CHAPTER V

STATUS AND ROLE OF WOMEN IN SOCIETY
"Writing by women about women." says Le Ann Schreiber, "is no longer seen as a distaff literature." She rightly maintains that women writers have become increasingly conscious of the fact that their own feminine experiences have a huge "uncharted territory" to explore and project through their work. Her fictional characters engage in fierce struggle for survival in an environment of prejudice, violation and an almost crushing adversity. This paper examines struggle for change in Anita Desai's novels. Although she does not write consciously for a social purpose, yet her works have unconsciously contributed to the feminist cause. In all her novels, there is a striving on the part of the female protagonists towards arriving at a more authentic way of life than the one which is available to them. Through the different portraits of educated Indian women, mainly from the upper middle class, and examples of Indian marriages in her novels, Anita Desai has tried to focus on the subservient status assigned to women and the need for these women to become independent. The image of Indian women has rarely been a positive one, especially concerning status and their role in society." This is because of their traditional position as it has been described by most male writers as marginal beings. This position of women has somewhat changed after women writers have set foot on the literary scene. Writers like Desai have partly succeeded in substituting a positive view of

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women as individuals who are intelligent, and who have an
indomitable will and a firm determination to survive in a
harsh world without losing their humanity towards their
fellow beings. We see Sarah in Bye Bye Blackbird, who
struggles to keep her identity as a white woman who is
married to an Indian man. We find Bim in Clear Light of Day
to be a strong willed and independant woman. Ila Das in
Fire on the Mountain works as a social welfare officer but
fails at the end by paying the price of her life. On the
other hand, we have Sarla of In Custody and Nur's wives,
who are house wives and live only for their homes and
family. Nanda Kaul of Fire on the Mountain, although is
intelligent and comes from a well-to-do family, does not
get a chance to show her talents in any way concerning
society. Sita of Where Shall We Go This Summer is a woman
of strong will and belief but is no attribute to the
society in any way. Maya and Monisha from Cry the Peacock
and Voices in the City are also housewives, who are
motherless but do not use their free time for any job or
social work.

Anita Desai writes about women fighting
endless battles to survive. She has endeavoured to draw a
pen-picture of Indian women, who are independent in every
way but still remain slaves of society, customs, parents,
husbands and children. Her novels are about the educated
upper middle-class women stripping away the facade of
chiffon sarees and cocktail parties to delve into their
lives, personalities and particular individual struggles.
She frankly uncovers the long standing inviolate world of women's instincts and natural yearnings for love and understanding.

II

In *Cry the Peacock*, the status and role of women can be clearly felt and seen through the characters of Maya, her mother-in-law and Maya's friend Leila. Maya's mother-in-law is a social worker. Although she is of a respectable family and a high social status according to outsiders, she knew the techniques of snatching money from Maya's father. Maya's father regularly sent cheques to Maya's mother-in-law, but if he got late, she would say "When will your father send me another cheque, Maya? Tell him I need it urgently—the nurses in the creche have not been paid this month" Thus when her mother-in-law would talk to her in a loving manner, Maya came to know of the reason immediately (pp.47-48).

Gautama is the eldest son of his parents. In their family they all sat and discussed matters together. But Maya would be left out because she was thought to be immature and unintelligent. At times when she would hear them arguing, she felt that she could discuss this matter with Gautama, but she never got such a chance. She thought:

"It was a legal case Gautama was defending. It was I, who ought to be able to discuss it with him rather than they, I vaguely felt. But they left me out of it with a naturalness I had to accept for they knew I
would not understand a matter so involved and I knew it myself. They spoke to me, the synocete, only when it had to do with babies, meals, shopping, marriages, for I was their toy, their indulgence, not to be taken seriously, and the world I came from was less than that - it was a luxury they considered it a crime to suffer, and so damned it with dismissal" (p.48).

