AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF


Title: Indian Women Rewriting Themselves: The Representation of "Madness" by Women Writers.

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Representations of "madness" in literature written by women have been the focus of feminist studies in the western world since the Victorian Era. When Charlotte Gilman Perkins wrote "The Yellow Wallpaper" in 1892, she "met with consternation of disapproving males . . . [and] it was virtually ignored for thirty years" (Kasmer 1). Gilman herself had gone through a "rest cure" which had brought her "perilously close to having a nervous breakdown" (Kasmer 1). Kasmer holds that the treatment of "rest cure" was commonly prescribed to women diagnosed with hysteria, to help them through "reintegration [into her proper] position as wife by forcing her to focus only on her home and children" (Kasmer 1).

Adrienne Rich calls for re-visionary readings of all feminist texts. "Re-vision--the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction" (483) is, for women, an act of survival. When we re-read female texts and re-write ourselves, we see "how our language has trapped as well as liberated us, how the very act of naming has been until now a male prerogative, and how we can begin to see and name--and therefore live--afresh" (Rich 483). Gilbert and Gubar, in their revision of Gilman's text, hold that the narrator "effects" her own liberation from the "textual/architectural confinement"
of patriarchal constructs by tearing down the wallpaper when she discovers her double behind it, enabling the double to escape to freedom" (91).

Thus, when female authors write about madness, they are "naming" themselves in their own language--the language of the body, which leads to freedom from the patriarchal construct and discourse. When women enter into this medium, they break free from the symbolic order, and only women who speak the same language, and listen with "another ear," (Irigaray) can interpret them. Interpreting this language through our bodies "involves a recognition of difference, a force different from the patriarch. This force points towards liberation" (Kasmer 13).

My discussion of the representation of madness in Anita Desai's Cry, The Peacock, and Bharati Mukherjee's Wife supports feminists' reading of madness. In both the books, the heroines break free from the patriarchal construct into another world where they can choose to name themselves. They rewrite and rename their experiences which leads them to liberation. This escape from the patriarchal construct and discourse is named "madness," but feminists claim this experience as empowering by questioning the very construct of madness. They claim that madness is actually a liberation from the patriarchal construct that keeps us in a subordinated and oppressed position in society.
Indian Women Rewriting Themselves: The Representation of "Madness" by Women Writers.

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Jaspal K Singh

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Redacted for Privacy

Professor of Women Studies, in charge of co-field

Redacted for Privacy

Chairman of department of English

Redacted for Privacy

Dean of Graduate School

Redacted for Privacy

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INDIAN WOMEN REWRITING THEMSELVES: THE REPRESENTATION
OF "MADNESS" BY WOMEN WRITERS.

I. INTRODUCTION

I became academically interested in the concept of madness as defined by feminists after I took a course entitled "Gender and Representation." Reading a chapter by Gilbert and Gubar from The Madwoman in The Attic was at once eye-opening and shocking to me. I have lived with a madwoman at very close quarters. My aunt, my mother's beautiful and sweet younger sister, who is married to my father's younger brother, had been diagnosed as "schizophrenic" (In the patriarchal discourse, it is defined as mental disorder marked by loss of contact with reality) twenty years ago, when she was forty. In layman terms, I was told it is called "split personality". We all lived in a joint family. She was the happy-go-lucky one, while my mother was the more responsible elder sister, who took care of the entire family's needs, cooking, sewing, knitting, washing, cleaning besides bearing six children. My mother bore six children because the first two were girls and then she was "blessed" with a son, and then again she bore two more daughters before she had another son. Each time the sons were born, my paternal grandmother distributed sweets and celebrated, and when I and my younger sister were born, my father refused to go to the maternity hospital to visit my mother or to see us.

My mother and my aunt were pregnant at the same time when I was born. My mother did not have enough breast milk to satisfy me, while my aunt who was having her first baby had excess breast milk, so she took to nursing me also. My aunt was more privileged because her first three babies were all boys. She took care of her five children and helped my mother cook and clean, but her main duty
was to look decorative and available to cater to her demanding husband's every need.

My aunt, who was born and raised in Burma, when she was young, used to be an idol for us. She always dressed beautifully, was always perfectly made up, and best of all, she always smelled sweetly of "Evening in Paris" perfume. She was fun loving, and dressed her little babies in all the cute little outfits my mother used to knit for her. My mother, on the other hand, not a preferred role model for us for I remember thinking what a drag her life was, was always too tired and too busy to dress up or look pretty. Besides, my grandmother was always around making life miserable for my mother. My mother had sleeping disorders which the doctors could not diagnose, while my aunt had adjusted to being married to a humorless man. My father was always traveling, buying merchandise for his cloth business, while my uncle used to take care of the store in his absence. My father was fun loving and was always full of energy, while my uncle was a humorless, strict disciplinarian. He was always putting restrictions on my aunt's visits to her brother's house or to her friends' houses, and I remember her sneaking off while he was at work. Other then that, she was treated like a privileged doll, and she did not acquire any skills for coping with the world--domestic or otherwise.

In 1979 the entire family--except my parents--left Burma and came to India after the brutal socialistic regime took over the democratic country. My parents were left back in Burma as they had business to complete before they could travel, and we all immigrated to India with our uncle and aunt. My parents were planning to join us within six months. My aunt, burdened for the first time in her life with taking care of all the eleven children, became exhausted and weak. She no longer looked pretty and no longer smelled nice. My uncle, during those days, became more humorless and, if possible, quieter. She had to have surgery where the doctors removed her entire labia (majora and minora) because of cancerous
growth. After four years of drudgery and then pain for my aunt, when my parents finally came from Burma (where they had been kept against their wishes), my aunt went mad. But first she had handed over the care of the entire family back to my mother. She suddenly started talking incessantly and kept on repeating that they had cut her vagina off. At forty, she looked shrunken and old. The doctors claimed that we all have ninety-six percent chance of becoming schizophrenic, but it takes a major crisis to "precipitate" it in most of us. Was the surgery the crisis point in my aunt's life, or did it become a moment in her life when she finally decided to rebel against the constraints of patriarchal society? Did she chose that point in her life to rebel? When my aunt was diagnosed as mad at the age of forty, I took care of her by taking her to the doctor and staying with her while she went through shock therapy. My older sister, who was an intern at the medical school, though sympathetic and helpful in getting my aunt treatment, was too ashamed to admit to being a blood relative of our aunt, because she claimed that madness was "hereditary" and can be passed on to us. She didn't want her peers to know. My uncle, at this point, was on a business trip since my family had to start a business in a remote area to survive in India. I became her sole companion and care-taker. She clung to me like a baby, and I, at twenty, felt maternal and nurturing toward my suffering aunt.

When we used to go to the mental hospital, the doctors and interns used to use her as a "case study" (more like a guinea pig, I felt), and would have endless experiments and discussions about her condition while I sat and watched helplessly. She used to wake up in the middle of the night hallucinating and "shooing" imaginary demons in the closet. The doctors finally put her on "largectil," a strong tranquilizer, and for the past twenty years she has been "docile" and "calm," and has not given trouble to any of her family members. She sleeps all through the day and night, and only gets up to prepare meals for her
children, eat, and then she goes back to sleep. She does not talk much, except about her childhood and about the happy days with my mother and her brothers at her parents' home.

Once, when my mother first came to India, she had gone through a mild "depression" and the doctors had prescribed "largectil" for her, too. My mother had started to cling to me like a child, and had started to talk "baby talk" with me. This had been after my aunt had been diagnosed mad. My two older sisters were away at the hostel of the college they were attending. My mother, however, recovered fast and got back into the "normal" world after a few months and has continued to cook and clean and sew for the joint family ever since.

My eldest sister, who is now a physician in the United States, was always labeled "hysterical" and neurotic as a teenager because she was feisty, full of life, and exuded sexual energy. It became the sacred duty of the male members of the family to suppress her sexuality and subdue her because it made them uncomfortable. This enterprise was led by my oldest uncle, who is married to my "mad" aunt. He used "tennis racquets" and thong leather sandals to beat her and subdue her. Her crime? She talked to boys, and she dared talked back to the males of the family. We were all sent to convent schools run by Irish nuns to get the best western education, but when my sister once attended a dance and did the "twist" with her friend's younger brother, she was caned till the "rod," (in which fabric for our father's store came rolled in) broke, and my sister had lash marks and bruises all over her body. At forty seven years of age, and a successful physician, she still calls me and asks why she hates married life and why she feels unfulfilled. I tell her it is because when she first got married and came to America, she was emotionally abused. She was put aside and neglected during her pregnancy. She shares this "shameful" experience with us sometimes after she breaks free of her restraint and control; otherwise, most times she tries to forget
her earlier painful experiences. She maintains that she was bringing the abuse upon herself because she could not live without abuse and had provoked her husband to abuse her by talking back and trying to be independent and proud. She blames it on her childhood, but never her husband. Sometimes she wonders if she has multiple personality disorder for she can get real "nasty" and mean to her husband, but she would immediately counter the statement and say if she had then they must have all merged back together for she feels so calm now. She is not mad yet.
II. WOMEN'S MADNESS: THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

"Empirical research, examining both the community surveys and the officially recognized 'cases,' shows that married status is one of the major factors correlated with women's diagnosed as depressed" (Jane Ussher 260). It is not marriage per se, states Ussher, that sends women to madness; it is the particular role that women adopt in traditional marriage, a passive, subservient role--"the classic mirror of man"--which is so harmful to women's mental health. Women's position in marriages are that of an "unpaid housekeeper or a servant." Women who do not have supportive relationships with a partner are more at risk to be diagnosed mentally sick. More often then not, states Ussher, it may be the absence of a meaningful role outside of the home which marks women as mad. "It may be the effect of being tied to the frustrating, boring, low status unpaid role of housewife" (Ussher 201). The work of a housewife is never-ending, yet her day has no structure and the tasks are not clearly delineated. "She is seldom rewarded. She is a door mat for her family with little or no control" of her life (Ussher 261).

Traditionally, the woman was passed from the father to the husband as an exchange through marriages, which maintains social cohesion, social order and maintains the status quo in patriarchal power structures. In the popular discourse, marriage is presented as a loving, trusting sincere relationship, the pinnacle of a woman's achievement, but in reality, it is a painful struggle. The example of the Victorian mad woman and the modern day "neurotic," who are diagnosed as suffering form syndromes such as depression are often cited. But in actuality, the real issue is not being tackled. It is a refusal to acknowledged that marriage as an institution often strips woman of her identity and power. If this is the case, then why do women voluntarily choose to enter the institution of marriage? If they are
aware that they are entering the institution of slavery, and still enter it willingly, why are they not considered mad by patriarchal society?

