



Scan to know paper details and  
author's profile

# The Setting and its Significance in a Few of Anita Desai's Selected Novels

*Dr. R. Bakyaraj*

*Guru Kashi University*

## ABSTRACT

Anita Desai is among the most distinguished and well-known Indian writers. Anita Desai was born on June 24, 1937, into a mixed-race family consisting of a Bengali father and a German mother. She was fluent in Hindi, English, Bengali, and German. Anita Desai nevertheless decided to write her children's books, novellas, and novels in English. In the traditional sense, she is not a social realist. Her stories focus on man-woman interactions, marital problems, emotional struggles, loneliness, and a lack of communication. Anita Desai's emphasis on the inner temperament of her characters sets her apart from other female authors. Her main objective is to depict the characters' mental states at a critical exigency.

**Keywords:** temperament, loneliness, traditional, family, emotional, interactions.

**Classification:** LCC Code: PN3355

**Language:** English



Great Britain  
Journals Press

LJP Copyright ID: 573397

Print ISSN: 2515-5784

Online ISSN: 2515-5792

London Journal of Research in Humanities & Social Science

Volume 25 | Issue 10 | Compilation 1.0





# The Setting and its Significance in a Few of Anita Desai's Selected Novels

Dr. R. Bakyaraj

## ABSTRACT

*Anita Desai is among the most distinguished and well-known Indian writers. Anita Desai was born on June 24, 1937, into a mixed-race family consisting of a Bengali father and a German mother. She was fluent in Hindi, English, Bengali, and German. Anita Desai nevertheless decided to write her children's books, novellas, and novels in English. In the traditional sense, she is not a social realist. Her stories focus on man-woman interactions, marital problems, emotional struggles, loneliness, and a lack of communication. Anita Desai's emphasis on the inner temperament of her characters sets her apart from other female authors. Her main objective is to depict the characters' mental states at a critical exigency.*

**Keywords:** temperament, loneliness, traditional, family, emotional, interactions.

**Author:** An Associate Professor, Department of English, Guru Kashi University, Punjab, India.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Author William Rueckert (1926–2006) initially used the word "eco-criticism" in his 1978 article "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism." An admiration for nature and all of its beauty characterised the late 20th-century ecocriticism movement. In literature, ecocriticism explores the relationship between people and the natural environment. It focuses on the presentation and analysis of environmental issues, cultural issues related to the environment, and attitudes towards nature in literature. Examining how people in society act and respond to nature and ecological elements is one of ecocriticism's primary objectives. This kind of criticism has gained a lot of attention recently because of advancements in technology and the

emphasis society places on environmental damage.

The story of Maya, a young, sensitive woman married to Gautama, a busy and successful lawyer twice her age, is told by Anita Desai in her book Cry, The Peacock. Maya was raised with much love from her advocate father, Rai Sahib after her mother passed away and her brother moved overseas. Her husband could not satiate her deep yearning for love and life. Thus, this loving attention looms over her marital life like a fatal shadow. She tries to blend in with Leila and Pom's social circle, but she finds it hard to cope with both men's and women's pettiness.

She becomes insane due to her death phobia and gives Gautama a death wish. Unconsciously, she thinks about killing him till the day of a violent dust storm. In order to "pass through an immensity of air, down to the very bottom," she asks Gautama to join her on the roof terrace. She stops at the parapet and shoves him over the side (Desai 184). Using photographs of nature, the book portrays the protagonist's mental and emotional landscapes and their intensities. Maya has psychological distress and extreme loneliness as a result of her inner environment, which is incompatible with the social realities of existence.

The protagonist Maya's emotional world is explored through nature imagery in Cry the Peacock, which also delves into her mind to reveal her warped reality. The first zoological image we see is of Maya lavishing love on her pet dog, Toto. Even after four years of marriage to Gautama, Maya was childless; yet, Toto's death, as fate would have it, left her alone. The death motif and the notion of estrangement are introduced with Toto's passing.

## II. THE EMOTIONAL STATE OF MAYA

Maya is about to have an emotional breakdown because she can't handle the fact that her pet has died. She perceived her pet dog, Toto, as a transferred love object, demonstrating her unfulfilled maternal desires as a married woman. Love needs an innate outlet because it is a strong and overwhelming force in women's lives. Scavenging plans are being planned to take Maya's pet dog away at the start of the book. As an indication of her maternal attachment to the deceased dog, she starts to grieve. The incident details Maya's anguish and depression following the passing of her pet dog, Toto. When the necessary steps were taken to dispose of Toto's body after tea, Gautama remarked, "It's all over.

The body was left to decompose in the sun all day. It isn't possible. Out onto the veranda since the smell of decaying flesh was overwhelming in the April heat and would soon permeate the rooms. Its eyes were open, looking motionless, and it cried when she put the small string bed behind the lime trees, where there was a cool, aqueous shade. And hurried to wash the tears out of her eyes with the garden tap before running, defeated, inside the house.

