

Cry of Women in Anita Desai's Select Novels: *Cry, The Peacock, Where Shall We Go This Summer?* and *In Custody*

By

Banumathi J

(15PEN001)

A thesis submitted to

Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education

for Women, Coimbatore – 641043

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master's Degree in English.

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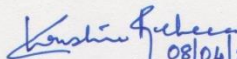
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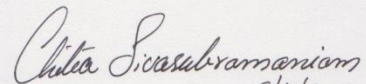
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Table of Contents

S No.	Contents	Pg No.
1	Introduction	1
2	Man-Woman Relationship in <i>Cry, The Peacock</i>	17
3	Alienation in <i>Where Shall We Go This Summer?</i>	38
4	Frustration and Anger in Marital Life in <i>In Custody</i>	57
5	Conclusion	74
6	Works Cited	85

Chapter 1

Introduction

Diasporic Literature is a vast concept and an umbrella term that includes in it all the literary works written by the authors outside their native country, but these works are associated with native culture and background. In this wide context, all the writers can be regarded as diasporic writers, who write outside their country but remained related to their homeland through their works. Diasporic literature deals with displacement, existentialism, rootlessness, alienation, nostalgia and quest for identity. It addresses the issues related to disintegration or amalgamation of cultures.

Fiction by Indian women writers constitutes a major segment of contemporary Indian diasporic literature. The women novelists of Indian diaspora in USA are Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Anjana Appachana, Kiran Desai, Sujata Massey, Indira Ganeshan and Jhumpa Lahiri. These writers have made their homeland memorable and popular by writing about it. Through the movements of migration or immigration, writers are turned diasporic. It depends upon individual's response to the adopted country and acceptance by the host. This acceptance also depends upon the value or importance of diasporic individual to the host society.

Diasporic fiction deals with space, moves between home and foreign country, the familiar and the strange, the old and the new. The contrasts and comparisons between these two spaces are frequent in the novels of Diasporas, which are different from the regular Indian English fiction. It is the passage to India with its images and impressions of India of their past, and its memory of an imaginary homeland. They blend their memory of India with their present, as it is the country of their birth and its ties do not allow them psychologically to acculturate and

assimilate in immigrated country. They turn homesick, homeless, alienated, nostalgic, and rootless and hence they go on deriving sustenance from the country of their residence.

Men and women experience migration differently and women's identities are changed by class and location. Jumpa Lahiri's *Namesake* (2004) focuses on the problems of child-rearing in an alien culture. The central theme of Lahiri's fictional aura is Indian-American life and the dilemma in the lives of Indian immigrants, who encounter problems such as identity crisis, alienation and nostalgic feeling. In the novel *Namesake*, the protagonist Ashima experiences suffering and isolation being far away in a foreign land. Ashima's anguish is indescribable as the alienation and the pain of becoming a mother in a foreign land surround her. Her mind is enveloped with a sense of fear as to how she can raise a child in a country where she is related to no one and where she is unmonitored and unobserved.

In Bharati Kirchner's *Shiva Dancing* (1998), the theme of nostalgia is depicted. The protagonist Meena Kumari is a victim of child-marriage, and kidnapping, but turns to be a successful computer software designer in San Francisco. Yet she desires to reconnect with her past-family, village, her love, and India itself.

Manju Kapoor is also one of the significant writers whose works establish the nexus between tradition and modernity. The dominating works of Kapoor can be critically seen in her significant novel *Difficult Daughters* (1998), set around the time of partition and it is the story of a woman torn between family duty, the desire for education, and illicit love. Her second novel, *A Married Woman* (2003) is quite powerful as its predecessor and thematically even more controversial. Women writers gave considerable contribution to the development of Indian English fiction. It is after the Second World War that women writers have enriched the genre, making it compatible in the context of the world literature.

Anita Desai is a prolific woman novelist whose novels deal with uncovering the layers of women psyche. She has tried to explain the mystery of heart of a woman from existential point of view. She finds women embroiled in culturally anguished situation struggling with neurotic problems. Desai shows that women are the sufferers, not only because of living in male-centric society but also as a human being. They are also victims of post-modernist sensibility caused by urban advanced life style. They feel diasporic sensibility in dual stages of their lives and felt that they are alienated from the society. After marriage, woman is supposed to live in husband's house and live in a different cultural condition.

Anita Desai is one of those who have tried to understand closely the predicament of women. She is one of the most distinguished women novelists writing in English language and comparable on the world scene, with the women writers, like Irish Murdoch, Doris Lessing, Margaret Laurence. M. Chakranarayan in *Style Studies in Anita Desai* says that "The novels of Anita Desai reveal her unique world view, but at the same time confirm to the existing tendencies in modern fiction" (82).

Indian women novelists, notably Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya have indicated that the novels written by women novelists have reached maturity. They forge a style of their own and reveal a power of artistic selection by which their novels achieve a harmonious effect. The writers share the experience of women in general and transmute these experiences into the form of fiction.

In an interview with Meenakshi Mukherjee, Anita Desai, points out that "the change is towards a widening of human concerns and of a willingness to integrate concrete historical and specific cultural dimensions in the creation of interior landscape" (13). The awareness of individuality, the sense of compatibility and incompatibility with their tradition-bound

surrounding, the resentment of male-dominated ideas of morality and behaviour, problems at home and at work place or in the society — all come up in the form of a discussion for these women writers.

Anita Desai is one of the diasporic writers and holds a unique place among the contemporary women novelists of India. She has to her credit a large number of creative works and a coherently growing readership throughout the world. She has published ten novels and other literary works of immense value. She has been awarded the prestigious Sahtya Academy Award for her novel, *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) and Author's Build Award for *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975). Her women characters in the novels rebel against patriarchal community in order to explore their own potential or to live on their own terms, regardless of the consequences that such a rebellion may have on their lives. They take the position of outsiders to fight and criticize the cultural ideologies that come in their way of becoming free individuals.

Anita Desai is born on June 24, 1937 in Mussoorie. Her mother was a German and her father was a Bengali. She completed her schooling at Queen Mary's Higher Secondary School in Delhi and got her graduation in English literature at Delhi University. She speaks German at home and Bengali, Urdu, Hindi and English at school and in the city streets. She grows up surrounded by Western culture and music. She married Ashvin Desai, a businessman at twenty-one and raised several children before becoming known for her writing. Her first book, *Cry the Peacock* was published in England in 1963, and her better known novels include *In Custody* (1984) and *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988).

Desai is considered as a writer who introduces the psychological novel in the tradition of Virginia Woolf to India. It includes her pioneer status of writing on women issues. According to her the effeminate movement in India is very new and a younger generation of readers in India

tend to be rather impatient of her books because they are about helpless woman. They find it somewhat unreal that woman does not fight back, but they do not seem to realize how new this movement is. Srinivasa Iyengar in *The Indian Writing in English*, says that

Anita Desai has added a few dimensions to the achievement of Indian women writers in English fiction. In Praver Jhabvala's work the social back ground is rather more important than the characters who enact the various comedies, tragic-comedies and farces in kamala Markandaya's, the accent is as much as much on the principal characters as on the diverse backgrounds, economic, political, cultural, social; but in Anita Desai's novels, the inner climate, the climate sensibility that lours or clears or rumbles like thunder or suddenly blazes forth like lightning, is more compelling than the outer weather, the physical geography on the visible action. Her forte, in other words, is the exploration of sensibility—the particular kind of modern Indian sensibility that is all at ease among the barbarians and philistines, the anarchist, and the amoralists. Since her preoccupation is with the inner world of sensibility rather than the outer world of action, she has tried to forge a style supple and suggestive enough to convey the fever and fretfulness of the stream of consciousness of her principal characters.

(464)

Anita Desai made her debut as novelist in 1963 with *Cry the Peacock*. It is followed by *Voices in the City* (1965), a story about three siblings and their different ways of life in Calcutta. Her novel *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) won the Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize. Her other works include *Clear Light of Day* (1980), *In Custody* (1984), and *Fasting, Feasting* (1999), each of which was short listed for the Booker Prize. Her children's book *The Village by the Sea*

(1982), won the Guardian Children's Fiction Award. Anita Desai's latest novel is *The Artist Disappearance* (2011).

The major dominating themes in her novels are alienation and human relationship particularly the man-woman relationship. Nowadays, these kinds of themes have assumed special significance in the closer individualism and the Westernization of attitudes and lives of people. The fiction of Anita Desai is relevant to all times because she writes about the predicament of modern man/woman. She looks in to man's psyche and goes beyond the skin and flesh.

Literature for Anita Desai is not a means of escaping reality and inquiry. She prefers the private to the public world and avoids the traditional groves of external reality and physical world. In fact, her real concern is the thorough investigation of human psyche, inner climate and she unravels the mystery of the inner life of her characters. Desai writes neither for placing entertainment nor for dissemination and propagation of social ideas. Her main engagement is to study human existence and predicament, her exploration being a quest for self. She is a novelist of psycho-emotional situation and her theme is the individual against himself or herself and against the milieu. Usha Pande in *The Novels of Anita Desai* says that:

Anita Desai is one of the most prominent Indian novelist in English. There are more than dozens of novels to her credit. Beside this, collection of short stories and articles too. She is status of women in the male dominated society. There are number of scholars who have studied and published many valuable accounts and comments on her works. She has an independent approach to women's problems in Indian society as well as life in general. Anita Desai is specially prominent for the insightful depiction of the inner life of the female characters in her writings.

Many novels of Anita Desai explore the tension between family members and the alienation of middle class women. (22)

David Crystal in *The Cambridge Biographical Encyclopaedia*, says that “frequently depict the attempts of urban middle–class women to harmonize the needs of the self with the demands traditionally made of Indian women by the family, caste, and society.” David Crystal further comments that the bond between family members, and the cultural experience of Indian women in particular affects the relationship, emerge as a recurring theme in Desai’s works as she deals with contemporary “Indian life, culture clashes between the East and the West, generational differences, and practical and emotional exile” (52).

Anita Desai mostly writes about the miserable plight of their insensitive and inconsiderate husbands, fathers and brothers. On the other hand, man-woman relationship brings characters into alienation, withdrawal, loneliness, isolation and lack of communication that frequently occurs in her novels. Most of Desai’s protagonists are alienated from the world, society, families, parents, and their own selves.

Desai’s main focus is to depict the psychic stages of her protagonists at some crucial juncture of their lives. Therefore, the most recurrent themes in her novels are the complexities of man-woman relationships, the founding of individuality and establishing the individualism of her characters.

Anita Desai is an Indian novelist and short story writer. Many of her novels explore the tensions between family members and the alienation of middle-class women. In her later novels, she wrote on varied themes such as German Anti-Semitism, the demise of traditions and Western stereotypical views of India. Desai questions the universal presumption of the western discourses on the basis that the West is unaware of the Indian traditions and problems of joint family,

dowry, purdah, sati, illiteracy and childlessness. She aspires to pin point these problems, so that Indian women can carry out a movement and try to find out a solution.

Anita Desai moves inward in her subtle psychological probing and seizes with the abnormal or the hyper-sensitive to lend a dimension of psychological depth and a poetic parable of consciousness to the Indian novel in English. Her work projects the difficulties faced by her characters in shedding their fears and insecurities, which result in disruption of their family ties. She describes her writing as 'purely subjective' in order to avoid problems which the objective writer has to deal with since she depends on observation rather than on the private vision, which she tries to enclose in the works to see what the subconscious does to an impressionable person. Anita Desai is more interested in portraying the response of a sensitive mind in the enveloping world. Bindulata Choudhary in *Women and Society in the Novels of Anita Desai*, rightly remarks "Desai wants to say that the helplessness of the women to find a suitability of existence can be eradicated, not by introspection but by constructive intuition" (81).

Desai's purpose of writing is to discover and then describe and convey the truth of life. The significance by plunging below the surface and plumbing the depths, is to illuminate those depths till they seem a more lucid, brilliant and explicable reflections of the visible world. She does not believe that literature ought to be confined within the reality. The fictional world of Anita Desai is located in human consciousness. She is concerned with the dark mysterious oppressive inner world of her intensely introvert characters. Her characters, especially the females have been portrayed on the verge of psychological breakdown.

Desai uses stream of consciousness technique, flashbacks and interior monologues. These techniques are used in order to capture the inner psychological realm, an intensified impression and a quickened multiplied consciousness. She is called as Virginia Woolf among the Indian

writers. She is a subjective writer and accepts that total objectivity is impossible and her dependence on the instinct is so great that when she writes down her novel, she has no plot on her mind but her novels gradually and instinctively take their own shape.

Anita Desai broadly elaborates her views on creativity; she thinks that writing is not an act of deliberation, vision or choice but a matter of instinct, silence, compulsion and waiting. Like an artist she handles the raw material of life and conveys it through a pattern and a design. She is much interested in life with its hopes, frustrations, negotiations, rejections and chaotic flow of events as she is concerned with the art of shaping, purpose and wholeness to life.

Anita Desai's characters reveal her vision of life and set out in quest of meaning. She is like an experimenter who deals with many existentialistic problems and predicaments. She is unique among the contemporary Indian English fiction writers. Apart from focusing on confusion and complexities of human relationships, she also moves around the theme of alienation and isolation.

Anita Desai's psychological novels keep hold of the Indian sensibility and socio-cultural ethos. She focuses on the attention of women in India in the male-oriented and male-defined social and moral codes. She is interested in characters that are not average but are driven into despair and as a result turned against the general environment and trend. She feels that a novelist must be sensitive and must have a power of keen observation so that they can give actual description and pick up the tiny details.

Anita Desai in her novel visualizes life for a woman as a series of obligations and commitments. Her themes and characters depict the existential reality and evoke the sensibility of her females. She focuses on the problems of communication between men and women and she has the talent of probing the psyche of her woman characters. The protagonist possesses a

resistant individuality and fight against the common place conformity and stick to their own vision of life.

Anita Desai's imagination makes her to take up themes like clash of characters, maladjustments due to family environment, class-conflicts, alienation and loss of identity, the narrow mindedness of Indian society, violence and death, and the complex human relationships. Despite various themes in her novels, the problems of relationships remains essentially central, and all the themes and issues finally get subsumed in this problem. But the often repeated themes are the problems of communication between husband and wife, between the individual and the social world. Alienation in devoted relation is a newly emerging idea of our modern society for parents and children who are equally alienated from each other.

Anita Desai is expert in depicting female persona and holds an enviable position as a psychological novelist dealing with the psychic problems of women, particularly Indian ones. They have been depicted as witless creatures without any will on their own. Male-dominated society has idealized women's pride in suffering with Sati-Savitri images. Anita Desai has emerged with a new awareness dealing the subject with her effeminate sensibility. The myth of Indian women as tolerant and sacrificing is not for her, but for the isolation and insecurity that a woman suffers. R.S. Pathak in *Indian Literature in English: Critical Views* quotes the words of Satish Barbuddhe, who says that "Desai's intentions as seeking to highlight the status of women in society" (199).

