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AGONY OR ECSTASY:
INTRICACIES OF RELATIONSHIPS IN THE NOVELS OF ANITA DESAI

D.H. Lawrence once remarked: The great relationship for humanity will always be the relation between man and woman. It is this extremely crucial cardinal, sensitive relationship which goes haywire in the fictional cosmos of Anita Desai's novels. An old adage goes: Marriages are made in heaven and executed on earth. Marriage is a lifelong happy union of two minds, characterized by love, understanding and adjustment. Women reveal their inner nature and respected complicated personalities through the language patterns and images which well-up in their individual minds.

The women populating the novelistic cosmos of Desai's work react sometimes violently and sometimes silently, unheard and unknown by others. A woman's role as a wife blocks her freedom. Simon De Beavoir believed that the institution of marriage has marred the spontaneity of feeling between the marital lovers by changing their feelings into mandatory duties and rights. A woman is more than her body. She is not only a Being-in-itself but also a Being-for-itself.

D.H. Lawrence once remarked: The great relationship for humanity will always be the relation between man and woman. It is this extremely crucial cardinal, sensitive relationship which goes haywire in the fictional cosmos of Anita Desai's novels. An old adage goes: Marriages are made in heaven and executed on earth. Marriage is a lifelong happy union of two minds, characterized by love, understanding and adjustment.

Relationships are like thin threads that bind one human being to other fellow human beings. Much of the interaction that transpires in life happens to involve one relationship or

another. These relationships while acting as a binding factor for some become a stifling sentence for others.

The construct of relationships has been skillfully analysed in Anita Desai's novels and focuses on the intricacies of relationships. The themes persistently and recurrently used by Anita Desai in her novels are: human relationships, particularly that of man and woman; alienation, loneliness and lack of communication brought upon the individuals by the pressures exerted by existential realities. Desai is not a votary of social or political probing, the outer weather, the physical geography, or the visible action like Nayantra Sahgal. Her forte is the exploration of the interior world. To project this existential predicament Anita Desai uses the weapon of relationships – incompatible couples, acutely sensitive wives, and dismal, callous, inconsiderable, ill-chosen husbands; hypersensitive, thin-skinned, individuals above whom neurosis looms as in evident doom; and Oedipal and Electra complexes marred children having disturbed relations with their parents. What is no innovative in the treatment of this theme by Anita Desai is that she explores so minutely the depth of her characters and analyses so thoroughly their motives that they were unimaginable among earlier Indo-Anglian novelists. Now the plot of the story is not so important as is the fluctuating relationships. Unlike others, Desai registers, as does the seismograph, the mental vibrations of her characters.

In her first novel, *Cry, the Peacock* (1963), Anita Desai portrays the psychic tumult of a young and sensitive married girl Maya who is haunted by a childhood prophecy of a fatal disaster. It gives expression to the long smothered wail of a lacerated psyche, the harrowing tale of blunted human relationship being told by the chief protagonist herself. She is the daughter of a rich advocate in Lucknow. Being alone in the family, her mother being dead and brother having gone to America to carve his own independent destiny, she gets the most of her father's affection and attention and in her moments of affection exclaims to herself: "No one, no one else, loves me as my father does". The excessive love Maya gets

from her father makes her have a lop sided view of life. She feels the world to be a toy made especially for her, painted in her favourite colors, and set moving according to her tunes. Having lived, thus, a careless life under the indulgent attentions of her loving father, Maya desires to have similar attentions from her husband, Gautama, a father surrogate. The very beginning of the novel highlights the husband-wife alienation theme by unfolding the relationship of Maya and Gautama. Their fate reminds one of that of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay in Virginia Woolf's novel *To The Lighthouse*. An average evening for Maya is hardly more than a "a quiet, formal waiting" (7). Their married life is punctuated all along by "matrimonial silences" (12) and Gautama's "hardness... his coldness and incessant talk of cups of tea and philosophy". (9) What pains Maya most is her utter "Loneliness in this house", "I was alone", she complains, "Yes, I whimpered, it is that I am alive" (9). She fails to understand the total lack of communication on the part of Gautama: "How little he knew of my suffering, or of how to comfort me... Telling me to go to sleep while worked at his paper, he did not give another thought to me, to either the soft, willing body, or the lonely, wanting mind that waited near his bed (9). We become fully aware of Maya's hypersensitive and highly disturbed state of mind when we see her, in the very beginning of the novel, reacting to the untimely death of her pet dog. She rushes to "the garden tap to wash the vision from her eyes", (15) but her husband remains undisturbed. His attitude agonizes her. An ever widening gap in communication between the husband and wife is felt throughout the novel. She muses: "had there been a bond between us, he would have felt its pull... but, of course, there was none.... There was no bond, no love-hardly any love". A restlessness always boils within her and the strangeness holds them apart. She feels 'defenceless and utterly alone' in the company of the "bleak, comfortless figure" passing as her husband. The reader can't help but hear the echoes of the voice of Eliot's protagonist in *The Wasteland*: "Stay with me. Speak to me. Why do you never speak? Speak. What are you thinking of? What thinking? What? I never know what you are thinking. Think."

