CHAPTER IV
Man-Woman Relationship

The fourth chapter of my thesis is “Man-Woman Relationship” that has been an interesting and important but challenging topic for the Indian women writers. It is an attempt to throw light on Anita Desai’s writing and thinking about man-woman relationship. There is no doubt that she has written a lot on this very topic. She depicts the problems of the conjugal life through her characters. It seems that among Anita Desai’s aims one aim is to depict the loosening bond of husband-wife relationship. D.H. Lawrence says,

The great 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. ¹

There have been many women writers besides Anita Desai but we can see that those writers like Nayantara Sehgal, Kamala Markandaya etc. have not such kind of feminine sensibility and they have not depicted the man-woman relationship in such a striking manner. The theme of man-woman relationship is an interesting theme for Mrs. Desai. Her earlier novels are based on this theme and she has depicted the predicament of women in this modern but male-dominated society and their destruction when they reach at the altar of marriage. While studying her novels, we notice the development of her attitude towards man-woman relationship. The main difference between Anita Desai and other women writers is that only in Anita Desai’s writings we find the existential
perspective on the theme of individual and society. Thus, many women novelists have touched the theme of man-woman relationship but the way Anita Desai does it is really particular and distinguished.

Anita Desai’s women protagonists have been portrayed in their relation with their husbands artistically. They are not pleased in their lives with their husbands. Their basic problem is that they face the lack of communication. In other words, the men have not enough time to share their wives’ problems. Sometimes they forget that their wives are not only characters from pious treatise but are real persons of flesh and blood. Consequently, they ignore their dreams and desires and don’t give proper importance to their emotions and feelings.

Not only is the man himself different, but as often happens in the society of changing values, his family ways, his surroundings to which she is expected to adjust herself are entirely different. The result is that there is a gradual erosion of marital relationship and for a woman, marriage comes to symbolize nullification of everything she has come to cherish. ²

Anita Desai’s various novels show that most of the marriages become the unions of incompatibility. It is true that men are rational and practical while women are emotional and sentimental. Therefore, the thinking, interest and attitude are not similar. This is why they look at the things in different ways, think differently and even react differently to the same problems in same circumstances. This creates erosion of marital relationship that is evident in most of Mrs. Desai’s novels.
Lack of communication between husband and wife is caused by the compatibility of temperament between them. The result or effect of this dissimilarity in thinking and attitudes is the marital relationship that is dissatisfactory. In her six novels, we come to know about such kind of dissatisfactory marital relationships and their ends.

The prominent theme in Anita Desai’s novels is the complexity of man-woman relationship. She has discussed the complexity of other human relationships also but her method of dealing the theme of man-woman relationship is very attention-grabbing. Her women characters are sensitive women with refined sensibilities. On the other hand, her male protagonists are logical with practical values. A sense of alienation and frustration originates due to this temperamental incompatibility. This makes the women disgruntled and starving emotionally. A gap is originated between them and the women have to endure this gap deeply. They lack mutual understanding that gives the women pain and mental tension.

Desai’s forte in her handling of maladjusted marriages- Maya, Monisha, Sita, Tara are all women of deep emotions and fine sensitivities who entrapped in marriages with men who are never out rightly cruel, who carry out their husbandly obligations assiduously but are impervious to their wives’ pleas for understanding, communication and respect for their individuality.  

Yes, Anita Desai’s women starve to be loved and understood but their husbands have not enough time so that they may understand their feelings.
Studying her novels and her women characters closely, we notice that their husbands neglect pleas of women for understanding, communication, love and respect and don’t fulfill their demands. Some writers have blamed only men for the disharmonious man-woman relationship but the fact is that not only males but also some social factors are responsible for the deteriorating man-woman relationship.

Anita Desai’s fiction is related with changing state of man-woman relationship. Man and woman are two questing individuals who may live in a mutual companionship on emotional understanding. Unless they trust each other and they are attached emotionally, their relationship will not be continued. There is no doubt that the role of husband-wife is the chief component in family context. Though all the relations keep their own importance, the importance of man-woman relationship is incomparable. The real need or importance of this relationship with all above facts has been depicted in Mrs. Desai’s novels. Through her many couples, she has thrown light on deteriorating condition of man-woman relationship, the roles of husband and wife and the ill effect of this situation.