Anita Desai's female characters are educated, well to do and hypersensitive women who are burdened by the contemporary chaotic situation. Molly Yancovitz in *Reading Anita Desai* says that "Desai writes women as a simplification, a producing identity [perhaps only strategically essentialist], that silently screams but against the oppressed positions of women in

India” (Molly Yancovitz). Anita Desai reflects the inner struggle of such women, their desire to break the shackles and come out of their nut shells of their existences and assert themselves as human beings. In their struggle they get alienated from the mainstream of life. Her pre-occupation with the individual, highlighting the psychological motivation, frustration, and sense of failure and her keen awareness of the futility of existence radiates from each of her novels. Satish Barbuddhe in the book *Indian Literature in English* quotes the words of R.S. Pathak who states that, “The authors characters in many novels are members of the Anglicized Indian bourgeoisie, whose marital problems are in the forefront. Her characters often adopt escapist ways to cope with the boring everyday life or world outside comfortable living” (195).

The Existential themes of freedom, decision, guilt, alienation, anxiety, boredom, death and destruction are all dealt by Desai. Her women characters are leading a comfortable life but internally they are wounded and strife-ridden personalities. Their easy and comfortable living fails to give them peace, love and satisfaction which they cherish the most and have to live without them throughout their lives. She focuses on characters rather than plot and delineates them by sinking deep into their psyche and sowing their agony, anger, dissatisfaction and frustration. Women are shown as caught between their desire to assert their individuality on one hand and the liability to live according to the traditional norms on the other. When her characters come out of their shells and face the reality of life, they get frustrated by the cruel and callous urban surroundings, in addition to the lack of sympathy and understanding on the part of their near and dear ones, which serve to enhance their isolation.

Desai is one of the foremost Indian novelists who try to portray the tragedy of human soul trapped in the adverse circumstances of life. Her novels deal with the problems of meaninglessness in life and lack of communication not from sociological or philosophical but

entirely from the psychological point of view. Desai as a psychological novelist tries to delve deep into emotional built up and crevices of her characters. She makes use of all techniques of a psychological novel like flashbacks, stream of consciousness, diary-entries, self-analysis and ruminations.

Although Anita Desai cannot be directly related to any effeminate movement to secure the complete equality of women with men in the enjoyment of all human rights, moral, religious, social, political, educational, legal and economic, yet she is well aware of the fact that, for Indian women, hearth and heart are two extremes and they have to strive against their circumstances to break apart from the cordon of customs and redefine themselves. Indian women, since the annals of history have been treated merely as objects to please men rather than to have an identity of their own. The idea of male superiority in India has received religious sanctions.

Anita Desai does not portray women as being strong and self-sacrificing but as helpless and frustrated, sense of failure and keen awareness of the futility of existence. Mostly her women characters are haunted by the deadly nightmares of imaginary apprehensions conjured up by their flawed nature and in the process, gradually they disintegrate themselves.

Desai's fictional world pinpoints the vicinity of female consciousness. She is obsessively and entirely concerned with the depression and oppression of these timid female characters that are unable to give space to their emotions. Desai can also be considered as spokesperson of Indian culture as she authentically conveys its problems, uncertainties, complexities and paradoxes and this is seen evident in her novels. She is expert in portraying the reaction of women towards a given situation, i.e., ill-treatment by in-laws and indifference of the husband. It is interesting to observe how Desai depicts life in a complicated situation. She is not interested in

social and economic problems; she devotes her entire creative energy in portraying the impact of social and family environment on the psyche of her protagonist.

Analysing Anita Desai's fiction in the light of her sensitive portrayals, her troubled characters desire to shape out a meaningful existence of them. The depiction of her story gives more psychological touch to it. Her novels probe the psychic dimensions of the protagonist. Thus, her novels are pioneering efforts towards delineating the psychological problems of her characters.

In *Cry, the Peacock*, Anita Desai portrays the transformation of a hypersensitive Hindu woman, Maya, of orthodox background seeking unorthodox means of fulfillment, into an insane individual. Maya's fascination for life clashes with her husband, Gautama's rational and pragmatic approach to it. Both of them could never understand each other and thus drifted apart. The fatal distance between Gautama and Maya arising from a temperamental incompatibility is the main factor to the theme of psychic disintegration.

In *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Anita Desai tries to use the myth of the archetypal Sita in the modern context. This Sita in her forties graying, aging, well-established, well-carried, finds herself alienated from her husband, children, in-laws and society. She regards their presence as a threat to her own existence and behaves abnormally. The withdrawal of her wounded and bruised soul into her own protective shell conveys her protest.

In *Custody*, Desai criticizes traditional society, but the novel focuses on a pathetic, trapped male character whose wife despises his inability to succeed financially. A terrified, insignificant person, Deven moves from mediocrity as a college lecturer to impending professional and financial ruin as he incurs increasing monetary debts, which he finally decides to endure rather than committing suicide. His wife gives him little support - in fact, the women in

the book seem rather nasty, especially the enraged young wife of Deven's hero, the poet, Nur. As the story progresses, however, Desai makes clear that just as the male characters are trapped in a world that offers no possibility for success, the female characters have even more rights to feel frustrated with a sexist society that reduces them to clinging to these men who cannot provide them with what they want.

Desai's novels *Cry, the Peacock*, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* and *In Custody* have exposed the evidence of the novelists' awareness of several problems related to women, which she tries to equip from psychological point of view. In these novels, she deals with the dislocation of normal life of temperament, and the mal-adjustment in family life. They are generally neurotic, highly sensitive but alienated in a world of dream and fantasy, and separated from their surroundings as an outcome of their failure or unwillingness to adjust with reality.

The present study entitled "Cry of women in Anita Desai's Select Novels: *Cry, The Peacock*, *In Custody* and *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*", the first chapter entitled "Introduction" deals with the introduction to diasporic literature and writers who belong to this realm and also it focuses on the closer study of Anita Desai's works which reveals the struggle faced by the women in the patriarchal society. Desai's work focuses on inner psyche of women and the position of women in contemporary society.

Chapter two entitled "Man-Woman Relationship in *Cry, The Peacock*" focuses on marital discord and its impact on women. Maya and Gautama, and all the couples around them are victims of bitter problems of maladjustments in marriage. Desai portrays the hyper-sensitive Maya and focuses on her effeminate psyche from childhood to her present life. Maya is the victim of many social and psychological predicaments. Maya's obsession with death, her father's fixation and her marital discords are the three strands around which the novel focuses on.

Chapter three entitled “Alienation in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*”, focuses on the lack of communication in married life. It is about middle-aged woman, Sita who is sick of the normal routine of meaningless existence. Sita is similar to that of Maya in *Cry, The Peacock*. Sita too is obsessed with her loveless marriage with Raman. Life makes them strangers to one another, who live under the same roof without sharing the essential communion of hearts.

Chapter four entitled “Frustration and Anger in Marital Life in *In Custody*” the study focuses on the marital disagreement between husband, Deven and wife, Sarla. The women characters *In Custody* are locked in silence and are not just ideologically but literally defined by the patriarchal discourse symbolized by the development of the narrative through Deven’s point of view. Deven initially escapes from the domestic life for financial crisis, goes to the fantasy of Urdu poetry but realises the harsh realities of married life and responsibilities, comes back to his wife and his son, Manu. Thus, Desai depicts the marital dissonance with a difference in her novel.

Chapter five entitled “Conclusion” focuses on how Anita Desai’s women characters suffer after marriage. She has explored different aspects of effeminate psyche and its effect on human relationship. Desai presents the complexity of human relationships as a big contemporary issue and human condition. She has analysed this problem and projected the changing relationships in her novels.

Anita Desai emerges on the literary horizon after independence, focusing on the contemporary issues. She has added a new dimension to her contemporary fictional novels. She has secured a unique place due to her innovative thematic concerns and deals in her fiction with effeminate sensibility. Her preoccupation is explored of deep psyche of her characters. Her fiction is relevant to all times because she writes about the predicament of modern woman. She

digs into a woman's inner psyche and goes beyond the skin and the flesh. Literature for her is not a means of escaping reality but an exploration and an inquiry. Her real concern is the exploration of human psyche, inner climate, and she unravels the mystery of the inner life of female characters.

Chapter - 2

Man-Woman Relationship in *Cry, The Peacock*

The theme of man-woman relationship in Anita Desai's novel *Cry, The Peacock* reveals the consummate craftsmanship. This theme becomes more important due to rapid industrialization, growing awareness among women of their rights and individualism and the westernization of attitudes and lives of the people. Her novels however do not challenge the futility of marriage as an institution but discloses the inner psyche of characters through their relations. Meena Bellipa in *Anita Desai: A Study of Her Fiction* considers it, "a remarkable attempt considers it to fuse fantasy with perpetual experience" (25).

In most of Desai's novel, marriage is shown as union of compatibility. Men are considered to be reasonable and women to be sensitive and emotional. She focuses on the status of women in India in the male-oriented and male defined social and moral codes. She portrays self-assertion and self-actualization of her characters in the face of the rigid codes of behaviour in a conformist and status-quo loving society.

Desai has explored the woman psyche, which also includes man-woman relationship. She focuses on the quality of life and people, with world and value. *Cry, The Peacock* mainly focuses on the family discord between the husband, Gautama and the wife, Maya. The novel is about Maya's cry for love and relationship in her loveless wedding to Gautama. The novel illustrates the dark and shadowy realms of Maya's consciousness and her deteriorating psychic state. Her novels suggest the identification of human beings with the forces of isolation.

Shanta Acharya in *Problems of the Self in The Novels of Anita Desai, in Explorations in Modern, Indo-Anglian Fiction* says that "Anita Desai is specially prominent for the insightful depiction of the inner life of the female characters in her writings". Many novels of Anita Desai

explore the tension between family members and the alienation of middle class women. She once remarked that, “writing is a process of discovering the truth- the truth that nine-tenths of the iceberg that lies submerged beneath one-tenths of visible portion we call reality” (241).

Cry, The Peacock, is the sad story of the hyper-sensitive young Brahmin woman Maya, married to a cold intellectual husband, Gautama. Maya requires a love partner with wide sympathies, highly sensitive, imaginative and responsive temperaments which Gautama lacks. Maya cannot captivate herself in totality of Gautama, a mighty tree no doubt lacks the mixture of support and sweetness of temperament which Maya longs for. She is extremely disturbed by the childhood prophecy of disaster, which drives her into the desperate situation where her sense of reality is lost which leads her to unseemly consequences.

Desai is concerned with the psychological reality and prefers strange and abnormal characters to normal characters. M.A. Waheed in *The Novels of Ruth Jhabvala and Anita Desai*, quotes Atma Ram who says that Anita Desai writes:

... instinctively, being carried away by her compulsions, allowing the novel to sprout and grow freely like a tree under the blue sky, and then trimming its ugly branches and uprooting weeds growing around it. The object that triggers her imagination could be very insignificant- a leaf dripping under a rain drop, a face seen on the bus, or a scrap of news read in the papers” (34).

Desai explores the inner visible section of the iceberg that one sees above the surface of the ocean. Desai depicts the inner state of mind and expresses most poetically the tension of man-woman relationship in a fast changing urban milieu. The novel starts with the depressing atmosphere with the death of Maya’s dog, Toto. The death upsets Maya and finds it impossible to endure the psychological strain. She is more attached to the dog because of her childlessness

and it seems that her pet-dog becomes a child substitute. She says “All day the body lay rotting in the sun” (7). She begged the gardener to bury her dead dog, but the gardener refused to do so and he said that the sweepers will do it. She waited for her husband to come but as soon as he arrived, “he did all that was to be done.... He telephoned the Public Works Department, he had sent them their scavenging truck to take the corpse away and saw it to himself” (8).

The image of dead Toto, besides conveying the death motif in the novel, serves as the symbol of an abandoned self-doomed loneliness:

All day the body lay rotting in the sun. It could not be moved onto the verandah for, in that April heat, the reek of dead flesh was overpowering and would soon have penetrated the rooms. So she moved the little string body.... Crows sat in circle around the corpse, and crows will eat anything — entrails, eye, anything. Flies began to hum amidst the limes, driving away the gentle bees and unthinking butterflies. (7)

Desai likes to dwell deeper and deeper into the character or scene, instead of going round about it. Desai feels that a writer must have certain traits of the heart and head which are essential for writing the novel. She is deeply concerned with the inner world of human beings and their agitations and disruptions in their family affairs and social environment.

The theme of marital dissonance and inharmonious man-woman relations are common in Desai's novel. Maya is locked up in her unhappy wed lock. Desai projects the problem of marital dissonance through incompatible couple like Gautama and Maya. She has acutely portrayed the sensitive Maya, who is dutiful with incomprehensible and insensitive husband, Gautama.

Gautama is cold and too practical to understand her grief but, instead he is concerned about his tea. He considers dog as a replacable thing just like any other furniture item. The Dog's

death reminds Maya of her loneliness, “It was not pets death alone that I mourned today, but another sorrow, unremembered perhaps, as yet not even experienced, and filled me with despair” (13). She feels lonelier and Gautama’s insensitivity is highlighted when he calls her a chattering monkey when she tries to share her feelings regarding her pet.

Gautama, the fly, discards gentle bees like Maya and dead Toto, to utter desolation and isolation. Toto’s death is being projected in different forms to explain Maya’s psychic derangement and her inescapable obsession with death. Maya stands for the domestic cat which under pressure drives wild and neurotic like iguanas. The iguanas suggest her neurosis and sadness in her married life.

Maya, a pampered child of Rai Sahib, is brought up in an atmosphere of luxury. As a pet and over protected daughter of a wealthy Brahmin, Maya suffers from father-fixation. Even after her marriage she expects her father’s qualities in Gautama “No one, no one else... loves me as my father” (43). Maya’s marriage to Gautama is more or less a marriage of convenience. It “was grounded upon their friendship of the two men and the mutual respect in which they held each other, rather than anything else” (39).

Jasbir Jain in *Stairs to the Attic: The Novels of Anita Desai*, says that “The world of Anita Desai’s novels is an ambivalent one ... the desire to love and live clashes... with the desire to withdraw and achieve harmony. Involvement and stillness are incompatible by their nature, yet they strive to exist together” (16). Both Maya and Gautama are two different temperaments and there is not a similarity in the physical or mental outlooks to bring them to close tie. Gautama’s sensibilities are too practical and rough to suit with Maya. He is a faithful husband who loves and cares for her in his own ways but Maya is never satisfied with that.

The conventional world, the gap between ideal and the human practice is accepted as a natural part of creation, she fails to understand the space. Maya is born in ignorance and her life is infected with illusion and her self-identity — the duality of her existence continues till the end of the novel. The conflict between Maya and Gautama is that of, sensuous and prudence, responsiveness and reason, imagination and common sense, dejected reality and self-nurtured illusions, extreme inwardness and outspoken realism, illusions and reality, mortal agony and divine solace, intellect and emotion, and strong judicious approach persists as the vital string of catastrophe.

The marriage life of Maya and Gautama, results in a rupture because the two are temperamentally different, but mutually opposed. Maya is full of life and she wants to enjoy life to the utmost. To her, sexual satisfaction is a necessity and the total denial of it makes her a victim of neurosis and mental breakdown in the relation. She shows interest in all the good things of life – nature, birds and animals, poetry and dance. She loses herself in the enjoyment of beautiful sights and sounds. The cries of birds evoke a sympathetic chord in her. She is presented in the novel as a woman who longs for pleasures of life.

