



Exploration of Feminine Psyche in Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* and Where Shall We Go This Summer?

Dr. Raheel K. Quraishi

Assistant Professor, Department of English
Bhiwapur Mahavidyalay, Bhiwapur Dist: Nagpur (M.S.)

Abstract:

Anita Desai portrays in her psychological novels, the picture of a woman who struggles and is obsessed with her inner world, her sulking disappointment and the turbulence within. The existential dilemma of a woman folk in a patriarchal society. By painting such characters, she makes an appeal for an improved way of life for women folk. She puts Indians as the central figures in her novels. She often shifts between female oriented and male oriented narrative. Anita Desai dealt exclusively with the inner labyrinth of her characters. Desai deliberates the issues of unpredictable discordancy, anarchy in marital life and discordant man-woman bond. In her novels, most of the key characters are alienated from the society, families, parents and even from their own identity, because they are not common persons but individuals who are not able to interconnect with the surrounding masses, not able to communicate themselves with this frame, they survive within their own confined domain where they dwell upon their dreams, which were never fulfilled. Anita Desai's primary concern is the human psyche and its relationship with societal ideals, rather than with communities or social forces. She is involved more in psychological component of her character.

Key words: woman, female, society, Maya, psychological, loneliness, peacock, Sita, life etc.

Desai is known as a psychological writer because she is primarily concerned with the nocturnal and nebular environment of the female psyche. Desai chiefly deals with the topics related to the motivations, consciousness and psychic tension of the female psyche. She creates a vast, but female-dominated gallery of characters. Hypertensive female characters are often chiefly discernable in her novels. Each is projected as an enigmatic individual. They are not picked from the society's common rung. They have no issues with food, clothes or shelter. They are rebellious and not so much against society as against individuals. They are revolutionaries. They have no physical or social issues. They are emotional and psychic.

Anita Desai highlights the bizarre demeanor of her characters by delving deep into their psyche. Plot and story always take a back seat in her delineation. She fundamentally explores multiple hues of psyche of her characters through the use of varied symbols imported from animate and inanimate world exist around, mythologies etc. Her creative writings enjoy richness and depth through the blending of different images into a specific pattern. This blend of images helps her to reflect the inner world of the characters.

Anita Desai's first literary venture was *Cry, the Peacock* published in 1963. The story is based on a young and sentimental girl who is fascinated with a prophesy of disaster during childhood. In this novel Anita Desai, portrayed a highly delicate, cultured woman by the name of Maya. The novel examines the inner world in which imagination and experience



combine with psychedelic influence. The novel opens with the dog's death and concludes with the heroine's death. The novel focuses on a profound concern for the woman's isolation and inhumane abuse by the male hero, who fails to interact, against his counterparts.

'Cry the Peacock', uses peacock as a symbol. Peacock is said to have the capability of sensing the approaching death which compels it to live with the unavoidable pang of death in life. Anita Desai uses Peacock to explore the gravity of Maya's painful existence. Maya, the key figure of the novel, from her very birth encounters death-like pangs many times before her actual death. Maya's anguish and chaotic existence are skillfully resembled to the deplorable life of peacock.

Anita Desai primarily delineates with the feminine consciousness through her prominent women figures. Her women possess individual voice which shapes their specific characters and personalities and reflects multiple layers of feminine sense and sensibilities. Her women are not extraordinary species but they are very common with the weaknesses as well as strengths of human beings. In-fact, they strive hard with various psychological tussles. Most of her women characters lead a life of solitude in which they experience the pains of exile. Maya entangled in warmthless marriage feels the same pain and loneliness. At the very young age she loses her mother and is left helpless under the care of her father. Extra pampering of her father makes her suffer from 'Electra Complex' which results in her marriage with Gautama. She fails to enjoy her marital life with Gautama due to his cold insensitive nature. Her feminine longings like having a child, spending time with her husband were strangled by considering them impractical and childish. Throughout her life she craves for care and love but Gautama always ignores her. She tries her best to express her views but is always bowed down by her husband. As a result, her dreams and desires are left unheeded which aggravates her sense of loneliness. The rejection she gets from her husband at every step ultimately leads to her catastrophic death.

In the androcentric society woman has never been treated as an equal to man. She has always been considered as inferior. Society fails to treat her as a human being. This gender discrimination leaves an indelible impression on Maya's psyche. When she encounters the cabaret dancers and hears the views of Gautama about them in particular and women in general, her pain rouses. This discrimination, non-acceptance provoke her to behave erratically.

Maya, Gautama, Rai Shahib, Arjuna, are the key figures in the story but main story rotate around Maya and Gautama, who is practical, unromantic, and unemotional and always found in detached mood. His counterpart, Maya, is a profoundly emotional personality blessed with the gift of poetic imagination and a neurotic feeling. Throughout the novel, one can experience the communication gap between the husband Gautama and the wife, Maya. Thus, Maya lives the purely lonely life throughout the story in this helpless and indifferent society.

Like Maya Sita of 'Where Shall We Go This Summer?' experiences the same emotional trauma in her life. Introvert by nature, Sita fails to cope up with authoritative society. Her insecure childhood due to her mother's elopement and father's affair with another woman affected her overall personality and marital relations. In her husband Raman she is unable to find a caring and loving companion. His indifference to her adds much to her loneliness. As a result, she experiences alienation throughout her life. She also suffers from



violent temperament. To comfort herself, she frequently takes refuge in smoking. Though she gives birth to four children and is expecting the fifth one, she feels suffocated in her congealed life and is unable to enjoy motherhood. In order to get rid of the mundane and strangled life of Bombay she moves to her native place, the island of Manori. Her brief stay at the island instills in her a new vigour and zeal to move on with life. This also transforms her personality which enables her to cope up with her further marital life with Raman. As a result, she seems more daring, serene and unruffled.

This is an influential novel which presents the plight of a lonely married female character aspiring to win over the chaos and misery of her very unusual life. She looks confidently under shallow sophistication and self-deceptions and learns in this way, that the much talked about values of politicians inevitably leads to cynicism and dishonesty. The author of a new book investigates the inner lives of many of her protagonists.

The story focuses on confusion, loneliness and non-communication in married life. It is the alienation of a woman, a wife and a mother, who is alienated by the family and the society as well. The most significant characters in the story are *Sita, Raman Rekha, Jeevan, Menaka* and *Karan*. The novel underscores that Sita being a woman always feels lonely and the novelist creates a woman's existential difficulty in this callous society. The novel reveals the sentimentality of a modern housewife, who is continually anxious and psychologically disturbed to develop her individual identity.

Thus, Desai succeeds in unraveling the suppressed womanhood through Maya in 'Cry the Peacock' and Sita in 'Where Shall We Go This Summer?'

Desai bestows most of her characters with mythological names to co-relate their experience with those mythological figures. For instance, Maya, like her name prefers to indulge in illusionary corporal life. When she fails to attain this, she gets disturbed psychologically and is unable to cope up with life. On the other hand, her husband Gautama is not much interested in the earthly pleasures which brings disharmony in their conjugal life. Sita is another mythological character whose life is endowed with suffering, sacrifice, uncomforted anguish and pain. Like this Sita, the Sita of Anita Desai suffers in one or the other way, throughout her life.

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