CHAPTER FOUR

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The role of mother is a significant part played by a woman. As an individual with independence and identity and as a woman with expectations and responsibilities from society this role has to be played so meticulously that any generation's sustenance on terms of emotional stability, spiritual growth and cultural heritage persists.

This research project proposes to analyse the role of mother from two angles: the characters taken for analysis as mothers and the influence their mothers had on them. The influence their mothers had on daughters in moulding as mothers is also accounted for and analysed.

The role these women play in order to maintain the integrity of the family honour and pride was not acknowledged or recognised by the men as their fathers, brothers and husbands.

In *Cry, the Peacock* the protagonist Maya remains a wife for four years not being promoted to the next stage as mother. But she retains with her the motherly qualities of sublime nature. Maya's failure to understand her husband was due to her deprivation as a mother. This irreparable schism has led her to tantrums. Understanding her problem was impalpable for others. As is the case with women who do not have children depend on pets so does Maya too depends on a pet. The intensity of her separation from her pet makes her run amok. She is not able to establish any meaningful relationship with anybody. Through four years since her marriage Maya has not only to live but also survive with this unrelenting sorrow. In addition to this the harrowing prediction of the
albino astrologer also eats at her soul inexorably. Despite her vulnerability Maya struggles to bring hope and happiness by sharing her problems with her husband.

As a daughter she did not have any considerable influence from her mother. As Maya’s mother ran away from her husband Maya found no asylum to alleviate her emotional turmoil. Had her brother been with her under constant touch that might have made her find some solace. He too plays a too insignificant part in the development of Maya as a woman. Had he as well shown some traits of responsibility the life of Maya would not have been this or thus ended? In order to play a motherly role a woman needs some kind of an exposure. This had been denied to Maya on different occasions.

There are also other women in this novel who share the same plight like Maya. For example the life of Pom is no better than Maya. Yet Pom leads a stoic life with one aim of helping her ailing husband. Pom is a woman who has seen too much of reality in life. She was able to accommodate all the difficulties in her day-to-day life with ease. For Pom serving her ailing husband was life and all happiness and joy wrapped into it. Such a life was difficult for Maya. The responsibilities demanded of an adult cannot be ignored by Maya. There was none to salvage Maya from her crisis.

Maya’s tragedy is that she cannot live in a vulgar world and with people who do not conform to her values that were actually her father’s meticulousness, beauty, culture, refinement and aestheticism. But ironically she is married to an ordinary day-to-day, non-Brahmin lawyer whose family does not know the simple pleasures of life. Not bothered of the individual’s needs and emotions they talk of big things and national events and even for relaxation they resort to the game of cards. Love for individuals or life does not
and touch. They dreaded this as their son and brother had dreaded passion, as wise men dreaded their flesh (*Cry, the Peacock*, 216-17).

Maya’s marriage was bound to be on the rocks because of their ill match. If she is an ethereal living amongst the stars her husband was too earthly with his cold logic, dispassionate objectivism, philosophy and frequent quotations from the Bhagavatgita. Maya was all the time seeking after an anchor, a refuge but finds none. Maya feels: “There was not one of my friends who could act as an anchor any more, and to whomsoever I turned for reassurance, betrayed me now” (64).

Maya’s mother-in-law is highly active and concerned with many social causes. She is more concerned with social work than the crying need of lonely Maya who asks her to stay for some time with her. There is an unnaturalness in her that is expressed through her voice. If Maya’s voice is soft and lilting hers is, “…a voice at once soft and broken with harshness, so that I could not tell whether she said this out of affection or had some motive far removed from any personal feeling” (47).

Maya’s mother-in-law is the ascetic type born to serve the world with immense energy busy with her many preoccupations always on the go, “…like some rhinoceros charging through the forest to her dispensary or her crèche or her workshop for the blind, the disabled the unemployed” (47).

Her asceticism is symbolised through her meagre meals and dull coloured clothes. Maya says: “In that stark room, I was the only one who wore a saree of a bright colour. The rest wore colours that no one could care about” (49).
exist or matter for them. It is against such odds that Maya has to emanate as a mother with all the virtues and loveable traits of immaculateness.

In Gautama’s family one did not speak of love, far less of affection. One spoke of discussions of parliament, of cases of bribery and corruption revealed in government, of newspaper editors accused of libel, and the trials that followed and of trade pacts made with countries across the seas. They had innumerable subjects to speak on and they spoke incessantly. Sometimes in order to relax they played games of cards so swiftly, so nervously, so intently that they found they had to release the mounting pressure by conversing, and would begin to talk again of political scandal and intellectual dissent. Maya had to evolve from such scruples as a healthy mother.

Gautama’s family was the brainy type that considered love and affection something inferior. And this suppression of the emotion finds a subtle expression later in the novel when Maya’s mother-in-law and her sister-in-law Nila were sitting together but avoiding physical contact. This apparently insignificant act reveals much of the family nature and temperament. For Maya there was nothing to learn on the traits of a mother even from her mother-in-law. The sublime quality of motherhood had always eluded Maya ever since her childhood. Gautama’s mother and sister jealously guarded their thoughts and were afraid to express their thoughts. Maya says:

They sat there, knee to knee, but scrupulously avoiding contact, and worked at, silently, absorbedly. Neither spoke, they dreaded speech now that they were so close together, as though their thoughts and ideas, safe and controlled by each one within herself, would explode out of the bounds prescribed for them and spill into the open, were the two to meet
In spite of her matronly concern Maya's mother-in-law is so cold that none could love her. She has strength, spirit and vitality but as though they make her incapable of human love. In spite of her age she is full of vigour.

If Maya's mother-in-law was a figure of old age she was much a figure of fire and energy. The gods might one day erect a monument to her though human beings would not. Maya says: “She awed me and attracted me at the same time ... I cried shrinking from her, for if she stood for life, then she stood for the world as well (158).

She was an extrovert devoted to the underdog. Maya says hers was a: “…world of trouble and suffering, hunger, unemployment, illness and helplessness. Its shadow engulfed her face, scarred it” (157).

But her trouble is that she is so much preoccupied with social work that Maya who is in dire need of solace and caring company is reduced to a mere person like many she is concerned about. Maya feels: “She knew so many people, gathered from such diverse backgrounds and situations, that I wondered how I could mean anything more to her than yet another human being to be made comfortable in a hostile world” (47).

She may be devoted to social causes and work like a slave for them but it is doubtful if she genuinely cares for her kith and kin like Nila her daughter whose married life is shattered and on the verge of divorce. Even her smile is ambiguous:

A smile that was like her voice- at once far away and absent-minded tender and involved. How much did she feel for Nila as her daughter and how much for Nila as an unhappily married woman in need of her help? One could not tell (157).
Nor does Maya's mother-in-law genuinely care for Maya. For her social service is more important to her than her immediate family members. Maya implores her to stay longer but she has to go back and Maya is miserable. Maya feels: “What the house empty again, and I alone with my horrors and nightmares?” (162).

Maya longs for her mother-in-law’s arms, hating her detachment. Maya earnestly needs her mother-in-law’s company. She feels:

If they stayed a while, they might help me, as my own father could not; by teaching me some of the marvelous indifference to everything that was not vital, immediate and present. I did not know how they could do this, but somehow it had to be done. (162).

Maya being motherless craves for motherly tenderness and refuge from her mother-in-law. She feels: “And yet I yearned for her to hold me to her bosom. I could not remember my own mother at all” (163).

On Maya’s imploring her mother-in-law to stay she says: “How can I, child ...it is impossible” (63).

Nila, another woman from Gautama’s family is Maya’s sister-in-law. Married for ten years she wants to be separated from her husband and seeks legal help from her brother Gautama but he brushes aside the very idea with his high brow attitude. He says: “What does she take me for- one of those two-rupee lawyers that squat under the banyan tree outside the courts waiting for clients low enough to consider them-prostitutes and petty swindlers?” (161).

Nila has school-going children and is in search of a job that she would need after the divorce. According to Gautama the failure of marriage is caused by Nila and hence he
is reluctant to waste time on such trifles. Her mother also dislikes the idea of divorce and believes that Nila has learned everything except lead a sensible life. Maya says: “…for she hated this matter of a divorce in the family and children going fatherless” (216).

Nila’s situation touches the right chord in Maya and she was admiring her. The similarity between the two is their marital discord. Nila like her mother is full of energy and activity. They both had immense faith in activity.

Outside the family there are two more women in the novel, Pom and Leila, who were Maya’s friends. Leila’s marriage was a love marriage and she had eloped with her lover who was a consumptive. She was an ascetic wearing neither bangle nor jewel an exact contrast to Pom in this respect. She was detached and worked tirelessly in a college and at home nursing her husband whom she had married knowing that he was a consumptive. Maya observes: “He had been dying of tuberculosis when she fell in love with him, and she had married the fatality of his disease as much as the charm of his childish personality or the elegance of his dark hair falling across his white brow” (57).

Like a masochist and martyr Leila was one of those who require a cross who cannot walk without one. Maya has wisdom combined with calmness. Leila accepts her lot as her destiny and doesn’t grudge or complain. Leila observes: “It was all written in my fate long ago” (59).

She is resigned and is a foil to Maya for unlike her she has accepted what she has- the sick husband, one room house and drudgery of life never having fun and suffering, a husband who has been: “…teasing her about her parents who had not seen her, written to her, or in any way communicated with her since the day of her elopement” (58).
From educated fatalist Leila, Maya’s memory comes to: “Pom, the pink, plump, pretty Pom who did not speak of fate, who had never been ill or overworked, or bitter” (60).

