

Chapter I

FEMALE PROTAGONIST IN *CRY, THE PEACOCK*

Anita Desai is the most significant woman writer today. She does notable work in book- reviews, journals, interviews, seminars and critical literature in Indian writing in English. She is a trendsetter novelist. She is fully aware about social structure of Indian community. In her novels she avoids abstractions and idealistic representation. She explores the disturbed psyche of the modern Indian woman. The female protagonists of her novels are the spokesperson of the novelist. Female protagonists of her novels have existential absurdity. They have lack of communication that creates mental crisis. Female protagonist in her novels like Maya in *Cry, the Peacock*, Monisha and Amla in *Voices in the City*, and Nanda Kaul and Raka in *Fire on the Mountain* are seen in the quest of their individual identity.

Desai's female protagonists are self-conscious of the reality around them they carry with them a sense of loneliness, alienation and pessimism. Anita Desai deals with the dislocation of normal life morbidity of temperament. Mal adjustment in family life. She works and the inconsistencies of modern life and adds a new dimension to the realities of life. Through her female protagonists, Desai draws life mysteries, turmoil and chaos she presents unsolved mystery of her female protagonist. Her unquestionable existentialist concerns have distinguished her from other novelists of her generation.

Through the female protagonists of her novels *Cry, the Peacock*, *Voices in the City* and *Fire on the mountain* Anita Desai sets herself seriously to voice the mute miseries and hopelessness of millions of married women of Indian society. These women are tormented by existentialist problems and predicaments. Desai reveals a rare imaginative awareness of various deeper forces at work and finds a profound understanding of women sensibility. In this way she unravels the subconscious of her highly sensitive female

protagonists. She writes about helplessness, agony, anger, struggle and surrender of the female protagonists. Almost all of female protagonists of Anita Desai feel alienated and exiled even though they stay in crowd. She is more interested in the interior world of her female protagonists than in political or social realities. Her novels deal with ferocious assault of existence. Her female protagonists are persons for whom alienation is the ultimate reality. They are mostly women comprising school-girl to grandmother. They are fragile, introverts longing for their existence.

Most of Desai's female protagonists such as Maya, Monisha, Raka, Nanda kaul, Amla, Ila Das suffer from the psychic deficiencies like schizophrenia, frigidity, hyperaesthesia, hypo-chondria, mental disassociation, introversion, inferiority are quite different. They are phlegmatic, unsentimental, monotonous, philosophical but quite practical and prudent.

Commenting on the sensitivity of female protagonist Anita Desai Madhusudhan Prasad writes:

"An uncrowned queen of the inner emotional world, she dexterously transcribes the subconscious, the phantasmagoria of her sensitive protagonists terribly bewildered by the burden of living hopelessly in the contemporary society bristling with absurd realities" (R.A.Singh 74)

Shanta Acharya writes:

"Her central characters are sensitive and respond faithfully to the needs of the self."(R.A.Singh74)

Late R. S. Pathak, prominent critic writes:

"Through her themes, characterization and images about confinement

and lack of freedom, Anita Desai has raised pertinent questions regarding the status and role of women in society. The most crucial issue that she takes up for discussion again and again is the question of women's freedom."(R.A.Singh 74)

Regarding her unusual character Desai says:

I am interested in characters who are not average but have retreated or been driven into some extremity of despair and so turned against, or made a stand against, the general current. It is to flow with the current, it makes no demands, it cost no efforts. But those who cannot follow it, whose heart cries out "the great No" who fight the current and struggle against it, they know what the demands are and what it costs to meet them.(Dalmia Yashodhara:13)

Desai's female protagonists are neither ordinary nor are their problems concerned with food, clothes and shelter. Their problems are concerned with the psyche. They struggle for the world within and the world without. Her female protagonists have an imaginary world of their own they have crisis of consciousness and tension of the external and the internal world.

Here in the novel *Cry, the Peacock* Maya is the female protagonist. Major themes of the novel are marital disharmony, lack of identity, escapism and a sense of the meaninglessness of life. The novel has three parts to it. The first part of the novel is prologue and the third part is epilogue. In the first part the novelist describes the agony and depression suffered by female protagonist Maya on the death of her pet dog Toto. For her Toto is more than the child. The second section the novel has seven chapters. This part reveals the gradual stages by female protagonist Maya moves from sanity to insanity.

In *Cry, the Peacock* Anita Desai discusses protagonist Maya's unconscious obsessed by her father, Raisahib. The most remarkable things about the novel *Cry, the Peacock* is building up the tension and presentation of the hideous transformation of a sensitive, poetic young lady into an insane individual.

