A mind not to be changed by place or time. The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven\textsuperscript{1}

This beautiful quote of John Milton speaks about the importance of mind-set. It is the mind-set which makes all the difference in the human life. The mind-set speaks about the attitude of the people and decides their behavioural pattern. The atmosphere in which the individual is brought up impinges its influence on the mind which in turn shapes the attitude of the individual. This attitude formation is very crucial in life because it decides the life of the individual. It is the attitude which can make life fruitful or dreadful.

As the discussion is about women, the attitude formation in woman is most important aspect because drastic changes occur in her life after marriage. Woman migrates (moves) to the new place i.e. husband’s house after marriage. She changes her habitat. She leaves her “first world” (parent’s house) and enters the “other world” i.e, her husband’s house after marriage. In fact, Migration is one of the important aspects of a woman’s life because the process of leaving the parental home and entering into her husband’s house is integral to any Indian woman’s experience.
A woman encounters the raptures giving way to various feelings when she leaves for her husband’s house. The focus on her family forms an important nexus in her world. It is within the institution of family that a woman seeks to construct a viable space for herself. Traditionally speaking, a woman’s primary sphere is her “home” (both parental and marital). It is in the home, within the family structure, that a woman lives and matures into a complete person. She tries to overcome her separation from her parental home by relating herself to the new world which she enters after her marriage. The feminine desire to locate herself within the landscape is the intense urge to locate herself from within. She makes constant comparison between her father’s house and her husband’s house. This existential conflict produces certain “needs” in her. Fulfillment of these needs in woman is important to keep her sane and alive. It is these needs which determine her mind-set and her attitude towards her family. Hence it is quite imperative to study the “needs” in detail.

Several sociologists and psychologists who have contributed to the development of concepts and theories on human behaviour, emphasized that one should take human needs and human feelings into consideration to make an assessment of human behaviour, their mind-set and their character. An interesting frame work that helps to explain the strength of certain human needs and their impact on human behaviour is developed by a popular socio-psychologist, Abraham Maslow. He propounded the theory of “Hierarchy of Needs”.

According to Maslow, there seems to be a hierarchy into which human needs arrange themselves. He says:

The behaviour of individuals at a particular movement is usually determined by their strongest need. Therefore, one should have some understanding about the needs that are commonly most important to people. Their non-fulfillment leads one to self-contempt, self-hate and finally to alienation. ²

Abraham Maslow also classified the needs into five categories. They are as follows:


The Biological (Physical) needs are at the top of the hierarchy because they tend to have the highest strength until they are gratified satisfactorily. “These are the basic human needs to sustain life like food, clothing, and shelter.”⁴ Until these basic needs of man are satisfied to the degree needed for the sufficient operation of the body, he does not dream of fulfilling other needs. Majority of a person’s activity will probably be at this biological level.

The second type of needs include Safety (Security) needs. When once the physical needs become gratified, the safety or security needs
become predominant. “Security needs are essentially the need to be free of the fear of physical danger, job insecurity and deprivation of the basic physical needs etc.” In other words, this is a need for self preservation. There is a concern and anxiety for the future life. If an individual’s safety or security needs are in danger, other things seem to be unimportant.

Once physical and safety needs are fairly satisfied, Social (Affiliation) needs would emerge as dominant in the ladder of needs. “Since people are social beings, they have a need to belong and to be accepted by various groups.” When social needs become dominant, a person strives for meaningful relations with others.

The fourth category of needs include Self-esteem (Recognition) needs. “After individuals begin to satisfy their need to belong, they generally wish to be more than just a member of their group. They then feel the need for both self-esteem and recognition from others.” Most people have a need for a high evaluation of themselves that is firmly based on recognition and respect from others. Satisfaction of this self-esteem needs produce feelings of self confidence, prestige, power and control. People begin to feel that they are useful to the society and influence their surroundings.

Self-actualization (Identity) needs are “the need to maximize one’s potential, what ever it may be. In a nutshell, it is realizing
personal potential and self-fulfillment, seeking personal growth and peak experiences. It is what a man can be, he must be.”⁸ Thus self-actualization is the desire to become what one is capable of becoming.

In a way Maslow’s theory helps to understand human behaviour. It also explains how needs motivate people and change their mind-set. However, an overtly rigid application of this interpretation will produce a rigid analysis, as people and motivation are very complex. People move up (or down) in the hierarchy of needs, depending on the experiences of their lives. For example, self-actualizers are mainly focused on self-actualizing but are still motivated to eat and socialize. Similarly, homeless folk whose main focus is on feeding themselves and finding shelter can also be, to a lesser extent, concerned with social relationships. Interestingly, “hierarchy of needs theory” seems to be used increasingly as an effective way to help people deal with depression, low self-esteem, poor life circumstances, etc. Though the matters of human emotions and feelings are not amendable to the techniques of sciences, a scientific approach with common sense can be used to solve existential problems of man’s life to a certain extent.

With regard to women, the existential dilemma in them can be relatively overcome when a more or less adequate way of fulfilling the existential needs is found. These needs are also referred as the psychic requirements of human beings because they are rooted in the very conditions of human existence. All married women have these
needs. When these needs are not fulfilled, there begins existential conflict among the women. It disturbs their mind and leads to internal as well as external stress.

Hence, in order to meet the psychic needs and the demands of the outer world and to enable them to feel at home, married women evolve certain strategies to live this world. They try to overcome the horror of separation from parental home by finding new strategies to fulfill their needs and also by relating themselves to the new world they step in. To fulfill the needs and cope with the new environment, women with healthy, positive and wholesome personalities, rely on the direct methods of coping with the stress situations, whereas, the psychologically fragmented individuals rely heavily on indirect methods of coping with a stress situation. Analyzing these direct and indirect methods of existence of women, Mrinalini Solanki, a critic, termed them as “patterns of survival strategies”.

While analyzing the “strategies,” a perspective contrast appears between the direct and indirect methods of survival strategies. Accepting the situation as it is, facing the reality with boldness and making effective adjustments in life are some of the direct survival strategies adopted by bold women. Whereas, escape from reality or the denial of reality is an indirect strategy adopted by emotionally fragile women. Commenting on this strategy, Mrinalini Solanki opines:
We tend to avoid those aspects of situation which are traumatic or self-devaluing or contradictory to our assumptions.  

The denial of unpleasant outer and inner realities is not enough. Such individuals also tend to **conjure up a world in fantasy**. “To gratify their basic needs for love, belongingness and self-esteem they create a world of imagination.” They involve in vague and non-productive fantasy. They are engaged in the wish fulfilling activity and do not bother about lack of achievement. Courageous women **live in the world of reality**. Instead of escaping into the world of fantasy, they go into the deeper layers of reality and try to work out possible solutions to conquer the problems of life.

The other indirect strategy visible among excessively sensitive women is that they have a tendency to **blame someone or something** outside themselves for their own mistakes and shortcomings. They also attribute their own unacceptable desires, wishes and thoughts to others. On the other hand, mature women **do not blame anyone** for their fate. They accept their fate with stoic nature.

