

Human Relationship in the Novels of Anita Desai

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The work of literature is really something amazing. Literary manifestations of the specialization process create a different linguistic experience and environment for male and female characteristics generally. Especially, in the novels, one gets the scope to move much closer to the female experience. Novels, therefore, are seen as structured and extended statements about reality. They reveal a lot of practical things those exist in the society.

A closer study of Anita Desai's works reveals her struggle for female autonomy, played out against the backdrop of the patriarchal cultural pattern. At the outset, it seems that she is asking a new and very different question. Her writing can be viewed as a self-conscious reaction to overwhelming masculinity of privileged dominant gender. One can identify in her characters an insubordinate tone of voice in asserting the personal and the subjective. Her emphasis is more psychological rather than sociological.

Her profound intellectual maturity provides a frame work based on gender (female) as the ideological scheme for the analysis of society in general. Anita Desai is a lot concentrated in terrifying isolation, finding it hard to reconcile with the world around "self". Her protagonists, therefore, are constantly confronted with the stupendous task of defining their relation to themselves and to their immediate human context. Acceptable behavioral pattern is alien to them. The root is not far and distant to find.

Her central characters, by and large, have strange childhood from which they develop a negative self image and aversion towards the existing society. The immediate result is - their fragmented psyche to view moving but their movement is always on the periphery. If they are placed within the female space, they are shown as threatening presence. Thus, the principle male characters in her works play negative roles in their relations with the females.

Anita Desai is the main advocate of the psychological novels dealing with the complex nature of woman. She has explained in detail the inner disturbances of her

characters in a very better-quality manner. Her novels deal with the contradictions and predicaments faced by the individual in the struggle for existence. She belongs to the group of Indo-English writers who have studied in detail the actual problems faced by the individual politically, and culturally leading their life in this very society.

Anita Desai has chosen to deal with the particular event which threatens the normal tempo of life. She has explained the effect of emotions and sentiments about the behaviour of a man and a woman and how they react to different situations. She has explained the behaviour of people under strain and suffering.

Anita Desai has become a recorder of dilemma faced by the Indian urban set up. She and Kamala Markandaya have taken human relationship as their main fictional object. Since human relationship describes the mental and emotional springs, therefore an artist can weave a story out of it. The innermost psyche of the protagonists is revealed through their interaction with those who are emotionally related to them on the basis of kinship. For this reason one finds in Desai's novels relationships are based on emotional idealism.

Other women novelists have also dealt with the same thematic concern of human relationship, but in a totally different perspective. Almost all of them are historians of the tension in the wake of India's emergence as a developing nation. Desai insists on loneliness which is the characteristic of modern times. The main thematic motif of loneliness leads one to describe the contributory factor to it.

Anita Desai emphasizes it so much that many times it appears to be the main theme. There is a breakdown of channels of communication between husband and wife, mainly by the incompatibility of temperament between the two. This phenomenon of dissimilarity in attitudes and resulting in unsatisfactory relationships occupy almost all her novels. This theme, though as old as the English novels itself, can be found in the novels of Richardson and Fiddling on one hand and in the novels of D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf,

Hemingway and Faulkner on other. D.H. Lawrence points out, "The greatest relationship for humanity will always be the relation between man and woman. The relation between man and man, woman and woman, parent and child will always be subsidiary."

Anita Desai has an independent approach to women's problems in Indian social life and life in general. She does not believe that marriage is as strong as all human relationships are. Some of her heroines have the idea of a blissful, happy conjugal life, but the idea seems to remain only a rainbow dream. In most of the male-dominated families the concept of marriage as a union of two different minds has not been realised. Women's individual identity has not been openly realised in Indian social life. She is taken for granted and this casual attitude is the cause of her suffering and miserable life. The difference between make-believe supernatural horror and modern horror world of conjugal lives is just this, that the former can be wished away, but the latter demands the heaviest price from the married woman to preserve the semblance of social Prestige. Uma Banerjee believes that,

"The hypocrisy of the institution of marriage is increasingly taking the shape of a dead albatross around the necks of the modern, emancipated, self respecting women."

Most of the studies on marital happiness indicate that homo-geneity, i.e. persons having similar tastes, interests, values tend to form stable relationship. This way marriage is said to be merger of two selves or marriage of two minds. In most of her earlier novels, Anita Desai has written on the theme of man woman relationship. As marriage is a union of two different minds and there is bound to be adjustments or maladjustment.

According to her, most marriages prove to be union of incompatibility. Men are apt to be more rational and women - emotional and sentimental. Their attitudes and interests are different and their outlook and reaction towards the similar things is quite different. The woman is expected to adjust with the changing family ways and surroundings. In a marriage, adjustment for the woman only means deleting her individuality, herself, her conscience. It affects her entire psyche and behaviour which destroys her sensibility and her very self. She feels tied down.

The result is that there is a gradual erosion of marital relationship; and, for a woman marriage comes to

symbolise nullification of everything she has come to cherish. Uma Benerjee rightly says,

"Mrs. Desai believes that one Nora will not make much of a difference and women will continue to play the supreme price for meal tickets".

All the marriages in Anita Desai's novels are business transactions. In each of her novel, there are traumatic experiences of married lives. Anita Desai indirectly suggests women to either remain unmarried, unfettered, and unaccented by the society; or, marry and be damned to everlasting private hell.

In her novels, there is a definite sequence; and in this pattern, can be traced the growth and her attitude towards the theme. Anita Desai gives a new dimension and vision to the theme of relationship.

Anita Desai's first novel, *Cry, The Peacock* (1963), follows the theme of the marital discord and its impact on women. Maya and Gautama, and all the other couples around them, are the victims of the poignant problem of maladjustment in marriage. The novel presents the story of a young hypersensitive and neurotic woman named, Maya. The novel begins with a gloomy atmosphere with a description of Toto's death, the favourite dog of Maya.

This incident upsets her so much that she finds it impossible to endure the psychological strain. The sad demise of Toto produces a terrifying sense of doomsday in her. She suffers from prescience. A cosseted and molycoddled daughter of a wealthy Brahmin, Maya, suffers from acute father-fixation. As a result, even after her marriage, she looks for the father image in her husband. Maya's marriage to Gautama is more or less a marriage of convenience. It 'was grounded upon the friendship of the two men and the mutual respect in which they held each other, rather than anything else'.

It was a match between two different temperaments and there was not a single link in the physical or mental outlooks to bring them to a close tie. Maya with her : round, childish face, pretty, plump and pampered the small shell-like ears curling around petty ignorance, the safe, overfull lips - the very, very black brows, the silly, collection of curls, a flower pinned to them - a pink flower, a child's choice of a posy. and Gautama with his tall, thin, stooped form, graying hair, pallid skin nicotine stained long, bony fingers, practical, matter of fact approach and clumsy mannerisms. It was a match between two different

temperaments without a single close tie. Meena Belliappa remarks, 'The incompatibility of characters stands revealed - Gautama who touches without feeling and Maya who feels even without touching'.

