II. LOVE AND DEATH
Cry, the Peacock presents the tragic story of Maya's loveless marital life along with her obsessive terror of death of one of the couple as predicted by an old, albino astrologer. It is a deeply moving psychological study of the heroine's consciousness. The narrative is developed in three parts- Parts I and III in third person narration and the Part II in first person purporting to be a memoir written by Maya telling her joyful experiences as a child in flashbacks and her troubled and unhappy married life later. Anita Desai presents almost the entire narrative as self-narration of Maya in the memoir form (160 pages of the text) whereas a very small portion (only 11 pages) is narrated by a third-person narrator. This device of narration is a master stroke of the novelist's art in so far as it serves to foreground the heroine's plight and bestows on the same an immediacy and intensity that would have been missed had it been rendered even by consonant Psycho-narration of the third person narrator. The distancing effect of third person narration would have failed to directly engage the sympathy of the narratee of the self-narration, that is, the reader of the memoir.

The present design of the narrative, on the other hand, succeeds to make the reader look upon Maya's story from her own point-of-view
cancelling out any effect of egotism and partiality so natural in case of memoir writers. Thus, the "Egotistical Sublime" of Wordsworth as expressed in The Prelude is absent in Maya’s self-narration. Further, the effect of absence of egotism is intensified by Maya’s statement in her narrative:

(A warning: Do not take too seriously what I write now, for I cannot quite recall whether these conversations, these episodes that I relate, ever actually took place, or merely occurred to me when I sat there, alone, insane with dread. I was ill, ill) (p. 149).

Notwithstanding this rider regarding the actuality of what Maya relates in the memoir, she is able to engage the sympathy of the reader who suspends his disbelief in the reality of her feelings and attitude to her predicament in life as expressed in her narrative.

The memoir is written in seven sections and each section consists of several movements of related incidents and conversations strung together like the various notes of a symphony. The parallelism between the parts narrated by the third person narrator and the autobiographical
narrator each assuming a narratee/audience; the iterative images, motifs and symbols; as well as the dominant themes of marital love and death, bring cohesion and structural unity to the three parts of the novel. And the title so aptly chosen for the novel highlights the twin themes of love and death symbolized in the peacock’s cry and through identification of Maya with the crying peacock:

When I heard one cry in the stillness of night, its hoarse, heart-torn voice pierced my white flesh and plunged its knife to the hilt in my palpitating heart. ‘Lover, I die.’ Now that I understood their call, I wept for them, and wept for myself, knowing their words to be mine (p.84).

Maya, young, beautiful and educated, is the daughter of a wealthy widower. Sensitive and high-strung in nature, she was protected in an extremely eliminative way by the father, and was provided with a life of opulence and grandeur. Thus, she has developed a refined taste for luxury and beauty. But now she is married to Gautama, a middle-class, middle aged, cerebral lawyer, who has neither the time, nor the capacity to reciprocate the demands of this sensuous person. When she pulsates with passion for Gautama, he doles out dried philosophy and quotations
from The Gita and preaches her the virtues of detachment. This dichotomy between the love-filled childhood and loveless marriage, and the mental antinomy between the wife and the husband, drives this sensitive person to the verge of nervous break-down.

The story begins with the death of Toto, Maya’s pet dog and goes on to show its impact on Maya’s life and psyche. Maya, being childless and lonely, agonises over the death, though she is incapable of handling the practical aspect of the burial of Toto. She frets and waits till evening for Gautama to come back from the court. Gautama came late, but he promptly calls up the Public Works Department to take the corpse away. Like his detached action, his consolation to Maya is prompt, abrupt and unemotional: ‘It is all over,’ he said. ‘Come and drink your tea, and stop crying. You mustn’t cry’ (p.8). Also, he leaves Maya immediately to attend to a client without giving her company or consolation. Dejected, Maya blames Gautama for her unhappy situation, and compares her love-filled childhood to her loveless marriage.

The characters of all the persons in Gautama’s family are of a piece with Gautama’s. As she reflects: “In Gautama’s family one did speak of love, far less of affection. One spoke—they spoke—of discussions in
parliament, of cases of bribery and corruption revealed in government, of newspaper editors accused of libel, . . .” (p.43). She can find no one there with whom she can share her sense of aesthetic appreciation. Gautama and Maya do talk in the evenings. But the difference in their mental make-up and aptitude for emotion make it impossible to communicate with each other. What is palpably real in natural scenery to her is alien to Gautama's practical nature. As a result, she escapes, in her mind, to recapitulation of the luxury of her childhood: “(As a child, I enjoyed, princess-like, a sumptuous fare of the fantasies of the Arabian Nights, the glories and bravado of Indian Mythology, . . .). People say he spoils me . . . I can get anything I want from him” (p.41).

Admiring the father, she develops in her his fastidious taste and becomes a keen observer of nature with its varying hues and myriad facets. She is also astutely observant of the animosity between her father and her brother Arjuna. A rebel, Arjuna, her brother, has no interest in or regard for his father's lifestyle. At twenty-two, he runs away from home. After many years he writes a letter to Maya to tell her about his life in New York, where he now works in a canning factory and fights for the liberation of the Negroes. But the fact that he has been able to break her
father's strong-hold and has gained his freedom makes Maya secretly envious of him. But, she herself has not been able to get free of her father's hold although she can clearly gauge the limitations of her rearing in her childhood:

(Yes, now that I go over it in my mind, my childhood was one in which much was excluded, which grew steadily more restricted, unnatural even, and in which I lived as a toy princess in a toy world. But it was a pretty one.) (p.78).

Critics have mostly commented on her 'princess'-like existence, not on her 'toy' status, a person without the capacity for free-will. So, when her father proposed marriage, to much older Gautama, this will-less creeper, accepts the proposal.

But, brought up on varied values and economic strata, marriage to Gautama is a failure from the beginning:

But do not presume, no one must presume, that our marriage was an empty one, a failure. Nor that Gautama was no more than a figure of granite to me, a mound of books that smelt faintly of mouldy rice and
wisdom. For he was more, so much more. I will not say that it was he who turned an immobile organ into a pulsing heart, for that had been done long ago, at my birth, by a man who stroked a lock of hair upon my forehead and called it a feather; ... But it was Gautama who found many more things to teach that heart, new, strange and painful things. He taught it pain, for there were countless nights when I had been tortured by a humiliating sense of neglect, of loneliness, of desperation that would not have existed had I not loved him so, had he not meant so much. He taught it the will to reflect as well, and, like a wild beast on a leash, it would strain and strain in fury till tiredness set in and, in the dark, I could say, 'He is right, and I was wrong'(p.167).

This realization, this acceptance of her failure comes on the heels of Gautama’s rejection of physical contact, while she craves for both physical and mental communion:
In the flashing darkness of eyeballs pressed upon by wet fingers, I relived the horror of those awesome realizations that had followed, sometimes, a moment of union, and taught me how hopeless, how important is sex—where not union but communion is concerned. ‘Gautama,’ I had whispered then, torn to shreds by the dragon-like dark, and my worn body had made a movement towards him. ‘Yes?’ he had replied, in a voice so daylit, so styptic, so dry, that we might never have brushed hand with hand, twined hair with hair, even in the most private night (p.90).

Maya’s frustration and longing for physical communion is manifested through her sensuous, erotic contemplation on every object; and in spite of Gautama’s lack of physical response, Maya loves and yearns for him. This leads to dark desperation. For consolation she seeks out two of her old friends – Laila and Pom. Laila, unlike Maya has taken life in her stride. In spite of being married to a tubercular person, she is happy as there is love and understanding between the couple. Pom, like Maya, has love for luxury. Though initially she constantly complained
against her mother-in-law, but, at the prospect of motherhood, has
turned fatalistic and goes to the temple at the behest of the mother-in-
law. But 'fate' is one word Maya cannot tolerate now.

