

## CRY THE PEACOCK, A SAGA OF FEMININE SENSIBILITIES

*Nisarg Kothari,*

M.A.Parikh Fine Arts And Arts College,  
Palanpur-India

### ABSTRACT

Like James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, Anita Desai seems to be more interested in exploring the interior world of the female rather than the externals. Like Thomas Hardy, She also believes that happiness is an occasional episode in the general drama of pain. Her novel 'Cry the Peacock' should be termed as an 'epic of feminine sensibilities'. She shares the grief and mental anguish felt by her characters in such a way that we can't help, but appreciate her. The novel shows how the pragmatic approach of Gautama proves to be a nemesis for him.

**Keywords:** Pragmatic, sensibilities, Plight

Anita Desai's literary world comprises of female characters who have to struggle to find balance between harsh realities of day to day life and their chosen world of imagination, fantasy, reveries and dreams. It is indeed a major challenge particularly for a sensitive person because one can succeed in doing so only either by doing injustice to one's own self or to the other person.

Maya, the female protagonist in the novel *Cry, The Peacock* is a troubled soul because her husband Gautama doesn't come to her expectations. They are poles apart, inspite of their living together under the same roof. She lives in her 'ivory tower' and is unable to bring her out of glorious past. It irritates her to realize that her husband is quite a practical, heartless person for whom such words as 'tender feelings, beauty, love, nature etc' are rubbish and out of his dictionary.

Gautama's plain advice to his wife is that past can not be regained and she should resign herself to her destiny. She must accept whatever life brings to her cheerfully. He is a cold realist who fails to respond properly to the hidden desires of his wife. It is poor Maya who is hoping against hope and awaits eagerly to see something 'unusual' in 'usual'. Maya makes desperate efforts to establish communication with her husband as well as to have communion with the others, but to no avail. Leaving aside her close relationship with Gautama, Maya has a special bond of affection with her pet dog 'Toto', whose death is a fatal shock to her. 'Toto' is almost like a child for her (The writer might wish to suggest 'a tot' by naming the dog 'Toto'). Gautama's refusal to give a decent burial to the dead dog adds fuel to fire. She wants Toto to be buried in a befitting manner. The death of her pet dog disturbs her to a great degree. she says:

*"It was not my pet's death alone that I mourned today, but another sorrow, unremembered, perhaps, as yet not even experienced, and filled me with this despair". (13)*

The pet's death shatters Maya beyond measure. She finds herself isolated in this cruel world. No one will come to console her..So she tells Gautama,

*"Oh, Gautama, pets might not mean anything to you, and yet they mean the world to me". (19)* This irks him and he says, *"You go chattering like a monkey and I am annoyed that I have been interrupted in my thinking."* (20)

We can notice two different aspects of Anita Desai's ideology. As a writer, she fascinates us with her lyricism and poetic imagery and has a legitimate claim for place within mythic mode. She is also aware of some of the advantages of myths and yet she raises her voice against it and turns to realism as well. Thus, though she lends grandeur and appeal to some of her characters by not divorcing herself from the mythic mode, she keeps her feet on the realistic ground also. Myth stands for isolation, loneliness, disregard for society and its values. And the characters who prefer to cling to myth, live in their own separate world having no connection with the outside world.

Gautama and her father are two important male characters in the life of Maya. She looks at them from different angles. She gives credit for whatever pleasures and peace she has found so far to her father. According to her, Gautama can never replace her father. She has a strong father fixation and looks to him only for comfort and peace, in the time of need, Gautama can never prove to be an ideal husband for her. Maya is a motherless child but her father showers all his love on her. She has been brought up as a princess. she says:

*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 the princes and regal queens ...." (41)*

Maya wanted to love and to be loved. But Gautama is used to speak like an ascetic instead of trying to appreciate her genuine physical needs, of peeping into her inner world, he preaches her calmly the pleasures of detachment. Obviously, no woman in the place of Maya would have any sympathy for such a dull, lifeless, cool person like Gautama. It was predicted by an astrologer that four years after her marriage, either Maya or her husband would die. Maya had not informed Gautama about this prophecy. There is no wonder that hostility and indifference shown to her leads to her frustration and voice of protest terminates ultimately into madness. Right from the beginning, we have seen her as a seeker of meaning in life, as an urban woman longing for a radical change in her monotonous life, as a rebel who wants to throw away age-old norms and wishes to breathe fresh air. It may be partly deliberate and partly accidental action, on the part of Maya, to push her husband from the roof and bring an end to his life. The cry of the peacock and her cries result into the tragedy. The peacock 'dance of joy' is, in fact, the 'dance of death', and the lack of communication in marriage leads to the shocking end. Surprisingly, no male figure comes to rescue her, to play the role of a savior to enable her to get much-awaited liberation.

