CHAPTER – 3

A detailed study of female psychosis leading to self destruction.
CHAPTER 3.1

Maya and the Fear of Insecurity
(Cry, the Peacock, 1963)

Anita Desai’s maiden novel, Cry, the Peacock (1963) is one of the most poetic and evocative Indian novels in English. It gives expression to the long smothered wail of a lacerated psyche the harrowing tale of blunted relationships being told by the Chief Protagonist herself. Cry, the Peacock is the tragedy of a father’s child Maya, the some what spoiled daughter of a rich aristocratic family in Lucknow brought up by her doting father since her mother died in early childhood was given in marriage to Gautama, her father’s “Protégé”(40) a man much older than herself. Maya though beautiful, intelligent, highly sensitive, sensuous, high strung woman fails to grow out of childhood. She is incapable of leading an independent existence. Virtually, whole her neurotic life is imperceptibly linked with her father’s undivided attention. Superficially it is just a matter of filial affection showered on an only daughter but it is more than that and it gathers to itself reverberant contexts of associated consequences. Her marriage to Gautama only serves to highlight her total involvement with her father. She constantly thinks of him and unconsciously searches him in her husband. Father-daughter love is, in fact leit motif of the novel. However, when we analyze her psychological complexities. We find that there is much more in her character than mere “father fixation”.

Through the “roads of treacherous memory” down the “corridor of years” Maya takes us to her childhood days while she is on “the lonely
voyage" through "an unpassable desert", i.e. her conjugal life. The tragedy of an incompatible couple: one sensuous, loving, feeling, a hedonist with love for life and the other cold, logical, philosophical a down-to-earth solicitor who is unfeeling with "dispassionate objectivism" to understand Maya's psyche we have to begin with her childhood. She is a motherless child born in a god-fearing traditional Brahmin family with a cultured, refined, rich and doting father. She also has a brother, Arjuna with whom she shares pleasant moments participating with him in kite-flying but not so adept as he. Her childhood had been happy, secured and she had enjoyed finer things of life, having been brought up in a world which in Gautama's her husband's view was incapable of equipping one to cope with world of reality. Memories of her childhood are pleasant and happy. She remembers with longing the mornings in the garden the breakfast session as good "as a revel of faires and elves", the feeding on fairy stories, the "Arabian Nights", the glories and bravado of Indian mythology, long and astounding tales of princes and regal queens, jackals and tigers". Looking back on her childhood, she is aware that it was a life in which "much was excluded, which grew steadily more restricted, unnatural even and in which I lived as a toy princess in a toy world." She is however, unable to outgrow it both physically and emotionally. Her round baby-like face is a true indication of her behaviour as a "Wayward, trying in fant" (66) She recalls her father's gatherings where refined, cultured gents of Lucknow would enjoy drinks and urdu shayari (Poetry) : "sentimental cronies swaying their head and uttering deep cries of pleasure upon hearing a verse..............'Paimana', mused an ecstatic voice, lost on the swaying sea of a word which he repeated to himself so ecstatically. 'Tamanna'." (100-1).

The most important childhood event in Maya's life is her visit to the temple with ayah and the prophecy of the albino priest whose memory
becomes the leitmotif in the novel. This experience is traumatic acquiring sinister proportions as time passes.

Childhood is a formative and autonomous period when a person has intrinsic desires for spiritual health and life. Uncorrupted by the adult world an unsuspecting child recognizes only the one reality that he lives; for him the past and the future have no existence. His consciousness is not split between them but is rather free to discover them through love. And the chief interest of Cry, the Peacock lies in the presentation of a mind that does not grow out of childhood and is incapable of leading an independent existence. As a result, Maya cannot arrive at a correct self evaluation is a blot on her father’s over protective and sickly love, dealt out to her with unconcealed partiality. Whereas Maya is his adored child, Arjuna his only son is the scourage because he does not toe the line; he rebels out of the perfectionist realm of the despot. Father’s tight lipped coldness towards Arjuna is too ill concealed to escape Maya’s notice. She recollects that her father was terse, cold and grim with Arjuna, “With me, he never was, no matter what did-even I noticed the difference and felt uncomfortable.” (133). Two forces influence Maya’s psyche the strict and orderly world of her father with its set principles and rules on the one hand, and his blind adoration on the other. They hamper free growth of her personality. Love has deep influence on the life of a child, its absence or its excess can work havoc with mental equilibrium. A humanistic psychologist described the shattering effects of a represssed longing for love. He holds that “distortion of love and trust in infancy” develops a schizoid personality. The term schizoid indicates a person who has lost his ability to feel and be in touch with others.

Maya gets love, a feeling of being “Wanted,” of belonging. But in reality what she receives is binding and restrictive love. It is a projection of father’s
own inadequacy, the expression of a neurotic urge to possess the child. It brings radical distortions in her character and her view of the world.

