CHAPTER-II

EGOISTS
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Egoism as a psychological process reveals the inner and multidimensional threads of "I". When "I" becomes individual it feels self-satisfied itself and forms the minute and appropriate ego-centric ideas. Let me quote a few lines of Nandury Venkateswara Rao, defining egoism thus:

A high wave rises on the surface of the ocean putting up a show of a separate volume of water. It may take pride in its supposedly irrepressible impetuosity and mistaken notion of individuality. But it subsides and disappears in the mighty sea again before our own eyes in a matter of a few seconds. It does not know that even that short-lived individuality is relative to the other waves like it but not in relation to the great ocean of which it is just an insignificant speck.¹

Egoists are the individuals with obsession of self in literary, religious, psychological and philosophical parlance has different interpretations. Hinduism posits self as ultimate aim of existence of man's meaning verging on Atamgyan or Atambodh leading to a stage of salvation or Moksha. The Upanishad is concept of the self, which deems it in wider terms as Brahman is perhaps synonymous with the psychological formulations of C. G. Jung. Self is the phenomenon of life, inescapable and inevitable in any process of growth. Hinduism also lays emphasis on Chitta, which represents the fundamental, instinctual drives of the human psyche. It primarily means 'I-consciousness'.
One of Anita Desai’s recurrent concerns is with the women characters’ attempt to retain their sense of self. These characters are true rebels and forge their own path of revolt against a repressive system. In the process, they might destroy themselves but refuse to surrender their own vision of life. A man who is wrapped in his narrow egoistic tendencies measures everything in terms of his personal considerations. Desai’s characters who are egoists reject whatever they may have inherited. They prefer to go in the opposite direction.

In Cry, The Peacock there is a big gap of age between Maya and Gautama. The reason of egoism of Maya and Gautama lies in two ways: One that is traditional and the other that is rational. A young girl in the quest of her fulfillment as a woman finds her husband cold so far as physical and emotional love is concerned. On the other hand, Gautama sees in her too much effect of a traditional Brahman family and thus finds in her indifference to the rational and scientific ideas of life. This unbending attitude in their respective approach to life makes them adament in their principles of life and here lies the *leit motif* of their respective egoism.

In order to understand Maya’s peculiar temperament and behavior it is of a vital significance to have a closer view of her upbringing and growth as a woman. Child of urbaned culture attained by its sophistication and aristocracy, Maya grows up in Lucknow with summer holidays at Darjeeling. Her childhood is a landscape of fairyland and fantasy world. Even a breakfast in the garden on a bright winter morning “a party, as good as a reveal of elves and fairies.” Considering herself “my father’s daughter.” She obviously has tremendous transference of her father and wants to realize in her life where “breeding, culture, leisure and comfort have been brought
to a nice art.” ³ In such a graceful atmosphere, there was no possibility of any disorder, chaos and failure. The father’s remarkable pattern of life, his neat, crisp attitude influences Maya’s growth as a woman. Despite Maya’s well-protected and nourished childhood whatever she is missing, however, is the surrender and giving. Maya does not enjoy the intimacy and profundity of the relationship which mother – infant relationship affords. It is through mother that she does not learn to relate to the other. Maya finds herself incapable of reconciling to the indifferent attitude of her husband. The tremendous difference between their outlooks on life place them on a different level of consciousness. As Belliappa observes:

The fatal distance between Gautama and Maya, arising from a temperamental incompatibility is basic to the theme of psychic disintegration.⁴

As a husband, Gautama’s first duty is towards his wife. But in his zeal for detachment he neglects it. For him, Maya is a spoilt child, to be laughed at, pampered and occasionally scolded. She is rarely to be taken seriously. He simply disregards her need for love. Maya laments his lack of interest in her. Thus Gautama’s failure to notice her demands for life reveals his failure as a husband. Maya is a childless woman and she is eloquent of her need, but he “did not give another thought”⁵ He is unable to give her the sense of security in her hour of distress. She desires his closet under standing not his philosophy. Instead of loading her with logic, flooding her with material amenities and physical comforts, she craves for emotional and spiritual equation. But Gautama quotes some lines from the Gîta to explain to her the high ideas of duty. He who “controlling the senses of the mind, follows without attachment the path of action with his organs of action, he is
esteemed.” 6 He also elaborates the meaning of action as vocation, “work, or life, whichever you please-of that order is what I mean by vocation.” 7 By escaping or avoiding physical contact with his wife, Gautama is following a path of abnegation. He misses the real concept of Karma. Even in the Gita, Kama has been included in Purshartha. The Gita does not denounce the procreative power but repudiates out of context gratification, which is the cause of man’s fall. Gautama’s rigidity in forcing his philosophy of non-involvement upon Maya is life-negating. Both Maya and Gautama fail to meet on a common platform regarding their comprehension of detachment with the result that Maya’s longing for life slowly gets a negative character under Gautama’s intellectual stresses. Gautama works for “fame, name, and money.” 8

