

PalArch's Journal of Archaeology
of Egypt / Egyptology

**Cry, the Peacock: A Study of Matrimonial Disharmony and Maya's
Alienation from Self.**

Subrata Kumar Rana

Asst. Professor, Department of English, Khalisani Mahavidyalaya, Chandannagar, Hooghly
subratakumarrana@gmail.com

**Subrata Kumar Rana, Cry, the Peacock: A Study of Matrimonial Disharmony and
Maya's Alienation from Self, Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of
Egypt/Egyptology 18(1), 5042-5051. ISSN 1567-214x.**

Keywords: Family, relation, structuralism, post-structuralism, power, body.

Abstract: “The family is a tissue of relationships and conventions” (Walsh 157) where structure is assigned and assembled. Post-structuralists interrogate the structurality of the canonical structure. Human beings are subject of made and made-ness where every single identity unfixes the fixedness. Power is related to every single living that interrogates the sanctioned practice of poesies. In the context of Indian culture govern-mentality, power, subject, and ethics question the W/hole(s). It demands heteronormative frame and normalization of body.

Introduction

“It is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex.... One must be woman-
manly or man-womanly.... some collaboration has to take place in the mind
between the woman and the man before the art of creation can be accomplished.
Some marriage of opposites has to be accomplished.” (Goldman 75)

In the context of Indian culture, marital or filial bonds assume great significance since familial ties are considered sacred in our country. All relationships- whether matrimonial, filial or siblings- are based on the idea of doing one's duty ungrudgingly. All successful and satisfying bonds are based on spirit of sacrifice and self-denial. However, the changed temperament of the age, when a distinctly individual identity is the cherished dream of every individual, has dealt a severe blow to the traditional concept of primary relationships. These ties are being seen from a different perspective altogether. Subtle cultural and intellectual changes, responsible for a shift of emphasis, from a collective destiny to an individual identity, are causing great upheaval in the psychic ecology of the contemporary man.

The fictions of Anita Desai are seen as structured and extended statements about reality:

“...fiction seems true only because it tautologically accomplishes the expectations it set up. Characters' behaviour and choices in a realistic novel, for example, appear true only because the characters have already been defined in such a way as to anticipate their behaviour and choices. (Childers 310)

The female characters depicted by Anita Desai appear vibrant because of its tautological accomplishment. Desai is more interested in the “interior selves” (Naik- 241) of her characters than in social and political realities. Desai's characters are individual; problems of the characters are also individual. In her novels- *Cry, the Peacock* (1964), *Where Shall We Go This Summer* (1975), *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), *Clear Light of Day* (1980), and *In Custody* (1984) women characters are set in urban milieu where they struggle against the oppressive environment. In most cases, the antagonists assume the form of a patriarchal domination. Portrayal of gender relationship in her fictions reveals Desai's feminist predilections. Desai vividly points to the

process of disintegration –social- economic- political- emotional-psychological-ethical-spiritual, her women experience in a canonical and assigned social structure.

The publication of *Cry, The Peacock* in 1963, Desai's first novel, chiefly concerned with the conjugal conflict between husband, Gautama, and wife, Maya, has shaped a new perspective to the accomplishment of women writers in Indian English Literature. Desai's novel- *Cry, the Peacock*, is a disturbing story employing interior monologue depicting the tragic mental breakdown of a young Indian woman Maya. It is the exploration into the psychic world of Maya, the woman protagonist, in the novel. The novel delineates her situation: her anxiety, frustration, metaphysical anguish leads her to the pandemonium of obsession. The novel portrays the troubled life of Maya who suffers from inexplicable premonition about the tragic end of her marriage with Gautama. The novel opens depicting the situation of Maya, an emotional woman, who is under the massive pressure of prophesy that either she or her husband would face death in the fourth year of their marriage.

