

Vol. 8, Issue-II (April 2017)

ISSN: 0976-8165

THE CRITERION

An International Journal in English

Bi-monthly, Peer-Reviewed, Open Access eJournal



UGC Approved Journal [Arts and Humanities, Sr. No. 40]

Editor-In-Chief - Dr. Vishwanath Bite

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ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

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Decoding the Duality of the Self and the Other in Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock*

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Article History: Submitted-01/04/2017, Revised-12/04/2017, Accepted-18/04/2017, Published-30/04/2017.

Abstract:

No one grows up in a vacuum; one's life exists at multiple intersections with the lives of others. Rather existence refers to 'being-in-the-world' to use Heidegger's phrase. However, this world is not to be understood merely as a world of things; but (here) "...the existent lives in a constant interaction with other existents, or, to put the matter in another way, existence is being-[for]-others or being-with-one-another" (Macquire 102). In this context, the present paper attempts to evaluate the duality-ridden existential conflict of human relationships in Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* (1963). The study has been done primarily in the light of the Sartrean framework of being-for-others/the self and the Other and allied conceptual instrumentalities thereof namely the look, intersubjectivity, constitutive otherness etc. The novel expounds the conflictual dichotomy caused by the dialectics of the self and the Other and project a swing pattern of Maya (*Cry, the Peacock*), the protagonist, as if torn apart in the dualistic extremes being engrossed in the Sisyphean search for a coherent meaning of relationship(s) with her counterpart. It is in this context that the researcher tries to explicate the conflictual dimension of human relationships vis-à-vis the dialectical understanding of the Sartrean 'being-in-itself'/'being-for-itself' and 'being-for-others'.

Keywords: duality, being-for-others, look, intersubjectivity, the self and the other.

I

Sartre's phenomenological ontology highlights the idea that consciousness always exists in a social context which is populated and co-inhabited by other consciousnesses. Accordingly, understanding consciousness and its mode of being necessitates an investigation of its relationship with other consciousnesses. It forms the ground for Sartre's philosophical assessment of our relations with others with special reference to conceptualizing the Other in terms of its absolute difference and sincere alterity. In his analysis of the important dimensions of man's being, Sartre postulates three main constituents of 'being' viz. being-in-itself, being-for-itself and being-for-others.

In the Sartrean conceptualization, this notion of being-in-itself relates to objects/entities other than humans. Sartre goes on to contend that being-in-itself is also free from the dialectics of activity/passivity or affirmation/negation. It is huge, firm yet motionless, and is nothing more than what it is. Therefore, it enjoys an exclusive status of 'being' and thus it has nothing to do

with other beings. At the same time, it is fundamentally contingent as well. It emits a sense of absurdity in terms of lacking a fundamental ground for the existence of its being. Further, Sartre holds that consciousness is always the consciousness of something. It means that consciousness relates to the being-in-itself (the objects in the world) in a certain manner. Interestingly, consciousness interprets the being-in-itself in its own way. Not only this, Sartre feels that the subject is ontologically immersed into the things of the world. Significantly if the things of the world are present to the realm of consciousness, it cannot be conceived as passive, rigid and motionless being-in-itself. It is in this sense that Sartre deepens his stance and holds that, consciousness cannot be—what it is—unless it is allied to a being, which is separate and independent of it. As a corollary, this being is separate and independent since it does not require consciousness as a component of its ontological existence. Contrariwise, consciousness is ontologically dependent upon the being-in-itself. As a consequence, Sartre formulates his key phenomenological position by confirming that consciousness is always a consciousness of something, for example, a car or a laptop. In other words consciousness, a characteristic element of man's being, connotes a separation from being as well leading to the embodiment of nothingness into the world. This is the typical Sartrean conceptualization of man as a being-for-itself. However, it is worth extrapolating that without being the nihilation of the in-itself, there can be no for-itself as well. The third dimension of being is called the being-for-others, which isn't reducible to being-in-itself and being-for-itself. Cox supports the stance: "Every person is a being-for-itself, but according to Sartre this is not all they are. There is another aspect of every person's being that is not for-itself but for-others" (23). It becomes relevant in the context of human-human encounter or intersectionality. Macquire observes: "Even in the most fundamental ways of being, the human existent spills over, so to speak; he transcends the bounds of an individual existence and is intelligible only within a broader framework that we designate as being-[for]-others" (106).

Now, there is a need to elucidate how do we understand others? It is necessitated to explicate the finer nuances of the bridge which binds a consciousness to other consciousnesses. According to Sartre, 'being' is the formative ground for understanding our relationship to others. Therefore, we need to consider ontology since it deals with the revelation of being. Sartre says, "...the Other is an indispensable mediator between myself and me... .I recognize I am as the Other sees me...nobody can be vulgar all alone" (222). He contends that man makes himself what he wants to be vis-à-vis his existential situations privileging the presence of the Other. Moving on, Sartre further holds that our relations to other people represent an essence of man. Accordingly, 'I am' generates a meaning in the presence of the Other only. Importantly, while experiencing others, we also experience the subjectivity of the Other. The realization that the Other, we encounter, is a subject posits a potential threat to our own subjectivity by raising the possibility that we may become an object to the subjectivity of the other consciousness. Seen thus, one experiences oneself as being subjected to the objectification by another subject since "...the Other constitutes me in a new type of being [by making me] his object... .In it I recognize that, as the object of the Other, I am not only for the Other, that is, that I actually am just as the

Other sees me” (Theunisson 222). Levy substantiates, “...all human relations can be resolved into this sinister dialectic of looking-at and being looked-at, of objectifying and being objectified in turn” (39). It is a revelation of our (potential) conflict-ridden relationship with the Other(s). Sartre opines: “Everything that goes for me, goes for the Other. While I try to enslave the Other, he tries to enslave me....Conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others” (Sartre 364). The fact that others can objectify me compels me to perceive others as objects and by doing so I deny them their subjectivity. It also highlights our wish pattern whereby it is desired that the Other should support/back our own self-conceptions. However, such wish-patterns may lead to conflicts. It is in this sense that in Sartre play *No Exit*, we encounter the polemical outburst that other people are hell. There is no ultimate solution to this situation. Such conflict-ridden relationships with others are also part of our condition—a fact which we need to understand existentially.

