

“HYPOCRISY OF MARRIAGE”- IN THE NOVELS OF ANITA DESAI

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ABSTRACT

When man lived a life of a settler he started getting emotionally attached within the group. The most basic instinct of companionship was felt as the societies grew and gave rise to the institution known as ‘marriage’. Marriage in Hinduism is a sacred relationship for leading a conjugal life and the purpose was not only to beget children or sexual fulfillment, but also to perform holy ceremonies with the better half of man, called ‘Ardhangini’. The concept of marriage changes from culture to culture but the bond remains lifelong. In the Indian male dominated society the women’s identity was not realized and accepted as mentioned in the holy texts. It was the woman who was expected to adopt the husband’s family culture, traditions and attitudes.

Anita Desai has dealt with problems of love, marriage and sex in her novels in a very realistic and convincing way. She writes the truth without any social fears. Unable to with stand the rationality, detachment and the torture of the husbands the protagonist in Anita Desai’s novels encounters with the psychological disorders and moves towards self-destruction. The aim of the research paper is to study the factors especially the coordinating factors that create the discord and disharmony in the married life through the life of her protagonists in her novels *Cry, the Peacock, Where Shall We Go This Summer, Voices in the City and Fire on the Mountain*. Thus she brings to light the hypocrisy of marriage in India.

KEYWORDS: Conjugal Life, Dissonance, Marriage, Rationality, Self-Destruction

INTRODUCTION

Centuries ago when man gave up his life as hunter-gatherer, he became more sensitive and emotional. He loved to live in groups with an emotional attachment. As these societies grew they felt the most basic instincts of all that is the need of companionship and thus gave rise to an institution known as marriage.

It is said that marriages are made in heaven and celebrated on earth; this belief is true to some extent as it is a special bond. A bond shared between two souls, who tie the wedding knot after promising to be companions for a lifetime. Marriage is an institution that admits men and women to family life. It is a stable relationship in which a man and woman are socially permitted to have children, implying the right to sexual relations.

It is the physical, mental, spiritual unison of two souls. It brings significance, stability and substance to human relationship which is otherwise incomplete. It plays a crucial role in transferring the culture and civilization from one generation to the other, so that the human race is prospered. The institution of marriage is beneficial to the society as a whole, because it is the foundation of the family, which is the fundamental building block of the society.

Edward Westermarck defined marriage as the ‘more or less durable connection between male and female, lasting beyond the mere act of propagation till after the birth of offspring’. According to *Horton and Hurt*, ‘Marriage is the approved social pattern whereby two or more persons establish a family’.

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 ardour until death parts them. **Kapadia**, while discussing the concept of the 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 institution of marriage in India is considered a very important one. It encompasses a number of meanings, apart from being a legalized way of uniting two people. The institution is as old as Rig Vedic age and was given importance in the Vedas; the marriage in Hindu philosophy is holy and sacred union. The purpose of marriage is not to beget children or sexual fulfillment, but also to perform holy ceremonies, Hindu wife is called ‘Ardhangini’ one half of man, and the husband cannot perform religious ceremonies without the presence of his wife.

The married women is given utmost importance in the Hindu society, ironically, widow or single women and divorcee are not given much importance during certain Hindu ceremonies. An incoming daughter-in-law is expected to adopt the lifestyle of a new family.

The gotra and surname of the wife changes as she will be regarded as the husband’s family member Marriage in Hinduism is sacred relationship. It is both an obligatory duty and a sacrament.

The Sanskrit word ‘Vivah’ originated from the three roots sounds vi+vah+ha which means ‘a very special dedication’. A Hindu marriage joins two individuals, so that they can pursue dharma (duty), artha (possessions), kama (physical desires) and moksha (ultimate spiritual release) together.

The marriage procedures, their sanctity, their aim, the respectability they carry etc. cannot be seen in any traditions in the world except in the holy land of India, as said by **Madam Annie Besant**. For a Hindu woman marriage is the end of her maiden life. Marriage is not a celebration of a ceremony. It’s all about a process of promising each other for leading a conjugal life.

