

# 1 Marital Discord in Anita Desai's Novels

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## 5 **Abstract**

6 Women's inscription continues to engage a place of substance for more reasons than one. It  
7 has questioned the accessible viewpoints which are fundamentally patriarchal. All women's  
8 writing need not necessarily be feminist. But feminist interpretations can appear through  
9 absence and denial. The sufferings of Indian women, marital discord, existentialism,  
10 annoyance are the major themes of feminist writing. Female quest for individuality has been a  
11 pet theme for many a woman novelist. After the Second World War, it has become possible  
12 that women novelists of quality have become inspirational for Indian English fiction.

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14 **Index terms—** 15 Marital Discord in Anita Desai's Novels Mohini Sharma omen's inscription continues to engage a place of  
16 substance for more reasons than one. It has questioned the accessible viewpoints which are fundamentally  
17 patriarchal. All women's writing need not necessarily be feminist. But feminist interpretations can appear  
18 through absence and denial. The sufferings of Indian women, marital discord, existentialism, annoyance are the  
19 major themes of feminist writing. Female quest for individuality has been a pet theme for many a woman novelist.  
20 After the Second World War, it has become possible that women novelists of quality have become inspirational  
21 for Indian English fiction.

22 Talking of fiction of more recent years Anita Desai is reported to have told her interviewer Atma Ram: "There  
23 is so little of it... There simply isn't enough, in the sense of variety, value, interest, significance." 1 But now we  
24 have a string of novelists who have made a blotch in the dome of Indian English fiction. They include Kamala  
25 Markandaya, Rama Mehta, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Dina Mehta, Shobha De, Bharathi Mukherjee,  
26 Namita Gokhale and Arundhati Roy, to name a few. They have written mainly on women related issues. While  
27 writing they touched major aspect of women's life i.e. marriage. G.B. Shaw, an Irish playwright and a cofounder  
28 of the London school of Economics, described marriage as an institution that brings two people together. He  
29 said that marriage should be based on intense, profound love and couple should maintain their ardor until death  
30 does them apart. Kapadia, while discussing the concept of Hindu marriage, writes: "Marriage was a social duty  
31 towards the family and the community, and there was a little idea of individual interest. The social background  
32 provided by the authoritarian family afforded no scope for the recognition of any personal factor, individual  
33 interest and aspirations, in the relation between husband and wife" (Kapadia, 1958, p.169). The works of these  
34 writers suggested penetrative insight into the intricate issues of life and also expressed social, economic and  
35 political upheaval in Indian society.

36 Marriage can be defined as a legal and social certified union between spouses which is legalized by customs  
37 and beliefs that recommend the rights to the partners. It refers to the rules and regulations which define the  
38 rights and duties after marriage. Marriage signifies the equal partnership and intimate union between a male  
39 and a female. It is a strong association which connects not only two individuals but also builds

40 Author : E-mail : mssharmamohini@gmail.com up a relationship between two families. It brings stability and  
41 essence to human relations, which is incomplete without marriage. Its strongest function concerns with the care  
42 of children, their upbringing and education. The concept of marriage varies from culture to culture but its role  
43 is same i.e. union of two opposite sex. This bond is lifelong and special.

44 In marriage two individuals with often-different backgrounds come together. The thinking, attitudes, mindsets  
45 and behavioral patterns cannot be expected to be similar or exactly matching. It naturally takes some time to  
46 know and understand each other. Husband and wife after marriage have to make efforts to adjust to one  
47 another's tastes and temperaments by subordinating personal gratifications and by making compromises between

48 themselves rather than breaking with each other in the event of differences and dissimilarities. The understanding, 49 resulting in compatibility in marriage, can thus develop only gradually.

50 On the other hand, life of women after marriage undergoes significant transformation. She has to leave her 51 parent's house and move to a completely new environment. She has to build relationship with all the close 52 relatives of her husband. Her role is more definite and her duties are more specific than those of the husband 53 and she has to adhere to the set pattern of conduct.

54 Indian culture gives supreme importance to life of married women and associates several important responsibilities 55 with it. Indian mythology describes a married woman as life partner who has to play fourfold character: 56 she is ardhangini, one half of her husband, symbolically speaking; sahadharmini, associate in the implementation 57 of human and celestial goals; sahakarmini, a part to all her husband's deed and sahayogini, a complete cooperator 58 in all his endeavor. Husband and wife mutually are called dampati, joint holders of the house, sharing work in 59 terms of their genetic, emotional and individual dharma.