This mismatching of temperaments becomes an insurmountable barrier because it is aggravated by Gautama’s inability to respect Maya as an equal. Gautam sees “No value in anything less than the ideas and theories born of human, and preferably male brains” 9 imposes his superior male attitudes on his wife’s hypersensitive temperament. Her self-esteem undergoes severe battering, for Gautama who sees nothing in her to esteem or respect, shows his elevated heights of male superiority. Maya mourns the “superior plane he always managed to elevate himself. Onto when I tried to involve him in my matters.” 10 Gautama is a man of male superiority due to which he does not accept Maya’s values. He scornfully mocks Maya’s sentimental insistence on funeral ceremonies through telling words like “bogus”, “childish trimmings”, “ultimate absurdity”, “meaningless”, “frivolities.” 11 Here is Maya’s fragile ego:
Burial and cremation are facts, Gautama. He shook his head vigorously, in contempt, as though he wished to drive me away his side. Facts that matter. I mean, naturally, he said in extreme irritation. You go chattering like a monkey and I am annoyed that I have been interrupted in my thinking. But being a creature of instinct, you do, every now and then, stumble-purely by accident. I am sure – upon the salient point of the problem. 12

Gautama’s rejection makes her self-confined. She retreats into her room in anguish, shaken into the painful knowledge that “in his world there were vast areas in which he would never permit me.”13 Rejection of her worth as an individual, Maya withdraws further and further into world riddled by fantasy and dreams. Maya-Gautama real tragedy is caused by male attitudes of superiority. Both are not ready to compromise. Maya’s fragile ego is unable to accept the reality.

In Voices in the city, there are two main egoists; one is the mother and seconds the city Calcutta. Mother as an egoist finds herself a self-loving woman, who is visible but the city Calcutta is invisible. These two egoists bring the complete ruin to the family. The novelist reveals the disgusting ugliness and sordidness of the city of Calcutta. In the city the rise and fall of the individual progress, happiness and sorrow, attraction and repulsion, love and aversion and relationship between the organic and inorganic entities as a series of events take place, but as an egoist Calcutta stands only for destructiveness and annihilation of man’s existence. Nirode mother and her three children come to Calcutta and are lost in the city of Goddess Kali.
There is chaos everywhere in the city which corresponds to the disordered and chaotic life that the protagonists live. M. K. Naik observes the role of Calcutta after the death of Monisha:

They halted and stood, trembling, listening to the sounds of a process at that very hour, chanting the goddess’s name and beating on drums. Close about them fell silence, and they turned to look back at the big house behind the shrubs. It was unlit. It seemed uninhabited.¹⁴

Nirode is victim of the apathetic and oppressive metropolis of Calcutta. He is an introvert by nature so he develops an anti-establishment attitude. His deliberate courting of self-denial and poverty is an example of the stubbornness and rebelliousness. He hasn’t “needed any for a long time now.”¹⁵ Nirode becomes jealous of his brother Arun after seeing off him for abroad for higher studies. He feels that everybody loves Arun and acknowledges his talents. Nirode’s inferiority complex leads him to an abyss of misery and self-pity. The city of Calcutta as a living entity challenges him. Nirode launches his literacy journal, voice, in this city for future progress. But he suddenly changes to writing. When he finds it quite difficult to earn his livelihood, he opens a bookshop in a dirty locality of Calcutta. In this devilish city, Nirode finds himself quite helpless and failure. Nirode is obsessed with failure but does not regret: “I want to move from failure to failure, step by step to rock bottom.”¹⁶ Nirode reveals the two faces of the city of Calcutta: “…One rapacious, one weary gaze at me from every direction.”¹⁷

For Amla, Calcutta is “Monstrous city that lived no healthy, red blooded life.” And it is also a city which “conspires against all who wish to
enjoy it.”\textsuperscript{18} At last Amla becomes fed up by her life in the metropolitan city of Calcutta. It is a city of destruction and demonstration, “the anarchistic genius of Calcutta is intrinsically negative.”\textsuperscript{19} The mother’s disinterested attitudes towards her children is reflected in the city’s apathy for its inhabitants. Dharma, Jit, Sonny, Aunt Lila – all the minor characters of the novel are also victim of the city of Calcutta’s indifference. The mother expresses her grief at the rough life her children live in the city Calcutta, away from her:

\begin{center}
He must be living a sordid existence; I cannot bear thinking of it. ... They will never come to me as son and daughter. If they come, they will come as strangers.\textsuperscript{20}
\end{center}

Again the city of Calcutta’s functioning appears in Monisha comes back Calcutta with her husband. But with satirical vain and rude behavior she makes with her family mixes her helpless. She is so much obsessed with negative working of Calcutta’s negative forces that she commits suicide. Nirode’s sister Monisha is placed in such a bad situation that ultimately she commits suicide. Here is as case like an ill matched marriage. Because of her sensitive character she fails to adjust herself to the suffocating atmosphere of the joint family of her in-laws. Jiban as her husband offers her no hope, neither a companionship nor protection nor freedom. She realizes fully well that nothing creative and fruitful can be expected in such an atmosphere. Monisha desires loneliness as she feels, “Alone I could work better and I should feel more whole.”\textsuperscript{21} She withdraws from others and confines herself to her room. Study of Kafka and Dostoyevsky, fills her mind with a notion of superiority. She says, “My silence. I find, has powers upon others.”\textsuperscript{22} It
gives her a feeling and demeanor of superiority and perhaps arrogance. As Whitment observes:

Negative inflation comes as depression and refusal to live.... This is difficult to recognize as inflation, but this too is based on the ego's notion. 23

