CHAPTER FOUR

RESOLUTION AND REGENERATION

There is no better way of achieving a state of equilibrium than to pick up the gauntlet and face, in a heroic manner, the reality with all its challenges. (Solanki 177)

Most of the characters of Desai analysed in this chapter are faced with insupportable problems of existence. Various factors trap them and they suffer enormously. Though they are victims of tragic circumstances, they stubbornly refuse to surrender to them. With patience, prudence and determination they heroically battle against the insuperable difficulties and emerge victorious. They grow again with new strength and optimism. All these courageous, industrious and enlightened characters are unforgettably immortalized in the novels Clear Light of Day, The Village by the Sea and In Custody.

Clear Light of Day, one of the poetic novels of Desai, highlights the aspirations and frustrations of Bim, the protagonist of the novel, whose apple-cart is cruelly upset by her familial circumstances that almost pulverise her psyche. The novel also demonstrates the process of how Bim loses her equanimity and ultimately regains it. Commenting on this novel
Asnani aptly observes:

The excellence of *Clear Light of Day* is essentially in the psychological insight and in the poetic tone by means of which even when the emotional strains for Bim are numerous, the author never allows us to forget the spirit of tolerance, fortitude, and self-sacrifice or to doubt whether Bim really has within her the titanic strength for tragic purification. In the paradox of Bim's tragic living we perceive that through the chill, brooding melancholy, withdrawal and disillusionment about her volatile nature... man may still apprehend, however poignantly, a beauty and grandeur that are not mutable. (11)

Bim painfully fights shy of remembering her past and her resistance to be nostalgic is proved from what she tells Tara: "All that dullness, boredom, waiting. Would you care to live that over again? Of course not. Do you know anyone who would -- secretly, sincerely, in his innermost self -- really prefer to return to childhood?" (*Clear Light of Day* 4). With a great sigh of relief Bim utters that she is very glad that her youth is over and firmly articulates: "I never wish it back. I would never be young again for anything" (*Clear Light of Day* 43). Her "farewell to Eden" (Chellappan 140) naturally arouses one's curiosity to know as to what has happened to Bim.
Brought up "in a house in Old Delhi, that is haunted by an aura of sickness and decay" (Mukherjee 30) and in an oppressive atmosphere of emotional insecurity Raja, Bim, Tara and Baba are deprived of the love and affection of their parents, who are engrossed in their own affairs. If Monisha, Nirode and Amla in Voices in the City, Hari and Lila in The Village by the Sea and Hugo in Baumgartner's Bombay suffer so much because of the incompatibility of the temperaments of their respective parents it is understandable. But in Clear Light of Day Raja, Bim, Tara and Baba undergo a lot of sufferings inspite of the harmonious relationship between their parents and in this respect these children are more unfortunate than the others mentioned above.

The indifferent attitude of their father, whom they know "as the master of the entrance and the exit" (Clear Light of Day 53) and who appears "to deal with both family and business by following a policy of neglect" (Clear Light of Day 52) completely alienates his children from him. Even the attitude of their mother towards them is shocking and it is in no way better than that of their father. Their mother, a diabetic, never realises the indispensability of maternal love for her children and her penchant for playing bridge in the Roshonara Club hardly gives her any time to spend with her children. The careless attitude of this woman is comparable to that of Otima in Voices in the City who without caring for her children
spends her time in playing Monopoly and mah-jong games in the company of Major Chada.

The harmful impact of the apathetic role of the parents on their four children is that it creates in the latter fear, anxiety and insecurity. Describing the relationship between the parents and their children Bande rightly says: "There is hardly any exchange between the children and the parents. They could certainly go haywire like the Ray Children in *Voices in the City*, for want of parental affection, but for the benign presence of Mira-Masi, a mother surrogate" (143). The feeling of hopelessness produced in the children by the utter negligence of their parents is aggravated by the unbearable wretchedness of their house. The detrimental home atmosphere generated by illness, boredom, ugliness and inactivity prompts Raja to compare his house with other houses:

It was an almost shocking contrast to the shabbiness of their own house, its peculiarities that hurt Raja by embarrassing him as he grew up and began to compare them with other homes, other families.... He felt there could be no house as dismal as his own, as dusty and grimy and uncharming. Surely no other family could have as much illness contained in it as his, or so much oddity, so many things that could not be mentioned and had to be camouflaged or ignored. (*Clear Light of Day* 49)
However, the unhappy and depressing situation prevailing at home does not dampen the qualities of courage and independence in Raja. Impressed by these qualities of Raja, Bim tries to emulate him in all possible ways. Of the four children, Raja and Bim have been very close from their childhood. As S. Gupta rightly says: "From their early childhood Raja and Bim find a greater mental and temperamental affinity with each other than with their other brother and sister, Tara and Baba" (118). When Raja says that he will emerge as a hero Bim also declares that she will become a heroine.

The timely arrival of Mira-Masi, who gives unlimited love for these children, prevents the imponderable damages that would have otherwise been caused to their personality. Giving the much needed emotional security she carefully looks after "the emotionally orphaned children" (Jena 60). With exemplary devotion she gives special attention to Baba, a mentally retarded child. To the frustrated children she is like a strong tree in whose shade they grow. Though the presence of Aunt Mira helps Bim have a sense of satisfaction it does not help release her rich potential that has remained untapped due to the peculiar atmosphere of her house.
Fortunately for Bim, her school atmosphere largely helps harness her energy and potentiality. As Desai points out:

At school Bim became a different person -- active, involved, purposeful. A born organiser, she was patrol leader of the Blue birds when still a small pig-tailed junior, later of the Girl Guides, then captain of the netball team, class prefect, even gloriously, in her final year at school -- Head Girl. A bright, slapdash student, she spent little time at her studies but did almost as well as those dim, bespectacled daughters of frustrated failures who drove their children frantically, bitterly, to beat everyone else in the exams and to spend all their waking hours poring myopically over their schoolbooks. (Clear Light of Day 122-123)

Being selfless, highly responsible and inclined to emulate the wonderful lives of Florence Nightingale and Joan of Arc, Bim vows to set the Thames on fire. But the untimely demise of her parents throws a spanner into her works. Deprived of the chances of realizing her ambition she is forced by familial circumstances to turn her attention to look after her family. Declaring that she will not marry, she confidently says that she will do things, earn her own living and look after Mira - Masi and Baba. Commending Bim on the heroic dimension of her
personality, R.S. Sharma observes:

Her revolt against the traditional image of the Indian woman is manifest in all that she says or does. Unlike most Indian girls she opts out of marriage for a life of chosen spinsterhood to pursue a career and a way of life which she accepts gracefully despite its limitations. That she does so not out of any other consideration except that of her own choice is evident from the fact that she is the more adored and admired of the two sisters; has a near sure offer of marriage from Dr. Biswas and continues to draw amorous responses from men including Bakul, Tara's husband, even now. (138)

Of all the major female characters of Desai only Bim and Nanda Kaul in Fire on the Mountain perform their domestic duties with a sense of responsibility. Whereas Nanda Kaul reluctantly fulfils her responsibilities, Bim willingly carries out her familial duties. The onus of paying the rent on the house, of feeding more than six people everyday, of getting Tara happily married and of taking care of Baba for the rest of his life falls upon Bim. When Tara wants to marry Bakul, Bim gracefully gives her approbation. When Tara goes away with her husband without bothering about the family problems Bim never has a grudge against her. Tara should have shared Bim's
troubles and problems. But Tara's adverse circumstances prevent her from doing so.