60 Over the centuries roles of married Indian women has undergone several transitions. Traditionally While 61 marriage is very important for both men and women in India, it effects a less essential adaptation in the life of 62 the male. In most cases, male continues to live in his original house and marriage does not influence his roles as 63 a son or a brother. His privileges towards life will be the same. No doubt he has to handle a new responsibility 64 in his life, but that will not change his entire life. He will become the head of the family and this aspect will 65 work in his favor completely. a married woman had to take care of her husband and his family. In the social 66 structure of the traditionoriented family, the typical pattern of husband-wife relationship was male dominance 67 and female dependence. The marriage of Indian women was built on an economic foundation. The division of 68 labor, resulting from the inescapable fact that women bear children and men do not, determined the necessity 69 for this. If a race was to survive, it had to produce, and rear to maturity, enough children to perpetuate itself. In 70 those times, it was a matter of life and death to a woman, tied down with bearing and rearing children. Centuries 71 of traditions have made the Indian women the most unselfish, the most self-denying and most patient women in 72 the world, whose pride is suffering. It is this pride which sustained marital harmony or at least did not allow 73 marital adjustment to become a problem.

74 Though the traditional conceptions regarding the status and role of husband and wife are slowly changing 75 in contemporary Indian society, the traditionoriented conceptions still largely prevail. Today's married working 76 women are facing a great challenge to maintain a balance between personal and professional life. The process 77 of industrialization and urbanization has brought about socio-psychological changes in the attitudes and values 78 of the people of this country, especially among the urban population. The opening-up of endless opportunities 79 to married women outside their homes has brought about a widespread feminine unrest. The attitude towards 80 marriage among educated women has changed. Desai writes: "More and more women consider self-respect and 81 the development of personality as necessary goals of life."

82 With the new strains and challenges that have emerged from the Indian family, the life of married women 83 has been going through an evolution. It has been wavering between traditional and western models. The fast- 84 changing social and family environment has thrown up new challenges for married couples. The educated women 85 of today living in urban areas are liable to develop a marked tendency to become extraordinarily conscious of 86 their individuality and individual status and are prone to have developed egos. The attitudes of spouses towards 87 each other's role and status might be of considerable importance for marital harmony or disharmony. The decline 88 in harmony can be associated with emphasis to individualistic, materialistic and selforiented goals over family 89 well-being. And this later takes the shape of marital discord.

90 Marital discord is a problem or lack of synchronization in the marriages. It symbolizes a breakdown in the 91 conciliation and co-operation of the married couples. Usually, marital discord originates when enmity develops 92 among the partners by internal and external manifestations like partition, physical aggression and vituperation. 93 It is a process that begins before physical separation and continues after the marriage is legally ended. Marital 94 Discord is a very effective stressor that can prompt individuals to enter stages or engage in behavior that will lead 95 them to have psychotic or organic features. It is a significant predictor of subsequent delinquency and depressive 96 symptoms for married couples. It is evident that marital problems are more likely to cause depression than 97 depression is to cause marital problems.

98 Marital discord is as old as the organization of marriage itself, even if it has diverged from time to time and from 99 person to person. In the pre-industrial period, men and women who came jointly in marriage shared intellectual 100 values, mutual dedication, belief and hope which subordinated the interests of the individuals resulting in the 101 smooth relationship of the family. There were tensions in their marital relationship too, but the ethical and 102 religious convictions, economic belief and the fear of social condemnation kept them together.

103 Discord within marriage is a strong catalyst of marital suspension. However, in context in which divorce is 104 rare and stigmatized, we might not expect marital dissolution to be as sensitive to marital discord. For examples, 105 instead of dissolution occurring due to a general lack of emotional completion, marital dissolution may require 106 more repeated or severe discord as perceived by at least one the spouses.