Anita Desai’s characters are allowed to stay as children, in an atmosphere of magic and superstitions. This is typical of Indian culture. As psychologists tell us, when a child lives in the world of myths, magic and fantasy for long, he projects his own feelings into an objective external world. The everyday realities disappear and take the colour of the child’s effective state. This is known as primary process of thought and perception. If the primary process of perception persists in adult life the individual continues to show an “infantile” mode of behaviour. The primary process enriches the inner world whereas the secondary process governs logical, thought and reasoning. Coordination between the two makes life rich and logical, and Maya’s father, a “fatalist” lets his daughter live in world of superstition. Maya tries to deal with everyday reality by her primary process and fails to assimilate the inner and outer realities.

The grown up Maya is the wife of a successful lawyer Gautama, engrossed in his profession and does not care for her. The central theme of the novel is Marital Discord and its impact on Maya can be seen.

Maya’s marriage with Gautama was more or less a marriage of convenience. Gautama and Maya’s father were friends to each other they have similar way of thinking and Gautama used to come to Maya’s house. It was a match between two different temperaments with not even a single link in the strain of their physical and mental outlooks to bring them to a close tie. Meena Belliappa remarks: “The incompatibility of the character stands revealed - Gautama who touches without feeling and Maya who
feels even without touching”. We become aware of Maya’s hypersensitive and highly disturbed state of mind when we see her in the very beginning of the novel, reacting to the untimely death of her pet dog Toto she rushes to “the garden tap to wash the vision from her eyes” (15). She becomes very upset but for Gautama it does not matter and instead of consoling Maya, he leaves her to meet a visitor, “forgetting her, forgetting her woes altogether”(7). He is too cold and prosaic to bother about his sensitive wife, too much concerned with facts and is quite philosophical. To quote Maya, “how little he knew of my misery, or of how to comfort me. But then, he knew nothing that concerned me......... The distance he coldly keeps from me. His coldness, his coldness, and incessant talk of cups of tea and philosophy in order not to hear me talk and talking reveal myself”. (9) Maya’s tragedy is that there is no one to share her feelings. Childless, with an uncaring husband, she is lonely and loneliness is the bane and burden or her psyche. And to cap it all she is not even sexually satisfied. Gautama does not respond “to either the soft, willing body or the lonely, wanting mind that waited near his bed”.(9)

Once it is delicately suggested that even the naked body of Maya fails to evoke any response from Gautama either because of exhaustion or boredom. The sensitive wife appears to him petulant, pampered, childish and immature, unable to cope with hard facts of lie. The sexual hunger gives another blow to the shattered woman. Physical intimacy. The mere warmth of flesh may alleviate her suffering. Once coming after a cabaret show Maya tries to entice Gautama by dropping her sari in eagerness to communicate with him. Even his indulgent smile was to Maya “unsmiling, it was the barrier, the limbo that had always held us separate “. (91) craving for sexual pleasure Maya prepares herself “Longing to be with him, be close
to him....... make haste in undressing ........But when I went....... he had closed his eyes not with mere tiredness, but in profound, invulnerable sleep, and was very far from any world of mine, however enticing” (93) and she becomes sad. She hungered for his companionship and spent sleepless night consumed with this hunger. The thought which often oppressed her was that “his companionship was a necessity. I required his closest understanding How was I to gain it? We did not even agree on which point, on what grounds this closeness of mind was necessary.” He made no attempt to take any interest in things which interested her. She hungered and hungered and when this hunger was not satisfied what was she to do? Protest like her brother? That she was incapable of because her father had taught her to accept life, and accept she could not because it told upon her nerves. She would lie awake at night stifled by the hunger she felt not only for Gautama but for all that life represented. She came to look upon her relationship with Gautama as a relationship with death. The albino is only a literary device used to manifest her hidden fear and under the stress of this fear she lost her senses and argued that since Gautama was not involved with life and did not care for it, it was immaterial to him whether he was alive or not and if only one of them was to live naturally she should live because as she kept saying “it was I who was meant to live.” She killed Gautama in a fit of madness and soon jumped to her own death. The excess of involvement in her and the complete lack of it in Gautama in the basis of the mal-adjustment that sparks off the fear psychosis in Maya. From an ordinary, hypersensitive child bride, Maya is transforment within four years into a neurotic homicidal maniac. This transformation takes place through the grinding process of the mindless compromise in her marriage which, in any case, is doomed to fail.

The tragedy lies in the fact that all this happened without any ill intention on the part of either partner. After all Gautama has been a dutyful
provider and in his own way, loves maya even though he is exasperated with her childish tantrums. Maya’s volatile temperament defeats the very purpose of her all consuming love and her heart is crushed with the depression: “There had been countless nights when I was tortured by humiliation, a sense of neglect, of loneliness, of desperation that would not have existed, had I not loved him so, had he not meant so much. There never lives a bird that did not know a storm, a stone, a wound” (210) But the communication and comprehension gap is too deep and too broad to be bridged by good intentions or even by intense love.