Whereas Raja and Bim involve themselves in literary pursuits to avoid boredom in their house, Tara has no such aptitude for literary ambition. Unfortunately for her, Tara's school atmosphere is unfavourable to her. Unlike Bim, Tara is utterly unhappy at her school. Lacking Bim's physical stamina, mental vigour, gumption and courage, she struggles to cope with the problems continuously posed by her school, which is to her "a terror, a blight, a gathering of large, loud, malicious forces that threatened and mocked her fragility" (Clear Light of Day 123). Being weak-willed, she is not able to face difficult challenges.

Helplessly left out in almost all the educational activities Tara becomes frustrated and is always alone giving rise to speculation that she is very much conceited. On the pitiable conditions of Tara at her school Desai says:

The noise, the dense populace, the hustle and jostle of school made her shrink into a still smaller, paler creature who could not rouse herself out of a dismal apathy that made the lessons as irrelevant and meaningless as the buzzing of a fly against the window pane, and friendship with the loud, vulgar, vigorous young girls in the class, so full of
unpleasant secrets and revelations and so quick to betray and mock, an impossibility, vaguely wished for but quite beyond her capacity to undertake. (Clear Light of Day 123)

Tara's crafts classes give her physical agonies that are aggravated by the unsympathetic attitude of Miss Jacob. Frightened by the ruthless shooting of a mad dog and offended by the unthinking behaviour of Miss Singh, Tara feels drained of her meagre enthusiasm for her fellow students. Rattled by the nightmarish school experiences, disenchanted with the emptiness of her house, neglected by her parents, and marginalized by Raja and Bim, Tara is severely gripped by a sense of restlessness that forces her to pursue the long cherished ambition of becoming a mother for a refreshing change in her dismally monotonous existence.

Though Bim does not expect any help from Tara, she pins her hopes on Raja and confidently feels that he will shoulder the family responsibilities. It breaks her heart when Raja is down with tuberculosis. Bim ungrudgingly bends herself extremely backward to nurse him back to health. She patiently satisfies his whimsical inclination and fanciful curiosities. Always sitting beside his bed and trailing the iced sponge across his pale forehead she reads aloud the poems of
Tennyson, Byron, and Swinburne to make him happy.

Without realizing the umpteen difficulties Bim is faced with, Raja is unhappy with the sordid atmosphere of his old house. Worried about his bleak future he is toying with the idea of seeking a new pasture. Oblivious of his responsibility to his rudderless family he invariably begins to long for "society, company, applause; towards colour, song, charm" (Clear Light of Day 49) and feels enchanted to find all these attractive elements in the Hyder Ali household. When he complains to Bim about the shabbiness of their house she, feeling that the complaints are only the tip of the iceberg of his increasingly growing restlessness, considers them as "petty cavils" (Johnson 14) of his petty mind.

The first palpable shock Bim experiences in her relationship with Raja is when she discovers that he withdraws from her. This bitter discovery has an unsettling effect on her and she unnecessarily loses her temper in the day-to-day activities. Desai brings out the severe impact of the withdrawal of Raja on Bim:

When Bim realized, although incredulously, that Raja was withdrawing, that his maleness and his years were forcing him to withdraw from the cocoon-cosiness spun by his aunt and his sisters out of their femaleness and lack -- or surfeit -- of years,
she grew resentful. She still sat listening to Aunt Mira's fairy tales but with a brooding air, resenting being left there, bored and inactive, by Raja. (Clear Light of Day 118)

If Raja's withdrawal painfully disturbs Bim, her literary taste that has strangely become different now from Raja's, disappoints him and he feels hurt on this count. Beginning to feel bored by the books brought by Raja, Bim starts to take a strong liking for facts and history. Though Raja and Bim have the common goals of becoming a hero and heroine respectively, with the passage of time they become different in their tastes. Comparing Elenor and her brother Morris in the novel The Years by Virginia Woolf with Bim and Raja, Solanki observes that "Elenor is unable to share her dreams and plans with her brother Morris.... Bim and Raja also, as they grow up, find it difficult to share their aims and objectives, their dreams and ideals" (52).

The love and affection showered by Hyder Ali upon Raja secretly induces his selfishness which leads him to "think that Hyder Ali had no son, only a daughter -- a curious thought, never spoken of, yet clearly felt "(Clear Light of Day 56). Completely immersed in the euphoric feelings electrified by this secret thought, he is obsessed with the strong desire of reaching the Hyder Alis. Becoming agitated he ungratefully
shouts at Bim, who has been hopefully counting on his help: "I have to go. Now I can go. I have to begin my life sometime, don't I? You don't want me to spend all my life down in this hole, do you? You don't think I can go on living just to keep my brother and sister company, do you?" (Clear Light of Day 100).

On the strength of the fact that she has weathered many a challenge, Bim tries her best to put up a brave face on this crisis too. But she is not able to hold down her deep feelings of disappointments for long. Crushed over the inhuman betrayal of Raja and the poisonous sting of his unbridled tongue, she becomes the picture of despair. Acutely alienated she expresses her feelings of sorrow and helplessness to Baba:

So now there are just you and I left, Baba. Does the house seem empty to you? Everyone's gone except you and I. They won't come back. We'll be alone now. But we don't have to worry about any one now -- Tara or Raja or Mira-Masi. We needn't worry now that they're all gone. We're just by ourselves and there's nothing to worry about. You're not afraid, are you? There's no need to be afraid. It's as if we were children again -- sitting on the veranda, waiting for father and mother when it's growing dark and it's bed time. Really, it'll be just the way it was
when we were children... It wasn't so bad then. Was it? No. (Clear Light of Day 101)

It is a cruel paradox of human existence that Bim stands deserted by her own siblings for whose welfare she abundantly sacrifices her personal ambitions. What is more baffling and horrifying to Bim is Raja's downright materialistic attitude. She feels jolted because Raja "missed his true calling of being a poet, as he had earlier vowed to Bim" (Hashmi 66). Though tormented by the inhuman treachery of Raja and perplexed by his interest in material things, with a great effort, Bim manages to control herself. But it is the callous and irresponsible letter written by Raja that obviously proves to be the last straw on the camel and "the most unkindest cut of all" (Shakespeare, Julius Caesar 3.2.177).

The impact of the tone of the letter unhinges her equilibrium, kills almost all her affection for Raja and fills her mind with anger, jealousy, bitterness, irritability, hatred and impatience that lead to her emotional degeneration. At the height of her fury over the pettiness of his mind she rejects him. Since the letter has caused turbulent changes in Bim it is pertinent to quote it here. Raja's letter reads:

You will have got our wire with the news of Hyder Ali Sahib's death. I know you will have been as saddened by it as we are. Perhaps you are also a bit worried
about the future. But you must remember that when I left you, I promised I would always look after you, Bim. When Hyder Ali Sahib was ill and making out his will, Benazir herself spoke to him about the house and asked him to allow you to keep it at the same rent we used to pay him when father and mother were alive. He agreed -- you know he never cared for money, only for friendship -- and I want to assure you that now that he is dead and has left all his property to us, you may continue to have it at the same rent, I shall never think of raising it or of selling the house as long as you and Baba need it.... (Clear Light of Day 27)

Inspite of her preoccupation with the teaching profession, many years of monotonous existence and the failure to realize her noble ambitions due to unlucky familial circumstances that have trapped her, drain away Bim's enthusiasm in life. Not only does she neglect her personal appearance but also she fails to maintain the proper upkeep of the house and garden. Rightly observing that the attitude of Bim is nothing but the outward manifestation of her inner degradation, Bande says:

Bim's untidiness symbolically represents her lack of zest of life. The bright adolescent girl, who worked deliberately and consciously to stand first in the examination and win laurels, is now turned into a
middle-aged spinster, wearing faded maxi, living in a dilapidated old house, with an unkempt garden. Everything about her reflects the decadence of mind.