107 Marital discord in marriage is not new to India as well, and it has existed at all era in well-known history. 108 But separation was resorted to only in severe cases where there was intolerable malice, abandonment, mental 109 illness, sterility, and disloyalty. In the wake of the industrial mutiny, marital discord has come to presume greater 110 importance. Men and women who came together in marriage lacked knowledge of various psychological and

111 social aspects of life, the proper understanding of which alone make sure peace, flexibility and self-control. In  
112 the commercial age, the increasing liberty of married woman has pulled her further apart and has changed the  
113 concept of marriage. In the words of Virendra Kumar "from stability, permanence and indissolubility to discord,  
114 separation and divorce" (Kumar.1978:25). Frequent marital discord can lead to a growing dissatisfaction for the  
115 partners involved, which force people to consider alternative to remaining married. For example, a person who  
116 handle marital dispute in a regular pace, may grow dissatisfied and try to live life independently.

117 Disparity and dissatisfaction are two types of marital discord that entail a particular level of severity, which can  
118 influence marital outcomes. Disparity in married life refers to age difference between husband and wife. When a  
119 young woman married an older man and he is unable to fulfill her desires physically and emotionally and always  
120 behave like an instructor, conflicts arise. He behaves according to his age and also because he is elder to her, he  
121 act maturely which a woman can't accept. Due to which marital discord occurs. Dissatisfaction, on the other  
122 hand, means the condition or feeling of being unsatisfied in marriage. Today's women are trying to create identity  
123 for themselves. They are becoming more independent and have successful careers. In competing with the world,  
124 they are trying to maintain balance between their family and professional life. This at times becomes difficult  
125 to achieve which is unacceptable to men and this creates dissatisfaction in relationship. Marriage dissatisfaction  
126 seems to be on the rise in today's way of life.

127 Either type of marital discord can have a negative consequence on developing children. One of the most awful  
128 things to a child is the possibility that their parents may break up. In the heat of marital discord, many people  
129 fail to distinguish the intense fear aggravated in their children. The emotional withdrawal of the couple can have  
130 either of the two effects on children: Firstly, children become fearful of parents disengagement leading to an  
131 eventual breakup of the family home. Secondly, children learn emotional disengagement as a strategy for dealing  
132 with challenging interpersonal situations. Learning the habit of emotional disengagement leads to unhealthy  
133 interpersonal relationships for children in the present, and also later in life as adults. Further, children who  
134 have adopted the strategy of emotional disengagement often have difficulty being empathetic to the needs and  
135 concerns of others.

136 The concept of marital discord dominates the contemporary literature, may it be of British, American or  
137 Indian source. It is one of the fundamental themes in the works of Nayantara Sahgal, Kamala Markandaya,  
138 Virginia Woolf, Raja Rao, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Anita Desai and others.

139 Anita Desai has highlighted marital discord as a serious concern in her works. She humbly admits that she is  
140 allergic to writing social novels. However, she is involved in the problems of marital discord and the insincerity,  
141 the faithlessness and the soul-destroying, grinding process of compromise which accompany it. Anita Desai  
142 while choosing marital discord as a theme, highlights how the lack of ability to put bare one's soul and convey  
143 freely one's fear and agony result in the snap of communication between husband and wife. Unusual attitudes,  
144 individual complexes and fears add to this distancing between the husband and the wife resulting in conjugal  
145 disharmony. In each of her novels, we encounter traumatic experiences of married lives. Each novel, maintaining  
146 the basic features of marital discord, presents different features of the problem to which Mrs. Desai gives new  
147 aspect and visualization. She bravely puts ahead the fact that in society, marriages usually pursue the jungle  
148 law of the survival of the fittest and being physically stronger, man survives. In her novels, marital discord is  
149 reflective of the social parlance. Excessive bondage and high level of restrictions imposed on a girl who recently  
150 parted away on her parents, hits her psychology leading to excessive frustration. This frustration emerges out  
151 in different forms like suicidal tendencies, non-adjustments, marital discords, psychological irritation and many  
152 more. Hence society and its restricted canvas play a great role in dealing with the girl's psychology. In the  
153 novels of Anita Desai, most of the protagonists find themselves trapped in marriage. Desai comments: "There  
154 are those who can handle situations and those who can't and my stories are generally about those who can't.  
155 They find themselves trapped in a situation over which they have no control." 2 All her characters fight the  
156 current and struggle against it. They know what demands are and what it costs to meet them. There is an  
157 effort, in the novels of Desai, to represent and understand the feelings, thoughts and doubts, which remain,  
158 locked up within the inner recesses of isolated female heart. Anita Desai's novels represent intense study of the  
159 personal life, the conflicts and anxiety which the females face. The characters of Anita Desai are trapped in  
160 the web of unreceptive circumstances. Anita Desai's robustly outspoken manner of propagating the typically  
161 unconventional but painfully realistic thesis that the institution of marriage is increasingly taking the shape of  
162 the dead albatross around the necks of the modern, emancipated selfrespecting women. Desai focuses on the  
163 personal struggle of middle-class women in existing India as they endeavor to prevail over the societal limitations  
164 forced by a tradition-bound patriarchal society. She has specifically mentioned middle-class women, with which  
165 she clearly indicates to such women who are traditionally bounded with certain restrictions of family and society.  
166 Her central theme in many of her novels has been portrayal of women's viewpoint, alienation of middle class  
167 women and tension that crops up in middle class families. Her novels, with a touch of feminist concern, portray  
168 the failed marriage relationship which often leads to disaffection and lonesomeness of the characters. She writes  
169 for the woman who is always dominant initially by father and then by husband.

