



Mental Health, and Trauma in Cry, the Peacock and Contemporary Indian Women's Writing

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Abstract— Writers have always tried to create stories to help understand human emotional phenomena, mental health remaining one of the most evocative and troubling themes throughout literature. From Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*, which narrates the stifling treatment of women's mental illness to contemporary ones like Hanya Yanagihara's *A Little Life* and Avni Doshi's *Burnt Sugar*, trauma narratives have evolved to capture the deep, raw, and intimate struggles of the mind. Women writers especially have depicted the most personal experiences about these realities and created women who, due to societal and cultural pressures and personal herstories, undergo immense psychological struggles. Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande have, for example, explored the quiet, internal suffering of their protagonists, revealing the profound trauma of loneliness as well as the enduring strength of those coping with it. Literature does more than merely depict these struggles, seeks answers for the systems that suppress them, and articulate suffering that is so often overlooked. This study focuses on the ways fiction portrays mental distress as a means to critique society's understanding, responding not just, as many assume, in personal terms, but also showing that trauma is always situated within history, culture and the compelling articulation of silence.



Keywords— Identity, Mental Health, Narrative, Psychological Realism, Trauma

I. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between literature and mental health has been deeply explored through various prominent works, including Gilman's "*The Yellow Wallpaper*" which highlights the psychological repercussions of the patriarchal system on women's mental health, Plath's semi-autobiographical novel "*The Bell Jar*" that intricately portrays struggles with severe depression and suicidal thoughts, and Kesey's "*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*", released in 1962, which critiqued conventional psychiatry and institutionalized care for the mentally ill.

In Indian English literature, mental health topics have been analyzed about India's social structure and a woman's role in it. Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* (1963) paints the vivid portrait of a woman's plunge into psychological distress within the contours of a stifling marriage, thus making it one of the earliest Indian novels to underscore mental health so profoundly. Shashi Deshpande's *That*

Long Silence (1988) also focuses on the patient pain of women within a patriarchal system framework while Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) depicts the pain of losing one's childhood through trauma and the accompanying psychological scars of abuse, loss and emotional deprivation.

Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* (1963) is one of the earliest Indian English novels to explore profoundly the psyche of a woman. The book is centered on Maya, a young woman whose eventual mental decline stems from a death prophecy, worsened by the discord in her marriage and emotional desolation. The readers are shown the increasing paranoia, emotional turbulence, and detachment from reality Maya experiences through Desai's stream-of-consciousness narration.

Cry, the Peacock stands out for socio-psychological analysis due to trauma's multifaceted focus. In Indian societal contexts, gender-based violence, familial strains,

and cultural norms stifling womanhood progress shape and characterize their existence, attempting to control their being. Maya's story is not simply a tragic tale of a woman succumbing to civilization's brutality – the patriarchal captivity ropes her existence. *Cry, the Peacock* is a crucial work of literature concerning the transcendental issues of psychological health intertwined with oppression and subjugation inflicted by the system, civilization, and patriarchal domination.

Furthermore, Desai's narrative style together with her profound psychological understanding qualify *Cry, the Peacock* as essential literature on mental illness. This novel has no objective and rational depiction of Maya's ailment; instead, it has sympathy and compassionate concern towards the contrived monstrosity of a tortured mind and sympathetic consideration, exhibiting despair and pain through the lurking shadow of consciousness. The informed choice targeting this text will aim to study the psychological verisimilitude while focusing on the social realities surrounding Maya's traumatic experiences.

II. METHODOLOGY

The analysis of *Cry, the Peacock* will be conducted through a socio-psychological lens by integrating psychology and social theory to examine the protagonist's decline into madness. This will incorporate consideration of psychological trauma, anxiety, and distress, particularly within a gendered framework. It will also draw upon psychoanalysis, specifically *Freudian* and *Jungian* accounts of repression, paranoia, identity, and their interrelations to explore Maya's fractured identity.