Husband-wife alienation in the novels of Anita Desai is the outcome of the hypersensitive nature of her women and their inability to establish a point of contact with their partners. Her protagonists suffer intensely because of their futile attempt to find emotional contact, response and understanding.⁴
In this way, Anita Desai has focused on different aspects of man-woman relationship in varying circumstances. She has imagined how an ideal man-woman relationship should be, but depicted how it is in present-age. The faults in this relationship make the individual perplexed and their lives difficult. She has also depicted the causes of this unsuccessful relationship and ill effects of it. To understand the various aspects of man-woman relationship, we need to discuss the characters individually.

First of all, Maya, the woman protagonist of Anita Desai’s first novel “Cry, the Peacock” is a frustrated woman whose frustration is mainly due to her loveless marriage.

Her first novel *Cry, the Peacock* is about Maya’s cries for love and understanding in her loveless marriage with Gautama; the peacock’s cry is symbolic of Maya’s agonized cry for love and life of involvement. 5

Maya is a sensitive woman who takes interest in worldly pleasures while Gautama is a famous and successful lawyer who has want of time to share his wife’s feelings. One other reason of his detachment from Maya is that he is too much older than Maya and has no interest in sensual pleasures. He doesn’t even reach the expectation of Maya as they are too high for him. She wants to be loved and understood but Gautama seems to ignore her inner self. With it, we can’t pass over Gautama’s caring ways. Gautama takes care of her and tries to understand her problems but he understands them outwardly. The inner world of Maya in which she wants to fulfill her dreams, is left unobserved by Gautama but he tries to soothe her in his own ways.
Maya starves for her husband’s companionship. She spends sleepless nights without this companionship.

The thought whichever more impresses her is that companionship is a necessity. He makes no attempt to take any interest in things which attracts her. She pines to satisfy her physical starvation and when it is not satisfied, what has she to do? She would lie awake the whole night suppressed by the starvation, she felt not merely for Gautama but for all that life represented. She began to look upon her relationship with Gautama as a relationship with death.  

Maya expects both emotional and physical satisfaction in her married life but they are denied to her by Gautama. His cold intellectuality and busy routine are responsible denial of her emotional satisfaction while Maya’s physical satisfaction is denied to her due to Gautama’s old age. He is a normal man and takes interest in his profession of an advocate. He is too practical to allot his time for expressing his love but it doesn’t mean that he doesn’t love her or doesn’t take care of her. He wants to understand her problem and to solve it but he is unable to do so. Maya has never told him about albino astrologer’s prophecy that is her main fear and problem.

Her heart craves for love and understanding, solace and support from her husband. Gautama tries to lay his finger on the exact problem that bothers her but Maya is too secretive to allow him to learn the cause.  

Since his words are true, we can say that Gautama is not very bad for Maya. Actually, he makes attempt to understand her problem, wants to keep her
content and tries to console her on her pet dog Toto’s death but he doesn’t succeed in doing so. The main reason is that Maya doesn’t involve him in her problems. On one hand, she wants to be understood but on other hand, she never tells her husband about her problem and albino astrologer’s prophecy. Instead of doing so, she blames her husband of all her sorrow, loneliness and frustration. She needs Gautama’s concern for both her willing body and lonely mind but unfortunately, he is not bothered about any of them. But it can’t be ignored that he tries to help her avoid worrying and to solve her problems.

Gautama is ignorant of Maya’s mind, and the main cause for maladjustment of their married life is lack of communication. They converse without communicating. It is doubtless that Maya’s longings for love and companionship are neglected by her husband. Although sometimes Gautama tries to bridge, he doesn’t get success. He is unable to give her physical and emotional attachment. In spite of Gautama’s effort to sooth Maya, she suffers from loneliness, alienation, frustration and dissatisfaction.

Because of terrible communication gap between them, they seem to be living in separate worlds. Maya struggles to relate Gautama but their marriage becomes a cage in which Maya’s desires are defeated by Gautama’s philosophy. When Maya becomes upset and ruffled on her dog’s death, Gautama tries to divert her from pain consciously. It is other thing that she is not helped by him at all.

Though Gautama is a faithful husband who takes care of Maya and loves her in his own way, Maya is never satisfied and happy. She feels that
Gautama never cares for her and does not have any feelings for her. The novel gives us an impression of the marital incompatibility and unhappy conjugal life. 8

Throughout the novel there are many examples that show that Gautama neglects Maya’s emotional yearning. Although they live together, Gautama knows very little about her. Maya feels that Gautama ignores her. She thinks that he can never understand her and never respond to her love for him. At last we see that she prefers her love for life to that for Gautama but it seems that marital disharmony is also responsible for it.