170 Women have been moved from different stages of life and the novelist sharply focuses upon the emotional  
171 reactions of the woman as she experiences these segments. She may be called the spokesperson of our culture as  
172 she authentically conveys its problems, uncertainties, complexities and paradoxes. She is an expert in depicting  
173 the reaction of women towards a given situation, for example, apathy of parents, ill treatment by in-laws, and

174 indifference of the husband. She describes the Indian woman as a fighter, a sufferer, a brave woman and in later  
175 novels eventually a winner because of her determined spirit and attitude of compromise. Anita Desai's works  
176 are directly related to social realities. Social realities are related to new family norms in which it is difficult for  
177 a girl to adjust or deal with the situations and circumstances. But Anita Desai does not reside like others on  
178 social concerns. She explores deep into the forces that condition the growth of a female in this patriarchal male  
179 subjugated society. She examines social realities from psychological viewpoint without posing herself as a social  
180 reformer. Her novels are studies of the inner life of characters and her talent lies in the description of minute  
181 things that are usually ignored.

182 Her women are in everlasting pursuit for a consequential life. Anita Desai states that all her writing is "an  
183 effort to discover to underline and convey the true significance of things." 3 This explains her involvement with her  
184 characters. Her protagonists suffer strongly because of their fruitless attempt to find poignant contact, response  
185 and understanding. Anita Desai's novels are in tune with her idea that "a woman writer is more concerned with  
186 thought, emotion and sensation." 4 In her writings she has touched upon depression, time apart, sex, household  
187 responsibilities, irritating habits, large family circle, expectations, and family decision making as the reasons  
188 which lead to marital discord.

189 ? Depression: It is a condition of mental disturbance, severe dejection, accompanied by feelings of hopelessness  
190 and inadequacy which create difficulty in maintaining interest in life. Same is the condition of Anita Desai's women  
191 characters who deal with frustrations, depression, and rejection in their life. They like solitude and privacy. Anita  
192 Desai is concerned with the depression and oppression of these intensely introverts female characters that are  
193 unable to vent their emotions. As in Cry, the Peacock, moving from one pit of despair and depression to another,  
194 Sita's feeling of hopelessness and dejection is depicted by: "All order is gone out of my life. There is no plan, no  
195 peace, nothing to keep me within the pattern of familiar everyday life." (79).

196 ? Time Apart: Time apart and a lack of worthwhile time with each other serves to get people out of sync.  
197 This makes life unbalanced and creates issues which results in marital discord. In the novels of Anita Desai,  
198 major reason of marital discord is lack of time given by the male characters to their wives. As in Gautama's, in  
199 Cry, the Peacock, busy profession spares him no time for his family. With no vocation to occupy, Maya broods  
200 over the coldness of her husband: "Telling me to go to sleep while he worked at his papers, he did not give  
201 another thought to me" (19). In Where Shall We Go This Summer?, Sita, in spite of living under the same roof  
202 for twenty years and parenting four children they hardly spend time with each other and they always remain like  
203 "an ill-assorted couple lacking altogether in harmony in their lives." (Madhusudan Prasad, 65)

