CHAPTER - III

MAN - WOMAN RELATIONSHIP
Anita Desai is an individualistic novelist. In her vigorously outspoken manner, she has tackled in her novels certain excruciating problems in a typically unconventional but realistic manner. She does not have any patience for the ritualistic hypocrisy of the institution of marriage, that is, increasingly taking the shape of the dead Albatross around the necks of self-respecting women. The difference between make-belief and the modern world of unhappy conjugal life is so conspicuous, and its appreciation demands heavy price from the married woman who wishes to preserve the semblance of social prestige.

Anita Desai draws our attention to the annihilations of self that marriage involves for a female. This is "a theme subsequently found in her novels". Almost all of Desai's novels deal with the problems of the modern woman accruing from maladjustment in marriage. In most of her novels she introduces marital disharmony as the central theme. Since she has an independent approach to women's problems in Indian society, Desai does not accept social traditions emphasized through religious platitudes. Nor does she believe that a woman's body and soul are property of a male-dominated family.

Desai has a definite concept of a happy conjugal life. Some of her young, immature, romantic

heroines have their own idea of a blissful conjugal life, which gets never realised and remains only a rainbow dream. The plight of Sarla of In Custody is a case in point. The concept of marriage which is related to a delicate union of two different minds, has not been properly realised in most Indian families. Woman's individual identity has not been positively and open-mindedly recognised. Woman has never been accepted as a full human being, and is taken for granted on a number of fronts. This casual attitude causes her consistent suffering and misery. The institution of marriage has been taken up, time and again, as one of the recurrent subjects in Desai's fiction especially the issue pertaining to unsuccessful marriages or incompatible marital partnerships.

As marriage is a union of two different minds, some adjustments are essential to be made. But these adjustments should naturally come from both the sides—the husband and the wife. Man's relations with woman, however, are most often like the bond existing between a master and a salve.2 Although woman is absolutely essential to man because "it is in seeking to be made whole through her that man hopes to attain self-realization."3 yet the treatment accorded to her sometimes is not human.


All the marriages in Anita Desai's novels are conducted, more or less, like business transactions. A marriageable daughter is handed over to the male partner without considering the delicacy of her mind and feelings. She has to fulfill responsibilities towards the parents or the relations of her husband and their demands of different kinds. Maya's marriage with Gautama, for example, is settled through her father's friendship with him. Anita Desai throws significant light on marital discords and hypocrisy, faithlessness and soul-destroying, grinding process of compromise which accompany it. In most of her novels, we encounter traumatic experiences of married women. Each novel, maintaining the basic features of marital discord, presents different aspects of the problem, to which Desai gives a new dimension and vision.

II

Cry, the Peacock presents Maya's hypersensitive and highly disturbed state of mind because of her tenuous relationship with her husband, Gautama. The novel is about Maya's cries for love and understanding in her loveless marriage. The peacock's cry is symbolic of Maya's own agonized cry for love. Desai, as said earlier has very effectively named her main characters as Maya and Gautama. Maya is illusion and Gautama is knowledge. So, symbolically, it is the story of illusion versus reality or attachment versus non-attachment.

4 Anita Desai, Cry the Peacock (New Delhi: Orient Paperback, 1980).
Maya is forced to differentiate between Gautama, her husband, and Toto, her pet dog, and finds Toto to be a better friend. Everything seems blurred to her when Toto dies. She "crept into a corner of the bed, crouched there, thinking that it was perhaps because of Gautama not understanding" (p.8).

Maya wants to live passionately like pracocks who tear each other before loving. She is all for a living contact or relationship and communion with Gautama. But, unfortunately, her involvement is pitted against his philosophy of detachment. At times Maya seeks solace in behaving like a child, wanting Gautama to be her guardian and protector: "I took his arm, even though I knew he detested me to do so. He tolerated my hold for a moment... then moved away, pretending to gesture to the gardener" (p.11). While Gautama is at his work, Maya has to be alone in the house all day. When they get some time in the evening, "As always, it created in me a sensation, a much loved, long courted sensation, of walking through a dark and wet night with somebody beside me..."(p.14).

Frustrated, after Toto's death, Maya wants to know the facts about birth and death. She is of the opinion that "burial and cremation are facts" but Gautama "shook his head vigorously, in contempt as though he wished to drive me [i.e. Maya] away from his side." He explains to her that only those facts should be mentioned
which "matter", and answered her "in extra irritation". To him, the death of an animal does not matter. Maya cries: "Oh Gautama, pets mightn't mean anything to you, and yet they mean the world to me" (p.16). Maya and Gautama make several attempts at serious conversation but they fail to connect as an unseen barrier and uneasiness prevents effective dialogue between them. What is real to her is shadowy to him and what are facts and realities to him are of no interest to her. Distance with coldness in their relationship is hard for Maya to bear. She needs expression badly because it not only reveals one but also relieves one. Dialogue is necessary in communication, but Gautama does not give his wife a chance to talk and express herself. Consequently, Maya suffocates in the absence of communication.

When Maya is in a mood to discuss things with Gautama, he gets annoyed. After some time he even makes a sudden attack on her, saying: "You have done it once again, Maya. You go chattering like a monkey, and I am annoyed that I have been interrupted in my thinking" (p.16). This humiliation naturally hurts Maya's feelings, because she thinks that care and concern, consolation and sympathy, should come naturally in the husband-wife relationship.

While spending their evenings together, Maya and Gautama do discuss certain topics, but they do not get absorbed in them. In fact, they stay quite aloof from each
other in discussions as in real life. As Maya confides, "And so we strolled up and down the lawn, talking desultorily, not really listening to each other, being intent on our own paths which, however, ran parallel and closely enough for us to briefly brush against each other, now and then, reminding us or, perhaps only myself of the peace that comes from companion life alone, from brother flesh" (p.18).

We see how day after day, Maya craves for Gautama's companionship. But he never pays attention to her. Maya explains: "...for now, when his companionship was a necessity, I required his closest understanding". But she has no idea how she can 'gain' the closest understanding, because, according to her, "We did not even agree on which points, on what grounds this closeness of mind was necessary". Even before she finishes her sentence, Gautama has already started "thinking of something else", shrugging her words off as superfluous, trivial" (p.19).

The marriage of Gautama and Maya is not based on love and understanding. Maya married him because of her father's choice. R.S. Singh has noticed the discordant husband-wife relationship and the loneliness of Maya.5 Maya herself pathetically cries :

"It was discouraging to reflect on how much in our marriage was based upon a nobility forced upon us from outside, and therefore neither

true nor lasting. It was broken repeatedly, and repeatedly the pieces were picked up and put together again, as of a sacred icon with which, out of the pettiest superstition, we could not bear to part (p.40).

