



## Thoughtless Ecocritic Kills Husband! An Analysis of Maya's Folly

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### ABSTRACT

Anita Desai's novel Cry, The Peacock confirms her love for ecology. Due to her minute sense of observation she has painted wonderful pictures of Winter season, Spring season, Autumn season and Summer Season. She has described the gap between rustic and urban life in The Village By The Sea and Bye, Bye, Blackbird. Like William Shakespeare, she paints bright as well as dark moods of nature. Reading Cry, The Peacock is like re-reading Immortality Ode by William Wordsworth. Maya, the heroine of this novel, feels really attached with stars, the moon, the sun, flowers, plants, trees, peak and mountains. She recollects the time she has spent with her father. But she fails to learn any moral lesson from the songs of birds though she feels delighted in their company. Like William Wordsworth, she is highly conscious of her emotions and feelings and fails to be rational. She kills her husband Gautam though the latter takes care of her. She reads books of P.B. Shelley, John Keats and R.N. Tagore but fails to 'accept the 'ultimate realities'. She becomes conscious of her growing melancholia and yet never consults the psychiatrist to get well. Due to her cruelty she deserves no sympathy.

### Introduction :

Anita Desai has aptly been ranked with V.S. Naipaul, Khushwant Singh, Githa Hariharan, Namita Gokhale and Kamala Markandaya because she has painted several pictures of nature in her novels. It is



true that she painted the materialistic side of life in *Bye, Bye, Blackbird* and *Voices of The City*. Yet she is fully eager to return to nature as the titles of three novels confirms — *Cry, The Peacock, Where Shall We Go This Summer* and *Village By The Sea*. In spite of having lived in the large cosmopolitan cities of India and England, she continued to love the rivers, mountains, peaks, oceans, sun, moon, stars, rainbow, winter, summer, autumn and spring. As a pictorial artist she painted the slow changing moods of winter. When spring arrives, it arrives slowly and not mechanically. Before the actual arrival of spring, the weather starts changing and new green leaves are noticed by her on the branches of trees. Spring had its own fruits to offer and she mentions the fruits that spring or winter offers to the people.

While reading the novel *Cry, The Peacock* I recollect William Wordsworth's famous poem *Intimations of Immortality From Recollections of Early Childhood* that perhaps Anita Desai had in her mind. In the first three stanzas of this Ode, William Wordsworth recollected his childhood when the green fields, gardens, streams, sun, moon, the stars, sky and earth were dressed in celestial light. As a child he felt delighted after seeing the rainbow and lovely roses. Shining of the moon and stars gave him immense delight. Every morning he enjoyed the beauty of sunshine. The songs of birds were source of his delight. He expressed this joy in many poems to share this feeling with friends and readers. The sight of flowing water of cataracts was pleasant in itself and left an everlasting impression upon his heart. Then he felt at ease seeing the shepherd boy with his animals in midst of green pastures. He used to hear many echoes in nature. He failed to be negative in his approach to nature as she was in jovial mood. He felt as if all the animals were enjoying holiday in nature. Had he not enjoyed all these scenes of nature, it would have been his folly.

### **Nucleus :**

Similarly Maya enjoys the beauty of stars and the moon from the beginning of the novel till the end. Various moods of moon create no fear for her. As a pictorial artist Anita Desai describes the pictures of shining stars that sooth the restless mind of Maya. On the contrary, her husband Gautam feels attached with the pleasures of urban life such as club parties, cabaret dancing, smoking cigarettes and drinking whisky. Due to his vocation as an advocate he remains busy with cases of theft, violence and adultery and often ignores the moods of Maya. He does not mind if she plans for any job in Delhi. He has no interest in her father-obsession i.e. it was her father who didn't create her interest in logic, national and



international affairs. She failed to appreciate the terms such as salvation, incarnation, rebirth, detachment, attachment, liberation and renunciation as asserted by Lord Krishna in *The Gita*.

Finally William Wordsworth finds joy once again in the company of animals as it is spring season. As birds and shepherds are happy, he decides to forget his melancholy mood. But alas! Thoughtless Maya doesn't feel the influence of shining moon and the stars that ask people to remove darkness from the world — be it intellectual darkness, physical darkness or spiritual darkness. Wordsworth had a positive attitude to life and hence joined the man who was beating the tabor to celebrate the beautiful spring season. May morning is beautiful to him and he identifies himself with natural objects and then forgets his loss i.e. he does not find the divine light in nature that he found in his childhood.

