

Marital Discordance and Psychic Tensions in Desai's Cry, the Peacock

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Abstract

The research paper aims to study the psychic tensions of Maya, the protagonist, caused by her marital discordance in Anita Desai's novel *Cry, the Peacock*. To explore the marital discord, mainly seen in the married life of Maya and Gautama, Maya's obsessed condition, drabness, and psychic disaster, the research tool used for the analysis is psychoanalysis, with a special focus on the psychoanalytical theories propounded by Sigmund Freud, and other psychoanalytical theorists like Jacques Lacan. The chief finding of the research is that Maya and Gautama live an unhappy conjugal life because of the incompatibility in their temperaments. Maya is pensive, receptive, and sensitive while Gautama is pragmatic, insensible, and lucid. The researchers interested in perceiving the psychic dimensions of the characters of Desai's fictions are expected to take this article as a reference.

Keywords: Anxiety; disharmony; incompatibility; psychoanalysis; temperament.

INTRODUCTION

The research paper chiefly focuses on the psychic tensions provoked by the marital discord in Anita Desai's novel, *Cry, the Peacock*, published in 1963. Marital disharmony and psychic tensions arising in the life of couples are not novel phenomena. Marital disharmony in spouses arises as an attempt to match the behavior and expectations of one with the behavior and expectations of the other (Jennings, 2014). Marital disharmony increases the risk of dissolution in couples' relationships, leading to the psychological distress of the children (Shrivastwa, 2021; Amato & Sobolewski, 2001). Anita Desai ushered in a new era of psychological realism with her novel, *Cry, the Peacock*. Desai's serious concern lies in exploring the feminine sensibility of Indian women (Menon, 2020; Pandey, 2020). Desai sketches the psychological and sociological conflicts and the troubled sensibilities of modern men and women in her creative works (Kadyan, 2016; Kaushik, 2012). Therefore, the recurring theme

that we come across in her novels is the woman's agony of existence in a hostile and taboo-ridden, male-dominated society. A diligent screenwriter, and a short story writer, Anita Desai "emerged to be one of India's most respected novelists" (Menon, 2020, para. 1). Literature, for Anita Desai, is not a means of escaping reality but an exploration of the human psyche and inner life of her characters (Shirwadkar, 1979). *Cry, the Peacock*, Desai's debut novel, is an authentic manifesto of women's predicament and the interior world (Sarika, 2021).

Cry, the Peacock is a family narrative mainly concerned with the issues of marital discord between Gautama and Maya. Pandey (2020) estimates that *Cry, the Peacock* "novel embodies the pivotal association between nature and human portraying woman as the main character" (p. 46). The daughter of a well-to-do father, Maya is an enthusiastic, spiritual, and sensitive young lady who is wedded to Gautama, a rational advocate. Gautama is a practical and rational man. Maya's creative and

susceptible disposition is not perceived by Gautama (Thakur, 1989). The relationship between Maya and Gautama gets deflowered because Maya is intensely involved in her interior world of phantasm (Srivastava, 2016). Unable to manipulate her conflict with Gautama, tenuous Maya kills Gautama at the climax and then commits suicide. Desai has skillfully fused fantasy with naturalism in *Cry, the Peacock*. The South-Asians argue that due to rapid industrialization, individualization and westernization of attitudes, growing voices for female's rights, intensive and inconsiderate husbands, fathers, and brothers, the discord in the life of the spouses occur. The problems the paper states are why Maya, the protagonist of the novel, is alienated from the world, from society, and from her family, what factors cause the disharmonious relationship in her marital life and what leads Maya to become so rebellious and atrocious. The rationale of the paper lies in looking for the answers to these questions from the psychoanalytical perspectives in Anita Desai's novel, *Cry, the Peacock*. The paper is concerned to demonstrate Desai's preoccupation is an exploration of the troubled psyche of her characters. Going beyond the skin and flesh, Desai digs into the inner psyche of men and women.

