

## Sense of Alienation in Anita Desai's Cry, The Peacock

Ms. Nilofar Rashid

HEAD MISTRESS (JUNIOR PRIMARY SECTION, I.I.S.J & RESEARCH SCHOLAR

### BIONOTES

Nilofar Rashid is Head Mistress (J.P.S) in I.I.S.J Al-Jubail, Saudi Arabia and is a Research Scholar. Her area of interest is Indian Writing in English. She has published number of papers in Journals, presented workshops and participated in seminars. She is an active member in NISA TOASTMASTERS CLUB (AL-JUBAIL) and is a coach of UTKALIKA TOASTMASTERS CLUB. she has qualified up to District level (Toastmaster: DELC) in March 2019. She was 1<sup>st</sup> runner up in INTERNATIONAL SPEECH in DELC 2020 in virtual platform. She has her own YouTube channel: EMBRACE YOUR JOURNEY: You may reach her at nilofar.rashid@yahoo.com

Abstract:

Of the entire contemporary Indian English novelist, Anita Desai (b, 1937) avowedly' an essentially subjective writer, is indubitably the most powerful writer of the stream of consciousness technique. Demonstrating her fictional strategy and underscoring her essentially tragic vision of life, Desai resorts generously to imagery to vivify psychic states as well as the distinctively individual consciousness of her highly sensitive, introverted characters and the complexities of human relationships, scenes and situations, resulting in a remarkable textural density. Anita Desai's predominant concern is not with society or social forces but the individual psyche and its interaction with social values .she is more interested in the psychological aspect of her characters. Desai is considered as a psychological novelist as her concern is mainly with the nocturnal and nebulous atmosphere of the female psyche. The motivations, the conscience and the psychic tension of the feminine psyche are Desai's main themes. Creates an opulent gallery of characters though dominated by the female. Most of her protagonists are hypersensitive females. Each is presented as an inscrutable individual. They are not chosen from the common rung of the society. Their problems are not related to food , clothing and shelter They are rebels and their rebellion is not so much directed against society as against individuals Their problems are neither physical and emotional.

In dealing with psychic maladies, Anita Desai strikes a new note. Her characters suffers from various complexes and mental diseases, which obstruct the healthy growth of their personality. A particular trait in the character, a tragic flaw develops into a psychic malady making the character neurotic and hysterical as Maya suffers from father\_ fixation.

Desai is a part of a new literary tradition of Indian writing in English which dates back only to the 30 s' or 40 s'. She explains that this is because "at one time all literature was recited rather than read and that remains the tradition in India. It is still rather a strange act to buy a book and read it, an unusual thing to do". Her new style of writing is

also different from that of many Indian writers, as it is much less conservative than Indian literature has been in the past. For these reasons, she says, she is not widely read in Indian Universities if at all'. (cls p-29)

Her novels highlight the themes of love, marriage and sex. Her characters are usually women who are haunted by a peculiar sense of doom, withdraw themselves into a sequestered world of their own, become neurotic, self-destructive and unhappy...'(A Study Of Love, Marriage And Sex In Anita Desai's Novels-VinayDubey)

According to Prof. K.R.Srinivasalyengar 'Her forte is the exploration of sensibility- the particular kind of modern Indian sensibility that is till at ease among the barbarians and philistines, the anarchists and the amorlists. Since her preoccupation is with the inner world of sensibility rather than the outer world of action, she has tried to forge a style supple and suggestive enough to convey the fever and fretfulness of the stream of consciousness of her principal characters.(K.R.Srinivasalyengar-Indian writing in English,1973,p-464)

She has given a new direction to Indian English Literature. Her novels are considered to be the great contribution to the Indian English Literature. She started her literary journey with the publication of her first novel Cry, the Peacock in 1963. The 1960's scattered a sense of great dejection and gloom all over India. In 1962 China obtain a victory over India and this defeat brought a sense of disgrace and humiliation, Anita Desai's novel Cry, the Peacock published. She must have a nag of disillusionment in her subconscious mind, which came before us in the form of a novel Cry, the Peacock. She has measured the individual level of the abandoned self of her characters. Desai has delineated the self-alienation, despair, death, desolation and socio- psychic fragmentation of the protagonist. Through this article I have made a humble attempt to discover the meaning of alienation and inner life of Desai's protagonist Maya in the novel Cry, the Peacock. I was, being human borne alone; I am, being woman, hard beset; I live by squeezing from a stone The little nourishment I get'

