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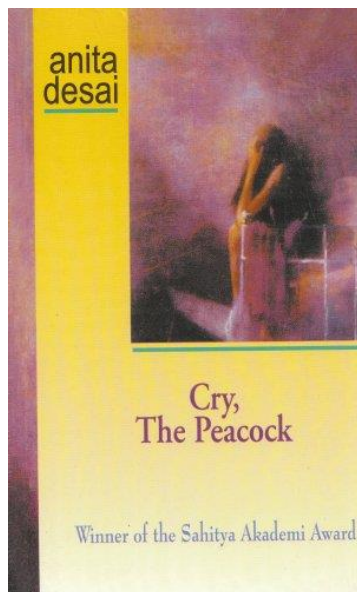
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## A Psychological Cry of an Alienated Woman: *Anita Desai's Cry, The Peacock*

Dr. C. Alice Evangaline Jebaselvi, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.

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Dr. C. Alice Evangaline Jebaselvi, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.

A Psychological Cry of an Alienated Woman: Anita Desai's *Cry, The Peacock*

## ***Cry, the Peacock, A Feminine Novel***

*Cry, the Peacock*, by the most famous Indian writer, Anita Desai, remains a splendid piece of writing. The novel has its unique genius and characters. The theme of alienation a recurring motif of Anita Desai is found in this novel. *Cry, the Peacock* is a typically “feminine” novel, a novel of sensibility rather than action. The novel *Cry, the Peacock* portrays the psychological sufferings of Maya, a young protagonist.

### **Maya’s Life and Suffering**

Maya was a childless woman. Maya’s detached life was another reason for her psychological disorder. Whomever she loved in her life departed from her very soon and she was alienated completely. Maya loved her father and her pet dog too. Her pet dog’s death affected the inner mind of Maya. Maya, apart from all differences, loved her husband to the core. But Gautama became careless and never noticed the psychological imbalance of his wife. Her utmost love made her to believe the prophecy. She was more scared of her death than her departure from Gautama. She believed that the revelation of the prophecy may create a wall between them. So she hid the prophecy from Gautama, who was very much detached in life. Once when Maya was fully admiring the moon, Gautama started to talk about a case. In a fit of frenzy Maya pushed him from upstairs. Maya was psychologically affected because of the death of Gautama. As she felt guilty, she committed suicide and underwent a pathetic psychological death.

### **A Motherless Girl**

Maya was a motherless girl, who was over cared by her father. When she married Gautama she felt that, she lost her father and his affection forever. Often, she used to contrast things with her father’s home. Maya was over joyful with the company of her father and her whole world went around him. The first shocking incident she met in her life was the prophecy of the albino priest, which pushed her into a fit of fear. Only in her house, Maya had complete ecstasy. She says, “Delight makes me drowsy” (35). In the palm of Maya’s father, Maya was innocent enough to know, the humdrums of the outside world

### **The Prophecy of the Albino Priest**

The most tremendous thing that happened during the span of Maya’s life was nothing but the prophecy of the albino priest. The prophecy was a lengthy one. On hearing it, Maya

psychologically had a stress, in her mind. The prophecy mingled into her blood which even after many years gave her fear and tension. Maya used to say, “He had been-large or small? I cannot remember, but his eyes I do: they were pale, opaque, and gave him an appearance of morbidity, as though he had live like a sluggish white worm...” (29).

Death’ . . . ‘to one of your’. When you are married-and you shall be married young’ . . .  
‘Death-an early one-by unnatural causes’ . . .  
‘Four years after your marriage, so the stars prophecy’. (29-31)

The thought of the albino priest disturbed Maya. The prophecy of the albino priest was the first shock in her life. It troubled her tender heart. Each word of the priest was very clear and was recorded well in her mind.

### **Maya’s Loneliness and Dissatisfaction**

Maya’s loneliness was due to her over imagination. Gautama was totally rational, philosophical and detached and he never gave time for Maya. He always stuck to the Bhagavad Gita and constant in the philosophy of detachment.

Their indifference is mainly due to their different attitude; Gautama was always a performer and he never conjured his thought in love and attachment. Maya loved him and she wanted to fulfill his desires; whenever Gautama became indifferent, she was shattered inwardly. After the vulgar Lal’s party when she said it was horrible Gautama said, “Facts are made to be accepted-to be studied. Not to be wept over” (59). This made Maya distressed and she felt that Gautama was devoid of decency and was moving away from her.

Even sexually Maya was not satisfied. Sex is a part of pleasure in married life. But Gautama even rejected it because of his tiredness. She compared the cry of peacock, with her cry for love. As the peacock cried ‘pia pia’, ‘lover, lover’, Maya also cried for Gautama to accompany her in love. But without the hands of Gautama, Maya felt insecure as if, she were caught up in the net of inescapable suffering and she cried for help, but in vain. As Prabhat Kumar Pandeya rightly says:

Maya fails to evoke any response from Gautama either because of exhaustion or boredom. The sensitive wife appears to him petulant, pampered childish and immature, unable to cope with hard facts of life. The sexual hunger gives another blow to the shattered woman. Physical intimacy, the mere warmth of flesh may alleviate her suffering ... Later this unsatisfied physical hunger finds expression in an act of delicate violence. (Lonely Voyage 83).