Gautama is being bookish, sharp, logical and rational, whereas Maya is a fairy-tale illusionary entity. Gautama compresses the entire world as per the *Bhagwad Gita*, which is completely contrary to the emotional framework of Maya. Maya has romantic love where as Gautama is non-romantic. Maya's name symbolizes the world of sensations. Gautama's name on the other hand, symbolizes detachment from life. He is realistic and rational person. He has philosophical detachment towards life as in the *Bhagwad Gita* “‘He who is free from all attachment,’ and he said, softly ‘and neither rejoices on receiving good, nor is vexed on receiving evil, his wisdom is well established’” (95). Such incompatible different temperaments are bound

to have marital disharmony. Gautama's stands for the first name of Buddha and Maya, the name of illusion in Vendanta philosophy and the implications is quite distinct.

Somatkar in *The Theme of Alienation in Anita Desai's Cry, The Peacock*, says that "Maya expresses the agony caused by the haunting nightmare of death. Life was unbearable to her for a long time. She does not have any communication with Gautama. She comes to know that he is not capable of sharing his real feelings with her". Maya discovers Gautama's total indifferent attitude towards her physical charms and a sort of artificiality in her married life. For Gautama there is "no value in anything less than ideas and theories, born of human and, preferably, male brains" (99) and Maya finds it difficult to cope up with him, thereby she feels rebuffed and rejected — all driving her in a series of nightmares, fever, delirium, hallucination and dreadful breeding. Gautama detects it as,

Life is a fairy tale to you still. What have you learnt of the realities? The realities of common human existence, not love and romance, but living and dying working, all that of constitute the life for the ordinary men... if one must have a real, solid, personal world, why not create one within oneself, to detach our self into when the world around one grows either too boring or too hectic.... (115-17)

This sort of idea is borrowed from the *Gita* which ask for inner consciousness (atman) that witness the action of ego and that which deals with the physical world of illusion (Maya). This atman is independent of the routine realities and helps the individual to detach himself from the world of Maya. This disengagement ensures peace and stability which is the end of philosophical aspirations.

All these relationships between men and women point out the plus and minus points of brides and bridegrooms. Wedding is a union of two souls and two bodies. It is to be established

consciously and carefully. Its outcomes are the clashes, desperation, obsession, alienation and loneliness. Maya is deeply scattered at the insensibility, hypocrisy and disdain exposed through other marriages around her. Maya longs for husband's companionship and spends sleepless nights.

The city plays a crucial role in widening the marital gap between Gautama and Maya. She feels separated from the world of Gautama who does not want to be "interrupted in his thinking" by trivial matters such as the death of a pet dog. She feels the absence of her husband in the house for long hours. Whenever he comes, he gets busy with his clients or discusses politics and philosophy, which do not interest her. She feels dejected and lonely in the house, and "His coldness and incessant talk of cups of tea and philosophy in order to not to hear me talk, and talking reveal myself. It is that – my loneliness in this house" (14). R.K. Dhawan in *Indian Literature Today*, says that:

In Indian family plays a dominant role in the life of a woman. The family ties are more important and essential to a woman than her own welfare. Her own emotional well-being depends on her relationship with her family members. In a cultural environment where a woman is known by her family name and is identified with it, it is important that the bond be strong. The woman feels completely lost without this familial binding force. If this agglutination is missing as is shown by Anita Desai, the quest for linkage and affiliation can well lead a woman to a situation that invariably creates serious emotional problems. (214)

There is also a faint hint that her father's marriage was no good. This marital relationship does not represent a harmonious life and Maya is deeply moved by the hypocrisy and disgust

exposed through other marriages around her. She is not found anywhere discussing about her mother.

Desai's female protagonists try to discover and rediscover meaningfulness in their life through the known, the established. Her female characters are not normal but different from others. They do not find a proper medium for communication and thus become alienated and start brooding about their lives. All their wanderings and reflections finally bring them into new dimensions of understanding, which they have preferably ignored or rejected.

The description of "silk-cotton trees" that "huge, scarlet blooms" were squashed into soft yellowish miasma" (34), projects the inner void and alienation of a childless housewife. The explanations about the petunias and lemon blossoms suggest the temperamental isolation between Maya and Gautama. To Maya, Gautama's hand appears to be as cold and dry as the bark of an old and shady tree.

For Maya, Gautama's presence is a repelling and not a refreshing one. The lime reveals the flagging love life of Maya and Gautama, an ill-assorted couple who grow weak in silence and in-communication.

The thought which impresses Maya is that, Gautama's companionship is a necessity. Gautama makes no attempt to take any interest in things which attracts her. She pines to satisfy her physical starvation but this is not satisfied by Gautama. She would wake up at night, stifled by the hunger she felt, not only for Gautama but for all the life that represents. She expresses her feelings saying that "I went to bed alone, carrying my glass of water which I set down on the little table between our beds ... Gautama – I should have like to call out to him. I turned to the light in his study, a small bright oblong in the silent house" (26-28).

Maya is in love with living contact, relationship and communion, which are warm tender sensations in which she wants to lie around. She says:

I let these warm, tender sensation bathe me in their lambency... There were still some petunias, floppy white and faint mauve petunias- sentimental, irresolute flowers. I always felt, and yet, at dusk, they emitted such a piercing swoon of scent, a poignant, half and sweet... I started to it with the embrace of recognition.

(21-22)

Unfortunately, this kind of act is against Gautama's detachment of philosophy. He could not see the value in anything less than the ideas and theories born on human, preferably male brains. Maya longs for his companionship and spent sleepless nights. She could not tolerate her unsatisfied married life.

Gautama is a kind, cultured, rational, practical and a busy man with his own affair of business. Ayyappa Paniker in *Indian English Literature: Since Independence* says that "Gautama's life-style and circumstances of his family are just the opposite of what Raisahib cherished all his life" (46). He looks upon her love for good things as nothing more than sentimentalism and once, makes disparaging remarks about her that she has a mind of third rate poetess. Maya longs for companionship which to her despair she never finds in her marriage.

The novel echoes in the cry of Maya, the desire of a married woman to be loved with passion which few tend to get, "Because when you are away from me, I want you. Because I insist on being with you and being allowed to touch you and know you. You can't bear it, can you? No, you are afraid, you might perish" (113). On another occasion, in spite of her seductive postures, Gautama remains rigid and cold; Maya herself describes her predicament in these words: "I turned upon my side, close to him, conscious of the swell of my hip that rose under the

white sheet which fell in sculptured folds about my rounded forms (39-40).” Thus she does not only remain emotionally but also physically dissatisfied.

Maya perceives eventually that, she will lose herself as a result of a long experience of relentlessness. Her life appears as an endless tedium with nothing significant taking place at any time. She is never the centre of importance nor is she the instrumental in any event. In her world, social activities are so severely restricted that she seems to feel suffocated within it. But seeing through the Indian standards her life appears to be an ideal one. Maya has a secure home, a good earning husband, and a well-defined future. But her ideal external conditions are however not acceptable to her unconscious mind where her desire for unbridled freedom is hidden.

There is an identification of Maya with the peacocks that represents her cries for love which simultaneously invite their death, “Do you not hear the peacock call in the wild? Are they not blood-chilling, their shrieks of pain? ‘Pia, pia’ they cry.’ Lover, lover. Mio, mio, -I die, I die’ (82).” Like her, they are the creatures of the exotic wild and will not rest till they have danced to their death. For her, they represent the evolutionary instinct of struggle for survival. The image of peacock and the sound for its mating call “Piya, piya (82)” reaches out to Maya. She responds awfully to it, but not Gautama:

‘Can you hear them, Gautama?’

‘Do you....?’

‘Hear what?’ (82)

Gautama continues to ignore Maya’s feelings. He keeps himself isolated from the surrounding and has no sexual urge. Maya the ‘pea-hen’ fails to get a response from Gautama, the ‘peacock.’ Like the peacocks frantically longing for sexual communion, Maya craves for the company of Gautama, for his touch. The cry of the peacock shows the cry of Maya’s bruised

soul. Her suicide at the end of the novel becomes her enactment of her long wished desire to be in isolation.

Maya describes how the peacock danced and the remarkable impact produced in her mind: “they dance, but, like Shiva’s, their dance of joy is the dance of death, and they dance, knowing that they and their lovers are all to die... When they have exhausted themselves in battle, they will mate. Peacocks are wise” (82-83).

Maya is exasperated to hear the cooing of the dove. The dove is in a mood for mating, but Maya could not coo for Gautama. For Maya, dove’s mating is an ill omen and a symbol of loneliness, since their coo is a tedious repetition of the fatal words, “Go Away” (34). The alienation of the dove’s breed is a short-lived one, whereas for Maya it is far more enduring. For the dove it is natural and instinctive, but for Maya, though natural, it is self-reflection which dismantles her emotional stability and self-identity.

Another incident which stirs and excites Maya’s agony is when she goes with Gautama to the railway station to pick up his mother and sister. Maya sees the caged monkeys and feels; she too is caged within her nostalgic remembrances, “Cage upon cage. Long furred bodies swarming upon each other, till limbs and tails were twisted together, the elegant lines of their muscles contorted nightmarishly- the work of some fiendish maniac” (129). It shows her loss of privacy, her isolated life i.e. about the life of domestic imprisonment. It is her self-image. The monkeys wildly struggling inside the cage for liberation and release reminds Maya about her own alienation and isolation. She is sensitively prone to self-reflection which deconstructs her mental stability and self-identity.

Maya’s plight is worsened by the dust storm. The storm outside symbolically refers to the rising storm in her mind. The dust storm is a physical disclosure of the struggle between life and

death in the private world of Maya's soul. It also represents her release and liberation from her miserable plight. Gautama is neither moved by the storm nor by her suffering. He is pleased with a "cup of tea and a cold shower and some rest" (161). When he fails to notice the storm, Maya feels correct that her unexpressed decision to get rid of her husband. Maya is committed to life, while Gautama is detached to philosophy, so she thinks that "the man who had no contact with the world or with me. What would it matter to him if he died or lost?" (167).

Gajendra Kumar and Uday Shankar Ojha in *Indian English Literature: A Post-Colonial Response* says that "Anita Desai's protagonists are questers and their joy and glory lies not in completely triumphing over their confounding situations, but in the struggles they make against the prophets of doom and despair" (68). Maya's preoccupation with death has been actually planted long ago in her childhood by the albino astrologer's prophecy and possessed by the vision of foretelling the death of either of the couple after the marriage. She being intensely in love with life turns hysteric over the creeping fear of death, "Am I gone insane. Father, Brother, Husband. Who is my saviour? I am in need of one. I am dying, and I am love with living. I am in love and I am dying. God, let me sleep, forget, rest. But no I'll never sleep again. There is no rest any more-only death and waiting (84)." She is caught in the web of inescapable married life.

Gautama is not as romantic as Maya, which further shows as a dividing factor in their marriage. Gautama neither understands her nor wishes to enter her world, "He who, controlling the senses of the mind, follows the attachment the path of action with his organs of action, he is esteemed (99)."

The gap of communication between Maya and Gautama leaves her lonely to catch over the morbid thoughts of the albino astrologer's prophecy. Maya attempts to distract herself by visiting her friend, Leila. Leila marries a tuberculosis man against her parent's wish. She does

not wear bangles and leads a tragic married life and blames fate “it was all written in my fate long ago” (54). And the factor which influences Maya’s marriage is the prophecy that she constantly hears and it is haunted by the “black and evil shadow (29)” of her fate.

Maya’s cause of suffering is due to her marriage to Gautama, a man of her father’s age who is detached and reserved even to an extent of not fulfilling her physical and emotional needs. Also the indifferent behaviour of the members of Gautama’s family, the solitude and silence of the house after her marriage and the death of her pet dog accentuate her sense of loneliness which gradually develops into an actual sense of alienation.

In Gautama’s family one did not speak of love, far less of affection. One spoke- they spoke- of discussions in parliament, of cases of bribery and corruption revealed in government, ... and the trials that followed, of trade pacts made with countries across the sea.... (43).

The novel portrays the inner emotional world of Maya who is the victim of city life. The city life gives a hopeless attitude to Maya. The parties, dances, drinks and gossips in the club disturb her inner mind considerably. Moreover, she is disillusioned with the life in her in-law’s family. She feels estranged from her husband’s world and feels rejected and utterly lonely in the house. Naval Kishore Singh in *The Great Indian Women Novelist in English Literature* says that

Desai’s fiction... demystifies the idea of a national collectivity and looks toward the arts and the way of life of individuals as distinctive cultural representations. Her constructions of cultural memory are marked by nostalgia for the past, and a kind of closeness to the Romantic tradition with its “idealizing of the folk,” of vital subcultures buried deep within its own society. (27-28)

The gap between Maya's father's love and her husband's love make her conscious of the isolation that she lives in. She tries to gain space from her loneliness by continually thinking about her childhood memories with her father.

When with my father, even breakfast in the garden- for, on bright winter mornings, we have the servants bring it out into the flower-beds — becomes a party, as good as a revel of elves and fairies who feast on melons and syrups by moonlight. [As a child, I enjoyed, princess-like, a sumptuous fate of the fantasies of the Arabian Nights, the glories and bravado of Indian mythology land and astounding tales of princess and regal queens, jackals and tigers, and being my father's daughter, of the lovely English and Irish fairy tales as well...]. (41)

The loving attention of her father makes Maya oblivious of the deadly shadow; but as her husband Gautama fails to satisfy her longing for love and life, she is left to the solitude and silence of the house which prey upon her. She thinks of her husband's lack of love for her and once, in a fit of intense despair and agony, tells him straight to his face: "You know nothing of me - and of how I can love. How I *want* to love. How it is *important* to me. But you . . . You've never loved. And you don't love me. . . (96)."

The second part of the novel deals with Maya's long narration of her inner life. Maya feels like a prisoner of her past life, lives most perpetually in the shadows of the world of memories which engulf her. She keeps on remembering her childhood days to her father meted out to her. Gautama keeps criticizing her father as he knew that Maya suffers from father-fixation. He says to Maya:

If you knew your Freud it would all be very straight forward, and then appear as merely inevitable to you-taking your childhood and upbringing into consideration.

You have a very obvious father-obsession which is also the reason why you married me, a man so much older than yourself. It is complex that, unless you mature rapidly, you will not be able to deal with, to destroy. (122)

Temperamentally there is no compatibility between Maya and Gautama. Maya has romantic love for the beautiful, the colourful and the sensuous; Gautama is not romantic and has no use for flowers. Maya is a creature of instincts or a wayward and high stung child.

If Gautama had taken some steps to understand and been attentive to Maya, he would have saved her from the haunting fears of “shadows and drums, drums and shadows (128).” Their communication gap leaves Maya lonely to venture over the morbid thoughts of the albino astrologer’s prophecy. Maya attempts to distract herself by visiting her friends Leila and Pom or going to Mrs. Lal’s party or the restaurant and the cabaret, which proves powerless to banish the creeping terror. Gautama’s mother and sister Nila’s visit brings a brief respite to her and she enjoys her busy life in their company. Nila says “How can you be happy lying in the bed... ‘Human company is what you need. Young, gay people with plenty of ideas and ambitions and occupations’” (133). But once after they leave, Maya finds the house empty and starts to feel lonely with horrors and nightmares. In her words,

“Nila, with a grimace of her dark red mouth... I have to go back, the children start their exams next week, and I must look for a job....

