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

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Marital Discord in Anita Desai's Novels

Mohini Sharma

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

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

Marriage can be defined as a legal and social certified union between spouses which is legalized by customs and beliefs that recommend the rights to the partners. It refers to the rules and regulations which define the rights and duties after marriage. Marriage signifies the equal partnership and intimate union between a male and a female. It is a strong association which connects not only two individuals but also builds up a relationship between two families. It brings stability and essence to human relations, which is incomplete without marriage. Its strongest function concerns with the care of children, their upbringing and education. The concept of marriage varies from culture to culture but its role is same i.e. union of two opposite sex. This bond is lifelong and special.

In marriage two individuals with often-different backgrounds come together. The thinking, attitudes, mindsets and behavioral patterns cannot be expected to be similar or exactly matching. It naturally takes some time to know and understand each other. Husband and wife after marriage have to make efforts to adjust to one another's tastes and temperaments by subordinating personal gratifications and by making compromises between themselves rather than breaking with each other in the event of differences and dissimilarities. The understanding, resulting in compatibility in marriage, can thus develop only gradually.

While marriage is very important for both men and women in India, it effects a less essential adaptation in the life of the male. In most cases, male continues to live in his original house and marriage does not influence his roles as a son or a brother. His privileges towards life will be the same. No doubt he has to handle a new responsibility in his life, but that will not change his entire life. He will become the head of the family and this aspect will work in his favor completely.

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

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

Over the centuries roles of married Indian women has undergone several transitions. Traditionally

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a married woman had to take care of her husband and his family. In the social structure of the tradition – oriented family, the typical pattern of husband-wife relationship was male dominance and female dependence. The marriage of Indian women was built on an economic foundation. The division of labor, resulting from the inescapable fact that women bear children and men do not, determined the necessity for this. If a race was to survive, it had to produce, and rear to maturity, enough children to perpetuate itself. In those times, it was a matter of life and death to a woman, tied down with bearing and rearing children. Centuries of traditions have made the Indian women the most unselfish, the most self-denying and most patient women in the world, whose pride is suffering. It is this pride which sustained marital harmony or at least did not allow marital adjustment to become a problem.

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

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

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

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

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

Marital discord in marriage is not new to India as well, and it has existed at all era in well-known history. But separation was resorted to only in severe cases where there was intolerable malice, abandonment, mental illness, sterility, and disloyalty. In the wake of the industrial mutiny, marital discord has come to presume greater importance. Men and women who came together in marriage lacked knowledge of various psychological and social aspects of life, the proper understanding of which alone make sure peace, flexibility and self-control. In the commercial age, the increasing liberty of married woman has pulled her further apart and has changed the concept of marriage. In the words of Virendra Kumar "from stability, permanence and indissolubility to discord, separation and divorce" (Kumar.1978:25). Frequent marital discord can lead to a growing dissatisfaction for the partners involved, which force people to consider alternative to remaining married. For example, a person who handle marital dispute in a regular pace, may grow dissatisfied and try to live life independently.

Disparity and dissatisfaction are two types of marital discord that entail a particular level of severity, which can influence marital outcomes. Disparity in married life refers to age difference between husband and wife. When a young woman married an older man and he is unable to fulfill her desires physically and emotionally and always behave like an instructor, conflicts arise. He behaves according to his age and also because he is elder to her, he act maturely which a woman can't accept. Due to which marital discord

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occurs. Dissatisfaction, on the other hand, means the condition or feeling of being unsatisfied in marriage. Today's women are trying to create identity for themselves. They are becoming more independent and have successful careers. In competing with the world, they are trying to maintain balance between their family and professional life. This at times becomes difficult to achieve which is unacceptable to men and this creates dissatisfaction in relationship. Marriage dissatisfaction seems to be on the rise in today's way of life.

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

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

Anita Desai has highlighted marital discord as a serious concern in her works. She humbly admits that she is allergic to writing social novels. However, she is involved in the problems of marital discord and the insincerity, the faithlessness and the soul- destroying, grinding process of compromise which accompany it. Anita Desai while choosing marital discord as a theme, highlights how the lack of ability to put bare one's soul and convey freely one's fear and agony result in the snap of communication between husband and wife. Unusual attitudes, individual complexes and fears add to this distancing between the husband and the wife resulting in conjugal disharmony. In each of her novels, we encounter traumatic experiences of married lives. Each novel, maintaining the basic features of marital discord, presents different features of the problem to which Mrs. Desai gives new aspect and visualization. She bravely puts ahead the fact that in society, marriages usually pursue the jungle law of the survival of the fittest and being physically stronger, man survives. In her novels, marital discord is reflective of the social parlance. Excessive bondage and high level of restrictions imposed on a girl who recently parted away on her parents, hits her psychology leading to excessive frustration. This frustration emerges out in different forms like suicidal tendencies, non-adjustments, marital discords, psychological irritation and many more. Hence society and its restricted canvas play a great role in dealing with the girl's psychology. In the novels of Anita Desai, most of the protagonists find themselves trapped in marriage. Desai comments: "There are those who can handle situations and those who can't and my stories are generally about those who can't. They find themselves trapped in a situation over which they have no control."[2] All her characters fight the current and struggle against it. They know what demands are and what it costs to meet them. There is an effort, in the novels of Desai, to represent and understand the feelings, thoughts and doubts, which remain, locked up within the inner recesses of isolated female heart. Anita Desai's novels represent intense study of the personal life, the conflicts and anxiety which the females face. The characters of Anita Desai are trapped in the web of unreceptive circumstances.