(149-150)

Tara, who has come back from a foreign country with a perceptible change in her personality earnestly invites Bim for the marriage of the eldest daughter of Raja. The very mention of the name of Raja tempestuously disturbs Bim. It ignites Bim's simmering feelings generated by the unthinking letter of Raja and suppressed for a long time. Desai effectively presents the silent fury of Bim through a cluster of images of a flock of mynahs that suddenly fly out of the trees in a loud shriek and of a dog that madly charges across to the eucalyptus trees, tears long strips of blue bark off the pink tree-trunks and bellows furiously.

On hearing the unsympathetic statement of Tara that the letter is very old Bim flies into a rage. As Tara tries to play down the serious effect of the letter in order to avoid its being blown out of proportion Bim's volcanic fury spontaneously erupts:

I still keep it in my desk -- to remind me. Whenever I begin to wish to see Raja again or wish he would come and see us, then I take out that letter and read it again. Oh, I can tell you, I could write him
such an answer, he wouldn't forget it for many years either!

.... you say I should come to Hyderabad with you for his daughter's wedding. How can I? How can I enter his house -- my landlord's house? I, such a poor tenant? Because of me, he can't raise the rent or sell the house and make a profit -- imagine that. The sacrifice! (Clear Light of Day 28)

Like Amla who in Voices in the City is worried about the unpleasant changes in the behaviour of her sister, Monisha, Tara is disturbed by Bim's "psychosomatic symptoms" (Bande 147) that are visible in her talking to herself and gesturing with her hands when she is alone. Realizing that Bim should have a change, she is determined to take Bim and Baba to Hyderabad. When Tara broaches the topics of marriage and of Raja once again the frantic reaction of Bim is not completely unexpected. Feeling agitated and pouring out cutting remarks about Raja, Bim snaps that she is no more interested in Raja. Blinded by her emotional intensity she can not help employing unpleasant things about Benazir, Moyna and Riyaz. In this connection Desai makes a poetic comment on the cause of Bim's anger: "Something about Raja's letter, Tara's comment, the world of luxury and extravagance created by them and approved by both of them, excluding her, her standards, too rough and too austere
for them, made anger flower in her like wild red tropical bloom..." (Clear Light of Day 147).

Stunned by Bim's bitter statement that the poems of Raja are terrible and baffled by her biting criticism against him, Tara tells Bim: "I wouldn't ever believe, no one would ever have believed that you and Raja who were so close -- so close -- could be against each other ever. It's just unbelievable, Bim, and so -- unnecessary, too..." (Clear Light of Day 28-29).

Because of Bim's lone and long battle against life and economic hardships, the ugly qualities of meanness and stinginess have crept into her personality. Her unjustified scolding of Tara for leaving the rotten oranges uneaten, her failure to have milk brought for Bakul's tea and her unwillingness to use the expensive tea brought long ago are the unmistakable pointers that exemplify her degraded qualities. Giving reasons for the bitterness, meanness and parsimony of Bim, Tripathy observes:

Raja's desertion brings about a shock that partly unhinges her balance. She becomes irritable, impatient, sulky and complaining and at times verges on mean frugality. She for a time is disillusioned with caring, loving, suffering and affections for brothers and sisters. And hence her bitterness. (110)
Pained by the failure of Raja to refer to her name in his letter to Tara, Bim sadly reflects that the passage of time has destroyed the old relationships of childhood. Like Amla in Voices in the City, who had been Nirode's pet sister once, feels hurt to find him allying himself with Monisha, Bim feels wounded that Raja, with whom she had been very close once, becomes attached to Tara. Unable to stomach the fact that Raja has neglected her Bim becomes gloomy. Recalling those people who have selfishly used her and treacherously abandoned her, Bim muses over:

They had come like mosquitoes -- Tara and Bakul, and behind them the Misras, and somewhere in the distance Raja and Benazir -- only to torment her and, mosquito- like, sip her blood. All of them fed on her blood, at sometime or the other had fed -- it must have been good blood, sweet and nourishing. Now, when they were full, they rose in swarms, humming away, turning their backs on her. (Clear Light of Day 153)

The helplessness and agony of Bim gets intensified when she is not able to tackle the difficult problems posed by her late father's insurance business. In utter disgust and anger she is toying with the idea of selling out the shares. Tormented by her worries that the sale of the shares means the end of the income from the business and that her own salary is
hardly enough to cover her expenses, she seriously thinks of sending Baba to live with Raja. Suddenly pouncing on Baba she gives vent to her angry feelings. In the resultant repentance and self-introspection Bim feels tortured for having chosen Baba, of all persons, on whom to pour out her pain and frustration. Becoming nostalgic, she remembers how she loved Baba, Raja and Tara. Lying still, she muses upon the memories of her past. She realizes that her understanding of her dead parents is incomplete. Accepting that her love for Raja and Baba is inadequate she resolves to forgive the former and make the latter pardon her for cruelly hurting him.

With the purpose of collecting the torn strips of her mind together and fuse them into a concentrated whole she goes to her bookshelf and takes a book and it happens to be the Life of Aurangzeb. What she reads in the book greatly touches her and makes her feel stirred:

'Many were around me when I was born, but now I am going alone. I know not why I am or wherefore I came into the world... Life is transient and the lost moment never comes back... When I have lost hope in myself, how can I hope in others? .... Now I am going alone. I grieve for your helplessness, but what is the use? Every torment I have inflicted, every sin I have committed, every wrong I have done, I carry the consequences with me. Strange that I
came with nothing into the world, and now go away with this stupendous caravan of sin!' (Clear Light of Day 167)

The tragic remorse of the emperor, his feeling of loneliness and his statement about life and the lost moment in life arouse Bim's feelings of pity and fear. As Tripathy rightly points out the emperor's last words bring out a "Catharsis" (108) on Bim. These words touch her so much that she automatically begins to shed "repentant tears" (M. Prasad 134) and at last her tormented mind purified by the tears of atonement lands itself in the realm of peace. The impersonal reading of the old poems of Raja makes Bim understand that the ambitions of Raja are "modest and unassertive" (Clear Light of Day 169). With this new light on the personality of her brother she reconciles herself to his desertion and his inclination towards material prosperity. This crucial experience of Bim prepares the ground for her to destroy Raja's letter. As Bande says: "A heavy weight is lifted off her shoulders. She is liberated from her twisted vision and her confusion. She eliminates the nostalgia and phobia of her past and retains her link with her siblings" ("The Interplay of Rhetoric and Mimesis in Desai's Clear Light of Day" 100).

The crucial part deftly played by Tara in expediting the memorable achievement of the regeneration of Bim cannot be
underrated. Distressed by Bim's fears and worries and alarmed by the fact that she is skating on thin ice, Tara prudently resolves to pour oil on troubled waters. Her thoughtful suggestion for a family consultation to take a final decision on the insurance business is certainly not to set the cat among the pigeons. It is purely prompted by her genuine desire of bringing about a family reunion.

