Chapter-IV

Marital Discord in *Cry, the Peacock, Voices in the City, and Where Shall We Go This Summer?*

Women, in Anita Desai’s fiction embody the author’s quest for psychological insight, awareness and harmony. They are the focal point of contact between the writer's consciousness and the world from which they are alienated. Her women, therefore, have to face conflicts make effort to break away, to assert their individuality and think whether their decision to do so is the right one, how to resolve the identity crisis and emerge victorious from the trauma. These are some of the questions Desai seems to explore through her women characters. Her themes certainly touch the raw nerves of human experience. Among Indian writers in English, R.S. Sharma rightly feels that:

> She is perhaps the most self-conscious artist forgoing a unique world out of the day to day existence of an Indian female.

The theme of marital discord in Anita Desai’s novels reveals her consummate craftsmanship. Mrs. Desai sincerely broods over the fate and future of modern woman particularly in male-chauvinistic society and her annihilation at the altar of marriage. The novelist however
does not challenge the futility of marriage as an institution but discloses the inner psyche of the characters through their relations. In her novels, mostly women have been both culturally and emotionally dependent on men, and disruption of attachment or affiliation is seen not as a loss of relationship but a total loss of self, which is then seen as a neurosis. She has explored different aspects of feminine Psyche which also includes marital discord. According to R.K. Gupta:

Anita Desai not only portrays the feminine psyche of a common woman but also the subnormal bordering on abnormal woman. The woman who are under so much of psychic pressure that they cannot be known for insanity but then they are explicitly normal.

Desai’s female protagonists are generally caught in a web of painful circumstances, their struggle and the outcome of which is usually the basis of the novel. The struggle, one can readily see is not without purpose and the aim is to achieve the sort of harmony that generally eludes them whether it is the harmony in marital relationships between parents and children, the harmony with society or between the inner and outer life of the characters. The problem invariably in each case, is the difficulty of adjustment in conjugal relationships, of building bridges, of
bringing together or harmonizing and taking a holistic view of one’s situation. The major concerns of Mrs. Desai are loveliness, depression and solitude.

The novel *Cry, the Peacock* is a family play mainly concerned with the theme of marital discord between Gautama and Maya. The story is about spiritual prays of Maya, the half child, half-woman romantic heroine. Who identifies herself with the peacocks in the agony of ecstasy of their fatal love-experience? This novel presents an impression of the marital incoherence and encountered conjugal life.

I would take to critically analyze first *Cry, the Peacock*, which is Anita Desai’s maiden venture in novel writing. Structurally, it is divided into three parts. The first part introduces us to Maya. Here, the narrator wins our sympathy for Maya and makes us believe that her husband is cold and indifferent towards her. Whereas Gautama appears to be shrewd, calculating and extremely matter of fact about the gravest matter, Maya seems to be innocent and extremely sensitive. An incident (the death of their dog, Totto) which proves traumatic to her means nothing to her husband. There is such a vast difference in their attitude and nature that one cannot but expect a painful
incompatibility between them.

In the second part, Maya elaborates the root cause of their incompatibility. We are told of her past life and her encounter with the albino astrologer who had once told her that either she or her husband would die within four years of her marriage. The anxiety caused by this prophecy had diminished with the passage of time but with the death of their dog, Totto, all these past memories wake up from their slumber and begin to haunt her again. The burden of the past, on the memories of her childhood, the constant fear of death, her desire to live, her regression, all these are closely associated with her recollection of the words of the astrologer.

The third part shows how Gautama's death, does not affect the daily routine. There is however, whispered conversation about sending Maya to a lunatic asylum. The story of Maya's life seems to be one of a three-fold pattern of events that can be summed up as: deprivation, alienation and elimination respectively. In the first place, Maya has been deprived of the love of mother, brother, and later her father. Her sanity is questioned at the end and there is clear likelihood of her being deprived of it once she is sent to an asylum. Secondly she is alienated from her husband
and in the end she brings about his elimination from life and her own self from her family and society.

Anita Desai’s, *Cry, the Peacock, Voices in the City* and *Where Shall We Go This Summer*? Portray the troubled life of her female protagonists—Maya, Sita and Monisha. They seem to suffer since they have been married to the males, who fails to understand and agony of their fractured identities.

In Maya, of *Cry, the Peacock*, Desai probes the heart of a woman who suffers from a mysterious premonition about the tragic end of her husband would die in the fourth year of their marriage. When the novel opens, Maya’s marriage with Gautama is running in its fourth year and the emotional woman Maya, is just beginning to reel under the pressure of the prophecy that threatens to shatter her married life. As Dr. Sanjay Kumar has said:

Maya’s fear is aggravated as she fails to relate to Gautama her husband. Between the husband and wife there exists a terrible communication gap as both of them seen to live in different worlds.³

Maya is an instinctive woman of passions and emotions. Gautama, on the other hand, is a philosophical intellectual.
Driven by an instinctive nature, she expects some emotional and physical satisfaction in married life but both of them are denied her, one by Gautama’s cold intellectuality and the other by his age.

The novelist keeps Maya’s mother out of her life, since Maya has been deprived of a mother’s love, this painful void in her emotional life can be one of the factor responsible for her marital discord. In Maya’s life, the only mother figure is her mother-in-law, and she too comes into her life, too late to be any help. She is sympathetic but helpless and her belated appearance shows that she is important but was not there earlier when she was most needed.