Within marriage women have traditionally given up the right to say no to her husband if he desires sexual intercourse. In the nineteenth century, a man could legitimately beat his wife if he used a stick no wider than his thumb, and in today's world, violence within a marriage is considered a private affair. In such a depressing scenario, is it any wonder that women eventually become "mad"?

"Madness is more than a label. It is more than a protest. It is more than a representation of women's phallocentric discourse, a reaction to misogyny and patriarchal oppression. To understand madness, we must look further and wider than the individual--to the whole discourse which regulates woman" (Ussher 289). How does patriarchal discourse regulate "women"? How does it contain us and oppress us and constrict us within this discourse that it invariably leads to women's madness? What are the beliefs of the collective consciousness of a society that positions women as "the other." One of the beliefs in India is that to be born as a female is to have extremely bad fate. While living, the wife's marital duty does not come to an end, even if her husband abandons her or sells her. The husband has a right to discard his wife at anytime, but the wife is to worship him as a god. Another belief is that only extremely unlucky and evil women become widows. They are not welcomed at any happy occasions, such as marriage celebrations or childbirth ceremonies, for they are considered inauspicious.

Manu, the Brahmin law giver, 2,000 years ago declared that stealing grain or cattle, having intercourse with a woman who drinks liquor or slaying a women are all minor offenses for which the only punishment was loss of caste. For a traditional Hindu women, total subordination in the service of the supreme deity in the form of her husband was called for. She has to give in to her husband's every wish, even if he is physically abusive, for this ill-treatment of hers is an
opportunity given to her to purge herself of her sins, if not of this life, then of her previous births. Therefore, the husband is doing a good deed since he was providing her an opportunity to atone for her misdeeds. For such women, their existence loses its rationale once the husband dies. The death of a husband is construed as punishment for sins committed in a previous births; in order to atone for those sins and ensure that she would not suffer widowhood in her next birth, she was decreed by Manu to give up rich food. Wearing perfumes, flowers, ornaments and dyed clothes, adorning her hair, and taking two meals a day were to be avoided by a widow. Only one meal a day was permitted and she is made to sleep on the floor on a grass mat. Most of these injunctions are still followed. A widow who slept on a cot was making her husband "fall in hell." A widow's life span was to be spent in prayer so that when she eventually dies, she might be reunited with her husband in the afterlife.

In certain languages in India, the word widow is used as an insult and a "cuss" word. Most prostitutes are called by the word widow, and until quite late in my life, I though the word widow did indeed mean prostitute. When the word widow was used correctly, I use to wonder why they were calling such a nice lady a prostitute! In the same way, a woman who is barren is considered an evil woman, and the word barren is also an insulting word. A woman insures her husband's salvation by bearing sons. A woman who does not conceive is a cause for worrying and anguish. A husband is justified in remarrying for the sake of progeny. A barren woman, like the widow, is considered inauspicious and is prohibited from participation in festivals. The birth of a son, in every community, is an occasion for rejoicing. The birth of a daughter, on the other hand, is greeted with lesser joy, disappointment and silence. Female infanticide has been known for a long time in India. Because of the severity of the dowry system, female infanticide saves families from mustering up enough savings to facilitate the girls'
marriages when they grew up. Modern technology has served this culture-based prejudice. With the help of amniocenteses (and abortion being legal) a large number of female fetuses have been aborted.

If sati practice is not so prevalent today, the so-called dowry murders are replacing it. In 1987, 1,786 dowry deaths were officially reported in India (Narasimhan 49). This occurs amongst younger Indian women who are shamed by not being able to extract a sufficient amount of money from their parents to pass on to their husband's family upon marriage. Five brides a day are officially reported to burn in India, while thousands of such other deaths go unreported. Most of these are either reported as suicides, where the woman douses herself with kerosene and burns herself to death, or they are reported as accidental deaths where their saris catch fire at the stove while cooking.

Practices, such as sati and dowry, legitimizes the ownership of a woman by a man—in marriage and in death. In patriarchal discourse where women is "owned" and treated like property, it is no wonder that they rebel and escape into "madness."

There are other means by which a man contains a woman, although it does not entail the loss of life, yet the life that is lived is only half an existence. One such example, in which woman are crippled in the name of beauty, is Chinese foot binding. The objectification and confinement of women bodies provides erotic stimulation for men. Another method of controlling women's sexuality in the name of culture is female circumcision, which is still carried out in many countries in the world. Parallels are found in the nineteenth century Victorian women who were trussed up in their corsets and stays often until they fainted. Or twentieth century western women who cannot walk steadily in their high heels shoes and their tight skirts. The twentieth century woman is anxiety ridden about her weight and appearance to the extent that she will either starve herself or undergo plastic
surgery to change her "imperfect" image. Such practices serve the purpose of maintaining women's subordinated and powerless positions in patriarchal society.

Another method by which women were kept powerless and subordinated was through the chastity belt. This was a barbaric tradition where a "belt" of rusting, heavy, un-hygienic cage was strapped on a woman who undoubtedly suffered great agonies as well as insult and degradation. Such barbaric means of maintaining women's chastity was not just an archaic part of medieval history. Ussher cites Paula Weideger who states,

In March 1931 a further case was revealed . . . John B. had forced his wife to wear a girdle of chastity . . . the belt was made of leather and steel and secured by padlocks. It is said that Mr. B. had insisted on its use for twenty years. In December 1993, the leagues of Awakened Magyar put forward as point 19 of their National Program that all Hungarian girls of twelve upwards and unmarried should wear girdle of chastity, the keys being kept by the fathers or others competent authority. (Ussher 27)

Here men are seen to literally control the key to women's sexuality.

Methods of control abounds in patriarchy, and where there is control, there is resistance. When the control is extreme, the resistance have taken extreme forms. Madness is the manifestation of this resistance over total control

The arranged marriage system in India is another example of controlling women's sexuality. For a marriage to be arranged, the woman must be a virgin of good conduct and demeanor. For this reason the "honor" of the women is protected at all cost. Even in modern India, instances are rampant where boys, who dare cast an amorous eye towards someone's sister or daughter, are either severely beaten or, if the situation has progressed where the "boy" and "girl" have been caught meeting in secret, murdered. If the girl has lost her virginity before marriage by some rare chance, she is sent back home to her parent's house in disgrace, where more often then not, the girl commits suicide. Only the man she is
married to has a right to the "gift of virginity" and her purity. This is still practiced today, and "love marriages" where the man and woman choose their own mate is an exception rather then the rule. Immediately after the virgin bride is taken to her husband's home, she must try to please him in every way. Nowhere is it present in the patriarchal discourse what the frightened and inexperience young virgin bride goes through. There is complete silence on the pain and suffering of the young bride. Yes, the next morning, there is much celebrating and the bride is congratulated on becoming a "suhagan" (a female whose husband is alive). Many silences add to the misogynistic discourse in keeping woman bounded and subordinated. Arranged marriages are a norm in Modern India, and is a very important method to control women's sexuality. The various examples I have given so far helps maintain women as the "other" in the patriarchal discourse. Where there is so much control and power, there has to be resistance. Resistance takes various forms, and when there is extreme form of resistance, patriarchal construct names it madness.

**Madness as Representation**

The examples of the practices that control woman and her sexuality that I have given so far are the different manifestations of misogyny which maintains our subordinated positions as the other in the phallocentric discourse. In such a discourse, a woman who dares to question, who attempts to rebel is labeled a mad woman. In this male discourse, a woman sees herself as an enraged prisoner, state Gilbert and Gubar. They suggest that women can help themselves climb out from behind the mirror and have the power to create themselves as characters. This occurs when women refuse to be "killed" by the male-authored texts and are considered "inconsistent." When women start to question the androcentric texts,
when they learn to read against the grain, when women have power to create themselves as characters, even perhaps the power to reach toward the woman trapped on the other side of the mirror/text, they help the trapped women climb out. Yet before women can achieve that, they have to examine, assimilate, and transcend the extreme image of the "angel" and "monster" which the phallocentric texts have constructed for them. Before woman can write herself, declares Virginia Woolf, we must "kill" the "angel in the house." And similarly, the image of the "monster" must also be killed.

It is debilitating to be any woman in a society where woman are warned that if they do not behave like angels they must be monsters . . . In fact, social scientists and social historians . . . have begun to study the ways in which patriarchal socialization literally makes woman sick, both physically and mentally. (Gilbert and Gubar 53)

Diseases, such as anorexia and agoraphobia are manifestations of maladjustment to the physical and social environment, states Gilbert and Gubar, and strikes a disproportionate number of women. Girls who are lively and imaginative, when taught by the misogynistic discourse to be docile and submissive, are going to experience it as sickening, at some level.¹ Gilbert and Gubar claim that to be trained in renunciation is almost necessarily to be trained in ill health. A girl has to learn to be a beautiful object and in this way she learns to loath her own flesh.

¹ When I had first got married, on the third day after our wedding day, my husband took me out to have a cup of coffee so we could have a "discussion." My brother's wedding was three days after mine, and I had attended it with my husband. I had really enjoyed it and had a lot of fun, singing and dancing. My husband did not approve of my conduct. So, at the "discussion" he told me that the marriage could work only one way and that was either I have to follow his way or he was going to follow mine. There can be no two ways. I knew the implicit message in his words. We were going to go and live in his apartment, and he had a job and was going to support me. Besides, girls in India do not tell their husbands that they (the husbands) must follow their (the wives') ways. I went to live in a paper mill township in West Bengal, which was over fifteen hundred miles from my home town. He told me that as an "officer's wife" I must conduct myself with decorum—no more talking loudly and spontaneously, and no more laughing loudly. I must be dignified, docile and soft spoken.
When she looks at herself through the misogynistic discourse, she learns to "reduce" herself literally. In the nineteenth century England, this desire to be beautiful and frail led to women wearing tight corsets and "vinegar drinking," and in the today's world, this has led to the extraordinary phenomenon of anorexia and bulimia, where girls at the rate of at least one a day are believed to be dying from this "illness." Similarly, girls who are reared for and conditioned to lives of "privacy, reticence, domesticity" (Gilbert and Gubar 54) might develop fear of public spaces and unconfined spaces. The above mentioned "illnesses" are manifestations of the definition of femininity in the misogynistic discourse, in its extreme form.

When women writers depict madness in literature, Gilbert and Gubar claim that "female authors dramatize their own self-division, their desire both to accept the strictures of patriarchal society and to reject them" (78). They further add that the mad woman in some sense is the author's double, an image of her own anxiety and rage. Female writers depict the mad woman so that they can come to terms with their own "uniquely female feelings of fragmentation, their own deep sense of the discrepancies between what they are and what they are supposed to be" (Gilbert and Gubar 78).

