Chapter - 4

SOCIAL PROBLEMS
In the modern short stories, social problems play an important role in the lives of the protagonists, as the stories are character dominant. The protagonist's existence in the society depends upon his status in the society whether it is in India or abroad. Sometimes the protagonists are prone to struggle hard to find a niche in the society. Such are the protagonists, in most of the short stories of Raja Rao, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, and Salman Rushdie. Raja Rao has successfully,

Because he has made a deep study of man not only in isolation but also in the social milieu. He has given full scope to his characters (particularly the hero) to establish their identity as social beings, by making them involved in the values and experiences, which are valid in an Indian context.  

In his two volumes of short stories The Cow of Barricades, and The Policeman and the Rose, Raja Rao exposes the darker side of our inherited customs and beliefs, but he is not as strident as Anand or Iswaran in doing so. As C.V. Venugopal opines,

Life in his stories is viewed rather with a philosophical resignation and on the whole, his stories may be described as his commentary on certain conspicuous social institutions as well as on events of National importance from the viewpoints of decency, sanity, sympathy and understanding.  

Raja Rao has a great zeal for reformation in society, as is evident from the stories in The Cow of Barricades and Other Stories. In the very beginning of the stories of he quotes a couplet from Saint Kanakadas.

Caste and caste and caste, you say,
What caste has he who knoweth God
The story unveils the evil consequences of caste system in the society. The couplet of Kanakadasa in the beginning and vehement statements by Rammappa (Ramu) against caste system are the arrows shot by Raja Rao to wake up and shock the people of thirties and forties. The story is set in a village in Mysore State with its bare and dusty roads, small huts, sheep, and cattle. Raja Rao quite impressively presents the rural life. As C.D. Narasimhiah observes,

Within the compass of a short story so many evocative details of village life get mentioned: ‘the papal tree’ that sure landmark at the entrance to a village in South India, the ‘rumbling carts’ outside, the cawing crows, the sunbeams that steal through the tile roof, the creaking door behind which are the sacks of rice in the hall near the pillar and in the backyard that calf nibbling at the wisps of hay and throwing enormous quantities of dung and urine while not far is Javni the low class, low caste, servant who finds her way to fiction in a central way-swallowing her rice and pickle in the dark at the end of which she goes to sleep on a wattle mat.4

Javni, who is neglected and ill treated by her own brother, works in a Brahmin family. Though she is happily married in the beginning, she becomes a widow when quite young. More than this the police for some unspecified crime arrests her husband’s elder brother and the younger brother lived with a concubine. At home, their wives treat her so badly that she runs away to her brother, Bhima. There also she is ill treated by her sister-in-law. For all the domestic work, she gets only a mouthful of food and a sari for her body. Her brother and her husband’s brothers wives call her dirty, wicked, a prostitute, a “donkey”, “a witch.” Her brother is merciful enough to give her a small hut.
Poverty plays an important role in the social consciousness of an individual. In the case of Javni, though she earns only one rupee per month she is proud of her work because her husband had once washed the clothes of Maharajas. She is also very proud of her efficiency in her work as a servant. She says to Ramu,

Why Ramappa, there is nobody who can work for a Revenue Inspector’s family as I you can go and ask anybody in the town, including every paraiah if you like, and they will tell you Javni, she is good like a cow and will also add that there is no one who can serve a big man like the revenue Inspector Javni, as I. (TCB, 7)

Javni is the example of a simple, illiterate, credulous woman of an Indian village of the pre-independence days. Raja Rao is perfect in his use of superstitions and village beliefs in ghosts in his stories which set up a typical village atmosphere. In the early twenties and thirties superstitions and traditional beliefs have dominated the Indian village society. In the story, Javni warns Ramu against ghosts. She advises him not to go out after the sunset, because, “Here are spirits of all sorts walking in the dark, especially never once go by the canal after the cows are come home. It is haunted place Ramappa”(TCB, 5) Javni also has tremendous faith in Goddess Talkamma. The strongest faith in religion gives her strength to sustain all the miseries in her life. Whatever comes in her life, she believes, is due to Goddess Talkamma. As P.C. Bhattacharya says,

Here was that simple faith of a villager who worships with greatest devotion even a pebble smeared with red paint and placed under a peepal tree. And if there is a divine spirit working for the benefit of man why not an evil spirit working against him? 

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Raja Rao has not only presented the superstitious beliefs of the village but also the strict caste system that the villagers follow. Javni never complains about her birth in a low caste family. So she has no regrets and complaints. Even as she eats her rice and pickle in the dark byre, a cow throws a heap full of dung, splashing across the cobbled floor. But she never tries to go into the hall and eat her food there because she is afraid of making the floor of the hall dirty with her entry. Javni, though, is a victim of social ostracism,

is apparently an exposure of the evils of the caste system which was an abhorrence to thinking people like Raja Rao; Kanakadasa's couplet at the beginning as well as many an explicit and vehement statement of Ramappa against caste and irreligion scattered all over the story stand testimony to this aim of the story. Javni, however, is so much at peace with the world that she doesn't want to change her place for any other social privilege. If Raja Rao did aim at focusing the attention of the reader on the evils of caste system, he has not found in Javni the ideal objective correlative.

Unlike Javni, Akkayya is a widow in a high caste Brahmin family. She falls a victim to the destructive insularity of the puritanical tradition. In case of Javni, there is at least Ramappa who vehemently speaks against the caste system whereas in case of Akkayya there is no one who speaks in favour of Akkayya. Her life itself is the symbol of a life of a widow in the high caste and her life itself is a fervent plea for the necessity of a solution. “In Javni and Akkayya Raja Rao studies our cultural inheritance in its welcome as well as unwelcome aspects around the theme of social reform.”

Raja Rao draws the attention of the readers towards the miserable life that a widow leads in the society, particularly, in a Brahmin family in this story. It is a social custom that a
widow should have her head shaven—rough and prickly. She is supposed to clean the vessels, sweep the floors, and look after the children. But even in her stepson’s house life is not peaceful for her, as her stepson has accused her of wanting to poison one of his daughters because “she wanted to sleep with him.” Akkayya, who does not like it, returns to her parental home. Things are not better even at her parents’ house. Her father dies, brothers quarreled, and the family breaks up. None of the brothers wants to take in Akkayya. At last, her younger sister, the grand mother of the narrator takes her to her home.

Akkayya’s plight is the most excruciating example for the impending disintegration of the family ties, which have held Indian society from the very dawn of history, but today when the country is on the threshold of a technological era, characterized by what social scientists call counter-culture, a near-relation in a family can well run the risk of dying with no decent funeral, much less the ‘necessary’ ceremonies. Further her poignant tragic life is highlighted by its juxtaposition with the naiveté of the child, Kittu’s question, “Akkayya why is your head shaven, when all others, like aunt Nagamma and aunt Kenchamman and aunt Ranganayaki have their long, long hair?” (TCB, 71).

He does not understand why she has no husband like her aunts, and why Akkayya does not put holy vermilion on her forehead, why she does not wear bangles, why she always wears the same sari and not the blue beautiful—gold bordered saris her aunts wear. Then Akkayya cannot explain to the child all about the sufferings of a widow. Therefore, she simply sighs and keeps silent Raja Rao vigorously exposes the evils of the society through the miserable story of Akkayya.
The story “A Client” is about a clever angler and an innocent inexperienced young fish. It is the story of an old marriage-broker, Hosakere Nanjundayya who is looking for a prospective young groom. The young groom he hooks is Ramu, a plain-hearted student for marriage. Raja Rao through this story hits at the institution of traditional marriage. It also exposes the evil of child marriage,

We all know that whatever changes the pattern of marriage settlement might have undergone during the last few decades of the century, the settlement of a daughter’s marriage among the high caste Hindu ever been a great social problem. The prolonged battle between the unwilling simple youth and the crooked marriage broker, symbolizing this problem of our society in a certain historical context has been presented quite like the clever moves and counter moves in a game of chess or better like the intelligent devices of patient hunter luring his prey into his trap.

Ramu, the young college boy, is too much disturbed by old Hosakere Nanjundayya, as he had not thought of marriage so far. Ultimately, the angler succeeds in making Ramu aware of the benefits of getting married. The tactics employed by Nanjundaih to trap the prey need much appraisal. He mixes up enough truth with falsehood to convince Ramu. Indian traditional marriage system is suited well to the whims of the marriage broker, because in India most of the marriages are arranged through brokers. Indians give first preference to marriage and then to love but not like the other way round as in the Western countries. So marriage brokers play an important role in arranging the marriages. They do not speak in a straightforward way. They always speak in a circumspective way to please both the parties and if the match is fixed, then the broker receives money and gratitude from both the parties, if it fails, he would
say' marriages are made in heaven and it is God's decision', but sometimes he also receives beatings from the grieved people. Hosekere Nanjundaiah is an experienced man in the ways of the world and understands very well the psychology of young men and their parents. As P.C.Bhattacharya comments,

People like him must always be able to build a castle of falsehood on the foundation of a few blocks of truth must not accept any temporary setback as a failure, and must possess plenty of sang forbid to face any unexpected awakened situation.\footnote{TCB, 119}

He with all the desirable qualities of a broker and with a smooth persuasive tongue captivates Ramu, a young college going boy of nineteen years, four months, and three days. Ramu stood first in the Hasan High school and was going to Bangalore for higher studies. But he has not written his last exam very well, and is worried about it;

One cannot learn without books. His brother could write all that nonsense about working hard, getting university scholarship, and bringing a name to their ancient, revered family. If only he knew what it was to wash one's own clothes, clean the vessels, cook the food and sweep the floor, and spends uncountable hours, waiting at the doors of Sunderesha's to be condescendingly honored with the loan of a book. To talk to them charmingly, when you detested them in the heart of your hearts, to flatter them, cringe before them, and even slave for them when necessary. It was not easy like swearing before peasants or commanding one's wife. Bangalore is not Hariharapura. If only his brother knew that.