Maya’s sense of insecurity is further intensified by the absence of her brother who could have been a dear childhood companion. But, from deriving a sense of security from her brother, she finds that she is living in a situation that is marked by conflict between the two people who are dearest to her father and her brother.

Maya misses Arjuna during his absence and her happiness cannot be measured when she receives his letter. It is clear, that in spite of the loving care of her father, Maya is still lonely an unseen spirit of sadness
haunts the house. Despite all the luxurious, the home still lacks the vital family spirit. With marriage Maya has to leave her father. In this respect it can be said that, Maya is not a normal woman because she has never had a normal childhood. The only company she has in that of her father who pampers her to an extreme. It is worth mentioning here that her father’s behaviour with his son was entirely different from Maya. With his son he was a harsh and strict but with his daughter he was over indulgent. Even Maya noticed the difference and felt uncomfortable. It is possible that Maya’s father was aware of her weak mental state and therefore treated her like a delicate child. Not only did he pamper her but also fed her infant brain with fairy tales because the doctor had advised him not to make her anxious or sad. That was probably the time when Maya first began to reveal signs of her neurosis, and her father’s awareness of it made him even more attached to her. It is only natural for parents to be ever protective about an ailing child and therefore, her fallen was specially, tender with her. This pampering spoils Maya and makes her crave for attention all the time. She wants demonstrative love and does she has to loud displays of love. With her marriage not get it after marriage. Her father fixation is so great that she marries Gautama because of his friendship with her father.
After marriage she expects her husband to play as father with her. Maya does not grow up mentally which results in suffering. She has not attained emotional maturity which comes through facing facts and is content with the false nation that her husband can substitute her father and she can still behave like a child.

Gautama on the contrary, is aware of her father fixation. He tells Maya that she suffers from father fixation and until she matures rapidly, she will not be able to deal with life and will probably destroy herself in the end since passion of this sort is almost always self-consuming like any other husband Gautama expects Maya to behave like a mature person. But this increases Maya's sense of insecurity further, causing mental imbalance and acute psychic tension. This crippling impact, of her father fixation is obvious throughout the novel. Maya compares Gautama to her father at every step and thus ruins her marital life completely. Perhaps, Gautama would have been better able to handle her if he had been told of her weak mental state by her father. Perhaps her father wished to keep this a secret not only from Gautama but from others as well, because such a revelation might have reduced his daughter's chances of marriage for who would willingly marry a psychic case. The death of their dog brings their
respective, philosophies of life into sharp contrast. The dog's corpse brings no foolish sentiments in Gautama's mind. Instead he does all that was to be done, quickly and quietly like a surgeon's knife at work. Maya reacts differently. She remains nervous and disturbed till long after the episode. According to Meenakshi Mukherjee:

The main pattern of this novel is a contrast between this woman's response to the world through her senses and her husband's response through his intellect. 

One of the crucial remarks she makes in the novel is the problem of identity in her case. She longs to know where she stands in the loneliness of time, the impossible vastness of space. Her desperate struggle to have an identity of her own is threatened by the presence of Gautama. She therefore, looks upon him as an antagonist and her psychic problem becomes an existential one. As, Sheetal Y. Thakore has said:

Maya hungered and hungered. And when this hunger was not satisfied, what was she do? Protest like her brother Arjuna? That she was incapable of because her father had taught her to accept life. And accept she could not because it told upon her nerves. She would lie awake at night stifled by the hunger. . . . She felt not
only the Gautama but for all that life represented. She came to look upon her relationship with Gautama as a relationship with death.\(^5\)

Maya would like Gautama to meet her at the level of her inner life which to him is a closed book. He knows nothing of the astrologer and she deliberately avoids any reference to that phase of her childhood in which she had been troubled by the astrology's prediction. He is an ignorant about the fact that she has a brother and is successfully unable to know what is worrying her. From this arises a conflict of expectations leading to a failure in communication and to emotional incompatibility. The theme of marital therefore, does not acquire sociological connotations. Inspite of this, there is little evidence to show that Gautama makes Maya feel like a nonentity or that he does not let her assert her identity, to subordinate her identity to his completely. He never dominates her, true, but occasionally they do have arguments because their basic way of thinking differs and not because Gautama is a male chauvinist. He is realistic, down to earth and not at all sentimental. He just wished to combat her indiscipline with his sense of the practical. He never humiliates her deliberately but on the other hand she, with her disturbed state of mind, concocts all sorts of situations where even an
innocent action of the husband is regarded as a great
insult. The trouble with Maya is that while she realises she
is 'different' from all, she fails to realize that each one is a
different individual - who necessarily thinks, act and
behaves in a different manner from others. Just as she can
not think like Gautama, he, too, can not think exactly like
her, Gautama is not a threat to her identity though she
thinks him to be.

Maya's father is, no doubt, partly to blame for bringing up his daughter the way he did. He approved of
whatever, she did or said, never differed from her, even
when she was wrong. She therefore, comes to believe that
everything should be done according to her wishes. At every
step she compares Gautama with her father to the
disadvantage of the former because she fails to realize that
a father-daughter relationship is different from a husband-
wife relationship. A father may not expect anything in
return but with a husband it has to be a give and take
relationship. Maya is not prepared to give anything to
achieve a mutually happy relationship. She says that she
loves Gautama, rarely shows her love in deeds. Gautama,
on the contrary is gentle and patient with her, except those
times when she is too unreasonable. Even then he blames
her father and not Maya herself:
He (father) is the one responsible for this—for making you believe that all that is important in this world is the possess, possess-riches, comforts, posies, dollies, loyal retainers—all the luxurious of fairy tales you were brought up on life is a fairy take to you all. What have you learnt of the realities? The realities of common human existence are not love and romance, but living and working, all that constitutes life for an ordinary man. You want find it in your picture books. What wickedness to raise a child like that.  