This paper will explore the sociocultural feminist frameworks alongside psychological discourse to analyze the social elements of Maya's anguish. This study seeks to address how the culturally upheld notions of marriage, submissive femininity, and emotional stoicism adversely impact Maya's mental well-being. Through close reading of Desai's use of stream of consciousness, vivid motifs, and non-linear narrative structures, this paper argues that the novel illustrates the interplay of personal trauma with socio-cultural influences through sophisticated narrative techniques.

Cry, the Peacock is not simply a story of a person's psychological breakdown; it is a reflection on the socio-cultural dimensions that define a woman's psyche. *Anita Desai* captures in Maya a haunting depiction of trauma, repression, and emotional instability, revealing the delicate balance between mental illness and societal structures. In this paper, I contend that Maya's madness stems from a combination of internal psychological strain and social context, thus marking *Cry, the Peacock* as an important text

in the discourse of Indian English literature's exploration of mental illness. Using a socio-psychological framework, this study aims to demonstrate how literature can illuminate the intricate constituents of mental illness, especially those embedded in patriarchal settings, and how such illness is represented and critiqued.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The interrelation of mental health and trauma has been deeply studied in literary works, particularly in the modern fiction genre. The psychoanalytic theory of *Sigmund Freud* and *Jacques Lacan* provides important insights into understanding the unconscious, repression, and hysteria. *Freud's The Interpretation of Dreams* and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* propounds that trauma expresses itself in repetitions in the subconscious, which corresponds to the psychological strife of Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* (Freud 54). Lacan's theory of The Symbolic and the Imaginary helps explain more of Maya's splintered self along with her morbid obsession with death (Lacan 126).

In *Madness and Civilization*, *Michel Foucault* disputes common perspectives regarding mental illness, claiming that rather than being a purely medical issue, madness is socially constructed, marked, and contained within societal frameworks. When this view is applied to *Anita Desai's* novel, Maya's psychological breakdown manifests as aetiological both in personal suffering as well as in her equally suffocating and silencing patriarchal structures (Foucault 89). This corresponds with *Elaine Showalter's The Female Malady*, which analyzes the representations of women's mental ailments throughout history as trivialized or overly emphasized due to socially constructed, gendered expectations. *Showalter's* work is especially pertinent to *Cry, the Peacock*, where Maya's growing unease is interpreted not as a valid psychological problem, but rather the undue burden of being a woman, succumbing to the "hysterical woman" stereotype (Showalter 172).

The intersection between mental illness and female identity has been addressed by several scholars in Indian English literature. In *Shashi Deshpande's The Dark Holds No Terrors* and in *Draupadi* by *Mahasweta Devi*, female protagonists experience trauma and strive to survive in a patriarchal society. In *Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things*, psychological damage is also depicted, particularly regarding the character of Ammu, who suffers due to the unbending rules of society (Roy 214). All these works provide a wider context to contextualize *Cry, the Peacock* and suggest that Maya's mental collapse isn't an outlier, but part of a strange, recurrent cycle within Indian fiction.

Studying trauma also helps to explain the fragmented state of mind that Maya suffers from. *Cathy Caruth*, in her

work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, articulates that whenever trauma manifests, it is not completely integrated; rather, it emerges in bits and pieces, in the case of Maya it's her thoughts and hallucinations (Caruth 24). *Judith Herman*, in her text *Trauma and Recovery*, points out that along with other factors, a lack of social engagement makes trauma worse. Maya, in light of this, becomes much more tormented because of her emotional disconnect from her husband (Herman 134). Just as so, *Kalpana Rahita Seshadri's* inquiry into silence and resistance within feminist theory defends the notion that they deem 'madness' as an act of defiance against suffocating patriarchy (Seshadri 89).

