

Indian Fiction in English
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Lecture - 15
Cry, the Peacock

Good morning. In the year 2008, the critic Geetanjali Singh Chanda, she published a book titled Indian Women in the House of Fiction. So today before we start discussing Anita Desai's novel Cry, the Peacock I wanted to introduce to some of the concepts that she talks about in her seminal work Indian Women in the House of Fiction. While we were introducing genre and the critical tradition which formulated this genre this discipline Indian Fiction in English.

We spoke about how at a certain historical period the entire oeuvre of work which falls under the label Indian Fiction Indian writing in English. They were brought together and this was beginning to be offered as a course by Srinivasa Iyengar. We began to see how Meenakshi Mukherjee makes this intervention by talking particularly about the genre of fiction and she began to alert us to the need to look at the genre specifically in the Indian historical context.

And it was only much later from the 1990s onwards we began to pay very definite, very focused attention on woman who are writing in this house of Indian English a Fiction. So Geetanjali Singh Chanda's work is positioned at a certain historical period when women's writings are gaining a certain attention and there is a sensibility that beyond enjoying mere visibility.

There should also be sufficient critical attention, there should also be sufficient problematization of women's writing especially in the context to the newfound visibility in the 1980s in the post-Rushdie period.

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Geetanjali Singh Chanda

"It was a restless, April-hot Delhi day and I was almost 19. I read Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock*. The shock of recognition made me realise what I had missed in my study of canonical English literature. It was not just the presentation of an Indian context or names and people who looked and spoke like me, but the texture of the emotionally nuanced mindscapes of Desai's women characters that resonated and called me to myself. My heartfelt thanks to [those] who continued to write even when Indian women's writing in English was often viewed as mimicry" (2008)

I find Geetanjali Singh Chanda's introduction to this was particularly useful. It is located historically. She talks about how her own training had made her insufficiently attentive to certain kinds of texts and I quote from the introduction that she wrote in 2008. It was a restless April-hot Delhi day and I was almost 19. I read Anita Desai's, *Cry, the Peacock*. The shock of recognition may be realized what I had missed in my study of canonical English literature.

It was not just the presentation of an Indian context or names and people who has looked and spoke like me but the texture of the emotionally nuanced mindscapes of Desai's women characters that resonated and called me to myself. My heartfelt thanks to those who continued to write even when Indian women's writing in English was often viewed as mimicry. She speaks about the need to reinvent the Canon, need to reinvent the formulations, the lens through which Indian women's writing was seen until that point of time.

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Situating women in the nation

- o Colonial interventions - English education – vehicle for social reform and modernisation
- o The status of women – a central issue in India's modernity
- o 'the morally enabling' texts of English culture, the desire to help women become 'companionate wives'
- o Partha Chatterjee's "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question" (1989)

If we try to situate a woman in the nation, we just forget about how it is positioned when an Indian writing in English or Indian Fiction of English if we try to situate women and the aspects of general in the context of the nation we may have to begin really way back from the 19th century onwards with the colonial interventions. We know about the kind of impetus that English education received after Macaulay's Minutes in 1835.

And the English education, the different modes of modernities those were all seen as vehicles for social reform in modernization and we have also seen how the national reformers also found this idea extremely conducive that English education can in multiple ways enhance the kind of modernity, the kind of initiation into modernity that India was encountering them.

And the status of the women, it was always a central concern for India's modernity. When we talk about gender, when we talk about the issues related to women, it is difficult not to speak also about the various interventions initiated by the nationalist reformers and also the colonial administrators. We know about the extensive discourse in the context of the movements against sati or the advocacy for widow remarriage, about the need for female literacy, about the need to fight female infanticide.

So the women question was always at the center of India's encounter with modernity. English education most of the national reformers and the colonial administrators believed would try and take a mid-path as far as a women's question is concerned. For that in that sense, we find that women were introduced to a number of morally enabling text of English culture which

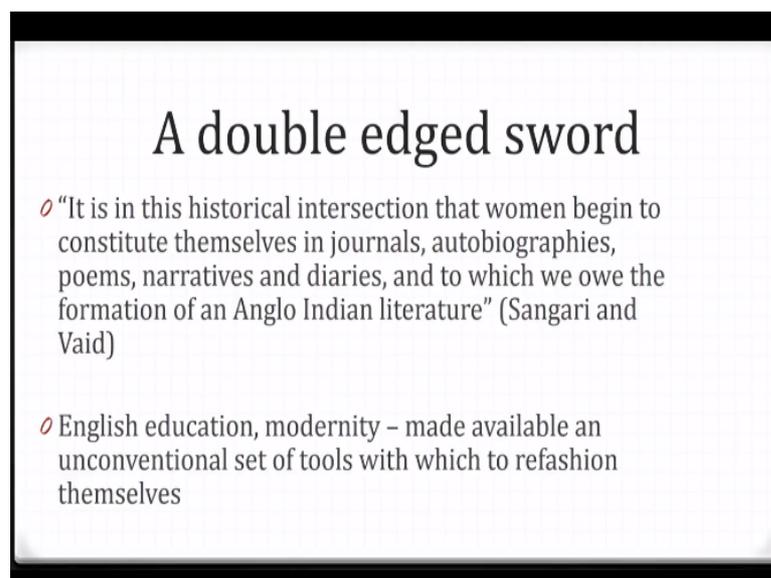
they thought would be useful in order to retain certain traditional aspects which were part of the Indian culture.

And also initiate them into modernity, initiate them into English education as far as the need of the hour was concerned. So there was this desire within the nationalist men and as well as modern educated men of those periods to help women become companionate wives. They did not want the woman to break out entirely of the traditional strongholds. They did not want the women to challenge all kinds of traditional notions.

They wanted patriarchy to exist in the certain form but at the same time they wanted to enable the women to become companionate wives and in a larger sense of we extend this argument, the women were needed to support the framing, support the formation of a modern nation but it also had to be ensured that women were continued to be bearers of tradition, women will continue to ensure that tradition is not entirely destroyed with this newfound enabling modes of modernity.

Partha Chatterjee very centrally addresses this question in his 1989 essay the nationalist resolution of the women's question and a couple of sessions earlier also we did refer to this essay. The English education and the newfound access to various vehicles of modernity.

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A double edged sword

- o "It is in this historical intersection that women begin to constitute themselves in journals, autobiographies, poems, narratives and diaries, and to which we owe the formation of an Anglo Indian literature" (Sangari and Vaid)
- o English education, modernity - made available an unconventional set of tools with which to refashion themselves

This was found to be a double edged sword as well. Kumkum Sangari and Vaid, they have done some interesting work on this aspect at the intersection of the tradition and modernity especially with respect to women. They have noted I read from their work. It is in this

historical intersection that women begin to constitute themselves in journals, autobiographies, poems, narratives and diaries and to which we owe the formation of an Anglo Indian literature.

Here Kumkum Sangari and Vaid are talking about an early phase from the late 19th century and early 20th century onwards. This is also a phase when English education is being made available to all men and women mostly from a certain class. We also get to know that these women who are being educated to become companionate wives, being taught to maintain a certain kind of a balance between tradition and modernity.

They are also being encouraged to write and this becomes a double edged sword. Modernization, the use of English language not only enables them to become good individuals and good wives and educated citizens of the modern nation but it also encourages them to express themselves. This was perhaps something that the nation was not yet ready to deal with.

That is a different question altogether that we shall not be going into the details of right away but what I am trying to suggest here is that English education and modernity which were predominantly colonial tools which were predominantly the tools of the nationalist establishments. We find that those made available to women and unconventional set of tools and they use these tools to refashion themselves.

