

**ALIENATION & PREDICAMENT OF THE PROTAGONIST IN
“CRY, THE PEACOCK”**

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ABSTRACT

Anita Desai is one of the best known contemporary women writers of Indian fiction in English. She holds a prominent place because of the immense popularity she commands as a novelist of human predicament of anxiety frustration , alienation and loneliness. “Cry, the peacock” is a novel depicts the character of love hungry Maya. She was married to a man who was taught, love is another name of attachment, which is denounced by Geeta . Maya, the protagonist constantly seized by the fear of death, loneliness and alienation from her husband Gautama. Most of Desai’s protagonists are alienated character . It is alienation which brings a disastrous end of their life.

Key Words – Human Predicament, Frustration, Alienation

Anita Desai is one of the most renowned Indian writers writing in English she holds a prominent place because of the immense popularity she commands as a novelist of human predicament of anxiety frustration and loneliness, woman suffering under their insensitive and inconsiderate husband. Anita Desai is one of the best known contemporary women writers of Indian fiction in English. Born to a Bengali father and German mother, she is an excellent example of the bicultural heritage of postcolonial India. Desai grew up in Delhi, receiving her education first at Queen Mary’s School and later at Miranda House, One of Delhi University’s most prestigious colleges, starting to write of the early age of seven. She published her first novel, “Cry, the Peacock”, in 1963. This work immediately established her as a major voice in Indian literature in English.

“Cry the peacock” is a novel depicts the character of love hungry Maya. She was married to a man who was taught, love is another name of attachment, which is denounced by Geeta. Maya, the protagonist constantly seized by the fear of death, loneliness and alienation from her husband Gautama.

Alienation refers to estrangement that occurs in the relation between Maya and Gautama. In Desai’s novels the protagonist is crushed by social and family pressure and cannot be free from it. This pressure creates isolated people like Maya. Maya experiences a strange feeling of not belonging to anybody. Maya is full of life and wants to enjoy life to the utmost. She is interested in all the good things of life nature, birds and animal poetry and dance. To her sexual satisfaction is a necessity and the total denial of it makes her a victim of neurosis and schizophrenia. Maya is presented in the novel as a woman who longs for pleasures of life. Gautama was very much older than Maya. He is middle aged lawyer, Cultured, rational and practical, he is very busy in his work and he do not have time for his beautiful wife. He does not admire her beauty and qualities but makes disparaging remark about her that she has a third rate poetess’ mind. Provided by this she confesses thus.:

*“Because when you are away from me. I want you.
Because I insist on being with you, being allowed to
Touch you and know you, You can’t bear it. Can you ?
No. You are afraid. You might perish” (Cry, the Peacock 113)*

Most of Desai’s protagonists are alienated character. She portrays her character as individuals “facing single-handed, the ferocious assaults of existence”(The Times of India). Maya was born in an orthodox family and enjoy life in her parent’s house but she finds totally different situation in her husband’s house. She faces totally different code of conduct she comes to know that her feelings are not cared for and she is being alienated, neglected and isolated in her own home. This disturbs Maya and she feels utterly defenseless and alone. Maya’s marriage with Gautama is an arranged marriage devoid of love and her feeling of alienation emerges basically from her total disillusionment with the life of the metropolis that has little regard for abiding emotional relationship. Maya feels exasperated at Gautama’s cold response to her physical and emotional needs

*“There were countless nights when I had been tortured
By a humiliating sense of neglect, of loneliness of
Desperation that would not have existed had ...not loved
Him so, had he not meant so much: (Cry the peacocks 201)*

Maya is poetic dreamy sensitive fond emotional while Gautama is realistic rational hard and cold detached philosophical and remote. Maya is beautiful and longing to be loved but Gautama neglects her beauty he even does not notice Maya. He tries to satisfy Maya’s

appetite for love with logic. The physical mental and emotional separation between them spoil their relation and She is alienated from her husband. Maya is longing for love and affection, her husband Gautama is incapable of understanding her genuine feelings and emotions. Regarding the relationship between Maya and Gautama. Shanta Krishnaswami rightly observes:

*“Her needs for nurturance and for being nurtured are
Left unfulfilled by a husband who is incapable of
Husbanding her in the traditional masculine role”*

(The women in Indian Fiction in English, 250)

Women in Desai’s novel tend to make constant comparison between their father’s and husband’s houses. Maya was fed on the love of her father but was married to a man. Who was taught love is another name of attachment which is denounced by the Geeta. Maya’s desire for love remained unsatisfied and she died childless. Maya keeps on remembering her childhood days or the treatment her father meted out to her. She feels that no one loves her Gautama’s house as her father loved her she seeks another father in her husband But he does not respond to her accordingly her husband shocked her sensibilities by his lack of human values like kindness to animal. Maya is terribly upset at the death of her dog that she loses her mental calm and Gautama neglects the emotional yearning of Maya and says that he would bring another dog for her .Toto’s death was intolerable to her as for childless Maya Toto was like a child. Maya feels alienation and badly disturbed by the indifference and carelessness of her husband towards the death of her dog both of them have different views about death. Gautama thinks death to be a normal event while Maya is disturbed by it.

The novel “Cry, the Peacock” demonstrates the conflict between the self and society because the letter prizes formalism over individualism. It evaluates the marital authority the suppressed and alienated role in the context of social patriarchal and marital authority. The protagonist Maya, points towards the illusory quality of all human relationship, male and female. There is not only a rejection of the traditional female role but a deeply felt and suffered rebellion against the entire system of social relationships. She is highly sensitive and keeps on questioning the social and cultural condition that generates neurotic trends in her. She yearns to live and experience life but conforming to society’s norms is a great hurdle and contributes to words making her neurotic insane, alienated and mal adjusted.

After the whole day of crying and mourning the death she feels worst when Gautama arrives in the evening and arranges for the systematic disposal of the corpse. She feels that he is doing it just as a routine duty she, as the representative of feminine principles is hurt to the care when Gautama dismisses her grief with a mere, “ It is all over” (Cry the peacock 08) She feels disturbed when he acts unsympathetically and ask her to stop crying and prepare tea. This behavior of Gautama hurts may and she feels that Gautama cannot understand the

intensity of her grief. The two are not on one side “but across a river, across a mountain and would always remain so” (Cry the peacock 114) Gautama lacks the necessary imagination to sensitively respond to the death of the dog as a loss by contrast Maya’s reaction appears to be hysterical but it represents a certain capacity for restore; intense and rich, which sets her apart from other

Women in Desai’s novel tend to make constant comparison between their father’s houses in their search for a sense of fulfillment women continue to rely on the home when it becomes clear to them that the home cannot fill their emotional spiritual vacuum they choose to withdraw. Withdraw becomes a symptom of Maya. To study The predicament of Maya, it is important to see her life as structured between her father’s house and her husband’s house. Both location acts as a reflection of her class she also becomes a threat to that very system. By printing Maya’s character Anita Desai upholds a new vista of feminist writing Maya stands apart from all the women characters in the novel and no doubt is the most interesting and psychological mystifying among all Desai’s female character she represents a sufferer at the hands of men. Her actions and reactions may not always draw one’s sympathy and can be dismissed as the useless thoughts of a luxurious mind.

The novel “Cry, the Peacock” is “a remarkable attempt to fuse fantasy with perceptual experience”(Meena Belliappa;25) It is the faithful description of psychosomatic growth of a female character, who cannot cope up with the practical world of the husband and feels dejected, forlorn and demoralized. “Cry, the Peacock” introduces a theme that would remain constant in Anita Desai’s fiction which is the lonely suppression and oppression of Indian women. This novel is concerned with the marital discord between Gautama and Maya. Marital discord is the cause of Maya’s alienation. Novel portrays the inner emotional World of the protagonist. Her mental upheavals her inner struggle, her desire for warmth, love and companionship and her obsession with death. Maya remembers the astrologer’s prophecy in the fourth year of their marriage. And terribly experiences the fear and agony of death: “Now that I understand their call, I wept for myself, knowing their Words to be mine” (Cry, the Peacock 84)

