Demystifying Gender Discourse and Gender Identity through Narrative Strategies Uses in Anita Desai’s Cry, the Peacock

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ABSTRACT

In modern and postmodern studies, feminism as a literary theory has made a paradigm shift in the gender debates in narratives. The project of feminist narratology is to explore different narratives from a feminist point of view. The explication of this very aspect of narratives, particularly by female writers, is of much importance in this era. Anita Desai, being one of the most prominent writers, deliberately chooses the themes in her narratives, considering the feminist stance on different structural levels and exploring women's world on psychological and emotional levels. The present research is particularly based on the analysis of gender construction in the female narratives of Desai. Cry, the Peacock by Anita Desai has been chosen for the depiction of narrative strategies on the basis of feminist literary stance. This research significantly enhances the vision of the feminist narratological aspect of Desai’s writings. It helps to grasp the different narratological strategies used by Desai in her famous narratives to reinforce the projection of feminism. For this purpose, the researcher is going to use feminist narratology as a literary theory for the analysis of Desai’s selected works and will focus on different structural elements of a narrative to sort out how gender is manifested in those elements.

Keywords: gender, feminism, narrative strategies, Anita Desai, Cry, The Peacock, Postcolonial Feminism

1. Introduction

Narration is always precipitated by certain intrinsic forces ranging from a collective issue like nationalism to personal issues like love. Gender is one of these propelling forces which have engendered a bulk of narrative corpus. Jackson (2010) points out that “literary production has historically been dominated by men, the novel has been the genre in which women have, for various reasons, been most prolifically engaged as authors and made the most significant contributions to the literary canon” (p.141). The feminist writers have meticulously used the narrative strategies to evince their stance regarding the socially charged and polemical issue of gender construction and representation. This proposed study will present a critique of Anita Desai’s novels from the feminist narratological perspective. So, not only the thematic dimension of the feminist discourse will be elaborated, but also the gendered narrative patterns will be explicated.

Anita Desai is considered the most influential Indian novelist of the postmodern period of critical feminism. The kind of themes, topics, and treatment in this noted novelist’s works reminds the Victorian Era in British literature, where women started getting free recognition after rejection and criticism (Kumar, 2020a). The most significant part of Desai creations is her concern for those oppressive women who are bound to follow familial restrictions and consider these restrictions as a hindrance to their mental freedom and individual identity.
All the female portrayals of Desai suffer a lot either from external factors or internal dissatisfactions. Desai vividly explores women’s situation from other cultures with her incredible powers, also different from the eastern one. In the language of Singh (2007): “Anita Desai dives deeply, darkly and silently, tries to work out the inconsistencies and dichotomies of the virgin territories of modern lifestyle. She adds a new dimension turning inward into the realities of life and plunges into the deep depths of the human psyche to score out its mysteries, turmoil and chaos inside the mind of her characters” (p. 18).

Desai was born on June 24 1937, to a German mother and an Indian father; thus, she was affiliated with two different cultures from her early childhood. Desai is blessed with an inner eye to have a deep insight into the minds of her characters. Historically, Indian literature has been very conservative and traditions bound following the conventional line of an orthodox society. Desai is a distinguished writer in this manner as she brought it close to the world of realities focusing on contemporary social issues. Her writing style is unusual from other writers of her age. Her literary creations focus on modern women who resist material orthodoxy and want to cope with males in recent times. Women of all ages are naturally inclined to write about women as their femininity prefers to do so. Desai also chooses women characters to lead her fictive story, who are victims of imposed social standards set by patriarchal rules.

This study analyses Desai’s Cry, the Peacock Mostly, Desai portrays the world of a dissatisfied woman in which the ruthlessness towards women is considered the result of proselytizing ‘modernity’. Cry, the Peacock is Desai’s first novel written in 1963 and received the Sahitya Academy Award. Maya, the protagonist, as a young, emotional, sensitive and ambitious type of girl, has been nicely portrayed by Anita. She is too much affected by her marriage’s meaningless and cold atmosphere to a mature, emotionless and rationale type of person, Gautama. Because of Maya and her husband’s temperamental disparity, she is a hypersensitive girl, meets a tragic end in the novel. Maya is the creation of the modern age whose dilemma can be judged with a different perspective from the traditional women. Maya’s consciousness and hypersensitivity keep questioning the meaning and purpose of her existence in the world. Her female characters suffer a lot. That’s why they become disillusioned and detached from the outside world. They find themselves incompatible with the needs of a patriarchal society. On the other side stands Uma who does not seem to make any resistance against patriarchal ruthlessness—applying the theoretical implications of feminist narratology on both selected novels has been tried to seek out the feminist stance in Desai’s fictions and how gender constructions work in the forefront.