Poverty plays an important role in the life of many young boys like Ramu. He has to get through the exam to settle down in life because one cannot do it without books. In
adolescence, attraction also plays an important role. Ramu has just begun to get attracted by Jayalakshmi, a neighbourhood girl. "But the Brahmin in him woke up. The caste mark was not on his face but on his soul. The sweetness sank into ashes. Away... He grits his teeth, and thrusting way all thoughts of Jayalakshmi, he walked on trying to think of the approaching examinations."(TCB, 120)

While he is thinking of Jayalakshmi and his examinations Hosekere Nanjundaiah meets him and he takes him to the nearby hotel. He starts talking about his father and family, but Ramu is unable to recollect his connection with him. But gradually with his tactful smooth talk he introduces the idea of marriage into the mind of Ramu. He also tells him about the advantages of getting married;

There is nothing like having a home my son. Especially for one like you, who has lived in such comfort"? (Have I? Thought Ramu) ‘You are so soft and quiet. Yes’ my son. You need a home. And after all why not marry? He smiled confusedly. ‘I am sure you have already thought of it. And in these days which boy of your age would not have thought of it? Well Ramu?

(RCB, 13)

Raja Rao presents how the angler attracts the attention of Ramu. But Ramu on the other hand does not want to think of the marriage because he knows about the unhappiness of most of the couples where the man is modern and educated while the wife is an illiterate, and traditional. Not only that, he wants to marry for the sake of money.
Thus, RajaRao successfully presents the social problem of child marriage as well as the problems of the parents of girls in getting a suitable groom. Thus the story is the most a typical of Raja Rao’s work. It reminds one of R.K.Narayan or Bhabani Bhattacharya known for social satires. It plunges us straight into sordid social reality. “A Client” presents the system of dowry and arranged marriage from the point of view of an idealistic young man.

While Nanjundaiah’s problem is to catch his fish, Motilal’s problem is to bring back the past glory and to elevate his position in the society. His ambition in life is to prove himself, to be the right descendent of the great grand son of ‘Bhata Tata Lal of Khodi.’ Motilal and Beti Bai start from a small village in Gujarat, some fifteen or twenty years ago with a copper pot in hand and nothing to wear except rags. They wander from one village to the other, singing and begging and eating food they got. They knot in the clothes, whatever they save. Nothing is more important to Motilal than achieving his aim. RajaRao here depicts the contrast between the way of thinking of Motilal and Beti Bai. Beti Bai comes from a poor family. Her mother was a manual labourer in Bania’s house whereas Motilal on the other hand comes from a rich family. His great-grandfather has maintained ten concubines and has squandered his property among them. His father also has maintained a mistress. Motilal’s father and grandfather have considered it a prestigious matter to maintain concubines, a symbol of social status. But the poor Motilal is left penniless. Even after he becomes a rich man in Hyderpore, his dream does not come true for, he knows only saving and not how to spend it. Thus, he does not succeed in fulfilling his dream.
In Hyderpore, he arranges a good marriage to his son and as a father of a prosperous groom he takes thirty thousand rupees as dowry. Even then, Rati, his daughter-in-law suffers a lot in the hands of her father-in-law and husband and then runs away with Venku, a concubine. She even looses her pregnancy in one of the beatings of her husband. She is attacked by plague. Raja Rao as a social reformer presents the sufferings of Rati in a realistic way.

Rati lay unconscious by the grocery, her eyes full of stagnant tears, her body stiff and uncovered, one hand upon her heaving breasts and the other upon the floor, her mouth wide open, with a crowd of buzzing flies, some that went in, some that flew around, and some that sat upon her palpitating nostrils, and amidst all this she moaned forth, raucous and breathless, ‘Mother, mother, mai... Mai... My mother, mai... (TCB, 51-52)

The two snake stories, “The True Story of Kanankapala, Protector of Gold” and “Companions” also present Raja Rao’s deep concern for the social trauma and superstitions about snakes. Raja Rao employs the folklore narration. Not only in villages but also all over India Naga, the king cobra is honored and rituals are conducted in its name. The true story of Kanakapala, Protector of Gold” starts, as ‘May those who read this, be beloved of naga, king of serpents, destroyer of ills’. It is true in the sense that it protects all those who are pious and honest and punishes those who try to snatch the gold from the Sanctum of the house. As Narsingh Srivastava observes,

Based on the myth of the snakes, it is a true story, s the title emphasizes, of human elevation and degradation both, talking how money may be saved for a pious use by a man like vision Rangappa and how it can be criminally grabbed by evil ones like his own descendents. Kanakapala the snake protector of gold becomes a veritable embodiment of gold itself, both as a
sacred family-treasure and as an object of greed and a source of evil. It is in this respect that the serpent is both a friend and an enemy. \textsuperscript{10}

The narrator being an old woman with a tremendous passion and interest in the social life of the people in that village describes the values and the reactions of the villagers in a vivid manner.

The story “Companions” depicts Raja Rao’s secular outlook. The story begins with a quotation from Hafiz, the Muslim poet and ends with invocation to the pepal tree, sacred to Hindus. The snake, Hindu symbol of fertility shows the protagonist Motikhan the path of salvation. Motikhan cries loudly “victory to Allah”. Both the religions help him attain salvation by renouncing wealth and woman. We also find references to communal harmony. But suddenly the temple bells rang, and the muezzin was heard to cry ‘Allah Akbar’. The story foretells the present need for communal harmony between India and Pakistan.”

Stories like “In Khandesh”, “The Cow of Barricades”, “Narsinga” tell us about the political situation in India during the nineteen thirties and forties. They also dwell upon Gandhi’s impact on Indian society. Gandhi is the first Indian National leader to have realized the importance of religious element in the revolution of society. As Jha Rama rightly observes,

Raja Rao as a leader of the masses knew that only by revitalizing the indigenous resource, which lay in India’s traditional culture, Indian milieu could be activated. This explains his emphasis on India’s traditional and legendary past as against the emasculated derivative culture, which he had so strongly denounced in the Hindu Swaraj. \textsuperscript{11}
It is the spirituality of Gandhian thought that leads to liberation and strength, which is the key to Gandhi's appeal, the Indian masses. This Gandhian thought towards action influences Raja Rao, who is an activist. His short stories and some of his novels illustrate the consolidation of people in groups and emergence of an awareness of Indian identity. The three short stories, “Narsiga”, “In Khandesh”, and “The Cow of Barricades” are the products of the influence of Gandhian thought. The story “Narsiga” is a tale of an orphan boy who finds Gandhi and Mother India as the symbolic figures for developing affection towards his master and his wife. “In Khandesh” deals with a man named Dattopant, whose suicide denotes the emptiness of the soul in the diseased milieu of colonial oppression. In “The Cow of Barricades” Raja Rao depicts the cow that is readily accepted as becomes the symbol of freedom struggle and also of the sacrificial Mother of India.

Raja Rao presents the national movement in the tale of an orphan shepherded-boy, “Narsiga”. He is protected and looked after by a Brahmin couple who support Gandhi in his social as well as political teachings. Gandhi the Mahatma remains the chief model of all the people. To him Gandhi is Mahatma, the God, who has no temple. The world of Narsiga is very small and simple and he is not capable of understanding what freedom is, but he sings Vademataram song. He knows that it is about mother- Mother India, who is very kind. But he does not know clearly who this mother is, because he has no personal experience of having a mother. He has lost his mother when he was born and is brought up by his aunt. He knows her as his mother, he also knows about the four-armed Goddess mother, whose picture is hung on the temple door. Though he does not understand the concept of motherland and mother-India, he is able to understand the Redman who enslaved this mother. The Britishers
are like those who have come to hunt in the woods with monkey faces. He imagines himself to be a brave soldier whose duty is to free the mother from the clutches of the Britishers. While reading books he used to pray with his eyes shut and his eyes suddenly grew full of tears and the whole earth seemed to grow soft and radiant. He feels that his head was resting on the lap of his great big, mother. ‘Mataram, Mataram, Vande Mataram. He asks his master who his mother was. Once in a fit of anger against the red-man once, he even hurled stones at the train in which a redman was traveling. Narasa’s love for Gandhi is such that when Gandhi is released from jail he feels very happy. He shares it with others. It is not a simple release of Mahatma and the mother India it was just like the advent of Rama Rajya to him. As M.K. Naik says,

Narsiga shows how the national consciousness roused by Gandhi percolates in the mind of a small illiterate orphan, though, in that process, ancient myth and legend get inseparably mixed with Gandhi’s life and character, as Narsiga the orphan imagines the great man” going in the air with Sita”... in a flower-chariot drawn by sixteen steeds.12

In another story “In Khandesh”, Raja Rao presents freedom struggle and the British rule. The Viceroy’s special train was to pass by the village and the village horseman’s orders are that the villagers should stand by the railway line to show their loyalty to the British Empire, but that they should stand with their backs to the train. In this story Raja Rao also presents the long lost feudalism, which was on the rise in the shape of the Maharaja’s visit to the village and the forced loyalty expected by the British Government.
One simple man, Dattopant wants to offer curd and mangoes to Maharaja and even a glass of sherbet to the Maharaja. Some even want to invite him to their houses. All the villagers stand by the railway track through out day and night, till the train that is carrying the Viceroy and the Maharaja passes through the village. Actually, the Maharaja is only a pawn in the hands of the British Sovereign. The villagers are also requested to present the guard of honour but with their backs to the train.

In all, the story presents the plight of the feudal India. It also presents how the youth rebel against feudalism, the British Raj, and colonial rule. The drumbeat also plays an important part in the village life. To some, drumbeat suggests only the passing of the train, which carries Maharaja, but to Dattopant it suggests fear, forebodings of death. It also takes Dattopant to a world of dream, a vision, and a fantasy in which he sees the Khandesh.