Female protagonist Maya is a motherless child but her father, Raisahib showers all his love on her. She has been brought up as a princess:

“As a child, I enjoyed princes like, a sumptuous
of the fantasies of the Arabian Nights, the glories
And bravado of Indian mythology, long and
Astounding tales of the princes and regal queens.....”(41)

Maya, the female protagonist is the most sensitive woman. She is suffering from neurotic fears and marital disharmony. In the novel *Cry, the Peacock* novelist Anita Desai painted protagonist Maya's neurosis growth, development and crisis in all the three parts of the novel. Protagonist Maya has developed a father fixation and after her marriage she finds Gautama, her husband a father substitute who is nearly twice of her age. Throughout the novel we see freedom is not possible to Maya. As Gautama, her husband does not love female protagonist Maya hates him. When she sees Gautama's reflection in the mirror she strikes it and tries to kill him. This shows the gradual transformation of female protagonist Maya into a Criminal. Maya seems to be self-seeking for a change in her life. She tries to connect her present with the past. Protagonist Maya suffer from the feeling of suffocation and disassociation of her inner self.

At the very beginning of this chapter we see how Maya is obsessed with prophecy of disaster. Anita Desai begins her novel *Cry the Peacock* with very sad incident of the death of the female protagonist Maya's dearest pet dog, Toto. In the very beginning part

female protagonist of the novel was shocked by the death of her pet dog Toto. She cannot control herself. She loves very sad and depressed till the end of the novel. Death of the pet dog is common for all but for Maya it is more than child. So in the very beginning she longs for the company of her husband. Gautama soon after the death of Toto:

“ She sat there, sobbing and waiting for husband to come home.

Now and then she went out into the verandah and looked to see

if he were coming up the drive which long shriveling.

melting and then shriveling again, like molten lead in

a groove cut into earth” (5)

Maya cannot manage herself so she reminds her childhood memories to escape from her present. The incident shows that the female protagonist of Anita Desai's novels cannot accept the situation. Instead of accepting the situation they prefer repent for the situation. Maya is not exception to this. In such crisis Maya usually resorts to crying and bursting into a lot of pillow beating.

For the female protagonist Maya the cry of the peacock is the cry of frustration within her. According to Maya world is a toy specially made of her. In the monsoon peacock dances madly and cries for its lover and finally kills itself in a frenzy of love. Maya's heart cracks up with the presumption of same hopelessness. Maya admits:

“ When I heard one cry in the stillness of night, its hoarse,

heart-torn voice, pierced my whit flash and plunged into

its knife to hilt my palpitating heart.” “I, lover, I die. Now

that I understood their call I wept for them, and I wept

for myself, knowing their words to be mind.” (97)

Protagonist Maya’s neurosis is somewhat collective. It poses a definite danger to her woman identity. The mental agonies and the tensions in her mind show miseries of her existence. It narrows down the poetic beauty of her life. Maya continues to lead an explosive life and comment on her unsuccessful married life:

“ it was discouraging to reflect on how much in our marriage was based upon a nobility forced upon us from outside, and- therefore, neither true nor lasting. It was broken repeatedly, and repeatedly, the pieces were picked up and put together again as of a sacred icon, with which out of the pettiest superstition, we would not seek to part”(45)

Maya cannot appreciate Gautama and Gautama does not understand her. In contrast he rejects her. He always uses to call her neurotic, a spoiled baby. Now Maya is a lonely creature. She becomes an existentialist due to her aching heart and gradual deterioration of psyche.

Prominent critic B. Ramchandra Rao writes:

“ In case of *Cry, the Peacock*, the problem is further complicated by the emotional instability of the heroine of the book. In the early part of the novel Maya is emotionally disturbed but very much in control of herself. But later the borderline that separates a nervous sensibility from an “ insane imagination” becomes thinner and thinner. There are moments of lucidity followed by the murderous clarity of an insane woman with a

frightening logic of her own”(Rao 12)

While reading the novel thoroughly we see the different shades of the female protagonist Maya's personality. Maya, female protagonist of the novel captures all the three parts of the novel *Cry, the peacock*. In the present chapter the effort is made to draw out the different shades of the female protagonist Maya. How is Maya's internal and external personality? How does she behave with other characters in the novel? Why does the female protagonist always depressed? How is her familial relationship? How does feminist approach work in the novel? Present chapter also tries to answer these questions.