According to Hindu mythology everybody carries three debts right from his birth (i) Rishirunam (ii) Devarunam (iii) Pithrurunam . In Pithrurunam we are indebted to our beloved parents who have given us the opportunity to come to this world by giving us birth. We have the responsibility of continuing their vamsa (generation). To clear this owe one has to get married and continue the generations.

Among the various processes of the Hindu marriage, Mangalasutram Dharana and Homam are considered to be the most important rituals of a Hindu marriage. The groom ties the mangalasutram, a sacred necklance which symbolizes commitment, safety and security offered to the bride by the groom as he asks her to share in a long and happy married life with him.

Homam (Holy fire), the bride and the groom pledge and declare to all those present that they have accepted one another voluntarily. Holding each other’s hand, the couple takes seven steps, symbolic of the seven marital vows around

the sacred fire. The holy fire, a great protection against evil, acts as an eternal witness to marriage.

- Together we will acquire energy to share responsibilities of our married life
- Together we will fill our hearts with strength and courage to accomplish all the needs of our life
- Together we will prosper and share our worldly goods and will work for prosperity of our family
- Together we will cherish each other in happiness and in sorrows
- Together we will raise strong and virtuous children
- Together we will fill our hearts with great joy, peace, happiness and spiritual dues
- Together we will remain lifelong partners in the matrimony

In the Ramayana, the wife is said to be the very soul of her husband, she is grihani (lady of the house) in her husband's household; Sachiva (wise counselor); Sakhi (confidante); to her husband in the pursuit of art. Kautilya says that a woman may abandon her husband if he is of bad character, if he is absent for a long time, if he has become a traitor or is likely to endanger her life, is an outcaste or has lost his virility. Every Hindu must marry. “To be mother, were women created and to be fathers, men; the Veda ordained that Dharma must be practiced by man together with his wife” According to Manu, “wife is a divine institution given by God. One should not think that one has obtained her by choice”. Her unity with her husband is established by the Vedas.

There is a difference of opinion among the sages whether the wife could abandon her husband or whether she should carry on the marriage, even in the unapproved form. The aim and objective of this institution is to achieve cohabitation of man and woman, the supreme values of Dharma, Arth, Kam and Purusharth. These are the material determinants of the concept of marriage. The purpose of marriage is that of aiding the creation of the higher and higher intelligent species in the homo-sapiens for achieving the realization of the Supreme. This thought was viewed by many western educated people as the stupidity of the Hindus barring the individual freedom of the soul to enjoy free sex and free life.

But the recent experiments conducted by the Genetics scientists confirmed that the whole range of emotions leading to the love and to the interest of the sex are controlled by a chemical secretion called oxytocin, and the whole objective of this chemical is to continue the process of progeny. The whole of the individual freedom and other behavior exhibited by the species is in confirmation to the control of the chemical named above for the progeny. This is the science of marriage.

If the marriage is carried over a long period, the Indian society thinks the woman as a good wife. This tells us that woman must have no life, no thoughts and no feelings contrary to the husband. The key to successful marriage is love, understanding, mutual respect, trust, commitment and togetherness. If any of the key ingredients are missing in the marital relationship, this gives rise to the adverse consequences creating a rift, disharmony and disrespect towards the relationship. This ultimately contributes to the deterioration of the marital bond.

Genesis 2:24 says “a husband should be joined to his wife”. Other translations say “he should cling or cleave to her. Today we would say he should bond with her. Besides, God she should be his highest commitment. The concept of marriage varies from culture to culture but its role is the same that is union of the two opposite sex. This bond is lifelong

and special”.

DISCUSSIONS

The present study is to focus on the hypocrisy of the concept of Indian marriage. It has been very delicately unfolded and portrayed in the novels of Anita Desai. Anita Desai, the Indo-Anglian writer is one of the modern novelists in English. She is a perfect writer who deals with feminine sensibilities and the predicaments of the married women in India. Indianness and the traditions of India are reflected through her writings.