But now the respect which Gautama has for her father has vanished. Remembering the days of vacation with her father, Maya asks Gautama if both of them could go on a vacation, to which he answers in a 'cold, astringent tone': "Your father would take you wherever you wanted to go. He can" (p.40). And Maya clearly sees how his tone is changed now while talking about her father. This incident forces Maya to think of the circumstances in which she married Gautama:

... had it not been for the quickening passion with which I met, half-way my father's proposal that I marry this tall, stooped and knowledgeable friend of his, one might have said that our marriage was grounded upon the friendship of the two men, and the mutual respect in which they held each other, rather than upon anything else (p.40).

On certain occasions, Maya feels so lost that she desires her father's company. At these moments she expresses her desire to see her father, saying that "It always helps". But Gautama, shocked and 'puzzled' at her behaviour, simply asks: "Helps what? Whom?" (p.53). After retorts like these, Maya knows she has also to forget about her father.
When Maya is in a loving and caring mood, she wants Gautama to notice it, but "His eyes remained blank of appraisal, of any response" (p.42). Unable to understand her, he says: "I don't even understand what you are working yourself up over. Were you that miserable?" (p.66). Maya notices the ever-widening differences between her attitude and that of Gautama.

Maya regrets her desire to be close to her husband because she knows it is of no use and she can only feel sorry for herself: "In a sudden, impulsive longing to be with him, be close to him, I leapt up... I hesitated, wishing to summon him to me yet knowing he could never join me. It was of no use. After I sighed and, once more, was sad" (p.93). Gautama, on the contrary, treats Maya as a child, simply because he thinks that she has no knowledge of business, administration, and politics. Maya knows that "In his world there were vast areas in which he would never permit me... On his part, understanding was scant, love was meagre. Not to be loved as one does love..." (p.104). Through Maya's consciousness and experiences is unfolded the tragic story of a woman completely misunderstood by her husband, who regards her as little more than an attractive household object.

When Maya sees her face in the mirror she thinks it to be a lovable face, but the fact that Gautama does not love her depresses her. "One might think it a lovable face. But it was not the face that a man like
Gautama could love" (p.105). Maya's married life is juxtaposed with that of Lila and Pom, the self-contented beings representing compromise in life. (p.8), and even they are more contented and happy. Maya knows the fact that there is no bond of love between her and Gautama, which she cannot bear: "Had there been a bond between us, would have felt its pull, I thought of him so deeply. But, of course, there was none. That had been proved to me tonight. There was no bond, no love-hardly any love. And I could not bear to think of that " (p.108).

In an unbearably long and lonely evening for Maya, Gautama, after a party with his friends, asks her why she did not come out, and she answers "You didn't want me". He asks in a made-up surprised tone, "Not want you? Did I say so? Did anyone say so?" and adds, "I merely wondered what you could possibly want of a gathering of elderly men..." To this, all that she could say was: "All I wanted was to be outside-with you, near you"(pp.110-11).

While emphasising the value of non-attachment, Gautama quotes a few lines from the Gita, reminding Maya that it is a sin to be too much involved emotionally. To this, Maya answers: "Oh you know nothing, understand nothing...Nor will you ever understand. You know nothing of me and of how I can love. How I want to love. How it is important to me. But you, ... You have never loved. And you don't love me...". Gautama is not ready for this. But Maya continues her speech: "Oh if you do, if you say you do, it means nothing. Love has no importance for you." (p.112)
Maya asks: "Is there nothing... in you that would be touched ever so slightly, if I told you I live my life for you?" (p.114). This excess of involvement in her and the complete lack of it in Gautama is the basis of the maladjustment that sparks off the fear in Maya. By the end of the novel, she becomes a totally different individual and this transformation takes place through the grinding process of the mindless compromise in her marriage, which, in any case, is doomed to fail. Maya is shocked at the apathy and hatred revealed through other marriage around her. Her mother is clearly absent from her memory; she does not mention any keep-sake or any conversation with her father about her mother. Gautama's parents also lived an unnatural married life, each too busy with his or her vocation to bother about the other. Maya's friend Lila is going through a different agony altogether. Married to a tubercular patient for love, she reacts violently if anyone mocks marriage and takes care of the needs of her dependant husband. Mr. and Mrs. Lal are also examples of hypocrisy. The Sikh wife publicly declares her husband to be charlatan and opportunist, revealing the deep-seated antipathy characterising a maladjusted marriage. Nila, a divorcee, declares: "After ten years with that rabbit I married, I have learnt everything myself" (p.162). Even pampered Pom complains petulantly aganist Kailash who is not ready to have a seperate establishment.
The two worlds of Maya and Gautama are sharply contrasted in the sense that both present the extremities of feminine and masculine principles. Maya is sensitive, imaginative and instinctive whereas Gautama is an optimistic, logical man. As Som Sharma and Kamal Awasthi opine, "psychologically feminine is deeply into feeling and sensation, whereas the masculine is into intuition and thinking". Maya's character illustrates the truth if this statement. Maya is Desai's first lonely woman, and the novel is "Maya's story, the story of her married life with Gautama".

III

In *Voices in the City*, the protagonist, Monisha, is married against her will to a "blind moralist", a "rotund, minuteminded and limited" officer. He quotes authorities like Burke, Wordsworth, Gandhi and Tagore (p.198), the renowned spokesmen of individual liberty, but does not recognize her wife's individuality. In his house, Monisha finds her life hardly better than an imprisonment. After her marriage, her whole being is compressed into "being Jiban's wife"(pp.111-12). This fact cuts her to the core and she reacts against it. Jiban, like other husbands of Desai's novels, is self-centered, indifferent, critical and demanding. Naturally, this attitude results in misunderstanding on either side.

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8 Anita Desai, *Voices in the City* (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1965).
Simply waiting for death and living a life dedicated to nothing is meaningless to Monisha (p.122). Thus *Voices in the City* also is a tragedy of misunderstanding.

Monisha feels suffocated because the kind of love she wants is not available in this world. By love, she does not mean physical passion at all. To her, love is an awake condition of the conscience. She says: "If only love existed that is not binding, that is free of rules, obligations, complicity, and all stirrings of mind or conscience, then but there is no such love. It is not there in my relationship with Jiban, which is filled only by loneliness and a desperate urge to succeed" (p.135).

Amla, Monisha's younger sister is also in an undecided state and gets attracted to an artist who is much older to her. Monisha's mother, staying away from her children, is also lonely and finds her life to be meaningless. In this lonely atmosphere, she gets involved in a relationship with a Major, with whom she tries to forget the sorrows of a lonely widow.