Leila was Maya's friend who had to work hard for a living, because her husband was handicapped. She fell in love with him and married him inspite of his dissabilities. Leila taught Persian literature to a few girls, who were not interested in gaining knowledge but were attending this class only for a time-pass. "....she taught Persian literature to a handful of girls who, while waiting, coyly for suitable marriages to be arranged for them, read allusions to sly and underhand sex in every romanticism, and yawend at the smallest sophistries" (p.57). Although Leila was very different from Pom concerning outer appearance, money matters, and social status but she was the one earning for her household. Leila's husband was a disabled person and Leila would let him correct her student's copies, knowing that she would have to go through the corrections he had made. Because of her elopement and love-marriage with her husband, Leila's parents had refused to write to her or see her. Maya would often think about Leila and her husband:

"Sometimes I thought of him as an animal, a ferocious and wild beast that had allowed itself to become a house pet for its own reasons. And he accepted the food and drink
she earned for him, as his due, even teasing her about her parents who had not seen her, written to her, or in any way communicated with her since the day of her elopement" (p. 58).

Mrs. Lal had four daughters because of whom she felt ashamed in company of guests. Maya was astonished to find this out that in such a high society the females are still considered to be of a low category. A lady asked Mrs. Lal if she had other sons, to which she answered hesitantly that she has four daughters. Maya thought,

"This ought not to have distressed me. I ought to have been able to rejoice at this, as my father had rejoiced in me, saying that in a daughter he had a treasure. Yet now the word brought up visions of dowries, of debts, humiliations to be suffered, and burdens so gross, so painful that the whole family suffered from them. Why? I was angry with myself, could not shake off the truth, and when the prim lady clucked her tongue in sympathy, I said nothing" (p. 71).

The Sikh Palmist wanted to show his superiority in the matter of prophesies and thus wanted to read Maya's palm. In this connection, he said "Sometimes it helps to have a little guidance. Especially women - they are less adventurous than us,... (p. 80). Gautama also, "saw no value in anything less than the ideas and theories born of human and, preferably, male brains,....." (p. 99).
While taking evening walks with Gautama, Maya would slow down in walking and as a result would be left behind. This she saw symbolically as her real life story, "But you move so fast, you leave me behind. You have left me, deserted. And yet I must follow, follow to the end. Lead the way then, and I'll come" (p.156).

III

In Voices In the City, Monisha is presented as an understanding and educated woman. She contemplates on the meaningless old traditions but knows that she cannot change them. In this connection she sees the place of women, which has not changed in the past years. Monisha writes in her diary, "touching the feet of older people in the Hindu religion.

"While placing her hand on my head in blessing, also pushed a little harder than I think necessary, and still harder, till I realize what it means, and go down on my knees to touch her feet....Another pair of feet appears to receive my touch, then another. How they all honour their own feet! More—I lose count— but many more. Feet before faces here..." (p.109).

These lines show how a newly married Hindu wife has to lower herself.

A degree of the knowledge of books does not seem to count as anything appreciable. Women are considered as a working machine in a household and they are
so much used to this position, most of them accept this position with satisfaction. Monisha is very interested in reading books. Her female relatives (Kalyanidi) ask her about the number of her saries and check in her wardrobe but 'laugh' when they find books there. (p.116) Monisha sees "Bengali women, who follow five paces behind their men" like female birds in cages, but having gentleness and patience in them. These Bengali women spend their lives "hidden behind the barred windows of half dark rooms,...washing clothes, kneading dough, and waiting for nothing, waiting on men self-centered and indifferent and hungry and demanding and critical, waiting for death and dying misunderstood" (p.120).

When Monisha comes to see Nirode in his room, she feels so good about it, but she has to return back to her husband's house where no one understands her. Nirode cannot understand why Monisha has to go back to that house. He says angrily - "Can't you stop going back? Can't you just turn and go in another direction by yourself?" (p.134). But he also knows the answer. Monisha enjoyed getting out of her prison-house and spend some time outside. When Nirode got seriously ill, she could go to see him and spend time with him. But now since Nirode was recovered, she did not get the 'privilege' of having the car and seeing Nirode. (p.135).

