

## **Murder for Freedom: A Psychoanalytic Reading of Maya struggling with the Female Oedipus complex in Cry, the Peacock**

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### **Abstract**

Literature is a true depiction of life. It isn't just about narrative in the novel, but sociological, historical, as well psychological facets. Some authors have gained expertise in amalgamating every characteristic of the period while portraying the lives of real people in their creative realm. It brings us close to the time period and the people belonging to the age as well as their social and psychological dilemma. In this case, Anita Desai, with her mastery of narrative, presents detailed characters in Indian settings. The author has special proficiency in depicting the physic of her female characters, which at times outshines the male counterparts. The female protagonists who fail to harness any attention in the reality present a picture of how life appears from their perspective. In *Cry, the Peacock*, she brings forth a constant collision between feminine perceptiveness and masculine logicalness with her strong yet fragile female character stuck in a loveless marriage. With Maya struggling with father-fixation, and Gautama prioritizing prudence over anything, the narrative is a constant crash between the mind and the heart. Maya narrates the serene beauty of the world, she is totally engrossed in the flora and fauna around her, and she desires a similar deep connection in her marriage while Gautama operates from his intellectual side, subjecting a practical opinion about everything. Thus, he fails to understand her expectation or his rational mind ignores it considering her wants rather frugal. At the heart of the novel, father-obsession is at play, and Maya psyche reveals her struggle with Female Oedipus Complex. Evidently, psychoanalysis and Freudian concepts can enhance the understanding of the early impeccable novel by Anita Desai.

**Keywords:** Oedipus complex, female protagonist, psyche

### **Introduction**

Sigmund Freud, the pioneer of psychoanalysis, with the publication of his book, *Interpretation of Dreams*, shook the intellectual world. The book didn't limit to the interpretation of his and his patient's dreams, for his early investigations, but it provided a grand picture of psychoanalysis. His huge theoretical work includes the psychosexual stages of

development. Sigmund Freud, in his book, presented the most controversial theory of the Oedipus complex, which occurs during the phallic stage of psychosexual development when a child is around 3 to 6 years. Around this age, the child develops unconscious desire for their opposite-sex parents. Meanwhile, they have an ardent rivalry toward their same-sex parent aggravating anxiety in the child. They began to imbibe the characteristics, ideologies, and values of their rival parents while substituting their desire for their opposite-sex parents with another person. The female version of the Oedipus Complex, the Electra Complex was proposed by Carl Jung, which was rejected by Freud. He replaced the theory with the Female Oedipus complex.

The male child suffers from mother-obsession until he realizes the absence of a penis in her; he assumes she has been castrated by his father. This escalates castration anxiety in the child which resolves the Oedipus complex. Like a male child, even a female child has an early fixation on the mother, but after realizing the absence of penis in her and her mother, the female child suffers from inferiority. To deal with this penis envy, the fixation shifts to the father in order to make up for the absence.

This research imparts a detailed understanding of the novel to comprehend the development of the female Oedipus complex or to say the uprising of the suppressed female Oedipus complex in the narrative which led to the murder of the seeming antagonist to seek freedom and restore life to normal. It all begins with the introduction of soulfulness of Maya.

### **Maya Is a Nature Lover**

Maya, the meaning of her name is illusion; the woman seems eluded in nature as she enters the creative imagery world. The poetic personality loses herself in nature from the beginning of the novel. She is flowers, plants, trees, sunsets, sky, and all of nature. The protagonist has a specific love for the natural surrounding she has grown into. Whether crows, flies, bees, or bluebottle, nature holds her attention, she is ever ready to delve into the minute natural beauty.

*Crows sat in a circle around the corpse, and crows will eat anything - entrails, eyes, anything. Flies began to hum amidst the limes, driving away the gentle bees and the unthinking butterflies. She thought she saw the evil glint of a bluebottle, and grew hysterical. (5)*

The above sentence, though an ephemeral instance of daily life, shows her effortless gaze at the natural surroundings around her. The narrative captures her very trait, which presents a soft, elegant feminine side of Maya, which requires delicate care and careful attention. This necessity was available during the shadow of her childhood, but marriage comes with its features and consequences. Her married life required accountability, and she misses out on the delicacy she had in her youthful years. Her husband fails to provide careful attention that the innermost subtle side of Maya desires.

### Childhood and Father Are Synonymous

Maya consistently complains about the heat of summer, while romanticizing her natural surroundings in utmost poetic affirmations. Though, she returns to a significant portion of her childhood, her yearly visit to Darjeeling with her father. Her earnest desire is to travel to the hill station to escape from the intense heat of the summer as well as to evade the mental turmoil she struggles with inside her. Some sentences explicitly describe her willingness to abscond from the present.