On the contrary Maya concentrates upon moonlit-room, glow-worm-golden, stars and their reflection on water, the showers of rain, the dry leaves falling in large number just with the change of seasons and the roses that have darkened with the heat of the sun. The rays of the sun give her warmth in the winter season and husband and wife prefer walking on roof and in the garden in their free hours. Open area of the house is preferable to dark rooms where freshness is totally missing. Quite frequently she feels disgusted with the air that fan provides and then curses it. But then fresh flowers of spring and winter are a source of her delight —

'... I always felt, and yet, at dusk, they (flowers) emitted such a piercing swoon of scent, a poignant, half-sweet, had-sad fragrance that matched my mood to perfection, and I started to it with the embrace of recognition, taking in deep breaths of this gentle, fading odour ...' (Cry, The Peacock, 2022, p. 19)

Here she is sensuous like John Keats and William Wordsworth. Just she has used three important words —

'Contact, relationship, communion.' (Cry, The Peacock, 2022, p. 19)

Of course, like Williams Wordsworth, Anita Desai thinks of her contact with the beautiful seasons. She is happy with her intimate relationship with various flowers and like romantic poets, she is conscious of the pleasure of her communion with nature.



Unfortunately Maya remains silent most of the time. Had she learnt smiling from smiling roses, she would not have felt tense. Had she shared her agony with some friends, she would have felt light-hearted. Had she learnt some lesson from humming of bees, she would have tried to hum herself. But alas! She just listens the songs of birds and fails to learn how to sing. She recollects walking on the beach and watching the stars and the moon but fails to form any positive view of life. Just she has adjusted in the world of solitude and loneliness and even the presence of Gautam's sister and mother fail to gratify her senses. Neither she requests them to stay in Delhi for some more time nor does she plan to visit them in Calcutta. Even in the cabaret dance party she keeps herself aloof and doesn't share any joy there. Consequently Gautam fails to please her dry moods.

At times she realizes that she doesn't possess Gautam's 'closet understanding' and hence fails to be a dedicated wife. She fails to create harmony between 'reality and idealism' as moral values are never illustrated by her. In other words, she shows complete indifference to ethical values and hence remains friendless and rootless. Even basic things are beyond her comprehension. Dead dog Toto is more important than living husband. Birds awaken from their dream but she finds herself lost in commotion, delusion and illusion. Like William Wordsworth, she watches the stars shining like diamonds but fails to be source of help to the needy people and orphans. Like R.W. Emerson, she wanders from one circle into another and feels moving from 'sensation into sensation' (Cry, The Peacock, 2022, p. 21)

When one client visits Gautam, she wishes to inquire — Who came to see him and for what? Naturally Gautam remains busy in preparing legal cases but then she shows no interest in the same. Like a meteor, she wishes to shoot but does not know — Where and how? Just she uses the term 'ultimate' but doesn't go in its depth. She doesn't know that the sun shines in the east and sets in the west ultimately. The howling winds ultimately cool down. The flowers blossom for two-three days and ultimately fade. Man grows old and ultimately dies. At the same time she thinks of 'absolute joy' (Cry, The Peacock, 2022, p. 23) but doesn't analyze the source of joy. She doesn't ask herself — which joy does she want? — Joy from nature, joy from urban life, joy of living, joy that comes from reading of books, spiritual joy that Lord Buddha and Lord Mahaveer got in meditation.

Actually Maya has been becoming a victim of melancholia and dementia from the very beginning. Since she possesses many books in her home written by R.N. Tagore, P.B. Shelley, Jon Keats and other authors, she ought to have studied them to gather wisdom. Just she listens the hymn of Radha-



Krishna several times and yet doesn't read Lord Krishna's teachings as published in *The Bhagwadgita*. Gautam uses high soundings words such as detachment, salvation, incarnation, responsibility and duty but she cares a fig for them. Constellations remain just a mystery for her as she does not wish to consult any book on palmistry.