Maya’s disappointment at Gautama’s lack of sympathy and understanding is hardly justified. She never confides her troubles, but Gautama still tries to help her to face facts and to make adjustments. He fails in this endeavor because she does not change her perspective or even try to see things as he sees them. This also shows her lack of faith in him.  

Maya’s regressive tendency and her repeated death gradually assume the form of a murderous intent, when she finds that she loves life and so does Gautama. Life to him would mean death to her. She kills Gautama, but his death fails to leave any sense of tragedy or pathos in its wake. Even the novelist seems to play down Gautama’s death which is mentioned euphemistically and evasively,
reminding one of Virginia Woolf, in whose novels also death is underplayed from this view. The novelist's attention is solely on Maya, what she feels, how she feels about what she does, and what she has gone through. For Maya it is only a push, for Gautama it is death. While others have been removed from her life in a subtle way, her murder of Gautama is her most daring act of assertion. The irony of the situation is that this assertion not only ends in removing Gautama from her life, but also her own removal from the house and Gautama's relatives. By her act, she has ensured her removal to a lunatic asylum and this removal from a sane society is another deprivation for her. Maya fails in her attempt to maintain an identity of her own and there is a steady deterioration in her mental state.

I would be wrong to conclude that Maya's only problem was the turmoil caused by her temperamental alienation from her husband. The prophecy of the albino astrologer is equally responsible for the estrangement. It haunts her mind and does not allow her to forget what she is doomed to go through. There is hardly any action in the whole novel but, through the meditation that goes on in Maya’s mind, it is evident from repeated references that the astrologer has left an indelible impact on her mind. His gestures had reminded her of a lizard - "as a lizard flicks its
tongue at petrified victims." Consequently, thoughts of lizards, rats and snakes constantly flash across her mind. We never hear her speak of the birds, the blooming flowers on the blue skies. Her thoughts about snakes can be interpreted as the astrologer, who with his forked tongue fills her innocent mind with poison. A deeper look into Maya’s psyche reveals that her life was basically unfulfilled. She ends up almost as if she was an outcast and unfit to be a member of the society in which she is living.

Gautama is a faithful husband who loves and cares her in his own way yet Maya never satisfied and happy. As Usha Pathania has said:

Marital relationships are established with the explicit purpose of providing companionship to each other. However, the element of companionship is sadly missing in the relationship between Maya and Gautama.

This novel *Cry, the Peacock* exposes an impression of marital incongruity and unhappy conjugal life. As Suresh Kohli has commented:

No other writer is so much concerned with the life of young men and women in Indian cities as Anita Desai is.

There is little analysis of Maya’s mind and more of
the conflict between Maya and Gautama. The novel is uneventful and even in important event, like the death of Gautama is not treated with the usual importance. Just one paragraph is devoted to the tragedy. Dialogues are monotonous and the narrator oscillates between description and edition. All that can be said is that the novelist has tried to give the verbal form of a situation which seems to be troubling her and to which she has found no solution. Her novel is a seemingly imperfect attempt to understand, explore and solve a problem that defies solution, if not understanding. Maya has a narrow life with limited interests hardly any inter-personal relationships. Even in her childhood, she was a lover. Though she is fond of possessing books by Tagore, Keats, Shelley, she hardly ever reads them. This tendency continues after marriage and Gautama points out to her, that she never reads the newspaper or a book neither does she involve herself in any extra-curricular activity. Consequently, her mental horizon remains narrow and she has a centripetal tendency as a personal relationship is concerned. She rarely gives anything especially to Gautama and always expects him to understand and love her.

For a woman, the traditional stereotype is one that cares and gives to others, even to the point of neglecting
herself. The feminist inspiration has produced women characters that do not lose their identity, but assert the need for an independent identity. In feminist fiction we come across to women who are shown to be making efforts to mould their lives to be themselves, even to the point of disrupting their tradition - bound relationship in a conventional family. Shyam Asnani feels that:

In each of her novels one could sense the author's urge for a way of living which would respond to the innermost yearnings of the Indian woman for self-emancipation and self dignity.¹⁰

But in portraying Maya as a character born of feminist inspiration, Anita Desai is obviously not sure of herself because Maya fails both in creating an identity for herself and in leading a stable life.

The problem and the agony of Maya's life are accurately reflected in the significant fable of the peacock's mating ritual. The cry of peacock is the cry of the natural instinct of a woman who is unfulfilled. But such a fulfillment is denied to Maya. She realizes that she wants Gautama's physical presence, his love and a normal life. She is capable of empathy which enables her to experience what the peacock and peahen are experiencing but this
makes her feel all the more intensely that though there is an emotional arousal, there is no physical fulfillment which is the cause of her agony and also the reason for her resentment against Gautama. A sense of lack of fulfillment leads Maya’s to brooding and regression. Being an introvert, Maya does not like socializing, nor is she able to face reality and, therefore, sits at home brooding. Anita Desai herself says in an interview, with Atma Ram:

It is a book and a stage of my work that I have simply outgrown.\(^{11}\)