Pom is the typical woman with love for clothes, jewellery, colour, looks; her list for newness, for brightness, colour and gaiety. She has zest for life even if she is bit of a plebeian. She is good-humoured taking Maya’s teasing living in her painted world where shadows of family, tradition and superstition had no place. She is described thus by Maya:

Logic, tact, diplomacy-nothing mattered to her who chattered so glibly and gaily all the day long, jumping up now and then to bring out a new pair of shoes, a new set of rings to show me, talking with eagerness and animation of anything that was new and bright, and never, never referring to family, tradition, custom, superstition, all that I dreaded now. I was certain she hated such talk as much as I did, even if she had no reason to fear them. Such things simply did not step over the bright enameled horizon of her painted world, for such things bore shadows, and shadows were alien to her,(61)

Pom is the typical Indian woman with her problems. She is pregnant and goes to the temple to pray for a son. She likes food and pickles and such craving is natural to women during pregnancy. She would even dream of food: “The delicacies that would be provided for tea, the sweetmeats she loved” (62). Her mother-in-law is an excellent cook: “…who had been born in a kitchen and married at its door” (62). It is an overstatement for when the woman has to cook for the family she has to be concerned with food and culinary
art. In its positive aspect the woman in Hindu religion is the provider of food and hence described as Annapurna— the goddess of plenty, literally with the in-laws under restrictions and hence she talks so maliciously about her parents-in-law with whom she lived and how she complained about this arrangement.

Living there means living: “…like two mice in one small room, not daring to creep out, for fear they’ll pounce on you, ask you wearing the jewellery they gave you” (61). Pom is a contrast to Maya and she is fed up with living with her in-laws whereas Maya craves for the company of her mother-in-law though she does not get it. Since Maya is childless she is conscious of pregnancy and children and notices Pom: “…smiling a suddenly matronly, faraway smile of condescension that pregnant women sometimes have for those not in the same condition” (63).

A typical Indian problem of yearning to have a son is referred to at another place in the novel in connection with Mrs. Lal who pretends to be well off but is not and has four daughters. Even though one may rationalise and glorify a daughter yet religious beliefs apart daughters are a liability because of the evil of dowry in society. How good life would be if there were no dowry system in society and the daughters would no more be a crushing weight. This live problem of society has been described in the novel. When Maya comes to know that Mrs. Lal has no son but four daughters she should not have been disturbed yet she feels:

I ought to have been able to rejoice at this, as my father had rejoiced in me, saying that in a daughter he had a treasure. Yet now the world brought up visions of dowries, of debts, humiliations to be suffered, and burdens so gross so painful that the whole family suffered from them. (71)
This is one of the rare instances when Maya confronts reality and is aware of it. Mrs. Lal in the hope of a son is pregnant again and Maya feels, “…and I saw, from the swell of her stained, limp clothes, that she was pregnant” (72).

Lastly there are cabaret girls who make a living out of their bodies displaying their fleshy wares titillating the lecherous males and evoking from them smutty sights. Maya observes their acrobatic show on the floor and says: “…a performance as revolting as it was remarkable on which quivering antennae sliding along it as slowly as snails that dribbled white slime over the white flesh” (83-84).

Maya’s dislike of the show is aptly described through the abominable animal imagery of the reptiles. The leering male spectators are similarly described using animal imagery, “…uttering little animal cries of voluptuous invitation, as cats do when they mate” (85). The show has been denounced after it is over and the spectators have:

…shadowed eyes, rings that caused thick fingers to bulge, teeth that gleamed animal-like, squirms and gestures betraying pleasurable and covert discomfort …a seething mass of pimps and lechers, of touts and prostitutes, masquerading in the garments over the poor and the beasts …It was perverse, it was wrong, but it was a fact, a fact that had been taken for the truth. Values were distorted in that macabre half-light (85-86)

The world of the cabaret girls has been described as: “…the privacy of dank, small rooms that smelt of unclean latrines and panting beasts, hidden away in unlit lanes from which they emerged, nightly” (81) after selling their bodies which is their merchandise. The multi-ethnicity of the girls implies that the flesh trade thrives throughout the world and in any international flesh market one does actually find women of all races and countries.
The female body which is a favourite subject of romantic Sanskrit and Hindi poetry finding expression in the nakha-shikha, meaning top to toe description of the heroine covering every part of the body including the most private flesh is reduced here to a saleable commodity: "...their protruberent posteriors, and of which they made much, arousing chuckles of delight ...bouncing movement that made her bosom more prominent ...so that more and more of that white, tallow-like flesh would rear out of her blouse" (85). With a little provocative display and movements they say, "...see what I have? Like it? Take it, gentleman, take it, it's yours!" (85). The response is what it should be, "Beautiful! B-beautiful b-bitch!" (85). These women are the bhogya, meaning fortune a thing to be enjoyed in a harlot or courtesan. The cabaret girls have carnal voice. Amidst all these odds Maya has to struggle out as a pristine mother.

Anita Desai has presented different aspects of women as mothers in *Cry, The Peacock* through several characters who have their individual voice. The voice is metaphorical not necessarily through speech but coming through the personality and character of the women in the novel. Aurally speaking, one finds the entire range of the octave in the novel: the soft voice of Maya, the authoritative voice of her mother-in-law at once soft and broken with harshness, the resigned tired voice of Leila; the trying-to-be-assertive voice of Nila; the loud vulgar voice of baring and exhibiting fleshy wares. Certainly the novel is about the dainty doe Maya but all the woman sometimes soft and lilting, sometimes loud and fast as in allegory. From the soft tinkling of the anklet to howling wind, from graceful subdued note to vulgar aural hammering all the notes are presented flat and sharp of the octave in the novel. Anita Desai has presented the polyphony of women as mothers and it is significant that there are many auditory images
in the novel. The novel takes us to the cities, hills and dales, the seas and mountains of the country where one hears the poly-timbred voice, cry, the peacock.

In *Voices in the City* Monisha the protagonist like Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* fails to conceive since there is a block in her womb. Because of this reason she remains barren for three years after marriage. A girl has almost no identity and is cursed by the society for not having a child. Her plight throughout her life will be miserable. These women will not be allowed to participate in family functions. If anything goes amiss in the family the blame will be attributed to these women. Monisha was deprived of motherhood. This leads to her being cursed by all the family members. The people in her husband’s family hardly try to understand a woman’s wretched condition especially a woman without a child.

Anita Desai creates characters who feel a terrible isolation in the suffering darkness of their life in which no deep communication is possible. There is a dreadful attractiveness in the eternal suffering the characters undergo. Like the Kafkaesque characters Desai’s characters suffer from the oppressive walls of sounds and smells from which there is no release. The attempt here is to examine how this oppressive environment acts on the two major characters Monisha and Nirode and to reveal. Monisha reacts in a different way only because she has no other alternative as a woman. There is a remarkable use of the bird-image in almost all the novels of Desai signifying the fettered condition of the human beings. Some titles of the novels such as *Cry, The Peacock*, *Bye-Bye, Blackbird* and *In Custody* are indicative of the enclosed, entrapped life the human beings as against the caged bird’s life. The question is how in the extreme terrors of its existence can the bird sing so happily and why is there no hint of fear in the
songs of the birds whereas the human beings seek individuality and meaningfulness in their existence and despair. Anita Desai associates birds with freedom they enjoy in the flights to heaven and in contrast presents her characters shackled by the chains of life in family, in the city and in the society. Nirode is an artist and as such belongs to the special category of people who are above and beyond the bonds of society. Unlike Monisha, Nirode could live his life as he would wish to away from his family, town and city of his choice and may even settle down in the dirty, dingy dark cube hole of Calcutta. When he finds his work of editing boring he switches over to publishing a periodical. Not satisfied with this he writes a play and hopes for recognition. In his need for communication he finds himself involved in his undertaking. So far he had kept himself uninvolved and had not longed for success. In fact, he seems eager to fail: “I want to move from failure to failure to failure, step by step to rock bottom. I want to explore that depth …I want to descend, quickly” (40). But his failure in getting accepted through his play shakes him deeply and hurts his ego tremendously. This destitution of his physical and mental health finds him in the hospital where he realises his plight and adjusts himself to the situation of his life. Dharma points out:

Like you, I find myself inexorably drawn away from my island, back to the mainland again, not having to think solely about one’s own state of mind, the dealing with problems not too close to one’s own heart, but at a more comfortable distance? (Voices in the City , 224).

Though Nirode at this stage is not prepared to fully accept this resolution of his problem of being his meaningfulness of existence he makes a new beginning in his life which he attains at Monisha’s death. Nirode realises that man loses something of himself
in his quarrel with his instincts: “...if, in being a victor, there was not also a part of him –
a part that had been remote, curious and unique – that was vanquished. And if it was not
better therefore to be–to be–what? What can a man be if he is not a freak?” (225).
Monisha’s death frees him from his former self and he grows vividly alive by the minute
moving towards his own death free from all the conscious and unconscious attachments
of life. It is death that makes a person restore the prevailing reality of the lot life offers.
The unacknowledged sacrifice made by Monisha’s self-immolation had restored sense in
Nirode. A similar act by someone in the life of Monisha could have created the
possibility of her being a good mother as she was willing to be. She was not endowed
with an opportunity to manifest her motherly trait.