When we read the novel *Cry, the Peacock*, psychoanalytic point of view the question that arises in the mind is that Does Maya's father, Raisahib unconsciously contributes to the ruining of her psyche? Raisahib is a man groomed in Victorian life style and progressively disposed in many respects but he is still a thorough Brahmin inside his mind. He has belief in fatalism and he exhorts Maya to accept bitter facts of life. He is close friend of Albino astrologer. When Maya was four years old, he showed her hand to him. He predicted that in the fourth year of her marriage either Maya or her husband would die. Mays's father believed him lot.

Unfortunately, Maya's mother died when Maya was child. So Raisahib kept close attention to Maya. She is spoilt by him. He gave special treatment to her. Thus, Maya is submissive and remains happily "Daddy's girl" always rather than appearing mature and independent.

When Maya reaches marriageable age he. (Maya's father) deliberately creates ideal circumstances for her to develop tender feeling towards Gautama who is almost twice of her age. Gautama is the only person whom Maya meets. She marries Gautama because she does not have her own choice to make. She is unable to decide her own choice as she is

mentally child, though she is marriageable age. Maya wants to prolong the relation with her father through Gautama. She longs for him whenever she needs reassurance and love.

In this way, once the prince of the toy, female protagonist Maya married to and imaginatively starved, emotionally barren and cool headed; middle aged man Gautama. Gautama is a lawyer in profession. He is brilliant, ambitious and serious minded. He leaves Maya emotionally and spiritually starved and insecure. Their great difference in age worked as a big gap in their lives. Her problems are not physical but psychical. They originate and exist because of the incompatibility of temperament. Protagonist Maya is romantic and hungry for love whereas Gautama is realistic and cold. He never understands Maya's feelings and emotions.

At the conscious level Maya is conditioned to think only on similar lines. One cannot deceive the id, the pleasure principle. The ill-coordinated psychic agency in the female protagonist Maya is the most interesting aspect of the novel. At the level of unconscious Maya has every reason to nurse a grouse against the father. Because of his over love, Maya spoilt. She has no ability to choice making and self determination. It is her father who throws her into the fetters of marriages with a passionless cold intellectual and neglecting her love ever after. When Maya sees caged monkeys at the railway station she recalls her father as a liberator, her reaction is:

“My father might have come! I announced for him, help
me look for him, Gautama He; open the cages and let
them out. Hurry.....”(150)

Albino astrologer's gloomy prophecy plays an important role in the whole life of female protagonist Maya. According to the prophecy she or her husband would die during the

fourth years of their marriage. Protagonist's belief in the prophecy takes the shape of an obsession neurosis and keeps growing at the core of her. In the beginning of her neurotic affection she frequently tells herself that she herself was going to die. But she had ardent love for life and so she starts thinking Gautama's life was threatened. She almost confirmed that Gautama certainly fated to die. Her thought makes her more and more secretive.

In the novel *Cry, the Peacock* novelist Anita Desai suggested female protagonist Maya is obsessed with the prophecy because of romance involved in it. Sigmund Freud, father of psychoanalytic theory attributes superstitious beliefs to suppressed hostility. To all appearances Maya is absolutely submissive and obedient daughter, sister and wife. But in the deep unconscious level there is immense suppressed hostility against her husband and her father. Maya is extremely faithful to her instincts. According to Sigmund Freud normal people in her circumstances would have affected withdrawal by influencing the instinctual urge at the psychic level. Maya expects some emotional and physical satisfaction but both are denied due to cold intellectuality and old age of her husband. She longs for sensuous enjoyment but it is dampened by spiritual doses of the *Bhagavat Gita*.

For every creature sex is an intensely and intrinsically pleasurable experience. It can also act as a revitalizing force in an otherwise sterile life. In the case of female protagonist Maya, if she were married to a younger man and has been satisfied sexually, her psyche would have been different. But because of Gautama's age and his cool attitude to sex she remains a disappointed woman. Being a childless woman her problems are more complicated. The birth of child would have given her a sense of achievement and she could create outside human interest. But it is not happened. Maya secretly wishes that Gautama will die according to the prophecy. The neurotic defense mechanisms like hallucinatory visions and nightmares experiences of split personality, adverse somatic symptoms and religious avoidance of

violence woefully fail to blunt the age of her unconscious wish. Thus Maya pushes Gautama off the parapet of their house is not an accident. But behind this act there has been prolonged psychic struggle which she has not known herself.