The alienation of Maya is rooted essentially in Gautama’s philosophical detachment his imperviousness to the “beautiful yet tremulous” beauty of the natural world and his gross unconcern over the “basics in life” Gautama would shrug Maya’s “words off as superfluous, trivial, (19) This gaunt, sarcastically, silent intellectual” was ever “eager to pursue the thread of logic to its end, slowly and steadily as a meticulous tortoise”(74 & 208). While Maya craves for love, Gautama flees it. His unconcerned and detached attitude is as much puzzling to the readers as it is to Maya. Maya cannot understand the intricacies of his psyche. Their trouble acquires a deeper tinge as there is no possibility of any fruitful solution. They live in separate world and “did not even agree on which points, on what grounds this closeness of mind was necessary.” (19) Thus Maya’s alienation leads her on to utter desolation and this is the typical condition of an unfortunate person who is alienated through and through. Her obsession drives her to a curious insanity, “Yes I’m going insane,” she herself admits, “I am moving further and further from all wisdom, all calm, and I shall soon be mad, if I am not that already.” (124) The unnaturalness of her life and stance keeps on haunting her. She elsewhere says : “This is not natural there is something weird about me now, whenever I go, whatever I see, whatever I listen to has
this unnaturalness to it.” Maya’s obsession with death leads her to think that “it was now to be either Gautama or I” she finally decides for Gautama who, when gone, will not miss life, for he is already ‘detached’ and indifferent to it.

Maya’s childhood world of fantasies and adult world of realities clash, producing more imbalances in her life. She wants to perpetuate the “fairy tale” atmosphere; she is however, unable to outgrow it both physically and emotionally. Her round baby like face is a true indication of her behaviour as a “Wayward, trying infant”[66] fantasy is used to expose Maya’s inability to grow out of the confines of her world in order to merge with the larger whole. Maya clings to fantasy because she is unable to relate to reality. Cry, the Peacock is the only novel in which Desai works through the conciousness of the central character, in her other novels, partly because the narrative techniques are different, the authorial conciousness signals the use of fantasy. Maya’s relationship to reality passes through three phases. First is that of her childhood, when she is closed within a limited world, the second of her life with Gautama when she makes abortive attempts to recede into her past and equally abortive over to reach out to others; the third and final phase in her total surrender to the world of her fears and to insanity. The collapse of reason is a natural consequences of the clash between the fantastic and the real and the clash becomes unavoidable when the boundary lines between the two refuse to shift.

Maya’s fears of the actual are projected through her recoil from her surroundings. She imagines them as having a power and avitality they do not have and closes herself within a private world which she discovers is incapable of being transformed into an anchor. It offers no magic charm and is bereft of fairy revels and love ballads - instead it is on demoniac one
of fear and terror, a “Phantom gone berserk.” (28) for her the demon of the
Kathakali ballet merges into the figure of the albino astrologer and finally
into the figure of Shiva dancing his dance of destruction.

She is throughout conscious of living though a nightmare even when
she goes out for dinner, or spends an evening at the cabaret. The exposure
of the human form and human lust in the half lights of the hall sends her
memory back to the bear dance she had viewed as a child. Behind the bear
dance she had sensed the cruel trainers, now behind these dances she
senses the exploitation of society. But through this world of dreams and
fantasy and nightmare, the fact of the astrologers prediction surface over
and over again making it impossible for Maya to free herself from her fears.

The detachment from the external world and absorption in her inner
world does not offer her any freedom or liberation in a spiritual sense; it
merely enslaves her. Maya lives in world of time, of flowers and seasons
and change and yet dreads the idea of change (121) while Gautama values
the deed she wants to cling to the movement. The inner world of her
imagination is no longer inhabited by human beings, it is inhabited by snakes,
rat and lizards, “wild horse, white horse galloping........Horrid arms, legs,
tentacles thrashing, blood flowing, eyes glazing........on the walls the lizards
were still.......hosts of minute, silent ants appear....... and eat away the fast
rotting flesh till only the fine white bones lay exposed to the fire........A
thousand rat twitched their tails - long grey germ ridden.” Maya’s terror of
an imaginary snake can be interpreted as the fear of the Maya (delusion) of
the hindu philosophy, that coils round us. It is in the collective unconscious
of the Hindus. Psychologically, reptiles stand for sexual urge. But, this fear,
here is indicative of her morbidity and fast deteriorating psychic condition.
Under high fever the dancer, the priest, rats, snakes all become one, including her father.

Her vision is that of horror and repulsion and this animal imagery is to be contrasted with that of the peacock with his majestic tail. Psychologists agree that it is impossible to live with such horror. On the top floor of Maya’s psyche edifice is the roof of insanity when she pushes Gautama and significantly the last scene of the novel also takes place on the top floor of Maya’s father’s house in Lucknow and both realistically and metaphorically the novel ends here.

