CHAPTER VII
TRANSEFFECTING IDENTITY

According to Desai it is the overarching conceptualization of patriarchy that should change. It should integrate a positive attitude which will encourage women to achieve their identity. Desai implies how important the co-existence is for man and woman:

... closeness, the other’s presence, living side by side, are presented not simply as duties, but as an aspiration characteristic of the relationship, that should join husband and wife. They may each have their roles, there is no question of their doing without each other.

It should unlock the social and familial system that keeps men and women in echochambers.

Maya longs for this coexistence, and her bitterness against the disintegration of her identity is revealed in these lines. “Don’t ask me, Gautama — you can make me tell, you can talk me into anything. You can force me into anything you like if you just keep talking and questioning long enough. But don’t drive me Gautama, don’t drive me.”

The nearly volcanic heaving of Maya’s consciousness is due to this ceaseless displacement of her real self within the patriarchal structure. She struggles over an explicit and habitual trick of silencing that is done by the existing system. Desai feels that “women and men function as mutual signifier and signifieds”.

the self is but an inherent part of the struggle for cohesiveness and self-recognition. For Maya extremity is a familiar condition and she swings wildly from one clutched emotion to another. She is impaled upon the cross of psychosis which topples her into a primitive, and utterly neurotic person. Her pain and incredible agony are drawn in these fevered lines. Desai’s Maya becomes a Janus-faced creature combining in her terrible anxiety intellectual courage and emotional cowardice. Vivian Gornick feels that:

captured as we are, thrashing around inside a skin, that wishes simultaneously both to conquer existence and simply to walk away from it, we are driven ever more deeply into ourselves. It is the true direction of life; to penetrate that circle, to get to the heart of it all, to free ourselves by struggling inward. To be defeated by the effort. To lose the battle on a grand scale. To go mad much more than suicide, madness in the symbolic illness of life. And fighting so much harder, travelling from so much further a distance toward that magical centre, women — more than men — go mad. Madness is in the female vein.⁴

This is exactly the predicament of Maya. Like Maya, Monisha too longs for love. Both feel that it is the very essence of life. Monisha feels that she and her brother fear love as they induc attachment that enslaves one’s self. She longs for a different kind of love. “If only love existed that is not binding, that is free from rules, and obligations, complicity and all stirrings of mind or conscience, then — but there is no such love.”⁵

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⁵ Anita Desai, *Voices in the City* (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks 1965), p.135
Maya also longs for this love that is culturally transmitted and inscribed in a woman's psyche. *Cry, the Peacock* symbolizes for Maya, the cry of a fragmented self that strives for wholeness. And the wholeness can be attained only through love, that subsumes the self. Love, Maya realizes like Monisha is full of imperfections. It has the negative markings of patriarchy. Love is valorized and it is the only emotion that can give woman wholeness. Her existence can be signified only through love. This is the concept on which femininity thrives. It is not education, knowledge and awareness that can give women an identity, but love. It is the concept that divides the self of woman and causes much dilemma. Maya is conscious about the negative aspect of love. Desai uses powerful images to illustrate that man's love is like a shadow, "a net" which entraps women down the ages. It assures protection but provides none, but catches her:

\[\text{... surely as a giant fisherman striding through the shallows of moonlit seas, throws his fine net with one brief, expert motion and knows, as it settles with a falling whisper upon the still water, that he will find in it a catch: I had not escaped. The years caught up, and how the final, the decisive one held me in its perspiring clasp from which release seemed impossible.}\]

Like Nanda Kaul and Ila Das in *Fire on the Mountain*, Sarah in *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, Sophie in *Journey to Ithaca*, Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer* is also a victim of this so called "love" that dehumanizes women. Sita is unable to make an existential choice in the arbitrary ground of patriarchy which binds her to her family. She struggles against the "character armour" that is placed on her. She is thoroughly dissatisfied and feels that all her life she has relegated her autonomy and freedom.

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6Anita Desai, *Cry, the Peacock* (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1965), p.95
According to J.G. Masilamani there are two protests that she registers:

One is a protest against society and its violence... the other is her personal protest against the role her husband and children had designed for her — a breeding machine, a broody hen, an incubator.\(^7\)

Sita’s escape to Manori seems to be a flight from the constraints of traditional womanhood. She becomes acutely aware of her Oedipal relations. She is convinced, more or less, that the traditional family infantilizes women and they never achieve adult ego. "She saw the island as a piece of magic, a magic mirror — it was so bright so brilliant to her eyes after the tensions and shadows of childhood. It took her sometime to notice that this magic too, cast shadows".\(^8\)

Sita’s father literally owned the island. The islanders worshipped him. He was an icon, for whom anything was possible. His "Jeevan Ashram" offered the islanders sustenance. Sita too suffers from father fixation. She is a "Freud’s woman" in the beginning. She is like Electra, fixated on her father as there is no mother in the offing. But her awareness transforms her and she becomes indecisive as to what to do. So she escapes to Manori. Sita’s father fixation ends when she realises that her father was also responsible for her mother deserting them. The painful realisation that her father was cheating the islanders also frees her from her father worship. She feels that the unresolved Oedipal complex will choke her, enslave her. So "she had to struggle to free herself from the chain or she might have spent her life in cold meshes, regarding the enigma of her father, slave to his undefined magic".\(^9\) Her decision to free herself, to


\(^8\) Anita Desai, Where Shall We Go This Summer?, (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1982), p.63.

\(^9\) Ibid., pp.87-88.
relinquish her father fixation, shows her emerging new self-concept.

