

Broken marriage leads to identity crisis of Maya in Anita Desai's Cry, The peacock

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ABSTRACT

Anita Desai, an Indian novelist and story writer, is known for her sensitive portrayal of inner feelings of her female characters. She holds a profound place in modern Indian English novels. There is always a reflection of feminism in her novels and they are more focused with sensation and emotion than action and experience. Her novels can be examined as the manifesto of female predicament. She talks about the male dominating society and destruction of marriage. She is absorbed with the theme of mismatched and inharmonious martial couple. Cry, The peacock (1963) her debut novel is a story of hypersensitive young woman Maya and unsuccessful marriage with Gautama. Maya and Gautama represent the two different poles in their temperament. The novel depicts how childless woman cries for love and in response gets philosophical preaching on detachment from Gautama. She was unsatisfied with her physical and emotional desires. These factors along with some others lead her life to a tragic end. She fights for her individuality and existence. Desai step by step demonstrated Maya's existential dilemma. She was always being neglected by her husband and this resulted in mental conflict.

The paper aims to examine how Maya quests for her identity and how she fights for her existentialism. The marriage of Maya and Gautama could not work and the paper aims to study the factors which affected their marriage and also identify how this broken marriage became crisis for Maya's identity.

Key words: Temperament, preaching, marriage, loss of identity

Anita Desai, a prominent Indian English writer was born on 24 June 1937 at Missouri, India. She is one of the best known contemporary Indian writers who holds well-known place in Indian fiction. She was shortlisted three times for Bookers prize and won Sahitya Academy

award in 1978 for her novel *Fire on the Mountain*. Her style of writing brought a new tradition in Indian literature as it is less conservative than Indian literature in past. Most of her novels portray man women relationships and its untold sufferings of women. She focuses on personal struggle and problems of contemporary life of Modern Indian couple. She presents the inner feelings of her characters, very sensitively. She gives individually to them. She expresses her own views through her characters. There is always an unsolved mystery in her novels and her protagonists are highly over sensitive, full of emotions, suffers from loneliness and lost in thought. The central theme of most of her fiction is quest for identity, broken marriage, unfulfilled desires and alienation. Her characters often meet to their tragic ends. There is always a feminist aspect in her novels. She speaks through her female characters which are dominated by other characters. She talks about destruction of marriage at the altar and identity crises for female protagonist.

Cry, The Peacock, the debut novel of Anita Desai was published in 1963. The novel contains the unusual story of central character Maya, who is haunted with her childhood prophecy of disaster that cannot be averted. The novel is organized presentation of Maya's psychic state which caused by her unpleasant thought about her death. The differences between her and her husband and their broken marriage are also very vital in the novel. Story deals with mental state rather than physical state. It displays the violent and emotional world of Maya. Her earlier life in her father's house was soothing, pleasant and happy. But her fairy tale kind of world got shattered soon after her marriage. There are lots of differences between Maya and her husband Gautama. He was fellow advocate with her father and ten year older than her. Maya's father felt Gautama is perfect match for her. But it was nothing like that for Maya. She was unhappy with her married life because her physical and emotional desires are unfulfilled. Maya was unsatisfied childless women. According to her "There was no bond, no love-hardly any love". The temperament and emotions of Gautama and Maya was totally opposite like South Pole and North Pole. Emotional and sentimental Maya always seeks for love in serious and philosophical Gautama. Whenever she asks for love, he starts preaching her lessons of detachment. Maya's life became very lonely and alienated.

Childless women often develop her love for pets. This happened with Maya too. Being childless she develops her love for her pet dog Toto and considers it as her child. With the death of Toto, Maya's dam of emotions got broke. Even at this time where she needs presence of Gautama, he was busy in advocating his cases. Maya was totally frustrated with

his this kind of attitude. The childhood prophecy of albino astrologer was also a immense cause for Maya's aggravation. According to his prophecy, in the fourth year of her marriage either she or her husband would die. In the beginning of story, Maya entered in the fourth year of her marriage. Being lover of life, she obsessed with the idea of death.

