CHAPTER V
DESAI’S FOCUS —
ON SOCIETAL BONDS AND BONDAGE

The Indian society's complexity arises from its composite culture, traditions and different religions which result in a melange of social stereotypes. This is again influenced by social class structures, subcultures and regional cultures and ethnic structures. These factors influence the individuals and their behaviour patterns.

5.1 Social Stereotyping

Rapid urbanization and scientific advances have resulted in society becoming replete with definite action patterns of the individuals. The action of the individuals in a society is thus shaped, appraised and evaluated by the cognition of the roles. Each individual constructs a meaningful world through cognitive work and social interaction. This world is very distinctive in its entity. Observation of people convinces us that the cognitive world of each individual is tremendously different from that of another. The cognitive world is synthesized through the individual’s social interaction, the individual’s view of himself or herself and also the attitude expressed towards him or her by others in the same social or psychological milieu. Thus the structure of the self varies according to the social system of which he is a part. The time factor also contributes and alters this process.

Culture definitely encompasses the social as well as the non-social world of the individual. Concatenation of individuals in a group or community has an effect on the behavioural pattern. To solve the common problems, they conform to a set pattern of behaviour. This will slowly emerge as the culture of that society. Culture thus
includes beliefs, attitudes and modes of action. This is transmitted to the next generation. The generalities thus employed focus upon certain issues and overlook the needs of a particular group—women in general. These imputations lead to stereotyping in society. In the words of Water Lippman “stereotypes are pictures in our heads, beliefs that we hold regarding the members of a category.” These mental pictures have no scientific relevance, as they are exaggerated views or pictures of a particular group. The traits of these groups are assigned to them. There is a tendency among people to attribute certain assumed qualities, behavioural patterns and sets of characteristics to a particular group of people. This is done sometimes consciously with a purpose and sometimes unconsciously without any purpose. The social stereotyping belongs to the first category. Social stereotypes are consciously produced with the intention of reinforcing the existing social system. For example, in Indian society women are stereotyped as the weaker sex needing protection. Ideal women are to be submissive, unquestioning and self-effacing. This emphasizes how social stereotyping is done by the establishment for convenience and perhaps for the functioning of society without confusion. According to Secord and Backman “…the typing of people is almost inevitable, because of its functional usefulness. No one can respond to other persons in all their unique individuality. That form known as stereotyping is generally exaggerated typing and has been constantly attacked by social scientists.”

Stereotyping is invariably linked with roles that are assigned to individuals in a society for its effective and smooth functioning. It is also linked with prejudice of a group towards another group. This prejudice is also traditionally passed on to the next generation. “Prejudicial beliefs and emotions sometimes become so intense that in the

eyes of majority members, members of a minority totally get separated symbolically as well as physically from the rest of humanity."

This process is reversed in the Indian context when we analyze the position of Indian woman down the ages till the present century. We feel that it is the single largest group which has been exposed to intense prejudice and discrimination. The majority are victims of stereotyping and continue to live deplorable lives. They implicitly accept the roles that are assigned to them.

The growth of capitalism in India has reinforced patriarchal values. This is mainly because of the fact that capitalism is exclusively a male domain. The economically empowered male makes his female counterpart all the more dependent on him. In the field of work also stereotyping leads to disparity in payment. "More work and less pay" was the situation faced by many women workers. This is mainly based on the belief that woman due to her biological difference is not able to do the same amount of work as men. In the home front it is even worse. "No help and No pay" is the policy adopted by the family and she faces a plethora of demands placed by the changing society, her family and her work. The answer to the question, why women meekly accept this deprivation is that "A woman's idea about herself is largely dominated by a system of demands and expectations on the part of society which are embodied in stereotypes, i.e., in images, which the women themselves come to accept and conform their behaviour to." Thus stereotyping plays a powerful part in forcing women to converge to the roles created by society and family. The continuous enactment of these roles gives her an image which sucks the verdure of her self, her potential. If she goes against these

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stereotyped roles:

. . . She must walk in dread
Steel gauntlets of traffic, terror-struck
Lest out of spite, the whole
Elaborate scaffold of sky overhead
Fall racketing finale on her luck. 5

It is against these powerful forces that the modern Indian woman is waging a battle. The barriers are not only by patriarchal establishment but also by mass media which again projects the same stereotyped roles of Indian woman and encashes a profit out of it. “The accusation that advertising has contributed to the role stereotyping of women and ethnic minorities has been supported by several studies. In 729 advertisements appearing in 1970, none showed women in a professional capacity, whereas 35 of them so portrayed men.” 6 They insidiously create an urge to aspire for these roles that are portrayed by the media. From soaps to high-tech machines, these advertisements exploit the traditional image of Indian woman. Another negative role that is projected through most advertisements is the role of woman as an enchantress who not only attracts but also manipulates men using her physical beauty and charm. Very few advertisements project the new confident, educated Indian woman.