Monisha becomes self-centered. This feeling is reflected in her own remark: "I am different from them all." 24 Its result is an unhappy end by burning herself. As Indira Bhatt observes rightly: "She is too silent for the family and the world distrusts her silence. She wants to be herself and not to compromise." 25

As egoist Nirode always travels in the opposite direction. He does not want to contact with other human beings. He turns away from love, wants nothing to do with marriage, and disapproves of his mother's friendship with Major Chaddha. After Monisha's death, he goes to the airport to receive her, but unable to take his eyes off her. Oedipal love for mother lies hidden in his unconscious. Due to it he rejects his mother's offer of financial help. Later when she wants him to sign the bank papers, he tells Monisha: "tell her to go shove it up that old Major of hers, all her stinking cheques ... I'm done with signing my name, believing my name or having a name." 26

Infact, the mother is incapable of entering into any dialectic relationship with him. This aspect of the mother is not exclusive to Nirode, rather she is never seen indulgent and involved in outer life of all her children. She can be supportive financially but psychologically she has withdrawn from the world of her children. A mother plays a dominant role in the formation of her children. But she is an egoist who loves only the
fulfilment of her own instinctual pleasure. As an egoist she finds herself a self-loving woman:

She was obsessed by her part as only a great actress can be, to the point of merging completely with the role, leaving no division whatsoever from these groups of flaccid women crossly managing their tired and whining children, She stood out as work of art in a crowded stuffy gallery.\(^{27}\)

The mother belongs to a bourgeois – tradesman’s family. After the death of her husband she departs from Calcutta. Her over-indulgent and egoistic behavior brought the separation between herself and her husband or children. Nirode makes critical remark on her egoistic nature and life-style. Amla forbids him, as she is mother; but Nirode’s reply to Amla unfolds the snobbish and cruel nature of the mother:

She is everything we have been fighting against, you and Monisha and I, and she is also everything we have fought for… the amalgamation of death and life.\(^{28}\)

Nirode is deeply disturbed and panicked at the total rejection of his mother and hence he compares her to Goddess Kali, the Goddess of destruction. The constant apathetic behavior of his mother reminds Nirode of his past. The negligence and dejection of Nirode make him to use the symbolic identification of the mother with Kali. The mother who gives him life is now Kali, the destroyer. The use of the mother symbol as a life-giving and destructive force gives the novel a fatalistic conclusion. As Anita Desai
herself writes that she is moved to write the book by the powerful impression of the city has created on her. A. V. Krishana Rao observes:

“Even as Anita Desai perceives it as a city symbolizing the three aspects of creation, preservation, and destruction...”

Here is a novel, *Bye Bye Blackbird*, where the feminine is posited, as it were, across the seven seas where the encounter with the masculine ego takes place. The leading female protagonist as portrayed in the novel is a separate class- a category alien to Desai’s novel. Sarah is a wonderful example of a woman who willingly resigns all the claims of her being a European lady. She materializes in full vision of her womanhood. She undertakes all the responsibilities as a wife of Adit. Sometimes egoistic feelings overpower her, but she soon recovers herself and agrees with the proposal of her husband Adit.

On the other hand, Adit’s whole life is based on the persona pattern. In his code of behavior and value judgments he displays immature and unrealistic approach vis-à-vis his vain, pompous and presumptuous pattern of living. In psychological term it can be said that he has not been able to differentiate ego persona parameters. As Edward C. Whitmont remarks: “Pseudoego is not rigid but also extremely fragile and brittle... such an ego is completely spilt off from the intension of the self.” In terms of Whitmont’s formulations, Adit has wilfully surrendered his ego autonomy. He has glided into the superficial glades of pseudoego. It is a state of identification with a dream, or with persona. Adit’s words betray utter lack of maturity and depth when he tells his friend Dev: “These English wives are quite manageable really.”

Thus in his relationship with Sarah as egoist, he
betrays the typical conventional attitude of the Indian male to his female counterpart which, as Sudhir Kakkar observes, is marked by dominance and “pervasive oppressive masculinity.”

Ironically, it is not Adit who suffers from egoism but it is his docile wife Sarah. By marrying a brown Asian she has broken the social code of England. Hence she is always subject to taunts and jibes of not only her colleagues but even of young pupils of the school where she works as a clerk. She always avoids any questions regarding her husband and family life but her peers take a perverse delight in asking such questions. Julia who is a teacher in her school comes out with typical British superciliousness. Sarah dreads such embarrassing comments:

She was still breathing hard at having so narrowly escaped having to answer personal questions. It would have wrecked her for the whole day to have to discuss Adit with Julia, with Miss Pimm .... She had stammered out her replies, too unhappy even to accuse them of tactlessness or inquisitiveness and for her pains had heard Julia sniff as she left the room, “If she’s ashamed of having an Indian husband, why did she go and marry him.”

Being an egoist, Sarah is not ready to accept reality. She always avoids this situation when she has to face. So she prefers going to big department store where she would remain an anonymous buyer, none knowing her Asian connection:

She went into the supermarket to wander among the stacked shelves in an absent mindedly happy way for she
loved the supermarket.... But inside the sparkling halls of the supermarket where walls of soap and cornflakes hid her from strangers’ eyes, she could be as eccentric, as individual, as she pleased without being noticed by even a mouse.  