The psychological perspectives and feminist aspects have been chronicled as fundamental details of *Cry, the Peacock*. *Usha Bande* in her novel *The Novels of Anita Desai: A Study in Character and Conflict* mentions how 'Desai's protagonists seem to cope with acute existential anxiety and the threat of psychological disintegration' (Bande 47). In *Feminizing the Narrative*, *Jasbir Jain* observes that stream-of-consciousness narrative technique in Maya's persona too enables the readers to go through the disintegration of her mind, reinforcing the portrayal of mental illness in the novel (Jain 110). Moreover, *P. K. Rajan's* *Studies in Indian Writing in English* argues that Desai's works attempt to integrate psychological realism with feminist discourse, which renders *Cry, the Peacock* of value from a literary and psychological perspective (Rajan 58).

Anita Desai's usage of psychological realism places her alongside modernist authors who give prominence to the subjective experiences of their protagonists. In this regard, *Mrs. Dalloway* by *Virginia Woolf* and *The Bell Jar* by *Sylvia Plath* are often referred to as parallel literature since they also portray women grappling with mental illness within stifling social frameworks (Woolf 95; Plath 67). Scholars like *Toril Moi*, *Gilbert*, and *Susan Gubar* have argued that many narratives depicting female insanity serve, more often than not, as commentaries on a woman's subjugation, which is also true of *Cry, the Peacock* (Moi 77; Gilbert and Gubar 145). Moreover, discussions on mental health in literature, like those found in *Madhumalati Adhikari's* *Psychological Realism in Women's Fiction*, further support the idea that Desai's novel remains socially relevant (Adhikari 163).

Through these combined lenses of psychoanalysis, trauma studies, feminist theory, and Indian English literary criticism, this literature review argues for the relevance of Desai's novel as a primary text depicting mental illness in Indian literature. It also analyzes the novel's place in the discourse on gender, psychological suffering, and the impact of social standards on a woman's emotional health.

IV. MENTAL HEALTH AND TRAUMA IN *CRY, THE PEACOCK*

Through the character of Maya, *Anita Desai* pays close attention to the issues of mental illness and trauma in the novel *Cry, the Peacock*. Maya's life is an image of a woman plagued with loneliness and existential crisis, and the novel exposes her internal conflict while critiquing the socio-patriarchal order that adds to her misery. Understanding how mental illness is construed in literature, and especially in this novel requires a close examination of Maya's character, the trauma she bears, the symbolic techniques of the narration, and other forms of symbolic imagery employed in the book.

4.1 Character Analysis of Maya

Maya as a character is not only a leading figure in the novel. She represents an intricate psychological picture: a tragic blend of childhood and marital anxieties blended with emotional vulnerability, all spiraling towards an inevitable breakdown. Her father's overprotectiveness and spoiling play a crucial role in shaping her psyche. She recalls her childhood as being one marked with affection, 'not a shadow falling' on her, which according to her father was "never let to fall upon me" (Desai 42). Such memories reinforce her emotional dependence on him, marking a troubling reality that plunges Maya deeper into distressing adulthood turbulence. Maya's father's sheltering predisposes her to being unequipped to handle emotional hurdles, which marriage, infused with dependency demands.

The marriage bore a significant burden on Maya's fragile psyche. Refusing to attend to her need for emotional affection is particularly challenging given Gautama's age and distance. Maya's desire for love and intimacy is thwarted by Gautama's alien demeanor and philosophical nature which makes her feel deserted. Condescendingly, he casts away all her worries as childish and neglects the vital role of nurturing, which is fundamental to her well-being. Even his indifference is harsh as he calmly tells her, 'You must not be afraid of the dark. You must learn to live with it' (Desai 87). Maya's loneliness is further aggravated by inadequate emotional sympathy, which forces her to pull deeper into her obsessive ruminations.

These fears Maya harbors are not only bound to exist but are associated with her childhood and the speculating prophecy inflicting her. An astrologer once foretold that within four years of marriage, one of them would die. While A Maya dismisses this prophecy, it turns into a terrifying certainty, exposing her anxious predisposition and paranoia, reinforcing her paranoid predisposition. Rather than an abstract notion, death becomes a dominating presence

dominating all her thoughts and actions, solidifying her obsessive tendencies.

