CHAPTER II
CRY, THE PEACOCK

Anita Desai holds a significant place in modern Indian English novel. As a novelist of considerable merit, she has enriched the Indian novel in English in more ways than one. The thematic concerns and technical innovations of Desai have made her “a disturbing and demanding presence in Indo-Anglian fiction.” (D. S. Maini 216)

Anita Desai in Cry, The Peacock deals with the philosophy of detachment and the psyche of her characters. It reveals the inner conflict of a woman in crisis, by dealing with the theme of marital maladjustment and the resultant estrangement in the life of neglected wife. “It gives expression to the long smothered wail of a lacerated psyche, the harrowing tale of a blunted human relationship being told by the chief protagonist herself.” (Pathak 20)

Cry, the Peacock pictures the story of Maya who is the most sensitive woman suffering from neurotic fears and marital disharmony. Her neurosis growth, development and crisis are painted in all the three parts of the novel. The marriage of Maya with Gautama leads to the tragic tone of Cry, the Peacock. Maya’s infatuated visions and unfulfilled fancies reveal the innermost shrines of human heart. It is elaborately analysed through this thesis that the innocent heart of Maya with a pathetic cry for the company of Gautama who fails to afford a key to her marital harmony.
Normally the introduction part presents the characters and situation in which one episode leads to another, but in a psychological novel or drama, the characters look into the past which leaves deep scars on their minds. The episode of Toto’s death has left a deep mark on the mind of Maya; she fails to forget Toto while her husband forgets it and fails to see the agony of Maya.

The second part is divided into seven chapters each of which presents an episode, revealing new aspects of the characters of Maya and her husband Gautama. Anita Desai has the power to peep into the minds of the characters. Part II takes the reader back to the sources of Maya’s neurosis. Chapter one of the part II traces the beginning of Maya’s compulsive fear, her intense longing, her love and her encounter with the albino astrologer who predicts death of either of the couple within four years of marriage. The first chapter of the second part discovers the materialistic approach of Gautama and his indifference or rather abhorrence for the emotional attachment. The second chapter of the Part II describes the atmosphere in Gautama’s family in contrast with the atmosphere in the family of Maya’s father. Maya was pampered by her doting father, but nobody speaks a word of love in Gautama’s family. They discuss things which are related with the society in general, but never a personal or private matter.

In chapter two, there is a beautiful description of Maya’s childhood and early experiences with her father, her marriage with Gautama and her inability to form a satisfactory relationship with him. After four years of their married life, Maya and Gautama have not been able to gain better sense of
understanding and mutual adjustment between them. There seems to be a sense of frustration reigning in her. Even people sometimes say, “No, you are too young” (CTP 22). But Gautama is indifferent to his physical structure. He does not give any importance to it as a means of attraction for a woman particularly his wife Maya. She sighs for Gautama’s negligence to her.

In fact, Maya as a wife needs more than all the assets like money and property. Her nostalgic experiences haunt her mind and she does not think of money as basic need of life. That is why she expresses her mind and her heart in response to Gautama’s idea of money as basic need of life. She utters,

But of course we must, Though I’m sure I don’t know if money is basic. And why must it always be money? It’s always be money, or property never a case of passion and revenge, murder and exciting things life that basic things why? Don’t they ever happen? (CTP 23)

Marital disturbances between the two are described in many episodes and in the story of Leila (Maya’s friend) who has ruined herself to the loss of her husband suffering from tuberculosis.

The third chapter presents Maya in Mrs. Lal’s party where Maya is disgusted with the poor tastes and insensibility of Gautama. The party emphasizes the hollowness of marital life in a wider context. The fourth chapter depicts the big difference between the tastes of Maya and Gautama. In the fifth chapter, Arjuna’s (Maya’s brother) letter is received. His letter
refreshed her memory of the days when he lived with her in defiance of his father’s ways of living and thinking. It also reminded her of the prediction that either Maya or her husband Gautama would die within four years of their marriage.

In the sixth chapter, Maya sees monkeys being taken to the laboratory. The monkeys are packed in a train in such a way that they don’t have space enough even to sit. The plight of the monkeys moves her with pity. Mother and sister of Gautama feel that Maya needs human company. She felt greatly relieved when they took her for shopping. In the end of the part II, there rises a fierce dust storm, reflecting the inner emotional storm of Maya’s heart and it also describes how Maya leads Gautama on to the roof and hurls to death.

In part III, Maya loses the equilibrium. Anita Desai depicts Maya’s final leap to death which very well balances the structure of the novel. The story of mismatching of emotional and love hungry Maya with unemotional and logical Gautama begins with Part I and passes through several episodes of Part II, convincing Maya that Gautama had no love for her and ends in the death of both of them.

The action in the novel begins in the fourth year of the marriage of Maya and Gautama. Therefore most of the incidents are seen in retrospect. The opening chapter describes the death of Toto, pet dog of Maya. This incident gives first shock to Maya. It depicts the mourning over the death of her dog, Toto, to be eaten by scavengers, soon after,
…to wash the vision from her eyes, continued to cry and ran, defeated, into the house…Crows sat in a circle around the corpse and crows will eat anything—entrails, eyes, anything. Flies began to hum amidst the lines, driving away the bees and the unthinking butterflies. (CTP 7)

Maya’s emotional attachment with her pet dog which is not unnatural, but it also reveals Gautama’s unemotional approach.

Anita Desai highlights the essential contrasts between the ideas of Maya and Gautama on the death of the dog Toto. Maya’s heart is filled with pity and becomes very sad at the line of her husband. Gautama answers, such as “the sweeper will do it,” he telephoned to the public works department to take the corpse away and “it is all over.’… Come and drink your tea, and stop crying…you mustn’t cry” (CTP 8). He does not understand her feelings and breaks her heart like a stick. When he is told that a visitor wants to see him, he indifferently leaves her and forgets all about Toto.

Gautama sends away the corpse of the dog in the truck of the municipality to be disposed of with the garbage though Maya wanted to give it a decent burial. The death motive is built skillfully into the structure of the story. Desai has expressed Maya’s death motive as:

She cried, and fled to the bedroom to fling herself onto the bed and lie there, thinking of the small, still body stiffened into the panic-stricken posture of the moment of death, and of
the small sharp yelp in the throat as it suddenly contracted. She
did not know it was a scavenger’s truck that had taken it away,
but she sensed the sordid horror it had brought with it, and left
behind, and she began again to cry. (CTP 9)

Maya speaks her mind in no uncertain terms. The incident of the death
of her pet dog reminds her of loneliness she has to bear in the earlier parts of
her life – “It was not my pet’s death alone that I mourned today but another
sorrow unremembered, perhaps, as yet not even experienced filled me with
this despair” (CTP 13). Gautama’s behaviour lacerates her feelings. Death of
Toto is a traumatic experience. She is caressed by her husband. He removes
the strands of hair from her wet eyes. Nonetheless, she has the sensations “of
snakes coiling and uncoiling their moist lengths about me, of evil descending
from an over hanging branch, of an insane death, unprepared for, heralded by
defeating drumbeats…” (CTP 17). The fact that the death of Toto, without
treatment, torments Maya. For Gautama, the rituals associated with burying or
cremating anybody are merely meaningless formalities. The dead body is to be
cremated some way or the other so that the atmosphere is not polluted. He,
therefore, asks Maya: “Why do I choose to think of you as one of those
mysterious people who find such comfort in hocus-pocus, in the bogus
ceremonies and childish trimmings with which we bury our dead?”
(CTP 18). He adds rather arrogantly and with acerbity:
To me it has always seemed the ultimate absurdity appropriate only in that it brings a meaningless life to a similarly meaningless end... They are a pack of sheep in any case. It is only the few who lead these animals, the ones who are capable of logic and analysis, who matter. (CTP 18-19)

Gautama is unethical skeptic, contemptuous for the unintellectual common people and animals. Maya is hurt by his blasphemy, she retorts:

… Oh, Gautama, pets mightn’t mean anything to you, and yet they mean the world to me… Living might not mean much to some people, but when they die, they want it to happen splendidly, something that will be remembered, for ages, by everybody. (CTP 19-20)

Maya holds that people often draws strength, joy, consolations, etc., from the memories of the whole associations and wish to keep them the whole of their lives.