Other recurrent image is that of the moon. To suggest the fast deteriorating mental state of Maya, Anita Desai uses moon symbolism according to the subjectivity of the heroine. The moon in astrology stands for imagination, a conventional symbol in the west and in Indian astrology, the moon is always gazing at Maya and the image recurs many a time like this one: "under the stark gaze of the moon, in that waiting silence.......Am I gone insane ? Father! Brother! Husband! who is my saviour ? I am in need of one. “(97-98). In her acutely disturbed state the moon appears to her as sinister and ghastly, “a demoniac creature, the fierce dancer......Accompanies by a deafening roar of silent drums.” (28) Indeed, it becomes one with Kathakali dancer and frightens Maya. Later, it is depicted as a full bosomed women glowing across the sky. Here the novelist acknowledges the mystery and uniqueness of psyche of which it is the ruling planet. Maya express her fear of the “ghost-white moon that sees all forgets nothing,” “That vast luminosity, so revealing.” “The bland white eye that watched and waited,” It is as if the light of the moon will reveal her inmost thoughts. Gautama comes between Maya and her worshipped moon as such she
chooses to punish him. Walking on the terrace with Gautama on that fatal night, Maya sees the pale hushed glow of the rising moon and walks towards it “in a dream of love”. The light of the moon has acquired the attributes of chastity, purity and tenderness. Symbolically, the position of the moon in the sky parallels the lucidity of the thoughts of Maya, which progress in the same degree and the moon becomes the symbol of her psyche.

The psychology of characters, the events and the setting in Cry, the Peacock coalesce with the imagery radiating through the narrative. The nature of images that flood Maya’s mind constitutes the unfolding of her character. Of course, the technique of stream-of-consciousness which the novelist utilizes, projects the agony of Maya’s neurotic mind. The novelist highlights Maya’s sexual demand with the help of two powerful symbols: the peacock’s voluptuous dance and the mating calls of pigeons. The title of the novel also symbolizes the agony of an unfulfilled desire. The cries of the dancing peacock “Pia, pia, mio, mio,” assimilate in Maya’s mind with her own anguish. She weeps for them as well as for herself, “knowing their words to be mine.” (97). The cooing of pigeons in her verandah evoke in her “a longing, a dread, a search for solution, a despair.” (35)

While some critics feel that, “Maya’s love with living juxtaposed with the awareness that there is only death and waiting”¹ is suggested through the symbol of the peacock, Usha Bande feels Maya’s sexual demands and ungratified desires, the resultant pain, agony and frustration are depicted through this powerful symbol.² This is in line with Meena Billiappa’s earlier comment that maya’s experience of love is not of ecstasy short lived like the peacocks’ but of ecstasy that is never attained.³
The Peacock in legend waits through the long arid summer for the moon. Its frenzied dance for a mate when rain clouds came is a portent of its own impending death. Significantly, the symbol of the dance of peacock merges with the symbol of shiv’s dance which is used at the end of the novel before the final catastrophe. The meaning becomes clear when Maya views the peacock’s dance as the dance of death which symbolizes death and also liberation and freedom for her tortured psyche. Maya identifies herself completely with the peacocks and hears her own fate in their agonizing call for love and death. Thus we find that peacock symbolism in the novel, the central symbol to manifest feminine psyche, has religio-cultural roots that enrich the meaning by providing undertones to the symbol.

The novel concentrates on Maya’s inner psychological tumult caused by a limited vision of the world. By succumbing to a fragile world of imagination and illusion, Maya had lost the courage to approach life, to find a meaning in life. Like the peacock symbol she possesses many things but most notably yearning for love, unfortunately, what maya thinks of as love is not love in the true sense of the word. It is a means to relieve her anxiety. It has no motivating force and is symptomatic of her insecurities. Maya is the prisoner of her own defence mechanism where safety and security are of primary importance.

Throughout the novel we are given to feel that the albino priests prediction and Gautama’s lack of sympathetic understanding are the fountain-heads, of Maya’s neurosis. The thought of prophecy takes her mind back to her father’s house, a sort of sport which she enjoys. The brooding nature makes her a victim who fails to hold to either past or the present. The thought about it was always a comforting bandage to her wounded psyche.
At times, escape into time and space is insufficient or inadequate to meet the survival needs of some individual. In such cases the next and more extreme strategy of survival is violence, aggression or destructiveness. It is universally accepted that aggressive tendencies are a very part of the human nature. L. Von Bertalanfly points out that there is no doubt about the presence of aggressive and destructive tendencies in the human psyche which are of the nature of biological drives "however, the most pernicious phenomena of aggression, transcending self-preservation and self-destruction, are based upon a characteristic feature of man above the biological level, namely his capability of creating symbolic universe in thought, language and behaviour." Talking about the reasons behind aggression he specifies that the occurrence of violent behaviour "always presupposes the existence of frustration and contrary wise, the existence of frustration always leads to some form of aggression."

It is believed that under the influence of a frustrating environment and a sense of rejection a person feels alienated and practices uncurbed aggression that at times, spills over into violence. In Cry, The Peacock, Maya’s desperation and her ultimate resort to murder and suicide stems out of the feeling that she has been deprived of the flow of love, admiration and sympathy. She reacts violently to rejection because it indicates her personal worthlessness.

In her portrayal of Maya, Anita Desai emphasizes the deep relationship between the unfulfilled sexual urges and the development of an aggressive personality. According to Freud, the need for sex plays a vital role in shaping the behaviour and attitude of human beings. Maya is tensed and disturbed because of the non fulfillment of this instinctual need. She grows aggressive and hostile towards the things around her.
Maya’s aggression can be termed as defensive. The objective of this aggression is not lust for destruction but the preservation of life. Once the aim has been attained, the aggression and its emotional equivalent disappear. If Maya could win Gautama physically and mentally, she would have been a different person altogether. She defends herself against the threat to her vital interests. Her main interest is her need for an object of devotion and her intimacy with him is essential for her emotional equilibrium. However, the detached attitude of her husband shatters her. She considers it an attack against life. Such on awful realization results in loss of self confidence and self-control.