‘No,’ I cried, miserable. What, the house empty again, and I alone with my horrors and nightmares? No! if they stayed a while, they might help me, as my own father could not.... They were the sane people, sane, sane, and yet so much more human than my own husband. (136)

As Maya moves towards insanity, she sees the visions of rats, snakes, lizards and iguanas creeping over her, slipping their club-like tongues in and out. Her dark house appears to her like her tomb and she views in it over the horror of all that is to come. Then suddenly, during her interlude of sanity, an idea hopefully draws in her mind, that since the albino astrologer had predicted death to either of them, Maya or Gautama, it may be Gautama's life but not Maya's whose life is threatened.

Thus, Maya transfers her death wish to Gautama and thinks that he is separate and indifferent to life; it does not matter for him if he misses life. She is haunted by the word 'murder'. Gautama remains so much lost in his work that, she finds him even unaware of the dust storm that has raged earlier in the afternoon. When she asks him to accompany her to the roof of the house to enjoy cool air, he accompanies her, lost in his own thoughts. Passing out of the room, Maya catches sight of bronze Shiva dancing and prays to the Lord of Dance to protect them.

Maya's impending doom and alienation is communicated through the various dance images. The glimpses of dances are the symbols of death and desolation, which obliquely connect with the isolation and separation. This emphasizes on the escalating sense of fatality and despair. The Kathakali dance "that rose out of realms of silence into one thunderous drumming" (38), shows Maya's psychic journey from stillness and silence to chaos and confusion.

Maya's life is complicatedly woven to her instincts and she expects emotional and physical satisfaction in her married life, but both are denied to her, one by Gautama's cold intellectuality and the other by his age. Maya's pleasurable enjoyment for love is damped by a liberal dose of the *Gita's* philosophy of non-attachment. Their marriage becomes an unfruitful one.

Desai attempts to focus about both the physical and the spiritual modes in life's aspirations. Desai in a sombre manner wants to convey that the physical aspects cannot be totally avoided in one's life; instead it is the means and medium for the spiritual. Gautama, who permissively quotes from the *Gita* explains about Karma and blissfully avoids his marital responsibility towards his wife, Maya.

The bear dance is related to Maya's childhood experiences which drive her into mere madness and hysterical derision. Of all the dance mentioned in the novel, Shiva's and the Peacock's dance is literally linked to the centrality of her alienated self. The dancing Shiva gains the new mythological meaning. It stands for 'divine isolation', a way out of existential predicament in which Maya is trapped and encaged. It is the symbol of escape and liberation from death and despair.

Maya asks Gautama to take her to the roof. While climbing the stairs she finds her cat suddenly speeding past them in a state of great alarm. They walk towards end of the terrace, Maya looking enraptured at the pale hushed glow of the rising moon.

I gazed at it watching the rim of it climb swiftly above the trees, and then walked towards it in a dream of love... I saw the moon's vast, pure surface, touched only faintly with petals of shadow, as though brushed by a luna moth's wings... casting light that was holy in its purity, a soft, suffusing glow of its chastity, casting its reflection upon the night with a vast, tender mother love. (172-73)

The 'stellar' picture focuses on obsessions and longings of the lonely self. In the novel *Cry, The Peacock*, it highlights on the agonizing 'solitude' of Maya, the psychic distance between her and Gautama, her elderly husband. It emphasis on Maya's deep obsessions with death and desolation, separation and loneliness "Death lurked in those spaces, the darkness spoke

of distance, separation and loneliness- loneliness of such preparation that it broke the bounds of that single word and all its associations, and went spelling and spreading out and about, lapping the starts, each one isolated from the other by so much (24).”

The lunar incident is another important part in the novel, which emphasises on the ‘morbid’ and ‘exhaust’ self of Maya chasing shadows and silences, but never meeting them. Always alone, she grows into pale and melancholic effeminate picture of a housewife. The “pale hushed glow of the rising moon ... her rim climbing the swiftly above the trees, and then walked towards it in a dream of love... the moon’s vast, pure surface... waxen white, virginal, chaste and absolute white, casting a light that was holy in its purity, soft, suffusing glow of its chastity... (172-73)” is but a reflection of Maya’s gloomy, pale and virgin life. The stark gaze of the moon in the waiting silence of the night conveys her hopeless predicament. The description of the moon assumes deeper significance with the death of Gautama at the hands of Maya towards the end of the novel.

At several places in the novel, Desai hints about Maya’s instinctual life by showing her keen aesthetic interest in nature. It is said that the life of instincts makes one close to the nature and strengthens it. In this novel *Cry, The Peacock*, Maya stands for the world of instincts whereas Gautama stands for the world of intellect. Thus they remain like railway tracks which never meet. Maya wants to merge with the elements of nature, but she finds Gautama as a disgusting barrier between her and the elements of nature. Therefore, she eliminates this barrier by pushing him down the terrace. As Gautama moves in front of her, hiding the moon from her view, she in a fit of frenzy pushes him over the parapet to “pass through an immensity of air, down to the very bottom” (173). Nigamananda Das in *Contemporary Indian Writing in English* says that “Desai is mature and serious in the elaboration of the nature of mind in her fictional

narratives. She finds her protagonists alone and they take it up as a natural condition. Women ‘trapped in their own skins’. Obsession with death as happens In Maya in *Cry, the Peacock*; she is isolated, insane to an extent and the novel is symbolic” (128).

Maya’s pushing Gautama off the parapet in their house is not accidental. There is no accident in psychic life. Behind Maya’s final act in violence there has been a long psychic struggle which Maya has not even known. Having done the act and having taken the recourse to psychosis, Maya relaxes herself and openly declares that unlike her, Gautama has not been in love with life and according to the prophecy, Gautama had to die: “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” (140). With the death of Gautama, Maya’s inharmonious marital life reaches the climax.

Maya’s family faces the craziness of material wealth so much so that Gautama’s killing becomes unavoidable. In the criss-cross of changing values and times, Desai’s concern is that of human personality and agony of human existence and her protagonist are outsiders to the society alienated from human sentiment and factual predicaments as an offshoot of awareness of deaths as the ultimate fact of life; it is the love for the life which thinks of death.

Desai in *Cry, the Peacock* has not only dealt man-woman relationship in Maya’s and Gautama’s life but also dealt with other characters like, Gautama’s sister, Nila, also does not leads a happy married life. They are incompatible and so she desires to divorce him after ten years of their marriage.

Thus the dominant theme of male-female dichotomy has been dealt successfully in this novel. Man-woman relationship brings the characters into alienation, loneliness, withdrawal, isolation and lack of communication that frequently occurs in Desai’s novels. Tension, worries,

disappointment, depression, fear and anxiety become their lot and they lose their sense of sanity and mental balance. When these characters have to face alienation, they become rebels to themselves and to the society.

Realities which are not noticed immediately are reflected in Anita Desai's novel. In *Cry, The Peacock*, she goes deep down into the source of marital disparity in a male-dominated society. She depicts female characters with great sensitivity and under the stress of marriage that finally destroys them. Maya's outer world of society and her frustrated life with Gautama, her friends and the inner world of her perceptions and the physical needs are the reason for conflict.

Therefore, these barriers between the two worlds are broken by Maya by killing Gautama. Maya seeks her reclamation in the killing of Gautama which leads her life into a tragic one. This tragedy could have been changed only if she had received some empathy and understanding from Gautama's side.

The theme of disharmony and discord is confined to the family and at times to the maladjusted or ill-adjusted self. Loneliness and unrequited love drive Desai's heroines to the extent of death, often manifesting in madness or suicide. Desai deals with the upper-middle class people of society. Binod Mishra in *Critical Response to Feminism*, says that "Desai's protagonists are women, who have reached different stages in life; even then they are fragile introverts 'trapped in their own skin'. Their emotional traumas sometimes lead to a violent death" (65-66). The novel ends with the tragic suggestion of the suicide of Maya. Even though the details of Maya's death are not properly given but the 'screaming' of Maya could be heard while "there was silence, and the both disappeared into dark quiet. All around the dark was quiet then" (184). This suggests the suicide act committed by Maya to end her tragic life.

The man-woman relationship in Anita Desai's *Cry, The Peacock*, helps to discover the pattern of human relationships, which comes under the weight of multi-dimensional pressures and tensions. Desai focuses on the predicament and dilemma faced by the urban middle-class, who is pre-occupied with the hard realities of life. Desai's prime concern in her novel is to explore the inner selves of her women protagonists. They vividly exemplify the dilemma stemming from the contemporary chaos created by the crumbling values.

Chapter 3

Alienation in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*

In the novel, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Desai analyses the trauma of a sensitive woman who is unable to accept the dictates and demands of a male-dominated marital life but ultimately comes to terms with it. The novel has been written in a coherent prose style that is stereotypical of Desai's work. This novel comes very close to *Cry, The Peacock* in the portrayal of a woman's psyche under pressure, brought about by marital discord. In *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Desai is once again back in her forte of portraying the emotional reactions of sensitive women.

The novel is divided into three parts. The first part entitled 'Monsoon' projects Sita as a rebel and portrays her departure to the island Manori. It deals with the present and the immediate past of Sita's life. The second part entitled as 'Winter' depicts Sita's recollection of her life with her father. This section assists the reader to understand her present conflict in the right perspective. The third section 'Monsoon' is a continuation of part one where Sita's submissive and aggressive trends dominate the proceeding. It also deals with her husband, Raman's visit to the island and her compromise with him.

In *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Desai presents an intense identity crisis of the central character Sita, a sensitive woman in her early forties. Impotent to live between the conflicts, she is in agony of identifying herself with the past, representing by her childhood on Manori island twenty years ago. M.K. Naik and Shyamala A. Narayan in *Indian English Literature 1980-2000: A Critical Survey*, say that "Anita Desai beautifully presents the complex web of childhood love and guilt" (79).

The novel is about the story of Sita, the daughter of freedom fighter, an extraordinary man who during his lifetime was recognised to be a saint by a few people and named as 'Charlatan' by a few others in Manori. Sita is the daughter of the political celebrity, whom many of his disciples considered as "second Gandhi" (78). Involving himself in the freedom struggle, her father had been completely forgetful of Sita's growing up age. He was mostly in jail and she had no mother to look after, so she was denied the regular life of a normal child. After Indian Independence, Sita's father, Babaji decides to retire from active public life to settle down in a calm and serene village to test his social theories. One of his admirers, Dalwala, a Parsi Millionaire, gives his island as a token of his respect.

On this lonely island of Manori, Babaji, brings up his daughter Sita among the natives, who loved, respected and even feared Babaji. He practices witchcraft and miracle which becomes a legend among the natives. But nonetheless, the pleasure of the island life compensates the absence of faithful care and affection of Babaji to Sita. Babaji fails to provide a happy life to his children, as his wife elopes with her lover, and he develops an affair with another woman. The atmosphere of a broken home makes Sita a reserved one.

One of the aims of Desai in her novels has displayed the characteristic spirit of the age has loosened the bond of husband-wife relationship. It will be interesting to account for the obsessive preoccupation of the novelist with this theme of broken family when she lightly touches upon the relationship of Sita's father and mother. Their relationship is one of the estrangements, for her mother deserted her father before she had headed for Benares from where she did not return.

Sita has lived a strange and unusual life with her father in the island of Manori, accompanied by his disciples and his family. He calls his house as Jeevan Ashram, "the Home of

the Soul” (57) and tries to put on the island his social theories about simple life untouched by the comforts of machine age. Having no opportunities for schooling, Sita lives in the island sometimes alone and sometimes in the company of her brother, Jivan.

With the passage of time, Sita finds her father turning into a real legend on the island and its simple villagers and fisher folk respect and admire him for his miracles ‘magic cures’ providing them sweet water of the well to drink, teaching them how to grow rich crop. For Sita, her father remains as a mystery. Not being able to communicate with him, she forms uncertain impression about him. She doubts if it can be cure by magic and not by medicines and faith.

Physical togetherness among the members of the family has been a rarity in this island as Sita’s father loved to be surrounded by flatterers. She is also puzzled by the hints given by her brother, Jivan at the existence of a mistress to her father, perhaps a second wife and the desertion by their own mother. These incidents and the environment are not favourable to the development of a balanced personality. The communication gap between Sita and her father creates a vacuum between them.

Once secretly in the middle of the night, Sita climbs to the attic, the prayer room, she finds him collecting pearls and gold to be distributed to the villagers with their medicines. Later she learns from Jivan that this jewellery belongs to their mother, her father’s second wife, who had left him perhaps because he had a mistress and gone to live in Benare. Sita is also suspicious with her step-sister, Rekha’s relationship with Babaji. These incidents make Sita lose her faith on life and develop in her mind uncertain and unrealistic attitude towards life. So Sita clings to a deep distrust of the male in her unconscious mind which affects her relation with Raman.

K.V. Dominic in *Concepts and Context of Diasporic Literature of India*, says that “changes have impacted human relationships and the quality of ... life rapidly that sometimes the

Orient finds it difficult to take reconnaissance of the situation brought about thereby” (170). A close focus on Sita’s consciousness reveals that she is a ‘round’ character who ends up an entirely different person from what she is at the beginning of the novel. If Maya’s father in *Cry, The Peacock* is over protective, Sita’s father in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* is careless and fails to understand his children. Sita’s childhood life was full of uncertainties because of the mysterious life led by her father. There has never been a unifying force in Sita’s family.

After the death of her father, Raman, a son of her father’s friend Deedar, takes her to Bombay and arranges for Sita’s education and later drawn by her beauty, marries her. Raman fails to provide Sita with absolute companionship. By nature, and upbringing, Sita’s root is in tradition represented by her father and the Manori island. Her sudden experience with Bombay following a hasty marriage with Raman threatens her very thought of her existence. The clash of identities between Raman and Sita takes an unhappy dimension. At the source of husband-wife conflict there is the theme of tradition versus modernism.

Anita Desai realistically presents the theme of husband-wife alienation in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* The domestic discord starts with the marriage of Sita and Raman. It is neither a marriage of choice nor a marriage of love; Raman marries her, as Sita herself says, “out of pity, out of lust, and out of a sudden will for adventure, and because it was inevitable” (89). Hoping her marriage with Raman will be a relief from her monotonous life in Manori, she accepts the marriage. But she gradually finds the city life has “ceased to offer security of safety but implied threats of murder” (90). Once in the city and in the company of her indifferent husband and the other members of his family, she feels alienated and retreats into a shell.

Having spent her childhood and early adult life on the lonely island under the wings of her father, she expects the same atmosphere in Bombay and her father’s quality in Raman. When

Raman proves to be a contrast to her father — matter-of-fact, unimaginative and pragmatic, she is totally at a loss to adjust herself to a new life. Added to this is the lack of privacy in their early married life. They live in the “age-rotted flat at Queen’s Road” (43) of her husband’s family till Sita and her husband move into a small flat.

Throughout the novel, Desai makes an attempt to go deeper into the extraordinary inner life of her protagonist, Sita. She is living in her flat; feels bored as a member in her family follow their own way of life. The loss of vast expanse of a picturesque island for a tiny flat, the displacement of a hoard of admiring aboriginals by some cynical relatives in the husband’s household, and above all the gulf between an all-powerful father and an ordinary and prosaic husband cause a great turmoil in her consciousness. Unable to put up with the indifference of her husband, Sita realizes that her marriage is on the rocks. She worries, suffers and revolts and her plight is never understood and appreciated by her husband, Raman or the other members of her family, including her children.

