

Unraveling the Tapestry of Self: A Study of Identity in Anita Desai's 'Cry, The Peacock'

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Abstract

The study delves into the intricacies of identity as portrayed in Desai's seminal work. Through a meticulous analysis of character dynamics, narrative techniques, and thematic motifs, this study examines the protagonist's journey towards self-discovery amidst a backdrop of societal expectations and personal turmoil. Drawing on Desai's nuanced prose and psychological depth, the research sheds light on the complexities of identity formation, exploring themes of alienation, familial pressures, and the search for autonomy. By delving into the psychological intricacies of the characters and their interactions, this study offers valuable insights into the ways in which Desai explores the human quest for identity and belonging in a rapidly changing world.

Keywords: Identity exploration, Human quest, alienation, familial pressures, and the search for autonomy.

Introduction

In the landscape of literature, Anita Desai stands as a luminary, known for her penetrating exploration of the human psyche and intricate portrayal of societal dynamics. Among her notable works, "Cry, The Peacock" emerges as a compelling canvas upon which Desai paints a vivid depiction of the complexities of identity. In this seminal work, Desai delves deep into the labyrinthine corridors of the human soul, unraveling the intricate tapestry of self amidst the backdrop of societal expectations and personal turmoil. The study encapsulates the essence of our exploration. Through a meticulous analysis of character dynamics, narrative techniques, and thematic motifs, this study endeavors to dissect the protagonist's journey towards self-discovery. Against the canvas of post-colonial India, Desai masterfully navigates the protagonist's internal landscape, laying bare the complexities of identity formation in a rapidly evolving society.

At the heart of our inquiry lies a quest to understand how Desai's nuanced prose and psychological depth shed light on the intricacies of identity. Themes of alienation, familial pressures, and the search for autonomy permeate the narrative, inviting readers to reflect on their own struggles with identity and belonging. Through the lens of "Cry, The Peacock," we aim to unearth the universal truths embedded within Desai's exploration of the human condition. "Cry, The Peacock," delving deep into its thematic depths and narrative intricacies. Through close examination and thoughtful analysis, we seek to uncover the profound truths and timeless insights that lie at the heart of Desai's magnum opus, offering new perspectives on the enduring relevance of identity in the human experience. It stands as one of the seminal novels delving deeply into the psychological realms of its characters. This novel explores the intricate psychological dimensions of Maya, who grapples with her husband Gautama's inability to recognize the

wrongs he has inflicted upon her through their marriage and his neglect. Maya is depicted as a sensitive individual who lost her mother at an early age and was raised by an overprotective father imbued with traditional Brahmin values, including a strong belief in fate and destiny. Her father introduced her to astrology, embedding its influence in her from a young age.

In her childhood, Maya's caretaker took her to an albino astrologer who predicted that either Maya or her husband would die an unnatural death in the fourth year of her marriage. This prophecy shocked Maya, leading to a seizure that night. In an attempt to protect her, Maya's father burned the astrology chart and dismissed astrology as irrational. However, Maya, having witnessed her father's adherence to astrological practices, found it difficult to accept his sudden denunciation. The more vehement his rejection of astrology, the more deeply Maya's faith in it solidified. This planted seeds of fear, confusion, and cognitive dissonance in her mind.

Maya pondered the disconnect between herself and her husband, perplexed by her futile endeavors to forge a meaningful connection between them:

“It was discouraging to reflect on how much in our marriage was based on a nobility forced upon us from outside... It was broken repeatedly, and repeatedly the pieces were picked up and put together again, as if a sacred icon with which, out of the pettiest superstition, we could not bear to part”. (Cry, The Peacock 38)

Maya's psychological struggles manifest vividly in the train of her thoughts. Over time, she begins to perceive her marriage with Gautama not as a union born out of love, but rather as a societal arrangement sustained by the fear of social judgment surrounding divorce. Her introspections frequently revolve around the nature of her relationship with Gautama, questioning the validity of their union. Despite the absence of affection and emotional connection, Maya finds herself trapped within the confines of societal expectations, unable to liberate herself from the loveless marriage that has become an enduring, bleak reality in her life.