Anita Desai depicts Monisha’s plight more fully and closely relates it to the
women who are like the female birds in the cages. Anita Desai feels that such women’s:

...lives spent in waiting for nothing, waiting on men self-centred and
indifferent and hungry and demanding and critical, waiting for death and
dying misunderstood always behind bars, those terrifying black bars that
shut us in, in the old houses, in the old city^OO)

Monisha too remains uninvolved. She is afraid of involvement and has lived her
life without it. In fact she is afraid of love. For love is like hate of warmth. For her love is
like running barefoot on broken pieces of glass and one will surely get likely to be
wounded and hurt. She feels that she is different from other women around her. She
remains an observer of life standing apart. She craves for an experience of having given
birth to a child or having attended death but her life has remained a silent, blurred film
that has neither entertained nor horrified her. When others can relate themselves to the
music of street singers Monisha is frightened. She finds herself incapable of relating even to this music for it has no meaning for her. She feels that even a terrible cyclone would not touch her. She longs for an experience, searches for her own feeling and finds herself devoid of any such feelings. She tries to gauge the feeling of death by burning herself and realises that this was not what she wanted. The common dowry death by burning is turned into an artistic device by Desai for the not-so-common woman, Monisha, in her search for the self, the solitude and the non-involvement with life. It is Amla who decides not to tread this path of isolation and uninvolvement.

Monisha dies screaming for life for the first experience or real feeling of pain awakens in her a desire to live. It is true that she loves to realise herself as an unfettered individual and not to become at any stage a complacent, purring, tame wife who adjusts herself to a gilded cage. She is too silent for the family and the world distrusts her silence. She wants to be herself and does not want any compromise.

The charge of theft serves as a fictional device and disturbs her status quo. As in the game of snakes and ladders from a high position of protective social place of a wife the protagonist Monisha falls down to reach the rock bottom in her husband’s family when she has to pick herself up unsupported by her husband and has to struggle to attain her individual status. The second device which serves as a cataclysm to inspect herself and her place in life is her barrenness, not so much her barrenness but the way the members of her husband’s family talk about her body: her organs, her ovaries washed in blood. The very secret and sacred part of herself laid bleeding in whose: “...soft breast is a great open wound, bleeding, scarlet, seeping over tiny feathers in a blot of fresh blood” (121).
Monisha wonders how others in the family can live, eat, work and sing bleeding through life? She cannot pretend to believe in these trivialities, the pettiness of existence. Having no religious faith she is left with her confused despair, a life dedicated to nothingness. She says:

   To sort the husk from the rice, to wash and iron and to talk and sleep,
   when this is not what one believes in at all? ...if I had religious faith, no alternative to my confused despair, there is nothing I can give myself to, and so I must stay, the family here, and their surroundings, tell me such a life cannot be lived – a life dedicated to nothing.(121-22).

Monisha had observed Nirode in his helpless condition in hospital, a flightless broken bird at the mercy of the other world. Desai invokes the Bhagvad Gita which demands non-involvement if a person is to survive. Monisha’s choice is clear since she cannot lead a life as her brother Nirode does. It is a choice between emptiness or death, insignificance or oblivion, meaningfulness or hypocrisy, acceptance or death.

Monisha is unique in her suffering. Unlike Maya in Cry, The Peacock she is not obsessed by childhood fears. Unlike Sarah in Bye-Bye, Blackbird she is not uprooted from her natural surroundings; the society is the same, rules are the same; but she is now married and is with her husband’s family. Shashi Deshpande in her That Long Silence probes the protagonist Jaya’s mind deeply but her problem is the problem of relationship. She has remained silent long enough, now that there is crisis in her life she realises that she had accepted what Deshpande calls the code of two languages of Sanskrit drama – Sanskrit and prakrit. She feels that now there will be a new relationship with her husband. She is angry but knows not where to turn her anger. She accepts life and the novel ends
on the note of hope for she feels that life has always to be made possible whereas Monisha's silence is deep-rooted. She does not wish to communicate nor does she seek any positive relationship with her husband. There seems to be a gap, an abyss which she thinks cannot be bridged and life cannot be made meaningful.

Desai has focused in sharp vivid words the plight of a woman suffering in silence of self-denial. Helpless and handicapped, the individual craves for the freedom of a bird flying high into the heaven. The imagery of bird sharply brings into focus the caged condition of the individual in general and the woman in particular. The reference to barred windows, enclosed rooms, locked container describes in sharp dark colours the dismal environment in which the human beings live. It is a disturbing and disconsoling picture: wherever one turns, in whichever direction one moves, there is no escape in Desai's world. There is no escape from lack of solitude. It is a life of eternal suffering, a life hedged in by an enclosed space which permits no options. Desai is not a feminist but as a woman she has competently probed the interior self of Monisha far better than that of Nirode.

Desai does not present a solution to the question of one's existence and meaningfulness of life. The problem is sharply focused both in the case of Monisha and Nirode but more starkly and disconcertingly stated in the case of Monisha since her enclosed existence defies any solution except that of death. Being a woman in India does not permit one to think of one's happiness or fulfilment. Life is to be lived for others, self-negating the desires of self-fulfilment. Desai presents a negative picture of life, a life of paralysing bondage. The woman characters accept defeat, suffer pointless agonies but do not fight to carve out a destiny for themselves.
These women are in search of silence and solitude which the society they inhabit will not offer them. Theirs is a tragedy created by themselves. They cannot identify what they are and they are always in conflict with objects around them. In exploring the meaningfulness of their existence they wish to avoid the senseless contacts which the society expects of them. It is a quest for the self that the characters know cannot be realised and which they know will constantly elude them perhaps because they are outside normal society.

Amla in *Voices in the City* is an erratic character who remains flawlessly independent throughout the novel. Her travails through life verges in all kinds of difficulties but she crosses all the hurdles with her good sense. She fights against the odds of life and the ferocious assaults of adversity. Her mother’s contribution in her upbringing is feebly perceptible. Her relationship with Jit and Dharma stands sufficient proof for her independence from motherly care and influence. In spite of all her accomplishment Amla fails to remain resilient when the city of Calcutta was rude to her. She is not able to witness a few facts that nauseate her. There was no palpable influence from the part of her mother. She finds no role especially the role of a mother. Had there been enough care from her mother she would have enjoyed the bliss of family life. But instead she only verges in the family sphere not playing a significant part to be named as domestic queen. It is a mother who knows all the chronological demands of a daughter. As Amla was bereft of such a bliss she slogs into mysterious relationships. She is perceived to be dangerous, attracting men - young or old - and leading them to their destruction.
Amla-Dharma love affair though sudden and short-lived is one of the enigmas of Anita Desai’s *Voices in the City* which critics have preferred to leave untouched. Probably they take it to be a juvenile fancy of Amla not quite significant for the narrative. Critical attention is focused on Nirode’s existential, angst-ridden character a deep and rich portrayal in whose presence Amla’s flash-love appears frivolous. However, Amla-Dharma love-relationship is intriguing and revealing. In order to understand Amla’s role in keeping the balance of the plot it is necessary to comprehend the nature of this affair and place it in its proper perspective.

To trace the reason for the development of this strange passion, study the impact of love on both Amla and Dharma and scrutinise this relationship which is strong but short-lived – powerful enough to give a changed perspective on life to both and short-lived enough to save them from a psychic debacle- may serve as a useful part of this project. Structurally, *Voices in the City* is divided into four parts each named after the character whose mental state it projects. Each section though mutually exclusive forms a part of the whole narrative structure. The section dealing with Amla is light and gay and provides a relief after the dark and hopeless world one shares with Nirode and Monisha. Among the three the youngest sister appears full of life and vivacity with a streak of frivolity inherited from their mother and an uncontrollable tendency to ride full blast on the tempest. But she is not much different from her older siblings and has the family trait of morbidity, as Jit observes. On reaching Calcutta Amla plunges into a world of parties and gaiety trying to escape the suffocating realities of life that have overwhelmed Nirode and Monisha. Soon, she is disillusioned by the superficialities she encounters in the society and craves for something elevating.
Amla meets Dharma a couple of days after her arrival in Calcutta. Their’s is a case of love at first sight. Dharma’s formidable aloofness is dissolved as he comes out of his shell, becomes chivalrous, tender, subtle and prophetic and suggests that Amla be his model for portraits. For Amla this first meeting becomes a miraculous force lifting the pall of despondency and giving way to a slow pain of love: “...she felt herself being torn, torn with excruciating slowness and without anaesthesia, form the Amla of a day, an afternoon ago” (186).

Very soon Amla sees herself in the image of a love-lorn maiden. She is intelligent enough to know that this relationship is unrewarding and hopeless but she cannot desist from plunging into it. She undergoes internal conflicts. Her questioning conscience is never at rest.