Coming to the next, we have find that the central protagonist, Sita suffers a similar predicament in her early life and throughout the novel, one sees her on the verge neurosis. The novel revolves around Sita’s abnormal unwillingness to deliver her fifth baby. Her flight to Manori Island in order to achieve the miracle of preserving the baby in her womb, of letting the baby neither go nor grow and her eventual return to Bombay with her husband in order to give birth after a slow process of realization is the theme of the novel. Shyam Asnani opines:

The novel dramatizes the theme of alienation and in communication in martial life, is a more controlled and less exotic manner.\(^{12}\)
The novel is divided into three equal parts dealing with perception (present), memory (past) and dream (future) respectively. Thus, the first part deals with Sita's arrival at Manori, and the discord between the mother and her children. Part II entitled 'WINTER 47' the central character. Just as Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* has been influenced by her childhood associations, same as Sita deals with the past and holds the key to the present behaviour in this novel. As A.V. Krishna Rao, has rightly finds:

Anita Desai eminently succeeds in dramatizing not only the individual human relationships against the backdrop of a cosmopolitan consciousness from a cynical sense of a loss of identity to the mystical realization of the meaning of existence as well as of his destiny.\(^{13}\)

Sita's predicament is too similar to that of Maya and Monisha. She is also obsessed with her loveless marriage with Raman. Here marital relation as well as abnormal man-woman relationship has been portrayed with a remarkable poignancy. Sita is a married woman and has four children, but in the picture of misery and dejection. She fells herself to be a prisoner in a house which offers her nothing but a crust of dull tedium, of hopeless disappointment. Her unhappiness in married life finds
expression in feelings of contempt for the friends and colleagues of her husband.

Sita's unusual childhood, stricken with deprivation doubt and despair, has had a negative impact upon her mind. It is the cause of her alienation from her husband, society and family. The effect of her father's partiality towards her step sister, and the discovery that he is a fake who cheats in order to influence people, the discovery of a step sister, the mystery that shrouded her mother's disappearance to Benaras have a shattering impact upon her mind. She feels enslaved within these doubts and struggles to free herself. A series of situations and incidents effectively project the seething tension, the compulsion and withdrawal of Sita's festered soul. The doubts, the waiting, the unsolved questions that seethe within her and prey upon her mind, turn her into a hypersensitive and melancholy individual, with a certain element of mental derangement. She turns into a paranoid character, a cripple without crutches, like a bird that startles at the slightest sound. Sita reacts in an unusual manner and suffers from persecution. What would hardly be noticed by another person becomes to her an act of persecution. She develops a haunting fear that there is hostility around her. There is a clash between the sensitive individual and the
insular, complacement world around her. Sita’s smoking is a gesture of rebellion, of self assertion, an attempt to be herself and to show the world, that has an identity of her own, whereas in reality she is actually crumbling down. Her untidy before her husband is the result of an underlying desire to prove that she does not care for anybody in a world that has not cared for her. And this is main cause of her marital discord. Her outbursts against society, her boredom are only camouflages to hide her failing strength from the world. Gradually all the problems and anxieties of her heart magnify in dimension. Like other heroines of Anita Desai, Sita too withdraws from everyone, but she remains as restless as a bird in a cage. She can never be at peace with herself whether she is in Bombay or in Manori. Her condition reminds one of a person in pair who shifts from one posture to another with a vain hope of getting some relief.

Sita realizes that if reality can not be faced then illusion was the only alternative. She therefore, decides to live under an illusion and finds the island to be as a refuge, a protection. It had provided her the first glimpses of happiness after a grim childhood. Now, with the passage of time she can remember only the positive aspects of the island which appears magical to her. The search for
happiness leads to the great escape to Manori Island - an escape of an extremely sensitive individual, so sensitive as to be made by her own husband. Cavafis poem gives her the strength to choose between 'Yes' and 'No'. The courage to refuse to fall in line with or to resist the rest of the world is difficult to be different is to walk a lonely path and to suffer. Sita believes that her decisions to say 'No' to society, to break its rules and not give birth to the baby are correct. Whenever there is a crisis she turns to Cavafis's poem for strength. It offers her considerable moral support in her decision to be herself and to do what she believes to be right even it is unconventional. Her rejection of her in-law and her alienation from society are only camouflages, the way an insect might adopt certain characteristics, not of its own breed, to hide her insecurity, restlessness her search for her true self and her own failing inner strength from the world. She has the conviction that she will regain her sanity in solitude.

Sita's over riding concern in not wanting to give birth to her fifth child is a kind of regression that she wishes to be reborn as a child. For, she had to assume the role of an adult before she could fully lead the life of a child. No wonder she is obsessed with keeping her fifth child rather than let it go or grow because to her, keeping the
child meant retaining her childhood in a carefree island.

The island is more a symbol than a place. It is an apt metaphor to concretize Sita's condition. She retreats into it as into a womb with her obsessive desire to recapture once again her childhood innocence and purity.\textsuperscript{14}

It is all the more incredible because she has already given birth to four normal children. Her decision to keep the baby rather than give birth is just as extension of her belief that the act will somehow bring her more happiness than reality ever can.

Sita soon finds that reality is no more troublesome than illusion. Happiness at Manori proves to be a mirage for the grim realities of life are present on this island just as in Bombay. Sita gets disillusioned with Manori and has to face reality. Her stay at Manori has refreshed her and she can now look at the world realistically.