Fate reminds her of a prophecy. Toto's death has released her pent-
up emotion and unearthed the secret she has been trying to run away
from till now. As a young girl, she had gone with her ayah to meet an
albino astrologer. He predicted unnatural death to Maya or her husband
on the fourth year of her marriage. The eerie atmosphere of the temple,
where the albino resided, the queer antics of the astrologer, his
hyperbolic language-all-had created a deep gash in her young mind.
Through her father's careful ministration she had forgotten the episode.
But in the unbearable heat of this summer of the fourth year of their
marriage, and the heat of unassuaged passion, the memory has come
back to haunt her. She feels the prophecy to be the gospel and goes
gradually insane with excessive fear of this inevitable death.

In her insanely illogical mind, she feels it should be Gautama,
instead of herself, who should face death. She argues that engrossed in
his work, Gautama has lost touch with life while she is acutely aware of
the world around her. In her morbid fear of death she turns away from
Gautama and seeks solace in her soothing, love-filled, and luxurious childhood. Gautama calls this her father-fixation and critics often quote this dialogue, accepting Gautama’s accusation as absolutely true. But the fact remains that she craves only for her father’s protective care realizing that Gautama is incapable of giving her compensating love although she observes that “I had fled down the corridor of years, from the embrace of protection to embrace of love” (p.82). It is Gautama’s apathy, his fear of the flesh, which turns this passionate girl into a lunatic woman obsessed with death hearing the footfalls of approaching death in every real or imaginary object.

She sees death in the mating cry of the peacock, in the musical notes, in dance as well. Death chases her everywhere till the last moment. One day walking with Gautama on the roof of their house, she is enrapt in worshipping the rising moon when Gautama comes between her and the moon thus obstructing her vision:

‘Gautama!’ I screamed in fury, and thrust out my arms towards him, out at him, into him and past him, saw him fall then, pass through an immensity of air, down to the very bottom (p.173).
Gautama’s mother and sister take Maya back to her parental house at Lucknow, where they waited for Maya’s father to come back from his summer holiday in Switzerland. In spite of their grief at the death of Gautama, they take proper care of Maya feeling that she has turned insane. At night, when Maya cries in horror, standing on the balcony, Gautama’s mother rushes upstairs to help her. There, both Maya and her mother-in-law “met for an instance, there was silence, and then both disappeared into the dark quiet. All around the dark was quiet then” (p.184).

Maya’s story reveals a sensitive individual’s agonizing passage from passion to frustration to death. Dubbed as neurotic and suffering from Electra complex, she is, in reality, an individual highly misunderstood for her clinging, creeper-like existence, her morbid fear of death and loneliness. Thus she remains true to her name ‘Maya’, elusive and mysterious for many of the critics of the novel to discover her true identity.

This drama of Maya’s life is presented in Cry, the Peacock with the first and third parts forming the prologue and epilogue, narrated by a third person narrator. The middle, substantial part two, is the memoir
written by Maya. The narrative presentation of Maya’s own story is made through three inter-related layers: a written record, the memoir of Maya; a spoken audience – directed discourse; and finally a silent self-address.

The first part narrated by a consonant third person narrator is meant to throw light on Maya’s psyche, her extreme sensitivity, as well as the contrasted characters of the couple. The third part, that comes back to third person narration again, reveals the sad end of the story of these diametrically opposite couple. The novelist’s design of the narrative distributed between two different narrators is effective to provide the reader with a convincing commentary on Maya’s miserable situation in life and thereby craving his sympathetic understanding of her plight.

The first part of the novel rendered in consonant psycho-narration, shows Maya in a crucial day of her life – the death of her (a childless woman) pet. There is no judgment, no comment as is appropriate to consonant psycho-narration. It is to be marked that the narration begins in-medias-res without naming the characters till the end of the chapter. The image scene, so powerfully poetic, draws the reader unconsciously to the inner world of Maya’s psyche and his response is sympathetic rather than critical. The novel has minimal action and hence in place of a well-
designed plot, we experience the movement of the plot in the progression of images and juxtaposition of characters in the inner drama of Maya's mind as in a poetic-psychological novel. The great image scenes like the meeting with the albino astrologer; cabaret dancers; dinner parties; the railway platform and the caged monkeys; as well as the storm scene at the end - all intensify Maya's mental turmoil.

All day the body lay rotting in the sun. . . . So she moved the little string bed on which it lay under the lime trees, where there was a cool, aqueous shade, saw its eyes open and staring still, screamed and rushed to the garden tap to wash the vision from her eyes, continued to cry and ran, defeated, into the house (p.7).

The unemotional voice of the narrator simply presents the scene and the intense emotion of the protagonist underlining her hyper sensitivity and keen observation.

The narration is done in Maya's poetic, imaginative and imagistic language. She likens the sun to a "purulent boil" "swelling visibly" "hanging from the topmost branches of the tree." Maya's colourful,
subjective thought reveals her tendency to think in sensuous terms. Her surrealistic vision of the sun underlines her anguish and restlessness. The simile of the sun as a purulent boil suggests her life to be a pus-filled wound swelling all the while.

The disposal of the dead dog is followed by a quoted dialogue of the couple:

'It is all over,' he said. 'Come and drink your tea, and stop crying. You mustn't cry' (p. 8).

The psycho-narration preceding this dialogue reveals the opposed mental make-up of the couple: Maya brooding, hysterical and inactive while Gautama is methodical, precise and unemotional. This fact is immediately reinforced through the quoted dialogue, too banal to console a bereaved. This also speaks of Gautama's habitual action of apathy along with his pragmatism. To reiterate this habit of mind of Gautama the narrator draws our attention to Gautama abandoning his wife, the moment an advocate comes calling, forgetting her, forgetting her woes altogether. The consonant psycho-narration underlines Maya's solitude, anguish as well as her extreme fear of death.
The denouement to Maya’s tragedy is provided in the epilogue, where the final picture of Maya’s marital as well as mental life is presented. Here the psycho-narration begins by presenting the setting. The setting is Lucknow, Maya’s parental house. Gautama’s mother and sister Nila have taken her back there, following Gautama’s death. Maya’s father is still in Switzerland for his summer holiday. Arjuna in America is also contacted by these two women. In spite of their practical approach, they are unable to sleep, unable to fathom their loss or Maya’s psyche.

If the story begins in a day of April heat it ends in May evening. We are shown the end of Maya and also her sad story through the third person narrator, who presents the mother and the daughter in dissonant narration in an ironic vein along with Maya’s ancestral home seen through the eyes of the two women:

...the air of appalling scandal that had somehow infiltrated even into this monument to discrete and traditional aristocracy, like a significant snigger uttered at a solemn public meeting... (p.177).
The expressions “appalling scandal” and “significant snigger” stress the inappropriateness of the women’s comment which shows their limitations in understanding in contrast to Maya’s self-narration that extols this building and elevates it to a monument of aristocracy. The narrator’s comment on the clock intensifies this ironic view of the women who are ordinary and plebian in their mental make-up so that fail to appreciate properly the aristocratic grandeur of Maya’s birth place.

So quiet was it that the very clock in the library with deferential slowness seemed to move its hand with sticks of incense and bowls of Ganges water (p.177).

The narration here reiterates Maya’s extolling this place as even such inanimate object as a clock also pays reverence to this citadel of aristocratic grandeur. Also the simile of the funeral priest is appropriate for the sombre atmosphere of the house which is described as “an expensive nursing home for convalescents.”

The irony directed against the two women is explicit when they avoid touching each other or when they refuse stubbornly to dwell upon their loss:
She was inflamed by the recollection of the girl greeting them with her feline embrace and, with a smile radiating out of her swallowing, brilliant eyes, insisting on bringing them tea, sweets, even as she recounted to them that story of mad horror, all in the same, cool, honeyed tones,... (pp.180-81).