"The matrimonial bonds that bind the two are very fragile and tenuous 'neither true nor lasting' but broken repeatedly: and repeatedly the pieces were picked and put together again as of a sacred icon with which, out of the pettiest superstition, we could not bear to part."

Maya is sentimental and is full of grief over the death of her pet dog Toto but her husband is detached and takes the incident as a matter of fact:

"It is all over, he had said as calmly as the mediator beneath the Sal tree. You need a cup of tea, he had said, showing how little he knew of my misery or of how to comfort me."

Maya was very much in love with Gautama and needed his companionship and understanding; but these were very much missing in their marriage. Again and again the reader finds Maya turning towards her husband for support and love but to no avail. Their tastes, likings, thinking are different:

"I tried to explain this to Gautama, stammering with anxiety for now, when his companionship was a necessity. I required his closest understanding. How was I to gain it? we did not even agree on which points, on what grounds this closeness of mine was necessary."

'Yes, yes'; he said, already thinking of something else, having shrugged my words off as superfluous, trivial and there was no way I could make him believe that this, night filled with these several scents, their effects on me, on us, were all important, the very core of the night, of our moods tonight".

Maya again turns towards her husband for help when his Sikh friend was talking of palmistry and prophecy. Gautama alone was like a 'rock in the wild sea-calm, immobile. But he too turned to me with an expression that displayed surprise at my vehemence.'

The meaninglessness of their relationship again and again dawns on Maya. She realises that :

" We belonged to two different worlds; his seemed the earth, that I loved so, scented with jasmine, coloured with liquor, resounding with poetry and warmed by amiability. It was mine that was hell".

The title of the novel, Cry, The Peacock, is about Maya's cry for love and understanding in her loveless marriage. Maya rejoiced in the world of sounds, sense, movement, odours, colours etc. She was in love with living contact, relationship and communion, which were the warm tender sensations in which she wanted to bask. Unfortunately, this involvement is opposed to Gautama's philosophy of detachment. Gautama could see no value in anything less than the ideas and theories born of human, preferably male brains. She hungered for his companionship and spent sleepless nights. She could not accept this unsatisfactory life, as taught by her father, because it told upon her nerves. She would be awake at night, stifled by the hunger she felt, not only for Gautama but for all that life represented.

In the second part of the novel, one finds Maya grumbling about Gautama's heartlessness. These are the early symptoms of marital discord. She discovers she has no saviours to cling to. She experiences a damaging blow. Gautama is least interested in her world of senses. Although he is normal in every sense, he seems averse to physical nearness. Like Maya, he too is a product of his early life-experiences. Desai has suggested that childhood experiences leave an impact on the future of the man.

Unfortunately for Maya, her early life proves to be a handicap; but for Gautama, if not a handicap, it is a seed of future discontentment in his life. He is afraid of showing his emotions. He avoids intimacy as it leads to the disclosure of the self. He remains disinterested about everything other than the matters of his concern. He is well aware of his nature, which, at moments of vexation, comes out with his underlying complex. He cannot appreciate Maya's sensuousness.

Actually, his name suggests that he is an ascetic. Naturally Maya always causes him tension as he thinks that she is a "wayward and high strung child". Maya's mental structure too is underdeveloped to follow the serious problems of the life. Hence they continue to exist in two separate worlds, never realising each other's difficulties. The world of one is extremely romantic and dreamy and of the other is rational.

Maya is a helpless child and she has a morbid longing for love. Gautama is a practical man and cannot stand this romantic nature. The novelist reveals Maya's desire for communion - physical and mental; while

Gautama thought the peacock's dance to death and the coupling call of pigeons. What Maya sought in the name of love was to relieve herself from the pressures of anxieties. Psychologist Coleman says about relationships that :

“The need to love and be loved is crucial for healthy personality development and functioning. Human beings appear to be so constructed that they need and strive to achieve warm, loving relationships with others. The longing for intimacy with others remains with us throughout our lives and separation from or loss of loved ones usually presents a difficult adjustment problem”.

Maya had three difficult problems of adjustment because she always felt that she was not loved enough by her husband. She felt neglected and remained a captive of her own thinking. For Maya, love means a close physical contact, and missing that, she feels depressed; whereas for Gautama, love cannot be an ideal in real life to crave for, and it leads to worldly troubles. These differences clearly show that they did not have similar ideas about love. Throughout the novel, one can feel the procrastination is made by the albino priest, and Gautama's indifferent demeanour only increasing the neurosis of Maya.

Many critics have pointed out this incompatibility. Usha Pathania, tracing the cause of disharmony between the two, remarks:

“Marital relationships are established with the explicit purpose of providing companionship to each other. However, this element of companionship is sadly missing in the relationship between Maya and Gautama.”

Whatever marriages have been referred to in *Cry, The Peacock*, they are not happy in the true sense. Maya's mother has not been mentioned in the novel. Gautama's parents also lived an unnatural married life. There is an apathetic approach between them as they keep themselves busy with their own vocations. Lila, Maya's friend, married a tubercular patient for love. She rages and raves at the mockery of the marriage, yet forbears all childish vagaries of her husband. Mrs. Lal, the Sikh wife, publicly denounces her husband as a charlatan and an opportunist, revealing the deep-seated antipathy for maladjustment in marriage. Nila, a divorcee, declares,

“After ten years with that rabbit I married, I've learnt to do everything myself.”

All these marriages point out those similarities between the attitudes of both husband and wife to life and things, in general, play an important role in making their conjugal life successful. Marriage is a union of two souls. Women who are treated casually become victims of clashes, desperation, separation and loneliness. They struggle against strong, negative, soul-killing circumstances, but in vain. They find solution in committing suicide or running away or living separately.

In Anita Desai's second novel, *Voices In The City*, the same theme continues. In this novel one sees faulty adjustment in the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Ray, the father and the mother. It was a marriage of convenience, the husband priding himself in his family name and title, and wife on her tea-estates and a house. Both of them have a soul-destroying hatred and terrific fury towards each other. The father transforms into a drunkard, debased, and dishonorable creature; whereas the mother changes into a practical, possessive woman, losing all her womanly and motherly charm and warmth.

She is polished and balanced, yet very cold, with a frosty love of power - like a concealed fluorescent bulb. Their marriage was something of a financial settlement. Amla, the daughter, says to Dharma about her father whether he regretted it later on because

“he hadn't quite bargained for mother, just for her houses and tea-estates.”

The father did nothing except that he spent his life sleeping, drinking and idling. Only thing he did with his sons was he taught them play cricket and he loved horses.

“He was always drinking and smiling, his knowing, spiteful smile, with an emotion in him that must have been very violent to show at all in his face, even so faintly”.

