CHAPTER – 4

MOTHERHOOD AND MID-LIFE: FULFILLMENT OR CURSE?

God could not be every where and
therefore he created mother.¹

This wonderful Jewish proverb solicits motherhood with
divinity. Motherhood is considered to be one of the most celebrated
achievements of a woman. It is perceived as one of the most important
functions of a woman. Motherhood for woman is in a sense a role for
receiving the seeds of man to provide a fertile ground for the nurture
of life. By analogy, if this argument is developed further, the seed then
grows into the nation and woman becomes the ground upon which the
nation grows. It is she who creates an individual for this world. Hence,
she is symbol of creativity and continuity; without her, neither the
people nor the culture can survive; without her, according to Hindu
scriptures, man’s spiritual existence is nullified. Thus a woman
becomes a symbol for **Creation**, **Culture** and **Civilization**, the three
big Cs in human life.

Marriage and consequent dislocation, motherhood and
consequent responsibility and midlife as a subsequent part of her
married life are said to be the important mile stones in a woman’s life.
According to many natural scientists and psychologists, dislocation of
the habitat plays a very crucial role in the after life of a woman.
Marriage causes such dislocation in a woman’s life. After getting
married and migrating to a new place, the problem of adjustment and existence occur in her life. In the preceding chapter it is observed that the married Indian women try to adopt various patterns of survival strategies to adjust and exist in the environment where they have to live throughout their lives. If the married woman has satisfactory relationship with her husband she will adjust easily in the new environment. With this marital happiness, she comes out in flying colours in all her roles as wife, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law and as mother. But if married woman does not enjoy conjugal bliss and continue to remain “alien” in her in-laws’ house, there is a danger that she may fail to bring out her true self in the roles of wife, daughter-in-law and as well as mother. The gloominess that has set in her life continues even in her midlife also. The bleakness of marital relationship affects not just the woman herself but also her relationship with children as mother.

In order to examine the effects of disturbed and undisturbed environment of the marital home on the aspects of “motherhood and midlife” of woman, the married women characters in the selected novels of Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya need to be discussed. Before that, a brief review of the concept of motherhood deserves rapt attention.

Motherhood is one of the finest phases of a woman’s life. In many cultures it is mandatory for a woman to become a mother upon which her “identity” depends. In fact, the infant’s first contact with
this world begins with mother. Mother is hailed and respected more in the Orient than in the Occident. Though most of the Indian families are patriarchal and feudal in nature, mothers make an admirable contribution to the all round welfare of these families. The presence of women as equal members of the family is very often challenged and criticized. But their role as mothers brings them to a respectable position within the household. Adrienne Rich brings out this status of woman as “child bearer,” simultaneously bringing out the gender discrimination that only a woman is called “barren” and never a man is called so:

Woman’s status as child bearer has been made into a major fact of her life. Terms like ‘barren’ or ‘childless’ have been used to negate further identity. The term ‘non-father’ does not exist in any realm of social categories.  

This concept, developed perhaps in the pre-scientific period, has had a deep impact in every culture. As creation is obviously attributed to woman, barrenness in woman is also blamed on her.

The image of woman in the Indian society as mothers or mother figures is always acknowledged as a very significant dimension of the social system. She has love, sympathy, care, and responsibility towards her children. Mother’s love is expected to be unconditional and intense. Her love and devotion to her children is unlimited and of
a rare kind. Vivekananda brings out the difference between the Western ideal of woman and the India ideal of woman as follows:

In the West woman is a wife; in India woman is mother.....

In India the mother is the center of the family and our highest ideal. She is the representative of God, as God is the mother of the universe. It was a female sage who first found the unity of God, and laid down this doctrine in one of the first hymns of the Vedas. Our God is both personal and absolute; the absolute is male, the personal, and female. And thus it comes that we now say: ‘The first manifestation of God is the hand that rocks the cradle.’

The image of the mother in India is not only confined to the women in real life but also to women in legends, history, and religion. Traditionally, mother in India is a revered figure; it is always “Matrudevo Bhava” – meaning “Mother is God” - followed by the father and then others in the hierarchy of worship. The Mother-principle is all pervasive. Even Indian symbols of wealth, art, music and knowledge are all female gods called mothers: Lakshmi, Parvathi and Saraswathi. In legends and folk tales the benevolent elderly woman is always the personification of the mother. Mother is considered to be repository of all positive values which influence the quality of life, and ultimately transform the society. Thus, the role a mother plays is of profound value to the well-being of a society. This is
symbolized by adding “amma” (mother) to every female name, while addressing her.

Since the concept of mother is central to Indian life and society, it has been treated with utmost admiration and concern in the nation’s philosophy, religion and literature. Literature in India (in regional as well as in Indian English) cannot avoid depicting the institution of motherhood as its subject matter. The aspect of “motherhood” has such a tremendous impact on the Indian writers that it has found its best expression and representation in the works of many authors like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R.K.Narayan, Bhabani Bhattacharya, etc., Therefore, Usha Bande says:

Given the importance of mother in Indian culture, it is not surprising that it should be a major theme in Twentieth Century Indian English Literature.4

This tradition is continued even by the writers of younger generation like Arun Joshi, Gita Mehta, Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai, etc. The present image of the mother is depicted with the live realities of life. She is considered to be the cultural sanctifier, the redeeming force and the sustainer of life.

The mother no longer appears in life and literature as a Mother Goddess, a glorified Devi of superhuman strength and wisdom. Rather she is a real human being; a multi-dimensional personality with her strengths and weaknesses, her magnanimity and greed, her
powerlessness and her frustrations. The treatment of the theme of mother in Indo-English literature is varied and in order to understand and appreciate it, one must examine the depiction of mother characters and their form, in the perspective of the male and female writers separately.

The portrayal of mother figure varies from a male perspective to that of a female perspective. A male writer may portray mother as an idealized life force; conversely, a woman writer may challenge the traditional image. Psychoanalysts observe that since mother is omnipresent in the psyche of Indians, particularly in the minds of Indian male, the men characters depicted by male writers react sharply if the image of the mother is shattered. That is why mother dead and lost would be far more easy for them to accept than a mother fallen from grace. For example, such women characters are Nirode’s mother in Anita Desai’s *Voice in the City* and Prince Abhay’s mother in Manohar Malgonkar’s *The Princess*. In fact, the concept of a “good” and a “bad” mother is a world-wide phenomenon. But under the particular Indian socio-cultural context, it acquires an added significance. A “good” mother is the one who not only fulfills a child’s physical needs but provides him reassurance through her confirming presence. Sudhir Kakar, a critic, presents the image of mother in the minds of Indian children as follows:

An Indian child tends to experience his mother totally as a “good” mother. She is the nurturing and fear-dispelling
A good mother helps a child tide over the emotional crisis and a bad mother proves detrimental to the child’s mental growth. For boys, however, mother is an ideal and an idol. Adoring her and placing her on a pedestal is a typical male ideal construct. A single step away from the traditional line by the mother can destroy the ideal image of mother present in the mind of the male. The fundamental benevolence of the mother helps a child to develop confidence in the self as well as in others. Mothers provide them with a sense of security against the onslaughts of the hostile world. However, if the image of a “good” mother is damaged by some mischance, the child develops fear, dislike and contempt for such mothers. These are in direct proportion to the intensity of his emotions toward the idealized mother who stands for self-sacrifice, endurance and love. Sociologists, psychologists and educationists attach great significance to motherhood. However, the women novelists are more realistic in their depiction of the mother. But one should remember that before being a mother, a woman is a human being. This aspect is justified by the reply of Nora in A Doll House, by Ibsen:

Helmer: Before all else you are a wife and a mother.