I let these warm, tender sensations bother me in their lambency, soothe me till the disturbed murmurs of my agitations grew calmer, and I could step out of my feelings into an evening world where the lawn had just been trimmed, the flower-beds just watered. (CTP 21)

The theme of marriage and love is deeply rooted in the novels of Anita Desai. H.S. Mahale exactly says,
the marriages in India and various complexities involved with them. Her worldliness and down-to-earth approach to life keeps her detached and makes her art a delightful experience for the people. (Mahale 50)

It is something different from that of the traditional marriage in which the bride is sacrificed at the altar of man’s dominance over woman who suffers like a speechless goat. She tolerates all the tortures and pains. She becomes the key of nervous breakdown caused by imaginative vision of the past and future. The love and married life of Maya is based on the marriages how they are followed in India but Gautama’s material life does not cooperate with Maya’s practical life.

Happy marriage life depends upon the healthy understanding of husband and wife. From the very beginning there have been two parts which people have taken in life before marriage and after marriage. According to Bertrand Russell,

Marriage is sometimes more serious than the pleasure of two people in each other’s company; it is an institution which, through the fact that it gives rise to children, forms part of the intimate texture of society, and has an importance extending far beyond the personal feelings of the husband and wife. (Russel 92)
In this novel, Maya and Gautama always live with lack of correspondence. Maya is alive through all her sense and live intensely for each moment. Her husband Gautama is remote, detached, intellectual and somewhat bewildered by his wife’s hypersensitiveness. Both husband and wife are poles apart in their nature. The first thing is the alienation between Maya and Gautama rooted deeply and basically in his philosophical detachment and imperviousness to the beautiful yet tremulous beauty of the natural world. Although he talks of the basics in life, he remains absolutely untouched by the basics conducive to a successful man-woman relationship. Walking along with Maya, he quotes a beautiful Urdu couplet, but her remains untouched to the tender feelings which are inherent in it surprisingly Gautama quotes an Urdu couplet:

Even if each star in the sky were an heart, what of it?

Give to me one he art that is capable of sorrow. (CTP 25)

But at the same time, Maya feels the inherent tenderness in the couplet. She finds the couplet full of compassion and touching feelings. Desai beautifully depicts this moment of Maya’s appearance:

My heart stretched painfully, agonizingly, expanding and swelling with the vastness of a single moment of absolute happiness, and my body followed its long sweet cure, arching with the soaring, annihilating torture of it. Ultimate, a world dropped down the tall tunnel of memory—it had been used that evening—ultimate, Ah, this was it, the ultimate absolute joy. Here lay perfection, suspended bearing all that it could bear so
full was it. Were one more flower to unfurl that night, one small bird to cry, if one bright star were to be shattered and fall now – I could have born it, no I was filled to the point of destruction. (CTP 25-26)

Maya feels that Gautama has not grown at all during four years of married life. He is devoid of the pulsations of heart and considered materialistic progress as covetable achievement of life. It is repugnant to Maya. She therefore says to Gautama snubbingly:

What are you thinking of? That ‘man who came to see you this evening’? He kept you in the office for an hour-or more, I am sure. What did he want? Oh, you don’t need to tell me – it must have been about some musty ole case, about money, or property, or something dreary, like that, wasn’t it? (CTP 23)

She knows that the things that Gautama pursues are dead dreary. Passions, strong emotions, convictions, etc., are unknown in his world of suits and suitors. In his world of materialism, murders are done for money, “not for love, or life, or basic things-like Toto dying” (CTP 23). Gautama brushes aside Maya’s love for basic things. He opines that reality and idealism are two phases of life, and they are to be reconciled for a happy and successful life. If women bear children, they will need money to give good life to the children- “Love- that great and splendid ideal of the young-ultimately becomes, you will find, for the man a matter of dealing with the bills that come in, and, for the women, or worrying about it” (CTP 23). The same concept has exactly revealed by a famous critic Usha Pathania:
Maya, like any other woman, strongly feels that love is the only protector of life, without which she feels neglected. As long as she was under the loving care of her father she felt secure. The flow of love, admiration and sympathy is suddenly disrupted when Gautama, giving too much attachment to money, name and fame, shows displeasure for too much physical contact and for her romantic and aesthetic temperament. Maya feels rejected, unwanted and lost. (Pathania 49)

Maya observes that the spirit of love prevails all over the universe. Her attention is distracted by the doves which are in a mood for mating. But somehow she has the feeling that her desire for love would remains unresponded. Therefore the doves seem to say to her repeatedly in fatal words ‘go away!’ (CTP 24)

Gautama’s coldness in matters of love makes her so sad that she saw in retrospect that the springs she passed in her father’s house used to be different and her father was so affectionate and loving. She recollects that spring at Lucknow was different. She enjoys herself,

… in the shade of bougainvillea arbour, where the light turns from lilac to mauve to purple, from peach to orange to crimson…a small butterfly flickers amongst the flowers… high incessant sounds form out of the very sun and air on such a morning, like crystals in syrup… delight makes me drowsy. (CTP 35-36)
She completely identifies Gautama with her father, though this identification incapacitated her from understanding in right perspective and the reality around her. She also tries to attempt to relieve from her childhood experiences. But she is failed to achieve a satisfactory relationship with her father. She also fails in her relationship with her husband. The neurosis in her stems from her love-wish which she transfers from her father to her husband. Her love-wish remains unfulfilled in both the cases.

It is a notable fact that Maya’s choice of Gautama, as her husband, is the choice of her father. She reveals:

Coming slowly upon his bicycle, in the evenings, it was my father Gautama, used to come to call upon, and had it not been for the quickening passion with which I met, half way my father’s proposal that I married this tall, stooped, and knowledgeable friend of his. One might have said that our marriage was grounded upon the friendship of the two men and the mutual respect in which they held each other, rather anything else. (CTP 38-39)

According to Gautama, Maya’s father-fixation is an expression of her appreciation of the mental qualities of her father. The kinship which develops between them soon grows into a conscious mental relationship, respect and friendship, but this association was different from love as light from darkness. In choosing Gautama, Maya searches the same qualities in him. She confesses, “Yet they had been friends – Gautama almost a protégé of my father. Who had admired him, and I believed… still did.” (CTP 41)
Maya is obsessed with the fear of death right from her childhood. When she was a young girl, an astrologer studying her horoscope predicted that either she or her husband would meet with death after four years of marriage. S.T. Paul rightly says, “The prediction of the astrologer assumes the dimension of an ominous obsession in Maya and surfaces in her conscious mind.” (Paul 3)

The astrologer’s prediction assumes the existential dimension and an ominous obsession in Maya. It surfaces her consciousness more often: “I tried to define the mark, give it a name, a locality… And what made the gods to reach out and touch it with their cold fingers, as they considered the prospect or a murder.” (CTP 122)

The death of Toto reminds her of the prophecy of the albino astrologer and she foresees her own death. She begins to feel that death is inevitable and the fear of death makes her impatient. She is obsessed by the morbid sense of death which continues throughout her life.

My child, I would not speak of it if I saw it on your face alone.
But look at the horoscope. Stars do not lie. And so it is best to warn you, prepare you…. Death to one of you. When you are married and you shall be married young….Death—an early one—by unnatural causes. (CTP 33)

This type of communication gap between husband and wife is well developed and felt throughout the novel. Ego and complex should not come after marriage. This is the main reason of failure of married life. Maya and
Gautama always disagree with each other. Their marriage has been an utter fiasco and they continue to be together leading to an explosive life of incommunication. Maya herself reflects upon her unsuccessful marriage.

It was discouraging to reflect on how much in our marriage was based upon nobility forced upon us from outside, and therefore neither true nor lasting. It was broken repeatedly, and repeatedly the pieces were picked up and put together again as of a scared icon with which, out of the pettiest superstition, we could not bear to part. (CTP 38)

Maya’s soul is not troubled before her marriage. The atmosphere in her father’s house gave her pleasant where the light turned from lilac to mauve, to purple, from peach to orange, to crimson. The whole sky at her father’s creeper – hung house appears like sweet ‘Sherbet’. This world appears to her like toys specially made for her, pointed in her favourite colours. This passion of suicide is the case of insanity due to unsuccessful love. Of course, it is a very pessimistic view of human passion. In such moments, it is natural for Maya to remember her father who showered boundless affection on her.