A couple of significant questions crop up here: why does Amla let herself loose particularly when she knows that this love will not be gratified? What does she expect from Dharma an elderly man married with a daughter almost her age and a wife to look after? Does it reveal the streak of frivolity of her mother? What does Dharma want from her? Is he exploiting a young, beautiful and vivacious Amla? What is the significance of this relationship? Why is it allowed to thrive? Probably, Monisha, Nirode and Aunt Lila encounter similar questions when they watch Amla entrapped in Dharma’s love. Aunt Lila’s mature word of wisdom to her is not to waste her youth, intelligence and spirit on a man who is using her. Nirode’s irritated silence is foreboding. Monisha advises her to beware of all friendship. But Amla cannot resist Dhanna’s charm and is drawn to him again and again.
Obviously, Amla - Dharma love has no sexual overtones. It is not clear what each wants from the other in the matter of physical gratification but it is evident from the strain they undergo that the relationship is not well-defined for either of them. It is precariously balanced between reality and hallucination creating a delicate situation from which there is no possible way out. This situation becomes an interior volcano and gives rise to conflicts. Dharma expresses his inner struggle through his paintings colouring the water of his upheaval within him. Amla’s conflicts are symbolised in her dreams. She dreams of the white birds in Dharma’s painting chiding her and the arching plants stretching over the pond never quite meeting its shimmering reflection. Symbolically, she is the palm unable to meet Dharma in his world, “…the melancholy maiden, dying of unrequited love” (211). The chiding birds are symbolic of her real self rebuking her for landing into a situation so hopeless and intangible.

Even without entering physical terrain and despite being befogged by lack of clarity love sustains both Amla and Dharma in their separate worlds. In psychoanalytic terms what they feel for each other is not love but ‘psychic symbiotic union,’ to use Eric Fromm’s phrase. This is a pattern of relationship in which two persons come close, develop strong attachment but remain physically independent with no sexual attraction. By studying Amla’s expectations from her life in Calcutta and her quest for fulfilment one can understand the nature of her passion. She comes to Calcutta full of exuberance determined to enjoy the city, her new job as a commercial artist and her independence. She tells Aunt Lila with self-conscious buoyancy: “Calcutta doesn’t oppress me in the least …It excites me,” (142). This vision soon gives way to despair at finding the commercial world around her shallow and unrewarding, full of the Jits. She feels isolated amid the hubbub of
Calcutta because she cannot relate meaningfully to the society. The only person whose artistic temperament attracts her is Dharma. He becomes her ideal.

Amla invests Dharma with miraculous attributes she would like to see in a person she admires and loves. In return Dharma satisfies her need for admiration. He is a responsive and appreciating audience. Amla finds it easy to open up before him. It may be mentioned here that some puzzling questions of the novel regarding their mother, Nirode and Monisha are revealed through Amla-Dharma conversation. Dharma, on the other hand, enjoys his power over her, feels inflated and enhanced by her adulation and becomes aware of her soothing presence which fills his life with a purpose. He does not withdraw his feelings for her although he knows the impropriety of the attraction. He relishes being so important to her. Not that Dharma is self-centred as Nirode surmises or that he is callous in rejecting her once his art acquires the desired depth as some critics point out. What he and Amla play at can be described as 'passive' and 'active' forms of symbiotic fusion. Dharma’s love is active whereas Amla’s attachment is passive. He enjoys his infallible authority over her. She enjoys her submission to that authority.

Whatever be their feelings for each other it cannot be denied that these feelings are powerful and instrumental in giving them fresh visions and insight. Dharma’s gets transformed into an inspired artist whose art acquires depth because of Amla’s intrinsic innocence. Dharma himself admits that his portraits are inspired by Amla and that Amla has enabled him to see: “...what the subconscious does to an impressionable creature, how much more power it has on them than sum and circumstances put together. And this is the revelation that made me ...begin on a new era” (223). Amla’s transparent inner being has a therapeutic effect on Dharma’s growth as an artist. He is able to see human possibilities
and limitations. His paintings modified on and inspired by Amla represent in a surrealistic style the psychological pulls and pressures of human life itself. Dharma's development as an artist and his re-discovery of himself are due to the inspiration provided by Amla day after day in his studio.

As long as Dharma has his sway over Amla he finds a way to relieve his anxiety springing out of his loneliness. Once she wriggles out of it he reacts with a feeling of helplessness and an impotent rage. Dharma recollects his irascibility when his daughter had struggled free from his hold to marry her cousin. Same unsavoury feelings trouble him now as Amla breaks off. He tells Amla that he did not want his daughter to grow much as he does not want Amla to mature. He says:

I wanted her the same, always the same, beside me. But, like her, you too are slipping out of the chrysalis – what a marvellous, soft, sleepy state of being that is, neither of you realised. I see you also turning into a bright insect, attracting trouble wherever it flies, throughout its brief days ...I hate to see that change.\(^{(227)}\)

Dharma drowns his unhappiness by turning from his island existence to the hubbub of the mainland. His preoccupation with his forthcoming exhibition serves to gratify his intrinsic need for triumph. Moreover, he is happy to find himself once more amid his friends, critics, admires, buyers and agents. Unfortunately, Dharma bargains for something mediocre when art opens the doors for self-realisation. Nirode is not much farther from the truth that Dharma's once brilliantly clear and detached vision is eclipsed by his new self-centredness. His creative ability unites him with his material but it does not give him an
inter-personal fusion. Art, therefore, is not an answer to his problem of existence to remain unchanged and he pursues his artistic career only to reaffirm his superiority.

Amla’s growing passion for Dharma changes her perception also. She comes out of her frivolous approach to life and glories in her peak season of love enjoying that tautly strung moment of perfection with Dharma’s measured talk and serene appearance by her side when she says: “...when all flowers are in bloom, and all fruit is ripe” (217). At this moment of perfection she realises that the ripe fruit has a worm embedded in it but she does not wish to give it a thought. The worm here means the reality that lies at the core of their relationship. She wishes to connive at Dharma’s allegiance to his wife the question of social propriety and impropriety of maintaining this relation and his greater inclination toward his art. But she cannot dissociate herself from these facts. As soon as she learns about Dharma’s daughter she reacts instantly and decides to break free from him.

More often than not one finds that Amla’s reactions to Dharma’s cruelty to his daughter are too sharp and hence puzzling. Amla feels hurt at Dharma’s callousness and leaves him in disgust. She feels that by Dharma’s degrading behaviour he had lost her respect. Dharma cannot reconcile when Amla prefers to leave him. The quickness and sharpness shown by Amla in her reactions are due more to her own inner conflicts than to her disillusionment. Amla feels if Dharma could be unfeeling towards his daughter he could well be insensitive to her. She dreads this thought, undergoes conflicts and breaks away from him before he could shunt her out. Again, sensitive as she is, she gauges his growing interest in his exhibition as an indication that she has outlived her utility. Reality attacks her with impunity that she is treading dangerous grounds that Dharma is, after all,
committed to his wife and society and that he is a conformist who would not be able to enrich her with love. This hurts her pride.

A combination of all these revelations and inspirations fill Amla, expand her, make her rise and float and on its drift she leaves the house, feeling as emptied out, fragile and exhausted as if a high fever had drained her.

In desperation Amla leaves Dharma and once falls into the pattern of life she dreads. The life she had tried to beautify with love and art slips away from her. In an attempt at self-torture she tears the invitation card to Dharma’s exhibition and goes to the horse-race instead, with Jit. This is her regression choice. She opts for a movement backward. This suggests not only her quest for new distraction to overcome her isolation but her sickening view of life as a gamble, a horse-race wherein one has to get going if one wants to win. Otherwise like the sick horse one is left to the vultures.

If her feeling for Dharma and Dharma’s for her were to be called “love,” it cannot keep them sequestered. It should preserve one’s integrity and unique individuality and help one overcome desolation. Amla and Dharma have artistic visions but unfortunately they are too wrapped up in their psychological problems to realise true and mature love which could be an active force, full of motivational energy making it a central experience of life. What their conscious minds construe as love is an illusion created unconsciously though to relieve them of their isolation.

The influence of her mother on Amla was too feeble and she also was not given an opportunity to demonstrate her volition to prove the great essence of her womanhood through her sublime qualities. Despite her constructive endeavours in the novels with her steering of elegance her role has become a prosaic drama.
Aunt Lila is another character in the novel whose role assumes significance as a mother though she is only a surrogate mother. She observes: “It doesn’t cause men much to show spirit. It’s when I see it in a woman that I am pleased. A girl must have a spirit and a profession” (143).

With such lofty ideals in life aunt Lila constructs the life of the girls at home for the morsel of food and draught of water she gets in recompense. Her role gathers momentum as she shows traits of responsibility as a mother. Although her own daughter Rita’s life was a debacle she had inspired her with lofty spirits and ideals and made her play a greater role without falling a prey to the tinsel world that life sometimes thrusts upon. She had instilled in her daughter the spirit of independence imbibed into her by her elders. Aunt Lila wishes these girls also possess such sublime spirit of independence in their lives. The richness in her character goes unadulated as she is not heeded by the girls. The lasting impression that she had left remains imperceptible to normal perception.

The role of the mother in Voices in the City is very important because all the characters revolve around this character for their different roles in this novel. The mother is a woman well accomplished and married to a down to earth man. She is an overqualified woman who is too refined to fit into the prosaic world of her husband. She finds always a gap in her husband for her intellectual thirst. This gap she fills through Major Chadda, a retired army man, who salvages her from her crises. This estranged and meaningless relationship leaves a deep gash in Nirode the son of the family who becomes a highly irresponsible man till the death of his sister. Her manners and mannerisms had ill taught her children and all of them form their own destiny by taking their own decisions willfully in their lives. Their mother had failed to show a path of propriety for
her children to follow and to lead their lives more confidently. She had been an artistic failure in spite of all her accomplishments. She proves useful to none as a mother. The one defence on her side she probably can have to refute her behaviour is by putting the blame on her mother, rather her parents in failing to see a befitting match in marriage. Her role as a mother does not bring unity or love in the family. Her role as a mother has led to wide schisms in her children.