She regrets her wind, her impulsive actions . . . the magic was gone. But the island has produced a cathartic influence upon her; it has purged her of all anxieties and doubts. Torn between two overwhelming warring forces, her outright distrust of the pettiness, horror and hypocrisy of middle class existence and the realization that the rejection of the
Unlike Maya in *Cry, the Peacock*, Sita's relationship with her husband is normal. There is, no doubt, a temporary alienation at the time Sita comes to Manori, but absence makes her heart grow fonder and she realises that this attitude towards life is more rational than her own. His courage in facing the hardships and realities of life have a greater significance, she realises that bearing Bombay had been an act of escapism. She had merely been a coward and had all along felt frustrated when confronting the "ugliness of a meaningless life."

Sita felt to make a compromise to live with her husband and travel alone mentally and emotionally. But later on it became improbable for her to make any compromise. Hence, she escaped the land of magic but there she found that time had made it spoil there also on the place and its people. As Uma Banerjee has said:

She becomes the victim of neurosis that destroys her mental equilibrium and threatens her sanity till she decides to run away to Manori Island, seeking the miracle that will give her the power of not giving birth. But the magic power of the island belonged to her childhood fantasy and has disappeared with the passage of time.
The intense realization brings her back to painful reality, forcing her to retraces her steps back towards the safety and slavish security of her house in Bombay, to wait resignedly for the birth of her child. She takes wiser step than Maya and controls herself and she acts before a peril can take place.

Sita's final moment of realization comes, ironically not when her husband is patient with her on trying to reason with her but at a time when he has given her up. It is now that she feels "released" and free. The tensions and passions within her identity are not quite independent of her husband's, that life with him is real and the future is more important than the past. And with this realization the truth dawns upon her that her behaviour had not been completely unnatural because the heifer, the grain, the slum barons all wish to hide and resort to loneliness before giving birth. In each case the experience of loneliness precedes that of creation. She returns to Manori in order to give her fifth baby a normal birth. With this realization, Anita Desai achieves her desire that:

The book follows the pattern of the monsoon to gather darkly and threateningly, to pour down wildly and passionately then withdraw calmly
Till now, there had been a conflict in Sita's mind. She was like a restless spirit unable to achieve peace. With the realization that true courage is in facing the hardships, the realities of life, and that running away is merely an act of cowardice she comes to peace with her self. Her running away from her home and urban environment has proved a failure. None of her doubts and problems has been resolved. In fact, she has merely succeeded in alienating herself further from her husband and children. The one and most significant aspect where she has emerged triumphant in her escaping to Manori is her sanity and normalcy. She realizes that real courage is what her husband shows, it mean standing up and trying to face the conditions and coming to terms with them patiently, boldly and creatively. By going away she has learnt the need of togetherness, in loneliness she has discovered that her true identity can be forged only in relationship. If she has to live in this world, she can do so only by adapting to her circumstances by adjusting herself to others with whom she has to deal in the course of life. It has to be a balanced give and take relationship.

With Sita, this realization and subsequent
reconciliation is more important than the previous conflict that had tormented her. In this kind of realization, one can discern as advancement in Desai’s vision of a woman’s struggle to find her identity. One may not unreasonably suggest that the name of the heroine recalls not only the name of her nobler namesake in the Ramayana, but also her undoubted faith that her real, identity was firmly linked with that of her husband, Ramayana. In this novel, it is apparent that the novelist is taking the radical road only to end up a conservative. Even in her earlier novels *Cry, the Peacock* and *Bye-Bye Blackbird* it seems that, to the novelist, the identity, the very life of the wife is inextricable tied up with her husband. Maya in the first novel acts impulsively, she pushes and thus kills her husband Gautama and then goes insane due to the disintegration of her marital relations. Her loss is therefore, two fold-of husband and of rationality. In *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, Sarah’s chooses to accompany her husband Adit to India and deliberately leaves her English self behind in England, in order to maintain her identity and at the same time to forge an integrated self, achieving wholeness. In her case, her will dominates her emotions. In the present novel Sita is guided by her emotions is hypersensitive, emotional disturbed and wants to satisfy a mysterious urge. But what she does
under the prompting of emotion is wrong, at she later realizes. In the end, she returns home to Bombay, thus her relations with her husband are reintegrated.

Whatever the advocates of the feminist viewpoint may have to say; in each case, the decision to return or to accompany the husband through life’s trials appears right because the men in most of Desai’s novels are practical, down to earth and considerate unlike their wives, who in most cases, exhibit a tendency to go insane under the slightest pleasure. The husband in most of her novels is always presented under the strain of having to understand his wife. We never across drunkard’s wife beaters or even bigamists as far as Anita Desai’s male characters are concerned. Had they been so, the return of the wife to them would have definitively meant submissiveness and orthodoxy both on their part as well as on the part of the novelist. But tradition is not always wrong. It ought to be followed if it guarantees happiness and a sense of well-being. It has provided his worth in the case of Sita in the present novel. Ploughing the lonely furrow is not an always rational, but sanity lies in returning to a normal family life and obligation. The very fact that Sita does not succumb to the tensions that afflict her mind is a triumph to her womanhood.
Thus, the marital discord between Raman and Sita is based on the conflict of values, of principles, of faith even, or between normal double social standards and the iconoclastic temperament of uncompromising honesty. It is a clash between the compromises with disappointment.

