



Translated Men and Women : Cultural and Social Negotiation in Postcolonial Literature in English

Shailendra Rajput

Research Scholar

Department of English Literature
IES University, Bhopal (M.P.)

Under Supervision of

Dr. Renu Srivastava

Department of English Literature
IES University, Bhopal (M.P.)

Paper Received date

05/12/2025

Paper date Publishing Date

10/12/2025

DOI

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18070518>



Abstract

Anita Desai in her novels deals with various kinds of human relationship and shows the contradictions inherent in tradition and modernity, scientific ideas and superstitious beliefs, the dowry, debts and social humiliations, karma and fate, the social disintegration and their effects on the families.

The problems of man and woman occupy the central place in her novels Maya, the chief protagonist, in Cry the Peacock apparently is an example of the disintegrated vision of human relationships. Even the title of the novel, Cry, the Peacock, is suggestive of it. Maya, who symbolizes the pangs of the peacock mating, narrates the secrets in the following lines.

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". They spread-out their splendid tails and begin to dance, but, like Shiva's their dance, knowing that they and their lovers are all to die When they have exhausted themselves in battle. they will mate. Peacocks are wise. The hundred eyes upon their tales have seen the truth of life and death, and know them to be one. Living, they are in love with life. "Lover,

Lover", You will hear them cry in the forests when the rain clouds come. "Lover, I die"....(1)

Key words :- Contradictions, Humiliations, Disintegration, Splendid, Exhausted

The mating, the crying and the yearning for the male peacock this dance symbolically reveals the importance of love in human relationship. The concept of love therein is linked metaphorically with the traditional myth of Siva's.

This dance is symbolic of an apocalypse that leads to the perfect cessation of all human desires and bondages except a yearning to know the hidden secret of life and death.



International Educational Applied Research Journal

Peer-Reviewed Journal-Equivalent to UGC Approved Journal

A Multi-Disciplinary Research Journal

Maya, the daughter of a lawyer, passes a rich and prosperous childhood, and for the sake of her father, she marries an over-aged man who happens to be a friend of her father.

As there is a disparity of living standard between the two families, this marriage creates a wider chasm in the relationship of the couple. The family of Maya champions human values, rights and the freedom of mutual discussion upto a level of dissension, while in Gautama's family "one did not speak of love, far less of affection one spoke they spoke of discussion in parliament, of cases of bribery and corruption revealed in govern-ment.(2)

Maya's marriage with Gautama is an arranged marriage. As a Brahmin girl, she has heard much about "fate", "astrology" and "palmistry", but for Gautama, who is "no Brahmin and no traditionalist", these are the words "alien from birth". (3) Gautama laughs at Maya whenever she talks about horoscope, past karmas and palmistry. He regards these matters as the property of a traditionalist. He thinks of them as barriers which affect "our everyday lives".(4)

Maya hates Gautama for his authoritarian approach to life, and this develops deeper differences between them while living under the same roof of a house: "They only know how to eat and how to mate. No horoscope for that. But our lives are more complicated".(5) Their difference is the difference of a sentimental woman and an unsentimental man.

Gautama, as the text reveals, stands for all that belongs to the mental level of human approach, while Maya yearns to follow the call of her heart. Anita Desai has wonderfully analysed these two characters in the following lines.

Gautama was not a man to whom confession of the heart could easily be made of the mind, yes, readily, as soon as the idea had formed, sifted and settled into coherence, But of the heart-no, it was of no use.

Maya's memory of the dead dog. Toto, makes Gautama to laugh at her. Being sensitive to each happening in life, she regards the death of Toto as a prognostication for an ill-omen to her family: but Gautama does not believe in such things. The entire visionary approach of the novelist envisages a slash between tradition and modernity through Maya and Gautama.

Maya always remembers the prophecy of an astrologer that her marriage is going to end in its fourth year, with the death of either wife or husband. As the astrologer proves true in his prediction of her brother, she thinks of it seriously. She is concerned with the thought of death. Whenever she is alone and isolated, she recalls the prediction of the astrologer:

The astrologer, that creeping, spreading sly magician of my hallucinations-no, of course they were not hallucinations. Arjuna had proved them to me, and yet could they be real?-had never said anything to suggest that it was I who would die young, unnaturally and violently, four years after



my marriage.... He had only emphasized that this great toll that fate would take, would be taken after my marriage.

She believes in the forecast and thinks that either of the two will lose life. She desires to possess the body and mind of her husband. Whenever she fails in the fulfilment of her emotional intensity from Gautama as a husband, she becomes neurotic and feels as if her nervous system had broken down. She is sometimes so surrounded by her morbid and melancholy inertia that in her loneliness she perceives a bizarre world of dreams that turns into nightmare, She now sees the "purple shadows of a dreadful night".

The coldness and unsentimentality of her husband leave her alone for analysing and dissecting the deeper Impulses of her mind. Loneliness breeds in her a habit of procrastination. She tries to ease her tension in human relationship. Maya recites a shloka of the Bhagavad-Gita to stress the significance of the calm of mind and steadfast wisdom. Here is this shloka from the Bhagavad-Gita:

He whose mind is not agitated in calamities and who has no longing for pleasure, free from attachment, fear and anger, he indeed is said to be of steady wisdom. He who is free from all attachment and neither rejoice on receiving evil, his wisdom is well established.