Aunt Lila tried to guide Amla and show her the right direction. She wanted Amla to break off her
unnatural relationship with Dharma - but Amla was not ready to hear anything about Dharma. Aunt Lila gave her the example of her own daughter who's marriage ended in a divorce but Amla said that her case is different because she is not married. Aunt Lila answered "What is the difference? Women place themselves in bondage to men, whether in marriage or out". This was her age and experience speaking. Amla later became more thoughtful and mature. She tried to understand her relationship with Dharma. When she went to see Dharma next time, she was more careful. But Dharma foresaw that her attitude had changed. Men generally cannot accept the fact that women can also be independent. Their inner satisfaction lies in the feeling that women are dependent on them. Dharma said: "You have changed and I fear that change - as my daughter had changed. This change brings in me the feelings of impotence and helplessness" (p.227).

IV

Sarah, the young wife of Adit in _Bye-Bye_ Blackbird has no position or saying. Although she is educated and is working, still Adit has shown to her what her place is, which is of course under him. She has to respect all his decisions no matter if it is a household matter or cooking, Sarah's job or the plan to go back to India, Adit took the decision and Sarah had to accept it.

Adit's friend Dev was surprised to eat Indian food in Adit and Sarah's house but Adit explained to
him "...I taught Sarah to cook straight away. No British broths and stews for me" (p.15). Because Sarah had married an Indian man, she had to live in his house like an Indian woman. One night as Dev and Adit were late in returning home after their long walk, Dev was careful of not making noise and waking Sarah, but Adit told Dav how manageable the English wives can be. "She's used to being woken up. These English wives are quite manageable really, you know. Not as fierce as they look - very quiet and hardworking as long as you treat them right and roar at them regularly once or twice a week "(p.29).

Sometimes Sarah felt that she was being ruled twenty four hours a day. In school she had to work according to her Boss and at home she did Indian chores, even if she didn't feel like it. "When she briskly dealt with letters and bills in her room under the stairs, she felt an impostor, but, equally, she was playing a part when she tapped her fingers to the sitar music on Adit's records or ground spices for a curry she did not care to eat. She had so little command over these two characters she played each day, ...")(p.34). Dev went to an Indian party where he heard two middle aged women talking about the mentality of Indian women: "She [mother] says no- the disgrace of having an unmarried daughter living alone in London is too unbearable at home!......As if one were a child. And I tell her it is not the same as being an unmarried woman in India. She agrees but she says that people at home don't understand that." The second lady agreed to this and told
her own experience. "Perhaps she is right. I will never forget that year after I left Oxford to go home and work with All India Radio, Minakshi, I never will....Those horrible men,.....All at least fifty years old and with a dozen grandchildren at home, but if they saw an unmarried working girl - toba!" she exclaimed. "They just go mad. They think that if you are working and not married, it must be because you are..." her voice dropped." (pp.88-89).

Once when Adit and Sarah went to Sarah's mother and father's house, her mother realized that Sarah must be getting tired after the hard work of school and responsibilities of the house. To this Adit exploded "But she loves the school !...How often I've said Sarah, give up your job, it doesn't look nice for you to work after you are married, and every time she says to me, "no, Adit, I love it." (p.134) Adit cannot change his mentality of typical Indian men even in England. He is still of the belief that in society women are looked down upon if they work after they are married.