In Khandesh the earth floats. Heaving and quivering, rising and shriveling, the earth floats in a flood of heat. Men don’t walk in Khandesh. They swirl round and round upon their feet and move forward. Birds’ don’t fly in Khandesh. They are carried on the billows of heat. Horses don’t move in Khandesh. The earth moves to them. (TCB, 22)

The dream of Dattopant is symbolic of the life, which the villagers are forced to lead in the village under the British rule. As H.M. William says,

In Khandesh” records the death of a simpleton, Dattopant, whose stream of consciousness is suggested in an impressionistic style of writing. The story is also a hideous jest at the expense of British imperialism, since Dattopant
falls to his death beneath the wheels of the train (a train carrying the Viceroy and a Maharaja), to which he has been ordered to pay his loyal respect. 

But what is ironical is that the death of Dattopant is not at all considered seriously. C.V. Venugopal says,

Raja Rao’s attack on blind adherence to false values attains a seething sharpness in his description of Dattopant, as he, blindly rushing in the all-consuming rain towards the train to show his allegiance to the Maharaja, is squashed by the train itself with a thud... But what if one Dattopant is squashed, a hundred, Govindopants continue to remain, and see the Maharaja—He was God like—like Raja Sivaji’ tradition indeed dies hard.

In the story “The Cow of Barricades” also Raja Rao depicts the freedom struggle while at its peak. Here the author presents the symbolic Mother India reflecting the oneness of the country and all its salient values. In “In Khandesh” and “Narsiga” he presents the general picture of the national movement whereas in “The Cow of Barricades”, he presents the struggle against the white man. Raja Rao is the first man who acquaints the West with the aspirations of Indian freedom struggle and the atrocities of British. He also presents the cow, Gowrie as the symbol of self-sacrifice and martyrdom. In fact the cow saves millions of villagers from destruction. She is the mother in bondage. She is the all-sustaining and self-giving mother earth. Only Mahatma and the Master in the story understand her. She is a regular visitor to the Ashram of the Master on Tuesdays. She refuses all grass, grain, and rice water gathered by the disciples of the master, and accepts only a handful of grain from the master. The Master describes it as ‘the great mother’s vehicle’. The political struggle becomes sanctified and is easily comprehended by the villagers through the symbol of the
cow, Gowrie. “She may be my baton-armed mother-in-law. Though she may be the mother of one of you, perhaps she is the great Mother’s vehicle.’ And like to a mother, they put kumkum on her forehead, and till Tuesday next they waited for Gowrie.”(TCB, 175) As P. C. Bhattacharya says, “All conflicts, all animosities, all forms of struggles between man and man shall vanish and everyone would live in harmony with everyone else”\textsuperscript{15}.

Gouri also becomes very sad and begins to shed tears at the condition of the people. But the people of the village have sustained the Britisher’s retaliation, because the call of Mahatma proves to be stronger. Soon everyone in the village begins to join in the freedom struggle. An army is formed to fight against the Britishers. People begin to build more and more barricades.

Gouri was striding out of the Oil Lane and turning round Copper Sennayya’s house towards the Suryanarayana Street, her head held gently bent and her ears pressed back like plaits of hair, and staggering like one going to the temple with fruits and flowers to offer to the Goddess.(TCB, 179

When there is peace, the statue of Gouri is erected and legends have come up in the village about Gouri. The Mahatma may be wrong about politics, but he is right about the fullness of love in all creatures- the speechful and the mute.

While Raja Rao depicts the problems of the society before Independence, which are common to every one in the society, Anita Desai delineates social problems, which are purely personal. In an interview to the question of a postgraduate student at the University of Nice she says,
I am committed to my writing but I am not writing for the sake of promoting any cause... I don't really think a writer has a duty to society apart from telling the truth...I explore the inner reality, not the one-tenths visible iceberg that one sees above the surface of the ocean but the remaining nineteenth of it that lie beneath the surface. It is a necessary to explore this underground to illuminate it, to make it real for the reader. I am not a social reformer or a social worker.

In her stories, one can see a tension between convention and exploration, family solidarity and individualism, social requirements and impersonal factors. As Usha Bonde observes, “Anita Desai disowns all social concerns and asserts more than once that she is interested in individuals and not in social issues. Social issues intrude only when they affect the characters.”

In two volumes of her short stories, Games at Twilight and Diamond Dust the protagonists struggle to fit themselves into society, which they live in. In “Games at Twilight”, the protagonist Ravi struggles to prove himself among his friends. He is engaged in a game of hide and seeks with his friends. His problem is by hook or crook he must win the game. He waits for a long time in his hiding place without giving any chance to his friends to find him out. But unfortunately all the children forget about him and they indulge in another game. Ravi’s victory transforms into a pathetic realization of his own insignificance. On the other hand, his mother’s annoyance also makes him shed tears. His stature is reduced to nothing but that of a little baby in front of others. Here Desai successfully presents the struggle between the need for self-assertion the and desire for recognition. His struggle to win over Raghu remains unfulfilled. The thoughts and ideas of Ravi seem to be beyond what a child would usually think. R.S. Sharma comments,
Anita Desai has a deep perception of the brutality of life that is concealed by seeming innocence and tenderness. In many stories, she unveils this brutality through characteristic irony. In fact, in most of these stories the protagonist happens to be young adolescent struggling to come to grips with the adult world. The stories capture that moment in their life when reality intrudes in their world of innocence like a hot blast and destroys their complacent acceptance of what appear them to be real.

In “Studies in the Park”, “Sales”, “Surface Textures”, “The Accompanist” Desai presents the same problem of the protagonists struggling to assert themselves in the society. They want to fit themselves well and want to be honoured by the society. In “Studies in the Park” Suno’s struggle is to get a first class and to get a good job and thus fulfil his father’s dream. Anita Desai presents Suno’s inner struggle to get through the examination, as the resultant tension drives the individual to a state of helplessness.

In another story “Sales”, Desai describes the struggle of an artist to establish himself as an artist in the world of art. The artist is forced to sell his painting to support the family consisting of his wife and a child. The protagonist has an unusual vision of becoming a great man but at the end he is reduced to a state of helplessness. Desai here satirizes the philistine temperament of people who spend time in discussing art but have no real talent to appreciate or to promote art and artists. The pathetic life of the artist is a good example of the difficulties of survival of an artist in a competitive and insensitive environment. The visitors encourage the artist with a hypocritical show of friendship but in reality they have no interest in him or his paintings.
In the story "Pineapple Cake" Anita Desai presents the triumph of instinctive urges over social refinement and sophistication. The dignity and honour lose in this clash with instinctive urges. M.V. Fernandez coaxes her son Victor to dress quickly for the marriage party by promising him a pineapple cake at the party. She is vexed with the boy as she has to run after him to get him ready by promising him something or the other every time. For the same reason she seems to prefer to have a daughter. "Mrs. Fernandez sighed to think how much easier it would have been if she had a daughter instead. Little girls can be dressed in can petticoats and frocks like crepe-paper bells of pink and orange, their oiled and ringlet hair crowned with rustling wreaths of paper flowers."(GT, 50)

The little boy Victor has no faith in his mother’s promise of pineapple cake because previously such promises have not been kept up due to some reason or the other. Desai also describes how the preparations are made for a rich people’s marriage party. Just then an unfortunate death occurs. A man with an exposed Adam’s apple sprawls over his chair, his head hanging over the back in a curious way as if dangling at the end of a rope. He is the man with whom Mrs. Fernandez had shared the taxi to the Hotel where the wedding was taking place. The woman in the purple wet dress screams and calls him Aub, Aub.

Mrs. Fernandez is so insensitive that she leaves the spot, grabs the arm of her son and makes him sit on a chair and shows him a plate of pastries and pineapple cake. Victor realizes the grossness of life even though he is a little boy who is innocent and who does not know what death is but Mrs. Fernandez, an elderly woman behaves just like a child, completely forgetting about grimness of death at the marriage party. Her main intention is to
fulfil her promise to give her son the pineapple cake. The story tells us of the greedy nature of middle class mentality. Desai, through this story, wants to hit at the middle class morality by satirizing Mrs. Fernandez’s behavior.

In the story, “Farewell Party” Desai presents the world of upper class executives and their wives. In that world, everyone is known not by his or her name but by the name of the company in which he or she is working. Mr. and Mrs. Raman (Bina) leave for Bombay as Mr. Raman has been transferred. On the last day of their stay they arrange a farewell party and invite all the friends, neighbors, colleagues, and higher officials with whom they have been in contact during their five years of stay in that locality. Bina is a frigid and a friendless woman but she is a responsible mother and has been serving her children for fifteen years. Her outside relationships are confined only to the hospital and the doctors. Outside this circle of family and the hospital she has no life. So she has a very limited circle of friends. Most of the employees of the locality are present in the party with their wives. Mr. Raman works for a cigarette company. He is not an employee of a British firm or American or even American collaboration. So he suffers from a sense of inferiority complex.

Even the wives of the executives whose names are also not known are known only by the names of their husbands and their companies in which they are working. Anita Desai makes penchant comments on the upper-middle-class people who give importance only to the social status of people.

They were the wives of men who represented various mercantile companies in the town- Imperial Tobacco, Brook Bond, Esso and so on- and although they might seem exactly alike to one who did not belong to this circle, inside it were subtle gradations of importance according to the
particular company for which each one’s husband worked and of these only they themselves were initiates. Bina was, however unwilling, an initiate. Her husband worked for one of these companies but she had always stiffly refused to recognize these gradations, or consider them. They noted the rather set sulkiness of her silence when amongst them and privately labeled her queer, proud, boring and difficult. Also they felt she belonged to their circle whether she liked it or not. (GT, 86)

The passage stands in evidence of the fact that, “Anita Desai describes in detail, the falsity and pretentiousness of the world of executives, their flirtations and their pseudo-concerns their small talk-the cold unreality of their existence.”