There was hardly any common liking among the couple. The mother loved music, nature and all the fine things of life :

“ My father always got on her nerves by simply never doing anything. I always see him lying back indolently, like an overfed house cat, against mother's

embroidered Tibetan cushions, toying with a cheroot or a glass of whisky or both.”

So, it is clear that there was hardly any common liking among the couple. The wife loved music, nature and all the fine things of life. The musical soirees arranged by her were of no interest to the husband. The sweet music would affect all the guests and even the children, but the husband would remain immune to it. He lay against a bolster, smiling a vacant, feline smile and drinking; and with the passing of hours he fell asleep - his head drooping forward and his mouth open and wet. The sweet ‘*shehanai*’ was no better than a noisy pipe, a piece of plumbing to him. Wife, too, had contempt and resentment for him. Husband had the same hatred and malice towards her:

“When he came to Kalimpong and saw her wandering about her garden, touching her flowers, he never followed her. He used to lie back against his cushions, idle and contended - contended I think, in his malice.

He had contempt for his wife's love for nature. He used to taunt and make fun of her when he tells his daughters to look at a butterfly and 'Forget yourself in that study. Then you will be fortunate - like your mother.' The truth was that the wife had deliberately forgotten him; shut her mind to him by concentrating it on flowers and music and fine food, and things he shunned. This hatred between the father and mother leaves a scar on the mind of the children. They are the real sufferers.

The private hell of the couple is enveloping and destroying their lives and pursuing them step by step. Monisha, the elder daughter, is childless and is a victim of a ill-matched marriage. Jiban and Monisha had nothing in common between them and were married because he belonged to a respectable, middle-class Congress family

“Monisha ought not to be encouraged in her morbid inclinations and that it would be a good thing for her to be settled into such a solid, unimaginative family as that, just sufficiently educated to accept her with tolerance.”

Monisha changes after marriage from a sensitive, mild, quiet, sensible girl into a barren, distant, without any compassion, neurotic, diary writing woman, which she herself hates. She is happy neither with her husband nor with his family members. Monisha's ill-matched marriage, her loneli-ness, sterility and stress

of living in a joint family with an insensitive husband push her to a breaking point. Her life is:

“My duties of serving fresh chapatis to the uncles as they eat, of listening to my mother-in-law as she tells me the remarkably many ways of cooking fish, of being Jiban's wife.

Jiban is present at home but ‘Jiban is never with us at all’. Monisha feels trapped in Calcutta and in the house with the thick iron bars:

“I am so tired of it, this crowd. In Calcutta it is everywhere. Deceptively, it is a quite crowd-passive, but distressed. Till there is reason for anger and then a sullen yellow flame of bitterness and sarcasm starts up and it is vicious and mordant . . . This boil erupts, every now and then, now that the weather is so hot, the heart so parched.”

This view of the city expressed by Monisha shows that she has a loveless life and misunderstood by everyone. She feels she is like the bleeding heart doves:

“wounded and bleeding, but scurrying about their cages, picking up grain, these stay on the ground, restless, in flux and bleeding.”

She faces the trauma of living in a joint family, where there is no private life. She wishes to do work in privacy, away from the aunts and uncles, the cousins and nieces and nephews. She has no privacy even in her own room.

It was first regarded as bridal room, but now no longer, as her fallopian tubes were blocked. "The sister-in-law lies across the four-poster, discussing my ovaries and theirs". They make fun of her, as in her wardrobe, instead of saris, there are books. Monisha is the intellectual type who carries her own personal library to her in-law house. However, nobody bothers about the books she has in her library. Anita Desai has presented the picture of women as daughters-in-law in typical middle class Indian families who are not at all happy. All their ambitions, talents, potentialities are reduced to be mere housewives and they can do nothing beyond mundane household chores. Jiban tells Monisha,

‘Be a little friendly to them. That is all they ask of you - a little friendliness.’

Amla feels sorry for Monisha and wonders how and why it was that she had been married to ‘this boring non-entity, this blind moralist, this complacent quoter

of Edmund Burke and Wordsworth, Mahatma Gandhi and Tagore, this rotund, minute-minded and limited official.' (Voices in the City: 188) Jiban was dull and prolix. He worked in a dull Ministry and he would go on talking about his work.

Monisha is accused of theft by everyone in the family. She had taken Jiban's money to pay the hospital bills for Nirode. She had to suffer the humiliation from men and women who are mean and low. The mother-in-law shouts,

'the servants will be dismissed, all of them. I will not have a thief in my house. . . After all, you were the only person who was in the room all day.'

Monisha 'is willing to accept this status then and to live here a little beyond and below everyone else, in exile.'

But she is not able to bear this for long and commits suicide by self immolation. The maladjustment is menacing by the adverse attitude of the family members and hostile social traditions and background.

The other marriages referred to in the novel are also not happy and satisfactory. Dharma, the painter, bears his marriage as it has become his habit. He expresses his idea of marriage to Amla:

"Our relationship is not all so straight-forward and pat, married relationship never are. There is the matter of loyalty, habit, complicity . . . things I couldn't talk to you about till you married and knew for yourself".

Dharma and Gita Devi are almost like strangers. Their daughter had married her cousin, who lived with them for fifteen years. They leave Calcutta and come to live in the suburb, where nobody knew of this incident. Amla feels that Dharma has committed a terrible sin of casting out a young daughter from himself. He says, 'nothing that concerns my daughter concerns me.'

His wife prays the whole day, isolating herself even from her husband as if she was repenting in the bubbling prayer of a sinner in despair.

Amla, who was attracted towards Dharma in the beginning, now feels revolted on seeing his other part. She had willingly let herself be lured toward him. The glamour of mystery, his uncanniness, the eeriness about him had lured young girls to his studio. Amla had changed after meeting Dharma. She had grown pale and worked very poorly in the office. She faces swings in her mood after going to Dharma's house, she

would become another Amla, "a flowering Amla, translucent with joy and overflowing with a sense of love and reward." She would like to hear the details. It was only during these hours she felt she was alive. She wanted tangibility and permanence in the relationship which she could not receive from Dharma :

"The understanding between them was an interior volcano, colouring the water of his existence and splashing on to his canvas the tints of the upheaval within him."

Now, at times, Amla wondered whether Dharma saw in his model anything more than inspiration which offered him rescue from the complexities of nature in which he had enslaved himself. Amla gets no peace from this relationship. Her aunt, too, advises her to leave him as 'he uses you, something in you that he needs. But the rest - what does he care for that?' (P.221) At last Amla breaks away from Dharma. She realises that Gita Devi was the base of all Dharma's actions, 'the spread lotus that bore the weight of the god absorbed in his meditation and the spinning out of his Karma.'

