Marriage and Widowhood

Chapter 4

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Marriage is the oldest institution in human life. It is as well an important social occasion, which announces to the people around that the young bride and groom are bound in wedlock. The marriage rites and ceremonies give religious and social recognition to the sexual behaviour of the male and the female. Marriage in Indian culture is not only an alliance made by a man and a woman, but also an alliance between two families. To the Hindus, marriage is not merely an arrangement for a man and a woman to live together. To them the *vivāha* or the marriage ritual is one of the sixteen *samskāras* (sacraments). While marriage is a religious rite, it is also an occasion for social celebration in which two families are brought together in a close relationship. The relatives and friends on both the sides assemble to participate in the event. Socially it is the announcement of a new relationship. The Hindu marriage is not merely a legal contract but a sacrament which lends a sort of permanency to wedlock. The rituals and ceremonies which accompany it give a special significance to the union which would otherwise be a simple gratification of the sexual instinct:

Since marriage is a sacred contract made between a man and a woman, society mobilizes all its forces, legal as well as moral and social, to cement the union stable. It has to be solemnized at sacred seasons, auspicious days or time. (Joseph 175)
The religious ceremonies performed by the priests are a necessary and important part of the marriage ceremonies. These rituals sanctify the union. Besides giving publicity to the union, they gain the acceptance of society for the newly wed, thus announcing the new relationship. The Hindu marriage rites stress the permanency of the marriage bond and the co-operation of the husband and the wife. The important ceremonies associated with marriage are the betrothal (nischitārtha), the handing over the bride (kanyādānam), the mutual firm clasping of hands between the bride and the groom (pāṇigrahanam), and the seven meaningful steps (saptapadi) which the couple take around the sacred fire. These solemnize the tie and ensure abundant food, wealth, vitality, and all round happiness. The various rituals and vows ensure mutual harmony, happiness, continued compatibility, prosperity, and marital success. The couple prays for progeny, long life, and well-being. These religious samskāras have the sanctity and approval of society. The different forms of marriage are different ways of obtaining a wife. There are the pre-marriage rites, the principal marriage rites, and the post-marriage rites. The indissolubility of the tie is an essential principle firmly established among the Hindus. The moment the marriage knot is tied, after the enjoined marriage rites are performed, they become partners for life, and the tie is broken only by the death of one. With marriage, the female child passes out of the possession of her parents and out of the possession of her horde into the possession of her husband. This transfer sometimes involves compensation in the form of bride price or bride wealth. The husband
and the wife are considered one, and the ceremonies observed by the husband without the co-operation of the wife do not yield the desired result. Hence an orthodox Hindu performs all ceremonies in the company of his wife. The marriage rites and ceremonies, along with the mantras recited "bind" the husband and the wife together. Apart from the marriage feast (in which the partaking of food indicates oneness), the marriage procession which announces the marriage brings the people together. The music played also adds to the atmosphere. It sometimes signals the beginning or end of a ritual. It is supposed to scare away the undesirable invisible beings from the marriage _pandal_ and the premises. The presence of Agni (the sacred fire) contributes to the inviolable sanctity of the marriage rites. The bridegroom marries his bride in the presence of Agni, the God of Fire, and various other devas whose presence is invoked and who are supposed to be present at the time when the marriage ceremonies take place. Thus the marriage tie is solemnized in the presence of the divine. It is believed to purify the bride and animate her with the activity of procreation. A marriage usually involves a readjustment of the social structure whereby the bride's relationship with her family is greatly modified. She enters a new and close relationship with her husband. Before the marriage, the girl's family members are outsiders for him, as he is an outsider for them. Thus it constitutes a social disjunction which is not destroyed by marriage. The social conjunction results from the continuance, though in altered form, of the wife's relation to her family, their continued interest in her and her children. Two separate and
distinct social groups, families or lineages, are brought together through the union of a man and a woman. The religious ceremonies performed by the priest aim not merely at averting spiritual dangers, but also at the success of the union. From time immemorial certain rites and ceremonies have been associated with the institution of marriage. These rites often differ from society to society, and even in different epochs. The various ritualistic formalities which accompany a marriage sanctify the union.

The marriage ceremony involves a number of stages, beginning with the selection of the bride and the groom. In orthodox societies this is done by the elders. An auspicious date is fixed, and sometimes a betrothal takes place. The horoscope and the dowry are two important customs associated with the preliminary formalities. The parents exchange the horoscope of the bride and the groom. An astrologer is consulted to decide the match. It is only after a lot of initial discussions that the marriage is approved and celebrated. A number of works in Indian English fiction contain reference to this samskāra. Raja Rao, R.K.Narayan, and Mulk Raj Anand have described these ceremonies in their works. The novelists depict these rites in different ways. While Raja Rao concentrates on the philosophical and spiritual aspect of marriage as in The Serpent and the Rope (the novel presents a ritualistic and symbolic union of Ramaswamy and Savitri), R.K.Narayan's works expose the tradition-bound conservative society of Malgudi. Novelists like Lalithambika Antharjanam (Agnisaakshi),
K.B. Sreedevi (Yainam), and Rajam Krishnan (Lamps in the Whirlpool) expose the tragic plight of women caught in an orthodox and conservative set-up. Most of the Indian novels refer to the customs and practices intimately associated with the Indian culture, each novelist depicting them in his own way. A study of R.K. Narayan's Bachelor of Arts, Vendor of Sweets, Painter of Signs, and Grandmother's Tale, Mulk Raj Anand's Gauri, Kamala Markandaya's Nectar in a Sieve and A Handful of Rice, Anita Desai's Cry, the Peacock and Fasting, Feasting, Manohar Malgonkar's Princes, and Kavery Nambisan's Scent of Pepper are undertaken here.

The superstitious and the orthodox closely adhere to the age old traditions and customs associated with marriage. In an orthodox society one finds the traditional method of "arranging" marriages after comparing the horoscopes of the bride and the groom, taking into consideration the family, status, caste, relative affluence and future prospects of both the families. These rigid caste prohibitions and difficult astrological hurdles in India are referred to by R.K. Narayan. The role of the matchmaker, who is appointed to find a suitable bride or groom by the respective parties, at the Indian wedding is also significant. This is found in a number of Indian English novels like The Bachelor of Arts, Gauri, Nectar in a Sieve, and A Handful of Rice. In The Bachelor of Arts Ganapathi Sastrigal is appointed to give out that he is acting on his own, while in Nectar in a Sieve Old Granny plays a similar role. Ravi's father comes from his village to play the
role of a matchmaker as Ravi has no one to do so in the city (in A Handful of Rice). Through the situation Ravi refers to the difference between the urban and the rural set-up. A contrast to his present state is provided by his recollection of his village:

Women came and went, and one always knew which girls had come of age, which young men were looking for brides, and when the time was, there was never any shortage of emissaries, you never had to look for one because they were always there, experienced women who went determinedly back and forth until the marriage was arranged. Yes, there it would have been different, he would have had no problems at all. Ravi sighed for his village, a thing which he did not often do; and was unhappy. (48-49)

While Ravi’s father comes and carries out the preliminary negotiations in A Handful of Rice, in Gauri a barber acts as the go-between. Some of R.K.Narayan’s novels contain references to the rites and ceremonies, associated with marriage, in south India. The society’s orthodox belief in astrology is humorously presented in The Bachelor of Arts. The second part of the novel contains much of the discussions on marriage and the customs and practices associated with it. Chandran has to face the hurdle of rigid customs and useless traditions--like the absurdity of astrological considerations, and matching the horoscope of the bride and the groom before finalizing the proposal--existing in the Hindu society. Through the
novel, the novelist points out the difficulty of love marriages in an orthodox Indian society. Caste, status, and financial position of the two families concerned are taken into consideration. In Chandran’s case too there is the question of caste, subcaste, of dowry, family status, and finally the tallying of horoscopes. Since Malathi’s (the girl he loves) people too are liars there is no difficulty regarding the caste and subcaste. But difficulties arise due to the low status of her family. Her father is only a head clerk while Chandran’s father is a retired high ranking government official. The customs and traditional practices shatter the hero’s romantic illusions. What happens in Malgudi is typical of the orthodox Hindu society in India as well. It thus appears as a microcosm and symbol of India. Chandran’s mother is the depository of age old customs and traditions. Being very conservative, she makes a lot of fuss regarding the dowry and the social status of the bride’s family. The clash between tradition and modernity, and the two generations (that of Chandran and his parents) is suggested through their differing views. His romantic love for Malathi thus clashes against his mother’s cherished convention, superstition, and fatalism. Through Chandran’s mother, as well as characters like Jagan in The Vendor of Sweets, Sriram’s Granny in The Waiting for the Mahatma, and Raju’s mother in The Guide, R.K.Narayan presents the problems regarding custom in a tradition-bound society. In The Painter of Signs the orthodoxy is represented by Raman’s aunt who is averse to his alliance with Daisy and vehemently opposes the match. Expressing her dislike, she
leaves on a pilgrimage. With regard to customs, one finds the clash between the two generations here too. The old stick to the traditional social values which the younger generation feels have frustrated them in life. Chandran's mother disapproves of the match because of social conventions and rigid caste prohibitions that are to be followed and respected in society. She refuses to disregard the traditional practices and clings on to them till the very end of the novel.