In the above lines, she betrays lack of conviction in accepting the fact of her being married to an Indian. This leads to a split between her ego and persona. Sarah becomes a schizophrenic in her efforts to mediate between the two opposing demands of her life situations. In fact Sarah’s problem stems from her peculiar psychic make-up and behavioral mode. Psychologically speaking, Sarah belongs to the introverted feeling type and such people are difficult to approach because of the intensity of their inner world. Adit also refers to her shyness and introspective nature when he says: “you are like a Bengali girl... that reserved.” Sarah reacts against the conservative and overmuch concern for order, form and a system in life in England- the land which Dev encounters with its reality perceived as a land of “liberty, of eccentricity, of individualism.” The flat, drab and placid routine irritates Sarah. She says:

I should think ninety out of every hundred people here live lives exactly alike... every Sunday have roast beef for lunch.

Adit has lack of attachment and emotional disappointmeant Adit with the English relationship. Due to clash of egoism Sarah tells him: “Oh we can’t stand cuddling and petting and all that!” All this not only shocks and appeals Adit but it also serves as a severe hurt to his ego. He tells himself: “My mother-in-law hates and despises me. Dev makes fun of the life I lead
and ideals I profess. Therefore I am angry. I am hurt." Sarah is also conscious of her rightful place and defies both Adit and mother when she tells Adit: "Don't you treat me the way she always does – as though I'm an individual with my own life to lead, but just-just some appendage to them, with nothing but duties and responsibilities instead of rights." With her healthy ego and sense of discrimination, she can form a detached, objective and dispassionate view of a situation.

Sita in Where Shall We Go This Summer? is an inborn egoist. Like other heroines of Desai Sita's childhood plays an important role in shaping her personality. Her childhood was unusual in the sense that her mother has deserted the family and the father, a freedom fighter and social worker, was too busy to take care of his children. She lived a life of austerity with limited material comforts. Due to it from her childhood Sita becomes haughty, supercilious, egocentric and unadjusting. She is always seething with anger, discontent and apathy. When she becomes pregnant for the fifth time, she decides to go against Raman's advice. She develops negativism. Due to it she refuses to co-operate or obey commands or does the exact opposite of what has been requested. As Shallo Sharma rightly observes:

Parental handling is the primary determining influence in child behavior. One type of handling will produce undesirable behavior pattern; another method will produce socially acceptable pattern. In other words, no child is born "bad", but parental mishandling can cause him to behave in a manner, which is considered "bad". It is indeed fortunate that this so. The fact that children learn to be selfish and stubborn...
Going back to history reveals some facts about Sita's egoistic and self-centered nature as having been a symptom of her want of care and sympathy of a mother and father. In her moments of joy and sorrow, she has none to share; hence she keeps herself to herself. That becomes her character trait quite unpalatable to others. It has its origin in her childhood life and experience. Her father's unusual tenderness towards her stepsister Rekha confuses her with internal questions which never become articulate and were kept repressed. Usha Bande rightly comments: "This experience breeds feelings of worthlessness, and its consequent strategy is rebelliousness. Sita cannot corroborate her father's dubious ways. It keeps down her psyche as a bad human experience." The whole situation can be interpreted in terms of her repressed feelings at violent eruption. Psychologically repressed, it is natural to hate or wish for death. Freud observes: "Hate, too, rages unrestrainedly."

Her flight to an island is highly symbolic in that it indicates her inability to connect herself to the outer world. Due to her egoism, she now decides neither to give birth to her fifth child nor to undergo an abortive surgery. Once she "had to struggle to free herself from the chain or she might have spent her life in the cold meshes, regarding the enigma of her father." Now after twenty years when she finds her life in the city unbearable, she turns to it as a refuge. As egoist, she fails to perceive that the folly lies in her own self and that her flight to the island is nothing but an attempt to flee from her own self. Her running away to the island also can be seen as one of her emotional outbursts. She has uttered "No" while rejecting her life in the city.
It is her egoism due to which she desires to live in her past. Sita’s past does not allow her to reconcile with her contextual reality. There arises a situation when Sita as an egoist meets another egoist Raman. Due to egoism they meet with an inner clash of human relationships. She always leads her life “in the center of crowd.” As a child, she develops an intensity of human behavior by which she wants to lead a life of human love. As she does not meet with her emotional fulfillment in human love, a rush of negative emotions overpowers her. This situation leads her to fear after fear. She desires to lead her life one way, but the destiny pulls it the other way. Thus, a world of illusion surrounds her: “if reality were not to be borne then illusion was the only alternative.”

Sita’s ego forces her in isolation. She sometimes becomes jealous of her daughter, Meneka. Sita wishes, if she had the talent of her daughter, she would have nursed and would have been “a sensible woman.” She confesses her ignorance to reconcile with the realities of life:

I should have known how to channel my thoughts and feelings, how to put them to use. I should have given my life some shape then, some meaning. At least, it would have had some for me- even if no one else had cared.

Sita always desires to be wetted by the rain of human emotion and love from her husband instead of running after sensual pleasure and maddening luxuries of life. She wants to attain the love of legendary figures-Ram and Sita – of the ‘Ramayana’ in her own life. As O. P. Budholia observes:

She aspires to run after substance instead of shadow.

