

## Women's Inequality as Portrayed by Anita Desai's in Cry the Peacock

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### ABSTRACT

Anita Desai examines the issue of gender inequality in *Cry, the Peacock* by focussing on Maya, the main character, and her psychological challenges in a patriarchal culture. The novel explores Maya's union with Gautama, a detached, logical personification of the patriarchal standards that suppress the demands of women on an emotional and private level. Maya's sensitivity and need for emotional connection are written off as unreasonable, underscoring the oppressive roles that conventional gender norms play in keeping women in submissive roles in marriages. Desai shows Maya's increasing psychological unease as a mirror of the profound emotional and societal alienation that women experience when their voices and wishes are silenced. Maya's fascination with a death prophesy represents her inner struggle and her yearning to overcome the limitations of patriarchal domination. The Peacock criticizes the emotional and psychological suppression of women in a world dominated by males through Maya's spiral into insanity in *Cry the Peacock*. Desai's novel offers a compelling examination of women's inequality by showing how social conventions and traditional gender expectations may harm to those who want autonomy and acceptance.

**Keywords:** Gender Discrimination, Patriarchal Society, Resistance, Frustration, Human Psychology, Liberty

Anita Desai holds a great niche in the contemporary women novelists of Indian women writers. Her female protagonists are seen combating with the social taboos made by the masculine community to assert their own identities and places in the world. Her first novel *Cry, the Peacock* deals with the psychological turmoils and the inner world of a female character Maya who demonstrates her insecurity, fear and depression after her marriage. In this work of fiction, Anita Desai explores the themes of isolation, despair, and dissatisfaction. There are seven sections to the novel. The novel lacks a clear hierarchy, presenting events from a stream-of-consciousness perspective. In Lucknow, Maya's father, Rai Saheb, is a well-known barrister, and his family is wealthy. Arjun is Maya's brother as well. The sole child of Rai Saheb is named Maya. Rai Saheb used to spend most of his time with Maya because her brother lives in the United States. Her father gave her a very loving upbringing and tried to grant all his daughter's wishes. That is why one day she mutters when her husband goes to the bathroom, "No one, no one else, loves me as my father does" (43).

Maya had never been without anything, but since her mother was not alive, she could not experience motherly love. Maya is Rai Saheb's only child, so she receives her father's full love and support. Although Gautama is a lawyer and Sahab's buddy, Maya finds Gautama unsuitable. Their ages are very different, and he

thinks differently than Maya. When Maya and Gautama were married, there was nothing about Gautama that Maya could ever be delighted with. Because he does not satisfy her psychologically or physically, Maya feels stuck in this marriage. Maya began to feel quite depressed. She received Rai Saheb's undivided affection before marriage, but Gautama showed her little love or care following their union. She falls victim to depression as a result. Gautama's mother worked as a social worker. She has made several contributions to society. Maya would get less irritated when Gautama's mother and sister visited his home, but she would get lonely and alienated when they left again. Gautama used to have this problem with her since he was never sensitive to her emotions. Maya would wait for him as he continued to work. "Telling me to go to sleep while he worked at his papers, he did not give another thought to me, to either the soft willing body of the lonely wanting mind that waited near his bed" (9). He fails to realize her misery and does not know how to comfort her. In sensitivity of her husband clear as follows: "----- he knew giving me an apal ring to wear on my finger, he did not notice the translucent skin beneath the blue flashing reins that run under and out of the bridge of gold and jolted me." (Dhaliwal 9).

There are other shades of life. When Maya's dog dies, her husband uses soothing words also to her. He says, "Maya, Do sit down. You look so hot and worn out. You need a cup of tea" (9). In fact, he brings a cat for her but it does not change Maya's life so much. The novel has been written from the point of first-person narrative. Anita Desai writes, "Gautama gave me a cat. She was white and had hairlike tassels of silk" (33). Since Gautama was a serious man, he had no time for foolish behavior like this. While Maya was a lady who did nothing and had lofty aspirations but did nothing to pursue them, he would concentrate on his life and profession.

Another item comes to light. Despite being married for four years, Maya has no children. She is missing something and cannot seem to locate it in her life. Her grief for her puppy reveals how alone she feels. Her odd conduct in the story is demonstrated by the loss of her pet and her overly intense bond with her dog. She feels disoriented, irritated, abandoned, and completely broken. Further discomfort and tensions between the two are created by Gautama's lack of care and attention to her, which causes Maya to drift further away from him. She cannot seem to reconcile the outside world's demands with her inner self. Maya is haunted by the albino astrologer's insight, which predicts that one or both lovers will pass away in their fourth year of marriage. This childhood prophecy is still ingrained in her memory and contributes to her strange attitude. She can never forget this incident after being married.