The alienation of Maya is rooted essentially in Gautama's philosophical detachment, his imperviousness to the 'beautiful yet tremulous' beauty of the natural world and his gross unconcern over the 'basics of life' Gautama would shrug Maya's 'words off as superfluous, trivial' (19). This 'gaunt, sarcastically silent intellectual' was ever 'eager to pursue the thread of logic to its end, slowly and steadily as a meticulous tortoise'. (74,208). IN a different situation, Gautama would have proved to be a remarkably successful husband. But he and Maya are irreconcilables. Their union is likely to ruin each other's life and happiness. Maya's rootlessness keeps on increasing everyday. It culminates in a kind of schizophrenia—"a body without a heart, a heart without a body')196). Ultimately, Gautama begins to appear to her as a 'guest who might never be encountered again' and as an 'unreal ghost'. Her intense absorption only enslaves her. What Gautama taught her, she thinks, was pain: 'there were countless nights when I had been tortured by a humiliating sense of neglect, of loneliness, of desperation that would not have existed had I not loved him so, had he not meant so much'. This is the typical condition of an unfortunate person who is alienated through and through Her obsession drives her to a curious insanity, "yes, I am going insane, she herself admits. I am moving further and further from all wisdom, all calm, and I shall soon be mad, if I am not that already".

Cry, the Peacock is a pioneering effort towards delineating the psychological problems of an alienated person. Maya's moods, obsessions, dilemmas, and abnormality are conveyed very effectively in it. Her uneasiness and infantilism have found a powerful expression in the novel. As Meena Beliappa maintains, "The ardent introspection of Maya marks a valuable introversion in Indian fiction. It points to a line of significant development exploration not of the 'social' man, but 'the lone individual'.

A brief glance at Anita Desai's second novel, *Voices in the City* (1965), would bring forth the theme of dried up human relationships more significantly. It sketches the spiritual odyssey of a world-weary, lean, hungry-looking journalist named Nirode, doomed to reside

in Calcutta, the 'city of death'. He is a sensitive, proud, and talented young man with abilities to excel others. The sense of insecurity, which he develops from his early childhood, however, makes him unaware of himself and his aim in life. Thinking of his young brother Arun who shines in his studies and games and thus claims a sum of money set aside by their father for the education abroad of one of the two sons, Nirode reflects: "It might have been he, he knew that, had he not, as a child, an emotional and disorderly school boy, fallen from his horse and declared to his father, through tears, that he hated horses, sports and would never refuge in 'shadows, silence, stillness' for 'that was exactly what he would always be left with. "talking to Professor Bose, he tells him:" "I don't know. How can one survive? It seems hard" (20). One single factor, which damages and destabilizes Nirode's personality most is his mother-fixation. Like Paul Morel in D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, he develops Oedipal relationship with his mother. His childhood is conditioned by his love for her and hatred for his father. After his father's death he wishes to be a protective force for his mother, a husband-substitute for her, but as he suspects her of an intimate relationship with and amorous overtures towards Major Chadha, he grows jealous of his rival and is completely alienated from his mother. He begins to hate her. "To think that all through his life he had despised his father and adored his mother, only to turn after his father's death, to pity for him and loathing of that same, unchanged mother-this moved him now" (66). He is constantly haunted by the morbid thoughts of his mother's amorous relations with the Major. He asks Amla to "go home to mother awhile, and grow up a bit by listening to her experiences of love" (196). Nirode's loathing for his mother cuts him off from his family. He wishes to delink himself completely from it. He tells his friend Sonny" :Look, do me a favour. Don't keep bringing my family in, Sonny boy.... I neither inherited nor do I now borrow a single damn thing from my family. May they rot, may they flourish- as long as they leave me alone" (58). He rebuffs his mother's offers of financial help to him and later when she desires him to sign the papers of transfer of money in his name in a bank, he tells

Monisha” “Tell her to go shove it up that old major of hers, all her sticking cheques... I’m done with signing my name, believing my name, or having a name” (1380. Alienated from his mother, Nirode turns rootless. He loses his faith in life and develops an attitude of “complete negation”. He pursues one failure after another and treats it as a creed of his life. “He wants to be done with happiness and suffering, see beyond them to the very end”(42)” Tumult of a deep unease” (68) agitates his mind and he feels he was born with his ‘heart emptied out’. He hates happiness and derives consolation from his suffering. He tells David: ‘What worse death than at the hands of happiness?. Anyone who feels happy deserves to die’(96).

