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Editor-in-Chief : Dr. Bijender Singh

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## **A CRITICAL INSIGHT OF FEMINISM IN ANITA DESAI'S NOVEL *CRY, THE PEACOCK***

**Dr. Satrughna Singh**

**Associate Professor, Department of English**

**Raiganj University**

**Raiganj, Uttar Dinajpur, West Bengal**

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### **Abstract**

For her unique subject concerns and use of feminine sensibility in her writing, Anita Desai, one of the most well-known modern women writers of Indian fiction in English, has contributed a new dimension and flavor to contemporary Indian English fiction. She also holds a prominent place in the genre. She pays close attention to social trends. The 1963 film *Cry, the Peacock* accurately depicts the psychosomatic development of a female character that is depressed and unable to handle the practical world of her spouse. Any ideology that aims to provide women's rights and equality—usually by raising their status—is referred to as feminism. The foundation of feminism is the historical subjugation of women by men. A political, cultural, or economic movement to provide women equal rights and legal protection is referred to as feminism. The study examines Anita Desai's concept of feminine awakening. She makes an effort to delve into the minds of her female characters. She embodies the issue of women's consciousness and sensibility in contract with males and their sufferings based on physical and emotional suppression in the book *Cry, the Peacock*. Anita brings a fresh perspective to feminist publishing with her role as Maya. Maya is a vibrant young woman who, like all women around the world, must deal with the realities and expectations of marriage. The current study makes an effort to examine Desai's expression of her preoccupation with creating a society free from male dominance. The study also aims to look into how patriarchal values affect women's depression, loneliness, and other psychological, social, and economic issues, as well as their role in these issues. The goal of this research project is to examine feminist consciousness in Anita Desai's book *Cry, the Peacock* and to emphasize the position and suffering of women in a patriarchal society.

### **Keywords**

Feminine, Self-determined, Sensibility, Expectation, Marital Life.

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A political, cultural, or economic movement to provide women equal rights and legal protection is referred to as feminism. The study examines Anita Desai's concept of feminine awakening. She depicts women who live under oppression, are repressed, and are autonomous in their spatial existence. She makes an effort to delve into the minds of her female characters. She embodies the issue of women's consciousness and sensibility in contract with males and their sufferings based on physical and emotional suppression in the book *Cry, The Peacock*. Anita represents a novel facet of feminist publishing as Maya. One of the most well-known Indo-Anglican novelists is Anita Desai. Born in 1937 in Mussoorie, she completed her elementary education at Queen Mary's School before graduating from Delhi University with a bachelor's degree in English literature. She gained notoriety after her debut book, *Cry the Peacock*, was published. She received the proper recognition for her second book, *Voices in the City*. The goal of this essay is to examine how Desai articulated her obsession with creating a world free from male dominance. An effort has been made to demonstrate how Desai captures the idea of women's distinct sensibility when compared to their male counterparts, how they endure physical and emotional oppression, and how they fall prey to a social and cultural structure that is dominated by men. When it comes to feminism, we can state that it is far from being a single, cohesive movement. It offers a wide range of methods for analyzing the literary works that both men and women have created. It appears that Anita Desai is aware of the connection between the literary movement and feminism as an apolitical movement. The goal of the feminist movement is to examine literary works from the perspectives of language, culture, biology/psychology, and ideology. The dominant and recurrent topics in her writing are the portrayal of feminine sensibility and the struggles faced by women within a male-dominated social structure.

Among Indian women authors of contemporary fiction, Anita Desai occupies a significant position. Her female heroines are shown defying social conventions established by the male community in an effort to claim their own identities and positions in society. Her debut book, *Cry, the Peacock*, explores the inner life and psychological struggles of Maya, a female heroine who

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exhibits anxiety, insecurity, and despair following her marriage. *Cry, the Peacock*, one of the most poetic and moving Indian novels ever published in English, was published in 1963. It highlights a sensitive woman's distinct intuition in stark contrast to an indifferent husband's detached and pragmatic outlook. The book can also be viewed as a spectrum of approaches to addressing the binary opposition of men and women as objects. This place offers every possibility, from young womanhood to motherhood and a man-free existence. Here, the key terms are liberty and equal treatment. It is perceived that a lady finds it hard to bow down to life's realities and let go of her conventional Hindu values. Several interpretations of the novel have been offered by critics. Her writing highlights an additional aspect she incorporated into her fiction: the significance of women as an undervalued segment of society. The statement "Beat them, starve them, how you like them, they will sit and look with animal eyes and never raise a head to defend themselves" is another true representation of women provided by Ruth Praver Jhabvala (Gooneratne and Ruth Praver Jhabvala 97). According to Professor K.R.S. Iyenger, "Maya is both the centre and the periphery of this world, which is why *Cry the Peacock* succeeds. Whether she is insane, historical, or sane, her craziness permeates the entire novel and gives it shape and vitality" (Iyengar 16). It's "a remarkable attempt to fuse fantasy with perpetual experience," according to Meena Belliapa. (Belliapa 25). A critic such as Som P. Sharma and Kamal N. Awasthi point out that Maya doesn't appear to be a spoilt woman, even if she had an overly protected upbringing. She is able to distinguish between her father's indulgence, her childhood acquaintances, and her husband's demanding demands—who frequently stopped asking her for a cup of tea. Even after four years of marriage, Maya still feels unstable since Gautama told her that she was too young to conceive and that Maya had a somewhat higher potential for philosophy than she had at birth. Her accusation is that Gautama is repulsive and preoccupied with material matters, as evidenced by his statement, "It's always money or property - never a case of passion and revenge, murder and exciting things like that - not for love or life basic things- like Toto dying." (Desai 24)