"She was inflamed", as commented by the narrator reveals Nila's underlying emotion which she has not been taught to vent although she could not accept her mother's conviction that Gautama's death was an accident discounting Maya's story of pushing him below the parapet. The difference between the mother and the daughter in their reactions to their common situation of the greatest stress is, however, presented by the narrator with sympathy and understanding without any element of irony. Nila, extremely in discomfort, and her mother, too tired and disinclined to speak, are however similar on one aspect:

... and that was that in their thoughts, that ran much on the same lines, there was bitterness, naturally there was bitterness, but no hatred what so ever (pp.179-80).
The "naturally" of the narrator's comment here makes an amusing observation of thoughts of the two ladies, while he is of complete understanding and sympathy with Maya's self-narration. Further, the irony borders on mild sarcasm as the two women being sensible and unemotional, can feel bitterness but no hatred because the latter feeling is too emotional compared to the former.

As has been said before, Maya's self-narration is presented as a memoir written following Toto's death and it bears the stamp of Maya's unresponded, hungry heart and her tortuous loneliness. Except for the fact we know that the story begins in April heat and ends in May loo, there is no reference to the exact time when the memoir was written. The narration contains events from her early childhood to the critical moment that ends with Gautama's death and she records each event meticulously. The memoir begins with the following:

There remained a certain unease, a hesitance in the air, which kept the tears swimming in my eyes, and prevented their release. I was not allowed the healing passion of a fit of crying that would have left me exhausted, sleep-washed and becalmed. Something slipped into my tear-hazed vision, a
shadowy something, that prodded me into admitting that it was not my pet's death alone that I mourned today, but another sorrow, unremembered, perhaps as yet not even experienced, and filled me with this despair. I could not focus my mind upon it, so swiftly and constantly did it move (p.13).

Maya's narrative is consonant self-narration. The use of this technique nullifies any superior knowledge or value judgment of the narrating self. By merging completely with the experiencing self, it highlights her dark confusion over the uncertain feeling following Toto's death. It harps on one single string of emotion, the confusion and the dawn of knowledge is gradual and tortuous through a process of recapitulation, analysis, rejection or confirmation.

The experiencing consciousness reveals not only the dark confusion but also Maya's unmitigated misery, her loneliness and lovelessness and ultimately the culpability of Gautama. This last impression is conveyed through the classic comparison of Gautama to Gautama-the Buddha.
Maya’s analytical ability, her minuteness of observation and her extreme sensitivity have also their counterpart, in her poetic delineation of the natural world:

Rangoon creepers entwined these pillars and climbed the walls, spread trembling tendrils towards the roof . . . clusters of small, star-like flowers that had been pink and red in daylight, and now were white and strongly scented . . . Now rising upon the uneven breeze, now descending, with a slow, mysterious movement as of nocturnal snakes. They say it attracts snakes—this sweet, intoxicating fragrance. No, I am wrong. It is Queen of the Night that attracts snakes. Beauty and evil, evil, beauty. Snakes, summer scent, flower, white, white, white . . . (p.16).

The narration reveals a dynamic inner life. The photographic description of the garden in night light reveals her sentimental nature, her love of the natural world and her poetic sensibility. The statement about evil and beauty echoing Keats’ famous line “Beauty is truth, truth beauty” reveals her attempt at going from personal to general and
ultimately trying to accept the inevitable. The last line emphasizes her precarious hold on herself when she is agitated by emotion.

Maya’s attempt at generalizing her sorrow arises from her failure to locate the ‘unease’. The awareness of ‘something’ is revealed in slow steps underlining her paranoia, her hallucination and the torturous process by which she is enlightened of the past. She starts hearing deafening drumbeats that could be the onset of schizophrenia when she hears sounds unheard by others. She thinks of death as well as these sounds which could be the drum-beats accompanying Hindu funeral pall bearers. Henceforth, the awareness of death and drumbeats follow her:

In the end, it was not the stars that told me, but the moon, when it rose out of the churn of my frenzy . . . it was not the gentle moon of love ballads and fairy revels that so swiftly mounted the roof of our house, but a demoniac creature, the fierce dancer that had all day been trying to leap the threshold of my mind and home, accompanied by a deafening roar of silent drums. . . . It was a phantom gone berserk, and, from a body of absolute white, assumed terrible colours, rose out of realms of silence into one of thunderous drumming.
God! God! I cried, and sat up in terror . . . A black and evil shadow. Its name was not that of a demon in a Kathakali dance drama, nor was it one of the limpid appellations of the moon. It was, I remember it now, Fate (p. 29).

Maya's language becomes now intensely emotional and imagistic relating to her hallucinatory vision. It presents an overwrought mind, agonizing over death and her vision mistakes the moon for a demoniac creature, a fierce dancer. The hallucination objectifies for her the horror of death. The paradox of "a deafening roar of silent drums" underlines her own demoniac fear of death.

Now she digs out the buried memory of the astrologer’s prophecy. This recollection is the result of Toto’s death and Gautama’s desertion resulting in her loneliness. The memory of astrologer is given an impressionistic representation:

He had been- large or small? I cannot remember, but his eyes I do: they were pale, opaque, and gave him an appearance of morbidity, as though he had lived, like a sluggish white worm, indoors always, in his dark room at the temple gates, where
the central lingam was painted a bright, vicious red, as though
plunged in sacrificial blood, and light burned in a single lamp
from which oil spilled into a large, spreading pool (p.29).

Here is a vivid first person account of the quality as well as the
component parts of the thought of that climactic event. A number of
images reveal the horrifying experience of not only that day, but also its
effect on Maya recapitulating the same. It shows Maya’s thought on
multiple planes: pure logical presentation: that is a culmination of the
story of ‘unease’ of the entire day; past memory unravelled gradually
through association with one death; and also the poetic similes that
underline the lurid, feral impact it has left on Maya’s psyche. The
narration thus reveals the central schema (in this case, the atmosphere of
the temple and the antics of the astrologer) that shapes Maya’s mental
landscape. Though she and her father have tried to erase that memory,
the essence of the prediction, death, has been in her sub-conscious. But
now in association with Toto’s death, the prediction of death hovers over
her consciousness.
When the drums fell silent and the moon began to sink over the trees, I knew the time had come. It was now to be either Gautama, or I (p.32).

Maya's consonant self-narration moves her story ahead when it makes the prophecy responsible for her fear of death. But we also find in her fear the portrayal of a lonely, wanting mind that wonders back and forth in search of a friend, a supporter.

With successful use of the consonant type of first person narration, the writer represents Maya as surveying various stages of her life showing many facets of her personality. Primarily what is underlined is her frustration over lack of sex and hence her failed desire for children. Maya's subverted attempts at mating and procreating are reflected through her longing and agonized observation of nesting birds:

On our verandah, the pigeon's nests were suddenly filled with babies that twittered and muttered and whispered and whimpered all day... The doves, in a mood for mating, cooed to each-other until I was distracted. I counted them as omens
of ill fortune, of separation, for their coo was a tedious repetition of the fatal words, 'Go away!' (p.34).

The words like 'babies twitted, whispered, whimpered' bespeak her maternal instinct, but the futile desire is transferred to the fateful sounds of doves. Thus one thought leads to another revealing the core of Maya as a lonely, lovelorn, frustrated woman.

She escapes through associative memory to a more pleasant time at home:

It is another spring – a far more idyllic one, for it is at home, in Lucknow. I have been strolling amidst the vegetables with father – he takes an interest in tomatoes of a foreign variety, and I nibble at a radish, then a spring of dill-but he has been called in by a visitor, and now I am waiting for him, in the shade of the bougainvillea arbour, where the light turns from lilac to mauve to purple, from peach to orange to crimson, as the small whispers of breeze turn and turn again the heavy load of blossoms upon the air. . . . The world is like a toy
specially made for me, painted in my favourite colours, set moving to my favourite tunes (p.35).