In one of the earlier sessions when we had briefly taken a look at the one of the earliest Malayalam novels Indulekha. We did see how this central protagonist Indulekha is being enabled to refashion herself in certain ways and think about a woman who is not only now introduced to English education but she also has a power to express herself. So this is what education and modernity together began to do to women's writing in the early 20th century.

And this has been termed as a two-fold adventure by Meenakshi Mukherjee. She talks about how these women were also forced to reconcile between two sets of values.

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A two-fold adventure

- “to reconcile two sets of values – one obtained by reading an alien literature and the other available in life” (Meenakshi Mukherjee)
- Attia Hossain’s Sunlight on a Broken Column – the chasm between English education and an Indian lifestyle – anxieties of ‘belonging’

The one set of value was predominantly western, this was obtained by reading an alien literature written in English produced from England and the other was their own experience, the experience that was made available to them from their own immediate context from their own engagements with family with society and with the different context of the nation. This did deal at least some of them to a lot of dilemma.

They had to choose between this alien culture which was enabling there and the immediate context immediate life context which were closer to their heart but at the same time were delimiting and were containing them in multiple ways. If you take one of the earliest examples Attia Hosain’s partition novel, Sunlight on a Broken Column, it speaks about the case of between English education and Indian lifestyle.

And there we find these articulations of the anxieties of belonging of identity of the need to associate oneself with a certain community.

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The act of writing

- A subversive activity
- Ultimate transgression can render them homeless!
- For women across a broad spectrum of age, community, regions, class and caste – English and bhasha

The act of writing historically if we overview it particularly when it comes to women, it is always been seen as a subversive activity. We do find the kind of containment which was at work when we came to addressing the issues related to the act of writing by women and women across borders, across the irrespective of the differences in terms of region, language, community, class, caste, everything.

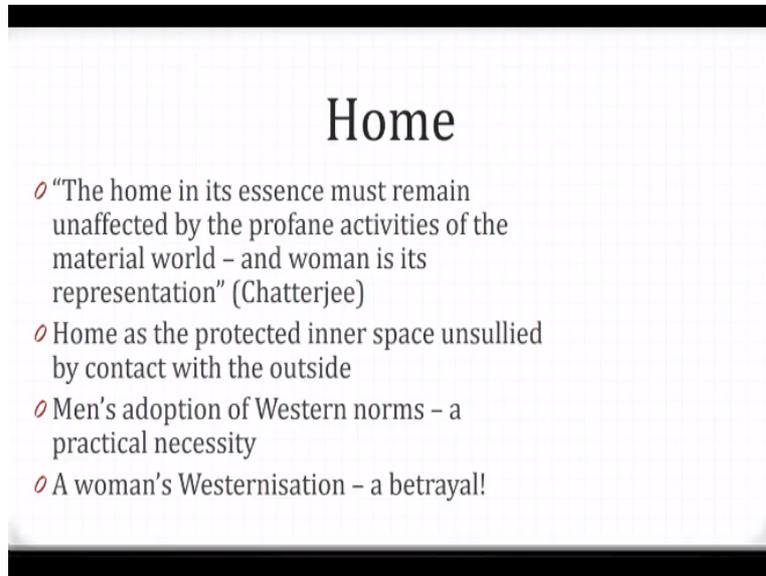
Women across a broad spectrum of all of these material things, they have realized that ultimate transgression can render them homeless and this is evident not just in certain kinds of cultures and certain kinds of languages, we do find these sort of challenging articulations coming out from women writers even at the risk of endangering themselves in various ways.

We find this in the English tradition tension if you take a look at it the writings of Virginia Woolf and how she even questions the absence of space when it comes to the ways in which the women writer operates. So now I am trying to draw your attention to the idea of home and how the act of writing which was being carried out from this home space as far as the early 20th century is concerned, this home space is the yet to be nation and the external influences are the colonial influences.

When we move a little ahead in time during the post-independence period, that is the period when this novel that you get about discussed today Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* is written. During that time women are still being made to negotiate between these different spaces made available to them. They are still not too sure of how much they can express themselves, how much they are allowed to transgress, "a love to use it."

They are still not sure how much of the modernity can be used to enable them and not too sure how much traditional they are expected to become in order to not in danger, the kinds of facilities which are being made available to them.

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So home in that sense if we go back to Partha Chatterjee essay again which is a useful entry point whenever we talk about the issues of nation and how women are situated in that. He illustrates this idea to show as the role played by the idea of home with a national space. The home in its essence must remain unaffected by the profane activities of the material world and woman is its representation.

Partha Chatterjee is not talking about the literary writing. He is not talking about Indian writing in English. He is not talking about the writing of fiction by women but this becomes very useful. This is useful for us to understand how even within Indian Fiction in English even within this space of literary writing, there is a way in which women are being invested but the responsibility of protecting home as the inner space.

And this space needs to be unsullied by contact with outside. It is his inside, outside dichotomy that we find being played out in most of the works written by women writers. This may operate at various levels when we look at a novel like Heat and Dust. We know that the outside inside dichotomy is played out in the totally different way altogether. There we find a woman who is not entirely an Indian.

But who has acquired a certain lived experience in India who comes into contact with certain Indian men with whom she is negotiating certain relationships, relationships which are also sexual in nature but when it comes to a writer like Anita Desai and her novel *Cry, the Peacock*, we find a different kind of inside and outside at work. We find citizens of the same country, we find men and women who belong to the same country, the same nation being forced to negotiate the amount of space that they can occupy within the home.

And in that context it is also useful to remember that right from the beginning the men's adoption to western norms, men's uncritical adoption of modernity that was always seen as a practical necessity. There were no moral links to it, it was not seen as an act of loyalty or as an act of defiance nevertheless we may also recall some of the anxieties at writers like Raja Rao had in writing in an alien language.

But nevertheless when they justify the need to write in English and when they produce their first work and the body of writing in the alien language in the foreign language they are not being judged for that. On the contrary, their nationalist loyalties, the practical necessity of this all of those are further strengthened.

But as far as a woman is concerned, a woman's westernization has always been seen as a betrayal which is why we have a number of writings from the 19th century onwards giving moral quotes to women, how to behave, how to behave in this society so that your traditional values are not compromised beyond a certain extent. So this dichotomy is extremely interesting if I could draw your attention to the novel that we discussed in the previous class, *A Strange Case of Billy Biswas* by Arun Joshi.

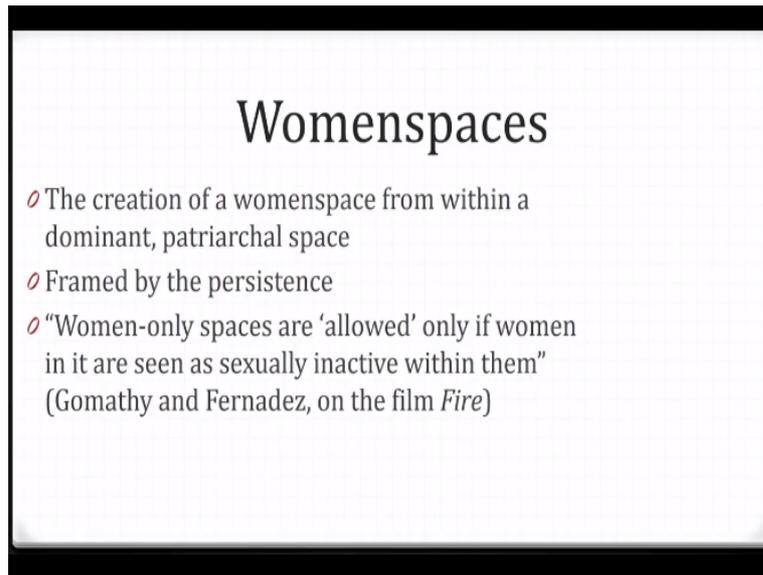
We find that the man is at love to do a number of things because his resolution with modernity because he finds that extremely important to identify and be in terms with his own self and the transgression, the sexual transgressions, the moral choice of that he makes the betrayal if one could call it so that the family faces those are not seen as moral or amoral choices.