Another indirect strategy adopted by hyper-sensitive women is **emotional insulation**. “It is related to individual’s degree of emotional involvement in situations that might prove disappointing.” If a woman is hurt emotionally, she may insulate herself to such an extent that she cannot achieve a close and affectionate relationship again.
Whereas, broad-minded women adopt **forgive and forget policy** with patience and endurance to sustain themselves in life.

**Indulgence in violence**, physical, sexual or psychological is also an extreme form of indirect survival strategy. Eric Fromm clarifies the reasons behind such hostile attitudes among individuals:

Life has inner dynamism of its own: it tends to grow, to be expressed, to be lived. When this tendency is thwarted, the energy directed towards life undergoes a process of decomposition and changes into energies directed towards destruction. However, when one penetrates deep into the unconscious dynamics of such a person, one invariably finds him free in the negative sense, i.e., he is alone with his self and confronting an alienated, hostile world.\(^{13}\)

When other strategies do not meet the survival needs sensitive women, they adopt this strategy of **violence**, aggression or destructiveness, whereas, the sturdy women instead of indulging in any kind of violent act, try to work out possible ways to come out of their problems. But when no ways are feasible for them they **wait for the good times** with patience and stoic endurance.

In total, the purpose behind the direct and indirect survival strategies of women have been to fulfill their “needs” and to continue their living in new environment. At this juncture, it would be appropriate to discuss in detail, the “hierarchy of needs” and the
“survival strategies” adopted by the women protagonists of Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai, to have a meaningful existence in life after marriage.

Anita Desai’s perception of life is governed by an existentialist concern and psychological insights. Her portraits in fiction like: Maya, Sita, Nanda, etc. provide a vast potential for a systematic study of the strategies which are employed by bewildered and lost individuals for their survival. On the other hand, Kamala Markandaya’s perception of life is governed by sociological and economical concerns. Her protagonists like Rukmani, Nalini, Sarojini, etc. equally provide enough scope for study of the survival strategies which are employed by mentally and emotionally sound individuals in their lives. Hence, it is apt to study the women characters individually from selected novels.

In the early part of Kamala Markandaya’s *Nectar in a Sieve*, one gets enough indications about the kind of future that is in store for Rukmani. Her marriage is altogether a different marriage which is contrary to the wish she has expressed. This marital bond marks the beginning of a life of misery in her life.

By the time I came to womanhood prestige of my father was very much diminished. Perhaps that was why they could not find me a rich husband, and married me to a
tenant farmer who was poor in everything but in love and care for me (Markandaya, *Nectar 2*).  

Rukmani lives in a hut and in utter penury. Major part of her life is miserable, unhappy and disappointing. She, along with her family, has to suffer for getting even the basic physical needs fulfilled. She faces the hardships of her life with stoic attitude, whereas her children, who do not have patience, take drastic steps to fulfill their basic needs of life. Rukmani’s two elder sons, Arjun and Thambi leave for Ceylon to work in the tea-plantations; Murgan, her next son, goes to city to work as servant in a Saheb’s house. Her daughter, Ira who is abandoned by her husband for being barren, feels that she is an extra burden to her parents. Hence, in such a state, she takes to prostitution.

Even minor characters in the novel are affected by hunger and poverty. Hunger not only kills, but also degrades and dehumanizes the people. Kunthi, the minor character in the novel, is driven to prostitution who later on blackmails Rukmani and Nathan during their most difficult days. Old Granny, the most pathetic figure in the novel, is all alone in the world with no one to care for or look after her in her old age. Affected by hunger, she dies of starvation. Kali, the neighbour of Rukmani, is also affected by poverty. Her hut is destroyed in floods. She has nothing for herself and her family. She goes to Rukmani for help but, Rukmani could not help her, for she herself, along with her family, is suffering with hunger and poverty.
Hence, the characters in this novel struggle for basic physical needs in life. So the question of fulfillment of “other” needs does not arise among these characters.

Human conflict is often caused by one’s own physical state of well-being. If Arjun and Thambi turn to emigration, Ira to prostitution, Kunthi to blackmailing, it is just because of their wish to survive in the face of starvation. The winds of change are the urbanization and industrialization that every peasant society has experienced in the present century. Once these man-made factors come into picture, human nature is affected, and human conflict ensues even when it is not a question of survival; greed and materialism change the shape of the old culture prevailing in the society. The tannery is a symbol of encroachment of the city culture on village culture; the corruptions of the city seep into village life. Rukmani is unhappy about the change in the village atmosphere.

The change that came into my life, into all our lives, blasting its way into our village, seemed wrought in the twinkling of an eye (25).

With the advent of tannery, an imbalance is created. With economic disparities comes the moral depravity. But Kamala Markandaya through the character of Rukmani leads the reader to the philosophical truth that has sustained a civilization for centuries – “bend like the grass that does not break” (28).
The spirit of acceptance sustains one in adversity and exalts one in good times. When one sheds this passive spirit of acceptance, one is ruined. This is what happens with Rukmani’s children. Her fourth son Raja refuses to accept the working conditions at the factory and his rebellion results in his death. Rukmani accepts this shattering blow with the same passivity with which she accepted her older sons’ departure for Ceylon. But passivity does not signify absence of emotion. This acceptance, born of simple faith, does not break down even when the deities, in whom Rukmani reposes her faith, remain unmoved by her prayers.

Kamala Markandaya’s heroines, accept the situation as it is, and face the real situations that come in their life with heroic endurance. This is the way of their life. They adopt the strategy of forgive and forget policy. Instead of shielding themselves from the problems, they face them and try to compromise with the situations, waiting for the good times.

Rukmani’s life is full of misfortunes which follow her in a series. Initially, it comes in the form of tannery, then it is nature and next it is the turn of Kunthi to make her life miserable. The greatest shock of her life is that when Nathan admits that he has illegal contact with Kunthi and has fathered her two sons.

Faithlessness on the part of the spouses is the rudest jolt to the matrimonial relationships. However, Rukmani’s courage, self-control
and level-headedness save her from being swept away by a sense of mortification. Rukmani understands him and forgives him, not because she is a dumb peasant woman under the heels of a chauvinistic society but because she is a strong woman. The love, faith and trust she has in him make her face with a stoic calm the worst experience in her life. The “forgive and forget” policy she adopts saves her domestic ship from drowning in the sea of troubles. Finally the couple has been freed from prejudices against each other.

It seemed to me that a new peace came to us then, freed atlast from the necessity for lies and concealment (87).

Rukmani’s miseries do not end there. Kuti, Rukmani’s ailing child also contributed in a non-trivial way to make her life far from happiness. Her next shock is that Ira gives birth to albino child whose father is unknown. Rukmani maintains the same temperament even when she comes to know that the land that they are hiring is sold to the tannery people.