The disenchantment faced by Nirode runs in the family. His sister Monisha is also haunted by morbid musings about death. Like Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* Monisha too lacks love for her husband and is unable to establish any life-giving rapport with him. She does not find any love even in her relationship with her mother. She feels that she and her brother Nirode lack this vital element of life and ‘in place of this love that suffuses the white face of this mystic waif, we possess a darker, fiercer element-fear”. (139) Married against her will to a ‘blind moralist’, a ‘rotund, minute-minded and limited’ official, who is addicted to quoting complacently and indiscriminately authorities such as Burke, Wordsworth, Gandhi and Tagore (198)- all spokesmen of individual liberty, she finds her life a virtual imprisonment. She is always haunted by her ‘confused despair’ and a sense of ‘a life dedicated to nothing’— a life teeming with ‘these trivialities, these pettiness of our mean existence’ (121-122). The oppressive lack of privacy, her sterility and her in-law’s suspicion, the absence of love and understanding in her life and the resultant loneliness within and without go to make Monisha a ‘pathetic figure’.

The scenario of Anita Desai’s next novel, *Bye-Bye Blackbird* (1971), is analogous to her earlier novels. It is an authentic pursual of human relationships be deviled by cultural encounters. Of all novels of Desai, this one is most intimately related to her own experiences.

She told in an interview 'of all my novels it most rooted in experience and the least literary in derivation'. The novel captures the confusions and conflicts of another set of alienated persons. It has rightly been maintained that the immigrant blackbird involves issues of alienation and accommodation that the immigrant has to confront in an alien and yet familiar world. She analyses this problem by delineating realistically the situations of three different characters, Dev, Adit and Sarah and by exploring the effect of racial hatred on their sensibility. Dev, a new comer to England, feels put out in the early stages of his stay in London because of the insults hurled at the black by the callous and arrogant English men, but gradually turns Anglophiliac and finds the life of an alien 'enthralingly rich'(99) and highly enterprising. Adit's situation is just the opposite to Dev's. He who has married an English girl and settled in England with no desire to return to India and is often ridiculed by his friends Dev as 'book licking today', and 'spineless imperialist lover '(21) because of his unreserved love for England, gradually feels disenchanted with London. He begins to consider himself 'a stranger, non believer' (212), and as the growing nostalgia torments him, he makes up his mind to leave for India to lead a real life short of all pretences.

Sarah's situation is more complex and precarious than that of Adit. Had Anita Desai chosen to treat her less realistically and more imaginatively, she would have found in her character enough scope for the tragic dimensions of her other heroines. Sarah is, however, practical and balanced and hence faces the reality boldly and rationally. Being married to Adit, an Indian, in the land of racial hatred, she feels at times divided and is unable to decide which is her real self-her-self as Sarah, an English girl, the Head's secretary in the school for English children or herself as Mrs. Sen, the wife of Adit, grinding spices for his curry which she herself does not care to eat. She doubts if outside of these two 'roles' she plays everyday, she has any existence or identity of her own. She wonders, with great sadness, 'if she would ever be allowed to step off the stage, leave the theatre and enter the real world –whether English or Indian, she did not care, she wanted only its sincerity, its truth' (39).When Adit

himself to leave for India and she decides to accompany him, she knows that she is bidding farewell to her English self; “it was her English self to which she must say good bye.

Though none of the characters in this novel are driven to morbid hallucinations and tragic degeneration like Monisha, Maya, and Nirode, yet they still face blankly at the pale picture of faded relationships. The basic relationship that man owes to another due to their same configuration is found missing in the present times. English men are non receptive towards black men and hence the bond of human brotherhood is never formed between them. Anita Desai has very beautifully woven this missing link in the present novel. Even a relationship as intimate as that of husband and wife has abandoned its earlier meaning and signification. Sarah is Adit’s wife only for the namesake. The bonds of love, freedom, and togetherness that mark any man-woman relationship is seen missing in their marriage. This marriage instead of giving her a name has, in fact, snatched away her entire identity. She is caught between two worlds-both of which she cannot fully accept without killing something inside her.