Deciding to initiate conciliatory stances, Tara, who has been incessantly tormented by the feeling of guilt, asks Bim to forgive her for not helping her in nursing Mira-Masi and attending her funeral. Her insistence on being given "a punishment or at least a reprimand with which she could finally plaster the episode, medicate it" (Clear Light of Day 174) appreciably strengthens the sisterly bond of love between them. As Jain aptly puts: "It is this confession which makes possible that final purging of anger on Bim's part" (127). This happy experience gives Bim a shot in the arm and makes her move still closer towards Raja.

Triumphanty emerging from the darkness of misunderstanding and inadequate love and seeing the clear light of the sun, Bim, full of mirth, sends an invitation to Raja through Tara with a clear message of love and hope: "Tell him we couldn't come - but he should come. Bring him back with you,
Tara -- or tell him to come in the winter. All of them.... Tell him I'm -- I'm waiting for him -- I want him to come -- I want to see him" (Clear Light of Day 175-176). The musical orchestra remarkably serves as an effective instrument for Bim to get a noteworthy insight into existence. With a notable perception of the changes in the voice of Mulk and his Guru, Bim reflectively remembers a beautiful line quoted in the novel from T.S.Eliot's Four Quartets: "Time the destroyer is time the preserver" (182).

Perceiving in the voice of the Guru his deep feelings of failure, frustrations, bitterness and sorrows of his life, Bim reaches a stage in which "Iqbal, Eliot, the Guru, his music and Raja all become one" (Bande 153). Understanding the full significance of the history of her house that contains the present, past and future, she acquires the very essential knowledge of the inevitable changes in life. Comparing To The Lighthouse with Clear Light of Day Kanwar observes:

The passage of time results in loneliness and isolation for some, as with Lily and Bim. It is as if the theme of loneliness is being carried over from the earlier novels, Mrs.Dalloway and Cry, the Peacock. But instead of ending on a note of fatality, both To the Lighthouse and Clear Light of Day end in affirmation, with Lily having her vision
and Bim reconciling to the change that she had hitherto violently rejected.... (39)

Bim attains her equanimity, liberation and regeneration through love, magnanimity, understanding, acceptance and reconciliation. She recaptures her wholeness through "the discovery of self" (Chellappan 139). Commenting on the achievement of Bim and the significance of the novel Clear Light of Day, Jena precisely points out:

Bim achieves her 'self' not in isolation but in togetherness. She is the knight in quest of self-hood which she achieves not in rejection but in acceptance, not in withdrawal but in positive commitment. The novel as a whole seeks the ultimate wisdom of life in one intuitive understanding and a rational acceptance of the various polarities and contradictions of life. (59)

Whereas in Clear Light of Day Bim alone achieves regeneration, in The Village by the Sea almost a whole family gains regeneration. Hari, the hero of the novel is constantly hit by miseries of existence but he never loses heart. Understanding the very poor condition of his family that is on the verge of disintegration he is determined to save it. With their drunken father doing nothing for the welfare of the family and sickly mother being invalid, both Hari and Lila have
to take the insufferable burden of looking after their almost shattered family. Like the father of Bim and Raja in Clear Light of Day, the father of Hari and Lila does not care for his children. In the absence of the help and involvement of the parents the children lose not only physical comforts but also the very essential psychological needs. Devoid of love and affection and enough food and comfortable shelter Lila takes the role of a mother and Hari that of a father. As Solanki aptly says: "The Village by the Sea... embodies the struggle for survival on both the planes -- physical as well as emotional" (62).

The unfortunate familial circumstances keep Hari and Lila on tenterhooks. With very little money available in the house, they find it extremely difficult to make both ends meet. It is both ironical and cruel that they, living by the sea, often do not have any fish to eat and everyday they eat dry bread and rice. Living in a small hut whose walls are crumbling, Hari is much worried that he is not able to give good fish to his hapless young sisters, Bela and Kamal. The boat and buffalo that are their family wealth are sold out to pay debts and no money is left to buy medicine for their sick mother. Hari and Lila, who have stopped their education due to economic and familial reasons are pained over the prospect of having no money for their sisters to buy new books.
Though their fate precariously hangs in the balance they are sanguine about their future. When Lila, tormented by the inability of overcoming the family difficulties, cries in despair, Hari consoles her with his strong hope that their future will be bright. The optimism of her brother inspires Lila and she begins to believe that "change would not come suddenly or quickly to their home and family but it would come" (The Village by the Sea 16). This unflinching faith in their unknown future sustains them during the agonizing period of dreadful adversities. Inspite of his faith in his future Hari is not free from the cruel pangs of alienation. Writing about the condition of Hari, Desai observes: "Everything belonged here, everything blended together -- except for himself. With his discontent, his worries and his restlessness he could not settle down to belonging" (The Village by the Sea 41).

Socio-economic factors force Hari to come to terms with the harsh realities of his family. His realization that it is his primary responsibility to see his sisters well-settled and that he should find out suitable bridegrooms, who may ask for mind-boggling dowries forces him to take a strong decision. He resolves that he "must have a job if he was to find his sisters a way out of this dark, gloomy house and the illness and drunkenness and hopelessness that surrounded them like the shadows of the night" (The Village by the Sea 46).
Hari is the first person who is bravely going to make a choice in Thul. Fortunately he has three choices before him — the choice of getting a job in the new Thul-Vaishet fertiliser complex, of asking Biju for a job on his fishing boat and of going to Bombay to get a job with the help of Mr. de Silva. Hari is not very hopeful of getting a job in the complex because he knows that only engineers and mechanics will easily get jobs there. He does not feel encouraged to obtain a job on Biju's fishing boat since he is strongly influenced by the statement of an old man from the city that "it's time you gave up your boats and nets and turned to something new" (The Village by the Sea 59). Satisfied with the idea of seeking a job in Bombay he is determined to go there and he runs away without the knowledge of his family. In this connection it should be pointed out that Arjuna in Cry, the Peacock, Nirode in Voices in the City, and Hari in The Village by the Sea experience an unwholesome atmosphere of their respective families. Not being able to cope with their distressing family problems they run away from their homes. Whereas Arjuna and Nirode escape from their families, Hari runs away to Bombay not as an escapist but as a responsible person to earn money to save his family from the clutches of poverty.

Hari's struggle for existence in Bombay is extremely grim. Contrary to his expectations his first experience in the city is frustrating. Abandoned by the farmers who are going to meet
the Chief Minister to express their displeasure over the construction of the fertiliser factories on their land, he is gripped by the feelings of helplessness and alienation and stands alone in the crowded city. When he is in the state of perplexity about his future plan a coconut seller talks to him about the importance of confidence, self-help and independence:

Ask, ask, ask the government all you like. Do you think the government has ears and can hear? Do you think the government has eyes and can see? I tell you, the government has only a mouth with which it eats -- eats our taxes, eats our land, eats the poor. Take my advice and keep clear of the government. Don't ask it for anything, don't depend on it for anything. They tell you the government is your father and your mother. I tell you my father and my mother threw me out when I was six years old to go and earn my own living. I don't need them -- I fend for myself -- I'm a man and depend on myself. That is the best way to be, boy -- free and independent.... Be a man, be independent. (The Village by the Sea 85)

Though what the coconut seller says is a stinging satire on the inhumanity and indifference of the government, his forceful observation on being independent intensifies the power
of the resolution of Hari to face the tough challenges of existence. With a determination in his heart, he begins his odyssey of reaching the abode of the de Silvas, who have kindly promised him a job once. Although his painful experience in Seabird proves to be highly disappointing, he never allows his frustration to dampen his spirit of optimism. The timely help rendered by Hari Lal, a Good Samaritan, and Jagu, another man exceptionally generous, gives Hari the most essential sense of security. Hari's poor economic condition forces him to accept the hard job of washing the kitchen pots in Sri Krishna Eating House "the meanest and shabbiest restaurant Hari had ever seen" (The Village by the Sea 92). Girding up his loins for hardwork he resolves to take up the gauntlet and not to run away from the cruel and tiresome tasks.