There remained a certain unease, a hesitance in the air, which kept the tears swimming in my eyes, and prevented their release. I was not allowed the healing passion of a fit of crying that would have left me exhausted. Sleep-washed and becalmed. Something slipped into my tear-hazed vision, a shadowy something, that prodded me into admitting that it was not my pet's death that I mourned today, but another sorrow, unremembered, perhaps as yet not even experienced, and filled me with despair. (*Cry, the Peacock* 8)

Maya marries Gautama, entirely contrastive to each other in their nature and emotional responses, is quite senior in age to her. Maya feels aches for love and understanding in her loveless marriage with Gautama. She is in vain to find out love in lovelessness, life in

lifelessness, light in lightlessness as if her heart beats in darkness for the crisis of identity in the midst of their marital relationship.

Yes, I cried, yes, it is his hardness-no, no, not hardness but the distance he coldly keeps from me. His coldness, his coldness, and his incessant talk of cups of tea and philosophy in order not to hear me talk and, talking, reveal myself. It is that – my loneliness in this house. (*Cry, the Peacock* 9)

The peacock's cry is the symbolic expression of Maya's grief-stricken sob for love and involvement in life. While Maya, highly sensitive and emotional woman, craves for deep attachment, Gautama believes in the philosophy of detachment. She is in vain to have either emotional attachment or sexual satisfaction from Gautama:

... but I realized, also, with new-found maturity, that was when one's wildest passions were over, one's greatest furies calmed, when the body lay worn and nearly senseless, that one grew most keenly aware of the crepitations of the mind, the strange coldness of the heart, like an expanse of new ice upon which thoughts streaked, distant and dark, haunting one's awareness. I listened to the throb of my pulse. (*Cry, the Peacock* 9-10)

“Androgyny tells us that, regardless of one's sex, one's gender identity may consist of combination of feminine and masculine behaviours” (Tyson 115). While Maya is an artist, Gautama is an intellectual with no feeling for sensuous or the beautiful. He is detached, sober and industrious while she is highly sensitive and reacts with extraordinary intensity. Her reactions indicate her early vulnerability to insanity. “Individuals obsessed with sex may use it to fill up an emotional emptiness or to numb inner pain. They see sex as an escape from their despair”(Kalpana 62). “Maya expects some emotional and physical satisfaction in married life

but both of them are denied her, one by Gautama's cold intellectuality and other by his age" (Rajeswar 241). But Gautama, a typical husband with mechanical attitude towards life, treats Maya as a kid, a light-hearted lady who is not worthy of his buoyancy. Even he makes formal mechanical love in a loveless manner which is contrary to Maya's expectation. As if Maya and Gautama are two contrastive and contradictory words placed side by side for the sake sonic effect, an oxymoron and a binary opposition.

Absorbed in his hectic schedule, Gautama successively ignores Maya's desires remaining muted coldly to her psychic and physical needs. The contradictory life of Maya and Gautama not only frightened Maya but also formed a lacuna in her mind that compelled her to believe- "The *Gita* does not preach involvement in tradition. It preaches- recommends, rather – detachment on every count" (*Cry, the Peacock* 17). This is how Maya habitually suffers the anguish of discontented desires. She confesses that "it was not my pet's death alone that I mourned today, but another sorrow, unremembered, perhaps as yet not even experienced, and filled me with this despair" (*Cry, the Peacock* 8). Maya cries "that night Gautama worked late. I went to bed alone, carrying my glass of water which I set down on the little table between our beds..." (*Cry, the Peacock* 24). Bitterly disappointed with Gautama, Maya feels the burning flame fiery hell, a loveless lock of marriage. The darkness killed her appetite for life:

Death lurked in those spaces, the darkness spoke of distance, separation, loneliness- loneliness of such proportion that it broke the bounds of that single word and all its associations, and went spilling and spreading out and about, lapping the stars, each one isolated from the other by so much. (*Cry, the Peacock* 22)

