



---

## **Anita Desai's conceptual structures: Cry, the Peacock**

Dr. Chander Shekhar,  
Assistant Professor of English,  
Govt. College for Women, Ateli (M.Garh)

### **Introduction**

Desai skillfully weaves these different structures together to create a multi-layered narrative that delves deep into the psyche of the characters and exposes the intricate workings of their relationships. One of the most prominent conceptual structures in the novel is the psychological framework. Desai delves into the inner thoughts and emotions of her characters, particularly through the eyes of the protagonist, Maya. Maya's psychological state is constantly at the forefront, with her bouts of depression, anxiety, and paranoia. This exploration of the human mind highlights the fragility and vulnerability of the human psyche, and how it can be easily impacted and damaged by external forces.

Another conceptual structure that Desai explores is the marital framework. Maya's relationship with her husband, Gautama, is depicted as suffocating and constricting. The oppressive nature of their marriage is evident in Maya's feelings of confinement and her overwhelming desire for freedom. Desai emphasizes the power dynamics within the institution of marriage, and how it can lead to a crumbling of the self.

Within the cultural framework, Desai delves into the constraints of society. Maya is trapped in a traditional Indian household, where she is expected to fulfill the roles and responsibilities assigned to her as a woman. The societal expectations placed on Maya limit her freedom and individuality, further reinforcing her feelings of entrapment.

Symbolism is another important conceptual structure in the novel. The peacock, which constantly haunts Maya's thoughts, is a symbol of her inner turmoil and suppressed desires. The Peacock represents her longing for freedom and her struggle to break free from the chains that bind her. This symbol recurs throughout the novel, serving as a reminder of Maya's internal conflict.

Lastly, the fatalistic framework is present throughout the novel. Maya constantly has



---

premonitions of her own death, reflecting her feeling of impending doom. This sense of fatalism adds a layer of tension and unease to the narrative, as it heightens the reader's anticipation for an inevitable calamity.

**Anita Desai's conceptual structures in *Cry, the Peacock* are complex and interrelated. Some of the most important ones include:**

- The duality of nature: The novel is set in a lush, green landscape, but Maya is also drawn to the darkness and decay of the forest. This duality reflects her own inner turmoil, as she is torn between her desire for life and her fear of death.
- The role of women: Maya is a strong and independent woman, but she is also deeply insecure and dependent on her husband. This conflict reflects the challenges faced by women in a patriarchal society.
- The power of the imagination: Maya's imagination is both her greatest strength and her greatest weakness. It allows her to create a rich and beautiful world, but it also makes her vulnerable to fear and anxiety.
- The importance of relationships: Maya's relationships with her husband, her children, and her friends are all fraught with tension. She is unable to find true intimacy or connection, which only adds to her sense of isolation.
- The inevitability of death: Maya is obsessed with death, and she sees it as a constant threat. This fear of death prevents her from living fully in the present moment.

These conceptual structures are all brought together in the novel's central metaphor of the peacock. The peacock is a beautiful creature, but it is also associated with death and decay. It is a fitting symbol for Maya's own inner turmoil, and it represents the complex and contradictory forces that shape her life.

In addition to these conceptual structures, *Cry, the Peacock* also explores themes of alienation,



---

betrayal, and the power of the human imagination. The novel is a powerful and disturbing portrait of a woman who is struggling to find her place in the world.

**Here are some specific examples of how Desai uses these conceptual structures in the novel:**

- The duality of nature is evident in the way that Maya is drawn to both the beauty and the darkness of the forest. She finds peace and solace in the natural world, but she is also afraid of its power.
- The role of women is explored through Maya's relationship with her husband, Gautama. He is a controlling and possessive man, and he makes it clear that he does not believe that women are equal to men. Maya's struggle to assert her independence is a reflection of the challenges faced by women in a patriarchal society.
- The power of the imagination is seen in Maya's ability to create a rich and beautiful world in her mind. However, her imagination can also be a source of fear and anxiety. For example, she is haunted by visions of her own death.
- The importance of relationships is evident in Maya's inability to find true intimacy or connection with anyone. She is deeply insecure and afraid of being hurt, which prevents her from forming close relationships.
- The inevitability of death is a constant theme in the novel. Maya is obsessed with death, and she sees it as a constant threat. This fear of death prevents her from living fully in the present moment.

The conceptual structures in *Cry, the Peacock* are complex and interrelated. They all come together to create a powerful and disturbing portrait of a woman who is struggling to find her place in the world. The novel is a classic of Indian literature, and it continues to be relevant today.



