

## Women as a suffering soul in Anita Desai's cry, the peacock

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### Abstract

The present paper describes Anita Desai's probe into the problems of woman be it of a daughter, sister, mother, grandmother or a wife. Desai focuses on the gender roles of women seen through the lenses of female activities experiences goals, values, institutions, relationships and modes of communication. Men in her novels mostly exist only as projections of women's point of view. Most of Desai's women characters registered protest against the circumstances which oppressed them. Desai's entire fiction traces the changing image of women in the face of existential dilemmas. The modern woman protests and dares to pronounce her convictions. Desai has presented three kinds of females in the peacock.

**Keywords:** gender role, voices in the city, feminism

### Introduction

Anita Desai holds a prestigious position among the Indo-Anglian novelists. Her pre-occupation with the Indian women and their reaction to the changing situation in modern India distinguishes her from the other women writers. Her protagonists, chiefly Indian women, belong to the various age groups and are in constant conflict with the society. Most of these novels focus on women. The protagonists suffer in a meticulous world dominated by men, who in the guise of father, brother or husband present a constant threat to their integrity.

The history of patriarchy reveals varieties of cruelties and barbarities perpetrated at women. The average woman has always led a life not better than that of a slave. At all the stages of life, right from the childhood to the old age, she has been in a subordinate position to man. She has never been recognized as an independent entity free to select a course of her life at her own choice. Her welfare has always been said to be associated with the welfare of her husband whose service alone has been recognized as a way for her deliverance. To a wife, the only God worth worshipping is her husband regardless of the fact whether he treats her well or not. The irony is that man is born of a woman and yet the latter is dominated by the former. She has been enslaved, degraded and subject to various types of atrocities and tyrannies in the man dominated society.

The troubles and miseries of widows know no bounds. The widowed women are looked down upon as social out castes. Most of them come to be associated with ill-omen. If you are faced with the sight of a widow while starting on your journey for a certain purpose, you will be advised to postpone the mission. The travails undergone by a deserted or a divorced woman hardly need to be described.

Even normally, women are not treated as human beings but as chattels or commodities. In most households women are expected to be at the back and call of their husbands to show servility and be always in the feet of men who have every freedom to use them as shoes or kick them away depending upon their whims. What an irony indeed! In the same society and in the same society and in the same household apartheid is practiced. There are two sets of laws: one for the privileged males and the other for the deprived tribe of women.

This state of affairs in the man-dominated society has led to the consequences, the negative results which tell upon both the women as individuals and the society whose part they are. In such an unjust society, women suffer greatly. Their physical development suffers, their mental advancement is retarded, their moral and spiritual growth gets balked. The situation is responsible for the formation of complexes in woman, inferiority complexes and then the complex of revenge against the society.<sup>1</sup> Their unconscious mind harbours an attitude of revolt, which often expresses in suicides or murders.

The incidence of larger number of suicides among women than among men is accounted for by this factor. The women remain stunted personalities, which make for an irreparable loss not only for themselves but also for the society of which they are a part. Society is deprived of the great contribution which women could have been able to make if they had been allowed free and unhindered development of their personalities. III-treatment of women results in incapacitation of one half of the population. The children born of such women don't grow to their full potential for their initial environment itself is one of the restraints, controls and restrictions. Ultimately the whole society suffers including those who perpetrate this injustice and crime on women. That we have had to suffer servitude for such a long period of time in history: that the entire society has had to undergo indignities and ignominies for centuries, is all due to the mountains of injustices heaped on the woman, the mother of man.