Elaine Showalter posits three phases in the growth of feminist tradition “limitation, protest and self-discovery”. Anita Desai’s novels are directly related to all the three phases. Anita Desai reveals to us the picture of the marginalization of Indian women as a wife by their husbands and the others around her. She portrays her protagonists as motivating factors in society, initiating and regulating their own lives as well as the lives of others. Subaltern attitude of the women puts her in the castration of all thoughts of feminine liberty and equality.

A woman in the Indian society is not a person, but considered as an accessory, a slave to the master-man. Women in our culture are not individuals in their own right but the objects through whom man aspires for self-affirmation and self-relationship. Women rarely lead an independent life. Her identity is seen in terms of her male counterpart and as such the female world is not one with the male world but it is adjunct to it. The role of a wife restricts a woman’s self-development and circumscribes it.

Her major themes are alienation, existentialism, human relationships, marital discord, violence and death. She reveals the harsh realities of life and is skeptical about the concept of marriage in India. She deals with the mental turmoil and the chaotic condition of a married woman in the Indian society. Most of her protagonists are in the throes of her existence and the social world.

Being neglected, ignored and deprived of conjugal love Desai’s female (wives) characters remonstrate against their male characters (husband) either by violence as self torturing and death. Female protagonists want love, care and attention from their male partners. They make all efforts to get these things but all is in vain. Thus, with the portrayal of characters like Maya, Monisha, Sita and Nanda Kaul, Anita Desai is subversive about the institution marriage. The incompatibility in marriage is gender based, because the attitude towards life of a husband overpowers the attitude towards the life of a wife. She tries to put herself in his mould all alone and thereby undergoes a significant transformation of her inner psyche, a prey to the psychological sufferings of frustration, anger, anxiety, depression and pessimism. Anita Desai’s novels are redolent of the hypocrisy of the Indian marriage.

Man’s aspiration of self-affirmation and domination is fulfilled through woman as objects, which puts women in a sub ordination to the masculine world and her commitment towards her womanhood and their female egos. Desai’s women are not old, orthodox type nor are they modern westernized type. Despite the impact of western culture Anita Desai remains intrinsically Indian in her feminine sensibilities.

Cry, the Peacock is the first novel of Anita Desai. The novel is the fight of life and death of Maya with her neurotic personality. Anita Desai has depicted the failure of the marriage of Maya and Gautama. Maya is married to Gautama who is quite older to her. Gautama often visits Maya’s father and he likes him. Hence Maya is married to him. In India marriage decisions remain within the purview of the family.

Maya is a very sensitive, passionate and emotional woman but Gautama is very practical, insensitive and rational man. Maya deeply loves her husband and expects the same from him. The love begins with the marriage for Indians, especially a traditional Indian woman. The novel opens with the death of the family dog, Toto who was so dear and childlike to Maya. The reaction of Maya and Gautama is very different over Toto's death. Gautama calls the public works department people for the scavenging truck to dispose the corpse of the Maya's pet.

Maya is greatly disturbed by her pet's death, as he is not a dog for her but a child. Gautama asks her to make tea for him:

“It is all over; come and drink your tea and stop crying. You must not cry”. (pp. 8)

Maya, who is in great shock at the death of Toto, Gautama disregards her sentiments and emotions rather act very insensitively. She wants to make love to Gautama, but he stands apart. This happens in the fourth year of their marriage.

Maya longs for the sensuous enjoyment of life, she even takes initiative in love but Gautama's passive and cold reaction shocks her. Driven by an instinctive nature, she expects some emotional and physical satisfaction in married life but she is denied of both. Maya was very much in love with Gautama and needed his companionship and understanding but it was all in vain. We find Maya begging for her husband's support and love.