Following Butler (1990), the storyteller’s character isn’t built up upon a specific build of sex; he/she isn’t marked as lady or man in light of specific gendered attributes, yet sidesteps names and is decided upon different viewpoints. By deciding to appear as something else, the person in question wants to destroy the differentiation of sex and rather be viewed as a person with his/her individual personality. As the novel incorporates gay references, the content’s development of sexual item decisions as freed from sex limitations can be viewed as a cross-sexuality certification. In Queering Narratology, Susan S. Lanser (1996) notes that “composed on the Body, whatever the sex of its storyteller, is an eccentric novel with a strange plot”. In this sense, the term eccentric can be utilized to assign “another digressive skyline, another perspective about the sexual” whose principle foundation of an account to speak more loudly for an equivalent society objective is to “work up instead of set sexual and printed constraints”.

Likewise, Susan S. Lanser (1996) utilizes the term sexual orientation, a definition that I will use in my future reference to sex, as a method for recognizing “a male or female character by drawing on social codes that routinely imply manliness or gentility” (p. 255). However, Marilyn R. Farwell (1996) states Written on the Body as a “Postmodern Lesbian Text” (p. 168).

In her article “The Genderization of Narrative”, Monika Fludernik (1999) states that there are two different ways of developing organic sex in account messages unequivocal or verifiable.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

In the wake of the anti-essentialist postmodern era, feminist writers have challenged the phallocentric pattern of the world on a thematic level and the narratological level. They have achieved the unity of matter and manner to reinforce their stance apropos gender debate. Anita Desai belongs to this stratum of creative writers who have used feminist narratological strategies in her novels. Her Fasting, Feasting and Cry, the Peacock are representatives of her peculiar propensity.

1.2 Research Questions

(i) How does gender dialectics has been manifested by Desai through the art of narration and the narrated?
(ii) To what extent the structural strategies of narration exhibit the feminist propensity?
(iii) Whether the overt/ covert thematic issues contribute to the feminist discourse?
2. Literature Review

The study revolves around the three key issues: Desai’s fiction, feminist discourse, and narratology. In this portion, the works produced about these relevant issues will be critically reviewed.

2.1 Anita Desai’s Fiction

Anita Mazumdar Desai (June 24 1937) is a famous Indian novelist who is the writer of many novels and other non-fiction works. She has been shortlisted three times for the Booker Prize. She has been claimed as a trendsetter in modern feminist thought. She has got an appraisal from women, in general, to raise her voice for their sufferings and bring forth their rights for self-representation and their separate valuable identity that has been denied by a patriarchal society where men are all in all. Most of her novels have a feminist stance in them. Desai has raised her voice for the tormented women. Her novels have touched the heights of fame for Desai as being a true Indian feminist writer. *Fasting, Feasting* is one of her best novels in which the character of Uma is focused. Through the character of Uma, Desai portrays the domestic environment of Indian society in a realistic manner and presents the discriminated attitude of society towards women.

There can be drawn distinctive lines between feminine sensibility and feminist approach. Some radical feminists have a pure feminist approach and talk about the subservient conditions of women. But Desai’s approach is slightly different as she does not ignore the responsibilities of a woman. According to Vandana Singh and Deepti Singh (2012), Desai raises her voice for feminine sensibility and does not follow the idea of peculiar western feminism concerned only with female suppression and ignoring other aspects of women. She proposes the concept of feminine sensibility. She raises her voice for the disharmony and discontentment of the women that are the outcome of their yearnings for an identity. By casting a deep insight into Desai’s female figures and considering the feminist stance in her work, especially those novels which have victimized women, it seems that Desai challenges the traditional models of married women who are mother servants in their household and have no security for their survival. Maternal responsibilities create boundaries for them to come forward and enhance the suffocation in their lives.

2.2 Feminist Discourse

Feminism is a set of ideologies concerned with defining, exploring, and defending women’s rights in society. Feminism is a theoretical debate over the issues of masculinity and femininity; thus, a feminist is the one who believes in the concerns of feminism and directly or indirectly involves himself in the struggle for women’s rights (Kumar, 2020b).

Feminism, according to Freedman (2001), can be interpreted as follows: “All feminisms may start with the assertion that feminisms concern themselves with women’s inferior position in society and with discrimination encountered by women because of their sex” (p. 1). In the same way, Karen Offen (2012) also explicates the concerns of feminism in these words, “Feminism makes claims for a rebalancing between women and men of the social, economic, and political power within a given society, on behalf of both sexes in the name of their common humanity, but with respect for their differences” (p.151-52).

Rogers (1966) claims that patriarchal feeling or the desire to keep women subject to men is the “most important cause of misogyny because the most widely and firmly entrenched in society” (p. 272). According to Millett (1977), this situation arises because the ruling sex seeks to maintain and extend its power over the subordinate sex.

Feminism does not stand alone as a literary theory or movement. It relates itself to other schools of thoughts also, like structuralism, post-structuralism, psycho-analysis or Marxism. In past times it was limited in approach. Still, different departments of literary concern and social institutions started to think about the emerging voice and see the relevant issues to be further analyzed with the passage of time.

