

**Indian Female Gothic Narratives and Resistance:
A Study of Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock***

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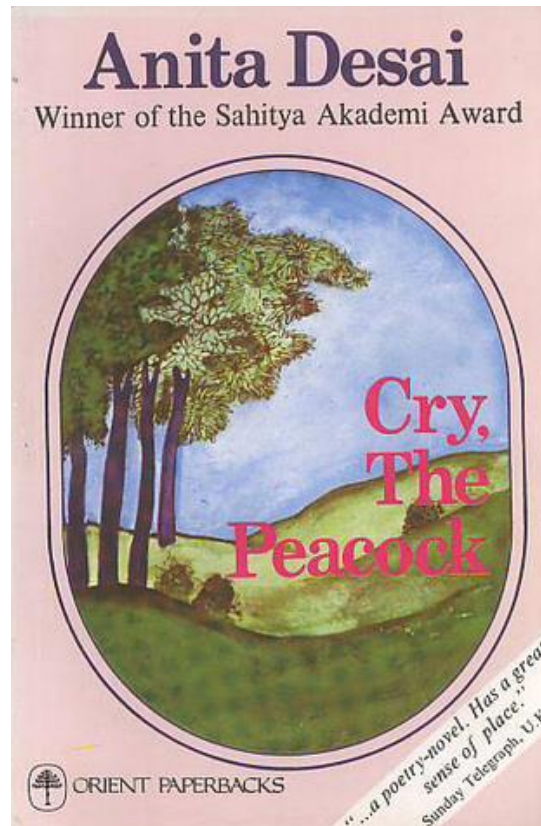


Anita Desai

Courtesy: <http://www.in.com/anita-desai/profile-21703.html>

Indian Women Writers Questioning Patriarchal Norms

Indian women writers are one of those revolutionary fighters who moved the pen extensively to recover and recuperate the self-identity. Throughout the years they raised their voice to find a place in the society. They created their own literature in which they questioned the whole lot of patriarchal norms and regulation, and stereotypical representation, and confined role of women in literature texts. They eradicated such kinds of concepts by creating an individual space to show the agony and sufferings of women through their strong writings. As Cixous says, "Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies" (78).



Anita Desai's Narratives

Anita Desai is such a prolific writer who brought out her inner feelings outside through the narratives and showed the path to youngsters how to represent and evince the women sufferings and painful condition before society. She is always concerned with the inner world of her characters and their roles. She basically showed the plights of modern women in the existing condition of patriarchal society. Desai has written abundantly who published her first novel in 1963, *Cry The Peacock*. Then she came up with *Clear Light of Day* (1980) which she counted as her most autobiographical work as it is set during her age and also in the same background. Later, she published *In Custody* which was short listed for the Booker Prize, was all about an Urdu poet. Besides these novels she has written many novels which gained the appreciation and obtained many awards also.

Focus of This Paper – Analysis of Characters Using Gothic as Medium

This paper tries to explore the resistant attitudes of female characters in her first and famous novel *Cry the Peacock* by using Gothic as a medium. The gothic literature has a long history that span over many centuries. This particular genre flourished in the age of eighteenth and nineteenth century where people started attracting to this innovative style. Critics have studied thoroughly about the genre and described the features in different ways. Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) is considered as one of the first original Gothic novels. Later many writers published, wrote and contributed abundantly to this genre. M. H. Abrams defines the Gothic in General in his book *A Glossary of Literary Terms* in the light of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* as follows:

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Some writers followed Walpole's example by setting their stories in the medieval period; others set them in a Catholic country, especially Italy or Spain. The locale was often a gloomy castle furnished with dungeons, subterranean passages, and sliding panels; the typical story focused on the sufferings imposed on an innocent heroine by a cruel and lustful villain, and made bountiful use of ghosts, mysterious disappearances, and other sensational and supernatural occurrences (which in a number of novels turned out to have natural explanations).

Female Gothic

The female gothic is one of the most exciting sub genres of Gothic literature. It is derived from the work of Ann Radcliff and other female writers of the nineteenth century. The term female Gothic is coined by Ellen Moers In 1977 in *Literary Women* to figure out the depiction of women in a Gothic. But, Indian gothic narratives are very different from the western gothic narratives. Indian writers come up with their own style and subverted the genre into a new style. Instead of using extreme physical terror and horror full setting places they converted into old gardens and some actions. Hence, Indian women writers widely use gothic as a medium to express their feelings and sufferings.

Image, Plots and Settings

Novels of Anita Desai, often, expose certain recurring methods in image; plot and settings which provide the charm of the narratives. The two opposing components such as gothic mystery and philosophical elements combined together in her novels. *Cry the peacock* is a best epitome of such narration in which she clearly brings out the philosophical elements and gothic mystery. Most of Anita Desai's novels show the characteristics Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) in which she used the same technique to evoke the terror and horror.

Focus on Modern Situation

The setting of the Anita Desai's novels is particular in terms of bringing up the modern formation instead of old fashion which we usually see in the gothic narratives. She often makes her novels in the city, hill station or in the big gardens. Besides, she mostly portrays her characters as wanderers who are searching the self-identity. Desai has opened up a space to discuss the feminist mode of writing throughout her career. N.R Gopal talks about Anita Desai's particular characterisation as "Anita Desai not only explores and portrays the feminine psyche of a common women but also of the subnormal bordering on abnormal women" (21).