In the story, “Devoted Son” Desai describes the problem of a son who always wants to keep his father fit in health, which becomes a punishment to the father.

The routine to which the doctor son puts his father seems almost tyrannical. The son sees the dietary restrictions as conducive to the well-being of his father, but the father considers them to be a denial not to be inflicted by a worthy son on an old father.”

As a devoted son, he serves his mother in her last days of ailment. Now it is his duty to look after his father as a responsible son. He has to keep of his father healthy and fit. He also feels that it is his social responsibility to fulfil his duties towards all the people in his life, his wife, children, parents, friends, and even his patients. So he always struggles hard to be called a good person in the society. Against this his father always considers his son a ruthless person because his son denies him good food. He had been vexed with living a long life with all types of dietary restrictions. But his doctor son never allows him to eat anything he likes.
In the stories, “An Accompanist”, “Surface Textures” Desai presents the protagonists’ personal problems in coping up with life in the society. In “An Accompanist” the problem faced by a Tampura player Bhayya to become an accompanist to the Ustad is presented. He wants to dedicate all his life to the Ustad leaving his wife and family because he is so much immersed in the music played by the Ustad. He is like his parents to him. In “Surface Textures” Harish is a government servant who is too much obsessed with the observation of surface textures of different objects. He is so obsessed with the observation that he forgets his job, family, and surroundings and finally becomes a Swami sometimes accepting and at other times not accepting the offerings of the villagers.

All the stories in the second volume are set in India, America, Mexico, and London, which are labeled as stories of domestic life. In the first story, “Royalty” Desai presents the preparations made by a retired couple Sarala and Ravi to go to a mountain resort in order to escape the dust and heat of the mid summer in Delhi. The unexpected guest, Raja, an old friend of both at the Oxford University, interrupts their preparations. Raja is a famous poet, who has come to India on a visit to see all the places, particularly, the Himalayas. His intention is not to see Sarla or Ravi but to seek shelter for a short time in their house. But Sarla thinks that he has come to them to live the days, which they had spent together. Raja also expresses his intention to see Winheaven. When Maya, sister of Sarla mentions that, they were going to spend the summer in Winheaven. Then the troubles begin to occur first when the cook leaves the house on his summer leave and then the servant falls sick and Sarla has to do all the work, cooking and arranging everything to Raja. But fortunately, Raja
decides to leave for Kashmir along with the Duttas abandoning Sarla and Ravi. Desai also presents in the story the social custom of satisfying the guest. Being busy in recollecting the telephone numbers of the common friends known to Raja and Ravi and Sarla, Sarla forgets to invite her sister, Maya. But in the evening when the party is about to start she telephones to her sister. But Maya who is very sharp tongued, “Picked up every indication that her sister had been unforgivably remiss, and coldly rejected the insulting last-minute invitation, insisting proudly that Pravin was working late and she could not possibly leave his side, he never wrote a line without consulting her.”(DD, 16)

Sarla feels guilty and humiliated. In addition to this Sarla faces another humiliation. A petty lapse in the domestic life leads to humiliation. Sarla’s forgetfulness, though not intentional, makes Maya angry and to take revenge she also arranges a party to celebrate the occasion of her husband, Praveen’s papers going to the press. On that occasion, they want to honour the Honorable Minister of Human Resources. Only Raja is invited to the party with a note that the Minister’s wife wanted to see only Raja because she has read many books of Raja and so wanted to talk to Raja.

Desai here presents the feeling of jealousy and sense of revenge that were prevalent between the two families. In order to be called a social persona one needs be careful in one’s behaviour and must keep in mind every minute thing. Otherwise, the domestic harmony will be spoiled. In this story Desai very sensibly focuses on the need for a delicate balance which has to be maintained at all costs if one wants to be a socially important person.
In the story, "Winterscape" Desai describes two sisters Anu and Asha who long to be with their son. But Rakesh fails to fulfill his duty towards his mothers. As a social custom, he has to look after his aged mothers in their old age. But he is away from India. Though the two mothers go to London to see their grandson, they fail to mix-up with their daughter-in-law because there is a lot of cultural difference in the way of living of the two sisters and their foreign daughter-in-law. Desai in this story presents the sociology of a remote Punjabi village. As per the age-old dogma in the minds of Indians girls are always looked down upon. But Desai tries to protest against this dogma by presenting Asha and Anu’s father as a skeptical and rationalistic person. He likes his daughters very much. He even sends them to school quite against the criticism of the elders in the village. But the circumstances are not encouraging for their studies. The birth of two male children in the house forces one to stay at home and look after the domestic work. Anu who is always dependent on Asha is also forced to stay at home after Asha’s marriage. Desai makes a very bitter comment on the condition of girls in those days in Punjab. “Another generation would be born and raised before any girl in that Punjab village became an office clerk or a bank teller.”(DD, 29) As a keen observer of the society Desai in this story presents the struggles of the two sisters in their lives. Both the sisters lose their husbands at a tender age and bring up their only son, Rakesh against all the calamities in life.

“Diamond Dust” labeled, as a tragedy is another example for Desai’s keen observation of the society around her. In this story the protagonist, Mr.Das struggles hard to cope with his pet dog ‘Diamond’ which is a ‘badmash’ ‘Satan’, a ‘shaitan’. Quiet against the wish of the
members of his family, colleagues, and neighbours he loves his pet dog very much though all make fun of him by calling the dog a ‘coal’, ‘koyla.’

The real trouble begins, when the puppy grows into a real badmash, a wild devil attacking the children of the neighborhood and running after the female canines. Every time it escapes, Mr. Das feels himself miserable until it is found and every time it is found he has to change the leash into a stronger one. But every time it proves to be waste. The dog’s strength is more than that of the leash. Above all “Diamond’s phobia went so far as to cause him to chase children in their neat shorts and white shirts, their white frocks and red ties and white gym shoes as they make their way to school. That was the worst of all for Mr. Das.”(DD, 58) Desai also vividly describes the behaviour of the neighbourhood in Bharati Nagar where Mr. Das is residing. “The neighbours stopped short of actually making a report. It was – had been- a friendly, peaceful neighborhood, after all, built for government officials of a certain cadre: all the men had their work in common many were colleagues in the same ministries, and it would not do to have any enmity or public airing of personal quarrels.”(DD, 58) Even the neighbours and Mr. Das’s colleagues are very sympathetic of his plight. His much obsession with the dog leads him to his doom.

The story “Underground” begins with Jack Higgins and Meg, who are searching for an accommodation to spend their holidays in Cornwall. Meg and Jack fail to get a suitable accommodation till the end and are forced to adjust in a small tube station in which there is no proper ventilation and they have to keep open the windows to let the air into the room. The story within the story of Helen and Bob is the main story. Bob, a recently widowed hotel
owner, frequently becomes nostalgic of his wife, particularly, about the days he had spent
with his wife. Once a young couple interrupted him with their child while he is very busy
attending on his dying wife. It disturbed him and his wife too much. From that day onwards
he resolves not to allow any one into the white house, though there are plenty of vacant
rooms. He always sits in the terrace where he and his wife used to sit feeding raccoons in the
evening. He recalls how he had enjoyed though briefly his wife’s companionship. At the end
Meg and Jack conclude that he is a daft.

In another story, “The Man Who Saw Himself Drown” Desai presents a male protagonist,
a nameless character who struggles to reveal his presence to his wife and children and to his
neighbours. His existence in the society is in trouble, because an incident in his life. The
protagonist goes on a business trip to a town and stays in a hotel room provided by the
company. Being tired, he wants to have a cool beer but the drink does not give him relief. So
he wants to go for a long walk through the streets of the city. While roaming through the
streets he reaches the riverside where a group of people had gathered One of them asks him
to call the police and also asks him whether he had a car. He does not want to stay there. So
he says ‘no’ and turns back but suddenly a man is lifted from the water. The man who is
lifted from the water is just like him. His life itself is now at stake. He is dead being alive.
He, for fear of being identified, stays back in the hotel room for three days and after that
decides to leave the hotel to go to his city. Nobody asks him anything and he leaves the hotel
without paying the bill amount quite against his nature. He wanders in the streets like a
beggar and is chased by the children who throw stones at him. He wants to go home. He
catches a train without buying a ticket. At his house the situation frightens him further. His
wife appears in a widow’s dress. The real struggle starts now. There is no place to go to as his identity and place in the society is lost.

After he reads in the newspaper the news of the death of a person identical to him he hesitates to come out and reveal himself. This fear of being identified with the dead man brings about his doom. In the end, he meets his real death. Desai in this story weaves a story around a timid protagonist who dies twice in his life. As elderly people always say, the timid dies every day whereas the bold dies only once. This is quite apparent in the case of the protagonist in this story.