Women as well as texts have been subjected to traditions of hermeneutics where the multiplicities of their being have been reduced to a single meaning "sealed with the authority of patriarchal knowledge and power to name" (King and Morris 23). When read in relation to male needs, the "only approved images of self available to women reflect and sustain patriarchal ideology. In this way, women, like texts, are imprisoned within an alienating interpretation, closed off from movement and exploration" (King and Morris 23). In fact, when women do write and question the patriarchal texts, as Charlotte Perkins Gilman did, in "The Yellow Wallpaper," the story was regarded as "a chilly account of inexplicable
incipient madness" (King and Morris 23). It is only with increased awareness of sexual inequality, that early feminists could provide a valuable reading of the text. It could be seen as a study of a breakdown brought on by pressures put on her to conform to the role society allots a woman. In "The Yellow Wall Paper," the narrator is prohibited by her husband and brother to write or to stimulate her senses in anyway and is confined in a barred room. To Gilbert and Gubar, "The Yellow Wallpaper" represents "the oppressive structures of the society in which [the narrator] finds herself, 'surrounding her' like an inexplicable text, censorious and overwhelming. . . " (90). The creeping figure behind the wallpaper is the narrator's double, and as her anger and hostility towards her husband mounts, she assists the double to break free from the form that confines her. She breaks free from the confines of patriarchal discourse, in the "hallucination of madness" (King and Morris 25). King and Morris claim that through language, experience is defined and controlled in accordance with patriarchal discourses. In "The Yellow Wallpaper," the text of the story demonstrates the "reification of reason" within this male-value system. The narrator defines her husband as "practical in the extreme. He has no patience with faith, an intense horror of superstitions and he scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures" (3). He is objective while she is unreasonable. Anything "rational" and "reasonable" is defined as more legitimate, and anything that is "irrational" and "unreasonable" becomes, by definition, invalid and inadmissible, rather than another way of looking at things. Finally, when the narrator helps the woman behind the paper get out, in the "abject helplessness of her insanity lies the means of power by which her repressed shadow self can gain a form of victory" (King and Harris 31). In madness, the narrator discovers liberation (Lisa Kasmer 1). Kasmer claims that madness has become "a higher form of sanity" for the narrator
and the narrator's descent into madness is seen as "a way to health, as a rejection of and escape from an insane society (3).

In madness, a woman refuses to be defined by the patriarchal language. She creates her own language, in which she sees her own truth. Helen Cixous calls this écriture féminine. She states that woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies" (Cixous "The Laugh of the Medusa" 224). To write, holds Cixous, is to act in a way that will give her access to her native strengths.

It will give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have kept her under seal; it will tear her away from the super-egoized structure in which she has always occupied the plan reserved for the guilty--tear her away by means of this research, this job of analysis and illumination, this emancipation of the marvelous text of herself that she must urgently learn to speak. (Cixous "The Laugh of the Medusa 225)

Cixous states that a woman without a body is dumb and blind and cannot possibly be a good fighter. A woman is reduced to being a slave for the male and in order to release the real woman, "we must kill the false one who is preventing the live one from breathing" (Cixous "The Laugh of the Medusa 225). When a woman writes, "one would have to listen with another ear, as if hearing an 'another meaning' always in the process of weaving itself, of embracing itself with words, but also of getting rid of words in order not to become fixed, congealed in them" (Luce Irigaray "This Sex Which is not One" 208). When a woman writes herself in her language, she is said to be

whimsical, incomprehensible, agitated, capricious . . . not to mention her language, in which 'she' sets off in all directions leaving 'him' unable to discern the coherence of any meaning. Hers are
contradictory words, somewhat mad from the standpoint of reason, inaudible for whoever listens to them with ready made grids, with a fully elaborate code in hand (Irigaray "The Sex Which is not One" 208).

Thus, to understand the "mad woman" we have to listen "with another ear," and if we still do not understand and ask them what they mean, they will simply answer "nothing. Everything" (Irigaray "This Sex Which is not One" 208).
III. THE REPRESENTATION OF MADNESS IN BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S WIFE

How does the heroine of Bharati Mukherjee's Wife escape from the constraint and control of patriarchal discourse to liberation through "madness"? When and how does her journey to "madness" begin? Does she suddenly decide to resist the patriarchal construct, or was it accomplished over a period of time through small gestures of independence? But first, how is women constructed and kept in the subordinated positions through such a misogynist discourse? Is this position desired by women?

When millions of sheltered virgin girls get married through matrimonial advertisement in India, as did Dimple Dasgupta in Wife, where does it finally lead--marital bliss? In the east we seek matrimony because the interpretive community of the culture informs young girls that marital bliss is to be desired, and girls accept the "truth" with enthusiasm. I did, and so does Dimple Dasgupta. When her parents were searching for the perfect match in the newspaper (matrimonial section) advertisement, where males seek "beautiful, fair, tall, educated young girl of good conduct, within their caste," she is dreaming of freedom. "Marriage would bring her freedom, cocktail parties on carpeted lawns, fund raising dinners for noble charities. Marriage would bring her love" (Wife 5). While waiting for the perfect match, girls worry if the males will consider them desirable for marriage. Dimple, at age twenty, feels unattractive because she was unfashionably slim, and already perceived her life a waste, which lies like "a chill weight in her body, giving her eyes a watchful squint and her spine a slight curve" (Wife 4). Her mother will not allow her to worry, for it will make her frown and it is bad for her skin. It might result in wrinkles. Dimple, who grows up on the image of women as desirable sex objects which is projected in the popular Hindi movies
(which produces the highest number of movies in the world), worried about not being "bosomy and fair like a Bombay starlet. She thinks of breasts as having destinies of their own, ruining marriages or making fortunes" (Wife 4). She writes to beauty advisers in the popular magazines, begging desperately for help in increasing her breasts size, because she believes that "this defect will adversely effect [her] chances of securing an ideal husband and will sorely vex the prowess of even the shrewdest matchmakers in this great nation" (Wife 11). She adds "need I say that I am desperate, almost suicidal? I see life slamming its doors in my face. I want to live!" (Wife 11). And to her living is being considered desirable for some man to fine her suitable for marriage.  

She takes to buying skin whiteners, and in her desperation, she wants to buy a "concrete bra" which is advertised in the newspaper. It promises the wearer that it is what their "Dreamboat wants" after all, so they must purchase it and end all their heartaches. It gives the wearer the appearance of having large breasts. Her mother, being too old fashioned and bosomy herself, does not have much sympathy for her predicament; besides, she does not want her daughter to worry for "worrying makes them [her breasts] shrink" (Wife 4). Still, seeing her daughter suffer, she "prescribed pre-bath mustard oil massages, ground almond and honey packs, Ping-Pong [table tennis], homeopathic pills and prayer to Lord Shiva, the Divine Husband" (Wife 5).

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1 The representation of the importance of the size of women's breasts might seem ludicrous but I have first hand experience of such practices. I am a slim woman, and I used to be a skinny girl at the age of twenty. My family worried constantly that no virile Punjabi man would find me desirable and appealing for marriage. Hence, I was fed two kinds of tonic and nourishing food (bananas mashed in bread with sugar, butter and honey), so that I would put on weight in the right places, and hook a prospective groom. On the other hand, in the western style fashion scene of New Delhi, I was be asked to model jeans for "Jean Junction" because they considered my body fashionably thin. Needless to say I was not allowed to model, for a "good girl" did not go do such things, and my confusion grew as I felt attractive in my college scene yet unattractive in my home environment.
When Dimple, who is going through such turmoil and torture at a tender age, becomes sick and is admitted to the hospital, the doctor who treated her is unsympathetic toward a girl who cannot locate the exact spot of the pain in her chest. "His mouth grew cruel and skeptical... He couldn't respect her pain: it raised no welts; it didn't bleed" (6). He has more important patients to attend to. For instance, the woman who burned herself--"a human torch!" To Dimple, this woman is to be envied, for to her she embodied Sita, the ideal wife of Hindu legends of The Ramayana who walked through fire at her husband's request to prove her purity after being kept away overnight when she was abducted. (Sita, even after proving her "purity" by successfully walking through fire, was thrown out by her husband, anyway. Yet people praise her virtue and her obedience for her effort in trying to please her husband.) Dimple yearns for such an honor--she prays for it and will die for it. "Such pain, such loyalty seemed reserved for married women" (Wife 6). To her parents, her inner sickness--"mysterious pains, headaches, nervous tics, were nature's way of indicating a young woman's readiness for marriage" (Wife 7).

Dimple is not encouraged to get a good education which could lead to a profession. Instead, she whiles away her time trying to study for an undergraduate degree so she would be considered educated enough for a professional man. She knows that "without a BA, she'd never get a decent husband" (Wife 10).² For Dimple and all the girls in India, "reading novels, studying for exams, ²I went to graduate school to get an MA. in English literature, after I completed a B. Sc. degree. I went into science because my family accepted the idea of a lady doctor. It is prestigious. When I couldn't get into medicine, everyone lost interest in my career goals. I thought it was a waste to spend time studying for a science degree when I would never use the knowledge I acquired get a job. I thought, why not study English literature as I enjoyed reading so much and it wouldn't require so much hard work. I too went to college to while away the time until I found a suitable match. I was never encouraged to excel in any of my studies. My eldest sister had to fight very hard to go to medical school, but they allowed her after much crying on my sister's part for they considered it a good and prestigious profession. My father was always pleased if we even just got passing grades. I wasted precious years at the university and a large amount of my parents'
flipping through film magazines were strategies of waiting" (Wife 9) for the ideal husband who will fulfill all their dreams and desires--magically.

Is one to be fulfilled through love? In the discourse of marriage in India, love is never mentioned, only honor and duty. Women know what their duty is toward their husbands very well, but about love, they have no earthly idea. Sex, too, is never openly discussed. When young girls are denied the fulfillment of the magical night, they become suicidal and desperate to have their marriage arranged. Dimple, considering herself unattractive, blames herself and thinks of death (Wife 12). Her mother thinks of schemes to make her daughter appear attractive for a traditional Indian male by having her photograph taken "with her hair arranged in soft waves and bell-shaped gold earrings peeking, as if by accident through the hair" (Wife 13). The only aim in Mrs. Dasgupta's life, it seems, is to make "a real woman" out of Dimple (Wife 13).

In this fashion, girl in Indian wait, chaste and pure, for life to begin. The representation of Dimple's life in Wife is a true representation of girls' life in India.

money so that my value would increase in the marriage market. My sister was not allowed to finish her internship, but was forced into marriage, despite her protests.