According to custom, the proposal must come from the bride's side. Hence a go-between (Ganapathi Sastrigal) is appointed. While Chandran's mother refuses to give up her orthodox views, his father tries to help in arranging the marriage, brushing aside the considerations of family, status, and dowry. The hold of customs and the insistence of the orthodox on "respecting the old customs" (70) is conveyed vividly in the novel:

> For his sake they were prepared to compromise to this extent: they were prepared to consider the proposal if it came from the other side. Whatever happened they would not take the initiative in the matter; for they belonged to the bridegroom's side, and according to time honoured practice it was the bride's people who proposed first. Anything done contrary to this would make them the laughing-stock of the community. (70)

The horoscopes are matched to ensure happiness, health, and harmony in life. This custom associated with marriage is referred to in a number of creative works. In spite of man's attempt to rationalize
everything, astrology continues to influence him. The Kodava belief in comparing the horoscope, the auspicious season for marriage, and the inauspicious month of kakkada (thirty days when marriages are not held) is found in The Scent of Pepper. It also forms a significant part of the marriages which take place in Malgudi. The Bachelor of Arts humorously mentions the difficult astrological hurdles which Chandran has to overcome to carry out his marriage. Consulting the horoscope is one of the common Hindu practices associated with marriage in India. Novels like Grandmother's Tale, The World of Nagaraj, and The Financial Expert also refer to the custom of consulting the horoscope. Chandran's mother comments on the custom:

'It is the custom. When a girl is ready for marriage her horoscope will be sent in ten directions, and ten different persons will see her and approve or disapprove, or they might be disapproved by the girl herself; and after all only one will marry her. (158)

A traditional Hindu marriage involves a number of preliminary formalities, and Chandran’s mother checks his exuberance referring to it, and the chances of the marriage not taking place. The novel refers to the never ending rituals associated with marriage:

'First, our astrologer must tell us if your [Chandran's] horoscope can be matched with the girl's; and then [. . .] their astrologer will say. Let us hope for the best. After that, they must come and invite us to see the girl [. . .]. After that they must come and ask us if you like the girl.
And the terms of the marriage must be discussed and settled....' (83-84)

That the horoscopes do not tally cause much frustration and despair in Chandran. A clash between custom and reason ensues. One finds the hero brushing aside his mother's orthodox views. Ironically he later submits to his parents' wishes and marries the girl of their choice. Though Chandran's unorthodox views do strike a modern note, later on he shows himself as a conformist submitting to the traditions and customs of his community. The incident thus throws light on his character. Though the horoscopes are returned (as they do not match) it only gives rise to further debates and discussions. The long controversy over the matching of the horoscopes is not only humorous, but also gives one a picture of the convention bound society of Malgudi. The vehement quarrel between Chandran's father and Malathi's father over the superiority of their own child's horoscope provides humorous instances in the novel. The different calculations are finally attributed to the difference in the almanacs used. Like Chandran's mother, the novelist himself refers to the fatalistic attitude of the people:

We believe that marriages are made in heaven and a bride and groom meet, not by accident or design but by the decree of fate, the fitness for a match not to be gauged by letting them go through a period of courtship but by a study of their horoscopes; bride and groom meet
and love after marriage rather than before. (Walsh, R.K.Narayan: A Critical Appreciation 17)

The irony lies not only in the incompatibility of the horoscope but also in Chandran himself, for though he may rebel against the system, he is also conditioned by the selfsame system more than he is aware of it. The importance of caste, family, astrology, and the financial status in a marriage alliance is stressed throughout the novel. In the battle between custom and reason, custom and tradition win. The autobiographical element in the novel is significant, for the author himself underwent a similar situation in his life. A reference to his marriage is found in R.K.Narayan's My Days:

My horoscope had the Seventh House occupied by Mars, the Seventh House being the one that indicated matrimonial aspects. The astrological texts plainly stated that Mars in the Seventh House indicated nothing but disaster unless the partner's horoscope also contained the same flaw, a case in which two wrongs make one right. (108)

But, unlike Chandran's, in R.K.Narayan's case a more favourable reading by another expert enables the marriage to take place. The role played by the matchmaker, the trust in the horoscope, the discussions on dowry, caste, and status, which are associated with marriage are also found in R.K.Narayan's Grandmother's Tale, Vendor of Sweets, and Manohar Malgonkar's Princes. The hold of astrology on the human mind is beautifully portrayed by Anita Desai in
Cry, the Peacock. The novel explores the turbulent emotional world of
the neurotic protagonist Maya. Born into an orthodox family, she is
haunted by the disturbing memory of the astrologer who had predicted
that she or her husband would die four years after marriage—"Death
[. . .] to one of you [Maya or her husband Gautama]. When you
are married—and you shall be married young" (30), suggests the
inevitability of death. The death of Toto, her pet dog, triggers off the
memory of death and the albino astrologer who had made the
prediction. From the very beginning the novel refers to the "indefinable
unease" (12) Maya feels at the back of her mind. The final disaster is
hinted at the very onset when Maya is in the fourth year of her
married life. The novel repeatedly refers to the impending doom. The
action revolves around the horoscope and the prophecy. Using the
device of the interior monologue the novelist presents the "intolerable
grapple with thoughts, feelings and emotions" (Iyengar 464) of the
protagonist. This inner turmoil is also "reflected in the language, syntax
and imagery" (Iyengar 464) of the novel. Because of her failure to
establish a fulfilling relationship with her husband, Maya inhabits a
world full of morbid fears and turns neurotic. Through a psychologically
disturbed female protagonist Anita Desai brings out the impact of
astrological predictions on the human mind. The novelist portrays the
obsessional thoughts of her hypersensitive character, thus beautifully
capturing the psychic states of a woman haunted by the awareness of
death. As Maya herself admits, tradition, superstition, and custom
were all "alien" (61) to her once. It is the prediction which brings doom
in her life. One finds a constant to and fro movement between the past (of Maya's life with her father, and brother, and the albino astrologer's prophecy) and the present (her life with Gautama and his family) in her mind. The haunting memory of the horoscope and the prophecy work like a leitmotif in the novel. The prophecy leaves such a deep impression on her that even after years of the incident it remains vivid in her mind. To escape from reality Maya seeks refuge in the childhood memories which fill her mind. But her “Hindu” psyche refuses to let go the astrologer's prediction. The prophecy lingers in her unconscious and surfaces in disguised and distorted forms, manifesting her hidden fears. Various incidents, like the death of Toto, her brother Arjuna's letter, and a typical Indian scene like a temple with a lingam (a Shiva temple), an oil lamp, and a fortune teller examining the hand of a young girl to be married, remind her of the horoscope and the prediction. Anita Desai does not focus on the details of the incidents but concentrates on the impression these objects have on Maya's psyche. The prediction wreaks havoc in Maya's life. She finds it difficult to adopt a fatalistic approach to her problem. Though after the prediction astrology had never been uttered or even mentioned in her presence, the albino astrologer lingers in her mind and casts a shadow on her life. She is consoled with the words, "we must learn to accept" (54). These mnemonic words from childhood recur in her mind, but she is unable to accept the disaster foreseen on reading the horoscope. Her father burns her horoscope but does nothing to allay the fear in her. The inevitability of death is suggested from the very
beginning and what is left for one to know is who is to die--Maya, or Gautama. The novelist objectifies her (Maya's) mental state through symbols like the dust storm, and the cry of the peacock. The syntax too shares the qualities of her disturbed mind which is loaded with thoughts of death. Though the astrologer had emphasized the potency of prayer and faith to avert the disaster, Maya is unable to extricate her thoughts from the fear of death and her love for life. Through the recurring memory of the horoscope and the incident, the novelist conveys her protagonist's preoccupied mind. The tensions within Maya give rise to severe headaches which are symptomatic of her desire to elude issues. The albino (white, symbolizing death) astrologer lingers in her mind, and through the world of dreams, nightmares, and fantasies the astrologer's prediction surfaces again and again making an escape from the thoughts impossible. Psychologists like Freud point out the peculiar behaviour of superstitious people:

[A superstitious person has a tendency to] ascribe to external chance happenings a meaning which will become manifest in real events, and to regard such chance happenings as a means of expressing something that is hidden from him in the external world. (257)

Unable to face reality she concludes that even for the fulfilment of the astrologer's prophecy her death is not necessary. It is her desire for self-preservation that makes her shift the burden of the prophecy on to Gautama. Maya finally transfers the prediction on to her husband.
Psychologists have studied the peculiar behaviour of compulsive neurotics. They elucidate how compulsive neurotics have a certain typical peculiarity with regard to superstition and the possibility of the death of other persons. Their superstitions are often private ones which have a common origin with their neurosis. One finds in Maya nostalgia for childhood in which no marriage or death haunts her mind. The horoscope and its prediction become the primary reason behind Maya killing her husband, and her morbid fears which lead to insanity. The deep attachment to her father and marital incompatibility only aggravate the situation and drive her towards insanity. While the prediction leads to neurosis, marital discord contributes to her neurotic fantasizing. Gautama has only contempt for the rituals and considers them as absurd. The novel repeatedly hints at the difference in their temperament. While Gautama does not believe in the "bogus ceremonies" (14) and "empty rites" (17), Maya is obsessed with an astrological prediction which her husband refuses to take seriously or dwell upon. Maya finds herself married into a family which "would hoot with derision at the mention of superstition, with pity and scorn for those who allowed their lives to be ruled by them, and ruined by them" (75-76). The subject is hence rejected by his family as puerile (as Maya's childishness). One wonders why she is married off when, in an orthodox family such a marriage would never take place. One also notes that she is married into a family which does not ponder over horoscopes. The novel clearly indicates her family to be a tradition-bound one:
Born of a family of Brahmins that for generations had lived their lives—[. . .]—according to prescribed patterns, had married according to the advice and suitability of their horoscopes, had diligently taken up careers that the pundits had chosen for them out of the constellations, had had their children's stars studied and speculated upon before they even spoke their first recognizable words [. . .]. (75)

The socio-familial background and upbringing as well as the fatalistic attitude to life create much trouble in Maya's life. Since she comes from an orthodox family it is natural for her to be obsessed with her horoscope and astrology:

[. . .] Maya has enclosed herself in a world of superstitions and is unable to break out of the constraints imposed by the orthodox society, with its belief in horoscopes and future-telling. It is from her Indian background that she has nurtured both a love and fear of the unknown. But in her case it is self destructive and carries negative associations. (Uniyal 158)

The horoscope and the prediction are not Maya's hallucinatory creations as Arjuna's letter too refers to it. The novel is a fascinating psychological study of neurotic fears and anxieties caused by age old superstitions, marital incompatibility and disharmony. Anita Desai here concentrates on the superstitious fears which influence human life. Astrology plays a significant role in an orthodox person's life. In
Cry, the Peacock, the prediction is carried out by Maya though she transfers it on to her husband. The novelist shows how an obsession with superstitious beliefs leads to disaster and even death. Gautama's death at the end of the novel reminds one of the albino astrologer's prediction, and his words that the "stars do not lie" (29). One is thus left with a belief in astrology and the predictions it makes.