But Sita’s battles with Raman become more intense when she becomes pregnant for the fifth time. She is weary, forty years old and this pregnancy impinges on her, her limitation, powerlessness and subjectivity. Her physical condition again drags her back to the feared overwhelming femininity from which she is “in flight” to use a phrase of Karen Horney. She feels trapped. Sita becomes a victim of panic anxiety. Raman scorns Sita’s escape to Manori, her eccentric behaviour and feels that she is emotional, illogical and impetuous. He feels that a woman’s happiness is in the house of her husband.

Self-abnegation is not looked at a sacrifice or compromise, but as a virtue. Raman is shocked when she tells him that the only happy moment in her life was when she saw a man and woman in a very intimate way, in the Hanging Gardens. He feels angry and ashamed of their relationship. He desperately tells that

any woman — any woman one would think you inhuman. You have four children. You have lived comfortably, always in my house. You’ve not had worries. Yet your happiest memory is not of your children or your home but of strangers, seen for a moment, some lovers in a park. Not even of your own children”.

This outrage to a certain extent reveals the psychological abuse of a wife in the marital framework. She is always placed within the value framework. These values become integrated in systems and they endow women with an “object status” — objects endowed with a significant function and that is to become a mother, a wife and also an

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10 Ibid., 147.
object of sexual gratification. Levi Strauss writes: "The reciprocal bond basic to marriage is not set up between men and women, but between men and men, by means of women, who are only the principal occasion for it". The patriarchal marriage cannot satisfy women's need for autonomy and connectedness. They long for connectedness with their identity. For this connectedness we require empathy, which is central to an understanding of the aspect of the self that involves "we-ness", transcendence of the separate disconnected self... without empathy, there is no intimacy, no real attainment of an appreciation of the paradox of separateness within connections". This lack of sympathy generates struggle between Raman and Sita. Raman towards the end realises his mistakes and is ready to change. This realization makes him say in the end with a lot of warmth, in an empathetic manner: "It wouldn't be bad to give up the factory and come to live here. Do some farming. I'd like that".

Thus the battle between Sita and Raman is resolved. Sita feels that she had enough of emotional drain, battling against her husband, her family. She realises that they are also victimized by the so called ideology. No wonder inspite of her alienation she was inextricably bound to them, through anxiety and guilt.

Her relationship with her daughter Menaka triggers off many conflicts. The daughter is hostile towards her mother and the mother is shockingly indifferent most of the time. Menaka's actions are aimed at Sita, and the intention is explicitly clear — to hurt. Menaka obeys her mother against her angry thoughts and feelings. Menaka tears to

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pieces a painting of hers, that is appreciated by Sita. She also dislikes her mother’s visit to Manori. She feels cheated, lonely and apprehensive about her admission in the Medical College. All her frustrations are directed at her mother, Sita.

7.1 Fighting for Space

According to Herman and Lewis there are three important stages in which daughters angrily reject their mothers: “The Oedipal, pubertal and young adult periods of life”. The child experiences two kinds of power — the nurturant power of mother and the dominant power of father. The girl child especially feels scandalized when she realises that her mother (whom she regards as all powerful) is inferior to her father. It is this awareness to a certain extent that compels her to be different from her mother. Sita’s conflicts with Menaka can be explained in terms of psychoanalysis. The daughter challenges Sita’s “fabricated peace” with the world. Sita is never at peace with herself or with the world that fragments her identity. Menaka always acts according to her will. She never subjects herself to her mother. Sita, who never had such freedom, to do what she wants. She feels rejected, depressed and terrified by her daughter’s self-sufficiency and autonomy. “The more dissatisfied a mother feels with her own life, the greater will be her worry that her daughter might repeat her “mistakes” and the more difficulty she will have tolerating her daughter’s attempt to arrive at her own decisions”. Sita is terrified by her daughter’s action and choices. Sita realises that she cannot remain an outsider for long or live in exile.

Her anguish is the ultimate anguish of women who are smothered, deprived and

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15 Ibid., p. 156.
manipulated by patriarchy. Atma Ram observes that this novel "describes in artistic terms the tedium and monotony which haunt married women in their later years. It dramatises a powerful struggle between life-denying and life-affirming impulses with a view to achieving harmony in life".\(^{16}\)

Sita tries to achieve harmony in life but not in the traditional manner, but by creating a "new space" for her. Her true sense of self, her new awareness empowers her with an understanding of her position in the family. It is because of this new understanding that she is able to see Raman in a different perspective. When she resolves her inner conflicts. She conquers the fears that alienate her, that make her an "outsider".

Nanda Kaul in Fire on the Mountain moves away from people. Her self-estrangement is again common to all neuroses. She fights her instinctive drives with a fierce determination. The objective is of course not to get "involved". All her life she was "involved" whether she wanted it or not. All her life, she was exploited and cheated by her husband for whom she was nothing but an ornament. She feels her children did not have any genuine affection for her. She too wears the character armour and is a product of repression. She feels that she is self-sufficient and resourceful. In Carignano she hopes to get privacy and her independence. But both elude her.

"All her life she wanted was to be alone, to have Carignano, to herself, in this period of her life when stillness and calm were all that she wished to entertain. All her life she longed for stillness".\(^{17}\) But she could not, as she was bound to the traditional roles of a wife and mother. To avoid friction, confrontation, she never questions her husband's affair with Miss David. Nanda Kaul feels threatened and so escapes to Carignano for

\(^{16}\) Atma Ram, "A View of Where Shall We Go This Summer?", Response: Recent Revelations of Indian Fiction in English. (Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 1983), p.246.