In fact, her failure to have physical love of her husband creates in her a philosophizing attitude in life. Even the philosophical principles do not comfort her inner distress. The love professed in the Gita is something different from the love she aspired to. Like Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, Maya opts for an ideal love, yet the physical love does not spare her psyche untouched. She complains to Gautama against his unsentimental behaviour towards her:

"You've never loved. And you don't love me". Gautama is jealous of her philosophizing nature, and reminds her of the shloka of the Bhagavad-Gita in response to her complaints. It distresses her and she once again complains against his dispassionate attitude towards her. Maya expresses her grievances thus: "Love has no importance for you. It is merely attachment. "

Yet another factor creating a void in human relationships (as between husband and wife) is Maya's prosperous and loving childhood. In Desai's fiction, the protagonists' search comforts their distress through nostalgia.

Maya is no exception to it. This way, the novelist unites time past with time present. Maya says to Gautama, "I had the happiest childhood. They were my happiest times." philosophizing nature of Maya leaves an infectious effect on Gautama. He also begins to philosophize the questions of Maya thus that life is "an aura that passes through a continual cycle, passing from day to night, from manifest to the unmanifest into the manifest again".



International Educational Applied Research Journal

Peer-Reviewed Journal-Equivalent to UGC Approved Journal

A Multi-Disciplinary Research Journal

He teaches Maya about the rebirth of human soul again and again. He quotes the sayings of the Upanishads and stresses on the inseparable link between the present and the past karmas. He thus shares the visionary reflections of Maya for linking the past with the present in order to form an impression of the Absolute or a consciousness of the Timeless.

To think to think that we are to pay, in this life, for what we may have in a past one, to think that we may have to pay horribly, oh, horribly, for something terrible, something terrible, that we might-have done it is terrible.

City works in an organic form in the novels of Anita Desai. In this novel, too, the city affects the plan of the character. Maya's brother, Arjuna, is obsessed by the city-sensibility. He works for the Quit India Movement in a city, and after the country's freedom runs away from there, and comes to New York. Here he works in a canning factory and fights for "the Negro cause. "

Maya with all her social rebuffs and domestic hardships delves in her unconscious mind where she finds only the word 'death' ingraved. This creates a tragic vision of life in her. The prophecy of the astrologer pierces her mind deeply. Everything unsuitable to her mind becomes an ill-omen to her: As I threw myself on the chair before the dressing table, crushing bottles and posies between my fingers, that echo was transformed into the rhythm of drum beats ... There is something weird about me now where ever I go, whatever I see whatever I listen to has this unnaturalness in it. This is insanity. But who, what is insane ? I myself? or the world around me?

Her question indicates the negative approach to life. The beating of drums' is symbolic of the tension in her nervous system due to fear of death.

Her constant procrastination makes her inert. Sometimes. she like Hamlet, thinks of a life after death. She is a deserted and love-lorn lady. She yearns for human love. The departure of Gautama's mother and sister teases and baffles her. She once again realizes her isolation and loneliness. She aspires to be hugged by her husband. But the unsentimental and cold behaviour of her husband disappoints her.

And I yearned, yearned for her to hold me to her bosom. I could not remember my own mother at all. My throat began to swell with unbearable self-pity. I would cry, I know it in a while, and dreaded it, in their sane presence. 'Please, I whispered'.

In this passage, the last word "please" is expressive of the inner vision of Maya. As a love-lorn lady, Maya wishes that her mother-in-law should stay with her. The word "please" reflects her helplessness in the human world.

Maya represents the pangs of a modern sensitive lady. She questions Gautama about the existence of a man after life: "You do believe in an after life, Gautama? In the permanence of one's soul, and the resurrection of one's body, in different forms ? No matter how one dies?"



International Educational Applied Research Journal

Peer-Reviewed Journal-Equivalent to UGC Approved Journal

A Multi-Disciplinary Research Journal

Horror-stricken, she experiences nervousness in her psyche. She is baffled with the gradual growth of insanity in her. The images of "cat" and "lizard" symbolize her gloomy vision of life. The rush of negative emotions so overpowers her that it affects her vision of life too. Her world of memories becomes a world of fantasy and deception:

If only I could discover now what I had pursued so long along roads of treacherous memory, of great love, of great despair, for I loved too much, too many. Loved?... The word shot down the long black vacuum and struck the very bottom of the well. Then the echo rose, spread, in slow ripples, and struck the sides, resoundingly. Once again that word rang in my mind, clear as a drum-beat on a waiting night.

Here, the adjective-noun phrase "a waiting night" refers to the negative vision of Maya and her thought of death. She develops an indifferent attitude towards life. She wishes a deliverance, a moksha from all kinds of worldly cares and anxieties.

Anita Desai in her cosmic vision interlinks time and memory together for an integrated vision of life. In fact, time past can be defined only through memories. To recollect the past memories is to link unconscious and conscious states of the mind.

This linking device of time past with time present signals a new hope for future. This psychological merger of the times in a flux creates a vision of wholeness. In the novel of Anita Desai one finds an "obsessive involvement with the characters' past as key to their consciousness, their life".

Refernce

1. Desai, Anita, Cry, The Peacock. London, Peter Owen Ltd. 1963 New Delhi Orient Paperbacks 1995, p. 48.
2. Desai, Anita, Games at Twilight A collection of short stories London William 1978, p 69.
3. Desai, Anita, Calcutta Kaleidoscope. The Illustrated weekly of India, 1958, p 86
4. Budholia O.P., Anita Desai, Vision and Technique in Her Novels, B.R. Publishing Delhi 2010, p 84.
5. udholia O.P., Anita Desai, Vision and Technique in Her Novels, B.R. Publishing Delhi 2010, p 89.