CHAPTER IV

NOVELS OF MIDDLE PERIOD

In this chapter the next four novels which were written during the middle period of the career of Anita Desai as a novelist are selected for the study of the depiction of realism in them. The novels are *Fire on the Mountain*, *Clear Light of Day*, *The Village By The Sea* and *In Custody*. They were published in 1977, 1980, 1982 and 1984 respectively. The period from 1977 to 1984 marks the middle period in the career of Anita Desai’s creative writing. Hence these novels which are written during this period are classified as the Middle Novels. One notices the signs of maturity in the creative sensibility of Anita Desai during this Middle Period. With the experience of having written four novels with considerable success, she moves ahead with more confidence and responsibility, the result of which is this set of four novels. *Fire on the Mountain* is undertaken for study in the immediate subsequent part.

*Fire on the Mountain*

**Introduction:** The *Fire on the Mountain* which was published in 1977, won the National Academy of Letters Award in 1977, the Sahitya Academi Award for 1978 and the Royal Society Award. The novel portrays Nanda Kaul, who suffers from alienation and detachment. She
lives alone in a bungalow in Kasauli, a hilly resort, near the Himalayas. She values complete solitude and she has done away with family cares and concerns. Nanda Kaul’s efforts at maintaining a total seclusion ends in utter failure and an eventual disaster.

The study explores the realities of a life of responsibility, concern and involvement as well as a life of denial, detachment and retreat leading to the great reality of death. The senselessness and purposelessness of life which amount to meaninglessness is the essence of life. *Fire On The Mountain* is built on this vision and idea. In an interview with Jasbir Jain, Anita Desai points out that all human relationships are inadequate and end in disaster; and that each human being is alone in suffering. The study explores the loneliness of the characters, a bane which is a common reality of life. The following aspects of realism are traced in this novel: loneliness, withdrawal, detachment, infidelity, domestic violence, rape, murder, neglect of old age and child marriage. The study analyses the plight of the protagonist, Nanda Kaul who is entangled in the throes of her own singular nature and agony of detachment. Her internal encounter with the sense of meaninglessness and rejection is explored into.

**Plot:** The novel is divided into three parts: ‘Nanda Kaul at Carignano’, ‘Raka comes to Carignano’ and ‘Ila Das leaves Carignano’. The three
parts of the novel are named after the main characters namely: Nanda Kaul, Raka and Ila Das. The house ‘Carignano’ is located on the ridge in Kasauli hill-station and it has a history of its own. The house had been built by a Colonel Macdougall in 1843 for his wife and their seven sick children. After the Macdougalls passed away, the house came to be occupied by the Pastor of the church, then miss Appleby and several unmarried ladies, until it came to be owned by Nanda Kaul in 1947. The stark barrenness of the house appeals to Nanda Kaul as she herself is emotionally barren.

Everything Nanda Kaul had wanted was here, at Carignano, in Kasauli. It was the place, and the time of life, that she had wanted and prepared for all her life. She wanted no one and nothing else. Nanda Kaul feels that whatever else came, or happened here would be unwelcome intrusion and distraction. Nanda Kaul had reached this stage in her life—that of loneliness, old age and detachment. The II Part of the novel brings Raka. Raka, the great-grand daughter of Nanda Kaul arrives to Carignano in order to recuperate from an acute bout of typhoid. Nanda Kaul resents her presence at Carignano as she does not wish to be tied down with the same old duties and responsibilities. Raka is brought up in an atmosphere of marital disharmony and abuse. Therefore, Raka is a very solitary child and she is quite indifferent to Nanda Kaul, always prizing her own
privacy. Her very indifference poses a goad, a challenge to Nanda Kaul. Before she herself can realize, Nanda Kaul is drawn towards the child. In the third part of the novel, we see Ila Das, a social worker who is an intimate friend of Nanda Kaul. She is an old woman, a contrast to Nanda Kaul. Ila Das’ life is one long tale of woe and suffering. She is strangulated and raped by a local villager Preet Singh. Ila Das, as a committed social worker had tried to dissuade Preet Singh from marrying off his minor daughter to an elderly man, a widower with children. Nanda Kaul receives the news of Ila Das’ brutal murder with deep shock.

**Analysis:** *Fire on the Mountain* exemplifies the truth of individual existence that suffering is constantly a part of life. Conflict, struggle, death, problems, chance happenings are all inevitable in life. *Fire on the Mountain* exhibits again, as any other novel of Anita Desai, the reality of the complexities of human relationships. The desire to be solitary or all by oneself, is one of the predicaments, in which an individual finds himself. This solitariness is the result of failure of intimate relationships. Though human relationships, especially marital and blood ties, turn acrimonious and unbearable, they cannot be terminated easily. This could be illustrated in the life of Nanda Kaul. Nanda Kaul’s loneliness appears very prestigious, as the wife of the Vice-Chancellor. But she is a bird in a golden cage. Loneliness is the only way of life she knows. Nanda Kaul
has carried on and fulfilled a great life of responsibilities and the accompanying duties as the wife of the Vice-Chancellor in the small town of Punjab. Now she has concluded her responsibilities and she wants to recede into a life of seclusion. Nanda Kaul surrenders her individuality completely despite the personal humiliation. She tolerates the viciousness of her husband for the healthy growth of her children.

An individual may yearn to live in seclusion, all alone. But the fact remains that the mind keeps ruminating of the past, people, incidents and the like, the same is true of Nanda Kaul. She depicts poor adjustment to her circumstances in constant reminiscing. Her thoughts go back to reminiscences of her busy, cluttered life. She had played a very viable part, that of the wife of the Vice-Chancellor of Punjab University. She had accomplished her responsibilities with great finesse. But she considers her life like a box of sweets, very sickening. She cannot completely eject it out of her mind, the thoughts keep swirling, and she finds herself analysing the very life that she had an aversion for. Nanda Kaul’s desire to lead a detached life is the consequence of deep marital discord. It is due to the infidelity on the part of Nanda Kaul’s husband. Her husband had never loved and cherished her, but he had kept her like a queen. He had only done enough to keep her quiet while he carried on a lifelong affair with Miss David, the mathematics teacher, whom he had not married because she was a Christian. He had loved Miss David all his life.
It is true that marriage can pose a bond to a woman and the bond may be of a different kind in each case. Some may be protected by it, some may have created their own niche in it, some still may be dependent on it, yet others may be irritated by the bondage it imposes on them. This reality is traced in the novel.

Nanda Kaul feels a deep yearning to be alone. This peculiar longing comes out of the hollow life she has led with the Vice-Chancellor. He had always desired her to be in silk and she was the centre of the hectic activity going on in the household. The wives and daughters of the lectures of the University, where Mr. Kaul was the Vice-Chancellor looked at Nanda Kaul in awe and whispered almost in her hearing:

“Isn’t she splendid? Is not she like a queen? Really, Vice-Chancellor is lucky to have a wife, who can run everything as she does and her eyes had flashed when she heard, like a pair of black blades, waiting to cut them.”^2

But only Nanda Kaul knew her agony of being the wife of the Vice-Chancellor. While, she had pined for his love, she had been reduced to being a show-piece or a door-mat in the Vice-Chancellor’s household.
Each individual has his or her values, the elements he/she considers as significant. For Nanda Kaul, marriage has great social value and she does everything she considers good and adjusts accordingly. She depicts a willingness to adjust to the values of her husband. Adultery is a universally accepted ground for divorce. But Nanda Kaul has never contemplated this. It may be due the social stigma attached to divorced women. Therefore, resentment has been building up in her incessantly. The Vice-Chancellor’s family-life has deteriorated and become empty. But Nanda Kaul has carried out her role, but without mutual love, affection or understanding. Her relationship with her children, too, is unsatisfactory. This is a result of her unhappy relation with her husband. The novel reveals: “And her children- the children were all alien to her nature. She neither understood nor loved them.”

The care of others was a habit Nanda Kaul had mislaid. It had been a religious calling she had believed in till she found it fake. It had been a vocation that one day went dull.

Naturally, one perceives that the traditional family is nothing but an exploitative institution which has been structured only for the benefit of the husband, and at the expense of the sacrificial goat who is the wife. The husband swaggers his manliness through his extra-marital affairs because he has the power, prestige, independence. The wife has to opt for a subjugated role of tolerating him. Since time immemorial men have
regarded women as inferior, because she is not economically independent. She depends on him for sustenance. Nanda Kaul is financially not independent. She has to keep up the semblance of a happy wife because Mr. Kaul holds a prestigious position. Nobody can deny the fact that while Indian women subordinate their needs, in order to enhance the well-being of their children, the Indian male feels he ought to be free for an extra-marital affair. He does not realise that in the act he threatens the stability of his own marital life. It is an unwritten rule that even if the husband has an affair, the wife has to accept him because he is ‘superior’. Nanda Kaul is an illustration to this point. She had been duty conscious, tending to everything and everybody’s needs without either recognition or love from husband and children. This reality of life is explored in the present novel.

She could not identify with the house because she did not feel it was hers. Life has been cruel to Nanda Kaul. The traumatic experiences of enduring infidelity from her husband has been agonizingly lacerating her sensitive heart. There had been no way out for her, the desire to be insensitive as a charred tree or pine. Adult life can contain traumatic and painful experiences. Therefore, the longing in Nanda Kaul for a life of detachment and isolation.
However, one cannot deny that wifehood and motherhood are privileged. But motherhood entails sacrifice. Nanda Kaul has rendered sacrifice. But towards the end of it all, she has gained nothing. Her husband has failed to relate to her. She accepts his life-long affair and comes out empty-handed. Nanda Kaul encounters everything with passivity. This is the plight of many a hapless Indian woman. This is the contemporary reality. Nanda Kaul has developed total bitterness, because she is aggrieved, she is victimized.

Raka, Asha’s grand-daughter (Nanda Kaul’s great grand-daughter) would soon arrive at Carignano to recuperate from an attack of typhoid. This fills Nanda Kaul with irritation and apprehension. Nanda Kaul prefers to live at Carignano, her privacy quite undisturbed. The arrival of the child in her domain, is considered a cruel interference. The sight of the postman or even the shrill ringing of the phone irritates her. She cherishes silence jealously. For Nanda Kaul, Carignano is a self-imposed exile. Nanda Kaul agonizes over the fact that Raka would be her dependent. That she would have to urge her to eat eggs or spinach, warn her against going here or there, tuck her in bed, see to her comforts and the like. Nanda Kaul is wary of showing any motherly affection to the child and accords her a cold welcome. Now she is fast moving towards senility. She herself is desolate and humiliated; she does not want to be
bothered with great grand-daughter Raka and her needs. Nanda Kaul feels that every attachment to be the beginning of a new betrayal. But the reality is that all human relationships and bondages are hard to be erased. Now, Nanda Kaul has assumed a new identity. As a mother, Nanda Kaul gazes upon the tedium that resulted from the plethora of children and grand children she had brought up. Now that is sickening like a box of sweets. The new identity is that of the supercilious regal lady, withdrawn behind a tough barrier of seclusion. But little does she know that this barrier is going to crumble; the very involvement she has tried to shut out, makes its appearance. The paroxysm of desperate yearning takes control once again, after a few days of Raka’s arrival. Nanda Kaul’s mundane needs being met by her affluence, the emotional needs hanker after involvement and attachment. Nanda Kaul realizes that it was not so simple to exist and yet to live in anonymity. With the arrival of Raka, Nanda comes to terms with her need for Raka’s company, her reverie gyrates on her dead father’s adventures and the like. But she fails to please Raka. Nanda Kaul’s invitation to Raka for a walk to the Monkey Point, comes as an inconvenience to the little one. Nanda Kaul is lonely and she now realizes the need for human company. Whereas Raka is a lonesome child, who does not see any use of human company.
But, to the utter astonishment of Nanda Kaul, the child Raka is very unusual. Raka resembles Nanda Kaul in her desire to be isolated. The natural urge in Nanda Kaul to pamper Raka, to comfort her, are all rebuffed by Raka. This manoeuvring of Nanda Kaul only points out her desperation and need for human company which she has not realized earlier. Anita Desai points out that Raka was simply born to it:

“If Nanda Kaul was a recluse out of vengeance for a long life of duty and obligation, her great grand-daughter was a recluse by nature, by instinct. She had not arrived at this condition by a long route of rejection and sacrifice- she was born to it, simply.”

Raka was the finished, perfected model of what Nanda Kaul herself was merely a brave, flawed experiment. The maternal instinct which had been long suppressed raises its head once again. Nanda Kaul craves for Raka’s company. Nanda Kaul can no longer camouflage the steel exterior. Her attitude towards Raka undergoes a gradual change. She tries to bring Raka out of her shell by narrating to her fantastic tales. However Raka cautiously guards her own privacy. Nanda Kaul feels that Carignano belonged to no one else, and had no meaning for anyone else. In real life, we invariably find that relationships have to move on as such, although for a short while they become dysfunctional due to one or the
other reason. Nanda Kaul had not wanted Raka at Carignano, but the fact that the child is equally or more withdrawn, draws Nanda Kaul towards her. The novel points out that Raka was simply born to it.

Further, the study explores the repercussions of a broken home and parental disharmony on the child’s psyche. Raka’s reticent and detached behaviour bewilders Nanda Kaul. Raka makes no demands for attention. She wants to be left alone to pursue her own secret life amongst the rocks and pines for Kasauli. Raka refuses human company. She is more occupied with rambling in the countryside rather than playing games. She is withdrawn and disturbed. The drunken orgy in the club of the Research Station, which she witnesses stealthily, serves to unlock her recollections of her own home:

“…….her father, home from a party, stumbling and crashing through the curtains of night, his mouth opening to let out a flood of rotten stench, beating at her mother with hammers and fists of abuse – harsh, filthy abuse that made Raka cower under her bedclothes and wet the mattress in fright…..”

Raka’s troubled familial experiences have created in her a kind of a repulsion. This is witnessed in her response to the party going on in the club. She flees from there like a chased animal, her sweating fists beating
her sides and her feet stamping on the thorns. Therefore, she has developed a trouble-making nature, that is pent-up in her. This is witnessed in her setting the forest on fire towards the end of the novel. The study explores that the parents’ own unhappiness, confusion and conflict has made it impossible for them to look after Raka. Raka faces all the repercussions of an abusive home, torn apart by drunkenness and domestic violence. There is total disorganization.