204 ? Sex: Regularity, quantity, quality and infidelity are all frequent cause of hassle and dissonance in marriage.  
205 In reference to Anita Desai's Cry, the Peacock, the root of Maya's distress is her marriage, is his disconnected and  
206 aloof behavior to the amount of not fulfilling her physical and emotional desires. "A continuous frustration of  
207 the body's sexual needs can be disastrous to somebody like Maya, given her fierce instinctuality." (M. Rajeshwar,  
208 1998:23)

209 ? Irritating habits: Irritating habits of partner incite impatience or anger. At times, people find some of their  
210 partner's habit undesirable and thus causing friction in relationship. In Cry, the Peacock, Maya, the central  
211 character of the novel, who has failed to grow out of her childhood, lives in a world of fantasy and fairytale that  
212 is far removed from reality. This irritated Gautama who was rather a mature man.

213 ? Large Family Circle: Large family or in other words 'joint family' comprises of married couple and husband's  
214 other relatives. Life for a newly married woman becomes difficult if in-laws don't give her necessary support and  
215 space. It gets difficult for her to adapt in new environment as she comes out of the protective shell of the parental  
216 family. In case of Monisha in Voices in the City, her life is in a state of depravity due to the domination of her  
217 in-laws. Repeated comments from her in-laws on her inability to conceive makes her go through psychological  
218 miseries.

219 ? Expectations: It is a strong belief about what might happen in the future. Especially in marriage, spouses  
220 have certain hopes and expectations from their partners. The difficulty with expectations is that they are often  
221 poorly defined and sometimes completely unknown. And unknown things generate curiosity. Most of the people  
222 idealize marriage and become disheartened once those prospects aren't met.

223 ? Family Decision Making: It relates to important decisions related to family; for e.g. decision involving child  
224 planning. For Example: -In Where Shall We Go this summer? When Sita came to know that she is fifth time  
225 pregnant, the intensity of the feeling of obsession is apparent in her constant fear of child-birth. She feels a strong  
226 revulsion as her husband was confused and puzzled. She herself takes a quick decision that she doesn't want to  
227 have the baby. This decision makes their married life disturbed.

228 ? Conflict: It is a serious disagreement or argument or eternal conflict between the sexes. After marriage when  
229 men do not behave according to the expectations of women and vice-a-versa, conflict is obvious. In Where Shall  
230 We Go this Summer? , Sita's husband gets irritated when Sita decides to go to the island in pregnant condition.  
231 He says "Not much longer to go now, Sita, it'll soon be over. You are doing a blunder. " (Anita Desai:1975;21)  
232 But she wasn't ready to listen and in frustration she says "I am trying to escape from the madness here, escape  
233 to a place where it might be possible to be sane again." (Anita Desai:1975;23)

234 ? Isolation: Isolation in Anita Desai's novels was a significant cause of Marital Discord. In the novels, isolation  
235 operates at two levels-physical and mental. Physical Isolation may be within the wall of the house in which women  
236 is alone and nobody is there to care for her and mental isolation occurs when a woman feels that her husband

237 does not care about her. In Desai's *In Custody*, the problem between Deven and Sarla is the lack of togetherness.  
238 She expects her husband to take care of her with continued responsibility. Because of opposite temperament,  
239 they hardly spend time with each other. Thus making Sarla go through mental trauma and live an isolated life.

240 ? Lack of Communication: Husband-wife alienation ensuing from lack of communication and unpredictable  
241 inappropriateness form a very important issue of Anita Desai's novels. Anita Desai's women long for love and  
242 unity of the strength which they recognize as the panacea of the troubles of the world. Their refusal to cooperation  
243 and surrender and the incapability to accept their partner's perspective, unavoidably results in separation and  
244 isolation. As in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, Sita finds herself alienated from her husband due to lack  
245 of communication. She remains an ignored personality. She creates a world of her own which she fills up with  
246 extraordinarily sensitive beings. Lack of understanding and incapacity to strike a sympathetic chord with Raman  
247 (her husband) leads to discord.

248 ? Domestic Violence: As we would mostly assume, domestic violence is not limited to physical violence only.  
249 Emotional abuse and economic deprivation can also be categorized under domestic violence. This has also become  
250 a significant concern leading to marital discord.

251 Anita Desai thus highlights significant issues about the complexity of human relationships as a big  
252 contemporary problem and human condition using various reasons leading to marital discord. In her novels,  
253 like, *Cry the Peacock*, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, *Voices in the City*, and *In Custody* she depicts the  
254 fruitless marriage relationship which frequently leads to separation and isolation of the characters. The conception  
255 of dysfunctional marriage is treated in Desai's first novel -*Cry, the Peacock*.