Sita in Where Shall We Go this Summer? is undeniably a mother saddled with four children and awaiting the fifth. Anita Deasi’s novel Where Shall We Go This Summer? incorporates the story of a middle-aged woman, Sita who is sick of the mundane routine of a meaningless existence. She feels suffocated in her well-ordered, posh flat in Bombay and struggles to break away from it all. The easiest course open to her is to go to Manori her maiden home. To recapture some of her past and to revive the magic created by her father she escapes to the island in order not to give birth to her already conceived child. However, the island offers no refuge. She is gripped by the existential dilemma when faced with the existential abyss. Finally she decides to go back to Bombay with her husband and children. The story ends with Sita, Raman and children ferrying back to the Mainland.

Some critics have criticised the conclusion of the novel as too unassertive and negative; a few feel that it suggests lack of finality; while others claim that it denotes a defeat of the individual. The ending remained weak without any connection. It is difficult to believe the decision to return to Bombay and to sanity. There are others who praise the ending as life-enhancing and appreciate Sita for accepting the realities of life. Anita Desai herself maintains that any other alternative to conclude the novel would have been
grossly unreal and inartistic. Moreover, it is for heroes and martyrs to say the great 'yes' or the great 'no' – most of us have not the courage to say either 'yes' or 'no'. It is necessary to re-examine this issue in the light of existential philosophy and to suggest that the ending is neither unconvincing nor unassertive. Sita the protagonist is neither a hero nor a martyr; she just learns to compromise. As a mother she enters into the realm of bad faith by being consciously unaware of her human condition in this world.

Bad faith is a common theme in existential literature in general and of Jean Paul Sartre in particular. In his Being and Nothingness, Sartre deals with this concept elaborately whereas in his plays and novels he explores human psychology manifesting la mauvaise foi which means bad faith. Bad faith is the result of a defence mechanism that man adopts in face of his existential anguish thus trying to escape the reality of his situation by pretending that it is not himself but some other force that determines his actions. Man is a conscious being. Sartre calls him pour-soi which means "Being-for-itself," as distinguished from en-soi which means "Being-in-itself." Consciousness is pure subjectivity characterised by emptiness within. According to Sartre,

For consciousness to be able to imagine, it must be able to escape from the world by its nature; it must be able by its own efforts to withdraw from the world. In a word, it must be free. "freedom is absolute" and by turning inwardly man discovers freedom …and for him freedom is his bliss, not freedom to do this or that, to become king or emperor, or the exponent of public opinion, but freedom to know himself that he is freedom.(23)
However, when man realises that he alone is responsible for his plans and projects and choice, he feels unnerved. This gives rise to anguish, an anguish in the face of freedom. Man evades it by escaping into Bad faith.

Anita Desai’s novel is an eloquent commentary on the predicament of man trapped in the human condition which he cannot remedy. Sita’s irony is the fact that she constantly dangles between self-relisation and self-delusion, consciousness and anguish, good faith and bad faith. When she is ready to fathom the mystery of life she falls a prey to anguish and struggles to flee it by imagining herself helpless. The two planes on which she lives, one that of existential awareness and another that of escaping the reality of her situation are central to her consciousness. She is, in fact, the main subject in the experience of nothingness as well as an object to be commented upon. Paradoxically, the ‘Great No’ that she utters so boldly and on which she acts so independently, dissolves eventually into a meek submission. She decides to go to Bombay with her husband. She follows the monotonous track of life that has no periods and no stretches. It simply swirled around mudding and confusing leading nowhere. The moments of her Good Faith when she is on the brink of recognising the reality of her being are elaborately punctuated with self-delusion and lie in the soul.

Sita’s everyday life becomes aimless and meaningless for her and she cannot make any coherent sense out of it. She is unable to:

... inwardly accept that this was all there was to life, that life would continue thus, inside this small enclosed area, with these few characters churning around and then past her, leaving her always in this grey, dull - lit, empty shell (Where Shall We Go this Summer? , 36).
Sita waits for an appropriate moment when some force or inspiration will impel her. The moment comes when she realises the significance of Cavafy’s verse, implying the ‘Great No’. Expounding the concept of Bad Faith, Mary Warnock says that human beings have numerous possibilities and one such possibility is that he can answer ‘No’ to any suggestion, “...not only of what he should do, but also of what he should think, or even how he should describe and categorise what he perceives in the world” (Existentialism, 43). Cavafy’s lines have been etched like an amulet on the dull metal of her mind and show that she is conscious of herself as being-for-itself.

Cavafy’s poem also suggests that the path is sufficiently easy for those who say ‘Yes’ but the few who dare say ‘No’ have to face untold difficulties. Anita Desai asserts that she is interested in characters who are not average but have retreated or been sent back into some extremity or despondency and so transformed against or made to withstand against the common current. It is easy to drift with the current, it makes no claims and it does not fix price or efforts. But those who cannot follow it whose heart cries out ‘the great No’ who fight the current and struggle against it, they know what the demands are and what it costs to meet them. Sita is certainly not average; she has gained the consciousness of the meaninglessness of life. She has confronted the absurd. She cannot share Raman’s acceptance of life’s ordinaries. His friends, acquaintances, relatives and business associates are for her no better than animals, “…nothing but appetite and sex. Only food, sex and money matter” (Where Shall We Go this Summer?, 31-32). She calls them “animals” who are neither pet, nor wild beasts but “…pariahs …hanging about drains and dustbins, waiting to pounce and kill and eat” (32). Her rebellion renders her unfit for society and its norms. She has seen beyond them. As a
conscious being she cannot stand finitude. She wishes to attain “Being.” As Sartre points out that a person who feels that he is different is the one who has the stage though he cannot help being in Bad Faith achieves that spontaneously. He says: “One puts oneself in bad faith as one goes to sleep, and one is in bad faith as one dreams” (Being and Nothingness, 49).

To begin with Sita has an ability to exercise her freedom because she can turn inward. Sartre points out that freedom is absolute and a man can discover it if he looks inward. Sita is disgusted with the ordinariness of existence. But she is caught in the existential dilemma. Yearning for order and meaning in life she finds chaos and meaninglessness. She sees her boredom stretching all around her and engulfing her. It is so suffocating that she searches for: “…few of these moments that proclaimed her still alive and not quite drowned and dead” (Where Shall We Go this Summer?, 33-34).

Sita cries out that she wants to: “…escape from the madness here, escape to place where it might be possible to be sane again” (23). Her urge for freedom lies in her assertion: “I will go” (24). One of Camus’s characters in Caligula finds the world so intolerable that he expresses a wish to have the moon or eternal happiness or something crazy that does not belong to this world. Sita’s act of escaping to the island to find refuge in magic comes close to the wish expressed by Camus. However, once Sita is on the island she perceives the nothingness that is within her. She is depressed at the realisation that she alone is responsible for her choice, plans and projects. A sense of emptiness pervades her because human reality carries nothingness in its structure and consciousness is the one that fills the gap of nothingness. The forlorn feeling implies that everybody chooses his or her being. Forlorn feeling and anguish go together.
In her effort to flee that anguish Sita seeks justification for her actions in external agencies. Towards the end of the novel she tries to maintain her freedom. She tells Raman that she had to escape to the island in order to stay whole. This urge is in itself an act of Bad Faith because she is trying to hide a displeasing truth from herself that she deserted her family. According to Sartre one who practices Bad Faith tries to present as truth a pleasing untruth. Thus, a person deceives himself and the duality of the deceiver and the deceived does not exist here. Bad Faith, on the contrary, implies in essence the unity of a single consciousness.

But Sita’s husband interprets her escape as desertion. She is pained. She refuses to accept it: “No, no – desertion, that’s cowardly. I wasn’t doing anything cowardly” (108). She begged him to see with turbulence of pride. She admits:

> I was saying No – but positively, positively saying no. There must be some who say No, Raman! Perhaps I never ran away at all. Perhaps I am only like the jellyfish washed up by the waves, stranded there on the sand-bar. I was just stranded here by the sea, that’s all. I hadn’t much to do with it at all. You call yourself a helpless jellyfish. Yet see what you have done to yourself, to all of us. All of you? But you have nothing to do with it. Nothing. There’s just the sea – it drowns us or strands us on the sand-bar and there’s the island. That’s all.” (108)

Evidently, her refusal to accept the responsibility for her action is Bad Faith. She devises an outside agent the sea in whose hand she is a helpless fish. Here she becomes inauthentic, object-like. She is like Hugo, the Sartrean hero in Dirty Hands who does not accept that he has murdered Hoederer. He reflects, “Did I ever do it? It was not I who
killed – it was chance … Chance fired three shots … But me? Me? Where does that put in the things? It was an assassination without an assassin (49). By calling herself a helpless jellyfish at the mercy of the sea Sita is trying to run away from her responsibility. It reveals an inner disintegration in the heart.