\(^{17}\) Anita Desai, Fire on the Mountain, (New Delhi: Allied, 1977), p.17
self-preservation. She avoids commitments and responsibilities. It creates intense conflicts in her. The freedom she aches for is achieved at the cost of self-alienation. She becomes a recluse out of vengeance. Nanda Kaul’s alienation brings with it apathy, despair and dejection.

Nanda Kaul feels empty inside, isolated from other men and women. But she tries to fight the vastness and complexity of problems that confront her by resorting to regression. In order to pacify the trauma of the self that feels abandoned, she tries “reconstructing, block by block, by block, of the castle of childhood.”

She idealizes her father and in fact this is the only thing that comforts her in her solitude. She battles in vain to defend herself against the futility of her existence. Nanda Kaul tries to repress the conflicts of a person who is rejected by the family.

The final confrontation is with her real life situations. It is the arrival of her great granddaughter Raka that precipitates the intense conflicts. Raka was a natural recluse. It was not imposed on her by anyone (unlike her grandmother). It is this realization that shatters the facade of self-sufficiency and independence of Nanda Kaul. All her defence mechanism crumbles when she experiences Raka’s indifference, self-sufficiency and autonomy. It threatens her sense of being. According to May:

the overwhelming threats then recede into our unconsciousness.

But through these manoeuvres we deny our own freedom to make choices. We shrink from our responsibilities and reject our own potentialities”.

Thus Nanda Kaul’s behaviour, her isolated existence, according to Desai is largely

\[18\] Ibid., p.116.

based on her previous experiences and due to the hostile environment. She starts the "disowning process". This disowning process is the disintegration of the pretentious social self when confronted with a crisis. The process gets completed when she takes in the news of Ila Das's murder. She is unable to withstand the battle between the two negative valences. The two kinds of negative valences she encounters are in the falsity of her existence and her failure to reconstruct her self-hood in isolation, in moving away from people. This isolation was only a mask worn by Nanda Kaul to conceal her longing for utter dependence. The ultimate result of this repression of natural inclination culminates in her death. Ila Das's murder becomes a tangent and it also dismantles the inauthentic self-hood of Nanda. Modernists consider the dismantling of self as "the way for a new self-at-play" and it also suggests that "the centre cannot hold, may ultimately be resolved into an educated reaffirmation of self-hood, as 'Look We've come through!'"

Nanda Kaul embodies the predicament of women who are cast away by their families, who are driven to neurosis due to the sinister effects of pessimistic terror. The intensity of emotions which she experiences contribute to her complete breakdown. The already wounded self fails to surface into the clearlight. The tragedy becomes complete when Raka sets the forest on fire. The fire on the mountain symbolizes the inner fire that rages in the heart of lonely, repressed and exploited women who are betrayed by the existing structure. Paul Sharrad observes about the tragedy of Nanda Kaul thus: "When her personal equilibrium is upset, there is nothing for her to fall back on. The gap remaining between transcendent forces and individual cares is so great that only something

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Another character who wages her battle alone is Ila Das, a friend of Nanda Kaul. Her life itself was a battle, a battle for survival. She is described "as an old animal that has been made to run before the hounds".22 Her family's decline becomes complete, when her brothers squander the family fortune. Not a penny is given to the two sisters, Ila and Rima. Ila is also given the responsibility of looking after her bedridden mother. She herself tells "I have had to go from pillar to post, trying to earn fifty rupees here and fifty there, with not a room to call my own most of the time, and it's grown worse".23

But she was a born fighter. She never tries to escape from the harsh realities of her life like Nanda. It is again her presence that reminds Nanda of her unhappy past and that she was incapable of fighting her battles unlike Ila. In order to keep up her self-deception Nanda Kaul rejects Ila Das. It is again this feeling that she could have averted the tragedy of her friend who trusted and loved her that kills Nanda.

Ila is brutally raped on that particular night, after her visit to Carignano. Preet Singh rapes her inorder to take revenge. He tries to get his seven year old daughter married to a very old man for a quarter of an acre of land. Ila bravely fights against this and foils his plan. Preet Singh retaliates in a brutal manner.

Her eyes still swivelled in their sockets, two alarmed marbles of black and white and quickly left the ends of the scarf, tore at her clothes, tore them off her, in long screeching rips, till he came to her, to the dry shrivelled, starved stick inside the wrappings and

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23 Ibid., p.125.
raped her, pinned her down into dust and the goat droppings
and raped her. Crushed back, crushed down into the earth, she
lay raped, broken still and finished. Now it was dark”.24

“Every year more than 4000 cases of rape are registered in India. According to
an article, every two hours a rape occurs somewhere in India. This means a total of 4,380
rapes per year”.25 The undue importance that is given to the chastity of women has its
own psychological repercussions. So once violated or degraded they become untouch-
ables or outcasts. The society looks down upon the rape victims. Caste and class
related rapes also exist in Indian society. They are powerful weapons used to silence
women.

Desai here presents the hostile environment which humiliates and batters the self
of Indian women. It is the most painful ordeal for women to be tortured physically and
mentally. Rape is an ultimate physical act of violence against women to control them, to
dominate them. It sometimes becomes an act of vengeance. Incidents of rape, abduction
and battering of women are increasing in India. They are not isolated incidents. Rape is
used to maintain the inequality that exists within the power structure.

Women activists and organisation have raised their voice against rape and
other violence against women. The battles are fought not on equal terms and unless
women take radical action against this violence, this victimization will continue. The
psychological trappings have become so powerful that it requires systematic counter con-
ditioning to empower the self. All the preconceived notions about her position, her role
in the family, and in society need change.