Sarah's mother was a famous social worker in her village, while her father was unknown to most people around, "....it was she who played the Tory matron in retirement, busily organising church bazaars and cluck-clucking over a farmer's daughter...."(p.143). Sarah's father used to "well dressed and portly man of victorian speech and habit" as Sarah remembered him in earlier years. But when he retired and went to live in the house "His wife had chosen for this new period of their
lives", he retired from his wife's life as well:

"He was a source of no little embarrassment to his wife who had acquired so much social prestige with retirement and a country house. Most of the time it was easy enough to keep him buried unobtrusively in the back garden but he an uncanny knack of trundling a wheelbarrow full of manure across the lawn just as she was handing out glasses of lemonade to a party of local Conservative matrons under the cedar tree. None of them thought of referring to an old dumb gardner, of course, and she said nothing either, but could not restrain a look of bitter accusation at the line of smelly manure he had left behind him. 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 as tightly clutching his elbow and steering him into the best pew, she played her weekly role, smiling a serene and royal smile. Otherwise he never showed himself to the village and not many visitors came to the house, so her attitude to him was less frequently one of embarrassment than of irritation and abuse."(pp.144-45).

Adit's friend Jasbir tried to cheer Sarah talking about the bright days that were coming ahead in India. He talked about how Indian women have servants for
cooking and Ayahs for looking after their kids. But Adit did not like this idea. He wanted Sarah to do her own work as she did in England. Adit warned Sarah hastily. "Don't give her ideas.....She is not going to live in a maharaja's palace, you know. She's going to live in a family of in-laws, a very big one, and learn their language and habits. Then, till I get a job and perhaps after that, for a while she's got to help out. 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).

Sarah told Emma and Adit that Miss Morris, her head, had offered her a higher job in another school. Adit got very annoyed at this news and thought that Sarah did not want to go back to India with him. But Sarah had no other choice than to leave her job and go to India with Adit. She answered: "Why you should think, Adit, that I could want to accept, or consider accepting it. I just cannot tell - with our tickets bought, our things packed, all preparation made. You know I want to leave"(p.216).

Thus, Sarah is shown to be a caring and obedient wife. Because of her husband's wish, she happily leaves her job and prepares to go with him.

V

Sita in _Where Snail We Go This Summer_ is obviously kind of woman, but when she got married to Raman
and came to his house to live, she saw the daily routine of women there. Their job was to work nonstop in the kitchen as if they had devoted their life to cooking. After one meal was over, they got busy preparing for the next:

"The women...bent over their trays on which they were chopping vegetables - chopping, slicing, chopping, slicing the incredible quantities of vegetables they daily devoured.... everyone talked of the meal to come, if meals were not being eaten, then they were being cooked, or cleaned up after, or planned." (p.48)

Sita realised that she was running away from the truth. However, she could away to the island for a few days for her inner satisfaction while Raman could not do so, even if he wished. He was the head of the family and thus had to carry on his responsibilities. "There was courage, she [Sita] admitted to herself in shame, in getting on with such matters from which she herself squirmed away, dodged and ran. It took courage. That was why the children turned to him, sensing him to be the superior in courage, in leadership," (p.139), while "She [Sita] had escaped from duties and responsibilities, from order and routine, from life and the city, to the unlivable island" (p.139)

Even though Sita was distressed at the 'tedium and uglines of a meaningless life,' she knew that she had no alternative but to go back with her husband and get tied up in her routine household duties. She realised
that she could not make it alone and that she would have to follow him.

"She began to trail after him (Haman) knowing she would follow him. follow the trail of footprints he had laid out for her. She lowered her head and searched out his footprints so that she could place her feet in them, as a kind of game to make walking easier, and so her footprints, mingled with his, sometimes accurately and sometimes not, made a chain of links, wet and muddy hollows, across the washed and brushed sand" (p.150).

Sita is presented as a woman of abnormal feelings. Her dreams and goals are from out of this world, which could never be fulfilled. Thus she had no other alternative than to return with her husband.