4.2 Exhibitions of Mental Illness Through The Lens of Trauma

Maya has notable signs of anxiety, and psychological distress, her mind is filled with ruminations that are a jumble of images and fantasies. Her moods fluctuate rather dramatically and she can go from an intense craving to be adored to rage filled with terror. Her thoughts surrounding the prophecy cause her to see death omens like a cat which she views as a portentous death (Desai 112).

The paranoia that she has begun to exhibit is apparent in the increased detachment that she has from reality. A quote that captures the delusions she is struggling with describes the world as this:

Illustrating the world as cruel *'The air seemed thick, congealed, a dead weight pressing upon me... I wanted to scream, to shake off the silence that clung to me like damp, rotting leaves* (Desai 135).

Such imagery underscores her entrapment, mentally and within an oppressive, voiceless matrimony. Following trauma specialists like *Cathy Caruth*, traumatic events lead to an alteration in time: the past intrudes upon the present (Caruth 23). Maya exemplifies this phenomenon, being unable to escape the haunting repetition of the prophecy in her mind.

Her growing animosity towards Gautama is the most troubling sign of her mental breakdown. Maya begins viewing her husband as both the executor and the scapegoat of her perceived fate due to the all-consuming belief that death is unavoidable. This psychological projection reaches its peak when she ends up killing him—an act that is paradoxically both an imprisonment to her fate and an incarceration of control that defies her prophecy. In any case, the action does not set her free; instead, it deepens her madness fuelled by a loss of direction.

The integration of symbol and plot is done in a way unreliable to Maya's deteriorating psyche. The infusion of stream-of-consciousness narrative aids the readers in parallel experiencing a character's thought process descending into turmoil. Patterns of fragmented phrases, reckless shifts in atmosphere and voice, and sometimes drifted-back themes serve to add psychological robustness to the text.

An important symbol in the novel is the peacock, which Maya observes over and over again. Maya hears peacocks screaming in their dances which is a direct reflection of her agony:

"Did you ever have a glimpse of a peacock screaming in the dead of night? Did you listen to a peacock shriek with so much pain, at the dreadful death he speaks of?" (Desai 99).

Pavani's peacock represents her fate, and how one is bound to suffering. The cry of a peacock denotes their internal struggle. The contorted 'movie' screams show the contrast between the peacock's beauty and its torment, which represents Maya's existence – fiction that is beautiful externally, but psychologically horrific internally, one bound to a world tormented by psychological suffering.

The depiction of decay and darkness in the novel is also a notable narrative feature. Maya refers to capsulation as an oppressive environments and describes it as death and confinement. Images like stagnant air and decaying walls highlight imprisonment, while shadowy figures represent her inability to escape.

Maya's inner monologue as a form of stream-of-consciousness technique permits readers to accompany Maya's mental state throughout the novel. Unlike conventional third-person narrators, Desai puts us inside Maya's head, where her paranoia and fear appear immediate and claustrophobic. This tactic supports *Elaine Showalter's* claim that stories of women's madness often blur the external world and internal reality, compelling one to confront the very nature of perception's volatility (Showalter 187).

As with Maya in *Cry, the Peacock*, I perceive the character's cognitive decline as an intricate manifestation of psychological condition, trauma, and the enduring impact of societal expectations of femininity. She exemplifies the impact that emotional deprivation, social estrangement, and unacknowledged fears from childhood can have on an individual. Through multi-layered symbolism, non-linear storytelling, and intense self-reflective writing, *Desai* captures the essence of a woman imprisoned in the corridors of her mind. Watching Maya's metamorphosis through the lens of psychological realism and feminist criticism not only deepens our understanding of her character but also broadens our perspective on the portrayal of mental illness throughout history in literature.