Maya is a young wife who is left alone for the whole day and gets ignorance from her husband Gautama even in the evening. He doesn’t understand Maya’s love and need for him. Hypersensitive and affectionate wife Maya never appears happy with her distant and cool husband. In the novel Maya says,

In his world there were vast areas in which he would never permit me and he couldn’t understand that I could even wish to enter them, foreign as they were to me. 9

These words express that although they are physically together, they are emotionally far apart.

After all Gautama has been a dutiful provider and in his own way, loves Maya even though he is exasperated with her childish tantrums. Maya’s volatile temperament defeats the very purpose of her all-consuming love and her heart is crushed with depression. 10
In brief, Maya, a hypersensitive woman who wants to be loved and understood, is not satisfied with her cool and practical husband. She craves for mental and physical satisfaction. Gautama, a successful lawyer has no time to spend with Maya and to share her feelings. And secondly, he is too much older to her and doesn’t believe in worldly pleasures. Where Maya appears eager to be closed and attached to Gautama, he preaches and talks about “Bhagvatgeeta” and behaves in a detached manner. It doesn’t mean that Gautama doesn’t care about her. Yes, he loves her and takes care of her but he does it in his own way. He is unknown to her main problem and concern and has no time to know anything about her. Therefore, Maya begins to think that he doesn’t love her and can never give any response to her love for him.

Monisha, woman protagonist of Voices in the City is also a victim of loveless marriage. Her husband Jiban is not very busy in his profession but he is a typical middle class male who exhibits independence and maturity in his role in the family dynamics. Like Maya, she also seeks the relationship of understanding and depth with her husband. Monisha is a convent-educated woman but unluckily her husband has a tradition-bound family. He gives her nothing—neither true companionship nor freedom to live in her own way. As the relationship between her and Jiban lacks compassion and understanding, it has been remarked by—

Loneliness and a desperate urge to succeed, _ _ _ the most calamitous pleasures and pains, fears and regrets _ _ _ .

In her behavioral pattern, Jiban is a representative of rational, logical and practical males who prefer success to anything else. Jiban also seems to be
devotee of success who has no time for his troubled wife who waits for
affirmation and admiration from her husband. Jiban neither gives her hope nor
reaches to her expectations. It is authentic that loneliness and lack of
understanding are main characters of their relationship. Once she is condemned
as thief by her parents-in-law and is not favoured but accused by her husband.
This suggests that her husband Jiban doesn’t take care of her. Her in-laws suspect
on her and he always takes their side. Thus, he doesn’t understand her feelings,
her sorrows and her lack of freedom because of his business in other matters.

A strange figure of conjugal life has also been presented in this novel
through Monisha’s parents whose marriage is portrayed as convenient and
comfort. While her father prides him on his family’s name and fame, her mother
does on her house and tea estate. Therefore, they show soul-destroying contempt
and fury towards each other.

Anita Desai in ‘Voices in the City’ has depicted feminine sensibility
mainly through the delineation of man-woman relationship. Firstly, the
novel presents an eccentric and inconsistent figure of a conjugal life
through Nirode’s parents. Monisha and Jiban signify the most usual
and painful instance of conjugal conflict.  

It is doubtless that Monisha leads a sorrowful and dissatisfied life. He has
never noticed her grief, alienation and frustration of her life. No instance is seen
in the novel which shows that he takes care of his wife. Her in-laws trouble her
and her sterility also upsets her badly but we observe that her husband never
soothes her. He seems to have no intimacy with his wife. Jiban is different from
Gautama and Raman who love their wives in their own way but Jiban never takes care of her neither mentally nor physically. Jiban's ignorance is so hard that when it becomes intolerable, she commits suicide. If Jiban had understood his wife's problems and inner predicament, he could have avoided her destruction.

Monisha's situation represents not only her individual situation but also the situation of so many daughters-in-law who become jailbirds in houses of their husbands. Even husbands fail to understand and communicate with them because of their father's or mother's domination.13

In this way the marriage of Monisha and Jiban is unsuccessful and maladjusted that ends with her suicide. Not only her circumstances but also the attitude of her husband is opposite to her expectations. This is why she has always suffered because of her relationship with her husband and even committed suicide as a consequence of it.