The story, "The Artists Life" presents the innocent dream of a little child who wants to become a good painter. The protagonist, Poly returns from her summer camp imagining herself as an artist. This story is "Set against the backdrop of middle class Amherst Massachusetts an ordinary domestic life with neat suburbs and tidy garbage bines, Polly’s longing for real art contrast with the mundane world." 21

Polly’s problem is she always longs to do a good painting having been influenced by her art teacher, Mrs. Abigail. She wants to identify herself with her art teacher. She wanders in the backyard to find a suitable object to paint, a ‘real’ painting but her thoughts gets sidetracked with the sight of the outhouse and the tenant in it. Her desire to become a painter temporarily vanishes and starts to investigate her tenant’s house and finds some shattered sculptures, and thinks that perhaps her tenant is a sculptor. The artist in her comes out but when they see is a heap of garbage in a corner of the house they run into the house to inform
about it to their parents. Their mother who always takes care of the surroundings is worried about flies that come out of garbage causing diseases. So she asks her husband to keep the garbage boxes near the porch of the outhouse. But her husband returns shocked because she had opened the door without a stitch on her. This shocks their mother also. But the next day the tenant brings a black boy along with her to clean the surroundings. Their father feels very happy because the backyard will be cleaned. But suddenly a shocking incident takes place. The children have adjusted themselves with their monotonous life. Desai in this story presents the protagonist's longing for real art in contrast with the mundane world in a symbolic way swinging the ridged rubber. As Hower Edward rightly comments on the story, “The Artist’s Life’ is set in a suburban American home where an aura of mystery emanates from an out building where a seldom- seen- tenant lives. Polly an adolescent becomes curious about it as she remembers a summer camp where a dream counselor gets her enthusiastic about art.”

In her next story “Topoztlan Tomorrow” the protagonist Mr. Louis sets out to go to his native place. Topoztlan is a Mexican city, where he has an ancestral house and few relatives. He reaches his aunt Dona Celia’s house. His aunt has sold a part of their house in the backyard to a businessman without knowing about his business and about the number of members in the family. But the real calamity enters the house when their neighbour starts his business. He is a garbage collector. His seven children are busy in separating the garbage. His business creates such a nuisance to his family that they cannot bear the foul smell coming from it. In addition to this, the wife of the man did some of her business at the front door of
the house putting a trough, and boiling the corn, and sold it in such a way as if they were being grown in the house itself.

Louise's aunt and cousin are too much worried about this nuisance. She always thinks of vacating the businessman from their courtyard. Louise wants to give a police complaint against them but he has no right because his aunt had sold it to him. The businessperson has every right to do whatever he wants to do.

Louise turns nostalgic remembering the Topoztlan of the past when they were small children living there. So much has changed since he had left for U.S.A. The peaceful atmosphere of Topoztlan is shattered and disturbed by the signs of the modern life, a wine shop, a hotel, and a butcher's shop at the end of the lane. On the way to his Uncle, Don Beto's house, he meets his childhood friend. His friend informs him about the meeting and a stage performance protesting against the golf club, which was coming up in the village destroying the natural beauty of the village. Arturo expresses his indignation over the urban rich people who were responsible for that:

That's right. It's a pretty place, no? Green hills streams, nature – so why not come and spoil it all; make a playground for the rich so they can come up on weekends a to play, and who cares if the green hills and the pure streams all vanish? Plenty of boys doing nothing who could caddy for them, too. But we're going to teach them a thing or two – we're putting up a real fight. Come along for the show – you'll meet the old gang.” (DD, 145)
Louise finds himself in a state of confusion. For one, who has come from the city, everything seems to be quite right because if the golf club comes it will be for the benefit of the people. The people in Topoztlan will join their children in the club and feel proud of having a membership in it. Desai in this story presents the rapid urbanization of the villages. The villagers on one hand protest against it and on the other hand feel proud for having changed into urban people. Thus in this story Desai presents both the villager’s eagerness to preserve the natural beauty of their village as well as their craze for getting urbanized.

In the final story, “Rooftop dwellers” Desai presents the protagonist, Moyna who struggles hard to prove herself against the competition in the world of journalism and literature. She leaves her family for the first time to join a literary magazine in Delhi. She lives with same employees like the secretaries, nurses, bank tellers, and flight attendants for some time, as that was the only accommodation available to her in Delhi. Her first experience in the hostel room is so bitter and disgusting that she is forced to leave the hostel in search of a single accommodation. Unfortunately on one day she is caught red-handed feeding her pet cat Mao, under the table. In the hostel there is a rule that no one is to keep pets. The individual rooms outside seemed to be much princely but her request to have it has been turned down by some landladies and landlords because most of the owners did not trust a single woman in the society. So Moyna is also

Scrutinized with such suspicion, questioned with such hostility, that she realized that no matter what they stated in their advertisements, they had nothing but fear and loathing for the single working woman, and the greatest dread of allowing one into their safe, decent homes. (DD, 163)
At last she finds an accommodation in a bursatis. In the middle class families the girls are not allowed to go out of the house and work outside their native place. But Mayona’s father sends her to Delhi to work in his friend’s office, a literary magazine.

Desai also describes the Managing Director, Tara as a typical example of a middle class working woman who always complains of her mother-in-law and her husband. It is a universal social problem that Desai explores in this story. She also describes every triviality problem of working women experience through the struggle of Moyna in reaching her working place. The travel in the D.T.S buses, and the behaviour of the passengers and the demands of auto rickshaw people are the constant worries of all the workingwomen in general in the society. She engages a private autorikshaw owned by Gurumail Singh, who lives in her neighbourhood. One fine day Mr. Bose decides to close the Magazine. It comes is a shocking news for Moyna. She is unable to take any decision individually. It was her father who had selected even the present job as chief editor for her. Again now, she has to consult her father or her friends as to what to do. While she is still brooding over what to do next a letter from her mother arrives in which she is given a note at the bottom of the letter, after giving all the advice of a responsible mother that,

Our neighbours have invited us to a welcome party next week; their son Arun is returning from the United States. He has taken a degree in geology and is expected to find a suitable job in the field. I am sure he would be pleased to meet you again. If you are planning a visit soon, we shall ask him over for a meal. I know his family is very keen. (DD, 207)
Being a middle class girl, she readily accepts her mother’s invitation to get married, which is the aim of a girl in life. Desai presents in this story the middleclass mentality of a girl in the middleclass society. Thus in these stories Desai presents the protagonists who struggle to drive away their sense of loneliness by mixing up with the people in the society but when they come out of their homes they get confused and are left isolated in the society. As Hower Edward says,

In Anita Desai’s fiction home is both a prison and a refuse. Those who escape face isolation from their families and society but those who stay risk suffocation. Family tensions make her characters attempts to transcend domestic lives into personal triumphs or tragedies. 23

While the protagonists of Raja Rao and Anita Desai struggle to establish their identity by exploring the evils of Indian society and Indian milieu, the protagonists of Bharati Mukherjee struggle to establish their identity and fit well into the American society. Married to a Canadian writer Clark Blaise almost all of her short stories depict her dilemma between the two cultures, the East and the West. This conflict forms the main theme of most of her short stories. After completing her studies in America she went to Canada along with her husband where she had faced acute racial prejudice. As she says in an interview,

In Canada I experienced an awful lot of racial discrimination – there were a lot of violent incidents in which Asians were roughed up- it was there in housing, in jobs. Canada was a very hard place to be a dark skinned Asian in. After five years we moved to New York and I have never regretted that decision. 24
These bitter experiences in Canada are the predominant themes of her volume of short stories, *The Middleman and Other Stories*. In her first volume of short stories *Darkness* her primary concern is with Indian expatriate experiences in the new society. The expatriates naturally become immigrants who gradually get assimilated into the host society at all levels psychological, social and cultural and then try to become true Americans. In Canada she was ill-treated and has even led an agitation against the harassment and discrimination. While she was in Canada, she tells in an interview to Tirthankar Chanda,

> I am not aware of too many Canadian citizens of Indian origin, who like me were not spat on were not evicted from hostels, not served in stores. I have been myself sent to the back of the bus I have been physically harassed in Toronto subway station and I always lived in rather elegant areas of cities I know of people thrown on subway tracks. In Canada I felt not only that I was simply the colour of my skin; brown Canada in the early seventies was going through a kind of unacknowledged 'browning' of the society as a result of having liberalized their immigration policy which meant that suddenly instead of racial quotas they were taking in people on merit basis.  

The racial discrimination is too bitter and unbearable that she further says,

> In a survey, in which primary school children were asked in Ontario, a multiple choice question; if you had a preference, would you kick a tree, a stone, a dog or a Paki. And of course the most popular choice was to kick a Paki. Not only did the government refuse to recognize that there was this kind of intolerance it even created policy papers about what Canada do we want in which they raised the question in terms of race.
She finds her position different in U.S, as there are civil rights legislation and agencies of redress. This forms the theme of her stories like “The World According to Hsu”, “Isolated Incidents”, “Tamurlan”, “Hindus”, and “Visitors”, in the volume Darkness.

The story, “The World According to Hsu” is about an American couple Graeme Clayton and Ratna Clayton who want to spend their vacation in an old fashioned way on the shores of a vast new ocean, on a strange African Island. Graeme Clayton’s desire is to see the Southern Cross Ratna’s desire is to take stock of life. They stay at the Hotel Papillion of a former French Island Colony off the African Coast. With the help of the car driver, Mr. Justine they had been saved from the hands of the military troops and were led to a safe place, Hotel Papillion, which is the choice of all Indian tourists to the Island. He also gives details of the important places in the Island, The Fort, and the religion, which is followed by the Islanders. The Island is always on rampage. There is no peace at all with the students fighting against the government and the troops trying to suppress. As A.V.Krishna Rao rightly comments,

Mukherjee deftly dovetails into her apparently explosive plot about racial harmony and disharmony in Canada, the primordial elements of ancient geology and geography, modern history and politics, illustrated and symbolized by the scientific account of Hsu about the formation of the earth and the environment at one level and the political volatility and violence in former French Colony, at another.27

Mukherjee takes Toronto and Montréal as settings to depict the racial tensions and harmony. The protagonist Ratna is very much worried about her safety in Toronto, but her husband promises that if any thing, even if a racially humiliating incident occurs he will
certainly quit his job and leave Toronto. Ratna who is the offspring of an International
marriage, a daughter of an Indian doctor and a Czechoslovakian mother is easily known in
Toronto as Indian. She is married to a liberal white Canadian – a Wasp. The story ends with
the note that the protagonist Ratna always feels aloof whenever he goes out because of the
threats and violence. As S.P. Gabriel observes,