Like the horoscope, the 'bride-seeing' ceremony also forms an integral part of any traditional Hindu marriage. The ceremony (at which the bridegroom's party comes to "examine" the bride) which takes place at the initial phase of a marriage is described in some of the Indian English novels. In The Bachelor of Arts, Chandran, brought up in a conservative and convention ridden society is unable to violate the age old customs and traditions. Through the hero one finds the novelist expressing his own preference for the traditional and the conventional. Chandran marries according to his parents' wishes. The horoscopes match and R.K.Narayan provides a short description of the 'bride-seeing' ceremony in which the girl is coaxed to come before the "viewers". A similar, but humorous description of the 'bride-seeing' ceremony is found in The Vendor of Sweets. The novel (like The Bachelor of Arts) depicts the clash between Mali (representing the new values) and his father, Jagan, (representing the old values), and Jagan's final escape from the world of responsibilities. Jagan confronts a new world where marriage has lost its sanctity. As in his other works here too R.K.Narayan shows himself as intimately familiar with the ways, habits, and aspirations of the middle class south Indian families
he describes in his works. The clash between the ancient customs and rituals, and the modern values become explicit as Jagan tries to make his son adopt the traditional ways of life. The fact that Mali and Grace (a half Korean, half American girl) are not married shocks Jagan. Such a relationship is unacceptable in a society like Malgudi. The ways and manners of the Hindu society, as Jagan adopts it are pitted against Mali’s westernism. Mali has only contempt for the Indian ways and ignores the customs and traditions which are a part of it. The absence of ceremonies in the Mali-Grace relationship, which does not succeed, is significant and in sharp contrast to Jagan’s recollection of his own ‘bride-seeing’ ceremony and marriage which is performed according to the traditional practices. The western admiration for Indian ways is conveyed through Grace who prefers to marry according to the Indian customs. The East-West dichotomy is suggested through their relationship. But it is ironic that while Mali (an Indian) is averse to Indian practices and prefers the occident, Grace (representing the West) does not reveal a similar attitude. Mali brushes aside Grace’s idea of getting married as “funny notions” (146), revealing a total break with his orthodox upbringing. Moulded by an orthodox set-up, their relationship appears to Jagan as “living in sin” (135). He even performs actions of a purificatory nature to cleanse the house of the pollution he believes it has acquired due to Mali and Grace’s tainted relationship. Jagan’s recollections of the ceremonies associated with his own marriage highlight the absurdity and meaninglessness of Mali’s relationship with Grace which lacks togetherness. Jagan’s own
marriage had been carried out according to the customs which accompany a traditional Hindu marriage. As with most characters in R.K.Narayan's orthodox milieu, Jagan too does not have a say in the choice of his bride. He has to marry the girl of his parents' choice. The preliminary formalities as well as the marriage are in contrast to the absence of customs and rituals in the Mali-Grace relationship. The description of the ceremony is significant as it takes place at a stage when Jagan decides to leave his home and enter the next phase of his life (vānaprastha). Jagan seeks shelter in the past and relives the days of his youth. It presents a picture of marriage and domestic felicity under the traditional set-up. The situation is infused with humour and serves to expose the absurdity of the practices. The bridegroom's party is fussed over by the bride's people (as in The Painter of Signs). It shows the honour with which the bridegroom and his family are treated at any traditional Indian marriage. The novel refers to this--

"[. . .] they [the bridegroom's party] were honoured visitors, on whose verdict would depend the future of the girl; it was a highly serious and important role, and they were expected to carry themselves with dignity [. . .]") (150). It becomes an occasion for the display of ceremonial behaviour. While the bride's people try to "judge his intelligence and outlook" (149), Jagan is warned by his elder brother "not to be too communicative, as a certain mysteriousness was invaluable in a son-in-law" (149). In a humorous way the novelist points out the meaninglessness of the customs followed by the orthodox:
the code demanded that their [the bridegroom's] hosts should press the delicacies upon them. Then one would have to break off the jilebi minutely with the tip of one's finger and transfer it to one's mouth, and generally display reluctance or even aversion until pressed again, and then just to please others eat two or three bits in succession and then take an elegant sip of coffee. The essence of behaviour in these circumstances consisted in seeming to do things for the sake of one's hosts. (151)

R.K.Narayan thus humorously describes Jagan's delicate mission in which pretensions are kept up, for "although everyone was fully aware of the purpose of the young man's visit, one had to view the main purpose casually, neither side displaying too much interest or anxiety" (152). The bride appears only after much persuasion. In a traditional society like Malgudi Jagan's plight is similar to that of Chandran and Viswa (Grandmother's Tale), for he too cannot voice his opinion regarding his future wife. As the novel points out, with a contrary behaviour one would only "cheapen oneself" (155). A similar situation is depicted in Mulk Raj Anand's Gauri. The bridegroom, Panchi, is not allowed to have a glance of the bride, nor the bride of the groom, before marriage. Each of them has to depend on rumours regarding the other's appearance. This explains Panchi's impatience at the 'showing' ceremony. But a total break from the orthodox characters portrayed in R.K.Narayan is Daisy in The Painter of Signs. She is at odds with the mythological image of the Indian woman. The
novel embodies the spirit of change and urbanization which blows over Malgudi. It deals with Raman's love and disenchantment with Daisy, an ardent worker at the family planning centre in Malgudi. Daisy effects a readjustment of traditional values, and dominates over her male counterpart, thus manifesting the spirit of liberation. One finds her character strikingly modern as against the traditional characters, like Savitri (The Dark Room) or Bala (Grandmother's Tale), in other R.K.Narayan novels. In the novel she topples the subservience to male authority. The emergence of the active female here is accompanied by the reduction of the male who is a passive character. She rebels against the orthodoxies and approves of a relationship between a man and a woman on equal footing and not on interdependence. That Daisy does not believe in marriage rituals or customs indicates her break from her brahminic upbringing. Daisy thus reminds one of Mali in The Vendor of Sweets. She has no taboos of any kind. Streaks of feminism have been woven into her character. This is evident when she describes her 'bride-seeing' ceremony:

My mother called me one day into a side room and told me to be prepared to be inspected by a prospective bridegroom. They had a shock at home when I told my people that I'd not allow anyone to inspect me as a bride and that I'd rather do the inspection of the groom! They felt outraged [...] and said 'Don't be mad! Don't you know that it's not done?' I replied, 'If it is not done, it's better that someone starts doing it now'. (130)
The language is charged with irony and humour when Daisy describes the arrival of the "eminent personage" (131). She says, "What a fuss they made when they arrived. It's hard to get a bridegroom, and when one is available parents treat him as a hard-won prize" (131). For her tradition is a shackle decelerating progress. She goes through the ceremony feeling suffocated. As in any orthodox set-up she is hushed back into the room when she questions the bridegroom. Her dominant nature is similar to that of Bharati in *Waiting for the Mahatma*.

Dowry too is often a deciding factor in the selection of a bride. The gift of the bride (*kanyādānam*) is accompanied by other small gifts. This is associated with the concept of marriage as *dāna* (meaning "gift"). It was once a voluntary offering and had its origins in the Vedic times. Though earlier considered as a meritorious act, gradually the custom of *kanyādānam* itself reduced the status of a daughter. She became one of the things possessed by her father—a possession which he could donate at free will, without taking into consideration her choice or opinion. The father or her guardian became solely responsible for the choice of the bridegroom. This "gift of a maiden" slowly gave rise to the notion that it should be accompanied by some *daksīna*, some gift of gold or wealth for the bridegroom. But in course of time the bridegroom started demanding the gift and this gradually led to the practice of the payment of dowry in modern times. The dowry system marks the economic aspect of marriage. In *The Bachelor of Arts* Chandran's mother refers to this when she says, "It is the duty of every father to set some money apart for securing a
son-in-law. We can't disregard custom'" (85). At the vägdānam in The Vendor of Sweets the dowry is given by the bride's party with a gentle suggestion to count the cash. The novelist points out the significance which economic transactions are given when a marriage takes place. Apart from this a demand is also made to furnish the nuptial suite. One finds R.K.Narayan's comic irony at work when Jagan's father passes the cash on to be counted saying, "'It was not necessary to count [. . .] but since you insisted on it..."' (158). The goods gifted are later "examined" and their value assessed by Jagan's relatives. One finds the degradation of a custom (of giving gifts to the daughter by her father on her marriage) in this description. Marriage is thus often reduced to a business transaction. The novelist himself says, "Marriages are, of course, made in heaven, but they are a business in our part of the universe [. . .]" (A Writer's Nightmare 46).

Anita Desai too points out (in Fasting, Feasting) how in a modern society rituals and ceremonies have become secondary to the economic aspect associated with a marriage alliance. In the novel Uma's husband (Harish) leaves her because he is already married and had married her for the dowry to save an "ailing pharmaceutical factory" (93) he runs. Harish, an old travelling salesman, accepts the dowry given with "alacrity" (87). The novel humorously adds that the dowry "must have seemed like a bonus to a man who may not have expected more than one dowry in a lifetime" (87). One of the attempts of the family at getting Uma married even ends in disgrace as the engagement is broken, and they lose the dowry given to the boy's
family. The family thus loses two dowries for Uma. There is no 'bride-seeing' ceremony to avoid further embarrassments for the family, and the family is portrayed as being frantic to get rid of its unmarried daughter. *Nectar in a Sieve* refers to the wedding ceremonies in a south Indian village. Rukmani’s father’s declining status is indicated through her recollection of the different marriages which take place in her family. At the opening of the novel Rukmani refers to her elder sisters who are “married fittingly” (1) because her father was the respected headman of the village. They are given plenty of gifts, jewels, and a dowry. As Rukmani recollects, one finds in her words a picture of the diminishing prestige and fortunes of the family:

My [Rukmani’s] three sisters were married long before I was. Shanta first, a big wedding which lasted for many days, plenty of gifts and feasts, diamond earrings, a gold necklace, as befitted the daughter of the village headman. Padmini next, and she too made a good match and was married fittingly taking jewels and dowry with her; but when it came to Thangam, only relations from our own village came to the wedding and not from the surrounding districts as they had done before, and the only jewel she had was a diamond nose-screw. (1-2)