Freud maintains that “aggression originates from a death instinct i.e. an innate tendency to undo the process leading to life and revert to the inorganic state from which life originally arose”

Maya’s fears and death instincts play an important role in shaping the deteriorating condition of her personality. The conflicting psychic states lead her to think of death as the only means to find solace in the existing circumstances. The Albino’s prophecy seems true to her and she thinks of destroying the cause of her unhappiness. She muses silently “Could death disturb him then?” (166).

Maya, no doubt, debates over murder, but at the same time she flinches from it. She is sad and bewildered to think that is the only alternative left to her. Such thoughts make her feel dejected and helpless. “And sometimes I paused to feel the arrow of that word, murder, sink into my flesh, and to cry, a ‘Is this what I have come to?’ (166) Maya has reached a stage where her anxiety is not unconscious or suppressed but it is on the surface to be observed by everybody. These spells make her feel intensely insecure. The storm symbolizes her violent effort to free herself from all her fears, anxieties frustration, phobias.
Talking about the life instinct and death instinct. Freud maintains that the death instinct is, "directed against the organism itself and thus is a self-destructive drive, or it is directed outward and in this case tends to destroy others rather than oneself." In Maya, the basic conflict now is between "life instinct" (Eros) and "death instinct", The life instinct comprising both ego and sexual drives is placed in opposition to the death instinct, which is considered the root of human destructiveness, directed either towards the person himself or the world.

Maya adopts self-assertive-aggression when she decides that only Gautama is doomed to death. The decision facilitates the pursuit of a goal, whether it is to destroy or to create. Self-assertive-aggression is an essential quality for survival. Thinking about Gautama, Maya is driven by the passion to destroy, to satisfy her existential needs. In the end of the part II of the novel, it seems that death is looming on Gautama's head Maya is in search of a suitable opportunity when she can get rid of this hurdle between herself and her father.

Walking towards the terrace end, she makes Gautama pause: "..... talking, gesturing he moved in front of me, thus coming between me and the worshipped moon, his figure an ugly, crooked grey shadow that transgressed its sorrowing chastity (208)". At this moment aggressive impulses completely overpower her. She sees no other way for her survival. Her acute father fixation paves a way to remove all obstacles whether Arjuna or Gautama. She finds no father substitute. Both of them have no place in her life. Thus, she pushes Arjuna out of her thoughts and Gautama down the roof to close the chapters of all conscious and unconscious longings. R.S. Singh highsly comments that by pushing Gautama towards his death, "she had destroyed
the source of her uneasiness, her husband who had failed to play the role of the guardian to her”.

Maya’s act of aggression against her husband soon turns her into an act of self destruction, filled with guilt and unable to bear the pangs of the conscience, she also commits suicide. Erich Fromm aptly observes: “Man seeks for drama, excitement, when he cannot get satisfaction on a higher level, he creates for himself the drama of destruction.”
NOTES


 CHAPTER 3.2

Monisha and the problems of neurotic despair
(Voices In The City)

Voices in the City is far more realistic than Anita Desai’s first novel. She creates characters who feel a terrible isolation in the suffocating darkness of their life in which no deep communication is possible. There is dreadful attractiveness in the eternal sufferings the characters undergo like the kafkaesque characters, Desai’s character suffer from the oppressive walls of sounds and smells from which there is no release.

A will-less, helpless and passive woman, Monisha stands in direct contrast to Maya. If Maya’s trouble lie, as we have seen in her rich sensuality, Monisha’s difficulties arise due to her passivity. Anita Desai uses the narrative technique of diary in order to record Monisha’s psychic turmoil, 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 indentify herself with her in laws family.

Anita Desai’s women, it is argued, move “outside the realm of reason”¹ The cause is of course their obsessive loneliness, and “their solitary musings add to their morbidity and quicken the process of their disintegration”² It has also been said that her “characters have a near neurotic quality about them.” It is perhaps rather simplistic to describe Anita Desai women thus. The basic question is : what is it that prompts them to reject the pattern of normalcy? Their loneliness is not something
that they hanker after, but is rather imposed on them. The 'near-neurotic' quality is not the cause but an effect of being left alone, ignored and humiliated.

The novelist has delineated Monisha’s psychic life at some length. It is her destiny to militate against a corrosive emptiness within as well as without. Her relationship with her husband is characterized “only by loneliness” and lack of communication, married against her will to a “blind moralist”, a “rotund, minute minded and limited” official, who is addicted to quoting complacently and indiscriminately authorities such as Burke, Wordsworth, Gandhi and Tagore (198) - all spokesman of individual liberty, she finds her life a virtual imprisonment. She is always haunted by her “confused despair” and a sense of “a life dedicated to nothing”- a life teeming with “these trivialities these pettinesses of our mean existence.” (121) “Is-this what life is then, my life?” she asks “only a conundrum that I shall brood over forever with passion and pain; never to arrive at a solution ? only a conundrum - is that, then life ?”.