5.2 The Many Victims

Anita Desai portrays the existential insecurity created by stereotyping in a very powerful manner. According to Desai women feel that they are outcastes. They feel empty, threatened and depersonalized by family and society. Desai feels that this insecurity makes women

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vulnerable. The Indian woman, owing to this, experiences the risk of losing her identity and self-image in highly potentiated forms. Desai's novels graphically portray the existential anguish of Indian women, who are unable to forestall the danger of being sucked into the whirlpool of stereotyping. It is so powerful that it shakes the reader out of complacency. Through Monisha in *Voices in the City* Desai unveils the real drama of Indian woman's life, bordering on the tragic. She is swamped, impinged upon by the stereotyped role models, customs and traditions of the establishment. She feels that she lives to satisfy others. Monisha feels an outcast in the confines of her husband's joint family. She asks a question to herself "what is the meaning of life without freedom and equality?"7 It is a question existential in its anguish epitomizing the frustration of an average Indian woman stereotyped to play rather a meaningless and marginal role in life. The greatest trauma according to Desai is to exist alone, amidst the madding crowd, without any understanding and love. If the person is more conscious or aware of his autonomous self, the anguish is more. Monisha thus experiences her "separateness" in an intense manner. The trapped situation of Indian woman as evidenced in the case of Monisha is comparable to that of the caged dove which is unable to move freely. Monisha looking out through the barred window of the house brings home to us the domestic confines that really limit, handicap and even obstruct the personal development of Indian women. She oscillates between two extremes: either to completely submerge her identity or to impel her individual self forward, breaking all confines and then existing in isolation and preserving her autonomy. According to Desai the discrimination against women and the submissiveness of her sex have become enduring characteristics of Indian society.

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We find Desai’s other heroines also more or less in the same situation. Monisha finds herself a victim of situations and ostracism in the domestic locale. She is cutting vegetables. She feels scandalized that women in the house without the least trace of sympathy, scornfully and even mockingly discuss her inability to have children. Monisha’s trauma is revealed in these lines, “I can’t leave these vegetables. I am cutting for them — that could create a disturbance. But I stop listening and regard my insides: my ovaries, my tubes, all my recess moist with blood, washed in blood, laid open, laid bare for scrutiny.”

The prejudice of the family has stressful and disorienting effects on Monisha. The familial environment totally fails to provide her anchorage and does not give her any sense of security. The oppressive atmosphere increases the cognitive and emotional uncertainties. She resigns to her plight meekly, and feels that there is no escape from the shattering and oppressive atmosphere of a tradition-ridden family. She feels as though she is chopped up by the stereotyping patterns and tradition-bound family even as she is chopping vegetables. Monisha would like very much to deviate from the accepted and acceptable social norms but owing to an impaired and inadequate self-image she feels frustrated and consequently changes the venue of her fight to her own inner self, where she is deeply entrenched in a cocoon of apparent safety. This is the case of most Indian women who happen to be very vulnerable in their life situations and “voices in the city” are the tremulous voices of many, many Monishas, who barter off their identity for the sake of safety. This feature of Desai’s heroine has its obvious and reinforcing parallels in Bharathi Mukherjee’s Wife. Mukherjee’s heroine Dimple Das Gupta is also undefined. She represses many of her emotional needs. We see the essential “feminine characteristics” injected by the family restraining her own needs and desires.

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and curbing her moves towards independence. Dimple, married to an ambitious engineer Amit Basu, feels overwhelmed when her husband denies her freedom of choice and decision which exists within herself. She feels: “his disapproval was torture; all her life she had been trained to please. He expected her, like Sita, to jump into fire if necessary.”

Monisha becomes a victim of intense prejudice when Kalyanidi, her sister-in-law, inspects and almost invades her wardrobe. Kalyanidi has absolute and unequivocal feelings of antipathy towards Monisha’s passion for books. She is shocked to see Monisha’s wardrobe filled with books. Her frustrations produce intense anger and hostility towards herself. She suppresses the aggressiveness towards her own self, towards Jiban’s family and towards her husband very effectively by embracing silence. “This unnatural silence and obstrusiveness of hers, it seemed to emphasize the distance she had travelled from reality into a realm of still colourlessness”

There is no way in which she can blow off her frustrations created by society’s callously irrational stereotyping, except by means of masochistic suffering which works like a psychological mooring for her.

Kalyanidi represents the nonchalant passive conformity of Indian women in general. She, like many of her type, is afraid to deviate from the norms of expected behaviour whereas Monisha acts boldly and differently. Monisha on the contrary scoffs at the meaningless existence of those who conform to the dead habits of worn-out conventions, mostly using soliloquies and diary entries when she is in her elements. But Kalyanidi finds her security and resultant comfort in conforming to the death-dealing stereotyping to which she is exposed. What we notice is the old self-image of Indian women in contradiction with a new self-image which annuls and cancels out the

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treacherous norms of social stereotyping to which they are exposed. The awakened minority of Indian women still fight the battle to recast their roles on the basis of equality and justice. It is to this ideal that Desai’s heroines move at great cost and even at perilous stakes.

