

Presentation of Local Color in Anita Desai's Novel "Cry, the Peacock"

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Abstract

Anita Desai's novel Cry, the Peacock is considered to be one of the distinguished novels in English literature. Through this novel Desai present fate and fatality, evil and mortality, death and destruction and problems of mostly people who are facing the problems of marital disharmony, escapism and loss of hope in life, on the behalf of protagonist Maya. At that time when the novel was written present a culture where family bonding and the powers struggle in Indian communities presented a challenge. This novel emphasis that how our society obsessed by the false prophecy of astrologers and they are making our life poisoned. As Maya and Gautama are the main protagonist in the novel and both characters represent the problem with emphasis and poignancy all around them and other couples are also the victim of this self-created tragedy, Desai portrays Maya as a young and sensitive girl who is victimized by a childhood prophecy of a fatal disaster.

Keyword: *Considered, Distinguished, Mortality, Destruction, Disharmony, Escapism, Communities, Astrologers.*

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Introduction

Anita Desai is a critically lauded 20th century writer was born on 24 June 1937 at Mussoorie to German immigrant mother, Toni Nime and a Bengali businessman father, D N Mazumdar. She was a student at Queen Mary's Higher Secondary School in Delhi and received her B.A in English literature in 1957 from the Miranda House of the university Delhi. She is a best known and celebrated Indo-Anglian novelist of post-independence era. Desai had made a significant contribution to the development of Indian novel in English by her psychological themes and characterization. Anita Desai lives in United Kingdom with her husband Ashvin Desai, has been professor of writing, Massachusetts institute of technology USA. They have for children one of them is Kiran Desai a Booker Prize winning novelist. Desai published her first short story when she was only 20 years old. *Cry, the Peacock* was her first novel which was published in 1963. *Voice in the City* in 1965, *Fire on the Mountain* 1977, *Clear Light of the Day* (1980), *In Custody* (1984). In addition to novels, she has written many books for children, a number of short stories that have been collected in anthologies and essays. Anita Desai known as the leading member of generation of writers who have carved out a harbor for Indian fiction in English. Her writings like a burgeoning literary complexion with writers of Indian origin instrument in from around the World. The world of Desai's fiction is largely a domestic one. Her novels reveal the present scenario of women in India since independence, the lives of women in the modern Indian nation state. Anita Desai is the recipient of Sahitya Academy Award (1978) for her novel *Fire on The Mountain*, Guardian Award (1984), for children's fiction, Booker Mc Connell Prize (1980, 84). She has been shortlisted for the Booker Prize three times. Desai is undoubtedly one of the major Indian English writers of her generation. Her portraits of domestic disharmony in traditional Indian families and the suffering of women in largely partial world and in Indian society established her as a reputed writer. She portrays not only the Indian culture and tradition but also the Indians abroad, and about Westerns in India. She displays again and again how gender issues are Central to politics and the nations as well as in the families. Desai claims that "*her novels are no reflection of English society, politics or character*"

Desai has a desire of innovation in her writings and this innovated touch not be found in other Indian writers' writings.

Introduction of the novel

Anita Desai's first novel *Cry, the Peacock* was published in 1963 is the winner of coveted Sahitya Academy Award. This is a story of a young girl Maya

whois psychic tumult by childhood prophecy of astrologer a white albino. Astrologer's prophecy was a prophecy of disaster to be fall her or her husband Gautama during their fourth year of marriage. Desai novel *Cry, the Peacock* portrays the hypersensitive condition of females through the character of Maya. Desai's Maya who is haunted by the prophecy of astrologer, like Maya another person who are blindly believes in astrologers and occultism are destroying their life and they have deep faith in myths. Maya's father was a rich advocate in Lucknow. She lives alone with her father because her mother has died and her brother lives in America. Her father cares like a mother so she gets her father's affection and attention and says, "No one, no one else, love me as my father does".

Maya expects to have similar attention from her husband Gautama, a father surrogate. Maya feels that everything in world should be happened according to her and set moving according to her tunes. Marriage of Maya and Gautama was more of less a marriage of convenience. Through this marriage Maya represent the whole class of women in our society who are struggling for their identities and feelings, how women are ignored and suppressed by society, by family and by their husband. After death of her pet dog Toto, Maya feels very uneasy and different, instead of consoling her in her grief, Gautama leaves him alone to meet visitor. Toto's death brings a misfortune for Maya's condition and she became insane and very hypersensitive and disturbed state of mine. The novel represents cries of Maya and her life was like a hunger, who was not satisfied but feel more hungered and hungered and her relationship with Gautama as a relationship of death. The white albino's prophecy was only the cause of Maya's fear, this fear shows that Indians have a deep faith in myths or archetypal customs. Anita Desai has used symbolic image which accentuate Maya's dilemma. The inner conflict in Maya between life and death was symbolized by the peacock. Maya admires the myths about the famous peacock dance like the dance of Shiva, it is one of the protections and destruction.