In this story, then, Mukherjee offers an interrogation of Canadian
multiculturalism from the perspective of diaspora and the transnational
movements and flows of people that have made and continue to make
revisions in the discourse of citizenship and national identity necessary.
Classified in Canada under the rubric of “visible minority” status, Ratna
Clayton finds herself consequently excluded from the dominant discourse of
Canadianness. Half European, her darkness of skin is the signifier of the
difference, which fixes her cultural identity as an Indian or South Asian
ethnic, a category viewed to be mutually exclusive with Canadianness.28

In another story “Isolated Incidents” Mukherjee shows how with its newspapers, legal system
and historical records the society clings to an outdated state versions of itself. It is about the
story of two young girls, Poppy and Anne, who have departed from different shops to test
their fortune in future. Poppy becomes a pop singer and Anne is employed in the Human
Rights Office Redress Cell in Toronto. When Poppy makes a call to Anne after her arrival at
Toronto from Los Angeles, she is busy in settling the case of Doctor Supariwala, who has
been rejected by the students for not teaching well in the classroom. As they argue, ‘She
belongs to the world of research, not of the classroom, like many of her countrymen.’ While
she is still dealing with the problem another man who seems to be very rich, Mr. Hernandez
comes to her with a case against the husband of his sister. His sister’s husband now refuses to
sponsor her and wants to marry another girl. Though Anne explains to him that the case is not of the human rights he does not listen. She remembers an incident, Perwad, John Mohan case, who has been assaulted at a sub way. When Miss Anne asks him whether he had reported it to the police then he says that,

Of course, of course. But what good are the police? The assailants fled. We have no witnesses. The police suggest my client got drunk and started a fight. Miss Vane. They make this boy feel like a complainer. The victims are made to feel guilty. (D, 82)

But as an employee of the Human Rights Office she knows the facts.

I know Torontonians were proud of their subway, their politeness, proud of their moral spotlessness. This after all was not New York. Assaults on John Mohan Persawd and dozens like him would always be considered isolated incident, and who’s to say they were racial in nature? Police treated is as simple assault, rowdiness, and drew no necessary inferences regarding race. No witnesses, no case, and police involvement ended. (D, 93)

Such is the position of immigrants in Canada, which Mukherjee explores through this story. But the immigrants on the other hand are also cheaters as in the case of Mr. Hernandez’s sister. As she says,

“Nothing is fair!” she shouted. “There isn’t any justice. And your sister was never married! It is a trick to cheat Immigration. “Her voice sagged with grief, and she sat, a small figure at the end of a long, busy dining hall. (D, 121)

“Tamurlane” is also another story in which is presented the struggles of illegal immigrants to Canada to get legal papers and other documents of legal immigration. Anti-Indian
sentiment in Canada is very clearly exposed in this story by Mukherjee. The illegal immigrants collect and work as unskilled laborers in an Indian restaurant owned by Mr. Aziz. She also describes deftly the riots against the Indians in Toronto by hooligans. The man who looks after getting the legal papers of immigration tells about his experiences:

One boy knocked me down. Actually he tripped me, so it looked like an accident. Then the other two spat on me, called me names you would not believe. I’m a Gandhian of the old school. I just lay there with my face against a parking meter, to protect my eyes, you know. The eyes are delicate the rest is reparable. And all the time the hooligans were belaboring me, my friend. (D, 113)

Rich people like Mr. Chowdhury can leave Toronto and lead a peaceful life somewhere in New York or other. But for workers like Mr. A Mohan Gupta and others it is difficult to go out of Toronto. The story ends with a violent and ironical incident that takes place in the restaurant, in which one of the chefs who is an illegal immigrant hiding in a secret place gets killed by Mounties just when he was getting his legal Canadian papers.

This ironical chuckle of indignation of Canadians against Asian immigrants in the Canadian society is presented in another story, “The Hindus” by Mukherjee. It is true that everything changes through the immigrants in Canada, the modern exiles risk their old world for a new one. St. Andrews observes, “New world is changed again by continual immigration and redefinition. The bonds between all people in Canada, as in U.S. are in large part bonds of immigrant peoples.” 29
It is the case with ‘Pat’ H.R.H. Maharajah Patwant Singh of Gotlah Purveyor and Exporter, who leads his life by selling the heirlooms to Americans.

He thanks the Americans who understand them. No one at home understands their value. Here, I can sell off a little Pahari painting for ten thousand dollars. Americans understand our things better than we do ourselves. India wants me to starve in my overgrown palace. (D, 135)

He has bitter hatred towards India because the government has seized all his property and while he is disposing off his heirlooms, he has been arrested and put in jail for three days and ill treated along with the common criminals. He feels more comfortable in America. On the other hand the narrator of the story, Leela Lahiri also feels comfortable in America. She has come to America after separating from her husband, Derek who has been in Toronto, because he fails to fit into America. Being a Canadian he feels at home only in Canada. He says, “In the two years I have tried to treat the city not as an island of dark immigrants but as a vast sea in which new Americans like me could disappear and resurface at will.”(D, 136)

Mukherjee’s preoccupation with the idea of finding a home in an alien land finds place in her other stories like “Nostalgia”, “Visitors”, “A Lady from Lucknow”. As Andrews comments,

Her fundamental question is when does an individual leave the immigrant category and truly arrive as a full citizen. Within the canons of Toronto and New York, the yearnings of immigrants to acculturate, pushes up against the desire to embrace cultural ghosts of the lost homeland.
It is evident in the story “Nostalgia” in which Dr. Manny Patel is bothered by this longing for the old land and old ways. He tries to satisfy this longing for the lost home by parking his Porsche, a gleaming symbol of his position in the new world and wanders into the “Little India” of the sari palace and new Taj Mahal where thoroughly acculturated citizens can purchase bhindi and cardamoms and dal and masala tea. But unfortunately just when he was longing to feel at home by wandering into the little India he has been shattered by an incident in which he had been cheated by a group of hustlers from India who exploit him sexually and blackmail him. This sense of longing for the lost world and the new world in which he is living does not offer him a safe place. To return to one’s old world is not possible to any one whether he is a Hindu, a Sikh, an illegal, or a legal because the influence of their background history prevents them from a reconstruction of their lost world.

In the story “The Lady from Lucknow” a Pakistan based Muslim, Nafeeza Hafeez must overcome all differences with an Indian Based Muslim from Lucknow. Whether she is an Indian or a Pakistani, she must be aware of the social structures of India and Pakistan. She has to know all the customs of the society to her it may be India, Pakistan or the country in which she is living. She is to fit herself well into the main stream of the social milieu. But there, the immigrants are often trapped within the hostilities of old immigrant groups. The irony is that the Muslim family, which has moved to Pakistan from Lucknow to save itself from Rawalpindi, fails to preserve their communal values when this cherished idea comes into contact with the alien culture. A Lucknow -born Pakistani wife, Nafeeza develops a lustful affair with Mr. Dr. James Bhimish, which leads to humiliation as she sheds her shame and guilt, though born in a more respectful family due to the influence of the alien culture.
and the freedom it has given to her. As A. V. Krishna Rao comments about the presentation of the character of Nafeeza as,

Mukherjee seems to say with an ironical chuckle that it is now left to the permissive Americans to turn the tables on the overprotected Asian expatriates. The message seems to one’s excessive cultural conditioning is always vulnerable she is finally sent back to her beautiful deck-house by a cab.31

The difficulty in preserving the old culture and forging a new one is also the theme of the story, “Visitors” in which Mukherjee describes how one gets tangled up between two cultures as one requires the exoticism of ethnic identity and the other demands complete abandonment. These mutual requirements threaten an individual’s self and identity. In this story, Mukherjee presents a fabulous constellation of people. All immigrants from Asian countries drop in invited and uninvited to wish the newly arrived Mrs. Vinita Kumar. She has been transported recently from Calcutta to Manhattan Condominium. Each visitor wants a different dimension from the bride. Each demands her to be a true Indian and a casual American woman at one and the same time. A student visitor to her house misunderstands this casual manner and misbehaves with her. As S.P. Gabriel comments

Mukherjee’s fictions construct their central material around “the reality of transplantation and psychological metamorphosis” (“Imaginary Homelands” 70) brought about by the crossing into North America (US, for the most part) of characters from divergent ethnic backgrounds and national origins: economic and political refugees from Afghanistan, Uganda, Iraq and Bangladesh; illegal stowaways from Ludhiana; professionals from Bombay and Calcutta; mail-order brides from Nepal; and domestic caregivers from
Trinidad. Despite their disparate cultural histories and social differences, Mukherjee's characters share the experience of Diaspora as they explore new ways of belonging and "becoming" in America. They are America's new "middlemen," But "not-quite[s]"... Who have to negotiate "between two modes of knowledge"...and remake home out of "the hurly-burly of the unsettled magma between two worlds."

While all the protagonists are trapped inside the Canadian society in her short stories in Darkness, the protagonists of The Middleman and Other Stories are trapped and found struggling in the American society. The protagonists struggle to mix with and assimilate into the American culture. In doing so some are humiliated. In the opening story, "The Middleman" she describes the underworld activities in America. The narrator Alfie Judah is a middleman in the world of smugglers. Clovis.T.Ransome is a notorious gangster-adventurer under whom the narrator works. Judah provides people with everything that they want like, gems, drug what not. He is a skeptical person, a hustler just like many immigrants. The narrator and other immigrants fail to find suitable jobs and become middlemen because their background and past history of the countries from which they have come do not allow them to modify their ways except in rare occasions, as Judah says,

I've seen worse. I've seen Baghdad, Bombay, Queens – and now this moldering spread deep in Mayan country. Aztecs, Toltec's, mestizos, even some bashful whites with German accents. All that, and a lot of Texans. I'll learn the ropes. Forget the extradition order; I'm not a sinful man. I've listened to bad advice. I've placed my faith in dubious associates. My first American wife said, in the dog-eat-dog, Alfred, you're a beagle. My name is Alfie Judah, of the once-illustrious Smyrna, Aleppo, Baghdad – and now Flushing. Queens-Judahs. (TM, 3)
Though, the story starts with details about the narrator, and moves on to the beautiful Maria, the wife of Ransom T Cloves, the adventurer who has captured her from the Minister, Mr. Gutierrez. Mukherjee, a keen observer of the American society, who describes in detail the activities of the underworld smuggling in America.