24 Ibid, pp. 142-143.
25 Sohaila Abdulabi, “Rape in India: An Empirical Picture”, Women in Indian Society. A
Desai, through Raka, brings forth the marital violence. Tara, Raka's mother is the helpless victim. She is physically and mentally persecuted by her husband who is an officer in the Indian Foreign Service. Nanda Kaul’s daughter accuses Tara of being incapable of making adjustments; women themselves are partly responsible for this atrocity. The parents also force them to conform, to meekly accept their predicament. Raka carries the scars of her mother's victimization. Even when she is far away in Carignano she could visualize “... her father, home from a party, stumbling and crashing through the curtains of night, his mouth opening to let out a flood of rotten stench, beating at her mother with hammers and fists of abuse”.

It is the utter dependence of woman and her lack of awareness that contribute to battering of women. According to Wilhelm Reich:

> a repressive society thus automatically produces repressive people; the only way of breaking through this and setting this conflict the other way is by loosening the character armour and releasing and satisfying the sexual instincts. We always get back there in the end.

The passive nature of woman towards violence is mainly due to the societal and familial suppression. These battles are thus fought on old grounds, but a growing awareness among women has contributed to the essentialist notion of having a mind of their own, a true identity. In *Bye-Bye Blackbird* and *Journey to Ithaca*, Desai has delineated the battles fought by two foreign women. Sarah in *Bye-Bye Blackbird* and Sophie in *Journey to Ithaca* suffer from temperamental incompatibility. Sarah, married to an

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Indian husband finally resolves her conflicts by deciding to accompany her husband to India. The compromise she makes emboldens her; she does not transfer her sovereignty, her independence, to another person. Her words to her husband "Don't sally me" confirm the fact that she has achieved autonomy, concretized her identity. She feels empowered to live in an alien country. She doesn't have any false expectation about her life in India, as revealed in these lines:

... She could hardly believe her, to a land where she would regain warmth and personality. If she was to come to life there again, she was sure it would be as a new, a different personality. Perhaps this would make it all easier for her, for Adit, for everyone.28

To Emma she confidently says "I think when I go to India, I will not find it strange after all. I am sure I shall feel quite at home very soon".29

Matteo and Sophie in Journey to Ithaca come to India to share the adventure. Sophie accompanies Matteo "... to stay together, to recover their unique and essential love".30 But in India she realises that the gulf was becoming wider and wider because of Matteo's neurotic obsession with spiritual enlightenment. She thinks that he is enslaved to the book by Hesse The Journey to the East. His search for a guru finally takes him to the ashram in the hills. The guru is a 'Mother'. Matteo is completely convinced about her power to give him enlightenment. Matteo feels that "she contains — she is the container of a power that gives the world this heightend and illuminated quality".31 He

29 Ibid., p. 219.
31 Ibid., p. 141.
goes on raving to Sophie that, "when I leave her, I feel I am falling down, down into darkness. No, no darkness but greyness, flatness, emptiness. When she appears everything comes to life, it flowers, it brightens". This contributes to the main conflict between Sophie and Matteo. Matteo’s rejection of Sophie’s love, calling it mortal, transient, shatters Sophie. “She felt herself caged in a zoo, or person, forced into surrendering her freedom and privacy”. Unable to bear she goes back to her parents’ home in Frankfurt.

Sophie tries to live her life without Matteo. But the telegram which arrives to say that Matteo is sick and he is in hospital, brings her back to India. Back in India, she tries her level best to fight against the odds, to break the spell of the Mother. She undertakes a journey to find the roots of the Mother. She is overwhelmed by the striking similarity in the life of the Mother and Matteo. She resolves her inner conflicts by finding the truth about the Mother in the “Abode of Bliss” who enslaved her Matteo. She is determined to find Matteo and settle their conflict. So in Sophie we can find a woman, who is fully conscious of her potential, who is not to be disappointed or dejected by hostile situations, but who is bold enough to fight her battles alone. Desai has finally created a woman who squarely confronts both her femaleness and the negative forces that atomize her self-hood. Sophie realizes finally that

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\text{I must be the bridge to nowhere} \\
\text{But my true self} \\
\text{And then} \\
\text{I will be useful.}\]

\[32\text{Ibid., p. 141.}\]
\[33\text{Ibid., p. 148.}\]
\[34\text{Quoted in Helen Diner, Mothers and Amazons (New York: Anchor Press, 1965), p. 27.}\]
She not only decides to act as a bridge between Matteo and the mysterious past of Matteo’s “Mother”, but also stresses that woman herself has the power to reach out to the trapped self.

In *Clear Light of Day* Bimla like Sophie fights her battle alone. She is rejected by her sister Tara and brother Raja whom the former idolizes. B. Das remarks that, “it is a novel that with its controlled pacing — between the past and the present — reveals characters not so much in action as in the process of acquiring increased self-awareness as in Proust or Virginia”.35

Bimla’s struggle to survive, her reconstruction of the past events, her struggle against the haunting loneliness in the old house in Old Delhi, where nothing happens at all. Bakul, Tara’s husband, admires Bim’s qualities. He feels with her qualities of decision, firmness, resolves. She is definitely superior to Tara. But it is again the absence of these qualities that makes him marry Tara. The stereotyped attitude towards women is highlighted. He wants his wife to be submissive, timid and clinging.

Tara feels that Bakul has never recognized her as a person. She feels her existence has become hopeless. She feels that “she had followed him enough, it had been such an enormous strain, always pushing against her grain, it had drained her of too much strength, now she could only collapse, inevitably collapse”.36

Unlike Tara, Bim rebels against “A woman’s place”. She feels that society along with their ideological reimportation relegates a secondary status to woman. She is terribly moved by the suffering of Mira Masi and the fate of Mira’s sister who were discarded by their husbands.


