

## A STUDY OF MARRIAGE AND MAN-WOMAN RELATIONSHIP IN THE NOVELS OF ANITA DESAI

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### ABSTRACT

*Women always face many problems in their life in various ways. Women were suppressed and ill treated by the opposite sex. Women were slaves to them and under their control. They didn't have the liberty or equality. Women were not free to act on their own. Many illegal activities and cruelties were done to them. Education was refused to them but the suppression was broke out by some of the great women and they proved their power. Anita Desai in all works is extremely disturbed and worried about plight of women and sad state of affairs in a patriarchal society. This is clearly seen in her novels and how her selection of female characters.*

**KEY-WORDS:** *Identity crisis, suppression, subjugation, Love.*

Anita Desai has shown in her novels how women characters in early childhood have been confined in their homes and it results alienation from social mainstream. Besides she also shows how stress and strain confines her abilities and makes her meek and submissive in patriarchal society. Anita Desai unlike other novelists have dealt the theme of human relationship from different perspective as she lays too much stress on loneliness and emotional breakdown. Communication break down due to temperamental incompatibility and dissonance in attitudes between husband and wife is believed by her as the root cause of the marital relation, rifts and tensions. This theme of Desai finds support from English novelists like Richardson, Fidding, D.H. Lawrence, and Faulkner. These authors believe that the relation between man and woman is the greatest relationship for humanity and that other relationships will always be subsidiary.

The author approaches Indian women's life independently, she argues that women's individual identity has been taken for granted and no one in society and home cares for her, and the result is that it increases her

suffering and she continues to live a miserable life. Uma Banerjee believes that, “The hypocrisy of the institution of marriage is increasingly taking the

Shape of a deal albatross around the necks of the modern, emancipated self-respecting women” (Banerjee. 123). Uma Banerjee talks about conjugal relationship to be good and booming, the tastes and interests of the two should be same. As this is an accepted belief that marriage is a union of two minds, but Anita Desai makes a modification to this belief that two minds are different and there is bound to be some maladjustment. As we all portray women as emotional and sentimental and expect them to change and adjust to the new environment. But Anita Desai believes that change means to delete her individuality, herself and her conscience. But she remains reluctant to the transformation and it affects her behaviour and psyche. It dashed her cherished dreams and it also erodes marital relationship. Uma Banerjee rightly says, “Mrs. Desai believes that one Nora will not make much of a difference and woman will continue to play the supreme price for meal- ticket” (Banerjee. 155). Most of the marriages in Anita Desai’s novels are about traumatic marital experiences and Anita Desai even goes on to say indirectly that women must remain unmarried and if marry then be ready for a hellish life.

*Cry the Peacock* (1963) her first novel portrays all married couples confronting poignant problems of maladjustment in marriage. Maya’s marriage with Gautum is shown in the beginning of the novel as this is a marriage between two incompatible souls and minds. But Maya seems to be more obsessed with the account of her pet dog’s death. She hardly cares for her relationship, she is hypersensitive as it was more or less a marriage of connivance, but her nuptial knot was tied while following traditions and customs of male dominated society. Maya with her, “Round, childish face, pretty, plump and pampered the small shell-like ears curling around petty ignorance, the safe, overfull lips – the very, very lack brows, the silly, collection of curls, a flower pinned to them – a pink flower, a child’s choice of a posy” (*Cry, the Peacock*: 105). Here we see the match of temperamental difference between the two. Meena Belliappa remarks:

The incompatibility of characters stands revealed – Gautama who touches without feeling and Maya who feels even without touching (Belliappa. 26).

“The matrimonial bonds that blind the two are very fragile and tenuous ‘neither true nor lasting’ but broken repeatedly and repeatedly the pieces were picked and put together again as of sacred icon with which, out of the pettiest superstition, we could not bear to part (Desai. 40).

Maya is grief-stricken by the death of her pet dog, but her husband remains totally indifferent to her. He did not show any compassion for her grief, neither he tried to console her. Her husband’s indifference and total detachment with her wife’s situation is clearly seen with these words “It is all over, he had said as calmly as the mediator beneath the sal tree. You need a cup of tea, he had said, showing how little he knew of my misery or of

how to comfort me” (Desai. 9). Maya’s relationship with Gautum is devoid of love, understanding and companionship. But Maya makes her best to make good relationship and to develop love but result is complete failure, as their opinions, tastes, likings are quite different:

I tried to explain this to Gautama, stammering anxiety for now, when his companionships was a necessity. I required his closest understanding. How was I to gain it? We did not even agree on which points, on what grounds this closeness of mind was necessary. ‘Yes, yes, he said, already thinking of something else, having shrugged my words off as superfluous, trivial and there was no way I could make him believe that this, night filled with these several scents, their effects on me, on us, were all important, very core of the night, of our moods tonight (Desai. 19-20).