In the absence of Hari, the hard struggle of Lila to run the family reaches a new height of despair. The onus of looking after the whole family falls on the tender shoulders of Lila. Unlike Bim in Clear Light of Day, who is also faced with a similar situation, Lila does not lose heart. When Bim's brother, Raja goes away to Hyderabad leaving Bim and Baba in the lurch, Bim seeths with anger and becomes desperate. But when her brother runs away to Bombay, Lila who is not educated like Bim, is very patient and works hard to run the family. With her honesty, sincerity and industrious nature, she gets
the regard and timely help of not only the de Silvas but also of Mr. Sayyid Ali.

The hospitalisation of the mother of Lila for treatment in Alibagh with the generous help given by the de Silvas is a crucial turning point in the wretched life of her father. Tormented by his apathetic attitude to his hapless wife and stirred by the gravity of her situation, not only does he visit the hospital but also stays there to look after his long neglected wife. He repents that he is solely responsible for the very bad condition of his wife and family and takes a firm resolution not to consume toddy thereafter.

The determination of Hari to secure his economic independence is in no way weakened by the unbearable privations he experiences in the hotel. Hari feels thrilled when Panwallah, a watchmender having his heart in the right place, expresses his wish of taking him as an apprentice in his leisure hours. The impact of the encouragement of Panwallah on Hari is so great that the latter begins to learn the watchmending work with a will. Impressed by the good improvement of Hari in the craft, Panwallah keeps on inculcating self-confidence in him. When Hari is unhappy over the fact that there will be no farming and fishing left in his village in the wake of the big factory being constructed there,
Panwallah allays his fears with wise counsel. On hearing the enthusiastic promise of Hari that he will learn more he continues to advise him on the techniques of survival:

Learn, learn, learn -- so that you can grow and change. Things change all the time, boy -- nothing remains the same. When our earth was covered with water, all creatures lived in it and swam. When the water subsided and land appeared, the sea creatures crawled out and learnt to breathe and walk on land. When plants grew into trees, they learned to climb them. When there were not enough plants left to eat, they learnt to hunt and kill for food. Don't think that is how things have remained. No, boy, they are still changing -- they will go on changing -- and if you want to survive, you will have to change too. The wheel turns and turns and turns: it never stops and stands still. (The Village by the Sea 129)

A remarkably happy change is perceptible in the development of the personality of Hari. His unforgettable experiences in the hotel where he learns the great significance of hard work, in the park where he imbibes the noble quality of compassion from an old woman, who puts a pinch of flour on every ant-hill, in the house of Jagu where he gains a deep understanding of the difficulties and miseries of hard existence and finally in the Ding Dong Watch works where he
grows to be prudent, have greatly changed him for the better and he has become a man of maturity and confidence. As Desai puts: "He was no longer the frightened, confused boy who crawled into any hole where he could find shelter and protection. He knew he could make choices and decisions now" (The Village by the Sea 130).

Sufficiently armed with optimism, resolution and a moderate amount of money, Hari returns home to implement his plans to improve the lot of his family -- the plan of rebuilding his hut, of starting a poultry farm in his field and of setting up a watch-mending shop. Jubilantly running on the wet sand of the smooth beach with his joyful young sisters he is not able to speak for delight. Desai aptly describes his feelings: "He felt like a new person, like someone who had emerged from a tightly shut box and now saw the light and felt the breeze for the first time. He could have been newly born -- a butterfly emerged from a cocoon" (The Village by the Sea 140).

With their beloved mother getting cured of anaemia, their father turning over a new leaf expressing his deep regrets for his past irresponsible ways and their brother reaching the threshold of attaining prosperity, Lila and her sisters will not be "financially hard-pressed and materially alienated" (Swain 46) and they will have their physical and emotional
needs fulfilled to their satisfaction. When Hari explains his ambitious plans to the bird watcher, the latter promptly appreciates and rightly advises Hari:

Adapt -- that is what you are going to do. Just as birds and animals must do if they are going to survive. Just like the sparrows and pigeons that have adapted themselves to city life and live on food leftovers and rubbish thrown to them in the streets instead of searching for grain and insects in the fields so you will have to adapt to your new environment... You are going to give up your traditional way of living and learn a new way to suit the new environment that the factory will create at Thul so as to survive. Yes, you will survive. (The Village by the Sea 155)

The extraordinary patience and perseverance of Hari and Lila saves their family which is on the path of enacting "a domestic drama of tragic intensity" (Swain 45). Experiencing the emotional ecstasy and being in the seventh heaven, the regenerated family happily celebrates Diwali with a variety of sweets and crackers. As Tripathi remarks:

A fresh, lively, primitive tale of the sons of innocence and poverty working for survival against the backdrop of nature is framed and reigns supreme for its beauty in the realm of Anita Desai's novels.
It is a narrative of a rare device taking the reader out of the psychic obsessional worlds to a sane, jovial life of health and hope and regeneration and the change is welcome to the readers and critics. (119)

Like Hari's search for existence in The Village by the Sea, Deven Sharma's grim struggle for a meaningful existence in In Custody is really heart-rending. The feeling of acute frustration of not having a chance of making a mark in the literary world and the agony of not being able to satisfy the ordinary aspirations of Sarla make him consider his drab existence a very cruel trap. Commenting on the novel and the tragic life of Deven, Dwivedi rightly observes: "In Custody is a novel abounding in failure and frustration, bitterness and restlessness and that the protagonist in it constantly leads a life of mental and physical tortures and financial hardships" (95).

A deep study of the meaningless existence of Deven marked by defeats and disappointments reminds one of the luckless life of Fateh Chand in the short story "Resignation" by Prem Chand. The following passage from the story describes the miserable life of Fateh Chand which almost corresponds to that of Deven:

... from our hero's character it would be more appropriate to call him, "The Slave of Defeat." He
had failed in his office, he had failed in his private life. He was a failure among his friends, there was disappointment and defeat all round him.... He was kind and generous by nature, which means that he was taken advantage of by everybody. (Chand 82-83)

Economic and familial factors are responsible for the tragic existence of Deven. His childhood experiences are not favourable for the normal growth of his personality. In view of the poverty of his parents he does not get many things in life. With no means to fulfil even the ordinary desires of his mother, his father, always with an "apologetic smile" (In Custody 73), finds it very difficult to cover up his inability to run the family. The abject penury of the family has developed in Deven the feelings of helplessness, insecurity and inferiority that ruthlessly continue to haunt him. Describing the lack of self confidence of Deven, Desai writes: "All through his childhood and youth he has known only one way to deal with life and that was to lie low and remain invisible" (In Custody 14). Without understanding the actual realities of human existence he has been leading a life strongly marked by frustration caused by economic difficulties.