VI

Nanda Kaul and her husband who was a Vice-Chancellor in Fire On The Mountain belong to a high class, but in reality, Nanda's husband had no respect for her. The house in which they lived, was 'his house, never her's (p.18). Mr. Kaul had wanted her always in 'silks and pearls' entertaining his guests. But in reality, she was a no one. Nanda's husband had an affair with another woman who was his 'special guest' (p.26) at parties. He would go to drop off this guest home while Nanda stayed at the lonely house, feeling neglected. Only to the outsiders and guests - she was the 'Vice-Chancellor's wife'. 
Nanda seemed to be brave and bold in her old age while as a young wife and mother, she had been a typical Indian woman, performing her duties 'with that still, ironic bow to duty that no one had noticed or defined' (p.19). The house of her husband, "The old house, the full house, of that period of her life when she was Vice-Chancellor's wife and at the hub of a small but intense and busy world, had not pleased her. Its crowding had stiffled her" (p.29). She probably would have refused to stay in that atmosphere if she was asked about her choice and will. But her husband did not think it necessary to know her feelings or wishes.

Raka, the young great-grand-daughter of Nanda Kaul is also a notable character. When she came to Carignano, she was fascinated by the natural beauty of Kasuali and 'detached herself' from everything else. She proved herself to be another being who loved solitude just like her great-grandmother. She needed no friends or companions and so had none. But is it questionable what she would become when she grew up. What would be her role in society in future? "It was the ravaged, destroyed and barren spaces in Kasuali that drew her' not the 'civilized world in which Raka had no part and to which she owed no attachment" (p.91). Raka's mother Tara was another homely woman who had no place in society. Her father would return home from a party, "stumbling...beating at her mother with hammers and fists of abuse...". Raka remembered her mother crying who never had any say in the house (pp.71-72). Nanda Kaul remembered her mother who was another typical Indian
homely woman who had no role in the social world. She was happy and satisfied in filling 'her store' (p.94).

Ila Das is Nanda's old time friend. In her old age she worked as a Welfare Officer which seems like an honourable and well paid job, but the fact was that she had no security and her pay is so insufficient that she could barely manage her meals. Though the situation had not always been like this. It was 'strange to think' that this woman had a 'nanny' in her childhood. She had dresses with 'ribbons' and laces' and guests and relatives were 'invited to hear her recite her nursery rhymes' (p.111).

Nanda's husband had got a job for Ila in the Home Science College. That time was a 'blessed period of her life' which was 'secure for a while as as lecturer, sure of her meals and a bed in the hostel.' Now she wished she had 'stayed there' and not been 'so hotheaded'. Now she realised that at that time 'a little humility would have been much, much better' (p.124). But the reason of Ila's hot temper was that after Mr. Kaul died, the new Vice-Chancellor did not recognise her as the new principal, although she had all the rights. But she had no strength to go against him as she was a woman—a weak figure of society.

Ila realised and shared with Nanda 'how helpless' their 'upbringing' has made them. She regrets, "We thought we were being equipped with the very best-French lessons, piano lessons, English governesses -
my, all that only to find it left us helpless, positively handicapped" (p.127), She knew that they had been brought up in comfort and they were so dependent as children that now even if they wished to do something individually, they could not do it. Ila always plans things and talks 'optimistically' (p.129), she wanted to turn the world right side up and she tried but she could not achieve any mentionable goal. She admits that she has 'this little bit of security, this tiny bit of status' (p.128) but the reality is that this status did not help her when she was raped and killed in her old age.

Ila tells Nanda sadly that the village women are willing "to try and change their dreadful lives by an effort, but do you think their men will let them? Nooo, not one bit' (p.129). Later on, with Ila's death it is proved that the condition of well educated and working women is no different than that of the uneducated village women. Ila was trying to compete with the role of working men by trying to change the lives of the villagers but when she reasoned with a man, she knew that she 'wasn't making any headway with him' (p.130). Thus she tried to do her duty but the men undid it.