Nirode, too, has no faith in man-woman relationship. He hates his mother as he believes that she has an affair with Major Chadha. He is repulsed to see the pretences and show between Jit and Sarla. This couple belongs to the upper class of society. They have no love for each other but live together as it has become a status symbol. Jit is aware of the many admirers of his wife but doesn't say a word about it. Sarla doesn't want to go and meet her in-laws back in south. Nirode feels revulsion for this relationship. He says: "Marriage, bodies, touch and torture . . . he shuddered and, walking swiftly, was afraid of the dark of Calcutta.

All that was Jit's and Sarla's, he decided, and indeed, all that had to do with marriage, was destructive, negative, decadent.

All the characters in this novel have distrust for marriage. Aunt Lila hates men - particularly her fat, self-centred, long-dead husband. Her opinion is that "women place themselves in bondage to men, whether in marriage or out. All the joy and ambition is channelled that way, while they go parched themselves." She learnt it the hard way. Her daughter, Rita, is also a victim of maladjustment in marriage. She is divorced and working with some of the finest physicists in Paris. Thus, in all the menwomen relationships mentioned in the novel, we see a picture

of desolation and emptiness. They illustrate that marriage, at best, is a farce, at worst, it is a malignancy that destroys body, mind, and soul completely.

The strain of maladjusted marriage continues in *Bye-Bye, Blackbird* also in the garb of social problem. Adit and Sarah, Samar and Bella are victims of alien culture, as this is a novel based on immigration problem. There is utter confusion and escapism in their marriage. Adit marries an English girl Sarah and incurs the anger of the white society. But it is not Adit who suffers most but Sarah, the docile wife. By marrying a brown Asian she has broken the social code of England and is subjected to taunts not out of her colleagues but also of the young pupils of the school where she works as a clerk. Her pupils ignore her and taunt her. She heard them scream, "Hurry, hurry, Mrs. Scurry."

Sarah had long been fascinated with India. That she wants to know India more, is shown by her interest in India stamps. But she does not want to disclose this part of her characters to everyone. She faces identity crisis for this reason:

"When she briskly dealt with letters and bills in her room under the strains, she felt an imposter, but, equally, she was playing a part when she tapped her fingers to the *sitar* music on Adit's records or ground spices for curry. She did not have little command over these two charades she played each day, one in the morning at school and one in the evening at home, that she could not even tell with how much sincerity she played one role or the other".

The strains of interracial marriages are so much on her that they affect her daily life. She even goes for shopping in big departmental stores to remain an anonymous buyer. The super market was a soothing place to her. Here she would wander about unnoticed, in absent-mindedly happy way and she could buy anything without acquiring the distinct personality. These purchases could have marked her with:

"But inside the sparkling halls of the supermarket where walls of soap and corn flakes hid her from strangers eyes, she could be eccentric, as individual as she pleased without being noticed by even a mouse.

Both Adit and Sarah pretend the facade of happily-married life. The tension between pretension and actuality, appearance and reality is always there which tell upon her, resulting in schizophrenia. She is constantly under tension which makes her life unreal,

that is why, she is affected by tortures of anxiety and insecurity. She herself feels,

"who was she? . . . Both these creatures were frauds, each had a large, shadowed element of charade about it.

Her face was only a mask, her body only a costume."

Sarah is a different person at home. She tries her best to adjust with her Indian husband. She makes 'Charchari' curry with different spices and even wears a Benarasi sari of Adit's choice. Sarah bears the tantrums of Adit, to save her marriage. Sarah feels over-decked when she puts on a heavy sari with heavy chain of golden mangoes sent by his mother as a wedding present. Adit flares up in anger, "you feel like a Christmas tree! I suppose all Indian women look like Christmas Trees, perhaps like clowns, because they wear saris and jewellery."

Sarah doesn't get spice powder in the house as Adit hates it and would throw it out. Sarah is more like Indian girls in her docility; whereas Adit is a typical Indian male when he expresses his opinion to Dev:

"These English wives are quite manageable really, you know. Not as fierce as they look - very quiet and hard working as long as you treat them right and roar at them regularly once or twice a week.

Adit was attracted towards the shyness and quietness of Sarah. He told her, "you are like a Bengali girl. Bengali women are like that - reserved, quiet. But you are improving on it - you are so much prettier".

Sarah, formally, had the problem of emptiness in her life.

"She had jettisoned most things out of it when she had married - childhood, family, friends: all the normal ordinary things with which an ordinary person must fill and adorn his life."

She was attracted towards Adit's so many relations and attachments, pictures and stories, legends, promises and warnings. She tries to fill her life with these colourful things. At the time of making a decision of going to India, she is filled with apprehension about her future. She had inflated these dreams, making them screens with which to surround and protect her. Sarah finds it difficult to adjust to the voyage, the uprooting, and the child in one stride. In spite of doubts in her mind Sarah readily accepts to leave her country. She says,

“I think when I go to India, I will not find it strange after all. I am sure I shall feel quite at home very soon.”

In reality, Adit and Sarah are afraid of rejection, vicious distrust and mocking pity from their own people, transforming them into escapist. Sarah, finding the world around her hostile, submits to Adit - the very cause of her alienation and isolation. She never protests and is ready to sacrifice anything for her marriage. The symbolic nature of relatedness of Sarah and Adit can be expressed in Erich Fromm's words: “Both persons involved have lost their integrity and freedom, they live for each other and from each other, satisfying their craving for closeness, yet suffering from the lack of inner strength and self-reliance which would require freedom and independence, and furthermore, constantly threatened by the conscious and unconscious hostility which is bound to arise from symbiotic relationship.”

The marriage of Samar and Bella is identical to the marriage of Adit and Sarah. They are also the victims of separate culture mal-adjustment. The novelist has presented a highly volatile situation:

“Two Indian, two English women frozen in the stances of players on the stage who had not been told what to do next. Somewhere in a locked closet, a slab of marble like a black grave stone awaiting and engraving a grave, a bunch of flowers.

Their differences are marked from the beginning: “But Bella and Sarah sat in stiff silence, their Anglo-saxon faces impassive.

They had learnt exactly how much of this foreign world was theirs to tread and had given up their early attempts, made out of curiosity and desire to join, to interpret jokes.”

The marriage of Mala and Jasbir is also a farce. Each partner has changed to his worst due to disharmony. Jasbir has changed into an over loud, careless clown; whereas, Mala is a dishevelled, impractical, impolite, idle young woman. Both have longing for physical comforts and good living. Mrs. and Mr. Roscommon-James also present a very loathsome picture of marriage.

Sarah identifies the cause between egoistic tendencies of her parents. Mrs. Roscommon-James scolds her husband bitterly,

‘She scolded him in tone that would lead anyone not present in the room to think she was speaking to an unusually, naughty, and tiresome dog. He never answered.’