Nora: I believe that before all else I am

a human being just as much as you are-
or at least that I should try to become one.
Women writers paint mothers with all their human limitations. If they are the nurturing beings, they are also the ones who require nurturing themselves particularly from their daughters. In reality, there is a certain amount of aloofness in the relationship between the mother and the daughter. As the girl-child carries the potentiality of motherhood, she is seen as an extension of the mother. Along with the mother, the girl-child becomes a co-sufferer and co-traveller in the journey of life; and her travel is towards her home. Both the mother and the daughter are victims of social injustices. That is the reason why the Indian mother looks towards her son for hope and recompense.

Sudhir Kakar has pointed out that mothers have a special maternal affection reserved for daughters. The mother unconsciously identifies with her daughter, and this bond is stronger than the one between the mother and the son. Through her daughter, she relives her experience as a girl. Kakar says: “mother tends to cultivate a symbiotic bond with her daughter”7 as she unconsciously tries to recreate the familiar bond she enjoyed with her own mother. This is especially true in the Indian context where the girl is considered as a “guest” in her natal home when once she is married. The mother re-experiences the emotional turmoil which her separation had caused and hence she becomes affectionate towards her daughter. But all this is at a sub-conscious level. In practicality, the mother gives more
importance to her son, who takes care of her when once the daughter departs.

The impact of “good” or “bad” mother is different on the male and female children. For example, if a mother leaves a girl child in the lurch, the girl fails to internalize womanhood. A mother is a girl’s friend who gives her a sense of separate identity and helps her tide over the traumatic growing-up period successfully. Hence a mother plays a very important role in shaping the life of a girl. If this care is absent, the daughter loses her sense of identity. She is left to grow alone and face the baffling physical and emotional changes without any aid. This leaves her confused all her life, unable to gear up to face life and its realities effectively. Such characters are found among the female protagonists of Anita Desai.

The fast changing Indian society under the influence of modern Western culture brought many changes in the lives of Indian women. Consequently, mother and mother-figures have also undergone some radical changes.

Psychoanalysis focuses mostly on the mother-child relationship from the child’s psycho-sexual aspects of growth. It studies and locates every aspect of adult personality in the child. It studies how the adult was in his or her childhood and how he or she continues to behave later in his or her life. These studies focus greatly on the patterning of emotions that takes place, particularly during childhood.
The influence of mother and child is mutual. The life of mother gets radically changed after the entrance of the child into her life. R.C.Baral in his discussion explains the importance of child in the life of the mother as follows:

Motherhood represents biological (reproductive) and socio-cultural functions of a society. Metamorphically, mother is alluded to as the source of life.... Motherhood, however, cannot be studied conceptually without the child.8

The psychological changes that occur with pregnancy and the birth of the child are studied by many psychologists. Sociologists, on the other hand, attribute a total socio-biological change in a woman with the attainment of motherhood. For modern thinkers and feminists, motherhood for a woman is a biological experience as well as a cultural construct. It is one of the channels which bestow recognition on woman. Therefore it is an empowering experience for her.

From a very young age, an Indian girl prepares herself to the ultimate goal of her life – marriage. The mother, along with the other women relatives, begins this grooming process quite early in a girl’s life to make her transition from daughter to wife and then to a mother as smooth as possible. Commenting about the grooming process of woman, Meena Shirwadkar points out as follows:
Every female is born into a well-defined community of women within her particular family. As a result, very early in a girl’s life, there begins an inculcation of culturally designed feminine roles. The expectations of being an exemplary daughter-in-law become a tremendous burden on the Indian woman.\(^9\)

In her husband’s family, a bride is normally accorded the lowest position in the family hierarchy. She is expected to show obedience and compliance to the wishes of the elder women of the family. An Indian woman’s position becomes consolidated in terms of family acceptance when once she becomes pregnant. The prospect of motherhood provides solutions to many of her difficulties. To quote Sudhir Kakar:

Pregnancy becomes deliverance from the insecurity, doubt and shame of infertility. Pregnancy and imminent motherhood for an Indian woman thus becomes an event in which the culture grants her high status.\(^10\)

A woman is treated with respect and thoughtfulness due to her potential motherhood, which are not accorded to her in the status as a mere wife. Alladi Uma has pointed out that every Indian woman “turns towards motherhood with an overpowering zest.”\(^11\) She looks towards her children both for companionship as well as for the satisfaction of her emotional needs. It is in the role of a mother that a woman can be
her real self. Thus a woman’s search for a companion is completed in her motherhood. Often, what she misses in the husband, she achieves in the company of her children. A woman achieves a sense of power and freedom in their company as she can behave without any conditions or reservations. Thus, she considers the role of the mother more important than that of a wife. “Being a mother thus becomes synonymous with being a woman” 12

Leader and Jackson bring out the importance of children in their book, The Mirages of Marriages as follows:

Children keep the marriage alive by providing the parents a raison d’etre for the marriage, and help fill the emotional and physical distance between the spouses, so that the expression of tension and friction between them is kept at a minimum.13

This clearly spells out that children are not only important for alleviating the status of the mother but also strengthening the bond between the parents. The birth of a child fills the father’s heart with happiness. The reservations he maintains with his wife vanish and he becomes free with her who has gifted him the child. Thus the child becomes the source of happiness for the parents. Such a child requires equally favourable conditions to grow according to its individual needs. Unconditional love is essential for the healthy growth of a child. But if these favourable conditions are missing in the
childhood, the child develops distorted personality. It feels isolated and helpless in the world which he or she conceives as potentially hostile. This effect is clearly visible throughout his or her life. Psychology gives clue to self-actualization and self-alienation process in the individuals. Karen Horney, a psychologist opines:

Every human being has an intrinsic nature. It is neither wholly good, nor wholly bad, is rather neutral and weak. It can be pressurized by habit, cultural and social forces but it cannot be eliminated altogether. It remains with man forever and struggles for self-actualization. If this ‘inner nature’ is suppressed one gets sick, if it is encouraged, it leads to a healthy personality.\(^{14}\)

Analysing this “inner nature” he explains constructive and destructive behaviour of man in his book, *Neurosis and Human Growth*. Horney provides systematic analysis of the evolutionary nature of man from his childhood experiences. He says:

Children whose parents do not give them genuine love, lose the sense of belonging, the ‘we’ feeling, and develop profound insecurity and vague apprehensiveness.\(^{15}\)

Hence the hypocritical elders who are both over-protective and dominant or who neglect the child completely obstruct children’s free use of energies and damage their self-esteem and self-reliance. A threatening environment evokes in him or her fear of others and of
self. In such a situation, in order to retain his or her chance of remaining meaningful to himself or herself, he or she adopts self-glorification i.e. the desire to lift oneself above others. Commenting about this self-glorification act of the child, Usha Bande says:

The child adopts interpersonal strategies of defence towards achieving self glorification. The solutions include: movement towards people, away from people and move against people.\(^\text{16}\)

The adoption of these defense strategies depends upon individual temperament and his social or familial conditions. A child who moves “towards” people adopts compliant or self-effacing characteristics; Moving “against” people denotes an aggressive trend, whereas those who move “away” from others become detached persons. This speaks about the importance of childhood and the role of parents, especially that of mother, in shaping the adult life of the individual, because mother is supposed to be the first human contact for the infant who also serves as a bridge between him and the world as also to be an absorbing sponge of all his emotional disturbances.

Taking into concern, the views expressed by various sociologists and psychologists, an attempt is made to study the characters of married women depicted by Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai in the light of “Motherhood and Midlife”. Though the writers do not fully
expose the childhood of their personages, flashbacks and references that are provided are sufficient to understand them.

Anita Desai’s women characters tend to forgo their vital “self” somewhere during their journey from childhood to adulthood. Most of her characters are grown up individuals, apparently well-settled in life, some of them right in their middle-age, disturbed psychologically by forces beyond their comprehension. Desai reveals their childhood through flashbacks relating the present structure of psyche to their past life. These characters “debunk the myth of motherhood”. For them children are source of anxiety for them. This aspect runs as a continuous thread in Anita Desai’s novels. Their mid-life is also equally affected. Though experiences of the characters differ in their contents, they adversely affect their growth as adult individuals who are emotionally mature and psychologically healthy.