On the other hand, those are seen as ways in which the man is allowed to respond to his self the calling yourself. He is allowed to run away from home but one needs to wait and see whether those kinds of choices are being made available to the woman who is a protagonist in

this novel *Cry, the Peacock*. We find that she is forced to act. She is forced to behave only in response to certain confinements of home, certain expectations.

And her liberation cannot be at the expense of many other things which surround her, the stakes are placed quite differently as far as the woman is concerned. Those are certain things that we shall come back to which we will try to come back at a later point.

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I would like to present this case to you that within the space of Indian Fiction, the women spaces are created from within a dominant patriarchal space and this is an argument which some of the feminist critics have also put forward and they also argue that this has been framed by certain kind of persistence and these women-only spaces, this is again in the context of screening of the film *Fire* which had caused a lot of controversy on account of his homosexual contents.

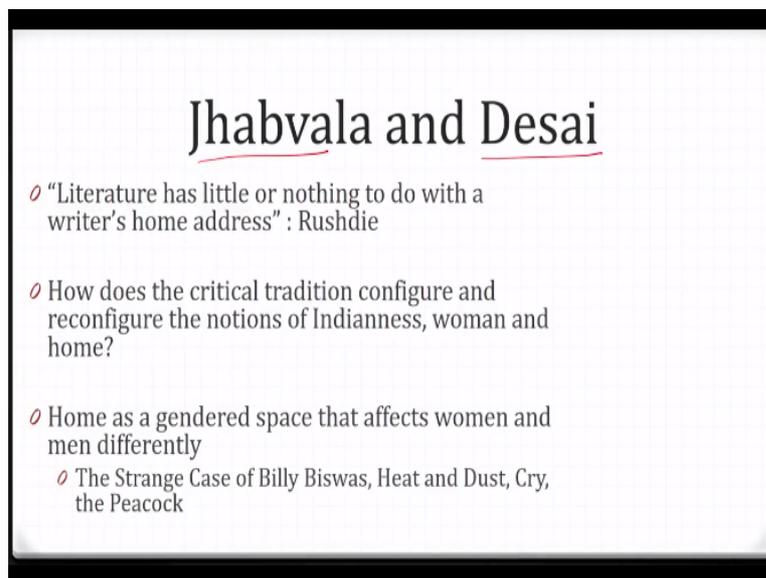
And Gomathy and Fernandez who are social activists and feminist activist who were responding to the issues related to the film *Fire*. They stated that the women-only spaces are allowed only if women in it are seen as sexually active within that. So there is a provision for allowing women on least spaces.

There is a provision for enabling women spaces, but those spaces and the articulations which come out of those spaces should not necessarily challenge or subvert any of the existing notions. This seems to be the deal and unfortunately to a very large extent, we find that the

women space which is generated from the space of Indian Fiction in English that also operates within this dominant patriarchal space.

This is not to say that there is a formula for this kind of an operation, we do find some of the novels say for example Arundhati Roy's *God of Small Things* challenging the gender rules in significant ways. There are women moving out of the patriarchal space and carving out to need space for themselves though there is lot of stake that is a different question altogether again.

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Here I want to take this liberty to very quickly to a comparison between Jhabvala whose work we saw little earlier and Desai's work which we are just about to see. In the first essay that we discussed, the introduction to *Vintage Book of Indian writing* coedited by Rushdie and Elizabeth West. He argues the literature has a little or nothing to do with the writer's home address. Is this a case?

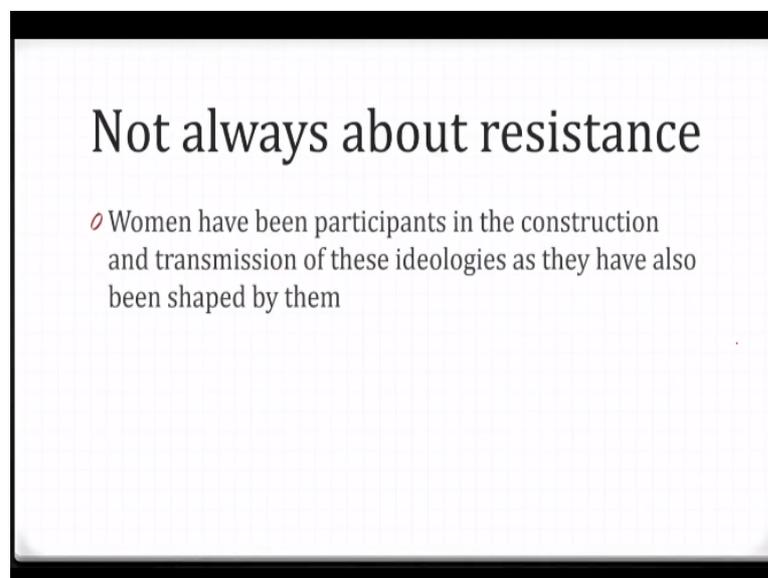
We need to ask how the critical tradition configures and reconfigures notions of Indianness, women and home. If you take two writers, Jhabvala and Desai who are from totally different backgrounds whose claims to Indianness are placed in two different ways whose lived experiences are evaluated and are framed through various other social political mediations. You need to ask whether their home address plays a role or not in the way their works are received.

One also needs to ask whether this works differently when it comes to male writers and female writers. That is again another question that we need to address and what we can perhaps notice as a broad trend is that home as a gendered space affects the men and women quite differently.

This is very evident in a way we look at least the last couple of novels that we had discussed, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, *Heat and Dust* and today the novel when we see *Cry, the Peacock* it will be quite evident that home as a gendered space I repeat it affects men and women differently. The articulations are different, the modes of enabling are different, the ways in which the women characters are allowed to respond, the male characters are allowed to respond, those are radically different from one another.

And there are of course a lot of concerns. In addition to this, we may need to gloss over at this point of time but nevertheless these are certain useful questions to ask if you need to come up with newer frameworks to deal with texts which do not neatly fit into the available frameworks. It would be rather lame to say that all women's writing is always about resistance.

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It would be a very lame claim to make and it would be rather more nuanced, more useful and more nuanced if we say that women have been participants in the construction and transmission of these ideologies as they have also been shaped by them. So it is not as if many of these articulations of subservience or if dominance they are done through certain active set of ideologies with very conscious frame of mind.

It could be inadvertent as well but nevertheless it needs to be admitted that women writers, women characters and women in general have also been participants in this process of constructing a certain labels or constructing certain identities because they two have been shaped by that, whether we are looking at a work like Cry, the Peacock or Heat and Dust or any of the other novels written by women such as Kamala Markandaya, Shashi Desh Pandey.

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Indian women and their homes

- o Certain patterns - not necessarily a chronological development or progression
- o "A significant feature of Indo-English women's novels is the desire to project the past, or at least some elements of it into the future. They propose alteration rather than a radical transformation of homes that they have known. ... The novels recommend reviewing and changing those aspects of traditional family life that silence women but acknowledge the overall importance of both family and tradition"

Or at a later point even radically different work such as Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things, we begin to notice certain patterns and those patterns need not necessarily suggest a chronological development or progression that is again not to say that we can trace the historical evolution of women's movement or the historical change in the articulation of the women's question if we look at Indian women's writing.