Anita Desai has probed the theme of human relationships more minutely and skillfully in *Where shall We go this Summer?* (1975). In this novel, she returns to the theme of alienation and in communication in married life. Just like Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* and Monisha in *Voices In the City*, the protagonist of the novel, Sita suffers from the pangs of loneliness not only of a woman and of a wife but also of a mother. The marital discord crops chiefly from the dichotomy between two irreconcilable temperaments and diametrically opposite viewpoints represented by Sita and her husband, Raman. Sita, a sensitive, over-emotional, middle-aged woman saddled with four children, feels alienated from her husband and children and undergoes unbearable mental agony because of her high-strung sensibility and explosive emotionality. She has a ‘dry, worn face’,(17) which has assumed ‘the aged stillness’(18). She feels suffocated by the ‘vegetarian complacency’, stolidity, ‘insularity’,

and unimaginative way of life of her husband and his people. As a result of her experiences, boring and monotonous, 'she never got used to anyone'.

Sita is the daughter of a political celebrity, a well-known freedom fighter, whom many of his disciples consider 'the second Gandhi (62). As her father was mostly in jail and she had no mother to look after her, she was denied the regular life of a normal child (46). Sita has thus 'lived a strange and unusual life' (46). After independence her father comes to settle in beautiful natural surroundings of Manori Island accompanied by his disciples and his family. He calls his house Jeevan Ashram, 'the house of the Soul', and tries to put on the island his social theories about simple life untouched by the comforts of machine age into practice. To Sita her father is an enigma. With passage of time she found her father turning into a veritable legend on the island as its simple and gullible villagers and fisher folk respect and admire him for his miracles – 'magic cures' – providing them sweet water of the well to drink, teaching them how to grow a rich crop, and ridding the land of snakes and scorpions. Not being able to communicate with him, she forms uncertain and vague impressions about him. She doubts if he cures by magic and not by medicines and faith. She also discovers that his father's 'daylight, practical charisma' has 'its underlit night-time aspect' (55). Once climbing to his attic, the prayer room, secretly in the dead of night, she finds him pounding pearls and gold to be distributed to villagers with their medicines. Sita is also suspicious of her father's relationship with her step sister Rekha across whose stolid shoulders he places his arm while walking and whose fingers he squeezes fondly while sitting by her side. All these experiences make Sita lose grip on life and develop in her mind uncertain and unrealistic attitude towards life.

After the death of her father, Sita is taken to Bombay by Raman, the son of her father's old friend Deedar, who later turns out to be her husband. Though Sita has four children with Raman, she remains restless and dissatisfied with her settled and dull domestic life. Small, commonplace incidents like crows preying on the wounded eagle lying in the

street or Karan scratching his leg by the spoke of the railing while climbing the gate, or children enacting a fighting scene witnessed in a film, or her daughter crumbling a sheaf of new buds unconsciously, or tearing her: Bored with her dull life she often sits smoking as if waiting for someone: 'Bored' How' why' with what' and could not begin to comprehend the boredom'(33). She tells her husband that : "I think what I'm doing is trying to escape from the madness here, escape to the place it might be possible to be sane again'(23). She considers her visit to the island as 'a pilgrimage' 'to beg for the miracle of keeping her baby unborn'(20). She also traits it as a place of refuge from the boring life of the town. But when her daughter, Menaka who has had enough of 'her mother's disorder and nonsense' (86), messages her father secretly to take them to Bombay, Sita feels like ' a woman unloved, woman rejected' (97) and betrayed by her children. She ultimately decides to return and accompany her husband. She however, unable to decide 'which half of her life was real and which unreal'- her half that experienced ' primitive reality' of the island or the other half which enjoyed the civilized reality of the mainland?