The childhood experiences of Desai’s women characters have left an indelible impression on their minds. For most of them their childhood holds the key to the type of adults that they have grown into. Anita Desai studies the degenerative and crippling effects of an over-indulgent parental attention in *Cry, The Peacock*. Maya, being motherless, becomes the adored child of her father. Excessive pampering hampers the process to maturity, jeopardizing every chance of happiness in all her relationships. It is generally believed that a healthy parent–child relationship provides the children an opportunity to grow mentally and emotionally and prepares them to
make their own decisions and face the resultant consequences. But Maya’s over-protected childhood is responsible for her inability to cope with and adjust to changing circumstances. This is responsible for her hysterical outbursts and later homicide and suicide. Speaking about parental pampering, Usha Pathania sums up:

Pampering hampered the smooth transition form childhood to adulthood. Because of her father’s overindulgence, Maya remains a child, craving for parental pampering even after her marriage.\(^{18}\)

It is the absence of her mother that has stunted Maya’s growth as an individual. She seeks her lost mother in the gardens, flowers and trees. Hence, she remains away from human company and fails to grow into a matured individual. Her socialization is incomplete because of the absence of her mother. She expects the affection of a mother from her mother-in-law. But her mother-in-law is too busy, involved in social welfare activities, that she cannot pay attention to Maya’s urge. In familial structure of patriarchy, the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is generally not one of deep emotional attachment and in this case, the social structure prevents the mutual understanding of these two women. Maya is childless too. Hence she develops attachment with her pet dog, Toto. So, when the pet dog dies, she cannot control her grief.
In Maya’s husband, Gautama’s family a different kind of environment prevails. An analysis of relationships in Gautama’s family helps one conclude that they have a frank and objective evaluation of each other. Gautama’s mother is affectionate to her children. The family suffers from no inhibitions, no anxieties, and express themselves without the fear of being misunderstood. The mother, though an extremely busy person pays the needed attention, looks after them and radiates warmth towards them. This naturally impresses Maya. Gautama’s father is a freedom-fighter; always on the move. Hence the nucleus of the family is the mother, who looks after her children and simultaneously engages herself in social work. Hard work is the motto in her household. She condemns an idle do-nothing-existence when she tells Maya, “The best way to fall ill is to stay in bed” (Desai, Cry 131). Nila, her own daughter is amazed at her hard work.

Gautama’s mother loves her children and guides them well. She criticizes Gautama for his treatment of Maya. “Keep her still: keep her quiet: keep her indoors! What nonsense, you will talk, at times, Gautama?” (132) She taunts Nila, her daughter for her lazy habits and holds her responsible for her strained relationship with her husband. To Nila’s derogatory comment about her husband, “After ten years with that rabbit I married, I’ve learnt to do everything myself, her mother retorts very tartly, ‘except lead a sensible life.....For I hate this matter of a divorce in the family, and children going fatherless’” (135).
Gautama’s mother is more concerned about her own daughter Nila’s marriage. Nila stands in direct contrast to Maya. She is a victim of broken marriage and reveals the sensibility and courage to analyze her situation. She is determined to fight for her cause, although her decision to get a divorce meets with her brother, Gautama’s strong disapproval.

The aim of human life, for the members in Gautama’s household, is not an epicurean delight in the pleasures of the senses. It lies in facing the hard realities of commonplace existence and tiding over them. Maya is simply amazed at the wonderful agility that Gautama’s mother has, to move in and control confidently two separate worlds. As a social worker, she is concerned with the trouble and suffering, hunger and unemployment, illness and helplessness of the masses. But after playing her role in this world of sordid realities, she plunges into “one of love and excitement and passion and fire, the one that her family inhabited, searching for them there, to embrace them” (133). All these qualities of her mother-in-law attract Maya, who candidly admits: “If she was a figure of old age; she was as much a figure of fire and energy. The Gods might one day, erect a monument to her, though human beings would not. She awed me, and attracted me at the same time” (132).

Gautama’s mother is aware of the needs and expectations of others. She is a self-sacrificing person who understands every one around her. When she takes Maya for shopping; she knows that
waiting for the bus in the heat is quite an ordeal for Maya. She, therefore, brings cool cucumbers for her to bite and feel refreshed and revived. Maya is naturally overwhelmed by the gesture:

Only you would think of doing such a thing I said to the old lady, filled with a longing to throw down my parcels and embrace her – a pillar of life and living, an anchor...

Oh! to live in her world, to be of her kind: What safety, what peace? (134)

Maya’s mother-in-law is neither an idealist, nor a perfectionist nor is she a romantic. She is the only middle-aged character in this novel. Rest of the women characters, including Maya, are young. Though old, Maya’s mother-in-law is an energetic social worker and engaged in innumerable activities. She is concerned with the welfare of everybody around. Her husband is always a stranger in the family. He is a man who finds time and energy to think of the future of India, but not of his own family. Participating in the freedom struggle, he cannot take care of his family as well as his wife. In order to cope with the situation, Maya’s mother-in-law takes active role in family affairs and also develops an interest in social service, in order to keep herself busy.

To sum up, Gautama’s childhood experiences are in sharp contrast with those of Maya. He has grown in the midst of realities of life. His parents are not self-seeking idealists but people with
commitment towards society. Hard work is the creed in their household, which has been a nurturing ground for them to grow and branch out. Hence all of them have matured into independent individuals who can express their views without any inhibitions or reservations. In the world of Maya’s childhood, however, such freedom was denied. It is something unimaginable because of the despotic rule of her father and absence of mother.

The sharp contrast of the characters of Maya and Gautama can be attributed to their respective styles of brought up. Both of them have the attention of only one of the parents. But Gautama grows into a matured human being with worldly success because of his practical mother whereas Maya turns into an impractical dreamer due to an excessively doting father. The contrast between the children who are brought up by mother and by father is clear in their attitudes and behaviour. Maya’s relationship with her father may appear ideal and romantic, but in reality it obstructs her growth. Though she has a brother, her father does not encourage her to interact with him because he rebels against her father. She is left to interact intimately with her father only and he becomes a model of perfect gentleman for her. However, he is a benevolently despotic elder who focuses all his attention on her, and instead of giving her freedom to grow as an individual, he offers her a life of submission. Hence, Maya grows up physically, but not mentally.
Similarly, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* is again a study of filial bond between an indifferent parent and a sensitive growing child. If Maya’s childhood appropriates to fairy tales, Sita’s childhood is filled with undesirable worries. If Maya’s father is overprotective and indulgent, Sita’s father neglects her completely. The novel thus, analyses the devastating effects of emotional deprivation on the personality of a developing child. Sita, a middle-aged woman of forty, lacks faith in everything and everyone around her. This originates from being motherless and her disturbing relationship with her father who indulges in clandestine activities while parading as a Saint.

Anita Desai establishes that filial bonds are so intriguing and complex that children can hardly know the ultimate truth about their parents. When children try to know this they are pulled into opposite directions – sometimes towards the father and sometimes towards the mother. To Sita the absence of her mother is also a great loss. It creates an emotional vacuum and insecurity in her life. In the absence of a benign, loving and caring mother, she develops a “feeling of being isolated and helpless in a world conceived as potentially hostile” (Desai, *Where Shall* 65). At the conscious level she is so much used to being without mother that she feels she is born without mother. The following lines speak about her feelings towards her mother:

> Life seemed complete without her; there was no reason for her to exist. Sita had imagined she came into the world motherless (84).
Consequently, she does not value this relationship, till she sees the pearls and jewels which belonged to their mother. She is stunned to learn that their mother is not dead but had run away to Banaras. A mother dead and lost is better than a callous one who deserts her child. A deserter mother is considered to be a “bad mother,” in the view of a child. No child likes to see the sacred image so sullied.