Research Methodology

To analyze the motive behind the marital disharmony of Maya and Gautama, the paper applies a qualitative approach to research by exploring the primary resource, that is, the text, *Cry, the Peacock*, by Anita Desai, from a theoretical modality based on the psychoanalysis propounded by Sigmund Freud, with some references to Jacques Lacan. And the secondary resources on this text, such as literature from journals and websites commentaries are surveyed to note the research gap. It applies the purposive sampling method by taking the data from the textual lines to justify the working hypothesis. Its delimitation primarily lies in focusing on the culture and practice of male hegemony, and women's

endeavor to disrupt it in assessing the novel, *Cry, the Peacock*.

Theoretical Framework

Psychoanalysis is an analysis of the unconscious forces believed to affect the mind. Psychoanalysis is the therapeutic method originated by the Austrian psychiatrist, Sigmund Freud in the late 19th century for treating mental illness by bringing into consciousness a patient's unconscious fears, conflicts, and fantasies through transference ("Psychoanalysis," 2020).

Psychic complexes can arise due to the depression and anxiety disorders in marital relationships (Shrivastwa, 2021). Freud (1973) argues that the id, the ego, and the superego are the components of the psyche that determine our personality. A component of the unconscious, the id "contains all the urges and impulses, including what is called the libido, a kind of generalized sexual energy that is used for everything from survival instincts to appreciation of art" (McLeod, 2019, para. 1). The id acts in accordance with the "pleasure principle" (Freud, 1973, p. 14). The ego is a part of the conscious personality and is driven by the "reality principle" (Freud, 1973, p. 25). The ego operates to balance both the id and the superego. The superego is an instinct of conscience and self-criticism (Freud, 1973; McLeod, 2019). It operates on the morality principle. Freudian psychoanalysts take literature as a record of the dream. A dream accomplishes the repressed desires that lie buried in the unconscious mind. Text is manifest content that embodies the writer's id, ego, superego and anxiety at the latent content through such defense mechanisms as displacement, condensation, denial, sublimation, and so on (McLeod, 2019).

Another psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, interprets Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical work in the light of the structural linguistics of Saussure. Lacan (1977) claims, "unconscious is structured like language" (p. 56). Meaning is created as a part of the signifying chain of language in the impact of the other on the self

rather than being signified. Lacan (1977) categorizes three stages of human psychic development. First, the Real Stage is the stage up to 6 months of the child who perceives every object as an unfixed mass (Tyson, 2006). Second, the Mirror stage is the stage of 6-18 months. This stage is the oedipal, pre-linguistic stage. At this stage, the child takes the mother as a mirror of himself/herself. This stage is a stage of both recognition and misrecognition (Tyson, 2006). Third, the Symbolic Stage is the stage between 18-36 months. It is an oedipal linguistic stage. The slightly emerged sense of self and subjectivity in the child in the mirror stage gets developed in this stage through the language (Lacan, 1977). The language represses the child's desire to remain with the mother. All the repressions get accumulated in the unconscious like structured signifiers in language. The child's living with the mother is real, which is repressed in the unconscious and causes trauma time and again.

The psychoanalytic approaches mentioned above are prominent research tools used to examine how the psychic and contradictory instincts of Maya and Gautama provoke marital discordance in Anita Desai's novel, *Cry, the Peacock*, leading to their dissolution.

Review of the Related Literature

This segment of the paper surveys the literature and all the critical responses given to the theme, characterization, and narrative technique of Anita Desai's novel, *Cry, the Peacock*, published in 1963. A group of critics has assessed the theme of the novel from different perspectives. *Cry, the Peacock* is a story of a highly emotional, sensitive and imaginative woman recorded by a woman novelist (Bande, 1988). Pathak (1988) marks the portrayal of the predicament of a modern woman in the patriarchal society in *Cry, The Peacock*. Desai sketches the male characters with a rational disposition and the female characters with an emotional and sentimental disposition (Bande, 1988; Pathak, 1988). For these critics, the novel, *Cry, The Peacock*,

exposes the suppression and oppression of women by insensitive men in Indian society.