The preceding discussion highlights that people experience the duality of relating to the Other in different ways, always seeking an equanimity of mutual reciprocity and constitutive otherness with the Other coupled with an ongoing and oscillating master-slave dialectic. It is important to point it out here—a bit hurriedly though—that Sartre in his later work *Notebooks for an Ethics* notes that it is possible for the consciousness to have an authentic way relating to the Other wherein both consciousnesses are subjects. He calls this a ‘we-relation’. Contextualizing the novels being assessed, the scope of the critique relates more to the Sartrean framework of the being-for-others with reference to his seminal work, *Being and Nothingness*. In the context of Desai’s *Cry*, the *Peacock*, the Sartrean framework of the self and the Other holds compelling implications especially in relation to understanding the anguished tale of human relationships representing the conflictual, dichotomous, ambivalent and dialectical dynamics of the self and the Other. The critique attempts to highlight that the self-destructive orientations, rebellion and loss of self on the part of Maya can be elucidated by evaluating the duality of their being vis-à-vis the dialectics of the self and the Other.

It is also worth highlighting here that Desai explores the emotional world of her protagonists, revealing a rare imaginative awareness of various deep forces at work, coupled with a profound understanding of the existential being. The recurring theme in her novels is the trauma of existence in a ‘hostile world’ marked with morbidity, duality and alienation. Jain rightly interprets her world as an ambivalent one: “It is a world where the central harmony is aspired to but not arrived at, and the desire to love and live clashes, at times, violently with the desire to withdraw and achieve harmony. Involvement and stillness are incompatible by their nature, yet they strive to exist together” (23). In this sense, Desai’s themes reveal an intense struggle of an individual to survive the existential calamities, viz. alienation, anxiety, inauthenticity, bad faith etc. and thus mirror the duality of human condition.

II

Cry, the *Peacock* is the most widely acclaimed and diversely interpreted of Desai’s works. However, it is pertinent to note here that in the substantial body of the critical

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interpretations of the novel, the duality of human relationships is yet to be interpreted vis-a-vis the Sartrean framework of the self and the Other. That's what the present critique aims to undertake.

The novel is largely concerned with the aspects of disharmony in the man-woman relationship. The novel projects an inherent conflict therein coupled with a sense of anguish at the level of reflective consciousness. Here, the novelist builds up a gripping story of marital discord signifying the dialectics of the self and the Other. The novel is steadily laid on Maya, the female protagonist and her existential journey under a variety of pressures, chief of which is the duality of the self and the Other. Her loneliness is terrible, her tragedy gripping and her fate breathtaking. Displaying swollen subjectivities, Maya and Gautama are depicted as two poles who behave like binary opposites dialectically subjectivizing/objectivizing each other. Schroeder interprets the Sartrean understanding in this context:

One's experience of the social self [being-for-others] is disorienting; it displaces one's own hold on the world. Quite literally, one loses one's subjectivity and becomes an object. Thus, the Other's subjectivity effects a radical transformation of one's existence, a change of modality: from subject to object. (178)

Thus the Other does not only "...reveal to me what I was; he has established in me a new type of being [and]...this being could not have found any place in the For-itself" (Sartre 222). The whole narrative is a testimony to their bewildered relationship. Using stream-of-consciousness technique, Desai reveals the dynamics of existential anguish which persists between the two characters that are diametrically opposite to each other. They fail to become the carriers of positive values as they proceed on the dialectic of the self and the Other and hence are unable to achieve a sense of negotiated being-for-others. In the Sartrean parlance, the text involves them in a mutual dialogue of subjective desire. But both the characters are unable to achieve a sense of constitutive otherness due to which all the conflict/suffering comes into being. As they move on the dialectic of subject-object duality, they are unable to create a common world and fail to develop respect and understanding for each other as separate and independent individuals. This manifests "...inauthentic modes of being-with-others, modes that are detrimental to a truly human existence" (Macquire 103).

Maya, a childless and extremely sensitive young woman is married to Gautama, who is a lawyer. Gupta in his book titled *The Novels of Anita Desai: A Feminist Perspective* writes: "Childless, with an uncaring husband, she is lonely and loneliness is the bane and burden of her [being]" (13). They have an edgy relationship because of their contesting subjectivities representing the discursive signifying system(s) with respect to their being-in-the-world. Maya is overtly dreamy, impressionable, poetic, emotional, always unveiling a distinct displeasure with her present state of being/situated-ness. It also epitomizes the problematics of individuality versus conformity. All this is manifested in the intensity of her wild reactions, which are always out of proportion to the actual incident/event. On the other hand, Gautama is cerebral, detached, philosophical, logical, remote and highly practical individual. Maya is a person who feels

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intensely while Gautama is a man who thinks and thinks deeply. To use Eliot's phrase, there is a complete 'dissociation of sensibilities' in the context of their relationship. Maya is "...alienated from Gautama due to their incompatible temperaments" (Rani 33). Both are confined to their own respective worlds from which they don't want to come out. In other words, they live protectively in their own shells, manifesting a lethal opposition between the self and the Other. Maya's problems result from her failure to out-grow her wild subjectivity/self that she imbibed early in life. She fails to understand that "...one cannot ultimately control the social self [being-for-others], for although one can try to influence the Other's judgment, the Other is free to see one in whatever way he wishes. His power is grasped through one's impotence" (Schroeder 183). As she grows in years, there occurs incongruence between this self-concept and the expectations of others. Instead of changing with the times and assimilating varied experiences of constitutive otherness, she moves in the opposite direction by defending her beliefs against the Other and thus expands the gulf between the self and the Other. In this perspective, she faces the duality to search for alternative structures of being. Accordingly, the cry of the peacock becomes a symbol "...of her innermost cravings...the pathetic cry of her anguished soul" (Prasad 19). Another noted critic Bande aptly describes the cries as symbolizing "...the agony of an unfulfilled desire" (52). Philosophizing the cry motif in the context of the present critique, it is worth mentioning that Maya realizes that the Other (Gautama) she has encountered is a subject who posits a potential threat to her own subjectivity. She senses her being-for-others as a "...blank slate that the Other-as-subject fills in and like a cage created and sustained by the Other-as-subject" (Schroeder 184). It raises the possibility that she may become an object of the subjectivity of the other consciousness. Hence, she experiences herself being subjected to the objectification by another subject, i.e., Gautama. This aspect of Maya's 'being' reveals her conflict-ridden relationship with the Other (Gautama). The fact that the Other can objectify, forces her to see the Other as an object by denying him his subjectivity. Since the Other (Gautama) fails to support Maya's self-conceptions, it leads to the existential conflict in the novel. Extending the argument to wider inferences, the Maya-Gautama relationship equals Martin Buber's concept of 'I-It' relations. Buber holds that 'I-It' relation stands in opposition to 'I-Thou' relation. While being in an 'I-It' relation, one does not relate to the other person in wholeness but turns the Other into a thing or instrument and thus denies the existential authenticity to the Other. This fuels the conflicting and contesting space of interpersonal relations.