“I tried to explain Gautama, stammering with anxiety for now, when his companionship was a necessity. How was I required his closet understanding. How was I to gain it? We did not even agree on which points, on what grounds this closeness of mind was necessary. ‘Yes, yes’; he said; already thinking of something else, shrugged my words off as superfluous, trivial and there was no way I could make him believe that this night filled with these several scents, their effects on me, on us, were all important, the very core of the night, of our moods tonight”. (pp. 22)

As what marriage is defined and known is being just practically expected by Maya. Even after four years Maya is childless and longs for companionship and sensuous love proves that Gautama who is a practical and rational man fails to recognize the basics and purpose of the marriage. On the other hand masks himself by preaching the philosophy of Gita, being kind, caring and a modern husband who takes her to cabaret dance club, asks her to sit with him and have tea in their corridor. He neither understands her nor pretends nor wishes her to enter his world. He keeps himself aloof from her in terms of emotional and physical relation.

“In his world there were vast areas in which he would never permit me, and he could not understand that I could even wish to enter them”. (pp. 89)

Maya, a childless woman finds herself suffocating in her loneliness who always longed for her husband's loving attachment. But he belonged to the world of detachment, the different worlds they both lived under the same roof.

She realizes that:

“Already we belonged to two different worlds; his seemed the earth that I loved so, scented with jasmine, colored with liquor resounding with the poetry and warmed by amiability. It was mine that was hell”. (pp. 88)

Unlike, Sita in ‘Where Shall We Go This Summer?’ Maya has cordial relations with her in-laws and the servants in the house. Maya remains dissatisfied not only emotionally but physically too. The sacred relationship of marriage now became a meaningless burden for her. It would not be an exaggeration to state that Gautama was responsible for Maya's chaotic and neurotic condition.

She is shocked by the hypocrisy of the other marriages around her. Maya's mother is not mentioned in the novel, and we do not get any references of her mother either through any discourse with her father or she mentioning of her mother or her photograph. Thus it creates a picture that her father's marriage was not good. So he might be concealing it from Maya. Gautama's parents also lived in an unnatural married life; his sister Nila is a divorcee with unsuccessful married life of ten years. She declares: "After ten years with that rabbit I married, I've learnt to do everything myself".

Leila, Maya's friend who teaches Persian literature in girls' college marries a tubercular man against her parents wish. Maya is surprised that after knowing about his disease she marries him and later leads a gloomy life without wearing any bangles or jewellery. She reveals the mockery of her marriage as a part of her destiny and says, "It was all written in my fate long ago". (pp. 54). Mr. and Mrs Lal are also cursing each other for their deep-rooted dislike for each other and maladjusted marital relationship.

Another incident what Maya recollects is that of Mrs. Sapru who comes to Maya's father as a client with great tears of sorrow. She begs for her case, as she is blamed by her husband for having lost his command over the affairs which has created hatred and criticism for her. Mrs. Pom, the pink and plump lady who is very lively without any sickness or tiredness. But she is also not happy with her husband Kailash who does want to move out his parent's small house in order to save money. She feels miserable and insulted at the questioning and interference of her in-laws in her personal matters. Thus she lacks privacy for herself.

She says: "To live here like two mice in one small room, not daring to creep out, for fear they'll pounce on you, ask you where you're going, when you'll be back, why you aren't wearing the jewellery they gave you...Oh!" (pp. 55)

Finally Maya becomes neurotic and thinks that Gautama has no right to live who has displeasure towards this world and according to the albino astrologer one of them would die, she decides for herself that it is Gautama who has to die and hence pushes him off the terrace. She too kills herself unsatisfied. Meena Belliappa remarks; "The incompatibility of the character stands revealed- Gautama who touches without feelings and Maya who feels even without touching"

Judith Butler in Gender Trouble points out: "The woman in marriage qualifies not as an identity but only as a relational term that both distinguishes and binds the various clans to a common but internally differentiated matrilineal identity". The temperamental and emotional incompatibility of the husband-wife relationship causes the end of their life. Maya's tragedy, is a tragedy of an Indian women destroyed at the altar of marriage and social life.