Srivastava (2016) analyzes the significance of the title in the novel. The peacock's cry is a metaphoric cry of Maya for love and accompaniment. In *Cry, The Peacock*, it outlines Maya's cry for love and understanding in her conjugal life with the loveless Gautama. Some readers of Desai credit her with being the Virginia Woolf of India for introducing the psychological techniques in her novels (Jain, 1982). Thakur (1989) has surveyed the narrative technique used in the novel, *Cry, the Peacock*, and marked it to be a stream of consciousness with a very few conventional episodes. Pandey (2020) judges the novel from the eco-feminist perspective in these words: "Through Maya, a female character, the novel deals with the rigidities between pastoral village life and the incursion of industrialization on the land as well as its dwellers" (p. 47). Rao (1977) contends that when the gap between sanity and madness diminishes, Maya liberates herself from illusion by killing her husband. The clash of two polarities, the life of instincts and the life of rationality, leads to the destruction of the leading characters of the novel. Jain (1982) briefly alludes to Maya as a neurotic figure: "In *Cry the Peacock*, Desai explores the turbulent emotional world of the neurotic protagonist, Maya, who smarts under an acute alienation, stemming from marital discord and verges on a curious insanity" (p. 21). In this way, a group of critics have addressed the psychic issues in the characterization of Maya, but they do not notice the marital conflict in the fiction.

Obviously, many critics and scholars have analyzed the novel, *Cry, the Peacock*, from different aspects. The judgments of most critics hint that the novel addresses issues of psychological dimensions. However, extensive research on the psychic upheavals of the characters is not conducted. This clarifies the emergence of the research gap in the novel. Hence, I have aimed at surveying the marital disharmony in the novel, *Cry, the Peacock*, from the psychological perspective.

Discussion and Analysis

The novel, *Cry, the Peacock*, presents an impression of the marital incoherence and distressed conjugal life between Maya, the protagonist, and her husband, Gautama. Marital discordance occurs between Maya and Gautama mainly because of temperamental differences between them. Maya is poetic, enigmatic, philosophical, and adores the remote while Gautama is rational as a practicing lawyer. Maya is fond of the remote and nature, but Gautama has no time to appreciate it. Their diverse attitudes towards life create tension in their lives.

In our contemporary male-dominated society, marital discord has been shattering the very identity of women because their repressed longings are not accomplished (Shrivastwa, 2021; Amato & Sobolewski, 2001). Maya's tensions are heightened because her longings are not accomplished from the very beginning of her married life. Maya, the daughter of a wealthy advocate in Lucknow, mostly finds herself alienated in the house because her mother is already dead, and her brother has gone to America to further his career. She obtains affection and attention from her father in her tense period. She is accompanied by her father. According to Freud (1973), when a young girl is attached to her father during her psycho-sexual development, an Electra complex gets developed in her. Maya confesses to herself: "No one, no one else, loves me as my father does" (p. 13). This exclamation obviously signals Maya's attachment with her father that later on develops into an Electra Complex again acts as the catalyst in the deflowering of her marital relationship with her husband.

Maya's troubled psyche is marked when Maya's pet dog, Tato, dies at the very beginning of the novel. The dog is the symbolic body of the mother she might have identified in the mirror stage. In the mirror, oedipal, pre-linguistic stage, the child takes the mother as the mirror of himself/herself (Lacan, 1977). Maya faces the first emotional crisis because she has been lavishing all her affection on it. The opening chapter reports how Maya first

could not endure the sight of her beloved dead dog and that she rushes to "the garden to wash the vision from her eyes" (p. 7). Maya ponders:

Something slipped in my tear-hazed vision. A shadowy something that prodded me into admitting that it was not my pet's death alone that I mourned today, but another sorrow, unremembered, perhaps as yet not experienced, and filled me with this despair (p. 8).

If the attachment is lost, the child keeps on seeking it in Maya's symbolic stage and hence remains in a state of loss. People's enjoyment and love for life are reduced when they are in a state of loss (Carleton, 2016b). Having great uncertainty and fear in her mind, Maya waits for her husband to come. Maya's husband, Gautama, a middle-aged man, a busy and prosperous lawyer, comes very late in the evening and does "all that was to be done, quickly, and quietly like a surgeon's knife at work" (p. 6). He reacts insensitively to the death of the dog. Gautama regards it as a very minor incident and consoles her, saying, "It is all over" (p. 6). But it is not all over for Maya because "She sensed the sordid horror it had brought" (p. 7). Gautama "rose immediately, ordering tea to be sent to the study, forgetting her, forgetting her woes altogether" (p. 8). This demonstrates Gautama's practical, insensible, and indifferent nature.

