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## The Theme of Alienation in Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock*

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### **Abstract:**

Anita Desai (1937) is an Indian novelist. As a writer she has been shortlisted for the Booker Prize three times. She received a Sahitya Academy Award in 1978 for her novel *Fire on the Mountain*. She won the British Guardian Prize for the village by the Sea. The paper attempts to analyze her novel *Cry, the Peacock* (1963) which is her first novel. The title of the novel is symbolical. It suggests the theme of the novel. Maya, the protagonist of Anita Desai's novel *Cry, The Peacock*, is the most sensitive woman suffering from neurotic fears and marital disharmony. The story of Maya is the story of hypersensitive women who, miserably fails to modify her attitudes and temperaments according to the needs of her life as a married woman in a male-dominated society. Women, in Anita Desai's fiction embody the author's quest for psychological insight, awareness and harmony. Her themes certainly touch the raw nerves of human experience.

### **Keywords: Hypersensitive, Patriarchal, Neurotic, Orthodox, Turmoil.**

Anita Desai's fiction has invited much critical attention. Feminist critics have assessed the psychological development of Desai's female characters in terms of the patriarchal Indian family structure. Desai in all her novels and short stories focuses on the personal struggles of middle-class women as they attempt to overcome the societal limitations imposed by a tradition-bound patriarchal culture. Her debut novel, *Cry the Peacock* presents Maya, the protagonist as a hypersensitive women. The novel is opened with the theme of mysterious death of Mayas dog Toto in the first part while conflict, violence and inner frustration are dealt with complete skill in the second part. The third part deals with Maya's loneliness and isolation.

R.S. Sharma rightly observes, "Cry of the Peacock is a symbol of Maya's life in death and death in life."<sup>1</sup>

Both husband and wife had different attitude towards life. Maya wants to be attached to the world and its charms, while Gautama wants to remain aloof and detached so as to attain 'peace of mind'. This attitude alienates them from each other.

The neurotic world of Maya is quite different from the practical lawyer husband Gautama. She has developed a father-fixation and she is not happy with her unromantic husband. Maya was born in an old orthodox family, enjoyed life in her parents' house. After her marriage she finds that her feelings are not cared for and that she is being neglected, isolated and alienated in her own home. This disturbs her terribly and feels herself lonely. The death of Toto, the dog makes her alienated. She is badly disturbed by the indifference of her husband, Gautama to the death of dog and it shows his carelessness towards his wife.

Anita Desai's Novel portrays the troubled life of her female protagonist Maya. She seems to suffer since she has been married to Gautama, who fails to understand and agony of her fractured identity. Maya is an instinctive woman of passions and emotions. Gautama, on the other hand, is a philosophical intellectual. Maya expects some emotional and physical satisfaction in married life but both of them are denied her one by Gautama's cold intellectuality and the other by his age. The dream world of Maya and the solid world of Gautama can't go together any longer.

Cry the Peacock is a pioneering effort towards exposing the psychological problems of an alienated woman. It is the study of the experiences of a disturbed and alienated mind. Maya compares Gautama to her father at every step and thus ruins her marital life completely. Maya's hypersensitivity is her tragic flaw which coupled with her circumstances, becomes the root cause of dissonance in her relationship with Gautama. Anita Desai has used symbols in the novel. The sky is the symbol of her total mind. They daylight is her conscious mind, while the night represents her unconscious mind. The dust- storm has been used by Anita Desai as the end of life.

J.P. Tripathi rightly observes, "Maya's joy at the sight of Gautama is also expressionistically rendered. Maya is not prepared for death because her dreams of enjoying life are yet unfulfilled. Maya's love of life, besides being an important theme, is partly responsible for tragedy."<sup>2</sup>

The tragic end of the novel is due to different type of violence's and at last the deaths of the husband and the wife. M. Adhikari rightly observes, "I feel here Desai has attempted to project a woman's fight individuality and liberation.... an archetype situation is caused by her sensitive nature and her refusal to make compromise with her dumb existence. She had never desired to resolve her personal problems through death."<sup>3</sup>

Maya is torn between her love of life and fear of death. In order to subdue her turmoil, Maya kills Gautama in a vindictive rage. After killing her husband, she is burdened with guilt, and haunted by self- contempt, self-accusation and self-hate, she drags into complete darkness of world of the insane. She dies in her quest to find fuller life. Her frustration reaches its completion and in a fit of insane fury she pushes him down from the terrace. Her madness becomes more explicit when he starts justifying her act in front of Gautama's mother and sister. The novel ends with the author reporting the tragic death of Maya as she jumps out of the balcony.

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