Mrs. Desai's novel, *Voices in the City* (1965), is a powerful attempt at the exploration and analysis of the dark recesses of the consciousness of its three characters—Nirode and his two sisters, Monisha and Amla. Each of the main characters in the novel is oppressed by the hollow and meaningless existence in Calcutta. Each of them is greatly affected by it and finds themselves imprisoned in the cell of isolation, with no hope of escape from it. The novel is an instance of what Mrs. Desai herself called, in an interview with Yashodhara Dalmia:

> The terror of facing single handed, the ferocious assaults of existence.\(^{18}\)

In this novel Anita Desai presents the feminine psyche mainly through the character of Monisha, although there are other woman characters also in the novel. Monisha is similar to Maya in the sense that she is also childless, sensitiveness and victim of ill-matched marriage.

The protagonist of the novel, Nirode is a proud,
sensitive and talented young man with qualities which overpower others. But he is unaware of himself and of his aim in life and suffers from inferiority complex. His father had set apart certain amount of money for the education abroad of either of the two sons who excelled in studies. Nirode's younger brother makes a remarkable head way in his studies and games. When he claims the sum of money load aside by his father Nirode reflects; that his father might have known that he would never be successful. The inferiority complex haunts him and makes him seek.

There is a striking contrast between Arun and Nirode; one stands on success, the other on failure. In real life, Nirode cannot be a part which is academic attainments for in extra-curricular activities, but the other side Arun has joined all the activities. This enhances his sense of inferiority. He feels humiliated, unwanted, isolated and belittled. In saner moments he realizes that the adventures of his boyhood have been a Nightmare, not a real journey, because he has never been able to make a start, to take the first step forward. His inability to start on a journey is indicative of the basic uncertainties in his temperament. It is owing to his lack of volition that he is helpless to act and set out on his journey.
Withdrawn from unable to communicate with the outer world and living in isolation, Nirode creates his own and begins to look at himself as a person for whom aloneness was the sole natural condition, aloneness alone the treasure worth treasuring. For him there exists nothing but the void in which all things appear equally insignificant and meaningless. There was only this endless waiting, hollowed by an intrinsic knowledge that there was not a thing to wait for, a sense of futility grips him and he feels reluctant to rise to his fate again go. Starting again means making efforts. It equals in effect to participating in life its activities, human contacts and ambitions, for which he has a strong dislike. He feels proud in his non-involvement attitude his society and emptiness. This problem is, for Nirode, one of essential sensibilities and in the Indian context this would mean knitting together of desperate intellectual levels.

Nirode wonders how to bring the scattering of dispute intellectuals together mentally, so that they can do this bit. While Nirode analysis the problem from the point of view of the Indian situation. The actual implications transcends the specific context for what he is seeking without being fully aware of, it is a mode of communication which while accepting the plurality of life is yet pliable
enough to make us intuit the unity of life. One important factor that to a great extent is responsible for Nirode's destabilized and isolated state is his mother fixation. R.S. Singh views that in the novel:

The theme of alienation is treated in terms of mother-children relation.\(^{19}\)

Like Paul Morel in D.H. Lawrence's *Son's and Lover's* Nirode also develops oedipal relationship with his mother.

During his childhood he loved his mother and hated his father. After his father's death he wishes to support his mother, but as he suspects her of an intimate relationship with Major Chaddha, he grows jealous of his rival and is completely isolated from his mother. He begins to hate her and is constantly haunted by the morbid thoughts of his mother's amorous relations with the Major. Nirode's caustic invectives against his mother are a defence against his oedipal love for her that lies hidden in his subconscious.

He feels greatly distressed at his mother's behaviour also because it violates his moral and social standards. In Indian culture womanhood is worshipped as a Goddess, particularly motherhood. The most important function of bearing and rearing children has been assigned
to her. She is seen as the epitome of love and sacrifices. With such a sublime picture of motherhood as its backdrop, Nirode cannot digest the loose conduct of his mother. It kindness severe repugnance in him and conforming touch, his experience extreme loneliness and separation. He feels an outcast in the gripped world where he was already feeling unwanted. He is by ferocious worth, hatred for his mother and cuts him off from his family. He wishes to details himself completely from it and tells his friend, Sunny that he has never inherited or borrowed anything from his family, he wants only life alone. He rebuffs his mother's offer of financial assistance to him and later when she wants him to sign the papers for transfer of money in his name he refuses firmly. Isolated from his mother, Nirode loses his faith in life and develops an attitude of complete negation. He pursues one failure after another and treats it as a part of his life. He hates happiness and derives consolation from his suffering to such an extent that he tells David anyone who feels happy deserves to die. After Monisha's death, Nirode goes to receive his mother at the airport and is struck by her beauty. His mother's composure and quiet indifferences he felt himself drained by blood and Monisha's tragic death, terrify him and he begins to reflect if she is a mortal being.
He identifies her with Mother Kali and apprehends his death through her. He loses faith in love, life and turns hysterical and behaves like a frantic:

Don't you see in her face, in her beauty, Amla don't you see the amalgamation of death and life? Isn't it perfect and inevitable that she should pour blood into our veins where we were born, and drain it from us when we die.²⁰

Nirode rejects his past, his upbringing, his inherited property, everything that may attach him to some kind of a semblance with routine. He rejects touch and intimacy and wants to be free in his private isolated world of doubts and questionings. Failure becomes a trait of his personality and he becomes a rootless nihilist, a psychic outlaw.