2.3 Narratology

Narratology is developed out of structuralism and Russian formalism. It is the branch of structuralism that has flourished in recent years. It is “the study of the form and functioning of the narrative” (Prince, 1982: p.4) and “the elaboration of instruments leading to the explicit description of narratives and the comprehension of their functioning” (Prince, 1982: 5). Historically, it goes back to the past. As a literary theory, it has gained its origin from a structuralist mode of thinking and emerged as a distinctive school of thought in the mid-20th century. Different theorists have explained this phenomenon in different terms, so it has become complicated now. In simple words, anything that tells or presents a story, whether it is text, performance or picture, is narrative. Narratives are everywhere.

Feminist narratology reconceptualized the whole thought, and at the heart of this bifurcation, it also widened the scope of the field. To have full command of the rubrics of feminist narratology is of paramount interest for textual interpretations along with the reader’s reception. As opposed to classical thought of
narratology of analyzing the structure of texts systematically and scientifically, feminist criticism challenged the assumed perception of narratology that there is a universal law in texts, taking the concept of universality as being andro biased and male-oriented.

3. Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The research is a qualitative one in its nature. The theoretical framework of Feminist Narratology is used for the analysis of the selected novels. Ruth Page’s model (2006) developed in her “Literary and Linguistic Approaches to Feminist Narratology” is utilized for analysis. The model incorporates both the literary and the linguistic aspects of texts. But the researcher will be focused on the literary dimensions. So, the following narrative strategies will be explicated through textual analysis:

3.1 Narration (how does narrating take place?)

Shlomith Rimmon Kenan defines narration as ‘A communication process in which the narrative as a message is transmitted by addressee to addressee’ (Kenan, 2005). Addresser means the narrator of fiction, and the addressee is the narratee to whom the narrator intends to relate the story.

3.2 Modes of discourse

According to Gerald Prince (1990), ‘Modes of discourse’ are ‘the various ways in which verbal acts can be represented’. Modes of discourse are employed in the fictive work to impart the information; it’s up to the narrator which way of discourse he/she uses to communicate to the readers.

3.3 Order

Order is used as a narrative technique to recount the events in successive order. There may be a difference between the narrated order and the narrating order, as Prince (1990) explains. It’s a necessary part of the narrative related to the chronological succession of the events.

3.4 Point of view (Focalization)

Rimmon Kenan (2005) explains focalization in a comprehensive manner, “the story is presented through the mediation of some ‘prism’, ‘perspective’, ‘angle of vision’, verbalized by the narrator though not necessarily his.” The narrator has a certain perspective that motivates him/her to write the story. His/her point of view helps to categorize the story in a particular way.

3.5 Speed

Gerald Prince (1990) includes the speed of recounting the events as a partial part of the narrative as she conjures, “within any given narrative, the events and situations making up the world of the narrated may be presented more or less quickly, and the rate at which they unfold constitutes what is called narrative speed”. The speed of narrating the events helps to justify the manner of writing by the narrator.

3.6 Narrated (What is narrated?)

The narration of the events relates to the propositions which express the relation of different events to each other. These situations or events are the topic-comment structures about that world’ (Prince, 1990).

3.7 Events

The story is a collection of events or a set of propositions that may be interpreted in terms of active and stative events’ (Prince, 1990) or ‘kernels and catalysts’ according to Kenan (2005) interpretation. Events of a story are recounted in a successive manner, thus related to the chronological order of the story.

3.8 Setting

The setting is the description of the surroundings of the characters. As Prince (1990) observes, “a setting is equivalent to a set of propositions referring to the same (background) spatio-temporal complex,” Thus setting involves the scenic descriptions related to the impact of space and time.

3.9 Theme

The theme is the ideological facet of the text. According to Prince (1990) definition, “there is a general thought or idea of which a set of (sub-) propositions (or a set of themes) is taken to be an illustration. It is the conceptual world of narrative and consists of a single dominant perspective.
3.10 Characterization (Gender construction)

A character is like a topic or ‘the logical participant’ (Prince, 1990) in a developed narrative by assigning certain characteristics. The art of presenting the character in accordance with its traits is called characterization. All these features have been streamlined to develop a rigorous critique to show how gender is propelling narration.

4. An Analysis of Cry, the Peacock

4.1 Narration

*Cry, the Peacock* is a psychological narrative fiction whose focus is a female character Maya who is also the protagonist of the novel. She is preoccupied with a childhood obsession with a prophecy of death disaster by an Albino astrologer and her husband’s indifference. Temperamental disharmony in her married life makes her a neurotic person. She is the embodiment of a cultured Indian woman who is hypersensitive, passionate, and emotional and has the acute desire for love and attention from her husband Gautama, a rational, logical and practical-minded person. There is nothing common in them, and it results in marital discord. Disparities between husband and wife worsen as the story goes on and ultimately leads them to a fatal end. Following narrative strategies will find out the narrator’s feminist bent of mind through literary and linguistic devices.