Anita Desai has commented on the marital disharmonies existing not only in the lives of Indians but also in the lives of English people. She expresses her views about Indian married couples with Adit's retort to Dev, “the married couples in India are not in parks, they are at home quarrelling.” The marriage of Sarah and Adit, on the whole, is satisfactory.

In her next novel, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975), Anita Desai returns to the theme of alienation and lack of communication in married life - the theme of her first novel. But, here, the treatment is more controlled and the wife's loneliness is the loneliness of the woman, wife and a mother - loneliness conditioned by the society and family; whereas, the childless Maya's anxiety is existential and temporal, Sita's ache is domestic and temporal.

It is the story of a middle-aged woman, Sita, who is sick of the mundane routine of meaningless existence. She feels suffocated in her well-ordered, posh flat in Bombay, and struggles to break away from it all. The course open to her is to go to Manori Island, her maiden home. She wishes to recapture some of her past. She escapes to the island in order not to give birth to her fifth child.

Sita's predicament is similar to that of Maya of *Cry, The Peacock* and Monisha of *Voices In The City*. She too is obsessed with her loveless marriage with Raman. It was difficult for her to understand that though they lived so close together, Raman could not know the basic fact about her that she was bored with life. It was shock to her to realize the emptiness of her marriage. The mal-adjustment between Raman and Sita is based on values, on principles, on faith even or between normal or double standard. Uma Bannerjee has rightly pointed out :

“This is not simply a case of an emancipated woman, revolting against the slavish bonds of marriage. It is much more than that. It is a question of the basic truth that is bitter and naked and can neither be hidden nor be halved to suit individuals.

Sita's neurosis springs from the dull, monotonous existence of her daily life, that denies her any sense of active involvement.

“Life had no periods, no stretches. It simply swirled around, muddling and confusing, leading nowhere.”

She becomes actually conscious of what she was missing in life after witnessing the tender scenes in the magical island where she had spent her childhood with her father. The maladjustment of the marriage had changed her completely. She had ‘lost her all feminine, all maternal belief in childbirth, all faith in it and again to fear it as yet one more act of violence and murder in a world that had more of them in it than she could take.’

The fortyish woman who faces Raman at the Manori house is a stranger; the long years of marriage had ravaged her soul and body:

“He stared at her with distaste, thinking her grotesque. It was the face of the woman unloved, a woman rejected . . . But whereas her beauty had turned haggard through nerves and neglect, her fire had turned on him and even on the children, he felt, in spite and ill temper.”

Raman is a businessman, practical, faded, stooped with the responsibilities of life that he takes so seriously. His expectations are ordinary and sensible. He is puzzled at the irrational behaviour of Sita. He is considerate and tries his best to make her happy. Raman's is a traditional Hindu family where even men do not smoke openly, but, Sita, just to spite the in-laws smokes openly. Things become really bad, so Raman shifts to a flat to avoid daily tensions. But, even here, Sita is not happy. Raman is at a loss to understand the reason of her boredom. He thinks himself a dutiful provider of the family. The subtle difference between union of bodies and communion between souls do not strike him as an important part of his life. He is incapable of understanding the vital necessity of Sita. Life makes strangers out of them who live under the same roof without sharing the essential communion of hearts.

Anita Desai's next novel, *Fire On The Mountain*, is the story of the agonised cry of Nanda Kaul, an old woman, who has had too much of this world and longs for a quiet and secluded life. Her life is another example of marital disharmony. Her husband, Prof. Kaul, the Vice Chancellor, carries on a life-long affair with Miss David, the Maths teacher. But, she being a Christian, he could not dare break social code and marry her. The marriage is again based on physical lust and circumstantial convenience for the husband, who lives a double life. Outwardly, the Kauls were an ideal

couple to the university community but from inside it was all empty and the whole social role and socializing was a sham:

“Not that her husband loved and cherished her and kept her like a queen - he had only done enough to keep her quiet while he carried on a lifelong affair with Miss David, the mathematics mistress whom he had not married because she was a Christian but whom he had loved all his life.

Nanda looks on and bears this affair with a frozen smile on her face. She looks after the family, his house, his children, shutting the doors, supervising the cooks and servants, entertaining the guests very efficiently with a maintained poise. But she loses her individuality and identity in the process.

Nanda Kaul is not very happy in her heart in coping with the large family and stream of guests. Her relationship with her husband was nothing beyond the duties and obligations they had for each other. The same is true of her bond with her children:

“And her children - the children were all alien to her nature. She neither understood nor loved them. She did not live here alone by choice - she lived here alone because that was what she was forced to do, reduced to doing.

She seeks solitude not because she favours it, but to rest her pain-filled mind. She has shut herself away from the world, her children, and grandchildren, because she is afraid to be hurt again. Her frozen, granite-hard exterior is only a facade to hide the sears of wounded self inside. All through her life, she had only been pre-tending, wearing a persona, acting a role which is imposed on her.

Her granddaughter, Tara, also suffers from nervous break-down as a result of maladjustment in her marriage. She is forced into marriage with a diplomat, practical, worldlywise man and has the accepted vices of the modern society. She is the wrong type of wife for a man like him. The strain of the marriage and brutality of Rakesh, the husband, is reflected on the twisted personality of their daughter Raka. This is the most fearsome outcome of marital maladjustments. Raka enjoys ugliness, devastation and death-like solitude and repulses from society. She does not grow into a normal healthy child. She is a child who has never experienced the warmth of loving arms around her fragile body and is, therefore, unable to either give or receive love.

Even the two married couples, who resided in Carignano, present a confused and maladjusted married life. Finally Ila Das emerges as another legacy of a broken marriage whose life is bitter irony of her face.

Clear Light Of Day is a novel about relationship of two brothers and two sisters. The elder brother, Raja, is a poet and married to a Muslim girl, and lives in Hyderabad, keeping a tenuous relationship with his brother and sister who live in Delhi. The novel is not without the theme of maladjustment in marriage. All the marriages described in the backdrop of the novel are unsatisfactory. The parents have no time for their children. They were always busy playing bridge at home or at club or always ill. The mother was suffering from severe diabetes and had to be attended to by the husband, as it was his duty. She passes into coma and is hospitalized. Instead of going to the club, the father goes to the hospital every evening. She is not remembered after her death, least of all by her husband. Her marriage and her life is a card house.

The marriage of Tara and Bakul is also a marriage of convenience. She marries Bakul as she wanted to escape from the dark, forbidden house to a life of laughter and gaiety. Bakul needed a wife who would adjust according to his needs. Tara felt the house to be ill and that anyone who lived in it was bound to be ill. She also wanted to escape from the college, "just down the road. No further. And the high walls and the gate and the hedges - it would have been like school all over again."

She confuses that she didn't think it that way then:

"At that time I was just - just swept of my feet. Bakul was so much older and so impressive, wasn't he? And then he picked me, paid me attention - it seemed too wonderful and I was overwhelmed.