But Rukmani’s dreams of a “grand wedding” (2) are shattered due to her father’s diminished prestige, and she is married off to a poor tenant farmer, Nathan, without even a dowry. Hence she makes preparations for her daughter’s marriage from the time of her birth, and brings them
out on the occasion. Ira, Rukmani’s daughter, too is married off with a dowry they could afford. *The Scent of Pepper* as well as *The Princes* refer to the economic transaction which has become a part of the marriages. Nanji’s father agrees to give a dowry to save her from the hands of her stepmother thus indicating the economic transaction which accompanies a Kodava marriage. Besides the reference to the amount set apart for Nanji at the very beginning of the work, the economic aspect of marriage is referred to later on in the novel when Subbu expresses his desire to marry Mallige. Nanji then points out that the girl “will be married off with next to nothing” (188). Nanji resents Mallige’s modest background:

> Families with prestige gave gold and silver to their daughters, to be displayed on the night of the wedding. Mallige had come with two tin boxes—one filled with clothes and the other with an assortment of vessels not worth more than fifty rupees. Her bridal finery, which had astounded everyone, had been borrowed. Her jewels amounted to no more than a gold chain, *pathak* and silver toe-rings. Nanji had seen the contempt in the eyes of the guests who went away saying, ‘The grandson of the Rao Bahadur could have done better’. (198)

Like the dowry, the bride price too is a custom associated with marriage. *The Princes* refers to the huge amount given to Abhay’s mother’s family as dowry. The bride price, a custom prevalent among some of the social groups, gives the bridegroom the right to marry the
Mulk Raj Anand's novel _Gauri_ alludes to this custom. The novel deals with the story of the eponymous heroine, Gauri, who is beaten, mistrusted and exploited by her husband, Panchi. She finally abandons her home and husband, and chooses to live on her own and to depend on herself. At her wedding, in addition to the bride price given by Panchi's uncle, Panchi gives a pair of gold ear-rings. The gyrations around the fire are even stopped because of the cheap bride price Panchi gives. The bride price is considered a recompense to the bride's kin as well as a means of securing rights over her and her offspring later on. In _Gauri_, Laxmi, Gauri's mother, mentions her intention of using the bride price to start a dairy business. Bride price, like the dowry, is a custom which degrades the position of women.

Like the invitation cards sent, the marriage procession, and the music, the betrothal ceremony too makes the marriage known among the people. Since the marriage agreement is based on word of honour, it is essential that it should be made known to as many as possible to minimize the possibility of one of the contracting parties repudiating the marriage in toto. A short description of the Wedding Notice ceremony held at Chandran's house is found towards the end of _The Bachelor of Arts_:

It was a day of feast and reception in Chandran's house. A large number of guests were invited, and at the auspicious moment Jayarama Iyer [Susila's father] stood up and read the saffron-touched paper which announced that, by the blessing of God, Chandran, son of So-and-so,
was to marry Susila, daughter of So-and-so, on a particular auspicious date, ten days hence. (163)

Chandran's failure in marrying Malathi plays an important role in his struggle towards maturity and marks the end of a phase in his life. This forces him to move out of Malgudi to attain a wider experience. The ripples created in his life subside with his marriage and he ultimately accepts life as it is. The ceremony of vāgdānam (the mutual agreement) is also described in *The Vendor of Sweets*. Priests, a few neighbours and relatives are invited to Jagan's betrothal. The bride's party arrives with fruits, betel leaves, new clothes, saffron, silver plates, lamps etc. The dowry is given, and the din created by the music party makes it known to the whole town that a marriage is being settled. A feast is held after the ceremonies.

It is only after the approval of the elders, and the preliminary formalities, that the marriage takes place. Invitation cards are then sent, announcing and inviting for the marriage, and an enormous crowd turns up at the marriage. This traditional atmosphere is created in a number of R.K. Narayan's novels. Many of his works refer to the principal marriage rites. Though the experiences in his life make Chandran lose belief in the sanctity of the institution of marriage, he opts for a traditional Hindu marriage. The preparations for the marriage involve days of intense activity. The novelist avoids a lengthy description of the marriage ceremonies, and merely refers to its effect on Chandran, who is once again lost in a romantic world. The failure in love, besides playing an important role in moulding his career and
bringing about the transformation in his character, also shows the importance of family relationships in a traditional set-up like Malgudi. The impatience Chandran shows to marry Malathi is later shown in Susila's case too. In spite of the experience he has gained in his life, one does not find much change in Chandran's behaviour. Despite making different attempts, R.K.Narayan's characters are unable to escape from the grip of various outmoded customs, or go against the prevailing practices in their orthodox society. In the caste ridden Hindu society of Malgudi, arranged marriages appear to be the only possibility. Even Chandran's father, though comparatively modern in his outlook, is not able to completely shake off the time-honoured customs and traditions. Brought up in an orthodox brahmin household, the novelist himself seems to uphold tradition. His characters are tradition-bound, superstitious and rooted in the age old practices of their religion. But this is not a deliberate attempt to be traditional:

Narayan never deliberately attempts to be Indian, but because he deals with convincing human beings in authentic situations, and records their responses honestly, and because these human beings happen to be Indians, he succeeds in achieving that difficult task: writing in a genuinely Indian way without being self-conscious about it. (Mukherjee, The Twice Born Fiction 199)
The traditional atmosphere of Malgudi is evoked in *The Vendor of Sweets* with a description of Jagan's marriage ceremony:

Jagan's whole time was spent in greeting the guests or prostrating himself at their feet if they were older relatives. The priests compelled him to sit before the holy fire performing complicated rites and reciting sacred mantras; his consolation was that during most of these he had to be clasping his wife's hand; he felt enormously responsible as he glanced at the sacred thali he had knotted around her neck at the most auspicious moment of the ceremonies. (160)

The sanctity attributed to Jagan's marriage is lacking in Mali's relationship with Grace. Theirs is a marriage of convenience where each of them can leave when the relationship becomes a burden:

Mali had proved that there was no need for ceremonials, not even the business of knotting the thali around the bride's neck. Nothing, no bonds or links or responsibility. Come together, live together, and kick each other away when it suited them. (175)

Through Jagan the novel asserts the hold of tradition. Apart from the reference to the noise, visitors, and the feasting which go on for three days, R.K.Narayan also humorously refers to the bitterness over the quality of the coffee and the missing gold waist belt included in the list of jewellery. His works give a clear picture of the socio-cultural milieu
of Malgudi. The simple characters one finds in his works are conservative, and they closely adhere to the traditional values of their orthodox community. One finds in his works "an unadulterated expression of an Indian consciousness" (Dass 212). Malgudi is deeply caste ridden and traditional, and R.K.Narayan asserts the "validity of traditional Indian values" (Ramteke 110) in his works.

A child marriage (of Balambal) is described in Grandmother's Tale. Balambal (Bala) is married at an early age to Viswa (Viswanath). The novel traces her transformation from a school girl to a determined woman and finally to a docile orthodox wife. As in his other works, here too R.K.Narayan has created typical Indian characters who cling on to their traditions and customs. They have the notions and feelings, taboos and morals of India with them. The novel depicts an orthodox grandmother's tale. Being an orthodox woman, it is natural and apt that she describes the marriage ceremonies of her mother as described to her. The child bride, in spite of her reluctance, is forced to go through the ceremonies. The action is taken forward with the marriage between Bala and Viswa. The novelist conveys the ignorance and childish nature of Bala and Viswa through his description of the ceremony. For a child like Bala the marriage is just "an occasion when she would be showered with gifts and new clothes and gold ornaments" (10). The auspicious date is fixed and she is forced to be indoors, which makes her sulk and weep. In such a social set-up where both the bride and the groom are not allowed to express their views with regard to the marriage Chandran's love affair in
The Bachelor of Arts strikes one as modern. The lengthy description of the ceremony conveys the childish nature of the bride and the groom. The novel gives a picture of child marriages prevalent in India:

On an auspicious day she was clad in a saree, decked in jewellery and taken to the pillared hall of the temple where had gathered guests and relatives and priests, a piper and drummer creating enough noise to drown the uproar of the priests chanting mantras and the babble of the guests. She was garlanded and made to sit beside a boy whom she had often noticed tossing a rubber ball in an adjoining street whenever she went out to buy a pencil, ribbon or sweets in a little shop. (10)

Viswa ties the tāli as she sits on her father’s lap. There are week long celebrations, feasting and the exchange of ceremonial visits between the bride and the groom’s parties. The rigidity of customs do not allow them to meet alone. While the bridegroom returns to his school life, the bride’s life changes after her marriage, for she cannot go out freely or play with her friends. According to custom “they could not meet normally as husband and wife. Bala, being only ten years old, must attain puberty and then go through an elaborate nuptial ceremony before she could join her husband” (21). But Viswa does succeed in establishing a line of communication with Bala in spite of all the difficulties he has to face. The novel throws light on the custom of child marriages in orthodox societies. In Malgudi Bala is considered a widow when Viswa disappears soon after his marriage to her. She is
branded as a widow "pretending to be a *sumangali*" (29), and prohibited from entering the temple lest she follows the rules of a widow to preserve the sanctity of the temple. Hence Bala leaves her house determined to find her husband. One finds it difficult to accept her daring act keeping in mind her submissiveness and passivity before and after retrieving her husband. Her marriage to Viswa is in contrast to the "quiet and private" (49) marriage of Surma and Bhatji (Viswa) and the "quiet, and simple ceremony" (90) in which Viswa is married to the maid's daughter towards the end of the novel. Both these marriages end abruptly, one with Viswa returning to Bala leaving Surma, and the other with his death. It is the *tāli* around Bala's neck which makes her describe herself as the "real wife" (57) and hers the "legitimate home" (57). Her actions are justified by introducing the Savitri legend. Bala is compared to Savitri who brings back her husband from Yama. Savitri in mythology is known for her austerity and purity of mind, and with her future behaviour Bala too proves to be devoted to her husband. The novel traces the transformation Bala undergoes. Her marriage plays a significant role in this transformation. R.K.Narayan operates within the framework of a traditional Hindu society in most of his works.