Anita Desai depicts Monisha’s plight more fully and closely relates it to the women who are like the female birds in the cages. Their “lives spent in waiting for nothing, waiting on men self- centred and indifferent and hungry and demanding and critical, waiting for death and dying misunderstood, always behind bars, those terrifying black bars that is in, in the old houses, in the old city,” (120) Monisha too remains uninvolved she is afraid of involvement and has lived her life “without a touch of love, or hate or warmth.” Infact she is afraid of love. For love is like running barefoot on broken pieces of glass and one is likely to be wounded and hurt. She feels that she is different from other women around her. Enclosed in a locked container, she
feels that she is different from other women around her. Enclosed in a locked container, she remains an observer of life, standing apart. She craves for an experience of life of having given birth or having attended death, but her life has remained “a silent, blurred film that has neither, entertained nor horrified her. When others can relate themselves to the music of street singers Monisha is frightened. For she finds herself incapable of relating even to this music. It has no meaning for her. She feels that even a terrible cyclone would not touch her. She longs for an experience, searches for her own feeling and finds herself empty like an empty corridor, “full of lifeless appurtenances.”

Monisha suppresses her emotions and makes no attempt what so ever to analyze herself. Instead, she yearns for greater will-lessness, which is symptomatic of severe neurosis. From Horneyan psycho-analytical angle, Monisha adopts the strategy of resignation. A Person following the strategy of withdrawal has a strong tendency to remove himself from the “inner battlefield” in order to relieve his tensions. He does not participate in the act of living and becomes an onlooker on life. He lacks aspirations, efforts and the will for achievement. By stifling his wishes, he erroneously feels satisfied at having reached a state of non attachment, happy that he has no expectations from life and from others. He shows a fear for emotional involvement, because it may curtail his freedom. Thus by withdrawing himself from his surroundings into a world of his own, he wants to save his individuality, but unfortunately as this withdrawal is not a healthy man’s detachment, it leads to disintegration. His main aim-to keep himself intact -is defeated in itself. He is alienated from himself, because it is just impossible for an individual to grow in a vaccum without having closeness and friction with other human beings.
Monisha's predicament in *Voices in the City* is similar to that of Maya; she is obsessed with fear. Monisha is oppressed by a sense of suffocation. Her married life began with the reception arranged by the heads of the many headed family where "feet before faces" was the manner of her initiation into the family and in this way she gets the first blow at the reception, she is made to touch the feet of a large number of Aunts and Uncles socially, the joint family, with so many traditional bindings is impossible to live with even Nikhil, Monisha's nephews, is exasperated by this "bad system" as he turns it; it is so detrimental to individual growth and freedom. But, psychologically, it is more of a shattering experience for Monisha than it socially is. Used to the open and pure atmosphere of the mountains where she has lived all along, she found the very houseto be intimidating to her she longed to thrust her head out of the window but the bars were too closely set. Besides, what was there to see but other walls and other bars?. In the privacy of her room she was oppressed by a terrifying sound that repeated itself like the motif of a nightmare from which they seemed no escape. She was also oppressed by the "damp pressure of critical attention." Her own room, safely barred as it is, is totally shorn of privacy. Monisha's fallopian tubes are blocked—of what good is then the room to her? The sisters-in-law flock to her room, even laugh at her volumes of kafka, Doestovsky, her Russian and French dictionaries. They discuss Monisha's physical form as if it is laid bare for their scrutiny—the ovaries, the blocked tubes. What would be the place of a barren women in a joint family bustling with aunts uncles, sisters-in-law and children— one of disrespect, little regard and humiliation! Meena Shirwadkar assigns Monisha's sufferings to her childless state. It is true that traditional Indian society looks down upon a childless women. A woman gains status only as a mother. Even in Manusmriti, Manu classified women into two groups—the unwed girl and wife were estimated to be low in his laws, but the
woman as mother enjoyed a higher position and respect in social and family hierarchy. The dual status of women as seductress and benign mother has continued to remain throughout history. So is Monisha's case, the awareness of her low profile in family and in society is punched so unceremoniously daily into her that it becomes one of the reasons for her inferiority complex. Every time she hears them talk of "blocked tubes." the urge on her part is to look down upon them from a superior height of her silent defiance. Monisha is made to live in a barred enclosure, shut away from life, activity and privacy to the extent that she is not allowed to speak to her own brother and sister. The mother-in-law and Jivan act as perpetual body guards. Even when Monisha in a rare gesture of defiance, chooses to go out with Nirode especially when Jivan is not around - the family reacts in a predictable way; they are shocked and wish Jivan was there to stop his wife from going out. Monisha herself suffers from pangs of guilt, she has not taken the permission of the lord! Her meekness is all the more apparent because she takes her little disobediences as defiance. These are the woman who go on surviving without making any effective mark in their lives.

Looking at the bleeding heart doves in the zoo. Monisha is struck at the symbolic implications it has for the total apathy of Indian women. Monisha's suffering and search come through sharply through this image to Monisha it is a horrifying mystery. .....cage of doves.....wounded and bleeding, but scurrying about their cages, pecking up grain while over them fly blithe budgerigars like animated splinters of rainbow. These stay on the ground, restless, in flux and bleeding......how can they live, eat, work, sing. bleeding through life? (121).