The dialectics of the self and the Other are at play from the very beginning of the novel. The novel opens with the death of Toto, Maya's pet dog—an incident which brings out the utterly opposed reactions of Maya and Gautama. Jain observes the importance of this event: "Toto's death is but an event which triggers off a set of responses and becomes a reason for her present misery" (24). Further, "...the cold indifference of Gautama is presented against the deep concern of Maya for Toto" (Choudhary 55). For the childless Maya, Toto has been a child substitute. She expounds her fondness for the dog as: "Childless woman do develop fanatic attachments to their pets, they say. It is no less relationship than that of a woman and her child, no less worthy of reverence and agonized remembrance" (Desai 15). She is bereaved and deeply

moved by Toto's death. The sight of Toto's small white corpse lying in the sun encircled by crows and flies humming over it makes her miserable and wretched. She rushes to the tap to wash the vision from her eyes which highlights her total immersion in the loss. Here, Desai skillfully projects the abyss between Gautama and Maya and the resultant emotional alienation of the tormented protagonist. Maya is in a state of emotional turbulence and is desperate for Gautama (the Other) to come to alleviate her misery by communicating to him her poignant feelings over the day's tragic happenings. On the contrary, Gautama fails to understand the enormity of the loss for Maya. Consider the following textual extract in this regard:

Later in the evening, when the sun hung pendant from the topmost branches of the trees, swelling visibly like—she thought—a purulent boil, until it was ripe to drop, her husband came home. He was very late. But as soon as he came, he did all that was to be done, quickly and quietly like a surgeon's knife at work. He telephoned the Public Works Department, he had them send their scavenging truck to take the corpse away, and saw it to himself that they lifted it in with care. When the truck had left, he came to her, wiping his fingers on a handkerchief much used and soiled during the day, yet still in neat folds. 'It is all over,' he said. Come and drink your tea, and stop crying. You mustn't cry.'... . And Gautama rose immediately, ordering tea to be sent to the study, forgetting her, forgetting her woes altogether. (Desai 8-9)

The above extract reveals that Gautama's casual attitude and surgeon like responses of telephoning the public works department to send their scavenging truck for disposing off the dog's corpse and then immediately afterwards inviting her for tea, shock Maya. Gautama, with his precision of logic and detached attitude, fails to understand Maya's misery and anguish over the death of the pet. This deepens the dichotomy of the self and the Other manifesting the absence of mutual understanding between them. Maya ruminates, "...how little he knew of my misery, or of how to comfort me. But then, he knew nothing that concerned me...it is his hardness" (Desai 14). In the Sartrean context, she muses, "...I am in a world which the Other has made alien to me, for the Other's look embraces my being" (Sartre 261). Hence, Maya's framework of meaning stands ruptured compelling her to face the wilderness of existential freedom vis-à-vis the need of a personal appropriation of the world of the Other. Unlike her, Gautama can't give himself up to the mourning of a pet's death and keep brooding over it. He looks upon death as a natural phenomenon to which all living beings are subjected to. In other words, he lacks the ability to recognize the fissures, gaps and contingency of existence. Kierkegaard in his important treatise *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* makes an important observation which holds value to interpret Gautama in a certain way. He says that, "It is one thing to think and another to exist in what has been thought" (228). He gives his logic-loaded cold response to Maya: "Why do I choose to think of you as one of those mysterious people who find such comfort in hocus-pocus, in the bogus ceremonies and childish trimmings with which we bury our dead? To me, it has always seemed the ultimate absurdity" (Desai 18) and then "As for death—Toto's dying, you will find, will become a matter

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of missing the games you played with him, finding empty time heavy on your hands and ultimately, a search for replacement” (Desai 21). Gautama fails to understand what Kierkegaard interprets, i.e. “...truth which edifies is the truth for you” (Either/Or 227). He is glued to his subjective truth/philosophy and hence he does not allow Maya to think independently. Not only this, they also lack the Kierkegardian ‘earnestness’ towards each other. By earnestness, Kierkegaard refers to a conscious awareness whereby every relationship is realized in its entirety/authenticity.

Gautama advocates a stoic acceptance of life and its brutal facts which Maya’s ‘being-for-itself’ is yet to learn. A worthy critic Srivastava in his book titled *Six Indian Novelists in English* comments: “No dark passages, no hidden labyrinths seem to exist in Gautama’s mind” (295). In Kierkegardian parlance, Gautama holds a fervent desire to reason himself into the façade of love towards the Other. However, both of them have obsessive loyalty to their philosophies and ideas, and neither is prepared to relent. Gautama’s rationality is silhouetted against Maya’s fancies. Jamkhandi supports the stance: “Their actions are the result of polar motivations. Desai exploits the occasion of the dog’s death to point out their singularities; the warm [Maya] and cold blooded [Gautama] responses to the world about them and within them” (20). Gautama is bewildered by Maya’s hyper-sensitivity whereas Maya is pained at his detachment and hence both of them appear to be objectifying each other. There is nothing to suggest the possibility of a healthy relationship between the two. In this sense, Maya experiences the pangs of alienation. Hence, her natural existence is marred by the dialectic of suppression governing her relationship with the Other. She desires for his companionship and close understanding but the way to achieve the same resists and defeats her. It is important to consider the Sartrean conception of desire again so as to comprehend Maya’s existential anguish. As discussed earlier, in the Sartrean framework, desire refers to the unsuccessful attempt to move beyond the looker-looked upon dialectic signifying determination of the Other’s freedom. Maya’s attempt proves to be futile since Gautama (the Other), who is desired to become an instrument of her use as an object, returns the look and thus destabilizes Maya’s desire mechanism. Maya experiences “...the look at the very center of [her] act as the solidification and alienation of [her] own possibilities” (Sartre 263). They do not even “...agree on which points, on what grounds this closeness of mind was necessary” (Desai 19).