Here we can say that female protagonist Maya is faithful to herself. The social and moral consequences of her actions do not matter to her anymore because she embraced psychosis. Thus, prophecy said years ago has become truth to her. In this way, the novelist Anita Desai presented the social and psychological condition of woman in Indian society. Female protagonist Maya of the novel *Cry, the Peacock* is the representative examples of this. She is the mute representative of depressed woman in male dominated society like India.

Female protagonists of Anita Desai's novels are failed to maintain familial relationships like Maya in *Cry, the Peacock*, Monisha and Amla in *Voices in the City*, Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* And Nanda Kanl, Raka and Ila Das in *Fire on the Mountain* are the examples of this. Desai's female protagonists are rebels and their rebel is against one's spouse, children, siblings and relations.

Dr. N. Raj Gopal said:

“The inner most psyche of her protagonist is revealed to us through their interaction with those who are emotionally related to them on the basis of kinship. For the purpose of fiction, to human relationship is more fertile and potential than that in the family and especially among the kins”(Gopal 4)

Maya is the female protagonist of the very first novel of Anita Desai *Cry, the Peacock*. In this novel Desai concerned with the theme of disharmonious and unfulfilled family relationships of the female protagonist, Maya. Maya is born an old orthodox family.

She enjoyed her life with love and pleasure along with discipline in her father's home. As a young girl Maya has the affectionate and kindly care of her father. She feels like a princess living in a fairy-land. Since, Maya is motherless apart of the maternal love.

In this type of atmosphere, the growth of her personality is not normal. She suffers from the cause of egocentricity and possessiveness. Her father's over caring nature and the absence of any other woman in the family. She remains deprived. She was not trained to meet the challenges of life where pain and pleasure co-exist. The fairy world of her father's house makes her unable to face the realities of life after marriage.

The novel *Cry, the Peacock* also depicts different experiences taken by the female protagonist Maya and her husband Gautama during their childhood in their families. These experiences lead them both to disharmony in their later married life. Protagonist Maya and Gautama belong to two different worlds which is the cause of incompatibility and unhappiness in their married life. Maya has a very happy childhood in her father's house. She enjoys her father's affection. She is motherless and her brother Arjuna runs away from home at an early age. That's why she starts thinking about her past days whenever she feels frustrated in her married life.

On the other hand Gautama has different experiences than Maya. His mother is a social worker. She works very hard. She also attends her dispensary or her workshop for the blind, the disables and unemployed. His family members have many subjects to speak on. They speak incessantly of:

“Discussion in parliament of cases of bribery and corruption
revealed in government” (46)

Gautama's father is a freedom fighter. He wants to write a book about freedom struggle and free India. Gautama's father is so busy in other activities so he cannot make emotional attachments with his family members. Thus, both overprotective and restrictive family environments bring adverse effects on Gautama and Maya. This atmosphere proves fatal for them. They cannot maintain proper family relationship after their marriage. Maya grows as highly sensitive and emotional type of woman. On the other hand Gautama is an over busy and intellectual type and very practical. Due to this temperament between two their marriage proves to be incompatible.

After marriage of Maya and Gautama, we see there is no place for Maya, female protagonist of the novel in the world of Gautama. He neither understands nor wishes her to enter his world. Thus his world is totally strange to Maya:

“On his part, understanding was scant, love merge....”(89)

Maya, the female protagonist is a childless woman and she has no vocation to pursue, she finds herself in utter suffocating loneliness. She always loves to be with her husband. Gautama treats Maya as a child. Once both of them talked of the flower, Gautama plucked it and gave it to Maya saying,

“who should deny you that?”

he said, and smiled at me as to a winsome child” (102)

Then the debate Maya said,

“And you will think me a tiresome child for it, for showing what you

Once called my ‘third-rate poetess’s mind.....” (96)

Gautama's treatment of Maya as a child pains her much. She wants to liberate herself from the ages of old guardian-child chain.

Thus, protagonist Maya has father-fixation. She cannot relate with her husband on equal basis. By living a carefree life with her loving father, she desires to have a similar attention from her husband. But when Maya comes to know that Gautama is busy and he always engrossed himself in his vocational affairs and she fails to meet her demands, she feels neglected and miserable. Maya's dissatisfaction with marriage makes her depressive.