Anita Desai's robustly outspoken manner of propagating the typically unconventional but painfully realistic thesis that the institution of marriage is increasingly taking the shape of the dead albatross around the necks of the modern, emancipated self-respecting women. Desai focuses on the personal struggle of middle-class women in existing India as they endeavor to prevail over the societal limitations forced by a tradition-bound patriarchal society. She has specifically mentioned middle-class women, with which she clearly indicates to such women who are traditionally bounded with certain restrictions of family and society. Her central theme in many of her novels has been portrayal of women's viewpoint, alienation of middle class women and tension that crops up in middle class families. Her novels, with a touch of feminist concern, portray the failed marriage relationship which often leads to disaffection and lonesomeness of the characters. She writes for the woman who is always dominant initially by father and then by husband.

Women have been moved from different stages of life and the novelist sharply focuses upon the emotional reactions of the woman as she experiences these segments. She may be called the spokesperson of our culture as she authentically conveys its problems, uncertainties, complexities and paradoxes. She is an expert in depicting the reaction of women towards a given situation, for example, apathy of parents, ill treatment by in-laws, and indifference of the husband. She describes the Indian woman as a fighter, a sufferer, a brave woman and in later novels eventually a winner because of her determined spirit and attitude of compromise.

Anita Desai's works are directly related to social realities. Social realities are related to new family norms in which it is difficult for a girl to adjust or deal with the

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situations and circumstances. But Anita Desai does not reside like others on social concerns. She explores deep into the forces that condition the growth of a female in this patriarchal male subjugated society. She examines social realities from psychological viewpoint without posing herself as a social reformer. Her novels are studies of the inner life of characters and her talent lies in the description of minute things that are usually ignored.

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

- *Depression:* It is a condition of mental disturbance, severe dejection, accompanied by feelings of hopelessness and inadequacy which create difficulty in maintaining interest in life. Same is the condition of Anita Desai's women characters who deal with frustrations, depression, and rejection in their life. They like solitude and privacy. Anita Desai is concerned with the depression and oppression of these intensely introverts female characters that are unable to vent their emotions. As in *Cry, the Peacock,* moving from one pit of despair and depression to another, Sita's feeling of hopelessness and dejection is depicted by: "All order is gone out of my life. There is no plan, no peace, nothing to keep me within the pattern of familiar everyday life." (79).
- *Time Apart:* Time apart and a lack of worthwhile time with each other serves to get people out of sync. This makes life unbalanced and creates issues which results in marital discord. In the novels of Anita Desai, major reason of marital discord is lack of time given by the male characters to their wives. As in Gautama's, in *Cry, the Peacock,* busy profession spares him no time for his family. With no vocation to occupy, Maya broods over the coldness of her husband: "Telling me to go to sleep while he worked at his papers, he did not give another thought to me" (19). In *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, Sita, in spite of living under the same roof for twenty years and parenting four children they hardly spend time with each other and they always remain like "an ill-assorted couple lacking altogether in harmony in their lives." (Madhusudan Prasad, 65)
- *Sex:* Regularity, quantity, quality and infidelity are all frequent cause of hassle and dissonance in marriage. In reference to Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock,* the root of Maya's distress is her marriage, is his disconnected and aloof behavior to the amount of not fulfilling her physical and emotional desires. "A continuous frustration of the body's sexual needs can be disastrous to somebody like Maya, given her fierce instinctuality." (M. Rajeshwar, 1998:23)
- *Irritating habits:* Irritating habits of partner incite impatience or anger. At times, people find some of their partner's habit undesirable and thus causing friction in relationship. In *Cry, the Peacock*, Maya, the central character of the novel, who has failed to grow out of her childhood, lives in a world of fantasy and fairytale that is far removed from reality. This irritated Gautama who was rather a mature man.
- *Large Family Circle:* Large family or in other words 'joint family' comprises of married couple and husband's other relatives. Life for a newly married woman becomes difficult if in-laws don't give her necessary support and space. It gets difficult for her to adapt in new environment as she comes out of the protective shell of the parental family. In case of Monisha in *Voices in the City,* her life is in a state of depravity due to the domination of her in-laws. Repeated comments from her in-laws on her inability to conceive makes her go through psychological miseries.
- *Expectations:* It is a strong belief about what might happen in the future. Especially in marriage, spouses have certain hopes and expectations from their partners. The difficulty with expectations is that they are often poorly defined and sometimes completely unknown. And unknown things generate curiosity. Most of the people idealize marriage and become disheartened once those prospects aren't met.
- *Family Decision Making:* It relates to important decisions related to family; for e.g. decision involving child planning. For Example: - In *Where Shall We Go this summer?* When Sita came to know that she is fifth time pregnant, the intensity of the feeling of obsession is apparent in her constant fear of child-birth. She feels a strong revulsion as her husband was confused and puzzled. She herself takes a quick decision that she doesn't want to have the baby. This decision makes their married life disturbed.
- *Conflict:* It is a serious disagreement or argument or eternal conflict between the sexes. After marriage when men do not behave according to the expectations of women and vise-a-versa, conflict is obvious. In *Where Shall We Go this Summer?* , Sita's husband gets irritate when Sita decides to go