Nirode, Mohisha's brother, dislikes his mother's present action and Monisha understands him perfectly well, but in her own house, no one understands her feelings. Amla once invites Monisha for tea so that they can have some time alone to talk, but Monisha brings Jiban and her niece. Because of Jiban, the sisters have no privacy. "Jiban was as dull as she was, but more prolix" (p.194).
Amla cannot understand why Monisha married Jiban as they both are of such opposite nature. As her aunt tells Amla, Jiban's family is "completely unsuitable to Monisha's tastes and inclinations". But even then their father "decided he was the right man, [and] that it was the right family". This revelation totally shocks Amla and she cries: "Why? ... How unfair, how criminally unfair". But the aunt's explanation was: "I thought so too, but perhaps he thought he was being sensible—that Monisha ought not be encouraged in her morbid inclinations, and that it would be a good thing for her to be settled into such a stolid, unimaginative family as that—that is how your mother excused its happening" (p.198). This unfortunate decision sealed Monish's fate. As Seema Jena points out, "The story of Monisha is similar to that of Maya....Here, too, we have the similar theme of marital discord".9

The novel presents the most absurd picture of married life, through the predicament of the parents of Nirode, Mohisha and Amla. It is, again, a marriage of convenience and both partners started neglecting each other in a few years. The father transformed himself from an easy-going man into a drunkard and dishonourable person and the mother turned into a cold, practical and possessive woman. Amla tells Dharma: "I saw such terrible contempt and resentment in her eyes...when he came to Kalimpong, he never followed her. He used to lie back against his cushions, idle and contented--contented, I think, in his

9 Seema Jena, Voice and Vision of Anita Desai, p.66.
malice" (p.207).

Their mother, now a widow, lives alone in Kalimpong by choice, though she writes letters to her children. She is friendly with a Major who also lives in Kalimpong. In one of his dreams, Nirode, "saw his mother exchanging sensual smiles with the retired Major in the presence of her husband" (p.28). The very mention of the Major by his mother is disgusting to Nirode. He thinks that his mother treated his father and Major differently. Not that she does not miss the old times, but cannot help behaving like that. She writes to Nirode: "I was so crazy as to persuade Major Chandha to play a game of Monopoly with me last night, and in no time we were reduced to a pair of squabbling children..." (p.60). Nobody can say her behaviour is not childish. Sonny's father is very lively and seems to have been a romantic person in his youth. Nirode thinks that his own father "must have been real enough at one time—very real in all that raw vulgarity". But Nirode hates "the physicalness of the loves of that kind of men...". Nirode's father was like that before marriage, but his mother tamed him and "he was brought up to it". At that time, she was terribly keen on being a lady and an intellectual. She's changed now, and is as vulgar "as father was" (p.81). Nirode connects Sonny's father's 'physicalness' to his mother's actions now.

Amla and Nirode are discussing 'love'. Nirode hates the word and does not believe in it because of his
mother's attachment to the Major. He says: "Ask her about the love that made her swallow father whole, like a cobra swallows a rat, petrified rat ... Ask her about the love that makes her perch on her mountain top, waiting so patiently and surely for retirement and tedium and the last wormy twisting of lust to send Major Chadha--Chadha!—into her open arms" (p.190) But the question remains as it was as to why is Nirode's mother so friendly and free with the Major. From her letters it seems that they only shared a few hours of some evening together. But what does Major Chadha give to his mother that his father could not? It is probably the comfort of happily sharing each other's thoughts, talking on 'simple subjects' and 'playing a few games' and walking together.

Amla argues with Nirode, saying that he never tries to understand their mother. She asks: "What do you know of mother? Or her relationship with father? What do you know of Major Chadha?" Nirode sits back with a cold, stiffened distaste on her emotional outburst and replies:

I know of their little monopoly and mahjong games, she wrote herself. I can see them, the Major with bushes of hair bristling in his ears, bushes of hair tackling inside his nose, and his red pop eyes trying to nudge the sari off her shoulder. I can see her leaning across to give him a good look into her blouse, saying "Ah-ha, I have you now," the way she does. Don't imagine that isn't also an aspect of love of which you, you human beings, claim to know so much (p.191).
Thus he blurs out his bitterness to Amla. Amla tells him that it is his depravity that makes him regard love as, "something ugly and degenerate" (pp. 190-91). Even then, Nirode is not ready to hear anything pleasant about his mother.

The old Aunt Lila thinks about the relationship of men and women. In her conversation with Amla she says:

"Lease men to run that part of life, I always say. I used to say it to your mother..." and she'd laugh and say, "Men? But what do they know of the matters of the heart?" They know nothing of course, inadequate at that as at everything else, but they like to imagine they run everything, so women ought to just go on and let them imagine it while they get on with the work" (p.199).

Thus it is clear that Aunt Lila hates men, particularly her self-satisfied husband. Rita has gone through a short-lived marriage. Sonny's two sisters, Lila and Rina, present pathetic spectacles: "Lila had married for a title and lived now in penury, in a crumbling house in which she took in paying guests who drank, or wrote her insulting letters. Rina had married for money... and it was her husband who drank and wrote scandalous notes to other women" (p.84). Jit Nair and Sarla are also continuously threatened by mal-adjustment based on intense distrust for each other. For Mr. Basu, Mrs. Basu is an attractive toy. Arun's wife, a nurse has nothing in common with him. Dharma also admits that married relationships are never
straightforward or made to order. Thus marriages are shown by the novelist to be ridiculous and absurd. Marriages, which are believed by most people to have been made in heaven, are no guarantee for mutual happiness and confidence.

IV

Bye-Bye, Blackbird\textsuperscript{10} presents an unmatched relationship of an Indian man and a foreigner. Sarah, even after trying her best, cannot belong to either of the two worlds—hers and her husband's. It is her "destiny to hang between the two worlds, Indian and European, and be torn by their conflicting loyalties"\textsuperscript{11}. Sarah's suffering is aggravated on account of her husband's lack of understanding, and she seems to be under the 'spell of rootlessness'. It is the inherent conflict and divergence in their situations that constitutes the basis of maladjustment in their married life. By marrying an Indian, Sarah feels cut off from her own country and people.

In this novel, Desai has once again drawn our attention to the destruction or reduction of self that marriage involves for a female—a theme which is subsequently found in her other novels too. Sarah has real love and understanding for Adit, which in turn he lacks. He is too preoccupied with himself to care for her thoughts or feelings. In Sarah "there is the real split, a real dilemma, a real suffering, but she triumphs over all

\textsuperscript{10} Anita Desai, \textit{Bye Bye, Blackbird} (New Delhi Orient Paperbacks, 1985).

these". She knows his weak points and is sure that her smallest refusal will shatter him, and she agrees to do whatever he likes. She does not want arguments and chaos to tell upon her married life and would sacrifice all her comforts to preserve it. So with all her 'hesitation and anxiety', she accompanies Adit to India.