Sita’s life is full of tension, struggles and tortures which make her life hellish. Many a time she tries to mend it, to test it and to repair it and to fulfil her duty but she is lost in the tangle or the net of those problems which she wants to get rid of. She thinks of her past childhood. Free from all the tension makes a contrast between her childhood and her present young womanhood in which she is cast into another environment of tension and shadows.

Since Sita has not experienced the tender love of her mother or even her father for that matter, she longs for such love from Raman. Instead of pouring love on her, he is indifferent and uncaring. On another occasion, Sita chances to see from her balcony an eagle being attacked by a few crows. Moved by the plight of the eagle, Sita tries her best to save it from the predators using her son’s pop gun in vain. Knowing fully well her sensitive nature and how the

misadventure of the eagle had disturbed her mind, the next day Raman comes out with his morning cup of tea and heartlessly draws her attention to the horrific sight of a mutilated dead eagle and mock: "They (the crows) have made a good job of her eagle" (37). It is not flattering to Sita to be laughed at like this by one whom she had expected to share her feelings for the ill-fated eagle. When Sita is appalled by the wounded eagle chased by the blood thirsty crows, or the irritating behaviour of servants, Raman not only fails to understand her agony, but also fails to relieve her of her fear.

Raman resents those who depend too much on him because he fears that such persons may try to have control over him. He changes his concentration towards his business so that he can escape from interpersonal conflicts. He has set his own standards and meticulously tries to fulfill his obligations. Sita says "Everything was clear to him, and simple: life must be continued and all its business" (127). Therefore, he cannot tolerate lack of control shown by Sita. Raman's inability to honour her claims of love hurts her deeply.

Unpredictably Sita and Raman are ill-suited to each other and they are wide apart like the two poles. Anita Desai effectively communicates this in the little scene where they talk about the stranger they have seen during their visit to Ajantha and Ellora. On their way from Ajanta, they encounter a foreign tourist standing on the highway, waiting for the bus and Raman offers him a lift in his car. When the tourist tells them he wanted to, wander about India for a bit, Sita cannot help admiring his bravery. But Raman cuts her short with a remark that the foreign tourist was not brave but only foolish, as he "didn't even know which side of the road to wait on" (46). This summarises the dismissal of her opinion in a casual and brusque manner disturbs the mental poise of the sensitive Sita.

Sita dreams to get love and affection from her husband, but all ends in a nightmare. She expects Raman to treat her in a gentle and a tender way but he neglects her instincts and concentrates on his business. As a result, the husband-wife relationship leads to difficulties that come as the outcome of identity crisis, for both Sita and Raman, who stand for binary oppositions.

Raman is a creature of society, more or less a socialite, more accommodative, an unconcerned one whereas Sita is hyper-sensitive, an introvert personality and a pessimist. She not only hates her husband for his absence of feeling but also mocks the subhuman tranquil, calmness and inactive and the routine manner of her husband's family. As a result, she speaks with "sudden rushes of emotion" (44) to let go of her anger and anguish in her marriage life.

In order to pursue for a means of escape she begins to smoke, abuses her children for trifles, and flies into a rage when the servants talk in the kitchen because she thinks that they are fighting. Finally, Sita chooses three things — exile, silence and cunning. This shows her ultimate rejection of the values that her husband represent, and she plans to go to Manori island as a kind of self-exile in her search for identity in silence and in her recovery of the past, away from home and civilization.

Sita is not happy with her indifferent husband in her family life. In this novel Raman and Sita do not play a role of an ideal husband-wife. There is a lack of coherence in their lives. Like Gautama in *Cry, The Peacock*, Raman also keeps himself busy and indifferent to his wife. This is the reason why Sita finds herself away from society and family. She feels suffocation owing to her lack of adaptability of people living like animals. She finds every existence threatened with boredom because her husband keeps himself busy in his business and children growing independent. In this situation, Sita struggles in the grip of the monster of boredom and feels that

“She herself looking on it saw it stretched out so vast, so flat, so deep, that in fright scrambled about it, searching for a few of these moments that proclaimed her still alive, not quite drowned and dead” (33-34). The theme of alienation and miscommunication in married life is presented in the consciousness of a shy and sensitive woman, who is bored and frustrated by her common place and dull life and tries to escape into purposeless and unproductive loneliness.

Sita is an experienced keen eyed and mature mother; she knows the joy of motherhood and is reasonably contented. But she is emotionally hurt in the recent years; her shock comes from modern town culture, habitat and life way. She starts to smoke and gives her frequent fits of violent temper. The conjugal life saddles her with four children and she reaches the breaking point when she is expecting her fifth baby. She is haunted by a strange idea: “By giving birth to the child now so safely contained, would she be performing an act of creation, or by releasing it in a violent, pain wrecked blood-path, would she only be destroying what was, at the moment, safely contained and perfect” (50). The strain involved in the child births earlier was not felt, but being hurt in several ways, in recent times she is not prepared for the delivery of the fifth child in her womb. Therefore, she tries to escape from this predicament.

Raman, too looks like Gautama who can never join with Sita into conjugal love and for him, to think over it is useless, like the blind search for another realm of lucidity in the midst of chaos. Like Maya, Sita is also tired of her hellish life. She has given birth to four children with pride and emotional satisfaction. But now she fails to understand what she should do at the time of the birth of fifth one. Her condition is miserable. Raman also utters, “a woman now is her forties, graying to behave with such a total lack of control” (38).

Like Gautama in *Cry, The Peacock* who does not understand Maya, so is Raman, who takes least effort to understand Sita. When Sita is tortured by the fear of her fifth pregnancy,

Raman does not understand her anxiety and tantrums. He simply exclaims: “Don’t be silly” and “Sita, don’t behave like a fool” (147).

Sita’s problem is due to maladjustment husband, Raman, who is a businessman. The home life and the surrounding atmosphere disgust her. She is fed up with Raman, whose lack of feeling brings her to the edge of insanity and a change takes place within Sita from proud mother of four children, “sensual, emotional, Freudian” (29) to a woman of “rage, fear, and revolt”, for “Control... had slipped out of her hold” (29). Sita reveals that her wishes are always unfulfilled in both the social and the family life.

Not only Raman but also the children offend Sita’s sensibility by ignoring her. She feels terribly upset when she comes upon her sons who, strongly influenced by the cinemas, “hurled their bodies at each other as if they were made for attack and combat” (40). They are even more disapproving when she cries to stop the game. She feels deeply sad that her children are strongly overpowered by the desire to destroy the new buds. Sita is not able to bear the sight of the destruction of “new buds on the potted plant she had been labouring to grow on the balcony” (41).

Sita feels that her husband also, like her father, deliberately neglects her and this compels her to choose for a life of loneliness. The absence of her mother causes an emotional emptiness in her life. Sita being a motherless child is not able to assume womanhood. As psychologists say, mother is indispensable. So also the company of the girls of the same age group is essential and of great importance for developing a sense of identity. As Sita is lacking both, she grows unprepared to shoulder the responsibility of a wife and a mother. The unwholesome personality of Sita makes her fail to understand her own children.

Sita cannot be blind to what goes on around her, particularly when it involves her servants and her own children. This is not appreciated by Raman. When she reacts very strongly to a quarrel between Rosie, her servant maid, and other servants. The vociferous quarrel of the servants racks her being and chokes her. When Raman learns of this, he disapproves of her reaction and accuses her of being melodramatic. When she tries to justify her concern as such incidents may harm their children, he simply dismisses it asking her not to make much of it. This chilly response wounds her sensibility and “the wound remained open” (43). The very next sentence, “More small incidents” (44) indicates that many more incidents of his unkindness are repeated in her life alienating her from him.

The life of Sita is haunted by loneliness. It represents modern married women’s distress. The agony and unhappiness in Sita’s soul spring from her inability, so she fails to cooperate with her husband and children. She faces ‘the ferocious assaults of existence’ and knows that her rebellious attitude towards society will crush her.

Raman is like Gautama in *Cry, The Peacock* who is practical, busy and indifferent to his wife. Being a real person, Raman is more involved in providing a stable and comfortable home for his family rather than trying to understand the writings of the troubled mind of Sita. Raman has his own issue to deal with. He marries Sita out of pity, also attracted towards her beauty. When this initial stage of pity and lust goes off, Raman finds his routine activities more fascinating.

Just as the wives in Desai’s novels are passionate, sensitive, emotional and poetic, the husbands are prosaic, matter-of-fact and insensitive to the feelings of their wives; and Raman is not an exception. He considers Sita’s behaviour playful. He never tries to understand her agonies

and emotional complexities. He refuses to involve himself in Sita's inner life and always appears to be "as stolid as a soundly locked gate" (24).

The polarity of attitudes between the sensitive, Sita and the matter-of-fact Raman is brought out by another incident. Raman brings home a group of his business friends and throws a wild party. According to Sita, most of them are like beast in their behaviour. As a result, Sita cannot even treat her husband's friends, guests, colleagues, business associates, and visitors with tolerance and understanding. So, she says: "They are nothing but appetite and sex. Only food, sex and money matter. Animal" (43). But to Raman they are all "Indian merchant class" (43) and he wants his family to get used to them.

Incident after incident, Desai brings out the bruised consciousness of Sita. When Sita chooses to escape into Manori island, Raman instead of convincing her or comforting her, very casually remarks that "So you're running away — like the bored runaway wife in — in a film" (36).

Raman knows well the mystery about Sita's mother, who left her children behind. This rankles for an explanation in Sita's subconscious mind. In addition, her father had robbed her of all mutual faith and trust that is essential to establish a normal relationship with any other man. Raman fails to realize her terrible need of psychotherapy to make her see the relevance of her bond with him.

The past becomes a psychic residue in her personal unconscious, the back drop of her life, and her obsessive preoccupation with it gives her the strength to leave her home, her husband, two children and the urbanized life of Bombay for Manori island where she thinks that she would be able to live under a magic spell. She notices that:

She saw the island illusion as a refuge, a protection. It would hold her baby safely unborn, magic [for she is in her advance stage of pregnancy]. Then there would be the sea- it would wash the frenzy out of her, drown it. Perhaps the tides would lull the children, too, into smoother, softer beings. The grove of trees would shade them and protect them. (24)

Sita has her vision to fulfill on the island as one sees it in the early part of the novel. Sita remains restless and dissatisfied with her settled and dull domestic life. Bored with her drab life, she often sits alone smoking cigarettes, “Bored? How? Why? With What? And could not begin to comprehend her boredom” (45). She reveals,

She had come here in order not to give birth.... Wasn't this Manori, the island of miracles? Her father had made it an island of magic once, worked miracles of a kind. His legend was still here in this house- in the green tinge of the night shadows, the sudden slam of a wooden shutter, the crepitation of rain on the roof- and he might work another miracle, posthumously. She had come on a pilgrimage, to beg for miracle of keeping her baby unborn. (28)

Therefore, Sita tells her husband that she does not want to keep the child. To see her abnormal desire her husband calls her a ‘mad child’. Without giving attention at the rational advice of her husband, she ultimately takes her daughter Menaka and younger son Karan with her and leaves for Manori, which she considered to be the island of miracles.

Sita's idea of giving birth to her fifth baby in the suffocating atmosphere of the crowded city and a sickening household made her to leave the city for good to arrive at the island of Manori, which she thinks as her childhood paradise. When she reaches Manori with two of her children, Menaka and Karan, nearly after twenty years of life in the city, she feels relieved.

Sita's return to Manori is no thunder and illusion of her past life. While on the island, as a young girl, she had slowly but unmistakably grown out of the cocoon of childhood. She had fought to free herself from the magic of her father, but after twenty years, the island life has again gained an ascendancy over her and the island has become a symbol of a private refuge and is only a route of escape for her. ". . . knowing that accepting that, she knows it was because ordinary life, the everyday world had grown so insufferable to her that she could think of the magic island again as of release. If the sea was so dark, so cruel, then it was better to swim back into the net. If reality was not to be borne, then illusion was the only alternative" (74).

Like Maya in *Cry, The Peacock*, Sita too is sensitive and thoughtful. Her story moves from Bombay to Manori, the island where Sita goes to get a relief from the dullness of life, instead she becomes more isolated in the island. On the island, Sita is haunted by the stories and memories of her dead father. She believes that her father might work another miracle posthumously. This brief escape from the unexciting routine of Bombay life engulfs her new awareness about life itself. Her escape to the island is an unfailing echo of the earlier husband-abandonment motif in her identification with her mother, a "ghost white" (79) which cannot be expelled by her.

Sita's attempt to escape from the sickening confines of her married life takes her to the island. She tries to refurbish her drained sensibilities by attempting to enact her childhood experiences. Quite contrary to anticipations, they no longer provide her with the expected charm and remedy. This only goes to aggravate her predicament though she remains seemingly tranquil. While at Manori, Sita's attitude takes a new turn. There is a distinct change of attitude in this novel pertaining to the portrayal of man-woman relationship. Sita neither dies in the end nor kills anyone nor does she become mad. She simply compromises with her destiny.

Monisha, her daughter, wants to become a scientist, her sons are often quarrelling among themselves and her husband Raman, a factory-owner, is a matter-of-fact person. Raman as a husband fails to understand his wife. Sita had lived with some satisfaction with her father at Manori to escape from the hypocrisy and tedium of her middle class existence. But at Manori too she is unhappy and restless.

Tired of such a life, boredom and mutual accusation, Sita slips into a life of silence and brooding, "Physically so resigned, she could not inwardly accept that this was all there to life, that it would continue thus, inside this small enclosed are" (48-49). Sita, caught between the world of primary values and the possible nightmare of urban living, yearns for a life of peace and innocence. Hence, her return to Manori is both an escape and return in search of her true self.

Sita sees the face of reality in this world of illusion and realizes that in essence there can be no running away from reality. After Sita's return, her withdrawal is indicative of a need for love, the kind of free, unquestioning love which would envelop her. Her happy marriage does not recount to her personal life but to her experience, which can be seen by a young woman attended by a person who loved her.

In the beginning of the novel, Desai depicts that Sita has become a victim of her marriage to Raman, though it is not stated explicitly by the omniscient author, the observation which is made by Moses, the care taker of Sita's island home. On her return to island, Moses is shocked to see Sita as she alights from the car. Having once known her as a spirited and cheerful girl, Moses is hardly able to overlay the present appearance of Sita on the one that still lingers in his mind. It is the same in Sita, he wonders, shocked by her, "empty, vacant, stumbling" appearance (14). 'The extraordinary brilliance' that was once her face has now become dry and worn.

Sita considers her visit to the island as 'a pilgrimage'. She also treats it as a place of refuge from the boring life of the town. After the death of her father, she had left the island with Raman. It shows the disappointments of Sita about her life. She begins to enjoy the slow-moving life of the island a soothed life, half-conscious, dream life. But Menaka and Karan get bored with their life on the island.

Longing to find some solace for her bruised consciousness and hurt ego, she tries to relive her past assisted by the memories of her childhood. But to her dismay, her children Menaka and Karan are not all that pleased with life on the island. They do not see the island pleasure through their mother's eyes and long to get back to the city of Bombay.

