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## **Reclaiming Voices, Redefining Narratives: An Analytical Review of New Feminism in Anita Desai's Cry, the Peacock**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The aim and the focus area of the present research paper is on the documentation and graphic journey of contemporary women. Today Women is playing an important role in economic, social political, agricultural, technology, environment, and in allied sectors of the society. Despite the presence of women in all the arenas there still exists issues that are needed to be discussed not only in one state or country but is discussed globally on the basis of color, sex, economic and social conditions. Since time immemorial the opinion of women is not taken into consideration not only in lower strata of the society but in elite sectors also. The protagonist, Maya, emerges as a symbol of defiance against societal norms, questioning expectations imposed on women. The analysis discusses the complexity of female identity, utilizing psychological realism to unravel Maya's internal struggles. It also explores the intersectionality of feminism and postcolonialism, offering a holistic perspective on the evolving landscape of women's liberation. The review positions the novel as a bridge between traditional and New Feminism, emphasizing its contribution to the ongoing evolution of feminist literature. This paper delves into the manifestation of New Feminism in Anita Desai's seminal work, "Cry, the Peacock," exploring how the novel contributes to the redefinition of feminist narratives and the reclamation of women's voices. But After 1975, feminist

writings highlighted the new age women who was capable of taking decisions, managing her affairs and was a self-reliant economically independent person and were also publishing novels in English, Hindi, Urdu and all regional languages. Indian women writing in English gained a lot of ground quickly in terms of expressing their own thoughts and problems. They began to challenge patriarchal society's fundamental social laws. In their works, they portray a wide range of sufferings and tragic events that women have faced over time.

**Keywords:** Economic, Social Political, Agricultural, Color, Sex, Economic and Social Conditions etc.

## **Introduction**

Contemporary literature, enriched by the principles of New Feminism, serves as a potent medium through which societal perceptions of gender roles are both reflected and reshaped. The present research paper provides a succinct overview examining how literature, embodying New Feminist ideals, contributes to the dynamic process of altering societal attitudes towards gender roles. The study employs a multifaceted approach, combining literary analysis with socio-cultural inquiry, to investigate the ways in which narratives informed by New Feminist principles influence public perspectives. By focusing on selected literary works that encapsulate the intersectionality and individual agency intrinsic dissects the nuanced portrayals of characters, themes, and narrative techniques. Key components of the research include an exploration of how literature reflects the principles of New Feminism, emphasizing intersectionality and individual agency. It investigates the transformative potential of these narratives on readers' perceptions, challenging conventional norms and fostering more inclusive understanding of gender roles. By evaluating reader responses, both contemporary and historical, the research gauges the impact of literature on shaping societal attitudes towards gender roles, offering valuable insights into the enduring relevance of New Feminist ideals in the context of evolving cultural landscapes.

## **Analysis**

*Cry, the Peacock* serves as a profound exploration of feminist thought. Maya's internal conflicts are depicted through psychological realism, unraveling the complexities of her identity within a rigid social framework. Desai uses Maya's emotional and psychological journey as a metaphor for the wider struggle of women to assert their individuality in the face of oppressive societal norms. Through a synthesis of literary

analysis and cultural inquiry, this research aims to contribute to the broader understanding of how literature acts as a catalyst for societal change, influencing perceptions of gender roles in alignment with the tenets of New Feminism. *Cry, the Peacock* is depicted as a canvas for feminist inquiry, inviting readers to reflect on the interconnectedness of gender, culture, and power dynamics, ultimately encouraging a critical dialogue on the ever-changing nature of women's empowerment. The analytical review delves into the novel's portrayal of women's experiences, examining the ways in which Desai's narrative challenges traditional gender roles, highlights the evolving landscape of feminism.

### **Review of Literature**

The transition from traditional feminism to New Feminism has marked a significant shift in feminist literature. Earlier feminist movements primarily focused on gender inequality, while New Feminism incorporates a broader spectrum of experiences influenced by race, class, and culture. In the works of Margaret Atwood, Toni Morrison, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, feminist narratives depict women's resistance to patriarchal oppression and explore themes of autonomy, self-discovery, and intersectionality. Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* and other feminist works create a space for challenging conventional gender roles, offering new perspectives on women's empowerment. The protagonist, Maya, emerges as a symbol of defiance, questioning the expectations placed upon her as a woman. Through her struggles with marriage and societal expectations, Desai lays bare the restrictive nature of traditional gender roles, setting the stage for a feminist exploration. *Cry, the Peacock* goes beyond simplistic portrayals of women and delves into the intricate layers of female identity. Maya's internal conflicts, desires, and fears are carefully woven into the narrative, offering readers a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted nature of women's experiences.