Her husband again upset Maya when he didn’t cooperate with her about fortune teller who was his friend also. Her futile relationship with her husband and her immediate reaction with her words as: “We belong to two different worlds, his seemed the earth that I loved so, scented with jasmine, coloured with liquor, resounding with poetry and warmed by amiability. It was mine that was hell” (Desai. 102). The title of the novel *Cry, the peacock* stands justified. It is actually cry of Maya for love and care in her loveless marriage. Maya’s world is altogether different, she has her own world, tastes, and odour as her husband is totally not interested in her world. This leaves her hopeless, dejected and alone, as it is quite difficult her to accept the role of life given by her parents and husband. She spends her sad days in isolation and broods upon the life given to her by others.

Maya grumbles because of her husband’s uncaring and negligent attitude. Her husband is least interested in her world, and it results in two separate worlds. They continue to live in their own worlds, never realized each others difficulties. Maya’s world is romantic, dreamy while Gautama’s world is rational and practical. Maya longs love but didn’t receive as Gautama is without romantic feelings. If she would have got love and care from her husband, it would have relieved her from pain and anxieties. It is not only Maya and Gautama who are unhappy, there are others also, for instance Lila, who is Maya’s friend is also unhappy with her married life. She married with a tuberculosis patient. She didn’t receive love and care from her husband and it ultimately results in divorce, she makes fun of marriage as she says, “A ten years with that rabbit I married, I have learnt to do everything myseal” (*Cry, the Peacock*.162) All these cases which the author talks about in the novel *Cry, the Peacock* is about unhappy marriage, incompatibility between husband and wife. Women who confronts became the victims of torture and pain. Their only solution to escape from this miserable world is suicide and they even didn’t hesitate in doing it as it becomes difficult for them to continue to bear the pain.

In *voices in the city*, her second novel with the same theme as it talks about unhappy marriage between Mr. and Mrs. Ray. Both are obsessed with family names and it deepens their gap. Husband is obsessed with his

family name and talks about proudly, didn't understand his proper role, neglects her basic duties, same is done by her wife as she talks pompously about Tea estate and a house. It was a terrible clash of egos and it spoils their life and ruins marital relationship. The novel also deals with the incompatible marriage of Monisha and Jiban. Monisha's husband is the prisoner of conventional culture. He believes that a woman's most important roles besides child bearing are cooking, cutting vegetables, serving food and brushing small children's hair under the authority of a stern mother-in-law. Monisha feels that her privacy is denied to her. Her husband is busy with his middle rank government job with no time for Monisha and no desire to share her feeling. The theme of alienation is treated in terms of mother-children relationship which itself is a consequence of dissonance in husband-wife relationship. Monisha leads an equally fragmented and starved life. She is alienated from her mother as well as her husband. The graph of her mental life can be constructed from her long searching and self-confronting entire in the diary. Her relationship with her husband is characterized only by loneliness and lack of communication. He reckons his wife as worth nothing in consequence. He does not bother to ask his wife, when he finds some money missing from his pocket even. Monisha's ill matched marriage, her loneliness, sterility and stress of living in a joint family with an insensitive husband push her to breaking point. The element of love is missing in her life and finally she commits suicide.

In *Where Shall We Go This Summer* Anita Desai chooses marital discord as the subject matter of this novel and highlights how the inability to lay bare one's soul and express freely one's fear and anguish result in the snapping of communication between husband and wife. Different attitudes, individual complexes and fears add to this distancing between the husband and the wife resulting in conjugal disharmony. Raman and Sita have irreconcilable temperaments and attitudes to life. The ill-assorted couple of Raman and Sita are confronted with the same problem of husband-wife discord. Sita represents a world of emotion and feminine sensibility while Raman is a man with an active view of life and the sense of the practical. Sita is a nervous, sensitive middle-aged woman with explosive and emotional reactions to many things that happen to her, she always wants to escape reality and does not want to grow up and face the responsibilities of adult life. On the contrary, Raman represents the prose of life. He represents sanity, rationality and an acceptance of the norms and values of society. He is unable to understand the violence and passion with which Sita reacts against every incident. His reaction to his wife's frequent outbursts is a mixture of puzzlement, weariness, fear and finally a resigned acceptance of her abnormality. He cannot comprehend her boredom, her frustration with her. In this novel theme of alienation and lack of communication in married life is discussed by writer. Sita finds herself alienated from her husband and children. She remains an ignored personality since childhood. She is the product of broken family. She yearns to have the attention and love of others but her father remains busy with his chelas and patients. Even after marriage,

she remains lonely. Her husband also is busy. He fails to fulfil her expectation. As a result, there is marital discord, tension between husband and wife.

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