The principal character in each case is trapped in a situation of struggle against the ill-fate. Certainly the damage caused by the tannery is irreparable. Rukmani has lost more than what she has gained. Ira has ruined herself at the hands of the tannery. Her sons have left and one of them has been destroyed by his ruthlessness. Rukmani remembers how others of the village became the victims of the tannery. She helplessly says:
Somehow I had always felt the tannery would eventually be our undoing. I had known it since the day the carts had come with their loads of bricks and noisy dusty men, staining the clear soft greens that had once coloured our village and cleaving its cool silences with clamour. Since then it had spread like weeds in an untended garden, strangling whatever life grew in its way. It had changed the face of our village beyond recognition and altered the lives of its inhabitants in a myriad ways.

Inspite of the state of affairs discussed, Rukmani is never willing to blame the tannery for everything. Hard luck continues to chase Rukmani. The final and the most serious of the tragedies that strike Rukmani is the death of Nathan. The coming of the tannery to the village brings an upheaval in the fortunes of Rukmani.

Despite all the difficulties Rukmani retains love and kindness to adopt the leper, Puli, an orphan boy, with whom she returns to her village after Nathan’s death in the city. She entrusts Puli to Dr.Kenny for treatment. Rukmani’s philosophy is one of fortitude. She believes that “a man’s spirit is given to her to rise above her misfortunes” (45). Even the minor characters display the same fortitude in the novel. It is this fortitude that sustains Old Granny who has lived all alone making a meager living by selling vegetables. She says: “It is not unbearable. One gets used to it” (62). She explains the need for stoicism. “To those
who live by the land there must always come a time of hardship, of fear and of hunger, even as there are years of plenty. This is the truth of our existence” (134). When Kali’s hut is destroyed in the storm she is thankful that at least “it stood until the worst was over” (135). Rukmani too is of the same faith when her barren daughter Ira is forsaken by her husband. She consoles her, saying: “We are all in God’s hands and He is merciful” (80). The psyche of Indian wife remains to be a mystery not only to the West but also to the Indian men. It is apt to quote Dr. Kenny who stands puzzled at the stoic nature of Rukmani and says: “‘My God!’ He cried, ‘I do not understand you’” (114).

To sum up, Nectar in a Sieve is not only Rukmani’s story but also the story of a strong-willed average Indian wife. Misfortunes chase her as a shadow one after the other; but her sheer will power helps her overcome them every time. She will certainly be remembered as a woman who could stand all kinds of suffering and who successfully continues her journey of life never willing to stumble or give up. She faces the realities of life by accepting the situation as it is. Her optimistic vision of life is expressed in the following lines.

The clamour that invaded our lives has strengthened us.
Had there not been what has been, I might never have known how blessed we were (52).
Do what she may; she is destined to be defeated. The struggle of Rukmani is against the merciless whims of nature and the incurable poverty of the family. It is implied in the rules of the game that she be the loser. But what distinguishes her is the invincible optimism and the inflexibility of her purpose in the pursuit of the needs of life in the face of the worst odds.

Rukmani is one of the best creations of Kamala Markandaya. The greatest qualities of an Indian wife are brought out through her character. Unlike Kunthi and Ira, she does not degrade herself morally; that is why she does not take any immoral steps to fulfill her or her family’s physical needs. In fact, she remains composed even in dire poverty.

From the thematic point of view, Kamala Markandaya’s *A Handful of Rice* is a continuation of her first novel, *Nectar in a Sieve*. In this novel, Nalini and Ravi are pitted against the cruel forces of economic hardships. Nalini, who is aware of their financial status, is very understanding and undemanding. Unlike Ravi, she is a level-headed girl who is fully contented with her lot, keeping their limitations in view.

Nalini knows that Ravi desires to own a few luxury items despite the financial constraints. She, therefore, decides to save him from being “consumed by vague dissatisfaction and frightening ambitions” (Markandaya, *A Handful* 13). In the face of these
insurmountable obstacles, Ravi – an average Indian male - becomes harsh and brutal towards Nalini. But she bears all this harshness with her strength of character, without a word of complaint against him. Ravi, unable to cope with the situation, turns to immoral ways of earning once again, which he has given up when he married Nalini.

*A Handful of Rice* depicts the impact of economic hardships on the fundamental human ties. Bread and butter is the sordid reality for all human beings. Common to all is the influence of economic factors on the power structures within the society. Every time the need for “a handful of rice” has the power to ruin not only materially but also spiritually. There is a limit to human endurance and to the homeostasis capacity of human mind and body. When circumstances go really out of control, tender feelings, regard for values and ideals disappear. Physical hunger, non-availability of job, rising prices drive one to madness where rational appraisal of each other’s thoughts and deeds become impossible. Just like Rukmani and Nathan in *Nectar in a Sieve*, Nalini and Ravi struggle for fulfillment of physical and safety needs of life. The only basic difference is in the setting of the novel i.e., *Nectar in a Sieve* speaks about rural poverty and *A Handful of Rice* speaks about urban poverty. Ravi is like Rukmani’s third son Murgan, who leaves the village to be a servant in the city. As in *Nectar in a Sieve*, the novel is about the human spirit that refuses to buckle under moral stresses and strains of life. In *Nectar in a Sieve*, one can see how village culture ultimately succumbs to the economic and
moral depredations of the city. *A Handful of Rice* deals with the other side of the issue – why villagers leave the village and what happens to them when they come to the city. The reason why they leave village is clear: it is to escape the endless cycle of poverty and hand-to-mouth existence, buffeted between nature’s storms and the landlord’s extortions. Markandaya shows this in almost every novel. Due to sheer starvation, Kuti and Nathan die in *Nectar in a Sieve*; same is the case with Ravi’s mother in *A Handful of Rice*. The reason, why younger generation left the villages whereas the previous generations have not, is aptly expressed as follows:

> The pattern must have gone on a long time, generations, because nobody objected, nobody protested, they just kept going, on and on, and were thankful that they were able to(12).

Young men leave villages in order to save their children from starvation. Ravi too like other young people rebels against his parents’ stoic peasant values. He has rejected his father’s concept of not leaving the native village in spite of poverty. He has no hesitation in leaving the village and never wants to have anything to do with the village. Just as Rukmani senses the drastic changes that the tannery would bring in their lives, Ravi’s mother also senses the effect of this link to the outside world that would drive her children away. For the younger generation the train heralded a wonderful future; but for the
mother it is a daily threat of separation, a threat that becomes a reality as each of her children leave for the city.

It came once a day, barely paused – for the village was not even a station but only a halt – and in a few minutes it was gone, vanished beyond the horizon for another whole cycle of night and day. But the lines remained, double lines of steel bolted on to sleepers that moved both ways into the distance like an articulated animal; remained, and became a presence in their lives (26).

Ravi did not have patience and endurance to face the crisis in his life. Hence to fulfill his basic needs, he takes his journey towards the city. On the other hand, Nalini, his wife though a city-bred, has better understanding of life and its values. She displays the fortitude of the older generation. She carves a niche for herself equal to that of Rukmani’s character in Nectar in a Sieve.