Plagued by profound loneliness within her marital union, she found herself ruminating incessantly on the purpose of her existence, igniting a fervent search for self-identity. This internal struggle and pursuit for self-definition are evident in the following excerpt:

“His coldness and incessant talk of cups of tea and philosophy in order not to hear me talk, and talking reveal myself. It is that – my loneliness in this house”. (Cry, The Peacock 14)

The Rationale of the Study

The study lies in the significance of Anita Desai's exploration of identity within her seminal work, "Cry, The Peacock." Desai's novels are renowned for their profound psychological depth and keen exploration of human experience, particularly in relation to themes of identity, belonging, and cultural conflict. "Cry, The Peacock" stands as a cornerstone in Desai's body of work, offering a rich tapestry of characters navigating the complexities of self-discovery amidst societal expectations and personal turmoil. By undertaking a meticulous analysis of character dynamics, narrative techniques, and thematic motifs within "Cry, The Peacock," this study seeks to illuminate the ways in which Desai delves into the intricacies of identity formation. The protagonist's journey towards self-discovery serves as a lens through which Desai explores the tensions between individual desires and societal constraints, shedding light on universal aspects of the human condition.

Furthermore, Desai's nuanced prose and psychological depth provide fertile ground for examining themes of alienation, familial pressures, and the search for autonomy within the context of the novel. Through a

close examination of these elements, this study aims to offer valuable insights into Desai's portrayal of the human quest for identity and belonging in a rapidly changing world. Ultimately, by unraveling the tapestry of self in "Cry, The Peacock," this study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of Desai's literary prowess and the enduring relevance of her exploration of identity themes in contemporary literature.

Literature Reviews

In "*Feminine Sensibility in Anita Desai's Cry, the Peacock*," Dar (2013) contends that Anita Desai's writing challenges the stereotypical image of the submissive Indian woman lacking individuality. She emphasizes that Desai's work explores feminine sensibilities and the dissatisfaction with patriarchal norms, stemming from a realization of self-worth. Dar notes that the quest for self-identity is central to Desai's narratives.

In his article titled "*Gender Dynamics and Feminist Consciousness in the Novels of Anita Desai*," Uddin (2014) contextualizes Desai's works within the socio-cultural and political landscape of India. Uddin notes Desai's focus on middle and upper-class women while acknowledging her portrayal of subaltern women, which provides a socio-historic lens into Indian society. He highlights Desai's exploration of women's evolving consciousness, as her protagonists strive for autonomy amidst familial pressures. Uddin asserts that Desai's narratives unveil the patriarchal oppression women endure, particularly in the realm of sexuality. He contends that Desai's female characters are ensnared by the societal pedestal of "the Sati-Savitri-parampara," dictating a woman's worth based on chastity and patriarchally prescribed virtues.

Pati (2015) in her book "*Representation of Women in Anita Desai's Novels*," lauds Desai's innovative approach to representing women in literature. Pati analyzes Desai's use of narration, character comparison, and symbolism to explore the diverse feminine experiences depicted in her works. She praises Desai's sensitive portrayal of women, attributing it to the author's profound understanding of the female psyche. Pati contends that Desai meticulously crafts her characters to highlight their self-awareness and daily struggles, presenting a nuanced portrayal of the feminine perspective. Contrary to being labeled a rebellious feminist influenced by Western ideologies, Pati argues that Desai simply seeks to expose the imbalances inherent in male-female relationships through her writing.

In her article "*Communication Gap between Husband and Wife in Anita Desai's Cry, the Peacock and Where Shall We Go This Summer?*" Rathore (2017) argues that Desai's novels reflect Indian society, where women are expected to be submissive according to their husbands' demands. Desai highlights this expectation as a source of marital conflict and alienation in her works.

In her article "*Feminism in Anita Desai's Cry, The Peacock*," Kaur Dhaliwal (2018) challenges the idea that Maya was inherently neurotic. Instead, she argues that Maya was initially a normal woman who became neurotic due to the lack of understanding and communication from her husband.