Sita always bears mental tension and lives in conflicts. The conflict between Sita and her uninvolved children is also seen in the novel. Both Menaka and Karan fail to adjust to the primitive life on Manori. They want to go back to Bombay to live the urban life. The sharp conflict between Sita and Menaka is also seen in the novel in which she discusses the science and opulence of art. Sita says, "Science can't be as satisfactory. It's all-all figures, statistics, logic; science is believing that two and two make four-booth" (82). She gives her argument and says, "It leads you to a dead end. There are no dead ends, now in art. That is something spontaneous, Menaka alive, and creative..." (85).

Manori contradicts her expectations of being a refuge from her shattered domestic life because it has lost its childhood charm for Sita. Finally, when Moses informs Sita of the impending arrival of Raman, she initially responds with shock but later resigns herself to it and even feels relieved. She feels one violent pulsation of grief inside her, like a white bird flying up with one strident scream, then plummeting down, thinking, "It's all over and then a warm expansion of relief, of pleasure, of surprise on the happy surprise. She begun to laugh" (118).

Menaka's fear of losing admission in medical college makes her restless and she sends a message to her father, Raman secretly to take them to Bombay. Sita fails to get rid of her anxiety. But she is more courageous than her predecessors. She feels stirred, though unwillingly and unexpectedly, to welcome her husband when he comes to the island. Ironically Raman only notices her dress but fails to understand her emotions. In fact, he has not come to take her back to Bombay instead he has come for his daughter, Menaka. Sita feels betrayed by all and yet she compromises herself.

There is not a mutual adjustment and understanding between Raman and Sita. This is the cause of the reason that Sita feels herself like a woman unloved, a woman who is rejected and betrayed by her children at the arrival of Raman. She does not wish to go back to Bombay and realizes that it would make her very hard to make compromises when she does not want to go, but she moves back to Bombay for her childrens' happiness.

Sita's act seems to be the lot of many Indian wives. Still a trivial thought pushes her: "had not her married years, her dulled years been the false life, the life of pretence and performance, and only the escape back to the past, to the island, been the one sincere and truthful act of her life, the only one not false and staged?" (47). This makes her happily react to the unexpected arrival of Raman without any reservations. Though she is a slightly shocked to learn that Raman has come to the Manori only because of Menaka and not for her, she soon recovers from it as she realizes that he has acted only in the interest of the family. Eventually she decides to return and accompany with her husband. Yet she is unable to decide "which half of her life was real and which unreal?" (139). This enables her to delineate the existentialist sensibility and emotionality.

Desai brings about this transformation in Sita's personality as an inevitable outcome of a sensitive and disappointed woman's acceptance of the stark realities of life and her submission to live with them, for what cannot be cured must be endured. When Raman joins them and the children appear so happy in his company that Sita feels let down.

When the husband and wife are having a discussion as to why Sita had found her marriage life disappointing, Sita tells him frankly that happy occasions have been so rare in their marriage life that she is able to recall any one happy moment. But Raman thinks otherwise accuses her of being inhuman: "Any woman –any one would think you are inhuman. You have lived comfortably, always in my house. You've not had any worries" (134).

It is the authoritative attitude of Raman, which gets expressed in words like: "You have lived comfortably" and in "my house" (134) that have accentuated Sita's sense of alienation. In fact, her disillusionment with the institution of marriage has even made her cynical about people and life in general, "She had realized what a farce marriage was, all human relationships were" (139).

Sita is always reminded of her humiliation at Raman's hands and his indifferent nature. While she is going for a walk with her children in the Hanging Garden, she comes across a beautiful Muslim woman and an old man looking at each other with all affection and tenderness. The scene registered deep into her memory like a work of art. It reminds her own search for love in a loveless family. She narrates this to Raman to remind him of her loveless plight. As she says "I have never seen such tender, such gentle movements.... Tender, loving... they were not like us... divine. So strange- that love, that sadness, not like anything I've seen or known" (133).

Sita desires to be hugged and loved by Raman. Seeing a couple in the 'Hanging Garden', loving each other, free from all the worldly conversation so intense, quite divine or insane and

her heart begins to weep and she murmurs distractedly. For Sita, marriage life has been the life of annoyance, the life of duplicity and vanity and only one escape into the past, to the island, the magic land. She knows that there are two periods of her life, each in direct contrast to each other. And life for her seems to be simply swirls around, muddling and confusing, leading her nowhere.

Desai depicts the theme of love and marriage very beautifully and minutely in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* It seems to be an epitome of an irresistible yearning for a purposeful life. With the help of marriage one cannot revive the heart-rending troubles or pains or the happiest moments of others life. Marriage needs more faith. It is the aspiration of the soul to gain wisdom or virtue.

The destruction around her overwhelms her and she goes to Manori in search of a miracle, of same way of ongoing and protective life without the need for it to be exposed to constant danger. The trip to Manori becomes for her a trip to self-discovery and recognition of reality. Her island home is not as she remembered it.

The scars that have been left behind her by twenty years of a dry and unromantic married life do remain in her psyche. But they have not splintered her consciousness as in the case of Maya in *Cry, The Peacock* who becomes a helpless victim of her own sentiments. Towards the end of the novel, Sita becomes aware of the blunt realities of life. The sudden change in the behaviour of her children on seeking their father again after a brief separation makes her conscious of the fact that whether she likes it or not, she has to put up with certain things at least for the sake of her family, if it not for her own sake.

It is this realization that makes Sita feel sudden warmth towards Raman. She even feels comforted in his company “when he asked her gently, “How are you?” She stood back so that he could enter. As he did, she felt comfort, security” (120). This new found sense of warmth and

confidence towards Raman is the natural conclusion of the crisis she faced in her twenty years of married life. Basavaraj Naikar in *Critical Response To Indian English Literature* says that:

Where Shall We Go This Summer? May thus be seen as a parable on the inability of human beings to relate the inner with the outer, the individual with society. It is a story of illusions melting away in the cold light of the everyday and the common place. It does suggest that life of complete inwardness is not the solution to the problems of life. Nor is the other extreme of complete conformity and total draining out of the individuality and the imagination of the human being the proper way out of the dilemma. It shows that human happiness consists in harmonising the opposites of life. (144)

Hence after her marriage, Sita fails to adjust herself with her family. She wants to know the realities of life. Her return to Manori allows her to see the face of reality in this world of illusion and she realizes that no one can run away from reality. At the time of Raman's arrival and through her reluctant conversation with him, she comes to realize that the escape from the cold actualities of life is not a positive solution to her spiritual impasses. She feels that she is a coward and realizes that life must flow on and so must have the courage to face reality.

Chapter 4

Frustration and Anger in Marital Life in *In Custody*

Anita Desai explores deeply the complicated world of human relationships, a world of temperamental incompatibility, where emotion, financial worries and tensions that hinder marital bliss. She is equally concerned with the simplicity and purity of human relations as with the cunningness and delicacy of human behaviour. *In Custody*, is a different category, in the sense that she attempts to study the helpless nature of the male protagonist due to poverty, helplessness and lack of initiative.

In Custody has a male protagonist who comes from a lower middle class family and whose consciousness is essentially directed towards a wider world beyond himself and his family. In doing so, Desai evokes the dominant attributes of contemporary Indian society through the character of Deven who acquires a symbolic connotation besides his role as the central figure. The diverse trends that affect the contemporary middle class Indian are unified into the sensibility of the protagonist, Deven.

Nur, also shares same fate like Deven, whom Deven considers as the epitome of reverence and regard, the God of Urdu poetry, is fraught with misery and poverty. Nur not only suffers from poverty, in the sense of the lack of material goods but the poverty of the mind, the psyche. He is not only plagued by ill-health but also by his surroundings. The competition between his two wives, the noise and chaos of the fanatics, and the absence of decorum, all combined; create a distorted atmosphere, and an unaesthetic ambience.

Deven comes from Delhi and settles down at Mirpore, a small town along with his wife, Sarla and son, Manu and leads an unhappy domestic life. The place he lives looks like a “cruel trap or prison, as well, an indestructible prison from which there was an escape” (19). He is also

disappointed with the atmosphere of the college in which he works, “After he graduated and married and came to Mirpore to teach, it became for him, the impassable desert that lay between him and the capital with its lost treasures of friendship, entertainment, attractions, and opportunities. It turned into that strip of no man’s land that lies around a prison, threatening in its desolation” (24).

Deven, an impoverished temporary lecturer in Lala Ram College, Mirpore, a representative of ordinary average being, is a humble and helpless person. Socio-economic factors colour his personality and mould his psyche. Unable to change his circumstances, Deven starts living in his self-created world of idealism, fantasy and illusions. As a result, he ignores the realities of life after marriage as well as the household responsibilities. He seeks to reach out into the wider world in the hope of self-fulfillment. He undergoes experiences of various shades and complexities and eventually emerges as a wise man with complete knowledge of being in this world.

Anita Desai’s strongly outspoken manner of propagating the typically unconventional but painfully realistic thesis that the institution of marriage is increasingly taking the shape of the dead albatross around the necks of the modern, emancipated self-respecting women. Desai focuses on the personal struggle of middle-class women in existing India as they endeavor to prevail over the societal limitations forced by a tradition-bound patriarchal society.

While undergoing the sufferings, Deven suffers from the problem of marital dissonance. Sarla is a simple middle class girl with all the aspirations as a new bride which other young girls have dreamt of. Deven had been more a poet than professor when he married Sarla. He had been working as a temporary lecturer and still had confidence in his verse but she was too colourless

to be a poet's wife. Also, she had not been his choice but that of his mother and aunt who were crafty women.

Deven had been more a poet than a professor when he married Sarla — he had only been taken on as a temporary lecturer and still had confidence in his verse — and for the wife of a poet she seemed too prosaic. Of course she had been his choice but that of his mother and aunts, crafty and cautious women; she was the daughter of a friend of an aunt's. She lived on the same street as that family; they had observed her for years and found her suitable in every way: plain, penny-pinching and congenitally pessimistic. (69)

Anita Desai has highlighted marital discord as a serious concern in her works. She humbly admits that she is allergic to writing social novels. However, she is involved in the problems of marital discord and the insincerity, the faithlessness and the soul-destroying, grinding process of compromise which accompany it.

Anita Desai while choosing marital discord as a theme, highlights how the lack of ability to put one's soul and convey freely one's fear and agony result in the snapping of communication between husband and wife. Unusual attitudes, individual complexes and fears add to this distancing between husband and wife resulting in conjugal disharmony.

In each of her novels, Desai focuses on traumatic experiences of man-woman relationship. Each novel, maintaining the basic features of marital discord, presents different features of the problem to which Mrs. Desai gives new aspect and visualization. She bravely puts forth the fact that in society, marriages usually pursue the jungle law of the survival of the fittest and being physically stronger, man survives.

In her novels, marital discord is reflective of the social parlance. Excessive bondage and high level of restrictions imposed on a girl who recently parts from her parents, hits her psychology leading to excessive frustration. This frustration emerges out in different forms like suicidal tendencies, non-adjustments, marital discords, psychological irritation and many more.

There are differences between the couple in the matters of running a household. Deven is preoccupied in his pursuit of Urdu poetry and does not take much interest in his family. Deven too is like Gautama in *Cry, The Peacock*, who does not care about his wife instead focussing on his professional career. He aspires for an intellectual environment, while Sarla longs for a luxurious life. Her dreams are shattered by her marriage to a man of academic profession and having to live in a small town like Mirpore.

Academically Deven is at his lowest recede for he could not command the attention of his students. His position in the classroom is so bad that he cannot look in the eyes of his students. Instead, he “had been for years practicing” (12) the trick of focusing: “His eyes upon the door at the far end of the room, the door that opened on to the passage, freedom and release” (12).

Deven understands the suffering of his wife but since he wants to concentrate only on his poetry, he keeps himself at a distance from her to avoid any confrontation. Deven has at least his poetry to distract him from his unhappy married life, while Sarla has nothing and so she feels bitter for it is difficult to live on the meagre salary of a lecturer. Deven’s sense of despair on the professional front affects his domestic life adversely for he is fully aware of his personal inadequacy and incompetence in fulfilling his wife’s desires and dreams.

Desai has specifically mentioned middle-class women, with which she clearly points to such women who are traditionally bound with certain restrictions of family and society. Her central theme in many of her novels has been the portrayal of women’s viewpoint, alienation of

middle class women and tension that crops up in middle class families. Her novels, with a touch of effeminate concern, portray the failed marriage relationship which often leads to disaffection and loneliness of the characters.

The main feature which makes Deven sympathetic is his helplessness, humility, suffering and nobility. Socio-economic factors colour his personality and mould his psyche. The son of a debilitated, asthmatic school teacher, Deven belongs to a lower middle class family. As a child, he has witnessed the bitter disappointment of his mother and the apologetic smile of his father for his failure in measuring up to her expectations. Obviously these familial and social factors generated in him a complaint and submissive tendency.

Deven is one born to be bullied. Deven finds neither respect nor consideration from his colleagues, students or neighbours. Like his father he feels apologetic because he cannot do better. This attitude prevails in his life in general and towards his family in particular which makes him live with a sense of defeat and failure,

He understood because, like her, he had been defeated too; like her, he was a victim. Although each understood the secret truth about the other, it did not bring about any closeness of spirit, any comradeship, because they also sensed the two victims ought to avoid each other, not yoke together their joint disappointments. A victim does not look to help from another victim: he looks for a redeemer. At least Deven had his poetry; she had nothing, and so there was an added accusation and bitterness in her look.

(68)

Deven feels inferior owing to his diffused sense of failure. Obviously, his irritability with Sarla appears to be the outcome of his hurt male ego. Deep down, his rage is, in a way, an

extentialization of self-hate, born out of an unconscious self-accusation. He reapproaches himself for his inadequacy to make his distinction in life “all he could measure up to was this- this shabby house, its dirty corners, its wretchedness and lovelessness” (67). What he has secretly dreamt is “the world of drama and revolving lights and furies” (67).

On the other hand as a young girl and as a bride, Sarla dreams of her own. She dreamt the magazine dream of marriage: “stepping out of a car with plastic shopping bag full of groceries filling them into the gleaming fridge, and then rushing to the phone placed on a lace doily on a three legged table...behind a flowered curtain” (67). But by marrying into the academic profession and by living in a small town outside Delhi, her dreams never came true and led her to embitterment. As a result of the obstructing of her dreams:

The thwarting of her aspirations had cut two dark furrows from the corners of her nostrils to the corners of her mouth, as deep and permanent as surgical scars. The droop of her thin, straight hair on either side of head repeated these twin lines of disappointment. They made her look forbidding and perhaps that was why her husband looked so perpetually forbidding, even if he understood their cause. (68)

Sarla is a plain, penny pinching congenitally pessimistic woman, who presents the picture of an abandoned wife. In her company, Deven feels as if he was a stranger, an intruder. He is pained to notice the dereliction of his marriage. Deven’s miserable life with an unsympathetic and sarcastic wife makes him to think that his marriage, family and job have placed him in the cage and there is no way to escape. Sarla never raises her voice in his presence but gave vent to her pent up feelings when she is out of his way, preferably in the kitchen, which she considers to be her own domain. Here Anita Desai vividly depicts the socio-economic problems of the middle class family which can cause tension between husband and wife.

Isolation in Anita Desai's novels is a significant cause of marital discord. In the novels, isolation operates at two levels — physical and mental. Physical isolation may be within the wall of the house in which a woman is alone and nobody is there to care for her; and mental isolation occurs when a woman feels that her husband does not care about her. In Desai's *In Custody*, the problem between Deven and Sarla is the lack of togetherness. She expects her husband to take care of her with continued responsibility. Because of opposite temperaments, they hardly spend time with each other. Thus, this isolation makes Sarla go through mental trauma and live an isolated life.