Tara’s visit brings back the old memories which she had buried long ago. Birn loses her control when Tara mentions about the reconciliation with Raja. To Birn he was always a deserter, who did not care for them. She feels

... exhausted — by Tara, by Baba, by all of them. Loving them and not loving them. Accepting them, not accepting them. Understanding them and not understanding them. The conflicts that arose inside her with every word they spoke and every gesture they made had been an enormous strain, she now felt, leaving her worn out.\(^ {37} \)

But her strong sense of self successfully coordinates her thoughts, her intense emotions and she emerges with a clear thinking. She achieves an inner unity and has a clear mental picture of what she wants to do with her life. So towards the end she freely forgives Raja. It is her consistency that leads to the emergence of a new self. “Bim thus becomes symbolic of forces that sustain and support life against all those positive and creative forces which ensure permanence in change, continuity in discounting”.\(^ {38} \)

Shashi Deshpande, Nayantara Sahgal, Bharathi Mukherjee and Sobha De have all portrayed the emotional battles fought by women. They have all pinpointed that oppression of woman is rooted in sexual segregation. The established belief is that if her sexuality is not controlled, it will contribute to the downfall of man. Her identity is also “fabricated” on this ground by patriarchy, so as to avoid a social, familial and political confrontation. The existing identity gives emphasis to her subservient position,

\(^ {37} \) Ibid., p.166.

encourages her tight-lipped rectitude, and emphasizes the baseless fact that being a female, one is powerless, weaker than man. The social and psychological conditioning of a woman is based on conjectural assumptions which do not have any plausibility. Slowly these conjectures acquire the status of truth.

In Sashi Deshpande’s novel *The Binding Vine* Kalpana is raped by her uncle. Shakutai, Kalpana’s mother is reluctant to report it to the police. She laments thus:

*If a girl’s honour is lost, what’s left? The girl doesn’t have to do anything wrong . . . . people will themselves point a finger at her . . . . even if it is true, keep it to yourself, don’t let anyone know of it. I have another daughter, what will become of her?*

So honour or chastity is the most valuable thing for women. If one loses it, the ignominy earned will haunt not only the person but also the whole family. Sobha De in her novel *Starry Nights* brings out the exploitation of women in the field of films. Asha Rani, the actress is exploited sexually from a very tender age. She becomes emotionally anaemic towards the end. Her mother, out of sheer helplessness, sells her daughter for money. How a woman’s sexuality is transformed into a marketable commodity is highlighted by Sobha De. Akshay, the superstar, accuses Asha Rani’s mother thus:

“You can’t call yourself a mother — you are a scum. A wretched exploiter of your own child. You think you have made your daughter a big star — but it is her life you have ruined! How do you sleep at night? Doesn’t your conscience kill you?”

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We can very well conclude that Sobha De is textualizing the feminine situation. It is a woman’s sexuality that makes her vulnerable to exploitations. She focuses relentlessly on the dark fate that awaits women in a society where gendred subjectivity exists. Asha Rani is benumbed by her exploitation. She closes her mind to everything.

All she wanted was to be a carefree, seven-year-old again and lie down in amma’s lap. While she rubbed hot coconut oil into her dry scalp she wanted to cry. For what she asked herself. She felt so weary, physically and emotionally drained.41

The majority of roles that are given to women in films are meant to give men sexual pleasure or scopophilia. The traditional man-woman roles are also highlighted and exploited by the medium.

Sobha De has also dealt with theme of marital disharmony. Akshay the super star in Starry Nights is never faithful to his wife. But the wife suffers her heartbreak and chooses to stay with her husband. She blames Asha Rani for corrupting her husband. She blurts out:

... we women should sort out matters between ourselves. We should not involve men. Poor Akshayji — bechare — what can he do if women like you throw themselves at him? He is only a man.42

This shows the impact of a deep rooted prejudice against — woman as an enchantress, woman as a temptress. So the blame falls entirely on her.

Shashi Deshpande, through Urmila in The Binding Vine, brings out the emotional battles women have to fight ... No human being wants to be dominated. The most

41 Ibid., p. 73.
42 Ibid., p.49.
important need is to love. From the moment of our birth we struggle to find something with which we can anchor ourselves in this strange world we find ourselves in. Only when we love, do we find this anchor”.  

But she emphatically says that this love cannot be confused with sex, as it gives only transient pleasure. It is the love that Desai qualifies in *Journey to Ithaca* through Matteo and Sophie — love that is redemptive, love that is free from obligation, love that is unconditional and not binding.

Bharathi Mukherjee in her novel *Jasmine* conveys the final transformation that should take place within us. “Adventures, risk, transformation: the frontier is pushing in doors through uncaulked windows. Watch me reposition the stars”.

This exploitation can be broached in the light of that image that exists for women. Self-restraint is to be found more in women than in men. So it culminates in blocking all the spontaneous expression of instinct. They are repressed and incarcerated within the female psyche, if she crosses the space that is barred to her. The grim reality is that the female is forced to conform to the norms and regulations of forbearance.

All these women novelists are concerned with the emerging consciousness of women. In Sashi Deshpande’s *That Long Silence*, Jaya when accused by her husband feels that “... she could say nothing. I was in my place, pinned to it by his anger, a monstrously huge spear that went through me, excruciatingly painful, yet leaving me cruelly conscious”. It is this new consciousness that gives her confidence to break her silence, to see life differently.