Roles are an integral or indispensable part of our life. The concept of the role has been borrowed from theatre and consequently social life gets reduced to a series of acts involving role-playing. In society each individual is assigned certain roles. These become a deep-grained part of the person’s existence. According to E.E. Jones and H.B. Gerard, role is “... behaviour that is characteristic and expected of a person or persons who occupy a position in the group.” These roles thus impute fixed qualities and behavioural patterns to the genders. Historically speaking they are also influenced by the belief that man is superior to woman and that woman should be controlled by man. This belief forms the basis of many of our religious and moral laws, customs and traditions, which confine women to their homes or places of duty assigned to them. Roles thus contribute to the systematic labelling process called stereotyping. At times an individual is expected to perform different roles at the same time. The benefit accruing from stereotyping is that it ensures some kind of orderliness in society and as a corollary to it, role confusion is minimal.

The modern Indian women like most women elsewhere in the world carry the burden of many roles — the care of the children and the home front with implications relating to her roles as a cook, washer-woman, home-maker, entertainer of guests and so on. Most of these roles have been selected and assigned to them by the higher ups in society wielding a lot of power and clout. This is one major reason for the gender wise

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opting for stereotyping. The individuals are not given any choice and are even constrained and crushed by the monolithic system. Prejudice, discrimination and exploitation are an inherent and inevitable part of these stereotyped roles. These "selected" roles become a burden for women even as they are obvious, and they "... learn that certain behaviour patterns are expected of them just because they occupy certain positions."\textsuperscript{12}

Role obligations take precedence and are of great importance in Indian society, especially in the case of women. According to Sara S. Mitter "no western culture places such potent, challenging and ubiquitous role models before the eyes of its daughters."\textsuperscript{13}

The ideal role models are placed before Indian women and they become sad victims of the steamrolling of stereotyping by the callous system. Thus the role enactment becomes mechanical and the true self gets fragmented. The so-called ideal Indian womanhood is a very powerful instrument used by the establishment in marginalising and suppressing women themselves.

The ideal woman should be chaste, submissive and should implicitly follow the duties of a pativrata. These roles are culturally and traditionally imposed, and in turn, result in negative stereotyping. But the establishment and the role models are so powerful that even the new generation of educated, liberated Indian women find it difficult to effect a radical change. The expectations and the attributes of the existing system actually create an inter-role strain as well as an intra-role strain on women in India. Inter-role strain means the strain in accommodating and adjusting the respective roles of individuals on the basis of their gender. Intra-role strain means the strain that is experienced by an individual in the performance of his or her assigned roles. When these


women with a new consciousness question the rationale of these conflicts and strains, they actually question their own selfhood, which is essentially a part of the nation’s life. In India it is the powerful lobby of men that chains the womenfolk because basically in the case of men stereotyping is marked by unlimited freedom.

As an illustration of these dual strains the case of Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, Maya in *Cry the Peacock* and Bim in *Clearlight Of Day*, may be analysed. Desai through Sita depicts the estrangement of those Indian women from family and society due to psychological oppression. They suffer the loss or impairment of identity as the socio-political and familial framework forces them to perform certain roles for maintaining peace and harmony. The gain of the establishment is the loss of the Indian woman. She loses the freedom to choose, and this causes dual strains, within the self and with otherselves. The estrangement with one’s own self causes estrangement with family, society and one’s own space according to Desai. Sita typifies such kind of an estranged woman. She comes to Manori searching for her roots. She feels “she had come on a pilgrimage to beg for the miracle of keeping her baby unborn.” She hopes for this highly improbable possibility to happen. Her husband Raman calls her a mad person. The lack of understanding between the wife and the husband forces Sita to seek refuge in this island, Manori, where she grew up. Sita is convinced that she cannot and should not bring her child to this chaotic world where there is no understanding, where we have violence, hatred and exploitation.

She loses her “control” when she becomes pregnant for the fifth time. She is forty and her three older children, feel ashamed of their mother’s plight. Her “control” snaps when her husband too fails to understand her dilemma. She feels that she should break through the facade of the ideal wife-cum-mother. She shocks Raman who represents

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a typical Indian patriarch by saying “children only mean anxiety, concern and pessimism, not happiness. What other women call happiness is just sentimentality.”

Desai thus punctures the existing concept of motherhood and its glorification in Indian society. The first and foremost duty of a woman is to provide children for the sake of continuing the family. The majority are not given a choice in the matter of having children and it becomes an inviolable part of their duty.

There is always a powerful stigma attached to not having children and remaining unmarried. A childless family is an incomplete family as the existing image glorifies motherhood. Apart from this, the whole responsibility of nurturing and bringing up children is completely thrust on women. Desai places a powerful question before us through Sita: whether this sacrifice, this living for others at the cost of one's freedom, and loss of self respect are superior to all other activities. We feel that: "such glorification is like the sugar-coating on bitter quinine, and women for generations have fallen for this bit of sugar and accepted a role that has confined, suffocated and immobilized them."