The fountain-head of violence in the families could be traced to the patriarchal form of society. Men have an access to economic and social resources which endows them with greater power over women because women are economically and socially dependent. Violence is one of the ways in which men try to assert their strength and power. Addictions to alcohol or illicit drugs also perpetrate violence in the family.

Childhood is valued as a period of happiness, one of innocence and protection. Anita Desai portrays the world of Raka as permanently damaged by the insensitivity and apathy of her drunken father. Such a child cannot mature and develop into a wholesome personality. Uncommon family conditions and experiences drive the individual to neurosis and maladjustment in personal relationships. The child who is exposed to troubled, oppressive conditions cannot acquire the skill to build an agreeable, loving adult relationships. Marital disharmony,
indifference of parents, lack of love-all implant an indelible negative impression on the child. Raka is totally withdrawn and resists Nanda Kaul’s efforts towards affection. Even the fantastic tales woven by Nanda Kaul do not interest her. The study explores that Raka’s introversion and detachment is due to her abusive home experiences. Raka is interested in the barren spaces of the valley. The things which interest young girls do not have value for her. These are the effects of her internal emotional barrenness due to emotional deprivation. The researcher feels that the following statement is relevant:

“Psychoanalysts have clearly established that unhealthy upbringing at home, unpleasant and unwholesome relationships among family members are the cardinal causes of conflict in children and adults”—opines Dilip. K. Khetrapal.⁶

That is why, the ravaged, destroyed and barren spaces in Kasauli attracted her. She always wanted to be alone and she found darkness more friendly. Raka’s sleep appears to be disturbed. Raka is naturally drawn towards destructive elements. In setting fire to the forest, Raka portrays a significant reality that a child could revert to a violence and destruction under the agony of a deprived and loveless childhood.
Fire caused the above mentioned excited obsession in her. Raka imagines, the cries of animals and birds burning in that fire. Raka’s is a disturbed psyche. Raka is preoccupied with forest-fire. At night she kept getting out of bed and coming barefoot into the drawing room to look out of the window and see the fire spread. She went back and back again to the window to see if the fire had come any closer to Carignano. Raka’s behaviour was a challenge to Nanda Kaul. Raka was totally unconcerned about anything. Nanda Kaul wondered if she at all realized how solitary she was–she certainly neither asked nor bothered to see if there was a letter for her, or news. Solitude never disturbed her. Raka did not possess the normal child’s instinct for attention and affection. Raka has had the experience of living in sophisticated society of Madrid, Delhi, New York and other big cities. Yet amid the misery and pain of her own home, she has experienced the dearth of parents’ affection. Raka exemplifies withdrawal and detachment from human company, and exhibits the facsimile of happiness and contentment. But it is a well known fact that a child does need love, attention, security and a sense of belonging for healthy growth of personality. Usha Bande talks of Horney’s opinion of the possible causes of detachment during childhood. According to her, Horney catalogues the plausibilities that wield “cramping influences” which the child has to incessantly struggle against. The intimidating environment created by the parents threatens to “engulf him without
sufficient regard for his individuality, not to speak of encouraging his personal growth”. Therefore, in order to withstand this struggle, the child withdraws and creates an emotional barrier between himself and others. He develops this means to preserve his individuality. The child feels that he is free in his own world. Raka creates a façade of preserving the unity of herself. She remains a recluse and has no urge for the company of other children. Even the news of her mother’s illness does not seem to disturb her. Her mother’s illness is not a new fact for Raka. Raka represents those unlucky children who undergo relentless suffering for no fault of theirs. Self-indulgent and callous parents render them maladroit. Thus one realizes that, Raka is a prey to the emotional deprivation.

The treatment of human relationships of which the parent-child relationship is peculiar to Indian English Literature. An efficacious and impressive model, good conduct and mutual love and respect on the part of the parents go a long way in building good relationships. The study explores these uncomfortable truths. It throws light on unhealthy and unsavoury aspects of relationships and the facts of parental dysfunction on the sensitive psyche of the child.

Raka who lacks a powerful loving father-figure, is drawn to Ram Lal. Nanda Kaul is surprised to see the girl interact with Ram Lal more naturally than with her. She had not even called her Nani. Mother plays a
significant role in the life of a girl—the role of a counselor and confidante. The girl-child instinctively turns for protection and emotional closeness to her mother. She needs her support and love. This too is missing in Raka’s life. Nanda Kaul has failed miserably with Raka. The tales of adventure which Nanda Kaul weaves about her own father prove pointless. They only make Raka feel impatient and restless to break out into freedom. From the very beginning she wanted only one thing, that is, to be left alone and pursue her own secret life amongst the rocks and pines of Kasauli.

Raka lacks an affectionate father-figure. At times her father, had made sporadic attempts to bring her out of her shell, by taking her to tea at a restaurant and insisting, in Madrid, that her mother invite children for tea on her birthday. But these experiences were hardly useful in bringing her out of her shell. Raka’s is a complete refusal of human company. But Raka’s father has not realized that a democratic set up at home as well as a loving relationship with his wife would have fostered a healthy mind in his daughter. Compromise and mutual respect builds a democratic relationship. But he is a father who is ‘absent’ in her life; he has not endeavoured to build a healthy emotional rapport with Raka. Therefore, she is psychologically insecure. Especially the girl-child needs an understanding, sympathetic mother. But Raka’s mother Tara suffers a chronic nervous breakdown. Tara’s nervous breakdown emanates from, again a marital disharmony. She is married to Rakesh who is a diplomat.
in Geneva. He possesses all the vices that he should have, as a successful man in a sophisticated, polished society. Tara is forced by her mother Asha to move with Rakesh to Geneva. Tara is unable to care for Raka who has to recuperate from typhoid. Tara herself is reduced to a helpless jelly by the cruelty of Rakesh. Yet she is advised by her mother to carry on her marital life. Tara moves to Geneva with Rakesh, and is expeditiously pushed to another nervous breakdown.

Tara’s life illustrates the fact that although she is educated, she cannot free herself from the clutches of a cruel husband. The traditional family structure demands that the wife tolerate everything. The truth of wife battering is a universal problem. It is also a well known fact the influence of alcohol is sure evidence to wife abuse. But the unfortunate reality is that the wife abuse goes unreported because people want to portray their families as happy and loving. Domestic violence is a complex social problem. It may be sexual or psychological maltreatment. Tara is a victim of all these cruelties. Tara has tolerated the maltreatment to the point of a nervous breakdown. Tara is another example of a martyred woman on the altar of marriage. She quietly tolerates because she has no familial support to rebuff her husband. This evidences to the reality that all women are vulnerable to violence at the hands of their partners.

Tara is not only the victim of physical abuse, but also of verbal abuse. But she still continues with him, perhaps with a positive hope of
change for the better. The social stigma attached to the woman who has left her husband is too much to bear, whatever be the circumstance or the problem. Tara emphasizes the plight of the ill-treated wife. Raka, the product of this environment is therefore unusual. Tara has developed low self-esteem.

So in such a situation, it is an onerous task for Tara to cater to the child’s physical and emotional needs. She is forced to give the responsibility of running her life to her mother. Therefore, as Nanda Kaul discovers, Raka was not like any other child she had known, not like any of her own children or grandchildren. Amongst them, she appeared to have no needs.

Ila Das is Nanda Kaul’s childhood friend. In Ila Das, we realize yet another woman caught in adverse circumstances and the cruel clutches of the patriarchal society. Ila Das, a spinster, lives in penury. She is at Kasauli as a Government Welfare Officer, sent to educate the villagers. Hers is a long tale of woe and a relentless struggle for existence. Ila Das is a refined and well-bred lady. She is born and brought up in a well-to-do family. Ila Das had served as a lecturer in Home Science; through Nanda Kaul’s assistance she had secured the job. But very soon, all the prosperous days terminated. Ila Das’ father died of a stroke and her mother lay sick. The family fortune was divided amongst three drunken,
dissolute sons. The hard-working sisters Ila and Rima did not receive a penny. The sons had been sent to foreign universities— to Heidelberg, Cambridge and Harvard. But they lived in utter dissipation. The family fortune withered away and the sisters were left to fend for themselves.

Ila Das’ sister Rima, worked at giving piano lessons, going from house to house and for Ila Das, Nanda Kaul had suggested to her husband, the Vice-Chancellor, that he create a job for her in the Home Science college. But Ila Das, after serving for sometime had left the job because her seniority was not considered. She was superceded by another member of the staff for the post of the principal. Mr. Kaul was no longer alive to help Ila Das. The self-respecting Ila Das could no longer continue with the job. But now, she is impoverished and destitute. Ila Das had now completed the course in social work and had been appointed by the government as a welfare officer in Kasauli. As a social welfare officer, Ila Das does not make much progress in educating the villagers, as they are bound by poverty and struggle for existence. Tradition and custom also have a stronghold over them. She lives a life of penury.

The study explores the reality that a woman has to contend with the patriarchal society at every stage of her life. Ila Das has to contend with the patriarchal society. The village priest is against her. As a social worker, she finds that it is very hard to teach a man anything. Although
the women are willing to learn and change for the better, the men do not allow them. Therefore, Ila Das has antagonized herself against the priest and other men.

This element points out to the male chauvinism with which women are burdened. This has been witnessed in society. It is not unusual for men to frustrate and thereby impede the enlightenment of women. They seem to feel threatened by the presence of a knowledgeable woman and therefore, they curb with an iron hand, anything or anybody who tends to educate ignorant women. The study explores this reality.

Ila Das is a paragon of patience, courage and resilience. Although she struggles boldly through every odd, she does not desist to smile. She is sensitive to the life which every human being has to lead, which is replete with misery, pain and helplessness. She cherishes happy memories, but at the same time, she does not deny the present. Although, she is impecunious, she leads life with a stubborn principle and determination. She is badly in need of succor as she has to look after Rima, her sister, who suffers from cataract. Ila Das is capable of great love, sacrifice and fortitude. She cares for her old mother and sick sister. She is also a powerful evidence to the fact that a principled person has to endure many travails in society.
Ila Das executes her duty as the government welfare officer with the utmost sincerity and zeal. It is a notable, well established fact that when people work conscientiously and meticulously for justice, they invite trouble. Ila Das is no exception to this reality.

The study traces the realism of one individual preying upon another. Anita Desai presents the inexcusable, outrageous and horrendous act of one human being preying upon another for selfish motives. Even though our society is acculturated and educated, no longer barbaric, this inhuman practice of one human being preying upon another is evident. Preet Singh, a local of Kasauli assaults Ila Das and finally kills and rapes her, because she, as welfare officer had tried to stop him from marrying his seven-year old daughter to an old widower with six children, a quarter of an acre of land and two goats. This is the sad exposition of the civilized society.

Violence has always been used by the male as a sign of his domination on women. Some men use rape and brutality to disgrace women, who question their sense of superiority. Due to this, women are deprived of their freedom. The problem of rape is alarming and displays the unfortunate condition of our society. Rape happens to be the most abhorrent and dreadful crime both for the victim and the society. The victim suffers from guilt feelings and mental trauma and agony if she survives.
In spite of the legislative measures adopted in favour of women, and women’s gradual economic independence, countless women still continue to be victims of violence. They are beaten, raped, murdered, burnt. Women have been victims of torture, humiliation and exploitation since time immemorial. Violence against women is not new. The husband who is supposed to love and protect, indulges in violence against the wife. For the woman, it can amount to a shattering experience, because, she has loved him. Even if she revolts, she cannot, because of the fear that her own parents may refuse to keep her. It is high time women realized that they should not submit to oppression and that they have the potential to look after themselves and their children. They have to realize that their torture creates an emotional trauma for their children. Women have to develop strength to accept responsibility for their lives which tends towards a positive approach. Education would go a long way in strengthening them and erasing the social stigma of separation from husband.

The study explores another aspect of realism in this novel, that is, rape. It is an act of violence and humiliation for women where she experiences a stupendous sense of helplessness and powerlessness. Women who are preyed upon or persecuted like this, feel the constant fear and restriction on their movements and, friendships may have to be repressed.
Preet Singh assaults Ila Das, lying in wait for her in the dusk. The love of money, his bestiality and the lust for vengeance for curbing him in his wrong deeds have prompted him. This heinous deed is nothing but a commentary on man’s inhumanity to man. It is regrettable to see that violence is world-wide. Not only is violence indigenous, but it takes different forms and enshrouds all elements of society, race, religion and culture. Various manifestation of violence are seen—suicide, rape, murder, massacre, civil war, racial prejudices etc. One has to learn to resist violence.

The present novel deals with the degradation of woman in the likes of Ila Das, Tara and Nanda Kaul. This is a burning reality. Ila Das is involved in people’s affairs, is unselfish, yet she meets with a tragic end. No matter what you do or do not do, the futility of existence cannot be denied.

Ila Das is already subject to economic insecurity which necessitates a complete change in her pattern of living. Most industries, business concerns do not hire elderly people, who are approaching the age of retirement due to the energy and time which has to be spent in training them. Poor Ila Das has no hopes anywhere. The dreary future which lies ahead coupled with economic and emotional inhibitions make Ila Das’ life difficult. Suffering, in one or the other form, which is a reality of life is seen here.
Ila Das has to contend with people who are blinded by ignorance and customs. “How can I get my work done if even the young men don’t take my side and help? In the end, the women listen to them – if not to the priest, then definitely to their husband.”8 She says,

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“Now I’ve just heard about a family living in my own village–they’re planning to marry their little girl, who is only just seven, to an old man in the next village because he owns a quarter of an acre of land and two goats. He’s a widower and has six children, but for a bit of land and two goats, they’re willing to sacrifice their little girl………”9– Ila Das tells Nanda Kaul.

This kind of discrimination and treatment of the girl child as a burden and as a commodity to be sold off for profit is not a new issue. The little girl, as yet, has no sense of identity and no consciousness of herself. The ideal of girlhood is to obey the elders and follow the traditions– says the patriarchal society. The seven year old daughter of Preet Singh is yet another girl child who will be sacrificed at the altar of marriage. Child-marriage bears adequate testimony of the male dominated society.