Sarah, in the back of her mind, is trying to break all the relations she has with her English mores. She even tries to forget the memories of her childhood. When Adit reminds her of her old toys, she gets upset but does not want to be sentimental. Adit picks up one of her old toys and asks her lovingly if she played with it, to which she gets furious and asks him to "throw" it away. When Adit tries to convince her that it was "charming" of her mother to have kept her old toys as keepsakes, she says sharply: "Adit, stop being so sentimental" (p.151).

One night Adit and Sarah plan to go out to a big hotel to celebrate. Sarah takes out her favourite dress to wear, but Adit asks her to wear a sari instead. To this, Sarah protests by saying that the rain will ruin the sari. Adit gets very angry at this attitude. Adit expresses his irritation for Sarah: "Why should you?" he says "Don't Indian women wear saris in the rain?" He chooses for her a sari that his sisters had once sent her

12 Seema Jena, Voice and Vision of Anita Desai, p.70.
and refuses to listen to her protests or recognise the embarrassment in her tone. After this Adit forces her to wear a gold necklace also, although Sarah does not want to dress up so heavily, because then she would feel like a Christmas tree. He snapped the clasp shut and flares up in anger:

"You feel like a Christmas tree! I suppose all Indian women look like Christmas trees to you or perhaps like clowns, because they wear saris and jewellery. You-you-English people and your xenophobia! You'll never accept anything but your own drab, dingy standards and your own dull, boring ways. Anything else looks clownish to you, laughable."

"I didn't say that — any of that", Sarah interrupted; her pallor altered to a flush. "I never thought that. You imagine these things yourself and try and put them in my mouth".

"Oh yes, it was I who said you look like a Christmas tree, wasn't it? It was I who laughed because for once you are dressed the way a woman should dress, with a bit of glamour and romance, instead of that bloody mackintosh you wear day in and day out..."(p.193).

When Adit plans to go back to India, his state of mind is very unpredictable. He gets very angry for the smallest reasons. Sarah herself outlines her assessment of the problem:

There was no going against Adit in any matter whatsoever these days. She could not tell what effect the smallest refusal or contradiction might have on him—he might start beating his chest and complaining of being misunderstood,
he might shut himself up and weep... anything was possible in his highly-strung and dramatic condition. She dreaded such a reaction. Rather she would sacrifice anything, anything at all, in order to maintain, however superficially, a semblance of order and discipline in her house, in her relationship with him. His whole personality seemed to her to have cracked apart into an unbearable number of disjointed pieces, rattling together noisily and disharmoniously. If she allowed this chaos to reflect upon their marriage, she knew its fragments would not remain jangling together but would scatter, drift and crumble. So, she had clutched the mouthpiece of the Head's telephone and mumbled "Yes, yes, all right" and swallowed a few aspirins to still her headache. [But] The nausea remained (p.200).

Sarah now cannot read his mind. When Adit says one day "It's over", she gets frightened and asks: "You mean-? Our marriage?" to which Adit replies: "No - England! England!" (p.203). After making up his mind to go back to India, Adit does not know if Sarah wants to go with him or not. He does not care to know her wishes and expectations from life. He is uncertain when he asks her:

"I must go. You will come?"

"She was crying, he saw now, for convulsions shook her shoulders and, behind her hair, he saw her face as red and contorted as a child's. He shook her knee again, impatient for her answer.

"You won't, Sarah ?"

"Oh I will", she cried, "of course I will. I must" (p.204).
Just as Maya loves her dog Toto, Sarah is very attached to her cat, Bruce. She fears to leave him back in London. "Sarah had first asked Adit, indirectly and hesitantly, whether she might take Bruce with her and he had replied, directly and unhesitantly, that she might not" (p.209).

Before Adit and Sarah are ready to leave for India, their Indian friends come to visit them. When the topic starts, they joke about having servants in India and say that Sarah will not have to work much in India. To this, Adit gets angry and does not want Sarah to think that she will lead a luxurious life in India. "Don't you go imagining a life of luxury, Sarah, he said so sternly, with such a worried look that Sarah laughed and that annoyed him" (p.213).

In foreign countries, the expectant mother mostly receives much attention and care, which Adit can not give Sarah. Although they have been in London for quite some time, Adit has not changed his mentality. Adit himself is surprised sometimes to find how little he thinks of it. He is no worshipper of the pregnant female and is aroused to no special tenderness by Sarah's "condition". Only occasionally would he get up and lift a heavy box or shift a piece of furniture for her, but more often than not it does not occur to him that she might need his help (p.213).

When Sarah tells Adit about the offer of her
boss, Miss Morris, he immediately takes it as a negative answer from Sarah—an excuse for not going to India.

"I knew it—I knew it would happen. It had to, I ought to have been prepared".

"Adit stop groaning What do you mean?" Emma interrupted, shocked by his behaviour which had exploded the tender mauve light of feminine brooding.

"She will never come with me", Adit shouted, pointing at Sarah. "She's got cold feet. She's seen to it that I've burnt my boats and am ready to go, then she breaks it to me. Always, gently, always quietly. But I knew it all long. She hasn't the courage, she's backing out".

"I think you are talking more foolishly than I have ever heard anyone speak in my whole life", Emma snapped (p.215).

Later on, Sarah gets very annoyed because of her husband's weak attitude. She keeps trying her best to be strong in her will and answers but her husband does not give her moral support. A mention may also be made to incompatible relationship of Sarah's mother and father. Her mother has a very strong personality. She is a commanding woman who goes by rules and regulations whereas her father is a simple easy-going person. Sarah says to herself: "Sometimes I think he doesn't hear a word Mummy says anymore" (p.142). When Sarah's father comes to the house in the evening, after working in the garden, not worried about the soil on him, her mother goes into a frenzy of irritation.
As she directed him to the sink, handed him a bar of yellow washing soap and scrubbling brushes, all the while standing at a safe distance from him, she scolded him in tones that would lead anyone not present in the room to think she was speaking to an unusually naughty and tiresome dog. He never answered. He had acquired the silence of a piece of log submerged in a water meadow, of a scarecrow in a cornfield (p.144).

Because Sarah's mother is a well-known social worker and very popular in society, sometimes she treats her husband even in public in this manner.

On Sundays, when she liked to play the ruling gentry of the village by gracing with her presence, ...she felt the need of a Squire on whose arm she could make her appearance in petal hat and pearls and, in preparation for this theatrical weekly occasion, she sternly supervised his bath on Saturday night and had him dress "decently for once", then tried to ignore him ....If the vicar made the foolish mistake of enquiring after his health as they filed out of church, she hastily replied for him, ...Otherwise he never showed himself to the village and not many visitors came to the house, so her attitude to him was ...one of embarrassment than of irritation and abuse (p.145).