They feel incapacitated as they are forced to “control” their natural instincts, fine sensibilities for the sake of family and society. To Indian women, self-control at any cost is an accomplishment. But at times this causes neuroses, character disorder and loss of identity. Too much of control or restriction of the natural impulses leads to inner conflicts. These conflicts create maladjustment, discontent, loneliness and marital discord. Yet the marginal fact remains that out of these negative results of “control” emerges a by-product which we call stability, on which is placed a high premium in the conformist Indian Society.

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Desai in her first novel *Cry, the Peacock* depicts very powerfully the conflicts in the mind of an average Indian woman, when she is forced to perform the roles that are given to her by patriarchy and tradition. The inter-role strain and the intra-role strain experienced by Maya, the heroine in the novel, *Cry, the Peacock* exemplifies the agony of an average Indian woman who has the power of thinking for herself. The role strains created by stereotyping are depicted in a subtle, but intense manner, through Maya's interactions with her empirical world. She feels suffocated in a world that prevents her from self-realization and fulfillment by forcing her to perform the duties of a daughter and wife faithfully. It is the fact that “... she forsakes her freedom and lets others make of her a stunted, although beautiful bonsai tree..."\(^\text{17}\) that subverts her sanity.

Desai uncovers the intense psychological strife produced by the stereotyping of roles. Maya’s relationship with her father, husband, brother, and her interactions with other characters in the novel in the social milieu unfolds stereotyping of Indian women at various levels. From the beginning till the end the novel is replete with discourses and incidents which highlight stereotyping of women in general. Maya the protagonist in the novel idealizes her relationship with her father. But this is disrupted by her brother Arjuna’s letter. To her horror Maya realises her father is also responsible for her sense of rootlessness and lack of self will. Maya’s father extols the virtue of acceptance and tries hard to convince Maya that one has to accept everything meekly to experience wholeness. The very idea is revolting to her, but she, unlike her brother Arjuna, rebels against this not externally but internally.

Her sense of psychological deprivation becomes more intense when she gets married to Gautama who valorizes detachment and control of one’s senses. According

to him "He, who, controlling the senses of mind, follows without attachment the path of action, with his organs of action he is esteemed."\(^1\) Gautama’s lack of understanding and detachment give rise to Maya’s exacerbated sensitivity and she sums up her life thus: "It was a desert, without an oasis and I was tired of pursuing mirages."\(^1\) It is this sense of rootlessness, lack of understanding that shatters the self-worth of Maya in *Cry, the Peacock*. She becomes neurotic. "Most neuroses involve along with other complex determinants, ungratified wishes for safety for belongingness and identification for close relationships."\(^2\) Maya with her intense sensibility and sensitivity finds it difficult to involve Gautama the detached, the controlled philosopher, in her matters, in her needs and cares, as he finds it tiresome.

Desai in this novel also highlights the stereotyped attitude of people having only girls. Mrs. Lal who is pregnant for the fifth time scandalizes Maya. The orange spotted lady’s sympathetic remarks about Mrs. Lal having four daughters shows the stereotyped attitude in society. The prevailing attitude is that the birth of a girlchild is a burden to the parents. So powerful is this stereotyped attitude that it clouds the rational and sensible views of women in general. What surprises us is the fact that inspite of the reform movements and women’s movement in India, the image of Indian woman and her proprieties remain the same. The female tradition that was established centuries ago remains unaffected to a large extent. The new awareness of the middle class tries to pillage this traditional and stereotyped role of women. But the mould will be indissoluble, if they do not have a solid self-image, backed by the realisation of their potentials which will free them from this social and political confinement. They have to achieve a clarity

\(^2\) Ibid., p. 116.

about their own self, which will empower the self in overcoming the potential-narrowness of all self-enclosed historicity and taking a leap into an expanding reality.

Maya's fractured self searches for fulfillment and wholeness. But she is hunted down by the lack of understanding and loneliness. Her bitterness arises mainly from the stereotyping that is done by society which is ipso facto patriarchal. "In this world there are vast areas in which he would never permit me, and he could not understand that I could even wish to enter them, as foreign as they were to me." Out of sheer helplessness she embraces silence and secrecy. She feels she is powerless to fight for her freedom and this disrupts her psychic schema. No wonder she is constrained to enter a world of hallucination and fantasy created by her much-deprived self. Maya's maenad shrieks for freedom as she takes the final plunge to meet death is definitely an anti-patriarchal strategy and a result of her extended awareness. According to Allen Wheelis "the extended awareness is both cause and effect of the loss of identity. It is a cause for the reason that identity is harder to achieve, if renegade motivations have free access to consciousness." Desai convinces us that it is the typed picture of woman as "home maker" and "traditions bearer" that impedes the progress of the female self. She is unable to renounce these roles supplied by tradition and culture and favour a role that gives wholeness to her true self and a firm sense of identity. "A firm sense of identity provides, both a compass to determine one's course in life and ballast to keep one steady. So equipped and provisioned one can safely ignore much of the buffeting." It is this individuality, new emerging consciousness that accentuates the orientation of Desai's female characters. According to Usha Pathania, "Desai thus stresses the individuals

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23 Ibid., p. 21.
and individuality. In her novels the protagonists desire and strive for a more authentic way of life than the ones offered to them."\(^{24}\) Maya’s tragedy is not an isolated incident, perhaps the common heritage of most Indian females who stress and strive for individuality which is the very antithesis of straightjacket stereotyping.