In yet another novel *Fire on the Mountain* 1977) Anita Desai explores the intricacies of human relationships that are turning sour in the light of modern awakening. In the present novel the focus is on the relationship of Nanda Kaul and her great grand daughter, Raka. The loneliness and the isolation of the two have been presented in with much ingenuity and minuteness. I the perfect privacy of her sprawling house 'Carignano' Nanda Kaul lives like 'a recluse'. She has been conceived of as 'a charred tree trunk in the forest, a broken pillar of marble in the desert, a lizard on a stone wall' (23) with only one difference, viz. she, unlike them, is capable of irritation and annoyance. In this 'lonely house', (16) she has been living all these years alone. After living the life as the Vice Chancellor's wife, as a pivot of a busy world', which had stifled her, all she needed was to live like 'a recluse out of vengeance for a long life of duty and obligation'. It was the place, and the time of life, that she wanted and prepared for all her life..... and at last she had it. She wanted no one else and nothing else. It

was with these feelings that Nanda Kaul had to welcome her great great granddaughter, Raka, into her house and life. Unprepared for this new contingency, she petulantly asks: “Have I not done enough and had enough? I want no more. I want nothing. Can I not be left with nothing?” (17). She loathes the very idea of involving herself in any way anymore. The arrival of Raka would only mean letting the ‘noose slip once more round hr neck’(19).

Raka on the other hand, just like any other character of Anita Desai is herself suffering from the pangs of loneliness and solitude. To Nanda, Kaul she appears as ‘like one of those dark crickets that leap up in fright but do not sing, or a mosquito, minute and fine, on thin, precarious legs’(39). Raka was the finished, perfect model of what Nanda Kaul was merely a flawed experiment. Raka, the latter feels, had not arrived at this condition ‘by a long route of rejection and sacrifice –she was born to it, simply’ (48). She herself says” “I’m shipwrecked. I’m shipwrecked and alone’ (61-62). The two soon work out ‘the means by which they would live together’ unobtrusively (46). Raka is busy with her natural allurements and Nanda Kaul is reading, characteristically enough, from *The Pillow Book of Seri Shonagon*—A Woman lives Alone. The irony here lies in the fact that two people related to each other by blood cannot find a way to communicate. They are happy living their own independent lives under the same roof. It is this incommunication, this insensitivity, and this deep dark silence in relations that Anita Desai works to project in her novels.

This incommunication, silence and loneliness form a new face in Anita Desai’s next novel *In Custody* (1984).. Here the unsaid functions to create meaning in the otherwise meaningless life of her character, Deven. By setting up a more concrete binary of meaning and the meaningless, the unsaid forces the reader to re-evaluate the purpose of communication in an individual context throughout a book which, paradoxically, explicitly illustrates methods of articulation and response. In the end, Deven, a failed communicator, is left responsible for the containment of the past, unchanging and repressed. Deven is trapped, trapped between the said and the unsaid, between his life and what his life could have been .

Solanki notes that Desai's protagonists are often portrayed in times of great weakness. She states, Anita Desai's novels are concerned with the portrayal of the most troubled part of her protagonists' life. They are 'at their wit's end; the world seems to be out of joint', and 'in their helplessness, as they feel like trapped birds'(22).

Deven's inability to impact others in a significant manner, his apprehension to see beyond his own limited scope, and his failure to communicate or accomplish any of his goals creates a personal universe we will term meaningless. As readers, we first meet Deven in relation to another character, highlighting his static dependency and dimensionless existence. It is Murad's agency that brings Deven alive at the beginning of the novel. Desai's opening asserts, "(Deven's) first feeling on turning around at the tap on his shoulder while he was buying cigarettes at the college canteen and seeing his old friend Murad was one of joy... but this rapidly turned to anxiety when Murad gave a laugh....'But I have a class just now, Murad', he stammered as Murad squeezed his shoulders tightly as if he did not intend to let him go'(9). We can understand from the text's implication that Deven was facing away, with his back to us, until Murad's tap turned him around to face the reader. Deven is an insignificant character of the background until Murad turns him around. Once turned to face front, he is unsure of how to react. Deven feels tied to his daily pattern of classes, his daily obligations. Yet, he feels anxious rejecting Murad as well and can hardly respond appropriately to release himself from Murad's grip.

This opening to Desai's novel is very significant in terms of Deven's place in the world and the way in which his relationships will function. Deven is heavily dependent on others, has very little agency, and has a difficult time communicating his feelings or desires with authority. Stimulating his own betrayed, Deven allows his life to be torn up into small, insignificant, non-functioning relationships by his ineptitude towards the explicit exchanges he is invited to participate in as well as his refusal to accept the implicit meaning of the unsaid which arises beneath and between his failed interactions. Thus, Desai opens her

novel with the non-hero, Deven, involved in a mainly parasitic relationship from which he cannot, and does not even recognize he should escape. Deven ignores the unsaid within him that seeks to alert him to the dangers or truth that are inherent in the situation.