As a husband, Gautama’s first duty is towards his wife. But, in his zeal for detachment, he neglects it. For him, Maya is at best a spoilt child. She is to be presented with a new one. She is rarely to be taken seriously. Paradoxically, Gautama is tender to her, at his cares and concerns are devoid of human understanding. He simply disregards her need for love. Maya
laments his lack of interest in her, “Giving me an opal ring to wear on my finger, he did not notice the translucent skin beneath, the blue flashing veins ran under and out the bridge of gold.” (CTP 52)

Maya loves her life deeply. Gautama’s failure to notice the demands for life reveals his failure as a husband. Maya is a childless woman, lonely and miserable. She is eloquent of her need of him, “…he did not give another thought to me, to either the soft, willing body or the lovely, waiting mind that waited near his bed” (CTP 48). He is unable to give her the sense of security in her hour of distress. She desires his closest understanding, not his philosophy.

Maya desires for consuming madness. The limitation of individuality which separates Maya from Gautama arises the love-blame. For such a consummation, she has only the ideal of the peacocks that are in the process of mating, kill each other.

…how they love the rain-these peacocks. They spread out their splendid toils and begin to dance, but, like Shiva’s, their dance of joy is the dance of death, and they dance, knowing that they and their lovers are all to die, perhaps even before the monsoons come to end. Maya likes calls of peacocks she often hears, cries in pain, “Pia, Pia or lover, lover, Mio, Mio, - I die, I die. (CTP 95)
The dance of peacocks reminds her of the dance of Shiva. The dance of Shiva together with the dance of the Kathakali dancers in the south would bring home to her the wisdom of the unconscious that for living, one has to die. Peacocks symbolize this wisdom because with hundred eyes upon their tails, they have seen the truth of life and death and know them to be one. In this respect love is equivalent to life. Then Maya rightly says, “living, they are aware of death, Dying they are in love with life. “Lover, lover,” you will hear them cry in the forests, when the rain clouds come, “Lover, I die.” (CTP 96)

She hears their cry and echoes it. She feels their thirst when they look towards the rain clouds, their passion when they aspire for their mates. With them she cries-“Agony, agony, the mortal agony of their cry for lover and for death.” (CTP 96)

Gautama does not have even a single word of appreciation of the delicate finger as expected by Maya. On the another occasion, when both were cuddled in bed, young Maya was longing for Gautama’s physical intimacy. Gautama fails to fulfill Maya’s physical needs. Her efforts to draw Gautama closer to her and used to expose the swell of her hip that rose under the white sheet which fell in sculptured fold about her rounded form. These receive no response from him. Without even trying to understand the basics of a conjugal life, Gautama’s eyes always remain “blank of appraisal” (CTP 42) as though he has seen nothing.
It is not Gautama alone who is emotionless. The whole family of Gautama can talk on any topic under the sun but love or emotions. They talk about discussions in Parliament, cases of bribery, rampant corruption, trade pacts, political treaties, etc., but love or personal emotions are out of bound. Gautama’s mother has innumerable engagements which leave her with little time for love or affection. Gautama’s father has great love for the country-kept going to jail every now and then-but he evinces no interest in his family. None in the family talks about a serious matter with Maya. They would talk to her only about household, non-serious matters, such as babies, meals, shopping, marriages, Hence she regrets, “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” (CTP 45). The atmosphere of Gautama’s family is so impersonal that Maya feels choked in it. Her efforts to create a family atmosphere fail completely.

Maya gets a lesson in patience and fortitude from the instance of her friend, Leila. Maya goes to meet her and finds that her husband, who is afflicted with tuberculosis, is bedridden and her parents have stopped even writing to her because she has married the man without their consent. Leila starts teaching Persian to young girls, who are waiting for their marriages and lives on her own earning, yet she nurses her husband with a bright smile on her face – “When I saw her tend him a glass of medicine, or left his body into a comfortable position, I saw in her movements an aching tenderness, subdued by long sadness, with great beauty and great bitterness.” (CTP 53)
Leila is an image of love and sacrifice and it is set off by the example of Maya’s another friend, Pom, who is pink, plump and pretty. She has all the comforts of life, yet she considers living in a room with her parents-in-law as if the two mice are living in a hole. Her mother-in-law does the kitchen work with such diligence and regularity as if she was born in the kitchen. Still she is forcing her husband to move to a new flat. She has her wardrobe full with silk and chiffon yet she would demand more. The two examples of Maya’s friends must have given her the philosophy that one could adapt oneself in all situations, live in straight circumstances or in prosperity, but to live without love in this world is beyond endurance, more so for a girl who has the taste of love of a doting father.

The clash between the irreconcilably difficult temperaments of Maya and Gautama is highly significant throughout the novel due to the lack of communication between them. A very small thing as Gautama’s inability to distinguish the smell of lemons from that of petunias surprises Maya that they do not share any common sensibility or understanding. Impossibility of communication between Maya and Gautama is also expressed by the novelist.

Mostly, Indian women are controlled and conditioned by the dictates of their husbands and their family. Educated or illiterate, rich or poor they have to depend on their husbands for everything. Maya’s life is a classic example of Indian women who have no independent existence. For instance, Maya desires to go to the south to witness the Kathakali dances. But Gautama summarily dismisses her request in a matter– of fact way. He does not care for the intensity of her desire. Maya expresses her desire to see the Kathakali dances to him and says,
I want – I want to see the Kathakali dances I have heard of the ballads they have in their villages. They say they go on for days and days. And the dances are all men, and they wear such fantastic masks. And the drums . . . The masks they wear . . . you must have seen them? And their costumes. And the special kind of music. And it is all out in open, at night, by starlight . . . and perhaps they have torches. Yes, I suppose they dance by torchlight . . . (CTP 48)

The husband and wife alienation is also seen by temperamental incompatibility. Both Gautama and Maya stand in sharp dissimilarity with each other as opposed to archetypes and as such, constantly remind their counterparts, Raman and Sita in Where Shall We Go This Summer? Gautama is pragmatic, unimaginative and unsentimental and believes in detachment on every count. On the other hand, Maya is a highly sensitive girl gifted with supreme poetic imagination and neurotic sensibility.

Gautama takes Maya to a party hosted by Mrs. Lal, hoping perhaps that Maya would feel relaxed, but on the contrary she returns dejected and disgusted – “I thought I was doing you a favour by taking you out one evening”, but “it was a stretch of unrelieved gloom”(CTP 65). The behaviour of men and women in the party disgust her. The ladies are trying to show off their wealth and degrade the others. A prim lady has the occasions to ask Mrs. Lal if she hasn’t kept an ayah for her little son, or whether she doesn’t have an
air-conditioner to make her feel small. Mrs. Lal on her part tries to show the grilles she has got fixed recently. Mr. Lal has little regard for the fact that he has stained the sari of Mrs. Lal, when she tries to adjust exposed her pregnancy to the Prim Lady’s view.

Maya is further disgusted by the Prim Lady’s Sikh husband, Harbans Singh, who claims to have a good knowledge of astrology which is a taboo in the families of Maya’s father and Maya’s in-laws - she utters:

…”Fate” the word that has not come to my ears in spoken form, for so long. Banned from my household, banned by my father… my father had thrust them all (horoscopes etc.) into the fire, together with an unsavoury scraps of paper seized from the ayah’s hand. From that day, the word had not been uttered in my presence, not ‘astrology’, nor ‘palmistry’…Nor had it returned to the orbit of my being with marriage, for to Gautama, no Brahmin and no traditionalist, it was a word alien from birth. (CTP 66-67)

The last and greatest shock comes to her from the cabaret dancers’ attempt to show their bosoms, legs and posteriors,

This is my bosom, a flagrant label read, And these are my legs proclaimed a second, as she stood on her head, while her legs writhed and kicked and waved provocatively. In between these antics, she pranced to little dance tunes, perspiring and panting to get back her breath, and her systematically rounded, pneumatic posterior bore its own inviting level here is my bottom, pinch it! (CTP 73-74)
As the dancers shamelessly display the parts of their bodies, men and women present there also make vulgar remarks. A fat man sobs, “Beautiful! B-beautiful, b-bitch!” The Sikh fellow said, “We should have brought you here last week… Last week there was a strip tease!” The primness of the prim lady departed as she screamed “What! What!” (CTP 74) nudge Maya sharply and cruelly.