Even when Maya strives to deflect her from the blazing fire of pain, she tries to convince Gautama to take her to south to see the “Kathakali dance drama” (*Cry, the Peacock* 28) but the desire ends in hopelessness. “Gautama’s reaction was exactly what” (*Cry, the Peacock* 40) Maya had envisaged: “If that is your only reason for wanting to go all that way south, I suggest you wait till a Kathakali troupe comes to give a performance in Delhi, as it is bound to sometime- perhaps in winter. It will be less expensive” (*Cry, the Peacock* 43). All Maya pines for perishes swiftly- “I cannot bear it- I must leave him immediately, if only I could buy a railway ticket...” (*Cry, the Peacock* 45). Gautama’s

“life, his attitude, his learning and his career assume a similar pattern- formal as a Moghul garden, gracious and exact, where breeding, culture, leisure and comfort have been brought to a nice art, where no single weed is allowed to flower, no single flower to die and remain on the stalk, no single stalk to grow out of its pruned shape. (*Cry, the Peacock* 45). “... she was a mess”. (*Cry, the Peacock* 46)

Life of Maya emerges to be an infinite anecdote of severance and lovelessness as she commences to drop all immediately after her wedding with Gautama. Having once enjoyed a “princess like, a sumptuous fate of the fantasies of the Arabian Nights, the glories and bravado of Indian mythology, long and astounding tales of princess and regal queens” (*Cry, the Peacock* 43), she now appears to face the tragic overturn of destiny. The calamity lies behind their “marriage based upon a nobility” (*Cry, the Peacock* 40) that is bestowed on them from outside, “and therefore neither true nor lasting” (*Cry, the Peacock* 40).

She misses the close-company of her caring and affectionate father that she expects from her intellectual, greedy and calculative husband, Gautama. She imagines Gautama to be replica of her father- “loves me as my father does” (*Cry, the Peacock* 46). The electra-complex has

invoked her misery in life where there is "No light, but rather darkness visible" (*Paradise Lost*, Book-I, line- 63). She plunges deeper into troubles as she fails to transport anything meaningful. The lack of activity consequently renders her deserted and more favorable to mental edginess and fretfulness.

Maya, being childless, unoccupied, and isolated woman, is deprived of a healthy and impulsive vent of her stance that has enhanced her miseries. Her terrible eventlessness of life turns her to the world of hallucination. Maya's dreamland full of aspirations falls apart and she gradually becomes insane:

Yes, I am going insane. I am moving further and further from all wisdom, all calm, and I shall soon be mad, if I am not that already. Perhaps it is my madness that leads me to imagine that horoscope, that encounter with the albino, his predictions, my fate? Perhaps it is only a phenomenon of insanity? (*Cry, the Peacock* 108)

A danger for an ominous disaster not only wretches Maya insecure and alienated but also she is shattered by the prediction of an albino astrologer who envisaged her husband's or her own death in the fourth year of their married life. The fact that her life of miserable existence of fantasies and nightmares leaves her distressed and her heart beats in darkness in search of light as Gautama remains indifferent to her feelings and fears. When Maya anxiously desires to share her anxiety that threatens to end their life the stance of Gautama seems to be frolicsome:

This life you speak, of this little episode, this brief flash in the pan, how insignificant and trivial it appears compared with this immortal cycle to which all humanity is bound, living or dying and which turns without stop, without point, you might say.... (*Cry, the Peacock* 122)

Gautama who declines to come out of cocooned crust of intellectuality fuels Maya's exacerbation by exhibiting his cruel aloofness towards Maya's trepidation. Gautama is "a body without a heart" (*Cry, the Peacock* 196) and Maya is "a heart without body" (*Cry, the Peacock* 196). Maya raised her voice: "Nor will you ever understand. You know nothing of me – and of how I can love. How I want to love. How it is important to me. But you, and I looked at him straight, and with hate, 'You've never loved. And you don't love me..'" (*Cry, the Peacock* 112). Predestined to live a life of corporeal, emotional and spiritual seclusion the life of Maya gets converted to "only a dream. An illusion. Maya- my very name means nothing, is nothing but an illusion" (*Cry, the Peacock* 172).