### **Comparative Feminist Narratives**

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* presents a dystopian view of female oppression, where women are stripped of autonomy. Similarly, in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, women navigate societal expectations in the context of war and political unrest. Both works, along with Desai's *Cry, the Peacock*, exemplify feminist narratives that question established gender roles while depicting women's pursuit of identity and freedom. *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel explores themes of female oppression, autonomy, and resistance, offering a powerful narrative that resonates with feminist discourse. *Half of a Yellow Sun* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie published in 2006,

Adichie's novel, set during the Nigerian Civil War, portrays the lives of women navigating societal expectations, war, and the quest for self-determination, *Bad Feminist* by Roxane Gay, is a collection of essays, Gay explores contemporary feminist issues, challenging stereotypes and offering a nuanced perspective on feminism in the 21st century, *Eloquent Rage: A Black Feminist Discovers Her Superpower* by Brittney Cooper, combines personal narrative and academic analysis to explore the intersections of race, gender, and feminism, *The Power* by Naomi Alderman, is a speculative fiction novel imagines a world where women develop the ability to generate electrical power, leading to a shift in gender dynamics and societal norms, *Women Talking* by Miriam Toews is a fictionalized account of real events, exploring the voices of women in a Mennonite community who come together to discuss and confront systemic oppression, *We Should All Be Feminists* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is based on Adichie's talk, this essay explores the necessity of feminism in the contemporary world and advocates for gender equality.

### **Research Methodology**

This research employs a multifaceted approach, combining literary analysis and socio-cultural inquiry. By analyzing the narrative techniques, character development, and thematic elements in *Cry, the Peacock*, the study delves into the nuanced portrayal of female identity, societal norms, and feminist discourse. Reader responses from both historical and contemporary perspectives are examined to assess the impact of feminist literature on societal attitudes. Desai's portrayal transcends stereotypes, contributing to the evolution of feminist literature. The place of woman in society has always been different in every age and society, that's why women have never been given equal rights. New Feminism is characterized by its intersectionality, recognizing that women's experiences are shaped not only by gender but also by factors such as race, class, sexuality, and culture. It goes beyond the binary framework of earlier feminist waves, acknowledging and advocating for the rights and perspectives of women across diverse backgrounds.

It can never be denied that from ancient times she is continuously trying to find a place in this orthodox society. Almost all the female protagonists of Desai's novels remain in their own world of fantasy thwarted by male practices or by social norms and practices. That's the reason they feel a sense of alienation and are not in a condition to adjust with their surroundings. The emergence of women's consciousness and their quest for self-discovery introduces a novel framework of values within the fictional system. The typological experiences of these women share consistent elements, including a

sudden awakening, profound introspection, and a conclusion marked by deliberate and conscious decisions. In the novel Maya's ongoing struggle to conform to societal norms is a pervasive theme. She grapples with the desire to voice her discontent against her husband's injustices, yet simultaneously resigns herself to the unfavorable consequences. Notably, authors such as Margaret Atwood, Toni Morrison, and Virginia Woolf have contributed to the discourse on women's empowerment and freedom. Many writers have supported the empowerment movement, advocating for a shift in societal attitudes towards women. Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* reveals;

*"Sex is biological and gender is social imposition. She asserts that patriarchal authority has given women a minority status that inflicts on her a "self-hatred and self rejection, a contempt both herself and for her fellows."*

The novel illuminates the distinctive sensibility of a sensitive woman, sharply contrasting with the detached and practical demeanor of an insensitive husband. Central to the narrative are the operative concepts of equality and liberty, revealing the challenges women face in reconciling with the harsh realities of life. The writer endeavors to delve into the predicament of Maya within a dehumanized society, using the portrayal of the female protagonist to shed light on her struggles. Maya's loveless marriage to Gautama stands as the tragic catalyst in her life. Critics in the present research paper employ diverse perspectives to unveil the authentic portrayal of women, a theme also explored by Ruth Praver Jhabvala, who eloquently captures the condition of women in creative and thought-provoking lines.

"Beat them, starve them, how you like them, they will sit and look with animal eyes and never raise a head to defend themselves."

Desai employs psychological realism to provide readers with a deep dive into Maya's psyche. This narrative technique allows for an exploration of the internal struggles women face, adding a psychological dimension to the feminist discourse. The novel becomes a canvas for feminist inquiry, inviting readers to reflect on the impact of societal expectations on women's mental well-being. The novel serves as a bridge between traditional feminism and the emerging wave of New Feminism. Maya's journey becomes a catalyst for change, embodying the shifting paradigms within feminist thought. Desai's narrative suggests that women's liberation is not a linear progression but a dynamic process that adapts to changing societal landscapes. Empowerment of women is the progress of country and all felt to equip the women with necessary skills with education and modern trade.