At the end, Ila was 'crushed back' crushed down into the earth' (p.143) and killed by Preet Singh, just because she requested him not to marry his seven year old daughter to an old widower' who was a father of six children (p.130). Thus when Ila tried to save his
daughter's life, she was answered by a man's physical powers who thought that he contemplated a task of bravery by raping and killing an old helpless woman.

VII

Bim is the only female character in Clear Light of Day who is bold, strong and educated. She could have been working at a respectable job with all the brains she had, but due to her brother's mental illness she was confined to home. Her life is expressed as old Delhi"...which does not change, it only decays..." she thinks-"I never go. And here, nothing happens at all" (p.5). Bim is actually fed up with her dull, boring and lonely life. Desai has shown: "the airless, stagnant, dream-like, lives of a decaying family".2 Especially of Bim in this novel. It seems that Bim has adjusted to the circumstances of her life, but we know that external control is only put up by her and inside she has an emotional storm gathering.

Bim, as a young girl was very fond of Florence Nightingale and Joan of Arch. These ideals filled confidence in her and she decided in her early years: "I shall earn my own living and look after Mira Masi and Baba and be independent. Ther'll be so many thing to do - when we are grown up- when all this is over" (pp.140-141).

Bim was a girl with visions and dreams but is it her misfortune that she could not work out her plans. In this connection, Gabriele Annan writes that this novel deals with: "the theme of frustrated expectation", and "an elegiac mood followed by it."3

In the earlier years, Tara was alienated and introvert and Bim was rebellious and wanted to reach out to the wide open world. As a student, Bim was smart and intelligent, participated in games and was the monitor of her class while Tara lacked all these qualities. But situations had changed and now Bim is the one who is isolated and who 'turned grey and heavy' with time. She has tragically been felt behind in the race of life.

_Clear Light of Day_ is also a story of the lonely Mishra sisters. In their youth, instead of attending college for higher education, they searched for husbands. On their engagement ceremony itself, Bim felt that "they are not educated yet, they might find marriage is not enough to last them whole of their lives"(p.140). This predicament proves to come true for these unfortunate sisters. Then Bim decides that married life and its bonds are not for her. She prefers to be independent.

Both the Mishra sisters are now grey

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haired, running a nursery school in the day time and giving music and dance lessons in the evening, while their lazy brothers sit talking of politics while drinking whiskey all day for which their sisters have to pay. Both unfortunate sisters were married together and abandoned together by their husbands. They now have to work hard to earn their living and that of their brothers.

The mother of Bim, Tara, Raja and Baba is a different character. She neglected her children and never thought about the future of her daughters. She missed an evening out at the club for the first time in twenty years when she was so ill that she had to be admitted to the hospital. It is unbelievable when in her unconsciousness she muttered the names of cards rather than the names of her children. When she died, the children never missed her as they hardly ever saw her.

Mira Masi is another character who is worth mentioning here. She was the one who brought Tara, Bim, Raja and Baba. She was married at the age of twelve and widowed at fifteen. She was much exploited by her in-laws for whom she served as a maid. She washed clothes and dishes, cooked and scrubbed the floor. Mira Masi thus presents the picture of an Indian widow and her tragic life in the house of her in-laws.
VIII

The main female characters in The Village By The Sea are Lila, her mother and her two young sisters. These people are so minor, they might not even be recognised in society but Lila is everything to her family. Lila's father was an idle man - he did not care to fulfill his responsibilities of a father and husband. He left everything to Lila and 'stank from drunkenness' (p.11). He was a weak person who turned his face from his responsibilities. Instead of sending his children to school, Lila's father drank toddy and slept all day. "She [Lila] had given up going to school long ago so that she could stay home and do the cooking and washing and look after others"(p.11).

Women of the village came together to wash their clothes. They spent this time merrily, being able to chat in a light hearted manner. "They seemed to be enjoying this part of their housework....for only a few jobs were enjoyable"(p.12). Even if they enjoyed the company of each other, they had to stop at a particular time and go home to start 'cooking' (p.21).