256 *Cry, the Peacock* portrays the psychic uproar of a young and sensitive girl Maya who is disturbed by a childhood  
257 prediction of a fatal disaster. The novel is about Maya's cry for love and relationship in her loveless wedding.  
258 The peacock's cry is an implication of Maya's distressed cry for love and life of involvement. It "explores the  
259 turbulent emotional world of the neurotic protagonist Maya who smarts under an acute alienation stemming  
260 from marital discord and verges on a curious insanity" (Madhusudan Prasad, 1981: 3). In this novel, Maya,  
261 whose obsessed condition is brought about by multiple factors, include marital discord and drabness and psychic  
262 disorder. Desai looks in to the cause for marital discord and mention how such discord influences the family.  
263 Most of the times, the inability of an individual to be responsive to the behavior patterns of her partner leads  
264 to tension and stress in the relationship, while sometimes it is on adaptation of various levels of affection that  
265 strained relationships occur. This novel explains both husband and wife relations in depth. It has been mentioned  
266 that both have strained relations because of their incompatible attitude. Maya is pensive, receptive and touching,  
267 while Gautama pragmatic, insensible and lucid. Maya is prosaic and high-strung Gautama isolated, thoughtful  
268 and inaccessible. Maya has gentleness, quietness and affection, Gautama is rigid and bitter. The marital bond  
269 that binds the two is very brittle and shaky; the growing tension between them reaches its climax when Maya  
270 kills Gautama and then commits suicide. Maya is a convict of the past, lives almost eternally in the shade of  
271 world of memoirs, which overwhelm her. Gautama, on the other hand, lives in the present and accepts reality  
272 and facts even though they are not very beautiful. On the converse, Maya never tries to admit the truth, but  
273 she wants to live in her thoughts and fairy world. She keeps on recalling her childhood days and the love her  
274 father meted out to her. Maya herself is in two minds about her bond and love with Gautama as she always  
275 seeks other father in her husband. On other occasions she looks at her marriage as a fiasco as she says "broken  
276 repeatedly and repeatedly the pieces were picked up and put together." 5 . The incompatibility between them  
277 emerges from their attitudes and approaches to life. With his pragmatic and practical attitude, Gautama fails  
278 to respond to Maya's emotional needs. She is conscious of the insurmountable impasse between them. Sensitive  
279 Maya is awfully distressed and loses her mental calm at the death of her dog and Gautama neglects emotional  
280 yearning of Maya and says that he would bring another dog for her. This emotionless behavior makes Maya  
281 brood over Gautama's insensitivity -"Showing how little he knows of my misery or how to comfort me". (*Cry,*  
282 *the Peacock*, p.14). Gautama is so near to her yet so far. This gap in communication coupled with her obsession  
283 with the albino astrologer's prophecy makes her an emotional wreck.

284 Not only Maya, Desai has used other characters as well to emphasize on issues of discord. Leila, Maya's friend,  
285 married a tubercular patient for love. She rages and raves at the mockery of the marriage, yet forbears all childish  
286 vagaries of her husband.

287 Both marriages point out that qualities and shortcomings, capability and weaknesses of husbandwife and  
288 projects how they have not cautiously and deliberately been balanced to make a relationship successful.  
289 Similarities between the attitude of both husband and wife to life and things in general play important role  
290 in making their conjugal life successful. General situations in society are such that no proper time or thought  
291 is given to these affairs. It results in conflicts, desperation, separation and loneliness. Women who are treated  
292 casually become sufferers of these clashes. Their reliability and traditional approach to them cause alienation in  
293 their lives. They struggle against strong, negative, soul-killing circumstances but in vain. They become hopeless,  
294 desperate and nervous. Committing suicide, running away or living separately are the only solutions visible to  
295 them. The fact that ultimately Maya turns insane and kills her husband may contain an indirect comment on  
296 their different values of life. The novel becomes a fascinating psychological study of neurotic fears and anxieties  
297 caused by marital incompatibility and disharmony.