This failing will follow Deven throughout the novel, condemning the relationships and methods of communication with which he is involved. The unsaid that Deven leaves hanging in the air, unarticulated, is destructive to his command of the class and his satisfaction as a teacher. The students' expressions as they look toward Deven reflect the manner in which he impacts their lives 'The expression he saw – of boredom, amusement, insolence and defiance-made him look away quickly and focus his eyes upon the door... opened on to the passage, freedom and release', Desai illustrates (12). Beyond the college grounds, Deven exerts little more agency and purports little more significance than he manages at the college. In comparison to his wife and son, Deven realizes his own passivity and distance. In a moment of household peace, Desai describes Deven's condition in relation to his family by stating, 'Sprawled upon the broken cane chair in the veranda, he listened to Sarla moving about the house inside, and watched his son playing on the steps. They were busy, he idle, They were alive, he in limbo' (69). Except for outbursts of anger, Deven remains mainly an observer in his family environment, relegated to the background of his own home. He even goes so far as to see himself between death and life, so greatly distanced he feels from the world of interaction and exchange.

His relationship with his wife Sarla and their son Manu is strained at best. Although the two are joined in marriage and have consummated a bond through the act of having a child, Deven and Sarla hold a disdain and embitterness toward one another that prevents any successful understanding between them. Estranged, failed man-woman relationships are common in the work of Desai. Khanna testifies in her critical analysis, '..... in (Desai's) novels we hardly get a glimpse of the delights and exultations of mutual, reciprocated love; instead we meet with the agonies, the heart –aches and the shocks of embittered man-woman

relationship' (27-28). Note her use of the terms 'mutual' and 'reciprocated'. These terms suggest the functioning of good communication paths in order for a relationship to be successful. Truly, Manu is the only entity that remains to connect them in a normative manner. The unsaid that exists between them has forged a gap and produced further forms of failed communication. Deven's speaks to Sarla mainly in the form of angry outbursts or contained condescension. Their strained rapport crates a tense household where little love or comradeship is accomplished. Unable to explicitly communicate the feelings he wishes to relate, Deven resorts to immature behavioral episodes to garner attention and react revenge. As the text states, 'Tearing up a shirt she had not washed, or turning the boy out of the room because he was crying, (Deven) was really protesting against (Sarla's) disappointment; he was out to wreck it, take his revenge upon her for harboring it' (68-69). Sarla's unsaid disillusionment tortures Deven to the extent that, since he is unable to speak with her on the subject, he feels the need to punish her. They combat each other daily, rarely expressing their actual feelings or concerns, in more of a warlike atmosphere than a familial one. Deven knows to expert that Sarla will often react to his rage in silence, another example of the failed communication connection. As Deven returns from his final trip to Delhi, he is less offended than usual by the mere sight of Sarla and the dissatisfaction she has come to symbolize for him. Desai writes, '(Deven considered touching (Sarla), putting an arm around her stooped shoulders and drawing him to her. How else could he tell her he shared all her disappointment and woe? But he could not make that move: it would have permanently undermined his position of power over her, a position that was as important to her as to him'(193-194). Even at this conciliatory point in Deven's thinking, he is incapable of producing a gesture of communication. His patterns are too ingrained and the healing power of the unsaid is actively avoided by him.

Anita Desai's novels serve as a helping tool to understand the intricacies, minutiae, and workings of human relationships in the modern scenario. The glue that bound the

relations earlier has now gone dry. In the modern scenario no relation has been left with its ingenuity and authenticity. The relation of daughter and father, mother and son, sister and sister and even of husband and wife has come under the dark shadows of suspicion, distrust, incommunication, and above all silence. The thread of relations has lost its tenacity. Just like Anita Desai's characters, Nirode, Monisha, Maya, Sita and Sarah, modern men and women are living a dead life. The relations they make are only for namesake. Only on a surface they are somebody's mother, father, daughter, son, husband and wife, but on the deeper level they all are alone and lonely. They can hardly find words to communicate with their loved ones. This incommunication and mournful silence has piloted them to a strange place, where they are surrounded by strange people, whose language and dialect they cannot understand. Anita Desai has very beautifully explored this strangeness in her novels and opened a whole new world in front of us. Her novels are indeed an excellent study not only in human relations but also present a thesis on human psychology.

The women populating the novelistic cosmos of Desai's work react sometimes violently and sometimes silently, unheard and unknown by others. A woman's role as a wife blocks her freedom. Simone de Beauvoir believed that the institution of marriage has marred the spontaneity of feeling between the marital lovers by changing their feelings into mandatory duties and rights. A woman is more than her body. She is not only a Being-in-itself but also a Being-for-itself.

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