Rukmani is relatively free as compared to Nalini. The freedom that peasant women enjoy, despite poverty and the bonds of village life, is better when compared to city women of poor background. Nalini is leading a compact suffocating life in the city. Initially Ravi, her father’s apprentice, courts her as a romantic youth. But the courtship is all too brief and marriage shrinks her beyond all recognition.
Poverty not only grinds Ravi down, but also crushes gentle Nalini brutally. But this does not redeem Nalini. Nalini, gentle by nature, accepts adversity passively: “Nalini took it stoically. She was used to obedience and saw no point in banging her head against a stone wall.”(190) But Ravi cannot accept the adversity. He cannot manage the state of affairs like Apu who even maintains a degree of dignity and uprightness. He even accuses Nalini of infidelity and throws her out. In the long bitter struggle for existence, her volition has been eroded completely. She cannot function as an autonomous being, having been grounded down in the mill of suffering. When existence itself is at stake, the question of independence, of autonomy for the spirit does not arise.

Nalini like Rukmani shows great courage in facing the harsh realities of life. She accepts everything that comes into her life without any complaint. Every action of her may be a question mark to the outsider, an enigma; yet she would not mind being her original self. She, with no complaints, retreats to her household work. Every incident turns out to be an episode of peace and implicit obedience. She remains to be a hallmark of stoic nature in all situations. She doesn’t weep or cry. She maintains her household with what ever money Ravi gives at home. The very thought of asking for some more makes her shiver in the shoe.

It would mean asking him for extra money and perhaps he would shout at her, she thought, take her by the
shoulders and shake her while he shouted as he often did and it made her feel afraid and a little sick. She frequently felt this way and she wondered bleakly, what it would be like to have no fears at all, like a memsahib, say, who could not have any fears about milk or money or the future or the heavy hand of a moody husband? (202)

Nalini knew the art of keeping in touch with the mood and character of her husband. She always assists him. She never goes in for anything that one can dare call luxury. She cannot think of becoming an added problem to the purse of Ravi. When Ravi oscillates between the world of selfishness and deception on one hand, and that of moral values as decencies on the other, Nalini makes him discriminate between these two tendencies.

Noble and strong-willed Nalini is the strength of Ravi, especially in crumbling state. She is behind him like Sita to Rama. With the patient endurance, inexhaustible capacity for love, and simple tenderness, she explains the consequences to Ravi when he rebels against economic disparity. She acts as anchor to Ravi’s life by guiding him in a right way.

The author seems to recommend compromise in all her novels. Even the minor characters like Nalini’s sister, Thangam follow forgive and forget policy. Despite the fact that Ravi turns out Thangam, her husband and little children from the house, she gives shelter to her
sister when Ravi turns Nalini out of his house blaming her for infidelity.

The character of Nalini is powerfully portrayed by Kamala Markandaya in *A Handful of Rice*. She is the sort that can redeem even an errant husband like Ravi. She emerges as the heroine of the novel because she bears all the troubles of her life with heroic endurance and surmounts every experience that is aimed at weakening her integrity. She waits for good times in life with positive ray of hope. At the end of the novel she compromises and accepts the fact that any human being who is burdened with economic problems suffers depredation and erosion of character, like her husband Ravi. Hence, she forgives her husband generously.

It is a little different with Kamala Markandaya’s *A Silence of Desire*, where the Social (Affiliation) needs play a dominant role. In the previous novels, the characters emerge develop, consolidate or disintegrate under the impact of economic hardships, whereas in this novel ideological adjustment of an urban middle-class couple is depicted. Sarojini, a traditional housewife, is in sharp contrast with the scientific and modern husband, Dandekar. Their relationship which has been harmonious for fifteen years is disturbed when an external stress enters unexpectedly. In the earlier part of the novel, the solid foundation of the matrimonial relationship depended upon the emotional feedback and physical attention which Sarojini provided
to Dandekar. Commenting on the moral support provided by Sarojini to Dandekar, Edwin Thumbo opines:

Sarojini supplies the active centre of the Dandekar household, a point we must grasp firmly if we are to appreciate the dislocation which will soon afflict the family.¹⁶

The conjugal bliss for Dandekar and Sarojini depends almost entirely upon the wisdom of Sarojini. She is tactful and knows that every husband wants appreciation. She, therefore, does not let the charm of novelty wither away from repetitive routine gestures of receiving presents every month. Usha Pathania opines that:

Dandekar is a male chauvinist for whom the wife is like a robot or some sophisticated mechanical device for the fulfillment of his needs. ¹⁷

He cares for her but shows a fleeting interest in her ideas, attitudes and thoughts. Dandekar is very sensitive and sentimental in many ways, but he is also bound to traditional gender roles. He needs the anchor of patterns; he earns the money for the family, and he expects his wife to take care of family matters; so that, when he comes home and finds his wife absent, his first feeling is one of loss. The relationship between husband and wife thrives and blooms to happiness when it is respected as a partnership between equals. Both
should recognize and respect each other’s identity. Once the superiority or inferiority equation strikes, the deterioration begins. Balanced relationships provide a sense of security which is essential for the sense of wellbeing of the persons involved. This awareness is drawn on Dandekar when Sarojini becomes indifferent to him.

Domestic harmony, however, is too fragile to be taken for granted for any length of time. It runs smoothly so long as things are under control. But the problem arises with a sudden inexplicable growth in Sarojini’s womb. She is a traditional woman with immense faith in religious practices. She keeps her visits to the Swami a secret, knowing fully well that Dandekar, fuelled by such rationalism would object to faith healing. Dandekar finds out that Sarojini has told him lies regarding her outings in the evenings. He suspects her of infidelity. When confronted, she tells him the truth. Hovering between a surgical operation and faith healing, he feels he cannot control his wife’s desires anymore and that the Swami is an intruder in his life. He feels that Swami is a challenge to his own identity. This thought shatters his domestic peace irrevocably.

Like any other man, Dandekar wanted recognition of his male ego by his wife. When she keeps her visits to Swami a secret, Dandekar feels that his status as the head of the family is threatened. He loses his mental equilibrium and discards all norms of decent and courteous behaviour. He even visits tarts to satisfy his male ego. Similarly, Sarojini has unflinching faith in tradition and religion which
is not acknowledged by Dandekar. She too feels the threat to her ego from modern attitude of her husband. Hence she keeps her visit to Swami, to cure the tumour in her womb, a secret. The unhappy interlude comes to an end with an interpersonal fusion of scientific views and religious beliefs of the couple. Hence, it can be inferred that fulfillment of Social (Affiliation) needs are as important as fulfillment of physical needs.

Anchored like Rukmani, in the Indian way of life, Sarojini believes in suffering patiently to cleanse or spiritualize herself. Though she worries about the outcome of the operation, she is calm and asserts repeatedly that she is in God’s hands. Finally she faces the reality with great courage and gets operated successfully. Though for sometime she hesitates to face the reality of getting operated, she adjusts with the reality of life and undergoes the surgical operation.