Day by day protagonist Maya's morbidity increasing, when Gautama sees he warns her against turning "neurotic". He blames her father for spoiling her:

“ He is the one responsible for this-for making you believe
that all that is important in the world is to possess.
possess, riches, comforts, poises, dollies, loyal retainers-all the
luxuries of the fairy tales, you were brought up on. Life is a
fairy tale to you still” (98)

We see throughout the novel *Cry, the Peacock* tug between emotion and reason. Female protagonist Maya stands for emotion and Gautama for reason. Maya and Gautama are two ends of one stick. They cannot unite. Inner desires, passions, emotions, always overrule the intellect that is the reason. Here in the novel we see the imaginary world overcomes the real world. Through the female protagonist Maya and her practical husband Gautama, novelist Anita Desai shows her female protagonist is sensitive. The male protagonists are not sensitive but they always aggravate, even the cause the problems for female protagonists.

In the novel *Cry, the Peacock* male protagonist Gautama is detached, philosophical, rational and even inconsiderate. The couple has totally contrasted nature of each other. They have different opinions on any simple incident. They cannot adjust themselves of even for a moment also. In the very opening part, the death of the pet dog Toto, aggravates Maya's mental condition. It makes her increasingly conscious. It makes her increasingly conscious of the mysterious working of destiny. In this situation Gautama must have console her, but instead of consoling her he keeps himself indifferent and insensitive even to natural beauty, smells, colors and sounds. Maya realizes:

“Already we belonged to separated worlds, and his seemed the earth that I love so, scented with Jasmine, coloured with liquor, resounding with poetry and warmed by amiability. It was mine that way hell. Torture, guilt, dread, imprisonment- these were the four walls of my private hell, one that no one could survive long. Death was certain” (88)

Here, neither Gautama nor Maya have tried to understand each other. Gautama male protagonist of the novel frequently keeps detachment as preached in the *Bhavad Gita*. His discouraging response to Maya's requests and suggestions include the desire to go south to see Kathakali dance. Gautama, as his namesake, he remains a detached prince. Gautam Buddha keeping himself unattached and distant, Lord Buddha had walked out of his wife and his child, Rahul toward the road of *nirvana*. Gauta is a *sthitapragya*, that is, he signifies as Buddha- the utter silence of the mind. But such equanimity produces illumination.

Gautama, of the novel, *Cry, the Peacock* is neither as detached nor imaginative as his namesake. Seemingly his death is the transversion of the original Buddha, more fit in

the modern world Gautama, as per his Hindu consciousness thinks of Maya, in terms of the concept of illusion suggested by her name.

Female protagonist Maya is a refuge in her husband's family. Her extreme sensitivity makes her a "border line patient" (Kristeva, 1982: 49). She is a toy princess. She finds herself in a dilemma. She keeps only contact with autistic reality. The split in Maya's personality results her loss of belief in herself. This leads Maya to interiorize of the split. She indulges in a narcissistic imagination. Maya's discourse become on site of displaced eroticism at a denotative level. She is unable to find an outlet of her feelings. Maya trapped in the past because she has father-fixation and she cannot relate with her husband on equal basis. Though after marriage Maya's house is full of servants, she feels empty, alone and afraid. She sits in her house "as in tomb" (129).

The two temperamental traits of passion and reason associated with the female protagonist Maya and her husband Gautama. These two different traits reassert the philosophy of *Bhagavad Gita*. In also relocate in a contemporary context such as to create modern landscape of transcendence. In this process protagonist Maya becomes an embodiment of herself. In appearance and an illusion, protagonist Maya emerges as the concept of Maya. This means the realization of the transitoriness of all existence and a refusal of the permanence of things. Here in the novel *Cry, the Peacock* we see reason and passion exist at binary poles. Reason does not understand the undertones of passion. Maya says:

"In this world there were vast areas in which her world never

Permit me, and he could not understand that I could even wish

to enter them, foreign as they were to me" (104)

Throughout the novel, there is a binary opposition between passion and reason. There is also binary opposition female protagonist Maya and male protagonist Gautama. One is blind to other. If reason is boring, passion is idle. Reason is dry passion refuses its fluid to remain still:

One is too weak. One wearies

..... One needs to breathe. (121)

Towards the end of the novel both Maya and Gautama does not survive. It is due to passion that kills reason. As we see passion alone does not survives, to sustain. It loses itself in a dread of horror. Maya's Cry, her sharp scream indicates this fear. In short we see that Maya's attachment leads to desire and desire to anger. The anger results in delusion. The delusion leads to further enmeshing herself in attachment, to death, to madness, to confinement. At the end Maya kills herself. Thus the novelist Anita Desai attaches both psychological nuances to Maya, the tragic neurotic female protagonist *Cry, the Peacock*.