When language intervenes in a child's life, he experiences anxiety at the loss of his union with the mother in the pre-oedipal stage (Lacan, 1977). Maya's predicament gets heightened by her childhood days. She recalls an experience from her childhood when she went to the temple with her ayah. There was an albino astrologer who predicted that in the fourth year of Maya's marriage, either Maya or her husband would die. Maya is married early to Gautama, a leading lawyer and her father's friend, who is twice her age (Srivastava, 2016). Maya is destined to suffer from emotional starvation, especially since she is childless.

The paradoxical nature of Maya and Gautama, marked by his indifferent reaction to the death of her dog, is reflected in his indifference to her barren state again. Maya is highly sensitive,

imaginative, and sentimental, but Gautama is an unimaginative, pragmatic, and unsentimental man (Pandey, 2020). Though Maya and Gautama live together, their temperaments are not reconcilable because their sensibilities are characterized by diverse instincts. Surprised by Gautama's inability to differentiate between the smell of lemons and petunias, Maya muses:

The blossoms of the lemon trees are different, of much a stranger, crisper character... Their scent, too, was more vivid—a sour, astringent scent as refreshing as that of ground lemon peel, or a crushed lemon leaf. I tried to explain this to Gautama, stammering with anxiety, for now, when this companionship was a necessity, I required his closest understanding. (p. 21)

It is not merely Gautama's insensitivity, as is implied in his inability to distinguish between the two smells, but his being inured to the beauty of the natural world and unresponsive to her feelings, traceable in part to his philosophical detachment, that causes their estrangement. Nature stands as the id for Maya. The driving force of the id seeks immediate gratification of all urges (McLeod, 2019). Maya feels sorry for her husband:

... Poor Gautama. Not to be able to notice the odor of limes, not to hear the melancholy voice singing somewhere behind the plantains, not to have time to count the stars as they come out one by one—poor Gautama, my poor, poor husband... (p. 237).

Indeed, she feels that Gautama “had never lived, and never would” (p. 204). Gautama stands as the ego of Maya. He is a barrier to her id. The Ego controls the pleasure principle of the id (Freud, 1973). The temperamental incompatibility that characterizes their relationship brings about an unbridgeable gulf between them, causing acute mental agony to the sentimental Maya, whose condition is aggravated by her father-fixation, as observed by the unresponsive Gautama when she harks back to her childhood memories to avoid the present:

If you knew your Freud, it would be very straightforward... you have a very obvious

father-obsession, which is also the reason why you married me, a man so much than yourself. It is a complex that, unless you mature rapidly, you will not be able to deal with, or destroy. (p. 238)

Maya's conjugal life with Gautama is disturbed by her Electra complex. Cherry (2021) states, “The Electra complex is thought to take place during the phallic stage of psycho-sexual development, ages 3 to 6, during which time daughters spend more time with their fathers, flirting and practicing sexual behaviors without sexual contact” (para. 10). Of course, Maya and Gautama make several attempts at serious conversation, but a nameless barrier prevents effective communication. The facts and hard realities to him have no interest for her. What is the truth? What exactly is the “truth of living” (p. 236)? Maya feels that even if she tried to formulate a comprehensive answer, he wouldn't understand her. This expression justifies her feelings for him:

While he, because he didn't care for walks, or views, was tired from reading too much, and had matters to think out within the confines of his brain, remained behind in the dusty, enclosed cup of the small pain down below. (p. 91)

What is real to Maya is shadowy to Gautama. Lacan (1977) argues that real is the pre-oedipal stage which gets shattered by the entrance of language. Gautama enters into Maya's unconscious being a language and creates trauma in her psyche. Maya is deeply frustrated in her married life, and she is unable to express herself. It also suggests the wide chasm between what she expresses and what happens. Marital conflict occurs when the spouses do not have common interests and when they do not have some time to spare (Jenkins & Smith, 1991). Maya's neurotic condition is worsened by her recollection of the prediction made by an albino astrologer in her childhood: “My child, I would not speak of it if I saw it on your face alone. But look, look at the horoscope. Stars do not lie” (p. 33). The astrologer hinted that when a person is married young, he meets an early death by unnatural causes.