Disappointment, however, had not brought them any closer. To live on a lecturer's salary can be an oppressive experience and having no choice of their own, Deven and Sarala feel desperate. On the familial front, Deven finds himself as an angry self. The repressive atmosphere of a lower middle class ethos offers him no suitable avenues for recognition.

Deven is a gifted young man whose imagination has been fired by the glories of Urdu poetry. The harsh realities of life produce in him intense feelings of frustration and resentment and force him to adopt different solutions to cope with his difficulties. Deven is aware of his personal incompetence to fulfill his wife's desires and dreams on the material level.

Sarla accuses Deven tacitly, so he speaks abusively to Sarla "hurling away dishes not cooked to his liking, bawl uncontrollably if meals were not ready when he wanted them or their small son was noisy or unwashed" (68). This is an effort to rebel against her disappointment and avenge her for accommodating it. Sarla characterizes as being a massive downfall in Deven's roller coaster ride and Manu was an uprising in his journey.

Deven leads the life of a victim, a victim of the ordinary life. Whenever he sees Sarla, he reminds of his victim figure. Tired of pursuing such a life of victimization, Deven lies low and

remains invisible. He exists in an invisible cell on the margin of life. For Deven, the countryside between Mirpore and Delhi “turned into no man’s land that lies around a prison, threatening in its desolation” (24). He feels as if his real life is lost.

The real and free life has always been beyond Deven’s reach. The lack of togetherness combined with his wife and his only child, Manu. In a desperate attempt to escape from a terrible sense of isolation and marital dissonance, he seeks refuge in the fantasy world of Urdu poetry. His son, Manu, represents another ‘up’ in his roller coaster journey. When Deven and Manu went for an evening walk, Deven experiences another important epiphany that Manu makes him realize. For once, he did not resent his circumstances as “the first desolation at his loss was being gradually filled that evening with the realization it has that loss had simplified his existence” because he knew how to deal emptiness for he is used to it. This allows him to conveniently “escape from complexities with which he would not have known how to contend” (72) for he is afraid of major change and what impact it may have on his life.

A contrast to Deven is Murad, his childhood friend, who asks Deven to go to Delhi and interview Nur Shahjehanbadi, the greatest living Urdu poet of Delhi — though no longer very active and to write an article for a special number he proposes to bring out on the poet. According to Deven, Murad, the son of a wealthy Kashmiri carpet-seller is a spoilt boy with lots of money to spend on films and cigarettes; while Deven has been a poor widow’s son “who could be bribed and bought to do anything for him, and although this had been the basis of their friendship” (3).

Yet their friendship had stood the test of time. Murad is the editor of an Urdu journal, *Awaaz*, which he says he runs to save the glorious traditions of Urdu from being extinguished by the Hindi-wallas. He is probably not very rich now — he says that his father has disinherited him.

Unlike Deven, Murad is resourceful and aggressive and seems to give the impression that he can have his way with most people. Even so, there is something quite pitiable about his attempts to get things out of people and maintain an appearance of decent living.

Murad frequently visits Deven's college and disturbs him for company. Deven finds himself in a tight corner when he has to oblige his friend's request on one hand and guard his image as a teacher on the other. It is evident that Deven cannot discard his friendship with Murad because of his attachment to him. At the same time, he feels guilty when his students find him in the company of Murad at the college canteen and restaurant and everywhere.

For Deven, lover of Urdu poetry and admirer of Nur, this becomes the very summon he has been waiting for all these years. In the first interview with Nur, Deven faces humiliation at Nur's hands. Nur shouts at Deven for disturbing his sleep and calls Deven a fool: "It can only be a great fool. Fool, are you a fool?" Deven admits his humiliation that he is a fool: "Sir, I am! I am!" (38).

Again, when Nur gathers from Deven that he has a highly-developed taste for Urdu, Nur comes down heavily on Deven: "You don't look fit to serve anyone, let alone muse of Urdu" (43). Nur continues his trade against Deven: "It seems you have been sent here to torment me, to show me to what depths Urdu has fallen. All right then, show me, let me know the worst" (43).

Deven is ready to bear the brunt of Nur's misconception and conceitedness expecting the real and free world of Nur's poetry. This hope is shattered by cruel fate. He is again humiliated by Imtiaz Begum, Nur's second wife, who lashes out at Deven pointing out at the drunken Nur who collapses on the ground "You have reduced him to that, making him eat and drink like some animal, like a pig, laughing at your jokes, singing your crude songs, when he should be at work, or resting to prepare himself for work" (60).

To recall Deven's unsuccessful first interview with Nur, he felt he "could not lose his job, his salary, his family" (76) just to chase his dreams but soon realizes that "being trapped like an animal" is not worth it. He now realizes that it is Nur's genius and art that is bringing about a transformation in his life "the hither to entirely static and stagnant backwaters of his existence" (110) is banished. He is now given a role in life; to preserve Nur's poetry and his family is not going to stand in the way of Deven's ambition.

During Deven's second visit to Nur, he realizes that his role in life has changed from being an ordinary college teacher to the guardian of Nur's poetry. They are the barriers in the way of Deven's dreams such as his family, his job and Nur's second wife, Imtiaz Begum. These downfalls are redirected back up with his will to chase his dreams and a little help from Nur's first wife.

Nur's second wife, Imtiaz Begum is also characterized as being a major downfall in Deven's roller coaster journey. He thought that the unexpected friendship with Nur has allowed the door of his "trapped life" to open "a closer familiarity with the poet" (142) has proved that what he thought of as the wider world is just an illusion and that he would only "thunder into another cage inhabited by some other trapped animal" (142). Deven thought that meeting Nur would be one of the most influential events in his life but finds out that they are in similar situations where both their marriages kept them confined in a cage. Deven soon experiences the harshest epiphany of his journey; that life has its challenges and calamities and the only way to live through them is fighting back. This also marks the end of Deven's roller coaster adventure.

Although Nur's first wife offers help, she demands a payment. She asks Deven: "are poets' families to starve while you and your kind from the colleges feast?" (135). At first Deven is doubtful in continuing the interview with Nur because of the fee, but decides that he needs to

finish what he had started. Since he is experiencing debt problems of his own, he borrows the money from Lala Ram College from their funds. During the interview, distractions and chatter have disrupted the interviewing process. Chiku, Deven's technical assistant "fumbled with the machine and did not take any of Nur's verses or memoirs down" (167). The interview fails to live up to the expectation of Deven and the institution.

Deven feels his one shot at redemption is destroyed when he fails to get the tape with content academic value. As a consequence his marriage life will be destroyed and his relationships with his colleagues will be cut off. Deven believes when the board members see it, they will accuse Deven as having cheated the institution by receiving funds and because of that he fears for his censure or dismissal of his occupation.

Unlike the evil Kunthi from Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*, Desai's characters seem justified when they act out of self-preservation. Furthermore, unlike Markandaya's *Rukmani* and *Ira* who appear justified for their rebellion yet suffer punishment. The Urdu poet's young wife in Desai's *In Custody*, who rages at her limitations and writes in her own defence, stands out as the most outrageous of these woman. In fact, she radically redefines her experience by insisting on telling her story.

The character's self-justification has continued in recent years as women writers tell their own stories and that of other women. When women make the lives of real women in the centre of their books, they go beyond creating sympathetic female characters to making claims for an alternative reality, an alternative truth. The illicit, self-interested qualities so condemned in earlier fiction become liberating, positive, and creative forces.

Desai shocks us at the end of her novel when she presents Nur's young wife's point of view in a letter to Deven, in which the woman claims that Nur married her because of her 'gifts

and abilities', not because of sexual entrapment as had been assumed throughout the novel. She challenges him to read her enclosed Urdu poems:

Let me see if you are strong enough to face them and admit to their merit. Or if they fill you with fear and insecurity because they threaten you with danger — danger that your superiority to women may become questionable. . . . Are you not guilty of assuming that because you are a male, you have a right to brains, talent, reputation, and achievement, while I, because I was born a female, am condemned to find what satisfaction I can in being maligned, mocked, ignored and neglected? Is it not you who has made me play the role of the loose woman in gaudy garments by refusing to take my work seriously and giving me just that much regard that you would extend to even a failure in the arts as long as the artist was male? (196)

Deven's timidity prevents her defiant letter from gaining her acceptance in the world of Urdu poetry. Frightened of having to 'enter that world on a mission of mercy or rescue', he tears up her poems. But her angry statements make the reader reevaluate what they previously had only seen through the eyes of a male character. By making women's frustration understandable, Desai subverts her book's primarily unsympathetic portrayals of women which turn out to have been Deven's, not the author's perceptions.

Not only the incident brings him down, but also Sarla and Manu will fall too because he will not be able to support them, and thus Sarla and Manu will be forced to return to her parent's house while he paid off their accumulated debts; tarnishing in the process his son's view of him even more when he tries to patch things up. With all the debt issues that Deven endures, he finally realizes life has its tragedies and challenges and the only way to survive this cruel world

is to face the reality. He finally sees that structure and form is what is missing in his life and expected 'thorns' lie ahead.

Deven is finally ready to hop off the generic roller coaster life and live by his own pattern. This epiphany also marks the rebirth in Deven's life. This is proven when Deven declines Murad's offer of paying off his debts for sole rights of Nur's interview tape as he finally stands up for himself, which he is not able to do in the beginning of the novel. Deven's role in life altered as well to being an ordinary Hindi teacher to the "custodian of Nur's genius" (225).

Deven realizes that his friendship with Nur still exists and that "their alliance could be considered an unendurable burden — or else a shining honour" (225). Despite having a tape filled with disastrous memories and hardships, Deven felt he has the duty to preserve it. At the end of Deven's roller coaster adventure expedition, he finally realizes hardships and anguishes will always be a part of life and he has accepted these challenges.

In Custody, criticizes traditional society, but Desai's novel focuses on a pathetic, trapped male character whose wife despises his inability to succeed financially. A terrified, insignificant person, Deven moves from mediocrity as a college lecturer to impending professional and financial ruin as he incurs increasing monetary debts, which he finally decides to endure rather than committing suicide.

Deven's wife gives him little support but the women in the book seem rather spiteful, especially the enraged young wife, Imtiaz Begum, of Deven's hero, the poet Nur. As the story progresses, Desai makes clear that just as the male characters are trapped in a world that offers no possibility for success, the female characters have even more right to feel frustrated with a bigot society that reduces them to clinging to these men who cannot provide them with what they want.

In fact, Desai does more than simply subvert a male society's attitude towards women, since she portrays a flawed Sita-like image that is too disillusioned and angry to want to fulfill self-sacrificing ideals. The condition of Nur is also somewhat similar to Deven. First of all, Deven suffers bitterly throughout *In Custody* because he is seen as weak character and personality to refuse the burdens others place upon him. Nur's wife, Imtiaz Begum, gains respect as a character by asserting her rights and abilities.

In contrast, Deven becomes noble at the end of the book by taking upon himself tremendous responsibilities: "He had accepted the gift of Nur's poetry and that meant he was custodian of Nur's very soul and spirit. It was a great distinction. He could not deny or abandon that under any pressure" (232). Amar Nath Prasad in *Critical Response to Indian Fiction in English*, says that "Anita Desai studies at once a timid and ineffectual but growth — oriented person who shows self-confidence and clarity of vision" (109). Only as Deven decides to accept and endure whatever disasters befall him does he reach a kind of graceful inner strength: "Soon the sun would be up and blazing. The day would begin, with its calamities. They would flash out of the sky and cut him down like swords. He would run to meet them" (196).

In Custody, Desai focuses on marital friction and relationship problems. Desai has repeatedly tried to project the idea that a blissful conjugal life is a rainbow-colored dream of romantic mind, or wishful thinking of an immature intellect. In a marriage, adjustment for a woman means deleting her individuality, her inner self, her conscience, so that the ideal couple represents the self-satisfied, arrogant husband and his legally bonded woman slave. In this novel, the married couple leads a gloomy married life. They are quite different from each other in their temperaments.

Being devoted to art and poetry, Deven is possessed by his poetic vision and he follows the religion of Urdu poetry. It is also relevant to think that because of his constant reading of Urdu poetry and Islam, Deven's mind is inclined to marry more than one wife, over and above he keeps himself aloof from his wife Sarla. If he had shown his love and affection towards his own family, his wife and son, he would have led a happy and contented life full of satisfaction and peace. In his relation with his wife, Sarla there is something missing which is said as lack of harmony, adjustment and concurrence. A wife needs love and affection and nothing else, even from her husband and money can never quench her love – thirsty heart. She needs only sympathy, consolation, appreciation of her work, sharing of pains and pleasures and healthy mutual love and understanding.

In this modern lunatic world what is generally missing is the real feelings of love and affection in the married life. Physical love and lusty relation or healthy sexual relationships do not satisfy a woman till she discovers the depth of spiritual love in the heart of her husband.

The machine packed age of 'weariness, fever and fret', the healthy marital relation between husband and wife, the problem of love and marriage are dealt in detail by Anita Desai, in her novel, *In Custody*. Marriage is a means to combine two souls. It is a ceremonious bond to the two bodies into spiritual harmony. But this truth does not seem to be true in the novels of Mrs. Desai. Under the complicated situation, Deven's married life does not yield better and sweeter results. His "plain, penny – pinching and congenitally pessimistic" wife presents the picture of an abandoned wife" (69).

In Sarla's company, Deven feels suffocation and is pained to notice the bad aspect of his married life. Complicated problems of married life settle upon him like a grey monster. He feels aged and haunted. He does not understand his wife and her motives and intentions. But he thinks

that she does not care for him and his feelings. Both feel humiliated and insulted living in one room.

Only at the end of the novel, Deven admits that his wife's untidiness, her shabbiness and sullen expression were all the results of his own misdoing and that 'it was all a part of his own humiliation'. All her aspirations were neglected. Everybody neglects her company. That is why she feels embittered. Deven understands her disappointment "because like her, he had been defeated too: like her, he was a victim of circumstances" (70).

Similarly a wife revolts, runs away, commits suicide, becomes a homicidal maniac, and finds tremendous freedom in blessed widowhood. The great 'No' is said at least to ensure freedom of both body and mind. By implication Mrs. Desai makes it clear that either one should remain unmarried, unfettered and unaccepted by the society as such, or marry and be damned to an everlasting private hell. In consequence, therefore, she is taken with definite discomfort by the complacent reading public. Her novels are indeed chilling encounters of the traumatic experiences of marriage lives.

Anita Desai is a modern writer as she considers new themes and knows how to deal with them. She explores the grief of women living in modern society. She presents her opinion about human relationships and human conditions as a big contemporary problem. Desai deals with intricacies of such relationships as one of her major themes, which is a universal issue. She endeavours to show this problem without any interference.

Thus, each of the above is a very common trouble dealt with in a marriage. These problems can also be prospects for the growth and accord for a healthy relationship. Whether these issues remain problems causing stress in marriage, or become an opportunity for growth depends upon man-woman attitude. The result of this trend may be continuing declining of the

bonds between the generations and a decline in the mean psychological well-being of the population. It is thus clear that catastrophe in the marriage world of Anita Desai's fiction arises basically because of unreliable incompatibility.