Each one of Anita Desai’s works has been produced out of a specific reality. The study seeks to examine the reality of old age and its
problems. The aspect of old age which has been treated in *Fire on the Mountain* is relevant. Old age is, in itself, very sensitive. The reality of neglect, unwantedness and the feeling that their resources have been used up cannot be disregarded.

The common idea is that the old, aged people are unproductive, capricious, no longer useful—therefore, they should pave the way for younger people. Due to this prevalent idea, the old age is seen as a negative aspect. Young people show negative and unfavourable attitudes. The elderly are not treated with respect, reverence and consideration. Their illness, loneliness and fears are not taken into consideration and they become the victims of crime; they are not strong enough to defend themselves. Ila Das is victimized even by the street urchins. Her movements are awkward and clumsy which make her a prey to ridicule. This displays the callousness of the urchins and it points out the need for sensitization among young people, of the problems of old age.

*Fire on the Mountain* evinces the sad reality of the negligence of old parents by the callous grown-up children. In modern times, it is noticeable that children have less feeling of obligation towards their ageing parents. Good marital adjustment may be reflected in good parent-child relationships. She did not live here by choice – she lived here alone because that was what she was forced to do. Nanda Kaul’s grown up children have neglected to perform their duties to their mother. In such
circumstances, it is inevitable for Nanda Kaul to be unhappy in her old age. Even with her past achievement as an able house wife and a dutiful mother, she feels she has fallen short of her hopes and expectations. She has a feeling that she is unwanted. Nanda Kaul has carried the unhappiness of her marital life into her old age. She does not cherish any happy memories to contribute to her present condition. She has no social contacts, nor does she interact with anybody, except with Ila Das. But her interaction with Ila Das is too reluctant and reserved to be neglected. Her unhappiness and helplessness is enormous. She dies out of shock at the news of Ila Das’ murder, but not before recollecting the negligence of her children. Elizabeth Hurlock points out in her book: “happiness in old age depends upon fulfillment of the ‘three A’s of happiness’—acceptance, affection and achievement.”¹⁰ Hurlock’s statement explains Nanda Kaul’s condition. Thus Nanda Kaul remains unfulfilled.

K.S.Renne’s statement which is quoted by Elizabeth Hurlock is relevant here:

“Relations with the spouse are so central a feature of an individual’s social and emotional life that an unhappy marriage may impair the capacity of both partners for satisfactory relations with their children and others outside the family.”¹¹
Therefore, the present study proves that the reality behind Nanda Kaul’s maladjustment with her children can be traced to her marital disharmony.

Therefore, Nanda Kaul lacks the ability to express warm and spontaneous feeling toward others. She is afraid to express positive feelings towards her great-grandchild Raka because past experience has shown her that it is unlikely that such feelings will be returned and consequently her efforts will be fruitless. Nanda Kaul has become self-bound and emotionally passive. As has been pointed out through studies by psychologists that the feelings of disappointment and disillusion and feelings of persecution are also more common in old age, than pleasant emotional states.

It is true that one may not spell out one’s hopes of life, but one does have expectations for the future, expectations of love and care from grown up children. So this loss of these expectations has required Nanda Kaul to make a variety of adjustments. Once she was the centre of the swirling activity, but now, she has to adapt to the change and this skill is essential for survival. But she is not equipped to cope with the onset of changes in old age and she needs assistance. She is not able to compromise with her prior expectations and present reality of abandon and neglect. The maternal instinct in her, raises its head once again. She makes all efforts to win Raka over to her side, but in vain.
With the study of *Fire on the Mountain*, the fact is reinforced that contentment can never be attained by detachment or alienation. Contentment comes only through relationships, and social interaction and social cooperation. Bitterness, hatred and unforgiveness take their toll over the individual. It can never impart a peaceful and fulfilling life. It is the involvement in warm human relationships that gives men a definite meaning in life. Ila Das and Raka prove this to Nanda Kaul. One has to come to terms with life by forgetting the bitter past.

Although men are looked upon as wiser in the way of the world or superior to women in intellect, reality is different because the financial responsibilities are shared by both in modern life. Even among the labour classes, women are the sole breadwinners. However, with all this, women are still considered dependent and calls for total submission on her part. Myriads of women have submitted and yielded at the altar of marriage and at the end of it gained nothing. The need for women to keep their identity and know their real self has always been a struggle. Anita Desai brings out realistically the predicament of women in a man’s world. Ila Das’ death is the evidence to the fact of man’s brutality and cruelty. Nanda Kaul’s plight is again the self-centred materialism of her Vice-Chancellor husband. Tara’s plight is also an evidence to man’s cruelty.
Conclusion: The study has thus explored the realities of marital disharmony and its repercussions on the child’s sensitivity, problems of old age, the psychological realities of loneliness, depression, the social realities of male chauvinism, domestic violence, alchoholism, rape and discrimination towards the girl-child.

Moreover, Anita Desai has said in an interview with Ramesh Srivastava, that the character of Ila Das is based on a real person whom her mother knew and who occasionally visited their home in Delhi, and that she caused much hilarity and scorn among them. “Later when Anita Desai was in Kasauli, the lady had met with a violent death in a nearby village.”¹² Thus the author provides an authentic information of Ila Das’ death.

Nanda Kaul has taken a pride in suffering and has lived in subjugation to her husband throughout her life. She has considered that it is essential that she abide by the rules set by the patriarchal order. In a patriarchal society, a woman has to be an ideal wife and mother; and she has to attend to umpteen roles in the family or joint family. Nanda Kaul has all the attributes which such a woman should have – sacrifice, docility and patience. The study has explored the real predicament of the ideal woman who accepts her lot unquestioningly.
The study has explored the realism of communication. Communication means receiving and sharing, not mere words. Sometimes, a relationship ends. But still continues to exist in squabbles, arguments and sometimes, in patches of silence. The study has explored into the reality that marriage goes beyond a physical relationship. It exists even when the husband takes on a mistress. Yet the wife submits to the relationship, because man desires it. It is a mature human relationship that goes beyond the physical relationship and that is why it continues to exist in such cases.

Fire on the Mountain increases the readers’ awareness of what is happening in India. Ila Das is a social worker. She is raped and murdered for her protest against child marriage. All these happenings bring the readers face to face with reality.
Clear Light Of Day

Introduction: The novel was published in 1980. It was nominated for the Booker Award. The novel is set in Old Delhi and it records the enormous changes that a Hindu family goes through since the Indian independence. It portrays Bim, the protagonist, who marks a progression from the weak and sensitive protagonists whom the author had portrayed in her earlier novels. Bim does not suffer mental trauma. She does not cherish suicidal tendencies. In fact, she is a dynamic woman who is in total control of her life. Therefore, the study explores into the realism of the new woman.

Bim does not remain confined to the domesticity. She officiates between the private and the public. For her, her education is the emancipating factor, bringing her an assurance of rich intellectual life, economic relief and autonomy from the dismal atmosphere of her own home.

Plot: The core of the story handles the lives of four characters—Bim, Raja, Tara and Baba—children of the Das family who reside in Old Delhi. Anita Desai holds the mirror of the present to the past with a view to connect the mighty changes that these two realities bring in the lives of the characters. The novel centres on a house in Old Delhi and the two brothers and two sisters. Tara is married to Bakul, who is working as a diplomat in foreign ministry. It is a marriage of convenience. Tara wanted
to escape the dismal atmosphere at home and Bakul was in need of a submissive and unassuming wife. Bim remains unmarried, while Raja goes to Hyderabad and marries Hyder Ali Saheb’s daughter Benazir. Hyder Ali was their neighbour and the owner of their house. Baba is an autistic brother.

The family is a queer blend of eastern and western culture. The western life style—drinks and bridge—is part of their culture. They grow up with their, rather indifferent parents—a diabetic mother and a father who is negligent of his domestic responsibilities. Both the parents are sadly negligent of the children and are always preoccupied with bridge game and the Roshanhara club. Bim is very close to Raja and shares love for poetry with him. Both Bim and Raja find this psychological temperamental affinity to bind them. However, Tara is an unassuming, simpleton. The novel opens with Tara’s return to India with her husband Bakul; they have come to attend the marriage of Moyna, Raja’s daughter in Hyderabad.

Tara and Bakul, visit their house in Old Delhi, where Baba, the imbecile brother and Bim live. Tara is extremely happy to see the house of their childhood after a long interval. She requests Bim to accompany them to Hyderabad to attend Raja’s daughter’s wedding. But she is shocked to learn that the relationship between Bim and Raja has soured. Bim makes it clear that she is unable to tolerate the pride and arrogance of Raja. Now she is an independent entity.
Aunt Mira is another significant character in the novel. She is a child widow, and a distant relative of Mrs. Das. She had been called to look after Baba. With Aunt Mira’s arrival into the household, the Das children had found tender care and affection and they wound their lives around her. Towards the end of her life, Aunt Mira had degenerated into an alcoholic. But for Aunt Mira, the Das children had not experienced any parental love, care and indulgence.

Bim is the more interesting character and dreams of becoming a heroine, envisages a life full of adventure. She decides not to marry but dedicate her life for her vocation and looking after Aunt Mira and Baba. Bim stays in the same place, gets educated and teaches History in the same college. Tara feels that Bim is very contented, having everything she wants. But Bim is angry, unhappy and upset with Raja for having abandoned her. Yet she is stoic and hides her anguish. For twenty long years, Bim torments herself with the rejection, the desertion of Raja, whom she had loved and cared for. Raja goes away to Hyderabad, to Hyder Ali (whom he had worshipped as a role model), leaving Bim saddled with an alcoholic aunt and a mentally retarded brother. Raja marries Benazir and begets five children. Bim treasures the pieces from their past like the Urdu poems he has written and also the memories of their idyllic childhood spent together. Unlike her sister Tara, Bim is intelligent. She chooses an independent life, brushes aside suitors like Dr. Biswas.
Bim’s heroic acceptance of the family becomes central to the novel and she embodies Anita Desai’s vision of the new Indian Woman. 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. She plays the role of Florence Nightingale and Joan of Arc, (whom she had worshipped) within the confines of her family.

Despite her independence, Bim is in the grips of bitterness and resentment. The betrayal of her brother, the letter which he had written to her long ago, had clearly displayed that he has now transformed from a brother to her landowner.

One night Bim reads ‘The Life of Aurangzeb’. Aurangzeb’s last words serve as a mirror in which Bim sees the course of her own life:

“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? Come what will, I have launched my frail bark upon the waters.........”13
It is not only a moment of realisation, but also of reconciliation. It is a rare moment of illumination. The lines stick in her mind, filling her eyes with tears of repentance. She clears all the dreadful debris of the past by tearing off the papers and letters, including the offensive letter of Raja. All her tormenting emotions—anger, guilt, fear, remorse is spent. She forgives Raja. When Tara, Bakul and their daughters start for Hyderabad, Bim says to Tara with genuine eagerness—“Tell him I’m waiting for him— I want him to come— I want to see him.”

A transition from hatred to love, from rejection to acceptance is seen. She makes an introspection of herself and rejects all that has hindered her growth into a truely liberated soul. Crisis in life necessitated her to make readjustments to her external world, however, it also sets in motion an introspection in her that necessitates change. She questions herself and feels compelled to come out of her grievance and extend understanding to others.

The significance of the title lies in its metaphorical suggestiveness. The misunderstanding, hatred and hostility caused by deep-seated prejudices represent darkness of the night, which is removed by clear light of day which stands for clarity of vision brought about by sympathy, compassion, love and wisdom. The title is highly significant in another way. When the novel begins, we find references to the disturbed atmosphere in the country, communal disturbances, the imminent
partition. The future seems to be full of evil forebodings. The pre-independent, post-independent India and the partition of India is the background for the novel. However, the forces of darkness and evil which are looming large on the horizon are driven back by the forces of gentleness, sanity and understanding. The misunderstandings that had developed among the members of the family are removed in a moving manner. They find themselves in the clear light of the day.

Temperamental differences, mutual misunderstanding, jealousy, anger seem to create a barrier amongst the members of the family, but in course of time discords give place to understanding. Anita Desai has dealt with the brother-sister relationship in connection with another family, the Mishras. In this family the three brothers are devoid of any responsibility, while the sisters, Jaya and Sarla work hard. Jaya and Sarla are married, but abandoned by their husbands. Through these female characters, Anita Desai pleads for a better status for women, especially women past their prime. The novel ends with a positive note and a realization that love alone preserves life from disaster.

Analysis: Bim does not lead a parasitic existence, in that, she does not need a male prop. The present study explores this aspect of realism. Bim consents to the portrayal of the new woman. The study analyses in Clear Light Of Day, the extent of difference between the two types of women—
the surrendering or yielding type, in the traditional type of woman and the new woman who does not relinquish her hold on life, but she moves on untrammelled to independence.

Bim says: “I can think of a hundred things to do instead. I won’t marry.....I shall earn my own living– and look after Mira Masi and Baba and be independent.”15 She understands her worth and she does not depend on marriage as a social support. Premila Paul asserts “It (marriage) can be a restricting institution for someone who wants to go beyond all narrow confines, work, serve and ‘do’ things”.16

She graduates in History and becomes a Lecturer. Bim does not assume the traditional role of the woman to please the man. She is courageous and bold. This attribute in her helps her to overcome the shock of the death of her parents. She has to fend for herself and for the family. The study reveals that, in Bim, the fact that the patriarchal society cannot oppress the woman when she is educated and economically independent, is manifested.

Bim shoulders enormous responsibility– of the marriage of Tara, catering to the sick Raja, providing tender care to the autistic brother Baba and the alcoholic aunt Mira. Her only luxury is buying books for herself. She is self-made and self-possessed, imperturbable and westernized. She competes with the male world in smoking. She is a
witness to the fact that a woman is more clear-headed, patient, capable of multi-tasking and can be the sole bread-winner in the family.