Bakul has moulded Tara according to his likings. It disturbs him that she becomes the old Tara of her youth as she enters her old house. She has turned into the "hopeless person" she was before he married her. Love is not the major criteria for their marriage, and both accept it as form of biological need. Bakul, being in foreign services, looked for a wife, not as a companion, but a thing to take pride in, like a show piece. At times, Tara felt that she had followed him enough, 'it had been such an enormous strain, always pushing against her grain, it had drained her of too much strength, now she could only collapse, inevitably collapse.'

Still she, like many others of her type, manage to preserve that facade of a successful marriage. Aunt Mira's marriage is a portrayal of social taboo. She had been married at twelve years of her age and was a virgin when she was widowed. She was blamed bitterly for the death of her husband and then was treated as a servant. She washed and cooked for them. She massaged her sister-in-law's legs and nursed wakeful babies. When she became aged, it was time she was turned out, 'another household could find some use for her : cracked pot, torn rag, picked bone'.

She was searched out and brought to Das household, as she was a useful slave. The daughters of Mishra's, Sarla and Jaya, also have an unhappy marriage and are divorcees. The novel is about the relationship of the brother Raja and sister Bim. Bimla is unmarried sister who is free from the traumas of an incompatible marriage. She devotes her life for the care of her mentally retarded younger brother, Baba, and old Mira masi. Bim is very close to her younger brother Raja. She identifies with Raja and tries to be his equal, intellectually and emotionally. Raja has great interest in Urdu poetry and his enthusiasm increases in Urdu verses as he goes to his neighbour Hyder Ali's house. Bim and Tara are attracted towards English romantic poets, especially Byron. But Bim, with her sharp mind, did not give in easily to romance and romantic feelings. She is more interested in 'fact, history and chronology.'

She starts reading Gibbon's *Decline And Fall* in search of knowledge. She is unable to digest the heavy sentimentality of expression of her brother's compositions. Raja also admires her intellectual interests. During the Independence movement, the country is rocked by violence all over, and Raja becomes a suspect for Muslims. Raja falls ill. Bim nurses him like a mother and expects that one day he would take their father's place.

But Bim is shocked when Raja leaves for Hyderabad and marries Benazir, Hyder Ali's daughter, and then adopts their life style. Bim feels cheated and nurses a grudge against him. She finds fault with everything Raja did, building up her resentment against him. They have seen a 'gap between them, a trough or a channel that the books they shared did not bridge.' Left behind in the house, Bim feels bitter with Raja and Tara, who, she thinks, have broken apart from their childhood closeness and become very different. She feels rejected, deserted and needs a renewed sense of self justification.

Now Bim feels unwanted and isolated. All these years she had felt herself to be the centre. . . Bim, who had stayed and became a part of the pattern, is inseparable. She feels that she, the house, and old Delhi are all parts of the past which is decaying and dead; and rest of the family have moved far ahead in new direction. She tries to have her spite on Baba but he would neither sulk nor wishes to punish her. He knows neither grudge nor punishment. It was Baba's peaceful sleep and in her night long vigil of violent turbulence of emotions within her that she comes out of prejudices, anger and resentments in which she is caught. She realises that Raja, Tara and Baba were part of her. They all made a complete whole:

“There could be no love more deep and full and wider than this one, she knew. No other love started so far back in time in which to grow and spread. Nor was there anyone else on the earth whom she was willing to forgive more readily or completely or defend more instinctively or instantly.

Bim realises the inspiration for selflessness and a move towards others. This is a growth and development on the part of Anita Desai's attitude towards man-woman relationship. In this novel, she has come to the conclusion that there is no cause for despair. This novel shows the clear light of day i.e. the realisation which is the ultimate wisdom of life, the intuitive understanding, and with it, Bim forgets her bitterness and achieves peace.

In her novel, *In custody*, One finds the marital disagreement between husband and wife. In this novel Deven, a lecturer teaching Hindi in college in a small town, aspires to become a poet in Urdu poetry. He thinks, his wife Sarla, is an obstacle, because Deven's marriage was against his choice. Sarla used to live in the same locality. Deven's mother and aunts had observed Sarla for years and found her suitable in every way – ‘plain, penny-pinching and congenially pessimistic’.

Deven was more a poet than a professor when he married Sarla. Sarla was also a person of high aspirations. She had wanted to be rich and to be surrounded by luxurious atmosphere. She was attracted by various advertisements and aspired for ‘the magazine dream of marriage : herself stepping out of a car, with plastic shopping bag, full of groceries and filling them into the gleaming refrigerator.’

Sarla's dreams were not fulfilled with her marriage with Deven because they had to leave Deven's town to

a smaller town. The thwarting of her aspiration ‘had cut two dark furrows from the corners of her nostrils to the corner of her mouth, as deep and permanent as surgical scars.’

Both, Deven and Sarla, are dis-appointed with each other. Both of them understood each other's disappointments. Deven and Sarla avoided each other. They don't bear together their "joint disappointment". Deven expresses his disappointments by taking extreme measures and thus avoids his wife's accusations. He becomes annoyed on simple ground. At home he is very aggressive but outside he is quiet and humble. Sarla is a typical Hindu woman. She never complains about injustices done to her by her husband. ‘Deven knew that she would scream and abuse only when she is safely out of way, preferably in the kitchen, her own domain.’

Deven too behaves as a typical superior Indian male. He cannot share his defeat and share his disappointments and woes, as they are degrading for him. In the views of psychologists the behaviour of Indian male is:

“Social conditioning definitely has a big role to play in their desire to dominate. Right from the very beginning, the patriarchal society, he is brought up in, implants an inherent sense of superiority and gender bias in the men.

Sarla, too, has ways of expressing her anger and disappointments. She suspects Deven of going to another woman in Delhi. She, being illiterate, cannot think beyond it and Deven, too, doesn't try to explain the truth to her. Sarla would put the fold of her sari over her head as if she was mourning or at a religious ceremony. This makes Deven further weak, looking for escape. But there is no escape for him. Deven is presented as a defeatist here:

“He felt aged and mouldy. He was sure his teeth had loosened in the night, that his hair would come out in handfuls if he tugged it.

That was what she might well do, he feared, to teach him not to venture out of the familiar, safe dustbin of their world into the perilous world of night-time bacchanalian revelry and melodrama.

Now he would sink back on the dust heap like a crust thrown away, and moulder.

Both of them try to hurt each other with actions or words. Sarla accuses Deven with her expressions of sullenness. Deven gets irritated by her shabbiness, her hunched, twisted posture, her untidy hair. At times, he thinks of putting his arm around her and tell her that he shared all her disappointments and woes. But this would have undermined his position of power over her, "a position which was as important to her as to him : if she ceased to believe in it, what would there be for her to do, where would she go?"