The couple of Adit and Sarah is next one to be studied who are the protagonists of Bye-Bye, Blackbird. Sarah has been passing through an identity crisis because of her marriage with an Indian so, isn't it a responsibility of Adit to understand her or to inspire confidence in her? Though Sarah loves him too much and performs all the duties well, Adit never cares to help her overcome her conflict in which she has become ruffled to take some decision. But it seems that nothing is in her hands and she has to accept whatever her husband Adit decides.

As a husband, Adit fails to inspire any courage, confidence in Sarah for judgment and discrimination. There is hardly any evidence in the novel
which could suggest understanding, profundity and reciprocation in Adit-Sarah marital equation.  

It is certain that their marriage is based on love and even now they love each other. Sarah’s love is seen in all her acts, her performing duties and in bearing all the insults she gets from her surrounding. But Adit never shows any sign of love for his wife. Although she has to undergo a mental conflict or turmoil, her sincerity in her relationship with Adit can’t be described. She is deeply so attached to Adit that no other relationship is more significant for her than that to her husband. But Adit seems to be ignorant of her needs and her suffering. He even doesn’t enquire about her problems and mental state. His attitude towards his wife shows the typical conventional attitude of the Indian male to his wife. It is suggested by his words,

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

Sarah honours her marital commitment and feels satisfaction in her married life. On the other hand, Adit doesn’t take care of her. He takes his decision without discussing her and thinking about her.

Anita Desai’s next novel *Bye-Bye, Blackbird* appears to be an authentic study of man-woman relationships abused by cultural clashes. Of all the novels of Mrs. Desai this one is mostly concerned to her own experiences.
Mrs. Desai’s has deeply and objectively studied Indian married couples. She has fearlessly commented on the marital disharmonies existing in the lives of Indian married couples. Adit’s typical retort to Dev sums up Mrs. Desai’s point of view about Indian married couples, *The married couples in India are not found in parks, they are at home quarrelling.*

Sarah dies a spiritual death that has never been understood by her husband. Not only through Sarah and Adit but also through some other couples, Mrs. Desai has presented that marriage is a farce at best and at worst, it is a malignancy that destroys the persons completely. Firstly, Jit Nair and Sarla have feelings of distrust and disgust for each other. Mr. Basu considers Mrs. Basu as an attractive plaything. Arun’s wife has nothing common with him. Dharma confesses that married relationships are never straightforward and made to order. Sony’s father admits Babulpur a place for her wife and for his occasional visit. Little professor Bose trots to his wife. These illustrations suggest Mrs. Desai’s point of view on man-woman relationship.

Although Sarah endures suffering and mental torture, she never complains against her husband and due to her love, she does not even hesitate to leave her motherland. She does all this for her husband who never makes a single attempt to solve his wife’s problem, to understand her mental predicament and to inspire courage in her.

The marriage of Raman and Sita, protagonists of “Where Shall We Go This Summer?” also seems to be maladjusted and unsuccessful. Like Gautama, Sita’s husband is unable to understand her passion. Where Sita is sensitive and
irrational, Raman is passive and rational. Raman is a successful businessman lacking the time to be with his wife. Even after five children, they lack marital harmony and adjustment.

The conflict between two polarized temperaments and two discordant view-points represented by Sita and Raman, sets up marital discord and conjugal misunderstanding as the leit-motif of Desai’s novels.¹⁸

In the novel, we come to know about the incident of crows attacking on an eagle. Though it is a trivial incident, it is an objective or relative to Sita’s estrangement from her husband. Sita is dissatisfied with her husband. The lack of feeling in him ruffles her. Her main problem is because of her maladjustment with her husband. She is a middle-aged woman who has always dreamt of getting love and affection from her husband but unfortunately it seems that her dreams end in nightmare. Raman always ignores her instincts and feelings. She wants him to treat her in tender and loving way but he is so practical that he can’t do so. Raman is a creature of society and an extrovert while Sita is a pessimist and an introvert. She seems to hate Raman due to lack of feeling and understanding in him.

Mrs. Desai has touched one other man-woman relationship through Sita’s parents. Their relationship seems to be that of alienation from each other. Her mother leaves or deserts her father when she goes to Benaras and never comes back. Not only her mother but also her father lead a strange life. His character can’t be understood as he is a saint to his disciples and a wizard to the villagers but his relationship with women is mysterious. He has an affair with a mistress.
His relationship with Sita’s stepsister Rekha seems to be affected by Electra complex. Through Sita’s parents, Mrs. Desai has depicted a different aspect of man-woman relationship.