“Bim had found everything she wanted in life. It seemed so incredible that she hadn’t had to go anywhere to find it, that she had stayed in the old house, taught in the old college, and yet it had given her everything she wanted.....”

She is not supercilious and she possesses distinct and well-defined ambitions for her future. She does not wallow in self pity, although she depicts an amount of alienation and detachment. Bim has greater confidence and clearer perception of life. It is owing to such a clarity that she breaks off from marrying Dr. Biswas, who was on the verge of proposing to her. Bim is full of iron will and determination.

The study reveals that until and unless women are provided with education and allowed to settle for a wise decision after education with regard to their career and marriage, they will not be happy. What is required is to apply the fruits of education in real life situations. It is only on the basis of education that a person can move out of the prescribed norms of behaviour or life.
Education enables Bim to talk. Also, this ability comes as a result of her position as a college lecturer. Bim is portrayed as stubborn and strong willed. It can be noticed in real life that, the role of education and the ability to speak the English language fluently guarantees cultural elevation and independence to women. Education does have a liberatory role on the life of a woman. This aspect is very commonly seen in modern days.

Bim’s modern opinions are revealed when she talks to her girl students: “I’m always trying to teach them to be different from what we were at their age– to be a new kind of woman....” She protests against the system of conventional marriage. She challenges patriarchy. Bakul says to his daughters Maya and Mala:

“They must do something besides sit and listen to Baba’s records......You are to visit relatives. They want to meet you. They want to introduce you to young people in New Delhi.........”

To this remark of Bakul, Bim sarcastically comments: “And marry you off as soon as they can arrange it.”......If you can find two eligible young men– you wouldn’t insist on their going back to college”.

Bim remarks thus, when the Mishra girls are getting engaged: “....... they’re in such a hurry to get married....... why don’t they go to
college instead? marriage isn’t enough to last them the whole of their lives”. Bim had not at all felt comfortable with the idea of the Mishra girls getting married at the age of sixteen and seventeen Bim depicts a strong and unique personality. She chooses not to succumb to the standards of society, but she lives a life based on her own ideals. In her outright rebellion against patriarchy she comments:

“…..Father never bothered to teach me. For all father cared, I could have grown up illiterate and cooked for my living, or swept. So I had to teach myself history, and teach myself to teach. But father never realised– and Raja doesn’t realise.....”

Bim makes a choice of remaining single. She rejects Dr.Biswas’ proposal, without fear of physical hardship and insecurity. Her free will urges her to embrace suffering and the responsibility of looking after Baba. Dr Biswas calls Bim’s life a sacrifice–

“Now I understand why you do not wish to marry. You have dedicated your life to others– to your sick brother and your aged aunt and your little brother who will be dependent on you all his life. You have sacrificed your own life for them.”

At this remark–“Bim’s mouth fell open with astonishment at his horrendous speech so solemnly, so leadenly spoken.....” Her free will
and choice to remain unmarried, is misunderstood by Dr. Biswas. The spinster figure is however, the product of education and westernization. Education has raised the age of marriage as is seen in modern life.

One indubitably feels that it is wrong to call her love, a sacrifice. When a person sacrifices, there is a loftier or noble feeling of giving something to the one who needs it. Not only this, Bim has a persistent desire to live as a liberated woman. This reflects the conflagrating truth of women’s liberation which began years ago. Bim like other Anita Desai protagonists does not succumb to schizophrenia, but emerges a stronger and a more balanced personality. She steers the family through adversities and prosperities. She does not reject life inspite of its vicissitudes and conflicts. Being an instance of singular pride and fortitude, she eventually envisages an ultimate harmony in her relationship with her siblings. She proves that love is the supreme force in life, which can transform selfishness. Love is certainly the reason for life, although a difficult ideal.

There has been a very robust and spirited development in thoughts about women and their role in society. Bim represents the mobility of Indian womanhood in the modern context. But still, a woman is not regarded as an autonomous being since she has always been assigned a subordinate or relative position. De Beauvoir aptly points out that
marriage subjugates and enslaves a woman and leads her to “aimless days indefinitely repeated, life that slips away gently towards death without questioning its purpose”. Therefore, women pay for their happiness at an expense of their freedom. Such a sacrifice on the part of a woman is too high for anyone because of the kind of self-contentment, serenity and security that offers a woman drains her soul of the capacity for greatness.

Bim represents the portrayal of the meaning of being a woman in modern India; the kind of woman so far having been subjected to the marginalization and oppression of the patriarchal society, suddenly transforming themselves. Bim is the New Woman. She refuses to marry because she might feel enclosed by the role of the wife, she does not want her freedom to be curtailed and that marriage might render an onslaught on her individuality. Many practical studies conducted through survey of women to lucubrate their proficiencies and accomplishments, state that women are equal to, if not even more capable of multi-tasking. Bim is express evidence. She endeavours to be level-headed and judicious even amidst the ill health and decay of her home. In a society which is patriarchally governed, any attempt at individuality in a woman is apprehended with doubt, Bim prevails and tries to lead her life on her own terms. Bim represents the self confident, assertive, educated, metropolitan woman. She is also modern and westernized, in that, she smokes.
Bim, the new woman, has evolved out of the circumstances. It is with the realization that it is only she who is entitled to take on the burden of the family. The circumstances are such that, with the death of their parents, she is naturally forced to take control. With Aunt Mira’s degeneration into an alcoholic and Raja’s irresponsible flight to Hyderabad, Bim is faced with the urgency of fending for the vulnerable inmates of the household. True to her feminine gender, Bim acquiesces to the onus. She assumes her responsibility towards the family. Nobody need point it out to her. She assumes it, as is true of a woman and Bim does not make any effort to shrug off her encumbrances. This realization of her familial bonds imparts the reader with an insight into the reality of life.

Bim defends the cause of girls’ higher education. She is right in opining that marriage is not enough to last the girls, the whole of their lives. Rather, they should pursue a vocation and be independent. The accustomed aim of older people is to get the girls married. But in the plight of the Mishra daughters, Jaya and Sarla, Bim’s fear rings authentic. They are abandoned by their respective husbands. Without suitable higher education, they are condemned to earn a paltry livelihood by giving music lessons. Therefore, Bim urges her students to be well educated, self-sufficient and independent. This thought and attitude is universally realistic.
The issue of women embarking upon a new identity is a concurrent matter, whether in India or abroad. The concept of the ‘new woman’ calls into question the traditional ‘pativrata’ image the woman. The modern woman is essentially conscious of her position in the family and society, of her potentialities and she is enlightened. The modern woman is predisposed to confront the repercussions of her preferences.

Bim is self-assured, assertive and ambitious. She is conscious of her individuality, dignity and her independent identity, which is not dependent on man, even though he is related to her by birth (here it refers to Bim’s brother Raja). The novel reveals that her life is highly influenced by the new order of things; with all her hopes and aspirations she is determined to charter the course of her own destiny.

For centuries marriage has been considered to be the destiny for women, irrespective of the fact, whether she is happily married or is miserable due to oppression by the male in patriarchal setup. For ensuring harmony in marital relations, an acceptance and adjustment of the wishes, attitudes and sentiments of both is necessary. But when the needs, wishes or individuality of one of the parties is ignored, then the consequence is discord.

Educated women have succeeded in many fields. They are rational and well informed about the issues of life. Many affluent educated
women, pursue vocation for contentment. Patriarchy has always signified that a woman’s place is the home and the hearth. Therefore, women had been relegated to the background for family roles. But in modern days, things have changed.

Aunt Mira is the representative of all the women who do not have a job to give them security. The mother of the Das children is free to pursue her hobbies and leave the smooth running of her household to Aunt Mira. She is a marginalized woman in the patriarchal society. But aunt Mira holds an important position in the Das household. She is the surrogate mother, who initiated change in the Das household, which had been gloomy with lack of parental attention.

One is cognizant of this aspect in Indian families of the presence of widowed aunts and this is a real feature. The patriarchal order also prescribe a strict code of dress, and behaviour for women to practice self-effacement and to discourage the attention of men. Here, Aunt Mira is an illustration. It is a notorious fact that victims of child marriage and widowhood are subjected to inhuman treatment. They are captivated by social taboos and customs. They are constrained to perpetual hardship. This is due to the fact that women have ingested the culture and philosophy ordained by patriarchy, and they whole-heartedly reconcile themselves to the sovereignty of male dominance. Usually, the deferential attitude, inertia, fear, lack of education and exposure forces them to be tight-lipped.
Aunt Mira was a virgin widow. Her young husband, who was a student, having left for England for his study, immediately after the wedding, caught cold in the rain and passed away. They said it was her unfortunate horoscope that induced this catastrophe. Aunt Mira was widowed at the age of fifteen, and she was conjugally not contented. However, her ugly and prematurely ageing appearance had conserved her of sexual exploitation by the male members in her in-laws’ household.

Aunt Mira, who was frequently unwell, was now growing almost bald. When Mrs. Das wrote a letter, asking Aunt Mira to come over to her household, Aunt Mira’s in-laws were too ready to send her away. Right from the raw age of fifteen, Aunt Mira had slogged as a common drudge and now had grown shabby, thin and worn out. But “useless, but another household might find some use for her, as the worn article, thrown away by one, is picked up and employed by another.”

Aunt Mira was well received and embraced by the children. The Das children had been severely deprived— “........no one had ever made them things before, no one had ever had the time. “I’m just going to the club, I’m waiting for the car’, the mother said irritably when approached.

The children received affection, tender care and warm company in Aunt Mira. So she now became an indispensible person in the Das household.
“They (children) crowded about her so that they formed a ring, a protective railing about her.......Their arms were tight around her, keeping her for themselves. They owned her and yes, she wanted to be owned. Their opposing needs seemed to mingle and meet at the very roots, inside the soil in which they grew.”

Even the slow Baba advanced and developed to some extent in Aunt Mira’s care. But their efforts to make him talk failed and gradually they learnt to foresee his few needs and how to respond and “his manner of communication seemed full and rich enough to them.”

Aunt Mira was contented, more than mere happy with them—“she laughed at the profusion, the beauty of this little grove that was the whole forest to her, the whole world.....” Aunt Mira is a sure prop, a support for the children; she provides them with the only care and affection, that they know of. Aunt Mira represents the Indian joint family which is usually a support system for widows and the helpless. For the Das children she was priceless.

The study reveals that the widow is a person who has to be pitied and shown sympathy. The joint family especially is wonted to provide shelter to widows. Due to the evil of child marriages, destiny ushers many young women to be doomed to the dismal life of widowhood. Harsh
words and drudgery fall to their lot. Many a time, the widow is customarily looked down upon as an ill-omen and inauspicious. Widowhood remains a grievous, distressing part of Indian family life, because in Brahmin households, the widows’ head would be shaved and she had to abide by restrictions. Even the sight of the widow was treated as an abomination.

Under the pretext of protection, the widow usually succumbs to the life of a drudge. In the Das household, Aunt Mira is always surrounded by children and she has the occasion to shower them with motherly affection. She is protective and she, as a widow vindicates her presence in the family. She works so hard that the Das children always look up to her for help.

The study explores a very sour, undesirable aspect of sophisticated life that is displayed in *Clear Light of Day*. It is the indifference of parents. With all the wealth, affluence and education, they are sadly poor at caring for children. Mr. Das hardly visited their part of the house. He never addressed them even on his way out or on his way in. Therefore, the children are neither shocked nor disturbed at such a father’s death. He had adopted a policy of neglect, both in the affairs of his business and family. The children are naturally exposed to hybrid culture, that of club going, smoking etc. Accordingly, there is the failure of the family as a healthy social institution under the influence of western culture. There is
also a silver lining. The lackadaisical attitude of her parents towards the family and children creates in Bim an opportunity to garner varied experiences and develop an independent attitude. The faith which traditionally, a woman has to develop in man is lacking in Bim. She is critical of Aunt Mira’s desire to be owned. It is all due to the fact that Bim’s father displays a negated role model.

The study examines the realism of the rupture of human relationships. This time it is the sibling relationship. “Anita Desai tries to tunnel under the mundane surface of domesticity and deal with the reality that lies submerged under the appearances”. The affiliation and interdependence among the Das children is not all that strong. This is the consequence of the non-involvement of the parents. The parents-children togetherness is lacking in the Das family and therefore, the lack of tender affection and sense of responsibility among the children. The dearth of the sense of responsibility in Raja could enable him to relinquish his duties to the family and his siblings. Further, the paucity of a robust father role model causes him to shrink from his responsibility towards his family.

The environment of the Das family had served as a ‘strong hold’ for its children; Raja, Bim, Tara and Baba cling to it. But in adolescence the ambience of home has an abhorrent effect on them. Bim finds solace in being the head-girl at school – she prefers school to home. Raja inclines towards reading the priceless manuscripts in Hyder Ali’s library.
Raja inclines towards society, company, applause. Tara, only gets closer to Aunt Mira. Aunt Mira was as constant as a staff, a tree that can be counted on not to pull up its roots and shift in the night. She was the tree that grew in the centre of their lives. The companionship of parents, which is an essential element in the children’s life, is missing. The children, therefore, seek companionship elsewhere. Bim seeks it in her school, Raja, in Hyder Ali’s library and Tara at home. The dismal and sick atmosphere of their house was an embarrassment for Raja. Tara also tried to escape to the Mishras’ house to find solace. Eventually she escapes through her marriage to Bakul, a foreign diplomat officer. The dearth of able parenting, and a loving, caring mother, who should cement them together, leads them to acquire a divided sibling relationship. The Das couple, played bridge forever. They neglected the upbringing of their children. This kind of parental indifference is reflected in some sophisticated and well-to-do families.

However, Aunt Mira’s affection and care renders them with the tenacity necessary to lead life. Bim’s self-assurance and boldness is commendable. Catering to the needs of an autistic brother and an alcoholic, infantile old aunt is no small task.