According to Jasbir Jain:

Anita Desai is concerned with the portrayal of psychological reality and as such prefers characters who are peculiar and eccentric rather than general. Hence most of her major characters are not from real life but are either entirely imaginary or an amalgamation of several different characters. (Jain : 68)

In this way, we see in the novel *Cry, the Peacock*, female protagonist Maya failed to maintain proper relationship in her family. Thus, Desai's female protagonist as well as male protagonist Gautama could not understand the situation. They didn't know how to maintain harmony in their lives. The couple Maya and Gautama is representative couple of this type.

Novelist Anita Desai highlights the marital problems of middle class Indian society, through the characters of Maya and Gautama.

Anita Desai through her novels portrays female protagonists in a typical way. She has created her own place in Indian English literature. She is really known for her portrayal of female protagonists whether young or old, rich or poor, single, married or widowed. Maya, female protagonist of the novel, *Cry, the Peacock* is an unusual woman, introverted and child like. In the novel we see, she completely lacks the virtues of grace and self possession. She exemplifies thought, emotion and sensation of a female protagonist that is why we fascinate for study of her illusions.

Female protagonist Maya is a reclusive; she lives alone with her husband. She always wants to be an interaction with her husband Gautama but it does not happen in the novel. So the major action of the novel takes place in the protagonist Maya's mind. By the prophecy of Albino astrologer that one of them will die in the fourth year of their marriage, Maya was depressed. She fears of her own death. Maya desperately tries to imprint life's experiences on her memory. Maya wants to live and enjoy her life. To fulfill the demands of fate, she finds out the only way that her husband has to die and she has to live.

In the novel female protagonist: Maya's illusion revolves around the four significant events. These events are – the death of her pet dog Toto, Lal's visit to her home, a visit from her in laws, a shopping trip and a letter from Arjuna, her brother. These are very ordinary incidents for all. But for Maya, these incidents create havoc in her life. For instance, the death of a pet dog would be simply mourned. For other it would not be a serious matter. But for Maya, the death of pet dog is not less than child

She says-

“.....is no less a relationship than that of a woman and her child” (168).

When Maya and Gautama visited Lal's house to attend a party, they met many people there. Mr Lal and Mrs. Lal don't have proper communication. Mrs. Lal was something strange in nature to her husband. As usual there were different types of conversation in the party- fate, astrology and palmistry. The Sikh, in the party was a palmist. Gautama advises Maya to show her hands to palmist whose predictions always come true. When Maya shows her hands him the Sikh palmist repented that the danger was close now. By this Maya makes haste in undressing and preparing herself to go out in the garden, where the beds were made for the night. Fatality and fate came to her mind. She played with the flowers sadly. In her nightmares she recalled the peacock calling-

“Pia, pia”, and crying “lover, lover, Mio, Mio- I die, I die”(97)

Arjuna, Mays's long lost brother lives in America. Though Arjuna was in America, she had her memories. After a long interval he had written a letter to Maya addressing her 'Dear Maya'. In this letter there was nothing but denunciation of sweet, prosperous and joyful life to which he had been born. By his letter Maya realizes her past memories with him. She could not control herself After few days, Maya received a letter from Arjuna inviting her and Gautama to spend a long vacation there in New York. Thus Mays was overjoyed.

Nila, Gautama's sister and her mother were with Maya for few days, they came to there for their legal consultation. During these days, Maya had a shopping trip with them. After finishing their legal consultation they returned. Maya was sad because now there was none without her own lawyer husband Gautama to look after her in the house Maya again started crying that the house was miserable for her and empty. She was alone with her horrors and nightmares. She wanted Nila to stay further for few weeks. Thus, Maya's strong

reactions to all these ordinary events show her high perception of the things around her. Except for these things her life is normal.

Maya's lack of manual labour and social activities leads her to take up an inward journey and finally she becomes an existentialist character female protagonist Maya. Without outwardly concerns and social contacts lies a self centered life. Her loneliness and inward things develop her personality into a woman of illusions.

Anita Desai through her first novel *Cry, the Peacock* represents theme of uniqueness of sensibility of female protagonist Maya. She is compared with male counterpart. Desai also tries to draw our attention how female protagonist suffer on account of emotional as well as physical repression and become the victim of male dominated social and cultural order. Talking about feminism, we can say that feminism is a revolt against the domination of males in every walk of life. It was revolt against 'Patriarchal Thinking' and domination. Feminist literary criticism primarily response to the way, woman is presented in literature. After 1960, it became a movement. It spreads in different angles such as psychoanalytic, Marxist, political; Black and Radical.