4.2 Modes of Discourse

Maya is an introvert by nature, she broods over things sensitively and fails to accept the undesired situation, and resolutely she suffers from psychological traumas. The main action of the story takes place in her own mind rather than the external world. The narrative is divided into three parts, part 1 and 3 are short in length, and the third person is used as a medium of discourse. Part 2 is the main part where the narrator has presented the story in detail by Maya’s mouthpiece, employing the first person as a mode of discourse. As the story is taking place in the mind of Maya, that’s why the stream of consciousness is very much there to present the ongoing action and reaction of the protagonist, thus free direct discourse has been adopted by the narrator to present the details of narrated events. Winterson (1995) herself addresses this issue in her essay “Imagination and Reality” as she emphasizes that: “The reality of the image leaves out nothing. It is the most complete reality that we can know. Imagination takes in the world of sense experience, and rather than trading it for words of symbols, delights in it for what it is” (p.150).

As far as the feminist vision of the narrator is concerned, the mode of discourse as adopted by the narrator as a narrative technique is a direct source to get the core idea of narrative because free direct discourse makes the narrator able to expose the story to its narratees comprehensively indirect and straightforward; mainly in the case of a psychological novel like *Cry, the Peacock* where the internal conflicts and mental traumas of a woman are the focal points of the narrator. Free direct discourse has easy access to the characters’ minds by using other narrative devices such as interior monologues and stream of consciousness. *Cry, the Peacock* is a novel in which external events are not of any significant nature; rather, the mind of the character is the place of action and one’s thoughts and internal conflicts can’t be made clear to the reader if the character herself/himself is not the direct source of presenting those feelings and emotions.

4.3 Point of view

Point of view or focalization represents ideas and values by which a narrator of fiction tries to keep her/him at a certain position. It is easy to understand her/his vision for writing fiction. Presentation and perception are related to the perspective of the narrative. The style of presentation and the way or manner of perception or the impression that the narrate gets from this style helps define the narrative point of view. Point of view is the term pertinent to the art of narratology. In every narrative, the narrator has some idea in her/his mind to present to the readers and to lead this idea he/she usually employs more than one characters in the story, as the characters carry divergent views and ideas that are actually an insight to the vision of the narrator of the story about some particular purpose. Thus there may be a single perspective throughout the narrative or multiple perspectives.

*Cry, the Peacock* consists of three parts. Part one is of very short length and is like a prologue; 3rd part is also short in length and is the epilogue. In both parts, the narrator is omniscient and uses the 3rd person, while in part two, the narrator uses the 1st person and is one of the characters from the book. Maya is the protagonist of the novel, and she herself relates her own story, thus using the 1st person narrative technique, as is the case with most psychological novels. The readers get everything from Maya’s words, whose concern is her married life with her husband, Gautama. From her views, the feminine vision of the narrative is explicated realistically and in an artistic manner because she’s being an introvert, never fully gives expression to her thoughts; thus, the place of action is the protagonist’s mind. The narrator’s perspective about the woman plight for her search of identity is stressed upon by Maya. In narratives, where the major character is the narrator of the story, the details are bound to be subjective. The narrative may be loaded with prejudiced vision because everything is related through one’s own perceptions, i.e. what Maya hears or
what she feels. This particular narrative is about Maya's restricted world, the relation of husband and wife, dissimilarities between them, and her chaos for affection and companionship in her relation.

Part 1st of the book carries the scene of the death of a pet dog that has a greater significance to understand Maya's hypersensitivity and the practicality of Gautama and stresses the line of difference from the very start of the book. At the loss of her dog, Maya is bereaved and disturbed to think that how she will be able to come out of this misery as she assures herself that she will never forget it. Gautama remains calm and tries to divert her attention by offering her a cup of tea as if it matters nothing to him or, in Maya's words living or dying was a matter of fact for her, and he was moved not by these frivolities at all. She laments, "How little he knew of my misery, or of how to comfort me. But then, he knew nothing that concerned me" (Desai, 1991; p.14). Thus their different approaches to the incident make the reader understand their relationship in the coming chapters of the book.

The narrator emphasizes that the difference between opinions and approaches create tensions in relations, and outcomes are heart-rending. Gautama has his own theory of life. Sometimes he is not unbearable to that extent as Maya feels but being a sensitive person, she is unable to understand his practical approach and rational powers even in delicate matters. At every moment reader finds that the style and manner of the narrator try to justify Maya's reactions from which narrator’s feministic vision and the point of view about woman’s needs other than materialistic one is stressed upon as is the case of Maya, who is not only ignored by her husband but is treated in the same way by her in-laws also. Gautama’s family is very much like him, indifferent and ignorant about other’s existence. In Maya’s words, “in Gautama’s family, one did not speak of love, far less of affection” (Desai, 1991; p.43).

She is restless in such an environment where everything seemed to be mechanical and everyone is busy with his own affairs, hardly realizing others' pain. This was a different life for her from the life which she spent in her father’s home. She was bound to live because there were no other options and perhaps she loved Gautama so much and expected the same warmth from him. Among his family members, she was treated as a childlike person whose involvement matters nothing to them except in such cases,

“They spoke to me, the synocete, only when it had to do with babies, meals, shopping, marriages, for I was their toy, their indulgence, not to be taken seriously, and the world I came from was less than that- it was a luxury they considered it a crime to suffer, and so damned it with dismissal” (Desai, 1991; p.45).