These indecencies and ribaldries give shock to Maya. She can not stay in such a company. She cries, “I have to go. Gautama, I must go” (CTP 75). The sight of fatigued dancers, cavorting and hip-rolling, reminds her of a her show in which the bear stand on its tired feet, his snout up in the air. He stands “shaggy, clumsy, old and exhausted” (CTP 75). She takes pity on the bear and gives him bananas to eat. Maya is a woman of so delicate sensibilities that the Doctor has to be called to give her a little morphine so that she could sleep in peace.

It appears to Maya, “None of them looked as though they are doing what they want to do. They all look so sad to me-so terribly sad” (CTP 78). Maya therefore thinks that they are forced into this profession by ‘evil uncles, or step-mothers.’ On the whole, the party is ‘horrible’. But Gautama does not feel uneasy, because he does not have a decent living as Maya has, nor is he an over-protected child like Maya. He asks:

…why on earth should I be wretched because a party, or my host, or the guests did not measure up to my conception of wit or chart?...Frankly, if a man were to react to the sight of
pregnancy by bursting into tears, Maya, no court of law would consider him sane or sober… Facts are made to be accepted-to be studied. Not to be wept over… (CTP 79)

Maya is distressed to see that her husband is so much devoid of the sense of decency. She snubs him,

All the truth in living just passes them by, and I am so sorry for anyone—yes, even you, unsuspecting husband—who misses it. It is like spending seventy years of one’s life in a graveyard—being born in one, and dying in one. It is a waste—a waste. And one life-time is so short, it’s over before you know it! (CTP 79)

The most painful part of Maya’s anguish has been that she is childless. On learning this fact that Mrs. Lal has four daughters to look after her, Maya rejoices at Mrs. Lal’s prospect as her father might have rejoiced in her. Despite the fact that when the daughters grow up, they bring up visions of dowries, of debts, humiliations to be suffered. That is why Maya always feels the pinch of her father’s sufferings. This is the most painful aspect of the marriage of a girl. This is a notable fact that the people of this society are not convinced that their sacrifice in love is for the sake of the race or they die for the sake of living. Maya realizes that her love is not only for Gautama’s but mainly for the life that would permit her to touch him. She also admits the limitations of love.

Maya feels very much upset that Gautama does not understand her need for companionship and communion. She reveals:
In the flashing darkness of eyeballs pressed upon by wet fingers, I relived the horror of those awesome realizations that had followed, sometimes, a moment of union, and taught me how hopeless, how important is sex - where not union but communion is concerned. (CTP 90)

After attending the party hosted by Lal, Maya feels ill at ease to learn that Mrs. Lal who is already having a small son and four daughters was pregnant again. She does not like to show her palm to Harbans Singh as she is weighed down by the prophecy of the albino astrologer of her childhood. She does not enjoy the cabaret. She feels sorry for the sad plight of the cabaret girls. She associates herself with the cry of the peacocks, she weeps for them, weeps for herself because she has now understood their call. There is a wild gulf between Maya and Gautama as the two have different tastes and different opinions on several matters.

Maya’s likes and dislikes are peculiar. As a tender-hearted woman, she is unable to bear even the slightest disregard on the part of others. In her childhood, her father sees to it that each and every desire of hers is fulfilled and she is looked after with utmost care. Her father used to hold her in his arms, wipe her tears and pacify her irrespective of the gravity or triviality of her problems. She expects the same treatment from her husband but feels hurt when he ignores her feelings. Her husband’s negligence of her tastes and wishes drives her to severe strain and conflicts. There are many instances where Maya’s sensitive and tender feelings are overlooked by Gautama.
In spite of Gautama’s lacking in decency, Maya loves her husband and she reveals,

If mothers enjoy watching the clumsy drooling of their babies while they eat, or of their faltering attempts at walking, then I enjoyed, similarly, his helplessness in matters practical, his vulnerability when it came to ideas, his speechless need of me… and all this set off by an aloofness, a vast and serious knowledge based on self-sacrificing years of study and hard work, his refusal to concede, to compromise: all this I admired, perhaps envied. (CTP 150)

Maya has the longing to be with Gautama, to be close to him. She makes haste in undressing, preparing, herself, to join him. But when she went to rouse him, he had closed his eyes in profound and invulnerable sleep. Her desire for love remains unsatisfied. As she lies on the bed, she remembers how the advances of a young woman succeed in getting her response of a stranger. She remembers that a young woman, holding a white dog on a leash, smiled to a young man, “and he smiled in reply, and went up the steps behind her” (CTP 82). The image of the woman with the white dog haunted her. Her unsatisfied desire for sex troubled her so much that she started getting fearful visions—“Upon this bed of hot, itching sound, I summoned up again the vision of the Terrific albino who had cast his shadow like a net across me as I had flowed down the corridors of years…” (CTP 82)
According to Desai, Maya must love in order to exist as peacocks do, and like peacocks she must tear the mate and be torn by him. For Desai, love has not to do with a farce but with a real power. To Shakespeare, the sexual doings of humanity may appear comical but for Anita Desai and Lawrence it is so tragical that there appears to be only one way of it—the equilibrium of friendship. Maya puts the instinct of sexual love against that of death. Both are the experience of the unconscious. For Maya sexual love and procreation are the means of evading the fear of death. After the death of dog which troubled her out of peace, Maya prepared herself that very night to seek reassurance from Gautama through sexual relationship. The night which follows the dog’s tragedy is specially welcome to her. She sits down on her bed, cool and refreshed after a bath in her white night clothes but her rituals fail to entice Gautama. She wanted to confess her loneliness and her fear of death but left alone. She felt that the prophecy of the astrologer would come true very soon.

Maya’s father has developed a pure friendship between the two sexes and if Maya grows nostalgic about open friendship it is because Gautama’s pseudo nobility has forced her to keep the lid of shame on sex. Both Maya and Gautama are opposite in their nature. Gautama has no love for poetry and his sensibility is so simple, as to believe that he was capable for pure friendship. On the contrary, Maya, being a woman was capable of no pure friendship. Friendship is the product of the conscious mind. In the words of Harman, “She was capable of it, if only she had been allowed to draw from the wells of the unconscious life of her soul.” (qtd S. T. Paul 3)
This kind of friendship would have been much more indispensable and would have also built a solid foundation for a lasting relationship. Later her search for sexual love from Gautama is a part of her expression of the same will bring satisfaction. Since her search for satisfaction involved the question of life and death and it could not be other than violent. In chapter II she confesses both; that she does not seek affection for its own sake and that it has to be violent,

...as always happened to me, it was after my most anguish moments that a piece of truth fell into my exhausted mind…

That I longed for with the fiercest desire, not even for Gautama, but for my father who would said to me, with that assured and reassuring calm; it will all be well, it will all be well soon Maya. (CTP 95)

Thus her goal has never been to gain sexual satisfaction. On the other hand it is the unconscious purpose of securing this life through sex and procreation. The nature of longing is the same-self preservation, though it is also one of the grand illusions humanity since time immemorial has been suffering from. In spite of his deep insights, Gautama fails to realize that Maya’s need for love is spiritual because “it is the demand of her spirit to ‘meet me half way, in my own world not merely demand of me, burlesquely, to join him in his which, however safe, was so very drab and no longer afforded me security” (CTP 96). But Gautama shrinks from physical contact. Whenever Maya becomes sentimental, at the same time he quotes from the Gita. His talk shows that he can intellectualize the great scripture but he cannot understand its inner meaning.
By avoiding physical contact with his wife, Gautama is following the path of negation. He misses the real concept of ‘Kama’. According to Hindu belief, it is rooted in Dharma and is the foundation for successful married life. Man-woman communication has been considered sacred by the Hindu scriptures. According to Kamakala Vikas the communion of male and female power is Shiva-Shakti-Mithun-Pinda. M.K.Gandhi also points out, agreeing with The Gita, that Kama divorced from Dharma leads “not to Moksha but to perdition” (CTP 150). Gautama is running away from his duty which is the accepted bond of marriage. He gives agony to his wife who rules under a sense of humiliation and rejection. She reflects,

There were countless nights when I had been tortured by a humiliating sense of neglect, of loneliness, of desperation that would not have existed had I not loved him so, had he not meant so much. (CTP 150)

Without love, Maya feels very insecure. She feels that she is caught in the net of inescapable and there is no mercy. As it is a hard reality, not a vision or nightmare, she feels the laceration in her heart. In the fit of sorrow, she feels as if she has gone insane and is in need of immediate help- “Father! Brother! Husband! Who is my saviour? I am in need of one. I am dying, and I am in love with living, I am in love, and I am dying” (CTP 84). Thus Maya is deeply stricken with the sense of loneliness and insecurity.