Dandekar can never deny that Sarojini is a devoted wife. Nevertheless, the mysterious behaviour arouses his suspicion. Like Rukmani, Sarojini also has no complaint whatsoever against her husband with no defence against the allegations that Dandekar puts on her. Even though Sarojini is aware of Dandekar’s visit to the prostitutes, she does not retaliate. She thinks her illness to be the main reason behind this unexpected act. She knows how she has been neglecting her husband as well as her children. She, therefore, does not reprimand him for his changed ways that make her feel sad and guilty. Sarojini like Rukmani can accept her lot under changed
circumstances. Her capacity to adapt and adjust is her real source of strength.

Sarojini is an average woman of a middle-class family. But halfway through the novel, she is seen clinging to her faith in Swami in the face of a grave crisis in family life. One comes to realize the precious nature of family harmony and the importance of the role of the wife and the mother in promoting it. In between this harsh and unenviable task of juggling between love, home and children, she has to look after her physical and spiritual welfare too. Sarojini digests the truth that she has growth of tumour in her womb and does not intimate the matter to her family members. She feels that this would disturb the peaceful atmosphere of the family. But the secret that she has kept in her heart for not disturbing the family happiness turns out to be a curse for her. Commenting on the attitude of Sarojini, Uma Parameshwaran opines:

I don’t think it is for self-protection but for protecting the men they love. Women in her novels dissimilate and lie for various reasons: for sparing hurt to their men’s egos; for keeping from them knowledge that would cause them suffering, as with Sarojini’s illness; to prevent unwarranted jealousy; to allow for their loss of touch with the earth and spirit, and so on. But each time, it is to spare the men they love.18
In spite of all this, she bears everything with patience hoping to get healed of tumour through prayers and regaining her conjugal bliss once again. Finally, the domestic harmony is regained when Sarojini compromises with the situations and forgives Dandekar for his rude behaviour.

This is the strong positive note clearly visible in Kamala Markandaya’s women. Markandaya’s women characters, unlike Anita Desai’s, are undeniably the forerunners of the courageous females of modern India. The women alone fight with their problems and muster courage to compromise. The woman marches off towards future, however hazardous, with quiet confidence, determined to provide a better future for her. To accept life as it comes without blaming anyone for their ill-fate and waiting for the good times with positive ray of hope is a predominant nature of Kamala Markandaya’s women. Hence, like Rukmani and Nalini, Sarojini also carves a special niche for herself among the noble heroines of Kamala Markandaya.

On the contrary, Anita Desai’s women have defiant attitudes. They fight against the commonplace conformity and adhere to their own vision of life without striking any compromise between the ideal and the real. Hence ultimately, they fail to construct healthy relationships. Most of her women characters are torn apart between the attachment and alienation in their relationships. In the selected novels of Anita Desai the question of fulfillment of physical and safety needs, like Kamala Markandaya’s heroines, does not arise because the
female protagonists hail from rich families. In spite of all physical comforts, they are not happy with their life. They desire for perfect conjugal bliss which is not possible for them. Hence, in order to pacify their disturbed mind, they resort to indirect survival strategies.

Maya, in Anita Desai’s *Cry, the Peacock* is married to Gautama, who provides Maya with all the physical comforts she was used to in her father’s house. But Maya is far from being happy and feels that Gautama does not understand her or her “needs”. She is more acutely aware of her loneliness because she has nothing to keep herself occupied. Maya lives in a world of idealism and fantasy, whereas Gautama is a realist to the core. He impresses upon her that human concepts and ideals change according to the needs, and new facets keep on appearing. Hence life is always a flux. An ever widening gap between the husband and the wife is felt throughout the novel. She muses: “Had there been a bond between us, he would have felt its pull.....But there was none” (Desai, *Cry* 39).

Maya, being motherless, is pampered by the father. Shielded from reality and from the gross ugliness of the outside world, Maya fails to initiate herself into adult life. For fulfillment of her emotional needs, she turns towards her mother-in-law and sister-in-law. But she cannot get the affection she is craving for. Having failed to occupy a place amidst her people, Maya creates a symbiotic unity with the world of flora and fauna. Her failure to connect herself to Gautama’s world results in her loneliness in marriage. She feels that whatever
she has received from the father is taken away in marriage. In the case of Maya, Social (Affiliation) and Esteem (Recognition) needs seem to be unfulfilled.

Maya is not a conventional housewife. She belongs to a rich stratum of society and does not have to labour, to sweat and toil for bare necessities. Unlike Rukmani and Nalini in Kamala Markandaya’s *Nectar in a Sieve and A Handful of Rice* respectively, her concerns are neither economic nor social but aesthetic. She is however married and childless, upper class, post independent Indian woman, left alone and solitary. Economic security does not instil a sense of power in her; in fact, it makes her more powerless and non-effective.

Embittered by the present and with no hopes of a satisfactory future, she feels insecure. She needs reassurance and comfort from her husband. But he is unable to fulfill that “need” of her. She gradually starts drifting away from the unpleasant present into the world of her childhood where she “lived as a toy princess in a toy world” (35). She feels that she has not enjoyed anything; she has not lived a wholesome life of contentment and happiness after marriage. She, therefore, finds it difficult to survive without regressing back to her good old days.

Figure of her father has always provided a sense of security, stability and protection and an all encompassing love which made no demands. She is not aware that her inability to assume the adult
responsibilities of married life has led to this situation. Therefore, Maya adopts the strategy of escape into the past, as the present with its confusing demands, teases and torments her. Her upbringing in a fairy tale environment handicaps her in establishing any satisfying rapport with the down-to-earth relations of Gautama. Maya’s father is, unfortunately, unaware of the crippling effects of excessive pampering of a child. After her marriage, of course, he advises her to accept whatever comes in her way but Maya continues to find fault with the environment and the people she interacts.

Maya is alienated from her friends also; as she discovers them to be different from her. A very potent reason for Maya’s escape from the present is her childlessness. To ward off this anguish, Maya retreats to her childhood events and happenings. She takes recourse to unreasoning and allows imagination to take full charge of her thought processes. Inner demands and external reality are in clash, in Maya’s case. She finds it difficult to accept the reality of her married life as the charm of childhood world is too strong to pull her out of it.

Maya frequently indulges in egoistic fantasies. In her world of imagination she is the main figure. It fulfills her “need” for total attention and importance. The perfect and ideal love, which Maya aspires for, exists only in her make-believe world. She prefers the world of flowers and trees, birds and blooms, because in them she finds no contradiction to her thoughts and feelings. Maya wants her husband to take care of her, “like a delicate flower” (42). Thus Maya’s
retreat into the world of fantasy does not liberate her from the nagging sense of insecurity and obsessive fear of death. The most dominant image is that of the astrologer and his prophecy disturbs her mostly. The present is frustrating, dissatisfying and unacceptable, and the past is also not wholly gratifying. She cannot find any viable strategy to achieve peace of mind and integration of personality. In a bid to survive, Maya leans heavily on the past thinking it to be a very solid support. Although Maya wants to live, her awareness of death disintegrates her thought-process. It provides here merely an opportunity for self-indulgence but fails to save her from schizophrenic disturbances.

Maya’s thoughts and speech seem to move to several opposite directions at a time. She struggles between the past, present and future. She does not have the boldness to accept the realities of life. Hence in a way Anita’s sensitive protagonists shun the realities of life. They feel that exposure to realities of life is like hurting themselves in the battle of life.