4.3 Socio-Psychological Interpretation

Anita Desai's novel *Cry, the Peacock* is not only concerned with the peacock's disintegration at a psychological level but also investigates how sociocultural factors, such as rigid expectations and a dominating patriarchal society, lead to psychosocial problems. Maya's struggle is closely integrated into the socio-culture that confines and cages a woman to specific roles. Her suffering is far from personal—it is the violence in reality that she is schooled into accepting, the violence marked by gender, duty, family, and a clash of emotional fragility with indifference by

society. To make sense of Maya's breakdown, it becomes imperative to examine all the controlling factors, especially the societal standards, family and marital expectations, and the eventual collapse of her psyche.

4.4 Role of Societal Expectations

Right from the onset of her story, as a woman, Maya is conditioned to fit into the skeletal structure of patriarchal standards as a suffocating emblem of identity culled from her husband with marriage as the singular avenue to self-fulfillment. None of the above-cited priors pays regard to her individuality, emotional complexities, as well as psychological needs. This is precisely where women are expected to endure, adjust and suppress all their wishes.

These beliefs are deeply rooted in Maya's upbringing. Even though he is affectionate, her father views her as a delicate object with no agency. He satisfies her wants, but never equips her for life outside his boundaries. Consequently, when Maya enters marriage, it is with a deeply romanticized heart: to her, love is complete surrender, filled to the brim with passion and intense emotions. These ideals sharply contradict the actual reality of her relationship with Gautama, who is heralding the very detachment and rationality that patriarchal masculinity frequently demands. Her blatant indifference, however, is not an unmalicious form of cruelty. It is conditioned - like so many other women - to be far too practical for their emotions and expect submissive dependence from women.

Maya's social estrangement is intricately linked to the gendered socio-spatial divide in her domestic space. As much as she craves intimacy, Gautama overlooks her emotional suffering as irrational. When offering her distressing solutions to achieve a set goal, he gives her 'logical' answers that lack warmth. He reinforces the assumption that women's feelings are unnecessary and exaggerated. His warm attempts, "You must not let yourself be troubled by such thoughts. They have no reality except in your mind," (Desai 76) further amplify her alienation. That reason encapsulates where the overgeneralization that women have to endure given the confines of pseudoscience trivialization comes from is even more striking: in reality mental distress tends to be real psychological distress.

4.5 Family And Marital Pressures

Maya's husband Gautama is not remotely close to what her idealized mental framework would class as a "companion". Appearing to embody all the traditional gender roles, Gautama is emotionally detached and entirely guided by a cold rationale. No wonder, unlike Maya who is deeply sensitive and responds to the world in nuanced ways, he seems to fit the imprint of a traditional man whose emotions are stunted by rigid reasoning.

Maya constructs a self-justification of her marriage by actually hoping for companionship, as one would expect almost unlocks a supportive, understanding husband who appreciates her nurturing qualities. It is soberly revealing how devoid of reality expectations and imagination might be.

Desai depicts the marital discord as an ongoing battle of frustration between love and intellect. Maya lashes out and attempts to express her torment but gets ignored. The more she tries to be validated, the more she ends up feeling lonely. While Gautama provides care for his wife, it is always practical instead of physical or verbal affection. This lack of emotional validation widens throughout the novel. Her frustration becomes clearer in her emotional outbursts:

"You don't love me! You don't care for me! If you did, you would understand that I am suffering, that I am afraid—afraid of something terrible, something I cannot even name!" (Desai 102)

This quotation portrays perfectly how Maya yearns to recognize her suffering; she feels dire pain being overlooked. Her words seek help and connection desperately but are unable to offer sufficient emotional depth. Maya is confined to the choice-less reality of intensive unbearable emotional neglect which only grants her renewed mental distress in which profound loneliness settles.

Though a source of affection, her father's influence adds another layer of complexity to Maya's psychological state. His adoration came with the burden of overprotectiveness which rendered her incapable of facing hardships. The expectation that Maya should always be happy sets an untenable standard, one that shatters upon confrontation with reality. Indulgence does not equip one with the tools needed to navigate emotional strain, and in Maya's case, the lack of resilience training means facing difficult emotions becomes impossible. On the other hand, Gautama, who suffers from an emotion-free upbringing, finds it impossible to fathom the pain Maya is experiencing. Their marriage becomes, therefore, a detrimental intersection between two forms of conditioning—one that bathes in emotional gratification, the other that completely ignores the 'emotional realm.'