### **Gautama and Maya**

Gautama's negligence and his way of compartmentalization disintegrated Maya into psychological depression soon. Maya substituted the factors and happenings around her and was trying to say something. Arjuna's letter and the remembrance of the prophecy were also fate. Summer season began and it destroyed all the beauty of nature. The heat of the sun, made the flowers, birds, insects, green leaves to disappear. As the heat suppressed all the beauty, Maya too felt suppressed. The dust storm is not more violent than, the storm inside Maya's heart.

### **Depression**

From the beginning of the novel itself Maya's deep depression was evident. She loved her pet dog very much. Because of poor care and due to the carelessness of the vet it died, one day. Maya was literally crying and waited for her husband. Gautama came late and did not show any emotions. When Maya lost Toto she felt she was alone and she wanted someone to console her. She became nervous and walked here and there and whenever she crossed the veranda and saw the dead body of Toto, she became more and more sad. Maya's husband Gautama came and gave the corpse to the welfare office. Maya ran behind the vehicle which took Toto.

The death of Toto had a great impact on Maya. Being a childless woman she developed fanatic attachment to Toto. She always said that childless women do develop fanatic attachments to their pets. Maya was tormented by the death of Toto and she was more agitated to see her husband's emotionless reaction to the death of her pet dog. As Bipin B. Panigrahi and Viney Kirpal rightly observes:

At the root of Maya's psychic retrogression lies the disparity between their dispositions: she experiences the world through the senses while Gautama looks at it through reason

and commonsense. While on the metaphysical level, the tension represents a conflict, between two contrary approaches, on the literal level it turns out to be a conflict between objective reality and the Self-nurtured illusion of Maya, Maya loses control over herself because she lives in illusion (71).

### **Total Alienation**

Maya was alienated not only from Gautama and felt lonely, but also from the whole family of Gautama. They did not even know a thing called love in the world. They used to discuss about parliament, rampant, trade, cares of bribery, politics but never about love. For them love was a matter which should not come out, while they speak. They treated Maya as a toy and never used to discuss serious matters with her. So Maya did not find any intimacy with them and she failed to communicate with them properly. Though they went for shopping with Maya, it couldn't help Maya to recover fast.

Maya's complete psychological depression is clear by the end of this chapter. She became aware of the drum sound of the priest and she shouted "stop them, tell them, tell them to stop", she slowly and silently in an inaudible voice replied to the drums. She thought of keeping the matter a secret because it may cause a great danger. Maya herself realized that she was becoming mad. She inwardly needed someone to rescue her from this great danger. She called out. "'Gautama', I said, pressing my hands to my ears. 'Arjuna. I believe I am ill. Something has gone wrong'. But in silence only I no longer dared speak aloud. It must be kept a secret. The danger of it, the terrible danger" (128).

### **Progressive Disintegration**

Maya disintegrated more and more when she saw the climatic changes, she imprisoned herself in the world of imaginary fear, and wanted to go off from the realities of life. She loved too much everyone around her but no one saw her in the correct sense. No one responded to her love. There was a dust storm, outside her room and she also realized it inwardly. Gautama made her more stunned by asking her, who was Toto; these words were said by Gautama in a causal walk in the garden. It took much time for Maya to recover from the shock which Gautama unknowingly gave Maya, only pains, pains of loneliness, and pains of solitude Maya said.

“But it was Gautama who found many more things to teach that heart, new, strange and painful things. He taught it pain, for there were countless nights when I had been tortured by a humiliating sense of neglect, of loneliness, of desperation that would not have existed had I not loved him so, had he not meant so much”. (167)

### **Detachment and Suicide**

Gautama was always detached. One evening they went for a stroll upstairs. They talked plainly and for a long time they stopped talking anything and when she asked him, what he was thinking, he started to talk about a case. Maya was shocked to find his mechanical attitude, even at the time of intimacy. When they turned, at the edge of the parapet, Maya enjoyed the light of the moon. But without knowing all these things, Gautama started to move in front of her, to say something. This was the great blunder he did and Maya felt he interrupted her by, “...coming between me and the worshipped moon... ‘Gautama!’ I screamed in fury, and thrust out my arms towards him, out at him into him and past him, saw him fall then, pass through an immensity of air, down to the very bottom.”. (173)

Out of guilt, Maya committed suicide. When Nila’s mother heard footsteps climbing the stairs, she ran to stop Maya but it was too late; she could only watch the heavy white figure go towards the bright, frantic one on the balcony, screaming. Maya’s death was the outcome of suppressed love. The thought of losing someone whom she loved much made her move to a fit of frenzy and in that state she killed Gautama. Later losing completely the lovable one gave her no scope to live and decided to go to Gautama.

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