Maya and Gautama have not made an effort to comprehend one another. The book's male protagonist, Gautama, often practices the detachment that the Bhagavad Gita preaches. The urge to travel south to witness the Kathakali dance is one of Ilis's negative responses to Maya's pleas and recommendations. As befits his name, Gautama continues to be an aloof prince. Lord Buddha had left his wife and kid behind, detached from them. Rahul in the direction of nirvana. Gauta is a sthitapragya, representing the complete stillness of the mind or the Buddha. However, clarity like that brings light.

Gautama from the book. Unlike his namesake, Cry the Peacock is neither inventive nor distant. It seems that his passing represents a modern-day equivalent of the original Buddha. According to his Hindu awareness, Gautama views Maya through the lens of the delusion implied by her name. Maya, the main female character, finds solace in her husband's family. She is a "borderline patient" due to her acute sensitivity (Kristeva 49). She is a princess toy. She comes upon a problem. She exclusively communicates with the world of the autistic. Maya loses confidence in herself as a result of her personality splitting. Maya internalizes the division as a result. She lets her egotistical imagination run wild. At a denotative level, Mays's speech became the location of misplaced eroticism. She cannot seem to let her emotions out. Maya's father's fixation keeps her stuck in the past and prevents her from having an equal relationship with her husband. Though after marriage Maya's house is full of servants, she feels empty, alone and afraid. She sits in her house "as in tomb" ( 129).

There is a binary antagonism between emotion and reason throughout the entire novel. Also, there is a binary antagonism between the male protagonist, Gautama, and the feminine protagonist, Mava. One is unaware of the other. Passion is idle if the reason is dull. Reason is a dry desire that will not let its fluid stay motionless: "One is too weak. One wearies ... One needs to breathe." (121) Towards the end of the novel both Maya and Gautama does not survive. It is due to passion that kills reason. As we see passion alone does not survives, to sustain. It loses itself in a dread of horror. Maya's cry, her sharp scream indicates this fear. In short one can see that Maya's attachment leads to desire and desire to anger. The anger results in delusion. The delusion leads to further enmeshing herself in attachment, to death, to madness, to confinement. At the end Maya kills herself. Thus the novelist Anita Desai attaches both psychological nuances to Maya, the tragic neurotic female protagonist *Cry*,

*the Peacock*, “Anita Desai is concerned with the portrayal of psychological reality and as such prefers characters who are peculiar and eccentric rather than general. Hence most of her major characters are not from real life but are either entirely imaginary or an amalgamation of several different characters”. (Jain 68)

In this way, one can see in the novel *Cry, the Peacock*, female protagonist Maya failed to maintain proper relationship in her family. Thus, Desai's female protagonist as well as male protagonist Gautama could not understand the situation. They didn't know how to maintain harmony in their lives. The couple Maya and Gautama is representative couple of this type. Maya's obsession with life is evident in how she views the adult and material world. She has a strong affinity for the sights, sounds, shapes, and colours of the natural world and is very sensual while discussing the world of flowers, fruits, forms, and hues. She becomes furious upon discovering that her spouse is indifferent to the dust storm, a sign of his lack of awareness and care for life. Gautam is a symbol of the materialistic, male-centric civilization and society. Because she is infatuated with life, she murders her spouse. Her murderous conduct is a rebellion against the heartless societal capitalistic system. Because of societal conventions and established standards, she becomes a somewhat shackled enslaved person and longs to be set free—her uprising against the established social order and her sensitivity against the norm.

The novel contrasts Maya's sensitive and emotional nature with Gautama's cold rationality, emphasizing the ways in which feminine traits are undervalued in a male-dominated world. Maya's inability to express her emotional needs or find validation for her feelings reflects how patriarchal cultures prioritize masculine rationality over feminine intuition and emotion, further entrenching women's inequality. Maya's character also represents a yearning for autonomy and resistance against the traditional expectations placed on women. Her obsession with a prophecy of death and her eventual murder of Gautama can be seen as symbolic acts of rebellion against the oppressive structures that imprison her. The act of violence becomes her final attempt to break free from the suffocating restrictions of gender roles, though it ultimately leads to her own undoing. Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* highlights the emotional and psychological struggles of women within a patriarchal framework. Through Maya's character, Desai critiques the gender inequalities that result from traditional marriage structures, societal expectations, and emotional repression. The novel paints a poignant picture of how these dynamics can lead to a woman's mental deterioration and eventual rebellion against the system that confines her.

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