Daughters need mothers to train, protect and guide them. Sita’s adolescence at Manori is like a haunted memory. Without mother, she fails to internalize womanhood. In this incongruous mix of loneliness and crowding, she is left to grow alone and face the turbulent world. Psychologists believe that mother is indispensable for girls, particularly during puberty and adolescence. Similarly, company of girls of the same age-group is also essential for becoming social as well as developing a sense of a separate identity. Usha Pathania feels that:

Friendship between girls is of the greatest importance. Identification with a similar being can strengthen the young girls’ consciousness that she is an independent ego. 21

Unfortunately, Sita lacks both mother and girl friends. She grows into womanhood, unprepared and unwilling to shoulder the responsibilities of a wife and mother. Her traumatic relationship with her father blasts all chances of a satisfying emotional bond with any
other man in her life. Even she does not have good relations with her step sister, Rekha or her brother, Jeevan.

The unwholesome and restricted experiences of her childhood vitiate Sita’s relationship with her sons and daughter too. She cannot understand the behaviour of her own growing children.

It’s all madness - the boys acting out that scene from the film they saw, fighting each other on the floor, Menaka and her magazines and the way she’s torn all those drawings... (36).

When she sees her sons playing a game of attack and combat, she screams to stop them. For her this appears as sheer violence. Sita does not have maternal tolerance and patience because her motherless childhood hindered the growth and development of these qualities. Though she becomes a mother, she carries the vacuum with her which does not let her nurture her children “baffled as she is by her own predicament as a woman, as a human being” (148).

Sita’s absurd and far-fetched step to go to Manori appears to be an attempt to escape from reality. It is also expressive of her revolt against the modern society, its values and its alienated existence. Sita feels that:

The experience of life has been bleak and drab, grey in many ways harrowing and depressing and she couldn’t bear the thought of bringing the child into a world as
dreadful as this which is really the opposite of happy pregnancy and the expectations attached to it (144).

Sita’s children Menaka and Karan are horrified by everything they see on the island. As she had taken the decision to bring them to Manori, she tries to make things comfortable for Menaka and Karan; but, she fails. Sita herself misses the old magic. She realizes that the present Manori Island is in stark contrast to the Manori Island of her father’s.

In brief, Sita has superficial and unfulfilling filial bonds with her children. There exists a complete lack of communication. They just get along together. Indeed, a study of the mother-child relationship in Where Shall We Go This Summer? suggests that parental neglect is as injurious as excessive pampering, to the healthy emotional growth of an individual. Sita does not grow into a responsible wife or a matured mother because of her emotional deprivation during her traumatic childhood. Sita is estranged from her husband and children because of her unusual emotional reactions to the incidents that occur to her. Unlike Maya she tries to find some way out for her emotional deprivation. Hence, she shifts to Manori Island along with her children to find some solace. But she realizes and admits, “It was no place in which to give birth. There was no magic here – the magic was gone” (147).
Sita’s final decision to follow Raman to Bombay is the turning point in her mental journey. So far she has considered giving birth as an act of violence but now she realizes “a seed fallen from the tree of life into the cosmic womb, is a violent activity, but in its impetuosity it is creative” (148). Therefore betrayed, realized and humiliated Sita comes back to Bombay. She is compelled to welcome the child into the world of violence and suffering. When asked about the fate of the fifth child, Anita Desai in her interview with Atma Ram answers:

It is born. It lives. It compromises. It accepts the dullness; either closes its eyes to or else condone destruction, ugliness, rottenness. In other words, it leads an ordinary life of the kind its mother tried so desperately to change only to find she could not.\(^{22}\)

Thus Sita’s return to Bombay brings her a new child safely. Menaka’s admission to Medical College is gained and the children are reared.

An analysis of Sita’s character reveals the fact that emotional needs of the childhood have to be gratified in a proper way for the healthy growth of the individual. Raman, her husband, is a realist and a practical man. He is fortunate to have affection of both the parents. Hence, he assumes a balanced personality. Unlike Gautama in *Cry, The Peacock*, he takes care of his wife, Sita. Hence he follows Sita and makes all efforts to bring her back to Bombay. Thus his timely action
saves their relationship; whereas, Gautama’s negligence ruins the entire family in *Cry, The Peacock*.

The relationship between Nanda Kaul in *Fire on the Mountain* and her children is also intriguing and ungratifying. Nanda Kaul has already discharged her duties and fulfilled all her promises, being a mother of many children. She is bored of the physical life filled with nothing but monotony of repeated actions with no time for herself:

> Too many trays of tea would have to be made and carried to her husband’s study, to her mother-in-law’s bedroom, to the verandah that was the gathering place for all, at all times of the day. Too many meals, too many dishes on the table, too much to wash up after (Desai, *Fire on the Mountain* 29).

Now her desire to live unseen, unknown is the result of unhappy and cumbersome relationship she has had with her husband and children.

Nanda Kaul initially resents Raka, her grand-daughter for her intrusion because it awakens her past memories of her children, who “were all alien to her nature. She neither understood nor loved them” (28). She, therefore, does not miss them. She considers them extra pieces of furniture which she does not need now:

> After her husband’s death, her sons and daughters had come to help her empty the Vice-Chancellor’s house; escort her to Kasauni. For a while, they had stood out, in
Carignano, like too much furniture. She had wondered what to do with them (36).

Nanda Kaul’s relationship with her husband was nothing beyond the duties and obligations they had for each other. She had so many children and bringing them up had been a real tough job for her as they constantly needed attention. She remembers her excessively busy life when they were small:

She seemed to hear poignant shrieks from the cane beds in the garden- a child had tumbled off the swing, another had been stung by a wasp, a third slapped by the fourth- and gone out on the veranda to see them come waiting up the steps with cut lips, bruised knees, broken teeth and tears, and bent over them with that still, ironic bow to duty that no one noticed or defined (18-19).

It is believed that strong maternal instincts in women make them derive a peculiar joy in bringing up their children. The fond memories of this phase later fill their heart with tenderness. But Nanda Kaul is an exception to this. The years when her children were small seem to her “like the gorge, cluttered, choked and blackened with the heads of children and grand-children’s” (17). Bringing them up had been more of a duty than an act of love or a source of emotional satisfaction: “Discharge me- She groaned I’ve discharged all my duties. Discharge” (30).
After a long life of disorder and unpredictable happenings, she has reached a state of elegant perfection. Prospects of having a child around her at this stage are very undesirable for her. Children are pictures of innocence and pure joy, and they can brighten the saddest moments of one’s life. Yet, it is not so with Nanda Kaul. The sight of a bird feeding its baby does not arouse tenderness in her. Even when Raka reaches Carignano, Nanda Kaul tries to keep herself aloof as her arrival reminds her of her own children; and, she does not want “to be drawn into a child’s world again – real or imaginary, it was bound to betray” (45).

Living in the desolate house at Carignano Nanda Kaul does not remember anything pleasant or satisfactory about her children, though she is frequently reminded of what she did for them. When she receives her daughter Asha’s letter, she is in no hurry to open it and go through its contents. When she reads the letter, it distracts her and reminds her of the most troublesome period:

She struggled to suppress her anger, her disappointment and her total loathing of her daughter’s meddling, busy body ways, her grand-daughter’s abject helplessness, and her great grand-daughter’s impending arrival here at Carignano (14).
She tries her best to forget this, and concentrates on the soothing scene outside. But she gets upset and perturbed, puzzled and disgusted, and asks herself:

Have I not done enough and had enough? I want no more.
I want nothing. Can I not be left with nothing? But there was no answer and of course she expected none (17).

Fire on the Mountain also deals with the detrimental effects of a stifling home environment upon the tender psyche of a young child. Raka, is not a normal child by any standard. She shuns all tenderness viciously. To Nanda’s utter dismay, Raka’s rejection of her is complete. Raka becomes an introvert because of the abnormal circumstances. She is the victim of a broken home.