*Cry, the Peacock*, intricately explores the psyche of its central character, Maya. The characterization in the novel is rich and layered, offering a nuanced portrayal of Maya's complex emotions, psychological struggles, and societal conflicts. Through Maya's struggles and triumphs, the novel becomes a vehicle for challenging societal norms, unraveling the complexities of female identity, and contributing to the ongoing evolution of feminist literature. The narrative delves into her inner thoughts, fears, and anxieties, providing readers with a profound understanding of her mental state. Desai's masterpiece invites readers to engage in a critical dialogue on feminism, beckoning them to reevaluate preconceived notions and embrace the ever-changing landscape of women's liberation. It goes beyond simplistic portrayals of women and delves into the intricate layers of female identity. Maya's internal conflicts, desires, and fears are carefully woven into the narrative, offering readers a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted nature of women's experiences. The novel introduces various characters who play roles in Maya's life, such as her friends and acquaintances. These characters contribute to the exploration of Maya's social interactions and the external influences on her mental state. Desai's portrayal transcends stereotypes, contributing to the evolution of feminist literature.

In the gender literature it is often strongly advocated that women should be given property rights in order to involve them in decision making process and thereby empowering them. Surprisingly, hill women like women elsewhere in the country, do not own any property rights over land or other assets. Being the primary breadwinners, men exercise control over household income and are also the decision makers on how to spend or invest the money. Though women are the main contributors in cultivation and household food economy, yet they are seldom treated as breadwinners and hence have little control over income. However, in some cases it is seen that women do participate in controlling household income, particularly in educated families. Desai employs psychological realism to provide readers with a deep dive into Maya's psyche. This narrative technique allows for an exploration of the internal struggles women face, adding a psychological dimension to the feminist discourse. The novel becomes a canvas for feminist inquiry, inviting readers to reflect on the impact of societal expectations on women's mental well-being. She endeavored to portray them as individuals growing into themselves, unfolding the delicate processes of their being and becoming. Her heroines display high degree of competence in countering their oppressions and maintain a down-to-earth attitude towards life in general.

*“Her novels acknowledge the concrete social, political and economical barriers that stand in the way of women’s search for empowerment and eccentric bias that permeate all levels of Hindu culture...realistic in emphasizing adverse effects of colonialism and neo- colonialism on Indian society and especially its women.”*

Discussing further the concept of gender, the concept of gender theorist Judith Pamela Butler can be analyzed. According to her,

*“[Gender] ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pre-given sex; gender must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established. As a result, gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive cultural means by which “sexed nature”, or “a natural sex” is produced and established as “prediscursive”, “prior to culture”*

Modern urban women want more than the men to have separate homes and nuclear families and a change in the division of labor in the family, responsibility towards parents, siblings, and the in-laws of women. It suggests that the husband-wife bond is becoming closer and is posing new strains and problems. Thus due to depressed and unsettled economic conditions and poverty, many women of the urban proletariat and of rural artesian class who had to migrate from village to urban centers were forced to take outdoor manual work for wages along with their men as laborers in plantations, mines, and factories, etc. This created a new class of urban working women. Thousands of women started taking up jobs out of their homes in various factories and other places of work. With the spread of education and opening up of various women’s colleges, more and more women started getting into various universities.

## **Conclusion**

In the novel, *Voices in the City*, Anita Desai portrays the image of a highly sensitive, unhappy, unsatisfied and introverted woman, Monisha who is a victim of ill-matched marriage. Married into a placid, middle-class family, and to a prosaically dull husband, she is unable to adjust to her environment. She stoically refuses to identify herself with her in-laws’ family and finally commits suicide. Desai effectively displays the complete lack of togetherness, mutual understanding and communication in the marital relationship of Monisha and Jiban. The current case study on Anita Desai has performed a significant function of instilling a positive “Feminine” identity rather than a female identity, role model women who deters the dependence on men. She has raised voice for the India women. Almost in all novels of the Anita Desai, she

has always tried to convey the inner urges of her female protagonists through her writing and depiction of situation in a proper way that has echoed to all. These things have helped her to peep into the inner world of the women and delineated their reality in totality. She has always acted in her own way and attempted to express the feminism in her own way. She has contributed to the India with the feminist concern; the most important thing about her is the way of expression. Her all novels revolve around men and women of exception, incompatible couples and have always tried to explore the feminism in varied ways. The findings are expected to shed light on the transformative potential of literature as a force for social progress and the ongoing evolution of gender dynamics in contemporary society.

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