Certain patterns maybe evident, they may overlap each other, they may also be totally and radically different from each other. I would like to greet you from one of the concluding remarks made in Chanda's book. A significant feature of Indo-English women's novels is the desire to project the past, or at least some element of it into the future. They propose alteration rather than a radical transformation of homes that they have known.

The novels recommend reviewing and changing those aspects of traditional family life that silence women but acknowledge the overall importance of both family and tradition. We find some kind of a balancing act at work over here. We do not find the women writers entirely rejecting the ideas of home, rejecting the ideas of tradition, rejecting the ideas of patriarchy.

We found them trying to renegotiate with all of these aspect with all of these institutions and establishments.

We try them trying to propose alterations. Here I also digress a bit and draw your attention to the novel that you will be doing at a later point *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy. One of the critics Ajay Shekhar has pointed out that Roy has been very successful and subverting the ideas of gender, subverting the ideology of patriarchy but the same tool has not been used very successful when it comes to cast.

There is a certain kind of containment; there is a certain kind of politics of containment which continues to be at work. That is something that we need to take a look at later point but what I am trying to drive home is the idea that beyond the certain point it seems as if the women writers have not been able to entirely reject certain ideologies and certain conventions which have been historically, culturally and socially delimiting the articulations of women from the 19th century onwards.

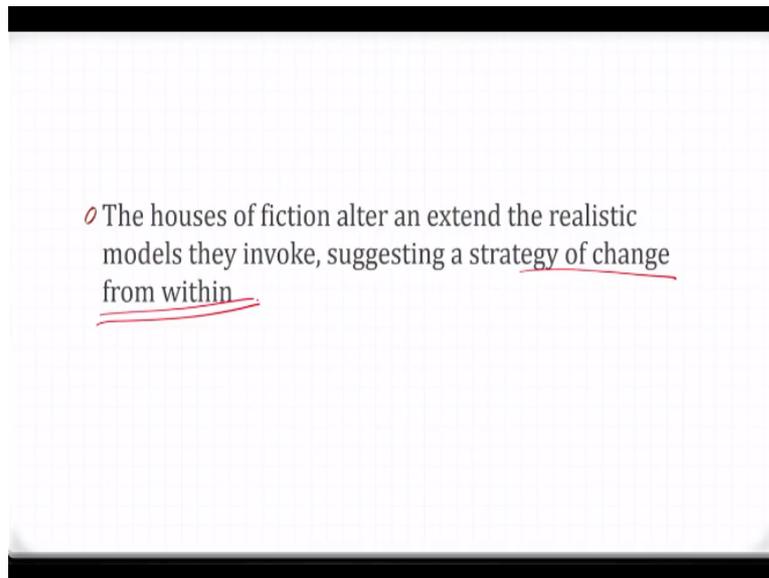
And also it needs to be admitted that whenever we talk about the space of Indian Fiction in English, they are the house of Indian Fiction in English, it is mostly a male preserve. You look at the highly successful commercial writers and even if you look at the award winning writers, you look at the set of writers who have been continually getting critical attention, you look at the syllabi of Indian writing in English or Indian Fiction in English, we find that is entirely a male preserve.

There is a certain space which would be perhaps even safe to say that within the house of fiction perhaps there is a room allotted to women who are writing, a room allotted to women within that room, within that space of containment, they are allowed to transgress, they are allowed to question, they are allowed to radically all to the paradigm.

So many of the things which are being taught and thought, being taught to them and the thought which has been received by them but beyond that point it always needs to be reminded to them and it always needs to be acknowledge by the critical tradition that their space is only a room inside this huge house of Indian Fiction in English, this huge of house of fiction within India.

I would rather agree with Geetanjali Singh Chand's observation towards the end of her work.

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That houses of fiction alter and extend the realistic models they invoke suggesting a strategy of change from within. One would not really know how successful this strategy is going to be but nevertheless it is very important to acknowledge that certain kinds of paradigmatic shifts or at work when it comes to women writing in English and also one needs to be attentive to the modes of altercations that these women writers are bringing forth even when that is not within the established frameworks of critical writings and critical understanding.

And I also invite one of our students Ashwathi to share with us some of the insights that she gained from her reading of the novel Cry, the Peacock. It is me Ashwathi Venugopal going to present on the novel Cry, the Peacock written by Anita Desai. Have any of you read any other novels of Anita Desai like very vague family attitude author. Yeah, so first of all we will move on to the very short biography of the author, very few details just enough to understand the context of the novel in discussion.

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ANITA DESAI

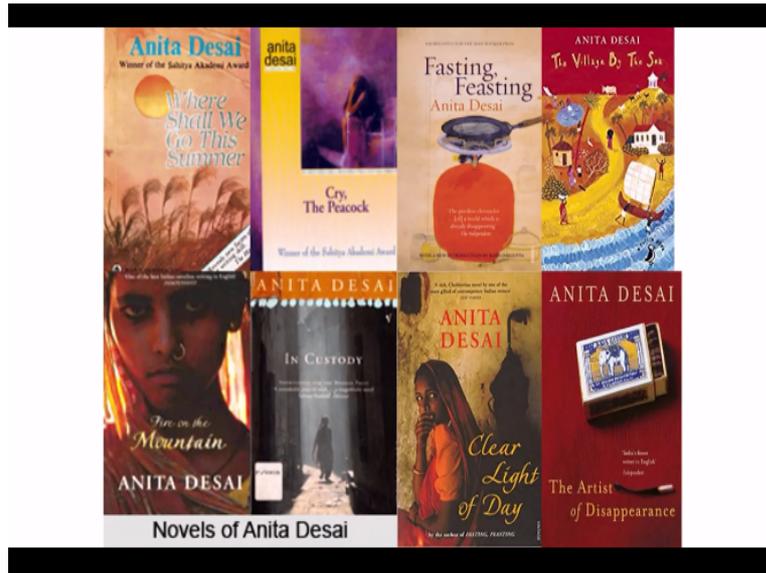
- Born in Mussoorie (1937)
- Bengali-German parents (bicultural heritage in postcolonial India)
- Education in Delhi
- Settled in USA

- Shortlisted thrice for Booker
- Sahitya Akademi Award (1978)
- Novels, Children's fiction, Short stories

She was born in Mussoorie, I think today it is Himachal Pradesh Uttarakhand area and she had her by cultural heritage because her father was a Bengali and her mom was from Germany. So she stayed in India till she had education in the Delhi and only after marriage that she went and settled in US. So she had this access to English, Bengali, German so the access to multiple languages.

And mostly she spoke English as she grew up as a person who spoke English mostly at home like with parents and all. So it is basically English was home, she was not that alien to English or she did not like choose to write in English, she was educated, she spoke in English, so very much close to English in that way. She was shortlisted thrice for Booker price and she had won Sahitya Akademi award in 1978 for a work, will look into a few of her works and besides novel she has written a few children's fiction, short stories.

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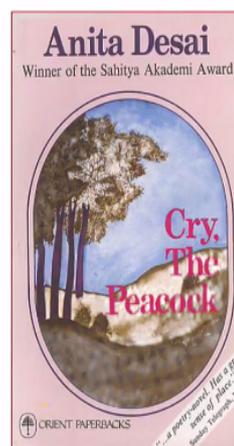


And these are very few of the popular novels. So Fire on the Mountain is the one that she won the Sahitya Akademi award for. In Custody is also very critically discussed novel and Artist of Disappearance is the very recent one, Fasting Feasting all of them we can make out from the cover pages itself that they are mostly speaking about you know female protagonist, mostly engaging with women.