Every wife yearns for the intense intimacy with her husband. But in Cry, the Peacock the protagonist Maya receives hostility and indifference rather than delicacy and affection. In this novel Desai presents the silence, solitude, melancholy and dark world of shadows in Maya's life. Cry, the Peacock is concerned with its chief protagonist Maya's psychological problems. Based on the mythological and archetypal images and symbols, this novel explores the hidden and dormant impulses of Maya's psyche. As a young sensitive girl Maya desires to be loved. She marries the friend of her father, Gautama, who is much older than herself. She belongs to a traditional Brahmin family which believes in astrology and other prophetic strains of Brahmanical order. On the other hand, Gautama's family represents the rational side of life. Thus Maya is haunted constantly by the rationalistic approach of her husband to the affairs of life. Maya loves Gautama passionately and desires to be love in return; but Gautama's coldness disappoints her. They are different with each other in tradition and modernity, trust and distrust in human relationships, Brahmanical and non- Brahmanical order of the society. The prophecy of albino astrologer creates a fear psychosis in Maya 's mind: The astrologer, that creeping sly magician of my hallucinations-no of course they were not hallucination, Arjuna had proved them to me, and yet could they be real? Had never said anything to

suggest that it was I who would die young, unnatural and violently, four years after my marriage, nothing to suggest that he even thought that. The astrologer's prophecy proves to be true in the case of Maya's brother, Arjuna. Gautama as a rationalistic fails to understand Maya's emotional mental state. In the first part of the novel the death of her pet dog Toto serves as the symbol of an abandoned self- doomed to loneliness.

Maya feels alienation due to the death of Toto. It was intolerable to her. The death of dog indicates the eternal truth in human life. The idea of death terrifies Maya and she is obsessed with it .She is badly disturbed by the indifference of her husband Gautama to the death of dog and it shows his carelessness towards his wife. Because Maya is a childless lady and Toto was like a child to her. Both of them have different views about death. Gautama thinks death to be a normal event while Maya is disturbed by it .The second part of the novels reveals Maya's psychic death and narrates the tragic death of Maya's husband Gautama. Maya and Gautama have different approaches towards life. Gautama is a lawyer. In his family one did not speak about love and affection and spoke of parliament, cases of bribery and corruption revealed in government while Maya's family champions human values and rights .She is very sensitive and cannot ignore her feelings. Maya wants her fulfillment as a woman and as a wife. But her father like figure does not soothe her burning heart. She opts for an ideal love. Maya symbolizes the pangs of peacock mating narrates the secrets in the following lines: Do you not hear the Peacock 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"....They spread out their splendid tails and begin to dance, but like Shiva's their dance, knowing that they and their lovers are all to die....when they have exhausted themselves in battle, they will mate .Peacock are wise. The hundred eyes upon their tales have seen the truth of life and death, and know them to be one. Living they are in love with life "Lover, Love", you will hear them cry in the forests when the rain clouds come, "Lover I die

The anguished shriek for mating, the crying and the yearning for the male peacock reaches out to Maya but not to Gautama. She asks Gautama to hear the call "pia, pia", but Gautama remains listless to the cry. He has no sexual and passionate urge towards her. Maya, the pen-hen fails to have her instincts fulfilled from Gautama, the 'peacock'. She feels loneliness ,isolation and desertion. Gautama is a self-controlled reasonable, dutiful and wordly, wise man. He does not try to soothe her.

Maya aspires for human love. She yearns to be loved by Gautama's family members. But the cold behavior and indifference of Gautama's family members disappoints her: And I yearned, for her to hold me to her bosom. I could not remember my own mother at all. My throat began to swell with unbearable self-pity. I would cry, I know it in a while, and dreaded it, in their same presence. Please I whispered....