Nirode prefers negation to acceptance. He does not want to continue and feels as if he was born with his heart emptied out. He feels isolated and cherishes this isolation he closes himself in his world and withdraws from the outside world. He is sick and feels like a leper. He is dissatisfied and disillusioned with the world around him. For him, life is meaningless, absurd like the journey of Sisyphus, 'loneliness alone' matters, and his ideal is to
disregard pain and pleasure and see beyond them. He has a romantic belief in freedom and hates to be responsible for anything for he tells David that he is like a traveller and will always travel alone. He reveals this fact to his pragmatic philosopher.

The relationship between David and Nirode is perhaps one of the most satisfying relationships in the novel. Whenever Nirode feels the need to make a confession or share a confidence, he invariably turns to David for sympathy and understanding just like Hamlet who reposes his confidence in Horatio and seeks his advice in hour of crisis. David, on his past trusts and respects Nirode as an individual entity. Despite their apparent differences, they share a good deal in common. Both have strong personalities, highly sensitive to the environment and sincerely committed to their personal and professional pursuits. And yet their relationship remains ironical throughout the novel. David loves India and finds fulfillment by his continual tours as well as by adapting to and adopting some of her cultural values. Nirode makes fun of David's love for Indian things by saying that David would become a disciple of a guru one top of a mountain. The difference between them is that David stands solely for individualism while Nirode stands for both, individualism
and idealism without any compromise in his personal life. Style which is a "congenital failure" and his search for freedom is an existential search.

The novel presents an eccentric and inconsistent figure of a conjugal life through Nirode’s parents. The marital conflict changes Nirode's parents into psychic demon. Monisha and Jiban signify the most usual and painful instance of conjugal conflict. Her winding journey towards her horrible ending paints her physical diversion in black, mourning colours. From a simple, silent, sensitive, beautiful mildly self -centered girl, she transforms into a sterile, insane, diary-writing woman.

Monisha lives in her husband’s house, shares his bed, serves his family, is alleged of stealing Jiban’s money and it is Jiban who mildly covers her burnt body and begs forgiveness from her relatives. Her death in the end parted the bondages that sequestered her soul and body in the life. As R.K. Gupta has rightly said:

> Indian male - chauvinistic families expect woman to adjust. The opposite tendency of the family members, hostile social conventions and backgrounds make these marital discord a great menace.²¹
Anita Desai has delineated marital disharmonies as they exist in Indian male-dominated society.

The female protagonist of the novel, Monisha is in no way qualitatively different from Nirode. She too is an isolated character caught in the cross-currents of changing social values. She is certain that she has no faith, no alternative to her confused mind and she fails to respond adequately to the apparently sickening Indian ethos.

She finds that Nirode, except her diary, is the only other medium for communicating her feelings and ideas in an atmosphere of distrust, envy, ignorance, monotonous drudgery and lack of privacy. Neither her husband nor her in-laws try to sympathies with her. She vacillates between her hope and despair in the Kafkaesque world of her husband's joint family. She longs for her mother's love and seeks her brother sympathetic company, having tragically failed to win either the affection of her mother-in-law or the affable companionship of her husband. She is repelled by the mechanical and monotonous recitation of the Sanskrit lesson by Nikhil. The recitation that filters through the barred windows drives her mad, and even the slightest pause in Nikhil's "Maniac Recitation" gives her some relief, soon gets on her nerves again, she feels claustrophobic and
completely bummed in.

Monisha's husband, Jiban, is a conventional man for whom the most important roles of a woman are cooking and child-bearing under the authority of a stern mother-in-law in a joint family. He is clearly for the static and stable social structure in any circumstances. In contrast, Nirode cares about people as human beings. He writes a play which fulfills his subconscious desire to communicate with the audience. He stands for the reconciliation of the conflicting personal desires for solitude and social communications.

Monisha's problem is now to be by herself in a room of her own for she feels that she could work better alone. She like Nirode wants to be free, but unlike him finds it difficult to free herself of her duties. She longs for isolation and her life follows a pattern of monotonous activity, without acquiring any meaning. Jiban's posting at Calcutta and Monisha's childlessness further add to her despair. Looking at the women around her she asks herself:

Why are the lives such as these lived: at their conclusion, what solution what truth falls into the waiting palm of one's hand, the still pit of one's heart?22
She finds the reply in the bleeding doves that carry their suffering with them, but her own options are limited. For her the choice is between death and existence which is not a difficult choice. Monisha, like Gautama, turns to detachment and self-control as the self subjugated attains peace and moves among objects with the senses under control, free from any longing or aversion. But the detachment, they achieve like the detachment of Nirode, is not born out of experience, but out of fear and attachment. They are both afraid of the inroads that love may take into their lives, for there is no love which is free of rules and obligations, completely.

The kind of love Monisha seeks is not available to her. Jiban destroys whatever meaning the relationship might have had and thus helps her, in a way to take recourse into her private self. As R.K. Gupta has remarked:

Monisha's plight depicts not only her individual state but also the state of so many daughter-in laws who become jailbirds in the houses of their husbands. Even husbands fail to understand and communicate with them because of their father's or mother's domination.23

The retreat into the self weakens Monisha's involvement in the living world and the rift between the observer and the
observed widens and conflicts multiply. Dissociation of action from life saps away the natural, normal zest to participate in life, to live and not merely to exist. Her silent advice to her brother is that he should not get into any involvement and be totally alone. This unvoiced pleading is more for herself than for Nirode. Being 'totally empty' she cannot provide an answer to life’s problems, but it also implies living in a hole or in a 'glass cubicle' as she realizes later. Ihab Hassan points out that:

The cult of inactivity involves the alienation of the moral and artistic imagination from things of this world, often leading to a criminal state of autonomy.