In the novel *Cry, The Peacock* the protagonist Maya is a young, beautiful, intelligent who is incapable to overcome her childhood memories. The very beginning of the novel highlights the husband wife alienation theme by unfolding the relationship of Maya and Gautama. Maya, self-centered favorite daughter of a wealthy father, gets married to an older man, a detached, sober and industrious lawyer. They have entirely opposite attitudes, temperaments and visions, almost all evenings for Maya is hardly more than a "quiet, formal, waiting" (CP, 7) their married life is interrupted all along through marital stillness and Gautama's "hardness...his coldness, incessant talk of cups of tea and philosophy". (CP, 9)

It is not easy to imagine how Maya suffers in the loneliness of this house. She is unable to know the total lack of reconciliation on the part of Gautama. How little he knew of my suffering, or of how to comfort me.... telling me to go to sleep while he worked at his papers, he did not give another thought to me, to either she soft, willing body, or the lonely, mind that waited near his bed? (CP, 9)

Maya has hypersensitive and highly disturbed state of mind, which is shown ultimately in the death of her pet dog, Toto, she rapidly goes to the garden tap to wash that dreadful sight from her eyes but Gautama does not care for her sorrows and tears. His behaviour irritates her. The communication gap between Maya and Gautama remains in the whole novel. She muses "Had there been a bond between us, he would have felt its pull... But, of course there was none... There was no bond, any love-hardly any lone. (CP, 108)

Her inner sufferings make her restless. She feels insecure and alienated in the company of dissolute, cold restless figure passing as her husband. She says:

There were still spaces of darkness in between us, above and around, and it was that which gave the air such weight....Death lurked in those spaces, the darkness spoke of distance, separation, loneliness of such proportion that it broke the bounds of that single word and all its associations...I cried to myself....what is the use? I am alone. (CP, 22)

Basically the loneliness of Maya is established in Gautama's philosophical isolation, his imperviousness to the beautiful yet tremulous beauty of the natural world and his gross unconcern over the basics in life Gautama would shrug Maya's word off as superfluous and mean. This thin, satirically quite intellectual was ever "eager to pursue the thread of logic to its end, slowly and steadily as a meticulous tortoise (CP, 74)

If Maya had not had this type of hypersensitive vision, Gautama would have proved to be a good husband. But they have different and opposite out look towards each other. The life and happiness of Maya and Gautama ruin is each-other through their union. Maya's inclination to depend firstly on her father then on her husband in a sensitive relationship is in response to the demands of her psyche to protect against the attack of a hostile world. She has vanished to hold her life and have the requirement of psychological support continuously. Therefore, she accepts to engage with Gautama who is much older to her. She depends on him and feels protected. Gautama's irritated exhortations, "you have a very obvious father obsession", (CP, 146) is correct and affirmed in the sense that for Maya.

Her father is the strongest, significant and inspiring force in her life. Gautama further remarks that her Freudian fixation is a mistake. According to Horney it is not a sensual desire but is her search for self-satisfaction.

Maya reflects through her father's vision in her whole life. Even after one or two years she could not make healthy relationship with Gautama. Inner desire and other liabilities create a conflicting situation. There are the intellectual, social and political conference often held in her in-law's family. Here one did not speak of love, for less of affection". (CP, 46)

So Maya wants to get some ideas to remove her degradation and suffering. Anita Desai expresses the sympathetic atmosphere of Maya's house, where Maya always feels irritated towards her over-busy husband. This irritation is a cry of a distressed woman who feels alien and unwanted. Maya suffers acutely. She remains always with him and becomes conspirator for his disdainful attitude. She can be cheerful in her life if she

compromises with Gautama. She surrenders herself to him unwarily. Maya has the tremendous solicitous qualities: as she is helpless, suffering, humble. Her extravagant and lavish qualities remain concealed in her instincts because she does not want to dominate. She is dominated by her father before marriage and by Gautama afterwards. He has greater qualities in comparison with Maya like age, arrogance, knowledge and the capability to dominate her. She is governed and protected always by her father and later by her husband. Erich from uses this term to represent the out side power on whom a helpless or a dependent person projects all his longing and develops a symbolic relationship Maya also admires his greatness which is clear when she declares not to appreciate him for "this superior plan he always managed to elevate himself on to when I tried to involve him in my matters, my wants and cares." (CP, 113)

She achieves the great affirmation of herself through him. Maya does not only wish her sexual desires in oral through contact, relationship and communion, but also in physical. There some moments in her life when she tries to encourage and excite Gautama for sexual union, but also in physical. There some moments in her life when she tries to encourage and excite Gautama for sexual union, but in his sleep or consciousness, Gautama remains untouched by her feelings, and he has no sensuousness like Maya. She explores her gloominess through the withered flowers.