The study examines the aspect of realism that of childhood experience and trauma that can spread its dark web even in adult life.
This reality is commonly known. Tara has married an efficient officer. She has travelled the world over with him. But she reels under the power of guilt and fear of her childhood. Tara is enclosed in fear and insecurity. Tara is now part of a beautiful family, wife of an affectionate husband and mother to two adolescent daughters, leading a sophisticated life, her life is quite enviable. But the agents of her fears and insecurities can be traced to her childhood, the fountain-heads being Mr. and Mrs. Das. While their negligence and callousness served to create rebellion and independence in Bim, it reduces Tara to a dependent, yielding and sensitive woman. Moreover, Tara is also tormented by the notion that her father has killed her mother. Tara’s guilt for having abandoned Bim to a lonely life of burdens, is tremendous. Even as a young girl, Tara did not enjoy her school life. She had made no friends; and had earned the qualification of being a conceited and insolent girl. She had neither excelled in academics, nor in sports, nor in any of the extra-curricular activities. There was an amount of detachment witnessed in her behaviour. All she had craved for, is the solace of the proximity of Aunt Mira. That is the basic insecurity kindled in her due to parental dereliction. At school, she could be seen roaming all by herself in the grounds. Tara is presented as a foil to Bim and she displays characteristics in stark contrast to Bim.
Tara visits her home along with Bakul, once in three or five years. But the decadence she sees here, unnerves her. So Bakul accuses her,

“So, I only have to bring you home for a day, Tara, and you go back to being the hopeless person you were before I married you....And you won’t let me help you. I taught you a different life, a different way of living. Taught you to execute your will. Be strong. Face challenges...... But no, the day you enter your old home, you are as weak-willed and helpless and defeatist as ever.”

Tara attempts to break off from her parental home through her marriage. She had craved for freedom and she procured it. With marriage, she enters into a different lifestyle. As a child, when Tara was confronted with the question as to what she would like to be on growing up, she says that she would love to be a mother. She sets out to accomplish what she had planned to. She has also escaped the palling ambience of their house. Bakul is a gentleman, with egalitarian values. Inspite of this fact, she converts into the original, tremulous, unsure Tara that she previously was, when she comes back.

As neither of the parents feels the sense of accountability regarding the children, there are no tender moments between parents and
children. The children, as has already been pointed out are left to look after themselves. Usha Bande quotes Erikson, which is as follows:

“Development of a healthy personality depends on a certain degree of choice, a certain hope for an individual chance, a certain conviction in freedom of self-determination.” For a healthy personality, freedom of self-determination is essential, as opined by Erikson, points out Usha Bande. She further says: “.....for creating order, parent-child partnership is essential because man is not a ready-made being. He is moulded by his circumstances and his choices. She continues: “unfortunate home atmosphere makes the question of ‘choices’ impossible for the Das children. As they grow up into mature individuals, they carry with them the fear of their past life. It has been a disorderly world. They all dread it.”

Therefore, in the absence of familial unity, the offspring tend to scatter. But the Das children, fortunately have Aunt Mira, a surrogate mother. The disastrous and harmful effects of parental negligence is however mitigated to some extent, due to the presence of Aunt Mira. The children of such parents naturally tend to be detached from one another.
Bim’s disappointment and frustration solidifies into an injurious, reeking of emotional wound. The unhappiness in the family, even with affluent parents, the disharmony between parents and children, the communication rupture and the negligence of parents, stuff out the sensitivity from her and hardens her. Nevertheless, Bim does not articulate her feelings. One can surmise, that Bim’s decision to remain unmarried has its seeds in her circumstances and parental experiences. Bim says that she would not want to return to her childhood. This acerbity is the consequence of the unsavoury atmosphere of her home life, and her acrimony towards her past also reveals her wounded, tortured feelings.

Loneliness is a recurrent realism with Anita Desai. The ubiquitous features of indifference and selfishness in larger society are seen in a diminutive way in the Das family. Deep down in her heart, Bim is lonely. With the arrival of the letter from their father’s office which requires one of them to attend the meeting, Bim unfurls her bitterness and anger on the dumb Baba, threatening to send him away to Raja. Bim is the worst victim of detachment, alienation and loneliness. She would like to fence herself in away from the past and the future. Bim is wounded by the callousness of her parents and brother. Therefore, she compares them to mosquitoes.
“They had come like mosquitoes–Tara and Bakul and behind them the Mishras, 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, sweet and nourishing. Now, when they were full, they rose in swarms, humming away, turning their backs on her”.

Bim, also displays eccentricities. She has a longing to be alone. Her own lack of companionship which is but natural for a lonely human being, manifests in the following way. She is overburdened with responsibilities, and therefore, she gives no thought to herself or her appearance. She displays symptoms of premature ageing. Bim sustains a stupendous fatigue and duress at the fact of Raja’s betrayal. As is the reality seen in society, men are to a great extent egoistic and when the issue of attending to the needs of spinster sisters is forthcoming, they try to evade it. So Raja is true to his type. As soon as he is physically fit, after the attack of tuberculosis, Raja breaks free of his parental home to fly off to Hyder Ali’s household in Hyderabad. All the twenty years, Bim has suffered, but Raja has not worried or agonized over how Bim might have shouldered the burdens of the family. He has inherited Hyder Ali’s property and has grown prodigiously rich. One can deduce the extent of Bim’s bitterness and sense of desertion when Raja writes her a letter in
the capacity of a landlord, as Hyder Ali’s son-in-law, which says that he will very magnanimously allow Bim and Baba to live in the house, till they would need it.

With Tara’s visit to home, Bim is somewhat forced to encounter the fact of the massive void in her life. She was always aware of it, but she had tried to repress it. As is Anita Desai’s stratagem of delving deep into the character’s psyche, so she does it with elan. Bim is reported to be talking to herself, as she is trying to adjust to her lonely situation.

Tara had taken Bim to be incredibly competent in handling the house. The IV part of the novel reveals that,

“She had always thought Bim so competent, so capable. Everyone had thought.......But Bim seemed to stampede through the house like a dishevelled storm, creating more havoc than order......or had her old capability, her old competence begun to crumble now and go to seed?.....”

These are the indications of an individual who is constrained to assume the charge of the whole family. Although Bim is sapient and shrewd, she does suffer from peccability, and she needs protection. But she still musters courage and forges ahead. Bim is seen talking and gesturing to herself.
Bim has built fences and bulwarks around herself, over the years. She has fenced herself in and hardened with all the acrimoniousness and animosity against Raja. She harbours enormous hatred and thereby she contorts familial sentiment. This is the consequence of the feeling of loneliness.

A single woman is usually not accepted by the society as healthy, sane and normal person. She is seen as abnormal, deficient and looked upon with suspicion. This aspect is witnessed in society. She has to bear with hardships on the economic level as well as carry the onus of the upbringing of the family. From the view point of the society, a spinster symbolizes a withdrawal from life. Single life has always been associated with loneliness and social isolation. Therefore, as an eccentric spinster, Bim camouflages her anger and unhappiness, under the garb of a over bearing and terse demeanour. She has nursed hatred and bitterness against Raja for twenty years. Raja’s proud letter, asserting his position as a landowner has injured her pride.

Raja, who is the only sane male child of the family, easily abdicates his responsibilities to Bim. Raja’s flight from the dismal home is in the form of his frequent visits to Hyder Ali’s library and his deep interest in Islamic Studies. Had his father not intervened at the right juncture, Raja would have involved in Islamic Studies at Jamia Milia. But he ultimately studies English Literature at a Hindu college. Raja has no
qualms about relocating to Hyderabad. He has utterly no compunction about Bim and Baba. The indubitable westernized social values which have seeped into the family atmosphere, has left no scruples with Raja. This is presented authentically and clearly. Raja, like his western counterpart departs soon after he is in good shape.

The Mishra sisters who never had the prerogative of acquiring higher education, got married, in their teens. They are separated from their husbands. Therefore, they are required to persevere and labour at maintaining themselves and the family.

One notices that, the instituted customs and attitudes, are slow to change, especially those about incorporating new ideas about women and their place in society. Equality between men and women is only a doctrine and hard to be brought into practice in the social and political convictions. With all the affluence, Jaya and Sarla are sacrificed at the altar of marriage, with no access to education. The husbands have exercised their franchise to leave them.

One is well-acquainted with the fact that the worth of a wife is measured by the number of sons she gives birth to. The birth of a son has religious connotations. The welfare of the parents’ souls after death, hinges on the rituals performed by the son, and not by the daughter. Women have internalized these patriarchal injunctions. One reads in *Clear Light of Day* that the Mishras’ wealth has been squandered by the
three brothers, who were sent to foreign universities for education. The discrimination is glaring. As is known, even before the existence of legislative orders giving equal rights to women over the father’s property, women were not considered fit to be partakers of the family’s wealth. In the Mishra girls this sad and cruel reality is reflected. They toil hard for livelihood. This injustice was one of the stratagies used by patriarchy to perpetuate its hegemony. With such a mind set, the inner needs, aspirations and longings of girls go unheeded.

One can witness in the example of Mishras, the practice of society in bestowing privileges to sons and servitude to daughters. A passing reference is made, in the present novel, to the Indian festival ‘Rakshsabandan’. While the old Mishra father asserts that their sisters tied Rakhi on his wrist, which symbolises the love and protection of the brother for sister, he had really meant to look after them and protect them. With the younger Mishra men who have already dissipated the family wealth, ‘Rakshabandan’ is of little importance. The coming of English education and modernity, has also done away with the principles behind the meaningful festival. People’s attitude has metamorphosed and erosion of the Indian culture has already set in.

The affectionate brotherly relationships existing between Hindus and Muslims, is exemplified in the friendly relations of the Das children and Hyder Ali’s. But in the wake of independence, communal riots and
the consequent partition of the nation, a traumatic breach is created. The common culture, fellowship and togetherness shared by both communities is dealt a severe blow. The Hyder Ali’s had to evacuate to Hyderabad in the face of danger. The nation torn into two bleeding countries was a reality which had ruffled and disturbed many an amicable relationships. Hyder Ali was an exemplary man and he welcomed and encouraged Raja to read his manuscripts and utilize his library. Raja reverenced him.

India is a land of varied religions and languages. One can recall loving relationships in neighbourhoods, irrespective of caste and language differences. There have been instances of Hindus and Muslims celebrating and participating in one anothers’ festivals and rituals. Raja’s incessant worry for Hyder Ali’s safety is plausible and intelligible. In ‘Clear Light of Day’, Anita Desai has employed the political facts of the freedom struggle and its aftermath as a potent backdrop.

**Conclusion:** Thus the study examines the phenomenon of the independent, modern woman, human relationships, including that of the parent-child relationship, sibling relationship, the psychological problems of spinsterhood and widowhood. The woman is analysed in the light of the new reality, that is the educated and independent woman.

The study reveals that the novel reflects the fact that education has been instrumental in bringing significant transformation in upper-middle
and middle-class families. Women are now aware of new prospects and horizons. Education is wide-spread among girls. Therefore, the age of marriage has enhanced considerably. Girls have also learnt the art of fusing tradition and modernity to face problems. Thus the study examines how Bim grows to attain her selfhood and also reach her on goals in life.
The Village by The Sea

**Introduction:** The novel has won the 1982 Guardian award for children’s fiction. The story is based entirely on fact and the author presents the realities of the rural poor with clarity. It is the real life story of a family in a village called Thul, situated on the western coast of India. The characters are all real, based on living individuals. But their actual names have been changed in the novel. Anita Desai herself writes at the beginning, that this novel is dedicated “for Lina, Aditi and Ranjit Mayadas whose house in Thul provided me with many holidays and all the material for this book.”

The present study spotlights the critical situation of poverty. The pathetic economic circumstances suffered by the characters points to the stark reality. It examines the realities of the agony and anguish of the peasants as they haggle with the complications and challenges of life and living. The study examines the realities of the modern man to survive in a materialistic world. It examines the way in which he develops resilience when he confronts trials and afflictions, and how he musters the sustenance required to navigate himself through hindrances, inconveniences and obstacles. The study seeks to examine the ways in which man approaches his identity problems, how he responds to the cultural transformations around him. The realities explored in this novel
are the facts that show that life is an adventure at times, for certain people; and that one needs to cast away old social values and conventionality and move forward with time. The study explores the conflict between the urge to flourish in life along with the enhancing of one’s capacity for growth, and the urge to remain in the old set-up.

**Plot:** *The Village By The Sea* is the story of Hari who develops into a self-made man. His parents who had once owned a fishing boat and a cow, have become poor. The father is immersed in drinking and he has to sell his boat and cow due to the enormity of debts. The mother takes ill and is confined to bed. Hari is a school drop-out. Lila is Hari’s elder sister, who takes care of the household and the two other younger sisters Bela and Kamal. Lila is the pivot around whom the whole family revolves. Hari works in the small patch of land behind their hut. There is a strong rumour that a fertilizer factory would be set-up in their village, Thul. Hari has no hope of getting a job as he is illiterate. Therefore, Hari plans to go to Bombay with the help of Mr. De Silva, who has come from Bombay, to stay in Thul from Bombay. Hari is confident that employment in Bombay would enable him to shoulder the responsibility of his whole family. Hari reaches Bombay. Now his only passion is to look for work. Although he feels lost in the big city he forges ahead. Hari traces the De Silvas’ apartment, but he finds that they have not returned
from Thul. Hiralal, the watchman, takes Hari to his friend Jagu’s Sri Krishna’s Eating House, where Hari gets work as the cook’s assistant. He is paid a rupee per day. Hari works with two other boys who can speak only Tamil. There is Mr. Panwallah, the watch-mendor next door. Hari becomes friendly with him. In his spare time, Hari learns mending watches. Soon the monsoon sets in and Bombay is rocked by heavy rain. Hari earns money. There is a gradual change in Hari’s behaviour. He is more confident and now he knows how to live in Bombay. He is a self-made man. Hari plans for his future. He returns to his village, a confident boy. He finds his father has reformed and his mother is well.

**Analysis:** The working class whom Hari represents, nurses a strong tendency towards upper mobility. The novel reveals the suffering, misery, conflict and the aspirations of the poor classes. It depicts their struggle for bare subsistence. With all this, Hari and Lila evince an unflinching spirit to sustain and persevere through the worst of trials. The novel records the starved lives of the peasants, their lives being afflicted by illiteracy, negligence, drunkenness, sickness and homelessness. Hari and his family represent the pressures of industrialization and the threat of losing whatever little they have. The rumour that many factories will be established in Thul disturbs the peace and calm of the village. The life that is portrayed in the novel is grim and sordid. The realism portrayed
here may serve to sensitize the elite to the problems of the poor. In addition to the threat of industrialization to the village of Thul, there is the hostile force of nature which the villagers have to suffer passively.