Sita too is gripped by this inauthenticity. She cannot stand the criticism of Raman. Sita is also unable to face the reality of life with its violence, sufferings and pains. According to the existential concept defying the reality with its sorrows, pain and guilt offers existential Catharsis. Sita, however, cannot confront even the small incidents. They seem to threaten her existence. The sight of the crows forming a shadow civilisation in that city of flats and alleys and making a feast of a wounded eagle unnerves her to the point of tears. Raman says: “…they’ve made a good job of your eagle” (Where Shall We Go this Summer?, 27). Her husband’s casual remark is inhuman and callous in her opinion. Similarly, her daughter Menaka’s childish acts of tearing her paintings carelessly and her crushing the buds unconsciously are interpreted by her as pernicious. During such moments she is frightened beyond words. Destruction appals her to such an extent that she is unwilling to bring forth her child into this world. She does not approve of childbirth and begins: “…to fear it as yet one more act of violence and murder in a world that had more of them in it than she could take” (38).

In avoiding these hard facts of life she escapes into the serious world, a world in which rules and regulations are readymade. It stands in contrast to the concept of Sartre’s world where a man has to play his own game of life and invent its rules all by himself. In Sita’s case the situation is ironic. By her reflective consciousness she sees this existence as futile and chaotic. She seeks relief in her past in the magic island because: “…ordinary
life, the everyday world had grown so insufferable to her” (72). The pressing exigencies of her freedom cause her anguish. She tries in vain to flee from it. Thus, her dual Bad Faith is related to the ambiguity of the human condition characterised by both fatuity and transcendence.

The act of going to Manori in quest of magic is also fraught with Bad Faith. Magic is an external agent. Sita searches for meaning in it. Instead of delving deep into her own self to find the existential fissure in her being she deceives herself by filling in that gap with solidity. Sita knows that it is possible to keep the child unborn and give it a bewitched life. Nonetheless, by insisting on keeping the child she hides a truth from herself. What she knows inwardly she negates outwardly. This is conscious self-deception: “...since the being of consciousness is the consciousness of being” (19). Moreover, bad faith is a phenomenon of concealing from oneself as also from others a fact of which one is conscious but does not want to reveal it because it is uncomfortable.

Sita despairs at the mechanical life and the roles she has been playing. A motherless child she derives satisfaction by imagining that: “...she came into the world motherless” (61). Like Sartre’s famous waiter, she has been over-acting what she is not. As an adolescent she is unwilling to leave the protective chrysalis of childhood. As a married woman she plays the roles of wife, mother and hostess. She has to continue this drama because familial ties and social values want her to act. Rene Lafarge’s words are very significant in this context:

... if one wants to enjoy real freedom one must reflect and think deeply so that the emptiness within replaces fullness. Reflection is necessary, for only then will the veil fall off and fullness give way to emptiness, so that
we find ourselves faced with the real world, the world of freedom (Jean Paul Satre: His Philosophy, 63).

Sita realises that she is separated by nothingness. The discovery that to value things and to face the consequences of this evaluation is her own decision and this causes much anguish to her. Interestingly enough, Raman helps her on both the occasions. And each time she feels that one epoch of her dramatic part is over. On the first occasion Raman takes her to Bombay after the death of her father, “…to close the theatrical era of her life, her strange career, and lead her out of the ruined theatre into the sunlight of the ordinary, the everyday, the empty and the meaningless” (Where Shall We Go this Summer?, 71-72).

Now, twenty years after the first visit Raman comes again and she broods:

She felt – tired, dishevelled and vacant as she was – like a player at the end of the performance, clearing the stage, packing the costumes, in equal parts saddened and relieved. Her time on the island had been very much of an episode on a stage, illuminated by gaudy sunset effects and played to thunderous storm music. The storm ended, the play over, the stage had now to be cleared – then the players could go home (110)

In other words she prefers servitude to unbearable anguish and submission to freedom. She refuses to accept her responsibility because it is difficult for her to govern herself. Existentialists believe that man finds it easy to forsake his freedom and get a master to rule him because freedom implies shouldering all responsibility for every act or thought produces anguish. Saul Bellow’s hero, Joseph, in Dangling Man puts this situation in simple but eloquent words:
We are afraid to govern ourselves. Of course, it is so hard. We soon want to give up our freedom. It is not even real freedom, because it is not accompanied by comprehension. It is only a preliminary condition of freedom. But we hate it. And soon we run out, we choose a master, roll over on our backs and ask for the leash. (167-68)

This applies to Sita’s condition also who avoids the consequences of her decisions. In trying to find a justification for her existence in the love of a muslim couple she encounters in the Hanging Gardens, Sita is once more in Bad Faith. She refers to it as the only happy moment of her life. It means her relation with Raman is vitiated by a kind of internal negation. Her words express in Bad Faith: “I thought I could live with you and travel alone – mentally, emotionally. But, after that day, that wasn’t enough I had to stay whole. I had to” (Where Shall We Go this Summer?, 105). In human relationships love is an exercise in Bad Faith. In love one tries either to absorb the other’s freedom or one makes oneself completely dependent on the other. In either case freedom is impaired. Sita is whole and yet desires to be in complete harmony with her lover. She cannot find this divine harmony in reality and so she seeks it elsewhere. Anita Desai echoes Sartre when Sita sees her marriage as a farce and utters that all human relations were a farce.

In fact, Sita is aware of the eternal struggle between bipolar forces, the gulf between the hostile unreasonableness of the world and the innate impulse in man to surpass it. Brooding over her escape from her familial duties and responsibilities, she wonders whether it is courage or cowardice:
She had escaped from duties and responsibilities, from order and routine, from life and the city, to the unlivable island. She had refused to give birth to a child in a world not fit to receive the child. She had the imagination to offer it an alternative – a life unlived, a life bewitched. She had cried out her great ‘No’ but now the time had come for her epitaph to be written – *che free per viltate gran frfiute*. Very soon now that epitaph would have to be written. (101-2).

In deciding to reverse her original decision of staying in Manori and accepting to go back to the routine of life Sita rejects the existential responsibility. She does not want to make a choice. It is safer to go back to the serious world of comfort and security, of accepted norms and laws. Like the woman who is taken to a restaurant by her lover Sita too prolongs the moments of her decision. In that, she becomes transcendence-fatuity which is again an instrument of Bad Faith. However, Sita realises that the universe is impenetrable and beyond her limited human vision and comprehension. She is unable to understand the ‘real’ and the ‘unreal’ halves of her life. Her conscious refusal to lead a life of helplessness and chaos leads her to the island but realising that the untroubled, eternal existence is an illusion of the existential abyss she accepts what life unravels in order to keep the integrity of the sublime motherhood through her role as a mother.

Anita Desai’s characters often suffer from a gnawing sense of disintegration within and disjunction from the world around. They are acutely conscious of their inability to connect the fragments of their experience of time and selfhood in an integrated whole by an antithesis in emotion and thinking, in reason and imagination within themselves. They seek to overcome this disjunction to arrive at some coherence
within and connection with the outside world and others: Maya in *Cry, The Peacock*, Monisha in *Voices in the City* and Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* possess extremely imaginative and sensitive minds while their husbands are extremely rational, self-controlled and practical. The lack of a meeting point between their polarities of imagination and reason is the main reason of the lack of mutual understanding between them and the poignant sense of feeling incomplete and unfulfilled. The quest for fulfilment often remains a struggle ending in violence and self-destruction. The characters seek to fulfil themselves through their relationship in marriage and their relationship with brothers and sisters being the most intimate rather than through their parents, especially their mothers.

The relationship among the brothers and sisters - Raja, Bim, Tara and Baba- in Desai’s ‘four – dimensional’ novel *Clear Light of Day* is similarly threatened by their inability to perceive the deep connection with each other hidden under the apparent divergences and differences from each other. In their pursuit of individual destiny they find the loss of a wider based, socially integrated deep-rootedness. They look back in anger and guilt craving for a recovery of a sense of fullness and closeness that they seem to have lost somewhere. There is a void created by their most needed parent especially their mothers at the point of their emotional struggle.

From their early childhood Raja and Bim (Bimla) find a greater mental and temperament affinity with each other than with their other brother and sister Tara and Baba. Both Raja and Bim are boldly independent and possess a fiery impetuous spirit. Baba is congenitally handicapped, mentally retarded, unable to learn beyond a few simple things that Aunt Mira manages to teach him. Tara a normal child is a very sensitive and
clinging type of person. The childhood closeness is lost gradually as the children grow older and become aware of their dreams. Their differences of personalities are related to their response to poetry, music and literature and are presented in images of sounds and silences. These attitudes and images are among the artifices of construction used by Anita Desai to present what she states to be the theme of the novel. She uses images and symbols, the most important being those of sounds, silence, storm, heat and partition of India.

Raja, Bim and Tara realise the dullness of their household and the strange distance between the world of adults and children. Their diabetic mother, tight-lipped father administering daily injections of insulin to their mother, their separate world of club and card-games create a chasm between the parents and children. It also brings the four much closer to each other in search of love and security. They look beyond the house and try to know the world through books and literature as they do not have many opportunities of direct contact with the world. Aunt Mira, a distant cousin of their mother called on to stay with them and take care of the youngest child Baba tells them fairy stories which satisfy them for a few days only. Bim feels discontented and restless and turns to Raja who breaks the barriers, goes out into the outside world and brings for them the literatures of English, Urdu and Hindi. Literature fills the void in their world and adds colour and charm to it. They all, however, react differently reflecting their individual personalities.