**5.3 The Price they Pay**

Another fictional case study of stereotyping has been made by Desai. Bim in *Clear Light of Day* displays a high level of autonomy. She protests strongly, at times tacitly, when her family tries to affix predetermined meanings to her behaviour. Dr. Biswas who attends on Raja (Bim’s brother) and Mira Masi gets attracted to Bim. He takes Bim home to introduce her to his mother. The mother extols the virtues of her son and Bim gets annoyed. Bim is not at all impressed by the stereotyped relationship between the mother and the son marked by the former’s possessiveness. She tries to opt out of this relationship. Her self-control snaps when Raja asks her, whether she has been approved by Dr. Biswas’s mother as her future daughter-in-law. Bim’s aversion and contempt for the stereotyped beliefs and customs in the family and society itself are self-defining. It is her realisation that “one is not born but rather becomes a woman”\(^{25}\) that makes her different from others. It is this consciousness that makes her different from her sister Tara, who depends on the typified feminine ego ideal of the “suitable girl.” At a very early age, Bim renounces this “ideal” which is antithetical to the establishment of her autonomy, as a human person entitled to the right of choices. She tells her sister reaffirming her decision. “I can think of hundreds of things to do instead. I won’t marry. I shall work — I shall do things, I shall earn my own living — and look after Mira Masi.

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baba and — and be independent.” 26 She wants to free herself from the marital cocoon in which women have limited space. Remarks made by Bakul about Bim also suggest implicitly that “she did not find it. She made it . . . she made what she wanted.” 27

The crucial question at the moment is why she is different from others, why she cannot conform, why she rebels, why she wants to retain her identity. The answer could be found in the psychology. Children’s sense of gender is greatly influenced by the parents. “Brauch and Barnett (1975) have found that many early differences between boys and girls reflect the treatment of the infant or small child as girl or boy. They show that girls are influenced away from autonomy and success, especially in a claustrophobic culture as that of India. Girls also identify with the mother, who is perceived by both boys and girls as being generally weaker than the father.” 28

To find the answer to the question why gender based stereotyping of roles exist in society, we have to delve deep into the psychology of womanhood. The examination of psycho-social aspect of stereotyping questions the theory of Freud that biological aspects of women determine their essential feminine qualities.

The intensive studies in psychology throw light on how social roles are “created” for women and how they are prepared for these roles. They prove that feminine qualities “. . . are not inevitable consequences of women’s biology.” 29 The role that she plays demands certain kinds of work and qualities. These qualities are indoctrinated in her even as an infant using cultural and social conventions, behaviour patterns and allied

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27 Ibid., p. 158.
norms of conduct. Nancy Chodorow, Adrienne Rich, Nancy Friday and others contribute to the theory that the so-called femininity is constructed and sustained by patriarchal culture and society. They argue that “... a girl’s personality, her psychology takes shape through her relationship with her mother.” The studies show that the mother’s personality and interaction with the child are very important factors in constructing its personality. “She is the anchor, the mediator for the baby’s experiences.” The mother’s image is powerfully imprinted in the psyche of the child and it controls much of its future behaviour this conditioning results in the formation of feminineness at subliminal levels. Girls unlike boys are encouraged to retain the image of the mothers. They become an extension of the mother herself in due course of time.

The girl emulates her role model consciously and unconsciously. Lesser participation of the father in the domestic life again contributes to a greater intimacy between the mother and her. In the case of boys the mother insulates them against acquiring her (feminine) qualities from the very beginning, whereas the daughter is encouraged to eschew her personality and to emulate the ideal mother image. Thus from the very beginning while the male repudiates the qualities of the mother, the female conforms to the existing image of the mother. Thus a girl is deprived of realising her true self. So if she has to establish her identity she has to renounce this stereotyped role model. The main thing about gender is that it is transmitted very powerfully through individuals who actively, albeit unconsciously, shape the child’s identity in accordance with the culture of their country.