Through her keen observation, Mrs. Desai delves deeply and shares her findings with the world. Among her main concerns is exposing the hard layers of emotions to reveal their true femininity and demonstrate that they are not void of feelings but rather are seeking a life filled with love. *Scream A female novelist* tells the narrative of a very sensitive, creative, and emotional woman in *Cry, the Peacock*. It is evident that Maya is rapidly breaking down due to the strain of marital conflict. She is led from emotional instability in the beginning to crazy, insanity, and murder towards the end of the story by her insensitive and unresponsive husband Gautama. Despite not having a clear commitment to the feminist movement, Anita Desai is deeply concerned about the condition of women under the male-dominated, oppressive system. Her cry for the peacock is a singular illustration of the feminist viewpoint, or rather, an illusion of it. The majority of the novel's elements are typical of female writers. Through the heroine's reactions to the situations and events in the book, Anita Desai defines the distinctiveness of feminine sensibility. Maya is a sensual, sensitive, and intensely emotional lady with an infatuation with life.

Maya's own depiction of her relationship with her husband makes it plain that their marriage was doomed from the beginning. She describes her husband as materialistic, practical, pragmatic, and inattentive, whereas Maya is incredibly sensitive, imaginative, passionate, and sensual. It's hard to concur with the detractors who label Maya as neurotic. She is a healthy, normal-looking woman. Her sensuality, inventiveness, passion, and sensitivity may be her sole

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transgression. These are, in reality, the traits of a typical female with a respectable social standing and upbringing. According to her, Maya's marital disagreement and disharmony push her to emotional instability, insanity, and even murder. The following marriage-related statement makes it evident: "... It was broken repeatedly, and repeatedly the pieces were picked up and put together again, as of sacred iron with which out of the prettiest superstition, we could not bear to part" (Desai 40).

Maya is the opposite of Gautama. Between the two, there is a total absence of communication. This is evident from her husband's behavior towards her following Toto's passing. Gautama just needed "a cup of tea," as everything was "all over" for her. He is unable to identify her "misery" and is unsure of how to "comfort" her. The following makes the husband's insensitivity evident: "He didn't know anything that worried me. He gave me an opal ring to wear on my finger, jolting me with his blue flashing veins that went under and out of the gold bridge, but he failed to notice the translucent flesh beneath" (Desai 9). The spouse's icy and uncaring demeanor is further demonstrated when he tells Maya to go to bed "while he worked at papers." Maya suffers from both physical and mental depression. She states, "He did not give me, or the soft, willing body or the lonely, waiting mind that waited near the bed, another thought" (Desai 9). Maya's orientation for the natural world and environment demonstrates her unwavering love of life. She describes the world of nature—its forms, colors, flowers, and fruits—in a very sensual way. She is extremely sensitive and drawn to the images, sounds, forms, and colors of the natural world. When she discovers that her husband has overlooked the dust storm, she becomes enraged. This demonstrates his lack of regard for human life. She views Gautama as a symbol of a materialistic, male-dominated society. Without a doubt, her compulsive love of life leads her to kill her husband. Murder is a reaction against the heartless, materialistic society structure. Maya feels that the wisdom, reason, and order of this world are geared towards men, and she is not worthy of living in it. She dislikes the rational, normalcy-based civilization. She longs to be freed from the bonds of enslavement imposed by social conventions and habits. Her rebellion against the social order is an aesthetic revolt, a revolt of sensibility against the logic of the so-called normalcy that uses a web of institutional mechanisms to colonise desire: "... everything that keeps me living and doing in the same way is gone from my life, including all order and formality. There is no plan, no peace, or anything to keep me in the pattern of familiarity" (Desai 195).

Maya is a symbol for the disordered mind of the contemporary Indian lady. She makes an effort to reconcile her innate desires with her academic goals. She is so tired after this important deed that she becomes even more confused when the existential folly of life is pointed out to her. She goes through a mental breakdown when she is alone and unable to communicate. According to feminine studies, an Indian woman—whether passive or violent, traditional or modern—serves as a metaphor for the writer's feelings of emotional fragility, anxiety, and loneliness. She sparks a never-ending conversation about social values. She serves as the main interface between the author's awareness and the otherworldly realm, facilitating both her perception of reality and her hope for deliverance. She represents not just growth and development, life as a whole and reproduction but also retreat, deterioration, and death, making her a potent emblem of opposition to prejudice and societal and sexual injustices. A fresh set of ideals is established in the fictional world with the awakening of women's awareness.