The hope of Deven that his marriage to Sarla will herald a period of happiness is not fulfilled. On the contrary, it
painfully accentuates his perennial problems. Influenced by advertisements and cinema shows Sarla longingly expects a life of prosperity from Deven. But the economic hardships of Deven stand in the way of realizing her dreams and desires. Feeling dejected and disappointed she becomes indifferent to Deven and this indifference paves the way for matrimonial discord. She never tries to understand Deven's difficult situations because she has no love for Deven.

Worried by the measly salary with which he finds it difficult to make both ends meet Deven takes extra efforts to augment his income. He writes many poems and sends them to Murad but most of them are rejected. He writes a monograph which is never published. Almost all his efforts end in defeat. Instead of comforting Deven, Sarla irritates him by her typical behaviour rudely marked by her annoying scream. Lacking a sense of adjustment she becomes a burden to him. Infuriated by the unco-operative and unhelpful attitude of Sarla, Deven hates himself for his awful helplessness. Becoming aggressive, he throws away dishes and shouts at Sarla over trifles. The loveless situation surcharged with misunderstanding, disappointments and discontent has gone to such an extent that both Deven and Sarla deliberately try to avoid each other.

If Deven is unhappy in his house, his condition is not better in the college where he has been teaching. Owing to
force of circumstances Deven, who is greatly interested in Urdu poetry is unwillingly teaching Hindi for which he has absolutely no aptitude at all. Being a square peg in a round hole he has no courage to see the students and to speak to them and he "had for years been practising this trick of ignoring his class and speaking to himself, or someone outside, invisible" (In Custody 12). The attitude of neglecting them has lowered his image in the eyes of his pupils. Tormented by the humiliating situations both at his house and working place he is longing for an opportunity of escape.

The long-awaited chance of escape comes in the form of an interview with the famous Urdu poet, Nur, whom Deven has been greatly admiring all his life with a sincere devotion for Urdu poetry. Considering the interview that is arranged by Murad as a wind-fall, Deven becomes the picture of jubilation. Three major reasons account for the immense happiness of Deven. The first one is that he can make use of his critical and poetic abilities. The next is that this interview project gives him a chance to adore Nur to his heart's content. Commenting on the creative and critical strength of Deven and the need of his mind Tripathi observes:

He has two distinct powers: the critical, intellectual power of a professor and the creative power of a poet.... he is temperamentally, intellectually suited to love and adore an idol --
The poet Nur is that idol. This is the need of his ego, his psyche; poetic estimation is thus his life blood.... ("Anita Desai's In Custody: A Study in Thematic Design and Motive" 204)

The last reason is that Deven believes that his meeting with Nur will pave the way for his prosperity. Being allowed to meet Nur in the latter's house Deven feels with a thrill of joy:

It was to him as if God had leaned over a cloud and called for him to come up, and angels might have been drawing him up these ancient splintered stairs to meet the deity: so jubilantly, so timorously, so gratefully did he rise. This, surely, was the summons for which he had been waiting all these empty years, only he had not known it would assume this form. In his mortal myopia and stupidity, he had expected it to come from Sarla when he married her, or from the head of the department at his college who alone could promote or demote and alter his situation in life, or even from Murad who, after all, lived in the metropolis and edited a magazine. (In Custody 39)

But Deven does not know that his meeting and interview is going to be a frustrating experience. The great expectations of
throwing away the wretchedness and meanness of Deven's existence are shattered when he himself witnesses the obnoxiously miserable and squalid living conditions of Nur in the very first meeting he has with him. Despite the unpleasant experiences, this meeting exposes him to the hard realities of existence. He comes to know that due to the political changes, Hindu-Muslim rivalry and lack of political patronage Urdu poetry has been neglected. Nur tells Deven that Urdu poetry "is dead, finished. The defeat of the Moghuls by the British threw a noose over its head, and the defeat of the British by the Hindi-wallahs tightened it. So now you see its corpse lying here, waiting to be buried. He tapped his chest with one finger" (In Custody 42).

With no patrons and encouragement Nur, a great genius, becomes desperate and loses his interest in composing Urdu poems that is the mainstay of his living. His desperation forces him to seek the company of the inferior people and he spends his time and money mostly on drinking and eating which baffles Deven, who has innocently assumed the life of a poet as sacrosanct. A victim of socio-political factors, Nur leads a purposeless life that causes his personal degradation. Commenting on the pernicious circumstances of Nur, Siddiqui, a minor character in the novel, remarks that "he is a whale in a pail of water" (In Custody 98). Pained and disappointed over the indecent behaviour of the people, who always swarm round
Nur, Deven compares the position of Nur to "a serene tika on the forehead of a madman" (In Custody 51). Witnessing the detestable food and drink habits of Nur and the audacity and innuendoes of his evening visitors, Deven feels like a trapped fish. Unable to stand the hysterical temper and horrible vituperation of Imtiaz Begum generated by the nauseating vomit of Nur on the floor of his house Deven leaves the house of Nur with a pricking conscience that "he had abandoned the poet in his agony" (In Custody 62).

In his second meeting with Nur, Deven is unable to conduct the interview because of the birthday celebration of Imtiaz Begum. But this meeting unexpectedly gives Deven an opportunity of witnessing the pathetic situation of Imtiaz Begum that increases his awareness of the realities and difficulties of human existence. A victim of male-dominated society Imtiaz feels discouraged. Neglected by Nur and his sycophantic admirers who purposely fail to appreciate her poetic power and poetry, she is forced to become a rival of her husband. Obsessed by the idea of becoming as popular as Nur she resolves to arrest the popularity of Nur. In this connection what Tripathi comments on the character of Imtiaz is worth quoting:

Character of Imtiaz Begum, the second wife of Nur, is composed of two opposite elements -- fascination and jealousy for the poet. By her intellect, beauty, skill in singing and dancing she has won the heart.
of Nur. Later man-woman rivalry asserts and she desires to compete with Nur as poet. Consequently she tries to stop the usual poetic sessions of Nur at the terrace, and plots against his publicity, interview and book-publication on him. She adores and hates Nur for his superior talents .... Pretensions, show and stratagems characterise her nature. (142)

With the aim of refurbishing her image and of ensuring the success of her birthday celebration, she secretly invites her relatives and plants them in the audience to shower her with a heavy rain of encomiums and congratulations. The excitement and happiness emanated from her singing of her own songs is marred by the outlandish behaviour of Nur. Stung by his apathetic attitude towards her, she reproaches him with a furious temper: "You couldn't face an audience that was not willing to listen to you. You couldn't accept the evidence of my success. You could not bear the sight of someone else regaling a large audience with poetry..." (In Custody 89). The violent shouts of Imtiaz at Nur trigger off an ugly scene between the two wives of Nur. Frightened by the hideous verbal fight between them, Deven goes out of the house of Nur making the second meeting too an exercise in futility.
Disheartened by the horrible experiences in the house of Nur and discouraged by the enormity of the work involved in the project, Deven becomes down-hearted. Inspite of the evaporation of his zeal for the work, impressed by Murad's idea of getting a tape-recorder for the successful recording of the interview "that would be a ... great event in the world of Urdu poetry" (In Custody 91) he falls in the trap set by Murad. Unwittingly making a rod for his own back, Deven with the help of Siddique, the head of the Urdu department, moves heaven and earth to make the college acquire a tape-recorder. On hearing the news that the Principal has sanctioned the amount of money for the tape-recorder, he feels thrilled because he has so far met with only "disappointments and anti-climaxes, with delays and diversions" (In Custody 103). Jubilantly thinking that he can preserve the poetry of Nur for the benefit of posterity he feels that he is really allotted a role in life.