3When my marriage was arranged at the ripe old age of twenty-five, I knew theoretically what "making love" was all about. As a virgin bride, who had no idea that when one loves another there is desire for sex, I equated the act of having sex with procreation. For a young virgin bride in Indian, who has no prior knowledge of sex, the wedding night could the most traumatic experience of her life. Yet, in the media and society, the wedding night is projected as the most fulfilling night of a young bride's life. There are songs and poetry written about this magical night called the "suhaag raat" which means the night of the good fortune or the night of the husband. Young girls and women get together before the wedding ceremony singing songs about the magical fulfillment of the "suhaag raat."

4I, too, had my photo taken at a prestigious photo studio located in the posh area of Cannaught Place in New Delhi. I had my hair tied back and I wore traditional Indian sari, yet I was wearing a sleeveless blouse (modest women do not wear sleeveless blouses, specially for showing to prospective grooms). But the expression on my face appeared gentle and my friends insist I look innocent in retrospect. I was not very pleased with my picture for I wanted to appear more worldly as I had seen some of the Delhi girls appear. However, this picture was shown to my prospective husband, who insists to this day that he was cheated, for either the picture was another girl's or I was switched, for I was far too modern in real life. This, in spite of us meeting at a tea place for a number of hours where he "interviewed" me. I, too, had asked my share of the questions. At any rate, when I asked him why he chose me if he considered me so modern, he answered, "as a challenge." To this day I have not figured out his cryptic comment. Was the challenge to subdue me, I wondered?
All girls perceive marriage the way Dimple does: "Marriage . . . would free her, fill her with passion" (Wife 14). Discreet and virgin, she waits for real life to begin. When prospective grooms come to interview girls, they go through humiliating experiences of being shown to the boy and his family. Mukhherjee labels the boys "candidates." For the Hindu bride, horoscopes have to be matched and checked by Brahmin pundits, who are looking for qualities of virtue that will enhance the groom's life and fate, and not vice versa.

Another obstacle that stands in the way of the girl and her family's is that of dowry. As the fear of rape controls all women, the threat of dowry further controls all women in India. Mr. Dasgupta, who is an electrical engineer of modest income, could not afford a substantial dowry for his daughter's wedding. Yet besides all the wedding arrangements, which includes a lavish meal (eighty-five kilos of fish), he is able to give the girl "the usual gold ornaments (which normally is a full set including a heavy necklace, bracelets, ring and earrings made of twenty-four carat gold), saris (which are normally rich embroidered silks), watch, fountain pen and some furniture" (Wife 15). In fact, Amit takes some cash in lieu of furniture for he is planning to immigrate to another country soon, and the cash will come handy. While the male's family sits around and orders the girl's family, the girl's family does everything in their power to please them. When the prospective groom's mother, Mrs. Basu objects to the name Dimple, and when the future sister-in-law remarks about the fact that the girl appears darker in real life than in the picture, Mrs. Dasgupta flatters and pleads with the prospective in-laws saying "She is so sweet and docile, I tell you. She will never give a moment's headache" (Wife 15). Parents of girls in India are always put in the position of

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5My mother-in-law asked my brother if I had false teeth because I had a habit of laughing with my hand in front of my mouth. I had picked up this habit from the modest Burmese girls of my childhood, who always covered their mouths when they laughed, yawned or even smiled widely. All through the evening she had stared at me unsmilingly. She, too, like Amit's mother, had let me know that I was not her first choice, implicitly in the beginning, and more openly
being labeled unlucky for bearing female children. Is it any wonder that female infanticide continues in modern India? In such a misogynistic discourse, "madness" seems the only way out of so much pain and oppression.

Even in such a dismal scenario, the representation of weddings is always a happy affair--colorful "shamianas" (tents), piped popular music, shimmering silks and glittering gold jewelry, aromatic spiced foods, robed temple priests chanting mantras, incense, flowers--a dream come true for every young girl. But how does one know the wedding had been perfect? According to Mukherjee, the hundred and five photographs taken at Dimple's wedding is proof of that. It was perfect. There were pictures of young girls braiding the bride's hair with traditional red ribbons and tinsel, the bride in a red bridal brocade sari, children sleeping on sofas, women on the roof blowing conch shells, and the groom stepping out of a green Fiat car decorated with red and white garlands of flowers (Wife 17). The representation of marriages in the patriarchal discourse appears so attractive that girls desire it intensely. They have no idea of the "reality" of marriage. It remains for them to find out.

Dimple assumes that they would be like all the "young marrieds" portrayed in commercials on television and popular magazines. In the representation of the middle-class married life, young couples are portrayed as contented, up-to-date people with children who are perfectly formed and shaped and always clean. They are never shown living in run-down houses. They would go out for selecting "their" colors for their bedroom's decoration. "That was supposed to be the best part of getting married: being free and expressing yourself" (Wife 20). Instead she finds herself in a small crowded apartment which she shares with her ailing mother-in-law and young brother-in-law. Her room had "gray cotton [curtains] with red after a few weeks of my marriage. When my mother went to visit them in their home town to make the final arrangements, my mother-in-law dictated a long list of gifts (dowry) which we were supposed to bring and distribute among his family after marriage.
roses inside yellow circles that her mother-in-law had hung on sagging tapes against the metal bars of the windows" (Wife 20). She does not get a chance to "express" herself, and she feels disappointed. She has no idea that she can express herself through her sexuality. When her new groom tries to be sexual with her, she has no idea what she is supposed to feel or how she is supposed to react--instead she wonders why he is talking in such a strange furry whisper. When he holds her hand under the table, "she let her hands stay under the table but they were limp and resentful" (Wife 22). In spite of that, she "lets him grab her and push her down among the pillows and fall on top of her" (Wife 23). The way she copes with this kind of assault is to let her mind wander and think of other things. Reality becomes a hard thing to face for a young, inexperienced bride. Dimple becomes a toy to be manipulated at will by her husband, and in his absence, by her demanding mother-in-law. Life becomes mechanical and dull. Dimple learns to be obedient and dutiful, as all wives do in India. When her husband comes home from the office, she dutifully asks "Did you have a good day at the office? Can I bring you fresh lime and water now?" (Wife 24). For women in such situations, escaping into a make believe world seem to be the only recourse left. Left alone at home with nothing to do and nothing to look forward to, Dimple's reality gets mixed with make believe--her coping mechanism.

In those hours he was away, any face in the magazine was fair game. She borrowed a forehead from an aspirin ad, the lips, eyes and chin from a body-builder and shoulders ad, the stomach and legs from a trousers ad and put the ideal man and herself together on Park street [in a posh locality in Calcutta] or by the side of a pool at a five star hotel. He wore blue bathing trunks, there was no ugly hair on his back and shoulder blades as he leaped feet first into the pool while she stood on the edge wearing a scarlet sari with a gold boarder, behind wrapped around sunglasses, and trailed her toes in the water. (Wife 24)
She has no sense of "reality." The only reality she has known so far has been the one constructed by the patriarchal discourse. She only knows how to be a pleasing sex object, standing around, looking pretty. When such a role is finally perceived as an illusion, it leads to pain and confusion, and she learns to rebel and resist the imposition of patriarchal constructs.

When life appears empty and unfulfilled, many women feel remorse and regret at the wasted educational opportunities at the university. "Dimple had the first convulsion of regret that she had not taken her university exams" (Wife 25). Usually, it is too late to remedy the situation. Woman feel helpless and hopeless, for they internalize the image of themselves as emotional and incompetent. For instance, Dimple resists learning how to check her mother-in-law's temperature with a thermometer because she can't "tell where the thread of the mercury is; its too fine." She wails "I'm too stupid about these mechanical things" (Wife 25).

Women suffer the humiliation of being put down constantly. When the first flush of desire and passion for the bride abates, Amit Basu, Dimple's husband surprises her one day by casually observing "I always thought I'd marry a tall girl. You know the kind I mean, one meter sixty-one or sixty-two centimeter, tall and slim. Also convent educated, fluent in English" (Wife 26). If one is too westernized in India, one is looked down upon and is considered too "fast" and modern, yet if one is too "desi" (native, not foreign) one is ridiculed as being backward. What is real and who decides?

When a woman feels cheated because she is unfulfilled after she gets married, and looks around for answers, does the discourse provide any answers, or are the stereotypes reinforced every where she turns to? In Dimple's case, as is

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6After my MA. I started to do post-graduate research work in the field of linguistics at Delhi University, but I gave it up immediately after my engagement. I could not come back to school for nearly fifteen years after my marriage. On the other hand, my husband had a Ph.D. from an Indian university at the age of twenty four, and another masters degree from a Norwegian University before the age of twenty eight.
true of all women in India, she is oppressed by the representation of women in the media and literature as object to be use at the discretion of the male society.

Dimple takes to reading English magazines to improve her reading skills, and she finds the following letter to the female editor by a female reader.

Divorce Delhi-Style." To question the goodness and utility of marriage because statistics of women suicides is grim is to make a foolish and unjust attack on a long-lasting and noble way of life. Marriage is the song of the road and we should all sing it. Otherwise the virtues of our culture will wither and fall off by the wayside. Are you forgetting the unforgettable Sita of legends? Can she recall how she walked through fire to please Ram, her kingly husband? Did Sita humiliate him by refusing to stroll through fire in front of his subjects and friends? Let us carry the torch (excusable pun) of Sita's docility!

Marriage alone teaches the virtues of sacrifice, responsibility, and patience. If we are ready to admit that our society does not need responsible people, e.g., hydraulic engineers, chemists, doctors and industrialists, then we should all be ready to go and live in jungles. Then if "happiness" is our only goal in marriage as you claim, we should live under the thumb of Mr. Mao Tse-Tung. No, no, dear lady editor; just as the man has certain obligations to society, so the wife has obligations to the husband. Infidelity in the man should not be matched with philandering on the side of the wife. After all, we are not so depraved as Europeans or our own film stars. Kindly do not deprave your readers further. A cheating wife is not to be understood and sympathized with--she is to be turned out like a leper! Three cheers for marriage. Hip, hip! [sic]. (Wife 28)

This women writer believes it is acceptable for a man to be unfaithful to his wife, but completely intolerable in a woman. Marriage is supposed to teach women the art of sacrifice, responsibility and patience, and this women reader believes it as a reality to be followed by every women. Why is it that women become the instruments, the tools, of the misogynistic society in harming other women? In all the dowry deaths in India, the mother-in-law takes an equal part in burning the brides. In America, almost all the soap opera writers are women where sexual
stereotypes abound. Women become oppressed by the stereotypes of the docile and dutiful housewife, or the mean and independent bitch, and they are unable to resist the construct in any way. Yet the ones that dare to resist or rebel are labeled mad and cast outside the androcentric discourse.