Addiction to alcohol or toddy, as it is told in the novel has wrought havoc in the lives of the people. This is one of the main causes of poverty into which they are steeped. Hari’s father lies drunk the whole day. The stench from the fermented toddy which he drinks day and night is too much to bear. When Hari wishes that his father should rather die, his wish is understandable. The drunken man lies in a heap the whole day on a mat in a corner of their dark and shadowy room. Their sick mother also lies in the same room and “he fouls the room with the stench of his drunkenness.” The novel reveals that this happens to be a habit of their father, ever since Lila was a child. Hari also relates that he does not want to go in the village as “all they do there is drink.” Their condition is so derelict that there is nothing in their hut to eat except dried chapati. They eat it with a pinch of salt and some green chillies. Hari and Lila do not utter anything. But they communicate with each other, the problem that assails their family, the problem of poverty and drunkenness. The only question that they ask each other is: “what will we do?...Hari knew exactly what she meant, but he did not like to tell her so.”
Hari’s father does not realise the harm he causes to his family. He is always provoking his children to anger. But as Lila is a docile girl, she tolerates everything quietly. Hari’s father is powerless to overcome the habit. The family is also socially isolated. There are not many instances of their interacting within the neighbourhood. Further, there is an atmosphere of chaos in the family. Lila and Hari live in continual fear of the future.

Another instance is depicted in the novel. The Khanekar family which consists of three brothers and an old mother. All the three brothers are submerged in toddy addiction to the extent that, they do not care for agriculture or fishing. These are the staple occupations of Thul. They perpetrate drinking in that, they brew toddy, drink it themselves and sell it to others. Their mother Hirabai, an old woman, is herself addicted to it. Thus, the novel evinces the stark realism of alcoholism which is a common evil in society.

Migration is another aspect of realism explored in this novel. Hari migrates from the village to Bombay, as the village has nothing to offer him. But the frustration and disappointment in the city tires him. It is a perennial struggle for survival. Bombay’s teeming population holds the satiated rich on the one hand, and on the other, there is the ugly reality of the rural poor and the misery of the working classes. Socio-economic
changes affect the younger generations. Young men like Hari leave the village in the hope of betterment. But the city has extremely poor chances of offering it. Boys like Hari accept suffering. They have to do something to bring relief for their families.

The assault of industrialization on human values, relationships and property/land causes suffering. This is too touching a reality because the peasants are deprived of their land which is the only source of income. Such misfortunes coupled with natural disasters abuse them. Therefore, they are forced to migrate to urban areas. Migration also puts undue stress on them as they are displaced from their native places and people. Their predicament is desperate as it is a question of their survival. Therefore, migration is perennial. Especially migration from the rural towards the urban areas, happens when the young men realise that their hereditary professions will not provide enough sustenance. They gradually leave their native villages and move to cities.

Hari decides to go to Bombay. Hari joins the teeming population who are on their way to Bombay for employment. He notices that the daily wage earners live in squalid slums. He finds that poverty is witnessed in a large dimension in Bombay—bad working conditions, squalid slums, low wages, the suffocating atmosphere. There is a realistic description of the Sassoon docks. Hari’s awe at the crowd in the city is
distinctly depicted. He is simply silenced by the awe. “The boy is jostled by the pushing people around him that he is carried along by them.” The hustling crowds, the scramble of fisherwomen as they shifted the baskets of the slithering fish from the boats to the market; the ground that was dangerously slippery as it was scattered with fish scales and mud; the familiar smells of the sea and fish, the noise of the traffic that was never heard in Thul— all these details are graphically painted. The cruel sarcasm of the police as they confront the village folk trying to cross the busy roads and such other jeers and offending remarks depict the callousness of the mechanized people— “send him back there- let him grow pumpkins—keep him off the Bombay streets.” Such remarks are commonly heard.

The study reveals that Anita Desai portrays a real picture of the intrinsic existence of the poor sections of the society. It is a live touch of the real predicament. This is seen in the realistic note on the Bombay zopadpattis, where Hari goes with Jagu for whom he works. The shack is made out of rags and flattened tin cans, where millions of people who come to work to Bombay, live. They cannot afford the rent for flats. The shack where Jagu lives shows the dismal condition of the slum dwellers’ lives. The absence of proper drainage facility, lighting, latrines and water facilities create a hell for them. Jagu’s hut is filled with rain water; the scene of the family crouched on the lone cot is very touching. As the
monsoon has begun with all its force, the rain and slush from outside has crept into the shack. Hari is aghast to find Jagu’s family huddled on a string bed. The already crowded shack is leaking and the members of the family have covered their heads with rags. It is a moving realistic account of their predicament. Such poor living conditions are breeding grounds for tremendous problems of health and nutrition. The conditions of over-crowding enhances the rate of infectious diseases. The dispensary was a broken building with a tin roof on which the rain beat loudly. There was a long queue of men, women and children who were waiting in the veranda and outside in the rain to show themselves to the doctor. Hari is touched to witness the scene at Jagu’s shack. The existence of the shack or the zopadpatti itself is essentially a manifestation of dire poverty. The scene there emerges as misery incarnate. The basic amenities of clean and warm living conditions appear to be a far-fetched dream to people like Jagu.

   Bombay life is replete with crime and violence. Hari encounters a beggar and a coconut seller in Bombay who represent Bombay’s under-world culture which flourishes on conspiracies and betrayals. He finds that it has pervaded the business arena of the city. “....A safe job as a front to fool the police, and a dangerous one behind it with which to make a living....”42 – says the beggar on the pavement. Hari is sure that he has come to Bombay to earn an honest livelihood and not that of deception.
Although he might have been initiated into the profession of crime through the coconut-seller and the beggar, whom he encounters in Bombay, Hari does not give a single thought to it. There are times when Hari carries on nine months in Bombay with great difficulties. But he never considers opting towards a life of crime for easy and sumptuous money. Bombay which is basically a centre for trade and commerce has attracted poor migrants in search of work. Due to this fact, there happens to be a problem of housing these migrants. Thus the slums or zopadpattis are over-crowded. The novel depicts this reality of the rural poor who cannot eke out a living from the meagre resources in the village and therefore have to move to the city for food and employment. But life is not easy even in the urban areas. They come here and are helplessly propelled into questionable means of livelihood.

The man-made menace of industrialisation is another aspect of realism explored here. Due to this fact, Hari resolves to move to Bombay in search of employment and better financial possibilities. This aspect of realism is one of the causes for the peasantry to move towards urban areas, which in turn become over-crowded. The people of Thul village are informed that the government intends to build many factories in Thul. Their coconut and betel nut estates along with their paddy fields would be destroyed to build factories, roads, housing colonies, market and other
amenities. Thousands of people would come here from elsewhere and work in the factories. Urbanization is seen invading the calm village. There is a general resentment and fear among the people of Thul. As Thul thrives mainly on agriculture and fishing, the future seems to be very bleak for the people who depend solely on these occupations. There is no other solution to face this problem, but to organise themselves and rebel against it. Moreover, fishing in that area will receive a death blow due to the fact that the effluents from factories will be let out into the sea, thereby polluting and killing the fish. The young men being persuaded by all these facts are however, not able to convince the elders. It is difficult for the elders to believe that they will lose their lands. They assert: “....No one can take our land,...it is ours, and we will not sell.”

The prospect of constructing factories in the fourteen villages along the coast, which also includes the village of Thul, would create tremendous job opportunities. But illiterate men like Hari or Ramu may be given the job of a sweeper, or a coolie; in other words, the most ill-paid jobs. The well-paid jobs would be occupied with educated and trained professionals. The boy Ramu who expects to be employed in the up-coming factories in Thul, represents the type of people which is on the rise. The philosophy of healthy change is the one which should be adopted. Biju who has built a huge diesel engine fishing boat, and Mr. Panwallah, the watch-mendor in Bombay belong to this group.
The village Thul is gripped by the government’s attempt to industrialize it. This phenomenon of industrialization is a continual process and is a characteristic feature of the social and economic development of the country. Industrialization is the consequence of the fast developing science and technology. The people of all these villages organize themselves and go to Bombay under a leader, Adarkar. They meet the Chief Minister and protest against the government’s drive of industrializing their village. It is a vivid and remarkable account of the villagers being taken to Bombay. Hari joins them.

Civilization is always marked with industrialization, urbanisation and migration. The present novel presents this realism very poignantly. The life that is depicted is realistic. The struggle of mankind to overcome and satisfy hunger goes on incessantly. Anita Desai documents very realistically the plight of this village which has been invaded by industrialization and its interference in the calmth of the village. It wreaks havoc in the rural economy, causes displacement of the rural folk and severe denigration. The novel focuses upon the reality of rural life which is constantly in transition. The struggle between tradition and modernity is ubiquitous. Disintegration of the family is imminent. The novel is deeply implanted in the Indian soil and its ethos. It depicts the sufferings of the rural folk and is an authentic record of rural life.
The economic forces bring out the natural culmination of progress in establishing a factory or road; but for the villagers this progress is meaningless and is an enforcement. Therefore, they see this project as an agent of dehumanization rather than as progress or growth. While the forces of spatial expansion are always at work, they may be beneficial in many respects and detrimental in other ways. The urban areas devour the green, calm environs of the village with great speed. This is a well known aspect of realism. In other words, this could also be visualised as an aspect of growth. Commercial and economic growth is ubiquitous. But still, the study depicts that such growth can never be considered as a defence against poverty. This is witnessed both in Bombay and in Thul. Therefore, the industrial assault against the rural economic and social life is an intense realism that is always seen.

The novel presents the stark realism of the disparity of extravagant life style of the rich and the insecure economic conditions of the poor. This is reflected in the dingy circumstance in which the dwellers of zopadpattis live on the one side and the affluent dwelling places of the rich, on the other. This conflict is represented in the meagre dwelling of Jagu and people like him. Whereas the DeSilvas live in a tall apartment building in a posh locality. The sight of children and women in brightly coloured clothes, eating strange food is awe-inspiring to Hari. He had
never seen such food at home. “The sight of imposing tall buildings that lined the road was breath-taking.” Hari is amazed at the lavishness of the DeSilvas’ drawing room, the carpeted floor, the huge furniture, the bright pictures and mirrors and flowers that embellished the immaculate walls. “He became conscious of his dirty feet in their dusty sandals and wondered how he could ever step into that room in such a condition.” These lines portray the absolute disagreement between the two classes.

The study explores the aspects of tradition and custom which is a potent realism seen in India. No where in the world there can be seen the female fraternity which is so much immersed in rituals and traditions as the Indian female fraternity. Lila represents the true-to-life Hindu woman, in her devotion to Hindu rituals. The ‘tulsi’ plant is a plant-diety which is revered and worshipped in every Hindu household. It is an indispensable part of their worship and a very significant part of their lives. This is true of both rich and poor households. This aspect of realism finds expression in the present novel. The beginning of the novel depicts that Lila begins her day with this significant ritual. The cluster of three rocks, located towards the sea shore are permanently smeared with red and white powder. Lila consecrates the rocks and worships them on a daily basis. The novel says: “.....she felt it was the best time of the day for her, the only perfectly happy and peaceful one.” She seems to be rejuvenated
with this everyday ritual. Although the earthen walls of her hut were on the collapse, and the windows thrown open without shutters and the hut needed re-thatching, Lila believes that one day everything would be well again. This faith seems to carry her through.

Further, the people of Thul do not see the significance of medical treatment. They resort to quacks and such other persons, who treat their ailments with herbs, powders and barks. The medicine-man is a common sight in villages. He is preceded by a dwarf-cow decorated with necklaces, tassels and an embroidered cloth covering the hump. He usually treats the villagers for their boils, aches and fevers. He is something like a wizard, who will perform the puja in favour of those who could not benefit from his medicines. The villagers worship the cow and bring a bundle of hay from the man and feed the cow. This is considered a pious act. Such customs and traditions play an important role in the lives of the villagers. This medicine-man hands down to Lila pouches of ash to keep under their pillows to drive away demons. He also prepares a paste out of the ash and gives it to Lila’s mother to swallow like a pill. It is given to ‘cleanse’ her from within and to drive out her fever-demon. Such is their ignorance and thus, the gullibility of the villagers aids him in earning his livelihood. The novel portrays these aspects of realism, and the problems that affect society in the face of urbanization.
Another aspect of realism explored here is the peasantry’s ignorance of family welfare measures. In their poverty and ignorance they even tend to neglect such measures and thereby promote a big family which further aggravates poverty. They nurse a faith and pride in possessing a big family and tend to treat the value of family planning unnecessary. Therefore, Hari’s family is a huge one. As he is the only son of the family, he feels the burden. The thoughts of their future worry him. He also worries about the dowry that is to be given away to marry off three sisters. Hari ruminates that bridegrooms demand large sums of money, gold, buffaloes or even land. He realises the impossibility of his sisters’ marriage in their present circumstances. Even if he were to work hard, he conceives that he may not be able to meet the demands of dowry. The stark reality of coming under the clutches of the money lender is too painful to contemplate. The present situation is that of poverty. Hari’s household is saturated with it. The condition of their mother is deteriorating and they are unable to afford the doctor from Alibagh.

It is apparent that Anita Desai presents the basic Indian problems in this novel. The study examines the situation presented in the novel and deciphers that the remedy lies in hard work and education. The characters in the novel become aware of this aspect. Hari’s hard work and resilience, Lila’s courage and patience, their father’s resolution to reform himself
and get down to hard work— all these can be viewed as potent solutions. Hari is a hard working boy. His iron will power, the desire and purpose to do something helps him. Inspite of the suffering they have undergone, both Hari and Lila have great vitality. Poverty has succeeded in instilling courage in them. Man is naturally endowed with flexibility. He can emerge out from decay and disruption. Their parents also subscribe to this conviction. Despair, distress and afflictions serve to test the strength and tenacity of an individual. Difficult and severe circumstances always bring out the tolerance and resilience in man. A new sturdy personality emerges out of the suffering individual, that leads him to hope and fulfilment. Many facts of life confront the reader through the exploration of this novel. The researcher opines that any destructive force can be confronted and overcome if the problem is approached with courage and confidence.