Though equipped with a tape-recorder Deven's third meeting with Nur also turns out to be unsuccessful. Fearing that his recitation of poems will disturb Imtiaz, who is very ill, Nur, who has been already warned by her not to recite any poems, refuses to be interviewed by Deven. The worst of the matter is that Imtiaz herself sternly tells Deven not to disturb Nur. Perplexed by the unexpected development Deven feels crushed and helpless. Fortunately for Deven, Nur's first wife comes to his
rescue without the knowledge of Imtiaz. She promises him that she will make arrangements for the interview in a separate place known to her and that she will inform him of the arrangements a few days later. Though Deven is happy about the plan he is shocked to be told that he should make payment to Nur. Since Deven has no money for the payment he becomes panicky and leaves Nur's house toying with the idea of abandoning the project.

Deven's personal experiences during the last three meetings with Nur make him understand the gravity of the deteriorating existence of Nur. Deven, who has expected that his friendship with Nur will pave the way for his escape from the miseries of his existence in Mirpore, feels terribly disillusioned. He sadly realizes that Nur is as trapped as he is. Commenting on the impact of the tragic existence of Nur on Deven, Bhatnagar aptly points out:

This peep which Deven gets into the poet's personal life not only purges him of his idealism but makes him realize that it was not he alone who was living in a trap, but Nur himself was living in a kind of cage like some trapped animal. Realizing that one victim cannot help another, he decided not to have anything to do with Nur. (110)
Witnessing fight, jealousy, ill-treatment and exploitation prevalent in the house of Nur, Deven remembers the two lines of a poem written by Nur: 'My body no more than a reed pen cut by the sword's tip, Useless and dry till dipped in the ink of life's blood' (In Custody 129). These two lines make Deven, who hitherto has considered that art is separate from life, understand that Nur's art draws its substance from his very life.

Though Deven thinks of giving up the project, it is not possible for him to do so. When Deven asks Siddique to help him get money for the recording from the college, the latter seriously tells him that "that is your business, how you go about it. But the recording must be done, the tape has to be handed over to the authorities" (In Custody 140). Not being able to get the fund from the college, Deven feels tortured by serious misgivings. Desai lucidly says about the agonizing feelings of Deven:

Deven stared open-mouthed. He could not see why anyone should help him. He no longer knew if he ought to be -- or even if he wanted to be helped. Were these people really helping him to succeed in a unique and wonderful enterprise or simply locking him up more and more firmly in a barred trap? And was the trap set by Murad, by Siddiqui, or by Nur and his wives? All he knew was that he who had set
out to hunt Nur down was being hunted down himself, the prey. (In Custody 143)

Even when he is given the much needed fund by the college he is not completely happy because the problem of getting the permission of Trivedi, the head of the Hindi department, for one week's leave threateningly looms large in his mind. As is expected Trivedi harshly shouts at Deven:

One week? It would be a relief to me if it were one year... and I did not need to see your stupid mug again. I'll have you demoted, Sharma -- I'll see to it you don't get your confirmation. I'll get you transferred to your beloved Urdu department. I won't have Muslim toadies in my department, you'll ruin my boys with your Muslim ideas, your Urdu language. I'll complain to the Principal, I'll warn the RSS, you are a traitor. (In Custody 145)

Though humiliated by Trivedi, Deven silently pockets all the insults uncharitably heaped on him without even any semblance of protest. Temperamentally Deven is aggressive but outwardly appears to be quiet because his sense of responsibility to successfully complete his project compels him not to antagonize anybody else.
The crucial recording of the interview materializes only in the fourth meeting at a hidden place and during the recording Deven faces a lot of unpleasant problems. The persistent demand of Nur for biriyani and liquor, the intolerable interference of the idle men surrounding the poet, Chiku's inept handling of the tape-recorder and the embarrassing paucity of money give Deven very anxious moments of agony, despair and fear. Since Deven has handed over all the money to Nur's first wife, he has no money to meet even the incidental expenses. With a great difficulty he gets some money from Murad. Inspite of Deven's sincere efforts the recording is not properly done and it woefully turns out to be a heart-breaking fiasco.

For the failure of Deven's ambitious project, Murad is mainly responsible. From the very beginning Murad is insensitive to the untold sufferings of Deven. What is highly shocking is that he causes almost all the troubles of Deven under the guise of friendship. It is true that Deven has no good opinion of Murad whose track record is not honourable, but Deven's partiality for popularity blinds him to a dispassionate consideration of the whole ramifications of the project. Deven, known for his gullibility, should have been extra careful because he does not know even the nitty-gritty of the recording of an interview. It is Murad, who has treacherously prompted Deven to buy a tape-recorder and in the purchase of it he has
vulgarly cheated him by getting him a second-hand recorder. Again it is Murad who is responsible for sending Chiku, a half-baked technician.

The non-co-operation of Murad in playing the tape-recorder to ascertain the extent of the usefulness of the tape containing the details of the interview is an unmistakable pointer to his inhumanity to Deven. He advises Deven that he had better take the tape to Mirpore to try to edit. Wounded by the heartlessness of Murad, Deven distressingly reflects on their friendship:

Squeezed suffocatingly in Murad's embrace Deven wondered what a friendship really meant. Without sympathy, without compatibility, what was under these jests, these embraces? Nothing but familiarity, custom. It was really custom that was the lasting ingredient of friendship, nothing but long custom, and custom could be a well from which one never rose, a trap from which there was no release. (In Custody 175)

Worried that even the efforts of Pintu and Siddiqui do not help solve his problem of editing, Deven begins to realize his isolated condition and the necessity of correcting matters himself; otherwise he will be thrown out of the college for
"false pretences, misappropriation of funds, fraud, cheating and incompetence" (In Custody 179). With the help of his students Deven is able to edit the tape but it proves to be "useless from a scholarly point of view" (In Custody 180). Frightened by the terrible consequences of the failure of the project, Deven implores Siddiqui to bail him out of the crisis. The unsympathetic response of Siddiqui makes Deven feel deeply let down. Unable to cope with the insurmountable problems that life continuously throws at him, Deven acutely longs for only his past invisible existence:

He lay there wishing he could lead the rest of his life in this near-unconscious state. He hoped his former life of non-events, non-happenings, would be resumed, empty and hopeless, safe and endurable. That was the only life he was made for, although life was not perhaps the right term. He needed one that was more grey, more neutral, more shadowy. He sifted through alternatives like torn pieces of grey paper, letting them fall to the floor of his mind with a whisper and bury him in sleep. (In Custody 183-184)

The fact that Deven likes to have an invisible existence reminds one of Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison. Like Deven, the nameless black hero of the novel is good and honest. Both the heroes are victims and they discover that the society is full
of lies and understand that people use lies for their own advantage.