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to the island in pregnant condition. He says "Not much longer to go now, Sita, it'll soon be over. You are doing a blunder. " (Anita Desai:1975;21) But she wasn't ready to listen and in frustration she says "I am trying to escape from the madness here, escape to a place where it might be possible to be sane again." (Anita Desai:1975;23)

- *Isolation:* Isolation in Anita Desai's novels was a significant cause of Marital Discord. In the novels, isolation operates at two levels- physical and mental. Physical Isolation may be within the wall of the house in which women is alone and nobody is there to care for her and mental isolation occurs when a woman feels that her husband does not care about her. In Desai's *In Custody*, the problem between Deven and Sarla is the lack of togetherness. She expects her husband to take care of her with continued responsibility. Because of opposite temperament, they hardly spend time with each other. Thus making Sarla go through mental trauma and live an isolated life.
- *Lack of Communication:* Husband- wife alienation ensuing from lack of communication and unpredictable inappropriateness form a very important issue of Anita Desai's novels. Anita Desai's women long for love and unity of the strength which they recognize as the panacea of the troubles of the world. Their refusal to cooperation and surrender and the incapability to accept their partner's perspective, unavoidably results in separation and isolation. As in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?,* Sita finds herself alienated from her husband due to lack of communication. She remains an ignored personality. She creates a world of her own which she fills up with extraordinarily sensitive beings. Lack of understanding and incapacity to strike a sympathetic chord with Raman (her husband) leads to discord.
- *Domestic Violence:* As we would mostly assume, domestic violence is not limited to physical violence only. Emotional abuse and economic deprivation can also be categorized under domestic violence. This has also become a significant concern leading to marital discord.

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

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

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

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

Madhusudan Prasad briefly alludes to Maya as a neurotic figure: "In *Cry, the Peacock,* Desai explores the turbulent emotional world of the neurotic protagonist, Maya, who smarts under an acute alienation, stemming from marital discord, and verges on a curious insanity."[6] He partially agrees with discovery of Maya's neurosis in the novel based on 'marital discord' arising out of her 'morbid preoccupation with death' and it shatters the very identity of 'women in our contemporary society dominated by man in which woman longing for love is driven mad or compelled to commit suicide.' In his opinion, the blame should not be put on Gautama's shoulders. Maya's psychosis does not completely occur out of 'marital discord' in which Gautama is utterly to be held responsible. On the converse, he dreadfully tries to understand her problem. Furthermore, in her hours of anxiety Gautama is very much worried about her troubled mind and acts as a nurse. Therefore, she admits that he is "her guardian and protector."[7] The marital discord arises out of her neurotic traits in the face of which she is herself helplessly struggling to disentangle. The novel sensationalizes the fight of life and death of Maya with her irrational personality. Similarly Srinivasa Iyengar says *Cry, the Peacock* is really "Maya's effort to tell her story to herself, to discover some meaning in her life, and even to justify herself to herself."[8]

In *Voices in the City*, Anita Desai's main concern is chiefly with human beings and their important bonding and how in the absence of meaningful relationships a person suffers. She probes the psychic coercion that may affect an individual in forging long term relations and how an individual is exasperated if he is not capable to form such relationships. The theme of partition is treated in terms of mother-child relations which itself is an effect of discord in husband-wife relationship. Monisha live a fragmented and famished life. She is estranged from her mother as well as her husband. Her association with her husband is marked by loneliness and lack of communication. Jiban (her husband) thinks that a woman's most important role is to take care of children and household jobs under the supervision of mother-in-law. He has no time for her and no desire to share his sentiments as he is quite busy in his professional life. Monisha's mis-matched marriage, her lonesomeness, unfruitfulness and pressure of living in a joint family with an insensible husband pushes her to breaking point. The element of love is misplaced in her life and at last she commits suicide.