In this passage the last word "please" is the expression of Maya's inner psyche. She is a love-lorn lady. She wishes that her mother-in-law should stay with her. The word 'Please' reflects the pangs of a modern sensitive lady and her helplessness in the human world. The constant anxiety and loneliness breed in her delusion. The hallucination born of her isolation and lonely temperament make her a psychic patient. A mental shock produces an injurious effect on her subconscious mind. This trauma leading to an obsession in her psyche .Another shocking effect upon Maya's psyche is the

prophecy of an astrologer about her future that after four years of their marriage one of them would die either husband, or wife. After four years of her marriage she recollects about this prophecy.

‘.....we had been married four years. It was as though the moon light had withered the shadows in my mind as well, leaving it all dead-white, or dead-black. When the drums fell silent and the moon began to sink over the trees, I knew the time had come. It was now to be either Gautama.....’

Thus Maya’s loneliness, obsession, seclusion, unfulfilled womanhood, emotional stimuli, unresents, debilitating husband and over-ridden death phobia make her neurotic in her behavior. Her growing insanity and neurotic behavior is approaching near some disaster. She whoops and produces a sound “like an antic owl”. Before mirror she giggles “at the absurd image”.

She finally invites her husband to follow her to fresh air out of the room. She leads him upstairs on the roof and she hears the sound of “an owl” for an ill-omen. She in a fit of maddening fury, thrust him down the roof. He falls down to the very bottom and dies.

In the third part of the novel she also dies, Thus this alienation and solitude between husband-wife relationships brought out their death. The novel *Cry, the Peacock* describes the reasons and consequences of alienation in the relationship between Gautama and Maya. Maya’s neurotic behavior is due to her intense alienation. Both husband and wife have different attitudes towards life. This attitude alienates them from each other. Maya’s isolation haunts her no more as she kills her husband in a fit of maddening fury. It is an alienation which brings a disastrous end of their life.

Desai builds her novels round the struggle within the self, the dismal and morbid moods of men and women. To her, writing is a means of discovering one’s identity. Desai’s novels are autobiographical, in the sense they reflect her ‘quiet’ temperament. Her novels exude the felling of gentle isolation. In the words of Atma Ram “whereas a man is concerned with action, experience and achievement, a woman is concerned more with thought, emotion and sensation.”

Anita Desai represents the finest portrayal of feminine sensibility by experimenting the inner world of her protagonists. Writing is a process through which Anita Desai explores reality. Her writing is an attempt to discover the complexities of existence and the thing that makes it possible. “Writing to me is a process of discovering the truth—the truth that is nine-tenth visible portion we call reality. Writing is an effort to discover, to underline and convey the true significance of things”. Anita Desai’s first novel *Cry, the Peacock* appeared in her flowery-poetic language and with her mastery of domestic themes. The heroine of the novel Maya is a young woman, this novel reveals the sensibility of Maya. She is married to Gautama, who is older than her. He is detached and indifferent man. The novel presents the characteristics contrast between the two and it shows a vivid portrayal of the sensibility of Maya. However, Desai does not give more details about the persona of them. But the sketches enable us to draw the differences that persist between the ill matched couples. In *Cry, the Peacock* there are three parts. The first part gives a background about the death of Toto. The second chapter consists of seventeen chapters. In these chapters we see the bewildering story of Maya. In the final part the

novelist's authorial comment is given. The language used by Desai in this novel is poetic, full of images and fascination. Throughout the novel Desai explores the yearning of the protagonist Maya for the usual things which are denied to her. This novel is an exploration of the sensibility by Maya. Desai is excellent in depicting the inner furies of woman and their rising tone for emancipation and empowerment. K.R. SrinivasaIyengar, calls her an "original tales" and admires her skills in both inventing and narrating the stories.