Metaphorically, the state of Sita’s mind resembles a tide
in the monsoon. The foetus she carries inside her womb resembles the tide; it creates in her a tragic vision of life. She feels helpless in her isolation and alienation. The tide of the sea envisions symbolically the tide of her personal life. She analyses her psychic depth, which exhibits the tragic vision of her life.\(^{48}\)

All her life Sita has been searching a father figure in Raman. But Raman is far from being so. She goes to the island with the desire for security, tenderness and gentleness. Her agony is that her insensitive husband remains unchanged, dull and impotent. Sita remains isolated: “He had nothing more to give her, or he was just unaware of her needs and demands.... Not being given what she wanted.”\(^{49}\)

Sita is rebellious due to it; she hates her husband for not understanding her; dislikes her children for they are insensitive. Sita feels that she is betrayed by her children who turn to their father. At heart she also recognizes her husband and his disposition: “He never hesitated – everything was so clear to him, and simple: life must be continued and all its business.... That was why the children turned to him, sensing him to be the superior in courage, in leadership.”\(^{50}\) As a wife she thus expresses her frustration for want of equal proportion of love in her life; she rebels against Raman on the line of her mother. She expresses her anger thus:

“In those”, she explained, I thought I could live with you and travel alone-mentally, emotionally.... I think perhaps that is the urge my mother felt when she runs away to Benares. But what happened to her? I wonder, Raman. I had to run away, too-to the island.\(^{51}\)
The concluding part of the novel, however, has a different tone and this is an essential artistic development in the whole structure of the novel. Sita who has been unable to come out of her egotistical self now gets an apocalyptic vision. Earlier she was unable to compromise with her husband. But she has the “fluttering impulse to touch him and reassure him.” 52 The ego resolves and tames itself easily when an individual reaches a stage of awareness. Of course, this process involving repetitive cycles of “inflation and alienation is superseded by the conscious process of individuation when awareness of the reality of the ego-self axis occurs.” 53 Thus Sita recognizes the misleading design of her ego-complex and starts appreciating the reality of the ego-self exis.

Like Sita, In Fire on Mountain, Nanda Kaul also seeks retirement from the hectic activity, noise and wants to merge herself with the stillness of Carignano. Self-exiled Nanda Kaul’s withdrawal to the foothills of Himalayas is guided by her negativity towards life. The desolation of Carignano appealed to her sensibilities: “What pleased and satisfied her so, here at Carignano, was its barrenness” 54 with her withdrawal to Carignano. She bids good-bye to all that shows her repulsion and disinterestedness. Even a letter from her daughter fails to create any ripple of emotionality in her dehydrated world and she “resolved to say ‘No’ to what even demand or request it contained. No, No, No.” 55 Like Sita, Nanda Kaul has also decided to say ‘No’ to deeper communion, involvement and falcity or contingency of her life-situation. Nanda Kaul wants to “be alone, to have Carignano to herself, in this period of her life when stillness and calm were all that she wished to entertain.” 56 Thus divorced from the world of affection, relation
and communication, her movement to the foothills of Himalayan seems ironic.

Nanda Kaul’s role as a wife remains pedestrian throughout and nowhere does she reflect her will to reach out to world outside herself. The presence and flattery of the university employees have strengthened her persona, which she has confused with her reality. She is taken in by the feigning, fawning and flattering voices of the guests, visitors and wives and daughters of University professors: “Isn’t she splendid? Isn’t she like a queen? Really, vice chancellor is lucky to have a wife who can run everything as she does.”57 Throughout her life, Nanda Kaul lives on a persona level and confuses her individuality with the social role. Nanda Kaul’s disinterested with indifferent participation in the household can be vouchsafed by the affair between her husband and Miss David. While moving to Carignano, Nanda Kaul abandons everything that belongs to her husband and completely snaps the old ties and bonds.

While Nanda Kaul’s husband achieves position and popularity in the society and her children settled themselves in life and career, she remains ignored and abandoned. Naturally, as it were, a sense of waste and emptiness crept into her mind. Psychologically, it is a state of ego-depression when darkness, delusion and negligence overpower a man’s psyche. Nanda Kaul’s lack of mental and emotional involvement in the family dynamics can be assigned to her inert state of mind. The playful shrieks of the children irritate her. As vice-chancellor’s wife, she felt suffocated and choked “at the hub of a small but intense and busy world.”58 The unwelcome little guest of the house stays unnoticed, while Nanda Kaul groans in self-pity and pain: “She would never be able to sleep... it would upset her.”59 Being egoist Nanda
Kaul is not ready to adjust with anyone. By her mere instinct and intuition, Raka comprehends that she is considered an intruder in the realm of Nanda Kaul as “A mosquito flown from the plains to tease and worry.” Nanda keeps herself aloof and isolated.

Nanda Kaul also goes through a tremendous experience in her encounter with Raka. Psychologically Nanda recognizes her shadow in the young girl, which represents the contents of Psyche that have been rejected and repressed. As Jolende Jacobi feels that such people build a spiritual or moral tower to live in, which is “Not a natural growth but an artificial scaffolding erected and sustained by force... to enter into a genuine relationship to do any really vital work.” Raka as her alter ego or positive shadow confronts her with her failure to actualize herself in life. Nanda’s going to nature also signifies her coming back to life. Nanda who so vehemently desires Raka to go away from Carignano, now wishes no one to go either; certainly not Raka. She comes to appreciate that Raka “alone understood Carignano, knew what Carignano stood for – she alone valued that...” Raka makes Nanda Kaul realize the need to destroy her inner desolation and barrenness to connect with the world outside with its creativity and meaning.