Childhood is a formative period when a person has intrinsic desires for spiritual health. He/she discovers the beauties and sweetness of human relationships through love. Raka’s parents have no time or inclination to cater to the emotional needs of their child. The mother is in such an unhappy predicament that she cannot do anything for Raka. Her shattered mental equilibrium and deteriorating physical strength makes her miserable and helpless. The father also has no time to look after the well-being of his child. Consequently, Raka’s traumatic experiences deprive her of a child’s innocent trust and feeling of joy in the company of others.
Like Sita, Raka is a victim of emotional deprivation. Her embarrassing, love-less childhood fills her heart with suspicion and distrust. Hence, she turns her back upon human beings and develops a strong fascination for the ugly, lonely, rugged and desolate aspects of nature. The dissonance or chaos in the life of her parents makes Raka averse to belongingness.

The issues regarding the demands and expectations, fulfillment and frustration with regard to the basic human bonds like the mother-child relationship cannot be easily settled. These are intriguing, alluring, disappointing; yet, very difficult to do away with. Nanda Kaul’s strong resolution to be alone in Carignano begins to crumble in the human presence of Raka. Maternal love and her basic instinct to take care of others weaken Nanda Kaul’s self-imposed detachment. Once again she has someone to care for. Her inner dictates force her to reach out to Raka to love and be loved.

Karen Horney, a psychologist, in this regard, mentions a compliant person’s craving to “strengthen his inner position by being accepted, approved of, needed, wanted, liked, loved, and appreciated.”²⁴ For instance, Nanda has tried to feel wanted and loved by her dear ones all her life. Consciously or unconsciously her efforts have been to get a positive response from her family for her devotion, but all in vain. So she directs all her energies to win Raka. Despite all the betrayals and disappointments she received from a faithless husband and selfish children, she feels irresistibly drawn towards
Raka because she desperately longs for love and realizes that if she is discarded any longer she will be crushed by self-hate.

Thus, Anita Desai’s protagonists break away from the traditional role model of a mother in their attitude towards child-bearing and motherhood. The mother is never presented as an understanding presence who finds fulfillment in her role as a mother or a benign protector. These characters can be read as a negation of the role model of a mother. The seeds of suffering, in the case of almost all Anita Desai’s characters, are sown in their childhood. The childhood interaction with their erratic parents results in distortion of values and realities of human existence. The novelist presents the hypothesis that the filial ties are the most sensitive and enduring. They can inject one with trust and love or with distrust, hatred and suspicion. To a child, the parents are the models. He or she worships them and sees others as the extension of these two figures. Particularly the role of mother is very important. On analyzing the characters of Maya, Sita and Raka, one can deduce that absence of mother hampers their positive emotional interaction in any other relationship which one establishes later.

On the other hand, Kamala Markandaya idealizes the concept of motherhood in her novels. Her protagonists, unlike Anita Desai’s heroines, are not well-settled. Most of her characters face social and economic problems. The mothers, she tries to depict, are traditional Indian women. Though they face hardships in life, they display heroic
endurance and face the realities of life boldly. They are always worried about the welfare of the family, particularly that of their daughters. In her novels mother-child relationship plays a significant role. External factors such as economic hardships and changing values and attitudes, adversely affect the fundamental ties of relationship. Nevertheless, these bonds are sacred, powerful and enduring. Even when the solidarity is affected, these ties, in her novels, do not become a noose around one’s neck. Kamala Markandaya favours greater freedom. She portrays trust and understanding between the parents and children. The filial ties, therefore, are no insufferable bondage for her characters. Their march towards autonomy is consistent, smooth and inevitable.

Woman shapes her personality by a careful cultivation of certain virtues. Her strength lies essentially in her innate capacity for compassion and sacrifice. The embodiment of such a mother figure is found in Rukmani in Kamala Markandaya’s *Nectar in a Sieve*. The chronicle of Rukmani’s life illuminates the multi-coloured, ever changing nature of filial ties. The children are the flesh and blood of the mother. Theoretically, this should make the ties strong and permanent. However, the hard facts of human existence, as depicted in the novel, highlight the impact of money on filial ties. Gifted with foresight at times, Markandaya’s mother characters cultivate tastes and skills primarily for children’s sake. Though Rukmanı has the ability to read and write, it is of no avail to her after marriage.
Nevertheless, she practices writing purposely so that, “when my child is ready, I will teach him too’ and I practiced harder than ever lest my fingers should lose their skill” (Markandaya, Nectar 13).

Mothers care and pray for their children even when they are grown-up and can look after themselves. Rukmani’s mother feels unhappy when, for many a year after Ira’s birth, Rukmani does not bear a child. Despite her own failing health, she tries her best to help Rukmani. This concern on her mother’s part profoundly impresses Rukmani, who vividly remembers and reproduces the words spoken by her mother on her death bed after many years as follows:

When Ira was nearing six, my mother was afflicted with consumption, and was soon so feeble that she could not rise from her bed yet, in the midst of her pain, she could still think of me and one day she beckoned me near and placed in my hand a lingam – symbol of fertility. ‘Wear it.’ she said, ‘You will bear many sons. I see them, and what the dying, see will come to pass.... Be assured, this is not illusion’ (18).

Rukmani is the product of a culture where the birth of a son is a blessing and that of a daughter, a sort of curse. Rukmani, though quite liberal in her views, is not free from this bias. Parents love their daughter, but they are proud of their sons. Nathan, Rukmani and
even her father are no exception. When Rukmani gives birth to her first son, Arjun, she is filled with joy.

The real worth and strength of a relationship is judged in the times of need and adversity. Parental obligation is not over by simply marrying away their daughter. The prime concern of parents is to see their children happy and blessed with all the good things of life. Rukmani and Nathan bring up their daughter, Ira affectionately, and get her married well. Unfortunately, she is not destined to enjoy married bliss because of her barrenness. She is deserted by her husband and has to live with her parents. They are wise, understanding parents, who never, by word or deed, make her feel an unwanted burden.

Even the minor characters display ideal motherhood. Ira though a minor character, plays an effective role in the novel. She looks after her ailing brother, Kuti, with motherly devotion. To save him from hunger, she takes to prostitution. Her supreme self-sacrifice ennobles her and imparts to her a heroic grandeur. Being a street walker, she gives birth to a child who is a sickly albino child, different from the other children; and, so becomes more an object of contempt than of pity. However, she is a devoted mother who nurses the child affectionately, and feels proud as any mother of a legal child would be, and endures patiently the shame and humiliation that is heaped upon her for his being, a “bastard”. She suffers terribly but she suffers silently without ever giving an idea of her deep spiritual anguish. Even
Kunthi is not a spiteful woman; she keeps Nathan’s secret until driven against the wall by her children’s hunger. Though she is immoral by character, she too represents the ideal motherhood.

The tyranny of circumstances makes her life miserable at times, but as they have mutual understanding, absolute trust and a spirit of self-sacrifice, the bond between the mother and the son does not turn brittle or bitter. The sons of Rukmani move away from her because of adversity without any choice. Rukmani is proud of her sons who have the courage to find a way out of their misfortunes and confidence to carve a new destiny. She is a wise mother and hence encourages the children in their ventures, and let them plan their future.

Rukmani is not ruffled into extreme emotional outburst. But deep inside, she is highly disturbed and depressed, and suffers for her loved ones. Her adolescent stage has been tamed into maturity and womanhood and she absorbs all misfortunes that come her way. She does not give up her endeavour to live and let live. She has extreme tenacity for life. Her personal pains are overpowered by her suffering for her family, particularly, for the youngest son, Kuti, who is a sick child. She is constantly vexed by her failure to feed them. But when she finds Raja beaten to death, his limp, fragile body lain at her feet, her grief knows no bounds. The intensity of her sorrow and misery leaves her speechless. She can think of no claim, no compensation for her son’s premature death. Rukmani accepts stoically her fourth son
Selvam’s decision not to cultivate the land but take up some other career in life.