Mukherjee describes how the Asian men and women enthusiastically embrace the new world, which, among other things, represents security, the possibility of self-realization, and liberation from the restraints of the traditional societies in her other stories. As Thomas J. Carabas comments,

At the same time these immigrants are usually too sophisticated to uncritically embrace every aspect of American life. Mukherjee's protagonists are mostly well-educated women, who come to America with a cosmopolitan background and a first-hand knowledge of the upheavals and sufferings which afflict most of the earth's inhabitants. This awareness prevents them from being readily absorbed into the mainstream of American life. While a part of them enthusiastically adopt the best their new world has to offer, another sits warily on the sidelines as an independent spectator.  

This is true in the case of the protagonists of the stories "A Wife's story"," Jasmine", "Tenant", "Fighting for the Rebound", "Buried Lives", and "Danny's Girls." In "A Wife's Story" Mukherjee presents the interaction of Asian culture with the American culture and the liberation the American culture provides to the protagonists. Mrs. Panna Bhatt adapts very well to the social and cultural milieu of America. She feels free. She says, "I've made it. I'm making something of my life. I have left home, my husband, to get a Ph.D. in specialized, I have a multiple-entry visa and a small scholarship for two years."(TM, 29)
In a delightful way she presents the difference between her grandmother and her own improved status in U.S.A. she says, “My mother was beaten by her mother-in-law, my grandmother when she’d registered herself for French lessons at the Alliance Francaise. My grandmother, the eldest daughter of a rich zamindar was illiterate”. (TM, 28) Being a literate and well-educated woman, her own position sounds far better than those of her mother and grandmother. That part of a woman acting like a traditional wife is lost to her now as she admits, “That part of my life is over, the way trucks have replaced Lorries in my vocabulary, the way Charity Chin and her lurid love life have replaced inherited notions of marital duty.” (TM, 26)

While enjoying the free life of America on the one hand she also feels quite dreary, lonely, and confused and on the other expresses her anger against the tyrannical ways of America.

I don’t hate Mamet. It’s the tyranny of the American dream that scares me. First, you don’t exist. Then you’re invisible. Then you’re funny. Then you’re disgusting. Insult, my American friends will tell me, is a kind of acceptance. No instant dignity here. A play like this, back home, would cause riots. Communal, racial, and antisocial. The actors wouldn’t make it off stage. This play, and all these awful feelings, would be safely locked up. (TM, 28)

She is weighed down by the burden of two cultures and struggles hard to balance her past life and new life in America. Even after having been Americanized totally she at times broke out of it and it just like a true Indian woman. She surprises herself when she hugs Imre on the street. She also realizes how many changes she has to make when she gets ready to dress in a
beautiful sari and her heavy ornate wedding jewellery to meet her husband at J.K.F. Airport. Though she gets ready just like an Indian traditional woman she is not what she is outside. The story ends with a note that foreign culture is not a hindrance but helps the protagonist to realize herself though it is an indictment of the institution of marriage. She wants to come out of that bondage of the institution of marriage.

The Americans Mukherjee’s protagonists encounter with, are primarily middleclass white people, who fit the old white Anglo-Saxon idea of Americanness as Carabas says,

Many though not all, of these people are socially and economically established and their privileged status has hitherto isolated them not only from the changes in the world beyond their borders, but within America as well. These disturbing and often incomprehensible strangers bring to their insular lives unwanted knowledge to which they react in a manner as instinctive and predictable as to be labeled a tropism.34

The racial tropism manifests itself when the Asian newcomer’s presence becomes unbearable, and provokes the American to leave the scene. It is presented in the story, “Fighting for Rebound” Griff, the narrator relates his affair with one of the immigrants, Miss Blanquita from Manila. Like many of the protagonists, she has a background of wealth and culture. She knows six languages, knows about the American culture very well, and is dare enough to ridicule their ways. To Griff she is sometimes so familiar and sometimes so different. Blanquita feels comfortable with Griff and with the American ways because nowadays America is everyone’s dream and everyone’s second country. Moreover Blanquita understands well what the problem is as she explains, “You are all emotional cripples. All
you Americans, you just worry about your own measly little relationships. You don’t care how much you hurt the world.”(TM, 83)

Griff on the other hand envies her freedom, her green card politics, and its love but not the justice that empowers her. Blanquita, who does not find any response from Griff, leaves him and departs with her boss, but unfortunately she returns to Griff again. But it is for a brief period. If she were to find more to be gained somewhere else she would definitely abandon Griff. As Carabas says,

In many ways Mukherjee’s Asians are ideal immigrants, but they are so different from earlier immigrants, for example, the southern Europeans who came to the United States in the early part of the twentieth century, that they contradict deeply held American ideas about immigrants. The immigrants from south and central Europe came to America as unskilled laborers. Most of them lacked both the education and the self-esteem to challenge the idea of Anglo-Saxon, or Nordic, superiority. They were however, white enough to fit in once they shed their foreign-looking clothing and hairstyles and picked upon enough English to calm the fears of a foreign invasion. Their willing assimilation into American society served to confirm a sense of innate superiority. Mukherjee’s immigrants have darker skins which makes it more difficult for them to stop unnoticed into the mainstream of American life, but they are also better educated and more sophisticated than the average American which means they are better prepared to defend themselves against those who demand conformity. Unlike earlier immigrants who quietly acquiesced to their Americanization, they insist on entering the new world on their own terms. They want more than mere toleration: they want the best their adopted land has to offer. 33
Such is the protagonist in the story, “Tenant” who feels rootless in America. She turns psychic because she suffers from a sense of self-alienation. She will not be able to find roots either in her native culture or foreign. Maya Sannyal teaches English in the Department of English at the University of Northern Iowa. Most of the immigrants like Maya Sanyal have lived in merely independent or emerging countries, which are prone to civil and religious conflicts. All the immigrants who have come to America by chance or for necessity should understand the two hundred years of history of America and learn to adapt to American society. We find Maya Sanyal emerging herself into a different woman at different stages in the subtle, complex, and traumatic process of being a new woman. Her American colleague, Fran, is responsible for her coming to Iowa. Even while talking to Fran and drinking a glass of bourbon, which is a symbol of her new life she feels lonely and contemplates on her position in America.

Fran considers Maya as a bold adventurer who has made a clear break with her past in India. But as we come to the end of the story we learn that there is no setback in the mind of Maya. When Rab Chatterjee, another Bengali professor invites her to his home she dresses carefully in one of her best and loveliest saris. At his house and while returning to her house she is humiliated by Chatterjee because he knows about her marriage with an American and the divorce later. In the entire Bengali community in America, she has been considered a ‘loose woman’ and a divorcee and unfit to marry a respectable Indian in their community. She is not satisfied with the American society also though she has become an American citizen. At the end, we come to know that though she owns an American citizenship she will never be able to understand the vigor, the light, and the hustle of the new world. Her
psychological make up does not allow her to get a permanent home in the new world's she is a tenant and remains a tenant forever. The social problems of Maya and protagonists like her are not likely to be solved.

In the story "The Management of Grief", Mukherjee describes the agony and pain experienced by the Indians in Canada when they lose their husbands, wives, children, and relatives in a plane crash. It is a story that emerged out of her scintillating and controversial documentary, "The Sorrow and the Terror". In the actual crash of Air India flight 182 on 23rd June 1995 which killed 329 passengers, most of the victims were Canadians of Indian origin. Shaila, the protagonist narrator of the story loses her husband and two sons. Her neighbour, Mrs. Kusum loses her daughter, her husband and another Dr. Raghav loses his four children and wife and the total family of his relatives. While all the Indians in that locality are brooding over the death of their kith and kin the Canadian Government sends a volunteer interpreter to settle the matter concerning the payment of dues to the government and the payment of compensation to the deceased families. Language is a problem for them. Some of the Indians do not know English. The Government representative pays the first visit to Shaila because all the Indians in the locality put forth her as a bold woman who can manage the situation efficiently. So she approaches Shaila and requests her to help her in settling down the records of the deceased people. Mukherjee, even in her grief, presents a situation of communal harmony among all Indians, when they gather at the hospital to look at find the photographs of the dead bodies that are brought to the hospital.

Judith Templeton, a social worker who comes to settle the payment of compensation visits Shaila seeking her help in speaking to the other families. Among them are the Sikh
couple who have lost their two sons. They do not want to sign the necessary papers because to sign the papers meant signing their sons’ death warrants. They were illiterate people. They did not even know how to write the cheques to pay the necessary bills. So the water, electricity, and gas connections to their house are disconnected. Even then they do not want to sign the papers. On the other hand they are so stubborn that their sons will certainly come to save them if they lead a hopeless life. They have strong faith in their sons and on the way they are brought up. Shaila tries to make them understand the situation, telling them that she too has lost her husband and her two sons. But the Sikhs are stubborn. Judith and Shaila feel helpless. While they are in the car Judith talks about her next destitute a woman who always wept. She calls her the ‘realness’. Then Shaila gets angry at the unsympathetic attitude of Judith and requests her to stop the car. She gets down and slams the door making Judith to ask the question “Is there anything I said? Anything I did Shaila. Let us talk about it. (TM, 195)

This story is a good example for Mukherjee’s ability to present socio-political issues effectively. While explaining the deeply moving response to the Air India crash she also criticizes Canada’s racialized society and its inadequate attempts at handling the situation.