The marriage becomes an occasion for enjoyment and revelry in the rural atmosphere. It forms a part of the portrayal of village life in *Nectar in a Sieve*. A large part of the novel concentrates on marriages and the marital life of its characters. The marriage between Nathan and Rukmani is one based on love and understanding. It is an ideal
one in contrast to the other marriages depicted in the novel. The garland of dry mango leaves which Rukmani sees on arriving at Nathan's house assumes symbolic significance as it prefigures their life and labour growing to bits of withered leaves, and the blows by the calamities of life. The novel describes Ira's marriage. A matchmaker is appointed to find a suitable groom. The economic aspect of the bridegroom, ensuring a sound financial position, is also taken into consideration. The preliminaries are completed and a day is fixed for the wedding. Ira accepts her parents' choice with docility and after marriage leaves with her husband to begin a "new life" (36). Chapter six of the novel gives a description of the marriage ceremonies which take place in the propitious season. The preparations start weeks ahead. The novelist shows how the marriage becomes an occasion for the whole village to celebrate. Marriages and similar festivities become rare moments of joy in their lives which are filled with poverty and the vagaries of nature. It is a symbol of joy, hope (for a new and better future), and happiness. The people join to celebrate and help the family. Music and feast accompany the celebrations. The picture of feasting and plenty ends with the marriage. The rains destroy their work and there is little to eat as most of the provisions had gone to make the wedding feast. The bride and the groom sit "uneasily" (37) side by side. The white (a symbol of purity) flowers Ira wears on her hair assume significance in the novel. The picture she presents in the first part is in contrast to the role of a prostitute she is forced to take up later on in her life. One does not find here a long description of the
wedding ceremonies as the narrator concludes it abruptly with the words, "So they were married" (38). Like most expatriate writers Kamala Markandaya has set her early novels in the land of her origin. The novel beautifully conveys the din and bustle accompanying Ira's marriage and the emptiness thereafter:

Then the palanquin [into which Ira is lifted] was lifted up, the torchbearers closed in, the musicians took their places. We [Rukmani and Nathan] followed on foot behind, relatives, friends, well-wishers and hangers-on. Several children had added themselves to the company; they came after, jigging about in high glee, noisy and excited: a long, ragged tail-end to the procession. (38)

The noise and bustle end with Ira being taken to her husband's house. But her ceremonial marriage turns out to be a failure. This seems to be indicated at the beginning itself--"The walls showed cracks" (38) soon after the marriage indicating the "crack" in Ira's life with her husband due to childlessness. Her husband deserts her and marries again. In contrast to Rukmani and Ira's marriages is Murugan's (Rukmani's son). While Rukmani and Ira's marriages are arranged by their parents, Murugan marries without the presence of his parents. His marriage too fails. The novelist seems to uphold a traditional marriage based on love and understanding, as in the novel, only the Nathan-Rukmani relationship succeeds. M.K.Naik too refers to these different relationships in the novel:
Rukmani's marriage was a sacred covenant which bound the two [Nathan and Rukmani] together in sun and in rain, but not in the case of Murugan [and Ira] who had arranged his own marriage and who, being in the city and without the sanction of elderly people of the village, deserts his wife and takes another woman without any compunction. (Dhawan 215)

But it is difficult to accept this as Ira's marriage which is arranged by her parents, and is conducted with "the sanctity of elderly people of the village" (Dhawan 213) too fails and her husband takes another woman as his wife. The novel portrays some of the various beliefs, rituals, and ceremonies found in the country. Apart from the glossary, one finds descriptions like "across the doorway a garland of mango leaves, a symbol of happiness and good fortune, dry now and rattling in the breeze" (4), and "Ira had been given in marriage in the month of June, which is the propitious season for weddings [. . .]" (39) which an Indian reader would know. These may be a nostalgic recollection of the homeland by an expatriate writer. Kamala Markandaya's works are more or less free from literal translations of Indian words. The elaborate descriptions of marriages, festivals, and other customs along with a glossary at the end of the novel makes one feel that the novelist has a western audience in mind--that she is presenting India to the West.

A conventional Hindu marriage is also found in Manohar Malgonkar's Princes. One finds here a reference to the
alliance between Abhay and Kamala. It is a traditional marriage brought about after consulting the horoscope, like that of his father and mother, but a happy one. One finds Abhay gradually accepting his father's values. The lavish marriage festivities with brass band, fireworks and dancing girls indicate it to be a royal marriage. As a member of the princely tradition Abhay too has to marry, and make provision for the succession:

‘For people in our [the princely class] position [. . .] a marriage is a sacred thing. It is not a private, purely personal matter at all, but an affair of state, as it were. Even the Political Department has an interest. There is a duty, an obligation to marry someone suitable. Someone whom the people will one day have to accept as their Maharani’. (166)

As in any orthodox society, he has to marry after seeing the bride's photograph while the girl is not allowed to and has to observe strictest purdah. Abhay mentions how his mother first saw his father during their wedding ceremony when the curtain between them is removed. The women had to observe sati and sacrifice themselves. They thus became goddesses whose names were added to the family shrine. The marriage shatters his plans to marry Minnie Bradley whom his family does not accept. It to them is an "unsanctified marriage" (188). Abhay is married to Kamala in “a purely conventional Hindu marriage” (218). One notes Abhay’s emotional detachment at the ceremony. He
goes through it as "a sort of penance" (219). The marriage emphasizes his return to the princely fold:

It merely emphasized that I [Abhay] was now within the fold, aware of my obligations to my inheritance. I was taking a wife because a future Maharaja must have a Maharani, but I knew that no other obligations, such as love or marital fidelity, were imposed. (219)

The festivities described here are a display of wealth and extravagance. The marriage also plays an important role in the gradual transformation which Abhay undergoes. Like his father, Abhay accepts the forces of tradition in his life:

When I [Abhay] reflect on this [his marriage], I wonder whether there might not, after all, be something to be said for our deeply rooted customs, evolved after generations of trial and error; mine is certainly not an unusual example of how love can flow as a consequence of marriage, living together and the begetting of children.

(218)

Actions which do not have the sanction of society are vehemently opposed by its members. In a conservative and traditional society, rituals and ceremonies continue to have their hold, however liberated the people are. Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* hints at how religious ceremonies have lost their significance in the modern world. As against the few references to ceremonies and customs in her other novels, *Fasting, Feasting* describes Uma's wedding preparations in a
language charged with humour. The novelist seems to convey her dislike for the traditional practices which accompany a marriage ceremony. The novel provides a description of some of the customs and ceremonies associated with marriage. The action in the first part of the novel centres around Uma, the plain spinster daughter of a close-knit Indian family, smothered by her overbearing parents and their traditions. The first part, set in India, presents a conventional society in which unmarried daughters (like Uma) are a burden to the family. This part is in sharp contrast to the second part of the work which is set in America. The novelist concentrates on some of the aspects of a tradition-bound society in the initial section of the work.

Unlike her other works, in *Cry, the Peacock* and *Fasting, Feasting*, Anita Desai dwells on characters who are more or less tradition oriented. While Maya is obsessed with a prophecy, Mira-masi is obsessed with the rituals which rule her life from dawn to dusk. The influence of social customs on women is found in some of the works of fiction. While Uma is a mere puppet, Maya's superstitious upbringing does not give her any choice. The first part of *Fasting, Feasting* provides a description of Uma's marriage. Her marriage is a contrast to Aruna's (Uma's sister), for Aruna makes "the wisest, most expedient choice" (100). The description of the ceremonies also contributes towards the Indian atmosphere created in the opening section of the work. Uma's story conveys a sense of Indianness (full of visiting aunts, inquisitive neighbours, ceremonies etc.) while the second part has an
American texture. The language is infused with humour. The account given in the novel implies the significance of marriage in a girl's life:

There was a time, a season, when every girl in the big, far flung family seemed suddenly ready for marriage. It was as if their mothers had been tending them, in their flower pots, for just this moment when their cheeks would fill out and their lips take on a glisten and all the giggles and whispers would arrive at that one decision—marriage.

(66)

The novel refers to the various marriages (of Anamika, Uma, and Aruna) which take place in the family. Anita Desai seems to reconstruct an India around her. The absence of bridegroom jokes and gifts from the bridegroom to the children prefigures Anamika's relationship with her husband. The novel humorously describes the situation. Anamika is referred to as "someone brought in because it was the custom and because she would, by marrying him, enhance his superiority to other men" (70). The relationship ends with her death. The bridegroom's behaviour at the ceremony indicates his later behaviour towards Anamika. Marriages often mean nothing more than a show of wealth to families, and the bride is unimportant and her happiness a minor issue. This is seen in many of the novels in Indian English fiction. The traditional upbringing accorded to girls in Indian society is faithfully portrayed in most of the creative works. Through Uma, the novel depicts how in a traditional set-up a girl's unmarried state becomes an "embarrassment" (85) for her parents,
and "an obstruction" (85) in conducting other marriages in the family. Uma's mother tries to dispose of her daughter and sends her photographs (even has them touched up) to everyone who advertised in the matrimonial column. The novel describes the wedding preparations and shows how it does not make any difference to Uma whose views are not taken into consideration by the family:

Mama frantically supervised the cooking of meals and making of sweets for three days in a row. Papa was seeing to the marquee being set up on the lawn, the priest and all his requirements in the way of ceremony and ritual, and the musicians to play during the reception. Uma found herself richer by a dozen saris, a set of gold jewellery and another of pearls, then was handed a garland and posted at the entrance to the marquee to wait for the bridegroom. (87)

The bridegroom arrives with his relatives. The description of the ceremony itself hints that the marriage between Uma and Harish will be a short lived one. Uma herself seems to realize this. Harish asks the priest to cut short the long ceremony and appears reluctant to accept the garland. Uma does not have a choice but to accept her parents' overbearing presence. One notices that she is "made to" wait for the groom, "made to drape hers [garland] over his head" (88), and throw rice into the fire at the ceremony. The novel indicates a world where ceremonies and rituals have lost their sanctity. The ceremonies are performed, "not that anyone was listening, apart from Uma and her
husband who had no choice” (89). The Sanskrit verses recited by the priest are comprehensible to him alone. After the ceremonies Uma leaves for her husband’s house. But the relationship ends with Uma’s return to her house after a few days. The marriage is cancelled as it was made by her parents, while Uma continues to be non-existent to them:

The marriage was somehow cancelled, annulled. Uma was never told of the legal proceedings involved. It was assumed she would not understand, and was never quite certain if she had never actually married or if she was now divorced. (95)

Another glimpse of the traditional society is presented when, being a divorcee and having “cost her parents two dowries, without a marriage to show in return” (96), Uma is considered ill-fated by all and no more attempts are made to marry her off. Her position thus becomes “that of an outcast from the world of marriage” (96). Aruna’s wedding is a “splendid” (101) occasion unlike Uma’s which had been “drab” (101). One finds Aruna more assertive than her sister. She takes time to make a choice, at her insistence a reception is held, and the family even throws a cocktail party to welcome Arvind (the bridegroom) and his family before the wedding. The marriage as well as the preliminary preparations are “chic” (101) and “untraditional” (101):

[... ] the wedding was as chic as Aruna had planned it; the ceremony itself brief, its chief features being Aruna’s
elaborate sari and jewellery and the groom's maharaja-style turban. (102)

The Carlton Hotel provided the dinner, and even if some relatives refused to touch food cooked by who knew what low-caste cooks in what polluted kitchens, most of the guests were profoundly impressed and grateful and said so in heartfelt tones as they left, compensating Papa somewhat for the shocking expense. (102-3)

While Anamika and Uma submit to their parents' wishes, Aruna has her way. Her marriage survives. Aruna's preference for city life is seen throughout the novel and her "untraditional" (101) marriage highlights this trait in her character.