Voices in the City: Anita Desai has highlighted the marital discord as a serious concern in her works. Her each novel deals with either of the psychological cause creped in due to the unhappy and disturbed married life. She gives new aspect and visualization of the farce concepts of the traditions of the marriage in India. Monisha, one of the protagonist of this novel is just the victim of the same marital discontentment as what Maya undergoes. Monisha is in much distress and frustrated because since her childhood she faces the strain and tension in the husband-wife relationship of her parents.

Desai looks into the reasons for marital discord and effectively illustrates its effects on the family. Like Maya, Monisha also longs for the love and satisfaction from her husband. She is also childless like Maya and a victim of ill matched marriage. Jiban, her husband thinks that a woman's important job is to look after the house and the household jobs under the supervision of mother-in-law and considers his wife worthless. They live in a joint family and he has no time for her, no desire for her and keeps himself busy in his professional life.

Her life is what she narrates:

“My duties of serving fresh chapattis to the uncles as they eat, of listening to my mother-in-law as she tells me the remarkably many ways of cooking fish, of being Jiban’s wife” (p.111)

Jiban is present at home but “Jiban is never with us at all” (118)

Unlike Maya she does not express her emotions and suffers from the moribund feeling. She is married against her wish and the unsuitable alliance creates disharmony in their marital relationship. Her marriage has diverted her from a sensitive, quiet, sensible girl into an uncompassionate lonely, diary writing woman and the pressure of the joint family makes her neurotic such that she hates herself and commits suicide.

She hates diary writing as it demonstrates her of her non-existence; “I am turned into a woman who keeps a diary. I do not like a woman who keeps a diary. Traceless, meaningless, uninvolved--- does this not amount to non- existence, please?”. (p. 138)

Like Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* she fails to communicate with others and even with her own self. She cannot comprehend her experiences and finally ends her life. The situations in the family force her to write a diary which is disliked by her as she desperately wanted privacy: “Only I wish that I were given some tasks I could do alone, in privacy, away from the aunts and the uncles, the cousins and the nieces and the nephews. Alone I could work better and I should feel more-whole. But less and less there is privacy”. (p. 115)

Simone de Beauvoir’s observation is valid: “Marriage subjugates and enslaves woman and it leads her to “an aimless days indefinitely repeated, life that slips away gently toward death without questioning its purpose”.

Desai’s fourth novel *‘Where Shall We Go This Summer?’* depicts the protagonist Sita’s irresistible desire for the quest of meaningful existence. The incompatibility between the couple, the dichotomy of the perception towards life creates a marital discord and void in Sita’s life.

Through this novel Anita Desai has tried to voice the quest for existentialism and unhappiness of millions of married women since ages, her helplessness towards her emotional world, their sensibility as well as psychology. Anita Desai describes the marriages in India and the various complexities involved with them. The entire story deals with mental and emotional struggle-an inner fury which makes us think about the various problems of the Indian women in society and life.

Sita though married to a successful businessman with four children is subjected to misery and dejection. Her unhappiness in married life is marked by Raman’s practical, rational and passive nature. She is paranoiac with concept of life what Raman, his friends and colleagues have.

When Sita comes to know that she pregnant for the fifth time she does not want to give birth nor does she want to abort the child.

When Raman asks her about abortion she shouts

“Mad! You’re quite mad. Kill the baby? It’s all I want. I want to keep it, don’t you understand”.(p. 31)

Raman totally confused with her words says,

“You just said you don’t want it. Now you say you do want it. What’s up? What’s up?” (p 32)

Feeling frustrated and prisoner as a caged in the four walls of Bombay Sita takes refuge from the mundane realities of her marriage to the Manori Island. She is fed up of the violence and the behavior of people around in Bombay. When she decides to go to the Manori Island with her daughter Menaka and her son Karan, Raman is irritated at her decision and finally resigns to her abnormality.