Desai has used some techniques which have been used by D.H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf in order to deal with thoughts, emotions and sensations at various at various levels of consciousness. The technique such as Stream of Consciousness and Flashback Methodology have been used widely. Very few Indo-Anglican novelists have paid so much attention to form and technique. Anita Desai has rendered a new dimension to Indo - Anglian fiction by handling the pitiable and awful plight of the alienated self, especially of housewives facing single handedly by the torments and fortunes of their insensitive and temperamentally callous husbands. This is further enlivened by her unconventional concern with the inner reality of the characters and the shaping of artistic imagination. To her, a work of art should grow from within "s inner beckoning and compulsion: "I think theories of the novel are held by those of an academic or critical turn of mind, not the creative. A writer does not create a novel by observing a given set of theories ...he follows flashes of individual visions and relies on a kind of instinct that tells him...not any theories. Anita Desai is concerned with the delineation of psychological reality.Hence she prefers the characters who are peculiar and eccentric rather than general and commonplace. She conceives each character as a mystery and riddle. Her characters are almost sick of life and listless plaything of their morbid psychic longings. Most of her female protagonists are abnormally sensitive and usually solitary to the point of being neurotic. In dealing with the psyche of the characters and their motivations she moves deeply and dwells in the inner reality of her characters.

Anita Desai eschews traditional practices and gives free reins to her individual vision. Most of the Indo Anglian novels are the novelist; they are instinctive outcome of her inner compulsions. It is a natural growth. Desai protagonist's socio-psychic rebels alienated selves who find it difficult to compromise with this milieu. Her characters reflect the mythic reality of our life through the complex interaction of the self and the society The Indo-Anglian novels till 1970s treated themes of political and social import. They have handed their stories based on the princes and paupers, saints and sinners, farmers and labors, untouchables and coolies cities and villages. The more impressive and sophisticated themes like the country "s independence movement, East-West encounter, tradition and modernity, materialism and spiritualism have been dealt by the great writers like Raja Rao, Kamala Marakandaya and Khushwant Singh. The very notion of the exploration of the human mind was alien to them. The English novelists before Anita Desai have studied man and his world in relation to the objective social reality. They used their art as a powerful instrument to present social problems; she is not ready to follow the same traditional approach. She writes neither for providing entertainment nor for the propagation of social values. Her main pre-occupation is to study human existence and human predicament, her exploration being a quest for self. She is the novelist of psycho-emotional situation and her theme is the individual against himself and against this milieu.



Anita Desai as a novelist occupies a distinctive realm of contemporary Indian English fiction. The world of Anita Desai is the inner world of her characters. Desai has been observed totally by the turmoil's of the minds of her characters. So Desai presents a kaleidoscopic image of the minds of her characters. Existential predicament of her protagonist by various factors is her main issue in her novel. She makes known to us the unconscious motives of human psyche, the problem of human relationship, the protagonist's quest for identity almost in all her novels from the *Cry*, the *Peacock*. In an interview she has admitted that: I am interested in character, who are not average but have retreated, or have driven into some extremity of despair and turn against or make a stand against the general current. It is easy to flow with the current, it makes no demands, it costs no effort, but those who cannot follow it..know what the demands are, what it costs to meet them”.

Desai has made this statement true in her novel *Cry*, the *Peacock* itself. Desai's protagonists are introspective, hypersensitive and eccentric women. The women in her novels are unable to realize the reality and who live in the world of imagination and fantasy. These peculiar traits of the women characters in the novels of Anita Desai provide the basic idea for her novels. *Cry*, the *Peacock* is the anguished loneliness of a fairy- tale princess Maya. Maya's life with her father was a continuously fantastic party. After marrying Gautama who is much older to her, Maya fails to get rid of her father obsession. She strives hard to forget her memories with the past. The death of her pet dog Toto brings intolerable pain in her life. And it once again brings back to her mind the albino astrologer's prediction about the fourth year of her marriage. The greatest tragedies of modern man and women are to be alienated from self and society. Most of Desai's protagonists face this problem of alienation. They find themselves as incapable beings, who cannot fulfill the expectations of society or the roles. Anita Desai's novels examine thoroughly the dark interiors of the human psyche and a description of various forms of loneliness and isolation which these characters. Maya is totally different from the rational and logical Gautama by her sensitive, sentimental and imaginative psyche. But her isolation is end when she realizes that he is not able to empathies with her reactions to events around her .Even her friends do not provide any solace to her .Maya admits,” there was not one of my friends who could act as an anchor anymore ”and even Gautama” could never join me”. This existential anguish troubles Maya often.” but those were the times when I admitted to the loneliness of the human soul, and would keep silent. The things we leave unsaid would fill great volumes”. The distance between Maya and Gautama keeps widening and gradually Maya begins to accept it.”I longed to....touch his temples and soothe the pain with caresses and words. But, of course, did not do so, could not dream of doing so. And yet the alienation, the strain of remaining aloof did not hurt. This was as if should be. Maya need “contact relationship communion” to console her disturbed mind. Yet, she and Gautama were often just parallel lines which could never meet among Desai's protagonists,” Maya is a brilliantly documented figure portraying an alienated consciousness, tortured by her own phobias and neurosis. In her earnest appeal for love, her child-like responses to life's problems and her hypersensitivity.....”(UshaBande 69).Anita Desai has brought forth all the sorrows of an alienated being in modern society. Mulk Raj Anand goes beyond the economic determinism” and projects the problems faced