Maya desires tender sensations like love, contact and communion. Seen thus, she displays an orientation for the Second Attitude towards others, i.e. the attitude which relates to the consciousness which judges others as the objects of its look and hence manifests the subject paradigm. When Gautama recites an Urdu couplet, Maya feels ecstatic: “Even if each star in the sky were a heart, What of it? Give to me one heart that is capable of sorrow” (Desai 23). The recitation of this couplet fascinates her since it manifests a slight trace of feeling which Maya earnestly desires in the Other (Gautama). Therefore the couplet, weighted with compassion and coming from Gautama, brings immense happiness to Maya. One small gesture of desired response from her husband places Maya’s subjectivity at calm—though momentarily. Her happiness here has its roots in the realization that she has been able to draw Gautama into the

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orbit of her subjective realm. In other words, she is happy over the fact that he sees what she desires him to see towards his Other and thus temporarily transcends the transcendence of the Other. However, the temporal happiness of Maya again gets shattered when Gautama forgets the quoted couplet later. He remains impervious to the inherent tenderness in the couplet but Maya, on the other hand, continues to turn it over and over in her mind: "I heard that couplet alone... . My heart stretched, stretched painfully, agonizingly expanding and swelling with the vastness of a single moment of absolute happiness" (Desai 23). Prasad observes this conflict as a continuum in the narrative: "This gap...between husband and wife, well developed, is felt throughout the novel. Maya and Gautama, always disagreeing, tiff with each other even over trifles" (5). The matrimonial bonds that bind the two are very fragile, "...neither true nor lasting but broken repeatedly, and repeatedly the pieces were picked up and put together again" (Desai 40). Spouses, as life partners, are supposed to share the joys and sorrows of each other. However, Maya feels the other way. She is miserable because "...he had not the faintest knowledge of her" (Desai 114). Gautama does not satisfy her intense longing for love and life. She muses over her husband's lack of love and understanding of her, and once, in a fit of intense despair and agony, tells him straight on his face:

Oh, you know nothing, understand nothing. 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, you have never loved. And you do not love me. (Desai 112)

Gautama remains engrossed in his work without caring for Maya or her "Soft, willing body or the lonely wanting mind that waited near her bed" (Desai 9). This makes Maya sufficiently aware of her loneliness and she sadly reflects "I am alone" (Desai 9). In this sense, Gautama equals the notion of 'average everyday man' of the Nietzschean philosophy and hence conceives himself as part of social order only. In this way, he is perceived to be lacking the innermost possibilities of the authentic being. In other words, Gautama fails to understand that "...the real subject is not the cognitive subject...[rather] the real subject is the ethically existing subject" (Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments 281). In addition, Gautama's lack of sexual interest in Maya leads to the blockade of Maya's libidinal satisfaction which transports the dichotomy of the self and the Other to another level. She rues about Gautama "...telling me to go to sleep while he worked at his papers, he did not give another thought to me" (Desai 9). Another critic Chakraverty in her book titled *Quest for Self-fulfillment in the Novels of Anita Desai* comments that "...the novel abounds with images of her sexual and romantic frustration" (36). Resultantly, Maya starts repressing her desires and it leads her towards the state of a repulsion paradigm. In other words, she experiences Heideggerian guilt for not living the kind of life she desires to live. Heidegger defines guilt as "...call of your consciousness to be that which you are not" (Heidegger 300). This call invites Maya to change the course of her life in a fundamental way. Hence, she starts experiencing a sort of repulsion towards the Other and hence deepens her alienation from Gautama. Interestingly, her repulsion/distantiation is existentially significant since it manifests a sort of insistence on

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subverting the Other according to her own idea of what he ought to be. In the Buberian sense, Maya fails to understand that "...there can be no 'I' without a Thou" (Macquire 110). However, to make sense of Other-as-subject isn't possible for her and hence she fails to measure the space of the 'in-between'—the self and the Other.

Left alone, Maya—through her imagination—regresses into the world of the father and her childhood memories and hence she exhibits her inauthentic being. As a result, she inhabits "...the shadow world of the memories which engulf her, wave upon wave" (Maini 121). In Heideggerian context, since past has exhausted all of its possibilities, living in past connotes a kind of meaninglessness/inauthenticity. However, the quest for satisfaction leads her back to her childhood in search of a solace where she feels, "...the world is like a toy specially made for me, painted in my favourite colours, set moving to my favourite tunes" (Desai 35). Sartre holds that, "...most people choose an aspect of their past, then project it into their future as part of themselves" (Palmer 67) and this is the Sartrean bad faith. The loving attention of her father makes Maya oblivious to the deadly shadow of reality and perhaps this is the reason that it blocks her encounter with reality. Unfortunately, all this indulgence on her father's part inflates her subjective self. As a consequence, she is under the constant spell of her father even after her marriage to Gautama. She venerates him as: "His [Maya's father] beam is especially tender, his attention especially loving... . I have always loved instinctively anyone who crinkles the corner of his eyes when he smiles. To me, it is a sign of warm-heartedness and reminds me, always, of this man's open love for me" (Desai 39). In the Sartrean context, Maya cherishes the First Attitude towards her father which includes slave, looked-upon and objectified paradigm and hence she needs a devoted father. Apparently, he does not disrupt Maya's world of free consciousness by returning the look. Seen thus, her subjectivity remains significantly conditioned. Accordingly, the relationship does not offer shame, conflict or an alienating effect and thus suspends the subject/object duality to a certain extent. However, what she fails to see is that the world of her father is a world where she is denied interaction and involvement with her surroundings. She is discouraged from developing an individual set of values unraveling her objectification—though of a different kind. In its implication, this crucial factor heightens the void in her present relationship with Gautama. As the gratification of her desires is not possible, her frustration witnesses a vertical and horizontal growth. Since Maya has led a life of perfect control and security at her father's house, she expects similar love/security from her husband. However, Gautama fails to satisfy her intense longing for her desired love and life. She is left to the solitude and silence of the house which preys upon her and intensifies her alienation. On the other hand, Gautama criticizes Maya's ignorant attitude towards the realities of life. He feels that she has confined herself only to the picture books. While Maya thinks her childhood to be the best period of her life, Gautama makes her realize that it is a delusion. In this sense, Maya's growth towards emotional maturity is visibly hampered and even after her marriage she cannot get over the world of illusions. Though she physically lives with her husband but emotionally and mentally, she always finds herself to be in the world of her father. Seeing her abnormal behaviour, Gautama considers her, "...a spoilt baby, so spoilt that she can't bear one adverse

word. Everyone must bring a present for little Maya—that is what her father taught her" (Desai 115). All this instills in her a desire for the companion of her imagination, who can indulge and pamper her in exchange for her love. Gautama fails to fit in the frame of desires of Maya, which leaves Maya caught between "...opposed-role expectations" (Dicaprio 369) intensifying the pangs of alienation and conflict. The loss of her mother at an early age also fractures her 'self' and causes deviant behavioral comportment in the later part of her life.