Even in front of her daughter and son-in-law Mrs. Roscommon James looks down upon her husband.
Sarah knows of the bitter relations of her mother and father. She can hear her father's 'horrendous snores, snorts, whistles and grunts' while his wife "jabbed him in the ribs with an elbow and hissed, "Tommy! For heaven's sake, Tommy!" (p.151).

Even the most nondescript married couples are doomed to live a loveless life. Mr. Miller for example, opposes his wife and supports Adit, Mrs. Gummidge growls at her husband each morning, Christie Langford mentions a friend seeking divorce, and she herself marries for money. Adit's comment that "the married couples in India are not in parks, they are at home, quarreling" (p.74), sums up any impartial observer's view about the marital discords besetting the family life.

In an interview, Desai has said about *Bye-Bye Backbird* "...that's one of the books I'd like to disown".13 If the writer herself is not satisfied and convinced, the reader has every reason to feel the same. However, we should be happy to note that the mixed marriage Desai celebrates in the novel succeeds, unlike other novels of Indian writers on the same subject.

The theme of man and woman relationship has been treated in detail in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*14

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14 Anita Desai, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (Delhi: Orient paperbacks, 1982).
because of the two opposite temperaments of the protagonist, Sita, and her husband, Raman. Sita is a sensitive and overemotional woman. Her husband, however, is made of different stuff. His face is "usually as stolid as soundly locked gate" (p.34), which would give a hint to his practical approach to life. The reasons given for their marriage are pitifully inadequate to build a marriage upon: "... and finally out of pity, out of lust, out of a sudden will for adventure, and because it was inevitable, [he] married her" (p.99).

Sita is not very happy for having made a compromise which she takes to be her defeat. But married life, as Chesterton remarks, is a perpetual compromise, and any compromise or sacrifice for a greater good is said to vindicate one's victory and greatness. Only by 'connecting' extremes can one arrive at an acceptable path in life. This is the positive solution that the novel offers to the present-day temperamentmal adjustments.

Sita is utterly confused when she finds out that she is going to have a fifth baby, for it shows that she does not have 'control' over herself (p.32). What makes matters worse is her feeling that Raman does not try to understand her feelings. She thinks that earlier the

situation was different but now she is too old to have another child. The conversation below between Sita and Raman describes their attitudes:

"But you were always so pleased about the babies Sita", he said, closing his fists, unclosing them, uncertainly.
"They always pleased you".
"I am not pleased, I'm frightened", she hissed through her teeth. "Frightened".
I thought it grows easier and easier".
"It is not easier. It's harder - harder".
"It is unbearable", she wept (p.32).

Raman hopes that everything will be fine as time goes by, but Sita seems to act differently contrary to his expectations:

He hoped... that once the discomfort and physical misery were over, she would fill again into that comfortable frame of large, placid joy, of glazed satisfaction, of totally inturned pride and regard, as did other women ....But she filled out little, ... she continued to huddle, to twist her fingers, to smoke bitterly through the nights and display an agony that he felt was as unbecoming to her as it was puzzling to him (p.32).

Raman tries to console her saying that "Not much longer to go now, Sita; it'll soon be over". But this brings the storm: "All through their married life they had perferred to avoid a confrontation. All that they had done, he now
saw, was to pile on the fury till now when it exploded. Perhaps there had been incidents, thoughts during the day he had not known about, would have left undisturbed had he known. It was as though for seven months she had collected inside her all her resentments, her fears, her rages, and now flung them outward, flung them from her" (p.33).

Disaster-prone from the very beginning Sita's marriage to Raman is already on the verge of collapse, when she runs away to her childhood home, in the hope of a miracle that would save her from giving birth to her fifth child in this violence-ridden world around her. Sita suddenly decides to go to Manori alone. Her husband tries to stop her absurd act by asking her not to leave in this condition, but her acts get more violent and her will to leave grows stronger. When Sita tosses her clothes and other things into her suitcase, he does not believe that she is serious; "... she was silent and blind in the face of his alarm and disbelief as he stood watching and not quite believing what he saw" (p.33). Actually, Sita's neurosis is the direct result of the clash between the hypocritical outer world of her marriage and her inherent honesty.

Now and then Raman exclaims: "Don't be silly", "Sita, don't behave like a fool", and "Think of your condition". "What do you know about my condition?" she flared. "I've told you. I've tried to tell you but you
haven't understood a thing" ...(p.33). Thus, 'the theme of marital incompatibility' is continued in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Desai's fourth novel, where the protagonist Sita leaves behind her busniness-imprisoned husband and flees ... to an island.18

Raman at times thinks that Sita has started behaving as an abnormal woman, talking nonsense. Both of them cannot understand the other's feelings or intentions, as would be clear from the following extract from the novel.

"But I don't want to have the baby", she cried. "I've told you".

... It was not only the brutality, the murderousness of this statement that seemed to attack him with the clubs and spears of a beastial civilization, but it seemed so shockingly out of character with a woman who... winced dreadfully every time she heard a child cry.... "It's too late to do that", he said with thin lips that were glued together at the corners.... He had not read the Vedas or the Mahabharata.... still, he was born a Hindu. Family planning was all very well, but not- "You should have thought of it earlier", he said". It's too late now". "Too late? Why too late? It's not been yet". He was repelled, he turned away, not being able to see her any more for hatred of her. He hated her, hated her talk. "One can't have an abortion at this stage", he said fiercely, his face turned aside.

"Hu"--- a breath fell from her heavily, like a stone dropped. "Wh-What?" she stammered. "Wh-abortion?" They started, uncomprehendingly at each other, more divided than they had been on the balcony that day—she fighting, the other laughing. What did he mean? What did she mean? In that snarled moment of silence, time was a scummy sea, telling nothing.

"What do you mean abortion?" she gasped, her eyes burning. "I suppose that's what you mean. You want one". "Mad!" she grasped. "You are quite mad. Kill the baby? It's all I want. I want to keep it, don't you understand?" "No," he shouted in exasperation, feeling himself made a fool that she spun round and round her finger till he was sick and giddy. "You just said you don't want it. Now you say you do want it. What's up? What's up?"

"I mean I want to keep it—I don't want it to be born". "Mad", he breathed in relief, understanding all in a stumbling access of clarity...."You've gone mad". "I think, what I'm doing is trying to escape from the madness here, escape to a place where it might be possible to be sane again".

"Who is mad here? In this house? What madness? What madness is there here?" (pp.34-35).