This reminds us of Maya's agony and quest in *Cry, the peacock*. Just as Maya tries to merge the fantasy of the peacocks dance of death with her own life that is pursued relentlessly by 'death' Monisha too tries to
connect the bleeding but still singing and living doves to her own life and her inner bleeding. She realizes that life means a successful merging of pain and pleasure, a sorrow and peace, the two facets that make it a whole. Ironically it is the child Anu with a lot more commonsense that Monisha, who tells her that it only the red colour of the doves' feathers that looks like blood and that actually they are not bleeding at all. The fantasy yields place to the bitter reality. Monisha ought to have understood the message of this stack reality that she sees too much and to deep which makes her an alien in her own family.

Monisha although deeply hurt silently suffers the humiliation of being branded as a thief. The charge of theft serves as a fictional device and disturbs her status quo position as in the games of snakes and ladders, from a high position of protective social place of a wife, the protagonist Monisha falls down to reach the rock bottom in her husband's family where she has to pick herself up, unsupported by her husband and has to struggle to attain her individual status. Monisha's life at worst is pathetic. Her words "I am still allowed letters" (139) go only to reinforce the total jail like atmosphere and the treatment meted out to her. Yet she continues to stay without any struggle or even an utterance of protest.

Monisha cuts herself from family life and lives in an ivory tower of her pride, safe in the belief of her own significance. In the Gita, her attention is drawn by the lines which say that a man of wisdom is satisfied in the self by the self alone, and he has no desire.Erroneously, she substitutes the real self by her actualized self-image and feels assured of her non-involvement. The concept of “the self” as mentioned in the Gita and referred to above is deeper than what Monisha has taken it to be.
Monisha’s total detachment amounts to a renunciation that is not envisaged in the Gita. The Gita is not for renouncing action but is for renouncing the fruits of action. One has to struggle and stand for what is right and just irrespective of the results of one’s effort. The equanimity and poise of mind envisioned in the Gita does not negate action and duty. Meek submission to oppression only serves to perpetuate injustice and is no less a crime than perpetrating injustice. Monisha chooses to ignore this in her pursuit of getting away from involvement and attachments. It is not that Monisha is unaware of the oppression, yet she chooses to do nothing about it.

It inspires her to be detached, because “from attachment arises longing. If only love existed that is not binding, that is free of rules, obligations, then but there is no such love” (135) she tries to live according to this philosophy, but her age, experience and circumstances stand in the way of correct interpretation of the highly spiritual goal of the Gita. The principles of detachment propounded in The Gita are different from Monisha’s neurotic striving for resignation, where she shuts all doors to life. As A.V. Krishna Rao observes “The absence of the element of love makes her feel lonely, lost and bitter, She defines love as an awake condition of the conscience but fears and avoids it, because love then implies a sense of duty.”

Like Nirode, Monsiha has a glorified self image and takes neurotic pride in thinking herself as different from other women in her in laws family. She considers a craving from aloneness and detached attitude to be the mark of a superior intelligence, she choose withdrawal as a strategy for survival in the uncongenial atmosphere of Jivan’s family: “keep it all the yourself, a secret, quite private, all your own, to keep and gloat over.” (114-115). However, such a life style creates an emotional vaccum in her. The retreat in to the
self further weakens her already tenuous link with the outer reality - Jasbir Jain rightly argues: “Monisha’s and Nirode’s withdrawal reflects not only survival patterns but, more significantly, reveal the nature of their psychological problems.”

In Monisha’s case, her aspirations as an intellectual person and her idea of self respect clash with the demands of her role as a daughter-in-law in a traditional household. Like Mrs. Dalloway, Monisha believes in maintaining the “privacy of the soul” and shaving off the forces that try to violate it. Mrs. Dalloway says: “there is dignity in people; a solitude; even between husband and wife a gulf; and that one must respect ... For one would not part with it oneself, or take it, against his will, from one’s husband, without losing one’s independence, one’s self respect.”

Mrs. Dalloway seeks to protect herself from the threats of life through an ironic detachment which is different from Monisha’s. Monisha does not protect herself but wants to have an ideally free sense of individuality which clashes with the conventions of the society. This conflict result in alienation and estrangement. Her problem is of meaningless existence and absence of meaning full relations. She is engulfed in a state of depressive reaction. Such feelings, argues Barcelay Martin, lead a person to lose interest in his job, recreation friends and family, and slow down in speech and physical activity when Amla visits her, she notices these changes in the behaviour and personality of Monisha. She finds her alarmingly different. Monisha tries her utmost to preserve the supreme privacy of the self, but her present circumstances violate the sacred space of the self. Her neurotic pride creates an unhealthy self-esteem. In her self preservation, she is not free from the ego involvement. She feels: “My Science, I find, has power upon others ....” (130).
In Monisha, the individual ego is in a state of constant flux, mediating an exchange between inner and outer, past and present, unconscious and self-conscious, self and society, between the instinctual and institutional in her life. Monisha's sense of "me" has become too strong. She cannot reach out to others.