To many people a movement to the past, an escape into time and space comes as a convenient way out to obliterate the present. At times, escape into time and space is insufficient or inadequate to meet the survival needs of some individuals. In such cases the next and more extreme strategy of survival is violence, aggression or destructiveness. Anita Desai’s women also adopt this strategy for survival.
In her portrayal of Maya, Anita Desai emphasizes the deep relationship between the unfulfilled sexual urges and the development of an aggressive personality. Maya is tense and disturbed because of the non-fulfillment of instinctual need. She grows aggressive and hostile towards the things around her. Maya’s aggression can be termed as defensive. Maya’s fears and death instincts play an important role in shaping the deteriorating condition of her personality. The conflicting psychic states lead her to think of death as the only means to find solace in the existing circumstances. Maya adopts self-assertive-aggression when she decides that only Gautama is doomed to death. This decision facilitates the pursuit of a goal, whether it is to destroy or to create. Self assertive aggression is an essential quality for survival. She sees no other way for her survival. Her acute father-fixation paves a way to remove all obstacles whether it is Arjuna, her brother or Gautama, her husband. She finds no father substitute in them. Both of them have no place in her life. Thus she pushes Arjuna out of her thoughts and Gautama down the roof to close the chapter of all sub-conscious and unconscious longings.

Like Maya and Gautama in Cry, The Peacock, the relationship between Sita and Raman in Where Shall We Go This Summer? is disrupted because of their inability to understand each other. Like Maya she also feels lonely and alienated; oppressed by the feeling that Raman does not understand her or her Esteem Needs. She is a dreamer and a romantic visionary, whereas Raman is a down-to-earth
realist like Gautama. She feels the deep sense of alienation. She turns towards her children for fulfillment of her emotional needs. But her children not only separate themselves from her, but also reject her. They swiftly accommodate themselves to the outside world which Sita fails to do. She reads the minds of her children, looking at her anxiously:

Whenever she turned or looked up, she saw them staring at her, watching her as though waiting for her to break down and admit failure. To them, she realized with a painful sloughing off of disbelief, it was life in their flat on Napean Sea Road that had been right and proper, natural and acceptable; it was this so called “escape” to the island that was madness (Desai, Where Shall 102).

Hence she is equally distressed at the thought of bringing forth the child in her womb into a world which is insensitive to human existence. Hence in search of fulfillment of her needs, she leaves her husband’s home and goes to the island of Manori, her parental home, But the island offers no more than a short respite.

Sita is not alone like Maya. She is the mother of four children and fifth one is to be born soon. Therefore, her struggle to recapture the past does not end in isolation. She understands the futility of her actions well in time. Like Maya, Sita is also motherless. The absence of natural mothers failed to initiate them properly into the
“separation-individuation”, a process through which a female child learns to separate and see herself as an individual. What saves Sita from complete disintegration like Maya, is her children, her pregnancy and her own willingness to reconcile herself with vicissitudes of life.

Sita like Maya adopts escape into the past as the main strategy of survival. Like Maya, she too withdraws herself from her surroundings. The normal everyday life becomes intolerable to her; she wants to run away from it as she finds it impossible to continue the monotonous life. Sita shares with Maya the inability to relate herself positively to the people and environment around her. In her opinion, members of her husband’s family lead lives of boredom and dullness. It is impossible for her to be one of them. Like Maya and Nanda Kaul she also wants to travel alone on the psychic plane to retain her wholeness and individuality. Sita’s withdrawal from the world outside reaches the limit of absurdity and improbability when she wants to keep the baby unborn, Raman rightly considers her mad. Her sudden decision to go to Manori and not to give birth to her child is like a neurotic person’s reaction to a threatening situation. The fear of childbirth that Sita harbours has several psychic reasons. The foremost is that as a mother of an infant she will have to forsake her strategy of detachment. Again, she will be involved in life, physically and emotionally. Her detachment and escape from social acts and norms make her wish that the child remains unborn. Sita’s fleeing to Manori reveals her desire to indulge in fantasy rather than face the
reality. The moment she arrives to the island, she wonders if she is really going to perform an act of creation or her own belly is going to protect the child for ever. By closing her eyes to the reality and resolutely following her fantasy, she achieves a kind of victory by rebelling against her bondage, and overcoming her weaknesses. Her thought of protecting the child from the callous world is in fact, a strategy to guard her self-image. She adopts the strategy of fantasy as a source of escape from the harshness and cruelty of her situation. The island seems to her as “a magic mirror it was so bright, so brilliant to her eyes” (101).

Most of the time, she entertains only those virtues which she can visualize and admire. She views herself as more reasonable, patient, and unselfish than she really is. For Sita it is easier to avoid reality than to face it. By doing this she gets lost in the world of illusion. But this emotional insulation does not protect her from facing the realities of life.

Sita is seen waiting for an alternative to her meaningless existence and her journey to the island is, a journey to her past, to her childhood. Her refusal to continue life as it comes shows the grave disturbance of her mind. She also realizes that, due to the lack of friends and mother in her childhood, probably, she kept herself completely absorbed in the natural surroundings of the island. In Sita’s case, the past is so oppressive that the present cannot push it out to become her main concern. When normal strategies prove
inadequate, she resorts to even more abnormal act of defense in the form of psychotic reactions. Like Maya, she too is disappointed with the realities of life.

Analyzing these psychotic reactions of Sita, Jasbir Jain, a critic, opines as follows:

Sita’s responses are characterized by a break from reality and the introduction of delusional and hallucinatory defenses which attempt to restructure reality in such a way as to protect what remains of her psychological integrity.\(^{21}\)

Anita Desai exquisitely delineates several shades of aggression and violence in the character of Sita, a shattered and frustrated woman, who feels trapped in the monotony of her house which offers her nothing. Sita’s behaviour shows clear signs of violence seething inside her and forcing her to find fault with everyone, even her children and husband who are an integral part of woman’s existence. She indulges in verbal aggression and open criticism of others. Her habit of smoking shows her vengeance and the sadistic impulse to hurt other’s sentiments. Sita’s neurotic fears and anxieties make her terribly aware of violence around her. She finds it intolerable, a potent threat to her identity and sanity. She therefore takes refuge in the Manori Island. Her flight from experience originates presumably from
her reverence for life and her unwillingness to accept violence in any form.

Sita’s rage is an externalization of inner turmoil. She feels sad that even her husband does not understand her tender feelings for preserving the baby. She wants to take all sorts of suffering on herself rather than bringing the baby into the world which is full of violence and brutality. Sita’s behaviour, thus, incorporates a kind of rebellion to the last moment. Her aggressiveness towards Raman and her children show that she wants to enjoy a sense of triumph over everyone. In protecting the child from the harshness of the world, rather unconsciously, she is trying to prove that she can even control the cycle of nature.