The maladjustment between Raman and Sita is due to the clash of values, of principles and of faith. As Raman sees it, it is conflict between the compromise with disappointment, and Sita believes that it is the capacity to say the Great No if and when needed. This is not simply a case of an emancipated woman revolting against the slavish bonds of marriage. It is much more than that. It is a question of the basic truth that is bitter and naked and can neither be hidden, nor be halved to suit
individuals. She has had enough of that life and wants to escape from its dull routine. In the city, everybody's actions seem to be full of abnormality to her, but Raman cannot understand why she feels so. "Raman and Sita accuse each other of madness as they look at reality from two different perspectives". The following lines are expressive of tenuous relations between the husband and wife:

"So you're running away - like the bored runaway wife in - in a film". She stabbed him between the temples with a short ferocious glare.

"It can happen in real life, Raman, I will go. I am leaving tomorrow. On the island - It'll be different".

He laughed...."You want to work a miracle", he mocked.

"An immaculate conception in reverse". "Why not?" she challenged with a bravado that came to her too easily once she was astride an idea. Skimming on it, floating" (p.36).

What is a matter of life and death for Sita, is hardly more than a small incident of life, which occurs "in everyone's life, all the time" (p.37). For example, Sita is very upset when her son's ayah takes him to a park and gets into a fight, leaving him alone. Raman advises Sita not to "make too much of it", but "nothing ever closed for her: ripped open, the wound remained open" (p.44). The following incident would illustrate this point better.

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When Raman's business associates come to pay a visit, he thinks them to be "pleasant [and] tolerable" but his wife's way of evaluating people is very different: "People were, to him, friends, visitors, business associates, colleagues, or acquaintances... He found them very like himself and not worth much thought ... Not an introvert, nor an extrovert a middling kind of man, he was dedicated unconsciously to the middle way". But to Sita such persons "are nothing-nothing but appetite and sex. Only food, sex and money matter. Animals". Unlike her pet, they are like pariahs "hanging about drains and dustbins, waiting to pounce and kill and eat" (p.47).

The sight of the two lovers hits Sita very deeply and reminds her of her own hollow, empty and loveless married life. It makes her feel so helpless that she felt like weeping. For Raman, however, such confessions are; meaningless "life must be continued, and all its business" (p.138). Sita, on the contrary, feels herself trapped, finding Raman, his friends and her in-laws drab, commonplace, snugly fitting in roles assigned to them without any resistance.

It was beyond Raman's imagination that someone can be so bored of life as his wife was. "She sat there smoking, not even looking at the sea any more, till he exclaimed, "Bored? How? Why? With what? and could not begin to comprehend her boredom" (p.50). She herself cannot give any solid answers to his questions, but she
does find "her boredom ... stretched out so vast, so flat, so deep..." (p.50). She cannot believe that"... although they lived so close together, he [Raman] did not even know this basic fact of her existence" (p.144). Middle-aged, faded and stooped with the responsibilities of life that Raman takes so seriously, his expectations are apparently, so reasonable, so sensible, so practical that no ordinary wife may deny them: "Perhaps one should be grateful if life is only a matter of disappointment, not disasters" (p.143). Bored? Why? With what? are the three vital questions, asked time and again by men like Gautama, Jiban and Raman.

Because of their unadjusting natures, the husband and the wife become so estranged that they find their spouse's company unbearable and the only link that continues between them is "a shared physical act of inner nervousness" (p.51). The marital maladjustment presented by the novelist through such characters may at times be a legacy of unhappy parents to their daughters. Like Maya's father, Sita's father also has a painful history of married life. Her mother had run away and is now taken to be dead by her family.

While at Manori with her children, Sita never finds Raman as a necessity for her. She tries to be happy with her children, although she occasionally feels lonely and insecure. One day when Moses came to announce Raman's programme to come to the island,
She felt one violent pulsation of grief inside her ... thinking, "It's all over -" and then a warm expansion of relief, of pleasure, of surprise—oh, happy surprise! ... Everything stirred, tumbled, rose around her, strange, she thought—the man so passive, so grey, how could the very mention of him arouse such a tumult of life and welcome. She felt it herself unwillingly, unexpectedly—but she felt it (p.128). This is the tragedy of woman. Sita does not like her "children's almost unbearable excitement" and feels "bitterly that they were being disloyal to her" (p.129).

When Raman comes to Manori, Sita does not care to change into a better dress. The shabbiness in dress reflects her rebellion. Earlier also, he, defying her husband's expectations, "had continued to wear, instinctively, the garb of the male and then the female peacock"(p.130). Whenever Sita or her husband need emotional support, the other partner turns around unknowingly or deliberately. "Raman had nothing more to give her, or he was just unaware of her needs and demands" (p.132). When Sita asks Raman the purpose of his visit to Manori, hoping that he had come because he cared for her, he simply answers that "Menaka called me". Sita feels that not only her husband but also her children have betrayed her, and "Their betrayal had torn her open with such violence... he had not come to see her to fetch her, as she had supposed, he had come because Menaka had called him. He had betrayed her too. They had all betrayed her" (pp. 132-33). This woman who now faces Raman, is a stranger whose emotions are destroyed after years of an incompatible married life. He stares at her "with
distaste, thinking her grotesque.... It was the face of a woman unloved, a woman rejected.... But whereas her beauty had turned haggard through nerves and neglect. Her fire had turned on him and even on the children... in spite of an ill-temper" (pp.133-34). Sita too, is completely disillusioned by her relationship with Raman - in fact, with all human relationship - because, she feels they are meaningless in the long run. She realises: "What a farce marriage was, all human ralationships were" (p.144). As for Raman, "it was hard to believe now that he had married her, in a romantic whim, not only out of a cavalier's pity... but for her fire and beauty, her quite outstanding fire and beauty" (pp.133-34). Sita feels like a jellyfish "washed up by the waves, stranded there on the sand bar". Her depression and distance from her husband is clear through the following lines:

From the way he turned, the way he disregarded her, did not see if she followed or not, she felt him release her then-give her up. She felt it was surely as if his hand, till now clutching her hand, had let it drop let her go. He did it not in a passion, but out of pure weariness with her, weariness with her middle, her dark muddled drama. He had no part in it, she had said, so he could leave her to it. He released her and at last she was free (p.149).
Sita does not want to return to the mainland at any cost. She only hopes that "the great gap between them would be newly and securely bridged". She allows Raman then to have his triumph, which he deserved "purely by being so unconscious of it, so oblivious" (p.151).

At last, Sita comes to the conclusion that she cannot live without her husband or family. She knows she needs them and that she has no identity without them. Like a tamed animal or a vanquished player, "She lowered her head and searched out his footprints so that she could place her feet in them... and so her footprints, mingled with his ..."(p.150).

