INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation an attempt is made to explore the discourse of Anita Desai's novel, *Cry the Peacock*. To begin with the text is deconstructed from within its architechttonic structure. The text is a conceptual construct which is constituted and held together by a number of signifying units in a certain syntagmatic, linear progression overshadowed by paradigmatic correlations. As such our method of analysis follows a very slow and steady path of identifying these units of significance which, in their linear progression, follow each other in their logical constitution. This is based on the fact that a literary discourse is a specific articulation of a specific perception of a specific existential experience. The author does not simply report a cultural parameter or a mundane empirical reality but presents a discourse on the basis of our specific perception of human relations set in specific time and space. This is more so in the case of Anita Desai who used the empirical Indian cultural patterns as a point of departure for her explorations of human relations which do not follow the
usual studies of social realism. Her discourse in *Cry, the Peacock* as well as other writings is more of the order of surrealistic fantasies. She is concerned primarily with the inner life or existential predicaments of her characters without presenting issues of class or gender. In this specific text when the two characters, the being and the other, are not able to establish correspondence, it is not at all a case of infidelity or even, at least at the manifest level, of extreme indifference. It is simply that the two live in different worlds which very rarely coincide with each other. This is precisely the reason why the psycho-analytic approach followed in our analysis is more appropriate than a sociological perception.

The syntagmatic constitution of the text which is responsible for the emergence of its discourse is a specific conceptual concept. Slowly and steadily there is an evolution and development of the narrative sequences which push one logical sequence into another. This architectonic structure is extremely important to follow the development of the narrative and the unfolding of the intricacies of the discourse, both from within and without. This is why in this analysis, very heavy emphasis is laid on the unity of the text and the conceptual constitution of the discourse. It is understood from within the text and it is explored from the inter relationships which are presented by the various signifying units.

After a very long descriptive analysis of the syntagmatics of the text we move on to the paradigmatic correlations. It is obvious that even though the reader must follow, in her first reading, the syntagmatic progression, the
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writer obviously has an overall view of her text before it is articulated in its linear progression. As such there are within the linear constitution several paradigmatic correlations which crisis cross all along the text. So after the first reading, or the first presentation of the text, one has to follow its constitution also in its paradigmatic correlations for a proper comprehension. This is what we have done in the second part of the dissertation.

It is followed by the identification of a certain number of basic themes under whose impact the whole text is constituted. This is our third and progressively higher level of analysis where the normal logical, syntagmatic and paradigmatic correlations are by-passed to acquire an understanding of the text as the conceptual unity where we dwell deep into the psychic discursive formulations which take us beyond the materiality of the text. At this level we are able to explore the immanent undercurrents of the discourse purely at the psychic, existential level. This level also leads us to understand the similarities in thematic configurations of other texts of Anita Desai.

In Cry, the Peacock we have a discourse which borders on the surreal. The relation between Maya and her husband is obviously non-coherent but what is primarily responsible for this non-correspondence is the fact that neither of the two is willing to or even interested in understanding the other. They are of course living in two different worlds and their personal interests do not coincide. Such relations could be
complementary instead of leading to confrontation at every moment of their steps. However this does not happen and none of them makes the least effort to accommodate the other. Her husband is indifferent and is engrossed in more pragmatic worldly affairs. She is introvert and her reaction to his indifference leads to extreme depression. In such moments she becomes superstitious and begins to imagine all kinds of astrological and allegoric correlations. As there does not seem to be any hope, any exit from this blocked relation, she begins to constitute her own surrealistic world of fantasies and dreams which are slowly and steadily transformed into nightmares. She becomes neurotic and in her moments of extreme depression and anguish she begins to question the very existence of her life, of his life, and of their lives together. In this process, alienation is complete and beyond any return to normalcy. She almost begins to play the narcissistic game of life and death, of hope and fear, of existence and non-existence. What began as a simple affair of non-involvement with each other where her husband did not respond to her affection and her desire she moves on to a psychic path full of extreme complexities. She weaves a cobweb of dark visions and absolute depression and she becomes a victim of her own fantasies. What is interesting to note here is that in this constitution of the discourse Anita Desai transcends the normal social and cultural behaviour of Indian life. There is no doubt that the text is full of Indian symbols and cultural facts but the psychic path of Maya does not depend entirely on these normal cultural patterns. Maya then begins to be a highly disturbed being whose personal existential experience transcends all reality. This is why Cry, the Peacock can be understood and analyzed
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primarily in psycho-analytical terms where the point of departure may be circumscribed by the personal cultural norms but in its evolution it becomes a highly personalized existential encounter with one's own self.

We see that in spite of different discursive formations in other novels of Anita Desai, the immanent discourse remains basically, the same. We have presented brief analysis of some of her other important texts which underscore this significant paradigm of Anita Desai's literary discourse.

The first chapter deals with the syntagmatic division of the text and a presentation of the narrative as it unfolds the basic sequences. In the second part of this section, the basic units of significance which are responsible for the constitution of the discourse are duly identified and described. These basic units are the veritable semantic features which are used by the writer to construct the narrative in its syntagmatic as well as paradigmatic structure.

In the second section, there are three chapters presenting three basic themes: Life and Death, Alienation and Disintegration, Light and Darkness. In this section we attempt to present the three undercurrent thematic units around which the whole edifice of the Anita Desai's discourse is constituted. This is the indepth, psychic analysis of the relation or non-relation of the two beings who form the paradigm of the conflict. As we move slowly through the narrative, we realize that the two protagonists
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are engaged in a dialectical relation without any manifest exit. And obviously this extreme non-relation ends in a disaster.

The third and the last section explores the same thematic undercurrents in other texts of the author. We find that in spite of formal differences, the discourse of the author remains fundamentally the same. There is a certain obsession with non-relations in the Indian context that seems to be the basic perception of the author.