The circumstances under which Maya chooses to marry Gautama also contribute to the failure of their conjugal life. She chooses to marry Gautama "...a tall, stooped and knowledgeable friend" (Desai 46) of her father at the latter's proposal. Maya ponders, "...our marriage was grounded upon the friendship of the two men, and the mutual respect in which they held each other, rather than upon anything else" (Desai 39). Therefore, the roots of the relationship are not grounded in mutual love/understanding but upon the friendship of the two men and their respect for each other. Maya holds onto Gautama because he is chosen by the doting father and she desires him to be "...a father surrogate" (Raizada 33) or "...a younger protégé of her father" (Parmar 3). Maya ruminates, "...'No one, no one else'...loves me as my father does" (Desai 43). But as Gautama becomes more and more aware of Maya, their relationship goes on declining steadily. It is further underlined with Gautama's sexual sterility. Importantly, "...sex is not only a pleasurable experience but it can act as a revitalizing force in an otherwise sterile life" (Rajeshwar 15). On the contrary, Gautama (the Other) refuses to be reduced into a mere father substitute. Srivastava remarks: "The attachment of a little motherless daughter to her father is a common occurrence but when Maya detaches her libidinal urges from father and hooks them onto Gautama, she expects a similar satisfaction but it does not happen to be so" (284). Importantly, Gautama holds Maya's father responsible for making her believe that the world was a toy especially made for her and thus subjects her to double objectification. He shatters Maya's world by saying:

The realization that another person...very close to both you and your father, whatever you might say...does not place the same trust as you do in the adored figure...all this shakes your faith, proving it to have been... (Desai 146)

Her world of fanciful beliefs gets shattered when she faces the returning look of the Other. In this sense, the gap between their swollen subjectivities shines brighter manifesting a dialectical contest between the self and the Other. Maya realizes: "...I had grown too involved...here lay the catalysis of my unrest" (Desai 60). Their marriage denotes a complete mess in every respect. Their matrimonial bonds are very fragile and tenuous. As a result, Maya considers her marriage as a hopeless regret and a broken affair. Maya considers Gautama as if 'unavailable' to her and hence she is unable to establish rapport with her husband and remains an utterly alienated individual throughout the novel. Here, it is worth considering Gabriel Marcel's concept of 'availability'. By availability, Marcel means the willingness to offer oneself at the disposal of the other. He holds that people are largely unavailable to one another; such unavailable persons are pre-occupied with themselves and thus closed to themselves. However,

‘presence’ is opposite to unavailability and it “...depends on a person’s coming out of himself or transcending himself towards the other” (Macquire 111). However when each person tries to be a God, the duality of the self and the Other is deemed to deepen.

Since the love project with the Other (Gautama) has failed miserably, Maya feels her loneliness to be of Gautama’s making. On the contrary, Gautama does show occasional care for her in his own philosophical manner. However, Maya fails to translate it into meaning, leaving the relationship in a chaotic state of affairs. It is worthwhile to note here that he does notice Maya’s unhappiness and sorrow and even tries to bring some relief by philosophizing with her about certain aspects of emotional intensity: “I relaxed then. I sat upon a pillow and saw, opposite me, a round faced child in white petticoat gazing bleakly out of the silvered mirror” (Desai 66). Such temporal realization is also found in Maya but the same happens to be extremely short-lived. The utopia Maya desires, is unattainable. Her quest for the perfect Other remains unfulfilled. This sort of realization comes easily to Gautama with his detached temperament but Maya is emotionally far more vulnerable than him. He feels the harsh sting of the discrepancy between desire and achievement and thus refuses to act as an object of Maya’s fantasies and false dreams. It is Gautama’s preference for logic on all counts and Maya’s desire to live a fairy tale life that constitutes their fundamental suffering.

Gautama tries to satiate Maya’s wild subjectivity with undesired actions containing logic and rationality and hence actually widens the gulf between the self and the Other. But Gautama’s attempts at philosophizing with Maya show the contrast between what human will sets out to do and thinks it can do and what it actually does. By quoting from the Bhagvad Gita he actually confronts Maya, who considers it as the negation of life and feels all the more miserable. Gautama believes that any deviation from the path shown by the Bhagvad Gita will make life empty and “...you will continue to reach out and grasp for everything—every desirable thing in view and imagine you have filled your life and given meaning to your existence by doing so” (Desai 111). Seen thus, he is “...earthly with his cold logic, dispassionate objectivism and frequent quotations from the Bhavadgita” (Pandeya 38). Whereas Maya is perpetually wallowing in sentiments, Gautama aspires for the ideal of renunciation. Mukherjee opines that at times “Gautama comes very close to one traditional ideal of life and achieves an inner calm” (100). Therefore he pleads to Maya: “You should be capable of a greater detachment than I, hence of greater peace of mind and stability” (Desai 119). It is pertinent to note that Gautama partially has a cool, analytical attitude towards Maya’s zest for life but she fails to see any connecting link between her husband’s philosophy and her love for life. Another noted critic Ram supports the stance by pointing out that “...the novel conflicts between a powerful yes and a potent no” (35). The philosophy in the Bhagvad Gita meant for the attainment of serenity, stability and peace of mind implies for Maya a nullification of life and its vivid aspects. She responds to the beauty and poetry of life. Krishnaswamy believes that “...she [Maya] refuses to concede victory to the doctrine of Karma, of inexorable life and death and punishment as parts of an immortal cyclic process to which all humanity is bound forever” (249). Hence, she is happy to lose herself in her sensuous and sentimental world and searches for the same in the Other. Maya is drawn to the

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gratification of the desires of the senses and of the heart. She is opposed to the ideal of utter renunciation of earthly desires and terms doctrine of the Bhagvad Gita as "...an inhuman dry stick" (Desai 112). Srivastava remarks: "Since she is still a child, abstract thinking is of no help to her" (284). She desires to live each moment of her life. Her sensitivity, love of the beautiful, the colorful; passes by her spouse completely since he believes in detachment. Maya says, "You are untouched. How can I explain it to you then? I shall never be able to tell you now. You shall never help me. It is all true. One of us will win, the other must lose" (Desai 97). This tragic gulf between the two constitutes the crux of their inharmonious relationship.