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The sudden awakening, the deep contemplation, and the abrupt conclusion with deliberate choices are recurring themes in the women's typological experiences. Though her troubles are not resolved in the end, the way a very particular type of crisis is shaped fictionally and experienced through her eyes is fulfilling since it results in inner enrichment, a rush of excitement, and psychological triumph in her struggle against harsh reality. In her book *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millett exposes patriarchal political thought, which aim to keep and grow the ruling sex's hold on authority over the females. She illustrates the culturally imposed contradiction of womanhood. Gender is socially imposed, whereas sex is biological. She claims that considering that women are a minority due to patriarchal administration, she experiences "hatred for oneself and self-rejection, a disdain for both herself and for her brethren"(Millett 55).

In a nutshell a prerequisite for women's freedom is an awareness of the male-centered society, including its rhetoric, institutions, and behaviours, as well as civilization and culture. Understanding them entails understanding the nature of oppression, repression, and dominance as well as their modes. The emancipation and freedom of women is facilitated by all those alternative discourses that oppose and criticise these institutions and practices and raise awareness of oppression. Anita Desai depicts the presumptions, reality at all, and pain of Maya in her piece of writing, which are shared by all women. Maya is portrayed by Desai as a poor lady who survives on borrowed hope prior to marriage. But following her marriage, it appears that she has lost her sense of self-worth. She sees in Gautama a sign of flinty wisdom that neither comforts her nor inspires her, instead of a caring soul. In particular, Maya's feminist consciousness challenges the way world treats women and makes her aware that she was not raised in a normal environment. We may conclude from these entire actions that Maya was insane since no lady could kill her husband in such a brutal way and that she was also mentally unstable. It demonstrates that Maya was not feeling well. Maya is transferred to the mental asylum after her father's residence, where Gautama's mother and sister drop her there. The novel's ending is left open-ended, and a white shadow that might hint to Maya's passing is visible. In the book *Cry, the Peacock*, Maya experiences an abundance of affection and warmth from her father, which causes her to behave strangely with her spouse and causes her to face numerous issues in the post-marriage period. She looks on her husband Gautama to show her love and care, but he is too preoccupied with his own work to give her the time and attention she deserves. As a result, Maya becomes irrational, disobedient, and furious. However, Maya's decision to murder her husband in this way is utterly abhorrent. She ought not to have done that. In overall, Anita Desai's work *Cry, the Peacock* tackles feminism on the one hand while simultaneously imparting to young girls a valuable lesson about the need to work hard and not give up on their aspirations, as doing so could put them in Maya's shoes. Real life is very different from fiction, and there are many more significant aspects of life besides romance. Gautama dies as a result of his wife's neglect. Although he doesn't believe it, he could have lived a happy life.

From a feminist standpoint, Maya is an iconic figure because she distinguishes herself as unique and different (a peripheral self). Maya's feminism is her struggle for personal fulfillment in contrast to the female stereotype of her friends and the expectations and criticism of her husband. She fights to maintain her identity even though it is at odds with the society around her (patriarchy, religion, female stereotype), and she finds validation in her own voice (life affirming). Maya is a protagonist with feminine sensibilities who, in spite of opposition from friends, family,

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or religion, dares to uphold her distinctive individualism that is both aesthetically and morally coherent. Maya is actually driven to take action in order to preserve her individuality and her distinctive identity. Maya's attempt to self-identify and her resistance to subservience were marginalised when she was declared mad for killing her spouse. In short, Anita Desai's portrayal of a fighting woman in *Cry of the Peacock* involves her battling three traditional elements in her life: her husband's masculine power, her friends' stereotypically submissive positions as wives, and her religion's retribution and detaching ideals. She is married to a man who is not only double her age but temperamentally quite different from her. Maya has been completely neglected by her husband because Gautama has been influenced by the philosophy of non-attachment in the Bhagwad Gita and practices it absurdly in his relationship with his wife. Maya is deeply frustrated and hurt by the discovery that he is totally indifferent to her physical charms. In response to Gautama's ridiculous application of the Bhagwad Gita's nonattachment concept in his marriage to Maya, the latter has been entirely abandoned by her spouse. Maya is extremely upset and frustrated to learn that he is completely unaffected by her physical attractiveness. Desai is more inclined to investigate the private sphere than the public one. Her true interest lies in investigating the human psychology and inner environment, as well as solving the enigma surrounding the inner lives of her characters, such as Maya. Her female role models saw themselves as individuals, which makes them estranged from the community, the outside world, and their families. Her characters tend to be self-absorbed and always strive for ways to change their surroundings or the situation at hand.

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