It may be remembered now that Evelyn Fox Keller in her pioneering article of

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30 Ibid., p. 9.
31 Ibid., p. 15.
1978, "Gender and Science" supports Nancy Chodorow's theory of male and female personality structures. According to them gender roles have not given individuals any freedom. They have always created conflicts in the minds of males and females. These have also given rise to the fragmentation of the self and have resulted in gender dilemma. The gender conservatives feel that the recasting of roles of the females will endanger the stability of the family. The undue importance that is given to the stereotyped images distorts the natural unfolding of the self. This distortion of self-image is more in the case of women. It is mainly due to their negative socialization process. The Indian women especially have found it difficult to deviate from stereotyped feminine behaviour. The ruling element is of course a very damaging negative feeling which can be death-dealing in its impact, namely fear — the fear of society, fear of isolation in family and fear of not getting acceptance. In order to attain autonomy and a proper self image women may have to get rid of their multi-pronged fears.

Bim in Clear Light of Day is to a certain extent free from the so-called fears. So she never strives for the stereotyped image. The parental indifference and depressive atmosphere of the house make Bim a totally different woman. She also frees herself from mother and exists in a totally different plane. She is not the ideal mother who encourages daughters to become an extension of herself. Empowered by her reading Bim becomes self-willed, self-assertive and self-contained. She successfully maintains her autonomy in shaping her life, belief system, attitudes verbal and nonverbal communications. Bim tries to extricate herself from the filial bonds and bondages that implode her. Even when she is rejected by her family she is not weighed down by sadness.

or sense of loss. It is her powerful self-image that preserves her from disintegration and coercive value systems. She looks at the rejection by the family with a rare equanimity.

"... Tara and Bakul and behind them the Misras, and somewhere in the distance Raja and Benazir — only to torment her and mosquito-like, sip her blood. Now when they were full, they rose in swarms, humming away, turning their backs on her."  

She surfaces into the clear light of the day from the despair created by her family's rejection. She even consoles Baba, her mentally-retarded brother, by saying there is nothing to be afraid. Desai here projects a new self which is "... antithetical to an overcultivated, self-absorbed and feminised culture."  

In *Voices in the City* Amala and Monisha feel that their mother Otima is different. She is never the good wife or timid wife who meekly submits to the demands of the patriarch. Her husband constantly derides her and in retaliation she ignores him psychologically. He is always provocative and she distances herself from him. She never indulges her children emotionally. In her letter she claims that she loves them. But she never exerts her control over her children. The words of Nirode confirm the Chodorovian concept that the image of the mother is embedded psychically in each individual. He says "I see now that she is everything we have been fighting against, you and Monisha and I. She is also everything we have fought for. She is our consciousness and our unconsciousness, she is all that is manifest and all that is not manifest."  

### 5.4 Deprived of...

Sita in *Where shall We Go This Summer* is renounced by her mother in a mysterious way for reasons best known to the latter. Sita feels that "... she came into this  

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world motherless and the world was crowded enough so." 36 The question why her mother deserted the husband and the three children vandalizes her. No wonder she ends up with father fixation, even though it is a short reprieve. This sets her thinking as she offers her sympathy shortly though to her father who has been victimized by her mother’s actions. Secondly she has no alternate source of concentration or the semblance of a mental shelter. For these reasons she gets focussed on her father’s personhood.

Sita after her marriage tries to locate her mother who has gone away from home. She keeps on asking herself embarrassing questions about the bizarre behaviour of her mother. But no answers are found forthcoming. The vacuum resulting from this leads to a case of psychological abandonment and deprivation. This situation can be explained in terms of an observation made by two scholars Luise Eichenbaum and Susie Orbach. According to them “...unwittingly mother provides her daughter with her first lesson in emotional deprivation.” 37 This deprivation is replicated by Sita who fails to understand the trauma of her daughter Maneka. The key word here is “unwittingly.” The behaviour patterns that she keeps to may be considered highly personalized psychological reactions to the Bohemian and lecherous life style of her father. Since the reasons are not divulged she suffers all alone in a masochistic manner. Sita unwittingly passes this deprivation on to her daughter Maneka and tragically enough, Maneka feels in a compulsive manner being deprived of the mother’s benevolent protection and caretaking. All this happens at the hands of Sita who receives this psychological bequest “unwittingly.” This replication of Sita’s behaviour modelled on that of the mother may be labelled, with scientific accuracy “automaton conformity” a phrase coined by Erich Fromm. Yet we can’t help going beyond this since the ultimate cause of the situation is the behavioural aberration of Sita’s father.

36 Anita Desai, Where Shall We Go This Summer? (New Delhi : Orient Paperbacks, 1982), p. 84.
who was a Promethean wielding unlimited power owing to the sinful, social structure which distilled the tyranny of a rare kind. Viewed from this perspective Sita’s is a case of veritable victimization in which there is a conspiracy involving the patriarchal structure of society and helplessness of feminine entities. No wonder “Sita had been too incompetent a mother to know how to deal with her trauma, how to give her comfort.” 38 The result is that Maneka feels alienated from her mother. The psychological concept of replay may be observed here as evidenced in the behaviour of Sita. The behaviour indicates the escape route from her sense of frustration, rejection, self-pity and helplessness. She is yet another victim of circumstances, thanks to a male domination which upsets her life style altogether.