It is the instinct of motherhood that attracts Puli towards her. She feels a spontaneous affection and love for the destitute, leprosy-stricken boy and takes him immediately into her protective fold.

I could not help feeling a vague responsibility which certainly I knew I was in no position to fulfill (185).

She is concerned about his disease and regrets his inconvenience. She gives great laxity to his child-like nature. Ultimately she absorbs the destitute Puli into her warmth and love, brings him along with her to her village, gets him cured of his disease, and infuses meaning into life. In turn, she finds in him consolation and comfort for her deep, gaping wounds of sorrow and suffering.

Highlighting the ideal qualities of Rukmani as mother Usha Pathania opines that:

The single force that unites the whole structure of the novel is the character of the narrator, Rukmani. She is not simply a village girl, a loving and devoted wife and a sacrificing mother. She has transcended these limited physical identities to represent the universal mother figure. She is the eternal mother bound by love and affection to her hearth and home. 26
Rukmani, therefore, has achieved the significance of universal motherhood. Everything that crosses her path is sieved through her kind, simple, tolerant, understanding, sympathetic and loving self. Rukmani, the mother figure, symbolizes the mother earth. The earth is the virgin soil, the source, the origin, the well-spring, the life-giver, the supporter, the sustainer, and even more, the last resort, the consoler and the healer. Thus, it is positive sustaining force of life which does not waver or falter. Her integrity is never on the brink of collapse. In the face of all calamities, she unfolds her lap to take in everything and everybody around her. She is the eternal mother figure.

The mother-child bond is important in almost all of Kamala Markandaya’s novels. Mothers are often depicted as self-sacrificing and protective towards their children. In her novel, *A Handful of Rice*, Ravi’s mother though heart broken at the departure of her sons to the city, does not openly come in their way to happiness. Ravi also, cherishes deep regard for her even during his criminal days. He tells Jayamma, Nalini’s mother:

If I could lie to you I would lie to my own mother

(Markandaya, *A Handful* 18).27

In Kamala Markandaya’s fiction women find fulfillment in becoming the mother of a son. Rukmani feels frustrated till she gives
birth to a son. Nalini also considers herself supremely blessed when a son is born.

Nalini was lying on the mat, looking spent and curiously flat after so many months of bulging, but supremely happy (136).

In the Indian cultural tradition, mother is a protector also. Father’s love for his children can be erratic and wayward: which many a times bewilders, harms or spoils the child. Mother has a hidden source of power to remain silent, to suffer and protect her children, to rise to their defense if need arises. In this context Usha Bande opines that:

It is the father in India who thrashes the child and spanks when there is something done by the child and always the mother puts herself between the father and the child.28

The father corrects while the mother comforts the child. For instance, when Ravi and Nalini go to the beach with their son, Raju, he suddenly tugs at the loin cloth of the pattani seller and the tray tilts, scattering a handful of pattani. Ravi is beyond himself with rage and beats Raju mercilessly. Nalini is, no doubt, unhappy over the incident; but, she cannot bear the cruel beating given to her son. She therefore, comes to Raju’s rescue.

Mother-daughter relationship is tremendously fascinating in Kamala’s novels. Mothers are particularly protective towards their
daughters, and that is why they put restrictions on their movements especially during the adolescent years. Nalini’s mother keeps a protective watch on her. She does not trust the young girl alone in the company of Ravi. He, at times, feels horrified at the strict vigil kept by Jayamma who does not let him go near Nalini:

Nevertheless it irked him unbearably to see how assiduously Jayamma glued herself to her daughter.

Whenever he was present and unoccupied (40).

In his heart of hearts, Ravi, however, appreciates and values the moral behind it. He has sisters in the village and knows the strict watch that is kept on young unmarried girls in their community. For instance, in Mulk Raj Anand’s Untouchable, motherless Sohini is a victim of molestation; and, Leila in Two Leaves and a Bud is safe only till her mother is alive.

Mothers in Kamala Markandaya’s world stand by their daughters in their hour of need. Rukmani, in Nectar in a Sieve takes care of Ira when she is forsaken by her husband for being barren. Nalini’s mother, Jayamma, does not show any resentment towards her daughters or their children even when they stay with them after marriage. Thangam, Nalini’s sister, is dependent on her parents because her husband is of no worth. She is somewhat conscious of being an unwanted burden when she expects her second child. Even Jayamma is not very pleased at the prospects of having to feed
another mouth. However, Apu, her husband, knows her better and tries to soften her. She in turn replies:

Of course I will. Do you think I am an unnatural monster?

Never think that, not for one moment. I am very glad, very happy, that our daughter is to have another child (95).

When Puttanna, Thangam’s husband, steals Apu’s money, Jayamma, for the first time, feels bitter and hardens against her daughter, Thangam. She is very well aware of her daughter’s ill luck. “But for money, Jayamma would have been kinder to Thangam. Her daughter had suffered a good many years – ever since her ill-starred marriage to that good for nothing husband” (178).

Indeed A Handful of Rice is a viable comment on the importance of kin bonds. The economic stress disrupts these ties. Breaking away from these ties is like breaking away from one’s roots. Ravi candidly confesses to Damodar that without his father’s identity he could not have been able to marry Nalini. Mother-child bond is largely based on a spirit of sacrifice. Mother is a guiding and protective force. However, money plays a vital role in all relationships. It fulfills many of the expectations involved in emotional attachments. Without money one is left with empty gestures and a quick descent into the depths of despair which is perceptible from the life of Ravi.
Kamala Markandaya’s *A Silence of Desire* stresses the need to the protective parental presence for the physical and mental well-being of children, particularly daughters. The novel highlights the fact that dissonance and disharmony in husband-wife relationship spills over and adversely affects the parent-child bond.

Sarojini and Dandekar are affectionate parents, who take proper care of their children. Dandekar is very fond of his daughters. Every month he brings presents for his daughters, Lakshmi and Ramabai, who are always excited about those gifts. However, all this is changed when the conjugal harmony between Dandekar and Sarojini is threatened. Sarojini does not comment but she feels sorry for the girls. Very calmly she reminds him about the gifts.

I was wondering if you could get the girls something this month ....I know they miss it.  

Despite the unforeseen crisis in their married life Dandekar and Sarojini are, always, careful about the impact of an unpleasant situation upon the tender psyche of their young daughters. Sarojini, too, tries not to neglect her children as much as possible. Her visits to the Swamy take away quite a lot of her time. She tries to make it up by sacrificing her time of rest. In a bid to save her daughter from the agony of knowing about her ill health, Sarojini gives vague excuses for her absences. Dandekar advises Sarojini to tell the truth. She does
not agree as it can prove quite traumatic for young girls. She therefore, tells Dandekar:

    It is not something you tell a girl of her age. My mother told me when I was twelve. I don’t want her to be frightened as I was 30.

Kamala Markandaya brings into sharp focus the absolute necessity of the benign, protective and vigilant presence of a mother. Sarojini’s absence from home and her stories regarding her visits to her friend’s house confuse the daughters. Rambai, the elder daughter starts going out in mixed company. This disturbs Dandekar. He wants to know about the boy with whom she goes to the milk bar. Dandekar is amazed at this transformation.

    The moods and activities of the parents cannot escape the notice of their children, howsoever young they are. Mother’s misery is invariably reflected on the daughters. So when Sarojini gets operated successfully, Dandekar thinks of his daughters and wants to convey to them the good news regarding their mother.

    Kamala Markandaya displays genuine insight into the mother-daughter relationship. Mothers are protective particularly about their daughters. Meena Shriwadhwkar observes:

    Though these mothers may have sons, they are seen to be more concerned with the problem of girls. Rukmani and
Ira, Jayamma and Nalini, Mira’s mother and Mira, Sarojini and her daughter – there is quite a spectrum and a wide range almost for the first time of mother-daughter relationship.31

Almost all the women in Kamala Markandaya’s novels poignantly illustrate the mother principle. Rukmani adopts Puli, the leper boy in *Nectar in a Sieve*; Jayamma beats Ravi in *A Handful of Rice* for his attempt to enter into their house. Later she treats him like her own child when she offers him food. Jayamma’s children enjoy a relaxed relationship with their parents. The interaction with their parents inspires them to have confidence, faith in others and in themselves.