The title of the novel is highly symbolic. It symbolizes the agony of an unfulfilled desire Peacocks know their death before hand and they also enjoy their last day with dance. “Peacocks are wise living they are aware of death. Dying they are in love with life” (Cry, the Peacock. 83) The sky to see the approaching death in the form of dark clouds and this they are never free from the fear of death throughout their lives. It is used as the symbol of Maya who is obsessed with childhood prophecy. She loves her life when she knows about her death. It is the ultimate reality that peacocks will die when it rains. When they gaze at the clouds loaded with water, they burst out of pain, “Pia, Pia.....lover, lover, mio, mio, I die, I die “(Cry, the Peacock 82) Even though they enjoy their fullness of life in a short period. Maya is in a similar situation But she could not enjoy her life because her husband was not

according to her expectation he was taught the philosophy of Geeta. He believes in detachment he did not give love and care to Maya. Cry the Peacock is built on a series of contrasts between opposed modes of perception and contradictory and mutually exclusive attitudes towards life. The comparisons between Maya and Gautama acquaint the reader with their polarities two principles that despite their intrinsic interrelatedness and interdependence stay separated.

Maya does not find Gautama according to her expectation and has adopted a complaining attitude towards him. Gautama tries to satisfy Maya's appetite for love with logic rationality and material things but does not notice and neglect her beauty and the longing to be loved the physical mental and emotional separation between them torments their relation. Maya is pulled further in to this fatal mechanism by Gautama because apart from being pragmatic, unimaginative and deeply engrossed in his work, he lacks any sexual urge in her. The line of communication is quite blocked because he fails to understand the emotional value of her desire. While working on his paper he pays no attention "to either the soft, willing body or the lovely wanting mind that waited near his bed" (Cry, the Peacock 70). She realizes his coldness towards her and painfully becomes aware of her loneliness as she whispers, "I am alone (Cry, the Peacock 09)

Maya has to constantly pay for Gautama's coldness by laying awake all night stifled by the hunger she felt because of him and for what it meant to stay with him. Eventually Gautama begins to appear to her as "guest who might never be encountered again" (Cry, the Peacock 09) or as an unreal ghost. She looks upon her relationship with him as a relationship with death.

Anita Desai through the character of Maya unfolds the modern feminine sensibility of isolation and trapped psyche Maya's alienation is reflected in the loneliness of the bear and the cages and the caged monkeys. Her desire to get monkeys released and her faith that her father would open their cages and let them out symbolizes her own suffocating loneliness. She also compares herself to the peacock that mates only after fighting. When they have exhausted themselves in battle, they will mate peacocks are wise. Hundreds of eyes upon their trail have seen the truth of life and death and know them to be end, living, they are aware of death. Dying they are in love with life. Lover Lover you will hear them cry, in the forest when the rain clouds come 'Lover, I die' (Cry, the Peacock 95-96)

The story of Maya's life seems to be one of a three fold pattern of events that can be summed up as deprivation alienation and elimination respectively in the first fold, Maya has been deprived of the love of mother brother, and latter her father, Her sanity is questioned at the end and there is clear likelihood of her seeing deprived of it once she is sent to an asylum secondly she is alienated from her husband and is the and she brings about his elimination from life and her own self from their family and society.

The Problem and the agony of Maya's life are accurately reflected in the sing significant fable of the peacock's mating ritual. The cry of peacock is the cry of the natural instinct of a woman who is unfulfilled but such a fulfillment is denied to Maya. She realizes that she woths Gautama's physical presence his love and a normal life. There is no emotional and physical fulfillment which is the cause of her agony and also the reason for her resentment against Gautama. A sense of lack of fulfillment leads Maya's to brooding and regression being on introvert Maya does not like socializing nor is she able to face reality and, therefore, sits at home brooding.