Sita’s violent outbursts are an obvious device to protect her from self-hate, indifference and neglect. Raman is shocked to see her in a stage of rage, fear and revolt; because, a woman in her forties, graying and ageing should not lack self-control. Her panic, at the small incidents like fighting and playing of her children, puzzles and confuses Raman. Sita develops the phobia that the world around her is not moving according to her whims and fancies and can no more offer security and safety. She is frightened of her revengeful actions. Unconsciously, she craves to destroy all the people around her because she feels that they are intruding into her world and disturbing her peace. But she succeeds in other way i.e; she destroys her false self-image which is the cause for her abnormal behaviour.
Hence, she is saved from being crushed by it, whereas Maya in *Cry, The Peacock*, unable to destroy this false self-image, murders her husband, mother-in-law and kills herself.

Unlike the protagonists Maya and Sita in *Cry, The Peacock* and *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* respectively, Nanda Kaul’s “self-actualization” needs are at threat. Maslow’s concept of self-actualization provides real meaning, purpose and true personal development for the individual’s life. The existential ideal of an autonomous self is rejected again in *Fire on the Mountain*. A life of detachment and non-involvement is an impossible dream on the planet called earth. One can physically live in isolation but mind is a strange place – it is always full of people and their memories which make detachment and non-involvement impossible. As the wife of the Vice-Chancellor of a University in Punjab, Nanda Kaul played her role with such grace and dignity to the envy of everybody around her. She is appreciated by wives and daughters of lecturers and professors of the university for her talent to manage the household affairs in a systematic manner. They use to whisper among themselves as follows:

Isn’t she splendid? Is not she like a queen? Really, Vice-Chancellor is lucky to have a wife, who can run everything as she does and her eyes had flashed when she heard, like a pair of black blades, waiting to cut them

(Desai, *Fire on* 18).22
Though Nanda Kaul’s social affiliation and self-esteem needs are fulfilled to a certain extent as a Vice-Chancellor’s wife, it is essentially meaningless and unsatisfying. She has led her life according to the wishes of her husband. She carries on with her duties without any complaint. But deep down in her heart she feels lonely and neglected. Hence, after the death of her husband and fulfilling all her responsibilities, she wants to lead a life of recluse in Carignano. She wants to shut memories of the past and attain self-actualization in her life i.e., she wants to be to herself in recluse and access her will and wish according to her convenience. But this process is disturbed by the arrival of her great grand-daughter, Raka and her childhood friend, Ila Das.

In fact, the reality of human relationships that Nanda Kaul seeks to obliterate from her consciousness is the dominant “need” of her unconscious. The arrival of her great grand daughter disturbs her mentally. Because of this she gives a very cold welcome to Raka. She does not show even a tinge of grand-motherly affection, and regards her as “an intruder” (40). But Nanda is surprised to see Raka wandering amongst the rocks, with least interest in the human world, Nanda wonders if at all she realizes how solitary she is. Raka is a small child, but she has perfected the art of withdrawal. Indeed, if Nanda Kaul is a recluse out of “vengeance for a long life of duty and obligation, her great-grand daughter was a recluse by nature, by instinct” (48). The writer infers that the failure lies in the psyche of
Nanda. It is her inability to brush aside the haunting past that fails her and not the world around. G.S. Balaram Gupta rightly argues:

In Carignano it is only apparent that she is alone. Her past keeps surging up in her memory and these reminiscences create uncontrollable ripples in her consciousness.\(^{23}\)

Nanda realizes that all her life she has been a puppet in the hands of circumstances. She feels that it is impossible on her part to stay alone without intruders. Thus her self-actualization need remains unfulfilled.

To fulfill her need, the strategy of withdrawal fascinates Nanda Kaul as a viable tool for survival. Due to several frustrating experiences in her life she develops a strong aversion to all human contacts. Nanda Kaul’s craving for solitude is a strategy to avoid all belongingness. Being a betrayed woman, she finds nothing worth-keeping except the preservation of individuality. Despite her escape from the world of relations, Nanda Kaul does not feel at peace within. She appears to be a resigned individual, all set in for spiritual experience of inner peace. In fact, her escape from the mental, emotional and social conflict is only a semblance of peace. She overlooks the basic principle that the past cannot be erased from life by running away from it. Nanda’s escape to Carignano constitutes a desperate attempt to get away from the past. It is only physically that she runs away from it. The bitter reality of her life still has a tight hold
on her mind and thoughts. This planned and willful rejection of the world does not help her obliterate the painful memory of the days when the Vice-Chancellor has an affair with mathematic mistress, Miss David. It haunts her even in isolation at Carignano.

In case of maladjusted, unfulfilled individuals, there is a strong tendency to turn inward i.e. they tend to reduce their involvement in the world around and muse over and live in the past. Nanda is not free from the bondage of the past. She wants to give up social responsibilities. Her escape from the past does not strengthen her. In fact, it proves to be a source of greater disappointment and neglect. She does not achieve the spiritual calm.

Nanda Kaul weaves a charming web of fantasies to survive in a world of bitter truths and cruel realities. Raka’s arrival at Carignano makes her aware of the fact that “Fantasy and fairy tales too had their place in life” (89). When she is ignored by her great granddaughter Raka, Nanda feels uneasy and incompetent in her role as a great grandmother. Although Nanda has rejected the whole world, this rejection by a small child is something Nanda cannot digest. Nanda’s gradual involvement in Raka’s life is suggestive of her need for emotional attachments. It is strange that both of them want to exclude apparently what they inwardly need most.

Raka’s obstinate indifference makes Nanda see the futility of her desire to be alone. To win the child’s attention, she shares her
childhood with Raka. In her isolation, Nanda is cut off from reality; and, therefore, gets more involved in fantasy figures. Moreover, in her imaginary childhood she seems to have become a child again. Whenever Nanda tells Raka about her past, her voice undergoes noticeable changes. One can easily make out the difference between fact and fiction through her narration. Nanda initially adopts the strategy of fantasy as a means of breaking through Raka’s indifference. But Raka is not the active listener and when Nanda does not get the desired response from Raka, she feels thwarted and disappointed. This feeling of disappointment in Nanda is clearly explained by Colin Wilson, a psychologist as follows:

Man is the only animal who is prone to insanity; and this is because he spends so much time in this suffocating prison inside his own head. His fantasies creep all over him like ivy on a tree, until they drain away his life

(qtd. in Stern 89).

In a way her emotional insulation is shattered by Raka’s presence. This reality is unpalatable to Nanda Kaul. She is a fragmented personality who recoils from all contacts. Two of the contradictory forces, withdrawal and involvement, hamper her sense of relatedness and totality. Her withdrawal into self-destructive isolation is in no way a solution to her psychic conflict. Nanda is gripped by inner violence, because her life has been a long tale of frustration and disappointments. She wants to close the doors of the
past and withdraw into isolation; yet, memories never die and, subconsciously, the past torments her. But she is not ready to review anything of her past life openly. She does not confess her long standing fears and suppressed desires to anyone.

