



RESEARCH PAPER

**Prismatic View of Female Psyche in the Backdrop of Social Exclusion
of Women in *Cry, the Peacock* by Anita Desai**

¹Mahira Masood ²Muhammad Riaz Gohar ³Laiba Tanveer

1. MPhil Scholar, Department of English, Gift University, Gujranwala, Punjab, Pakistan
2. Associate Professor, Department of English, Government Graduate College Gujranwala, Punjab, Pakistan
3. MPhil Scholar, Department of English, Gift University, Gujranwala, Punjab, Pakistan

***Corresponding Author** 22101270002@gift.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

This present research paper focuses on Social Exclusion of Women which becomes a common issue in society. The purpose is to study the aspects of a woman's psycho-social conditions by critically analyzing the mental conditions and mindset of the protagonist, also the impact of her childhood and adolescent memories in her later stages of life with reference to the people living nearby. Qualitative method has been used in this research. The finding is based on protagonist named Maya whose psychological conflicts, despair and hopelessness caused by her disturbing marital life lead towards her tragic end. The character of Maya affects the mindset of a woman and she faces the support or criticism when she expresses her true feelings about her life. Thus it gives a lesson that Girls should be brought up in such a ways that they can face all kinds of situations independently when they grow up.

Keywords: Conflicts, Feminine, Marriage, Psychological, Womanhood

Introduction

Any Anita Desai is a critically-lauded 20th century writer, and her novels, on the experiences a dinner lives of Indian men and women are known for their compassion, eloquence, and lucid prose. Having come of age when India gets independence in 1947, Anita Desai highlights politics and gender issues into her works. At that time she is known as the Mother of the Indian psychological novel genre. Her cautious depictions of modern Indian life have secured her a place of honor in the pantheon of Indian authors. Winner of the Sahitya Academy Award, Desai has authored as many as sixteen works of fiction. Due to her hard work, Desai won many awards and recognition for her work and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize thrice. Anita has been actively involved in teaching as well. She continues to be a motivation for many young aspiring writers today.

When Desai was only twenty years old, she published her first short story. Her first novel was *Cry, the Peacock* (1963). Many other novels in which some are include: *Voices in the City* (1965), *Bye-Bye, Blackbird* (1971), *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975), *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), *Clear Light of Day* (1980), *In Custody* (1984), *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988), and *The Zigzag Way* (2004). In addition, she has written books for children, many short stories that have been collected into anthologies, and essays.

Anita Desai is a prominent contemporary Indian English woman writer of fiction. She has written on a lot of themes but a majority of themes are based on women's sufferings. Anita Desai has a unique inner approach to women psyche which she explains with careful sensitivity that shows her deep understanding of women's problem in India. This study focused on the important roles of female characters in her novels and their status in the intricate realm of her fiction writing. The study has contemporary relevance because it deals

with issues that are representatives of contemporary reality. It is with this intention of honest social and psychological research of contemporary fiction that this study will be carried out.

Most of Anita Desai's stories deal with her personal experience of life. She never supports a single theme or message. She believed in telling the truth as it is. Her sensitive explanation of the inner feelings of her female characters is outstanding. Many of Anita Desai's novels explore tensions between family members and the isolation of middle-class women. Anita has managed to deal with topics ranging from anti-Semitism to western quintessential ideologies of India and the death of Indian traditions and customs in her books. Her works deal with current Indian life, culture clashes between the East and the West, generational differences, and practical and emotional exile.

In 1963, *Cry, the Peacock* was published. The repression and depression of Indian women were the subjects of this novel. This work immediately established her as a loud voice in Indian literature in English. Here she digs into the mind of a hypersensitive young urban wife. Her name is Maya. She is a passionate and sensitive young lady married to Gautama. He is a realistic man. Maya is totally different from him. Maya needs a beloved spouse with broad understandings, too much conscious, creative and susceptible disposition. Gautama lacks these feelings. She belongs to an orthodox Brahmin family. She trusts in astrology. Gautama and his family represent the intellectual face of living. Maya's sadness is a result of her own belief. She's not able to face the minor truths of living. The novel concludes with the death of Maya. And after killing her husband, she mentally gets back of her secure and destroyed childhood. The issue of female is addressed by Anita Desai with sensitiveness and full of emotions. By Maya's role, Anita Desai carries a new side of feminist publishing.