It is ironic that, rape, domestic violence, dowry deaths, wife battering coexist

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with a popular ideology of romantic love. The women novelists in post independent India have highlighted the fact that woman's liberation requires a revolution within the woman herself. In most of her novels, Desai has traced the patterns of gender relation in family and society. But more than any writer she has focussed on the interior landscape of woman. She has portrayed the pain, confusion, anger, disillusionment of female psyche. There is a new emerging self-concept that comes out of these battles that are fought internally as well as externally. The significance and the power of her writing stems from the fact that Desai "... is a writer who writes for herself" and to quote her own words "... all my novels, it is rooted in experience and the least literary derivation".

There is definitely an inward turning to convey the flow of experience. In Desai more than any other writer, this other becomes identifiable. Desai focuses on the total awareness and emotive experiences of the individual. There is a never ending flow of emotions, sensations, memories, associations and reflections of the characters in the novel. The images in her novels are related to the psychic personality of her characters.

Desai focuses on the inner reality of things. It is inevitably the intimate, private world of the self that is highlighted by Desai. The emotional energy displayed by the characters and the emotion packed passages confirm that she has judiciously used this technique for simulating reality and for conveying truth. In other words Desai's stream of consciousness technique tries "to convince the reader of the privacy and the actuality of the mind being represented ... [and] to stand for ideas peculiar to that mind".

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7.2 Transeffecting Identity

The literary form and identity of characters are inextricably linked. All literary forms are the sum total of the individual’s creative process, his or her perception and experience. Literary forms evolve from human experience, thoughts and powerful feelings. In other words they revolve round the life of man, his relationship with the empirical world. In novels especially the unique presence of human beings is felt. The psychological novels especially deal with unique self of human beings, its disintegration, transformation, its adaptative powers, its dynamism and its powerlessness. In this particular form, character predominates more than the plot. It becomes essentially a certain character’s story, and their view of the world around them. In psychological novels the self and its interior and outer landscape become very significant.

Desai’s novels are basically psychological. The story is revealed through the states of mind of characters. The self and its identity is the focal point of attention. It is through the character that the aspects of identity are brought out. The aspects of the self, its disappointments, frustrations, its capacity to overcome fragmentation are brought out through the form of the novel. In Desai we can see the self of Indian woman at very close quarters. The fundamental truths about her existence, the battles that are fought and left unfought, the many conflicts in her life and her new emerging identity can be traced in Desai’s novels. Janette Turner Hospital says that

Desai’s people have been sustained and driven by passion for some sense of individual significance in the teeth of poverty, loneliness, the grind of obligations, the intrusive press of family and city. In quietly triumphant ways they have found it. The meanings of their lives may be ambiguous, but they have arrived at a meaning,
they have won it, they plant it before themselves in triumph, like a banner”. 49

The identity of women in India is at cross roads. The search for a new identity and how to achieve it are major areas of research among women activists. The traditional identity or concept of the self has many virtues and weaknesses. The Indian woman’s identity is slowly changing due to education, new orientations and also due to the work of women’s groups. The women writers have also contributed to this very effectively and meaningfully.

Indian society, which is patriarchal, thrives on the concept of females as submissive, timid and totally dependent on men. The traditional role models are placed before them — Sita who follows Rama, who becomes the embodiment of sacrifice, Savitri, whose chastity and unique love gets back her husband’s life, Kunti, Gandhari, Panchali, and many others, who obey and “worship” their husbands. The recorded history of India never gives women any place except a few. The values, beliefs misconceptions about sex and gender obstruct the development of the female psyche.

Women writers after Independence, especially were interested in presenting the change that was slowly enveloping the Indian womanhood. Anita Desai has traced the evolution of this new self in her novels. According to her those women who became aware of their oppression, circumscribed existence, were labelled as mad or neurotic. Some others were driven to the point of self-destruction. Most of her life-energy or life instinct which helps her to build a strong sense of the self is wasted, due to many conflicting situations in her life. Her conscious intelligence is always veiled by the voice of

societal and familial responsibility. The conflicts arising out of this are repressed. So the Indian woman never achieves the "Adult ego stage" as visualised in Transactional Analysis an interesting branch of psychology. She shifts continuously between the Child and Parent Ego States. According to Adler "... women have a harder time asserting their masculine will to power, they have more neuroses". Desai's female protagonists break the traditional concept of women meekly accepting their fate, for the sake of family. Those who cannot withstand these intense conflicts commit suicide.

In Transactional Analysis three ego states are available to any person such as the Parent, the Adult and the Child. The Adult ego state is the ideal state which propels the self to actualization. In this state the self in mature, reasonable, rational and logical. In the Child ego state, the childhood of a person is preserved. The Parent ego state is actually imitated or copied from the parents. In the absence of a balance in these the personal start crumbling as shown by Desai.

In Cry, the Peacock Maya when interacting with Gautama, responds as a child. The novel begins with the death of Maya's pet dog Toto. She reacts like a child. Gautama always maintains the Adult ego. He says: "I sent it away to be cremated. . . . It is all over. Come, won't you pour out my tea". 'Tea!', she cried, looking up. "But . . .!" Then she cries and helplessly runs to see if the bed of Toto is still there. His coaxing falls on deaf ears and he leaves her alone in her misery.

The psychological game played by Maya is "Why Don't you, Yes. But." The problem of her "messing up" becomes the centre of focus. The root of this "messing up" can be traced back to her childhood engagements. "Engagements are of two types:

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pastimes and games. A pastime is defined as an engagement in which transactions are
straight forward. When dissimulation enters the situation, the pastime becomes a
A pastime is a natural mechanism used by the person to ward off guilt, or
game . . .”. 52 A pastime is a natural mechanism used by the person to ward off guilt, or
to ease one’s desperation.