Maya and Gautama, the two have different tastes and different opinions on several matters. Once, Maya had a chance to hear the melody of Urdu couplets which were being recited by the people outside the room of
Maya. Maya had inherited a taste for Urdu poetry from her father who used to say that Urdu poetry was evocative. Maya therefore had a strong desire to join the party, but she knew that Gautama would not like her coming out of her room. On thinking the attitudes of Gautama, Maya reveals: “Torture, dread, guilt, imprisonment—These were the four walls of my private hell that no one could survive in long. Death was certain.” (CTP 88)

Maya feels that the writer of the couplet is a fellow inmate in nightmare asylum. The overflow of emotions breaks all restrictions. She goes to the party and she feels “I found myself rushing out and appearing breathlessly in their midst – the midst of this charmed circle of leisurely gentlemen, so comfortably and securely male, laughing, talking, drinking, genially drinking themselves into delight” (CTP 89). But Gautama says loudly, to make it audible to Maya, that poetry is really enjoyable because it is “unrelated to our day, unclouded by the vulgarity of ill-educated men and over-bearing women” (CTP 89). The other people also give the reaction that they would not be able to continue in their mood of bliss in the presence of a woman. She feels that male chauvinism would not permit her to share in human friendliness. She moans, “the mirror, always the mirror!-in my bedroom, feeling sick, as though I had been struck a blow, knocked giddy. Was it so unforgivable to wish to share in human friendliness? (CTP 89). She has to go back, beaten and defeated.

In spite of so much of suffering, Maya loves her husband intensely, but her husband is devoid of emotion of love. She thinks that love is necessary for her life-“it was not merely for his presence that I longed, but mainly for the
life that would permit me to touch him, feel his flesh, hold and then tighten my
hold on him…” (CTP 90). And not only on Gautama alone but on all the
pulsating world around him all that suggested life and great dismay there was
no communion between her and her husband. It is the natural desire of all
women that they should share their ambitions and aspirations with their
husbands, but Gautama seemed to be well insulated against the current of love.
She wanted to transmit to him “the laughter that gurgled” in the throat, “or the
bonfire in the pit of my stomach when I saw the sun unfurl like a rose in the
west” (CTP 90). But in the absence of any response from her husband, she
feels lonely in such moments of exhilaration.

Maya becomes nervous, she thinks that she is not good enough for
her husband. She sees in the mirror that hers is “the round, childish face,
plump and pampered”, with “Shell-like ears, curling around petty ignorance,”
(CTP 90) while Gautama would like “the elongated, etiolated one of an
intellectual, refined by thought and reflection, bereft of the weakness of
impulses, aloof from coarseness and freshness” (CTP 90). The behaviour of
Gautama in the party also gives her the impression that there is no love lost
between them-“Had there been a bond between us, he would have felt its
pull, I thought on him so deeply…there was no bond, no love-hardly any
love.” (CTP 93)

The emotional alienation and the temperamental gulf between Maya
and Gautama is well maintained in Chapter five of part II. Hence standing
near Gautama in the moonlight, Maya thinks that she is far away from
him “Nothing was hidden. All was revealed, and it was not what I haunted
for. He was not my side at all, but across a river, across a mountain and would always remain so” (CTP 114). Gautama believes that he has nothing against his wife’s intensely sensuous approach to life because this could very well be another way towards the same ideal condition. But since the novel is narrated from the point of view of Maya, the ideal itself seems to be challenged. Gautama’s aspiration to stability and calm appears to her to be a negation of life in all its vivid aspects.

These type of short-comings and trifling things create in Maya, an acute mental tension. Thus in the hours of tension, Maya returns to childhood memories to escape the present. During her past infancy, She enjoys herself a brief life of a painted butterfly. She is unable to recapture that happiness of the past. “I had the happiest childhood, they were my happiest time”(CTP 98). Maya herself observes that, “the world like a toy especially made for me, painted in my favourite colours set moving to my favourite tunes,”(CTP 36). Gautama does not understand her tender innermost feelings and calls her a spoilt baby to whom, “Life is a fairy tale” (CTP 36). Her present moment is lot in the reveries of the past.

In this way Maya and Gautama fail to meet on a common platform of married life regarding their comprehension of detachment. Maya’s longing for life slowly acquires a negative character under Gautama’s intellectual stresses. Gautama only works for ‘fame, name, money’, as he himself admits, he is busy in his legal practice and remains engrossed in his thought throughout his life. In fact he is a successful man of the world. He is not free from his egoistic tendencies.
Gautama loves to quote The Gita that one should not be attached to anything. But it is interesting to note that the same Gautama is seen picking up cigarette after cigarette and insisting on having his cup of tea in time. His elucidations of the Gita reveal an ambiguity in his thinking. Though he goes on pre-acting non-attachment, he is not free from attachment. He is immersed in his legal practice. His preaching is merely verbose, intellectual jugglery. He does not practice what he preaches.

Gautama remains frigid and quotes from The Gita to exhort her not to be attached with this mundane, materialistic world. He quotes from The Gita,

> He is fit to attain immortality who is serene and not affected by these sensations, but is the same in pleasure and pain… ‘He whose mind is not agitated in calamities and who has no longing for pleasure, free from attachment, fear and anger, he indeed is said to be of steady wisdom…’ (CTP 93)

Being wrought with passion, Maya refuses to accept this dry philosophy and snub her husband for being cold to her urge for love- “How it suits you to quote these lines of a dry stick, an inhuman dry stick. Oh, you know nothing, nor understand nothing, nor will you ever understand. You know nothing of me” (CTP 97). When Gautama remains unmoved by her unabashed expression of love, she asks him fiercely- “Is there nothing in you that would be touched ever so slightly, if I told you I live my life for you? (CTP 97). But Gautama points out the inevitable law of mutation in life and it is futile on her part to arrest the divine ordainments. He also points out that punishment is given in the form that Karma takes in their eyes. He becomes a wooden block, devoid of desire and emotion.
Maya grips Gautama’s arm tight feeling that it is flesh and bone, ashes and dust and not the eternal rock which she suppose it to be. Maya is shell shocked by his blasphemy. She stammers, “Not faith, but logic. But, Gautama, that is terrible—not faith, but logic” (CTP 104). She wants security from Gautama, but he leaves her in a sea of darkness. She cries, “No! where were safety, reassurance gone? Peace? Gautama?” She feels as if Gautama has left her to drown “in a treacherous sea.” (CTP 104)

Anita Desai is deeply influenced by D.H. Lawrence. *Cry, The Peacock* reminiscence of Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers*. She is also influenced by Freud in the novel. Gautama is conscious that Maya suffers from father-fixation. In his discussion with Maya, he utters:

If you know your Freud, it would all be very straight forward and then appear as merely inevitable to the taking your childhood and upbringing into consideration. You have very obvious father-obsession which is also the reason why you married me, a man so much older than yourself. It is a complex that, unless you mature rapidly, you will not be able to deal with, to destroy. (CTP 122)

This obsession of Maya represents her private hell to which she thinks she is doomed. She herself tells, “Torture, guilt, dread, imprisonment-these were the four walls of my private hell, one that one could survive in long. Death was certain.” (CTP 117)
This obsession drives her to insanity. She makes no bones about it:

Yes, I am going insane. I am moving further and further from all wisdom, all calm and I shall soon be mad, if I am not that already. Perhaps it is my madness that leads me to imagine that horoscope, that encounter with the albino, his prediction, my fate?... Perhaps it is only a phenomenon of insanity... (CTP 124)

The prophecy of the albino astrologer pronouncing death to either Maya or her husband is deeply ingrained in the sub-conscious of Maya and disturbs her while awake. During her sleep, she has visions of rats suckling their young tenderly but spreading plague. She dreams of the desert with its vast stretches of sand and the dangerous lizards with their death’s rattle. Gautama wants to know about the horoscope that Arjuna has referred to in his letter. Maya does not want to let Gautama know that an astrologer has predicted death of one of them within four years of their marriage, fearing that Gautama, who is unsentimental utilitarian, must put her in peril of life.