The failure of Maya and Gautama to build a bond between themselves is essentially due to their rival subjectivities towards life and its various existential components. The reason of such a failure is consequent upon the idea that "...to be objectified by the Other is to be totalized, defined, judged, limited—incorporated into a system of ends that one has not chosen—and at the mercy of an alien consciousness" (Schroeder 176). For instance, love is a sentiment to which Maya attaches a great deal of importance. In fact, Maya's quest is for 'a perfect love' where thoughts are understood without being said and feelings are conveyed mutely. As discussed earlier, Sartre holds that such a love is doomed to failure since it is the project of trying to be seen as the most beloved object in the eyes of another or to make the Other look at us in a certain way in order to be judged as the most valuable object. In other words, it is an attempt to treat love as a controlling phenomenon since through love; we intend to control/condition the subjectivity of the Other. On the contrary, to love someone in such a way also means negation of a free consciousness. In this sense, love cannot be a satisfying experience. To elucidate it further, love involves our wanting the Other to freely see us as the most beautiful object, but at the same time it also wants the Other to be enslaved by how beautiful we are and, thus depriving the Other of their genuine otherness. Such a situation is far from nihilating the subject/object duality. Seen thus, the argument contends that Maya-Gautama's love-beloved paradigm proves to be quite unstable. Maya experiences the absence of a desired love in her cold, skeletal relationship with her husband who displays thorough insensitivity towards her. Maya exhibits her tall claims like, "How I want to love. How it is important to me" (Desai 112) or, "Is there nothing in you that would be touched ever so slightly, if I told you I live my life for you" (Desai 114) gradually realizes the shortcomings of love: "It was the first time that I admitted to the limitations of love, and I flushed now that I realized it, yet I was in too agitated a state of mind to reflect long upon the shameful of this false love that I proclaimed" (Desai 103). Now, Maya disdains Gautama. On the other hand, Gautama considers Maya's desired love as nothing more than a great, splendid ideal of the young woman which ultimately gets reduced to the mundane superfluities, such as domestic economics, payment of bills and rearing of children. In this sense, Gautama offers a counter-point to Maya's idealism. At another time while ruminating over the possibility of her nihilation or that of her husband Maya feels: "At no time did I fear for him, sense him to be in danger as, surely, I would have, if my love had been beyond the imaginary and transitory" (Desai 165). Importantly, Maya is too much in love with herself, which makes her lack the ability to love the Other and this serves to testify Gautama's professed hollowness of

love. It is not that love has no significance for Gautama, but it is a different kind of love: “Love that is without any ambition, without any desire, without any life except that which keeps it alive, burning.” (Desai 119).

The gulf of the self and the other is also embossed in the names of Maya and Gautama. Maya, the illusion, runs after the illusory and Gautama, the detached Yogi, is like a mass of large and steadfast rock, dry and immobile, unaffected by the lapping waves of the sea. In the Sartrean context, Maya’s being-for-itself treats Gautama as being-in-itself at this juncture of the narrative. Prasad aptly remarks: “Chapter Four brings into focus the essential contrast between Maya and Gautama by juxtaposing luscious Urdu poetry and arid Indian philosophy together” (4). There exists no homogeneity of interest or attitude between Gautama and Maya. Maya has a romantic love for the beautiful, the colourful and the sensuous; Gautama is no romantic. She is fascinated by sights and sounds of nature and many a times she spends a lot of time in the company of nature. Contrarily, Gautama is totally oblivious to nature. Maya is shocked to find that Gautama cannot distinguish between the smell of Petunia and that of Lemons, "Like a horse, he raised his head, pointed his chin, and sniffed the air. He had not noticed anything himself, never did. 'Ah', he said, having sniffed. 'Yes and the lemons also'— (Desai 19). Gautama is tranquil, undisturbed though not wholly indifferent to what is happening around him. He is like a lilly upon water, floating but with its petals dry, whereas the catalysis of Maya’s unrest is her habit of getting involved. The sham and fakeness of the people at Lal’s party; the exhibitionism of the cabaret dancers and the grotesqueness of the men leering at them are all visible to Gautama. But all of this leaves him selectively unperturbed because he apparently realizes that everything and everybody cannot measure up to his conception of perfection. On the other hand, the same makes Maya miserable and wretched. She lacks Gautama’s detached attitude and sense of the practical and is thus unable to put up with the normal, everyday mediocrity.

The problematics of the self and the Other are distinctly marked in the most conspicuous communication gap between Maya and Gautama. Gautama has access only to the outward manifestations of her thoughts. She realizes that to speak is to live but fails whenever she makes an attempt, "...to involve him in my matters, my wants and cares, which to him were childish, tiresome and even distasteful" (Desai 113). Another critic Dash in her book titled *Form and Vision in the Novels of Anita Desai* observes: “Maya’s perception of the world around her is in terms of the warmth and profundity...that transcends the insipid and commercial relationships of which Gautama is the symbol” (21). Though Maya and Gautama make several attempts to reach out to each other but their different personalities prevent the flow of effective communication. Maya chooses to enjoy the company of the cat and takes her to the garden. Maya says, "We tiptoed around each other with caution, and sometimes—in brief, breathless moments—we came close enough to touch" (Desai 33). This communion with nature also projects a painful aspect of Maya's life, her inner dryness. With no vocation to keep herself busy and sublimate her desires, Maya seeks refuge in her loneliness. She withdraws herself into a world without human contact. Such an attempt worsens her situation and darkens her subjective self.

Amplifying it further, Maya is childless even after four years of marriage. She is frustrated at her childlessness and that is why she gets emotional at the visualization of the rats suckling their young ones, "Rats will suckle their young most tenderly. I know this, as now I lived quite near one, with seven young ones nestling between her legs" (Desai 126). Prasad opines, "The image of rats suckling their young obliquely indicates Maya's agonizing obsession with her barrenness and childlessness" (56). Another reason that obstructs Maya's communication with her husband is the brooding nature of Gautama. Whenever Maya speaks emotionally, he gets irritated and says, "...you go on chattering like a monkey, and I am annoyed that I have been interrupted in my thinking" (Desai 16). Maya thinks that Gautama seems to have arrived at a Buddha like detachment and is unperturbed by her sorrow. She feels, "In his world there were vast areas in which he would never permit me, and he could not understand that I could even wish to enter them, foreign as they were to me" (Desai 89). Gautama's coldness alienates her further and increases her sense of isolation. She craves for Gautama's company as well as his understanding of her. She believes in involvement, whereas Gautama "...is the preacher of detachment on every count" (Desai 17). Although living as husband and wife, they are strangers to each other. They talk and converse while strolling together, but it is only a meaningless conversation that does not bring them closer or inspire Maya, at least, with feelings of being related:

And we strolled up and down the lawn, talking desultorily, not really listening to each other, being intent, on our own paths which, however, ran parallel and closely enough for us to briefly brush against each other, now and then reminding us—or, perhaps only myself—of the peace that comes from companion life alone, from brother flesh. (Desai 18)