Raja is enchanted by the aristocratic Hyde Ali their neighbour and landlord who went out on a white horse every evening. In his disappointment with their house he feels: “...there could be no house as dismal as his own, as dusty and grimy” (49). Invited to their house by the old man Raja is initiated into Urdu poetry and also Muslim culture
which amazed and enchanted him. Raja’s enthusiasm grows and he learns to read, recite and compose Urdu verses. His younger sisters listen to him admiringly though their response remains very limited. Raja introduces Bim and Tara to the English romantic poets especially Byron, drawing them beyond their school girl interest in romantic stories.

Although both Bim and Tara admire their young romantic brother Raja immensely Bim alone is able to keep pace with him. Tara finds it difficult to learn passages of poetry and recite them and she feels left out of the circle of companionship in which Raja and Bim stand together. Even as a grown up woman with two teenage daughters Tara has not forgotten that pang of disappointment. She could still: “Feel herself shrink into that small miserable wretch of twenty years ago, both acquainted with Byron, with Iqbal, even with T.S. Eliot” (42).

When Bim felt very lonely and unhappy during the upheaval of 1947 she turned to poetry to provide her solace and comfort – she reads Lawrence’s Ship of Death and Eliot’s The Wasteland.

Bim’s identification with Raja is very deep. She tries to be his equal intellectually and emotionally. If Raja’s ambition is to be a ‘hero’ then Bim’s is to be ‘a heroine’. Her ideal women are figures like Florence Nightingale and Joan of Arc, single and selfless women. She looks down with scorn upon the ‘frivolous’ interests in jewellery, clothes and parties that the Misra sisters have and at the engagement party of these two they go up to the roof top with her and there she says: “I can think of hundred things to do beside marriage, ...I won’t marry ...I won’t, shall never leave Baba and Raja and Mira – Masi” (Clear Light of Day, 140).
True to her word Bim takes up teaching job after finishing her education and also takes care of Raja, Baba and Aunt Mira. While Tara begins to spend most of the time with the Misra sisters Bim stands alone at times with more than one invalid on hand. Tara meets a Foreign Service man, Bakul gets married and goes away to live out of India. Marriage an institution set up by the tradition is rendered more as a social security than a biological demand. Bim’s life is sacrificed at the altar of marriage as she remains a chronic spinster. The mother’s is the most secured relationship with whom a daughter can express her social and private needs. As the domain of women is limited in Indian societies a woman cannot go beyond a certain limit as a man does. It is nothing short of odium that life will lead a woman into if she were to encroach and experiment with male dominion. Bim’s life is jeopardised by her parents especially her mother due to her lack of care for about the future of her daughters.

The different goals of life of the two sisters are an outcome of their tendency to live either by emotion and imagination reflected in their reading. Tara’s craving for the warm, half-sleepy, non-challenging atmosphere of their home and Aunt Mira’s closeness is reflected to some extent in her enjoyment of the fairy tales narrated by Aunt Mira. Tara is an incurable romantic who believes firmly in the possibility of coming upon a treasure or at least a pearl in the snails she picks up in their garden. As she grows up she reads Looma Dorna and Gone with the Wind. As Tara grows older she is happy to dress up well and go out in the company of their neighbours, the Misra sisters. Bim cruelly cuts off Tara’s long hair in the promise of making them short and curly. Her marriage is well tuned since she is happy to be dominated and governed by her husband Bakul who had preferred her to Bim for her gentle and soft nature.
Although Bakul admires Bim’s sharp mind and strong personality he chooses Tara to be his wife who would be more gentle and easily manageable. Tara was fed on romances and in reading them she would be dragged helplessly into the underworld of semiconsciousness of the romances while: “Bim was often irritated and would toss them aside in dissatisfaction” (121).

The elder sister’s sharp mind did not give in easily to romance or romantic feelings and she wonders what did she want? The answer is facts, history and chronology. Her interest in history grows and she starts reading Gibbon’s Decline and fall in search of knowledge. As she realises the mediocrity of her brother’s composition something in her cringed at a kind of heavy sentimentality of expression that was alien to her. She becomes conscious of her inability to give in to excessive emotions. Raja also realises this development in her and admires her intellectual interest for he knows his inability to do something similar.

The idealistic songs of human dignity, freedom and universal brotherhood that were in the air around 1940s in India appeal to the youthful Raja. His favourite couplet of Iqbal extols human creativity in comparison to God’s: “Thou didst create night but I made the lamp. Thou didst create clay but I made the cup” (50).

The impact of these literatures on Raja is to make him more idealistic and liberal in his attitude towards different communities and their cultures. Raja and Bim are aghast at the sudden outbreak of hatred, mistrust and parochialism among the Hindu-Muslim-Sikh sections in India at a time independence is to be declared. The country is rocked by violence all over and Raja becomes suspect for his frank statements of friendliness for the
Muslims. Although himself ill at this period Raja wonders at his way of thinking and feeling so different from anyone else's at that time or day. Bim could not help admiring what she saw as his heroism: his independent thinking and his courage. Raja was truly the stuff of which heroes are made, she was convinced.

Such adoration is definitely the stuff of which hero worship is made. When Bim discovers Raja to be an ordinary young man interested like others in marriage, property and enjoying material comforts she is shocked, disappointed and becomes bitter. Raja’s desertion of old Delhi, the old house, Bim and Baba in search of a new world, his marrying Benazir, Hyder Ali’s daughter and then adopting their life style creates a chasm between Raja and Bim that had begun to appear much earlier. The slowly emerging differences over their reading had revealed certain important differences in temperament but they had not acknowledged them. Raja’s quest for the distant world, different cultures, more colourful and sophisticated than his own had first led him to Urdu poetry and then to the house of Hyder Ali. Bim had begun to ask for a rational and non-emotional understanding of the world through facts and chronology rather than through imagination. In her anger she picks up Raja’s juvenilia as the target of bitter criticism calling them terrible and nauseating. This shocks Tara on her visit to Bim and Baba in their house in Old Delhi. Bim’s words threaten Tara. The enclosed world of love and admiration which she had watched from the outside as an unequal younger sister was no more seen or felt by her.

During Tara’s visit to Bim and Baba both the sisters are aware of the tremendous change brought about by the passage of time altering their relations and attitudes. They are continuously haunted by the memories of their childhood, their parents and the
cataclysmic summer of 1947 and each tries to exorcise it in her own way. They recall the
period of childhood as an age of love and closeness with each other the four of them
forming a complete whole. But cracks begin to appear as they grow up and acquire more
individual personalities. The partition of India and Pakistan shatters their family too and
becomes a powerful image of their feeling of estrangement. The partition brought barriers
between people who had lived together for centuries in an atmosphere of mutual social
and cultural understanding. The division into two individual units causes each group a
crisis of identity for there is a forced uprooting and deviation from the fundamental
principles of the common Indian culture that had prevailed over the country where
individual units had followed their diverse ways of living, remaining one whole entity. In
a similar manner Tara, Bim and Raja also face a crisis of relating their present to the past –
their adulthood to childhood. The period of adolescence – fails to provide a continuity
from the early period of childhood to the later stage of adulthood causing deep
psychological trauma and stress.

Another entity is Baba whose problems are slightly different. His lack of ability to
conceptualise and communicate forces upon him a void and a vacuum of silence, a void
that cannot be filled by anybody. Even his mother had to show the utmost care for him.
He fills it with the sounds of the gramophone records of 1940s refusing to change the
familiar instrument and records by the latest Hi-Fi system brought for him as a gift by
Raja. Forced to live on the periphery of lives of others he creates his society in the sounds
that he can control and regulate. His withdrawal from the world, his silence and his
undemanding existence give him an aura of other-worldliness. Both Bim and Tera think
of his lack of worldly concern and he becomes a test of their sensitivity and perceptivity.
When Bim and Tara insist on his going to office and trying to learn to work he at first ignores them by his silence. But as the pressure of their will increases he leaves the house in a state of acute tension and comes rushing back to his room. In his room the gramophone has been put off and Baba feels threatened by the overwhelming silence. As Tara comes to his room she sees it ring with her voice and then with her silence. In the shaded darkness silence had the quality of a looming dragon. Even Tara senses the oppressive silence in the room and wonders whether it was to keep it at bay that Baba played these records so endlessly and so obsessively? Change and growth frighten Baba whose ability to understand others and comprehend abstract concept is severely limited. For him time is at a standstill and any indication of change disturbs him. His set routine of life is governed by the circular movement of the gramophone records and he feels comforted by its loud ‘primitive’ rhythm. As he changes the needle of the gramophone he feels defeated and infinitely depressed. His fondness for music is limited to the music of the 1940s for he does not like contemporary music and also fails to respond to the musical notes of the various birds calling out in their garden and the other sounds of life going on outside. His windows also do not interest him. When the gramophone is not playing he feels overwhelmed by the sounds outside:

...the silence of the room ...did not soothe or protect him but, on the contrary, startled him and drove him into a panic – the koel calling, calling out in the tall trees, a child crying in the servant’s quarters, a bicycle dashing past, its bells jingling,(14)

He finds solace in the mechanical music, “...a mechanical bird had replaced the koels and pigeons of daylight” (30).
Other examples who have been undone by lack of motherly influence and care are the Misras. For the Misra brothers and sisters music is a means of entertainment, livelihood and a vocation requiring full dedication. The two sisters who had got married but were sent back by their husbands put their limited skill in dancing and singing to practical use giving lessons to young girls and earn money. Deserted by their wives who wanted them to change their residence and also become more serious about work their brothers spend idle wasteful lives. Mulk one of the brothers pursues music as hobby but does not wish to earn the money that is needed for such expensive pursuits. When Bim, Tara and Bakul visit the Misras, Mulk soon gets agitated and quarrelsome. In this scene a person’s voice is used as a means of reflecting his personality. While Mulk gets upset he shouts and sobs. Bakul uses his most discreet voice and controls Mulk as the others feel helpless. The sisters are totally incapable of resisting their brothers’ aggressive and quarrelsome demands and the writer emphasises their weakness. In speaking to Mulk they call him in: “...shrii crooning voices, like pigeons. Mulk, Mulk, rose the pacifying croons from the pigeons in the chairs” (38).