by Cry, the Peacock is a tale of Maya's love for Gautama, her husband. She is over sensitive deeply devoted and affectionate in nature. Maya requires a love partner who can sympathize proportionately with her sensibilities. But tragedy begins in her life because her husband does not possess those wide ranging sympathies. Anita Desai's novels offers us a rewarding study of socio-psychological activities. Her novels offers a view of the long smothered wail of lacerated psyche of a female. They, of course, tell us the harrowing tale of blunted human relationship. Maya in Cry, the Peacock is married to an older man, a detached, solar industrious lawyer, who is unable to recognize and understand the female sensibility. The following passage in the novel is a telling predicament of the likes of Maya and the total disregard for their existence" How little he know my suffering, or of how to comfort me telling me to go to sleep while worked at his papers, he did not give thought to me. To either the soft willing body, or the lonely wanting mind that waited near his bet."

The portrayal of feminine sensibility is a pervading strain in all Anita Desai's monumental works. Maya, the heroine of Cry, the Peacock is a love sick and love impoverished woman. She is affected by her husband's detachment with her. She demands her rightful life from Gautama," I live my life for you and you are untouched you shall never help me. It is all true one of us will win, the other must loose".

Maya, in Cry, the Peacock is a delicate housewife unable to cope with the apathy of the in-laws and the dehumanized and depersonalized urban set up. But she is not a, "haunted protagonist" who flees from reality. She is an existential predilections and predicaments. She records the memory of her life with her father and with her husband Gautama and his family. Being a sensitive daughter of a well – to – do father, her impression are impulses borne, reacting to human reality and environment according to her likes and dislikes. There is also an element of tragic pathos in her expressions varying from one moment to another according to her anxiety- ridden moods. Thus there is dreaminess in what she expresses and to what she reacts. The portrayal of Maya is projected in a sympathetic vein. Maya needs the benefit of sympathy and understanding from readers. Her life is shadowed by the three – fold effect of death; doom and destiny. Though her mind is at times highly confused and anxiety- hidden, she does not lose her discriminating sense. In this way, one is able to appreciate her womanly impulses. Maya strives for a meaningful life throughout the novel.

Anita Desai believed the" literature should deal with the most enduring matters" what matter is the psychic and the existential reality of the characters. Their obsessions, eccentricities, tremors and traumas. The enduring human conditions and the emotional life of the woman characters are her chief concern.

The novel opens with Maya "sickly obsession with death. Toto the family dog is dead. Maya's neurotic condition is brought about by a variety of factors including marital discord and barrenness and psychic disorder. Married at an early age to Gautama, a friend of her father and leading lawyer, who is of twice her age. Maya seems destined to suffer from emotional starvation especially since she is childless. The first emotional crisis she faces which arise at the death of her pet dog. Toto, on whom she has been lavishing all her affection, the dog so dear to her heart, is dead. No, cried and fled to the bed room to fling herself on to the bed and lie there, thinking of the small, still body stiffened into the panic-stricken posture of the moment of death.