Literature Review

The present paper explores that complex elements in man-woman relationship is the dominant theme in the novels of Anita Desai. It demonstrates that how Anita Desai digs into the female psyche and goes beyond the skin and flesh to explain the unpleasant situation of modern women. Kukreti and Sumitra (2000) says that Anita Desai dives deep in the unconscious and sub-conscious psyche of the people who live in foreign countries and reveals their nausea, nostalgia and desires to their native land. Her description of character and situation is not one-sided and her protagonists seem to be cherishing a strange love-hate relationship with the land of their adoption. With great accuracy and brilliance, Adit, the chief protagonist is weighing the merits and demerits of this foreign land but at the close of the novel, he comes up with an output when his English self was receiving and fading and dying that to achieve their real self and to have a "real life" (204) he must go to India, his birth place. Anita Desai's *Bye Blackbird* depicts circular journey of a soul look for a perfect life as she feels that all these immigrants are prone to schizophrenia and predicament to live or not live in England."

According to Srivastava (1984), this novel *Cry, The Peacock* presents an eternal conflict between the inner and outer worlds of Maya. "It is an externalization of the interior of her cocoon."

Anita Desai's work can skillfully be hailed as a landmark in Indian English fiction as she brings into limelight the interior landscape and psychic quest of her characters. Her novels highlight situations in which (Swain, 1999) said that "emblems of remonstrance and psychic protest, strive for the protection and preservation of their dignity and self-esteem" in an impulsively dominating society. Unlike a photographer who's concerned with the portrayal of surface reality, Desai is a painter of moods, of will, of incompatible choices and inner experiences. She speaks not only of the confusion in the human soul but also of its

depth, its poetry and pathos; its beauty and compassion. Her writing is concerned not only with the inner experience of characters but also with their unarticulated unconscious life.

Most of her novels represent the continuous, ceaseless, disordered and chaotic flow of consciousness of its characters, including their varied sensations, unconnected thoughts, memories, associations and reflections which find expression in a stream of words, symbols and images corresponding to the pre-speech, non-verbalized, disjointed illogical level of mental-emotional life. Srivastava (1984).

The elegant bird, Peacock, is also a fast-moving bird explained in 57th chapter of the Vamana Purana. Kartikeya is the son of Anita (Fire) is also called Agni-nandan and Pavaki, hence his union with passion. The Shakira (female power) of Kartikeya is Kumar and she also rides a Peacock. In the Durga Saptashati she described as Kumari Shikhivahana. This aspect of the bird also demonstrates violence. From Karthikeya's (1979) point of view, the Peacock in the novel stands for violence before mating:

"Before they mate, they fight. They will rip each other's breasts to strips and fall, bleeding."

It is applaudable that the Peacock an Indian bird is also used allegorically in west, "The Peacock, which in Greco-Roman world may have symbolized man's hope for immortality, is of Indian origin" The Encyclopedia of Religion (2005). There is a mysterious illustration of Kartikeya in relation to the Peacock. Also known as Kumar he "rides on the Peacock, the killer of serpents, for he defeats the most subtle instincts that bind the spirit of man in his body."

Som P. Sharma and Kamal N. Avasthi(1984) remarks, "Maya is seething in eros manifested in her multi-dimensional projections of companionship, motherhood, of Keatsian sensuousness of her identification with petunias. Gautama on the other hand is an Apollonian: he is into form, order, discipline career and logomachies." Maya actually expects physical and mentally satisfaction in married life but both of them are denied by Gautama.

According to Tandon (2008) that makes deep analysis about the types of violence against women community and its reasons. It compares statistical figures on the crimes and violence and demonstrates how government and voluntary organizations are making efforts towards ending / minimizing violence against women. This article states that number of cases against various other types of women's violence registered in police station in the year.