Anita Desai illuminates the eternal cycle of life and death via the metaphorical usage of nature. The spring season represents new life and creation. Another instance of nature versus humans occurs when Maya and her husband attend a dinner party at Lal's house and she notices orchids. The thought of them makes her uneasy. "There were orchids in a basket on the veranda," she informs Gautama. However, according to Mrs. Lal, they never bloom. They are orchids of the hill. You see. They'll be dead shortly (Desai 63). Maya's statement is quite evocative. Anita Desai depicts Maya's actual existence with orchids. These are hill orchids, but they can't thrive there because they were transferred to a different climate.

She appreciates the fleeting beauty of dewdrops on grass blades and rose petals; nature is also very important to Maya. By providing shade, a soft breeze, the scent of flowers, and friendly greetings on the verandas of Maya's Garden, it constantly

aims to amuse Maya. Four years from now Maya feels confident that one of them must die since she and Gautama were married; she never considers the option of preventing the disaster by heeding the albino's advice and asking for the mercy of the all-powerful, merciful god. There were no friends with whom she could discuss her worries, and she dared not mention it to Gautama. The albino turns into his prophecy and horror.

When Maya first got married, she was hopeless and depressed. For Maya, Gautama is no company. They are not compatible. In terms of tastes, a peasant and a princess are married. Like most women, Maya yearned for both sex and a kid. She had several mental pictures of man-woman relationships. A woman followed a man to a closed house after he gave her a wink. She had heard the peahens and peacocks yelling "Pia, Pia," which translates to "lover, lover." However, Gautama was soundly sleeping before she woke up after changing her attire.

The pictures of lemon flowers and petunias allude to Gautama and Maya's temperamental separation. Gautama and Maya had different opinions on a number of significant matters. Gautama believed that Maya had been shielded from the harsh truths of her upbringing. About existence, "You still see life as a fairy tale." What knowledge have you gained about life's realities?

Although she wanted to go to the Mushaira outside her room, a woman had no place with males, not if She could understand the Urdu couplets. Through his signals, she discovered that Gautama had requested her not to stay. She was startled, as though she had found a flaw in her untouched skin. Because she lacked the somewhat lengthy face of an educated woman, she believed that Gautama did not love her. To make matters worse, he told Maya that she shouldn't expect love—what he refers to as attachment—from him in a lengthy speech that was peppered with Gita references and attacked the idea of love. He didn't know.

He adheres to the detachment ideology and attempts to control Maya in every way. Gautama is portrayed by the author as a ruler with the

authority of a husband, and Maya is portrayed as a dominant woman and a stereotypically Indian wife. Nature's bleakness and emptiness reflect the protagonist's level and the pattern of life.

### III. THE WAY MAYA EXPRESSED HER EMOTIONS

As the author explains, Maya's consciousness is governed by nature, and she unconsciously finds herself drawn to it as a regulated entity. The narrative also contains numerous instances that demonstrate how Gautama, in particular, continuously satisfies her desire for an outdoor lifestyle. This incident demonstrates Gautama's attempt to rule as a ruler and Maya's attempt to be ruled. Male dominance always suppresses Desai's protagonists.

Maya links birds, plants, flowers, fruits, and poetry to her joyful feelings and pleasant emotions. She uses animal imagery as a powerful means of expressing her repressed rage and anxieties. The novel's thin texture is given much-needed substance by the colour symbolism, dance symbolism, and the symbolic role of the stars and moon.

Maya remembers her dreamy early years. "He is like a silver oak himself, with his fine, silver-white hair brushed smoothly across his bronzed scalp," she says with affection for her father's hair. She compares her early years to a "Mughal Garden," demonstrating her love for him. "As a child, I loved princess-like, a sumptuous fare of the Arabian-Nights fantasies," she explains. Maya considers her brother Arjuna (Desai 41). Because her brother is always trying to get away from his father's stuffy, affluent environment, she likens him to a "wild bird."

He disobeyed his father and befriended boys from low-income families. He enjoyed wandering on dusty streets, played football, rode a bicycle, and detested a simple, comfortable life. He fled to America from his home. Kites are used to illustrate Arjuna's attitude: "Mine were awkward kites that never lost their earth-bound inclination." The birds that sailed high, high, and

united were Arjuna's hawks, eagles, and swallows. These pictures allude to their deepest desires. Maya is an earthly creature, but Arjuna longs to soar into other worlds and find purpose in existence.