When Dimple forgets to bring her husband his fresh lime and water one day when he gets back from his office, he is displeased. She finds his "disapproval torture; all her life she has been trained to please" (Wife 30). When she is on the verge of tears for not being able to please her husband, remembering the article she had read about the poor, roofless village woman who had been thrown out of the house because she was barren, Amit suddenly changes his mind about the fresh lime and water, but instead orders her to close the bed-room door, promising her roguishly to show her some very interesting things. Here Amit is portrayed as completely irrational and illogical in switching his needs from fresh lime and water to having sex with Dimple. Yet actions such as Amit's are validated in patriarchal society, but a woman can never get away with such actions without being named illogical. Dimple does not understand what is happening to her—-is she supposed to be pleased that he forgot his anger, or be thankful, or is she supposed to take some other action? What is a woman to do in such situations, but acquiesce. But, for how long? To Dimple, life as a wife seems inglorious. She even begins to yearn to be burned alive. "Oh, to have walked through fire! Oh, to have the courage and the passion to be dramatic" (Wife 31). To women in India, glorious death is preferable to being buried alive as an unfulfilled housewife. Is death not a form of resistance? Women who commit suicide escape the oppression, and women who become mad become liberated.
Indian women are taught passive resistance; they are taught non-violent means of resistance to get their ways with their husbands.\(^7\) For instance, withholding sexual favors to get your husbands to do things for you. Yet to Dimple and other proud women of India, such means can be "so degrading" (Wife 31). Such women find ways to resist. When Dimple becomes pregnant soon after her marriage, she resents it, unlike most married women. She resists the patriarchal construct of motherhood, and this is an indication that Dimple is not "normal." Such acts of resistance leads to "madness." "She gave vicious squeezes to her stomach as if to force a vile thing out of hiding" (Wife 31). The only reality at that point is her vomit, not the "reality" of motherhood. She forces herself to vomit by inserting her fingers down her throat. "It[the vomit] was hers" (Wife 31). She claims her vomit as her own and makes it an empowering experience; she finds pleasure and excitement in the smell of vomit that clings to her body. She finds power in being able to control her own body. For her "vomiting was real . . . but pregnancy was not" (Wife 32). Patriarchal discourse will never validate such acts. It will be labeled madness to feel empowered by one's own vomit! She resents her husband for making her pregnant. She thinks "bitterly that no one had consulted her before depositing it in her body" (Wife 33). She feels helpless and it enrages her. She tries to get rid of the baby in numerous ways, carrying large buckets of water up the stairs, and doing hard work. In her unhappiness she picks quarrels with Amit and laughs at him. "She thought of it as a brief period of passion, when she had broken through her fortress of politeness" (Wife 35). Later, in her powerlessness, she becomes fixated on the mice in her apartment, who she had previously considered her allies. They become her vicious enemies for they disrupted her daydreams, and she takes to listening for the sounds of their

\(^7\) Gandhi learned non-violent resistance from the women of India—another example of how patriarchal society validates a male's experience, while negating the female's experience by the absence of discourse on it.
furry scurrying so "she could smash life out of their little gray heads" (Wife 35). When finally she manages to corner one, "she seemed confident, a woman transformed . . . [and] in an outburst of hatred, her body shuddering, her wrist taut with fury, she smashed the top of a small gray head" (Wife 36). When a woman is so repressed, even smashing of mice's head becomes empowering. Yet in patriarchal discourse, such acts are considered unhealthy and sick.

Dimple takes to jumping rope "until her legs grew numb, her stomach burned; then she poured water from the heavy bucket over her head, shoulders, over the tight curve of her stomach. She had poured until the last of the blood washed off her legs; then she had collapsed" (Wife 43). She gets rid of the unwanted baby, and in the eyes of patriarchy, she has just committed a great crime. She has killed her own baby. She must be mad, otherwise why did she not accept the message of the patriarchal discourse that motherhood is to be passionately desired by all women? Dimple Basu resisted the cultural text, for if she had not, she would have welcomed the baby as the most fulfilling experience for an Indian woman to have. Does Dimple pay a price for resisting, or does it empower her to go beyond the misogynistic discourse to freedom?

Dimple Basu's "madness" becomes apparent when she moves to America with Amit a few months after her marriage. She learns to question the cultural text consciously. The more oppressed Dimple gets, the more the mad Dimple makes an appearance in the text. She merges in and out of realities—her reality and patriarchal reality. When she meets a progressive Indian woman, Ina Mullick, she is fascinated with her. How can an Indian woman be so free in action and in

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8When I did not get pregnant immediately after my marriage, I went to the doctor and asked her if anything was wrong with me. I had desperately wanted to conceive. When I did become pregnant, I was happy beyond measure, and when my daughter was born after a very difficult Cesarean section, I did not complain a single time. I considered myself blessed and fortunate to become a mother. I was sent to my in-laws' house for my confinement, and my husband came to get me after three months at which time he saw our daughter for the first time.
speech? Ina is considered a very sexy and attractive woman in spite of being skinny. "Dimple had no idea that skinniness could look so chillingly sexy on some people" (Wife 75). What is the truth--skinny is attractive and considered sexy, or is it buxom and full bodied woman who are attractive and sexy? It is, after all, only a construct. Yet if one starts questioning it, where does it lead? If one is outside of the cultural construct, is one mad, and if so, isn't it a definition given by the misogynistic discourse?

Dimple's journey into "madness" comes about because she resists the misogynistic discourse in various ways. She is offered a job to work in a boutique in Queens, New York, when she first arrives in America, but Amit, who is insecure because he did not yet have a job, denied her permission to work. He insists that the man who had offered her the job is just a lecherous "Punjabi" who wanted to score with her because he knows all Bengali girls are beautiful. When Dimple tries to claim this remark as a compliment and asks Amit if he thought she was pretty, he replies that was not what he meant at all. All he meant was that all Bengali girls are considered pretty and that is a known fact. Dimple hurts both for the remark about her beauty, and about her inability to accept the job. She wonders what it will feel like to work in boutique. The power to act is taken away from her. She will never know. After Amit gets a job as a boiler maintenance engineer, she is kept isolated in an apartment all day as she does not have transportation, nor does she know how to drive. Also, she is unsure about her English speaking skills. All he requires from her is to fix his meals and be there for him while he complained about the horrible job that he has. She is not allowed to make friends with Ina Mullick because he considers her too "Americanized" and she might give Dimple some "bad ideas." The bad ideas were that Ina goes to night school, and Amit insists that she is just opening herself up for being mugged in the subway. An Indian woman had no right to put herself in such an unsafe situations, especially
"with so many Indians around, a television, and a child, a woman shouldn't get
time to get crazy idea" (Wife 69). In spite of all the warnings about "crazy ideas",
Dimple makes friends with Ina. She envies Ina's friendship with Milt, a young
white American man. Even though Ina is married, she has a comfortable friendship
with another man. She wants to be like Ina, who is spontaneous and is a lot of fun.
The only problem is she has to keep her friendship with Ina a secret. She starts
spending more and more time watching soap operas and other programs on
television. She stops telling Amit how lost she feels in America.

She didn't tell him about her immoderate daytime sleeping either.
They were unspeakable failings. She thought of them as
deformities--sinister, ugly, wicked. She had expected pain when
she had come to America, had told herself that pain was part of any
new beginning, and in the sweet structures of that new life had
allotted pain a special place. But she had not expected her mind to
strain like this, beyond endurance. She had not anticipated inertia,
exhaustion, endless indecisiveness. (Wife 115)

She did not want to be considered a sinister, ugly, wicked deformed person. When
women talk about their pain, patriarchal discourse finds it a form of sickness. One
day Amit comes home and sees that his wife had been crying and inquired into the
matter. She tells him that she just got a call from an acquaintance of theirs whose
friend in Calcutta died of burns. She was told that the girl's sari caught fire while
she was heating milk on a kerosene stove for her three month old baby. When
Dimple wonders aloud if it was a suicide, Amit accuses her of being melodramatic.

That night, trapped between the cold wall and Amit's heavy body,
in post nightmare lucidity, she sought revenge. In sleep the body
had lost its compact strength, also its capacity to excite fear in her.
She had a sudden desire to examine the body, touch the curves of
cheek and chin, trace all dents, depression, scars, probe the
weakened spots until she knew just where to strike or pierce and
make him bleed in the dark. Her own intensity shocked her--she
had not considered herself susceptible to violence--so she tried to
explain it away as unnatural sexual desire. "Love is dread," she whispered loudy to the sleeper.

In the darkness she fitted her round little chin into a slight hollow of flesh on Amit's left shoulder. Gradually, as she pressed the chin deeper into the hollow, applying light, rhythmical pressure, she began to feel that violence was right, even decent. If she were to ram her chin deeper into the hollow, perhaps she could extract from Amit a thrilling surrender. The darkness was unbearable exciting, taut with angry premonitions, promises. Her own body seemed curiously alien to her, filled with hate, malice, and insane desire to hurt, yet weightless, almost airborne. She dug her chin deep into the depression, so deep that he squirmed in his sleep. (Wife 117)

Why is it that when she is thinking of death and pain, she feels airborne and light? Why does she feel violence was right, even decent? Why is death and dying, or is it killing, so full of promise? Dimple's feelings of weightlessness come from breaking free of the restraint put by patriarchal discourse where feelings of rage by women are considered improper, even insane. If being bad feels so weightless and light, why is it considered madness?

When they go out visiting other Indian friends, Dimple finds her husband's presence oppressive, for he does not allow her to taste any alcoholic drinks. If he was not there she might have "permitted herself a sip or two" of beer. "But Amit will always be there beside her . . . acting as her conscious and common sense. It was sad, she thought, how marriage cuts off glittering alternatives" (Wife 127). Yet Dimple creates her own alternatives. She creates an alternative reality where she does not have to wait for anyone's permission to savor life.

In such an unfulfilled marriage, Dimple starts dreading even her dreams, which she cannot share with anyone. She becomes "a small stiff lump, hair arranged like black bat wings against the sky blue pillow" (Wife 128). Caught in such a dismal situation, Dimple feels that catching a fatal disease, like leukemia, is preferable and more "glamorous." Her reality turns to dreaming and her journey to
"madness" begins. Was she a prime candidate for "madness" right from the beginning when she resisted the misogynistic cultural text by getting rid of the baby? Or does it start one afternoon when she has sex with the tall and good-looking Milt who considers her beautiful and who finds the dimple on her cheeks charming? Does her repressed sexuality, when it finally stirs, make her feel guilty and impure? Caught, Dimple starts actively to look for an alternate reality, an alternate world. Thinking of dying in a beautiful style is one way of constructing her own reality.