The absence of the mother creates a psychological deprivation. This has contributed to inconsistencies in all her relationships. Sita, just as her mother escaped to Benares escapes to the island of Manori; the circle getting completed in a repeat action. Since she has herself experienced the agony of rejection, she takes her son Karan and her daughter Maneka along with her. Yet the inconsistencies may be made clear from the following citations. While she lived with Raman and his family:

the more stolid and still and calm they were the more she thrummed as though frantic with fear that their subhumanity may swamp her. She behaved provocatively — it was there that she started smoking, a thing that had never been done in their household by any woman and even by men only in secret — and began to speak in sudden rushes of emotion, as though flinging darts at their smooth, unscarred faces. 39

38 Anita Desai, Where Shall We Go This Summer? (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1982), p.108.
39 Ibid., p. 48.
Moses, the watchman of Manori contemptuously observes thus: “One day Miriam saw her sitting on the floor, playing with mud. Like a dirty brat. Playing with mud! An old woman like that! Mad.” 40 This deviant behaviour may be analysed psychologically. Unable to handle the present successfully Sita moves back in time, through the process of time. She imagines herself to be a little child enjoying herself playing with mud.

Sita’s inconsistencies result from the process of externalization. According to Karen Horney externalization is the “... tendency to experience internal processes as if they occurred outside oneself and as a result to hold these external factors responsible for one’s difficulties.” 41 Another dominant tendency noted is to run away from the existing situation. Sita is always overtaken by a gnawing sense of despair and emptiness and consequently she devalues herself and even compares herself to a jelly fish.

Maya in Cry, the Peacock suffers like Sita, due to the absence of the mother in her life. She looks to her husband and his family for the missing connections in her life. Her inner sense of unworthiness increases and she loses cathectic flexibility, the ability to withdraw emotionally from roles and people. Her husband Gautama cannot help her through and fails to provides her an intimate empathetic understanding. This results in her masochism and depression. Maya feels that she lives in a persecutory world and kills her persecutor — her husband — Gautama. These persecutory feelings stem from over-dependence, lack of individuation, a profound belief that something is missing in her life and the internalized abuse of early childhood. Madhusudan Prasad observes thus: “Maya’s neurosis also denotes a collective neurosis which tries to shatter the very identity of woman in our contemporary society dominated by man in which woman longing

40 Ibid., p. 157.
for love is driven mad or compelled to commit suicide.”  

Anita Desai here highlights the human problem through Maya. Maya represents the predicament of ordinary mortals. We are not free to choose alternatives that come our way. This means consciously sacrificing certain potentialities for the sake of family and society. The application of moral rules in society creates a dichotomy in the individual between manifest and hidden traits, human proclivities and goals. This results in the strong feelings of alienation of the individual and the consequent death wish behaviour of Maya more or less resembles Dimple Sen Gupta in Bharathi Mukherjee’s *Wife*. Dimple, like Maya, kills her husband. Here we can see a disgruntled and rebellious self which moves towards neurosis. Dimple, like Maya, feels alienated from her husband and family. She seeks fulfillment and even goes to the extent of committing adultery. But the feeling of guilt fragments her self completely. In a neurotically charged atmosphere she commits the murder like Sita and feels relieved. Mukherjee describes the murder thus: “She touched the mole very lightly and let her fingers draw a delectable spot, then she brought her right hand up with the knife, stabbed the magical circle once, twice, seven times, each time a little harder.” But Mukherjee unlike Desai leaves the situation unresolved. Her heroine Dimple unlike Sita remains calm after the murder. Both the novelists very powerfully convey the fact that the neurotic conflicts in women arise due to continual oppression, physical as well as mental.

Nanda Kaul (*Fire on the Mountain*) and Mira Masi (*Clear Light of Day*) are victims of stereotyping in two different ways. Nanda Kaul, even though the reasons are of a different kind, unlike Mira Masi, is conscious of her exploitation and marginalized existence. Mira Masi, on the contrary, suppresses and internalizes all her disappointments.

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and fears. Nanda Kaul regrets accepting the exploitation and feels that this has left her barren and empty like Carignano, the place where she lives. Mira Masi faces “the empty nest syndrome.” When Bim, Tara and Raja become independent she loses her sense of belonging. This sense of belonging plays an important part in shaping one’s identity since it is one of the primary emotional needs of all human beings. Both experience emotional barrenness that results from throttling of feelings.

In the case of Mira Masi the familial framework is the most important milieu. Her victimized position distances her completely from other important spheres of activity. Nanda Kaul is also a victim of the narrow ranges of value systems. This limits the interaction of the individual, and causes isolation, powerlessness and alienation. She is rejected by her husband and children and lives all alone in Carignano. It is to keep up the facade of the ideal family. When Nanda Kaul uses “distance-machinery” to protect her self-esteem, Meera Masi is inexorably driven by the need to get acceptance and approval of her family. It is her compliance that leads to her victimization in the family. She becomes a mute spectator. The subjectivity of these women convinces us that they are also enslaved by the existing stereotyped concepts of gender and role-performance. Patriarchy has fixed rules and regulations that women have to observe in the so-called familial framework. In this painfully real world “created” for women, the traditional gender-based role performance disrupts their personal autonomy and causes identity crisis.