The thrust is given to “Why do I do this”. Maya throughout her life is harassed
by this question. She is father fixated, a victim of the black and evil prophecy of
the albino. The albino’s prediction that after four years of marriage, either Maya or her
husband will die of unnatural causes disrupts her psychic schema. She is, from then on,
living under its constant threat. She herself confesses “My father, with his quiet words,
would have done nothing to allay my fear or dispel my conviction, but merely underlined
the power by asking me however sadly, to accept it, ‘for it must be so.’” 53 Maya’s is a
tragic script that is based on fears resulting from child abuse. So the fears recur through:
out her life. The Adult in Maya is subsumed by her Child ego state. Maya fantasizes
about the death of her husband. She feels that only the death of her husband can free her
from the fear of the prophecy that was made. Once she makes this decision to survive
she feels relieved:

It is relief, I called back to the Gods who mocked in the dark
wings, it is only relief at having survived, at having regained the
will, and the decision to survive. It is only relief. I promise you,
you shall see — I swear — survive”. 54

In Clear Light of Day Tara, Bim’s sister, carries some disappointments of her
childhood. When she sees a snail in the Rose walk in her house, her Child ego state is
activated. She claps her hands and cries. Bim her sister maintains her Adult ego state.

53 Ibid., pp.53-54.
54 Ibid, p.190.
“As Tara performed the rites of childhood over the handy creature, Bim stood with lowered head, tugging at the hair that hung loosely about her face as she had done when she had sat beside her brother...”  

But in Bim the Child ego state is not activated. She feels strongly that in order to maintain her psychic equilibrium, she had buried her painful past. She remarks that “...one is too young to know how to cope, how to deal with that first terrible flood of life”. Bim immediately forces Tara to regain her Adult ego response. But Tara does not respond and she plays the game by asking “How could I?”.

Tara’s script contains three principal roles — Tara as a child, Tara as a wife, and Tara as a sister. It is when she interacts with her sister (who consistently maintains the Adult ego state) that her Child ego is activated. At times, even with her husband Bakul, she interacts like a child. When she discusses Bim with her husband, her Child ego is again activated. Tara is upset when she sees Bim in an aggressive mood. But Bakul says that he hadn’t noticed it. Tara reacts like a child “‘Haven’t you?’, cried Tara in that voice of the anguished sparrow chirping”.

Bim on the other hand, is always moving towards self-actualization — “Becoming” a new woman. “Becoming” is a word coined by Allport to signify self-realization. From her early childhood, she displays an organized behaviour. In school and college, she performs admirably. While Tara was always a victim of inferiority complex. She lacked the vigour and energy of her sister Bim. She never comes out of this slough of despondency. The teachers and everyone with whom she interacts compare her with her dynamic sister Bim. Tara shrinks back to her shell like a snail.

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56 Ibid., p. 43.
57 Ibid., p.159.
To Bim, school and its teachers and lessons were a challenge to her natural intelligence and mental curiosity, that she was glad to meet. Tara, on the other hand, wilted when confronted by a challenge, shrank back into a knot of horrified stupor...  

It is Bim's substantial self that endows her with potential abilities. Emotions influence her intellectual processes, but she conquers them objectively with her supposit self. Her ego maintains a harmonious balance between the id and superego. And so she is able to maintain her Adult ego.

In *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, Sita can also be analysed using the script. A life plan evolves when a transaction takes place between mother, father and child. In the case of Sita there is only the father in the past. Her mother’s desertion shocks Sita. She comes to the island which was an integral part of her childhood. In Bombay, in her flat, she tries to rescue a wounded eaglet from the crows. She tries to keep the crows at bay, using Karan’s toy gun. She ignores her child who falls and cuts his chin. Her Child ego is activated, “Tatterdemalions all in tantivy. She laughed and shot at them again and again - - pop! pop! whoosh, they whistled and shrieked, veering off to their other buildings...”.  

Sita, when she interacts with her husband also vacillates between Child and Adult ego. When she meets Raman for the first time after her father’s death she clings on to him like a child. “My father’s dead — look after me”. Sita when she is about to leave for Manori is stopped by Raman he is alarmed by her decision. Even in this situation her Child ego is activated. Raman exclaims “Don’t be silly. Sita don’t behave like a fool, think of your condition.” Sita angrily retorts:

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59 Ibid., p.123.
What do you know about my condition? I’ve told you — I’ve tried to tell you but you haven’t understood a thing” and hurled slippers, papers, nightgowns. Raman tries to prevent her once again by rationalizing the situation “you can’t go to the island in the middle of the monsoon. you can’t have a baby there”.61

But Sita agitatedly says thus: “But I don’t want to have the baby”, she cried. “I’ve told you”.62

But over the years, she changes and is in the process of “Becoming”. In the final confrontation between the husband and wife, Sita’s Child ego is activated. Sita feels betrayed when Raman tells her about Menaka’s letter, pleading with him to come. She reacts thus, ‘Ah’! she exclaimed with the very theatricality her husband feared, her children loathed and she could not control.”63 Raman looks at her in disbelief. He sees the face of a woman loved, a woman rejected.