The story of Maya and Gautama revolves around incompatibility, broken relationship, and lack of understanding of married life. Desai successfully depicted that, only the basic needs like food, cloth, and home is not enough in women's life. She needs physical and emotional satisfaction. In Maya's case she is neither satisfied emotionally nor physically. Being motherless, she was a princess for her father. After her mother's death she became more sensitive towards relationships. She always quest for love. She was getting enough love in her paternal home but situation is totally different in her in-law's home. She finds herself lonely and leftover, and this resulted in development of her wholesome love towards Toto. Author expressed her feeling as "Childless women do develop fanatic attachment to their pets, they say. It is no less a relationship than that of a women and her child; no less worthy of reverence, and agonised remembrance".

The valley of differences between Maya and Gautama was very wide. They belong to different approach and temperaments. Their marriage was an adjustment rather than involvement and love. Maya was dealing with loveless marriage and communication gap between them was very ample. Maya wants to enjoy life and love it in its all forms. In contrast, Gautama is epitome of asceticism and lack of involvement. Maya is impractical, romantic, sensitive, and passionate, on the other hand Gautama is practical, unromantic, indifferent, and philosophical. The environment in families of Maya and Gautama was also very different. Maya spend a comfortable and unforgettable childhood. Her father loves her utmost. But dream of lifelong loving life got shattered with her marriage with Gautama. The circumstances in his house were totally contradictory. She finds herself ignored, isolated, and alienated. She expresses that in Gautama's house, no one talks about love and affection. They only discuss about parliament and corruption in government.

Maya always cry for love. She connects her cry, pain and agony with cry of peacock. The peacock in the title and in whole story is highly symbolic. Peacock is the only bird who knows about its death. It knows that the death is the ultimate reality and when it rain, they will die. They gaze at sky to see approaching death from the black clouds. Therefore there is

always fear of death in them. According to Anita Desai the voice of peacock- 'pia-pia' expresses 'lover' and 'mio-mio' expresses 'I die'. Therefore the voice of peacock expresses- 'lover I die'. They are haunted with the fear of death. In the same way Maya was also haunted with feeling of approaching death. According to astrologer, she or Gautama's death is near. She is deeply in love with life and don't want to lose it. This fear along with loneliness and death of Toto made Maya insane. With the passage of time, the insanity increased. She thought if only one has to die than why should I? Why not Gautama? She wants to live, and enjoy life. But he was serious and monotonous. There is no meaning of life for him. Finally, in fate of insanity, she pushed Gautama from parapet and after some days, she committed suicide in guilt. Her insanity became the reason for her tragedy.

Maya and Gautama were going through unsuccessful married life. This status leads Maya's life to identity crises. Identity crises are a psychological state of uncertainty and confusion. In which a person's sense of identity become insecure. In Indian society, even in twenty first century, have a pre-decided list of norms, traditions, rules and regulations for their daughter-in-law. But they forget that she also have her own sets of belief, values and individuality. For keeping everybody else happy, and fulfilling their desires, she has to sacrifice her own wishes. She, after marriage, caught with in web of expectations and traditions. Maya, being wife of unloving husband, was suffering from identity crises. Gautama ignores her and treats her like she does not exist. There is no emotional bonding between them. She was discarded and had no identity. She was in search of meaning of her life. Earlier she was a loving daughter but she can never be a loving wife.

To conclude, in *Cry, The Peacock*, Desai presented the mental state of Maya, a young woman whose unsuccessful married life became hurdle for her identity. The novel displays the contemporary issues of Indian Society. Author successfully deals with the complexities of marital life. The man women relationship is universal issue and she chooses it as her subject matter. Therefore the novel attracted the readers' world widely. The best part is, she allowed hers readers to squeeze out the hidden fate of Maya by their own.

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