There is complete absence of self criticism of any kind in the narrating self, and from here on, the narrative tense moves from past to present quite frequently and quite easily which shows consonance between the narrating and the experiencing selves. The narration reveals a number of facets of Maya’s psyche. First of all it lends proof to Maya’s romantic escapist tendency whereby she loves to escape into a world filled with memories. The next is the minuteness of her observation and her feeling being at one with the world around her. Maya’s acute sense of oneness with the universe is revealed in a powerful passage as the following:

... it was not only for his presence, his love that I longed, but mainly for the life that would permit me to touch him, feel his flesh and hair, hold and then tighten my hold on him. And not on Gautama alone, but on all the pulsating world around him, from the frieze of stars silently exploding in the summer sky to the faintly fluttering owls making covert, hidden love in the
crotch of the fig tree— all that suggested life and the great, entrancing world to me who was doomed not to live (p. 88).

It is to be marked here that Maya is much like the Lawrentian lovers for whom the human love-making in its passionate abandon partakes of the mystical experience of oneness with the whole world. Another passage highlighting the same experience occurs just before Maya executes her unspoken decision of the murder of Gautama:

I continued to mount, step by step, to the roof, looking up to see the evening sky lowering itself to descend upon me till, suddenly, when I had burst out into the open, we were one—the blue immensity and I (p.170).

In a true memoir fashion, her remembrance appropriates other memories that come on the path and the process is one of association. Thus, the memory of a pleasant summer of childhood drags her mind back to the scorching heat of that summer of the fourth year of their marriage, Gautama’s criticism of her childhood, and his apathy.

Maya frequently escapes into her childhood of pleasure, plenty and protection. The present tense used by the narrating voice, even while
recapitulating a childhood scene of the past, reveals the continued importance of those things for Maya particularly her fairy-tale life, her father's indulgence, and the safety and security she had and still needs.

In contrast to that both Gautama and his entire hard-working, pragmatic family do not show interest, care and love for her. As a result, she turns to the only solace she knows:

As always happened to me, it was after my most anguished moments that a piece of truth fell into my exhausted mind—the truth that it was not for them that I longed with fiercest desire, not even for Gautama, but for my gentle father who would have said to me, with that assured and reassuring calm, 'It will all be well, it will all be well soon, Maya.' He had often had to hold me in his arms, or, when I was smaller, wash the tears from my face, and repeat those mesmerizing words to me in his deep tones. . . . As I had been a wayward and high-strung child, I heard these phrases frequently, and each time I felt them soothe me like a stream of cold water that tumbled through the ferns of Darjeeling, like the cold,
pearl mists that crept over the blue hills and poured into the valley (p. 48).

Critics call this habit of her escaping into childhood as Maya’s father-fixation, a form of Electra-complex in terms of Freudian psychology. But her language passionately describing the memories of her father has no suggestion of erotic in it. Thus the simile in the passage comparing her father to the cool water of Darjeeling and not volcanic eruption of passion underlines the luxury of her home, her longing for paternal care and protection. On the other hand, her language is erotic while she describes anything while Gautama is around:

But there was a moon. A great moon of hot, beaten copper, of molten brass, livid and throbbing like a bloody human organ, a great full-bosomed woman who had mounted the skies in passion, driven the silly stars away from her, while she pulsed and throbbed, pulsed. and glowed across the breathless sky (p.47).

Maya’s erotic vocabulary gives expression to a consciousness obsessed with the idea of sex and procreation. In her agitated state of
mind she incongruously juxtaposes 'moon', now to a 'bloody human organ', and then to a 'full-bosomed woman' pulsating. And her impassioned, agitated thought at the failure of communication with any member of Gautama's family leaves her dejected and determined not to return to that family again.

Maya's memory narration fuses her past and present, reveals her need for companionship, for an anchor in life. But she also accepts the unbridgeable gap, even the increasing gulf between her and Gautama, and this is how the prophecy of the albino takes centre-stage in her life. Lonely and desperate and unfulfilled in desire, she grows obsessed with the idea of death:

Upon this bed of hot, itching sand, I summoned up again the vision of the tenebrific albino who had cast his shadow like a net across me as I had fled down the corridor of years, from the embrace of protection to the embrace of love, yet catching me as surely as a giant fisherman . . . I had not escaped. The years had caught up, and now the final, the decisive one held me in its perspiring clasp from which release seemed impossible (p.82).
This shows how in a first person narration the psychology of the narrator influences the form and content of narration. Very deftly the blame is placed on Gautama for his apathy. Chased by the Eumenides of prophecy she is ultimately caught by them and the cause of their success is the failure of embrace of love on the part of Gautama.

Maya, like any young woman craves for physical love which Gautama is unwilling to provide and that hurts her ego, and self-worth and she starts losing her sanity:

As I threw myself on the chair before the dressing-table, crushing bottles and posies between my fingers, that echo was transformed into the rhythm of drumbeats that grew in strength and volume, grew and did not diminish. This is not natural, I told myself, this cannot be natural. . . . 'This is insanity. But who, what is insane? I myself? Or the world around me? And the vibrations of the drums quivered like ripples touched with froth across the mirror, . . . (pp.121-22).

Maya’s narration picks up her meandering thoughts and the connecting link between one and the other is the record of inner events
in the memoir: a series of emotions, the primary one being anger and doubt. Her anguished, reflective language is a pointer to her insanity. The fact that she does not narrate but resorts to quoting her thought speaks of the hiatus between thought and truth. As Dorrit Cohn says, “Occasional quotation of past thoughts – on the pattern of ‘I said to myself: . . . ‘” narration, with its rhetorical speech “render moments of climactic conflict or high pathos” (p.161). The act of her questioning the sanity of the world throws into ironic relief her own sanity and her self-doubt. The mirror as the reflector of inner personality reflects the schizoid split between her ego and alter-ego. She sees her face, her pride, through Gautama’s eyes as childish and lacking control. Gautama’s lack of perception is also revealed in his failure to understand Maya’s inner crisis and her gradual slide into insanity. Maya’s insanity is complete when she bids farewell to her loving father and calls of herself as a ‘nothing’:

Only a dream. An illusion. Maya- my very name means nothing, is nothing but an illusion (p.144).

It is a rather self-defeating narration of her condition that the once-near- narcissist girl is still fully self-absorbed but at the same time she denies her existence. When she bids farewell to her father, to her
brother, the free bird, the last hold on sanity slips from her. It is in this context that she writes her being “alone insane with dread” of death asking the readers not to take her words too seriously because the conversations and episodes she writes in her memoir may not be actual but simply constructions of her mind. Since the novelist has nurtured and intensified the reader’s sympathy for Maya through her presentation of earlier episodes and scenes, Maya’s rider fails to make an overturn of reader’s sympathy at this late stage. On the other hand Maya’s statement is one coming from a very sensible and sane person and not one who is insane. Hence, the rider serves to intensify the reader’s sympathy rather than diminishes it. We only know, whether insane or not, she loved life, she feared the prophecy on which she had unshakable faith, her terrible loneliness, and her need for freedom along with her craving for protection. Failing to get any solace from Gautama she wished for his demise, instead of her death.

Like the consonant self-narration she uses for narrating certain real or imaginary episodes, Maya at times quotes directly her thoughts or presents narrated thoughts through quoted monologue or narrated monologue, or even presents verbatim the dialogues as recollected by
her. Maya uses self-quoted dialogue/narrated monologue frequently at moments of inner crisis or for rhetorical speeches and especially while expressing feelings for Gautama:

'Velying here in the dark?' he said, and drew a finger down my cheek. Fall, fall, long fall into the soft, velvet well of the primordium, of original Instinct, of first-formed love (p.15).