---

**Anita Desai's conceptual structures in *Cry, the Peacock* are complex and interrelated. Some of the most important ones include:**

- The duality of nature: The novel is set in a lush, green landscape, but Maya is also drawn to the darkness and decay of the forest. This duality reflects her own inner turmoil, as she is torn between her desire for life and her fear of death.
- The role of women: Maya is a strong and independent woman, but she is also deeply insecure and dependent on her husband. This conflict reflects the challenges faced by women in a patriarchal society.
- The power of the imagination: Maya's imagination is both her greatest strength and her greatest weakness. It allows her to create a rich and beautiful world, but it also makes her vulnerable to fear and anxiety.
- The importance of relationships: Maya's relationships with her husband, her children, and her friends are all fraught with tension. She is unable to find true intimacy or connection, which only adds to her sense of isolation.
- The inevitability of death: Maya is obsessed with death, and she sees it as a constant threat. This fear of death prevents her from living fully in the present moment.

These conceptual structures are all brought together in the novel's central metaphor of the peacock. The peacock is a beautiful creature, but it is also associated with death and decay. It is a fitting symbol for Maya's own inner turmoil, and it represents the complex and contradictory forces that shape her life.

In addition to these conceptual structures, *Cry, the Peacock* also explores themes of alienation, betrayal, and the power of the human imagination. The novel is a powerful and disturbing portrait of a woman who is struggling to find her place in the world.



---

Here are some specific examples of how Desai uses these conceptual structures in the novel:

- The duality of nature is evident in the way that Maya is drawn to both the beauty and the darkness of the forest. She finds peace and solace in the natural world, but she is also afraid of its power.
- The role of women is explored through Maya's relationship with her husband, Gautama. He is a controlling and possessive man, and he makes it clear that he does not believe that women are equal to men. Maya's struggle to assert her independence is a reflection of the challenges faced by women in a patriarchal society.
- The power of the imagination is seen in Maya's ability to create a rich and beautiful world in her mind. However, her imagination can also be a source of fear and anxiety. For example, she is haunted by visions of her own death.
- The importance of relationships is evident in Maya's inability to find true intimacy or connection with anyone. She is deeply insecure and afraid of being hurt, which prevents her from forming close relationships.
- The inevitability of death is a constant theme in the novel. Maya is obsessed with death, and she sees it as a constant threat. This fear of death prevents her from living fully in the present moment.

The conceptual structures in *Cry, the Peacock* are complex and interrelated. They all come together to create a powerful and disturbing portrait of a woman who is struggling to find her place in the world. The novel is a classic of Indian literature, and it continues to be relevant today.

Anita Desai's novel *Cry, the Peacock* explores several conceptual structures throughout the story. Here are some of the key ones:



---

**Psychological Structures:** Desai delves deep into the psyche of her protagonist Maya, exploring her intense inner thoughts and emotions. The novel presents a psychological portrait of a disturbed and unhappy individual, depicting Maya's inner conflicts and her descent into madness. Throughout the novel, Desai delves deep into Maya's psychological structures, providing readers with a profound understanding of her complex inner world. Maya is depicted as a disturbed and unhappy individual, plagued by intense inner thoughts and emotions. As the story progresses, Desai reveals Maya's inner conflicts, which ultimately lead her to a state of madness.

Maya's psychological portrait is painted with vivid descriptions and introspective passages, allowing readers to empathize with her struggles. Desai explores Maya's deep-rooted fears, anxieties, and traumas, unraveling the layers of her troubled psyche. Maya's unhappiness is depicted through her inner dialogue, highlighting her dissatisfaction with her own life and the world around her.

As the narrative progresses, Maya's inner conflicts intensify, pushing her closer to the brink of madness. Desai provides glimpses into Maya's deteriorating mental state through hallucinations, delusions, and fragmented thoughts. The unraveling of Maya's psyche becomes increasingly apparent, as her actions and perceptions become more erratic and detached from reality.

Desai skillfully captures the descent into madness, portraying Maya's mental breakdown with vivid and unsettling imagery. Maya's inner turmoil consumes her, leading her to make irrational decisions and engage in erratic behavior. The author explores not only the causes of Maya's madness but also the consequences it has on her relationships and interactions with others.

Desai's portrayal of Maya's psychological struggles offers a thought-provoking exploration of the human mind and its vulnerabilities. The novel serves as a reminder of the delicate balance between sanity and madness, highlighting the importance of mental well-being and the potential consequences of neglecting our psychological health.

In conclusion, Desai's exploration of Maya's psychological structures provides readers with a deep insight into the inner workings of a disturbed and unhappy individual. By delving deep into Maya's psyche, the novel presents a compelling psychological portrait, depicting her inner



---

conflicts and her descent into madness. Desai's skillful portrayal of Maya's psychological struggles serves as a powerful reminder of the complexities inherent in human nature and the profound impact our inner thoughts and emotions can have on our lives.