*'Is there so much work to be done this summer? Couldn't you get away - just for a short holiday?'* (36)

*He said, 'Where would you like to go? Darjeeling?'*

*'Father would be there,' I confessed, and felt something spring up amidst my crushed spirits, like fresh grass after rain.* (36)

Maya's longing to resume her childhood yearly routine of the summer tours to the hill station is her willingness to depart to the fairytale phase of her pampered years. Being a daughter was the best time of her life, while marriage transformed her life into a chaotic roller coaster ride, requiring permission from her husband at every step. His unavailability is a synonym for his rejection of the proposal of resuming her childhood annual chores. Escaping to Darjeeling isn't about the summer heat, it's more about setting feet into the golden phase of her youth when everything was available at a distance from her hand, and life was a plaything.

The protagonist misses her childhood, but she misses the most imperative part of her childhood, her father. After losing her mother at an early age and her brother studying abroad, her father was her only caregiver, who never disappointed her. Her words express her love for her father, visible in various instances.

*'No one, no one else,' I sobbed into my pillow as Gautama went into the bathroom, 'loves me as my father does.'* (40)

Maya loved her father diligently; her love was reciprocal to her father's love for her. The protagonist clarifies she does reminisce about her childhood, and her father as well. This tug of war makes up half of the novel hidden underneath the beautiful wordplay of another neurotic character by Anita Desai.

*In Gautama's family one did not speak of love, far less of affection. One spoke -they spoke -of discussions in parliament, of cases of bribery and corruption revealed in government, of news- paper editors accused of libel, and the trials that followed, of trade pacts made with countries across the seas, of political treaties with those across the mountains, of distant revolutions, of rice scarcity and grain harvests . . . They had innumerable subjects to speak on, and they spoke incessantly. Sometimes, in order to*

*relax, they played games of cards, so swiftly, so nervously, so intently, that they found they had to release the mounting pressure by conversing, and would begin to talk again, of political scandal and intellectual dissent (40-41)*

The analogy of her emotionality and intellectuality depicts the divide residing from the beginning between the protagonist and her husband as well as her husband's family. They are all about the world, on the other hand, she is all about sentiments incompetent to understand their intricate yet complicated worldly things.

### **Gautama's Unresponsive Comment**

Like Maya whose name remunerate illusion, the name of her husband Gautama means Lord Buddha, ironically, his personality and intellect match to a great extent. In every scenario, his rational sides take over the matter to present a practical view of the situation. When Maya displays her desire to escape the heat of the town by visiting hill station, he makes a sheer excuse for work. The lawyer puts forth the pending cases and the current occupations to avoid her insensitive childlike wants.

The man of the house understands the innermost yearning of his wife Maya, he understands it well but ignores it. His analytical mind sees Maya's romantic outlook of the world, as a trifle. This is another reason why the neurotic side of Maya keeps on increasing as the narrative proceeds. She remembers the prophecy of the albino astrologer, who declared the 4<sup>th</sup> year of her marriage requires a sacrifice. Someone has to give up something. It begins to take a toll on the protagonist, it buzzes in her frequently, and her mental trauma is visible to the reader in a sort of wordplay.

*'People are looking!' And the dancer, too, and, from a distance, a maniac albino. His shadow lapped me. (139)*

Gautama continues to ignore her increasing mania. He finds it irritating and his intellectual brain is well trained to avoid the major alteration in Maya's behaviour. Gautama could have saved her sloping on the different side, if he would have been a little more attentive to her; it isn't about the delicate care her fragile side required, but even minimum concern.

Instead, he calls out her subconscious father fixation, on top of his voice. She didn't marry Gautama for him but as a father surrogate. A man of her father's age, but unlike her father's thoughtfulness.

*You have a very obvious father obsession-which is also the reason why you married a man so much older than yourself. (CP 146)*

He declares the reason behind her marrying Gautama. According to Freud, female children are obsessed with father, they try to imbibe the characteristics of same-sex parents, while in adult age, and they try to replace the father figure with a partner of similar behaviours

and traits. Anita Desai's *Cry the Peacock* deliberately structures the novel around the Freudian theoretical work of the Oedipus complex, suppressed hither and thither in the neurotic wordplay of the protagonist.

### **Mother-in-Law and Sister-in-Law: Escape from Neurosis**

Her household becomes a blissful place with the arrival of her mother-in-law and sister-in-law. Maya missed the feeling of belongingness, which was accessible at her home. With the arrival of her female relative, she ventures into the happy phase of her life. They roam around the city for shopping and enjoying their time. Through, Maya at times gets erratic with the new development in her life, but she relishes it.

*'Look at her, she's quite bright-eyed again,' said Gautama who had come to sit with us a while that last evening before they left, with so rare a smile, I hardly believed it to be a smile. 'You have done her good, you should stay longer.'* (139-140)

Even her husband notices the breakthrough from her generally neurotic as well as unsatisfied self. He mentions the sudden drift in Maya's personality. The Id and superego balance up and the ego took over her. This is reflected in the calmness and transitions in the demeanour of the protagonist.