This point could be illustrated in Lila. Lila is a docile and homely girl. She never rebels against the patriarchal values. One witnesses that, although her father is unfit to shoulder the responsibilities of the household, she respects him. She does not rebel against the traditional ways of life. She also does not quest after freedom from the traditional norms and patriarchal values. She is portrayed as an ideal woman, who performs her traditional roles effectively. She is a dutiful daughter. At the same time, she undermines the female roles of submission and
accommodation. This can be witnessed in her taking on the role of a strong man in the family. The father himself is incapacitated to fend for the family. The situation requires a reversal of positions for their survival. While Hari is away in Bombay, Lila looks to the financial needs of the family. Lila emerges as the quintessence of patient suffering. She exudes a quiet resignation to poverty and suffering. Lila’s portrayal strikes the reader as very realistic. This is due to the fact that women are extremely hard-working. In most lower class families, women play the significant role of the provider.

Village life is in the process of expansive socio-economic transformations when confronted with the urban culture. Money lenders are very significant in rural economy. The poor peasants are forced to borrow money at a very high rate of interest, when they are in need of money. During such times, the peasants having pawned whatever they possess for the money, never get back their property, as they are unable to repay the loan. Like this, Hari’s father has lost his boat and cow.

There is Biju, who is a successful fisherman. His diesel engine boat is the product of the industrialization that will soon come to the village. Impressed by the amount of money Biju is spending to build the boat, Hari fantasizes about life in Bombay and going there to earn money. The future appears to be very luminous. Biju’s diesel engine boat is the
epitome of the onset of mechanization in the village. The common human emotions of jealousy and envy find expression here. The villagers are jealous of Biju’s prosperity and they do not have a single positive word to say about it. There is also a strong rumour that Biju has amassed wealth through smuggling. This aspect speaks of the contamination of social and moral values that is one of the consequences of the invasion of urban values. As part of industrialization, the values of comfort, luxury and materialism will naturally be ushered in. So, social change is natural. Biju represents the fact that the dishonest and the wicked thrive, while the honest, hard-working people wilt away under the restraint of moral values of honesty.

Natural calamities spell disaster and desolation because the people who procure sustenance by land or sea, are exposed to hardship and starvation just as they have enjoyed plenty in good times. The fishing village of Thul witnesses many calamities every year. Many fishermen lose their lives to the sea. Many fishing boats have drowned. The severe monsoon which is let loose is described like this:

“All night lightening flashed and thunder boomed while the coconut trees creaked and swung dangerously over their hut. The sounds of the wind and the sea were so loud that the girls hid under their cotton blankets, saying their
ears ached, not admitting that they did it out of fear.......At times it seemed that their hut would be blown to splinters. Lila feared that one of the coconut trees would fall upon their roof...

**Conclusion:** The positivity which comes at the close of the novel is however realistic enough. The solution is realistic. After all the tribulations, Hari’s father has realised his responsibility to the family. Thus, in this novel social realism has been traced.
**In Custody**

**Introduction:** The novel was published in 1984. It was shortlisted for the Booker Award. It was made into a film by Merchant Ivory Productions, starring Shashi Kapoor and Om Puri. It marks another stage in the career of Anita Desai as a novelist. It digresses from the usual preoccupations of the author with hyper-sensitive and neurotic female protagonists. Here the author delves into the male protagonist’s psyche. The present study explores into the reality of the twists and turns which life suddenly takes when the protagonist wants to redeem the material and temporal nature of his experiences to the indestructible and abiding realm of poetry. The study examines the struggle of the protagonist who seeks a positive freedom from a self-imposed trap of self-effacement and suicide. As this novel explores the male psyche, the female characters are on the periphery of the narrative. It asserts the author’s belief in the positivity of life. The study examines the nature of a middle-class man’s struggle with repeated failure, exploitation and then the experience which descends out of the same struggle. This leads one into a mellowed understanding of life, its perennial exertions and struggles. The study also examines the strain of marital incompatibility that further aggravates the existing problems. The study explores the truth of the meaninglessness of life and its ultimate ineptitude. The reality of an idealistic spirit that is enclosed in
materialism is explored. This realism of life is explored by examining the
grovelling circumstances of the protagonist, along with his marital
relationship which is equally unhappy. His relationship with
unconscionable people and its consequences is explored. The
protagonist’s life which is although dull and ordinary, is overwhelmed
with despair and uncertainty.

Plot: The protagonist Deven is a Hindi Lecturer at Mirpore (outskirts of
Delhi) in a private college. He is a mediocre academician, but he exhibits
great admiration for Urdu poetry. The celebrated Urdu poet, Nur is his
hero. His friend Murad who edits the journal *Awaz* forces him to
interview Nur and give a feature on Nur’s poetry to his journal. Deven is
exhilarated at this proposal. Deven visits Delhi for the same purpose.
Here he encounters the real Nur, not the Nur of his ideal Urdu poetry. The
real Nur is senile, squabbling in drunkenness and dissipation. Nur is
surrounded by lechers and louts. The environment in Nur’s house
nauseates Deven. Deven returns to Mirpore in utter horror. But Murad
tyrannizes him to do the feature on Nur. Again, Deven goes to Delhi to
Nur’s house. Imtiaz Begum, Nur’s second wife is introduced. Deven
becomes aware that she has deprived Nur of everything – of his audience,
applause and reputation. Nur himself wallows under her spell. However,
Nur consents to recite his poetry and Deven readily submits to write it
down. The sanction of money from Deven’s college authorities permits
Deven to purchase an audio equipment. But the recording does not
materialise due to Imtiaz Begum’s sickness. Nur is preoccupied with her
and is unable to spend time with Deven. Nur’s first wife consents to help
Deven provided he pay her money. Deven stays with Nur for three weeks.
Chikku, his assistant assists in recording, but unfortunately he succeeds in
recording only the non-essentials of Nur’s senile talk and laughter, but
not his precious recitations.

Deven lands in great difficulties. The audio which he has recorded
is of no use. The college authorities threaten him with loss of job; Murad
oppresses him. Nur demands money from him; the college boys threaten
to beat him up. In the midst of this chaos, is his deteriorating relationship
with his wife, Sarla. But Deven emerges a positive person in all these
conflicts. He visualises himself as the custodian of Nur’s genius. The
novel ends with positive affirmation.

**Analysis:** The study explores into the experiences of failure and
disappointment of the protagonist. These aspects of internal realism affect
mankind at one time or the other. The study attempts to examine these
aspects of the novel. Deven stumbles into Murad’s trap from which there
is no escape and from then on, his frustrations aggravate. On Murad’s
insistence, Deven goes to Delhi to interview Nur, but the suffocating
atmosphere there repels him. He comes back to Mirpore. Murad persuades him to accomplish the task. This time Deven finds that a soiree party has been arranged in Nur’s house. It is to celebrate Imtiaz Begum’s birthday. Nur reveals that Imtiaz Begum has swindled him of everything—his reputation, his poetry and his audience. Once again Deven decides to quit the project. But Murad tells him to take the help of a tape-recorder for interviewing the poet. Deven feels this idea may work. Siddiqui, the head of Urdu department in Deven’s college assists him to avail contingency from the college authorities. Murad assists Deven in buying a tape-recorder. Deven falls into Murad’s trap, as the latter advises him to buy a tape-recorder from Jain whom he (Murad) knows. Jain allots Deven a raw technician, who lacks expertise. The recording remains a total failure; and the recording does not serve any scholarly purpose.

In the meantime, Nur writes to Deven to send him money for his cataract operation. Nur’s first wife Safiya Begum had helped Deven to rent out a room, where they could accomplish the interviewing work. Nur writes to Deven to clear the rent bills. Murad does not pay Deven. Deven sees through Murad’s plot of exploitation. Deven is at loss. He is threatened by the college authorities for embezzling the amount. Deven is in danger of losing his job. He realises that he is imprisoned in a row of cages.
Deven is hauled from one problem to another. Everybody around him seemed to exert his weight on him. Nur’s wives, Nur himself, Murad, the technicians, his students; everybody wants to exploit him for money. The fact that Nur’s poetry which had sustained him all these years, seems to be the cause for his failure and frustration. The meagre job of a college lecturer on which he had depended is now at risk.

Nur, the poet is no longer a notable personage. He is a senile old man, who is only worried of his own life. He tries to extract as much money as possible from Deven. Nur and his two wives depict the selfishness and self-centredness which is so common in day-to-day life. Imtiaz Begum professes to be a talented poetess. Both the women demand money from Deven under the pretext of paying for the room rent and the medical treatment of Nur’s son. Murad, too, is out to exploit Deven. He wants to promote the cause of the journal Awaz and the future of Urdu literature. Deven is pushed and tugged at from every side, thereby creating tension and desperation. Deven’s students assist him to some extent, but that too, in the hope of procuring good marks. The callousness of man is presented in the garb of all these individuals. Deven realises that, it was not his fault. He says:

“I worked hard……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.”

In such circumstances it is only natural for Deven to wish that somebody would attack him and stab him to death. Such is his sense of desperation. Man at times commits blunders even though he is well educated and is capable of conducting his life well. This is a known reality. Deven allows Murad and later Nur to take control of his life. Deven allows himself to be exploited to the fullest. It denotes that although Deven is a college lecturer and an educated person, he is not worldly wise. He is so much pre-occupied with the world of Urdu poetry, he has lost the sense of practical wisdom. He lands himself in inestimable financial problems and the fear of losing his job. This is due to the fact that he has not recorded anything that is worthy of scholarly use. Deven’s sense of failure is so acute that he develops a deep inferiority. Usha Bande says: “Reducing himself to a zero, Deven engages himself in the shrinking process”. Due to this attitude, he cannot make an assertive progress in his project. His idealized mind glorifies Nur, but the real Nur repels him. Therefore, his idealized mind ushers him with the project, but failure and the practicality hinder him. Deven takes time to realise that reality is made up of the plebian and the crude elements of life.
Deven portrays an excessive reliance on his ideal Nur. Deven attempts to construct meaning to his life through this dependence. This points out to severe debility in his personality. One notices a dearth of capability in Deven as he depends upon an external stimulus rather than internal courage to make himself whole.

At the same time, he nurses bitterness at his dependency on Nur for fulfilment. He depends upon Murad involuntarily and follows him blindly. Deven lacks a strong will power and self-confidence. His extreme modesty does not push him any further. Deven oscillates between rejecting and conducting the project. His relief at encountering a helper only proves his weakness. His self-pity and desperation sway over his feeling. He rues: “My hard work leads nowhere, to nothing. Nothing.”

He is in a continual need of a helper, to buy the tape-recorder or even to operate it. He suffers psychological sluggishness; he cannot do things on his own. Deven feels it is his lot to receive insults and indignities. The novel reveals: “All through his childhood and youth he had known only one way to deal with life and that was to lie low and remain invisible.” He had faced failure and even as a student he had no hope to pass the examination. He suffered an inherent tendency towards cowardice. The sense of defeat and frustration are intrinsic in him. Deven’s frustrations arise from the fact that he lacks the ability to get
through and out of the various complications he creates for himself. He knows that he is “totally inadequate, incompetent and unconfident.” Deven is so immersed in defeat and negativity that he realizes that one complication leads to another. Therefore, the novel says: “…..And where would it lead him- to yet another pile of refuse, or to the clear shining horizon at last?” He feels “his inherent weakness inside him like an empty hole, which was always there.” Such perceptions render him slothful and lifeless. Deven’s movements are listless both in thought and action. He suffers a habitual timidity, irresoluteness and a great degree of uncertainty in whatever he did. Therefore, even the external stimuli accumulate in such a way as to disable him at his recording project. But the truth about life is that unhappiness and distress teach most of life’s significant lessons. Deven does not end up in suicide. He learns to accept life as it is. The author writes, “perhaps when everyone had cut him off and he was absolutely alone, he would begin to find himself and his own strength.” At every stage of agony and frustration he notices a new spirit of resistance and resilience surge inside him. Deven is left wiser than before. He realizes that some of life’s questions cannot be answered. He has to forge ahead.

Another aspect of realism can be reiterated here. Childhood experiences and upbringing play a strong role on the wholeness of adult
personality. Deven’s father, a school teacher, fails to come up to the expectations of his wife (Deven’s mother). Deven has noticed the kind of apologetic smile on his father’s face. The disappointed and disgruntled behaviour of his mother has cast a strong impression on the young Deven. Therefore, he has grown into a very susceptible and naive adult, who can be easily carried away by Murad’s words. Deven’s father has succeeded in presenting to Deven the legacy of his literary inclinations. As is true, the misery of life could be accepted and tolerated only with the help of such inclinations. The parents’ inadequacies have a deteriorating influence on the child and the adult psyche.

The study examines the aspects of inferiority complex and a sense of powerlessness in the novel. Deven is irked by such feelings. Therefore, he assumes great humility and tries to gain sympathy from others. He would like “lie low and remain invisible”. Throughout his life this has been his technique of dealing with others. He has learnt to swallow insults without much ado and thereby thinks he can gain other’s sympathy. Even when Murad makes the proposal of interviewing the great poet Nur, Deven squirms under despair, helplessness and diffidence. As he feels that he is an insignificant man working at a worthless job, even the journey from Mirpore to Delhi is a great challenge and adventure.
The fact that his job does not satisfy gnaws at his heart. Coupled with this is the dissatisfaction of his family life. Deven leads a dull and prosaic life. Therefore, he seeks an escape into the world of Urdu poetry. His strategy of lying low helps him at shrinking away from circumstances. This shows a detachment towards the existing conditions of life. Bipin Panigrahi says “Deven lacks a vantage point from which to approach life and that he suffers from a sense of cultural and social dislocation.”