In Sita’s case not only Raman but also Sita is partly responsible for their maladjustment in their married life. On one hand, a critic has written

Raman fails to comprehend his wife’s emotional outbursts and dissatisfaction at the world around her. Raman is totally inadequate to comprehend the significance behind Sita’s reactivity to situations which appear trivial to him. 19

On the other hand, another says,

Like Maya and Monisha, Sita seeks free and unquestioning love, love that transcends the self. But what these women do not realize is that their longing for such a love is itself self-seeking and not self-sacrificing. 20

Thus, the whole blame of unsuccessful marriage can’t be laid on one of them as Sita expects too much from her husband while he can’t spend a little time to be according to her expectations. He never ignores her intentionally but lack of time and practicality of his character make him do so.

Sita goes to Manori Island to achieve a miracle of keeping her child unborn. As she is obsessed with a loveless marriage, this act of hers symbolizes that she has no desire to continue the bond between her and Raman. She believes with difficulty that although her husband has been living with her for a long time, he doesn’t know that she has always felt boredom all through her life. Since this is the basic fact of her life, she thinks that her husband doesn’t know or
understand her completely. He is unable to comprehend her boredom and the chasm between them widens and widens. It is true that Raman and Sita make a loveless alienated couple.

The only moment of happiness in Sita’s life is when she has seen an old man caressing a sick and meek young woman in a park. When she tells Raman about it, he thinks her to be crazy. But reality is that she always desires for mysterious love-fulfillment. She seeks a communion in which not only body but also soul and mind unite or mingle completely. It is an unfortunate thing that she longs for an idealized love from her husband who is very practical and busy person.

The greatest problem of Sita is her sense of alienation from her husband. Raman and Sita behave as if they belong to two different worlds. Sita becomes too much disturbed to see the scene of eagle attacked by the crows but Raman doesn’t give it any importance. We can’t ignore that Raman takes care of her physically. Yes, he is not aware of her inner predicament or doesn’t understand her mental perplexity but he takes care of her physically. Whenever she is ill or looks upset, he enquires about her illness or cause of depression. As he is busy in his own affairs, he doesn’t understand her boredom. Therefore, he is not totally responsible for their unsuccessful marriage.

The communication gap is ruinous for the institution of marriage. As a result of this gap, the couples suffer from the private torment of broken marriages. They share the house, but there is no communication of spirits.
They live under the same roof yet experience emptiness, loneliness and alienation. 21

These words seem to be factual in the case of Sita and Raman. The communication gap is seen between them. They differ in their attitudes and opinions. But if they understand each other, they can avoid the problem of maladjustment with each other. Over all, Raman is not a bad husband and he never teases his wife. Actually in his own way, he is worried about her. He wants to solve her problems but the basic reason of her problem is unknown to him. He has never understood the boredom of his wife’s life. He has always thought her to be happy and satisfied while she has been bored and frustrated in her life. When Sita escapes to Manori Island, Raman goes after sometime to take her back. Although he tells the reason of his arrival differently, he wants to take his wife back to their house. This shows that he outwardly takes care of her but inwardly he doesn’t understand her feelings.

In this way, the relationship between Sita and Raman is also like that between Maya and Gautama. Raman has never ignored her but she feels ignored and unwanted. Raman loves her and takes care of her but unfortunately, he doesn’t understand her boredom, her feelings and her inner predicament, and so she thinks that he ignores her. She thinks that he doesn’t understand and doesn’t response to her love for him but actually she has never recognized or known his love. The basic problem is that he has failed to understand the inner world of Sita.

Nanda Kaul, woman protagonist of Fire on the Mountain keeps her relationship with her husband till the end in spite of his faithlessness. Yes, her
husband, vice-chancellor of Punjab University has kept a life-long affair with Miss David, the mathematics mistress who was a Christian. In spite of Nanda Kaul’s knowledge about it, she maintains her relationship with her husband pretending everyone to be unknown to this fact as she seems to have no other option. This doesn’t mean that she is satisfied in her life. In reality, her own children are alienated to her perhaps because they remind her of her husband whom she wants to forget while living alone in Carignano.