Maya is very much obsessed with the predictions of the albino astrologer. She often muses:

It must be a mark on my forehead, which had been so clear to the opaque eye of the albino who had detected it, upon which the stars now hurled themselves vengefully, and which prophesized a relentless and fatal competition between myself and Gautama. (p. 122)

Maya's rationality is impaired by her obsession with the prediction of the albino astrologer. It is her reactive obsession, not her autogenous obsession. Reactive obsessions are influenced by known external stimuli, while autogenous obsessions are evoked abruptly into consciousness (Lee & Kwon, 2003). Again, Maya ponders:

I tried to define the mark, give it a name, a locality. Was it an arrow? A coffin? A star? Was it between the eyes? At the temples? Was it dark? And what made the gods reach out and touch it with their cold fingers, as they considered the prospect of the murder? (p. 122)

Maya is aware of herself being confined to her private hell. Her obsession with death is reinforced by the death of her pet dog which takes her into a state of insanity. She is uncannily conscious of this because she herself observes, "Yes, I am going insane. I am moving further and further from all wisdom, all calm, and I shall soon be mad" (p. 124). The haunting prophecy makes Maya look at her relationship with Gautama as an appointment with death. Freud (1973) hypothesized that people channel their death instinct in many ways, and it sometimes manifests as alienation. Maya's rootlessness keeps on increasing every day. It culminates in a kind of schizophrenia, "a body without a heart, a heart without a body" (p. 196). Ultimately, Gautama begins to appear to Maya as a "guest who might never be encountered again" (p. 196) and as an "unreal ghost" (p. 196). Besides creating temperamental incompatibility and emotional alienation, their polarity helps Maya to justify the idea that it might be Gautama who is destined to die. Gautama's error lies in his rigidity. He does not try to understand her

impulses; rather he intends to change Maya. He tries to teach her his own ways and philosophy, but Maya's killing of Gautama symbolically suggests that Maya (illusions) is able to overpower and destroy Gautama, the personification of the lopsided view of detachment. The novelist highlights Maya's physical needs and sexual demands with the help of two powerful symbols. The peacock's voluptuous dance and the mating call of pigeons.

Thus, the novel leaves an impression of marital incongruity and unhappy conjugal life. The lack of communication between the two characters and the references to the steadily recurrent theme of incompatibility between Maya and Gautama are repeated many times in the story and in Maya's reflecting on their unsuccessful marriage. The lack of conciliation between the two entirely opposite temperaments is highlighted in various such trifling incidents. There is total alienation between husband and wife. Her pet dog's death is symbolic of her own psychic death, but Gautama remains untouched by it, for his world of reality has very little place for Maya's fantasy. The Albino astrologer's prophecy of the death of one of the two spouses four years after their marriage has constantly fevered Maya's mind. Her love of life and desire to live shifts the astrologer's prophecy onto Gautama's life. Maya pushes Gautama and he goes hurtling down from the terrace to death because, in a strange way, she feels that she was meant to live whereas Gautama had always been indifferent towards life.

Morbidity and Anxiety of Maya

Anita Desai's first novel *Cry, the Peacock*, is perhaps the first step in the direction of psychological fiction in Indian writing in English. The novel astonishes us with its neurotic and near-morbid obsession with the character, Maya, the psychologically disturbed heroine of this novel, with anxiety and death. According to Freud (1973), Thanatos, the death drive, allegedly compels humans to commit a horrible and self-destructive act that could

force their own death. Maya's obsession with death begins after the prediction of the albino astrologer when he announces, "But look, look at the horoscope. Stars do not lie. And it is best to warn you, prepare... death to one of you" (p. 33). When she was a child, it was predicted that either she or her husband would die within four years of their marriage.