Feminism is far from being single homogeneous movement. It suggests a broad spectrum of approaches to study the literary works written by men or women. Anita Desai is aware of relationship between feminism as apolitical movement and movement within literary writing. In her first Novel *Cry, the Peacock* we see feministic approach. In this novel novelist Anita Desai portrays true picture of woman through the female protagonist Maya. True picture of woman also given by Ruth Pravar Jhabvala. Anita Desai's contemporary writer, she says-

"Beat them, stave them, how you like them, they will sit and look with

animal eyes and never raise a head to defend themselves....” (Jhabvala 97)

Iyenger says:

Cry, the Peacock scores because Maya is at once the center and circumference in this world. Her insanity- rather she is sane, historical or Insanity- rather she is sane, historical or insane-fills the whole book and Gives from as we l as life.” (Iyenger16)

While thinking about the woman in Indian society. She is marching ahead at the path of development but still she assigns traditional roles to the woman. Even today woman in Indian society cannot come out of these customary roles because she is suppressed by male dominancy. She is imprisoned in the four walls of the house where there is no one else to share her grief. When she married with rich husband and there is all comfort to her yet she tries to let others, husband, father-in-law, mother-in-law, brother-in-law listen to her agony. But it goes unheard in most of the cases. The female protagonist Maya of the novel *Cry, the Peacock* goes through this situation.

Human Identity is usually connected to and defined by societal and cultural norms. When it comes to woman, she is defined only in relation to man as she is wife, daughter, sister or anything etc. She is deprived of an identity of her own. Woman has always considered as an accessory to man. She has not allotted independent existence. She is described as weak, passive, foolish, and fat-headed. Her biological features are connecting with her destiny. She is laden with a traditional role and confined within the four walls of the house. Semon de Beauvior, prominent feminist critic puts it in a right way in her *The Second Sex*

“one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”(295)

There is a much scope of female predicament in the novels of Anita Desai. She deals with the woman's inner world, frustration and storm raging inside her mind. The novel *Cry, the Peacock* is the story of female protagonist Maya. But there are many other female characters such as Nila, Gautama's sister, Nina and Pom and Liela Maya's friend, Mrs. Lal that represent different aspects of woman. The novel is considered to be a trend setter in feminist writing. In this novel novelist Anita Desai portrays female protagonist, Maya is hyper sensitive and cultured.

Female protagonist Maya, over spoiled child of her father Raisahib, dives deep into her tapped feminine psyche from her childhood to her unnatural death as a youth. She is the victim of many social and a psychological predicament in her father's house Maya is dominated by father's love. Her father always treats her as a child. Being a motherless child, Maya's father tries to give her mother's love as a result Maya remains a child. She cannot decide her own husband. She has no choice about her future, so by her father's opinion Maya ready to marry with Gautama though he is twice of her age.

On the other hand when spoiled Maya married with Gautama, insensitive and practical kind of person, she is always neglected by him. From the very start of their marriage it is broken. In the novel we see female protagonist Maya is extremely sensitive, imaginative, passionate and sensuous. Her husband Gautama is materialistic, practical, pragmatic and unresponsive. Maya is perfectly normal and healthy woman. Her only sin is: she is sensitive, imaginative, passionate and sensuous. Maya's social and familial background makes Maya such type of woman. Maya in view is driven to emotional instability, insanity and even murder under the pressure of marital disharmony. It is clear from the following statement:

“.....It was broken repeatedly and repeatedly and the pieces were

picked up and put up and put together again as o sacred iron with which
out of the prettiest superstition we could not bear to apart.....” (40)

Women are always dominated in the patriarchal Indian society. They have no
respective place in their own houses and in the society. There is complete lack of
communication between husband and wife. For husband, wife is just like a toy. Use it, enjoy
it and throw it. Husband never assures her. He never encourages her. Here also we see such
male dominancy in the novel *Cry, the Peacock*.