Gautama blames Maya's father for spoiling her life: " He is the one responsible for this – for making you believe that all that is important in the world is to possess, possess riches, comforts, posies, dollies, loyal retainers all the luxuries of the fairy tales, you were brought up on. Life is a fairy tale to you still" (*Cry, the Peacock* 122). Later, thinking Maya's circumstances aberrant, Gautama traits it to father fixation:

If you knew your Freud it would all be straightforward, and then appear as merely inevitable to you- taking your childhood and upbringing inot consideration. You have a very obvious father-obsession- which is also the reason why you married me, a man so much older than yourself. It is a complex that, unless mature rapidly, you will not be able to deal with, to destroy. (*Cry, the Peacock* 146)

Anita Desai depicts an ill-fated woman, Maya, who seems to have lost her way after her marriage with Gautama. This distress of hers forces her to the final debacle. The tragic end of their marital relationship is seen in Maya's act of killing her husband and afterwards committing suicide, a sigh of relief from endless psychological torture and metaphysical anguish: "So then I

pushed him, hard, and he fell. And when I went down the stairs to the terrace, he was lying there" (*Cry, the Peacock* 214).

Maya, being a wife, demanded a space in the mind of her husband, Gautama, and wanted to be saturated by love and sex, a social right of any woman in any marital relationship:

The innate biological differences between men and women, which justified their assignment to different social roles, were thought also to lead to differences in sexual behaviour and needs. Whereas male sexuality is seen as naturally aggressive and forceful, women's sexuality was conceptualized as a response to male desire, driven by reproductive and maternal instincts..... the importance of female sexuality and of fulfilling sex as crucial for a happy life. (Mottier 34)

Life of Maya discloses a protagonist's voyage from a state of keenness to that of dissatisfaction that leads her to the final adversity.

Works Cited

- Childress, Joseph and Gary Hentzi. *The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism*. Columbia University Press: New York, 1995. 310. Print.
- Desai, Anita. *Cry, the Peacock*. Orient Paperbacks: New Delhi, 1980. Print.
- . *Clear Light of Day*. Orient Paperbacks: New Delhi, 1986. Print.
- . *Fire on the Mountain*. Allied Publishers: New Delhi, 1977. Print.
- . *In Custody*. Heinemann: London, 1984. Print.
- . *Voices in the City*. Orient Paperbacks: New Delhi, 1986. Print.
- . *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Orient Paperbacks: New Delhi, 1987. Print.
- Goldman, Jane. "The Feminist Criticism of Virginia Woolf." *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism*. Eds. Gill Plain and Susan Sellers. Cambridge University Press: New York, 2007. 66-84. Print.
- Kalpana, R. J. *Feminism and Sexual Politics*. Prestige Books: New Delhi, 2005. Print.
- Kalpana, R.J. *Feminism and the Individual*. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 2005. Print.

Kumar, Gajndra. "Feminist Critical Theory and the Novels of Anita Desai." *Critical Essays on Anita Desai's Fiction*. Ed. Jaydipsinh Dodiya. Ivy Publishing House: New Delhi, 2000. Print.

Mottier, Veronique. *Sexuality: A Very Short Introduction*. O UP: New York, 2008. Print.

Padley, Steve. *Key Concepts in Contemporary Literature*. Palgrave Macmillan: Roundmills, 2006. Print.

Rajeswar, M. "Superstition and Psyche in Anita Desai's *Cry, The Peacock*." *Feminist English Literature*. Ed. M.K.Bhatnagar. Atlantic Publishers: New Delhi, 1999. 241.

Walsh, William. *Indian Literature in English*. Longman: London and New York, 1990. 157.