Thinking that Maya is ill, he proposes that she should go with her father to whatever place he goes, but he could not realize that his and Arjuna’s utilitarian ways of living and thinking are opposed to those of her father, under whose love and care she has grown. Therefore she is torn between the two forces. As she is married to Gautama, it is not possible for her to go back to her father’s ways, howsoever strongly she feels inclined to them. The inner conflict has caused the headaches and hallucinations.
Maya is a woman of delicate psyche. She goes to the station to receive Gautama’s mother and sister. She sees there a train-load of monkeys being taken to the laboratory at Bombay. The monkeys are packed into cages in such a way that they do not have space enough to stretch and move. She sees, “Long furred bodies swarming upon each other, till limbs and tails twisted together, the elegant lines of their muscles contorted nightmarishly-the work of some fiendish maniac” (CTP 129). This sight is painful enough to move anybody to pity; it moves Maya far more deeply. Maya cries, “they are thirsty and hungry. There is not even a bowl of water for them… something must be done about it immediately” (CTP 129). At this moment she remembered her father who was always kind and affectionate-“My father might have come. Look for him. Help me look for him, Gautama. He’ll open the cages and let them out.” (CTP 130)

Maya has sympathy, or rather empathy for the imprisoned monkeys so much that she feels as if she is herself in the cages:

There I was amongst them, not one of those who sat quietly, an infinity of sadness and resignation, but one of those who clung, clung to the bars till they cut into my flesh, and rattled them, shook them, crying over and over again, ‘Let me out! I want to live Gautama, I want to live! (CTP 131)

Though Maya was aware of the fact that the world she lived in was not an unmixed pleasure. On the contrary, she knew it to be full of pain which one should learn to endure, and so made it endurable. But she failed to stabilize
this awareness. The cause of her failure can be attributed partly to her indulgent and over-protected childhood and partly to Gautama’s dry intellectualism. Thus *Cry, The peacock* presents the struggle for survival of the simplest organism embodied in Maya. She is as simple as a child in her desire and as violent as animal in rebellion.

Like birds and animals she is a creature of pure instinct. The most vital instinct in birds as in her is the fear of death. Maya’s cries are mainly the outcome of her instinct for self preservation. The fear of death that either Gautama or she is to die makes her almost go mad with the apprehension lest she should die. This fear in her is neither the fear of the last judgment nor of any other metaphysical hypotheses. Her instinct for survival is indeed felt in the blood. Like animals and birds, Maya longed for a contact and relationship with Gautama not detachment.

The company of Nila and her mother is living example of hard work and courage for Maya. Maya realizes that both the ladies are same and much more humane than her husband. She wants their love because she is not getting so much care and love from her very unsentimental husband she reveals,

And yet I yearned for her to hold me to her bosom. I could not remember my own mother at all. My throat began to swell with unbearable self-pity. I would cry, I knew it, in a while, and dreaded it, in their sane presence. (CTP 136)
Love may be the best possible way to find salvation for the sages, but for those who are too young, it is the ground and true cause of their existence. Love and indulgence would have given Maya a sense of satisfaction in this world. She wants to live with Gautama and also wants to get sound sleep. But her sleep is constantly disturbed by the cries of peacocks pacing the rocks at night — “searching for mates, peacocks tearing themselves to bleeding shreds in the act of love, peacocks screaming with agony at the death of love” (CTP 146). When she fails to find her love to Gautama she takes a long breath to see peacocks. “Have you seen peacocks make love, child? Before they mate, they fight. They will rip each other’s breasts to strip and fall, bleeding, with their peaks open and painting. When they have exhausted themselves in battle, they will mate.” (CTP 95)

Maya’s dreams could not be the dreams of Gautama because “the man had no contact with the world or with me (Maya)” (CTP 150). Maya forgets everything except the albino’s dark prophecy. She is torn between two worlds— the receding one of grace, the approaching one of madness. The warning signal ‘Danger! Danger!’ (CTP 150) rings in her ears. She does not know where to run and hide herself. She grows utterly tired and loses all sense of time and values. Despite her mighty efforts, time is trying to engulf her.

Through the contrasted pictures of these two lovers, their words, thoughts and deeds, Anita Desai establishes that perfect love on this planet is difficult to achieve. Desire for loving and being loved in return in physical, emotional and spiritual dimensions to the point of perfection is beyond attainment; hence life of those gifted with higher love-sensibilities is bound to be partly tragic.
Gautama calls Maya a lady with third class poetess’s brain. But she has a poetess’s heart and also imagination. If Gautama too possessed a passionate poetic, imaginative heart, the novel would end in some other way. Emotional alienation is the central problem of the novel and also Maya. Thus the novelist introduces the modern existentialists jargon into the texture of the book. Money, success, fame are the chief concerns of Gautama where as his family, passion, revenge, murder or something exciting is desired by Maya. Too much attachment is the diagnosis of Maya’s unrest. But she is not too much attached to life, love, Gautama but to the obsession of the doom. If she were absorbed in life, spectacle of pregnancy would not revolt her. She realizes madness creeping upon her “Yes, I am going insane… I shall soon be mad.” (CTP 108)

The turning point in her obsession comes with the flash of the idea that not she but Gautama might die. This brings reversal of affections confirming her to her selfishness. Bodily temperature results from her agonies. She has self knowledge: “I am torn between two worlds – the receding one of grace, the approaching one of madness. My body breaks in the battle.” (CTP 177)

The inner, violent, accumulated hatred of Maya for Gautama, born of selfish love of life and life’s joys, in total disregard of her husband’s claim to life erupts when Gautama calls her mad: “‘Madness’ I screamed, leaping up at him, to strike him, stab him I choked and began to cry hysterically” (CTP 178). She falls into a fit of fierce and revengeful anger. Instead of a lover, Gautama becomes an adversary. Her psychiatric hatred is caused by inadequate mating and insufficient spiritual companionship. Part III finds her
in permanent delirium at her husband’s death and what she did. She says she is better qualified for life because in love with living than Gautama – an insane ground for imparting death.

Maya notices that the season is changing. Summer is setting in, everything seems to be changing. “The light merely turned red, tinged with my own blood that crept through the hair-fine veins across my lids” (CTP 152). The resultant effect is that she can “see the world through my own blood that morning and it was red” (CTP 152). She shuts her eyes for long. She is destined to see and face the reality. The heat is “pouring in like thick, warn oil.” (CTP 152)

Maya has imprisoned herself in the world of imaginary fears and memories of past life, and cut-off from the realities of life. There is a dust-storm like Shelley’s ‘West Wind’ blowing with a violent force. This violent dust storm, known as the summer too symbolizes the storm that is blowing within Maya. Maya identifies herself with the wild aspects of the dust-storm. She enjoys its turmoil, its violence and a wild chiaroscuro oven-hot colours that churned over and over in a heat-swelled bubble around her. The dust filled house is like a tomb and it carries the odour of burial. At the end, Maya in a fit of frenzy pushes Gautama down and he falls head long and died. Similarly, Maya in a fit of madness jumps out of the open balcony and meets with the same end as Gautama.
The skillful presentation of Maya’s predicament in this novel reveals Anita Desai’s proficiency in the art of characterization. By deftly presenting the physical and psychological facets of her characters, she draws the emergence of the conflict between men and women. Her views are more often implicit. Through a series of events and descriptions the necessary response is evoked and the right emotion is elicited. Desai has employed the stream of consciousness technique to trace the process of the deterioration of Maya’s psyche.