The inner suffering of Maya begins with the prediction of albino astrologer because her prophesy breaks her individuality. Maya could not come out from her despair and isolation neither through her father's fatalistic exhortation nor through Gautama's logic. In reality, Maya has magnified notions about herself, which denotes hypocrisy. She unconsciously remains with fairy tales who is far away from all the anxieties and sufferings. She is a denizen of this toy world, where even breakfast was as good as revel fairies who feast on melons and syrups by moon light. She has perfected her image as being different from others. She becomes angry with the idea that a man should rise with merits in daily life. She pretends herself that she is different from all of them. In fact, the destiny should be partial towards her.

Maya has the different notions about life and wishes that another should have visualized her life as she realises. She can't face the reality. She affirms that she is extraordinary, she imagines herself as a princess. Maya wishes that all of them must give importance to her., She realises that fate is merciless and it will hit her like a storm. She can't overcome the sufferings and anxieties of a royal life in a secured environment of sublime bliss and beauty. To spend the life of an ordinary man is far away from the scope of her obsessive notions. In these situations, the most important thing is to embrace life. To re-enter in everyday world means to come back to knowledge. Maya fears knowledge as a dark shadow" stark hard and ultimate as the rock bottom of a dry well." (CP, 186)

Consequently, she becomes aggressive to everything that is complete, and confirmed. Time is certain that she hates it. The defences as a destined order of connection its separation and overwhelmed. Overwhelm here means that death, finally she would fails to escape. Imagination is the safest protection. Due to her imaginary world she is capable of nothing but illusions imagining them to be real Maya individuality are exiled. She wonders at herself and demolishes her identity. The consequences of demolition, she often realises that she is not a human being, but a dream: "Maya my name means nothing, is nothing but an illusion." (CP, 172)

From nothingness she turns into a 'caged monkey'. This signifies her lack of self. The subjective and objective awareness of Maya is spotted. She has no interest in the external world for herself. This is pitiable condition when a person goes into psychotic condition, which identifies as a insanity or madness, Maya's edition hastily diminishes. After sometimes she has reached unity. Maya moves herself-hate towards Gautama. Her chief is self-protection. She assures herself that Gautama doesn't live long. Because he has injured her neurotic pride by neglecting loves. She kills her husband in vindictive rage because she could not control her inner feelings. Freud analyses Maya's mental state at, "aggression originates from a death instinct i.e. to undo the process leading to life and revert to the inorganic state from which life originally arouse." (Freud, 137 )

Maya's fears and death instinct denote significant role in shaping the deteriorating condition of her personality. The clashing inner feelings guide her to think about death with merely to get relief in the existing position. The prediction of albino astrologer seems true to her and she recollects the reasons behind her sufferings. She muses silently: "could death disturb him then?" (CP, 166)

Undoubtedly, Maya argues herself over murder but at the same time, she loses her courage from it. She becomes worried and gloomy to think that this is the only substitute to overcome her sufferings. These thoughts make her depressed and incapable. "And sometimes I paused to feel the arrow of that word, murder sink into my flesh, and to cry, is this what I have come to." (CP, 190)

Maya has arrived at the level where sufferings not unawares and suppressed. The coming storm identifies her aggressive effort to liberate herself from all sorrows, gloominess, irritation and fears. Ah! Storm, storm, wonderful, infidel storm, blow, blow! I cried..... Frightened? No! I ran from the thought, laughing, Oh no, what need of fright? It is relief; I called back to the gods who mocked in the dark wings. It is only relief at having survived, at having regained the will and the decision (CP, 109). The novel, in the final analysis, comes out as a purely psychological novel converging into, frustration, alienation, isolation, estrangement and anguish.

Anita Desai has taken the problem of Indian female existence in all her ten novels. Her works have unconsciously contributed to the feminist use, an expression of inner pre occupations and of the modern ideal of tiding a male-dominance free society.

### Works Cited

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