*'No,' I cried, miserable. What, the house empty again, and I alone with my horrors and nightmares? No! If they stayed a while, they might help me, as my own father could not, by teaching me some of that marvellous indifference to everything that was not vital, immediate and present. I did not know how they could do this, but somehow it had to be done. They were sane people, sane, sane, and yet so much more human than my own husband. God, to be alone with him again, my unknowing, unsuspecting and steel-hard adversary in this oneiric battle, all night, all day, for how many more nights, how many more days? God, to have to start counting them again, in utter loneliness! 'No,' I begged, and flung myself at her knees, feeling her warmth radiate towards me. 'Stay - stay another week. There'll be a dust-storm, it'll be cooler-'* (140)

Even though she is aware of her inclination toward insanity, her sister-in-law and mother-in-law appear as a rescue from the point of no return. They are better companions than Gautama who knowingly keeps pushing on her neurotic side. She insists they stay consistent, but they leave as per their plan.

*Trains passing in the night, I cannot bear to hear them. They all leave me behind, alone.* (141)

*That was an interval of sanity, of lucidity, as of a bright day in the middle of the week when it is still too early to think of the coming Sunday, too late to remember the past*

*one. And yet, remember is all I did in those intervals between the intimacies established between my guests and myself, and all I did once I was alone again. (141-142)*

The departure of her female relatives further let her sink into the darkness residing in her head. There is a sudden elevation in neurotic behavior of Maya. The prophecy of her childhood echoes in her head all the time. The repetition of the same image and of the same worlds at times is strong. It showcases the impact, a thing of childhood has poured over her. However, the departure of her sister-in-law and mother-in-law further magnifies the nuisance.

### **Murdering Gautama: An Attempt to Reset Life**

Maya's mind is stuck in a childhood memory; the prophecy of the albino astrologer reverberates in her head all the time. Either she or her husband has to die in the fourth year of their marriage. Even during the peak of her neurotic behavior, her sensitive outlook toward nature continued, as if the superego trying to divert her attention.

*The birds were quiet at last, each having found a perch to rest on, and the music lesson had begun. The high, tinny sound of the nimble sitar raced up and down the scales, too softly to irk, and the voice that followed it was too childish, too strained with effort to be mocked. Bats swooped across from end to end, lightning swift, but dark, and the small squeals they emitted might have been bits of stars tinkling to earth. (176-177)*

It was the fourth year, it was either her or Gautama, she had to pick one, and the jostling between Id and Superego continues until she chooses herself. They went to the terrace in the evening to rejoice in the beauty of nature. She expresses her surrounding with beautiful expressions.

*And then we turned again, walking towards the terraced end now, and I saw, behind the line of trees that marked the horizon, the pale, hushed glow of the rising moon. I held him there, while I gazed at it, watching the rim of it climb swiftly above the trees, and then walked towards it in a dream of love. (179)*

Gautama blocks the bright moon in the sky, which infuriates Maya. She pushes him from the edge of the roof. Actually, the moon embodies his father, Gautama is an obstacle restricting the father-fixation. The impulsion of removing the husband was present from the beginning, and the prophecy in the background intensified the compulsion. Eventually, the protagonist completes the ardent subconscious desire when her Ed takes over her. Gautama is out of the way.

*And then Gautama made a mistake -his last, decisive one. In 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. 'Gautama!' I screamed in fury, and thrust out my arms towards him, out at him, into him and past*

*him, saw him fall then, pass through an immensity of air, down to the very bottom.  
(179)*

The murder of Gautama provides the freedom Maya wanted. With this, the female Oedipus complex completes a major step, with no restriction; Maya is at liberty to return to the old life, her childhood home to her father.

### **Undesired Consequences**

Gautama is gone. She has chosen her life over him. She is in love with living, but the freedom has done no good. Maya slides to the neurotic side, her voice changes consistently going shrill and pale and whatnot. She enjoys retelling how she accomplished her task. How choosing herself, was a compulsion for Maya. Her sister-in-law and mother-in-law are back in the house. They are waiting for her father to arrive. So, she could return to her previous life.

### **Conclusion**

Ravi in his comparative study of Anita Desai's *Cry, The Peacock & Voices In The City* observed Electra complex resulted in affection in Maya. There's more to affection. Gautama replacing the father figure doesn't resolve the complex, because he never was the appropriate replacement. Thus, it aggravates the situation by developing a diversion from father-obsession. This complex breach emerges as the reason for the decline of Maya toward suppressed or existing neurosis. Moreover, there isn't a constant collision just between Gautama's rationality and the Protagonist's sensitivity, but Superego and Id, which they personify respectively.

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