Hence mother-child bond is of great significance in healthy development of children. The disturbing environment at home not only hampers the growth of a child into a healthy being but also becomes the root-cause for disturbing their future life. In Anita’s world one does not find wholesome, satisfying emotional interaction between the parents and the children. Sometimes the parents are either over indulgent, or neglect the emotional needs of their children. Absence of mother adversely affects their character. The protagonists fail to inculcate a sense of direction in their life. Their childhood does not become a foundation for healthy interpersonal relationships and adjustments. It is a bondage from which they fail to free themselves. The mother characters are depicted with different touch. They do not
fit into the mould of traditional Indian mother. They do not enjoy the pranks of their children. For instance, Nanda Kaul and Sita never feel the attachment with their children. Somehow they do not enjoy the motherhood as Kamala Markandaya’s women do. They debunk the ideal image of a loving mother.

Whereas, in Kamala’s world the mother is depicted in the traditional image: a loving and protecting mother. Here mothers find fulfillment in the relationship with their children and serve as a creative, protective force in life. The fundamental benevolence of mother, in her novels, help the children develop confidence and endurance against the onslaughts of a hostile world. Almost in all the selected novels of Kamala Markandaya, mother’s role is highlighted. The mother-child relationship is not a mechanical one. The filial bonds are of far-reaching consequences as the nature of interaction between parents and children – the ground for future happiness or misery in a larger social context comprising adult relationships.

The flaunting of motherhood and social outlook practiced towards childless women is another sore point discussed by Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya in their novels. For instance, Ira in Nectar in a Sieve is left by her husband for not bearing the children. Motherless Maya in Cry, The Peacock is also childless. These two factors disturb her psyche. The mantle of motherhood gives the wife a new assurance.
In the Indian society bareness is unacceptable. In order to be accepted, a woman has to become a mother as childless woman is like a haunted animal who tries to hide herself in whatever little dark corner she manages to find. Hence, motherhood is not a curse rather it brings fulfillment to woman’s life. Though Anita’s mother characters do not cherish motherhood for obvious reasons, still they too want to be mothers. They are aware of the fact that motherhood brings identity to women.

After discussing the concept of motherhood with respect to Anita and Kamala’s women characters, their midlife needs to be examined. Midlife is the middle part of one’s life where one is neither young nor old. It is that part of woman’s life where she gathers some experience as wife and mother. This experience brings a kind of maturity in her vision of life which in turn changes her thinking. She is expected to attain a balance personality with which she judges the life not with passion and emotion but with reason. Both Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya believe that the development of wholesome personality is affected by the experiences one undergoes in their life. Hence it can be inferred that the early life experiences accounts for the behaviour of the adult.

The ground for future happiness or misery is based on previous experiences of woman. She has to organize her world, i.e. the environment that she inhabits falls into a pattern and design created by her psychological response to it. When a woman continues to have
a unification of connection with her environment, she develops healthy atmosphere and healthy personality. But if a woman continues to be haunted by the feeling of severance of connection with her environment and natural setup, her anguish and loneliness deepen, leading her to a deep rooted despair. Crises creep into the midlife of some characters depicted by the novelists due to peculiar childhood and dissatisfying adolescence which do not give them the opportunity to attain maturity of thought and outlook even in their middle years. In the light of the above discussion, an attempt is made to analyze the behaviour of the middle-aged characters depicted in Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya.

The women characters depicted by Anita Desai can be categorized into young, middle-aged and old. Maya, Nila, Leila and Pom are the young women characters in the novels. Nanda and Illa Das are the old women characters depicted in the novels. Sita and Maya’s mother-in-law are the only middle-aged characters in these selected novels. It would be interesting to analyze the attitudes and feelings of these middle-aged characters in the novels.

The only middle-aged character is Maya’s mother-in-law in Cry, The Peacock. She is involved in social welfare activities. Her husband was a visionary freedom fighter who had no time for the wife and the family. No reliable connection existed between the romantic dreamer husband and a realistic practical wife. In order to fill this emptiness in her life, she takes up social service as her vocation. The disturbing
relationship of the parents adversely affects their children’s life. Nila, her daughter is on the verge of taking divorce from her husband and her own son, Gautama’s marital life is also on the edge of disturbance due to lack of compatibility. It seems that the incompatible heredity is carried from parents to children. Though Maya’s mother-in-law faces dissonance in her marital life, she does not take any drastic step like: taking divorce from her husband like her daughter, Nila or committing suicide and murder like her daughter-in-law, Maya. This shows her balanced attitude which she developed by assimilating the realities of life.

Sita, the main protagonist of *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* is a middle-aged woman whose unfortunate and miserable childhood makes her fail to prove herself an affectionate mother. She fails to inspire feelings of love and confidence in her children. In her childhood, Sita’s life is full of uncertainties, tensions and shadows. Before coming to Manori, she has an unsettled life because of the strange and mysterious life-style of her father. Engrossed in the freedom struggle, he has been totally oblivious of her growing chronological and mental age. She spends her early childhood in jails, in crowded assemblies, in mobs, in slums, where life is not calm but harsh and barbaric. For her this was no age for games but one for prayer and sacrifices. On the island, Sita and her brother, Jeevan live with their father along with their step-sister, Rekha. But this physical togetherness is hardly enough for developing mutual understanding or emotional affinity. The disturbing stories about her father having a
mistress, desertion by her own mother and Rekha being a step-sister - all puzzle Sita. Indeed, the environment on the island is not conducive to the wholesome development of a balanced personality. The incidents, events, attitudes and behaviour patterns for which Sita fails to get convincing explanations during her tender years get embedded in her psyche and result in her losing faith in life and in the goodness, innocence and sanity of the world. She, thus, harbours a deep distrust and fear of the male in her unconscious mind. These negative feelings adversely affect her relationship with Raman, her husband. Sita does not have maternal tolerance and patience because her motherless childhood hindered the growth and development of these qualities. When she herself becomes a mother, she carries the vacuum with her which does not let her nurture her children. To avoid humdrum existence of her life, she escapes to Manori Island. She realizes that she cannot escape from realities of life. But at last, her middle-age premises edify her that happiness lays in conciliation rather than in confrontation.

Nanda Kaul, the chief protagonist of *Fire on the Mountain*, is aged eighty. Though she cannot be termed as a middle-aged woman, she has been alienated, trying to obliterate a life-time of humiliation and desolation right from her young age as a wife and mother. Her attitude towards life becomes embittered and soured. Her previous experiences explain her inordinate desire for seclusion and non-involvement in regular human affairs. Hence she resents the coming
of Illa Das, her old friend. In Illa Das Nanda finds the reflection of her humiliating past which gave her nothing, helped her in no way, but disturbed her psyche. She pretends to be happy before her. But the seemingly peaceful present existence of Nanda is only a cage built by her as she believes that it protects her from the onslaught of the humiliating reminiscences of her past.

The rape and death of Illa shatters Nanda’s illusion about herself. As Ranu Uniyal, a critic, feels that Nanda suffers the psychological shock of rape and feels like Illa, that her womanhood too is defiled and selfhood insulted. The critic further says:

Illa Das’s rape enhances Nanda’s sense of guilt as Nanda could have helped Illa Das but did not. The shocking realization that she had become a party to the oppression of woman by her indifference and selfishness overwhelm her and Nanda dies under the weight of guilt.32

Illa’s rape and murder an event in the world of actuality, ignites the spark in Nanda’s mind that burns her own pretences and make-beliefs into ashes. A woman aged eighty with immense experience of life cannot understand the simple truth that life cannot be lived on pretences. Hence, the bubble of illusion purges when it faces reality.

