fails to hang on reaction against every circumstance. Consequently she is left as a stranger yearning for the life of an original world. She tries hard to adjust in the house of Raman's parents after marriage but there she hangs has a crackpot failing to adopt her self to society. Thereby she moves to a small plot settling a nuclear family of her own. Here her life is slight better but her seclusion is disturbed, she finds her existence in danger tackling with the the tedium of life.

The agonies and the succession of sorrowful moments in her life make her bold enough to refuse the conventional commands of society. When Raman comes Manori to take Menaka (Sita's daughter) for admission to medical college, his arrival satisfies a bit but eventually she once again comes to realise the harsh realities of life. She feels that she has escaped from responsibilities, duties, orders and routines, and from the life of hustle-bustle to the island. She refused to bring that child into the world because it wasn't fit to receive the child.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Coming to an end, we may summarise the theme of both the novels is lack of harmony and friction in life limited to the patriarchal society. The feeling of being unloved leaves Maya at the gates of death and violence while Sita endures agony due to 'Oedipus Complex'. As per many critics and Desai scholars, both Maya and Sita are the spokeswomen of the Post-modern Indian feminism as influenced in 'Cry, the Peacock' and 'Where shall we go this summer?' They both stand in for Indian structure which is very elaborate and multilayered Maya's disliking to face her neurotic trends compels her for cruelty while Sita's compromising and adapting to some situations send her home tranquilly.

### **REFERENCES:**

Desai, Anita. *Voices in the City*. Delhi: Orient, 1965.

Desai, Anita. *Cry the Peacock*. Delhi: Orient, 1980.

Desai, Anita. *Clear Light of Day*. New Delhi: Allied, 1980.

Adhikari, Madhumalti. *Defying Patriarchy: Female Protagonists in Virginia Woolfs*

Mrs. Dalloway, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*, *Points of View* Vol. II, No. I, Summer 1995.

Meitei, M. Mani. *Feminism and Anita Desai's Cry the Peacock and Where Shall We Go This Summer*. P.M. Nayak and S.P. Swain, eds. *Feminism and Indian English Fiction*. Bareilly: Prakash, 1996.

Inamdar, Q.F. *Treatment of Neurosis in Cry, the Peacock* M.K. Bhatnagar, ed. *Indian Writing in English*. Vol. V, New Delhi: Atlantic, 1999.

Gupta, Ramesh Kumar. *The Concept of New Woman in Anita Desai's Clear Light of Day*. M.K. Bhatnagar and M. Rajeshwar, eds. *The Novels of Anita Desai: A Critical Study*. New Delhi: Atlantic, 2000.