Her husband did not love her as a wife; he treated her as some decorative yet useful mechanical appliance needed for the efficient running of his household. She played the gracious hostess all the time and enjoyed the comforts and social status of the wife of a dignitary. But she felt lonely and neglected. Her husband carried on a life-long affair with Miss David, the Mathematics mistress. 22

There is no doubt that Nanda Kaul has been only his need for his house whom he has married only to hide his guilt and cover his long-life relationship with Miss David. Nanda Kaul has performed all her duties well and physically, she has always been with Mr. Kaul but mentally she remains distant aloof. Her life is deprived of her husband’s true love. Although he used his wife as a weapon to make his social status high all through his life, Mrs. Kaul has always got his rejection. How does her mental predicament matter when her physical state is not understood by her husband? Actually he has given her that much by which she has been kept quite.
She is however, waiting, always waiting with a singular, burning, soul-destroying hatred for her husband to cease living, for the blessed widowhood, the exquisite solitude without man and children around. 23. His words may be considered as affected by hyperbole but it is certain that she hates her husband badly. Certainly, her marriage with Mr. Kaul was based on convenience, comfort and physical lust for him. As she has bitter experiences of her married life, she now rejoices and enjoys her loveless and secluded life. In fact, she has always been troubled and tormented by her husband’s faithlessness although she has been quite and dutiful.

In this very novel, Mrs. Desai has depicted different but general aspects of man-woman relationship not only through Nanda Kaul and her husband but also through some other couples. Tara, Nanda Kaul’s granddaughter has to suffer nervous breakdown and its basic reason is marital discord. Her married life has been so terrible that she becomes neurotic. Her husband is a drunkard by whom she is given regular beating and abuses. From a man who beats his wife brutally, no other good thing can be expected.

Two other married couples present a picture of maladjusted and completely confused married lives. These couples lived in Carignano earlier before Nanda Kabul, and their married life can’t be comprehended as completely unsuccessful married lives. Nanda’s friend Ila Das has never married because of her stray brothers.

In Fire on the Mountain, Nanda Kaul’s husband is the cause of her present aridity and selfishness, while Ila Das’s good-for-nothing brothers are the
cause of her negated womanhood or even motherhood, since she could never marry. ²⁴

Thus, Nanda Kaul has always been quite and performed all her duties well while her husband Mr. Kaul has a life-long affair with Mrs. David and has never loved and taken care of her but always kept her silent. Their relationship is only a relationship of comfort and convenience for Mr. Kaul.

In Anita Desai’s subsequent novel *Clear Light of Day*, she does not write about the tension between husband and wife but about that between a brother and sister. It is just a coincident, for tension is tension whether it exists between brother and sister or husband and wife and there can be only one way of resolving it. ²⁵

Yes, the basic tension in this novel is between Bimla and her brother Raja. Actually there is only misunderstanding between them that can’t be cleared. As we can glimpse that Bimla loves all her family especially her brother Raja very much while he leaves his house and gets married with a Muslim girl. It is his personal life that doesn’t mean that he doesn’t take care of his sister. He writes a letter to Bimla, shows his concern and tries to do something for her in his own way but Bimla misunderstands it and takes it as her insult and this gives her so much sorrow. Such is the relationship between a brother and sister and it is a fresh addition in the treatment of man-woman relationship by Mrs. Desai.

She has also taken a married couple in her novel. It is of Tara and Bakul whose conjugal life can be compared with that of Maya and Gautama. But frankly speaking, Tara’s wedded life is not so disturbed as that of Maya. Since
Tara is more mature than Maya and Bakul is not deprived of emotions as Gautama, their marital clash is limited.

Love was not at all the point of deliberation in their married life. Both of them concede their marital life as a form of biological need, no more, no less. Mrs. Desai has portrayed it as an astonishingly practical and peaceful marriage. But it declined its own purpose. Tara’s spiritual vacuum haunted her, being a helpmate of a diplomat, she played it adroitly with diplomacy and practical scheme. 26

It is doubtless that their marriage is a marriage of comfort and convenience for both of them. While Bakul who is a junior diplomat wants a young wife, Tara desires to escape from her gloomy house. Now love has not been the base of their married life. Instead they consider their married life as a form of Biological need, no more and no less.

Aunt Mira’s married life is a real portrayal of a social taboo due to which she transforms into a disordered alcoholic woman. Bimla’s neighbours Jaya and Sarla who have been called “Mishra daughters” in the novel belong to “once married” category. These ill-fated girls have got married but they are used and thrown away as useless things. Bimla’s brother Raja has married a Muslim girl Benazir more for her property than for any other reason. Through these characters Mrs. Desai has shown the ugly face of marriage artistically. Anita Desai writes in the novel,

He even came close to her and touched her cheek, very lightly, as if he could hardly bear the unpleasant contact but forced himself to do it out of
compassion……. She 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 show could only collapse, inevitable collapse.  