Monisha’s failure to maintain the equilibrium wislessness, which in turn, implies a rejection of life she is unable to face the challenges of life. For Monisha and Nirode, touch and communication imply a humiliation.

This urge to "feel whole" is not wholesome, but an outcome of a desire to shut all doors. Amla notices the change in her sister not physical but something psychological has changed her so much that she bears only a faint resemblance to the sister she had known.

The city of Calcutta conveys two selves of Monisha:
one rapacious, the other weary. Her actual self which is weary and rapacious, is glorified. Her real self is symbolized by a dove, caged and wounded. Just as the dove is not bleeding it is only scared, her real self is also not suffering because it is exiled. As A.V. Krishna Rao a reputed critic has rightly said:

Calcutta conceived as a force of creation, preservation and destruction is ultimately identified as a symbol for the Goddess Kali.25

As an isolated type, Monisha's first automatic impulse is to save her self by retaining into her shell of loneliness. Solitude suits her temperament. The urge to hide is presented symbolically as the desires to dive underground in the lanes of Calcutta but just as the Burroughgs are overpopulated, in Jiban's home, not her. Alone she reads books and enjoys a communication with the vast, dark emptiness which is her hour of freedom. But what she considers freedom is just a conflict and liberation from all fears. She does not get freedom as she does not acquire self knowledge emotionally crippled and the inability to share her feelings with others isolate her and make her a pitiable person. Releasing this, she is terrified by her emotional vacuum. This new awareness leaves her
guilty when she judged by herself. Like Hunter Grachus of Kafka, she appears to be in a rudderless ship, driven by the wind that blows in the inner most regions of death. She is aware of her distinct situation:

I am different from them all. They put me away in a steel container, a thick glass cubicle, and I have lived in it all my life, without a touch of love or hate or warmth on me. I am locked apart from all of them they cannot touch what a waste, it has been, this life enclosed in a locked container, merely as an observer at that, I have not given birth, I have not attended death. All the intervening drama has gone by unwound itself, like a silent, blurred film that has neither entertained nor horrified me.\textsuperscript{26}

Monisha hates the mere atrociousness, the rapacity and the uneasy lassitude of conscience of Calcutta and feels nostalgic about her mother's place Kalimpong and the town where Jiban worked earlier. Her sensitive nature and educational background don't make it easy for her to accept her role as the eldest daughter-in-law of a traditional joint family whose members constantly show their lack of refinement. She desperately desires to connect herself to Nirode for whose health and welfare she feels anxious and worried. Ironically enough, it is Monisha who becomes "an unshelled snail" when she is unjustly accused of theft by
her mother-in-law and others. What wounds her most is Jiban's tacit acquiescence in their collective allegations. Later, when she explains to Jiban that she had taken the money from his purse in order to clear the medical bills of the hospital during Nirode's illness, Jiban's reply only deepens her hunt for she cannot have children.

She is tired of her life because of her tendency to brood becomes lonely and meaninglessness. In an attempt to rebel against this meaningless and death like isolation, she runs strikes a match to put an end to her painful life. Amla, Nirode and Leila take her to the hospital but by then she becomes free from all the fetters of life.

Amla, unlike her brother and sister, decides to lead a gay life with the painter, Dharma. She is a creature of instinct and one who is able to adopt herself most according to the changes in her situation. Even when she feels intensely, she does not allow herself to be totally swept way by her feelings. She finds the Nirode's and Mohisha's mystifying silence in the beginning, but later she also starts perceiving the hollowness and meaninglessness of her life.

Her illusion of love and involvement is shattered when she learns that Dharma has disowned his daughter. Since she needs communications and reciprocation, she is
also discouraged if not disappointed, by Dharma's utterly self centered and cynical existence in the periphery of the circle of life without getting involved in the activities around him.

The city of Calcutta is, in symbolic terms, an ugly ghostly monster in whose deadly grip three helpless preys - Nirode, Monisha, and Amla groan and grasp of life. For Monisha it is a "devil city" and the unrelenting city Amla is also affected by this city.

Thus, the novels present the different sort of marital discord. We see that a marriage is nothing but a convenience. When two souls come together through their marriage some kinds of difference is bound to be there. But the wedlock's are used to be settled blindly and without considering the attitudes, feelings and outlooks of the brides and bridegrooms, which are compelled to fail in every sphere of their conjugal lives. Proper understanding of each other, a sense of wisdom and love for each other can make their conjugal life successful. But in India male-dominated society only women have to adjust. Adverse attitudes of the family members make the family lives, a great menace. In this novel Anita Desai has illustrates so many marital relationships like Aunt Leila later man,
particularly her long dead husband and her daughter Rita had broken off with her husband and was living in her world of scientific research. Jit Nair and Sarla have an intense distrust and disgust for each other. Mr. Basu and Mrs. Basu they are also act unpalatable etc. Through these illustrations Desai says that, such kinds of marriages destroy body, mind and soul completely.

To conclude, *Voices in the City* deals with the isolation of Nirode, Monisha and Amla in the monstrous city of Calcutta. All the three main characters, aware of sorrow and death, are involved in a quest for life and love. Mrs. Desai eminently succeeds in dramatizing not only the individual human relationship against the backdrop of a cosmopolitan consciousness, but also the growth of individual consciousness, from a cynical sense of man's loss of identity to the mystical relation of the meaning of his existence as well as his own destiny.

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REFERENCES


7. Ibid., p. 102.


15. Ibid., p. 37.


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