Since childhood Sita remains a neglected character. She is the result of broken family. As the other side of the coin; Sita's father had a face of a deceiver in his personal life, which shattered and shook Sita. Sita's mother renounces her family life and becomes a Sadhika at Benaras. Her father has a strange attraction for her elder sister Rekha and the fisher-woman of the island. She is shocked to know from Jeevan, her brother that Rekha is their step-sister.

Sita yearns for her husband's attention, love and concern. Even after marriage she remains lonely as her husband is always busy with his work, friends and colleagues. He fails to address to her expectations. As a result the gap of marital discord and disharmony is widening. She feels ignored and unwanted as the children are also growing and are becoming independent.

Raman's indifferent attitude towards her makes her feel that he has married her out of sympathy, lust of her beauty, friendly and a social responsibility. When Raman comes to the island to take his children, he keeps distance from her. When Sita quotes the happiest moment of her life, initially Raman gets annoyed but later realizes his mistakes and is ready to change.

“Women are meant to be loved, not understood”, *Oscar Wilde* once said.

Thus the battle between Sita and Raman is resolved. Sita feels emotionally drained out battling against her husband and family. Men and women who come together in marriage lack knowledge of various psychological and social aspects of life, proper understanding and self-control. By committing herself to her pregnancy and choosing to give birth to her baby, Sita frees herself from the strictures of marriage and defines herself in relation to non-patriarchal values. Ironically, woman creates ethnic and racial boundaries by giving names and identities but their own identities remain suspect, insignificant and anonymous to men.

Fire on the Mountain' novel grapples with the theme of disrespect and dissonance of the three generations. Nanda Kaul the widow of the former Vice Chancellor, Panjab University has chosen the house on the top of the mountain in Carginano, in the village of Kasauli. Nanda Kaul wishes to live a lonely life as she had lived a life full of sounds, noise, looking after children, family, entertaining guests and discharging responsibilities.

Socially Nanda Kaul has a high standard being the wife of a Vice Chancellor, but sick emotionally. Her life with her husband is like a showpiece for his bungalow and is faced by humiliations at his hands. In reality she is not the queen of his heart but an unloved woman, a mother of his children and an obedient daughter-in-law. Her husband's lifelong affair with Miss David, the mathematics teacher, leads to her tension and trauma. She had not only tolerated this man but borne him many children. She became an alien to her children she neither understood nor loved them.

Rosemarie Tong observes: “Sometimes women play their roles not so much because they want to, as because they have to in order to survive economically and/or psychologically. Virtually all women engage in the feminine role-playing”.

To save herself from self betraying she used tranquilizers and engaged herself in discharging the family duties. Nanda Kaul is disturbed at the news of the arrival of her psychologically ill great grand daughter, Raka who is sent from

Geneva because of her excessive drinking and aggressive father who torments her mother. Tara, Nanda Kaul's daughter informs Nanda Kaul about Raka. Tara at this age also is facing the abuses by her husband. It is one of the strategies of the men in the Indian society for their power assertion, they ventilate in bullying and committing atrocities on their wives.

Ila Das, Nanda Kaul's childhood friend turned as a social worker is being raped and murdered by the father of the girl child whose child marriage is being opposed by Ila Das. Nanda Kaul finds herself guilty of her murder for allowing to her to leave the house at night. At last Nanda Kaul hangs herself for it and meantime Raka sets the forest on fire.

This novel can be considered as a masterpiece for the hypocrisy of marriage in India. Nanda Kaul who must be close to her eighties hears her daughter suffering from the abuses who must at her sixties and her granddaughter in Geneva suffering from the domestic violence and the marital discord what she had faced in her life.

Marital dissonance in case of Nanda Kaul and her husband, Tara and Rakesh; Raka's parents and the alienation of the pastor of Kasauli Church from his wife represent the hypocrisy of married life in India. Thus Anita Desai lodges her protest against unhappy married life in the phoney world which is masked as descent and harmonious institution of married life.