Paper explores the study of feminism and its other definitions. It explains that Feminism fights against male chauvinism and demands equal rights and treatment of women as human being in society. It claims emotional and psychological adjustment respecting each other. Feminism is not actually about insult of partner but is a movement of social reconstruction. It is not anti-man but it challenges to patriarchal thoughts.

Many Indian writers concentrate on women's situation in the Indian society. Actually women have always been in the need of such a platform which can show them a light to lead a respectable life in the society. There are a lot of reasons and the main reason that women have taken up their pen is that it has allowed them to create their own world. That is why women's writings are playing a very crucial role in women's lives. According to Shirwadkar(1883)comments, "The girls are at the centre of most of the novels by women writers in which some are first person narrations by the central woman characters, this has given scope to the feminist point of view to enter into the sphere of IndoAnglican fiction." Simply speaking feminism actually means the doctrine which advocates for women's complete equality with men in all spheres - political, social, legal, economic, cultural, academic etc.

The main aim of this research is that how does the novel portray the issue of male domination in the society. After read this novel of Anita Desai, I will also note the consequences of this patriarchal society. On the other hand, there is also another major problem of this research is the causes of alienation faced by Maya in this novel.

Material and Methods

A research paradigm is a method, model, or pattern for conducting research. It is a set of ideas, beliefs, or understandings within which theories and practices can function. There are four paradigms which are discussed in research paradigm like Positivist Paradigm, Interpretivism or Constructivism Paradigm, Pragmatism Paradigm and Postpositivism Paradigm. In this article, Interpretivism or Constructivism Paradigm is applied. This approach is used in the majority of qualitative research conducted in the social sciences; it is predicated on the existence of numerous realities rather than a single reality. According to interpretivists, human behavior is complex and cannot be predicted by predefined probability.

In research sampling, the primary source for this research study is the text of the book "Cry, the Peacock." In addition to this research study, the researcher was inspired by the novel's use of a variety of stylistic devices and methods. As a secondary source for the research, reviews of various writers and critics from newspapers, authentic websites, and academic publications have been employed to support this work.

Conceptual Framework

Psychoanalytical theory

Sigmund Freud (1983) in his psychoanalytic theory formulated that, learning to identify themselves with the same-sex parent plays a significant role during the evolution process of an individual. In Freud's theory of psychosexual development, the "libidinal energy" is focused on distinct "erogenous zones" in the child's body during different stages of their development. An erroneous development stage causes interference in the proper culmination of their psychosexual development, resulting in a sort of fixation". Freud affirmed that such fixations, that hinders the primal stages of an individual's psychosexual development, often leads to certain apprehensions, eventually leading to neurosis and abnormal behaviors as an adult. According to Freud, a male child's excessive longing for the physical proximity of his mother is what constitutes an Oedipus complex. He competes with his father, mimicking the demeanor of his male begetter to gain his mother's unrivalled affection. The child identifies his father as his sexual competitor and attempts to replace him. Carl Gustav Jung (2012) coined the term "Electra complex" though the term is often associated with Freud. Freud explains this expression as "psychologically inaccurate" and described it as an attempt" to emphasize the analogy between the attitudes of the two sexes." Freud (1983) applied the term. "Feminine Oedipus attitude" or "the negative Oedipus complex"; to infer what we now term the Electra complex. The Electra complex a suggestion by Carl Jung elaborates the psychosexual drive of a female child wherein she competes with her mother to "possess" her father. In the course of an infant's psychosexual development, this maladaptive complex occurs during the girl's phallic stage akin to the Oedipus complex experienced by a boy child.