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CRY, THE PEACOCK

- Debut novel- 1963
- Contemporary Indian-English Women's fiction
- 'Second generation' of Indian-English novelists



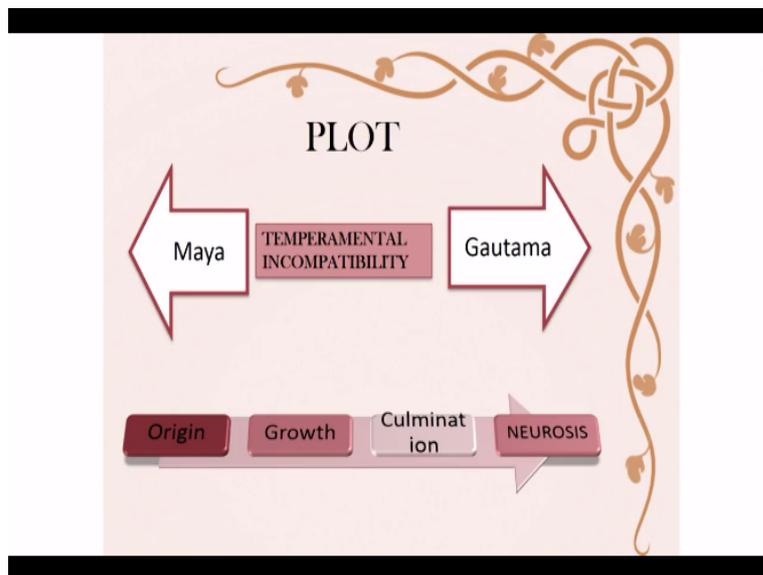
And yeah so now let us move on to the novel in detail. It was the first novel which was published in 1963 and she is one of the prominent among this line of Kamala Markandaya, Jhabvala that we discussed in class of contemporary Indian-English Women's fiction. There is a whole genre like that and she is also known as belonging to the second generation of Indian-English novelists.

So this is a very vague classification I think we have already discussed in our one of our materials about Indian Fiction divide into 3 phases and first generation belonging to Mulk Raj Anand and R. K. Narayanan in 20s and 30s and then there are few novelists very prominent 50s and 60s and then very modern ones that comes post 1980s with Rushdie and Roy. So she is unique among all the Indian English Women's fiction writers for a few reasons, I will move on to it.

So before moving on to why this novel is significant or why this novel is how can we place it in this long trajectory of Indian English Women's Fiction or generally Indian English Fiction as such is that it showed in a new genre called psychological novel or psychological realism. So it is something very unique and Indian Fiction was just encountering it for the first time among other women novels or women based novels.

So I will just quickly go through since all of you have might have read the summary. I will just very quickly go through just enough to support my presentation.

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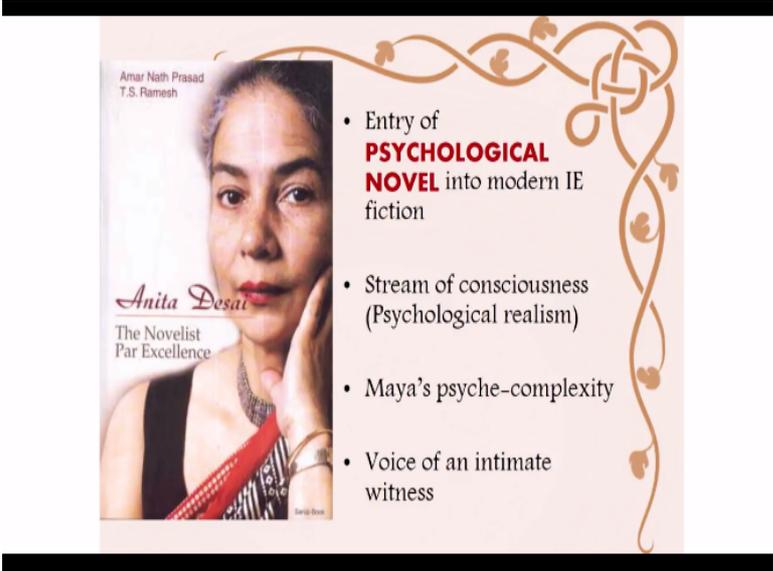
So basically there are Maya and Gautama, two characters' husband and wife, their temperaments are like on poles like both either side of the pole. Maya is a very sensitive, emotional, dreamy. These are the probable adjectives that I can give it to the character and Gautama is a very practical, detached, intellectual guy and this woman is like she takes happiness from very, very small things in life.

For example, she takes happiness from say flowers in her garden, from birds around her, from animals that she sees, from her pets that is how temperamentally different they are. So you can imagine this Gautama as this very you know so called intellectual husband who sits and discusses very intellectual matters, worldly things while Maya has a very small but beautiful world.

So the entire novel has 3 parts, first two parts is you are actually living dwelling inside Maya's mind like it is all first person narration and Maya is explaining her problems like starting with why she is feeling alienated in her own house, why is she so temperamentally different from her husband Gautama, why she is not able to cope with Gautama's you know character and then I think it is like three fourth of the novel, I mean more than 90% of the novel is part 1 and part 2 explaining entire Maya, the character.

You actually dwell inside her brain and then part 3 just quickly switches off to third person narration in which you so this climax I think you know that she I know it is again a spoiler but she goes insane after all this neurotic development of hers and she is actually like you known medically she is you know insane and the third part is only one that you get a third person narration of their family life.

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Amar Nath Prasad
T.S. Ramesh

Anita Desai
The Novelist
Par Excellence

- Entry of **PSYCHOLOGICAL NOVEL** into modern IE fiction
- Stream of consciousness (Psychological realism)
- Maya's psyche-complexity
- Voice of an intimate witness

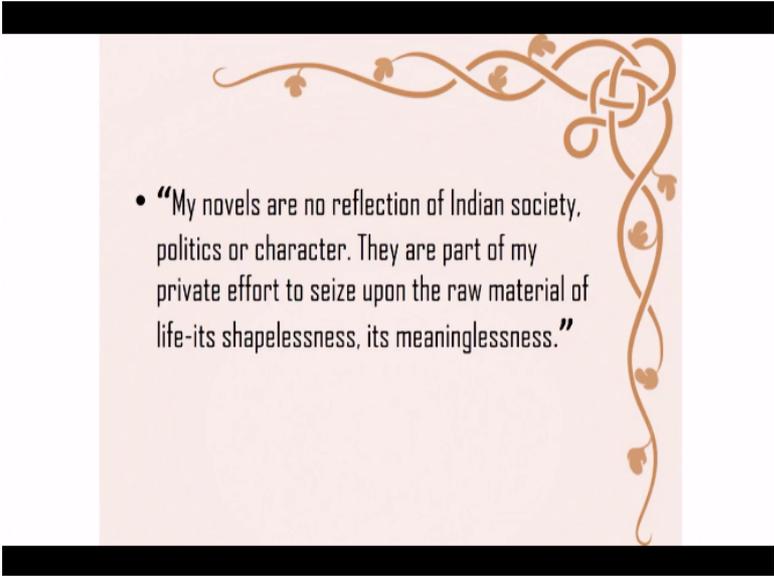
So why this is called a psychosocial novel is because this is probably for the first time that Indian English Fiction encountered look into inner consciousness of human being inner self. It is entirely about Maya's mind, Maya's thoughts, Maya's whatever she thinks about it is even actually equated to the stream of consciousness technique that whatever comes to her

mind is entirely, it is a very direct or clear cut expression of, it is actually in the form dialogues itself what she thinks.

You come to know about the character of Gautama only through Maya's eyes for the first two parts like only through Maya's eyes and how much you know about the character of Gautama is only through it is very limited compared to what you know about the character of Maya. So that is why it is you feel you are like an intimate witness to all of it or to put it better you are actually dwelling inside her brain.