### IV. THE RATIONALE BEHIND MAYA'S MENTAL ILLNESS

A picture of an iguana is used to symbolise Maya's mental illness as it reaches its peak. A household cat's image gets transformed into a terrifying iguana. Maya screams, "Iguanas, my blood ran cold, and I heard the slither of its dragging tail even now, in white daylight," as she notices the cat scuttling about the room. "I'm telling you to get off!

Go! (Desai 147). Maya represents the domestic cat that, like iguanas, becomes irrational and neurotic when under stress. The iguanas allude to her depression and neurosis. Maya's mental representations of animals reveal her underlying innate desire. Her suffering is roused and heightened by the sight of the monkeys in cages on the train platform.

There isn't even enough room for the monkeys to sit as they are crammed into a train. She felt sympathy for the monkeys' predicament. She is also imprisoned by her sentimental memories. It also represents the loss of her privacy, her life of seclusion, and her captivity at home. Maya is therefore reminded of her separation and alienation by the monkeys' raucous struggle for freedom inside the cage.

In order to convey the increasing impatience and fatality in Maya, Anita Desai also employs a variety of dance images that repeat themselves. The "Kathakali Dance" is one of these pictures. The brutal exploitation of society is depicted in the pictures of "Cabaret Dance" and "Bear Dance." The dance of death is described using yet another legendary metaphor. The picture is known as the "Dance of Shiva," because it represents freedom. The most important of all the pictures that the novel's title centres on is the "Dance of the Peacocks." The peacock's magnificent dance, whose "Dance of Joy" is also the "Dance of the

Death," reflects Maya's love of life. Desai tells the story well:

"Pia, Pia," they exclaim. "Lover, lover, Mio, Mio – I die, die – how these peacocks love the rain." Like Shiva, they spread out their magnificent tails and start dancing, but their joyous dance is actually a dance of death, as they dance with the knowledge that they and their lovers will all perish, possibly even before the monsoon season ends.

Due to his isolation from the environment, Gautama does not respond to the peacock's cries. He lacks both sensuous desire and sexual need. Gautama, the "peacock," thus does not respond to Maya, the "peahen." This book makes creative use of the dust storm meteorological image. It symbolises Maya's wish for "release from bondage, release from fate, release from death and dearness and unwanted dreams" (Desai 219) and the ferocious storm that is building in her subconscious. With the joy of a dancer, Maya greets the storm and sees in it the source of both pain and joy.

## V. HOW MAYA VIEWED THE PASSING OF GAUTAMA

Maya's perception of Gautama's death intensifies as she becomes increasingly concerned about protecting herself. Seeing an owl frequently is also an omen of impending death. Maya calls Gautama's attention to the owl before pushing him, saying, "Listen, I said, stopping at a sound." "Have you heard that? The bird is an owl. The owl is the eerie representation of death. The novel's repeated use of animal images enables readers to empathise with the unvarnished sense of suffering and estrangement. After Gautama dies, Maya calms her annoyance by thinking about how peacocks break their bodies to relieve their anguish because she thinks the peacock's "shrieks of pain" are "blood-chilling." It is a foreboding picture.

She was so irritated by Gautama's persistent disregard for her advances that she believed she had no communication with either Maya or the outside world. Gautama did not hear her cry for a

mate, which she shared with the peacocks. She became so agitated by this predicament that she began to feel the strain of the situation on her thoughts. She occasionally questioned why she ought to adore Gautama. She and Gautama ascended the stairs for a walk in the last seconds. Gautama was so engrossed in a case that he failed to notice the smell of limes, the sombre voice singing somewhere behind the plantains, or the opportunity to count the stars. Gautama made a mistake as he began to discuss the argument. Maya thought he had arrived.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Therefore, nature always coexists with the bits and pieces of daily life and vividly depicts all facets of human existence and mental processes, reflecting them in the environment in which people live. Women exhibit a greater awareness of the natural world. In *Cry, The Peacock*, Maya is a poetically sensitive and perceptive woman who loves to spend time with her pets, birds, flowers, and other natural things.

## REFERENCES

1. Myles, Anita. *Critical Essays on Literature and Environment*. New Delhi: Sarup; c2012. Print.
2. Sharma RS. Anita Desai, New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann; c1981.
3. Iyengar, K. R. S. (1983). *Indian Writing in English, 164-165*. New Delhi: Sterling 1983.
4. Wilson, J. (ed.), (1976). *Contemporary Novelists, 355-357*. London: St.James Press.
5. Desai, Anita: *Cry, the Peacock*, New Delhi, Orient Paperbacks, 1980), p. 43.
6. Inamdar, Q.F. Treatment of neurosis in 'Cry, The Peacock'. *The Novels of Anita Desai: A Critical Study*. Eds. Manmohan, K. Bhatnagar and M. Rajeswar. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors.2000, p. 25.
7. Desai Anita, *Cry the Peacock*, Orient Paperbacks, Delhi, 1980.