When Hari came home, he saw his sisters. "He seldom thought about them, or their lives....Lila, Bela and Kamala, his three sisters....Here they were, with nothing but a small smoking fire to light their hut or give the comfort while he was away"(p.45). Hari was thinking of his sisters. He knew they had no future:
"What were they waiting for? What were they hoping for? They could never look forward to working on a fishing boat or in a factory, as he did. They would have to marry, one day, and he would have to see to it since his father would not. He would have to find them husbands, and buy them their wedding finery silk saries and gold jewellery - and arrange their weddings to which the whole village would have to be invited. The bridegrooms might demand a dowry - a bicycle or even a scooter. Gold buttons, coins and jewellery. A cow or a buffalo. A piece of land. He had heard of the fantastic demands that bridegrooms made and that parents had to meet" (p.45).

Lila tried her best to fulfill all her responsibilities successfully, but others did not try to understand her. Although she had admitted her mother in the hospital, which her father would have never done, he shouted at her - "What do you know about anything? What makes you think you can manage things? You can't (p.99). Lila and her sisters now had a new responsibility of earning money. "Now they had not their mother to look after or Hari or their father, they quietly cooked and marketed and swept and washed for the strange gentleman who never spoke to them...."(p.110).

The villagers could not dream of women taking place in any social movement. When the people from Thul village came to Bombay and saw the procession of women, they were wonderstruck. "...they had not brought
along a single woman with them, had not thought it necessary, had been sure that they, the menfolk, could manage it all on their own and the women would only be a nuisance, "(p.76) Thus, in this novel, the real life of villagers is shown. Women are considered to be able to only cook and clean the house. But in Desai's other novels, we see that women in cities have similar position.

IX

In Custody represents two kinds of women, Sarla - a professor's wife and Nur's uneducated first wife, but unfortunately their condition is alike. Sarla has beautiful dreams of her household before she got married, but the truth came out to be totally different. When she found out the reality and the standard of Deven's living, she was worried and disappointed, "But by marrying into the academic profession and moving to a small town outside the capital, none of these dreams had materialized, and she was naturally embittered"(p.68). Because her ambitions were not fruitful, Sarla's face had grown stern and plain. Even though Deven knew the reality, he could not do anything to help her. Being a woman Sarla had to compromise with the situation: The thwarting of her aspirations had cut two dark furrows from the corners of her nostrils to the corners of her mouth as deep and permanent as surgical scars. The droop of her thin, straight hair on either side of her head repeated these twin lines of disappointment. They made her look forbidding, and perhaps that was why her husband looked so perpetually forbidden, even if he understood
their cause" (p.68).

Deven's personality was very weak in comparison to other males. He had no other choice, but to agree with others but on the other hand he wanted to be a dominating husband in his own house, because dealing with a typical Indian wife was a totally different matter.

"Dealing with Sarla was a different matter. Sarla never lifted her voice in his presence - countless generations of Hindu womanhood behind her stood in her way, preventing her from displaying open rebellion. Deven knew she would scream and abuse only when she was safely out of the way, preferably in the kitchen, her own domain. Her other method of defence was to go into the bedroom and snivel, refusing to speak at all, inciting their child to wail in sympathy" (pp.145-146).

At times when Deven saw Sarla over-busy in her housework sweeping and cleaning, he had sympathy for her, but instead of showing his care he was worried about his position which was higher than hers.

"He considered touching her, putting an arm around her stooped shoulders and drawing her to him. How else could he tell her he shared all her disappointment and woe? But 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...."(pp.193-194)
Overall, it is clear through the observation of Desai's novels that women are dominated by not only the male members of the family but even by elder women of the family. They are mostly busy in the household chores and have no say in business matters. Even the working women have to obey their husband's wishes in matters concerning their jobs. Thus women are still behind in social matters – as they have to yet make a considerable and recognised place in the family before being recognised in the society.