298 Madhusudan Prasad briefly alludes to Maya as a neurotic figure: "In *Cry, the Peacock*, Desai explores the  
299 turbulent emotional world of the neurotic protagonist, Maya, who smarts under an acute alienation, stemming

300 from marital discord, and verges on a curious insanity.” 6 He partially agrees with discovery of Maya’s neurosis  
301 in the novel based on ‘marital discord’ arising out of her ‘morbid preoccupation with death’ and it shatters  
302 the very identity of ‘women in our contemporary society dominated by man in which woman longing for love  
303 is driven mad or compelled to commit suicide.’ In his opinion, the blame should not be put on Gautama’s  
304 shoulders. Maya’s psychosis does not completely occur out of ‘marital discord’ in which Gautama is utterly to be  
305 held responsible. On the converse, he dreadfully tries to understand her problem. Furthermore, in her hours of  
306 anxiety Gautama is very much worried about her troubled mind and acts as a nurse. Therefore, she admits that  
307 he is “her guardian and protector.” 7 The marital discord arises out of her neurotic traits in the face of which she  
308 is herself helplessly struggling to disentangle. The novel sensationalizes the fight of life and death of Maya with  
309 her irrational personality.

310 Similarly Srinivasa Iyengar says Cry, the Peacock is really “Maya’s effort to tell her story to herself, to discover  
311 some meaning in her life, and even to justify herself to herself.” 8 In Voices in the City, Anita Desai’s main concern  
312 is chiefly with human beings and their important bonding and how in the absence of meaningful ??1975) is similar  
313 to her first novel Cry, the Peacock, and focuses on marital dissonance which accentuated the perceptively highly  
314 strong nature of their protagonists. The mismatched couple of Raman and Sita are confronted with the same  
315 problem of discord. Sita’s marriage to Raman was not based on proper understanding and love between them.  
316 Desai gives the explanation as “and finally-out of pity, out of lust, out of a sudden will for adventure and because  
317 it was inevitable, he married her.” (99) Sita represents a world of sentiment and feminine sensibility while Raman  
318 is a man with an active view of life and the sense of the practical. Sita is a restless, responsive middle-aged woman  
319 with unstable and emotional reactions to many things that happen to her, she always wants to escape reality  
320 and does not want to grow up and face the responsibilities of adult life. Raman represents wisdom, shrewdness  
321 and an acceptance of the norms and values of society. He is brisk and precise in dealing with the business of life.  
322 He is unable to understand the hostility and passion with which Sita reacts against every unpleasant incident.  
323 His response to his wife’s recurrent outbursts is a mixture of bewilderment, tiredness, fear and finally a resigned  
324 acceptance of her abnormality. He cannot comprehend her boredom, her frustration with him. In marital life  
325 theme of estrangement and lack of communication is discussed by writer in this novel. Since childhood, Sita  
326 remains a disregarded character. She is the result of broken family. She yearns to have the attention and love  
327 of others but her father remains busy with his chelas and patients. Even after marriage, she remains lonely as  
328 her husband Raman fails to fulfill her expectations. He fails to understand her violence and passion just like  
329 Gautama in Cry, the Peacock.

330 Raman is wise, lucid and passive whereas Sita is unreasonable. Through Sita, Anita Desai voices the  
331 awe of facing all alone “the ferocious assaults of existence” (TOI: 13). The conflict between two polarized  
332 temperaments and two discordant viewpoints represented by Sita and Raman, sets up marital discord and  
333 conjugal misunderstanding as the leit-motif of Desai’s novels. They are temperamentally poles apart which  
334 accounts for their being unable to forge a harmonious marital relationship.

335 Where Shall We Go This Summer? May thus be seen as a fable on the incapability of human beings to relate  
336 the inner with the outer, the individual with society. It does suggest that a life of complete inwardness is not the  
337 solution to the problems of life. It shows that human happiness is in balancing the opposites of life. The novel  
338 shows Desai’s terrible image of life, in which the blameless bear. They pay a heavy price for their honesty and  
339 virtue, as intended by an unkind fate.