This morbidity is intensified by the death of her pet dog, Tato. In the process, the novel becomes a fascinating psychological study of neurotic fears and anxiety caused by marital incompatibility and disharmony. The imbalance among id, ego, and superego leads to the chaotic state of mind (Freud, 1973). The various psychic states of Maya, chaotic and disordered as they are, have been unified into a pattern through a series of interactive motives and motives and symbols. Maya's muted and muffled cries for love in her loveless marriages are articulated in *Cry, the Peacock*. The cry of the peacock is symbolic of life-in-death and death-in-life (Srivastava, 2016). Maya's neurosis in the novel is based on marital discord arising out of her morbid preoccupation with death. Maya's psychosis doesn't completely occur out of marital discord, in which Gautama is to be held responsible. On the contrary, he dreadfully tries to understand her problem. Marital discord arises between Maya and Gautama because Maya is haunted by an awareness of death throughout the novel.

After being possessed by the vision of an albino astrologer, Maya recalls his talk about the myth surrounding the peacock's cry. The peacock in the latent content stands for Maya's association with her mother in the mirror stage. The child in the mirror stage apprehends distinction between the self and the mother; however, he is in the illusion that they are not distinct (Lacan, 1977). The peacock is the companion or mother for Maya in her mirror stage. The cry of the peacock in the rainy season evokes the Eros of Maya. The intense love for life gets turned on when Maya reflects on the approaching death. Maya muses

Am I gone insane? Father □ Brother □ Husband □ Who is my savior? I am in a 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. There is no rest anymore, only death and waiting. (p. 89)

Here, we can mark the conflict between Eros and Thanatos in Maya. Eros is referred to as love, or life instinct, or libidinal energy that is innate in all humans (Freud, 1973). Thanatos is a morbid obsession with death that arises out of the incoherent state of mind, an outcome of the conflict between the conscious and unconscious (Freud, 1973). The battle between Eros and Thanatos leads Maya towards a destructive drive. Maya confesses, "Yes, I am going insane. I am moving further and further from all wisdom, all calm, and I shall soon be mad if I am not that already" (p. 124). Maya's neurosis arises out of her need for Gautama's concern for either her "soft willing body or the lonely wanting mind that waited near his bed" (p. 9), but he is not bothered about either of these. Yet as a husband, he tries to help her avoid worrying. Therefore, she says:

So rambling, he drew me away from my thoughts of anguish which rose, every now and then, like birds that awake from dreams and arise out of their trees amidst the great commotion, circle a while, then settle again, on other branches. (p. 21)

Maya is schizophrenic. Schizophrenia is defined as "a severe mental disorder which is characterized by a wide range of unusual behaviors: hearing voices (hallucinations) and distorted or false perceptions, often bizarre beliefs" ("Schizophrenia", n. d., para. 1). Maya's schizophrenia is caused by her delusions and disordered thinking that impair her rationality.

Maya's world is one of delusions and hallucinations (Jain, 1982). In her world alone, there emerges the life of women such as Pom and Lila along with Albino. Maya is unable to give up the thought of the albino (Bhatnagar, & Rajeshwar, 2000). Therefore, she consoles herself by bursting out, "God, Gautama, father, surely it is nothing but hallucinations" (p. 64). For Gautama, Maya's psychic trouble is too strong to be hailed. His sensible suggestions that the sign of pregnancy should not reduce

one to tears made her “jump to lean over the bedstead” (p. 57) and threw back her head to the screen at him as if she is preparing to plunge off the cliff.

Lack of motivation, withdrawal from friends and family, visual hallucinations are the symptoms of schizophrenia (“Schizophrenia,” n. d., para. 1). Maya has all these symptoms. Convinced with it, she says: “There is something weird about me now. Wherever I go, whatever I see, whatever I listen to has this unnaturalness to it. This is insanity. But who, what is insane? I myself? Or the world around me” (p. 125). Neurotics always generate negative emotions ranging from fear, anxiety, irritation, loneliness, destruction, and death (Leary & Hoyle, 2009). From time to time, the realization of Maya that her actions are insane drowns her. She surprises Gautama with a new trend in her obsession with death. Gautama utters in despair, “Though why you should give thought to such a subject mystifies me...” (p. 144). When she gets, intensely disturbed, Gautama sits by her side and starts nursing her as best he can. But she reacts angrily: “How dare you? My outraged heart pounded against my ribs, till I choked, till I saw night about us and began to cry hysterically” (p. 154). This justifies the tension in their marital relationships.