Psychological realism she said, it was not a deliberate attempt of hers to do it, in fact she was unique because she deliberately chooses not to write about social themes which other novelist of that time I think Jhabvala we discussed about social themes, east west encounter, politics to some extent even other Indian English writers or women Indian English writers. She would deliberately put it.

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- “My novels are no reflection of Indian society, politics or character. They are part of my private effort to seize upon the raw material of life-its shapelessness, its meaninglessness.”

She has actually said in my novels are no reflection of Indian society, you do not expect me to write about society, social themes, pressures and all of that politics, character nothing. Nothing of society of those times, they are part of my private effort to seize upon the raw material of life-its shapelessness, its meaninglessness.

So she actually says what she actually express from this literature according to her the purpose of literature is not to you know express her ideas or opinions about social themes or social economical political ideologies or something. No, it is not the way that she is going to

shape it. She wants to look into actually thrive into you know human beings in a self of human beings.

She actually prefers the inner reality to the outer, insight to sight that is what she says and private world is what she focuses on and so in this case it is Maya's private world, it is her troubled sensibilities, it is her troubled feminine sensibilities that is explained throughout the novel. So hope you guys got a very vague idea what the novel is talking about, what is its significance in the trajectory, what was Anita Desai trying to do through the novel.

Now we will move into the themes. So themes, there are very, very few critical materials because all in the previous presentations we have had like very popular critics Meenakshi Mukherjee and other very popular critics talking about novels but even she herself has not talked much about this novel. So there are very few critical materials if you go back and check by popular critics as such.

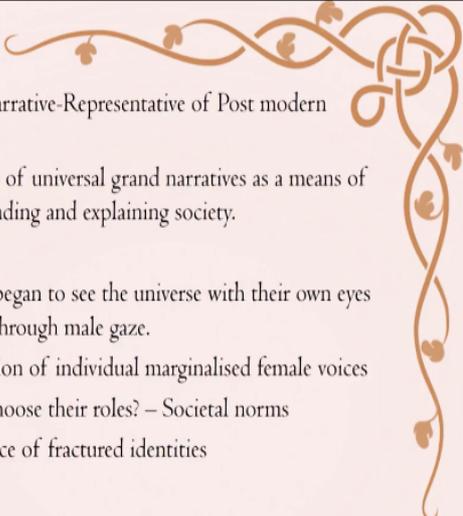
So whatever you find are only a few things which are generally talking about Aruna Desai's female protagonist.

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Maya is projected as Desai's exemplary of feminine consciousness. How?

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- Maya's narrative-Representative of Post modern feminism
 - Rejection of universal grand narratives as a means of understanding and explaining society.
 - Women began to see the universe with their own eyes and not through male gaze.
 - Articulation of individual marginalised female voices
 - Free to choose their roles? – Societal norms
 - Acceptance of fractured identities

So she is one of the prominent interpretation say she is a representative of postmodern feminism. I am sure you will feel it is a very heavy-loaded term but I will just explain it in this particular context. So as already explained in the postmodern world you focus on individual.

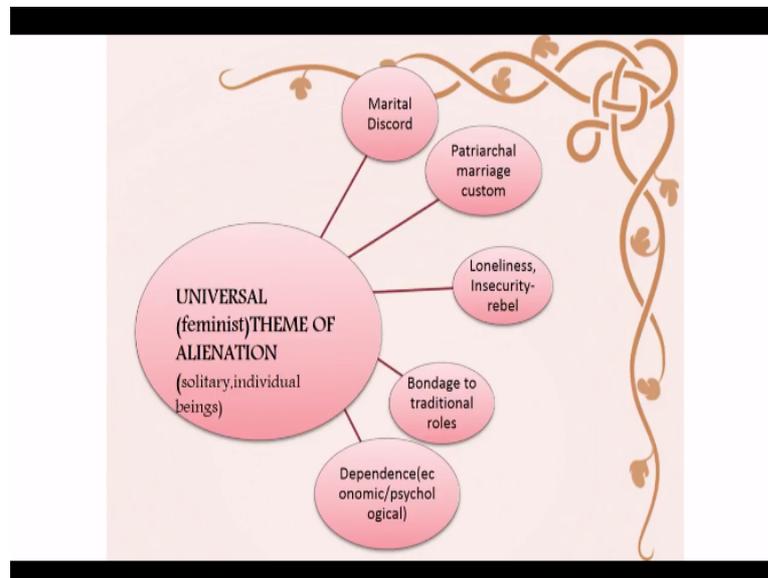
There is freedom, power, sense of existence, identity for an individual and women because they have been historically marginalized in the sense especially in Indian societies where there is some form of expectations about how she should be, how a wife or a woman in the house should be and she has been stereotypically limited to home domesticity. So in this context it is important because in this novel women began to see the universe with their own eyes not through male gaze.

Like it is no way influenced by how the male world wants the women to look at the world and societal norms that expect them to have. For example, they should preserve family culture, the entire burden of responsibility of preserving family should be on women. So all these stereotypes associated with it. The Maya character is an entire antithesis to all the stereotypes.

In fact, post modernism strives to get some acceptance from the audience. It is actually fine to have you know fractured identity. No identity is so linear, so uniform that you always remain the same, it is actually very, very fine to have a fractured identity and that is exactly what Desai tries to portrays on the novel. She has an extremely fractured identity. She is partly may be in the modern sense I do not know whether you can call it irrational or emotional.

I mean it is not the matter of attaining judging the character of Maya. It is all about she just does not give up to what other world which is dominated by so called patriarchy expects from her.

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Then, there is a universal theme of alienation which is more prominent in the case of women subjects. So Anita Desai's novels almost all of them focus on solitary individual beings. So here in this particular novel, there is marital discord due to difference in their temperament and in fact there is a part where you have heard this Indian proverb called not proverb it is actually from the Pitah Rakshathi Koumare Puthro Rakshathi Vardaykye exactly this is a parallel to it.

So there is a dialogue for Maya, father, brother, husband who is my savior, I am in need of one, I am dying and I am in love with living, I am in love and I am dying. So many parallels from Indian culture and marital discord is so explained in so clear cut detail that there is a dialogue from when she starts this is the initial part of the novel.

So she says giving me an opal ring to wear in my finger, he did not notice the translucent skin beneath, the blue flashing veins that ran under and out of the bridge of gold and jolted me into smiling with pleasure each time I saw it. So this is a very clear cut entire view that this is literally how you dwell in somebody's mind you know exactly what Maya is feeling about her relationship.

All sorts of expectations from her husband, relationship with her husband is all denied and to the point that there is very serious communication gap between the husband and wife and that when she becomes rebellious in some sort but she cannot express her rebelliousness even that is explained so she has a brother called Arjuna, he left home after fighting with their parents around the age of 22 or something.

She has this very great feeling oh for you know feeling for her brother who actually made up you know had the courage to like leave and show that how rebellious he is and it is all about this women caught in social, economic, cultural, political crisis of all sorts and to the point that ultimately she ends up losing her sanity, losing her mental poise and finally there is yeah bondage to tradition that is already discussed what you expect from domestic lives of women.

And also ultimately there is discussion about when you actually dwell deep into it, you can she is economically dependent on her husband, psychologically also she is really virulent like to the whole part of the novel she has never given up. She is entirely you know so persistent in expecting what you know she feels from her what she expects from her husband, the love, the caring, the need to be heard until to the point that she actually makes herself.