4.6 A Psychological Breakdown

In a manner, a layering effect occurs with Maya where societal expectations, emotional abandonment, and unresolved trauma, pile on one another until they reach a breaking point. Psychological collapse. Anxiety, which stemmed from a trivial fear of the prophecy, shifts to full-blown paranoia. With every turn of the page, it becomes palpably clear that her hold on reality is steadily losing ground and she is increasingly convinced that death is

lurking close by. The sign predicting her husband's demise shifts from vague premonition to obsession, ultimately controlling every action and thought she has.

Maya's disintegration is not abrupt but rather gradual and characterized by extreme behavioral deviations, explosive violence, and progressive dissociation. She perceives signs everywhere, interpreting mundane occurrences as premonitions of disaster. The tension within her thoughts spirals into uncontrollable hysteria. Desai showcases this transformation through Maya's splintered self-dialogues, which gradually devolve into chaotic streams of thoughts devoid of sequence or sense:

"The walls pressed in. The night had voices. They whispered, they called. The stars were spinning, the earth tilting, and I – I was falling, falling" (Desai 164).

This freefall into madness culminates in the most startling development of the novel—Maya's murder of Gautama. This act is the final culmination of psychological unhinging as she tumbles him over the edge, rationalizing in her mind that she will be escaping her fate. Yet this action is far from an emancipatory impulse; it is the complete capitulation of her mind's coherence. Killing Gautama becomes not only an assault on the man but on the prophecy—her futile attempt at grasping control of a predestined life that had hunted her mercilessly for years.

Yet, her actions do not bring her peace. Instead, they leave her completely untethered from reality. The very structure of her world disintegrates, leading her to total madness. Tragedy marks the endpoint of her journey instead of triumph—illustrating the ruthless aftermath of emotional neglect, societal expectations, and psychosocial dynamics that lack profound nuance.

Maya's tragedy in *Cry, the Peacock* is not merely a personal one; it is a reflection of a larger societal failure to recognize and address women's mental health. The conditioning of women's suffering within the undercurrents of patriarchy shapes Maya's breakdown, a family unit that smothers without preparing one for the harsh winds of reality, and an emotionally sterile marriage. Desai's depiction of Maya serves as a powerful critique of patriarchy and social norms that overwhelm women to the point of a psychological break. Exploring her narrative stems from a sociopsychological approach and sheds new light on the intersections of womanhood, trauma, and mental health.

V. COMPARATIVE INSIGHTS

Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* is a pioneering work in Indian English literature that depicts a woman's psychological breakdown rather vividly. It certainly isn't the lone novel addressing the issues of mental suffering,

emotional blanking out, and the suffocating influence of societal norms on the feminine psyche. Other Indian English novels like Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* also engage with female pain, trauma, and the effects of societal expectations. These comparisons enhance one's understanding of the psychological intensities in Desai's novel and how remarkably different it is from others dealing with women's issues.

5.1 The Weight of Silence and Trauma

In *Cry, the Peacock*, *The God of Small Things*, and *That Long Silence*, one can observe the deep-seated trauma and its impact on the female characters. Maya suffers a breakdown as a result of emotional exhaustion, akin to Jaya in Deshpande's *That Long Silence*. Both women feel imprisoned in the inner walls of their homes which becomes their marital cage, in essence, unable to access the emotional chasm that lies between them and their husbands. Jaya, like Maya, enters marriage with certain expectations only to grapple with harsh disillusionment. Yet, while Maya succumbs to hysterical frenzies and drastic acts of violence, Jaya prefers a more subdued course of resistance: withdrawal. Instead of sounding off and drowning in her emotions, she chooses repression.