'Her female protagonists try to discover and rediscover meaningfulness in life through the known..different from others. They do not find a proper channel of communication and thus become alienated their wanderings and reflections finally bring them into new vistas of understanding, which they had form. Most of her protagonists are alienated ones. She portrays her characters as individuals' facing single-handedly (The Times of India)

Conclusion:

Anita Desai has widely treated many issues related to the feminine sensibility. The issues which have been treated largely in her novels are love, marriage, divorce, social taboos and inhibitions, cruelty and violence towards the female sex, problem of rehabilitation after divorce, extent of liberty and freedom to the female sex and crisis of conscience and values. The he-man approach has been completely ignored by Desai in her novels. Several of Desai's novels explore tensions between family members and the alienation of middle-class women. The deep –rooted agonized psyche of womanhood was brought to the lime-light by Anita Desai, in her literary bloom, especially in married woman. They are torn between the memories of the past and the realities of the present. With the bloom of an unpleasant and an unacceptable situation, nostalgic feelings get stirred up. There is a pattern which frames her novel with the conflict between man–woman relationships that inevitably leads to alienation. InduBhadran says, "Her main concern is with the psychic reverberations of the characters who are caught in an existential anguish ,obsessed with the past memories and nostalgic feelings, shunning reality, struggling to cope with society in transition and terribly alienate

The opening chapter dealing it report how Maya could not stand the sight of her beloved death dog and that she rushed to "the garden tap to wash the vision from her eyes" Maya thinks and grows hysterical and finds the setting sun "swelling visibly like a purulent boil" her condition is aggravated by Gautama's casual and unfeeling remarks: it is all over come and drink your tea and stop crying you mustn't cry further". This incident brings out the contrast between Maya, who is highly sensitive and imaginative and of a neurotic sensibility, and Gautama unimaginative and practical and unsentimental.

The distance between Maya and Gautama widens with the death of Toto, therefore it is not surprising that they have been constantly quarreling with each other even for trifles. Although they continue to live together, the husband and wife do not share anything between them not even the sensibility that can differentiate between "half sweet", "half sad fragrance of petunias and some astringent smell of lemon.

R.S. Sharma comments:".. in the process, the novel becomes a fascinating psychological study of neurotic fears and anxieties caused by marital incompatibility and disharmony and compounded by age-old superstitions"(24).Maya finds herself spiritually ruined, and out of frustration she condemns Gautama to death and burdened with death haunted by self-contempt, self-accusation, self-hate and drags herself into complete darkness of the world of the insane. As the very title suggests, Cry, the Peacock is about Maya's cries for love and understanding in her loveless marriage with Gautama.

Shashi Paul in her article titled Alienation to Existentialism: A study of Anita Desai's novels states: "Desai's protagonists are highly sensitive and terribly bewildered by the



burden of living helplessly in the society with absurd realities. Therefore her fictional world is full of imperfection and unfulfilment hankering and helplessness, agony and anger, struggle and surrender. She is essentially a novelist of existential concerns. (Mira. 96-97)

Thus *Cry, the Peacock* is a brilliantly study of the abnormal psychology of its neurotic protagonist Maya. She is an enigma, her moods, observations and dilemmas and abnormality are conveyed effectively by Desai. Her fears insecurity, strange behavior, loneliness and sufferings indicate how Desai has succeeded in portraying her female protagonist Maya making her one of the most enigmatic characters in Indian fiction

Anita Desai is a writer who makes her readers "...understand and feel what it is to be woman, know how a woman thinks and feels and behaves." Desai depicts the story of Indian woman, the various forces that are working against her, the unalterable life situations which trap her identity. The dark and foreboding nature of oppression used against woman, the traditional value system and culture that deny woman her freedom. The frightening possibilities confronted by woman are innumerable fears, disillusionment and imminent defeatism. The elusive procrastination according to Desai is not a solution. She feels that by rediscovering one's identity and by establishing it, one moves towards self-actualization. Desai as a modernist pinpoints that, for this new self-concept to emerge our psychological needs have to be fulfilled. The preconditions necessary for the satisfaction of these needs include the freedom to speak, freedom to action, freedom to express oneself, freedom to seek information and freedom to move around without fear. Only an impartial and robust society can provide fulfillment of these needs. It almost sounds like a utopian concept in the case of Indian woman.

According to Desai a women's self is colonized by these values. They also lead to passivity of women. The helplessness of a woman trapped in a love-less marriage is the theme of her novel *Cry, the Peacock*. Maya's marriage denotes the stereotyped marriage in the Indian family. Identity and temperamental compatibility recede to the background. No opportunity is given to the girl to voice her opinion. The way to the "sacred alter" becomes her way to the confinement in patriarchy. In Maya we can see the new awareness emerging.

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