These words suggest that both Tara and Bakul feel bitterness for each other although they pretend to be loving and satisfied. Bakul takes care of her in his own way but Tara feels emptiness in her life. Bakul has given her a very good life and changed her living style positively but Tara is not fully satisfied with him. Some instances in the novel show that their marital disharmony touches the same nerve-point as that of Maya and Gautama.

The marital dissonance between Deven and Sarla, the protagonists of In Custody can’t be ignored. Actually like most of young girls, Sarla has always dreamt of a rich life full of luxury. But after her marriage when she has to face the realities of life as she has got married to a middle class professor of a small college, her dreams are scattered. This is why although she doesn’t say anything; a quite rage is always in her mind. In the novel Mrs. Desai writes,

She looks like a picture of an abandoned wife.  

Through this statement, Deven shows his disliking for his wife, Sarla. It seems that there has been a conflict between them. The problems and mental condition of both of them were unknown to each other as they have no mutual communication. When Deven returns from Delhi after two days after Nur’s interview, Sarla thinks otherwise. She has some misunderstanding but she doesn’t
discuss him about it. These kinds of things create a gap between them. She is angry but keeps silence. This silent rage makes Sarla feel aged.

Sarla wanted Deven to be the custodian of her family. But, unfortunately, he pays a little care to his marital life. 29

It is certain that he loves his family but due to his low salary and attempts to get fame and money keep him away from his family. Most of his time is spent out of his house and this makes his wife upset who has so many expectations from her husband. He wants to take care of her but becomes helpless due to his circumstances and dreams and finds it unable to spend time with Sarla sharing her problems. On other hand, she wants him perform all his duties well and be custodian of her family. This weakens their relationship.

In *Fasting, Feasting*, we come to know about a totally unsuccessful marriage in which the married life ends before it begins. Yes, it is Uma who gets married to a man but soon after her marriage, she comes to know that her husband has already his own family- a wife and children also, and he has married again only for money. This is really a very big cheat in marriage that destroys Uma’s life completely.

In this very novel, Mrs. Desai has shown one other woman who becomes the victim at the altar of marriage. She is Uma’s cousin Anamika who is a very talented and intelligent girl. She has got a proposal to study in abroad but unfortunately she doesn’t get permission from her family to go abroad for further studies, and that proposal is used to get an able bridegroom for her. She gets married in a joint family and after some time she is burnt alive by her husband
and his family. No question of love and care arises when she is not even permitted to live alive in this world and murdered by the man whom she has thought her saviour.

In this way, most of Anita Desai’s novels present different aspects of man-woman relationship. Not only in one but also in most of her novels, it is seen that while the females are ready to do everything for their husbands, the males don’t reach their expectations. They don’t understand their wives and ultimately and indirectly, they hurt them mentally and sometimes physically also.

While Maya in *Cry the Peacock*, Monisha in *Voices in the City*, Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, and Nanda Kaul in *Fire on the Mountain* suffer on account of marital dissonance in a man-dominated world, Sarla in *In Custody* finds her satisfaction under the care and guidance of her husband Deven. 30

While women of Anita Desai’s novels are eager to get their husbands’ love and mutual understanding, they behave in a different manner and sometimes begin to preach them. In some of her couples the relationship between man and woman seems to be that between master and slave. Man keeps relationship with his wife as it is essential. In most of the Indian families women are not respected, and if they are conscious of their emotional needs, they strive for self-fulfillment. The relationship between a man and woman is unsatisfactory and incomplete in her novels, and its main reason seems to be the communication-gap between them. Sometimes we perceive that the opinions, interests and attitudes of husband and wife vary. Not only this is fact but also man’s society, family and
surroundings may be different from that of woman. The woman is expected to adjust in her new house after her marriage. As it has been shown in Mrs. Desai’s novels that when a husband doesn’t support his wife, it becomes very difficult for her to adjust in the new atmosphere. This creates a gradual erosion of marital relationship.