The bitterness of Jaya's realization comes out when she adds: *"A man can walk away from his wife whenever he chooses, but a woman? A woman must wait. She must stand at the threshold, watchful and patient"* (Deshpande 92). This quote illustrates the passivity expected of women and the silence that is imposed which is what Deshpande is critiquing. In contrast, Maya is unable to bear such confinement. Her suffering is displayed in unfiltered form through erratic behavior, hallucinations, and in the end, the murder of her husband. While Jaya's struggles are by no means any less deep, Desai's novel takes a much more visceral approach. It places the reader amidst the chaos of Maya's mind, fusing the internal with the external.

In *The God of Small Things*, Roy deals with the theme of female suffering with the character of Ammu, whose hopes and ambitions are thwarted by a stifling and rigid patriarchal structure. Just like Maya, Ammu is a partially defiant woman, but unlike Maya, she undergoes social exclusion rather than madness as a consequence of her defiance. She does not bring about her tragic end through her own choice—she is a victim of the forces around her. She is devoid of choice, her affection towards Velutha branded as 'forbidden' and her unraveling. Roy writes: *"Perhaps Ammu, Estha and she were the worst transgressors. They all broke the Love Laws. That lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much"* (Roy 177). That is, in a sense, recapturing Maya's fight against her very own

surmounted expectations—both women fail to evade the repercussions of defying the boundaries set on them.

5.2 Psychological Depth: Maya's Isolation vs. Shared Suffering

Differences in the internal struggle of a character provide a distinct narrative focus in Desai's work compared to other novels: *Cry, the Peacock* keeps the sole focus on psychological suffering. As opposed to Desai's work, *That Long Silence* and *The God of Small Things* approach a form of mental distress interdisciplinary with socio-political nuances. After all, the story is unresolved – it stays with Maya and remains in her abstract, subjective reality, as the convoluted way of thinking does all the interpreting. About her character, Ammu and Jaya's pain, at least for the most part, remains private, or deeply felt, but shared with other people encompass a family, children, and the society that surrounds them and controls them.

What stands out the most is the element of Maya's wilderness within *Cry, the Peacock*. Companions, a community, or an external entity that recognizes her pain do not exist: the woman cannot find a single confidante. Everything when brought down to a singular level is an external layer. The absence of companionship heightens the unmitigated intensity of one's suffering. Hardly sociable these days, even Ammu can be considered to have some degree of social connection when it comes to her children, most notably Rahel. Though Jaya has ways to think things over and voice her pain, (albeit silently) to herself, something of sorts is highly unlikely to be available for Maya who, unlike the rest, has to face the madness dimension of solitude. This emptiness fused with the struggle from the lonesome death of patriarchal society and hierarchical structure pushes her over the edge, solidifying why she has no other choice but to succumb to this madness.

The stream-of-consciousness style Maya Desai employs creates a connection to deep isolation by submerging the reader in Maya's slowly declining mental state. She loses complete control over her thoughts as her perceptions shift and reality splinters into fragments. This differs from the restrained tones exhibited by *Deshpande*, who speaks in a matter-of-fact fashion, or the poetic, Roy with her multifaceted storytelling. Alongside its content and form, *Cry, The Peacock* distinguishes itself as an intense psychological exploration as opposed to a more feminist or sociopolitical critique.

5.3 The Depiction of Female Tranquility: Amity V/S Endurance

How these female protagonists differ from each other serves as a critical distinction among the texts. Jaya from *That Long Silence* endures her unhappiness quietly, which keeps her trapped in a cycle of resignation. In the case of *The God*

of Small Things, Ammu aggressively tries fighting back but succumbs to external forces. Contrarily, Maya's pain is placed on other people, in this case, venting at Gautama. This act of violence is so intense that it destroys the foundation of her reality.

Maya's crime is not only her turning down her husband but also the denial of the patriarchal world that has caused her torment. In killing Gautama, she symbolically escapes the emotional neglect and indifference that has smothered her. That does not grant her freedom, however; it only tightens the noose on her destiny. Unlike Ammu or Jaya, who are powerless to change their conditions, Maya becomes both captive and executioner; a woman whose mental suffering is bound to culminate in tragedy.