Monisha seeks an escape from conflict—inner as well as outer, but she does not reach the stage of Moksha which means a release from worldly involvement. In Hindu philosophy it is described as the state in which all distinctions between the subject and the object have been transcended. There is established a direct experience of the fundamental unity of a human being with the infinite. With Monisha, the things are altogether different. Psychologists interpret the desire of Moksha as a response to psychic stress. They term it as a regression to the undifferentiated phase of infancy in which child and mother are united in symbiotic intimacy. This interpretation is quite relevant in Monisha's case. Indian philosophical concepts of non-attachment and Moksha are far removed from Monisha's mode of withdrawal into herself guided as it is by a sense of insecurity vulnerability and helplessness. Monisha's dissociation from a life of action saps away the natural human zest to participate in life. Ihab Hassan points out that the cult of inactivity involves the "alienation of the moral and artistic imagination from things of this world, often leading to a criminal state of autonomy."

Monisha's failure to maintain the equilibriums, heightens her neurotic vision of reality which is primarily influenced by a mixture of the tragic and ironic. Monisha considers the reality tragic because she finds her experiences ambiguous, uncertain and absurd. Burdened by unanswerable question and in escapable conflict, she avoids any participation in the
activities of the real world. She implores: “allow us just this-to stand back, apart, in the shadows, and watch the fire and the flames, the sacrifices that are flung into it, the celebrations, the mourning and permit us- not to take part (136)”.

From the psychological point of view, Monisha’s plight is ironic also, as it brings about a self-deprecating and detached perspective. The ironic ameliorations are aptly condensed in Freud’s offer to the sufferer to exchange his unbearable neurotic misery for ordinary human unhappiness. Monisha’s problem is not meaningless existence, but the absence of meaningful relations. Her indulgence in self-deception and her preference for solitude leave incurable wounds in her mind. These drives lead her to an “encounter with nothingness” “she is ultimately engulfed by what is called the state of depressive reaction and commits suicide.

Like other inhabitants of the place, Monisha also represents tension between stillness and movement, between activism and quietism. Left with no choice, she prepares herself for a gradual dissolution. In her struggle for liberation from a trap situation, death seems to be the only way out. Her failure to find a meaning in human relationships makes her end, her existence in the world. She is weary of living in a crowd which appears peaceful from outside but can turn violent any moment:

I am so tired of it, this crowd. In Calcutta, it is everywhere. Deceptively, it is a quiet crowd - passive, but distressed. Till there is a reason for anger, and then a sullen yellow flame of bitterness and sarcasm starts up, and it is vicious, mordant.” (118).
Violent thoughts are not instinctual drives but passions rooted in the total existence of man. They are some of the ways to make sense of life. Monisha opts for a violent end to establish her triumph over her in-laws by defeating their attempts to subjugate her. This is a neurotic way of feeling “great”. It denotes an unconscious impulse “to frustrate, outwit or defeat others in personal relations” such feelings in Monisha denote that she is terrible conscious of her inauthentic existence. She considers herself as entirely passive, a mere object and woefully lacks the sense of her own will and identity. To compensate for this she must acquire a sense of being able to do something, to be somebody, and to be “effective”. Before committing suicide Monisha is under a strong maniac grip. Her self destructive tendencies externalize in the form of action. It is only self hate which she wants to destroy, not herself. She confesses before her death: “God, she pain! Here it was, on her eyes, her face, here it came - there all over - with her arms she wrestled with it, she fought it, it was not what she wanted - she screamed No! No! No!” (242) J.A.C. Brown argues that the act of suicide, like a neurotic symptom, satisfies both the desire to punish oneself for hating one, who should be loved and the desire to punish the beloved for real or imagined neglect. The meaning of the act is therefore, “a specific approach: If you had treated me better I should not have killed myself.”

Monisha presents the picture of a reserve and quiet person, but aggressiveness is an integral part of her personality. When Jivan questions her about the script of Nirode’s play, she grows violent and defensive. She feels that Jivan has no right to intrude into their secrets. She snatches away the papers, but is bewildered at this sudden surfacing of violence in her behaviour:

The violence of action where has it sprung
from? I thought I had subdued everything
inside me, laid it in a dark and quiet place to
sleep. Yet it has leapt out, this violence, and made me snatch the manuscript out of Jivan's astonished hands. I'll save Nirode as much of it as I can, as I save my own self from it (133).

Monisha is a psychotic, who does not have an objective view of herself. Her surroundings and the people around her. She emphasizes the primary reality of her conscious experience and decisions. She has, consequently failed to achieve an adequate self identity, a meaningful way of life. Her ineffectiveness, in bringing about a compromise between the demands of her physical and social environment and her psychic needs, brings about fatal results. In such instances the individual turns his hostility inward against himself. He may engage in "exaggerated self-accusations, recriminations and feel severe guilt and self-devaluation. Such reactions do protect the individual from expressing dangerous hostility towards others, but may lead to depression and even to attempted or actual suicide." In Monisha's case inter personal conflicts and disruptions, associated with marital conflicts, result in severe stress and ultimate self immolation.
NOTES