The husband fails to realize that his wife is no character from some pious and conventional treatise, but a real individual of flesh and blood; he takes for granted her fidelity to the strict regimen she assumes, not taking into account that she has temptation to vanquish, that she may yield to them, that in any case her patience, her chastity, her propriety are difficult conquests; he is still more profoundly ignorant of her dreams, her fancies, her nostalgic yearnings of the emotional climate in which she spends her days. 31

This fact of Indian society has been touched by the author Mrs. Desai in almost all of her novels. It is doubtless that Mrs. Desai has presented the marital disharmony in Indian life very artistically. Where woman is ready to adjust in every possible way, her husband’s attitude is always rude. Mrs. Desai suggests that the only fault of woman is her expectation of love and understanding from her husband that is never fulfilled by him.

In Mrs. Desai’s novels women appear to be pleading for a marital relationship based on mutual trust, understanding and love. They don’t want their pretence and selfishness in their relationship with their husbands. But when they don’t get whatever they want, they become upset and silent. And this silence
makes their relationship worse and worse. In other words, when her women fail to build up a relationship based on companionship, equality and understanding with their husbands, man-woman alienation originates among them.

Husband-wife alienation in the novels of Anita Desai is the outcome of the hypersensitive nature of her women and their inability to establish a point of contact with their partners. Her protagonists suffer intensely because of their futile attempt to find emotional contact, response and understanding. 32

The alienation of husband-wife relationship is the outcome of communication gap between man and woman. This gap almost always proves to be ruinous for this relationship. Consequently, the couple, especially wife suffers from private torment and mental agony as their marriage comes to almost breaking point. They live under the same roof but unfortunately the woman experiences loneliness and emptiness. Mrs. Desai in almost all of her novels has presented the conflict through which the married couples of present age are passing. Her women characters seem to be emotional beggars who emotionally depend on their husbands asking for love and understanding from them. The way in which their husbands love them and take care of them, is not understood by them and instead of trying to be satisfied, they think negatively and their married life worsens and worsens.

Through Mrs. Desai’s novels, it seems that mutual companionship or emotional understanding is almost absent in the present life. And if it is somewhere, it is based on pretence and selfishness. The trust between man and
woman is only nominative. Although Anita Desai has dealt with other family relations also with high seriousness, her presentation of man-woman relationship is really praiseworthy.

The most recurrent themes in all her novels are *the hazards and complexities of man-woman relationships, the founding and nurturing of individuality and the establishing of individualism.*

It is certainly true that Mrs. Desai has presented the complexities and different aspects of man-woman relationship through her several characters. Some of her women protagonists become perplexed as their husbands have no time to share their problems. Maya of *Cry, the Peacock* and Sita of *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* are not satisfied as they can’t spend their time with their husbands. Although such kind of men loves their wives and take care of them in their own manner, unfortunately their wives don’t understand their feelings. Most of the men are practical and logical. They physically take care of their wives but unluckily they fail to understand the inner world or mental condition of their wives, and this gives them a feeling that their husbands want to keep only physical relationship with them and don’t want any kind of mental attachment. Maya’s case is some different as she strives for physical attachment as well as mental. On other hand, Sita thinks physical contact as an act of animals. Monisha of *Voices in the City* feels alienation in her husband’s house as he is not aware of her hobbies, feelings and perplexion. Some males of Indian society who keep their wives only because it is necessary, are also taken by Mrs. Desai as her protagonists. Mr. Kaul of *Fire on the Mountain* is Nanda Kaul’s husband who has
to keep her in his house only because of social values because he has an affair with Miss David. He has neglected Mrs. Kaul’s dreams and desires all over his life. When man conceals anything from his wife, she misunderstands him, and marital disharmony is born as in Sarla’s case. Sarla of In Custody demands her husband’s protection and when he conceals something from her, she feels too bad.

In each of her novels, we encounter traumatic experiences of married lives. Each novel, maintaining the basic features of marital discord, presents different features of the problem to which Mrs. Desai gives a new dimension and vision. She fearlessly puts forward the fact that in society, marriages generally follow the jungle law of the survival of the fittest. Being physically stronger, man survives. 34

To some extent or in some of her novels, this seems to be true. Her women strive for understanding, love, care and emotional communion but their husbands ignore their needs. On one hand, her women characters try to adjust in every way and to comprehend their husbands’ wills and needs. On other hand, the men neglect them. Sometimes they try to comfort or take care of them but they fail to understand their mental and emotional need. Physically they soothe them but they are unaware of their emotional world. This creates a gap in communication and due to this very gap marital disharmony is born. Thus, we can conclude that not only a single couple of Mrs. Desai is totally satisfied and content in their married life.
Notes and References