The different aspects of the institution of marriage can also be traced in Kamala Markandaya's *A Handful of Rice*. It presents the life of Ravishankar (Ravi) who flees the countryside and plunges into the turmoil of urban life. The chance meeting of Nalini, and his marriage to her proves a turning point in his life. Ravi becomes a part of the Apu (Nalini's father) household, first as an apprentice and later as a son-in-law. With Ravi's marriage to Nalini the two aspects—the rural and the urban—of life merge together. While Ravi does not have a job or an identity of his own in the city his father's presence gives him the "identity and status" (57), and a background and roots that are solid and stable, and reassuring in his in-laws' eyes. There is no dowry, and the day and hour of the marriage is fixed. At the wedding Nalini's bridal finery exposes the poverty of the family. The novelist does not
describe the rituals in detail but provides a vivid account of Ravi's wandering thoughts:

He obeyed, in a trance, with an awkward clumsiness which they indulgently excused as marriage nerves. He got up, he sat down, walked around the sacred flame, and fell at the feet of his father for his blessing. Somewhere beside him in all this was Nalini, but he was not now clearly conscious of her. The fire filled his vision, that and the flowers, flowers everywhere [. . .]. From somewhere came the smell of burning camphor [. . .] and there was the smell of incense too, wafting up in their blue trails of smoke from incense-sticks [. . .]. (59)

The smell of flowers, camphor, incense, and the sound of music fill the atmosphere. Ravi finds it difficult to bear the weight of the garlands he wears. The reference to his "shoulders aching from the weight of the flower garlands heaped upon them" (58) symbolizes the future responsibilities Ravi has to shoulder in the house before and after Apu's death. With Apu's paralytic attack and death afterwards Ravi takes on as his successor. The novelist beautifully presents Ravi's psychological condition as he is taken on a nuptial drive after his marriage. He dreams of a better life, but is jerked out of his reverie. In his later life too after a brief spell of happiness Ravi has to face poverty and hardship. The drooping plantain stems and the wilting mango leaves and marigolds, which hung on the doorway, too hint at their later
life which is full of difficulties. The marriage procession (announcing the marriage) completes a circular movement:

[They were] back where they had been, nothing changed except perhaps for the worse, nothing to do but put as good a face as possible upon the anti-climax. Enveloped in a sense of incongruity, feeling awkward and slightly foolish, Ravi stepped over the threshold he had done hundreds of times before [but now as a son-in-law].

(62)

With the marriage Ravi attains a new status in the family as Nalini’s husband. A feast is held and with his father’s return to the village, life returns to the usual routine. Unlike the usual marital residence (virilocal, “place of the male”) is the one (Uxorilocal, “place of the wife”) depicted in the novel. Here the couple (Ravi and Nalini) attaches their new household to that of the wife’s natal domestic group. For Apu he becomes a son and heir to carry on his work when he dies. Though the marriage brings more problems for Ravi, it also effects a drastic change in his status from a bootlegger, vagabond, and street loafer to a respectable household man. Marriage thus marks a shift for Ravi from the world of Damodar, into which he had entered after leaving his village, to the human world of Apu and his family. He assumes a new identity and becomes ready to repudiate all that is unworthy. In spite of his transition from the rustic to the urban landscape, Ravi is unable to shake off his rustic background. He turns nostalgic for the old ways of life, at the same time projecting a
fascination for the new. Ravi loses his freedom after marriage and labours under the burden of Nalini’s family. As a member of Apu’s family Ravi gains respectability. The novel refers to Ravi’s changed status and his awareness of it:

He had no friends left. His former associates were nomads, flitting from quarter to quarter as official surveillance tensed or relaxed, and unless one belonged to that band there was no way of locating them. Not, Ravi told himself piously, that he would want to. He would never condemn them of course: never would such heresy fall from his lips: but the fact remained that they were vagrants, seedy failures whom the city had defeated. (111)

As against his earlier existence as a part of Damodar’s group is his austere living at Nalini’s house. In works like *Nectar in a Sieve* and *A Handful of Rice* the customs and ceremonies add on to the suffering and misery of the peasants she describes in them. In Indian society, a marriage is celebrated with pomp and splendour even in the midst of hunger and poverty (as in *Nectar in a Sieve*, *A Handful of Rice*, or *Gauri*). Rukmani’s father, Rukmani, Nathan, and Apu have to spend a lot on the marriage and the feast which accompanies it, despite their bad financial position. For them the marriage celebrations are occasions of plenty. Though these ceremonies add happiness to their otherwise dull life, the lavish spending on food, music and the like is wasted as Ira is returned home by her husband in *Nectar in a Sieve*. 
The happiness is momentary, for both Ravi and Ira have to face the harsh realities of life soon after these festivities.

Novelists (like Mulk Raj Anand and R.K.Narayan) while referring to the customs and ceremonies of the orthodox often apply ancient values to a modern context. While Mulk Raj Anand applies the Sita myth in *Gauri*, R.K.Narayan applies an ancient marriage system to a modern context. *Gauri* opens with a description of the heroine's marriage to Panchi. The relationship later leads to her transformation from a docile woman to a self-reliant one. With the marriage begins her sufferings. Gauri is restored to Panchi only to be rejected because of the rumours of her life in Hoshiarpur, and she leaves. The novel is an indictment on the society which reduces women to the position of slaves. Gauri is presented as a docile cow at the beginning of the novel. At the marriage negotiations, her parents repeatedly refer to this quality of hers and say, "Gauri is like a cow, very gentle and very good" (11). Panchi himself feels like a "holy bull" (13) going to marry the "little cow Gauri" (13). The novel opens with a reference to the marriage procession and the ceremonies associated with it. The marriage marks the bringing together of two villages--that of Chota Piplan and Piplan Kalan. Suggesting the difference between the two villages the novel points out how the negotiations for the marriage had taken months. One of the difficulties is that the bride is from an ancient village and the groom from a small hamlet. The music played at the ceremony also shows the difference between the two villages. Describing this the novel points out how "the gay band of Piplan Kalan
[... ] struck up 'Tipperary' by the gateway of the big village, drowning the 'peenpeen' of the Shehnai flutes of the little band that had come with the bridal party" (9). The groom's party is looked down upon and insulted. The parties quarrel over the bride price as well as the large numbers who accompany the bridegroom. Both the villages try to outshine each other in their rivalry. One finds in the novel some of the ceremonies which have become a part of an Indian marriage. The quarrels over dowry, jewellery etc. have all become a part of the marriage ceremonies. The groom's party is abused and given food with hemp. Panchi also becomes the butt of Gauri's friends' pranks at the 'showing' ceremony. Throughout the ceremony the bridegroom's inferior social status is hinted at. From the very beginning the marriage is thus doomed to end in disaster. Panchi is considered an inauspicious orphan, and there are hostilities between the two parties. The relationship is broken off and renewed three times before the marriage actually takes place. Bad omens recur—the horse on which Panchi rides tries to throw him off, Panchi steps over the threshold before oil is poured on the corners of the doorway—in the novel. Life in the village is filled with superstitions and sufferings. The superstitious nature of the villagers is beautifully portrayed here. Though oil is poured on the corners of the door way, "just in time to save the marriage from disaster" (18), according to the villagers the marriage between Panchi and Gauri is doomed right from the beginning. Their superstitious beliefs come true at the end as Gauri leaves her house. One also notes that, as the villagers foresee,
bad luck falls into the couple's life with the marriage. Her arrival coincides with the fall in the family fortunes. The joint family breaks up, as Panchi fights with his uncle, and a drought strikes the village. Each disaster is seen by Panchi's aunt, Kesaro, as the unfortunate result of the ill-starred marriage with the unlucky and inauspicious Gauri. Gauri thus comes to be identified with Goddess Kali (the destroyer). In spite of his disbelief in superstitions, the idea of Gauri's bad stars continue to possess Panchi. In a village filled with superstitions, it is natural for Panchi to believe Kesaro's words that Gauri is the cause of their bad luck. Life in Indian villages is thus filled with superstition, sufferings and poverty. There is a reference to the ceremonial fire and the priests reciting the holy verses at the marriage ceremony. Panchi and Gauri go around the sacred fire and Gauri is "tied" to Panchi from behind with her apron. Mulk Raj Anand seems to mock at and condemn a marriage which lacks the full approval and sufficient knowledge of the concerned partners. The novel also depicts Panchi's comic plight at the 'showing' ceremony. One finds here what Radcliffe-Brown refers to as "joking relationship" (Brown 106). They are the teasing reminder of the social disjunction caused by the marriage, while the social conjunction is maintained by friendliness that takes no offence at the insult. The show of hostility is considered a continued expression of the social disjunction. Joking relationship is thus a way in which persons standing in certain relationships, resulting either from kinship or more usually from marriage, are permitted or required to behave towards one another in a disrespectful or insulting
way at which no offence might be taken. Thus in this relationship between two persons one is by custom permitted and in some instances required to take no offence. Panchi himself refers to the custom:

[...] he vaguely knew that such jokes were part of the time-honoured ritual of initiation into marriage, and his aspirations to chivalry prevented him from exhibiting bad temper, though great sparks of violence glowed inside him. (24)

Panchi's behaviour at the 'showing' ceremony expresses his naivety and temper which is later the cause for much of the misunderstanding between him and Gauri:

But [the] first joke at his expense was so crude and violent, and the demolition of his headgear so complete, that he was pale with hurt pride and unnerved, in spite of himself, and could not work up any of the bluff of enthusiasm expected from him. (23-24)

One also finds the aspects of folk culture in the marriage ceremonies with which the novel opens. As a part of the 'showing' ceremony a number of riddles are asked to Panchi. The language used is a mixture of English and vernacular. The custom of partaking of food (signifying oneness) is found here when the bridegroom is given a betel leaf which he puts into the bride's mouth and then has a piece of it himself. Panchi allows himself to be fooled and led by others at the ceremony as later on in the novel. Much of his later behaviour is thus
prefigured at the marriage ceremony. From the beginning he brooks anger against Gauri and holds her responsible for all his humiliations, indicating his later behaviour of blaming his wife for every mishap. Panchi's curiosity at not being allowed to lift Gauri's dupatta, and his wild impulse to satisfy his curiosity by pulling it aside show his impulsive nature later on when he beats Gauri at his will and throws her out. Critics like M.K. Naik see revealed in similar ceremonies a particular aspect of the peasant character:

The convention according to which the women folk of the bride's side welcome the groom's party with satirical verses and lampoons; the practical joke of putting hemp in the food served at the marriage feast; and the girlish pranks which the friends of Gauri play on Panchi at the time of the ceremony of “the showing”—all these reveal a robust (if somewhat rough) sense of humour in peasant character. (Mulk Raj Anand 90)

At the very onset the novel indicates the framework of Gauri from the Ramayana. The novel uses the Sita myth as a structural parallel like the Bhasmasura myth in R.K. Narayan's Man-Eater of Malgudi. Mulk Raj Anand transmutes the myth of Sita who is exiled by her husband Rama on the taunting remark of a washerman that she is impure because she had to live in Ravana's Lanka for some time. But the parallelism between the two stories stop at the point where Panchi challenges Gauri to give proof of her purity:
It is part of Anand's technique that in his novel a myth should be pursued up to a certain point and then suddenly reversed. This contains an implicit comment on the values of the past, and reveals Anand's rejection of the ideal represented in the particular myth. [..] this novel is unique among Indian novels in rejecting rather than extolling the time honoured womanly virtues of patience and submission. (Mukherjee, The Twice Born Fiction 164)

The legend is thus transmuted to suit the modern times as the heroine instead of suffering silently leaves her house to carve out a life for herself. She adopts a path different from the one adopted by her mythic counterpart. The parallel between the two stories, and the past and the present, is hinted at throughout the novel:

'Be like Sita...'. (28)

'They [the people] are telling him [Panchi] that Ram turned out Sita because everyone doubted her chastity during her stay with Ravana!... I [Gauri] am not Sita that the earth will open up and swallow me. I shall just go out and be forgotten of him...'. (244)

The Sita myth is introduced at the beginning only to be exploded at the end. As in the case of Ira or Uma, Gauri's ceremonial marriage too is not a success. In Gauri the "woman who is banished [Gauri] becomes the woman who herself rejects the narrow world of subjections and fears that enslave Panchi despite his better self" (Sinha 69). The
heroine becomes a symbol of new womanhood. Mulk Raj Anand does not endorse or justify the myth but presents a modern version. Gauri's plight reminds one of Girija in Rajam Krishnan's *Lamps in the Whirlpool*. Both the novels trace the transformation which the female protagonists undergo. Girija a middle class girl, and a Hindu wife in a brahmin community has to maintain ritual purity which her mother-in-law insists. Unable to stand the restrictions of a tradition-bound, orthodox set-up she leaves her house only to return to be charged with infidelity. Girija is forced to choose between a crushing orthodoxy at home and the freedom of self-expression outside it. In *Gauri*, the novelist appears as a champion of the amelioration of women:

[..] all the old antiquated ideas of India don't apply. The Sita myth doesn't apply. Rama is a coward, not a hero [..]. (Rajan, *Studies in Mulk Raj Anand* 114)

I [Anand] think it is not the lot of woman to become Sita any more. (Rajan 114)

Unlike Savitri, in R.K.Narayan's *Dark Room*, who returns to her house, Gauri shares the qualities of Nora in Ibsen's *Doll's House*. Though Mulk Raj Anand advocates the liberation of women, he seems to stress the need for retaining the traditional aspect of life as well. In the novel he “juxtapose[s] what is decayed and unhealthy and what is still vital and precious in the Indian tradition” (Naik, *Mulk Raj Anand* 87). The transformation Gauri undergoes through the impact of modernity is firmly rooted in tradition. During all her trials “two traditional props
sustain her—her faith in the goddess, and her certitude of her own role as a Hindu wife" (Naik 91). In spite of contacts with modernity Gauri remains firmly rooted in tradition. Through the novel Mulk Raj Anand depicts the unsuitability of an old myth to the modern world:

My [Mulk Raj Anand] characters were not meant to be revised versions of old mythical symbols of the epics. I think that human beings do change in a changing universe, even if ever so little. So old mythical characters like Sita, or Savitri or Rama, are not eternal types who must be repeated in new incarnations. We cannot live by the good and bad examples of gods and kings of 5000 years ago. (Reddy 26)

According to Mulk Raj Anand there is no return to old myths and contemporary man has to forge new myths for himself which do not approximate to the old ones, but draw their power from India's ancient culture and heritage. The novel which opens with a description of the marriage ceremonies ends with its total break up. But it ends with "the hope of a better order through the successful union of what is imperishable in tradition and what is life-giving in modernity" (Naik 95).

Unlike the other tradition oriented characters in R.K.Narayan is Daisy (The Painter of Signs). She does not attach any sentiment to married life, and carves her own separate identity in life. One finds in her a sort of unmitigated antagonism to the concept of marriage. She discards the institution with its rites and ceremonies. Her brief period of courtship with Raman makes it clear that she is not interested in
housekeeping, and that her work will always have precedence over her wifely duties. Since Daisy prefers a "very simple ceremony" (158), the Gandharva marriage is chosen to do away with any formality:

He [Raman] had explained to Daisy the five kinds of marriage he had read about and they had come to the conclusion that the system called Gandharva was the most suitable one for them; that was the type of marriage one read about in classical literature. When two souls met in harmony the marriage was consummated perfectly, and no further rite or ceremony was called for. Daisy said that although she had no faith in any ancient customs, she would accept it, since it seemed to her a sensible thing. (158)

One finds in Daisy the transition of the image of the Indian woman from the archetypal Sita-Savitri image to that of a modern one. The system of marriage they opt for is quite contrary to the traditional one in which the father of the maiden invites the young man to accept the hand of his daughter. A properly bedecked daughter is given away by her father in this brahma form of marriage prevalent among most social groups. The situation further exposes Raman's servile nature towards Daisy, and her upper hand in the relationship. Though they decide to live together, the two conditions Daisy lays down—that they will have no children, and that she will be allowed to pursue her social work—reminds one of a similar situation in the Mahabharata. One finds in R.K.Narayan an extensive use of myths and legends. Through Daisy
the Hindu legend of king Santhanu, who marries a beautiful woman on the condition that he is not to question any of her actions, is introduced into the novel. She says, "If you want to marry me [Daisy], you must leave me to my own plans even when I am a wife. On any day you question why or how, I will leave you. It will be an unhappy thing for me, but I will leave you...." (159). Raman himself refers to the legend when he says, "Whatever you say, I will never interfere. I won't question you. I will be like the ancient king Santhanu...." (159). The novelist does not take the point of comparison beyond this and even before Raman questions her, Daisy leaves him. A classical legend is here applied to a modern context in the relationship between Raman and Daisy. The juxtaposition of the fate of Raman with that of the mythical Santhanu generates the irony of contrast without any attempt to shatter the myth. His characters like Raman and Nataraj often find the myth as a spring of consolation. An infatuated Raman agrees to Daisy's conditions. One does not find here the usual discussion on horoscope, dowry, caste, or status. In Gandharva marriages the parties themselves form the union without the knowledge or consent of their parents or relations. It is settled through mutual understanding as in the novel. There is mutual love and consent between the bride and the groom, and it is usually a voluntary union of a maiden with her lover. Parents and kinsmen have nothing to do in such marriages. But the relationship between Raman and Daisy lacks understanding, and one doubts Daisy's love for Raman. The feeling of oneness is lacking in the relationship described here. It lacks togetherness, and as Raman
makes out “the path of peace lay in not contradicting her” (168). Each leads a separate life and the relationship ends even before it begins, as Daisy leaves saying “Married life is not for me” (178). The incident throws much light on their characters. R.K.Narayan seems to point out that such marriages, which do not have the sanction of society, do not last. A non conformist like Daisy, who does not care for traditional customs and practices, does not find a place in R.K.Narayan’s milieu. The victory of tradition is thus ensured in most of his novels. The order which is temporarily disrupted with her arrival is restored once again as Daisy leaves and Raman returns to his own world. In spite of rigid unconventionalism and streaks of feminism shown by Daisy, in the social context of Malgudi she appears a travesty of womanhood. The descriptions of the rituals and practices in R.K.Narayan’s works are a part of the traditional life and society the novelist portrays in them. While tradition and custom win in his Malgudi, the progress of the unorthodox and the unconservative is mostly thwarted. Marriages without their accompanying ceremonies do not succeed in Malgudi.