Female protagonist Maya and her husband Gautama is pole apart. They don't have
proper communication. In the very opening part of the novel, there is the death of Maya's pet
dog Toto. She is in sorrow, being a childless: death of pet dog is more than child for her. But
for Gautama, it is "all over" and he simply asks "a cup of tea". He fails to realize her
"misery" and does not know how to "comfort" her. Gautama is very insensitive husband. It
clears from the following:

"....he knew nothing that concerned me. Giving me an opal ring to were on
my finger, her did not notice the translucent skin beneath, the blue flashing
veins that ran under and out of the bridge of gold and jolted me”(9)

Gautama has nothing to do with Maya's emotions. He is cold and unresponsive. He
every time asks Maya to go to sleep while he worked at papers. Thus Maya is a victim of
emotional as well as physical depression. She says:

"....he did not give another thought to me, to either soft

Willing body or the lonely waiting mind that waited near the bed....” (9)

Cry, the Peacock engages the complexities of modern Indian culture from a feminine perspective. Deasi makes Maya her mouthpiece to express her views about woman. As Helen Cixous, a prominent feminist critic 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)

In the novel, we see female protagonist Maya, is driven away from parental embraces as well as her own body. Gautama in the story is representative of male centered materialistic civilization and culture.

Towards the end of the novel female protagonist Maya kills her husband due to her obsessive love of life. The act of murder is revolt against callous materialistic social order. Female protagonist Maya believes that she is not fit to live in this world based on male centered wisdom, reason and order. Maya doesn't like the civilization based on logic and normality. She wants to be free from the chains of slavery based on customs and established norms of the society. Her revolt against the social order is an aesthetic revolt- the revolt of sensibility against the logic of the so called normality.

In the novel *Cry, the Peacock* Anita Desai represents disturbed psyche of modern Indian woman through female protagonist Maya. Throughout the novel we see she tries to strike a balance between instinctual needs and intellectual aspirations. When Maya experiences loneliness and lack of communication she finds herself in mental crisis. There are many women we see in our society face same situation their day to day routine. But they don't dare to voice against the situation due to male dominancy.

According to feminine study Indian woman serves to reflect the writer's sense of isolation, fear, bewilderment and emotional vulnerability, whether they are passive or

aggressive, traditional or modern. She evokes continuous discussion of social values. Woman is focal point of contact between the writer's consciousness and the alien world, her experience of reality and hope for salvation.

Kate Millett's '*Sexual Politics*' reveals the patriarchal politics, whereby the ruling sex seeks to maintain and extend its power over the woman. She shows the dichotomy of femininity as a cultural basis. Sex is biological and gender is social imposition. She asserts that patriarchal authority has given woman a minority status that inflicts on her a "self hatred and self rejection, a contempt both herself and for her fellows". (55)

This the quest of identity of Anita Desai's female protagonist is not only one woman's quest but the quest of human being towards some understanding and acceptance of her predicament. There are many other female characters in novel but female protagonist Maya's story is heart rendering.

Nila, Gautama's sister and his mother present positivity and strength. Nila has the ability to fight the odds which come into her life. There are to more female characters in the novel. They are Pom and Liela, who are Maya's friends. Liela's marriage is a love marriage and she eloped with her consumptive lover. She faced all the vicissitudes of life and she bravely fights as the wife of a patient struggling for life. She accepts the situation as her destiny and does not have any complaint about her life.

Pom is another female character in the story. She faces the problems which are common in the lives of women in India. Pom lives with her in-laws under many restrictions. There are complex webs of many do's and dont's around her every time. Through the female character Pom, Anita Desai elaborates how women are suffocated to her permissions from there in- laws for every work. Life for her is-

“like to mice in one small room, not daring to creep out,
for fear they’ll pounce on you, ask you where you are going,
when you’ll be back, why you aren’t wearing the jewelry
they give me” (55)

Through Mrs. Lal’s character Desai shows a woman and her family is not considered complete and meaningful without the birth of a son. We see throughout novel Mrs. Lal pretends to be well off with four daughters but she longs for a male child. Moreover only sons are considered as true successors of their parents. The novelist elaborates how women in male dominated society are sexually exploited and treated as commodity through the female characters.

Through female protagonist Maya Anita Desai upholds a new vista of feminist writing; Maya stands apart from all the female characters in the novel. Maya represent a class of woman who silently suffer at the hands of men. Her actions and reactions may not always draw one’s sympathy. It can be dismissed as the useless thoughts of a luxurious mind.

Thus the novel highlights female protagonist’s various aspects. Novelist Anita Desai excels the miserable position of highly sensitive and emotional women. Females are tortured by males by negligence and loneliness. Though the novel *Cry, the Peacock* is about female protagonist Maya, all the secondary female characters like Nila, Pom, Leila, Mrs. Lal, the mother etc. contributes to the poly timbered voice of women and issues related to them.