Research Gap

Considerable research has been conducted on various English novelists, focusing primarily on their subject matter and stylistic elements. This study, however, concentrates specifically on the depiction of women's identities within the realm of post-colonial literature. The quest for identity is a recurring motif in the literary endeavors of Anita Desai, esteemed figures in contemporary Indian literature. Their narratives intricately examine the complexities of individual and cultural identity amidst the backdrop of modernity, globalization, and societal evolution.

Objective:

To analyze the portrayal of identity in Anita Desai's novel "Cry, The Peacock."

Research Methodology:

This study aims to explore the theme of identity in the literary works of Anita Desai and Kiran Desai, focusing specifically on their narrative style. The research has employed a qualitative approach, utilizing literary analysis techniques to delve into the portrayal of identity in selected texts by both authors. Firstly, the research involves the selection of key literary works by Anita Desai and Kiran Desai that prominently feature themes of identity. These works are chosen based on their critical reception, thematic relevance, and availability of scholarly resources for analysis. Once the primary texts have been identified, the research proceeded with a close reading of the selected passages, paying particular attention to the narrative techniques employed by the authors to develop and depict characters' identities.

Findings

- The study "Unraveling the Tapestry of Self: A Study of Identity in Anita Desai's 'Cry, The Peacock'" revealed a nuanced exploration of identity within the novel.
- Through an analysis of character dynamics, narrative techniques, and thematic motifs, it became evident that Anita Desai intricately examines the complexities of self-discovery amidst societal expectations and personal turmoil.
- The protagonist's journey towards understanding her identity unfolds against a backdrop of alienation and familial pressures, highlighting the tension between individual desires and societal constraints.
- Desai's adept use of psychological depth and nuanced prose offers valuable insights into the human quest for identity and belonging in a rapidly changing world, making "Cry, The Peacock" a seminal work in the exploration of identity themes within literature.

Conclusion

In delving into the multifaceted theme of identity across Anita Desai's body of work, it becomes evident that her novels serve as rich tapestries reflecting the intricate nuances of human existence. Through characters grappling with questions of selfhood, cultural displacement, and societal expectations, Desai crafts narratives that resonate deeply with readers on a universal level. She deftly navigates the complexities of individual and cultural identity against the backdrop of a rapidly changing world, inviting readers to ponder the fluid nature of identity and the myriad influences that shape it. Desai's characters often find themselves torn between conflicting allegiances, whether it be to tradition versus modernity, East versus West, or the pull of familial expectations versus personal aspirations. Yet, amidst these tensions, Desai offers glimpses of resilience, as her characters navigate the complexities of their inner worlds with courage and introspection.

Through her nuanced prose and keen psychological insight, Desai invites readers to confront their own conceptions of identity and belonging. Her novels serve as mirrors reflecting the human experience in all its complexity, challenging us to consider the ways in which identity is shaped by culture, history, and personal experience. In conclusion, Anita Desai's exploration of identity in her novels is a testament to her skill as a storyteller and her deep understanding of the human condition. Through her characters' journeys of self-discovery, Desai reminds us of the universal quest for meaning and belonging that unites us all as

human beings. Her work continues to resonate with readers around the world, offering profound insights into the enduring mysteries of identity and selfhood

Through a meticulous analysis of character dynamics, narrative techniques, and thematic motifs, this study has illuminated the intricacies of identity exploration in Anita Desai's novel "Cry, The Peacock." The protagonist's journey towards self-discovery serves as a compelling exploration of the tensions between individual desires and societal expectations, shedding light on universal aspects of the human experience. Desai's nuanced portrayal of themes such as alienation, familial pressures, and the search for autonomy offers valuable insights into the complexities of identity formation in a rapidly changing world.

Recommendations for Future Research:

Future research endeavors could delve deeper into specific aspects of identity exploration within Desai's works, examining the influence of cultural context, gender dynamics, and socio-political factors on character development. Additionally, comparative studies with other novels by Desai or works within the broader spectrum of postcolonial literature could offer enriching insights into the thematic concerns and narrative techniques employed by the author. Exploring the reception and interpretation of Desai's novels across different cultural and linguistic contexts could also provide valuable perspectives on the universality of her themes and the enduring relevance of her literary contributions.

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