Chapter – 5

Conclusion

Anita Desai is a distinguished Indian English novelist who went abroad and attracted most extensive critical attention in her works. This may be due to complexity of form and theme in her novels. Her novels deal with the fundamentals of the Indian sensibility and socio-cultural ethos of India, focusing on the important question of status of women in India in the male-oriented and male-defined social and moral codes, subtle portrayal of the protagonist's quest for self-assertion and self-actualization in the face of the rigid codes of behaviour in a conformist and status-quo loving society.

Anita Desai explores the Indians', especially women's use of make-shifts to escape attachment and their attempt to find love and life in disillusion that are the end product of their alienation, obsession, transgression and diffusion of self in double consciousness, i.e., of a woman and then an Indian.

The uniqueness of Anita Desai's fiction, however, lies in her treatment of effeminate sensibility. In India where women have redesigned roles, which do not allow any room for individualism, identity and assertion, Anita Desai advocates for women who question the age-old traditions and want to seek individual growth. They try to reassess the known in a new context and find a meaning in life.

Anita Desai is unique in the sense that she portrays each of her characters as an unsolved mystery. All of her novels probe into the innermost depth of the human psyche unfolding the mysteries, inner turmoil and chaos found in the minds of her characters. She has emerged as the most outstanding woman novelist, preoccupies more with the inner world of sensibility rather than with the outer world of action.

Desai suggests that a balance between the conventional pre-set role of women and the contemporary issues have to be struck. Her female protagonists try to discover and rediscover meaningfulness in life through the known and the established. These characters are not the usual, average, normal women, but different from others. They do not find a proper channel of communication and thus become alienated and start worrying about their lives. All their wanderings and reflections finally bring them into new vistas of understanding, which they had formerly ignored or rejected.

Desai's central focus is on the inner lives of her characters. Her protagonist turns out to be a rebel refusing to follow the established taboos. And as a result her protagonist feels that they are alienated from their families. Her women characters brood over their lives which finally brings view of understanding of what has been ignored or rejected.

Most of Desai's protagonists are alienated characters. She portrays her characters as individuals 'facing single-handed, the ferocious assaults of existence'. Thus, characters in her novels are generally neurotic females, highly sensitive and engaged with their dreams and imagination, and alienated from their environments. They often differ in their opinions from others and embark on long voyages of contemplation, in order to find the meaning of their existence. That is why they suffer from their relationships more than others do. In other words, in Desai's novels, the love encounters explode into marital disputes as the result of devastating post-marriage relationship between husband and wife.

Anita Desai has dwelt upon problems of love, marriage and sex in her novels in a very convincing and realistic way. She seems to champion the view that marriage alone does not provide a ready-made solution to life's tension, chaos and turbulence. Instead, mental satisfaction and happy married life means better understanding between husband and wife. One

needs the genuine help of the other. A proven and trusted sense of co-operation at every stage and phase is required. Psychological adjustment is safe key to a healthy compromise and cordial existence in a conjugal life. Husband and wife need to nurture the strong feeling that they are complimentary to each other.

Anita Desai highlights significant issues about the complexity of human relationships as a big contemporary problem and human condition leading to marital discord. In her novels, like, *Cry*, *The Peacock*, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* and *In Custody*, she depicts the fruitless marriage relationship which frequently leads to separation and isolation of the characters.

D.K.Pabby in *The Fiction of Margaret Laurence and Anita Desai: Discourse in Alienation*, says that “the world of Anita Desai’s novels is an ambivalent one; it is a world where harmony is aspired to but often not achieved; and the desire to live life fully with proper zeal and love, clashes, at times violently, with the desire to withdraw and keep inwards” (103).

The problem of marital discord in the novels lies in the fact that Gautama in *Cry*, *The Peacock*, Raman in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* and Deven in *In Custody* are practical and matter-of-fact men while Maya, Monisha and Sarla in these three novels respectively are idealistic. Maya, Sita and Sarla each crave for love and understanding but their tragedy is that they are married to wooden, hard-hearted and insensitive men. All the marriages in Desai’s novels are more or less business dealings, the under-counter profits rationally handed over to the male partners.

Desai is a keen observer of the predicaments and paradoxes of life as unfolded through inter-personal relationships and also individualistic dilemmas. Being a women writer and writing chiefly from women’s point of view, she is obviously more involved and more interested in the

mysterious interplay of various relationships as also the queer functioning, at times, of the human mind.

The novel, *Cry, the Peacock*, is about the description of psychosomatic growth of a female character, Maya, who is not able to cope up with the practical world of the husband, feels dejected, forlorn and demoralized. It is mainly concerned with the theme of disharmony in the relationship between husband and wife. Desai looks into the reasons for marital discord and illustrates how such discord affects the family. Sometimes, the inability of an individual to be responsive to the behaviour patterns of her partner leads to strain and tension in the relationship, while sometimes it is on account of varied levels of sensitivity, that relationships become strained. In the end, the novel attempts to discover the turbulent emotional world of the neurotic protagonist, Maya who has lived a carefree life under the indulgent attention of her loving father, and desires to gain similar attention from her husband; but she totally fails in her marital voyage.

In the novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Desai pinpoints a real and pathetic picture of a lovely married woman Sita, who aspires to establish victory over the chaos and sufferings of her rather unusual existence. Desai depicts the theme of investigating the consciousness of an introvert and sensitive woman who is bored and frustrated by her commonplace and hum-drum life and tries to escape into purposeless and unproductive loneliness. Desai chooses marital discord as the subject matter and highlights how the inability to lay bare one's soul and one's fear and anguish results in the snapping of communication between husband and wife. Different attitudes, individual complexes and fears add to this distancing between the husband, Raman and the wife, Sita resulting in conjugal disharmony.

Sita represents a world of emotion and effeminate sensibility while Raman is a man with an active view of life and the sense of the practical. Sita is a nervous, sensitive middle-aged

woman with explosive and emotional reactions to many things that happen to her; she always wants to escape realities, and she even hesitates to perform ordinary responsibilities of life. She finds her very existence threatened with boredom because her husband keeps himself busy in his business and the children growing independent.

The theme of alienation and lack of communication in married life are discussed and re-assessed by Desai in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Sita finds herself alienated from her husband and children. She remains as an ignored personality since childhood. She is the product of a broken family. She yearns to have the attention and love of others, but her father remains busy with his chelas and patients. Even after marriage, she remains lonely. Her husband also is busy. He fails to address her expectations. As a result, there is marital discord, a widening gulf and increasing tension between husband and wife.

The problem relating to the emergence of an alienated self due to the sheer boredom of a routine and conformity-bound life in a metropolitan city, is taken up again Desai's novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* The pattern of isolation in marital disharmony and discord emanating from the conflict between incompatible temperaments is shown through Sita in this novel. This is due to lack of proper communication. Here Sita is like Maya, a sensitive woman who is saddled, by the force of circumstances, with the burden of life in the form of four children and a middle aged man, Raman as her husband. An upper middle class routine-bound life does not offer her any joy or fulfilment.

In Custody, presents the thematic problem of love and marriage in a very exquisite manner, analyses the crushing upheavals of Deven Sharma, an impoverished college lecturer. In this world of 'sick, hurry and divided aims,' he has to confront the common problems as others do. After his marriage with a sullen and dull wife, Deven sees a way to escape from the

meanness and hopelessness of his daily life. Deven and his wife, Sarla lead an unhappy marital life. They are quite different from each other in their temperaments. Desai deals with the purely marital problem of this materialistic world of glittering civilization in a pent up city like Delhi, where people have little time to stand and stare. In such a big city the relationship between husband and wife is commonly under strain because of the undue indulgence of husband in extra-curricular activities and his attachment to other women during work hours.

In the character Deven, Desai shows a timid and ineffectual but growth-oriented person who shows self-confidence and clarity of vision. Though throughout the novel, he is shown as weak personality, tossed by self effacing drives, all his feebleness is submerged at the crucial moment of self-scrutiny. His awakening typifies coherence and completeness. Sarla lives in the illusion or show her reluctance to face the reality and live in self-imposed solitary confinement. To this category, belongs Maya, but there are other characters who compromise with life, like Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Although they have their problems, they manage to transcend them. Desai depicts the characters, who are deeply sensitive to the grandeur as well as sordidness of life. Maya, Sita and Sarla, all are engaged in search of meaning of life, of understanding life, not concerned with the immediate problems of bread and butter but involved with the abstract human condition of love, hate, attachment and detachment.

While Maya's trauma springs from emotional validity in *Cry, The Peacock* and Sita's plight in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* is both emotional and physical. Desai seems to question the value of marriage which does not give due place for women. Maya suffers neglect and her dignity is under constant threat at the hands of her husband. Her identity is submerged in Gautama's existence. Her own self is weary, eager and wounded. She feels that her married life had made her slave. Unable to bear her real self she kills herself at the end. Her suicide is a

confession of her failure in life but it strongly registers Maya's disapproval of women's bondage to men.

In *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Sita is an extended character of Maya. The novelist explores the realm of the effeminate psyche of a high strung woman against the usual norms of the patriarchal society. While Maya revolts against the oppression in a typical effeminate way of suicide, Sita takes up escapism to assert her individuality. Her quest for 'wholeness' and 'individualism' starts when she is pregnant for the fifth time. Her staunch inclination for individualism makes her appear neurotic. She feels that her real self could be found and rejuvenated by connecting with the past. Sita and Raman of this novel are utter foil to each other. Sita flees to her father's island to find some sense in her life. Her flight is an act of protest against oppressive environment, false materialism and male-domination. The success of her emancipation comes when Raman agrees to go to the island to farm. Unlike Maya, Sita does not destroy herself. The very fact that Raman is changed much to live according to Sita's wish speaks volumes for the magnitude of her success.

In *Cry, The Peacock*, the theme of identity crisis of Maya stems from several inter-related factors. She is a passionate and sensitive girl married to a practical minded Gautama, who is completely detached from emotions. She is fractured self-starving for re-affirmation and re-discovery of her identity. Her identity crisis is more of socio-psychic than of a psycho-ethnic nature. Her quest for identity is concerned with her mental journeys in the world of reality and also in the world of illusion. Maya is identified with the peacock which represents her cries for love which simultaneously invite death.

In *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Desai presents the intense identity crisis of Sita. Her problem is due to the maladjustment with her husband. Sita and Raman stands for binary

opposites. She hates Raman for his lack of feelings and her husband's family for their subhuman placidity. Unable to live in the present, she identifies herself with her past and she goes to Manori island as a kind of self-exile in her search of identity. This is indeed her final effort to save her identity. The problem of survival takes its roots from identity crisis. But at the end of her stay in Manori island, Sita comes out as a different personality. Her quest for identity is over. She realizes that life is a continual process of sacrifice, adjustment and compromise. Sita reconciles with her husband after asserting her identity.

Sarla, in *In Custody*, sacrifices her dream after her marriage. She has been selected as Deven's wife by Deven's mother and aunt. Sarla's dream of luxurious life has been crushed by marrying Deven. She feels frustrated and defeated in her life. Unlike Maya, Sarla did not kill her husband and commit suicide. She accepts her fate like Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* She adjusts herself even though when Deven humiliates her by throwing cooked dishes at the walls. She remains silent and supports Deven in the end of the novel, as a dutiful wife.

The problems presented by Desai encompass the issues raised by women's right. Though she is not proclaimed as an effeminate writer, her concern with the empowerment of women echoes the voices of effeminate writers in Indian context. Her women characters seek a distinct identity of their own. They want to have dignity and equal importance as that of men and no wonder they are in constant conflict with society. Her female characters are presented with throbbing pulse longing for love, acceptance and recognition, longing of self-expression and individual fulfillment.

Desai presents the complexity of human relationships as a big contemporary issue and human condition. So, she analyses this problem by projecting and expressing changing human relationships in her novels. She presents themes like alienation and detachment and knows how

to tackle them in brilliant manner. Anita Desai takes up outstanding contemporary issues as the subject matter of her fiction while remaining rooted in the tradition at the same time. She explores the anguish of individuals living in modern society. She deals with the complexity of human relationships as one of her major themes and she strives to show this problem without any hindrance in her novels.

Anita Desai has been influenced by the effeminate movements. Through her novels, Desai have highlighted gynocentric ideologies and sought ways to liberate women from the confining roles defined by the phallogocentric society. Women share common emotions and their problems are universal. It is a struggle against those institutions, social relations and ideas that keep them powerless and subservient to men. They should realize their self-worth through collective action and interpersonal relationship and emerge as liberated women.

Desai have effectively dealt with the theme of marital dissonance in all its psychological, sociological and economic outcome. Desai probes into psychoanalytic factors of marital dissonance. Desai have stipulated the view that the novels are meant to explain theories of philosophy, sociology and psychology. She is rather concerned with the disturbing questions of women existence. Women in her novels are seen as worst sufferers, highly oppressed and suppressed by social 'translation' or 'marital dissonance.' Desai's novels deal with the 'trapped married couple' in which women are treated like animals and cows. The emotional bond between man and woman is characterized in her novels.

Desai is deeply concerned with the inner world of human beings and their turmoils and upheavals in their family affairs and social environment. Maya and Gautama in *Cry, The Peacock*, Sita and Raman in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Sarla and Deven in *In Custody* are locked in unhappy wed locks.

Desai's novels reveal three important areas of excellence; characterization, theme and structure. Her style is unique in its own way and is beautifully suited to the intrinsic needs of her art. The theme of marital dissonance is shown so neatly that each novel becomes a distinctive world in miniature. Maya might not have been an introvert and killer, unless she had got the sympathetic affection of her husband, Gautama. M.A. Waheed in *The Novels of Ruth Jhabvala and Anita Desai* says that "These rebel victims are not the outcome of an eccentric vision of the author but they are indicative of the emergence of this disquieting stance which modern literature stands to project" (173).

Another important aspect which is emphasized is the carelessness of the husband very often described as the prose of life. Desai's hint on the cold light of reason may help one passing the time but cannot solve the problem of marital dissonance. Gautama, therefore fails to satisfy his wife, Maya in *Cry, The Peacock*. Desai, by projecting women comparatively in sober roles, tries to focus on their aggressiveness and submissiveness. Sita and Sarla at last, reconcile to the hard reality of life. As a matter of fact, Desai dislikes aggressive attitude in women but in spite of her unwillingness at times, she creates characters like Maya and Sita. Desai seems to pinpoint that women's role changes according to the situation and it is up to the men to understand them and avoid marital dissonance.

To sum up, Desai has given importance to the individual woman character. It is significant to note that in her novels no role or reaction whether it be violent or silent, subdued or emphasized gone unnoticed. Desai highlights the important aspects of modern thought and civilization related to psychoanalysis through her works.

The portrayal of various characters in her novels, emphasize, from different perspectives, the role of harmonious familial ties. Desai's psychological implications with reference to the

theme of marital dissonance make her works an engrossing study for those who explore the reality of human happiness in terms of sociological concerns and psychological truths. Desai believes that the woman's heart is like a fruit which can only prosper in the warm sunshine of love and that love should be showered on the woman by her husband for a harmonious life making the home as the paradise in earth instead of worrying about Heaven after death. Thus Desai through her novels, inspire one to cherish these bonds and maintain their harmony in their married life.

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