**Marital Structures:** The novel revolves around the complex and dysfunctional relationship between Maya and her husband Gautama. Desai explores the dynamics of a failed marriage, presenting the tension, lack of communication, and emotional detachment that plague their relationship.

Through Maya and Gautama's marriage, Desai highlights the various aspects of a failed marital structure. The tension between the couple is evident from the beginning, as they struggle to connect on a deeper level. The lack of communication is a major issue, as they rarely share their thoughts and feelings, leading to misunderstandings and resentment.

Emotional detachment is another key element in their marriage. They seem to have lost the spark and passion that once existed, and are now merely going through the motions. They are physically present in each other's lives, but emotionally distant.

The novel also delves into the societal pressures and expectations that contribute to the breakdown of their marriage. Maya and Gautama are constantly trying to maintain a facade of happiness and success, but this only adds to their stress and unhappiness. The pressure to conform to societal norms prevents them from addressing their true feelings and desires.

Moreover, Desai explores the impact of personal ambitions and individual growth on a marriage. Maya's aspirations as a writer clash with Gautama's traditional views, and this creates a further rift between them. Their inability to compromise and support each other's dreams further adds to their marital struggles.

In depicting a complex and dysfunctional marriage, Desai sheds light on the fragility of marital structures and the importance of communication, understanding, and emotional connection. The novel serves as a cautionary tale, emphasizing the need for couples to actively work on their relationship to prevent it from deteriorating.



---

**Cultural Structures:** Cry, the Peacock also highlights cultural structures prevalent in Indian society. Desai explores the societal expectations placed on women, particularly the pressure to conform to traditional gender roles and fulfill societal expectations. The novel delves into the conflict between individual desire and societal norms.

One of the main cultural structures explored in Cry, the Peacock is the expectation placed on women to conform to traditional gender roles. The protagonist, Maya, struggles with the pressure to fulfill societal expectations of a obedient wife and daughter-in-law. She feels trapped and suffocated in her marriage, where she is expected to be submissive and follow her husband's wishes without question.

Desai also portrays the conflict between individual desire and societal norms. Maya's desires for independence, freedom, and self-fulfillment clash with the expectations placed on her as a woman in Indian society. She longs to break free from the constraints of marriage and explore her own individuality, but she is constantly reminded of her duty to her husband and family.

The societal norms portrayed in the novel also include the pressure to prioritize family honor and reputation over personal happiness. Maya's husband, Gautama, is more concerned with maintaining appearances and societal norms rather than addressing the issues in their marriage. This conflict between personal desires and societal expectations leads to a sense of frustration and discontentment for Maya.

Furthermore, Cry, the Peacock touches upon the cultural structures of arranged marriages and the belief in fate. Maya's marriage to Gautama is arranged by their families, and she constantly reflects on how she had no control over her own destiny. The belief in fate and the acceptance of the arranged marriage system as a cultural norm is prevalent throughout the novel.

Overall, Cry, the Peacock sheds light on the cultural structures and societal expectations that shape and constrain individuals, particularly women, in Indian society. It explores the tension between individual desire and societal norms, as well as the constraints placed on women to conform to traditional gender roles and fulfill societal expectations.

**Symbolic Structures:** Desai employs various symbolic structures to convey deeper meanings



---

and themes in the novel. The peacock, for instance, symbolizes Maya's anxiety and her fear of impending doom. It represents her premonitions and serves as a symbol for the trapped and tormented state of her mind.

The peacock also represents the idea of beauty and artifice. Maya is part of a wealthy and privileged family, and the peacock's ostentatious display of feathers mirrors the superficiality and facade of their social status. It suggests that Maya's anxiety and fear are not only personal but are also influenced by societal pressures and expectations.

Furthermore, the peacock's trapped and tormented state of mind mirrors Maya's own internal struggles. Maya feels trapped by her circumstances and unable to fully express herself or pursue her own desires and dreams. The peacock's beautiful and vibrant feathers serve as a contrast to its confined state, highlighting the tension between external appearances and inner turmoil.

Desai's use of the peacock as a symbol also highlights the theme of powerlessness. Maya feels powerless in her own life, unable to change her circumstances or break free from her fears. The peacock's inability to fully extend its feathers and fly represents Maya's own sense of being trapped and constrained by her anxieties.

In addition, the peacock symbolizes the idea of intuition and premonition. Maya has a heightened sense of awareness and foresight, often experiencing premonitions of danger and doom. The peacock's association with these premonitions suggests that Maya's anxieties are not baseless, but rather reflect a deeper understanding of the world around her.