VI

_Fire on the Mountain_20 depicts the predicament of Nanda Kaul, a wife and mother coming from a wealthy family and the wife of a 'respectable' Vice-Chancellor, who keeps himself busy with parties and 'the other woman'. Here the maladjustment is because of the life-long faithlessness of Mr. Kaul to his wife. Nanda tries her best not to think of this ugly topic and keeps herself busy with household matters, but she does have her times of sorrow and sadness. At times she feels neglected and misunderstood and waits for her share of love and her rights. Apparently, Nanda's husband seems to love and care for her but their marriage is based on circumstantial convenience for the husband who lives his

double life without any commitment to either his spouse or to his mistress. Nanda becomes the victim of forced motherhood, producing a number of unloved, unwanted children. She decorates the dinner table with silk saries as a competent hostess, seething with frustration under the veneer of a contented conjugal life. While Mr. Kaul keeps his mistress, Miss David, on the teaching staff, invites her for badminton parties, goes to drop her back at night and comes back quietly to his separate bedroom, Nanda keeps a frozen smile on her face, looks after the family, his children and his house. Even after carrying a life-long affair with Miss David, Mr. Kaul could not marry her, as she was a Christian. But the cause of Nanda's predicament can easily be seen in her loveless life caused by this affair. Hence the death of her husband is like the death of her jailor, and brings for her the long-awaited freedom from the condemned cell of spiritual annihilation.

When Nanda thinks of the other woman in her husband's life, the evenings become "dark" to her and the badminton net "grey and spidery as to be invisible in the ghostly light"(p.25). After the party, the guests go home and the court seems 'deserted'. The 'eerie silent' atmosphere is unbearable to Nanda and she keeps on "walking faster and faster back and forth, back and forth" eagerly waiting for her husband who comes after dropping 'one' of the guests home. Now that he comes back and goes to his bedroom,"... she paced the lawn again, slower and slower"
(p.26). As the Vice-Chancellor's wife, she may be admired by the teachers of the university and their families but the fact is that she is merely a show-piece to her husband, never having any existence of her own. She is so unsure of her status that she does not feel that she has any right over the house she lives in. Everything belongs to her husband and nothing to her. She may appear to be happy, receiving compliments from the wives and daughters of the lecturers and professors, over whom her husband rules, "Isn't she splendid? Isn't she like a queen? Really, Vice-Chancellor is lucky to have a wife who can run everything as she does" (p.18), but the fact remains that Nanda's husband is a dismal failure in playing his role of a loving husband.

However, Nanda's condition can still be called better than that of her grand daughter, Raka. Raka thinks of her father coming from a party "stumbling and crashing through the curtains of night, his mouth opening to let out a flood of rotten stench, beating at her mother with hammers and fists of abuse—harsh, filthy abuse... and her mother lay down on the floor and shut her eyes and wept". Raka remembers the "flat, wet jelly of her mother's being squelching and quivering... and... crying" (p.72). Raka's mother, Tara, suffers from chronic nervous breaks downs as a result of a mismatched marriage. A pattern of Tara's neurosis comes out clearly through Asha's letter. Like Mohisha, she must have been a simple
and romantic girl, forced into a marriage with a diplomat, a practical and rich man, who, having pushed himself upon the ladder of success, has the habits that are accepted as virtues in a polished society: "Tara... does not understand him, doesn't understand men and she really is the wrong typed wife for a man like him.... It is true that he does drink" (p.15). Life with a domineering drunkard is sure to be hellish.

Nanda also remembers her childhood days. Her mother was homeloving; "But not my father. He was adventerous.... He did not like being in the house at all .. He was happy travelling, exploring, his interests were so much wilder and his collections reflected them" (p.94).

When the life of such high-society women is so wretched, we can easily understand the plight of village women. Ila Das tells Nanda about her experiences as a welfare officer. She tells her about the women of the village- "... the women are willing, poor dears, to try and change their dreadful lives by an effort, but do you think their men will let them? No,not one bit" (p.129). Woman's fundamental dependence is on man. Women are wronged in a society dominated by male-oriented institutions and are forced to feel dwarfed from the very beginning of their life. 21

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VII

Clear Light of Day 22 presents the theme of maladjustment in marriage on a more realistic and broad scale. The heavy cloud of gloom that accompanies the hopeless efforts of Bim's mother to lead a normal life, alienates her from her husband and children. Her marriage is like a house of cards and for this reason, no one remembers her after her death, least of all, her husband.

The conjugal life of Tara and Bakul is a replica of that of Maya and Gautama but with a lesser degree of frenzy and hypertension. Tara is less romantic than Maya, and Bakul is not so dehydrated in emotion as Gautama. But the maladjustment touches the same nerve points:

He even came close to her and touched her cheek very lightly, as if he could hardly bear the unpleasant contact but forced himself to do it out of compassion .... She felt she had followed him enough, it had been such an enormous strain, always pushing against her grain, it had detained her of too much strength, now she could only collapse, inevitably collapse (p.18).

It is a marriage of convenience for both of them, Bakul, a junior diplomat, wants a young bride to be moulded according to his needs and Tara intensly longs for an escape from her dark, forbidding, disease ridden house into the glittering world of youth, laughter and comfort. It is good that she meets Bakul at

the right time and uses him as an instrument for escape. Tara desperately tries to capture happiness, using diplomacy, discipline and common sense, but fails miserably. Still she manages to preserve the facade of a successful married life.

The Mishra daughters, Sarla and Gaua, belong to the "once married" category, used and thrown away like old pieces of comfortless furniture. Raja marries Hanazir for her property and Bil indicates that theirs is not a happy union.

Desai dislikes the partiality and prejudices expressed in the man's world towards women, but she equally dislikes the superficial and trivial lives led by women themselves to hide the marital discord in order to preserve the hypocritical sense of social honour and prestige.

VIII

In custody 23 depicts the life of a typical Indian woman, with a rural base, Sarla is a pure housewife who only has to worry about everyday's menu. She is busy with household matters and looks after her son, while Deven has crossed the limits of questioning and is madly in love with an old Urdu poet's poetry. To go to Delhi to hear him recite his poetry, Deven even neglects his responsibilities as a husband and a father. Sarla seems

to have no limits to tolerate but later, she begins to taunt him, and here is where lack of understanding, love and care come into the scene. With her stony face, Sarla sulks all the time. She is not Deven's choice but that of his mother and aunts. She is too prosaic for the life of a poet. Sarla, as a new bride, "dreamt the magazine dream of marriage" (p. 68) and had fine aspirations, but because of her marriage with one in the academic profession and living in a small town, none of her dreams materialise, and she is naturally embittered. Both Sarla and Deven are unhappy and frustrated by their married life. They avoid each other, and are like "two victims doomed to live together". Sarla deserves more of our sympathy because "at least Deven had his poetry—she had nothing, so there was an added accusation and bitterness in her look" (p. 68).