One [way] was to stand under a warm shower and slice open a jugular, though it would mean having to ask Amit where the jugular vein was, exactly, and he might get suspicious. He was a suspicious sort of person. The other was to squat near the kitchen cabinet where the cleansing fluids were, select an aerosol can of pesticide, open her mouth wide, air and spray for a very long time. She speculated if the pesticide came in different flavors as well as different scents--peppermint, wild cherry, lemon--like chewing gum. It was important for the body to look and smell good when discovered. The moment of discovery, the moment when someone came across her corpse and let out a shriek, obsessed her. It would not do to think of beetles and roaches on their shells, with frail legs jabbing the air. The exposed jugular vein was aesthetic. She could see pretty jet sprays of pinkish blood. They flared toward the ceiling of the bathroom, then fell backward and ran down her breasts and shoulders. She would like to make one extravagant gesture in her life. (Wife 154)

The alternate reality that Dimple writes for herself in not ugly and unexciting, but beautiful and exhilarating. Even death is conceived as beautiful and desirable in her reality. To Dimple Basu, who is denied any action or any independence, dramatic death is preferable. But more than the act, it seems the thought of it is empowering enough for her--there is hope, maybe someday? She starts having nightmares. Some one had murdered her the night before and concealed her corpse amongst the Bedouin brasses and baskets of indoor plants. She feels like
death, and thinks that Amit will notice and recoil from her looks, but when she goes to set his breakfast on the table, all he says is "hurry up with the breakfast, can't you? I'll be late for work if you dawdle like that" (Wife 186). Amit never views her as a separate and individual entity. All he sees is a sexual object to be used at his discretion.

When Milt makes love to her, and she wants to feel close to him, she inquires if she could ask him a personal question. When he says she could, she asks him what kind of a job he had. For an Indian girl, a man's professional background is very important for he is supposed to provide for her and take care of her material needs. She does not know what to do with her sexuality. Milt is surprised and disappointed at her question, for he tells her he is willing to answer any question about himself which might bring them even closer. When she discovers that she does not know what to do with her sexuality, she is crushed. Is woman a sexual being, and if so, what is an Indian woman to do; what are the alternatives for her? Could she continue on with life with Amit after such empowering knowledge? She feels she has mismanaged it [sex with Milt] all; she'd seen enough TV and read enough novels to know this was the time to lie in bed, to hum little songs, to pinch, pull, slap; it was not the time to reach for dark glasses and sensible undergarments and make discreet inquiries about the young man's job. She was so much worse off then ever, more lonely, more cut off from Amit, from the Indians, left only with borrowed disguises. She felt like a shadow without feelings. Whatever she did, no matter how coolly she planned it, would be wrong. (Wife 200)

In the reality of the patriarchal construct, Dimple realizes she will never be able to act—no matter how coolly she plans it. Her reality and the patriarchal reality cannot co-exist. When Dimple once again realizes that the representations of life by the misogynistic discourse is really unreliable, when she discovers the "truth,"
she finally escapes the construct and creates her own reality where she is empowered to take any action she chooses. She escapes into madness where she is not constrained by the patriarchal construct anymore, where she is finally free.

She allows one irritant to tilt her over. It is not a major crisis that "precipitates" her madness—it is the tiny little irritants that pile up in a woman's world and compels them rewrite their fate, rewrite their reality. One morning, when fear and loneliness spills over, and the knowledge that if she does act soon, she might be condemned to waste her life, she gets up to help her husband get breakfast and notices the wheaties flakes on the counter. And sugar—he always spilled sugar on the counter. It was one of the little things that irritated her. She thought how horrible to have to spend a whole lifetime watching him spill sugar on counters, how many pounds of wasted sugar that would add up to in thirty years or forty years; but he never thought of such things, never thought how hard it was for her to keep quiet and smile though she was falling apart like a very old toy that had been played with, sometimes quite roughly, by children who claimed to love her. (Wife 212)

All the carelessly strewned crystals of sugar suddenly starts to represent all the precious moments wasted in her lifetime by a careless and uncaring man. How many more years in this lifetime—living an unfulfilled and empty life—with no relief in sight, and no hope? She no longer wants to keep quiet and smile, as women are taught to do. She does not want to be part of such a discourse that does not allow for alternatives, and finally "she sneaked up on him and chose a spot... then she brought her right hand up and with the knife stabbed the magical circle once, twice, seven times, each time a little harder" (Wife 213), or did she? For she remembers that on TV women got away with murder. Dimple recreates reality from the same discourse that keep us as the other. But at last, it does not matter whether Dimple really murders her husband, for she is finally free. In the place
where Dimple finally retreats to, he does not matter anymore. She is inaccessible. She has created her own world, her own reality, and in madness, she escapes the patriarchal construct which can no longer constrain her and control her.
Dimple's journey to "madness" and freedom starts with her act of resistance when she aborts the unwanted baby, but for Maya, the "neurotic" heroine of Anita Desai's *Cry, The Peacock*, the escape to freedom and "madness" starts when she begins to question the collective reality of the patriarchal discourse. She is oppressed all her life because of the discourse where the binary opposition of "masculine" and "feminine" prevails. Maya's "faults" are that she is too emotional, irrational and superstitious, whereas her husband is the unemotional, rational and reasonable type. When her pet dog Toto dies, she cries and mourns him because she was very attached to him as she does not have any children of her own. When her husband comes home and sees his wife's distraught face, he does not understand her emotionalism. He calmly calls the Public Work Department's scavenging truck and has the dog's carcass removed. He tells her she mustn't cry and asks her to have a cup of tea to soothe her, but when an important visitor is announced, he forgets all about her unhappiness, and orders the tea to be sent to the study. Later she tells her husband that "pets mustn't mean anything to you, and yet they mean the world to me" (*Cry, The Peacock* 16). He gets extremely irritated with her talk and says "You have done it again, Maya. You go chattering like a monkey, and I am annoyed that I have been interrupted in my thinking" (*Cry, The Peacock* 16). He then proceeds to call her a "creature of instinct." When she wants to do something splendid in the memory of her pet dog, Gautama, her husband, points out to her that he is sure the ones that "disappear" (dies) do not want a vulgar display at their disappearance. Maya felt the cruelty of the words, for she thinks of her pet's
short stump of a white tail again, of the foolish little wisp at its end. And of his wild, thrilled bark as he saw me return from a morning in town, the impact of his body as he flung himself upon me. These did not disappear. Not meaninglessly. They were at least as enduring as the facts Gautama was continually extolling. Were they not? I pleaded silently, childishly. Were they not? But I did not ask aloud. (18)

In Maya's mind, the reality of her pet's presence is deeply felt, even if she cannot talk about her feelings in concrete and logical terms. She remembers the day when she had told her father of her visit to a temple priest and the contents of the horoscope he had made for her. Her father had been "unreasonably" furious. The priest had told her that within four years of her marriage she or her husband would die. For Maya, the death of her pet reminds her of another death looming ahead of her--either hers or her husband's. From that day onward, her father had banned the word "fate" from their home. Even though her father was born of a family of Brahmins that for generation had lived their lives--the eating, studying, traveling and marrying that formed the structure of a more or less idle lives--according to prescribed patterns, had married according to the advice and suitability of their horoscopes, had diligently taken up careers that the pundits had chosen for them out of the constellations, had their children's stars studied and speculated upon before they even spoke their first unrecognizable words . . . my father had thrust them all into the fire together with the unsavory scrap of paper seized from the ayah's hand. From that day, the word had not been uttered in my presence, nor "astrology" nor "palmistry." (75)

Her father banned the word "fate" because he was afraid for her. Was it a logical step on her father's part to think that banning the word fate from their lives will alter it? Her husband, on the other hand, being "civilized," "would hoot with derision at the mention of superstition, with pity and scorn for those who allowed their lives to be ruled by them, and ruined by them" (Cry, The Peacock 76). Yet,
because she is born and raised a Brahmin, she realizes the importance of the
influence of astrology in her life; she has internalized all the messages about "bad
fate" and "evil fate," and she knows that if she becomes a widow, she would be
blamed. When she "hesitantly, fearfully attempt[s] to take up the topic with
Gautama . . . he disdain[s] to discuss so puerile a subject, and dismisse[s] it by
saying 'Palmistry, Astrology? What new fad is your sudden interest in them? Must
we be so childish?" (Cry, The Peacock 76). For a man it is easy to become
unorthodox and "civilized," but for a woman, she is trapped in her culture and in
her fate.

When a woman feels trapped by fate, what is her recourse? She is not
allowed to be emotional, and has to suppress her feelings and fears, for it can be
disruptive for others. When Maya was a little girl, she saw a performing bear, and
was upset. She was unable to sleep because of the cruel treatment of the bear by
the trainer. Her father called a doctor who prescribed morphine for her so she
could calm down. She realized, as do other girls, "that [her] childhood was one in
which much was excluded, which steadily grew more restricted, unnatural even,
and in which [she] lived as a toy princess in a toy world" (Cry, The Peacock 89).
Fathers either treat their daughters as possessions to be passed on to their
husbands, or as toys to be enjoyed until marriage. Maya's realization of her
treatment by the males and her objectification are what lead her to rewrite her fate.