Thus while the protagonists of RajaRao, Anita Desai struggle with their problems in the Indian society. Mukherjee’s protagonists struggle to exist in the American and Canadian society. So also, the protagonists of Salman Rushdie struggle in India, Pakistan and America, and London. Just like Charles Dickens and Mulk Raj Anand, the protagonists are rich and poor, rubbing shoulders with one other. Exiled from his country and religion Rushdie gets shelter in Scotland Yard. In the state of forced isolation, he had suffered a lot, deprived of family and friends. He cannot meet his son and wife because of security problems though he talks with them over phone, even his wife did not know where he lived. As Rushdie himself
says to one of his correspondents, that the two years of separation from his family and the feeling of being rejected by his own people have caused him too much pain.

In “1000 days Trapped Inside a Metaphor”, he says,

What is my life worth? Despair whispers in my ear: “Not a lot.” But I refuse to give into despair... because... I know that many people do care, and are appalled by the ... upside-down logic of the post-fatwa world, in which a ... novelist can be accused of having savaged or “mugged” a whole community, becoming its tormentor (instead of its... victim) and the scapegoat for... its discontents... (What minority is smaller and weaker than a minority of one?)

This sense of aloofness and isolation and the ability to find a home even in exile is the theme of the stories in the collection of short stories East, West. In the first story, “The Good Advice is Rarer than Rubies” Rushdie tries to depict the activities of middlemen in the society and how they exploit innocent men and women at the consulate. It is a story about a beautiful young house servant who is happy and content with her work. Her wise parents marry her to an old man in England. She rejects her entry into Bradford, England, at the consulate office. She is a citizen of Pakistan. Mukherjee explains in detail how the innocent men and women are exploited by the middlemen in the society through the character of Mohammad Ali. Miss Rehana reaches the consulate office early at dawn. The gates of the office were still closed but the advice expert, Mohammad Ali, is ready with his angler to catch that day’s fish. His watchful eye observes all the Tuesday women at the consulate office. Mohammad Ali falls on Miss Rehana who was eating Pakoras at the hot snack stall.
He approaches her and tries his best to catch the fish by saying, “Please, you allow me to give some advice? Small cost only.” (EW, 2)

Miss Rehana who is also very keen on not falling a victim to the catcher says that she has no money with her and is an orphan and gives him an advice that always-good advice should find good money. The free advice given to Rehana is the investment to attract the other customers of his business. He has all the business tactics. He scrutinizes all the papers and finds that all the documents intact but he does not want to leave Rehana. He then uses his talkative trick, as he finds the prey more captivating. He gets ready to offer her a fake passport but Rehana is not ready to take it. On the other hand, she advises him not to give such advice to make the women insulted by the officer at the consulate. The fish is out of the reach of the angler. Salman Rushdie in this story presents how people like Mohammad cheat innocent women in the society. He also advises that women should be bold and confident like Rehana. In an interview with Irshad Mohammad in Toronto Rushdie comments on the freedom of Muslim women in reply to a question about the provocative statements made by him on the reformations of Islam,

I think the first thing that has to be broken is a number of social strictures. It’s not even to do with theology. It’s a question of how Muslim societies have constructed themselves into prisons, you know, into places where people are constantly instructed and commanded and ordered around. And the people who feel that prison most keenly are Muslim women. Even in places where they don’t have to wear the chador or burkah, they have direct experience with oppression. So I’m saying, let’s leave aside the great ideas of Islam. I’m just talking about how you arrange your so your societies.
The story, “Free Radio” is a satire on the attractive schemes for family planning. The Government attracted the young men and women by offering a free radio, whoever undergoes the sterilization operation. A young Rickshawala undergoes the sterilization operation to get a free radio. Through the protagonist of the story Rushdie wants to describe how innocent people like Ramani are exploited by the people who always wait for the opportunity to cash their innocence are exploiting innocent youth like Ramani. The protagonist in the story falls a victim of the bad company of friends who always drink illegal liquor at the back of an Irani canteen. They always flatter him by saying that he is a very handsome chap and tempted him to try his luck in stardom in Bombay only to extract money from him to play cards and for the drink. So Ramani leaves the village by selling away his Rickshaw to try his fate in Bombay. But his dreams of becoming a hero are shattered by another widow with five children in the village who traps Ramani and marries him by flattering him as the Krishna of her life. Thus the three misfortunes lead to the doom of the protagonist Ramani, his marriage with the widow, his sterilization, and his obsession with Bombay stardom.

The story, “Prophet’s Hair” is a satire on the Muslim society. It is based on an incident that took place in Kashmir. A relic of Prophet Mohammad, a hair encased in a silver vial goes missing from the Mosque and reaches a moneylender Hashim. Having regard to the relic he wants to must return it to the Mosque, but he never returns it. On the other hand he keeps it in his bounty of antiques. Rushdie also satirizes the ways of the moneylenders in this story. Hashim argues that he charges more interest so that people should learn the value of the money. But unfortunately because of the effect of the relic everything goes wrong in his
house. The liberal and kind Hashim becomes more orthodox, religious and adamant. He forces his wife and children to become zealots like him. He begins to talk only truth and forces his children to read Quran five times a day. He becomes a tyrant in the family. For the sins or the crimes he has committed Hashim suffers a lot, he loses his son and kills his daughter and in a fit of temper he kills himself. After seeing all these things his wife becomes mad. Though Rushdie presents the evil effects of the relic he does not criticize the Muslim community. On the other hand he wants to say that he is not against the religion of Islam. In “100 days Trapped inside a Metaphor”, he says,

I said; Selman you must send a message loud enough to…. Make ordinary Muslims see that you aren’t their enemy, and must make the West understand a little more of the complexity of Muslim culture…and start thinking a little less stereotypically… And I said to myself. Admit it, Salmon; the story of Islam has deeper meaning for you than any of the other grand narratives…Islam doesn’t have to mean blind faith. It can mean what it always meant in your family, a culture, a civilization, as open-minded as your grandfather was, as delightedly disputatious as your father was…. Don’t let the zealots make Muslim a terrifying word; I urged myself, remember when it meant family…. I remind myself that I had always argue that it was necessary to develop the nascent concept of the “Secular Muslim”, who, like the secular Jew affirmed his membership if culture while being separate from the theology… But, Salmon, I told myself, you can’t argue from outside the debating chamber. You’ve got to cross the threshold to go inside the room, and then fight for your humanized, historicized, secularized way of being a Muslim. 38

The second set of the stories in the section, “West” consist of, three western archetypes, “Hamlet”, Christopher Columbus”, and “ The Wizard of Oz”. In the story “At the Auction of the Ruby Slippers” Rushdie criticizes the vision of the people who have gone mad about
the memorabilia of the slippers worn by Dorothy in the movie “The Wizard of the Oz”. In the story he presents them as symbols of quasi-religious significance. He presents it in the shape of a parable to describe how the society idolizes fame and money to hide an underlying vacuum. Different types of people gather at the auction of the Ruby slippers including the priests.

Exiles, displaced persons of all sorts, even homeless tramps have turned up for a glimpse of the impossible. They have merged from their subterranean hollows and braved the bazookas, the Uzi-armed gangs high on crack or smack or ice, the smugglers, the emptier of houses. Political refugees are at the auction; conspirators, deposed monarchs, defeated factions, poets and bandit chieftains. Such figures no longer wear the black berets, the pebble-lensed spectacles and enveloping greatcoats of yesteryears, but strike resplendent attitudes in boxy silken jackets and high-waisted Japanese couture pantaloons. The women spot toreador jackets, bearing sequined representations of great works of art. One beauty parades Guernica on her back while several others wear glittering scenes from the Disasters of War by Francisco Goya. (EW, 90)

Rushdie makes fun of the auctioning places where everything and anything can be auctioned.

The Grand Saleroom of the auctioneers is the beating heart of the earth. If you stand here for long enough all the wonders of the world will pass by. In the Grand Salesroom, in recent years, we have witnessed the auction of the Taj Mahal, the Statue of Liberty, the Alps, the sphinx. We have assisted at the sale of wives and the purchase of husbands. State secrets have been sold out openly to the highest bidder. On one very special occasion, the Auctioneers preside over the sale to an overheated and inter-denominational bunch of smoldering red demon, of a wide selection of human souls of all classes, qualities, ages, races, and creeds. (EW, 98)
He criticizes that everything is for sale in the auction rooms and there is no place for morality. At the end he satirizes the mentality of the multitudes who have attended the auction. They always want to live in dreams and are always fictitious:

In fiction's grip, we may mortgage our homes, sell our children, to have whatever it is we crave. Alternatively, in that miasmal ocean, we may simply float away from our desires and see them anew, from a distance, so that they seem weightless, trivial. We let them go. Like men dying in a blizzard, we lie down in the snow to rest. (EW, 102)

Raja Rao in his stories has dealt, though not as a social reformer, with the problems of the society like child marriages, caste system, and deserted people and also with the independence movement of India and the Gandhian thought. As a Brahmin he also deals with the problems of religion and religious rituals in his stories. He is a keen observer of the evils of the society, particularly in India, and tries to present them in his stories. So also in the stories of Anita Desai we find the problems faced by children, parents, wives, and husbands. She also focuses on many of the problems faced by women in establishing themselves in the society whether it is India or other countries. The same sense of struggle we find in the stories of Bharati Mukherjee's stories. But her protagonists always struggle to establish themselves in Canada and America. Their problem is to get assimilated into the alien country and become part of it. In the stories of Salman Rushdie the protagonists struggling to get whatever they want. In some stories the Muslim religion is satirized.
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