



Hermeneutics Of Intercultural Struggles In Anita Desai's *Cry, The Peacock*

Dr Anjaiah Manda^{1*}, Dr R. Bakyaraj²

^{1*}An Assistant Professor in English, MALLA REDDY ENGINEERING, COLLEGE FOR WOMEN, Hyderabad – 500100, Telangana.

²An Assistant Professor in English, MALLA REDDY ENGINEERING, COLLEGE FOR WOMEN, Hyderabad – 500100, Telangana.

Abstract

This paper explores the circumstances, events, and cultural, social, and political developments that give rise to intercultural conflicts in both Indian and Western contexts in Anita Desai's *Cry, The Peacock*. In the novel, she addresses issues such as the misery and inability to adapt of a few Europeans living in India and the Indians in Western countries who have nostalgic feelings. Most of the characters are rootless and unable to establish a strong presence in any one culture. The study has discovered a cultural conflict between the younger and older generations, whose lifestyles are very different from one another. It discusses the conflict between Gautama's reason and reality and Maya's delusion and illusions. Additionally, the researcher has discovered that the novel can be interpreted as a fight between modernity and tradition, between human relationships based on trust and mistrust, and between marital disharmony, worry, and unconcern. The study has found that these conflicts are a result of conflict between the younger and older generations as well as between the new and older cultures within the same society. This is sufficient evidence of the intercultural existence and lifestyle.

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Among the most renowned Indian English novelists, Anita Desai's works have garnered significant critical acclaim both domestically and internationally. She concentrates on the intricacies of modern Indian society and the challenges faced by Anglicised middle-class women in modern India in her novels. Most of her protagonists try to get above the constraints placed on them by a patriarchal society that is bound by tradition. Her novels are set against the backdrop of the cultural and social upheavals that have engulfed India since its independence, and in her latter works, she tackled issues such as the breakdown of traditional Indian values, western misconceptions about India, and anti-Semitism in Germany. Since she frequently discusses "roots," she also addresses topics like hybridity, changing identities, and imagined homelands.' She says, "My roots are divided because of the Indian soil on which I grew and European culture which I inherited from my mother" (Wandrekar's "The Ailing Aliens: *Bye-Bye Blackbird: A Symptomatic Study in Schizophrenia*," 149).

Through a feminine perspective, Desai's novels address the complexity of contemporary Indian culture. Numerous significant recurrent themes, like the difficulties with independence and communication, the impact

of the West, and the tensions that inevitably lead to conflicts between religious and household connections, are all hinted at throughout the works. Desai illustrates the issue of marital discord and breakup in *Cry, the Peacock*. To highlight this idea, the author writes in the first person. Aside from mental compatibility, marriage is a social institution that considers practically all factors. The pair in the novel, Gautama and Maya, are completely different from one another psychologically. They also have completely distinct temperaments. Maya is a vibrant, happy person who always wants to enjoy life to the fullest, while Gautama is a sombre, pragmatic person. She believes that having a satisfying sexual relationship is essential to married life, but she is not given this. Maya has a keen sense of aesthetics because she is the affluent father's daughter. She finds great joy in the sounds of nature, animal behaviour, bird song, dancing, poetry, and music. Her family friend Gautama is considerably older than her and has little interest in the sensual pleasures of life. He calls the culture she longs for decadent, looks down on her ideas and desires, and preaches to her about the idea of disinterest.

The primary female protagonist Maya, her psychological issues, and her sense of alienation are the focus of Desai's *Cry, The Peacock*. She marries Gautama, a friend and lawyer for her father who is considerably older than she is. Maya comes from a conventional Brahmin household. She adheres to several prophetic branches of the Brahmanical order, including astrology. However, Gautama's family stands for reason and reasonedness in life. Therefore, even though many people find Maya's face endearing, a man like Gautam could not fall in love with her. What he sees primarily in her face, in contrast to her father, is excessively prolonged childishness, pampering, ignorance, and silliness, all of which he does not intend to partake in. As a result, when Maya's amorous, artistic, and emotional requirements are satisfied by Gautam's hardness, they become estranged from one another. Their feelings of estrangement drive them to fight.

The novel can be viewed as a story about the problems that exist between modernity and tradition, between human relationships and mistrust, between marital disputes and animal concerns. The protagonist of the novel, Maya, is a sensitive young woman who is consumed by her childhood catastrophe prophecy. Her father has taught her to accept the catastrophe, claiming that the world is full of devastation since it was founded on a Western, not an Asian, idea of existence. Generations of people have instilled in us the belief that acting within one's constraints and embracing them is more admirable than attempting to act outside of them and destroying them. He ceased speaking, saying that one must accept.