Just as hyper-sensitivity and sensuousness are a second nature to Maya so are logic and rationality to Gautama. They go to extremes in their approaches. There is nothing common between the two. The ever-inflating subjectivity and morbid introversion in Maya unfold the emergence of vague fears and apprehensions. On experiencing herself as the Other-as-object, the resultant loneliness throws Maya into the hallucinatory world of the albino astrologer's prophecy whereby she has to combat this ominous fixation single-handedly. Bande rightly opines that, "Throughout the novel, we are given to feel that the albino priest's predictions and Gautama's lack of sympathetic understanding are the fountain-heads of Maya's neurosis" (53). The sooth-sayer's prediction of death either of Maya or of Gautama in fourth year of their marriage hovers incessantly in Maya's consciousness and brings her close to a mental crisis. She is "...agonizingly aware of the net of the inescapable" (Sivaramkrishna 18). Sharma in her book *Symbolism in Anita Desai's Novels* states: "Maya's mind is constantly seized by the fear of death" (27). The terrifying words of the prediction haunt her like drum beats:

And four years it was now, we had been married for four years. It was as though the moonlight had withered the shadows in my mind as well, leaving it all dead-white, or dead-black. When the drums fell silent and the moon began to sink over

the trees, I knew the time had come. It was now to be either Gautama, or I. (Desai 32-33)

This childhood experience of the prophecy of the albino plays a very important part in Maya's life. Though she lives in the house but in the most basic sense she does not live there except in her own mind. She can never forget that terrible place when the Ayah took her to the albino astrologer where he lived, "...like a sluggish white worm, indoor always, in his dark room at the temple gates" (Desai 28). The memory of her encounter with the albino priest continues in the novel and deepens her loneliness. Whenever alone, she listens to the cries of the peacock and is immediately reminded of the prediction of the priest. Maya feels so possessed by the vision of the albino astrologer that she recalls his words about the myth surrounding the peacock's cry, "And now I recalled that oil-slick, sibilant tongue whispering poetry to me in the bat tortured dark. 'Do you not hear the peacocks call in the wilds? Are they not blood-chilling, their shrieks of pain? 'Pia, Pia,' they cry. 'Lover, lover Mio, mio,—I die, I die'" (Desai 95). Listening to the cries of the peacocks in the rainy seasons, she recollects the time of her childhood when she used to visit jungles and observe the mating of the peacocks but now the same cries make her restless and she realizes, "And I knew I should never again sleep in peace. For, God, now I was caught in the net of the inescapable, and where lay the possibility of mercy, of release?" (Desai 97). Thus, she compares her state of mind to a peacock and becomes conscious of her alienation. Iyengar says, "If one of the determining causes of Maya's tragedy is the albino astrologer's prophecy, another is the myth surrounding the peacock's cry [as well]" (467).

Importantly, the death-motif is a very important influence on Maya's consciousness and it extends her alienation from Gautama. It sufficiently reveals that since her childhood she has been haunted by death, either her own, or that of her husband. The death motif, as we see, is built into the structure of the story. For Maya, the death wish occurs recurrently. Being a prisoner of the past, she lives perpetually in the shadowy world of her memories. The memory of the prediction of death made by the albino astrologer for one of the spouses; has always been throbbing in her consciousness. The death of Toto has queered the pitch. The more she thinks of death, the deeper she finds herself in love with life which brings forth the element of her existential duality. It is her love with life that she transfers her death wish to Gautama. She talks of death frequently even though she is too young to worry or discuss about death. Gautama does not take interest in her discussions, but she continues to ask about his views regarding death, "...after all, what if we are wrong, we Hindus? What if there is a Christian hell? Oh, I do hate to think of it...I should not like to die and find myself in purgatory, should you, Gautama?" (174) Jain says in this respect:

But for Maya self-control is fast slipping away. Her pre-occupation with the idea of death and with the possible kinds of after life, the grip of the cyclic births—all these render her hold on reality and control tenuous and intermittent. And she moves towards insanity and destruction. (28)

Speaking dualistically, the association of the foreboding of her own death comes into a severe clash with her sensuous love for life and she is gripped by a frenzied wish to hold on to

life. Her existential anguish is reflected in the expression: "I am dying and I am in love with living—God let me sleep, get rest. But no, I will never sleep again. There is no rest anymore—only death and waiting" (Desai 84) and later, "Torture, guilt, dread, imprisonment—these were the four walls of my private hell that no one could survive for long. Death was certain" (Desai 88). Gautama offers her merely cold logic since he considers her "...a spoilt baby" (Desai 98). She is unable to free her thoughts from the fear of death and her sensuous love for life. In this sense, her desire for self-preservation makes her shift the burden of the prophecy to Gautama's life. Perhaps it is Gautama who is destined to die. Maya does not feel prepared for her death, while Gautama, she thinks, has reached a stage of detachment and indifference to life. She says, "The man had no contact with the world, or with me. What would it matter to him if he dies and lost even the possibility of contact? What would it matter to him?" (Desai 175). She tries to penetrate into his world but he is absorbed in his work and does not realize that she had not only entered the room, but had also spoken and left. She wonders, "...could death disturb him then?" (Desai 166)

It runs parallel to her feeling of being encaged and entrapped. Her existential duality is also reflected through an elaborate use of metaphoric condensations and metonymic displacements and the same become the formal signifiers to uncover the underlying sickness of their relationship. The signification of desire and counter-desire takes place around these clusters of condensed and displaced images. It is in this sense that the signifying system of the text represents the problematics of the self and the Other. As the novel progresses, the intensity of the peacock's dance escalates too. The peacock dances madly, crying for its lover in monsoon season and then killing itself. The images of the albino, the kathakali dancer, the bronze Shiva, and other images of rhythmic movement cross the mind of the heroine. The image of the train passing a railway crossing at night evokes a world of loneliness. The dance of Shiva signifies the dance of death. Prasad notes that this dance connotes "...liberation, a way out of the puzzling existentialist predicament in which Maya finds herself trapped" (18). Under these circumstances, Maya needs Gautama's love and attention the most but he, being impassive and phlegmatic, continues to maintain a stolid attitude, which only exacerbates Maya's anguish. Since Maya is morally not strong enough to measure up to the challenge posed by the evil prophecy of the albino, she frantically, "...turned in desperation to find someone to help me, but no one came...for the first time in my life I was defenseless and utterly alone" (Desai 128). Thus she looks around for a savior but everyone—her father, husband, brother, friends—fails her. Maya symbolically questions: "Will the summer never end? Will the monsoon never come?" (Desai 143). Krishnaswamy comments: "Gautama, the brilliant up and coming lawyer, has neither the time nor the capability of showing tenderness towards her, at a time when she most needs it, buffeted as she is by the albino's prophecy of disaster and death in her life, four years after her marriage" (245). Moving from one fit of anguish to another, she assures herself that Gautama has no contact with the world. She ponders: "The man had no contact with world or with me. What would it matter to him if he died and lost even the possibility of contact? What would it matter to him? It was I, I who screamed with the peacocks, screamed at the sight of rainclouds, screamed