Freud (1973) envisioned displacement as a form of the distortion of the dream. Displacement substitutes an illusion for something real. Desai uses symbols and images in the novel, *Cry, the Peacock*, as displacement to carry out hidden meanings that help us to know the psychic states of the characters. The dust cloud cloaks her vision. It predicts her future death and destruction. It is inside insanity objectified. It makes Maya burst into a rhetorical flourish, encompassing the events of her life. Her encounter with dust presages her violent act of killing Gautama. The mirror is the instrument through which Maya can see the outer world. Maya iterates, “the mirror that reflects the window, I saw no rain, no clouded sky, no promise, no sweetness, but only the summer heat, the summer sky...” (p. 149). It also images their future death and destruction: “The world was tilted upside down, insanely,

unnaturally so that our faces appeared bloated, as though they were the faces of corpses...” (p. 126). Maya’s insanity and disturbed psyche can be marked in such expressions.

Desai uses the metaphorical expressions of the zoological images in the novel to explore the psychic states of Maya. A metaphor is used for substituting some repressed instincts (Lacan, 1977). A bat evokes Maya’s imprisoned self. Maya confesses, “I felt as though a bat were caught in the same room with me, and shrank involuntarily” (p. 25). For Maya, Gautama is the lizard that becomes an insect to be swallowed: “The lizard, with glazed eyes, glared sullenly. The tail no longer twitched, but it had done so once. That was the warning, the threat” (p. 159). The dog is a vehicle that connects Maya with the astrologer and his horoscope, ultimately dragging her to the death obsession. The owl is also a metaphor for the death instinct. Maya heeds the owl before she resumes her conversation with Gautama: “‘Listen’, I said, stopping at a sound. ‘Do you hear that? It’s an owl’” (p. 178). With a similar implication, the peacock is used. Its cry is the image of her yearning for love. Born out of this urge, she tears Gautama as peacocks do in love-making. The demonstration of odd behavior, thrill-seeking, and risk-taking are the symptoms of Thanatos (Freud, 1973). Maya demonstrates odd and thrill-seeking behavior. The cry of the peacock evokes the death wish in Maya: “It was I. I who screamed with the peacocks, screamed at the sight of the rainclouds, screamed at their disappearances, screamed in mute horror” (p. 151). The window for Maya becomes her journey back into the past. Ultimately, she gives up hunting for the windows and says, “I gave up my hunting of the windows —not even a ghost was left there....” (p. 159). This equally suggests her increasing state of insanity.

According to Freud (1973), the unaccomplished, repressed desires of human beings get stored in the unconscious state of mind. If such desires are repressed and suppressed for a long time, it may result in insanity or suicide. Similar is the case in the context of the novel too. Maya is the tragic heroine in the novel whose desires to love and

be loved were never fulfilled. Maya expects some emotional and physical satisfaction in her married life but is deprived of both of them—one by Gautama's cold intellectualism and the other by his age. Maya's longing for the sensuous enjoyment of life is dampened by liberal doses of the Geeta philosophy of non-attachment. McLeod (2019) attributes the neurosis of a woman to sexual dissatisfaction resulting from the rigors of civilized sexual morality. Her effusive emotionality is always counter-balanced by Gautama's analytical mind. He views "nothing subjectively, nothing with passion" (p. 150), but she is flooded with "tenderness and gratitude" (p. 11). He merely touches her hair, falling "into the soft, velvet well of original instincts, of first-formed love" (p. 11). He draws "a finger down her cheek, and takes to hating her pretty face for failing to make an impact on him" (p. 11). This displays his indifference to her id.