In isolation, Nanda’s aggression is directed against her “self” because she has to cope with the conflict between her idealized self and real self. In fact, the reality of human relationships that Nanda Kaul seeks to obliterate from her consciousness keeps intruding and damaging her false self-image. The news of the death of Ila Das overwhelms Nanda Kaul with the feelings of worthlessness and inadequacy. She realises that she lives in a make believe world to compensate for the cruel reality. Discussing the character of Nanda, Sandhya Rani Dash, a critic, comments as follows:

Indeed in the case of Nanda Kaul the acts of aggression are acts of self-destruction. Self-destructiveness in eccentrics or neurotics manifests itself in their constant endangering of their lives or financial security.\(^\text{25}\)

Anita Desai believes that no place on earth is free from violence and destruction. It is not only in the crowded metropolises that Nanda encounters violence and aggression but also in quiet sleepy place like Kasauli. The ghastly act of rape and murder of social worker Ila Das are a reflection of violence prevalent in the society. It is a sudden shock to Nanda. The protagonists in Anita Desai’s novels create their
own private world and inhabit it with strange, benevolent or evil figures which ultimately destroy them.

An analytical study of the women characters of Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai and the survival strategies they adopted reveals that needs and survival strategies of human life are mutually co-related. For a peaceful existence of a human being, his or her needs have to be fulfilled. If fulfillment of needs become a necessity for survival, it leads to the discovery of various strategies for survival. In this struggle for survival, Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai’s women protagonists find themselves in the midst of troubles which are posed to them economically, socially or psychologically. The main concern of Anita Desai’s protagonists’ is a quest for meaning in life, a persistent search for identity and ideal love-relationships. Most of her characters suffer from a spiritual vacuum. Maya is not allowed to step into the world of realities, where pleasant and unpleasant, satisfying and dissatisfying persons and events exist side by side. Nanda Kaul suffers the agony of a rejected wife and grand-mother. Sita is also deprived of marital joys and satisfaction. They employ indirect methods, compensatory behaviour or survival strategies to achieve a sense of fulfillment, identity and individuality. To resolve their conflicts, they attempt to escape into time and space. Some of them turn their back on the present and take the route back to their childhood. Others snap their relationships with people and also with ideas. However, withdrawal and escape do not help them in achieving
a sense of authenticity. These strategies do not help them to overcome their fears and anxieties. They are still haunted by nothingness and worthlessness. Disgruntled and dissatisfied, they turn to aggression which manifests itself in murder or suicide.

Thus, it is established that the positive strategies adopted by Kamala’s protagonists help them to triumph over their problems in due course of their life. They meet the challenges and overcome all difficulties that they face in their in-laws’ place by adapting themselves to the new environment. But the strategies adopted by Anita’s heroines are of no avail to them. They do not provide them with abiding solutions to their fears and anxieties. Infact, these strategies make them feel all the more anguished. But for some characters like Sita, escapades into time and space, venting out emotion in violent outbursts of anger, and flights of fantasy provide them the essential wisdom and inner strength to face the reality of human situation. Sita is saved from complete disintegration unlike Maya, because she has been blessed with children, and is also in her family way. Sita is also willing to reconcile herself with life’s realities which help her return to her husband. Unlike Sita, Maya’s life ends in tragedy because of various reasons. She being a hyper-sensitive motherless child feels the loneliness even after her marriage. Her practical aged-husband does not understand her sensitive feelings. Her childlessness also contributes for the tragedy in her life. Unable to give vent for her feelings, Maya is overburdened internally which
bursts out later destroying her and her family. Nanda too faces the ultimate end because of her futile attempt to isolate herself from others. Being a woman of eighty, she has vast experience of life. But she forgets the fact that man is a social animal and cannot alienate himself/herself from the society. She could only alienate herself physically but not mentally. She realizes this fact with the death of her close friend Ila Das which in turn kills her too.

Unlike Desai’s women, Kamala Markandaya’s women viz. Rukmani, Sarojini and Nalini believe in an affirmation of life in the midst of colossal human suffering. The characters of Kamala Markandaya show great powers of heart and soul even in moments of crisis and calamities. Her novels do not end in a note of despair. A ray of hope shines through human suffering. The “needs” of these women are basically at the first two levels. The survival strategies they adapt lead negative aspects of their life towards a positive vision. All the women characters in the novels experience troubles and turmoil in life. But they triumphantly rise above their desperation because of their aspiration. Though both the novels *Nectar in a Sieve* and *A Handful of Rice* are tragic stories dealing with the theme of starvation and suffering, they end on a progressive note of strength and resolution of women. What emerges at the end of Markandaya’s novels is the aspiration of the characters to regenerate and reconstruct a new world order where all the polarities are reconciled and the sharp edges of life are blunted.
Disillusionment and despair; disappointment and frustration abound in the lives of her protagonists also. But they are no idealists; they know that all mortals are fallible; and believe that the great courage lies in “bending like a grass” and not in saying the “Great No” to life. They are no relentless seekers of individual identity and thus, not afraid of involvement and surrender. They are, indeed, great heroic figures in their capacity to rise above their misfortunes. However, those who cannot adapt or adjust, face dissonance, disillusionment and disintegration in Kamala Markandaya’s world also.

Even Anita Desai establishes the fact that only those who have the capacity to compromise and confirm and are willing to remain within the pattern of familiar, everyday living alone can survive. Anita Desai in an interview says:

If one is alive in this world, one cannot survive without compromise; drawing the lines means certain death. It sounds courageous to say a great “No,” but real greatness lies in saying the great “Yes”. 26

Swimming against the current can be an attention catching device but, to swim with the current, with the other competitors, is the test of one’s stamina and ability to co-operate and tolerate healthy competition. Survival means surviving against odds. It cannot be interpreted as a flight from stress situations. It stands for mastering
the odds. Trying to live with the help of survival strategies like: adjusting by compensating or withdrawing, or getting violent or weaving fantasies, is futile. Hence, conflict is a total process of human consciousness. Any compartmental approach would touch the problem on the surface and have only a tinkering effect. One should not, therefore, shy away from disquieting situations, disturbing events and unpleasant persons. The problems that Anita Desai’s heroines face are psychological or spiritual, not social, or economical. The ordinary problems or everyday life are never really touched upon. Hunger, starvation and poverty, the mute misery of the millions of Indians are never touched upon by Mrs. Desai, whereas Kamala Markandaya’s heroines are realists. They are not sophisticated like Maya, Sita, and Nanda Kaul, but they have the wisdom to accept life and people as they are. Rukmani, Nalini and Sarojini believe in the “great act of compromise” which brings “heavenly happiness” into their lives. Being over-sensitive and not touched by everyday problems, Desai’s heroines create hell for themselves. In fact, they have no vocation in life. Hence, their life asserts the saying that “An idle mind is a devil’s workshop”. With no serious activity to perform in life, their “idle mind” pushes them from heaven to purgatory.

Unsuccessful wife looks for an opportunity to be a mother where she can exercise her power or retain her identity and autonomy in the household. The moment child is born, the mother is also born. Motherhood brings identity to woman. Hence the next will deal with
the aspects of “Motherhood and Midlife” with regard to women characters depicted in the novels of Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai.
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