Overall, the peacock in Desai's novel serves as a powerful symbol that conveys Maya's anxiety, her internal struggles, the facade of societal expectations, powerlessness, and the theme of intuition. Through its various symbolic meanings, the peacock provides deeper insights into Maya's character and the broader themes explored in the novel.

**Fatalistic Structures:** Cry, the Peacock has a fatalistic undertone, infused with a sense of inevitability and foreboding. Desai explores the concept of destiny and the idea that certain events are predestined or cannot be escaped. This fatalistic structure adds a haunting and dark atmosphere to the narrative.



---

The fatalistic structure in *Cry, the Peacock* is evident through the portrayal of the novel's protagonist, Maya. She is haunted by a sense of impending doom and a belief that her life is bound to end tragically. This fatalistic undertone is established from the very beginning of the novel, as Maya's dream about a peacock's cry symbolizes her inner turmoil and foreshadows her eventual demise.

Desai delves into the theme of destiny and the idea that certain events in life are beyond human control. Maya's husband, Gautama, symbolizes this concept as he believes that their married life is determined by fate and that their happiness or unhappiness is predetermined. This fatalistic perspective permeates the narrative, adding to the sense of foreboding and inevitability that hangs over Maya's life.

Throughout the novel, Maya attempts to break free from this fatalistic cycle, seeking solace and escape through her daydreams and fantasies. However, these attempts only further emphasize her inability to escape her predetermined destiny. Maya's recurring nightmares, which depict her death in various ways, reinforce the fatalistic structure of the novel and contribute to the haunting atmosphere that surrounds her.

Desai's use of language and imagery also enhances the fatalistic structure in *Cry, the Peacock*. The descriptions of nature, with its dark and ominous overtones, mirror Maya's internal struggles and reinforce the sense of an impending tragedy. Additionally, the repetition of certain phrases and motifs throughout the novel further solidifies the fatalistic undertone, emphasizing the idea that the events unfolding are inescapable and predestined.

Overall, *Cry, the Peacock* showcases Anita Desai's exploration of various conceptual structures, including psychological, marital, cultural, symbolic, and fatalistic. These structures contribute to the overall theme of the novel, examining the complexities of human relationships, the constraints of society, and the fragility of the human mind.



---

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, *Cry, the Peacock* utilizes a fatalistic structure to explore the themes of destiny and the inability to escape certain events. This structure creates a haunting and dark atmosphere, underscoring the sense of inevitability and foreboding that surrounds Maya's life. By delving into these fatalistic concepts, Desai effectively portrays the internal turmoil and struggles of her protagonist while adding depth and complexity to the narrative. *Cry, the Peacock* showcases Anita Desai's exploration of various conceptual structures, including psychological, marital, cultural, symbolic, and fatalistic. These structures intertwine to create a nuanced and complex examination of human relationships, societal constraints, and the fragile nature of the human mind. Desai's masterful storytelling allows the reader to delve deep into the psyche of the characters and witness the intricacies of their lives and struggles.

### **References**

- Pathok, R. (1991) *The Expression of Feminine Sensibility in Anita Desai's Novels: Beyond the He-Man Approach*, in Sushila Singh, ed., *Feminism in Recent Fiction in English: References*, New Delhi: Prestige Books.
- Bande, U. (1988) *The Novels of Anita Desai*, Prestige Books, New Delhi.
- Desai, A. (2006) *the Peacock cries* Orient Paperbacks, Delhi.
- Deshpande, S. (1983), *Roots and Shadows*, Orient Paperbacks, Hyderabad.
- Sharma, P.S. (1981), *Arnold - Helneman*, New Delhi, Anita Desai.
- *Recent Trends in Feminist Thought: A Tour de Horizon, Feminism, Theory, and Criticism*, Delhi: Analysis Pencraft International, 1970 Singh, S.
- Tarika, S. (1993), *A Book of Her Own: A Biography of a Nineteenth Century Woman*, *Colonial and Postcolonial History*, History Workshop, No. 36.
- S. Cariffithsm, 1996. *40 women whose ideas changed the world: beyond the class ceiling*. Press of Manchester University, Manchester.
- Desai, A. (1980) *a bright day's light 1980*: Penguin Books, London.



- 
- Desai, A. (1979) The Times of India's Yashodara Dalmia had an interview with Anita Desai.
  - Anita Desai, Arnold Heinemann, New Delhi, 1981. Sharma, R.
  - Roots and Shadows, S. Deshpande, Orient Paper, Hyderabad, 1983.
  - Kate, M. Sextual Politics, 1969. Rupert Hart, dans, in London.
  - Meena, B. (1971) An analysis of Anita Desai's fiction (Ninth Writers Workshop).