Nila, Gautama’s sister, is a divorcee and has suffered a lot in her husband’s home. She is quite satisfied with her decision because her life with her husband was unbearable for her as she declares, “after ten tears with that rabbit I married, I’ve learnt to do everything myself”. Being her brother and protector, Gautama does not support her because it is not much important issue for him. These female characters intensify the narrative and the narrator’s endeavour to spend their lives without meaning. Marriage is a serious affair and a sacred agreement between man and woman who decide to be tied in a union of Body and soul. It should be given proper attention to avoid the negative outcomes but is ignored in our society without noticing that hasty decisions make destructions. The narrator of Cry, the Peacock, focalizes on this issue and mainly focuses on psychological oppressions that a couple faces when they stand in different positions. In societies like India, a woman is expected to compromise and sacrifice in her husband’s home she does so. Still, the outcomes of it are hilarious as they become the victim of negligence, ignorance, isolation and neurosis, such as Maya, suffers her internal traumas because of the dissimilarities of the temperament. The female characters contribute to the polytimbered voice of a pathetic woman.

4.3 Events

Events, being the constitutional part of any narrative, have been discussed above for their structural significance in the formation of the narrative. Events help the readers justify the theme of the narrative and the narrator’s point of view. The division between static and active events signifies the classification among different narratives loaded with multiple purposes. The text under discussion is the simple story of a complicated woman who is bound to live her life in a restricted environment contradictory to her nature and bear the heart-rending cold behaviour of her husband, whom she loves so much but is completely disappointed by his argue mental powers over the soft emotions of love and affection. She is helpless over the situation and mentally suffers a lot, so the place of action in this particular narrative is the mind of the protagonist of the novel. There are no significant events in the narrative, but the ordinary type of situations described in detail to pinpoint the ongoing actions and responses in Maya’s mind to clarify her mental disruptions.

In the introductory part of the book, the reader is confronted by a death of a pet dog that comprises the first event of the novel and is also very significant to understand the importance of pets and Maya’s mourning over its death. The narrator gives the minute details of its death by Maya’s introspections, who feel childless over her pet’s loss. Furthermore, the contradictory reactions from Maya and Gautama over the incident make the readers able to
get the opposite nature of the couple and draw a line between emotional vs rationale, soft/hard and logical vs dynamic and the resultant tensions arising from this difference in the next part of the book.

The second event in Part two is the visit to Lal’s home and a trip to the cabaret that is also important to unfold the mysteries of Maya’s world and her obsession with superstitions by giving the details of Albino and her horror over the impending danger of death prophecy. Apart from it, her concern for simple things has been brought to light, and the narrator’s feminist vision is also stressed upon in the party through Mrs Lal’s character. She has four daughters but still wishes to have a baby boy because daughters are like burdens and having a son symbolizes pride. In this way, the narrator is putting forward different attitudes of different people like Mrs Lal’s embarrassment having four daughters and other women sympathy over it, the importance of predictions and Maya’s unusual and horrified reaction over the subject of palmistry because of her suppressed disturbance of the death prediction which she wants to conceal from everyone.

The novel is a psychological novel. The story is about psychological and neurotical problems and miseries of a woman who is different from an ordinary woman and represents the plight of other women who are emotionally and sentimentally deprived of due love and attention they needed for their happy life. The narrator is concerned with the character’s mind to exploit her trauma and uses different techniques to make the narrates aware of her mental processes. That’s why there are no such external events of any greater significance but these above mentioned ordinary events.

4.4 Setting

Setting plays an important role in considering the place, time and scenic descriptions of the events in the story and clarifying the types and nature of events. It involves the background of the story in general and the place of action of the particular events. It’s up to the narrator whether he chooses to give a comprehensive length to the setting or a precise one. He may also neglect it at the same time. Still, the part of the text devoted to setting justifies the importance of surroundings and scenes in the lives of characters employed in the narrative. Cry, the Peacock is textually important regarding the textual prominence of the setting or background description. The narrator’s concern is the heroine of the novel Maya, whose mind is preoccupied with the sensual world. She is completely involved in the beauty of flowers, the trees, garden, the image of day and night, changing seasons and their impact on her moods, spell of moon and stars in the sky at night, movements of insects and even the cries of peacock appeal her aesthetic nature. Each and everything has been given a considerable length and minute observation by Maya, and the impact of these impressions in her mind provides the reader with access to her mind.

In Cry, the Peacock setting has got significance to such an extent that it seems like a character playing its part in the fabrication of the narrative. Maya’s character would not be clear to the readers if the narrator ignored the setting because it reveals the limited exposure of Maya’s world and her sensitivity towards seemingly trivial objects, thus somehow justifying her insanity at the end of the story.