The description of the Kodava marriage in The Scent of Pepper provides one a glimpse of their culture. The novel presents a picture of the different aspects of the Kaleyanda life. One finds here the rituals associated with birth, marriage, death, and festivals of the people of Coorg. At the very opening it refers to the marriage between Nanji and Bailyanna. The marriage marks Nanji’s entry into the Kaleyanda household. She is received into the house after sprinkling a pinch of
saffron rice into a copper pitcher with water. Music, feast, and dancing form a part of their marriage ceremonies. The marriage with a member of the Kaleyanda clan brings with it a new prestige. A short description of Boju's (Nanji's brother-in-law) marriage is also given in the novel. It temporarily relieves Baliyanna from his depression, and marks Chambavva's last visit home from the Crystal Palace. Baliyanna refuses to have Appachu (his brother) at the wedding. Appachu's marriage is in contrast to the traditional marriages described in the novel. He marries a Christian and is baptized Appachu Basil Pinto. He defies the Kodava customs only to be deserted by his wife and children, and to return to his roots towards the end of his life. The use of Indian words like shamiana, mantap, pujari, and muhurtam serve to enhance the traditional atmosphere created in the novel. Boju's marriage plays a significant part in Subbu's transformation into manhood. It also marks a new phase in Nanji's life. As a part of the ceremony Boju touches the feet of his elders and seeks their blessings. Through Clara's presence the novelist hints at the East-West dichotomy. As at the funeral ceremony, here too she stands apart:

She wore a blue suit with hat and gloves but in the midst of all the colour and gold [the Kodava girls appear in silks wearing brooches, pendants, chains and diamonds which suggested the solidity of the girl's background], her dress looked too plain and the hat, ludicrous. (114)
The marriage is solemnized at the bride's place and the party returns with the bride to Athur. It suggests the usual post-marital residence which is virilocal. Where a similar custom is followed, the bride generally joins her husband in or near his natal residence, and is received by the women there. Among the Kodavas, as a part of the ceremony, the dancing young men block the path of the bride as she enters the house. The Kodava culture undergoes gradual changes with the passage of time and the old customs are replaced by new ones. The Kodava custom in which a bride is won by a man only after fighting and vanquishing nine suitors is thus replaced by the custom in which the Kodava groom cuts nine banana trees at his wedding. This is similar to the form of marriage in which the bridegroom is obliged to perform an act of prowess. This is reduced to a mock fight as referred to in this novel. At Subbu's marriage nine banana trees are planted in a row outside the bride's house. Subbu cuts them and dances as if he has really annihilated nine suitors to win Mallige. Ironically he is attacked by one "suitor" who is in love with Mallige, thus reminding one of the actual custom in which a suitor has to defeat his rival. Though injured, Subbu goes through the marriage ceremony. It is significant that the novel provides an elaborate description of Subbu's marriage as most of the later action in it revolves around him. Being late, a furious Kalappa (Mallige's father) keeps the groom's party waiting outside his gate. The incident gives one an inkling of the Mallige-Subbu relationship described later in the novel. Kalappa's fury "about the indignity of having had to wait for the boy's
party" (189) strikes as modern in the traditional Kodava atmosphere. The marriages described in the novel bring together two families, villages, as well as people. This is seen in the marriages of Nanji, Chinni, Mallige, and Appachu (two different cultures too in his case). The impact of Gandhian ideals and the influence of the Indian political scene on the life of the people of Coorg are found in the second part of the novel. One notices the gradual transformation which takes place in Coorg. A Gandhian, Subbu, in spite of his diminishing faith in congress ideals, refuses to have alcohol served during the two day ceremony. The "dry wedding" (194) creates much communal resentment. The ceremonies are described in the novel. The descriptions throw light on the Kodava customs:

The barber shaved Subbu using milk to soothe the skin, and was gifted money, rice and the mat on which Subbu sat. Subbu bathed and dressed [. . .] and seconds before the muhurtam, [was] led [. . .] from the Kaliyanda house to the wedding mantap [. . .]. (193)

At Mallige’s house the bangle-seller receives his gift of money, rice, and the mat on which the bride sits as he slid the bangles into her wrists. The bride is dressed and adorned with jewels. Mallige enters the house, thus changing Nanji’s status in the household. A number of ceremonies are performed as the bride enters the groom’s house after the marriage:

The bride broke a coconut near the well and carried a pitcher of water to the house and, like all Kodava brides
before her, stood the trial of patience [prefiguring her patience in dealing with Nanji] and stamina while young Kaliyanda men danced and blocked her path [. . .]. Mallige entered the house, sought the blessings of the elders and became a part of the Kaliyanda family. (196)

Unlike Chambavva (Nanji’s mother-in-law), Nanji is unable to get along with her daughter-in-law. But Nanji has to give way to Mallige as Chambavva had done earlier. Though Mallige has none of her mother-in-law's capabilities, she brings about changes in the Kaleyanda household as Nanji had soon after her arrival as Baliyanna’s wife. Besides focusing on the customs and ceremonies of the people of Coorg, the novelist also shows its significance in their culture though they undergo changes with the passage of time.

The social stigma, and seclusion imposed on a widow is portrayed in novels like Kanthapura, Fasting, Feasting, and The Scent of Pepper. Through Mira-masi (Fasting, Feasting) the novel portrays an orthodox widow obsessed with rituals and ceremonies. One finds in her an obsession for purificatory rites. Her days are filled with rituals like salutation to the sun, ritual baths, prayers, preparation of her vegetarian meal on her own for fear of being polluted, evening ceremonies in the temple etc. She recites ancient myths and is horrified by pollution and uncleanness. Apart from the private rituals she performs, she goes to the temple and sits through the rituals there. Mira-masi is one of the few elaborately described orthodox characters in Anita Desai’s fictive world. Anita Desai seems to condemn such an
orthodox social set-up. In a conservative society widows are believed to bring ill luck and hence looked down upon. They have to shave their head, are not allowed to wear jewels, chew betel, wear coloured clothes, and are forbidden to take part in auspicious occasions. Their very presence is considered an evil omen. The novel provides a detailed account of the rituals and ceremonies Mira-masi seems obsessed with. Like most Indian widows she too resigns to her fate.

One finds the description of her activities humorous. Mira-masi went through these rituals "as casually as if she were dusting her house [. . .]" (41). But her obsession with religion (after becoming a widow she had taken up religion as a "vocation" (39)) and purification appears "old-fashioned" (38) to Uma's family. Religion, for her, appears to be a means to escape from reality. She travels all over the country feeling "safe in her widows white garments" (38). Mira-masi even goes to the verge of making a human goddess of Uma, considering her to be "possessed" when she actually has a hysterical fit. Like a widow she spends her life going on pilgrimages. An entirely different picture is found in works like Kanthapura, and The Scent of Pepper. In the orthodox social set-up of Kanthapura one finds a character like Ratna, who is portrayed as a progressive widow. The novelist presents her as an educated young woman with progressive views. Though a widow, she does not dress and live in the conventional style of a widow. Ratna wears bangles, coloured saris, has Kumkum mark on her forehead and parts her hair. Though she is much criticized in the novel for her unconventional ways, she does not care for such criticism and chooses
her own path, and sticks to it with determination. Ratna also actively participates in the Gandhian movement, and conducts harikathas, reads out the newspaper, and carries on Moorthy's work when he is arrested and put in jail. In *The Scent of Pepper* the Kodavas allow their young widows to remarry as is evident from Nanji's marriage to Balyanna. In spite of being a widow Nanji is married according to the customs of the region. The Kodava widows are allowed to live their life, and are treated properly. Thus in a more or less traditional social set-up Nanji is married though she is a widow. Widows for them are a symbol of grief. They (like Chambavva) spend the rest of their lives in the Crystal Palace:

The inmates of the house knew what it was like to be shackled to a husband, home and society, and that past experience made them extremely sympathetic to each other's minor vices and addictions. (116)

Like any Hindu widow, the Rao Bahadur's wife, Chambavva, is dressed in white, denuded of her satin jacket, silk sari, chains, ear-rings and tiger-claw brooch which for her were the sign of her husband's prestige and valour. The change in Chambavva's status (from a married woman to a widow) creates much discomfort for her. In a humorous way the novel points out that though Chambavva, who had led a life of sloth, sat on a reed mat by the body of her husband "her grief overshadowed physical discomfort. Her status had slipped from that of wife to widow. Even a decaying husband was better than no husband" (14). The mourners offer her flowers and sympathy. In contrast to the
usual treatment meted out to the widows, the novel shows how the Kodavas treat their widows better than most of the other social groups. They retire from the day-to-day life and live in the Crystal Palace engaging themselves in simple pleasures like singing, games, and drinking, things which the widows in any orthodox society would be denied. But one also notes that though these Kodava widows lead a mirthful life it is also "an expression of rebellion that no one had time or compassion to understand" (20). The treatment meted out to widows varies from society to society. Creative writers often raise their voice against the inhuman treatment meted out to them by society.

Marriage is an auspicious occasion, a sacrament as well as a social institution for the Hindus. There are various social signals (like the procession, feast, and music) which indicate that a marriage is taking place. The actual ceremony is also publicly ratified. An orthodox Hindu marriage is often described as a tiresome affair—very noisy, tediously minute in ceremonies, liable to interruptions from disputes, and often an arena for rival factions to fight out all the ill-feeling, discontent, and jealousy which have accumulated for years. It is not only an occasion for enjoyment but also to show one's prosperity and status in life. The orthodox cling to the ceremonies which accompany a marriage. But more than the ritualistic aspect the financial and economic aspect of the institution is often emphasized in the modern world. The marriage becomes a means of bringing relatives as well as friends together. It is a social occasion of happiness and rejoicing, but often becomes a show of wealth and
splendour and an instance for establishing one's position and influence. Though the sanctity of the institution of marriage is maintained by the older generation, with modernization much of its significance seems to be lost. These ceremonies are depicted in different ways in Indian English fiction. Novelists have also brought forth the plight of widows in their works. The Indian woman is often presented as being bound by superstitions and conservative traditions. The hypocrisy of the priests, who are willing to match the horoscopes if money is paid, is exposed in a number of works. Creative writers denounce customs like dowry and bride price which have become attached to the institution of marriage. These are dealt with in an ironic and humorous manner as in The Vendor of Sweets or Fasting, Feasting. While Anita Desai concentrates on the psychological impact of religious beliefs on the human mind, Kavery Nambisan, besides giving one a picture of the Kodava culture, highlights the East-West dichotomy (like Kamala Markandaya). The characters representing the West often find themselves out of place in the traditional Indian atmosphere. References to similar ceremonies are found in a number of Indian English creative works, as it is a part of the life of the characters depicted in them. These ceremonies are a central part of the traditional set-up like Malgudi in which rebellion is almost impossible. Besides promoting social solidarity and happiness, these rites and rituals, which play a significant role in Indian life, are also an integral part of Indian English fiction.