

A Critical Study Of Familial Relationship In Anita Desai's Novel Cry, The Peacock
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Abstract

Anita Desai is a key figure in contemporary Indian English literature. The majority of her critics have concentrated their criticism on her novel's existentialist and psychological approaches. For them, Anita Desai's favorite topic appears to be "existentialism," in which the protagonists come to perceive the world as hopeless and pointless and experience alienation. Their criticism focuses on the way she personalizes the characters and presents them as hypersensitive. She is easily comparable to the modernist tradition represented by her European contemporaries like Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence, and Henry James. In her books, she examines the complexities of the man-woman relationship, particularly in the setting of industrialized metropolitan life, which places pressures on people. Her novels often focus on the incompatibility between men and women. The aim of this study is to give a critical analysis of family relationships in the debut novel of Anita Desai, Cry, the Peacock.

Keywords

Family, relationships, child, marriage, and man-woman relationship

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As we know, a “family relationship” can be defined as any mixture of filiation or conjugal relationships that connects two persons directly or indirectly through a third party. Human relationships are complex and complicated phenomena. In its widest sense, family “refers to a group of people who think of themselves as belonging to a separate group in society or marriage; the family mediates between the two individuals and the society, helping him to take his place in the wider world” (Broom and Selznick, *Sociology*, p.26).

A family is a group consisting of a mother, a father, and their children. They perform vital functions and influence the entire scope of social organization and culture. Family is more than just a group of people; it is also an institutional complex or a system of institutions. It could be a classic or contemporary family, a nuclear or joint family, or even a post-modern family. The phrase “post-modern family” refers to the wide range of family structures, including single-parent households and children. The family relationship is very important to human survival. Family members support each other in their difficult times. But in the present scenario, family relationships are becoming complex and difficult to maintain. Postmodern writers deal with the theme of family relationships in their novels. In India, family represents a wider circle consisting of grandparents, parents, uncles, aunts, cousins, and so on. The fact that each family member is identifiable by a relationship demonstrates the value placed on these individuals in the ethnic community. Many Indian contemporary writers also show this harsh reality in their works. Anita Desai is one of those authors who critically discuss family relationships in her novels.

Anita Desai, a novelist and short story writer from India, is a prominent figure in Indian English writing. She is referred to as an *explorer of the inner lives of the characters in her novels*. She is always aware of the twisted inner turbulence and interior tension of her characters. As a result, she became a recorder of a person’s struggle in an Indian urban setting. She gets interested in the analysis and display of human relationships. She’s known for using the English language and idioms according to her purpose without any effort. Her novels basically portray human conditions while focusing on familial relationships. Her novels also show conflict between individuals facing the incomprehensible power of family relationships. Desai shows her characters’ struggles and the conflict between individuals and family members. Most of the characters in her novels are not ready to identify themselves with the outside world. They are not ready to form harmonious relationships with others, and this is why they always struggle in their lives. Thus, most of the family relationships portrayed in her novel are hollow and meaningless. Dr. N. Raj said about her,

“The innermost psyche of her protagonist is revealed to us, through their interactions with those who are emotionally related to them on the basis of kinship. For the purposes of fiction, no human relationship is more fertile and potential than that in the family and especially among the kins”. He also said, *“the emotional crisis among kids is born of the realization that the kids fall short of the ideal in such relationship”.*

Anita Desai's first novel, *Cry, the Peacock*, also deals with these kinds of troubled family relationships. Her first book, *Cry, the Peacock*, primarily explores the issue of disharmonious and unfulfilled relationships among the characters. This paper is an attempt to analyze the family relationships in the selected novel, *Cry, the Peacock*, by Anita Desai.

Cry, the Peacock, by Anita Desai, was originally published in 1963. One of the main themes of the novel is marital discord and alienated and neurotic female characters. *Cry, the Peacock*, was Anita Desai's debut novel and the winner of the Sahitya Academy Award. Anita Desai's fiction is free from the contemporary stains of rural poverty, caste, and class conflict. Her fiction has interesting stories to tell about individuals who must navigate terrain that is too difficult and perilous to navigate safely. Her protagonist's innermost thoughts are open to us through their conversations with those who are related to them on the basis of kinship. In fiction, family relationships are more fertile and have more potential than any other human relationship. Anita Desai is identified with this fact, which is why her novels portray such relationships as being based on emotional idealism.