A simple gesture is here followed by a volcanic eruption of erotic feelings. The grieving pet-owner has transformed herself to the sulking wife and a passionate woman for whom, it seems that Gautama’s touch is what she lives for.

The following monologue, embedded in a past narration frame, reveals her need for passionate companionship and Gautama’s scant response and apathy results in her intense sense of loneliness:

Yes, I cried, yes, it is his hardness—no, no, not hardness, but the distance he coldly keeps from me. His coldness, 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 (p.14).
The narrated monologue here reveals the immediacy of Maya’s feeling, a feeling which has remained unchanged all through because of Gautama’s apathy and neglect of her and the emotional, physical and intellectual gulf separating the couple. It also reveals the way Gautama suppressed Maya’s natural ebullience resulting in her feeling of helplessness and loneliness. It shows further that Maya is intelligent and capable of searching, analyzing, or dismissing a particular argument for another till she unearths the root of their marital trouble. Maya's conscious effort projects her subconscious need to expose Gautama for his banality, and his lack of emotion or passion. In order to erase his hurtful words and deeds from her memory, she escapes into the pleasantness of her childhood:

When with my father, even breakfast in the garden . . . becomes a party, as good as a revel of elves and fairies who feast on melons and syrups by moonlight (p.41).

The narrated monologue here is occasioned by Gautama’s refusal to go south to watch Kathakali dance on the ground of money and it shows how her luxurious, love-filled childhood clashes head on with Gautama’s money-pinching, Gita quoting, subjugating attitude that rankles her.
When the dust-storm breaks loose, the storm is seen as mirroring
the storm raging inside Maya:

Oh, to send the whole card-house toppling with one high-
flyin kick and swoop of arms, to let the wild wind howl down
and across it leaving a great space of light and freedom in
which to dance round and round, . . . (p.157).

This direct quotation of her thought at this crucial juncture of her
developing insanity registers her desire to do away with all artificiality, all
play acting, as her married life has come to be. She asserts now her secret
desire for freedom that Arjuna could gain but she never dared to. She has
come to this final resolution through much soul-searching, for which the
use of the narrated monologue technique is appropriately utilized. The
technique is resorted to when she decides about Gautama’s death or
murder:

. . . and I gazed long at each feature of the image before me,
so like a painting on a chocolate box, and hated it fiercely. . . .
I forced myself into believing that I could see now what must
be the reason for my hating it so, for Gautama’s spurning it . .
. It must be a mark upon my forehead, which had been so clear to the opaque eye of the albino . . . and which prophesied a relentless and fatal competition between myself and Gautama. I tried to define this mark, give it a name, and locality. Was it an arrow? A coffin? A cross? A star? Was it between the eyes? At the temple? Was it dark? Was it pale? And what made gods reach out and touch it with their cold fingers, as they considered the prospect of a murder? (p.91).

A crucial realization and decision is represented through this self-narrated monologue couched inside retrospective narration. The narration begins with Maya’s self-analysis that has now turned to self-doubt and hate. But the blame is put on fate for the blemished face. Further, there is a new development here: there is competition between Gautama and her although he was an ally earlier.

Maya’s transformation from a death-obsessed woman to one contemplating murder reflects an existential crisis. But there is no self-recrimination as she feels it might be all fated. Notwithstanding Gautama’s apathy and insensitivity, his is a face “of those who lived, not of those who died, or murdered”: 
Could death disturb him then? What effect would the tap of the priest's faggot have, knocking against the door-post, as he came to light the cremation pyre? I could see Gautama grunting his displeasure, rapidly shaking his head to make the apparition disappear in humiliation. No, there was no mask of death upon that thinking, frowning face. But then, ... there was none on mine either ...

And sometimes I paused to feel the arrow of that word, Murder sink into my flesh, and to cry, 'Is this what I have come to?'(p.139).

Pursued by the memory of prophecy, Maya is in constant dread of death. She now wishes for the hanging sword to fall on Gautama's, instead of her head. But she is not a murderess; it is a necessity forced on her so that she could live and there by kill two birds with one stone fulfilling her longing for life and the prophecy of the astrologer.

Maya quotes frequently in her memoir conversations with her husband to justify her claim that they did not always talk, rather sat down
together in the evening to "matrimonial silences and conversation" (p.16).

'You are still frightened,' Gautama said, his voice reassuring, logical, calm. 'But why? Now it is all quite over and finished with. He did not really suffer long. If you would like a straw to cling to, then here is one- he did not suffer long. It was over before the vet arrived. The vet would only have prolonged the pain, in a case like this...'

'He might have helped,' I whimpered, knowing it had been hopeless.

'But it was hopeless.' Gautama's voice echoing my silent knowledge was like a support to whatever wavered and shook weakly in my wind-swept mind, as it had been on countless similar occasions (p.18).

The quoted dialogue here interspersed with presentation of every inflection of Gautama's speech reveals the narrating consciousness's need to establish the emotional polarity between the couple. Toto was her emotional anchor, but for Gautama, he already has become a dead
body. When she needs solace, another anchor, Gautama, gives her a “straw” of logic to cling on to. While Gautama’s voice is logical and calm Maya’s “silent knowledge” is still wavering.

The following quoted dialogue which is particularly an extension of the same conversation highlights the mental antinomy between Maya and Gautama:

‘You always say things like that. As though it didn’t matter whether people lived or died.’

‘It doesn’t,’ he snapped. ‘Not with the majority of dim-wits and numbskulls, it doesn’t. They are a pack of sheep in any case. It is only the few who lead these animals, the ones who are capable of logic and analysis, who matter. Their lives are of importance, and the triviality of their end is saddening, I admit’(p.19).

This dialogue, quoted by Maya is meant to substantiate her claim that Gautama is inhumanly logical and analytical without being instinctive and emotional. Moreover, the way he sneers at the very existence of the ordinary human beings projects his superiority complex.
Use of quoted dialogue is a significant device through which Maya allows us to see Gautama from her standpoint:

I insisted we leave the lights off in the dining room, ... imagining that from this dimness we should be able to look out on the stars.

‘They are so bright tonight,’ I pleaded.

‘Well, I hope bright enough for me to spot a fly if it falls into my dinner,’ grumbled Gautama, who was no romantic . . . (p.26).

This quoted dialogue interspersed with retrospective narration, appears to be an island by itself. In contrast to the deluge of Maya’s emotion, Gautama’s banality stands out starkly. This highlights the unbridgeable emotional chasm separating the couple.

Maya’s memory of these conversations is not always fixed on Gautama, but she resorts to the same minuteness of presentation of the speaker when she remembers her childhood:
'Maya!' my father calls, and it is in a voice so different from the one that had spat out 'Charlatan,' that perhaps it was not his voice at all that I heard. 'Maya.' I answer him so that he might find me...

'Who was that?' I ask. 'Who was that talking to you just now?'

He starts a bit, then beams at me...

'Why do you ask?' he says lightly. 'What, would it mean to you if I told you of a naughty clerk, or a lying client?'

'I would—I would hit him with my tennis racket!' He laughs loudly, for this is the kind of remark that, coming from me, pleases him inordinately. . . . 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, isn't it? Where shall we go this year, Maya? Choose!' (pp.37-38).

This conversation reveals Maya’s relationship with her father marked by delight, freedom and mutual love and reciprocation between them. It is also reminiscent of Maya’s pampered and luxurious childhood.
Her quoted dialogue with Gautama brings out the contrast of her present life with that of her past:

‘If only we could go away for the summer,’ I sighed,...

Gautama’s reaction was exactly what I might have predicted . . . ‘Why don’t you?’ he said, in a cold, astringent tone. ‘Your father would take you wherever you wanted to go. He can.’ It was the tone he normally used in speaking of my father, but without any leavening of indulgence . . .

‘Ah!, Gautama,’ I cried . . . ‘You don’t imagine I would go without you? Leaving you behind in the heat?’