The setting is restricted and limited to the home of Maya, as the place of action is the mind of the protagonist, so the events are taking place not on the battlefield or in different countries as in an adventurous novel where the hero is a male and performs tasks of different nature. Rather the narrative focuses on a female character confined to her home, the garden, the room and the veranda of her house. Outdoor activities are nullified to her except for one or two events where she makes a visit to Mrs Lal party or goes shopping with her in-laws, only there reader got the information of her place of living, i.e. Delhi.

All the scenic descriptions appear to be happening at the domestic level, so the setting is particular as far as the spacio temporal aspect is concerned. It is also consistent because the place of action remains the same from the start to the end of the novel. The narrator has shown the very limited exposure of the female protagonist, i.e. India in Delhi - the house in Delhi and, more specifically, the mind of the heroine. Indian is everywhere in the text, in the language of the characters, in weather, religion, traditional myths, astrology and Indian folks are there to enhance the effect of the setting.

The feminist vision of the narrator is exposed through the setting of the narrative. From the limited world of the protagonist, the narrator is capable of putting forward the condition of woman in general terms, especially the Indian woman who is to live her whole life in the four walls of her home by any means, even at the expense of her mental and psychological health that leads her to frustration and misbalanced temperament as in the case of Maya. Another trait with regard to settings in relation to female vision is the orderly fashion in which the minute details are provided to the readers in this particular text.

4.5 Theme

The theme is the fundamental element in a narrative that is celebrated throughout the narrative through the characters’ actions and speculations. It is easy to capture the general idea of narrative by the manifestation of the theme and discussing what a narrative is about. There may be one recurrent idea in a narrative or other themes along with it. Textual instances are abundant in a narrative to clarify the theme.
In *Cry, the Peacock* narrator takes the theme of man-woman relationship and marital discord into her focus, as in Maya and Gautama’s case, who have temperamental disharmonies. Disparities between husband and wife lead the female protagonist to a desperate end. They are tied to each other in a relation, but it seems as there are no ties of love and companionship in their relation. Maya has been portrayed as a hypersensitive, emotional and passionate woman who is an introvert in contrast to her husband Gautama, a rational, logical, practical and stubborn person, rigid in his thoughts and opinions. He remains to fail to satisfy Maya’s emotional and psychological needs because of her indifference and cold behaviour. Maya becomes neurotic.

In the introductory chapter, Maya’s sensitiveness is made very clear to readers when her pet dog Toto dies and is extremely disturbed by its death. She feels its loss like the loss of a child, and it’s difficult for her to come up with this loss without the attention from Gautama, but he has no concern for the death of such an ordinary thing. Rather he takes it. According to him, it’s ‘just all over, and Maya laments: “how little he knew of my misery, or of how to comfort me. But then, he knew nothing that concerned me” (Desai, 1991; p.14). He asks her to sleep without noticing that she wants his affection and doesn’t bother about her emotional needs. Maya thinks, “he did not give another thought to me, to either the soft, willing body or the lonely, wanting mind that waited near his bed” (Desai, 1991; p.14).

The communication gap proves a hurdle in their relationship because of the age gap between them as Gautama was a friend of Maya’s father and about his age fellow. Maya wants an expression of her repressed feelings. When she finds dismissal from her partner, she develops attachments to other things. Perhaps her relation with her pet dog manifests the emptiness dwelling in her, which may be because of not having a child after four years of married life as she concludes; “Childless women do develop fanatic attachments to their pets, they say. It is no less a relationship than that of a woman and her child, no less worthy of reverence, and agonized remembrance” (Desai, 1991; p.15). Their relationship is psychological torture for them, especially for Maya for whom material prosperity is not enough for a peaceful life. Rather, she wants more than this which relates to one’s emotional and mental health. Out of this mismatched relationship spring, other themes and the theme of mental incompatibilities, such as the theme of loneliness, are destructive for the protagonist, and she constantly bears the burden of it. This loneliness comes out of the negligence of Gautama, who never understands her wife’s emptiness because of his rigidity.

“Yes, I cried, yes, it is his hardness, no, no, not hardness, but the distance he coldly keeps from me. His coldness, coldness, and incessant talk of cups of tea and philosophy to not hear me talk and, talking, reveal myself. It is that _my loneliness in this house (14).” In the same scene further, she cries of her loneliness, “I was alone. Yes, I whimpered, it is that I am alone” (Desai, 1991; p.14).

The narrator is soft towards Maya’s delineation and presented her as a young, well-educated and an extraordinary woman who is different from an ordinary lot of woman who makes compromises over their mental and psychological thirsts in the pursuit of material needs. Still, Maya wants her thoughts to be understood, her emotions to be felt, and her desire for love and care to be fulfilled; when she finds these things insufficient, she becomes the victim of utter loneliness. She expresses her misery; thus, “Dared I go in? Beg for comfort? Confess to my loneliness and my terror of loneliness? Useless. Hopeless” (Desai, 1991; p. 28).