CONCLUSIONS

Anita Desai analyses and unveils the hidden motives of a man behind his facial reality of his conscious mind. Women's discrimination is still continued in hundred different ways. The wife is no more than a chattel, a slave who suffers the aggravated assaults committed by the husband. All the male characters, as husbands in her novels demonstrate sleaze towards the sacred traditions and the institution of marriage. The dedicated wives in the novels have to remunerate their life for the sordid acts of their husbands.

Anita Desai brings out the truthfulness and the reality of the relationships. The truth is that the traditions have always convinced the male superiority and wants women in this relationship of marriage to live in a vassal situation. Women's individual identity has not been positively and open mindedly realized in marriage. She is neither accepted as a full human being nor an equal partner to man in marriage. This attitude causes her consistent suffering and miserable life as portrayed by Anita Desai in her novels.

Marriage in Desai's novels is business transactions. But sometimes the order is violently convulsed; the caged bird batters its head against the iron bars and is a bloody mess. A wife revolts runs away, commits suicide, becomes a homicidal maniac or finds tremendous freedom in blissful widowhood. Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* believes that in every situation marriage is a yoke that destroys the female. She has skillfully portrayed her protagonists highly sensitive, turbulent with passions and emotions and terribly fed-up with the burden of living helplessly with absurd realities of the institution of marriage in the Indian society.

The most noteworthy thing of marriage in India is more related to procreation than anything else and binds a woman in to it. She can neither escape nor run away; because it is considered as a disgrace not only for her family but to the whole society and its traditions. Sita, in 'Where Shall We Go This Summer?' faces the same situation and dares not to come out of her marriage. Therefore in spite of sufferings she remains in marriage and never tries to give up her relationship with her husband.

In ancient India we had polygamy and the Shastras described the duties of a co-wife but in modern times bigamy

is a crime. But man being polygamous in nature he at times carries a life-long relationship with the other woman, as the husband of Nanda Kaul in the novel, 'Fire on the Mountain' who had an lifelong affair with Miss David, the arithmetic teacher. But he could not dare to break the social code and marry her because she was a Christian. The loss of Nanda Kaul's conjugal life is due to Prof. Kaul's cowardice and selfishness, who gave insincerity to their married life. On the contrary Nanda Kaul readily and sincerely discharged her duties towards the family as a mother, housewife and hostess, in doing so she lost her individuality and identity.

This is what the hypocrisy of marriage being presented by Anita Desai in her characters of Maya, Monisha and Nanda Kaul. She also challenges the traditional purpose of marriage of progeny as Maya and Monisha are left as childless. It is just a mere farce of the traditions which are not been followed in this male dominating society. She also focuses on the issue of marriage being considered as an obligatory responsibility of the parents in India, which forces the girls to marry a man who is not of her choice but chosen by their parents. Maya and Monisha are the victims of this obligation.

All these husband-wife relationships point out the futility of the institution marriage and through her characters she proves that most marriages are union of incompatibility. Marriage is a union of two souls and two bodies; it needs to be established very consciously and carefully. But generally the society does not offer apt time and notion for this and thus the outcomes of these relations are clashes, desperation, obsession, alienation and loneliness ultimately leading to destruction.

Woman in India is projected and recognized with her conventional roles assigned to her in the traditional socio-cultural milieu but her vital self remains unidentified, unrealized, caged and humiliated beyond repair. What Anita Desai proves is that wife and husband are the two wheels of the life chariot. No one is superior to each other. Once they are married they are not just two individuals, but they are a couple. She also urges to maintain the sanctity of the marriage and its aim as mentioned earlier. Marital relationships are repetitions of relationships with parent's patterns from childhood. Psychological adjustment is a safe key to a healthy compromise and cordial existence in a conjugal life. Husband and wife need to nurture the strong feeling that they are complimentary to each other.

"In Indian society, if a marriage is successful then the credit is seldom given to a female for her contribution to make it successful. In fact, it becomes successful because of her grace, love, wisdom and a sense of understanding, tolerance and sacrifice. If a marriage is unsuccessful then the woman is held responsible for the same" says P.F.Patil

P. F. Patil further suggests that "All marriages in Desai's novels are more or less business transactions. A marriageable daughter is handed over to the male partners without considering the delicacy of her mind and feelings. She has to fulfill either the parent's responsibilities or the relative's demands with different intentions".