In Dr Biswas’s life music occupies a very high place. Sent by the firm to treat Raja and then Aunt Mira he gradually picks up the courage to discuss his fondness for music with Bim. He tells her of his brief sojourn at Germany where he was initiated into western music and learnt to play violin. He tells her: “...music is one of the greatest joys we can have on earth. If one has that pleasure then one can bear almost anything in life” (79).

Western music is one of the few areas of interest where Dr Biswas’s mother cannot enter for she loves Rabindra Music. Forced to sacrifice his personal life for the sake of his mother he finds comfort and fulfilment in music. It becomes his means of
survival. It is almost the only pleasure he has. He tells Bim, "Without it life would be too drab – it would be only drudgery" (79).

Bim fails to make the best out of Dr. Biswas by clumsily making advances through a dry and drab dialogue jeopardising her opportunity for a possible marriage. The influence of a mother is more significant at crucial times whose rich experience wins their daughters lovely gentlemen callers.

Bim is surprised at Dr. Biswas’s selflessness and shares with Raja a contempt for such gentleness. But the two of them Raja and Bim find their own differences growing stronger till the day comes when Raja leaves their house for Hyderabad. They have seen a "...gap between them, a trough or a channel that the books they shared did not bridge" (121). Raja’s eagerness to enter the world of action disturbs Bim and she resents his moving away from her. She too wishes to be independent like him and tries Raja’s clothes thinking that simply by "...owning pockets, one owned riches, owned independence" (133). Left behind in the house she feels bitter with Raja and Tara who have broken apart from their childhood closeness and become very different. She feels rejected and deserted and needs a renewed sense of self-justification.

Bim’s separations from her brother and sisters heighten in her a sense of incompleteness, unfulfilment and slow disintegration. She loses her sense of coordination within herself and with the others. All these years she had felt herself to be the centre. Bim who had stayed and become part of the pattern inseparable now feels unwanted and isolated. She resists Tara’s and Raja’s gestures of love and affection for she feels that she, the house and old Delhi are all part of the decaying dead past while the rest of the family and country have moved far ahead in a new direction. When Tara
Bim insists that she, Bakul and Raja wish to come there to be with her Bim asks: "...who would be thrilled to return to this – this dead old house? ...so dead and stale" (156). Bim’s voice is like a burnt twig breaking, brittle and dry expressing her sense of being entombed in a dead house and a dead past. She has difficulty in relating to her own past and the past of her country. Anita Desai suggests throughout the crisis of Bim’s relation with her past the crisis faced by the Modern India in finding a constructive and useful relation with its past, glorious and chequered as it was. She has no patience with the attitude of Bakul who speaks highly of the achievements of ancient India ignoring the living problems of the day. She mocks his romantic statement more of a cliché than a sincere feeling: "A part of me lives here, the deepest part of me, always" (36). She herself has been so far unable to perceive the relationship between her present and past.

Bim is thus caught in contradictions within herself. Her sense of identity depends on her rejuvenating her connection with her brothers and sisters but she lacks the imaginative vision that can unite them once again with the same closeness. She feels torn apart in "...loving them and not loving them, accepting them and not accepting them. Understanding them and not understanding them" (166). In her night long vigil when the dust storm outside becomes an effective symbol of the violent turbulence of emotions within her she makes a brave effort to come out of the mash of prejudices, anger and resentments in which she was caught. She tries to break out of the shell of self-deception to discover her greater being in relation with the others so that they may form again a whole and a perfect pattern.

Bim discovers through the serious consideration of her whole life the urgent need to correlate her knowledge with her imagination. In the last words of Aurangzeb she finds
the inspiration for selflessness, a move towards others. The Moghul emperor's realisation reads as: "...alone he had lived and alone he made to die" (167). This makes Bim realise the isolation inherent in the nature of human life and of mortality and inspires in Bim a desire to recast the past and present for the ultimate journey into the future.

The vision of death instead of causing terror and despair makes her stretch her concept of time from the present in two directions backward and forward and relate the present to a much broader span. It is not immediate history that she goes to, her's or the nation's, but of a period in the past when the now separated Hindu and Muslim populaces had lived together forming one whole, a perfect pattern. Bim looks upon her soul as a bark and her life as an ocean and makes for reducing the unnecessary load on her soul.

The major action that destroys the rancour and bitterness of the past is Bim's tearing off of Raja's letter. Once she deliberately breaks down that wall of hatred she can find her deep similarity and connection with Tara also. Tara insists on articulating her sense of guilt in deserting Bim to face the family problems and also tries to bridge the gap that lies between them. In seeking her own happiness Tara had found escape in marriage: "Marriage was the complete escape" (157). Bim can see in Tara's suffering over the past a shared experience, "...her own despairs. They were not so unlike. They were more alike than any other two people could be" (174). This is an important acceptance coming from Bim's heart who had never before considered Tara to be an equal. Now she accepts with Tara that nothing is over ever, a realisation of the continuation of her deep lying love for her siblings. She feels
...there could be no love more deep and full and wide than this one. No other love had started so far back in time and had so much time in which to grow and spread. They were really all part of her, inseparable, so many aspects of her as she was of them.(165).

The love had lain dormant being too inarticulate, too unthinking but now she decides to strengthen it so that it may: “...suffice her in her passage through the ocean” (165). This love relates her with knowledge, reason with imagination and provides her with a sense of fulfilment.

Bim’s realisation of her, the estranged parts of herself is related to her experience of music in the last scene of the novel. At the music programme organised by the Misras one finds her realisation widening into a broader awareness of time, culture and society. Bim and Baba attend the programme after Tara, Bakul and their daughters have left to attend the wedding of Raja’s daughter at Hyderabad. Bim has conveyed through Tara her desire to make peace with Raja and invited him to their house in Delhi. In the evening at the Misras she finds a carefully planned and executed programme. The individual’s skill in singing becomes an occasion of social relationship. The programme is also a group activity Mulk, his Guru and the accompanists together create an atmosphere of harmony. A relaxed, congenial and friendly atmosphere prevails with all the persons sharing and belonging to a cultured society. Traditions of music, musical programmes are observed and congenial relationship of the individual with the society is revealed. The right combination of notes and melody move in harmony with the old traditional form which moulds and renews itself from age to age. The evening, audience and singers all together form a congenial whole like a design on a tapestry forming that composed absorbed
group before them. Mulk’s song: “...bound them all together in a pattern, a picture as perfectly composed as Moghul miniatures of a garden scene by night” (180).

This conceptualisation of an experience of music in visual imagery is an inevitable sequel to a separation from the past, the separation from one’s culture and failure to find replenishment for and vindication of the cultural verities from within one’s own self.

This is indeed what one finds to be the cause of feelings of insecurity and lack of a sense of identity that Maya and the immigrant Indians in England suffer from. Their inability to relate to their culture and background either due to psychological immaturity, as in Maya’s case or due to a forced transplanting of one’s self into an alien and hostile soil are reflected very effectively in their inability to enter the spirit of Indian music and enjoy it deeply.

In Clear Light of Day also Anita Desai uses music and responses to the fine art as a test of the protagonist’s sensitivity and maturity. It is also a reflection of the person’s ability to experience emotions. Bim’s response to the programme and her surrender to the atmosphere of the evening is an indication of at least a partial resolution of the antithesis of reason, emotions and imagination in her. Music becomes symbolic of the intuitive understanding of oneself and of the reality that lies submerged under appearances. With her inner eyes Bim perceives continuity in history in her, in her families and in time, not binding them within some dead and airless cell but giving them the soil in which to hand down their roots ...Reach out to new lines, but always drawing from the same soil, the secret soil, the same secret darkness (182).
Bim perceives this hidden source of her being: "...it was where her deepest self lived, and the deeper selves of her sister and brothers" (182). The harmonious relationship between the old Guru and Mulk also establishes the possibility of a meaningful interaction between the past and the present, old age and youth. The Guru sings with his whole life behind him his voice inclined to break, "...not merely with age, but with the bitterness of his experience, the sadness and passion and frustration" (181). Whereas Mulk’s voice is "...almost like a child’s, so sweet and clear ...full and ripe" (182). They provide an interrelation which satisfies both of them.

Their song brings also a synthesis of poetry and melody, verbal and non-verbal, relational and emotional modes of artistic expression. The Guru sings a verse of Iqbal to which both Bim and Baba respond feeling closer to each other.

The last scene becomes the image of Bim’s reintegration with her family, society and culture and her perception of a unity between divergent elements within herself and the world.

In the fourth chapter the role of a woman as a mother has been analysed. The characters in the novels taken for study formed the basis for the study. The following chapter forms the suggestions and summing up.