Nanda Kaul’s marital equation has an unpleasant side effect upon her husband, who proves unreliable or undependable. In this case the blame goes to Prof. Kaul who just gave lip service to her. Outwardly the Kauls were an ideal couple to university community but from inside it is all empty, the whole social role and socialiasing is a mere sham. In a moment of acceptance, Nanda Kaul confesses that:
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 loved.63

Because of her husband’s cowardice and selfishness Nanda Kaul has to suffer. She readily discharges her duty towards the family but in doing so loses her individuality and identity. Nanda Kaul is not happy in coping with the large family and unending stream of guests. She becomes egoist. Her egoism is situational. Due to circumstances she becomes situational egoist:

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.64

The third part of the novel deals with the story of Ila Das who has been characterized as a childhood friend of Nanda Kaul. She has been deceived first by her husband and then by her sons. Sometimes her egoism too becomes the cause of her downfall. The excess of egoism leads one to ruin and the same happens with Ila Das. At the end she is raped on the way by Preet Singh, a native of the village. While analyzing the characters of Desai’s novel Kunj Bala Goyal observes:

A few others, who are capable of maintaining their psychic balance to some extent even against the absurdity of the traditional patterns of life, generally lead a life full of despair and tend very often to revolt against them.65
Nanda Kaul gets Ila Das’ appointment in the Home Science College through her husband who is the vice-chancellor. Ila Das feels her ego hurt. She resigns as a protest against her seniority being overlooked. In order to please her only friend Nanda Kaul, Ila Das fabricates lies about Nanda Kaul’s glorious life to impress the child Raka. Her tragic death, in egoistic way, is of her own making. She is over-zealous in educating the villagers. Her attempt to prevent Preet Singh from marrying his seven-year-old daughter to a widower having six children rouses his anger and makes him kill her as a measure of vengeance. The act of Ila’s murder shows hurt of Preet Singh’s male ego. Ila fights for the positivism of life until she is destroyed by the negative forces of society. As egoist she never thinks of the consequences that might baffle her noble existence of social obligations. She always wrestles with her parental pride. She might have asked Nanda Kaul for sparing her a room, but her “absurd pride” always forbids her. She does not ask anything:

Because of her absurd pride in being her father’s daughter... she had not asked, had not begged, and so she was stumbling through the rocks alone... to the crumbling hut of mud and thatch near the earth heap of the hamlet, to search on the empty self for a scrap of food and to lie awake through the night on a fear-ridden-string cot. 66

In Clear light of Day, Bimla is egoist because of which she is not ready to overcome past and face reality. Slowly and slowly its history, chronology and facts attract her. Being self-centered, as she tells Tara, she never goes anywhere expect old Delhi. Like Old Delhi Bim is not ready to
change herself at all. Bim’s observation that Old Delhi does not change but only decays is substantiated by the unchanging attitudes and ways of its inhabitants like Bim:

    Old Delhi does not change. It only decays. My students
tell me it is a great cemetery, every house a tomb.
Nothing but sleeping graves.... I never go. Baba never
goes. And here, nothing happens at all.\(^{67}\)

After the settlement her brother and sister. Bim remains in old Delhi with her ailing neurotic brother, Baba. Old Delhi symbolizes Bim her own ego. After many attacks on Old Delhi, it is not decayed and changed. She regards the house in Old Delhi as right place for the fulfillment of her dreams. Bimla is rigid on her decision not to give up her house in Old Delhi and to overcome past to face reality. Tara advises Bim to end the dispute between her and Raja by going to Moyna’s wedding in Hyderabad and tear up the letter and forget it all. But being egoist she feels hurt at Raja’s behavior and refuses to do so. Bim continues to remain “entangled in the dense musty web”, and she tells Tara about the letter: “I will keep it. I must look at it and remind myself every now and then.”\(^{68}\)

Bimla explains the decadence of human values in our society as the old father’s command goes unheard: “Looking out and listening to his sons and occasionally shouting a command on them that went unheard, then sadly meditatively burning.”\(^{69}\) Bimla listens to the old man’s miseries. Bimla likes to have love and recognition from her brothers and sister, but she misses these two things. She thinks that everyone deserts her. She stands by Baba as a nurse. She burns inside because “the wholeness of the pattern, its perfection, would be gone.”\(^{70}\) She is disappointed when she is being deserted
by everyone in her family. She finally finds her in the "net that the knife of love had made." She feels pangs of "loving them and not loving them. Accepting them and not accepting them. Understanding them and not understanding them." Thus her ego is hurt. Bim becomes self-contained: As Jasbir Jain observes:

The resistance and opposition to playing the roles thrust upon the characters is part of their rebellion.... Rebellion, non-conformity, going in the opposite direction... an indication of will power or ego... an obsession with one aspect rather than a confrontation between two, it is also destructive.