‘Why not?’ he said, snapping open his cigarette case with a metallic click that matched his voice. ‘I dare say I can manage, considering I did so for a great many years before I married you.’

‘Is there so much work to be done this summer? Couldn’t you get away – just for a short holiday?’
His cigarette calmed him. . . 'Unlikely,' he said. 'There is a lot of work,' . . . 'Where would you like to go? Darjeeling?'

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

'I thought as much,' he said, smiling the smile that meant nothing more than a little cynicism—too indifferent, actually, to be called even that. It hurt me more than if it had been a look of unmasked misanthropy' (pp.38-40).

The quoted dialogue here shows Maya's mind as a homing pigeon which does not want to abandon her duty and place as a wife. Coming quickly after the presentation of her childhood home, the dialogue underlines the atmosphere of her husband's home marked by banality and insensitivity. Gautama's disparagement of her father highlights the cultural, emotional and aesthetic disparity between the couple.

Maya's recollection of her dialogue with Gautama also shows his insensitivity to the world around him. While he is apathetic to the poverty and squalor of his friend, the Lal's house, Maya feels both contrite and
sad. However, when they visit a cabaret show, she finds an ally in Gautama in her disgust with the exhibitionism of the dancers. The following dialogue shows Gautama’s lack of understanding and unresponsiveness are glaring, as when Maya craves for him physically, as she did after a party at home and Gautama had nothing but to minister her *The Gita* instead:

‘You have even forgotten those nights’, he said, ‘And I was going to be your fried, philosopher and guide tonight, and ask you to remember what it says, of attachment, of the sins arising from it, and the payment for those sins’...

‘How it suits you to quote those lines of a dry stick - an inhuman dry stick. Oh, you know nothing, understand nothing.’ I raised my voice. ‘Nor will you ever understand. You know nothing of me – and of how I can love. How I want to love. How it is *important* to me. But you,’... ‘You’ve never loved. And you don’t love me...’
‘Is there nothing’, I whispered, ‘is there nothing in you that would be touched ever so slightly, if I told you I live my life for you?’

‘You are – untouched. How can I explain it to you then?’

‘Listen. You do not need to explain. I understand, I do. And if I appear – untouched, then it is because I am too perturbed to be touched. This is madness, Maya, quite uncalled for. . .

’(pp.95-97).

Gautama’s pontifical air only serves his own purpose of not providing Maya with physical communion that she so greatly craves for and deserves. He does not understand nor speak of love that Maya is so keenly looking for and instead berates her as mad:

‘Neurotic, that’s what you are. A spoilt baby, so spoilt she can’t bear one adverse word. Everyone must bring a present for little Maya – that is what her father taught her.’ It was he who spoke bitterly now.

‘Don’t you speak of my father’-
‘I will certainly speak of him. He is the one responsible for this – for making you believe that all that is important in the world is to possess, ... all the luxuries of the fairy tales you were brought up on. Life is a fairy tale to you still... what wickedness to raise a child like that!’

‘I had the happiest childhood. They were my happiest times.’

‘Yes, and all you ever knew was happiness. What a crime! A crime because it was a delusion.’...

‘You must decide, you must see for yourself and realize what are the important things in life, what are the true values. That is why I am quoting the Gita so profusely tonight.’... (pp.98-99).

The quoted dialogue here shows the basic difference between the two persons—Gautama, devoid of all feelings and sensations, preaches The Gita while Maya intensely desires his responsiveness to her profession of love for him. As a husband, without fulfilling his duty, he is hiding himself under the cloak of The Gita and his pontifical air. The anger
and scolding he directs at Maya, actually should have been done so at Gautama himself as he does not really understand the significance of the message of *The Gita* about detachment, far from reflecting the same in the course of his life. Detachment is not a negative virtue: it is not mere negation of attachment and Gautama is seen as attached to money, fame and power.

Although Maya’s memoir is strewn with her quoted dialogues with her husband and sometimes with her father still the consonant self-narration is preponderant in the autobiographical record. As Maya bemoans her loneliness, the dialogues become few and far between. Maya’s depiction of her life in the memoir through self-narration is given a haunting, pathetic note.

Apart from the technique of self-narration, Mrs. Desai uses the device of character representation whereby Maya’s distinctive traits of personality are brought out through contrast and parallelism with other figures of the novel. To begin with, the contrast between the two central characters, Maya and her husband, brings the former’s personality into sharp focus. The basic difference in their characters is highlighted by their proper names: Maya, the chimera, and Gautama the namesake of the
great Buddha, the renunciator. While Maya loves nature, Gautama is indifferent to it and Maya’s craving for passion is in contrast to Gautama’s unresponsiveness.

They are poles apart in their sensory perception. When Maya points out the ‘swooning scent’ (p.22) of petunias Gautama sniffed the air like a horse and calls it the smell of lemons. Likewise, when Maya brims over with emotion hearing Urdu couplets being recited by people at Gautama’s party, he damns the same for its primitive, pointless absurdity. Maya, brought up on listening to fairy tales and gazals, could reciprocate to the recital with passion. Hurt by Gautama’s rebuff, she analyses their irreconcilable temperaments. She realizes that with her strong aesthetic sense she is keenly attuned to the world of beauty but Gautama is inured to beauty of the natural world as well as art.

While she craves for passion and companionship, Gautama fails to provide the same. While for Maya sex is not only ‘union but communion’, Gautama, however, does not realize its significance in marital life and offers Maya instead the dry doctrine of The Gita. As a result, Maya’s unassuaged, physical passion creates havoc in her psyche. She feels that most likely it is her round, childish face that repels Gautama. She has
found a blemish in her face causing Gautama’s lack of interest in sexual
love. This realization of the absence of love between them makes her
miserable and she gradually grows melancholic. Even the beautiful world
around or the gay tune of the sitar touches no tender chord in her.

Gautama, on the other hand, blames her intense desire for love and
protection as her faulty upbringing and berates her for her father-
fixation. But Gautama’s frequent quotations from The Gita and his
philosophy of detachment would not have been so cataclysmic in her life
had it not been for her past. Maya’s admiration for her father is
unshakable: she likens him to a silver oak. In view of Maya’s great love for
the natural world, this simile underlines appreciation of her father while
Gautama is compared to the bark of an old tree, weather-beaten and
rough. She also brings out the basic difference between the two most
important persons in her life, her father and Gautama, through the
contrast between their handkerchiefs. While her father keeps his white
handkerchief in neat folds, Gautama’s handkerchief, at the end of the day
is still in neat folds but soiled. It is however in their respective attitude to
life that Maya is in sharp contrast with Gautama. While Maya, as a child
would spend her summer in Darjeeling, her repeated request to Gautama
for short holiday falls on deaf ears. He cannot extricate himself from work
nor does he want to squander money on such trifles. Maya admires her
father’s refined taste and calls him “exact and gracious like a Mughal
garden” and Maya’s every desire is fulfilled by him. But Gautama is
devoid of any taste for refinement and his indifference and neglect of
Maya is rather heartless.

Sharma and Awashti in their essay, “Anita Desai’s Cry the Peacock:
A Vindication of the Feminine” collected in Srivastava’s Perspectives on
Anita Desai(1984) make a perceptive comment on the outlooks and
qualities of Maya and Gautama:

The worlds of Maya (Woman) and Gautama (the husband) are
sharply contrasted in that both represent the extremities of
feminine and masculine principle. Maya is seething in eros,
manifested in her multi-dimensional projections of
companionship, maternity, of Keatsian sensuousness; of her
identification with petunias. Gautama on the other hand is an
Appolonian, he is into form, order, discipline, career and
logomachies(p.140).
Gautama's family is ignorant of love and attachment. Both the parents of Gautama are very busy and she feels like a piece of furniture in their house to be patted while they remembered but is neglected and abandoned afterwards. Nila, Gautama's sister, is very unlike Maya although she has to suffer a difficult marriage. While divorce never enters Maya's mind Nila comes to Maya's house to seek Gautama's help on divorce and when Gautama refuses she tries to find help all by herself. Maya, docile and dependent is, thus, completely at odds with Gautama's workaholic, and self-centred, and loveless family.