Kamala Markandaya also has young, middle-aged and old women characters. If Ira, Nalini and her sister Thangam are the young women characters, Rukmani, Sarojini, Jayamma and other minor
characters like Kali, Kunthi and Janaki are the middle-aged characters in the novels of Kamala. Old Granny is the only old-aged character available in the novels.

Rukmani, in the novel, *Nectar in a Sieve* is a middle-aged character. She is in her forties when the novel opens. Due to her marriage to a poor tenant farmer, she has to suffer a lot throughout her life. But she does not complain or show any resentment for being married to a poor man. In fact she accepts her life as it comes to her and appreciates positive contribution of her parents towards her proper upbringing. Rukmani’s father gives her a sense of confidence and makes her hopeful for a bright future. So when her fortune changes, she displays considerable understanding of her parent’s limitations and accepts their decision regarding her marriage without any grudge or disapproval, as she does not wish to cause any misery to her helpless parents. Rukmani’s thwarted expectations of a suitable marriage could have created dissonance. But contrary to that, she praises her father for making her literate. She uses this skill in times of adversity. She respects Nathan and considers him her friend and guide. Though he is faithless to her, she displays great courage in forgiving him for his clandestine activity with Kunthi. Rukmani though unsophisticated village woman, understands the significance of her relationship with her husband. She understands the simple truth of life that united they stand and divided they fall, which the educated Anita’s heroines fail to inculcate in their life. The novel
shows that Rukmani is never idle because she always had hope, and she always had both object of inspiration and purpose. Thus the phrase, “Nectar in a Sieve” says exactly what the author wants to say about the human condition, and her novel is about the drops of divine nectar that is given to human beings; not about the sieve that makes it impossible to hold the nectar. Moreover, the sieve, traditionally, holds back the impurities and purifies that which passes through.

There are other middle-aged characters like Kunthi, Kali and Janaki who are neighbours of Rukmani. The women’s network in the novel is strong and genuine. Like Rukmani, they are also the sufferers of poverty caused by the tannery. Very little description is given about these characters in the novel. On an analysis of these characters, it is clear that they too display the similar courage like Rukmani in accepting the harsh realities of life and leading the life with stoic endurance without losing the cheerful spirit.

In A Handful of Rice, Jayamma, mother of Nalini is in her middle-age. She tactfully manages the entire house-hold with meager income earned by her husband, Apu through tailoring. She whole-heartedly bears the extra burdens of the family. But in a way she is not happy with her sexual life. When the novel begins she is in her prime of her life. After the marriage of her daughters, she feels that she has missed something in her life. She feels that she has married an old man who does not satisfy her sexually. But Jayamma is a traditional woman who cannot express her feelings openly. Hence, her
desires turn into fury because of long suppression. She tries to satisfy it by looking at pictures, processions and by trying to walk over burning coals. When Ravi beats her daughter, Nalini, instead of reacting with anger, she takes it as a manly action. When her son-in-law Ravi in a drunken state molests her, she does not protest against this incestuous act. Markandaya explores a new angle in the character of Jayamma. She suggests that woman is first a woman, and then, a mother. All relations are man-made, a primordial relationship of man and woman. A woman, however, has power not only to chasten and subdue, but also to sublimate.

*A Silence of Desire* is about the conflict between rationality and spirituality, scientific objectivity and intuitive subjectivity. It is also about woman’s expected role and predictable restraints. Sarojini, the protagonist of the novel, is in her middle-age. The entire credit goes to Sarojini for maintaining the conjugal bliss. The scientific and rationalistic husband, Dandekar always tries to influence her with his views. But she has unflinching faith in Indian tradition. She represents those Indian women who seek consolation for their physical and material woes in the promises of spiritual guides. Sarojini’s belief in the Swami’s superhuman powers and spiritual superiority impels her to go to him for the curse of her physical ailment. For sometime she upsets the equilibrium of her marital life. Her husband asks her to give up traditional values of life. Indeed it is not only a spiritual crisis but also midlife crisis for Sarojini. She feels
that she does not have freedom to assert her will and wish even after many years of her marriage. But after all, like Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve*, she also realizes and accepts the scientific spirit of the age which is not in conflict with the basic human values, as it merely attempts to make the human beings happy. Sarojini understands that her spiritual and moral aspirations need not be either sacrificed or subordinated; but, only her attitude to the scientific civilization needs re-orientation. Her husband cannot easily accept the changes that take place in their life because patriarchy has tuned him to be stubborn in certain aspects related to male ego. He cannot digest the fact that his wife is also an independent being who can take certain decisions regarding her life without his concern. He cannot assimilate the truth that his wife can go out all alone and visit people without his permission. This commotion in Dandekar reminds the words of protagonist Saru, (a character from Shashi Despande *That Long Silence*) who gives ironically the following imaginary advice regarding male ego to future wives in the college:

A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband. She should agree with his ideas without questioning him...... Women’s magazines will tell you that a marriage should be an equal partnership. That’s nonsense. Rubbish. No partnership can be equal. It will always be unequal, but take care that it’s unequal in favour of your husband. If the scales tilt in your favour, God should help you.33
Sarojini truly represents the traditional Indian wife, in her concern for the family as well as the religious devotion. Sarojini’s midlife crisis is resolved when she accepts the ‘new world’ following only the injunction of her spiritual Guru, the faith-healing Swamy. Markandaya suggests that solution lies not in spiritual impoverishment but in the balancing of scientific education and the physical well-being of the people. This perception in Sarojini which is the result of her middle-age experience saves her marital ship from drowning.

From the study it is clear that the behaviour of the individual in the midlife is the reflection of their previous experiences in their life. Hence it can be deduced that the present behaviour of the individuals, their thoughts, feelings and actions are implications of the past. Unhappy traumatic childhood and pernicious home environment leads to distorted personality which suffers from a spiritual dryness. In other words, the reason for strange behaviour of some middle-aged women characters is because they have been denied the “space to grow.” Both Kamala’s and Desai’s middle-aged women characters understand the fact that none can run away from the hard realities of life. Hence, Rukmani and Sarojini understand their life and adjust with the situations, Jayamma realizes her husband’s inability and pities him at the end, Maya’s mother-in-law faces the life boldly and in absence of her husband, she rears her children and continues with her career as a social worker. Sita decides to come back and continue
her marital journey with her husband. Finally, the decisions these middle-aged women make with their middle-age wisdom, are vindication of the traditional values of Indian culture, namely, acceptance and tolerance.

To sum up, becoming mother is always a cherished dream of every married Indian woman. The status and identity of women may vary from society to society and culture to culture. But to a large extent, women across the globe share one thing with their fellow women; it is biological motherhood. Irrespective of the kind of society, that is to say, whether one belongs to a developed society or to a developing one, motherhood is perceived as one of the most important functions of a woman. Across the national and cross-cultural level, the concept of motherhood shows diverse concepts with similar issues; yet the role of women in shaping human beings is central in almost all conceptions of mothering. It is because of the world-wide importance attached to it.

Modern women, those who are career-oriented, may feel motherhood to be a curse rather than fulfillment of life because they feel that children are the greatest responsibility of married women and in the process of rearing children, they may forgo their career and their identity of being a woman. Both the writers resolve such dilemma in modern women by depicting the characters of Rukmani and Maya’s mother-in law who nurture their children as well as maintain their identity as woman in parallel.
A girl brought up in a positive and affirming environment, develops positive traits which makes her bold enough to face the challenges of life. She grows into a matured individual who seeks **fulfillment** and identity not only in motherhood but also in her corresponding roles as wife, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law, etc.

After narrating the quintessence of marriage, heavenly happiness at husband’s place and fulfillment in motherhood, both the writers give a message to married Indian women. The concluding chapter sums up with a valuable message from the women writers selected for the study.
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