Maya is highly imaginative. She has been brought up in a world which is romantic in every sense of the term. Her mind is filled with the joys she has experienced during those days and she is unable to brush them aside. Maya enjoys a fairy tale like world of fantasies in her childhood, her father creates for Maya, his adored and darling child, a world of her choice with unbounded love and affection. Her father never says ‘no’ to her and he never reprimands her for anything.

Maya is not only romantic but also greatly sensuous. Brought up in such an atmosphere of sensuous beauty, she develops and sharpens her inherent poetic sensibility. Most sensuous objects inspire strong responses in Maya. She always derives rich flavours of joyful feelings from the sight of a beautiful flower, its fragrance, the sight of the moon, stars and night. She even feels that she has escaped the world of sorrow when she is in the company of nature. At the sight of white petunias, she feels:
I was drawn away from pain into world that knew no pain. To draw as close as possible to the heart of that mystery was to draw close to its lovely solution. I bent over them, inhaling that mist of sad, maidenly scent, feeling mood merge into mood, sensation into sensation till there was nothing left but that mist (CTP 24). She wants to draw as close as possible to the heart of that mystery.

Maya is pained at the suffering and the helplessness of animals as well as human beings especially women. She feels sorry for the chained bear at her father’s garden and for the animal dislocated from its habitat missing its majesty and freedom. She feeds the bear with a handful of bananas. She also helps the bear-trainer with fruits when he grumbles as being neglected for an animal. She is pained at the plight of her sister-in-law, Nila whose marriage has proved a fiasco after begetting three children and ten-year relationship.

Maya always loves to be dependent on others. Before her marriage, she depends on her father for everything. She does not want to displease her father as she has seen her brother Arjuna losing her father’s affection because of his rebellious nature. After her marriage, she depends on her husband. Though he is much older to her, she agrees to marry Gautama because he is her father’s choice. There is a clash between Maya’s childhood world of fantasies and adulthood world of realities. After her marriage with Gautama she has to face the realities of life. Unfortunately her urges meet with tragic failure. In the hour of crisis she not only reverts to childhood memories to escape the present but also burst into a fit of furious pillow beating which releases her emotions.
Maya is very fond of the company of children though she is a childless woman. She also expects reciprocal love from others. Her mother-in-law, a kind-hearted and affectionate lady, is a source of comfort to her. As a motherless child, Maya longs for mother’s affection. In her mother-in-law, she is able to visualize her mother’s image. In front of her mother-in-law her father pales into insignificance. She considers her mother-in-law “a pillar of life and living, an anchor much more than her son, and the only one I had now. Oh to live in her world to be of her kind! What safety, what Peace?” (CTP 134). The visit of her mother-in-law brings relief to her and she enjoys her company. After her mother-in-law’s departure Maya finds the house empty and finds herself lonely “No, I cried, miserable. What, the house empty again, and I alone with my horrors and nightmares?” (CTP 136)

Timidity, childlike dependence and inability to face life are the characteristic traits of Maya. Her character has an overbearing relationship with that of Gautama. Maya’s predicament can be fully comprehended only with the knowledge of the mind and thought of Gautama. While Maya is emotional, sensitive and a lover of nature, Gautama is sober, prosaic, taciturn and devoid of emotions. Gautama is indifferent to Maya’s psychological demands. He thinks material comforts alone matter in life. He fails to appreciate her sensitive nature and her childlike expectations. He treats with indifference and contempt matters that are precious and remarkable for her. His prosaic attitude drives her to the brink of neurosis in the beginning and virtual madness in the end. She reveals:
Poor Gautama, not to be able to notice to odour times, not to hear the melancholy voice singing somewhere behind the plantains, not to have time to commit the stars as they come out one by one—poor Gautama, my poor husband. (CTP 206)

Maya understands the philosophy of life. She also knows that heinous murders are committed only for the sake of money or property not for love or life or basic things. It is these basic things, her love or life, her love of freedom that provoke her to kill her husband. She also feels sorry at the loss of her post marital freedom. On the other hand Gautama miserably fails not only to feel the intensity of her innermost craving but also to listen to the pathetic cry of her anguished soul also.

Maya, being suffocated in her heart, utters impatiently, “Big for comfort? Confess to my loneliness and my terror of loneliness? Unless hopeless?” (CTP 207). That is nothing but only the blind search for another realm of lucidity in the midst of chaos. Gautama on the other hand, preaches the concept of The Gita, “calm yourself! Calm yourself! Worship, make sacrifices. Pray. Do we not know the story of Prahlad! Of how Krishna saved him again”(CTP 207). He adds….. “God is all while we are nothing, like everything else, man cannot exist without God also. We trustfully resign ourselves to his hands confessing that he is all.” (CTP 220)

But all this philosophical preaching sounds shallow and worthless to Maya’s agonized soul. Arun Joshi’s novel The Foreigner represents that absence of love does not mean hatred. Hatred is just the other form of love.
One can love without attachment without desires. Love is real only when one knows that what one loves, must one day die. Only birth and death are real. Gautama explains that Maya was taught by her father all the luxuries of her infan
cy. He utters, “life is a fairy tale to you, the reality of common human existence, not love and romance, but living and dying and working, all that constitutes life for ordinary man” (CTP 115). Gautama only knows the truth of life. It is only the reason that physical love is temporary and it should not be the part and parcel of human life; it has no permanence, no spirituality and no heavenly bliss. Thus Anita Desai represents the realities of human life. Attachment leads to detachment and detachment leads to discrimination.

Thus the temperamental incompatibility of Maya with Gautama makes her feel lonely, unhappy, and unfulfilled. The married life of both is not successful. Both Maya and Gautama stand poles apart in their attitude to life. Maya is emotionally immersed in her love for life, but Gautama is a dry type of a matter – of – fact person who shuns all sentimentality. He cannot wax eloquent over birds and flowers, sights and sounds. Maya visualizes him as “a meditator beneath the Sal tree,” (CTP 46) appropriately symbolizing Gautama, the Buddha. The tussle throughout the novel is not only between the temperamental incompatibility of the husband and wife, but is also between the fairytale world of Maya and the world of stark realities of Gautama, between life-affirming and life-negating principles of life and death. Gautama dies because he is detached, Maya dies because she is attached. Anita Desai uses an apt symbol “downed the wick” to denote the heroine’s excessive involvement with life as fatal.
Desai deals with this disharmony between Maya and Gautama by presenting instances of temperamental incompatibility to bring the mental distress of Maya to its climax. Maya receives her first fatal blow when she realizes that her husband Gautama, who knows her and whom she believes will be the substitute of her father, is contrary to her expectations. Gautama not only fails to show fatherly indulgence to her demands and hopes but also shows unpardonable lapses in the duties of a husband. He poses as a great intellectual and treats Maya as a whimsical child. Overcoming her disappointment she tries her best to attract his attention towards her physical charm which also meets with failure. Maya feels frustrated and lonely. Her feeling of loneliness is further augmented by her painful awareness that she is childless. To make matters worse, her pet dog Toto dies leaving her to her misery. The result is she withdraws into a shell, becoming neurotic.

Gautama with his cold logic has no patience for the alchemy of the mind as experienced by Maya. He can find interest only in subjects like the careers of politicians, and the wealth they amass. He is an over busy professional who cannot spare much time ever for his young wife and his sister. His sister Nila wants his help to divorce her husband but Gautama dismisses her request. He tells her that he is not one of those lawyers who will sit under the banyan tree at the courts waiting for clients too low to be considered as such-prostitutes and petty swindlers. He does not have time to waste on a case like hers – “the mess she makes by being too bossy and self-willed and bullying” (CTP 161-162). He proves that he is for money and fame though he often quotes The Gita. He never makes sincere efforts to solve either his wife’s or his sister’s problems. He is so rigid that he refuses even to think of them.
Gautama has a strong tendency to recoil from touch or physical nearness because he is afraid of emotions. To hide his fear he becomes sarcastic, passive or disinterested. He is aware of his weakness in the face of his wife’s superiority at emotional level. In such moments of irritation he casts derogatory remarks not only on his wife but also on her father. Gautama’s outlook has been formed by the “self-sacrificing years of study and hard work” (CTP 93). The conditions of his early life – the freedom-fighter father always on the move, his mother left to manage things in the house – give him a sense of responsibility. He is resigned and reserved by nature. He is always self-centered. He thinks of his profession only, and never thinks of his duty to his wife.