The narrator has a feminist bent of mind. That’s why she deeply tries to depict Maya’s suffering through her thoughts. Narrative techniques are used to justify her actions and reactions by laying stress on the theme of the unfulfilled quest for love in the pursuit of this love. She finds herself quite helpless because she has unconditional love for Gautama, his company and even the world around him.

She feels the pain and panic of ignorance and loneliness, misses the tenderness and longs for love. She can bear a painful heart and be aware that it’s Gautama who has taught her sensitive heart to bear this pain. Sometimes she even adores his powers of logic and arguments. Still, at the moments of her solitude, she acknowledges that her heart has become habitual to the suffering of this solitude.

“But it was Gautama who found many things to teach that heart, new, strange and painful things. He taught it pain, for there were countless nights when a humiliating sense of neglect had tortured me, of loneliness, of desperation that would not have existed had I not loved him so, had he not meant so much” (Desai, 1991; p.167).

Unfulfilled love is an unbearable burden for a person who is deprived of it. Maya’s sensitive nature makes her desperate from Gautama’s side. Till the end of the narrative, she is not hopeful rather takes her marriage as a matter of past with which her melancholy of thought and mood is related. “And yes, now that I remember, all the while I thought of him and our marriage as things of the past. I thought of the past with regret, deep, twilit, hopeless regret”
(Desai, 1991; p.168). From these retrospections, one can feel Maya's melancholic situation and the tragedy of her marriage as she calls it to regret.

Maya is completely introvert and ponders deeply in each and every object. She tries to find meanings out of them, and the result is similar to that of her disturbed and imbalanced psyche. Nights are always abounding with meaning for her, sometimes dreadful and sometimes peaceful. “Night, night, deep, night. This, I knew, was what one lived for: the nights were always beautiful — the gentle herbal balm rubbed into the hot temples and fevered bruises inflicted by the long, frustrating day” (Desai, 1991; p.27). Through the protagonist’s aspiration for sensual beauty and natural figures, the narrator emphasizes their importance much like the human characters in a narrative. At times, they symbolize zeal and zest of life for Maya, and other times, they are damp, bruised, and sad like her inner state. That's the reason she finds comparison between them and her situation. As here, when she finds posy in her room which were kept a day before and were now lifeless, “fatality—fat. Fate—fatality. I fingered the flowers sadly and felt much like them myself—bruised and tired, not quite alive, not quite of today” (Desai, 1991; p.81). At another moment, she compares her hopelessness to the stillness of the night, “the night fell still, the little cricket beside me fell still, and my heart fell still inside me (92)”. The movement of Bougainvilleas by the storm of dust winds makes her thoughts and emotions perturbed, and she feels the scratching of its thorns perplexing for her, “I hear them screech, sigh and sag. And I, who am nothing but an illusion, with them can do nothing but also screech, sigh and sag” (Desai, 1991; p.144).

Another theme prevalent in the narrative and motivating one for the protagonist’s reactions is her father fixation that is necessary to be discussed to understand Maya’s introspective character. The narrator is very much concerned with the complexities of her eccentric type of characters' inner world. Maya is sensitive to love and attention, which she got from her father but finds missing in Gautama. This sensitiveness pushes her into the life of imagination and fancies like that of her childhood rather than the world of facts and harsh realities like her present life with Gautama. She recalls her father’s devotion to her which she got being a motherless child, “he has looked after me alone, and his beam is especially tender, his attention especially loving” (Desai, 1991; p.37). Her father is a perfect figure of pure love and affection for her. Her memories about him are full of colours, fragrances and beauties of the past in contrast with her present, in which nothing lingers except loneliness, carelessness, harshness and detachment.

The fragile relationship between Maya and Gautama strengthens her obsession with her father. Her psychic reverberations are made known to the readers through her tenuous thoughts of pessimism and failure to find meaning in her existence. Her maladjustment is the root cause for her constantly remembering the past because Maya tries to substitute for her father in Gautama. Still, he fails to fill her vacuum and heal her quest and thirst for lovemaking her life unendurable. In such a case, she considers her agonies inescapable because she misses her father a lot and laments, “What I had forgotten was the magic of my father’s gentle words that had once had the power to soothe and console me. Now nothing calmed me (Desai, 1991; p.147).”

She finds no one to help her in this situation; she finds no attention from Gautama whenever she is lonely. If he will be helpful and loving towards her, she may save herself from this agony. Being emotionally and psychologically a weak person, she is powerless against this obsession, and her chaos makes her life unbearable for her. Even she starts to consider every moment as the last moment of her life. Many factors are responsible for hastening her way to destruction, the most important of which is Gautama’s coldness and incapability to understand her wife. In a fit of frenzy and insanity, Maya is interrupted by a thought that it may be Gautama who is to die because he is the one who is aloof from life and negates all the pleasures of life, so at the end of the fiction, she pushes him down from the terrace and commits suicide herself being quite an insane woman.