Feminism

Feminism is a socio-political movement for the freedom of women in a patriarchal society. A feminist is one who communicates about the cause of women. Moi (1986) remarks, "The word 'feminist' or 'feminism' is political labels indicating support for the goals of women's movement which emerged in the late 1960." A feminist believes that woman has a potential for action, a passion for liberty and a desire to assert herself. The feminists aim at

putting an end to male domination and for achieving this goal they have to damage the structure of culture as we know it; the feminists believe that women should struggle for their socially and economically freedom. They should try to end female exploitation

This research paper is based on psychological novel *Cry, the Peacock* by Anita Desai, a renowned Indian writer. The protagonist of the book, Maya, is a wealthy father's delicate daughter. The book focuses more on the characters' minds than their physical aspects. Maya is an extremely sensitive person in this novel. She is a vibrant and compassionate young woman married to Gautama, a rational person. Maya was upset with her spouse because he did not treat her with such kindness. Maya has fantasies of letting imagination, fantasy, and nostalgia take over her consciousness. As a wife, she wants to be satisfied in her desires. Maya constantly seeks satisfaction. Unfortunately, she experiences loneliness, isolation, and desertion when she is not happy with her spouse and when she fails to obtain it.

Results and Discussion

In Indian Writing, English Literature demonstrates the Indian culture and tradition, social values and even Indian history through the depiction of life in India and Indians. In Literature, Fiction is the finest tool to reflect the real society with solutions. The fundamental 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, Fiction which mirrors the social fabric reflects the thoughts of the present age.

Anita Desai's *Cry, The Peacock* is a distinct example or an illusion of the feminist point of view. She explains the uniqueness of feminine sensibility through the reactions and responses of the heroine to the events and situations in the novel. A highly emotional, sensitive and sensuous woman, Maya has obsessive love for life; she is completely normal and healthy woman. Her only sin is that she is sensitive, imaginative, very enthusiastic and sensuous and thus shows the disturbed psyche of modern Indian woman. She tries to strike balance between institutional needs and intellectual aspirations and is deeply confused when the existential absurdity of life is brought before her. When she faces loneliness and lack of communication with her husband, she feels herself in mental crisis. She is seen to share a very affectionate relationship with her father and is at pain to leave her home when she married. Her problem upbringing caused by her mother's death makes her isolated from the world outside. Thus she wrote, "... my childhood was one in which much was excluded, which grew steadily more-restricted, unnatural even, in which I lived as a toy princess in a toy world. But it was a pretty one. The expectations she had at marriage of her husband are not fulfilled. As a result, she becomes frustrated. She funds her husband Gautama, as a man in whom understanding was scant, love was limited. But as one reads through the novel, realize that her husband loves and protects her, but does not take her seriously and that too because she is a woman. He identifies her with "Maya", which repulse her and to which she objects. As time passes, she becomes more and more disturb, starts brooding over the feeling of loneliness in her heart.

Cry the Peacock is a good example of a novel that illustrates the struggles of an Indian woman within an Indian society, who experiences the pain of social, economic, and cultural binary segregation and at the end finds comfort in her love for nature and pets, as a means of survival. Maya, the heroine, is married to a well-known lawyer, Gautama, who spends ninety percent of his life drowned in his career, which he takes on a daily basis to his home. This actually means that he has close to no time for his young wife, physically and emotionally. The marriage is without love and the partners have no sexual relationship, leaving the wife emotionally starved and inculcating in her, a feeling of rejection and isolation. She becomes part of the furniture in the house, except for occasional sessions of tea with the husband at his will. This drives her into psychological torture and gets her beyond the borders of wisdom and in turn, turns her into a psychological and neurotic lunatic who borders on mental insecurities; fear and death. At the heart of the novel is the

symbol of the peacock which is likened to the life of the heroine and her behavior throughout the novel.

The research observes that Maya seems to have contrary energies in her body from creation like the peacock. There is supposition that women are inherently evil which can be traced back to Islamic traditions/ sayings, pronounced by some prophets. Rahman (1989) explains that a woman is a string of the devilish forces; a woman is like a private part when she comes out, the devil forces holds her thigh. This idea of recognizing women as evil corresponds with the biblical version on the subject: that "Adam represents the positive atom/ion and Eve represents the negative atom/ion hence the latter express negative energy, which resonates with the Hindu thought of the peacock as evil." The use of the symbol of the peacock in the novel, therefore, affiliated with not only with Maya's isolation by her husband, but also with her ultimate killing of Gautama. In other words, she becomes a 'villain' of his life.

The novel *Cry, The Peacock* by Anita Desai reveals delusions of the female protagonist who attempts to criticize her loneliness through her own make-believe shifts and finally when she understands the truth of living, she follows that emotions that rooted in faith and in love count for more than memory to live in reality and that is the only way to live with separation from disillusionments.