That beautiful moment till that point that beautiful not beautiful exactly that the striking moment when she actually you know twist her thoughts. So till then it was either of them who is going to die after 4 years of her marriage. In the fourth year, she was just so disturbed with the thought she just imagined that state of mind of hers when she just thinks oh it cannot be me, I love life like why should I die, Gautama is so detached like it does not matter if he dies or not.

So till that point you know exactly what Maya is going through till the moment she reaches that particular thought.

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Indian Woman's Predicament

- Uprooted from family after marriage
- Extent of freedom
- Childless wife's isolation
- Possibility of emancipation
- Beyond material comforts, need to be 'heard', cared

- Friends - Leela, Pom
- Gautama's sister & mother



So this novel is a very good reflection of woman's predicament as such because after marriage you get uprooted in the family, you actually start belonging to the in-laws and very much uprooted from your own family, you do not have any identity attached to your family before you into the point to change your second name with your husband's name and you belong to the in-laws and after that there is some form of restriction on their sense of freedom.

Especially in this case because Maya is childless, so she faces some sort of loss of identity because when she goes to meet her peers, when she goes to meet the friends of her husband that is some sort of discrimination in that sort she is always seen with this eye okay childless wife. So she is actually isolated in terms of that and beyond material comforts she needs to be heard.

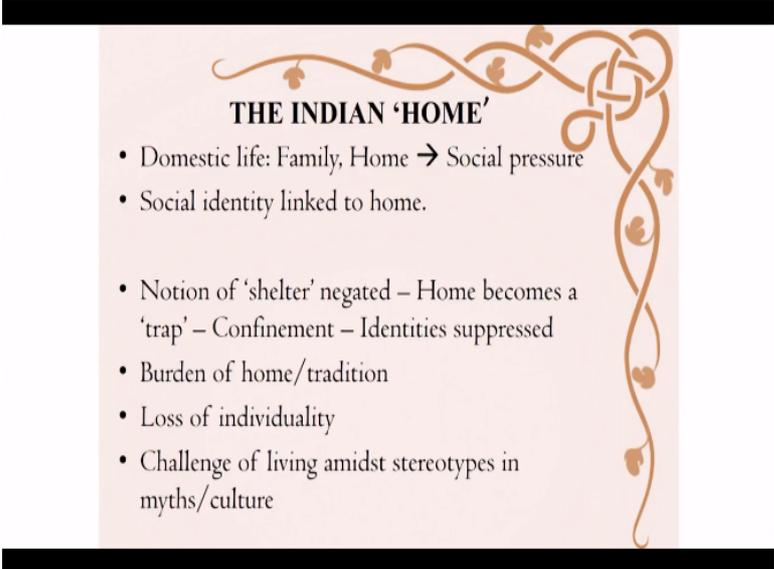
All these needs nobody else in the novel realizes except we the audience, the reader realizes it so much from what Maya says and for example there are other alternative interpretations of women of those time, some very interesting. Gautama's sister and mother is introduced in some parts. So Gautama's sister her name is Nila, they present this positive symbols of you know strength and positivity unlike hers who always you know laments her predicament.

The novel says ability to fight all odds that come into her life and she actually says after 10 years with that rabbit I married I have learned to do everything myself and then there is Leela and Pom. Leela is Maya's friend. She is another alternate women character. She is spotted as

a women nursing her dying husband and she kind of accepts her fate like that is what Indian women are supposed to do apparently at that time, continues to live that way.

And there is Maya's childhood friend Pom. She is a rebellious character but she try to rebel against the mother-in-laws arrogance initially but ultimately she is succumbed to her dominance as what that is what the novel says. So the alternate images of women you can very well compare them in contrast to Maya's character.

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THE INDIAN 'HOME'

- Domestic life: Family, Home → Social pressure
- Social identity linked to home.
- Notion of 'shelter' negated – Home becomes a 'trap' – Confinement – Identities suppressed
- Burden of home/tradition
- Loss of individuality
- Challenge of living amidst stereotypes in myths/culture

And then this beautiful theme of home you know especially in Indian context. So home you have this expression being at home because you know home is shelter, some sense of protection, some sense of private space in which you can freely express your identity without any restriction that is what you basically expect from a home you know. So wherever you can express your identity or feelings freely that is where you feel at home.

This novel is an entire contradiction to how women conceive for Indian women how home even in the concept of home was you know dictated to them by the society. Their social identity was linked to home, how they preserve their family, how they were in their family, they as a secondary to the husband all of them especially during those times 1960s and 50s when Anita Desai is writing the novel, it is very important.

Even though within their family and society and all of that it is totally through social brushes, all these pressures in the sense expectations, burdens and so there is sense of she tries to she finds it really hard to accept that confinement and you know she is psychologically, socially

dislocated even inside her home where you actually supposed to feel located very comfortably and sense of individuality, everything is so threatened inside the home because in-laws, her husband, nobody tries to understand her.

Again it is not part of judging her you know, you just accept her as she is and I just talked about the stereotypes in Indian legends and cultures just the Puthro Rakshathi that part where this lot of similar stereotypes to and there are I think metaphors like especially with the title that this is really important. So the title Cry, the Peacock we were wondering what is the significance of the title with the story.

So she mentions in some part the peacock appends very interesting story. The peacocks apparently in their mating process they actually fight with each other to the point either of them actually gets injured, gets defeated to the point that they actually die. So this is what the concept of dying in love. So that is exactly if you put it on to Maya's life you know she is fighting for love till the end and ultimately to the point she kills her husband.

The title itself is a metaphor though we smile it off as such today, when you actually look through the novel some moments you actually might feel justified at certain points, so not justified in the sense you tend to understand what Maya is going through. She is psychic in some sense; we need to accept that. She reacts too much; she actually lives every moment but every moment through her senses that is what makes her different.

So this is almost about the main themes or portrayal of Indian women in the novel.

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'INDIANNES' IN THE NOVEL

- Indian woman – 'Indianness' in thoughts
- Reflections on weather, flora, fauna, religious & mythical figures, traditional-folk elements (astrologer-prophecy-Marriage around which Maya's psyche is centered)
Eg- Attitude towards cabaret-goers.

TITLE (Symbol)

Moving on to how Anita Desai brought about some Indianness because in the novel is through no other description of the context to the place where they are living other than some places say they went so she is going for shopping with her in-laws which is in Delhi that is only mention of the place otherwise the novel is such a compelling narrative, you do not even feel the need to like know the background, place, temporal setting or the spatial setting.

It is the only place where you mentioned that it is in India where it is happening and there is weather, flora, fauna religious and mythical figures like there is a mention of Shiva and the Tandava dance of death and really folk elements. The novel is entirely surrounded at this astrologist prophecy you know prediction, all of them is very much centered in Indian culture, prediction you know there is a whole description of the astrologer.

He is an albino and you know it is actually you go through some psycho thriller movie that is how you feel when you read the novel and it is like lot of images coming through and like very, very (()) (46:45) images and then random progression of images exactly how you feel when you read the novel and then just to show that she is you know supposedly Indian women there like she sometimes says so she went with the husband to some party in which talks about cabaret-goers like people who go and attend cabaret dancers and all that.

And she is like she is not really influenced by but she actually condemns it like you know supposedly the stereotyping of Indian women as such.

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'INDIAN-ENGLISH'

- German, Bengali - bicultural heritage in postcolonial India
- English - First language she was taught at missionary school
- Her "literary language"
- "Uniquely Indian and uniquely her own" (Ann Lowry Wein)
- Usual IE vocabulary (weather, food, clothing)
- Combinations of words, Metaphors

And her use of Indian English is very important in the novel especially in our course Indian Fiction in English we need to understand that it was a literary language because she acquired it through her schooling like she first of all at her age of 7 or 9 she started writing her first story or first novel. She started off because she was educated in that language, it is nothing different about it.