Maya constantly finds herself insecure and helpless. She longs for someone who can help her to come out from this labyrinth. She makes a desperate cry in the following lines,

*“God, now I was caught in the net of the inescapable, and where lay the possibility of mercy, of release? This net was no hallucination, no .... Am I gone insane? Father! Husband! Who is my saviour? I am in need of one. I am dying, and I am in love with living. I am in love, and I am dying. God, let me sleep, forget, rest. But, no, I'll never sleep again. There is no rest any more—only death and waiting. (84)*

But the moon inspires appeals and prompts her to do what was inevitable. Some may find it difficult to justify Maya's act of killing her husband. But one must remember that merely getting married to a woman does not make a man 'an ideal or perfect husband'. It may be an exaggeration to say but thousands of husbands even today can be and should be disqualified as husbands because for them a woman is nothing but a lifeless doll. Gautama looks Maya as a spoilt daughter of a rich father. He forgets that she has her own small universe teeming with emotions, dreams, feelings where she would expect her husband to walk side by side her. There is a verbal fight between the two very often and she compares herself to the peacock who mates only after fighting. Like the peacock, she has tendency to shower infinite love but as we see it, it remains only a one-sided affair. What we learn from her words and deeds is just tip of the iceberg .she says:

*“Do you not hear the peacocks' call in the wild? Are they not blood-chilling, their shrieks of pain? “Pia Pia”, they cry. “Lover, lover, Mio, mio. I die, I die ...” Have you seen peacocks make love, child? Before they mate, they fight. They will rip each other's breasts to strips and fall bleeding with their beaks open and panting. When they have exhausted themselves in battle, they will mate. Peacocks are wise. The hundred eyes upon their tails have seen the truth of life and death, and know them to be one. Living, they are aware of death. Dying they are in love with life. (Page 95)*

Maya finds the environment around her very choking and suffocating. There is not a single ray of light in her dark universe. Anita Desai indicates Maya's suppressed desire, an unfulfilled dream of true communion with another, through the metaphor of the mating of the papaya trees.

Maya is the female protagonist and by allotting this role to her in the novel, the writer has made it evident where her own sympathy lies. In this male dominated society, a woman is generally at receiving end. In pre-colonial period, a woman howsoever noble in character or belonging even to a royal family, had to make a great sacrifice, for no fault of her own be it in the case of sita, savitri, or kasturba. The author of our holy book, 'Manusmriti' forbade any freedom to a woman. It is a long, sad, moving tale of innumerable injustices, humiliation and denial of an honorable status to a woman in society.

The heroine of the novel asks a pertinent question, 'Father, Brother, Husband – who is my savior?'. It is remarkable that in her small list of probable liberators, her father gets priority over her husband and yet none of them comes to her rescue. It is divine help that brings final solution and frees her from the grip of evil circumstances.

Maya's desire for communication with the other is fulfilled to some extent when Gautama's mother and sister sympathize with her and bring solace for her. Who can know the sorrows of a woman better than another woman?

Anita Desai is a great novelist of 'feminine sensibility'. She discusses the issues related to the world of women with great compassion and insight. Her heroines find it extremely difficult to develop harmonious relationship with their counterparts. They are in search of individual identity for themselves but it is a pity that they are forced to live like caged birds. The sense of loneliness and alienation pervades Desai's works. She believes that only pure freedom can bring happiness in the world. But it is a far cry from achieving such liberation for the women. They have yet to go a long way before they can expect to live the way they like. The protagonists in her novel either cut off relationship with the external world themselves or are left to their fate by the society.

'Cry the Peacock' helps us to understand man-woman relationship in a better light. Anita Desai's crusade against wrong social values and practices which close all doors of peace and progress deserves appreciation. Maya represents all Indian women whose uncaring husbands compel them to stand up in revolt much against their will. What they need from their husbands is a little bit of sympathy and unalloyed love.

Finally, it is Maya who wins and Gautam the preacher of detachment loses life. The novel fascinates us because there is a unique mixture of poetic beauty, lyricism and thoughtful study of the inner world of a modern woman. The sooner our conservative society flings the false image of a woman whose heaven lies at the feet of her husband, the better.

----