Maya's mental state is indeed a result of the horrible prophecy about her eminent death or that of her partner. It grows like a sick rose until she finds satisfaction in pets, animals and plants. This draws distance from Gautama, who never bothered to understand what she was going through. When her dog dies, it activates the memory of the prophecy and no one seems to understand her unusual mourning for Toto, the dog: It was that something else, that indescribable unease at the back of my mind, the grain of sand that irked, itched, and remained meaningless.

This paper would analyze the situation of the 'Esteem needs of the character Maya in Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* and its negative effect on her psyche.' At the highest level of the Psychological needs, Maslow (1987) placed the esteem needs which enclose the desire for independence and freedom to grow, for self-actualization, for status, recognition, appreciation and respect. Maya experiences a lowered self-esteem throughout her married life as she experiences an acute deprivation of high esteem for herself, both in her childhood and in her adulthood. These two phases of her life could be divided in two parts, firstly her life before her marriage followed by her life after her marriage to Gautama. This paper will highlight the deficiency of this need in her childhood and its consequences on her state of mind.

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The protagonist, Maya has every urge pampered, every mood delicately handled. An illogical crying fit produces a ruby for the child with assurance that one day it would belong to her. He creates an imaginary world for her which psychologically disunites her from real world. "The world is like a toy specially made for me, painted in my favorite colors set moving to my favorite tunes. Her emotional dependency on her father obstructs her

individual entity. It makes Maya weak and develops an inability in her to adjust to life after marriage.

Maya's image of ideal self, gets shattered repeatedly which gives rise to an identity crisis. Maya's father has been highly responsible for her fragile psyche which does not allow her to build realistic self-esteem. There is an unconscious declaration of Maya about the suppressed knowledge of the gap between what he did and what he should have. Her power of individual thought and action gets suppressed in this manner. Maya grows progressively insecure, losing contact with her real self. This divided self, ultimately suffers loss of identity which dampens her worth and esteem in her own eyes.

Maya's extremely intense accounts on the flowers and fruits, colors and forms also symbolize her sexual repression. Her hypersensitivity slowly turns in to mental illness. The fear of death dominates in her along with her psychological trauma. In a fit of insanity she murders her husband thus making her alteration as a neurotic complete. Here unlike the persistent episodes of matricide Maya angers on her husband Gautama as it is he who failed to satisfy her like her father. The image of her father transfixed in her mind thus owes to her falling a victim to her grave fate. Her Electra complex is what led to her deterioration as an individual who had an inability to rise from her father- fixation.

Conclusion

In sum, the essential to understanding the novel becomes a fascinating psychological study of neurotic fears and apprehensions caused by temperamental incompatibility. The novelist presents temperamental conflicting of husband-wife relationship. Desai focuses on the plight of the contemporary woman in the patriarchal culture. She believes that while women are emotional, men tend to be logical and matter-of-fact. Naturally, they view things differently and respond to the same situations in various ways. The two widely different individuals, Maya and Gautama were united in marriage as such; they are not able to lead a harmonious and purposeful domestic life. Marital dissonance is definitely a fact, a painful disturbing fact of conjugal life. Anita Desai deserves admiration for such a deep insight into the nature of male-female behavior. Conclusively, the present study on *Cry, the Peacock* is based primarily on feminism and beyond question; one can say that *Cry, the Peacock* is conflict and colored with the spirit of Feminism. The whole tragedy of pathos of the pampered rich woman is explained in this novel in order to show how bright but harsh foundation of upbringing in such a pampering aristocratic atmosphere crumbles at the first face with reality. In order to see social realities in the male dominated family, Anita Desai creates a small fantasy world and then she goes deep to those places in the heart and mind of the character where reality has a different form and character. In Desai's own words "Reality is merely the one-tenth visible section of the iceberg that one sees above the surface of the ocean-art is the remaining nine-tenths of it that lie below the surface. That is why; it is more near truth than reality itself. Art does not merely reflect reality- it enlarges it."

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