The burden of marriage weighs much more heavily upon the woman than the man. The redefining of the institution of marriage is the one constant strand that runs throughout the novels apart from her feminine sensibilities. Anita Desai highlights the three radical concepts- adultery, dissonance and disharmony.

Marriage is a unique relationship different from all others; it is not merely a private institution but witness to God's plan for both life and love in a way that no other relationship humans can have. Women and men find companionship in this relationship, where they complement each other, not because they are the same but because they are different.

Marriage is a pious and permanent union of man and woman. It is a bond that is more complex than sex and it grows with the years, with the children, with the kind of understanding that has to develop between people who go through

that round. Here one is reminded of **Kierkegaard** who in *Either/or a Fragment of Life* explores the nature of decision with special reference to three cases marriage, friendship and vocation.

Marriage Kierkegaard thinks is a lifelong union of two persons who commit themselves to each other for better or worse, a relationship that utterly transcends any temporary mood or infatuation: “Husband and wife promise to love one another for eternity.... If marriage has reality, then he is sufficiently punished by forfeiting this happiness; if it has no reality, it is absurd to abuse him because he is wiser than the rest” Anita Desai thus emphasis on the worth and dignity of the individual. Marriage is not just living in the same house with someone you love, but something more than that.

Husband-wife alienation are dominant is all the above mentioned four novels of Anita Desai, which causes fatalism and deterioration of women in the male prejudiced society and her annihilation at the altar of marriage. Childlessness is a curse in the Indian society which not only causes inner conflicts but also develops maladjustments in the family, which aggravates leading to destruction like Maya and Monisha. Meena Shirwadkar feels: “Anita Desai’s portraits of wives reveal the harrowing effect of urban dehumanization and alienation on them”.

Anita Desai in her interview with Yashodhra Dalmia says: “One’s pre-occupation can only be a perpetual search for meaning, for value, for – dare I say it – truth. I think of the world as an ice-berg- the one-tenth visible above the surface of water is what we call reality, but the nine-tenths that are submerged make up the truth, and that is what one is trying to explore”.

Marriage is become as an intimidating bond because the partners face a number of problems due to lack of trust, mutual respect, love and understanding where woman is victimized in the Indian patriarchal culture. It is the concept of marriage in India that makes a woman sad, isolated and helpless. Marriages discussed above conclude that the emotional conflicts are fused with her physical struggle which intensifies to bruise her sincerity and sensibility of her delicate mind. Her integrity is cracked due to her sufferings in the marital life and accounts for the disillusionments regarding marriage.

I would like to quote here another Indian woman writer’s perception of marriage; **Shanta Gokhale** considers that marriage is a “pit the poacher digs and covers with creepers”, and the wife and the husband are like “the bullocks ...yoked to each other and to the water-wheel ...treating the circle”.

Indian marriage is set-up and performed with all varied kinds of symbolic rituals and gestures such that it is made to seem to a woman that it would shelter, cherish and preserve the warmth of the relationship, but in the nutshell it is nothing but a contract of labour division of life to produce the generations to follow the same code of conduct and keep suppressing the feminine voice.

Bhagyashree Varma rightly suggests; “Marriage is a legalized social blackmail for woman. No woman in the world, once she knows the true implications of marriage as a social bond, would like to give man the emotional power and position as an opportunity to disturb, deprive, demoralize or dehumanize her”.

Sanctity of marriage is a mockery where people do not live up to the vows or oaths they take during performing the various marriage ceremonies. Purity and Solemnity is discarded, which is posing a threat to the institution of marriage in India.

“A woman must be honored by her father, brother, husband, brother-in-law and her son who desire their welfare. Where women are honored, the gods are pleased, but where they are not honored, no sacred rites yield any reward”, says

Manu in Manusmriti.

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