One day Maya and her husband, along with a few of their friends, go to see
a floor show where half-naked tired looking women are dancing. Maya feels
"none of them looked as though they were doing what they wanted to do. They all
looked so sad to me. So terribly sad" (Cry, The Peacock 90). When she voices
her opinion, her husband brushes it aside and says the women's choice of
profession is mere "exhibitionism" on their part.
Nothing but a penchant for exhibitionism. As common a disease as egoism, or megalomania, not to be suppressed . . . Then they are merely physically aberrant women of small ambition, who think it a compliment if men leer at their thighs. That only proves to you their level of intelligence. It is sheer pusillanimity that makes them take up this common form of half-way prostitution—the tantalus variety of prostitution, you might call it—and they're as happy as they are capable of being happy. None of them appear contented, I grant you. Exhibitionists never can be, there is never enough to exhibit, as there never is enough pleasure to satisfy the jaded. (Cry, The Peacock 90)

In his interpretation of Cry, The Peacock, Madhusudan Prasad states that the cabaret dance is juxtaposed in Maya's mind with the bear dance of her childhood. "[T]hese images of cabaret dance and bear dance obliquely point at the cruel exploitation in society. Thus both images are victim-and-victimizer images which . . forms . . Desai's prey and predator image" (World Literature Today 364). In India, women who are professional dancers or semi-strippers have no room in society. Only the very poor, low caste women, or women who have been kidnapped from villages or sold, do such shows. Gautama, I'm sure, is well aware of that, yet he is so judgmental. While he sees everything in black and white, Maya feels life is

like climbing a mountain from the top of which could be seen the entire world, unfolded like a map, with sun-silkened trees and milk-mild rivers and jeweled townships amidst fields of grain and valleys and tracts, all fruitful, all florescent, while he, because he did not care for walks, or views, was tired form reading too much, and had matters to think out within the confines of his brain, remained behind in his dusty, enclosed cup of the small plain down below. (Cry, The Peacock 91)

Maya feels so much and so intensely, while Gautama, like the narrator's husband in "The Yellow Wallpaper" is calm, rational and in control. He is the level headed thinker, while she is the emotional, irrational and childish type. She is forbidden to
get excited unnecessarily for she becomes easily hot and bothered and runs up a high temperature. Gautama had to give her "pills" to calm her down. Still Maya sees her husband as also someone who thinks nothing of having his clothes on the floor because he never had a thought to spare for such matters, nor time. She had seen him on "tenterhooks" for a cup of tea and feeling helpless because he could not make it himself nor find someone else to make it for him. Maya admires and envies him. She enjoys his helpless need of her, which is set off "by an aloofness, a vast and serious knowledge based on self-sacrificing years of study and hard work, his refusal to concede, to compromise" (Cry, The Peacock 92). Women have envied men their aloofness for centuries, for patriarchal society validates such qualities in them, whereas women's emotionality is suspect. Maya resents Gautama his ability to remain aloof and detachment--Gautama, a friend and protégé of her father's. From being a toy of her father's, she is handed over to her husband to become his toy. Her father, too, could not tolerate disorder. His thoughts, life, attitude, learning, and career were planned as

formal as a moghul garden, gracious and exact, where breeding, culture, leisure and comfort have been brought to a nice art, where no single weed is allowed to flower, no single flower to die and remain on the stalk, no single stalk to grow out of its pruned shape. As a stream in a moghul garden flows musically through channels of carved marbles and sandstone, so his thoughts, his life flow, broken into small, exquisite patterns by the carving, played upon by altering nuances of light and shade, but never stepping their limitations, never breaking their bounds, always moving onwards with the same graceful cadence (Cry, The Peacock 45).

To be so systematically organized and formal is validated as sanity by patriarchal discourse.

This controlled and contained man hands over his precious doll to an equally cerebral, tall, stooped, friend of his, and their marriage was grounded in the
else" (Cry, The Peacock 40). Madhusudan Prasad remarks "Gautama, though a father substitute for Maya, is also her lover, yet he miserably fails to feel her intensity of her innermost cravings but also to listen to the pathetic cry of her anguish soul" (World Literature Today 364). She thinks of the peacocks dancing in agony in the woods surrounding her house in Delhi, knowing they and their lovers are to die before the monsoon is over. She thinks in anguish about them beating their beaks on the rocks and stamping their feet. "They will even grasp the snakes that live on the sands there, and break their bodies to bits against the stones, to ease their pain... Before they mate, they fight. They will rip each other's breasts to strips and fall, bleeding, with their beaks open and panting. Peacocks are wise. The hundred eyes upon their tails have seen the truth of life and death, and know them to be one. Living, they are aware of death. Dying, they are in love with life" (Cry, The Peacock 95-96). Maya sees the actions of the peacocks where they smash the snakes against the rocks symbolic. Are women, too, not caught in the mouth of patriarchal construct, and as we struggle, are we, too, not smashed by the discourse to pieces? Or should women take control of the discourse and smash the phallic symbols that control them and rewrite themselves? Is painful death the only escape, or is there another reality we can construct? Can we not rewrite fate? Can we not rewrite ourselves where being mad is being free?

In the patriarchal discourse, Maya could not speak about "unimportant" issues like pain or love to anyone. In Gautama's family, one does not speak of love, far less affection. They speak of discussions in "parliament, of cases of bribery and corruption revealed in government, of newspaper editors accused of libel, and the trails that followed..." (Cry, The Peacock 46). As long as it is an intellectual subject, it is allowed to be discussed, but not love and emotions. "Women's topics" are not allowed when men are present. When Maya, starved for love and affection, dares mention love, Gautama becomes frustrated and calls her
"Women's topics" are not allowed when men are present. When Maya, starved for love and affection, dares mention love, Gautama becomes frustrated and calls her talk madness. Why doesn't she talk about honor or duty? To men like Gautama, topics like love and pain are to be avoided, for they cannot be contained and controlled. They make them uneasy, and as such, the discussion of such topics is considered madness. When she loses her temper at being called mad, and begins to cry, he accuses her of being neurotic. "Neurotic, that's what you are. A spoilt baby, so spoilt she can't hear one adverse word" (Cry, The Peacock 115). Women are not allowed to react no matter what names they get called, and it keeps them in their subordinated positions in society.

Another reason why women escape into madness is because men bring their own interpretations to the scriptures to keep them in the subordinated position and invalidate women's experiences. When Maya gets upset or emotional, Gautama quotes form the Bhagavat Gita.

He who, controlling the senses of the mind follows without attachment the path of action with his organ of action, he is esteemed. We are constantly being told of the risk in coveting the fruits of our actions, the merit of performing our actions without contemplating their success and failure. Action—or work or life, whichever you please—of that order is what I mean by vocation. I am certain, experience makes me certain, that only those who are capable of this manner of living, and working, are capable of peace, or serenity—better words than happiness, both of them. (Cry, The Peacock 116)

She could only say bitterly to Gautama—"Like you... like you and your marvelous hardworking family, I suppose" (Cry, The Peacock 117). Choosing to overlook her bitterness, he calmly adds that if she does not have a vocation in life, "life will remain an emptiness to you and you will reach out and grasp for everything—every desirable thing in view, and imagine you have filled your life
with and given meaning to your existence by doing so” (Cry, The Peacock 116). He is accusing Maya of filling her life with empty desires because he feels she can not rise about her emotional needs and become detached. Of course, he does not tell her how she is supposed to fill her empty hours, except by telling her what not to do. He wants her to become detached through meditation, and through giving up her desires. I assume he thinks that he has given up on worldly attachment, because he was rational and unemotional, but he achieves fulfillment in life by being a busy practicing lawyer. His job is his attachment to the material world. Yet for Maya, her world is real, and she does not want to escape into lofty thinking. "I don't care to detach myself into any other world then this. It isn't boring to me. Never boring . . . I want to walk about here and touch things--leaves, sticks, earth, everything. The world is full--full, Gautama. I am not bored with it that I should hunt for another" (Cry, The Peacock 118).

Yet Maya is driven to another world by her husband's detachment and logical ways, and her inability to become unemotional and rational--to a world of "madness." Driven by Gautama's logic--

the perfect logic of it: one incarnation acting upon other, the action performed in one incarnation bearing fruit in the next, as surely as autumn must follow summer, as surely as the sun rising tide must ebb. Knowing this, knowing that our deeds have significance, meaning, our lives develop an impetus without which life would be one amorphous darkness. (Cry, The Peacock 123)

For the males of India, the subject of reincarnation, when discussed in a logical manner, becomes truth and reality. Yet when a woman who feels bound by the same fate discusses it, the discussion becomes unacceptable, and she is accused of being neurotic and irrational. Maya' reality is not reality and her truth is not truth. The way reality and truth are constructed in patriarchal discourse is very clear
definition she is locked into her position due to her sex. When Maya gets disturbed by Gautama's talk about reincarnation and "the action performed in one incarnation bearing fruit in the next," and pleads with her husband to stop because she hears the echoes of the priest's prophecy, he gets impatient with her and says in disgust "Now, what is it? Really, it is quite impossible to talk to a woman" (Cry, The Peacock 124). Everything gets reduced to the binary opposition of man/woman, masculine/feminine or emotional/detached. After shaking free of Maya's frantic grip, he inquires "Why is your forehead so hot and damp? Do you have a temperature? (Cry, The Peacock 124). If a woman shows emotions, she must be sick. And surely, Maya slowly starts shifting from reality into dreams, where the albino priest is always talking. Like Dimple, she dreams of death. She escapes into an alternate reality, reality which patriarchal discourse labels madness. When Maya is so repressed that she cannot even discuss her fears, she shifts into another world. "I no longer dared speak aloud. It must be kept a secret. The danger of it, the terrible danger" (Cry, The Peacock 124). She sees caged animals, and she sees herself among them.

There I was, amongst them, not one of those who sat quietly, in an infinity of sadness and resignation, but one of those who clung, clung to the bars till they cut into my flesh, and rattled them, shook them, crying over and over again, "Let me out! I want to live, Gautama, I want to live! (Cry, The Peacock 156)

Maya wants to escape the misogynist construct. She wants to escape and become free to live. She is not one to remain quite and accept the misogynistic construct. She is going to rattle the bars constructed by this discourse, and shake them, demanding to be let out. Like the narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper," Maya started to roam around from "reality" to "madness," trying to escape, trying to help her "double" climb out from behind the male text. In a moment of clarity (sanity?),
started to roam around from "reality" to "madness," trying to escape, trying to help her "double" climb out from behind the male text. In a moment of clarity (sanity?), Maya realized that the albino priest, "the creeping, spreading, sly magician of my hallucination" had never said anything about her dying "unnaturally and violently" four years after marriage. It could be either of them—Gautama or her. She started looking at Gautama slyly, for "sly [she] had grown with such a load of secrets that has to be hidden from him, such evil and awful secrets" (Cry, The Peacock 165). For Maya, unable to discuss her horoscope, and feeling a burden of guilt, hiding the "truth" becomes "evil." If she had told Gautama about her horoscope before marriage, maybe he would not have married her. Again, this reality, this truth becomes questionable for Maya. If the truth, the reality by patriarchal construct makes Maya evil, she is ready to rewrite truth. She is ready to rewrite fate. She is ready to become mad.

In India, if a Hindu woman is born under inauspicious stars (Manglik), she cannot be easily married. She has to find an unlucky man who is born under the same stars and that way they can neutralize each others fate. On the other hand, the man born under the same stars can choose to marry any women. There are no such restrictions for him. But the girl has to pray, fast, and offer sacrifices to the Brahmin priests to be able to find such a match. Otherwise, she remains unmarried and is considered unlucky and inauspicious. Maya is not allowed to pray or fast, because Gautama is too "civilized," yet he is not above talking about paying in this life for sins committed in a previous life. He finds it perfectly logical. For Maya, when she accepts the prophecy of the priest as reality and truth, she cannot escape it. But when she has to face the patriarchal "truth", she is distraught and wants to escape back to her "reality--to madness."