Correlatively, the anguish that Desai explores through the lens of feminine suffering is more immediate and visceral and, thus, more jarring compared to the works of *Deshpande* or *Roy*. The pain of Maya is not merely a spectacle for the readers; they are made to endure it alongside the vivid claustrophobia of her encumbering psyche. This is the underlying factor that differentiates *Cry, the Peacock* from other novels; a book that focuses on a woman's mental breakdown rather than a novel about mere suffering.

All the novels discussed above reflect in one way or another the suffering of women, but it is Desai's work that seems to capture one's attention most because of the unrelenting psychological detail and study of the protagonist's isolation. Whereas Ammu is bound by social structures and Jaya learns to accept pain, Maya breaks apart to the point of complete obliteration and it is her disintegration that takes precedence. Desai's powerful use of subconscious monologue alongside an almost stifling attention to Maya's head makes the novel not simply about deteriorating mental health, but about death by drowning in it. Because of this, she stands apart as a strikingly disturbed voice of Indian English literature.

VI. CONCLUSION

Anita Desai's narrative skill vividly comes to life through the psychological suffering of a woman exiled in solitude, confinement and existential suffering while crying the peacock. As with many other Indian English novels, there is little concern for global socio-political tension; rather, in this case, the intimacy of mental instability is examined in almost claustrophobic detail. Maya does not only suffer a personal tragedy of a breakdown. Her madness is—in part—constituted by the negligence of patriarchal concerns and frail emotional frameworks that are available to women. Raw gave a contemplative depiction of a woman coming apart beneath the bombardment of her mind, while *Shashi Deshpande's That Long Silence* and *Arundhati Roy's The*

God of Small Things portrayed different kinds of struggles. If Jaya embodies the subversive silence of stifled oppression, and Ammu is slowly succumbing to the weight of social expectation's stranglehold, it is Maya whose turmoil manifests in a far more destructive manner, highlighting the most damaging consequences of untreated trauma.

In addition to personal anguish, within the context of gender and society, there is an urgent need to address mental health care in Desai's novel. Maya's seclusion is tied to her fracturing psyche, yes, but more to an inflexible world that ignores her panic, disdain and agony draped in emotions. The gap between his heightened sensitivity and Gautama's rational detachment underscores the greater problem of the dismissal of women's psychological suffering the female figure has to counter. By placing the reader in the very middle of Maya's subconscious, through stream-of-consciousness narration, Desai compels one to grapple with the chaos of a mind that struggles to find meaning in a world that does not in any way recognize her suffering.

This analysis is not only limited to works of fiction but remains central within the context of the intersection of gender relations and mental health in India. Even now, emotional distress, especially in women, is one of the most ignored mental health issues. *Cry, the Peacock* is a case in point, as it highlights the need to attend to life's raw realities especially as they concern women facing invisibility. The novel calls for an active approach to capture emotional struggles and unveils the plight of the mute whom society frames without sound.

This part of the research has concentrated on *Cry, the Peacock* and its frame of reference, but there is significant scope for other work. Further research might approach Indian English literature's mental illness themes through feminist trauma theory, psychoanalysis, or medical humanities, as it would be interesting to see what other structures of thought do to our understanding of psychological distress. Applying the framework to contemporary literature would be useful, too, as it would deepen understanding of how mental illness is depicted in literature over time. Additionally, integrating Indian and Western narratives on female psychology may highlight culturally relevant differences in depicting mental health suffering.

Of note, however, is the fact Desai's novel asks readers to grapple with the emotional numbness and the commonality of mental breakdowns. The tragedy of Maya is no longer an anecdotal one, but rather an illustration of the dire consequences that come with being too vulnerable and suppressing conflicts raging within. Literature serves, and continues to serve, an important function in society by

bringing such issues to the forefront and expanding the mental health conversation which is important both academically and socially.

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