340 In Custody, also focuses on theme of marital friction and relationship problem. Desai has repeatedly tried to  
341 project the idea that a blissful conjugal life is a rainbow-colored dream of romantic mind, or wishful thinking of  
342 an immature intellect. In a marriage, adjustment for a woman means deleting her individuality, her inner self,  
343 her conscience, so that the ideal couple represents the self-satisfied, arrogant husband and his legally bonded  
344 woman slave. In this novel, the married couple led a gloomy married life. They are quite different from each  
345 other in their temperaments as Deven is a professor of literature and Sarla has no concern in literature. She is  
346 unaware that her husband’s frequent visit to Delhi is to meet his girlfriend. Sarla is a picture of a discarded wife.

347 The problem of marital discord in the novels lie in the fact that Gautama in Cry, The Peacock, Jiban in Voices  
348 In The City, Raman in Where Shall We Go This Summer? and Deven in In Custody are practical and matter  
349 -of-fact men while Maya, Monisha, Sita and Sarla in these four novels respectively are idealistic. Maya, Monisha,  
350 Sita and Sarla each crave for love and understanding but their tragedy is that they are married to wooden, hard  
351 -hearted and insensitive men. All the marriages in her novels are more or less business dealings, the under-counter  
352 profits rationally handed over to the male partners. But not infrequently this order is violently convulsed, the  
353 caged bird batters its head against the iron bars and manage to leave a few bloodstains. Similarly a wife revolts,  
354 runs away, commits suicide, becomes a homicidal maniac, and finds tremendous freedom in blessed widowhood,  
355 the great ‘No’ is said at least to ensure freedom of body and mind. By implication Mrs. Desai makes it clear that  
356 either one should remain unmarried, unfettered and unaccepted by the society as such, or marry and be damned  
357 to an everlasting private hell. In consequence, therefore, she is taken with definite discomfort by the complacent  
358 reading public. Her novels are indeed chilling encounters of the traumatic experiences of married lives. Anita  
359 Desai is a modern writer as she considers new themes and knows how to deal with them. She explores the grief  
360 of women living in modern society. She presents her opinion about human relationships and human conditions  
361 as a big contemporary problem. Desai deals with intricacies of such relationships as one of her major theme,  
362 which is a universal issue. She endeavors to show this problem without any interferes. Anita Desai’s novels

363 can almost be examples of her idea that whereas man is concerned with action, experience and achievement, a  
364 woman writer is more concerned with thought, emotion and sensation. Thus, each of the above is a very common  
365 trouble dealt with in a marriage. Although these are problems, they can also be prospects for growth, learning  
366 and accord. Whether these issues remain problems causing stress in marriage or become an opportunity for  
367 growth depends upon man-woman attitude. The result of this trend may be continuing declining of the bonds  
368 between the generations and a decline in the mean psychological well-being of the population. It should be  
369 kept in mind that controlling access to divorce will not address the central problem, as chronic marital discord  
370 between continuously married parents appears to be as detrimental as divorce. More generally, the psychological  
371 well-being of the next generation of youth will be enhanced if emerging social trends or policy lead to an increase  
372 in the number of children raised by parents with stable and harmonious marriages.

373 The key to successful marriage is love, understanding, mutual respect, trust, commitment and togetherness.  
374 While many couples are able to find all the key ingredients in their marital relationships, others find one element  
375 or more lacking in their bond. This gives rise to consequences that are not always expected, or desired. This is a  
376 reason why a number of couples face adverse consequences, like divorce. Visible reasons why married couples find  
377 marriage as an intimidating bond is that they face issues like lack of trust, mutual respect, love and understanding  
378 in their relationship. It is thus clear that catastrophe in the married world of Anita Desai fiction arises basically  
because of unreliable incompatibility. What Desai pleads <sup>1 2 3 4</sup>



Figure 1: W © 2013

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<sup>1</sup>( )G

<sup>2</sup>20 2

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<sup>4</sup>20 2

If Maya's misfortune in *Cry, the Peacock* emanated from her fascination with a father figure, Nirode's (Monisha's brother) calamity lies in his love-hate bond with the mother. The marital discord transforms Nirode's parents into mental monsters. The father turns into a drunkard, debased and dishonorable creature absolutely different from an easy-going, sports-loving and fond father. The mother is transformed from a sweet, sensitive, accomplished beauty into a coldly, practical and possessive woman having no human warmth and tenderness even for her own children. Anita Desai presents through these images that at best marriage is a farce, at worst it is a kind of disease that destroys body, mind and soul completely.

Anita Desai's another novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*

Figure 2:

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381 this edition, page numbers are included parenthetically)

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