The condition of Nur Shahjehanabadi, the renowned Urdu poet, is also somewhat similar to Deven. Nur is an old poet who has decayed with the changing times, not only in the field of art but also in his personal life. He has two wives. The older wife is an old creature with a commanding face, 'so straight in its lines, so military in its firmness.' She lives in an inner courtyard of the house. Nur married a dancing girl later, for a son. His second wife, Imtiaz Begum, was from house for dancers, and was quite famous for her singing. She takes advantage of the poet and his position:

"She wanted my house, my audience, my friends. She raided my house, stole my jewels - those are what she wears now as she sits before an audience, showing them off as her own. They are not her own, they are mine! and she sent my secretary away too.

The lines express the frustration and anger of the old poet when he sat silent, neglected, and uncelebrated in a corner in the birthday celebration of his wife. At these times, he feels cheated and very old and weak; whereas Imtiaz begum is the centre of attraction of the function.

" . . . a powered and pointed creature in black and silver, coquetting beneath a shining veil which she held in place over her forehead while she turned her face from side to side, flashing smiles at her audience and making the ring on her nose glint with delight. She sat cross-legged and comfortable on the rug, her redpainted toes wagging with pleasure at the scene of which she was the undeniable centre.

She dominates Nur and he is afraid of her anger, "Nur began to cringe, his lips to pout, his glass to tilt and spill." He rises with a 'pathetic resignation' to her call,

"She, being a dancer, is capable of creating melodramatic scenes, feigning to be ill to get Nur's attention. The two wives fight like ferocious felines to "devour the helpless quaking flesh of the poet."

Nur is in a pathetic state unable to take care of the situation. He is caught between an uneducated country wife, with her crude speech and manners; and the melodramatic, shrewd dancer girl, with flowery Urdu. Nur, at the end, only wishes for 'the primordial sleep'.

The novel *Baumgartner's Bombay* concentrates on the life of two who were separated Germans, without family and country. Hugo Baumgartner, the protagonist, is the main character and Lotte is a female cabaret dancer. Both of them are alone foreigners in India and uprooted from their own culture.

Baumgartner, a German Jew, is living his last life in solitude in a duty flat in Bombay. He lives lonely life by himself. Lotte is an old lady who has lost her youth and beauty. She had a false marriage with one of her admirers, Kantilal Sethia, and is left alone after his death. She is hated by Kanti's sons from his former marriage. Both, Baumgartner and Lotte, are alone and their frustrations, agony lead them to choose each other as companion. There is a soft bond between them. Lotte has no other place to turn to except Baumgartner:

"He visits her, understands her, sympathises with her, and the two make an island of mutual understanding, reciprocal tenderness, insulating themselves from the harshness, bullying and cruelty of the world around."

In this novel, Desai's treatment of the relationship between man and woman is very different from her earlier novels. Here both are interdependent because both are alone in a different country. Lotte becomes channel of belonging to the place of Baumgartner's birth and upbringing. She fills the gap to a certain extent which is caused by his uprootedness. She is left alone after the death of Baumgartner. Her reaction on his death expresses the intensity of their relationship.

In Anita Desai's next novel, *Journey to Ithaca* (1994), female protagonists yearn for harmony and fulfillment in human relationship; whereas the male protagonists do not command themselves to the sensitive minds. The novel is a moving account of Matteo's nagging sense of alienation and his quest for spirituality. He is a portrait of loneliness and alienation. He is always lonely and ill at ease in the world in which he lives. Detachment and alienation are inherent in his temperament from the very beginning. An introvert by nature, he is neither free with anyone nor does he want to share his feelings with others.

His answers to the questions of his parents are sullen and monosyllabic. His attempts to keep clear of others reveal his desire to escape from real life and his disgust with his immediate human context. Matteo is withdrawn from the school. His father engages a tutor, Fabian, to teach him English. But his sudden spring like motion on looking at the title of the book in his tutor's hands, *The Journey to the East* by Hermann Hesse is a turning point in Matteo's life.

In this simple, mesmerizing prose, Hermann Hesse tells of a journey, both geographic and spiritual. The participants traverse both space and time, encountering Noah's Ark in Zurich and Don Quixote at Bremgarten. The pilgrims' ultimate destination is the East, the 'Home of the Light,' where they expect to find spiritual renewal. Yet the harmony that ruled at the outset of the trip soon degenerates into open conflict. Each traveller finds the rest of the group intolerable and heads off in his own direction.

The tutor and Matteo become good friends as they understand each other's needs. Fabian, in fact, turns out to be his friend, philosopher and guide. But, Matteo's parents, especially mother, do not approve the closeness of Matteo and his tutor with the book. Matteo is sick of his parents' involvement in his present and future.

Sophie, a confident journalist, a very 'normal' only child of affluent parents enters the scene at this turn. Matteo and Sophie marry after a brief courtship and immediately set out for the shores of India. Matteo's alienation and escape from his parents and community affect his matrimonial equation also. Due to ideological polarities, Matteo does not find satisfaction and happiness with his wife Sophie. Their marriage undergoes the bitterness frustration- trauma soon. Sophie is unable to adjust to Matteo's way of life and thinking because he rates the world of Gurus as more real and true than the world of Sophie or his parents.

A down to earth, materialistic and practical Sophie wants to keep the primary ties strong. She had come to India with no intention to find Truth or God or guru. She came out like just another adventurer bent on enjoying the exotic beauties and delights of India. She had never shared Matteo's dreams about India. Like an ideal wife, she wants to lead a life full of care and understanding. She does not want that Matteo should stay away in *ashram* after he recovers from his illness.

But Matteo gets infuriated with the suggestion. He thinks spirituality is something very easy to achieve.

Matteo moves from *ashram* to *ashram* and from one *Yogi* to another but the peace of mind and inner happiness elude him. All these futile ventures affect his health. Sophie takes pity on his condition and feels dismayed at his ridiculous predicament. Matteo's hunt is not yet over. From a magazine stall, he is able to get a book entitled *The Mother*. The photograph of the Mother becomes an epitome of eternal bliss to him. As Matteo reaches the Mother's Ashram, his joy knows no bound on hearing the Mother speak to the devotees.

For the first time since his departure from Italy, he experiences a sense of unity between the worldly and the divine. He falls under the spell of the holy Mother, an engaging old woman of unknown origin, wise, formidable, practical, highspirited and possessed of a mysterious spiritual attraction. He describes to Sophie what he experiences of unity of the spiritual with the physical, the dark with the light, the human with the natural.

Matteo is so deeply absorbed in the work of the *ashram* that there is little or no time left for family life. Sophie questions him as why home, family; a child is not enough for him! Sophie misunderstands Matteo's love and devotion for the Mother. Her comments about the Mother hurt him emotionally. He insulates himself to such an extent that he fails to achieve a close affectional relationship again with Sophie. She is constantly jealous of the Mother. Sophie was even keen to know if the Master and the Mother had a sexual relationship. 'Did they marry?' she asks.