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?* (1975) is similar to her first novel *Cry, the Peacock,* and focuses on marital dissonance which accentuated the perceptively highly strong nature of their protagonists. The mismatched couple of Raman and Sita are confronted with the same problem of discord. Sita's marriage to Raman was not based on proper understanding and love between them. Desai gives the explanation as "and finally- out of pity, out of lust, out of a sudden will for adventure and because it was inevitable, he married her." (99) Sita represents a world of sentiment and feminine sensibility while Raman is a man with an active view of life and the sense of the practical. Sita is a restless, responsive middle-aged woman with unstable and emotional reactions to many things that happen to her, she always wants to escape reality and does not want to grow up and face the responsibilities of adult life. Raman represents wisdom, shrewdness and an acceptance of the norms and values of society. He is brisk and precise in dealing with the business of life. He is unable to understand the hostility and passion with which Sita reacts against every unpleasant incident. His response to his wife's recurrent outbursts is a mixture of bewilderment, tiredness, fear

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and finally a resigned acceptance of her abnormality. He cannot comprehend her boredom, her frustration with him. In marital life theme of estrangement and lack of communication is discussed by writer in this novel. Since childhood, Sita remains a disregarded character. She is the result of broken family. She yearns to have the attention and love of others but her father remains busy with his chelas and patients. Even after marriage, she remains lonely as her husband Raman fails to fulfill her expectations. He fails to understand her violence and passion just like Gautama in *Cry, the Peacock.* Raman is wise, lucid and passive whereas Sita is unreasonable. Through Sita, Anita Desai voices the awe of facing all alone "the ferocious assaults of existence" (TOI: 13). The conflict between two polarized temperaments and two discordant viewpoints represented by Sita and Raman, sets up marital discord and conjugal misunderstanding as the *leit-motif* of Desai's novels. They are temperamentally poles apart which accounts for their being unable to forge a harmonious marital relationship.

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

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

The problem of marital discord in the novels lie in the fact that Gautama in *Cry, The Peacock*, Jiban in *Voices In The City,* Raman in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* and Deven in *In Custody* are practical and matter -of- fact men while Maya, Monisha, Sita and Sarla in these four novels respectively are idealistic. Maya, Monisha, Sita and Sarla each crave for love and understanding but their tragedy is that they are married to wooden, hard – hearted and insensitive men. All the marriages in her novels are more or less business dealings, the under-counter profits rationally handed over to the male partners. But not infrequently this order is violently convulsed, the caged bird batters its head against the iron bars and manage to leave a few bloodstains. Similarly a wife revolts, runs away, commits suicide, becomes a homicidal maniac, and finds tremendous freedom in blessed widowhood, the great 'No' is said at least to ensure freedom of body and mind. By implication Mrs. Desai makes it clear that either one should remain unmarried, unfettered and unaccepted by the society as such, or marry and be damned to an everlasting private hell. In consequence, therefore, she is taken with definite discomfort by the complacent reading public. Her novels are indeed chilling encounters of the traumatic experiences of married lives.

Anita Desai is a modern writer as she considers new themes and knows how to deal with them. She explores the grief of women living in modern society. She presents her opinion about human relationships and human conditions as a big contemporary problem. Desai deals with intricacies of such relationships as one of her major theme, which is a universal issue. She endeavors to show this problem without any interferes. Anita Desai's novels can almost be examples of her idea that whereas man is concerned with action, experience and achievement, a woman writer is more concerned with thought, emotion and sensation. Thus, each of the above is a very common trouble dealt with in a marriage. Although these are problems, they can also be prospects for growth, learning and accord. Whether these issues remain problems causing stress in marriage or become an opportunity for growth depends upon man-woman attitude. The result of this trend may be continuing declining of the bonds between the generations and a decline in the mean psychological well-being of the population. It should be kept in mind that controlling access to divorce will not address the central problem, as chronic marital discord between continuously married parents appears to be as detrimental as divorce. More generally, the psychological well-being of the next generation of youth will be enhanced if emerging social trends or policy lead to an increase in the number of children raised by parents with stable and harmonious marriages.

The key to successful marriage is love, understanding, mutual respect, trust, commitment and togetherness. While many couples are able to find all the key ingredients in their marital relationships, others find one element or more lacking in their bond. This gives rise to consequences that are not always expected, or desired. This is a reason why a number of couples face adverse consequences, like divorce. Visible reasons why married couples find marriage as an intimidating bond is that they face issues like lack of trust, mutual respect, love and understanding 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

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is a balance, a midway between the two extremes of ideality and fantasy and that is the only way to arrive at a fruitful solution of the problem of marital discord.

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