Her father's advice to adjust, to accept things as they are, rings constantly in her ears and in desperation she turns to her friends for solace. She tries to draw consolation and courage from her friend Leila, who accepts and adjusts to her life with a tubercular husband. She is resigned to her fate and is immersed in her work, both as a teacher and a wife. Unlike Leila, Pom, another friend of Maya, is fashionable and has a lust for new things. Though her mother-in-law works hard in the kitchen, Pom goes on complaining against her. But when she expects a child, she also turns fatalistic, goes to the temple to pray for a son as per the advice of her mother-in-law. Maya learns from her friends that contentment
arises from within. Comfort has nothing to do with giving love or solace. But Maya seeks love and failing that, is constantly unhappy. She wants to get rid of the hindrance to her happiness. But emotionally dependent as she is, she is unable to stand on her own. Instead she remembers her long-lost brother who has made himself free of all enchainment and ran away from home.

While Maya craves for the comfort of her home, her brother, Arjuna, feels like a prisoner and gazes through the windows of their house with longing for the outside world. As Maya recollects: “If I was a partridge, plump, content, he was a wild bird, a young hawk that could not be tamed, that fought for its liberty.” (p.113) He is temperamentally different from Maya in all respects. When Maya has ivory book-marks and leather-bound books, all neatly decorated, Arjuna’s books are crumpled, underlined and soiled. This hurts her fastidious taste and she complains but Arjuna would reply pointedly: ‘I well, I don’t just, look at them—I read them’ (118). The exchange reveals that Maya has no inclination for reading. Had it been so, it could have saved her from her torturous feeling of loneliness and might have become a balm to her hurt sensitivity.
Brought up as she is, she admires *gazals* and poetry, garden and roses, kindness and tenderness. She is virtually different from the whole world. Her delicate sensitivity is revealed by her attitude to the caged monkeys on a railway station, as they were taken to the laboratory in Bombay. The cramped space in which they were huddled together moved Maya to tears. She has a hallucinatory vision of being encaged herself. When no one not even a single passerby pays any heed to these unfortunate creatures, Maya reveals in her tears and fears her empathy and her tender, charitable and humane heart.

Thus the story of Maya is not the story of a neurotic Electra. Rather it is the story of the suffering and ignominy of a noble soul, who is subjected to several psychological jolts which finally throw her off-balance. It is the tragic story of a loving, caring, artistic, lonely woman. Her father's tender ministration clashes head-on with Gautama's hard hitting philosophy and words. Devoid of human love and humane values, Gautama's quotations from *The Gita* cannot prove to be a balm to soothe the wounds that he constantly inflicts upon Maya. This ultimately leads to her tragic end.
A further device of representation other than self-narration and character presentation used by Mrs. Desai in the novel is delineation of leit-motifs, symbols, images and hallucinating vision and dreams to probe and unravel the secret recess of the central consciousness. Mrs. Desai uses literal, metaphorical and symbolical images. Her characters seem to think in images that articulate their estranged sensibility and reflect their mental isolation. The central symbol of Maya's self-narrative is the cry of the peacock. This is related to Maya's frustrated passion. The theme of Maya's passionate longing for love that is thwarted time and again by Gautama provides the dominant leit-motif in the design of the novel. The mating cry of the peacock reverberates throughout the novel mirroring Maya's desperate passion of love:

But sleep was rent by the frenzied cries of the peacocks pacing the rocks at night - peacocks searching for mates, peacocks tearing themselves to bleeding shreds in the act of love, peacock screaming with agony at the death of love (p.146).

It was natural for Gautama not to hear the peacock's cries as Maya could. This led her to think him to be lost in distraction: "The man had no
contact with the world, or with me. What would it matter to him if he
died and lost even the possibility of contact? What would it matter to
him? It was I, I who screamed with peacocks . . . screamed in mute
horror.” (p.146) When Maya hears the peacock’s cry, she recollects the
albino astrologer’s explanation that the peacocks fight furiously before
mating. Knowing well, they would die before the end of monsoon, they
indulge in love as they love life. Maya, thus, finds her life to reflect that of
the peacock. Her basic emotion is that of yearning, expectation, a search
for love and living- the personal, the indefinable needs to be satiated by
the husband, failing which she feels her life doomed as the peacocks.

Like the symbol of the peacock’s cry the hovering presence of the
Kathakali dancer is a refrain throughout the novel. Her insanity and
obsession with death grow in proportion to the maniac dance of
Kathakali. In the first section of the memoir, on the verge of recollecting
the prophecy of the astrologer she describes the fierce Kathakali dancer
as “the mad demon”, a “phantom gone berserk” with “terrible colors”,
accompanied by “thunderous drumming”. (p.29) This is how she envisions
the Kathakali dancer in the second section of her memoir: “In the
shadows that spanned the ceiling above my bed, I saw the shadow of the
dancer spring to life, and I knew there was no time left, no time left at all." (p.48) Thus now the dancer has become the messenger of death with the figure of the dancer merging into that of the albino astrologer. The drum beats accompanying the dance that reverberate in her mind have a funeral overtone. She tries to overcome her fear by going south and make sure the dancers are all men. But Gautama laughs it away.

The prediction of the albino astrologer becomes the moving force behind Maya’s story of life. The prediction was made when she was a child, but the reference to it is reiterated throughout the memoir. As Kenan says, “the relation between the number of times an event appears in the story, and the number of times it is narrated” (p.56) underlines its importance in the interpretation of that event in the character’s life. At more lucid moments, Maya doubts the prediction of the astrologer and at others it becomes the guiding force of her life. Nonetheless, it impels Maya’s desire of Gautama’s death. Arjuna’s letter, however, confirms the prediction and pushes her completely into the lap of insanity.

Another recurring image that reflects her inner turmoil is the mirror and the nature of her perception of the same, her self-doubts, her self-deceptions. To begin with, she uses mirror as a reflector only towards the
end, when she has progressed far into the realm of insanity and it reflects here a momentary state of mind:

... I broke a storm loose myself, by striking out at his absurd reflection in the tall mirror, with such force, with such unconsidered force, that the great oblong of the mercurial cage went swinging... the world was tilted upside down, insanely, unnaturally, so that our faces appeared bloated, as though they were the faces of corpses floating in a grey sea...

I pressed my face close to the mirror, close to that bizarre reflection, and grinned into its teeth, then burst out laughing (p.123).

Maya's disturbed mind likens Gautama and herself to unnatural corpses. At the same time, by hitting at the mirror, she reveals her secret desire to hit Gautama and her "grinning" and "laughing" underline her madness. The mirror, thus, objectifies Maya's insane thought of getting rid of Gautama. There is also a reflective or thoughtful representation of the mirror. Rebuffed by Gautama in his party, she studies her face reflected on the dim mirror while her body separates itself from her soul.
She comes to the conclusion that her face, being just "a fleshly face", could not entice the professed intellectual that Gautama is.

Of the non-recurring images, there is one very significant mentioned at a crucial juncture in the story. This is Nataraja, representative of the creative and destructive force of Shiva, the Lord of the Dance. It occurs before Maya takes Gautama to the terrace where he meets his death. The image of the Nataraja suggestive of eternal movement, pulsating with life, is a symbol of liberation. Maya has gained self-confidence and poise to carry through her mission of achieving Gautama's end. There is also the one-time narration of the couple she had once seen while passing by in a car. The tenderness between the couple with a dog seems like the essence of love and meaning of existence to her. As Gautama is not able to live up to her expectations, she feels that Gautama, dead or alive, can make no difference to her life.