She feels messed up, she resents her life and wants to get away from it. But in this island, in isolation she unMASKs her self through the process of reflection. Through reflexive consciousness she builds a new self-concept. Her operational personality is activated and she achieves Adult ego. It is because of this, that she becomes conscious of her emotions, drives and gets a deeper insight into herself. From then onwards she learns to handle her problems. Her words “ ‘Wait! I’ll explain — I can explain everything now’, and the words of explanation clamoured inside her mouth” 64

In Voices in the City Amla like Bim, achieves the Adult ego stage unlike her sister

61 Ibid., p. 33.
62 Ibid., pp. 33-34.
63 Ibid., p. 13.
64 Ibid., p. 151.
Monisha. Both experience an unhappy childhood — an alcoholic and abusive father, and a mother who becomes the victim of his aggressiveness and malice. Monisha and Amla were deeply hurt by the unpleasantness of their home in Kalimpong. Amla tells Dharma that Monisha takes after her father. "She has his silence and a touch of his malice — Oh, bleached, refined, purified to just a pale shade of it, harmless to anyone but herself, but the shape, the design of it remains in her eyes and on her mouth, Dharma".65

Monisha is completely enslaved to the Voices Introject which culminates in her self-destruction. She retreats into a shell of silence, moving away from people, retreating into a world of her own. Amla tries to draw her out of her silence. Amla thinks that Monisha is self-sufficient in her silence. She doesn’t need any one to make her feel whole. The conversation can be analyzed using transactional analysis:

Monisha: 'One must have someone who reciprocates, who responds. One must have that — reciprocation — I think'.

Amla: 'Must?'

Monisha: 'If one could be offered that alone, by itself, silent, discreet, pure, untouched, untouchable — then, I suppose, yes...'. But what if it were offered to you all sticky with threads and strings and labels glued to it? Demands, proprietoriness, obligations, extortions, untruths, bullying? Would you take it then?66

Why Monisha retreats into her cocoon is very clear from her conversation with Amla. Here she responds is an Adult ego state. But she is too much oppressed by her husband’s narrowminded and traditional joint family. Her husband is also "... a rotund, minute-minded... utterly predictable person".67 Amla feels that they are

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66 Ibid, p. 197.
poles apart and are like two parallel lines that will never converge to a point. Monisha lacks the courage to go in the opposite direction. So her behaviour becomes a mask. Monisha does not fight against the conflict which arises out of their polarities. The conflicts are repressed deep into her unconscious and they are not discriminately solved by her ego. Her Child ego state is activated and she experiences intense fear which drives her to commit suicide.

Her own words clarify this inference:

And it has been my own fault, because I gave up the quest for it too soon, never seriously believed in it, abandoned before it truly began, thinking it not worth my while to search a treasure that would cost me endless devastation. I chose to stand aside and allow it to pass by, and now when it returns to terrify me with its window. I do not recognize anything in it but the terror”.68

Her terror arises out of her self-awareness, which makes her conscious of her deplorable existence, chained and framed by the patriarchy of her milieu.

Amla on the other hand fights against these hostile situations boldly. She has the courage to go in the opposite direction. At times she also responds in the Child ego state, when the city oppresses her. Monisha’s death upsets her equanimity and at the sight of her mother, her Child ego state is activated. “She flew up to meet her, crying so hard that she did not at once notice that her mother barely glanced at her and was in fact, about to walk past her”.69 The tragedy never upsets her mother’s Adult ego state. She is a woman who has suffered much, but in suffering she concretizes her identity. One would feel that she is desensitized by this stable self which has emerged out of many conflicts. It is

68 Ibid., p. 239.
69 Ibid., p. 254
the unboundedness of her personality that enables her to maintain her equilibrium. Nirode in an emotionally charged atmosphere tells Amla about their mother:

she is not merely good, she is not merely evil — she is good and she is evil. She is our knowledge and our ignorance. She is everything to which we are attached, she is everything from which we will always be detached. She is the reality and illusion, she is the world and she is Maya. 70

The final analysis is of Nanda Kaul, lovely, cast away on the mountain of Kasauli. She is withered by the turbulent and chaotic life. Raka, her great granddaughter’s presence was suffocating. She is reluctant to get involved in the world of the child. “She was doing her best at avoiding the other but found it was not so simple to exist and yet appear not to exist”. 71

When she interacts with Raka, her Child ego state is projected. She recreates her perfect childhood for Raka. Nanda Kaul creates a perfect father figure who travelled to Tibet and brought many beautiful treasures home. She tells Raka about her idyllic childhood. But the child never accepts her story and her lips get “pinched” in repulsion. With the arrival of Ila Das, Nanda Kaul’s Child ego state is once again activated. Raka observes thus: “It seemed the old ladies were going to play all afternoon, that gave of old age — that reconstructing, block by gilded block of the castle of childhood, so ramshackle and precarious . . .” 72

Ila Das’s tragedy shatter’s Nanda’s will to live, even the unconscious wish to survive. She tries to preserve her self by clinging to her false self-image of self-suffi-

70 Ibid., p. 256.
72 Ibid., pp. 116-117.
iciency and self-willed detachment from society. But this weak self is incapable of withstand-
ing the devastating flurries of empirical reality. Nanda like Monisha is terrified by this awareness of decay, exploitation and degeneracy in a woman’s life.

The radical changes that permeate the behaviour patterns of Desai’s female characters point to great possibilities in the process known as “from being to becoming”. The back-log of socio-cultural burdens gets off loaded and characters grow out of the tram-melled situations. They have new insights into new possibilities and have glimpses of a brave new world marked by gender equality, personal dignity and a posture exuding confidence. The identity of the Indian women is changing fast and the new self-concept has in it the powerful ingredient of a psychological renaissance. Desai looks for, finds, and highlights this prototype in her novels. The new horizons she visualizes are indicative of the transeffecting of Indian woman’s identity. This great leap is from stagnation to dynamism.