"The Cries of peacocks" in the novel represent her cries of love which simultaneously invite their death, same is the case with Maya "She is longing for the companionship like that of Radha and Krishna. It is a communication that she seeks the true marriage in which body, mind and soul unite the sort which the peacock seeks when it shrieks out its inside in its shrill intense mating colts" (Cry, the Peacock 116)

Her preoccupation with death had been actually planned long ago in her childhood by the albino astrologer' prophecy foretelling the death of either of couple of the after Marriage to make the matters worse, the indifferent behavior of the husband's family also increases her sense of loneliness which gradually develops into an actual sense of alienation. The solitude and silence of the house prey upon Maya. Also, the death of her pet dog starts a chain of reminiscence and reverie. Suddenly an eerie bit of experience, long buried under the load of years, is thrown up like the lava and glares at her in all its alienation and fury. Deep in her consciousness, the terror persists and paralyses more and more the normal motions of her mind and heart.

The novel portrays the inner emotional world of Maya who is the victim of city life. The city of Delhi acts in this novel as a compulsive presence. The Parties, dances, drinks, and gossips in the club disturb her inner mind considerably moreover, she is disillusioned with the life in her in law's family. She feels estranged from her husband's world and feels rejected and utterly lonely in the house. Thinking of her unhappy marriage Maya reflects with deep concern.

*"It was discouraging to reflect on how much in our
Marriage was based upon nobility forced upon us from.*

Outside, and therefore neither pure nor lasting. It was broken repeatedly, and repeatedly the pieces were

*Picked up and put together again, as of a sacred icon
With which, out of the pettiest superstition we could not bear to part"*
(Cry, the Peacock 40)

Maya's loneliness is, paradoxically, due to her too much of attachment. It is not for the lack of love for her husband that she suffers, but for too much of love for him. Her feeling of alienation emerges basically from her total disillusionment with the life of the metropolis that has little disregard for abiding emotional relationship. Maya feels helpless and she needs someone to offer her protection and consolation. But everyone fails her including her father. Gautama, her husband is engrossed in his own world. Arjuna, her brother runs away from home when she was younger. Even her friends offer no refuge to her. Maya feels that she is alienated she utters thus.

*"There was not one of my friends who could act as an
Anchor any more, and to whomsoever I turned for
Reassurance, betrayed me now" (Cry, the Peacock 73)*

Maya is an existential character in Hindi literature. Maya means affection or illusion and according to her name she has Maya (affection) towards her life. Maya says, am, an illusion, Maya my very name means. Nothing is nothing but a world of illusion (Maya). So, she also dies at the end. She is the symbol of dream, imagination and illusion. She tries to lead a positive life with hope and expectation. But both are not fulfilled by her practical husband. She meets death because she has gone against life. Desai portrays different types of personalities in this novel. Here, the writer does not reveal the name of the protagonist but highlights the qualities possessed by her. The name of Gautama Buddha who shatters all desires. Like Buddha Gautama never gives importance to physical desires and he believes in logic and reality. He is a practical man, a promising, prosperous, typical husband and much too busy practitioner of law. He is a detached person and he has no place for sentiments in his life. Even his legal profession symbolizes his logic vision of his life. He lives in the real world unlike Maya who lives in illusion. Her mind is filled with desires, expectations and love with life. It leads to her mental disorder and she becomes a neurotic woman.

She finally invites her husband to follow her for fresh air out of the room. She leads him upstairs on the roof. Gautama follows her upstairs on to the roof and she hears the sound of "an owl" of an ill omen. She in a fit of maddening fury, thrust him down the roof he falls down to the very bottom and dies (Cry, the Peacock 13)

In the third part of novel she also dies, Thus this alienation and solitude between husband wife relationship 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 attitude towards life. This attitude alienates them from each other. Maya's isolation hunts her no more as she kills her husband in a fit of maddening fury. It is alienation which brings a disastrous end of their life. In "Cry, the Peacock", she delves in to the mind of a hypersensitive young urban wife, Maya, who finds herself coupled with the ascetic Gautama,

a man given to abstraction and philosophy. Discovering that the poetic, creative and romantic side of her own personality is easily rejected by the patriarchal Society of which her husband is an emblem, the disturbed young woman quickly slips into insanity. Desai's instinctive perception of the female psyche characterizes many of her novels and established her as a writer with an unusual feminine

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All subsequent references in parentheses are from this edition of the novel.

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