It is true that an albino astrologer prophesied that she would have married bliss for four years only and one of the life-partners will die. According to Hindu mythology, Savitri was told about one year's life of Satyavan and yet she married the hero of her heart. With her devotion she could bring him back from Lord of Death. In the case of Maya, nothing abnormal happens so as to kill one of them. It was just a dust storm that evening and she asked the servants to shut the doors and windows. She offered tea to Gautam and then ... She pushed him down from the roof. She can't be justified as she was not an insane woman. She was in full control of senses and she could avoid the tragedy. Like Lady Macbeth, Goneril and Regan, she took the most brutal step in killing Gautam. Had she analyzed the results of her cruel deed, she would not have been admitted in the asylum. Question arises — Why didn't she consult any psychiatrist if she had felt symptoms of neurosis, dementia, nervous-breakdown, schizophrenia and commotion.

### **Conclusion :**

Maya can't be allowed to blame Fate and God for her devilish deed. It was her sheer ignorance of ways of life. The stars never made any prophecy in her life. If Lord Krishna had saved Prahalad, He could protect her too. She imposed death upon Gautam for no fault of the fellow as every man has to keep himself busy to earn his livelihood. There are no symptoms of lechery and sensuality in him and he was sinned rather than sinning. Like Edgar, King Lear, Desdemona, Julius Caesar, King Duncan and Banquo, he was killed by his uncivilized wife. Poor fellow got no time to struggle to escape from fatal death.

William Wordsworth visited Wye river second time (July 1798) with his sister Dorothy and found a few changes there. He told her that he suffered a lot of agonies due to French Revolution (1789) as the members of two groups of rebels quarrelled on many issues and then killed Louis XVI out of disgust and desperation. Yet his intimacy with nature had strengthened in these years and towards the end of the poem he asked her to remain associated with blissful nature. Being wise and prudent he didn't throw her



into the river. On the contrary imprudent and unwise Maya pushed down Gautam from the roof and gave an example of her mental degeneration.

Maya failed to learn any lesson from the rhythm of streams of Moghul Garden. She failed to take any guidance from blossoming flowers and shining stars. Her brother Arjun associated himself with Muslim boys and she didn't think in terms of national integration. He wrote to her about the growing gap between labourers and capitalists and this too failed to create her sympathy for labourers and farmers. Gautam asked her to listen to the radio but alas! Radio programmes had no charm for her. Yet she found society merely a 'hostile world'. (Cry, The Peacock, 2022, p. 43) Now the question arises — who is hostile to her in this complex world? Why does she not become intimate with any lady that she met in the party? Why does she not write columns on the corruption and red tapism that she observes in administration? On the contrary she blames new society for new irritations and failures as if Independent India made no progress after 1947.

Namita Gokhale became a widow in her youth and then had the responsibility to look after two daughters. She studied books and wrote a book on *Shiva* and then wrote six novels, one after another. She too lives in Delhi and leads her active academic life without killing anybody. Maya's Papa also taught her to 'accept' things, society, human relationships, and social ties as they are, not to crush them for personal whims. Robert Frost enjoyed cutting the wood all alone and thought of unity between vocation and avocation. In times of heavy snowfall he enjoyed his stay in the forest and remembered that he had 'miles to go' before he 'sleeps'. Unfortunately she regards her previous friends as mere 'shadows'. She accepts the world of fever, fret and illness and remains tired mentally and physically. Mrs. Lal and other ladies don't appeal her aesthetic sense at all and she feels bored in the party. She fails to follow the facts of life and finds gulf between herself and Gautam — a gulf that can't be bridged —

'... I was climbing a mountain from the top of which could be seen the entire world, unfolded like a map, with sun-silked tree and milk-mild rivers and jewelled townships amidst fields of florescent, while he did not care for walks, or views, was tired from reading too much, and had matters to think out within the confines of his brain, remained behind in the dusty, enclosed cup of the small plain down below. Were I to force him to follow me, he would follow unseeing. ' (Cry, The Peacock, 2022, p. 81)



Finally, she becomes a victim of her own misgivings, doubts, misunderstanding, melancholia and dementia and hence deserves no pity due to her criminal deed. Even teachings of Lord Buddha had no meaning for her. Had she studied the works of R.N. Tagore, she would have learnt how to rise above disappointment.

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