All order is gone out of my life, all formality. There is no plan, no peace, nothing to keep me within this pattern of familiar, everyday
living and doing that becomes those whom God means to live on earth. Thoughts come, incident occurs, then they are scattered, and disappear. Past, present, future. Truth and untruth. They scuttle back and forth, a shifting chiaroscuro of light and shade, of blood and ashes. And I am tired of it, my body can no longer bear it, my mind has already given up. Those are no longer my eyes, nor this my mouth. [I] search . . . for an order of lines and design, a symmetry that has deserted my own life. (Cry, The Peacock 179)

She scuttles back from her truth to the untruth of the misogynistic discourse that refuses to validate her experience. She no longer finds meaning in the systematic, structural discourse where one is forever bound. She frantically tries to discover meaning. Maya strains to "scuttle" back to the place of her "truth," to where her experience is accepted as valid. In the patriarchal discourse, Maya's lips and eyes no longer belong to her. She wants to be in a reality, where, what she sees and what she speaks are validated as realities and truths. She needs to fly to such a place on wild horses, or does she become a wild horse herself "flying away into the distance, the wild hills"? When she wants to reach the top of the mountains where she can look back at the male's construct of society and feel free, she falls.


Whenever she feels she is about to free herself of the misogynistic discourse, she is pulled back into "sanity" by "horrid arms . . . trashing tentacles." She pleads to be stopped and silenced, for she knows if she is not stopped, she is going "to fly up, at you, through you, past you, and away" (Cry, The Peacock 181). She pleads because once she escapes, she is going to take fate into her own hand and after flying into her husband who represents the misogynistic discourse, she is going to pass right through him and away. She wants to be "release[d] from bondage,
release[d] from fate, from death and dreariness and unwanted dreams." (Cry, The Peacock 190). Release and liberty, that was all she dreams of.

At this point in her life, where she has seen the "other" side, she still feels the "pain" of leaving her familiar world, she reaches out to touch her husband's arm to ask what he is thinking and why he is silent; he rejects her appeal. He starts talking about a "case" that came up in the courts and he remains oblivious to Maya. "He began now to speak his thoughts aloud, not conscious of the listener at all, but eager to pursue the thread of logic to its end, slowly, and steadily as a meticulous tortoise" (Cry, The Peacock 208). Gautama, and all the males in the world, talk slowly and steadily, for they know they have important things to say and discuss, and all the world waits for them while they speak.

When Maya can no longer bear the pain of dwelling in the misogynistic world, she finally pushes Gautama off the roof to his death because she realizes that with him she could never rewrite her fate. Does she really push him down, or did he slip and fall, and does Maya claim to have done it because she has been so guilty in keeping a secret from her husband? Does she believe her silence killed her husband? Even for doing this last act, Maya reaches out to the androcentric discourse and finds an excuse for pushing him to his death. She rationalizes. His ugly shadow was blocking the view of her beloved moon and she had to push him down. She needs justification for such an act. From this point, the narration shifts to third person. Is Anita Desai writing in the male language, or is this to make us think? For a women writer, to write about madness is to question the patriarchal discourse.

We no longer hear Maya's voice, for we are not going to understand her speech and act. Desai shifts to third person narration from this point on, where everything appears rational and controlled. We miss the contact with Maya, we
search for her in the lines between the text. Yet Maya escapes to an alternate world, an alternate reality where everything makes perfect sense to her.

When her mother- and sister-in-law arrive at the scene, they find Maya

who sat somewhere upstairs, delightedly opening cupboards, pulling out drawers, falling upon picture books and photographs with high, shrill cries of pleasure hugging them to her, dancing around the room with them, on air-borne feet . . Later, they could hear her moving about them, like a poltergeist, light and quick on its feet, eager in its chuckles of merriment, and frantic in its ceaseless movement, like a being that is hunted. (Cry, The Peacock 212)

From the perspective of male discourse, Maya is perceived as a being who is hunted. Why is she so happy, then? It is because she is finally free of the restraint put on by the patriarchal construct, and she has rewritten her truth, her reality. She chuckles in merriment, yet is frantically moving about like a being hunted. It is because she does not want to be recaptured and returned to the misogynistic discourse. Yet, Maya is not allowed to live her life the way she wants--free from restraint and bondage of patriarchal constructs and roles. Her in-laws are conspiring to send her to an insane asylum once they obtained a diagnosis of her "illness" from their doctor. How can she be allowed to live free after her "confession" that "it had to be one of us, you see, and it was so clear that it was I who was meant to live. You see, to Gautama, it didn't really matter. He didn't care, and I did" (Cry, The Peacock 216). Maya smiles and she is calm and she caresses her in-laws, expecting complete understanding. Maya' s logic is perfect. Gautama did not love life; she does. Therefore she should live and he should die. Why should it be viewed as illogical and irrational? They force her to her room to sleep. They wish the doctor could have given her some tranquilizers to "calm" her down, for they feel embarrassed and unhappy about her "condition."
Maya is free and light. She no longer feels tied down and burdened. "Then they [the in-laws] heard the patter of child's laughter cascading up and down the scales of some new delight . . . a brilliant peacock's feather perhaps?" (Cry, The Peacock 218). For me the story ends here and I see Maya laughing and running--cascading down--on wings of happiness, free, free at last--away from the debilitating construct of patriarchal discourse. She rewrites her fate and in her rewriting, she is no longer evil or unlucky. In fact she feels virtuous for she has given Gautama freedom from a burdensome life. She does not feel like an evil widow. Maya, in her madness, makes perfect sense.

Desai states that she switched over to third person narrative at this point because she "felt it [the first person narrative] can be a very dangerous tool for a writer. It's most difficult to control. It tends to run away with one" (The Massachusetts Review 535). Why did Desai need control? Why was she compelled to switch to third person narrative, after the depiction of Maya's split personality? Would it have been too shocking for patriarchal discourse if she had let her voice run away with her? Yet to leave the ending without the conventional closure of Maya's suicide would have given women more hope. Anita Desai wrote the novel in 1980 in India and I feel she tried to write a more acceptable ending. She manages to raise consciousness with the content. Desai, like other "female authors dramatize[d] [her] own self-division, [her] desire to accept the strictures of patriarchal society and to reject them" (The Madwoman in the Attic 78). Maya is outside the misogynistic construct and is finally happy in her madness.

But even in the conventional ending, one can see Desai's struggle to give the story some hope. Maya, who is on the balcony, appears "bright" yet "frantic," when her mother-in-law comes to fetch her, but she isn't going to allow them to lock her up. She chose another form of freedom. She disappears into the dark silence. Does Maya jump to her death, or does Desai mean something else when
there is finally silence? Silence, for she no longer needs to speak patriarchal language. Darkness and silence in patriarchal discourse and reality, while in the alternate world, where her other identity dwells, Maya may still be laughing and prancing about in her happiness. Is it not peace? If she commits suicide, then that is her way of resisting the misogynistic discourse. She may not have attained glory as a sati, yet first in "madness," and then finally, in death, she resists the patriarchy, and soars to the top of her "mountain," to roam free.
IV. CONCLUSION

From the discussion, I have argued many times that only strongly resisting the patriarchal construct can women become free. My sister is considered a strong woman for she went through so much marital suffering, yet she has managed to take care of her three daughters, has kept her marriage together, and has managed to run a successful medical practice. Even though she goes through turmoil and unhappiness, she is seen as better off than my aunt. Still, in our families, she and I are always looked upon as troublemakers, ones who talk too much. My mother is constantly pointed out to us as a saint, who sacrificed her whole life in the service of others, and many-a-time, our in-laws have cited her "goodness" as some thing we should try to emulate.

Is my aunt full of agony, like my sister, or is she contented in her world? No one knows. She is lost in her dream world, getting up when she wants, eating when she wants, talking only the things she wants to talk about. My mother, who went to visit her last year in India when her daughter finally got married, in spite of my uncle's innumerable attempts to thwart the plans, said that my aunt seemed very contended and happy, and cooked an entire meal for about forty of the wedding guests single-handedly. She goes where she pleases (she asks her sons to drive her around), she visits whoever she wants (my uncle is no longer on speaking terms with his eldest son, daughter-in-law and grandchildren, and she makes it a point to visit them every Sunday after going to the temple), and she says what ever comes to her mind. Yet, everyone in my family feels remorse for my aunt, and sadness for my uncle, who has to lead "half a life with half a woman." They feel my aunt has no sense of reality, and her moments of "lucidity" are rare and she is always in a trance. I believe that she is kept drugged (she is still on the tranquilizer) so that when she does feel she is "free," she should not be able to do
anything about it. But I believe now that my aunt has found a way to resist the misogynistic discourse; she has escaped from my uncle's strict, disciplinarian ways to a place where nobody can question her. She is free, whereas my sister is still trying to understand herself through the misogynistic discourse. How can I convince her that being controlled and being able to cope are not the only ways available to women? When is this message going to go out to women that there can be an end to this suffering that we go through because of the construct and constraint of misogynistic discourse? Who is going to tell all women to read Cixous's "Laugh of the Medusa," and learn to rewrite themselves, and "look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing" (229). Women must rewrite themselves through their bodies, and must reclaim their bodies back from the androcentric and misogynistic discourse.

If woman has always function 'within' the discourse of man, a signifier that has always referred back to the opposite signifier which annihilates its specific energy and diminishes of stifles its very different sounds, it is time for her to dislocate this 'within', to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers, containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of. And you'll see with what ease she will spring forth from that 'within'--the 'within' where once she so drowsily crouched--to overflow at the lips she will cover foam. (Cixous "The Laugh of the Medusa" 229)

Twenty years later, will I understand my aunt's language when she speaks? Or do I even need words? Did I not understand her a long time ago when I didn't have language, and when I had listened to her with "another ear"? Did she and I not communicate long before I learned there was a language for such as she and I? If we recognize, and can somehow reach a position outside this patriarchal discourse where we can recognize that we will no longer be alone, that even prior to language we had understood each other, that we will still have each other, will
we then resist actively? Will we be no longer scared to be considered crazy?
Maybe we will not be considered mad anymore, for half the world will be like us, and we would have rewritten ourselves. There will be so much laughter and so much joy, that the rest of the world might want to join us and leave the structured, controlled world behind where sexuality is repressed, body is negated, softness, tenderness, and gentleness are considered weaknesses? Maybe my sister will no longer have to fight for control of her emotions, nor will I have to be "docile" and "contained," and all women can finally be free and soar into the mountains. But in the meantime we have to learn to resist, to find spaces for ourselves where we can celebrate, where we can look into each other's faces and learn to laugh without restraint.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