Maya, who is very devoted to her pet dogs, is left alone with Toto. "Oh Gautam pets mightn't mean anything to you, but they mean the world to me," the speaker remarks (54). Here, the novelist has portrayed two persons from different cultural backgrounds; one of them loves dogs, while the other does not.

When Toto passes away, Maya is even more upset. She spends the entire day by herself with the dead dog and no one to dispose of it, so the topic of cremation comes up. While the event is an intolerable tragedy to Maya, Gautama, a rationalist, views it differently, dismissing it as a routine occurrence that should be handled with efficiency. "Why is it that I imagine you to be one of those enigmatic individuals who take such solace in hocus-pocus, in the fake rituals and silly decorations we use to bury our dead?" (14) It has always appeared to me the height of foolishness, fitting only in that it terminates a life as useless. On cremation, a religious rite and a sociocultural occurrence, Maya and Gautama disagree. It is a custom from long ago that should be kept in mind. Gautama did not like that and stated that a wealthy zamindar might bring new and stylish cars into his home to make an impression. But when it comes to birth, marriage, and death, he will not stray from custom. There are no criteria at all for the Gautama criterion. The firmness of actual life gave a small gasp and fell away like a worm-eaten fruit at Maya's feet when she felt it being said brutally.

Maya finds the men's Kathakali dancing to be interesting. Gautama is completely uninterested in the dance that she wishes to attend when she travels to South India. He adds that it will be less expensive when the troupe performs in Delhi during the winter. Leila, a friend of Maya's, is a believer in "Fate" and regrets not having enjoyed life more after falling in love and marrying a man who was terminally ill with tuberculosis. It was all written down ages ago, she thought, and nothing could be altered. Pom, a different acquaintance, spoke of lust instead of fate, of freshness, brightness, colour, and joy, and of spiteful remarks about her parents-in-law, with whom she shared a home. Leila was raised in a society that taught her to trust in fate, while Pom, who came from a diverse background, believed in change and freshness instead. It is, in a sense, a cultural confrontation between the younger and older generations. Pom talks intentionally and complains about the arrangement the in-laws made. Kailash is tempted by her to move out of his parents' flat and into a new one. But Kailash

questions, “What’s the deal with residing here? Let’s save our money, it’s so inexpensive” (61). This altercation is an illustration of conflict within a culture between the old and the young, or between generations.

Maya was raised in a Brahmin household and adopted the ancestors’ indolent lifestyle. In contrast to her, however, Gautam was indifferent to all religions. Gently and without words, his father would ask, “Fate? What is that? I was just aware of the labour aspect of it” (76). When Maya brought up the subject of palmistry and astrology, Gautama laughed it off and remarked, “Palmistry? Astrology? Are you now interested in them because of a new fad? Are we that innocent? Ultimately, despite the differences in our approaches, we have both received a full education” (76). This represents yet another overt example of the conflict between cultures, as well as the contrasts between them.

The conversation continues with a Sikh buddy who, although he too believed in fate, had a very different wife from him when it came to astrology, palmistry, and faith. Misunderstandings abound, leading to a collision with destiny. Maya’s father, an avid reader of Urdu poetry, would often sit in the garden during a blue twilight and recite passages from the poetry collection with his friends. Gautam would not be moved by the verses because they were ridiculous, archaic, and useless to him. He was a disaster for Maya, a philistine with a sharp, sardonic temper. Maya, who loved poetry, would look in at the purple darkness where white clothes and fragrant white flowers were surrounded by wreaths made of cigar smoke. However, Gautama would fear a rift or dispute when they needed to form a close alliance. It is because of their diverse cultural backgrounds and lifestyles. “Gautama was the one, fated to live on in this world that daily grew more desirable and the one to writhe and die in the crudest of hells?” (102) asks Maya, a believer in destiny after she concludes that those were the destinies selected for them.

Maya recognised the phoney affection, an inebriated need to hasten towards her spouse. She felt as though her destiny was being twisted while Gautam was chatting to his buddy and turned away. She responded, “Blissful, yes, because it is unrelated to our day, unclouded by the vulgarity of ill-educated men or of overbearing women” (104). When Maya states, “You did not want me,” (110) it becomes more evident how she and Gautama are at odds. Then Gautama shot back, “Not want you? Did I say that correctly? Why the excessive drama? I just wondered what you could want from a group of old men, all talking in Urdu and a little tipsy. Additionally, you rather embarrassed them” (111). Gautama finds it objectionable and perplexing that old guys are getting together while intoxicated and chatting in Urdu. It is an illustration of hostility against another culture, such as the poetic or traditional culture.