Missionary school education, Delhi college education, she actually says it is her literary language that she is using and her English is you cannot say it is uniquely Indian, it is uniquely her own English you know there are lot of metaphors like Shiva and the myth from all these folk tales, all of those examples. It is very much grounded in Indian culture, Indian myths and tales.

And ultimately all these novels, most of her initial novels are entirely psychological novels like going into mostly women protagonist, individuals you know females have alienation all these universal themes but much later like towards her later part of her literary career she is writing more of you know social reality.

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- Over time, focus of her novels shifted from individual's inner consciousness to social realities.

That is actually the *Artist of Disappearance* novel I just showed. You know she actually realized she should be you know in venturing some time into not just limited to individual things and she has some relevant topics to discuss, to write in her novels about social themes and towards her later part so this is an entire journey of her life you know. This is how the themes focus, how the writer's interest changes over time due to context or due to the response to her novels and all of that.

So really sort of I could not bring out any you know very critical perspectives because it actually lacks and even just before the class in the discussion I had with mam she was saying she never encountered some she herself is not talking much about this particular novel. She talks about many of her other novels but not this novel. So I am just still pondering over why what could have been the reasons why this happened and I am still pondering over it.

My presentation might be limited in that sense because unlike compared to other novels could not get like a critical material on it but these are the major themes which are very much grounded in India, Indian context, Indian women and this inauguration of this genre called psychologic realism is what made Anita Desai you know immortal in the trajectory. That is pretty much of it. I hope you got a general not general idea like a very good idea.

I hope you are inspired to go back and read the novel that is the basic expectation yeah that is it. Couple of other things that I would like to draw your attention to in terms of this novel *Cry, the Peacock*. Firstly, we need to notice the mode of publication of this work *Cry, the*

Peacock the novel. It was initially published by Orient Paperbacks and this was the publisher with home, most of the Indian writers was engaging within their earlier period.

But we do find that in the post 1980s they all moved towards Global Publishers that there is more visibility to their work, it also ensures you know better kind of salability and marketability as well but we find Anita Desai sticking to Orient Paperbacks for a longtime especially in the early stages of her career and *Cry, the Peacock* is one of her earliest novels.

And certain things which would be useful from the certain details which we need to pay attention from the novel I would like to bring to your attention. Certain discussions related to this novel do remind us off the play *Doll's House* by Ibsen. We find the character of Maya undergoing a radical change from the beginning towards the end of the novel and there is a certain parallel that we can see in the change that the character in *Doll's House* Nora undergoes from the beginning towards the end.

Even in this novel in the beginning we see that it is not as if Maya is married to a bad man. He is not a bad sort of fellow at all. In fact, in page 38 of this novel in the beginning we find Maya making this observation. People say he spoils me, this means that he fondles my cheek, holds my hand and says to me it is getting warm, time for us to retreat to the hills is not it? Where shall we go this year Maya choose?

People say he spoils me; they also say that I can get anything I want from him. Darjeeling I cried jubilantly of course and jump up and down at his side. So we find Maya being treated as a child by her husband and she also (()) (52:09). She is delightful about this kind of attention that she is getting from her husband in the beginning of the novel in the earlier stages of her life.

We also find that there are traces of discontentment within Maya's life, within her personality but at the same time in the first half of the novel we are not really being introduced to it. There were snippets of this that Anita Desai gives us from her character. There is this particular instance that comes in page 63 when Maya encounters this woman who has 4 daughters.

We find her having these horrible thoughts about having 4 daughters. Maya thinks this ought not to have distressed me. She is talking about the possibility of having 4 daughters. I ought to have been able to rejoice at as my father had rejoiced in me saying that in her daughter he had a treasure yet now the word brought up visions of dowries of debts, humiliations to be suffered and burden so gross so painful that the whole family suffered from them.

Why? I was angry with myself, yet could not shake of the truth and when the prim lady clucked her tongue in sympathy I said nothing. So this is a very telling passage, it seemed as if dowry, sati, the issues of the widow, all these were concerns which had long been buried during the nationalist face that post-independence period we had begun a new journey to modernity.

But here we find a novel written in 1960s and the nation is still young and this young educated woman is still horrified at the possibility that raising 4 daughters also means dealing with the lot of issues related to dowry, humiliation. This certainly is not the kind she is certainly not thinking about the possibilities that the female gender offers but she is thinking about the many, many difficulties that would be inflicted onto the family.

And also about the change that comes about in Maya's character towards the end just like we find the character of Nora undergoing a radical change in the Doll's House towards the end of the play. We find Maya also beginning to think and speak in a different way altogether. This comes in page 139 almost towards the end of the novel. What is death then I asked dropping down one earring after the other, two red rubies, what is death to you Gautama?

Do you believe it? And her husband replies perhaps if you clarified what you mean by death I could tell you whether you believe in it or not though why should you give thought to such a subject mystifies me it is definitely a new trend in you, you used to tell me that you were far too immersed in your garden and you cat and your friends to muse upon death and this is also an illusion to some of the earlier conversations that they used to have.

Maya was a young woman who was interested in gardening, interested in pets and those were the things that used to interest her, worry her, those were her concerns. Her world was very, very limited within her own home space and her garden and the beings which surrounded her.

So her husband is certainly Gautama, her husband is certainly alarmed when she suddenly talks about a very profound subject such as death.

And he says is this what you keep thinking about of these days, you are much too young and they continued to have this conversation. There was a time when you would have disdained (()) (55:44) consolation that was a time when I did not need you to console you with venalities, one changes grow. So Maya is beginning to realize that she is grown and which is changed and obviously this is not something that Gautama is willing to deal with.

He is not yet ready to accept the grown up version of Maya because it was so easy to manage a childlike wife who will just listen to whatever he says and who also delight at a prospect of a holiday, the prospect of pets, cats, gardening, it was that kind of a relationship perhaps was far easier for him to manage and as the novel progresses and when we reach almost again towards the end we find Maya growing up enough to pity her husband.

We find that she is no longer the self who is timid, who is cowardly, she grows up enough to pity the character that her husband has turned into. She says poor dear Gautama who was so intense and yet had never lived and never would. Here we find that Maya is not control of herself, her household and as well as her husband and Gautama is obviously terrified and we know the kind of end that he met with.

I would not give away the novel and spoil the interest of reading that by yourself but nevertheless it needs to be remember that if you look at the way in which Maya's character has transformed, if you look at the many minute details that even in the presentation Ashwathi shared with you, you would see that Maya is able to enable herself but this enabling of herself, her progressive faith in her own self is at the cost of losing herself in a certain way.

As in when she gains herself as in when she comes to terms with her own self and she takes charge of her own life, we also see that she is beginning to be seen as someone who is descending into madness and she totally loses control over her mind towards the end, so what was its stake over here? Why is it that always a woman who is being enabled which is also supposed to meet with certain kinds of ends which are not entirely enabling, which are not entirely fulfilling.

We too find again if you try to compare and contrast this with the fate of Billy Biswas that would be certain kind of parallels but also we would see that whether it is a primitive kind of society or a modernized urban society. The choices which are being made available to men and women are radically different.

And unless the world of fiction is also able to break out of these limiting ways of conceiving individualism, limiting ways of conceiving freedom that is very little possibility of radically changing the idea of women's writing or radically changing the ways in which women can be accommodated into this house of fiction, the certain suggestions that we. So what here extremely important is the idea of home and how that becomes problematized in the field of fiction.

And how the problematization of home is seen as essentially a kind of thing which happens only and mostly in the fiction written by women. So with this we wind up for today and we will meet again in the next class.