Gautama has access only to the outward manifestations of Maya’s thoughts and these visible aspects are so fragmentary that they cannot help him to piece together the total picture of her psychic disturbance. He is highly self-centered and repeatedly refuses to save his wife Maya from loneliness. Maya appeals to him several times but receives no positive gesture from him. Thus, Desai builds up Maya’s psychological alienation from her husband gradually but unequivocally by placing them in situation after situation which reveal Gautama’s cold attitude towards her sensitive nature.

The narrative pattern of Cry, the Peacock resembles that of R. K. Narayan’s The Guide with the difference that while Raju in the later novel develops consciousness by renouncing, the kind of life he has been living, and achieves salvation in this life itself, Maya fails to develop this
consciousness and kills her husband before committing suicide. Maya’s tale of sufferings begins with her marriage to Gautama whom she had chosen that being elderly he would be like her father. But Maya’s dreams never become true because during the four years of her married life, she had become aware that Gautama would never understand her. Instead his attitude over the years had been positively hard, “no, no, not hardness, but the distance he coldly keeps from” (CTP 133). She blames Gautama’s coldness on his incessant talk of cups of tea and philosophy with which he shielded himself against the cry of her heart. She suffered his neglect and sulked before giving herself quite often up to the fits of furious pillow-bearing, kicking and crying.

It is not that Gautama does not love her but he never tries to understand her. She always craves for love to Gautama. “No one, no one else,’ I sobbed into my pillow as Gautama went into the bathroom,’ ‘loves me as my father does” (CTP 40). They were instead looked in a deadly love-hate relationship while Gautama lived on the level of conscious ideas, Maya responded to her unconscious will. Between themselves, they represented two forces of attraction and repulsion out of which all things come to be formed. S. T. Paul rightly says:

Of course each of them is thought of as an expression of the unconscious and as fulfilling a unique purpose. Gautama’s philosophy of Karmayoga may strike as dry and sterile to the ears of Maya. (S. T. Paul 3)
The plot has its exposition in the first part which describes death of Toto and grief of Maya and unethical approach of Gautama. This incident gives the first impression about the emotional character of Maya and about indifference of Gautama to his wife’s woes. This incident leaves its shadow on the life of Maya till the end of her life. The second part, being the middle part, presents several different episodes, which reveal the gap between Maya and Gautama. It is made clear that Gautama has no love for Maya because he has misconstrued the meanings of The Gita’s message against attachment with the materialistic world. His indifference leads Maya to think that he might put her life in peril. Thus this part marks the development of indifference into the feeling of antagonism. The climax occurs in the seventh chapter of the second part in which Maya is in the most agitated state of mind. Part III completes the tragedy. Maya holds herself responsible for Gautama’s death, though there is no evidence to prove that Maya had killed Gautama consciously. Like a noble character, she goes off the balance, not physically like Gautama, but mentally. She dies grief-stricken.

The novelist uses the devices of imagination and its various shades, such as fantasy, reverie, dream, and still more complex states of consciousness as nightmares, illusions, delusions, hallucinations. The traditional devices of impressionism, expressionism, imagism and symbolism are also used. The galvanizing force of the artist’s personality, detached and distant, yet working through every word, synchronizes everything to the artistic problem of the presentation of the tragic and the abnormal passion. From Freud and Freudian
theories to the basically human problem of adjustment with the world, the artist moves skillfully. Reality of sunlight and open air is constantly contrasted with shades of imagination. Words, phrases, rhythm are with feelings expressed.

The girl in the cabaret troupe and the bear under the captivity of the trainer also suggest Maya’s bandage and the loss of freedom. The image of a train speeding through the country side in the dark night evokes a sense of loneliness which assumes an added significance to Maya’s inner agonizing loneliness. Bidulata Choudhury rightly says: “The world around her is seen against her soundless inner world where only desertion prevails.” (Choudhury 61)

The dance images are very artistically employed by Desai. The first dance image that is repeated in the novel conveying a sense of growing fatality in Maya is that of a Kathakali dancer. Another dance image used is the image of the dancing Shiva which according to Hindu mythology signifies the dance of death. It suggests liberation – a way out of the puzzling predicament in which Maya finds her trapped.

The image of the dust storm is an extension of the dance image. It is portrayed elaborately in the novel. It denotes the fierce storm raging in Maya’s subconscious mind and also suggests her desire for “release from bondage, release from fate, from death and dreariness” (CTP 109-110). Maya welcomes the storm and finds in it the source of agony and ecstasy.
The dance of the peacocks stands out as the most powerful and effective of all the images used in the novel. As the title of the novel suggests, the excited dance of the peacocks is emblematic of the main theme of the novel: the inner fury of Maya. The peacock dance contributes to the mood and the theme of the novel. Maya identifies herself with the peacock who mates only after fierce fighting. Maya feels that “peacocks are wise; while living they are aware of death and while dying they are in live with life” (CTP 95-96). Like the peacock, Maya also loves Gautama passionately but Gautama fails not only to sense the intensity of her cravings for love but also to listen to the pathetic cry of her anguished soul. Madhusudan Prasad observes: “Maya in a way symbolically substantiates the agonized cry of the peacock.” (Prasad 59)

Like the cauldron scene of Macbeth numberless fearful images are heaped together. “….first it is rats eating every thing and suckling seven young ones then a god leaping and whirling by torch light, then it is snakes near the Queen of the Night then it is a desert, lizards, iguanas and the albino” (CTP 52). Gradually the hallucination is no more visual, it becomes auditory-drum beats coming closer and closer: “And softly, softly the drums crept across the desert… Nothing but the sound, irrepressible, relentless sound of drums, drums beating.” (CTP 53)

In the novel, Anita Desai exploits the literary tradition of fatalism, imagism and symbolism. Maya’s father was a fatalist and enjoyed resignation. Maya cannot learn his resignation. Leila is another fatalist believing in
predeterministic notions. Maya is not resigned but rebellious. Side by side, the philosophy of ‘Karma Yoga’ is presented in the novel. Gautama’s father is a freedom fighter and recognized activist spending more time in prisons than in open. Arjuna is another freedom fighter established in America as a worker. Gautama’s mother is a lady dedicated to human service. But unfortunately Maya is dedicated only to her inside obsessions instead of a life of action.

Stylistically, there is a continuous shift from impressionism to expressionism in the various descriptions. Part of the plot, theme and action are presented as passing through the external vision of the artist such as the scene of the party, music, the cabaret dance are presented in terms of impressionistic technique. But most of the novel is an expression of the inner experiences of Maya rendered in expressionistic terms. Her ecstasy arising from the sweetness of Urdu verses is rendered as follows: “Ah, this was it, the ultimate, absolute joy. Here lay perfection… I was filled, filled to the point of destruction. God, God, I gasped - enough, enough, no more…” (CTP 30) this is what she feels and the way she feels it.

To sum up, Maya is a sensitive young woman with an overpowering enthusiasm to live her life to its brim, but becomes a victim of marital discord. Desai deals with this disharmony between Maya and Gautama by presenting instances of temperamental incompatibility to bring the mental distress of Maya to its climax. Maya receives her first fatal blow when she realizes that her husband Gautama, her father’s friend, an aged man who knows her and whom she believes will be the substitute of her father, is contrary to her
expectations. Gautama not only fails to show fatherly indulgence to her demands and hopes but also shows unpardonable lapses in the duties of a husband. He poses as a great intellectual and treats Maya as a whimsical child. Overcoming her disappointment she tries her best to attract his attention towards her physical charm which also meets with failure.

The message of the novelist is loud and clear. Mis-matched marriages will bring misfortune to both husband and wife. If they don’t die, they will be worse than dead. Secondly, the parents should not step aside as Maya’s father has done. Thirdly, love is not the sin of attachment as Gautama thinks. Finally, the wife of any woman, for that matter, should not be confined within the four walls of the house.