at their disappearance, screamed in mute horror” (Desai 146). Hence, she uses his restraint to convince herself that he is the one who should die. "It is against a background of frustrated married life that the haunting sense of death obsesses her. The fatal distance between Gautama and Maya is the basic theme of psychic disintegration” (Belliappa 10). Later when she tells him that she misses Toto, she waits for a response from him, for an offer of understanding and compassion:

Having offered the confession, I was overcome with a desperate timidity, begging him once more to answer, to come and meet me half-way, in my own world, not merely demand of me, brusquely, to join me in his which, however safe, was so very drab and no longer offered me security. Had he done so, all might have been quite different. (Desai 198)

But Gautama has forgotten even the existence of Toto and asks her who Toto was. To Maya, Gautama's words "...were as grim as any death sentence, absolute and unredeemable” (Desai 198). Maya cries out her anguish: "...I am torn between two worlds—the receding one of grace, the approaching one of madness. My body breaks in the battle... . All order is gone out of my life. There is no plan, no peace, nothing to keep me within the pattern of familiar, everyday living. Thoughts come, incidents occur, then they are scattered, and disappear” (Desai 148-149). When the world is "...no longer in control of itself” (Desai 153) and "...there was no relation at all” (Desai 163), she takes the plunge into a radical second attitude for others and begins to display indifference, hatred and sadism. She now is indifferent to the idea of confiding in him. In her existential blindness, she concomitantly ignores the Other as the foundation of her being-in-the-world and being-for-others and develops a sadistic attitude towards the Other. By inflicting pain, the sadist in her yearns that the brute facticity of the Other (Gautama) must creep into his consciousness. Contemplating murder, Maya persuades him to go for a stroll on the roof. In a fit of frenzy she pushes Gautama down the parapet. She is quite aware in her moments of lucidity, it is not fate but "...a chain of attachment, that hauled me, slowly and steadily, down the dark corridor to the pit where knowledge lay” (Desai 186). In this context it is relevant to quote Kumar: “Maya stabs at Gautama illogically time and again. Why can't he burst into tears at the sight of a pregnant lady? Why can't he shriek with pity for caged monkeys? Must he believe in an after-life? His sensible answers always drive her to insensate fury and she goes deeper and deeper into the inferno of over-heated mind” (178). After the death of Gautama, Maya gets caught up in an infantile regression. She finds that life is not worth living and realizes its fundamental absurdity. By killing the Other (Gautama), she perhaps realises that eradication of the Other is not a solution. Importantly, such annihilation (of Gautama) does not freeze the duality of existence. Seen thus, she is now burdened with the impossibility of a negotiation with the Other (Gautama). On failing to resolve such duality-laden existential questions, she prefers to commit suicide. Camus in his important treatise *The Myth of Sisyphus* holds that “There is one but truly serious problem and that is suicide” (1). Her tragedy is largely, "...the tragedy of woman destroyed at the altar of marriage” (Sharma 57). Prasad says further:

By connecting Maya's neurosis to her marriage, Anita Desai transforms the conventional story of marital disharmony into a moving study of the psyche of a woman who seeks love, must die at the altar, collective neurosis which tries to shatter the very identity of women in our contemporary society dominated by man, in which woman longing for love is driven made or compelled to commit suicide. (74)

The differences between them are too obvious for either to pretend that they do not exist. The gulf between the two is neither of Maya's making nor of Gautama's doing, but a result of their refusal to renounce their interests for the sake of one another. As a result, Maya identifies herself either with caged birds, monkeys and bears or with the disturbed conditions, i.e., the dust storms.

Hence, *Cry, the Peacock* portrays the dichotomy of the self and the Other which is signified through yoking together of two contrasting subjects and the fatal outcome thereof. Every page drifts Maya and Gautama farther away from each other and their evenings are reduced to a glass of fresh lemonade, or a cup of hot tea, and an hour of matrimonial silences. Singhal opines that Maya "...confronts the existential either/or [duality]. She suffers existential anguish for there is a conflict" (102). Maya lives in a secluded limbo of her personal woes and misgivings. She turns into a hypochondriac. The ever-widening gyre of her apprehensions and fears not only engulfs her person but the duality-led blizzard sweeping her mind also devours her husband. Gautama's rationality appears as callousness to her. Suffering from such distantiation from her husband, Maya weaves a nightmarish web with her diseased imagination which enmeshes her. Her spell of delusion leads her to the foreboding that a sinister event is about to take place. It is this un-negotiated dualistic delusion and the consequent obsessive-compulsive drives that lead her to kill Gautama towards the end of the novel. The act manifests a direct expression of an undesirable motive or impulse. The compulsion to kill has seeds in a deep-rooted existential conflict. Maya's killing of her husband is a revenge reaction arising out of her own frustration, unfulfilled longings and her husband's cold unresponsiveness. Through this murder-suicide paradigm, she perhaps chooses an inauthentic fulfillment and is relieved of both the past and the ongoing anguish.

Cry, The Peacock is thus the story of a hypersensitive woman who fails miserably to modify her subjectivity according to the needs of her life as a married woman vis-à-vis the dominant structures of the patriarchal society. Maya and Gautama are aware of the crisis in their relationship, but fail to fathom its magnitude. Seen thus, they make no sincere efforts to transform their skewed relationship and consequently they remain suspended in the realm of duality. As a result, they both are unable to arrive at a point of negotiated intersectionality that would resolve their crisis. Both refuse to "...concede to compromise" (Desai 93), or reduce dissonance, and therefore, conjugal bliss eludes them. Importantly, Maya holds the Other (Gautama) as if consuming her existential freedom and thus responds to him in bad faith. It is in this perspective that the dialectics of the self and the Other play havoc with the life of Maya and

Gautama and culminate into the vortex of their deaths. To sum up, they face an irreconcilable duality, i.e., the duality of the self and the Other.

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