Both Deven and Sarla have their problems and disappointments. Most probably both of them understand the cause of each other's disappointment, but always fear to discuss them with each other. Emotionally, they stand far apart and never feel close to each other:

He understood because, like her, he had been defeated too; like her, he was a victim. Although each understood the secret truth about the other, it did not bring about any closeness of spirit, any comradeship, because they also sensed that two victims ought to avoid each other, not yoke together their joint disappointments. A victim does not look to help from another victim; he looks for a redeemer. At least Deven had his poetry; she had nothing, and so there was an added
accusation and bitterness in her look. (p.68)

Deven never feels the need to explain things to her, and Sarla begins to derive mental peace in accusing him. Instead of telling her why he is compelled to go to Delhi, he indirectly accuses her on different subjects:

Usually he was enraged by her tacit accusations that added to the load on his back. To relieve it, he would hurl away dishes that had not been cooked to his liking, bawl uncontrollably if meals were not ready when he wanted them or the laundry not done or a button missing or their small son noisy or unwashed; it was to lay the blame upon her, remove its clinging skin from him. Tearing up a shirt she had not washed, or turning the boy out of the room because he was crying, he was really protesting against her disappointment. he was out to wreck it, take his revenge upon her for harbouring it, why should it blight his existence that had once shown promise and had a future? (pp.68-69).

Even though Nur is a famous Urdu poet, the condition of his house, because of his wives, is laughable. Each of his two wives, the two rivals, wants more rights over him. Nur's first wife asks Deven about Nur's second wife, who was an 'actress' to the older wife. "More tantrums going on up there?" she asks drily. Deven gives a nod, unsure if he wants to be drawn into another vulgar family quarrel. "It was true that it was Nur's family—Nur's wives, he imagined—and therefore no ordinary one, but it was still vulgar, and he had quite
enough of that at home to want any more" (p.121).

There are hostile feelings between Nur's first and second wives. Naturally the former feels more of her authority than the younger one. The first wife cannot tolerate the fact that the younger wife succeeds in spending more time with Nur:

She will not leave, 'She has planted herself in our house-like a witch. You will have to take him away-through this door', she pointed to a small door in the wall behind the goats. "He will come down to visit me-he does that sometimes then you can take him away by that door (p.124).

Nur's first wife feels that she should have more authority over Nur than his second wife. Very often she speaks about her authority which makes her feel safe. "His favourite dal", she said with a satisfied smack of her lips. 'Only I can cook it as he likes', she smirked" (p.125).

Nur's first wife is an uneducated elderly woman with qualifications of a good house-wife. But she has no manners of speech. On the contrary, Nur's second wife is a young woman who keeps herself very up-to-date and takes interest in his interests, i.e. his poetry. This difference makes Deven think that this might be the reason for Nur's second marriage:

Walking away with her crude speech ringing in his ears, so unlike the flowery Urdu spoken upstairs, Deven wondered if this was why the poet had turned from an uneducated country wife to the kind he had upstairs. He himself would
not have known how to choose between them. He had no way of satisfying or evading either (p.126).

The reality is that even after several visits to Delhi, Deven has not accomplished much. But, being a man, he does not want to admit his failure before his wife. When she sarcastically asks him why he has not been going to Delhi lately, he thinks that it would be better if she thinks that he has a female friend in Delhi. The feeling of jealousy in Sarla gives Deven a strange satisfaction. "It was only when she had disappeared, that it occured to Deven that it might have made a greater impression on her if he had allowed her to think he really had someone-female - to visit in Delhi" (p.127).

Deven and Sarla are mentally so cut off from each other that even living together does not make much difference in their lives. Even when Deven is at home, he stays aloof, sitting out in the garden or reading his newspaper. This carelessness of his has drawn Sar away from him:

He sat bent double in his cane chair, his arms hanging between his kness, his cigarette dangling from between his fingers, its smoke curling upwards in a spiral..peering through a crack in the kitchen door, Sarla watched, thinking: is he alive? without concern, only with irritation (p.128).
When Sarla tells Deven about her fear of robbers, he does not bother about it, saying that they have no valuables in their house. At this Sarla gets furious and points out the real condition of their household:

When Deven gave a short laugh, saying, 'What can robbers find in our house to steal?' she hissed, 'To them college teachers are big men, important men, how can they know that we starve?' He was both startled and offended by the ferocity of that verb and thought of asking her if she had ever gone hungry but did not care to engage in an argument with her, knowing she could beat him [in argument] (p.130).

Now even when Deven sees Sarla in a shabby condition, he is no longer irritated. He realises that both of them are disappointed and humiliated in their own ways:

He found he was no longer irritated by the sight of her labour, or disgusted by the shabbiness of her limp, worn clothes, or her hunched, twisted posture, her untidy hair or sullen expression. It was all a part of his own humiliation. He considered touching her, putting an arm around her stooped shoulders drawing her to him. How else could he tell her he shared all disappointment and woe?

But he could not make that move: it would have permanently undermined his position of power over her, a position that was as important to her as to him: if she ceased to believe in it, what would there be for her to
do, where would she go? Such desolation could not be admitted (pp.193-94).

As the novel is about to end, we see Sarla quite pleased to be "back in her own domain, to assume all its responsibilities, her indispensable presence in it; in her parents' home she had missed the sense of her own capability and position" (p.194). This is the lot of a typical Indian woman.

IX

Baumgartner's Bombay24 presents a pathetic picture of Hugo and his friend Lotte. Hugo's parents had a strange married life. Hugo Baumgartner, is a lonely soul, rejected by his parents, who themselves are not close to each other. Hugo can clearly make out that there is a rift between his parents. The showroom downstairs belongs to his father where he stays like a ruler, and upstairs was her realm. Her's is the world of music, "gaiety and outings". And "there was an element of unfamiliarity in his mother that Hugo understood as little as his father did" (p.48).

Lotte also exemplifies a strange married bond which gives her only lonliness. She is a daughter of a dancer who was brought to Calcutta when she was very young. Kanti Seth deceives her by a fake marriage, which saves her from going to the internment camp during the war. Kanti dies a sudden death due to excessive drinking

and Lotte is left all alone once again without any means. To make things less scandalous, she is given money and a flat in Bombay. Kanti Seth visits Bombay for short stays with Lotte. These are golden days for Lotte but she dislikes his habit of drinking. Kanti who is a well-settled man, with a family and flourishing business dies a lonely death which makes Lotte realise how lonely one is doomed to remain. It pains her to remember that even she has not been near him to look after him (p.73).

Desai has thus tried to project the idea that a blissful conjugal life is a rainbow-coloured dream of a romantic mind and thinking of an immature intellect. In a marriage, adjustment for women means sacrificing their individuality. The novelist also believes that women are the greatest hindrances and enemies to other members of their own sex. Her novels are indeed full of chilling encounters and traumatic experiences of married lives. The experiences that these women have with their husbands and in-laws leave a deep scar on their psyche.