Her informant, Montu-da, is embarrassed. 'We are not speaking of – of ordinary beings, please. We are talking of supramental beings and the union of the divine,' he replies. But Sophie persists. "Did they live as man and wife? . . . As man and wife - physically?" Montu-da flushes purple, takes out a large handkerchief to mop his face. 'As body and soul are one, yes,' he replies. This incident highlights Sophie's attitude towards Mother. Earlier, she taunts Matteo: 'What is she anyway? . . . Looks Indian, sounds Indian, but not Indian. Well, what is she then?' Ultimately, Sophie walks out with their two small children, dumps them on Matteo's parents in Italy, and sets off to investigate the Mother's provenance and career, presumably intending to discredit her.

Matteo and Sophie have a basic difference in their respective approach to life: Matteo represents all that

comes from the heart, while Sophie represents all that comes from the mind. Sophie resents the country, the people, the holy men and particularly the Mother, who, she believes, has snatched away her husband. Predictably, India that emerges to Sophie is harsh and pitiless : its skies brassy, its heat searing and the countryside nothing more or less than mud, screeching and fighting crows and cattle dragging themselves across the fields.

The people are rather ridiculous or simply obnoxious. Sophie and Matteo's departure from Italy to India, their apparent contradictions for the East-West encounters, their arrival at an *ashram* in Bihar and again their aversion towards the activities of the *ashram*, Matteo becomes perceptible when he begins to learn Sanskrit here but Sophie, on the other hand, feels suffocated and always complains to Matteo against the unsavoury atmosphere of the ashram.

From the very beginning of the book, differences between Matteo and Sophie is highlighted; even simple things like Matteo's long hair and Sophie's short 'manly' cut hair. Matteo is weak-willed and has surrendered himself to Indian spirituality. But Sophie is sceptical about it. The spiritually-inclined Matteo is running after *Gurus* 'to understand India, and the ways that is at the heart of India'. But, the materially disposed pragmatic, rational Sophie only "wants to go and eat shrimp, to go to Kashmir and live on a houseboat; and lie in the sun and shampoo her hair and eat omlets all day". In fact, Sophie constantly criticises both Matteo and things Indian. She could not accept the superstitious behaviour of Indian devotees like the woman in the novel who is going to the shrine to ask the saint to spare her eighth child (seven are already dead) who has fallen ill, rather than taking it to hospital.

In *Fasting, Feasting*, the tenth novel by Anita Desai, the claustrophobic feminine existentialism has been well exemplified through the character of Uma. After the attempts at arranged marriages have ended in humiliation and disaster, Uma has nothing to look forward to, only that she is at the beck and call of her parents. Aruna, Uma's younger sister, is married off in a jiffy. Being headstrong Aruna went against her parents' wishes in choosing a groom, and in insisting about the details of marriage preparations.

She was always on the lookout for perfection. She tended to ostracize her middle class parents and uncouth sister. She is a typical example of

unsuccessful cultural hybridization. The portrayal of Anamika, Uma's cousin exemplifies a deep-rooted evil rampant in the traditional Indian society. Apparently she was happily married but her marital existence is an indescribable tragic affair. One day news arrives that Anamika was dead. She had poured kerosene oil over her body in the early hours and set herself ablaze.

All this happened after twenty-five years of married life. She was the first tender lamb of the family to be meekly surrendered at the altar of marriage. Mira-Masi is, perhaps, the only woman character who feels emancipated, though in a different sense. She has denounced the material world, pilgrimages were the sole source of comfort for her, and she knows the real value and meaning of freedom.

But, at the same time, Mira-Masi does not denounce her familial relationships. In fact, she relishes gossiping and carrying tales from one family to the other, yet she does not neglect the spiritual side of her life. Thus, by renouncing materialism, ignoring the covetous attraction of the material and the social commitments and yet not completely surrendering her interaction with the external world, she has gained inner freedom and tranquillity.

In her eleventh and latest novel, *The Zigzag Way*, Anita Desai describes vividly the man-woman relationship of a miner family. Betty Jennings of Delabole, Cornwall, Liverpool had come to Mexico alongwith the Hammer family in the capacity of a maid of their children. In Mexico, she is proposed by Davey Rowse which she accepts and writes to her father informing this:

"Now Davey has come to fetch me and my bag is all packed again and we are to take the train north. We will go straight to the chapel from the boarding house and be married there. Davey says the chapel is justlike the one at home and we will have his Cornish friends as witnesses."

Betty did not say if what she saw awed or frightened or enchanted her but she did, in every line, express her trust in Davey and her joy in being with him.

In a letter to Miss Frances at the chapel school in Cornwall, Betty describes her new home in detail :

"We have moved into our own home in a row on the hillside amongst the other miner's cottages. They are not so unlike the ones at home in Cornwall, except they have red-tiled roofs and the walls are as coloured

as a rainbow . . . there is a stone trough for washing in, and along the wall are trees with lemons and oranges and a dark fruit like a pear that they call the *avvycado*. The kitchen is quite small and a bit dark, but Davey has put in all the shelves I need and pretty painted tiles around the sink so it is a treat to do the dishes here.”

Those who read Betty's letters might have thought her as a child playing at keeping house, but that was because there were aspects of her life she omitted to mention. She did not write of watching the miners' harsh lives, the drunken brawls in town or, on Sundays, the miners' revellery with the money they had made, spending it at cock-fights and in the taverns for drinking uncontrollably. There were aspects of their world that were too strange to be conveyed to those at home.

To conclude from the above study of Anita Desai's novels is that family and familial relationship play a very important part in her imaginary world; but more often the relationships are not harmonious. Husband and wife alienation in her novels is the result of the hyper-sensitive nature of her women and their inability to establish a point of contact with their partner. Her women are in eternal quest for meaningful life.

Anita Desai never shows a trace of biased or prejudiced outlook in this inner struggle between husband and wife. Her women either yield to or survive the existential problems within the family. Her character Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* is an improvement over Maya in *Cry The Peacock* and Monisha in *Voice In The City* is that she finds a settlement a meeting point between Maya's involvement and Monisha's noninvolvement and her realisation that there is no freedom and fulfillment without enchantment. In her novels, on one side, one finds Sarah *Bye Bye Black Bird*, who, in spite of being an alien woman; understands her husband, his family and country which she would accept one's in India; on the other hand, one finds Sarla in *In Custody*, though the wife of Hindi lecturer has absolutely no interest in literature or her husband's profession.

It can be concluded that Anita Desai has explored different aspects of feminine psyche and its effect on the human relationship and she has definitely given a new depth and meaning to the theme of man-woman relationship in her novels. The reader also experiences the reality in this man-dominated society where women are treated as mere commodities.