Inspite of the magnitude of the crisis in which Deven gets caught, when he receives a letter asking him to settle a bill on room-rent in connection with the interview, Deven feels that it is his duty to settle it. His earnest appeal to Murad to advance him money for his contributions to his magazine does not move him even a bit. Murad bluntly tells Deven that he cannot give any money since he has already spent a lot of money on drinks and other materials needed for the interview. He is prepared to give money if Deven gives him the sole rights of the tape-recordings to sell. The meanness of Murad is revealed when he ill-treats and contemptuously ridicules Deven. Moved by the pathetic sight of Deven, the printer spontaneously expresses his resentment over the ill-treatment of Deven. Desai precisely says about the impact of the treachery of Murad on Deven: "...the certainty that he could expect no more help from Murad had a calming effect upon him" (In Custody 190).

Without any help from any quarters Deven pathetically moves alone in the crowded streets of Delhi "like a swimmer in unknown water" (In Custody 191). On the pitiable condition of Deven, Dwivedi observes: "... he is hunted down by adverse circumstances like Hardy's Henchard in The Mayor of Casterbridge. We only wish someone should come his way and help
him out, but that is not to to be!" (92). Though deeply wounded by the perfidiousness of Murad, Deven continues to make efforts to settle the bills. Perturbed by the continuous flow of letters from Nur demanding money, he imploringly asks Siddiqui to persuade the college authorities that the project is of some value and make them pay the bills. As his request cuts no ice with Siddiqui, Deven tearfully cries to him:

Siddiqui Sahib it was not my fault! I worked hard -- I prepared for it and I worked -- but I was fooled and cheated by everyone -- the man who sold me the second hand equipment, the technician who said he could do the recording but was completely inexperienced, by Murad who said he would pay and did not, by Nur who had never told me he wanted to be paid, and by his wife, wives, all of them.... There is nothing to see for it, only a mess, a failure. That is all anyone will see. But underneath it -- underneath that lie my efforts, and my -- my sincerity. Also my regard for the poet, and my love for poetry, you know. That should be considered, before you judge. (In Custody 199-200)

Feeling abandoned by all Deven realizes the futility of expecting help from others. His circumstances force him to find out his own strength to face life. As Bande rightly observes: "When all support is withdrawn, Deven explores his own
potentialities that he can stand all by himself. His strength lies within, not without. This discovery is a sine qua non of inner directives guiding him to take cue from within" (162-163). Like Bim in Clear Light of Day and Hari in The Village by the Sea, Deven makes a resolution to solve problems.

Though Deven feels determined to depend on himself alone, he still feels unnerved. Frightened that the issue of the failure of the project will certainly snowball into a major issue, he is not able to sleep throughout the night. A little before dawn he desperately begins to walk in a state of frightful perplexity, panic and agony. Desai acutely describes Deven's anguished feelings:

He did not want the day to dawn. He had hoped to stretch the night endlessly by walking on and on. Day would bring with it the board-meeting, an enquiry, an interrogation, exposure and blame. Yes and what else? The bills would be returned to him to pay. The tape would be played and declared a disaster, even a hoax. There would be criticism. Who was he to have been entrusted with such a project as well as college funds? He would be sent for, he would have to appear before them, and plead for sympathy, for mercy, for acquittal. If it was not forthcoming, he would be censured perhaps dismissed. O God, if he was, he would be ruined and Sarla and
Manu with him. He would have to pawn, even sell her jewellery to clear his debts, she would have to be sent back to her parents to his eternal disgrace, and the boy would grow up to consider his father a failure -- a disgraceful, thoughtless, irresponsible and hopeless failure. Where would it all end? (In Custody 202)

The result of the mental agony of Deven is his crucial recognition that there is no release or escape from the realities of human existence.

The aesthetic experience Deven gains by recalling his joyful moments of listening to the voice of Nur not only mollifies his anguished feelings but also strongly binds him to Nur prompting him to take Nur's poetry into his custody. The impact of the experience is so great that it gives him a cause and power to live in the world facing challenges boldly. Desai explicitly points out:

When he remembered the joy of hearing his voice and listening to him quote poetry, then quoting his lines back to him, binding them together in a web, an alliance, he knew this was what he would have to recover, to retrieve. If he could do that, it would give him a reason, and strength, to survive whatever came. He had to believe that. (In Custody 203)
By eagerly taking the poetry of Nur into his custody Deven becomes the custodian of the genius of Nur and this intimate relationship automatically makes Nur also become the custodian of Deven.

Deven's realization that art is not separable from life and art cannot be a remedy for the difficulties of life, his acknowledgement that there is no escape from the unpleasant problems, his various lessons that he has learnt from his experiences and his determination to depend on himself have tremendously influenced his personality. The result of these influences is Deven's deep understanding of the ways of the world. In addition to his knowledge of existence, the fact that he is the custodian of Nur has boosted his desire to live. The new-found zeal to survive generates new strength in him and he optimistically takes an iron resolution of facing the challenges of existence. As Nair rightly points out: "Deven legitimately achieved some sort of a resolution and independence through his physical and mental travails" ("In Custody: The Road not Taken" 94).

Deven not unexpectedly commits himself to pay for the funeral of Nur, help his widows and look after his son. As Kirpal rightly observes: "In vowing to commitment, Deven discovers his identity and his worth" (136). No power can cow him down hereafter and he is whole-heartedly prepared to take
the rough with the smooth. With a strong resolution Deven courageously runs to face the day with its calamities. He is no more a weak-willed person. While running he stops only to pull out a thorny branch from under his foot and "it is a significant act implying his decision to march towards a higher goal beset with thorns" (Bande 166).

The metamorphosis of Deven once again recalls to mind that of Fateh Chand in "Resignation": "Like a madman Fateh Chand ran out of the house .... no longer cringing with fright, but holding his head up with pride. There was iron resolution in his face. He was a changed man" (Chand 91). Deven's sufferings and his determination to confront even insuperable difficulties bring to one's mind the hero of The Old Man and the Sea, Santiago, who is known for his endless struggle and inexhaustible fund of fortitude. Commenting on the relentless struggle of Deven, Dwivedi observes:

Deven is definitely an unmistakable person who is waging a hard struggle with his insurmountable problems both at home and outside. The frequent breakdown of his plans and programmes at times raises him even to tragic heights, and his ceaseless struggle with the odds renders him adventurous and heroic. (93)
When Peterson in her interview with Desai says that the novel *In Custody* is pessimistic, Desai firmly says:

So you look at my hero -- and I don't use the word sarcastically -- and think 'what a miserable worm'. You look at him with irritation or loathing. But it is possible another might see him with pity or sympathy or fellow feeling. I've presented him as he is -- without sentimentalising him. Perhaps to you he is a failure, and his life a failure, but I don't see him as one. The world is what it is, life is what it is, man can not help that -- but instead of being a victim of it, he can become the master by mastering the philosophy of life. (84)

If the tremendous change of personality of Deven is any indication, he will surely master the philosophy of life fully -- accepting the realities and facing the challenges of human existence. As Bim is distinguished for her boldness and sense of responsibility from the other major female characters of Desai, so is Deven for the same qualities from the other major male characters. While Gautama in *Cry, the Peacock*, Nirode and Jiban in *Voices in the City*, Adit and Dev in *Bye-Bye Blackbird* and Hugo in *Baumgartner's Bombay* are not able to adjust themselves to their difficult situations, Deven, like Hari in *The Village by the Sea*, learns to adapt himself to new challenges.
Desai displays various dimensions of human existence in her novels. To present them effectively, she utilizes a number of techniques. These techniques are taken for discussion in the next chapter.