The heroine of the novel *Cry, the Peacock*, Maya, has been depicted in many roles, performing difficult familial duties. Maya was born into an old, conservative family. Maya lived and enjoyed her life in her father's house. Her father provided her with love and pleasure along with discipline. Maya was a loved and pampered girl. At a young age, her father gave her every kind of comfort. Maya lived under the protected roof of her father's house in Lucknow. Her father is overprotective of her. Maya is a motherless child, and due to the lack of maternal love, she suffers from deprivation. The development of her personality and behavior is not normal in this type of atmosphere. She suffered from egocentricity and possessiveness. Due to the absence of motherly love and the overly protective nature of her father, she remained unaware of the challenges of a life where pain and pleasure coexist. Her father's magical world prevents her from facing the realities of life after marriage. Aside from that, she is troubled by the predictions of Albino, an astrologer. He had foretold her early marriage and the unnatural death of one of the couple after four years of their marriage. Maya was unconcerned about it at that

time. But after her marriage, she became concerned. Her husband, Gautama's lack of attentiveness as well as too much of her introversion reverberates in her mind. The four-year term he set aside is only a guideline and will come to an end. Despite the fact that Gautama is indulgent in his own way and affectionate enough for Maya, it is the inner spiritual realm that she is interested in but fails to connect with. It's because of the communication gap that Maya is hesitant to share her thoughts with him. She is driven insane and is the cause of both of their terrible deaths. Maya decided to kill Gautama because he had already died for Maya. Maya asked him to go to the terrace with her, where she pushed him from the terrace and also committed suicide in the end because of her guilt.

In men-women relationships, father-daughter relationships are the most significant relationships in a family. A girl's father is the first man she interacts with in her life. Her father's personality, behavior, and temperament directly affect a girl's life. A good relationship between a father and daughter might help a girl adjust to other male relationships she may have in her life. Such as a relationship with her brother or her husband. This relationship also helps to form positive or negative ideas about other men. Anita Desai portrayed the effect of this relationship on the life of the protagonist, Maya, in this novel.

In *Cry, the Peacock*, Desai portrayed the intense love between Maya and her father. Maya is an extremely sensitive girl because of her father's overly caring and protective nature. Her mother died in her early childhood. In an atmosphere full of love and care from her father, Maya grew up like a princess. These lines of the novel well describe the life of Maya at her father's house:

"As a child, I enjoyed, princess-like, a sumptuous fare of the fantasies of the Arabian Nights, the glories and bravado of Indian mythology, long and astounding tales of princes and regal queens, jackals and tigers, and, being my father's daughter, of the lovely English and Irish fairy tales as well, that were read out to me by him," (Desai, P.41).

Her father always tries to keep her away from the harsh realities of life, and he wisely plans the marriage of her daughter Maya. But her father fails when Gautama doesn't feel the sensitivity of Maya. Gautama criticized the upbringing of Maya, he says to Maya, a "neurotic" and "spoilt baby", a "father's to whom life is fairy tale" (Desai, P.78).

The novel *Cry, the Peacock* demonstrates how the couple's different family upbringings as children influenced to their later marital problems. The fact that Maya and Gautama are from two different worlds is what makes their marriage incompatible and unhappy. The main character of the book, Maya, grows up in

her father's home and enjoys a very happy upbringing. Due to the fact that she is amotherless child and that her brother Arjuna escaped from the family when he was a little child, she is left to enjoy the entirety of her father's devotion. Because of this, when she becomes irritated in her marriage, she begins to recall the days she spent at her father's house as a child. Contrarily, Gautama has matured in the light of prescribed norms and conventional expectations. He was raised in a completely different type of familial environment. His mother works as a social worker.

Gautama's disinterestedness and practical way of life make Maya alienated and restless. Her father's overprotective and over-caring nature makes her suffer in her marital life. It is regarded as one of the biggest reasons for her maladjustment with her husband. Maya's suffering is correctly highlighted by R. A. Singh, who deems her father equally accountable. Maya's condition is neither denied nor wholly blamed on Gautama, according to Singh, "*her alienation is not only do two go to mas indifference but she herself and partly her father is responsible for the same*". Maya is unable to break free from her father's magical world and adjusted to her sensible and emotionless spouse. Maya always tries to escape from the harsh and practical world of Gautama by reminding her childhood memories. In such a crisis, Maya is unable to have a normal relationship with anyone in her family. Therefore, both excessively protective and restricted family situations have negative effects on people that prove fatal for them and prevent them from having typical family interactions after marriage. Maya develops into a highly empathetic and perceptive sort of woman, whereas Gautama is a busy, intelligent, and overly practical type. The two have very different temperaments, and this makes their marriage incompatible.

As a result, the story is full of different familial connections and references that provide light on the types of connections the individuals have with one another. Desai focuses on the complexity of human connections, particularly the man-woman relation, which influences how each person's personality is expressed. Contrary to popular thinking, Desai considers these partnerships to have failed. As a result, Maya fails to establish meaningful relationships with people. These characters are motherless children, and their feelings of isolation, alienation, and insecurity are the result of their unhappy early years. Maya is completely alone and desolate as a result of her isolation. Since Anita Desai portrays the tensions and worries of being modern in a traditional society, family is nearly always the focal point of her novels and this is true in her debut book *Cry, the Peacock*, it is only natural for her to do so.

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