4.6 Characterization

Characters are the mouthpiece of a narrator who is presenting some idea in a way. Characters of Cry, the Peacock are also representations of the narrator’s view and have been portrayed in a very realistic manner. Maya and Gautama are the main characters in this fiction and a source to understand a woman who represents a woman lot in common. Maya and Gautama, as husband and wife, possess the characteristic of a typical married couple in a traditional set up where they have no choice to change the way of their lives except to accept it. Gautama, as a male, is portrayed with care, and Maya provides the details of her character because she is also the narrator of her own story.

The narrator has developed Gautama as a cold person who remains untouched from sensitive matters and does not take much pain over trivial issues. Here emerges the conflict of this tragic story because what is insignificant for Gautama is significant for Maya. Such as the death of her dog and Gautama’s reaction to it, which teases her a lot. He is surprised by her fear because it was an ordinary thing to live or to die. She describes him, “his voice reassuring logical claim. ‘But why? Now it is all quite over and finished with. He did not suffer long’ (Desai, 1991; p.18). Maya accepts the fact that he did not take the pain of anything. Losing someone dear to you as a matter of fact for him, and he calls those people “mysterious people who find such comfort in hocus-pocus, in the bogus ceremonies and childish trimmings with which we bury our dead” (Desai, 1991; p.18).

Maya has been portrayed as a woman of illusion who prefers to live in a world of imagination rather than accept reality. Reality and idealism are two different words for her, but for Gautama, there is no difference between the two.
Realities of life are the ideals for him either these are harsh realities or pleasing ones. That’s why he remains cool and calm to Maya’s emotional needs because he is far detached from her world of idealism. In Maya’s word, “Gautama, who was no romantic” (Desai, 1991; p.26) and careless about his harsh views not considering how painful they might be for his wife, who loves him a lot. At one moment, when Maya asked him to go somewhere for summer and wished to see Kathakali dances with him, he asks her to wait for the time when Kathakali troops will come to Delhi because “perhaps in winter, it will be less expensive” (Desai, 1991; p.41). The material gain was much important for him in front of Maya’s happiness. From here, his materialistic nature is accessible to the readers.

Maya’s character is delineated with deliberate effort because she is not expressive in her thoughts, but her restlessness shows her views about the things that disturb her. After dinner, when the couple comes home, Maya tries to indulge in a conversation with her and attract Gautama. Still, then she notices that “he spoke to me in the cool, stytic tone he employed when wishing to combat my indiscipline with his sense of the practical” (Desai, 1991; p.58). Whenever she wished to expect love and affection from his side and the tenderness to soothe her passions that her relation deserved, he tried to occupy her with his arguments about remaining indifferent and detached to such things. Maya’s sensitive nature can’t ignore this rudeness. Even in her childhood, she has been shown to depict love and care for everyone. Her hypersensitivity towards beasts is enough to understand how much pain she takes for common things. She was unable to sleep the whole night by the thought of that hungry bear she saw dancing for its master. She says to her father, “I was sure, I explain to my father, when unable to sleep that night, ‘that the bear doesn’t get much out of his earnings, I’m sure he doesn’t’” (Desai, 1991; p.77).

5. Conclusion

From this discussion, it can be concluded that the narrator has clear vision about her presentation of female portrayals and exclusively expects to address female readers from the other side. The setting of the novels, with relation to its domestic confinements, focus on the issues of marriage, sacrifices of a woman to save her family and other aspects of womanly characteristics, depict the feminine atmosphere of the texts and the aim of the narrator to convey her message to female narrates.

The first question deals with the writer’s endeavour to ratify gender dialectics to the art of narration and the narrated. Analysis of both texts is based on the constituent parts of the art of narration such as modes of discourse, speed, point of view and setting and some other related to the art of narrated, i.e. characters, events and thematic dimensions. Desai’s concern for the oppressed women is evident through her vision that these strategies have celebrated. Indian society is culturally and socially an orthodox society bound to follow all the social and conventional norms that do not allow the female to come in front and revolt against these norms. Desai chooses to throw light on gender inequalities and the segregation of Indian society with a deliberate effort.

The second question was to explore the effect of narrative strategies on the writer’s feministic vision, such as finding out how the writer uses these techniques to enhance her view. Analysis of both texts has been made by applying different elements of narrative in accordance with the focalization of the narrator so that it may be proved that the writer is deliberately stressing upon her focused point of female oppression and the disharmony between male and female because of their temperamental differences and the uncompromising nature of the man who is brought up with a clear vision of superiority. The analysis throws light on the gender-based inequality and Desai’s artistic manner, and her linguistic and literary devices.

The third question seeks to find out the relation between the feminist theory and the theory of narratology based on structural elements. Death for female emancipation goes back to the 17th century, but it took the shape of the literary movement in the late 19th century. Critics tried to find out the similarities and dissimilarities between feminism and other theories to enhance the importance of the feminist struggle and eradicate patriarchal oppression. To sum up, in all this discussion as mentioned above, Desai is exploring the inner and outer world of a woman with different narrative techniques and narrative devices support to find out over and covert thematic dimensions in these narratives.

References