Cry the Peacock

Cry the peacock is one of the most discussed and poetic novels of the Indian English literature. It deals with the mind set of Indian culture and tradition beautifully. The novel revolves around the character Maya, the protagonist of the novel, struggles to find a place in the society in the novel. She has been given different kinds of roles to understand and figure out the actual scenario of the world of indifference. Actually, the entire narration is the protagonist's psychic tumult, who is seen haunted by the prophecy of an astrologer in the beginning of the novel. Desai

uses the technique of stream of consciousness in the novel in which she describes the protagonist's psychic dilemma and alienation. It is the story of Maya's relationship with her husband. The novel mainly deals with the theme of marital discord between Maya and her husband Gautama. Maya goes through the different stages of life in the novel in which the author discusses the inner world of the protagonist, her desire for love and companionship, her eagerness to live freely and her fixation with the death.

Maya as a Rebel Woman

Anita Desai portrays Maya as a rebel woman, who feels uncomfortable in this patriarchal society. Being alone in the family, she got most of the father's love and affection. But, she clearly unsatisfied with her lively conditions and she resists and challenges the way her father nurtured her. She says that:

You have a very obvious father – obsession, which is also the reason why you married me, a man much older than yourself. The realization that another person, both close to you and your father does not place the same trust as you do in the adored figure shakes your faith. (Cry 122)

The other instance she rebelled the whole lot of patriarchal system is when she talks about her unsatisfied life with her husband Gautama. Lack of emotional attachment is very evident between Maya and Gautama. Though she is very eager and obsesses with the life, she challenges all the norms of the society. Her displeased sexual life portrays clearly by Anita Desai. She frankly admits and says her sexual dissatisfaction:

How little he knew my sufferings, or of how to comfort me. Telling me to go to sleep and while he worked at his papers, he did not give another thought to me, to either the soft willing body, or the lonely wanting mind that waited near his bed. (09)

Other Women Characters Who Rebelled and Resisted

Apart from Maya, there are other women characters that rebelled and resisted the odds and norms of the society in the novels. Nila, Gautama's sister and his mother one way started questioning the problems of society in the novel. Nila talks about her marital life as "After ten years with that rabbit I married, I have learnt to do everything myself" (162). The other woman character in the novel Laila, Maya's friend, mocks the entire system of marriage in the novel. She never complained about her unhappy marriage life, but she accepted her gloomy and unhappy life and said that "it was all written in my fate long ago" (54). In all these instances the women characters of Anita Desai's *Cry the Peacock* show the dejection of all the odds and norms prevailing in the society. They whole one way or other rebelled the so-called customs and tradition.

Dejection

Anita Desai portrays her characters as willing to do anything in the life. She gives priorities to each and every woman characters by showing the dejection of stereotypical representation. The incident of Nila's divorce clearly evinces the superiority power of her characters. Even Maya amused when she heard about Nila's initiative on divorce and went to near lawyer alone to discuss about it. Despite of her mother's disapproval for divorce she has shown immense courage to do so.

She uttered after the diverse letter that i have learnt everything to do myself. It is a clear proclamation of dejection and resistance of entire patriarchal system of the society.

Resistance

Maya's angry reaction towards the Leila's husband proves resistant attitude of the protagonist. She talks about her husband's silly talks on Leila's parents in a fuming way. Maya says:

Sometimes i thought of him as an animal, a ferocious and wild beast that allowed itself to become a house pet for its own reasons, and he accepted the food and drink she earned for him, as his due, even teasing her about her parents who had not seen her, written to her, or in any way communicated with her since the day of her elopement.(58)

Another instance for the resistance of the entire system is very obvious when Maya talks about her husband's obsession with money. She entirely unsatisfied with her husband and rejects his idea of life. She does not think money as a basic need of life. She proclaimed there are more things than money one has to share in the entire life. Maya says:

But, of course, we must, though I'm sure I don't know if money is basic. And why must it always be money? It's always be money, or property never a case of passion and revenge, murder and exciting things life that basic things why? Don't they ever happen? (23)

Maya continued fighting to get place in this male-centred society. Though she is in full love with the happy life, she showed her rage in the time. As astrologer's prophecy she decided to kill her husband who treated her as a puppet. The killing act of Maya (female character) shows dejection of entire stereotypical narration in which women were merely tools for their counterpart. Most of the western gothic and female gothic novels failed to portray their female characters as strong and superior than their male counterpart. It was not merely a killing, but it was Maya's revolt against entire social order and the rage that comes out from her past experience. Maya says:All order is gone out of my life, all formality, there is no plan, no peace nothing to keep me with the pattern of familiar, everything living and doing" (195).

Transferred Inner Affection to an Object

Maya's love towards her dog is something transferred her inner affection to an object. She has grown up without fulfilling the affection of mother and later she was denied the desirable love by husband. So, Maya is very much affected to her pet dog, Toto. Whenever she remembers about Toto she really feels something missing. She says on to that:

Small while Toto, whining a little, out of fear, his futile barks dying away into a hopeless silence. Small white Toto, small white corpse in the blaze of sun, abandon. "I shall miss himself-terribly, Gautama, I cried then, the confession fearing out of me in a stormy lush and even as I wiped away my quick tears and wept-more, I cried to myself what is the use? I am alone. (24)

To Conclude

In short, *Cry the Peacock* is a work in which Anita Desai portrays voices of resistance through the female characters throughout the entire narration. For that, she used gothic as a medium to reflect her ideas in a simple way.

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