Some of these images function as symbols and play a pivotal role in character delineation. Thus, in part one, the narrator's psycho-narration of Maya watching the corpse of Toto goes as follows:
Crows sat in a circle around the corpse, and crows will eat anything—entrails, eyes, anything. Flies began to hum, amidst the limes, driving away the gentle bees and the unthinking butterflies. She thought she saw the evil glint of a bluebottle, and grew hysterical (p.7).

The surrealistic details here delineate Maya’s subjective vision, her distorted perception and agitated mind. The same subjective vision couched in imagistic language gives a symbolic representation of the sun later in the evening “when the sun hung pendant from the topmost branches of the trees, swelling visibly like—she thought—a purulent boil, until it was ripe to drop, her husband came home” (p.8). This reveals Maya’s psychic force gone, berserk. The act of symbolizing the sun as a purulent boil, anticipates the ultimate moment of her agony ending in death. Her peculiarly individualistic vision and symbolic projection of ordinary, common objects are seen in her impression of the central “lingam” of the temple she had visited with her ayah. For her the “lingam” decked in the vermilion is transformed into one “plunged in sacrificial blood.”(p.29)
Her perception of the colour white is ambiguous on several levels. While, generally associated with peace and purity, it takes on mysterious significance for Maya. Her dead dog was white, the astrologer was albino. But white becomes delightful and comforting when she describes her father as a silver oak, with silver hair, dressed all white. On the other hand, the cabaret dancer's tallow flesh creates nausea in her. The white moon is the demon which unsettles her by reminding the prophecy of the astrologer. And the white stars also do the same. White, for her, symbolizes its malevolent aspect: moon whiteness has the lividness of corpse and shroud. To her agitated mind Gautama appears as "the meditator beneath the sal tree" (p.14), his hand "as cool and dry as the bark of an old and shady tree" (p.25), even his pillow is unrelentingly hard. He is likened to ashes and when she grips his hand finds it to be "flesh and bone, ashes and dust, not rock" (p.105). Thus a consistent effort is made to project the distant, detached Gautama as unbending, unrelenting and unemotional.

There are also a number of animal images. Her self-narration is littered with fearful presence of snakes, iguanas, mating peacocks and doves and ants. Maya terrorized by the unknown, "crouched" like a
haunted animal. The ants function as suggestive images when Maya represents them as encircling the oil spilled from the lamp of the albino. The flame dying of excessive oil and ants eating the same suggests Maya’s life which was eaten away by the ants of her loneliness and her intense fear of death. The wick of the lamp also represents another dimension of the novel: just as the albino astrologer not seeing the oil-filled lamp, and tending only the wick kills the light, so does Gautama’s failure to realize and reciprocate Maya’s impassioned cry for love, kill her desire and self-respect. There is also recurring representation of music and dance with their significance varying according to the attitude of Maya. Nataraja, the dancing Shiva, dancing to the music of time and the principle of death and life, symbolizes for her death alone, not life and creativity. Similarly, the dance of the peacock is the dying cry for love. The Kathakali dancer’s shadow pursues her like a terrible demon reminding her of impending death. Maya is also revealed through hallucinatory visions and dream representations. The first of the narrated dreams was one that occurred in her childhood. A sensitive girl, she gets extremely agitated witnessing the hunger and suffering of a tamed bear and the cruelty of its trainer. At night she has a nightmare where many bears were made to dance, while
they turned into monsters from some prehistoric age pointing at their
 genitals with "stark madness in their faces..." (p.78). As Dorrit Cohn
 observes:

 "The mind in vision is paralyzed, whereas the dreaming mind
 variously interacts with and reacts to the dreamed
 experience, so that a dream often includes a dreamer's
 thoughts in his dream" (p.51).

 Maya's dream reveals her sympathy and pity for the animal, while the
 exhibitionism of the trainer exhibiting his stomach creates nausea in her.

 The same empathetic imagination of Maya is revealed in her dream
 following Gautama's accusation of her with father-fixation:

 I am in fever then, and it is not a rat at all, that odoriferous
 creature nibbling at its squealing mewling young, whipping
 them closer to its body with a long, germ-ridden tail — it is
 only a fever. And my father, who sits in a corner beside the
 mirror, so that I can see two of him and he is doubly
 impressive, doubly unreal, is not the one who is nibbling
 either. Nor is it his tail that lashes. It cannot be, for he is
eternally smoothing down his silver hair with white fingers, or placing finger-tip against finger-tip to form a most inviting little cage, over the top of which he smiles at me, sweetly, crying (pp.123-24).

Initially, she sees her father in his usual role of keeping vigil when she falls ill. The fact that he becomes doubly impressive and doubly unreal, speaks of her admiration as well as her awe of him. But by investing him with a tail she turns him to a rat, the odoriferous creature with a difference as his tail neither lashes nor nibbles. All the same, she reveals her need to get out of the "most inviting little cage" that her father forms by his finger-tips. The suggestion of her dream vision is that her father has no longer the same importance for her as he had earlier in her childhood.

What I had forgotten was the magic of my father's gentle words that had once had the power to soothe and console me. Now nothing calmed me. There was no magic that was not black. What I yearned for as the only thing that could save me from insanity, if not from the violence of an insane death, escaped me now (p.147).
Of all her hallucinatory experiences, the one in the dust-storm is very significant. Though awake she acts almost as a somnambulist. Capturing the inner and outer reality simultaneously, this experience reveals her hope, apprehension and guilt, guilt for the desire to live at the cost of Gautama. Her insanity grows to a crescendo in proportion to the advance of the dust-storm. The delineation of the sub-verbal state expresses Maya's total loss of self-control. The inner experience unhinges the shackles of love, affection – all the emotion she had felt for Gautama.

The images describing the storm- "tingling thrill"; "churning broil"; "plunged with grabbing hands"; "rapacious teeth"; "the heart of a gigantic melon, ruby-red, juice-jammed, and womb warm" (p.156) give her hallucinatory perception a strong erotic undertone.

Maya and Gautama relationship in the novel as presented by Mrs. Desai has been misunderstood by most interpretative critics of the story. Some have studied it from the standpoint of abnormal psycho-analysis and others have, on the other hand, viewed the story exemplifying the Feminist theory of patriarchy and male chauvinism. The psychoanalytic critics have taken the words of Gautama at their face value, upbraiding Maya as "you have a very obvious father-obsession - which is also the
reason why you married me, a man so much older than yourself” (p.122). It is, however, forgotten that Gautama also agreed to marry her so much younger than him, almost daughter-like in her age. Hence, Gautama’s agreeing to marry Maya can as well be interpreted as the cause precipitating their marital disharmony. If Maya is blamed for the failure of their relationship, Gautama can in no way escape from being blamed. His failure to respond to Maya’s hankering after his love and sympathetic understanding drives her to insanity and violent death at the end. What might be the reason for Gautama’s failure, his abdicating of the duties and responsibilities of a true husband? The reason appears to us to be his inability for sexual love with a daughter-like girl because of his mother-obsession. It is pertinent in this context to remember the sexual-ethic as elaborated by D.H. Lawrence in *Sons and Lovers* where Paul is a failure in sexual love with Miriam, much younger than him although he was a thumping success with Clara, a married and elderly mother-like lady. In probing the consciousness of her heroes and heroines, Mrs. Desai is very much influenced by the practices of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and D.H. Lawrence. Like her predecessors, Mrs. Desai is writing poetic-psychological novels. Since Maya is not a rebel against patriarchy and
male-chauvinism but a conformist who looks upon a loving and happy family as the main-stay of a woman's life, there is no question of the novel adumbrating Feminist rhetoric. Maya's tragedy is wrought by the failure of her marital life with Gautama and it is Gautama who is squarely to be blamed for her insanity and death as is alleged by Maya herself.

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