Maya, a devout follower of Gautama’s school of thought, believes that without this motivation, life would simply be morphing into darkness. Which faith, he wonders, will supply the reasoning? Not trust. He disagrees with the notion that the plaster gods and goddesses should be clothed, bathed, and fed sweat meats to give the impression that they are living beings when they are just hungry children. Maya’s brother Arjuna is the complete antithesis of his father; he leaves for New York, defying his father’s aspirations, his family’s claims, and the norms of upper-middle-class living. Though he rides a bicycle and adds, “But I prefer the bicycle,” (131) his father wants him to get a car. Second-hand, it was so much less expensive. He befriends a slum inhabitant named Farid Mohammed and visits the slums, a notorious and socially marginalised region of the city.

The figure Arjuna, the nonconformist son and non-Brahminical anti-Brahminical who rebelled against established traditions and practices, makes the cultural clash more evident. It appears that *Voices in the City*’s Nirode is the reincarnation of *Cry, The Peacock*’s underdeveloped Arjuna. This is an illustration of a collision between cultures; specifically, it is a conflict between the ways of living of two generations, the old and the young.

Muslim culture holds that there will be harems - harems of dancing angels spilling wine - and roses in heaven, along with fountains. Beliefs rooted in religion and culture are at odds. Maya wanted to live and not die; she wanted to sleep. She did not wish for Gautam to be in a Muslim paradise or for herself to be in a Christian hell. She wanted to be content with her cultural background. She is not prepared to accept or be drawn to any other culture save her own; rather, she seeks spiritual perfection, the ultimate resolution, in her own culture. “No, I did not wish him in a Muslim paradise, no more than I wished myself in a Christian hell,” (175) she says, expressing her goal to find marital peace.

Maya toms between two realities as if her body is breathing during the struggle because she is captivated by a childhood prophecy of tragedy. It is, in a sense, a clash between the two cultures - the advancing lunacy and the vanishing grace. Though Gautama believes that “the world I love is fatal and the one i.e. aliens to me is the only one eternal,” (178) she nonetheless expresses her desire to live an endless life. That is to say, the work addresses the struggle between the spiritual and material realms, specifically the clash between Eastern spirituality and Western materialism. Maya claims that the stark, obvious difference between “East and the West” is demonstrated by her heightened expression.

In the east of sun glared, one eye glared, so white, so hot, that before its gaze each object, dead or alive, cringed: the white bones on the desert shrank, split and crumbled, and in the jungles, green leaves curled, withered and dead. In the west hung dust clouds, sulphur-yellow, iodine-tinged, heavy, gloomy, loaded with the respite that comes before a storm, violence, murder. Between the two, between east and west, below them, the earth fell silent. So great a hush descended, that each ear - snail's, lion's, shark's - was tuned to its reverberating echo, listening, listening for that final, awful crash, which might not sound louder than the barest whimper. We were as in a gigantic bubble, only it was not so gigantic after all - it was slowly compressing, concentrating, squeezing, and we waited, breathlessly, for that high moment when the east would clash with the west when the sun would explode cloud. The world grew smaller. It shrank, shrank soundlessly. (181)

This is an illustration of how the world is getting smaller and smaller due to globalisation and immigrants crossing borders to enter other nations, which may lead to cultural disputes. Life has no meaning and is only an illusion for the Maya. She has always existed in an illusionary and fixated universe. She feels a sense of melancholy when she thinks about Arjuna, which forces her to step outside of her fantasy world and back into reality. Believing in reason, Gautama frequently tries to lure her into his world by asking her if she has ever answered her brother Arjuna. She did not recognise the name. It is a conflict between the realms of reason and illusion in that sense. The realm of illusion seeks to subjugate the realm of reason and reality. The conflict in *Cry, The Peacock* is between Gautama's reason, logic, and reality and Maya's illusions and delusions. “Which other religion will give you logic, asks Gautama? Logic, not faith? Make a point, if you can” (123) meaning that religious faith and logic are not the same.

To sum up, Desai has made a substantial contribution to both the literary world in general and Indian writing in English in particular by infusing her works with an intercultural perspective that expands the boundaries of thought, which is, in the opinion of most critics and thinkers, a very important literary characteristic. In her novel, *Cry, The Peacock*, she outlined the issues and sufferings of disenfranchised people caught up in a society that is undergoing rapid change. She also revealed the various mental states, psychic resonances, inner motivations, and existential goals of humanity. She also addresses the plight of humanity and its moral, cultural, and social conundrums. She shines especially at bringing attention to the awful situation of extremely emotional and sensitive women who are tormented by feelings of shame, neglect, loneliness, and despair. Ultimately, the main theme of her novels becomes the existential issue of the estranged ego. She stands for a fresh wave of ideas and perspectives that are prevalent in contemporary English-language Indian novels. In the novel, Desai retells the intercultural elements of two distinct families and nations.

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