Bim’s rebellion is hardly noticed, for it attempts the unusual without seeming to do so. Bim pursues her studies when other girls of her age and class turn to marriage. While Raja reads his adventure stories and Tara passively submits to Lorna Doone and Gone with the wind, Bim turns to Gibbon’s Decline and fall. Bim is dissatisfied with her childhood. Her parents are indifferent towards her. They come home late at night. The Negligence of the parents creates a vacuum in her heart. Bim tries to escape from the unpleasantness at home by concentrating on her studies, which perhaps she thinks is a way out. By concentrating on her studies, Bim thinks she can avoid the insipid atmosphere at home. The parent’s continual absence from home, their disinterest in their children, the silent suffering of mother are at the root of the silent desperation that pervades the house. Bim criticizes Raja, she is criticizing him against the background of their childhood. Bim’s anger against Raja is anger against her father, and the male world so neglectful of women:
Father never bothered to teach me. For all father cared. I could have grown up illiterate and cooked for my living, or swept. So I had to teach myself history and teach myself to teach. But father never realized and Raja doesn’t realize—that doesn’t prepare you for running in insurance business.  

Here side-by-side Bim, we find Raja’s egocentric nature when he develops exaggerated attachment to Hyder Ali’s family and Urdu language. For it he leaves his family and old house in Old Delhi. As egoist he never cares about his father’s decision. Raja’s father forbids Raja for joining Jamia Millia for his so-called Islamic studies. Raja’s rebellion begins with romantic poetry, with learning Urdu and wanting to go to Jamia Millia. After all Raja takes decision to take part in Hyder Ali’s family. For they all grew accustomed to him. And Raja egoistically announces his decision to go to Hyderabad causing consternation to Bim:

I will go - go to - to Hyderabad. Hyder Ali Sahib has asked me to come. He has plenty of work- I will work for him. I-I will - go today -today. I will catch the train – I won’t stop here with you, another day, it’s enough – enough.  

But Raja is unmoved by Bim’s pleading and, packing his bags, leaves the house telling Bim: “I have to go. Now I can go – I have to begin my life some time, don’t I?” When Raja goes away to Hyderabad, Tara gets married and Mira Masi dies. Literally, there is only Bim and she is forced into adult responsibilities by her father’s death and Raja’s abdication in
favour of Baba. When Raja has left, she sits down on the steps by Baba’s side and prepares herself to face the situation:

Everyone’s gone.... They won’t come back. We’ll be alone now.... We need not worry now that they’re all gone. We’re just by ourselves and there’s nothing to worry about.77

Raja’s disertion of Bim in order to Marry Benazir leaves her frustrated. She keeps the letter written by Raja after the death of Hyder Ali- once their land lord and Raja’s father-in-law assuring that she can continue to live in the same house and that they would not raise the rent. Raja’s sudden assumption of the role of landlord makes Bim feel hurt and insulted. Tara’s attempt to appease her anger only rouses a feeling of jealousy and humiliation that now they share a world of colour and affluence leaving out and neglecting her. She feels rejected and let down. She feels that she is like heirloom, not valuable, not beautiful, but old. She feels her heart full with love, now “although it was shadowy and dark Bim could see as well as the clear light of the day that she felt only love and yearning for them all.”78 Being egoist she felt hurt and pain caused by the letter. But at the end she realizes the truth of life in accepting and forgiving Raja. Bim tears away the letter written by Raja, thereby lightening her burden. Bim reconciliates with Raja with the end of the hate and bitterness.

In custody Deven lives in a dream world, behaves like an innocent angel and in the end faces a hostile world of harsh reality around him. Prof. R. S. Sharma’s observation is that “Her (Mrs. Desai’s) protagonists are usually sensitive women who, haunted by a peculiar sense of doom, withdraw into a sequestered world of their own.”79 It may be applied to
Deven with some instinct, for he is a sensitive man haunted by an overpowering sense of failure and frustration. It is egoistic instinct that a Hindi lecturer, an intelligent and grown-up man indeed, falls into the inescapable trap of some Urdu lover like Murad and Nur. Being egoist, he plays no heed to the warnings of his friends and well-wishers. It is his egoist feeling due to which he lives in his self-created inferno.

Deven considers himself a patron and well-wisher of Urdu language and feels great pride in saying that he is trying to keep alive the delicate language. But this is not enough. In order to establish the superiority of the Urdu language as though he must denigrate Hindi. Deven feels:

Now I am planning, a special issues on Urdu poetry.
Someone has to keep alive the glorious tradition of Urdu literature. If we do not do it, at whatever cost, how will it survive in this era of- that vegetarian monster, Hindi?"^{80}

Deven finally reaches to the house of Nur. Frustrated by physical debility and deterioration in his poetic ability, Nur behaves roughly to Deven in his first meeting. When he comes to know about him as a lecturer in Hindi, he scolds Deven for coming to him. He is jealous of the existence of Hindi in India and his arguments against it become symbolic of his sectarian approach as a literary artist. He questions Deven: “how can there be Urdu poetry when there is no Urdu language left?”^{81} Nur refuses him to give his interview. He accuses the government of its partial approach towards the Urdu language. He chargès the Congress party for the deterioration of Urdu as a language:

Those congress wallahs have set up Hindi on top as our ruler. You are its slave. Perhaps a spy even if you don’t
know it, sent to the universities to destroy whatever remains of Urdu, hunt it out and kill it. And you tell me it is for an Urdu Magazine you wish to interview me. If so, why are you teaching Hindi?\textsuperscript{82}

As egoist Nur has another attitude towards the language and he gives no credit to academics for the well being of the language. He is full of disgust with the universities that he calls them graveyards of the language. He outbursts at a gathering of young poets who are reciting their poems at Nur’s house:

Cowards-babies ... you recite verse as if they were nursery rhymes your mother had composed.... We need the roar of lions, or the boom of cannon, so that we can march upon these Hindi-Wallahs and make them run. Let them see the power of Urdu, He thundered. They think it is chained and tamed in the dusty yards of those cemeteries that they call universities, but can’t we show them that it can still let out a roar or a boom?.... Yes, let Urdu issue from any orifice as long as it drives them away. But make its presence felt, he thundered thumping down his glass on his knee so that the liquor flew from it.\textsuperscript{83}

These lines reveal Nur’s frustration in his speech “use your powers for the purpose of - attack and vengeance!” he suggests to use weapon of “metaphor and alliteration.” According to him, he lives here “as hijras, as eunuchs.”\textsuperscript{84} Anita Desai perceptually observes the language issue has vitiated the mind of the intelligent evoking from it stereo type responses and
argument. Such debates are incondusive; they arise from egoistic feeling and controversies are described as here under:

There was the Indian camp and the Pakistan camp, the pure –Persian camp and the demotic Hindustani camp. They quarreled and mocked and taunted and lost their tempers, but as if acting assigned roles. There was no evidence of any one persecuting anyone else or of winning anyone over to his side through argument of persuasion.65

Nur is egoist and contemptuous of Hindi. He is not ready to give his interview to Deven as Hindi lecturer. So he taunts Deven and asks him to forget about Urdu literature and his poetry and go back to his college and “... teach your students the stories of Prem Chand, the poems of Pant and Nirala. ... Have you heard Sri Gobind’s latest poem cycle? He bawled... it would win the Sahitya Academy award for Hindi this year. For Urdu we can of course expect the same verdict as usual: “no book was judged worthy of the award this year. Why such treatment for Urdu...”66 Nur is jealous about Hindi. He says that Urdu is wrapped in a shroud. But the field of Hindi is green and flourishing. According to Nur, Urdu died in 1947 when the country became independent. Language is politicized and this comes in the form of communal riots.

In Journey To Ithaca Sophie follows Motteo to India. The egoism of Sophie does not allow her to conceding the ill treatment. She mated out in the various ashrams. She feels suffocated in Ashram. Her egoism leads her to see only drawbacks in the inhabitants of Ashram. The characters of Desai develop differences between husband and wife and with other persons.
As a true disciple of the mother, Matteo gets the assignment of writing her letters. Sophie with her womanly sentiments becomes jealous of the mother because of her too much involvement with her husband. Sophie, thus, feels herself isolated and bored. In her loneliness, she is fond of listening to pop-music, but she has the only one cassette of pop music with her. She thinks of the mother as “a monster spider who had spun this web to catch these silly flies.”\(^87\) Sophie is not ready to accept mother as a saint. She always exhibits the excess of rationalism in her human relationship. Disagreeing with Matteo, she asserts that “She may be your mother but I don’t need this one.”\(^88\) Her inquisitiveness to know all about the past of the mother leads her to discover her arrival in India as a dancer, “looking for a rich somebody to pick up for her.”\(^89\) It so happens that after the birth of her first child Giacoma, Sophie is pregnant again. Like Maya and Sita, Sophie also becomes rebellious against the forced decision of her husband. Being afraid of the future of her two children, she dislikes to make them barbarian here in India. So she, with the anxieties of a mother, leaves the company of her husband as an ashramite and comes back to Italy to her parents. Even the very mention of Matteo’s name disturbs her and she feels shattered for her future existence:

Matteo the thought of him made her turn face to the grass and burrow into it to stop herself moaning aloud, it hurt so shocking. He had been the cause of pain all the years in India, and she believed to remove him would be to remove the pain. Now, it seemed one half was ripped from her side, and she pressed her hand where it hurt so fiercely; it felt like a wound, a flow of blood.\(^90\)
She still feels the absence of Matteo but she tries to fill this absence in the company of another gentleman, Paolo, whom she meets in a party with Matteo’s sister, Caroline, in Italy. Anita Desai has structured a wonderful bond of relationship between husband and wife; when Sophie gets a letter of Matteo, she immediately rushes to him for nursing him in his illness in India:

She might have put India behind her completely, but when the telegram arrived to say Matteo had been taken to the hospital; she grasped the news and reacted to it with such swiftness that it was clear her mind had been with Matteo all this time, her senses alert to receive any message from him. Now, she packed her bag, bought her ticket and left with such speed it seemed nothing mattered to her but to be with him.91

Sophie is still jealous of the existence of the mother and aims at finding the truth of her past life. She determines to break the spell of relationship between Matteo and the mother. She inquires of the mother from the doctor and he narrates her entire story—how she becomes the mother from Laila, the dancer. She does not find her husband in the ashram after the death of mother. She does not think of her childrens and parents. Now, Sophie undergoes a metamorphosis of character:

Sophie is lying as still as a stone, with an arm across her eyes, thinking in the dark of that first pilgrimage she went on India that had ended in the death of a child. Now, she knows why the mother went on that pilgrimage. Why any one goes on pilgrimage, and why
she must go too. She says in a flat voice, “I’ll have to and adds ‘what else’? 92

Interestingly, Anita Desai invariably paints her female characters with a peculiar mould of behaviour and sensibility. They revolt against the monotony and stereotype everyday life, rejecting the sordidness, the brutality and the sheer dreariness of the physical world. In the process, they might destroy themselves but refuse to surrender their own vision of life.
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