The novel *Cry, the Peacock* depicting the 'lifesaving' mechanisms adopted by Maya's unbalanced mind, clearly demonstrates that no thinking individual can live by another rational. All the forces conspired to push Maya towards certain death unresistingly, she had to assert herself to save herself. Assertion of the self after introspection and self-analysis is considered by Anita Desai to be essential in confirming the individual's mature and positive integration with life.

Presentation of Local Color

The novelist represents *Cry, the Peacock* as a domestic disharmony in traditional Indian families and the suffering of women in a patriarchal world. The

novel chart how women in our society are blackmailed emotionally through sensitive psychological probing and sharp social critic. Desai novel portrays the emotional lives of people struggling to find meaning and stability within the framework of a society in transition. In the novel cry is symbolized as the cries of Maya, the peacock symbolism in the novel is closely related to feminine psyche and has religion-cultural roots that enrich the meaning by providing undertones to the symbols. The novel is a mouthpiece of female situation in our society. Her tendance with women's inner world,frustration and storm raging inside her mind intensify her predicament. Desai concern with the salvation of women is found page after page in her novels. This story is not only the story of Maya but also it contains many other female characters that represent different aspects of women. This novel depicts the problems of male dominant society. This novel preoccupies into motives, circumstances and interior action of the character which springs from, and develops from external actions, situation in real life.

In her husband Gautama's family, the atmosphere is heavily charged with intellectual, social and political discussions. Desai takes the example of Maya's mother-in-law, who was a social activist very energetic women and always ready to help in society for the blind, the disabled, the unemployed. She was only sympathies for social needs of others but ironically insensitive and unaware of her on daughter-in-law. She never tried to involve Maya into social activities she has no close bonding with her on daughter Nila. Women like Maya's mother-in-law are also the supporter of male dominated social process. Male in our society is dominant because women are enemy of women, they do not help each other in their problems, they only tortured and humiliated and have no respects for one another.

Anita Desai paints unyielding personage who look back to "*protect their vision of secret world of passion and beauty*". In this novel this is not a common place household situation showing a wife grumbling against an over busy husband to whom she can share her feelings. It is a cry of agonized women, who feeling lonely and unwanted in our regional areas. Maya clings more and more to Gautama arrogance of Gautama intrigued him. Her expensive traits remain suppressed in her unconscious, because she does not want to master her life. Maya is like other women in our society, who has no identities before marriage father there is on whom she externalized, and felt strong in her strength; now, there is Gautama. Gautama is presented superior to Maya in many ways- age, arrogance, knowledge and his capacity to rule over her life, like a male dominancy over female. Gautama wants to change Maya as he thinks she "ought" to be, instead of understanding her as she actually

“is”.

Emotions frightened Gautama so he reshrinks from contact to Maya, he does not share his feeling due to the superiority and became sarcastic, passive and disinterested. Like a dominant husband he vomits all his spite, casting derogatory remarks not only on her but also on her father too. The title of the novel also symbolized the agony of an unfulfilled desire. She projects herself as a helpless, suffering martyr; a childless woman, gripped by the misfortune of her pet's death, she feels herself as a helpless child. Anita Desai presents Maya's tussle using mirror imagery for other female character in our society. Due to her depersonalization, Maya feels, many a time, that she is not human, only a dream: "Maya- my name means nothing, is nothing but an illusion".

Maya's character is a key to unfold every female condition and situation which is faced by them in their family and their society. Maya's character lies in comprehending her divided self. There is no her part at self-analysis to apprehend her demands. The fast withering self and the receding contact with outer world, leave the core of her integrity impaired. Her failure to find life and more of it, becomes an appalling crime. She reprimands Gautama to death for it and then, burdened with guilt, haunted by self-contempt, self-allegation and self-hate, she pushed herself into complete darkness of the world of the insane. Like Maya many women's life made empty by their families. Her father's teaching denies her the right for open rebellion. Her husband's philosophy of detachment robs her of the sole pleasure and refuse in involved appreciation of nature's beauty. Usha Bande criticizes Maya and writes that "there is no attempt on her part at self-analysis, to apprehend demands".

This novel is a successful attempt of Anita Desai to give Maya a distinct individuality, an intuitive awareness, sense of justice and poetic imagination. Maya is presented Desai as a sensitive and humane. She was possessed and dictated by man in her life, she is endowed with an independent mind with immense potential to love and care. The theories and the philosophy of her husband do not solve the problem of her, they were theories only for saying not for applying. Maya is unhelped and ununderstood by the gamut of people surrounding her. At last in her frustration she has done the crime of killing her own husband. Like a peacock in wildness of society Maya and other women hunger for love. In quest of love their psyche bleeds to neurosis and subsequent tragic death.

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