Deven feels that his contact with Nur and the interview with him will lead to attain glory and that it will pull him from his mundane, boring existence. But the fact is that he is all the more disappointed on meeting Nur. Deven tries “to reconcile the meanness of his physical existence with the purity and immensity of his literary yearnings. The latter were constantly assaulted and wrecked by the former”. But in fact he is ensnared in the whirl of his literary yearnings with Nur. Murad is another agent working towards Deven’s entrapment. Slowly, Deven feels that his former uneventful life that is almost empty and hopeless, is very endurable. He has adapted himself to prosaic life. Therefore, he is happy to be back at Mirpore and live in anonymity. This was better than getting into the dissipated world of Nur’s life.
Marital disharmony is another aspect of realism that is traced in this novel. This is the consequence of a severe absence of communication between Deven and Sarla. Deven does not share any details of his profession or of his literary inclinations. She leads a frustrated existence as he has not risen to her expectations. Both are frustrated with each other and with their lot in life. Both are aware of this fact of each other’s life. But there is neither comradeship nor closeness of spirit between them. The novel reveals it like this:

“Like her he was a victim. A victim does not look to help from another victim; he looks for a redeemer. At last Deven had his poetry, she had nothing, and so there was an added accusation and bitterness in her look”.

The relationship which Deven shares with Sarla is very passive. It is the same kind of relationship that characterized his parents’ relationship. Deven’s father was a decrepit asthmatic school teacher. Deven has grown up in a lower middle-class household. Deven has always noticed the feeling of sorriness playing on his father’s face, as he could not rise to the expectations of his wife (as stated earlier). This fact has continued to influence Deven’s psyche since childhood. He suffers from a shy and sheepish temperament. This nature makes Murad rule over him with a heavy hand. He can easily have his own way with Deven.
Deven easily subordinates himself to others’ wishes. This can be observed as a negative trait in him. But the same Deven is aggressive at home. His feelings of incompetency, frustration and resentment show up. Sarla has always nursed the ambition of leading a luxurious life after marriage. But Deven is unable to fulfill her materialistic desires. Therefore, his hurt male ego surfaces in his irritability towards Sarla. Deep down Deven suffers self-hate and condemnation for his ineptitude. He feels: “………all he could measure up was this- this shabby house, thus dirty corners, its wretchedness and lovelessness”.60

He had always dreamt of the glamorous life of Nur; the atmosphere of lights and feasts which Nur’s world brought in. The utter frustration of not being able to translate his dreams and desires into actuality gnaws at his hurt ego. This hurt ego can only be expressed in the hearing of Sarla. He voices out his frustration in various ways. The novel reveals it in these lines: “……… he was out to wreck it, take his revenge upon her for harbouring it. Why should it blight his existence that had once shown promise and had a future?”.61 Deven shouts at Sarla and eases out his self-hate and stress, which has been piling up. But the same Deven resorts to complaint techniques outside home. He pleads with Murad for sympathy.
Sarla is the traditional submissive wife. She is plain and congenitally pessimistic; she is bitter and resentful as her aspirations are frustrated. But she will not rebel against the traditional Hindu philosophy of passivity and resignation to whatever lies in store for her. Although her aspirations are frustrated, she remains mute and sullen regarding her present condition. This aspect is true to life. Her revolt against her lot is shown in a taciturn manner. She is replete with frustration, both marital and emotional. She is the very embodiment of virtue and chastity; she is sheepish and submissive. Sarla is the recipient of Deven’s desperate reactions. He flings articles, dishes, clothes, if they do not meet his expectations. Sarla is naturally incapable of exercising any control over him. Thus she mutely condescends to her lot. Therefore, it is true that the Indian construct of a woman basically as a goddess or mother, further enslaves her into occupying the secondary position. This is a significant aspect of realism. It is true that the Indian woman is idealized and upheld to the position of a goddess/mother. This method restricts her behaviour, aspirations and her movements. When courageous women choose to go beyond this frame, they are rejected and not given the proper response by society. This thought is echoed in Imtiaz Begum’s words to Deven:

“All you are not guilty of assuming that because you are a male, you have a right to brains, talent, reputation and
achievement, while I, because I was born female, am condemned to find what satisfaction I can in being maligned, mocked, ignored and neglected? Is it not you who have made me play the role of a loose woman in gaudy garments by refusing to take my work seriously and giving me just that much regard that you would extend to even a failure in arts as long as the artist was male?"62

Imtiaz Begum’s words ring true because the woman who does not correspond to the traditional role of servility, submissiveness and virtue is inevitably designated as a temptress and a depraved woman. Although the woman has made considerable progress in educational, professional and other fields, she is required to be submissive, chaste and servile. These attributes are considered to be socially accepted and approved. Imtiaz Begum’s efforts to be a conspicuous poet to even supercede Nur, only depend upon the approval of Nur and his male audience. Her efforts remain ineffectual. Whether it is Sarla or Imtiaz, their attempts at carving a niche of their own is met with disdain. Their portrayal is very authentic because when women are suppressed, and their needs or desires are never considered, then they react rebelliously. Imtiaz reacts to demand attention. Sarla keeps sullen and mute by way of rebellion.
The study probes the universally true aspect of man’s essential aloneness. This aloneness is true of all the characters in the novel. Nur, the emaciated old man who is experiencing the ultimate human reality in his body and its process of decay suffers aloneness. It is a painful and inescapable human condition. Nur has been exploited by Imtiaz Begum in every way. He is left to flounder in drunkenness and neglect. Deven too suffers loneliness when he realises that his project is not successful. The suffering of other people does not reduce one’s own suffering in any way. One is condemned to sit and watch happiness receding. Therefore, one realises that man is ultimately alone. This realisation helps Deven to gather strength and not to run away from his problems. But he accepts the challenges. The fact is that suffering and problems have instilled courage to cross all barriers and human weaknesses. Inspite of his timidity, Deven emerges a victorious individual. Despite the despair and repeated failure, Deven’s positivity draws him from the miry pit and he practically emerges a victor at the end of the novel. An individual may be cowed down under tremendous pressure. But the truth is that, the strength which is inbuilt in an individual comes to the fore and he bounces back to newer strength.

The study explores another aspect of realism, that of the idealistic spirit being enclosed in materialism. This realism is illustrated like this:
Nur cannot separate his art from the debris of his dissipated life. Deven tries to pursue art apart from his life, whereas Nur pursues and integrates art in his life. Life and life’s problems endow man with strength and resilience. Without conflicts or problems man cannot realise his strength. In the same way, just as Deven was wondering how Nur must have created his poetry in the midst of this hubub, he realises that it is only in the midst of life’s hubub he has created his poetry. The fact that poetry cannot be separated from life comes home to Deven.

Nur is surrounded by louts, bookies and unemployed parasites, and not by elderly litterateurs as Deven visualized. Nur prattles and is more inclined towards food and drink. He drinks and vomits which Deven is asked to clean up. Imtiaz Begum shouts:

“Aren’t you willing to do that for your – your hero……..Do you call that a poet or even a man? All of you- you followers of his – you have reduced him to that, making him eat and drink like some animal, like a pig.”

The hubub of lechers around Nur is so perturbing that Deven fails to record the rare pieces of poetry which stumble from the poet’s mouth. Deven realises “all he knew was that he who had set out to hunt Nur down was being hunted down himself, the prey”.

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But Deven exudes implacable courage and optimism in trying to accomplish this feature. Deven hopes to save Nur’s poetry: “He had accepted the gift of Nur’s poetry and that meant he was custodian of Nur’s very soul and spirit. It was a great distinction.”65

It is true that practical life dampens the springs of art. Deven is pre-occupied with his daily struggle for survival. He has laid aside his literary inclinations. The advancement of art and literature depends upon political patronage too. Murad says in disgust that Urdu literature has stagnated due to lack of patronage:

“….Urdu—language of the court in days of royalty –now languishes in the back lanes and gutters of the city. No palace for it to live in the style to which it is accustomed, no emperors and nawabs to act as its patrons,…..”66

Just as human life is steered by financial and economic concerns, so also is art and literature.

Deven decides to forgo the idea of interviewing Nur due to diffidence. He realises that he cannot escape from Nur and his world. The first time he is repelled by Nur’s dissipated life and his surrounding which is full of lechers. The second time, he returns, he is caught between Nur’s wives. The elder one promises him that she would arrange for the
interview provided he pays her a lump sum amount. The younger wife is ambitious and professes herself to be a poetess. Again Deven decides to abandon the project. The next time he visits them, the house is aglow with Imtiaz Begum’s birthday celebrations. This involves her verse recitals. The atmosphere is one of a prostitute’s household, from where Nur has actually picked her. One can comprehend that art usually emerges from the brothel and this fact nauseates Deven. The wives block Deven’s endeavour to interview Nur and take his recitals. He feels that they would devour the helpless poet and everything that belongs to him. Deven realises the fellowship between art and life. He also perceives through the life of Nur that utter liberty is fallacious. The novelist says:

“a closer familiarity with the poet had shown him that what he thought as ‘the wider world’ was an illusion too – it was only a kind of zoo in which he could not hope to find freedom, he would blunder into another cage inhabited by some trapped animal……”

Nur is also trapped in his own cage. Each time he writes to Deven, he expresses a different problem and a perennial need for money. Deven cannot comprehend the complexity of Nur’s life and problems. It remains an enigma to him. His art too remains a greater enigma.
The study delves into the realism of the sordid condition of Urdu language and literature in the post-independent India. An associate of Nur says that Urdu has died in 1947, and whatever one sees of it in only a few universities is its ghost ‘wrapped in a shroud.’ Nur also affirms that the congress leaders have killed Urdu as they set up Hindi as the ruler. This points out to the fact that in recognizing Hindi as the national language, Urdu died a natural death. Murad asserts that he wants to publish a feature on Nur’s poetry and thereby reinforce the love of Urdu literature.

Nyla Ali Khan asserts that the partition of India shattered the writing community in that the members separated into two separate precincts. Muslim Urdu litterateurs migrated to Pakistan. Therefore, religious and cultural tensions prevailed between the two countries. In the garb of patriotism, there existed divided communal sentiments among political and religious leaders. Nyla Ali Khan further opines that Anita Desai, in depicting Deven’s aptitude for Urdu literature attempts to confirm the fact that one cannot codify Indian culture. Nur’s statement: “How can there be Urdu poetry when there is no Urdu language left?.......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.” This statement indicates the decay of Urdu language and its literature in post-partition India and that this factor is the consequence of “the
imposition of the singular definition of nation against which ethnic and religious minorities continue to protest in present-day India.” Thus the struggle between Hindi and Urdu for dominion had drastic economic dimension along with communal propensities.

Another aspect of inner realism portrayed here is the fact of Deven’s aspirations of converting his life into a meaningful existence through his penchant for Urdu poetry. His efforts at constructing a meaning to life through this means receives a blow. His hope of forging his life with fulfilment through the romantic cognizance of art and life is impossible. Nur is himself a dissipated man, wallowing in unworthiness and insecurity; he cannot impart meaning to Deven’s life. Nur says: “Has this dilemma come to you too then? This sifting and selecting from the debris of our lives? It can’t be done……..I learnt that long ago.” This statement illustrates the reality that one has to accept art along with the profligacy of life and that one cannot separate art from the dissipation.

The recording session of the interview is however conducted in a decrepit brothel, for which Nur’s second wife is infamous. The truth that any magnificent art or poetry comes from the world of cultural depravity, is depicted strongly. However Deven cannot condescend to extend the same devotion to Imtiaz Begum that he renders Nur. Imtiaz Begum admires the ornate and flowery poetry of her husband. She also struggles
to imitate his artistic elegance. But she was a woman who had adorned the brothel. Yet she hankers after Nur’s position that of a great poet. She claims to be Nur’s intellectual companion, unlike his first wife Safiya Begum. Imtiaz claims that her verse must have had a very luxuriant quality as Nur has married her in his old age, to satisfy his need of a scholarly wife.

Both Safiya Begum and Sarla represent the traditional woman, who lack the fecundity of their husbands. Both the women nurse aspirations of materialistic abundance. Both Nur and Deven, with their literary inclinations have not cared for their wives’ aspirations. Safiya Begum and Sarla do not possess the intellectual ability to immerse themselves in poetry. This aspect is very much true to life, because sometimes, literary people are not blessed with equally intellectual wives. But Imtiaz Begum’s pretensions towards poetry are not received with admiration from men like Deven and Nur’s other supporters. The audience looks down upon her assertions of literary excellence. This feature is another significant aspect of reality, where the woman’s pretensions towards literary inclinations are usually contemptuously treated in society. The novel presents the world of courtesans and their accomplishments, the customers applauding the performance. The scene comes out alive when Imtiaz Begum recites poetry. Her clientele enjoy it.
This aspect represents a segment of early post-independent years, which was once upon a time witnessed during antiquated sovereignty. But with the absence of the zamindari system and the merging of all the princely states, such a tradition has vanished. The true colour of courtesans has been depicted realistically and one can relive their real texture. The description of the details of her dress, her pan-eating are life-like. Even the small boys wearing the traditional cap is realistically presented. All these aspects prove that the novelist had a first-hand knowledge of the Delhi streets and its alleys. The lecherous louts who are hungry for food and drink, who live a parasitic life; Nur’s drunken ways, the inebriated talk and mannerisms are presented with microscopic detail.

**Conclusion:** *In Custody* is a novel with a difference, in that, the author deals with a male protagonist. But the basic element of internal realism remains the same. The same agony, frustration and the same impotence, helplessness and powerlessness are seen. The protagonist indulges in ceaseless struggle with odds that are against him. Thus the study examines the aspects of internal realism portrayed in the novel.
Notes


3. Desai, 145.


5. Desai, 71.


8. Desai, 129.


11. Hurlock, 318.


14. Desai, 176

15. Desai, 140

Desai, 158

Desai, 242-243

Desai, 268

Desai, 268

Desai, 221

Desai, 242

Desai, 154

Desai, 154


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Desai, 176

Desai 169

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Desai 153

Desai 232


Desai, 11

Desai, 13

Desai, 185

Desai, 14

Desai, 114

Desai, 146

Desai, 128.

Desai, 189-90

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Desai, 68-69

Desai, 196

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Desai, 143

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Desai, 131

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