To a large extent the gender roles become tools of social control and oppression. Desai highlights the fact through Mira Masi in Clear Light of Day. She becomes a widow at a very early age. Society holds her responsible for her husband’s death. The infernal effects of stereotyping, labelling that is done in society, is encapsulated thus: “She was turned out. Another household could find some use for her cracked pot, torn
rag, picked bone", 44 as in the case of many other widows.

Mira Masi loses her sanity due to her repressed fears. Life has been a long series of "denials" for her. The dichotomy in her life is that she is denied everything, but she never denies anyone anything. It is not a voluntary action on her part. Her economic dependence never gives her any option in life. It becomes impossible for her to decide or deny. Like her stereotyped counterparts, she always tries to please others and neglects her own needs and never achieves autonomy. The manic fear that envelops her is the fear of disintegration. The well in which the cow gets drowned is symbolic of her unknown fears. She feels that "it is the navel of the world . . . secret and hidden in the thick folds of grass from which they all emerged and to which they must return; crawling on their hands and knees." 45

Anita Desai depicts the contradictory nature of the roles of women in social and familial framework. The bonds created by society are absolutised by gender-based stereotyping. It has contributed to the wide chasm that exists between man and woman. We are drawn to the gilded cage of stereotyping by the rules of fixity. The words of Monisha in Voices in the City reveal the psychological roots of stereotyping in Indian society; "Lives spent in waiting for nothing, waiting on men self-centred and indifferent and hungry and demanding and critical, waiting for death and dying misunderstood always behind the bars, those terrifying black bars that shut us in, in the old houses, in the old city." 46 The terrifying black bars that shut women of India are patriarchy and its acquisitive nature. Even the self-image of Indian women is sealed and fixed by the so-called socio-political imperatives that restrict their mobility and action.

46 Ibid., P. 120.
The enslavement of women of India continues to be a painful phenomenon even at this juncture of history. The scuttling of the Women’s Reservation Bill itself confirms the fact that we are imprisoned inside the fortress of patriarchy. Syeda Saiyidain Hameed writes about this issue thus: “... the women’s bill shattered and sundered lay on the floor, reminder of how women have traditionally been battered and fractured to some patriarchal design.”

A proper concept of the self will definitely empower women to fight against the discrimination, and will definitely prevent them from falling into the traps set by patriarchal forces. The compelling nature of the so-called Establishment disallows the corrosion of socio-cultural boundaries which historically separate men and women. These boundaries cement the social bonds and bondages which marginalize women. The strength and clarity of women’s identity is very vital in breaking these boundaries. A collective action will be feasible only if men and women work together, with a new understanding. The negative binding effects of stereotyping can be minimized by achieving autonomy of the self which strengthens identity.

Identity of Indian woman depends upon her self-concept and “her self-concept is framed in the context of her roles. She is not a person if she is stripped of her roles.” It is the nature of roles that should change. The roles should have more freedom and flexibility so that a better and healthier self-concept would emerge from this crucible of interactions and innovations.

The process can be explained with the help of two concepts from psychology such as Assimilation and Accommodation. The Assimilation and Accommodation of...

new beliefs and values will increase the flexibility of roles. The processes of Assimilation and Accommodation are functional invariants of intelligent behaviour. The solidarity and cohesiveness of the self depends upon the assimilation of external elements in to the evolving self or structures of organism. But this alone is not enough. The capacity of the self to adjust to a particular environment is also a very important factor. These two processes should take place simultaneously and play a crucial role in image building. The dominant perspective holds that in women the processes of Assimilation and Accommodation are not properly balanced and this distorts the self-image of Indian women which causes the imbalance is the powerful “idealized image” of Indian women. The so-called idealized image prevents her from realizing and accepting the fact that “to be oneself is enough.” When an individual is pulled by two diametrically opposite images, it creates the so-called imbalance in the processes assimilation and accommodation. Karen Horney, observes thus: “The idealized image is a decided hindrance to growth, because it either denies shortcomings or merely condemns them.”

So, the most important imperative is that the Indian woman should relinquish the self-stultifying and the stereotyped image and, in its stead create a realistic and realizable self-image, new and refreshingly rewarding, without the negative back load as found in the present. This new concept of the self will convince the Indian women of the validity of an introspective question: “... what other significance can our existence have than to be ourselves fully and completely.”

This will enable the Indian woman to: “... chase away the army of darkness.”

50 Ibid., p. 183.
The new self-image will empower her and she will definitely realize it:

The light is in you

The light is in you

Be tomorrow's sun.\textsuperscript{52}

\textsuperscript{52}Ibid., p. 96.