Jacobson (2009) saw the psychic emotions of a person displaced in a text in the form of metonymy. Frustrated by Gautama's coldness, Maya gives herself up to a lift of pillow-beating. As her disillusionment becomes a routine experience, she increasingly sexualizes her surroundings, perhaps by way of displacement. The papaya tree in the country yard, for example, assumes a new sexual significance:

I contempt that, smiling with pleasure at the thought of those long of bridal flowers that flow out of the core of the female papaya tree and twin about her slim trunk, and the firm, wax-pelted blossoms that leap directly out of the solid trunk of the male... (p. 92)

The image of fighting and malting peacocks, apart from being the central motif of the novel, also underlines Maya's sexual frustration too (Asnani, 1985). The memory of her innocent enjoyment of their call in her childhood becomes the toil of her present overcrowded mind, full of bird and animal imagery:

But sleep was rent by the frenzied cries of peacocks pacing the rocks at night- peacocks searching for mates, peacocks tearing themselves to bloody shreds in the act of love,

peacocks screaming with agony at the death of love. The night sky turned to a flurry of peacock's tails, each star a staring eye. (p. 175)

Maya's id is not accomplished. The id is the primitive, sexual instinct that leads to aggression if not accomplished (Freud, 1973). Maya's continuous frustration at the suppression of the body's sexual needs makes her act in a disastrous way. A healthy physical, emotional, and sexual life would have given her a sense of security and stopped her psyche from decaying. Biologists regard marital discord as curing the ailment generated by the conflict. Maya must have thought that the treatment for her marital discord was her separation from her husband. But she takes a murderous step for the solution. She not only kills Gautama but also takes her own life.

Thus, the novel *Cry, the Peacock*, is a psychological novel that portrays the psychic tumult of a young and sensitive married girl who is haunted by a childhood prophecy of a fatal disaster. In the novel, Maya's obsessed condition is brought about by multiple factors, including marital discord and drabness, as well as a psychic disaster. The story ideally deals with the psychological consciousness of a female protagonist and is aptly illustrated amidst detailed images, monologues, and flashbacks. Children forget their imagination by indulging themselves in games. Anita Desai is nostalgic for her beautiful past. Her creative energy impels her to record her dreamy past in the novel.

Conclusion

Anita Desai's first novel, *Cry, the Peacock*, is a psychological novel that narrates the story of the estranged and detached couple Maya and Gautama, who live in their own worlds. Their attitudes, outlooks, and perspectives on life are diametrically opposed. The novel is primarily concerned with marital discord or disharmony and its impacts, particularly on women. Maya has gentleness, quietness, and affection, while Gautama is rigid and bitter. The marital bond between Gautama and Maya is so shaky that it leads Maya to kill her husband and commit

suicide. The growing tension between them reaches its climax when Maya kills Gautama and then commits suicide. Not only Maya and Gautama but also other minor characters suffered from marital disharmony and discord. Thus, the novel *Cry, the Peacock*, exposes an impression of marital incongruity and unhappy conjugal life. Desai is not interested in the pre-marital relationships between man and woman but deals with the problems of marital relationships in all their dimensions and manifestations. Marriage, which is a means of self-fulfillment and self-knowledge, eludes most women to come up to their anticipation and aspirations. Anita Desai looks into the reasons for marital discord and illustrates how such discord affects the family. Maya is a hypersensitive, childless woman obsessed by a childhood prophecy and father fixation and her husband, Gautama with his philosophy of detachment, is a reputed lawyer, worldly, wise, and realist. Maya looks for a communion relationship in her life, but her spiritual need almost remains unfulfilled. The need for emotional attention is the central problem of the novel. Maya yearns for his companionship and understanding, but her sensitive nature and intense emotions are smothered under the heavyweight of her formal life. Maya and Gautama disagree over trifles with each other. Gautama laughs at Maya's need to be loved, and when she tries to come close to him to ease her anguish, he preaches the doctrine of non-attachment from Bhagvat Geeta. Anita Desai in *Cry, the Peacock* has depicted not only the conflict in the man-woman relationship of Maya and Gautama but also the conflict of other characters. For instance, Nila, Gautama's sister, is not leading a happy married life. She comes to Gautama because she wants a divorce from her husband, but Gautama does not favor this because he knows that Nila is too bossy, self-willed, and bullying. In short, the dominant issues of marital discordance and resultant psychic tensions have been dealt with successfully by the novelist, Desai in *Cry, the Peacock*.

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